

---

# 2

---

## IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

### Archaeological Frameworks

Three theoretical frameworks are commonly employed in the study of Cold War materiality: conflict archaeology, archaeology of the contemporary or recent past, and archaeology of science. While all three provide relevant and useful constructs for studying the Cold War material record, they are markedly different in their methods and objectives. My purposes here are to acquaint readers with the basic contexts, concepts, and uses for each construct as a way of providing contextual background for later chapters.

Taking an archaeological approach to the study of Cold War North America is a profoundly useful method of providing material perspective on the formative role the Cold War had in the making of modern America. The archaeology of the Cold War offers opportunities to study the tangible aspects of a war that was fought for the most part through secrecy, intimidation, and strategic deterrence during what was arguably the most prolific period of scientific and technological advancement in American history. Although archaeologists have historically approached the study of the Cold War almost exclusively as an archaeology of conflict, it is increasingly evident that the Cold War was too much a part of late twentieth-century everyday life to be viewed only through the prescriptive lens of conflict. Aspects of Cold War material culture not directly connected to conflict might, for example, be more constructively studied as the archaeology of the contemporary past. And because the Cold War was heavily dependent upon scientific advancements for its existence, the archaeology of science also cannot be excluded as a legitimate theoretical

approach. Ultimately, the archaeology of the Cold War is an intellectual endeavor best pursued using a variety of inferential approaches, and eventually the archaeology of the Cold War may see a more robust mix of multiple philosophical and theoretical approaches. For now, however, these three domains, each itself an emergent field of archaeological inquiry, have made the strongest claims to the field.

### **Conflict Archaeology**

Accounting for what is certainly the largest body of scholarly work on the archaeology of the Cold War, conflict archaeology is itself a relatively new field of archaeological inquiry. Seeking to redefine, revitalize, and broaden what was already the well-established field of battlefield archaeology, conflict archaeology emerged in the 1990s as an inquiry focused on the tangible material aftermaths of violent social interactions across a wide range of spaces. Over time, conflict archaeology grew to encompass battlefield archaeology, which had traditionally focused on individual historical battle sites or discrete spaces of large-scale military actions between nations. Now neither restricted to the study of singular battlefields nor exclusively focused on the study of large-scale wars between nations, the theories and practices of conflict archaeology are used to study the materiality of violent human conflict across the broad temporal and spatial ranges of human existence. Rooted in the notion that participants in any conflict, large or small, brief or enduring, leave behind sites and even entire landscapes littered with the artifacts of aggression, conflict archaeology is the close study of the artifacts and landscapes that intergroup and intragroup conflict creates and leaves behind. Aimed at understanding the broad range of cultural, social, psychological, spiritual, technical, and historical aspects of conflict, this type of archaeology, when broadly practiced, recognizes that extreme economic, political, religious, and nationalistic motivations often drive human conflict. Moreover, these motivations are neither trivial nor ephemeral.

In North America, the field of conflict archaeology has explored a broad range of material culture associated with human conflict. The range of recent research in the field extends from the anthropological archaeology of prehistoric conflict sites (Arkush and Allen 2006; Lambert 2002; Potter and Chuipka 2010; Rice and LeBlanc 2001) to historical archaeology studies of famous American battlefields (Conlin and Russell 2006;

Geier et al. 2010; Scott 2013), and from studies of defensive fortifications and technologies (Broadwater 2012; Starbuck 2011) to archaeological investigations into the materiality of rebellions, riots, and acts of civil disobedience (Saitta 2007; Saitta et al. 2005).

Among North American conflict archaeology studies, the archaeological investigations at Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument (LBBNM) are particularly notable for having developed and influenced many of the analytical and methodological constructs used in conflict archaeology studies worldwide. As such, these investigations are worthy of a brief discussion.

Infamous in American military history as the site of Lieutenant Colonel George Custer's proverbial Last Stand, Little Bighorn was the site of a two-day battle in June 1876 that pitted Lakota and Cheyenne warriors against soldiers from the U.S. Seventh Cavalry. In the late twentieth century, scholars of the site recognized its larger historical implications as a battleground between two cultures and, facilitated in no small measure by conflict archaeology, began its reinterpretation as a complex historic site of violent cross-cultural conflict.

Beginning in 1958 and continuing to the present day, investigations at LBBNM have increasingly stretched archaeological frameworks. Incorporating innovations in archaeological science, theory, and method, LBBNM archaeological investigations advanced conflict archaeology in the United States as a whole through their early adoption of advanced scientific tools and technologies, use of amateur/professional research partnerships, and engagement with what might be described as "outside the trench" thinking involving new and novel interpretations of existing data, using innovative methods and analytical constructs to generate new data, and sharing widely knowledge gained from that research. Making use of advancements in metal detecting technology, LBBNM investigators in 1956 began the earliest published use of metal detectors in American battlefield archaeology, combining this technology with an existing history of well-documented surface collecting of firearm cartridge casings and bullets. From these finds, a renowned research program in firearm cartridge forensics would emerge (Scott 2013). Starting in the late 1980s LBBNM investigators began extensively using forensic pathology to study human remains either accidentally or intentionally disinterred, giving each discovery the attention of a modern crime scene and, in the process, gathering detailed information about every unearthed battle casualty.

