

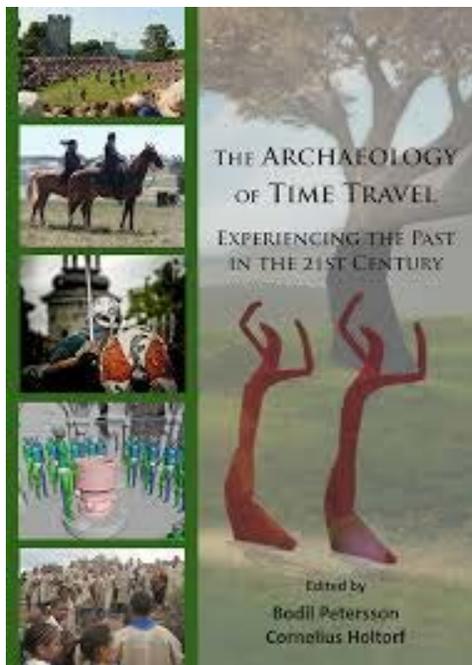
**Complutum**

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Petersson, Bodil y Holtorf, Cornelius Eds. (2017): *The Archaeology of Time Travel. Experiencing the past in the 21st Century*. Archaeopress Archaeology. 297 p. ISBN: 978-1-78491-500-1.



Time Travel is fashion again, even in Spain. With the success of *El Ministerio del Tiempo* (TVE 2015) an average of 2.5 million people have been following the adventures throughout History of the main characters, whose mission basically consists in saving History from those who want to pervert it. The idea is not completely new and Dr. Who (BBC 1963) has been doing so with his TARDIS for a long while, as well as many other fictional characters. However, when we talk about Archaeology and Time Travel, the concept goes far beyond the stands of a television show.

What is Time Travel then? “Time travel can be defined as an embodied experience and social practice in the present that brings to life a past or future reality” (Holtorf, p. 1). With this starting point for the book, one of the editors makes a clear statement of the topic, which

according to him, even Kristiansen (2001) found as the future of archaeological heritage presentation to the public. However, the key is in the “how” both technically and discursively. Therefore, the introductory chapter raises many issues that question the ethics of Time Traveling from numerous perspectives from the perpetuation of gender or ethnic inequality, to the politics of time travelling.

In order to address all these issues, the book is distributed in five parts that focus on different topics around Time Travelling. All of them follow a similar structure where two or three chapters are followed by a couple of comments, trying to build a dialogue between the different authors and topics in what ends up as a very dynamic book where maybe not many questions are answered, but all topics are deeply debated and criticised.

Part one focuses on the possibilities of virtual Time Travelling. New technologies are developing innovative ways to live the past in 3D worlds where we can easily become part of a lively experience. From two case studies (Chapters 2 and 3), Per Stenborg and Isto Huvila debate the Time Travel Paradox (any change in the past by a traveller may have affected the present) and the different approaches to Time Travelling (as observer or participant) respectively. Interesting comments over the experience of both case studies that, however, take for granted the real limitations and possibilities of these virtual environments in a moment technology changes very fast and our position within those changes is not specially good. With dozens of private initiatives (mainly around archaeogaming) that are starting to include VR experiences, Time Travelling is not only (never was) our field (i.e. on accuracy, Copplestone 2016). Nevertheless, the use of VR within archaeological/historical

Time Travelling is clearly an issue to delve into, not in the future... but now.

Part two is about the educational capabilities of Time Travelling, my particular favourite of the book. Chapter 4 (Westergren) offers a proposal of Time Travel as a tool for education in contemporary society values, aiming social cohesion and community building from a critical (and sensual) approach to the past. Using several examples, it shows how the Time Travel method can actually work. Chapter 5 (Ammert and Gustafsson) focuses on the possibilities of meaning making from the study of participant perspectives on Time Travel. The comment by Cecilia Trenter agrees on the possibilities abovementioned, but maybe lacks the inwards critical view to a model that can also be (and sometimes is) misused. The educational value of Time Travel is unquestionable, but while positive outcomes can be achieved (see Chapter 4), History shows us a perverted use of the past for damaging political agendas. The ethical side of the use of Time Travel is crucial, even more than Taylor's (1991) ethics of authenticity highlighted along the texts.

