Handbook of Landscape Archaeology

Bruno David, Julian Thomas

Counter-Mapping in the Archaeological Landscape

Publication details
Denis Byrne
Published online on: 15 Dec 2008

How to cite :- Denis Byrne. 15 Dec 2008, Counter-Mapping in the Archaeological Landscape from: Handbook of Landscape Archaeology Routledge
Accessed on: 19 Jul 2023

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.
Maps ostensibly depict geographical reality, but we know that they also have a hand in creating that reality. Maps and mapping were instrumental, for instance, in configuring the exotic landscapes of the West’s colonial dominions according to a Western frame of knowledge that enabled them to be understood, administered, and exploited (Carter 1987; Pratt 1992). The mapping of archaeological landscapes is not exempt from the influence of this history. Although it is true that great strides have been taken in the decolonization of archaeological practice over the last few decades (e.g., Hall 2005; Lilley & Williams 2005; McNiven and Russell 2005; Meskell 2005; Smith 2005), it would still be rash to assume that our mapping practices are value-free or ideologically neutral.

My primary concern in this chapter is the contention that we still pay remarkably little attention to the associations that contemporary people have with the archaeological sites that are an integral component of the landscapes in which they live. There are many reasons for this neglect, but my focus is on ways in which our mapping practices both collude in creating the illusion of “unsocialized” archaeological landscapes (that is, landscapes where archaeological traces are not enmeshed in contemporary social practice) and help to operationalize heritage management strategies that ignore social context.

The line of thought in this chapter was triggered by the reading of some of the recent literature by anthropologists working with Indigenous “tribal minorities” in Southeast Asia. In the course of their work, these scholars had become engaged in their subjects’ struggle to preserve the integrity of their forest habitats against encroachment by logging, mining, and even natural conservation interests. Through their engagement, the anthropologists came to appreciate the importance of being able to produce maps of the culturally inscribed landscapes of the forest dwelling groups as a counter, or antidote, to those existing maps that ignored or misrepresented these landscapes. The term counter-mapping has been adopted for what might be described as this tactical deployment of cultural mapping (Brosius et al. 2005; Cooke 2003; Peluso 1995). Anyone who has operated in the fields of cultural heritage or natural resource management knows that interest groups do need maps that describe their interests. To arrive mapless at the decision-making tables at which all the other key players—the loggers and miners, for instance—have unfurled their own maps of your homeland is virtually to invite your own marginalization.
Distancing Discourses

"How do people become aware that they are strangers in their own lands? Sometimes they are forcibly removed. Sometimes they are just reclassified." These words by anthropologist Anna Tsing (1993: 154) are a starting point for thinking about the way that archaeological mapping can make strangers out of the people who live in and around what we refer to as "archaeological landscapes." Tsing’s comment was made with reference to the groups of shifting agriculturalists who occupy many of Southeast Asia’s tropical forests. On colonial era maps, these forests were typically classified as “wasteland” or “barren” land and, as such, were appropriated by the state as unoccupied natural resource zones (Roseman 2003; Sowerwine 2004; Tsing 2003). The field systems and fixed villages of the lowland agricultural areas, by contrast, typically did find their way onto colonial maps, and the people of these areas were recognized as holding traditional title to their fields and plantations. On some early maps, the “blank” areas of forest surrounding zones of settled agriculture are reminiscent of those vacant spaces beyond the edge of the sea that are shown on medieval European maps (Roseman 2003: 114).

The condition of being “off the map” was one in which the forest people, from an official-cartographic point of view, were left floating in a noncartographic space with little or no recognition of their belonging to or in their own country. To be made the subject of colonial mapping may have been onerous for minority groups (Anderson 1991); to be left unmapped could be positively dangerous. The postcolonial governments of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam, rather than rejecting these maps, further elaborated them. The classification of tribal habitats as primary forest simplified the process of treating them as state resources that could be allocated as logging concessions and mining leases to national and international companies without reference to the people who inhabited them. Meanwhile, the “cultural villages” set up by the region’s postcolonial states as tourist attractions purport to offer visitors an authentic experience of ethnic minority cultures in theme-park miniaturized landscapes (Yea 2002). The culture of minority groups is thus celebrated off-site at the same time that it is being threatened in its home terrain. Rather than mapping the cultural landscapes of these peoples in situ in their forest habitats the state chooses to map them elsewhere in microcosm.

