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Bailey, Douglass (2018) Breaking the Surface: An Art/Archaeology of Prehistoric Architecture. Oxford: Oxford University Press,

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In the past two decades contemporary and modern art has increasingly occupied locations formerly exclusively devoted to continental theorists in anglophone archaeological writing. In British archaeology, the origins of this development lie in the mid-1990s, when the experimental approaches of post-processualism coincided with increasingly prominent self-organised collectives of (predominantly) London-based artists and the promotion of the YBAs (Young British Artists), most famously, by art collector and advertising executive, Charles Saatchi. As a student living in a licensed lesbian squat in Deptford in those years, it was easy to happen upon artist-run exhibition spaces in run-down shops and abandoned warehouses. Almost simultaneously, I witnessed archaeologists and anthropologists incorporating art into reflexive excavation methodologies on the Leskernick excavations. As another undergraduate, (now Dr) Gary Robinson said to me at the time: “wouldn’t a trained artist do this better?”. My reaction against post-processualist outsider art (itself an outgrowth from post-processualism), combined with my awareness of artists working together in self-starting ways, led to years of unwaged work as an informally (dis)organised, under-qualified art curator, writing grant applications creating opportunities for artists to work on excavations and in archaeological laboratories, and coordinating exhibitions while also, tortuously, attempting to finish a PhD. This self-sabotaging effort was fuelled by my belief that working with artists would enhance the methodological innovations archaeologists were then advancing and stimulate new questions and approaches. Just as I finished my first project, with artist Simon Callery in 2003, Colin Renfrew published *Figuring it Out*, and I quickly realized individuals with better funding, greater institutional support, and considerably more art-historical knowledge, were already working with art and artists, (although not, I now appreciate, with the same grass-roots approaches). Among those archaeologists working with artists at the turn of the millennium, (Chris Evans and Chris Gosden are perhaps not recognised enough here, and see Dixon (2018) for an excellent review), Doug Bailey would rapidly become one of the most prominent. His new book *Breaking the Surface* is a valuable contribution to archaeology’s recent engagements with visual art, and will be read as a demonstration of the insights provoked by his new sub-discipline; Art/Archaeology (see also Bailey 2017).

Breaking the Surface builds from a strategy of juxtapositioning; placing together “otherwise unrelated and unconnected elements in ways that provoke unexpected thoughts and engagement” (p38). Each chapter is intended as a “stimulating agitator”, provoking the reader to uncover new links between analyses of cutting, breaking, digging, and holes across time and space. This technique transports the reader across an impressively wide-ranging

terrain, encompassing not just art history and archaeology, but linguistic anthropology, philosophy and theories of visual perception. *Breaking the Surface* is “not primarily archaeological” just as it is “not primarily about artists, art movements, or the art historical” (p36). (Interestingly, Bailey does not feel the need to distance his book from architecture although his analyses surely make a contribution here). Both art history and architecture have a significant, longstanding literature concerned with ‘negative space’, a term which *Breaking the Surface* does not belabour, but which is called into play by Bailey’s choice of artists Gordon Matta-Clark and Lucio Fontana, and in his interrogation of ‘ground’ (an art-historical term he plays off against the ground we walk upon and, as archaeologists, excavate to illuminating effect). Bailey’s knowing playfulness in transposing august art-historical terminology into other registers increases the interdisciplinary reach of his approach and findings, which will be appreciated by readers from all the disciplines he explicitly disavows and more. With its emphasis on process (cutting and digging) as much as object (finished artwork or archaeological feature), and on the primacy of the concave (the negative space), over the convex (to the extent that the concave becomes convex), *Breaking the Surface* breaks new ground in more areas than archaeology, underlining the generative potential of the negative spaces Bailey has carved for himself between and outside disciplines. At the same time it offers useful and interesting new interpretations of the Romanian Neolithic settlement of Măgura, the Etton causewayed enclosure, and the Wilsford Shaft, a 30m hole in Wiltshire, dug during the Bronze Age, which are sure to be widely read by prehistorians.

Although it is only lightly referenced in *Breaking the Surface*, Bailey’s technique, (sloganned as ‘disarticulate, repurpose, disrupt’), as well as his method of juxtaposition, recall Georges Bataille’s surrealist anthropology. Bataille’s magazine, *Documents*, situated writing on modern art alongside texts and images from ethnography and archaeology. The legacies of surrealism can also be seen in Bailey’s fascination with acts of cutting and breaking as traumatic, transgressive and abject. Bailey’s ‘inter-texts’, short excerpts of text exhibited on white pages as if they were found artworks, transmit this most neatly. The inter-texts - a news report of a mass stabbing, the case of a teenage girl’s self-laceration from a psychiatric study, and policy recommendations for digging shallow graves - bring to mind 1990s British art, such as Mat Collishaw’s *Bullet Hole* (1988), a head-wound from a pathology text-book, blown-up and dissected, or Ron Mueck’s *Dead Dad* (1996), both exhibited in Saatchi’s *Sensation* exhibition. The 1990s themes of trauma, abjection and obscenity are represented in *Breaking the Surface*, not by any YBAs, (a moniker overexposure has since rendered unfashionable), but through an exploration of Ron Athey’s *4 Scenes in a Harsh Life* (1994). A series of ritualistic performances that involved scenes of cutting and perforating human bodies. The first of these scenes, *The Human Printing Press*, in which Athey cut a man’s back with a scalpel and printed the blood onto paper towels, marks a sensational start for Bailey’s art writing in the book, and offers another point of intersection with Bataille’s obsessions with sacrifice, ritual blood-letting and cutting as an act of transgression: “The skin is opened, the blood runs; the ground surface is perforated, the crumbling topsoils and carbonates are opened to the air” (p67). The section ends with a meditation on the symbolic exchanges between spectators and performers as pits were cut into the ground at Măgura, Romania around 8,000 years ago.

