Lived Experiences of Space, Time and Cosmovision

Wendy Ashmore

Essays in this Special Section highlight varied and convergent North, Central and South American expressions of knowledge and belief about time, space, and cosmovision, especially as manifest in lived experience inflected by politico-economic circumstance.

While authors over multiple intellectual generations worldwide have addressed issues of meaning expressed in space and time, publications by Johanna Broda stand out for their thought-provoking insights about cosmovision in Indigenous American cultures. Broda traces her involvement in such concerns to contact with Anthony F. Aveni in the 1970s and 1980s, and cites the seminal collaborations that, among other things, yielded *To Change Place: Aztec Ceremonial Landscapes*, edited by Davíd Carrasco (1991). During that formative period, as Dowd notes, Broda adopted the term *cosmovisión* (Broda 1982): 'borrowed from the common Spanish and German usage, [it] denotes the *structured view* in which the ancient Mesoamericans combined their notions of cosmology relating time and space into a systematic whole' (Broda 1987, 108, emphasis added). Linking time-space beliefs and practices, with respect to the structure of the universe, simultaneously unites Aveni's (e.g. 1988; 2001; 2008; Aveni & Urton 1982) interdisciplinary contributions to the fields of astronomy, anthropology, archaeology, and more. Together they exemplify Aveni's leadership in our consideration of 'real-time events' expressing Indigenous North, Central and South American knowledge and beliefs about time, space, and cosmovision in lived experience.

Whether or not it is invoked explicitly, Broda's (1982) *cosmovisión* is understood in all articles of this section: it constitutes the underlying culture-specific view of the world, encompassing the structure of the universe and ideas about its origin or development as interpreted through sets of symbols created in the built environment. Such creations manifest materially at widely varying scales of space and time, from individual artefacts to expansive landscapes, activated in single events, daily life, or cycles ranging from a day to a season to a lifetime and more. Processions and other mobile ritual practices enable people to materialize cosmovision through bodily movement in space and time, often yielding *cosmograms*, or materialized maps of the universe. Cosmovision is strongly evident not only in one region, but, according to many authors, across the globe. Its material expression maps the sky, time and the universe, as well as the intimately known human body in terrestrial space. Whereas the articles solicited for this Special Section derive from the Indigenous Americas, they certainly also relate to parallel inquiries and findings beyond that hemisphere (e.g. Huffman 1981; 1996; Richards 1996; Wheatley 1971). Importantly, all draw attention as well to historically contingent political, economic and ideational contexts.

Space

In her article here, Johanna Broda ties astronomy-based ritual calendars to their anchoring in two culturally distinct sets of lived landscapes, that of Aztec Central Mexico and the Inca world of the Andes. Her expansion into comparisons of Aztec and other cultures is a significant move, applying her close and insightful analyses to a wider range of cases. As importantly, she links materialization of cosmovision through ritual movements across those distinct lived spaces to 'taking ritual possession of the landscape'. That is, in her view, Aztec and Inca ritual landscapes reproduced not only cosmovision but also state ideology, expressed at scales ranging from individual shrines to whole valleys and beyond. Movement through those lands and abundance of these symbols were the practices that tied together space and time—and politics (Ashmore 2004; 2010; Thomas 1993). State and

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imperial colonization regularly features such possession taking, of course, commonly expressed as usurping control over revered places of the colonized society, or the well-known practice of replacing traditional places of politico-religious authority with new ones (Ashmore 2014; Broda *et al.* 1987; Low 2000; Taçon 1999; Van de Guchte 1999). As Broda reminds us, pilgrimage and other kinds of repeated movement along the same paths strengthen the attachment of memory, alike for traditional places and those newly accentuated by state or imperial directive (Snead *et al.* 2009; Tilley 1994).

