the ocean is not merely a space used by society; it is one component of the space of society. (Steinberg 2001: 20)

Seas cover 70% of Earth’s surface, yet for all of recorded history most people have spent their lives on land. Landscapes are normative—hills, forests, rivers, buildings, roads, and myriad other marked places structure, order, frame, constrain, and give meaning to our lives as social beings sharing a lived space. Whether your landscape is the tropical rainforest of lowland Papua New Guinea or the concrete jungle of New York, every morning you can wake up and traverse your landscape and experience through visual, olfactory, acoustic, and tactile senses familiar and fixed surroundings resonating with memories, emotions, and deep symbolic meaning. The main phenomena you experience as ever changing are the weather and social engagements with people. But what if your landscape was morphologically dynamic and fluid? It is such a dynamic realm that maritime peoples engage with day to day. If landscapes are so important to social behavior and identity, how is it that maritime peoples whose social realm is mostly the sea construct their identity, through seascapes, resonating with memories, deep knowledge, and symbolic meaning? Maritime people’s intimacy with the sea is illustrated well by Torres Strait Islanders of north-east Australia who have “more than 80 terms for different tides and tidal conditions” (Nietschmann 1989: 69) and whose history includes use and ecological knowledge of 450 species of marine animals (McNiven and Hitchcock 2004).

This chapter explores the cosmological construction of seascapes and the special ways maritime peoples engage with and control seascapes. The fluidity of seascapes presents unique challenges for cultural inscription and place-marking not generally encountered for landscapes. Focusing on Australian Indigenous seascapes, I argue that a key cosmological element of seascape construction and engagement is spiritscapes and the imbuenment of seas with anthropomorphic spiritual entities. For archaeologists, such spiritscapes—as a relational nexus between people, spirits, and the sea—are the key to defining, understanding, and appreciating ancient seascapes (cf. Thomas 2001). I posit that ancient seascapes as spiritscapes can be accessed and historicized, in part, through archaeological analysis of places of ritual orchestration located strategically across tidal flats and the adjacent coastal zone. An archaeology of seascapes, therefore, necessitates an archaeology of spiritscapes. This is the major theme of this chapter.
Seascapes: What Are They?

My spiritscapes approach responds to and aims to redress limitations of Western definitions and constructions of seascapes in encompassing the broader cosmological and spiritual dimensions of past Australian Indigenous seascapes. It emerged out of attempts to develop a conceptual framework that could accommodate the cultural meaning and significance of two seemingly enigmatic archaeological site types from northeastern Australia: dugong bone mounds on Torres Strait islands (cf. McNiven and Feldman 2003) and stone arrangements across tidal mudflats along the central Queensland coast (cf. McNiven 2003). So what are Western conceptions of seascapes, and how have they limited understanding of Indigenous seascapes?

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines seascape as “a picture of the sea” and “a picturesque view or prospect of the sea” (Trumble and Stevenson 2002: 2727). The English term seascape is most commonly used in reference to visual representations of the sea (mostly paintings and photographs), usually depictions of natural coastlines or ships. Beyond this authoritative and generally accepted view, it is difficult to find more nuanced definitions. In recent years, seascapes have been incorporated into environmental and heritage management, reflecting both the rise of environmentalism and concerns for heritage in general (cf. UNESCO Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage 1972) and increased interest in seas following the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982 and more recently the UNESCO Convention for the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage 2001. Although none of these conventions mentions “seascapes,” various government agencies around the world have incorporated the term into heritage management discourse. The Guide to Best Practice in Seascapes Assessment (Hill et al. 2001), a joint Irish/Welsh initiative, provides a “definition of seascape” based on the OED definition but “broadened the concept and assumed the definition to include: views from land to sea, views from sea to land, views along coastline, [and] the effect on landscape of the conjunction of sea and land” (Hill et al. 2001: 1). However, this definition of seascapes remains superficial for our purposes.

