

## CHAT ACT: Agency, Action and Advocacy

Moesgaard Museum, Aarhus University, Denmark

Friday 26 – Sunday 28 October 2018



At its most basic level archaeology is about the study of society through its material remains. Practitioners and researchers have interpreted this fundamental premise in various ways within the discipline, but also in allied fields such as anthropology, history, heritage and tourism studies (particularly given the 'material' turn). Historical and contemporary archaeologists in recent decades have been especially explicit in their engagement with how the materials we choose to study can reveal deliberately hidden and marginalised aspects of society. The interest in the subaltern, rather than elites, has been evident in Anglo-American historical archaeology, in particular, and in some way explains the noticeable resistance amongst archaeologists to the rise of right-wing 'fake news' and mainstreaming of alt-right ideologies that include (mis)uses of the past. Musing on the increasingly political and advocacy roles archaeologists have taken in recent years – be that criticising fracking under tribal lands (inc Reed & Marek-martinez 2015), documenting the refugee crisis in Europe (inc Hamilakis (ed) 2016), or detailing the alternative ways of living of the homeless (inc Kiddey 2017) - CHAT ACT will focus on the roles, aims and methods of historical and contemporary archaeology in an increasingly polarised contemporary.

CHAT ACT wishes to dissect what it is to be an archaeologist in our various societies now and asks: do archaeologists need to engage more with the complexities of being an academic and practitioner in the contemporary? Do we need to be wary of accusations of partisanship and 'liberal bias' or push for even more explicitly politically and impactful projects? What does being an archaeologist of the recent past mean now? What are our big ethical questions? Just because we can do it should we do it? Does what we do matter? Submission may include thoughts on:

Is the work of historical and contemporary archaeologists of the recent past to focus on the lowly and the marginalised or do we need to consider a wider spectrum?

How do we maintain our integrity as archaeologists in an increasingly politically polarised world?



How do we conduct archaeologies that are socially just and have a real impact on understanding societies in the past and the present – do we have an obligation to transmit what we believe their stories are to the wider public? How do we effectively do this?

How do we make ourselves even more relevant at a time when the autonomy, legitimacy and funding of universities and cultural bodies is increasingly under threat?

How do we maintain our activism while being employed in universities that are increasingly being driven by neoliberal, market-orientated tendencies (eg in the UK and US) or where the very concept of academic freedom is openly under threat (eg in Turkey)?

How do we include the people of our studies – be they in historical or contemporary contexts – in ways that are ethical, that allow their stories to emerge without demanding their descendants remember, that avoid skewing their agency or overly editorialising their experiences?

How do we truly represent the marginalised and deliberately forgotten in intersectional ways - and avoid simply replicating homogenising and discriminatory narratives - that include the complexities of class, gender, colour, religion, ethnic identity etc

Should archaeologists be advocates and if so how we do balance the desire to represent the people we study while acknowledging the public may not want to remember?

Who are the people we study, what is/was their agency, their actions and what are our roles in locating them and bringing their stories to a wider public?

How do we collaborate with others – be that in the field, in interpretation or in conducting transdisciplinary research – to make our observations more nuanced, creative, robust and impactful?

Should the current emphasis on social justice in humanities and social sciences influence how archaeologists and heritage professionals conduct our research? Should we aim to balance our work with 'objectivity' and do we need to consider the possibility that 'social justice' imperatives can skew our research questions and misrepresent our findings?

What are the limitations of our roles in advocacy and in activism? Are we in danger of overstepping our remit? Ignoring the desires of the public? Perpetuating – and even creating - 'bad' history?

We look forward to receiving individual and group submissions that explore the above, and aligned, questions through a variety of theoretical, practical and case-study based IRL and/ or conceptual modes. This can be done through presentations / film / discussions / debates / posters / performances (including some on line presentation). As this CHAT aims to promote interaction there may be scope for proposed workshops and / or training sessions. Please email Associate Professor Laura McAtackney with questions / comments ([laura.mcatackney@cas.au.dk](mailto:laura.mcatackney@cas.au.dk)).

Name(s) and affiliation (if any), title and abstract of upto 150 words (and also a 280 char tweet-length short 'abstract') to be submitted to [laura.mcatackney@cas.au.dk](mailto:laura.mcatackney@cas.au.dk) by 28 April 2018.



REFS:

Reed, P.F. & O. Marek-martinez *Oil, gas drilling threatens critical cultural heritage* [Dated 31 May 2015; accessed Nov 2017] <https://www.abqjournal.com/592328/oil-gas-drilling-threatens-critical-cultural-heritage.html>

Hamilakis, Y. (guest editor) 2016. Archaeologies of Forced & Undocumented Migration. *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology*. 3(2).

Kiddey, R. 2017. *Homeless Heritage: collaborative social archaeology as therapeutic practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.