the FRONT of the POSTER is YOURS

Gibson's theory of affordances—in The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception (1979)—defines environments as surfaces that afford support for humans and animals. The poster you are reading is such a surface: the scale is the human body.

Here, the poster will be conceived as your associate. Someone else is seeing you read at this moment. We will talk about that person. S/he sees the poster because of you. S/he is seeing someone else seeing. S/he becomes your associate.

I will attempt to use this point of departure to show what an artistic approach may contribute to archaeological research—making things demonstrable—in ways that are more direct than if left to words alone: demonstration is different from argument.

What is interesting about the person looking at you now, is that s/he becomes your associate by the fact that you are looking at something else: a readable artefact. S/he's too far away to read—you and the poster become an image.

«Seeing someone else see,» is what we do when we capture an image. The image comes about when a human layer is added to what is already in the environment, for someone else to see. There are archaeologists working like this on site.

Their interventions verge unto land-art and performance. These can be quite sober. Timothy Darvill's concept of rehabitation is a case in point. On the Billtown Quarry Site—the Isle of Man—his interventions departed from contingency.

He argues, in a book edited by Profs. Gheorghiu and Bouissac (2015), devoted to how archaeologists imagine the past, that rehabitation and reenactment are different approaches to enhance what archaeologists intercept on site.

Darvill argued that the time-factor—the slow time of the dig compared to the time it took for the people of yore to leave their traces—warps the perception of the archaeologist. S/he is brought out of sync with human work and -events.

The author drove two poles into the ground where there were ancient postholes, without determining their size, form nor function. Performing this operation at a normal working-speed, afforded a sense of place where someone had lived.

He asked a similar question with regard to the pits where archaeologists have determined that there had been 'placed deposits'. Getting into these pits, placing deposits and getting out again, inserts the researcher into an 'ecology of operations'.

In a similar vein, he organised a social gathering on the excavation site, without attempting to emulate a society of yore. Yet, the social activities had an accentuating impact on their perception of the site, similar to the cropping of an image.

In sum, it was enough for the interventions to be within the affordances of the site—as an environment left behind by people living very differently from Darvill and his crew—to prompt their sense of life-ways that had been there. What he did was «enough».

What Gibson writes—«As an affordance of support for a species of animal, however, they have to be measured relative to the animal. They are unique for that animal. They are not just abstract physical properties»—would seem to apply here.

However, there are archaeologists who go much further than Darvill in adding human layers to preexisting life-deposts, in ways that relate more explicitly to viewing. This is particularly poignant in Prof. Gheorghiu's work (the eARTh poster at WAC08).

Gheorghiu works both with land-art and reenactment, in ways that bring artistic methods directly unto the site, and intends to expand the research repertoire of archaeological digs, based on experiments that construct human experience.

They construct human experience, in that particular aspect that artists do when they work directly on their motif, and then step back to look at their work. Then they return to the work and continue. And so on. Artists see themselves see.

A special kind of intimacy grows out of this that perhaps is easier to comprehend in Prof. Gheorghiu's experiments of re-enactment. Here the approach is not to step back, but rather to immerse oneself into an augmented reality experience.

Hence there is a dialectic in his work, in which he objectifies the objective, and subjectifies the subjective. And ventures to explore procedures of discovery and falsification at their interstice. His approach is close to a Bildungsjourney.

I hope you don't mind if we return to the poster for a bit. The poster is public. It is designed to be posted in a space where people circulate, and where it is normal to go in order to see and to be seen. Its function is to publicise.

To give a circulation to materials that have already been published, research that has been done, or alternatively attract attention to events yet to come and future projects. The poster exists in a particular time-zone. It brings time to a threshold.

The poster speaks at the brink between past and future. It can make and unmake. It proclaims. And creates a circle around it in which we are the other to one another. The poster affords publicness. It prompts both creativity and performance.

It is political. An archaeology that proceeds methodologically to not only remove but also add layers, is located within the pedagogical tradition of the arts, in which choices are part of the research that has to do with tuning in.

