



Ingar Figenschau THE QUOTIDIAN, SMALL AND INCOMPLETE: WWII AND THE INDIFFERENCE OF THINGS

Abstract

This article examines how things contribute to an expanded and different understanding of contexts that are usually reserved for historical inquiry. To show this, the article illustrates how archaeological investigations of World War II prison camps connected to the German defensive Lyn-gen Line in northern Norway have uncovered aspects that are absent or unavailable in historical sources. Accordingly, it is argued that archaeology of the recent past is not the 'handmaiden to history'. How so? First, archaeological excavations and post-field work enable a unique material proximity and awareness. Secondly, fragmented artefacts offer new and different insights that do not rely on historical tropes. In conclusion, things are time witnesses that are not influenced by historical hindsight: they can present fragmented, unpleasant, personal and intimate aspects that are too trivial to be included in the grand narratives, but as archaeological investigations demonstrate, were fundamental to the everyday life of war.

Keywords: contemporary archaeology, excavations, North Norway, prisoners of war, things, World War II

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INTRODUCTION

Unlike most other social science and humanities disciplines, archaeology primarily deals with a non-discursive physical material; that is, with things. These things constitute an unquestioned source of knowledge for prehistoric times and even for more recent contexts where we have few or no written or oral accounts. In the contexts of the historically well-recorded, however, their significance seems to diminish. Despite the development and flourishing of sub-fields such as historical archaeology, industrial archaeology, and contemporary archaeology (e.g. Palmer & Neaverson 1998; Buchli & Lucas 2001; Casella & Symonds 2005; Orser 2017; González-Ruibal 2019), which clearly have contributed significantly to blur archaeology's chronological confinement, there is still a more or less explicit

inclination to think of things' source value as inversely proportional to the availability of other sources. Thus, and disregarding the fact that the modern thingly record is growing exponentially fast, archaeology's prime concern continues to be with the distant past (Olivier 2001; Olsen 2010). The contrast to the discipline of history is perhaps telling here; its domain and research focus is neither limited by the availability of other sources nor by age, but simply by the existence and availability of written (or oral) sources.

In this article, I will look into how studies of things may contribute to our understanding also of such contexts that have hitherto been regarded as primarily historical fields of inquiry. World War II (WWII) in Norway is such a field, and my main query in this paper is whether and in what way archaeological material may enrich and/or alter our knowledge of its historically well-doc-

umented events. WWII archaeology is of course not untrodden ground as exemplified by numerous excellent studies (Schofield 2005; Burström 2009; Myers & Moshenska 2011; Mytum & Carr 2013; Seitsonen & Herva 2011; Herva 2014; Persson 2014; Seitsonen et al. 2017; Seitsonen 2018), and also in Norway several studies have recently been conducted (Jasinski & Stenvik 2010; Jasinski et al. 2012; Utvik 2012; Jasinski 2013; Grabowski et al. 2014; Olsen & Witmore 2014). However, the focus is less evidently on how archaeology actually differs in this respect. That is, how archaeology and a material approach is qualitatively different from a historical and textual one, and leads to different knowledges and experiences of the past? Using material from prisoner-of-war camps in northern Norway, I will explore the archaeological assumption that studying these things does more than illustrate and confirm historical and oral accounts, and actually may generate new and different knowledge.

There is also another aspect of the archaeological approach that I find important to emphasize in this respect. As argued by Gavin Lucas, our acquisition of data happens through

an active procurement and presenting of material – an ‘operation of materialization’ (Lucas 2001: 212). Through surveys and excavation, the archaeological material is produced from the surviving fragments of past events, and through various post-field processes it is further examined, recorded, and cared for *in-* or *ex-situ*. Thus, what also interests me is what possible difference this archaeological process of procurement makes – from fieldwork to various supplementary laboratory works – for the kind of knowledge we produce? What information does this prolonged engagement with things provide? How is our understanding affected, and which events may appear through this material engagement?

The prison camps that form the basis for this article were part of the last German defense line, the Lyngen Line, established in northern Norway at the end WWII (Fig. 1). The line was located in inner parts of the Lyngenfjord area, Troms County, and was constructed between the autumn of 1944 and May 1945. Its aim was to provide defense against the anticipated but never realized threat of an advancing (Soviet) Red Army, which in October 1944 finally had defeated the German troops at the Litza River on

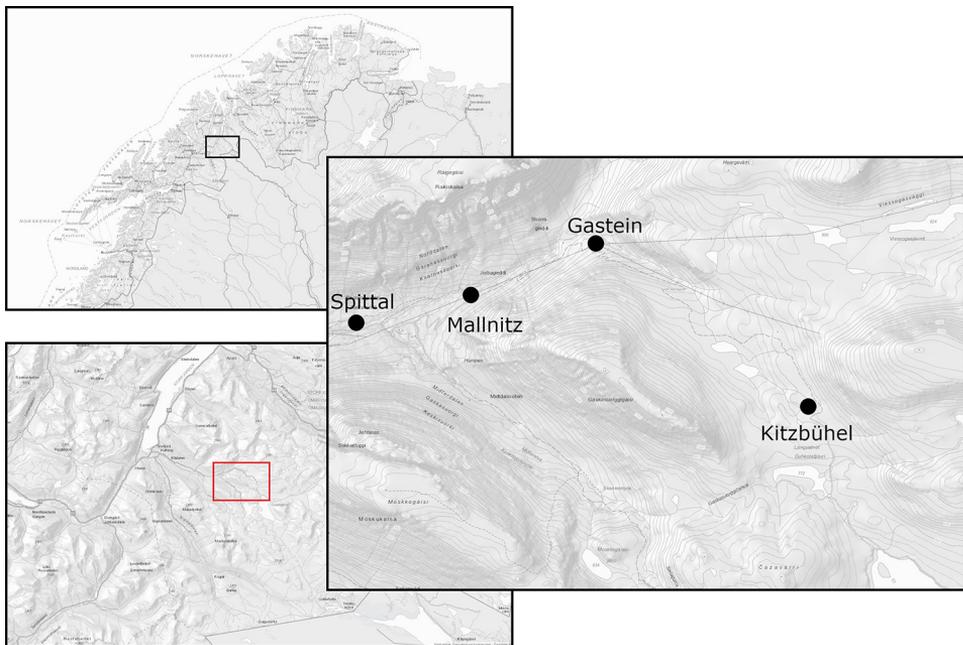


Fig. 1. Map of north Norway, Kitdalen and Norddalen. Illustration: I. Figenschau; map source: Kartverket, Geodata AS.

the Kola Peninsula, in their long-lasting attempt to invade the Soviet Union in the north. The defeat caused their subsequent massive evacuation from Finland and north-easternmost Norway (Ziemke 1959: 303–10; Hunt 2014). About 10000 prisoners of war (PoW), mostly Soviet soldiers, were forced to build the defensive structures of the Lyngen Line. Of these, nearly 1000 died as result of hunger, abuse, frost, and illness, and several were executed. A number of prison camps were built in the area. In Norddalen, there were four camps: Spittal, Mallnitz, Gastein and Kitzbühel. Two of these, Spittal and Kitzbühel, have been investigated as part of my PhD project. The material presented here constitutes the archaeological traces of soldiers and prisoners who lived, fought, and hoped during this last and very difficult stage of the war.