If it is understandable that postcolonial govern-
Archaeological traces are continuous with a whole universe of marks in the landscape that we learn to read in the course of our daily lives and in the context of our particular cultural worldview (e.g., Bradley 2002). Archaeologists, however, have been inclined to regard the archaeological record for any one period of the past as part of a landscape that belongs in that period and to that period. We have been inclined to think of it as belonging to the society that produced it. This ignores plentiful evidence that people in the present narrate these traces into their lives through myth or song, that they weave them into their own accounts of who they are, or that they apprehend them as being animated with the presence of spirits or deities. Although the archaeologist is often interested simply in origins, local peoples tend to absorb “archaeological” traces into the lived reality of contemporary lives that are lived in a past-present-future continuum. Distant-nature might thus be said to have a counterpart in a discourse of “distant-traces.” If the former denotes a pure nature that is always “out there” (Campbell 2005: 289) rather than meshed into the contemporary lived environment, then the latter denotes an archaeological record that is always “back there,” rather than integrated by contemporary culture.

Campbell juxtaposes the conservationist’s “distant-nature” mindset with Tim Ingold’s (1992) “dwelling perspective,” which posits a physical environment that is never conceptually separable from our daily lives. Ingold argues that rather than being born into a physical environment that they gradually adapt to using inherited knowledge and skills, people become culturally human by developing knowledge and skills in the course of everyday activities that occur in an environment that is conceptually and practically inseparable from culture. He sees human skills “not as transmitted from generation to generation but [as] . . . regrown in each” (Ingold 2000: 139). Under the conventional “genealogical” model, “the land itself can be no more than a kind of stage” on which culture is enacted (Ingold 2000: 139). In the dwelling perspective, by contrast, the land/environment is part of the same integrated continuum as culture. Both are part of the total experience of dwelling in the world.

Similarly, I suggest we should think of archaeological sites and objects as being an integrated part of the world people dwell in; that we should consider them inseparable from the dwelling experience. These archaeological traces unques-

reality it is always-already there as a dimension of the habitat we learn to live in. Archaeological traces are continuous with a whole universe of marks in the landscape that we learn to read in the course of our daily lives and in the context of our particular cultural worldview (e.g., Bradley 2002). Archaeologists, however, have been inclined to regard the archaeological record for any one period of the past as part of a landscape that belongs in that period and to that period. We have been inclined to think of it as belonging to the society that produced it. This ignores plentiful evidence that people in the present narrate these traces into their lives through myth or song, that they weave them into their own accounts of who they are, or that they apprehend them as being animated with the presence of spirits or deities. Although the archaeologist is often interested simply in origins, local peoples tend to absorb “archaeological” traces into the lived reality of contemporary lives that are lived in a past-present-future continuum. Distant-nature might thus be said to have a counterpart in a discourse of “distant-traces.” If the former denotes a pure nature that is always “out there” (Campbell 2005: 289) rather than meshed into the contemporary lived environment, then the latter denotes an archaeological record that is always “back there,” rather than integrated by contemporary culture.

Campbell juxtaposes the conservationist’s “distant-nature” mindset with Tim Ingold’s (1992) “dwelling perspective,” which posits a physical environment that is never conceptually separable from our daily lives. Ingold argues that rather than being born into a physical environment that they gradually adapt to using inherited knowledge and skills, people become culturally human by developing knowledge and skills in the course of everyday activities that occur in an environment that is conceptually and practically inseparable from culture. He sees human skills “not as transmitted from generation to generation but [as] . . . regrown in each” (Ingold 2000: 139). Under the conventional “genealogical” model, “the land itself can be no more than a kind of stage” on which culture is enacted (Ingold 2000: 139). In the dwelling perspective, by contrast, the land/environment is part of the same integrated continuum as culture. Both are part of the total experience of dwelling in the world.

Similarly, I suggest we should think of archaeological sites and objects as being an integrated part of the world people dwell in; that we should consider them inseparable from the dwelling experience. These archaeological traces unques-
associations with Aboriginal people, whereas the sacred category is framed by an essentialist understanding of traditional Aboriginal culture in terms of which “real” Aboriginal culture ceased being practiced in New South Wales during the 19th century. It is conceded that “sacred sites,” many of which are natural landscape features believed to have been created in the course of the travels of world-creating ancestral beings, can still be of spiritual significance to contemporary Aboriginal people, but it is not acknowledged that contemporary Aboriginal culture has the capacity to produce authentic sacred sites in the present. Both the “archaeological” and the “sacred” classifications thus contribute to the idea that contemporary Aboriginal environments are disenchanted.

