Putting the Soul into Archaeology—Integrating Interpretation into Practice

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The interpretation and presentation of archaeological remains and sites is of fundamental importance in society's understanding of and attitudes toward archaeology. They are crucial processes in transforming archaeology into educational, tourism, social, and community values, as well as in fostering political and financial support for our profession. The interpretation and presentation of archaeology has a long tradition of academic attention (e.g., Styles 2016; Tilden 1957), as well as organizational attention resulting in an embedment in policy guidelines such as the International Council on Monuments and Sites (2008) Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites. These academic efforts and heritage policies tend to focus, by and large, on interpretation as a communication process aimed at tourists and visitors (Perry, this issue; Moscardo 2014), on the social impact and political ramifications of

ABSTRACT

This article introduces a special volume of *Advances in Archaeological Practice* dedicated to the interpretation and presentation of archaeology. It provides an overview of several essays that came out of a session at the European Association of Archaeology Conference in 2017, which focused upon how interpretation can be implemented within daily practices of (cultural resource management) archaeology in a way that provides heritage value. We bring the arguments together into a call for a creative, interpretive archaeology that does not take compliance or academic publications as its end goal but will speak to a far wider range of audiences through the development and presentation of stories and narratives that truly engage and inspire people. We argue that this can be achieved by implementing "emotion design" methods that dynamically differentiate between information, message, emotion, and media, by working closely together with creatives, interpretive experts, communities, and partners and, ultimately, by integrating interpretation firmly at the core of planning processes, archaeological workflows, and our daily practices.

Este artículo sirve de introducción a un volumen especial de *Advances in Archaeological Practice* dedicado a la interpretación y presentación de la arqueología. Incluye una reseña de varios artículos que surgieron de una sesión en la Conferencia de la Asociación Europea de Arqueología en 2017, que se enfocó en cómo se puede implementar la interpretación dentro de las prácticas diarias de la arqueología (gestión de recursos culturales) de una manera que propicie la valoración del patrimonio. A partir de estas reflexiones hacemos un llamado para una arqueología creativa e interpretativa que no considere el cumplimiento ni las publicaciones académicas como su objetivo final, sino que hable a una variedad mucho más amplia de públicos a través de historias y narrativas que verdaderamente inspiren y capturen la atención de la gente. Consideramos que esto se puede lograr implementando métodos de 'diseño emocional' que permitan diferenciar de forma dinámica entre información, mensaje, emociones y medios de comunicación, trabajando estrechamente con creativos, expertos en interpretación, comunidades y colaboradores, y, en última instancia, integrando firmemente la interpretación en el núcleo de los procesos de planificación, los flujos de trabajo arqueológicos y nuestras prácticas diarias.

interpretation (e.g., Diaz-Andreu and Champion 1996; Habu et al. 2008), on public education (e.g., King 2016), on community and public archaeology (e.g., Bollwerk et al. 2015; Richardson and Almansa-Sánchez 2015), and on integrating interpretation "reflexively" in the archaeological research process (see Berggren et al. 2015; Hodder 1997).

However, we would argue that less attention has been given to the "presentation" side of the interpretive process, by which we mean the design and production of interpretive concepts, media, and activities for various audiences, as well as the development of the expertise and skill needed to achieve this. In addition, less attention has been given to implementing interpretive activities and presentation processes and including interpretive experts in the daily workflow and budget remits of archaeologists, especially those operating in the context of cultural resource management (CRM) or contract archaeology (Skeates et al. 2012).

A consequence is that practitioners who wish to engage in interpretation and presentation often reinvent the wheel, make mistakes that could have been prevented, or sometimes develop activities and products that are not as suitable and effective as they could be. Another consequence is that some practitioners simply do not put forth the effort at all, perceiving interpretation and presentation as lying outside the scope, possibilities, and financial responsibility of the archaeological process. So, how do we then go about the business of presenting archaeology? How do we transform archaeological information into activities, exhibitions, interpretive media, and experiences that truly engage and enrich our audience, be they visitors, communities, clients, partners—or ourselves? How do we integrate such efforts in our daily work routines?

