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Making *Archives in Place*: adopting a creative exchange approach in heritage research

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a reflexive account of creative exchange in critical heritage studies research. It does so by recounting the methodological opportunities and challenges of researching on a large interdisciplinary heritage programme. We tested this creative exchange approach when undertaking fieldwork with a museum and a history society in the UK's Clay Country in Cornwall, which resulted in a public-facing output: a short film titled 'Archives in Place'. We argue that this creative exchange approach enabled us to cross-fertilise our heritage research themes of 'transformation' and 'profusion', and we illustrate how new insights were revealed through examples taken while we were recording, analysing and editing the short film. By means of conclusion, we encourage heritage researchers to critically engage with methods and to have confidence in experimenting with creative methodologies which have the potential to open up new perspectives for heritage studies.

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Creative exchange; critical heritage studies; methodology; archives; museums

Introduction

This paper identifies the methodological opportunities and challenges of two research associates working on a large interdisciplinary heritage programme. By reflexively interrogating a collaborative research journey, we illustrate how 'creative exchange' was used to develop a methodological approach for exploring a site featuring authorised and vernacular heritage. We do not propose a new method for critical heritage studies, nor do we claim that a turn to creative exchange, or more widely 'creative research methods' (Kara 2020; Mannay 2016), is novel. Rather, our point of difference is that developing a creative exchange approach to our methods facilitated the cross-fertilisation (a term we unpack below) of our heritage themes located in one site – the Clay Country in Cornwall, UK.

In what follows, we build and illustrate this argument through the production of a short film, *Archives in Place* (AiP) which can be seen on the Heritage Futures website (<https://heritage-futures.org/archives-in-place/>) or on Vimeo (<https://vimeo.com/223623288>).¹ The 9-minute film both documented and facilitated exploration of the themes of profusion and transformation across different domains of heritage practice. By doing so, the paper addresses a core thread in current research seeking to address what Winter (2013, 533) called the 'critical issues' that 'extend outwards from heritage': the argument that heritage can be understood as 'plural heritage ontologies' (Harrison et al.

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2020, 6) or multiple, overlapping domains of heritage-making which ‘enact different realities’ (Ibid., see also Harrison 2015, 2018). While this is an established *way of thinking* about heritage, far less critical reflection exists on how researchers *empirically explore such overlap* through their chosen methodological approach. We wish to build on scholarship that seeks to critically engage with methods from the perspective of a heritage lens (e.g. Smith 2006; Waterton, Smith, and Campbell 2006; De Nardi 2014; Kiddey 2018; Meskell 2018; Bartolini and DeSilvey 2020b; Istvandity 2021; Bonacchi et al. 2023). Specifically, we provide a reflexive account of using ‘creative exchange’ (Fleishmann and Hutchinson 2012; Hayes, Maguire, and O’Sullivan 2021) and ‘methods assemblage’ (Law 2004) in a more-than-human environment (Bubandt, Andersen, and Cypher 2022) to explore interrelations and mutual impacts across different heritage domains. Simply put, our aim was to use film as a means to cross-fertilise the heritage themes of transformation and profusion at one location in order to seek new insights. In building this argument, our point is not to suggest that all heritage research should or will take a creative exchange approach. Rather, it is to contribute and catalyse discussion of how methodologies might enact current conceptual directions in critical heritage studies.

The paper starts by introducing the case study through a discussion of the larger research programme and the themes of profusion and transformation that framed our work. We then outline the concept of a creative exchange approach to cross-fertilise these themes through the making of a film, and we follow with a brief description of the location of our fieldwork, the Clay Country in Cornwall. The empirical section is on making the film itself, as we illustrate our creative exchange approach: first, by blending documentary and interventional methods through recording and gathering materials; and second, by developing a more self-conscious approach to curating and communicating heritage themes through editing. We conclude that taking on a creative exchange approach advances understanding of how to empirically assemble, cross-fertilise and analyse more-than-human elements in a complex post-industrial heritage landscape.

The research programme: transformation and profusion in heritage futures

The research for this article was undertaken as part of a large interdisciplinary heritage programme running between 2015 and 2019 (Heritage Futures, AHRC grant AH/M004376/1). The programme gathered a core team of 11 scholars from anthropology, archaeology, geography, and creative practice backgrounds, and 25 international heritage partners spanning natural and cultural heritage. At that time, the programme was at the forefront of what can be called a ‘futures turn’, both within heritage and beyond (e.g. Anders et al. 2018; Halford and Southerton 2023; Heritage, Iwasaki, and Wollentz 2023; Holtorf and Högberg 2021; Salazar et al. 2017; Spennemann 2007). The research programme examined heritage practices across a range of domains to consider potential for ‘creative exchange within and across them’ (Harrison et al. 2020, xxix). Four themes – diversity, profusion, uncertainty and transformation – structured the research design and reporting mechanisms, including a published book (Harrison et al. 2020).

