The corpse, heritage, and tourism: The multiple ontologies of the body of King Richard III of England

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Introduction

In August 2012 the bodily remains of King Richard III of England (b.1452-d.1485) were found under a car park in the English city of Leicester. Richard III was killed during the Battle of Bosworth in 1485, but beyond historical records suggesting that his body was taken from there to somewhere near Greyfriars Church in Leicester, the exact location of his remains was unknown and not marked by any grave. The remarkable rediscovery of his body could be considered in many ways, but in this chapter we are concerned with exploring the centrality of the materiality of these human remains for a range of interlocking social processes, including national identity, historical narrative, memory, inter-urban competition in the context of global neoliberalism, and heritage tourism. Prior to the discovery of the body itself Richard III had for long been the subject of competing interpretations and claims. However, the discovery of the actual body both created new potentialities and set limits to social and political action. What was possible before his actual bodily remains were discovered was different afterwards. The chapter therefore also seeks to develop a theorising of the dead body as possessing agency and as characterised by multiple ontologies, and not just the subject of competing claims.

The discovery and reburial of Richard III's body have attracted popular and academic interest from a wide variety of perspectives (eg. Buckley et al. 2013; Ashdown-Hill 2015; Carson et al. 2015; Langley and Jones 2013; Sayer and Walter 2016; Kennedy and Foxhall 2015; Appleby et al. 2015; Toon and Stone 2016). However, here we wish to examine how the bodily remains themselves 'work' as a nexus of a multitude of competing narratives and claims which position the dead body as central to a variety of processes including heritage, tourism, memory, inter-urban competition and national identity (and see Young and Light 2013). Within these processes we would argue that it is necessary to also focus on the centrality of the remains of Richard III as an active agent (and not 'just' a subject) and to consider the corpse in a framework emphasizing the multiple ontologies of the dead body as heritage.

A number of social science disciplines have undergone a 're-materialisation' involving a renewed appreciation of the role of material objects in social relations. Appadurai (1986: 3-5) famously argued that we should "…follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things." While the invocation to 'follow the things' has been influential in drawing attention to the importance of materiality in social life, it can be argued that it is problematic to reduce human remains to the status of 'thing', as above all they are the remains of a person (see Young and Light 2016). In this chapter we therefore suggest a combination of three perspectives which can be deployed to understand the role of the corpse –

distributed personhood as a part of broader assemblages, the dead body as an active agent, and the multiple ontologies of the (dead) body.

Within the discipline of Death Studies corpses have been theorised as elements within assemblages of material culture and embodied practice which make up a 'distributed personhood' of the dead (Hockey et al. 2010: 9). Textual, visual and embodied processes of memory formation intertwine in these assemblages with the material culture of death, including the dead body itself (Hallam and Hockey 2001; Williams 2004). The dead body is thus "a node in a nexus of social relationships, objects and exchanges through which personhood and remembrance are distributed and constituted" (Williams 2004: 267). However, within these assemblages the dead body is not simply a passive subject to which meaning is attributed. Though this point is debated (see Crandall and Martin 2014), many disciplines have argued that human remains exhibit agency, in the sense that their presence and materiality can be "the anchors of fields of power/social influence that shape human action…" (Crandall and Martin 2014: 432). As Young and Light (2016: 68) suggest "The corpse can be seen as playing an active role in a range of performances, practices and rituals incorporating and informed by material culture…".

To understand this active role it is necessary to deploy an understanding the multiple ontologies of the dead body. Kantorowicz (1957 [2016]) famously drew attention to 'the king's two bodies' – the physical one which dies like all human beings ('the body natural'), and the spiritual one representing the king's divine right to rule ('the body politic'). Kantorowicz's (1957 [2016]) detailed work explicated how these different conceptualisations of the one body were produced and sustained in specific social, cultural and historical contexts through discourse and practice (the emergence of a Western, early-modern, monarchical 'political theology'), rather than simply being different ways of viewing the body as an object. In a more contemporary context, Foltyn (2008) draws attention to the many ways that corpses take on meaning in different contexts.