In the Maya southeast, at the Classic Maya capital of Copan, Kristin Landau focuses on architecture, its placement and its design. Her study centres on seven 'paired groups' of what were likely high-status residential compounds. Her goal is to test models of settlement planning based on econometric concerns and on cosmological principles, using GIS-based techniques of mean centre, least cost analysis, elevation and viewshed for the seven groups. Landau's findings support 'a cosmological spatial logic for ancient Maya site planning at the sub-community level,' *without* inferring that it was the only such logic involved. Her analyses further suggest that 'the very ability to see conferred higher status': for the Maya, 'seeing' was an important design factor, associated with elevation, northern placement and royal or supernatural power (Houston *et al.* 2006). This is more than a static description: it connotes the active importance of the senses—in this case visual—for experiencing a place or landscape. Perhaps active movement was less important in this case than was the engagement of the senses. In so writing, Landau joins growing recognition, across the globe, of the importance of *all* our bodily senses for experiencing the world around us, and often for the political edge of shaping what those perceptions might be (E. Hall 1966; Hamilakis 2014; Houston *et al.* 2006; Mongelluzzo 2103; Skeates 2010). Her work, plus collaboration with Heather Richards-Rissetto, continues productive 3D modelling for exploring these lines of study (Richards-Rissetto & Landau 2014).

Invoking the significance of meaning in space and place, George Sabo, Jerry Hilliard and Leslie Walker invite consideration of how spatially separated rock art features in the Central Arkansas River Valley might map Indigenous cosmovision. They suggest that mutually exclusive rock-art themes occurring north and south of the west-to-east-flowing Arkansas River respectively reflect ritual connections to spiritual domains, and ritual promotion of earthly welfare. They go on to posit that rock-art iconography of this region relates to beliefs and customs of wider Mesoamerican, Southwest and Southeast North American cultures. They infer that their 'north-south model involves more subtle distinctions that the simple Spirit World/This World dichotomy', reflecting repeated exchange of ideas and ritual-related materials among the regions cited, perhaps via 'journeys by long-distance travellers seeking exotic goods and esoteric knowledge'. Many have debated the time-depth, geographic breadth and means of sharing beliefs and practices, including cosmovision, across multiple, culturally distinct regions of the Americas (e.g. Ford 1969; R. Hall 1997; Mathiowetz 2011; Quilter & Miller 2006). The pendulum swings repeatedly between significant to little or no sharing of symbols and their underlying meanings over long, even continental distances. Sabo and colleagues importantly reopen critical discussion, especially about setting criteria for distinguishing cross-cultural similarities and differences, and how these came to be.

Time

This theme continues from the first, with perhaps more emphasis toward how time cycles and astronomy manifest in the land. Both Broda and Vining link ritual timing firmly to cosmological space. Indeed, Carrasco's (1991) volume cited earlier, and contributions therein by Broda and Aveni, dealt with mapping ritual time on the lived Aztec local landscape. As Broda indicates, volume contributors 'continued to study Aztec ritual landscapes that were designed from the capital of Tenochtitlan integrating ceremonial routes of pilgrimage that embraced the entire Basin of Mexico. It certainly was an impressive landscape where the high mountains and the monumental imperial temple architecture were reflected in a myriad of spectacular images in the waters of the lakes'. I would add that aural and other non-visual cues shaped individual experience of orienting oneself within the cosmos. Moreover, bodily movement and sensory engagement embedded each person in both cosmic and political landscapes (Richards 1996; Tilley 1994).

Benjamin Vining takes us to a different place and different scales of time mapping. He adopts Ingold's (1993) description of *temporality* to discuss 'how shifting perceptions of time, cultural attitudes and politics impact local views of the archaeological landscape'. As part of an archaeological survey project in the high mountains of southern Peru, Vining asked local residents about archaeological remains in the vicinity. He explains how these Aymara speakers locate past,

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present and future in distinct spatial domains, and hold contrasting values for each of those domains.

