

Elusive practice

“... digital practice in archaeology is not a school of thought, or a methodological approach *per se*. Instead it might be thought of as a mindset, a predisposition that promotes the development of the critical skills that are necessary in order to actively and consciously participate in this discussion about, and to influence positively, the forms that technology take within our work.”

(Gareth Beale and Paul Reilly 2017)

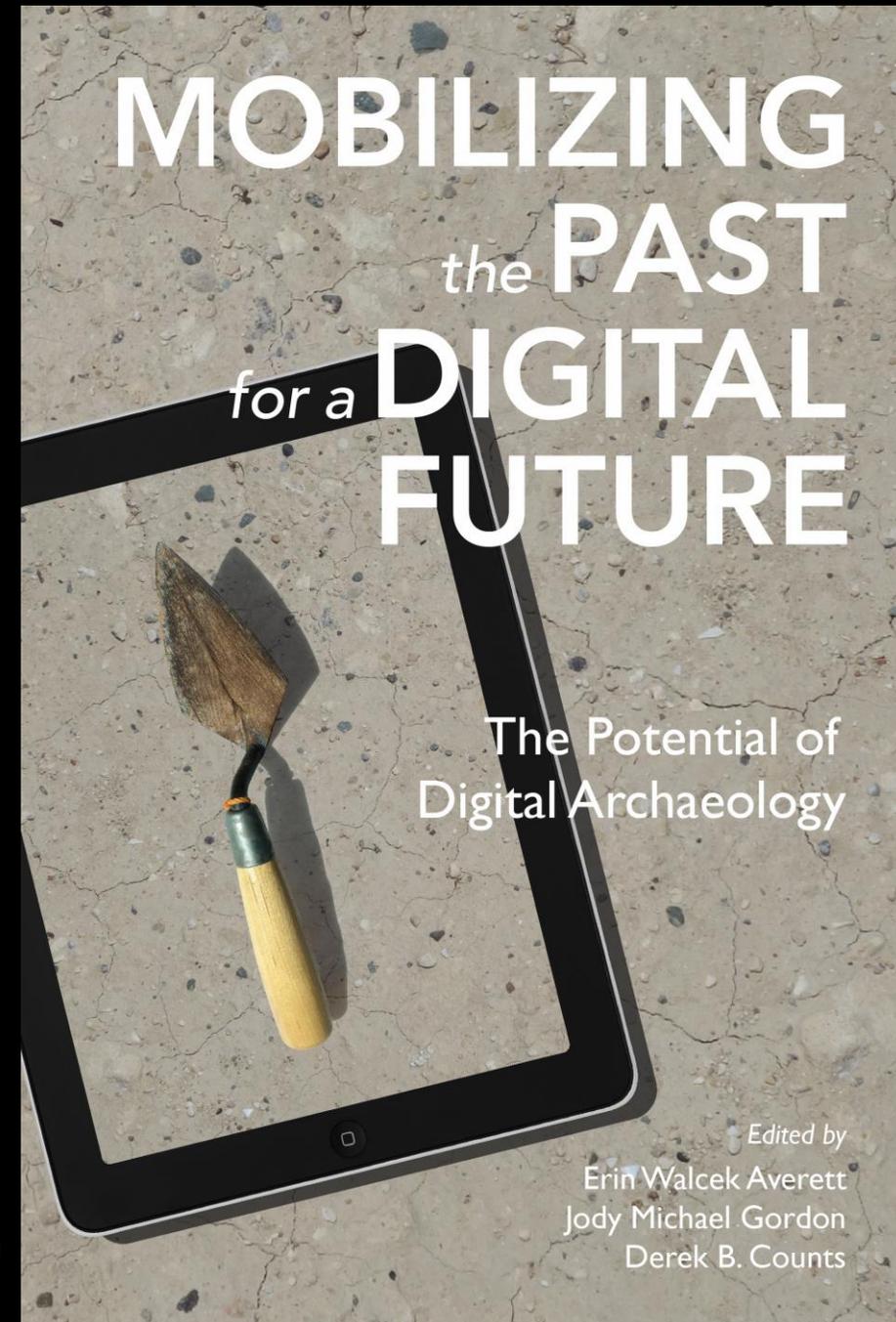
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Issue 44. Digital Creativity in Archaeology

