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## Sitting in the gap: ethnoarchaeology, rock art and methodological openness

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### ABSTRACT

For close to six decades, ethnoarchaeology has studied the present to better understand the past. However, if understanding the past is paramount, then what of the wishes and interests of those with whom we collaborate in the present? This situation raises questions such as who is ethnoarchaeology for, and how might its outcomes be valuable to both researchers and collaborators? We address these issues by focusing on the space in which researchers operate, namely the ‘gap’ between archaeological and Indigenous conceptualizations of the world, and propose methodological openness to help achieve new ways of thinking about ethnoarchaeology. Drawing on our experiences conducting rock art research in Australia and the American Southwest, we describe the complexities that emerged during conversations with Yanyuwa and Zuni elders and how they have helped bridge the methodological ‘gap’ and enrich our research and understanding of rock art.

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## Introduction

Despite nearly 60 years of literature, ethnoarchaeology continues to attract debate and substantive critique (for reviews, see e.g. David and Kramer 2001; Politis 2014a, 2014b; Stark 2003; van Reybrouck 2012; Yu 2014). Traditionally thought of or defined as a research method that studies the present to better understand the past (David and Kramer 2001), ethnoarchaeology has, for the most part, struggled to find its own disciplinary merit and continues to be viewed largely as a supplement for archaeologists. We argue that this view undermines ethnoarchaeology, which stands to achieve much more than the provision of ‘alternative’ insights into how human life develops and manifests in cultural expressions. Ethnoarchaeology differs from community archaeology in that its focus is not on evaluating and examining concepts of ‘community engagement and empowerment’ in the archaeological process as seen through excavation, presentation, management and so on (Thomas, McDavid, and Gutteridge 2014, 1; see also e.g. Greer 2014; Greer, Harrison, and McIntyre-Tamwoy 2002; Marshall 2002; Moser et al. 2002), but rather may be regarded as not unlike Indigenous archaeology, which according to McNiven (2016, 27) ‘focuses on laudable processes of collaborative community research and decolonization’. That said, Indigenous archaeology is also distinguished here from ethnoarchaeology on the grounds that the former not only ‘critiques and deconstructs Western archaeological practice’, but seeks to blend ‘the strengths of Western archaeological science with the knowledge and epistemologies of Indigenous peoples to create a set of

theories and practices for an ethically informed study of the past, history, and heritage' (Atalay 2006, 292, 301). Archaeological methods remain a large part of the Indigenous archaeology research encounter, with praxis modified to ensure ethical conduct and the fullest engagement and representation of Indigenous epistemologies. As Nicholas (2008, 1660) articulates, Indigenous archaeology makes archaeology 'more representative of, responsible to, and relevant for Indigenous communities', redresses 'real and perceived inequalities in the practice of archaeology' and broadens 'the understanding and interpretation of the archaeological record through the incorporation of Aboriginal worldviews, histories, and science' (see also e.g. Atalay 2008; Colwell-Chanthaphonh et al. 2010; Nicholas and Watkins 2014; Smith and Wobst 2005). However, in order to achieve these goals it must, to some extent, remain wedded to archaeological discourse and praxis, although this is mediated by way of reference to and engagement with Indigenous perspectives. Ethnoarchaeology on the other hand, as defined in the context of this article, may, if fully engaged, involve an abandonment of Western archaeological science altogether and instead be supplanted by an Indigenous epistemology. We argue that an ethnoarchaeology which fully embraces methodological openness and decolonizing principles offers a more radical rethink of archaeological endeavours, for it opens up a distinctively dialogic process in which all is potentially challenged, reconfigured and redefined. Archaeological agendas may in fact fall away in the face of Indigenous epistemologies, which articulate a distinct way of understanding.

Ethnoarchaeology has considerable potential to assist in our understanding of cultural life and its expressions over time, yet to be fully mobilized to do so, there are some tensions that need addressing and resolving. In particular, ethnoarchaeology needs liberating from a linear temporal logic and empirical benchmark, which in part are held responsible for its colonial associations. So too there is the need to ask questions such as: for whom does ethnoarchaeology work (not only as a substantive discipline, but as a collaborative practice with a range of cultural groups)? And to what understandings might its outputs contribute as triggers for knowledge generation and affirmation?

