

THE INDIAN BEHIND THE ARTEFACT OR THINGS BEHIND THE PROCESS?

Humanism, post-humanism and the transition
to the Neolithic

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In recent years, traditional models produced to account for the transition to the Neolithic have been challenged with the creation of narratives that seek to portray the character of this change in specific socio-historical milieus. At the other end of the spectrum, approaches influenced by the material turn have re-addressed this context, defining the Neolithic as a specific horizon within an ever-increasing entanglement.

Whilst these interpretive frameworks have yet not been challenged, they might gradually give rise to a new polarization in the debate about the Mesolithic-Neolithic transition. These approaches differ not only in that they operate at different scales of analysis (lived experience, macro-scale). They ultimately echo the humanist/post-humanist debate currently held in theoretical archaeology.

In this article, I argue that neither of these approaches is successful in revealing the complex set of forces that triggered the transition to the Neolithic. Drawing from this discussion, I suggest that a more comprehensive review of this context of change requires the fusion of elements discussed by these models. This situation hastens new challenges to archaeological practice, and it raises a series of questions on the current state of archaeological theory.

Keywords: Mesolithic-Neolithic transition, humanism, post-humanism, human/non-human, entanglement theory, lived experience, scales of analysis, symmetrical archaeology, transformation, directionality.

INTRODUCTION

I am tired of the familiar story of how the subject, the social, the episteme, created the object; tired of the story that everything is language, action, mind and human bodies. I want us to pay more attention to the other half of this story: how objects construct the subject (Olsen 2003:100).

It is an interesting time for archaeology. In a growing number of publications, the academic community is pointing towards a moment of crisis (Hodder 2012; González-Ruibal 2007; Olsen 2010, 2007; Shanks 2007; Webmoor 2007; Witmore 2007). The theoretical edifice that for the last 30 years has fed the archaeological imagination is beginning to crumble. Some are seeking to repair it; others are ready to knock it down, and in the middle of a newly deserted landscape, echoes of a new beginning are heard. What was initially a tentative dissatisfaction with archaeological consumerism of theory has become a plea to new ways, not only of looking at the past, but at understanding archaeology (see Olsen 2012; Olsen *et al.* 2012).

A discipline of things (Olsen 2003; Olsen *et al.* 2012), a symmetrical approach (Shanks 2007; Witmore 2007; Webmoor & Witmore 2008) or a case of increasing entanglement (Hodder 2012, 2011) are labels used for some of those who have questioned the soundness of current regimes of interpretation. They diverge in some of the desired goals, yet these approaches concur in that archaeological narratives have, for some time now, focused on human agents and society, leaving little space to argue the relationship between humans and things – or better – between things and humans. The problem, they claim, resides in the fact that archaeology has overlooked its actual object of study, using things as a *springboard* from which to reach society, the individual, human experience and so forth. These voices denounce the unbalanced emphasis given to the “Indian behind the artefact” (Braidwood 1958:734; Olsen 2010, 2003; Olsen *et al.* 2012) and, whilst this dissatisfaction was, until recently contained at the level of theoretical discussion – a product of intellectual debates that have, *once again* emerged in other areas of study (see Barad 2003; Brown 2001; Harman 2010; Latour 1999, 1993) – this reactionary approach is leading to the production of new interpretive frameworks. One such example is found in Hodder’s recent discussion of the emergence and spread of the Neolithic (Hodder 2012, 2011).

One could say that Hodder’s reassessment acts as a case study for a non-teleological explanation of evolution. Yet, interestingly, his model diverges from current interpretative frameworks suggested for the tran-

sition to the Neolithic, in that it moves away from the aspiration of capturing “particularistic histories of change” (Whittle 2007:626). Whilst the latter still is very much dependent on notions of acculturation and migration engendered in culture-historical times (Garcia-Rovira forthcoming; Miracle & Robb 2007), certain authorities have accentuated the need to consider the ways in which this process was experienced, prompting studies contained in smaller scales of analysis which are, in turn, centred on notions of lived experience and practice (Cummings & Harris 2011; Cummings 2007; Whittle & Cummings 2007a; Whittle *et al.* 2011).