Elusive practice

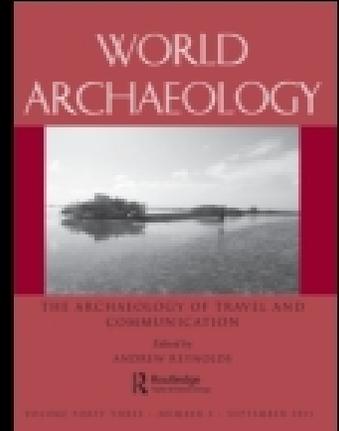
“Originally, we hoped to come up with a range of best practices for mobile computing in the field – a manual of sorts – that could be used ... Yet, what the workshop ultimately proved is that there are many ways to ‘do’ digital archaeology, and that archaeology as a discipline is engaged in a process of discovering what digital archaeology should (and, perhaps, should not) be.”

(Gordon, Averett and Counts 2016)



Elusive practice

- “... we are *all* digital archaeologists”
(Colleen Morgan and Stu Eve 2012)
- “We are all digital humanists now”
(Paul Ell and Lorna Hughes 2013)
- “I want to stop talking about digital archaeology. I want to continue to do archaeology digitally ... we have an unfortunate tendency to make approaches and tools into objects of study ...”
(Andre Costopoulos 2016)



The Digital and Archaeology

We are engaged with:

- Archaeologies *through* the digital
- Archaeologies *produced by* the digital
- Archaeologies *of* the digital

(after Ash, Kitchen and Leszczynski 2016)

... but (how) are these reshaping archaeology?



Bringing Practice to the fore

DE GRUYTER OPEN

Open Archaeology 2017; 3: 139–148



Original Study

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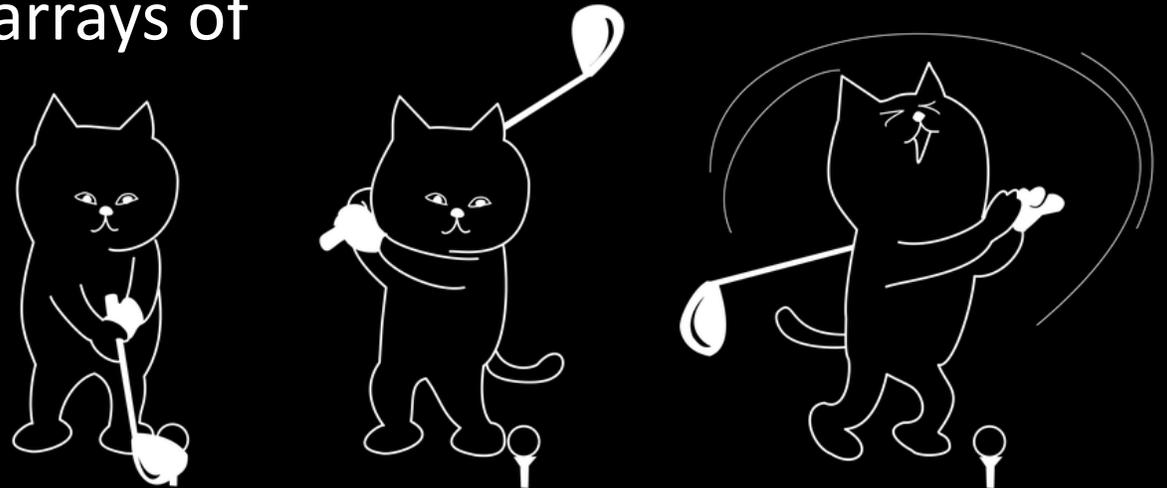
Online Tribes and Digital Authority: What Can Social Theory Bring to Digital Archaeology?