To develop this point it is productive to deploy ways of thinking about the (living) body developed in science and technology studies. Analysing how diseased bodies are dealt with in hospitals, Mol (2002) decentres ways of thinking about the body as a unified object which is multiple because it is viewed from multiple perspectives, to understanding the ontology of an object (the body) as something produced through multiple situated practices. In Mol's (2002) view an object is multiple because it is constantly enacted in complex social situations – a flow of relations rather than 'a given thing' viewed from multiple perspectives. Its multiplicity arises from an ongoing set of practices, materialities and technologies (which she terms 'enactments'), which may or may not be co-ordinated and which may be open to (political) contestation. Furthermore, arguing from the perspectives of archaeology and anthropology, Harris and Robb (2012: 676) argue that "…the body is always ontologically multimodal…in all societies differing socio-material contexts allow

different bodies to be called forth…These ontologies are sprawling, multifarious and often contextually applied."

In this chapter then we explore the discovery, treatment and reinterment of Richard III's body and its role in heritage tourism as a series of inter-connected enactments in which the shift from the absence of the corpse to its presence is central. Sometimes the body of Richard III is a subject, given meaning and appropriated for a variety of ends, but it also demonstrates agency. While not arguing that these are the only possible enactments we focus on five interlocking ontologies which we feel are key, ie. Richard III's remains as archaeological and forensic enactment; the materiality of his corpse in historical narrative; Richard III's remains and national identity; the remains of Richard III as a legal enactment; and finally the body of Richard III as neoliberal subject and agent of inter-urban competition.

Richard III's corpse as archaeological and forensic enactment

In 2004-5, Philippa Langley, a member of the international Richard III Society (see Richard III Society 2017a), launched a project to find the remains of the king (for a full account see Langley 2017). Historical research suggested that Richard's body remained where it was thought to have been buried, near to the site of the former Greyfriars Church in Leicester, now a local government car park. Eventually a 'Looking for Richard' project was launched, culminating in an archaeological excavation of the car park (the 'Dig for Richard III', now involving the University of Leicester Archaeological Services and Leicester City Council). Remarkably the first trench opened yielded human remains, which were subsequently established to be the skeleton of King Richard III. After over 500 years, Richard III had been found and the appearance of his physical remains provoked a series of enactments which placed the dead body as central to processes of historical 'authenticity', reputation, legal battles over ownership, national identity and inter-urban competition.

The excavation of Richard's body was undertaken with full compliance with the legalities and ethics required of excavating human remains in the UK. An exhumation license was obtained from the UK Ministry of Justice (significantly, it was one of the elements of this license – regarding the final resting place of Richard III's remains if he was discovered – which was central to later controversy). The story is complex, but what is important for this analysis is that at this point the body of Richard III became part of various enactments in active ways which contribute to the multiple ontologies of the dead body, starting with the legal construction of human remains.

As Richard's remains were uncovered in the trench they became part of an archaeological enactment which treated his body appropriately as an archaeological object. His bones became part of an enactment which incorporated the legal system,

the project driving his rediscovery and established archaeological practices and technologies. And this aspect of his body was also highly mediatized – pictures of his skeleton in the trench were reproduced internationally (and see Toon and Stone 2016). Probably there are few skeletons or human remains which have received so much media coverage or which are so recognizable to the general public (see Toon and Stone 2016 on the media and the creation of cultural heritage around Richard III's skeleton). Furthermore, the bodily remains and their scientific treatment were further integrated in a wider enactment of national identity, as the skeleton was that of a king of England.

And this enactment of Richard's body did not stop there. The excavated skeleton then became an object of considerable forensic scrutiny, with a plethora of scientific and technical processes applied to it, which again became the subject of widely distributed and viewed media images (not least because of the publicity value of the find for key actors such as the University of Leicester and the city of Leicester). DNA testing was undertaken to confirm that the bones actually were the remains of King Richard III. A variety of tests were undertaken to establish 'facts' about the ability of Richard to have fought in battle and nature of his wounds, what he ate and so on (see University of Leicester 2014), the results of which received widespread media attention and scientific reporting (Buckley et al. 2013; Appleby et al. 2015). Facial reconstruction techniques were applied to produce a representation of Richard's face to apparently show what he 'really' looked like (see BBC 2013).

