

Journal of Social Archaeology

<http://jsa.sagepub.com>

Archaeology dreaming: post-apartheid urban imaginaries and the bones of the Prestwich Street dead

Nick Shepherd

Journal of Social Archaeology 2007; 7; 3

DOI: 10.1177/1469605307067842

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://jsa.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/7/1/3>

Published by:

 SAGE Publications

<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Journal of Social Archaeology* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://jsa.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://jsa.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations (this article cites 7 articles hosted on the SAGE Journals Online and HighWire Press platforms):

<http://jsa.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/7/1/3>



Copyright © 2007 SAGE Publications (www.sagepublications.com)
ISSN 1469-6053 Vol 7(1): 3–28 DOI: 10.1177/1469605307067842

Archaeology dreaming

*Post-apartheid urban imaginaries and the bones of the
Prestwich Street dead*

NICK SHEPHERD

Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, South Africa

ABSTRACT

This article is concerned with the materiality of memory and identity in the post-colony, as mediated by the corporeal remains of the colonial underclasses themselves. Prestwich Street is in a rapidly gentrifying part of Cape Town, close to the Waterfront, the city's glitzy international zone. The accidental discovery of an early colonial burial site in Prestwich Street in the course of construction activities in May 2003, and its subsequent exhumation, became the occasion of a fiercely contested public campaign. This pitted pro-exhumation heritage managers, archaeologists and property developers against an alliance of community activists, spiritual leaders and First Nations representatives. The materiality of the site and its remains became a key point of focus for the working out of a range of forces and interests in post-apartheid society, including the buried legacies of slavery and colonialism in the city, the memory of apartheid forced removals, and post-apartheid struggles over restitution and representation. I argue that, even as the heightened political contexts of the events around Prestwich Street significantly determine the shape and nature of an emergent post-apartheid public sphere (on the one



hand), on the other hand, its clashing epistemological and ontological concerns challenge us to rethink and reformulate core disciplinary practices and guiding ideas. Are the remains of the Prestwich Street dead artefacts? Or are they ancestors? And under what conditions might they be both of these things?

KEYWORDS

heritage management ● human remains ● memory ● post-apartheid
● public history

'All that is buried is not dead.'

Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm*

■ SIX FEET OF THE COUNTRY

Ten years and more after the political transition of 1994, South African archaeologists find themselves at the centre of a divisive and bitterly contested public dispute. At stake is the fate of an early colonial burial site in Prestwich Street, Green Point, a rapidly gentrifying district of Cape Town close to the Waterfront, the city's glitzy international zone. The Prestwich Street exhumation has been a moment of truth for South African archaeology. It is also – in my telling – a story of failure and of lost opportunities. That is, a failure in a quite specific sense on the part of the heritage managers in the newly reconstituted South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA), and in a general sense on the part of the discipline of archaeology in South Africa. Archaeologists generally defended the exhumations in the name of a notion of instrumentalist science, distanced from broader issues of culture and society. They tended to be resentful of public intrusion into what they construed as a contractual relation with the developer and a technical exercise in recovering the 'facts in the ground'. For their part, SAHRA's heritage managers showed little political will to take on entrenched interests in the city or creativity in acknowledging the trauma of both the deep and more recent pasts. Instead, they opted for a narrow, and at times questionable, interpretation of the heritage legislation. Both archaeologists and key SAHRA officials acted with a concerted, at times bewildering, disregard for broader discourses of restitution and reconciliation, as though archaeology takes place outside of history, or as though the unrequited yearnings and energies of the past are an inconvenience to heritage managers that must be neutralized, instead of being

the very stuff and substance of the making of the new nation. But to say this is to get ahead of myself . . .

Where to begin? At the moment when the demolition crew first encountered human bones? Or at the end with the airy fantasy that is to be 'The Rockwell', with its promise of carefree luxury? Perhaps it would be better to begin by sketching a field of implication, a ground of ideas, to thicken our sense of time and place. Very well then: In Nadine Gordimer's novel *The Conservationist* (Gordimer, 1974), central place is given to two characters, the white Afrikaner and landowner, Mehring, and the body of an anonymous black man buried in a shallow grave on Mehring's farm. Mehring is an industrialist who sells pig iron to the Japanese. His ownership of the farm is an act of romanticism, a return to the land, but also a useful tax write-off in years of failure. The black man is a murder victim, possibly from the black location on which the farm borders. His hasty burial has been at the hands of the police, to save themselves the trouble 'of yet another murder investigation connected with the African location' (Clingman, 1986: 141).

The figure of the black murder victim enters Mehring's dreams to unsettle him, and render uncertain his possession of the farm. The murder victim has been improperly buried: he lies face down; his mouth is stopped with earth. In this second life of the imagination he acquires a new kind of articulateness. In the end, a storm sweeping in from Mozambique disturbs the body, 'bringing it to the surface to drive Mehring in terror and crisis from the farm, and to reclaim, in its representative capacity, the land' (p. 141). This is made clear in the novel. Almost the very last words, referring to the body, are 'he had come back', an echo of the great rallying cry of the African National Congress: 'Afrika! Mayibuye!' ('Africa! May it come back!'). Stephen Clingman, on whose sensitive reading of Gordimer's work I have relied, begins his account with an epigraph taken from Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*: 'All that is buried is not dead'. In his reading, *The Conservationist* is part of the next great 'signposting' in colonial consciousness, following Schreiner. He calls the book 'a history of the future'. What it foretells is the dissolution of the settler order.

The Conservationist established a powerful metaphor for the guilt of apartheid, the inevitable return of the truth of the past, and the impossibility of delaying forever the day of reckoning. With its themes of guilt and confrontation, hidden and revealed truths, it provided a central and compelling metaphor for the events of the 1990s, not least the institutionalized resurfacing of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. So far, so good; but wait. *The Conservationist* is based on an earlier, celebrated short story of Gordimer's, *Six Feet of the Country*, written in the early 1950s (Gordimer, 1956). If *The Conservationist* ends with the symbolic return of the body and the anticipated victory of the forces of African nationalism (even if it is not explained how this comes about), then the ending of the



short story is far more ambiguous. A black Rhodesian travelling to South Africa to look for work contracts pneumonia and dies on the farm of a white couple outside Johannesburg. The local black farm-working community wishes to bury the body with due respect, but a series of macabre confusions ensues. First the body, after a post-mortem, is buried without the consent of the health authorities. Then, when the black workers collect £20 for an exhumation, the wrong body is returned sealed in a coffin. The deception is only uncovered when the dead man's father, who has travelled down for the funeral, complains that the body is too heavy to be that of his son. Clingman writes: 'The implication is plain: "six feet of the country" cannot be granted to blacks, even in death. South Africa is a white man's country in which the basic dignities, in death as in life, are not afforded to blacks' (1986: 140). The dead man's father is fobbed off with an old suit, and the story ends 'in a kind of liberal anguish, contemplating this fact' (p. 140). Instead of closure we are left with a tangle of questions, further unfinished business.

To Gordimer's prophetic dream of incompleteness we can add some contemporary voices. The first is that of Achille Mbembe. Writing in a special issue of the journal *Public Culture* focused on Johannesburg, he says:

Our sense of urban totality has been fractured – hence the juxtaposition of different images, memories of a past rejected or fantasized. Specific historical objects are ripped out of their context even as the state busily tries to memorialize and museumize, to build new monuments and historic landscapes that are supposed to bring together different fragments of the nation. (2004: 404)

The second voice is that of Svetlana Boym (*The Future of Nostalgia*, 2001): 'In cities in transition the porosity is particularly visible; it turns the whole city into an experimental art exhibit, a place of continuous improvisations . . .' (p. 77).

