

‘[T]here is no such thing as nature or culture’ (Strathern, 1980:177).

Discuss with reference to human evolution generally and tool use specifically

The Quote in question referencing Mary Strathern’s ‘The Hagen Case’ 1980, has been misconstrued, although pertaining to the dichotomy of the nature vs culture debate in Archaeo-anthropological perspectives¹. The example set in context to the Hagen people of Papua New Guinea² who “do not refer to nature when describing the world” (Edwards 2016:1) but instead refer to the closest translation of “wild” or “domestic” Strathern 1980:191-192). Anthropologists have thus referred to this as a quote to establish nature and culture as a “social construct”. It’s whether nature or culture is a social construct which will be discussed referencing stone tool assemblages and behavioural development. However, in exploring the nature culture debate, it’s become apparent the question of definitions and how useful they are in outlining how we should approach the debate *“symbols are more real than phenomena; the signifier is more important than the signified (Scholte 1974:428 in McCormack 1980:5) but symbols such as nature have meanings attached to them which are culturally relative”*. Also highlighting the paradox of definitions in the light of a multidisciplinary approach, thus, we should proceed with extreme scepticism of our own understandings of Human evolution, as we are not separate from the processes in question. My aims are to further our scientific understandings between “domestic” and “wild” vs “nature and “culture”, to measure the validity of the statement in question and to explore examples pertaining to the nature culture debate, with reference to the development of stone tools in the Olduvai gorge, and the inherent paradox of defining the boundaries between cultural development and evolutionary development. In Conclusion I will have hoped to evaluate the statement and show how despite multiple schools of thought and definitions and examples, there is little cohesive rationality to categorise cultural groups in reference to stone tools or to presume that nature is separate from culture, that they are in fact of the same essence and of the same phenomenon and contextual to assemblages in question which implies a study of psychology and behaviours, how we go about that is another question.

¹ Levi-Strauss 1969(1949) does an association with the symbology we ascribe pertain to a universal dichotomy? *nature or culture*.

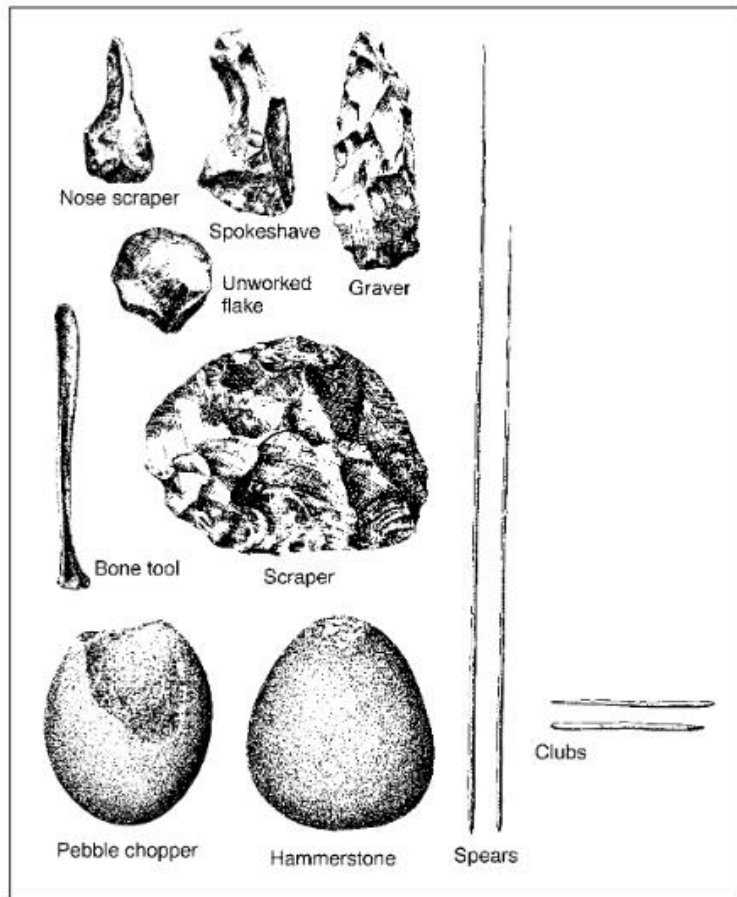
² See (Strathern and McCormack, 1980)