Whether any of these procedures produced accurate results or conclusions (and there is still some dispute over whether these remains are conclusively those of Richard III) is not the issue here. The point is that these complex and 'scientific' archaeological and forensic procedures formed enactments (in Mol's (2002) term) in which the skeletal remains performed a central role in questions of 'authenticity' and 'truth', which in turn underpinned much wider processes which are discussed below. The existence of the physical remains is key here – none of this would have been possible without the presence of the remains themselves. Science, technology and society become intertwined in particular constellations as the new life of Richard's remains gets underway. As Harris and Robb (2012: 676) argue, "ontologies are always bound up and inseparable from the material world, not determined by it but not independent, either."

Richard III's corpse and historical narrative

Richard III's skeleton was therefore constructed in multiple ways by enactments (Mol 2002) incorporating scientific approaches and technologies appropriate to establishing physical 'facts' about human remains. However, a further enactment incorporated these practices with competing discourses about Richard and how

representations of his physical appearance were intertwined with historical representations of his character and his acts. The opening sentences of the Mission Statement of the Richard III Society makes it clear that changing entrenched representations of Richard III is a key goal of the Society and the project to rediscover his body:

> In the belief that many features of the traditional accounts of the character and career of Richard III are neither supported by sufficient evidence nor reasonably tenable, the Society aims to promote, in every possible way, research into the life and times of Richard III, and to secure a reassessment of the material relating to this period, and of the role of this monarch in English history. (Richard III Society 2017a)

Perceptions of Richard III and his character have for centuries been shaped by Shakespeare's play *Richard III* (c.1592) (itself an important part of 'British' heritage), in which he is portrayed as an evil, Machiavellian figure who unlawfully seized and then ruthlessly exercised power. Importantly, in the original play and in subsequent stage and film portrayals, this evil is represented by Richard III's supposed 'deformity' as a crippled hunchback with a withered arm, or 'poisonous bunch-backed toad' in Shakespeare's own words (*Richard III*, Act 1, Scene 3). What is significant here is that in this mediatisation of Richard's supposed character it was a literally *embodied* representation and performance. For the Richard III Society, which sought to challenge this characterisation of Richard III in history, the discovery of his body offered a chance to provide physical evidence to overturn it. Once again, the presence of the actual remains had agency, creating possibilities but also setting limits to social action, as they were held to offer 'scientific facts' with which to challenge well-established stereotypes of Richard. This idea is expressed very clearly on the Richard III Society website in a statement from the Society's Patron, the Duke of Gloucester, who is quoted as saying:

> … the purpose - and indeed the strength - of the Richard III Society derives from the belief that the truth is more powerful than lies; a faith that even after all these centuries the truth is important. It is proof of our sense of civilised values that something as esoteric and as fragile as reputation is worth campaigning for. (Richard III Society 2017a)

Forensic examination of Richard's skeleton was central to this endeavour. Here attention focused on his spine to try and determine whether there was evidence of his 'hunchback' status. Computed tomography (CT) scans were taken of the individual vertebrae which were 'reassembled' in a virtual 3-D model (for a more detailed account see Pappas 2014). In fact, to the disappointment of many in the Society, this scientific examination revealed that his spine was curved, most likely due to adolescent idiopathic scoliosis which would have caused him physical

problems in life, though the fact that he went into battle would suggest that they were not as severe as has been depicted.

Again, another enactment of Richard's body took place here, combining science and technology with competing representations of Richard's physical appearance and how this was used to construct a particular representation of his character, one that has been sustained down the centuries in popular culture. It was the presence of the skeletal remains which was central to the enactment of attempts to establish Richard IIIs 'real' reputation. The presence of his physical remains became the central focus of attempts to establish historical 'authenticity', to distinguish between 'truth' and lies'.