What we aim to do in this article is to consider these questions and draw on experiences from our own practice where the potential for ethnoarchaeology is realized. We examine the presence of Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies that offset a standard 'archaeology' approach. Indigenous knowledge has provided rich insight into distinct configurations of social life, as tangible and intangible expressions. We reflect on the politics of doing this type of ethnoarchaeology, where conventional notions of time are abandoned and where the provision of insight for the practitioner is directly linked to the wishes and control of those sharing the knowledge. This process is not about the ethnoarchaeologist 'losing control of the research agenda', but a stronger commitment to the collaborative nature of this method and the conceptualizing that must accompany it. Importantly, if it is present generations that are the authors of their cultural universe, then they must overwhelmingly direct the ongoing authorial process of narrative production to which ethnoarchaeology ultimately contributes. We address these points by way of reflexive accounts of collaborative rock art fieldwork with Aboriginal families in northern Australia's Gulf country and Zuni religious leaders in the American Southwest. As we demonstrate, these experiences have been pivotal in developing a more nuanced understanding of Indigenous relationships to cultural expressions, both tangible and intangible, within the context of collaborative research. Importantly, this fieldwork has a strong commitment to a collaborative and decolonizing agenda (see above), and bears the hallmarks of a new ethnoarchaeological approach.

## Sitting in the gap

Our approach to ethnoarchaeology positions the researcher in a gap – the space between two conceptualizations of the world, namely the archaeological and the Indigenous. There is no attempt to wrestle our way out of this gap, for it is here that methodological openness is found and new ways of thinking about what constitutes ‘archaeological evidence’, for whom archaeological investigations are carried out and what stories we might tell as narrators of present/past interactions, are developed. Ethnoarchaeology’s place in this gap is a strategic resource, in the way that a third space is a margin of worth, not disassociation. It is in this gap that we might be able to better hear the articulations of those with whom we collaborate and those for whom the ‘past’ matters in ways the archaeologist can never conceive of. We take our thinking of this ‘gap’ from the work of the historian Minoru Hokari (2011), who sought ways to explain what he had learnt in studying Indigenous Australian histories. Hokari encourages his readers to accept the danger of multiple ways of knowing and to sit in the gap that has been generated by the West in its failure to understand other knowledge systems. He also confronted ‘dangerous histories’ through Indigenous ethnography as those that defy categories of good or bad (right or wrong in terms of disciplinary practice and legitimacy) and compels us to not simply add cross-cultural perspectives to our engagements with human life but to make our disciplines cross-cultural. Rather than incorporate plurality into a singular conceptual framework, he encourages plurality in the very practice of learning to know something and understand something. This perspective means changing the very way we see, look and hear accounts of social life, and in this instance, the signatures of social life.

Given the wide range of ethnoarchaeology projects undertaken around the world, its methods are varied although they generally focus on interviews, participant observation, recording material, sampling strategies and language (see e.g. Arthur and Weedman 2005; David and Kramer 2001; Politis 2014a). One of the guiding principles that ethnoarchaeologists follow in developing their methods is to ‘conduct research that will be useful to archaeologists as they interpret sites and material culture’ (Arthur and Weedman 2005, 240). This emphasis on acquiring culturally defined insights and perspectives is crucial to any ethnoarchaeological project, but from our experience it is the conversations that emerge during the course of the project which challenge conventional archaeological perspectives of both the archaeological record and relations between past and present that provide more important information about the way people conceive of and conceptualize the cultural aspects being investigated. Our approach encourages researchers to not only be open to the conversations that go beyond the immediate agenda that archaeologists have crafted for themselves, but be led by them as they provide the opportunity to explore broader inherent meanings and significances. Often it is the combination of unstructured, informal conversations and formal community meetings that ensures an open dialogue in developing research agendas. In these contexts we are challenged to rethink the very notion and existence of an ‘archaeological’ record. The ‘archaeological record’ we seek to explore and understand may be a subjective reading, and for Indigenous collaborators may be a record that does not exist, or may be configured in substantively different ways to that of ‘archaeological’ discourse. What does exist is a cultural universe made up of ancestral presences, and signatures of agency and sentience. Appreciating these presences and signatures is the first step to decolonizing one’s practice and engaging a methodological openness in which new knowledge can be acquired and shared (Smith 2012).