Bailey, like Bataille, is interested in the creative potential of destruction. He finds it in artworks including Gordon Matta-Clark's *Conical Intersect* (1975), a torpedo-shaped cutting bored at an angle through two 17th century buildings, exposing their internal skeletons. And in the *buchli* and *tagli*; canvases perforated and slashed, lit and photographed, by Lucio Fontana in the 1950s and 1960s. Archaeologists, Bailey argues, have been unwilling to examine the role of destruction in creating architecture, especially the Neolithic pit-houses of Măgura where it was "the integrity of the surface of the ground that was being destroyed". At Măgura and the Wilsford Shaft, Bailey dwells on the reactions people had to the destruction of the ground when „fear, threat, upset, and anxiety probably engulfed them" (p161). What is implicitly evoked here is nothing less than the sublime; an art-historical old chestnut, disarticulated from its disciplinary roots, and repurposed to enable new perspectives on affective relations in prehistory.

Breaking the Surface encourages the reader to think about holes in new ways, and, inevitably, once Bailey's agitants have done their work, one discovers more that could be added to Bailey's hole theory. Bailey's chosen artists are best known for cutting and penetrating bodies, punching holes in buildings, and slashing canvases. The forceful gestures carry over into his discussions of archaeological sites (prehistoric digging is traumatic, always containing the potential for "conflict or threat" (p127). Two of Bailey's inter-texts are reports of violence; stabbings and razor-cuts. The book emphasises acts done to the surface, especially those of violence and penetration (cutting, digging, breaking) over the agency of the surface itself, and the other kinds of opening (unfolding, collapsing, eroding, engulfing) that it involves. There is something phallic about Bailey's philosophy of holes, (even his Neolithic pits - due to the way visual perception appreciates convex shapes - "pop-out' of their natural and constructed backgrounds" (p93), which encourages me to wonder about an alternative politics of hole theory; about holes-which-open-themselves; which are themselves powerful agents with their own ways of opening; holes which swallow; and holes which expel forth. Active holes; including, of course, vaginas, about which much ink (not to mention other substances) has been spent, by psychoanalysts and philosophers (Kristeva, Derrida, Butler), and with which numerous artworks have been compared, but which remain curiously sublimated in Bailey's philosophy of holes. Part of the context for the Wilsford Shaft, is the fact that it was made in a landscape characterised by sink-holes – natural geological holes, which opened themselves out, revealing how the ground, like the body, is subject to involuntary openings, swallows and void-ings (for more on the associations between prehistoric sites and sink-holes in chalkland landscapes see Gale (2018). As opposed to the cutting, the opening may be understood as a latent capacity, already present, through which the ground or the body actively opens itself. Making space for the potency of openings in hole theory might change the emphasis from metaphors of forcible penetration, towards those of birth and growth, and/or of entropy and collapse. It would lead towards explorations of negative space by women artists, (continuing my 1990s theme; of Tracy Emin's *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963-1995* (1995) or Helen Chadwick's *Piss Flowers* (1991-2). The act of making a hole would be less an aggression than an encouragement; working with what the ground already wants; either to open itself or to fall away.

Relationships between archaeology and visual art might be said to have now entered their expanded field (to repurpose a phrase from Rosalind Krauss). Since the early 2000s, the

words art and archaeology have been grouped, added, subtracted, divided and compressed into a multitude of compounds (art and archaeology, artists in archaeology, art+archaeology, art-archaeology, art/archaeology, artaeology) describing a wide range of approaches (Dixon 2018). Bailey's *Art/Archaeology* is one of the more programmatic and ambitious of these fusions, aiming at the creation of a whole new sub-discipline (sorry!). It is also one of the more traditional and successful in its academic orientation, communicating via book-length academic publications as well as art residency programmes and exhibitions.

The history of how we emerged into this expanded field would repay further investigation. Such a history might trace the movement from a relationship which was, in archaeology, largely manifested via shared aesthetics, towards one focused on methodological or theoretical innovation. Arguably, the latter could not have happened before the full ascendancy of conceptual art. Think, for instance, of Stuart Piggott's involvement with neo-Romanticism and how the mid-twentieth century aesthetics of Georgian modernism influenced his interest in eighteenth century antiquarianism, art and archaeology. Piggott (who features in Bailey's book only as an archaeologist of pit-dwellings) could also be treated as a historical forebear for archaeology's relationships with art. But Piggott's extensive engagements with art and artists revealed themselves aesthetically; through the appearance of his drawings and his taste in choosing what to look at. The notion that visual artists might supply novel theoretical as well as aesthetic perspectives had to wait for later decades. It had to wait, I venture, for the 1990s; for post-processualism; for the rise of participatory art (Bishop 2012); for the co-option of avant-gardism by new systems of management (Boltanski and Chiapello 2017); for academic audit cultures (such as, in Britain, the Research Excellence Framework); for the marshalling of both archaeology and art under the banner of the Creative Industries; and for the forces driving neoliberal cultural funding policy today. Around the end of the last millennium and the beginning of this, the relationships between archaeology and art entered a new phase, but the full history of what happened, how and why, has yet to be told. And the full effects have yet to be realized.

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