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## Non-Places and Virtual Worlds

*As I pass through security screening and into the departure lounge, all thought shifts from the journey that has brought me here to the series of carefully orchestrated steps that will lead me from this place to my destination. I look around for the sign that will direct me towards my departure gate, checking my watch and noticing that I have less than an hour before boarding. I walk through the Duty Free store, past the aisles of discounted spirits and perfumes, indistinguishable liquids with only the bottle size and design to differentiate them. I join the queue to buy a cup of coffee and small bottle of water from Starbucks, before taking my seat in the far corner of the lounge, closest to what the sign tells me will be a twenty-minute walk to my departure gate. Out of the corner of my eye, I notice a scrap of pale blue carpet peeling away from the furniture fittings below my feet, to reveal a small triangle of green carpet underneath. In being presented with this insight into the building's stratigraphy, I think about other places where its particular histories are laid open, only to realize there are none. This is a place where history is banished beneath layers of fresh paint and carpet, where memories are erased like old furniture fittings, and where only the here and now seems to maintain a foothold. Not a scrap of peeling paint remains to tell the story of its former colour schemes, former histories, or traces of lives past. 'No place for an archaeologist,' I think, rising to my feet and starting my approach to departure gate G15...*

### INTRODUCTION

In previous chapters we have considered how we might take an archaeological approach to the contemporary or very recent past

in what would be recognized to be a fairly conventional series of archaeological ‘realms’—artefacts, places, and landscape. In this chapter, we will explore some of the ways in which an archaeological approach might be taken to some of the most distinctive features of late modernity. In Chapter 5, we explored a number of these features, highlighting non-places, the work of the imagination, and the virtual as key areas for archaeological inquiry. This chapter takes up some of the challenges of these new materialities (and, indeed, the new ‘virtualities’) of late modernity, considering the ways in which an archaeological approach to the contemporary world might help illuminate aspects of late modernity that have not previously been well understood. As in previous chapters in Part II, this chapter is broken into a number of sections reflecting broad themes relating to the distinctive features of late-modern everyday life—non-places; virtual worlds; experience economies and the work of the imagination; and hyperconsumerism and globalization.

## NON-PLACES

In Chapter 5 we looked in detail at Augé’s (1995) concept of the ‘non-place’. Augé uses this term to describe a whole series of spaces in contemporary society—airport lounges, shopping malls, motorways—that he suggests are to be distinguished from ‘places’, in the sense in which these spaces are not relational, historical, or concerned with the establishment of a sense of identity (all those things that characterize the traditional social anthropologist’s interest in ‘place’). These ‘non-places’ are primarily associated with the experience of travel or transit, and reflect the simultaneous time–space expansion and compression that he associates with late modernity. We suggested that such places rely not only on aspects of their generic design, but also on a series of ‘technologies of isolation’ that work together to produce a characteristic feeling of solitude and the emptying of consciousness discussed in Augé’s work. These technologies of isolation—the headphones of the in-flight entertainment system that one wears in the aeroplane, the iPod in the ears while working out at the gym, the isolation of the car as we drive

along the motorway, the silent banks of heads immersed in e-readers and mobile entertainment devices on public transport, both produce and are produced by a sense of hypermodern alienation that we can identify as a fundamental aspect of the late modern experience. But how might we approach such places archaeologically?

Let us start by taking an archaeological approach to the study of air travel. As with any journey, we first must decide where to start. Shall we begin with the global web of airports, regulated and synchronized with each other through international networks of travel and commerce involving air traffic controls, legal regulation, and globalized business firms, not to mention the millions of passengers who travel through them every day? At the level of the individual airport, itself a vast shopping and commercial hub, a microcosm of the globalized city? With the aeroplane, the site and technology of air travel that is the reason for the airport's existence? With the passengers, part of a network of inputs and outputs that flow through the space of the airport? Or with the millions of individual artefacts that make up the archaeology of air travel? Or should we consider all these aspects simultaneously, while focusing on individual sites and places, and on the artefacts found there? The sort of approach outlined in Chapter 5 to actor-networks and John Law's (2004) work on research method and 'mess' provide a tool to help us do this.

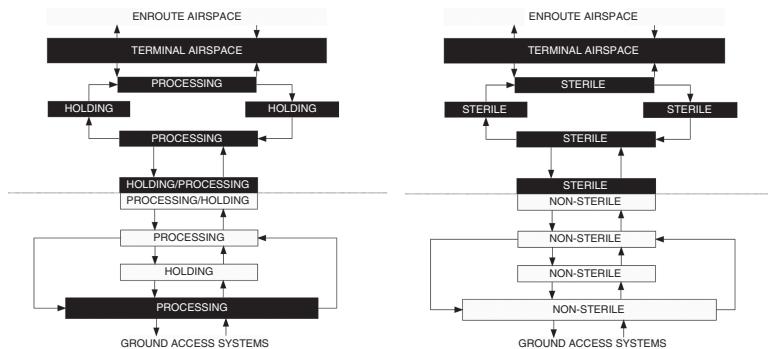
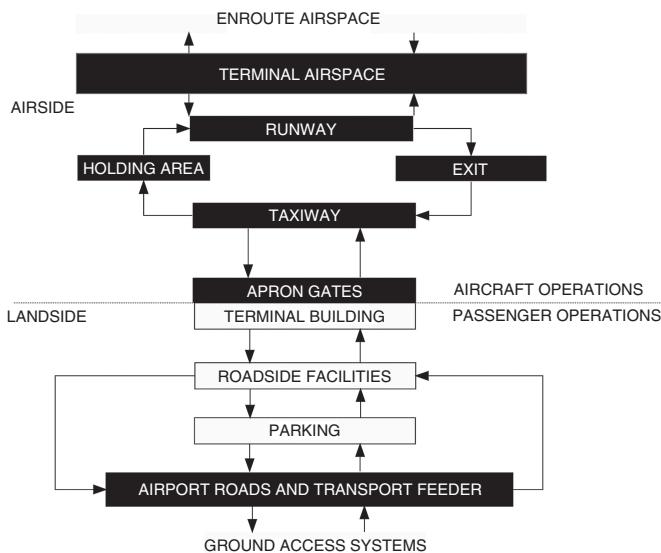
For want of a better place, we could begin with a consideration of Heathrow airport in London, or LHR as it is known by its airport code, one of 17,576 possible unique three-letter acronyms, of which approximately 9,000 have been assigned by the International Air Transport Association to airports throughout the world (Fuller and Harley 2004: 156). Airports Council International data states that London Heathrow airport is the world's third busiest airport in terms of passenger traffic, having received over 68 million passengers in 2007 (Airports Council International 2008). In 2009, ninety-two airlines serviced Heathrow, with flights departing to 187 international destinations (BAA 2009).

The airport is a complex artefact. Its operations represent a series of networks through which objects and people flow from one space to the next. It is complicated as an archaeological case study because it not only includes fixed infrastructure (runways, terminals, associated transport infrastructure, fixed machinery) but contains various

objects that are constantly in motion but which never leave the space of the airport (trucks for moving goods on and off aeroplanes, luggage trolleys) and other objects that are always in a state of transit through the space (luggage, food and other items for sale, aeroplanes, passengers).

