

# Chapter 18

## Multivocality in Multimedia: Collaborative Archaeology and the Potential of Cyberspace

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### Introduction

In recent years, archaeologists have paid increasing attention to how knowledge of the past is constructed, particularly as Native communities have begun to challenge practices that uphold the researcher as the ultimate arbitrator of the truth. The concept of “multivocality” provides scholars one means to create alternative archaeologies that do not eschew scientific principles while respecting Native values of history. Moving beyond traditional epistemological stances, however, may also entail moving beyond traditional methods of presenting the archaeological past.

This essay discusses a collaborative archaeology project carried out in Arizona’s San Pedro Valley with four Native American tribes: Hopi, San Carlos Apache, Tohono O’odham, and Zuni. The project entailed 3 years of ethnohistoric research, followed by efforts to develop an Internet site that presents the ways in which one cultural landscape is infused with multiple – complementary and contesting – viewpoints. As a case study, we consider what this embryonic Web site says about the potential of cyberspace for presenting alternative archaeologies grounded in a critical multivocality.

With the development of cultural resource management (CRM) in the USA in the 1970s, with its focus on research conducted in the public interest, archaeologists have become increasingly interested in finding ways to share the process and results of their research with a wide range of communities. CRM has also flourished outside of the USA, and thus emerging forms of public-oriented programs constitute a global phenomenon (Cleere 1984; Creamer 1990; Lertrit 2000; Palumbo et al. 1995). This general approach to working with the range of publics interested in the material

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remains of the past has now mushroomed into a field of connected though distinct practices, including “public archaeology” (Gadsby and Chidester 2007; McGimsey 1972; Merriman 2004), “community archaeology” (Marshall 2002; Mullins 2007), “applied archaeology” (Downum and Price 1999; Shackel 2004), “Indigenous archaeology” (Atalay 2006; Smith and Wobst 2005; Watkins 2000), and “collaborative archaeology” (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008; Kerber 2006). While we see no need at this juncture to unite these varied approaches, we nonetheless note that “multivocality” is a common concept to these practices, a useful means of hearing the voices of all those who have a stake in the past.

Despite exciting new forms of public outreach, CRM in the USA largely remains a technical means of identifying and assessing heritage properties and mitigating damage to them through research, while public archaeology, when done, tends towards a “let the public see what we are doing” kind of approach. While we can cite several clear exceptions (Leone et al. 1987; McDavid 2002; Swidler et al. 2000), in the main, public-oriented archaeology in the USA has yet to take the more fully reflexive and engaged modes that have been attempted elsewhere (Bender et al. 2007; Hodder 2003). Our work in the USA is a link to some of these more global trends, one American example that contributes towards shaping a more coherent approach that can be employed globally, irrespective of national borders.

## In Theory

Over the last several decades, scholars have become attuned to the ways in which archaeology is used, valued, and debated outside of the discipline. In the USA, controversies, such as those involving the disposition of the Kennewick Man/Ancient One, illustrate that scientists are not the only group that cares about how archaeological remains created in the past are treated and used in the present (Downey 2000; Watkins 2005). The “contested past” extends far beyond Native North America, from the looting of Iraq (Garen 2006) to the Bamiyan Buddhas’ destruction (Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2003), the pagan celebrations at Stonehenge (Chippindale 1986), the feud over the Parthenon marbles (Hamilakis 1999), and to the riot over Ayodhya (Bernbeck and Pollock 1996). These examples demonstrate that the contested past is often not about the past per se, but rather about control and power in the social and political present.

With the recognition that archaeologists are just one of many stakeholders, scholars have begun to explore how collaboration provides the means to transcend the contested past. Much of this work addresses how archaeologists and anthropologists have long fostered misrepresentations, and acknowledging that researchers do not necessarily have a privileged view into the past (Thomas 2000). As Robert W. Preucel and his colleagues (2006: 186) have written, “Museums are embarking upon a long journey to confront their own challenge ... to redress their history of representing Indian cultures as ‘primitive,’ ‘static,’ and ‘dying.’ We must devise new ways of

representing indigenous peoples that acknowledge their vitality, resilience, and ongoing struggles to gain political standing. ... we cannot make this journey alone; rather, we must make it in partnership with indigenous peoples.”

