

## October 2011: II OpenArch meeting in Borger (NL)

### Introduction

Hein Klompmaker

I think in the beginning (although some people think differently) there was content. And I tried to bring you to our concept of dealing with new media but also with content. We call our concept Empathic Archaeology. First of all I like to introduce you to the meaning of empathic archaeology by giving you some examples of inspiration for this concept. First of all I let you hear and read during the introduction perhaps a song of Gordon Lightfoot – If you could read my mind.

It is not only nostalgia to let you hear this. There are some other reasons to. What does it tell us? A story. There are several other examples possible about our concept. It is in the first place about storytelling. It is very important to be in the footsteps of not only the other but also the other is in the footsteps of you. And the song reminds us about a lot of feelings, empathy, emotion, feeling, compassion. We need that to explore more the available archaeological scientific proof. And we have to do something more. We have to live like the prehistoric men. There are also universal structures in every story: heroes, fairy tales, books, and castles, whatever you want. They are in every story, more or less universal. There is always another side. There are risks involved with empathic archaeology. In the song there is one fragment about the risks. You can't get a feeling from the past, but sometimes you lose it, you can't get it back.

Another source is August Rodin, the thinker. He stands for ratio, science and biology. We share the same biology of this naked man. And of course we have to be aware of neuroscience. Stories are not only listening to people, but they are also pictures of a thinker. There is also another side. When you don't think you don't do. You can worry a lot. I think that is of every time. Not only from our time, that we worry a lot. I think that the dolmen builders on occasional moments had to worry a lot too.

The third inspiration source is the birth of Adam. It is very famous because of two fingers almost touching each other. It is the almost feeling, it is not making contact, it is almost making contact. If you imagine Adam shown here as a prehistoric man. God and the apostles are different scientists involved. It would be very good, if museum not only look at archaeology but they should also look at other sciences (multi-disciplinary). It is also a story without words, there is another side to it. Because we don't know what happened here exactly, there are scenarios possible. Will they ever reach each other? Will the prehistoric men ever be reached by the scientists looking for him? Will they reach each, or are they retreating? Every time there is a most plausible scenario for the problem.

These are the inspirations. What can we do with it? We think we can do a few things. We can arrange through empathic archaeology: prehistoric sensation. That is to say you have goosebumps when you see or feel for a moment in the footsteps of prehistoric man. We hope with our exhibition and everything we do around the museum to reach that with our public. Second thing is that we think we can use and make prehistoric biographies although no dolmen builder is found, we miss a body. But to combine all sciences we can make fictional biography and it is also important that scientists who are looking for him are involved in this biography. We can use several techniques to make a profile of (pre)historic culture. Fourth thing is to do something with scientific debate. I show you some examples. We think we need content. In this case we thought we make new school wall pictures with images of TRB-culture. We made several pictures. Jouke Nijman is one of the illustrators. We think it was a lot of work to build a dolmen, we think we need some information about feeling how they dolmen was built and how the village looked like. You see all kinds of people standing and everybody sees that they have something to do with each other, but we don't know whether it is a tribe, family or just visitors. At the background you see what they were capable of, namely building huge dolmens.

We can also have the focus on researchers; it is not only reconstructing the past. How do we get our information? Cornelius Holtorf distinguishes four metaphors: the archaeologist is an adventurer, the archaeologist is a protector of the ancient, the archaeologist is a detective and the archaeologist is a treasure hunter. We made four comic like pictures in Dutch. We not only made them to confront the public with the subjects, but to do more with them. There are not only stories but also means. What can you do with

it? We make children's books, comic books, picture movies, interactive websites, tv-series, a musical, a musical DVD, etc. Through these products we reach a new public who have no interest in visiting the museum and probably will never go to the museum. But anyway we reach the public with our more or less idealistic goals. And as I told you empathy is about what is the relation to the life of people in prehistoric times. That is just some examples what we did in the past. We think that is important for every museum to do something with scientific research but also with scientific debate. Science is an everlasting discussion. In the Netherland we have a big debate: should we excavate one hunebed per generation or should we leave it. From our point of view it should be very interesting to excavate a dolmen. There are a lot of scientists against this idea. We try to exchange our arguments and motives. It should be okay to do that. You can use new media for that. To give you an example of that we try to not only to make the school pictures but also to try to get them moving. There are more means to a story. For example experimental archaeology, we can build the houses but also filming the building process of the houses. We can do something with living history en re-enactment. My message is: use new media and new presentation means only when you don't have any other means. I'm not sure if that is conservative of common sense.