

APPENDIX III.

Perspectives on Culture, Tradition, Vernacular Knowledge, and Culture Change to Understand Landscape as a Cultural Process

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Introduction

The underlying premise of this discussion is that people contribute to conditions that warrant the restructuring and reorganization of their interactions with their physical settings, with other members of their communities, and with residents of other communities (see **Anschuetz 1998b:31–82**). People revise their existing tactics and strategies, or adopt altogether new policies, for earning their living. As they accommodate changes in their natural, economic, social, political, and ideational environments at one point in time, they invariably instigate change (Minnis 1985:19; Waddington 1974:35; see also Watts 1988). Thus, culture, and all of its constituents, including landscape, is a dynamic, living process.

The purpose of this essay is to contribute to an understanding of landscape as a dynamic cultural process. This discussion provides part of a framework that land and cultural resource managers might find useful in considering how people of traditional and historical communities construct and sustain affiliations with the Valles Caldera National Preserve.

The discussion consists of six sections. First, the narrative begins by considering that culture is an elaborate cognitive and behavioral system (Kirch 1980:112–114) that people use for the efficient production, storage, and conveyance of information about their interactions with their natural, economic, social, political, and ideational environments. Second, I examine what traditions are and how they serve human communities by sustaining senses of continuity despite the unfolding process of culture change. The third section inspects the properties of vernacular knowledge through which people assign meanings to the facts that they perceive in their everyday world. The fourth segment addresses the assertion that culture change over time is inevitable, while the fifth section looks at how people with controlled access to a community's corpus of vernacular knowledge can use traditions and traditionalism as instruments of culture change. The concluding part provides commentary about why process and landscape concerns alike dictate the adoption of a historical-ecological approach. I suggest that the process of behavioral change conveyed symbolically within a landscape is, to a large degree, related

to how communities experience time and place. Moreover, the process of behavioral change requires the fundamental traditions throughout the landscape to remain more or less intact to demonstrate cultural-historical continuity.

Culture With a Capital “C”

Culture has been a central topic of discussion since anthropology's beginnings as a social science more than a century ago. It has been a unifying concept over much of the discipline's history. Nonetheless, its appropriateness increasingly has become a topic of debate since Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) noted that practitioners assign it a multiplicity of meanings. Over the past decade, critiques of the culture concept generally focus on the theme that *culture* inevitably “suggests boundedness, homogeneity, coherence, stability, and structure whereas social reality is characterized by variability, inconsistencies, conflict, change, and individual agency” (Brumann 1999:S1).

For the purposes of this study, we view culture as an elaborate cognitive and behavioral system (Kirch 1980:112–114) that people use for the efficient production, storage, and conveyance of information about their interactions with their natural, economic, social, political, and ideational environments during their life spans. Culture also allows people to transfer information about past environmental states and the perceived effectiveness of responses to fluctuations in their environments beyond the direct experiences of living generations.

Through their recollection of cultural-historical memory (Flinn and Alexander 1982), people generate a world of cultural product (after Boone 1994:7). Importantly, (1) cultural information flow patterns are highly selective in transmitting data at any point in time and between successive generations; (2) communities assign values to their perceptions and meanings of cultural information differently; and (3) communities are capable of consciously manipulating their cultural inheritance (**Anschuetz 1998b:44–58**; **Anschuetz et al. 2001:181–184**; Wills et al. 1994:298). At any given time, therefore, people not only inherit but also inhabit—that is to say, imitate, modify,

and build upon—their cultural heritage as a conceptual landscape for their own purposes.

Two complementary definitions of culture provide a framework for considering how human communities systematically bias the recognition and manipulate the transmission of environmental information. The first definition is by E. B. Tylor, who conceptualized culture at the time anthropology was emerging as a formal discipline as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (1871:1). More than 80 years later, Leslie White defined culture as “a class of things and events, dependent upon symboling, considered in an extrasomatic context” (1959:234).

Although Tylor and White’s definitions focus on contrasting aspects of culture, they share an underlying principle of patterned information transmission within communities. These information flow patterns are not only selective in what and how data are transmitted among living people and between successive generations, they also exhibit a wide range of variability among human communities. Each group’s particular sense of place and time helps organize the structure and pattern of their occupation of sustaining areas and their use of larger physical environments (see **Ansuetz 1998b:47–50**; see also appendix II).

