

□ Living with Heritage: Involuntary Entanglements of the Anthropocene – An Introduction

- Anatolijs Venovcevs
UiT: The Arctic University of Norway
anatolijs.venovcevs@uit.no
- Torgeir Rinke Bangstad
UiT: The Arctic University of Norway
torgeir.r.bangstad@uit.no

Heritage has come to be understood as a set of valued objects, landscapes and practices to be preserved and maintained for the benefit of present and future generations (Harrison 2020, 20–31). In recent years, commitments to safeguard and care for heritage have proliferated, fuelled by perceptions of threat that urge caretakers to act before it is too late (Holtorf 2015; DeSilvey and Harrison 2020). This rhetoric has been exacerbated by the global climate crisis that has rendered archaeological sites, landscapes and monuments even more fragile, testing the limits of conventional ideas of stewardship and management of heritage resources.

Yet, seemingly antithetical to this unprecedented loss, there has also been a proliferation of things that persist regardless of human care and concern (Olsen and Petrusdottir 2016). Anthropogenic accumulations such as archipelagos of sea-borne debris, industrial wastelands, decaying metropolises, dormant battlescapes and apocalyptic accumulations of greenhouse gases problematise the conception of the past as a passive resource. While one past seems to be more endangered than ever, we are drowning in the excesses of a different one.

To overcome the duality of loss and proliferation, this special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology* seeks to move beyond seeing heritage as a set of *management* practices or a series of humanly controlled *processes*. Contributors approach

heritage as something lived-with – that which shapes human and more-than-human lifeworlds. In this sense, we invoke the involuntariness of heritage by emphasising the fact that the pasts we live with are often consequences of chance and the intractability of the things themselves rather than the results of human choosing. This loss of control is made even more apparent in the Anthropocene, which, as observed by Max Liboiron, “both centralizes and decentralizes humans”, whereby the results of human-driven practices “will outlast the human species, decentralizing our role in the *longue durée* of planetary systems” (Liboiron 2016, 103–104). When discussing the proliferation of contemporary things, the idea of management becomes untenable – and at times deeply problematic (Ureta 2016; Beckett and Keeling 2018; Liboiron 2021).

The purpose of this approach is to radically enact a key point from Sterling and Harrison (2020, 28), that “heritage should not be reduced to a human construct” and as such should not be restricted to social and cultural processes of care and curation. As several of the contributions in this special issue point out, other-than-human beings and natural processes affect and are affected by the residues of human activities. Leftover materials of many kinds enact their own kind of ghostly impact and remembering (Olsen, this issue). The human-made debris that cuts across different lifeworlds and scales requires creative and radical responses which address what heritage means when the framework of contained and curated pasts appears increasingly untenable. Important steps have already been made to challenge the idea that heritage exists apart from large-scale material and environmental transformation and that it may be restricted only to pasts valued and managed by humans (Harvey and Perry 2015; Olsen and Pétursdóttir 2016).

In such circumstances, a productive way forward could be to borrow linguistic nuances from the languages of some of the countries included in the case studies of this special issue. In Norwegian, for example, the term for “legacy”, “heritage” and “inheritance” is the same word *arv* (*Din Ordbok* 2022) whereas in Russian those same words have the same root *наслед* (*nasled*) – onto or upon a “trace” – with linguistic separations between the terms only emerging in the twentieth century (Galeev 2017). Among the proliferating traces of the past, the conceptual differences between valued “heritage” and more general “legacy” start to lose their semantic power (cf. Harrison 2020, 42–49).

Therefore, in this issue, we liberally adopt UNESCO’s definition of heritage as “our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations” (UNESCO World Heritage Centre 2021) to try and capture the involuntary, lived dimension of the past. This perspective is not necessarily new, as scholars elsewhere have challenged fetishising hierarchies, proposed natureculture ecologies, theorised upon multispecies heritage and explored the excessive quantities and qualities of contemporary things (as examples see Gordillo 2014; Tsing 2015; Olsen and Pétursdóttir 2016; González-Ruibal 2017; Farstadvoll 2019; Pétursdóttir 2019; Harrison and Sterling 2020; Bangstad and Pétursdóttir 2021). However, what draws this discussion forward and pulls the papers in this issue together is the relational notion of “living with...” the traces of the past while being entangled within an unprecedented contemporary moment of the Anthropocene.

The special issue starts with **Bjørnar Olsen**, who further draws out the points presented in this introduction by presenting his research on the persistent Soviet legacies

of towns in northwestern Russia. Dominated by economic decline and state apathy, the towns in the region remain fundamentally Soviet 30 years after the collapse of the social, political and economic system that built them. As such, Olsen invokes a material hauntology to illustrate how this unwanted Soviet heritage underscores the daily act of living and being in rural industrial Russia. The radical provocation by Olsen helps frame the other contributions of the issue.