Porosity, continuous improvisation, fractured urban experience, objects ripped from their contexts, fragments of the nation, the unquiet and re-surfaced dead, guilt, atonement, dreams and stratagems: a useful set of notions to take with us as we consider the case of the Prestwich Street dead.

■ TIME-LINE PRESTWICH STREET

Green Point is a part of Cape Town strategically located between the central business district and the new waterfront development at Cape Town's harbour. For much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it lay outside the formal boundaries of the settlement, a marginal zone which was the site of the gallows and a place of torture, situated on a prominent sand

dune. It was also the site of a number of graveyards, including the graveyards of the Dutch Reformed Church and the military, and of numerous undocumented, informal burials. Those buried outside the official burial grounds would have made up a cross-section of the underclasses of colonial Cape Town: slaves, free-blacks, artisans, fishermen, sailors, maids, washerwomen and their children, as well as executed criminals, suicide deaths, paupers, and unidentified victims of shipwrecks (Hart, 2003b). In the 1820s Green Point was sub-divided and sold as real estate, in time becoming part of the densely built urban core. In the late 1960s and early 1970s black and Coloured residents of Green Point were forcibly removed, and relocated to the bleak townships of the Cape Flats, a series of events which have entered popular imagination via the fate of the residents of District Six, on the other side of the city. Green Point is currently undergoing a process of rapid gentrification, driven by escalating property prices. For many former residents this means that even as the political space has opened up in which they might reacquire property in the city centre, so they face new forms of economic exclusion.

In mid-May 2003 in the course of construction activities at a city block in Green Point bordered by Prestwich Street, human bones were discovered. The developer, Ari Estathiou of Styleprops Ltd, notified the South African Heritage Resources Agency in accordance with the newly passed National Heritage Resources Act (Act No. 25 of 1999), and construction was halted. Also in terms of the Act, the developer appointed the Archaeology Contracts Office (ACO), a University of Cape Town (UCT) affiliated contract archaeology unit, to do the archaeological investigation. The ACO applied for and was issued a permit by SAHRA for a 'rescue exhumation of human remains' (SAHRA, 2003e). This was not the first such exhumation in Green Point. In 1994 the Archaeology Contracts Office had been involved in the excavation of an unmarked burial site in Cobern Street, a short distance away (Cox, 1999). The Act provides for a 60-day notification period, and for a public consultation process. Antonia Malan, a UCT-based historical archaeologist, was contracted by the ACO to run the public consultation process, which she did in the name of the Cultural Sites and Resources Forum (CSRF), an advocacy organization with a track record of involvement in heritage issues. The South African Heritage Resources Agency is the national statutory body in charge of the protection and management of heritage resources in South Africa, and replaces the apartheid-era National Monuments Council.

On 11 June 2003 exhumation of the bodies began. Seven weeks later, on 29 July, a public meeting was held at St Stephen's Church in central Cape Town. At this point the remains of approximately 500 individuals had been exhumed. Most bodies were shallowly buried without grave markers or coffins. Earlier burials were intercut by later ones. The site was fenced with wire-link fencing and was open to public view. Estimates of the total



number of bodies stood at 1000 (up from an initial estimate of 200), on the 1200 square metre site. In the mean time, a Special Focus Reference Group (SFRG) had been set up, mainly of UCT-based archaeologists and human biologists. Malan and the SFRG framed the agenda for the public meeting in terms of consultations regarding the relocation of the bodies and the memorialization of the site. Judith Sealy, an archaeologist on the SFRG, presented a proposal in which she envisaged reinterment of the bodies 'in individual caskets, in a crypt or mausoleum'. This would be a place where 'one could honour the dead' while allowing 'access to the skeletons for careful, respectful, scientific study, by bona fide researchers' (Sealy, 2003: 1).

The public response was angry. The minutes of the first public meeting record '[a] general feeling of dissatisfaction, disquiet and disrespect' (Malan, 2003: 6). Questions were asked as to why the demolition permit had been approved without the requirement of an archaeological survey, why the exhumations had continued through the 60-day notification period, and why the first public meeting had come so late in the process. Opposition to the exhumations came from several quarters: community leaders, many of whom had been active in the struggle against apartheid; Christian and Muslim spiritual leaders; academics from the historically black University of the Western Cape; heritage-sector NGOs; and Khoisan representatives. Zuleiga Worth, who identifies herself as a Muslim Capetonian, said: 'I went to school at Prestwich Street Primary School. We grew up with haunted places; we lived on haunted ground. We knew there were burial grounds there. My question to the City is, how did this happen?' (Malan, 2003: 5). Joe Marx said: 'these bones are not unknown, they're known. These people were descendants of people in the Cape' (p. 6).

The minutes also record comments by a number of unnamed individuals:

Woman at back: On what basis does SAHRA decide on exhumation? Issues of African morality and African rights . . . (p. 4)

Man in green shirt: Developer contacted SAHRA and did marketing strategy for this evening. I don't buy these ideas . . . Archaeologists can go elsewhere to dig . . . (p. 5)

Rob of the Haven Shelter (a night shelter for homeless people): Many questions come from black people who hang around the site. Why are white people, and white women, scratching in our bones? This is sacrilege . . . (p. 6)

Zenzile Khoisan said: '. . . these archaeologists, all they want to do is to dust off the bones and check them out with their scientific tests and to put them in the cupboard!' Storming out of the hall he shouted: 'Stop robbing graves! Stop robbing graves!' (p. 6). In a set of notes provided after the meeting, the historian Ciraj Rassool, based at the University of the Western Cape, said that in proposing policy the Special Focus Reference Group had exceeded its powers and was involved in making proposals that its members 'were ill-equipped to make' (Malan, 2003: 3). He said that there was 'a lack

of political consciousness in the way the whole matter was being addressed; a kind of naïveté'. He also said that the 'matter was far too important to be left to the private relationship between the developer and the archaeologist as mediated by SAHRA' (p. 3).

On 1 August 2003 SAHRA announced an 'interim cessation' of archaeological activity on the site until 18 August, to allow for a wider process of public consultation. This was later extended to 31 August. In the wake of the first public meeting, Tim Hart of the ACO wrote to Ari Estathiou and Andre van der Merwe, the Project Facilitator appointed by Styleprops, to express his surprise and discomfort with the new situation. He wrote that it might be necessary to increase security on site because of what was 'proving to be very undesirable circumstances'. Nevertheless, 'despite yesterday's meeting (racial slurs and accusations of dishonesty and grave robbers)', the archaeological team remained committed to the exhumations. He wrote:

I want to visibly demonstrate . . . the despicable way in which people have been buried and allow them to judge whether this is a place of rest or a place of uncomfortable disarray. My personal opinion is that the site as it is [is] undignified, and the remains are deserving [of] greater dignity and [I] would like to demonstrate this. (Hart, 2003a)

On 16 August the CSRF convened a second public meeting. It also collected submissions by telephone, email and fax as part of its mandate of public consultation. Just over 100 submissions were collected. Mavis Smallberg from Robben Island Museum said:

my strong suggestion is to cover up the graves . . . Apart [from] the recently renamed Slave Lodge, there is no other public space that respectfully marks or memorialises the presence of slaves and the poor in Cape Town society . . . Only scientists are going to benefit from picking over these bones – of what purpose and use is it to the various communities to which the dead belong to know what they ate 150 years ago or where they came from? (Smallberg, 2003)

Imam Davids wrote on behalf of the Retreat Muslim Forum to say '[we] view the work and approach of the CSRF, based at UCT, with dismay . . .'