Even from this brief overview, it is clear that the guiding logic for the research was a comparative approach looking ‘across fields of practice that are rarely, if ever, thought about collectively’ (Harrison et al. 2020, 8). Methodologically, this approach was translated into multi-sited ethnography (16–17), which has been promoted more widely in heritage studies for enabling ‘structured comparison’ (de Suremain 2019, 23). Each of the thematic researchers (four themes, four teams) undertook fieldwork within distinct heritage sites and institutions, including sites not typically thought about through a heritage lens, but which can be understood to manage material, intangible, and/or digital legacies for the future. The profusion researchers researched museums and people’s homes; diversity researchers examined endangered language programmes and frozen seedbanks; the uncertainty team examined nuclear waste repositories and world heritage sites; and the transformation team investigated post-military, post-industrial and rewilding landscapes. Collectively, the team sought to capture vastly different geographic locations and institutions

with very different agents and heritage resources to compare practices of collecting, curating, conserving, and communicating heritage.

One of the authors of this paper was part of the transformation team, and the other author was part of the profusion team. The selection of transformation as a thematic strand coincided with the idea of examining landscapes and materials that were ‘undergoing active processes of change and transformation’ (DeSilvey, Bartolini, and Lyons 2020, 360). For us, transformation enabled ‘the inclusion of multiple processes and potentialities, incorporating changes in composition and structure, but also in character and condition’ (Ibid.). In this sense, transformation was focused primarily on the management of heritage practices and processes at sites where the built environment was being accommodated through ruination and material change, and where landscapes were being subjected to human or non-human dynamic processes that fostered an appreciation of more-than-human considerations (Ibid., 361). Our three case sites involved a post-military coastal site at a national nature reserve in Suffolk, a post-industrial site turned into a garden village in the Cornish Clay Country, and a rewilding initiative in Portugal. Comparing the different heritage processes at these sites within a transformation lens highlighted the complexities of nature/culture entanglements, particularly when national frameworks tend to separate the management of cultural and environmental/natural assets. The profusion theme examined the challenge of curating a proliferation of material (and increasingly digital) things, especially those produced for mass consumption. Our particular concern was with keeping material culture ‘variously labelled as “stuff”, “treasure” or “heritage”’ (Macdonald, Morgan, and Fredheim 2020a, 155). To explore how and why some things are kept and others are not, the team undertook fieldwork at social history museums (institutions tasked with keeping for posterity yet often straddled with large existing collections) and people’s homes (where domestic practices shape inheritance). Fieldwork was conducted in the UK, yet consultation of wide-ranging documentary sources and some direct exploration of international cases indicated profusion to be of global concern (Ibid., 166). The study challenged a simple keeping/discarding binary by showing these strategies for curating profusion to be ‘part of a spectrum that is characterised by degrees of visibility, organisation and care’ (Macdonald, Morgan, and Fredheim 2020b, 240).

Comparisons – or ‘cross-theme syntheses’ (Harrison et al. 2020, 12) – across profusion and transformation were made in the project book. For example, both themes were found to challenge traditional ideas of heritage as ‘static, unchanging and performed once and for all’ to focus instead on ‘possibilities of working with change’ (Macdonald, Morgan, and Fredheim 2020b, 247). Synergies were made between the profusion theme’s concern with the democratisation of heritage (or seeing worth in more diverse things, stories, identities, and memories) and the transformation theme’s attention to participatory management of changing landscapes (e.g. ‘citizen-recording’) (Harrison et al. 2020, 469).

Throughout the research programme, creativity as an engagement tool came through the guise of knowledge-exchange² activities, such as visual essays exploring shared issues (Harrison et al. 2020, 12–13), game-playing, blogs, scenario-building, planning a children’s book, visualising meeting minutes, producing exhibitions, photography, participatory arts events and films (see also Bartolini and DeSilvey 2020b; Morgan and Castle 2023). Most of the insights gathered were written up and structured within thematic strands. While we were active in fostering comparative insight *across* different heritage domains, or ‘plural heritage ontologies’ (Harrison et al. 2020, 6), in this article we shift our analysis. We move from reporting on working separately within distinct field sites addressing different thematic issues, to instead consider how we examined two themes by working together in a single location for creative exchange. In the next section, we outline the theoretical underpinning of our creative exchange to highlight how we attempted to cross-fertilise our themes in practice.

Creative exchange: cross-fertilisation through methods assemblage

The concept of ‘creative exchange’ has been used by scholars and (higher education) institutions, mainly through arts-based practices fostering multidisciplinary conversations (see, for example, Fleishmann and Hutchinson 2012; Hayes, Maguire, and O’Sullivan 2021). However, for our purposes, ‘creative exchange’ takes on a slightly different meaning. First, we adopt a wider understanding of ‘creativity’ to consider how being creative is embedded throughout research – from preparation, gathering data, analysis and communicating findings (Brooks, Lainio, and Lažetič 2020; Cerisola 2019; Kara 2020; Mannay 2016; Von Benzon et al. 2021). This goes beyond equating creativity solely with arts-based practices or with output-based activities; rather, being creative enables approaches to emerge and, where research methods can be adapted, allows experimentation in analysis and outputs. Second, while we align with the perspective that the ‘exchange’ relates to an ‘interchange of ideas’ and a ‘dialogue’ that stretch across scales, disciplines and practices (Fleishmann and Hutchinson 2012, 24–25), we tend to favour and explain below how creative exchange ‘recognises the potential interrelationship between all concepts’ (25).

