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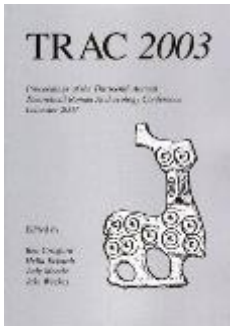


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# Experienced landscapes through intentional sources

*Alessandro Launaro*

## *Introduction*

This paper is about theoretical post-processual approaches to the study of landscape and a possible way of putting them into practice. The study of landscape has represented one of the more beaten paths in archaeological research towards the reconstruction, interpretation and understanding of past societies and cultures. This is because every human action is strongly 'spatial', set within its environment, acquiring 'dimension' through the active relation to it.

In Classical studies, landscape archaeology has meant a new appraisal of past human attitudes towards the 'environment', resulting in a shift from urban to rural areas (Barker and Lloyd 1991; Lloyd 1991), and contrasting the idea of a 'world of cities' proposed by Moses Finley (1985). Nevertheless, this new perspective, while stressing the inherent limits of the previous view of the past, has not yet meant a reconsideration of the landscape as something more than a productive system, apparently retaining its enquiry within the boundaries of the 'ancient economy'.

It is not the aim of this paper to deny the role played by the economy in the shaping of landscape. Instead, the point that I would like to make is that other approaches are needed in order to integrate our comprehension of ancient landscapes. New and different perspectives on landscapes have been introduced and developed within the framework of post-processual archaeology, and applied mainly in the context of prehistoric studies (i.e. Tilley 1994; Bender 1998), and only rarely in others (i.e. Witcher 1998; Altenberg 2003). These 'experiential approaches' could well represent the next necessary step in our search for the essence of the ancient landscape: indeed, as I will try to show, they are very suitable for application in the field of Classical archaeology. This is possible through the implementation of those sources that are usually referred to as 'intentional' (e.g. literature, epigraphy) and that are a strong presence in historical periods, such as the Greek and Roman world. They are an invaluable instrument in the hands of a landscape archaeologist since they present us with original accounts of people that lived and dwelt in a landscape, constituting those original subjective views that are so difficult to obtain in a prehistoric context.

## *The archaeology of Classical landscapes*

Before going any further, it is very useful to try to define the kinds of landscapes recovered by almost fifty years of archaeological research. After the pioneering work of the *South Etruria Survey* (Potter 1979), field walking has spread as a methodology throughout all of the Mediterranean area (Barker and Lloyd 1991). Valuable projects have dealt with different regions, enriching, and in some cases even creating from nothing, the knowledge of the investigated areas. The collection of surface materials together with the precise assessment of the relative environmental conditions has built an integrated scenario in which 'natural' and 'cultural' factors constitute the past landscape. The high merits of these researches are out of

question. Instead, what I argue here is that the approaches that have characterised these projects are largely reflected in the kind of results they have produced.

Indeed, looking at some recent publications (Coccia and Mattingly 1992, 1995; Malone and Stoddart 1994; Wightman and Hayes 1994; Barker 1995), it is interesting to note that they share a very similar layout regarding both research themes and presentation of results. The principal themes are environment, settlement and exploitation of an area projected in a long-term perspective. The study areas are defined as natural topographic units (e.g. a river drainage area or an inland basin) which, following the arguments presented by Cherry (1983), are better suited than those defined in cultural terms (i.e. the territory of an urban centre) in order to study the changing systems within them. The environment (e.g. geology, hydrology) constitutes the 'natural setting' for the different human cultures dwelling in an area through time.

It is important to note that human presence is primarily attested and interpreted through the collection and analysis of surface artefacts that are spread across the survey area. They produce good references for dating as well as a fundamental tool in quantification (Francovich and Patterson 2000). Numerical analysis of surface artefacts is used in order to assess size and, possibly, role of the pertaining sites, mostly through comparison with the whole plough-soil assemblage that has been recovered. This analysis produces distribution maps with settlement patterns that can be interpreted through the use of models, projecting the whole image against the reconstructed natural background. Human presence is then understood in terms of settlement (i.e. hierarchy, structure) and exploitation of natural resources, while landscape is almost seen as a productive organism. The main object of these researches is the definition of the changing nature of society and economy in relation to the environment of the given area: but in this view, different cultures seem only different answers in different periods of adaptation.

