Landscape in the Longue Durée
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Introduction

The pebble is a perfect creature
Equal to itself
Mindful of its limits
Filled exactly-
With a pebbly meaning
With a scent which does not remind one of anything
Does not frighten anything away does not arouse desire
Its ardour and coldness
Are just and full of dignity
I feel a heavy remorse
When I hold it in my hand
And its noble body
Is permeated by false warmth
Pebbles cannot be tamed
To the end they will look at us
With a calm and very clear eye

This poem by the Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert (2007) is a perfect illustration of the relationship between persons and things that this book attempts to explore in relation to the material medium of a landscape made up of pebbles in the longue durée. A pebble represents perfection. But why might a pebble be considered perfect compared with other kinds of stone? What is the relationship here between a subject and an object? How mindful is the pebble: has the pebble a meaning that inheres in itself, transcending a human desire to pin down its meaning? Does this reside, somehow, in its brute materiality?
In the poem, pebbles are thoroughly anthropomorphized but remain ambiguous in character. Unlike persons, they cannot be tamed. They are noble and dignified in this respect. In an aloof manner they look at us and simultaneously delude. They have a scent of their own, are cold, but have a false warmth in human hands. A dialectic exists in the poem between the objectivity of the pebble and the inevitable subjectivity of its meaningful relationship to persons. Things posited in themselves and for themselves, in their material interiority, can never have any meaning.

In giving meaning to the pebble we inevitably find a reflection of our selves in its material Otherness. In this sense the pebble always bears a mindful relationship to our social being and sensing body, through the medium of body of a thing that cannot think or sense and has no feeling. The pebble remains in itself and for itself in a relation of interiority. But on the other hand, persons and things are mutually constitutive, co-present and co-beings, but they are not equal. There is no equal or ‘symmetrical’ relationship between the two (cf. Olsen 2010; Olsen et al. 2012). This is because grasping the meaning of a thing is quite literally an embodied relationship. In other words, the pebble can never be known in the abstract. For a pebble to be meaningful to us, or others, we need to sense its own materiality, its stony difference, in relation to our fleshy bodies. When we do that the pebble no longer remains an object that is not subject to human will but becomes a quasi-subject with which we can interact, something that in this way becomes meaningful and comes alive or has some kind of agency. To know a pebble is thus to grasp it in the hands, to scent the thing, to gaze at it, to experience its pebble voice activated when we touch it with another thing. To know a pebble is also to reflect on what we can make from it, what we can make a pebble do for us and what, in the process, the pebble gives to us, the potentialities that it affords, the stories that unfold from its very materiality and difference. But we cannot tell any stories that we like: a pebble is a smooth stone. If the stone is entirely rough or jagged it is no longer a pebble but a different kind of thing altogether. This is precisely why we need to be mindful that the pebble has its limits and because of this has ‘a pebbly meaning’ that requires human representation to unfold.

Pebbles are like no other kind of stone and have an especial place in our contemporary culture. There are innumerable paintings and photographs of them. They appear on cards and posters, in shop-window displays, as ornaments in homes and gardens, as table numbers in pubs, sometimes as giant street sculptures in various forms. Some people collect pebbles and sometimes polish them in special machines. Pebbles are painted and kept in the pocket as talismans. No other kind of stone has
generated so much interest. Who, apart from geologists, has collections of granite or limestone or sandstone rocks? A quick search of the internet will generate thousands of products designed in the form of pebbles, or the use of pebble designs on an extraordinarily diverse range of products. A short list, in no particular order:

- pebble sofas
- pebble candles
- pebble dresses
- pebble chimes
- pebble tea-towel
- pebble tray
- pebble T-shirt
- pebble bath mat
- pebble blinds
- pebble wine label
- pebble soap
- cocoa pebbles cereal
- fruity pebbles sweets
- pebble linoleum
- pebble ironing-board cover
- pebble shower curtains
- pebble toilet bags
- pebble phone
- pebble deck chairs
- pebble bathroom cleaner
- pebble tissues
- pebble face wipes
- pebble water bottle
- pebble tablecloths
- pebble place mats
- pebble coasters
- pebble swimming costumes.

Manipulated within the advertising and marketing industries, there appears to be almost no end to the products that might be fashioned in the form of pebbles, or adorned with pebble designs. Can you imagine a granite tissue or a limestone cereal? Where are the sandstone face wipes and candles and shower curtains?