PRESENTING ARCHAEOLOGY—THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY

To tackle these issues, we organized a thematic, half-day session titled "Presenting Archaeology" at the European Association of Archaeology Conference in Maastricht (2017). The impetus was that despite an emphasis in European archaeological policy frameworks on dissemination, interpretation, and communication, there was no clear idea of how these policies relate to actual practice. Based upon our own experiences in research archaeology, contract archaeology, public archaeology, and museum and site presentation, we felt that—deliberately or not—decisions regarding the interpretation and presentation of archaeology were often made by archaeologists in isolation of creative specialists and interpretive partners or by forces completely outside the direct scope and workflow of archaeologists. We therefore invited international practitioners active in the field of archaeology, museum design, and heritage interpretation to jointly reflect upon their experiences with the interpretation and presentation of archaeology.

Important points discussed included the idea that the presentation of archaeology is often not considered a priority for (paying and decision-making) clients within CRM contexts and that it is given attention too late in the archaeology and planning process, resulting in interpretation not being part of the scope of work and archaeologists not being involved with interpretive and creative decision-making processes. In addition, many practitioners

feel underequipped (theoretically, practically, and creatively) to tackle the presentation of archaeology effectively. Despite this, and admirably, many examples were given of how archaeologists followed their passion and determination to make the presentation of archaeology happen within their daily contexts.

By learning from the good, the bad, and the ugly, from the mistakes we have made and the lessons we have learned, we explored how we, as archaeological professionals, might influence the interpretation and presentation process more effectively and how we might implement the lessons learned in our daily practices. Interestingly, the need among European archaeologists for such a practical session seemed to be quite substantial, as the session was the most attended of the whole conference.

In this special issue, we present a selection of those papers, written by European and African authors. We have selected research articles and practical "how-to" articles that have relevant takeaway messages for practitioners worldwide who seek to integrate the interpretation and presentation of archaeology in their work. These essays cover only a small selection of topics within an incredibly complex and diverse field of work, so this themed issue should by no means be regarded as providing the definitive answer on how to present archaeology. Rather, our aim is to provide a framework for discussion and inspiration.

INTEGRATING INTERPRETATION AND PRESENTATION INTO CONTRACT ARCHAEOLOGY

Today, most of the archaeological processes in Europe are governed within the framework of the (revised) "European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage," also known as the Malta Convention, adopted in 1992 by the Council of Europe. The Malta Convention consists of 18 articles, which together set out to study, protect, and communicate the value of archaeological heritage within state policies. The Malta Convention is adopted differently in the member states throughout Europe (see van den Dries 2011; van der Haas and Schut 2014), but in general, shared concepts include the integration of archaeology in the planning process, an emphasis on preservation in situ, and a call for a polluter-pay principle. A study from 2014 among representatives of 34 member states shows that Articles 1–6 (which deal primarily with the integration of archaeology within the planning process) were far more strongly implemented than Articles 7–12, which deal with issues such as awareness, communication, and outreach (Olivier and van Lindt 2014; for a discussion, see van der Linde and van den Dries 2014). This often means that there are few binding policies and frameworks in place to guide CRM archaeologists in their effort to interpret and present archaeology in their daily practice. This is problematic, as archaeologists therefore have to overcome constraints of time, access, funds, safety, and attitudes of clients, who often do not consider themselves responsible for paying for the public dissemination of research knowledge.

In a step-by-step article on how to set up a temporary exhibition within a large-scale field project, Peacock (this issue) shows how to work within these constraints, illustrating what a dedicated and structured approach can do to integrate interpretation and

public engagement issues into a complex CRM context with little to no public access to the site itself. Peacock provides clear and practical guidance on how to set up a "pop-up" museum against the backdrop of an Oxford-based case study. Importantly, she emphasizes the importance of creating a base guidance agreement from the outset, covering the scope and partner responsibilities of the interpretive project, and then details the temporal and spatial flexibility needed in this approach. Her work shows the importance of clear briefings and an open attitude toward programming within existing culturally based activities.

