# discussion article

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## What kind of archaeology do we want?
## Introduction

*Alexandra Ion* and John C. Barrett*

> *In so far as people think they can see the 'limit of human understanding', they believe of course that they can see beyond it*
>
> Wittgenstein 1998, 22

Contemporary archaeology seems to be marked by a questioning of the limits of interpretation, pushing for a radical change in the way we conceptualize our engagement with the past, the material and the world we live in: from archaeologies of affect, to new materialist approaches or calls to political engagement, practitioners seem to experiment with new questions and theoretical tools. As Artur Ribeiro points out in his contribution to the following collection of papers, '"new" has become the new normal'. But the question is, what are we trying to do with these experiments and what do we expect from archaeology in a world that is undergoing major changes and challenges?

Archaeology is widely defined by its methodological procedures such that techniques, and their development, are taken to determine what archaeology can and will achieve. In this way the existing archaeological paradigm is maintained and, indeed, policed by reference to what is currently deemed to be methodologically acceptable. One outcome is the emphasis in Europe upon the preservation rather than the investigation of archaeological deposits, given the assumption that tomorrow's techniques will always be an improvement upon those that are available today. And yet, if we do not explore possibilities driven by our desire to know, by our hopes of what archaeology might achieve, and by our preparedness to take risks in both our analysis and our communications, then there is the possibility that the subject will sink into the atrophy of normal practice rather than follow the trajectory of a dynamic and challenging development.

Given these concerns, we felt the need to organize a round-table debate as part of the 2014 Annual Meeting of the European Association of Archaeologists, where a number of points of view as to where our discipline

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might be heading were offered. The aim of the session was to discuss the extent to which current archaeological procedures might structure what we can know, or what we believe that we can know, about the past. If current procedures prevent us from undertaking the kinds of research that we desire, then to what extent are we prepared to accept the current dogma as to how we should do archaeology? In other words, are there inherent limits to what can be known in the mechanisms of archaeological procedures and in the development of archaeological theory, and if that is the case then what determines those limits? To explore these issues in as open a way as possible, the round table covered a wide range of topics and theoretical perspectives, from the relationship between past agencies and their interpretation to points of view focused on knowledge production.

What follows is a collection of papers that provide five short and hopefully provocative statements that outline the contributors' motivations and hopes for the future of archaeology, along with their reflections on what needs to change if those hopes are to be realized and what might inhibit such developments. By questioning the limits of what might be possible and by considering afresh the objectives of archaeological analysis, these contributions chart the extent to which either the nature of the material evidence or the imaginative use of that evidence is likely to determine the shape of future archaeologies. John Barrett's text is a plea for returning humanity to archaeological theory, by revisiting the fundamental question 'why do we do archaeology?' Benjamin Alberti takes the discussion further by exploring what drives us in our engagement with the past, advocating an archaeology of risk and wonder. Artur Ribeiro and Felipe Criado-Boado explore the methodologies of understanding. Felipe Criado-Boado imagines an archaeology at the crossroad of narrative and scientific knowledge and Artur Ribeiro evaluates the impact of theoretical concepts and ends up by claiming that what archaeology really needs is modesty. Finally, Alexandra Ion links ethics and osteoarchaeology, claiming that we need to rethink research questions and methods when we confront the material existence of another human being in order to explicitly address the link between our ontological assumptions and the kind of evidence we are looking for.

Ultimately, our contention is that archaeology is a discipline dealing as much with the present and the future as with the past, and that reflecting on 'what kind of archaeology' we want is more important than ever. How do we choose to interpret the traces of past ways of being in the world, why do we think our research matters and for whom? The way in which one answers these questions will shape the way in which archaeology imagines the relationship between past and present, and the way in which it places itself in relation to the challenges of the contemporary world. Our 'world is on fire', as Sada Mire stressed (personal communication), challenged by globalization; by war and migration; and by political, economical, social and environmental issues, and the question is, what role should archaeology play in this context? We argue that we need an 'archaeology that enlightens and is not afraid to be enlightened' (Sada Mire, personal communication).

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# Archaeology after interpretation. Returning humanity to archaeological theory

*John C. Barrett**

## Abstract

Do archaeologists recover the material record of past processes or the residues of the material conditions that made the presence of a kind of humanness possible? This paper attempts to emphasize the importance of distinguishing between these two options and argues the case for, and briefly contemplates the practical implications of, an archaeology of the human presence.

## Keywords

record; presence; materiality; understanding; explanation; self-organization

Archaeology's propensity to range across a variety of theoretical approaches, from the positivism of the new archaeology, through structuralism, post-structuralism and phenomenology, and on to the current concerns with the extended mind, network theory and the new materialism, and all within a period of fifty years or so, has been taken as indicative of an intellectual posturing that detracts from the 'real' business of doing archaeology (Bintliff 2011; 2015). This criticism seems, to me at least, to miss the point. All these theoretical approaches are no more than ways to think about the same fundamental question: why do we do archaeology? They allow us to evaluate what we are attempting to bring into view by our study of the material residues of the past. The means by which we establish the object of our studies are not the same means as those that we must employ to achieve such an objective. It has been the failure to distinguish between our definition of *what* we are studying and the question of *how* we intend to study it that has resulted in the various theoretical approaches appearing as if they were needless methodological distractions rather than the essential mechanisms that will open up perspectives on the reality that is the objective of our studies.

This confusion between objective and method, which is expressed by the assumption that the objective of archaeology is given by the current methodology, continues to have a detrimental effect upon wider perceptions of the discipline. Most outside observers, along with all too many practitioners, define archaeology in the banal terms of digging, the discovery of old things, and the physical analysis of those things (cf. Thomas 2004, 67–69). It is from this perspective that the history of archaeology is written as the development of techniques of recovery and material analysis. This consigns

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archaeology to the role of antiquarianism, the relevance of which for many contemporary concerns seems marginal at best. Such a negative perception surely contrasts with the more challenging view that archaeology could offer of itself, namely as an enquiry into the full chronological and global extent of humanity's place in history.

The distinction I wish to draw is between two ways of understanding archaeological evidence. The first treats that evidence as if it were the record of an absent past; the second treats the evidence as being the presence of some component of past realities. It is the same material, certainly, but the former approach leads to methodological worries about how the record should be interpreted whilst the latter approach can ask what the consequences of these continuing material realities have been for human existence. The kind of archaeology that I want lies with the second of these options.

Central to my argument is an understanding of humanity as an emergent form of life whose history has been one of fragmentation into diverse forms of humanness (Barrett 2014). The real conditions that should thus be brought into view by archaeology are the historical mechanisms by which particular human forms of life have defined themselves to achieve this remarkable, and at times catastrophic, diversity. Archaeological analysis does not, therefore, conclude its labours by uncovering a single humanity as the outcome of our studies, but employs our understanding that humanness has always been other and diverse, and has been, and is, brought into being within a network of real historical conditions. Archaeology should therefore explore how particular materialities made certain forms of humanness possible whilst also precluding others. Clearly such an understanding of the human potential for diversity is not without controversy, and this is the controversy that is debated by contemporary theoretical work. An informed debate concerning the real conditions that we are attempting to view must direct the design of the methodological means necessary to satisfy that objective. And whilst various methodological constraints, and opportunities, will certainly be encountered whenever we are engaged with our data, these do not in themselves determine the objective of archaeological analysis.

The actual conditions that have been available for the construction of human diversity are witnessed today as a surviving and very fragmentary material residue. Archaeology therefore encounters something, however minimal, of the actual conditions that facilitated the making of different kinds of humanness. It is this realization that we engage with some portion of the actual material past that takes us away from the common assumption that the object of archaeological analysis is a material record. We engage with a fragment of the actual existing reality of human existences, not with a record of their absence.

The traditional assumption that a contemporary material record (the representation of past processes) defines the object of archaeological study continues to underpin the definition of the discipline as a set of established methodological procedures that collect and analyse that record and convert it into yet another archival record (cf. Lucas 2012, 1–73). This process, we are assured, secures the empirical foundation for all archaeological knowledge about the absent past. Such an empirical validation is, however, much

weaker than is widely assumed. The material record only gains its historical significance relative to the extinct dynamics that gave it its current form. This obviously demands that some kind of bridging argument be established linking the record with the processes that it records (Binford 1977; Patrik 1985; Lucas 2012, 6–10), raising the obvious question of how such a bridging argument might be established. Four alternative lines of reasoning have been developed that provide us with very different kinds of relationship linking the material signifier with the humanly generated process that it is assumed to signify. The first of these is that particular categories of material represent the functional needs of its original users. Such needs are conventionally labelled by the tool, monument, or settlement categories to which the material is assigned by the archaeologist. The second claim is that extinct cultural traditions are represented by the style of the material and by some of the depositional patterns of the surviving material assemblages. Functional and cultural–stylistic attributions are distinctions assigned by the archaeologist, and they are distinctions that have been described by Dunnell (1978) as marking an irresolvable 'dichotomy' within archaeological analysis. The third and fourth lines of reasoning were those that were developed as part of the conflicting principles that distinguished processual from postprocessual archaeologies between the 1960s and the 1980s. Processual archaeology developed the principle that the various patterns of association and distribution of materials represented differently organized dynamics of extinct economic and social systems. These systems operated 'behind the Indian and the artefact' (Flannery 1967, 120) and the particular patterns revealed in individual cases were reduced to such general categories of organization as chiefdoms. These general categories were characterized by such high levels of functional coherence that no evidence would seem to exist by which to establish how such systems came into being or were transformed through time. Postprocessual archaeology, on the other hand, reasoned that past human agents employed their understandings of cultural values to achieve certain strategic ends and that these social strategies were thus represented by their various material products. In these terms different social systems were driven by conflicting patterns of social action, and these conflicts gave those systems an inherent dynamic (cf. Friedman and Rowlands 1977). However, no available method will ever allow us to translate the surviving material products of those systems into the indigenous meanings that those agents' actions had sought to maintain or to contest.

Treating the material as a record and the object of study, and employing different theoretical traditions to build optional links between that record and a now absent past, establish the claim that the procedures of the recovery and description of things are objectively secure. These procedures are, then, distinguished from the practices of historical interpretation that are treated as theoretical and transient. The reality of this distinction in contemporary archaeology is confronted by the way archaeological projects place their emphasis upon the demand to record the material residue, and the way in commercial archaeology that different levels of archaeological employment, security, status and remuneration operate across a spectrum between field technicians whose responsibility is to produce a description of that record in

terms of stratigraphic relationships and material categories, and academics who are assumed to have the responsibility of interpreting the historical significance of that material.

