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# The Archaeology of Time Travel. An Introduction

PAPERS PRESENTED AT THE 14TH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE EAA IN MALTA, SEPTEMBER 2008

That archaeological and historical museums invite visitors to “travel back in time” has become not only a cliché but also a common phrase in their publicity campaigns. Time travel has become popular in other contexts too. For example, the Swedish entrepreneur Hans Gerremo received a very special surprise birthday present on 27 June 2009. On the island of Öland, he was given a central role in a restaged wedding that took place in 1896. The guests appeared as famous personalities, from King Oscar II and Queen Sofia to August Strindberg, Anders Zorn, Edward Munch, Selma Lagerlöf and Carl Larsson. During the proceedings, Gerremo himself, in the role of Verner von Heidenstam, married his wife Gun who played Olga Winberg (Figure 1).

As this example illustrates, there are new ways in which people approach the past in our age. As a matter of fact, the desire to travel to another age is not entirely new in the history of the modern world. People have long been interested in how their predecessors lived their everyday lives. By the same token, to bring the past “alive” has been an ambition of museums for a long time. But within the Experience Society, in the context of a growing tourist industry and fast developing Virtual Reality applications, time travel has become ever more evocative and gained ever larger audiences, thus acquiring a new significance. Sensual experiences and restaged might-have-beens are increasingly pushing intellectual reasoning and careful source criticism into the sidelines. A familiar question thus needs to be asked again today: What role does the

past play in our age? We can expect to receive novel answers. We also need to focus more on trying to understand the specific phenomena of time travel that we can observe in contemporary culture. For what reasons and in what way are people choosing to travel into the past today? How do various media and new technologies enable ever more credible time travel? What role is played by feelings and emotions during time travel experiences? What ethical questions need to be addressed in this context? And: how is all this played out in relation even to the future?

These are questions which an interdisciplinary project group wants to investigate in more detail. The group brings together researchers from a number of different disciplines: archaeology, history, social anthropology, sociology, art history, musicology, philosophy and technology. Also belonging to the group are some institutions which develop and practice time travel in their daily operations: The Museum of Foteviken, Kulturen in Lund, Lund University Historical Museum, Lofotr Viking Museum in northern Norway and Land of Legends in Lejre, Denmark. We are interested in what happens when the materiality of museum exhibits and physical reconstructions of past realities meet virtual technology that brings these locations to life. The project group and network consists of established scholars, technicians and cultural practitioners who all have been working with novel perspectives in relation to time travel and/or new technologies and art.

In interdisciplinary cooperation, the project investigates the contemporary context in which time travel occurs, how time travel ex-



Fig. 1. A 1896 wedding restaged in 2009. Top: King Oscar II and Queen Sofia; The priest and district police superintendent, with their wives. Bottom: View of the wedding lunch; bride Olga Winberg and groom Verner von Heidenstam. Photograph: Carl-Johan Gerremo, reproduced with permission.

periences are created and how they are to be evaluated, both in terms of the specific sensory experience they provide and in broader intellectual terms. In particular we will focus on four themes under the following headings:

- Time travel between materiality and virtuality
- Time travel on the market of experiences
- Designing time travel
- Evaluating time travel

*Time travel between materiality and virtuality* examines how time travel makes use both of

material and virtual cultures, how these two worlds meet, and what new possibilities may emerge from such a meeting. What can we learn about features of our own world from taking the perspective of a past world? A considerable part of the data used and examined will be gained from virtual experiences that are created within the project.

*Time travel on the market of experiences* engages with the way in which time travel is linked to larger social trends associated with the emergence of the so-called Experience Economy. We ask about the social and economic framework within which time travel

has become popular, and at what cost.

*Designing time travel* involves practical work that is being carried out as part of several Master's dissertations at the University of Lund. The idea is that the students' ideas, with additional technical help from the Humanities Lab and the Virtual Reality Lab at the Ingvar Kamprad Design Centrum, will eventually be implemented in the museums that are involved in the project.

*Evaluating time travel* takes up a number of important ethical questions that emerge from practical time travel. What happens when time travel to a specific historical event becomes very unpleasant and disturbing for the traveller, and where are the limits of what is acceptable? Does the most important value of time travel lie in providing us with moral challenges, for example causing us to rethink our own values or norms in the light of experiences of another age?

The present issue of *Lund Archaeological Review* contains papers that were first given as presentations at the session "Archaeology as Time Travel" held at the 14th Annual Meeting of the European Association of Archaeologists in Malta in September 2008. This session investigated the popular phenomenon of time travel into the past, exploring aspects of all the four themes discussed earlier. From a number of interdisciplinary perspectives, in this case encompassing archaeology, ethnology and history, they threw light on how and why people in our age experience the past.

Cornelius Holtorf tells us about how time travel can be defined as an experience or social practice in the present that evokes a past (or future) reality. It is a practice benefiting from new technologies. He also discusses how we can speak of time travel as a reality and what implications this phenomenon has for our relations to both the past and the future.

Bodil Petersson deals with the particular identity that is created and manifested when a craftsman performs past methods. The actual

example is derived from present-day runecarving, an activity that has drawn several individuals in the Nordic area to make and erect new rune stones around the world. It is a kind of craftsmanship that is closely related to an ideal of past times, the Viking era. But instead of living in the past, the craftsman uses past methods to find solutions for an alternative future to our own present.

Lars Erik Narmo writes about handicraft as time travel, and how experimenting with past techniques and technologies can make us understand and get closer to the past as reality. His examples are mostly drawn from Norway.

Erika Sandström discusses how people live in the past during the Medieval Week that takes place every year in the month of August in Visby on the Swedish island of Gotland. Here the visitor, for one week only, is able to live in the medieval past. Many people are attracted, but what do they really do once they have arrived in the past?

Lynn Åkesson discusses how waste and garbage become vehicles for time travel. She considers how different kinds of waste and garbage are seen as either clean and positive or unclean and negative, and how such value judgements affect the resulting time travel experiences.

Roeland Paardekooper, finally, discusses archaeological open air museums, what they are, how they emerged and changed through history and how they are used in relation to the idea of time travel today.

We wish you a pleasant experience from reading the papers in full, and hope that they will succeed in transporting you back to the year 2009 when time travel first emerged as a significant phenomenon in society...

Bodil Petersson and Cornelius Holtorf, September 2052

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