Our consideration of the work of Latour (Ch. 4) has suggested we must look to the transitions, shifts, movements, and the interstitial spaces to explore the places where the social becomes traceable and to understand the relationships between the particular and the whole. Fuller and Harley (2004: 38) propose that the airport represents a sort of laboratory for considering relationships between technological and cultural processes and systems of social movement, and that the operations of the airport are transforming notions of national and global citizenship and humanity through allowing for a sort of ‘transit-life’. They suggest that one way of thinking about the airport is as a series of transformations from processing to holding and non-sterile to sterile. Passengers and their luggage are registered, cross-referenced, processed, and held in several cycles before shifting into terminal airspace. Landside and airside spaces are considered to be non-sterile and sterile respectively. Thus, what the airport *is* depends on where you are within it, and the means by which you are travelling through it (*ibid.* 17; see Fig. 9.1).

Let us look in more detail at how one moves through the space of LHR, and the various transformations that occur from the passenger’s perspective. There are five terminals at LHR, each serviced by various public transport hubs. Assuming one is travelling from Terminal 4, one enters the terminal and progresses to the check-in desk. Movements are constantly mediated by signs. Matching the numbers on the e-ticket with those on a screen, the passenger progresses to check-in, a place in which the bodies of aircraft passengers are linked and cross-referenced to their luggage and to a seat on the aircraft. At this stage, passengers become ‘distributed persons’ (cf. Strathern 1988, 2004; Wagner 1992; Gell 1998)—they become simultaneously not only their physical body, but also their luggage and the space on the aircraft on which they will ultimately fly. Their fortunes from this point become intimately linked with those other distributed pieces of their personhood. This is the first



**Figure 9.1.** Various ways of conceptualizing the space of the airport as a system. (Redrawn by Rodney Harrison from Fuller and Harley 2004: 16–17.)

transformation in the steps leading towards a citizenship of what Fuller and Harley (2004) refer to as ‘transit-life’.

Now we are at a crossroads. We could, like the narrative with which we began this chapter (and the one that forms an introduction to Augé’s *Non-Places*), follow the passengers as they make their

full transition into the sterile space of the airport transit lounge, but we might be more interested in following one of the other manifestations of the passengers' personhood in the form of their luggage. Indeed, from the luggage's perspective, the security and passport controls and the time it takes to progress through the transit-side shopping mall can be seen as obstacles intended to slow the progress of passengers so that their bags can be made to reach their aircraft at the same time as they do—a sort of race to reassemble the distributed person in his or her proper place on the aircraft. Within most modern airports, the time allocated to move the bag from check-in to departure gate is directly determined by the amount of time it will take the passenger to make the same journey (Ashford, Stanton, and Moore 1996: 186). A series of automated bag-handling systems move luggage from check-in through a network of conveyor belts and junctions, onto unmanned destination-coded vehicles (automated trucks for loading and unloading baggage) that utilize automatic barcode identification, through explosives screening, further sorting and automated processing, with diversions for fast-tracking urgent bags to the departure gate before they are loaded on to the aeroplane. At Heathrow Terminal 4, some 70,000 bags are transported this way each day (BAA 2009).

Our passengers must now pass through security screening and into the Departures area. Here they make the transition that their baggage has already made, from non-sterile to sterile space. Once again, the transition and passage are mediated by way of a series of signs that direct passengers to the appropriate security screening booth. Passing through security, passengers remove all but their inner layers of clothing while their hand luggage is x-rayed and scanned. On entering the departure lounge, passengers enter what is essentially a shopping mall (see Fig. 9.2). Nothing is private in the airport, but all thought and experience becomes internalized and focused on the passenger as consumer. Within the departure lounge, the focus is on the provision of well-known multinational goods and services that will be familiar to passengers as members of the global citizenship of transit-life. These multinational companies seek to reassure and encourage the global passenger through clear use of well-known branding and familiar shop design. Fast food restaurants and retail chains generally incorporate strong design



Figure 9.2. The airport as shopping mall: London Gatwick North Terminal. (Photo: Rodney Harrison.)

elements that make both their brand and function easily recognizable. For example, fast-food restaurants will be designed in such a way that customers will recognize that they should consume their food quickly then move on (Piotrowski and Rogers 2007: 157). This is achieved through the use of tall bar facilities and banquette-style seating in preference to tables, fixed benches rather than chairs, and plastic materials that are durable, anonymous, and easily cleaned.

There is obvious repetition in the layout and provision of services at airport terminals. One of us spent eight hours at Sydney airport (SYD) in transit from Adelaide (ADL) to LHR. When he exhausted the shopping mall at the terminal, a helpful shop assistant explained that there was another terminal, some twelve minutes walk away. The journey involved a series of tunnels and numerous escalators, eventually leading to another terminal, with its own shopping mall and restaurants. However the shops and food outlets were exactly the same, in more or less the same layout, and selling precisely the same things. Even the internal arrangement of goods in the shops was the

same. Only the staff were different, though presumably also perceived to be somewhat interchangeable.

This focus on the provision of standard, uniform, and predictable goods and services has been termed 'McDonaldization' by the sociologist George Ritzer ([1995] 2004; see also Ritzer 1998, 2003, and 2006). Ritzer points to the ways in which various aspects of the philosophy and operational rationale of the American fast-food restaurant have permeated all sectors of society, especially those relating to the provision of goods and services. He defines the 'dimensions of McDonaldization' as efficiency, calculability (the emphasis on quantity rather than quality), predictability (the assurance that products will be of the same quantity and quality in all outlets), and control through non-human technology (Ritzer 2004: 12). It is this final point that might concern us most as archaeologists of the contemporary past. Customers are controlled through the imposition of signs and other visual clues that help to motivate the behaviours that are expected of them; for example, bins are left by doors to remind customers to clear up after themselves when they leave the restaurants (*ibid.* 116). The physical design elements of restaurants encourage customers to eat quickly, or not to sit in the restaurant at all (drive-through windows). Colour schemes are chosen to motivate customers to move on as quickly as possible (p. 117).

In the vast shopping mall in which our passenger arrives through customs in the departure lounge at LHR Terminal 4, he or she is confronted with a number of retail outlets and restaurants of well-known franchises, both 'national' (Harrods, WH Smith, JD Wetherspoon) and 'international' (HMV, Starbucks). Our passenger would encounter the same retail outlets and restaurants whether in Terminal 4 or in any of the other four departure lounges at LHR. As we saw at Sydney airport, all these outlets, and the design of the airport itself, work together to produce an architecture of generic transit; they work on the body to produce a simultaneous sense of familiar alienation. The surfaces are frequently cleaned and painted so that they acquire no sense of historicity—such places exist only in the present and do not celebrate their connections with the past but seek to mask them wherever possible. The role of the archaeologist in such contexts is not only to explore the ways in which the bodily sensation of 'transit-life' is made manifest, but also to reveal the specific histories of these

places and the ways in which they are concealed from the public. The peeling carpet, the layers of paint, and the traces of previous styles of airport furniture all carry a sense of the specific history of the airport departure lounge, signalling to the passenger that he or she is in ‘this’ place rather than some other. Drawing attention to these artefacts and traces reinstates a sense of the past in these places that manufacture for themselves only a living present.

