discussion article

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Odd deposits and average practice. A critical history of the concept of structured deposition

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Abstract

This paper presents a critical history of the concept of 'structured deposition'. It examines the long-term development of this idea in archaeology, from its origins in the early 1980s through to the present day, looking at how it has been moulded and transformed. On the basis of this historical account, a number of problems are identified with the way that 'structured deposition' has generally been conceptualized and applied. It is suggested that the range of deposits described under a single banner as being 'structured' is unhelpfully broad, and that archaeologists have been too willing to view material culture patterning as intentionally produced – the result of symbolic or ritual action. It is also argued that the material signatures of 'everyday' practice have been undertheorized and all too often ignored. Ultimately, it is suggested that if we are ever to understand fully the archaeological signatures of past practice, it is vital to consider the 'everyday' as well as the 'ritual' processes which lie behind the patterns we uncover in the ground.

Keywords

structured deposition; ritual; rubbish; everyday practice; material culture patterning

Introduction

> *The analysis of structure has a potential which has not been exhausted in archaeology*
>
> Hodder 1982b, 9

The concept of 'structured deposition' – in its many and varied guises – has been prevalent within archaeological interpretation since the early 1980s. This persistence says a great deal about its importance and success as a concept. The idea clearly struck a chord in the early days of postprocessualism and has continued to resonate ever since. Following publication of the key paper relating to the idea (Richards and Thomas 1984), which focused on structured deposition during the Late Neolithic in Britain, the concept has

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spread far and wide – into other periods (e.g. Hill 1995; Clarke 1997) and other parts of the world (e.g. Chapman 2000; Pearce 2008). It has featured in dozens of academic papers and probably hundreds of archaeological site reports. Significantly, while reflecting recently on the lasting influence of his seminal 1982 edited volume *Symbolic and structural archaeology*, Hodder (2007, 201) specifically mentioned 'the idea that refuse can be structured to be socially active' as one of the main concepts which has survived the test of time. 'Structured deposition' now merits definitions in archaeological dictionaries (Darvill 2008) and textbook glossaries (Greene and Moore 2010, 320).

Given the very widespread take-up of the concept and considerable number of years which have passed since its inception, it is surprising that the idea of structured deposition has seen so little critical attention. People have tended to develop or transform the concept, rather than dismiss or argue directly against it. This too speaks volumes for its resilience and flexibility as an idea. Significantly, for some, the concept has actually come to be an interpretation in itself rather than a means of getting towards one. The paper presented here makes the most of what is in fact a surprisingly rarely taken opportunity to chart the history of one idea over the course of its lifetime, thus contributing to the history of archaeological interpretation more broadly. It investigates where the concept came from, but perhaps more importantly how it has subsequently been adapted and transformed. It also addresses the issue of whether the concept remains relevant today, and considers where it might be taken in future.

Richards and Thomas 1984

Any paper focusing on structured deposition really has to begin with Richards and Thomas's 1984 paper 'Ritual activity and structured deposition in Later Neolithic Wessex' (figure 1). As we shall see, Richards and Thomas did not necessarily 'invent' the concept, in its broader sense at least – their work drew substantially on the earliest postprocessual theorizations of depositional practice, and indeed, with hindsight, elements of the concept can be detected in some even older research. They did, however, coin the term 'structured deposition', and pushed interpretations of past material culture patterning into completely new territory.

As the title of their paper suggests, Richards and Thomas were concerned with the relationship between 'ritual' activity and the deposition of material culture. They began by highlighting the problem of interpreting the Late Neolithic henges of Wessex. A core question at that time was whether these monuments had a 'ritual' function. The generally unusual character of henges suggested that they may well have had a special ceremonial purpose. However, the large amounts of 'rubbish' and post-built structures found at some sites had confused the issue, suggesting a possible 'domestic' function as well or instead (Richards and Thomas 1984, 189; see also Bradley 2005, 10–16).

Richards and Thomas moved on to discuss the problems associated with the definition of 'ritual' generally, noting the tendency for it to be used as 'a catch-all designation for anything which defies a crudely utilitarian explanation' (Richards and Thomas 1984, 189). One way out of this situation, they

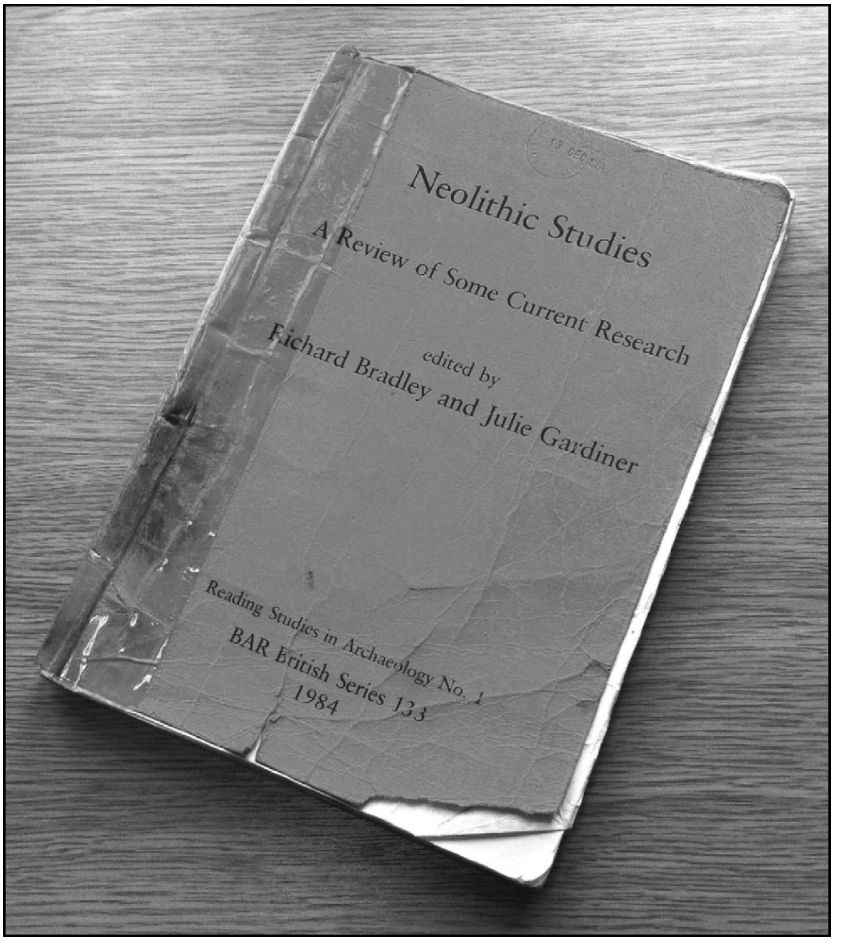

Figure 1 The University of Liverpool library copy of the book in which Richards and Thomas's 1984 paper was published.

argued, was to employ 'a systematic approach to ritual, which is specific to archaeology itself and allows the examination of both symbolism and structure as embodied in material culture' (ibid.). The fundamental element of the argument they put forward was the fact that 'as ritual activities involve highly formalised, repetitive behaviour, we would expect any depositional patterns [associated with these] observed in the archaeological record to maintain a high level of structure' (ibid., 191) – the original core concept of 'structured deposition'.

The site they selected to test out these ideas was Durrington Walls (figure 2), a well-known and extensively excavated henge in southern England (Wainwright and Longworth 1971; see papers in Larsson and Parker Pearson 2007 for a summary of recent excavations). The materials with which they chose to investigate the 'ritual' patterning of material culture were pottery (Grooved Ware), animal bone and, to a lesser extent, flint. In order to assess

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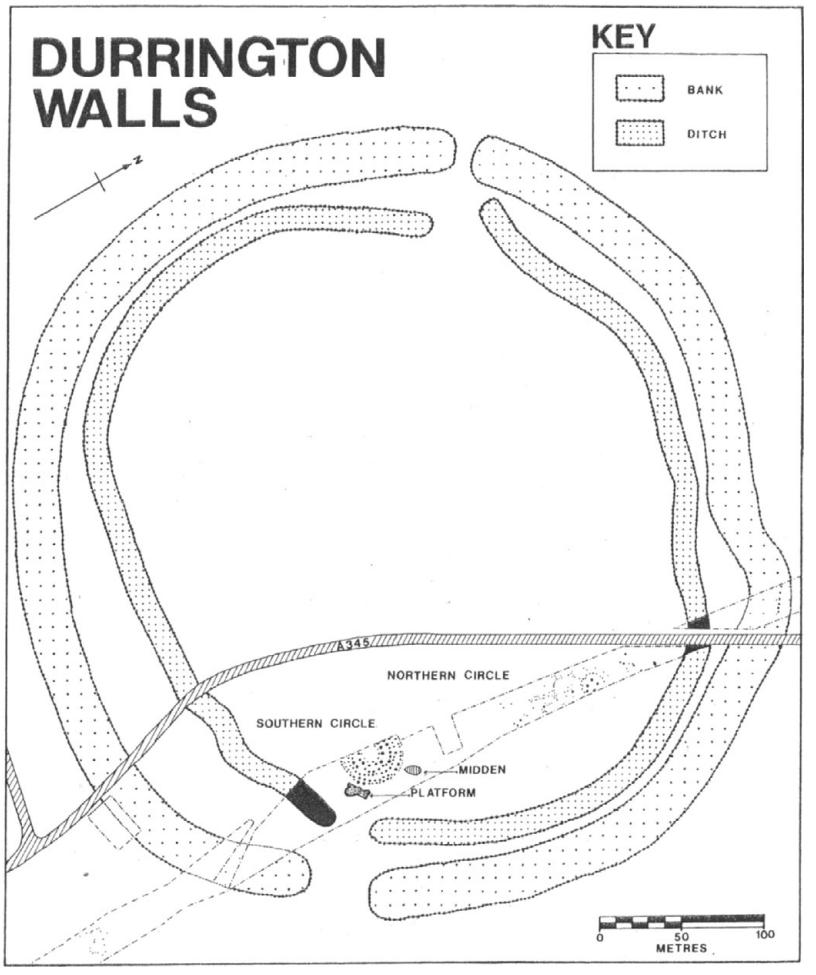

Figure 2 Plan of Durrington Walls, as excavated prior to 1984 (Richards and Thomas 1984, figure 12.2).

the deposition of pottery at Durrington Walls, Richards and Thomas defined a Grooved Ware 'design structure' with six 'stages' (types) of decoration (ibid., 194–95). Essentially, different types predominated in different places (figure 3). They noted that other forms of material culture (flint and bone tools) displayed a similar degree of variability (ibid.). On the basis of this patterning, they argued that 'the deposition of particular items was being controlled across the site' (ibid., 204). The second level of patterning investigated was the distribution of flint and pottery specifically within the Southern Circle. They highlighted 'a striking pattern of mutual avoidance . . . the post holes containing the highest frequencies of flint flakes are those which contain little or no Grooved Ware' (ibid.). Interpreting these findings, they argued that 'such clear patterning surely points to a pattern of formal deposition' (ibid.).

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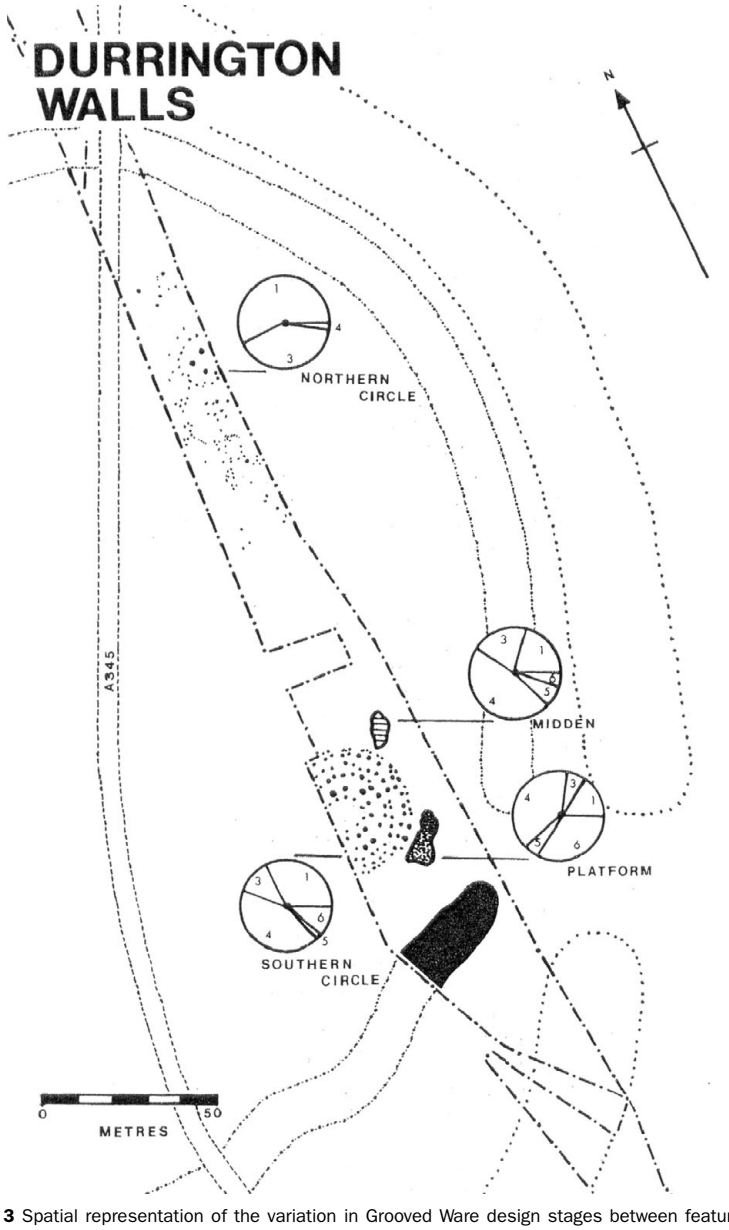

Figure 3 Spatial representation of the variation in Grooved Ware design stages between features at Durrington Walls (Richards and Thomas 1984, figure 12.3).

The distribution of animal bones was, in many senses, fairly 'complex' (ibid., 207) to interpret. Overall, as with the pottery, they argued on the basis of differential distributions that 'a set of rules governed the deposition of appropriate elements in different parts of the site' (ibid.), going on to suggest that 'part of the symbolic restructuring of the world which took place within

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henges involved the deliberate selection of wild animals, their use in feasting and their purposeful deposition in specified locations' (ibid.). Interestingly, following on from this, they briefly considered other examples elsewhere of odd deposits involving animal remains, which they noted were often associated with other 'high-quality' or 'unusual' material. They concluded by saying that 'the deposition of valued items – in isolated pits, in pits inside causewayed enclosures, in henges and in long barrow ditches – seems to have been an important element of ritual practice' (ibid., 214).

In summing up the results of their analysis, Richards and Thomas reiterated their key point: 'our analyses were designed to show whether the finds from Durrington Walls exhibit the clearcut spatial patterning that might be expected in a ritual context. The results of this investigation do suggest that this is the case ... ritual is not beyond the realm of archaeological inference' (ibid., 215).

Rereading Richards and Thomas 1984 in 2012

On rereading Richards and Thomas's classic paper in 2012, it comes across as a very optimistic study, with a considerable amount of work behind it. It made a number of important interpretive points, and took the analysis of material culture patterning into new territory. As discussed above, its influence has been long-lasting for very good reasons. At the same time, however, the paper does come across as slightly naive in places, and arguably flawed in others (see also Brück 1999b, 316; Thomas 1999, 81; 2007, 149; 2011; Albarella and Serjeantson 2002; Pollard 2008, 43). Before highlighting three of the main problematic issues, I want to make it very clear that comparable problems would be expected in any paper which is almost three decades old, especially one written so close to the beginning of a pioneering phase of archaeological theorization which was explicitly experimental in its methodology. It is worth noting that Thomas recently revisited the paper (having gone back to excavate at Durrington Walls) himself, and consequently has touched briefly upon some of these problems as well (Thomas 2011, 380–83).

The first point of criticism concerns the paper's approach to archaeological *process*. One key omission is the almost total absence of any serious consideration of the effects of *time* in creating the patterns observed (see also Thomas 2011, 380). Elements of the site are compared unilaterally, without any consideration of the fact that they may not always have been in use at once, in a monument which even then was thought to have been in use for several centuries (Wainwright and Longworth 1971, 225; Richards and Thomas 1984, 214). Additionally, the paper might also be criticized for its comparisons of depositional patterning between contexts which are not necessarily directly comparable; for example, the ways in which material culture would have come to be deposited in the Ditch, the Southern Circle and the Midden would almost certainly have been very different.

