Research Article

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Worlding Excavation Practices

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Abstract: This paper seeks to do justice to the often complex, messy, and sometimes ambiguous meaning making practices of archaeological field work. Taking recent adoptions of assemblage theory and sensory studies in archaeology as an angle of arrival, I contribute here to discussions on self-reflective and interpretive archaeology. Drawing on empirical encounters with troweling and backfilling at the Ardnamurchan Transitions Project in western Scotland, I describe the production of archaeological knowledge in terms of storying: the coming into existence of an earthly archaeological world through sensory correspondences. I show how storying generates meaning and knowledge through correspondences of more proximate with more distant excavation practices and interplays between them. Furthermore, I propose that through storying, archaeological meaning making as well as knowledge production can be understood as worlding: the generation of sustained remembrances of earthly events with lively corresponding materials.

Keywords: storying, the senses, correspondence, worlding, assemblage

1 Assemblies of Placed Senses at Ardnamurchan Transitions Project

At the Ardnamurchan Transitions Project (ATP), in the Swordle Bay area of Scotland, archaeologists dig into differently emplaced trenches, each with distinctly different “gradients, valences, moods, sensations, tempos, elements, and life spans” (Stewart, 2010, p. 342). I joined the excavation in the summer of 2014 as part of my doctoral research at the University of Leicester in the UK (Figure 1). Going for their fourteenth year in 2019, the remote excavation is an event of archaeological activity in a world inhabited by plants, animals, and the occasional hiker, next to, of course, the presence of geological and biological forces working their relatively slow but steady effect on the local earth over the centuries. At Ardnamurchan, archaeologists researching long-term social change on the peninsula are concerned with material identities and assemblages of places and persons across time (Harris et al., 2017). Here, noteworthy archaeological arrangements include remains of the Neolithic, Vikings, as well as medieval farming practices. The several trenches visible in Figure 1 have been marked for further excavation this year, based on experiences and imaginings from previous years, and assisted by techniques like geophysical surveys showing potential interesting excavation spots. As Harris, Cobb, Gray, and Richardson, (2014, p. 7) show, these assemblages of older times are not the archaeological record (or vice versa), but are rather themselves interpreted and given meaning during and after the excavation – and fed by data recorded through photography, scale drawing, written records, the sampling of soil, and other techniques and technologies.

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Figure 1: Ardnamurchan Transition Project, the excavation in the 2014 season.

The archaeological record itself has been subjected to much critical discussion. In more conventional terms, the record entails the documenting of the interplay between the materiality of the site and interpretations by archaeologists in the guise of context sheets, which are to varying degrees standardized. Critical discussions of the record by, e.g., Yarrow (2008), Ingold (2007) and Edgeworth (2012), question practices of interpreting and representing the material world and culture through the use of these documents, which can be themselves considered artefacts framing and narrowing what is meaningful and objective, while constituting the archaeologist as subjective agent. Drawing on Ingold's (2018) more recent work, I employ the term archaeological record as rendering diversifying correspondences between sensorial meaning making and knowledge production from the field. As I participated and observed alongside archaeologists at ATP, I am not so much concerned with institutionalized context sheets and their categorical inclusions and exclusions for structuring possible and impossible interpretations. I instead take the position that archaeological practices themselves are in ethnographic sense worth, including as a kind of process of recording or inscribing, and that record includes meaning making and worlding.

During my research I gathered data on how archaeologists produce knowledge. I followed encounters with archaeologists and distinct excavation practices in their environments. I will limit myself to two specific encounters in this paper: encounters with troweling practices, and encounters with the practice of backfilling. Taking these encounters for anthropologically significant events, I experienced the flow and tempo of the field site, including the many interruptions which organize that flow, as very significant. Atmospheric – and archaeological – trenches often switch between directly observable materials and more opaque but potentially interesting stuff in the ground, which produce many kinds of different worlds and beings with whatever makes up the life of the excavation. The material world and the potential of the different worlds inside the ground are felt and sensed: anticipation, hope, disappointment, and confusion sometimes. These sensory affects interrupted the flows of thought and stitched together many different archaeological techniques like troweling, photographing, discussing, mapping, and cleaning, among others. The stitching together of these social and technical interruptions and the emerging stories of reasons, concerns, and cares were formative for the flow of the manual and intellectual labor on the site and allowed for a kind of continuity of the production of archaeological knowledge – and making these worlds. This interrupted and fractal continuity over time gathered all these “gradients, valences, moods, sensations, tempos, elements, and life spans” (Stewart, 2010, p. 342) on the field site in assemblages of particular finds,

records, and practices, which came together into the active worlding of the ATP in the summer of 2014. These interruptions and this fractal continuity to the work were essential to the continuation of the excavation and to get a measure of the events on the field site, as I have discussed elsewhere (Pijpers, 2020). Interruptions of demarcated areas of the field site, in the sense of switches between outsider and insider perspectives, happen all the time during fieldwork (field notes H12). One archaeologist crouches down and employs her trowel to clean an area for a certain amount of time, only to get up then to ‘take a look’ at what she has just done. This might be followed by some more cleaning of the excavated trench in close quarters, and consequently, a photograph is taken for the record. Or, at other times, an area is mapped by hand and pencil, supported by a frame put on top of the trench and a literal top-down perspective. Meanwhile, a group of other archaeologists – seniors, juniors, academically affiliated or not – gather around to discuss preliminary findings of the trench and what they may mean. Here, the bodily sensorium functions not only as an agent registering empirical data, but is also inclusive of a reach toward sense-making of the worlds it is part of (Myers, 2015, p. 21).