From my point of view this perspective seems to bring within itself an undesired side effect. The leading role ascribed to the environment limits – even 'determines' – the possibilities of human beings who 'adapt to it' (or 'adapt it', which is, anyway, a form of adaptation) through settlement and resource exploitation, both expressions of the economic system. This economic system recalls to mind Lewis Binford's definition of culture as 'man's extrasomatic means of adaptation' (1964). Indeed, it is undeniable that it is possible to recognise the strong influence of New Archaeology (the later 'processualism') in the way these studies were conducted: numerical data, quantification and statistics are not far from the spatial archaeology proposed by David Clarke (1977).

As said before, it is not my intention to deny the importance of the role played by economy as a form of human activity or the influence exerted by the surrounding environment. The above-said researches have concentrated on settlement, exploitation and environment as the principal terms of the debate and have developed suitable methodologies in order to address these fundamental issues. But these are not the only questions that could be asked of landscapes, nor necessarily the most important. Following the path opened in the field of prehistoric studies, I take a different perspective, not to deny the achievements of the previous work, but in order to integrate and complete them.

## *The experiential approaches*

In traditional anthropology the notion of space has been related to 'a neutral, pre-given medium, a *tabula-rasa* onto which the particularities of culture and history come to be inscribed' (Casey 1996: 14). Given its strong ties with this discipline, it is not surprising to note that the New Archaeology has considered space in the same way, as an absolute and universal dimension. This idea fitted in well with the generalising attitudes of processual practitioners, who shared the neo-evolutionary belief that there was a high degree of uniformity in human behaviour, thus being more keen to account for cultural similarities rather than differences (Trigger 1989). Indeed, by identifying the ecological constraints that shaped human behaviour, they thought it possible to generalise about the spatial behaviour of human groups. In this theoretical framework, space was regarded as an abstract dimension, a mere container for interacting elements that were arranged according to the processual idea of 'adaptation', reducing everything to material survival (Hodder 1991).

In the last decade of landscape archaeology a significant part of the theoretical debate has dealt with new perspectives developed in anthropology (i.e. Hirsch and O'Hanlon 1995; Feld and Basso 1996; Ingold 2000) concerning the study of human spatiality. The introduction of the notion of *place*, taken as the concrete and contingent reality of landscape, has suggested the need for a major change of perspective. Indeed, some archaeologists like Christopher Tilley (1994) and Barbara Bender (1998) have started to re-think landscape as something more than a spatial background container for human activity. Rather, places are seen as a medium, actively involved in human experience. In turn, people are seen as taking active part in their surrounding, giving it shape through their experiences, perceptions and feelings. There is no real 'geometric' space in which everything is related to each other only through distance and location: instead human beings *dwell in a place*, building complex relationships with *their* environment, getting to know it not in an abstract manner, but through the concrete and daily experience of it.

Christopher Tilley has defined this as an *existential space*, set 'in a constant process of production and reproduction through the movements and activities of members of a group', constituting 'a mobile rather than passive space for experience' (1994: 16). The spatial layout of a landscape could be the same from an 'objective' point of view, but it is experienced differently by different subjects and cultural groups that perceive places as centres of different meanings depending on their individual experiences. In this theoretical framework places become essential in establishing personal and group identities, and take existence by virtue of being perceived, experienced and contextualised by people (Knapp and Ashmore 1999).