(Davids, 2003)

On the other side, there was a sharp reaction against those who had been critical of the process, and against the growing anti-exhumation lobby. A comment by the UCT-based human biologist, Alan Morris, is logged as follows:

Members of public/prominent academics (especially UWC) suggested development stop and site is made into memorial. They have totally misjudged the reason for having a public process. NOT opportunity to control development of the city, but IS opportunity to join process of memorialisation . . . don't let pseudo-politicians benefit at [our expense]. (Malan, 2003: 4)



The developer submitted a report to the CSRF, via Andre van der Merwe, 'to provide the developmental perspective'. Many of the luxury apartments that comprise the residential development had been pre-sold. At the time of commencement of construction R21 million worth of sales contracts had been concluded, and were at risk due to the delay. As well as carrying the costs of the delay, the developer was also paying for the archaeological work and the public consultation process. The report expresses the hope for 'a sensible solution' (Van der Merwe, 2003: 1).

On 9 August the synod of the Cape Town diocese of the Anglican Church, under the leadership of Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane, the successor to Desmond Tutu, unanimously passed a resolution condemning the exhumations and calling for '[the] appropriate institutions and organizations to be guided by African values and customs with regard to exhumations, burials and cemeteries', and for '[our] government, through its heritage agency . . . to maintain the integrity of the site as that of a cemetery' (Wheeder, 2003). Between 25 and 29 August SAHRA convened a series of 'Special Focus Group' meetings with 'interested and affected groups'. According to the minutes, a meeting with UCT-based 'archaeologists and academics' was:

fuelled by strong sentiment about the public's perception of archaeology. The point was raised that the public seemed to think all archaeologists wanted to do was to dig up bones . . . [it was felt that this] was part of the perception and general sentiment that demonized the discipline. (SAHRA, 2003d: 8)

At a meeting with the Cape Metropolitan Council it emerged that the delegation of powers between SAHRA and the City was in question, and that the City was 'acting illegally on some of [its] duties' (SAHRA, 2003c).

On 29 August SAHRA convened a third public meeting at St Andrew's Church in Green Point 'to wind up the public participation process' (SAHRA, 2003b). The verbatim transcript of the meeting records a number of comments from the floor. An unnamed respondent said:

There is this kind of sense that it is a *fait accompli*. There were 60 days. The 60 days are over, now it's will the developer be kind enough to us. Now to me this is not about the developer. This is about those people lying there and the people that were part, historically, of that community . . . [the interests of the developer] must be of secondary importance. The same with the archaeologists as well . . . they have a social responsibility first before they have a responsibility towards the developer. (2003b: 15–16)

Another respondent said:

There are multiple implications for this burial ground and its naked openness in the centre of the city . . . in this city there's never been a willingness to take up [the issue of genocide and the] destruction of human communities that were brought from across the globe . . . This is an opportunity to get to the bottom of that and time means different things to

different people, institutions, stakeholders. Time for the dead – we need to consider what that means. (2003b: 17–18)

Michael Wheeder, who was later to play a central role in the Hands Off Prestwich Street Ad Hoc Committee, said:

Many of us of slave descent cannot say ‘here’s my birth certificate’. We are part of the great unwashed of Cape Town . . . The black people, we rush into town on the taxis and we need to rush out of town. At a time many decades ago we lived and loved and laboured here. Nothing [reminds us of that history] . . . and so leave [the site] as a memorial to Mr. Gonzalez that lived there, Mrs. de Smidt that lived there. The poor of the area – the fishermen, the domestic workers, the people that swept the streets here. Memorialise that. Leave the bones there . . . That is a site they have owned for the first time in their lives *het hulle stukkie grond* [they have a little piece of ground]. Leave them in that ground. Why find now in the gentility of this new dispensation a place which they have no connection with? (2003b: 18–19)

Mongezi Guma, one of the facilitators of the meeting, said in his closing remarks:

How do we deal with the intangibles of people’s lives that were wasted? . . . [This is not just about] an individual or family. It is not just about that. It is about people who got thrown away literally . . . I’m trying to move SAHRA away from simply a legalistic decision. (2003b: 20–1)

On 1 September, despite a clear weight of opinion at the third public meeting opposed to the exhumations, Pumla Madiba, the CEO of SAHRA, announced a resumption of archaeological work at the site. In a statement to the press she said ‘[out] of respect the skeletons will be moved’, a formulation which echoes the terms of Hart’s email to the developer. She said: ‘Many of the people who objected were highly emotional and did not give real reasons why the skeletons should not be relocated’ (Kassiem, 2003: 1).

A feature of the period leading up to the announcement appears to have been a growing anxiety on the part of SAHRA over the cost of expropriation, and the possibility of legal action on the part of the developer. A leaked internal memo to SAHRA’s Archaeology, Palaeontology, Meteorite and Heritage Object Committee (the permit-issuing committee in this case) expresses the concern that should the site be conserved as a heritage site it would have ‘disastrous consequences for the developer who will presumably appeal against the decision and may instigate litigation against SAHRA and the city’. The Committee is informed that it is ‘imperative that a responsible decision be made by SAHRA and the city . . . The matter is urgent, as the apartments in the development have been pre-sold and every delay means that the expenses are increasing’ (PPPC, 2003). Minutes of a meeting of 8 August give an insight into the manner in which SAHRA was interpreting its mandate: ‘We as SAHRA staff are employed for our



experience and we are here to make the final decisions for the public' (SAHRA, 2003a: 4).

On 4 September the Hands Off Prestwich Street Ad Hoc Committee (HOC) was launched. At this point opposition to the exhumations shifted outside the officially mandated process of public consultation, to civil society and the politics of mass action. On 12 September the Hands Off Committee lodged an appeal with SAHRA calling for a halt to the exhumations and 'a full and extended process of community consultation' (HOC, 2003: 3). The appeal document notes that '[for] a large section of Cape Town's community, whose existence and dignity has for so long been denied, the discovery and continued preservation of the Prestwich Street burial ground can symbolically restore their memory and identity'. It continues:

[the] needs of archaeology as a science seem to have been given precedence over other needs: the needs of community socio-cultural history, of collective remembering and of acknowledging the pain and trauma related to the site and this history that gave rise to its existence.

In opposing the exhumations it argues that '[exhumation] makes impossible a whole range of people's identifications with that specific physical space in the city. Such a removal echoes, albeit unintentionally, the apartheid regime's forced removals from the same area' (2003: 8).

The date set for a tribunal hearing to consider the appeal was 23 October. In the run-up to the hearing the Hands Off Committee organized regular candle-lit vigils at the Prestwich Street site on Sunday evenings. A billboard was erected outside St George's Cathedral, a symbolic site of anti-apartheid protest, with the slogan: 'Stop the exhumations! Stop the desecration!' Lunchtime pickets were held in the city centre. On 19 November the SAHRA-convened Appeals Committee handed down a written ruling. The excavation permit awarded to the ACO was revalidated and the rights of the developer upheld. The Hands Off Committee reconvened as the Prestwich Place Project Committee (PPPC) to launch an appeal directly to the Minister of Arts and Culture. A letter of appeal was lodged with the Ministry on 12 January 2004. Supporting documents call upon the Minister to expropriate the site and 'to conserve Prestwich Place as a National Heritage Site' and a site of conscience (PPPC, 2003). The vision of the PPPC was to preserve the Prestwich Street site as a *vrijplaats*, an open space for memory and identity. The term is Christian Ernsten's, a graduate student in the Centre for African Studies at the University of Cape Town who followed events closely. He writes: 'The Dutch word means something in between the English "shelter" and "free zone", a space of security and creativity at the same time' (Ernsten, 2006).

