Everything is Everything

In 1968 the architect Hans Hollein wrote;

> A true architecture of our time, then, is emerging, and is both redefining itself as a medium and expanding its field. Many fields beyond traditional building are taking over ‘architecture,’ just as architecture and ‘architects’ are moving into fields that were once remote. Everyone is an architect. Everything is architecture. (Hollein, 1968)

At about the same time Joseph Beuys was making a similarly utopian, though now more famous, call for society to become its own work of art claiming that, “every human being is an artist,” (Schata, 1995) John Cage was not to be left out either having already said in an interview in 1965 that, “everything we do is music” (Kostelanetz, 2003). Cage and Beuys’s statements were and are as problematic as Hollein’s; Cage and Beuys, just like Hollein, were intent upon rediscovering or re-engaging with a totalising social art, bequeathed to all as a social birth right. But the supposed universal availability of arts practice has at least one unfortunate side-effect. What happens when you call someone an artist who doesn’t habitually practice as an artist? Does it make any difference if they are an architect rather than an artist? What is to be made of the accumulated skills, knowledges, acquired techniques and social networks which are apparently, and at best, made interchangeable by these, albeit unintentionally, absolutist statements and at worst, rendered worthless by them? In 2006 Michael Shanks wrote – and like the title of this forum it seems to have been meant as a provocation – “we are all archaeologists now” (Shanks, 2012). I am an architect but I have a consuming passion for archaeology so I took him at his word and, in the summer of 2012 I was invited by Lesley McFadyen of Birkbeck’s Department of History, Classics and Archaeology to participate in their Fieldschool module at Must Farm. In the three days of participation my aims were twofold: firstly to understand, as far as it is possible to understand from such a brief and partial encounter, something of the nature of how archaeologists excavate – to see how those excavations are directed and to take part in the digging itself; and secondly to participate in the drawn recording of artefacts if the opportunity presented itself. The opportunity did present itself and the drawing I had made there found its way (quite openly – this was no Ortonesque act of disciplinary infiltration) into the project archive (see Fig. below).

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1 With apologies to Diana Ross and Lauryn Hill.
2 The excavations were run on a day to day basis by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit under Mark Knight. In charge of the students of the Birkbeck Fieldschool was Lesley McFadyen.
3 Between 1959 and 1962 English playwright Joe Orton and his partner Kenneth Halliwell withdrew a number of books from local libraries, altered and then covertly replaced them, an act for which they were convicted and, briefly, imprisoned. See; COLSELL, I. 2013. Malicious Damage: the Defaced Library Books of Kenneth Halliwell and Joe Orton.
What are archaeologists and architects doing, and what do they believe they are doing, when they pick up a pen or pencil, or when they open a piece of C.A.D. software? What do their respective disciplines purport to be doing when their practitioners employ drawing practices? Do architects and archaeologists draw differently and do the instrumentalities implicit in their drawings stand opposed to one another as is often casually assumed – one future-facing and the other orientated towards the past? The relationship of archaeology to that other purportedly past-facing discipline, history, provides evidence, I would argue, of the dangers of assuming, or seeking, direct connections to the past. In historiography, superficially at least, the dangers of this view do seem to have been understood; in 1995 writing of the mid-twentieth century Annales School, Aron Gurevich observed that;

the historians of a new cast are very far from the old illusion of being able to ‘resurrect’ the past, to ‘live themselves into it’ and to demonstrate it ‘wie es eigentlich gewesen war’. They clearly understood that historical reconstruction is no more and no less than construction, that the historian’s role is incomparably more active and creative than their predecessors believed.” (Gurevich, 1995)

