The Archaeology of Meaningful Places

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If place-making is a way of constructing the past,
a venerable means of doing human history;
it is also a way of constructing social traditions and,
in the process, personal and social identities.
We are, in a sense, the place-worlds we imagine.
—Keith Basso, Wisdom Sits in Places

What is place, and why must archaeologists be concerned with it? In his groundbreaking book about language and place among the Cibecue Apache of Arizona, Basso (1996) demonstrates the intricate web of connections that exists among identity, trajectory, memory, and notions of the homeland. Place, in Basso's sense, is where history, both human and otherwise, happens and where knowledge gained by living history resides. What better concept, then, than place to organize the archaeological enterprise?

The Dictionary of Human Geography defines place simply as "a portion of geographical space occupied by a person or thing" (Johnston et al. 1994:442). According to Agnew (1987), a human place has three major elements: the locale, or setting(s) in which social relations are constituted formally or informally; the location, or geographic area encompassing the setting(s) for social interaction; and the sense of place. Thus, place is a juncture where environment, people, and meaning converge at multiple scales and, in the process, create a record of human behavior, perception, and cognition. The material record of human presence in a place is, in fact, archaeology's subject matter; economic, social, political, and symbolic meanings once ascribed to locales in the landscape may emerge in the process of reconstructing and interpreting people's pasts from the archaeological record.

Although the archaeology of place is a matter of current interest, it is not new to the profession; in fact, it may well surprise contemporary students of place that Lewis Binford was a modern pioneer in his recognition of the power and potential of this concept. In his article "The Archaeology of Place," he argues that until we turn our serious attention to the design of reliable methods for monitoring past conditions of interest, we will never be able to address interesting questions through the investigation of archaeological remains... We must turn our analytical attention to the role of different places in the organization of past systems [1982:28–29].

Archaeologists have not lacked opportunities for developing intellectual frameworks that situate place and landscape as central to human histories. Take Waldo Wedel, for example. In his autobiographical article, "The Education of a Plains Archeologist," Wedel (1977:6) recounts the tremendous impact that taking classes from cultural geographer Carl Sauer—the venerable father
of landscape studies—had on his view of human-nature dynamics on the Great Plains and on his explanations of continuity and change. In fact, Wedel is credited with having introduced principles of human ecology into Plains archaeology (Bamforth 1983). The anthropological community at large may never know just how profoundly influential were the frameworks set forth by Sauer (1925; who was in turn inspired by the cultural area studies of his University of California, Berkeley, colleague Alfred Kroeber) on generations of scholars wishing to expand horizons beyond the narrow confines of culture history and, more recently, of positivism. We do know, however, that it has taken many decades for anthropologists, and especially archaeologists, to ponder on place and landscape theories as they may apply to the reconstruction and interpretation of the past.

Although human ecology and cultural geography have had a great impact on anthropological theory since the 1930s (Steward 1955; Steward and Seltzer 1938; Wedel 1941, 1953), the positivism that accompanied the advent of the New Archaeology initially bypassed numerous aspects of human–nature dynamics for those most likely to create a conspicuous material record (Binford 1962). At that time, positivist geographers who favored quantitative tools of spatial analysis over the not-so-easily delimited and measured cultural landscapes also made important inroads in archaeological research (e.g., Clarke 1972; Hodder and Orton 1976). Landscape and place studies later regained popularity largely as a result of the humanistic geography of Cosgrove (Cosgrove and Daniels 1988), Jackson (1984), Pred (1984), and Tuan (1977), among others, and these concepts soon appeared in the anthropological literature in North America (e.g., Carmichael et al. 1994; Greider and Garkovich 1994; Rodman 1992; Walker 1991), Australia (e.g., Head 1993; Myers 1991), and Europe (e.g., Bender 1993; Ingold 1993; Tilley 1994). The influential anthropological work of Basso (1996) combined principles of ethnosemantics with geographic approaches to place.

Over the past 25 years, definitions and usages of place and landscape as conceptual tools for understanding cultural and social dynamics have evolved and expanded in unanticipated ways, as the essays in this volume and a number of topical reviews and critiques indicate (see Anschuetz et al. 2001; Ashmore and Knapp 1999; Fleming 2006; Norton 1989; Tilley 1994, 2004; Whittlesey 1998a, 2003; Zedeño 1997, 2000). Contemporary scholars attempting to set a broad range of intellectual and political agendas have also taken a keen interest in the concepts of place and landscape; these concepts also resonate with constitutencies such as tribal communities, ethnic minorities, and many others whose places are investigated archaeologically. Here, 14 contributors argue compellingly that archaeology is about the meaning of place inasmuch as it is about the past and about material culture and environment; these place and landscape studies successfully integrate humanistic and scientific forms of inquiry, thus honoring the intellectual roots established by Sauer and his intellectual progeny.

In the broadest sense, this book is concerned with describing and explaining how particular places contain key elements for understanding the social worlds constructed, maintained, and modified by those who once inhabited them. This is achieved through the investigation of biographical, topographic, geopolitical, ideological, cosmological, and mnemonic facets of place, beginning with processes of place making and continuing with the development of networks among places and between places and broader landscapes. Diverse spatial and temporal contexts in two culture areas—Mesoamerica and the Greater Southwest—serve as the backdrop for nine chapters that show how place is an ideal starting point to begin unraveling the human past. Several authors further address the enduring significance of places of the past for contemporary peoples. Ultimately, the contributors champion the notion that place is a valid and useful analytic unit for describing, reconstructing, interpreting, and explaining the form, structure, and temporality of the meanings humans ascribe to their environment.

