

IN TILLEY'S GARDEN: FIGURES IN A LANDSCAPE

CHRISTOPHER TILLEY

THE MATERIALITY OF STONE

**EXPLORATIONS IN
LANDSCAPE
PHENOMENOLOGY**

ROUTLEDGE



Reflections on the work of Christopher Yates Tilley 3

This is Part 3 of a reflection upon the works of Chris Tilley, prompted by his too-early death in March 2024.

I want to do justice to the range and depth, the significance of his work in anthropology and archaeology. My reflections are based on memories, close collaboration, and deep reading of all his writing. His work, now finished, deserves close attention because it deals with matters of wide concern and in such a sophisticated way, dedicated to careful consideration – relationships with environment; respect and acknowledgement of diverse voices; developing secure foundations of knowledge, in experience, modes of engagement with the world, representation and report.

What follows is not an exposition of his ideas but a reflection upon them, something of an exchange of ideas as I unpack how I react. I do look back with hindsight and wish that the conversation that ended when we parted ways in 1993 had continued. I disagree with much of what Chris came to stand for. I do not think he has the answers. But he always got me to think more carefully.

Part 1 is about our collaboration at Cambridge, two academics provoked to set things right.

In Tilley's Garden: a Summer Long Ago [Link]

Part 2 presents some allegorical associations in something of a play with the mythmaking that I find quite endearing in Tilley's anthropological archaeology.

Mythographic Triptych (annotated) [Link]

Part 3 is based on reading his work since we parted ways in 1993. I offer sketches of some personae in his scenario of experiencing landscape, and some features of a concept map within which his oeuvre might be situated.

In Tilley's Garden: Figures in a Landscape – [this post]

Part 4 is a celebration of Tilley's humanism – valuing individual experience and autonomy, grounding in empirics and critical thinking, focus on life and presence, environmental secularism. I find his humanism most considered, even profound. I think this is what he left in most of us, certainly those friends, family, colleagues, students whom I have heard react to his death – quite a passion for

life and the qualities of things.

In Tilley's Garden: Transcendental Experiences – [Link]

From the early 1990s Chris Tilley delivered an extraordinary series of case studies in the interpretation of ancient landscapes ranging across the prehistory of northern Europe, with passage graves and dolmens, carvings on bedrock, architectural constructions in earth and stone, placings in the land, and everywhere manifestations of *genii loci*, spirits of place, ancient comings and goings. He visited, revisited, and lived in these often evocative places.

He wrote of immersion, close attention to the flow of experience, awareness and mindfulness, time spent living with the prehistoric remains, in the footsteps of ghosts. He extended tropes of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche into the material world as a fundamental property of things where this equals that, where the stones of a passage grave connect directly with distant mountains or a coastline.

He described all this as a phenomenology of landscape. His was a project in what we can call environmental aesthetics.

The constant flow of human experience is cognitive, sensory, emotional or evaluative. A phenomenology requires figuration – figures, subjects, selves, persons, bodies, however defined, to engage with the world, look and move through the land, see, touch, react, evaluate. Processes of figuration are needed that focus, condense, distill into a gestalt, into components with which we might work. And we do find different figures and characters, static and animated, statues, pedestals without statues, in the sunlight and in the mists of Tilley's landscapes. Here are some of them.

Figures in a landscape

The anthropologist and the ethnographer

Over a couple of months in the summer of 1988, Chris and I visited many prehistoric sites in Sweden. We camped out, sometimes near farms and villages, and would regularly welcome locals who would bring some beer or wine to our campfire. We would talk about what we were doing. Chris never said it was archaeology, and

always described himself as an anthropologist.

After the works we wrote together in the 1980s, Chris never used the word archaeology in a book title again, and rarely referred to his work as archaeology. He described to me his move to University College London as a welcome shift into anthropology and his post there involved considerable commitment to building up a field of material culture studies. This disciplinary positioning fits with the academic landscape in the US and the conventional four-field division of anthropology into social/cultural, biological/physical anthropology, linguistics, and archaeology.

More interesting with regard to Tilley's work is the distinction, perhaps more French, between ethnology, ethnography, and anthropology, concerned with comparative study of cultures and societies, methods of field study, and characteristics of humanity, respectively.

Ethnology, comparative study of cultures, features in his reports on the fieldwork he made in Vanuatu in the 90s, especially looking at Wala canoes, and in regular references to case studies in the material culture of small-scale societies, as he described them. Foundations in ethnology and ethnography are a characteristic of the material culture studies promoted by the Department of Anthropology at University College.

Tilley consistently claimed over 30 years of fieldwork that his method of surveying sites, regions, topographies, through first-hand walking, noting in detail his engagements and reactions, was a form of participant observation – ethnography. He participated in the lay of the land and its features. Direct experience was, he insisted, the foundation for his studies and consequent interpretations.

So he titled a book *An Ethnography of the Neolithic (1996)*; it might have as easily been called *An Archaeology of Prehistoric Scandinavia*. In his later edited collection *London's Urban Landscape (2019)*, Tilley framed a series of local studies of the contemporary city as direct ethnographic encounters with everyday life and culture, another way of telling of the city. He claims these studies are strong criticism of abstracted and distanced academic treatment found in orthodox urban geography.

Underlying Tilley's ethnography was a considered conception of human experience. In

a kind of anthropic transcendentalism, Tilley centered human experience upon cognitive, sensory, and emotional/evaluative aspects of engagement with the world that are embodied and shared by all members of the biological species. These features of experience are taken to precede and transcend cultural variation and diversity. This premise, deemed phenomenological by Tilley, was the foundation of his anthropology. As anthropologist, Chris bracketed matters of ontology and epistemology (what is the past and how might we come to know it?) in favor of first attending to, being mindful of cognition, and sensory and emotional engagement with features in the landscape.

It was this anthropic transcendentalism that meant Tilley could immerse himself in a landscape and claim a secure and direct somatic connection with those in prehistory who had walked and worked the land. This was his participant observation, his ethnography.

How does Tilley's ethnography relate to this anthropology? A Tilley case study begins with descriptive detail of encounters in the land with topography and places, stones and architectures. Over the years more emphasis is given to descriptions of how one moves across a rock surface, along a pathway, with note taken of impressions. He talks of kinaesthetics and rhythmanalysis.