This worlding process of sense-making is built by a sensorial and embodied flow of impressions and data: archaeologists switched between touching the soil from up close with their hands or with a trowel; to smelling the soil and sometimes even tasting it; to taking a step back and looking at a particular trench in a particular state; and to organizing and arranging these different sensorial experiences into a somewhat coherent stream of thought. Even this latter part of organizing experiences and recording data was sensorial, as the assembling of a world with meaning and knowledge. Moreover, geophysical analyses and environmental surveys were employed to scan for future potential excavation sites (Harris et al., 2014, p. 4). These techniques embody a distinct sensoriality, as devices view and touch on environments in ways that co-organize and partially assemble archaeological knowledge, in turn making possible other ways to continue excavating parts of Ardnamurchan. I want to explore here how bodily relationships of proximity and distance with the trench in a sensorial sense inform the meaning of producing archaeological knowledge. I am interested in how the very different and multiple sensorial distributions of being inside the trench, and outside of it, correspond to one another and contribute to the worlding of a field site in a non-dualistic manner. I use Ingold’s (2018) notion of “correspondences” between sensorial proximity and distance to analyze both troweling practices and the practice of backfilling in this paper.

In this paper, I use both assemblage theory and sensory studies to venture in a slightly different direction, connecting them in a self-reflective way to both archaeologists’ experiences and my own experiences of proximity and distance during my fieldwork at the ATP in Western Scotland. Interplays of sensory correspondences with proximity and distance do not only occur in field work practices. On a theoretical level, assemblage theory and sensory studies are also in correspondence with each other. Drawing on the Ingold (2018), Stewart (2010), as well as Haraway (2016), I will show how these correspondences of earthly events enrich the making of meaning and production of knowledge through the worlding of Ardnamurchan.

2 STS, Sensory Studies, and Assemblage Thinking

In view of the previous section, my angle of arrival at archaeological practice and its shifting grounds is as a slight outsider. Though I did my anthropological fieldwork with archaeologists, I am not formally trained in the profession of archaeology nor anthropology. Instead, I enter into archaeology from the interdisciplinary field of Science and Technology Studies. As a well-known field in archaeological theory by now, STS studies the nearly endless varieties in which science and technology are being done, as these varieties attend to how imaginings and experiences form and coalesce into lived worlds (Felt, Fouché, Miller, & Smith-Doerr, 2017). From its multiple and hybrid perspectives, STS has had fascinating correspondences with archaeology, for instance with symmetrical archaeology, as well as studies on the ontology of things and objects, and their relations to humans and knowledge (e.g., Hicks, 2016; Knappett & Malafouris, 2008; Olsen, Shanks, Webmoor, & Witmore, 2012; Webmoor, 2013; and for a more complete overview: Hodder & Lucas, 2017). I will continue this move of thinking archaeology alongside STS, while affirming that this entanglement is emplaced on the shifting grounds to which this special issue is dedicated. With regard to the

correspondences between archaeology and STS, two relatively familiar linkages between the fields stand out as promising for such continued thinking, and in particular for grasping the relation between knowledge making and world-building in archaeological practice: assemblage theory and sensory studies.

Hamilakis (2017) has already crafted a strong link between sensoriality and assemblage thinking, by providing a rendition on how sensoriality enriches contemporary assemblages of historical events; in this case, communal eating and feasting events. Different from Hamilakis's (2017) work, which renders configurations of sensorial and temporal practices, I take the sensorial and the assemblage here as an occasion and interpretative moment of crafting a similar connection for the labor of archaeologists themselves during their fieldwork at ATP.

3 Assemblages as Correspondences of Particulars

Within interpretive archaeological theory, the discussion on arrangement of (past) things, persons, affects, and kinds – and therefore the organization of the archaeological record and what is included in it and excluded from it, gains renewed vigor in archaeology's adoption of assemblage theory. The roots of assemblage thinking lie in the coining of *assemblage* as a concept by Deleuze and Guattari (1988) in their post-structural philosophy. Their philosophy of assemblage and other related concepts have been amply analyzed and discussed elsewhere (see for instance Buchanan, 2015; DeLanda, 2006; Ingold, 2018; and adopted into Science and Technology Studies by, e.g., Law, 2004). Specifically for archaeology, Jervis (2019) analyzes the potential of assemblage thinking both for theory and practice. Jervis (2019, pp. 161–162) shows how assemblage theory can generate friction which disrupts dominant frameworks and provides alternatives in how archaeologists think about time, materiality, causality, and the fragmentation of history. In her book review on Jervis (2019), Beck (2020, p. 177) notes that assemblage theory “provides a framework for articulating the complexity and diversity of a studied phenomenon that goes beyond modern dichotomous thinking through a description of the ever relational and processual character of the phenomenon”. Thinking with assemblages does at least two things: it provides a framework which allows for the richness and specificity of, e.g., a field site and its environment to be increasingly included in what is understood as archaeology, and it critiques the rigidity of categorical perspectives and fixed methods on how to produce archaeological knowledge. I note here that, in employing the concept of assemblage, I am not concerned with adherence to its strict philosophical definitions only. In line with Hamilakis (2017, p. 180), I utilize a pincers move in which assemblage theory as digested by the above-mentioned authors meets the experimentality and empirical messiness of the field site.

