
The Archaeology of Collective Action. Dean J. Saitta. The American Experience in Archaeological Perspective Series. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007. xx+140 pp. (Paper US\$24.95)

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Dean Saitta invites us to expand theories of archaeological agency with a more inclusive look at the making of *collective* forms of experience. Saitta worries that a focus on the individual succumbs to the quiet seductions of neoliberal fragmentation, thus missing alternative vectors of social action. *The Archaeology of Collective Action* is also concerned with the politics of knowledge. Saitta and his colleagues have actively contributed to the recent archaeological engagement with the public sphere, and production of “useable pasts” that stimulate participation and debate beyond disciplinary horizons. Critical activism, however, is not devoid of pitfalls: for, if archaeology can be a source of empowerment for “those without history,” it is also a craft long beholden to *la pensée bourgeoise*. Navigating between theory and experience, between past and present, Saitta discusses the ethical, epistemological, and pragmatic implications of a commitment to archaeological praxis. In the process, he offers an up-to-date synthesis of the archaeological research conducted since 1997 by a group of scholars, activists, and volunteers (sometimes referred to as the “Ludlow Collective”) on the Colorado coalfields wars.

The first four chapters lay out the conceptual groundwork for Saitta’s vision of archaeology as an “*explanatory* and *emancipatory* enterprise” (p. 3). Influenced by practice/structuration theory and Marxism, yet weary of the impasses of objectivism and relativism, Saitta finds friendly ground in pragmatism and its concerns for democratic action. There, archaeology becomes one of many coexistent discourses, laboring to link different perspectives into more inclusive fields of knowledge that open new horizons of social action and community building. The book foregrounds labor as one of the crucibles in which salient forms of group consciousness are made. As a key domain of social action, labor must be understood relationally through its intersections with capital, class, race, kinship, sex, and ethnicity. Unraveling these articulations requires awareness of both the “small narratives” of

lived experience and “broader” stories of long-term political-economic change, and how their encounters play out in material landscapes.

The following two chapters turn to the Colorado miners’ strike of 1913–14, one of the bloodiest episodes in the history of U.S. labor conflicts, and a fulcrum in the struggle for union recognition. Using comparative archaeological research at Ludlow, one of the tent colonies where displaced strikers relocated, and Berwind, one of the coal camps that they deserted and subsequently resettled after the conflict, Saitta provides an engaging study of collective action in the past. While the analysis is still ongoing, the archaeological work offers tantalizing glimpses into miners’ lives, and social strategies they deployed to respond to authority before, during, and after the strike. Artifact assemblages and spatial evidence provide compelling illustrations of how workers crafted new forms of sociality and political consciousness around food preparation and practices, tent design/construction, and community layout, shaped in complex ways by ethnicity, gender, and economy. Marshaling material evidence from the battlefield, Saitta also takes a brief critical look at the remembered histories of conflict and violence at the site.

Though often insightful, Saitta’s discussion sometimes collapses the expression of class *in and for* itself, which tends to obscure the complicated relationship between intentional action and unspoken structure of feeling. Long a vexing concern in social theory, the question of consciousness (and conditions of its possibility) raises the delicate issue of whether archaeology is suitably equipped to retrieve past subjectivities—or the *kinds* of subjectivities it can bring into relief. On occasions, material expressions are interpreted, by default, as reflections of conscious collective action, when such associations would demand greater substantiation. But again, these questions arise in part from the ongoing nature of the work, and they will probably be addressed more squarely as research continues to unfold.

Looping back to the present, the final two chapters explore archaeology’s role in sparking public memory of disenfranchised pasts in a political landscape saturated with triumphalist histories of capital and liberal individualism. Saitta reviews the Ludlow Collective’s outreach efforts to retrieve labor struggles from the threat of erasure, by revealing the forgotten contributions of working people to American history and how, beneath the placid surface of status quo history, our present was fashioned in the brutal collision between industrial capital and labor. The project’s goal is to strike a corrective note between the excesses of both official and vernacular

narratives of the coalfield wars, to explore the various “synergies” between these different accounts (p. 103).