The book begins with a diachronic reconstruction of the Classic Maya community of Quirigüá (chapter 3), in which Wendy Ashmore demonstrates how alternative meanings of place can exist simultaneously and not always harmoniously. Celebration, alliance, domination, competition, and resistance are among the motives that may underlie place making; conflicting motives may in turn affect the relationships between singular places and social groups at several scales. Ash-
more notes that meanings may be purposefully created or accrued through time and from distinctive interactions among places and people. The life histories of places such as Quirigüá, as they are built, maintained, modified, reconstructed, and abandoned or purposefully destroyed, can carry profound social and symbolic significance not only to the original dwellers but to those who may later visit or inhabit such places.

In chapter 3, Arthur Joyce traces the life history of the Main Plaza at Monte Albán, thus demonstrating how key components of a single place may be targeted to detect social and political change. This author utilizes archaeological, epigraphic, iconographic, ethnographic, and geographic data to explain the material and symbolic transformations of the plaza and their impact on practice, identity, memory, and power relations in this Oaxacan community. From this exercise, the Main Plaza of Monte Albán emerges as the epitome both of cosmic creation and of power "produced, experienced, maintained, and transformed through the practices of people." Joyce demonstrates that changes in relations of domination and subordination in complex polities are embodied in the biographies of monuments to social power and are informed by dominant ideologies.

Rosemary Joyce, Julia Hendon, and Jeanne Lopiparo unpack the process of emplacement of Classic Maya centers in Honduras (chapter 4). The authors treat emplacement as the body of structured and coordinated place-making actions that developed from shared cosmologies and geographies among interacting communities but that at the same time was interpreted uniquely at each community according to topography and cosmology. Emplacement is inferred from architectural, topographic, and cosmological dimensions of site layout along the Lower Usumacinta River and tributaries, as they compare with highland Copán. The authors emphasize the interplay between shared principles and idiosyncrasies in settlement and ballcourt emplacement and its impact on the movement of people. Their argument clearly points to the importance of combining place and landscape scales of analysis in order to understand place-making practices from architectural layout.

In chapter 5, Stephanie Whittlesey explores the ideological landscape of the Hohokam of southern Arizona through cosmology, iconography, and the built environment. In her view, cultural landscapes reflect and symbolize ideology, values, and ethics, because they help naturalize social relations by making them appear inevitable. Whittlesey introduces the mountain as a container of water metaphor as the critical ideological link between Hohokam central places and the desert landscape; this metaphor allowed people to transfer ideological principles that were essential for the survival of a community's social world to younger generations. The author unpacks the mountain metaphor and other principles behind the organization of the pre-Classic central place of Snaketown through a multidimensional analysis of the cultural landscape.

Shifting the theme of place-landscape connections toward ethnic origins, group history, and identity, Leigh Kuwanwiswima and T. J. Ferguson discuss the broad philosophical and spiritual concept of Hopiitukwa, or Hopi land (chapter 6). As a cultural landscape, Hopiitukwa encompasses myriad natural and cultural features as well as archaeological sites or "footprints" of the Hopi ancestors. The authors' discussion centers on interrelated concepts of place, scale, time, and context from the Hopi perspective, to highlight the important relationship among archaeological sites or places of the past, the homeland, and the people. As Kuwanwiswima and Ferguson state, "The abiding connection Hopi people have with the material culture of their ancestors gives archaeology a deeply personal as well as intellectual meaning. Archaeology thus helps give focus to the comprehension of ancestral lifeways embodied in the monuments that constitute Hopi footprints on the landscape."

The next three chapters expand the focus and scale of place studies by emphasizing connections between imperial or national landscapes and places of local significance. In chapter 7, Christopher Garrett and Michael Ohnersorgen address the uneasy interaction between imperial rule and outer provinces of the Aztec Empire by looking at the ways in which rulers manipulated the landscape by altering public perceptions of social relations and meanings of place during times of upheaval. A geopolitical landscape perspective allows the authors to explain the juxtaposition
of a central social order that co-opted provincial leaders and sacred places, imposed imperial symbols and ideologies, and rewrote economic policies, against the indigenous sovereignty of the imperial provinces of Cuauhtlaúan and Öztuma-Cutzamala in east and west Mexico, respectively. Here, identity, power struggles, assimilation, and resistance were expressed differentially in the construction and modification of local places and in the reproduction of provincial and imperial traditions.

In an exploration of nation-place relations on the western frontier, Michael Heilen and J. Jefferson Reid scrutinize the cultural, historical, and strategic contexts of land commodification in the American West (chapter 8). The place of choice, Sanford Ranch in southern Arizona, is illustrative of the relationships established between citizens and national forces in the process of settling the western frontier. By situating the trajectory of Sanford Ranch in a broad geographic scale and discussing its potential for success or failure in the ranching enterprise, the authors make it possible to appreciate just how diverse frontier experiences were and how every homestead possessed a unique life history and array of meanings even though they owed their existence to the national imperative to colonize and commodify country and people.

In chapter 9, John Welch lays out the historical and practical challenges of "reconstructing" senses of place at a time when meanings, names, and traditional cultural principles are disappearing alongside language among the White Mountain Apache, or Ndée, of Arizona. Welch introduces the Ndée concept of place whereby "land" and "mind" are a unity and memory and geography are inseparable. Not surprisingly, historical efforts to undermine this worldview by public and private interests in North America have resulted in actual land loss and concomitant erosion of tribal cultural values and knowledge. The author explains how contemporary White Mountain Apache people are revitalizing their sense of place not only by recognizing archaeological places and reconciling familiar landscape features with oral traditions but also by proactively restoring the environment as a means to assert their sovereignty over the ancestral homeland.