I then gravitate to the critical reconceptualization of assemblage thinking by Ingold (2018). In his paper, he questions how parts of the assemblages relate to and associate with one another within this one world. He notes that assemblage theory is mostly (and wrongly) inclined to think, in my words, life and its organizations and fields as plateaus on which a variety of life exists and is articulated. The crux is, however, according to Ingold, that assemblage theory in this way does not at all describe how life and its relations happen for those who are in the midst of things, which includes all life and relations. I find it methodologically and interpretively crucial to move alongside archaeologists during this process in their field practices to do justice to life on a field site. With Ingold (2018), I understand assemblage as a way to think corresponding-with as central to the question of how the archaeological record can do more justice to the complexity of fieldwork and their environments. I focus on the interesting and innovative ways in which both assemblage thinking and sensory studies can provoke descriptive and interpretive archaeology to do more than provide a rather flat aggregate of things, events, and effects. The kind of answers given to such a question should, according to Ingold (2018) and Buchanan (2015)'s take on assemblage theory, not close down the question as being solved, but instead open the question up and diversify its potential answers.

In line with other recent authors on assemblage theory, assemblage theory thought in this way embodies a critical, analytical, and interpretative potential to address problems and find new ways of

understanding them, and this potential becomes even more vital by thinking it alongside sensoriality, as this joining provides a foundation for thinking the worlding of the excavation.

4 Mingling and Mangling the Senses

However, sensoriality itself, and in particular the legacy of sensory studies in phenomenology, comes with its own problem of dichotomous thinking. In his contribution to the Routledge Handbook of Sensory Archaeology, Tilley (2019, p. 76) describes the fleshy and embodied character of human sensory perception. Human bodies and perception form an integrated whole, both regarding the ways of knowing from the midst of things in the world at large, as well as regarding the outcomes of any kind of research. He notes that human senses are characteristically inseparable and even indistinguishable in the immediateness of bodily relationality with the world (2019, p. 77). My own research is closely related to Tilley's and I agree that it is necessary for archaeology to not only include recording the sensory dimension (2019, p. 80) of ancient bodily remains, but also of the excavators and how they relate to the field site (e.g., Yarrow, 2008), as inclusion of sensory experiences leads to a much richer account of the material reality of field work. Tilley's paper includes beautiful quotations, data, and descriptions regarding the sensory experiences of excavators on pebbles. These carnal sensory experiences include touch, sight, and smell. Reading these accounts on how archaeologists curse these tiny pebbles, as they are hard to walk on, and how they glistens and are incredibly rich in color when wet, incorporates a sense of aliveness to archaeological knowledge production (Tilley, 2019, p. 88). Moreover, such storytelling on the sensorial can translate this aliveness from the field into the training of archaeologists, who deserve to know and hear about this intimate dimension of archaeology in their education early on and upfront.

Tilley (2019, pp. 76–77) addresses Merleau-Ponty's (1994) phenomenology, among others (e.g., Classen, 2005), to theoretically frame his research. He notes two odd analytical and methodological positions, which he distances himself from. The first position he problematizes is that the senses are often isolated from each other in literature on the senses, while in human experiences the senses cannot in fact be isolated. In daily life, human bodies are very much unable to separate taste from smell from sight from hearing in experiences. That is why, generally, sensory research talks about the human sensorium or the sensible, in which senses are already mingled. The senses mingle and mix intimately, both throughout archaeological field practices and interpretative events occurring both during and after the fact.

It is for this reason that I find it astonishing that Tilley (2019, p. 77), while taking a stance in favor of the inseparability of the senses, ends up stating in the very same paragraph: "For purely analytical purposes I discuss the different senses below individually as a means to structure the discussions, but this needs to be understood in the context of these all being experienced simultaneously and at the same time." This is exactly, I argue, the problem Tilley attempts to counteract, but instead ends up reproducing. In Tilley's defense, this problem is hard to address in language. Hamilakis (2013, p. 17) insightfully notes that archaeology in modern times works toward being a pristine and finite science, far removed from sensorial complexities and the messy and mingled multiplicities of sensorial relationality. This problematic relationship is defined by Serres (Serres & Latour, 1995, pp. 131–132; see also Howes & Classen, 2014, p. 9) in his conversation with Bruno Latour as the phenomenological problem of defining sensation always in terms of language and not in terms of sensation first. Serres (Serres & Latour, 1995, p. 132) elaborate on this critical notion that the phenomenological project does not pertain to anything happening in the outside world. Applied to archaeology, phenomenology is a discipline which purifies the messiness of excavations by granting ontological primacy to the recording of separate sensations on context sheets. He describes the phenomenological project as a philosophy of modern urban thinkers locked in their ivory towers, completely out of touch with the outside world of multi-sensory perception and experience (Serres & Latour, 1995, p. 132). Archaeology (or field archaeology) can make sensation and experience matter, as I know that being immersed in a field site for many days is an unescapable confrontation with one's body and sensorium, not in the least because of the frustration of the many Scottish midges trying to get into clothes. My

point here is not that we should move towards a totalitarian notion of sensorial experience, but rather that ways of sensory correspondences between particulars in the field should be sought after and constructed. Language has a role to play in this correspondence, but not in categorizing and valuing the senses prior to acts of sensing.