THE HISTORY OF WAR IN NORWAY

The framing of the war as a special field of historical study – and the creation of what perhaps may be called a war-historical canon – happened early in Norway. Already in 1949, Norwegians saw the publishing of *Den Store Krigen* ('The Great War'), a three-volume history encyclopedia of over 2400 pages, which dealt with WWII in Norway in its 'entirety' (Christophersen et al. 1949). Since then books and papers about WWII have been published regularly, focusing on major events and local episodes based on historical sources as well as oral accounts and interviews (Hjeltnes 1987; Eriksen 1995; Grimnes 2018). These publications have contributed to set in focus – and create – both national and 'everyday' heroes, those who actively worked in the resistance movement and those who otherwise fought against the occupation power (e.g. Jaklin 2006).

At the same time we have witnessed an increasing number of biographies, diary notes and first-hand reports that deal with prisoners' and everyday life and fate (e.g. Kreyberg 1946; 1978; Pasjkurov 1990; Haugland 2008; Thoresen 2013; Isachsen 2016; Nansen 2016), but also more frequent accounts of those who chose to side with the occupiers (e.g. Hennig 2009; Veum 2012; 2013; 2014; Brenden & Thomassen 2013; Sørli 2015; Nielsen 2017; Veum et al. 2017). This may be seen as a more general outcome of the post-war generations' negotiation of the es-

tablished public image of the war, involving a dimming of historical patriotism and greater focus on suffering, death, and misery (Nikolaisen 2012; Dahle 2018).

In other words, the amount of literature dealing with WWII is extensive, and only a small selection is mentioned here. Still, though the literature does encompass a wide range of topics and perspectives, there are nevertheless certain overarching and partly sanctioning trends for what is incorporated and for how certain issues are to be emphasized. Norwegian historical narratives can be seen as inclined towards 'political' and 'moral' correctness that conveys an authoritative focus. This despite the fact that the focus has shifted from resistance struggles and military aspects to everyday life and personal memories, which from the 1980s onwards has resulted in greater interest also in the prisoners of war. It is likewise significant that the subject embraces and engages more than just professional scholars, something the many publications bear witness to. This has also fostered critical opinions about the Norwegian war historical corpus from politically deviant observers. Former SS volunteer combatant Rolf Collin Nielsen, for example, claimed in retrospect that what he characterized as talented 'political propagandists' and historians during and after the war, had been 'wiping out all the desired political nuances in people's consciousness,' and wondered why, for example, communism was not targeted as an equally abhorrent system as national socialism – which, according to Nielsen, testifies to a one-sided description of the war (Nielsen 2017: 183, 186–8).

This viewpoint notwithstanding, it is still significant that despite the multi-dimensional and heterogeneous character of the past, it mostly ends up as logical and consistent narratives (White 1973). Building their accounts on specific events, based on their own frame of reference in the present, the historians select and emphasize the elements that become 'historical', and thus establish a plot that provides a meaningful and coherent trajectory (Neitzel & Welzer 2013: 23). In this also lies a political and moral aspect that, to varying degrees, influences how the accounts and analyses are angled. This is evident in both textbooks, overviews, and reference works, which are particularly sensitive to changing political and moral frameworks (Nikolaisen

2012; Dahle 2018). Biographies and personal memories may provide alternative accounts, but are themselves often burdened with selective remembrance, where events are narrated according to linear and logical sequences that often necessitate memory shifts and rearrangements of events (Soleim 2009: 366; Olsen & Pétursdóttir 2017: 91). In addition, and importantly, these are stories written by people who know how it all ended, and therefore inevitably are coloured by post-rationalization through retrospection and newly acquired knowledge (Neitzel & Welzer 2013: 9).

What we have come to know as a significant ‘historical’ event was not necessarily obvious to those who experienced this first hand, where significance also was part of everyday leveling. In Franz Kafka’s diary, 2 August 1914, there is a note that exemplifies this levelling: ‘Germany has declared Russia war – swim course in the afternoon’ (Neitzel & Welzer 2013: 24). Today, it is indisputable which of these events became ‘historic’, but the reason why it is self-evident to us is also because we know the outcome of the future implied in the first statement – that the war actually broke out in all its cruelty. Kafka’s swimming course was, at the time, more immediate, fulfilling, and directly ‘historical’, but despite that, ended up as historically insignificant. By virtue of a natural urge to find reason and logic in history, we are inclined to conduct what Bruno Latour has called ‘retrofitting’ (Latour 1999: 179), which makes it easier to choose the essential, correct, and beneficial at the expense of the insignificant, false and negative (Veum et al. 2017: 513).

THE INAPPROPRIATE EVERYDAY

The interpretation of the history of war has often been a balancing act in which underlying political and moral values are pressed into compliance with contemporary interpretative frames of reference. This also characterizes the accounts of prisoners of war, where little focus has, for example, been put on the mundane aspects of the prison camps; the ‘normality’ of everyday routines that coexisted with the darker sides of interment. This may include idleness and boredom, but also the spare moments of drying, sewing, mending, and playing, as well as the diverse

illicit transactions across the fences, where services and commodities were exchanged. It is not far-fetched to assume that this avoidance is at least partly the effect of moral or political correctness, which somehow makes the more trivial aspects of PoW lives ‘inappropriate’ as fields of scholarly attention.

