

ANTHROPO-GEOGRAPHY: a rediscovered voice in the study of place

Jenny Quillien

The earth has set man his tasks and at the same time whispered hints for their solution.

Ellen Churchill Semple

A pearl of a read has emerged from the deadly dungeons of out-of-print: *INFLUENCES OF GEOGRAPHIC ENVIRONMENT* by Ellen Churchill Semple, first published in 1911, and dormant all these many decades, has been resurrected and reprinted. The twofold aim of this essay is to promote knowledge of the book's existence through a rather personal review and, then, secondly, to attempt an application of the author's ideas in a case study of a specific geographic region, one which is dear to my heart.

PART I: A RATHER PERSONAL BOOK REVIEW

Nothing less than a page turner was this rather weighty slab of a book—no pictures and six hundred pages. A few lines taken from the preface give a taste of the author's topic, style, and ambition.

...Man has been so noisy about the way he has conquered nature and nature has been so silent in her persistent influence over man, that the geographic factor in the equation of human development has been overlooked. ... The importance of the geographical element in the history of human development is that it is a stable force. It never sleeps. The natural environment for all intents and purposes is immutable in comparison with other factors.

...Man is a product of the earth's surface. This means not merely that he is a child of the earth, dust of her dust, but that the earth has mothered him, fed him, set him tasks, directed his thoughts, confronted him with difficulties that have strengthened his body and sharpened his wits, given him his problems of navigation or irrigation, and at the same time whispered hints for their solution. She has entered into his bone and tissue, into his mind and soul. On the mountains she has given him leg muscles of iron to climb the slope, along the coast she has left them weak and flabby, but given him instead vigorous development of chest and arm to handle his paddle or oar. In the river valleys she attaches him to the fertile soil, circumscribes his ideas and ambitions by a dull round of calm, exacting duties, narrows his outlook to the cramped horizon of his farm. Up on the windswept plateaus, and the boundless stretch of the grasslands and the waterless tracks of the desert, where he roams with his flocks from pasture to pasture, and oasis to oasis, where life knows much hardship but escapes the grind of drudgery, where the watching of grazing herd gives him leisure for contemplation, and the wide-ranging life of

a big horizon, his ideas take on a certain gigantic simplicity, religion becomes monotheism, God becomes one, unrivaled like the sand of the desert or the grass of the step, stretching on and on without break or change. Chewing over and over the cud of his simple belief is the one food of his unfed mind, his faith becomes fanaticism, his big spatial ideas, born of that ceaseless regular wandering, outgrow the land that bred them and bear them legitimate fruit in wide imperial conquests.

A Range of *Ahas!*

As I turned the pages, I found myself experiencing the pleasures of a range of *aha!* moments. At what points other readers will feel that delightful clink of the nickel drop will depend on their experiences and travels. I can only convey a few of mine as illustration.

Sometimes I found myself exclaiming, *Oh, why, Yes. Of course!* as a geographic truth, which I had very dimly perceived but never articulated, came galloping rapidly into focus. For example, we all recognize—without too much trouble—that mountains block and plains invite movement. That's all well and good, but Churchill Semple demands that we think it through. As I thought through my abundant time spent in the south of France, I realized that I had known that the Italians were our cultural (just a little noisy) cousins. I had known that the local patois simply ranged by degree from pure French to pure Italian as one made one's way around that coastline. I had known that trade with Italy was easy and our shared kinship oiled communication. Of course, I also had known that the mountains, particularly the Alps, that separate France and Italy were quite high, but, actually, not that formidable. Thanks to multiple and navigable passes—natural highways as it were—one can traverse the Alps without too much ado. I had also known that this was not the case with Spain. The Pyrenees are certainly less high than the Alps but they form an unbroken unbreachable wall from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean. Historically, entry and infiltration of the Iberic peninsula has been from south, and that, as the saying goes, *Africa begins at the Pyrenees*¹. Because one does not go through the mountain wall of the Pyrenees, what trade does take place between Spain and France is by sea with ports that have grown up on either side of the barricade.

Sometimes the sweet clink of the nickel drop was not *Oh, why, Yes. Of course!* It was more a moment of feeling startled and then the sudden view of a new perspective. For example, as a child in school, I had learned of the American war of Independence, the thirteen colonies, and the vying for power between the British and the French. I had not realized until Ellen Churchill Semple brought it to my attention, that with more densely populated and concentrated colonies with many navigable rivers, the Brits had a decisive advantage over the French who were far too widely dispersed to get their military act together. Or, to return to Spain for a moment, it had eluded me, that the high dry central plateau with Madrid in its middle, had, again and again, experienced the greatest difficulty in maintaining political control over the numerous and varied populated areas around its coastal periphery. So, of course, why be surprised that the history of Spain shows us that a heavy-handed and muscled arm of authority will be a standard recourse for keeping disorder and disintegration at bay.

Sometimes the *aha!* was farther afield, simply taken on good faith without much personal experience to go on. I know just a little something of Hinduism, had read sections of the Mahabharata, followed Arjuna, Krishna, and the great family feuds of India's national literature. I had even been a few times to the Indian sub-continent (the sub-continent as Salman Rushdie likes to call it). Churchill Sempole points out that India has little in the way of seaports and that the Himalayas close it off from the north. Geographically, India seems to hang down like some kind of purse with strings. Anybody and anything that falls into the purse would likely stay there and stew in its own juice. This struck me as congruent with the somewhat introverted stories starring Ganesh, Sita, Rama, or Hanuman. Or, for another example, I took on good faith that Africa, aka the dark continent, could have its darkness to some extent explained by the fact that its coastal areas are narrow, the rivers unnavigable, and it rises as a sharp continental plateau. One simply does not enter Africa that easily. I did know from my own travels how these phenomena protected Ethiopians from European colonization.

