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Introduction to Contemporary Archaeologies of the Southwest

This volume builds on papers presented at the 10th Biennial 2006 Southwest Symposium, entitled “Acts of History: Ritual, Landscape and Historical Archaeology in the U.S. Southwest and Northern Mexico,” held in Las Cruces, New Mexico, January 13–14, 2006. The symposium organizers, William H. Walker and María Nieves Zedeño, asked participants to focus on the role of practice theory in their theoretical and methodological considerations of ritual, history, and landscapes. The chapters submitted to this volume include studies of ancient and historical landscapes, the movement and shifting identities of past peoples, experimental archaeology, and preservation of sacred sites. They document a flowering of method and theory in southwestern archaeology since the mid-1990s that mirrors changes in the larger field. No dominant theoretical paradigm emerges; instead, contributors present a series of imbricated theoretical frameworks, many combining aspects of interpretive and practice theories with earlier historical particularist, processual, behavioral, and selectionist theory.

This range of theoretical perspectives derives mostly from the processual–post-processual debates of the 1980s (Hodder 1986; Schiffer 1988; Shanks and Tilley 1987a, 1987b; Skibo, Walker, and Nielsen 1995; Wylie 1989) and subsequent theoretical developments (e.g., Ashmore and Knapp 1999:6–8; Dobres and Robb

2000; Meskell and Preucel 2004; Mills and Walker 2008; Tilley 1994; Van Dyke and Alcock 2003). In this introduction we briefly describe each of the chapters, beginning with those involving place making at Chaco Canyon.

PLACE MAKING

The first three chapters, by Ruth Van Dyke, Christine Ward, and Anna Sofaer and colleagues, focus on place making in the complex landscape of Chaco Canyon. Van Dyke (chapter 1) defines this complexity through a “phenomenological” approach (see Tilley 1994), arguing that this landscape was a large-scale representation of a worldview—an imaginary cartography (*sensu* Smith 2003:11) shared by its inhabitants, builders, and visitors. She emphasizes visibility (horizons, buttes, and buildings), movement (roads, ramps, stairs), and material evidence of memory (ancestral sites, old and new buildings, memorable materials) to understand the experience of its sacred geography. Within the great house architecture, Van Dyke notes that great kivas are situated in a balanced symmetry that likely expressed a dualist social structure still found today in many historically known eastern pueblos. This balance is also replicated on a larger scale among networks of Chacoan roads, as well as between highly visible landmarks such as Hosta Butte, Fajada Butte (see Sofaer et al., chapter 3), and the canyon’s hidden pueblos. Other dimensions of the landscape evoke directionality and cyclical rituals that contributed to the overarching experience of Chaco Canyon as a central place in time and space.

Ward (chapter 2), building on discussions of artifact agency arising out of practice theory and landscape studies, argues that the acquisition of four kinds of exotic lithic materials recovered from a sample of five Chaco Canyon great houses was shaped as much by the social significance of these quarries and the subsequent life histories of their stones as by pragmatic considerations of distance, expedience, or lithic quality. She notes that these quarries, like the Chacoan built environment discussed by Van Dyke, are parts of cultural landscapes and therefore were active, rather than passive, participants in social activities. The four stone materials had long use histories in the ancient Southwest. They were therefore likely imbued with meanings and memories negotiated and contested through time as practices within Pueblo cultures and environments changed. All have distinctive coloring, and this, along with their historically contingent meanings, contributed to the sense that they were pieces of specific cultural places and the practices that made them. In a sense, the movement of these artifacts distributed important places across the Chacoan landscape similar to the ways gifts or other objects can distribute personal relations through exchange networks (see Wagner 1991).

An interesting facet of the reconsideration of modernist or enlightenment dichotomies during the 1980s was a recognition by some philosophers of science and technology, such as Bruno Latour (1993), that the more we create and apply specialized scientific knowledge, the more we actually foster knowledge and causal processes that transcend these specialties. Latour calls these transcendent entities “hybrids.” Cultural heritage, for example, depends on the modernist disciplines of archaeology, history, and architecture. Yet that knowledge, when put into practice in conjunction with other disciplines and institutions, creates a world of hybrid places such as national parks and monuments that, in turn, cause further experiences and practices for a wide range of peoples—many with no direct culture historical connection to the original archaeological site or historical place. This happens at regional, national, and international scales. Two of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) most popular world heritage sites, for example, are Britain’s Stonehenge and New Mexico’s Chaco Canyon. Once created, such places continue to be sources for new modernist scientific study, and, as a consequence, will continue to foster new hybrids often unanticipated by the scientists themselves.