There is quite obviously something very special about pebbles, an appeal that cannot be matched by any other type of stone. Those who
market and sell things to us must of necessity generate a feeling of well-being on the part of the consumer. Pebbles, from this perspective, are always happy stones. They are happy because they are quintessentially the stones we associate with the sea and holidays: playful rather than functional or utilitarian stones. Pebbles are dancing stones. They can be made to skim across water, unlike most other types of stones that just sink. More generally they signify informality, freedom and leisure rather than the world of work, hence the swimming costumes, dresses and T-shirt designs.

Extending beyond seaside holidays they have become domestic stones intended to be used in and to decorate the home. They are associated with friends and family, dining and social occasions. Pebbles are intimate and sociable stones, hence the table mats, coasters and trays, candles and blinds. As such they are also appropriate for outdoor domestic activities in the garden, hence the deck chair designs, outdoor tablecloths etc.

More broadly they have aesthetic value as ornaments and functional use-value as paperweights or doorstops to people who collect them. A whole body of beach artists make patterns out of them. Others such as the New Zealand sculptor Chris Booth specialize in making things out of pebbles (Booth 2007). There is a fundamental association with water and bodily cleansing, embodied experiences of water. So pebbles are particularly appropriate as designs for bathroom linoleum, as shower curtains and mats and are associated with products that cleanse the home and the body – soap, face wipes, etc.

Pebbles are said to feel good and promote well-being: they are therapeutic stones. Many self-help books concerned with the promotion of psychic well-being use pebbles as metaphors in their titles, hence the title of the compilation of quotations and insights by the mystic, Sadhguru, *Pebbles of Wisdom* (2015). On the cover, carefully arranged wise pebbles curve across the sea. Another book, *A Pebble for Your Pocket* by Thich Nhat Hanh (2001), is a collection of ‘mindful stories for children and grown-ups’ to do with contemplation and divine wisdom. Academics are not immune, either, from using pebble metaphors. Zalasiewicz’s *The Planet in a Pebble* (2010) is a geological history of the earth that begins with the humble story of a Welsh pebble and then wades through vast expanses of geological time: pebbles are good to think.

This book is a 4,000-year history of pebbles and the manner in which they have been used and thought through by people. Pebbles are usually found only on the beach, in the liminal space between land and the sea. What happens when pebbles instead extend inland and create
a ridge brushing against the sky? The book explores the multiple qualities and associations of pebbles in the past and the present through the investigation of a unique landscape of pebbles over the long term. It is a study of long-term relationships created through the lives of pebbles and the lives of people in a pebbled landscape. This is a matter of the ways in which different generations have appropriated and materialized pebbles in often quite distinct and disjunctive modes. The focus is also on the capacity of pebbles themselves to attract particular types of responses stemming from their materiality, responses that transcend the simple notion that time unfolds itself in terms of either continuities or ruptures. This is not a matter of objectification but subjectification in the relation between persons and things in which time itself is subjectified, a theme elaborated on in the conclusions.

Landscape in the longue durée

The title of the book pays homage, of course, to the general perspective of the Annales school of historiography, but differs substantially from the approach in a number of important respects. As a starting point it identifies archaeological research as essentially historical rather than ‘scientific’ in character. In other words, I take it as the purpose of archaeology to make sense of the past in the present through the creation of a narrative, in the case of this book one that tells a story of a pebbled landscape over the long term.

The work of the Annales school has been extensively discussed elsewhere (e.g. Trevor-Roper 1973; Stoianovich 1976; Burke 1990; Hodder 1987; Burguière 2009) and specifically in relation to archaeology excellent discussions can be found in the volume edited by Knapp (Knapp 1992a). Unfortunately, that book seems to have been little followed in the development of a historical analysis subsequently by archaeologists. Rather than discuss this perspective again in any detail, I hope it will suffice to list below ten very general points informing the discussions in the rest of the book that I find important in the Annales approach:

1. An emphasis on long-term diachronic processes: that is, long-term patterns rather than short-term events.
2. Finding the general in the details of the particular.
3. Reading the past from the vantage point of the present to gain insights.
4. The general stress on the collective and social nature of human actions rather than individual events/actions/thoughts.

5. The emphasis put on material culture as another way of telling and understanding. This is because archaeological evidence, fragmentary though it is, provides us very importantly with a material record of actual practice: what people do rather than what they say they do. This is to put stress on enduring material components of thought and action.