As archaeologists seek new partnerships with stakeholders, they face the challenge of finding new ways of listening and sharing different perspectives. This challenge, in essence, revolves around the concept of multivocality. The literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1984: 18) popularized this term to express how Fyodor Dostoevsky’s work “is constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousnesses as objects into itself, but as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other.” As Bakhtin explains, multivocality is not a mere celebration of different views, but a means to embrace creative tension when different voices come together. Multivocality here is thus no simple plurality, but an *engagement* of different voices arising together to tell a whole and complex story.

An approach of multivocality should be open to all views, but it is not an “anything goes” approach; it does not mean the end of science. We can still evaluate interpretations of the past even as we acknowledge that scientific modes of knowledge production are not the only legitimate means of arriving at the “truth” (Whiteley 2002; Wiget 1982; Zimmerman 2008). The validity of multivocality does necessarily come from a perfect synthesis of different voices, but rather from the internal coherency of each narrative and how each narrative contributes to our overall understanding of past worlds (Atalay 2008). Andrea Smith (2004: 254) explains that any act of looking backwards in time necessarily involves incorporating different viewpoints because, as she writes: “everyday discourses about the past, like discourse on other subjects, should also contain multiple perspectives and voices. In fact, narratives about the past may be especially dialogic. Not only do subgroups of each society share a multitude of stories and perspectives on the past, but in looking back individuals are also necessarily addressing previous themes and prior points of view. Hence, other voices (or Bakhtin’s ‘words of others’) may be even more prevalent in reminiscences than in other kinds of discourse.”

Multivocality in archaeology is inherently more anthropological than an approach that strictly depends on natural science methodologies. Opening up multiple narratives of history entails a broader approach that aspires to understand both the past and the values that communities have for the past in their present discourse and construction of identity. Incorporating these different views necessitates valuing inclusivity. We hear different voices when we engage in a genuine and respectful dialogue with others. Thus, multivocality not only fosters a more holistic anthropological archaeology, but also a more ethical approach, because it is grounded in the virtues we want to cultivate through our work (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2004, 2006b).

In sum, multivocality is an important part of collaborative archaeology because it recognizes that narratives of the past are inherently dialogic and multivocal. It is deeply anthropological because it seeks to understand not only the past, but also the significance of the past to people today. Finally, it involves genuine and respectful dialogue, not the mere use of other people’s histories for scientific ends.

## In Practice

The San Pedro Valley of southern Arizona is a persistent place, home to generations of Native peoples over the last 13,000 years. Some of the earliest sites in the USA are found in the San Pedro Valley, the vestiges of Paleoindians who hunted mammoths, bison, and other big game animals (Haynes and Huckell 2007). These peoples were followed by other native groups in the Archaic Period who began crafting ceramics and cultivating corn, beans, and squash. These developments led to village life, and the archaeological cultures known as the Hohokam, Salado, and Ancestral Puebloans (Doelle 1995). The first Spanish entrada, of Francisco Vázquez de Coronado in 1540, likely traversed through the valley and in subsequent centuries this region formed a crucial frontier in the northward expansion of the Spanish and Mexican empires (Flint and Flint 1997). European colonialism greatly impacted local Native groups, including the Sobaipuri, Manso, and Suma, establishing the foundations of Euro–American and Indian social relations (Spicer 1962). When Arizona became part of the USA in 1848, the birth of the “American West” was played out in the San Pedro Valley, where Apaches sought to defend a revered homeland and American settlers sought to civilize a country they believed rightly theirs.

Throughout the 1990s, the nonprofit Center for Desert Archaeology (CDA) in Tucson, Arizona, conducted an archaeological survey of the San Pedro Valley, where it actively pursued educational and preservation programs (Doelle and Clark 2003). While the CDA archaeologists learned a lot about the valley’s past from a scientific perspective, they recognized that they knew relatively little about the region’s traditional history. The CDA thus sought to learn more about how descendant communities conceive of their ancestors, the cultural values these communities have for ancestral villages, and the historical narratives embedded in tribal traditions. All of these topics were all recognized as important elements in a humanistic understanding of the past and as significant variables in an equitable management of heritage sites in the future. This realization led the CDA to develop the San Pedro Ethnohistory Project, a 3-year study funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, and conducted in close collaboration with the Hopi, San Carlos and White Mountain Apache, Tohono O’odham, and Zuni tribes.