Our creative exchange approach is based on the research programme’s ‘material-semiotic approach to conservation assemblages’ (Harrison et al. 2020, 13), which is in part drawn on the idea that ‘[a]ssemblages are always composed of heterogeneous elements’ and that they ‘emerge from the interactions between their parts’ (DeLanda 2016, 20–21). To appreciate and eventually reveal the interplay inspired by the assemblage of people, objects, spaces, practices, and emotions in crafting future heritage, we attuned to our wish to ‘cross-fertilise’ transformation and profusion. We use the term ‘cross-fertilisation’ to reference undertaking a kind of intellectual and empirical ‘pollination’ (Allen 2018). Like bees moving from plant to plant, we used our exchanges to transfer and translate elements of transformation and profusion from one heritage domain to another. The key was to embrace a creative approach, including ‘curiosity’, to pollinate new learning by placing profusion and transformation into different contexts and relationships with each other, and to respond intuitively to emerging insights (cf. Allen 2018). Cross-fertilisation led us to not only consider the creative exchanges between heritage domains and themes but also between each other (researcher – researcher exchange), with other people (participants – researchers in the field exchange), and with the broader landscape (more-than-human – researchers exchange) and how they can generate new insights.

Attending to this cross-fertilisation suggests practising what Law (2004) calls ‘methods assemblage’. Through this concept, Law is concerned with developing methods for understanding the complexity (‘mess’) of the world that slips beyond social science methods which traditionally have sought studying fixity, stability, and coherence. A key point of Law’s argument is that the methods do not simply ‘describe’ but also ‘produce’ realities. These ideas aligned well with our hope to develop our creative exchanges to both *identify* and to *generate* ‘cross-fertilisation’ of profusion and transformation in situ within one fieldsite. Indeed, we felt strongly that to do this, we would need to ‘remake’ our methods (another core strand of Law’s arguments). Working together across our two thematic strands presented an opportunity to explore the conceptual claim that heritage is enacted across plural ontological domains. Nonetheless, this presented us with challenges, mainly: how can we capture the complexity of engaging with, capturing and illustrating ‘plural ontological empirically? Here, ‘methods assemblage’ is useful because it encouraged us to remake our research programme methods so that they were ‘broader, looser, more generous’ (Law 2004, 4). More specifically, and of direct relevance to our aim, is Law’s idea that ‘situated inquiry’, as specific ‘methods assemblage’, encourages ‘rethink[ing] how far whatever it is that we know travels and whether it still makes sense in other locations, and if so how’ (Ibid., 3). These ideas pointed us towards developing an approach that would allow us to identify and produce a cross-fertilisation (or ‘travelling’ in Law’s sense) of themes. Throughout his book, Law stresses creative response (understood as improvisation, flexibility, innovation) as especially attune to this conceptual position. Law’s

concept is useful in theory, yet the challenge for us was how to practically apply, assess and represent this methods assemblage in the field.

Law's methods assemblage has synergies with ideas proposed in Bubandt, Andersen, and Cypher (2022). Identified as 'rubber boots methods', the term reflects how researchers investigating more-than-human histories and social configurations in landscapes are often in need of wearing appropriate footwear. The authors adopt a 'multiplicity of methodological approaches' drawn from different disciplinary boundaries to attend to the human, ecological, biological and structural elements found in landscapes (Bubandt, Andersen, and Cypher 2022, 4). Importantly, this involves broadening one's perspectives on how to approach the field, and 'be[ing] open to serendipity and wonder' (Ibid., 5), assisting us to adopt a methodological stance that is open to emerging opportunities and affects in a more-than-human environment. The authors based their methodological experiments at a former coal mining site near the town of Søby in Denmark, which is now a recognised cultural heritage site featuring woodland and rolling hills (Ibid., 1). We find parallels with the transformation of this area with our own case study location in the Clay Country.

The clay country

The location of our case study is in the county of Cornwall, UK. Affectionately known as 'the Clay Country', the interior of mid-Cornwall close to St Austell, was the site where china clay was first extracted and produced in Britain in the eighteenth century when chemist William Cookworthy discovered how to turn the fine powder into hard paste porcelain (Wheal Martyn 2012). China clay or kaolin results from the decomposition of some of the feldspar in granite (Thurlow 2005). Mining the clay involved using high-pressure jets of water to 'break up' the clay face, creating pits where water would accumulate and waste tips mainly composed of white quartz (Thurlow 2007). This had the effect of scarring the landscape (Storm 2014), leaving shiny white hills in the countryside which could be seen on postcards and dubbed 'The Cornish Alps' (Thurlow 2007). The entire china clay process itself involves laborious work that consists in extracting, separating, removing, settling, drying, storing and includes a host of material structures such as coal sheds, pumping engines and water wheels.