Second, in pushing the interpretation of material culture patterning to new limits, it might also be argued that the case for that patterning was slightly overstated. For example, while it is certainly true that within the Southern Circle some post-holes with large amounts of flint contained small amounts of pottery and vice versa (visible to the left in figure 4), overall it is difficult

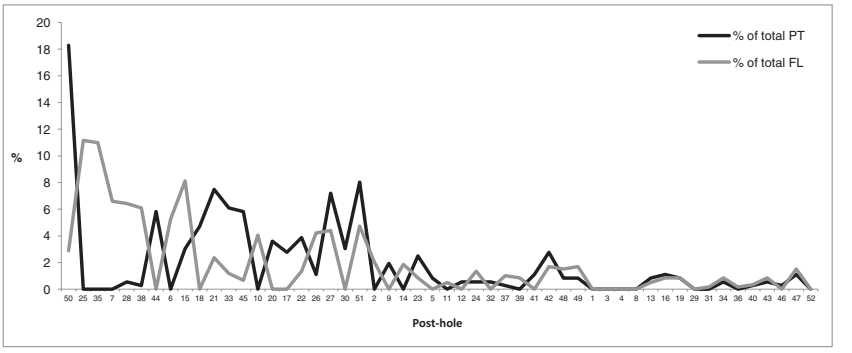

Figure 4 Graphic representation of the relative amounts of pottery and flint in each post-hole within Circles A and B of the Southern Circle. In order to make the two materials directly comparable, the quantity of sherds/flakes in each post-hole was calculated as a percentage of the total number. To make the graph more straightforward to read, the *x*-axis has been arranged in order of the percentage difference between the two materials rather than in order of feature number; those with large differences fall to the left-hand side, those with small to the right. Data from Richards and Thomas (1984, figure 12.6).

to support the suggestion of 'a pattern of mutual avoidance' (ibid., 204). In fact, 31 out of 52 post-holes contained directly comparable quantities (here defined as a difference of $< 2\%$) of both materials (visible to the right of figure 4).

Interestingly, a final point of criticism – one which is absolutely fundamental to this paper – was actually touched upon by Richards and Thomas themselves right at the end of their discussion in 1984. It concerns the interpretive leap made from (a) an observation of patterns of variability within excavated material to (b) the assertion that these patterns were created *intentionally* through 'ritual' deposition. Having reiterated the key argument of their paper – that 'the performance of ritual involves formalised repetitive actions which may be detected archaeologically through a highly structured mode of deposition' – they went on to point out, somewhat contradictorily, that 'domestic activity may also involve a high degree of structure' (ibid., 215). The difference between the archaeological signature of 'ritual' and everyday 'domestic' activities might thus be seen as, ultimately, very much blurred.

The issue of how to interpret material patterning – and whether it was created intentionally or not – is one which will be considered in detail towards the end of this paper. Next, in order to understand better where Richards and Thomas were coming from in their paper, and also to begin this history of 'structured deposition' at the beginning, we turn to other discussions of depositional practice immediately prior to 1984.

Postprocessualism and the origins of 'structured deposition'

Processes of deposition (and thus also their interpretation) are a fundamental element of archaeology. As a result, archaeologists have tried to 'capture' them in various ways – from Worsaae's 'closed assemblages', through Pitt-Rivers's sequencing of material culture via section drawings, to Wheeler's regimented boxes – since controlled excavation began (Lucas 2001; Trigger 2006).

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Significantly, many authors also speculated on the purposes of Neolithic depositional practice in particular over the course of the twentieth century, often alluding to possible 'ritual' motives, if not always exactly in those words (e.g. Stone and Young 1948; Field, Matthews and Smith 1964, 369; Case 1973).

In terms of the more immediate origins of Richards and Thomas's conceptualization of 'structured deposition', it is possible to identify two main strands of influence. The first is the general postprocessual theorization of the relationship between ideology/belief and the deposition of material culture, focused mainly on ethnoarchaeological studies. The second is a widespread movement within British prehistoric archaeology towards an interest in Late Neolithic 'ritual' and the idea that 'deposition' may have constituted a meaningful practice in itself.

Postprocessual archaeology developed, at least in part, directly out of a dissatisfaction with earlier theorizations of material culture patterning. In what is probably the clearest outline of the early postprocessual agenda, Hodder explicitly criticized Clarke for suggesting that 'depositional theory can be separated from interpretive theory' (1982b, 6), and the New Archaeology for viewing patterning within archaeological deposits as merely a passive reflection of what people had done in the past (ibid., 4). In making the case for an 'active' role of material culture, it was argued that artefacts had the capacity to intervene in people's ideologies and social worlds.

Much early postprocessual ethnoarchaeological work focused on deposition, and the role played by ideology/beliefs/symbolism in creating patterning within the modern 'archaeological' record. For example, in her 1981 paper concerned with 'possibilities for the future' in animal bone analysis, Moore discussed how the beliefs of gypsies structured the way in which they disposed of their rubbish (1981, 90). In that imagined future, she went on to publish her highly influential study of rubbish disposal in Kenya, within which she outlined the ways that the Marakwet people's conceptual boundaries and beliefs served to create highly structured material patterning in and around their compounds (Moore 1982; 1986; see figure 5). Around the same time, Hodder was attempting to get at very similar issues in his own ethnoarchaeological work amongst the Nuba (e.g. Hodder 1982a, 155–61).

The second strand of influence detectable within Richards and Thomas's formulation of 'structured deposition' was more directly related to developments in British prehistory. Given the character of British Neolithic archaeology – known more for its ceremonial monuments than for its often ephemeral 'domestic' sites – it is unsurprising that there should be a deep-seated interest in 'ritual' amongst those working in the period. However, in the first few years of the 1980s, the topic took on a new significance (e.g. Braithwaite 1984; Thorpe and Richards 1984). Around the same time, roughly the same group of archaeologists began to take seriously the idea that 'deposition' in itself may have been an important social practice. For example, in a discussion which was in many ways several years ahead of its time, Bradley (1975, 34 and 20) considered the deliberate filling of pits at various sites in southern England, and the placement of the skulls of red deer within the

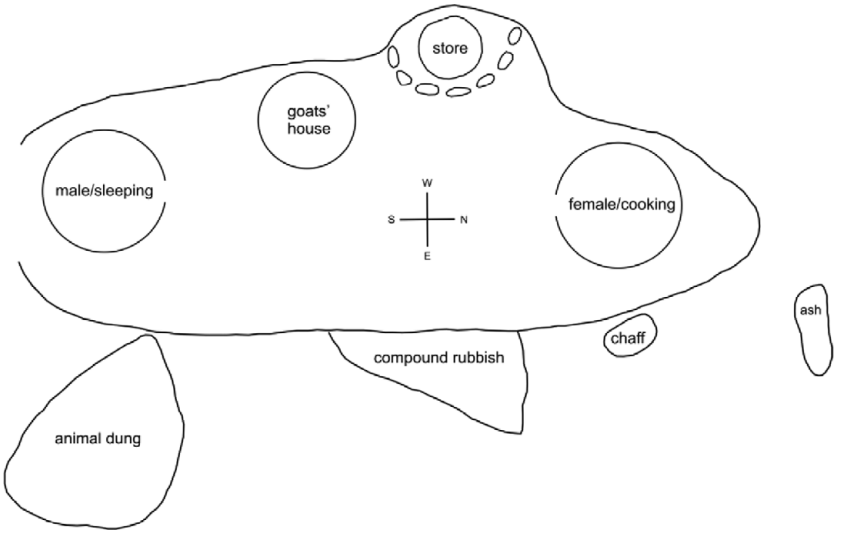

Figure 5 Rubbish disposal patterns within 'a typical Endo compound' (after Moore 1986, figure 17).

henge at Maumbury Rings. A key distinction drawn by several authors was that between what were often termed 'formal' deposits of rare/unusual objects (large slabs of decorated pottery, polished flint axes, complete skulls and so on) and more abstract material patterning (e.g. the overrepresentation of particular flint tools) created by the selection of certain objects for deposition (see, for example, Cleal 1984, 148; Thomas 1984, 167). Alongside this work, similar issues were also being considered – if not as heavily theorized – within the Iron Age, particularly in relation to the deposition of material within grain storage pits (Cunliffe 1983, 157–65; Grant 1984; Walker 1984).

The legacy of structured deposition: interpretations, 1985–2011

The following section charts the subsequent development of 'structured deposition', highlighting the various ways in which the concept has been transformed. Within this historical overview, I offer relatively little in the way of direct critique. It is not necessarily my intention to comment on individual papers and the specific approaches taken within them, but rather to highlight general trends and interests over the past three decades. The enormous success and staying power of the concept has ensured that huge numbers of papers, book chapters and site reports have been devoted to discussions of deposition. I have attempted to mention all of the key texts within the historical overview which follows, but cannot claim to have conducted an entirely exhaustive review.

As a result of this multiplicity of publications, a wide variety of equivalent terms has been used in place of, and often interchangeably with, the term 'structured deposition': ceremonial, deliberate, formal, formalized, intentional, non-utilitarian, odd, peculiar, placed, ritual, selected, special, symbolic, token and unusual deposits have all featured as well. Any history

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of 'structured' deposition must necessarily incorporate all of these, since this list of words in itself speaks volumes about the adaptability of the original idea. As we shall see, what people mean by structured deposition (and these various associated terms) also varies a great deal.

It is important to make clear from the outset that my focus in this paper is specifically 'structured deposition' (i.e. a particular concept in the present) rather than 'ritual' deposition (i.e. a suite of practices in the past) more broadly conceived; I do of course acknowledge that there can be a very close connection between the two. Consequently, I do not touch on the full spectrum of archaeological discussions concerning 'ritual' deposition (e.g. Walker 1995; Berggren and Nilsson Stutz 2010; Schiffer 2010) or indeed socially meaningful artefactual patterning (e.g. Clarke 1972; Grøn 2003). Equally, I focus exclusively on the Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age archaeology of Britain, in relation to which the vast majority discussions of 'structured deposition' (specifically) have taken place. It is worth pointing out that this restricted geographical and temporal focus is primarily a consequence of recent scholarly traditions, rather than because similar deposits are not identified in other places and periods (see, for example, Clarke 1997; Chapman 2000; Pearce 2008; Berggren and Nilsson Stutz 2010; Stiftelsen Kulturmiljövård 2011). Equally, I deal primarily with certain types of deposit – material usually associated with settlements and monuments (often in amongst a wide variety of 'rubbish'), rather than deposits which are more isolated (e.g. metalwork and metalwork hoards – see, for example, Fontijn 2002; Yates and Bradley 2010) – again because the latter have not usually been discussed under the banner of 'structured deposition'.

In an attempt to represent the variety of interpretations associated with the concept of structured deposition as simply as possible, in the remainder of this paper I have characterized the deposits under discussion by using two main terms (italicized in the text throughout). It is vital to emphasize that they are primarily designed to describe interpretations in the present rather than practices in the past. The first category I have termed *odd deposits* (following Brück 1999a); an example of this might be the burial of a complete horse, whose head had been removed and placed next to a complete dog, on the base of an Iron Age storage pit within a hill fort (Grant 1984, 534). The second category I have termed *material culture patterning*; an example of this might be subtly different distributions of flint tools (7.8%, 5.1% and 9.1% of the whole assemblage) within each of the three circuits of a causewayed enclosure (Whittle, Pollard and Grigson 1999, 370). It is important to stress that these two 'types' should not be seen as distinct, but as representing two ends of what is in fact a continuous spectrum.

In drawing a distinction between these two ends of a spectrum, I am mindful of Bell's work on 'ritualization' (1992), which has subsequently been taken up fairly widely within archaeology (e.g. Bradley 2005; Lamdin-Whymark 2008; Berggren and Nilsson Stutz 2010). In investigating 'ritual' practice within social anthropology, Bell suggests that ritual should be seen not as a clearly defined category, but as a relational and context-specific concept that is brought about through practices of 'ritualization'. She argues (Bell 1992, 74) that 'ritualization is a way of acting that is designed and orchestrated to

distinguish and privilege what is being done in comparison to other, usually more quotidian, activities'. In Bell's terms, *odd deposits* would be viewed as the result of clearly ritualized practices, since they were (arguably) consciously made 'different' from the rest. The processes through which *material culture patterning* came about are more complicated to tie down (as we shall see below), but certainly could be the result of 'quotidian' or non-ritualized practices. My own understanding of material culture patterning in relation to both 'ritual'/'ritualized' and 'non-ritual'/'everyday' practice is outlined in more detail within the later sections of the paper.

Finally, it is worth noting that again, for simplicity's sake, in the history which follows I have usually chosen to deal with work which focuses on the Neolithic separately from that which focuses on the Bronze and Iron Ages. This is not because I see these two strains of discussion as separate, but to ensure that my reading of a complex series of developments can be presented as clearly as possible.

The late 1980s: a slow start and some 'heavy' theorization

Interestingly, for the five or so years immediately following the publication of Richards and Thomas's 1984 paper, there were relatively few published discussions of their ideas. While people continued to consider 'deliberate' deposition as a practice (e.g. Pryor, French and Taylor 1985; Evans 1988, 47), it was not until the early 1990s that structured deposition really took off as a concept (see the next section). A delay in the widespread uptake of key theoretical concepts within prehistoric archaeology in Britain more generally has been noted elsewhere (Cooper, in press). In this particular case, it was perhaps inevitable that there would be a pause, as people took stock of the ideas put forward in 1984, recalibrated them to suit their own sites, carried out the relevant analyses and then published that work. Additionally, following the initial impact of postprocessualism in the early 1980s, several of the main protagonists went on to publish book-length texts developing the theoretical agenda (Hodder 1986; Shanks and Tilley 1987a; 1987b). A prominent discussion within these and associated papers (e.g. Barrett 1988; Hodder 1989) was the extent to which material culture could be read as a kind of 'text'. Consequently, ideas relevant to, and in some cases at least partly derived from, Richards and Thomas's work were being discussed, but mostly in abstract theoretical terms rather than specifically in relation to the Neolithic.

Having highlighted a delay in its uptake, it is important to stress that the more specific concept of structured deposition was not ignored entirely during this period. Thomas and Whittle's (1986) reanalysis of West Kennett long barrow, for instance, explicitly built upon Richards and Thomas's ideas. They identified 'significant patterning in pottery deposition in the five chambers according to style and decorative motifs' (ibid., 130), which they viewed as having been designed to convey specific meanings associated with 'age, sex or other social divisions' (ibid., 153). Equally, in his study of the material culture deposited at Stonehenge, Burl (1987, 95) also cited their argument, embellishing it in his own imaginative style: 'this was not rubbish but material deliberately gathered together in magical combinations that would generate

power and protection'. The concept of deposition as a meaningful practice was also beginning to solidify within Iron Age research at this time: 'put bluntly, people were doing something "pretty weird" in Iron Age Wessex pits, which is not that incomparable to the "oddity" of Neolithic deposition' (Hill 1989, 21).

Early to mid-1990s: consolidation and expansion

The early to mid-1990s saw significant and sustained work on structured deposition within the Neolithic, a full expansion of discussion into the Bronze and Iron Ages, and the publication of three key books (Bradley 1990; Thomas 1991; Hill 1995).

Neolithic In terms of continued work within the Neolithic, Thomas's book *Rethinking the Neolithic* (1991) set the agenda for many years to come. Chapter 4 – 'Pits, pots and dirt. A genealogy of depositional practices' – was given over entirely to an extended discussion of deposition. His fundamental point was that 'deposition was a social and cultural practice *in itself*' (ibid., 56, italics original), and in making it he placed intentional deposits firmly at the centre of subsequent debates. The initial focus of Thomas's chapter was on pits, rather than on impressive ceremonial monuments. Pits represented a particularly good type of feature through which to make the argument that deposition was a fundamental practice at that time, since it was possible to suggest that – unlike henges and so on – they had no clear function *other than* deposition (ibid., 59–60). In making this argument, Thomas focused predominantly on *odd deposits* (see definition above). By citing instances in which pristine bone pins, decorated chalk plaques, human bones and even the remains of brown bears had been placed in pits (ibid., 62), he was able to suggest that their burial had in itself been a meaningful act. In the same year, Barrett, Bradley and Green (1991) also dwelt substantially on deposition within pits. Like Thomas, they too used *odd deposits* (large slabs of pottery 'placed' with decoration upwards, complete antler picks and so on) to suggest that 'formal' deposition had occurred (ibid., 77). However, notably, in an attempt to show that 'ritual' was not something which occurred only in monumental contexts, they also used broader *material culture patterning* (variable distributions of artefact types, animal bones and so on) within pits to argue that depositional practices comparable to those described at Durrington Walls had occurred (ibid., 83–84). In the accompanying specialist reports volume, Brown (1991) in particular discussed structured deposition at considerable length. Echoing Richards and Thomas's original study, he focused on the 'mutual avoidance of symbolically disassociated [artefact] types' within pits and so on (ibid., 120), viewing material culture as having been used to convey complex social 'statements' about gender relations.

