ANALECTA PRAEHISTORICA LEIDENSIA 29

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contents

John C. Barrett   **Stone age ideologies**

1.   Introduction

How can we understand a past which we can never observe?
What is the relationship between our practice as archaeolo-
gists and the practices of those whose lives, which although
now extinct, we still hope to understand?

   Imagine. Imagine that the day has passed as a walk, at
first beside a river whose winter floods have receded leaving
the banks scoured and in sharp relief against the flow of the
waters. Progress has been slow. There are others with you,
and a child is being carried. Woodland encroaches upon the
water's edge and at times you leave the banks to cut along a
well established but overgrown path between the trees. The
trees are in bud and the smell of recent rainfall is all around
you. Eventually the path picks up again but now it begins a
climb which you have made many times before. You are
hungry and tired, but you know that you will reach your
destination that evening. Eventually the ground levels out.
The landmarks are familiar, a great uprooted tree, a narrow
stream. And then the trees give way to open ground, a huge
gently sloping area which had been burnt but which is now
deep in grass and from whence it is possible to look down
towards the broad expanse of the coast. The sea is bright in
the late afternoon sun and, to the south, the river which had
shared your earlier path, breaks the line of the shore. Resting
here little is said. Much of the journey has been in silence for
the world around exists without comment as it has always
done. Now, keeping the coast in sight and leaving the river
behind, the pace quickens and before the sun has closed
upon the sea your destination is reached. Beside a low
outcrop of white rock you and your companions join with
others, and at last you can rest. There is some dried meat and
there is talk. Small groups huddle together, there are fires
and there will be shelter. The next few days will be spent in
this company. Here stories will be told and memories
recalled. Food will be collected and shared, and in the heart
of these activities a child, the child carried here, will die.

   Is there an archaeology of talk? It seems unlikely. Talk
leaves no mark for us to recover, no trace to act as its record.
And if we continue to operate with the idea that the
archaeological record is the only medium by which the
meanings of the past are transmitted to the present, then that
record seems so fragmentary and so coarse grained that the

moments if not the localities of talk – short term and face to
face – seem for ever lost. In their place archaeologists seek a
general order in the material, mitigating the apparently
incomplete nature of the record by recognizing patterns
extending over huge geographical distances and lasting for
long periods of time. The archaeological record therefore
appears essentially the record of long term process. When,
from this perspective, we say that material culture embodies
meaning it is a meaning which seems to be mutely
expressed. It is as if the significance of the patterns
contained in the record lies in them being representative of
something, rather than expressive of meanings which were
once lived and talked about. These are not the meanings
enunciated, considered, and argued over in talk so much as
meanings which once stretched out over decades and covered
territories which no single person could ever traverse. These
meanings, which archaeologists refer to as 'traditions',
'cosmologies' or 'ideologies', seem some way removed from
the practicalities of getting on with life. Yet it was people
who were getting on with life who made, used, and discarded
the materials we now study.

   To assert that material culture is meaningfully constituted
is therefore one thing, to understand how those meanings
were created and operated historically, and to establish the
means by which archaeological analysis can explore such
issues, is quite another. In this contribution I want to
distinguish between the meanings which archaeologists
recognize as being located in the long term structural
relationships which are directly observable in the
archaeological evidence (such meanings appear to be
objectified in the record of the past) and the meanings which
were reproduced and objectified by the practices of those
people who created and lived amongst the materialities
which we recover archaeologically.

   It is wrong, as I hope to show, to treat *structure* and
practice as separate and thus alternative domains of analysis;
the fact that they have been so regarded is the problem.
Various attempts have been made to establish a duality of the
two, although these attempts are often expressed so
abstractly that they appear far removed from the historically
specific ways human life has been lived. The easiest route
through what has become a complex theoretical argument is

via the concept of human agency. The concept of agency simply establishes the idea that humanity is able to understand the worlds it occupies, to act upon those worlds in pursuit of aims and desires, and to monitor the results of those actions.

