Place as Material Culture

Place as Material Culture: Objects, Geographies and the Construction of Time

Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

PLACE, MATERIALITY, TIME AND RITUAL: TOWARDS A RELATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGY

DRAGOŞ GHEORGHIU AND GEORGE NASH

"Place is percieved as in some sense 'bounded', particularly in relation to the seemingly endless extension of space."
—Dean and Millar 2005

This book intends to explore the knowledge of the complexity of the *past*, by analysing the relationships between place, territory, material value of objects and landscape, time and ritual; concepts that occur within archaeological investigation. It presents the archaeology of place as a series of interconnecting and interactive relationships. It is clear that things and places do not emerge without some form of agency, usually through the concept of material manipulation, coupled with elaboration, innovation and time. Depending on the raw material used and the process of manipulation and its relationship with the environment, materiality gains value. At this juncture, we refer the reader to the collection, fabrication and exchange of shell valuables within the *kula* exchange system. This classic and extensively researched anthropological system clearly shows how a mundane item such as a cowrie shell can gain intrinsic and ritual value over time and space (Munn 1973). Here, all the ingredients of agency – place, materiality, time, and ritual – are employed to construct and secure a successful event. Arguably, this can be regarded as an ideal example of how the ingredients of agency work. But what of the mundane? How do we as modern humans work within the complexity of place, materiality, time, and ritual? True, collectively, Western society has become a cynical creature and, in many ways, the ritual element has all but disappeared, especially the ritual associated with religion. Arguably though, we appear to believe in something, albeit in an intrinsic and novel way. We are certainly materialistic, albeit towards monetary and property

value. These elements, although cohesive, are merely separate strands of a set of experiences that involve more robust components, such as time and place. This rather judgmental and generalised statement is partially based on the transient way we live our lives, the concept of *place* (or places) being a series of recognised theatrical performances within a hectic lifetime. The novelty here is how *place* is constructed and perceived. Perception would more than likely be the result of witnessing the boundaries (physical or otherwise) of a defined space, an assemblage of artefacts, distant and near memories, experiences or a series of events.

Finding Place

The notion that *place* can take on many guises and mean different things to different people is not new and, certainly within archaeology, we have made a number of observations suggesting that place is a multifaceted component of understanding who we are and where we stand in the grand scheme of things (Nash and Gheorghiu 2009). Place can be seen as a small feature within, say, a park or a road, or it can be an island, region or even a country, defined by the physicality of boundaries but also by cultural identity, linguistics, politics and religion. Place creates individual and group identity through a number of interconnected constituents that include agency, behaviour and, of course, history.

> *The question, 'what is place?' presents many difficulties. An examination of all the relevant facts seems to lead to different conclusions. Moreover, we have inherited nothing from previous thinkers, whether in the way of a statement of difficulties or of a solution.* (Aristotle, Book V, The Physics)

Place as a concept has its philosophical origins with Plato (Burnet 1902) and is represented in modern philosophical thought (e.g. Heidegger 1971; Dean and Millar 2005; Tilley 2005; Jones *et al.* 2012). Many branches of philosophy have incorporated, for example, aesthetics and rhetoric into contemporary and histo-geographical studies in order to tease out the concept of place, place being the antiphrasis of landscape (e.g. Berleant 2003). Here, place is sometimes difficult to locate, to define and to explore. These concepts, or what we would term as intellectually solvable problems, have also been approached by anthropologists (e.g. Tuan 1977; Augé 1992) and archaeologists (Tilley 1997; Bradley 2000; Nash and Gheorghiu 2009; Rubertone 2009). In archaeology, the first notion employed to designate a *place* is that of *site* (for an extended bibliography of the beginning of the use of this concept see Dunnell 1992: 22 *ff*) because of the presence of archaeological desposits, features,