The china clay industry reached its heyday in the nineteenth century: '[by] 1858 there were 42 companies producing about 65,000 tons of clay a year' (Wheal Martyn 2012, 7). Entire families were either directly or indirectly involved in the industry, which created a sense of pride in the Clay Country communities (see Bartolini and DeSilvey 2020a). However, in the second half of the twentieth century, the industry modernised and significantly downsized in Cornwall, leaving generations of skilled china clay workers unemployed. The transformation of the industry therefore had a profound effect on the perception of china clay, such as the creation of Wheal Martyn Clay Works (WMCW), a museum in St Austell 'established in 1975 by the producers of china clay in Cornwall to preserve and record the history of the mid Cornwall area' (Wheal Martyn 2012, 4).

The transformation of the industry and the creation of a museum provided a perfect case study for us to assess our themes. The museum is steeped in the past and the present, having been part of two china clay works in the 1800s – Gomm works and Wheal Martyn by the Martyn Brothers (Wheal Martyn 2012) extending outdoors – as well as a present-day working china clay pit. The inside/outside perspective of the past interwoven with the present captures how the history of the industry is also entwined with the landscape, its people and communities, and associated material and intangible heritage. Like the former coal mine near Søby in Denmark, much of the Clay Country landscape near the town of St Austell is made up of post-industrial fauna and flora, with walking trails permeating the rolling hills which mask the former 'Cornish Alps' of the waste tips (see Bartolini 2020).

WMCW is therefore a composite site, being a museum, a site of built heritage, a working extraction site as well as a place of archives and material and documentary storage. Yet, during the Heritage Futures programme, the museum and the industry archives were split between two

locations: the museum and a building about a 20-minute drive away which housed archives of the china clay industry gathered by volunteers of the China Clay History Society (CCHS). Ultimately, the plan for the near future was for CCHS's materials to be embedded within WMCW. As WMCW was already a partner in the Heritage Futures programme, with a transformation theme knowledge-exchange event taking place at the museum, we were tangentially aware that this imminent transformation appeared to be bringing into sharp relief issues of profusion, particularly as Heritage Futures PhD student Robyn Raxworthy was doing research on CCHS's archives. Therefore, a robust relationship had already been achieved with both WMCW and CCHS, so when we discussed doing some additional research to understand both WMCW's 'authorised' top-down heritage processes and comparing them with CCHS's vernacular community-driven practices, WMCW proposed that we do a visual public-facing output.

In this sense, as already introduced, we respond to dominant conceptual framings of heritage, both within this specific programme and the critical heritage studies field that emphasise comparison and overlap between heritage domains. Put simply, we wanted to experiment with how to research this in practice: two researchers embedded in two different themes within a large programme seeking to creatively exchange in situ and contribute an accessible output. We now turn to consider how we translated this *thinking* into a creative exchange *methodology*.

The methods assemblage: creating a film

Our 'methods assemblage' involved creating a research film encompassing both WMCW and CCHS. Film has been used in a variety of disciplines, such as visual anthropology, in order to investigate and represent everyday lives through the moving image (Banks and Morphy 1997; Pink 2007; Schneider and Pasqualino 2014). We should briefly clarify why we understand film to be a 'methods assemblage'. Film resonates with Law's interpretation of 'situated inquiry' being a 'methods assemblage'. As one of the authors has discussed elsewhere (Bartolini and DeSilvey 2020b, 20), film is a situated inquiry because it 'can generate new forms of situated knowledge' (Ibid., 21) by capturing and understanding heritage-making in place. This aligns with Haraway's (1988) notion of 'situated knowledges' which appreciates embodied experiences in place and helps us think about how these situated knowledges *are produced*. Film was a means through which we challenged ourselves to cross-fertilise our themes through creative exchange to produce new understanding of the interplay between transformation and profusion. Film allowed us to consider whether what we each thought we knew about these themes held up when brought into conversation through a located people-object-landscape configuration (cf Law 2004, 3). In what follows, we outline how creative exchange helped us to curate and communicate insights on our themes through recording and editing.

Gathering research materials: recording and creative exchange

In April 2017, we dedicated 2 days³ to visit the WMCW and CCHS composite site, speak with relevant staff and volunteers, and to film our interactions. Institutional ethical review was conducted through the transformation team based at the University of Exeter where informed consent had been gained to conduct qualitative research and to film fieldwork to develop audio-visual outputs. Initially, we had identified several key participants we wished to speak to at both WMCW and CCHS, and, having chosen to visit on one of the days when we knew most of the volunteers would be present, our pool of participants grew from there. The planned output was to be shared online through various platforms, including WMCW's website. This is a key part of the research we undertook: the desire to create an output that would be accessible to our participants and to the wider WMCW community. To gather information, we invited participants to show us each site and to speak with us about the linked museum and archive collections, as well as opportunities and

challenges they were facing for long-term curation. Logistically, we decided that one author would film, while the other would interact with participants on camera.

