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Author(s): Shannon Lee Dawdy

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# Clockpunk Anthropology and the Ruins of Modernity

by Shannon Lee Dawdy

This essay identifies the potential of an emerging archaeological turn for anthropology—and for archaeology itself. I argue that despite the critiques of the past two decades, the temporality of modernity and a belief in its exceptionalism still structure much of anthropological thought, as exemplified in the division of archaeology and ethnography and in the subfield of historical archaeology and its dystopic treatment of modern urban ruins. But alternative temporalities and analytical possibilities are also emerging, ones attentive to the folding and recycling of cultural elements that Walter Benjamin described with such philosophical depth. On the ground, Benjamin's insights can be put to use by paying greater attention to the spatiotemporal dynamics of capitalism's creative destruction, to the social life of ruins, and to projects that challenge the linear divide between modernity and antiquity. Releasing anthropology from progressive time necessarily entails a reintegration of the subfields and a direct engagement with recent ruins.

*What! Ruins so soon!* (Alexis de Tocqueville (2003 [1835]))

Alexis de Tocqueville was speaking of a ruined log cabin he stumbled on in his exploration of the woods of New York. He marveled at the restless American frontier and was enchanted by the oddness of new ruins. Until recently, such enchantment has been rare. More often, Western observers of recent ruins have found them banal, tragic, or noisome. Romantic views are usually reserved for the ruins of a more distant past. One of the unique attributes of Walter Benjamin was his ability to turn romanticism on its head. His aesthetic contemplation of the recent ruins of the shopping arcades of Paris and the artifacts they housed in dusty whatnot shops inspired him to rethink the temporality of capitalism and the dialectic of history, among other things (Benjamin 1999; Benjamin and Tiedemann 1999). The resurrection of Benjamin as a philosophical provocateur in the present intellectual moment is not unrelated to a growing aesthetic sensibility that shares Benjamin's and de Tocqueville's fascination with recent ruins. Nor does it seem unrelated to a growing cross-disciplinary interest in archaeology, a practice grounded in the study of ruins. Intensely personal encounters, both mediated and immediate, with large-scale recent ruins such as those of 9/11, the 2004 tsunami, Hurricane Katrina, the Iraq War, and the blooming global rust belt of postindustrial cities may also

feed this preoccupation. In Benjamin's terms, ruins are "dialectical images" that reveal time's twists and strip away the facades that mask the contradictions of social life.

We seem to be approaching an archaeological horizon in the social sciences and humanities (or what others call an archaeological turn). The portent of archaeological metaphors, ruins, materiality, and "thingness" and a renewed attention to time and temporality has a multilinear genealogy. While Benjamin was a very archaeological thinker who turned to archaeological allegory repeatedly through his philosophical career after an early visit to Pompeii, other twentieth-century thinkers have famously found archaeology useful in their own ways. Freud employed the imagery of archaeological stratigraphy to understand the complexity of memory and psyche as a process of filtering, layering, decay, and burial, with psychoanalysis imagined as a kind of excavation (Bowdler 1996). Derrida (1996) resurrected Freud's archaeological fantasies to extend them to the twisted collective memories projected by historical representations. Perhaps best known and recognizable, however, is Foucault's (1972) use of metaphors of sedimentation and fragmentation in the *Archaeology of Knowledge* to counter the routinized dominant narratives of historical writing and rote habits of archival selection.

More recently, the density of the archaeological metaphor in critical theory has grown beyond the idiosyncratic uses of individual authors and is on its way to becoming a shared self-conscious idiom (Boelhower 2005; Boym 2001; Jameson 2005; Ranci re 1996; Schnapp, Shanks, and Tiews 2004a). Archaeology's dirt and stratigraphic method appeal to post-modern aesthetics. Outsiders recognize that archaeology is among the most conjectural of sciences (Ginzburg 1989; Wal-

**Shannon Lee Dawdy** is Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology of the University of Chicago (1126 East 59th Street, Chicago, IL 60637, U.S.A. [sdawdy@uchicago.edu]). This paper was submitted 17 VI 09 and accepted 16 II 10.

lace 2004) and find its epistemological looseness liberating. It deals in reading traces and fragments and depends on fragile, inferential reasoning. Its claims to know the past, whether the archaeologist is a processual positivist or a postprocessual interpreter, are always modest. This humility about the limits of knowing an undeniably real past seems to appeal across the disciplines—a curative, perhaps, to poststructural blood-letting.

A closely allied fascination with ruins goes beyond epistemology and deals empirically with ruins themselves and their social meanings. To cite a recent anthropological example, a special issue of *Cultural Anthropology* (edited by Ann Laura Stoler) is devoted to “ruins and ruination” and includes contributions on the aftereffects of colonialism (Stoler 2008), the efforts to preserve the rubble of slavery in Bahía (Collins 2008), and the ruinous imagery of atomic America (Masco 2008). And within anthropological archaeology itself there is a turn toward the ruins of the contemporary past, as reviewed in González-Ruibal’s (2008) recent contribution to *Current Anthropology*, as well as an epistemological reassessment of archaeology most daringly proffered in contributions to a special issue of *Modernism/Modernity* (Schnapp, Shanks, and Tiewes 2004a). Most of these anthropological efforts are simultaneously antimodern and antiromantic, resisting a disposition toward ruins as sites for aesthetic contemplation, be it in a Benjamin mode or a neoromantic effort to beautify the vestiges of modernity. The ruins of modernity in these accounts are politically dystopic.

My concern here is not to argue for either a dystopic or a romantic view of recent ruins but rather to demonstrate that these have been alternating currents in the discourse of modernity and, more important, that the ruin revival indexes an emerging fixation on time itself. In short, I suggest that the archaeological turn signals a move toward alternative temporalities. This shift has disciplinary implications for both anthropology and archaeology. While I have a concern that archaeologists are going to miss their own theoretical wave, I pin hope on the new possibilities that come from willfully collapsing archaeological and ethnographic time. New ways of imagining time and social process are emerging in both scholarship and popular culture that create the possibility that anthropology’s subfields will be pulled back together after the past several decades of schizmogogenesis. My points here are meant to push this trend and partake of a “general upheaval of traditional conceptions of the identity of the past and the nature of time” that has “barely started,” though inspired by the rediscovery of Benjamin (Olivier 2004:208). Bruno Latour (1993) also shares some blame for this upheaval. The still-settling realization that we have never been modern poses a threat to archaeology and anthropology if the fields are left to continue their drift through progressive time.

A materialization of this particular end-time is the ruins of modernity—those shells of abandoned factories, burned-out tenements, boarded-up schools, weedy lots, piles of concrete rubble, and faded commercial districts. They are a ubiq-

uitous part of our urban landscapes. They may appear, disappear, and reappear in rapid succession, in an uneven rhythm, or persist far beyond their original use life, but ruins are a defining feature of the urban landscape. Attending to these ruins undermines the stability of modern, progressive time and simultaneously alters our perceptions of contemporary space. They remind us that modernity is always incomplete, always moving on, and always full of hubris.

There is a growing consensus that modernity is best understood not as a hodgepodge of ideas and practices but more basically as a form of temporal ideology that valorizes newness, rupture, and linear plot lines (Koselleck 1985; Latour 1993; Ou-fan Lee 1990; Schnapp, Shanks, and Tiewes 2004b; Taylor 2001).<sup>1</sup> This temporal ideology has provided the thin skin for a global culture that developed some time in the sixteenth century, noticeably accelerating and spreading from the late eighteenth century through the mid-twentieth century. Some scholars have exposed the delusional quality of Western society’s insistence on its unique temporality rooted in modernity’s narrative (this was among Benjamin’s major aims in the Arcades Project; Benjamin and Tiedemann 1999). While recognizing the compression of time affected by capitalism, Benjamin also recognized the nostalgic palimpsest of commodities and landscapes in which the past was constantly recycled. Newness and progress were not exactly an illusion, but they were certainly a gross simplification of the dialectical spiral of history.

Scholars have used modernity as a stand-in for all or part of that inexorable cluster of capitalism, secularism, industrialization, colonialism, the onset of Atlantic slavery, individualism and the divided subject, technological involution, urbanization, global integration, science and rationality, mass literacy, aesthetic modernism, the nation-state, and so on (see Cooper 2005 for a critique of this overused homonym). Postmodern critical theory reset the clock with a new rupture and launched a moral and epistemological critique against the projects of the modern era, but, as the awkward postmodern label suggests, it did not by and large question periodization itself. The demolition of modernity as a temporal ideology is a more recent trend and logically questions postmodern time as well. Latour’s (1993) view on this matter is perhaps best known. He argues that much of scientific practice is based on a rhetoric of newness. Still, his point that “the chief oddity of the moderns [is] the idea of a time that passes irreversibly and annuls the entire past in its wake” (Latour 1993:57) has not been picked up as firmly as it could be, not even by archaeology.

The slow death of modernity as a temporal ideology presents a problem for anthropological studies still implicitly or

1. It is helpful to duplicate Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s (1995) distinction between Historicity 1 and Historicity 2. Historicity 1 is “what happened.” Historicity 2 is “the stories told about the past.” Modernity 1 is “what is still happening” in terms of the pace, scale, and density of global exchanges in resources, technology, ideas, and populations. Modernity 2 is “the stories told about the present.”

explicitly organized around the traditional/modern split. Perhaps counterintuitively, it presents a special problem for archaeology and an acute problem for the subfield of historical archaeology, which has defined itself as synonymous with the study of modernity through its material culture (Hall 2000; Hall and Silliman 2006; Hicks and Beaudry 2006; Leone 1995; Orser 1996). Because it is an extreme case of a disciplinary practice entrapped by the ideology of its object, I will use the example of historical archaeology to show more generally how anthropology (and, indeed, most social sciences and humanities) remains deeply invested in the self-deception of modernity as always new and risks being condemned to repeat or simply elaborate on the grand narratives of the period. Although perhaps not exactly what Benjamin meant by “anthropological nihilism,” it is a phrase that fits the submerged problem I am trying to bring to the surface. I argue that the ways in which anthropology has approached the ruins of modernity demonstrate its continuing entrapment in progressive time. One result is a view of modern cities and industrial landscapes that is, at best, negligent and often retrospectively dystopic or millenarian.

In the sections that follow, I set out three tasks. The first is to illustrate what I mean by modernity’s temporality and the alternatives that are emerging in both popular culture and scholarship. This effort includes backtracking to show how archaeology (long before anthropology) arose out of efforts to assert a new sense of time called modernity. This project continues with contemporary scholarship, seen in the split, for example, between historical and ancient archaeologies. The second task is to demonstrate how the temporality of modernity has affected the spatiotemporal imagination, particularly regarding the urban landscape. I argue that it has led to dystopic views of the recent past but simultaneously to an anthropological blindness to the ruins and wastelands of modern cities, evidenced through examples from the literature of historical archaeology. The final section points to ways out of this archaeological nihilism, highlighting recent scholarship that is attentive to the endemic ruination of capitalism, the social life of ruins, and the folding of time in recycled artifacts, reused ruins, and reappropriated lands. I also suggest the potential of folding back together anthropology’s subdisciplines by riding the momentum of the archaeological turn.

## Temporalities

Almost all of our stories about modernity begin with an account of rupture followed by evolutionary progress (or in dystopic versions, devolutionary descent and chaos). The point of rupture can vary according to the preference of the storyteller, from the printing press in the mid-fifteenth century to the stumbling of Christopher Columbus into the “new” world or Martin Luther’s protest in 1517 that triggered the Reformation. Other options are Louis XIV’s absolutism or the French Revolution, both of which provide politically

contrasting points of departure preferred by different scholars. Marxists may date modernity to the first steam-powered mills, while the cultural studies crowd prefers the crowning of Queen Victoria and the fashions of colonialism that her cult helped spread. With some embarrassment we must admit that Collingwood’s (1927:324) observation that “a ‘period’ of history is an arbitrary fabrication, a mere part torn from its context, given a fictitious unity, and set in fictitious isolation” has rarely been applied to the period of modernity, despite its particularly arbitrary boundaries.<sup>2</sup> Whatever the starting point, modernity’s temporal ideology is that we have never been the same again.

The very fact that there is so little consensus about which event triggered the mythic rupture suggests that the facts are not so important as the effects. A belief in a sudden temporal break of one kind or another is the common denominator of all modernity narratives. Even one of the crankiest critics of modernity, Michel Foucault, who was highly attuned to the contradictions, silences, and repetitive cycles of historical writing, believed as passionately as a *sans-culotte* that there had been a radical break in the flow of history. He called it the Enlightenment.

Anthropology has not been utterly duped by modernity, although it, too, has had a long history of temporal confusion (for a review, see Sahlin 2000). The impact of Fabian’s (1983) and Wolf’s (1982) work criticizing the field for collapsing time and space has been deep and wide in the past 25 years. In anthropology, language that compares the “West and the Rest” in development terms that deny coevalness or depict non-Western peoples as frozen in time is no longer acceptable. As a result, the field has launched some of the most important critiques of modernity taken up across the social sciences and humanities (e.g., Appadurai 1996; Trouillot 2003). Still, I argue that the practices of anthropology remain very much embedded in an eschatology of modern rupture.

### *Ancients and Moderns*

The sense of modernity as a self-conscious difference marked by time can be tracked in discursive history (Boym 2001; Calinescu 1987). In the 1580s, modernity meant “of the present day” but also, as used by Shakespeare, “ordinary” or “commonplace.” In his lifetime, the word began to transform from the idiom of the ordinary to the rhetoric of the extraordinary. A growing inventory of things came to be called modern in distinction to the antiquated and outmoded. The past became less a legacy than a strange and useless inheritance. But there was, as yet, no consensus, and by the late seventeenth century, the culture war between the ancients and moderns was raging.

It is said that the first battle took place in 1687 in France when Charles Perrault wrote and published *Le Siècle de Louis*

2. For an interesting subperiodization of the temporalities of modernity, see Gaonkar (2001). Hanchard (2001) makes the excellent point that temporalities experienced by the African diaspora entail yet more possibilities.

*le Grand*, in which he pronounced that the literature produced under the then-current reign of Louis XIV was superior to the literature of the ancients of Greece and Rome, who had been enjoying a revival (afterward named the Renaissance). The poet Nicolas Boileau and a league of classicists launched a vocal protest, arguing that in terms of both form and content, the ancients had achieved a perfection that should be emulated but could not be surpassed (DeJean 1997). The fighting spread to England, where a parallel quarrel took place in the 1690s and inspired Jonathan Swift's (1704) *Battle of the Books*. But this squabble was not just about books. Many of these men were clever satirists, as well as antiquarians, and their dueling pamphlets were as much about political and economic tensions of their lifetime. As antiquarians, they studied the past in order to come up with new ideas for everything from urban planning (Vitruvius) to treatments for hemorrhoids (Hippocrates).

Archaeology began as the jock branch of antiquarianism, a physical exploration of Europe's past. In fact, one of the earliest recognized archaeologists, Flavio Biondo (1392–1463), was known not only for recouping the texts of Cicero but also for his systematic physical survey of the architectural ruins of Rome, which were then overgrown and partially buried in areas of town given over to vagrant pigs. One of his last publications was a treatise that recommended using the urban models of ancient Rome to reinvent Italy's political and military structures (Christenson 1989; Rowe 1965). Biondo was a man who believed not so much in progress as recycling. It was he who coined the term "Middle Ages" to refer to the long intervening epoch between the fall of Rome the Empire and its revival in his day as Rome the City. Biondo's phasal terminology suggested that his generation had arrived at a point when time began to fold back on itself (thus the Renaissance). He was not yet modern.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the idea that Europe and its cultural outposts had entered a unique era was entrenched. Time had straightened into an arrow, and Biondo's phasal break retrospectively marked a point of no return. The moderns had won the war. The intellectual movement of the Enlightenment was quite diverse, containing strains of sentimental humanism as well as scientific rationality, but if one idea united luminaries, it was the notion that human knowledge was progressing and that knowledge would improve the world. Archaeology was one of the new fields to advance the cause, and many were to soon follow in the shoes of Johann Winckelmann and Thomas Jefferson, often credited as the first scientific archaeologists in Europe and America, respectively (Christenson 1989). Although the ancients and moderns debate was dead, a campaign to maintain that victory rested on reinforcing the perceived cultural divide between antiquity and modernity. This was a task for which archaeology was tailor made. It is a project it continues to carry. And it is one that sociocultural anthropologists now collaborate in.