Let us skip forward in time to the point at which the passengers and their distributed material culture are reunited in flight. Here too, there is a strong potential for archaeological analysis. We might think of an analysis of the material culture of air flight and the differences between the material assemblage of First Class and Economy class. While most of the artefacts are fixed within the aeroplanes themselves, the artefacts associated with inflight meals seem an appropriate place to start such an analysis, representing as they do the most widely experienced portable material artefacts of air travel. A comparison of the breakfast trays that were handed to customers on an Air Canada flight between London and Toronto in January 2009, for example, illustrated some major differences. Within the economy meal were a large number of plastic wrappers and utensils that are used and then discarded, either by the airline itself (if the items are all handed back to the flight attendant) or by the passengers should they choose to take any of the items off the plane with them. However, the Executive First Class tray contained almost exclusively items that could be washed and reused, and very little in the way of material that could be taken off the plane by the passenger and/or end up in landfill. A tub of yoghurt was the only item common to both. Even within the same flight, we see the proliferation of very strong differences in the material signatures of First and Economy class travel, which is created through the differentiated use of materials (plastic vs. stainless steel cutlery; plastic vs. crockery plates; paper vs. cotton napkins; disposable vs. reusable items) as well as their presentation.

This focus on one aspect of the material culture of air flight suggests other areas for future archaeological research. How do individual airlines differentiate themselves whilst also giving the passenger a comfortably generic experience? How do these conflicting desires, to distinguish your brand whilst producing a generic

transit-life ‘non-place’, resolve themselves through material culture? What is the role of the archaeologist in understanding this distinctively late modern phenomenon?

This section has suggested some approaches to the archaeology of non-places with specific reference to LHR Terminal 4. As one of the key features of late modern societies, both the ways in which generic spaces of transit are produced and the ways in which they are experienced emerge as key areas for an archaeology of ‘now’. We will now turn to consider another of the specific spaces of late modernity, the space of the virtual and its associated new communicative technologies.

## VIRTUAL WORLDS

In Chapter 5 it was argued that one of the key aspects of late modernity revolves around the proliferation of communicative technologies and their associated impacts on the experience of time and space, what Jean Baudrillard refers to as the development of a ‘hyper-reality’ (1994, 1995; see also Tiffin and Terashima 2001). Central to these changes has been the rise of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) and virtual experience, part of the work of the imagination as a social force discussed by Appadurai in *Modernity at Large* (1996; see further Ch. 5). What role does archaeology have to play in the exploration of the internet, new communicative technologies, and virtual worlds? While anthropologists have begun to explore the ways in which CMC is giving rise to new forms of virtual communities and the sociocultural implications of new communication technologies (e.g. Hine 2000; Miller and Slater 2000; Fabian 2002; Wilson and Peterson 2002; Eisenlohr 2004; Zongming 2005; Boellstorff 2008), there has been little discussion of an *archaeology* of virtual communities. Graves-Brown (2009b), in a provocative look at how an archaeologist might approach the internet, suggests that we should consider computer software to be an ‘intangible artefact’. Web pages, he points out, are not simply documents, but behave as ‘tools’ in the sense in which ‘they actually do something’. Given that ‘tools’ have always formed a focus of traditional archaeological inquiry, the fact that web pages can be

considered to be tools suggests that archaeologists may indeed have a role to play in understanding them. Noting that these virtual tools are coterminous with humans as part of complex actor-networks, he suggests:

the design of the tools that we use in the virtual world, and the nature of their relationship to real world analogues, can have important implications for our understanding of the nature of twentieth- and twenty first-century society. This suggests that archaeology, with its depth of understanding of material culture, can have an effective role in the exploration of the virtual.

These issues were considered as part of Harrison's (2009a) archaeological investigation of the virtual settlement of 'Second Life' (SL). Virtual settlements have expanded rapidly in response to the development of computerized technologies that allow for the creation of interactive synthetic environments in which users are sensually immersed and that respond to user input (Sherman and Craig 2003: 6). As a medium, virtual reality (VR) has three defining characteristics—it operates in real time, so that feedback is not noticeably delayed from the perspective of the user, it is interactive, and is based on the use of three-dimensional spatial models (Whyte 2002: 3). While many early VR mediums employed stand-alone computer-based technologies, the widespread availability of the internet and broadband technologies that allow large amounts of data to be downloaded relatively quickly has meant that internet-based VR has grown rapidly in the last decade. This has led to the development of what are commonly known as virtual worlds (but which might be better termed virtual 'settlements') and virtual communities. Rheingold (1993: 5) defines virtual communities as 'social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on... public conversations long enough... to form webs of personal relationships in cyber-space'. Jones (1997) distinguishes between such virtual communities and their virtual settlements, defining a virtual settlement as 'a cyber-place that is symbolically delineated by topics of interest and within which a significant proportion of interrelated interactive group-CMC occurs' (*ibid.* 6). He posits that a virtual settlement must meet a minimum set of conditions, requiring a minimum level of interactivity, a variety of communicators, a certain level of sustained membership, and a

public common space where interaction may occur. While Jones is at pains to point out that the virtual communities are not created by new technologies, it is important to note that the development of virtual communities and settlements is reliant on the technology that realizes the possibility of VR.

While it has its antecedents in the work of Anderson (1983), the anthropology of online communities (e.g. Hine 2000; Miller and Slater 2000; Fabian 2002; Wilson and Peterson 2002; Boellstorff 2008) is a relatively new field of research. Indeed, there is some argument as to whether the concept of an 'online community' is even a useful one (e.g. Rheingold 1993; Hakken 1999). One important aspect of the anthropology of virtual communities has been to emphasize 'the link between historically constituted socio-cultural practices within and outside of mediated communication and the language practices, social interactions, and ideologies of technology that emerge from new information and communication technologies' (Wilson and Peterson 2002: 453), and the blurred boundaries between online and offline worlds (Miller and Slater 2000: 5). Wilson and Peterson (2002) distinguish between those studies concerned with offline social, cultural, and historical processes (e.g. Garfinkel 2000) and those more concerned with the development, diffusion, and reception of new technologies and media (e.g. Latour 1996). Agre's (1999: 4) work has considered the relationship between online and offline identities, suggesting the ways in which 'social and professional identities are continuous over several media, and... people use those several media to develop their identities in ways that carry over to other settings'. The connection between offline and online identities and the cultural significance of the internet and its relationship with nationalism, gender, and class is the focus of Miller and Slater's (2000) ethnographic study of the internet in Trinidad. Other areas of anthropological and sociological concern in the study of the internet have included communication and language shifts (e.g. Eisenlohr 2004), and the relationship between ideology and social and linguistic practices in cyberspace (e.g. Crystal 2001; Wilson and Peterson 2002: 461).