All human agency is situated; it has available to it different sets of resources, it has expectations as to the significance and value of those resources, and by necessity it acts with reference to different demands and controls which are placed upon it. Agency also operates temporally, it moves through life as a sequence of experiences, a sequence punctuated temporally and marked spatially by displacement. An example of this would be the sequence of experiences encountered in a walk. The human agent therefore experiences their own life by passing through time in which occurs a series of events. These events may be 'bracketed off' from one another by such simple devices as moving from one place to another, or by turning the body to face away from one place and towards another. These bodily experiences form part of an individual's biography. Agency, however, does more than merely experience life, it also makes sense of it.

It is in making sense that agents discover meaning in the world around them and in their own actions. Meaning is something which is both taken from the world when it is the product of interpretation and understanding, and it is something given to the world as the product of action. Agents therefore recognize a coherency and meaningful order in the world and they act, on the basis of that perceived order, to achieve certain ends. That such acts appear effective establishes the empirical validation of the original interpretations upon which they are based, and through such acts the agent is able to understand their own place and being in the world. Meaning is therefore created through interpretation, action and communication; it does not reside in some message or symbolic structure but has to be redeemed by an active process of interpretation and negotiation.

This point is of central importance to us, it will be the means by which we will unite the concepts of practice and structure, formulate a critique of current archaeological approaches towards the 'ideologies' of Stone Age societies, and establish the nature of archaeological research into these periods.

2.   The archaeology of archaeology

We began with a short, imaginary, journey. Before we can return to the kinds of experiences encountered there we will have to undertake another journey, this time through the more entangled undergrowth of archaeological reasoning. Our goal will be to reach a position from whence we can question the logic of a great deal of the recent interpretive

work identified as 'postprocessual archaeology'. The remarkable failure which typifies this work is that whilst 'agency' has been adopted as the object of analysis in a commitment to write into history the existence of a knowledgeable humanity, and thus establish a break with processual archaeology, the practices by which that agency both gained and used its knowledge are rarely discussed. Consequently the agencies most obviously present in the writing of Stone Age archaeologies are not those of Stone Age peoples but of archaeologists themselves.

We must certainly begin by accepting that the histories of the Stone Age are the products of our writings. They are therefore the products of our enquiry into the past rather than being the direct representation of the past itself. That such an enquiry on our part is possible, and that the histories which it produces are open to evaluation, are because a general consensus exists among archaeologists that not only does a large body of evidence exist for the past, but that we are capable of establishing the significance of that evidence.

The evidence comprises a complex of material remains, and when we establish a meaning for those remains, in terms of some historical significance, we create an understanding of history. Two complex issues are embedded in this seemingly innocent statement; the ways humans understand their world, and the nature of the relationship between the understandings others once had of their world and the understandings of the past created by archaeologists.

We have already touched upon the first. Humans understand the world by understanding their place within it; they read the world around them and discover therein an order or logic whose utility is demonstrable through practice. Practice re-inscribes that understanding of order upon the world. It is therefore through *practices* which seem to achieve desired aims that the meaning of the world is realized and given some sort of empirical validation. Practices are, for the most part, inherently social for not only do they make sense to the practitioner but they also make sense to others – they are a social discourse. Practices therefore achieve some of the aims which are hoped for, they are generally understandable, although they may also give rise to consequences which were unintended. Practice is the means of interrogating the world whereby previous experiences and understandings are shown to be valid and adequate to the tasks at hand.

Ricoeur demonstrates how a conscious agency moves between different temporalities; an awareness of one's own self is built in relation to an awareness of the grander cosmological ordering of the world via the practices or narratives by which self-awareness is seen to have a practical validity in relation to that seemingly changeless cosmology (Ricoeur 1988). The meanings both read from and inscribed upon the world are relatively open. A number of views may

be expressed of a particular condition, or a number of interpretations offered of a single event. The transformative power of agency, as it acts on the world by convention, creates new conditions which those conventions then have to accommodate. The ways actions interpret and impart meaning may always escape the expectations of convention. This is not to say that anything can go, competent social agents do require to be understood for their actions to be effective; they must make some reference to what is already expected of them by others and to what is already taken for granted, however radical their own pronouncements upon the world might be.