Richard III's corpse and national identity

Kantorowicz (1957 [2016]) examined how the body of a king is both that of an individual and an ideal – the office of majesty and the continuity of monarchy, notions often further tied up with imaginings of the nation and the nation-state. As in many other contexts the body of Richard III was a subject of discourses about the nation in the UK. The discovery and presence of his body underpinned the contested nature of the relationships between the body, claims over rights to its reburial, place, and national identity.

After the excavation and forensic testing of Richard's remains, events moved on to consideration of his reburial, which lead to further enactments of his body. On the one hand the rediscovery of Richard III's body was intertwined with relatively straightforward discourses about his role as a national figure – he was a king of England and one with a considerable (though contested) international profile. The monarchy performs a significant role in imaginings of the British nation. His burial was thus linked in political and popular discourse to a particular performance of national identity, one which was ultimately also linked to heritage and the development of tourism.

However, Richard's body became the focus of competing claims over his identity that linked in complex ways to national identity and his reburial. The initial application to the Ministry of Justice for an exhumation license contained a statement that if any remains were recovered they should be reinterred in Leicester, but the wording of the actual license was less specific (see Royal Courts of Justice 2014). However, once Richard's remains were discovered a new organisation – The Plantagenet Alliance (largely formed of distant relatives of Richard III) – emerged, arguing that for various reasons Richard should be laid to rest in the city of York. There were even further arguments that as a king he should be interred in Westminster Cathedral in London.

The discovery of Richard's physical remains, and their legal enactment, thus provoked competing claims over the legal right to his body and its reburial which are discussed in the next section. However, a further enactment involved the construction of historical narratives and discourses about Richard, his life, his identity and allegiances on a sub-national scale as Leicester and York constructed different narratives around Richard to support their claim to his remains and the right to reinter him in their cities.

For example, at the time the Plantagenet Alliance website contained a statement recognising Richard's importance to the nation, but also seeking to position him as essentially 'northern', rather than bearing any specific connections to Leicester:

> We believe that the proposed location of Leicester is wholly inappropriate for the burial of King Richard III, who had no connections with the town beyond his horrific death, bodily despoliation and appalling burial in a foreshortened grave. There are many expert historians of his life and times who agree that King Richard III may well have been intending York Minster to be his mausoleum. It is fitting and respectful and in keeping with all of our national customs regarding treatment of the dead, to bury this king in a place "appropriate to him" – that place is York. (King Richard III Campaign 2014)

The discovery of Richard's skeleton thus provoked a further enactment involving discourses around his identity as the basis for competing claims to bury him in a particular location, which in turn grew into a further legal enactment of his bodily remains.

Richard III's corpse as a legal subject

The claim of the Plantagenet Alliance that Richard III's body should be buried in York solidified into a legal challenge to Leicester's claim for reinterment. This culminated in a judicial review in the High Court of Justice. The Plantagenet Alliance could not argue that they had an outstanding claim to reinter Richard III as a point of law. Instead, they challenged the original granting of the exhumation license by the Ministry of Justice and what it said about reinterment on the basis that national consultation had not been undertaken regarding where Richard III's remains should lie (Royal Courts of Justice 2014). They argued that, since it was a matter of national importance, such consultation should have taken place.

Ultimately the High Court ruled that there was no precedent in law for public consultation and that the original license stood, and that the Secretary of State at the Ministry of Justice in granting the license was fully aware of the views of sovereign, state and church to support an informed decision. In the Court's judgement:

Since Richard III's exhumation on 5th September 2012, passions have been roused and much ink has been spilt. Issues relating to his life and death and place of re-interment have been exhaustively examined and debated. The Very Reverend David Monteith, the Dean of Leicester Cathedral, has explained the considerable efforts and expenditure invested by the Cathedral in order to create a lasting burial place *"as befits an anointed King"*. We agree that it is time for Richard III to be given a dignified reburial, and finally laid to rest. (Royal Courts of Justice 2014: 38)

Thus ended a further legal enactment of Richard III's body, leaving the way open for his reburial in Leicester, a decision with considerable implications for heritage tourism.

