

Coming to Senses

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Topics in Sensory Archaeology

Edited by

José Roberto Pellini, Andrés Zarankin
and Melisa A. Salerno

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INTRODUCTION

LETTERS FROM A PAST PRESENT

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Amazon, September 14, 1859

Dear friend Alphonso,

It has been a week since we arrived. We have already landed the equipment, and we have started the walk through the forest. We cannot be far from the ruins. The problem is that none of the natives seem to understand the maps, and this is delaying the progress of the work. The people of the region do not approach space objectively; they just inhabit space and grasp it in a practical way. The sensory acuity tests for the Society of Anthropology of Paris have been conducted. I will send the tabulated results in the next few days. Our friends must be anxious. You can already share with them some of the findings. As they predicted, in the tests using dynamometer, extensometer, and algometer, the natives showed a high threshold of pain and incredible tactile precision. Meanwhile, in the tests using campimeter and ophthalmoscope, they showed a narrow visual field. The Ancient Greeks were right to say that touch was a primitive sense, very close to animality; and that sight was the

most evolved of all senses, pretty close to contemplation and abstraction. I have difficulty communicating with local people. I only know a few words of their language, and I cannot even pronounce them. To be honest, I find it impossible to imitate their guttural sounds. Even when I use universal gestures, natives look at me with surprise. I want to be patient, but I confess that I find some of their customs irritating. The nakedness of their bodies, the complete lack of hygiene, the continuous invasion of personal space, the heightened state of alert resulting from mysterious situations... If it not were for the guide trained in London, I would be facing serious difficulties. Warm greetings to Mary.

London, January 17, 1860

My dear George,

I am so happy that everything is fine. I have already sent the test results to our friends in Paris. They are just thrilled. Do not forget to write down everything you find and observe in the forest. It will be important for future explorers to have additional references. That will make them less dependent on the natives. Please remember to collect the plant samples for the people from Cambridge University. News from London: Our friend John Ruskin continues to attack the charcoal factories that pollute the city. He wrote that London is a “rattling, growling, smoking, and stinking city, a ghastly heap of fermenting brickwork, pouring out poison at every pore.” The authorities of London finally started a movement to ban the factories and make the city cleaner than ever. Be careful with the natives and the forest!

Amazon, April 25, 1860

My dear Alphonso,

I am so glad to hear that London will become more beautiful to the eyes. I could not tolerate the shades of grey and the foul-smelling air any longer. You should be here. The Amazon is gorgeous. The trees are huge; they look like the giants of old myths and legends. The vegetation covers the sun, but it is nice to see when the light rays pass through the leaves of the trees. What makes me uncomfortable is the heat and the humidity of the environment. The absence of wind increases the feeling of warmth, and I am always soaked with sweat. The proximity of the trees makes me focus on the surrounding space, losing sight of the horizon. Sometimes I feel distressed in such an enclosed atmosphere. The smells of the forest are especially intriguing. I never imagined that we could map the landscape using smells. There are smells of garlic, cinnamon, lemon, and some others I cannot even recognize. Walking is not always easy. The volume

of leaves and roots on the ground forces us to slow down the pace. However, there is always a tree to lean against. The forest is full of textures, including the thick bark of old trees, the furry texture of moss growing on the rocks and the fallen trees. Everything allows for a tactile knowledge of the environment. Whenever we find a stream, we consider it a blessing. We can drink some water, freshen up, and get some rest. I am gradually getting used to the forest and to native people. When I first got here I found them very different from us. But now, living among them, I begin to understand them better. I have learned their language and I can communicate with them easily. I have learned a lot about their costumes and the way they experience the forest. Here everything is alive; there is a continuous feeling of being in the world. Native people have a particular relationship with objects. Modern societies describe objects in quantitative terms, and treat them as depersonalized and inanimate things. Natives associate objects with the cosmological and mythological orders that give them meaning. Things have a life of their own! I am starting to believe that collecting remains is a form of conquest, and that the objects we take with us are nothing but a sign of victory over their former owners. I keep asking myself: Are we destroying the original meaning of objects when we impose a new meaning upon them? Do we deny any resemblance between these people and ourselves to take advantage of them? I do not know. We have not found the ruins yet, and we are running out of time. The contract is about to end, and we will have to leave the Amazon. I am concerned, as we will have to do things quickly. Please send my regards to your wife, Mary.