What will it take for archaeology to operate as if its role were not to interpret the representations of the past but to engage with that part of the reality of the past that exists today? First it will require that we accept the object of archaeology to be those historical conditions that enabled particular forms of humanness to emerge. There is, therefore, no transcendental 'human nature' to which all humanity can be reduced (cf. Jones and Alberti 2013, 16), but rather there have always been in history a range of possibilities for the ways the growth and development of humanness could occur by means of the entangled relationships between individuals, other forms of life and available material conditions (Barrett 2014; 2015).

Second, we should abandon the strong distinction commonly drawn between biological processes on the one hand and sociocultural processes on the other, and understand instead the working of self-organizing biological and biomechanical systems (cf. Oyama 2000). This certainly does not mean that we end up attempting to explain sociocultural processes by their reduction to genetically deterministic processes. Forms of life are *self-producing* and we need to grasp that 'self-producing' (autopoiesis) describes the processes by which organisms, whatever their level of complexity, grow to maturity (Maturana and Varela 1980) by bounding and remaking their internal coherency through an ability to direct themselves towards those material conditions that provide them with food (energy) and security (Thompson 2007). This orientation by any organism away from danger and towards the niches of security and sustenance includes the construction of regions of social cohesion and is a conscious reading of the environment (cf. Kauffman 2000, 111–14). In other words, life in general wins the possibility for its existence by pragmatically discovering a sustaining (i.e. meaningful) order among things. But humanness does more than this because it develops the desire to rationalize such a practically experienced order to reveal its overarching cosmological logic and putative origins (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1966; Miller 2005). Thus we arrive at a simple generalization. Humanness is the evolving consequence of a particular, self-producing, form of life's ability to process information and energy by finding a place for itself within some portion of the larger environment (Barrett 2013). The successes, failures and diversity that have mapped the histories of different forms of humanness have each played themselves out within the networks of material relations by which patterns of social cohesion, competition, exploitation and resistance have been constructed: archaeology's role is surely to establish the histories of those processes and to trace their consequences (Barrett 2015).

Third, by abandoning the dominant metaphor of a record with which to think about the nature of our evidence we will finally shake off the archaeological obsession with absence. Not only are archaeologists currently 'only too well aware that much of the material culture from the past has not survived into the present' (Lucas 2012, 178), leaving only 'a sparse suspension of information particles of varying size, not even randomly distributed in

archaeological space and time' (Clarke 1973, 9), but also the one absence that Lucas (2012, 178) believes 'seems to haunt us the most [is] people as living, breathing beings'. But should we not begin to understand that the network of components that once afforded the conditions of possibility for certain forms of humanness, living and breathing, to come into being, still survives in an albeit reduced, fragmentary and material state as part of our contemporary world? And if this material is indeed not so much a record but a presence, then should not our methodologies be constructed accordingly? Rather than producing the description of an assemblage of static things, fieldwork could now explore how material conditions must have provided the means of sustaining the dynamism of particular forms of life. These forms of life moved, worked and knew their worlds from within the contexts that were provided in part by those material conditions. It is from this perspective that we can begin to see a new richness permeate the previously 'sparse suspension of information particles' of our evidence. But how is that richness to be brought into view? An engagement with an archaeological record often prompts the need to *explain* its formation. An engagement with the material conditions of human possibility on the other hand prompts the desire to *understand* those conditions. The issue of causality clarifies the distinction I am making between explanation and understanding (Wright 1971, 6–7). Whilst explanations of the archaeological record are sought amongst the forces that gave it its current form, the construction of humanness cannot be 'explained' in these causal terms. Material conditions do not cause certain kinds of humanness to come into being, but they do provide conditions within which forms of humanness could evolve to find a place. Understanding arises when we recognize the possibilities provided, for example, by a particular topography and architecture that facilitated a certain sequential ordering, grouping and division of movements between people and practices, an ordering that might facilitate paths of access between various spatial hierarchies. And within these architectures, technologies of production, storage, allocation and consumption would have operated to manage and transform both living (including other forms of humanity) and mute resources into residues. In this way certain dominant forms of humanness have had the ability to grow within the constraints and opportunities provided by material conditions, whilst other forms have been constrained and extinguished.

Explaining the formation of the archaeological record and understanding how forms of humanness could have emerged in the material conditions that survive today in a fragmentary state are two distinct programmes of work. It is the latter kind of archaeology that I seek. This will require fieldwork to express the dynamics of inhabited space, cycles of production and of consumption, and the construction of dominant ideologies. To develop this way of expressing an archaeological understanding will be the most difficult demand of all, requiring expression through the imaginative use of the currently available technologies. The responsibility for this development will lie with the fieldworker, who will operate as a historical researcher rather than as the recorder of ancient materials (Andrews, Barrett and Lewis 2000).

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# Archaeologies of risk and wonder

*Benjamin Alberti**

## Abstract

In this statement, I argue that one way for archaeology to realize the potential of its materials to tell us something different about the past is to confront the question of alterity, understood as the ontological difference that lies at the roots of much archaeological material. If we accept alterity as a starting point of analysis then we stand a chance of challenging the strictures of interpretive frameworks that foreclose the possibility of encountering something new. Methodologically and theoretically I argue for risk-taking, especially taking on conceptual resources from indigenous thinkers and adopting a stance of wonder in the face of our materials which can open up unsuspected archaeological realities.

## Keywords

perspectivism; indigenous theory; Davi Kopenawa; wonder; alterity

> *The only true voyage, the only bath in the Fountain of Youth, would be not to visit strange lands but to possess other eyes*
>
> Proust 1993, 343
>
> *Finally other* xapiri *spirits carried my eyes off into the distance and this is how I too started to become a spirit*
>
> Kopenawa and Albert 2013, 51.

## A desire for alterity

Yanomami thinker and shaman Davi Kopenawa (Kopenawa and Albert 2013, 51) recounts a story told to him by his stepfather of his capture by water spirits:

> the water being woman grabbed my wrist and pulled me with her into the forest. I started to run at her side, smashing the branches in the underbrush as I passed. I was very excited and kept yelling: '*Aï! Aï! Aï!* A *yawarioma* girl is taking me on her path! The light is blinding me! I'm scared! *Aï! Aï! Aï!*' No one other than me could see her ... I could no longer see anything around me. I could not have recognized my people or my own house. I had become other.

What are we afraid of? We are motivated to understand the past by desires often veiled to us: I am at least partially driven by the search for what I now would call the sense of alterity experienced as a boy standing among the ruins of Dunstanburgh Castle in northern England. The memory of that experience is one of the familiar textures and smells of grassy mounds and

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**Figure 1** La Candelaria ceramic pot from the Arminio Weiss Collection, Museo Municipal de San Rafael, Argentina. Photograph by the author (Colour online).

masonry made uncanny by the absence of the people and things that they allude to by their very presence. Alterity I take to mean a state of being that escapes conventional modes of understanding. Can anything be made of it, or is it beyond the pale of archaeological analysis? My hope is that we can make something of it. I advocate for archaeologies of 'risk' and 'wonder'. Through theoretical risk-taking and taking a stance of wonder in the face of our materials we open ourselves to the alterity latent in things and our experience of them.

> *I've been trying to coax a particular body of pots into life for several years (e.g. Alberti 2014b; figure 1). The La Candelaria body-pots from north-west Argentina date to the first millennium AD. Now in museums and private collections, many were found in funerary contexts. Their odd anthropomorphism and association with bodies make them candidates for an exploration of alterity.*

This approach is aligned with other ontologically oriented archaeologies, which I will classify into two camps: New Animists and New Materialists. New Animists search for the evidence of relational ontologies among premodern peoples. As such, animism has produced a renaissance of ethnographic analogies. Worlds proliferate with relations between non-human and human beings and objects are affective and powerful.

> *Amazonian perspectivism occupies a privileged position as a potent model for animist ontologies. It has been defined by its most vocal proponent, Viveiros de Castro (2012, 83), as 'the conception according to which the universe is inhabited by different sorts of persons, human and non-human,*

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**Figure 2.** Detail of La Candelaria ceramic from the Museo Arquaeólogico El Cadillal. Photograph by the author (Colour online).

> *which apprehend reality from distinct points of view'. Bodies are the seats of these distinct perspectives. Among the La Candelaria ceramics, zoo- and anthropomorphic bodies are fixed onto other bodies.*

New Materialists offer exciting and complex correctives to conventional Western metaphysics (e.g. Olsen *et al.* 2012). Relational and symmetrical approaches redescribe time, materiality and archaeological practice. To those inspired by Jane Bennett's vital materiality (Bennett 2010) or Ingold's generative flux (e.g. Ingold 2011), the world itself and not just the non-modern world is full of inherent vibrancy. We are all said to participate in a 'world-in-motion'.

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*La Candelaria bodies and ceramics are unstable (figure 2). Processes prevail over forms. Bodies are reinforced through practices of marking and fixing that are shared across the animate/inanimate divide.*

Somewhat dramatically, however, I would characterize these approaches as ontologically predatory – they swallow rather than open up alterity. More than a decade ago Viveiros de Castro (2003) argued that Indigenous peoples' ontologies have been relegated to the status of epistemologies. Western science alone, he claimed, deems itself to have access to the singular Ontology, the really natural Nature. Others' natures are simply seen as poorly scripted versions of Western Nature. I don't think ontological approaches in archaeology have fully addressed this critique, apparent in the way Indigenous peoples appear in the literature. New Animism, for example, equates ontology with belief and its method is that of analogy. These ontologies are to all intents and purposes still cultures – that is, beliefs about ontology. The New Materialists do address multiple ontologies but tend to draw from an alternative stable of Western theorists. Native informants can provide key examples of, say, a world in movement and flux, but in a kind of ontologically predatory act they disappear as active participants in theory building. Moreover, among some New Materialists metaphysical exhaustion seems to have set in. Fed up with the endless search for human meaning, objects are understood to hold something back (e.g. Olsen 2010). There is something mysterious and unreachable, broodingly independent, about these new things.