The piling up of empirical detail can feel unrelenting. One might wonder where Tilley is leading us in a thick description of a prehistoric building on Malta, in noting this and that. He certainly displays control of the empirics – he knows his stuff, of that one might be assured. But one might ask – so what? He has been there and has witnessed. One might call the style documentary or journalistic reportage. He doesn't question or experiment with ethnographic style in representing experience. Tilley does not offer stream of consciousness, for example, or poetic condensation; photography, table, maps, and infographics are offered as self-evidently documentary, transparent in their representation.

Occasionally Tilley will make a comment, drop a hint where the features of his description are taking us (the rock has these distinctive qualities, the mountains are close by and are of a different rock), of where judgment might lead. And then he shifts persona to reveal what is going on.

The seer and the mythographer

One is in the landscape, attentive. The flow of experience can be unrelenting – impressions, noise, even cacophony. How might one filter, summarize? On what might one focus? There might easily be too much, excess.

Tilley notes patterns and regularities, or identifies what he considers to be significant features. He might note that the passage graves in a region are mainly oriented this way or that; their stone has these qualities; carved footsteps go up the rock surface, not across; menhirs mainly have a curved shape; when walking the path you see certain things in sequence. He may substantiate such observations with statistics and tables.

Then Tilley steps back and makes a proposition – this is a manifestation of a structuring principle, perhaps, of the existential contrast between the world of the living and the dead, he might say. His tour de force was in seeing *elective affinities*. The menhirs are root tubers or axes; the linear hilltop construction is a beach; the stones are honey or ochre; the monument is a mountain.

Drawing on Goethe's novel about marriage, affiliation, attraction, Walter Benjamin used the concept of "elective affinities" in promoting the proposition that cultural objects and historical contexts are not arbitrarily linked but are instead drawn together through deep, underlying affinities. Such affinities are complex interplays of social, economic, material, and ideological forces. Just as chemicals combine based on their elective affinities, an early use of the concept, elements of culture and society combine based on historical contingency, ideological alignment, and, for Tilley, phenomenological qualities.

Whence does Tilley derive such affinities?

Some are deductions: in culture, and as noted by the likes of Lévi-Strauss, one may acknowledge the structuring principle of binary opposition; one may propose that an observed cultural pattern is a manifestation of a particular binary, such as life and death, sky and ocean, nature and culture, raw and cooked, whatever. Tilley may propose that a particular observed pattern is manifestation of the cultural universal of a rite of passage.

Here he may also deploy the rhetorical tropes of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche:

this equals that, applied to material properties, as well as text and communicative media. Tilley held that metaphor is the principal feature of material culture, and wrote a book about this.

The standing stone is an ax. Pebbles are a beach. A wavy line stands for water.

Tilley also worked abductively, through speculative reasoning based upon his accumulation of learning and his predispositions. Immersed in experiences of the land, looking out over from the monument to the pebble-banked beach, he sees an affinity. He jumps to a summary insight into an elective affinity and then reflects upon its validity and sense.

In this abduction one might describe Tilley as a kind of seer, an augur, diviner (as well as a connoisseur, as I will say below). One observes the sky, the intestines of a sacrificed animal, the casting of runestones, or simply the flow of experience, draws upon memory and learning, notes features and characteristics, and then posits significance. This points to that. In the cacophony, the noise of experience, Tilley found affinities and allegories, echoes and resonances. The affinities may seem at the limits of reason (a menhir is a root tuber!?), but he reasons through them rigorously nevertheless.

As he indicates in *Materiality of Stone* (page 145), Tilley does seem to have conceived of himself as part of a priesthood:

Archaeologists, such as ourselves, given permission, and allowed free access everywhere, become the new temple “priesthood” able to make up our own knowledges and tell our own stories rather than having to listen to those told by others.

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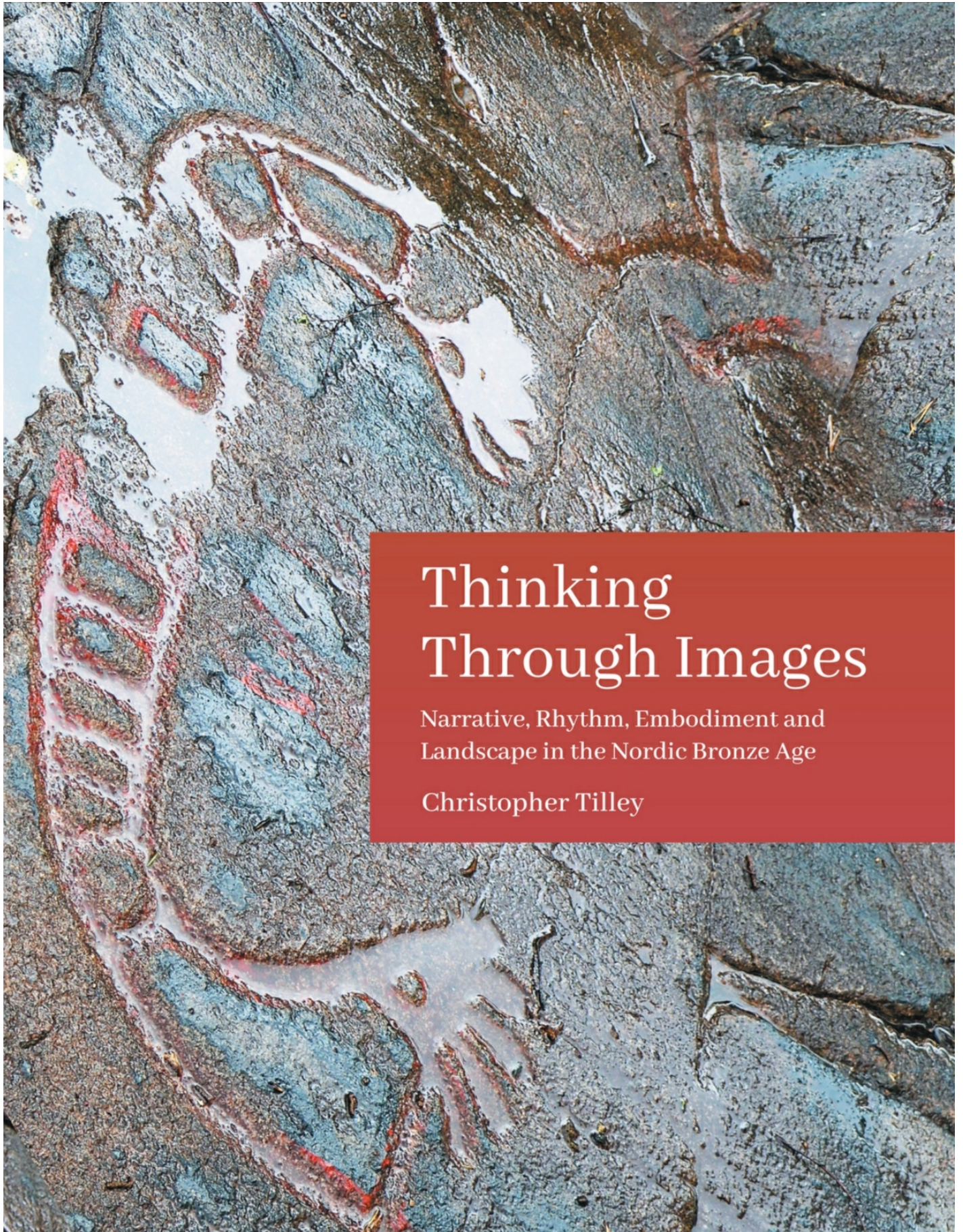
Wrapped and painted stones in a landscape.