While archaeologists study ancients, sociocultural anthro-

pologists study moderns, and the universalizing theories of human culture and behavior that once justified their shared roof have become unfashionable. With precious few exceptions, practitioners in both fields believe in the temporal rupture of modernity and refuse cross-temporal comparison. One may object that over the course of institutional anthropology's lifetime, such comparisons have been at times fashionable, as with the direct historical approach or the analogism of ethnoarchaeology. However, after the critiques of Fabian and Wolf, the first method has fallen out of favor, and the second has been carefully qualified and redirected (Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009). A major implication of their critiques was that all of anthropology had been involved in a project of constructing living prehistories, or mapping the premodern. The typologizing of contemporary cultures was tantamount to a crude Darwinian reduction of human diversity through temporal flattening. Although I have no objection to the core of these critiques, one unintentional result was the temporal cleansing (Hamann 2008) of anthropology such that the divide between ancients and moderns is now carved ever more deeply rather than questioning the ideology that created the divide in the first place. While all living peoples are now considered modern—or in the same time zone—peoples of the past are considered so exotic and "other" that most would find it dangerous and irresponsible to compare, for example, Romans to New Yorkers or Aztecs to Singaporeans.

Although many archaeologists of antiquity and prehistory frame their research in the large temporal units dubbed by Fernand Braudel *la longue durée* that might allow them to identify long cycles in globalization or the rise and fall of empires, they have swallowed the self-proclaimed exceptionalism of modernity with remarkably little protest. In fact, most archaeologists defend the divide rigorously. They have a strong tendency to neglect continuities and recycling from the premodern era and instead insist that the circa post-1450 period is incomparable to any that went before. They by and large neglect the similarities between ancient and modern cities, insisting that not only the massive scale and technological involution of material life but also many essential aspects of political being and social experience are qualitatively, starkly different from what came before. Modernity is allowed to be essentialized even if nothing else is.

#### *Archaeological Ruptures*

The refusal of comparison, parallels, long cycles, or genealogies with a deep past is epitomized by how archaeology has splintered. The subfield of historical archaeology in the United States (postmedieval and industrial archaeology in the United Kingdom and Europe) is defined as covering the period after 1450, 1492, 1500, or, for some, 1750 (note again the lack of

consensus regarding begin-time).<sup>3</sup> This schizmogeneration from studies of antiquity and prehistory (themselves convenient, though distinct, fictions) was necessary not simply because the source materials are different as a result of the greater depth of textual evidence after this period, thanks to the printing press and the spread of European colonialism; rather, it is because these were studies imagined to address quite different worlds. So different is their subject matter as a result of the imagined rend in history that many archaeologists are biased against historical archaeology for not being real archaeology (Lucas 2004; Shanks, Platt, and Rathje 2004).

The problem is not one of method. The problem is that historical archaeologists do not study antiquity or the cordoning off of a dusty, strange, and largely irrelevant past that seems to be archaeology's special contribution to modernity's rational knowledge building and temporal ideology (Lucas 2004; Thomas 2004a, 2004b). Mainstream archaeology rests on "an awareness that men have not always lived and thought as we do. The development of archaeology is therefore intrinsically linked with that of the discovery of otherness. . . . the remains of the past are different and unusual and this distinctive strangeness is proof of their age" (Olivier 2004: 206). Another justification for the separation of the archaeology of antiquity (old worlds with texts) and prehistory (old worlds without texts) from studies of modernity goes by the name "time perspectivism" and holds that the temporal resolution of the first is at such a broader timescale than other social sciences, such as history or ethnography, that the human phenomena they study are incommensurable (Bailey 1983; Murray 1999; for a review, see Lucas 2005:32–60).<sup>4</sup>

Although recently the idea of prehistory has come under attack from within the discipline (Schmidt and Walz 2005; Taylor 2008), historical archaeologists still define their work quite confidently as a special study of modernity. They devote themselves to working out reiterations of modernity's temporality or narratives of rupture and progress (even if the latter are viewed with cynicism). Deetz (1996 [1977]) famously defined historical archaeology as "the archaeology of the spread of European cultures throughout the world since the fifteenth century, and their impact on and interaction with the cultures of indigenous peoples" (5). Charles Orser (1996) elaborates Deetz's definition but in less neutral terms.

3. There has been some attempt to define historical archaeology by its method, as archaeology with texts (e.g., Moreland 2001), which would include archaeologies of premodern time-places with historical records, such as Rome or dynastic China, but this usage has not gained any traction, supporting the point that archaeology is deeply invested in the antiquity/modernity divide. One other source of disputation to this division, however, may be the growing field of African historical archaeology, in which textual evidence rather than the presence/absence of colonialism guides practice (François Richard, personal communication, May 2009).

4. Christopher Pinney (2005) draws a parallel between the division of the subject/object and the temporal purity imposed by modernity, with interesting implications for archaeology as the subfield to which both objects and the premodern are relegated.

He says the objects of the subfield are the haunts of colonialism, eurocentrism, modernity, and capitalism, each an ideology with material consequences that produce inequities, injustices, and dissatisfaction. For Mark Leone and many fellow Marxist historical archaeologists, the field is synonymous with the study of capitalism, and they see it as a moral imperative of their work to critique the inequalities it creates in the present (Leone and Potter 1988; McGuire 2006; Palus, Leone, and Cochran 2006). Orser's and Leone's work is representative of the tone of academic historical archaeology since the 1980s, which casts a particularly dystopian pall over the recent past, although it is much more prone to focus on modernity's evil monuments than its ruinous failures. A somewhat more balanced view is reflected by Martin Hall (2000), who also defines historical archaeology as the material study of modernity but focuses on "the complex ways in which localities were created within global systems of distribution" (3)—a distribution of ideas, people, and things in which agency and negotiation of individuals and non-Western peoples play as important a role as do the centripetal forces of hegemonic systems.

Thus, historical archaeologists by definition are as invested in the rupture between antiquity and modernity as any prehistorian or classical archaeologist. They simply score the qualitative divide from their side of the break. This schism breaks just one step below the divide between sociocultural anthropologists and archaeologists (Brumfiel 2003), with the animosity and institutional separation of ancient and historical archaeologies likewise affecting the ability to make comparisons. Research and publication collaboration between ancient/prehistoric archaeologists and historical archaeologists is exceedingly rare (for a review of this ongoing problem, see Lightfoot 1995).<sup>5</sup>

The following are some examples of the types of questions this split disallows: Are the differences between ancient and modern cities simply those of scale and tempo, or are they truly of kind? Are grid patterns and secular subjects such whole new inventions? Or totalitarian architecture and panoptic public spaces? What would ancient Greek and Roman urban sites reveal about our own spaces? Or those of Teotihuacán and Teotihuacan? Most archaeologists of antiquity decline to consider the possibility of such modern phenomena as racialization, capital accumulation, or terrorism in the past—to look for such things in antiquity is not only anachronistic but also offensive. The past is not supposed to share these dystopian aspects of our present and recent past. The deep past is, for many, a utopian refuge. One has to search hard to find anyone willing to venture a comparative study of ancient and modern societies, though there are unique and perhaps growing exceptions (Fletcher 1995; Gosden 2004;

5. In the United States, in fact, the cordoning off of ancient archaeology has been given new lifeblood by the recent creation of two powerfully funded institutions, the Joukowsky Institute for Archaeology and the Ancient World at Brown University (est. 2004) and the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World at New York University (est. 2007).

Rathje and Murphy 1992; Webster 2001). Generally, there is such a dearth of comparative work to draw on that the exceptionalism of modernity and its cities is really just an assertion. Indeed, it is a political ideology—a political ideology that historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, and many stripes of humanists have inscribed over and over again, fleshed out with details and colorful facts but rarely questioned. This refusal of comparison between the past and the present is increasingly being challenged from an unusual front—popular culture. Considering popular reimaginings of urban space and contemporary time offers a way to think outside of our habitual academic grooves. A fascination with recent ruins and folded temporalities in movies, hobbies, and fashion may represent a more radical refusal of modernity than any self-flagellating treatise. This movement might be viewed as an athletic instantiation of Walter Benjamin's antimodern revolutionary romanticism. Bringing these possibilities to view involves a quick journey from the streets of New Orleans to the sewers of Paris.

#### *Clockpunk Scenes*

Since Hurricane Katrina, anxious, contradictory images of New Orleans have circulated, including those of an antique city, a submerged wasteland, a sterile suburb, a timeless ghetto, or a future Disneyland (Souther 2007). These spatial dreams map temporalities while channeling the possibilities for social change. The ruins of Katrina, like ruins elsewhere, simultaneously evoke the past (when a structure was once whole and occupied), the present (as a state of decline, abandonment, or return to nature), and the future (as a stage setting for dystopia, such as in the use of modern ruins in films such as *RoboCop*, or, more rarely, a utopia, such as that in the novel *Ecotopia* [Callenbach 1975]).

While it may be obvious that my interest in ruins is heightened by the present state of my longtime field site of New Orleans, my interest is also piqued by contemporary movements in popular culture that focus on ruins, end-times, and collapsed temporalities. Thus, the scholarly search for Benjamin's dialectical images is paralleled by (perhaps even unconsciously enticed by) a proliferation of popular experiments in imagining time. There are two basic kinds of antimodern experiments or projections. The first is millenarian, about end-times. Cyberpunk and postapocalyptic movies such as *Blade Runner*, *Mad Max*, *The Matrix*, *Escape from New York*, and *I Am Legend* have proliferated since the 1980s. Most of these have been shot on location in the real-life ruins of Detroit and rust-belt factory towns. End-of-the-world themes are also staples of Japanese anime and Playstation games.

The narratives in these popular culture forms are fundamentally linear in imagining end-times as the terminus of a trajectory. Real-world events such as the Y2K minor panic, wars in the Middle East, AIDS, global warming, natural disasters, and the economic downturn that began in 2008 certainly feed this culture of gloom and millenarian movements

from Christian Zionism to al-Qaeda. The spectacular ruin of the World Trade Center in 2001 did not so much usher in this era as provide a real-life stage set for the representation of a dystopic postmodernity already under way. Its image is burned into our collective cortex, and there is no amount of academic skepticism that can entirely dispel the haunting of this ruin—and the suspicion that it signals at least the end of an empire. More realistically, I argue, it tolls the end of a certain kind of time.

The second type of antimodern temporal imagination seems to be of more recent vintage, at least in terms of its popularity, and is neither linear nor circular but involves a complex folding of time, or what Svetlana Boym (2001) calls reflective nostalgia. Mainstream media examples include *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy (in film as *The Golden Compass*), the Harry Potter series, and recent TV programs such as *Lost*, *Journeysman*, *Heroes*, and *Life on Mars*. It is also expressed in contemporary material culture through retro and eclectic interior design styles, which are guided not by a desire to accurately reproduce past place-times, as would a period room of a museum, but rather by an impulse to play with future possibilities by jumbling anachronistic furniture and artifacts (see Thorne 2003 for an astute take on the politics of apocalyptic/retro aesthetics). These are mundane examples of Latour's (1993:73–75) quasi objects that can create multiple times and diffuse conceits of a predictable ontological order.

This temporal folding in popular culture holds enough fascination for some to inform an entire lifestyle and several urban youth and online communities visible in the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, Australia, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and now Brazil. The Steampunk or Clockpunk subculture combines Victorian or Edwardian fashions with contemporary nanotechnology and musical forms.<sup>6</sup> Elements of this aesthetic have seeped into the mainstream through the comic book *League of Extraordinary Gentleman* (Moore and O'Neill 1999–2007). Clockpunks embrace a knotted temporality as expressed in their revival of the antique science fiction of Jules Verne and H. G. Wells. They see it as the role of their generation to engineer not the end of the world but the end of modernity, by purposefully entangling moments of its progressive time line. This is not the same “back to the past” neo-Luddism that characterized many 1960s back-to-the-land experiments. Although Steampunk shares a do-it-yourself (DIY) commitment to alternative economies, it is intently urban and focuses on reappropriating advanced technology rather than refusing it (fig. 1; for a how-to guide to Steampunk DIY urban survival, see Killjoy 2008). The most political adherents self-consciously refuse the commodity form through DIY labor, recycling, salvaging, sewing, and thrifting while simultaneously seizing individual control over mystified technologies such as computers, the Internet, digital recording,

6. Although “Steampunk” is the more common term, I prefer “Clockpunk” for its more generalizable connotation.



Figure 1. Steampunk computer. Photograph courtesy of Wikipedia commons. A color version of this figure is available in the online edition.

medicine, and even water purification and food production (Killjoy 2008). This is sustainability with an attitude and an aesthetic. Notably, Steampunk is also associated with a utopian optimism about human potential. According to a foundational manifesto:

We live in a world at the edge of ecological catastrophe, in a world where the race for hoarding profits and resources is recreating all over the planet slums typical of 19th-century London, and the individual's rights, obtained through fierce collective struggles in the last two-hundred years, are starting to wear away again one after another. That is why many people are beginning to consider the idea of de-growth, of slowing down production rhythms—or even of going back to early industrial conditions—as the only real solution to the death of the world as we know it. . . . This trend becomes particularly radical when it refuses a mystical and unlikely return to the preindustrial past and hybridizes with the hacker and punk do-it-yourself ethics: the result is not only critical of hypertechnological progress, but it proposes alternatives which are both self-produced and, what's more important, open to self-management. (reginazabo 2008)

Thus, for some members of the Steampunk movement, the relationship between material culture and temporality is understood as key to understanding current political economies and their utopian alternatives. Recycling of goods and the ecological sustainability of cities through practices such as

urban gardening in vacant lots are seen as resonant with the imaginative recycling of time (Killjoy 2008).

Another contemporary social phenomenon indicative of the archaeological turn in popular culture is the urban exploration (UrbEx) movement (Paiva 2008; Solis 2005). Practitioners spelunker into the abandoned spaces and modern ruins of contemporary cities, exploring sewer tunnels, factories, amusement parks, and schools. While these activities are usually illegal (minimally violating private trespassing laws), most urban explorers take only photos and post blogs with images via several online sites. Others sometimes collect souvenirs and call themselves “industrial archaeologists,” apparently unaware of their academic doppelgangers. The most prominent urban explorers are artists who pride themselves on their ability to see what society has overlooked in these neglected spaces. They are underground flâneurs, kindred spirits to Walter Benjamin, who was himself a bemused fan of Charles Fourier's science fiction utopia.

#### *Benjamin*

While there are many facets to Walter Benjamin's work, what I want to focus briefly on here is his thinking about archaeology, ruins, and temporality. Just as for many scholars archaeology represents an inspiration to reimagine materiality, Benjamin represents an inspiration for reconfiguring anthro-



pology as we know it, by allowing itself to be carried along by the archaeological turn toward alternative temporalities.

Benjamin was himself an archaeologist, a historical archaeologist in particular. He was also a Clockpunk and an urban explorer. He was fascinated by a visit to Pompeii early in his career, but his attention soon turned to everyday objects and architecture, to detritus and the ruins of modernity such as the Paris arcades, those glass-covered passageways that invited shoppers into a special world of goods. These architectural forms were between 75 and 100 years old by the time Benjamin was taking his walks through Paris in the 1920s and 1930s and had been eclipsed by department stores in his day (as the latter are now eclipsed by shopping malls). What he found in these remnant spaces abandoned by major capital were junk shops, brothels, mom-and-pop whatnot stores, and “things to think with.” Growing out of his dissertation work on Baroque allegory, as well as his exposure to Surrealist art and theatre, Benjamin latched onto a method for understanding the historical dialectics of society through material remains. The Arcades Project, although problematic for its unfinished state and the intentional dispersion of its philosophical center, is clear as a method. Benjamin’s method was that of a collector and an urban flaneur. He recorded the buildup of outmoded and discarded commodities. The scrapbook files of his project included descriptive inventories (and originally photographs) of umbrellas, hats, crystal lamps, toys, dusty knickknacks, and velvety interiors. The arcades themselves were architectural relics on the landscape, as were ornamented Victorian mansions and cast-iron railroad stations. Benjamin explored and recorded abandoned, underused, and reused spaces in Paris, including the catacombs, sewers, and metro system of the underground city, which particularly fascinated him (Convolute N even contains recommendations for particular routes in the sewers, in the same vein as an UrbEx practitioner; Benjamin and Tiedemann 1999:87). He recorded the archaeological, with notes such as “In 1899, during work on the Métro, foundations of a tower of the Bastille were discovered on the Rue Saint-Antoine. Cabinet des Estampes” (Benjamin and Tiedemann 1999:91).

