The Beauty of Letting Go: Fragmentary Museums and Archaeologies of Archive

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> There seems to be a constant decay of all our ideas; even of those which are struck deepest, and in minds the most retentive, so that if they be not sometimes renewed by repeated exercises of the senses, or reflections on those kinds of objects which at first occasioned them, the print wears out, and at last there remains nothing to be seen.
>
> John Locke, *Human Understanding*

Archaeology and museology constantly balance their emancipatory potential against their legacies as colonial controlling processes. Do archaeology and museums occupy a key space in contemporary identity formation? Are they part of the modern state's inventory of attributes rather than public "contact zones?" Museums' attempt to reinvent themselves as socially engaged places of memory are hindered by an embedded desire to catalogue, conserve, and display objects. Many of the peoples whose objects are collected and displayed believe in an encultured world in which the decay and death of people, objects, places, and time was and remains expected.

We need to consider how objects work and what their rights might be. Objects, places, and people have typically "messy" biographies that offer points of attachment for a wide range of sensory engagement. Archaeology's two strengths, materiality and context, can productively expose significant ruptures in master narratives through archaeologies of archive that ask how objects come to be collected and displayed

(or not) and at what cost. This wider understanding of the archive as multitemporal and multisensorial can show how decay and history intersect with personhood, place, and politics, demonstrating the Beauty of letting go…

Imagine a beautifully designed museum where light, airy galleries enter into contrapuntal conversation with darker, more atmospheric niches. Imagine further that these spaces frame and give texture to thousands of objects[1] collected from near and far, from long ago and yesterday. Now imagine that, intermingling with beautiful and intact, text-accompanied objects, there are hidden display cases, empty or half-filled with tragic and disintegrating objects, some smelly. The visible manifestation of declining funding? The aftermath of "looting" such as recently occurred at the Iraqi National Museum in Baghdad? No. The future of museums and archaeology? Hopefully.

Any talk of the future requires revisiting first principles. One such basic principle concerns how we treat material culture and, is encapsulated by asking the simple but salient question "why conserve?" Foregrounding artifacts as always being in states of transformation, some of which may be called "decay," should not be positioned as a shock tactic to spur greater conservative efforts (Page and Mason 2003), but as a comment on culturally specific understandings of the nature of artifacts, time and being. The relevance of museums[2] and archaeology in postcolonial contexts is constantly debated both to score easy political points and to address serious mismatches between museums and the societies in which they operate (for example Davison 1998; Hooper-Greenhill 1992; Karp and Lavine 1991; Pearce 1992; Stocking 1985). The institutional "audit cultures" (cf. Strathern 2000) that determine what is and isn't collected and displayed (Belk 2001), who gets jobs and funding, and what research, collection, and education outputs should be, is a pressure ill-suited to museums and archives functioning for the diverse publics they should be serving. Similarly, in studying the material culture of "other" cultures we oscillate between studying artifacts in embedded physical contexts and by disembedding artifacts for study elsewhere. This latter move typically entails legal ownership justified by neoliberal notions of stewardship and conservation, leading to friction between "an object-center d discourse on ownership, while archaeologists and ethnographers are but part of a larger (perhaps western) academic discourse which values knowledge over property" (Brodie 2003:13). But what saves museums, archaeology, and their attendant archives is their skill at using artifacts as metonyms that have the valence to evoke imaginaries of "other" people, objects, and places (Kusimba 1996;

Simpson 2001). Yet despite this power, few practitioners pay sustained attention to the histories and biographies of their archives (but see Bennett 1995; Fehr 2000; Gosden 1999; Murray 2001; Trigger 1989) or consider how objects work.

At the heart of these techniques of acquisition, research, and display is a particular brand of post-Enlightenment science that stresses the importance of static ocular-centric observation and meta-narratives that James Elkins calls "our beautiful, dry and distant texts" (Elkins 1997). This bias has made largely unproblematic the acceptance of quasi-military techniques like aerial photographs, infiltrative participant observation, and culture-historical mappings to surveille and enclave the people or "cultures" of specific geo-cultural landscapes (Harley 2001; Werbart 1996). Though social scientists are mostly aware of the problematic construction of sight as the sense of reason (for example Elkins 2000; Jay 1994) dependence on vision remains our single most pervasive epistemological and ontological bias. The scientific gaze is positioned as a neutral but potent vehicle that can access spatially, culturally, and temporally distant knowledge systems. Archaeology and museology trace a genealogy to Robert Merton's contention that the science of studying artifacts and people was portable, replicable, and that the forces generating social phenomena were largely uniformitarian (Merton 1973). Few practitioners today support Merton's assertions, but paradigm lag, familiar institutionalized practices, and lack of political will are hard obstacles to overcome. But we can try. One way to perceive our faults and institute remedial action is to step outside our normal boundaries – a move Johannes Fabian likens to an "out of body experience" (Fabian 2001). Sometimes we can only "see" ourselves clearly, especially warts and all, when we adopt another's perspective – in this case the "cultures" we display and the real and imagined audiences of those displays. Previously subject and objectified people increasingly are taking control of their identity, biopower, and representations (for example Said 1989; Tuhiwa-Smith 1999).

Allowing such outsiders in can generate innovative display techniques. Fred Wilson – an African-American former museum attendant turned installation artist – culls objects from a museum's collection, which he juxtaposes in provocative and thoughtful ways. In one powerful statement, ragged British and French imperial flags blindfold and gag wooden Zambian masks with the musty naphthalene-ness of the flags warring with the oilier nose of the masks (Wilson 2002–3). This "reverse gaze" (see Clifford 1988:120–1) has the benefit of presencing a counternarrative, but the disadvantage of being easily ignored because

it typically is reactive. Rather than a binary "us" : "them" opposition, we can insert the objects we collect, study, and display as agents. Georg Simmel writes powerfully on the politics of numbers: a "3," for example, suggests the possibility of an interlocutor and exponentially more connective and disjunctive possibilities than does a binary (Simmel 1950 [1908]:43). This approach grants greater human – object intersubjectivity and coproduction (Latour 1993; Haraway 1991; Polyani 1962) and shows perspective's partiality:

