

the value of a bottom-up perspective, but the connection to the theoretical model is not clear to me. Despite the call for attention to detail and human engagement with things, the perspective remains at arm's length. What, more concretely, would the performance of the embodied self, moving across that landscape, look like? What precisely would be an object of concern for the peasant gazing at the shifting seasons and the enclosed hill with its shrines and storage units: The plough in their hand? Their leaking shoe? The thundering clouds in the sky? The growing spelt wheat?

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The implications of Indigenous conceptual frameworks and methods for rethinking humanness as performance

Claire Smith¹ and Kellie Pollard²

¹Flinders University, Bedford Park, Australia and ²College of Indigenous Futures, Education and Arts, Charles Darwin University, Northern Territory, Australia

*Corresponding author: Email: claire.smith@flinders.edu.au

We agree with Barrett's argument that the different forms of human life were developed through the performances established between humans and their various objects of concern. However, this argument needs more thought, as his paper is in response to recent attempts to define archaeology as the 'discipline of things', centred upon what archaeologists do (Olsen et al. 2012, 3), and through this is attempting to shift the discipline in a particular direction. In this paper, Barrett argues that 'archaeology should be the study of things with the express purpose of understanding how humans might once have brought themselves into existence as they lived amongst those things'. This approach opens a myriad of responses. We write our commentary from the standpoint of two female archaeologists who have worked with Australian Aboriginal people for many years. While Claire Smith has some international experience with Indigenous peoples in India, Indonesia and North America, her core knowledge is from working with Aboriginal people from the communities of Barunga, Beswick and Manyallaluk, located in a remote area of the Northern Territory, since 1990 and with Ngadjuri people in South Australia since 1998. Kellie Pollard is a Warajuri archaeologist, lecturer and researcher at Charles Darwin University. Her research interests include Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies; Indigenous research methods; and ethics and Indigenous-Australian contact archaeology. She conducted her doctoral research with the Larrakia people in Darwin, Australia.

Firstly, we would like to address a core question raised by Barrett: 'who is best situated to understand the material in the way suggested: those who engage with the material itself or those who treat the material recovered as a record requiring interpretation?' We do this by drawing on our work with Aboriginal people in Australia. The issues raised by Barrett are pertinent to our current Australian Research Council (ARC)-funded project, led by Kellie Pollard, titled *Indigenist Archaeology: New Ways of Knowing the Past and Present*. This project will deconstruct prevailing theory and methods in archaeology using Indigenous standpoint theory (Foley 2003) and Western philosophical theory such as 'forms of life' (Wittengstein 1958). It combines Western and distinctly Indigenous worldviews and conceptualizations for new models of decolonized archaeology. Our approach responds to a call by Anishinabe-Ojibwe archaeologist Sonya Atalay (2014) to address a major challenge for Indigenous archaeology globally: the need

for new Indigenous models of epistemology to guide the development of interpretive frameworks that decolonize representation of the past and present in the worldview of Indigenous communities. Martin Porr, an anthropologist in Australia, recognized (2018, 398) that the future key challenge for archaeological research is ‘the epistemological negotiation of the relationships between storied (Aboriginal knowledge) and classificatory (Western/scientific) knowledge and the development of interpretative frameworks that allow assessment of their respective ontological characteristics’. Pollard’s research project, while still in its infancy, will address this challenge by designing new models of archaeology that effectively incorporate the worldviews and values of Aboriginal people because, as Barrett points out in his article, ‘those who engage with the material itself’ are better placed to interpret the cultural heritage of their forebears than archaeologists who are almost universally grounded in a Western archaeological epistemology. In Australia, Aboriginal people live on their traditional lands and, while the material culture they use day-to-day may have changed through time and land-use patterns also have changed since European colonization, they are better placed than archaeologists trained in Western methods to interpret the materials that were used by their forebears. This may change through time as more Aboriginal people become qualified archaeologists (one of the central aims of Pollard’s research), but at this time Pollard is one of only four Aboriginal people with a doctoral degree in Australian archaeology.

Secondly, we live in a material world. The creation of material culture is one aspect of becoming and being human, most likely emerging from, as Barrett recognizes, the emergence of language through symbolic gestures that are visible to others (Noble and Davidson 1996, 144). If we accept this, we should also accept Barrett’s point that different forms of human life arose from the performances established between humans and the objects with which they are concerned (both living and non-living). However, all material culture has a symbolic function, so we are not sure if we fully agree with Barrett’s point that the archaeology he describes is fundamentally different from ‘the more traditionally defined discipline that has sought to equate currently existing patterns of material residue with extinct systems of social ranking, economic practice and symbolic production’. We would appreciate greater clarity on this point.