What constitutes practice?

“... there is no unified practice approach ...” (Schatzki 2001)

Practice is:

- “... something human individuals do ...” (Reddy 2009)
- “... something people do, not once but on a regular basis ...” (Stern 2003)
- “... embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity ...” (Schatzki 2001)



What constitutes practice?

Practice is:

- More than simply an activity or sequence of activities
 - Entails people doing things with other things
- Arises from repeated actions established through a set of norms
 - ‘normal practice’, ‘best practice’; normal vs. actual practice
- Thoughtful, learned, and remembered action
 - Entails expert practical and tacit knowledge; learned from other practitioners

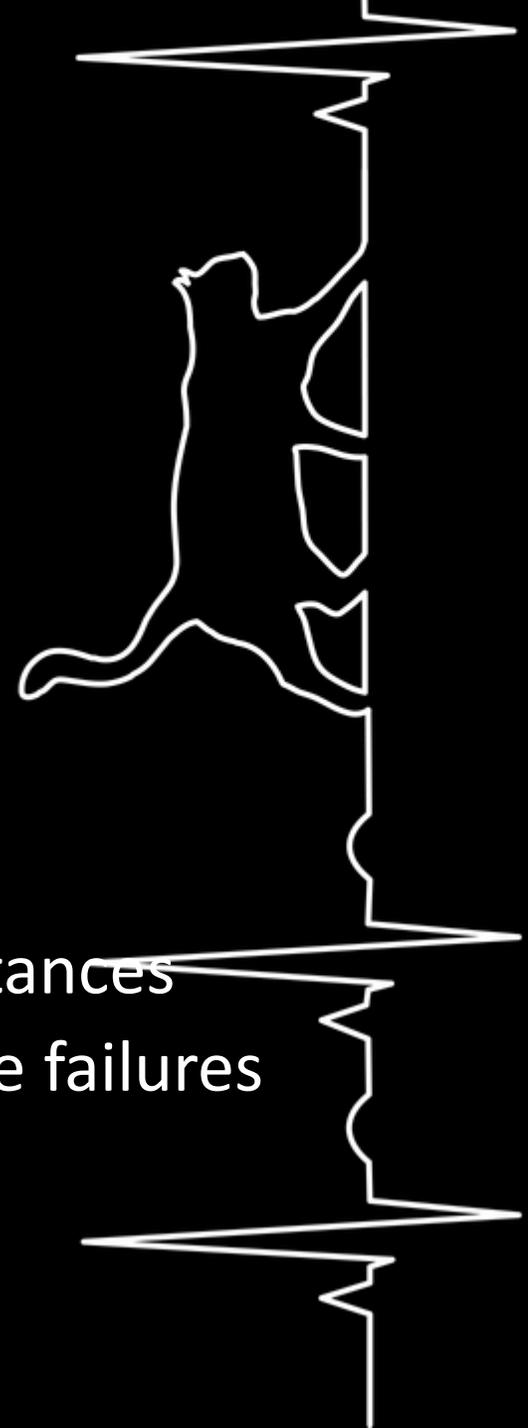


Where does the digital fit in?

'Digital reverberations':

- New capabilities
- New complexities
- Adaptations by human practitioners
- Unexpected, unintended side-effects
- Failures through poor adaptation or unanticipated circumstances
- Hidden aspects and sleight-of-hand of practitioners disguise failures

(after Woods 2002)



Tracing digital practice #1

Zooming in on practice:

- What people say and do
 - Canonical vs. actual practice
 - Definitions of tasks in software and adaptations to practice
- Performative role of tools/technologies
 - Tools carry scripts within them
 - Digital affordances
- Sense and objectives
- Boundedness
 - Tension between repetition and creative re-production
 - Digital both operationalises and makes boundaries indeterminate
- Durability and persistence
 - How novices become proficient; community of practice