6. The importance given to interdisciplinary insights that link archaeology, history, anthropology, sociology, geography, psychology and other disciplines. The outcome is that all historical knowledge is essentially synthetic in character.

7. A striving for synthesis and comparison in relation to the manner in which material circumstances relate to human experience.

8. The idea that time is not uniform, a kind of universal measuring scale that is homogeneous and linear in character, but subjective and made up of different rhythms: some short-, some medium- and some very long-term indeed, which intermingle and criss-cross. There is no present divorced from a past that is supposedly gone for ever. The past is always a material presence and we are always surrounded by things of the past that, in fact, are constitutive of our present. Only the people who made these things are gone for good, but they also live on through the medium of things. This is discussed further below.

9. The recognition of the often habitual, repetitive and unconscious nature of human ‘mentalities’ relating to symbolism and the manner in which cultural traditions get played out in spaces. Braudel liked to say that space is the best kind of way of slowing down history (cited in Ricoeur 2004: 152). To put it another way more pertinent to this study, landscape and place slow history down through its material sedimentation.

10. The attempt to integrate the local and regional into a broader perspective best exemplified by Braudel’s masterly study of the Mediterranean (Braudel 1992).

What I find inadequate is the frequent recourse to various forms of technological and economic and demographic reductionism and a misguided faith in quantitative and statistical approaches to historical evidence, especially in the work of later members of the Annales school (see discussion of Knapp on this; Knapp 1992b: 6ff.).
Going beyond the ten general points listed above, the book much more specifically develops a perspective directly inspired by existentialist and phenomenological philosophical theoretical traditions that are themselves heavily influenced by a Marxist emphasis on material practices. Again, for the sake of brevity, I list a further seven points informing the discussions throughout the subsequent chapters:

1. A stress on materiality that insists that what we need to study is the real rather than representations of the real. What this means is a return to the things themselves, in the case of this book pebbles in a pebbled landscape. We do not base our knowledge on their pre-existing representation in a field of discourse constituted by the abstractions of texts, maps, photographs, plans, GIS analyses and so forth. In this respect synthetic archaeological texts and indeed a great body of the research represented in the Annales school are built solely on representations of representations, providing only a simulacrum of the real, or in other words a copy of a copy of something that never really existed in the first place.

2. An insistence that knowledge of the past in the present is only to be satisfactorily gained through the direct medium of the sensual and sensing body that is always already our primary research tool. The starting point is our experience of the world through our human involvement and participatory immersion within it: being there, touching and being touched in both a literal and metaphorical understanding of the sensation of touch. Our sensuous carnal relationships to the world end in both landscapes and objects. So the body is both the cognitive and the existential ground of culture. Perception begins in the pre-objective material and subjective human body and ends in landscapes and things (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Cszordas 1990; Abram 1996; Marrato 2012; Tilley and Cameron-Daum 2017).

3. An emphasis on performativity in human relations or in other words the notion that identities are constituted through performative practices (Butler 1980). We learn through making and doing and through direct observation of others. Landscapes and the things within them are part of us and we are part of them, we are of them (Heidegger 1962; Thomas 1996).

4. An interpretative stress on the agency of landscapes and component parts of those landscapes. A landscape made up of pebbles with a particular topography, vegetation, soil, climate, etc. cannot be thought in any way we might like, nor does it determine the way it is thought
through. We thus eschew any simplistic idealism or cultural relativism or crude adaptational and functional deterministic perspective.

5. The relationship between persons and things involves an entangled, complex, material field involving the intertwining of the flesh of the body and the flesh of the world (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 1968; Tilley 2004, 2008, 2010). This is a dialectic of embodiment and objectification (Bourdieu 1977), a bringing forth of things into the world. We do not find a pre-existing world of things and landscapes to study but create both. As such, landscapes and things are material entities that shift and change and have different contours and produce different experiences. This has profound consequences for a theory of things and is a point discussed extensively in the conclusions.

6. An emphasis on our determinate situatedness in the world: everything that we do, say or think is from a point of view and therefore always limited in terms of a particular perspective and relation to the world (Casey 1993).

7. Our relation to the world always involves an intermingling of all our perceptual senses, and this synaesthetic experience is itself intimately linked to our kinaesthetic bodily involvement in it (Tilley 2008).