structures and artefacts (see Hurcombe 2009: 38 *ff*). However, the extent of the archaeological place is in many ways artificial, in that archaeological excavation is an arbitrary practice, usually defined by the limit of excavation based on funding or development. Clearly (sub-surface) archaeology extends beyond the mindset of the 21st century archaeologist and his or her limit of excavation. In order to achieve the 'complete picture', one would need to excavate everything! Here, in an ideal archaeological world, *place* (the site) is extended to include, say, the Roman villa and its landscape. Lewis Binford's relationist description of a site as being not only a collection of artefacts but also the relationship between them (Binford 1964), defines better the synchronous relationship between the artefacts that create an archaeological place (say, a prehistoric lithic scatter). Moreover, and sometimes ignored, one can also consider the effect of time with *place;* in other words, can an event, a drama, a performance or multiples of the forementioned constitute place? Although Binford identifies a limited one-dimensional relationship between artefacts, can an additional dimension be established when one witnesses the complex stratigraphy of a site that involves artefacts from different periods? This is clearly seen with landscapes that contain, for example, Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age sites. Even though the archaeology from each period is diverse, a relationship does exist in terms of *place*; in this case, the place could represent a large upland area. The bond that draws these different sites together is the rhetorical nature of place. However, the narrative theme for each period could be different, i.e. different stories for the same components with the *place* (or different performances in the same theatre).

A further relational concept used in archaeology is *territoriality*, perceived as a connection between personal perception (i.e. travelling) and geographic constraints that link different landscape points delineated by the physicality of place (i.e. geographic landmarks or cultural/economic/political limits) (e.g. Djindjan, this volume; Ruggini and Copat, this volume). Sometimes *territory* is substituted with *space* (Baudry and Daire, this volume).[1] In a similar vein, Michael Shanks (1992) talks about the idea of familiar and unfamilar space, each separated by a ritual barrier; one is governed by cognition – the looking, the seeing, the experiencing and the knowing – the other an unknown quantity; one a place, the other a space (niether are defined by boundaries).

[1] At this juncture, we wish to stress that we are not intellectually playing with words. For this volume we are more concerned with the physical entities and extent of the elements that socially and politically construct space.

> *Once knowledge can be analysed in terms of region, domain, implantation, displacement, transposition, one is able to capture the process by which knowledge functions as a form of power and disseminates the effects of power. There is an administraion of knowledge, a politic of knowledge, relations of power which pass via knowledge and which, if one tries to transcribe them, leads one to consider forms of domination designated by such notions as field, region and territory.* (Foucault 1972)

As stated earlier, *place* must be bounded either physically or metaphysically; it cannot be infinate. However, as we have demonstrated, place is sometimes difficult to define (e.g. the artificiality of the boundary that defines the archaeological site). If this is a fundamental problem, can we relax the sometimes rigid physicallity of place? The answer is probably yes, but only as an archaeological construct, especially in the way we apply, say, taphonomies to a physical object or structure. Usually, we can only assume the extent of a bounded place, entity or curtilage based on a fragmentary record; gone are the banks and ditches, gone is the palisaded fence and gone is the boundary wall. We can only assume through, say, the distribution of certain types pottery or metalwork where a territory was, but are the boundaries that we construct rigid enough? What about ethnicity and the influence of religion; *things* that are difficult to see within the archaeological record? At best, we can argue that *place* is very much a social construct, the physical boundaries being arbitary and formed from history, conformity and consensus (see Ingold 1980, 1986; Tilley 1994; Ruggini and Copat, this volume).

> *Boundaries, as with virtually everything else in the Aboriginal system of knowledge, are related to mythologies.* (Tilley 1994)

As we have seen, boundaries are socially constructed. In many societies, these constructs are the result of history … *it's always been there and there it remains!* Strehlow (1965) in commenting on Western Desert Aboriginal groups, recognises boundaries that were demarcated by places or points (within the landscape), which are associated with powerful myth. Ancestors would have travelled from one point to another, further legitimising the boundary. Here, cultural constraints determine the boundary of place and natural points, such as natural bridges, mounds, passages, fords, lakes and pools, valleys, terraces and rock shelters, or even stones on a beach become encultured. (Fig. 0-1)

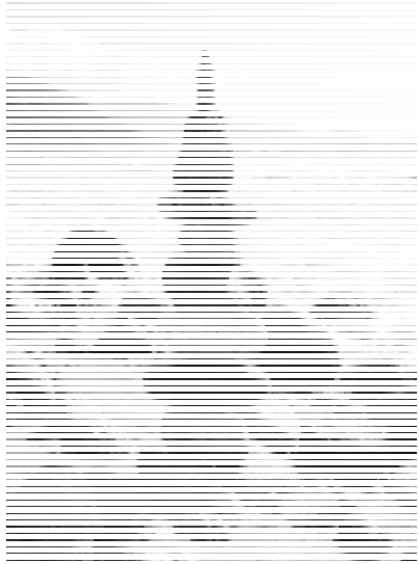

Fig. 0-1. Artificiality of materials to create a landscape focus. (Photo G. H. Nash)

> *Human activities become inscribed within a landscape such that every cliff, large tree, stream, swampy area becomes a familiar place. Daily passages through the landscape become biographic encounters for indivduals, recalling traces of past activities and previous events and the reading of signs [elements of the natural landscape] – a split log here, a stone marker there.* (Tilley 1994: 27).