In the latter half of chapter 4, Thomas (1991, 70) moved from pits back into more familiar territory: 'it is in the context of henge-monuments that the formality of structured deposition is most pronounced and hence most easily recognised'. Expanding his previous work at Durrington Walls, he discussed deposition within the comparable monuments of Maumbury Rings and

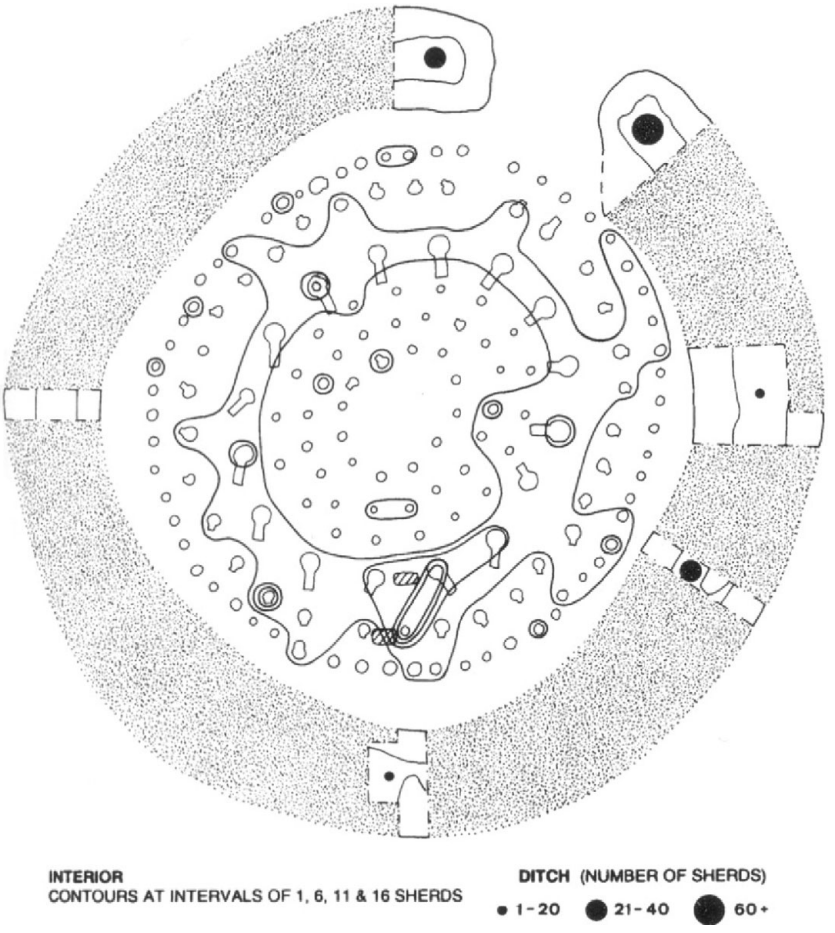

Figure 6 The distribution of Grooved Ware at Woodhenge (Pollard 1995, figure 4).

Woodhenge (ibid, 71). As at Durrington Walls, particular combinations and variability in the distribution of material culture across these sites were seen as having been meaningfully constituted, 'concerned with drawing contrasts and emphasizing boundaries between inside and outside, tame and wild, culture and nature, and with an emphasis on entrances and transitions' (ibid., 72). This dual theme (a) of uneven patterning of material culture being viewed as having been intentionally created to convey a message and (b) of entrances and particular cardinal points being stressed through deposition subsequently became highly prominent, being developed in a number of key papers relating to the Sanctuary (Pollard 1992), Woodhenge (Pollard 1995; see figure 6) and Mount Pleasant (Thomas 1996). A quote from one of Pollard's abstracts (1995, 137) nicely sums up the sort of argument being made: 'deposition is seen as a process through which a variety of connotations and symbolic references were incorporated in the monument [Woodhenge], in addition to

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contributing towards a complex classification of space that served to order ceremonial and ritual practices'.

Bronze and Iron Ages Due to its ambitious scope, Bradley's book *The passage of arms* (1990) – which investigated 'hoard and votive deposits' throughout prehistory across north-western Europe – perhaps even more than Thomas's work placed the practice of deposition firmly at the centre of prehistoric archaeology. Notably, it expanded discussion into new periods, focusing mainly on the Bronze Age, but also on the Iron Age (and the Neolithic). Bradley did not always deal with deposits which are 'structured' in Richards and Thomas's original sense: the 'votive' deposition of a hoard of bronze jewellery in a bog is not quite the same thing as the patterned deposition of broken pottery and animal bones within a henge ditch. However, in focusing on (a) deposition as a meaningful practice, (b) the identification of 'ritual' deposits and (c) particular combinations of objects he did touch on many directly comparable issues.

Over the course of the early to mid-1990s a number of papers focused on Iron Age material culture deposition as it reflected ideologies and the social use of space (e.g. Hingley 1990; Parker Pearson and Richards 1994; Parker Pearson 1996). Broadly speaking, there was an assumption within this work that activity areas could be inferred directly from *material culture patterning* (e.g. the differential distribution of fineware pottery) in roundhouses, and that on the basis of this evidence it was possible to infer gender hierarchies and so on. *Odd deposits* (complete animal carcasses and so on) were also drawn in at times, to reinforce arguments about east–west spatial oppositions, for example (Parker Pearson and Richards 1994, 54). It must be said that many of these interpretations of deposition come across as rather uncritical, and it is certainly possible to critique them (see Brück 1999a; Pope 2007; Webley 2007). 'Special' deposits in the Bronze Age were also discussed at this time (Needham 1992).

Hill's 1995 book *Ritual and rubbish in the Iron Age of Wessex* (an extended version of his 1993 Ph.D. thesis) represented the most extensive examination of structured deposition published so far at that point, and arguably remains so today. Within this short review, it is difficult to do justice to the full extent and complexity of Hill's analysis and interpretations. He drew direct inspiration from Neolithic research, where he suggested that it was much easier to argue for the existence of 'odd' deposits (Hill 1995, 5). Hill adopted an explicitly critical approach to the formation of the archaeological record, problematizing the notion of 'rubbish' (ibid., 1) and questioning the temporality of deposition through which material would actually have come to be deposited (ibid., 4). Like Richards and Thomas (1984), Hill was interested in the material visibility of 'ritual', yet he correctly took a more complex view of its archaeological signature: 'discovering significant degrees of structure and symbolism in archaeological deposits is not a secure basis for their interpretation as ritual deposits' (ibid., 4). He was also more rigorous in his identification of what he termed 'special' (ibid., 27) and 'non-average' (ibid., 34) deposits, ultimately noting that the former (unusual assemblages of pottery, certain groups of animal bones, two or more small finds, and

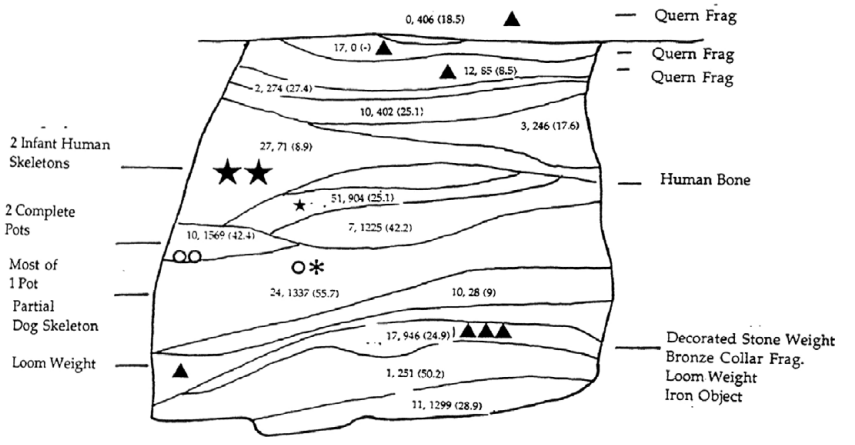

Figure 7 Schematic diagram of the deposits within Pit 7372 at Winnal Down (Hill 1995, figure 7.10).

human bones – ibid., 40) were often correlated with the latter (pit layers with especially large numbers of sherds, for example – ibid., 95; see figure 7). He also explored the idea that 'special' deposits were sometimes used in order to emphasize the symbolism of settlement boundaries/entrances and so on (ibid., 76–83; see also Hill 1994). These spatial patterns – notably identified in both vertical and horizontal dimensions – were viewed as meaningfully 'structured' (e.g. Hill 1995, 96). In the final three chapters of the book, Hill summarized his overall impression of what was going on. It is interesting to note a number of points of close comparison with some of the Neolithic interpretations we have already discussed: these deposits represented an 'explicit articulation of key classifying principles through the deposition of material in particular parts of sites' (ibid., 113) and so on. Very similar readings of *material culture patterning* were being made in relation to archaeology from very different contexts.

Hill's study, like Bradley's (1990) before it, set the agenda for many years. Its influence on subsequent papers is clear, with 'deliberate' deposition in settlement boundaries, 'unusual' deposits of pottery in pits and so on distinctive features of Iron Age research (e.g. Fitzpatrick 1997; Gwilt 1997). In her study of human remains in Late Bronze Age Britain, published in the same year as Hill's book, Brück (1995, 254) also drew direct inspiration from Neolithic research. Again like Hill, she stressed the need to be cautious in identifying 'ritual', since 'most day-to-day activities, including refuse disposal . . . may result in structured deposits in the archaeological record' (ibid., 254).

Late 1990s to early 2000s: pushing the boundaries and the beginnings of critique

If the previous period was one of consolidation, in the late 1990s and the early 2000s there is a sense that structured deposition had become very much part of the later prehistoric interpretive furniture. The fact that deliberate and meaningful deposition *had* happened was, broadly speaking, taken for

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granted. One significant consequence of this widespread acceptance was that people no longer spent as much effort proving its existence, and thus time and space were freed up in which to push interpretation further (sometimes to the extreme).

Neolithic The Neolithic interpretive landscape in the late 1990s is captured nicely within two site reports for causewayed enclosures: Etton (Pryor 1998) and Windmill Hill (Whittle, Pollard and Grigson 1999). Both were excavated (re-excavated in the case of Windmill Hill) in the mid- to late 1980s, ensuring that all post-excavation analysis would have been undertaken after the concept of structured deposition had been introduced. In Pryor's report, 'placed' or 'structured' deposits were given prominence from the outset (Pryor 1998, xix). Notably, he assumed that *all* of the deposits there were meaningful: 'there was no evidence to suggest that any of the finds ... represented casual loss or disposal of rubbish, or were derived or residual. Everything that was found was put there – and presumably for a purpose' (ibid., 67). Significantly, he placed the burden of proof firmly on the side of non-ritual deposits – if no evidence could be found to suggest that they were *not* intentionally placed, then they were. This shift reflects the much wider increased acceptance of, and reliance on, the concept within prehistoric archaeology noted above. Importantly, the phrase 'structured deposition' was also used as interpretation in itself, rather than as a means to describe patterning within deposits (e.g. ibid., 66) – another tendency which became increasingly commonplace from then on. In line with previous work on henges, Pryor stressed differences between the western and eastern halves of the enclosure (ibid., 66), a pattern which has been revisited on numerous occasions since.

Whittle, Pollard and Grigson's (1999) publication of Windmill Hill presented an extended, and much more considered, discussion of depositional practices there. Their understanding of the formation processes in evidence at the site was somewhat less predetermined than Pryor's had been: 'artefacts and faunal remains could have worked their way into the ditches through a variety of processes: by accident, through casual discard, patterned disposal routines, or intentionally "structured" deposition' (ibid., 355). However, in line with much previous work, they ultimately came to suggest that most deposits *were* inherently meaningful: 'the mixing of materials in depositions was perhaps used to create complex symbolic statements' (ibid., 371), and that deposition had been one of the primary 'functions' of the enclosure (ibid., 381). Like Pryor, in arguing this, they highlighted a few clearly *odd deposits* (e.g. ibid., 357), but also stressed subtle differences between the three different circuits. Acknowledging that these differences may have come about at least partly through 'routine' activity, they nevertheless went on to argue that 'the patterning ... does seem to embody commonly held notions about appropriate actions in relation to particular parts of the monument' (ibid.).

Thomas's book *Understanding the Neolithic* (1999), a reworked and updated edition of *Rethinking the Neolithic* (1991), offers an excellent opportunity to see how things had changed over the course of that eight-year period. The main differences in his chapter on deposition are a significant

expansion of the section on pits (which almost doubled in length from six to eleven pages), echoing a broader trend within Neolithic archaeology (e.g. Whittle 1997; Pollard 1999), and the incorporation of his own and Pollard's work since 1991 in the discussion of henges (ibid., 81). Interestingly, in 1999 he also chose to revisit Richards and Thomas (1984), presenting a much more critical view of his findings back then than he had done in 1991, stressing in particular that deposition at Durrington Walls had not perhaps been quite as rule-bound as they had argued (Thomas 1999, 81).

Notably, again suggesting that by this point the concept was firmly embedded in academic discourse, two other papers published around this time attempted to integrate discussions of structured deposition with other topics of contemporary concern, including 'landscapes' and phenomenology. Jones (1998, 315), for example, presented an extended argument focusing on Neolithic Orkney, suggesting that different animals had been deposited 'in certain places according to a series of topographic and symbolic principles', being used to embed particular meanings (drawn from the local landscape) within many settlements and tombs. Bradley also dealt with the relationship between structured deposits and the landscape in his book *An archaeology of natural places* (2000). He presented a useful review of 'the sheer complexity of the phenomenon that has become known as structured deposition' (ibid., 122), summarizing previous work and contemporary perspectives on the subject at that point in time (ibid., 117–31). In an explicit attempt to unite the concept of structured deposition with more recent phenomenological ideas, he suggested that the choreographed manner in which many monuments may have been experienced would itself have led to strong *material culture patterning* (ibid., 127).

In two papers published in 2001, Pollard and Pollard and Ruggles put forward two quite different, but both relatively extreme, arguments concerning deposition. In his innovative paper 'The aesthetics of depositional practice', Pollard brought attention to the aesthetic qualities of Neolithic deposits, suggesting that 'in a post-Duchampian tradition they could even be seen as artworks' (Pollard 2001, 315). In making this argument, he also reinvigorated the late 1980s textual metaphor, arguing that 'objects are part of a material "language", and through structured sets of association, separation and linkage in deposition construct specific statements' (ibid., 316). He also emphasized the performative nature of pit digging, suggesting that 'particular dispositions, the use of left and right hands, and the laying out of objects in relation to the sides and back/front of the body, could have served to reproduce classificatory principles of purity, gender symbolism and so forth' (ibid., 325) – the sort of argument which previously had been made only in a monumental context. This subtle move towards the *process* of deposition being seen as important (as well as the material message conveyed by the artefacts deposited) represented a key shift in outlook which has been maintained ever since.

Turning to arguably the most monumental context of all, Stonehenge, Pollard and Ruggles (2001) put forward one of the most extreme interpretations of depositional complexity so far. Ultimately, within their paper, they suggested that deposits had been placed differentially across the

monument with reference to (1) segmented, (2) radial and (3) concentric conceptions of the monument; (4) right-sidedness (when entering the ditch); (5) previous deposits and the associated memories of what should go where; (6) wild/domestic oppositions; (7) ideas of fertility and renewal; (8) ancestors and the supernatural; and finally the passage of first (9) the sun and then (10) the moon (ibid., 79–88).

Bronze and Iron Ages In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the continuing legacy of Hill's (1995) work is clear. The notion that the deposition of 'rubbish' in a settlement boundary may have served to emphasize its significance (e.g. Brück 1999a, 153; Guttman and Last 2000, 355) and that key deposits may have been used to mark significant moments in time as well as space (Brück 1999a, 154) clearly owe a debt to his work. Similarly, several researchers chose to use his criteria directly in order to identify 'special' pottery deposits around this time (e.g. Guttman and Last 2000; see also Brudenell and Cooper 2008). Within two papers published in 1999, Brück brought a much-needed critical perspective to the debate. In her discussion of 'ritual and rationality' (1999b) she deconstructed the distinction between the two terms, arguing that it was unhelpful, both methodologically and theoretically, to impose this post-Enlightenment opposition on a pre-Enlightenment past. She also pointed out that what we see as 'odd' deposits might have been completely normal to people in the past (ibid., 329). Critically, in terms of many of the arguments discussed above, she also argued that within later prehistoric archaeology 'the symbolic aspects of human action all too often have been stressed at the expense of the practical' (ibid., 325). In her other 1999 paper, she set out some of these arguments in more concrete terms by focusing on the evidence from Middle Bronze Age settlements. Importantly, she managed to discuss the potential symbolism of *odd deposits* (e.g. 1999b, 152), but at the same time to consider *material culture patterning* as a product of routine practice (ibid., 151).

Mid-2000s to the present day: the resurgence of 'the everyday' and hyperinterpretation

Recent work on structured deposition in both the Neolithic and the Bronze Age/Iron Age has been characterized by interpretations which, seemingly, are heading in two very different directions. On the one hand, people have come to look in much more detail at what might be termed the 'everyday' processes which might lead to structured deposition. On the other, however, there has at the same time been a movement towards what, following Fleming (2006), might be termed a 'hyperinterpretive' approach to material-culture meanings. There is also, still, a lingering aura of 'ritual' that arguably biases interpretation of deposition, especially within Neolithic monuments.