> There is a premium on establishing the capacity to see from the peripheries and the depths. But here lies a serious danger of romanticizing and/or appropriating the vision of the less powerful while claiming to see from their positions... The standpoints of the subjugated are not "innocent" positions. On the contrary, they are preferred because in principle they are least likely to allow denial of the critical and interpretive core of knowledge. They are savvy to modes of denial through repression, forgetting and disappearing acts – ways of being nowhere while claiming to see comprehensively... But *how* to see from below is a problem requiring at least as much skill with bodies and language, with the mediations of vision, as the "highest" techno-scientific visualizations (Haraway 1981:191; italics original)

Partial perspectives confer authorship, responsibility, and self-awareness. They ameliorate a top-down scopic stance with a more embodied vision. I attempt the "how" to perceive "from below" by considering how objects work and suggest three fundamental rights for objects that, in turn, encourages an archaeology of archive. I conclude by moving beyond the building to consider how "heritage sites" and storytelling offer socially engaged and multisensorial means of identity formation and coming to terms with difficult past and presents. I situate this discussion in post-Apartheid southern Africa, sampling artifacts, museums, and monuments.

Object Logic

> What does food want from us?
>
> Aldona Jonaitis, Sintra Conference 2003

When we study or display artifacts we frame our work on concepts of the object's authenticity. Within this frame objects are usually presented

as being in an either pristine or conserved state. Restoration and conservation interventions may even be unvoiced lest they detract from foregrounding the objects' authenticity. Alternatively, interventions may be highlighted to demonstrate conservation science's virtuosity (Crew and Sims 1991). The expertise and power invested in these conservation programs can gloss the fact that the provenance and ownership of artifacts in the archive is contested and suggest that the objects are clearly safer in say, Los Angeles, than wherever they originated, legalities and ethics aside. But conservation interventions are strategic and are not applied to most artifacts as it is expensive and time-consuming. High-profile interventions create the impression of comprehensive curatorial care and deflect attention from artifacts accumulating in and rotting in collections (Beck and Daley 1993). Whichever façade is presented, the object is abject, subservient to a greater project concerned with uncovering original meanings and presenting a pleasing outer surface. What then is the logic of objects? How do they work; how may we know their needs and approach them? One way to understand object logics is through their changing material states and our attendant and unstable perceptions of materiality.

Though now unfashionable in mainstream anthropology, the "fetish" helps connect materiality to human subjectivity. We can trace the fetish to the 1436 CE Portuguese-African encounter in which the medieval amulets called *feitição* (Latin *facticius* – "manufactured") were transferred to seemingly lawless African life that was seen to revolve around "idols" (Pietz 1987). For the Portuguese, "fetish" came to mean a beautiful façade masking something false. But it soon came to mean an object that embodied the spirit of a civilization and that was ultimately incommensurable but integral to cross-cultural colonial encounters. Later, Marx's classic analysis stressed the attribution of surplus value to objects, mis-recognizing human-material coproduction. Otherwise put, material relations between people and objects become expressed as social relations between objects (Marx 1967 [1867]:72–3; also Appadurai 1992). Consequently, social scientists try to decipher residues that accrete and erode on and from objects, giving primacy to meaning rather than materiality.

Another twist on human-object relations among "Westerners" from Classical times to the near-present concerns the power of objects over people and vice versa. Elaine Scarry traces a shift from when beautiful objects had the capacity to hold in their power people who gazed upon them, to when the beholder's gaze has power over the object (Scarry 1999:120–4). This shift is bundled with a Euro-centric discourse on

"beauty" – a quality objects are said to radiate when they bear out the intentions of their makers. When different cultures came into contact through European colonialism, people realized that displaying exotic objects and bodies in museums involved considerable violence to the object and the truth it was meant to convey but could not. Museums violate one of the key tenets of archaeology – the importance of context. Metropolitan museums almost always are disembedded, displaying objects, places, and people from elsewhere in spaces that encourage vision and a relatively fast flow of movement. The spatial and cultural difference between the museum and its objects is often so great that audiences consider it a betrayal. Even grouping objects in dioramic simulacra do not ultimately succeed. People do not have "faith in fakes" (Eco 1986), which utilise mechanical reproductive processes that water down the essential "aura" of a work (Benjamin 1968:221). Unless, of course, the "fake" seeks not to copy but to create and even recreate itself – Las Vegas with its temples, pyramids, and pirate ships being the most outrageous example. Alternatively, copies need not be considered watered down penumbral phenomena, but actively draw from an original's aura. An example here is Lascaux II – the photogrammetrically reproduced replica of the Upper Palaeolithic rock art site in what is today France. So successful is the copy that it is limited to 2,500 visitors per day, thus both drawing from an aura and becoming an artifact in its own right. Authenticity is a key concept in curators' and publics' perceptions of what is worth keeping, displaying, discarding. But "authenticity" is a malleable concept and can accommodate fakes if they are old, sufficiently spectacular, or endorsed by sufficiently authoritative connoisseurs. Authenticity is also directional. Some people are more concerned with the object as material manifestation while others are more interested in the knowledge and emotions tethered to objects.

Integrating these directionalities is important because glossing detached objects with text compounds confusion. The limitations of language are marked in postcolonial contexts where many people cannot or will not read. Textual alienation stems in large measure from the core epistemology of museums as a visible and repeated disciplining of objects and people into a desired world order. Objects are seldom displayed or curated without a caption, label, or description. Branches of archaeology have even considered material culture as "text" in which objects constitute a "record", "syntax," or "code" that can be cracked and meaning read off (for example Tilley 1991). This privileging of language over object stresses an outsider-looking-in stance that does not adequately reference the object's originator community, temporality,

or geography. Words may be thought of as a voice speaking for an object, but a harsh one that is not always well-disposed to that object. For example, the "Yosemite" of North America were so-named by their enemies the southern Sierra Miwok. Lafayette H. Bunnell of the Mariposa Battalion chanced upon the latter in 1851 CE and believed "Yosemite" to be an emic ethonym. However, "Yosemite" means "there are killers among them" and the "Yosemite" called themselves the "Ahwahneechee" or "people of the gap-mouthed valley" (Gudde 1998). But for this historical conjuncture their artifacts must now (and forever?) bear an exonym. Ethnonomy – the emic and etic ascription of identities – is a critically important study able powerfully to expose the masking and naturalizing of European colonialism. There are several ways to deal with the tyranny of text. One way, more common to art galleries than to museums, is to display objects unencumbered by text stressing the incommensurability of writing about objects. Feelings of wonder and a greater appreciation of the object as material manifestation are the fruits of such a tactic. If that object can be displayed without impediment, people can experience other attributes such as smell – usually of mustiness, chemicals or sometimes woodsmoke – and occasionally touch such as in "blind alphabets" (Coombes 2001:250–1) and discovery rooms. Text can even be used against itself by, for example, hanging opaque text-imprinted plastic in front of objects, actively hindering people's view and understanding of what is on display (see Figure 10.1) (Ouzman 1995:3).