In this article, I wish to consider the question of how this changing context (Mesolithic-Neolithic transition) should be suitably approached by confronting Hodder’s model of increasing entanglement with – what I call here for practical reasons – multiple transition models. To this end, I suggest that in order to unravel the fundamental character of this process, it is necessary to find strategies that allow the definition of a situation of directed transformation in which human and non-human agencies recombined, bringing forward new forms of sociality. At the practical level, this kind of study can be triggered through the integration of elements discussed by humanistic and post-humanistic approximations to this context of change. However, the aims of this research agenda may only be achieved by ceasing to see the material turn as a way of rupture (Olsen 2012).

ON THE EXPERIENCE OF CHANGE: SEARCHING FOR MULTIPLE TRANSITIONS

In the latest contribution to *Current Swedish Archaeology*, Bjørnar Olsen defines his recent encounter with notions such as individual, agency or practice as an encounter with “a fossil record of extinct species” (Olsen 2012:16). This understanding is fostered by noting that the post-processual skeleton was already constituted over 30 years ago, and it is consolidated by pointing at the amount of literature that has to date challenged what is commonly defined as a “humanistic turn” (e.g. Hodder 2012, 2011; González-Ruibal 2007; Olsen 2010, 2007, 2003; Shanks 2007; Witmore 2007). Yet, despite his contentions, the extinction of a species can only be announced when all its members have vanished and, as far as one can appreciate, agency, structure and practice continue to play an important role in the way in which past narratives are configured. This situation can be illustrated through the kind of interpretive models recently produced for the transition to the Neolithic.

The issue of the Mesolithic-Neolithic transition was soon imbued by defining elements of the post-processual agenda. By mid 1980s, new generations of archaeologists had begun to produce narratives in which human agency was put at the core of this process of change. On this occasion, human agency took a quasi-political status by focusing on the role that Mesolithic populations would have had in the transition to the Neolithic. Some questioned the capacity of Neolithic populations in displacing hunter-gatherers (Dennell 1983), whilst others focused on demonstrating degrees of continuity of Mesolithic practices and material culture in the Neolithic (Zvelebil & Zvelebil 1988). The influence of post-processualism can also be seen in many other texts produced on the topic to date (e.g. Thomas 2004, 2003, 1988). Yet, most recognizable examples of how post-processualism has influenced the way in which we envisage this moment of change have been produced more recently.

In the last few years, a series of authorities have found agreement that it is imperative to cease defining the Mesolithic-Neolithic transition as a single process, defending the need to seek for multiple episodes of change (e.g. Whittle 2007; Garrow & Sturt 2011; Cummings & Harris 2011). This proposition is not entirely new as Childe (1954:70) had already noted the need to take into consideration this moment of change at regional level. Yet, with a few exceptions (e.g. Garrow & Sturt 2011), it follows from the theoretical programme that stems from the initial reactionary view that emerged in the early 1980s. Whilst it is difficult to locate the precise moment at which this tendency emerged (see Cummings & Whittle 2004 for early views), it already stood as an explicit proposition in *Going Over: The Mesolithic Neolithic Transition in North West Europe* (Whittle & Cummings 2007a). In this publication, Whittle and Cummings discussed how the traditional characterizations of the Mesolithic-Neolithic transition had given rise to what they defined as a “teleological fallacy” (Whittle & Cummings 2007b:2), which ultimately determines how we do research on this period of change.

Alternatively, these proposals have sought to understand how these changes were perceived, internalized and reworked in specific socio-cultural milieus, explicitly drawing on Bourdieu’s (1977) notions of *habitus*, and ultimately from Heidegger’s (1962) portrayal of Dasein experience *in-the-world*. They depict the context of change that we define as the transition to the Neolithic as a context of transformation, pointing at how new elements were internalized and reworked through practice; an element that again owes much to the structuration theories of Bourdieu and Giddens (Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1985), and that was popularized in archaeological enquiry through the work of Barrett (e.g. 1988) among others.

A clear illustration of how these insights have translated into practice can be found in Cummings and Harris's (2011) recent consideration of the role that domesticates would have had in the transition to the Neolithic. Moving away from black and white portrayals of these moments of change (Garrow & Sturt 2011:59) characteristic of traditional models (Sheridan 2004, 2003; Thomas, 2004, 2003, 1988), Cummings and Harris suggest that the transition would have taken place through different processes and that these can only be better comprehended by exploring this issue on local scales.

