Introduction

When people hear that I am an archaeologist and have worked in Greece, they often ask me to name my favorite discovery. They frequently assume that my work involves temples, museum quality artifacts, and, just maybe, precious metals. When I reveal that I’m a survey archaeologist and most of my favorite finds involve broken and abraded sherd found in olive groves or on an isolated and humble hilltop fort, there is inevitably a kind of disappointment. The modest or even mundane character of the things that I find fails to resonate with popular expectations of archaeology which still tend toward sensational and singular objects and monuments. In contrast, cooking pots and storage vessels, rural installation and forts, and seasonal shelters and roof tiles are often the stuff of archaeology, especially in the Mediterranean basin, and the ordinary character of these things rarely evokes any interest among the general public. As a result, the most common response is a kind of incredulity. “You’re just studying sherds?” (See Holtrof 2006 for a review of popular attitudes toward archaeology).

If the mundane character of survey archaeology produces public incredulity, the work of archaeologists of the contemporary world often creates professional confusion. As Bill Rathje related, when he first started the Garbage Project, colleagues questioned whether his work was archaeology at all (Shanks et al. 2013: 358). A similar sense of bewilderment emerged when I described our efforts to document the opening of the Alamogordo landfill which received the famous dump of Atari games. Not only was my research at the landfill seen as too modern to be considered archaeology, but many of my colleagues saw sifting through contemporary trash as repellant. As Rathje noted in his conversations with Michael Shanks and Christopher Witmore, despite discarded things being the typical object of archaeological research, the abject character of contemporary trash pushed it to the furthest margins of public and disciplinary interests. Moreover, our efforts to take a deposit of Atari games seriously also garnered a certain amount of suspicion. After all, the fate of the Atari games themselves seemed primarily of interest to nostalgic “fan boys,” the dig itself was little more than an elaborately staged effort to sell Microsoft products, and it seemed possible to discover the fate of the Atari dump through some careful documentary research. The skeptical attitude toward the archaeological value of this excavation stemmed in no small part from the status of these games and the excavation itself as deeply embedded in contemporary consumer culture. Both our interest in the Atari games and the global media attention that the dig attracted appeared like a particularly egregious example of
Marx’s notion of commodity fetishism (Olsen 2011, 92-94; Dawdy 2016, 137-142). For Marx, our fetishization of things obscured the alienation of labor in their production. This attachment to things, then, overwrote our attachment to people and made more difficult our concern for social relations and contributed to further alienation of the worker. An interest in things necessarily represented a lack of interest in people, social relations, and reality. The prevalence of this attitude toward things in contemporary culture makes understandable the response of my students, when initially encouraged to document the objects left behind in faculty offices and labs in an abandoned building on campus: the offices were filled with “just stuff.”

[Insert transitional sentence here that takes these public responses and my professional interest and locates in 1980s American culture.]

Things

The late 1970s represented a watershed moment for how archaeologists thought about things. In the U.S., the post-war prosperity of the 1950s and 1960s encountered its first challenges in the oil crises of the 1970s. First in 1973, the members of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries enacted an embargo of oil exports in response to Western support of Israel during the Yom Kippur War and again in 1979 when the Iranian revolution disrupted oil exports. The resulting shocks to the global oil market led to massive spikes in the price of gasoline as well as other petroleum based commodities. This, in turn, led to slower economic growth and “stagflation” characterized by high levels of inflation, high unemployment, and slow economic growth. Ultimately, the chair of the U.S. Federal Reserve Bank, Paul Volker, decided to increase interest rates steeply in an effort to control inflation, while also realizing that this decision would increase unemployment and push the U.S. into the recession in early 1980s. At the onset of this crisis, President Jimmy Carter in a now well-known nationally televised reminded the country that “But we’ve discovered that owning things and consuming things does not satisfy our longing for meaning. We’ve learned that piling up material goods cannot fill the emptiness of lives which have no confidence or purpose.” (Quoted in Jelfs 2018, 37-42). Carter’s failed re-election bid a year later, punctuated by Ronald Reagan’s famous statement that “we don’t have inflation because — as Mr. Carter says — we have lived too well,” may well serve as an invocation for the famously acquisitive and materialistic culture of the 1980s (Jelfs 2018, 42).

