

* The following is a discussion between Alexander Stevenson and Robert Wallis following the 'Object- Excavation-Intervention' Conference at the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds 04/06/2004:

"With the divide you presented between Anish Kapoor's "Turning the World inside out" and the ancient stone circle where it was briefly sited, would you say modern artefacts are unable to sustain archaeological interests? In the question I put to Mr Dion (rather bluntly unfortunately) I queried the ability of modern detritus to be considered archaeology at all, rather art until sufficient time has passed that these substances become rare or significant without the aid of the artist? Would you mind commenting on these ideas?"-Alexander Stevenson 06/06/2004

"I do think that there is a profitable dialogue developing between art history / sculpture and archaeology. I also think that archaeology is profitable cast as the study of past material culture of whatever form, be it produced 1000 or 1 year ago, with implications for how we understand ourselves in the present, and people in the past."-Robert Wallis 10/06/2004

Dr Robert J Wallis, Associate Director MA in Art History at Richmond the American International University in London

* The following is a discussion between Alexander Stevenson and Sven Ouzman following the 'Object- Excavation-Intervention' Conference at the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds 04/06/2004:

"As a recent fine art graduate with an interest in archaeology and forensics, I am fascinated by the passing of time and the reorganisation of cities marked by discarded public and personal information such as credit card fragments and broken signs. I not only search for, document, list and archive artefacts, but repair them. I was very taken by your comments on the archaeologist's choice of whether or not to clean and repair artefacts. I fix many using logic and observing nuances though I often find myself making aesthetic judgments or corrupting obvious clues in favour of some more potent image. Rather than guessing at a whole word I will only fix what is immediately visible and in need of repair, applying what I learn only to other partial shapes and letters that are of the same text work. Would you consider making a comment on the nature of such a practice and the reasons for your own "stopping-points?"-Alexander Stevenson 06/06/2004

"I stress that my views are by no means representative of most archaeologists/ museologists/ conservators. For most of these people, re-constructing some understanding of past events/lifeways is made easier by also repairing the material culture of those people. Yet, at the same time it is that patina of age that attracts us to the objects and gives them their authenticity. But there can be a double standard where modern material culture is not held to the same standards of

analysis and care as are ancient artefacts. In these debates time becomes prime - older is often considered better (a type of origins game) despite more recent artefacts having better potential to tie in to living communities and thus offering a different set of data. Rather than temporality, materiality is for me a more interesting inquiry. Though archaeologists are united by their analysis of material culture, we do not always devote enough time to understanding the material other than providing a scientific name like 'crypto-crystalline silicate' without knowing how that type of stone flakes and so on. At this point politics is unavoidable. Is 'archaeology' only a lens whereby 'we' study people, places and times other than our own? What is we brought archaeology's analytic to bear on ourselves in the here and now? Recently I have begun studying graffiti in relation to older rock art traditions. Despite some forms of graffiti being modern artefacts, the tradition of marking a place has an archaeology and archaeological techniques are useful in understanding this artefact - see, for example,

'Letters on the Sidewalk are Today's Artefacts'

As for the repair and re-construction of artefacts (modern or ancient) - this decision is contingent on very many factors ranging from having available expertise/imagination, to political will, to ingrained habit, to having time, staff, space, money and so forth. One also has to distinguish between physical and conceptual reconstructions. I think the best reconstructions are those in which the reconstructor's hand is obvious and her work is distinguishable from the 'original' (which may have a history of reconstructions). This transparency conveys that objects have lives and they acquire histories and stories through their life and sometimes death. But it is at the places of breakage and discontinuity - of non-seamlessness that a wide audience is made aware both of how powerful and how partial our knowledge is and where the imagination is given space to roam within broad constraints.

To ask of you - when reconstructing personal items like credit cards, how do you situate your ethics? Is your intervention identity theft (to be provocative)?