The volume closes with Stephen Lekson's essay on the dynamics of place in interpretive archaeology (chapter 10). Drawing comparisons from four public places—Mesa Verde Ruins, Manitou Cliff Dwellings, Bent's Old Fort, and The Fort restaurant on the outskirts of Denver, Colorado—Lekson points to the sliding scale of reality that permeates the interpretation of archaeological places by both scientists and the public at large. From a world heritage site to a privately owned replica of Mesa Verde's cliff dwellings, and from a carefully reconstructed frontier outpost to a popular restaurant fashioned in the likeness of that fort, fascination with all things archaeological runs through the public imagination and forces professional archaeologists to reconsider the cultural value of place irrespective of age or origin. Reflecting on the meaning each of these locales on the basis of criteria such as authenticity, context, and history, the author challenges readers to discover new senses of place; he convinces us that these archaeological places—whether real, relocated, reconstructed, or imitated—possess their own wisdom and deserve their own history.

In the remainder of this introductory essay we weave information and ideas from each chapter into a thematic overview where diverse lines of thought are integrated to reveal the multiple facets of meaningful places and to illustrate ways in which places may be approached archaeologically. We have framed our arguments on the archaeology of meaningful places within the methodological and theoretical positions upheld by the authors to highlight their individuality as well as their common intellectual goals and achievements.

Toward an Archaeology of Meaningful Places

The need for an archaeology of place that explicitly deals with the structure of the archaeological record was acknowledged as early as 1982 by Lewis Binford, but frameworks that integrate archaeological method with theoretical understandings of meaningful places have been slow to develop and operationalize (e.g., Adler 1996; Anschuetz et al. 2001; Ashmore 2002; Ashmore and Knapp 1999; Bowser 2004; Van Dyke and Alcock 2003; Whittlesey 1998a, 2003; Zedeño 2000; Zedeño et al. 1997). These newer frameworks have
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not as yet been widely adopted largely because of
the analytic challenges posed by deriving mean-
ing from archaeological places. The volume au-
thors address these challenges by integrating
empirical approaches to archaeological places
with broadly based interpretations and recon-
structions of meaning.

An archaeology of place, as Bowser (2004:11)
defines it, is one that focuses on the ways in which
people impart meaning—both symbolically and
through action—to their cultural and physical
surroundings at multiple scales and on the ma-
terial forms these meanings may take. Its premise
is simple: people create places through behav-
ioral interactions with nature and the supernatu-
ral; they cognize their experiences by developing
spatial referents for their actions through material
modification and verbal and metaphorical inscrip-
tion. On the basis of these cognitive processes,
people develop senses of place and attachments
to place that motivate, structure, and transform
their interactions with the material world in pat-
terned ways (e.g., Gould 1980; Myers 1991). Thus,
the scrutiny of archaeological places as geographic
or architectural referents of human behavior, per-
ception, cognition, and history has the potential
to reveal an untold wealth of cultural and social
information.

An archaeology of place must address both
natural and modified environments. "Natural
places" are those locales in the landscape that,
though not obviously a product of human modi-

cification, affect human behavior and are in turn
modified through verbal and nonverbal inscrip-
tion (Basso 1996; Bradley 2000; Jones 1998; Tilley
and Bennett 2001; Whitley 2004). Mountains,
rivers, springs, quarries, lakes, conspicuous land-
forms, plants, and animals inform social and cul-
tural practices. As Joyce and colleagues note in
chapter 4, these natural places may affect the
emplacement of architectural features and even
entire towns or temples. Naming and the con-
struction of natural metaphors and imaginaries
(Whitley, chapter 5) promote the preservation and transmission of knowledge
by reference to singular places. An archaeology
of natural places, therefore, considers nature's ar-
chitecture as a fundamental conceptual resource
for understanding cultural form (Tilley and Ben-
ett 2001:335).

The concept of place as "built environment"
is not new to social sciences; in fact, a great deal
of archaeological, ethnographic, and geographic
research has been devoted to the modification of
the earth's surface by means of constructing facil-
ities—houses, streets, public plazas, temples, mon-
uments. Prehistoric and historical archaeology
emphasizes the ways in which this built environ-
ment constrains or enhances social interaction
and communication (e.g., Bender 1995; Cosgrove
and Daniels 1988; Hirsch and O'Hanlon 1995;
Jackson 1984; Lipe and Hegmon 1989; Matthews
2002; Parker Pearson and Richards 1994; Pauls
2006; Rathje and Schiffer 1982; Schiffer and Miller
1999; Tuan 1977). The theoretical writings of Fou-
cult (1977) and Giddens (1984), in particular,
have received a great deal of attention in spatial
archaeology (e.g., Ferguson 1996; Nielsen 1995;
Smith 1996). As cogently argued by Wendy Ash-
more (chapter 2) and Arthur Joyce (chapter 3),
approaches to architectural places can be produc-
tive when they focus on material biographies or
life histories vis-à-vis social and cultural change.
As a complement to biographies, emplacement

can reveal the delicate balance of commonalities
and differences in the architectural interpretation
of overarching cosmologies (Joyce et al., chapter
4). Ideally, the archaeology of place should seem-
lessly integrate the natural and the built environ-
ments, as this is also an archaeology of people's
historical relationships with nature.

Most recently, agency and materiality have
further lent the archaeology of place a fresh focus
by bringing forth issues of perception, practice,
and memory. Each of these approaches under-
scores both individual and social dimensions of
place, as well as the power of places and actors to
influence one another and to mold or altogether
alter the course of social history (e.g., Meskell
2003; Thomas 1993; Tilley 1994; Van Dyke and
and Lekson (chapter 10), for example, point out
that history addresses not so much the nature
and dynamics of outside realities as people's rela-
rship with their surroundings, their social
and physical environments as experienced, and

architectural constructions and social memory. Hopi
and Apache senses of place (Kuwanwisiwma
and Ferguson, chapter 6; Welch, chapter 9) further
indicate the inseparability of place, memory, and
identity, highlighting the need to practice an archaeology of place that is responsive to alternative ontologies and alternative forms of history. Such practice could in turn allow a closer approximation to the meanings of past places and would foster the appreciation and preservation of cultural heritage and contemporary cultural values attached to it.