## Rock art research and ethnoarchaeology

To explore the idea of methodological openness, we turn to some of our most recent work involving rock art recording with the Yanyuwa in northern Australia and the Zuni in western New Mexico (USA). From both projects emerged a greater awareness and appreciation of the complex relationships that exist between people and their cultural expressions (tangible and intangible), and how rock art in particular sits more broadly in a social universe, well beyond the conventions of archaeological research.

In 2010, the *li-Anthawirrayarra* Sea Ranger unit in Borroloola (southwest Gulf of Carpentaria region, Northern Territory) invited the authors, along with John Bradley (an anthropologist with 30+ years' experience working with the Yanyuwa) to work together recording rock art across their homelands, the Sir Edward Pellew Islands. The Rangers were keen to learn more about their rock art sites using archaeological techniques (e.g. dating motifs and sites) as well as having knowledge about the sites made readily available across the broader community. In addition to the community aims, we were initially interested in addressing archaeological themes including the place of Yanyuwa rock art in a broader 'Gulf' style from the surrounding region (Border 1988, 1989; Layton 1992; Walsh 1985; see also Brady and Bradley 2014b; Taçon 2008), and investigating the role of rock art in the archaeological construction and characterization of seascapes.

As the research progressed we found that the conversations with Yanyuwa about their rock art and the process of visiting sites and recording motifs were revealing insightful ways of considering the relationship between people and place, as well as rock art. Listening to Yanyuwa testimonies and watching interactions with rock art, and coming to fully appreciate the magnitude of this cultural insight for guiding the project was an essential step in the project's development. This process required methodological openness and a commitment to abandoning the imposition of set research agendas and archaeological 'discourse'. The project had to be led by Yanyuwa knowledge of rock art and Yanyuwa interpretations of such rock art in the present. This approach culminated in a sense that no rock art, nor any 'feature' of the Yanyuwa universe, can be considered 'of the past', nor is it possible to diminish their cultural worth to declarations of 'site', 'artefact' or 'material culture'. When listening to Yanyuwa readings of rock art and country (the contexts in which it is found), the realization comes (for the researcher) that all is sentient, present and containing law and essence. Already held to exist by Indigenous collaborators themselves, the research undertaking, while having commenced with some degree of purposefulness and research objective, is compelled to respond to Yanyuwa views, and is significantly enhanced in doing so. So too the researchers must remain epistemologically open and methodologically responsive as a commitment to transparent and decolonized research methodologies. As such, in collaborations of this kind, we put on our epistemological training wheels and came to terms with what this meant as researchers and let go of existing assumptions that left us conceptually and practically hamstrung in our capacity to learn and come to understand. This experience was fertile ground for shaping a new ethnoarchaeology, which Brady has also applied in his work at Zuni Pueblo. In 2014 Brady commenced work on rock art regionalism through conversations with the Zuni Cultural Resource Advisory Team (ZCRAT), an ongoing project which has led to further revelations on how engagements with rock art can highlight cultural identity as conveyed through distinct conceptions of place, people and time.

### **Rock art and the agency of the spirits**

Our first fieldseason with Yanyuwa families was in April 2010 when we visited the centre of the Yanyuwa universe – the offshore islands of the southwest Gulf country. At Black Craggy Island, we focused our attention on surveying the island's south coast, known as Limiyimiyila. The morning was taken up with surveys and recording among the tall sandstone rock stacks at the eastern end of Limiyimiyila where a large cluster of hand motifs and other abstract and geometric images were located. The afternoon consisted of a survey towards the western end of Limiyimiyila where only one site containing figurative imagery (e.g. marine zoomorphs) was found and documented (see Brady and Bradley 2014a). Our initial thoughts about these findings drew upon a Western epistemological framework whereby the rock art was organized according to its style, content and distribution across the landscape. However, upon returning to our camp where Yanyuwa family members were waiting, our conversations with senior women revealed that our initial readings of the rock art were partial and factored in only one small component of how rock art comes to be part of a relational setting on country. When describing how our afternoon survey turned up only one site after searching close to a dozen suitable shelters for rock art, Roddy Harvey Bayuma-Birribalanja said to us, '[t]he old people let you see it, they have given you the eyes to see it' (conversation translated by John Bradley, 8 April 2010). This statement is loaded with complexity and highlights how other forces dictate the human experience of country and the sentient world around us. In Yanyuwa, the 'old people' can be spirits of deceased kin or spiritual entities who inhabit country. Either way, they are constant presences, ever-knowing and always watching, engaged in a communicative encounter with people on a regular basis. Roddy's statement reveals that the old people control country, what people – including any visitors, such as the archaeologist – can see, and this includes the rock art. Roddy's statement highlights that there are other forces and agents at work in the context of this research. The overall partiality of our reading of the rock art was directly linked to the singular nature of the archaeological research process. In this dialogic moment, we were pressed to consider not only the limitations of this approach but also the ethics of pursuing this approach in the face of significant Yanyuwa insight and intellectualizing of the rock art, its location and character.