Van der Velde and Bouma (this issue) discuss their experiences integrating site presentation and community projects within a large-scale CRM project in the municipality of Dalfsen, the Netherlands. Their contribution highlights the problem of the lack of effective implementation of Article 9 of the Malta Convention—which calls for the promotion of public awareness and accessibility—within the Dutch system. The authors argue that this situation has contributed to a context in which contract archaeologists, including themselves, primarily focus on compliance and quality control for their paying clients, and not on disseminating knowledge, creating social values, or working effectively together with volunteer archaeologists (see also Willems 2014). Van der Velde and Bouma illustrate how this atmosphere contributed to a situation in which the local municipality felt so disconnected from archaeological finds and discoveries that there was no support for public-oriented projects once archaeologists started to advocate for these. In a detailed discussion of the project, the authors describe how a unique archaeological find turned the municipality from a disinterested party into a strong advocate for the public value of archaeology, taking control of the interpretation and presentation efforts itself. They also describe what it took to shift the relationship between archaeologists and the municipality into a mutually beneficial one in which there was still room for archaeologists. Van der Velde and Bouma argue that, for their part, this shift could only happen by having an open mind toward the presentation of archaeology, as it meant letting go of control over research questions and interpretations. In their view, allowing for "subjective" interpretations and messages, which could not be backed by factual field data, in the way in which the archaeology was presented provided far more public and collaborative benefit than strict adherence to notions of "objective" research. Mainly, this was because the local community could now align itself more strongly and personally to narratives and interpretations.

EMOTION DESIGN

Such case studies illustrate that making a clear distinction between "information" (by which we mean an archaeological interpretation consisting of data in the form of finds, figures, dates, objects, etc.) and "message" (by which we mean a heritage interpretation of that information into a story that people can partake in, as in what the information could mean) can improve the collaboration between public actors and archaeologists. This is because it challenges both parties to think more structurally about how stories about the past are being constructed, what those stories actually mean, and what those stories are meant to do. In the case of Dalfsen, this meant highlighting heritage narratives that focused on family life in different periods, with the aim of fostering feelings of social cohesion among new

residents. Interestingly, this distinction was brought forward as part of an "emotion design" process by a creative studio charged with presenting archaeological values in the planned housing estate at Dalfsen.[1] It shows what the mediating power of interpretive expertise can offer to the archaeological process; it provides a platform by which to discuss multivocal notions of what constitutes heritage, but it also allows for the creation of story lines supported by archaeological facts and objects that different partners can actually relate to.

As Ripanti and Mariotti (this issue) remind us, however, presenting a heritage story that has a relevant message to people, supported by archaeological information, is not enough to turn people into engaged actors. What generations of scriptwriters, filmmakers, and experience designers have long known is that a good story needs to make an emotional impact—an emotional connection between audience and story—for it to truly last and become relevant. By setting out their "emotive approach" to public archaeology at the Italian site of Vignale, and by drawing upon preliminary data yielded within the European research project EMOTIVE (Economou et al. 2018; Roussou et al. 2017), Ripanti and Mariotti illustrate not only that stirring an emotional connection within local communities is a key component in heritage-making (see Smith and Waterton 2009; Smith et al. 2018; Wetherell 2012) but also that emotions, considered from a value-based heritage perspective, can provide social as well as economic benefits to both communities and archaeological projects.

In this example, the authors pay specific attention to the medium of "theatrical performance" to provide emotional connections, but it should be noted that many types of media are suitable for conveying emotions and story lines. One such medium is "podcasting," which is the topic of a practical article by Amundsen and Belmonte (this issue) that provides guidance on how to develop such a public engagement tool effectively. Amundsen and Belmonte show how a very specific audience was reached by creating an emotional connection to archaeology through the medium of cooking, and they highlight the importance of having a clear value statement, or interpretive concept, as well as a targeted, flexible, and adventurous approach toward audience-building. The article reminds us that if we truly wish to democratize our profession and engage different audiences, we need to look over our disciplinary boundaries to fields such as marketing, business, and design.

