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## For the record

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Contemporary archaeological theory has seen a shift from exploring how archaeology should be practiced – that is to say, how we should do archaeology – to another equally fundamental question: what is archaeology? Certain factions, such as the Symmetrical archaeologists, have asserted a clear-cut definition: archaeology is the study of old things (discussed in Govier, 2022). Slowly, this definition has seeped into the discourse; it is an easy, palatable one-liner, after all, one that neutralizes the discipline, absolving it of any overt connection to politics, gender, ideology, culture or power. Barrett, however, in his paper *Humanness as Performance* challenges their definition and offers the following descriptor: ‘archaeology is the examination of historical conditions with reference to surviving material residue’ (2022, 1). I have three points to make in relation to Barrett’s interesting paper: the importance of discursivity in the analysis of a Baradian (2003, 2007) ‘phenomena’, the nature of performativity and the issue of ocularcentrism.

Barrett’s paper emphasizes the environmental conditions that accommodate or disclose different realities; I wish to highlight the discursive aspect of the material conditions. According to Barad, ‘apparatuses are the material conditions of possibility and impossibility of mattering’ (2007, 148). Barad explains that apparatuses mark (or create) boundaries – they are ‘boundary-drawing practices’ (2007, 206) – and that apparatuses are discursive practices that produce ‘objects’ and ‘subjects’ (2007, 148). In an attempt not to get bogged down with scientific jargon and neologisms, I think a simple (and useful) aspect of Barad’s theory is that subject and object are not givens but rather entangled (materially) with elements that we might think are lost with the absence of life (such as discourse). Traditionally, discourse is linked to language and words; it could be argued that the archaeological record is silent, especially prehistoric archaeology, and discourse died with the human. Barad, however, binds the material and discursive; both discursivity and materiality are ‘mutually implicated’ in the phenomena (2007, 152). The job of the archaeologist, therefore, is to unpack the relationship between the two in a given phenomena and to assess relationally the field of possibilities and impossibilities that afforded the phenomena to take place. Material-discursive practices can be ‘casually’ or specifically produced, and all material components on Earth have the capacity to create ‘specific material configurings’ (2007, 335). Thus, we need to comprehend where the line between humanness and nonhumanness falls, how is it constructed and what role materiality plays in the emergence of the situations we are trying to understand; I argue that humanness cannot be found by addressing the human alone.

Barad discusses the relationship between phenomena (material-discursive events) and imagines an emergence that iterates (iterative intra-activity) or reconfigures, iterative / iteratively indicating that there is a repetitive quality to events, reconfiguring suggesting there is a change (2007, 208). One of the unique complexities we are faced with in archaeology is the fact that we can have abrupt ontological gaps between the analyst and the archaeological communities they unearth. Edgeworth describes the act of excavating as a setting ‘where the present confronts the material traces of the past, which force themselves through into the present moment’ (2012, 77). I wish to emphasize the unknown quality of the archaeological record, and it is often unknown, as the iterations or reconfigurations that have occurred in the time between the inhabitation of the

settlement and the moment it became a subject of archaeological concern are not linked discursively to present day; information is piecemeal and vulnerable to the contemporary machine of archaeological enquiry that as an apparatus itself is well-documented and entangled with powerful institutes, businesses, funding bodies and governments.

If becoming (according to Barad) entails enfoldings of phenomena that iterate or reconfigure, then at abandoned settlements the discursive qualities of human activities lie dormant whilst nonhumanness continues with the passing of time to the abrupt moment when the contemporary archaeologist starts their excavation. If we consider a site like Çatalhöyük, there are phenomena present from the end of its occupation as a viable town hosting vibrant communities to our present; in part, during this time ‘between’ the prehistoric communities and the present communities that engage with the site, we might see evidence of human activities that are culturally distinct to the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods (which the site is esteemed for), for example, a Hellenistic burial, but for the most part, the phenomena we find will be nonhuman, and the intelligibility we locate will be in the form of decomposition processes, animal burrows and so on. The dormant material-discursive events of human lifeways encompass a unique set of discursive practices (specific styles of apparatus); these unknown factors are met (in an almost dialectical fashion) by the contemporary archaeologist entrenched within a different set of discursive practices. The apparatus in this context is not simply a tool or piece of equipment (cf. Barrett, 2022, 3), but a set of discursive practices that create meaning. Barrett regards ‘the relics that have survived [archaeology] as being the eroded fragments of the material apparatus through which forms of humanity (and various other forms of life) had been able to act’ 2022, 5 – I think this statement is correct; however, rather than lacking the apparatus that will enable us to see (Barrett 2022, 3), I argue we lack the full-scale set of discursive practices that would enable us to *feel* the past.