Neolithic Following the lead of Thomas (1999), Pollard (2001) and others, the 2000s saw substantial continuing focus on Neolithic pit deposits. Interestingly, however, there was a notable shift in emphasis within many of these accounts towards the 'everyday'. For example, in our publication

of the large pit site at Kilverstone, myself, Emma Beadsmoore and Mark Knight chose to focus predominantly on what the material culture within the 200 or so pits was able to tell us about the rhythms of everyday life, and about the nature of occupation at the site, rather than any (arguably) symbolic meanings (Garrow, Beadsmoore and Knight 2005; Garrow, Lucy and Gibson 2006; see also discussion below). I took a similar approach to the material found in pits across East Anglia in my Ph.D. (published as Garrow 2006). Similarly, both Harding (2006) and Lamdin-Whymark (2008) focused mainly on the evidence for everyday life contained in pits, in Rudston Wold and the Middle Thames Valley. Harding (2006, 122), for example, chose to interpret pits made up of multiple layers containing just burnt flint and then predominantly pottery not as a complex material 'statement' of meaning, but rather as a direct reflection of the activities which had occurred on the site. Similarly, Lamdin-Whymark (2008, 104) suggested that the significant contrasts observed between the contents of apparently 'paired' pits potentially reflected the fact that each had been filled at a different time, or was derived from a different zone of activity associated with different practices.

Significantly, while people have recently begun to feel comfortable discussing the 'everyday' processes which could have led to structured deposits within pits, there has not been a comparable interpretive shift in monumental contexts (although see Beadsmoore, Garrow and Knight 2010). For instance, in direct contrast to the perspective he took in interpreting the material within pits, Lamdin-Whymark (2008, 147–48) viewed differences in the material deposited in different parts of the causewayed enclosure at Staines as the result of deliberate and 'formal' segregation of materials. In a similar vein, Mercer and Healy (2008, 762) – having considered the possibility that differences in the distribution of pottery types between the two enclosures at Hambledon Hill may have come about because they were used mainly by two different sets of people – went on to dismiss that interpretation, preferring instead a symbolic one (directly drawing on Pryor's interpretation of Etton) whereby certain kinds of ceremony involving certain materials were considered appropriate in different places within the monument complex.

The effect of a monumental location in evoking 'symbolic' readings of material culture is especially clear within what I have termed 'hyperinterpretive' accounts. Harris (2005, 47), for example, argues that 'within the ritualising architecture of Etton these acts [of deposition] would take on greater significance and greater meaning'. One example cited of this accentuated meaning is 'that both the fox skull and the first pot were placed in the ground upside down is surely significant, stressing inversion, the breakdown of normality, perhaps even the carnivalesque' (ibid., 45). Pollard (2008, 53) made a comparable case for enhanced meanings within the same enclosure, arguing that the killing and subsequent deposition of animals, for example, 'could have been a strategy to draw in something of their raw, generative energy, enhancing the potency of the enclosure'. He went on to describe a quernstone as 'inverted' (not just upside down) with leaves and twigs 'packed over and around' (not just on top of) it (ibid., 55), again making clear the exaggerated meanings which he felt would have

characterized these deposits. Harris has subsequently made similar cases for the enhanced meaning of deposits within the Early Neolithic pit at Rowden (Harris 2009) and at Hambledon Hill (Harris 2010).

Interestingly, in the 2000s, both Pollard and Thomas got to revisit their previous desk-based work in a more hands-on manner, re-excavating small parts of Woodhenge (Pollard and Robinson 2007) and the Southern Circle at Durrington Walls (Thomas 2007) respectively. While both writers took the chance to re-evaluate the formation processes through which the deposits on those sites had formed, they did not substantially revise the ways in which they saw any 'structure' within them as having come about.

Bronze and Iron Ages A comparable shift in emphasis – towards more 'everyday' explanations for the structuring of deposits – to that described above within the Neolithic has also occurred within Bronze and Iron Age archaeology. Woodward and Hughes (2007), for example, highlighted the need to explore unintended patterning within roundhouse gullies alongside the more obviously 'odd' deposits. Similarly, Webley (2007) pointed out the complexities of the depositional processes through which the material culture in roundhouse gullies came to be 'structured', and the need to take non-symbolic possibilities into account. Perhaps the most detailed recent critique of structured deposition within a Bronze Age/Iron Age context is Brudenell and Cooper's (2008) consideration of 'depositional histories' on a series of later Bronze Age sites in Bedfordshire. In their paper, they argued that the idea of structured deposition has often been 'adopted and applied somewhat simplistically', leading to a situation in which 'the potential complexity and interpretive scope of depositional histories on later prehistoric sites has been substantially curtailed' (ibid., 15). In a similar manner to some of the Neolithic work described above, they described various ways that *material culture patterning* which would usually be taken as evidence of 'special' deposits could in fact have come about as a result of relatively 'mundane' practices of everyday life (ibid., 30–33).

The 'hyperinterpretive' turn has not been as pronounced within the Bronze and Iron Ages. Nevertheless, items of material culture have been attributed enhanced meaning by some. Brück (2006, 304), for example, suggested that grain may have been viewed as a powerful symbol of transformation, and quernstones as 'redolent with the symbolism of life and death'. Equally, again in a similar way to the Neolithic, it has proved hard to shed entirely the spectre of 'ritual' explanations for *material culture patterning*. For instance, Woodward and Hughes (2007) continued to view the differential patterning of deposits within roundhouse gullies as, for the most part, both intentional and symbolically meaningful, while Webley (2007, 139) discussed the likelihood of '"ritualized" house abandonment behaviour'.

Rethinking structured deposition

In this section, my aim is to question some of the things which have been taken for granted about structured deposition since 1984, and to turn the spotlight onto those issues associated with it which I view as problematic. In doing so, I hope to initiate a debate – one of the main reasons why I wanted

to publish this paper in *Archaeological dialogues* – in order to reinvigorate the concept for the 21st century.

Over the past 28 years, as I see it, three main issues have arisen which need to be addressed:

1 There has been a tendency to conceptualize different types of deposit, which formed through quite different processes and may well have had quite different meanings, in similar ways, under the banner of 'structured deposition'. We need to be more explicit about where on the sliding scale from *odd deposits* to *material culture patterning* (as I have termed it here) various acts of deposition should be situated, and distinguish between them more clearly.
2 In most discussions of structured deposition, there has been a tendency to attribute enhanced meaningfulness to *material culture patterning*. Generally speaking, variability has been viewed as both intentionally created and symbolically relevant. We need to devote more attention and effort to examining the validity of any such meanings proposed, and to think through whether and how they could actually have been conveyed in practice.
3 When investigating depositional patterning within the material record, there has been a tendency to place interpretive emphasis on just one section of what should in fact be a broad spectrum of explanations for it. We need to engage more critically with the past processes which led to *material culture patterning*, and shift our expectations as to the material signature(s) of 'everyday' practices. While the latter have, since the very beginning, always been acknowledged, they have broadly been ignored at the expense of other ('ritual') acts of deposition, and thus remain undertheorized and underexplored. In Bell's (1992) terms, we need to focus not just on the 'ritualized' but also on the non-ritualized (or 'quotidian') practices as well.

I will deal with each of these three points – which, as we shall see, are intimately related – in turn below. At the root of much of what I will be saying is a dissatisfaction with the balance so far achieved between what might be characterized as the 'ritual' and the 'everyday'. It is important to stress that I am not wanting to reinstate any kind of ritual/domestic divide, which has been very effectively critiqued within archaeology in recent years. Brück (1999b), for example, has made the important point that any characterization of practices as being either 'ritual' or 'rational' is a consequence of post-Enlightenment thought; this distinction may not have had any validity in the prehistoric past and so should not be imposed upon it. Equally, Bradley (2005) has shown how practices that we might be tempted to divide up into the 'ritual' and the 'domestic' spheres were in fact closely linked in many elements of prehistoric life.

'Ritual' practices (including deposition) are also very hard to define. Bell (1992; 1997) in particular has shown how, within anthropology, 'ritual' can mean many different things to many different researchers, and the same is certainly true for archaeology. Similarly, she has also argued that amongst people studied ethnographically, what is considered 'ritual' and what is not

is both context-specific and relationally determined; again, the same can almost certainly be said for the people we study archaeologically as well. Nevertheless, Bell argues (1992, 6) that ritual is still a meaningful sphere of study, and develops a distinction between 'quotidian' and 'ritualized' practices in order to get towards it (ibid., 74). Similarly, I have maintained my use of the ritual/everyday opposition because it represents a clear way of framing the argument, especially since that opposition (or something very similar), as we have just seen, has seemingly been in most archaeologists' minds when discussing structured deposition.

It is important to stress that in reasserting the 'everyday' or 'mundane' elements of deposition, I am in no way seeking to deny the 'ritual' or 'symbolically meaningful' aspects. Rather, by emphasizing both (overlapping) spheres, and thus facilitating more varied (and arguably more accurate) interpretations of structured deposition, it should be possible to work towards a better appreciation of the signatures of past practice, and thus ultimately to create richer understandings of the past.

Exploring the full spectrum of structured deposition

Right from the start of this paper, I have characterized the types of deposit we encounter by using two different terms – *odd deposits* and *material culture patterning*. As explained above, I see these as representing convenient terms to characterize either end of a continuous spectrum. From the very beginning, there has been a tendency to discuss these two 'types' of deposit together, to elide them as examples of just one phenomenon – structured deposition. As mentioned above, despite the serious theoretical attention and methodological prominence they gave to more abstract *material culture patterning*, Richards and Thomas were still tempted to mention *odd deposits* (bear bones, pristine arrowheads, polished axes and so on) in their argument (1984, 206). The latter were ultimately used in order to bolster the suggestion that the former could be understood as meaningful.

A certain asymmetry generally resides within the elision of these two 'types' of deposition – *odd deposits* are almost always used to support the meaningfulness of *material culture patterning*. Pollard (1995, 145), for example, used carefully 'placed' bundles of antler picks in the ditch at Woodhenge (a deposit which would probably be placed towards the *odd deposit* end of the spectrum) as evidence to support his argument that the broader distributions of animal bone and other materials at the site (deposits more towards the *material culture patterning* end) could be seen as intentionally constituted and meaningful. Similarly, *odd deposits* – including groups of 'nested' sherds and bundles of cattle ribs (Whittle, Pollard and Grigson 1999, 357 and 364), complete pots, quernstones and polissoirs (Pryor 1998, 33 and 107), 'token' deposits of human bone (Brück 2006) and so on – have all been mentioned alongside rather less clearly 'odd' *material culture patterning* for similar reasons.

It is important to stress that, in most cases, the use of *odd deposits* to bolster the argument that *material culture patterning* was indeed meaningful has been implicit rather than explicit. The underlying assumption is that people *did* deliberately deposit seemingly valuable or symbolically rich objects

in the ground, and that therefore deposition can be seen as a meaningful practice in the past. This much is, I think, undeniable. However, once the argument moves on from this point, to the suggestion that most or all *material culture patterning* in henges, causewayed enclosures, settlement boundaries and so on can be interpreted as being symbolically meaningful and/or as having been intentionally created, it becomes, for me, much more difficult to accept. As we will see in the next two sections, *material culture patterning* can come about by other means. In eliding the different ends of the depositional spectrum, and treating all structured deposits as essentially one category, we have, I feel, curtailed the interpretive possibilities open to us and thus made structured deposition a less helpful means through which to interrogate the past. This tendency has also contributed to the situation where the identification of structured deposition is viewed as an interpretation in itself; a 'black box' which holds the truth but is hard to access. Often, it now seems to be considered enough to identify a 'structured deposit' and leave it at that – people did funny things in the past, end of story. For me, it is in studies which have maintained an interpretive distinction between these two 'types' of deposit, enabling discussion of the dynamic between them (e.g. Hill 1995; and especially Brück 1999a), that the most effective discussions of past depositional practice have come about.

Enhanced meaningfulness and the symbolism of structured deposits

Towards the end of the preceding history section, I discussed the fact that 'hyperinterpretive' accounts of material culture have risen to prominence over the past ten years. It is not in fact this strand of enhanced meaning attribution that I want to question here, however. Although I myself have not generally found these accounts especially convincing, they have usually been self-consciously 'creative' and are perhaps an inevitable outcome of the postprocessual opening up of interpretation (see Fleming 2006, 268). Rather, my focus here will be on the relationship between *material culture patterning* and ideological/symbolic meaningfulness – a subject which has been on the agenda since the early 1980s.

Historically, in discussions concerning the meaningfulness of structured deposition, two subtly different arguments have been made. The first is that people in the past deposited things differentially on a site in order to convey a set of specific meanings. The second is that people deposited things differentially on a site because of the meanings that the different parts of that site had. It is worth noting that these two strands can be viewed, quite justifiably, as two stages of essentially the same recursive cycle of meaning/practice.

The first slant of this argument was clearly visible within Richards and Thomas's original paper, where they argued, for instance, that material culture may have been deposited in specific sequences in order to 'communicate rules and categories' (1984, 191). In a similar vein, Shanks and Tilley had previously argued (1982, 151) that human bones were differentially deposited in chambered tombs in order to present a particular message about the make-up of society. Equally, Hill suggested an '*explicit* articulation of

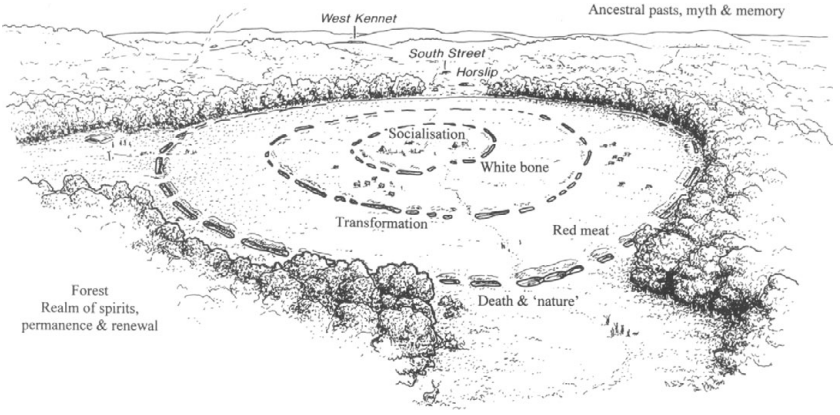

Figure 8 'Simplified interpretation of the setting, major activities and possible meanings of the enclosure' at Windmill Hill (Whittle, Pollard and Grigson 1999, figure 227 detail).

key classifying principles through the deposition of material culture' (1995, 113, italics original). This view of the meaningfulness of material culture patterning clearly has its roots in the early postprocessual discussion of the active ('textual') role of material culture, and a contemporary desire to make the most of the archaeological record. Over time, however, the second slant has become more prominent. For example, in his discussion of Mount Pleasant, Thomas argued (1996, 202) that 'particular kinds of vessel, decorated in particular ways, were appropriate for use in given parts of the site, or at least for deposition there'. Similarly, Whittle, Pollard and Grigson suggested (1999, 382; see figure 8) that a broad symbolic scheme of life in general was mapped onto the enclosure at Windmill Hill, affecting what could be deposited where.

In these scenarios, the meaningfulness of deposition is conveyed *intentionally* – people either used material culture to convey specific messages, or deposited it specifically with reference to key classificatory principles (usually associated with particular parts of a site). As Brück has put it,

> the material products of human action (artefacts, sites, etc.) are frequently interpreted as metaphorical representations of past social and cosmological orders. According to such a viewpoint, sites and artefacts (as repositories of cultural meaning) often appear to have been created through the application of abstract symbolic schemes; human action is seen as governed by belief systems rather than practical considerations (1999b, 325).

Again, it is not my intention here to question the possibility that material culture *may* have been deposited in order to convey a message or in accordance with some symbolic scheme. The issue I want to highlight is the fact that, in making these arguments, people have often felt compelled to interpret *all* variability as being representative of some kind of symbolic scheme. Thus, to mention just one example amongst dozens, Pollard viewed a 65–35 percentage split in the distribution of pottery at Woodhenge as being illustrative of a

symbolic east–west divide within the monument (1995, 148; see figure 6). In my opinion, this general position is untenable – variability does not have to have been intended or explicitly meaningful.

Moreover, in order to accommodate the often contradictory *material culture patterning* observed between different material types (e.g. where pottery distributions do not match the flint), people have often been forced either to put forward extremely complex explanations and rules affecting deposition, or to resort to vague statements which are general enough to incorporate the variability. In the case of the former, it sometimes becomes difficult to understand how people in the past could possibly have remembered them all. In the case of the latter, explanations often come to seem rather banal. Equally, time is often flattened significantly, as the deposits plotted two-dimensionally across causewayed enclosures and henges are compared without full consideration of the temporality of their deposition. People have generally failed to consider the complexity of the processes which lay behind the patterning observed.