The Things They Carried (1990), a sustained conversation about things suffused American culture. Many of these works used things as a way to critique consumerist society. The video for Madonna’s “Material Girl” for example, concludes with Madonna rejecting by expensive gifts from suitors and departs the video in a beat-up pickup truck. The juxtaposition between materialism, poverty, and violence in contemporary rap and hip hop music, perhaps best seen in the early 1990s work of Notorious B.I.G., provided a constant reminder that the benefits of consumer culture were unevenly felt in society. The last chapter observed how the growing anxieties about trash became another outlet for the public anxieties about the role and importance of things in American life, this chapter will consider how many of the same anxieties channeled a growing interest in things among archaeologists and anthropologists.

At around the the same time that materialism and consumer culture were becoming topics of conversation in American political and cultural life, a series of important works emphasizing the role of things, material culture, and consumer practices came to influence archaeological work. The publication of James Deetz’s In Small Things Forgotten: An Archaeology of Early American Life (1977) not only stimulated the still-developing discipline of historical archaeology in the United States, but also influenced British scholars who were looking for an approach to objects that went beyond the processualism of New Archaeology (Hicks 2010, 66; Hicks 2006, 5). Deetz’s effort to locate objects, including “small things” within a broadly-construed cultural context presented a way to bridge the gap between the structuralist practices of New Archaeology and interests in objects as signs and symbols in the anthropology of Geetz (Hicks 2010, 46). In Deetz’s hands, things occupied a vivid place in the daily and ritual life of 18th century New England. His understanding of these objects, however, did not emerge from the work of excavation, or other strictly defined archaeological practices, alone, but from the intersection of objects, texts, photographs and informants. For Deetz, taking things seriously involved using them to understand the underlying society and culture which manifested itself through the use of physical objects (Olsen 2011, 143-145). In the next decades, a group of British archaeologists and anthropologists would stand this idea its head by arguing that things were more than mere manifestations of structure, attitudes, and “society,” and, instead, actively contributed to the creation of human society and relations.

In his ability to offer rich contexts for things, Deetz’s work anticipated another work from the same time that influenced a growing, global interest in things: Schiffer and Gould’s Modern Material Culture: The Archaeology of Us (1981). As I have discussed in the introduction, this work framed the study of modern material culture as ethnoarchaeological practice. The contributors in this book, built upon the work of Richard Gould over the course of the 1970s (get cites) and Michael Schiffer’s interest in developing a middle range theory to bridge the gap between archaeological evidence and human behavior. As Gould and Schiffer acknowledge in their introduction, any effort to apply ethnographic techniques to archaeological problems quickly comes to recognize that a “direct” relationship between modern behavior and past behavior in archaeology was impossible. Instead, as their book showed, archaeologists should look to the potential for indirect links between the contemporary and the past that could
inform the nature of archaeological reasoning. In many ways, however, the approach developed in *Modern Material Culture*, and through Schiffer’s later work both on contemporary objects (e.g. 1991; 2007) and Behavioral Archaeology (1995) continue to see objects as the manifestation of behaviors and practices, rather than agents in their own right (Hodder 2007, 202-203), although Schiffer’s later idea of “compound interactors” (Schiffer 1999; Olsen 2011, 136-137) demonstrates his willingness to understand the complicated interaction between things and individuals.

These books found an eager audience in the U.K., where anthropologists and archaeologists alike had read Mary Douglas and Baron Ischerwood’s *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (1979) and recognized the appeal of an ethnoarchaeological approach to understanding not just the archaeological past, but also behavior in the contemporary world. Ian Hodder, Daniel Miller, Michael Shanks, and Christopher Tilley took the ideas and methods presented in these books and over the course of the 1980s and 1990s applied them to a wide range of earlier and contemporary contexts. For an archaeology of the contemporary world, the relatively short analyses of punk fashion in Hodder’s *Symbols in Action* (1982) and of Swedish and British beer cans in Shanks and Tilley’s *Re-Constructing Archaeology* (1987) anticipated the more sustained critiques of modern material culture by archaeologists in the 21st century. In a 2007 retrospective on his edited volume *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology* (1982) Ian Hodder noted that while this volume received generally unfavorable reviews, by embracing ethnographic practices in the field, it introduced a method for understanding that things can be socially active and play a role in social relationships that increasingly come to include both individuals and things (*Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 17.2 (2007), p. 199-228, especially Hodder and Leone’s remarks).