By this stage all of the human remains on the original site had been exhumed and were in temporary storage in Napier House, a building on the adjacent block, itself to be demolished as part of the Prestwich Place

development. During the SAHRA appeal process the ACO had applied for permits to disinter human remains believed to exist under West Street, and the adjacent block containing Napier House. This was expected to result in the exposure of a further 800–1000 bodies. On 21 April 2004 – Freedom Day in South Africa – the remains were ceremonially transferred from Napier House to the mortuary of Woodstock Day Hospital, on the other side of the city. Some of the remains were carried in procession through the city centre in 11 flag-draped boxes, one for each of the official language groups in the country. Muslim, Christian and Jewish religious leaders blessed the remains in a ceremony at the site prior to the procession. On 22 July the developer was informed that the appeal to the Minister had been dismissed and that construction activities on the site could continue. Terry Lester of the PPPC was reported to be ‘deeply saddened’. He said: ‘We’re acting the whore in this instance, bowing down to the god of development and selling a segment of our history’ (Gosling, 2004: 1).

Subsequently, the focus of attention has shifted to issues of memorialization and access. On 6 April 2005 two of Morris’s graduate students, Jacqui Friedling and Thabang Manyapelo, made a presentation to a combined meeting of SAHRA and the PPPC as part of an application to conduct basic anatomical research on the Prestwich Street remains. Their application was turned down, mainly on the basis of a negative response from the PPPC. An activist in the PPPC described this to me as a ‘rearguard action’: having failed in their initial objective of halting the exhumations and preserving the integrity of the site with its remains, their concern was to protect the remains against further invasive procedures. Significantly, this decision coincided with a change of leadership at SAHRA, with Phakamani Buthelezi replacing Pumla Madiba as chief executive officer. At a meeting on 17 September SAHRA’s Executive Committee resolved ‘not [to] approve basic anatomical research on the human remains exhumed from the Prestwich Place site’, effectively extending this decision into a moratorium on future research (SAHRA, 2005). It resolved ‘that the cultural remains may however be studied’. In response, Friedling said: ‘SAHRA has denied all South Africans the right to know about their heritage . . . The information we can get from these bones will make these people come alive again’ (Gosling, 2005).

■ POINTS OF FRACTURE

A starting point for my own reading of these events is the notion that Prestwich Street constitutes a ‘point of fracture’ (Edwards, 2001; Hayes et al., 2001) through which might be glimpsed the working out of a range of forces and interests in post-apartheid society. These forces and interests



have to do with issues of culture, identity and memory, but also with issues of citizenship, the possibilities and limitations of participatory politics, and the emergent shape and nature of a post-apartheid public sphere. In this sense there is more at stake than the ultimate provenience of the Prestwich Street dead, important as this is as an issue. It is through the unfolding of events around Prestwich Street that we catch the drift of contemporary practices and guiding ideas, that we descry the future. Following Clingman's reading of Gordimer, we might say that Prestwich Street writes 'a history of the future', is as much about post-apartheid urban imaginaries as it is about debates around the relation between archaeology and society, or the ethics and practices of public consultation.

A number of interesting divisions emerged, as it were, at the sharp end of the trowel at Prestwich Street. One was in the different institutional responses of the two public universities most closely tied to events, the historically black University of the Western Cape (UWC) and the historically white University of Cape Town. UCT-based scholars were generally pro-exhumation. In the early days of work on site the institution championed the excavation as a research opportunity. UCT provided most of the specialists that sat on the SAHRA-appointed SFRG. More recently, Alan Morris has become the most widely quoted UCT-based scholar in the public media on the matter of Prestwich Street (for example, in a statement in September 2005 describing the HOC/PPPC as a 'small, very vociferous, very bitter' group) (Gosling, 2005). UWC, on the other hand, has been a significant source of support for the HOC, as well as being the institutional base for the majority of scholars critical of the handling of the site by SAHRA and the ACO. In part this reflects disciplinary differences. UCT's response was led by archaeologists and human biologists. At UWC, which has no department of archaeology, the response was led by historians in the Department of History and the Institute for Historical Research.

Making sense of these different responses would entail a careful account of the different intellectual trajectories of the disciplines of history and archaeology in South Africa, as well as the different institutional histories of UCT and UWC: the former a liberal, English-medium institution proud of its history as a (relatively) open university under apartheid; the latter the 'home of the struggle' in the Western Cape in the 1980s, currently renegotiating its identity as an historically black university in the competitive contexts of a globalizing higher education sector. For present purposes, we might note that the events around Prestwich Street leave open a number of questions concerning UCT's involvement as an institution. These include questions of accountability in the relations between an institution which styles itself as 'a world-class African university' and the different publics that it serves, and in which, notionally at least, it is embedded. They also include more focused questions of research ethics, and the issue of non-compliance with international protocols like the Vermillion Accord.

As well as differences between institutions, there were significant differences within institutions, with key individuals playing a role in determining institutional responses in different periods. A close reading of the transcript shows the extent to which Janette Deacon, a trained archaeologist and chair of the relevant permitting committee, and Mary Leslie, the head of archaeology at SAHRA, were responsible for orienting SAHRA's institutional response in the crucial period leading up to the first public meeting. Two features of this response are of particular significance. The first is the manner in which the notion of total exhumation came to be accepted by SAHRA and the SFRG at an early date not only as a preferred option, but as a given. This was despite the fact that the National Heritage Resources Act explicitly provides for the possibility of non-exhumation in the case of contested sites. The second is what has been termed the 'archaeologizing' of the research process around Prestwich Street: that is, the extent to which the problem was framed as an archaeological one, to the exclusion of other methodologies and forms of investigation, notably social history and oral history. It was archaeologists who led the response of the SFRG, and who sat on the platform at the first public meeting in a representative capacity as scientists and holders of expert knowledge. It was only somewhat later in the process, once the majority of the remains had been exhumed, that the notion of 'multi-disciplinary research' begins to appear in the SAHRA transcript.

From a legal point of view a number of questionable decisions and actions were entered into under SAHRA's purview in the period leading up to the first public meeting. The first was the decision to run the public consultation process in tandem with the 'archaeological investigation'. Normally the 60-day notification period would precede any work on site. The second is the fact that a full seven weeks were allowed to elapse before the first public meeting was held, close to the end of the notification period. The third was to allow approximately 500 bodies to be exhumed on a permit for a 'rescue exhumation', specifically described as a 'preliminary investigation' designed to establish the parameters for a public consultation process (SAHRA, 2003e). This is a scenario which a UWC-based colleague has described as a 'mass harvesting' of human remains. To the extent that the presence of human remains would inhibit a luxury residential development, and to the extent that delays in construction would affect the profitability of the project, at an early stage Prestwich Street was understood by the various players as a win all/lose all situation, in which the unstated bottom line was total, speedy exhumation. Ultimately the most questionable aspect of SAHRA's response was the manner in which it worked closely with the ACO and the developer to facilitate this process.

Finally, a number of tensions emerged between national and regional heritage priorities which are instructive to the extent that they cut to the heart of issues of race and class at play in the events around Prestwich Street. It has been suggested that one of the reasons why the PPPC failed



in its appeal to the Minister was that this was seen as a ‘Cape’ issue, tied to Coloured identity politics. In a South African context the notion of Colouredness denotes a complex amalgamation of creole or mestizo identities, with the descendants of Khoisan groups and people imported as slaves from the Dutch possessions at Batavia. The creolized nature of identity politics at the Cape, much like the hybrid nature of Prestwich Street site, with its hotchpotch of the urban poor, is in tension with national heritage priorities articulated in terms of ‘Africanization’, and accounts of essentialized (black) African cultural histories. Thus it is relevant that most of the archaeological contractors and students who worked on the site are white, and that many of the activists of the HOC are Coloured, just as it is relevant that the CEO of SAHRA at the time and the Minister of Arts and Culture are black and that the developer is white. However, rather than finding in the events a simple fable of racial antagonism, they arguably represent a more complex convergence between new (black) and historical (white) elites, and the continued marginalization of black and Coloured urban working-class histories.