Initially, we entered the field using a broadly ethnographic approach similar to what we had each been using within our respective transformation and profusion teams. That is to say, our aim was to learn about everyday, situated practices and understandings of managing heritage in the Clay Country and to observe any routine processes associated with the management of this heritage during our time in location. Given the brevity of our visit, this was not the traditional model of a sole-ethnographer embedded in a field site over the long term, but more akin to ‘collaborative auto ethnography’ (Morgan and Pink 2018) and ‘short term ethnography’ (Pink and Morgan 2013).⁴ In this sense, we approached the field using the camera to document our fieldwork experiences as they unravelled, but also used recording for ‘a more deliberate and interventional approach’ (Pink and Morgan 2013, 353). This blending of documentary and interventional approaches enabled us to probe relatively quickly, intensely and deeply (see Pink and Morgan 2013) into the vernacular and authorised heritage practices of WMCW and CCHS. While a useful entry point, we agree with Von Benzon et al. (2021, 3) that our desire to instil a creative investigative lens was to seize ‘the opportunity to experiment with research methods in ways to help us think differently about how best to tackle’ our transformation and profusion themes. Creative and multiple approaches accommodated the need to consider the wider more-than-human elements embedded in the landscape (Bubandt, Andersen, and Cypher 2022) including heritage institutions.

For example, when visiting CCHS, we recorded conversations with volunteers (including individuals who had worked in the china clay industry) that could be qualified as semi-structured interviews. We asked broad questions around people’s work and role, essentially letting the camera roll continuously to document whatever aspects participants wanted to tell us in relation to their day-to-day working lives in the china clay industry and in their current roles volunteering for CCHS. Both authors would intervene to ask for more specific details or prompt certain questions related to specific items. Yet beyond this documentary-style of recording, we also used the camera in a more interventional manner to create conditions for creative exchange, such as by taking conversations beyond sitting down in an office-like space and recording while being taken around the archive to encounter key documents. In these circumstances, a boxed folder would be taken off a shelf, and documents would be unfolded as we filmed volunteers showing us specific elements or dates of records, as well as unsorted duplicates. At other times, talking about certain collections made us curious for additional detail at which point, for example, large format maps and aerial images of the landscape would be found and unfolded. This drew other volunteers into the conversation through their assistance with rolling out, thus implicitly performing to the camera the scale of these visual materials. Relocating our filming equipment, navigating laden shelving units and boxes in the process of being packed for transfer to WMCW, enabled moments of creative exchange between ourselves, the CCHS volunteers, the objects, and the archival environment as a means to experience the interplay between transformation and profusion in direct and embodied ways. The use of video, images, and material objects functioned as probes to enter into the everyday lives of the CCHS volunteers, their relationships to the decline of the industry, and its transformation into a proliferating material legacy.

Certainly, recording our own and others’ embodied movements on film became another key technique for blending our documentary and interventional approaches to filming leading to creative exchange. If CCHS’s office and archives are located indoors, WMCW is experienced both indoors and outdoors since it features a working china clay extraction site. This required walking to our destination; walking and experiencing; walking and observing; walking with other visitors; walking to listen to the sounds; walking to feel the soil and touch the clay (Figure 1). This resonates with gaining a sense of place (Tuan 1977; De Nardi 2014), letting us both be guided as well as independently drifting within the landscape to embrace the sights, sounds and materials.

Here, it is important to note that being aware of our embodiment and surroundings was both individual and *exchanged*. In other words, our ‘experiential perspective’ (Tuan 1977) was captured



Figure 1. Screenshot of an ex-china clay worker breaking the clay during a guided tour at WMCW. Source: AiP, 07:37.

through the exchange of our immediate thoughts in place, reflecting on our themes and the sensory which directed choices about what to film. For instance, at one junction in our roamings, we were struck by the amount of stuff – old machinery and various parts and objects – which appeared scattered in a grassy area on the museum grounds (AiP, 02:42). A panning shot helped us soak in the profusion of material whilst we listened to the birds singing and chirping in the background. Once we stopped recording, one of the authors noticed how each item was tagged, while the other author pointed at some of the moss that had started to form on one of the objects. This revealed in unexpected ways the wider interplay between transformation and profusion, prompting consideration of how these prolific material legacies from rapid change associated with the decline of an industry can move through different categorisations; or in this case seem to sit between categories, here being somewhat ‘discarded’ (showing signs of weathering from natural elements) yet ‘treasured’ (kept in a museum landscape with associated infrastructures of care like labelling) (see also Harrison et al. 2020, 468–469). We contend that these moments of exchange attend to the cross-fertilisation of our two thematic perspectives, contributing to our application of ‘methods assemblage’.

We invited our main participant, WMCW’s curator and collections coordinator, to give us a filmed guided tour of the site moving around and between the backstage offices into the museum storerooms. This was a more intimate exchange with an authoritative figure describing the processes and practices of the museum’s collection policy. However, at one point in our tour, we entered a room populated by some volunteers who became part of our exchanges, enabling us to understand the kinds of tasks they undertake and the wider context of the institution’s relationship with their volunteers. As we squeezed into a smaller storage space, the curator put on protective gloves and carefully chose a lease book (the Manor of Treverbyn, AiP, 04:17) to demonstrate the material and textual aesthetic of the nineteenth century binding and handwriting. A conversation ensued about this particular area in the china clay landscape which tied with an earlier conversation on this property with members of CCHS: how a sizeable piece of land was eventually cut into leased plots, some dedicated to specific china clay extraction sites. Other objects adorned the storage shelves, including items with notes, such as ‘Not accessioned. Should it be?’ (AiP, 06:36). The combination of exchanges that stem from moving through the museum’s backrooms and filming encounters with material objects allowed us to consider the subdivision of plots of land alongside the number of items that could be added to the museum’s collection.