Benjamin interacted with the materials and places he encountered with allegorical engagement for what they poignantly expressed about human desires, failures, and mythic repetitions, but we should not understand this process as a literary mode devoid of sociology. Rather, what Benjamin strove to see was how material culture pulsed with meaning long after the moment of production because it embodied a particular history and web of social relations spun by a restless political economy. For the Victorian generation, in particular, he thought about the social implications of their commodity aesthetics but also the causes for their eclipse:

All these products are on the point of entering the market as commodities. But they linger on the threshold. From this epoch derive the arcades and intérieurs, the exhibition halls and panoramas. They are residues of a dream world. . . .

Every epoch, in fact, not only dreams the one to follow but, in dreaming precipitates its awakening. It bears its end within itself and unfolds it—as Hegel already noticed—by cunning. With the destabilizing of the market economy, we begin to recognize the monuments of the bourgeoisie as ruins even before they have crumbled. (Benjamin and Tiedemann 1999:13)

In Benjamin’s late work there are three key points that are still radical in their possibilities for anthropology. The first of these, the mystical logic of commodity aesthetics, has had the most visible impact on anthropology, through the work of ethnographers such as Michael Taussig (2010 [1980]) and William Mazzarella (2003), although many of the broad-ranging critiques of neoliberalism still seem innocent of its nuances. The second and third points have perhaps gathered less attention within the field: his suggestion of a method that requires looking for dialectical images in landscape, artifacts, and expressive culture and his insistence that the linear narrative of modernity and capitalism must be questioned. While dialectical imaging as a method has been taken up in the humanities, particularly in arts and literary criticism, Benjamin’s worries about temporal blindness have been overlooked by almost everyone.

In Benjamin’s writing, these three things—commodity aesthetics, temporality, and dialectical seeing—are connected as phenomena, process, and method. Of the dusty, outmoded commodities he found in the arcades, he says:

With the vitiating of their use value, the alienated things are hollowed out and, as ciphers, they draw in meanings. Subjectivity takes possession of them insofar as it invests them with intentions of desire and fear. And insofar as defunct things stand in as images of subjective intentions, these latter present themselves as immemorial and eternal. Dialectical images are constellated between alienated things and incoming and disappearing meaning. . . . With regard to these reflections, it should be kept in mind that, in the nineteenth century, the number of “hollowed-out” things increases at a rate and on a scale that was previously unknown, for technical progress is continually withdrawing newly introduced objects from circulation. (Benjamin and Tiedemann 1999:466)

Benjamin models a way of understanding everyday objects that takes into account their shifting meanings and, in fact, suggests that objects acquire more intensely affective, complex meanings as they age and become archaeological. Far from commodities being lifeless things produced by a soulless market, they are particularly powerful as semiotic vessels, as a result of their quickly effaced functionality. This is true as much for the collector of curios wandering the flea market of the arcades as it is for the archaeologist-interpreter. To attempt to see these artifacts as dialectical images means to see their shifting meanings and inheritance from the past. In kinship with the object biographies of Kopytoff (1986) and

Appadurai (1986), Benjamin's method encourages us to view the history of the object through its life course but with the distinct demand that we pause on its death and rebirth (from a useful, fashionable thing to a sentimental curiosity or unwanted junk) in order comprehend the contradictions, failures, subterfuges, and comedic-tragedies of the society that produced it. He distinguishes this method from both hermeneutics (which reads intentionally encoded messages) and phenomenology (which reads only the presentist immediacy of experience). Instead, looking for dialectical images is akin to provoking involuntary memory of the conditions that produced the relations between objects and people (Benjamin and Tiedemann 1999:703 [paralipomena to "On the Concept of History"]).

Ruins and dilapidated, adaptively reused buildings are architectural equivalents of Benjamin's outmoded commodities. In fact, the imagery of ruins and demolition sites pervades Benjamin's work on the arcades, and learning from ruins was fundamental to his dialectical method, although he was resolute in his disbelief of decline (see, e.g., Convolute C, p. 546 of Convolute S, and p. 874 of "The Arcades of Paris" in Benjamin and Tiedemann 1999). For him, ruins represented the impermanence and bluster of capitalist culture as well as its destructive tendencies. He understood that the ongoing creation of ruins in the modern city affected the social imagination: "Along with the growth of the big cities there developed the means of razing them to the ground. What visions of the future are evoked by this!" (Benjamin and Tiedemann 1999, Convolute I).

It was through his intensive visual interaction with everyday objects in the streets and shops of Paris that Benjamin came to see the temporality of modernity as an illusion. Its insistence on the new covered up the persistence and recycling of the old. Although a Marxist, he rejected the progressive temporality of social evolution fundamental to Marx's critique of capitalism and vision of a socialist future (see especially "On the Concept of History" in Benjamin and Tiedemann 1999). Instead, for Benjamin this cult of the new was itself a form of false consciousness. He in fact called the Arcades Project a prehistory of modernity. He understood temporality as the past and the present constructing one another in an ongoing dialectic.

He was concerned to debunk mythic histories (much as Foucault was to take up later) but most especially the mythic history of modernity itself, which he refused to see as either rupture (in his words "catastrophe") or progressive evolution. Time for him was not a series of linear strings laid end to end but a Hegelian knot. He believed that the source material for a utopian imagination came from the relicts of the past. And he recognized past utopias. He "[defined] history retrospectively as the ruins of an unfulfilled past" (Buck-Morss 1989:26). By redeeming the utopian impulses of the past and creatively recycling the best ideas rather than rejecting them through capitalism's frenetic obsolescence, Benjamin imagined an improved future—recognizing that the root of rev-

olution is "to revolve" rather than "to evolve" and that "overcoming the concept of 'progress' and overcoming the concept of 'period of decline' are two sides of one and the same thing" (Benjamin and Tiedemann 1999:460, Convolute N).

The powerful mutual attraction between Benjamin's philosophy and archaeological practice has not gone unnoticed. European archaeologists less attached to an anthropological hearth have recently embraced Benjamin's visual and temporal dialectics, most eloquently Laurent Olivier's (2008) *Le sombre abîme du temps* (see also Schnapp, Shanks, and Tiewes 2004b; Shanks 1991). However, the revival of Benjamin's work may bring some embarrassment to anthropology. Through the delegation of its subfields, anthropology has been quite active in constructing the time-myths of modernity, not least through the division of labor when it comes to the study of ruins.

## Ruins

A long and thick literature exists in the humanities on the contemplation of ruins in literature and art, from Renaissance through Romantic-era European fixations on the remnants of Greek and Roman antiquity and the Middle Ages (Daemmrich 1972; Goldstein 1977; Hughes 1995; Janowitz 1990; Riegel 2004; Springer 1987; Woodward 2001; Zucker 1961; for a rare consideration of ruins in the American literary imagination, see McNutt 2006). Prominent genres treated by culture theorists and critics are the French and German romantic tradition in literature and the British landscape tradition. The latter, in fact, provides the nineteenth-century roots of historic preservation and nationalist archaeology in the English-speaking world. A partial explanation of today's archaeological turn is this close association between ruins and archaeology: "Archaeology is, in most minds, associated with ruins of one sort or another—ruined buildings, decaying structures, broken objects, all variously buried or rotting on the surface. They speak of the passage of time and, ultimately, of oblivion or forgetfulness. Archaeology as a contemporary practice is very much an act of salvaging such ruins, rescuing them from oblivion" (Lucas 2005:130). Here is another reason historical archaeology has a tenuous epistemological and disciplinary position in the wider field: it uncovers things not yet forgotten. But it could do even more dangerous and productive work, I argue, by uncovering things thought best forgotten, such as the failures of state projects and the paths of destruction wrought by high capitalism.

Scholars interested in the national contexts of archaeology are not unaware of the affective and symbolic power of ruins that can justify (and fund) the field (Abu El-Haj 2001; Hamilakis 2007). Likewise, a growing literature in archaeological theory on the problems of time and temporality does grapple with the complex temporalities of ruins (see, e.g., special issues of *World Archaeology* [vol. 39, no. 4] and *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* [vol. 18, no. 1], as well as Bailey 1987, 2007; Bradley 2002; Gosden 1994; Lucas 2005; Murray 1999; Olivier

2004; Van Dyke and Alcock 2003; Witmore 2006). But it is notable that most of these studies actually focus on antiquity in antiquity or deal with modern time only in meta-archaeological terms, ultimately failing to escape the temporal exceptionalism that historians and anthropologists grant the post-1450 period.

More pertinent to my focus here is a surge of interest by both artists and scholars in ruins elsewhere in the world (Hosagrahar 2005; Rodríguez-Hernández 2007; Taneja 2008) and in the ruins of modernity or the physical remnants of state modernism and the architecture of industrial capital (Bissell 2001; Edensor 2005; Jaguaribe 2001). These are the intellectual equivalents of the UrbEx movement. While on the one hand it seems inevitable that as modern wreckage piles up in developed and developing nations, attention will turn to the accumulating debris, it may take some concerted effort to put an anthropological frame around the ruins of modernity. They present paradoxes that challenge basic understandings of how time works and how anthropology should be structured.

#### *Modern Times and Dystopia*

It has become commonplace to note that by the early nineteenth century, residents of Western urban and industrial settings were experiencing a sense that time was accelerating and becoming increasingly disciplined. Industrial modernity at once creates “a spectacle of speed, novelty, and effervescence” (Gaonkar 2001:9) and a drudgery of punch cards, day planners, and alarm clocks. Temporal compression and segmentation were pushed along by continual improvements in clock and watch technology, as well as the synchronization demanded by railroad schedules. E. P. Thompson’s (1967) and Georg Simmel’s (2004 [1903]) observations about the importance of “clocktime” to capitalism have been elaborated on to the point of being overstated. Allen (2008) argues that well into the nineteenth century, American life was structured by multiple overlapping temporalities of work life, family life, nature, life cycle, and religious calendars, only a few of which could be brought under the control of the clock. This could well be said of the contemporary present, with polyrhythmic temporalities created by new technologies such as cell phones, e-mail, and the Internet and a drift away from clocktime through contract labor, flextime, and homeschooling.

The contradictory senses of modern time as both exceptional and routine are paralleled by contradictory senses of modern space as both emancipated and dystopic. In fact, it is difficult to separate the modern experience of accelerating time from the modern experience of palimpsest urban spaces and the creation of young ruins. This is “the paradox of rapid destruction inherent in the productivity of capitalism” (Munn 2004:3), first noted by Marx and Engels and expanded on by David Harvey (1985, 2003), who calls it the force of capital’s creative destruction. The ambivalent, seesawing forces of our modern political economy create landscapes of boom and

bust, speculation and abandonment, in both the metropole and the former colony (Ferguson 1999). Stephen Graham (2004) points to the parallel and not unrelated cycle of war and violence. Geographer Tim Edensor (2005:4) even asserts that ruins are quintessentially modern. However, modern urban spaces may be distinctive only in the rapidity of their cycles and the prevalence of ruin and vacancy within their streetscapes (although this, too, has yet to be settled via sustained comparison with ancient cases). Cycles of ruin, destruction, and abandonment are a defining feature of cities. Cities are palimpsests, or “a multilayered space where traces, ruins, and remnants of past city-building efforts coexist in the present with the early signs of an imagined Future City, embryonic glimpses of what is to come” (Murray 2008:172).

If Raymond Williams (1975:23) was right when he said that “out of an experience of the cities came an experience of the future,” then that future has more often than not looked bleak since the eighteenth century, as imagined by artists, writers, reformers, and oft-thwarted urban planners. The ruins of modern cities represent the dystopian present. Elsewhere I have traced the professionalization of modern urban planning and many of the tenets of the rationalized street grid to New World reinventions of Roman design (Dawdy 2008). In Europe, related efforts to open up the city to light and air, to straighten and broaden the streets, and to segregate public and private spaces arose out of Enlightenment critiques of aging cities. Images such as those given us by Mercier (1781–1788) in his *Tableau de Paris* figured the eighteenth-century city as oozing fetid vapors and sheltering crime and degeneracy under its crumbling eaves.

Dystopian discourses about the city as an evil, swampy forest or a Dante-like mechanical landscape are remarkably persistent and cyclical in the Western imagination. John Ruskin (1866), the quintessential romantic of premodern ruins, described his own Victorian capital as “that great foul city of London,—rattling, growling, smoking, stinking—ghastly heap of fermenting brickwork, pouring out poison at every pore” (9). Charles Dickens painted similar gothic portraits of London in the mid-nineteenth century. Across the channel, Émile Zola described Paris:

The curved line of the horizon could scarcely be divined; the expanse of houses, which nothing bounded, appeared like a chaos of stone, studded with stagnant pools, which filled the hollows with pale steam. . . . It was a Paris of mystery, shrouded by clouds, buried as it were beneath the ashes of some disaster, already half-sunken in the suffering and the shame of that which its immensity concealed. (Zola 1898:1)

Hausmann used Zola’s critique of Paris as a landscape still (or again) plagued by human rot to push forth his campaign to chop up, clear, and bound the city. After World War II, London was once again “imaged as a city of gray shadows, derelict bomb sites, and treacherous moral quicksand” (Mort

2008:327). In these images, morality and materiality are co-constituted, and they recycle episodically in each city's history.

In the early United States, a nervousness toward recent ruins in Poe and Melville's writing revealed "a barely hidden national fear that within the republic's emerging urbanism might lay the seeds of destruction" (McNutt 2006:11). World War I and the Depression engendered another wave of anti-urban disenchantment resulting in a flight to the suburbs and large-scale planning in some cities and ruination in others. The discourse of midcentury U.S. urban "renewal," as it was called, which between 1930 and 1970 gutted, divided, and/or removed inner-city communities across the country, was different only in nuance from Haussmann's gutting of Paris. According to Harry Truman's 1949 State of the Union address, cityscapes needed to be cleansed of these nonproductive "slums" and "unhealthy firetraps."

Urban dystopia is still fashionable today: "Representations of dereliction echo through resurgent popular gothic cultural forms which espouse the idea that the structures of the modern world are falling down, a notion which extends to an envisioning of the city as a disaster zone. Fuelled by millennial fears of apocalypse and the belief that a new medieval era is upon us . . . industrial ruins similarly question the persistent myth of progress" (Edensor 2005:14). Dystopic and apocalyptic urban imaginaries have now spread to Africa, India, and Latin America in the twenty-first century, while they recycle themselves in London (Mort 2008; Murray 2008).

The paradox of modern ruins is that they are not antique and thus hold little utopian value. In fact, if contemplated for too long, they can reveal the contradictions of progress. This may be one reason why projects of demolition often proceed rapidly in urban settings, even if all that replaces failed projects are wastelands and vacant lots.