This also relates to a more general distinction between different levels of knowledge and different ways of seizing (war) history. The history of the war is often framed as a grand narrative (Lyotard 1984), and while the smaller accounts are not omitted, they are themselves often shaped by the overarching story. And this is where archaeology, potentially, may come in as an important alternative, corrective and supplement (Olivier 2017: 11). What is important to inquire into, therefore, is whether archaeology actually can contribute with alternative stories, with accounts of other events than those historically emphasized; accounts which are differently communicated through things. Although the actions of war ended long ago, the material constituents, albeit ruined and fragmented, remain as physical postponements and witnesses. To what extent is this redundant material, the ‘spoils of history’, capable of imparting knowledge and thus make a difference to history, which for long has held sway over the interpretations of the war?

THE QUOTIDIAN, SMALL AND INCOMPLETE

The process of archaeological fieldwork often consists of preparatory work, fieldwork and various supplementary laboratory work, where each component is partly unique and set apart from the other. The preparation is often aimed at getting to know the place and its surroundings through existing documentation, previous registrations, aerial photos and maps, etc. However, expectations created through such preparatory work often differ significantly from being present at a site, seeing how it actually looks and feels, and discovering – through navigating and working on it – how it is shaped by processes of regrowth, erosion and ruination – by what is left. As an outdoor exercise, fieldwork is also affected by weather, by sounds and smells, birds and insects, making it a strange mix of concrete phenomenological and cognitive experiences.

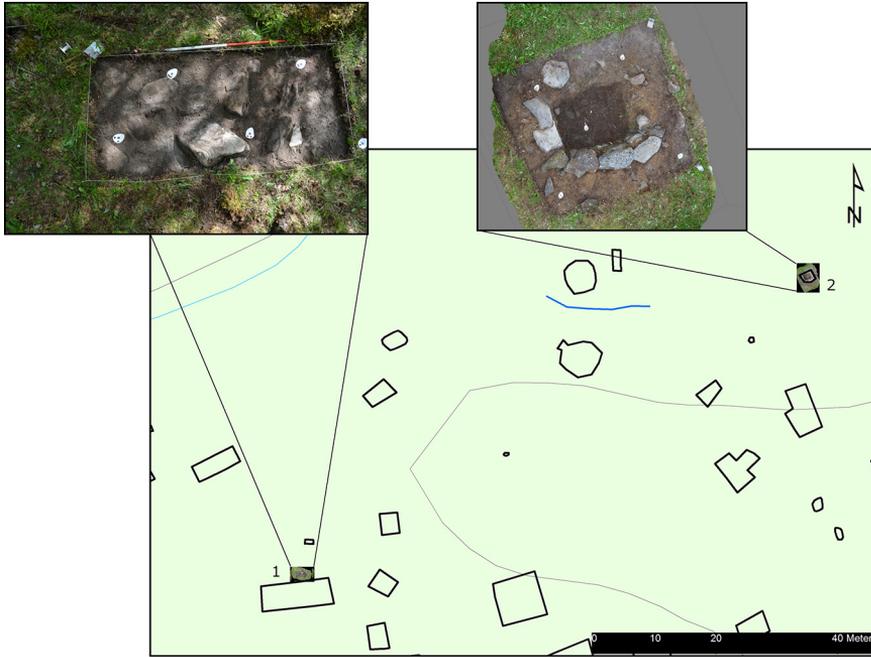


Fig. 2. Map of the western part of Spittal with Trenches 1 and 2. Map & illustration: I. Figsenschau.

Fieldwork, the archaeological encounter through which structures and things gradually emerge and *become the site*, is thus a tangible and dynamic meeting that sets it apart from most other scholarly encounters. The site is experienced and learned through a wide range of sensorial impacts, which manifests fieldwork as something more than mere observation, recording, and data collection (Lucas 2001; González-Ruibal 2014; Hamilakis 2014; Burström 2016).

Another significant and inevitable feature of the archaeological encounter is the uncertainty it involves. Expectations and probabilities notwithstanding, what actually awaits you at a survey or excavation is largely hidden and unknown. Moreover, since we rarely have the opportunity to excavate a site in its totality, selections have to be made with respect to where and how much to dig. This means that in most cases we only get information from parts of the actual site investigated. Due to these sampling biases, archaeology is often criticized as a random and scrappy activity, promoting bold accounts of the past on the basis of few and often fragmented objects (Lucas 2012: 15). But does this criticism

and the alleged biases necessarily invalidate or disrupt the knowledge potential of archaeology and the things retrieved?

Before addressing this let me move on to my own fieldwork conducted in the two WWII prison camps, Spittal and Kitzbühel, in northern Norway, both established by the German forces in connection with the construction of the Lingen Line from autumn 1944 to May 1945 (Figsenschau 2016). The excavations conducted aimed to explore the conditions of prisoners and soldiers, their everyday activities in what was to them an unknown landscape of winter and darkness. To accomplish this, we selected areas of the camps that seemed promising, targeting both the actual prison camp and areas occupied by the soldiers. At the outset, we believed our selections were fairly reliable, since the material is still partly visible on the surface. In reality, the outcome proved quite similar to what archaeologists generally experience: in some places, the material was rich, while other areas yielded very few finds.

Spittal was a PoW camp organized and run by Organization Todt¹, and was in April 1945 regis-

tered with 232 prisoners of war (Hesjedal & Andreassen 2015: 122). The camp is situated on an old fluvial deposit in a relatively flat area in Norddalen. Excavation trenches were laid out at four different places, and I shall briefly comment on two of them to exemplify the contrasts in terms of scarcity and abundance of finds (Fig. 2). The first trench, measuring 2 x 1 metre, targeted the soldiers' accommodation and was placed immediately outside a distinct rectangular structure to the west of the soldiers' camp. The structure was believed to represent the foundation of a building and the trench was placed in what was interpreted as an entrance area. The finds almost solely consisted of nails of different types, which admittedly was a somewhat disappointing result. Nevertheless, the excavated trench confirmed the presence of a building but refuted the assumed entrance, as neither soil signatures nor the presence of any other construction details supported it.

Trench 2 was located further east within the soldiers camp, covering a small, drywall embedment of unknown purpose. Well camouflaged by

moss and other vegetation, one could glimpse parts of a shoe sole and a ski binding, which aroused curiosity regarding this singular structure. Here the result was completely opposite to Trench 1, as the square embedment, measuring barely 1 x 1 metre, was literally filled with finds. Cans, buttons, boots, ski bindings, ointment containers and medals were found – items that despite their varied original uses all shared the fate of being discarded material. Neither was there seemingly any selection in the deposition of the objects; as the war ended they all seemed democratically defined as matter-out-of-use – regardless of whether they were canned goods, boots, or medals. The structures' function is uncertain, but during the final course of the war, the embedment had been used as a garbage pit, revealing insight into the soldiers' everyday life during that terminal phase.