Following from Olsen, **Genéviève Godin's** contribution draws attention to the ability of the River Thames to curate its own heritage. Based on ethnoarchaeological work among the mudlarks along the River Thames in London, Godin explores the meeting points where material bodies, bodies of water and human bodies meet. While governed by the Port of London Authority and a Code of Practice that are weakly linked to the Portable Antiquities Scheme, mudlarks physically engage with the past outside of formal heritage management frameworks. They negotiate a series of temporal and spatial zones that Godin defines as underworlds, liquid worlds and borderlands before arriving at Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia (Foucault 1986 [1967]). By focusing on touch and drawing upon queer theory, Godin concludes by emphasising the porosity of bodies, surfaces and things – to touch heritage is to leave something of yourself behind and to take something of that heritage with you.

Next, **Anatolijs Venovcevs** archivally and phenomenologically explores the mine wastes of northeastern Norway and western Labrador, Canada to draw out the difficulties in characterising, containing and valuing the excessive by-products of contemporary resource extraction. By illuminating the cracks and contradictions of various types of mine waste and by cataloguing the protracted struggles to do “something” with waste through semantic or economic means, he underscores the inevitable material ambiguity of mine waste for management or containment – an ambiguity that blurs the lines between the mining industry and the surrounding industrial towns. Ultimately, the material legacies of mine waste present their own ambiguous affordances.

From the lives of landscape ruins to the lives of creatures living with ruins, **Monika Stobiecka** puts forward an idea of lively heritage as a way to counter the sterilisation of the past on Mediterranean archaeological sites by bringing in cats, sheep, birds, bees, goats and other nonhuman animals into the frame – literally through art and photographs. By grounding her work in an art/archaeology approach, she demonstrates how the animals were always there – and in fact widely depicted before the advent of photography. By bringing animals back as agents who literally live with heritage, Stobiecka seeks to inspire discussion on how animals can facilitate a lively dimension to the past within the present.

Keeping with the theme of post-human aftermaths, **Stein Farstadvoll** provides an excellent archaeological study on the afterlives of Nazi barbed wire in Norway. While exploring this thorny subject (pun intended), Farstadvoll demonstrates the difficulty of removing stuff that was designed to be durable and irremovable – an obstacle for prisoners, invading armies, post-war clean-up efforts and heritage legislation alike. In so doing, he demonstrates how barbed wire in Norway has literally become “owner-less”, having slipped through multiple layers of human control to enact its own form of “slow violence” (Nixon 2011) in its more-than-human afterlife.

Moving to the High Arctic, **Dina Brode-Roger**'s deeply embedded ethnographic work on a reopened power plant in the High Arctic town of Longyearbyen, Svalbard, follows along the themes explored within the issue by tying in human and material perspectives, the politics of memory, museumification and desired and undesired facets of heritage. In so doing, her work evokes a series of tensions as multiple chronologies, government policies and material affordances clash, emanating from the simple act of opening the door to a previously abandoned power plant. Suddenly, the power plant becomes a centre of community attention, whereas before it was a taken-for-granted piece of infrastructure – a tension made even stronger by the fact that without the power plant there would not be a human community in the High Arctic to notice it in the first place. Yet through these negotiations comes the discomfiting material reality of why the building survived in the first place and the limits to what the building can become: asbestos and fibreglass fill the walls and the air, the toxic heritage of the twentieth century.

Torgeir Rinke Bangstad concludes the special issue by taking toxic heritage to its ultimate – and literal – conclusion. By focusing on coal tar, a nineteenth-century industrial waste product that was reused as pesticide for wooden buildings in Norwegian open-air museums, Bangstad further breaks down the distinction between waste and heritage and emphasises how museum heritage – things kept for posterity for future generations – become toxic objects through the daily task of preservation. Beyond merely a historic act of late nineteenth- early twentieth-century museology, there is a higher metanarrative within Bangstad's text in that everyone – even museum professionals – have to live with the unintended, at times monstrous, traces of the past to the point that even our most celebrated possessions are inexorably entangled within the toxic hallmarks of the Anthropocene.

Together, these contributions work to shift the discussion away from what heritage is to what heritage does. Through tracking the stories of living with heritage among the people, the animals, the plants and the things, many articles in this special issue also shed light upon the lives of heritage. Although constantly shifting between value and waste, use and toxicity, newness and obsolescence, the heterotopias of living pasts continue to centre and decentre our place among heritage.

Acknowledgements

This special issue is organised as part of the research project *Unruly Heritage: An Archaeology of the Anthropocene* funded by the Norwegian Research Council (grant number 250296). We like to thank all the contributors for their hard work and participation as well as other members of *Unruly Heritage* for their feedback and for discussions that developed many of the earlier versions of the papers. We would also like to thank Alfredo González-Ruibal as the Managing Editor of the *Journal for Contemporary Archaeology* for his kind feedback, support and encouragement in us pursuing this special issue. Likewise, we would like to thank all of the editors and the editorial board of the journal as well as the peer reviewers of the various articles in this issue for their time, interest, commitment, and dedication. Elmira Zhamaletdinova deserves a debt of gratitude for assistance with the Russian linguistics presented in this introductory piece.