The emphasis placed upon agency, through whose interpretations and actions the structural conditions which it occupies are recognized, regenerated, and transformed, means that those structural conditions cannot by themselves determine the trajectory of history. Structural conditions do not contain some necessary direction; they do not embody a teleology. They partly define the material conditions in which people find themselves living and the traditions of knowledge upon which people draw to understand and to re-work those conditions, but the path we see history taking is contingent both upon our own actions as historians and upon the desires, motivations, and actions of agents who may always have acted otherwise and for whom the consequences of their actions may always have escaped their intentions. Structural conditions certainly change, and with such change the scope of opportunities available to agents may alter, but the directions agency takes in creating new structural conditions is not determined in the final instance.

Uncertainty and indeterminacy lie at the heart of life. Processual archaeology in particular plays a simple conjuring trick when it by-passes agency and presents as a cause for structural change, its consequences. As Bettinger has noted, a theory of consequences cannot be presented as a theory of process, a logical failure which processual archaeology holds in common with all functionalist analyses (Bettinger 1991, 216). Process refers to generative action and the latter, as we have argued, only lies in the hands of agency.

Material culture is itself the medium and the consequence of practice. If the human agent occupies a world which is structured by natural and human agency, then existing material conditions may appear to those who inhabit them to reveal the cosmological ordering of the world. But the agent also reworks those material conditions by re-inscribing a narrative of their own presence in that world upon them. Such re-inscription changes the nature of the world which may then be re-interpreted. We must be aware that not only does material culture have more than one meaning, because it can be read from a number of different perspectives, but that it also operates two dimensionally in the world, as the already given material conditions of life, and as the means

and consequences of its reworking. Agency is situated between these two dimensions, it both occupies and interprets that material, whilst also creating it.

The second issue must accept the generality of the points made here; they apply to our practice as archaeologists and inform the ways in which we create histories just as much as they once applied to those whose lives we hope to study through archaeological analysis. The archaeologist is involved in the interpretation of her or his own world and in the interpretation of other people's worlds which no longer exist. Giddens has argued that what distinguishes the social scientist from the natural scientist is that the latter deals with an object world which 'does not answer back' and which does not construct and interpret the meaning of its own activities. The social scientist, on the other hand, interprets a world which others have also interpreted and where a valid understanding of those other social worlds must accommodate the knowledge of those who sustained them (Giddens 1982, 13). The past does not literally 'answer back' but the principle remains. Shanks and Tilley developed this reasoning by suggesting that archaeological practice involves a 'fourfold hermeneutic' (1987, 108). This may cloud the more simple point; the knowledge maintained by those others who sustained the life worlds we investigate must feature in our understandings of those worlds (cf. Shanks/Hodder 1995, 10). Shanks and Tilley suggest that part of the hermeneutic particular to archaeology is the archaeologist's attempt to "understand an alien *culture* involving *meaning frames* radically different to his or her own" (1987, 108 my emphasis). What concerns me is the vagueness of the terms which I have emphasized.

Archaeologists are not privileged to observe the people whose lives they wish to study, instead they work with the residues of the materialities those lives once inhabited. Despite this, and given the need to include in our writings an understanding of the knowledge by which those now extinct lives operated, there has been a tendency to reify such knowledge in the surviving material residues. These residues are observed to be patterned and to contain order and as such are taken to represent the structural conditions which *the archaeologist* seeks to understand. The interpretation of humanly created 'material culture' is assumed to reveal the forms of knowledge implicated in its creation. In other words the structure of material culture supposedly encodes other peoples' knowledge, and this is something open to archaeological discovery. Archaeological practice thus stands between the structured and unchanging material residues of the past and the assumptions and motivations of contemporary archaeology. My point is that the knowledge created under these conditions need have little to do with how those who once reworked some small segment of that material universe saw it for themselves.