The only detailed ethnographic study of SL is Boellstorff's *Coming of Age in Second Life* (2008). This study, which approaches the online settlement of SL as a traditional ethnographic field, considers

changing notions of personhood associated with the emergence of virtual settlements, and draws out the connection between virtual and actual worlds. Boellstorff (*ibid.* 29) emphasizes the fact that, contrary to the widespread use of terms such as 'post-human' to describe the notions of personhood generated by virtual worlds, 'virtual worlds reconfigure selfhood and sociality, but this is only possible because they rework the virtuality that characterizes human being in the actual world'. The connection between actual and virtual personhood thus emerges as a critical concern for both the anthropology and archaeology of online communities.

Harrison (2009a) draws on the work of Jones (1997) to suggest a new way of understanding virtual communities through the study of their cultural artefacts. His outline of a new discipline of 'cyber-archaeology' extends not only to the actual technologies employed by virtual communities (computer hardware, the internet), but also to the objects they create within virtual settlements. He suggests that it is possible to understand aspects of a virtual community through the study of its virtual material culture, and to explore issues of 'virtuality' that would be of concern to archaeologists and those with a focus on material culture. Discussing the ways in which virtual material culture is produced and the complex network of transactions in virtual material culture that can be 'read' by exploring the history of virtual objects in SL, he shows how objects carry information about who made them and when they were created, and ways in which this information can be interrogated at any time by selecting the object and 'inspecting' it with a series of mouse clicks. Objects and gestures are frequently queried by SL users, to find out who 'owns' them. The 'history' of the creation of any object is contained in its code. All SL objects are composed of a series of three-dimensional shapes, created using a limited three-dimensional modelling tool or the more sophisticated Linden Scripting Language (LSL) which is used to give objects within SL autonomous behaviour. Once an object has been created by a user in SL, it is registered as 'created by' and 'owned by' particular residents. The owner and the creator of the object maintain certain rights over the object, and the creator of an object may mark it as uncopyable, unable to be modified, or unable to be transferred to another resident. Objects which have been marked as able to be

copied, modified, or transferred preserve a history of all such actions carried out on them. These constitute an amazing digital archive of the traffic in virtual objects throughout SL, and allow one to build up a picture of the ways in which objects have been modified and used throughout their virtual lives.

It is the concern with stratigraphic layering that makes such an investigation of virtual material culture a form of archaeological excavation. Indeed, one could imagine using a Harris Matrix to record the changes and layers of ownership of objects in SL, for example. This would produce a grid that would allow the transformations of objects and their ownership in SL to be compared across time and space.

In addition to this ability to look in detail at the ways in which objects have been created, used, modified, and moved around the virtual settlement, the significant digital archives produced by SL allow the potential for a study of the ways in which the ‘meanings’ of objects and places have changed through time. For example, one artefact conserved in the SL History Museum is a small statue of a hippo (Fig. 9.3). A wide range of mythology surrounds hippos in SL, although it appears that more recent users may not be aware of this mythology as it relates to ‘old’ social practices dating to earlier versions of the virtual settlement.

The tale of the hippo began simply enough in a forum thread by Darwin Appleby in which he strikes a long lasting topic about hippos, which became one of the longest lasting threads on the SL forums. It was then carried over into the grid when Hikaru Yamamoto started a zoo in which a small hippo family could be found. This small yet humble family loved to be fed by visitors and soon became a crowd favorite! Soon enough hippo statues and avatars began to appear throughout the grid... Some may have forgotten about the beloved hippo, but to others the hippos shall never die... HIPPO was also the name of a Linden-made object that you could put keywords into and it would detect other people wearing HIPPOS that had the same keywords in them as well. Example: Oz Spade has ‘cats’ in his HIPPO, Bob Boberson has ‘cats’ in his HIPPO, Oz walks past Bob, and both of their HIPPOS light up. The HIPPOS still work, but are not used by many residents, becoming one of those things that ‘never really caught on’. (Second Life Wikia 2009)

While this particular artefact is clearly intended to be humorous, it does demonstrate the way in which certain types of technologies in



**Figure 9.3.** Screenshot showing an Avatar ‘inspecting’ the Hippo statue in the Second Life History Museum to study its history, which is shown as a series of time- and date-coded ‘layers’. (Photo: Rodney Harrison.)

SL, as in the real world, become defunct not only because their function is taken over by new technology, but also because they go out of fashion or do not prove to be socially popular.

Harrison (2009a) concludes with a discussion of the explicit programme of heritage conservation in Second Life, suggesting that the way in which virtual communities use (virtual) material culture and heritage to create a sense both of belonging and of ‘place’ emerges as a new area for study. Indeed, as Paul Basu (2007: 97) has noted, ‘it is somewhat paradoxical that the internet, this globalising technology *par excellence*, should prove such an effective facilitator of individuals’ localising strategies’. However, Harrison (2009a) is critical of the rather limited palate of forms of heritage in SL. He argues that the ways in which SL functions as a space that both relates to and changes individuals’ sense of personhood and being in the (actual) world suggests that we should be concerned with the trend in SL towards homogenous ‘official’ heritage discourses that allow little space for the development of alternative or subaltern forms of heritage within such virtual environments.

Bartle (2003: 1) has described virtual settlements as ‘places where the imaginary meets the real’. But how does the virtual influence the ‘real’ world? One example is the material legacy of the Year 2000

problem and the ways in which its associated millenarianism was expressed in both incidental and designed material remains of global Millennium celebrations (Harrison 2009c). Concerns about global technological catastrophe and the end of the world at the end of the last millennium centred on international fears surrounding the 'Millennium Bug', fears that were manifested in monumental building programmes that looked to the past to emphasize stability and the absence of change. These fears were spread through the electronic media and proliferated on the internet, creating a virtual panic that we can read in the archaeological record of monuments produced to mark the beginning of the new millennium.

The 1999–2000 calendar changeover became a focus for fears around what came to be known in popular parlance as the 'Year 2000 problem', the 'Millennium Bug', or simply 'Y2K', which described potential errors that might occur in critical computer systems due to the practice of storing year dates with two digits rather than four.

The Year 2000 computer problem is globally considered as one of this century's most critical issues, so much so that the world community has joined forces to resolve the problem....[A]t the end of the twentieth century, many software applications will stop working or create erroneous results when the year switches from 1999 to 2000....[D]ate sensitive embedded chips could (also) stop working...[These] embedded business systems control traffic lights, air traffic control, security systems, time clocks and hospital operating systems. (Reid 1999: 1–2)

Predictions regarding the effects of the Year 2000 problem ranged from the inconvenience of the failure of computer software programs to the collapse of critical services such as power and water. A very successful information campaign on the potential hazards of the Year 2000 problem led to most organizations and businesses upgrading computer software and hardware so that very few problems were experienced when the clock struck midnight on 31 December 1999 (CNN 2000). However, by this point the global preparedness for the Year 2000 problem was reported as having cost well over US\$300 billion (BBC 2000b).

