

ANG 6930 – Archaeology of Alternative Futures

Section 06D3
Spring 2012

Tuesday 12:50-3:50 PM (Period 6-8)
Turlington 1208H

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Office Hours Tues. 9:00-11:00 AM

Required Texts:

Harvey, David
1990 *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*.
Blackwell, Oxford, U.K.

Koselleck, Reinhart
2004 *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*. Columbia University Press,
New York.

Leone, Mark P.
2010 *Critical Historical Archaeology*. Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, CA.

Sabloff, Jeremy A.
2008 *Archaeology Matters: Action Archaeology in the Modern World*. Left Coast Press,
Walnut Creek, CA.

Additional reading as listed below and added throughout semester

Course Description

Archaeology of Alternative Futures is an experimental graduate seminar on the relationship between historical consciousness and future planning, including modern policy making. Archaeology is only part of the equation, as we will consider all lines of inquiry that afford perspective on long-term human experiences and the potential for insights on the challenges of uncertain futures. Archaeology may be uniquely situated to provide insight on long-term human experiences, but it is not often consulted in matters of modern policy making. And why not? Have the architects of modern social theory dismissed premodern human experience as relevant to the challenges of those who crossed that rubicon long ago, except, that is, in the rhetorical sense of the primitive other, useful for gauging “progress”? Or has the time-space compression of modernity outlined by David Harvey shortened experience to only the here and now, with futures never before experienced and pasts irrelevant to things yet to come? We will problematize the connections between lived pasts and anticipated futures in this course to locate the untapped potential of historical “sciences” for shaping public policy.

The course is organized around three themes to cultivate a sense of how different ways of conceptualizing the past affects both the practice of historical sciences and the way in which historical data are incorporated (or not) into modern policy. In the first section on *Practice* we will take a look at case studies in historical sciences that are purported to be relevant to the

challenges facing contemporary society, such as environmental degradation, economic sustainability, political unification, emergent pathogens, and warfare. We will find in this work a nagging tension between practitioners who are optimistic about the promise of deep-time perspectivism and those who remind us how little archaeology and related fields have actually contributed to policy and contemporary practice.

In the second section on *Theory* we will delve into a fascinating literature that helps us to understand that historical time (e.g., the periodization of American history) cannot be reduced to natural time (e.g., the orbital cycles of celestial bodies), and thus must be conceived as a product of human experience and perception. We will start with the temporality of modernity and then work our way through postmodern critiques that expose the linkages among modern senses of time, capitalism, and globalization. If we can appreciate that human perception of time varies cross-culturally, then we can begin to understand that connections between lived pasts and anticipated futures likewise vary under different material, cultural, and political circumstances. Among other topics, we will investigate the possibility that historical ruptures like modernity have occurred repeatedly in the ancient past and therefore provide greater insight on contemporary issues than ever before imagined.

The third section deals with *Policy*, and here we want to investigate two related questions: (1) How are historical data and perspectives incorporated into policy making?; and (2) With what sort of time horizons do policy makers work? Seminar participants will largely determine the direction this section takes given their particular interests, but we will also read some general material on the anthropology of policy making. Ultimately we want to determine the impediments to greater salience for archaeology and related fields in the formulation of policy, and to find opportunities for stretching the time horizons of policy making. This last effort will no doubt prove to be the most difficult as we come to understand that changing perceptions between pasts and futures takes more than critical self reflection. For better or worse, modern challenges require sound information on the causes and consequences of long-term change, so we return at the end of this seminar to the practice of history and archaeology to ask ourselves: How can we do things differently to be more relevant?

Format and Expectations

This is a true seminar, so we will meet each week for three hours to discuss the topics and readings as outlined below. Beyond the list of readings I have conjured up, seminar participants will suggest additional sources based on personal interests. I expect everyone to develop in this seminar a research project that integrates each of the three organizational topics discussed above (Practice, Theory, and Policy). For example, one may want to investigate how the archaeology of particular region involves the development of data on the human consequences of climate change, engages some theoretical discourse on human perception of change, and challenges appropriate policy issues. To facilitate the development of each project, seminar participants will choose a historical/archaeological case study that provides or has the potential to provide empirical evidence on the connections among material change, human perception of change, and human intervention against change. This may sound like a limited resource base, but it includes case material on deliberate societies, resistant movements, and millennialism, as well as any of the growing examples of intervention showcased in books like *Questioning Collapse* (McAnany and Yoffee, eds. Cambridge 2009). No matter the case material, seminar participants will need to engage the theoretical literature we will read in the second part of this course to question the way the past is perceived and investigated. For instance, rather than view the past as a series of historically determined outcomes of prior circumstances, we can turn that around to suggest that the past is a series of alternative futures. In this sense, we would seek in the historical record of the past circumstances akin to those of modern existence

and examine how it played forward in actual experience. If we are to then bridge this information to modern policy issues, we will want to consider that alternative futures were not simply unanticipated outcomes of prior circumstances, but instead purposefully enacted alternatives to the way things were done.

As noted above, our excursion into policy making will be structured by the interests of seminar participants. Each participant will be asked to choose an agency or organization that engages in public policy and to investigate the manner in which it uses historical data, particularly the linkage between such data and future time horizons. In most cases, participants will likely find plenty of material on uses of historical data in shaping policy, but within time horizons that are frustratingly short-term, timed as they are, to the rhythms of markets, political cycles, or other forces that hamstring any concern for long-term futures.

Seminar participants are required to research and write two papers for this course, one on the historical/archaeological case study and another on policy making. Papers are limited to 4000 words each, excluding the list of references cited, tables, figures, and notes. To the extent participants work quickly to develop paper topics, we will have ample opportunity in this seminar to discuss ideas and draft material. If all goes as planned, we will have an opportunity at the end of the course to discuss how history/archaeology and policy making may be more mutually influential in each of the participants' case studies.

COURSE OUTLINE

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Readings</u>
Jan. 10	Orientation and Prospectus	
PRACTICE		
Jan. 17	The Promise of a Relevant Archaeology	Sabloff 2007
Jan. 24	The Pitfalls of a Politicized Archaeology	Leone 2010
Jan. 31	Planning Futures (in this seminar)	
Feb. 7	Archaeology and Sustainability I	Redman 1999
Feb. 14	Archaeology and Sustainability II	select chapters in Fischer et al. 2009, Rick and Erlandson 2008, & Redman et al. 2004
THEORY		
Feb. 21	The Condition of Modernity	Harvey 1990
Feb. 28	Futures Past	Koselleck 2004
Mar. 6	Spring Break	
Mar. 13	Utopian Views (First Paper Due)	selections from Jameson 2005

Shore, Cris, Susan Wright, and Davide Però (editors)
2011 *Policy Worlds: Anthropology and the Analysis of Contemporary Power*. Bergham
Books, New York.