I believe this point to be of crucial importance, not simply because it defines a necessary difference between our archaeological knowledge of the various pasts which once existed and the knowledge of those who inhabited those pasts, but because it also reminds us that the proper object of archaeological analysis is not material culture but the *inhabitation* of material culture.

To reiterate: human practice is neither determined by, nor is it reducible to, the structural conditions which it inhabits. Material cultural residues which are recovered archaeologically are part of the contemporary conditions within which archaeologists work. Past human practices were situated quite differently in some smaller portion of these material conditions. Archaeologists should study the ways other humans once occupied their worlds, a practice through which archaeologists also understand their contemporary world. In postprocessual archaeology the former is often forgotten at the expense of the latter.

The emphasis upon a dominant archaeological understanding of contemporary material culture is relatively easy to document. Interpretation, writes Tilley, is something we only have to do "if we are puzzled or ignorant about something ... we interpret only if things are not obvious to us" (Tilley 1993, 2 emphasis removed). Interpretation is a process in which we are actively involved and is a form of 'making sense' of things which initially puzzle us. We make sense of things either because we can find a way of fitting them into our preconceptions or because, more radically, we have to rethink our preconceptions.

What then is it in archaeology which puzzles us? Tilley suggests that "in relation to the contemporary act of archaeology we are interested in the manner in which certain meaning effects of material culture are emphasized by individual authors and woven into interpretative accounts. Why is this meaningful or important to the archaeologists?" (Tilley 1993, 5 emphasis removed). Thus, whilst "all archaeology involves the adoption of interpretative procedures that it ought to be possible to identify and describe" and in which the intention is "to identify the effects significant meaning has on its observers and readers both in the past and the present" (Tilley 1993), it becomes all to easy to impose contemporary meaning effects upon the agency of the past. An example may suffice.

Thomas and Tilley have offered an interpretation of the 'symbolic structures' of the Neolithic in Brittany. It is an interpretation which arose from a week long field class to the region in 1991. Neither author had visited the area previously and the impact of the monuments upon them was powerful. As the week progressed they found that "all the interpretations we were making were interlinked and seemed increasingly to make more and more sense of the monuments and the artifacts in the museum exhibitions as we visited

them" (Thomas/Tilley 1993, 225). The reworking of these 'on the spot' observations allowed the authors to "make a series of interpretative remarks with relation to the entirety of the Breton Neolithic, attempting to cover a period which spans roughly 2500 years" (Thomas/Tilley 1993, 227). These remarks therefore draw upon the surviving and cumulative debris resulting from two and a half millennia of human activity, debris which we can arrange into a sequence of types and forms, such as "menhirs and the development of axe symbolism" (Thomas/Tilley 1993, 229), which seems to display some internal logic. The only human agency which stands amongst this debris is that of the two authors. The way that their practices are situated in a contemporary academic discourse is expressed in the scale of their vision – the entirety of the Breton Neolithic – and in the routines of written and illustrative discourse. Who else would compare the ground plan of Barnenez, the skeletal human rib-cage and one of the rock engraved motifs from Les Pierres Plates (Thomas/Tilley 1993, fig. 6.11), other than someone who has spent too long in a library? If the agency of an 'other' exists in such an account then it is only dimly recognizable.

The foregrounding of the act of archaeological interpretation in the writing of history reminds us that we create those histories and with that creation comes responsibility. Archaeology is a "material practice in the present", with "no final and definitive account of the past as it was", but rather "a plurality of archaeological interpretations suited to different purposes, needs, desires" (Shanks/Hodder 1995, 5). The contexts of archaeological interpretation "include the interpreting archaeologist(s) and the questions asked and entities existing in the archaeological record" (Tilley 1993, 9). There is no past which exists independently of us and against which we can evaluate the veracity of our historical writings. That said, some form of assessment is possible for there are good and there are bad archaeologies. But if we treat material culture as an open text, endlessly available to our re-interpretations, how are such judgments to be made? I would suggest that much depends upon the way in which we welcome a humanity other than our own into our histories.