Why do Westerners tend not to conceptualize seascapes beyond sea vistas? Key to understanding this limitation is appreciating the history of European capitalism and the associated production of seascapes as little more than areas of sea, devoid of deeper cosmological, cultural, and political meaning, may be linked with European legal notions of the “freedom of the seas” and seas as public space. In Saltwater People: The Waves of Memory, anthropologist Nonie Sharp (2002) links the development of the “freedom of the seas” notion with the European desire for unmitigated access to the world’s waters for trade and commerce during the 17th and 18th centuries. Critical was the c. 1604 treatise Mare Liberum (Freedom of the Seas) by Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius. According to Philip Steinberg (2001), mare liberum was central to capitalist constructions of the ocean-space as an empty, nonterritorial domain defined as an antithetical counterpoint to land-space. Furthermore, the ocean was seen “as an empty surface between the terrestrial places that ‘mattered’ . . . the sea was constructed as an asocial space between societies” (Steinberg 2001: 208). This emptiness and placelessness established a cartographic tradition of representing sea-space two dimensionally as homogenized blue space and necessitated a new (arbitrary) georeferencing grid system of latitude and longitude for European ocean navigation. Steinberg (2001: 122) points out that mare liberum is encapsulated in Jules Verne’s 1869 famous novel 20,000 Leagues under the Sea, wherein Captain Nemo describes the sea as “an immense desert. . . . Only there do I have no master! There I am free” (Verne 2000: 68–69).

Sharp (2002) argues that a key consequence of mare liberum was that it blinded most Europeans to those maritime societies, usually small-scale Indigenous communities, with complex seascapes. However, such a view also ignored complex traditional seascapes of various small-scale maritime societies in Europe, especially in Scandinavia (e.g., Westerdahl 2005). But what are these complex seascapes? Remarkably, scholarly insights into the nature and the construction of complex seascapes are restricted to the past 40 years.

A major conceptual leap was the publication, in 1989, of A Sea of Small Boats, edited by anthropologist John Cordell. In his introduction to this seminal volume, Cordell (1989: 1) provides a clear and useful definition of complex seascapes: “Seascapes are blanketed with history and imbued with names, myths, and legends, and elaborate territories that sometimes become exclusive provinces partitioned with traditional rights and owners much like property on land.” The impetus for the volume was the plight of many small-scale maritime fishing communities around the world whose fishing rights and broader systems of “customary maritime tenure”...
government agencies and bureaucracies imposing open-access, common property doctrines regarding in-shore areas and resources. In the settler colonies of Australia and the Americas, such impingement reflected the doctrine of *mare liberum* and ignorance that rendered Indigenous seascapes invisible to be mapped as vacant "blue" space.

A key ethical consequence of these actions is that it not only effaces legal recognition of seascapes and strips Indigenous communities of their ancestral rights to customary marine tenure but also delegitimizes those rights and represents them as legally and morally counter to the common law right of "freedom of the seas." It is a moral philosophy to legitimize colonial expansion. In other contexts, for example, Japan and Oceania, customary marine tenure remains strong and supported by government agencies (Ruddle and Akimichi 1984, 1989). However, fisherfolk of European heritage in North America have developed informal marine tenure systems that often clash with governmental formal policies that juggle open access and regulations (Bowles and Bowles 1989; McCay 1989) and in some cases Native American treaty rights (Knutson 1989; Langdon 1989). *A Sea of Small Boats* was the first major step toward filling the knowledge void on complex seascapes in terms of customary marine tenure. The past decade has seen a focus of research on Australian Indigenous systems of sea tenure and cosmological construction of seascapes. Key volumes are *Li-anthawirriyarra, People of the Sea* by John Bradley (1997); *Customary Marine Tenure in Australia*, edited by anthropologists Nicolas Peterson and Bruce Rigby (1998); *Saltwater People*, compiled by the Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre (1999); and *Saltwater People* by Nonie Sharp (2002). Key journal papers include Jackson (1995), Mulrennan and Scott (2000), Magowan (2001) and Morphy and Morphy (2006).