We also welcomed serendipitous moments that emerged through our fieldwork. For instance, one of the CCHS volunteers unexpectedly offered us transport in his car from the storage building



Figure 2. Screenshot of the china clay waste tips. Source: AiP, 00:41.

to WMCW, located about a 20-minute drive away. This allowed us to experience an everyday journey that many volunteers make to have lunch in the cafe, meet with museum staff, or to engage in object labelling/accessioning with the museum curator in preparation of the transfer of CCHS's archival material to WMCW in the future. We filmed our rich discussions with our driver, who gave us the opportunity to stop and look at some of the waste tips that 'by legislation', he specified, are 'bench-formed; they're in 80-foot steps' (Figure 2). We travelled the roads tracing this landscape, in awe of the seemingly never-ending revegetated hills, tips and pits, and better appreciating their scale as they towered over the car (and indeed we struggled to fit in the video frame), gaining a *sense* of local connections to place through the perceptible emotion expressed in our driver's spoken narrative accompanying the visual tour. By filming us moving around in the landscape, we let it impress back upon us as we found ourselves absorbed by the scale of the industry and the scars left on the landscape. Such scars, as notes Storm (2014), are not only visual remnants but also affective ones.

At the end of each fieldwork day, we would spend our evenings exchanging on our reflections and going through our audio-visual materials to organise them into folders which were labelled by event (e.g. interviews with CCHS; tour of WMCW-outside, etc.). The materials included audio recordings (such as those collected through our Zoom recorder), moving images and stills. For each event, we would discuss, debate and schematically identify highlights that we felt enhanced our understanding or provided new insights of transformation and profusion, respectively.

These brief examples illustrate how we used the process of recording not simply to document our experiences as they unfolded but to prompt creative exchange with each other, our participants, and the environment (institutions and the wider landscape). Moving with the camera, recording our own and others' journeys, offered a route into appreciating how the landscape, the industry and its transformation are entwined with proliferating material legacies of industrial 'heritage'. Serendipitous moments of creative exchange, like being driven by a local who worked in the industry, revealed the hopes, uncertainties, and emotions associated with the future of this transformation.

Stitching together: editing and creative exchange

Having focused on recording, we now turn to editing which amounts to curating and communicating the material we collected. Editing was a means to operationalise our creative exchange framework at a more self-conscious level. On the one hand, we purposefully attempted to find

ways to cross-fertilise our themes; on the other hand, we were consistently mindful of producing and communicating an output that would be accessible to our participants and the wider public.

We set aside 2 days to analyse the materials we had collected to make a film. This initially seemed like a straightforward task; however, it soon became much more complex as we sought to balance critical thinking around transformation and profusion with creating a publicly-facing output for WMCW. While this process began during our two-day meeting, it continued through multiple online conversations and screen sharing exercises, and included input from our programme colleague Antony Lyons, who helped polish-edit the final product.

To start, we considered our event highlights (mentioned above) and assessed how our thematic exchanges could be cross-fertilised. We drew diagrams to query the relationship between material traces (demanded by grappling with the profusion of archival records, ephemera, and objects related to this declining industry) and the intangible legacies that linked stories, memories, social networks and sense of belonging with the transformation of the landscape. Intuitively, we considered building a narrative bookended by temporality: an introduction to the present site and how it came to be, and an ending that pointed to an uncertain future. Ultimately, however, we were confronted by our own issues of profusion and transformation as we struggled to select key audio and visual materials from the plethora of materials we had gathered, and to re-interpret those materials as we transformed them into an audio-visual narrative. As we assessed our materials, we realised we were applying processes in making the film that we were in fact researching with practitioners: categorising, curating, conserving and communicating.

If 'methods assemblage' is a useful methodological tool to appreciate the messiness in the field, it also poses an analytical challenge when trying to coherently organise a short research film for public consumption. For us, this is where our creative exchange approach came in to help structure and attend to the 'interrelationships between all concepts' (Fleishmann and Hutchinson 2012, 25): our creative response (Law 2004) through film assisted in stitching together a cohesive whole through the cross-fertilisation of our themes. We argue that this was done through the blending of the technological capabilities of our film editing software, the heritage themes that emerged from our participants and the debates that transpired through our curatorial process.