The same principles and values can be applied to the culturation and legitimisation of points that are constructed by us, such as ditches, enclosures and palisades (Thorn, and Pasztor and Barna, this volume).

Cultural boundaries ritualise a place by different acts of *separation* materialised under the shape of symbolic and ritual limits, consequently generating a *rite of passage and ownership*; and, as a result, a *place* becomes a ritualised fragment from a whole, establishing a series of places (or points) within a place (Zubrow, this volume).

Finding Materiality

In the first part of this chapter, we explored some of the issues concerning *place*. These issues are by no means definitive. Still within the theme of *place*, we now want to ask the question: can place be materiality?

Archaeology is, by its nature, an exploration of material culture, whether a handy artefact, a rock-art panel, even a feature or structure. Therefore, can the elements of *place*, in particular artefacts that define boundaries, points or zones of place, such as fences, hedges or walls, establish a materiality of *place* (e.g. Miller 2005)? Using philosophical discourse, Bradley (2000), Hurcombe (2009: 40) and, recently, Jones *et al.* (2012) have applied a number of approaches to understanding the materiality of natural and cultural places; here, place becomes an artefact that is experierenced and sometimes feared and revered.

Cultural places are structured in a fractal way, their smallest material element being the object, followed by object assemblages (representing the various levels of occupation within, say, a site) and, finally, the material culture that defines the form, function and personality of a territory or region, sometimes referred to as a *tradition*. (Djindjan, this volume) Objects with clear intentionality of design and style can be considered rhetorical, the indexes of places (Bond, this volume; Ruggini and Copat, this volume). The structure which gives the identity of a place is sometimes known as *genius loci*, i.e. an animistic and sacred symbol. For natural places, their *genius loci* shall be investigated in the materiality of geomorphs, not only as human interventions in nature but natural interventions with people (de Nardi, this volume).

Sometimes, some of the material of a place and, at other times, the whole place, is re-used (or recycled) through a process of monumentalisation (Gheorghiu, this volume), this ideological practice creating the premises for social competition (Mason, this volume).

Finding Time

As a fundamental subject of archaeology, time has been frequently approached in contemporary literature (Bradley 1991, 2002; Thomas 1996; van der Leeuw and McGlade 1997; Murray 1999; Gardner 2001; Lucas 2005; Holdaway and Wansnider 2008). This book attempts to place emphasis on the idea that time is, in itself, a means to measure the materiality of the world and and also that a material place is an indissoluble mix of material and time. A place seen as a chrono-material relationship (Dods, this volume) in a determined location of the territory is a *chronotope* (Thorn, this volume); therefore, the spatial-temporal experience of a place implies a *heterotopic* and a *heterochronic* (Bouissac, this volume) experientiality. Although the temporal dimensions of the human experience are complex (Hall 1983; Dods, this volume), in the material archaeological record of a place, two kinds of time can be

discerned: a linear time (since making an object or walking through a landscape involves a sequential experience of time) and a circular or cyclical one.

One can suppose that the recurring time of the seasons generated the perception of a cyclical time in traditional societies (Thorn, this volume), which had material consequences on diverse places (Gheorghiu, this volume). Both linear and cyclical times could have a sacred value (see Hall 1983; Dods, this volume), which ancient Greeks labeled *kairos* (Sipiora and Baumlin 2002).

Compared with natural places, where the time of human life plays an insignificant role, cultural places such as settlements imply both kinds of time, this aspect being visible in identity strategies, since a group identity has a dominant temporal trait. It is generally agreed that the relationship with the past is a key element in forming collective identities (Lowenthal 1985; Gosden 1994; Olivier 2004). Discussing place and time in Maori society, the archaeologist Christopher Tilley (1999: 181) described a case of identity construction using a circular time: "the places were not, for the Maori, symbols of past time, of a dead and distanced history, but of a past living in and informing the present".