## Risking theory

Casting what we do as mysterious – or even as a cause for wonder – I agree with. But equally important is the refusal to lock our theories or materials within scripted frameworks, new or old (Alberti *et al.* 2011, 905). I take ontology to be a tool for unsettling our certainties rather than only a better way to describe the world. If we are to get at ontological difference we have to 'take seriously' other bodies of theory – Indigenous metaphysics, or its lack. This means refusing what Spivak (1999) calls the figure of the Native Informant that haunts and founds modern texts – the animist, in our case. It means to risk following the theory, not simply the staged example. Harris and Robb (2012) argue for a notion of multi-modal ontologies of the body, in which ontologies can coexist in a given culture. They reference Descola's (1996) account of the 'staging' of a curing ritual by an Achuar shaman. Darts are removed from a patient's body, darts that had actually been hidden about the shaman's person beforehand. The efficacy of the cure despite its apparent duplicity depends, they argue, 'on the beliefs with which we frame it' (Harris and Robb 2012, 671). While Descola's point is indeed that the regurgitation of the darts is a 'conjuring trick', the concept *tsenstak*, translated as 'darts', is in fact shorthand for an experience that is too complex to fully represent. Descola (1996, 333) explains, 'The tsentsak are not real "darts" or even invisible ones. They are animated principles or incorporeal automata that are as impossible to represent as the mysterious entelechy ... of classical

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**Figure 3** Detail of La Candelaria ceramic from the Museo Archaeólogico El Cadillal. Photograph by the author (Colour online).

philosophy'. In other words, shamans use the props to avoid having to make lengthy explanations to the uninitiated.

> *Humanoid faces and frogs are two of the most common forms on the ceramics (figure 3). Humanoid faces are placed on necks. Frogs appear as plastic additions to bulges that push out from bodies. The eyebrows and nose of the face are replicated in the front legs and mouth of the frog. The eyes are isomorphically positioned.*
>
> *The perspective of a given species differs according to affects proper to different bodies. 'Souls' are all human in origin. Bodies are always in danger of transforming into other species' bodies, and therefore into other affective capacities, realities. Souls are only present at moments of danger. Under normal conditions the soul is not present 'in' the body because bodies and souls eclipse one another. These are visible and invisible worlds. There is no realm beyond the material where thought or souls reside. La Candelaria ceramic pots are not supports for representations, beliefs. They are fully entailed in what they depict.*

Darts, rather than being evidence of two ontological modes of the body, correspond to figure and ground, the infinite supposition of states. Perhaps the lengthy explanation is significant to us as theoretical exegesis. That is, it is the thought of the shaman that we need as our interlocutor, not the conjury – just as we are not interested in, say, Bourdieu's table manners but care more about his concept of cultural capital.

Of course, taking such thought as theory we risk the loss of credibility. As Indigenous philosopher Viola Cordova (2007, 53) has pointed out, the Native American 'is not seen as a valid thinker'. We may be dismissed as 'misguided neoprimitivists', as Severin Fowles (2013, xi) puts it. Fowles (ibid.) risks much

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by reading the Puebloan category of 'doings' through Indigenous theories in his 'critical unpacking of religion' in archaeology. It is not, however, only about credulity. With Kim Tallbear I would argue that archaeologists are actually terrified of the claims Indigenous scholars make on their theories. But the aim is just that – to treat Indigenous thought as theory, with the full reciprocal effect it ought to have on archaeology's theory-making and concepts. This, then, is not an analogical or illustrative usage; it is theoretical and conceptual engagement.

> *The pots have many eyes, but are also equipped with other organs of knowledge – ears, noses, skin. Knowledge requires the proprioceptive potential associated with a particular body part. To be open to knowledge you need to mark those organs in particular ways. The ceramic bodies provide an ear or nose to pierce; a skin to incise.*

Davi Kopenawa (Kopenawa and Albert 2013, 35) gives an account of when the *xapiri* spirits first opened his eyes to knowledge:

> When I was a very young child ... I saw the spirits for the very first time. At nightfall, the warmth of the fire eased me to sleep in my mother's hammock. After a moment their images would start to come down to me ... A path of light opened before my eyes and unknown beings came towards me ... There were so many of them, and they kept their eyes set on me. It was beautiful but terrifying because I had never seen *xapiri* spirits before.

We could describe this as parallel to a state of wonder. Wonder is powerful, emotive; it is awe and terror in the face of something just beyond the reaches of comprehension. Wonder also expresses an attitude towards research. Philosopher of science Isabelle Stengers (2011) has recently likened scientific practices in their original and most creative condition to practices of wonder. Of course, the term carries risks. It evokes mysticism, the unknowable; again, incredulity. But Stengers does not mean we should be immobilized by awe at the wonderfulness of the world. Rather, we should simply 'not explain away' things. It is about taking on the surprise, letting it linger. Wonder can provide a powerful clue, especially when things are not well ontologically, when what did appear to make sense no longer does. Wonder, as Michael Scott (2014, 20) tells us, can open us to unsuspected realities that threaten to disrupt and change our knowledge of what is.

> *And to see is to be seen. You must be seen first by the spirits in order to activate your own sight, knowledge. Davi Kopenawa is looked on by the* xapiri *spirits, and hence can see and then know. But these are staring, open eyes – they are the ghost of the living, those who are going to die. They cannot see the invisible.*

## Risky materials

Anthropologist Helen Verran (2001) has written of the 'disconcertment', the intellectual discomfort, she felt while observing mathematics taught in Yoruba primary schools. She was struck by the innovative manner in which local teachers adapted their limited supplies to teach maths using Yoruba

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number. The tension between different ontologies that was negotiated by the teachers led her to describe them as 'ontic innovators' (Verran 2014). Ontic innovation is the practical side to wonder as a response to ontological tensions. The task of the archaeologist, as ontic innovator perhaps, is to work on the ontic immediacies – the concrete bits of ontology – at our disposal. We can see this in Jonathan Walz's (forthcoming) medical archaeology, where a new archaeology comes out of healers' practices in Tanzania. Time, place and reality are reconfigured through the material objects assembled in medicine gourds during itinerant journeys. Lesley and David Green (2013) write how distress and wonder drew them into another kind of archaeology among the Palikur of Brazil. Palikur knowledge as movement led them to conceptualize archaeology as 'reading the tracks of the ancestors'. 'To follow', the Palikur say, 'is to allow oneself to be translated'. The Greens translate 'tracking' into archaeological terms but in such a way that archaeological concepts and practice change and not the original intention.

> *Following perspectivism, subjectivity is a condition of being and relating, not their result. And to know a thing is not to objectify it. It is to add the maximum amount of subjectivity to it. Ontological predation – the utter annihilation of an Other through changed perspective – requires maximal subjectivization of the Other. The danger is that the material worked on in putting together the pot has become too much of a subject itself, too capable. To know something – to make it subject – is to put you at risk of a predatory exchange. Souls can be stolen, perspectives lost; bodies transformed. The pot is thus only partially made subject. Its exchange capacities are curtailed. It is in fact an objectified subject.*

Still, the situation of archaeologists is not strictly parallel to that of Verran's teachers. The ontological turn in anthropology has yet to tackle fully alterity in matter itself. Archaeologists' ontological crises are not provoked in the first instance by encounters with living peoples but by encounters with materials, by what we see and touch. Materials are not outside the question of alterity in archaeology – they are central to it. Recognizing the ontological self-determination of matter (Alberti 2014a), to paraphrase Viveiros de Castro, is parallel to risking new theory. We acknowledge that materials act back. Scientific techniques discipline us; they force us into certain activities, practices and consciousness. Archaeological entities are constantly in flux – materializing and dematerializing – together with the cognitive work and practices of the archaeologist (Lucas 2012). But understanding the very particular ways they do is the principle challenge. 'Vibrant materiality' alone can only hint at the possibilities.

> *Materials are, like bodies, bundled affects, all the way down; enlivened, inherently capable of subjectivity. Materials, like Kopenawa's water spirits, can predate us – pull us through terror into wonder and knowledge, or blind us to our own ontological annihilation (figure 4).*

So what is there to be afraid of? Plenty: the loss of perspective to some other theory; the loss of our identity as archaeologists; the loss of the true,

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**Figure 4** Detail of La Candelaria ceramic from the Museo Archaeólogico El Cadillal. Photograph by the author (Colour online).

historical past; being predated by our materials. But do we need generalized certainty, an overarching framework within which the truth of the past is revealed? Materials and concepts are brought into ontological determinacy locally. What we could call 'material ontographies' – descriptions and analysis of ontologies – should be highly specific and, as in the case of the Greens' work among the Palikur, produce local resolutions to questions at the interface between archaeological materials, archaeologists, local communities and theory.

It is possible to experience the past as a foreboding and wondrous alterity, as the threat of rupture to quiet certainties. I would like to foster that feeling – though clearly it is just one starting point among many, just as Proust and Kopenawa are not talking from different perspectives but differ in what 'perspective', 'eyes', 'bodies', 'knowledge' are. Finding a way, through risk and wonder, to explore the potential of alterity in archaeology to generate new concepts and methods that can be deployed to agitate debate well beyond the discipline is my hope for a future archaeology.

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# Archaeology will be just fine

*Artur Ribeiro**

## Abstract

Many archaeologists are currently stuck in a mindset in which attention is paid exclusively to ideas that are 'new' and 'revolutionary'. This fetishization of the 'new' leads us down a dangerous road as it promotes uncritical disdain of old ideas which remain valid and it advocates fads from neighbouring disciplines which are methodologically vapid and philosophically dubious. The objective of this paper is to question whether archaeology requires constant 'paradigmatic change' and my answer to this question is no. By constantly altering the status quo, archaeologists are promoting a culture in which theoretical 'newness' is given the spotlight and ideas are considered valid as long as they are original. Against this, I recommend a more critical view of new ideas and a revision of old ones – a culture which prioritizes the quality of archaeological theories regardless of whether they are new or old.

## Keywords

theoretical; paradigm; critique; fad; improvement; progress

## Archaeology and archaeological theory

I was asked my opinion regarding what archaeology needs for a brighter future – and these opinions, as per custom, tend to drag in all sorts of polemical stances. The desire to polemicize is not what motivates this contribution: much on the contrary, my objective is not to present a new and revolutionary view for the advancement of archaeology. However, in this day and age, it seems that 'new' has become the new normal (no pun intended), and thus, by claiming that archaeology should stay relatively unchanged, I might actually be making the most polemical statement of all. Naturally, stating that archaeology should remain mostly unchanged is not claiming that archaeology has reached its full potential – it is rather that archaeology will improve itself and turn out just fine regardless of what archaeological theorists proclaim. There are only so many ways to reinvent the wheel and often the wheel is neither necessarily new nor better. Stepping back, I ask, 'does archaeology require a paradigmatic overhaul?' and I will try to answer this question and justify my answer as best as I can.

