Scandalous Space

Between architecture and archaeology

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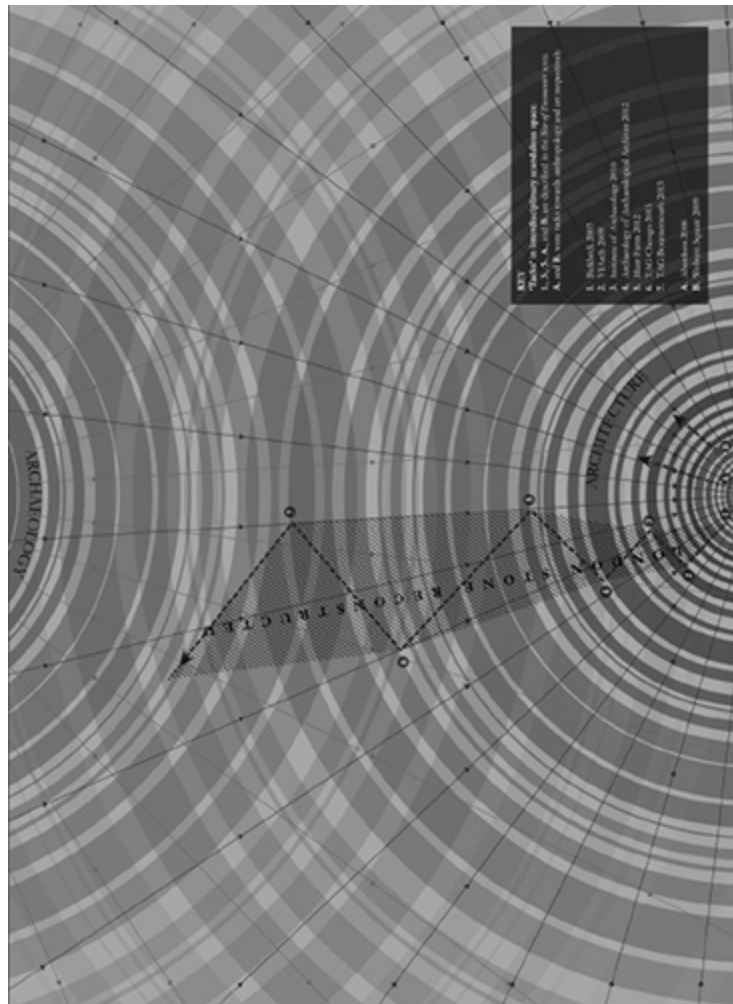
Fig. 1 Alessandro Zambelli, Chart of the Scandalous Space Between Architecture and Archaeology.

Introduction

As the fifteenth-century Kentish rebel Jack Cade struck London Stone, he pronounced himself transformed into Lord Mortimer and Lord of the City of London (Cade was not related to Richard Duke of York as the surname 'Mortimer' would, then, have implied, there is substantial doubt that his name was even, in fact, Cade). As he struck the Stone he decreed also that "piss" running in the public gutters be transmuted into wine. Five hundred and seventy years later a fragment of the Stone remains on Cannon Street not far from, but not exactly, where Cade struck it.[1]

Later, William Shakespeare was quite clear that Cade's power to turn the world upside down was ratified in the striking with his staff of this, London's fetish stone, its protective palladium. The Stone itself bears witness to and so validates the transubstantiations wrought through Cade's revolt: foot soldier to Lord; rural naïf to urban adept; water to wine. Cade's transgression of social and physical categories recalls the story of Christ's miraculous transformation of water to wine, but Shakespeare's Cade is a bathetic rather than a transcendent figure and under his stewardship these alchemic transformations stem from baser material, even, than everyday water. At the end of the fifteenth-century claret was not, as it later became, a synonym for red wine from Bordeaux, instead it qualified the colour of the wine; somewhere between red and white, and not exactly rosé either. And, of course, claret has also come