Given these reasons, the analysis of space is no longer directed only towards the identification of generalising norms concerning human attitudes towards space (i.e. settlement patterns and hierarchy, resources exploitation): instead this *topoanalysis* has to explore 'the creation of self-identity through place' (Tilley 1994: 15). Indeed, the significance which is ascribed to specific configurations of natural or geographic features 'is never self-evident but rather culturally determined' (Knapp and Ashmore 1999: 2). Tilley proposes a perspective on landscape that tries to unravel ancient perceptions that are buried deep within the visible appearance. In order to appreciate these hidden aspects the landscape has to be experienced again, raising the feelings of those that created it. This experiential approach, derived particularly from the thoughts of the German philosophers Husserl and Heidegger, is termed

*phenomenology*, 'an understanding and description of things as they are experienced and perceived by a subject' (Tilley 1994: 12).

While stressing the important role played by human perception within the definition of a landscape, experiential approaches still show some major deficiencies:

1) It is very difficult to recreate the complex perceived structure of a landscape: all the five senses concur in raising feelings, building up human experience through the creation of a complete scenario of sensations. Further, present landscapes are the product of stratified processes and so they are usually preserving only some traits of their original layout: in this sense it is difficult to connect the *right feelings* with the *right period*.
2) The feelings (and the relative experiences behind them) of the modern archaeologist are not necessarily the same as those of the people that originally shaped the landscape. Space is socially and culturally constructed: it is an expression of a specific culture and in this sense it is encoded in a language that has to be understood in order to appreciate the implied meanings.
3) The phenomenological approach still lacks a convincing methodology: recovering subjective feelings needs an objective method that prevents archaeologists from inserting their own feelings into the interpretation. Doing so is extremely difficult since it is not easy to split the archaeologist's subjectivity, isolating the 'ancient feelings' from the modern one.

All these deficiencies concur in creating a situation in which the only way through which we can recover past meanings and feelings is through a subjectivity which in turn cannot transcend itself in drawing an objective picture of this experience. These difficulties in recreating the conditions for an *appropriate* experience of the landscape hamper the potentials of the phenomenological approach, and different scholars could experience the same landscape in different ways (compare Tilley 1994 with Fleming 1999). This produces no real knowledge of the past, proposing only hypotheses that usually cannot be accepted nor rejected, lacking an objective frame of reference.

## *Ideology and intentional sources*

Knowing the main problems in approaching a phenomenological analysis, it seems obvious that the main task of landscape archaeologists should be to transcend their own subjectivity while identifying themselves with the perception of the period at issue, in order to view the landscape from the 'right' perspective. This is not a simple task: it needs a very good 'from-the-inside' knowledge of the culture and society we are dealing with.

At this point it is necessary to introduce the significance of intentional sources in the study of experienced landscapes. Intentional are those historical sources that are themselves a product of an interpretation of 'reality' by their authors. Indeed art, architecture, poetry, literature, epigraphy and every other human creation, material culture too, show to some degree the perspective of their author rather than an objective overview of their subject. They are the expression of an 'intentionality' and therefore they are not independent from the context that has produced them. For these reasons, they have been interpreted mostly as offering a top

down perspective on the views of a 'small urban segment of an elitist society' (Cherry 1983: 389) rather than producing an objective and trustworthy insight into history. In turn, material culture has been connected with those social classes and social-economical issues that have been seen as underrepresented in 'narrative history'. Indeed, it seems that both these categories of sources, intentional and material, are context dependent and a help in defining the context itself. What I argue here is that the active intentionality inherent in every human creation, previously felt by scholars as something to be purged while analysing a source, becomes an advantage in order to enhance the accuracy of an experiential approach to landscapes. In this framework, reading a source means the opportunity to recover ancient subjective views and perspectives that are usually part of a wider scheme of past ideas.