It is the hallmark of any science that wishes to be reputable to demonstrate to other sciences and to society at large that, yes, our science is indeed advancing and we are challenging the limits of what can be done and known. Archaeology is no exception and archaeological theorists are the most vocal in advocating progress. What is particularly curious is the fact that while theoretically minded scholars are usually the ones who consistently appeal for

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revolutionary changes in the discipline, there is no explanation of why theory is considered an advance in and of itself. In the last decades, archaeologists have simply established as fact that new theories and approaches have the same value as, if not more value than, engaging with the material record and providing new empirical discoveries.

Granted, there are scholarships, professorships and project funds on the line and submitting proposals with new and innovative research does give an edge in the competition, but how long will it take for the funding entities to realize that 'new' does not necessarily translate into 'better'? By flooding the approved journals and publishers with new 'revolutionary' theories and approaches we have trivialized the capacity to truly improve the state of the art. Furthermore, the introduction of new ideas is rarely done innocently and in a humble fashion – it is usually accompanied by uncritical disdain and disregard of competing ideas. A viable project for a pluralist stance (Bintliff and Pearce 2011) seems further from fruition every year that passes, a stance that would have allowed for a respectable integration of archaeology among its sibling disciplines – history and anthropology.

It could be argued that archaeology does hold a solid place among history and anthropology, but it certainly does not seem that way. While anthropology is currently undergoing an original ontological reawakening, history is thriving in the wake of postmodern critique and gradually developing itself into a discipline that is no longer naively empiricist. Archaeology, on the other hand, is thriving just like anthropology and history, but unlike its older siblings the youngest sibling is getting all the wrong advice. Archaeological theorists seem to be running out of ideas and many theorists, instead of stepping back for some self-reflection, are just grabbing at whatever is closest at hand. Whether it is a new hip sociologist with a French-sounding name or a philosopher whose name has too many consonants and not enough vowels, what seems to matter is not content or even compatibility – only difference. If it is different, then it must be good. This rash and unbridled attitude is indeed going to make archaeology improve, but not necessarily in the best of ways. By simply adopting whatever is hip and sexy in other disciplines, archaeology learns the hard way that not all external influences are legitimate.

One of the most glaring cases would be the mingling of archaeology with Graham Harman's object-oriented ontology, or OOO (Harman 2002; 2011), allegedly one of the pillars of speculative realism. OOO is, at first glance, very appealing. In Harman, some archaeologists saw the chance to be revolutionary and simultaneously ride the wave of the so-called ontological turn (Edgeworth 2016; Normark 2014; Olsen 2010, 68 ff.; Olsen *et al.* 2012). However, an attentive reading of his work discloses some glaring red flags. What is speculative realism? Speculative realism claims to be a form of post-Kantian metaphysical realism that aims to surpass the subject–object dualism. A brief look into the authors generally associated with speculative realism, Quentin Meillassoux, Ray Brassier, Iain Hamilton Grant and Graham Harman, shows that there is little to nothing in common between them. Of these four authors, only Meillassoux can be qualified as a speculative realist (Meillassoux 2008). This is strange because Harman claims to be a

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speculative realist (Harman 2013) as his OOO is supposed to be a form of post-Kantian Continental materialism. Well, as Peter Wolfendale (2014) and Ray Brassier (2014) have demonstrated, there is nothing within Harman's OOO that makes it speculative realism, nor does it actually surpass the subject–object dualism. The only relationship that can be established between Harman and speculative realism is that he attended two conferences titled Speculative Realism. Also disquieting are the actual problems of OOO, with the most obvious problem being Harman's incapacity to define 'object' in a clear and concise manner (Brassier 2014, 419–20), a problem that seems to similarly affect some archaeologists. The murkiness that surrounds OOO is not evidence of flexibility and anti-foundationalism so characteristic of Continental orthodoxy, but blatant dismissiveness. Ultimately, attaching OOO buzzwords and premises to archaeology does not lend it more credibility; it diminishes it.

What is more worrying is that non-anthropocentric and object-based metaphysics have been around in Anglo-American philosophy for a comfortable amount of time, comfortable enough that many of the issues broached by Graham Harman's OOO have already been discussed in a professional and assertive manner by the likes of Theodore Sider, David Lewis, E.J. Lowe and L.A. Paul. Unlike its Continental cousin, Anglo-American philosophy is unarguably one of the projects that has developed most in the last sixty years. It has transcended its 'analytical' boundaries to become an authoritative voice in ethics, cognitive sciences and quantum physics, to name just a few areas. Archaeological theorists, however, avoid Anglo-American philosophy as much as they can, further substantiating that the aim is simply to make archaeology newer, but not necessarily better.

Nonetheless, even without Anglo-American philosophy, archaeology does become better. It becomes better not only because archaeological theorists learn from their mistakes, but also because there are those who change archaeology from the sidelines. These nameless archaeologists are the vast majority and it is these who unconsciously and gradually add more insight into the past. They are the commercial archaeologists, the students of archaeology and the county archaeologists who, by making sure that archaeology is practised in a correct and proper manner, are already supporting its continued success. They improve archaeology by adding information to the ever-growing database of archaeological knowledge, they ask the modest yet essential questions, and they are mostly in constant contact with the lay populace. Like the wind that gradually erodes the rock, the nameless archaeologists are those who sculpt archaeology into something superior, while on the other side of the fence there are theorists who insist in new revolutions and proclaim the death of [insert irrelevant theory of the past here], the same theorists who think they can make an even better sculpture by simply borrowing a bulldozer and laying everything behind them to waste.

**Does archaeology require a paradigmatic overhaul?**

'No' is the only correct answer. However, we must admit that not all is well with archaeology and some effort must be put into making it better,

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and this seems clear to everyone. What is not entirely clear is what is wrong with archaeology and how it can be improved. One of the most common attitudes is to claim that the current archaeological standards and practices are inadequate to deal with the material record, even though the material record is the one unchanging object in our discipline. The material record of today is the same as when Flinders Petrie and Gordon Childe were around – and calling it something different (e.g. code, admixture, assemblage) does not change that fact. Thus when archaeologists decide to *define* the material record in a new way, archaeology is not actually becoming something new, much less is it undergoing a 'turn' or 'paradigm shift' (Lindstrøm 2015, 212).

For instance, there was processual archaeology that expounded the virtues of laws of behaviour, systemic process and cultural evolutionism; then there was postprocessual archaeology that argued that post-structuralist theory and material culture as code were the way to go; and of course there are now several candidates to fully replace postprocessualism as the standard of reference, given that it has allegedly become, in the words of Bjørnar Olsen (2012a, 11), 'normalized, mainstream and hegemonic, [thus] leading to the theoretical lull that has characterized its aftermath'.

Bjørnar Olsen's intentionally polemical and hyperbolic phrasing is to cajole a reaction out of his readers which, truth be told, works like a charm (see responses to the article in question). What does not work as charmingly is the actual content behind his phrasing. The claim that postprocessualism has become normalized, mainstream and hegemonic is a bit of an exaggeration, and clearly a misattributed view of what postprocessualism actually represents in the long run. First, processualism and postprocessualism were of much more modest influence than assumed by those living in the English-speaking world (which includes Scandinavian countries for the sake of the current argument). In fact, a cursory look into any archaeological department in Portugal or Germany, respectively where I am originally from and where I currently am, reveals a sobering picture where processualism and postprocessualism are addressed only in a passing manner. This might make it seem that both Portugal and Germany are behind in terms of interpretation practices but the truth is that their archaeology is merely different, one that relies considerably less on a priori type theorizing (*sensu* Bintliff 2011).

Second, at the time it seemed that postprocessualists were banking on a revolution that would shake archaeology's foundational structures, one that would also affect archaeology on a methodological and inferential level. Barely did it do such a thing: Shanks and Tilley's alternative to 'scientific' archaeology (Shanks and Tilley 1987, 135–240) shared the same characteristics as most scientific endeavours (Watson 1990, 686); the excavation and retrieval methods employed by Hodder were pretty much the same as those recommended by Lewis Binford and Michael Schiffer (Tschauner 1996); and even Hodder's hermeneutic approach did not manage to distance itself that much from middle-range theory on a methodological level (Kosso 1991). Overall, postprocessualism had little impact on the core scientific basis on which archaeology is founded (VanPool and VanPool 1999).

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Nevertheless, to further support the argument that postprocessualism became the establishment perspective, Olsen (2012a, 14) transcribes a quote from Stephen Shennan (2007, 220) where it is claimed that postprocessualism seems to have become 'mild and normal' in recent years and thus is now the archaeology of everyone. I believe this to be an unfair outlook given that Shennan continues, in the same text, to say, 'In archaeology ... the theory wars of the 1980s and 90s have at the very least diminished considerably in intensity and there is a renewed concern with the process of doing archaeology' (Shennan 2007, 220). Furthermore, Shennan's dismissal of postprocessualism is even more evident in his *Genes, memes, and human history* (2002, 9), where he argues that postprocessualism failed to be the ethnographic analysis of a 'present' that is long gone. The impact that postprocessualism wrought in archaeology is often misunderstood: it is commonly seen as a paradigmatic revolution in the Kuhnian sense but it should be seen more as simply as a 'mild and normal' evolution of archaeology.

Just as the culture–history and processual straw men did not truly exist, the postprocessual straw man also does not exist. This does not mean that archaeological critique is not a critique *of something*; what it does mean, however, is that the big theoretical movements of the last century are best seen in hindsight as additions to archaeological practice and interpretation rather than as substitutions. Imputing more importance to postprocessualism than it actually held is to convey erroneously the idea that archaeology is mandated by dogmatic paradigms (Kuhn 1996), while it is more reasonable to believe that archaeology undergoes continuous revisionary changes in an undramatic way (Toulmin 1970, 46). Granted, some figures and approaches in archaeology did hold considerable influence in the past, but claiming that they were 'hegemonic' is pure rhetorical exaggeration. Moreover, supplanting an influential movement merely because it is influential does not seem a sustainable path for archaeology. Just as an example, the critique titled 'tyranny of the text' (Olsen 2010, 56) came a mere six years after the 'tyranny of the method' (Thomas 2004, 55). Following this tradition, the 'tyranny of the thing' is almost overdue.

**If it is not broken, do not fix it**

This seems the hardest lesson of all. It is hard because we instinctively want to make archaeology better but we fail to recognize that it is already getting better at a solid rate. The rate of change is more than adequate, and trying to keep up with every fad that shows up is obviously not tenable. History, for instance, is a model of slow but assured improvement. In history we see various influences, like Ginzburg's microhistory (1993), as additions rather than paradigmatic revolutions, and these additions are generally accepted in the discipline after some critical tempering. Even the postmodern critique of history, which was supposed to revolutionize how history was to be practised, barely managed to have any impact except angering some historians and ultimately filtering out some unwanted naive empiricism.