to stand in for blood. Four hundred and fifty-one years later Rebecca Daisy who had, for eighteen years, kept a "sweetstuff stall" next to London Stone protested, when asked to move on from her pitch, that "she [would] go quietly" only when she was "removed in a narrow box."[2] This overthrow of social order – and the 'spilling of a little claret' – is rife with transgression, with slippage; Cade, like Mrs. Daisy, was no blue blood but neither was he quite, any more, a commoner – as he struck London Stone he and his staff became something in-between; Cade, a scandalous practitioner of his own new Law and his staff, an instrument instantly reforged through contact with London Stone, for the enforcement of that Law. We will return to the adventures of Jack and Rebecca in the final two chapters of this book.

London Stone is an artefact of oolitic limestone whose manufacture may date from Roman times.[3] And yet it is scarcely an 'archaeological' artefact at all, since almost no work of that category has ever been done upon it, set adrift, as it has been, from its ancient physical contexts. Indeed, the work that has been done in connection with the Stone which most closely approximates archaeological practice is much more like what might be categorised as historical practice. E. H. Carr would have seen this as a positive attribute, for him, "archaeology, epigraphy, numismatics, chronology" are mere "'auxiliary' sciences of history."[4] Africanist historian and anthropologist Jan Vansina more conventionally characterises the differences thus, "most historians deal with written or oral messages. Most archaeological findings document situations, while historians often focus on sources which document events."[5] Those that have attempted to describe London Stone have tended to treat it as if it were such an "event," a prolonged event recorded in words and sometimes in drawings or photographs, but always tied to London around it, both

physically through its ever-eroding presence and through complex, as I shall go on to describe, networks of analogical connectivity.

Such is the transformative power of analogy; its unique ability to carry meaning, anaphorically, across fields of knowledge and, for the purposes of this account, *disciplinary* fields, forging, "the most beautiful bond possible" the bond of analogy.[6] The logic and the sympathetic magic of analogy underpin the arguments of this book just as it underpins the interdisciplinary structures it describes and employs. Throughout, I will describe experimental practices performed in the space provided by these analogical networks. Working, in particular, directly upon London Stone, using it as a common locus for the interconnected disciplines of architecture and archaeology as revealed through their shared drawing practices – disciplines which have, in various ways, claimed the Stone as their own.

> *I suppose, architects and archaeologists could be regarded as procedurally equal but temporally opposed: after all the very same tool – the trowel – that the builder uses to fabricate the architectural forms of the future is used by the archaeologist, in the excavation of a site, to reveal the forms of the past.[7]*

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 (we will come to trowels in Sites of Encounter: Must Farm below)? 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? Tim Ingold, in the quotation above, illustrates one way of thinking about the tangled relationship of architecture and archaeology, relationships which this book aims to

demonstrate and explain, even as it uses those knotted connections to make interdisciplinary work between them. In fact, I aim to show that architecture and archaeology are not at all "procedurally equal," but that they share a more nuanced relationship of procedural resemblance, and that, even more emphatically, they do not stand "temporally opposed."

The relationship of archaeology to that other purportedly past-facing discipline, history, provides evidence 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."[8]

"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.*[9] By going to primary sources, sources often personal and only obliquely related to the main subjects of mainstream histories, von Ranke's idea was that a closer approximation, a more accurate reconstruction, of historical cultures could be made. Tod Presner describes this account 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."[10] For von Ranke and his followers the past was, through these empirical reconstructions, solved or at least rendered solvable. Walter Benjamin like Gurevich, was

unconvinced, and described von Ranke's "wie es eigentlich gewesen" as, "the strongest narcotic of the [nineteenth] century."[11] 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"[12] 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.[13] Work at, for example, Çatalhöyük[14] in Turkey or the explicitly titled *Cotúa Island-Orinoco Reflexive Archaeology Project*[15] have now established a kind of archaeology without (professional) archaeologists in the spirit, perhaps, of Bernard Rudofsky's *Architecture Without Architects*[16] though shorn of architecture's alternative central tradition of the vernacular. Where Rudofsky's "non-pedigree" architect might tap into ancient local practices of building, no equivalent tradition is available to an archaeologist. Instead, as I will argue, 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. Chapter 2 will examine in detail the kind of making characterised by its 'propositional' nature – propositional that is in the sense derived from Bruno Latour's "proposition" which, "designates a certain way of loading an entity into another by making the second attentive to the first, and by making both of them diverge from their usual path, their usual interpretation."[17]