And where might the affinities take us? From this speculative reasoning comes speculative fabulation, speculative mythography. Tilley makes his case studies reveal a theater of archetypes of character and narrative scenarios in prehistory. He writes of initiation and rites of passage; ceremony and procession; dance and song; cycles of lives and afterlives; shamanic journeys; ancestral connections; cosmological arrangements; secret and revealed knowledges; darkness and light; warriors and priests. Tilley was both seer and mythographer.

We might expect Tilley's milieu to take in great sweeping landscape vistas, those familiar features of the sublime and picturesque, but his focus was intimate, local.

Garden, not landscape.

Let me give a more detailed example of this mythography, for it is such a key feature of Tilley's accounts of prehistory.



Thinking Through Images

Narrative, Rhythm, Embodiment and
Landscape in the Nordic Bronze Age

Christopher Tilley

In Thinking Through Images: Narrative, Rhythm, Embodiment and Landscape in the

Nordic Bronze Age (2021) Tilley returns to his fascination with rock art with a study of the site of Brastads-Backa in northern Bohuslän on the west coast of Sweden. The book opens with a prelude that captures his archaeological sensibility.

I have been bedazzled by the creative force and power of these images. They seem to offer unique potential for discovering, entering into and understanding an alien world so very different from our own. If an image is worth a thousand words, it is also worth a thousand artefacts. This is because we intuitively know that Bronze Age natives, like us, thought through images as a means of understanding and representing themselves to themselves.

He then offers one of his evocative detailed descriptions of the carving that appears on the cover of the book. I will quote some of it to illustrate Tilley's prose and style of argument.

Standing on Rock 1 at Brastads-Backa in northern Bohuslän on the west coast of Sweden, below my feet there is an arresting image of a boat deeply pecked into the gently sloping granite (see cover illustration and Fig. 2.18). The image occurs in an area of the rock where there is a water flow running across the surface. The most deeply pecked and damaged areas in the centre are water-filled. This boat is one of 55 others on this particular rock but it is of unique form. The two

prows, fore and aft, are in the form of upraised human hands. The central part of the inner palms of each have been left unpecked.

The right palm is slightly raised in comparison to the left. It is suspended on an upward curving arm that is also the boat prow, at the fore of the boat. There is no distinguishable left arm that stands apart from the gunwale. Rising above the right hand there is an almost upright extension of the keel line of the boat. The boat is depicted as if it is suspended on water rather than floating partly submerged. The entire hull is visible from the keel line to the gunwale. The two are connected by 12 struts set at irregular intervals. This boat is an arrested image. It has no crew, lacks a sail or a rudder or any visible means of locomotion. If there is motion it is implied.

Unlike the other boats on the rock, it has an unusual orientation. Rather than running parallel with and horizontally across the rock, its long axis runs from the south-east to the north-west up the rock surface. Almost all the other 300 or so images on this same rock are depicted so as to be seen from below looking up at them from the south-east side. In order to see this

particular boat comfortably and from the right way up, or the usual visual perspective, you need to move across the rock to the right and then turn around in order to view it from the south-west side looking across the rock surface. The image, like many others on the rocks at Brastads-Backa, thus choreographs the movements of your body exerting its silent power and agency.

There are 30,000 recoded sites of rock art in Scandinavia. The meaning of the designs, their iconology, has attracted much speculation. Some motifs of the iconography such as ships, hats/helmets, birds, axes, animals, and wheeled vehicles are found far away too in the Mediterranean and Near East. Prehistorians since the nineteenth century have seen these as signs of global interconnectivity in the European Bronze Age, offering broad explanations of the iconography as manifestation of religious belief, ritual practice, common mythology, and the lifeworld of roving heroic warriors.

Tilley acknowledges the wide distribution of certain motifs, and points out that this overlooks the considerable variability that is so evident locally. Turn to the carvings themselves! Make them one's concern, not the myths and stories one may hope they convey. This is what he presents in his study of the pecked rocks of Brastads-Backa. Tilley notes the specific arrangements and relationships of motifs as one physically encounters the rock surfaces in the landscape, noting syntagmatic chains (this then this then that) and paradigmatic links (this associated with that) – melodies and harmonies. He calls this kinaesthetics and rhythmanalysis, and says it is part of a narratological approach.

The seer (in Latin the VATES, the inspired poet) must attend scrupulously to the tiniest things that others will overlook in their preference for broad and generic, familiar and unchallenging accounts. Fresh and vital insight is grounded in the utterly particular. Tilley's poetry, the mythography is the speculative leap through universal characteristics of human experience.

we intuitively know that Bronze Age natives, like us, thought through images as a means of understanding and representing themselves to themselves

Here then is part of his summary story of the pecked rocks of Brastads-Backa. Again, I quote at length to show Tilley's mythography

... little was more striking and visually beguiling than the carved rocks themselves. I have already argued in Part I that they represented the real wealth of the communities in northern Bohuslän and were far more significant to the local people than any metal trinkets. They were the inalienable wealth of the local group. Processions and parades moving between the rock would have involved walking between them, dancing over the larger carved surfaces, wearing costumes and masks, playing music, holding banners and ceremonial regalia aloft. The people would animate the images and they would animate the people. Thus, the images were an active part of the parades and ceremonies and marked the processional routes taken through the landscape. Outstanding and complex carving surfaces with arresting images were emblematic of group identity and solidarity. They created the fame of the group in the eyes and minds of others made permanent and immovable in the local landscape ...