Object rights

> Without accepting the fact that everything changes, we cannot find perfect composure. Because we cannot accept the truth of transience, we suffer.
>
> Shunryu Suzuki, *Branching Streams*

These non- and antitextual interventions help center the object, but they are still subject to human agency instead of a more networked human-object coproduction. Though logically only partially possible, it might be interesting to think about objects as having certain rights, as people do. These rights are not synonymous with "stewardship," "curation," "conservation," and similar interventions that are more accurately characterized as human obligations to objects. The general goal of these activities is to preserve some form of patrimony for the

Figure 10.1 Text on plastic obscuring artifacts. "The Wind Blows Dust ...
material culture of the San of southern Africa's central interior" exhibition, South
Africa, 1995

benefit of future human generations. Rather than relying on a deferred
temporality – a kind of "excavating the future" – object rights draw from
environmental politics of the brand that acknowledges the mutuality
of "nature" and "culture" (for example Cronon 1995; Pollan 2001;
also Ingold 2000). As a result of environmental lobbying, legal rights
were granted to singular objects (such as trees) and coagulations of
objects (such as a watershed; see Stone 1973) within most Western juris-
prudences. These object rights strengthened people's ability to claim
aesthetic, posterity, and economic rights bound up in (natural) objects.
This approach was initially promising in asking what the needs of
natural objects were, but became hijacked by the gentry. Perhaps the
approach can be redeemed by using explicitly cultural objects. The
most obvious and powerful such cultural object is human remains. The
polemic on archiving human remains shows the power of words. What
would happen if, instead of using "human remains" we used "humans."
This one instance of a common curatorial embracing of the fragmentary,
decaying, and incomplete nature of a specific artifact strategically uses a
diminished physical state to suggest similarly diminished responsibility

to wider society. More complete human "remains" such as mummified or otherwise preserved people tend to evoke stronger reactions from people, and museums almost never "restore" people, though they can simulate them and try to arrest their decay. For example, Oetzi, the *c*.5300-year-old Tyrolean "ice man" loses about 5 grams of his 14 kg body weight a day, now slowed to 6 grams a month with the construction of a special refrigerated storage facility (SAPA 2003). But apart from being artifacts, archived humans can reasonably be ascribed certain "rights" such as are contained in the World Archaeological Congress "Vermillion Accord" and various national legislations that regulate the treatment of humans dead and alive. A note of caution is here required. Rights-speak is very common these days and, as Michael Brown warns (2003:229–40), predisposed to conflictual, antagonistic interchanges rather than committed to finding workable ground. Nor should objects' rights take precedence over human rights. The recent outcry over the destruction of Iraqi archaeological and other heritages was much more muted when it came to speaking out against the loss of human life in the same war (Hamilakis 2003; Ouzman 2003). Further, the "audit culture" that pervades archaeology and heritage provides sufficient noise and business to drown out the concerns of claimants on specific heritages. Perhaps object rights should be meant spelled with a small "r." But some sort of strong object-centric corrective is needed – a robust set of expectations which objects can reasonably expect to have. This is not to argue that we reverse the trajectory from human back to the all-powerful affective object (cf. Scarry 1999:120), but to acknowledge that humans and objects produce and projects each other and should have contextually equivalent standing (Latour 1993:142-5; Stocking 1985). What then would objects' "rights" be and how may we accommodate them?

Drawing from recent renewed archaeological interest in "object worlds" – especially those experienced multisensorially (Stahl 2002) – I suggest three basic object rights: the right to a life history, agency, and home. These rights may also be stated in the plural, since most artifacts have long, complicated, and multiple biographies (Hoskins 1998).

First, acknowledging an object as a living entity or having life potential accords with many indigenous conceptions of material culture embodying sentience (cf. Brown 2003:chapter 5). Here the originator or custodial community who have insider knowledge on the conditions of the object's genesis and/or care are key. Some objects are said to have a life cycle, and in these instances "conservation" disrupts the

balance between life and death and stigmatizes the archive as a macabre space. It is like life support for a gracious but terminally ailing relative. Conservation and display stress stasis, and though often aesthetically pleasing, this appearance belies considerable violence to the object and to the object's creators. Life and its residues are necessarily multi-sensorial – and archives are not exempt, especially when they can, if pushed, accommodate different sensory registers. For example, in southern Africa, the Bantu-speaking Venda have special drums used to summon rain (see Figure 10.2) (Blacking 1965:22–30). These drums

Figure 10.2 Venda drums safe and fed in National Museum, South Africa

are spoken of as being a herd of five cattle that regularly need to have pungent animal fat and red ochre lovingly rubbed into them to make them "well." Pleasingly, this indigenous intervention can fit within existing curatorial practice as fat prevents the wood and animal skin from cracking. That the fat and ochre are modern and not "original" is offset by realizing that these substances add to the drums' archaeology and satisfy their makers' wishes. Further, when these drums are made, the largest "bull" may have the bones of the chief or the stones from a crocodile's stomach with whom the chief is zoomorphized, placed inside it – a perfect embodiment of the inextricable human–material relations. The chief is an active ancestor residing in the similarly active drum, which needs to be kept in a safe place, usually a cave. Though unanimity is a fiction, a number of Venda have expressed their satisfaction that a museum qualifies as such a safe place to keep the drum ancestor.