It has been argued that archaeology is like architecture in reverse.[18] If architecture looks to the future by making drawn propositions then archaeology designs also, but in

the form of reconstructions of the past. This book argues further that design and reconstruction are simultaneously central to both disciplines and are forms of propositional making; archaeologists have no direct access to the past and so their reconstructions are compelled to be propositional, and that equally, architectural propositions are reconstructive. As Nicholas Stanley-Price has put it, "a reconstructed building – if based primarily on excavated evidence – must be considered a new building (reconstruction as a creative act)."[19] Archaeology reveals for architecture a form of making based on practice whose connection to the past is not, as with architecture, predicated on quasi-mysterious, and in any case contested, canons of ancient form-making and monographic histories, but which makes available both evidence-based and interpretive practices (for example; particular excavation techniques, assemblage, finds interpretation, all of which will be discussed in more detail below). But the reliance of mainstream archaeology upon, in particular, empirical evidence to the exclusion of more speculative reconstructive design, should not replace the playfulness central to conventional design disciplines. Because for archaeology, architecture in its turn can reveal precisely that invention and speculative engagement with, often, ambiguous or contradictory evidence (for example; site, programme, technology) which defines and provokes the design practice latent within it. Writing more generally of interpretation within archaeological practice rather than reconstruction itself (which often follows in short order) Jean Gero claims that, "the practice of archaeology over-emphasizes and over-rewards unambiguous certainty in our interpretations, even though our conclusions are usually drawn from necessarily partial, underdetermined and complex evidence."[20]

These disciplinary inversions make available to archaeology, but also to architecture, a shift in understanding of what a reconstruction or a design might be for – what it is capable of doing. What for the architect are fragments of brief (proposals from a client for a building), context (the physical, historical, political and economic environment from which a design and any subsequent building might emerge) and tectonics (the way a design and any subsequent building might be thoughtfully put together), for the archaeologist are analogous fragments of evidence. And although it is something of a truism that the collection and use of these fragments for the archaeologist faces the past (what did the building look like to which these fragments belonged?) and for the architect faces the future (what will the building look like to which these fragments belong?), I would argue that this has little effect other than to occlude the over-arching propositional character of both design and reconstruction. That is, at the moment of enquiry – in the present – there is no building, but the design, just like the reconstruction, proposes one.

To emphasise this point I quote below at length from Kevin Greene's standard archaeological primer *Archaeology: An Introduction*. The practices described in this text are not similar to descriptions of architectural practices, they are, but for the words "excavation," "interpretation" and, of course, "reconstruction," identical;

> *An excellent way of increasing understanding of an excavated building is to create a scale model or reconstruction drawing. [...] Fragments of architectural stonework such as window or door frames, voussoirs from arches and vaulting, and roofing slates and tiles, all may help to date the building as well as to reconstruct it [...] Excavators also benefit from the detailed analysis of the excavated remains; new interpretations may be suggested, and attention drawn to parts of a site that need further investigation. If several plausible reconstructions are deduced from a single plan it is best to offer more than one interpretation in an excavation report. Computer graphics are now very sophisticated, and virtual reality modelling*

(VRM) of structures allows viewers to look around the interior, or inspect the appearance of the exterior from any angle.[21]