More generally, they speak of a conception of heritage in post-apartheid South Africa which remains essentialized around the inverted terms and tropes of colonial discourse: in which the ‘blackness’ of ‘Africa’ replaces the whiteness of apartheid. Part of the value of Prestwich Street – a value whose loss we may only see clearly in the years to come – was in reminding us of the essential nature of Cape Town as a creolized and cosmopolitan place, an entrepôt and incipient world city in the globalism of colonialism. It was this conception of Cape Town that was replaced by the apartheid conception of the *moederstad* (mother city), a little bit of Europe on the dark tip of Africa. And it was the practice of forced removals, like the forced removals that affected the black former residents of Green Point, which gave form to this conception.

■ AN IMAGE OF SCIENCE

Centrally at stake at Prestwich Street is what the historian of science, Yehuda Elkana, has called an ‘image of science’ in archaeology (Elkana, 1981). Most of the archaeologists involved in the events around Prestwich Street were anxious to defend an idea of archaeology as an instrumentalist science concerned with the ‘facts in the ground’. Generally epistemologically positivist (rather than constructivist), this is a notion of archaeology that actively distances itself from broader issues of culture and society, except in the case of educational archaeology, which is framed as the transmission of archaeological knowledge to a receptive public (‘giving [them] back their history’). In this conception of archaeology as science, engaging with

historical and contextual factors becomes framed as the 'intrusion' of 'politics'. In deep ways, it is regarded as compromising the integrity of archaeological interpretation, which finally rests only on 'the data', understood not as a series of constructed knowledge objects, but as hard and discoverable units of information – a bit like artefacts themselves. In fact, the homology between discovered artefacts and units of data is a deep one in archaeology, and helps to explain why archaeologists generally have been so wedded to a 'discovery' mode of knowledge as found rather than produced. Thus, the idea that archaeology should take place at a distance from society – that it should try as far as possible to filter out the noise of heritage claims, identity politics, and the busy play of interest in the post-colony – is both a starting point and an article of faith for many archaeologists in South Africa.

Two comments need to be made about this image of science in archaeology. The first is that, of course, this is not limited to South African archaeology, but constitutes a normative mode of archaeology globally. In this sense, the events of Prestwich Street demonstrate the specific, local consequences of a more general theoretical position. The second is that rather than being a new development, this is a position with deep historical roots in South Africa. Understanding the nature of the response to Prestwich Street, as well as understanding the extent to which archaeologists felt maligned and misunderstood, means understanding something of this history.

Like archaeology in many parts of Africa, South African archaeology began as a hobby practised by colonial administrators, military officers, missionaries, and others (Robertshaw, 1990; Shepherd, 2002b). In the 1920s and 1930s it was professionalized and institutionalized, partly through the agency of John Goodwin (1900–1959), a pioneering figure on the local archaeological scene (Shepherd, 2002a). Until the late 1940s South African archaeology was practised as a colonial science under the sign of the transnationalism of British Empire. The onset of formal apartheid was experienced as a setback by the largely Anglophile discipline, from which it only recovered in the late 1960s. Two events were central to the re-emergence of South African archaeology in its contemporary form. The first was a period of rapid economic growth through the mid- to late 1960s, which encouraged a modernizing apartheid state to spend money on developing its universities and museums. The second was the influence of the North American New Archaeology (Shepherd, 2003).

By the early 1970s South African archaeology had effectively shifted its metropolitan allegiance from British to North American archaeology. The New Archaeology solved the conundrum of a largely state-funded discipline ostensibly given to the writing of black history under apartheid by insisting on a radical divide between archaeology and society. Encouraged by the positivism, technicism and empiricism of the New Archaeology,



South African archaeologists passed the red-letter years of state repression, anti-apartheid struggle, and the various reprisals and clampdowns, immersed in the minutiae of the archaeological record. It also led to the irony of the archaeology of the South African Iron Age being explored and articulated in the same period as the doctrine of Black Consciousness was being expounded by the likes of Steve Biko, with its special emphasis on the integrity of the pre-colonial past, with no intellectual exchange between the two (Hall, 1984, 1990). What emerges most strongly from the period of the late 1970s and 1980s is not only the silence of archaeology on issues of politics and society, but the resolution *not* to know, the perception that it was not the place of archaeologists to comment on such matters, that they were a distraction from the job at hand. The nature of this silence is a matter of interpretation. Characterized by its defenders as being essentially disinterested, primarily theoretical and epistemological, and by its critics as being strategic, calculating and political, it would appear (in the nature of such things) to be both: calculating and self serving while rooted in a sincere interpretation of the role and responsibility of science; and well intentioned, with a strategic eye to survival under difficult conditions.

The major development in the post-apartheid period has been the influence of the discourse of cultural resource management. The origins of this development date back to the late 1980s, so that the advent of cultural resource management (CRM) locally closely maps the period of political transition in South Africa (Deacon, 1988; Hall, 1989). In this context, the significance of CRM discourse has been in providing archaeologists, already leery of social engagement, with a vocabulary and a set of practices through which to articulate a response to social transformation and the imperatives of post-apartheid society. The essential nature of the contemporary discipline might be said to be composed of the positivism, instrumentalism and scientism of the New Archaeology, with an overlay of cultural resource management discourse with its particular, and strictly delimited, notions of value, stakeholder participation, and the like.

Such a sketch is necessarily a caricature. It arguably describes the archaeological mainstream, and ignores many excellent and exceptional projects which challenge this legacy of unaccountability. Mainstream or not, it leaves us with a number of observations to take into the contexts around Prestwich Street. The first is that South African archaeology experienced the latter decades of apartheid as a period of unprecedented growth and development, and that the post-apartheid years have arguably been more difficult and uneven. The second is that from at least the late 1960s to the present there has remained intact in the discipline an image of science as something that takes place in isolation from society. Rather than social commentary or critique, the essential business of archaeology is interpreted as the gathering of information (or facts) related to the archaeological past. The third is that archaeology enters the stage heavily freighted with the

burden of its own history, that when a trowel enters the ground it establishes itself as an act which is overdetermined in advance, and that it is precisely in those areas that most concern us here – contested negotiations around notions of culture, identity and memory in the multiple public spheres that constitute post-apartheid society – that archaeology finds itself weakest, and least able to articulate a response.

■ RIVAL LANGUAGES OF CONCERN

Perhaps more than anything else, Prestwich Street presents itself as a struggle over language. We encounter Prestwich Street through a substantial, and growing, archive, which takes the form of records, minutes, reports, transcripts, submissions, film recordings, photographs, reminiscences, email exchanges, and so on.¹ One thinks of the different theatres or spheres of performance through which events were played out: the theatre of excavation, framed by the wire-link fence, with its crowd of curious onlookers; the theatre of public consultation, with its more-or-less conscious echoes of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process; the theatre of street protest, with its more-or-less conscious echoes of the anti-apartheid movement. At an early stage two distinct and opposed discourses emerged: on the one hand, the institutionally situated heritage management discourse of the pro-exhumation lobby; on the other hand, a nascent or emergent public heritage discourse based on an empathetic identification with the dead, and the needs of social restitution and reconciliation. Each, in turn, gave rise to what I have termed rival ‘languages of concern’ (Shepherd, 2006). Those arguing for exhumation did so on the basis of the scientific value of the remains as a source to access ‘hidden histories’. The proposal circulated by the SFRG at the first public meeting states:

These skeletons are also – literally – our history, the ordinary people of Cape Town, whose lives are not written in the official documents of the time. They did not leave possessions or archives. If we want to recover their history, then one of the most powerful ways to do so is through the study of their skeletons. (Sealy, 2003: 1)

In this case the semantic slide from ‘our history’ to ‘their history’ is instructive. A number of tropes emerged and were recycled by archaeologists throughout the process. At the second public meeting Belinda Mutti, an archaeologist, argued in favour of exhumation ‘to give history back to the people’ (Malan, 2003: 12). Liesbet Schiettecatte argued that ‘[leaving] bones leaves information unknown. Studying them brings them back to life . . .’ (p. 13). Mary Patrick argued to ‘[continue the] exhumation – otherwise half a story is being told’ (p. 13). At a public level this desire to ‘give history



back to the people' and 'bring the bones to life' was mediated by the technical discourse of cultural resource management, with its rituals of 'public consultation', and its circumscribed notions of value, need and interest. The double valency given to notions of 'respect' and 'dignity' by SAHRA and others had its counterpart in a pragmatic language focused on 'real reasons', 'sensible decisions', and the fact that 'life must go on'.

