Matériel Culture

The archaeology of twentieth century conflict

Edited by John Schofield, William Gray Johnson and Colleen M. Beck

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The twentieth century probably saw no more conflict than in previous centuries; increased global communication and media coverage have, however, heightened our awareness of it. The scale and intensity of war was greater than anything before and the human cost reached unprecedented and previously unimaginable levels. Following the end of the century the materiality of these many conflicts – from local skirmishes to world wars – is becoming accepted on to the heritage agenda as a valid form of cultural resource for the benefit of future generations. Matériel Culture describes these recent developments, and documents why the study of conflict is important – and to whom.

The term ‘matériel culture’ encompasses the material remains of conflict, from buildings and monuments to artefacts and militaria, as well as human remains. This collection of essays, from an international range of contributors, illustrates the diversity in this material record, highlights the difficulties and challenges in preserving, presenting and interpreting it, and above all demonstrates the significant role matériel culture can play in contemporary society. Archaeologists have led the way in understanding these remains, as the fantastic selection of case studies in this volume suggests. Among the many studies are: the ‘culture of shells’, the archaeology of nuclear testing grounds, Cambodia’s ‘killing fields’, the Berlin Wall, the biography of a medal, the reappearance of Argentina’s ‘disappeared’ and Second World War concentration camps.

In presenting this collection the editors challenge our perception of what constitutes cultural heritage, what is significant about it, and what is worthy of record and preservation. This new and exciting field of archaeology has a wide relevance for academics and professionals in many disciplines, most certainly in archaeology, heritage management, history and anthropology.

John Schofield is an Inspector for English Heritage’s Monuments Protection Programme. William Gray Johnson and Colleen M. Beck are Associate Research Professor and Research Professor respectively at the Desert Research Institute in Nevada, USA.
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MATÉRIEL CULTURE
The archaeology of twentieth-century conflict

Edited by

John Schofield, William Gray Johnson and Colleen M. Beck

London and New York
During the course of this project we have become increasingly aware of the degree to which our interest and enthusiasm for matériel culture have been shaped by our own lives, and by the experiences of close friends and family. It is almost as though the very act of studying modern military archaeology has become an encounter with our lives; our own pasts. No doubt this will also be the case for numerous of our contributors: it clearly is for Jody Joy and Gabi Dolff-Bonekämper, whose contributions are arguably the most intimate of this collection. It is for this reason that we dedicate this volume to those whose experience has contributed in a significant way to shaping our own interest in the past:


Without them our enthusiasm for and commitment to this subject would never have materialized, and this book, and other related articles, would not have been written.

JS, WGJ and CMB
July 2001
Contents

List of figures x
List of tables xiii
Acknowledgements xiv
List of contributors xv
Series editors’ foreword xvii
Preface xix

1 Introduction: matériel culture in the modern world 1
   John Schofield, William Gray Johnson and Colleen M. Beck

2 Paradox in places: twentieth-century battlefield sites in long-term perspective 9
   John Carman

3 The ironic ‘culture of shells’ in the Great War and beyond 22
   Nicholas J. Saunders

4 The battlefield of the Dukla Pass: an archaeological perspective on the end of the Cold War in Europe 41
   Roger Leech

5 The Salpa Line: a monument of the future and the traces of war in the Finnish cultural landscape 49
   Ulla-Riitta Kauppi

6 Forgotten and refound military structures in the Central Pacific: examples from the Marshall Islands 58
   Henrik Christiansen

7 The archaeology of scientific experiments at a nuclear testing ground 65
   Colleen M. Beck
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Missing in action: searching for America's war dead</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lisa Hoshower-Leppo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Mapping Cambodia’s ‘killing fields’</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helen Jarvis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Tell the truth: the archaeology of human rights abuses in Guatemala and the former Yugoslavia</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rebecca Saunders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Violent spaces: conflict over the reappearance of Argentina’s disappeared</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zoë Crossland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Biography of a medal: people and the things they value</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jody Joy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Monuments and the memories of war: motivations for preserving military sites in England</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John Schofield</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>‘So suspicious of enemies’: Australia’s late nineteenth- and twentieth-century coastal defences, their archaeology and interpretation</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Denis Gojak</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Historic airfields: evaluation and conservation</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jeremy Lake</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Social space and social control: analysing movement and management on modern military sites</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Michael J. Anderton</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>The differing development paths of Second World War concentration camps and the possibility of an application of a principle of equifinality</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John G. Beech</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>A many-faced heritage: the wars of Indochina</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P. Bion Griffin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Evaluating and managing Cold War era historic properties: the cultural significance of US Air Force defensive radar systems</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mandy Whorton</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Archaeological examination of Cold War architecture: a reactionary cultural response to the threat of nuclear war</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>William Gray Johnson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>The Berlin Wall: an archaeological site in progress</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gabi Dolff-Bonekämper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONTENTS ix

22  Managing heritage in District Six, Cape Town: conflicts past and present 249
Antonia Malan and Crain Soudien

23  In small things remembered: significance and vulnerability in the management of Robben Island World Heritage Site 266
Kate Clark

24  Troubling remnants: dealing with the remains of conflict in Northern Ireland 281
Neil Jarman

25  Displaying history's violent heritage: how does the archivist approach exhibiting documents which relate to violent events? 296
Anne George

26  The hammering of society: non-correspondence and modernity 303
Roland Fletcher

Index 313
Material culture—past and present, partial and entire, in situ at an archaeological dig, on or of the landscape, or cached in a museum—illuminates cultural phenomena in many ways. Material culture communicates, expresses meaning, conveys experience, disciplines, and exhibits agency. Just as material culture is various, so too the study of material culture reflects a broad array of perspectives, analytical stances, and underlying philosophical traditions. DESCRIPTION. Critical discourse surrounding contemporary material culture has become an important aspect of design education because it offers designers new perspectives on how their practice affects society and the environment. Discussions about material culture have offered critiques of consumerism and throw-away culture. [7] New approaches to materiality can be seen through ideas such as Cradle to Cradle Design and Appropriate technology.