

# HERITAGE FUTURES – A DESIGN PARADIGM



Last May I delivered the Reinwardt Memorial Lecture at Amsterdam School of the Arts  
– [\[Link\]](#)

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# 'Let me tell you about Hadrian's Wall ...'

Heritage,  
Performance,  
Design.



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This week it was published as an illustrated booklet – *Let me tell you about Hadrian's Wall: Heritage, Performance, Design* The 2012 Reinwardt Lecture. Amsterdam School of Arts, 2013



Background: phases in the growth of the heritage industry this last 40 years, as I have tried to describe in some of my writing:

**Heritage – self consciousness.** In the 1980s the rapid growth of the heritage industry, cultural resource management as it is known in the US, became very evident – new museums opening, more and more references being made to cultural legacies that were in need of attention and protection, a growing professional sector of heritage and cultural resource managers to attend to the remains of the past-in-the-present and offer them up to the public.

**Heritage – politics.** Chris Tilley and I, in our 1987 book *Reconstructing Archaeology* [Link], dug into the politics of cultural conservation and received a hostile reception when we argued that the heritage industry made conspicuous what was already the case with academic archaeology – that any work done on what remains of the past is always, of course, located in the present and so embroiled in the cultural politics of communities, states, institutions – there can be no value-free

study of the past for its own sake. Since then it has become orthodox understanding that archaeology and heritage are wrapped up in changing modernist notions of tradition, history, agency, nationalism – key components of how we see ourselves connected to where we have come from, as individuals, in communities and nation states, as a species. This is explored in great detail in my book *Classical Archaeology: Experiences of the Discipline* (1996) [Link] and in the discussions with archaeologists that I edited with Bill Rathje and Chris Witmore under the title *Archaeology in the Making* (2013) [Link].

**Heritage – creative cultural production.** In *Experiencing the Past* (1992) [Link], a follow up to my work with Tilley, I elaborated this notion of archaeology/heritage as creative cultural practice. Randy McGuire and I proposed in an article in 1996 for *American Antiquity* that archaeology is craft – skilled labor done with the remains of the past. It is simply their particular specialization that distinguishes academics and professionals from others who also work on what remains, a society of amateur local historians, for example. Such a notion of heritage as active and dynamic shifts focus from conservation efforts aimed at the stewardship of sites and artifacts, from cultural property to the manifold of *engagements* between the past and the present, the celebration of intangible vernacular tradition and folklore, for example, as much as the presentation of ancient arts in a national museum. *The Archaeological Imagination* (2012) [Link] traces some of the historical roots back to the eighteenth century.

**Heritage – performance.** Heritage is about performing the past. Performance is a powerful concept that helps refine the understanding of dynamic engagements between past and present. Mike Pearson and I explored some ways that this could be activated in our book *Theatre/Archaeology* (2001) [Link], and in a recent review [Link].

**Heritage – design.** In *Archaeology: the Discipline of Things* (2012) [Link], Bjørnar Olsen, Tim Webmoor, Chris Witmore and I outline a unified field of *pragmatology* – the concern with things-and-things-done (the meaning of *pragmata*) that includes archaeology, anthropology, science studies, histories and sociologies of technology, and design.

In *Let me tell you about Hadrian's Wall* I draw upon experiments in theatre/archaeology as a hybrid of contemporary art and archaeology, as well as my

work in the design school at Stanford and suggest ways that we explicitly acknowledge that heritage is a field of design.

Here's a description of how this might look, taken from the end of my new book:

... begin *in medias res* with a design challenge or brief. Here, imagine it is a local archaeological museum. Research the context – ethnographically, or by whatever appropriate means, with an eclectic research methodology that aims to establish deep, empathic insight into needs and desires of clients, constituencies, and communities. Define the problem/need/desire, or else redefine – building a museum may not be the solution to local circumstances and points of view. Make this definition design actionable, something that can be addressed by a service, a product, an experience, something made or assembled. Ideate: generate ideas and possible solutions to the challenge/brief—perhaps enhanced support for a local history society may be just what is needed. Choose some of these ideas for prototyping: material models/mock-ups that can be shared, showing possible solutions, not specifying a definitive answer. Show, rather than tell. Share these models, test them out with people to see how they work, or not – evaluate. Perhaps it emerges that what really is at

stake is demographic in character – a disjunction between the attitudes to the local past of younger and older generations. Repeat/iterate with another prototype. Build when force of circumstance dictates (depending on feasibility of technology and resources, practical and economic viability). Be aware that any 'solution' is provisional.

In all of this process there is rich and flexible interplay between action, inscription and description, research and theory, fabrication and display, with agents, witnesses and audiences, experts and users constantly exchanging roles in collaborative co-creating teams or communities that recognize little hierarchical structure. Such design thinking connects with what I have outlined as *agile management* (Shanks 2007). This pragmatics is about informed intervention under a tactical attitude, performative remix and assemblage, post-disciplinary, because it freely can combine scientific research and expressive arts, and located in specific encounters between past and present. There is both ambition to make a difference and contribute to well-being, as well as a humility that stands by work done while recognizing how

provisional that work always is.

I suggest that here we have a way of practically carrying the insights afforded by performance art, ideology critique, archaeological theory, and critical heritage studies into heritage management strategies and structures, making actionable their points about the ontology of the past (located, constructed, dynamic, tangible and intangible).

Here is the book – Heritage, Performance, Design: The 2012 Reinwardt Lecture.  
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