Tradition: Sustaining Senses of Continuity Within Culture Change

Regardless of their particular form of expression, **Stewart Peckham (1990)** portrays information regulating mechanisms that structure the content of, and organize the meanings within, data transmitted among living people and between successive generations, as *traditions*. According to **Peckham**, traditions generally relate to people’s valued understandings of “how they became who they are” (1990:2). In turn, traditions unify how people of a cultural community create and occupy their landscapes across the dimensions of space and time (**Ansuetz 1998b:47**). Trigger argues that traditions arise out “of the need for patterns or structural principles that provide some degree of coherence and meaning to the inexhaustible variety of concepts that the human mind is capable of inventing and manipulating” (1991:557, citing Gellner 1982:116–117). Lastly, Redfield (1940, in Watson 1995:683) recognizes that traditions sustain the validity and coherence of the group’s conventional understandings over time.

Peckham (1990:2–5) outlines the fundamental characteristics of traditions. These traits include value, persistence, and continuity within a community. Even though traditions allow for persistence and continuity in the threads of constructed meanings, they nevertheless are dynamic and subject to change over time given the latitude in their form and practice (after **Ansuetz 1998b:48–51**; **Peckham 1990:2–5**; see also Rappaport’s [1979a] discussion of ritual. Geertz concludes, “that persistence and change are aspects of the same social phenomenon, namely, tradition” (1994:4).

Trigger maintains traditions arise out “of the need for patterns or structural principles that provide some degree of coherence and meaning to the inexhaustible variety of concepts that the human mind is capable of inventing and manipulating” (1991:557, citing Gellner 1982:116–117). As **Ansuetz (1998b:44–58)** observes, shared comprehension of meanings defines the contents of traditions.

Two crucial issues underlie this statement (**Ansuetz et al. 2001:182–183**). First, a common world view among community members is implicit and obligatory (Whorf 1956:213–214). Second, fundamental concepts underlie and structure human thought (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:3). These concepts are matters not only of intellect but also of action and include mundane everyday matters. Consequently, people interacted with their environments to define and to mark their occupation of spaces within their physical environments in patterned ways of residence, subsistence, and other activity, including oral tradition (adapted from **Ansuetz et al. 2001:183**).

Even though traditions constrain the structure and organization of human behavior, they do not cast culture in an absolutely determinist role (**Ansuetz 1998b:50**). Traditions are not wholly determining “because the human ability to reason allows individuals to manipulate and modify culture to varying degrees” (Trigger 1991:559) as they “realize their own changing needs and aspirations” (Trigger 1991:560). Geertz (1994:4–5) maintains that traditions by definition must be both resilient and malleable to retain their meaning as people confront changing circumstances. For this reason, traditions can be viewed as strategic resources that can be modified to fulfill desired ends (Geertz 1994:4).

A consequence of this essential latitude in behavior is that cultural systems encompass much greater internal behavioral variability than anthropologists normally recognize (**Ansuetz 1998b:50**; **Ansuetz et al. 2001:183**, after Rambo 1991:71–72; see also Trigger 1991:552). Nevertheless, the need for structural order and coherence of meaning shape the contingent variation of culture and its capacity for elaboration (Trigger 1991:561; see also Atran 1990; Berlin 1973; Berlin et al. 1974; Lakoff 1987; Nazarea 1999a; Shore 1996 for discussions of structures that condition perception and experience). Given these properties of traditions for transmitting information, this discussion now turns to a consideration of how cultures structure perception and information transmission patterns.

Vernacular Knowledge: Reigning Conventional Wisdom

Vernacular knowledge refers to the processes and results of certain kinds of ordinary thinking that people rely on as an indubitable source of truthful knowledge of their everyday world (see Atran 1990:1–4, 275n1 for his discussion of *common sense*). Knowledge is distributed differentially within a community, even though our reference to the group’s culture tends to make us think such information is shared among all the people (Barth 2002:1). Access to certain vernacular knowledge can

be exclusive to a community's carriers of tradition (Rumsey 2002). Because traditional knowledge allows people to understand and describe their experience with certain worldly phenomena, the validity of such belief is beyond question.

On one level, vernacular knowledge "is just the way humans are constitutionally disposed to think of things" (Atran 1990:2). On another plane, vernacular knowledge defines and informs their world view. Geertz defines *world view* as "a people's picture of the way things, in sheer reality are, their concept of nature, of self, of society. It contains their most comprehensive ideas of order" (1973:127).