Are we more empowered to reconstruct items from our own cultures than others? I would be interested in your thoughts." Sven Ouzman 14/06/2004

"Actually I think you've hit the nail on the head, especially concerning the factors that define how an artefact will be repaired. Plus I have long wrestled with the divide between the physical and conceptual associations that aid reconstruction, and I see it as one of the most pronounced overlaps between Archaeology and Art. I especially enthused over your comments on the standards of care for modern material culture. I certainly feel that sensitive information is allowed to become a kind of 'dust' layer, freshly pushed to the corners of public spaces. Without this layer I wouldn't be able to construct an art practice! But it is simply the fascination that I have and that audiences have when I re-position credit card fragments, broken sim-cards, or more elusive sign fragments into a gallery.

Suddenly the invisible becomes poignant perhaps even illicit?" Alexander Stevenson 16/06/2004

"Ja, very much so. A little like Freud's 'unheimlich' - the familiar that comes to revisit one, but often in unfamiliar surroundings/contexts." Sven Ouzman 18/06/2004

"I don't intend to have power over the 'victims' of my collection! Though I am interested in the possibilities that I have available if I were to over-step the mark. So yes, transposed identity is or may soon be a prominent part of the work. I was considering a list of names that are at least partially visible on the cards, almost a name and shame list! But there is a divide in the collection between sensitive personal data(sim-cards and credit cards) and Public information(road-signs, warnings, missing cat posters, banners etc.). The latter is far more imaginative as fragments no longer point to the thing they once represented, or tell you what it is they once pointed at. This half of the archive is very impersonal and very uncertain, as if questioning language or more visual forms. Repairing these signs is also far more aesthetic task. But to answer your question more directly: Ethically I do hope people are challenged by the collection. I personally find the regular occurrence of finding credit cards quite peculiar when I would never discard my own personal details in such a public way. One wholly intact card has the name of a doctor on the front which made me feel somewhat confused, as therefore any member of society even the most educated could take part in my collection." Alexander Stevenson 16/06/2004

" 'Are we more empowered to reconstruct items from our own cultures than others?'- Considering the 'Celebrities' of Ancient archaeology, as yet the sphinx remains nose-less! Reconstruction's rely on the assumptions of individuals and race always seems to be an issue when foreign groups try to 'change' anything. In my own case I would love to take my ideas of reconstruction and apply them to any subject in any country, especially the signs that deal most provocatively with language. But as laws and culture vary across the contemporary globe, different subjects seem to be taboo. There are certain qualities of individuals and of Nations that in challenging may be welcomed or reviled, depending on the national pride/politic." Alexander Stevenson 16/06/2004

" 'Are we more empowered to reconstruct items from our own cultures than others?'- Logically, we should be. Work like yours helps expose the fault lines in archaeological thinking. Archaeology, after all, is a set of surveillance techniques, many of which are military in origin." Sven Ouzman 18/06/2004

"Do you ever find yourself unable to evade national politics? Have you ever found it difficult to speak with authority in cases of still existing tribal culture?" Alexander Stevenson 16/06/2004

"As a white South African male - frequently. On one hand, as a civil servant I am

subject to lots of those politics. personally, I would like to contribute to nation building but am aware always of the potential abuse even (especially) well-meant interventions can be subject to. Citing objectivity won't do, so I chose to go for an overtly fallible, mildly `progressive' stance that tries to cast everyday issues in different and often humorous lights." Sven Ouzman 18/06/2004

"As a little extra to my rambling I would just like to add that I find it interesting that we are always excited by close genetic ties to historical grandeur, and I would say that the grander or more exotic the find the further we will go in the hope of discovering ties to it. The whole nature of repair though, as you pointed out in your paper, is fraught with divided mindsets on the nature of `restoration'. I think Historians and Archaeologists(correct me if I'm wrong) are more empowered by the `discovery' of items from their own cultures and their associations than in the possible reconstruction's?" Alexander Stevenson 16/06/2004

"I think you are right, but also think that most archaeologists have not yet thought this through." Sven Ouzman 18/06/2004

Sven Ouzman, a Fulbright Scholar at the Anthropology Department of the University of California at Berkeley.