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Furthermore, archaeology seems to have lost a good part of its critical edge. The inceptions of processualism and postprocessualism were shortly followed by insightful criticism, yet today the various ideas that have cluttered the journals and books seem to be readily accepted or ignored with little to no serious critique. What seems to matter nowadays is novelty – or at least the illusion of novelty – but not the improvement of old ideas. Are hermeneutics and middle-range theory completely off the table? Is there no chance to look into past approaches and theories and see where they can be improved? It seems awfully myopic of archaeological theorists, famed for looking into the long-lost past, to completely ignore ideas that were credible a mere 20 to 30 years ago. Moreover, it seems impossible to publish anything regarding archaeological hermeneutics or middle-range theory without derisive comments on how outdated it is, while in philosophy, for instance, ideas pertaining to Aristotelian or scholastic philosophy are constantly debated and discussed, because unlike archaeological theorists, philosophers seem to be able to recognize the importance of past thinkers for their current work.

It might seem hypocritical of me to claim that archaeology needs little change while presenting a laundry list of issues within archaeology. I guess what I am trying to convey is that archaeology itself needs little to no change; what does need to change is the attitude that most archaeological theorists have in relation to archaeology. Archaeology has become a fully grown adult who leads a modest and fulfilling life, while archaeological theorists behave like condescending parents who believe they know better. Just like overbearing parents who try to force their friends and children into whatever new fad diet is around, archaeological theorists are trying to force archaeology into a new fad philosophy or theory, and just as new fad diets are eventually proven to be inadequate, so too will the new philosophies and theories be proven to be inadequate.

In closing, archaeology does not need any more pseudo-revolutions. Archaeology is not a building that requires constant demolition and reconstruction. Not only do many archaeological theorists want reconstruction, they tend to want archaeology reconstructed into some gaudy exotic piece of architecture. I would rather believe that archaeology is a garden: it requires maintenance like removing of weeds and trimming of hedges, and sometimes it requires something new to be planted. It is not the individual plants that grant archaeology its identity but the combination of plants and flowers as a whole, and in this garden not all the ambitious plans that are currently in the works are going to survive. Ultimately, what archaeology really needs is just good ol' fashioned modesty, cohesion and acceptance, because it is only through these virtues that the garden will truly thrive.

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# Tangled between paradigms in the neo-baroque era

*Felipe Criado-Boado**

## Abstract

The underlying notion for this article is that archaeology requires an amalgamation of humanities and science, and of narrative and scientific knowledge. The need for this fusion has arisen in a context in which contemporary society is experiencing major changes in epistemics, aesthetics and fashion; an increase in virtual experiences; and an economic crisis. I refer to this situation as the neo-baroque, a condition that is elusive and partially ambiguous. This social context (perhaps the final crisis of modernity), and the breakdown of this integration in pragmatic terms, call for a repoliticization of science.

## Keywords

archaeological theory; modernity; baroque; narrativity; archaeological science; symmetrical archaeology

The underlying notion for this article is that archaeology requires an amalgamation of humanities and science, and of narrative and scientific knowledge. The need for this fusion has arisen in a context in which contemporary society is experiencing major changes in epistemics, aesthetics and fashion; an increase in virtual experiences; and an economic crisis. I refer to this situation as the neo-baroque, a condition that is elusive and partially ambiguous. This social context (perhaps the final crisis of modernity), and the breakdown of this integration in pragmatic terms, call for a repoliticization of science.

The challenge of knowledge in late modernity is how we might mobilize in a positive, transformative way what is the highest level of information, self-reflexivity and self-awareness that humanity has reached in its entire history. We have never known so much, so well, about so many things. Never before has it been possible to create significant interrelationships between everything we know. However, none of this is much use in terms of consolidating social welfare, and the archaeology that I want is one that contributes towards achieving this goal.

A way forward might be exemplified by *Castle*, a television series for which I have a particular weakness. Its co-stars are charming, but I like the series above all because, in a way that I am sure has little to do with the intentions of its scriptwriters, it becomes a statement in defence of the humanities. The series is about a novelist who helps out a policewoman from New York.

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While she gathers evidences, he puts together the background story. In a very simple way, this shows us how, without evidence, we only have a novel, but without a narrative, all we have is evidence that proves nothing. I think this is the best way of summing up the situation between science-oriented and narrative-oriented research.

This kind of synthesis is increasingly common, as exemplified in anthropology by Fuentes and Wiessner (Fuentes and Wiessner 2016; Wiessner 2016). The development of archaeological theory over the last ten or fifteen years, as happened in the fields of history and philosophy of science, has bridged the divide between the old dualities of positivism/hermeneutics, explanation/interpretation and objectivism/subjectivism. Differences still exist, but if the objectivist ideal of processualism was exhausted some time ago, it is also obvious that a subjectivist version of postprocessualism or a postmodernist hermeneutic liberalism is not the solution. The rise of critical reflexivity as a central component of all theories and practices, and the consolidation of a weak model of science (rigorous data, robust methodologies and reflexive theories), open the way to a new integrative proposal that Kristiansen (2014) has recently identified as the 'new paradigm' for archaeology.

Kristiansen's proposal combines the science-based potentials of archaeological research (big data, deep archaeometries, information sciences, visualization technologies) with robust theories to produce meaningful narratives. This problem-oriented type of archaeological research brings together anthropological approaches and social sciences with 'hard' sciences. The frequent appearance of terms associated with 'sewing' and 'stitching' in material studies and in current theoretical archaeology converges with this trend.

However, any integrative strategy involves difficulties. Some are marginal: how to avoid the practical contradictions of diverging theoretical schemes (eclecticism has never been a solution), or how to overcome the dispersive effect of narcissistic disciplinary criticism (which is more interested in defending one's own identity and competing for academic power than in creating syntheses). But the most substantial difficulty is that we will not be able to progress towards a new state of awareness without first embedding these integrative trends within a reconsideration of modernity. This is urgently required and something that I would call a 'symmetrical re-modernity', which is to be understood as a process of overcoming the tropes that have shaped European thought up to now. To do this it will be necessary to question the philosophical foundations of modernity, identify the transformations of modern epistemologies, and correlate these with the transformations of knowledge and power strategies operating in our contemporary knowledge society.

For me 'symmetry' faces up to the challenge of overcoming the dichotomies that date back to the very origins of Western philosophy. Since the rise of Greek philosophy, the language of 'dualization' has constituted the metaphysics of being and in particular the way of resolving the copular verbs (i.e. the relationship between the subject and that subject's actions in relation to objects) in Indo-European languages, which drives our European

understanding of reality at ontological and epistemological levels. For a very different approach, one of the most original projects in the field of philosophy in the last 30 years is the rethinking of European philosophy from a Chinese perspective (Jullien 2010, 208). Jullien's simple but effective approach shows that the problem that Western metaphysics has with the duality distinguishing the object and the subject cannot be translated into the Chinese perspective: it depends on our European languages, which the Eastern tradition overcomes.

The ability to integrate *narrativity* and *scientificity* (the integration of sciences with humanities, theory with data) makes archaeology an essentially symmetrical discipline. I am not referring by this to the creation of a post-humanist metaphysics of objects and things (see criticism by Barrett 2014), but to the fact that archaeology is in a good position to overcome the traditional dichotomies of modernity, as has been demanded by several authors (Bryant 2011; González-Ruibal 2013; Latour 2007). Interpretive practice is the kernel of any integrative strategy that must avoid both explanatory objectivism and a hermeneutic subjectivity, but seeks instead to change the world through its interpretation without reifying the individual subjective condition. The main problem that still remains with regard to interpretation is that world views cannot be one-views. Therefore the key task is to find a contextual way of representing the world that integrates two different steps: the first step achieves a 'weak' interpretation through a formal comparison of regularities occurring between different ranges of phenomena or different codes (either material, literal, performative or ideal), the second step constructs a 'strong' interpretation by reading these regularities from the rationale of the cultural context to which they belong, something that constitutes what I refer to as a 'reason lost' (Criado-Boado 2012; 2015). Although the second step is the definitive one, the density of the matter is provided for by its own interpretation, which Ingold (2011, 342) illustrates with reference to basketry. Recent interest in material studies (Lemmonnier 2012) and thing-oriented approaches (Olsen 2012b) supports the empirical basis of interpretations in the material dimensions of real things. To some extent meaning could arise from the materialities themselves, because materials incorporate the means and senses of the actions on them. Their material dimensions speak about these means and provide the preconditions for them. Materialities are products that reflect the entanglement of the mind and the world; they negotiate, or even cause, this relationship (Malafouris 2013). Thus not only does the materialization process express this relationship (mind–world), but also its consequences (the material characteristics of matter) reproduce it. In the near future we would need to go far beyond speculative cognitive archaeology by including advances in the neurosciences and even archaeometric data. Some evidence suggests that in material culture there is a relationship between ways of doing, ways of perceiving and ways of thinking. The notion of 'statistics of the world' (Torralba and Oliva 2003) unveils the reason behind this entanglement and why human products (either materials or ideals) do not depend solely on the brain, the body, society or the environment, but instead upon connections with states of mind related to the world which include past human experiences, perceptions, projections

and reactions. Good archaeology will always embrace a productive fusion of speculative and scientific knowledge.

The current transformations of interpretation have to do with the ongoing transformations involved in the emergence of the 'knowledge society', but also relate to other realms: the scientific (the 'third scientific revolution'), the cultural (neo-baroque aesthetics), the social (the crisis of the European welfare state), and the political (hegemonic hyper-liberal power strategies). We need to disentangle the relationships within this network, such as science, knowledge, neo-baroque, the crisis and neoliberal policies and economics.

