

One world, One place

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In September 1997, Cape Town's District Six Museum organised a sculpture festival in the field of debris left after one of the apartheid government's exercises in racial cleansing. Artists crafted installations from the debris, evoking memories of the diverse communities who had lived in this portside suburb from the mid-nineteenth century. Several thousand people, many of them former residents, came to listen to the music and speeches and wander around the artworks. Igshaan Jacobs, forcibly removed from Constitution Street and an avid collector of ceramic sherds, gave form to his concept of history through an intuitive archaeology: "This porcelain is how I relate to my history. If I could just piece together one small cup from all the pieces I've gathered I would have something to hold on to".

The District Six Sculpture Festival is an apt emblem for the World Archaeological Congress and the One World Archaeology movement. Apartheid had been the issue around which the Southampton Congress of 1986 and its formalisation as WAC were shaped (Ucko 1987). In the mid-1980s South Africa was a police state in the midst of a long revolution that had started with the Soweto uprising of 1976. The Group Areas Act, which had enabled the forced removal of more than 50,000 people from the slopes of Table Mountain to make way for a whites-only suburb, was one part of an edifice of legal discrimination that set South Africa apart as a pariah nation-state. WAC's founding statutes specifically excluded South Africans from membership until such time as South Africa abolished legalised racial discrimination. This change had happened more rapidly than anticipated: in 1994 South Africa had been admitted and the decision made to hold the fourth plenary congress in Cape Town. The symbolic taking back of District Six and the construction of memory from the debris of the past, by the descendants of a dispossessed community, was centrally representative of what the One World Archaeology movement stood for.

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ABSTRACTS

Abstracto: Este artículo rastrea la historia del World Archaeological Congress desde una perspectiva sudafricana –una posición estratégica apropiada, dado que el WAC se formó entorno al tema del apartheid y la relación entre el estudio del pasado y la política del presente. Mientras el apartheid fue una cuestión bien definida, los asuntos que el WAC ha tenido que afrontar con posterioridad no han resultado tan sencillos, e incluso en ocasiones han llevado a la incertidumbre. El concepto de Una Arqueología Mundial que el WAC adopta puede ser visto como una serie continua de meditaciones ligadas con una propuesta fundacional. Sin embargo este mundo ha cambiado. Las nuevas tecnologías de información y comunicación suponen el fin de las distancias que en el pasado supusieron un factor limitador para los movimientos mundiales progresistas. En pocos años, la red de banda ancha tendrá un coste bastante inferior en todas las ciudades del mundo. Las organizaciones mundiales que luchan contra intereses establecidos serán redes flexibles que se organizarán entorno a cuestiones locales, compartiendo al mismo tiempo la información y los recursos a nivel global. De este modo se abren grandes oportunidades para los movimientos mundiales que enlazan, a una y al mismo tiempo, las complejidades de las circunstancias locales y las oportunidades de las alianzas globales.

Résumé: Le rôle de l'apartheid et de la localisation de Cape Town sont des éléments utilisés dans le survol du développement du Congrès Mondial de l'Archéologie et du mouvement *One World Archaeology* depuis 1986. À l'époque un boycott académique a empêché la participation des Sud-africains au congrès de Southampton durant lequel fut formaliser le CMA. Le terme un monde, une place, caractérise la proposition d'adopter une nouvelle approche et l'opportunité de repositionner le mouvement *One World Archaeology*. L'approche un monde, une place s'oriente sur le concept de place, de sites locaux d'engagements et de connections entre la question de l'identité, le patrimoine culturel, l'interprétation historique et les droits humains. Un accès élargis aux nouvelles technologies de communication peut faciliter cette approche et offrir le potentiel de se préoccuper de la diversité des localisations et rendre possible le développement d'un réseau de communication stratégique d'une « archéologie engagée ».

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It is doubtful whether the academic boycott, which led to some twenty or so archaeologists living and working in South Africa being uninvited from the Southampton conference, had any discernible effect on the apartheid government. In the mid-1980s, the Pretoria regime's energies were focussed on stockpiling oil, procuring armaments, buttressing the pseudo-independent homelands and their compliant tribal leaders, and carrying out a vicious undercover campaign of intimidation and assassination, the true extent of which was only to become apparent a decade later through the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1998). Indeed, it is rather the case that the ensuing controversy within the South African archaeological community—in which some supported the boycott while others argued passionately against it—served the government of the day rather well, allowing the claim that there was freedom of debate within liberal intellectual circles, and that claims of repression were a communist-inspired misrepresentation.