A second noteworthy conversation occurred on South West Island in April 2010. Dinah Norman a-Marrngawi had asked us to document a shelter at Lilardungka where she remembered camping as a young girl, and she mentioned that we would find a painting of a *yirrikirri* (donkey) on the shelter wall (Figure 1). Since donkeys were an introduced species, the painting would be fairly recent in age and given Dinah's memory of the location and the image we assumed it would be easy to find. However, despite recording numerous motifs at the site, we failed to find any trace of the *yirrikirri* (see Brady and Bradley 2014a). We reported our results back to Dinah when we returned to the camp. Dinah's response to the *yirrikirri*'s absence was: '[o]ld people must have taken it away, too many of them have died you know'. Here the absence of a known painting was not related to taphonomic factors but instead focused on the relationship between the agency of the old people and the health and well-being of the community. This explanation represents a critical insight into understanding the connection not only between rock art, the agency of the old people and the health and well-being of an Indigenous community, but also to the archaeologist who becomes implicated in this network of relationships. Our ability to see this known motif was directly related to the events happening in the community. Thus, at one level a story about the disappearance of a known motif could easily be told, but the complexities behind that disappearance only became known once a conversation with Dinah occurred.

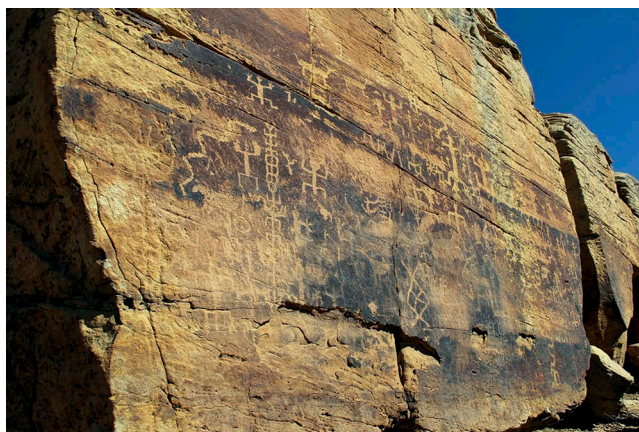




**Figure 1.** Shelter at Lilardungka on South West Island where Dinah Norman a-Marrngawi asked us to document a painting of a *yirrikirri* (donkey).

Rock art as an indicator of the health and well-being of the Yanyuwa community has been observed on other occasions. Bradley (1997, 180–181) recalled how senior men and women told him that, '[w]hen art work is seen to be fading, or the stone is flaking away with an image on it, it is said that this loss is due to the spirits being sad. They are sad that nobody is using the country or that all the senior people associated with the country have died and the subsequent generations of people have not bothered to visit the country'. In addition, Bradley described for us his experiences visiting burial sites with senior Yanyuwa men in the early 1990s, recording their comments about the rock art that was encountered. For example, when Mussolini Harvey observed some faded turtle-like zoomorph paintings, he stated, '[t]hey are things that were once alive on these islands that are dead now, too many white people, too many old people been die out' (pers. comm. to John Bradley, 1994; see Brady and Bradley [in press-a](#)). Mussolini's response to the motifs again highlights the complex relationship involving the agency of ancestral spirits and the health and well-being of the community while also bringing in a new element – too many European intruders into this culturally powerful place that is usually off limits to non-Yanyuwa. The intrusion into this site by outsiders is another reason why senior men such as Mussolini believe the old people take the rock art away.