Osteological studies of Little Big Horn combatants generated a wealth of data relative to the victims' ages, social statuses, diets, lifestyles, health, and probable cause of death (Scott 2010). LBBNM researchers shared data and knowledge on these and other topics widely among both professional and avocational archaeologists and historians, often leading to compelling international research collaborations. Ultimately, the impacts of the LBBNM archaeological investigations on the field of conflict archaeology were far-reaching. Patterning their work after that done at Little Bighorn, conflict archaeologists now regularly make new and novel use of data in collaborative research efforts, employ more critical analytical constructs, and work to foster engagement with amateurs and the interested public. This approach is yielding new insights in the archaeological study not just of older conflict sites, but of more recent sites as well, which often fall under the scope of what has become known as modern conflict archaeology.

### **Modern Conflict Archaeology**

Whereas conflict archaeology in general focuses on conflict in all eras and of all magnitudes and durations, the archaeology of modern conflict looks exclusively at the material culture remains of twentieth-century and later conflicts. Dubbed modern conflict archaeology by its most prolific and proficient practitioners (Carman 1997; Saunders 2004, 2012; Schofield 2005, 2009; Schofield, Klausmeier, and Purbrick 2006), the approach blends traditional archaeological methods and perspectives with the analytical constructs and theoretical frameworks of fields such as cultural studies to produce research that is distinct, both temporally and philosophically, from conflict archaeology. While conflict archaeology has struggled to shake its battlefield archaeology origins, connotations, and traditions, the field of modern conflict archaeology emerging in the late twentieth century focuses explicitly on conflict as a multidimensional social phenomenon capable of producing a materiality and range of physical traces that are specifically ascribed to conflict. Possessing multiple meanings that may change over time, artifacts of conflict can also incorporate notions of identity, ethnicity, class, and nationality (Saunders 2012). A prime example of this is the Avtomat Kalashnikova, or AK-47, assault rifle, a well-known artifact of the Cold War that was recognized worldwide as a symbol of the Soviet Union, and by association, of communism. Since the end of the Cold War, however, it has taken on new meaning to

become a metaphor for violent revolution, class struggle, and even terrorism (Graves-Brown 2007).

In the analytical constructs of modern conflict archaeology we witness the influences of postmodern/post-processual archaeological theory and its strong corollaries to research in the archaeology of the contemporary past. Within these constructs, modern conflict archaeologists have studied the materiality of recent conflict using theories that intersect with issues of agency, hegemony, gender, class, nationalism, ethnicity, identity, and exclusion, among others. The critical study of modern conflict and its material legacies typically employs an interdisciplinary approach, centered on the application of theories, practices, and analytical methods drawn from a strong range of academic disciplines, including anthropology, architecture, chemistry, earth science, engineering, geography, heritage studies, history, marine studies, metallurgy, psychology, sociology, and others. And while modern conflict archaeology still derives its core field research methods, practices, and theory from historical archaeology, it possesses characteristics that make it a distinct subfield of conflict archaeology.

One particularly elemental characteristic of the archaeology of modern conflict has been its focus on the material aspects of mechanized conflict and industrialized warfare. Beginning in the late nineteenth century and continuing today, nations have armed their militaries with increasingly advanced weapons and technologies manufactured using mass production processes. Whereas in the pre-industrial era muzzle loading rifles and cannons, and wooden warships, had limited the pace and mortality of even the largest and longest conflicts, by the turn of the twentieth century mechanization had created industrialized warfare. Mass production supplied huge conscripted armies with new and deadly armaments, including long-range artillery, high-velocity ammunition, high explosives, armored vehicles, and rapid-fire small arms. Beginning in World War One and continuing throughout the twentieth century, the increasing sophistication of weapons technologies led to higher casualty rates, culminating with the atomic weapons used on Japan and the threat of even greater losses in future wars due to the use of biological and nuclear weapons. Industrialized warfare created an unprecedented material legacy whose cultural correlates, social consequences, and aftermaths are today the purview of modern conflict archaeologists.

A defining characteristic of the archaeology of modern conflict is

the notion that investigations need not be limited to the tangible effects of conflict. While the study of materiality is elemental to exploring the cultural, social, or political dynamics of any conflict, whatever its scale, scope, or form, there are intangible aspects of the material culture of modern conflict that can offer valuable insights. Studies of such intangibles of modern conflict as creativity among combatants (Buchinger and Metzler 2006; Cocroft and Wilson 2006), fear (Grguric 2008; Hanson 2016; Jacobson 2009; Wilson 2011), paranoia (Hanson 2010), and memory (Moshenska 2010; Myers 2008; Trigg 2007) have all made valuable contributions to the post-processual aspirations of the field.

Although the archaeology of the Cold War is deeply rooted in the study of modern conflict, this does not preclude future studies that might explore the substantial and enduring materiality of the Cold War from other relevant analytical, social, or temporal perspectives. In fact, one of the most promising of these other perspectives is the archaeology of the contemporary past.

### Archaeology of the Contemporary Past

For nearly a century, historical archaeology in the United States has focused on understanding conditions of life for literate, historical-period people in periods and places where archival documents were either limited or absent, or for which the excavation of buried remains was the best or only method for obtaining new information. Over roughly the past decade, however, an archaeology of the contemporary past, or “contemporary archaeology” as it is often known, has emerged to study the material culture of the very recent past. This is a past for which archival documents may be abundant and the excavation of remains may be a supplemental method of obtaining historical information. Using the tools, methods, and even theories of traditional historical archaeology, contemporary archaeology is characterized by efforts to apply traditional archaeological methods and practices for new data collection uses at twentieth- and twenty-first-century sites.

Archaeologies of the contemporary past are concerned with studying the cultural artifacts, systems, places, spaces, and events found within the realm of late-modern industrial societies, in so-called living memory. In this context, living memory is considered to be the collective, remembered events of a human social generation extending back roughly 80