As we will see in the next section, other possible interpretations of the variability observed in the distribution of material culture are possible. Before turning to these alternative views, it is important to highlight a third strand of discussion, relating to the *unintentional*, yet still symbolically meaningful, patterning of material culture. These arguments have usually been made by those arguing that not all *material culture patterning* need necessarily be 'ritual'. As Brück (1995, 255) puts it, 'both ritual and [more 'everyday'] rubbish disposal practices may be structured according to cultural principles'. Essentially the same point has been made by many other authors (e.g. Hill 1995, 16; Whittle, Pollard and Grigson 1999, 355). Moore's (1982; 1986) ethnoarchaeological work amongst the Marakwet in Kenya, which is frequently quoted, demonstrated that even 'routine' rubbish disposal practices could potentially be spatially 'structured' in relation to a society's symbolic categorization schemes (see figure 5). The Marakwet did not necessarily *explicitly* reference these schemes in disposing of their refuse, but those schemes did nevertheless influence the 'archaeological' record that was created. Essentially, the same thing is assumed to have occurred in the past.

In the next section, I turn to the final point I wish to make: that *material culture patterning* does not even have to have come about (unintentionally) as a result of underlying symbolic schemes. It can just happen.

The material signature of 'everyday' practice

Since the first study of structured deposition, *variability* in terms of *material culture patterning* has been central to almost every argument made. Richards and Thomas (1984) argued that differences in the prevalence of decoration on pottery across the site were symbolically meaningful, and that differences in the amount of pottery and flint in the Southern Circle post-holes could be taken as evidence for ritual practice. As we have seen, numerous others have made many similar points since then. I do not want to argue here against the suggestion that *material culture patterning* was not in

the past, and cannot be today, *explicitly* meaningful. It can. However, I do think that in attributing enhanced meaningfulness to all patterning, we have foreclosed other interpretive possibilities (see also Brudenell and Cooper 2008; Beadsmoore, Garrow and Knight 2010). Essentially, what might be characterized as the 'symbolic' side of interpretation has come to dominate the 'mundane' to an unacceptable degree. Perhaps more importantly, it strikes me that underlying many of these arguments has been a fundamental misunderstanding of the archaeological signature of 'everyday' practice.

It is this last point to which the phrase 'average practice' in the title of this paper refers. A quote from Pryor's Etton report (1998, 254) perfectly illustrates the point I am making: 'first and foremost, the patterning [of flint] was not homogeneous; this indicates beyond reasonable doubt that the assemblage(s) was not the result of random processes'. Similar arguments have been made many times elsewhere (e.g. Thomas 1996, 201–2; Whittle, Pollard and Grigson 1999, 370; Lamdin-Whymark 2008, 147). Because he considered this issue in the most detail, Hill's study represents perhaps the most extreme example. He states (1995, 41), for instance, 'I would expect the majority of layers to contain thoroughly homogeneous deposits'. Crucial to his argument was the notion of an 'average' and 'non-average' pit fill, the latter being defined by standard deviations away from the mean (ibid., 34). The assumption within all of this work is that the non-homogeneous or non-even patterning of material (often identified using chi-squared tests) can be taken as evidence that those differences must have been *intentionally* created in the past. What I want to suggest here is that the 'random' processes of everyday life which Pryor mentions (above) in fact absolutely *do* create uneven patterning.

It is important to stress at this juncture that many of the studies mentioned above have considered the possibility that *material culture patterning* under discussion could have come about for relatively mundane reasons (e.g. Hill 1995, 2; Whittle, Pollard and Grigson 1999, 371; Mercer and Healy 2008, 762). However, due to the historical legacy of structured deposition's original formulation, these interpretive options have ultimately been sidelined or dismissed. In my opinion, the archaeological signature – in terms of the structure of deposits – of 'everyday' practice needs to be taken as seriously, and to be as heavily theorized, as the 'symbolic' or 'ritual'. In order to demonstrate the point I am trying to make concerning the material signature of 'everyday' practice, I would like to turn briefly to two examples, one from the modern world, the other from the Neolithic.

Figure 9 shows the amount of each material deposited by the public in recycling centres across Merseyside during the 2010–11 financial year. Some materials (e.g. cardboard) were disposed of in fairly regular quantities throughout the year. Others (e.g. green waste, glass, plastic, aluminium cans) fluctuated significantly. In the case of green waste, such variability is easily explained as a result of the seasonal cycle of plant growth/gardening activity. Similarly, glass disposal peaked markedly over and after the Christmas period, as one might expect given the increased consumption of drinks during seasonal festivities. However, the variability in terms

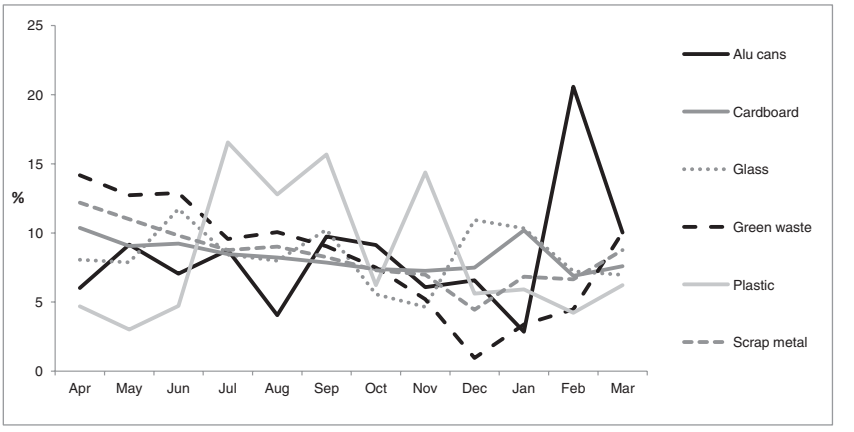

Figure 9 Quantities of six different material types recycled each month in Merseyside during the 2010–11 financial year. In order to make the six materials directly comparable, quantities are expressed as a percentage of the total. Data from Merseyside Waste Disposal Authority.

of the disposal of plastic and of aluminium cans is much harder to explain. In the case of plastic, one might expect deposition to increase over the summer (with increased consumption of bottled drinks), but the peak in November cannot be explained in this way. Similarly, it is not clear why aluminium cans should have peaked so dramatically in February.

It would be mistaken to suggest that the deposition captured within this graph is in no way a meaningful reflection of ideology or symbolism: the fact that any of these materials were brought for recycling at all reflects the ideologies of green living and sustainability; the disposal of glass at Christmas is clearly tied in to cosmology, belief systems and so on. However, importantly, what these data emphasize is that *variability can in fact be the norm*. These patterns of variability were not created intentionally in order to convey a symbolic message. The people making these deposits will not have been aware of the patterns they helped to create. However, that is not to say that those patterns are meaning*less*. They do have something significant to say about the rhythms of everyday practice and consumption – the deposition of objects is often the final stage in a long series of practices and processes, and the material culture represented can therefore fluctuate simply as a result of the inherent ebbs and flows of life.

Turning to the Neolithic, we can see comparable patterns emerging within a very different dataset. Figure 10 shows the quantities of material deposited within 138 Early Neolithic pits at Kilverstone, Norfolk (Garrow, Beadsmoore and Knight 2005; Garrow, Lucy and Gibson 2006). Figure 11 shows those quantities in a way which allows us to compare the amounts of flint and pottery in each pit directly. In some cases, the amount of both materials is closely comparable, but often the two numbers are very different. Equally, the majority of pits show significant deviations from the mean. It would certainly

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Figure 10 Pottery and flint distributions at Kilverstone, Area E (Garrow, Lucy and Gibson 2006, figure 2.7).

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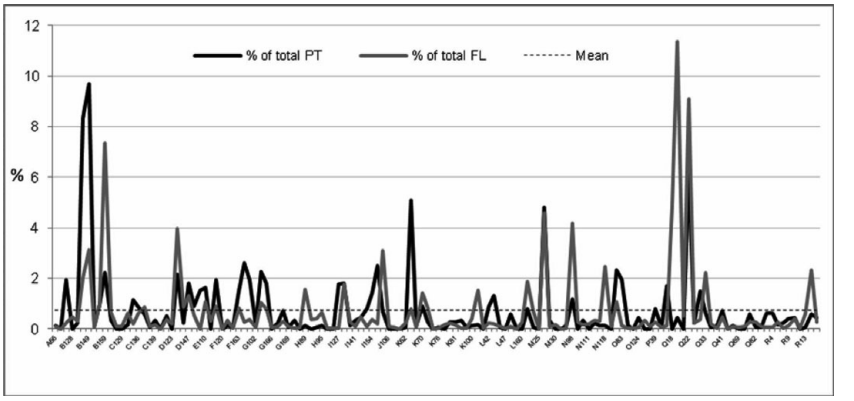

Figure 11 Graphic representation of the relative amounts of pottery and flint in each pit at Kilverstone, Area E. In order to make the two materials directly comparable, the quantity of sherds/flakes in each post-hole was calculated as a percentage of the total number.

be possible to interpret patterns such as these as having been intentionally (and meaningfully) constituted in the past – a material-culture text designed to express contradictions within society and so on. However, it is also possible to put forward a more 'everyday' explanation. It is perfectly feasible to view variability in the quantities of different materials within each pit and within each different pit cluster – like the recycling dumped in Merseyside – as reflecting the fluctuations of everyday life at the site. The accumulation of pottery and flint, and the digging and filling of pits, occurred at different 'tempos' (see Garrow, Lucy and Gibson 2006, 74–75). Consequently, when one pit was filled, there may have been lots of all materials available in the pre-pit context. However, when the next pit was filled, it is possible that while lots of flint had been knapped, no further pots had been broken; as a result, that pit would have been sparse in terms of pottery, but rich in terms of flint (ibid.). Through these simple processes, the picture of Neolithic life captured in Figure 11 gradually emerged. Importantly, just like the recycling data presented in figure 9, while the patterns revealed probably were not meaningful to those filling the pits nearly 6,000 years ago, and were not created intentionally, they *are* meaningful to us in our attempts to understand 'everyday' past practice.

Conclusion

It is something of a cliché that, in constructing a history, one turns a spotlight on the assumptions which underlie interpretation in the present. In writing this history of structured deposition, I must admit that I was surprised by quite how persistent the ideas put forward in Richards and Thomas's 1984 paper have been. Not because it was not a good paper – it was. It is just that 28 years seems a long time for any idea(s) to have stood the test of time. As we have seen, to a significant extent the concept of structured deposition *has* done so. One key explanation as to why it has must be, simply, that it

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works. Richards and Thomas captured an idea which has remained in tune with interpretations since, and which also successfully captured the essence of a genuine suite of practices in the past. Consequently, the assumptions of that paper still do underpin interpretations today.

In the preceding section, I attempted to question a few of those assumptions. I argued (a) that we need to be more explicit and less complacent in our labelling of structured deposits; (b) that 'everyday' explanations for material culture patterning should be investigated more; and (c) that the signature of everyday practice is not usually 'even' or 'average', but highly varied and variable. Underlying these suggestions is a general feeling that the 'ritual' side of interpretation has perhaps unfairly come to dominate the 'everyday'. The possibility that deposits could come to have structure for relatively 'ordinary' reasons has been considered ever since Richards and Thomas's original paper. However, due to the historical legacy of structured deposition outlined in this paper, the implications of this possibility have often been ignored.

As mentioned above, I do not want in any way to argue for a total shift away from the ritual to the mundane. Structured deposition was, at least in part, introduced in order to bring out the 'strangeness' or 'alterity' of the past (see Thomas 1991, 1; Hill 1995, 5), allowing the investigation of ritual, symbolic meanings and so on. This aim was a good one, and one which was certainly achieved, enriching our understanding of the prehistoric past considerably and for the better. However, it strikes me that over the years the strangeness of structured deposition has gradually become more and more familiar. The identification of structured deposits can now seem rather formulaic. Consequently, I feel it is vital that, as archaeologists trying to understand the past, we properly investigate the material signature(s) of normal everyday life as well. Importantly, in saying this, I am not advocating a move to make the past more boring. Ultimately, I think that if we are able to investigate the 'everyday', and make *that* seem strange or different, that is even more of an achievement. It is therefore vitally important that, as archaeologists, we gain confidence to explore the mundane in more detail – in monumental contexts just as much as on seemingly more 'everyday' sites.

It is possible to suggest that, in taking the approach we took to Kilverstone, and focusing on the everyday (and 'meaningless') in our interpretation, we moved understandings of Neolithic pit sites further on than we would have done if we had stressed the ritual (and 'meaningful'). Different interpretive possibilities were opened up. I would argue that, if we are ever to understand fully the processes behind structured deposition, it is crucial that we explore this side of life elsewhere as well. For instance, if we saw the variability of pottery decorations across Durrington Walls not as evidence for intentionally constructed statements about society's rules and symbolism, but as a consequence of the fact that different elements of the site simply came into focus at different times when different traditions of pottery decoration were prevalent, our understanding of the site would be changed significantly. Similarly, to take a couple more of the examples discussed above at random, would we perhaps learn more about the pits at Down Farm if we saw the

presence of different types of flint in different pits as a sign not of symbolic exclusion (Brown 1991), but of the fact that people visiting the site had simply been using different materials at different times? And what would happen if we did explore further the differential distribution of fabric types at Hambledon Hill not as a sign of depositional rules, but as evidence that different contemporary groups of people *had* had access to different parts of the hilltop (Mercer and Healy 2008)?

To my mind, if such possibilities were at least considered, our understanding of those sites and others would change significantly, and perhaps for the better. As soon as the structure evident within deposition is made potentially 'everyday' in this way, different interpretations become possible. Equally, the 'meaning' of those patterns is not some obscure material-culture text (which we cannot easily decipher), but relates directly to past practices (which, arguably, we can). The opening up of interpretive possibilities was one of the main elements of the postprocessual agenda back when the notion of 'structured deposition' first took off. In revisiting that interpretive world, charting the evolution of ideas since, and questioning some which have persisted, it is hoped that this paper might revitalize the possibilities for structured deposition that seemed so fresh back in 1984.

Acknowledgements

This paper has been a very long time in the making, and so here, even more than usual, it is important to acknowledge many people. I would like to thank J.D. Hill, whose Iron Age lectures in the early 1990s first inspired my interest in deposition; Anwen Cooper, Christopher Evans, Chris Gosden, Mark Knight, Lesley McFadyen and Marie Louise Stig Sørensen who have all (in their very different ways) made me question, reconsider and consolidate my ideas about deposition over the years since then; Emma Beadsmoore and Mark Knight for their insight and inspiration in analysing the assemblages from Kilverstone and Etton; Josh Pollard and Julian Thomas for their helpful and encouraging examiners' comments on my Ph.D.; Anne Teather for organizing the Re-depositing Prehistory session at TAG 2005 in Sheffield, where I first formalized some of these thoughts in a presentation entitled 'Rethinking the structure in deposition'; Chris Wakefield, with whom recent conversations about his own insightful undergraduate dissertation on structured deposition within causewayed enclosures helped me to clarify my own thinking a great deal; Matt Grove for his much-needed advice about statistics; and Lee Jones at the Merseyside Waste Disposal Authority for taking the time to search out their monthly recycling data for me. A number of people very kindly allowed me to reproduce their original figures: Colin Richards and Julian Thomas (figures 2 and 3); Josh Pollard and the Prehistoric Society (figure 6); J.D. Hill (figure 7); and Alasdair Whittle, Josh Pollard, Caroline Grigson and Oxbow Books (figure 8). Finally, I would like to thank Anwen Cooper, Jody Joy, Elizabeth Shove and Fraser Sturt; the *Archaeological dialogues* editorial committee; and the two anonymous referees for their insightful and very helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

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The interpretation of depositions in pits. Is it time for the pendulum to swing back?

*Åsa Berggren**

Richard Bradley was critical of the hesitation he saw in British archaeology towards the use of the interpretive category 'votive deposit'. The artefacts were instead interpreted in practical terms, as lost things or hidden treasures. This was published in 1990 in *The passage of arms*. Since then, or – as Garrow shows – since the mid-1980s, much has happened. Garrow has reacted against what he calls the hyperinterpretive turn in archaeology, where almost every patterning of material culture is regarded as intentional and symbolic. Instead, or as a complement, he wants to see a more developed discussion about material culture patterning as a result of everyday practices that just happen, without an attached symbolic meaning, but still varied and variable. So, is it time for the pendulum to swing back?

Starting with the 1984 paper by Richards and Thomas, Garrow has thoroughly and convincingly identified a series of problems in the decades-long use of the concept of structured deposition. His discussion concerns mainly British archaeology, where the term 'structured deposition' was coined and has had its greatest impact. It has not become greatly used in, for example, Swedish archaeology. However, a review of categorizations and interpretations of deposited materials from the Neolithic in Scandinavia shows a similar situation to that in Great Britain. The terms are different, but some of the problems seem to be the same.