There are different ways in which we can conceive of the importance of cultural traditions and collective memories of the past. One form is the recall of traditions and memories that sit in the mind and is linked to individual and collective experiences of the past in the present. Another is to place emphasis on memories that sit in the body in the world, that is, they are embodied, and do not require acts of recollection (Connerton 1989; Casey 2000; Ricoeur 2004). They instead involve the manner in which bodies engage with the materiality of landscapes and things. Such bodily memories born out of bodily experiences transcend time and directly link past and present through the medium of embodied interactions, producing an active habitual immanence mediating relationships between people and things and landscapes. This point is again one that will be elaborated in the conclusions to the study, but I want to sketch out the position a little more here since it is crucial to the argument.

**Time and the longue durée**

A common-sense understanding of the ‘longue durée’ might be that it simply refers to the long term, a long period of chronological time. This notion of clock or objective chronological time is ultimately uninteresting
and helps us to explain and understand nothing. It is empty time, time as a container segmented by dates and events, befores and afters.

The *Annales* approach to time as exemplified by Braudel is far more subtle than that. Braudel hierarchically distinguished between time as duration; long, continuous and almost imperceptible historical time rhythms; long historical economic cycles and rhythms, and much briefer short-term changes in which time, as historical motion, speeds up in the form of events and then dissipates. This was a distinction between long-term geographic and environmental structures, medium-term socioeconomic cycles (involving, in the case of the Mediterranean, such matters as linked movements in economics and demographic structures – such matters as cereal price curves, demographic curves with reciprocal movements of industrial production, ground rents, seaport duties, etc.) and short-term sociopolitical events.

His concern was the interrelationship between historical change and the near-permanent in history (Braudel 1992: 651). This was a matter of conceptualizing the interrelationship between rhythms of material life and fluctuations of human existence. Different times and their histories thus both overlap and develop simultaneously: ‘in seeking to grasp all the different vibrations, waves of past time which ought ideally to accumulate like the divisions in the mechanism of a clock, the seconds, the minutes, the hours and days – perhaps we shall find the whole fabric slipping away between our fingers’ (652). Beyond this he notes that there are not ‘two or three measures of time, there are dozens, each of them attached to a particular history’ (657). Dates might be assigned to the beginnings and ends of particular historical rhythms and economic cycles, but according to how one conceptualized time and place they were arbitrary and open to debate and re-evaluation. The notion of duration here is linked to both continuity and heterogeneity as conditions of experience. In other words, duration is multiple rather than singular in character, characterized by coexisting times rather than a singular time.

As regards the Mediterranean, its geography, climate, topography and physical regularities partly constitute the longue durée and they severely constrain possibilities for material, institutional and cultural changes. These are the ‘constants’ of history and produce enduring ‘mentalities’ or structures of feeling: ‘all western writers who have at some time in their lives encountered the Mediterranean have been struck with its historical or rather timeless character, its longue durée’ (658). Thus the fishermen who sit round in a bar today waiting for the wind to change are doing the same thing as was done in antiquity, and the wild countryside
takes us back into the ‘mists of time’ (658). The Mediterranean world of
the sixteenth century was overwhelmingly a world of peasants, tenant
farmers and landowners: ‘peasants and crops, in other words, food sup-
plies and the size of the population, silently determined the destiny of
the age … still waters run deep and we should not be misled by surface
flurries’ (660).

Braudel thus splits apart any notion of a unitary historical time. In
its place we have a multiplicity of times that are interwoven and inflect
each other. A notion of an embodied human time, perhaps implicit in his
view of long-term history, allows us to take his perspective further. The
notion of time informing this study is phenomenologically understood
as temporality, the times of bodies, sensual relations and human experi-
ence. This time of the body and of intersubjective material relations is a
time of the self and a time of others, a lived time and one of the times of
landscape.

There has been insufficient attention to such an understanding of
time in archaeology, which is rather surprising given that it has always
defined itself in terms of deep time as opposed to the superficial times
of anthropology and sociology and indeed history. It has thus claimed
superiority: only archaeologists can adequately study things in time.
Unfortunately, the primary concern has always been pragmatic – dating
things and ordering them in chronological succession in an untensed and
inhuman time of duration in which notions of past or present or future
are irrelevant. This is what Gell refers to as ‘B series time’ in the analytic
philosophical tradition, as opposed to the ‘A series time’ of existentialist
and phenomenological philosophies informing anthropological discus-
sions (Gell 1992b).