The film editing software we were using, Final Cut Pro X, enabled us to splice (cut) scenes, add audio, and layer in text, still images and cover pages. In a way, moving scenes around, taking the audio from one source and overlaying it to a still or moving image provided us with a means to 'pollinate' ideas and cross-fertilise the transformation and profusion themes. However, we needed some sort of guiding theme in order to help us decide what to move around and why. A series of curatorial decisions were made during our exchanges. For instance, we wanted the film to privilege participants' voices: we believed that their voices captured affective qualities and place-attachment indicative of '*transformative research frameworks*, which are flexible enough to take account of relevant contextual factors' (Kara 2020, 27, emphasis in original). This explains why we did not want to narrate the film ourselves or overlay our own voices to explain the thread of our narrative. Instead, we chose to 'show' rather than 'tell' viewers how we structured the storyline through six 'chapters' pre-empted by a black screen and white lettering. We wanted the chapters to be open-ended, enabling viewers to reflect and critically engage on the heritage themes.

It is important to note that what we did was to tell a story in a way that encapsulated our creative exchange with each other and with the field. We encountered multiple forms of storytelling in the field – from guided tours to the spontaneous telling of anecdotes. Storytelling can be considered 'a form of preservation practice' (Roberts 2018, 148), and we suggest that in the field, storytelling was being used by participants to sustain connections between industry, identity, and place when navigating 'changes [that were] massive' (AiP, 01:53), leading not only to a weakening of connections but 'erasure' of these elements (Roberts 2018, 148) as entire 'villages disappeared' (AiP, 01:55). In this context, storytelling preserves by (re)articulating a sense of place and attachment to the Clay Country and a sense of belonging within an industry-based community. In a way, our film was also

a means to preserve this storytelling tradition by giving voice to our participants and by us selecting and curating scenes that told their stories through heritage themes.

The themes we chose were essentially those that emerged from our participants by conducting a thematic analysis of the materials we collected. For instance, the second chapter related to particular practices of care (i.e. the wearing of gloves; storing of items in protective environments; labelling and documentation) which communicate value judgements (Harrison et al. 2020, 468) guiding what is (and is not) kept in the rapid transformation of industrial landscapes (see Macdonald, Morgan, and Fredheim 2020b for more detailed discussion on selection criteria used for managing heritage profusion). We recorded these exchanges, for example, when the curator showed us the Manor of Treverbyn lease book (AiP, 04:17) noting that ‘the care that was taken in making them’, indicated by precise handwriting, is what makes such objects ‘human’, ‘beautiful’ and eliciting of emotional response. This interaction gave us pause to consider the care practices we had encountered in the vernacular volunteer setting, and how various practices of care had been performed on camera, even if we were not always aware. For instance, as above, the telling of stories to camera itself may be considered an act of caring preservation for the intangible elements of this industrial place-based heritage. On re-viewing our clips while editing, we also came to better appreciate CCHS volunteers undertaking diverse acts of care focused more ostensibly on objects: storing these on shelving units; researching and documenting (including sharing personal direct experience, as we encountered when entering into their group conversations while they worked in the archive); seeking to acquire new items (recounting a company office shift as an opportunity to gain archival documents because ‘as they tipped them out, we collected’, AiP, 03:50); and sharing knowledge by helping people with queries and giving guiding site tours at WMCM. Film as a creative device can also be seen as an act of exchanging caring preservation by capturing a moment in time of these locals’ presence, their distinct voices and their everyday volunteering practices.

Caring for objects and legacies also relates to the experience of heritage, and how this can elicit an emotional response from participants. The third chapter, for example, specifically addressed the affective and emotional qualities sometimes entwined with collecting. Our recording and movement across both WMCW and CCHS sites enabled us to witness how both organisations were trying to create some order and logic with their collections. In some cases, the process of decision-making rests on wider, and sometimes personal, concerns that may shift through time. This idea follows on the expressed hopes and ambitions for managing and preserving heritage in the face of rapid transformation and profusion, yet, become imbued with affective qualities. For instance, after mentioning the passing of an important CCHS member and ex-china clay worker, we were brought to sift through his personal collection relating to china clay which was donated to CCHS. Although prior to his passing he had indicated to CCHS members that they could split his collection, CCHS decided to keep his collection intact for two reasons: the contents were too complex to be divided, and they wanted to honour his memory (AiP, 05:40). This highlights how archival collections are part of an ‘affectual infrastructure’ (Pile, Bartolini, and MacKian 2019) where feelings (here, of obligation to honour original intent)⁵ and living memory are entwined with both the materiality of the collection and the institutional framework. CCHS members also acknowledged, however, that the archive could change in the future. For us, this demonstrates how intense structures of personal feelings are in some ways tied to the objects now, but in the future, when most of the CCHS members would have passed, this personal collection could be transformed from a collection that is emotionally tied to the memory of the individual to one that is distinctly tied to the transformation of an industry.

We did not enter into this task with a specific script for our film. However, we were certain that an essential aspect of the china clay story we wanted to investigate was the relationship between the contemporary history of the declining industry and the birth of an archive as a repository for the objects, ephemera, stories, and memories linked to this industry. It was through the process of editing raw audio-visual recording to piece together this broad story that we further developed our

understanding of *creative exchange*. Ultimately, a draft of the film was presented to the participants to elicit feedback; no comments were obtained, and WMCW posted the film on their website.

In this section, we have thus explored moments of creatively exchanging our ideas and reflections that led to the cross-fertilisation of profusion and transformation. Cutting and splicing raw footage led to making unexpected correspondences between these themes, organising them into distinct heritage-related concerns as we edited footage into an accessible public output.