London, July 14, 1860

Dear George,

I would like to be there with you, but it is impossible for me to leave England right now. I have great news: Mary is pregnant. We are incredibly happy. We would like you to be the baby's godfather. I think your idea of mapping the forest using smells is a little strange. How can you map the landscape using something so ethereal? I find it irrational. Remember: science depends on the eyes and the use of scientific instruments. Do not trust the rest of the senses; they are deceptive. Last week, I told Oken about your experiences. He says that it is natural for the natives to use smells, textures, and sounds to guide them through the forest. This is why they are so lazy, lustful, and irrational. Do not let yourself be influenced by these people. Objects are only alive in the world of children's imagination and witchcraft. We only collect remains to learn more about other cultures. Our duty is to educate both Europeans and native people. I

am a little concerned about your delay. We are running out of money and time; and—if nothing changes—you will have to come back soon. That would be a pity, as the University needs the objects for a new exhibition. Mary sends her regards. She is planning a dinner party in your honor. I guess it is not pleasant to eat what the natives eat.

Amazon, October 30, 1860

Dear friend Alphonso,

Congratulations for your future child! Thanks for asking me to be the baby's godfather. I accept, with all my heart. Here life is tough, but full of surprises. Last week, we walked through the forest at night. I never thought we could move so fast. Obviously, vision helps; but the lack of visual stimuli makes sight work more intensely with the rest of the senses. At night everything has a less inferred, less substantial, but more powerful presence. We often say that truth is in the eyes, but I have recently found out that this is not always true. The cartographic training I received in London is of little value here. I used to depend heavily on vision, and not having a chance to look at the horizon made me feel completely disoriented. I start to understand how local people approach the region. I can taste the flavors of the forest. I can now hear what I could not before. I have the feeling that I can see with my hands, my feet, and my skin. Everything seems different. This is making me question my bodily, sensory, and emotional education. We have finally found the ruins, but we are short of time and supplies. The place is in a poor state of conservation. It is a large stone building, and the walls are covered with moss and roots. The forest is swallowing up the monument. I am concerned about the lack of money. Some of the people working with us are sick. They were bitten by mosquitoes. They have a fever and even seizures. I am not sure how long we are going to stay here. Please, find additional funding. Talk to the chancellor, the sponsors of the institution. If they want the objects, they will help us.

London, November 23, 1860

Dear George,

Do not forget to record everything you see. Remember you are a scientist; and as science is objective, you need to be objective too. Do not worry about your sensory or emotional experiences. They do not matter. You know it well: impressions change with the subject. The draftsmen in your team are well trained. We need you to measure the ruins. I will try to raise some money. I know the living conditions in the forest are appalling,

and I would like to offer you more comfort. Beware of sick people, or you will die.

Amazon, December 25, 1860

Dear Alphonso,

Merry Christmas to you and Mary. Here nothing reminds me of this happy date, and I confess I have some difficulty recalling family reunions, the smell of roasted turkey, homemade apple cider, puddings, and gifts. If it were not for the calendar, I would have forgotten to celebrate. This makes me think of the multiple connections between our memories and the sensory stimuli we receive from the material world. The snow falling down, the colourful Christmas tree ornaments, the sweet taste of candies, the indulgence of alcohol, Christmas carols echoing through the streets, people gathering around the table... I miss thinking about those things. I miss thinking how anxious I was the night before Christmas. We have learned that science is the only way we can get closer to the truth, as science is based on reason. I have questioned this idea, considering the relationship between the people from the region and their surrounding world. I sometimes believe that our education is so strict that we think of it as unquestionable. We consider scientific discoveries as absolute truths. What is the difference between scientific education and that of the church? Is not science similar to religion when it says that there is only one way to find the truth about the world? Science has taken the place of God; and scientists, the place of the priests. I am less and less concerned about London and this modern world that controls our lives with its watchful eyes.

London, February 2, 1861

Dear George,

Mary and I are worried about you. Maybe you have stayed too long in the forest, and it is time for you to come back. I will prepare everything for your return. I beg you to stop this madness. Your position at the university will be secured. What you need is to get married and have kids. Mary knows the Mayor's daughter. She is single and she cooks like an angel. She loves your stories. Come back and we can arrange everything for you.