... the images themselves, as much as the processions and ceremonies that were related to them were the centre of attention. The entire character, meaning and appearance of a carving surface might be altered by adding new and visually dominant images or inscribing others in new places. I have argued that this was the case in relation to the dominant 'cobbler' image on rock 1:1. This may be why carving surfaces often appear to us to be haphazard, chaotic and disorderly, lacking in structure. Experiencing the images on the rocks was almost certainly designed to be part and parcel of the transformation of the self, bringing about altered states of consciousness of the self and society. They were active in this process, both medium and outcome of identity construction in relation to others, important qualisigns of that which was valued. The processions and parades and ceremonies might mark the end of a process in which these images were brought alive and became animate ...

... by stressing rhythm, beat, repetition, silence, pause and using musical analogies such as the notion of individual motifs as being somewhat akin to the sounds of instruments being played on their own with a

singular voice, or in an orchestral crescendo of sound, I have tried to express, in an undoubtably primitive way, that might be better developed by others, two distinct ideas. The first is that the social experience of the rocks in processions and parades was accompanied by singing, the steady beat of drums, the sonorous sounds of lurs and not contemplative analytic silent mediation on their deeper meanings ... above all this experience was celebratory and joyful and social, most especially in the case of the larger surfaces and panels on which many people would move and dance. The second is that the meaningful rhythms of the rocks seen in succession was related to the rhythmic movements of the people who experienced them, in the kinaesthetic and emotive responses of their bodies in relation to what they experienced and saw.

R E L I Q U E S
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Old Heroic BALLADS, SONGS, and other
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M D C C L X V .

Title page of Thomas Percy's collection of fragments of ballads, a landmark in European romanticism, as well as literary antiquarianism. The quote DURAT OPUS VATUM is from Roman poet Horace: amidst the material ruins of the past, texts scattered to the wind, trees in their last leaf, "it is the music of poets (*opus vatium*) that endures".

The romantic and the transcendental humanist

Tilley was not unhappy to be associated with English romanticism, eighteenth century and after. He walked, like Wordsworth, attending closely to subjective experiences, especially of nature and the land, releasing wonder from the overlooked familiar, or what had gone unnoticed. In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth regularly condemns "habit," "use and custom," and "the regular action of the world," asking us to experience the miracle of being in the most commonplace objects. There are certainly, at least for me, curiosities of resonance, in Tilley's writing, with the English romanticism of Jacquetta Hawkes (I'm thinking of her universal anthropology *Man on Earth*, especially her account of Britain *A Land*, and the more poetic *Fables* and *Symbols and Speculations*). I sense there is something of Paul Nash's mystical, mythical, English landscape in Tilley's dimly lit stories-in-the-land, though the affinity is not so much with Nash's paintings as with his more prosaic compilation, *The Shell Guide to Dorset* (so easily accessible now at Yale University online [Link]). Tilley never mentioned any of this.

American transcendentalists Emerson and Thoreau also come to mind with their disposition towards essential *individual* experience that connects with a universal unity between the human and the natural, a vitalism beyond culture/nature binaries, transcending time. Personal intuition is, for them, a critical source of knowledge and moral guidance; they advocate a life that aligns with one's inner truths and the natural world. They share a critical view of societal norms and aim to explore and promote a more spiritually and morally fulfilling existence. So too, in many ways, Tilley. And he never mentioned this at all.

The antiquarian and the connoisseur

In 1988 Chris and I visited the rock carvings at Nämforsen in the company of the University of Lund's library copy of Gustav Hallström's *Monumental Art of Northern Sweden from the Stone Age* (1960). This is a big book, itself a monumental record of

the site. It was quite a commitment to take it with us into the field. Of course, it was also indispensable, a documentary key to the “art of ambiguity” as Tilley called the site. The place is so difficult to take in because it overflows immediate experience. Here’s some of what he said about Hallström in his book *Material Culture and Text* (1991) – it is quite revealing:

“He transforms a disparate series of documents (individual rock carving surfaces) into a monument. That which is truly monumental is Hallström’s *effort* – ...the book ... the dedication, the supreme effort of will to complete it ... despite failing health. Mobilized and compressed into a bound text, the rock carvings [are his] personal monument, his claim to immortality. This monument ... is more like a gravestone ... for it signifies a textual space that is meant to exclude its author: an object intended to be unmediated by a constitutive subjectivity.”

In Part 1 of this commentary on Tilley’s work, I recalled Poussin’s seventeenth-century painting of shepherds in an Arcadian landscape. They have found a monument in a landscape. Is it a tomb, a gravestone? Is it a pedestal of a statue since toppled and removed? An inscription reads, ambiguously, ET IN ARCADIA EGO – “I too [was/is/have been/will be] in Arcadia (the archetype of idyllic landscape)”. Just who is the subject? This is Tilley’s take on Hallström’s monument. And on Tilley’s own monumentality.



It was not just Hallström. In his collaborative work at Leskernick on Dartmoor, for example, another upland landscape in southern England, Tilley refers with great approval to the documentary work and speculative conjecture of antiquarian William Borlase (1696-1772).

I have found myself very taken with the eighteenth-century antiquaries of the northern borders between England and Scotland. Two voices come to mind when reading Tilley. Alexander Gordon was one of the first to center an historical argument (about Roman colonization) on a personal archaeological survey. In *Itinerarium Septentrionale (A Northern Journey, 1726)* one finds that same in-the-footsteps dogged documentation of monuments in the land as adopted by Tilley. While walking the land became a key component of archaeological field survey in the second half of the twentieth century, certainly, one might read in Gordon a similar personal and subjective commitment to present-at-hand experience found in Tilley's phenomenology. A combination of personal experience and aspiration to authoritative account is very evident also in John Wallis's *Natural History and Antiquities of the County of Northumberland* (two volumes 1769). Anecdotes run through his detailed

commentary on stones, waters, plants, fishes, quadrupeds, eminent men; the second volume describes three itineraries through the land with special attention to antiquities and especially the ancient dwelling inhabitants (landowning families).