To this end, the article explores the kind of transformations that would have taken place with the appropriation of domesticates. Departing from the possibility that animals were crucial in people's belief systems during the Mesolithic, they assume that the differentiation between humans and animals would not have been clear-cut. This situation, they suggest, has to be taken into consideration when examining the impact and acquisition of domesticates, as people would have conceptualized these animals according to pre-existing worldviews, meaning that domesticates would not have been considered as an opposition to wild species. Moreover, these new animals would have triggered the generation of new practices, in turn, producing new potential for ideas of wealth and status to be written (Cummings & Harris 2011:367).

Lived experience, transformation and the local context: a humanistic approach

A brief examination of Cummings and Harris's model enables us to recognize central elements governing their interpretative framework. Following from notions of situated understanding and practice, they move away from the definition of the big picture, and seek to explore the ways in which this moment of change was experienced by specific groups. This, in turn, leads to the discussion of how new practices triggered contexts of transformation. In practice, this concern materializes through the examination of the local context (see Garcia-Rovira forthcoming for discussion of this concept).

This reorientation allows Cummings and Harris to historicize this moment of change. However, whilst breaking with the monolithic nature of overreaching models, it is necessary to ask whether, on the one hand, their approach succeeds in unravelling the character of this process and, on the other hand, whether it effectively reveals the underlying forces sustaining the transition to the Neolithic.

Interpretive frameworks like the one just examined not only have allowed breaking with the unrepresentativeness of single models but have also helped in moving away from an understanding of the Neolithic as-

sociated with “grand narratives of social evolution” (Barrett 2011:66). Yet one question has remained unresolved. Whilst working towards the definition of multiple transitions, the very idea that a new set of practices spread across Europe has been maintained and so has the appreciation that there is a certain degree of directionality – understood as an irreversible situation (see Robb in press) – in these changing historical conditions. This is something important to consider for, in defining human interaction as the motor of the spread of the Neolithic, these studies are caught in a dilemma.

Whilst post-colonial theory reminds us that cross-cultural interaction produces contexts of mutual transformation (e.g. Bhabha 1994; Trivedi 1993), in this particular situation, these encounters resolve – in the degree of resolution that we can obtain archaeologically – in the Neolithization of Europe. Moreover, processes of colonization might be resourceful in this situation, yet it appears unfeasible to posit that the directionality is given by the movement of populations. Neither is it possible to conceive this change resulting from gradual colonization, nor is it acceptable to confer these kind of contexts as an active-passive phenomenon. Thus, disregarding this situation as an explanation for directionality, we are left with a fragmentary understanding of the character of the transition. Conceivably, this can only be attained by pursuing an understanding of this context as one of directed transformation. I will return to this idea towards the end of the text. However, I first want to further examine the suitability of Cummings and Harris’s interpretive framework.

Their interpretive model, like many others that stem from notions of habituated practice, is concerned with how human beings perceived and experienced the transition to the Neolithic, and although to a certain extent they point at the role that non-human agencies had in this context of change, by noting how new practices (in different landscapes), “produced potential for ideas of wealth and status to be written” (Cummings & Harris 2011:367), their interpretive framework continues to place human beings at the core of this process. Though the role of human agency should not be undermined, for domesticates do not spread to Europe by themselves, it is not difficult to observe the lack of attention given to non-human agencies in this context of change (note that Harris (in press, 2013) has rectified this situation in his latest contributions to the topic). To this end, it is fair to suggest that, despite the strength of their contribution, Cumming and Harris’s interpretive framework fails to reveal the underlying forces sustaining the transition to the Neolithic.

ON THE EXPLANATION OF CHANGE: THE TRANSITION AS A CASE OF INCREASING ENTANGLEMENT

It is very difficult to argue that there is not some directionality to human-thing entanglements [...]. Archaeologists in their introductory lectures expound the long-term shifts in technology, scale of society, elaboration of symbols, speed of communication and so on. Is it possible to find some non-teleological way of making sense of this apparent directionality? (Hodder 2012:168).

