


# UPDATE: DECEMBER 2022 – SLOW ARCHAEOLOGY



“Our brains aren’t designed for multitasking”, my dear friend Cliff Nass, mathematician, cognitive scientist and psychologist, warned me a good long while ago – and he’d written a book about it! “It will slow you down and cloud your reasoning.” OK – I’m still working on the same big three projects as back then. But I am quite sure that my research and thinking have evolved most significantly and in ways I could not have anticipated *because* I have run the three projects in parallel, letting the frictions and unexpected contrasts throw up insights and prompt new lines of reasoning. And what’s wrong with slow research, when one is obliged to explore new territory, follow diversions, smuggling concepts across disciplinary borders? All this takes time, especially when you learn the lay of the land and change your mind about where you want to go.



the sorting of the waves

best wishes for new year 2023 : from a northern ocean

*Greece and Rome* began as a project with Gary Devore to write a text book. It will still be able to act as one when Gary and I finish, but it is very different from what we set out to write. We deal with challenges to the field of classics, most notably the shape of the great grand narratives, busting some old myths. We employ a well-evidenced model that accommodates the social and cultural dynamics of antiquity, the dramaturgies, choreographies and scenographies (our model draws on performance theory), with focus on the *actuality* of the past. Ours is not another “reception” of antiquity, but work performed on and by the remains of the past, presences now, entanglements in matters of contemporary concern.

And then we started up a book club, *Reading Antiquity*. Just about every week for the past 18 months we have read books with club members enrolled through Stanford Continuing Studies, watched movies, discussed fictional works that deal in ancient Greece and Rome – Gore Vidal, Madeline Miller, Federico Fellini, Alice Oswald, Anne Carson and many more. Gary’s smart insights as a novelist of antiquity himself, my own experiences in research creation and arts practice as research (ongoing work in theatre/archaeology and performance design), and especially the wonderful engagement of our book club members have prompted us to rethink our project. How

might we work with what is left of antiquity so as to witness voices and agencies beyond those who remain so familiar in their constant and unchanging retelling? Our answer is to embrace conjecture, to pursue speculative fabulation in a kind of ironic and anachronistic amalgam of David Hume and Walter Scott, two prominent figures in the Scottish romantic enlightenment at the beginning of the modern historiographic project, with contemporary inspiration from Donna Haraway and Ursula Le Guin. So now the load-bearing skeleton of the book comprises characters fleshed out in fictional scenarios, with characters, some well-known, alongside commoners and outsiders, long hidden from history, accessed through archaeology. A current favorite of mine is our story of druid Diviciacus visiting Rome in the political turmoil of the end of the Republic, reflecting on the lifestyle of his community compared with that of his host at dinner, the politician Cicero.

Last academic year, 2021-2022, I spent a sabbatical leave in northern Europe. The objective was to pull together another long running project, *Borderlands*, that has involved fieldwork and research focused on the northern edge of the Roman empire (including excavation of the outpost at Binchester), extended back into prehistory and forward through to the present. I knew from the outset that I needed to take in wide angle and long-term perspectives as well as microscopic detail to understand, in a fractal way, this extraordinary archaeological landscape. The challenge here is to find a form, a chorography, that can handle the richness, the heterogeneity of senses of place, *genius loci*. Experiences involving the pandemic, of mobility, of traversing borders and territories, have sharpened my appreciation of how important is the concept of bordering. I am finding the concept to be surprisingly under theorized.



Viking ship burial, Ladby, Denmark – exploring the connectivity afforded by the North Sea in the wake of the Roman empire

*Greece and Rome* and *Borderlands* are both projects that center upon a quest for a form that is adequate to their subject matter. They involve the media experiment at the heart of another ongoing project, *Theatre/Archaeology*.