Amazon, October 18, 1861

My dear friend Alphonso,

I have been here for two years, and I am still amazed at the forest. I have learned so many things about the world, my body, and the senses. Details are slowly revealed. If I had been here for a short period of time, I am sure that I would not have created significant memories of the forest and the people. There is a relationship between the passage of time and the way we understand the world. We need time to explore the textures, colours, sounds, smells, and feelings of the landscape. We need time to understand the language of the world; a language which is particularly spoken by the senses. We are embodied beings, and our experience of the world is inevitably sensory. Try to imagine yourself without your senses. Not only without vision, but without touch, hearing, smell, taste, the sense of movement, balance, temperature. What is the overall feeling? Desperate, is not it? Without our senses, we cannot grasp the world; we are isolated. Without our senses, we suffer; our mind loses its references. The senses are not just physiological tools. We use the senses to interpret our place in the world. It is through the senses that we build our own identity. When you wake up in the morning, it is the image of your room, of your bed, that makes you remember who you are and where you are. It is the smell of the coffee that tells you that you are late for college. It is the touch of your clothes that makes you feel comfortable. It is through the senses that you give meaning to the world. You identify political parties by the colour of their badges and flags; you know where you are thanks to the smells of the city. We judge the world and the people using the senses. When somebody has a smell that we describe as disgusting, we find that person disgusting too. When we say somebody's clothes are ugly, we define his or her appearance as inferior to our own. We create social hierarchies by means of sensory taxonomies. When we transform some meals and perfumes into luxury goods, we prevent some social classes from having access to certain smells and tastes. We are sometimes so arrogant as to say how people should dress, eat, and behave at home or in public. Modernity is intimately connected with the control of sensory experience; the elimination of unpleasant odors and disturbing noises through specific policies; the separation of the bodies through the segmentation of space. We found the smell of the slaughterhouses unbearable; but at the same time, the air of the cities became filled with smoke and chemical products. Now, we reject the soot, the smells and the sounds of factories; and we believe that they should be a thing of the past. Our museums, galleries, and libraries were transformed into places for contemplation and social regulation. In this politicized and ordered space, the visitor's body was

shaped by new codes of social behaviour. Do not touch; do not eat; do not talk out loud; dress appropriately. What we call civilization is nothing but the control of the bodies and the senses. Modern education has one particular purpose: to perpetuate a model of the world that I do not find it useful anymore, as it is only focused on vision. For the Western world, beauty is in the eyes; in the Amazon, beauty is an array of images, smells, textures, and tastes. For the Western world, sight is above the rest of the senses; here, it is another sense just like the others. Did you realize that we have created the notion of “primitive society” to define modernity? What is what we call “primitive” if not the lack of reason and control over the body? We describe the natives through an imaginary conception of disorder and indulgence of the senses and emotions. We apply the model of our own society to other people, and we say that if they want to be civilized, they need to perceive the world just like we do. Reducing these people’s senses transforms their relationship with their natural, material, and social world. I do not want to be a part of this anymore. I am leaving the ruins. Most of the team has already left me. They could not get used to the forest. Antônio, Andrew, and I decided to stay. I am sending you all my records. I need to explore new worlds of senses. With respect to marriage, do not worry; I have met a special woman here. Her name is Iracema. I am completely in love with her. I will write to you as soon as I can. Greetings to Mary.

London, May 17, 1861

My dear friend George,

The records you sent me were strongly criticized by our colleagues. They do not provide any measures; they lack precision, objectivity. I apologize for the harsh words, but as your friend I am compelled to bring you back to reality. We do not care about your emotions and opinions. I remind you that you are a scientist. You need to set aside subjectivity. Do not get involved with the natives. You will end up getting sick. We ask you to come back to London as soon as possible. There will be no more funding for the research. How can you say that you are in love with a savage woman? I understand your needs, but please stay away from that people.