The research involved four methodologies: “place-based” interviews, which entailed taking groups of cultural advisors to archaeological sites to talk about land and history; semistructured interviews that took place on tribal reservations with elders and other tribal colleagues who could not participate in the field work; studies of museum collections that hold artifacts excavated from the region (Fig. 18.1); and meetings and review sessions to ensure that the work was proceeding respectfully and equitably. The research products from this work included a scholarly book (Ferguson and Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2006), numerous articles (e.g., Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2006a), and a 16-page full-color magazine devoted to the study (Ferguson et al. 2004). Four thousand copies of the magazine were produced, with 1,000 going to each tribe for free distribution among its members, while



**Fig. 18.1** Apache elders Larry Mallow Sr. (*left*) and Jeanette Cassa examine ceramics from the San Pedro Valley at the Arizona State Museum (photo by Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh)

hundreds of more copies went to those living in the San Pedro Valley today so that they could better understand the tribal histories and values of their home.

At the end of the project, our Native colleagues expressed their satisfaction about the outcomes, but they challenged us to imagine how we could reach an even wider audience, particularly Native American youth, in a way that went beyond standard texts. (Even with the color magazine, we recognized that only a subset of the public will ever sit down to read about the valley.) We briefly considered producing a video, but dismissed this idea because of its costs and limited reach, since many TV education shows are seen only a handful of times. We then began exploring the idea of a multimedia and interactive Web site.

After informally surveying the Internet, we determined that there are six basic kinds of Web sites that concern archaeology: virtual digs, information sharing (e.g., *Archaeology Magazine*), commercial pursuits (e.g., eBay), database management, educational sites, and blogs. None of the sites we found when we conducted this search embodied the kind of dynamic, multivocal approach to archaeology that we pursued in the research phase of the San Pedro Ethnohistory Project. And none of the sites employed the range of media strategies available on the Internet to provide a sense of place, the richness of an elder telling an ancient story, or a translation of complex archaeological data into lessons that are easily understandable. Furthermore, we found that the vast majority of educational sites are geared towards school children instead of the broader adult public or specific tribal, underserved communities.

From our perspective, there is a clear need for ongoing public education and dialogue about Native American history and archaeology. Most Americans today remain fundamentally uninformed about the events, people, and processes that led to the American Southwest's contemporary social and political landscape (Bataille 2001). Native Americans are often perceived to be inconsequential to America's past, peoples near extinction. Modern reservations lead the public to think that these land holdings are timeless entities rather than the result of expedient nineteenth and twentieth century political policy. Countless books and articles *about* but not *by* Native Americans have further fostered misconceptions about Indian culture, lifeways, and worldviews. For many, stereotypes supplant understanding. This can be seen anecdotally in the San Pedro Valley, where the few representations of Native Americans are restricted to life-size wooden carvings of Indians in front of convenience stores and streets named after far-away tribes, like Choctaw Drive and Sioux Avenue (Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2009). Devon Mihesuah (1996) has eloquently described the persistence of false Native American stereotypes in the USA, ranging from representations of Indians as being all alike to being godless with no religion. Recent surveys also suggest that the general public misunderstands archaeology and how scientists come to understand the ancient past. A Harris Interactive poll, for example, demonstrated that 8% of Americans associate archaeology with ancient cultures while 52% primarily associate the field with digging, bones, and dinosaurs (Ramos and Duganne 2000).

Yet, the strong and abiding interest of the public in Southwestern archaeology and Native American history and culture is also clear. Heritage tourism has exploded in the last decade, particularly in the American Southwest with its many Native communities and archaeological parks. A recent survey conducted by the Arizona Humanities Council, for example, found that 59% of the people who come to Arizona visit historic sites (Arizona Office of Tourism 2006) and a recent report by the University of Arizona noted that in 2000 almost 93 million Americans sought out heritage-related activities while vacationing (Leones and Dunn 1999). The continuing popularity of authors such as Tony Hillerman and movies such as *The New World* also illustrate the enduring fascination with Native America. The Harris Interactive poll noted above also indicates that 90% of the American public believes that students should learn about archaeology in school. The seminal study of Rosenzweig and Thalen (1998: 12) confirm that Americans are deeply invested in our collective past, but they dislike the "nation-centered accounts they were forced to memorize and regurgitate in school." Americans, the authors argue, want history they can explore on their own terms, without excessive mediation from scholars; they want history to transport them back to the times when events were unfolding; they want history to open up their world to new voices and experiences.