In epistemological terms, the third scientific revolution (cf. Kristiansen 2014) means the final decline of a system of knowledge based on metaphorical or metonymic representations, and the definite overcoming of analogical reasoning and knowledge. New genomics and digital technologies herald the emergence of a knowledge articulated by ersatz models (e.g. the DNA sequencing of an individual) and the experience of virtual realities. At the same time, the end of the old representationalism is related to major transformations currently taking place in the fields of knowledge, economics and politics (the 'knowledge society' or 'information age' – Castells 1989) that fracture the traditional equation of wealth with value. This makes possible counterintuitive situations in which, for example, Google's stock value exceeds that of General Electric by 50 per cent, with an annual turnover that is 4.7 times lower, and it fosters new forms of economic practice (commons, prosumers, Uber, the zero-marginal-cost society – Rifkin 2014) that take advantage of digital technologies. Meanwhile, what I identify as neo-baroque is one of the material ways of being that echoes the new cultural ways of living. Moreover, it goes together with current transformations of epistemology (i.e. anti-representationalism – Viveiros de Castro 2012) and ontologies (i.e. the agency of things – Brown 2001; Henare, Holbraad and Wastell 2007).

The recent actualization of the baroque (c.f. Klein 2004) in the world of fashion and aesthetics is significant (Prominski and Koutroufinis 2009) and equates with a number of major changes in all of the different realms of reality today: in epistemics, perception, virtual experiences, the economic crisis. I refer to this as the neo-baroque era not in a celebratory way, but instead as a critical diagnosis – a period that is not representational, but when old and new potentials (the synthetic, the corporeal, experiences, feelings, emotions and senses beyond sight) are available to understand reality. At a time marked by the hegemony of interpretive practices, when everything is nothing but interpretation, the baroque *loop* (Deleuze 1988) shows the way followed by the hermeneutic spiral of understanding. At a time when there is a fusion of different subjective horizons and everything becomes confused and confusing, the baroque brings back the adventure of combining, of diversity and cultural interbreeding. At a time when new ontologies emphasize things, the life of matter and the agency of actants, the baroque is recovered as the art that was able to breathe life into the inanimate. Something curious is happening: the same rationales that, from the perspective of northern European bourgeois and Protestant citizens, discredited the baroque in early modern Europe today warrant its reappraisal.

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What sense is there in the congruence between this neo-baroque in fashions and styles and the moment when science is breaking away completely from analogy and representation? The third scientific revolution has occurred at the same time as the neo-baroque, in the same way as the first baroque period anticipated the scientific revolution in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. If we return to the genealogy of the original baroque we can see that although the baroque was reviled by the Enlightenment it marked a milestone in modern science and contributed to making that Enlightenment possible. The maximum perfection of realism and the expression of emotion elevated to theatrical levels seen in baroque art and literature were capable of causing, better than any other means, the dual separation between object and subject (Panofsky 2013, 63). The development of science required this duality as a condition to enable the discovery of a modern epistemology and ontology. It is no coincidence that great scientists have always paid special attention to representation, with a constant entanglement between art and science (Galileo dedicated his life to science because he could not be an artist – Shea 2013, 59). This can be seen in the fields of perspective, cartography, optics, geodesics and, later on, photography: Nikola Tesla and Ramón y Cajal were great photographers. Now this emphasis has shifted to renewed interest in the visualization of data, derived from a genuine interest in how best to show 'big data' so that they are comprehensible. The eruption of 3D imaging is one extreme effect, similar to what happened a few years ago with GIS technologies. In both cases their boundless possibilities and low cost turned desktop PCs into incredible tools that often led us to forget what the scientific problem was that needed to be solved (something that Llobera (2010) has rightly criticized). Everyone now makes 3D reconstructions, but nobody says what the research question is. It is not because they do not know how to ask research questions but because the question is unnecessary. The aim is boiled down to re-engaging with reality itself, to making a model of it in high resolution, and ideally emancipating it from subjective distortion. The simultaneity of visualizations and 3D imaging with the ongoing scientific revolution and the neo-baroque is not a mere coincidence: on the one hand both overcome the hurdles of analogical representation (3D modelling is not an analogue drawing, but a mechanical and a synthetic image), and on the other hand their aim is to return to things themselves.

However, this emergence of the neo-baroque is ambiguous. It occurs in a non-representational period, in which pure experience enveloping bodies and things replaces representation and scientific models that wrap up the rationale of the world (for a critique see Millán-Pascual 2015). At the same time a new regime of understanding emerges that is characterized by synthetic, ersatz and corporeal performances, including a strong appeal for the emotional. Emphasis on precise depictions of reality arises from a pre-theoretical new empiricism (exemplified by the 3D and virtual reality boom) and matches with the complete dissolution of bodies and objects into experiences arising in the ontological turn. There is a trail to patch together these different experiences. For this reason it is not surprising that 'sewing' terminology is today a frequent metaphor in the archaeological narrative of other disciplines, whose genealogy is embedded, in my view, in the experience of coping with the multiplication

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and increasing complexity of modern life. It seems that the intricacy of the current multivocal action, multi-agent reality and multicultural context demands sewing, mending and patching up our fragmented life. *Entanglement* has become a core concept to encompass the fluidity of networks and to mean something that does not belong to single human actors but that is intrinsic to reality itself: it epitomizes the interwoven nature of the real, and calls for transdisciplinary research.

In this sense, Hodder's *entanglement* (2012) is as significant as Disney's *Tangled*, and, yes, I am referring to the Walt Disney film from 2010, two years before the appearance of Hodder's book, which in no way demerits it, but in itself has the merit of illustrating the fact that both works belong to stronger dynamics of rationality than the intention of their authors. The intellectual neo-baroque is an acknowledgement of plurality and multi-otherness, of diversity and fragmentation. The reality of these networks, interwoven with transitive and copulative engagements, is now so strong that in all of the different fields of knowledge and practices of late modernity we need the skill of seamstresses in order to construct intelligible, effective and efficient diagnoses of reality. And so theoretical literature has become full of terms we normally associate with this field: sew, mend, patch, entangle, ensemble, unravel, neatness, messiness, threads, networks, and so on.

This weaving process knits together such events as the neo-baroque, *Castle*, socio-economics, digital power (the fifth estate), anti-representationalism, new ontologies … and crisis. This type of synthesis that brings together big science, knowledge, new paradigms, entanglement theories, community research and public science leads us towards theoretical and practical consensuses that can be either as productive in scientific terms as they are empty in their transformative horizons, or as active in political terms as they are scientifically weak. In either case, there is the suspicion that this consensus which is interwoven into today's theoretical and practical integration of the sciences echoes neoliberal ideologies.

Kristiansen's (2014, 27) statement about living in 'the most exciting of times' focuses critics on the dilemma between optimism and pessimism (Larsson 2014, 53). Optimism lies in our chances of going deeper into the modernization project and producing a re-modernity, both reflexive and revised. Meanwhile, pessimism overwhelms us when we make a radical critique of modernity (following authors who approach modernity from a reverse perspective: Debord (1967); Jullien (1998); Kurz (2002); Piketty (2013); Rodrik's *trilemma* (2011)). Despite the fact that according to the latter idea there is no chance of salvation within modernity because modernity is the problem itself, from a pragmatic perspective the time has come to bring into play positive syntheses that recover the legacy of knowledge and modern experience, integrating it with the critical and reflexive perspectives of radical critique to draw up new paradigmatic frameworks that reconcile the main theoretical trends and proposals of the twentieth century in archaeology, science or culture.

The new paradigmatic frameworks require a symmetrical perspective, understood in the weak sense of thinking beyond dualities, that combines narrativity and scientificity. Applying this reflexive integration to research

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requires a re-politicization of our practices because, at the same time as creating scientific *reason* (i.e. certainty, by bringing together meaning and rationality), they displace practical reason from the domain of science and place it within a political arena. Knowledge is a social construct, and as such a political dimension must always form a substantial part of research practice. The political dimension is the means of building intersubjective networks of trust through the creation (as accounted for science by Latour (2013, 46)) of a transparent institution of archaeology (Alonso-González, forthcoming), something that has recently been addressed by Mizoguchi (2015). We must not be afraid of politics engulfing our practice in relativism and scepticism. The hard component of archaeological science that I advocate, and the epistemological and ontological precautions I have outlined here, together with ethics, prevent us from falling into the *trompe l'oeils* of extreme subjectivity. I do want an archaeology that is pragmatically pervaded by combining scientificity, interpretation and politics. Without considering the political dimension of knowledge (Beck 1997; Zaera-Polo 2008), radical optimism in science sounds like a version of the neoliberal consensus, another *trompe l'oeil* that is denied by the current situation of Europe and the world. Let me be provocative, to end: perhaps this sort of agreement in theoretical positions in archaeology and science could epitomize the trail to create the agreements that are so difficult in everyday life.

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## The body of the martyr. Between an archival exercise and the recovery of his suffering. The need for a recovery of humanity in osteoarchaeology

*Alexandra Ion**

### Abstract

This paper addresses the limits of the methods and questions asked by osteoarchaeologists when dealing with human remains. Osteoarchaeologists seem to take for granted that through the study of such remains they can say something relevant about a past individual's identity, something about the nature of their being. Since the early 1990s various voices have questioned these assumptions, also claiming that the study and display of human remains are unethical. It is my intention to rethink the topic of ethics in osteoarchaeology by shifting the focus to the research questions and methods we employ – what kind of evidence are we looking for and what kinds of relationship are we establishing with those earlier lives? By taking as a starting point the analysis of the remains of the Greek Catholic Bishop Vasile Aftenie, killed during the Communist regime, I explore the view practitioners take as the legitimate way of framing the relationship between past and present and the transformation of bones into scientific objects. In the end I propose that such

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a re-evaluation, alongside an opening of our discipline towards anthropology, can contribute to a recovery of humanity as part of the academic discourse, which should be the key element in any ethical discussion.

**Keywords**
body; osteoarchaeology; death; method; ethics; humanity

*Problematic distinctions are not binary oppositions*

LaCapra 1999, 699

The discovery of human remains is one which triggers a special emotional response (see Boyle 1999; Krmpotich, Fontein and Harries 2010; Crouch 2015); at times it turns into a disturbing experience, and altogether it starts a process of both distancing from and connecting to these relics (Leighton 2010, 91). At first glance, human remains seem like the closest material encounter with past individuals that one can get – they are the literal remains of a once living being. Osteoarchaeologists seem to take for granted that through the study of such bones they can say something relevant about a past individual's identity, something about the nature of their being.

Since the early 1990s various voices have questioned these assumptions, claiming that the study and display of human remains are unethical, as they objectify the once living being. It appeared as if the transition from a living being to corpse all too easily absolved the researcher from any ethical responsibility towards that individual. This simple claim was, however, thrown into doubt in those cases where an indigenous community included their dead within their community and therefore within the bounds of their ethical responsibilities. Discussions thus began to focus on the issue of the 'proper' handling, study and display of human remains, ranging from issues concerning the repatriation and reburial of bodies obtained in an abusive manner by science (Sayer 2010; Fforde, Hubert and Turnbull 2004; Jenkins 2010), to questions of what constitutes a proper research and display setting (see the codes of practice of the professional associations dealing with remains – Cassman, Odegaard and Powell 2008).