In any event, few of those who argued it out in Europe and the United States asked what we thought; for what was at stake was the nature of Truth it-

self. Most North American archaeologists linked the association of political issues and academic research with McCarthyism. Many in Europe believed in an objective science of the past. Those in the opposing camp argued that the interpretation of the past was invariably political and that archaeologists had a moral responsibility to recognise rights of cultural patrimony. Archaeology had been complicit in colonialism, and reparation and repatriation were in order (Ucko 1987).

This cluster of issues—the politics of the past, rights to cultural property, and the relationship between Indigenous communities and archaeologists—has continued to be the nexus of the One World Archaeology movement beyond the formal and final settlement of the South African issue in 1994. Often, this has resulted in complex and confusing circumstances that have not had the ethical clarity of the opposition to apartheid. WAC was compromised in 1994 when it became clear that the Indian government would not respect freedom of expression at the third congress in Delhi. The meeting ended in disarray with participants scuffling in the aisles. The subsequent inter-congress in Brac was dedicated to retrospection on the India issue and the controversy over Ayodhya (see Rao and Reddy 2001; Sharma 2001), but most of the Indian delegation walked out. As the meeting progressed, it seemed that the Croatian hosts were intent on using the WAC presence as an opportunity to advance their case against Serbia, and Croatia's innocence in the cultural destruction of Bosnia (Hall 2002a).

While the fourth congress in Cape Town was inevitably a celebration of freedom—with the icon of Nelson Mandela as the meeting's patron—it was only too evident then (as now) that, for those crowded in the informal settlements along the freeway from the airport, little had changed. Preparations for the fifth congress in Washington were dogged by the mounting crisis in Iraq and the U.S.- and British-led invasion and occupation of that country. Some British archaeologists called for a boycott of WAC in Washington as a protest against U.S. imperialism without seeming to accept that they, too, should be isolated in response to the actions of their own government (a particular irony for those of us who had accepted the consequences of living and working in South Africa twenty years earlier). And beyond this are the other issues—comparable in many respects to South Africa in its apartheid years—over which WAC has not taken a position: for example, the explicit mobilisation of culture and history in the Bosnian and Rwandan genocides, Russia's continuing attempt to eradicate Chechen identity, the brutal repression and cultural destruction of the Taliban in Afghanistan, or the continuing denial of historical identity and human rights in Palestine.

Seen in this way, One World Archaeology is a continuing series of engaged meditations on a founding proposition. It is hardly surprising that these often come close to compromise, are inconsistent in application, and often seem confused. It is one thing to have a clear belief in the Truth and Objectivity of

Science. It is surely more complex by far to attempt to engage in the politics of cultural rights, identity, and the representation of the past. An engaged archaeology will always be a complex archaeology—a tangle of judgement calls based on incomplete information, with patterns and the right path only becoming evident in the bright light of hindsight (Hall 2005).

This is not all a reflection on the One World movement then and now—the world of 2004 is not the world of 1986. WAC was shaped by an internationalism that saw the future in terms of adherence to global principles of justice. It adhered to the precepts and policies of UNESCO and adopted a complex governance structure of plenary council meetings every four years and a global executive of elected area representatives and Indigenous representatives. In practise it proved difficult for such an executive to meet, given the expense of such exercises, and subsequent meetings rarely matched the heady idealism of the formative meeting in Southampton in 1986. The underlying implication was that a full executive—well informed, rational, and setting aside sector interests—would establish a set of universal principles for a world archaeology that respected the rights of communities to their cultural patrimony and the social responsibilities of archaeologists in interpreting the past (Hall 2002b).

Such an approach was consistent with the times but—again with that clarity that comes with hindsight—at the end of an era. Within five years, the Soviet Union had collapsed, dissolving decades of polarised politics and sweeping away the apartheid regime as a by-product of a new world order. A new politics took shape through the 1990s, marked by a resurgence of ethnic and identity politics; culture wars that targeted cultural property and archaeological heritage, in some cases leading to genocide; international finance flows facilitated by new information technologies; global tourism on an unprecedented scale, resulting in massive capital investments in the heritage industries; and a widening gap between wealth and poverty. The United Nations and UNESCO appeared increasingly ineffectual, while other organisations were the targets of radical protests. Today, the successors of those who demonstrated their support for a global world order now protest against the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization. For WAC, this transition is best symbolised by the African National Congress. The ANC exiles who endorsed the 1986 meeting in Southampton are now ministers and senior civil servants in Pretoria, engaging with their counterparts at Davos or in trade negotiations.