The primary goal of the San Pedro Internet Project was to extend and transform the original research program into an education project that reaches a national public audience, Native American communities, and those living along the San Pedro Valley today. More specifically, our aims included: encouraging young tribal members to learn about the past from their elders; strengthening alliances with educational and cultural organizations; correcting public confusion about Indian culture

and history; fostering critical thinking about history; providing a venue of public education for tourists who visit Indian lands; cultivating an appreciation for the desert land, water, plants, and wildlife; and expanding a collaborative and multivocal archaeology with new technologies.

In the fall of 2004, we received a Planning Grant from the Southwestern Foundation for Education and Historical Preservation to prepare an NEH Special Projects grant application. With this financial support, we conducted a 2-day workshop with tribal participants and project personnel, created a preliminary proof-of-concept Web site, held preparatory meetings among project scholars, and traveled to meet with our Native American colleagues. Over the course of 2 days, a group of tribal cultural advisors, scholars, and professionals met to create the overall vision for the SPEIP. The workshop was headed by Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson, who have worked extensively with the tribes, and Douglas Gann, whose expertise includes digital technologies and heritage interpretation. This group was joined by a Hopi multimedia graphic designer (Gerald Dawavendewa), a specialist in online curriculum development (Sara P. Chavarria), and a specialist in multimedia education projects (Neil Markowitz).

The next year we received an NEH Special Projects Planning Grant to expand our original concept, continue our collaboration, conduct three focus groups, and prepare an NEH Implementation Grant. For this phase of the planning process, we decided to refocus the proof-of-concept Web site on just one tribe (Hopi), with the archaeological perspective providing a counterpoint. With limited planning funds, this approach of depth over breadth allows us to illustrate what could be done with all four tribes when full funding is provided. In early November, Ferguson and Gann conducted 16 interviews of Hopi tribal members; planning meetings were held with the staff of the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office; and collaborative work continued with Dawavendewa. Later in November, we held planning meetings with our Zuni, San Carlos Apache, and Tohono O'odham colleagues. A draft of the proof-of-concept Web site was completed in December 2005 and reviewed by the project participants and the CDA staff and advisors. In January 2006, Chavarria held three focus groups with students at the University of Arizona, adults at the Benson Public Library, and Tohono O'odham tribal members at the Venito Garcia Library. Based on the quantitative and qualitative feedback from these focus groups, the proof-of-concept Web site was revised and reviewed again by our tribal colleagues, project staff, and CDA personnel, along with the finalized grant proposal.

Unfortunately, despite all these efforts, our implementation grant was not funded so Internet site has yet to be completed. We think the successes of the project to date include the active participation and partnership between an archaeological organization and Native American communities, and making substantive strides towards showing how projects can be mutually beneficial for scholars and Indigenous peoples. Additionally, we think that the Internet is an ideal vehicle to provide a multivocal perspective on the San Pedro Valley. The use of Native designs, wiki dialogues (software that allows users to create, edit, and link Web pages easily to create a collaborative Web site), audio and video interviews in both English and Native languages, photography, instructional text, interactive features, and Native



**Fig. 18.2** A screen shot of a page explaining Hopi beliefs about corn (designed by Gerald Dawavendewa and Doug Gann)

music all combine to effectively show that the valley has not one history but many histories, not one voice but many voices (Fig. 18.2). However, this is a task with few, if any, precedents, so one of the main challenges is to come up with a user interface that is intuitive and simple yet conveys the complexity of the cultural landscape and historical perspectives.

## Conclusion

From this project, we have come to see how collaboration cultivates multivocality. That is, by working with descendant communities, we are compelled to seek out and hear their stories, new stories about the past. In turn, multimedia has the unmatched potential to not only disseminate multivocal knowledge, but also regenerate it. That is, through mechanisms, such as wikis and enthralling Internet videos, by reaching Native youth and those living among the ruins of past cultures, the Internet uniquely provides the opportunity to invigorate a public conversation about archaeology and American Indian history.



Alison Wylie (1995: 258) has observed that “Colonial or neocolonial domination [is] marked by a sustained and deliberate delegitimation of the historical consciousness of those whose heritage and identity are in question, sometimes including the systematic erasure of their historical presence.” Thus, to undo archaeology’s colonial inheritance we must seek to create projects that are defined by a sustained and deliberate *legitimization* of the historical consciousness of those whose heritage and identity are in question. Through the theoretical approach of a collaborative multivocality and the methodological approach of multimedia, we thus seek to create humanistic perspectives of the past, explore the mechanisms of domination in history, and to alter the political economy of scholarly research. The lessons learned here, we hope, will be of interest to public, community, applied, indigenous, and collaborative archaeologies alike.

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