As I will argue later, amongst those disciplines which define themselves, at least in part, by the production, or design, of objects and collections of objects, we can see various structures or models of making develop over time. These paradigms of making, often in normative, institutionally directed ways, but also in transgressive modes, help to define and in some cases police the centres of their discipline, or blur them respectively. The transdisciplinary move across the space between such centres towards other disciplines is, in this account, described as *scandalous. The* notion of the scandal will be used as shorthand for the processes of archaeological-architectural interdisciplinarity[22] following an outline below, of the origins of the term in Claude Lévi-Strauss's *The Elementary Structures of Kinship.*[23] In this view, the scandal provides a framework for understanding resemblances between homologous disciplines and, I argue, between architecture and, through antiquarianism, archaeology in particular. It also describes more precisely the kind of interdisciplinarity necessary for the type of transgressive practice central to this book. So, although Lévi-Strauss, uncontroversially, considers the natural and the cultural to be mutually exclusive and exhaustive sets of social practices, rare conditions which do conform to both – for example the incest taboo – catalyse, for him, a kind of cross-practice scandal.

In this book, analogy is adopted as a method of transgressive, visual practice. This practice functions because, as I will argue, a homological relationship exists between some disciplines, in this case architecture and archaeology, a homology which, founded upon common suites of tools and techniques has been occluded, and is rediscovered through the intimately related practices of design and reconstruction. This is a mode of

interdisciplinarity which manifests itself in categories of drawing and recording interrogated, and sometimes modified, to reveal processes, in archaeology, more commonly associated with design, and processes, in architecture, more commonly associated with reconstruction. In order to produce work between these different practices of making, new or, the retrieving of old, sometimes obsolete or abandoned, undisciplined tools and techniques is required. These are further developed and employed below in Chapter 2. London Stone Reconstructed.

How are we to characterise the tools and techniques which function within what I argue is the analogical, navigable, space between architecture and archaeology? What form of practice is it possible to sustain at this intersection? And crucially, what is to be gained from practising there? It is within this *scandalous space* that I seek to answer these questions and to posit a role for this kind of practice in relation to its parent disciplines. Between design and reconstruction and between architecture and archaeology, therefore lies a scandalous space for transgressive practice where scandalous artefacts may be made.

Site of Encounter

Birkbeck

In 1967, Robert Smithson wrote that in the everyday industrial and commercial "monuments" of suburban New York he was witnessing, "ruins in reverse." That, "the buildings don't fall into ruin after they are built but rather rise into ruin before they are built."[24] This observation has, over the years, struck a chord with architects and archaeologists alike.[25] In particular I was reminded of a sketch I had made early in the researching of this book, no more than a doodle really – a sketch reproduced here in Figure 2.[26] It implies, at first glance, a clockwise circularity of architectural and archaeological processes; empty plot, to scaffolded construction, to completed building, to extendedbuilding, eventually to ruin, and so to excavated archaeological site. And then it seemed to me that this circularity might, with a little imagination, be productively undermined, that it could be read instead as; empty plot, to a sequence of ruins rising towards ever more complete states – as one might build a folly, to a building scaffolded for demolition, then to its site excavated to reveal earlier buried forms of itself.
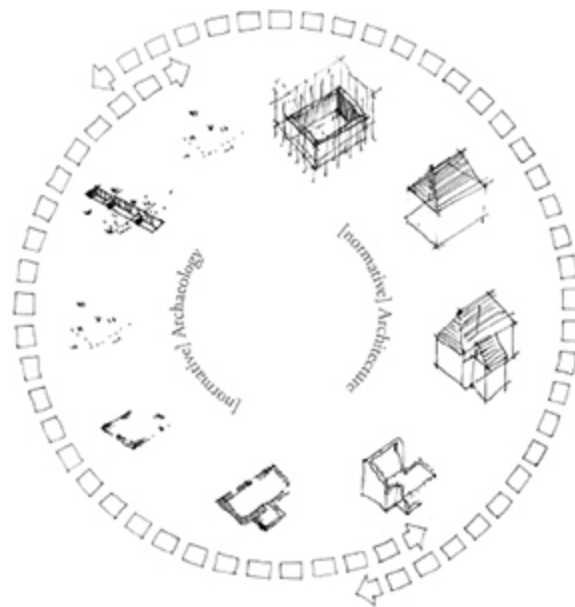

Fig. 2 Alessandro Zambelli, The Circularity of Architectural and Archaeological Processes. 2018.