This last observation leads to issues about *ideology*. An ideology is a complex ensemble of ideas, beliefs and feelings that are perceived by those that are part of it as an absolute and objective truth. This dimension has been explored by the Frankfurt School of *critical theory*: it has been usually interpreted functionally as related to the economic lore and dominant power (Hodder 1991), and thus as permeating all aspects of a society at all levels. This approach has been seen by Ian Hodder as *materialist*, in the sense that ideology and cultural meanings are seen as conferring adaptive advantage, thus equating *culture* to *survival* and suggesting a predictable relationship between economy and society (*ibid.*). Furthermore, in this view, 'individuals appear to be easily fooled' (*ibid.*: 28) and largely passive. Hodder suggests that it is necessary to recognise 'a more creative and active role to ideology, and to material culture as ideological' (*ibid.*: 72), stressing the fact that they must be studied from the *inside*.

Furthermore, an ideology is shared not only by the members of a dominant class. Instead, it is actively created and re-created by the higher as well as by the lower classes of a society. This means that there is space for individual (and potentially opposing) thought, playing dialectically with the dominant ideology in a process that produces change. This is the dynamic evolution of a wider and general system of ideas, encoded in a language that has to be understood by all in order to be effective. In this view ideology would constitute the 'mentality' of a cultural group, and intentional sources would be the product of such well-established ideologies.

## *Past 'mentalités'*

The concept of *mentalité* was first introduced by the *Annales* School of History (scholars like Lucien Febvre, Marc Bloch, Fernand Braudel and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie). This term refers to the complex ensemble of ideas that build up culture and identity and has been perceived as a strong presence in the flowing of history. This concept can be associated with that of 'ideology' and understood as that range of ideas, biases, feelings and experiences that constitute a cultural identity. If we compare this definition with the above-said theoretical issues, it will appear clear that experiential approaches are in pursuit of past *mentalités*.

It is very interesting to observe that the *Annaliste* perspective has played a significant role in recent archaeological theory through the Braudelian idea of time scales (Braudel 1980), especially the concept of *longue durée*, or the long-term history (Bintliff 1991; Knapp 1992). Most of the *Annaliste* approach was used in order to give account, and a better explanation, to social and economic changes through time, focusing primarily on long- and medium-term processes (*longue durée* and *conjonctures* respectively). I think that one of the best

contributions of the *Annales* School to archaeology would be, besides Braudelian time-scales, a better understanding of *mentalités* and a guide to their interpretation, mostly through the use of intentional sources. In particular I am referring to the excellent work by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie (1978) regarding peasant mentalities at the village of Montaillou: in this famous case, the sources for his research were constituted primarily by the very scrupulous registers of the Holy Inquisition's interrogatories!

The fact that the most interesting interpretations of this subject come from scholars mainly involved in a tight confrontation with intentional sources is significant: these are the main 'objective' sources available. Intentional sources are the product of 'original subjects' who lived and experienced space in their time from their own cultural perspective, the direct expression of a 'being-in-the-world' through the perception of an ancient mentality. Tilley himself affirms that 'to understand a landscape truly it must be felt, but to convey some of this feeling to others it has to be talked about, recounted, or written and depicted' (1994: 31). In the frame of an experiential analysis, intentional sources are 'objective', depicting a landscape that is 'real' as far as it is perceived in this way. They do not necessarily present us with objective truth, but they report the experiences and feelings of those people that witnessed and lived in a particular humanised space, their subjective, ideological and intentional view. The most important aspect is that the subjective perspective is still preserved while offering a good degree of objectivity for 'a good debate'. Of course, intentional sources are amenable to different interpretations, too. But the historians' tradition of studies (literature, philology, art, etc...) could well represent the indispensable hermeneutic tool for a critical evaluation of them, using concepts like those proposed by Hodder (1991) in archaeological interpretation: *coherence* and *correspondence*. Indeed, intentional sources are the references around which we can gather, discuss and build interpretations of landscapes.

We need to contextualize the author of the source we are dealing with historically, critically approaching his or her views in the framework of a joint evaluation of his or her public, defining the historical social group to which both belong. The definition of their shared and underlying *mentalité* could then present us with their own 'view', the key to understand their own landscape, their own world.