A COMFORTABLE PLACE FOR INTERPRETATION

In order to develop meaningful interpretive experiences, one needs to develop a strong concept in the form of a story that a specific audience can relate to. This can be done by determining facts, defining messages, identifying desired emotional responses, and designing the right medium to turn the interpretive concept into an interpretive experience. While these elements are inseparable parts of a dynamic, creative design process, they are often regarded as having a sequential order within archaeological processes and discourses. This means that interpretation and presentation efforts can be seen as trailing after archaeological research and conservation—as if storytelling,

design, and social impact by interpretive experts should happen after archaeologists are finished collecting data and consolidating remains. This "linear" thinking about the value and place of interpretation within the heritage workflow is implicit in dominant heritage discourses (see, e.g., Smith 2006), which perceive heritage as a resource under threat that needs "research" to unlock its "true" value. Unfortunately, this can lead to postponing interpretive activities and necessary resources to the end of a project, when they are in danger of not receiving investment—despite the good intentions of practitioners (van der Linde 2012).

This idea that interpretation and presentation efforts should be tackled at the end of the archaeological workflow and fieldwork is not only diminishing to interpretive experts; it also underestimates their value by seeing these processes primarily as being of benefit to "the public." As Sara Perry (this issue) points out in a thought-provoking piece, the true strength of interpretation is two-sided: its value faces not only toward the public but also toward archaeological researchers themselves. This is because, ultimately, archaeological interpretation is not different from heritage interpretation: The act of interpretation by an archaeologist is a subjective process that happens within a social context; moreover, we need convincing narratives and media to help us in world-building, academic communication, and integrating alternative and dissonant voices. Perry points out that interpretive elements such as story lines, messages, emotions, and media are therefore not simply tools that belong to creative experts whom one can hire to translate research work for the public; rather, they should be explored for their power in research interpretations and reflexive methods at the trowel's edge, which also means that interpretive experts should be part of the interpretive process. By illustrating her team's work at Çatalhöyük, Perry shows that a truly reflexive, multivocal, interpretive methodology can only happen when heritage interpretation is seen as sitting not at the outer edge of the workflow but comfortably at its core. When we do this, we might truly start to develop narratives about the past that different partners can share in. But if we exclude partners and interpreters from our fieldwork, and if we do not consider interpretation and presentation as expertise to be taken seriously, we face the danger that our work will remain "soulless" (Perry, this issue) and that other people will write our narratives for us (Silberman 2003).

STAYING IN TOUCH WITH NARRATIVES

Because of their fundamental place in heritage discourses (Duineveld 2006; Hajer and Wagenaar 2003; Holtorf 2010), narratives play a powerful role in the negotiation over values at heritage sites. Although there are abundant examples of the misuse and abuse of archaeological narratives for political gain (Diaz-Andreu and Champion 1996; Habu et al. 2008), there are many instances in which the presentation and use of narratives for value negotiations is not as clear-cut as simply "right" or "wrong." In a heartfelt article about the interpretation and presentation of the World Heritage site of Goree Island and the Maison des Esclaves in particular, a site steeped with heritage connotations regarding the Atlantic slave trade and its legacies in the present, Thiaw and Wait show how different interpretations of a multifaceted and dissonant heritage can lead to conflicts between stakeholders within

various levels of engagement. The article reconstructs the ways in which different story lines and values have come to be negotiated within tourism activities and decision-making processes, paying specific attention to the power of oral interpretation and questioning the position that archaeologists should take within a delicate network of stakeholders consisting of descendants, communities, tourists, international organizations, and politicians. The authors illustrate what happens when the interpretation and presentation of heritage stories occurs in isolation from the production of archaeological knowledge. They call for a stronger integration of archaeological stories, through community archaeology and education, as a way to mediate heated discussions between a range of alternative interpretations by grounding them in the scientific record. As Thiaw and Wait point out, this calls for an active stance by archaeological interpreters to facilitate the mediation between different values and ambitions.