The most significant contributor to the development of an archaeology of contemporary things and consumer culture may be Danny Miller’s work on contemporary consumer culture. In a series of books published starting in the mid-mid 1980s, Miller argued that late 20th century consumer practices were more than just a debased or slavish responses to cleverly constituted marketing campaigns or the manifestation of an uncritical herd mentality, but the complex and often ritualized of identity formation and culture making (Miller 1987, 11). Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* (1977), Miller (1987) demonstrated how the interaction between individuals and objects created meaning in both in past and present societies. By grounding his assessment in ethnography of contemporary British society, he argued that the physical form and materiality of objects gave them a place distinct from language and other ritual practices in social interaction between individuals. Despite the ubiquity of modern material culture, objects played a key role in creating social relationships in the same way that archaeologists had increasingly recognized for pre-modern societies (Mullens 2011, 6; Miller 1995). The massive increase in the quantity and diversity of things present in the modern world did not diminish their importance. Instead, Miller’s attention to both consumer practices and everyday life made his work a touchstone for the study of modern material culture and consumer culture. This focus on modern consumer culture, however, despite its origins alongside the work of archaeologists Ian Hodder and Christopher Tilley, neither drew upon nor directly advanced
archaeological practices and methods as they confronted the daunting challenge of dealing with the late 20th century abundance of objects and the complex place of objects in consumer practices that produce modern life. Instead, Miller’s work gave rise to the field of modern material culture studies and consumer studies, which have produced an impressive body of scholarship with relatively few contributions from archaeologists of the contemporary world in the United States.

Arjun Appadurai The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective (1986) is contemporary with Miller’s work and included Igor Kopytoff’s “The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process.” This oft-cited essay proposed that things had biographies which could be tracked over time with productive results. In particular, he noted that objects could move in and out of commodity status, when it has clear exchange value in a society. In fact, Kopytoff argues that over the life of an object, it may exist outside of commodity status and undergo singularization when it becomes the object of a wide range of social, ritual, and emotional values that go far beyond its value as a commodity. At other points in the life history of an object, it might have acquire a hybrid status where it is both singularized and commodified to varying degrees. This not only represented a salient critique of Marxist views of fetishized objects as commodities, but it also provided another paradigm for the considering the changing social meaning of objects over time. Unlike Miller’s contemporary critical engagement with things in a British setting, Appadurai’s volume drew on a wide range of ethnographic and historical studies which did not explicitly touch upon the consumer culture in industrialized economies. Archaeologist Colin Renfrew did participate with a study of the Chalcolithic Varna cemetery in Bulgaria and argued that changes in technology stemmed from social processes rather than simply technical developments.

While American archaeologists were not at the fore of the European theoretical approaches to the study of things, they did continued to consider modern material culture in an American context. Michael Schiffer’s 1991 book, The Portable Radio in American Life, for example, emphasized not only the development of the portable and later transistor radio and its impact on American life. He documented the history of radio technology starting with vacuum tubes and continuing through the use of transistors, ferrite rod antennas, multiple bands, various battery types, and gimmicky combinations with cameras to show how the radio as consumer technology sought to establish a place within American consumer culture. He parallels the technologies used in radios with their role in American social life through the rise of radio shows like “Amos and Andy”, popular music and news programs, the use of the radio in politics, and, of course, sportscasting. In the conclusion of this remarkably untheoretical book, Schiffer argues that in the 1980s, Japanese companies like Sony have rewritten the history of the technological and commercial development of the portable radio and claimed it as a Japanese invention. He argued that this misrepresentation of the history of the radio, which he calls corporate “cryptohistory,” has a significant impact on how American society and policy makers understand the development of technology. By tracing the history of the portable radio, Schiffer argued that by revealing the origines of objects central to everyday life, Americans can free themselves from corporate
narratives that overwrite the key role that inventors, tinkerers, and university researchers had in creating technology. Schiffer applies a similar approach to the study of electric vehicles in the early 20th century. The failure of electric powered vehicles to become the dominant approach to motor transportation despite their initial popularity had as much to do with their association with women and short trips in town on household errands as they did with any technological limitation (Schiffer 1994; Schiffer and Skibo 2004). His broader study on the history of practical electricity in the 19th century offers a theoretical statement that grounds his approach to the development of technology in the modern period to a range of prospects from Bruno Latour’s Science and Technology Studies (Latour and Woolgar 1979) to Appadurai’s ground breaking Social Life of Things (1986).