Archaeological ruins in the area, associated with the past, have generally negative connotations; as a consequence, the ruins are not even acknowledged as present. Rock piles of varying age, however, act as boundary markers and are therefore valued in contemporary discussion of land rights. His arguments are reminders of the potency of understanding space better by acknowledging the shaping effects of time—and political economies. He also extends the time/space discussions of other articles by bringing us into the context of *today*, to beliefs and practices of pastoral groups who are arguably somewhat more removed from control of daily life by state elites than were the daykeepers, scribes, architects and planners discussed in other articles. Nevertheless, by linking landscape conceptualization to politico-economic utility, Vining mirrors political implications of other contributions. As always, more concerted conferring is needed among those who study the past and the present (also see R. Hall 1997).

Cosmovision

Without repeating earlier comments, I call attention to how Broda, Sabo and colleagues and Landau situate people within the cosmos around them, on a daily, seasonal and other temporal basis. Broda discusses how ritual shrines and ritual circuits connecting them map a sacred geography that, in both Aztec and Inca cases, relates the mundane world to the supernatural, cosmic, and political one. Sabo and his colleagues make similar inferences about assemblages of rock art identifying a comparably multidimensional sacred geography in Central Arkansas. Landau argues for cosmology as a strong but not determinative factor in conceiving and constructing at least parts of the urban landscape at Copan, again in the context of a dynamic politico-economic world.

Work by Reiko Ishihara (2008) at the Maya site of Aguateca. Guatemala, further illustrates such a nexus of belief, religious practice, economics and politics, this time in the great chasm or *grieta* that splits the Maya city in two horizontally, from roughly north to south. It also provides the city with a vertical dimension, linking the surface world with an 'open cave' to the underworld. The chasm predates the city, of course, and one of its most notable features is a portion of the chasm 'floor' associated with daily phenomena of rising temperatures, cloud formation and wind. Nicknamed 'Chill Hill' and inferred as a place where clouds arise and bring rain, this ritual space emerged at a time of increasing drought. Establishment of the royal palace alongside the east side of the chasm at Chill Hill points to political opportunism whereby rain-calling rituals are associated with the king, who is then credited with bringing the precious water from the sky. James Brady (1997) describes a broadly similar occurrence at the nearby city of Dos Pilas, and other examples abound across the globe (e.g. Richards 1996; Schmidt 1983).

One of the most striking Old World counterparts to the foregoing inferences, to me, is the Stonehenge Riverside Project of Mike Parker Pearson and colleagues (2006), in the specific landscape encompassing Stonehenge, Durrington Walls, the River Avon and other places and features in their vicinity. Inspired by proposed parallels of cosmovision in the Stonehenge landscape and that of faraway, millennia later and culturally distinct Madagascar, the authors interpret the ancient British landscape of stone and wood monuments as mapping cycles of birth, death and renewal. In Madagascar, impermanent wood constructions are associated with the living, while stone 'expresses the eternal in material form' (Parker Pearson & Ramilisonina 1998, 311). Provisionally applying this relational analogy in the Stonehenge Riverside landscape, timber construction at and near Durrington Walls is in the Domain of the Living, while Stonehenge is the Domain of the Ancestors. Parker Pearson and colleagues propose that experiences of social groups in that domain were united not by politics, economics, or a state government, but by the cosmovision that mapped the transit of the seasons and of the human life cycle onto the land they inhabited. As mentioned earlier for New World contexts, processions and other practices situate human bodies in terrestrial space so designated. Astronomical phenomena as well as natural and built features are the 'tangible' markers of time and space that guided their lives for centuries. As in all cases of this section, space, time and cosmovision are the dimensions of such lived experience.

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Wendy Ashmore earned her doctorate at the University of Pennsylvania, and has conducted archaeological research in prehispanic sites of Guatemala, Honduras and Belize. Her primary research foci are settlement patterns, landscape and the social meanings of space. Among her publications are *Lowland Maya Settlement Patterns* (ed. Ashmore, 1981), *Archaeologies of Landscape: Contemporary Approaches* (eds. Wendy Ashmore & A. Bernard Knapp, 1999), and *Settlement Archaeology at Quirigua, Guatemala* (2007). In 2012, the American Anthropological Association recognized Ashmore with the Alfred Vincent Kidder Award for Eminence in American Archaeology.

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