The interpretation of depositions has been discussed in Scandinavia with a slightly different starting point. As Bradley pointed out, the ritual or votive interpretation has been regarded as less controversial in Scandinavian than in British archaeology (Bradley 1990). However, the general theoretical trends in archaeology have had their influence on this issue as well. While a ritual or votive category of depositions had been used in Scandinavian archaeology since its introduction in the 1860s, the processual trend in theory meant that fewer votive or ritual interpretations were put forward during the 1980s and early 1990s. But since the mid-1990s the votive or sacrificial interpretation has become more used. Some hesitation may in some cases be felt towards the votive or sacrificial category of interpretation, and the concept of ritual deposition may be preferred as a more general category (Berggren 2006; 2010). Still, interpretations of the deposited materials as symbolic or ritual have been regarded as valid alternatives.

Often the discussion of depositions, especially in Denmark, has concerned wetland deposited materials, but has extended to dry-land depositions as well.

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These dry-land votive deposits consist, for example, of a few artefacts placed under a stone, a ceramic pot placed in a pit and so on. They represent what Garrow would categorize as odd deposits. One illustrative example is an intact funnel beaker placed in a small pit, fitting nothing else but the pot, placed upside down, with a big stone placed on top of it. I categorized this as a ritual deposition in the site report (Berggren and Celin 2004). About 15 examples of funnel beakers deposited intact in pits from the Malmö region in southern Sweden are known (Hadevik 2009). The concept used to categorize these pits is often sacrificial or offering pit (in Swedish *offergrop*).

During the last few decades large-scale infrastructural developments have taken place in areas of Sweden, leading to large-scale archaeological investigations. As a result, the topsoil has been stripped over large areas and certain patterns among the remains have become clear. Among other things, patterns of material culture in pits have been recognized. These represent what Garrow would categorize as material culture patterning.

These pits and the material in them have been discussed and categorized in various ways in Swedish archaeology. There has been discussion whether they should be interpreted as waste or ceremonial deposits (see e.g. Stålbom 1997 for a discussion concerning Bronze Age pits). The ceremonial interpretation has been seen as a valid alternative and some of the pits have been categorized as offering pits. Perhaps because the sacrificial category was a generally accepted interpretation, it was not experienced as far-fetched to use it in the case of these pits as well. A shift can be detected here. From having signified specially arranged materials such as intact pots and other artefacts, the term 'offering pit' now also included pits with rich assemblages of fragmented materials.

In an attempt to discuss the function of these pits with examples from the Malmö region in south-western Scania, the concept of Early Neolithic find-rich pits (in Swedish *fyndrika TN-gropar*) was suggested in a student paper from Lund University (Eriksson *et al.* 2000). Pits with large find material from this period were known before this, but the phenomenon was systematized in this paper and the concept has become accepted and increasingly used during the past decade, at least in the Malmö area. In a survey of localities where pits from the Early Neolithic have been found in the Malmö area, a little over half of 70 localities included pits that could be categorized as find-rich pits. The average was one to three pits per locality. The definition of a pit rich in finds has varied. The definition of what is rich material may be difficult and is by necessity arbitrary. In the original student paper it was defined as a total weight of between about 0.5 and 1.0 kg or above, consisting of finds of flint and/or pottery, not excluding other materials (Eriksson *et al.* 2000, 4). In the other mentioned study of the Malmö area, the definition was of at least one kilogramme of material (Gidlöf 2009, 94).

I believe this concept grew in popularity as there was a need for an analytical tool in the efforts to understand these material patterns. The sacrificial interpretation was experienced as too specific and not always appropriate. In fact, the sacrificial category itself had in some cases become something of a covering concept in Scandinavian archaeology, used to describe a range of

various activities and rituals that were perhaps not best described as offerings or sacrifices (Berggren 2006; 2010). And the categorization of these pits as votive pits seems to have been experienced as similarly problematic. However, the use of the term 'find-rich pit' has also been unclear at times. In some ways this term has become used in the same way as the concept of structured depositions as described by Garrow. First introduced as an analytical tool, it has also been used as an interpretation in itself.

Pits categorized as find-rich pits have occurred in great numbers in one location as well as in isolation from other similar pits. A pattern of depositions may be especially clear at a location with many pits, as at Kilverstone, where Garrow and his colleagues conducted their investigation (Garrow, Beadsmoore and Knight 2005). Such places have been found in the Malmö area as well. They are very unusual, as the average per site is just a few find-rich pits, as mentioned above. At Svågertorp, to the south of Malmö, more than 30 pits from the Middle Neolithic were investigated, showing a clear pattern. They were of similar sizes (about 0.8 m in diameter) and depths (0.14–0.33 m) and contained large amounts of flint and pottery, and in some cases reddish-coloured stones were placed in a concentration or a circle. Also, large amounts of burnt hazelnut shells were found in the pits. Some of these pits were described as votive pits or offering pits in one of the site reports. The argument used for this interpretation was that some of the pottery may have been placed in the pits as intact pots or at least as large parts of pots. But, interestingly, the pattern of depositions in the pits of similar assemblages and amounts of everyday material from the settlement was also used as an argument for the votive interpretation (Touminen and Koch 2007). Other pits in the same locality were not categorized as votive pits as the material in them was perceived as mundane or everyday in another of the site reports from Svågertorp. These pits were categorized just as pits, even though similarities between the pits were recognized (Koch and Touminen 2006). In Garrow's words, the Middle Neolithic pits at Svågertorp would be described as material culture patterning. As we can see in this example, the patterning of everyday material has been used as an argument for interpretations of the pits both as votive and as mundane.

In the area of Almhov, also to the south of Malmö, about 200 Early and Middle Neolithic pits were found at a site with Early Neolithic grave monuments such as long barrows and dolmens. Of the pits, 94 were recognized as find-rich pits in the original site report and a subsequent article (Gidlöf, Hammarstrand Dehman and Johansson 2006; Gidlöf 2009). Most of these pits were between two and three metres in diameter and most were less than 0.5 m deep. The pits contained large amounts of pottery and flint and also animal bone. In these studies, the term was explicitly used as an analytical instrument to discern patterns in the material. The interpretations of the pits include both ritual deposition and other more mundane functions (Gidlöf 2009).

In a later study the pits of this and neighbouring sites were systematically compiled and interpreted (Rudebeck 2010). Seventeen pits from the Early and Middle Neolithic were categorized as pits with intentional depositions and 192 pits were identified as other pits from these periods. In this study,

50 were categorized as find-rich pits. Another definition of 'find-rich pit' was used here: a find-rich pit contained at least 50% of the average of the pits in the area in at least one of the categories of flint tools, bone or pottery. These find-rich pits were categorized and interpreted as feasting pits. Thus in this study a difference is made between pits with deliberate depositions and feasting pits. The first category is equivalent to Garrow's odd deposits and the second to his category of material culture patterning. Some of the pits are arranged in pairs. This pattern is interpreted as a part of the temporary settlements of huts used during large gatherings and feasts at this site. One pit was dug when a hut was erected. It was in use during the time of the settlement, perhaps as storage, and contained little find material as a result. The other pit was dug at the end of the settlement, where waste from the stay was deposited, resulting in much material. The feasting pits are regarded as the result of activities connected to the gatherings and the feasting, such as the preparation and consumption of food and drink, various crafts and the handling of waste (Rudebeck 2010). In this example the pattern of the material in the pits is separate from what is regarded as votive deposit and is interpreted as a function of the gatherings and the feasting that took place there.

So as can be seen from the above examples, the category of find-rich pit has been used in various ways, for example as an analytical tool to discern patterns, but also as an argument for a votive or a mundane interpretation of these patterns. Both the terms 'structured deposition' and 'find-rich pit' may be useful as analytical tools. But the amount of finds or the patterning of the material does not in itself offer an interpretation of the past actions that resulted in the patterning. The acts have to be interpreted in themselves. It seems that in many cases we find ourselves asking whether the acts were ritual or not.

As Garrow is arguing, the structure of a pattern is not in itself an argument for a ritual activity. This was pointed out already by Richards and Thomas in their paper, as they said that domestic activity also involves a high degree of structure. Among other things, this is connected to how one defines ritual. Repetition may be said to be a characteristic of ritual, but looking for repeated acts and interpreting them as ritual is inadequate.

I believe that the separation of ritual from non-ritual is part of the problem. Perhaps it is not always possible to understand how acts were categorized in the past. According to the ritualization concept as understood by Catherine Bell (1992), any act may be ritualized, through a strategy of differentiation. To identify ritualized acts these strategies have to be identified. But this may not always be possible. An act may be performed in the same way on different occasions, but only when, for example, a special word is uttered is it differentiated and ritualized. This means that the material remains of the acts, ritualized and non-ritualized, may be exactly the same. Thus we have to consider that ritualized acts are not distinct from other acts. Ritualized acts may be found anywhere in a continuum of acts of different degrees of formalization, from very formalized ceremonies to more causal, more temporal, less formal acts (Bell 1997, 138). This is similar to the continuum ranging from odd deposits to material culture patterning that

Garrow points to. This means that the categories, both the analytical tools and the interpretations, are not strictly delimited, but rather flexible.

We may also take into consideration the possibility that what we would categorize as ritual today was perhaps not separated from the mundane sphere of society in the past. Or, if we stick with this separation, there is also the possibility of profane rituals. That something is ritualized does not necessarily mean that it should be connected to religion.

Thus we may not always reach an unambiguous and strict categorization of past acts. However, interpretations of the cultural context and the social results of the acts may still be possible.

In the case of materials in pits, their deposition in the ground was the very last thing that happened in the past. The different materials had been handled in various ways before this. A structured deposition may be structured as a result of actions taking place prior to the deposition. Generally, a discussion of pre-depositional practices as a part of the interpretation of depositions may be very fruitful (see Rudebeck 2010). The gatherings at Almhov may have had many structured and even ritualized acts as components, but was the deposition of the material in the pits ritualized or not?

My own view is that it is possible to discuss differentiation and ritualization strategies in many cases, while acknowledging the continuum between ritual and habit. A habitual placing of structural patterns in a ritual category is not satisfying. Instead the ambiguous character of some acts and their role in social production may be discussed.

So, is it time for the pendulum to swing back to a place where the ritual interpretation is no longer acceptable? In a very crude way, Garrow's paper may be read like this. But Garrow is calling for a more in-depth discussion of depositional practices and he does not mean for the pendulum to return to exactly the same position as before, which actually pushes the archaeological interpretation further.

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Meaningful but beyond words? Interpreting material culture patterning

*David Fontijn**

Duncan Garrow's article is a thought-provoking review of the concept of structured deposition and I agree with several of the points he makes. Thinking along the same lines, I would like to make a few additional remarks on structured deposition.

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There is more to the object's life than just deposition

Garrow argues that the presence of a practice of deliberate deposition in prehistory is too much taken for granted nowadays. I would like to add that archaeologists too often assume that it was really the deposition of the material we retrieve that was central to the act in the perception of prehistoric people. This is, after all, tacitly assumed in the way find distribution tends to be analysed. Comparing the presence of sherds of type A in one pit to a pot of type B in an adjacent ditch of a henge implies that what matters is the presence ('deposition') of the pottery in the pit and ditch fills. I wonder, however, if things are not somewhat more complicated than that. Sherds ending up in a pit can be the last part of a longer sequence of acts. For example, it might have been the content of the pot that mattered and for which it was brought to the henge. Something was done with it and it broke or was deliberately broken. From that moment, we are dealing with fragments of a pot, and we have to consider the way those sherds were treated and how these could end up in the archaeological record. This is a different stage, involving specific natural and anthropogenic processes. Selection and deliberate deposition of sherds may or may not be one of them. In the perception of the participants, it can, for instance, have been the eating of food during a particular event at that particular location – a henge – that was central, but not necessarily the final discarding of its container.

What I suggest is that we should analytically separate the significance of an object during its life and its significance during the moment when it was finally deposited into the ground, to become part of the archaeological record. For a modern example, one may think of the deliberate breaking of a glass during a Jewish wedding ceremony. In this context, and during a specific stage in the wedding, the glass is meaningful and becomes central to the act for a short moment. I wonder, however, if this is still the case after the glass has been broken and if it comes to the fore in a special treatment of the sherds afterwards.

Returning to archaeology, it seems to me that some of the claimed examples of structured deposition actually tell of very different practices ending up in deposition. Thomas (1999, 66) gives the example of an Early Neolithic pit at Wingham, Kent, where an assemblage entirely made up of waste flakes can be refitted back on to a core, 'with no tools or utilized pieces having been created in the course of the reduction sequence'. This stands for a way of flint working that deviates from average practices, but also for a subsequent collection and deposition of waste in such a way that one gets the idea that a notion of completeness mattered here. This, however, is different from another example listed by Thomas (1999, 65: Balfarg, Fife), where he mentions a pit that was lined with potsherds of different vessels. Here, sherds were apparently used as building material to create a particular structure or to mark a pit in a particular way that was dug and subsequently used for some other purpose. Even if the sherds were specifically selected for this, it was not their deposition that was central here – the pit was dug and constructed for some other purpose.

And what to think of the 'deposition' of pyre 'debris' in prehistory (McKinley 1997, 137–39)? Does it represent a structured deposition of material, or is it merely the meaningless leftovers of a meaningful social

practice? On the one hand, it represents the remnants of a special social activity, which took place at this location (a deceased was burnt, and vital remains were taken out and buried elsewhere or kept by the mourners). On the other hand, there are also indications that charred wood was substantially rearranged and that some bone and artefact fragments were left in place, although they must have been visible. In those cases the pyre remains became the centre of monumental Iron Age mounds (Fokkens, Jansen and Van Wijk 2009; Fontijn and Jansen, forthcoming). This suggests that both the taking out and the leaving in place of material were relevant practices here, and simply speaking of the *deposition* of pyre debris conceals such nuances.

So, in my view, a first step in redressing the balance in the study of structured deposition would be not just to compare the presence or absence of objects from different contexts, but also to include the practices in which they were involved in the comparison. What were the activities by which the material we retrieve ended up in the archaeological record? Here we may consider deposition of material as the final stage of a longer use-life, and accept that in the course of that life, and during deposition, its significance may have shifted from meaningful item to alienable thing, or vice versa.

Meaningful but beyond words?

Raising the issue of the meaning of objects brings me to another point made by Garrow: that material culture patterning does not have to come about as a result of underlying symbolic schemes, but 'can just happen' (p. 109). The way material tends to be treated and deposited need not be explicitly intentional, but might still evidence that it was meaningful, yet not meaningful in a referential, discursive sense. Already in 1995, Maurice Bloch argued that archaeologists have focused too much on the symbolic and the referential in their discussion of the meaning of objects (Bloch 1995). Material, he argues, can often 'mean' something in different ways. He gives the example of geometrical carvings on the three main posts and shutters of a Zafimaniry house in the eastern forest of Madagascar. These carvings 'mean' nothing in the referential sense: they do not stand for a concept or an idea – at least, this is not why they are carved. The practice of carving parts of the house, however, is considered essential to the life cycle of a family inhabiting the house. It is seen as part of a process of human maturation and settling down, in which the house is seen to 'harden', and the carvings honour the hardness of the wood. The house does not represent the marriage – the house is the marriage (Bloch 1995, 215). As such, the carvings do mean something as they seem to express a particular sense of ordering that is familiar and recognizable to the Zafimaniry. It is often this sort of non-discursive, material meaning that we are dealing with if we consider the possible significance of material culture patterning of the kind discussed by Garrow.

To take a modern example: a particular kind of disorder and litter, often including beer bottles reused as ashtrays, is often felt to make an apartment into a real students' home. If the garden of that students' home, however, is used in the same way, the non-student neighbourhood will have a bad feeling about the fact that 'litter' is dumped in a place that is – in their view – made for gardening. The different attitude towards waste in student communities is

not something that is explicitly stated. Rather, it is something you can become confronted with if you are introduced to a students' home as a green freshman, as 'the way we do things here'. Rationalizing this attitude, for example by seeing it as a reaction towards bourgeois society, will come later and is perhaps etic rather than emic. It also will not make clear why it is particularly in the treatment of waste that such a reaction against society materializes. Material culture patterning implies that any society has preconceived ideas of where and how to do particular things – cultural biographies in the sense of Kopytoff (1986). Mapping the life cycles or biographies of that material is not necessarily about explicit symbolical schemes and cultural concepts, but it is about what people (implicitly) feel to be 'the right way of doing things in a specific context'. As Kopytoff remarks (1986, 67), it is often only if we are confronted with a deviant treatment of an object that we come to realize that we actually have a prior conception of what would be the 'right' life-path of a specific kind of object in a specific context.