Much of our awareness of the above-mentioned issues and problems has come about from Indigenous calls for recognition of their Indigenous rights not simply to *land*, as defined by Western legal custom and following Western agendas of recognition, but from broader conceptions of place, as defined by Indigenous peoples' own customary legal frameworks. Demands for legal recognition of Indigenous seascapes has resulted in major advances in understanding customary marine tenure, the territorial dimensions of seascapes, and the cosmological construction of seascapes by Western academics (mainly anthropologists). That these advances are beginning to have broader impact is revealed by a recent issue of the English-based journal *World Archaeology* devoted to "seascapes." In his intro-

observed that "seeing and thinking of the sea as seascape—contoured, alive, rich in ecological diversity and in cosmological and religious significance and ambiguity—provides a new perspective on how people in coastal areas actively create their identities, sense of place and histories."

This new perspective similarly informs my conceptual approach to seascape archaeology (McNiven 2003; McNiven and Feldman 2003). It also provides the basis of my definition of seascapes as the *lived sea-spaces central to the identity of maritime peoples. They are owned by right of inheritance, demarcated territorially, mapped with named places, historicized with social actions, engaged technologically for resources, imbued with spiritual potency and agency, orchestrated ritually, and legitimated cosmologically.* This definition concerns communities who are best described as "maritime peoples" or "sea peoples" or in the Indigenous Australian context—"Saltwater peoples" (Sharp 2002). For such peoples the sea is central to identity. For example, the Yanyuwa people of the Gulf of Carpentaria (NE Australia) "use as a metaphor for their existence and their identity the term *Li-anthawirriyarra*, which means "those people whose spiritual and cultural heritage comes from the sea” (Bradley 1998: 131). For the remainder of this chapter, I explore the spiritual and ritual dimensions of seascapes of maritime peoples and what I consider to be a key aspect to the cosmological construction of seascapes as spiritiscapes—anthropomorphism.

**Anthropomorphic Construction of Seascapes as Spiritiscapes**

Cosmological construction of seascapes as spiritiscapes socializes seas and marine environments so they are

1. explicable and comprehensible;
2. domesticated and familiar;
3. historical and transformative;
4. sociable and engagable.

Separation of these four dimensions is difficult, because they exhibit considerable overlap. The key aspect of overlap and the essential basis of the seascapes as spiritiscapes construction is animism through anthropomorphism whereby certain marine *features, forces, and fauna are imbued with sentience expressed largely as human cognitive, emotional, and social qualities. Thus the sea, as a
to human presence and action in much the same way that people are capable of reacting consciously to the presence and the action of the sea (see Anderson 2000 for an extended discussion of “sentient ecology”). Anthropomorphism imbues the sea with agency and intentionality such that it can be engaged sensuously and socially and controlled ritually in certain circumstances.

**Explicable and Comprehensible**

A key aspect of human cosmological construction of seascapes is anthropomorphic imbueuent of “inanimate” (for example, waves) and “animate” (for instance, animals) phenomena with various degrees of human physical, cognitive, emotional, and/or social qualities. In *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion*, Guthrie (1993) argues that animism and anthropomorphism are central to religious belief and to human perception and cognitive capacities more generally. The intuitive capacity and tendency for anthropomorphism by humans is revealed by its constant employment in animal behavior studies by scientists (Kennedy 1992). “We habitually anthropomorphize about animal behaviour, using our own mental processes as models to ‘explain’ the behaviour in terms of intentions” (Kennedy 1992: 89). Kennedy (1992: 167) goes so far as to suggest that anthropomorphism “is probably programmed into us genetically” (cf. Boyer 1996). The attribution of spiritual entities to phenomena, largely through a process of anthropomorphism, provides an ontological framework to structure, to understand, and to explain the “natural” world. This framework is in direct contrast to the ontological dualism between society and nature—the cornerstone of Western science.

Nietzsche (1989: 60) cogently observes that “people conceptually produce the environment they use, delimit, and defend.” Environment encapsulates the engaged spaces and phenomena of society while cosmologies account for what is relevant and important to know and understand in the environment. “Anthropomorphism may best be explained as a result of an attempt to see not what we want to see or what is easy to see, but what is *important* to see: what may affect us for better or worse” (Guthrie 1993: 82–83). The desire to make phenomena and processes comprehensible and explicable is needs-based and engagement-dependent. I suggest that marine cosmologies tend to focus on dynamic forces (for example, tides, winds, currents) and associated topographical features (for instance, channels, reefs, sandbanks), because understanding processes that influence and determine spatial and temporal variability of these phenomena is critical for marine people’s livelihoods. To this I would add that what is considered dynamic is culturally contingent and based on culturally specific degrees of engagement and intimacy with dynamic phenomena.