An archaeology of place also has a decidedly political facet: power struggles, contestation, displacement, opportunism, and resistance are common threads throughout this volume; many of these topics are articulated in detail by Garraty and Ohnserorgen (chapter 7), Heilen and Reid (chapter 8), and Welch (chapter 9). These authors unpack the intricate connections of places and the increasingly larger geopolitical landscapes, which may encompass a country, an empire, or a continent. By alternating scales of analysis, it is possible to bring forth the depth and extent of variability in place-making practices and meanings as well as the tapestry of local responses to ideological imperatives. To lose sight of this vast scale of observation and analysis is to completely misunderstand the potential of place for uncovering the workings of the world.

As is evident in several chapters, places and the landscapes that contain them are multi-layered; each layer, in turn, represents a particular realm of experience and cognition. For example, in this multiethnic and multicultural world, given places and landscapes may be lived or understood in diverse and often contrasting ways (Rodman 1992); this much is true for the Aztec (Garraty and Ohnserorgen, chapter 7), the Arizona settlers (Heilen and Reid, chapter 8), the Hopi (Kuwanwistwma and Ferguson, chapter 6), and the Apache or Nde (Welch, chapter 9). Through current technological advances, notably geographic information systems, different natural and cultural "layers" can be visualized to facilitate the reconstruction and interpretation of place meanings.

In short, this is a challenging kind of archaeology, one that pushes the boundaries of scientific archaeological inquiry by seeking empirical approaches to subjective experience and combining humanistic and scientific methods. The goal of such an endeavor is not to sacrifice theoretical and methodological rigor for discursive flare but, rather, to cast the intellectual net wide enough to incorporate useful concepts and methods from many fields. An archaeology of place is, therefore, frankly and unabashedly multidisciplinary. Furthermore, as scholars we are generally aware of the larger power struggles in which our narratives of place are embedded globally (King 2005; Knapp and Ashmore 1999; thus our research must be cognizant of the fact that knowledge of distant places is accessible to everyone and can affect us all.

What is a Meaningful Place?

At its simplest and most useful for archaeological pursuits, place is a discrete locus of behavior, materials, and memory—a meaningful locale, a product of people’s interactions with nature and the supernatural as well as with one another. As noted above, the concept “place” encompasses a wide array of spatial categories, not the least of which are physiographic features such as caves, mountains, springs, ancient trees, and salient rock outcrops (e.g., Ashmore and Knapp 1999; Bradley 2000; Stoffle and Zedeño 2001a, 2001b; the sky, and the ocean bottom. Place becomes a material culture category by virtue of transformation through human activity (Agniew 1987; Bowser 2002:136–144; Carroll 2007; Zedeño 2000:106). Furthermore, place is distinguished from space by virtue of interaction, action, memory, and meaning (Carroll 2007; Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003; Whitley 2004). The recognition of a place’s existence and its significance by the individual and the collective is what defines its meanings, outlines its historical trajectory, explains its connections with other places, and lays out its articulation with the broader landscape, whether tacitly or explicitly.

To illustrate, for the Hopi of Arizona or the Hidatsa of North Dakota, an eagle nest is not simply a domestic structure built by a parenting raptor. An eagle nest is a locus of religious activity because it contains a resource that is critical for the spiritual well-being and survival of the community. Among the Hopi, ownership of an eagle nest is determined by clan membership and inherited accordingly; the knowledge required to trap eagles and to use feathers belongs to clan and
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society and must be transferred through formal training (Fewkes 1900). In the case of the Hidatsa, the right to trap eagles must be acquired through visions, self-inflicted torture, and expensive purchase; it also has ties to clan membership and inheritance rules (Wilson 1928).

In both cases, eagle-trapping places may not exhibit measurable human modification except for the placement of perishable and nonperishable offerings or the construction of a trapping pit and a temporary structure or shelter nearby. Yet, for the members of these cultures, the eagle nest, as a place, conveys a clear sense of ancestral origin, ritual purpose, and social rights and obligations; provides a geographic anchor for identifying territorial identities within and between groups; and serves as a source of knowledge and moral lessons for the generations to come. Eagle nests or eagle-trapping pits continue to be used today as territorial markers, providing these groups with a means to symbolically assert ownership and use rights over lands that were lost to them in the nineteenth century. Human histories thus have a very strong spatial focus that lends a ready visual tool to memory and a sense of continuity and regeneration in the face of strife, destruction, or turmoil.

Place is distinct from site in that visible or measurable human modification is not a necessary and sufficient condition of place, whereas site is, by archaeological definition, an arbitrary category in archaeological systematics that contains material evidence of human activity (Binford 1982; Ebert 1992; King 2003; Rossignol and Wandsnider 1992). This important distinction does not imply that an archaeological place exists outside a material referent; rather, it suggests that human action, whether random, opportunistic, or purposeful, creates and modifies places and marks their significance in ways not always amenable to traditional archaeological analysis. In his critique of archaeological systematics, Binford (1982) advances the idea that place, as an activity locus, should be the unit of interest in archaeological research because it best captures the range of variation in human–land and human–resource interactions that characterized the organization of past cultural systems. He notes that site, as a typological unit, conflates meaningful variation into categories that tell less about the past than about archaeological typologies.

For Binford, a focus on assemblages, features, and resource zones, on the other hand, reveals far more information of interest than site typologies: "The facts of interest are the ways in which places are differentiated one from another" (1982:28–39). Although his emphasis on the economic organization of mobile hunter-gatherers would be seen today as overly narrow, his outline of method is both accurate and timeless. One may begin approaching place from an assemblage-centered methodology, as he proposes, and progressively expand the reach of the analysis to incorporate unmodified physiographic features, from plants and animals to prominent landforms and even the sky, seasons, sensory properties, and other elements of nature that could have influenced the life history and performance characteristics of particular places (Carroll 2007; Zedeño 2000). Inferences of meaning must thus be buttressed with sound archaeological data, historical documents, or ethnographic analogy (e.g., Bowser and Patton 2004; Brown 2004; Stewart et al. 2004; Whittlesey 2004; Zedeño and Laluk 2008). Archaeologists are uniquely trained to analyze space, and thus they can move effortlessly from space to place without becoming burdened by essentialist site typologies.