The inversion is imperfect, yet revealed for me an uncanny mirroring of normative disciplinary processes – an uncanniness I will return to below. Smithson observes of one of Passaic's "timeless" voids, "that monumental parking lot divided the city in half, turning it into a mirror and a reflection – but the mirror kept changing places with the reflection. One never knew what side of the mirror one was on."[27] But architecture and archaeology are not only, or not simply, "reversals" of one another, they are situated reversals –

places where design and reconstruction meet, where construction and ruin encounter one another. This "site of encounter"[28] and the one at Must Farm at the end of this book are analogical sites, but they are also physical places in space and time occupied by people practicing in a variety of interdisciplinary forms. Figure 1 characterises these sites[29] as places and moments where my interdisciplinary practice has 'tacked' in order to navigate across disciplinary ripples towards archaeology. Site of Encounter: Birkbeck and Site of Encounter: Must Farm are brief descriptions of this transdisciplinary tacking.

In 2003, in order to satisfy a long-standing, yet at that time casual, interest in archaeology I enrolled on an evening course at Birkbeck, University of London. This short course was part of their certificate in the Archaeology of the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic Periods.[30] Although run by Birkbeck, the sessions were hosted by the U.C.L. Institute of Archaeology three hundred meters away to the north housed in a building founded by Tessa and Mortimer Wheeler in 1937 and to which it moved in 1958.[31] Birkbeck, itself established in 1823 as the London Mechanics' Institute, was founded for the education of working adults and, because this was still its principal function in 2003, I was able to attend whilst simultaneously running my architectural practice.[32] I was not particularly interested in acquiring an archaeology qualification, my intention at that time was simply to understand the subject in a little more detail – something to take me 'out' of architecture, briefly, once a week.

As the course progressed, however, I became aware of a growing sense of familiarity with some of the materials we were using and with the techniques we were being asked to employ. Norah Moloney, who ran the evening class, is a specialist in lithic analysis[33] and the room we used at the Institute also contained collections of lithic artefacts. In particular I remember two kinds of drawing which Norah asked us to tackle. The first were those, by others, in text books which we had been encouraged to refer to; sectional reconstructions of early buildings – drawings which seemed to me curiously like 'planning stage' architectural drawings. That is, scaled drawings containing just enough informationto be structurally and constructionally plausible and which often form the basis of applications for building licences from local government authorities in the U.K.

The second, and more important, were drawings – rapid sketches really – that we, as a class, were asked to prepare of some of the stone tools available in the room. Figure 3 is an example of one such sketch, the making of which, as I will explain below, proved to be an uncannily familiar and, in a (very) small way, a memorably transgressive act.

That 'uncanniness' brings to mind, now, Sigmund Freud's re-working and expansion of Ernst Jentsch's 1906 work On The Psychology Of The Uncanny in his own essay of 1919.[34] Freud agreed with Jentsch that certain uncomfortable, even frightening feelings of displacement, commonly