At the beginning of this article, I tentatively associated Hodder's entanglement theory with the line-up of archaeologists who have sought to re-address the lack of attention given to things. Some might disagree with this association for his approach continues to dwell on human matters, as is illustrated in his reconsideration of the issue of social evolution (see below). Similarly, Hodder begins to discuss his entanglement model by displacing his approach from that of other archaeologists influenced by the material turn in archaeology. In his words: these archaeologists – as well as their sources of inspiration – “could look more closely at things themselves” (Hodder 2012:1). Whatever the case might be, despite the differences that may exist between the aforementioned approaches, they are linked by a critique of social constructivist accounts of the past where human agents appear in a position of dominance, and by the lack of concern given to things in archaeology and the social sciences more generally. What matters in this particular situation is the ways in which Hodder's material turn has triggered new interpretive frameworks for the transition to the Neolithic.

Inspired by recent discussion on materialism and post-humanism, his entanglement theory is founded on the displacement of the human subject in favour of a definition of social dynamics where agency is located in the web of relationships that exists between humans and things. In this formula, primacy is not given to specific units (e.g. humans or non-humans) but to the phenomena that entangled webs produce. Central to Hodder's entanglement theory is the acknowledgement that these webs of relationships are produced through dependences and dependencies created between humans and non-humans, humans and humans and non-humans and non-humans (Hodder 2012:268 for formula). It is in these webs of dependence and dependencies that change takes place (see Hodder 2012:88–111).

Entanglement theory presents a number of challenges to archaeology. Similarly to symmetrical approaches, Hodder's theoretical framework enables us to direct critique to the primacy given to the human subject in past contexts such as that of the Mesolithic-Neolithic transition. What is more, it turns the attention to a particular element which has, with a few exceptions (e.g. Ingold 2011, 2012), been undermined in our analysis of past contexts. Besides human/non-human relations, there is a world out there which is not inanimate. Therefore, things can affect other things which, in turn, create a human response in their willingness to provide care and maintenance. The significance of this proposition is elucidated in Hodder's discussion on the character of the unfired, sun-dried clay used to build the houses at Çatalhöyük. Evidence suggests that the walls expand swiftly when in contact with water. Moreover, they shrink in dried conditions. Detailed examination of these walls demonstrates that care and investment were expended to avoid collapsing walls, for instance, using large wooden posts and covering them with a layer of plaster (Hodder 2012:64–68). Whilst we could simply understand this as an appreciation, as something to consider in our interpretation of past contexts, it has profound implications at the level of theory. These chains of dependence and dependency are used to indicate that there is directionality to human-thing entanglement. In contrast to traditional evolutionary theses based upon notions of progress, Hodder's suggests that directionality is not produced by an orientation towards progress but by the inability to go back, as humans are always involved in a process of investing more to protect what they have. As such, human beings continually look for new solutions. In this sense, he notes, the Neolithization process could be considered as a particular stage within an ever-increasing entanglement, rather than through teleological explanations of one kind or another (see Hodder 2012:167–177).

The subject, the object and its entangled relationship: a materialist approach

One can or cannot buy the idea that the involvement of humans and things produces “sticky entrapments” (Hodder 2012:94) which in turn act as the underlying cause of social evolution. Nevertheless, entanglement theory offers an approximation to the relationship between humans and things which goes beyond both human primordialism and biological determinism. In his model, Hodder (2012) relocates historical forces, noting that the complexity inherent in social processes can only begin to be grasped by focusing on the character of entanglements. To this end, he challenges *old stories* of the transition to the Neolithic,

displacing the dominant role given to human agents in this process of change and, in turn, addressing how the underlying forces triggering this context of change are ultimately directional. The model presented by Hodder is provocative and offers profound challenges to archaeological interpretation and practice. However, as captivating as this model is, it leaves a series of unresolved questions.

First, in its attempts to provide an explanation for the apparent directionality that human history takes, entanglement theory overlooks the fact that these changing historical conditions necessarily produce contexts of transformation at a regional level. His framework works in the development of a metanarrative at the expense of considering context specific explorations of the transition. This is an interesting appreciation as in his entanglement formula [Entanglement: Humans depend on things + things depend on things + things depends on humans + humans depend on humans], Hodder states how humans depend on humans; in his explanation, however, he asserts that this point is obvious and does not need clarification. In doing so, he fails to find symmetry in his approach, as his account develops at the expense of considering how human agency, and its exposure to alterity, would have produced contexts of transformation.