That the belief in an object's life cycle is not just an "indigenous" concern was forcefully highlighted in 2004, the 500th anniversary of Michelangelo's "David" sculpture, to be commemorated by a controversial restoration process. In the debate that lost itself in the minutiae of how best to clean the sculpture, art historian James Beck adopted a larger and more sensory perspective by opposing any intervention whatsoever:

> A work of art is pretty much like a human being. We all get battered, we all break bones, they mend, we go and get some disease, we get cured, and then we die. There's an organic life to a work of art, too. It accumulates experience as humans do, and those experiences shape it. Once you've understood that, the idea of going back to the original seems pointless, even if it were possible (Spinney 2004)

The stains and marks objects acquire and lose over time are part of the process that give artifacts their allure (also Dekkers 2000). Archaeologically, the patina on "David" is a site formation process in miniature, the stratigraphy of years of environmental and social information. Further, basic research suggests that this "grime" is protecting what is really an inferior piece of marble – Michelangelo then being short of money – from more rapid decay. Apart from their politics and financial implications, these restorations draw on a Classical ocular-centric "perfection," which prefers clean surfaces to underlying layers and textures. Such curatorial assumption of single authorship and a relatively brief genesis lead to "pristine" restorations, which project a narrow range of knowable original meanings. This focus on original

states explicable by meta-narratives is in need of remedial roughness. Here conservation mirrors archaeology – peeling back layers to an imagined original state and meaning that is considered more important than the overlying layers and subsequent lives of the artifact these layers represent. Artifacts made for one purpose and then reused at later times for another purpose are usually considered derivative and even decadent.

But these multiple lives highlight the second right of objects – agency. Rather than here tread the well-worn path of active agency, I support a more chaotic and fragmentary agentiveness that would fall within de Certeau's "*docta ignorantia*" (1984), replete with unintended consequences rather that over-determined, all-knowing social manipulation. For example, the social sciences use material culture of people present and especially past as metonyms – "artifacts were seen as standing for an entire human culture" (Dicks 2003). Having imputed into you the capacity to speak for whole cultures and epochs is an enormous responsibility. As a fragment with specific life histories, an object necessarily embodies temporality, but often fragmented with imperfect knowledge of its context. But to assume that our and the object's temporality are commensurable is to assume rather than question that time past connects with time present. Many objects are mysteries – we do not know who made them, why, or for what purpose. But a grid of classification, causality, and consequence can mask this deficiency. Better to foreground the object's right to exist as an interesting but sometimes unknowable and unknowing entity, reining in the portability and replicability of Merton's scientific method. Through the object we may have a more modest but honest view of material and human agency. An interesting convergence of these agencies is provided by bacterium such as *Pseudomonas stutzeri* that are used to clean medieval European frescoes (Arie 2003). Janet Hoskins puts this relationship in a more active but chaotic dialectic: "Not every biographical object is chosen by its subject. An object can at times be imposed or attributed, linked to someone who did not consciously choose it as a vehicle for her own identity" (Hoskins 1998:161). A good example of the sometimes knowing, sometimes recondite object is the "bored stone" – a ubiquitous sub-Saharan African artifact. Usually a hard rock culturally modified into a more or less spherical artifact through which a hole is bored (see Figure 10.3), bored stones are found in many cultural contexts dating as far back as 27,000 years ago to now (Ouzman 1997). A survey of published, ethnographic, and archaeological sources yields no fewer than 43 observed or imputed uses of "bored stones" that range from

Figure 10.3 Bored stone and less agentive associated artifacts, southern Africa

digging stick weights to spindle whorls to phallic objects. The power of language to mask via the generic label "bored stone" compresses disparate millennia, cultures, and geographies into two words. Debate on bored stones" "original" meanings is common. Even when clearly having multiple uses – like when a digging stick weight was used as an upper grindstone – the subsequent uses are seen as derivate and secondary. Technology is an important aspect of this artifact's agency. Many European-descended Africans have difficulty reconciling the huge labor and aesthetic effort of bored stones with their imaginations of, for instance, the San as noble or even ignoble "savages." When people today are allowed to pick up these objects they heft them, feel their weight, peer through their aperture, sniff and tap them, and they wonder, wonder, wonder... But left at that point, the attraction to bored stones and similar artifacts with laminated histories is indulgent and makes archaeology and museums even easier to marginalize by people for whom ruins have no romance. Here the post-colony's histories add an essential political engagement between archive and audience. Thus, bored stones also presence violence. In central South Africa Boer farmers would routinely break these artifacts because they associated them with

the San who fought tooth and nail against the Europeans over the land. A broken stone is thus no less worthy an artifact because of the manner of its death. Bored stones and similar "special" artifacts have an agency that selects us to collect and display them. We therefore need to temper strong object agencies with "small things forgotten" which have less direct but perhaps no less interesting biographies.

Third, objects have a right to a home. I do not necessarily mean an "original" home but the object's right to integrate with or reject its current surroundings. This requires understanding an artifact's life cycle and biography as always in production. Most archives are concerned with provenance – the succession of homes an artifact has had and owners it has tolerated – which is vital in, for example, countering the illicit antiquities trade (Renfrew 2001). But provenance can be presented piecemeal, glossing dubious, derivative, or violent episodes or stressing an original location. Objects are important per se, but as and even more important are the various knowledges associated with objects that underpin the material's authenticity. Absent objects like the Elgin Marbles help to sustain particular brands of nationalism that would not be as strongly attached had the object not been absent. The most promising way to satisfy an object's right to a home is via an archaeology of archive that traces how objects came to be collected and curated, and their archival life cycle. The archaeology of archive is multiple and even contradictory but has the necessary messiness that people living in previously colonized countries or lands with violent pasts may find more believable than the sterile simulacra approach used in large parts of the heritage industry.

Archaeologies of Archive

> Why, if ancient knowledge has been preserved and if, speaking in general, there exists a knowledge distinct from our science and philosophy or even surpassing it, it is so carefully concealed, why is it not made common property? Why are the men who possess this knowledge unwilling to let it pass into the general circulation of life for the sake of a better and more successful struggle against deceit, evil and ignorance?
>
> Peter Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*.