Anthropomorphic ascription concerns both “static” and “dynamic” marine phenomena. For example, the Goemulgal of Mabuyag island (Torres Strait, NE Australia) know that granite boulders emerging from the sea to the west of their residential island are Kamunab and her children who “sat down in the sea” after a family argument (see Lawrie 1970: 85–86 for details). In terms of dynamic phenomena, Burarra and Yan-nhangu peoples of northeast Arnhem Land (Australia) use human anatomical and behavioral “referents for various saltwater features,” such as “knees” for waves, “teeth” or “mouth” for “the shoreline edge of the sea,” “abdomen” for “moderately distant waters,” “habitually speaking” for “the constant crashing of beach surf and of inshore waves,” and “rumble” or “growl” for “the more distant (and therefore less clearly audible) waters of open sea” (Bagshaw 1998: 159).

**Domesticated and Familiar**

A key aspect of anthropomorphic imbueuent of seascapes is a cosmological cartography of creation narratives and placenames. In conjunction with dwelling and engagement (see Thomas this volume), such narratives and placenames socialize spaces by making them part of one’s familiar, historicized and ancestral environment. As Nietzsche (1989) notes, “places used are places named.” For example, the Yolngu of northeast Arnhem Land (northern Australia) understand that numerous places such as “rocks, sandbanks, mud banks, channels, tidal eddies or reefs” were created by ancestral beings and may even be places where such ancestral beings still reside (Davis 1989: 51; see also Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre 1999; Morphy and Morphy 2006). An important part of seascape narratives, as for landscape narratives, is a vocabulary of placenames that help to structure and to punctuate narrative events and engagements. In the context of the Aegean Sea during Hellenic times, Loukatos (1976: 468) suggested (albeit in a somewhat simplistic and functionalist sense) that anthropomorphism of coastal features was due to “man’s [sic] need for a milieu of ‘human-like’ beings, and to his [sic] fear of solitude.” Furthermore, the “capes, promontories, rocks, and islets, because of their strange forms or
or enemies of the sailors, and sometimes, veritable monsters to be avoided. But, in merciless solitude, any animated presence is acceptable, even if it is an agent of the devil" (Loukatos 1976: 469). Yet Indigenous Australians reveal that placenames in the sea can take on greater referential significance and spiritual potency. For example, the Yanyuwa of the Gulf of Carpentaria recount the mythic journey of the Spirit Ancestor Dugong Hunters for a distance of 110 kilometers through their seas; a journey marked by more than 50 named places on islands and in the sea (Figure 13.1). Yanyuwa hunters have a strong sense that past and present become one as their own dugong hunting journeys are a recitation and reenactment of the “mythic” journey of the Spirit Ancestor Dugong Hunters (Bradley 1998: 137). Thus, dugong hunting at once recreates the past in the present and reaffirms a cosmology that cocreates a seascape and a maritime identity. In short, cosmological cartographies help legitimate one’s identity and place in the world.

**Historical and Transformative**

All ethnographically known seascapes dealing with the relatively near-shore environment developed within the past 6,000 years given flooding of continental shelves with the postglacial marine transgression. As such, cosmological construction of seascapes, along with associated creation narratives and placenames, all date to some time within the past 6,000 years. While this eustatic reality provides a maximum date for ethnographically known seascapes, it is clear that seascapes, like landscapes, are historically dynamic and ever-evolving.