References

- Bangstad, T. R. and P. Pétursdóttir, eds. 2021. *Heritage Ecologies*. London: Routledge.
- Beckett, C. and A. Keeling. 2018. "Rethinking Remediation: Mine Reclamation, Environmental Justice, and Relations of Care." *Local Environment* 24 (3): 216–230. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2018.1557127>
- DeSilvey, C. and R. Harrison. 2020. "Anticipating Loss: Rethinking and Endangerment in Heritage Futures." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 26 (1): 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2019.1644530>
- Din Ordbok*. 2022. "Arv på engelsk." Online: <https://www.dinordbok.no/norsk-engelsk/?q=arv>
- Farstadvoll, S. 2019. *A Speculative Archaeology of Excess: Exploring the Afterlife of a Derelict Landscape Garden*. PhD diss., Department of Archaeology, History, Religious Studies and Theology, UiT: The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø.
- Foucault, M. 1986 [1967]. "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias." Trans. J. Miskowiec. *Diacritics* 16 (1): 22–27.
- Galeev, T. I. [as Галеев, Т. И.] 2017. "Значимость и Многозначность Лексемы Наследник в Русском Языке." [The Significance and Polysemy of the Lexeme Heir in the Russian Language] In *Ученые Записки Казанского Университета, Серия Гуманитарные Науки [Scientific Proceedings of Kazan University, Humanities Series]* 159 (5): 1106–1119.
- González-Ruibal, A. 2017. "Ruins of the South." In *Contemporary Archaeology and the City: Creativity, Ruination, and Political Action*, edited by L. McAtackney and K. Ryzewski, 129–154. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gordillo, G. R. 2014. *Rubble: The Afterlife of Destruction*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Harrison, R. 2020. "Heritage as Future-Making Practices." In *Heritage Futures: Comparative Approaches to Natural and Cultural Practices*, edited by R. Harrison, C. DeSilvey, C. Holtorf, S. Macdonald, N. Bartolini, E. Breithoff, H. Fredheim, A. Lyons, S. May, J. Morgan and S. Penrose, 20–50. London: UCL Press.
- Harrison, R. and C. Sterling. 2020. *Deterritorializing the Future: Heritage in, of and after the Anthropocene*. London: Open Humanities Press.
- Harvey, D. and J. Perry. 2015. "Heritage and Climate Change: The Future is not the Past." In *The Future of Heritage as Climates Change: Loss, Adaptation and Creativity*, edited by D. Harvey and J. Perry, 3–21. London: Routledge.
- Holtorf, C. 2015. "Averting Loss Aversion in Cultural Heritage." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 21 (4): 405–421.
- Liboiron, M. 2016. "Redefining Pollution and Action. The Matter of Places." *Journal of Material Culture* 21 (1): 87–110.
- _____. 2021. *Pollution is Colonialism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Nixon, R. 2011. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Olsen, B. J. and P. Pétursdóttir. 2016. "Unruly Heritage Tracing Legacies in the Anthropocene." *Arkæologisk Forum* 35: 38–45.
- Pétursdóttir, P. 2019. "Anticipated Futures? Knowing the Heritage of Drift Matter." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 26 (1): 87–103. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2019.1620835>
- Sterling, C. and R. Harrison. 2020. "Introduction: Of Territories and Temporalities." In *Deterritorializing the Future: Heritage in, of and after the Anthropocene*, edited by R. Harrison and C. Sterling, 19–54. London: Open Humanities Press.
- Tsing, A. L. 2015. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- UNESCO World Heritage Centre. 2021 "About World Heritage." Online: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/about/>
- Ureta, S. 2016. "Caring for Waste: Handling Tailings in a Chilean Copper Mine." *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 48 (8): 1532–1548. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518x16645103>

Anatolijs Venovcevs is a PhD candidate in the Institute for Archaeology, History, Religious Studies, and Theology at UiT: The Arctic University of Norway as part of the project *Unruly Heritage: An Archaeology of the Anthropocene*. His current research focuses on twentieth-century single industrial mining communities in northern Russia, Norway and Canada. He researches within contemporary archaeology, industrial and historical archaeology, historical geography and GIS. He likes long walks through beautiful landscapes devastated by modernity. Address for correspondence: Department of Archaeology, History, Religious Studies, and Theology, UiT: The Arctic University of Norway, 9019 Tromsø, Norway.

Torgeir Rinke Bangstad is a researcher at the Department of Archaeology, History, Religious Studies and Theology at UiT: The Arctic University of Norway. He is affiliated with the research project *Unruly Heritage: An Archaeology of the Anthropocene* and his research interests include contemporary

archaeology, museums, memory and toxic heritage. He holds a PhD in cultural heritage studies from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim and has recently co-edited the volume *Heritage Ecologies* (Routledge, 2021) together with Þóra Pétursdóttir (University of Oslo). Address for correspondence: Department of Archaeology, History, Religious Studies, and Theology, UiT: The Arctic University of Norway, 9019 Tromsø, Norway.