Thirdly, while Barrett does not focus on the interconnections between tangible and intangible cultural heritage, there are implications embedded in his vision of archaeology. Intangible cultural heritage is defined as ‘the practices, representations, expressions as well as the knowledge and skills that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage’ (UNESCO 2003). This can include things such as language, dance, stories and other cultural traditions. In addition, aspects of natural and cultural heritage can overlap, particularly in regard to Indigenous knowledge. Australian Indigenous landscapes are informed with intangible cultural heritage – ‘invisible’ elements such as myths, place-names, ancestral journeys and knowledge initiation rites. Barrett’s approach articulates with current archaeological thinking that is focussing on the intangible aspects of Indigenous cultural knowledge, including the shape that archaeology might take if guided by Indigenous philosophies, perspectives and worldviews (e.g. Hillerdal et al. 2017; Pollard et al. 2019); the role of narratives in storing and recalling knowledge, including curating both new and old technologies and preserve important and sacred places (Porr and Matthews 2016); the co-creation of knowledge (Ferguson et al. 2015; Krieder-Reid et al. 2017), ethics and social justice (Smith et al. 2018; 2022); and a ‘heart-centred’ archaeology focussed around care and emotion, rather than dispassion and rationality, whilst still operating within a rigorous and relational framework (Supernant et al. 2020). The current trend is a cumulative response to calls by Nicholas and Andrews (1997, 3) for ‘archaeology done with, for, and by Indigenous peoples’ and by Smith and Wobst (2005) for the decolonization of Indigenous theory and practice.

Finally, we agree with Barrett that defining archaeology as the ‘discipline of things’ has the potential to divert us from understanding how an archaeological commitment to other forms of humanity might be practiced. Around the world, archaeologists are rethinking the question

‘what is archaeology?’. Smith’s own definition is archaeology as ‘the study of human behaviour, past and present, through the analysis of material culture, both real and virtual, as situated within cultural landscapes’ (Smith 2017, 1). This builds on current reformulations of archaeology as ‘the study of the ancient and recent human past through material remains’ (Harrison and Schofield 2010; SAA 2022) and includes the possibility of artefacts being virtual as well as real (cf. Graves-Brown 2014). Barrett’s article informs this ongoing reassessment of the purpose of archaeology. We look forward to seeing how this is enacted through archaeological performance.

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Reply

John C. Barrett

I am very grateful to all who have provided comments on this paper and for the problems that they have raised. These problems arise from my attempt to employ a Peircean ‘semeiotic’ in pursuit of a social archaeology (Preucel 2006; Crossland and Bauer 2017), for while Saussure provides us with the idea that things can stand for something else, and can thus operate semiotically, Peirce proposed that things (signs) must determine their meanings to an ‘interpretant’. If we were to treat archaeological things as material expressions, which could be variously interpreted as concepts, and if the meanings of those things were clear to some, then they will have been clear (have been recognized) by a community of interpretants (Peirce 1878; Preucel 2006, 50–66). It was the various communities who lived amongst those things, and it was these communities that I take to have comprised a social community. To have been social at any time was to have been recognized by others, which was to have been seen, and to have behaved appropriately, within those material conditions, the residues of which the archaeologist records today. Our problem is, of course, that the social community is now extinct. Thus, while things may once have been ‘meaningfully constituted’, they may also have been variously and differently interpreted by those who lived amongst them, and this would have implications for the kind of social existences that things could have sustained. I therefore doubt the adequacy of simply assuming that the pattern of things records a single social structure, simply because the structuring of social life (i.e. the historical process) arises from the ways that different communities have related to each other. I have argued that social communities recognized others within those same communities by the ways that they behaved amongst things, and I wonder the extent to which things might have enabled the differentiation between communities within a single social structure. As examples of this, the orientation of roundhouses that were backed away from the roadways through certain hillforts might reflect an Iron Age concern with the privacy of the domestic space from the gaze of others (Barrett et al., 2000, 320), and the routines of agricultural production and the preparation and consumption of foods may have increasingly differentiated between engendered social statuses (cf., Goody 1976).

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