Tuning in to the subject matter can be hard work. But it is not enough with hard work. One also has to—as Darvill's example demonstrates—find the "right tune". It shows that work adds a human layer. Research is a human enterprise.

Scientific work leaves its traces. And if one often avoids applying an anthropogenic perspective on research, it may be because the traces it leaves is back-grounded by its—often assumed—contributions to the common good.

An archaeology of research would have to not only formulate the methodological questions of how to tune in on site and to the traces there—in the scope of human affordances—but would also have to work on tuning in on the traces left by research.

How do the traces left by the research—as set off technical operations, skills, working habits and results—on the traces of the past, communicate the interest(s) one has in the past? And how will these traces be assessed and evaluated by posterity?

Do the kinds traces left by research in situ yield and evidence our availability—and interest as fellow humans—to the life-forms of yore? Evidently, these are tricky questions, that may be part of some larger "wicked problem" of our time.

If our availability, at a human level, to life-forms of yore is reduced to «spiritual resonance» and a naïve identification with populist undertones—which is certainly found in the «cousin discipline» of anthropology"—we are missing the mark.

But if the reasons we have to cultivate an awareness of our own tracery, is to tune in on the remnants of the past in productive ways, then the people that come after us are left with readable traces, and they will understand what we were trying to do.

You will by now have understood why I started this conversation with bringing to awareness the other person who is looking at you from afar. S/he needs not be removed in space, s/he can also be remote in time, with claims to be your associate.

The cultivation of this state, of availability and mobilisation, before the evidence of human work and life is a 'droit de cité'. It is a condition for being part of the artistic community. And features a combination of receptivity and readiness of long standing.

This "ground zero" of perception is not achieved by a philosophical reduction, as in Husserl's phenomenology, but through a process of enskilment, similar to professional listening among musicians. To distinguish it I call it phenomenology φ.

Jacqui Wood's archaeological research methods (Bouissac & Gheorghiu 2015) are interesting that this point, because she is skilled in the arts & crafts of making, and uses her queries in ancient manufacture to query and study making in ancient times.

In aspects, her approach is similar to Darvill's in that our current categories can inspire practices falling out of sync with the modus operandi of making in the past. If archaeologists specialise in pottery, their makers did other things than (only) pots.

Conversely, in studying the manufacture of a chevron striped hood from the Orkney Islands, she concluded that it was likely to have been manufactured by more than one person. As she was circulating between crafts, she became aware of circulation.

That is, she learned to appreciate and query the fact that there is a good deal of bricolage—and making do—in human undertakings. There are contingencies and the contingency of utilising contingencies; which in turn yields a certain kind of order.

How many archaeologists still use hand-written logbooks? Anthropologists have to keep their diaries handwritten, because the places they go to do fieldwork, often do not have electricity and the climate-conditions don't allow anything else.

Even ink can be precarious and, among anthropologists who go to do fieldwork in rainforest areas, Jacqueline Thomas and Luc Bouquiaux's (1976) advice of using textured paper and fat crayons is still followed by people going to the tropics.

Which means that various personal systems for connecting disparate elements—which on computers is done by cut & paste, hyperlinks, drag & drop—and annotating them, are developed by anthropologists while they are in the field.

The relevance in discussing such artefacts as manual field-notes/-diaries/-logs as a subcategory of traces left by research, that add to the tracery of evidence that the researcher is there to harvest, was pointed out by Clifford & Marcus already in 1986.

Indeed, even their book-title Writing Culture is suggestive of the fact that diary- & logbook-writing adds a layer to the cultural stuff anthropologist work with when doing fieldwork. Evidently, annotation systems add yet one layer.