In *Seeing Like a State*, Scott (1998) defines "high modernism" as an aesthetic that stamped its hyper-rational forms onto both urban and rural landscapes. And it is the failure of these grand projects—the hubris of the state—that interests him. Some of his examples are from the capitalist west, such as Haussmann's Paris, but also from the communist east, in the form of Soviet collectivization, and from the south, in the form of futuristic Brasilia. His examples focus deliberately on large state-directed projects, but a different type of spatial dystopia is reflected in the modern ghost towns of the Sacramento Delta, of Detroit and Kansas City, of Birmingham and Sheffield. These landscapes are evidence of the hubris of the market (Coronil 2001). It is not simply that ruins and vacancy are evidence of capitalism's episodic failures. If the rusting ruins of the Ford plant in Dearborn, Michigan, or the miles of abandoned steel mills outside Chicago are any measures, its cumulative successes are not nearly as enduring on the landscape as its accumulating failures. Like the future Earth in the animated film *WALL-E*, capitalism is a machine churning out wreckage faster than monuments. The character of Wall-E may be Benjamin's angel of history for the millen-

nial generation, a naive transformation of the Paul Klee original.

The creation of ruins is a function of capitalism's fast-moving frontiers and built-in obsolescence, as well as political hubris and social conflicts. As a result, "the transformation and metamorphosis of cities over time is not the result of a singular logic, a unilinear teleology, or a universal process of urbanization. City-building processes are contradictory and uneven" (Murray 2008:171). Another of modernity's contradictions is that its temporality dictates that all forms lose value over time (if all is going well, progress means modernity's own projects are being constantly eclipsed by the next new), but at the same time its hubris encourages the construction of monumental structures built to last. Such contradictions can be seen in Le Corbusier's massive projects that attempted to dictate social democracy or in Albert Speer's philosophy of ruin value, which guided the design of his fascist buildings so they would have aesthetic appeal for thousands of years—as inspirational ruins.

Within scholarship, there is a politics in attending to ruins. Clearly, different strains of romanticism have informed archaeology's predisposition toward ruins since the Renaissance. Yet no one feels that romantic toward modernism except for a few bowtie architects. Instead, "in their fractured materials, they translate into ruin the fragility of former utopian projections. What is foregrounded by the decay of these edifices is the contradiction between the purpose of the modernist structure as the embodiment of the new and the tangible display of its datedness in the midst of the cultural transformations of the city" (Jaguaribe 2001:331). In their rush to critique brutal modernity (Fischer 2004), scholars have obsessed about its monuments and brash successes such as those of Corbusier and Speer but rarely attend to its more quotidian ruins and failures.

#### *Archaeology of Modern Cities: Where Are the Ruins?*

Anthropology has participated in the dystopian vision of modern urbanity and the related temporal ideology of progress. The subfield of historical archaeology illustrates this complicity through a rather peculiar relationship of simultaneous exaggeration and neglect. What Charles Orser (1996) calls the haunts of historical archaeology—colonialism, capitalism, eurocentrism, and rational modernity—are aptly named. At least since the 1980s, publications in historical archaeology have been largely devoted to excavating the ghost stories of slavery, class struggle, industrial discipline, and the violent institutionalization of criminals, the indigenous, and the poor. Interpretations of the remains concentrate on the moments that towns and plantations were laid out, on the peak periods of factory production, on massacres, and on high points in ethnic or racial exclusion. In other words, the preponderance of archaeological narrative has been devoted to developing modernity's sinister success stories, so many beginnings and ruptures. Laid end to end, the moments of

archaeological attention give the illusion of dark modernity's progress, with one monumental project building on the last. The discipline seldom pauses to examine the aftermaths of construction and longer social interludes—or the strata between dramatic events.

I suggest that archaeologists and anthropologists have not looked at the ruins of modernity as productively as we could for what they tell us about the downturns of economic cycles, the social life they generate, or the politics of their creation. Some ruins are long lasting, either because maintained or because utterly neglected. Others are dramatic but short-lived things. Studying why and how ruins are not only made but also erased, commemorated, lived in, commodified, and recycled can tell us at least as much about society as the processes that created the original edifices. Often, a site's period of decline and vacancy is much longer than its Golden Age or peak of production. To ignore these chapters is to ignore a substantial part of urban experience.

Mark Warner and Paul Mullins (2008) note that the archaeology of modern cities has come along way since Bert Salwen first complained in 1973 that no one seemed to be taking the city seriously as a unit of analysis. Indeed, it has even come a long way since Roy Dickens's 1982 volume, *Archaeology of Urban America*, and Edward Staski's 1987 volume called *Living in Cities* (Dickens 1982; Staski 1987) first tried to fill that gap. The explosion in legislated cultural resource management projects has produced a pile of data on cities both small and large across the United States and United Kingdom. Analysis and anthropological interpretation have also advanced. The best of this work has focused on issues of class and consumption, mapping out the complicated ways in which economic structures intersect with ideologies of desire and proclamations of identity along the lines of ethnicity, race, gender, and religion. But if you take a survey of the work in urban historical archaeology, you will have a hard time finding authors oriented toward ruins and vacancy, despite the fact that for many denizens these have been defining features of their modern landscape.

Réginald Auger and Bill Moss (2001) note that in Quebec it has been difficult to get scholars and the government to deploy resources to study the Lower Town's period of decline in the nineteenth century. This is a lacuna shared in many urban areas. Paul Shackel and Matthew Palus (2006) point out that even at the intensively studied site of Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, attention has focused on the relatively brief period of industrial success in the antebellum period, when it was the site of a major national armory. Research and interpretation have neglected the longer history of economic struggle following the Civil War. Further, the National Park Service's efforts have been so oriented toward commemoration of industry that architectural features "do not retain the appearance of ruins. They look neither 'restored' nor 'reconstructed,' but rebuilt to signify something other than a ruin, something that will last longer" (Shackel and Palus 2006:59). This suggests that the decaying ruins of modernity are not

only unromantic but also meaningfully dangerous. Modern ruins signify the failures and impermanency of capitalism and the necessary poverty it engenders temporally or spatially, in contrast to its promises of ever-expanding flow and possibilities of social uplift.

One might expect to encounter an exception to this rule of ignoring recent ruins and periods of decline in the strong industrial archaeology tradition in Britain, but there, too, the focus of most work has been on the heyday of industrialism on understanding the role of the factory at its height, when smokestacks billowed into the air and surrounding tenements teemed with life (see, e.g., contributions to Green and Leech 2006). Understanding what role the abandoned factory played in postwar Sheffield and Birmingham has not, thus far, been of significant interest.

Ruins are also telling in their absence. Nancy Munn's recent work on New York tracks how ruins were disallowed in the nineteenth century. Instead, "places become old or are destroyed before their ordinary or appropriate times" (Munn 2004:3). This compulsive process of demolition and rebuilding has created a dense archaeological platform on which contemporary Manhattan sits (Cantwell and Wall 2001). The Five Points Project is an important exception to the neglect of urban decline, although in other ways it demonstrates the ways in which archaeologists still have difficulty seeing social life in the ruins. On the edge of today's Chinatown, the neighborhood was described by Charles Dickens in 1842: "Poverty, wretchedness, and vice, are rife enough where we are going now. This is the place: these narrow ways, diverging to the right and left, and reeking everywhere with dirt and filth. . . . Debauchery has made the very houses prematurely old" (Dickens 1842:88–89). His description resonates with the characterization of the archaeologists, who refer to it as a slum notorious for crime and vice (Yamin 2001). The archaeological project produced an enormous amount of artifactual material, based on rich features such as privies and cesspools. But the analyses provide little spatial or architectural sense of what a slum is or the collectivities that enlivened it. One wonders how its tight spaces and decaying architecture may have affected social and economic life and what sorts of informal economies may have complicated the consumer individualism (or consumer ethnicity) presumed by the archaeologists' interpretations. The social life of modern ruins is underdeveloped.

## Exploring Decay and Demolition

One justification for focusing on modern ruins is that they so immediately evoke for us the magico-real qualities of the human landscape or what Edward Soja (1996), following LeFebvre (1991), calls "thirdspace," the places continually recreated out of a conjunction of imagination and materiality. They reveal the lived environment as a historical process with an uncertain future. Among the ruins, the physical gaps of missing walls cite missing people, and their status as neither

present nor past spells out the temporal ambiguity of real time. They provoke the imagination while their patina, dust, and jagged edges work on our senses. The contemplation of ruins need not be choked by romanticism, which stops short of critical intellectual engagement in order to indulge in melancholy and unreflective nostalgia. Contemplation can instead take other modes, including anthropological ones.

Ruins and vacant lots clear away the clutter that masks historical processes and the verve of urban life. Dell Upton writes that the built environment is “only the shell of the urban artifact” (cited in Belford 2001:114), by which he means to warn us not to be lulled into thinking that life follows form. The built environment and its clunkier accessories are demoted from their seemingly deterministic role when transformed into ruins, leaving us freer to see the archaeological evidence as signs of human improvisation rather than human design.

Two opposing aesthetic forces have shaped the lived landscape of the modern city: the desire to create clean, geometrical, and efficient order (the impulse chronicled by James Scott and many other scholars of modernism) and an urge to escape these same rigid structures—to dream the city as a place of “surprise, contingency and misrule” (Edensor 2005: 53). Ruins, neglected neighborhoods, vacant warehouses, abandoned amusement parks, squatter camps—these are the spatial dimensions of this second aesthetic. Looking at the prevailing images of the modern city from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, one would have to conclude that a city would be incomplete and out of balance without ruins and unpoliced zones. These are part of what we desire in a city.

### *Disaster*

Disasters and their ruins provide a particularly dramatic example of the anthropological possibilities. Local responses to ruination can be read as confessions of social realities and oracles of new possibilities. Most of the disasters that have decimated large modern cities since the eighteenth century have been man-made in one way or another. How these ruins were created and how they are treated in the aftermath give us a clearer picture of the tensions that undergird local political economies than do the first impulses toward planning and construction (Bintliff 1997; Dawdy 2006). The treatment of ruins in postwar London, postindustrial Detroit, post-9/11 New York, and post-Katrina New Orleans are diverse but telling. Archaeologically and anthropologically, there is much to be learned from slowing down and paying better attention to processes of destruction, abandonment, and decay—not as interludes but as the main act. Instead of rushing to reconstruct the fleeting moments of completeness, we need to get better at recognizing what Benjamin called an object’s afterlife, which may have a more lasting legacy. This is one of the tenets of Benjamin’s method that qualifies the widely used object-biography model (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986). Landscapes and objects can continue on in a ghostly

state, or, perhaps better said, they are reincarnated through reuse and recycling while retaining some spirit of their former social roles.

Ruins created by disaster mark important chapters in the life cycle of many modern cities. New York’s Great Fire of 1835 wiped out a huge chunk of the city, more than 700 buildings. New Orleans lost 80% of its urban fabric to a fire in 1788, although the city was rebuilt quickly, using the same orthogonal grid, and in some cases replica buildings were erected to replace those lost, reusing bricks and foundations (Dawdy 1998). Such a mnemonic recycling of ruins occurred when San Francisco was rebuilt after the 1906 earthquake and fire. Burned, molten bricks turned glassy and organic by the heat were reused throughout the city as decorative accents in exterior masonry and mantle pieces. Immediately after the fire, Golden Gate Park became a sprawling common ground of shared experience in trauma, where city residents took refuge and set up camp (Fradkin 2005). They reported experiencing a new sense of solidarity out of this forced restructuring of their city’s materiality. It was one that did not erase class and ethnic divides, but it did cut across them, materialized in the souvenir bricks distributed throughout the rebuilt neighborhoods.

If we return to our own time and to New York, we see that a rather different recycling has been used on the ruins of the World Trade Center, indicative of its status as a national ruin. Steel from the Twin Towers has been recycled to form the bow of the new San Antonio-class amphibious assault ship, anointed the USS *New York*. Another piece of steel has been buried at the U.S. embassy in Afghanistan. More prosaically telling of our neoliberal global economy, the great majority of the nearly 200,000 tons of steel was shipped overseas to foundries in China, India, and South Korea. Pieces are now being sold back to American consumers as car parts, food cans, and paper clips (Seabrook 2008; *Washington Times* 2008). The intense controversy over the future of the Ground Zero site expresses a variety of political and social tensions and highlights the ways in which disaster ruins are hot thirdspaces where imagination and materiality are smelted (Goldberger 2004; McKim 2008; Sturken 2004). Some were angered at how long it took to demolish; they were offended by the ruin as a reminder of pain and failure. Others were upset that it was demolished completely. They wanted some portion of the facade preserved as a memorial. Once the decision was made to redevelop the site, controversy continued over whether to replace the towers much as they were or to erase their imprint by creating a whole new form or some combination. The final design traces the former footprints in memorial pools. The ruins have been replaced by another sort of contemplative space that references absence but not failure.

A more bizarre example of the thirdspace of ruins and their manipulation as commemoration comes from contemporary New Orleans. In the center of a traffic island still surrounded by devastated shells of former homes and businesses in the Lower Ninth Ward sits a new sculpture installation memo-

rializing the victims of Katrina. It is a fake ruin of heavy, durable steel crafted in the form of a skeletal frame of a house and isolated chairs left behind by the storm (fig. 2). Tens of thousands of actual ruins in New Orleans have been passed over as possible memorials to the city's trauma and loss in favor of something less personal, less fragile, and less politically charged than the forensic ruins of a nation's failure. In the durability of its materials and its occupation of an unusable strip of land, the memorial demands that the viewer presume that soon all this surrounding it—the real ruins of Katrina—will be forgotten and replaced, as if the disaster were only a momentary though tragic failure and not one of a perennial nature.

What Nancy Munn (2004) says of nineteenth-century New York applies to anxieties in present-day New Orleans surrounding the demolition of Katrina houses: "In a moment of demolition, a place's entire existence—the concrete space, temporal pasts and futures and current identity held together in it were consumed as it was torn apart. And ongoing disappearances and transformations could prefigure a transgenerational spacetime of repeated vanishing and mnemonic loss in the current, changing face of the city" (14).

FEMA pays for demolitions but not rebuilding. The agency will demolish only ruins that pose an immediate public health threat or those for which the owner submits a special request. Not coincidentally, the one area where federally funded demolition has proceeded at the fastest rate is the Lower Ninth

Ward. Often against residents' wishes, severely damaged houses have been swept away by the bulldozer because of their assessed threat to public health. Many local activists called for houses to be preserved as memorials, but they have been unsuccessful. There are now a handful of model houses reconstructed with the aid of NGOs and grassroots organizations, but walking through the former neighborhood, one sees the predominant sights of weedy lots and stairs to nowhere (fig. 3). The urban sounds of traffic, radios, and machines have been replaced with the sounds of cicadas and mockingbirds.

The Lower Ninth Ward represents less than 10% of the area that was decimated by the levee breaks. In other hard-hit neighborhoods, a mixture of slow rot and haphazard renovation is more the norm. In 2010, one sees gap-toothed renovation with fully rebuilt, elevated, and elegantly relandscaped houses neighbored by weedy lots on one side and rotting, windowless ruins on the other, sometimes with abandoned mud-caked cars in the driveway and faded curtains flapping in the breeze. In at least one-quarter of the city, there is almost no activity at all. One finds lone pioneers still living in FEMA-supplied trailers parked in the driveways of their gutted houses, but the lights in the trailers are the only ones to be seen. The reasons that much of New Orleans' material fabric is being allowed to lie in ruin are multiple, but the overriding one is that the consensus of the mayor, state, and federal officials, who relied on a committee of bankers and



Figure 2. Katrina ruin memorial, New Orleans. Photograph by S. Dawdy.  
A color version of this figure is available in the online edition.



Figure 3. Lower Ninth Ward demolition site, 2008. Photograph by S. Dawdy. A color version of this figure is available in the online edition.

real estate developers to guide them, is that the master plan for rebuilding New Orleans will be, to quote the commission, “to let the market decide” (Horne 2006*b*). Four years later, there is still no approved master plan.

Despite this lack of direction on the part of public institutions, there is life in the ruins. Three phenomena are particularly interesting, in the realms of art, green technology, and political activism. First, artists—painters, sculptors, poets, and multimedia types—are pouring into New Orleans and making it their home (Burdeau 2007; Dewan 2008; Schjeldahl 2008). Many of them admit to finding the ruins scattered with lost objects aesthetically stimulating, but they also appreciate the juxtaposition of the old and the new in the better-preserved, pastel-colored historic neighborhoods. Their activities are giving new lifeblood to New Orleans’ notions about itself as a cultural capital, although it is also being quickly and strangely appropriated, as in a recent fashion shoot set inside ruined homes (*T Magazine* 2008).