There is no reason to suppose Tilley read either Gordon or Wallis. I am expressing here an interest in the genealogy of Tilley's praxis, not as in a history of ideas, but more in the way of dispositions, traits, and sensibilities. In this regard it is quite easy to see in Tilley the figure of the connoisseur. While often now associated with overly-refined high-cultural taste (an expert offering valuations of antique furniture or old master paintings), or with a myopic and fetishistic focus on precious (or not so precious) things, the connoisseur might equally be acknowledged simply to be one with deep and scholarly knowledge of a specialized subject, knowledge achieved through long personal commitment and interest. (Tilley dedicates his book on pebbles to George Carter, a local amateur archaeologist, and his granddaughter Priscilla Hull). Tilley's connoisseurship was rooted in collections of experiences rather than of artifacts such as works of art, perhaps more like a gourmet (hence my description of him as an Epicurean of landscape).

While one might disagree with his evaluations of the experiences in which he dealt, there was little doubt that he had very carefully considered his judgments; Tilley knew his stuff, microscopically – god in the details.

Many voices

In my experience and reading, Tilley actually fits none of these personae, archetypes, these figures in a landscape. He was all of them, and none. He cultivated many voices. And there are other figures we might call forth in Tilley's landscape, his garden.

So I am not wishing to categorize Tilley as a romantic or transcendentalist, or any of the other figures. My point is simply to give some shape to the processes of figuration, as we might call them, in his phenomenology. These are fictional characters in the theater of his research. I have argued elsewhere, (in a 2023 essay on *Social Theory and Archaeology* and in the 2013 book *Archaeology in the Making*), against using summary categories, especially those that come with the suffix -ism, to understand how research and knowledge-building works. Tilley's work shows that it is much more interesting, much more grounded than -isms allow.

Let me continue with the metaphor of figures in a landscape and outline a suite of matters and topics, concepts with which they are concerned in the drama of building archaeological knowledge.

Antinomies and aporiai, digressions and deviations

The concerns of these figures in a landscape are shaped by a semantic field of troubled concepts – foundational, tactical, ontological, methodological. They include: humanity and experience, materiality, design, landscape, body, performance, mediation and representation, and temporality.

Tilley and I parted ways on how to navigate this field. He cut a decisive and clean path for-all-time through these concepts. I have found instead irresolvable tensions and antinomies, dead-ends and no-way-through aporiai, deviations and necessary digressions, questions in pragmatic, local, always temporary decision making.

Here are some features of a concept map.

Humanity and experience

Tilley's anthropology was one of universal humanity in cultural diversity. I have connected it with a transcendental outlook, though Tilley never named it as such. He certainly affirmed the unity of humankind and maintained the validity of comparative ethnology that might juxtapose canoes in Vanuatu with prehistoric structures on the south downs of England. He asserted connection not through analogy or empathy or socio-cultural modeling, but through the *concept* of a shared phenomenal field, as Merleau-Ponty called it, shared embodied experience.

The question must surely be raised of the implication of power and agency in the relation between universal and particular, global and local, indeed of the validity of the anthropological project of ethnographic fieldwork, of participant observation (shared experience). Did Tilley ever step back and reflect on a question such as – how might I account for and validate my competency in bracketing out my individual locatedness (in life cycle, history, culture, society) in order to identify the universal, intersubjective pre-reflective components of experience

in a walk through an English landscape, in a visit to a village in Vanuatu, or in a London neighborhood? To whom is one accountable in such an enterprise? To what end? For whom?

In his work on pebblebed heathlands with Kate Cameron-Daum he performs ethnography on a suite of stakeholder interests and records their accounts of experiences in the landscape, witnessing diversity. Much of this concerns different modes of engagement – through military maneuvers, cycling, riding, walking one's dog. Stakeholders are presented as categories or character types and we read descriptive accounts of women riding horses, soldiers crawling over pebbles.

How are such accounts related to the experiences themselves – the prereflective phenomenal field? Tilley asserts the validity of experience, but never reflects critically on how it is to be shared, other than through being present, being there. Tilley made much of the importance of living with landscapes, on-the-spot, monuments in reach and visible out-of-the-kitchen-window. Anything else will involve re-presentation and loss of immediacy, mediation, translation into word, image, whatever.

In the end therefore one must trust the witness, Tilley himself, or his collaborating colleagues, who wrote the accounts. Above all, in contrast to witnessing, one must seek to *replicate* authentic experience in order to achieve inner, secure, *gnostic* insight, that will for-all-time remain ineffable, asserted, not-to-be-spoken-of.

I emphasize this last point. Tilley's phenomenological gnosis involved direct insight that is typically hidden from casual experience and does not come from external institutional teachings. Gnosis can be esoteric, even exclusive, in that it typically requires exceptional preparation and resources. You will need to refine your phenomenological sensibilities, buy or rent a house in the heathland and go native, become inhabitant for a year or two, that one might witness the landscape in depth and first hand.

In *Leviathan and the Air Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (revised 2017) Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer explore debates in the seventeenth century around the integrity of knowledge production. Robert Boyle stood for experimental method, where controlled modes of engagement with the workings of nature, and

involving machines such as his vacuum pump, would generate experiences that trustworthy gentlemen scientists could witness and report to the world. Political philosopher Thomas Hobbes, in contrast, looked for natural law and viewed experiments as the artificial, unreliable products of an exclusive guild. Tilley too was appropriately concerned with the conditions under which reliable knowledge might be produced.

This comparison with debates over the role of intellectuals in public life and the problems of social order and assent in Restoration England should show that I am not intending to be negatively critical in this assessment of Tilley's ethnography. What may be called gnostic intuition is easy to relate to a most common feature of scientific reasoning that Charles Peirce called abduction. This is not the place to explore the ways that academics and administrators from liberal democracies might pursue knowledge of others in small scale societies past or present, in developing nation states, or however the object of knowledge is construed. I have no *definitive* answer to these matters of how we build knowledge other than to say that I have found pragmatist science studies (and I would include here that of Shapin and Shaffer) the source of most fruitful insights – we are indeed part of what we seek to understand, and knowledge is an achievement, struggled for, worked for, riddled with contradiction, messy, complex (as outlined in my book *Archaeology in the Making*).

More important is that Tilley took an informed stand on these critical issues. Recalling our conversations in the 80s and early 90s I suspect that his anthropic universalism owes less to an existential phenomenology of the likes of Merleau-Ponty, and more to a Marxian concept of species-being – the human capacity to labor and make unalienated lifeworlds in ways that transcend mere physical survival to include dynamic processes of cocreation, connection, and self-realization. This would connect Tilley's project with *internationalism*, seeking global solidarity in shared experience of contemporaneity, rather than a concept of transcendental humanism, seeking an escape into a reverie of individual experience.