This rather dull preambulation through archaeological theory has reached its goal; to distinguish between structure and agency and to recognize that the material world is both the context and the consequence of human practice. Structures are the conditions which exist and which humans recognize as resources with which they can work. Agency understands those resources, it reads them and recognizes that some of its own desires can be achieved through action and discourse which use them, agency finds a place for itself in the world. Structure and agency do not form a duality because each interpenetrates the other through the consciousness of agency. The ordered pattern of material

residues, like the order of social and economic institutions, arises as a *consequence* of this inhabitation of the world. We may treat such consequences as the *systemic* arrangement of things or of social institutions. Bettinger has dealt in detail with an argument similar to the one pursued here where he demonstrates that neo-functionalism and Marxist theory both assume that 'culture process' occurs by means of systems transformation (Bettinger 1991).

The disentangling on the one hand of the interpenetration of structural conditions with agency, which is the real condition of history, from on the other its systemic consequences, means that we are in a position to avoid analysis which seeks to explain systemic change by reference to the system itself. To claim for example that social or economic systems are directly represented in the patterns of archaeological residues, as Renfrew has done, immediately removes the possibility of situating historical agency within its material and structural conditions (Renfrew 1994). To go further and claim that the social or economic system existed to be adaptive and that systemic change is to be explained as an adaptive response to some external stimuli is trivial. As Bettinger comments "most behaviours have at least some potentially beneficial effects" (1991, 53), simply by placing themselves in the world people generally adapt to it with a certain degree of efficiency.

It is time to return to the people whose lives we should be studying and to the kinds of experiences with which we began this paper. This means, among other things, that we no longer write an archaeology of the *Mesolithic* or *Neolithic* as if these systemic orderings of material and institutionalized practices were themselves the forces of history, for they were not. It is thus pointless to seek an explanation for the transformation between one such system and another in terms of those systems themselves.

3.   The archaeology of inhabitation

Consider the dead child. What kind of being was this? Was such a life understandable, for where did it find its place and how could this death be brought into a conformity with the world as it was? Perhaps the child could be named, placed among the living community, or perhaps the life had been so fleeting as to render it insubstantial, transient. The sudden and unexpected death could perhaps, by reason, become understandable. Archaeologists do not listen to the stories by which others talked through the logic of such a situation, establishing what was required to hold some small portion of the world together, or to tear asunder the inappropriate conditions which gave rise to the events which they then perceived. But archaeologists do study the conditions which helped to render such talk possible, and they do observe the consequences of actions which accompanied the practice of such talk.

To talk an understanding of the world into being, to be able to comprehend the passing of a life, or to be able to contain the implications of that death, is to express a sense of *vision* which sees how the world is and establishes the place within it for such an event. We use the terminology of visual perception to describe an understanding of temporal continuity, the relationship between event and structure. The idea of seeing or sensing one's place brings us back to the ways the practices of inhabitation make sense of life. Time and place combine in the way we experience the world. We may pass time at one place and we separate different parcels of time as we move between places, a movement through time and space. The landscape therefore embodies the temporal aspects of our inhabitation of it. But as such it must contain more than one kind of temporality. To think across time, to link the time of one's own life or of the life of another to the time of a larger cosmological order requires that, through the practice of inhabiting the world, we are able to bring those different temporalities together in the one world which we encounter.

Hirsch argues that through inhabitation the landscape is brought 'into view' by the discovery of its familiarity (Hirsch 1995, 3 see also Carter 1987). The way this works is between an occupied 'foreground' of immediate experience and a 'background' of perceived potentiality, the latter being thrown into relief from the point of view of the former (Hirsch 1995, 3). The relationship must be both spatial and temporal. The foreground is the 'here and now' whilst the background is not merely the 'horizon' but also 'the time of law', a place of creation and history, the location of some other ideal state. The background is therefore a displaced temporality, a landscape which the subject sees as separate from themselves, creating the situation of the spectator, but a landscape wherein they too could find a place. Such landscapes express what Smith describes as 'the pleasure of detachment' through which 'something ordinary is made extraordinary' (Smith 1993, 79 & 81).