Many of these same individuals are political in their work or involved in one of the many grassroots political organizations that have cropped up all over the city, some neighborhood based, some issue based, around violence, schools, public housing, and/or renters’ rights (Brand 2008; Horne 2006*a*). Those who live near or among the ruins of the Lower Nine are particularly active. There are squatters and homeless people who participate in public demonstrations. There are

also young activists such as those belonging to the well-named organization Common Ground. In the immediate months after the storm, their takeover of public parks as campsites for their volunteers and vacated churches and businesses for medical clinics caused little controversy. The disaster meant that the socially licit rules governing the fair use of both public and private property changed, although the law did not.

Although it seems to surprise local Louisiana residents, who often joke wryly about lax environmental regulations that have encouraged petrochemical companies to colonize the state, post-Katrina New Orleans is becoming a center for green housing initiatives in the United States. Several NGO projects have sprung up in the city to help residents rebuild using salvaged or recycled materials and implementing energy efficient designs (Green Project 2009). Although some of the projects that have received the greatest media attention, such as Brad Pitt’s Make It Right Project, could be cynically viewed as do-gooders taking advantage of *terra nullius* for their own reasons, there is also a significant grassroots element to this movement. This is particularly true in the Lower Nine, where the intensity of the destruction seems to have wielded its own creative force against conservative habits. The ruins in New Orleans are influencing a radical restructuring of the social imagination.

The example of New Orleans tells us that we should look to moments of crisis, destruction, bust, and contraction for



signs of new possibilities in the social, political, and economic system. How space gets rearranged and used in these moments of disjuncture when residents are forced to abandon their habitus can inform us about what social rules can more easily be broken than others and what sort of utopian society exists in the thirdspace of the urban landscape.

### *The Social Life of Ruins*

Modern ruins are usually depicted as negative spaces—either blank spaces on maps or scenes of blight and negative value. They are places that drag a city down, liabilities that limit its economic and social potential. This is how many of the poor neighborhoods of New Orleans were depicted before the storm. This is how the industrial ruins of Gary, Indiana, and Detroit are understood, as are many of their neighborhoods. In these same cities, ruins are negative in another way—they are black; they are racialized. Poor, segregated African Americans are consciously or unconsciously depicted as social ruins in the popular, mediatized imagination (Breunlin and Regis 2006; Massey and Denton 1993). The fabric of the ghetto is imagined as isometrically continuous between the fragile buildings and crumbling psyche. Emancipation and desegregation as failed social experiments—this is the melancholy ruin of America's inner cities. Allowing ruins to be dismissed as negative spaces allows their inhabitants to be written off as mutants and specters, the creatures that inhabit the squalid cosmopolitanism of *Mad Max*, *RoboCop*, and *Blade Runner*. They are projections of that phantasmagoria, the dystopic modern city.

There is a political and economic usefulness to this dystopian vision. Writing ruins and abandoned land off as negative space, even if occupied and used by inner-city residents, allows property to be imagined as *terra nullius*, ripe for imperial planning as the capitalist cycle spins back toward boom. It is an imagining that allows the urban indigenous to be relocated and hemmed into public housing reserves and have their vernacular structures torn down. The cycle that began with the imperial establishment of colonial cities such as New Orleans, New York, Cape Town, and Calcutta begins again.

But when examined ethnographically, ruins and vacant lots come into focus as important spaces of urban activity, even of social, economic, and ecological productivity. As geographer Tim Edensor (2005) shows, they are resource areas that provide architectural plunder for scavengers and collectors. They provide shelter to the homeless. They serve as playgrounds for children, vandals, skateboarders, and bored urban explorers. Vacant urban land can be commandeered for gardens or livestock raising or can become a de facto nature reserve frequented by birders and adventurous children (Hinchliffe et al. 2005; Whatmore 2004). In neighborhoods underserved by municipal services, they provide convenient dump sites or places to work on your car. They can also become art spaces or art itself, epitomized by the Heidelberg Project in Detroit and the Watts Towers in Los Angeles, as

well as several site-specific recent installations in New Orleans by the art collective called Homemade Parachute.

Many of these activities in the ruins are linked to networks of an informal economy—one of sharing and cooperation but also of illegal practices such as pot growing, drug dealing, or car stripping. This is the flip side of capitalism—not its opposite but its underside. Capitalism creates these economies in part by rapidly generating the spaces that encourage them—the ruins and vacant lots that create new possibilities. When capital abandons a building or a neighborhood, the grip of private property relations is loosened. We get a return, temporarily at least, of the village green, the common ground—a temporal folding back to the times before the enclosures of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Thus, while urban renewal projects hemmed in and packed the city with the privatization of poverty, the fast-moving frontiers of capitalism and its boom-bust cycle of speculation and development also created—and create—new vacancies and open wastelands. Production moves to Asia. The middle class moves to the suburbs. Businesses move to the mall. Ruins and tracts of abandoned land are left behind.

These are opportunity zones for alternative urban life. Simply because they involve some sort of trespass does not mean that they are not socially important and, in some neighborhoods, more vital than any legitimate machinations of the political economy (on informal urban economies in such spaces, see Boulianne 2001; Ruggiero and South 1997; Saff 1996). Lefebvre (1991) declared, “The most important thing is to multiply the readings of the city” (159). It is an anthropological oversight that so often the entrepreneurs who build 20-year factories and their parking lots are figured as more important architects of the city than those anonymous denizens who adapted the abandoned projects to their own uses for the next 60 years. Who says that Rome of the gladiators is any more significant than Rome of the roaming pigs?

### *Archaeological Exceptions*

There is a small but growing set of exceptions to the rule that historical archaeology neglects ruins and vacancies. Elaine-Maryse Solari (2001) tracks how the slum of West Oakland, with its high-density rows of Victorian houses, was transformed into a gap-toothed ghetto of abandoned lots and tenements by midcentury urban renewal projects. She documents the process of ruination—how large blocks of livable houses were taken down not only by bulldozer but also by military tank, allegedly to make room for new developments for the greater public good, such as post offices and public housing complexes. But the razed lots were then left vacant and abandoned for 5 or 10 years at a time—in the end being redeveloped by more private enterprises. It was in the ruins and vacant lots of West Oakland and amid the fury they created that political groups such as the Black Panthers arose in the 1960s. Although famed for their militant rhetoric and high-profile murder cases, the Panthers also collectively comman-

deered the ruins of the neighborhood to set up schools, medical clinics, and food programs. Ruins produce politics.

In Washington, DC, Little and Kassner (2001) note how Victorian African Americans living in small neighborhoods aligned along narrow alleys ventured out to make use of wild plants, which they collected in vacant lots. In Sydney, Australia, the Rocks neighborhood “grew riotously . . . its ground appropriated by convict women and men, who built houses, fenced off gardens and yards, established trades and businesses, and raised families. They created ‘their town’ there, with relatively little government intervention in their lives, much less official land grants or freehold titles” (Karskens 2001:69). On the Caribbean island of St. Eustatius, Gilmore (2006) details the economic decline and depopulation of St. Eustatius after the 1790s, while Courtney (2006) documents the landscapes of ruin created by wars and powder magazine accidents in France and the Netherlands. Poor suburbs were particularly hard-hit in the world wars. In some cases, whole neighborhoods were never rebuilt but instead preserved as memorial ruins.

A study by Margaret Purser and Noelle Shaver (2008) looks at plats and townsites in the Sacramento Delta of California. They focus on the problem of sites that appear boldly in the archival records as perfectly planned towns but are quite ephemeral archaeologically and architecturally. These ambitious townsites dot the Western landscape, which the authors identify as evidence of the speculative nature of capitalism, particularly in the form of urban real estate investment. Similarly, Mary Beaudry and Stephen Mrozowski (2001) reconsider their Lowell, Massachusetts, study: “The question that Lowell’s history begs is how a community planned and conceived to succeed could have been so quickly transformed into a landscape of neglect” (118), although residents seem to have taken advantage of that neglect to carve out spaces for autonomous activities outside the total institution of the textile mill. Similarly, Paul Belford (2001) observes that common yards in Sheffield, England, were adapted for gardening, laundry, craft making, and child rearing but also spaces for socializing and “everyday acts of resistance” from drinking to proclaiming St. Monday, the sick-day strike.

In my own fieldwork, I am attempting to pay greater attention to the episodes of ruination and vacancy at the sites I excavate. At the Rising Sun Hotel site in New Orleans, we have evidence for three different structures burning at the site and at least two periods of abandonment and dereliction caused by a combination of natural and economic factors (Dawdy et al. 2008*a*). Archaeologically and stratigraphically, these episodes account for the majority of the material recovered and are the focus of our interpretations. More recently, at excavations begun in 2008 at St. Antoine’s Garden behind St. Louis Cathedral, I am focusing on not only the brief and important building events recorded at the site (including church construction and the initial land clearing for the town in 1718) but also the long episodes in between (Dawdy et al. 2008*b*). The periods most neglected by the

historical record of the site are those after the citywide fire of 1788 and the economically troubled period between the Civil War and World War II. These periods of neglect, however, are among the richest archaeological strata, with abundant evidence of the appropriation of the site for a squatters settlement and informal economic activities such as a henhouse. In the strata from the long interwar period we are finding concentrations of children’s toys and feasting pits, indicating the lively social life of the site during a period in which the garden was often described as abandoned and unkempt.

## Conclusion

My aim is not to suggest simplistically that the gridded central town square represents the urban space of domination while the ruin and vacant lot represents the urban space of resistance. Certainly, political alternatives and informal economies may more easily flourish in the ruins. But ruins are also evidence of vast inequalities in power and resources. They are landscapes that speak equally to domination. Those who make the decisions to pull stakes on enterprises, to transfer production, to break unions, to pull city services, to close schools, to segregate with railroads and superhighways, and so on—these are the power holders who create ruination. Thus, we should not be naively romantic about modern ruins, but I do insist that they have stories to tell and should not be ignored as if they are mute spaces. We should turn to them as Benjamin turned to the arcades, to see beyond the bluster of capitalism. In our anthropological narratives rooted in modernity’s temporality (and in Marx), we have been obsessed with only one side of the equation—the overdetermined, planned aspects of urban design. But these are simply the easiest to study—those hit-you-over-the-head moments of arrogant construction, the wielding of raw power, of crass class ambition embodied in teacups. These are the moments that propel the plotline of progress forward, but they are ideologically selected moments taken out of the totality of social life.

An anthropology open to the archaeological methods of Walter Benjamin would recognize ruins as dialectical images that lay bare the historical contradictions of social life. In the artifacts of vintage modernity, Benjamin recognized the materials for utopian as well as dystopian political imaginaries. Ruins are tears in the spatiotemporal fabric through which new social forms can emerge. They are, in Foucault’s (1986 [1967]) terms, accidental heterotopias suggestive of antimodern heterochrony. In today’s millennial exhaustion, there is hope in the ruins, in their suggestion that modernity can be surpassed—when time is no longer imagined as a rigid line extending infinitely into a future horizon. It is this possibility for a temporality freed from progressive time that I see in the Clockpunk movement and in the archaeological turn in the humanities and social sciences. Archaeology must let go its hoary fixation on the divide between antiquity and modernity.

This means collapsing different archaeologies back together (classical, prehistoric, historical, etc.). But this is not enough, lest this move simply adjust the moment of rupture between the archaeological past and the ethnographic present. A more promising strategy would be to collapse the line between archaeology and ethnography.

In making this call, I am not a loner, although for some holding kin ideas, it means the end of anthropology rather than its rebirth (for a review of anthropology's own obsessive millenarianism, see Hutnyk 2002). Such a linear narrative seems unnecessary. I can point to two movements that I see as generally sharing the spirit of reinvention advocated here: contemporary materiality studies and ethnographic archaeology. In the past 10 years, anthropologists have become increasingly engaged with material culture, leading to some collaborative publications between archaeologists and sociocultural anthropologists (e.g., Buchli 2002; Tilley 2006). Shared concerns include the semiotics of objects, embodied practices, and phenomenology. Still, most of these efforts are distinct in terms of both temporality and practice. Archaeologists study long-dead things and their human relations, while ethnographers study peoples' representations of largely ahistorical things. An important exception to this pattern of separate spheres comes from the frontier of archaeology, largely as practiced in Great Britain and continental Europe. Various called the archaeology of the contemporary past (Buchli, Lucas, and Cox 2001) or ethnographic archaeology/archaeological ethnography (Castañeda and Matthews 2008; Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009), this movement is already succeeding in collapsing ethnographic and archaeological time. Archaeologists are engaging with living communities and investigating the material practices of the now through participant observation and ethnographic interviews. Although these hybrid methods resemble ethnoarchaeology (and are considered by some its reinvention), they are motivated by a studious avoidance of allochronism and modernity's time line. The point is not to find ethnographic analogies for the primitive but to find archaeological continuities and contingencies in the present—to show that we can learn something about contemporary societies by investigating their material practices. In this way, archaeology is not compensating for its lack of ethnographic subjects in the deep past but demonstrating its positive value for the study of all times.

Some archaeologists of the contemporary see little need for a rapprochement with anthropology. Some even advocate an abandonment of anthropology and a redefinition of archaeology as the study of materiality or object life, regardless of time period (Fahlander and Oestigaard 2004; Lucas 2004). I am not so ready to give up on the sociological, not because I am nostalgic for the old anthropologies of Morgan and Boas that blended studies of needle cases and longhouses with accounts of kinship structures but because it is delusional to think that artifacts speak for themselves. They may have a type of agency, but it is largely a situated and historical agency created by human habitus. To separate archaeology from an-

thropology is to deny the tangled history of material and human life. Quite simply, one does not exist or make sense without the other. But to see this history realistically as tangled requires a different temporality than what has generally framed archaeological and anthropological queries. Still, I anticipate that the greatest resistance to abandoning the rupture between archaeological and ethnographic time will come from sociocultural anthropology. Archaeology is the scapegoat, guilty of perpetuating the Victorian sins of evolutionism and essentialism. But modern exceptionalism, in which so much contemporary ethnography remains invested, is simply the flip side of modernity's temporal ideology.

The possibilities for a Clockpunk anthropology relieved of modernity's time line might be found in the ruins of today's cities. Adaptation will involve a slowing down of social time and an understanding of cycling, recycling, and reappropriation of historic elements. Benjaminian Clockpunk pushes against anthropology's recent hyperconstructivism that has led to a tendency to assert all traditions as new and invented. Viewing the present as always new forces anthropology to march to the temporal ideology of modernity. In many recent ethnographic accounts (and some archaeological), the past has no ontological reality of its own. This tendency in the field is an overreaction to the critiques of Fabian, Wolf, and Hobsbawm. It allows modernity's cult of newness to override any search for intergenerational continuity and thus makes the temporal break between archaeology and sociocultural anthropology appear that much more justified. An alternative is to allow recent misgivings about the temporal purity of modernity to transform our methods in a Benjaminian mode so that we can see complicated, nonlinear patterns of social transformation. In today's atmosphere of end-times, nostalgia, and Clockpunk, anthropology is called on to come to terms with its own temporal practices and contributions to the conceits of modernity. Reinvention means revolution, the root of which is to revolve—to return to an earlier possibility before time splintered into antiquity and modernity.

## Acknowledgments

I am still humbled by and grateful for the original honor that spurred this article, an invitation by the first Theoretical Archaeology Group—USA conference organizers to participate in a plenary session with Ian Hodder and Edward Soja. The manuscript version was materially improved by the generous readings of colleagues William Mazzarella, Nancy Munn, François Richard, and Thomas Trautmann. I also benefited immensely from the suggestions of the reviewers and commentators and will be trekking down the new pathways they lighted for me for some time to come. I did my best to make a start with revisions here.