Instead, then, of situating objects as metonymic of far-off places and process, we can use them to speak of their most recent history – in the archive. Archives are created in a bewildering variety of ways – planned,

serendipitous, and chaotic. Despite the rapid rate at which we accumulate, we seldom curate as efficiently: most archaeologists, museologists, and similar have no formal training in "collections management," typically a euphemism for "crisis management" (Pearce 1999). Here the schizophrenic ability of archaeology to step outside normal epistemological and ontological bounds by borrowing techniques, methodologies, and theories from other disciplines is useful in generating ideas that can then be developed in ways useful to archaeology by dispersing its objects (Shanks 2001). In this spirit, archive archaeology borrows directly from "taphonomy" – the palaeontological principle that explains the "life" history of fossils from the death of an organism to its moment of human discovery (Behrensmeyer and Hill 1980). This taphonomy incorporates a slew of agencies from how sediments accrete and erode: the effects of acids on soil and bone, climate, earthworm bioturbation, and so forth. Similarly, artifact archives grow and shrink, appear and disappear; but unlike in the case of palaeontology, artifacts can be discovered many times and have ongoing lives beyond the moments of discovery. They have different layers to cater to different audiences with image, text, and sometimes sound, touch, and, rarely, smell. Great effort is put into making these layers seamless. But just as Walter Benjamin, who influenced the Situationists (see for example Debord 1994), remarked that anyone can follow directions but only the truly gifted can use a map to get lost (Benjamin 2002), perhaps greater effort should be put into making sure the overlaid layers are not in perfect registration, but show ruptures – "the process of construction, the backing and forthing of logic, of different logics belonging to the past and the present, piecing together and laying out the contradictions rather than smoothing them over" (Coombes 2001:237–8). Here greater use of the senses can be immensely productive. Smell, perhaps our most evocative and difficult-to-discipline sense, best embodies organic decay, the life of an object ebbing sway or transforming into another energy. Similarly, archives, be they books, ethnographic artifacts, and so on, have unique smells and atmospheres that influence how persons move, what they pick up, which drawer or dark corner they are attracted to. Though there are alternatives such as collecting and excavating less and repatriating more, curatorial decisions are tied to enshrined principles of stewardship and conservation and to dominant economic, moral, social, and political climates. These pressures and the haphazard nature of most collecting leads to many occlusions and missing information. But even occlusions leave residues. Just as we can determine the shape of a stone tool from associated lithic debitage even if the tool itself is absent, that a hut was

made of reeds because these left impressions in clay walling, or know that as-yet-unseen sub-atomic quarks exist because of their imputed effect on slightly larger and seeable atomic particles, so archived artifacts' lacunae leave traces.

What's Missing?

A series of such gaps and traces is provided through a taphonomic triangulation between an archaeological site, a museum display, and sociopolitical concerns that center on South Africa's new coat of arms (see Figure 10.4a). Unveiled on April 27, 2000 (Smith et al. 2000; Barnard 2003), this most potent of state symbols has at its center a mirror-imaged human figure inspired by a San rock painting from the "Linton Panel." The Linton Panel is a painted rock fragment ("panel" suggests an over-determination to frame and suggest wholeness) displayed at the South African Museum in Cape Town since 1918 CE (Figure 10.4b). The fragment is ensconced in the type of softly-lit display hall advocated by architect Juahani Palasmaa in his "eyes of the skin" manifesto that seeks to temper the subtext of light as analogous to "reason" with darker locales that allow other more haptic senses and especially the contemplative imagination to play a greater role (Palasmaa 1996). The historic building, soft lighting, and beautiful religious imagery (Lewis-Williams 1988) combine to evoke a reverential aura. To the sacred is now added respect attendant on political power through knowing that one of Linton's human figures (Figure 10.4b inset) is incarnated in South Africa's highest symbol of state. This political knowledge is, however, for a restricted audience as there is no contextual information pointing to the human figure or its journey from religious to political symbol. Indeed, this painting's smallness and low position requires the viewer to contort his or her body – suggesting that "seeing" can morph into a more embodied practice of "looking" (see Okley 2001). Though Linton is a fragment in the intensive care of the display case, museum visitors do not know that this fragment is radically displaced from its home on Linton rock shelter (we do not know its San name) in the remote and high Drakensberg mountains over 1,000 km east of coastal Cape Town. The laconic accession annotation that this fragment was "collected" belies the physical impact on the fragment's home. In removing two[3] approximately 1.85 m × 0.85 m painted rock fragments two approximately 5 m^2 gaps were left in a rock-painted rock wall (see Figure 10.4c). This physical and aesthetic violence – after 80 years the Linton removal scars still seem fresh with rough and chalky fragments
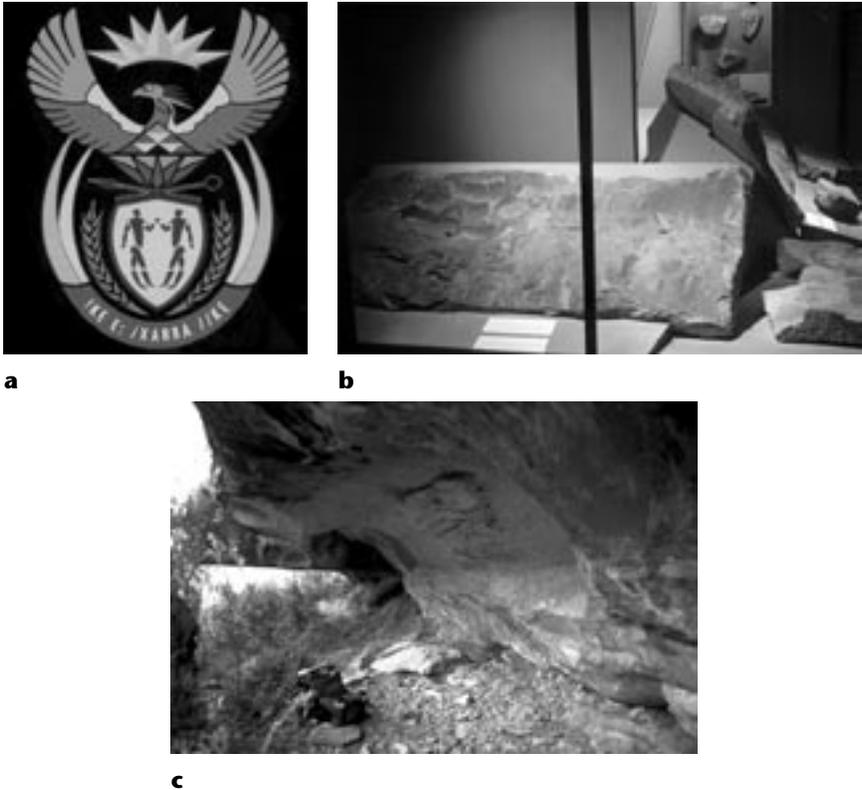
a