Things with Patina

Shannon Lee Dawdy’s demonstrates the enduring significance of the social readings of contemporary material culture in her study of post-Katrina New Orleans (Dawdy 2016). Dawdy’s work takes a critical interest in the concept commodity fetishism in contemporary New Orleans and seeks to rehabilitate the concept of the fetish to understand the role that things have in creating social relationships in “antique cities.” By expanding the concept of the fetish from its narrow use in Marx as a veil which obscures the labor and social relations necessary to produce an object, to include concepts developed by Freud and the work of historian William Pietz (Dawdy 2016, 138-139), she argues that the status of certain objects as fetishes serves not to obscure labor but to transform them into objects that exist outside of commodified experience of consumer capitalism. Dawdy develops the sacred character of fetishized antiques and “Granny-had-ones” against the backdrop of the social displacement of post-Katrina New Orleans to show how old things created a sense of community and resilience in the face of the profound devastation of Katrina and the remaking of the city through new arrivals. Following Kopytoff (1986), Dawdy drew upon a wide range of interviews and objects to demonstrate that the personal stories and histories attached to objects as well as the physical signs of age, the literal patina in the book’s title, allowed them to shed their status as commodities and reemerge as objects of singular value. A plain wardrobe owned by a long-time white resident of New Orleans took was meaningful because it evoked the story of its purchase by the interviewee as a teenager as well as certain physical characteristics that marked it as a piece of traditional furniture (129-130). The singular nature of this object parallels the celebrated “throws” distributed by participants in Mardi Gras parades which have themes and markings identifying them to particular years and groups. These cheap plastic novelties are not only valued through their association with a specific occasion, but also serve as a blatant critique of capitalist culture. Mardi Gras throws often imitate currency, jewelry, and table wares made of precious metals and by doing so critique the acquisitive character of capitalism by not only giving these “precious” objects away, but by doing so at such quantities that they saddle many long-time New Orleans residents with bags of throws from the parade season. While residents discard most of these objects, some of Dawdy’s informants kept a few from each year as distinctive souvenirs of particular parades, themes, and experiences.
Dawdy is careful to note the difference between white and black attitudes toward the antiques and old objects. Her black informants rarely had the same attitude toward old things as her white informants. The reasons for this were socially complex. On a simple level, Dawdy noted that many black residents had difficulty finding stable housing where they could collect, store, and display old objects. More subtly, she argued that remembering New Orleans past also evoked memories of slavery, Jim Crow, and systematic discrimination which negatively impacted generations of black New Orleans residents. Dawdy also develops further Kopytoff’s comparison of the commodified object to an enslave individuals. Kopytoff argued that the movements of enslaved people into commodified status in the slave market is only temporary. Enslaved individuals soon re-establish agency, personalities, and individuation both in bodily form and in relation to others over the course of their time as slaves. Objects likewise have moments of commodification which then give way to more diverse and dynamic “biographies” that leave a physical imprint. Dawdy suggests that commodification of objects with biographies that give them special significance to individuals may evoke the experience of the slave market in ways that are deeply uncomfortable for New Orleans’ black residents (151).

Dawdy’s study of objects in contemporary, post-Katrina New Orleans allowed her to argue that the patina on objects in New Orleans offered a material critique of consumer culture. The desirability of objects effaced by time and embedded with stories from the past subvert consumer culture by valuing the old and singular more than the new and improved. The fabric of old things preserves and communicates the evidence for their age and experiences and gives these objects a kind of material agency that refuses to obscure their life histories and reminds us that objects exist within a dense network of social relations between both individuals and things. The central role that such old things play in the social, material, and culture fabric of New Orleans both makes this city as visible reminder of contemporary resistance to the out of capitalism and also shows how the character of old things construct these cultural and social attitudes.

**Materiality and Agency**

Dawdy’s work blends currents in American historical archaeology with attention to the role of capitalism and perspectives on the consumer culture rooted in the work of Daniel Miller and his students of modern material culture. Her interest in complicating and challenging Marx’s idea of the fetish, for example, echoes efforts among scholars of the things to demonstrate that things are more than simply vulgar distractions meant to obscure the social working of labor. At the same time, Dawdy’s insistence that material culture in New Orleans represents a critique of consumer culture, rather than simply a distinctive expression of how things serve to construct social relationships, suggests a continued hostility toward things as they exist within consumer culture mediated by contemporary capitalism.