## *Classical landscape through intentional sources*

As noted above, besides some exceptions (see below), it is difficult to find an application of phenomenological or experiential approaches in the archaeology of Classical landscapes. By contrast, and remarkably enough, the term 'mentality' is one that recurs very frequently in the works of historians, particularly concerning those interested in the ideological construction of space. In the following I wish to discuss some approaches which have made use of intentional sources to understand ancient landscapes.

Concerning the analysis of written sources, the work by Mary Beagon on Pliny the Elder (1992; 1996) produces some very good observations regarding the kind of scenery that most appealed to Greeks and Romans. She recognises an essentially 'civilised nature', 'a countryside that was pleasant and easy on the senses rather than bold, spectacular, or challenging' (1996: 286). She stresses the role of rationality in the feelings about a landscape: from a Roman point of view it had to be comprehensible, codified in a 'language' understandable by all who were sharing a Roman culture and identity: indeed she speaks of a 'psychological need to feel in

control of an explicable world' (*ibid.*: 295). Some of the most interesting aspects relate to Pliny's idea of a 'complete integration of the natural scenery with the human exploitation of it' (*ibid.*: 290), as exemplified by the river Tiber and its surrounding humanised landscape, constituting a *place* where man and nature were not divorced, where aesthetic and utilitarian were taken as one.

From another perspective Jim Roy (1996) tries to reconstruct the classical Greek countryside from the description of landscape in dramas. While demonstrating how the dramatic space is usually a distorted version of the real contemporary landscapes, he notes also how this perception corresponded to a 'shared knowledge of the countryside taken for granted by poet and audience' (*ibid.*: 290), well-comprehensible by the latter even when ruthlessly adapted to suit the purposes of the play. Such a case is represented by Euripides' *Bacchae*, where an invented *wild* countryside 'serves to focus all that is the antithesis of the carefully structured polis' (*ibid.*: 103). Indeed, stereotypes represent a key element in tracking a mentality and its ideology, depicting characters and places that refer to a reality which may not even exist, but that is present as 'real' in peoples' minds. This case shows clearly how intentional sources are a direct expression of the feelings and perceptions of people, describing a space that is real as far as it is perceived in this way.

Concerning inscriptions, the observations made by Giulia Petracco Sicardi (1995) about the contents of a Latin inscription dated to 117 BC (*CIL* V.7749) are particularly interesting. This bronze table, known as the *Sententia Minuciorum*, was an official document concerning the organisation of the Ligurian territory behind the city of Genua. Together with the definition of boundaries and properties, there is a huge presence of ancient toponymy. This aspect enables Petracco Sicardi to begin to comprehend the perceptions that ancient Ligurians had of their own environment. Indeed, it is possible to track the experience of this landscape through the elements that most attracted their attention: the great importance of rivers as a resource (i.e. river *Porcobera*, 'that brings trouts') and as elements in the articulation of the landscape. Petracco Sicardi also observes that there is a dichotomy between the western and the eastern part of the valley: in the former rivers gave name to mountains (i.e. river *Lemuris*, *iugum Lemurinus*), in the latter mountains gave name to rivers (i.e. mount *Tuledonem*, *flovius Tulelasca*). This observation is taken to point out the different perceived natures of the valley, depending on the perceived importance of watercourses. Such a view has been preserved until today by means of medieval toponymy, concerning the river Verde ('green') on the Western side and the river Secca ('dry') on the Eastern.

Dealing with contemporary issues of Roman imperialism, Nicholas Purcell (1990) sets out to investigate Roman attitudes to geographical space, the conceptualisation of geography and landscape, and the involved mentality. He talks about an ideology that displays 'the power of the conqueror to grasp the landscape, human and physical, and change it' (1990: 23). He recognises an ideological aspect involved in the relationship between the Roman *villa* and the landscape in which it is inserted (1995), its prominent site interpreted as an eloquent means of displaying control over the productive landscape (Horden and Purcell 2000). Further, Purcell deals with the typical Roman arrangement of the land, the centuriation (Purcell 1990, 1996): in this impressive demonstration of control over the forces of nature he finds the expression of a 'visual power' wielded onto the cultural manipulation of landscape. He stresses the role of ancient toponymy as an instrument for the 'incorporation of a territory that was to remain familiar throughout the Roman period' (1996: 201). In fact, as colonial Greeks before them, Romans were trying to transfer the topography of home to new settled settings, 'making sense of an alien world' (*ibid.*: 202).