I propose that we need another ontological understanding of these remains as part of an osteoarchaeological analysis, to move beyond the idea that dead matter simply represents the once living human being and to adapt our methods to a different understanding of what the material, emotional and spiritual transformation from life to death might mean. I claim that we need to rethink research questions and methods in order to address explicitly the link between our ontological assumptions of what the studied bones are, and our epistemological goals: what kind of evidence are we looking for and what kinds of relationship are we establishing with those earlier lives? In the end I propose that such a re-evaluation can contribute to a recovery of humanity as part of the academic discourse, which should be the key element in any ethical discussion. I consider that at the heart of the problem is where we, in our present time, choose to stand in relation to the past in our process of knowledge production – what I call the ethical implication of our process

of engaging with the material and our emotional responses to that material. Therefore, by revealing and understanding these limits, we can imagine an osteoarchaeology that can provide a more meaningful way of engaging with alterity and the past.

Archaeology currently experiences what Robb and Harris (2013) have referred to as a crisis in contemporary understandings of the body, where the move between disciplines is a move between ontological premises and wider philosophical assumptions of what the body is. The relationship between the osteology and the archaeology of human remains is one of two different regimes of meaning that transpose the body from a natural-history to a humanities perspective, from the body-as-biological organism, analysed by osteologists, to the social being explored by funerary archaeologists. As Sofaer (2006) has noted, this creates a tension between two seemingly distinct models, the body as an embodied being and the body as a material thing. This tension also permeates ethical discussions of the 'proper' treatment of human remains in more ways than one: we claim ethical duties towards the former 'owners' of the bodies, the former embodied beings, but in practice we address them as material culture. In general, as reflected in the codes of practice or in ethically themed writings, most osteoarchaeological ethical provisions are framed in line with Geoffrey Scarre's position (2003; 2006; see also Tarlow 2006) that contemporary practices impact upon the dead as 'past people' and not as 'the dead'. In other words, we owe a respectful treatment to the dead in virtue of their former wishes as living people (that of being laid at rest, for example). It is not very clear, nor is it often discussed, what a respectful treatment means, and how one can legitimately justify osteological study if one follows this path. However, I claim that it is precisely this ambiguity present in contemporary practice as to how one should read these bones that creates the ethical problem. One cannot address humanity by limiting it to the bounds of skin and bone; rather one should explore embodied identities (Hamilakis, Pluciennik and Tarlow 2002; Joyce 2005; Rebay-Salisbury, Sorensen and Hughes 2010; Hamilakis 2014). It is precisely the rupture created by death that we need to think about in order to address what Thomas Browne (1835, 56) referred to as 'This reasonable moderator, and equal piece of justice, Death'. Does death contribute to a change in those humans' ontological status for us? In their current post-mortem status, after undergoing a number of taphonomic processes, are they simply signifiers of past individuals (dead matter which was once part of a biological organism), are they the signified beings (humanity residing in bones), or are there more complex processes at play? Should we even call them things? Are they bones or people? Is the reply to this question a valid enough argument to continue transforming them into scientific specimens or exhibits?

Osteoarchaeology applies a standard, universal framework for understanding that views human remains as material evidence; the way these procedures are devised means that they assume that it is a limitation of our methods that prevents us from unlocking the 'mystery' of the past. I claim that the issue of ethics should be considered precisely in relation to the regime of evidence in which we decode these human remains and ultimately to how we negotiate and interpret absence – what do we take these bones to stand for?

Contrary to Geoffrey Scarre, and quoting Kieran Cashell (2007, 346), I claim that 'precisely understanding the continued presence of the dead absentee for the living "survivor" . . . constitutes the philosophical problem of death'. A lot of the earlier and current debates on ethics in osteoarchaeology have avoided engaging in a deeper intellectual discussion and critical reflection on the topic, as has been rightly pointed out by Karlsson (2013) and by Svestad (2013): reburial can objectify and silence remains in the same way as any other practice.

In order to explore the view that practitioners (archaeologists and osteologists) take as the legitimate way of framing the relationship between past and present, with the dead standing for this past (Sayer 2010, 13) and the transformation of bones into scientific objects, I briefly explore a particularly controversial case study – the osteoarchaeological analysis of Bishop Vasile Aftenie's remains (PS Sa Mihai Frăţilă 2012). It is a case study that brings together two contrasting views on the nature of the bones, of their materiality in relation to absence/presence/past/present, and, depending on the way in which we choose to link these aspects, we take different views on the dead and on death in our endeavour. Aftenie's case is one in which osteoarchaeology met the cult of relics and the politics of memory. I should mention that even though the case study is similar to endeavours classified as forensic archaeology/anthropology, it is not my purpose to highlight the importance of such endeavours for the wider society. On the contrary, I intend to deconstruct the conviction that there is just one methodological reading of what the 'evidence' given by bones is, and that the results unquestionably contribute to bringing justice to the dead. My intention is to explore the relevance of the standpoint that osteoarchaeologists propose in regard to their understanding of a human being, and hence highlight how this clashes with the need for a more 'humane' osteoarchaeology.

Vasile Aftenie was killed during the Romanian Communist regime in 1950. In post-socialist Romania, archaeology and osteoarchaeology have been called upon on several occasions in the context of recovering and creating 'meaningful memories' (Kohl, Kozelsky and Ben-Yehuda 2008) of contemporary individuals who have tragically died or disappeared during the Communist regime. Examples include the research of the Institute of Investigating the Crimes of Communism in Romania for finding political victims of the Communist regime (Muraru, Budeancă and Bumbeş 2007; Petrov 2009a; 2009b; Institutul de Investigare a Crimelor Comunismului în România 2006), or the exhumation of several bishops' remains supervised by the Greek Catholic Church. The exhumation of Vasile Aftenie falls into this latter category, being part of a process of beatification led by the Greek Catholic Church. After the fall of Communism, society redefined itself in part by re-evaluating such existences, distancing itself from the past politics of forgetting (the forced silence on the created ruptures or absences during the Communist period). But what role did osteoarchaeology assume in this process and what did science choose to recall through the investigation of such a body? This brought together the perspective of the Church, which saw these bones not as signifying the past but as that 'being', and the biologically informed osteoarchaeological approach which saw them as objects and 'evidence'.

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Precisely because of these competing perspectives which met on the physical territory of the body, I view Aftenie's body as a *lieu de mémoire*, a space in which the past, its traces and memory meet. This concept, advanced by Piere Nora (1989), helps us in decoding the relationship between history and memory. Memory implies an affective relationship with the past, 'life . . . open to the dialectics of remembrance and forgetting' (ibid., 8), whereas history is a detached representation of something lost, looking at its object of interest from outside (ibid., 8–9). What the osteoarchaeological analysis did was to turn memory into history, to transform personal experiences into an archival exercise.

On 10 May 1950, Vasile Aftenie, a Greek Catholic bishop, died in the Văcăreşti prison. The limited information we have suggests that his death was caused by the beatings and torture he received in order to make him denounce his Greek Catholic faith (PS Sa Mihai Frăţilă 2012). Therefore, 60 years later, osteoarchaeology was called to fill in this void. Thus, to quote Verdery (2000), 'what put these bones into motion?': 'he was jovial, funny and popular. He was also invited to dine with the families of parishioners. The Securitate thought he would break easily, but he was the first one who died for his faith' (Corlăţan 2010). Vasile Aftenie had studied theology at Blaj and Rome; he was ordained a priest on 1 January 1926 and became a bishop in April 1940 (Biografie PS Aftenie n.d.). On 28 October 1948, aged 49, Aftenie was arrested and taken, along with other five Greek Catholic bishops, at first to Dragoslavele and then to the Căldăruşani Orthodox monastery, which had been converted into a prison. He refused the mitropolite position offered by the Orthodox Church in exchange for denouncing his faith. In May 1949 he was transferred to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, where he was tortured (Biografie PS Aftenie n.d.):

> According to the information from his file from CNSAS [National Council for Studying the Securitate Archives], on 25 March 1950, being in the basement of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the bishop Vasile Aftenie was paralysed and was taken to the hospital of the Văcăreşti prison, where, in the night of 9–10 May, he died at 51 years (Arhieparhia de Alba Iulia şi Făgăraş 2010).

His body was buried in secret in Bellu Catholic cemetery in Bucharest in an unmarked grave. After a couple of days, Monseniore Augustin Francisc from Saint Iosif Cathedral brought a cross, on which was inscribed simply 'V.A. 1950' (Corlăţan 2010). Some 60 years later, on 12 May 2010, my colleague Andrei Soficaru and I arrived at the presumed grave of the bishop in Bellu cemetery to attend the exhumation of Aftenie's bones. The process was supervised by the Commission for the Recognition of the Bones of God's Servant Bishop Vasile Aftenie (Arhieparhia de Alba Iulia şi Făgăraş 2010). The process of beatification of Vasile Aftenie was part of a broader agenda of canonization inside the Romanian Greek Catholic Church, which included seven other bishops. This was an integrated attempt at recovering the Church's memory and identity post-1989. In the Communist era, the Church had been prohibited, its properties confiscated, and its priests imprisoned. In the post-1989 'retribution' process, bodies become a means of establishing

legitimacy and provided material evidence of the Church's persistence in space. The bodies both of parishioners and of the dead became actors – the bishops' human remains are witness to the suffering endured by the representatives of the Church, the living embodiment of its history.

My colleague and I, as well as several archaeologists from the Institute of Archaeology Vasile Parvan, had been called to take part in this action in order to analyse the unearthed bones, to decide if they belonged to the bishop, and to bring evidence regarding his violent death (which translated for the Church into signs of martyrdom). This latter aspect essentially was at the core of the beatification process – the 'evidence of the bones' would be added to the testimonies and information found in the CNSAS files. Our research spanned two days, and consisted of unearthing and analysing the remains. The exhumation was attended by about 30 people: the gravedigger who had dug the grave in 1950, the exhumation committee, other gravediggers, archaeologists, priests and parishioners (Arhieparhia de Alba Iulia şi Făgăraş 2010). As soon as the level of the first bones was reached, the archaeologists took charge of the process: 'Poorly preserved ... the bishop's remains were found at a 1.98–2.06 m depth, calculated from the superior margin of the border. The body had been placed in dorsal decubit position, with his head towards the west' (Dragoman *et al.* 2012, 58). Besides the body, fragments of wood and nails from the coffin were also discovered, along with pieces of clothing. He was probably wearing his priest's garment, as a white collar and dark blue fragments from a pair of trousers were discovered (ibid., 62). Other materials discovered in the pit suggest that the grave had been an active place of worship and post-interment interventions: these included two buttons, construction debris, a candle fragment, a candle holder, Communist- and post-Communist-era coins, and a labelled glass vial with a lid containing hair (ibid., 69–70).