Second, entanglement theory is merely used as the *explanans* for an overall context of change. It is an overarching model which leads to a metanarrative, rather than to new ways of looking at this process of change at different scales of analysis, leading to a particular question: Is there any way to apply his insights to produce new representations generated by particular sites or regions? Or should we, as some have noted (see Olsen *et al.* 2012), seek to profoundly challenge how we – archaeologists – constitute knowledge about the past we seek to study? Should we, as Olsen (2012) has pointed out, return to a more descriptive way of doing archaeology in which the object becomes the subject matter? Would this kind of archaeology entail the forgetfulness of processes such as that of the Mesolithic-Neolithic transition?

SEEKING SYMMETRY

In this text, I have so far explored two interpretive frameworks which develop from theoretical discussions encapsulated in the humanist and material turn evidenced in archaeological thought in recent decades. This examination has led to the defining of their approaches as fragmentary for they fail to portray the multidimensional character of this process of change. Whilst this line of thought will be resumed in the

next section, I want to take the opportunity to produce a reflection on some elements central to current theoretical discussions in archaeology.

For some time now, I have engaged in the search for more suitable approaches to the study of the Mesolithic-Neolithic transition. This examination springs from a degree of disappointment with how we have researched – and continue researching – this moment of change. My questions were initially focused on the level of understanding that we have of the mechanisms of transmission of the Neolithic (see Garcia-Rovira 2013), and developed further in an attempt to find a more comprehensive picture of the complexities inherent in the transition to the Neolithic. It was in this situation that I felt compelled to read the work of those who have been influenced by the material turn recently evidenced in archaeology. A brief search of the literature produced on the topic undoubtedly provided valuable insights that can be transposed to my research interests. Yet, I felt uneasy with some of their assertions.

My first contention derives from views which denounce the lack of attention paid to non-human agencies in the definition of past social processes (e.g. Olsen 2012). Whilst there is no objection to defining the clear humanistic attitude of post-processualism – and this should not surprise anyone as its ultimate motivation was to place human beings at the core of socio-cultural dynamics – it may be recalled that a concern with non-human agencies arose in the late 1980s and materialized through the implementation of practice theory (Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1985).

For instance, as early as the late 1980s, Barrett (1988) emphasized the necessity to move away from understanding socio-cultural milieus as though contained in the world of meanings and ideas to integrate material environments. Similar concerns were expressed about the implementation of Heidegger's ontology in our discipline (e.g. Thomas 2006, 1996) as it put forward the idea of the *world* as source of understanding and action. Be it through the idea of the *habitus* or *heritage*, what these approaches sought to denote is that our *being-in-the-world* does not simply spring from the acquisition of a “world of ideas and collective representations” (Childe 1942:22), but instead from the totality of the relevant environment, thus noting the role that material agency plays in human understanding and action.

Interestingly, though, this positioning has not been adequately translated into archaeological interpretation (note Cummings and Harris's model). The reasons for this might be found in the almost simultaneous entrance of structural and post-structural thought into archaeology (see Olsen 2003 for discussion). In any case, on close inspection it is possible to break with the prejudicial characterization of it as “post-processual

orthodoxy” (Olsen 2012:11). Whilst overall it is possible to define this period as one in which certain models and ideas have become hegemonic, serious attempts have been made to break with the humanistic attitude leading the theoretical project. By the same token, although the recent return to things has been deeply influenced by different bodies of theory from those used previously, it might be disproportionate to define this episode as one of rupture (Olsen 2012:20).

My second concern derives from the very claim post-humanist influenced frameworks make in presenting symmetrical approaches to archaeology (see Witmore 2007 for detailed discussion), for, on close inspection, their frameworks may be considered slightly asymmetrical. This point may be illustrated by expanding on Ingold’s (2012, 2011) recent critique of the definitions given to human and non-human entities.

Among the kind of critiques initiated by post-humanist influenced scholars in archaeology, Barad’s Agential Realism (2003) has provided a real edge as it unfolds a framework from which to discuss social phenomena, moving away from human primordialism. Her approach is elegantly contained in the following discussion:

There is an important sense in which practices of knowing cannot be fully claimed as human practices, not simply because we use nonhuman elements in our practices but because knowing is a matter of part of the world making itself intelligible to another part. Practices of knowing and being are not isolatable, but rather they are mutually implicated. We do not obtain knowledge by standing outside of the world; we know because “we” are of the world (Barad 2003:829).