Dawdy’s interest in the material signs of patina on old things in New Orleans, however, speaks to a growing interest among archaeologists, historians, and anthropologists into
the materiality of things. In geographer Caitlin DeSilvey’s book, *Curated Decay*, she discussed her work to document the deteriorating remains of a century-old Montana farmstead which had been abandoned in 1995 (DeSilvey 2017; 2006). Looking through over a century of objects, she observed the multiple processes and agents that have shaped the assemblage of material associated with this farmstead and described evidence for the nesting habits of rodents, patterns produced by hungry insects, and the play of humidity, microbial action, rust and rot on the fabric of the farm and its contents. She speculatively proposes the potential for collaborative curation with animals, microbes, and chemical processes that continuously transform the materials that make up our contemporary world. Any one who has stepped foot in an abandoned building recognizes that the evidence for abandonment has less to do with the absence of human activity as it does the visible presence of a wide range of non-human agents and processes.

The DeSilvey’s work offers a compelling North American example of recent efforts to consider the materiality of our world in ways that challenges the long-standing dichotomies between humans and nature and humans and things that have defined the social sciences and humanities for the last two centuries. Many of these approaches center on critiques of the working ontologies that allow us to group objects into categories of “things.” These critiques have often emphasized flat ontologies which reject the hierarchical divisions that rank humans, animals, and things at different levels. Flat ontologies, often loosely described as “object oriented ontologies” offers a paradigm for understanding the interaction between things, between things and humans, and between humans as fundamentally similar. In this approach to objects, things have a kind of agency in their interaction with humans and other things.

Archaeologists have introduced these and similar ideas in a diverse range of ways from calls for a “symmetrical archaeology” (Witmore) to the concept of “entanglement” (Hodder xxxx) and new or neomaterialism (for a survey of these approaches see LeCain 2017). Michael Shanks and Bjørnar Olsen, for example, stress that things are not a separate category (Shanks, et al. 2012, p. 8-9). Many of these ideas continue ways of thinking reminiscent of Donna Haraway’s idea of the cyborg, in which the blurry division between humans and things extends to recognizing the heterogeneous character of objects in our everyday life (Haraway 1991?; LeCain 2017, p. 80). Tim Edensor observes that ruins likewise blur the difference between human and non-human agency making it impossible to keep tidy ontological divisions when confronted with elusiveness of human efforts to create order in the world (LeCain 2014, 64; Edensor 2005). Breaking down the purity of categories like things and humans undercuts co-constructivist views in which things create society and, more importantly, provides a way to consider the commingled meshwork of existence that makes human life on earth possible (Latour xxxx; Ingold xxxx).

Timothy LeCain’s study of the Berkeley Pit in Butte, Montana demonstrates how some of these ideas can shape new understandings of the world (LeCain 2009; LeCain 2014). While LeCain is a historian, not an archaeologist, his attention to materiality and matter offer a compelling perspective for the discipline of archaeology and an opportunity to connect the discipline to environmental history. The Berkeley pit was a massive open pit
mine created by the Anaconda Copper Mining Company in 1955 after conventional mining methods using tunnels and shafts became less effective. The massive pit excavated by equally massive machines eventually extended for 1800 feet below the surface and was near 1.5 miles wide (LeCain 2014, 71). In 1982, mining ceased at the pit and when the pumps that served to keep pit dry stopped operating, it filled with acidic water laced with a toxic combination of heavy metals. The copper mined from this pit served to conduct electricity, make guns, produce components for TVs and Michael Schiffer’s portable radios. It also provided jobs to generations of residents of Butte, Montana. The pit changed the local landscape and introduced toxic chemicals to the water table. The toxic water interacted with residents and wildlife.

LeCain starts his 2014 article on the “ontology of absence” with the arresting story of a flock of migrating snow geese who landed in the pit in 1995 and were killed by its toxic waters. The interplay between the geese, the mining, the metals in the acidic waters, the rhythms of migration, and the weather conditions that night led to their demise. LeCain concludes with the observation that humans created the pit, but the absence presence of the pit remains a persistent and independent agent in the global landscape, technologies, and even migratory patterns that shape our world.