In opposition to this discourse the Hands Off Committee emphasized the language of memory and personal reminiscence. They sought to articulate an alternative set of values (African values, spiritual values), and alternative notions of space/time (the notion of the site as a heritage site or a site of conscience; and in one memorable intervention, the notion of 'time for the dead'). They insisted on recalling a more recent past of apartheid and forced removals, as well as a deep past of slavery and colonialism. More generally, they sought to insert the events at Prestwich Street into a prevailing debate in post-apartheid society around notions of truth, reconciliation and restitution. Building on this, it is possible to observe a number of instructive convergences in the events around Prestwich Street. The first is a convergence between the practices of troping that I have described and a positivist conception of archaeology as science, resulting in the production of observable data and 'information'. The notion of history that emerges – the history that is to be 'given back to the people' – becomes severely curtailed, as essentially archaeological data relating to the provenience of the burials and physical, chemical and anthropometric measurements of the bones themselves.

A second convergence is between the discourse of cultural resource management and a political strategy of containment. Particularly instructive in this case, I would argue, was the manner in which the language and practices of CRM actively discouraged the emergence of radically new identities and refigurings of the public sphere, through a narrowed conception of need, interest, value, and the mechanics of public participation. The notion of 'heritage' that emerges is itself narrowed and ambivalent, internally divided between the promise of individual restitution and reconciliation and the practice of restricted access and bureaucratized control. Human bones as stories or as books, with each bone a part of the story; bones as parts of a puzzle; bones as history; the work of the archaeologist characterized as a process of bringing bones back to life: rhetorically speaking, such formulations are of real interest. They speak of a particular conception of the knowledge object, and a particular conception of archaeology as science, even as they set in place the ironies involved in taking the bones away from one group of people (the anti-exhumation lobbyists of the HOC), in the name of returning them as history to another (un-named) group of people.

For myself, writing as an archaeologist in South Africa with a position on Prestwich Street that is different from the majority of my colleagues, in that

I have been opposed to the exhumations, and supportive of the arguments of the HOC, what has interested me most in the events around Prestwich Street has been the glimmer of an alternative set of possibilities – of ‘newness’ – present in the discourse of the HOC. Prestwich Street encourages us to revisit and re-examine core disciplinary practices and ideas, and to consider alternative ways of knowing the archaeological past and of approaching the problematics of heritage and memory in post-apartheid society. It raises the possibility of alternative archaeologies, even of alternative epistemologies. We associate archaeology with a radical – a prying – ‘will to knowledge’, every excavation a mini-enactment of the Enlightenment injunction to know, to uncover. Prestwich Street makes the argument for an alternative kind of archaeology: an archaeology of silence, of secrecy, of closure (rather than disclosure). Adapting a term from Derrida, the archaeologist Keisuke Sato has written of ‘archi-violence’ as the violence done against sites and remains in the process of archaeological investigation (Sato, 2006). This violence is physical and material, but it is also disciplinary and epistemological, the violence of certain methodologies and of certain ways of knowing.

How has the archi-violence of Prestwich Street differentially affected the communities of the living and the dead? In what sense do physical and chemical measurements of human remains and notes on their provenience constitute history, and more specifically a history which is ‘given back to the people’ as ‘their history’? Are there cases in which the current of sympathy between the living and the imagined community of the dead might be more profound in the absence of such information? How do we mediate between the multiple possible ways of ‘knowing the past’ in the case of a site like Prestwich Street, beyond simply asserting the priority of archaeology as science? As archaeologists in the post-colony, how do we take account of the discipline’s own history – its gaps and silences, its unexamined practices – in formulating our approach? Do we enter the debate from the perspective of the priority of positivist science, flourished like a banner before us, or more modestly, as belated arrivals at a society-wide discussion on science, citizenship and accountability? The events around Prestwich Street raise a tangle of epistemological and ontological issues, but these resolve themselves around a simple set of questions: Are the bones of the Prestwich Street dead artefacts? Or are they ancestors? And under what conditions might they be both?

■ POST-APARTHEID URBAN IMAGINARIES

And so, what of post-apartheid urban imaginaries? I have on the desk in front of me a large-format, glossy brochure for ‘The Rockwell: luxury



De Waterkant living', produced by Dogon Gavrill Properties, the estate agents responsible for selling the development (Dogon and Gavrill, 2005). The Rockwell, which is currently under construction on the Prestwich Street site, will consist of 103 'New York-style' apartments, plus parking bays, a private gym, a restaurant, a deli, and a swimming pool. The historical point of reference for the development is the Jazz Age of early twentieth-century New York. According to the brochure:

Inspired by the early 1900 buildings of downtown Manhattan, The Rockwell displays an inherent richness and warmth. It has been designed to have an upmarket industrial New York feel. Textured raw rock, brick and plaster are set against smooth glass and tempered steel. (p. 2)

This is because:

At the turn of the previous century, they did design right. Not only because it was classical in form and function. Not only because it was the birth of a new age and an explosion of fresh ideas. But because they did it with soul. (p. 1)

Doing it 'with soul' becomes a refrain, and the rest of the brochure makes reference to 'Rock & Soul', 'Pure Soul', 'Rich Soul', 'Style & Soul', 'Rhythm & Soul', and (obscurely) 'Deli & Soul'. The brochure continues:

It was the beginning of a new era. A time of industry. It was the industrial revolution. And with this era came the music, the freedom of spirit and the romanticism. It is in this spirit that The Rockwell was conceived. (p. 1)

By way of summary, it declares in bold type:

The craftsmanship must have character. The design must have heart. The Rockwell has it all. (p. 1)

The brochure is richly illustrated with photographs, which fall into two types. The first are pictures of clean, depopulated interiors. Linen and pale wood, dusted free (as it were) of history, of unwelcome associations, and the stain of the earth below. The other category of pictures illustrates the notion of 'luxury De Waterkant living': caviar perched on a wedge of toast, a bowl of ripe figs, rounds of sushi on a plate, coffee emerging from a spigot, a reclining woman looking out from a hot-pink boudoir.

This sort of thing is familiar from promotional campaigns – the overblown language, the hype and the jive – at the same time it is profoundly jarring, not so much post-modern pastiche as a cynical annihilation of history. The full force of the notion of 'forced removals' – a phrase used by the HOC to describe the exhumation and relocation of the Prestwich Street dead – strikes home. It is as though history, memory, every rooted association between a group of people and a site on the landscape is evacuated, pulled up at the roots, to be replaced by a copy-writer's whimsy. Prestwich Street becomes a site of instantiation of a new kind of post-apartheid urban imaginary, one in which history is imagined by the

victors and beneficiaries, and in which victims have no place outside of the borders of memorial parks and heritage precincts. It is also, profoundly, a site of globalization. It has become a commonplace that the period of political transition in South Africa coincided with the concerted effects of globalization. Part social experiment, part vale of tears, Prestwich Street, like the adjacent Waterfront, becomes a site of instantiation of a new kind of global urban imaginary, in which places are stripped of specific histories and local identifications, and repackaged and rebranded to meet the tastes of a generalized elite, imagined in terms of the markers of 'cosmopolitanism': sushi, espresso, and 'New York-style' living.

