HOUSEHOLDS, TIME, AND PRACTICE: A REPLY TO VITELLI

Stephen W. Silliman

Giovanna Vitelli (this volume) offers interesting perspectives on the archaeological study of Indigenous people in colonial contexts. She does so through a commentary on my recently published (Silliman 2009) article in which I outlined a perspective on practice and memory that has helped me interpret the ways that Indigenous communities can persist between the dichotomies of change and continuity. I offer here some clarifications and engagements with her comments.

Giovanna Vitelli (en este volumen) ofrece una interesante perspectiva sobre el estudio arqueológico de pueblos indígenas en el contexto colonial. Lo hace mediante un comentario sobre mi reciente artículo publicado (Silliman 2009) el cual esboza una perspectiva sobre práctica y memoria que me ha ayudado a interpretar las maneras en que las comunidades indígenas pueden persistir entre dicotomías de cambio y continuidad. Ofrezco aquí algunas aclaraciones y discuto algunos de sus comentarios.

I welcome Giovanna Vitelli's response to my recent article in *American Antiquity*, and I appreciate having the chance to engage with some of its content. I am pleased that my work garnered her attention, and even more pleased that she seems to have used my article mainly as a departure point rather than as a punching bag. One never knows how such things will go in the literature. At a practical level, this departure strategy leaves the two of us on more common ground to develop these kinds of perspectives (with our respective nuances) rather than on rifting plates that undermine dialogue. In that spirit, I offer a brief reply to clarify my work and to comment on hers.

Vitelli brings a perspective that should be welcomed in the Northeast and beyond. Archaeologists continue to struggle with the dilemma of using material worlds framed in academic terms to interpret cultural words lived in Native American terms and experiences, which is a task made even more difficult in the aftermath of long-term colonialism. Vitelli makes headway with her article. Particularly useful is her approach to cognition, metaphor, and knowledge that offers conceptual anchors for our archaeological struggles with terminology and that may better align what we say in the present with the realities of Indigenous experiences in the past. She does a marvelous job of trying to elucidate those threads in the larger fabric of social and cultural worlds, expanding as she does beyond my discussion of memory and practice. Vitelli's innovative approach to mortuary practice and materiality in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century southern New England promises to deliver interpretations more attuned to the subtleties of Indigenous lives in colonial worlds. However, three caveats are necessary since she offered these as counterpoints to my interpretations of Eastern Pequot household material culture in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in that same region.

First, cemeteries and houses offer rather different windows into social and cultural worlds. When used in conjunction, their points of overlap and their points of dissonance tend to bring more inclusive, more nuanced interpretations of overall life in the past. Taken alone, mortuary contexts access rather directly the cosmological, the ritual, and the liminal, as different cultural traditions work through a variety of emotional, familial, social, and political intersections surrounding death and mourning. These make Vitelli's emphasis on "thresholds" very pertinent. Households, while definitely capable of revealing similar things, often reveal more clearly

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the realm of everyday practices. Households may be spaces for contestation and transformation, but they are also contexts for repetition and familiarity. More poignantly, they are the contexts for familiarization, as new material objects become incorporated, appropriated, and made meaningful in use and through experience. This grounded my interpretation since I wanted to discuss how, in a household context and as a function of social and individual memory, objects may defy our preexisting categories and assumptions. To turn Diana Loren's (2008) phrase about this period being about the familiar meeting the unfamiliar, I have become interested in how the unfamiliar becomes the familiar and how our classificatory schemes sometimes elide the possibilities of seeing those.

Second, I applaud Vitelli's attempt to look deeply into Indigenous worldviews, long-term traditions, and what she calls "ethnographic" approaches with respect to her work on seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century contexts. However, I remain wary of the "ethnographic approach" as an overarching theme, since it seems to suggest that archaeological approaches cannot work on the cognitive aspects that she proposes are uniquely ethnographic, or that ethnographies need not be contextualized in their time of production to avoid homogenizing cultures across time and space (see Lightfoot 1995; Stahl 1993). I would caution against assuming a universal Native American mindset, set of metaphors, or "underlying philosophies" for the Northeast or elsewhere that cannot or do not change. This runs the risk of essentializing Native identities and cognitive processes for an untold number of centuries and across perhaps too large of a region, and it could turn this into what McGhee (2008) has criticized as untenable for Indigenous archaeology. For example, Vitelli's drawing upon Vine Deloria, Jr.'s (1994) ideas about Indigenous concepts of equilibrium may be viable entry points into complex cultural and colonial processes, but the equilibrium concept likely cannot be applied universally to all Native Americans across the continent and in different circumstances and periods. Such an approach is not ethnographic at all in scale or purpose, but verging on something more ethnological and problematic.