“Wie es eigentlich gewesen” is usually translated as “how things actually were,” an influential principle in the rise of source-based history from Leopold von Ranke’s 1824 work, Geschichte der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494 bis 1514 (Ranke, 1885 [1824]). The idea was that by going to primary sources, sources often personal and only obliquely related to the main subjects of mainstream histories, that a closer approximation, a more accurate reconstruction, could be made. Tod Presner describes this view of the relationship between event and narrative as demanding, “a structural homology between real events and the narrative strategies used to represent, capture, and render them meaningful” (Presner, 2004). For von Ranke and his followers the past in this view was, through these empirical reconstructions, solved or at least made solvable. Walter Benjamin, like Gurevich, was unconvinced and described von Ranke’s “wie es eigentlich gewesen” as, “the strongest narcotic of the [nineteenth] century” (Benjamin, 1999). By the time E. H. Carr wrote in his influential What is History in 1961 that, “by and large, the historian will get the kind of facts he wants. History means interpretation” (Carr, 1987) interpretive and reflexive historiographies had already marginalised empirical reconstructions understood, as they were, to be part of this now discredited empiricist historiography. Following suit, archaeology became freer, it seemed, to make reconstructions through multivalent, reflexive interpretations of hitherto mainstream archaeological evidence (Shanks and Hodder, 1995, Hodder, 2006). Work at, for example, Çatalhöyük (Hodder, 2000) now presage a kind of archaeology without archaeologists in the spirit of Bernard Rudofsky’s Architecture Without Architects (Rudofsky, 1964) but
shorn of architecture’s alternative central vernacular tradition. Where Rudofsky’s “non-pedigree” architects might tap into ancient local practices of building, no equivalent tradition exists in archaeology. An antidote to this seeming free-for-all is available; architecture as an overtly design-based discipline can lend to archaeology ways of re-casting its own reconstructive practices to reveal forms of propositional making already latent within them. Just as archaeology could, indeed should, make available to architecture its evidence-based practices of excavation, assemblage and find identification, including a range of technical, in-situ, drawing practices along with, as Blaze O’Connor put it, “taphonomic forces, accumulation, sedimentation, reuse, repeated activity, truncation, chaîne d’opératoire” (O’Connor, 2008).

Yet one might have thought that for the word artist, or architect, or archaeologist to mean anything, that surely they must adhere, however broadly conceived, to certain sets of practices, techniques and aims which are differently centered from other disciplines even if those same practices, techniques and aims shift over time and through space. Even in my own interdisciplinary research (Zambelli, 2011, Zambelli, 2013), it is important to be able to say that, “I am an architect, using the tools and techniques of architecture and archaeology, towards archaeology, to produce work which is a hybrid of both.” But without working definitions of ‘architect’ and ‘archaeologist’ these objectives become meaningless.

What would it signify, therefore if an architect were to record an artefact at an archaeological excavation? What if that recording were made using (accidental) hybrid architectural/archaeological drawing techniques but the purpose of that drawing was simply to take its place in the project archive amongst other drawings made by archaeologists? And what if those architectural drawings were presented at, say, an archaeological conference, or workshop; what would this signify for that architect’s practice, or for the practice of archaeology? I would maintain that the products of this kind of hybrid practice would still be intelligible (and not trivial) because the suites of artefacts and practices, techniques and tools used in archaeology and architecture already have a relationship of shared ancestry.

If architecture looks to the future by making visual, usually drawn, propositions then archaeology designs also but in the form of reconstructions of the past in the present (Shanks and Tilley, 1992), (Shanks and McGuire, 1996). In addition I would propose that elements of architecture and archaeology are simply (and not so simply) forms of one another; that some resemblances between them are explicit and revealed, and that others have become obscured with time, but that all such resemblances share homological similarities of interconnected origins – even though those origins may be manifold. Of the suppressed and now apparently divergent resemblances, design for architecture and reconstruction for archaeology are closely related but may be rendered explicit through types of interdisciplinary analysis and practice. Furthermore, the intimacy of design and reconstruction enables interdisciplinary practice in the space between their parent disciplines.

To return to Must Farm, the fortunate (for me) confluence of commercial excavation with an educational fieldschool enabled me to practice something like archaeology, fleetingly, in a commercial though perhaps surprisingly nurturing, environment; an architect navigating outwards from his base discipline (Coles and Defert, 1998) towards archaeology. Disciplinary centres do, of course, serve a function – interesting, ground-breaking and moving work continues to be made deep in architecture and archaeology and art, but for work to be self critical it must look not just to its centres, nor even its peripheries, but to the space between disciplines where the influence of parent disciplines is weak and thus available to interdisciplinary practices; space where we can, if not all then many of us, be something like archaeologists.

\* The Must Farm drawing was presented in a paper I presented at TAG 2013, Chicago.
References