The background is therefore the historical or transcendental space to which practice aspires, and we must keep hold of the centrality of practice as *the* means by which the background is revealed or brought into view. Howard Morphy has described the way Narrityin Maymuru, a Yolngu from north-east Arnhem Land was able to recognize, or bring into view, the landscape around the Snowy Mountains on the border between New South Wales and Victoria which neither of them had ever visited before. That landscape was recognizable in terms of ancestral time and could therefore be seen and talked about (Morphy 1995, 184). Morphy expresses the relationship between the body's own experiences, the foregrounded practices of inhabitation and talk, and the background of historical time thus brought into view as the 'triadic relationship' between 'the individual',

'the world in which he or she lives', and 'the ancestral world of the past' (1995, 187). For the Aboriginal people of Australia the Dreaming "represents a structure ... which has in part been lived and has, as a consequence, connotations. It had its origins in the past, in its separation from the flow of Dreamtime events. It has gained its connotations through its incorporation in subsequent history, through being reproduced in a form which enabled it to accommodate to the exigencies of historical events" (Morphy 1995, 188). Ancestral time was transformed into place when the moment of the ancestral presence was frozen into the form adopted by the place. Temporal sequences of ancestral events thus became spatially segregated places for the human observer where "what remains is the distance between places rather than their temporal distance between events" (Morphy 1995, 188). It is through their inhabitation of the landscape that the individual reworks the relationships between the temporal experiences of their own body and its practices, and the temporal relationships expressed by the events of ancestral time. "The ordered, frozen world of the ancestral past becomes part of the subjective experience of the individual, through the acquisition of knowledge in the ancestral past as he or she moves through the world" (Morphy 1995, 189).

The individual recontextualises their experiences by lifting their eyes from the foregrounded ordinary event to see the background horizon of extraordinary, sacred or historical order. The practices by which such order is brought into view, and by which the ordinary life becomes embedded within it, are talked about as the discourse of 'being in the world'. Tilley writes that to "understand a landscape truly it must be felt, but to convey some of this feeling to others it has to be talked about" (Tilley 1994, 31), and he links the process of relating one place to another via a serial movement along a path as a 'narrative understanding'. Events and places are given meaning by linking them as a particular sequences of foregrounded experiences to the background of generalities. The particular rhetorical organization of a narrative works on us because we share an understanding of both, we see how the particular relates to the general, in effect we share the same landscape. Thus "a critical understanding of spatial narrative requires that we investigate precisely why we prefer some plots or configurations of things rather than others. In other words attention must be played (sic) to the manner in which the story is creatively orchestrated, how it guides, and what it passes through" (Tilley 1994, 32).

If we accept that a fundamental relationship exists between landscape, understanding and language then we should also be in a position to recognize that an archaeology of practice, of the agent's inhabitation of the world, is also an archaeology of talk. Gell and others have written of the poetics of those who inhabit the densely forested highlands of New Guinea. Gell's concern with the issue of linguistic iconicity leads him to distinguish syntactic iconicity, shared by all languages and covering the rules which govern the arrangement of the main and subsidiary clauses within a sentence, and sentence meaning, from phonological iconism which concerns the connections between the "sound-substance of individual words and morphemes and their meanings" (Gell 1995, 234). Gell proposes that "the primary forest environment imposes a reorganization of sensibility, such that the world is perceived in a manner which gives pride of place to the auditory (and another sense we hardly ever use, olfaction ...), and that this transformed sensibility has manifold consequences in the domain of cognition tending to promote phonological iconicity in language" (Gell 1995, 235). In a world where the landscape is known primarily through sound and smell, where there are no open vistas linking the moment and place to a far horizon, Gell finds a cultural expression of 'sympathy' in this 'intimate, concrete and tactile world' which maintains a phonological iconicity in its languages with its use of a wide range of onomatopoeias. In contrast the dominance of a phonological iconicity may fall away in conditions where a visual experience of the connections between landscape features predominates and a more 'arbitrary' language emerges where 'sign and meaning belong to entirely separate codes' (Gell 1995, 235).