Conclusion

This paper has focused on using a creative exchange approach between two heritage themes (profusion and transformation) in one composite field site (the Cornish Clay Country) through a methods assemblage (making a film). We examined how we embedded the combination of both creativity and exchange to foreground the value of cross-fertilisation for critical heritage studies research. Our creative exchange was not only between heritage domains but also with each other, with other people in the field, and the wider more-than-human landscape. Significantly, the paper takes a step beyond framing creative exchange as the dialoguing of ideas (Fleishmann and Hutchinson 2012, 24–25) to consider how the implementation of a methods assemblage (Law 2004) that considers ‘interrelationships between all concepts’ (Fleishmann and Hutchinson 2012, 25) can be deployed in practice through a structured film-making narrative. We describe below three specific findings on how creative exchange through cross-fertilisation led to new insights on the interplay of transformation and profusion.

A significant broader finding was the very different vernacular and authorised strategies for managing profusion within this radically transforming composite site. Yet, while different, these strategies shared a commonality of being mobilised to navigate the emotional upheaval of the impact of a rapidly transforming industry on a community’s sense of place, of identity, of self-worth. Many of the creative exchange moments we discuss revealed CCHS volunteers to be responding to the decline of an industry by gathering and holding onto as much material legacy of the china clay industry as possible, propelling towards profusion through archival memory-making. This was a form of collecting where everything, by virtue of threat of loss through transformation, was considered to hold value (‘we should keep everything, as everything has some historical or heritage relevance’, one CCHS volunteer put it, AiP, 07:45). Conversely, the WMCW curator was found to take a very different approach, seeking more selective collecting (guided by professional museum standards including significance assessment): ‘we don’t collect duplicates’ she explained (AiP, 06:53).⁶ By inviting these perspectives through creative exchange, a key tension of heritage-making within this composite field site, and arguably heritage practice more widely, was shown. The oscillation between keeping/discarding while recognising value and meaning emerged through both: value is attributed by being deemed worth keeping but value needs selective loss to discriminate (also, Macdonald, Morgan, and Fredheim 2020a, 161). By using creative exchange to reveal this tension, our film empirically managed to explore conceptual claims that heritage emerges across complex, ‘plural ontologies’.

A second broader insight was how movement – moving through buildings, institutional practices, within the wider landscape – revealed the ways that transformation and profusion were *already intersecting* at this composite site. Moving with the camera, from archival buildings into the landscape, and back through a museum and its storerooms enabled us to see, to experience and to feel the interplay between the transformation of an industry into proliferating ‘heritage’. We encountered the manifestation of this transformation through vast archival collections and complex future-keeping decisions at the museum. We used filming and editing to cross-fertilise these themes by moving across the composite site not only physically but also narratively through splicing and layering when editing.

A third insight is how our film became a creative testimony to different professionals (vernacular and authorised) trying to make sense of their changing world. Our examples point to attempts to

consider and engineer specific idealised futures when dealing with the interlinked issues of transformation and profusion through managing and preserving china clay industrial heritage. Making this film and using this as a moment to enter their lives and to creatively exchange with each other and with them, gave voice to these processes and highlighted their acts of caring through preservation. *Archives in Place* both documented and prompted articulation of how people working with archives and collections do not take decisions lightly, and that emotional and affective qualities are woven within this process.

Finally, beyond the specifics of this case-study, where our discussion ultimately concludes is to encourage heritage researchers to critically engage with methods and to have confidence in embracing more creative, improvisatory approaches. Developing a creative exchange approach to tackle the complex challenge of investigating the interplay between key heritage studies themes (here, profusion and transformation) enabled us to advance our understanding of how to empirically assemble and analyse a complex more-than-human environment. The paper has demonstrated how we took the leap into an intuitive and exploratory way of working by making a research film. By revealing our experience of producing *Archives in Place*, we have contributed to wider debate on methods within critical heritage studies, and ultimately seek to prompt the emergence of other modalities of creative exchange to better align conceptual and empirical directions through methods assemblages.

Notes

1. All underlying research data for this article is accessible via the film and included in the article.
2. Knowledge-exchange has some synergies with ‘creative exchange’, such as through engaging in activities and dialogue between academia and external partners (see Fleishmann and Hutchinson 2012).
3. The brevity of the fieldwork is due to competing tasks, schedules and budgets within the larger interdisciplinary heritage research programme.
4. Importantly, short-term ethnography emphasises the *intensity* of the engagement rather than the quantity of temporal interaction (Pink and Morgan 2013).
5. In the profusion team’s research, ‘obligation’ (and its emotional resonances) was a strong motivating factor for why some things were kept and others were not in homes and museums (see Macdonald, Morgan, and Fredheim 2020b, 242).
6. For further discussion of the criteria used in significance assessment, see Macdonald and Morgan (2018), and on selecting from profusion in museums, see Fredheim, Macdonald, and Morgan (2020, 181–183) and Macdonald, Morgan, and Fredheim (2020b).

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