The book ends with a dual plea for (1) recuperating archaeology from the realm of irrelevancy and (2) reasserting the importance of class as a salient positionality in today’s world. Against the tactical failures of identity politics, archaeology can be used strategically to “show how groups who have learned . . . to see themselves as different in variety of nonclass ways share some common class experiences” (p. 110). The power of artifacts to conjure affect and effect can be mobilized to connect different “militant particularisms” to a broader sense of collective struggle.

Though a slim volume, *The Archaeology of Collective Action* is incomparably rich in ideas and examples. True to Saitta’s pragmatist agenda, the book invites conversation across a wide spectrum of audiences. In this spirit, it will make for an excellent text in undergraduate classes and a solid manifesto for public outreach archaeology. It will also attract the interest of politically minded scholars working on labor. While it does a great job of underscoring how material culture can mediate historical contradictions between past and present, the book does not entirely resolve (and does not claim to resolve) the question of archaeology’s success as a mode of political action and raising public consciousness. The book documents the important forays made to commemorate Ludlow’s silenced history in a sometimes unfriendly political climate. Yet, as Saitta himself remarks, how many minds will be changed? As with any politically engaged scholarship, the force of Saitta’s message must be evaluated in the arena of practice and praxis—which is fitting for the book, as I am sure Saitta would accept no other litmus test.

Music, Memory, Resistance: Calypso and the Caribbean Literary Imagination. Sandra Pouchet Paquet, Patricia J. Saunders, and Stephen Stuempfle (eds.). Kingston, Jamaica, and Miami, FL: Ian Randle, Publishers, 2007. xii+466 pp. (Paper price unavailable)

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A performance practice, social intervention, and literary genre, calypso can be approached from various

disciplinary perspectives. In its aim to examine these multiple roles simultaneously, *Music, Memory, Resistance: Calypso and the Caribbean Literary Imagination* represents a remarkable achievement on a number of fronts. Among the various results of this multidisciplinary work, the essays encourage (1) an expansion of the boundaries of “the literary” to include linguistic forms that have been predominantly associated with oral communication; (2) a reexamination of calypso as a form that has an oral/aural history but concurrently exists as a written form; and (3) the creation of a forum for considering how calypso as a performance practice impacts novelistic production in the Caribbean. Through its inclusion of essays by prominent scholars such as Gordon Rohlehr and Louis Regis, the collection offers new sites of inquiry while providing historical grounding for readers who are new to calypso.

This collection of essays was originally presented at the 2005 conference, “Calypso and the Caribbean Literary Imagination” hosted by the University of Miami, then published in *Anthurium*, Volume 3, No. 2 (Fall 2005), a special issue of the journal. In addition to including more essays and reorganizing their presentation, the purpose of republishing this work as *Music, Memory, Resistance* is, as editors Sandra Pouchet Paquet and Stephen Stuempfle state, “to enjoy a different kind of circulation among students, scholars, and calypso enthusiasts” (p. xiv). One of the ways the text could circulate is through its explicit linkage to a set of digital archives housed at the Historical Museum of Southern Florida’s website (which were available until 2009 at <http://www.calypso-world.org>). Indeed, the first essay by Hollis “Chalkdust” Liverpool, a transcription of his conference presentation in which he oscillated between a formal talk and singing calypsos, indicates the critical need for print collections that focus on performance practices to seek amplification through accessible archives of performance recordings. Several essays seek to narrate those performance archives. For example, Andrea Shaw’s “Big Fat Fish: The Hypersexualization of the Fat Black Woman’s Body in Calypso and Dancehall,” sensitively depicts the legacy of women blues singers’ self-promotion and artistic development. Likewise, in his discussion of the United States’ 1950s “calypso craze,” Michael Eldridge works to reveal how the craze was in effect drummed up by industry executives and that the internationalization of calypso brought forth issues of minstrelsy and the false dichotomy opposing an authentic folk practice to tourism-driven shows.

The critical approach that the collection identifies as its contribution to the field is an articulation