A similar uneven picture emerged in Kitzbühel, the other prison camp in Norddalen, located further up in the barren mountainous landscape at an altitude of 800 metres. Here, a total of five excavation trenches were opened (Fig. 3), of which

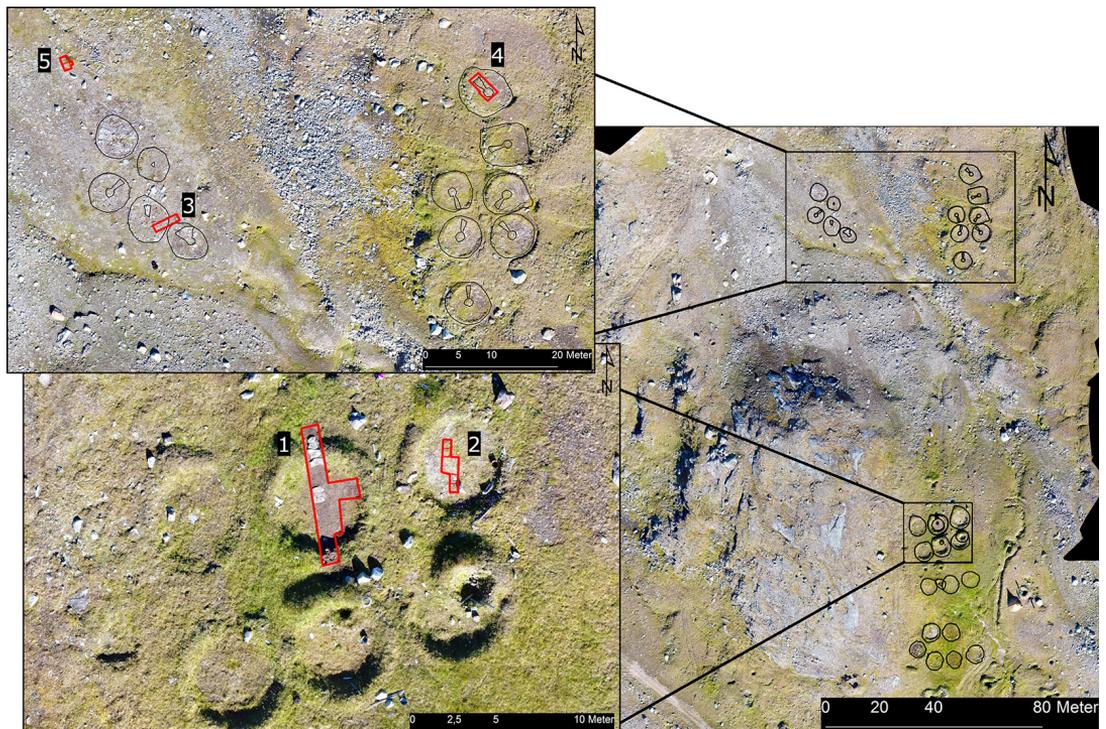


Fig. 3. Map of Kitzbühel with the excavated trenches. Map & illustration: I. Figenschau.



Fig. 4. Keyhole-shaped structure in Kitzbühel (Trench 4); top: before the excavation started; below: during the excavation. Photo & illustration: I. Figenschau.

and remnants of Bakelite² products. It also revealed a well-built stone-paved feature covering the floor area between the entrance and the centre (Fig. 4). The feature had a peculiar keyhole shape, and during our investigation we encountered similarly shaped stone-paved features in almost every plywood structure in the soldiers' quartering area.

In some sense, this contrast might be said to be expected, although material recorded from other prisoner camps is far less categorical in this respect (Grabowski et al. 2014; Olsen & Witmore 2014; Figenschau & Arntzen 2019). Most likely, the prisoners did not have access to material resources in the same way as the soldiers, and they therefore probably cared more for the few things they actually had, leaving few of them behind. In this sense, the scarcity and

absence of materials also become informative. It is still somewhat ironic, though, that despite my intention to explore the conditions under which both prisoners and soldiers lived these months, I ended up with far more material and information about the soldiers; that is, information about the everyday lives of those on the 'wrong' side.

For one thing, this shows that although we always have expectations regarding a site and design our investigations to fulfil them, what actually results will at least to some extent be a matter of coincidences and uncertainties. There is an important 'object lesson' to be learned also from this, which exemplifies, regardless of other agencies and opinions, the power and indifference of the material. In some sense, in this case the archaeological material also provides a counterweight to the historical accounts by drawing our attention towards the least historically and politically 'correct'. Things are not

three shall be commented on here, all sharing the property of being placed in the foundations of erstwhile plywood tents (so-called *Finnenzelte*), prefabricated tent-like cabins made of plywood. Two of these trenches were excavated in two different plywood tent foundations in the prison camp (Fig. 3:1–2). Trench 1 initially measured 8 x 1 metres and was later extended up to 3 metres wide, while trench 2 measured 3 metres in length and up to 1 metre wide. The finds from these were few and consisted mainly of construction materials in the form of nails and bolts, and without any immediately diagnostic traces of the Soviet prisoners.

Further north-east in the camp area, another trench, measuring 6 x 1 metres (Fig. 3: Trench 4), was opened in a plywood tent in the area of the soldiers' quartering. This trench yielded a rich assemblage consisting of, among other things, glass, game pieces, porcelain, a fountain pen,

‘political propagandists’, to use Collin Nielsen’s (2017) words; on the contrary, things promote and democratize the nuances of the war, and they continue to surprise us.

This brings me back to the argument concerning the fragmented and incomplete character of archaeology. Indeed, archaeology is packed with incompleteness, so to speak, with fragmented objects and ruins, and as argued over decades, it is illusory to expect an archaeological record that is complete or undisturbed (e.g. Childe 1956; Bonnichsen 1973; Clarke 1973; Binford 1983; Schiffer 1987; Lucas 2010). Whether a WWII or a Stone Age settlement, it is inevitably the material that has been left, has survived and is recovered that constitutes our starting point; this is both our lot and affordance.