Human time in archaeology has been valuably discussed in terms
of narrative and object biographies (e.g. Barrett 1994), adaptations of
the practice theory of Bourdieu (1977) and Giddens (1984) stressing the
sequencing and the timing of human projects in relation to making and
using things, time as arising from the social use of things (Gosden 1994),
processes of remembering and forgetting through things (Rowlands
1993, 1999; Jones 2007), conceptions of how the past may have been
understood in the past (Bradley 2002) and through a Heideggerian con-
ception of time as fundamental to an ontology of social Being, an essen-
tial part of that being how people relate to and do things with things
(Thomas 1996: chs. 2 and 3).

The temporality of social life, produced in concrete practices that
actively produce space-time rather than taking place in space and in
time, has been stressed by a number of anthropologists (Bourdieu 1977;
Munn 1992; Thomas 1996; Hirsch and Stewart 2005). Time has thus been understood as fluid and in flux and multiple rather than singular in character. However, as Robbins points out, virtually all anthropological studies in which time is actually considered as an integral part of social practices assume continuity between past and present (Robbins 2007). There is little sense of rupture or discontinuity and this is true of Munn’s own account of spatiotemporal relations on Gawa, in which she successfully integrates a consideration of land and sea, the body, gardens and food consumption, ceremonial exchange and witchcraft (Munn 1986). The wider theoretical question of the relationship between past, present and future in the longue durée and in relation to a study of things has only been tangentially addressed.

Bergson (1991) influentially stressed time as *la durée* or duration. The carnal human body exists in time, it fuses through its material being, past, present and future, which interpenetrate each other. The body experiences a flux of sensations in time linking matter to memory. So how we understand the world links matter to memory. Our understanding is embedded in the manner in which we encounter and remember the world through our embodied experience of it. Time is embodied through memories. These either may be consciously recalled or are a product of inscribed corporeality and habit (81–2). Through the moving corporeal body past and present interpenetrate each other and lead to the future. Both duration and simultaneity constitute the self. Through the body the present passes at the same time as it is present. So the paradox is that the past becomes contemporary, or is in the same time, as the present that it once was part of.

Deleuze, building on Bergson’s position, explores the paradox further and I am indebted to the brilliant discussion of Hodges (2008) for the following brief account. One of the paradoxes of time resides in the following: ‘the past would never be constituted if it did not coexist with the present whose past it is’ (Deleuze 1991: 59). Past and present from this perspective coexist in the same time, contrary to a common-sense understanding that, philosophically at least, turns out to be a non-sense. The past thus can only exist and come into being in the present, but the present itself does not exist in itself because it is past. Acts of remembering (as recall or part of bodily habit) bring forth the past as present: ‘all of the past coexists with the new present in relation to which it is now past … each past is contemporaneous with the present that it was, the whole past coexists with the present in relation to which it is past, but the past element of the past in general pre-exists the passing present’ (Deleuze 1994: 107–8). Hodges explains the paradox: ‘the only place the
past can exist is in the present – it has nowhere else to be – even though the present is not ‘present’, of course. This generalized past, therefore, does not exist in actuality, but is the virtual form of the past, accessible through various acts of remembering’ (Hodges 2008: 411). So different times can coexist with each other, some are deep and are of a very long-term nature, others are much shallower and of shorter duration. Such times are themselves fundamentally non-chronological in character. These are the times of making interpretative sense of past as present and present as past: ‘la durée underpins human existence and the physical conditions which shape it; while the experience, appropriation and representation of “time” reside largely in the domain of everyday practice, neurological, cognitive and embodied processing’ (414). The longue durée thus has emergent properties that actualize themselves in particular practices that take place in particular historical contexts in particular landscapes.

I take seriously in this book that the past may be considered in some respects to be coeval with the present. It is not over and done with, something that is finished and completed. This co-presence is activated through the temporalizing practices of persons in particular social and historical contexts. This perspective I wish to link to another – that the embodied perception and experience of things and landscapes may also be considered coeval and outside a chronological spatialized and homogeneous notion of time. This is very different from thinking about cultural memory as recall or simply being a matter of remembering or forgetting. These need to be differentiated from social practices in which referential meaning and significance gets assigned: this pebble sculpture is a representation of a prehistoric axe, that is a modern representation of a crab or an ice-cream cone. In these cases we find only difference rather than similarity.