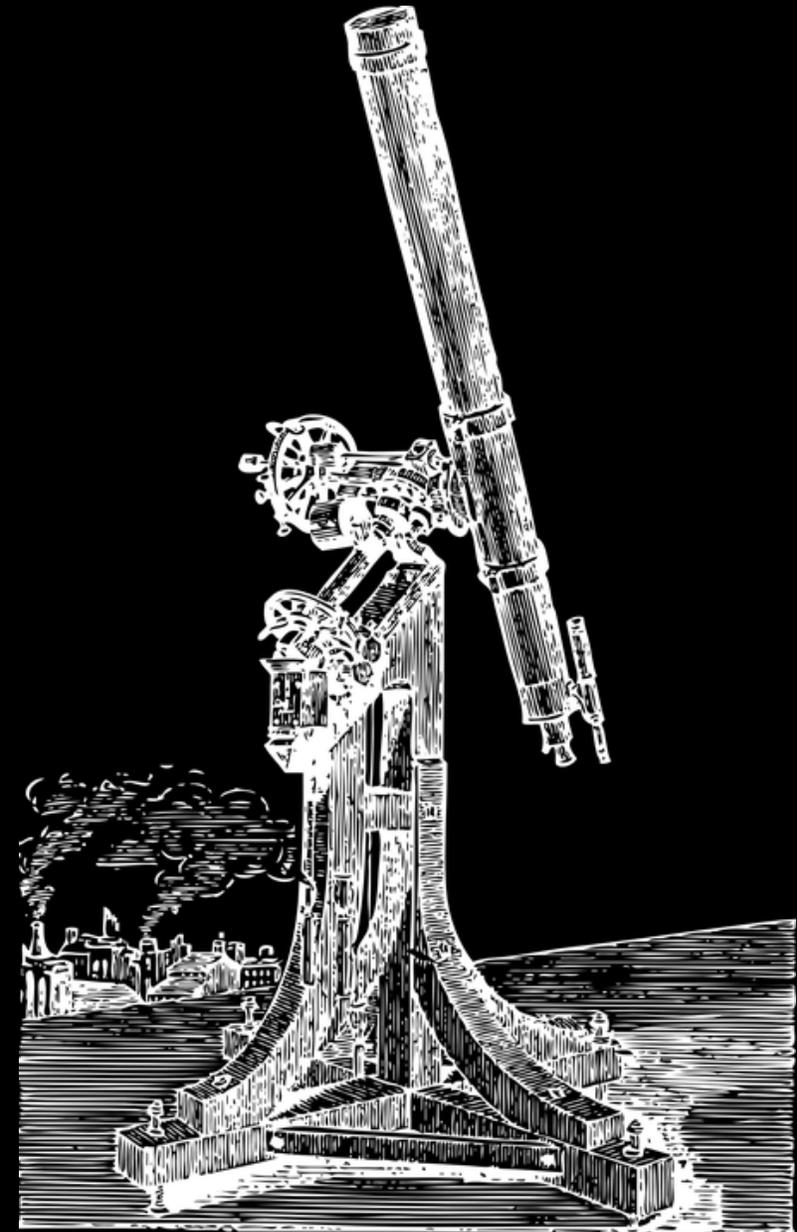
(after Nicolini 2009)

Tracing digital practice #2

Zooming out of practice:

- Interconnectedness of practices
 - How one practice becomes a resource for others
- Tracing the practice-network
 - Effects of local and trans-local practice-networks
 - How practices become implicated in actions separated in space and time

(after Nicolini 2009)



Questions for digital practice

- What are our digital repertoires? What digital work routines etc. do we hold in common? How were these created and developed?
- How has archaeological practice changed with the digital?
- What is the nature of identity of the community? What determines membership? Are we all d(D)igital archaeologists?
- How is learning and knowledge reproduced? Is it practice-based or technology-based?
- Is there a wholly digital practice distinct from practice more generally?



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