The perspective in question Strathern (1980:187) believes that while there are different concepts of nature and culture, cultural relativism provides a major inconvenience to this approach the quote is the equivalent of calling water wet, as we should know one cultures ontology does not necessarily apply to another, “whatever *status these concepts have within ‘rationalist’ discourse*” *there has been demonstrably ‘empiricist’ appropriation of them.*” Leach 1976:67). As Anthropologists and Archaeologist, it is inherent within the discipline to study and analyse human evolutionary and cultural development, but the Strathern quote is an example showcasing cognitive dissonance within the discipline, as a model for when interpretation (by the discipline) falls into the trap of defining people psychologically (tarring with the same brush), with no verifiable evidence outside of the context(in this case) of The Hagen People of Papua New Guinea “*although we allow other cultures to comprise of in terms of sets of artefacts and images which differ from the style of our own, we tend to super impose them on the same reality and nature as we perceive it*”(Wagner 1975:142). Considering the perceived evolution of Human kind, through the Olduvai assemblages of our ancestral Hominds, through to comparison of ancestral and contemporary hunter gatherer groups for comparative behaviours and reasoning, and contrasted with our “western” sedentary lifestyles. In understanding this process I considered various perspectives in anthropology and beyond, including Anderson, Imagined communities (2006) and how he talks about how nationalism is a shared phenomenon amongst humans, and here I hope to apply its essence into the nature culture debate. Nationalism is often misrepresented as a political ideology or a theory that follows “*the transition from agrarian society to an industrial one*” Gellner (1997 cited in Eriksen (2007:3), which coincides with traditional chronological narrative, however in further elaboration it’s highlighted that “*it should be categorised with kinship or religion rather than a political ideology like fascism or liberalism*” (pg7) highlighting an important socio-political perspective. Nationalism (with a lower-case n) embodies willingness of people of various cultures to exist as a socio-political entity Pratt (2003:12) cited in Devlin (2018, AHAN6005), comparably interpretable as “cultured nature”³. Operating parallel is Kinship and Religion which are things which are cultural as well as natural, even perhaps also considered “cultured nature” and a comparable analogy to the nature culture debate⁴, the nation-state which follows the “*political and social bodies operating congruently*” (Gellner2006: 6) is an example of a “culture”, in that nation-states in their development have taken on forms relative to each culture and history of its descendancy (Anderson 2006:44⁵) i.e The “Nation”.

³ Pratt2003 in line with Eriksen 2007 argue “technology” also crucial aid in the creation of a national consciousness.

⁴ “No single meaning can in fact be given to nature or culture in western thought: there is no consistent dichotomy, only a matrix of contrasts.” Hastrup1978:6

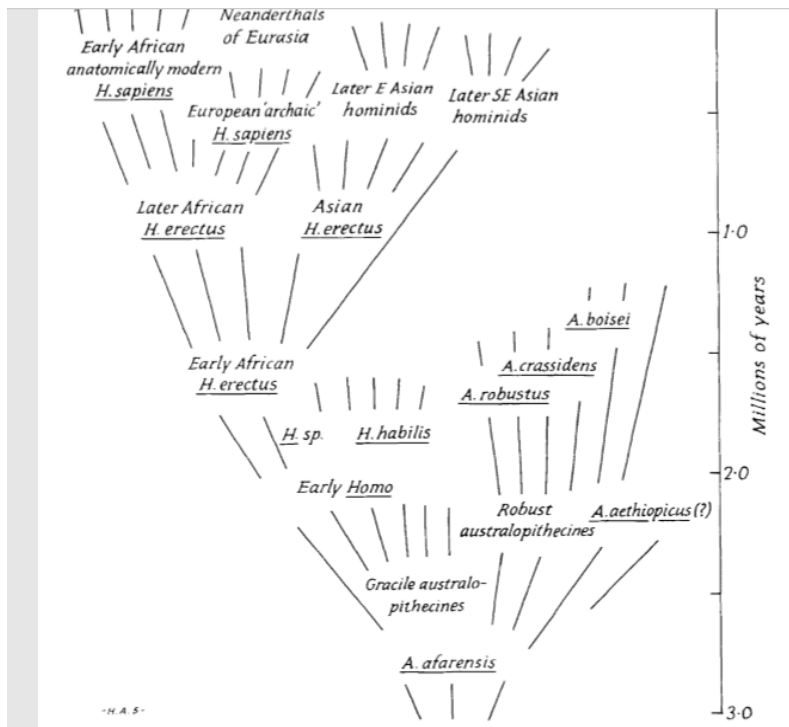
⁵ Cultural precedent overtaking the “Dynastic Ruling classes”