Next to this first problem of the separation of the senses in language, Tilley (2019, p. 77) problematizes a second position. He notes that much research on the senses, and notably the intellectual historian Jay's (1993) work, suffer from dangerously abstracting the senses by imbedding them in a critique of culture. Jay's nearly 600 pages long monograph is a cultural critique on the rise and fall of primacy of vision throughout Western European philosophy and history. Through ten chapters, he moves from vision in Plato, to Enlightenment thinking, surrealism, phenomenology, and existentialism, to film studies and contemporary feminist thought and ethics, among others. I find the connection between vision, the Enlightenment, and contemporary distancing practices of science related to the problematic separation of the senses particularly interesting to Jay's (1993, p. 22) thought, as he finds in the privileging of sight a desire for clarity and certainty over doubt or other sense like touch. However, Tilley (2019, p. 77) reduces this historical work by invoking a false dichotomy between lived experience on the one hand, and deadened and simplified historical abstraction on the other hand.

I problematize the knowledge claim made by Tilley (2019) here. The human multi-sensorium is neither a historically neutral nor a socially and politically neutral phenomenon. Nor is the comingling of the senses simply pragmatically and experientially apparent and out of scope of a cultural critique. Rather, I pose it differently: phenomenology's interest in the senses for the sake of language is itself part of what philosopher Rancière (2004) calls the distribution of the sensible. The distribution of the sensible refers to, in short, whatever is made sensible or sayable within a community with regard to the world. Scholar of science Myers (2015, p. 21) concurs as she notes that these "regimes of the sensible" determine both what the human sensorium can and cannot perceive and have a strong normalizing effect on these sensory possibilities and impossibilities. In other words, the rules of engagement of what bodies can and cannot perceive become itself imperceptible. As such, what is possible to sense, *and* what is possible to record in language or otherwise, is a distinct matter of social and political regimes with their own histories (see e.g., Wylie, 2002 for a study on values, ideals, and interests in archaeological knowing).

While the separation of the senses Tilley (2019) seeks to counter is definitely a problem for the diversification of a more ethnographic rendering of what and how archaeologists sense during their field work and the meaning of this for the record, he seems to uphold the division between the concrete and multisensorial world of field work, *vis-à-vis* a dangerous vision of academic abstraction. As Myers (2015) shows in her work, scientists (including archaeologists) have always been concerned with being deeply attentive and articulate about how to sensorially render their objects of study. How then, can we work towards a distribution of the sensible for the archaeological record, which is inclusive of the comingling of the sensorial experiences of archaeologists as a historical, social, and political endeavor? This question runs parallel with, and is intimately related to, the question I posed earlier in this paper on assemblage theory as adopted from Ingold (2018), e.g., how to think of assemblage theory as a theory of correspondences between its particulars, alongside sensory studies as itself a social and political theory on sensory correspondences? I propose that these questions can be addressed through the way of storying and storytelling, as methodological dimensions of worlding. The richness and meaning Serres (1985, p. 152), for instance, evokes through his text is an example of storied correspondences with sensoriality.

5 Worlding with Trowels

Drawing on my field notes, I attempt here to produce an analysis of sensory correspondence and storying-worlding, incorporating the ATP. Even though the season just started when I arrived, the project had been going on for close to a decade, and as such had a history of its own, which I dropped right into. After arriving and working the very first days with archaeologists at ATP, I was invited to join in with a borrowed

trowel. Before this moment, for the first days, I kept myself to interviewing and asking questions, roaming around the different trenches to get a sense of the project. These days were spent looking at how archaeologists touch stuff, talking about epistemological concerns, and thinking about the relationality and the sensorium in relation to archaeological knowledge production. While troweling, however, I became part of the fieldwork in a different manner: I participated with more direct influence on the trench I was working in, and I started to see the trench in a more molecular way: there were small uneven patches of soil between the rough stones; incredibly tough roots made it virtually impossible to move fast and had to be given proper attention almost individually – insofar as roots can be said to be individual; and the soil's distinctions in color were plentiful, but also incredibly hard to distinguish with my untrained hands and eyes. Some areas were elevated and in different gradients of gray, others deeper and a darker shade of brown. I moved across the field site with speculative touch, with no indication from the site if what I was doing was not overly destructive. While troweling myself, and wondering how to be 'like' an archaeologist, I repeatedly asked myself in a somewhat anxious fashion: What am I doing? And what should I do? How deep should one remove soil when cleaning the trench? And how does one measure this, while in the act of troweling? Jim, a senior archaeologist at ATP, showed me how to use his trowel and gave me some advice. I was instructed to work from the known to the unknown, layer by layer, and lay the context bare without disturbing the stratigraphy too much.