Richard III's corpse as neoliberalised subject and agent – heritage, reburial and inter-urban competition

The various enactments of Richard III's skeleton were central to broader processes of heritage, tourism and inter-urban competition. Leicester could have at any time (based on the historical record) made a reasonable claim to being the final resting place of Richard III – in fact Leicester Cathedral had previously placed a memorial stone to Richard without any controversy – but this had not been developed as a significant heritage attraction. However, the discovery of his remains and Richard's sudden presence (and establishing a legal right to reburial through the court case) then lead to new developments in which the body as heritage was central. Richard III's remains were a subject which could be represented in a particular way for a global heritage tourism market, but were also an enactment in which the actual existence of his skeleton was central and which changed the whole related heritage landscape. The skeleton demonstrated agency, making some enactments possible and setting limits to others. This had considerable implications for heritage tourism development and the cities involved.

Leicester is a relatively prosperous city but until recently tourism had not been a major part of the local economy. The city was home to various small museums but, with the exception of the National Space Centre, it had no major attractions. Prior to the 'Looking for Richard' project there had been little attempt to promote the city's association with Richard III since there was no obvious 'sight' associated with the King. However, the local tourism authorities recognised the potential of the discovery of Richard III to boost tourism in the city. For this reason the destination marketing organisation responsible for the city of Leicester and the county of Leicestershire – Leicester Shire Promotions, formed in 2003 – contributed £5000 towards to the costs of the excavations (Richard III Society 2017b).

The 'Looking for Richard' project attracted international media attention, bringing Leicester welcome publicity and putting the city in the global spotlight. This interest intensified after the discovery of the skeleton in August 2012 and the story started bringing visitors to the city. For example, 6,800 people visited the excavation site when it opened to the public for 6 days in September 2012 (Leicester City Council 2016). Richard III represented an unexpected 'attraction' which could be used to boost Leicester's visitor economy and the city council were eager to exploit the interest in the discovery of the King's remains. The City Council and tourism authorities were well aware that interest in Richard III could be leveraged to attract tourists to the city and boost the local economy.

In one way York and Leicester were engaged in just another example of inter-urban competition within the context of neoliberal urbanism, in which ideas about the primacy of free markets and the importance of competition as the key to economic growth and development are applied not just to businesses and individuals but also to places (such as cities) (Theodore et al. 2011; Hall 2007). In particular, cities must compete to attract investment and visitors as part of increasingly entrepreneurial (Harvey 1989) strategies to maintain economic growth and create employment. A key part of this process involves cities actively promoting themselves as dynamic and attractive places to visit. This is a well-established facet of contemporary capitalist urbanism, but what is different here is the prominent role played by a corpse as heritage in this inter-urban competition. Richard's skeleton was a neoliberalised subject, but also an active agent – its discovery and presence created a new set of possibilities, which the city of Leicester acted upon to establish new patterns of global heritage tourism.

In this context, King Richard III represented a welcome (and unexpected) resource for the City Council. Once the identity of the Greyfriars skeleton was confirmed, Leicester suddenly found itself with a unique selling point of being the burial place of King Richard III. Moreover, this was not just any king: instead, it was a king who (thanks to Shakespeare) had a global reputation. Richard III was now linked with Leicester in a way which no other place could replicate. For the City Council, Leicester's association with Richard III represented a means to raise the international profile of the city by enhancing its place distinctiveness and potentially giving it a greater competitive edge. The discovery of Richard's remains could also be leveraged to attract visitors, thereby contributing to local economic development and providing a pretext to fund regeneration in the city centre and the provision of new attractions for visitors. Thus, Richard III become the central subject within new strategies to boost Leicester's economy. While some (eg. Ashdown-Hill 2015) have been critical of efforts to cash in on the discovery of the King's remains, such efforts were an entirely logical response in the context of neoliberal inter-urban competition.