Considering the Olduvai gorge Assemblage first when analysing stone tool development, of the Olduvai Gorge in East Africa, consisting of a complicated assemblage array (see image up for comparison (Ingold 2000:184) Leakeys' (1971) in their categorisations of Stages of Olduvai Gorge Technology which ultimately provides grounds for an example for more inheritance of misinterpretation, whether intended as such, it shows the difficult start processual archaeology got off to. *"who would think that the common human biological endowment was significantly different from that of chimpanzees on the evidence of the striking similarity between the toolkits of contemporary free ranging chimpanzee populations and those of certain ethnographically recorded populations of*

human hunter-gatherers?" Ingold 200:363, and yet when comparison is made by Jones (1977:197 and McGrew 1992) in their assertions of the similarity between the aboriginal toolkit and Tasmanian Toolkit (Ingold:364) 'the simplest material record ever recorded' and the assemblage pattern created by Hominids 1.74 million years ago, the connotations insinuated from the western view point doesn't seem to register in its oblivious nature. As Ingold says *"It's hard to deny that the differences reflect real changes in intellectual and manipulative abilities"* and yet it's is often misconstrued by narrative that we have developed in a forward motion from the stone age until now, and that is too much of an over-simplification to justify it as even a generalisation. However, the developments while reflecting cultural changes, they also reflect biological changes and intellectual changes in Human nature which has had that inadvertent effect on how early humans behaved and interacted with the materials in question. It's incomparable for establishment of patterns to justify the comparison of modern chimpanzees (Hasam et al 2009), with a modern

environment and human presence in their stone age, to humans at Olduvai gorge, or to Aboriginal Hunter Gather tribes.⁶



Highlighting the problem of Co-occurrence over 1.75 million-year period (Ingold 2000:184).

Development of various stone tools,⁷ and variably noted across several species of hominid as opposed to one,⁸ this isn't one cultural group it's several, if not dozens. Over the course of this period we can infer that behaviours also changed in the material exchange between artefacts left behind by other groups, and through interaction with the items themselves. It's important to

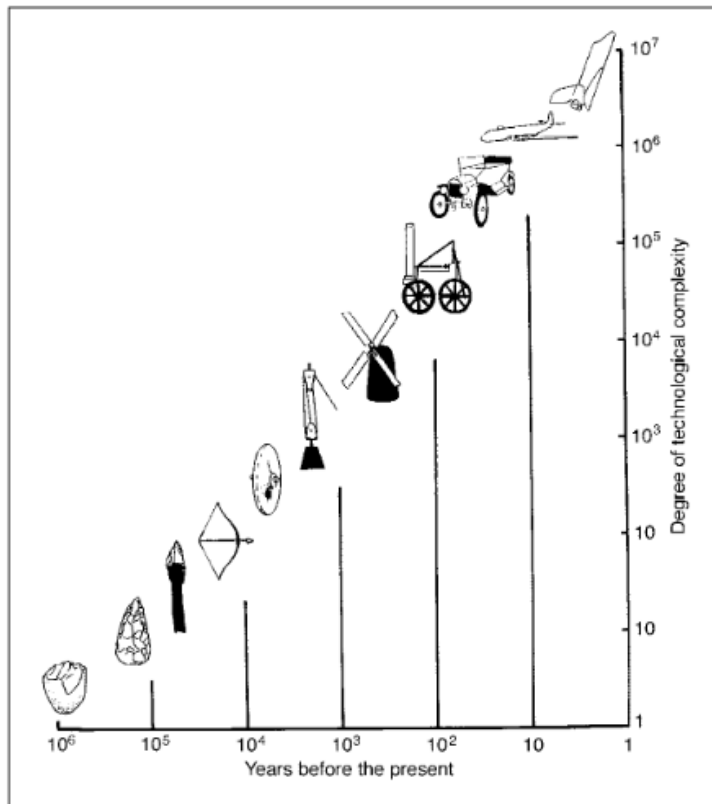
note that there is also little to suggest that these groups back then even considered themselves, "cultural groups" or even as "nations". Paleo-Anthropological analysis of Modern apes and chimps' behaviour, examples studied (in Hasam et al 2009, Soresse, Geneste 2011) infer how the use of stone tools by Capuchin monkeys and chimpanzees show "Capuchin Monkeys observed in attaining nuts, have been observed using stones as tools to open nuts, crabs and fruit" (Hasem et al 2009:339-44). Elaborating concurrently "Every stone tool is a product of the technical system of a society" Soresse, Geneste" (2011:4). Further on it's stated, in Sorressi and Geneste (2011:334) "relationships with other technical subsystems (food collection, processing and social co-operation) should be determined as they are potentially linked". Where one discipline may say "culture" another sees evolutionary instinct. Here through these comparative examples, it's clear to say how the line between nature and culture have been blurred through interpretation of the evolutionary process. It's easy to forget how long these time periods of behavioural and technological development are, what we can see immediately in an assemblage is slow to also be observed in progression of Paleoanthropological observation (Hasem et al 2009). To say that culture developed in a chronological line is as clear as an anachronism than ever, and understandably a