At the heart of Barrett’s paper are performances, which we might frame as ‘constituting acts’; these acts are informed by modes of discourse (therefore, are discursive) and the material (on carbon and cinnabar, see Govier 2019) and are enacted by an entangled social force (a human; on constituting acts, see Butler 1988). Constituting acts are not always reflective of the desire of the human (cf. Barrett, 2022, 6), Butler notes that performative acts can be an ‘accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo’ (1988, 520). Discursive practices can hinder or impede; they can be unspoken and often insidiously embodied. Thus, the twine that binds a community or weaves a social fabric is barbed and restrictive; at its most basic, discursive practices are the powerful forces that inhibit the ease of movement through space, and ironically make it ‘social’ (Barrett (2022, 7) touches upon the politics of context). An important facet of Barad’s critique of Butler’s presentation of performativity is that it focusses on human bodies (2007, 209). Barad broadens the discussion and concept to the matter of bodies (both human and nonhuman) (2007, 210). New Materialisms ensures that we do not negate the integral role matter plays in the emergence of human lifeways in the archaeological contexts we explore (as is often stated in New Materialisms: we are matter; see Govier and Steel 2021).

Critiques such as anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism can sometimes be used to shut down the debate; I suspect both will be aimed at Barrett. However, levelling matter at the expense of acknowledging human systems of oppression is certainly not what New Materialisms calls for, particularly when we stay true to the concepts outlined by thinkers such as Barad (2007) and Bryant (2014). Following Barad, it is the insidious nature of the interwoven character of matter, discourse and power that is disclosed; by locating and unveiling intra-actions, the analyst can be ‘intra-active’ (2007, 246). To be intra-active in archaeology, I suggest, is to be committed to the production of truths, and an important feature of this entails embracing reflexivity, the consideration of the subject position of the author, enabling multivocality, reflecting on the technologies available and the limitations of the technologies employed, and the biases that are evident in the enactment of excavation, interpretation and dissemination of data. Sensorial archaeology, for example, highlighted the ocularcentric nature of the discipline and illustrated how the visual is often given precedence over the other senses, creating a mute, scentless, tasteless past (Day 2013;

Hamilakis 2011; Thomas 2009). In recent years, archaeologists have actively readdressed the different and concomitant senses, innovatively utilizing archaeological data to piece together sensuous pasts. The archaeology of the senses highlighted that sensory engagement is synaesthetic and argued that Western narratives arbitrarily created five distinct sensory categories (Hamilakis 2011, 210). This critical engagement with the senses developed the discourse and reconfigured the potentiality of sensuous engagement in the past for contemporary audiences. Reading Barrett's paper, it is obvious that the role of the visual is vital in his theoretical discussion, as seen in his proposal that new visual technologies might offer opportunities for excavators to better understand historical locations (Barrett 2022, 12); his argument that action can be read like a sign (2022, 6) and his emphasis that performances are observed (2022, 9); the visual permeates his discussion. Barrett's discussion could be accused of ocularcentrism; developing the performative aspect of his argument will likely remedy this issue. Barrett focusses on performance, drawing a distinction between the performer and the observed (2022, 8); a Baradian phenomena entangles these positions. A more profitable line of enquiry might be the analysis of 'doing' or making together, whether we consider the affective relationships formed during 'communitas' (emotive collective togetherness; see Turner 2012) or the embodied knowledge and communication that occurs in communities of practice (Wenger 1998; Wendrich 2013; discussed in Govier 2017); rather than reiterating a cartesian division (cf. Barrett, 2022, 9), the interwoven character should be addressed.

For the record, I am for the archaeological record – in the sense that I think archaeological materials hold knowledge and information about past events (cf. Barrett, 2022, 11). If we take Barad's theory on board, it is clear that there is a great amount of information in archaeological materializations owing to the interwoven character of matter and discourse. As such, the archaeological record is not simply a ledger or register or script documenting a sequence of events but an opportunity to gain ontological insight into factors such as discursivity, power, causality, agency and materiality. Regardless of training and expertise (cf. Barrett, 2022, 9), no one person or excavation team should be placed in the privileged position of sole responsibility for interpretation; information must be collected and shared in a manner that makes further research possible. Finally, I see no need to offer a blanket statement about what humanity is or isn't, was or wasn't, especially one that starts with the notion that humanity 'respected the significance of people, plants, animals, and things' (Barrett 2022, 1) – evidence of human activities unequivocally suggests otherwise.

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## Comments on 'Humanness as performance' by John C. Barrett

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In his work 'Humanness as performance', John C. Barrett criticizes the old but yet influential perspectives in archaeological practice in which the materials of the past are viewed as a fossilized record of past human behaviour (e.g. Binford 1962; 1981; Childe 1956) or even as text to be read (referring particularly to Saussurean semiotics; e.g. Hodder 1986; Patrik 1985; Tilley 1990). This is due to the active role of human agency being ignored or hardly considered in these perspectives, despite an active role of individuals and of how material culture has been, and