Through practice the connections are made between the foregrounded experiences of ordinary life, its routines and surprises, and the background horizons of generality, history and order. The experience of a particular landscape will find within it a particular link between the two spatially and temporally, and by a certain form of narrative the links are talked about and understood. The experience of the landscape therefore makes certain narratives appropriate; the closed and intimate sympathies of the forests or the lineal narratives which address the experiences of walking through open country. In the walk with which this contribution began another possibility occurred, to emerge from a local and closed path onto an upland vista. Such a walk could not have taken place anywhere in post-glacial Europe, it was not a walk over a broad lowland expanse or a coastal plane. Those who passed through that open and undulating landscape could tell the stories of their own journeys, the remembered narratives of places visited in turn, but they could also look out from an upland vantage point and gain, at that moment, a clear view of the distant horizon and of the places which lay between them and that horizon. Such a vantage point gave voice to the possibility of a narrative vision of landscape which was available only to those who stood partly outside and looked across it and saw, from their perspective, its connections. From such a point time and space might seem to collapse into a single synthesis, a set of fundamental

principles which evoked the pattern of the land seen with a clarity of vision which was only available in an extensively cleared landscape of undulations and sharp relief (cf. Bloch 1995). Exactly how such a synthesis might be established, the nature of the principles it employed, are not determined by the physical conditions it uses, but those conditions make such a synthesis possible.

In his *A Phenomenology of Landscape* Tilley (1994) visits three regions in southern Britain; the coastline of south-west Wales, the Black Mountains of south-central Wales, and the chalk downland of southern Wessex. Tilley evokes the characteristics of the topography of each of these regions. Through this topography an interplay is established between the landscape and the monument, an interplay which itself depends upon the movement, vision and experiences of the human body. The conscious body, which is absent from almost all archaeological texts, is the agency through which place, monument and landscape can be recognized in relation one with the other. The relationship, expressed as a narrative, is never of one form, and so the stories are not repetitive (see also Fraser 1995). Sometimes the narrative is about the approach towards the monument and the landscape position within which it is set and through which the agent passes, at other times it may concern the way the place and the monument operate as a point of reference for the landscape beyond. Such narratives require the ability to name places and understand a way of relating them. Thus Tilley suggests "that it was precisely because the coast provided both rich economic resources *and* a wealth of named and distinctive natural topographic markers that it was so symbolically important to both Mesolithic and Neolithic populations" (1994, 86). But the ways of relating these named markers is through the interplay of foreground and background. Between these the monument and other landscape features slip with reference to the position and movement of the body as well as the biography of experiences which the body carries with it.

Monuments expressed a certain way of talking about a particular range of landscape experiences; they made sense when situated in the expansive vistas of the relatively open and topographically distinctive landscape forms which they addressed. Perhaps we can now begin to hear the ways narratives could have been constructed in the topographically varied landscapes of Atlantic Europe. As the vegetation was increasingly cleared to reveal the distant forms of these landscapes so it became possible to see an integration between distant places and places already encountered. The narratives of that integration, in their various manifestations, often shared a rhetorical concern with human burial and ancestral veneration. In this way past and present were brought together at one place and thus the passing of human life could be allocated a significance in a changeless world.