Leicester moved swiftly to capitalise on the discovery of Richard III. In February 2013 a temporary exhibition was established in the city's Guildhall (which was open until

June 2014). In the same month Leicester Shire Promotions started promoting Richard III short breaks aimed at couples, interested families, and the group market (Leicester Shire Promotions, undated). Leicester City Council later invested £4 million in a permanent exhibition about the life and death of Richard III which opened in June 2014 and was partly situated on the car park where the King's skeleton had been discovered (Watson 2014). Leicester Cathedral, in anticipation of the King's reinterment, invested £2.5 million in the regeneration and landscaping of Cathedral Square (Shellard 2016). As part of this project a statue of the King (donated to the city in 1980 by the Richard III Society) was moved to a new (and more prominent) position outside the cathedral (BBC 2014). The cathedral also funded a new tomb for Richard in the anticipation that it would be a major tourist attraction. The city and cathedral also staged on elaborate reinterment ceremony on 26 March 2015, well aware that Leicester would once again be in the international spotlight.

The City Council had correctly judged that Richard III would be a major attraction for tourists. The temporary Guildhall exhibition attracted 201,653 visitors during the period that it was open (Leicester City Council 2016), while the permanent exhibition received 81,627 visitors in its first year (BBC 2015). Following the reinterment, visitor numbers at Leicester Cathedral increased substantially from 29,500 in 2012 to 220,000 in 2015 (Visit Britain 2016). An analysis commissioned by the City Council reported that an extra 622,562 people had visited Leicester as a result of the discovery of Richard III, bringing an additional spend of £54.6 million which had created an additional 1012 jobs (Focus Consultants 2015). As the Mayor of Leicester remarked "[t]he discovery of King Richard III and his subsequent reinterment has had a greater impact on the city than we could ever have anticipated" (Leicester City Council 2015). Long after his death, Richard III was an asset of considerable value for the city of Leicester, becoming the centrepiece of a new urban branding strategy, intended to give the city a new competitive edge. Thus Richard's skeleton, its scientific excavation and analysis, became central in yet another enactment combining representations, place-based historical narratives and marketing and branding processes as part of global tourist circuits.

Conclusion

As objects from the past that have a significance in the present, corpses can be considered a form of heritage. Throughout history, corpses have attracted tourists, as interest in the remains of medieval saints and the burials of monarchs shows. However, in this chapter we have argued for the centrality of the dead body itself to this process. The discovery of the skeleton of Richard III shifted everything, provoking new constellations of history, identity, heritage, inter-urban competition, tourism and the materiality of the dead body itself. The dead body *as* heritage is central to many processes, in this case culminating in a new heritage tourism resource and a new heritage landscape in ways that have had international impacts.

Within these processes the dead body as heritage could be seen as 'merely' a subject, as something shaped and represented by competing interests. In such a view the different meanings associated with Richard III's remains are the result of the different viewpoints of different actors appropriating Richard's remains. However, though the dead body is sometimes a subject onto which meaning is projected, we have also sought to reject thinking of the dead body as inert. Conceptualising the body as having multiple ontologies which are the result of enactments (Mol 2002) opens up a more dynamic way of understanding the dead body and, in this case, how it plays a role in heritage, tourism and landscape. Furthermore, the dead body has agency through the part it plays in these enactments. As Harris and Robb (2013: 677) argue, considering the materiality of Richard's skeleton allows a perspective in which we can understand how the dead body can "act back, guide actions, reveal certain possibilities and foreclose others…", because:

> Ontologies are materially constituted and materials are negotiated ontologically. There is never a clear gap between a material thing and a person's ontological engagement with it…To understand how the material and the ontological come into being, we must give space both to the physical qualities of the world and to the manner in which the world's agencies are transformed through its engagement with people.

The discovery of the skeletal remains of King Richard III, we contend, exemplifies such a view. In the complex inter-locking processes we have discussed above, the body is central. However, we feel it important to end by introducing another aspect of the dead body which can be overlooked in such theorising – above all this was the body of a person, something which at times was perhaps lost in all the science, media, publicity, branding and inter-urban competition. Only in the ceremony of reinterment was this finally acknowledged – when 35,000 people turned out to witness and honour King Richard III as a human being.

Acknowledgements

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