Like contemporary approaches to landscape (Tress and Tress 2001; Zedeño 2000; Zedeño et al. 1999), the archaeological study of place today encompasses minimally five dimensions: spatial, temporal, formal, cognitive, and relational, as Whittlesey (chapter 5) illustrates in the Hohokam case. Likewise, volume contributors address each of these dimensions at multiple scales. Flexibility of scale is perhaps one of the most useful characteristics of place as a unit of analysis, as it allows the researcher to move from the bird's-eye view afforded by large-scale units, such as a river system, a mountain range, an empire, or a nation, to the single landform or architectural feature. By the same token, places may also be analyzed as discrete loci in their own right or as components of progressively larger units. As shown in this volume, multidiimensional and multiscalar studies are the most effective at isolating place meanings.
Place, Memory, and Metaphor

Place is the repository of sequences of actions that, through time and repetition, become part of a people’s “tradition.” Such sequences of actions may be evident, for example, in the types of artifacts and features associated with multiple occupations of a given locale or in visibly consistent use practices that modify a place and its immediate surroundings according to its users’ needs. If, through time, a place remains relatively undisturbed, then the artifacts, features, and modifications can become anchors of individual and group memories, of collective knowledge about land and history, and of moral lessons needed to maintain social cohesion. These landmarks are like pages in the history of a people (Zedeño 2000:107), as shown in the Ndee and Hopi cases (Kuwanwiswima and Ferguson, chapter 6; Welch, chapter 9). Not surprisingly, the intentional destruction of meaningful places—for example, the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City in 2001—is an effective means to alter or affect the cultural core, historical trajectory, and collective memory of a people (Meskell 2002).

Throughout history, individuals and societies have made places to initiate, enhance, celebrate, or commemorate people’s interactions with one another as well as with nature and the supernatural (Joyce 2003; Joyce and Hendon 2000; Meskell 2003; Sichem 1995; Tilley 1994; Van Dyke and Alcock 2003). An obsidian flake deposited at the base of a cliff, a copper nugget thrown into a lake, a pictograph, a stela, a plaza, a war memorial, a restaurant, and a mound are place forms that represent unique social orders and systems of thought, but all point to the universal need to create places that remind us and others about the experiences a human society has undergone and the knowledge it has acquired (Lekson, chapter 10). Beyond memory, many of these modifications attempt to secure the continuity of harmonious relationships with powerful forces of the universe (Brown 2004; Carroll et al. 2004).

Place making, therefore, is the power to “appropriate nature” (after Ingold 1986) and to “make culture” (after Tilley and Bennett 2001)—to develop bonds, make land our homeland, create order and negotiate power, integrate our practices and worldviews with those of others, and anchor experiences in the landscape by naming its features or by building our own, so that we can remember and learn from them in the future. Yet this purposeful exercise and the landscape modifications it leaves behind are but a sliver of the immensity of human action. People are continuously interacting with their surroundings and modifying them in unseen, unintentional, and unpredictable ways, and these interactions foster strong attachments to place even if they only last for short periods (Ingold 1993; Schiffer and Miller 1999; Thomas 2001). More often than not, it is this antlike work that exerts the greatest change. Why, then, do we appeal to a few places when we must remember our own history and teach it to others?

Whittlesey (chapter 5) states that a culturally constructed landscape is made of place metaphors that allow people to structure perceptions and social relations, to make people see connections they had not seen before, and even to predict the future. People do not need to remember and commemorate every place they have created because they have metaphors. As Whittlesey’s analysis of Hohokam mound construction at Snaketown suggests, a single metaphor allows people to conflate redundant places or link complementary places and features from multilayered landscapes into one concept or suite of related concepts and tie it to a few key places or landmarks.

Origin and migration traditions are examples of how multiple time periods, multiple group trajectories, and separate geographies become conjoined through metaphor into a single story line and a single landscape, to which all members of the society can relate at a given time in their collective history (Zedeño and Laluk 2008; Zedeño et al. 2009). This phenomenon may explain why places are named and talked about selectively and, crucial for archaeological inquiry, why places are differentially used, marked, modified, reused, and abandoned (Binford 1982; Schroeder 2004). It is important, therefore, to identify and explain places as a means to understand cultural landscapes rather than address landscapes as monolithic units, for place is what gives texture and substance to people’s relations with land and resources and with one another—the proverbial widening of horizons starts at one place and extends from there.
Place Biographies

Places would not be as useful for manipulating the social order if they were not constantly in the process of becoming. The transformation of a place into a landmark, for example, may involve a series of activities and interactions that crosscut various realms of individual and social life, from subsistence to ritual, and that accumulate, materially and mnemonically, through time (Zedeño 2006:106–110; Zedeño et al. 1997:125). The concatenation of diverse interactions of people and place generally produces landmarks with complex life histories not only in the extent of their material modifications but also in terms of accreted memories and metaphors attached to them. Ashmore (2002:178, chapter 2) asks, What happens to a place after it has been established and affirmed? Life history analyses reveal that place biographies are typically punctuated by events or interactions originating from four inclusive sources of change: natural landscape evolution, natural catastrophes, change in user groups, and material modifications. Changes in physiography, sudden or otherwise, may drastically alter people/place interactions; consider, for example, the effect of known volcanic eruptions, droughts, and floods on societal change worldwide. Places may be changed physically and meaningfully to accommodate diverse ethnic identities and changes in the economic, social, and political standing of their users. Intriguingly, as Ashmore (chapter 2), Joyce (chapter 3), and Garraty and Ohnersorgen (chapter 7) write, places may be modified materially and meaningfully to maintain continuity or to destroy continuity, depending on the historical contingencies within which they are being used and remembered. Because places are not passive stages for human action, they, too, can influence social relations and social change.