Such a change in context means that, in its turn, the One World archaeology movement must change—it must interpret its principles of social justice and an engaged archaeology according to these new political and economic circumstances. The direction to be taken, the opportunities to be seized or rejected, is a matter for debate that will lead to a broad consensus. As a contri-

bution to this repositioning, I suggest here an approach that centres on the concept of place—of local sites of engagement—and on matters of identity, cultural patrimony, historical interpretation, and human rights. My argument is that the new information and communication technologies—one of the enabling developments of the new world order—offer the death of that distance that has been such a limiting factor for progressive world movements in the past. Within a few years, reasonable bandwidth will be available at low cost in every city in the world. World organisations that contest entrenched interests will be flexible networks that organise around local issues, while at the same time sharing information and resources globally.

This concept—one world, one place—further the core concepts of the One World Archaeology movement in several key ways. How? Three dimensions, taken together, illustrate a nexus of opportunity for an engaged archaeology.

First, we live in an increasingly urbanised world. Over the next couple of decades there will be large-scale movements of people towards urban centres on the margins of the developed world. Mega cities will develop in Africa, Asia, and South America on an unprecedented scale. Within older cities in the West and North, there will be an increasing polarisation of wealth and privilege. We will increasingly come to understand rural issues in terms of urban hinterlands and the dynamics of power between the city and the country (Davis 2004). An engaged archaeology will need to be involved in the intricacies of local issues while benefiting from a wide-ranging network of comparisons between cities, as keynotes in a networked society.

Secondly, the issues of engagement will be increasingly complex. The essence of the One World movement in archaeology has been an awareness of the past as it affects communities, and communities are by definition localised in their concerns. The advent of new communication technologies has allowed such local communities to share this complexity with a global diaspora. Here, the ethnically mobilised conflicts in Bosnia and then Albania were definitive, coinciding as they did with the expansion and availability of the Internet. Croatian, Bosnian, Serbian, and Albanian ethnic communities, scattered across North America and Europe, participated in complex mobilisations of cultural capital that were part of contested claims to land and history (Hall 2002a). An archaeology that engages with such issues needs to be able to incorporate local and specific knowledge in all its detail.

Thirdly, it is rarely clear who is “right” and who is “wrong” in such localised mobilisations of identity and culture. If any generalisation is possible, it is perhaps that, in the cauldron of localised politics, history and cultural patrimony are invariably selected or distorted in the service of the emergencies of the present. Archaeologists will invariably be implicated as resources within such politics, and will make ethical decisions that are essentially “situational”:

judgements about where they and their expertise are best placed within the balance of oppression and repression (Hall 2005). It is irresponsible to make such decisions without a maximum awareness of local detail, and it is always valuable to strengthen such assessments through comparison.

Cape Town—the site of WAC’s reconciliation with its own past in 1999—illustrates well the challenges of an engaged archaeology. Now, as then, the drive from the airport to the city is a traverse from poverty to wealth: from informal settlements lacking adequate sanitation, potable water, and public health services to the gated and guarded residences on the lower slopes of Table Mountain. Now, as then, there is a primary correlation between wealth and race. Now, as from the time of its founding, the city’s overall material structure is framed by its history of colonialism and segregation—by the grid of the Dutch East India Company city overprinted with the geography of the Group Areas Act. Issues of language and identity are central in the city, since English is a minority language, the majority of residents speak Xhosa, and black Afrikaans speakers feel squeezed between the legacy of the past and the benefits of affirmative action. The consequence is a complex political, social, and economic context, at once unique and illuminated by comparison with cities elsewhere in the world.

The archaeology of Cape Town is, similarly, an example of local complexity and common issues. Eighteenth-century burials exposed by redevelopment along the foreshore result in bitter arguments about rights and identity that seem impossible to resolve. Disputes about sacred sites reveal a landscape of Muslim identity still to be incorporated in the city’s identity. There is little recognition of the industrial heritage of most of Cape Town’s people—as a rampant gentrification of the harbour area addresses international tourist conventions rather than local needs. These issues will intensify in the future as greater Cape Town continues to develop as one of Southern Africa’s three major urban hubs, drawing migrants from much of Southern Africa as well as international interests and global visitors.

An engaged archaeology will be immersed in all this complexity, with this “world in one place,” and at the same time will draw from the benefits of comparison and from strategic alliances that are contingent and opportunistic. These will be fruitful comparisons that will draw out the similarities and differences with other urban developments, particularly in other parts of Africa and South America. Such contingent arrangements will be well served by new communication technologies, facilitating connections that are less dependent on the often-unattainable funding necessary for League of Nations-type plenary meetings. Such networks have the potential to counter new forms of exploitation, such as the surrender of intellectual property rights, or the assumed ownership of theory in the academic departments of Western and Northern universities.

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