Vernacular knowledge therefore may be understood as a community's conventional wisdom. Cultural meaning, such as that embedded in a group's body of conventional wisdom, however, is dynamic and subject to notable change.

Nazarea suggests the importance of vernacular knowledge to landscape studies: "The landscape, or what's out there, is processed through human perception, cognition, and decision making before a plan or strategy is formulated and an individual or collective action is executed" (1999b:91). Also important in studying landscapes are "the complex ways in which places anchor lives in social formations ranging widely in geographical location, in economic and political scale, and in the accompanying realms of gender, race, class, and ethnicity" (Feld and Basso 1996:7). Landscape, then, deals with every aspect of resource management that underlies a "people's sense of place—the lenses through which they construct the environment and estimate their latitudes of choice and opportunities for challenge and refutation" (Nazarea 1999b:105).

The Inevitability of Culture Change

Just as the physical environment changes over time, so do culture, tradition, and the meanings contained within a community's world view (Anschuetz et al. 2001:184). These characteristics all are dynamic properties of human life; they are neither static nor immutable (after Plog 1974).

Although culture change over time is inevitable, the need to sustain order and coherence frame the range of possible variation (Anschuetz et al. 2001:184, citing Trigger 1991:561). Marked discontinuities in the structure of information and the organization of behavior, however, can signify the revolutionary overthrow or the transformation of previously established cultural frameworks (see Anschuetz 1998b). In the case of revolution, fundamental cognitive aspects that structure and organize the cultural system are replaced. In the case of transformation, change sustains a community's existing structural and organizational themes.

Transformations in a community's traditions carry social and cultural implications. Peckham (1990:3) observes that great culture change, regardless of the cause or motivation, can disrupt the original intent of the tradition or destroy some critical component to leave certain aspects of the tradition divorced from their ancient context. Of special interest to the present discussion, calculated attempts to reinterpret or revive traditions, such as can occur within nativistic movements (e.g.,

see Green 1974, 1976), "often involve only selected elements of the earlier tradition" (Peckham 1990:4).

Although a transformed tradition might only superficially resemble the original form, it "does not necessarily prevent it from being accepted and effective" (Peckham 1990:4) within the community for its contemporary needs and purposes. If the transformation or renewal of tradition results in a redefinition of the community's vernacular knowledge (even if the modification is not consciously recognized), the changes can establish a new configuration for people to interpret, and reinterpret, information available in their contemporary natural, economic, social, political, and ideational environments (see Anschuetz 1998b:57, after Williams 1961:23). The integration of folk Catholicism with indigenous belief among Pueblo communities in northern New Mexico following Spanish colonization is an example of transformation in community traditions in which cultural continuity is sustained in the face of considerable change in economic, social, political, and ideational orders (e.g., Gutiérrez 1991). From this perspective, study of changes in a community's traditions has less to do "with what they represent in themselves and more to do with what they indirectly reveal about the state of society, other religious bodies, or structures of meaning" (Beckford 1987:392).

Traditions and Traditionalism as Instruments of Culture Change

Anthropologists commonly view culture and its constituents, including tradition, as fundamental properties of human communities (e.g., Hall 1959, 1969; Rappaport 1979b:62; White 1949). In people's day-to-day lives, they use culture to construct and reconstruct traditional meanings with different valuation relevant to the circumstances and events they experience in their changing worlds (after Barth 2002:11; Lakoff and Johnson 1980:3; Rappaport 1979c:158, 1979d; White 1987:277; see also comprehensive case studies by Geertz 1994; Levy 1992; Whiteley 1987, 1988).

Tradition is a strategic cultural resource, which people can modify to fulfill desired ends within their contemporary natural, economic, social, political, and ideational environments. Geertz observes further that tradition is "a way of thinking, a way of speaking, and a way of acting that articulates in myriad ways the webs of significance produced by human cultures" (1994:4; see also Levy 1992:164). Moreover, vernacular knowledge, whose significance is derived and legitimized with reference to tradition, may be viewed as threads in the total fabric of meaning embedded in the community's world view (after Geertz 1994:6).

Through assertive links to tradition and world view, information relevant to contemporary circumstances, including affiliations to places on the landscape, can be cast as a community's vernacular knowledge, way of life, identity, and very being. On the one hand, some outsiders might be tempted to characterize a group's traditional patterns of culture as residues from a past that either at best are disconnected or at worst are irrelevant to the community's contemporary conditions.