## Comments

### Quetzil E. Castañeda

Center for Latin American Studies, Indiana University,  
1125 East Atwater Street, Bloomington, Indiana 47401,  
U.S.A. (quetzil@osea-cite.org). 23 VII 10

This is an ambitious, provocative article that advocates for a new approach to historical archaeology, i.e., both an analytical framework derived from Benjamin and a new object of study. The broader objective is to rid the field of ideological assumptions of modernist temporality and advocate a reintegration of archaeology and ethnography. As a reorientation of historical archaeology, namely, to address the social afterlife of ruins created by modernity and the multiple, nonlinear temporalities of materiality, this is a valuable contribution. Nonetheless the article is not as rigorous or powerful as I had anticipated. I am dissatisfied with the treatment of the rapprochement advocated and the use of a straw man caricature of anthropology.

Dawdy argues that modernity is essentially an ideology of time/temporality in order to exhort archaeologists/anthropologists to shed their presupposed belief in modernist assumptions of unilinear temporality, newness, exceptionalism, and progress. These become synonyms for each other and for what is to be expunged. These do not, in fact, equal each other, and they do not operate similarly or equally across practitioners or the field and not in the same domains of theory, schools, interpretation, analysis, or methodology. An unjustified, simplified characterization of anthropology is used as a scapegoat. Methodologically, in fact, all subfields of anthropology have been concerned with heterogeneous, nonlinear temporalities, for example, archaeological treatment of stratigraphy and ethnographic life histories. Linearity and newness maybe artifacts of interpretation or inhere within that which is studied. Not all linear conceptions of time or celebrations of newness are modernist, Eurocentric, or capitalist in origin, adherents, or significance. It is one thing to say that there is no method for dealing with multiple, non-geometric temporalities and another to say that there is X or Y shortcoming to these methods. Given the enduring anti-modernist, anticapitalist, i.e., Romanticist, ethos within anthropology (see Stocking 1989), blanket assertions that we valorize progress require evidence and argumentation.

Valorization of newness is less an ideology than the essence of academic gambits for cultural capital, status, funding, and publishing. However, the capitalist logic of creative destruction, which creates the aura of newness, is an essential and inherent function of archaeology: excavation and restoration permanently destroy existing material relationships and other knowledge in construction of the past, which is therefore inherently modern/contemporary. Thus, not only is the critique off mark, but it is the wrong target.

Dawdy does specify a target when she argues that we “trans-

form our methods in a Benjaminian mode so that we can see complicated, nonlinear patterns of social transformation.” Against this she opposes a misconstrued view of constructionism, which, contra her claim, does indeed analyze the invention of cultural traditions as a bricolage and recycling of ready-at-hand cultural fragments that history provides. Geertz’s (1973) theory of primordial origins is one of many examples of a theory of recycling and invented traditions that are not encapsulated by Dawdy’s inaccurate portrait of constructionism.

What really is she proposing that is—yes—new for (historical) archaeology? What is at stake? Since Dawdy does not actually describe or argue for but only appeals to an archaeological turn, we are left wondering not only what its content and direction are but where the ethnography (or anthropology) is that is shifting.

Dawdy makes a strong argument for collapsing archaeological and ethnographic time as epistemologically distinct. Yet, against her own logic and critiques of other archaeologies, she opposes a radical epistemological collapse of archaeological past and ethnographic present when she dismisses the claim that “the past has no ontological reality of its own.” If, ontologically and epistemologically, the past does exist out there as fragments that embody and signify the temporality of the past as they are enfolded into the present in simultaneous states of abandonment and reuse, then Dawdy ironically makes herself subject to the same critiques of allochronism that she explicitly seeks to avoid and charges against the rest of anthropology and archaeology.

She advocates for a methodological “collapse . . . between archaeology and ethnography” without ever specifying it as interpretive or disciplinary. Her vision, ironically, abides by a narrow, traditionally conceived historical archaeology: the research on modernity’s ruins not only fits within the definitions of the field she critiqued but also explicitly presupposes the very exceptionalism of modernity/capitalism she wishes to discard. The archaeological exceptions to the study of modernity’s ruins appear straight up archaeology backed with historical, archival research, not ethnography. There is no mention of the use of ethnography in her research in New Orleans (contrast Matthews 2008), and ethnographic methodologies are mentioned only in passing in the main text and in the conclusion. Given the article’s own turn from the ancients’ debates with the moderns and to ethnography at the very end, the claim for an archaeological turn is misguided or driven by the need to claim a new direction. This lack of substantive and speculative discussion on how to collapse archaeology and anthropology, except to eschew nineteenth-century approaches, puts into question her desire for rapprochement. In today’s ongoing integration of archaeology and ethnography, we need tangible models and programmatic statements.

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**Zoe Crossland**

Department of Anthropology, Columbia University, Room 452 Schermerhorn Extension, 1200 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, New York 10027-7054, U.S.A. (zc2149@columbia.edu). 25 VII 10

Dawdy's thought-provoking paper serves as a rallying call for archaeologists to engage more deeply with the contemporary past and to explore alternate temporalities that are not tied to modernist narratives of progress and decline. In the same spirit of critical engagement, I would like to further examine two of the many fascinating issues that are discussed in the paper. These are the relationship of archaeology to modernity and the view of ruins as a site from where we can challenge and explore the by-products of twentieth- and twenty-first-century capitalism.

Dawdy's point about the rupture of modernity is well made, and her search for ways to promote conversations within and across anthropology's temporal divide is important. In tracing archaeology's role in modernity's emergence, Dawdy has necessarily had to sketch what is clearly a complex and contested terrain. In this respect, it is worth noting that the association of historical archaeology with the material culture of modernity is particularly North American in orientation and has been subject to criticism by scholars working in other parts of the world (Ellison et al. 1996; Gilchrist 2005; Reid and Lane 2004). It may be that the different strands that exist within historical archaeology simply articulate the premodern/modern divide in different ways. However, they are worth attending to, as they can ensure that the narrative of archaeology's relationship to modernity does not endow this temporal ideology with more coherence and unity than it had or has. As well as writing archaeological histories that span the divide of premodern and modern time, we might also consider how archaeological practice itself has drawn on and recycled the premodern. This may be seen, for example, in the discipline's engagement with human remains. While the dead are positioned in some contexts as objects of study, at other moments their archaeological treatment retains and articulates a range of social distinctions and beliefs about the sacred that exist in uneasy accommodation with a modern secular worldview.

If our stories about modernity begin with rupture, then how are ruins keyed into this? It is worth interrogating what it does to call something a ruin. Dawdy notes that ruins tend to be positioned either as ancient traces of a long-gone and romanticized past or else as dystopic reminders of the "banal, tragic, or noisome" contemporary world. Ancient ruins are understood as decaying elements of the landscape that are no longer used for their original purpose. To give a British example: Durham cathedral is not a ruin; Lindisfarne monastery is. To focus on a ruin is therefore to bring decay and destruction into view. The ruins left in modernity's wake have an additional emotional valence. As Dawdy observes, they are

things that are uncared for, rejected, and discarded. The questions then become, who is the active agent in this discarding, and what are the effects of this framing? A particularly charged example, such as the archaeology of state repression and political violence, illustrates what is at stake. Scholars are starting to trace these histories through a nuanced and theoretically informed archaeology of clandestine torture centers and mass graves (e.g., Funari, Zarankin, and Salerno 2009). Spaces such as these are emphatically not ruins, although the state may want to treat them as such. Moreover, some sites resist being positioned as ruins. Mass graves are one example: what they contain is too important (too sacred?) to be discarded or ignored. Dawdy's call to attend to recent ruins is an important move to bring into view places that are devalued or maligned, but we should also consider what the category of ruin precludes or obscures. The recycling and folding of time through the reuse of ruins and other material traces seems to work from the assumption that there is some rupture between their previous life and that of the present. This frees them up to be recycled and repurposed. What about cases where the continued and active presence of the contemporary past is asserted powerfully and forcefully, even against the odds? Perhaps this is simply a problem of nomenclature, rather than the resonating echoes of modernity's purifications, but it strikes me that much remains to excavate in the concept of ruin and that in doing so we also open up other avenues for exploration. This speaks to the value and importance of Dawdy's intervention. Archaeology tends to locate memory in objects, viewing it as somehow inherent in the stability and permanence of the material world (see discussion in Forty 1999; Küchler 1999). From this perspective, the destruction of archaeological heritage is equivalent to the destruction of memory. Dawdy's paper shows that ruination may liberate some forms of remembering while it closes down others (DeSilvey 2006; Küchler 1993). Equally, it prompts us to consider the often destructive memory work of archaeology, in terms of both our temporalizing narrative strategies and our practical engagements with the past.

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**Severin Fowles**

Department of Anthropology, Barnard College, Columbia University, 3009 Broadway, New York, New York 10027, U.S.A. (sfowles@barnard.edu). 25 VIII 10

There is a grubby sense of fertility that hangs about recent ruins, as there is to farmland that has been left to fallow. Certain premodern peoples knew this quite well, regularly returning to abandoned and decaying homesteads precisely because they knew that fetid accumulations of excrement, ashes, and food refuse were rich seedbeds out of which sprang useful plants for the gathering. In fact, some archaeologists have argued that the Neolithic Revolution itself was born of ruins as wild seeds left in old campsites took root and became

stands of domesticates, the stuff of civilization itself. Forget the city; the modern ruins of the past may well have been the basis of the earliest sedentary villages, which, in many archaeological narratives, was the initial rupture propelling humans down the road to modernity.

Capitalism is a kind of slash-and-burn economics, but unlike premodern swidden systems, capitalism has not learned to recycle and deal with its own waste. It has not learned to embrace its own ruins as legitimate spaces of reuse, reoccupation, and innovation. Modernity may promise a world that is brilliantly new, but its great irony is that it delivers more and more ruins, the study of which reminds us that modernity is “always incomplete, always moving on.” As such, modern ruins tend to be sources of anxiety and dystopian fear. But they also have their own procreative potential, their own hidden life and vibrancy—indeed their own temporality—as Shannon Dawdy so nicely emphasizes in this essay.

The brilliance of Dawdy’s essay resides not just in her careful dissection of the relationships between ruins, aesthetics, capitalism, colonialism, and modernist notions of time but also in her efforts to connect this tangle to the growing divide between sociocultural and archaeological anthropology. She offers us at once a critique of discipline and a critique of dominant theoretical perspectives therein. Modern is to premodern as sociocultural anthropology is to archaeology: this, in brief, is the linked pair of oppositions at which Dawdy has taken aim. And she concludes that historical archaeology—situated uncomfortably astride both the modern/premodern and the ethnographic/archaeological divides—is just the sort of hybrid space in which a new anthropological project, founded on a nonlinear temporality and a conjoined archaeoethnographic mode of inquiry, might take root and flourish. “Ruins and vacant lots . . . create new possibilities,” she writes. And historical archaeologists, as the arbiters of vacant lots, have a role to play in bringing these possibilities to light. With her fresh look at the rich afterlives of modern ruins in New Orleans and Detroit, Dawdy already moves us a good deal forward in this regard. Let us hope that many others follow her lead.

Because I agree with so much of her analysis, let me instead comment on one of my few disagreements. Dawdy presents modern temporalities, writ large, as both linear and premised on a radical rupture between past and present. This is easily claimed and regularly repeated, but there is a core irony here that never seems to be addressed. Indeed, is it not already an act of purification to say that Western thought since the Enlightenment has been characterized by a linear, progressivist ideology of time, whereas premodern temporalities were very different? Does not this implicitly play into the very narrative of rupture and modern exceptionalism we have set out to transcend? Early anthropology separated a Western embrace of forward progress from a non-Western world locked into the myth of eternal return—hot modernity separated from cold primitivity. Surely this is not something we want to uncritically perpetuate.

The point of saying we have never been modern, it seems to me, is not that we must look for a turn that will lead us away from the modern per se but rather that modernity itself is a will-o’-the-wisp, a red herring that never existed in the first place. And this is to say, with respect to the question of temporality, that we have never been linear. We have never truly been members of a cult of progress and the new.

What, in the final analysis, was linear about Marx’s understanding of modern communism given his reliance on a notion of original, primitive communism? What was linear about Lewis Henry Morgan’s understanding of democracy given his reliance on a notion of primitive democracy? What was linear about Rousseau’s advocacy for the modern autonomous subject given his model of a state of nature in which individuals were similarly free and unfettered? What, for that matter, was linear about the 1970s feminist movement given its reliance on a notion of primitive matriarchy? My suggestion is that none of the major social analyses within modernist scholarship has ever been linear. The ideology of eternal return, I suggest, is at least as Western as it is non-Western, and for moderns, the future has always been the past.

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#### Haidy Geismar

Department of Anthropology and Program in Museum Studies, New York University, 240 Greene Street, Suite 400, New York, New York 10003-6675, U.S.A. (haidy.geismar@nyu.edu). 18 VI 10

I found Dawdy’s poetic account of the alternative temporalities and engagement with modernity found in ruins and other spaces in between well written and very engaging. I am currently working on an exhibition that will be a material meditation on the urban experience in Melanesia, focused on Port Vila, Vanuatu’s capital city. What struck me most, reading Dawdy’s account of the ruined dystopias of cities such as New York and New Orleans, was how this perspective may also be extended to this Melanesian center, formerly a colonial periphery managed jointly and disorganizedly by French and British administrations. Like New Orleans, Port Vila’s everyday history is in ruins. But these are not dystopic or apocalyptic ruins, rather the inevitable ruins that signal colonial and postcolonial transition, tropical weather conditions, shifting values. The former French residency has fallen to the ground; the joint colonial court succumbed to fire two years ago and has not been rebuilt; the British Residence is now a five-star hotel. There are few monuments, plaques, or public markers, and the Cultural and Historic Sites Survey created by Vanuatu Cultural Center is without success in trying to enforce the protection of its list of landmarked buildings. As Dawdy notes, “Studying why and how ruins are not only made but also erased, commemorated, lived in, commodified, and recycled can tell us at least as much about society as the processes that created the original edifices.”

While I found Dawdy's piece evocative, I am less sure of what is new in her battle to overcome the linear and progressive qualities of our understandings of antiquity and modernity and fuse archaeological and ethnographic modalities. Insightful work on memory, monuments, and memorial museums has long advocated a perspective in which these forms are understood as material instantiations of that which is no longer with us, challenging the newness of the present, compressing time in provocative, experiential ways with the power to intervene in the comfortable metanarratives of history and progress (e.g., Forty and Küchler 1999; Küchler and Melion 1991; Williams 2007; Young 1993). Here I am thinking of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, or Gerz's Counter-Monument in Hamburg (Young 1992), but examples could go back to antiquity.

As Dawdy predicts in her comment, I am also unsure, as an anthropologist, whether this is a battle I want to fight. I started this comment with the detailed reference to the everyday city of Port Vila to underscore Dawdy's own point, which is that the ruin is as much a part of the condition of modernity as it is its antidote. I want to end with a word of caution, primarily methodological, concerning the viability of a nonprogressive alternate temporality within this kind of analytic frame.

While material culture theorists (e.g., Miller 1987) have constructed a sound argument for a mutually constitutive relationship between people and things when looking much more broadly at social reproduction, this poses a number of methodological challenges that we must carefully attend to. I wish to distinguish between archaeological allegory or metaphor and archaeological method, which is different from the messy holism of classic participant-observation (with its temporal compressions into contemporaneity) in that it takes an object or a crystallized moment as starting point, approaching practice or process from the other side, if it were. Ruins are the perfect archaeological object: paradoxically but by definition they are *fait accompli*. The sense of temporal compression that Dawdy recognizes in the ruin in fact obscures the progressive nature of the process of not only ruination but also interpretation, in which singular objects give way to complex theories.

Clockpunk and other playful interventions into urban and historical space and style might provoke us to rethink the process of interpretation. What, here, lies beneath the surface of the object? The Steampunk computer presents a certain aesthetic but works in exactly the same way as its mass-produced counterpart (I cannot tell from the photograph whether the computer runs Microsoft Windows, Mac OSX, or an open-source operating system). In this sense it may mash up styles but does not mash up our sense of progressive temporality or alleviate the burdens of modernity or the forms and frames of capitalism. Classic interpretive issues that have long provoked the way in which archaeology has framed its engagement with the deep past continue into our understanding of these present-day artifacts. Some kind of progressive

form or context to our study of these objects is therefore invaluable. Benjamin was not an archaeologist. He used archaeology as a metaphor to create, as Dawdy notes, an aesthetic sensibility within his literary and cultural analysis. Assuming that archaeology is more than aesthetic sensibility, and especially in light of the activism and political neglect that Dawdy so eloquently describes, we must take care that we understand artifacts as not only metaphors but also material components of broader social and political processes.