Sofaer and others’ (chapter 3) Solstice Project illustrates this process in an important and positive manner. They use the latest digital technology to enhance study and preservation of the sun dagger, one of the most important ritual places in the larger Chacoan landscape. Archaeologists have identified three large stone slabs on Fajada Butte overlooking the canyon that cast shadows and vertical shafts of light (the daggers) onto two spiral petroglyphs; the shadows and light record summer and winter solstices, equinoxes, and an 18.6-year lunar cycle like a sundial. In this project, Sofaer and colleagues transform an ancient sacred place into more than a locus of study within a cultural monument; it becomes also a digitalized virtual monument that will preserve information, making possible future archaeological studies that would otherwise be lost as a result of ongoing erosion. In the process they are bringing to life a hybrid place meaningful to scientists, contemporary pueblo peoples, New Age enthusiasts, and others. This hybrid place has now been actually displaced from its original eroding context in physical space and emplaced in a new context that will be subject to other forms of weathering in the digital realm, which will no doubt stimulate further hybrids in the future.

As exemplified by Van Dyke in this volume, phenomenology and practice have been important theoretical perspectives for escaping the confines of processual categories and creating new ones that highlight the role particular individuals can play in the creation of places and other facets of past human experiences of landscapes. Maria O’Donovan (chapter 4) reviews and critiques recent trends in landscape archaeology, particularly phenomenological approaches associated with post-processual archaeology, in her study of the Late Prehistoric (AD 1300–1400)

site Cerro de Trincheras, Sonora, Mexico. O'Donovan calls for a “social totality” approach that recognizes experience but gives equal consideration to the relationship between emergent structures (economic and ideological) that impinge on individual practices and experiences. To illustrate her ideas, O'Donovan explores the multifunctional and complex landscape within and around Cerro de Trincheras and argues that landscape archaeologies should embrace the social totality entailed by dialectical processes of practice.

Similarly, Michael Jacobson (chapter 5) recognizes that while ideologies are not material things, there are no wars, medical systems, or governments whose ideologies are not present in the production and use of those things. Jacobson considers the materiality of ideology and identity in the activities and architecture of a twentieth-century strikers’ colony in Ludlow, Colorado. The tents, street layout, and communal areas in the colony were arranged to reinforce the union leaders’ authority. In step with more recent identity studies, however, Jacobson tacks back and forth between similarities and differences among the strikers. The strikers encompassed seventeen ethnic groups, and their differences were celebrated in communal recreational events, including games and ceremonies. Nonetheless, the union’s centrality was also represented in communal gatherings through the singing of union songs.

Such experiments in communal integration echo earlier historic and prehistoric religious movements, including the late–nineteenth-century Ghost Dance. In chapter 6 Alex Ruuska explores the mingling of the natural environment and the Ghost Dance religion in contexts of practice, stressing the importance of understanding the pitfalls of previous western philosophical renderings of people and nature. Ruuska notes that despite the relatively large body of scholarship on the North American Ghost Dance movement, “little has been written about the natural environments Numic and Yuman ritual specialists selected for the performance of sacred pan-Indian rituals.” Ruuska emphasizes the ways perceptions of the animate aspects of landscape contributed to their use in Paiute and Hualapai Ghost Dances.

Joe Lally and A. J. Vonarx (chapter 7) address an important topic derived from the detailed discussions of archaeological site formation processes and study of ritual deposition that began in the 1980s. This is an important chapter for all those interested in the study of ritual, violence, and the natural processes that formed burned buildings. Lally and Vonarx are the sole representatives in this volume of the still active and important field of experimental archaeology. They question the validity of inferences archaeologists employ to explain the relatively common destruction by fire of buildings in the ancient Southwest. In common with behavioral archaeology’s interest in the detailed study of lower-scale archaeological site formation processes (often individual activities as opposed to the societal-scale

questions of processual archaeology), Lally and Vonarx define an experimental approach to the fiery destruction of places.

Such studies are critical for evaluating several regional and pan-southwestern arguments about the relationship among structural burning, ceremonial destruction, and warfare. Burned buildings (e.g., pithouses, pueblo rooms, Hohokam platform structures, and even Trincheras sites) characterize many prehispanic sites in northern Mexico and the US Southwest. Interpretations of the uses and meanings of these particular structures and sites depend on inferences about the causes of their abandonment, including burning. Scholars such as Steven LeBlanc (1999), Jonathan Haas and Winifred Creamer (1993), and others (Wilcox and Haas 1994; Woodbury 1959) link such burning to warfare precipitated by environmental changes, particularly during the Little Ice Age. Others (Montgomery 1993; Walker 1998, 2002; Wilshusen 1986) see much of this burning as resulting from the ceremonial closure of sites and structures that accompanied the abandonment of sites and regions. Although practice theory allows us to unify ritual and warfare within one or more forms of practice, fire is itself an active causal object with its own performance characteristics that contribute to the practices of burning. As such, to understand fire's materiality, we need also to consider the physics and chemistry of fires themselves.