In sum, the contingencies of fieldwork conditions are reflected in the jumbled record in field-notes. They are dictated by the sequence of events and observations. Till a meaningful dialogue between ideas and evidence starts to emerge.
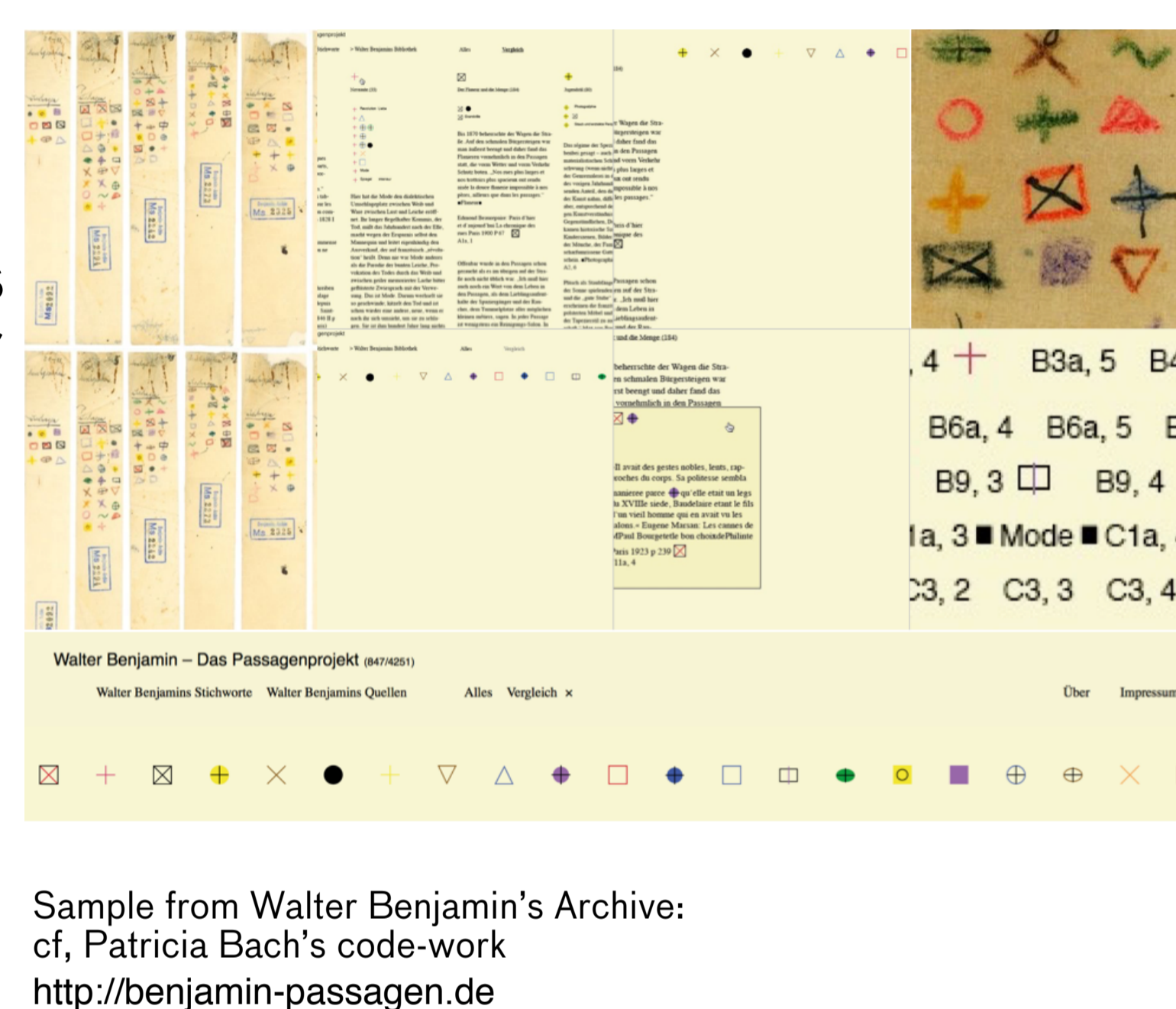
Sample from Walter Benjamin's Archive:
cf. Patricia Bach's code-work
http://benjamin-passagen.de

Past this threshold, a second layer of contingency is added: the annotation system. In practice the annotation of field-notes has two functions: one is to navigate in the notebook while fieldworking, the other is to classify while editing.

Unfortunately, note-books are mostly considered as personal assets, and they are rarely available to the public, or larger audiences. If they are passed on, it is usually by inheritance. Whether it is to the family, colleagues or student-apprentices.