Archaeologists and other scholars have increasingly recognized the interaction of various agents as assemblages and have drawn on a wide range of theorists to explore how the interaction between various human and non-human agents create dispersed fields of agency. Unlike the traditional view of assemblages in archaeology, which may represent common types of objects or object derived from the same or similar contexts at the site, the assemblages proposed by Manuel DeLanda (2006), Bruno Latour (2005), or developed through a critical reading of Deleuze and Guattari constitute distributed arrays of agents that makes any action possible. While these thinkers and those inspired by their works continue to debate how best to understand how agency emerges from assemblages (see for example, the discussion in the 2017 CAJ especially Hamilakis and Jones 2017; Antczak and Beaudry AD 2019), archaeologists are increasingly recognizing the value of this more expansive definition of assemblage has the potential for tracing the significance of archaeological practices to things, people, and communities. Chris Matthews, for example, has demonstrated that an emphasis on assemblages creates a method to analyze the people, identities, things, and places as serve as the locus of social change. In his work with minority communities of Native American and African Americas in a predominantly affluent and white community on Long Island, Matthews has proposed that engaging objects, places, and groups ensures the production of a socially meaningful past which ensures that. For Matthews, such attentiveness to the community as an active producer of archaeological knowledge has practical implications especially for minority groups who have increasingly found their heritage threatened by the continued expansion of affluent and white development. More broadly,

Codex

The final part of this chapter will reflect on a recent multimedia project developed by
the artist Micah Bloom in Minot, North Dakota. His work, which was not archaeological in a proper sense, documented the aftermath of the Souris River flooding which devastated the small city of Minot in 2011. The floods caused the evacuation of over 4000 homes, the construction of almost 2000 shelters by FEMA, and a final cost of over $1 billion. Bloom’s work captured the tremendous impact of these floods by photographing the books left behind by the receding waters over the course of 2011. He also collected some of the books and created an installation that traveled to several venues across the U.S. In this exhibit, he arranged some of the waterlogged and disintegrating books on shelves annotated with a series of inventory numbers. He also displayed the Tyvek suits, masks, and plastic gloves and scientific paraphernalia that his team used when collecting and examining the recovered books. Finally, his installation featured a graveyard where Bloom arranged books in neat rows on a carpet of earth awaiting burial. On the walls surrounding this cemetery hang photographs showing the find spots of books with forensic clarity. The published book associated with this project includes essays from a range of scholars who respond to his work. These essays make explicit many of the

Bloom is hardly the only artist approaching books with archaeological sensibilities. In fact, a number of municipal waste disposal centers developed artist residency programs (San Francisco, Philadelphia) as a way to capitalize on the long standing recognition that everyday objects take on new meanings when discarded as waste and repurposed as art. Bloom’s photographs of books abandoned by the retreating Souris River and disintegrating emphasizes the materiality of paper slowly returns to pulp when exposed to water. Their unnatural entanglement with the wooded banks of the river further suggests that the flood reversed the process of book manufacturing by returning the books to pulp and then to vegetation. The status of books as treasured objects (Prugh 2017; Sorensen 2017), carefully curated in libraries, in homes, and in institutions, made these images of regression even more haunting. By playing on books as personal things, always in the process of construction and decomposition (Liming 2017; Haeselin 2017; Kibler 2017), the disembodied state of the decaying books makes the absence of humans all the more visible. The absence of clear human intervention in the fate of these books offers a salient reminder that agency is not limited to individuals. The interplay between the books, the flood, and their post-deluge deposition reveal evidence for the work of insect, animals, microbes and the inherent fragility of any single material state.

Finally, Thora Brylowe’s contribution to the book dedicated to the Codex project recognized in this assemblage of books the interplay of forces on the global scale. The weather patterns, for example, that produce the 2011 Souris flood occurred as part of the larger El Niño-Southern Oscillation when the cooling waters of the equatorial Pacific produced a La Niña weather pattern which caused wetter than normal winter and spring in the Northern Plains as well as the East Asian drought. Climate change will likely make El Niño and La Niña events more intense, and the 2011 La Niña was the warmest on record. Brylowe notes that industrial practices, including paper production which both removed old growth trees from the landscape at a massive scale and relied upon fossil fuels not only allowed for the emergence of books as an
affordable, personal commodity, but also spurred global climate change. The entanglement of books, climate, humans, microbes, weather, and history demonstrate the dispersed character of agency across assemblages. These assemblage not only spanned continents, but also centuries emphasizing the immediacy of Bloom’s photographs and installation as interventions which, like archaeology, seeks to provide some limits on how we see the interplay between objects.