It is now difficult to recall the scale of fear surrounding the Year 2000 problem, and the way in which it connected in the popular imagination with other millenarian uncertainties. *The Y2K Personal*

*Survival Guide* (Hyatt 1999) recommended stockpiling water, food, and basic groceries for all families and included suggestions for households in developing their own alternative sources of power and heating. There were a number of newspaper and television reports of individuals building bunkers or shelters in which they intended to weather the impending apocalypse. This meant that in addition to the excitement of the dawn of a new millennium for many, New Year's Eve 1999 was filled with a sense of apprehension and trepidation. Harrison (2009c) argues that this setting of widespread confusion regarding the impact of the Year 2000 problem produced a lasting legacy in the UK in the form of monuments and material remains associated with the work of the Millennium Commission, which in 1993 embarked on one of the most expensive monumental building programmes of the late twentieth century.

A range of monuments was constructed at the end of the millennium, many of them funded by the Millennium Commission (see further Harrison 2009c). For example, throughout Britain, tens if not hundreds of modern 'standing stones' were erected, mirroring the form of Neolithic standing stones, circles, and monuments. They evoked a Neolithic past, reimagined as a Golden Age in which fears of humanly generated environmental and technological disasters were absent. The Millennium Experience, a series of temporary displays and events throughout the year 2000, housed in the Millennium Dome on the Greenwich Peninsula, presented the future as post-apocalypse, while overall, the work of the Millennium Commission can be seen as looking to the past through the emphasis on projects associated with existing heritage sites and precincts. In addition to these physical memorials, all computer software and hardware produced after this period conserve artefacts of the fear of collapse of critical infrastructure and computing systems at the end of the last millennium, fed not only by legitimate concerns about the computing problem, but also by broader uncertainties about the future that manifested at this time. This is apparent in the insistence on storing dates within software and hardware as four digits rather than two.

This brief example illustrates the rich potential for an archaeological approach to the internet, new communicative technologies, and virtual reality. The virtual has become increasingly important as new media and communicative technologies have transformed

existing forms of communication and social relations. As discussed in Chapter 5, Appadurai (1996) has argued that the electronic mediation of communication, coupled with mass migration and transnationalism, works on the imagination in innovative ways. The imagination itself takes on a new role in late modern society, allowing the individual imagination to become linked with what Appadurai terms a 'community of sentiment', that allows the imagination to have agency in ways it has not previously throughout history. In the section that follows, we will consider the ways in which the work of the imagination and the new experience economy of late modernity might be explored archaeologically.

### THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY AND THE WORK OF THE IMAGINATION

In *The Experience Economy*, Pine and Gilmore (1999) argue for a shift from a service-based to an experience-based economy, in which goods and services have come to be valued not so much for their function, but in terms of their engagement of the senses and the experiences that surround their purchase and use (see also Sundbo and Darmer 2008). Some authors have related this shift in the nature of consumption to other conditions of late modernity, in particular the new modes of capitalism involving more flexible forms of capital accumulation and distribution. In Chapter 5 we noted that the manifestations of the experience economy—casinos, museums, entertainment spaces—have formed a major theme for archaeologists of the contemporary past. For example, archaeologist Martin Hall and social anthropologist Pia Bombardella have written on the entertainment spaces of the new South Africa (Hall 2001, 2005, 2006; Hall and Bombardella 2005, 2007), and archaeologist Cornelius Holtorf (2005b, 2007, 2009) has undertaken research on contemporary entertainment spaces such as archaeological theme parks and resorts in the US, UK, continental Europe, and South Africa. We will consider their work here in more detail to explore some of the ways in which archaeologists can contribute to an understanding of the experience economy of late modernity.

Theme parks are generally considered to represent the most fundamental manifestation of the experience economy (Clavé 2007: 155), and are central to the discussion of the emergence of ‘experience’ as a commodity. Although there was a long tradition of amusement- and trolley-parks, which provided picnic areas, mechanical rides, and other forms of entertainment (themselves evolving from a tradition of travelling fairs and expositions), the opening of Disneyland in 1955 is considered to represent a watershed in the sense in which it represented one of the world’s first fully themed amusement parks, which has subsequently acted as a model for the development of not only other theme parks, but themed attractions such as shopping malls, casinos, hotels, and restaurants (e.g. see papers in Sorkin 1992; Mitrašinović 2006). Bryman (2004: 2) refers to this process as the ‘Disneyization’ of society, and notes that this process has several dimensions. The first dimension he refers to as ‘theming’—where institutions or objects are given an overall narrative unrelated to their history or function. The second he describes in terms of hybrid consumption—‘a general trend whereby the forms of consumption associated with different institutional spheres become interlocked with each other and increasingly difficult to distinguish’ (*ibid.*). The third relates to the area of merchandising, where goods and services that bear images and logos are produced for sale. The fourth dimension relates to performative labour, where frontline service work is increasingly viewed as a form of performance and a certain display of mood is linked to the performance of that service. This is perhaps most clearly embodied in the phrase ‘service with a smile’. Ryman argues that Disneyization extends the principles of McDonaldization in a new way, in the sense in which it is concerned with promoting consumption but swaps the homogenization of experience with the increasingly spectacular context in which consumption can take place. Indeed, Mitrašinović (2006: 35) goes further, to argue that homogenization is a necessary prerequisite for ‘theming’ to work, by creating a blank template prior to the requisite fusing of what had previously existed as separate domains of human culture and experience.

There are several ways in which archaeologists might approach the study of theme parks. The first is a consideration of the themes used by theme parks themselves. As Holtorf (2007, 2009) points out, many theme parks draw on historical, archaeological, or

heritage-related themes. He (2009: 58) suggests that by exploring these themes and the ways in which they are utilized within the context of particular theme parks, we might explore the potential for a ‘new archaeology for a new society’. A second avenue of investigation relates to an analysis of the material culture of the theme park itself. If we are to consider theme parks as a microcosm for understanding the experience society, then an analysis of its material world should help us to understand how the experience economy operates. An archaeological investigation of theme parks could take place at the level of individual artefacts, sites, or whole landscapes. Because most theme parks still operate as functioning entities it is not possible to excavate them, but instead, archaeologists have subjected them to analysis through an exploration of their material culture and physical architecture. Working in such circumstances, archaeologists are concerned with both the physical layering of buildings and artefacts in space and the layers of meaning that such places produce.

### **GrandWest Entertainment World and Casino, Cape Town, South Africa**

Hall and Bombardella (2007) provide an analysis of the GrandWest Entertainment World and Casino in Cape Town, South Africa. Their procedure illustrates how an archaeologist might approach such a space. Disneyland and other theme parks have been described as heterotopias—places that exist in parallel to the everyday and that provide a vision of a utopia (e.g. Marin 1984). Like other theme parks, GrandWest exists as an entirely self-contained fantasy world. The entertainment complex comprises two hotels, a casino, restaurants, food court, bars, ice skating rink, bowling alley, cinema complex, rides, and concert venue. Of particular interest is the ‘Magic Company’, ‘a gateway to a world of fantasy and fun-filled adventure—particularly for little people... housed in a 17th century Fort, with a replica of Jan van Riebeck’s historical ship anchored outside’ (Sun International 2009a). Hall and Bombardella (2007: 247) note that GrandWest is a gated complex, enclosed by high fencing with visible CCTV and security staff. This not only creates a sense of security,

but of isolation from the world outside. They describe it as a 'night out in a simulated town' (*ibid.*).