How to hold a trowel, and figure out which side goes into the soil, does not require much sense. The use of the trowel-tool is itself blatantly low-tech and obvious. To embody the trowel, however, as an extension of the body's sensorium is a distinctly different matter. The experience of 'roaming about' from a more distanced point of view when I just arrived stands in contrast with the immersion of the troweling practice, and the distinctly different register of the senses that goes with this intimacy. This is a move from a grander immersion in the diversifying landscape-esque environment of the field site to a grittier and more close-up encounter with stones, roots, and soil. By relating to the field site in a more proximate way, I was entering into correspondence with a part of a site, which could not respond in language. The soil will not answer fast and categorical questions on how to trowel, because it can only do so through a slow and patient relating, which becomes apparent by means of a sensory correspondence with roughness and unevenness in the trench. Doing archaeology this way is about what happens outside of the boundaries of stratified archaeological theory, when history lets go, and the dense materiality of a place intervenes instead. Doing justice to this process of sensory assembly, and putting oneself alongside that world, means that history as it is known fades partially into the background. Learning archaeology seems to happen inside worlds of trenches, learning the practice alongside other archaeologists, and composite societies of soil. Though I worked alongside them as well, the conjoining of my fieldwork with the fieldwork of the archaeologists culminated in an unguided experience of my troweling. Skill differences and different sensitivities diversify the assembly and worlding of the site.

Archaeologist Mark provides an apt example of this diversification. He regularly works with local community volunteer groups, who are invited to work on a field site close to their homes. These community groups are part of Archaeology Scotland's Adopt-a-Monument scheme (Richardson, 2011). Providing support and training from experienced archaeologists from Scotland's heritage organization, local diggers are invited to take care for their local archaeological sites and monuments. They are more proximate with the environment they inhabit and know more about the local history than many professional and university-trained archaeologists, who are temporary visitors even when returning to an excavation over the years. Saliently, Mark argued that there are a higher proportion of tactile diggers in the community groups, compared to university students. He explained that these community groups seem to feel and hear the changes more quickly, as opposed to university-trained students, who are often better seers. Often Mark has to explain to community archaeologists that there is something to see at all, whereas they are able to distinguish areas of soil with their hands in close proximity to the soil. The social distinction between community archaeologists and trained archaeologists signifies differences in way of sensory dispositions, but also in relations of proximity and distance to the trenches.

There is a process of diversification here also in terms of how knowledge is produced, and storying is being done with regard to what is possible for bodies to sense. This difference in sensory dispositions

suggests contrasting ways of storytelling and meaning making. The volunteers here seem at an advantage because of their close relation to the heritage site and incorporate local storied history through the possibility of adopting part of the site. Following the account given by Mark, these excavators embody the sense of touch, being in touch with the field site as a place. They follow and build on their curiosity to learn something about the world they are part of and desire to intimately sense their environment (field notes B2). In contrast stands meaning making by sight as primarily employed by the student archaeologists, which focuses on a desire for certainty in embodied understanding, in efforts to make clear what is going on in a trench, which is supported by literature on the history of the senses and the predominance of sight in modern times (e.g., Jay, 1993). The matter of intuitive work on site by touch through trowel, which I have seen Mark doing and I hear community diggers embody as well, is distinctly different from intellectual knowledge, which students draw on when joining an excavation.

This distinction between tactile community diggers and vision-oriented university students, however, has limited explanatory potential and is somewhat ambiguous. Rather than opposites, these are contrasting ways of storying. In a storying process, the senses feature as a continuum, in which touch and sight diversify meaning and knowledge, but nevertheless remain part of the human sensorium and experiential possibility. I propose that this storying process is embodied by Mark and his colleagues and their commitment to going to Ardnamurchan for many seasons. They follow encounters in the guise of theoretical and empirical questions and finds, crafting the relation between them and this part of Ardnamurchan as a specific place. Their recurring visits to the field site over many seasons establish and build on their sensorial distributions (Rancire, 2004), meaning that they form connections and relations over the years beyond contradictory notions between the senses. In other words, taking archaeology as a world-building practice establishes a continuous hold on an excavation and include archaeologists as well as the environment in their worlding. Through their practices, which are organized and codified in established discourses of what should be done in particular cases (e.g., Renfrew & Bahn, 2005), their sensorium opens up to the worlding of the excavation. Their world-building relates to the outcomes of the involvement with the process of the excavation, after a dedicated following of the material culture of the societies involved. Worlding provides an opening, and not a determined closure, of questions about history.

I suggest, moreover, that sensory dimensions of proximity and distance to the trenches through troweling and more distanced vision have a distinct epistemological character. I observed that sensorial proximity and distance permeate archaeological practices of knowledge production, and not only on the field site. After the digging season, archaeologists return to their places of residence and employment. They bring with them not only the finds, samples, and artefacts they collected from site for further analysis in laboratories, but also a sensorial register of experiences, which keeps the site very much alive, but in more places more distant to the site. They plan future visits and review the previous ones; analyze their thoughts and experiences and discuss them; and are in real ways excited to return. For instance, in email correspondence with archaeologist John, he sends me the following: “All ok here, and we will be back in Ardnamurchan (fingers crossed!) in the summer. 2020 is the first year I haven’t been there at least once since 2005!” (personal e-mail correspondence, 24 November 2020). Due to the Covid-19 crisis, it was not possible to visit the site in 2020, and this email shows the continuous desire to ‘be there’ in a very anthropological sense. The forced distance to Ardnamurchan created by the pandemic, and so much in contrast with a sensorial proximity of touching and troweling the soil, adds to the storying of the project and the worlding of Ardnamurchan. And, I argue, this forced distance cannot be seen separately from the archaeological knowledge that is produced, if in first instance only because of the change of plans and possibilities of revisiting the site.