An embodied history

Connerton (1989) is rightly critical of the kind of approach to history that puts all the weight on thought and ‘inscribing practices’, privileging historical texts as the font of all knowledge. He draws the important distinction between ‘inscribing practices’ and ‘incorporating practices’, practices relating to the body and habit in which the past is ‘sedimented in the body’ (72). Habit memory of the body is mnemonic in character and repetitive, or memory without thought, but this memory is performed through the body and leaves little historical trace.
Casey puts forward one of the best discussions of bodily memory from a phenomenological perspective. His definition is that it is ‘an active immanence of the past in the body that informs present bodily actions in an efficacious, orienting and regular manner’ (Casey 2000: 149). It works through the movements of the body in the world through habitual enactment and has an active rather than a passive character, part of social being. It is a ‘settled disposition’ to act in a particular way, an effective history within the body that is efficacious in the world (151). It is essential in allowing us to go on in the world and allowing us to feel familiar in that world. It is a matter of ‘immersion in memorial depths beyond – or rather, beneath and before – the two-dimensional flatlands of recollected scenes’ (167). The past becomes present in these body memories and becomes the future. This is not some kind of pale reflection of the past in the present but the past in the fullness of its plenitude, a co-immanence of past and present, an entanglement of the two. It is not a repetition of the past in the present. Bodily memories unlike recollected memories are fundamental and primary to social being. Unlike memories recalled in the mind they are not subject to memory loss or being unreliable, since they arise out of embodied practice.

Beyond body memory, Casey refers to three primary mnemonic modes: reminding, reminiscing and recognizing. These are in between the polarities of memory in the mind and memory of the body and remind us that memory itself is not fixed or static but slips into and out of differing forms of consciousness and bodily being in relation to differing temporalities (Ricoeur 2004: 38ff.).

Olsen rightly points out in a discussion of Connerton that although he usefully stresses the materiality of body memory, he has almost nothing to say about the manner in which this relates to the materiality of things and their durable persistence in the world (Olsen 2010: 122). The same criticism can be made of Casey and Ricoeur. Archaeology, above all, demonstrates that the past is still present, a past in the present, memory made material and a memory that is co-immanent (see excellent discussions in Rowlands 1993; Bradley 2002; Meskell 2004; Jones 2007; Olsen 2010: ch. 6). It provides the possibility of another way of telling about the relation of past to present through its focus on material things. In general, archaeology has set itself an agenda of trying to understand the past in itself and for itself in terms of the realities of a deep past time. But archaeology also has to be about the relationship of present to past in its intellectual, material and sensory embodied dimensions. The ‘common-sense’ approach usually adopted takes no account of this, implicitly asserting that the past is separated from the present. It is
something completed, gone for ever, and thus can be objectively reconstituted from the traces that remain. If we abandon this train of thought rooted in a chronological time then we are forced to ask the question of how archaeology and history can provide us with knowledge of the past if it is no longer where or what or when we thought it might be in a dead time divorced from the present.

In a study of things and landscapes in the longue durée the following are inevitably involved: (a) we are practically engaged: landscapes are good to work with; (b) we are cognitively engaged: landscapes are good to think; (c) as a consequence of this our bodies are materially entrapped by that which we study, in the specific case of this book by a landscape of pebbles; (d) the concomitant of this is a collapsing of an abstract notion of time, the consequence of which is that we realize that the past is in and of the present and the present is in and of the past. We live through the past in the present and the present in the past. Like it or not, we are always participants and involved physically and imaginatively. This direct physical and imaginative involvement with past and present simultaneously is that which permits us to make sense of both and forms the basis of all our understanding.

Approaches to long-term history have always been dominated by a stress on changing technologies, environments, economic relations and demographics in various ways that are deemed to be the key variables, or they may emphasize instead cultural memory, social processes of collective remembering and forgetting (Halbwachs 1992; Nora 1996; Ricoeur 2004; Erll 2011). The position taken in this book takes as its main focus the significance of embodied relationships between people, landscapes and things over the long term and the manner in which they persist and survive. In other words, it is a history of human embodiment. While the particular cognized meaning and significance of landscapes and things may alter, shift and change in cycles, long-term embodied relations persist because they arise from sensuous human involvement, engagement and participation in a material world with material effects. They arise from the very nature of the things themselves.