GrandWest is built around a theme relating to the heritage of Cape Town. The main architectural elements used to establish the theme include

- a reconstruction of the 'Fort of Good Hope', referred to as the 'Magic Castle' and containing a mini-funfair, rides and arcade games;
- a series of commercial buildings set around a lake containing reconstructed eighteenth century 'Cape Dutch' style architecture;
- reconstructed nineteenth century streetscapes and façades which form the outward facing perimeter of the complex; and
- 'The District', which comprises the casino, restaurants and commercial buildings built around a reconstruction of Cape Town's District Six, including narrow streets, washing lines with washing hanging on it, and vernacular façades. (Hall and Bombardella 2007: 247–250)

Hall and Bombardella (2007) note that there is little attempt to offer a realistic reproduction of the majority of these elements, and they exist as an eclectic mix of architectural styles and time periods, juxtaposed to create a homogenous and nostalgic representation of Cape Town's past. The 'theming' is established not only through this architectural connection, but through a continuous narrative connection between attractions within each of the four areas. For example, the streets within 'The District' are named after actual streets within District Six. These streets host themed bars and events that contribute to the overall heritage-themed 'experience' at Grand-West. 'If you're feeling the need to let your hair down and dance the night away, travel no further than Hanover Street. Boasting two bars, themed events, live bands, a large dance floor and showcasing the best of Cape Town's DJ talent, Hanover Street is a hot and happening club in the heart of The District' (Sun International 2009b). This theming leads to an integration of all experiences into a single overarching 'story'. Consumption forms a part of all aspects of this experience.

However, as Hall and Bombardella (2007: 256–7) note, this is not a coherent story, but one that draws on the power of nostalgia,

reflecting ‘a global trend in individualised entertainment that promotes consumption through desire for a state of life seen as better than the present, but ever just out of reach . . . which unintentionally produces a new set of referents for an imagined past, a bizarre, concentrated mélange of romanticised Cape Malay and white suburban villa Baroque, with a bit of colonial militarism thrown in’. This suggests, as in the work of Holtorf discussed above, that theme parks should be considered as places that offer alternative ideas of history, the reconstruction of which might be a legitimate archaeological concern in its own right. This connects with Jameson’s (1991) characterization of late modernity as a form of pastiche, a merging of all discourse into an undifferentiated whole as a result of this process by which the cultural sphere had become entirely colonized by the culture industry, which he saw as a reflection of a crisis in historicity (see Ch. 5). So what does this archaeological record of the mythologized Cape Town at CapeWest tell us about late modern societies?

Hall and Bombardella (2007: 257) note that CapeWest offers new formulations of race ‘as the old racialised divisions of apartheid are reassembled as socio-economic classes’. The symbol sets of artefacts that form the material culture of ‘The District’, for example—the street signs, washing lines, narrow streets, and vernacular façades—represent a new articulation of older racialized representations of District Six under apartheid. Many readers will be familiar with the recent apartheid and post-apartheid history of South Africa, a system of racial segregation in which the state classified and kept separate white, coloured, and black citizens, enforced by the National Party government of South Africa between 1948 and 1990. The system of apartheid was dismantled over the period 1990–93 and finally removed in 1994 during the country’s first general elections with universal suffrage, at which time it elected the African National Congress (ANC) as the governing body. Under the presidency of Nelson Mandela, post-apartheid South Africa sought quickly to establish itself as a new nation in which: ‘Each of us is as intimately attached to the soil of this beautiful country as are the famous jacaranda trees of Pretoria and the mimosa trees of the bushveld—a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world’ (cited in Manzo 1996: 71). In their discussion of heritage in plural societies, Ashworth, Graham, and Tunbridge (2007: 194) suggest that South Africa’s ‘rainbow nation’

demonstrates an attempt to develop a mosaic society in which a new past must be created to reflect the new circumstances of the present. They point to the use of the heritage of apartheid in the post-apartheid era to contrast with the modern situation to develop a vision of history in terms of a linear narrative from 'bad past' regime to 'good contemporary' one, and to develop the theme of the struggle for freedom (see also Coombes 2003: 120ff.).

Hall and Bombardella (2007: 254) argue that the District emphasizes representations of District Six's residents as having a penchant for drinking and partying, and primarily representing a lower socio-economic status, through the citing of bars and other adult entertainments such as the casino in this area, and the use of the washing lines as shorthand for social class. 'Replicating the unique vibe of Cape Town's Old District Six with buildings inspired by those found on the original streets, The District lies at the heart of GrandWest's dazzling nightlife—offering a banquet of culinary delights from an impressive selection of Cape Town's finest restaurants, along with an infectious mix of local and international music.' The multicultural nature of District Six is reflected in the presence of Indian, Thai, Italian, and Japanese restaurants. It does not accurately reconstruct aspects of District Six's ethnic make-up, but merely replaces it with a shorthand for ethnic diversity and 'other-ness'.

This brief exploration of the 'archaeology' of GrandWest provides us with one approach to the archaeology of the experience economy where theme parks remain in operation. Another approach is possible to the remains of *abandoned* theme parks, which would lend themselves to conventional excavation and archaeological recording techniques. This approach can be illustrated by the archaeological survey of the former American Adventure theme park in Derbyshire, England.

### The American Adventure Theme Park, Derbyshire, England

The American Adventure theme park was built around the rehabilitated site of the former Shipley Coal Mine, and opened by Derbyshire County Council in 1985 as 'Britannia Park' (this history of the park is based on Udder Creative 2009 and Squires 2006). The original

Britannia Park sought to celebrate ‘the best of Britain’, and contained several ‘British Genius’ pavilions showcasing British design and a miniature railway, both of which were later reused by the American Adventure theme park. Its other attractions included ‘Small World’, a series of small-scale replicas of international landmarks, and ‘Adventureland’, containing several fairground rides and attractions. Britannia Park seems to have been dogged with problems from the start, and only remained open for twelve weeks, after which it was closed due to poor attendance. The site reopened in 1987 as the American Adventure, one of the UK’s first fully themed parks. It was based on a Wild West theme, with one half of the park dedicated to Native Americans and the other to cowboys and ‘pioneers’. The new park design made full use of the lakeside setting, reworking Britannia Park’s ‘British Genius’ pavilion into a fibreglass ‘Mount Rushmore’ style mountain with carved faces (which would later become known as the Aztec Kingdom) as part of Pioneer Playland, a replica of the Alamo, the ‘El Paso Arena’ in which horseback stunts were performed, and a series of fairground rides and other attractions. Themed shops and restaurants, a Wagon Wheel themed Ferris wheel, log flume ride, and mine train rounded out the park’s offerings.