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### Cornelius Holtorf

School of Cultural Sciences, Linnaeus University, 391 82 Kalmar, Sweden (cornelius.holtorf@lnu.se). 17 VII 10

In her thought-provoking paper, Shannon Lee Dawdy combines a critique of archaeological temporalities with a call for archaeological attention to the ruins of modernity. She considers these ruins and the activities they attract as particularly significant because they represent the underside rather than the opposite of modern capitalism. Their study is said to contribute not only to revealing the true character of modernity but also to challenging its core. This is an obvious point. I am not sure, however, to what extent a study of the ruins of modernity can support Dawdy's desire of moving toward nonmodern (postmodern?) archaeological temporalities.

The observation that an unnecessary conceptual divide between antiquity and modernity defines the existing division of labor between prehistoric and classical archaeology on the one hand and historical archaeology and social/cultural anthropology on the other hand is important. To the extent to which historical and contemporary societies are assumed to be generally comparable and alike, prehistory is characterized by fundamental otherness. This presupposed division essentializes both modern and premodern societies and is ultimately disabling for academic fields jointly concerned with what it means to be human and investigating the remains and accounts of human thought and behavior under circumstances different from ours. Indeed, archaeology's loss of antiquity (Hicks 2003), manifested in the discipline's awakening interest in studying the contemporary world, is increasingly resulting in creative and challenging work (e.g., Harrison and Schofield 2009; Holtorf and Piccini 2009).

Dawdy's paper exemplifies those rare studies that refuse to accept compartmentalizations of anthropological and archaeological expertise according to chronographic periods. Some such works pursue comparative research by moving fairly uninhibited across time and space. For example, Jared Diamond's (1997) *Guns, Germs and Steel* presents a broad and generalizing sweep of the history of everybody for the past 13,000 years. Other work focuses on contemporary sense making and does not distinguish strictly whether the material used is prehistoric, historical, or contemporary, as in an in-

novative German exploration of the notion of the Wild Man (Rätsch and Probst 1985) and in my own studies of the meanings of megalithic monuments in northeast Germany (Holtorf 1996, 2000–2008).

Nonchronographic logic is not necessarily grounded in arcane theory, but, as Dawdy knows, it is prominent in popular culture, too. In Paul Verhoeven's (1990) sci-fi movie *Total Recall*, experiences of past and present are increasingly mixed up with one another until the viewer can no longer be sure which section depicts the past and which the present and indeed how the experiences actually differ from one another. Likewise, in heritage, all past periods tend to collapse into one (Lowenthal 2002:17), and Dawdy's discussion of Steam-punk and Clockpunk very much confirms this. Heritage and popular culture suggest that we are concerned not with age but with pastness, i.e., the quality or condition of being past. That quality or condition is not immanent in any part of the material or living world but generated under specific conditions in the present. Here lies one embryonic core for a new temporality that refuses modernity's linear logic, even providing for time traveling (Holtorf 2010).

Paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould (1987) showed that time's arrow and the idea of deep and progressive time that it epitomizes are not lawlike truths but rather mythlike historical achievements allowing the modernist paradigm to flourish. The writer Alan Lightman (1993) later speculated about "Einstein's dreams," in which time is organized in novel ways: in one dream world "the texture of time happens to be sticky" and "portions of towns become stuck in some moment in history and do not get out," whereas in another "time is a sense, like sight or like taste," and "a sequence of episodes may be quick or may be slow, dim or intense, salty or sweet, causal or without cause, orderly or random" (63, 115). Recently, art historians Mieke Bal (1999) and James Elkins (2002), as well as sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel (2003), have all been investigating academically how the past in our minds might be organized in nonlinear and nonprogressive ways: from discontinuous histories and zigzag narratives (Zerubavel) to maps and landscapes (Elkins) to preposterous histories in which phenomena of subsequent periods inform our understanding of earlier ones (Bal). All these concepts challenge modernist temporalities profoundly.

But is the linear and progressive time of modernity really undermined by attending to abandoned factories and piles of concrete rubble? They remind us, as Dawdy states, that modernity is "always incomplete, always moving on, and always full of hubris." But the ruins of modernity also confirm the very idea of progress. They are debris left behind in the wake of relentless innovation. Although the study of loss, destruction, and forgetting is a timely task for archaeologists (Holtorf 2006), it does not establish a different temporality. Dawdy's urban explorers can be seen as the contemporary counterparts of James Cook, David Livingstone, and Howard Carter, reuniting archaeology and ethnology in seeking knowledge about unknown places. Although their age can be counted in

decades rather than centuries, the ruins of modernity have already managed to be forgotten, rediscovered, and reappreciated—part of the wheel of modernity turning ever faster.

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#### Randall H. McGuire

Department of Anthropology, State University of New York, Binghamton, New York 13902-6000, U.S.A.  
(rmcguire@binghamton.edu). 4 VIII 10

Shannon Lee Dawdy's paper "Clockpunk Anthropology and the Ruins of Modernity" should provoke a lot of creative thought and useful debate in our field. She effectively combines issues of modernity, the nature of historical archaeology, and the concept of ruins with the theory of Walter Benjamin and her reflections on a post-Katrina New Orleans. The wide-ranging nature of this discussion makes the paper exciting and engaging, but her broad-brush approach leaves some specific issues underdeveloped or confused. Her arguments have significant political content that demonstrates the relevance of historical archaeology to contemporary concerns. Dawdy cogently critiques scholars for using the concepts of modernity and modernism as stand-in for an immense range of phenomena, yet, with her demolition of modernity as a temporal ideology, she commits the same sin. This was clearest to me in her discussions of capitalism and Marxism. Capitalism does not equal modernism, and modernism does not equal capitalism, although the two concepts and the realities that they attempt to capture are intertwined and interdependent in complex ways. But scholars cannot use one as a synonym for the other or assume that by taking apart one they have dismissed the other.

Many (arguably most) Marxists have adopted modernist notions of progressive time. This modernist temporality characterized the party Marxism of the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba. After World War I, however, Western Marxists, including the Frankfurt School, Antonio Gramsci, Rosa Luxemburg, and Walter Benjamin, developed a critique of modernism and party Marxism. Marxist scholars, including Raymond Williams, David Harvey, and Frederic Jameson, have continued this critique to the present day. The majority of Marxist scholars in historical archaeology, including Mark Leone, Charles Orser, Robert Paynter, Lou Ann Wurst, Heather Burke, and me, have built our theory from this critique of modernism, not from a progressive party Marxism. Dawdy disdains Marxism, yet she champions Benjamin's three key points and his view that the meaning of materials and places springs from their particular history and their position in webs of social relations as spun by ever-changing political economies. This is Western Marxist theory. At the same time, however, Dawdy rightly points out that most Marxist historical archaeology "casts a particularly dystopian pall over the recent past," overemphasizing the evils of capitalism. Her point that we need to pay more attention to the possibilities



for creativity and resistance in capitalism and to the “strata between dramatic events” is well taken.

Dawdy’s broad brush occasionally results in errors of detail. Eric Wolf and Johannes Fabian critiqued anthropology for collapsing space and time. They did not, however, critique the direct historical approach. Rather, their critique rejected cultural evolution and the method of cross-cultural comparison. A direct historical approach, whereby scholars start with an understanding of the present and work back in time to see how that present developed, is compatible with the positions of Wolf and Fabian.

Historical archaeologists have traditionally been a defensive and self-deprecating lot when it comes to the importance of our field. Dawdy’s paper dispenses with considerable angst over the significance and possible contributions of the field. Many decades ago, some leading proponents of historical archaeology claimed that historical archaeology could be nothing more than the handmaiden of history. Dawdy envisions a much greater role for our discipline once we have dismissed the temporality of modernism. For her, this process will dissolve the contrasts between ancient and modern that separate prehistoric and historic archaeology and archaeology and ethnography. She predicts that this archaeological turn could reintegrate the subfields of anthropology. I share her opinion that removing an essentialist notion of modernity will lead to fewer divisions in archaeology. I welcome her optimism for the reunification of anthropology, but in my view the divisions between cultural anthropology, linguistics, and biological anthropology extend beyond modernism and will not be so easily resolved. I wonder how Dawdy would relate her position to Michael Schiffer and William Rathje’s behavioral archaeology? These archaeologists defined archaeology as the study of the relationship of material culture and human behavior in all times and places, thus ignoring (if not directly dismantling) the temporality of modernity.

In my brief space here, I can only begin to address the many issues and insights that Dawdy’s paper raises. Dawdy has made a compelling argument for the dismissal of modernity and for the usefulness of Walter Benjamin’s theory, process, and method for historical archaeology. I look forward to the graduate seminar discussions this paper will foster among my students.

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**Laurent Olivier**

Département des Ages du Fer, Musée d’Archéologie Nationale, 78105 Saint-Germain-en-Laye cedex, France  
(laurent.olivier@culture.gouv.fr). 22 VI 10

It is difficult in a few paragraphs to give anything other than a general impression of such a rich and dense text. What moves and impresses me in Shannon Lee Dawdy’s article is that she proceeds from a revelation (the term is not too strong): just as Walter Benjamin found the revelation of a

Copernican revolution of history in the deserted junk shop of the Passages de Paris in the 1920s, Dawdy discovered the possibility of another functioning of the past in the present-day ruins of New Orleans. From the cosmopolitan colony of Old Louisiana, thrown onto a muddy lagoon between sky and sea, continually disrupted, submerged, and devastated, there emanates the memory of the past, like a monster of wood, brick, and iron, which is dreaming. Far from wiping it out, the destructions caused by the postindustrial barbarism of our era in fact reactivate old faults, through which an irrepressible stream of the dark matter of the past pours out. It contains the countless voices of the repressed America of its origins, that rogue America of whores and impoverished toffs, of losers and hustlers, of Negroes and Indians. It is a past that, strictly speaking, escapes us.

As archaeologists well know, places are passages leading directly to the past. They also know that access to the past is made possible by things, by the matter places are made up of. With this as a starting point, to paraphrase Benjamin, one discovers that archaeology and ethnography are not very far, buried deeply in the ground or at a great distance elsewhere, but they actually begin right here and right now. One has only to look all around, like the stroller who walks through the passages and the waste ground. As Benjamin writes in his preparatory texts for his *Livre des Passages*:

The metamorphosis which leads someone who strolls through a bygone period is performed in the street. He wanders along the street. . . . If it doesn’t lead him to his mother’s home, at least it leads him towards a past which is all the deeper as it isn’t his own, his personal past. . . . The stroller recognizes what is around him; a youth speaks to him which is not the past of his own youth, still recent, but a childhood that was lived through earlier, and it is all the same to him whether it is that of an ancestor or his own. (Benjamin 2008:91)

As Dawdy emphasizes, this is indeed a revolution in the perception of the past: if one really draws conclusions from the fact that the past is accessible only through the present—that is to say that it truly exists only in the present and through the present—then one must admit that the bases on which we have built those venerable disciplines that are archaeology, history, ethnography, and anthropology are inadequate and must be reconsidered. New foundations must be established because the time of the past to which ruins give us access is not the time of history but that of matter; it is not the time of events but that of the memory (Olivier 2008). For we do not discover the past; we can only, to some extent, re-remember it.

The Copernican revolution in the vision of history consists in the following: we used to consider “the Then” as a fixed point, and we thought that the present endeavoured to grope its way towards knowledge of this fixed point. From now on, this relation must be reversed and the Then must become a dialectic reversal and an irruption in the awakened

consciousness. Now politics prevail over history. Events become something which has just this moment struck us, and re-remembering is needed to establish them. There is an as yet unconscious knowledge of the Then, a knowledge whose progress, in fact, is structured like an awakening. (Benjamin 2000:405–406)

This as yet unconscious knowledge of what has already taken place is precisely that knowledge of the history of places, right up to the most recent transformations in the present-day world, reconstructing the archaeological approach. For indeed, as Benjamin (2000) indicates, “the new dialectical method of historical science appears as the art of seeing the present as an awakened world which the dream that we call ‘the Then’ relates to reality” (406). The past has died out but has never disappeared. It is here with us; only we can make sense of it. Yes, “politics now prevail over history” (Benjamin 2000:406); times are changing.

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### Nick Shepherd

Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, Private Bag, Rondebosch 7700, South Africa  
(nick.shepherd@uct.ac.za). 16 VII 10

One of the functions of archaeology for modernity has been to demonstrate that time is a line, marked by ruptures. This it does via the iconic image of the stratigraphic sequence, the successive layering of deposits, and the reversal of this process through the act of excavation, hence the metaphoricity of archaeology for the major theorists of modernity (Freud, Benjamin, Derrida, Foucault): layered, sedimented time, metonymically repeated in the changing colors and textures of archaeological horizons, sliced open by the trowel, laid bare for the inspection of the archaeologist in what becomes a very modern moment of knowing, combining panopticism and temporal oversight with a rational, enquiring spirit. Here stands the archaeologist, the trained eye that reverses time’s arrow to reveal buried pasts, repressed contents.

At the same time, and more subversively, the practice of archaeology gives the lie to this comforting modern myth. Through their actions, archaeologists reintroduce and reanimate the buried evidences of gone time, thrusting them into an unsuspecting present, often with surprising consequences. Bringing to light buried contents, including the remains of the dead, invites temporal disjunctions and overlaps a looping, simultaneous, repetitive conception of time, surprising returns, painful relivings, and a haunted present marked by revenants, afterlives (Benjamin) and spectres (in Derrida’s sense of that which history has repressed).

The fact that most archaeologists resist the implications of this second observation is another way of saying that they resist the implications of the archaeological turn as Shannon Dawdy describes it in her fine, provocative paper or that they/

we are in danger of missing “[our] own theoretical wave.” This disjuncture between theory and practice, or between a version of the discipline and its implications in the world, provides a fertile breeding ground for cautionary tales, ironic oversights, and tragic/hilarious near misses. It also opens the way for a Clockpunk anthropology.

Time for a story. As I write, South Africa is in the grip of football fever. Hosting World Cup 2010 is not without its ironies in Jacob Zuma’s South Africa. The most visible signs of the World Cup are the new football stadiums. Designed and built by some of the world’s leading architectural and engineering firms, they are marvels of style and cutting-edge construction technology. Superimposed on the old apartheid city, the stadiums, with their transport arterials, speak of imagined futures, the postmodern, or the hypermodern incarnate.

Cape Town’s stadium was supposed to be on the city’s fringe, where it could have an afterlife providing much-needed sporting infrastructure. FIFA overruled the recommendation of the local organizing committee in favor of a location in Green Point, nudged up against the flank of Table Mountain. In doing so, it inadvertently brought the stadium into one of the most contested city spaces in Cape Town. I have described the events around the contested exhumation of the Prestwich Street burial suite at length elsewhere (Shepherd 2007). Briefly: in mid-2003, in the course of construction activities, an early colonial burial site was uncovered in Prestwich Street, Green Point. Those buried at the site formed a cross-section of the colonial poor, including persons who were enslaved in life.

The majority of South African archaeologists supported the developer in calling for the speedy exhumation of the site. They argued that by accessing the remains, they would give them back their history. In response, a grassroots social movement, the Hands off Prestwich Street Committee (HOC), was formed to contest the exhumations. They called for the preservation of the site and its remains as a site of memory and conscience. As archaeological work at the site continued, the HOC adopted antiapartheid tactics, including mass marches, pickets, and vigils at the site, in an attempt to halt the exhumations.

Working within a modernist conception of knowledge, archaeologists asserted a relationship with the past as one of knowledge, with themselves as the appropriate mediators of this relationship. The HOC were at pains to articulate an alternative relationship with gone time and the ancestors, based on empathy, self-knowledge, and rival regimes of care. The copresence of the living and the dead in postapartheid city spaces became (in their terms) an opportunity to confront the legacies of historical trauma and continued social injustice.