Similar approaches have also been applied to urban landscapes. Concerning the perception of Rome itself, Purcell (1992) talks about a 'rhetoric of numbers' to be experienced by those visiting the city through its numerous and varied features, creating the feeling of an enormous and grandiose space: the deliberate production of an 'impressionistic' effect of vast size. Further, Ray Laurence explores the Roman city of Pompeii (1994; 1995). He identifies this urban space as a social product, stressing how 'the Roman city consisted of the social actions of its inhabitants and visitors in space and time' (1994: 141).

Roads are another important aspect that has been considered. Robert Witcher (1998) interprets them not only as physical structures enabling movement to a destination, but also (and mostly) as embodiments of issues of ideology, power and identity that are intimately involved with the human social construction of the world. The 'geometry' of Roman roads is connected to a subjugation of both nature (modifying the layout of the landscape) and society (controlling movements). From a similar perspective Ray Laurence analyses the road system of Italy (1999): he recognises a connection between roads and the Roman mostly linear view of space, well exemplified in the *itineraria*, lists of locations along a linear path (see also Janni 1984). Roads are interpreted as a fundamental element for the production of territorial space: this production of 'Roman space' is seen as the introduction of a new cultural form in a conquered landscape. He mentions the experience of travel on Roman roads as a display of cultural identity, in order to unify places, naturally disunited, in the creation of a Roman consciousness.

While all the studies presented come from historians or philologists, the one by Robert Witcher is the only from the mind of an archaeologist. Indeed, he himself notes that ancient historians, 'more aware of people and personalities than the structures and processes which have formed the basis of archaeological research', have offered 'the more interesting interpretations' in a way similar to phenomenology (Witcher 1998: 61).

Through a tight dialogue with written sources all these studies have produced and proposed many interpretations about the perception of space by a particular culture or society group in a given period. Comparing the views and experiences of the different ancient texts, their relation with the establishment and their following, they have tried to penetrate the common language or ideology that presided over the shaping of landscape, thus 'defining' a possible methodology for the experiential approach.

## *Experiential approaches through intentional sources*

The issue of methodology is fundamental to this paper: the definition of a possible 'good practice' for experiential theories. The missing element for such an approach to landscape is the archaeologists' inability to identify themselves with the period at issue while still maintaining an 'objective' perspective. The solutions proposed by a re-enacting (Collingwood 1946), interpretative (Tilley 1993) or cognitive approach (Renfrew and Zubrow 1994) have not solved the inherent problems of such a study. But, if this task has been proven to be difficult in prehistoric spaces, it may be easier, I argue, in approaching the landscapes of a literate culture. In fact, intentional sources like literature and epigraphy could be successfully used in obtaining a deep insight into the *mentalités* of ancient peoples about their places. These general ideas are not only the expression of a dominant elite, but they are also comprehended, if not shared, by an entire society, constituting its culture.

Experienced space is a place of meanings that are produced by the *mentalité* operating in the shaping of space: this last human activity is mostly intentional, and so well comprehensible through intentional sources. If we look at the main critiques of the experiential approach, we can propose how to solve these issues to some degree:

1) Intentional sources can (and need to) be contextualized. It is possible to locate ancient authors (being an artist, a poet, a politician...) and their possible public within their own historical period and social-cultural area. This does not mean that intentional sources will give account of every coeval point of view: in the case of Classical landscapes, a male Mediterranean elite bias will be still present. However, since we are dealing with ideologies, they are probably presenting us with a picture widely shared by a large part of the population (see above). We are not dealing with individuals, but with groups, within which the general perspective, the operating mentality, is accepted, at least in its most general lines. Further, about context, it is possible to connect 'narratives' of the same place from different periods or peoples to known archaeological situations, joining the material evidence with its own human perspective, connecting the *right feelings* to the *right period* and to the *right place*!
2) Intentional sources are codified according to, and soaked with, past ideologies. They are themselves an expression of a specific culture and they view space in the only way possible, which is as socially and culturally constructed places. In this framework, following their narratives, the archaeologist is brought across meaningful places, described and ordered in a definite way, so to appreciate their implied meanings.
3) Intentional sources are a product of human experience. They are not human experience itself, in the sense that it is not possible to recreate exactly the flavours, sounds and peculiar views that concurred in defining the past experience of a landscape. Nevertheless, they are the 'creation' of such a complex array of sensations: within perception, their authors have combined all of these feelings in the experience that they try to describe. To some degree, the 'experiential complexity' is still preserved.

The emphasis on intentional sources (such as literature and epigraphy) does not mean that material data are unsuitable for an experiential study. As has been said above, ideology permeates all aspects of a society at all levels, as does material culture (Hodder 1991): it is itself an 'ideological product' and it can be used in the discussed perspective as well. Let us consider, for example, patterns in pottery-type distribution across a landscape: Roman fine-ware and local-production coarse-ware could also be interpreted as the result of a cultural choice in the past and thus defining another aspect, beside 'economic concerns' (i.e. supply; Millet 1991). This aspect could co-determine the final picture and define another characteristic of those intentionalities involved in the shaping of landscape. All the above-said elements, if approached in a holistic way, could provide a deeper insight in the ancient mentalities of those that dwelt in these places.

## *Conclusion*

Concluding, the main concern of traditional landscape archaeology was with the economy and social relations determined largely by the environment while underestimating the cultural aspect as an almost predictable reflection of them. The real truth behind this, I think, is that the best approach to space in general, and landscape in particular, is an integrated approach in which material evidence and intentional forces as well as cultural and economic-environmental factors are seen together.

Indeed, material data as well as settlement and exploitation patterns that are recognised in the landscape need to be contextualised in order to appreciate how people *thought* of *their* environment and took decision concerning it or, more precisely, the *idea* they had of it. The experience of a place, of a landscape, gives importance and meaning to some places rather than to others, even if these are 'identical' from an environmental point of view. This is a clear reflection of the application in human behaviour of something more than a general principle of 'maximum result with minimum effort'. Indeed, if such a principle exists, I argue, it needs to be contextualised, so to define exactly what such people *believed* was a good definition for *maximum result* and for *minimum effort* respectively.

Finally, this brings us back to the perspectives opened by Hodder regarding a 'contextual archaeology' in which 'our interpretations of the past need to incorporate cultural meanings, intentions and purposes' (1991: 9). It is not surprising that this author affirmed the examination of the more immediate historical context as the means by which we gain 'an adequate insight into cultural meanings' (*ibid*: 11).

Intentional sources are necessary in achieving a complete comprehension of human spatiality: they are the direct expression of original past feelings and experiences. Identity is created through a system of beliefs, values, concepts and biases: it is a product of an ideology. In turn, this complex cultural ensemble constitutes the backbone of experiential approaches to a space that is settled, exploited and dwelt in by humans, so configuring itself as a *place*.

As pointed out by Nicholas Purcell (1996: 209), we need to place 'side by side the routine behaviour of our species in its pursuit of survival in the landscape with the most grandiose and culturally complex of its attitudes and ambitions with regard to the world of nature'. I would like to take this a little further, saying that what we really need is a *synthetic* approach in which these different aspects (nature and culture) are seen as constituting an indivisible *unicum*. In approaching spatiality, as in the case of Roman landscapes, we need to be both archaeologists as well as historians, winning over the traditional distinctions that pretend that all that is made by humans could be naturally split in objective and subjective, concrete and ideological, material and intentional.

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