Over the next twenty years, various new rides and exhibits were introduced (Fig. 9.4). By 1989 the miniature railway did a complete circuit of the lake and a number of new rides had been added to the park, including ‘Spaceport USA’ and the ‘Missile’ rollercoaster, at a cost of £4 million. In 1993 a new ‘Stars and Stripes’ theme was introduced, and many of the rides and exhibits were restyled in a way that was consistent with the revised theme. Over the late 1990s the park changed management several times, and began shifting away from its American theme by rebranding itself as ‘Adventure World’; however, by the turn of the century, it was again being marketed as ‘the American Adventure’. Over the period 2000–6 there were some new additions to the park’s rides and attractions, but many of the older rides were closed and the park itself began to run down. It is possible to track these changes in the fortunes of various park attractions through an analysis of theme park maps, many of which have been archived on enthusiasts’ websites. Squires’ account of the park in 2006 is helpful in understanding the nature of the park’s downturn in this period:

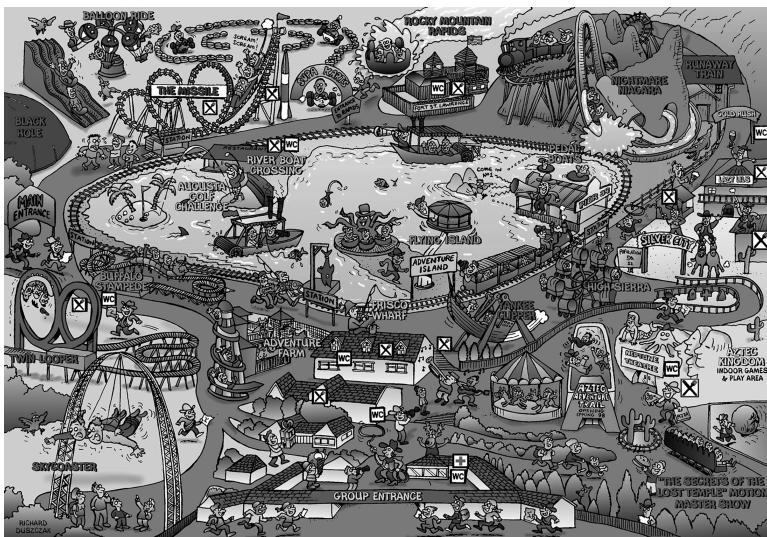


Figure 9.4. The American Adventure park map, c.1999. (Courtesy Richard Duszczak Cartoon Studio Ltd.)

It was increasingly obvious that over time, less and less attention had been paid to maintaining the existing rides. Amongst other things, Nightmare Niagara's tunnel had long stopped turning (apparently the tunnel disorientated people, rendering them unable to brace themselves as necessary for the drop ahead), The Missile's track had gone from deep grey, to sort of grey, to brown, The Rocky Mountain Rapids had lost all or most of its features, and everything on park could be described politely as needing a repaint.

At the end of 2006 the park closed for the last time. When Derbyshire County Council were contacted in 2009 a purchaser for the site had not been found, and the bulk of the rides had been removed and sold to other theme parks. Enthusiasts' websites track the movement of these rides and their components— anecdotal accounts suggest that Twin Looper (originally opened as the Iron Wolf in 1995) was relocated to a park in Poland where it has been renamed the 'Tic Tac Tornado', while other rides were relocated to Suffolk and Leicestershire (Udder Creative 2009). This suggests that the distributed nature of theme park artefacts and the network of connections

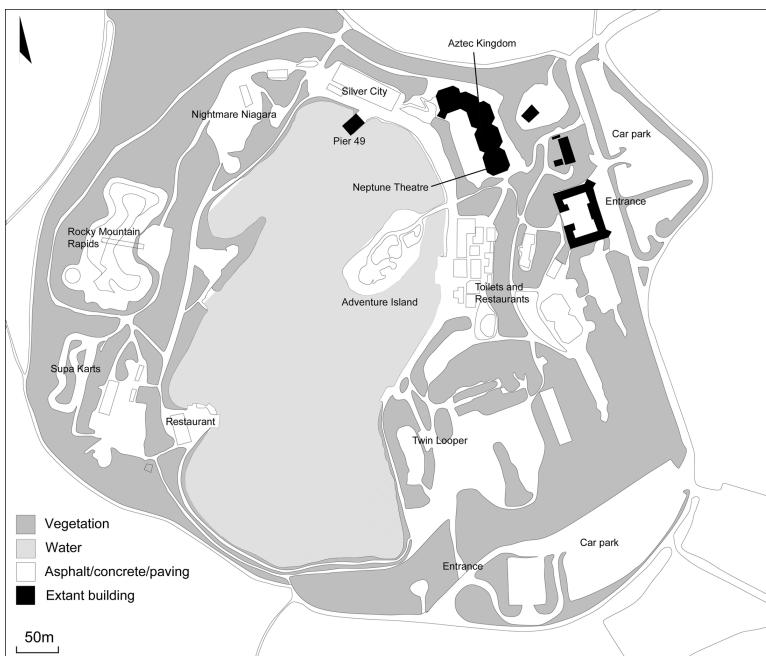
between them is an important area for future research on the nature of the experience economy and its material culture.

An archaeological survey of the site was conducted in 2009. The survey focused on recording the extant surface features on the site. By the time the survey was undertaken, most of the buildings had been demolished and almost all useful materials had been removed. The only standing buildings were sections of the original entrance buildings, the Aztec Kingdom and Neptune Theatre, Pier 49, and various temporary buildings and staff buildings located close to the old entrance. While the park had been in operation, most of the abandoned rides and attractions had simply been left within the park grounds, as discussed by Squires during its final year of operation in 2006:

perhaps the best part about the park is the signs left of the past: Nightmare Niagara's station remains, as if a tribute to its own former purpose; all the buildings around Space Port still remain to be seen, as they were the day they closed in October 2004; buildings which have not been used in a decade still stand, as there is no need to demolish them. And the park make no effort to close off these now abandoned areas, so they lay there, for anyone feeling a little nostalgic to explore.

This meant that it was not a simple matter in matching the archaeological remains to the theme park maps, as many of the maps do not show places or attractions that were not in operation at the time the maps were drawn. The palimpsest nature of the park's archaeological remains reminds us of how extreme the differences between design plans and the material record might be, even when exploring places relating to the very recent past (as discussed in Ch. 3). Nonetheless, various activity areas were able to be matched from their material remains on the ground when compared with 'historic' site maps obtained from the internet and when later compared with historical aerial imagery obtained using Google Earth. The resulting archaeological survey plan is shown in Fig. 9.5, and photographs taken during the survey in Figs. 9.6–9.7.

We might consider abandoned theme parks to represent an archaeological record of the failure of the experience economy and an artefact of changing fashions for different themes. González-Ruibal (2006), for example, has suggested we should focus our archaeological



**Figure 9.5.** Archaeological survey plan, former American Adventure theme park, May 2009. (Drawing: Rodney Harrison.)

gaze on the ruins and rubbish of modernity to explore the places where modernity has failed ‘to deconstruct the weakness and contingency of our notions of the “modernist super-artefact”’ (2006: 196). Here, we might be tempted to see the changing fortunes of Britannia Park and the American Adventure theme park within the political context of Britain in 1985 and 2006 respectively. In 1985, Britain was in the midst of the miner’s strike, the end of which was widely interpreted as a heavy political blow for the trade unions in their battle against Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative Government policies. The idea of a theme park that celebrated all things British, sited on a former coalmine site, may have been difficult for some members of the UK public, and certainly the local community, to reconcile. A Wild West fantasy theme, on the other hand, may well have had the sort of escapist subject matter that would have



Figure 9.6. The remains of the Aztec Kingdom and Neptune Theatre in 2009. (Photo: Rodney Harrison.)

appealed under such political and social circumstances. The failure of the park in mid 2006 similarly came at a time when there was an upwelling of anti-US sentiment in the UK as a result of unpopular US foreign policy relating to the US-led Afghanistan War. Within such a context, an American theme would probably have been unpopular with English customers. While anecdotally there appear to have been a range of particular circumstances that led to its closure, when considered in a broader political and social context, we can see that the failure of such artefacts of the experience economy may relate as much to the individual fortunes of their management as to the changing fortunes and popularity of their themes themselves.