Yet, although no specific study has been made of contemporary Aboriginal place-based spirituality in NSW, it is not difficult to find references that are suggestive of recent or contemporary Aboriginal associations with archaeological sites that are spiritual in nature. Some of these relate to beliefs that archaeological sites and objects are imbued with supernatural power. On the New England tablelands in recent times, for instance, there have been Aboriginal people who believe that old ceremonial raised-earth circles (bora rings) can cause your feet to swell up if you inadvertently walk on them (Cohen and Somerville 1990: 58). Among contemporary Muruwari Aboriginal people in northwestern NSW, Harrison (2004: 199) notes that “ancestors”’ spirits are associated with the objects that they used during their lifetimes” (see also McNiven and Russell 2005: 193–94). When visiting archaeological sites, Muruwari people sometimes rub flaked stone artifacts on their skin. As a Muruwari woman, Vera Dixon, explains: “when you’re rubbing the stones over your skin you can get the feeling of . . . you sort of get the feeling of the spirits coming into your skin somehow or another” (Harrison 2004: 199).

Perhaps the most visible expression of such beliefs is seen in the insistence by Aboriginal people that the skeletal remains of their ancestors—remains that are often thousands of years old—be treated not merely as people rather than specimens but as spiritually animated subjects (Byrne 2004). The anxiety expressed by the contemporary Aboriginal people of NSW about ancient burials exposed in the course of erosion or earthworks is likely to relate to historic-period beliefs that inappropriate contact with human skeletal remains is a cause of illness. This is illustrated by a case in which Aboriginal people, moved from their traditional country by the government to a camp at Lake Menindee in western NSW in 1933, attributed a number of subsequent deaths there to exposure to dust blowing off an adjacent eroding ridge where burials were exposed (Kennedy and Donaldson 1982: 17).

Probably the most detailed and thoughtful study of contemporary Aboriginal relationships with an historic period archaeological site in NSW is Rodney Harrison’s (2004, 2006) account of the association that Muruwari Aboriginal people have with a former campsite (1870s–1940s) at Dennawan on the Culgoa River in the northwest of the state. During their periodic visits to the abandoned settlement, Muruwari people sometimes have visions of spirits in human form, and they believe that removal of artifacts from the site results in illness (Harrison 2004: 201). Artifacts found at sites like Dennawan are described by Harrison (2004: 205) as “becom[ing] extensions of long-dead relatives: powerful, troubling and at times problematic.” Seen in this light, traditional country is an extension of known/named deceased kinfolk, as well as more distant ancestors. It is not, then, that people attribute an other-worldly agency or efficacy to the sort of objects and places described here; the force of these objects and places comes from their being very much of Ibis world, the world of living people. This seems very much the sort of “dialogic relationship” that Lynn Meskell (2004: 77) describes for people-object relationships in ancient Egypt. She focuses on the precise social context in which specific objects are mobilized (2004: 54) rather than simply characterizing them as powerful or efficacious. For the most part, such contexts have gone unexamined by archaeologists working in NSW.

In the literature and practice of heritage conservation, the almost complete lack of acknowledgment of Aboriginal spiritual associations with archaeological sites and objects stems, as I have suggested, from a rigidly bipolar secular/sacred classification of Aboriginal heritage. As an instance of exclusion-through-classification, this omission resonates with the land classification and mapping practices in Southeast Asia mentioned earlier. In both cases, classification and mapping have rendered contemporary culture invisible in the landscape. In the Southeast Asian case, the classification of rainforest habitats as primary forest wilderness becomes a charter for the resettlement of shifting agriculturalists out of their forest homes (McElwee 2001; McWilliam 2003; Sowerwine 2004). In the case of NSW, Aboriginal people were “resettled” from almost the entire landscape within a century or so of British settlement in 1788. There is a real sense in which, as living Aboriginal people were displaced from the landscape, they were replaced...
Chapter 59: Counter-Mapping in the Archaeological Landscape

Mapping from the Inside

For Indigenous minorities in settler colonies, including the Aboriginal people of NSW, the experience of becoming "strangers in their own land" (Tsing 1993: 154) has been accompanied by the experience of seeing themselves replaced in the land(scape) by their own archaeology (Byrne 2003a). Aboriginal archaeological traces became familiar to settlers as one of the attributes of the land they now owned but living Aboriginal people became strangers in that land.