⁶(see evolution tree figure Foley 1980:384).

⁷ artefacts which are established as having significance in the record, are the numerous and reoccurring pieces. (Geneste 2011: 341,)

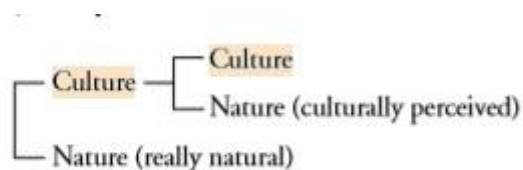
⁸ Homo Habilis, very different behaviourally, psychologically and biologically to Homo Sapiens

simplistic view simply shows a failure to perceive the sheer vastness of time and events that have passed co-currently and often parallel but without any intermixing which is incredibly difficult to picture 20 million years in the past as we have no way of truly understanding factors in behaviours and stone tool development of that time. Thus, it's comparable for our labelling of cultures and "developments" as the same derogatory fashion of formerly labelling cultures 'primitive' *"to posit a direct line of continuity from olduwan choppers to the space shuttle is quite absurd"* Ingold 2000:365 in response to Cotterell 1990:9-see figure(below). This should highlight the inherent problems



within interpretation of material Culture, what is a perceived learning and over a passage of time, cannot be applied so naively in an attempt to order multiple cultural and technological developments as a collective, in the way the Strathern Quote has, although not intentionally on Marilyn *"the apparent ascription of attitudes and beliefs to this or that set of persons should not be mistaken for a study of what people think or feel. (Strathern 1992 xvii ed Nature, culture Gender 'The Hagen case',) she is not to be understood as telling us about what they believe within their minds. And like wise for other claims that, on the surface, appear to be psychological attributions"* (Edwards 2016:439). In identifying the cultural groups of the time and based on more detailed analysis of the

Olduvai gorge stone tool assemblage, it seems that there is a series of cultures across multiple species resembling each-others as opposed to their being a singular culture (Ingold 2000:184). So here there is clear that a matrix of definitions and misinterpretation inevitably weave a convoluted picture of the issues of interpretation, to where we ignore the very observation of culture in situ, manifest by comparative relativism to another. So much that I would agree that there is no such thing as a universal 'culture' or universal 'nature' only notions subject to various interpretation and relative disciplines.