This is not a new or even an unusual phenomenon in post-apartheid society. Martin Hall and Pia Bombardella have written about the effects of the 'experiential economy' at sites like GrandWest Casino, Gold Reef City, and 'Montecasino' (a Tuscan themed casino and entertainment complex) (Hall and Bombardella, 2005). Leslie Witz has tracked the origins and development of Cape Town's 'township tour' circuit (Witz, 2006). Nigel Wordens's pioneering studies of Cape Town's Victoria and Albert Waterfront examined the ways in which heritage was constructed and contested at a prime tourist destination (Worden, 1996, 1997). What makes Prestwich Street different is the imminence of the materiality of the past, and the tragic/ironic distance between the charnel house in the ground and The Rockwell's 'Deli & Soul'. What makes it different, too, is the passionate identification of the living descendants and inheritors of the HOC and the felt presence of the Prestwich Street dead, frightening and implacable as the dead always seem, especially in their resurfacing, but also curiously vulnerable in their cardboard boxes in the Woodstock Day Hospital.

■ IN THE POST-COLONY

In many ways Prestwich Street was that rarest of phenomena for heritage managers and practitioners, a spontaneous, deeply felt, community-based identification with a site and its histories. Properly speaking it needs to be understood in the context of other popular or 'grassroots' social movements in post-apartheid society. The District Six Foundation, the parent body of a community social history museum that works with 'the experiences of forced removal and with memory and cultural expression as resources for solidarity and restitution' (Rassool, 2006: 1), is one significant example that comes to mind. Another is the Treatment Action Campaign, a public information and advocacy organization that has challenged the denialism of the government around HIV/AIDS and campaigns for affordable anti-retroviral treatment (TAC, 2006). These various organizations have in common a concern with contesting the nature and extent of citizenship in the post-apartheid state,



exploring the possibilities of participatory politics, and testing rights and entitlements under the new constitution – in the broadest sense, giving shape and substance to a post-apartheid public sphere. That heritage managers and archaeologists showed themselves so reluctant to acknowledge the broader context of events at Prestwich Street, that they so consistently opted for a narrow interpretation of rights, interests and accountability where there was space for a more visionary response, represents a significant failure, and places in a minor key subsequent discussions around ‘memorialization’ and ‘multi-disciplinary research’.

In an immediate sense there were a number of things at stake at Prestwich Street, and not the least of these is the nature of archaeology as a discipline in the post-colony. The surfacing of the buried dead is always experienced as a traumatic moment, as an eruption of the past in its most literal and inescapable aspect into the fabric of the present. But it is also a moment that takes us to our deepest selves and, socially speaking, confronts us with profound energies. In a transitional social context (and what society is not in transition?) these are among the energies that transform us and the society of which we are a part, that aid us in our task of ‘becoming’. Perhaps, after all, Prestwich Street describes what the historian Premesh Lalu has called a ‘history of the present’ (rather than a history of the future). By this he means that the condition of post-coloniality requires a form of history that constantly interrupts and unsettles the present, especially the narratives of the ‘nation’ (Lalu and Harris, 1996). Swirling, heterodox, contested: the energies of the Prestwich Street dead are still among us. For the living, the task becomes how to interpret these energies as a force for the good rather than as a threat, how they might be harnessed to generate not only heat but light, and a greater understanding of the place in which we find ourselves as fellow citizens who stand on opposite sides of a divided history.

By now I hope that it is clear that the case that I want to make here is concerned with the inevitability of engaging as archaeologists with what I want to term the ‘necessary entanglements’ of life in the post-colony. Furthermore, that this is not done as a penance, or as part of the price to be paid for working in the kind of edgy social contexts that define post-apartheid South Africa, but rather because it is through an informed and self-aware engagement with issues of culture, identity and memory in contemporary society that we renew and rethink our own practice as archaeologists. How attenuated – how ‘thin’, and ultimately how unviable – becomes a version of archaeology which turns its back on such issues, which marks off for itself a territory in the name of science as the untrammelled pursuit of verifiable facts. Neither does this only apply to archaeology in South Africa, or in post-colonial contexts. One way of reading the history of archaeology under apartheid is in terms of a loss of constituency, and the divorce between archaeology and society. Equally, one

way of reading the history of archaeology as a global discipline founded in the contexts of colonialism is in terms of the imposition of a set of methodologies and epistemologies on non-Western people and territories, the capture of local histories and material cultures, and the replacement of whole structures of feeling and modes of knowledge relating to the deep past. What better source of renewal for the discipline as a whole than to confront seriously the contemporary legacies of these ideas and desires? Is it an exaggeration to say that in the ground zero of Prestwich Street we might conceivably find the questions which allow us to rethink and reimagine what we do as archaeologists?

For the discipline as a whole Prestwich Street is a cutting edge, always an uncomfortable place to be. It plays itself out in terms of notions of imagined community, the unrequited legacies of slavery but also of forced removals, complex negotiations between local urgencies and global dynamics, the relation between rooted histories and simulacra like *The Rockwell*, a politics which is profound and troubling but also strategic and opportunistic, and in terms of rival ideas of science and a contested set of disciplinary and institutional histories. But it is also – and pre-eminently – a story of state control, exercised through the capture and institutionalization of the dead and their possessions, the bureaucratization of private yearnings, and the instantiation of particular regimes of care and languages of concern. One form of convergence between the disciplinary interests of archaeology and the workings of the state may be seen in those primary means of control: the map, the plan, the grid-line. It is the lines of the plan or grid, finally, that determine the differential fate of objects and consign them to particular regimes of care. A closing image, then, as a way of taking leave of Prestwich Street: The dead of Green Point extend far beyond the city block constituted by the Prestwich Street site, a fact which is currently causing anxiety and controversy on the part of city managers and developers. Neither does the interment of the dead respectfully follow the lines of a map, so that bodies fall either side of the notional boundaries that constitute city blocks, plots of private land, edges of streets. Such, indeed, is the fate of a handful of the Prestwich Street dead. One looks closely at the sides of the excavation to see the signs of truncation: a torso which extends under the roadway, legs which have been exhumed and form part of the collection in the Woodstock Day Hospital. I am reminded of a line: ‘To remember is to dismember’.

Acknowledgement

A number of people and institutions have assisted with the preparation of this article. I would like to thank my colleagues in the Project on Public Pasts, Leslie Witz, Ciraj Rassool, Premesh Lalu and Noeleen Murray, for advice and comments. The usual disclaimers apply. My thanks go to Christian Ernten and Gerard Ralphs,



graduate students in the Centre for African Studies, for assistance in constructing the archive around Prestwich Street. I gratefully acknowledge financial assistance from the National Research Foundation of South Africa. Particular thanks are due to Eustacia Riley and Janine Dunlop for their exemplary research assistance.

Note

- 1 Part of the story of Prestwich Street is the story of the dispersal and proliferation of sources. At the same time, the status of these sources is ambiguous, existing as they do in a semi-public domain, or in a public/private domain. I would like to place on record my appreciation of the role played by Antonia Malan, and by Andre van der Merwe, the Project Facilitator acting for the developer, in allowing substantial access to their personal archives on Prestwich Street. SAHRA, a publicly accountable body, only allowed me to copy material from their archive after protracted negotiations, and after I had signed a release form saying that I would not use the material to 'perjure' the organization or its representatives.