described in remarkably similar terms across a number of European cultures and languages, could be defined most completely in the German word heimlich. And that;
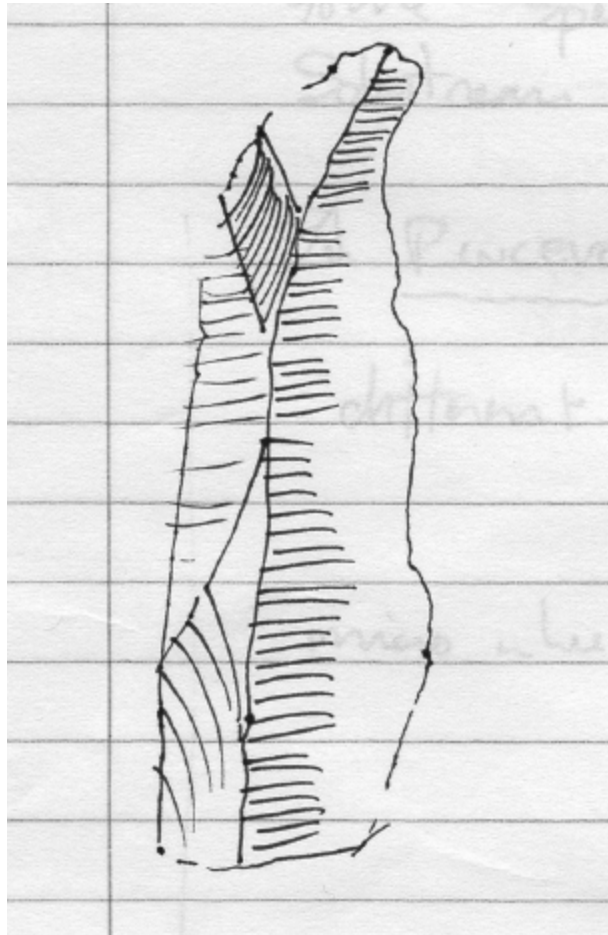
Fig.3 Alessandro Zambelli, Sketch of a Flint Burin, 2003.

among its different shades of meaning the word 'heimlich' exhibits one which is identical with its opposite, 'unheimlich'. What is heimlich thus comes to be unheimlich.[35]

Heimlich and unheimlich both mean that, "what is familiar and agreeable," but also, "what is concealed and kept out of sight"[36] are simultaneously true. Freud continues;

Schelling says something which throws quite a new light on the concept of the Unheimlich, for which we were certainly not prepared. According to him, everything is unheimlich that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light.[37]

To this we can add the uncanny apparition of the 'double'. Whilst drawing the stone tools it seemed to me as though I were seeing, or in some other way

sensing (the practice of drawing it) doubled. The drawings I was making in this archaeology class became somehow uncoupled from both my discipline – architecture, and from the discipline towards which I was working – archaeology. At first it seemed that this doubled act of drawing was both architecture and archaeology,*but I realised that it could not strictly be part of archaeology (I was not an archaeologist) but neither would the products of this hybrid practice be recognised by architects as architecture. These drawings belonged to neither discipline, yet were related to both.*

Unlike Freud who, in seeing himself reflected in the glass door of a train carriage failed to recognise this "inferior" and challenging double,[38] I have been seeking, through the making of this book, to understand the source and possible uses of this doubling, the effect of, "meeting one's own image unbidden and unexpected."[39] This doubling, alongside the "repetition" Freud identified as underlying the unheimlich occurs, I maintain, because of the parallel development of architectural and archaeological practices and their interconnected origins.

Some years after this event I came across the following text which, for its uncanniness, is worth repeating at length;

> *There is need for some* degree of confidence if a good line is to be drawn exactly in the right place, but often the inexperienced draughtsman loses his nerve and judgment when confronted with an expensive and cleanly beautiful sheet of drawing-paper or linen.

> […] a good word may be said, for mechanical pencils such as the Mars 'Lumograph', which allow the lead to be extruded or retracted at will and have moderately efficient devices for producing a sharp point.

> […] if he wishes to learn his craft thoroughly he will be well advised to serve a period of apprenticeship to the old-fashioned, hand-dipped pen, which is still used by some of the most supremely accomplished technical draughtsmen of our time.

> […] it is of the utmost importance that every drawing should bear a drawn scale rather than a mere written note of the representative fraction.[40]

Somewhat like the text from Archaeology: An Introduction quoted above this text sounded, at least to my disciplined, professionalised ears, as though it might be about the training of an architect; the terms used for drawing tools and techniques though somewhat outmoded, would be familiar to an architect of a certain age – to those generations of architects who learned in precisely this way, with these tools, and those like me who had trained in these skills though they were already dying. Yet this quotation comes from Brian Hope-Taylor's book called Archaeological Draughtsmanship – and it is about archaeological drawing practice. It was curiously unsettling to read this text