Part of this dynamism reflects the inherent dynamism of marine environments and concomitant socially mediated changes in marine resource use strategies. When historical events and changing social circumstances are included, it is clear that seascapes represent palimpsests of old and new engagements and perceptions of the sea. Yet such palimpsests are not necessarily cumulative as places can become disengaged and forgotten. Maritime peoples maintain seascapes as dynamic cosmological entities so that they can be kept alive with relevance and resonance. History construction, as a teleological process, constantly reinterpretst those sites and places that are relevant and thus remembered (as heritage) and those sites and places that become irrelevant and eventually forgotten. Thus, relevance and resonance extend...
beyond superficial engagement for raw material and food resources. As discussed above, seascapes are cosmologically constructed and are central to the identity of maritime peoples and their ancestral connections to place. In this connection, Cordell (1989: 34) notes that Torres Strait Islanders “imbue their marine environment with a density of names far in excess of anything that would be required purely by the logistics of fishing. Territories, sub-surface features, rocks, and reef clefts are named after events and mythical characters, providing local people with a constant, visible historical anchor.”

**Sociable and Engagable**

If seascapes are understood cosmologically as anthropomorphized spiritscapes, they can be engaged socially by people. In this conception, the sea is a participant in, not a contextual backdrop to, social engagements (cf. Ingold 2000: 40–60). Thus, maritime people technologically travel across the sea but socially negotiate their way through a seascapes. A “Saltwater person can never be alone while out on the sea” (McNiven 2003: 334). In some circumstances, sensing the presence of a malevolent spiritual entity brings on a psychological state of fear and stress.

In other circumstances, spiritual engagements—phenomenal and sensual, predictable and unpredictable—can have impacts that are benign or neutral (Langton 2002). However, a key quality of spiritscapes is that anthropomorphized phenomena are engaged socially and may be controlled (or contained within the rules of societal frameworks for human behavior in a world shared with spirits) by people through formal, codified ritual performances—sometimes at specially designated places (that is, ritual sites) and sometimes using portable objects (that is, ritual paraphernalia). In marine contexts, I refer to such engagements as the “ritual orchestration of seascapes” (McNiven and Feldman 2003), and it is such ritual orchestrations that can leave rich material signatures amenable to archaeological enquiry.

**Ritual Orchestration of Seascapes**

Maritime peoples undertake a range of rituals to engage with marine spiritscapes. These ritual engagements relate to the following six domains:

1. Continue the availability of key subsistence species (that is, “increase” or “maintenance” of Carpentaria (NE Australia), the “land” or “mainland” starts 3–10 km “inland” from the beach with sand ridges across saltpans considered “islands” in the same sense as off-shore “islands” (Trigger 1987; see also Bradley 1998: 131). Thus marine ritual sites located many kilometers “inland” of the high tide mark may well be considered shoreline sites under certain cosmological and ontological frameworks. As such, my tripartite division is used simply as a heuristic and not as a universalizing ontological statement. Indeed, identifying how cultures of the past ontologically constructed the land-sea interface is necessarily an empirical question that needs to be demonstrated and not assumed (e.g., Helskog 1999). Geographical issues of ontology aside, Australian Indigenous ethnographic examples of each of these three contexts of marine

- 1. Continue the availability of key subsistence species (that is, “increase” or “maintenance”
- 2. Conveying spirits of the dead to the spiritual realm of the sea (for example, mortuary rites);
- 3. Celebrating the creative acts of ancestral beings (for instance, through songs and dances);
- 4. Introduce people to the spirits who inhabit the sea, for their own security or protection (as with certain forms of initiation);
- 5. Capture of key subsistence species (that is, hunting magic);
- 6. Controlling elements important to use of the sea (for example, wind, waves, and tides).

Domains 1 to 3 relate to maintenance and renewal of seascapes to reaffirm maritime cosmology and identity. Domains 5 and 6 relate more to strategic manipulation of seascapes to aid food procurement and sea travel and are often associated with behavioral restrictions (taboos). Domain 4 concerns and links both.