References

- Boym, S. (2001) *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books.
- Clingman, S. (1986) *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside*. Johannesburg: Ravan.
- Cox, G. (1999) 'Cobern Street Burial Ground: Investigating the Identity and Life Histories of the Underclass of Eighteenth Century Cape Town', Unpublished MA thesis, University of Cape Town.
- Davids, M.N. (2003) Fax from Imam Davids to Antonia Malan. Cape Town.
- Deacon, H.J. (1988) 'Guest Editorial: What Future Has Archaeology in South Africa?', *South African Archaeological Bulletin* 43: 3–4.
- Dogon, D. and G. Gavrill (2005) *The Rockwell: Luxury de Waterkant Living*. Cape Town: Dogon Gavrill Properties.
- Edwards, E. (2001) *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums*. Oxford: Berg.
- Elkana, Y. (1981) 'A Programmatic Attempt at an Anthropology of Knowledge', in E. Mendelsohn and Y. Elkana (eds) *Sciences and Cultures: Anthropological and Historical Studies of the Sciences*, pp. 1–76. Boston: Reidel.
- Ernstsen, C. (2006) *Stylizing Cape Town: Problematizing the Heritage Management of Prestwich Street*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town.
- Gordimer, N. (1956) *Six Feet of the Country: Short Stories*. London: Gollancz.
- Gordimer, N. (1974) *The Conservationist*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Gosling, M. (2004) 'Exhumation of Prestwich Street Skeletons Has Been Given Go-ahead, Says Developer', *Cape Times*, 23 July, p. 1.
- Gosling, M. (2005) 'UCT Students Exasperated as Sahra Blocks Bones Study', *Cape Times*, 22 November, p. 7.
- Hall, M. (1984) 'The Burden of Tribalism: The Social Context of Southern African Iron Age Studies', *American Antiquity* 49: 455–67.

- Hall, M. (1989) 'Contract Archaeology in South Africa', *South African Archaeological Bulletin* 44: 63–4.
- Hall, M. (1990) "'Hidden History": Iron Age Archaeology in Southern Africa', in P. Robertshaw (ed.) *A History of African Archaeology*, pp. 59–77. London: James Currey.
- Hall, M. and P. Bombardella (2005) 'Las Vegas in Africa', *Journal of Social Archaeology* 5(1): 5–25.
- Hart, T. (2003a) Email from Tim Hart to Andre van der Merwe and Ari Efstathoui. Cape Town.
- Hart, T. (2003b) *Heritage Impact Assessment of West Street and Erf 4721 Green Point, Cape Town*. Prepared for Styleprops 120 (Pty) Ltd, December. Cape Town: University of Cape Town.
- Hayes, P., J. Silvester and P. Hartmann (2001) 'Photography, History and Memory', in W. Hartmann, J. Silvester and P. Hayes (eds) *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History*, pp. 2–9. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.
- HOC (2003) *Substantiation of Appeal Submitted by the Hands Off Prestwich Street Ad Hoc Committee*. Cape Town: Hands Off Prestwich Street Ad Hoc Committee.
- Kassiem, A. (2003) 'Public Given Time to Appeal Against Moving Graves', *Cape Times*, 3 September, p. 6.
- Lalu, P. and B. Harris (1996) 'Journeys from the Horizons of History: Text, Trial and Tales in the Construction of Narratives of Pain', *Current Writing: Text and Reception in South Africa* 8(2): 24–38.
- Malan, A. (2003) *Prestwich Place. Exhumation of Accidentally Discovered Burial Ground in Green Point, Cape Town [Permit no. 80/03/06/001/51]: Public Consultation Process 9 June to 18 August 2003*. Prepared by Dr Antonia Malan, Cultural Sites and Resources Forum for the South African Heritage Resources Agency and the Developer. Cape Town: Cultural Sites and Resources Forum.
- Mbembe, A. (2004) 'Aesthetics of Superfluidity', *Public Culture* 16: 373–405.
- PPPC (2003) *Submission to DAC Tribunal*. Cape Town: Prestwich Place Project Committee.
- Rassool, C. (2006) 'Community Museums, Memory Politics and Social Transformation: Histories, Possibilities and Limits', in I. Karp, C. Kratz, L. Szwaja and T. Ybarra-Frautso (eds) *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Robertshaw, P. (1990) *A History of African Archaeology*. London: James Currey.
- SAHRA (2003a) *Minutes of Meeting of the Prestwich Place Exhumation Project, 8 August 2003*. Cape Town: South African Heritage Resources Agency.
- SAHRA (2003b) *Minutes of South African Heritage Resources Agency Public Consultation Meeting held on 29th August 2003 at St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Somerset Rd, Green Point*. Cape Town: South African Heritage Resources Agency.
- SAHRA (2003c) *Minutes. Prestwich Place Burial Ground: Meeting between SAHRA, HWC, City Council and Department of Public Works*. Cape Town: South African Heritage Resources Agency.
- SAHRA (2003d) *Minutes. Prestwich Place Burial Site: Meeting with Archaeologists and Academics*. Cape Town: South African Heritage Resources Agency.



- SAHRA (2003e) *Permit No. 80/03/06/001/51 issued by the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) Archaeology, Palaeontology, Meteorites and Heritage Objects Permit Committee to T.J.G. Hart of the Archaeology Contracts Office*, pp. 1–4. Cape Town: University of Cape Town.
- SAHRA (2005) *Minutes of Presentations and Discussions for Proposed Research Proposals on the Prestwich Place Human Remains*. Cape Town: South African Heritage Resources Agency.
- Sato, K. (2006) 'The Site of Memory, the Site of Things: Against Identity Politics', in *World Archaeological Congress Intercongress on Cultural Heritage*, pp. 1–4. Osaka.
- Schreiner, O. (1982) *The Story of an African Farm*. London: Penguin.
- Sealy, J. (2003) *A Proposal for the Future of the Prestwich Street Remains*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town.
- Shepherd, N. (2002a) 'Disciplining Archaeology: The Invention of South African Prehistory, 1923–1953', *Kronos* 28: 127–45.
- Shepherd, N. (2002b) 'The Politics of Archaeology in Africa', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31: 189–209.
- Shepherd, N. (2003) 'State of the Discipline: Science, Culture and Identity in South African Archaeology', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29: 823–44.
- Shepherd, N. (2006) 'What Does it Mean to Give the Past Back to the People? Archaeology and Ethics in the Post-colony', in Y. Hamilakis and P. Duke (eds) *Archaeology and Capitalism: From Ethics to Politics*. London: UCL Press.
- Smallberg, M. (2003) Email from Mavis Smallberg to Antonia Malan. Cape Town.
- TAC (2006) Home Page of the Treatment Action Campaign. Cape Town (consulted 1 March 2006) : www.tac.org.za.
- Van der Merwe, A. (2003) *Report Submitted as Part of the Public Submission Process, August 2003*. Cape Town.
- Wheeder, M. (2003) Email from Michael Wheeder to Mogamat Kamedien. Cape Town.
- Witz, L. (2006) 'Museums on Cape Town's Township Tours', in N. Shepherd, M. Hall and N. Murray (eds) *Desire Lines: Space, Memory and Identity in the Post-apartheid City*. London: Routledge.
- Worden, N. (1996) 'Contested Heritage at the Cape Town Waterfront', *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 2: 59–75.
- Worden, N. (1997) 'Contesting Heritage in a South African City: Cape Town', in B. Shaw and R. Jones (eds) *Contesting Urban Heritage*, pp. 31–61. Aldershot: Ashgate.

NICK SHEPHERD is a senior lecturer in the Centre for African Studies at the University of Cape Town, where he convenes the programme in public culture in Africa. He sits on the executive committee of the World Archaeological Congress, and is co-editor of the journal *Archaeologies: Journal of the World Archaeological Congress*. In 2004 he was based at Harvard University as a Mandela Fellow. He has published widely on issues of archaeology and society in Africa, and on issues of public history and heritage.