By 2006, over 50,000 Aboriginal archaeological sites had been recorded and inventoried in NSW. Some of these recordings date to the early 20th century, but most were triggered by the legislation enacted in 1969 to protect Aboriginal heritage. Further legislation in 1980 required that such sites be identified in the course of environmental impact assessments (EIA) for certain categories of land development. But we should note that this mapping of Aboriginal archaeological sites has occurred partly because it has been possible to map them. They have a physical presence in the landscape, and archaeologists have possessed the methods and technologies for mapping that presence.

Archaeologists have highly tuned visual skills but, as Nick Shepherd (2006: 1) observes in relation to colonial archaeology, these skills constitute a "particular optic" that has "involved not seeing . . . [as much as it involved seeing]." What we have been inclined not to see includes the sort of associations, illustrated in the previous section, that living Aboriginal people have with archaeological remains. The physical remains have a transcultural "legibility" (Scott 1998) that associations lack. It is a counter-mapping strategy in Aboriginal heritage might be expected to apply itself to.

An Aboriginal counter-mapping strategy might also attempt to depict the landscape according to an Aboriginal worldview. Conventionally, maps of Aboriginal heritage places in NSW have consisted simply of recorded archaeological sites plotted from heritage inventories onto topographic survey maps to form constellations of dots scattered across the terrain (this applies irrespective of whether the recorder has used site-based or "off-site" archaeological methodologies; see Thomas Richards, this volume). But it is not, of course, how contemporary Aboriginal people experience their heritage landscape. The archaeological maps provide the kind of flattened-out, bird's-eye view that the Western cartographic tradition has developed, a view that has little or nothing to do with the way that people (who, after all, do not dwell in the sky) experience their environment (Ingold 2000: 241). In everyday life, people apprehend their environment from within; they experience it in the course of moving through a three-dimensional reality rather than across a two-dimensional surface (Ingold 2000: 241). To pick up on an earlier point: an aspect of this three-dimensionality that is absent from conventional maps is the "depth" the landscape comes to possess by way of it being an extension of deceased kin and more remote ancestors. This extension is actualized by people in the present who are able to "see" or to apprehend past lives as they move through the landscape.

Such an understanding of human landscape perception highlights the key role of pathways as constituting the trajectories that we take through the world and along which our bodies and minds experience the world (Tilley 1994; see also Tilley, this volume). The experiential reality of our lives in the environment, as Ingold (2000: 242) observes, is "laid down along paths of movement, of action and perception. Every living being, accordingly, grows and reaches out into the environment along the sum of its paths." Recent attempts in NSW to bring the mapping of Aboriginal cultural heritage closer to lived Aboriginal experience have included projects where archaeologists and historians have worked with Aboriginal communities on the north coast of the State to record their patterns of movement through local landscapes over the last century or so (Byrne and Nugent 2004; English 2002). In the course of these projects, local people drew the routes of historical pathways onto enlarged aerial photographs or walked the pathways with heritage professionals. The resulting pathway maps were contextualized within local...
that were recorded during oral history interviews, but it remains true that ultimately the pathways were inscribed on conventional bird’s-eye-view topographic maps. The challenge that lies ahead is for us to venture right off these conventional maps and attempt to depict local Aboriginal environments in ways that approximate the way they are perceived by those who dwell inside them (this is important also for researchers aiming to historicize Indigenous pasts—that is, the ways that Indigenous peoples perceived their worlds in the past). If people perceive and experience the environment by moving along pathways—Ingold and Tilley, among others, encourage us to think of these as “paths of view” (Ingold 2000: 239)—then it is these views that we should be striving to map.