Once the bishop's remains were removed, they were placed in a box and stored until the following day, when the anthropological analysis took place. First, we washed the bones with water in the courtyard of the institution, left them to dry and then analysed them to determine sex, age, potential trauma marks or pathology. The results revealed that the remains of three individuals were represented, with the presumed bishop's remains labeled as 'skeleton 3' (Soficaru and Ion 2012). The information that we had to confirm was that the skeleton belonged to a man, aged 51 years, who had been tortured. To this was added the hearsay that he had been buried in a shortened coffin, having his feet cut in the process. To test these accounts, the bones were examined by eye and through a magnifying glass, compared with reference materials, and measured. The results of the analysis suggested that the remains belong to a man with a minimum age of 45 years and an average calculated height of 180 cm, and showed signs of a slight osteoarthritis. Based on these data, and corroborated by the 'V.A. 1950' inscribed on the cross and the priest's apparel discovered in the grave, the interpretation that the skeleton belonged to Aftenie appeared feasible. At the same time, given that the femora and tibiae were placed at the same level and in the correct anatomical position (Soficaru and Ion 2012), we could refute the belief that his legs had been cut. However, the lack of evidence for trauma on the bones themselves ('no

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fractures, cuts or blow marks were registered' – ibid., 37) prevented us from saying anything about the possible torture he might have suffered. It is worth noting that many torture methods would not have left marks on the bones, and their memory cannot be retrieved through such investigations (in contrast with this case, for example, in the parallel situation of Monseniore Vladimir Ghika, a Catholic priest who died in prison in 1954, the anthropologists could retrace the steps of the beatings he had received, as described in a talk presented at the Institute of Anthropology 'Francisc I. Rainer' by Andrei Soficaru and Mihai Constantinescu).

What can be seen is that the anthropological analysis turned into a process of identifying the person, an identification based on the correspondence between the story and the body. In this context, the body becomes archival material onto which age, sex, cause of death and material traces of suffering are inscribed. Osteoarchaeology acted as a legal forensic investigation, following a method of inquiry developed from a positivistic view of science (see also Domanska 2005, 396), one in which science was seen as evidence and not as interpretation (Ricoeur 1969). There is a history of viewing human remains as evidence since nineteenth-century court cases, and of decoding body signs as 'tangible evidence of otherwise invisible processes and events' (Crossland 2009, 71; other authors touching upon the semiotic perspective in osteoarchaeology include Domanska 2005; Joyce 2005; Marila 2009; Sofaer 2012). The model in Vasile Aftenie's case followed similar research into war crimes or the recovery of political victims' bodies (Anson and Trimble 2008; Cox *et al.* 2008; González-Ruibal 2012). In such instances, archaeology supports the idea that through the 'correct' identification and recording of discoveries, objects and bodies, it can provide evidence, reconstitute crime scenes and uncover victims' and killers' identities (Hanson 2008, 19–20). The key element is a body understood as *corpus delicti* (Buchli and Lucas 2001, 121), and the endeavour is often subsumed to an indictment. Given this understanding of the role of osteoarchaeological interpretation, the bones were constituted as signs or clues, and the body as evidence, a witness questioned to put a face to an already known story. The premise is that although 'reality may seem opaque, there are privileged areas, signs, clues, which permit us to penetrate it' (Ricoeur 2006, 123), a premise constructed in the semiotic paradigm (see also Ginzburg 1980). This is the reason why it was an investigation of the material traces (potential trauma marks), signs inscribed on the biological being. Ultimately their point is that signs are a substitute for the presence of the thing. An alternative might be what Ewa Domanska (2005, 395) called archaeontology, the 'gathering of existing things and the contemplation of their being with the aim of regaining the beginning'.

In this manner the individual was once again silenced. Ideally, an osteoarchaeological investigation in such a forensic context could serve as a good way of understanding and talking about the materiality of terror/violence and the way in which absences have been created by the Communist regime through the manipulation of bodies (cf. González-Ruibal and Moshenska 2015; Martin and Anderson 2014; Renshaw 2010). Such an account would allow us to understand the politics of symbolic forgetting

of the political enemies of the regime through a deeper understanding of a variety of issues: the ways that the victims' living and dead bodies have been handled and disposed of, the ways in which certain bodies have been turned into a place of commemoration for the Greek Catholic believers (who left traces of their veneration at the grave), and the ways in which such bodies served as symbolic landmarks that signified their outlawed beliefs and the meaning of the life of 'V.A.'. However, even if these were to be addressed, the problem still remains – how could osteoarchaeology have contributed to moving beyond an objectifying paradigm? The methods are limiting and raise ethical issues. One interesting point is raised by Bennett (2010, 12–13), who proposes that we raise the status of the materiality of which we are composed: 'Each human is a heterogeneous compound of wonderfully vibrant, dangerously vibrant, matter. The ethical aim becomes to distribute value more generously, to bodies as such … and in a knotted world of vibrant matter, to harm one section of the web may very well be to harm oneself'. This follows concepts derived from thinkers from Henri Bergson to Gilles Deleuze and it draws upon the philosophy of biology, and reorients thinking from passive matter towards 'vibrant life' (ibid.). Such an approach thus recuperates traditional questions in the philosophy of biology – how is life organized, the relationship between parts and wholes in understanding the dynamics of life – and in this case it can replace our current divisions between passive bodies and cultural understandings with bodies 'that act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own' (ibid., viii).

Furthermore, the osteoarchaeological endeavour focuses on the bones and records the static material as if the memory of a past identity resides in that material. It is true that the bishop's body acts as a *lieu de mémoire*: through its materiality, it makes manifest the past in the present. But different memories are brought into view depending on the ways in which this materiality is framed. What the osteoarchaeological process did, in the case of Aftenie, was to reduce the dynamic process of living and dying in a certain political and religious context to a static series of cause–effect relationships by constructing a divide between the three dimensions: bones–bodies–humanity. As the written accounts tell us, Aftenie was significant to others through the way he would direct his existence, in a lived body, whereas the scientific report understood the bones as passive objects, playing a functional role in the wider framework of the biological body represented by the skeleton. What gets lost in this interpretive process is the very humanity and performed identity of 'V.A.'. This is also reflected in the fact that the methodology silences our own (authors of the analysis) engagement with Aftenie's memory and his remains. How can humanity be recognized and expressed in the context of the analysis if there is no procedure or language that would acknowledge it without seemingly losing what is deemed as scientific objectivity? The analysis limited itself to highlighting the signs inscribed on the bones, read objectively as traces of past agencies inscribed on the biological being. Thus what was recorded was the agency of the killers (trauma marks, or their absence): Aftenie's age became 'age of death' and his passions were turned into 'cause of death'. Terms found in the osteoarchaeological report ('perimortem trauma',

'possible causes of death', etc.) are interpreted by the Church as evidence of martyrdom, integral to the view of the body as an agent, transformed through pain, and described through a language that encompasses the concept of personhood. For osteoarchaeology, on the other hand, 'V.A.' is a body described by the percentages and medical terms that limit themselves to an anatomical geography of a physical body. At the same time, other signs are simply enumerated – e.g. the taphonomic observation that the colour of the bones ranged from dark brown to black, as a result of the interwoven effect of the soil and the fabric of his trousers. However, this could have sparked a meditation on how Aftenie's identity (the priest's garment) sieved through his decomposing body (his bones), and merged with the burial environment. From this perspective we view an open body, placed at the confluence of dynamic processes in which life and death, identity and materiality, get enmeshed and co-constitute each other. In practice, the meaning of the remains moved from a body as 'cover' to embodied experience, from a body questioned as object of osteoarchaeological interest to a subject body (sacred relics) and the meaning of being embodied (Ciocan 2013, 17).

This case study illustrates that through constructing its categories, osteoarchaeology can become an unethical endeavour due to its ontological assumptions about what the bones stand for and the way in which such a study addresses and also misses the issue of past humanities. But the challenge remains: can we imagine a different osteoarchaeology? The Vasile Aftenie case provides a good example where we see how the limits of scientific discourse are configured in a context where different models of knowledge production (based on material evidence) overlap or collide, due to different ontological perspectives on the human body. Such an encounter confronts our embedded belief that current methodology is the only way forward. There is no easy or straightforward answer at the moment because we have pushed death out of the contemporary discourse and our practice leaves no room for ambiguous or transgressing categories. The engagement with other ontological perspectives on human remains might open up our discipline, but my thought is that what we need is a radical, new way of understanding the materiality of the body.[1]

What can we ask of osteoarchaeologists? I would say that one way further is to open our discipline towards anthropology (see also the recent proposals gathered in Crossland and Joyce (2015)), a move that would lead to a different positioning towards the individuals we talk about. In the particular case of Vasile Aftenie the application of a universal and standard methodology, devised for any kind of body/tomb, did not leave room for an understanding of the particulars of his situation. Osteoarchaeologists failed to acknowledge precisely the view of the body as the deceased himself would have embraced it, as a member and a bishop of the Greek Catholic community. Thus I think that maybe we need to adopt an approach similar to that which Crispin Paine has applied to religious objects in museums and move beyond what can ultimately be read as a colonialist practice which ignores the significance that the community gives to their own material. And by this I do not simply suggest that we 'talk respectfully' about human remains (whatever that might mean), but that we move beyond an 'objective' and universal methodology and actively engage with the agency of these remains. What is ultimately at

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stake here is an exercise in sincerity[2] – our approach to the Other (whether we talk about a prehistoric skeleton or a Second World War soldier) is grounded in a certain metaphysical stance, which is often unacknowledged under the pretense of 'objectivity'. Therefore the first step would be to make explicit this stance and affirm what it is that we deem important when we engage with the dead. My own interest is to give back a voice to those who got lost in the midst of history, or to reflect on the way the agency of their remains has impacted on the living.

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## Notes

[1] An interesting attempt at re-evaluating the concept of materiality is that of Jane Bennett (2010), but a discussion is still needed on whether the materiality of a human body can/should be approached in the same way as the materiality of a non-human entity.

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