b

c

Figure 10.4 Life history of the Linton Fragment

       a. Embodiment in South Africa's Coat of Arms 2000.

       b. Museum display 1918-present. Inset, rock painting that occurs in coat of arms.

       c. Linton fragment's original home, 2000. Damage done 1916–1918.

that adhere to one's finger as you touch the scar – is at stark odds with the managed museum space. A further slippage is the huge and un-equal labor that went into procuring this artifact. Between 1916 and 1918 CE three men labored mightily to chisel the fragments to satisfy the then SA Museum Director Louis Péringuey's desire to display San rock art (SA Museum correspondence, accessed December 4, 2000).[4] But these three men's labor was not equal. Superficially, it cost £122.00 – a considerable sum, worth a year's salary to a skilled worker – for the whole operation (not £30.00 as stated on the SA Museum web site and by

Lewis-Williams 1988). Of this, about £60.00 was paid to Mr. Stephanus Naude, a white stonemason, while his co-workers – "Jonas" and another, unnamed black worker – received around £8.00 each, the rest being spent on materials and transport. This "cost" is a telling indication of the valuation of race-identified labor (Shepherd 2003).

More recently, the Linton fragment has exposed a gap between "value" and "price/lessness." In 1995 CE Linton and seven other painted rock fragments from southern Africa toured Berlin, London, and New York (no African venue) as part of "*Africa: the art of a continent*" exhibition. Linton was, for insurance purposes, valued at R1-million – a huge sum, the cost of a hgih-end apartment overlooking the South African Museum today. Insuring collections is common practice, but this sum made its way into the press. Linton's millionaire price tag came to stand as an authoritative valuation of an allegedly priceless heritage. Then working as an archaeologist at National Museum,[5] I received numerous requests from landowners and municipalities to appraise their archaeological "inventories." Though they did grasp the concept of alienable and inalienable heritage (Weiner 1985), the landowner response to the insured sum confirms Igor Kopytoff's observation that restricted-circulation "priceless" objects can only maintain this status by periodically entering a market economy (Kopytoff 1992). "Priceless" thus just means "extremely expensive."

These "missing" episodes in Linton's life history and the slippages it exposes took a new twist two weeks after the coat of arms' unveiling. In an article entitled "Guess what's missing?" journalist Glenda Daniels found "striking and disturbing that the two human figures in the middle [of the coat of arms] are in attitude and 'giss' (general identification, shape, and size) unmistakably male – two male bonding figures" (Daniels 2000). Comparing the coat of arms figure (Figure 10.4a) to the original rock painting (Figure 10.4b inset) shows that the transformation from museum to state object involved some separation anxiety with the neutering of the state symbol version. Daniels interpreted the figures either as representing "subliminal patriarchy" or, more playfully, as "androgynous" figures. This latter option she dismisses, bringing up the valid point that coats of "arms" tend to be masculinist and seldom incorporate femininity. But her "androgynous" throw-away comment is probably spot-on. The dominant tenor of the rock art produced by diverse southern African gatherer-hunter communities is that their religious import is dominantly shamanistic (Lewis-Williams 1988). Shamanic altered states of consciousness are understandable to us through neuropsychological studies. In these states, gender identity

and allegiance is radically and even violently altered. Third and further genders are entirely plausible in the Spirit World (see Butler 1993). Thus, the "androgynous" or "stick" figures[6] in San rock are probably not "androgynous" or "asexual" but their absence of primary sexual characteristics accurately presences the impossibility of maintaining a simple gender binary. The value of archaeology in approaching Linton's rock art on something approaching its appropriate cultural context points us to its most deafening silence – that of its makers and their descendants. Prior to its removal, Linton lived in an area which nineteenth-century British colonial administrators labeled "Nomansland" to nullify Xhosa and San claims to it. The San of the area fell victim to colonial genocide and assimilation and their absence from displays like Linton is telling (see Mayer 1998). Most displays and dioramas are seemingly politically disengaged yet actively gloss destructive epochs even when the material displayed speaks explicitly to such destruction (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1993). The lack of respect for this violence is especially acute at the South African Museum. On March 20, 2001 the (in)famous "Bushman diorama," located in the next hall from the Linton Fragment and inter-visible, was closed for fear of offending the public and San descendants despite many of these expressing approval for the diorama and its accompanying contextual and remedial information. The diorama was one of the museum's longest-running (*c.*1911 CE) and most popular exhibits (Davison 2001; also Skotnes 1996):

> Within the changing social context of South Africa, museums have a responsibility to reconsider their roles as sites of memory, inspiration, and education. The South African Museum, together with the other museums that form Iziko Museums of Cape Town, is currently rethinking directions and priorities. In this context a decision has been taken to "archive" the famous hunter-gatherer diorama while its future is reviewed. It will not be dismantled but will be closed to the public from the end of March 2001. This move shows commitment to change and encourages debate within the Museum, with the public and especially with people of Khoisan descent. South African Museum statement. http://www.museums.org.za/sam/resources/arch/bushdebate.htm, accessed 8, June 2002.