In doing so, the term *traditional* is imbued with pejorative connotations that it does not deserve. Bradburd observes that if the term *traditional*:

... is intended to suggest that some societies are 'cold,' fixed in amber, unwilling or unable to change, then it is both insulting and ridiculous. If nothing else, the narrative of the 20th century is the account of peoples the world over accepting, using and creating 'new' technologies even as they put 'old' practices to new uses (Bradburd 2002:12).

On the other hand, a group's statements of its associations under certain circumstances may be constructed to assert the immutability of its traditions over the generations since time immemorial (see Barth 2002:5). Such statements typically are made to audiences of persons either within or outside the community for whom access to the assembly's vernacular knowledge is restricted to all but a few specified "knowers" who define the group's social reality (after Geertz 1994:7–8, citing Berger and Luckman 1966:87, 134; see also Barth 2002:5). As a conscious or unconscious creative strategy, the underlying motivation for making such statements can be an overwhelming concern to establish the veracity of shifting claims of affiliation or practice (e.g., Barth 2002:5; Green 1974:68–74). According to Rumsey, "The creative act [on the part of the group's exclusive 'carriers of tradition'] is to do this in such a way as to deny change and temporality and to fabricate for their audiences a sense of transmitted invariance and timelessness: a performative illusion of considerable ingenuity and persuasive power" (2002:15). In this sense, people assert their "old" practices to put the "new" economic, social, and political technologies at their disposal to use (Bradford 2002:12).

To cast the redefinition of community traditions in the face of changing natural, economic, social, political, and ideational environments over time *necessarily* as the cynical products of politicians is inappropriate (after Levy 1992:164). Although a transformed tradition might resemble the original form only superficially, the community may accept the reinterpreted history as a mechanism for sustaining its sense of identity in the face of contemporary circumstances (see Levy 1992:164; **Peckham 1990:4**). In fact, when culture change demonstrably sustains community and identity, some anthropologists extend the notion of *indigenous* to include a group's incorporation of knowledge obtained from outside sources.

Public commentaries and performances declaring strict adherence to a community's traditions fulfill the definition of *traditionalism*. Social science theory has long held the premise that actors, who use traditionalism in nativistic

and revitalistic movements, can serve as principal agents of culture change within their communities. Some sociologists argue that "'traditionalism' is not the same as 'tradition,' but also that the traditionalist is both innovator (Shils 1971:146), and a major instrument of modernization" (Geertz 1994:5, citing Singer 1971:162). Persons who identify themselves as traditionalists in promoting matters said to be held sacred by their communities typically reject the focus and contexts of established traditions and assert revisionist histories to address issues relevant to the community's contemporary needs (after Geertz 1994:5–6; see also Levy 1992; Whiteley 1988).

Discussion: The Need for a Historical-Ecological Perspective

Concerns with process and landscape alike dictate the adoption of an explicitly historical-ecological perspective, which is based on "a culturally specific temporal and spatial perspective applied at the regional scale" (Crumley 1994:8). A historical-ecological perspective broadly embraces a traditional landscape concern, namely, the material traces that people have left on their environments. It builds from the premise that interpretation of vernacular and formally built landscapes alike should be in terms of the essential values and beliefs that a community uses to structure and organize its behavior (e.g., see Cosgrove and Daniels 1988; Meinig 1979; Penning-Roswell and Lowenthal 1986; see also appendix II).

The process of behavioral change encoded within a landscape over time is, to a large degree, a function of operational cultural constructs of time and place. As a community of people live their lives, they typically move among places within the settings that make up their landscape. People transfer the vernacular knowledge of their communities between and across generations through day-to-day conversation and ritual behavior (Crumley 1994:7), although individuals "participate to greater or lesser degrees in the production and application of perceptions of their environments" (Crumley 1994:9). Generations of people might inhabit and modify a multitude of places within their community landscape differently over time. Nevertheless, as long as fundamental traditions remain more or less intact, elements of a common underlying structural pattern persist over time (e.g., see Rapoport 1990:17). In adopting and applying a historical-ecological perspective, explaining the process of culture change requires the traceable persistence of traditions across the regional landscape over time to demonstrate cultural-historical continuity along a trajectory of path-dependent change.

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