Rituals of orchestration usually take place in the following marine contexts—on land behind the edge of the sea (for example, inland of the high tide mark); across the intertidal zone; and/or across the sea (isolated tidal banks/reefs or on the water surface). Yet, at the outset it is acknowledged that this geographical tripartite structuring is from a Western perspective; the high-tide mark is imbued with ontological significance because it represents the meeting place of two major realms—the land and the sea. Yet for the Burarra and Yan-nhangu peoples of northeast Arnhem Land, the intertidal zone down to the Lowest Astronomical Tide is designated “land” (Bagshaw 1998: 158). Alternatively, for the Gunbalin people of the Gulf of Carpentaria (NE Australia), the “land” or “mainland” starts 3–10 km “inland” from the beach with sand ridges across saltpans considered “islands” in the same sense as off-shore “islands” (Trigger 1987; see also Bradley 1998: 131). Thus marine ritual sites located many kilometers “inland” of the high tide mark may well be considered shoreline sites under certain cosmological and ontological frameworks. As such, my tripartite division is used simply as a heuristic and not as a universalizing ontological statement. Indeed, identifying how cultures of the past ontologically constructed the land-sea interface is necessarily an empirical question that needs to be demonstrated and not assumed (e.g., Helskog 1999). Geographical issues of ontology aside, Australian Indigenous ethnographic examples of each of these three contexts of marine
summarize, examples of open water rituals include returning parts of marine animals (food items) back to the sea for spiritual renewal of these animals, manipulation of sea animal parts (e.g., incorporation of body parts within harpoons when hunting) to attract a species to the hunter or fisher, sea burial of people, and propitiatory offerings to placate sea spirits for safe sea travel. Examples of tidal flat rituals include stone-walled tidal fishtraps with ritual offerings to attract fish and stone arrangements to control the elements. Examples of shoreline rituals include burials and arrangements of stones, bones, and/or shells to attract marine animals or control the elements.

I argue that a key direction for any attempts to access past seascapes through archaeological investigation is focusing on the cosmological construction of seascapes as expressed through rituals of seascapes orchestration. To date, little archaeological attention has been directed toward seascapes rituals. The potential for archaeological insights into open water rituals seems remote given their ephemeral nature and aquatic context (cf. Lindenlauf 2003). Much greater promise exists for ritual sites located across tidal flats and adjacent coastal areas. For example, various locations along the tropical coast of central Queensland, northeast Australia, exhibit Aboriginal stone arrangements of unknown antiquity across intertidal flats. While no ethnographic information has been forthcoming about these sites, I hypothesize that at least some of these sites may be associated with ritual control of extreme tidal regimes critical for scheduling of local marine mobility and subsistence (see McNiven 2003 for details). Case studies of terrestrial sites associated with marine rituals are more common and usually concern hunting magic (mostly associated with marine mammals) and mortuary activities. For example, elaborately constructed mounds of dugong bones are located on various islands in Torres Strait, northeast Australia (see McNiven and Feldman 2003 for details). The number of dugongs in these mounds ranges from a few hundred to many thousands. These mounds are linked to hunting magic rituals with specific items (for example, dugong ear bones) used to establish sensory contact with dugongs to attract these animals to hunters. These mounds date mostly to the past 300–400 years with a maximum known antiquity of 600 years (David and Mura Badulgal 2003; McNiven 2006). Perhaps the best example of mortuary activities that inform marine cosmologies are the boat burials and associated rock art of Scandinavia, Southeast Asia, and

Conclusions

People dwell in a world where negotiating spirit- scapes is part of the normal rhythm of daily life (Thomas 2001: 175–76). Spiritscapes are pervasive and all encompassing. While particular places across land- and seascapes can be the focus of spiritual energies and spiritual beings, spiritual lifefulness can be an essential feature of most phenomena. Often spiritual forces are engaged unpredictably and informally. At other times deliberate attempts are made to engage spiritual forces through formal ritual performances. Seascapes, as the space of maritime peoples, are cosmologically constructed as sentient realms of spiritual energies and entities with anthropomorphic characteristics where mutually recognizable, formal and informal engagements are possible both sensuously and socially. Yet, as archaeologists our conceptual frameworks and methodologies restrict our ability to access marine cosmologies, because we tend to read material culture terrestrially. By conceptually framing seascapes as anthropomorphized spirit- scapes, I have attempted to provide an analytical process whereby engaging with formal ritual sites of the coastal and adjacent intertidal zones puts us in a better position to extend our gaze seaward to appreciate in some small way the seascapes that formed and informed the everyday lives of ancient maritime peoples.

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