6 Proximity and Distance Through Backfilling

A different crucial dimension to these distant and proximate sensory correspondences is found in the practice of backfilling. Backfilling is the refilling of an excavated trench at the end of the excavation.

Figure 2: The backfilling process.

The excavated mound is covered first, as shown in Figure 2, by black plastic sheets which serve as a barrier to keep the state of the mound as pristine as possible (Figure 2). The plastic also serves as a marker of sorts. Like a bookmark, it features as a physical reminder of the progression of the excavation for future digging seasons. After the plastic has been put in place, turf is placed on top. This turf has been removed from the mound in the beginning of the excavation, stored in a shed, and is returned at the end. In the case of ATP, both the removal of the turf and the returning of it are done by hand, shovels, buckets, and wheelbarrows, as the site is too remote for any machine diggers to reach. This means demanding physical labor for the archaeologists, who have to lay bare the site before beginning the interpretive part of their work and cover it up at the end.

By contrast, shows a trench excavated and backfilled a year earlier, and nature's reclaiming of the mound, as the turf has been regrowing and covering more and more of it (Figure 3). Following Latour's (1993) analysis of modern science, I might explain the practice of backfilling as a separation of the natural and the social. Following this explanation, the black plastic indicates a layer of separation between what archaeologists are interested in, e.g., the historical remains of people and their practices, and the natural growth of plants, movement of animals, and effects of water, and other biological and chemical processes. This way, the excavation remains undisturbed underneath the turf, soil, and plastic in the absence of archaeologists, and the site is somewhat safeguarded, and progress marked, until the possible return of the archaeologists in the next season. The regrowing trench shows that the growth of grasses and roots is temporarily interrupted by the excavation practice and continues when the site is left after the excavation season.

The practice of backfilling tells its own story, showing archaeologists very much engaged with both the well-being of their work and the continuity of the excavation as a landscape (see also Edgeworth, 2016). Both the practice of unearthing the site and backfilling it are the most labor-intensive and cooperative of their time at the site. During the backfilling practice, archaeologists all around me were occupied with this collective practice of backfilling, and the site was buzzing with us moving around with buckets of soil and

Figure 3: A backfilled trench from the previous season, regrowing.

turf. Gone were the times that archaeologists spread out and focused on their own smaller or larger tasks and trenches. The process of backfilling creates a more integrated site-wide machine, and a comparison to the collective movement of ants crossed my mind at more than one point. This was not a time for discussion and interpretation, and I also joined in the manual labor. In other words, there was a call for less methodological participant observation, and more physical doing. We became differently immersed into the field. From operating the wheelbarrow to bring turf back to the site from the shed, while crossing the fluctuating elevation of the terrain, to being a link in the chain and returning the turf to the soil, there was little time for thought. Steering a full wheelbarrow in particular was quite exciting, as the muddy slopes and elevated terrain required a certain agility and maneuverability, in order not to end up in the thick vegetation. The playful and exciting character of this practice should be emphasized, even though it was also physically very demanding work, especially when contrasted by a differently invested academic inquiry. Mark's story on the difference between community volunteer diggers and student archaeologists, with its concerns with recording and the creation of academic knowledge, fades into the background and knowing becomes a matter of proximate sensing by physical doing and moving. During the backfilling, I felt most in touch with the site and other archaeologists, not in terms of the continuity of the history of the site, but rather in relation to the continuity of the excavation as an environment.

The practice of backfilling signals the ending to the excavation season and establishes a different sensory relationship of proximity and distance to the site. Archaeologists take a step back with regard to the intimacy of excavating particular trenches, and their physical closeness to see, feel, understand, and interpret dissipates in favor of organizing the remains of the environment. There is an ambiguity here too, as contrary to the proximity of immersion in a trench, while the landscape itself becomes more apparent and proximate, the mound becomes more distanced. This ambiguity is also there when encountering the backfilled trench in Figure 3. As I was not present during the previous season, when this site was excavated, I could only see and cross over the area and speculate on what had happened there, and how the busy backfilling process the year before would have been like. The separation in time finds its place in the sensory distance from this particular mound. Archaeologically, the regrowing trench has become inaccessible, even though the black

plastic sheet is still present. But as this trench was not a part of the excavation plan for this year, the plastic sheet did not function as a marker, but instead the covered mound was a historical artefact of its own. In this sense, the mound became a more autonomous monument, historical in its own right as it reminded those present of the previous season. Even though its history at the site is archaeologically uninteresting at the moment, it does serve as a monument to a social archaeological activity of sorts.