The world of academic publications stops here, and another—artisanal—world starts. Rabinow, Marcus, Faubion and Reese relevantly suggested, on the background of such considerations, that apprenticeship in fieldwork be organised as studio-crits.

They published a four-way conversation devoted to this topic as late as in 2010. Indicating a laborious process of moving from the artisanal logic to a logic closer to that used by designers and architects, would bring new materials on the table.

This needs not be as relevant for archaeologists as for anthropologists, since they are organised in teams, and a greater part of the practices relating to logging field-records from digging-sites is res publica—public matter.

Which is why a sample from Walter Benjamin's annotation practice—displayed above—is included here. It was developed for his personal use, but also readable to his friends, with whom he corresponded a good deal. Today the material is public.

In sum, the material is a rare and precious intermediary case of a personal system developed in view of a certain circulation, which today is publicly available for consultation at the archives of the Akademie der Künste in Berlin, Germany.

Which means that it provides a real occasion to assess a problem of which Benjamin himself was keenly aware. That the contingencies of research—even library research—and the contingencies of scholarly editing are not the same.

Benjamin made a great point out of distinguishing between the researcher's and the scholar's card-indexes. His idea was that their interaction was stereoscopic —from this he developed a concept of 3D writing, giving depth to a subject matter.

Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) was inspired by modern artist Paul Klee (1879-1940). Benjamin acquired an exemplar of Klee's now famous print Angelus Novus, which he incorporated into his philosophy as the 'Angel of History':

"A Klee painting named Angelus Novus shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress."

Benjamin purchased the print in 1921, and the above passage is from Benjamin's 1940 essay "Theses on the Philosophy of History." The year he died in Portbou.

These are materials from High Modernity, and one could object that it falls out of the scope of archaeology. As is common knowledge, Michel Foucault argued otherwise in his now classic book on the Archaeology of Knowledge (1969).

When Foucault was elaborating this programme the archaeological «excavation site» was the historical archive. And he also developed a notion of the archive that in the end became rather abstract. And did not relate to material practice in research.

To find an adequate approach to Benjamin's annotation—as a practice and a system of artefacts—we must look elsewhere. Starting by pointing out the rather obvious impact of his inspiration from Paul Klee. Curious small items.

In Signatura rerum (Eng. Signature of All Things, 2009) Giorgio Agamben elaborates the concept of 'signatures' based on a definition of Enzo Melandri's, which in simple terms is: a sign within a sign, that operates within a sign-world.

It does not operate by itself, and has to be activated/played. It can pass overlooked and unseen, for this reason; and discarded as superfluous. There are historical examples of this phenomenon in the area of modern typography and book editions.

In a modern print-shop the type-setter and the printer belonged to different and clearly distinct professions. They had each their system of signatures: one to identify type-sets, the other to identify the print-sheets before they were folded into books.

The latter are numbered and clearly visible in books—e.g. every 16th page. A number of them are still in circulation. Though print-shops still talk about 'signatures' for stacks of 16 print-faces, the practices are disappearing with digital printing.

Nevertheless, they provide a material example from the recent past in which the same type of duality is manifested at a professional level, that Benjamin pointed out with reference to the duality between the researcher's that the scholar's indexes.

In his collaboration with T.W. Adorno, it becomes clear that Benjamin did not believe in a synthesis between these two sorts of indexes, or filing systems (nor, therefore between navigation and classification systems).

Rather, he would sustain the contradiction and instead open the ground for the multiplication and proliferation of mediations between them. That is, a realm in which reading and sensing would come together. Sensing and making sense.

Which is how, dear reader, we will have moved from the topic of the image emerging from our ability to see someone else see—seeing ourselves seeing—to sensing others sense, and our ability to sense ourselves sense.

Arguably, the kind of experimental interventions conducted by archaeologists as Prof. Gheorghiu are actively involved in asking how it is possible to awaken the intelligence of sensing on site, in the field, in the service of archaeology.

While—in a different session (T09-C) at WAC08—José Pellini is developing an agenda for sensorial archaeology, which is more concerned with the sensorial worlds of the people and life forms we are working to comprehend.