The third part focuses in the most common Time Travel activity nowadays; Historical Re-enactment. With three chapters and two comments, where Roeland Paardekooper's comment and Holtorf's chapter are probably the most encouraging pieces. Holtorf shows the example of Lejre (Denmark), recently rebranded as *Land of Legends*, in an interesting marketing strategy that uses the results for the previous research on living the past as an amuse where, through stories of the past, you can embody and learn about it. He argues that archaeology nowadays is more about experiencing the past, a face-to-face embodied encounter with it. Paardekooper raises a very important question in this sense (p. 192); use archaeology to tell a story, or tell a story to convey archaeology? A balance that needs the collaboration of both parts, the audience and the performer, who are not necessarily different people. The conclusion is interesting, as experience is a priority over message. After all, as Kowialka says in the next part, "there is no real archaeology without fictional elements – there is no archaeology without time travel fantasy" (p. 213).

Fantasy is the *leitmotif* of the fourth part, devoted to cinema. Two chapters and two comments that delve into those pasts and futures

that never happened but still transport us to different times. Interestingly, as Laia Colomer points out in her comment, both chapters (9 and 10) focus on the materiality of the movies, but having in mind the political agenda behind them. We do not represent the past and the future innocently or even scientifically, but according to current interests. This critique is also applicable to archaeological interpretation in a general way and could not be alien to cinema.

The last part focuses on the bond between Time Travel and contemporary society with an interesting chapter by Michaela Fenske, who offers an ethnographic approach to the topic from the perspective of consumers, actors and scholars. Then, the interview to sociologist Erika Andersson Cederholm, delves into the market of Time Travel, mainly as a tourist product within the commoditization of experiences (and cultural heritage). Furthermore, the comments for this section offer an interesting debate around the role of Time Travel as refugee (Småberg) and the critical approach to new possible futures from it (Knudsen).

Actually, this last idea is somehow developed by Petersson in the concluding chapter, where he argues how Time Travel is based on anachronisms that are vital to understand ourselves and portray the past, the present and the future, being the sensual experience of Time Travelling a superb tool of imagination.

When dealing with the past, it is clear the present bias. When dealing with the future, imagination is quite free, but I would like to take one of the examples of this last chapter to make a point on the flaws of this model. *Star Trek* has certainly been a mirror to look at our future selves in terms of technology, but in regard of dress codes it is in some way wrong. Most futuristic Time Travels (when things go fairly well) portray very basic outfits as if the most efficient way of dressing in the future was keeping things simple, even uniform. But, if that is better, why are not doing it now too? If thinking that this would be a better future does not change our current dress code (as technology has actually changed), maybe we do not know ourselves that well, in the future, in the present, or in the past. A review is not the place to delve into this kind of paradox, but I find interesting how our limits are clearly shown with all the examples present in this

book and the debates around them. If I had to highlight a critic, I find most comments more a review of the chapters than a debate, but there is no doubt reflection and debate are encouraged for any reader with a will to think beyond the usual.

The concept of Time Travel is fairly clear, and does not need a machine to physically transport us anywhere. We do it everyday, imagining pasts, futures and even alternative presents. However, we are still behind in regard to the use of Time Travel as a real tool to engage society in the experience and

construction of discourses about the past. Maybe this is due to academic fear (this same one that cannot hear the words 'commercial' or even 'people'), or just due to time, expertise or tradition. What is true is the growing interest on a field that has always been there but we are starting to realise as an academic and professional niche for archaeology. This book can serve as a great starting point to gain interest in it, and it is downloadable for free in the web page of the editor, so there are no excuses to read it, reflect on it, and embrace Time Travelling.

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