The role of ancestors in matters relating to rock art was also commonly heard during Brady's visits to engraving sites near Zuni Pueblo with ZCRAT members in 2014 and 2015. While discussing the various styles, superimpositions and meanings of rock art found across Zuni tribal lands, attention turned to some of the clearly deteriorating panels at several sites ([Figure 2](#)). When Brady asked if ZCRAT would be interested in having the panels stabilized and preserved using rock art conservation techniques, the responses emphasized the other forces at work in relation to the engraved panels. At Donash' An K'yana, where several heavily faded and deteriorated spirals and sun motifs were located, Eldred Quam stated, '[i]f they want something, they'll take it back, the spirits will take it back, they're always watching' (pers. comm. to Brady, 20 October 2015). Similarly, when discussing rock art from Chimi K'yana K'ya Dey'a in Arizona's Grand Canyon (the Zuni place of emergence, see e.g. Bunzel 1992, 547–548; Ferguson and Hart 1985; Green 1979, 333), Ronnie Cachini remarked upon an engraved panel that had recently fallen from the canyon wall. Acknowledging the role erosion played in the damage to the panel, he also noted, 'well, it did



**Figure 2.** Engraved panel with deteriorating motifs at Pescado, near Zuni Pueblo.

belong to them ... they took it ... if they want it, they'll take it back' (pers. comm. to Brady, 23 October 2014; see also Colwell and Ferguson 2014; Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2006). In both instances, Eldred and Ronnie emphasize not only the agency of Zuni ancestors in events surrounding what archaeologists may consider natural processes but also the presence and power of the ancestors in the landscape who are continually watching over the Zuni as well as the archaeologist working with them.

The insight that comes from these examples is that rock art is something much greater than an indicator of past human activity. Any preliminary reading of rock art and 'sites of significance' using Western archaeological constructs quickly felt limited as people narrated their world as one full of sentient and multifarious agents. Had we not listened, and consciously adopted methodological openness to understanding the contemporary dimensions of rock art, as linked to the imagery's broader relationships with health, well-being and the agency of the spirits or 'old people', we would have failed to document vital aspects of Yanyuwa and Zuni rock art relationships. By assuming a disposition of openness, which in praxis means slowing down the research process, listening and engaging in dialogue and being fully cognisant of kinship, social order and Indigenous epistemology and ontology, conversations with people that revealed the complexity of meaning tied to the rock art were made possible. What we heard was integral to raising an understanding of how rock art's significance extends well beyond the archaeological realm and into a contemporary world where images can be found to be active, sentient and multivocal.

### ***The force of encounter(s): affect and emotion***

A key aspect of the collaborative research framework involves working together and ensuring that external agendas do not dominate (e.g. Atalay 2012; Brady 2009; Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008; Dongoske, Aldenderfer, and Doehner 2000; Kerber 2006; Nicholas et al. 2011). These opportunities are invaluable experiences for archaeologists if they hope to gain a better understanding of the relationships between people and their cultural heritage. However, what is sometimes overlooked in these partnerships is the affective and emotional experiences (positive and negative) of the people we work with and what these can tell us about the nature of encounters with tangible markers of the past.





**Figure 3.** Left: view of the Kurrmurnnyini sorcery site; right: painting of a yellow anthropomorph at Kurrmurnnyini.

In 2012, Brady, John Bradley and Yanyuwa man Leonard Norman visited a sorcery site known as Kurrmurnnyini as part of our project (Kearney did not accompany the group on this occasion due to strict rules of gendered access). The site is associated with a particular type of sorcery called *narnu-bulabula*, which involves the painting of images onto rock art and singing them with power songs to attack the life force of a targeted individual (Figure 3). Although the sorcerers who could perform these acts are now dead, Kurrmurnnyini is still feared across the region for its immense power and reputation. Archaeologically speaking, Kurrmurnnyini is rich in occupational material with well over 100 images on the roof and rear wall of the shelter (each of which represents a life lost to sorcery), along with grinding stones and bases, stone artefacts, flaked surfaces and European contact era objects (e.g. metal axes, gate hinges). While the site's rock art features many similarities with the so-called Gulf style of rock art, it was the affective experience or force of encounter with the site as seen through Leonard's emotions that added a vital layer to our understanding of the site (see e.g. Gregg and Seigworth 2010; Skoggard and Waterston 2015; Stewart 2007).