It may seem contradictory and flawed to characterize the fragmentary nature of the archaeological record as a disciplinary affordance. However, I contend that uncertainty and coincidence are not necessarily negative aspects; on the contrary, they have their strengths (e.g. Sørensen 2015). The beneficial factor is that we have to accept what is left and focus our attention on what is there rather than what we want to be there. We are forced to pay attention, so to say, to the many ‘swimming lessons’ exposed (*pace* Kafka), since traces of the trivial and banal often have a tendency to outnumber other survivors in an excavation trench. The archaeological material, in other words, is not filtered or censored through pre-established preferences of what is accepted, politically correct, or relevant with respect to current topical issues; actually, the randomly surviving objects force or require us to think beyond established truths, authoritarian interpretations and established historical tropes. Things make up hybrid assemblages of partially whole, partially weathered remnants that, also by virtue of this, distance themselves from established selection and historical narratives.

Few people become excited about rusty tin cans from the war lying seemingly misplaced in a presumably pristine and ‘wild’ mountainous landscape, and which thus are often rather referred to as pollution or ‘hazardous waste’. These random survivors apparently have no ‘historical’ value and seem deprived of the qualities needed to contribute to the ‘epic’ stories of the war (Seitsonen & Herva 2011: 178; Herva 2014:

303). Equally, there are few who would consider the stone-paved structures of the *Finnenzelte* in Kitzbühel as important war-historical sources. And yet, in an archaeological context these key-hole-shaped features appear as frugal structures that not only are aesthetically beautiful but also provide information on how the camp was carefully constructed and organized.

Just think of the care and concern that guided the arrangement of the tents in small compounds with entrances facing each other to create shelter from weather and wind, or the care by which the pavement is laid out providing stable support for the only heat source in the tent. Without any immediate connection to the main features of the northern theatre of war, however, they represent events, ways of life, frameworks of reference and decisions that rarely or never make their way to the historical accounts. They become like Kafka’s swimming lesson, barely noted in the margin, but otherwise forgotten.

And this is where archaeology provides a very significant difference by attending relatively even-handed to the diverse repertoire of things and features encountered. Almost everything from an archaeological excavation is recorded and collected. This egalitarian attention not only awakens trivial and redundant things from a ‘dormant sleep’, but also allows them to utter themselves as significantly different time witnesses. That is, as testimonies that provide or allow for alternative accounts, evidence, presences, and interpretations, and which by virtue of this also utter a humble criticism of historical dogmas (Lucas 2001: 193). In this situation, archaeologists may become what González-Ruibal describes as ‘post- and hyperwitnesses’, witnessing events that no longer take place, and which generate new relationships and memories: ‘We see too late, but we see more’ (González-Ruibal 2014: 369–70). To this may be further added that the material testimonies discovered allow for an unparalleled intimacy with the past and the place, which through the many and unpredictable encounters also generates curiosity and wonder. The recovered material becomes enrolled in new chains of events; they are re-materialized in a new circulation where they acquire new attention and, thus, take on roles of significance never originally intended (Lucas 2012: 17; Burström 2016: 321).



Fig. 5. Rusted canned goods are revealed in the post-field work by means of cleaning and lighting. Canned goods from Kitzbühel marked with among others 'Gebr. Rasch AG, Schleswig, Rindfl, i.e.S' and in the center '1 Kg h, 850 gr / g h 185'. Photo & illustration: I. Figenschau.

POST-FIELD WORK

This brings us further into what is often referred to as post-excavation work, or perhaps more correctly, post-field work and analyses. During this stage, the finds are processed, cleaned, photographed, measured and described, a careful attention and treatment that in many respects by far surpasses the care they received during their use-life. The relatively egalitarian attention characterizing the field situation is continued, and regardless of their character and condition, objects are studied and attended to, including things that may seem insignificant. During fieldwork, the actual discovery and exposure of the objects is a unique experience that both arouses curiosity and affection. In the post-excavation analysis, these discoveries and exposures continue. Now, however, they include other aspect of things' biographies through identifying traces of use, aging and afterlife. Washing and cleaning the finds,

Fig. 6. Nailing banality. Nails make up a large part of the archaeological material but are rarely considered 'worthy' or 'aesthetic' enough to be discussed or included. Nails from Spittal, cleaned, measured, described and photographed. Photo & illustration: I. Figenschau.



the removal of soil, sand and other debris, often reveal more testimonies. For example, that many of the cans bear stamps of various kinds, details that can reveal the producer, place of origin, and content (Fig. 5).

This attention also includes the dormant afterlife of things and the traces that are left from weathering, patination and secondary wear. Tin cans rust, nails corrode to new shapes, leather weathers and rubber changes character, while other materials such as glass, aluminium, and Bakelite are more persistent and may live on largely unchanged. Through what is left of them, including their wrinkles and scars, objects remember their own past, what they once were a part of and what their fate became. Remains of a sebaceous candle found in Spittal, a *Hindenburglicht*, not only testifies to the need to light up the polar night darkness in a plywood tent, but also to the smell of sebum, to rations, and other entangled aspects of a soldier's life. A tube from Spittal with *Dr. Dralle Birkenhaarsfixativ*, or a bottle of *Auxol Haartonikum*, recall how a normality of hygiene and personal care was exercised; the maintenance of 'grooming standards' within the German army (Pool 2015: 114), even here in this distant mountain valley.

And they also recall events of production, various uses and reuses, and daily trivial events. Events that make up the largest, but also least ‘historical’ part of our lives.

After cleaning the objects, measuring, description and photographing usually follows. Numerous details concerning length, width, thickness, shape, material, number and weight are recorded (Fig. 6). For example, the following:

One straight nail with a length of 10.4 cm, thickness of 0.63 cm. Felt nail with a length of 2.7 cm, thickness of 0.3 cm.

10 bent nails up to 10.1 cm long, thickness of 0.44 cm. One oven valve, circular with screw in center. Wings on the sides for tuning the valve. String attached in a square nut on the back of the screw. Diameter of 7.69 cm, length of screw 6.3 cm. Some of the canned food has identification marks, but due to its condition, it is very difficult to decipher. The largest can parts are from large cans with a diameter of 22.7 cm. One of these has ‘18’ stamped in (Data entry for Kitzbühel, G4022, SE, surface/layer 1).