Amazon, August 26, 1862

My dear friend Alphonso,

I will have a child! I am lost for words. When Iracema, my wife, told me she was pregnant, I felt like I was flying. My mind wandered through the stars. My heart almost exploded and my legs started shaking. A warm

smile filled my face, and then I began to cry. I felt like having a lump in the throat, but I managed to shout: "I will have a child!" I just wanted to share this with you, as I know you went through a similar experience. We decided to give a great feast. I still cannot find the right words to express what I am feeling. Our language is limited, and it is only in extraordinary circumstances that we notice it. How can I describe the love I feel for Iracema and my future child? Maybe I need to free the words, and let them express what I am feeling. When words are released from their original meaning, they open space for imagination; they give us a chance to take our descriptions one step further. When we dive into poetic reflections, we go beyond the limits of the possible. I am sure this is one of the most intense movements of imagination. When a poem echoes in the soul of a reader, then he or she is invaded by the ideas of the writer, defining the emergent meaning of the image. There is still much to be done in science. Our own way of writing is the result of domestication. In much the same way that we create social codes of conduct, we also create particular ways of telling a story. We write in a neutral tone, and we do not take sides. We lack empathy for the reader and the world around us. If we depend on the body and the senses to grasp the world, why does our writing not reflect that? Maybe, because we believe that our senses and emotions distort academic interpretation and conceptual reasoning. I ask myself if this understanding is not a distorted picture of reality, created by education and specific conditions of existence. We accept the difference between facts and fiction, between science and poetry, but we forget that scientific data are also constructs. Facts are nothing but narratives about something. Trying to see the world as it is, is telling a story about the world from a particular point of view. Exchanging letters with you, my friend, I realize that the most important thing about a text is not what it means, but what it makes people do. How does a text encourage us to act? Mainly, by means of affection. And what does a text encourage us to do? It makes people transform the potential energy of words into texts, paintings, photographs, political actions, decisions, acts of disobedience, etc. The author needs to cover different senses and feelings, and he or she needs to ask himself or herself at the end of each passage, what did the reader feel or learn? I will have a child, my friend, I will have a child!

London, January 12, 1863

George,

I am not sure if I should be happy or worried about the news. You need to control yourself. I have consulted a number of physicians, and they told me that you could have been bewitched by the savages. They say that the

sorcerers and witches of the New World are particularly powerful. I have already bought your return ticket. The vessel will depart at the beginning of March. Here you will have time to evaluate your actions and return to your previous life.

Amazon, July 27, 1863

Dear Alphonso,

Today, it is clear to me that, just as we learn to be a man or a woman, catholic or protestant, rich or poor, capitalist or anarchist, we learn what the senses are and how they should be used. I am afraid modern science is wrong: the way people use and understand their senses is culturally contingent. Social codes define appropriate sensory actions, and specify what sensory perceptions mean. My dear Alphonso, I am convinced that we learn to hear, see, touch, and feel. So, why are we not aware of our own senses and the sensory schema? Why cannot we accept that our senses are socially educated habits? The answer is simple: We have been taught that our senses are natural. Our daily life is experienced as a continuum, a non-narrated temporality that exceeds collective and individual awareness. We accept daily events and we do not question them; we rarely consider that things could be otherwise. We are part of a world that unfolds almost automatically. In general, we do not remember our daily practices, as they are inevitably embodied. What is experienced as natural, it is in fact a political-cultural reality: perceptual models are spread as a means to produce and reproduce some memories while deleting some others. The lack of awareness of life continuity is a myth mediating and naturalizing the political order at the level of daily perceptual experience. If we could integrate the senses, maybe we could change the field of human sciences, releasing the practice from the modern ideas that privilege vision and imprison us all. This would be necessary to reveal the hegemonic discourses behind authority. We can touch, feel, and see the objects; but we do not want other people to have the same rights. Working with the senses should not involve an effort to reconstruct other people's sensory experience; in other words, it should not be an attempt to understand how they feel, simply because sensory experience is socially and historically contingent. The notion of sensory empathy is problematic. When we work with the senses, we need to understand how people produce their own subjectivity, everyday practices, and history through the sensory experience of materiality, animated and non-animated beings, humans, animals, and plants. Farewell to you and Mary. I will not write again. This form of communication makes no more sense to me. I need to see your eyes, feel your heart, hear your voice. I hope some day you can

come to the Amazon, and feel in your own body everything I am feeling. I leave you with one of the most important things I have learned in the forest: scientific thought is especially designed to prevent the surrounding world from touching or transforming us. Now, I can say that I have never felt closer to the world. Your friend forever, George.