The publication more than 20 years ago of my book with Mike Pearson, *Theatre/Archaeology*, prompted satisfying ripples of discussion to run through the fields of performance studies and performance design. Defined as the rearticulation of remains as real time event, the project of theatre/archaeology seeks to generate insights and creative practices in both performance and archaeology by foregrounding shared concepts of *temporality* (actuality and encounter, metamorphosis and archive), and *design* (the pragmatics of theatre production and building archaeological knowledge). For devised performance this involves archaeological sensibility to the materiality of media and performance, its scripting and representation. For archaeology this involves focus on the production of knowledge, the performance of research in specific contexts, especially those associated with cultural heritage.



Becoming stone – effigy of an unknown knight, St Aidan's Bamburgh Northumberland UK  
Our experiments in theatre/archaeology didn't stop with the book in 2000. *Greece and Rome* has involved a model of the working and experiences of antiquity using concepts of performance and performativity. And now Gary and I are employing speculative fabulation as retelling, as metamorphic transcription of what remains of antiquity with a view to contemporary concerns. Critique of the components of the metanarratives of antiquity (characters, agencies, emplotment, and scenographies) has taken me into media experiment around figuration, myth and archetypes, reconfiguring components of the archaeological imagination – how we work to recollect and reimagine the past. This has included my long-standing fascination with photography as a fundamentally archaeological medium – photowork as performance, archaeography as theatre/archaeology. In *Borderlands* I am compiling portfolios, assemblages that articulate the performance of itinerary, of visiting, of the archaeological *dérive*. In all – the performance of research.

Mike's works of performance in the last couple of decades have also pursued themes of theatre/archaeology and more. In a series of performance works and publications Mike delved deeply into the performative dynamics and cultural politics of place-making in rural and urban environments, especially Cardiff and Lincolnshire, an extraordinary exploration of temporality and spatiality, memory and recollection, encounter and engagement – an environmental aesthetics, as Connie Svabo would put it. And Mike took up a senior role with National Theatre Wales. From 2010 Mike has designed and directed site specific productions of Aeschylus (*Persians*), Shakespeare (*Coriolanus*, with Royal Shakespeare Company), restagings of Ovid (*Metamorphoses*) and Homer (*Iliad*). Mike's theatre/archaeology taking up the actuality of classical works of theatre and poetry.

At the end of 2016 Mike and I were artists in residence at Bard Graduate Center in Manhattan. We presented a series of works under the heading "Staging Evidence". The

location of this theatre/archaeology, an exhibition of the works of Charles Percier, architect-designer to Napoleon, forced us to directly and uneasily address the katachestic synchronicities, the deviations, transgressions, the border-crossings in our research creation. In the wake of this perturbing experience we made a visit to the northern borders of England together in 2017 and started planning a new summary account of the praxis of theatre/archaeology.



The legacy of a perturbing experience – with Mike Pearson in “Staging Evidence” five performances in theatre/archaeology, Bard Graduate Center  
The overlap with the *Borderlands* project helped us complete the bulk of the new book during my sabbatical leave last academic year. The heart is the presentation of an annotated portfolio and a dialogue through our works in theatre/archaeology since 2000. This is organized in five parts centered on five key processes: fieldwork and visiting; assembling and gathering; worldbuilding between past and present; working with things; metamorphosis and entropy. These lead to an outline of a pragmatics, a more-than-representational methodology of theatre/archaeology as

a paradigm of research creation, a transdisciplinary practice suited to contemporary troubled precarity. Introductory sections deal with theatre and performance, the archaeological imagination, and especially with the philosophical foundations of theatre/archaeology in pragmatism, performativity, science and technology studies, process and relational philosophy, design foresight.

And then Mike died. It's not possible to express the sorrow, loss, and impact. It's enough to say that I'm working with friends and colleagues to get our book out as a case study in transdisciplinary daring and collaboration.

There are two other noteworthy features of this last year.