Was it Kristian Kristiansen who remarked that to combine Marxian materialism with phenomenology was a rather tough challenge!?

Here again, however, I am resorting to abstract -isms to try to throw light on complex intentions in an academic life lived most thoughtfully.

Materiality

Just what *is* a monument, a tomb, a dolmen, a grave? Just what *is* a canoe or a house? Tilley addressed directly these great questions of ontology. The basic answer is that *it depends* – on context, on connections and relationships, on dynamic processes of making, using, consuming, maintaining, curating, discarding. It depends on *experience*.

For Tilley metaphor is a structuring principle concerned with connection and affiliation that cuts across material form and signification – this might equal that. He placed this principle at the heart of his contribution to that subdisciplinary field of anthropological material culture studies that has become so associated with his academic home at University College London. This has been a major contribution to anthropology.

Much is to do with challenging the duality of mind and matter by exploring the contexts and relationships of things, what I have suggested are, to Tilley, elective affinities. This was the core of his phenomenology focused on the embodied materiality of experience in the flux of sensory, cognitive, evaluative engagements and *relationships* with things, and with any other elements in a phenomenal field.

And the materialities in his work can shine vibrantly, if not so much in the prose and photography of his writings, then in the extraordinary aura of the sites he studied and evoked. Certainly this was my experience of copresence with Chris in the land in those field outings of the 1980s described in my first commentary on his life work. I am nudged here into anecdote, which I suggest is a feature, if suppressed, of Tilley's ethnography. My memory throws up times spent with a fierce critic of Tilley's, Andrew Fleming. We spent a few afternoons in the 90s with David Austin, another vital presence-in-the-land, out in west Wales, in and around Tregaron and Cors Caron, its bog. I recall impressions, pre-reflective yes, distributed across walking pathways, slipping into chilly streams, railway tracks floated on peat, Andrew and David's noticings of ditches and leats, material palimpsests of entangled features, and Sunday lunches in the 13th century Talbot Hotel, with its elephant buried in the backyard.

Assemblages of experience and memory, presences and absences. One can truly appreciate the vitality of material presence, witnessing, dynamically, so much that is lost, absent. At least this is how I take Tilley's insights.

Design

I have never understood why Tilley's anthropology of material culture made no mention of design, as concept and praxis. This point is definitely one where we parted ways. Design – the envisioning, planning, making, of objects, systems, experiences, encompassing purpose and functionality, makers and users, aesthetics, technical and material considerations, and matters of realizing goals, of team building, community organization, project management. This is material culture!

There are several strands to my own adoption of a design-based outlook. I immersed myself in the world of studio pottery as part of my research into ancient ceramics. The craft/art/design nexus was central to my collaboration with those studio potters in the 80s and after and to the performance design of Brith Gof, the arts company with whom I worked from the early 90s. A move to Stanford in Silicon Valley brought an encounter with what gets called human-centered IT design thinking. I ran studio with some wonderful designers in our school of engineering as well as expanding the archaeological imagination into design consultancy for several large manufacturing corporations as well as the city and port of Rotterdam. This is modern material culture studies, as pursued, kind of, by some of Tilley's colleagues at UCL such as Danny Miller. Applied design archaeology. Most significant is the growth since the 90s of an explicit focus on experience: when asked what he does, David Kelley, founder member of design consultancy IDEO and colleague at Stanford, replies "I design experiences".

I find no indication that Chris showed any interest in such expertise. What reason was there for this missed opportunity, as I see it? Was Tilley concerned to "swim in the lane" of anthropology (and archaeology) and not stray? Did he not want to look closer to home at cases of industrial design? Was this too much of a distraction from the heathland?

Landscape

For me the biggest black hole in Tilley's garden is the core feature – the concept of landscape.

He upheld a clear definition of what he meant by landscape – basically human dwelling and embodied place-making. It seems that was enough, because I can find no inspection in his work of the genealogy and semantic range of the concept that

qualifies his narrow definition. For me such inspection is critical to maintaining the life and vitality of a concept, its valencies, inflections, affordances, affinities pertinent to particular local use and pragmatic mobilization.

Why did Tilley not unpack the associations of the concept of landscape with long histories of property ownership, with the environmental aesthetics of the picturesque and sublime, of rational improvement of agriculture, of shifts into rational modern extractive agribusiness? Human geographers and art historians have been spreading such critique of the concept of landscape for decades. In a world so troubled by the effects of centuries of application of an extractive and proprietorial disposition towards landscape, how can one adopt such a neutral definition?

Tilley has an article in Barbara Bender's edited *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives* (1993). Many of the contributions deal with a critique of the concept of landscape, though mostly in its cultural associations and not its association with certain configurations of political economy. Tilley presents his case for a phenomenology of megaliths and in so doing makes reference to modernist and contemporary artwork associated with land and environment (Hepworth and Moore to Smithson, Heizer, and Long). His purpose is not to question the concept of landscape, which most if not all of the artists were doing, but to assert that they too were like the people who built the megaliths – expressing a universal human concern with place-making. For Tilley, these artworks can help us achieve phenomenological insight into sculptures in the land.

Tilley worked with Bender and Sue Hamilton on *Stone Worlds: Narrative and Reflexivity in Landscape Archaeology* (2007), their fabulous and fascinating account of excavations at Leskernick on Bodmin Moor in south west England. They present diaries and team deliberation, poetry and experiments with photography, and there is discussion of arts-based approaches to the mediation of archaeological experiences of the prehistoric remains in the land. The project's topic that equates landscape with experiences of place-making is given context. I will have more to say about this remediation below. Here I note that focus remains on achieving phenomenological insight into experiences of engaging with prehistoric places. The experiments with wrapping stones Christo-like with painted cling film, or of flagging lines of sight, are not to question the concept of landscape, but to heighten material engagement.

I have spent much time studying antiquity. I might reflect upon the *diverse* experiences in Graeco-Roman antiquity which might be associated with Tilley's concept of landscape. The Roman *pagus*, the *chora* of the city states, Pindar's geopoetics, pastoral idylls of Hellenistic Alexandria, *cadastration*, slave *latifundia*, Horace's rural retreat, systems of surveyed roads, Pompeian wall painting, Virgil's farming manual in verse (*Georgics*), rural shrines, Hadrian's Wall and the *limes*, all convey engagements with land that are not at all reducible to the one-dimensional concept of landscape as dwelling and place-making.