CHAPTER ONE

ARCHAEOLOGY OF A TEAR: DELUSIONS IN A TENT IN A STORMY DAY IN ANTARCTICA

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The second time I came back from Antarctica, in 1997, my mother said:
“My son went to Antarctica, and the one who came back was another person.”

From that moment on, every time I visit Antarctica I look for the other me;
I look for myself in the never changing landscapes,
in the memories that live on the islands like ghosts,
in the sounds of the animals that shatter the silence.

And then I wonder, did I ever leave Antarctica?

(Andrés Zarankin)

When I reread the numerous articles that our research project has published since 1996, I realize that we have limited ourselves to use an orthodox narrative respectful of the traditional parameters of the discipline. In these articles, our presence is almost invisible. We are only mentioned as authors; we transform ourselves into omniscient, neutral narrators, or (in the cases we use the first person of the plural) into some sort of unified mass representing science. We describe objects and structures in a monochromatic style, without using adjectives or emotions. As archaeologists, we present ourselves as disembodied beings, scarcely affected by the surrounding world (Krieger 1944; Schmitz *et. al.* 1991; Schobinger 1973). This is the way we produce discourses, attempting to be “objective,” and avoiding exposure or feeling vulnerable in front of the others.

It is only recently, probably because I am getting older, or because my life has changed significantly, that I have begun to reflect on some things often regarded as “taboo”; in this case, the emotional relationship between the archaeologist and her or his object of study, as well as the outcome of this relationship. Experience is the way we come to know the world. It is from an experiential standpoint that our project has decided to approach the encounter between human beings and Antarctica, both in the past and in the present. This has led us to rethink the multiple connections among people, things, meanings, and the construction of stories.

Archaeology and sealers in Antarctica

During most of the nineteenth century, the South Shetland Islands (the first region of Antarctica to be “discovered”) were visited by sealing vessels. Hunters wanted to obtain large quantities of oil and furs to be sold in different markets. In contrast to written documents, mainly dealing with captains and other characters of “historical relevance,” archaeological remains on the islands were left by ordinary sealers. The material analysis of the hunting camps has provided insight into these people’s lives in previously unexpected ways (Salerno 2011; Zarankin and Senatore 2007).

Documentary sources indicate that sealing companies landed “gangs” on different points of the South Shetlands. Each gang was made up of a number of sealers in command of one or two officers. These people had to build their own shelters in order to live and work on the islands for a couple of days, weeks, or even months. The intensity of sealing varied throughout the century. As the activity came to an end, the location of the camps and the stories connected with them were gradually forgotten.

Our project began in 1995, and one of its main goals was to discuss the first attempts of the modern world to incorporate a hostile region, completely unknown until the nineteenth century, into its economic and political boundaries. Our research focused on a specific area: Byers Peninsula on Livingston Island. Livingston was frequently visited by sealers, and—at least until today—it shows the highest concentration of hunting camps on the South Shetlands (27 sites) (Fig. 1-1).

Archaeological fieldwork on Byers Peninsula combined the survey of the area and the excavation of specific locations. In this way, we were able to work with different scales of analysis.

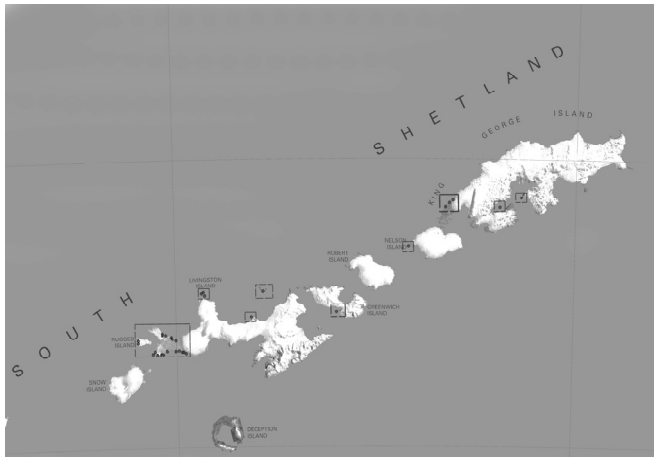


Fig. 1-1: Archaeological map of the South Shetland Islands (Antarctica) showing the location of archaeological sites (Image by LEACH 2014).