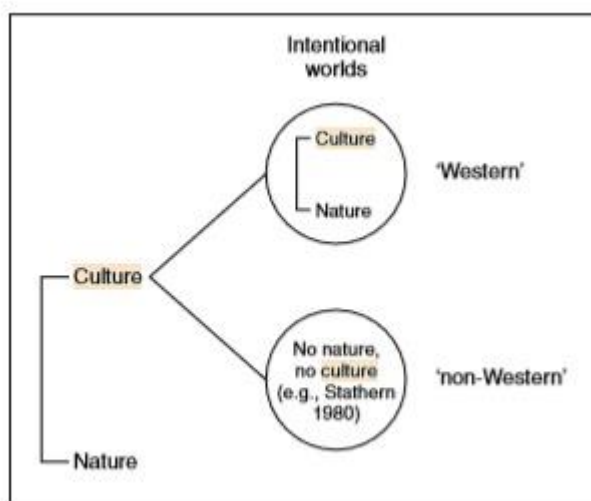
(Ingold 2000:41)

'Culture is just what one needs to know in order to operate as a functioning member of society'

Ingold 2000:138) the requirements for a functioning member of society is dependent on a number of factors of needs, and requirements in European culture dictate our constructions and projection of notions of nature and culture (McCormack 1980: 6). Not only does the matrix of definitions include western, but also non-western and as we've seen with the issue of categorisation through a relative perspective, we then our forced to compensate by including multiple perspectives in our approach.

"Rather than regarding nature as a relative cultural category or an objective framework around culture it might be better to be seen as Both" (Hastrup 1989:7 in Ingold 2000:42). In doing so not only are we establishing perspectives, we are evolving to include reflexivity into our narratives, showing the contrasts of comparison and interpretation towards our past. Ingold (ibid) further

includes how we should then approach.



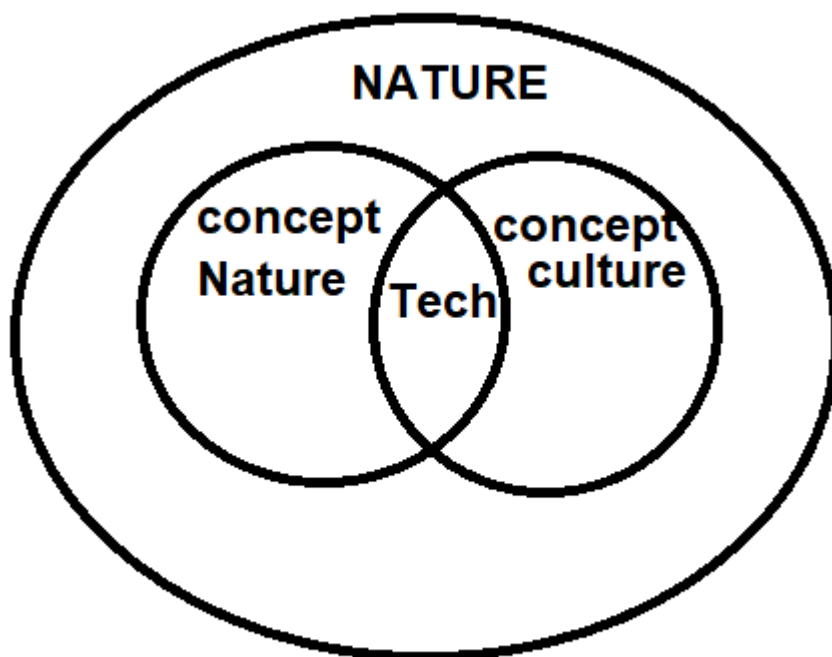
The question of stone tools, isn't merely a question about stone tools as artefacts the questions represents a question concerning technology⁹, our technological view of the world, has rendered our perception of the environment as merely "standing reserve" Heidegger 1937, however our continuous use still also implies an intimate interaction with it and

our industrialised lives much like the earlier mentioned nationalism, we probably depend just as much on the environment as any hunter-gatherer tribe, the argument by Heidegger, is we are no longer consider the "Natural", we consider only resource. (Heidegger in Krell 1993:329). Much akin that we no longer consider the "nation" only the "state" Hobsbawn, 1994). The dictomoy of nature and culture is merely perception of the environment. In the case of the Mbuti of the Itura Forest of Cameroon we can see how the approach towards the forest is referenced indigenously as 'Father' or 'Mother' (Turnbull 1965:19), interchangeably, and analogous of their dependency on the forest for food, warmth and shelter, but also references the intimate and singular connection they have with the forest, there is no consideration of separation from the forest/NATURE and provides a stark contrast in perspective towards our western perception and categorisation of Nature and Culture As commodities, *"They see themselves as involved in an intimate relationship of interdependence with*

⁹ "The essence of technology is ultimately a way of revealing (is human) the totality of beings. As a way of revealing it is pervasive and fundamental in our time so much that we cannot opt for or opt out of technology" Heidegger in Krell 1993.

the plants, animals and hala, including deities” Endicott (1979:82) the mbuti show how our inability to understand that nature and culture operate indistinctly with one another as a mechanism and basis for evolution(in this case and is not unique to the mbuti). This very projection implies that we westerners don’t see ourselves as operating in an intimate relationship with nature, cause when we look, are we not? Are we also not connected?