These dry descriptions may of course be seen as an anonymization of the objects by translating and ‘sterilizing’ them into standardized categories and numerical data, distancing them from context and past usage. Yet, what such an entry reveals is that the collected artefacts are treated relatively equally; that is, with much of the same care and attention, regardless of whether the object is complete or fragmented, known or unknown. It also assigns the material a new role and context that affords attunement and insights where generalized descriptions, such as ‘Bakelite’ or ‘glass’, are mostly dissolved, allowing each object an opportunity to be seen. In phenomenological terms this work may be described as a disciplinary mode of ‘bringing close’ (Heidegger 1962: 139–40), whereby things that previously were dormant and ‘out-of-hand’ (Pétursdóttir 2014) in the field, are brought into our concerned engagement with them.



Fig. 7. Modified Bergschuhe from Spittal. Photo & illustration: I. Figenschau.

They become ‘known’ through our routines and explicit inspection, involving, thus, both a present-to-hand and ready-at-hand archaeological attention. Through these processes, objects and categories of objects are also assembled and linked to each other.

In order to concretize the process, we may consider two very different objects; on the one hand, a relatively complete and easily identifiable object, and, on the other, a fragmented and less obvious one. Among the footwear found in Spittal, there were several *Bergschuhe* (Sáiz 2008: 77–8; Krawczyk & Jansen 2009: 84–5). Through post-excavation analysis, special features of this footwear could be better identified, as well as the nuances between common characteristics and modifications. Here is the description of object F1852 from structure 2A1720 in Spittal (Fig. 7):

Modified boot where one has cut off the upper part of the ankle portion and further down along the seams at the heel piece, making it more like a slipper. The sole is also slightly modified with a toe plate in the front. The length of the sole is approx. 29.5 cm. Right foot boot.

Although the boot is weathered and bears the mark of a life beyond its intended use, it is still an iconic reminder of the erstwhile Gebirgsjäger troops. The boot, however, has traces

that trigger other, and to us less obvious, memories. These include clear marks of repair and alteration, especially at the tip of the sole. Here a reinforcement in the form of a thick adapted leather piece is added with a German-made toe plate mounted on it. Originally, the *Bergschuhe* had large distinct nails that followed the edge of the sole. On this specimen, the foremost nails are either lost or replaced with the aforementioned toe plate. It may indicate wear, lack of spare parts, or personal preferences. The inserted toe plate, which for us appears as a morphological deviation, may have been felt as an annoyance for the soldier who used the boot, especially if it were added while the boot served its original purpose. Several soldiers complained that the considerable amount of iron in this type of footwear led to reduced insulation at low temperatures (Sørli 2015: 216–7; Nielsen 2017: 74–5).

Another irregularity of the boot is the cut-off shaft, which must have radically changed its original purpose. Whether or not it was done in order to adapt it to alternative or secondary (e.g. indoor/season) use is uncertain. The leather shaft cut-off may have been used for other, and at the time more pressing, purposes. The boot is easy to identify in generic terms (as ‘footwear’), but as an individual specimen it recollects numerous incidents relating to maintenance, repair, and adaptation, and more generally to coping in a remote winter landscape, revealing memories of a different existence.

At the opposite end of the scale are objects that are not readily identifiable, whether due to the object’s fragmentary condition or by lacking any diagnostic reference. One small find made in Kitzbühel belongs to this end of the scale. The find was made in a plywood tent in the actual prison camp, and is described as:

Small cylindrical object with threads at the top. Cut off/demolished on base. Grayish copper/tin in color. On one side, it is marked with ‘(H) ELIOS LITE’. Looks like a valve for a bicycle hose. Length 1.93 cm, width 1.17 cm. Somewhat squeezed and tapered in the shape with the narrowest point at the thread field (Data entry for Kitzbühel, 2A1000, F1213, Layer 1).

Wear and weathering characterize the object, and although it still bears the traces of its practical life – threads, shape and marking – it is so remote from my frames of reference that it could not be recognized as anything but an ‘archaeological find.’ Some objects do not easily reveal their past identity or practical purpose. They continue a kind of anonymous afterlife as ‘matter-out-of-hand’, but which due to their enrolment as archaeological material await a possible future recognizing. Such objects are often grouped into wider generic categories such as ‘iron’, ‘Bakelite’ or just ‘miscellaneous’. In order to know more about them, these unyielding objects may be further scrutinized through more detailed treatment, microscopic inspection as well as X-ray analysis and conservation.

An archaeological excavation reveals to us a fragmented and incomplete world of things, a world that also holds an array of small memories. The post-excavation analysis takes you further into this other world, a work that does not always have a positive outcome or even a conclusion, but which still brings you closer to that alien world; that is, to things. But what potential knowledge do these stranded objects really afford; what memories do they hold beyond those already addressed?

EVERYDAY EVENTS

Traditionally, accounts of soldiers’ lives capture them in the framework of combat, assault and killing, but this, of course, did not capture most of their everyday life. As Harald Welzer (2014) points out, the everyday of the soldier often consisted of idleness and being on call, interspersed by drinking, cinema, love life and hobbies. Boredom, home longing and ‘cabin fever’ were common, and illustrate the often-forgotten aspects of the war: ‘Many of the facets of war have an everyday character, which is barely conveyed, because, in the first place, it is obvious, and secondly, unspectacular and thus hardly worth telling’ (Welzer 2014: 189–90). The war creates its own unique frames of reference, and this also includes references for routines and daily enactments: drinking alcohol, playing a game of chess, or heating canned food on an OT oven in a cold plywood tent at an altitude of 800 metres. It is often such unspectacular events that leave



Fig. 8. Game pieces from Kitzbühel, Trench 4. Photo & illustration: I. Figen-schau.

traces in the archaeological record in the form of finds that hardly say much about what features on the main scene, but rather report specific everyday events (González-Ruibal 2014: 19).

These humble things do not themselves ascribe to any political agenda or censorship, or to characteristics such as ‘negative’, ‘malevolent’, ‘dark’, or ‘monster’ (see González-Ruibal 2019: 169–71). They simply refer to their own presence, remember their own lives, and quite faithfully also those aspects of the soldiers or prisoners’ everyday life they were most intimately attached to. In their humble way, these commonalities of war also remind us about the uncanny proximity between, on the one, hand killings and assaults, and on the other, the habitual features of everyday life.