Again, Tilley was well-informed and I take this as a deliberate decision on his part to plot a particular route through the complex concept field that includes landscape and its cognates. Observations such as these about antiquity seem not to have mattered to him. They are secondary manifestations of an existential and transcendental quality of human-being-in-the-world. As Tilley and Cameron-Daum wrote (2017, page 7):

“landscape provides, we argue, an existential ground for our embodied being”

I conclude that Tilley could ignore critique of the concept because he was pursuing a *transcendental* phenomenology of consciousness of experience, including emplacement – free of experiential content, pre-reflective, immediate. “We are in their footsteps.”

Perhaps I am unable to pull off the phenomenological *epoché* that would bracket off any considerations, assumptions, beliefs about the actual world (what we have inherited and been taught) to uncover the structures and essential features of conscious experience – how objects are experienced, the relationships between the experiencing subject and the experienced objects, and the intentional (directedness) nature of consciousness. Perhaps I am confusing what is experienced from how it is experienced.

Such questions and thoughts are, for me, distracting and misplaced. I don't want to achieve a phenomenological epoché. Why would I want to be an “insider” such as Tilley and Cameron-Daum aspire to be in the Devon heathlands? Insiders require others to be treated as outsiders. The concept of landscape is not neutral, nor

existential, nor transcendental, and I am far from being alone in arguing this. The concept field that includes landscape is a critical component of an exclusively proprietary view of land – “this land is my land, experienced by my own people, pictured in the ways we appreciate, not yours, except on my sufferance.” How do I know this? It is embedded in *my* experience of particular landscapes, experiences reported by many others, and not in a commitment to a transcendental and essential human concern with place-making and dwelling.

Yet Tilley and Cameron-Daum deny that this experience of mine can be authentic, primary, or immediate (2017, page 9):

“The landscape may be regarded in various ways as nature, habitat, artefact, system, a problem, as a source of wealth, as ideology, history and so on. Why people might describe it in these very different ways relates to their point of view and their interests and values, so inevitably the landscape seen from the ‘beholding eye’ means something radically different for a property developer, a local historian, an earth scientist, an artist and so on.”

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder! Who adjudicates any disagreement? Only the phenomenologists who are sufficiently sensitized to the existential grounds of human being to recognize reality? But they are not able to express or represent this reality *directly*, because words and images compromise direct experience of dwelling-in-the-land.

Chris’s MO was often to be blunt and combative. Let me follow suit, with a little humor.

I will be blunt. Tilley’s landscape is a zombie concept.

What is a zombie? The living dead, hanging on, refusing to pass on, taking living

form, but dead, and seeking out the living that it might consume our brains, thoughts, and turn us zombie too. The walking dead. Zombie concepts do the same – take from us the capacity to think fresh, vital, living thoughts, by propagating and infecting us with ideas that should have given up the ghost long ago.

With landscape restricted to existential experiences of dwelling and place-making we are actively prevented from asking and exploring awkward questions of who gets to own, use, dwell, and experience the land, and under what conditions.



Sampled landscape – mineral pigments from a colliery slag heap, Amelia Pit, Shankhouse, Northumberland. (The heap burned underground for decades – hence the reds through to white ash.) All traces of the colliery and mining village have been demolished and landscaped. There is nothing now to be seen.



Monument in a Landscape: Vanburgh's eighteenth-century Seaton Delaval Hall, intervisible with what was Amelia Pit. In the care of the National Trust. The house

was built for an admiral of the Royal Navy who had done well out of Empire. The Delaval family owned a lot of the land in this part of the north-east coal field and extracted as much industrial wealth from it as they could, while curating their landscaped estate.



Seaton Delaval Hall. John Piper 1941. In the Tate Gallery London.



Amelia Pit Shankhouse Northumberland c 1938. Hartley Main was the company that operated many of the collieries on the Delaval land and beyond.

Body

A team member of theater company Brith Gof was an extraordinary performer – transgender Dave/Lyn Levett who had cerebral palsy and limited control over their gestures and movements. I will never forget seeing them play the role, in a 1993 Brith Gof production, *Arturius Rex*, of King Arthur carried back mortally wounded from Camlann, the last battle, by two retainers. The stink of a last meal of sardines in a claustrophobic room of retreat. Their condition should, we might presume, have prevented intentional expression and communication. This was far from the case. Arthur, hero and monarch, compromised in his somatic expressive presence by wounds, by cerebral palsy? No – liberated!

Later in *Carrying Lyn* (2001) Brith Gof's Mike Pearson, Mike Brookes, Richard Morgan, and John Rowley carried Lyn Levett through the streets of Cardiff on the weekend of a Welsh rugby international – aggressive masculinity on show on the streets. Reactions and responses were taken up by photographer Paul Jeff through the polaroid instant back of his large format photojournalist's Speed Graphic

[Link]. Walking across Cardiff? In whose footsteps? Whose transcendental body-for-all-time?



Differently embodied – Carrying Lyn (through the streets of Cardiff) Brith Gof 2001.

In my research into the corporeality of the warrior male in antiquity, and in Mike Pearson's recapitulations of works by Antonin Artaud, we became fascinated with the disrupting concept of "body-without-organs". Questioning the concept of body as unified structure, we instead stripped it of its hierarchical organization of organs, rejecting the traditional interpretation of the body as a functional and structured entity, thinking, sensing, feeling. BwO – existing monstrously in a state of pure potentiality, devoid of imposed functions and roles, where no part has more significance or control over another. Pre-reflective yes, and fluid, like an egg, holding futurity. Distributed – to be yet enclosed and defined as an agent

of experience – not given, but futured.

Tilley's bodies are able-bodied and eternal, when none of us are, except transcendently. Dave/Lyn Levett burst open the body of shared experience in movement, gesture, expression, displacement, unexpected and yet recognisable, enigmatic and deeply touching. The concept of Bw0, growing out of Artaud's experiences of mental illness and mental health institutions, is an antidote to a spurious and repressive normality – this is what you existentially are and what you might experience.

I do so credit Chris for bringing focus on more-than-cognitive material engagement. Again, however, he seems to have wanted to stop short of the consequences of his premise, to stick with his transcendental phenomenology.

Performance

Tilley's bodies do move through the landscape, across and between, over and through its monuments. The moving body, animated in performance, the performative body is such a great feature of his phenomenology. In this regard he writes of kinaesthetics and rhythmanalysis.