Barad’s approach, and those similarly concerned with the dissolution of an ontological difference between humans and non-human entities (e.g. Haraway 1991; Pickering 1995), have fallen into circularity in that in order to argue the suspension of distinctions, they have had to hold on to the vocabulary they seek to dismantle. Whilst at first sight, this might be considered a simple matter of conceptualization, it has profound consequences for it drives thought to ponder on the relationship between humans and non-humans; a relationship which has proved rather attractive to archaeologists.

For instance, in his *In Defence of Things*, Olsen (2010) opens up the discussion by pointing at the intricate relationship that exists between humans and things. Following Serres (1995), he considers that, unlike other beings, human sociality is mediated by things. Moreover, in his definition he adds how, in looking at the depths of human history, it is possible to define an increasing relegation of functions to non-human entities (Olsen 2010:9–10). However, are human beings the only kind

of beings that have an inextricable relationship with materiality? This is precisely the question placed by Ingold (2012) who, in turn, responds:

Many migratory seabirds return to breed, year in, year out, to the same cliffs and in the same pairs – as do herds of ungulates to the same calving grounds. Whether cliffs and grounds can be understood as objects is moot, [...] they are most certainly *things* (Ingold 2012:429).

Following from this discussion, Ingold (2012) points out how the human/non-human divide continues to rest “on a claim to human exceptionalism, along with a vision of progress [...] which could have come straight out of the nineteenth century” (Ingold 2012:430). Human beings cannot be considered the only beings who have a tight relationship with materiality, nor can the history of human kind be defined as a history of increasing human/thing tautness. This critique is taken to an end by demonstrating how non-humans have, for the most part, been indirectly understood as things within the artefactual domain (Ingold 2012:431). Moreover, whilst this might be so, all things which do not fall into the human category are considered non-humans. However, is it possible to reduce all non-human things to the same category? And does it matter?

A detailed examination of non-human beings may simply enrich the conceptual realm that social scientists utilize in their examinations of society. Yet, supporters of symmetrical archaeology have continually sought to critically consider the vocabulary exerted in their analysis of human sociality. As Witmore, following Serres and Latour (1995:144), notes:

So long as we take for granted definitions of what it is to be human, what an “object” is, what constitutes an agent or even how archaeologists constitute knowledge, we will continue to be drawn into spiralling controversies, which merely repeat polar shifts every generation or so (Witmore 2007:549).

Unfortunately, whilst the category human has been continually defined (e.g. Olsen 2003), in the archaeological discourse, the category non-human has remained somehow unclear. Indeed, if, as Witmore (2007) notes, “human and non-humans should not be regarded as ontologically distinct, as detached and separated entities, a priori” (2007:546), perhaps it is not necessary to distinguish us from, for instance, a tree, a cow or the air. Yet, if a distinction is made between humans and non-humans, it might be worth considering how the category of non-humans can be broken down and how the given distinctions can aid our understanding of past phenomena.

An elegant contribution to this debate – even though it comes from another discipline – was produced by Anat Pick in her talk *Animal*

Life in the Cinematic “Umwelt” given at *The Phenomenological Turn* (Queen Mary University of London, May 2013). Though her work normally dwells on the question of non-human ethics (e.g. Pick 2012), Pick posed an important question with regard to living creatures. Responding to Heidegger’s ontology, she indicates how animals, as human beings, engage in projects and that these projects have to be constituted within specific *Umwelts* (see Heidegger 1962). Whilst one can ponder whether this specification matters to archaeological interpretation, it opens new questions to resolve with regard to the transition to the Neolithic. It may be more fruitful to think about the transition, not so much as a moment of increasing entanglement between humans and non-humans but as a process of creation of novel symbiotic populations (see Barrett 2011). Whilst still pondering on some of these ideas, I would like to return to the question that triggered this article.

DISCUSSION

The main aim of this text was to establish a comparison between interpretive frameworks about the transition to the Neolithic influenced by the humanist and materialist turn, with the aim of assessing whether these approaches successfully unravel the multidimensional character of this context of change. In doing so, it has been noted that, in isolation, these approaches present a fragmentary understanding of this process. Given the weight of such an assertion, it may be necessary to indicate what is meant here by multidimensionality.