GAME PIECES

One of the features that illustrate everyday life is game pieces. These are found in several prison camps in northern Norway, including Kitzbühel. There is one main type that recurs in most of these camps: a circular flat piece made of glass, often in the colours of green, white, blue and yellow. This can be further divided into two sub-types (Fig. 8). The first is decorated with a geometric pattern and has a diameter of c 2 cm and thickness of 0.3 cm; the other type is smaller, with a diameter of c 1.4 cm and without any kind of ornament. The latter is also partially transparent. The decoration on the first type consists of

three concentric circles that enclose a marked centre and with transverse lines radiating out to a rounded edge.

The number and extensive geographical distribution of archaeologically recovered game pieces of this kind indicates that they must have been part of a common game set distributed or sold in camps and at front sections (Sáiz 2008: 301; Pool 2016: 80). After some further investigations it turned out that they were part of a popular board game set, which, because of its size and low weight, became commonplace also because it often

combined chess, draughts/checkers, mill and tiddlywinks. The game pieces in Kitzbühel probably arrived here as part of these game packages. One particular source of supply may have been Reichskommissar Josef Terboven’s specified edition for the forces in Norway, possibly distributed as a Christmas gift.

While we may never know exactly how the board games travelled to Kitzbühel, or who played them, the game pieces do reveal knowledge. They testify to a widespread welfare scheme and a recognition of the need to fill the everyday ‘void’ with familiar and appreciated meaning. Even though snow and weather added an ever-increasing burden to the effort of building the final defense line, that daylight was slowly diminishing, and the course of war was progressively negative, or perhaps precisely because of that, there was a need for recreation and diversion, a need to think of something else. That opportunity was provided by the simple universe of board games, by chess or tiddlywinks. A welcome and remote universe operating largely independent of context, only 100 metres away from the actual prison camp, where several prisoners were executed and abused (Lund & Waarhuus 1945).

The board games thus point to another dimension of the war, one that does not concern the purely operational and tactical, and which does not interact directly within the specific framework of weapons, weather, and geography.

Fig. 9. The top of a Champagne bottle found in Spittal. Photo & illustration: I. Figenschau.

It removes the reality of war and helps create a second life of domestic normality. Within the German army, board games were also considered an effective combatant of boredom and as a means for maintaining morale. Many board game sets were designed so that they were easily assembled and carried along (Pool 2016: 80). The games also created a social arena where one entered into another form of interaction with fellow soldiers. Far from the reality of war, they could create personal and social ties beyond military relations. It was also an arena where established and predictable rules persisted, offering something fixed and universal. Thus, games may have provided consolation and reassurance by counteracting the ever-escalating *ad hoc* negotiations of rules of war and human values.

The game pieces thereby also become concrete memories of the great extremes of the soldier's existence, a life that for them – regardless of whether one mistreated a prisoner, cleared snow, prepared food, played or rested – was largely defined as work (Welzer 2014: 193–4; Westermann 2016). At the same time, although the game pieces hint at a human aspect, they were also used by soldiers and officers who often were referred to as malevolent and inhuman. These colourful game pieces look and feel good – they are pleasing and yet humble – something that could belong to anyone, even today, and thus likely be conceived as a brightening element in a miserable and cramped plywood tent. In a very concrete way, their presence in a prison camp 800 metres above sea level reflects how everyday needs are to be found everywhere (cf. Lehtonen & Kaila 2017: 44).

ALCOHOL

Bottles that have contained various forms of alcohol have often been found in connection with prison camps in northern Norway (Olsen & Wit-



more 2014), and relatively large quantities were detected in both Spittal and Kitzbühel. The finds from Spittal and Kitzbühel include glass of various shapes and colours, and a few ceramic bottles (Fig. 9). Germany was a major producer of wine, beer and schnapps/liquor during the war; however, as reflected in the archaeological material, wine from allied and occupied countries, such as Italy and France, also found its way to the German frontlines.

The identification of the bottle glass has proved somewhat problematic since the material is very fragmented with few diagnostic features, apart from general bottom markings such as '0.7 l, Da'. The material nevertheless includes wine bottles, and most likely also bottles for spirits and beer. Other investigated camps, such as Sværholt in Finnmark County and a German military and PoW camp in Peltjoki, Finland, have revealed a large selection of alcohol. Especially at Sværholt, the quantities are considerable, and bottles for spirits, beer, white and red wine, and even champagne, have been identified (Olsen & Witmore 2014: 184). A similar picture also appears in Finland, with finds of, among others, beer mugs and schnapps, wine and Cognac glasses (Seitsonen & Herva 2011; Seitsonen et al. 2017: 6; Seitsonen 2018: 95).

Distributions of artefacts are important for archaeological understanding, and even simple differences such as presences and absences can help enlighten different conditions both within and between camps. Above, we saw that game pieces were only found in the soldiers' accom-

modation in Kitzbühel, which suggests certain restrictions on interaction and the movement of goods across fences, in compliance with the general instructions given to the soldiers regarding the treatment of prisoners. This impression is further strengthened by the discrepancies in the distribution of alcohol-related finds. The alcohol in Spittal and Kitzbühel is mostly found in the soldiers' accommodation, while at Sværholt wine and spirits as well as game pieces were present in great quantities also in the prison camp and its associated midden (Olsen & Witmore 2014: 184–5). In Kalvik, a prison camp in Nordland County that was archaeologically examined in 2017 (Figenschau & Arntzen 2019), there were very few finds indicating the presence of alcohol in the prison camp. However, according to the German soldier Johannes Martin Hennig, who was posted in Kalvik in the period May–July 1944, alcohol was very common in the German quarters (Hennig 2009: 66, 106; 2015: 55, 81–2, 117).

Such differences may be related to local conditions in the camps, affected also by the course of the war. Kitzbühel and Spittal were only occupied for approximately seven months during harsh conditions at the very end of the war, while Sværholt was militarily active for over two years, mostly during what in military terms was a relatively calm period. This situation very likely influenced the living conditions and also the relationship between soldiers and prisoners. The investigations at Sværholt have revealed that various valued goods crossed the fences against the prevailing rules and regulations (Grabowski et al. 2014: 20–1). Sværholt is a very remote and difficult to access place on the Finnmark coast, where, moreover, static rules and regulations are difficult to implement for practical reasons. And perhaps the utter isolation, and thus in some sense a shared entrapment, may have fostered a kind of commonality that made it easier to see the human face of the enemy, and provided a more tolerant environment for exchange and interaction (Grabowski et al. 2014: 21–2; Seitsonen et al. 2017: 24–5). Though some of the same conditions may be said to apply for Kitzbühel and Spittal, the very context of the terminal phase of the war, of being beaten and on the defensive, may have made their extenuating and bonding effects less likely.