One component of such a viewing experience comprises the archaeological sites people may see, think about, and talk about as they move through their landscape (see also Rainbird, this volume for a discussion of various sensual experiences of cultural places). For Indigenous minorities who have been dispossessed of most or all of their land, the heritage inventory map that shows the spread of archaeological sites over the terrain of their local region is, to an extent, quite unreal. It is unreal in that they will never be able to view or to visit more than a small fraction of those sites for the simple reason that they don’t have access to the privately owned land on which they lie. For them, the archaeological landscape consists of those portions of public land (for example, road corridors, riverbank reserves, town commons, recreation reserves, national parks) that they do have access to. This is their viewable heritage, their visitable past. In addition to precolonial archaeological heritage sites, these public lands are also likely to be rich in archaeological traces of postcontact occupation. Living as they have for the last two centuries inside an alien cadastral grid, the pockets and strips of public land have provided a means by which Aboriginal people in NSW have been able to move around inside the colonized landscape. They have thus long been expert readers of the map of public lands, lands that can usefully be thought of as constituting gaps and openings in the cadastral grid of settler properties (Byrne 2003b; Goodall 2006).

It is not just the larger proportion of the archaeological landscape that is locked up inside the cadastral grid of private property, it is also the greater proportion of fishing places and other wild resource locales. The mapping of such places has a “counter” aspect to it in that it potentially unsettles the colonial mapping of resources that, like landscape in terms of its usefulness in the framework of the colonial, not the Indigenous economy (Byrne and Nugent 2004: 15–16). Given the modern nation state’s constant appetite for more national heritage, it would seem that archaeological mapping in places like Australia, unless it documents the association of contemporary Aboriginal people with archaeological landscapes, is simply a continuation of the colonial project of taking possession of new lands. This is a dimension of mapping that all archaeologists should reflect on before developing survey strategies.

Conclusions: Mapping Value

As maps proliferate and become accessories to more of the activities of everyday life there is, in some quarters, a counter-current of nervousness about the power that maps wield (e.g., Monmonier 1991; Wood 1992). In the field of landscape archaeology, we have cause to feel uneasy about the potential for the increased representability of archaeological landscapes via maps to come at the expense of a diminution of attention to the meaning these landscapes have for the contemporary people who live in them. Those of us who have engaged in large-scale environmental assessments are sometimes, for instance, disturbed by the insistence of biological scientists on referring to archaeological heritage sites as “values.” Our task, as they appear to see it, is to go into the field to map these “values” in a conceptually equivalent way to that by which biodiversity “values” are mapped. We find ourselves having to insist that the value archaeological materials have is not intrinsic to them but rather is ascribed to them by past and present people. Values in this sense, however, are perceived as being much harder to document and interpret than archaeological sites in their pure physicality, and there is often reason to worry that once the coordinators of environmental assessments have the archaeological field data in hand they will incorporate these data without the contextualizing social value data. As Meskell (Forthcoming) writes, “things trump people at every turn.”

Fortunately, archaeologists are not alone in the struggle against such tendencies. The countermapping initiative in environmental anthropology, reviewed at the beginning of this chapter, is a source of support as also are the numerous projects in which Indigenous people have themselves taken charge of mapping their own landscape interests. Not that counter-mapping doesn’t also have its downside. As Indigenous peoples
an increasing volume of Indigenous knowledge is becoming public domain. Another side effect is the embedding of maps as privileged forms of spatial knowledge (Harris and Harrower 2006: 7) as distinct, for example, from storytelling. A mud-map or sand-map is erased by nature soon after being inscribed; it “belongs” to the map-maker in the sense that its materiality often lasts only for the duration of a performance. It belongs, in a sense, to the story, which in turn belongs to the teller. A digital or printed map, in contrast, can be reproduced at will and consumed without reference to the original knowledge-holder.

All these concerns, rather than being an argument against counter-mapping, take me back to my earlier point that mapping is a technology of power and that, for marginalized peoples, being unmapped. Their best option is to take the mapping process into their own hands. A similar point is my earlier point that mapping is a technology of power and that, for marginalized peoples, being inscribed; it “belongs” to the map-maker in the sense that its materiality often lasts only for the duration of a performance. It belongs, in a sense, to the story, which in turn belongs to the teller. A digital or printed map, in contrast, can be reproduced at will and consumed without reference to the original knowledge-holder.

All these concerns, rather than being an argument against counter-mapping, take me back to my earlier point that mapping is a technology of power and that, for marginalized peoples, being unmapped. Their best option is to take the mapping process into their own hands. A similar point might be made about landscape archaeology: our mapping, indeed our whole practice, is implicated in relations of power. This is not a reason to cease; it is a reason to be watchful and careful.

References