Dropping 'ritual' and 'mundane'

Mapping the patterns (and deviancies) in the life-course of objects of a prehistoric society is – within the limitations set by the archaeological record and our own frames of reference – for that reason important in itself. I have the impression that this is also the agenda Garrow sets. I do doubt, however, if it is really helpful to label depositional practices with phrases like 'mundane' or 'everyday' activitities. This brings me to perhaps the only point where my opinion differs from Garrow's. He states that '*material culture patterning* ... could have come about for relatively mundane reasons' (p. 110), but this presupposes that a distinction between 'mundane' and non-mundane matters in prehistoric societies and is recognizable to us. In a similar way, his remark that archaeologists are to 'investigate the material signature(s) of normal everyday life as well' (p. 114) seems to suggest that everyday life is something different from 'ritual' acts. I wonder what was 'mundane' to the prehistoric societies we study and if it is helpful to use such a term here at all.

One of the major problems in the archaeology of the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age is the problematic identification of clusters of pits, posts and artefact scatters as 'settlements'. It is a paper by Jo Brück that sets this out wonderfully for south English sites (1999c). She demonstrates that there is a considerable variety among what are morphologically similar sites (1999c, 57). In terms of the presence or absence of particular artefacts, a functionally or spatially distinct category of 'domestic' site cannot be identified. Interestingly, Brück's table 4.1 suggests that the same holds true for supposedly 'ritual' sites that do look similar to henges. The same set of activities was certainly not carried out at all such sites (Brück 1999c, 57). It would be interesting to see to what extent some sites that we now a priori classify as 'domestic' or 'ritual' actually overlap in terms of the general biographies of objects on such sites.

This is the case with another controversial type of monument, the late Iron Age *Viereckschanzen* on the European continent – enclosed square areas often marked with earthen walls. Traditionally interpreted as Celtic sanctuaries, more recent research in Germany has shown that both the material present at

such sites and the way in which it was deposited do not markedly differ from what is found in 'domestic' settlements. Although this is often seen to prove that *Viereckschanzen* were 'domestic' sites, it is perhaps more to the point to remark that our way of classifying sites is not in line with the evidence of people's activities there. We are, apparently, dealing here with activities with an archaeological fingerprint comparable to what we find on non-enclosed, unwalled residences (Wieland 1999). This makes it all the more important to understand why people in certain locations thought it important to shield such activities with square enclosures and earthen walls.

Summing up, I consider Garrow's review a much-needed critique of structured deposition, and an invitation towards an empirically based archaeology of material culture practices that will certainly prosper, perhaps even more so if we drop such preconceived modern labels as 'ritual' and 'mundane'.

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Some deposits are more structured than others

*Julian Thomas**

I congratulate Duncan Garrow on his very engaging history of the concept of structured deposition, although I find it slightly terrifying that this history now extends over nearly 30 years. I find much to agree with in his account, notably the distressing point that what was originally intended as a heuristic has sometimes become an end in itself: the identification of a class of deposits that are 'structured'. Thus, for instance, Bishop, Church and Rowley-Conwy argue (2009, 82) that pits in Neolithic Scotland may have represented 'places of structured deposition rather than domestic settlements', and that therefore the plant remains contained within them should be regarded as unrepresentative. Here, structured deposits take on the abject character that used to be afforded to 'ritual' phenomena in archaeology: having been identified as irrational and abnormal, their interpretation is considered beyond archaeological competence, and they are not subjected to further analysis.

Having said that I go along with the greater part of Garrow's argument, there is one issue that bothers me. This is the categorical distinction that he draws between 'odd deposits' and 'material culture patterning'. While he affirms that these represent the two extremes of a continuum or a 'sliding scale', it seems to me that he repeatedly slips into the position where an absolute dichotomy is established between the two. As an example, he lauds 'studies which have maintained an interpretive distinction between these two "types" of deposit' (p. 107). On the basis of this division, he sets up a series of

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further oppositions: between odd and everyday, meaningful and meaningless, ritualized and non-ritualized, and so on. When Garrow talks of a form of 'material culture patterning' that is untainted by 'oddness' but characterized by an 'everyday' signature, it seems uncomfortably close to the early New Archaeology's optimistic belief that past lifeways could be directly 'read off' from material residues (e.g. Hill 1968, 135).

It is on the basis of this odd/everyday dichotomy that Garrow objects to the way that 'odd deposits' have been used to support the argument that material culture patterning can be meaningful. Such a complaint only really makes sense if we accept that 'odd deposits' and 'material culture patterning' are actually opposed categories, rather than different parts of a single phenomenon, which I would want to call 'depositional practice'. Now, if I were to be writing a history of the investigation of depositional practice, I would want to argue that these 'odd deposits' were like the visible portion of an iceberg, showing above the surface of the ocean. It was all the pits lined with potsherds, unbroken stone axes, placed animal skulls and general weirdness that could not easily be overlooked that first alerted archaeologists to the likelihood that 'something was going on' in the domain of deposition. Without this strangeness, it is much less probable that the more subtle forms of patterning would have been identified as a problem to be addressed, in other than functional terms. So when Garrow argues that the more formal and elaborate kinds of deposition have been overemphasized at the expense of the everyday, this is fair enough, but it neglects the point that 'odd deposits' were our point of entry into the complicated world of prehistoric depositional practice. It was from this bridgehead that it proved possible to address the more mundane forms of deposition, not least in Garrow's own excellent work. Consequentially, I am wary of separating the odd from the everyday in any categorical way.

Garrow is quite correct when he argues that the patterning that we can identify in material assemblages need not have been intentionally created, and that random processes do generate uneven patterning. But again, he seems to be imagining an either/or scenario, in which those deposits that are not characterized by 'oddness' represent the outcome of everyday, non-symbolic acts. The reality is likely to be more complex than this. Garrow says that he finds it hard to accept that all material culture patterning is symbolically meaningful or intentionally created, but these are not the same thing. Indeed, he notes that it is possible for patterning to be unintended, but still symbolically meaningful. However, he passes over this point rather too quickly, and I think it would have been helpful to give more consideration to residues that may have been generated through habitual and unconsidered adherence to cultural conventions. As he notes, Henrietta Moore's ethnographic study of rubbish disposal amongst the Endo of Kenya was a major inspiration for early studies of structured deposition, and it was concerned with the organization of material in domestic compounds and contexts that were anything but exclusively ritual. However, the patterns that she described were not 'meaningless', even if they might have been described as everyday. The Endo do not mix ash, chaff and animal dung, because each of these is placed in a part of the compound that has distinct connotations

of age and gender (Moore 1986, 102). Moreover, these locations are judged appropriate for the burial of men or women, young or old.

So, in the Endo case, deposition is guided by a set of connections between places, age, gender and death, and while it is far from random, the throwing of ash onto a heap behind a house, or the sweeping of dung over the edge of the compound, may not always be a fully intentional process. Much of this activity is likely to be habitual and unevaluated, simply repeating a pattern of acts without deliberation. The point is that in the Endo example mundane, 'everyday' activity *does* embody and reproduce a structure of symbolic meaning. Yet rather than carrying round in their heads a massively complex cosmological scheme, Endo people are simply conducting themselves in an appropriate way, cued by the architecture, topography and materials that surround them. They operate in the grey area between Garrow's two poles of conspicuous oddness and meaningless mundanity, where the two overlap and merge.

What I take from this is the need to complement a concern with the observed pattern of material in the archaeological record with a focus on deposition *as a social practice*, and I find this underemphasized in Garrow's paper. Garrow rightly stresses the importance of ideology and belief in early postprocessual archaeology, but he does not say enough about practice, agency and intentionality. In this context we might draw attention to Giddens's (1984, 41) distinction between discursive and practical consciousness, Heidegger's (1962, 67) 'presence-at-hand' and 'readiness-to-hand', and Bourdieu's (1977, 78) concern with the habitus. In each case, what is being referred to is the way that humans do not always operate in a state of explicit and calculative awareness. On the contrary, people often conduct themselves without deliberation, in an 'instinctual' and unconsidered fashion. But as Bourdieu in particular stresses, our habitual practices are learned ones, in which the arbitrary and conventional takes on the character of a 'second nature'. In practice, then, people may reproduce symbolic orders or conceptual schemes without having to think them through. It is my understanding that much of what we refer to as 'structured deposition' is the outcome of this kind of action: where people have placed or dropped particular classes of material in particular locations, or where they have kept specific substances separate from each other, simply because 'that is how it is done'. The archaeological signature of these practices may not be as clear-cut as the 'odd deposits' that emerge from the deliberate selection and arrangement of materials in a pit or ditch-butt, but neither are they randomly generated. Moreover, they will tend to mesh and interdigitate with processes that are more random, some of which may be attributable to non-human agencies. It is an open question to what extent any depositional activity on the part of human beings will ever be entirely free from the influence of inherited cultural conventions.

It is in relation to 'practical consciousness' and the habitus that we can turn to the issue of ritual. The most important point to make about ritual is that rather than representing an entirely separate and elevated sphere of activity, it is actually a mode of conduct that people can slip into and out of in the course of a normal day. It does not always employ a separate

rationality from everyday life, but it does often provide a context in which the guiding principles of that life can fall into a sharper focus. Ritual can be defined as expressive performance that is prescribed by appropriateness, and is sanctioned by tradition (Lewis 1980, 8). In ritual, people are alerted to the specialness of what is going on by distinct kinds of behaviour, often involving formality of utterance, body posture and movement. This awareness of the particularity of the event generally leads to an enhancement of attentiveness and a heightening of sensation. Ritual is therefore discursive rather than exclusively habitual, although it is a context in which the form of discursive action is highly circumscribed: one is intensely aware of what one is doing, even while one's focus is on 'doing it just right'. In the original Durrington Walls paper, Colin Richards and I suggested that there might be a relationship between the kind of deposition that was conducted inside the henge and the less spectacular but nonetheless structured material identified in the Neolithic pits at Fengate (Richards and Thomas 1984, 215). This argument was less contradictory than Garrow seems to suggest. For what we sought to imply was that divisions and associations that were established in the explicit context of ritual might be learned and then reproduced in other less formal circumstances, such as the filling of pits related to domestic occupation.

Some 28 years later, I am not sure how far this idea stands up. It is clear that deposition in henges is rather more complicated than we imagined in 1984, not least in that much of it appears to have been commemorative in character, representing a means of consigning the activities that had taken place in the monument to memory as much it was as a part of those activities. However, what I think it does indicate is that research on prehistoric depositional practices should *not* now develop a single-minded concern with the meaningless and the mundane. Instead, we need to consider the range of shades of grey between the odd and the unremarkable, and the variety of processes and agencies that interacted in the formation of any particular deposit. It may be that it is the *unintentional* generation of patterned deposits that we need to consider at greater length, and the way that these habitual cultural practices mesh with the more random processes that Garrow seeks to emphasize.

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Deposition in the Bronze Age

*Svend Hansen**

In his paper on structured deposition the author exclusively focuses on the Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age archaeology of Britain. He shows the

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wide range of discussions from the the key paper by Richards and Thomas in 1984 to the most recent papers of the 'hyperinterpretive turn'.

As the author correctly mentions, metalwork hoards have usually not been discussed under the banner of structured deposition. This is especially true for archaeological discourse in Germany. The English term 'deposit' is different from the German term *Depot*. By definition a *Depot* consists of a minimum of two objects which were deliberately put on the ground or dug into the earth. This term covers either Bronze Age hoards or Roman coin hoards: everything what was called 'treasure' in the 19th century. The term *Deponierungen* was originally used as an umbrella term for hoards, singly deposited objects, river finds and so on, and is also different from the term 'deposition'.

Nevertheless the discussion has several connecting points. Bronze Age hoards have been discussed for many years either as hidden treasures or as ritual deposits. The division was quite simple and was already in use in the 19th century in Denmark. Finds with complete objects from bogs were seen as votive offerings, finds with scrap material as founders' hoards.

A fresh view arose with the use of structural methods. The individual elements of a hoard were examined with reference to their relation to all other elements within the hoard, or to the entire system, including single finds from rivers and grave goods. From this, conclusions were drawn concerning the meaning and function of the individual elements as well as those of the entire system. Following the method of Claude Lévi-Strauss promised to find 'necessary relations' between elements which were not the results of anecdotal coincidence but reflected a system behind which insightful coherence should be visible. Lévi-Strauss spoke of syntagmatic chains and paradigmatic rows in his analysis of myths. This approach opened up the field for new perspectives on the phenomenon. It became clear that hoards were structured. They did not contain just 'anything' but a certain selection of things which was highly significant in space and time. Furthermore, certain hoard models existed which spread through Europe in several waves.

Discussing structured depositions, scrap metal hoards are the most interesting cases. The fragmentation of objects in many hoards is perhaps the crucial point within the history of the interpretation of hoard finds. Traditionally they were seen as founders' hoards. The used objects were fragmented to melt them down, were hidden in pots or other containers and remained in the earth for different reasons – war or some other crisis. Already in the 19th century scrap hoards were seen as remains of an international scrap metal trade (Sherratt 2012).

Through several studies of the early 1990s it became clear that also 'scrap metal hoards' have a certain structure. They contain a specific selection of weapons, tools and ornaments in certain proportions. It seems normal that they were deposed in a structured way, such as with ingots, weapons, tools and ornaments about each other in layers. The objects were fragmented according to certain rules. The weight of the fragments in the hoards depends on the region. In western Hungary, fragments are heavier than in Bohemia. In central Germany the fragmentation of objects was made according to standard weight, which has been attributed to a premonetary system (Sommerfeld 1994). In other cases fragments were seen as the result of ritual violence

(Nebelsick 2000). Fragments were sometimes collected in socketed axes to join them together for uncertain reasons. There is, however, evidence that fragmentation should be perceived as having taken place within complex (ritual) activity (Hansen 1996–98). Moreover, it is a striking fact that fragmentation was not connected with Early Bronze Age hoards but started in the transition from the Early to the Middle Bronze Age. Fragmentation was part of a new conception of the hoard which was quite successful. It consisted of fragments of ingots, weapons, tools and ornaments and became widely distributed and was still in use in some regions in the Iron Age (Hansen 2005).

There is in my view no longer any reason to speak of scrap metal hoards (*Brucherzdepots*). The fragmentation of objects in hoards has proven to be a cultural feature that is an integral component of the meaning and purpose of deposition. A recent study has shown regularity in the reuse of bronze votive offerings in the sanctuary of Olympia. Larger parts of bronze tripods, the most prestigious of votive gifts in the Geometric Period, were melted down; other single pieces were saved from being reused and were preserved in wells or in other heaps of votive debris within the sanctuary. Keeping these fragments in possession of the deity was possibly understood as *pars pro toto* (Kyrieleis 2006, 97).

Pattern in archaeological finds can always be understood in several ways. The regularity of fragment weights can be understood as the standardization of the votive gift. One could argue that fragmentation for practical reasons like remelting would lead to standardized results as well. Repetition is part of ritual activity as well as of standardized craftmanship.

The structure itself is not the explanation of the deposition. A degree of contextual information is necessary to understand a single observation of structured deposition. Structural analysis is not a mathematical equation whichs leads to identical results. It has to be adapted to different conditions and different contexts.

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Structured deposition meets deliberate object fragmentation

*John Chapman**

It is a pleasure to be invited to contribute to a debate on the nature of 'structured deposition', even though I do not have the expertise to comment on much of the detailed discussion of British prehistoric material presented in this excellent paper. The way in which my commentary approaches structured deposition is by posing two questions relating to the field of deliberate

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object fragmentation – an important aspect of many sites where structured deposition has been claimed (such as Kilverstone, Etton or Windmill Hill) – (a) can the identification of deliberate object fragmentation contribute to the understanding of specific deposits, sites or landscapes? (b) To what extent does the agency of humans and objects relate to structured deposition and deliberate object fragmentation?

The past social practice of deliberate object fragmentation (Chapman 2000; Chapman and Gaydarska 2006) related as much to 'odd deposits', such as the very fragmentary Gumelniţa 'shrine model' placed in a house on the islet of Căscioarele (Dumitrescu 1965), as to broader material culture patterning, such as the coarse pottery placed as grave goods at the Hungarian Copper Age cemetery of Tiszapolgár-Basatanya (Bognár-Kutzian 1963; Chapman 2000, 51–53; cf. incomplete decorated beakers in single graves: Woodward 2002). Balkan–Greek intra-site refitting has so far focused not so much on 'odd' types of object as on 'common but special' objects, such as fired clay figurines, shell bracelets and so-called 'rhyta'. Insufficient research has been completed on the fragmentation of 'mundane' domestic pottery assemblages but such a programme is now in progress, this time focused on Iberian prehistory (Gonzales, in prep.). The issue to which Garrow alludes (p. 90) of using 'odd deposits' to help interpret material culture patterning is therefore very relevant to Balkan objects, since past interpretations of objects such as anthropomorphic figurines have inevitably coloured the meaning (if any) of structured deposition involving these things. It should be noted that, while the vast majority of objects were deposited in settlement contexts, the phenomenon of fragmentation is also well attested in the mortuary domain.

Many of the same interpretational debates concern both intentional fragmentation and structured deposition, particularly the probability of other reasons for fragments of striking objects appearing separate from the rest of the object. However, many of the potential causes of fragment deposition – accidental breakage, the distribution of 'fertility', the disposal of an object whose ritual powers are declining or finished or the deliberate destruction of an object to render it powerless – cannot readily account for finding only part of an object rather than the potentially refitting fragments of an object deposited whole.