In writing Quirigua’s biography, Ashmore (chapter 2) notes that places may acquire successive meanings from use over time, particularly in the face of cultural diversity among users. The biography of a place may be rewritten by inventing new associations with creation myths, by modifying appearance, by selectively memorializing or forgetting, or even by creating distance between the place and its users. Whether manipulated by a single individual, by a social sector, or by the entire group, places may thus evolve with the users, creating in the process a sense of continuity. Joyce’s portrayal of Monte Albán’s Main Plaza (chapter 3) is yet another example of dovetailing place evolution and social order, where a central place becomes the axis mundi or organizing principle by which a social group attempts to perpetuate itself even in times of political unrest. Yet, as Joyce suggests, changes in the social order, such as increasing control of a user group to the detriment of another, may in time cause the breakdown of organic connections among places and users, as in the case of Monte Albán. When continuity is sought, place as a whole incorporates elements of the past and the present to achieve a sense of timelessness and a seamless transition in the social order.

It is important, therefore, to take into account that a place may represent multiple trajectories that, through time, are conflated or obscured by the smoothing effect of continuity. As Gallivan (2006:87) notes, place biographies precisely help sort out memories and retell stories from alternative viewpoints, thus de-homogenizing history and enhancing the diversity of historical experiences, particularly in multicultural and multiethnic contexts. Garraty and Ohnersorgen (chapter 7) note that changes can also be imposed upon occupied places as an attempt to assimilate others or to end resistance, as seen in the outer provinces of the Aztec Empire. Intentional burial, burning, demolishing or ephacing, and abandonment, as seen often in Mesoamerican and southwestern monuments, are all evidence of transformation both in the original fabric of a place and in social relationships.

Place Networks

Places do not exist in isolation, write Heilen and Reid (chapter 8). A place generally stands at the juncture of one or more socially constructed and sometimes conflicting landscapes; in fact, the meaning of a place often derives from its relative position within a network of other places across those landscapes (Rodman 1992). The significance of a place may be determined not only by its spatial, temporal, formal, and cognitive dimensions but also by its performance characteristics, that is, by its capacity to facilitate certain kinds of interactions—a relational dimension (Carroll 2007).
her colleagues argue that the emplacement of Classic Maya centers, which responded to both overarching cosmological principles and the singularities of site location, was coordinated to facilitate the flow of people along a river system and between topographic zones and to enhance supracommunity participation in formal activities such as the ballgame.

The characteristics of place networks are in turn determined by the nature of people-place interactions. For example, places along a trail or a river, as is the case of the Lower Ulu settlement system (Joyce et al., chapter 4), are connected sequentially by their geographic position relative to each leg of the trail and by the order in which people moving along it experienced places during a journey (Ingold 1993; Zedeño et al. 2008). On the other hand, the Main Plaza of Monte Albán is suggestive of a network of places established around a center point (Joyce, chapter 3), which is analogous (but scaled differently) to the networks established between the Aztec capital and the outer provincial centers (Garraty and Ohnesorge, chapter 7) or between Washington, D.C., and the western frontier (Heilen and Reid, chapter 8). Such arrangements may be conceived as place networks or "systems of settings" (Ashmore 2002:176), each with its own unique form and organizational structure.

To piece together people's histories from a place-making perspective it is necessary to address the ways in which places, by virtue of human action, become linked to one another to form a place network (Heilen 2005; Zedeño 1997, 2000). A network may encompass different types of places that complement one another in a single realm of action. To illustrate, a place network associated with food production not only includes fields and field houses, storage pits and processing locales, but also the places where shrines are built, prayers are made, offerings are given to propitiate rain, and harvest feasts are held. All of these places may or may not be geographically contiguous, purposefully arranged in a specific design, or even within the farmer's visual field, yet they are all intricately connected. Conversely, topographically similar landforms, such as buttes or hills, within a given visual field or geographic range may each articulate into widely diverging networks of places, actions, and memories.

Through time, places may accrue links to more than one network. Consider, for example, the Hopitutuwa—a land composed of multi-layered physical, social, and spiritual place networks that dates back to creation and has evolved since time immemorial. As explained by Kuwanwiswima and Ferguson (chapter 6), each place within the Tutskwa conveys information about the geographic origin and ethnolinguistic identity of the Hopi clans, their ancestral homes, their migrations and places they visited, their arrival to the contemporary homeland, their ritual calendar, and the struggles to preserve their sovereignty in times of change and upheaval. Sites of different ages, including the eagle nests discussed above, act as compasses in the sense that they help situate people in time, place, and specific cultural context. The concatenations of places are Ang Kukto or footprints that remind the Hopi who they are, where they came from, and what they must do to preserve their culture and society.

Yet another characteristic of places and place networks is the layering of meaning that occurs when places are used or experienced by different individuals or user groups. In the case of our hypothetical traveler, if a trail or a river runs across two territorial units, then each place along the trail will stand at the juncture of two distinctive networks—that of the traveler experiencing a foreign land and that of the territory's owner (Ingold 1993; Rodman 1992). Similar connections may be found among many other kinds of networks. Layered meanings are typical in complex or ethnically diverse societies that came to share the same landscape. The colonization of native lands in North and Central America by Europeans is perhaps the most significant example of layered meanings, but prehistory, too, offers numerous examples, such as the case of the Aztec Empire. Layered meanings that characterize place networks may be unpacked by scrutinizing place biographies to explain causes and consequences of change in users or in activities, and by progressively contextualizing relationships among places, until a sense of landscape begins to take form.