At a more proximate scale, Vitelli's argument runs counter to what I tried to outline in my article. I researched sites from the middle eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries, while her focus has been on the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Although many cultural features certainly link across those three centuries, the two time periods represent different moments in southern New England Native history given internal community dynamics and larger-scale colonial and settler nation policies. This may necessitate balancing interpretations between longer-term structures and metaphors and newer ones necessitated in the complex political, racial, and economic landscapes of the region from the mid-eighteenth century onward. We should no more collapse all of southern New England cultural practices and cognitive outlooks in the post-1600 world than we should for those periods that extend back millennia before the arrival of Europeans in the region. Many things can happen in the span of three centuries, and the Indigenous communities that persisted through those tumultuous colonial times deserve to be considered both in their changes as well as their continuities. As I argued in my original article, the former can happen to facilitate the latter.

This is exactly why I suggested a "shifting baseline" for comparison when we go about evaluating change or continuity. I did not at all seek an "uncoupling [of] later periods from their pasts" or a "repudiation of the pre-contact universe," as Vitelli claims, for such statements would undermine my commitment to narrating long-term Indigenous histories in the region and to breaking down the prehistory/history divide (see also Lightfoot 1995). In fact, I suggested that we look carefully at the shorter-tem scales of practice and meaning to accompany, not replace, the longer-term, deep-time, diachronic patterns that might be there as well. I felt that these more recent periods have been neglected due to the prevailing perspectives on "prehistory" and "precontact" that privilege those cultural patterns. We need to be careful about when and how we link more practices to their antecedents, taking into account not only Indigenous perceptions and memories of these linkages, but also embedded practices in academia that simultaneously seek out the deepest histories while ignoring the most recent of connections. The latter problem has political implications for contemporary Indigenous communities who face accusations of inauthenticity or change-beyond-recognition from their deeper pasts.

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In other words, we need to pay more attention to the pasts that people in the past found useable, appropriate, and meaningful rather than impose our points of comparison. Sometimes people drew on millennia-old ideas or practices, and sometimes they drew on the generation before. Vitelli is quite right that we should look for long-term beliefs or mental templates that might guide both of these, but this remains an empirical and conceptual question for specific cases. At times perhaps we should uncouple some of the distant pasts from our studies, at least temporarily for some analytical steps, *if* the people we study seem to have done so as well. Doing this makes our work more ethnographic, in Vitelli's characterization, rather than less. The Mayan case (Breglia 2006) offered in my article makes this point: If contemporary Mayan people have as much (if not more) active connection to their culture, heritage, and land of the last 200 years as they do to their ancestral Classic Maya civilizations that garner so much archaeological attention, then we need to think differently—the alterity that Vitelli mentions—about these processes. Individuals, households, and communities can forge different temporal linkages as part of daily practice or outright strategic intervention in the world, and we must be attentive to that. Importantly, though, to support Vitelli's points about deeper temporal and cultural rhythms: these same individuals, households, and communities may be, and likely are, using more deeply grounded and long-term knowledges at the same time. Archaeologists need to develop ways of seeing these multiscalar processes and practices, both analytically with our abilities to see broad swaths of time and ethnographically with our commitment to people's own understandings and actions.

Third, Vitelli states rather explicitly that my approach centers on individualism and agency and that it suffers under the "the idea that people are self-sufficient and internally motivated units ("social agents") who can be assessed independently." Were I making that kind of agency argument, I would have to agree with her critique. However, I did not propose such a scenario. I chose instead to emphasize *social* memory and *household* practices, both of which lodged the interpretation in arenas well beyond the scale of mere individuals. These permitted me to address questions of scale, some of which do not stay anchored in any individual's experience but still have to be negotiated and transmitted through it. I do, however, agree with Vitelli that a perspective on memory, such as the one that I advocated, should give significant weight to knowledge and experience as part of that process. A focus on practices can and should accomplish this, but considering knowledge more generally helps to make such links more explicitly since knowledge as a resource can be practical and discursive, bodily and mental, shared and secreted, active and inactive.

In conclusion, the rethinking offered by Vitelli promises to deepen and expand current approaches to interpreting Indigenous histories before and through colonialism. It will just be more appropriate if the abovementioned three issues remain on the interpretive radar. I enjoyed the critical engagement, and it provided me with additional perspectives on how to make our archaeological work more attuned to different scales of history, meaning, metaphor, materiality, and space. She and I seem to be in considerably more agreement than not, and I hope that such exchanges can move us forward in the sophistication, appropriateness, and sensitivity of our archaeological interpretations.

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