Certainly, the very idea of the Mesolithic-Neolithic transition is a conceptual construct which might bear little resemblance to past realities. Yet, ever since Lubbock (1865) defined a new period characterized by the emergence of polished stone tools, we have been unable to question that a series of changes took place alongside the domestication of plants and animals in Europe. If we are ready to accept the fundamental changes that this process brought with it, then it is necessary to expand our interest in the transmission mechanisms of new practices, to dwell upon the exploration of the definable elements of this process.

Despite obvious reservations, the process at hand bears resemblances to what has been defined as globalization. Whilst this concept has given rise to major controversies (see Neverdeen Pieterse 2009 for discussion), globalization stems from the increment of international trade, of the speed and forms of communication, free movement of capital and so forth. No primordial agencies can be granted to this process, yet this arrangement has led to a situation of irreversibility. Moreover, though

triggering effects on a global scale, globalization has not led to the homogenization of the world. Whilst at a glance it is only possible to see the effects of globalization by encountering analogous elements in different corners of the world, the directionality of this process has in turn led to the creation of new forms, or *glocalizations* (see Robertson 1995). These forms are understood as “the interpenetration of the global and the local resulting in unique outcomes in different geographical areas” (Ritzer 2009:255).

Similarly, at an archaeological level, the transition to the Neolithic has resulted in archaeological assemblages which are similar but different. We seem to know when the transition has taken place due to the reproduction of a series of diagnostic elements, yet our sets of evidence are always characterized by *common difference* (see Wilk 2004). If, in the grand scheme of things, the transition to the Neolithic can be conceptualized as a wide process triggering unique contexts of transformation at a regional level, if it can be defined as a process in which humans and non-humans agents recombined, triggering new forms of sociality, then it appears important to reconsider the ways in which the transition is studied archaeologically, from the excavation process to the production of narratives. This movement is necessary in order to define the conditions of possibility from which transition studies can proceed to interpretation.

Certainly, similar reflections to those posited in this article are beginning to emerge (see Barrett in press; Robb in press) in a context that, at best, could be defined as one of theoretical instability, at a moment where the post-processual discourse is finally destabilized by the force of post-humanist and neomaterialist approaches. But whilst it could be said that this situation is certainly triggering profound movements of reflection with regard to past contexts, its importance is underestimated as it is leading to heated debates among authorities on either side of the theoretical arena. If our concern continues to be that held in the theoretical realm, we might well enter into a situation where, once again, past contexts are manipulated in order to justify models of past sociality (see Shanks 1990:294; Johnson 2006:118; Lucas 2012:2).

CONCLUSION

Interestingly, in examining the models of Cummings and Harris and of Hodder, it has become possible to note that the weaknesses of their approaches are addressed by what appears to be an opposite (Table 1). In combination they not only present a more balanced account of so-

Table 1. Paradigms discussed in the text.

Multiple transition model	Entanglement model
Humans	Non-humans
Multiple historical processes	Historical process – metanarrative
Transformation	Directionality

ciality but solve the fragmentary characterization of the transition to the Neolithic.

In a thought-provoking article, Sherratt (1996) foresaw interesting parallels in the history of archaeology with what he defined as a European cultural dialectic (Sherratt 1996:142) characterized by cycles of thought that oscillate between Romantic and Enlightened attitudes. Thus, the Romantic stance drives research into context-specific studies in which interpretation and meaning become imperative, whilst the Enlightenment attitude seeks to produce comparative studies at a macro-scale level which reveal a story of ongoing stages. Obvious parallels can be drawn between these cycles and the traditions of research discussed in this text, and in archaeology more widely.

Conscious that a collapse of Enlightened and Romantic views may be constrained by our inability to break with the oscillatory movement characteristic of scientific enquiry, I would like to bring this article to an end by noting that, wherever the case might be, it may be more fruitful, and a much bigger challenge, as many have stated recently (see Shanks 1990:294; Johnson 2006:118; Lucas 2012:2), to establish a more balanced relationship between theory and practice rather than continuing to delve into past contexts guided by the primacy given to archaeological theory. This is a recurrent theme discussed by those influenced by post-humanist and neomaterialist agendas (e.g. Olsen 2012, 2003). Having reached this point, and acknowledging that a case study at this stage would result in the superficial exploration of an archaeological context, I urge considering the ways in which this interesting moment in which we are living in archaeology might trigger a profound movement of reconceptualization of issues concerning theory, method and practice.

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