One "material" way to build group identity is to relate objects with time, since "objects anchor time" (Tuan 1977: 123). The materialisation of the past through objects and, consequently, the manipulation of memories through materials (Johnson and Schnider, this volume) is very visible in monuments (Bradley 2002; Rubertone 2009). A relationship between the living and the dead through social "technologies of remembrance" (Johnson and Schneider, this volume) is possible with the use of material monuments. This material support of collective memory can produce "memorable places" (Bond, this volume).

Such continuity in time of a specific place becomes a problem of rituality (Gheorghiu, this volume) and the generation of a ritual time (see Bloch 1977).

Finding Being and Ritual

The relationship of the materiality of natural places with their phenomenological experience through ritual and performance, more than through rational thinking (de Nardi, this volume), offers to the archaeology of place a novel insight into the better understanding of the relationship of humans with nature. People connect space or territory with place (Baudry and Daire, this volume) not only visually and kinaesthetically, but also involving other sensorial modalities: haptic (touch), acoustic and olfactory.

These sensorial experiences of a place, defined as a *heterotopy* (Bouissac, this volume), are quantifiable qualities of the built environment and represent the relationship of being with place.

> *Lived bodily experience of place and landscape involve constant shifts in sensory appearances, a continuous process of sensorial interactions. The body is both encultured and emplaced.* (Tilley 1999: 180)

An emplacement can be the result of a two-way reciprocal influence between the phenomenology of the performance of the human body and the materiality of a place (de Nardi, this volume) and depends also on the rituality of that place, to cite only the *rites of passage* (van Gennep 1960; Barnard and Spencer 2002). These rituals emplace the individual (see Bourdieu 1977: 89; Bell 1992: 98) in positions of separation, liminality (Turner 1977) and re-incorporation (Thorn, this volume). When a place is ritually structured, with stages of separation and liminality, its fabric becomes discontinous (Thorn, this volume) and is visually emphasized with various ritual markers, such as palisades (Pasztor and Barna, this volume; Thorn, this volume), technological structures (Mason, this volume) or artwork (Nash, this volume). Such markings could even have possessed an artistic character (Nash, this volume), when the phenomenological experience of the individual acquired an aesthetical degree (for the ancient Greeks *aisthesis* meant the very "perception by the senses"; see Berleant 2003: 44). (Fig. 0-2)

Fig. 0-2. *Omphalos* in the courtyard of Malia Palace, Crete. (Photo D. Gheorghiu)

Finding Place, Body and Measurement

It is possible that the symbolic anthropomorphic perspective of the world (Tuan 1977: 90 *ff*) influenced the custom to measure the planet using the human body as indicator. One can say the "human being is the measure of all places", since different units of measurement derived from the dimensions of the body, such as the human step or the cubit (Pasztor and Barna, this volume) are to be found in monuments or in the plan of settlements. The measurement of a place entails geo-metry, which is the science of the relationships between parts. Another type of symbolic relationship involving geometry is the scale which relates, for example, natural places to cultural objects (de Nardi, this volume).

Finding Place and Sacredness

When discussing the relationship between human beings and nature one cannot ignore the religious connotations of this connection, to cite only the anthropomorphisation of places creating supernatural beings, with an identity role, like *genius loci* or Lares, the gods of places, protecting deities (for a relationship between identity, sacredness, and places see Eliade 1959; Thompson 2003).

Sacredness can be generated also from the position of a place in the world. There is, for example, the sacred place of ancestors, or the underworld (see Bradley 2000). Within the relationhip between place and sacredness a special trait is represented by orientation (Pasztor and Barna, this volume), with, say, the relationship of human beings and the rising, setting and movement of celestial bodies such as the sun and moon.

Arriving at a Conclusion: The Syncretism of Place, Material, Time and Ritual

The aim of this book is to present a series of essays that illustrate the philosophical and physical construction of place and we make no apologies for the disparate approaches of the authors: the over-riding theme has been place and the agencies that construct, govern and manipulate it. What has been made clear is that bounded places are constructed in a variety of ways, sometimes via the use of objects, sometimes using natural points and sometimes through the rhetoric of language, the latter creating a fluidity in the consequence and novelty of place. The consequence and novelty of place are certainly bound up with how places (and objects within them) become ritualised. This process is

usually the result of history through time; the longer the history, the more power it gains.