Are we surprised that this radical ethical/political project came to nothing? But wait: the dénouement is stranger than anyone imagined. A block of luxury New York-style loft apartments was constructed on the Prestwich Street site. These have been promoted in terms of an imagined history that

references the Harlem Renaissance. The dead of Prestwich Street have been consigned to a purpose-built ossuary. A low, bunkerlike structure at a busy traffic intersection, the most visible portion of the ossuary, was let recently to a coffee shop that styles itself the “Truth Coffee Roastery,” whose logo features a grinning skull. Aesthetically stacked cardboard boxes (of coffee) bearing the “Truth” decal inadvertently recall the stacked boxes of bones in the belowground levels.

Clockpunk scenes from the postcolonial postmodern, Walter Benjamin might have enjoyed their skewering irony. He might even have joined the football fans as they stopped by the Truth Café to enjoy a flat white, offered as a special for the duration of the World Cup. Shannon Dawdy is to be congratulated for her paper, which deserves to become a classic of the contemporary literature.

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### David Wengrow

Institute of Archaeology, University College, London  
WC1H 0PY, United Kingdom (d.wengrow@ucl.ac.uk). 18  
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At a time in American academia when the ties between archaeology and anthropology are being openly debated, this piece makes the argument that to “separate archaeology from anthropology is to deny the tangled history of material and human life.” “Quite simply,” as Dawdy says of the two disciplines, “one does not exist or make sense without the other.” There are many good grounds, in my opinion, for making that case, and Dawdy’s contribution (albeit philosophical rather than practical in orientation) is therefore timely. But I must admit that the arguments offered here for a rapprochement between the two disciplines do not strike me as the most compelling ones, on either philosophical or practical grounds. Clearly, this is not the place to fight personal agendas. I will focus instead on what I see as the gray areas in Dawdy’s often-stimulating piece, in the hope that these points can be clarified by way of response.

Dawdy is concerned with developing approaches to the material record that question the conceptual boundary between antiquity and modernity. Her commitment to this project is based on a conviction that the mutual constitution of antiquity and modernity is itself produced by a particular kind of ideology and masks significant relationships between past, present, and future. In seeking to escape from this ideological bind, she offers two new routes of departure, presented as complementary and reinforcing. The first follows a high theoretical ground and looks to a genealogy in the allegorical archaeology of Walter Benjamin. The second arises from grassroots urban activism and pop culture, notably genres of contemporary art and fiction such as Steampunk and Cyberpunk.

The common thread is an interest in imaginatively disrupting what is often (mis-)represented as a logical and linear

relationship between social and technological change, by hybridizing new and old inventions (hence the desktop computer with a mechanical keyboard and baroque monitor in Dawdy’s fig. 1). In historical archaeology Dawdy sees a similar potential for disruptive (but ultimately therapeutic) cultural interventions, if only historical archaeologists could give up writing celebratory narratives of modernity—the booming factory and its jolly tenements—and dwell instead on the poetics of ruination. Whether this can be considered a fair characterization of the state of historical archaeology is beyond my competence. But I do wonder whether Tim Edensor’s (2005) *Industrial Ruins* could have been explored, not just for its theoretical flavor but as a counterpoint to the author’s claim that understanding “what role the abandoned factory played in postwar Sheffield and Birmingham has not, thus far, been of significant interest” to archaeologists (see also Holtorf and Piccini 2009).

Too often, it seems to me, this article implies that the conceptual fence separating antiquity from modernity can be broken down from one side alone, i.e., from the side of modernity. Dawdy briefly acknowledges that there remains a great deal of conceptual and empirical work to be done in uncaging sociological concepts (she cites, in particular, “racialization, capital accumulation, or terrorism”) from an exclusively modern frame of reference. Archaeologists, she suggests, have neglected this task. But one of the productive achievements of recent decades has been to take racial categories out of prehistory and reveal them as modern cultural constructs. And with regard to capital accumulation in prehistory/antiquity, what of the intellectual legacy of V. Gordon Childe, who saw the roots of capitalism in the Bronze Age? And do we really want to reify the vague and instrumental category of terrorism by giving it an ancient pedigree?

In fact, the alternative temporalities that Dawdy really wants us to explore are not of this nature. They will not be uncovered through an exploration of deep pasts or the rediscovery of forgotten links between apparently disconnected phenomena (yes, those old anthropological studies of needle cases, long houses, and kinship structures). Instead, they are to be revealed through a close engagement with recent (as opposed, presumably, to ancient) ruins.

I find something paradoxical about this argument, which itself seems to assume a linear and progressive understanding of history. The chronological newness of (of all things!) ruins becomes a fetish: a guaranteed source of symbolic transformations, whose power resides in nothing more than the fact that they are not yet forgotten, a status that seems to rest purely on the fact that they retain some ongoing physical trace in the landscape. An archaeology/anthropology that is alive to multiple temporalities—different cultural modes of remembering and forgetting—must surely cast a broader comparative net than that (cf. Forty and Küchler 1999; Gell 1992; James and Mills 2005). Without this reification of the recent past, it is difficult to see what separates Dawdy’s Clockpunk anthropology from earlier engagements with the ruins

of modernity, including those of the Comte de Volney: an intellectual touchstone for the temporality of Enlightenment (Volney 1791; cf. Wengrow 2010).

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## Reply

As I sat down to write my response to these varied and thoughtful comments, I took a moment, as I imagine many of us do, to distract myself, to look away from the object of intent, so that our thoughts can form on the periphery. In other words, I procrastinated by reading the newspaper. The item that immediately caught my outer eye was an op-ed piece by Monique Clesca (2010) entitled “Blue Haiti.” The blueness is double and familiar: her homeland is now covered in blue tarp—the same blue plastic architectural band-aids provided by FEMA and the Army Corps of Engineers to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina—marking every damaged roof and soon repurposed as tents, drop cloths, and Mardi Gras costumes. The surreal mass sadness that sets in after such a catastrophic event is also familiar, although in Port-au-Prince’s case the exponential loss of life makes such a comparison fractional. Other observations by Clesca on her first visit back ring in the temporality and social facts that I was trying to bring into focus in the paper:

The traffic jam on the way to my house was an opportunity to slowly take in the changed neighborhoods, the camps, the rubble. . . . But above the devastation, I was surprised to see billboards advertising concerts by Haiti’s best-known musicians, like T-Vice, Carimi and Tropicana. Perhaps, I realized, dancing wasn’t entirely out of the question. Several musicians have already written songs about the quake. Many people sing along to this one: “Under the tarps, you are being ignored / Tents and sheets, they don’t want to see you. / Fissured homes are being ignored.” (Clesca 2010:1)

What I had hoped to do with this paper was to create an anthropological traffic jam. I wanted us to slow down and see things we sometimes pass by too quickly. These are of two types. The first is the empirical reality that the social life of cities, whether detected archaeologically or ethnographically, is as much about people making do, recycling, and repurposing as it is about intentional state projects or the gross successes of capitalism. It is about dancing in the ruins; it is about how easy it is, to paraphrase the Haitian song, to ignore life under the tarps. It is as if impermanent architecture indexes a life too brief and fragile to stand up to study. The second bypassed object is the underlying logic of anthropology’s current praxis. Let me address the second first, because that is where the greater misreadings have occurred.

I must agree with the harshest criticisms. The paper may fail to communicate its central call to the majority of readers. Castañeda sees a “straw man,” who for me was playing only

a supporting role. He focuses on that portion of the paper on antiquity and modernity intended only as an epistemological review for those unfamiliar with the literature on temporality in archaeology and anthropology or with the arguments made by many others about modernity’s peculiar temporal ideology. Perhaps I have not been so lucky as he, since I have frequently encountered students and colleagues who take the exceptionalism of modernity and progressive time lines for granted. It is they I had in mind as I wrote that section; I wanted to lay that history down so that I could get on to points more uniquely my own. So, indeed, I thoroughly agree that others have studied complex, nonlinear temporalities in other societies and other times (and thought that I had already padded the citations enough from my graduate course, “Time and Temporality”).

My disciplinary point was that if we accept that “we have never been modern” (Latour 1993), then we should not separate ethnographic from archaeological practice, or at the very least we should not prohibit cross-temporal comparisons between so-called ancient and modern societies. Perhaps the most immediate evidence of the ongoing disciplinary problem is the failure of the paper to provoke a response from ethnographers. Haidy Geismar’s is the only contribution from a nonarchaeologist. This is why most of the commentators misread my target as Clockpunk *archaeology*. My use of examples from historical archaeology was not intended to “[advocate] a new approach to historical archaeology” (Castañeda). Rather, historical archaeology is a symptom of a larger problem within a discipline structured around modernity’s temporal mythos, a point that Cornelius Holtorf seems to grasp most firmly. In fact, if anthropological praxis could be reoriented toward a more thorough rejection of modernity’s temporal ideology, then historical archaeology would cease to exist as a separate discipline. It is “the disjuncture between theory and practice” (Shepherd) that is the larger complaint.

The most cursory inspection of the ways in which graduate training in anthropology is conducted in North America will show that this target is more steel than straw (Crossland and Wengrow are spot-on regarding the provincialism of the critique, which I nevertheless think is needed). Most PhD-granting departments in the United States have quite separate tracks for archaeologists and ethnographers. Castañeda and Wengrow are correct that there are already movements afoot to erode this divide, which is why I cited Castañeda and Matthew’s recent volume, as well as the work of Edensor and the (largely British and European) movement toward archaeology of the contemporary past. For what I hope are obvious reasons, I tried in my language to avoid dragon-slaying statements about my arguments being all new. Instead, I repeatedly emphasized that I wanted to underscore emerging turns and recent trends and push them a bit further. Those already involved in this endeavor were meant to be acknowledged, not excluded.

A similar sense caused me to edit out mention of how I have already been implementing Clockpunk anthropology,

but if Castañeda's skepticism means I must toot this horn, my current book project looks at the connection between aesthetics, temporality, and social life in New Orleans through 25 ethnographic interviews that I juxtapose with findings from 15 years of excavation on sites in the city. I need both of these data sources to fully understand the fetishism of old houses, artifacts, heirlooms, and antiques—indeed, to understand the aesthetics of age and decay. This is not aesthetics as cultural cake frosting but aesthetics as a sensorial articulation of social facts and totemic Durkheimian force. I want to insist, contra Haidy Geismar (although she probably speaks for a majority of readers), that Benjamin's aesthetic sensibility was aimed not at literary or cultural analysis, which was only a means to an end, so much as sociological revelation. Thus, I am not sure it is desirable to assume "that archaeology is more than aesthetic sensibility" (Geismar), as if this is a shallow and insufficient mode of comprehension. In fact, if archaeology succeeded in understanding the social facts inherent in the aesthetics (positive or negative) of ruins and artifacts, that would be an anthropological success.

Aesthetics are not something to see through but something to look at. Zoe Crossland, for example, brings up the palpitating social realities both reflected in and constitutive of aesthetics when it comes to sites of death and burial; they may resist becoming ruins because neglect and decay would be sacrilegious. She asks us to remember who does the neglecting—an important question easily evaded (*mea culpa*) when the actor is, by definition, offstage. Nick Shepherd, meanwhile, reminds us that the archaeologist himself or herself is an actor who brings artifacts and ruins into violent view, forcing a dialectic between the past and the present, whether the bones of an African colonial or those of a Bronze Age matron exposed on a suburban London street. This act of exposure and visual juxtaposition of history with the present is what Benjamin imagined he was doing, which is why I think it is perfectly acceptable, despite Geismar's discomfort, to call him an archaeologist.

My focus on ruins has such a heavy chain of association with romanticism akin to that of Volney, as exemplified by Wengrow's final comment, that readers may not be able to hear that I am trying to decry the binomial urge to find utopias in antiquity and dystopia in modernity. Surely, I am trying to say, both inverses are true and we handicap our endeavor by throwing up barriers to historical comparisons. I am not particularly romantic about ruins, more a photo-realist. Take a look under the tarps. Do not dismiss the life there, whether it is one debased by violence or sustained by dance.

Severin Fowles is correct to point out that there is an irony in dating the birth of modernist temporal ideology to the eighteenth century, as this in itself is a story of rupture. But I have no problem with irony. If we imagine history as Hegel's spiral rather than Zeno's arrow, we can still allow that, periodically, we get these outbursts of proclamatory rupture—Christianity was such a narrated event in the first century

AD, the Russian Revolution was another case, and now, we are reminded, the Mayan calendar has predicted a new rupture to occur in 2012.

The point of my mention of Wolfe and Fabian's critiques was not that they argued for either a hyperconstructivist solution or a purging of the direct historical approach (contra Randall McGuire's characterization of my argument) but rather that the field has reacted to their critiques with a simplistic overcorrection by producing an extreme division of labor within the field that disallows cross-temporal comparison. I also know full well that to accept Benjamin's angel of history is to accept Marx's critique of capitalism. McGuire, however, leaps to the dichotomist assumption that my critique of Marxist archaeology means that I disdain Marxism. The Frankfurt School itself was founded on the vibrancy of critical engagement. What I am saying is that Marxist archaeology has focused so doggedly on capitalists that it has often ignored those living under, past, or beyond their designs. This is not the same as archaeology of romantic resistance; it is about a life not against but beyond.

In Buffalo, New York, where gorgeous, gilded robber-baron mansions sit cold and crumbling, a hybrid community is taking hold (Halpern 2010). Multigenerational Buffalo residents who stayed past the collapse of the steel industry and the heyday of Great Lakes shipping have become tolerant, even welcoming, of a class of new arrivals who call themselves Freegans. Like vegans, Freegans espouse a principled form of consumption—or, rather, of postconsumption. Like the squatter movements in the 1970s–1980s United Kingdom, Freegans occupy abandoned property, living communally and quite frugally. But unlike the squatters, they are not protesting gentrification or the failure of social contracts and economic parity. Rather, they are experimenting with the possibility of living as far outside as possible of the prevailing system of money and labor. They scour the city for scrap and salvage, go dumpster diving for furniture, and scour donation boxes for clothes. They raise as much food as they can to feed themselves. Their aim is not to protest their exclusion from the cash economy but to conduct an experiment in living beyond it. The Freegan experiment, like those of the more political Steampunks experimenting with temporally disturbed technology, may fail, as did many of the utopian movements of the nineteenth century or the communes of the 1960s and 1970s, but the effort is worth attention as a particularly imaginative life under the tarps.

An understanding of the type of possibilities these experiments suggest, both about past conditions and future worlds, is inherent in the call-and-response comments of Sev Fowles, Laurent Oliver, and Nick Shepherd. I was moved by the imagery of debris scatters, death's-head coffee shops, and 1920s Paris. In their method these authors are already deploying the type of dialectical imagery that Benjamin suggested as a way out of teleology and historicism. The social life of ruins means attending to the archaeology and anthropology of, to quote Olivier, the "right here and right now." I have little interest

in the literature on memory and commemoration, which Geismar understandably points out as a glaring lacuna in my approach to ruins. Ruins inevitably bring up for many viewers memories of loss or construction of new memories. But this is to drive by quickly and see only ghosts and ignore the campfires of the living.

It reminds me of the view from my eighth-floor flat when I lived in one of the newer neighborhoods of Madrid in the late 1980s. I was fascinated by the scene below, a rambling property of an unused corral, some sheet metal sheds, broken stone fences and rubbish piles, and an ambiguous square building having a single window with iron bars and a doorway blocked only by an old blanket. There was always lots of activity around the compound, which seemed to be a village remnant now subsumed by the megalopolis: people coming and going, motor scooters, yelling, singing (often late at night), and protests of urban roosters and donkeys. One morning on my way to the metro, I saw a public notice posted on a utility pole—something about action to be taken against abandoned property. I paid it little mind, but a few days later I woke up to the sound of heavy construction equipment and masonry under attack. By the end of the day, the ruin and its gypsies were gone.

—Shannon Lee Dawdy

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