The first concerns what may be called *applied archaeology*, extending the reach of a transdisciplinary humanities beyond the arts/science siloed boundary. H-Star and mediaX, industrial affiliates and research programs at Stanford under leadership of Martha Russell and Keith Devlin, closed business in March 2022. I worked with them for many years, applying the scope and insights of anthropological archaeology to interests and needs beyond the academy. How can archaeology inform design-actionable visions of the future, mobilizing long-term hindsight for creative future building in businesses, communities, organizations? Rooted in the mission of Stanford Humanities Lab, directed with Jeffrey Schnapp and Henry Lowood until 2009, and through my ongoing connection with the design group and d.school in the School of Engineering, much of this effort overlaps with what Riel Miller at UNESCO is promoting as futures literacy – skills and competencies needed to imagine better futures, indeed to decolonise the future, preventing things from becoming an extension of the inequalities and incompetencies of the present. This year I helped organize two workshops with mediaX and Tamara Carleton exploring futures literacy with partners from industry. And while I will miss contributing to their visionary agenda, I have found myself working more and more on applied archaeology and humanities. This year I joined Kimi Iwamura's Valley Breeze Consulting in projects with Nissan Motor Company (on human values in future mobility design – research managers Takashi Fukushige and Jun Tamura), with Aisin (imagining the future of a major industrial corporation refocused on human values and social innovation – Vice President Kenji Suzuki and General Manager Sadafumi Shirai), and with Biproggy, formerly Nihon Unisys (the concept of Digital Commons – CEO Akiyoshi Hiraoka). Extraordinary intellectual adventures in business archaeology addressing a critical challenge of the academic humanities to justify their research, learning and

pedagogy and to extend their skills and insights beyond the academy in the service of public good.



Professional learning community – a workshop in design foresight in Rotterdam  
While I call this applied archaeology, it is not a one-way knowledge transfer. I have used the tools and techniques of design foresight in building the socio-cultural model that is the core of our book on Greece and Rome. Mike and I have made much of the pragmatics of project management that is design foresight in developing the principles of site-specific performance design.

In all this I am finding inspiration in collaboration with Connie Svabo and her Research Center for Science Education and Communication at SDU (Syddansk Universitet – University of Southern Denmark), with its mission to bring the arts and creativity to STEM education, connecting technology and experience design in education and training, in the academy and beyond. Drawing on science and technology studies, key concepts include scholartistry and research creation,

creative pragmatics (the subject of a forthcoming book from Springer we are editing with Chunfang Zhou, Tamara Carleton and Jesper Simonsen) and eco-literacy, 360 degree understanding of complex adaptive living systems. This year a research team from SDU (with Tina Maria Brinks and Kean Najmeddini Gindesgaard) worked on the projects in experience design with Nissan and Aisin. We also helped a mediaX project run by Janet Carlson offer advice in the creation of a school in China centered upon design thinking and experiential learning.

This work draws upon my long-standing *commitment to student-centered pedagogy* and project-based experiential learning, learning by making and doing, a commitment activated in these projects with University of Southern Denmark, Roskilde in Denmark (where I hold an honorary doctorate), going back beyond Stanford Humanities Lab, though Larry Leifer's Learning Lab at Stanford, a precursor to H-Star, to learning programs in archaeology that we pioneered at University of Wales Lampeter back in the 90s, and indeed back to my work in the 80s to develop a new curriculum for high school Classics. My classes at Stanford continue to be a testing ground for such pedagogical practice. This last term of Fall 2022 I ran a new seminar in environmental aesthetics, exploring perceptions, experiences and engagement with the environment, surely a critical component of eco-literacy, of any sustainable environmental policy.



Sophia Colello's fabulous seminar project in environmental aesthetics – Ikebana meets the metaphysical principles of Zoroastrianism

Uniting research and learning, for we are all life-long learners, reaching beyond the academy, focusing on the needs and interests of learners, means we should surely endeavor to get to know our learning communities, whether they are associated with an academic institution or a corporate concern. The core of the design projects with corporate communities is deep ethnography of organizational culture. And this year I joining Ng Humanities House, an undergraduate residence at Stanford, as resident faculty. I am learning so much in the way of refreshing insights into these wonderful and talented young people. A personal mission – to do what I can to help them deal with the challenges that come with the legacy of the contemporary past.