The archaeology of ‘theming’ clearly has important implications for understanding the nature of late modernity and the role of the imagination in the experience economy. A more detailed analysis of archaeological phasing at the American Adventure theme park would be required to explore the ways in which the theme of the



Figure 9.7. A pair of 3D glasses found near the remains of the Neptune Theatre. (Photo: Rodney Harrison.)

park changed in more subtle ways, but even at a broad level, it has been possible to link the changes in theme and the park's fortunes themselves to broader social and political currents and historical shifts in fashion and taste. The archaeological analysis of these artefacts of the experience economy emerges from this discussion as an important new area of research within the archaeology of the contemporary past, and one that deserves more attention and detailed analysis in the future.

#### DISCUSSION: FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF LATE MODERNITY

In this chapter we have looked at what it means to take an archaeological approach to some of the most distinctive aspects of late modernity. In doing so, we have focused particularly on non-places,

virtual worlds, experience economies, and the work of the imagination. In Chapter 5 we identified several other themes that might be explored archaeologically, which we will consider briefly here.

## Hyperconsumerism and Globalization

The relationship between globalization and consumption was raised as an area of concern for an archaeology of the contemporary past by Buchli and Lucas (2001b). We might think here of an archaeological approach to Amazon.com, based not only in a study of its warehouses, but also its websites, distribution networks, and products. The network metaphor that was explored in relation to Actor-Network theory in Chapter 5 seems particularly relevant here. In thinking through an archaeological approach to hyperconsumerism and globalization, the areas for research outlined by Majewski and Schiffer (2001: 31–3) in relation to the study of consumerism are worth repeating. These include

- structural and behavioural aspects of the emergence, growth, and maintenance of consumer societies;
- effects of consumerism on the life histories of specific products;
- advertising and communication;
- explaining apparent alternatives/reactions to consumerism;
- commercialisation processes of consumer services and societal practices;
- ideological expressions of consumerist societies.

As we discussed in Chapter 4, many of these questions relating to consumption are shared amongst other disciplines with an interest in modern material culture. Nonetheless, they form the foundation for an archaeological approach to this distinctive feature of late modernity.

## The Final Frontier? Archaeologies in Orbit

At the time of writing there are estimated to be approximately 13,000 humanly made objects in orbit around the Earth (ESA 2009).

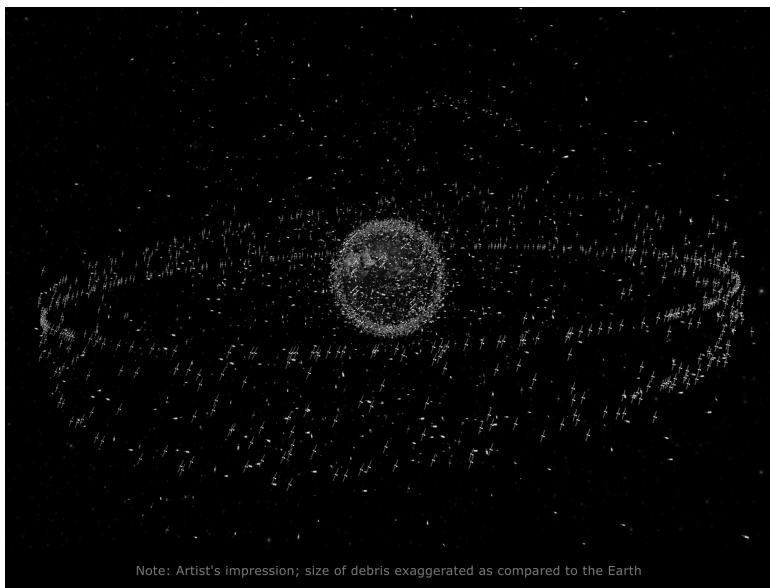


Figure 9.8. Distribution of catalogued objects in space being tracked by ESA. (Courtesy ESA.)

Fifty years of space activity have placed over 6,000 satellites into orbit, of which only around 800 are still in operation. These inoperable satellites and other sources have contributed to the development of a layer of 'space junk' in orbit around the earth which is so thick that the European Space Agency must monitor it to avoid collisions with operating space craft (see Fig. 9.8). Such objects are of interest to archaeologists as artefacts of space exploration (Gorman 2005), as part of the broader archaeological study of the Cold War (Gorman and O'Leary 2007), and are linked to other important late modern processes such as transnationalism, decolonization and globalization (Gorman 2009a).

Gorman (2009b) notes, however, that describing the spatial and chronological relationships of objects in orbit forms a problem for Earth-bound archaeologists, who work from a geodetic or Earth-centred perspective. She suggests that to begin to conduct archaeology in space, contemporary archaeologists must adopt new

space–time models that are sensitive to the altered space–time which exists beyond the Earth. The geodesic manifold, despite its complex mathematics, gives us a kind of map of space on which to plot the movements of artefacts, in which some points stay still over time and others swirl in continuous movement. Gorman’s analysis suggests some interesting new directions for the archaeology of the contemporary past, and tackles some of the conceptual problems of doing archaeology in orbit. The logistics of such an archaeology still require further consideration, but her work points to an important emerging issue for archaeologists of the contemporary past in engaging with archaeology that exists beyond the Earth.

## CONCLUSION

It was suggested in Chapter 5 that we need to see archaeology of the contemporary past in historical context—to consider the role of new communicative technologies and economic and social change associated with the late modern period as giving rise to a series of social conditions that have made it desirable not only to historicize the immediate past but also to analyse and comment on it. This chapter has considered instead the ways in which an archaeological approach might help us better to understand some of the most distinctive features of late modernity. In the first part of the chapter, we explored the archaeology of non-place and transit, considering the potential for archaeology to inform our understanding of the materiality of non-places. Following this, we considered the contribution archaeology might make to the study of virtual worlds and the ways in which new communicative technologies are transforming the relationships between individuals and their communities, landscape, and material culture. Finally, we explored different approaches to the archaeology of the experience economy, both to those artefacts that are still in use, and to those that have been abandoned. We have focused particularly on those issues that might be able to be approached archaeologically—the idea of a supermodern present ‘haunted’ by the past; the production of ‘non-places’ and the disassociative spatial elements of postmodernity that produce a sense of melancholy and

nostalgia; generic objects and spaces and their association with mass production and mass customization; and speed, experienced as the acceleration of time. What emerges strongly from this chapter is the key role that the archaeology of the contemporary past might take in this interdisciplinary area of research on the nature of late modernity and its associated temporal and spatial shifts.