This autonomy of the regrowing trench is surely mediated by research plans and other documents leading to the decision not to continue excavating it in the current season. However, from the midst of things on site, the senses tell a story which makes a different sort of world. Contrasting the backfilling process of Figure 2, the trench in Figure 3 corresponds from a much larger distance. In order to make this trench more proximate and include it in the storying archaeology being done here, it would be necessary to follow the interpretation of context sheets from previous season. From a Science and Technology Studies perspective, following the documents in this sense is a very feasible research method. Documents are artefacts too and inseparable from the practices that produce them (Shankar, Hakken, & Østerlund, 2017). What I want to stress here, however, is the switch of proximate and distanced sensory dispositions both for knowledge production and meaning making of these two different trenches. The one trench in the process of backfilling (Figure 2) is buzzing with aliveness in a very proximate sense. Ambivalently, this proximity is strikingly different from troweling practices, in which archaeologists crouching over their work are much more molecularly in touch with the trench. Contrastingly, the sensory proximity of backfilling highlights the larger environment of the season's excavation. And the regrowing trench in turn is an artefact, which makes it (and Ardnamurchan by extension) more proximate for readers in different areas of the world through a variety of translations by, e.g., context sheets, even as it turns more distant for the archaeologists at Ardnamurchan. I do not suggest here a relativist position, i.e., that sensory proximity and distance are all relative compared to the practice looked at, as this is a too simplistic vision on how knowledge and meaning are produced. I rather argue that proximity and distance in sensorial sense rearrange materials, tell diversifying stories, and add not only to an archaeology of ancient times, but also to the worlding of archaeological practices themselves.

7 Discussion: Sensory Storying in Loopy Practices of Worlding

Ingold's (2018) notion of correspondences between particulars addresses the material connections between different practices. Both the backfilling practice and the troweling practices enter into a sensory correspondence from the midst of things. This correspondence here is not just between the archaeologists, the trenches, the excavated mound, the black plastic, and the turf. It is also a set of diversifying correspondences storying lived time, including the lived time of archaeologists during field work. The notion of storying invokes unfixed and unfinished relations and allows me to emphasize the fluidity of sensory dispositions – from proximate, more granular, and molecular encounters with particular materials in a trench, to interpreting by means of more distanced sight and discussions of context, to the end of a particular season through backfilling as its own practice of proximate and distanced meaning making and knowledge production. Thinking with sensorial storying, moreover, embeds these particular practices of troweling and backfilling with other archaeological practices not addressed in this paper. I have written before on the practice of cross-sectioning, the interruptions of a rodent furrow, and the significance of measuring a trench by means of touch (Pijpers, 2020). These differentiate sensory storying and correspond with sensorial dispositions of proximity and distance to materials and material culture. Correspondences in this sense are gatherings affecting the inner lives of those gathered within, which those affected carry with them and reinterpret during the course of the excavation, and afterwards and outwards. As such, the correspondences told in this paper are partial and open connections (see also Strathern, 1992) and do not function as a conclusion to a discussion.

Stewart's (2010) notion of worlding further embeds this ongoing storying in the environment and world. Sensory correspondences in archaeological practices effectuate this coming to matter as world through storying. Archaeologists (university-trained and community volunteers, and...) have an active and

influential part in this process, and the field practices themselves collectively produce knowledge, meaning, and world in processes of “making-with” (Haraway, 2016, pp. 58–61) communities, heritage organizations, roots, soil and dirt, artefacts, and documents. The ecology of archaeological practices is riddled with more and less proximate and distanced encounters with earthly materials and is generative of abstractions in the form of the documents such as context sheets in the archaeological record, which itself becomes an actant in the multiple meanings crafted with an excavation like the ATP.

At times though, the contrasts between proximate engagement with the trench in terms of troweling and touching the soil and things and distanced engagements with the site in terms of seeing, discussing, and recording data on context sheets for the archaeological record seem rather strong and cause for friction. The sensory dispositions by local community diggers, who mostly know by touch, stand in contrast with more abstracted discovery of patterns by means of vision by student and university archaeologists. These form even more contrasts with how proximity functions differently in backfilling practices and the regrowing trench (Figures 2 and 3). At an uncritical sight, backfilling appears to be a rather straightforward organizational practice of returning the site to its former state, while providing a simple plastic marker for future excavations. It seems to be a rather thoughtless practice in contrast with more meaningful archaeological practices, aimed at packing up the bags, thereby de-escalating archaeological activity and enabling local visitors and tourists to safely walk across the ancient monumental mounds without disturbing them. Continuing this uncritical line of thought for a moment longer, backfilling passively separates a historical-archaeological part of the earth from a self-sufficient part of the earth inhabited by plants and animals, which are not any longer annoying interrupters to and complicators of the archaeological excavation, but rather returned as its native hosts.

This notion of separating sensorial dispositions is, however, not feasible in terms of sensorial storying. As Haraway (2016, p. 79) notes, the distinction between proximate and distant says nothing about which has more claim to the world. Rather, “intimacy without proximity is not ‘virtual’ presence; it is ‘real’ presence, but in loopy materialities” (2016, p. 79). The practices of troweling, taking a step back, and backfilling, among others, are such loopy ways of worlding materials. The worlding of the mound does not stop at a plastic sheet. Not only does the story of Ardnamurchan actively continue in abstracted form in more distant places, these places become intimate with the local excavation and the earth because of these documents. This storying practices also continue within the local environment itself, as rodents create furrows even below the sheets and strong roots of grass grow alongside it, which shows itself in part in a regrown trench (Figure 3). Intimacy with materials continues then in the writing of papers on ATP (e.g., Harris et al., 2014, 2017), as well as in conference presentations, and the evaluation and continuation of projects also involving community volunteers. Even the Covid-19 pandemic and the interruption to the excavation caused by it and the policies surrounding it serves to vitalize the desire of archaeologists to reengage with the site.