The structure of the book

The book is divided into two parts. Part I is concerned with the prehistory of the heathlands until the end of the Iron Age. Part II discusses the heathlands in modernity, broadly the last 300 years. The gap is largely due to the lack of useful earlier historical information about the heathlands until the modern era.
Chapter 1 introduces the Pebblebed landscape, discussing its geology and topography, the landscape relationships of prehistoric sites and basic find evidence from the Mesolithic until the Iron Age. Chapter 2 discusses the life and work of George Carter, assessing the importance of his archaeological work and the way it was received in his day. This is almost entirely based on unpublished manuscripts. Since Carter could not publish his own work, I felt duty bound to salvage it and present it for him in summary form. This is intended as a contribution to the history of early twentieth-century British archaeology and also provides some of the empirical background to other chapters where his work is discussed further (Chapters 3, 6 and 11).

Chapters 3–5 discuss the excavation and analysis of three pebble cairns. The deeply embodied social and symbolic significance of pebbles in a landscape of pebbles is emphasized. Chapter 6 discusses the Early and Middle Bronze Age burnt mound of Jacob’s Well and a series of spectacular pebble platforms or sculptures of Middle Bronze Age date. In Chapters 6 and 7 the evidence from East Devon is discussed in much more general terms in relation to the southern British and European Bronze Age. The concern here is to call into question the dominant social model of wealthy elites controlling metals and prestige goods. An alternative way of assessing wealth and value is put forward. Chapter 8 sets out an environmental reconstruction of the prehistoric landscape from the Neolithic until the Late Bronze Age. Chapter 9 assesses the major Iron Age hilltop enclosure on the heathlands, Woodbury Castle, in terms of a broad regional analysis of the wider East Devon landscape before the Roman occupation.

Chapters 10–12 discuss the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century use of the pebbled heathlands and their relationship to the Bicton estate, owned by the richest landowners in Devon. The discussions in Chapters 13–15 and the introduction to Chapter 16 take the account up to the present. The rest of the conclusion presents a model of continuity and change in the embodied use of pebbles in this landscape and engages with contemporary debates with regard to how we might develop a theory of material culture or of the meaning and significance of things.

In Chapter 12 I discuss the work of Thomas Hardy in relation to understanding the character of the nineteenth-century heathland. This is presented in the firm belief that we have much to learn about landscapes from novelists as an antidote to the sometimes impoverished accounts that archaeologists and historians provide. Hardy provides a brilliant understanding of embodiment in a heathland setting. In a similar manner Priscilla Trenchard’s account of her own contemporary artistic work
on the heathlands in Chapter 15 contributes significantly to an understanding of a modern poetics of embodiment in relation to pebbles.

The book is unusual from an archaeological point of view in that rather than discussing artefacts the chief focus of the research is unmodified natural things – pebbles. This is material that in a landscape made up of pebbles might ordinarily be considered just locally available building material and of no other significance. In an excavation such material might have been regarded in a cursory way, dug out and piled up on a spoil heap without any analysis. What would matter would be finds of things made by people, to which much time and care would be devoted in, for example, the serried rows of illustrated pot sherds or flints adorning countless excavation reports – they often have no other purpose.

Instead we devoted huge amounts of time to analysing this supposedly worthless natural stuff. During the course of the project I visited another excavation where pebbles had been found in a tree-throw hole together with a Neolithic pot. I asked if I might see the pebbles. They were all buried and lost on the spoil heap. The pot, of course, had been carefully preserved. This is symptomatic of an attitude of mind differentially evaluating the worth of natural and cultural things. In my opinion half the evidence that might have made sense of that pot had been destroyed. This attitude to the natural world, dismissing it as insignificant, has dramatically changed in the archaeological study of landscape over the course of the last two decades. It still seems to persist in relation to things. This difference between a natural thing and a cultural thing and how meaning is created in relation to both is a key aspect of any study of the meaning of things in general, a point taken up in the conclusions to the book.

It should be evident that this book is multi-faceted. It presents new empirical evidence based on archaeological survey and excavation in both Parts I and II. It presents a study of landscape over the long term, a fresh evaluation of aspects of the Bronze and Iron Ages, and a new theoretical contribution to an understanding of things.

The argument is meant to gradually unfold but many of the chapters, apart from Chapters 3–6, which need to be considered together, can admittedly be read on their own and are relatively independent of each other. It has proved to be difficult to stop writing this text and entire chapters that were originally meant to be included in it have had to be cut.