**Place Logic**

Golledge (2003:30) states that in the process of learning about places, people internalize knowledge by deliberately encoding environmental
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Information so that it can be used to determine where one is at any particular moment, where other specific perceived or encoded objects are in the surrounding space, how to get from one place to another, and how to communicate spatial knowledge to others. Welch’s examination of place making (chapter 9) demonstrates that the mode by which people encode place information into known categories of knowledge, create new categories, and later reckon these from memory is bounded by language as well as by cultural training and experiences (Levinson 1996:351), or what may be called “place logic”—a kind of cultural logic that orders the structure and meaning of places and their components (Stolle and Zedeño 2001a). Place logic incorporates critical principles governing the formation of place networks or systems of settings (e.g., Joyce et al., chapter 4; Kuwanwiswima and Ferguson, chapter 6). Individual and collective memories of place are generally inscribed or represented to others by appealing to elements in the place logic that help individuals contextualize unknown or newly experienced places by associating them with familiar ones.

Politics of Place

The study of place networks further allows one to understand change in the social and cultural milieu that is generally associated with the rise of conflict and its resolution. At the heart of human-nature interactions is the ability to make decisions about the nature and condition of a place (e.g., Agnew 1987; Bender 1993; Nielsen 1995; Smith 1996). To gain insights into the processes by which people gain or lose decision-making power, it is necessary to look at the broad landscape within which a place is being used, modified, or avoided. Although speaking from two unrelated and very distinctive geographic and historical contextuals—the Northwest Ordinance in the western frontier and the Aztec presence in core and outer provinces—Heilen and Reid (chapter 8) and Garraty and Ohnersorgen (chapter 7), respectively, present strikingly similar arguments regarding conflict and change in the political landscape and the impact on singular people-place relations. Both essays strongly converge on the idea that times of upheaval and dramatic change provide the best opportunity for analyzing the ways in which landscapes are socially constructed and places are connected within a broader network. These authors focus on the effect of the imposition of land-based systems of thought by a dominant political force over a local population and on the strategies of resistance versus submission to the imposed system.

Two facets of human-land interactions within a geopolitical landscape are addressed in these chapters. The first facet, in the words of Garraty and Ohnersorgen, is rooted in sovereignty, or “a suite of cultural dispositions that tie a given group to a certain space, including indigenous identities, traditions, and long-standing social networks.” Such interactions are anthropogenic dynamic constructions with culturally organized dimensions. As Heilen and Reid put it, these characteristics turn place and landscape into inalienable possessions—not necessarily immutable in quality but, rather, socially negotiated, scale dependent, and contextually variable. Thus a key to domination is to impose changes on the suite of cultural dispositions that govern human-land relations and define sovereignty. The second facet, therefore, derives from the “geographical…perceptions…of different governing units or factions involved in negotiating political landscape features such as political boundaries, locations and meanings of central places, and important loci of ethnic or religious identity” (Garraty and Ohnersorgen, chapter 7). Because of the volatile nature of geopolitical relations, particularly in times of conflict, such landscapes are generally contested within and outside the society that claims territorial and ethnic ownership. In Heilen and Reid’s view, geopolitical landscapes are distinct from sociopolitical landscapes in that the former are readily commodified. At the juncture of two conflicting landscape ideologies, a place may be at once inalienable and commodified, for example, Mount Graham in Arizona, which is sacred to the Apache but claimed by the scientific community for the siting of high-power telescopes.

Garraty and Ohnersorgen explain that modes of control over a people’s social order may be best achieved by disrupting their compass or the way in which they structure their relationships in reference to their surrounding landscape. Political control may be direct or indirect, territorial or hegemonic. The most archaeologically visible
forms of control are directly territorial, whereby both sociopolitical and geopolitical landscapes are reconstituted rapidly and visibly by actions of the controlling power such as military invasion and government takeover, dismantling and replacement of public architecture, transplanting of immigrant enclaves, forced relocation of the local population, religious desecration (Walker 1995), and other such actions that disrupt and break down the local population's physical attachments to places. At the opposite end of the spectrum are indirect forms of hegemonic control involving the symbolic imposition and manipulation of symbols and identities, thus causing disruption but not necessarily destruction or replacement of the social order. Indirect imposition of political control is likely to reconstitute the geopolitical landscape in ways that are less visible archaeologically than direct territorial control (Schriber 1992).

Place-focused analyses, such as those of Sanford Ranch in Arizona by Heilen and Reid and of El Sauce and Callejón del Horno in Veracruz by Garraty and Öhnersorgen, lend contextual depth and rich detail to broadly traced landscape approaches by revealing variation in specific forms of conformity or resistance to political control. Both studies, for example, show how overarching forms of control appear in frontier environments and how local populations react to the imposition of external power. The biographies of El Sauce and Callejón del Horno show a gamut of symbolic and practical acts of resistance by provincial elites and commoners to the imposition of an Aztec imperial order, as they appear, often subtly, in the material record. Garraty and Öhnersorgen point out that the responses of provincial elites to the Aztec presence also involved their strategic formulation of alliances with the Aztec dominant elites. In the Aztec case, the landscape remained a heavily negotiated but inalienable possession. On the other hand, Sanford Ranch's biography illustrates, on a small scale, the pervasive commodifying effect of hegemonic imposition of the Public Land Survey System upon a landscape previously inhabited by native communities that saw it as inalienable. Heilen and Reid state that the grid system was not simply a practical means for assigning allotments to immigrants and settlers of the western frontier but also a system of thought that effectively stripped local populations of their attachments to places within that grid. In short, these authors demonstrate that landscape and place theory can and should encompass the broadest possible temporal and spatial scale as well as the most diverse social and cultural manifestations, hence making this theory a powerful tool for the explanation of social change.