The violent process that led to the Linton fragment being in the museum could easily be accommodated into most display techniques, especially since most South African museum visitors are conversant with violence and its effects, given their country's turbulent imperial, colonial,

and Apartheid past (Coombes 2002). The museum as a "safe" space is just too much at odds with this history (Herzfeld 1996). Juxtaposing the taphonomic layerings and occlusions of the Linton Fragment's life renders it more believable and even parallels the painful histories and present circumstances of at least local audiences. In a region in which domestic violence, HIV/AIDS infection rates, and abuse of children and elders is marked, southern African archaeology and museology can usefully employ their mastery of larger perspectives of time and human behavior to destabilize demeaning but naturalized modern practices. We can show other possibilities of personhood, thereby demonstrating that hegemonies are not inevitable, and that the present can be remade. Using a life history, taphonomic approach we can show what's missing – and why. This is the muscular, fractious museum as "contact zone" that James Clifford perhaps envisaged (Clifford 1997; also Feldman in chapter 9 of this volume).

Beyond the Building

> If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence.
>
> George Eliot, *Middlemarch*

Elision and violence are familiar parts of archaeology and museum's lexicon (Mayer 1998). Washington D.C.'s Holocaust Museum and Johannesburg's Apartheid Museum bludgeon the visitor with multiple violences and absences. Few museums have demonstrated the imagination to deal with absence other than as sledgehammer. In Italy, some art museums harness absence by leaving blank spaces on walls from which artworks have been stolen. The slight discoloration of the once-covered wall speaks elegantly of the flow of objects through channels legitimate and non (Mariane Ferme, pers. comm., May 2004). The disjuncture between objects, history, and social justice can promote willful amnesia. Some communities choose not to preserve "sites of hurtful memory" such as Chile's National Stadium where Pinochet had "dissidents" dealt with or the Nazi headquarters in Berlin (Dolf-Bonekämper 2002; Forty and Küchler 2001). This approach is perfectly valid and means that history is not supported by an object inventory but by memory and oral histories (Samuel 1994). In a revealing reversal of memorial temporality, Rosemary Joyce in her presidential address to

the 2003 Society for American Archaeology conference told how the United States government turned to archaeology for advice on how permanently to mark nuclear waste storage facilities to warn future generations of the site's toxicity. In a supreme irony, the model for permanent marking was held to be the stone and clay-impressed writing systems of the classic civilizations of the Near and Middle East – sites the US invasion of Iraq threatens with destruction.

Staging Stories

The desire to tell and listen to stories is one of the few cultural universals (see for example Dundes 1984; Lakoff and Johnson 1999). By "story" I do not mean a make-believe, politically lame "fairy tale" but a robust narrative born out of a certain soil and people, though it can also have wider relevance. Recently, archaeologists have examined storytelling as a productive trope for conveying the multivocality and ambiguity standard archaeological techniques have so much trouble dealing with (Joyce 2002; Pluciennik 1999). Storytelling is capable of a double centering. First, the storyteller with his or her fund of knowledge, lived experience, and rhetorical skills is able to perform even if he or she is not text-literate, does not have a wide, worldly knowledge, or does not enjoy material wealth. Secondly, the story's stage – the locus at which the story is told or relates to – is brought strongly to the fore. Stories can both accord with and challenge "official" channels of information such as newspapers, television, and other top-down, minimally consultative processes. Stories are much more difficult to discipline because they allow people to interpolate their own voice and interpretations. Story-telling is a credible and democratic alternative to centralized knowledge production, though it runs the risk of becoming locally powerful but weak at transnational or transcultural scales. The /Xam San – a people destined for physical and cultural genocide – spoke of "Stories that float from afar" to tell how knowledge of the world seemingly travels on the air from far-off places (Lewis-Williams 2000). This seemingly overly romantic rendering of sound and knowledge does have materiality. Indeed, sound is technically a product of vibration and thus arguably part of the sense of "touch." Archaeologically, San sound has a material residue that acted as a powerful vector for identities ordinary and extraordinary (see also Tuzin 1984).

Among the thousands of San rock-engraving sites in southern Africa, there are at least 280 instances where people selected for naturally resonant ironstone boulders (Ouzman 2001:240–2; see Figure 10.5).

Figure 10.5 Gong rock at southern African rock-art site

Either stacked or broken by lightning, heat expansion, or freeze contrac-
tion to create a resonator, these "gong rocks" produce the brand of
repetitive, percussive sound and sensation that induces changes in
states of consciousness. These gong rock sites, unconstrained by walls,
nonetheless act like the vaulted cathedrals of Europe that were designed
to frame and direct music on its journey to heaven. Gong rock sites are
located in seemingly endless landscapes where sound travels from its
source unconstrained. Such sites potentially offer a powerfully multi-
sensorial site museum.[7] Producing the sound requires intense bodily
engagement – touch, hearing, perhaps singing, sweating, the release
of natural peptides and endorphins that blur sensory boundaries, even
confusing them so that sounds are touched, colors tasted. Synaesthesia
is a potent gambit in empowering the past and establishing seemingly
familiar knowledge. Even if the gong rocks are left unstruck – perhaps
as a requiem to their absent makers – the landscape can be so quiet as
to induce a constant ringing sound in one's ears – "the roar that lies
on the other side of silence."

Contrast these affirmatory, connective types of sound with Apartheid-
era curfew sirens that were also repetitive and percussive but which
limited rather than liberated. Implications for the heritage industry are

that soundscapes and maintaining an acoustic integrity are important aspects of managing sites and displays. Similarly, silence is perhaps one of the most important constituents of any story – the length, frequency, and quality of pauses can build suspense, deliver a dénouement, or show a necessary fallibility in the teller, the inevitable fragmentation of a narrative thread over time.