In his account Tilley is concerned to maintain, if somewhat diffidently, a distinction between the Mesolithic and the Neolithic marked by the emergence of monument building in the Neolithic. This was the process, according to Tilley, "by which the land became enculturated and ultimately transformed into architectural form during the Neolithic, when there arises a need to capture and control what the landscape is about through the medium of landscape morphology" (1994, 73). The distinction seems over played. The same places remained important, and similar narratives of the landscape may have been told, ensuring that the gatherer-hunter landscape was as densely enculturated as anything which followed. The transformation of place by the erection of stones – monument building – may merely have been contingent upon the numbers of people present at any one time and the nature of activities associated with the narratives of the place. It was the context of the places in which those narratives became possible which gave those monuments their significance, which made then meaningful. Tilley offers an evolutionary scheme taking us out of the Mesolithic and into the Neolithic via the appropriation of the ancestral powers and meanings of the landscape by individuals and groups who constructed and used the various chambered tombs, long cairns and long barrows (Tilley 1994, 202). For him it was in the Neolithic that "tombs presenced and marked out the bones of the ancestral dead in the landscape. In so doing they visibly brought the presence of the ancestral past to consciousness. ... [The] setting of place became much more anchored. The building of the monuments prevented the ritual and mythological significance of particular places being lost and forgotten. They stabilized both cultural memory of place and connections between places" (Tilley 1994, 202-4). But these assertions seem to confuse the longevity of survival of the archaeological monument with the stability of its meaning. Certainly the architectural forms represented by these monuments facilitated the complex organization of the ritual practices which used them. Coincidentally this might have further emphasized distinctions between statuses of practitioner by establishing clear levels of spatial segregation which each status might occupy (Barrett 1994). But these arrangements no more stabilize or appropriate meaning than does the veneration of a rock outcrop; what matters is that for either the tomb or the outcrop to have objectified a certain set of values then the narratives which set those values in place had to be told and understood, they had to be lived as a way of making sense of peoples' experiences.

We must surely accept the enormous longevity of certain landscape narratives which evolved, as the landscape of Atlantic Europe itself evolved, in the post-glacial period. In the telling of those stories certain acts of construction took

place which had further consequences for the ways in which the landscape could be viewed. These constructions, the monuments for burial and of ancestral veneration, do not mark the transition from one age to another, nor do they necessarily mark the emergence of a more stable understanding of the landscape. Monuments were simply the product of people continuing to rework the traditional narratives of their landscapes but under changing material conditions. These changing conditions, including the clearance of vegetation, the introduction of new resources and increased levels of population, do not 'explain' why these particular monuments were built but simply represent the structural conditions under which they became possible.

4.   Conclusion

Through talk experience is shared and understandings of the world are expressed. Archaeologists do not hear the talk of those whom they study, but then nor do most historians. Talk is intimate, a local practice which makes sense because assumptions about the world and experiences of the world are shared. It expresses the embodied nature of human agency through which the world is inhabited. The body moves through the world, and the experiences it encounters on the way are found to be comprehensible and can be acted upon because they are seen against the wider horizon of a socially constituted and ordered universe. Agency is therefore situated within particular structural conditions which it comprehends and through which it is able to act and to communicate the basis of that comprehension.

Archaeology has tended to confuse the issue by regarding its role as being to interpret or to explain ancient patterns of material culture rather than to understand how others once occupied the structural conditions which they perceived to govern their lives. This is a question of the extent to which archaeologists are prepared to relinquish the primacy of their own horizons of expectation and seek instead alternative horizons which others may have used to guide the passage of their own lives. We may certainly find a meaning for certain patterns of material culture when we draw comparisons representative of extensive geographical and chronological diversity, but such comparisons are expressive of the way we are situated within our academic discourse. There have been other ways this material was occupied, and it is this which should interest us.

The Neolithic was not a set of material resources which spread from south-west Asia through Europe, nor was it a set of abstract categories which were transmitted into different ecological and social contexts across Europe, although of course that is exactly what the Neolithic is for large numbers of archaeological commentators. Nor is the Neolithic to be explained as a shift in the systemic adaptation of human

societies away from gatherer-hunting which was brought about either by environmental change or by long lived and essentially abstract social processes. Material conditions certainly changed, but the Neolithic is about the ways those changing conditions were inhabited, understood and talked about, thus allowing the momentary experiences of life to be set against a background of perceived order. The megalithic and non-megalithic architecture of the Atlantic seaboard expresses a number of ways of situating the subjective experiences of movement and the encounters with place within a wider landscape context. These ways of talking were made possible by the very nature of the landscape itself in which some monuments eventually bridged the space between the occupied foreground and the background of desired and ordered possibilities, between subjective experience and the cosmological certainties which made the world the way it was.

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John C. Barrett
Department of Archaeology and Prehistory
University of Sheffield
Northgate House, West Street
UK-S1 4ET Sheffield