Our evolution depends not only on how we use our tools, given the very nature of this dichotomy, and how it is reflected in our archaeological and anthropological interactions with the world. Our culture is the discipline of choice our nature is to avoid that culture, you’ve heard of a holiday, and the incredibly instinctual pull towards having one as an academic? How is this any different to the formation of stone tools? The behaviour required in order to function with leisure require a more efficient approach to technology, the more efficient approach has brought us great innovations as seen across stone tool assemblages, and technology in general, the co-occurrence issue, is that we do not need to have started a project in order to contribute to it, or continue it, as seen from olduvai gorge, and the stone tool assemblage is an example of innovation and imagination, as with all technology, the difference is the perspective from which it’s understood, we as archaeologist and anthropologist should understand the innate failure of any modern scholar in projecting our understandings on the past, and the most efficient approach to the discussion of human evolution and co-occurrence of technology, is that they exist Co-currently, operate interdependently and paradoxically to our own capability of perception. In summary:.



Bibliography

- Anderson, B. (2006). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and The Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso.
- B Cotterell, J. K. (1990). *Mechanisms of pre-industrial Technology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Clark, J. (1983). *The Aboriginal People of Australia*. Hobart: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.
- Edward, T. R. (2016). Does Marilyn Strathern Argue that the Concept of Nature is a Social Construction. *Symposium*, 3(4), 437-442. Retrieved from <https://philarchive.org/archive/VIRDMS>
- Eriksen, T. H. (2007). *Nationalism and the Internet*. Oslo: Blackwell Publishing .
- Foley, R. (1989,). Hominid Speicies and Stone-Tool, Assemblages: How are they related Department of Biological Anthropology, . 380-391.
- Gellner, E. (2006). *Nations and Nationalism(2nd edition)*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- GenesteJ, M. S. (2011). Special Issue: Reduction Sequence, Chaîne Opératoire, and Other Methods: The Epistemologies of Different Approaches to Lithic Analysis. *Paleo-Anthropology*,. doi:10.4207/PA.2011
- Haslam Michael, A. H.-A. (2009, July 16th). "Primate Archaeology", , . *NATURE*, 460, pp 339-334. doi:10.1038/nature08188
- Hastrup, K. (1978). *The Semantics of Biology: virginity in defining females*. london: croon helm.
- Hastrup, K. (1989). Nature as Historical Space. *Folk* 31, 5-20.
- Hobsbawn, E. (1994). *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Progamme, Myth and Reality*. Cambrige : Cambrige University Press.
- Ingold, T. (2000). *The Perception of the Environment Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and skill*. New York: Routledge, Taylor Francis Group.
- Jones, R. (n.d.). The Tasmanian Paradox. (R. wright, Ed.) *Stone Tools as Cultural Markers*, 189-204.
- K, Endicot. (1979). *Batek Negrito Religion*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Leach, E. (1976). *Communication and Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Levi-Strauss, C. (1966(1949). *The Elementary Structure of Kinship*. London: Eyre and Spottiswood.
- Martin Heidegger(eds) David Farrell Krell, (Trans)William Lovitt. (1993(1977). *Basic Writings: Revised and Expanded Edition*. London: Routledge.
- Scholte, B. (1974). Structural Anthropology as an Ethno-Logic . In *The Unconscious in Culture* (pp. 424-54). New York: Dutton.
- Strathern, M. M. (1980). *"No Nature, No Culture: the Hagen Case In Nature Culture Gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Turnbull, C. M. (1965). *Wayward Servants: The Two Worlds of the African Pygmies*. London: Eyre and Spottiswood.

Wagner, R. (1975). *The Invention of Culture*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.