Situating silence and narrative thread is crucial. Spatially framing a story in museum originary and imaginary locations requires more than a formulaic object-centric design language. A good example is the Deer Valley Rock Art Center in Arizona, USA. Here, archaeologists let go and allowed architect Will Bruder to highlight essences of both the rock art and its immediate surroundings in ways unusual but interesting for the visitor. Bruder mimicked the profusion of engraved rocks with almost industrial emplacements of concrete clad in a copper-like skin that oxidized in a process analogous to that of the engraved rocks. He installed simple tubular pipes that directed the visitor's gaze to certain engravings and landscape features (Bruder 1997). Taking the notion of a peopled place still further, Estelle Smit applied animation and motion studies at three southern African rock engraving sites that both echo engraved patterns and human movement (Smit 2002). Human movement is a powerful indicator of identity (see Solnit 2000), differentiated on the basis of gender, age, race, urban or rural, outsiders or residents, New Agers and Christians, and so forth. For example, scant attention is paid to the anarchic movement of children – known as NCU's (non-conforming units) in the building trade – yet their passage is often very intuitive and sensuous, not to mention their being numerically the most dominant visitors to museums. Smit's gateways structures include perishable materials that decay and become "messy" over a period of years as, for example, the iron rich rocks are destroyed by lightning strikes every so often.

Discussion

This creation of emplaced, embedded site museums creates common ground for empathy or even argument. But the enthusiasm for site museums must be tempered by at least two factors. First, transport to non-metropole centers is often prohibitively difficult for many people and only privileged, well-wheeled people get to what become exclusive enclaves (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). Secondly, "site museums" may perpetuate a provincial relation between "city" and "countryside" rather than permitting each to do different work (Buck 1998; Omland 1997).

Human movement, this time at a larger scale, is again an important consideration. For all the talk of global interconnectedness, tracing flows, destinations, establishing movement patterns, and even identifying travelers is an imprecise science. Jonathan Friedman brings some sanity by pointing out that less than 2 percent of the world's population is on the move and that diasporas have become elliptical rather than linear. People tend now to return and revisit places rather than just "emigrate" or £flee" (Friedman 2002). We are not dealing with "locals" and "outsiders" but with people who move in and out of those states. Movement is far from neutral. Just as rock-painted fragments like Linton were moved against their will, so Apartheid and colonial administrations displaced people and their place-based identities and cultural property (Bender and Winer 2001). Bhabha's contention that hybridity is a "natural" human condition interrupted by the uniformitarian grid of imperial and colonial projects, seems spot on (Bhabha 1994). It is then not surprising that the postcolony offers the most emotionally and socially engaged methods of presenting objects, places, and people in critically defensible ways (Davison 1998). By emphasizing nontextual more performative ways of conveying knowledge, and by representing the past and present, situating vision as just one of a range of senses and bodily practices helps retain the elements of wonder and awe that are often strangled out by cookie-cutter design languages.

This is both a forward-looking exercise and an opportunity for retrospect. Though reprehensible violences were perpetrated by colonial archaeologies and museologies, some of the techniques we use may be reclaimed and many are empowering. A prime candidate is the curiosity cabinet. Previously a somewhat chaotic attempt to collect and systematize that became part of the apparatus used to exoticize and denigrate, curiosity cabinets have recently been creatively reintroduced into the public domain. The British conceptual artist Mark Dion's "cabinets of curiosity" installations for museums and public spaces attract unprecedented crowds (Vail 2001; Weisman Art Museum 2001). If curators were to be brave, then they could place large parts of their archive within the public display space. Of course not all objects are suitable for public display (see Burström 2003 for "the value of junk"), but the common lament of not being able to display would be largely solved by storing collections within display spaces. People could discover the collection in less ascriptive ways while being aware of great absences in their knowledge represented by unopened and perhaps unreachable drawers. This approach is gaining currency, though it has problems of being higher-maintenance and curators fear damage to objects.

Creatively used drawers could hold surprises like empty boxes, triggering music when opened, acrid and soothing smells, elegantly faded colors, making the "discovery room" and exhibit halls integrate.

This is not to ally with those destructively self-reflexive brands of social science that fail to recognize that they are authoritative sources of knowledge, but as a shifting set of practices whereby people and objects try to get along in the world and, indeed, help produce and represent each other (McCracken 1991). Archaeology as a set of repetitive and usually laborious techniques forces contemplation of the objects being studied, and helps to a degree in placing the massive violence of colonialism at the kind of distance needed to make intelligent yet emotionally engaged comment. This repetition and labour are analogus to "habit" and "skill" – mechanisms that permit innovation and act as pathways to virtuosity (see for example Hobsbawn and Ranger 1992). To this end, the practitioner has also to place him- or herself under the lens, as one of the most telling absences in most museums is the curator. It is, however, a fine line to tread between a courageous "archaeology of us" (Buchli and Lucas 2001) and an indulgent one, especially if the curator does not also involve multiple perspectives in which are embedded a range of sensory practices (Howes 2003). The challenge to archaeologies and museologies that seek contemporary relevance is how to permit people still to marvel at beautiful objects but to do so in ways that make the apprehender aware of the object's place in a continuum of humanistic and material practice. There is a beauty of letting go, but it takes resolve, will and, to reiterate the sentiment that began this chapter, requires "the repeated exercises of the senses, or reflections on those kinds of objects which at first occasioned them" if we are to arrest the decay of our ideas, but not all of our objects.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. I use "artifact" and "object" interchangeably.

2. By "museum" I refer principally to institutions that archive and display human cultural history, though this type of history is often housed in "natural" history museums, art galleries and so forth. I use "archive" to refer to any systematic collection of artifacts from university collections to private hoards.

3. The second Linton fragment bears detailed antelope paintings.

4. San rock art is understood not as "imagery" but as own entities that connected ordinary and Spirit Worlds. This transgressing of boundaries and exploring of strange worlds is perhaps one object-centric way of understanding how Linton, through its exceptionally fine imagery, wanted to travel to new worlds, such as the South African Museum, rather than being therE solely by Péringuey's desire.

5. South Africa has 18 "Declared Cultural Institutions" that have national status. These institutions periodically are reordered, amalgamated and unbundled – an interesting taphonomic process in itself.

6. Though by no means exhaustively quantified, among the many many thousands of human figures in San rock art, a ratio of something like 2 male figures exist for every figure but with 8–9 "asexual" human figures existing for "male" and "female" categories combined.

7. I here experience a conflict between personal and situational ethics. Striking gong rocks with a hard object removes the patina that has formed over ancient percussion marks, thus damaging the potential to date the percussion episodes. Further, as a non-San may I strike a gong rock? On the other hand, a recording of the anvil-like metallic sound could be played on-site and evoke something of its past atmosphere.

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