In an article on gender depictions in archaeological exhibitions and publications in the Netherlands, van den Dries and Kerkhof (this issue) illustrate another problem associated with a disconnect between heritage interpretation, creative (re-)presentations, and the archaeological process. The authors show that there is a substantial bias to reproduce gender stereotypes in archaeological illustrations and reconstructions, with a tendency to prioritize the illustration of males and their tasks in past activities. Providing a valuable contribution to the body of work on gender representation by, for example, Gifford-Gonzalez (1993), Moser (1993), and Solometo and Moss (2013), and drawing from a large-scale European public archaeology survey (Kajda et al. 2018), van den Dries and Kerkhof elaborate by illustrating how gender bias is also transferred to the minds and expressions of young children and how it hinders the public engagement of women in archaeology. This research should therefore be a reminder to us all that we must stay alert to and conscious of our own biases and preoccupations and that we must continue to seek collaboration with interpreters and creatives so as to make sure that, together, we do not allow gender inequality and stereotypes to become entrenched in archaeological presentations, thus hindering our sector's ambitions to gain inclusiveness.

PUTTING THE SOUL INTO ARCHAEOLOGY

In this issue of *Advances in Archaeological Practice*, we call for a creative, interpretive archaeology that does not take compliance or academic publications as its end goal but will speak to a far wider audience through the development and presentation of stories and narratives. Such an archaeology means integrating interpretative expertise firmly in the core of our workflow, so that we can harness its power to create public as well as research benefits, by developing shared story lines—or at least mediating between and highlighting dissonant discourses of heritage (Perry, this issue; and see van der Linde and van den Dries 2014).[2]

The collection of articles in this issue shows us that we should start off by making clear briefings and value statements; defining our target audience; implementing "emotion design" methods that differentiate dynamically between information, message, emotion, and media (while taking our own biases due to self-referencing representational traditions into account!); and

working jointly with interpretive experts, creatives, stakeholders, and audiences. If we do this, then, we believe, we can start to produce narratives and stories that truly engage people. This means that we are also intrinsically linked to and dependent on rigorous fieldwork, academic research, and preservation efforts, as we will never be able to create meaningful, memorable heritage experiences, or mediate between heritage discourses, without archaeological data, objects, and interpretations to draw from, learn from, refer to, and be inspired by. Rather, we argue that we must place interpretation and presentation at the center of our work, firmly rooted within archaeological fieldwork and theoretical underpinnings, and not as an afterthought.

How to achieve this will be the subject of innovative practice in the field and exciting new research projects (e.g., the EMOTIVE project). It is, as yet, unclear exactly where this effort will lead, but one thing is certain: it will require an open mind by archaeological practitioners to let go of the idea that facts, objects, and archaeological interpretations are the sole elements that make up a good story or visitor experience. If we do not let go, we face the danger of ending up with archaeological stories and presentations that are full of data and traditional modes of professional interpretation but devoid of feeling—a "dehumanized past" that does not mean anything to the people we work for. But if we tap into the passion we feel for our profession, if we root heritage interpretation in our daily routines, and if we work together with heritage interpreters, creatives, storytellers, communities, and partners alike, we truly can bring the soul into the past, as well as into our own practice.

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Data Availability Statement

No original data are used in this essay.

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NOTES

1. The creative studio that developed this "Emotion Design" method is Studio Louter (www.studiolouter.nl).
2. The French word *médiation*, which translates as "mediation" and which is used within museum contexts with roughly the same meaning as *interpretation*, is interesting to note in this regard, as it can be defined as "an action aimed at reconciling parties" (Desvallées and Mairesse 2010:46).

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