IDENTITIES, BOUNDARIES, AND PLACE MAKING

In the second part of the volume, the majority of chapters focus on the formation of identities, landscape boundaries, and the movement associated with these aspects of place making. Inferences about memories, sanctity, identity, and solidarity shape several of the chapters. To varying degrees, these chapters address the ways people's interaction with things brings particular landscapes to life. They become places where activities tether people to their ancestors, important historic events, and beliefs about politics, religion, and technology. People renew, modify, and replace these ties, thereby creating and re-creating landscapes. In this perspective landscapes are oceans in which places, like waves, sometimes rock gently and uniformly and at other times roil and thrust up, down, and sideways. Such was the case in several regions of the late prehistoric and historic Southwest.

Patrick Lyons, Jeffery Clark, and Brett Hill (chapter 8) consider the interplay of boundary making and memory work in the multiethnic history of the San Pedro River Valley of southern Arizona. They focus on architecture and practice to understand the changing identities and boundaries of people in this region. This was a crossroads in later prehistory, bringing migrating pueblo peoples from the north into contact with Hohokam peoples already living in the area. This encounter was critical to the forging of new identities in late prehistory, as well as to the

rise of the Southern Ceremonial Cult and its associated feasting bowls and jars, Salado Polychrome ceramics (see Crown 1994; Lyons 2003).

Hohokam peoples using ball courts and shallow pithouse structures originally occupied the valley. Their construction of ball courts came to an end around AD 1100, and, in the late twelfth century, Mountain Mogollon peoples moved into the area. By the late 1200s peoples in the valley were constructing aboveground adobe compounds associated with platform mounds, a form of ritual architecture that had spread throughout the now multiethnic Hohokam territory. At approximately the same time, Kayenta Anasazi from northern Arizona and southern Utah moved into the valley, recognizable by their stone pueblos, kivas, and other material attributes of Kayenta identity.

Greg Schachner (chapter 9) is particularly interested in understanding how demographic instability and mobility shaped the archaeological landscape of El Morro Valley in the Cibola region of New Mexico. Following the lessons of recent studies of identity in contemporary theory, Schachner stresses the differences between ancestral Zuni populations in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and later historic homesteaders to understand how each community created distinct landscapes through its land-use and mobility practices.

Lauren Jelinek (chapter 10) also explores a landscape created by the encounter between historic Mormon settlers and indigenous, reservation-dwelling Apaches in the Forestdale Valley of east-central Arizona. She draws on an understanding of the role oral traditions play in practices of memory making in both cultures to understand how they constructed their differing perceptions of the valley's history.

Barnet Pavao-Zuckerman (chapter 11) explores the historic landscape of Pimeria Alta of south-central and southwestern Arizona. Similar to Schachner and Jelinek, Pavao-Zuckerman compares seasonal mobility of the indigenous O'odham peoples with the Spanish missionary vision of a civilized landscape characterized by a settled agro-pastoral economy. As a faunal specialist, Pavao-Zuckerman brings a unique perspective to this topic. Her study of faunal remains from two mission settlements highlights a contested landscape in which mission inhabitants still pursued wild game, albeit more opportunistically rather than as a habituated subsistence practice.

Edward Staski (chapter 12), a behavioral archaeologist, considers the landscape of the Spanish colonial Southwest—focusing on the Camino Real, one of the region's most important communication routes. Staski wonders why this route resembled an informal trail if it was so central to the colonies of New Spain. Apparently, relatively little effort was put into its construction and maintenance. Staski further contemplates what this tells us about the organization of frontier practice in some kinds of empires. Following behavioral theory, Staski argues that

to answer these questions, we need to examine smaller-scale behaviors and the sites formed by them. They can be critical for understanding even the largest-scale phenomena, such as the frontier of the Spanish and later American empires. In this chapter Staski continues to develop his concept of “structural inertia” to account for the occurrence of ephemeral sites—what he calls “places of short-term, although repeated, occupation”—that often characterize frontier places. Staski argues that such sites are as informative about the creation of communities as are larger, more permanent settlement forts and towns and that they should be of prime concern to scholars studying the landscapes of empires.

Selectionist archaeologists share this emphasis on alternative visions of material variability and the importance of settlement patterns. Ann Ramenofsky, Michael Church, and Jeremy Kulisheck (chapter 13) exemplify the value of settlement patterns in a study of the abandonment and occupation of historic New Mexico pueblos. As selectionists, they frame their study of material variability as the explanation of the differential persistence and change in people and objects (in this case, pueblos) through time. They illustrate the power of this perspective through a case study of the abandonment of larger historic New Mexico pueblos. In contrast to previous models that explained the abandonment of large pueblos in the early historic period as the result of disease and population decline, Ramenofsky and colleagues’ preliminary findings suggest that Puebloan peoples moved from large sites to smaller settlements, allowing them to escape many of the effects of European diseases and actually survive to the present day.

The authors in this volume, while representing a diverse cross-section of southwestern archaeologists, are united by a concern with pushing the boundaries of archaeological method and theory. They agree that seeking new means for identifying and explaining material variation is a central concern of southwestern archaeology. In presenting largely complementary but sometimes contrasting perspectives, they are building a strong foundation for future southwestern studies.

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