Persistent Places: Archaeology and People Today

A common assumption is that unused or abandoned places became "lost" to people at some point in their life histories, hence acquiring archaeological or "natural" status. This unfortunate assumption has prevented archaeologists from gaining insights into people's enduring relationships with the land (Nelson 2000). Not long ago, Schilinger (1992) coined the term persistent places to denote those archaeological sites that show evidence of having been reused or revisited after their official "abandonment." Her conceptualization of a persistent place opened the door for discussions about the meaning of this evidence and the concepts and methods needed to properly explain it (Ashmore 2002; Zedeño 1997). At the core of a persistent place (a place that would not go away) is the human need to rekindle memories of experiences lived and to maintain rights and fulfill obligations inherited from the ancestors. Welch (chapter 9), for example, speaks of the challenges posed by the need to "reconstruct" a sense of place in the White Mountain Apache Reservation in Arizona decades after many ancestral places have been negatively affected by the activities (or lack thereof) of Indian and non-Indian people and by state and federal legislation dictating the fate of reservation lands. Yet Basso (1996) was able to uncover the wealth of place-based knowledge that still exists among the Cibecue Apache and to alert this community as to the urgency of preserving this knowledge and reconstructing their sense of place.

The notion of a persistent place also brings about the realization that places are not truly lost or abandoned, except perhaps in the analytic mind of the archaeologist who must distance himself or herself from a study subject in order to maintain a measure of objectivity. Rather, the specific role of a place in people's interactions and its position in a place network or landscape may change to
accommodate new social relations and cultural imperatives. Consider, for example, the extraordinary significance of the National Park System in the lives of the American people, where individuals of myriad ethnic and cultural backgrounds can find common ground in the stewardship of natural and cultural monuments and a welcome stage for teaching children about American history and heritage. This piece of commonsense wisdom is seldom formally translated into the analysis and interpretation of human-place relations in the past.

A common statement found in interpretive signs and brochures of archaeological sites and monuments reads: Why did they leave? Where did they go? (e.g., Widdison 1991). This statement has the effect of both imbuing ancient places with a cloud of mystery and keeping them outside the reach of ordinary people, including the descendants of those who once inhabited them. This exercise, too, disenfranchises communities whose social memories are anchored in archaeological places because it situates them at the same level as tourists and scholars-outsiders. Dispelling the myth that archaeology is about the vanished are the memories and experiences of the living, whose cultural logic is inextricably linked to meaningful places. Lekson’s case studies (chapter 10) are illustrative of how people can solve this artificial separation between them and untouchable ancient monuments by reinterpreting them in other places and in their own terms.

What is a “meaningful” place, and to whom is a place meaningful? one may ask. Welch (chapter 9), Kuwanwiswinma and Ferguson (chapter 6), and Lekson (chapter 10) furnish a clear answer to this question: a meaningful place is that which reminds people of their past and teaches them how to cope with the present and plan for the future. That this was true in the past is evident in ancient places that were made, marked, or modified to guide individuals and societies in making decisions and in keeping a balance with their environment and with the cosmos (Joyce, chapter 3). When such a human-place relationship was threatened or lost, people reinvented themselves in their new environment or attempted to recapture their compass; often, they did both. The White Mountain Apache, for example, are deeply involved in land-management strategies that are in harmony with their ancient worldview but that respond to the realities and needs of modern reservation life. In these endeavors, Welch states, the Navajo rely heavily on their place-bound traditions and teachings as guidance for proper behavior. In a similar vein, the Hopi do not see “archaeological” places as relics of their past but as the homes of the ancestors, still inhabited and very much alive.

Engaging the Archaeology of Meaningful Places

Archaeology is the only social science that theoretically and methodologically disengages from its subject matter in order to study it. Yet, as Joyce and colleagues (chapter 4), Whittlesey (chapter 5), and Lekson (chapter 10) explain, the challenge posed by implementing the archaeology of place is to coherently integrate objective and subjective means of analysis for reconstructing ancient places and interpreting their meanings. This integration is particularly necessary when piecing together place networks and elucidating elements of place logic. Lekson’s discussion of three kinds of places—public archaeological parks, re-created sites, and a popular restaurant that resembles a monument—and other volume contributions invite us to ponder the doubtful wisdom of total disengagement, which prevents scholars from addressing archaeological places as broadly and deeply as possible.

At a minimum, archaeologists can certainly learn how people created meaningful places and what the effects of their creations were even if specific meanings are not amenable to archaeological analysis. From the perspective of heritage, Lekson’s comparative analysis of interpretive materials written by archaeologists, land managers, and the interested public reveals the dangers of disengaging from our study subject. A remedy may well be for archaeologists to rewrite archaeologies that grant places their rightful histories (e.g., Pauketat’s 1998 reassessment of Cahokia or Gallivan’s 2006 reanalysis of Powhatan’s Werowocomoco) and that show the currency of place in our lives, both as archaeologists and as members of the public. Archaeological places, although a thing of the past, have the power to remind us, in the here and now, who we are, where we belong, and what belongs to us.
In this volume 14 scholars demonstrate not only that place is integral to understanding the historical trajectories of human societies but that it is indeed possible to take this concept to the field and return with a coherent and meaningful reconstruction of the past. The authors address place from a variety of perspectives including behavioral archaeology, anthropology, cosmology, phenomenology, contemporary social theory, geography, history, ethnohistory, and architecture. Collectively, these chapters emphasize the need to embrace theoretical diversity and multiple lines of evidence to develop an understanding of the significance of archaeological places. Without reducing the concept to fit into the fragmentary nature of archaeology, the authors succeed at anchoring their arguments on the material record of experiences, activities, meanings, and metaphors and at underscoring the enduring presence of the past in contemporary society.