Archaeology as story-telling

Our project used traditional approaches (involving normative methods and techniques, as well as an orthodox language) to study the past and write about it. However, at some point, we realized we were creating a new group of people “without history” (*sensu* Wolf 1982): “us” (the archaeologists). Being aware of this situation, in this work I will consider some other possibilities to tell alternative stories. I will try to find a more human way to make archaeology.

How can we connect experience, meaning, and stories? I am not sure, but I think that a good start is to “recover” our own body. We need to reverse the disembodied process once started by traditional archaeology (a proposal already made by Bond and Gilliam 1994; Hodder 2000, 2003; Joyce 2002; Oliveira 2006; Shanks and Tilley 1987a; among others). The archaeologist needs to feel, and recognize that she or he feels. It is through this experience that a new relationship with the past and the present can be established, widening the scope of archaeological interpretations (Shanks and Tilley 1987b).

Another relevant issue, which cannot be divorced from feeling, concerns the limitations of an archaeological language that is not prepared for disclosing experience. Our project is currently exploring a new line of inquiry that understands the archaeologist as a storyteller¹ (Beaudry 1998; Praetzelis 1998; Yamin 1998). We believe that the researcher should

include herself or himself in the story she or he is telling. Furthermore, we have recently published an article discussing how we can do this (Zarankin and Senatore 2012).

It is important to recognize two different options:

Stories as projections. This is an attempt to create stories about other people, consciously projecting ourselves into the context we are studying. Several archaeologists have explored this possibility (Beaudry 1998, 2005; Deetz 1977; Joyce 2002; Praetzellis and Praetzellis 1998; Yamin 1998). In our case, in a book showing some results of the research, we have recreated a day in the life of a sealer, “Samuel Green,” while he was working in Antarctica (Zarankin and Senatore 2007).

Transversal stories. This is an attempt to get ourselves explicitly involved in the stories we are telling. For instance, by means of the first person of the singular, or the introduction of situations, feelings, and experiences we have lived during the research. The idea is to become a part of the story we are telling. This possibility is not always considered by archaeologists, but I will explore it in the following paragraphs:

The wind blows hard. The tent shakes violently and it seems about to explode at any moment. Inside the sleeping bag, the only place where I can escape from cold, I wonder “what am I doing here, thousands of miles away from home, comfort, family, and friends?” I realize (and I find myself angry at the idea) that, despite what I want or crave for, I have no way to get out from this place where sun never sets. I cover my face completely, and I turn up the volume of my MP3 player (it’s funny: when we started the project, I had a Walkman and some years later, a Discman). Finally, darkness... a song of Sade invades my ears, and surrounds me. For a little while, I manage to escape from cold, the storm, the feelings of loneliness, that place...

The archaeological sites are not far away. They comprise a series of small stone structures that two hundred years ago were built by sealers. I don’t know if some of the people living there could have experienced something similar to what I’m feeling right now. Even though we (that is to say, me and the sealers) are separated by time, culture, nationality, profession, etc., some others things still connect us (being at this place, cold, isolation, homesickness, having “feelings”). Who knows... maybe they managed to escape from Byers (not by means of an MP3 player, but by means of songs, alcohol, or tobacco).

Another thing that connects me with the sealers is that both of us are or were on the islands with the aim of working in well-defined projects. Sealers were hunting; and I'm trying to study their life through material remains. I wonder, thinking about the site and the things we find every day, what kind of information are we producing? Some of the answers seem pretty obvious: what sealers ate, how they built their shelters, how many people lived there, how they dressed, what objects they used...

Is this information enough to get acquainted with these people and their stories? It is important to remember that they were members of "subaltern" groups; that they were silenced and made invisible by official stories. There are almost no historical references on the experiences of these "ordinary" people. However, material remains have the potential to shed light on their lives in Antarctica.

I return to the solitude of my tent, and I wonder if everything I'm feeling, everything that defines me as a person, is going to be recorded somewhere. To be honest, nobody will be able to understand what I'm feeling by studying my clothes or the spatial organization of the camp...