The 'fragmentation premise' posits two practices: objects were regularly deliberately fragmented and the resulting fragments were often reused in an extended use-life 'after the break' (Chapman and Gaydarska 2006). There are now several examples of sites in which the parts of broken objects have led their own separate 'lives' – distinguished through use-wear analysis – before being brought together in final deposition (Varna and Dimini shell bracelets, Dolnoslav figurines: Chapman and Gaydarska 2006; cf. Iberian examples of Neolithic pottery: Gonzales, in prep.). But what are the implications for structured deposition of these fragments? It is always possible that figurine fragments could have been discarded at the end of particular ceremonies, just as other complete figurines may have been broken. But it seems improbable that two different parts of a once-whole figurine, with different life-histories, came together by chance in a specific context – especially if that context also contained other special objects. Thus the reintegration of object parts with

different life-histories is a good instance of structured deposition in which four stages of an object's biography were presenced: the birth of a complete object, the fragmentation of an object, the reuse of different parts in different contexts of use, and the reintegration of the object as a part of the act of its final deposition.

The question of the social meaning of deliberate fragmentation has been enmeshed in the discussion of enchainment – the creation of links between people and things (and fragments of things). Ever since it was recognized that enchainment is an umbrella term covering a wide range of processes of relation building, the term has been problematized and, to some extent, it remains so even now (Brittain and Harris 2010). It seems reasonable to suggest that enchained links were just as germane to fragmentation processes as to structured deposition, insofar as the people making the structured deposition were positing relations between places, persons and things. Current research on the diversification of the interpretation of enchainment is predicated on the importance of revitalizing and extending this term for both structured deposition and fragmentation studies.

Two excellent examples of structured deposition were identified at Kilverstone (Garrow, Beadsmoore and Knight 2005) and Etton (Beadsmoore, Garrow and Knight 2010), even though this interpretation was only partly based on the basis of the refitting results at both sites. The implications of the Kilverstone and Etton refitting experiments showed contrasting patterns of fragmentation and deposition. The ditch segments at Etton must have been open for a long time – perhaps up to 500 years – with repeated visits but not such intensive deposition as at Kilverstone. At the latter, the pits often contained large, unweathered and unburnt sherds, in marked contrast to Etton, where the pits contained weathered, burnt sherds suggestive of the pottery being stored before deposition. There was a very strong inference drawn at both sites for the key social practice of deposition of material culture, whether pottery or flint, when a group moved onto a site and when a group abandoned the site. In summary, the ceramic assemblages on each of these settlements contained many, if not a majority of, orphan sherds, which represented between 2% and 25% of the vessel surface. It seems unequivocal that the deliberate fragmentation of vessels, not to mention lithics, contributed to the initial interpretation of these two sites as places of repeated structured deposition. The contrasting results of the two site refitting studies seem likely to indicate enchainment occurring on two different timescales. The material deposited at Kilverstone created enchained links between the site and other sites visited immediately before and after the Kilverstone occupations, since each pit group was dug at the same time and filled in quickly, perhaps within the time frame of a single visit. Here, the fragments presenced the living rather than the ancestors, marking out annual and multi-annual territories. At Etton, by contrast, the evidence for curation and complex treatment of the often weathered and burnt sherds suggests a greater time depth for enchained relations between the site and those visiting the site. These practices evoked the ancestors as much as the living, providing the enclosure with echoes of times long past. It is thus evident that we can answer the first question in the affirmative.

I now turn to the second question – the extent to which the agency of humans and objects related to structured deposition and deliberate object fragmentation. It seems to me that one major question underlying the debate over structured deposition is the extent to which people in the past were making their own conscious decisions which empowered them in their social world or, alternatively, were following their forms of habitus with little personal decision making in a robotic form of Bourdieu's *Homo economicus*. There is a distinctive, if not clearly articulated, view amongst some prehistorians that people in the past were much more like the latter than like the former and that any form of analysis that privileges the former is somehow illegitimate. Doubts such as this threaten Garrow's research aim of how to justify enhanced meaningfulness in material culture patterning.

It is, of course, fundamental to fragmentation research that all alternatives to deliberate fragmentation and deposition of fragments are explored before a conclusion in favour of that interpretation is reached. But if this procedure is satisfied through controlled argumentation, there is a presumption that not only the persons involved but also, potentially, the objects concerned have exercised some agency in the creation of enchained relations. What is not at all clear, however, is why we should construct a 'symbolic' interpretation of processes of fragment enchainment. Rather, everyday processes linking persons to persons, or objects to persons, would be better appreciated on their own merits without an a priori symbolic charge. However, this interpretational limitation would not be valid in the case of pit deposition displaying a strong symbolic message. Thus, in the case of the Hamangia Pit No 1 at Medgidia–Cocoaşe, on the Romanian Black Sea coast (Haşotti 1985; Chapman 2000), the use of whole as well as fragmentary objects to make a contrast between the fills and contents in the southern and northern parts of the pit enhanced the symbolic nature of the structured deposition. The agency of the 'assemblage' of varied raw materials constituting what must have been the full range, or close to the full range, of materials used in everyday Hamangia activities brought to life the productive capacities of the social group through citation of the raw material sources and the persons responsible for bringing them (back) to the Hamangia settlement for use and final consumption. The performance of placing the items of this assemblage in Pit No 1 focused attention on the persons playing important roles in the symbolic re-creation of Hamangia lifeways. In this instance, structured deposition and deliberate fragmentation reinforced each other in a striking symbolic practice. But there were many other cases where fragment enchainment lacked symbolic significance other than that inherent in forming social links. Only through a wide-ranging contextual analysis can we seek to make a proper evaluation of the extent of symbolic charge in any specific case.

In the same way that structured deposition is a sign of the alterity of the past (p. 114), it could also be argued that fragment enchainment indicates the specificity of past social practices. Although the object enchainment well documented in Melanesia (Strathern 1988) was one of the key insights leading to fragmentation theory in archaeology (Chapman 2000; Fowler 2004), Melanesian enchainment does not occur through broken objects, even if there

are such instances known in the *malangan* statuary of New Ireland (Küchler 1988). It would appear that, wherever the fragmentation premise can be supported by clear local or regional evidence, there are new and different processes that cannot be understood purely with recourse to Melanesian ethnography. This is a further sign that both structured deposition and object fragmentation help to shape our views of a past radically different from a recent ethnographic past.

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Reply to responses *Duncan Garrow*

Pattern in archaeological finds can always be understood in several ways

Hansen, p. 129

As with my initial paper, I wanted to begin this final comment with a quote. Hansen's neat point is just as relevant to the five responses above as it is to the history of structured deposition which my paper outlined. It contains a simple yet very effective message that seems especially relevant in this context.

In reflecting on those responses, it is important to state first of all that I very much appreciated the fact that *Archaeological dialogues* opted to ask people mostly working in, and on material from, countries outside Britain to respond. In first writing and then submitting my paper, I was always very conscious of my decision to focus only on British material – taken in order to narrow down the scope of an already very wide study. Reading those responses, it was encouraging to see that people have been having closely comparable debates in relation to similar material elsewhere. I also learnt a great deal about the material I had been discussing myself, even from these relatively short descriptions of archaeology and interpretations with which I am not so familiar. Berggren's discussion of the problems and 'mission creep' involved in defining 'rich' pits in Sweden, and Hansen's discussion of the structured relationships between broken artefacts within hoards in Germany and Hungary, for example, both resonate with and yet also shed new light on some of the British debates outlined above. Equally, I was very glad that both Chapman and Fontijn were able to comment – they have both contributed substantially to debates conducted within Britain about deposition, yet their work did not feature much at all within my paper because it relates to the Balkans (e.g. Chapman 2000) and the Netherlands (e.g. Fontijn 2002) respectively. It was also really nice to have at least one of the original structured deposition analysts comment on my history, and I must apologize to Julian Thomas for 'terrifying' him by reminding him that the idea is now almost 30 years old.

In the remainder of my response, I will focus on what I see as the three main themes raised by all five respondents as a collective – the importance of pre-depositional processes, the notion of habitus and practice, and the role and validity of oppositions (primarily 'ritual versus everyday' and 'material culture patterning versus odd deposits' in this case).

The importance of pre-depositional processes

All five of the respondents picked up, in one way or another, on the important role that processes *prior to* deposition have to play in 'structuring' the material culture actually deposited, and hence in our understandings and interpretations of structured deposition. I was very glad about this, as this single point was perhaps the most important element I wished to emphasize within my paper. As Chapman notes, citing the examples of Etton and Kilverstone, different settlement practices and rhythms of occupation resulted in quite different patterns of deposition at those two sites. Similarly, as Fontijn has discussed in detail within his own previous work (Fontijn 2002) and close to the start of his response here (p. 121), what eventually comes to be deposited is only 'the last part of a longer sequence of acts'. Those acts very much influence what is deposited how and where. Pre-depositional processes are vital to any understanding of deposition.

The notion of habitus and practice

Several of the respondents picked up on the issue of how 'practice' comes to be represented materially: the relationship between structure and agency caught up in the notion of 'habitus', and by association the knowledgeability and intentionality which lies behind any human action, and the material patterns which result from those actions. Fontijn, for example, states (p. 123) that 'material culture patterning implies that any society has preconceived ideas of where and how to do particular things'. Similarly, Chapman implies that my conceptualization of the causes of material culture patterning tends towards a view which characterizes people as 'following their forms of habitus with little personal decision making in a robotic form of Bourdieu's *Homo economicus*' (p. 132). Thomas suggests (p. 126) that my paper could have focused more on habitual practice and the way in which material culture comes to be patterned as a result of (unconsidered) symbolic orders and conceptual schemes.

In relation to these discussions of practice, I agree with Thomas that I could perhaps have discussed the unconsidered material reproduction of symbolic schemes more, but broadly disagree with Fontijn and Chapman. In relation to Fontijn's point, I agree that material culture patterning certainly *can* come about as a consequence of society's symbolic beliefs and culturally specific norms, as Moore (1982; 1986), for example, so clearly showed. However, it does not *have* to come about as a result of these; as stated in the main paper, variability in the archaeological record (ancient or modern) *can just happen* (more on this below). In relation to Chapman's point, it is important to stress that an argument which makes a case for material culture patterning having been caused by the 'mundane' practices of everyday life certainly does not have to imply that people necessarily always behaved in

a mundane, economic and/or boringly rational way (again, more on this below).

In his discussion of 'practice, agency and intentionality' Thomas mentions (p. 126) (alongside Bourdieu's notion of habitus) the distinction drawn by Giddens between discursive and practical consciousness – a distinction that I have always found helpful to work with. As stated above, I agree that I perhaps passed too quickly over non-discursive or 'practical' elements of practice (which nevertheless were influenced by symbolic orders and conceptual schemes) of the sort that could have led to material culture patterning. Again, Moore's work showed just this kind of thing – the Marakwet people's rubbish-disposal patterns were largely unconsidered (i.e. they did not consciously invoke or reference the symbolic order every time they disposed of something), but nonetheless were very clearly influenced by the 'symbolic' schemes of their society (dung, associated with the fertility of goats, could not be mixed with ash, associated with women, since goats and women represented two different and opposed types of fertility – Moore 1982, 78; see also figure 5). I too think that comparable beliefs probably did often lead to material culture patterning in the past as well.

The reason why I did not dwell on this aspect of depositional practice in more detail is that, ultimately, I took the fact that the types of patterning Moore describes would have come about in the past largely as a given, which did not really need debating since all sides would broadly agree. The main issue I wanted to focus on was what I see as an overemphasis within many discussions of structured deposition on patterns created as a result of *discursive* consciousness – material culture patterning created intentionally and explicitly, as a kind of 'text'. As a counterbalance to this tendency, I wanted to stress the fact that material culture patterning and variability could come about purely through non-discursive practice, and that it could come to be patterned without even being influenced by any underlying symbolic scheme. Once we manage to stop seeing all (or, at least, much) material culture patterning as the result of people in the past consciously constructing highly symbolic material-culture texts, and more regularly consider the possibility that it was largely unintended and unintentional (but nevertheless still meaningful – both to them and to us – in terms of practice), time and space should be freed up for the discussions which Thomas rightly feels are not made in detail within my paper.

The role and validity of oppositions

A number of the respondents also picked up on my use of opposed concepts to frame the debate. Thomas (p. 125), for example, suggests that the main opposition used (odd deposits versus material culture patterning) easily slides into an opposition 'between odd and everyday, meaningful and meaningless, ritualized and non-ritualized, and so on'; I can certainly see what he means. Similarly, Fontijn questions (p. 123) the helpfulness of employing terms like 'ritual' and 'everyday'. Berggren also touches on similar issues at various points in her response.

In the following section, I would like to defend the use of at least some of these oppositions. The main pair of oppositions that I actually was intending

to employ were 'ritual versus everyday' and 'odd deposits versus material culture patterning'. As stated in the main paper, I do of course recognize that such oppositions might be viewed as problematic, especially if it is ever assumed that they had meaning in terms of people's perceptions in the past (see Brück 1999b and Bradley 2005 for discussions of these issues). Equally, I understand that for some the use of any such opposition does not perhaps conform closely enough to postmodern conceptualizations of the fluidity of categories and meanings in the present. But, even now – having thought hard about these issues whilst writing the paper, and again in responding here – I do stand by my use of these oppositions. I feel that they are useful and help to frame a complex debate.

In relation to the 'ritual versus everyday' opposition, it is worth noting at the outset that 'ritual' is of course a term which always proves difficult to define. In discussing ritual within his response, Thomas (p. 127), for example, refers to Lewis's definition, whilst Berggren (p. 119) chooses to use Bell's more recent, but not entirely dissimilar, definition. The debate over ritual versus rationality was not something I particularly wanted to get into in the paper. As Bell put it (1992, 69), 'a good deal of writing about ritual involves extensive exercises in cleaning up all the data and terms that are not included in the main definition . . . the nearly-but-not-quite-ritual behaviour'. I fully recognize the points made by Brück in her 1999 paper on the subject, particularly in relation to the fact that people in the past would not necessarily have drawn a distinction between ritual and rationality in their own lives. However, turning back to Bell – whose fairly fluid and context-specific definition of ritual is very helpful, especially since it does not oppose ritual to rationality – I do still think that certain acts in the past would have been 'ritualized' and others (those which I have termed 'everyday' and which Bell would call 'quotidian') would not. Confusingly, these could even be physically and materially the same acts, performed in different contexts. The helpful 'tip-of-the-iceberg' metaphor which Thomas (p. 125) refers to in his response – where clearly odd deposits helped archaeologists to recognize a larger, more hidden body of meaningful depositional practice – is another way of viewing essentially the same thing. He is focusing more on how well we are able to identify 'meaningful' deposition in the present, rather than necessarily on what people felt about a deposit in the past. However, it is important to stress that the visible 'ritualized' tip of the deposition iceberg itself ends deep underwater at a non-ritualized (or 'everyday') base.

To illustrate the point I am trying to make in relation to the 'odd deposits versus material culture patterning' opposition (and again bearing in mind Bell's definition of 'ritualized' action), sometimes in prehistory people would have deposited things with accentuated ceremony – this would often have led to *odd deposits* but could equally have led to *material culture patterning* as well. At other times, however, people would have deposited material culture without any accentuated ceremony, but nonetheless influenced by cultural rules and conventions; in this case, we can gain insight into the latter by investigating the *material culture patterning* created as a result. Finally, it is important to stress that sometimes material culture entered the archaeological record without any such explicit rules affecting what was deposited when and

where. It is this point, I think, which people find problematic in my argument, and so I will try to explain better what I mean. In the Kilverstone pits, for example, various different materials were deposited, but exactly what was deposited in each pit seems to have depended simply on what was available in the pre-pit context at the time that pit was filled. Cultural conventions as to what should be deposited where did not come into it. Any variability or patterning within the pits' contents was created prior to the act of deposition, by the ebbs and flows of 'everyday' practice (which *would* of course have been very much affected by cultural rules and conventions). In saying this, I am *not* suggesting that the act of depositing material in a pit was not meaningful (or even 'symbolic' or 'ritual', if we choose to use those terms) – it almost certainly was. But I am saying that the spatial prevalences and contextual combinations of artefacts across the site were not meaningful – other than in relation to practices which themselves were almost entirely unrelated to the acts of deposition which characterize (the archaeologically visible element of) that site.

In making this point, here and in the main paper, my aim has always been to remind us to focus on and take seriously this end of the depositional spectrum (or indeed iceberg). It is important that we do not just see all patterning as an outcome of ritualized acts of deposition, or even of culturally significant conventions as to what should go where. As Thomas neatly puts it right at the end of his response (p. 127), it is important that we investigate how 'habitual cultural practices mesh with the more random processes' if we are ever really to understand how the structure of deposits relates to past practice.

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