During the 2012 visit the site was approached cautiously, with Leonard calling out to the site to say that we only wished to visit and did not mean it any harm. Throughout the two-hour recording session Leonard sat some way from the entrance of the shelter, not touching anything and saying very little. His responses and actions at Kurrmurnnyini were very different to our visits to other sites in the region where he was heavily involved in the recording process. When he did speak his responses were fearful and emotional for this was a place that was associated with death and evil acts, as well as the site where his maternal uncle was ensorcelled. While Leonard acknowledged his need to be at Kurrmurnnyini as part of our project, his relief at leaving the site was plainly visible (for further details see Brady and Bradley *in press-b*). Leonard's encounter with the Kurrmurnnyini rock art site was clearly triggered by his knowledge and memories of the site. While a story about the site could be told purely from the archaeological features present, including one of sorcery since many of the motifs are stylistically similar to other sorcery motifs throughout northern Australia, it is Leonard's engagement with Kurrmurnnyini and the fearful and emotional responses that highlight the affective qualities of the site. By observing and listening to how people respond and react to sites – in this case, a response rooted in fear – archaeologists can find themselves epistemologically and ontologically shifted, and growing in their appreciation and understanding of the power and potency contained in rock art (see also e.g. Blundell and Woolagoodja 2005; Hampson 2015; Young 1988).

Other encounters with cultural signatures have the ability to evoke memories, which in turn are useful in understanding affective and emotional experiences. For example, among the Zuni, affectual and emotive experiences have been reported by Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson (2006, 154), who note how Zuni experience positive and negative feelings influenced by spirits welcoming or turning them away at rock art sites and shrines (see also e.g. Benedict 1935; Colwell and Ferguson 2014; Stevenson 1904; Young 1985, 1988). Another example occurred in October 2015 when Brady visited a panel of rock paintings at the Village of the Great Kivas with Presley Haskie and Eldred Quam. During our recording session, Presley and Eldred were describing the various kachina spirit mask motifs present on the rock walls and began to recall their experiences and encounters with various kachinas. One motif in particular stood out for Presley: a white painted face with black dots, a zigzag-style mouth, large round eyes and black hair framing the face. He identified this motif as an A:doshle, a Zuni disciplinarian (see e.g. Parsons 1916). Presley recalled his encounter with the A:doshle from when he was a young boy and he was constantly arguing with his sister. In exasperation, his parents sent for the A:doshle to visit the house and discipline Presley and his sister. Presley remembered the visit and spoke of his fear at seeing the A:doshle and described how the A:doshle spoke only in Zuni and had him and his sister hug and reconcile their differences. At the site, Presley laughed when he relayed this story to Brady and emphasized the important role that the A:doshle continues to play in Zuni culture today. Although laughing about the experience, Presley's emphasis on the fear that was felt upon the A:doshle's visit was clearly articulated.

In this instance it was the encounter with the A:doshle motif that prompted Presley to recall his experience with this kachina spirit. However, the act of viewing the motif was clearly a powerful event as it triggered a response, or memory from his younger years, that could then be used to elucidate the broader meaning and significance of the A:doshle motif. While an archaeological analysis of the various styles of kachina motifs present on the rock walls could be undertaken here to explore relationships between rock art and material culture objects (e.g. kachina dolls), Presley's story is used instead to shed light on aspects of memory and the affective experience involving encounters with rock art.

Affective and emotional responses to rock art were also observed during Brady's visit to Donash' An K'yana with Presley Haskie, Eldred Quam, Harry Chimoni and Curtis Quam. While Harry and Curtis knew of the site and had visited in the past, this was the first time Presley and Eldred had been there. Engravings were found along a c. 250 m tall sandstone cliff face, with many obscured by small to medium-sized shrubs. During our recording session we discussed questions relating to chronology, styles and meaning. What became apparent during these discussions was the emphasis and attention that the men placed on the deeply patinated, pecked engravings while the more recent incised images were ignored or attributed to children or 'outsiders' from nearby reservations. This emphasis on the older engravings was directly related to their relationship to Zuni ancestors and Zuni origins. Most, if not all, motifs were linked in some way to aspects of the Zuni migration from Chimi K'yana K'ya Dey'a in their search for the Middle Place, Idiwan'a or modern-day Zuni Pueblo, and motifs were often described as having been created by Zuni ancestors. However, the affective and emotional responses to the engravings became most apparent when a panel that had been obscured behind a tall shrub was discovered. The panel featured four sun-shaped motifs with each sun shape connected to the other by a vertical line while a tree shape was positioned at the top of the panel. At the base of the arrangement was an outlined circle that was identified as the earth. Presley's reaction to finding the motifs was one of excitement, fascination and wonderment. As he trimmed the shrub back to get a better view of