So, what is the purpose of producing descriptive, formal information which does not provide a real understanding of the essence of people? Suddenly, as part of a bizarre delusion (something common in Antarctica), Binford materializes in my tent to remind me of the limitations of the archaeological record (Binford 1983) (Fig. 1-2). He talks to me about archaeological layers, and why it is impossible and absurd to worry about what people felt in the past. I thank him for his words, but I tell him that I have already sold my soul to Hodder! He vanishes in the air with a threatening look.

Almost immediately, I realize how powerful the normative and processual legacy we have inherited as archaeologists is, that when we write articles or books, we are expected to leave behind our human nature. Furthermore, we are expected to become all-knowing entities that are entitled to "see" but "not to feel" the past. We choose not to be a part of the story we are telling (not only in our texts, but also in the images showing the archaeological sites and objects). The result is a boring (technical-descriptive) narrative, with no space for the experiences we have while doing our work.



Fig. 1-2: Binford's ghost in my tent (Photograph by the author).

Tears

In Antarctica, tears are as common as storms and snow. Visitors shed tears of joy, melancholy, exhaustion, pain. In the privacy of the tent, far from the public eye, tears feel free to come out.

Tears are the focus of my reflection... What does a tear mean? A scientist would say something like this: "Tears are the secretions of the glands that clean and lubricate the eyes. The lachrymal fluid is made of water (98.3%), mineral salts (1%), proteins (0.7%), and other substances." However, does the chemical formula account for the meaning of tears?

All tears are made of the same components, but they stand for different things. Tears are feelings that the eyes and the senses perceive before they are shed. Tears transform us; sensory images permeate their salty humidity. Tears are the way we express our feelings, and the way we share them with the world... Nothing is the same after a tear.

Dilemma...

Through this example, probably halfway between a "naïve" and a "bizarre" story (a series of concepts that do not seem to matter in Antarctica), I want to question the dehumanizing practice of the archaeological narrative.

Are we satisfied with the definition of a tear, or should we move forward and give it colour and flavour? How can we achieve something like that? In my opinion, this is one of the greatest challenges of archaeology. At present, I believe we should consider our own subjectivity; we should explicitly say what we think and feel without any fear of being mistaken (sooner or later, every proposal will be challenged by some other). I believe “honesty” is one of the most important things when we come to interpret or create stories about the world (stories that are based on what positivist researchers call “evidence”).

One of the results of applying this perspective would be to connect the archaeologist’s work with that of a story-teller. The value of objects does not rely on things, but on the stories they help to create. Stories represent a strategy to appreciate the past and our work.

Solutions... Integrate our own subjectivity

If the past is defined as the presence of an absence, it is through discourses that we can fill that emptiness, give it content and sense. As some archaeologists claim (Hodder *et al.* 1995; Shanks and Tilley 1987b), the objective reconstruction and knowledge of the past were modern, positivist utopias. Is it not a waste of time to separate the subject who creates the discourse from the story as an outcome? Why do we not care about the reconciliation of the past and the present by means of the creation of multiple stories (subjective discourses where different groups can be represented)?

This would be a local and contextual history (not a universal one). The archaeologist as a story-teller should not be seen as a problem or limitation to write valid discourses on the past. On the contrary, the archaeologist as a story-teller should consider these ideas and present them as the distinguishing mark of an explicit subjectivity (one that encourages the dialogue with other subjectivities in the context of symmetrical relations). As Joyce (2002) points out, the archaeological narrative starts well before the author uses her or his pen on a sheet of paper; it starts in the field, in the lab, in the classroom, in the meetings, transforming writing into an echo of previous experiences. Without a doubt, the archaeological narrative starts with an embodied and sensory practice.

An archaeology of a tear

The wind gradually settles and I can hear the roar of the sea, the seals, and the sea elephants. I stick my head out of the sleeping bag; an intense

light blinds me for a moment. I touch my face: a tear has left a wet and sticky line that now starts to freeze. It is part of a minimal story that fuses with the past and transforms me (Fig. 1-3).



Fig. 1-3: ...inside my tent, Elephant Point, Livingston Island, January 2014
(Photograph by the author).

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Notes

¹ “Storyteller,” as Benjamin (2002) used the concept in *Storyteller, Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov*.