The amount of alcohol bottles at some of the camps testifies to easy access for the soldiers (and sometimes for the prisoners), indicating affluent and effective provisions. This is somewhat surprising, since abstinence from alcohol was considered a virtue within the SS, and those who committed crimes under the influence of alcohol were threatened with severe penalties. In reality, however, alcohol was used as both a reward, 'medicine' and an escape from reality (Westermann 2016: 4, 13; Kamiński 2017: 29). Alcohol was also included in German rations (Steffenak 2008: 153; Hennig 2009: 66) and was of course brought into the field (Reese 2005: 149; Seitsonen 2018: 38), as witnessed by the large deposits of alcohol bottles at German sites in Norway and Finland (Seitsonen 2018: 95). On the eastern front, SS soldiers were given special rations with alcohol in order to reinforce the social ties between the soldiers (Westermann 2016: 4) and achieved a significance that had at least indirect links with the war itself. It was thought of as a means to escape the psychic neuroses created by battles and combat, and provide relief from the stress of being stationed in an alien landscape far away from home (Seitsonen 2018: 106, 164). Access to alcohol seems to have been relatively equal among the German forces, but consumption was probably greater in peripheral areas and in direct front sections.

Like the game pieces, alcohol brings into view other aspects of war, even though it also added support to many of the most brutal acts of war. The alcohol surpasses the pure practical contexts, at least in immediate terms. Unlike board games, however, alcohol provided little moral and legal guidance in an ethically blurred context, and perhaps functioned quite to the contrary. It nevertheless provided an escape; not only from the immediate conditions of war but also in response to growing political disillusionment. Increasingly more Wehrmacht personnel found it problematic to provide support for the ideology and depraved logic of war without being affected. Clearly, this disillusionment did not affect all; some soldiers in this area stayed faithful to the idea of the 'Third Reich'. Indicative of this is a poster found on the wall of a farmhouse in nearby Birtavarre after the surrender, indicating both bitterness, anxiety and anger: 'So lange noch ein Feind uns in Germanien trotz,

Sei Hass mein Amt und meine Tugend Rache. Herausgeber: 6. Geb. Div/N.S. Führung' (Lund 2014[1982]: 79; Sunde 2014: 67).

Perhaps it became a normal condition for many soldiers (and officers) to be drunk and develop an addiction. Moreover, the socializing effect of alcohol became something that not only brought the soldiers together, but could also create a sense of well-being, a celebration of *Heimat* (home) and embracement of the 'German spirit' (Breitman 1991: 221). In this sense, alcohol may have acted as a two-edged sword that both contributed to increased violence and abuse, but also worked as a *post hoc* mechanism to ease the psychological traumas inflicted on the soldiers by the war (Westermann 2016: 7). The many remains of alcohol in Kitzbühel show that the need and demand for alcohol was always present. The soldiers that were to operate the Lyngen line were precisely soldiers who had been fighting for a long time on the eastern front, and were thus strongly influenced by this experience, the constant threat, and, not least, the final defeat and retreat.

THE END

Is there really any difference between historical and archaeological sources, or is archaeology merely an 'expensive' method of verifying what we already historically know? Does archaeology really bring something new to the events of the war, or is it a worthless effort in dealing with such modern events? In this paper, I have argued in favour of archaeology's ability to contribute with new insights that go beyond the historically known. At the same time, these are also insights, or knowledges, that may not comply with the expectations created by dominant historical tropes.

Some of the unique aspects of things are their persistence and integrity; they stay faithful to their life and fate and can report on aspects and events of the war that never found their way to the written sources. Unlike the latter, they were not intended to record information or serve as specific historical accounts or purposes, but have survived *in situ* – where it all happened – in their redundancy and state of self-preservation. Neither are they selected or censored in any direct sense, nor do they posture to draw at-

tention. This, admittedly, also makes them ambiguous. On the one hand, the presence of game pieces, alcohol bottles, tin cans, the stone-paved structure of a *Finnenzelte*, or a modified *Bergschuhe*, seem endlessly difficult to mobilize in support of prevailing historical tropes; they are time witnesses that are not influenced by any hindsight, they are indifferent to whether they represent something unpleasant, fragmented, unwanted or embarrassingly banal. On the other hand, they are all about the less articulated aspects of the war. They often embrace very personal and intimate aspects of events and conditions that may appear annoyingly tedious, trivial and even embarrassing to the prospects and tropes of the grand narratives, and yet they were imperative constituents of that actual lived past. A lived past that as much as the cruelty of the war was about keeping dim lights in a poorly isolated plywood tent, coke firing in small stoves, or preparing meals from frozen canned food. An actual past that also contained leisure time that had to be filled – with drinking to escape and bond, or with a game of chess or mill to have some fixed rules to follow and a faint hope of winning. Everyday practices/actions that lie buried beneath the surface, both in a concrete and metaphorical sense.

The knowledge of things is thus closely linked to the everyday life experienced by soldiers and prisoners of war, and it is in many ways trustworthy, and a consolation too, that it is these small objects that remind us of small events and trifling stories. The events and stories that easily become drowned, censored or considered unimportant in historical narratives. Even in war, most days are grey, filled with everyday activities – eating, working, living, sleeping and surviving – whether you are a soldier or a prisoner. And this everydayness is what grounds the archaeological difference and the knowledge that potentially emanates from things. They do not question the actual war and its course, but tacitly hint at lived and omitted stories.

The game pieces exemplify this real but ambiguous significance, which in their colourful appearances almost create an illegitimate recollection of joy and leisure, laughter and competition, in a setting alarmingly close to the dark features of death, violence and abuse. They refer to the banality of war, where an everyday

normality was enacted far from our norms, and where Kafka's 'swimming lessons' may seem as natural and obvious as war crimes. Our present encounters with these redundant things, the leftovers of war, thus offer access not only to a wealth of materialized memories, but also triggers involuntary memories. They are *in-situ* time witnesses that when revealed and brought to attention are difficult to explain away, omit, or ignore.

NOTES

¹ Organisation Todt (OT) was responsible for civil and military construction projects within Germany and the occupied territories in the period 1938–45 (Christopher 2014).

² Bakelite is an end product of the condensation reaction between phenol and formaldehyde, and was the first successful synthetic plastic. Bakelite was officially patented in 1909 by the Belgian chemist Leo H. Baekland (Weaver 2008: 13).

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