the motifs, he said, 'it's saying something, it's telling us something!' and 'this is exciting because of their links to our origins!' The sun-shaped motifs were linked not only to Zuni origins and emergence, but also to the changing of the seasons and the role they play in the Zuni prayer system, thus they are multivocal and an important motif in the Zuni graphic system. For Presley, the force of the encounter with the engraved panel triggered a positive emotional response that reflected not only his understanding of Zuni emergence history, but also a reaffirmation of his Zuni identity. Stories concerning Zuni origins remain an integral part of being Zuni and for Presley his association of positive feelings and responses to the engraved panel reflected this critical aspect of his identity.

## Methodological openness and new directions in ethnoarchaeology

Those who have lamented the limited impact of ethnoarchaeology on the discipline may have too narrow a perception of its role. Prehistorians who do not see the relevance of ethnoarchaeology usually are seeking some type of truth from the ethnographic record. (Skibo 2009, 33)

One of the greatest challenges that we see for ethnoarchaeology is the notion of time and the need to abandon conventional readings of time as navigable through a rubric of past, present and future moments. This is what turns ethnoarchaeology into something more, and calls on us to jump beyond the relatively simple premise that through the use of this method we might find in the vital cultural realm of the present frameworks to help us understand and describe the remnants of past human action. Ethnoarchaeology is capable of much more, and if conventional temporal structures are abandoned or rearranged, this research strategy might find itself operating in the service of more vexing and creative pursuits, such as investigating how knowledge of cultural life is co-produced and invented for future aspirations which pertain to community well-being, cross-generational education and safeguarding of cultural expressions. Our experiences with Yanyuwa and Zuni were challenging at the outset since we had to develop the confidence to let go of our archaeological training, which had taught us to approach 'features' such as rock art as a form of data to answer the bigger picture questions about the past. Yet it was our openness to considering and contemplating the ambiguities and complexities that emerged during the conversations with Yanyuwa and Zuni elders that have helped us to cross this methodological 'gap' and engage fully with these conversations as a key part of the research (see Kearney 2009, 2010). By doing so we have enriched our understanding of rock art and fully appreciate its sentience and agency. We can no longer walk blindly through Yanyuwa or Zuni country, because people have taken the time to teach us and educate us on how rock art is tied into a broader network of relationships that incorporate the living, the dead, ancestral beings, the health of country and the health of people. To ignore this would be not only foolish but also dangerous.

In striving to bring together distinct ways of knowing, the dilemma for ethnoarchaeology is that it seeks understandings of the past, but pursues these in the present, in cultural contexts where notions of past/present/future may be formulated according to different epistemological and ontological structures to those of the West. With ethnoarchaeology there is an inherent slippage of time, or compression of time between past and present, and through collaboration with diverse cultural groups researchers become more aware that time itself is configured in widely different ways depending on context. In many instances cultural groups do not possess notions of the 'past' as a Western epistemology might conceive of it, thus there can be no such thing as an 'archaeological record'. Many Indigenous people do not have a word for 'history', instead understanding

the present as a space and time in which ancestors, present generations and descendants all coalesce. It may be that the ancestors lie in the future, instructing the present generation in how to live, thereby reconfiguring the future as an aspirational present. It might also be that ethnoarchaeology and what it seeks to produce have greatest relevance when imagined through the lens of cultural identities which are constantly emerging, and which are dependent on knowledge that is constantly being produced and refined.

What is important for us to take away from our ethnoarchaeological experiences, and what we are most concerned with highlighting in this article, is the possibility that the past does not exist but is a sequence of revelations of existence in the present. It might be that the past is moveable, unpredictable and changing, all the while capable of shifting, revealing itself as presence or concealing itself from view. By accepting these possibilities, ethnoarchaeology distinguishes itself from standard archaeological practice and more closely aligns with cross-cultural and inter-cultural formulations of time, cultural expression, meaning and identity.

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## Notes on contributors

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