And then again Tilley, to my frustration, stops short, shuts down any exploration, any experiment. He knew how much the development of the concept of performance owed to the anthropological studies of Victor Turner, Eugenio Barba, Erving Goffman, Richard Schechner, Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett. As well as a host of articulate performance practitioners.

Was his reticence to explore a matter of confidence? Perhaps a recognition that we are all limited in our capacities to act on what we know and believe, what we might want to achieve? Life is too short.

Perhaps he held an unshakable confidence that his phenomenology was the only method and that there was no need to argue the case, only assert it. He didn't need to debate concepts like landscape, or practices like performance, because they were, for him, secondary abstractions from immediate experience of things themselves.

Mediation and representation

How might one represent experience, given its pre-reflective character (according to the phenomenologists)? How might one document performance, kinaesthetically, in rhythmanalysis? Before and after event and engagement.

These are central questions of mediation, of translation, of metamorphosis, of metaphor in Tilley's phenomenology. Given what I have been arguing, one might easily anticipate what I am going to say next. These matters are secondary to Tilley and so he could ignore them.

The collaborative work *Stone Worlds* (2007), discussed above, does try out some tools and techniques for raising awareness of the ways one might engage with sites in the land. We hear conversations and see different kinds of engagement, not just walking, excavating, mapping, photographing, but also setting markers in the land, wrapping stones in painted plastic to reorient perception, using frames and grids not just for surface recording, but door frames set up vertically to facilitate viewshed analysis.

It is in Tilley's two books about pebble landscapes, results from fieldwork undertaken between 2008 and 2012, that we gain deepest insight into the primacy he gives to direct experience over media and representation.

In an *Anthropology of Landscape: the Extraordinary in the Ordinary* (2017), written with Kate Cameron-Daum, we are presented with an ethnography of stakeholder interests in this landscape, with interviews and surveys and some psychogeographical mapping representing a diversity of experiences. Again emphasis is placed on participant observation and reporting or witnessing, with stakeholder interests categorized as heathland managers, Royal Marines, environmentalists, quarry managers, cyclists, horse riders, walkers, artists, fishermen, model aircraft flyers (more figures in a landscape). And emphasis upon becoming an "insider" – Chris and Kate lived in the heathlands themselves for the duration of the research. The ethnographic accounts are of great interest, and we can engage with all manner of experiences of the heathlands.

The prose is academic reportage, and we can forgive this perhaps. The words of the ethnographic informants, and their mental maps, are lively and give good sense of different experiences of the heathland. Though I do bring to mind Alice Oswald's extraordinary poem *Dart* (2002):

This poem is made from the language of people who live and work on the Dart. Over the past two years I've been recording conversations with people who know the river. I've used these records as life-models from which to sketch out a series of characters – linking their voices into a sound-map of the river, a songline from the source to the sea. There are indications in the margin where one voice changes into another. These do not refer to real people or even fixed fictions. All voices should be read as the river's mutterings.

I truly like Tilley's take on pebbles, their vitality, valency, multiplicity. And in the *thousand* pages of the two books there is so little experiment, exploration, play with re-presentation.

Here is Tilley's definitive statement on representation. It comes from the book *Landscape in the Longue Durée: a History and Theory of Pebbles in a Pebbled Heathland Landscape* (2017 page 34):

A stress on materiality ... insists that what we need to study is the real rather than representations of the real. What this means is a return to the things themselves, in the case of this book pebbles in a pebbled landscape. We do not base our knowledge on their pre-existing representation in a field of discourse constituted by the abstractions of texts, maps, photographs, plans, GIS analyses and so forth. In

this respect synthetic archaeological texts and indeed a great body of the research represented in the Annales school are built solely on representations of representations, providing only a simulacrum of the real, or in other words a copy of a copy of something that never really existed in the first place.

On these terms all of his books are abstractions from what really and literally matters. Am I wrong in finding this Platonic elitism profoundly ironic? A *thousand* pages to witness the ineffable, inexpressible reality of a pebblebed landscape beyond representation?



Landscape in the Longue Durée

A History and
Theory of Pebbles
in a Pebbled
Heathland Landscape

Christopher Tilley

UCLPRESS

Tilley rolls out that slogan from phenomenologist Edmund Husserl – “return to the things themselves”. Can a media communication event not be a real material thing? What of the thousand pages of the account of pebbles? What of non-representational mediation, such as performative and eidetic statements that effect change and perform work-in-the-world rather than just signify, communicate or represent? Plans and models enable the building of aircraft and bridges. Data centers consume 3% of global energy production, and this is set to rise to 6% by 2026. What of such materialities of communication and media that are explored in media ecology? These are hardly matters secondary to real experience “of the things themselves”. All these questions beg for approaches that do not uphold a separation of the real and the represented.

Temporality

Re-presentation involves temporal shifts. In the actuality of our archaeology, many temporalities mingle. Tilley appropriately acknowledges the fluid and multiple temporalities of archaeological engagements with ruins, remains, traces in the land (this is very evident in his books about the pebblebed heathlands). There are percolations, currents and eddies, synchronicities, displacements, losses and recoveries, erosions and durabilities. The multiplicity of archaeological temporality was of key concern to us when we were writing together in the 80s, and it is such a defining feature, surely, of engagement with landscape.

Is it that emphasis upon immediate presence that brings Tilley to curtail the intermingling, the palimpsests, by separating them out analytically, and chronologically? Royal Marines crawl across the pebbles of a deep-time geological substrate, while archaeologists pass them by on the way to a prehistoric monument. He regulates the temporal fluidity of such engagements in a landscape to suit his mediation, the presentation of a project in a book – most, if not all of his narrative is chronologically ordered according to conventional archaeological periodization. He doesn't follow one's typical experience of landscape as multitemporal, all times commingling. He sorts out messy time, just as the different activities of people on the heathland are categorized neatly – horse riders, bicyclists, artists

There's nothing wrong with this, and I could say the same of most of Tilley's navigation of the semantic field that I have just mapped. I am frustrated that he

could be so dogmatic and sometimes unreflective in his choice of clean and clear route from material trace through human experience to matters of representation and embodied perception. Nevertheless there are so few archaeologists and anthropologists who have taken up such a range of concepts in a toolkit for working with the reconstruction and actuality of the past. He was committed enough to his anthropological project to make accountable choices, and defend them.

And at the heart was an undeniable humanism. I'll turn to this in my final commentary.