The contrasts between the more tactile diggers and the more vision-oriented university-trained students add to the diversifying practices of worlding. Following Ingold’s (2018, p. 160) thought on correspondence, archaeological life is not interpreted adequately by an often reductionist summary of events in the archaeological record. Correspondences between sensed particulars instead add to rich stories, which are themselves transversal as performative encounters. This means that storying envelops the differential contrast between tactile-oriented and vision-oriented sensory dispositions and leaves open-ended correspondences between them. Intimate relations with the field are then not so much determined by the distinction between proximity and distance, but sensory proximity and distance serve as conditions to intimate encounters with materials. Both sensory proximity and sensory distancing occur on a continuum specific to the site, and their contrasting effects mingle together in worlding. In other words, meaning making and knowledge production are both dimensions of proximate and distanced relations-specific excavation practices. I propose that the materials of the field site are therefore traveling in open-ended material loops of intimate (proximate and distant) encounters through storying practices with the excavation. Loopy storying happens through practices, material artefacts as well as context sheets to other places such as laboratories and universities. Intimacy with a field site, however, is recurrently built through many iterations of the excavation. Continuing fieldwork at ATP for fourteen years, including the many switches between more proximate and distant encounters, makes Ardnamurchan bloom for the archaeologists

involved. Words like John's expressing sadness that they cannot join the excavation in 2020 show an ethics of care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012) for the environment and soil of Ardnamurchan.

Although not specifically addressed in this paper, I find it important to highlight that interruptive frictions are also part of the storying of the field site. Haraway's (2016, p. 79) notion of "intimacy without proximity" refers to a certain way of safekeeping the environment, while still being able to sense it and feel close to it. Haraway writes these lines in a section on material play in which maths, sciences, and arts are used to crafts figures and figurines of the Crotchet Coral Reef, without touching or interfering with the reef itself. Archaeological field practices are, however, different kinds of storying practices. They are intrusive in their environment by design (field notes M3). Their correspondences often disrupt animal and plant life, and even specific archaeological contexts and rarer finds are subjected to possible destruction by a combination of erosive forces on historical contexts, as well as hands, trowels, mattocks, and accidents forcefully interrupting in a particular trench. Moreover, diversifying sensory dispositions and a limited amount of time on a field site might very well cause friction and frustration, leading to decisions to dig faster and more – so-called – efficiently, including associated risks.

Meaning making in a diversifying way also means that touch and sight do not always see eye to eye. Sensory assemblies are also not simply cumulative in an open-ended and unending storying. With Haraway (2016), I emphasize, however, that staying with this trouble alongside people, plants, and animals within this anthropological process of storying is necessary to do justice to the diverse and complex world of excavation practices.

8 Conclusion: Storying the Excavation Through Sensory Correspondences

In this paper, I approached archaeological excavation practices from two entry points, to answer the question how to do more justice to the richness and complexity of knowledge production and meaning making during fieldwork. Drawing first on the concept of correspondence from Ingold's (2018) critical interpretation of assemblage theory and second on sensory studies, I render excavation practices in terms of sensory correspondences with multiple participants. Analyzing data from my participant observation research with archaeologists at the ATP, I find that the at times ambiguous contrasts between sensorial proximity and sensorial distance in excavation practices are particularly relevant for how archaeologists engage in meaning making and knowledge production during their work.

The meanings of proximate and distanced sensory correspondences depend on excavation practices. Troweling as an excavation practice is characterized by its very proximate sensory engagement through touch with the soil, dirt, stones, roots, and finds in trenches. Getting up from a crouching position and taking distance from this process allows for an orientation towards sight to see and discuss contextual distinctions in the trench, which would not otherwise be visible or discussable. I propose that the use of different senses such as (but not limited to) sight and touch corresponds with one another and leads to diversification in meaning making.

My analysis of the practice of backfilling a current trench and the example of a trench backfilled in the previous year show sensory proximity and distance in a different way. The practice of backfilling comprises very hands-on and proximate activities, such as carrying and redepositing turf. The practice of backfilling, however, also signals the covering up and safekeeping of a mound for the current season and involves a sensory distancing when it comes to the soil. The regrowing trench, backfilled at the end of the previous season, is a testament to archaeological storying and a monument of these lived times of archaeological research. A crucial dimension is the history built by archaeologists themselves by their recurring yearly visits, which makes the world of Ardnamurchan bloom in stories about the particulars in and of that world.

The interplay between proximity and distance in fieldwork carries archaeological storying through sensory engagements into even more distant locations. Academic publications, conference presentations,

teaching, and discussions lead to enriching the meaning of the excavation with previously uninvolved participants. This not only diversifies archaeological meaning making, but also carries intimate relations with the excavation into different organizations and people in the world.

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