A conclusion to consider is that a relational nature of *place* (Djindjan, this volume; Baudry and Daire, this volume) necessitates different strategies in terms of approach, such as the determination of coordinates and position (Zubrow, this volume; Pásztor and Barna, this volume), temporality (Dods; Bouissac; Thorn; Gheorghiu; Johnson and Schneider, this volume), materiality (Bond, this volume) and of the relationships with the natural context (Djindjan; de Nardi; Ruggini and Copat, this volume).

A place could represent a temporal relationship between present and past, between living people and their ancestors (Mason, this volume; Johnson and Schneider, this volume), becoming an image of memory. A place could be made visible when using material markers with ritual and aesthetic value (Nash, this volume), which transform themselves into monuments when they relate time and material to a specific spot (Johnson and Schneider, this volume).

In this book we have demonstrated that place, materiality, time and ritual are, in many ways, difficult to disconnect and are autonomous in their own right, since they form a sort of syncretism, an identitary syncretism which explains the topophily of human beings and the existence of *genius loci*.

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CHAPTER ONE

PREHISTORIC PLACE: STUDIES IN MATERIAL CULTURE, TIME AND SPACE

EZRA B. W. ZUBROW

"… There is a place for everything. There is a place for everything … every single thing … even that old thin g... "
—Anne Winkler Zubrow (1915-1993)

Introduction

Archaeology has always been concerned with material culture – that's what it does! Objects reflect some of the best attributes of humanity. They include some of the greatest pieces of creative endeavor known - aesthetics that soar; material innovations that improve the human condition; entertainment that provides happiness. They also include some of the worst. Objects designed for the efficient killing, torturing, and maiming of people is complemented by those that destroy, enslave and constrain others.

Material culture appeals to everyone. The objects of the past have a peculiar fascination. They relate the present to the past and contemporary society to its heritage. Today nations, states, communities and even individuals collect the objects of their pasts. Although not the cause of warfare, these objects often become its symbol and even justification (Zubrow 2002). There is a certain empowering quality about the material objects of the past that remind one of partially remembered narratives about ancestors in the broadest definition who did things out of love, fear, and desire. Once situated in time and space they symbolize when people were either agents of change or the backdrop upon which environmental and cultural processes of the past acted.

This fascination is hardly new. Nabonidus (556-539 BC), known for his famous cylinder, neglected royal Babylonian affairs in order to find objects of antiquity, which resulted in both the end of his kingship and the Babylonian empire.

Shortly after the first archaeologist put the first object into the first cabinet of curiosities, the questions of where, when, why and how became important. Once situated in time and space these objects are the agents of change and where general processes are enacted.

Some Introductory Issues

For "material places", a short hand term that this paper uses to indicate a "prehistoric object" located at a particular space and time, one needs to distinguish clearly between the physical realities of those "material places" and the representations of such "material places" in space and time by both the prehistoric participants and by the much later analysts.

A "material place" archaeology has to be concerned with both non-culturally and culturally constructed places. There are a range of "cultural constructions". They range from a minimal construction with a maximum of physical realities to a maximal construction and minimal physical realities. For both extremes and for the numerous cases in the middle there has to be a successful methodology that allows one to find and represent the actual "material places" in the prehistoric record. On one hand, one may note the .7 kg grey stone object found at 1:00 PM on May 12 2009 at 65 17 03 09 N 25 47 45 94E. The photograph of the object was taken at 65 21 51 16N 25 56 59 98E and presently resides at 65 3 29 12 N 25 28 8 29E (One may note the stone object, the discovery group, the measuring "GPS" from UNAVCO, accurate to a cm, and "on looking animals" in Fig. 1-1.) In the middle, an archaeologist culturally constructs the "material place" by stating that, "there was a prehistoric ice pick found at a habitation site dating from approximately 5500 BC. He continues by pointing out the photograph of the object was taken in the reconstructed prehistoric coastal houses of the Kierikki Stone Age Center and finally notes that it presently resides in the University of Oulu Archaeology Laboratory." Construction and interpretation go hand in hand in the archaeologist's statement. The prehistoric native would have a name for both the location of their home site and for the tool that was left. They might continue to speculate as to why it was lost or deposited at that time providing a far greater cultural construction.