Sometimes the *aha!* came as a surprise. *Really?* and I would read a passage twice to make sure I understood. Here is Churchill Sempole on oceans:

If we compare the Atlantic and Pacific oceans in respect to the rivers, we find that the narrow Atlantic has a drainage basin of over 19 000, 000 mi.² as opposed to the 8, 660, 000 mi.² of drainage area commanded by the vastly larger Pacific. The Pacific is, for the most part, ringed by mountains, discharging into the ocean only mad torrents or rapid broken streams. The Atlantic, bordered by gently sloping plains of wide extent, receives rivers that for the most part pursue a long and leisurely course to the sea. Therefore, the commercial and cultural influences of the Atlantic extend from the Rockies and Andes almost to the heart of Russia, and by the Nile Highway to even invade the seclusion of Africa. Through the long reach of its rivers, therefore, the Atlantic commands a land area twice as great as that of the Pacific, and by reason of this fundamental geographic advantage, it will retain the historical preeminence that it so early secured. The development of the World Ocean will mean the exploitation of the Pacific trade from the basis of the Atlantic, the domination of the larger ocean by the historic peoples of the smaller, because these people have wider and more accessible lands as a base of their maritime operations. (page 318)

Laws, Patterns, Organized Complexity

Churchill Sempole offers us numerous laws, or perhaps we should say, more simply, rules of thumb. The reader is always offered Churchill Sempole's own examples and then can turn to his or her own experience. Consider this example: *Rivers unite the peoples of their basin and it follows as a corollary that rivers do not make good boundaries.* (page 334)

The Rhine has long been the line of demarcation between the French and German and has done so rather badly if we consider the lurching from war to war and the reciprocal claiming of lands on the other side. And if a mighty nation controls a river, then it wants very much to control its mouth, the ports, the sea, and beyond. Only as a second-best will it entertain the possibility of a weak

nation at the mouth of the river as a way to stall off a rival nation from taking over. As I now live in Amsterdam, at the mouth of the Rhine, I know full well that the Dutch are there only on the sufferance of the Germans and the French and that when push comes to shove, as it did in World War II, they don't stand a chance. W.W.II Liberation Day for the Dutch is a solemn affair with no cocky victory songs. They had been creamed in very short order and others had to come to their rescue.

In the vein of rules of thumb, cognoscente of place literature will not fail to notice the kinship between Churchill Semple's approach with that of patterns as developed by Christopher Alexander and organized complexity as developed by Jane Jacobs. And note, once again, that the publication date is 1911, long before either Alexander or Jacobs were a twinkle in their parents' eye. I would like to quote Churchill Semple at some length on these matters so that the reader can fully appreciate the similarities and, perhaps, as I do, see that the re-discovery of Churchill Semple's work allows us to significantly enlarge the scope of current pattern work, particularly in integrating the built environment with its geographic underpinnings. Consider this passage:

Investigators in this field [anthropo-geography], moreover, are prone to get a squint in their eye that makes them see one geographic factor to the exclusion of the rest; whereas it belongs to the very nature of physical environments to combine a whole group of influences, working all at the same time under the law of the resolution of forces. In this plexus of influences, some operate in one direction and some in another, now one loses its beneficent effect like a medicine long used or a garment outgrown; another waxes in power, reinforced by a new geographic factor which has been released from dormancy by the expansion of the known world, or the progress of invention and of human development.

... The law of the resolution of forces applies in geography as in the movement of planets. ... The analysis of these interacting forces and of their various combinations requires careful investigation. Let us consider the interplay of the forces of land and sea apparent in every country with a maritime location. In some cases, a small, infertile, niggardly country conspires with a beckoning sea to drive its sons out upon the deep, as another with a wide territory and a generous soil keeps its well-fed children at home and silences the call of the sea. (page 18)

The reader could pick any one of possible examples for the first pattern (let's call it SONS TO SEA) of an ungenerous land that drives sons away along with a sea which draw them: how about Ireland, Greece, or Norway? I'll pick France for the second pattern (STAY HOME) where the soil is rich and well-watered, the wine fine and the cheese excellent.

In other passages, Churchill Semple reads a bit more like a precursor to Jane Jacobs. The reader may recall that Jacobs took urban planners to task for misjudging the nature of their job. A place, such as a city, or even a small city park, cannot be considered a simple design problem with just a few variables. Nor is it a design problem amenable to methods of statistics. Rather, like the biological sciences of growth, ageing, and death, it is a problem of organized complexity where a dozen or a few dozen variables are at play. Miss a variable and you fail, and these variables can change. Here, again, is Churchill Semple:

Skepticism as to the effect of geographic conditions upon human development is apparently justifiable, owing to the multiplicity of the underlying causes and the difficulty of distinguishing between stronger and weaker forcers on the one hand, as between permanent and temporary effects on the other. We see the result, but find it difficult to state the equation producing the result. But the important thing is to avoid seizing upon one or two conspicuous geographic elements in the problem and ignoring the rest. The physical environment of a people consists of all the natural conditions to which they have been subjected, not merely a part. Geography admits no single blanket theory. The slow historical development of the Russian folk has been due to many geographic causes—to excess of cold and deficiency of rain, an outskirts location on the Asiatic border of Europe exposed to the attacks of nomadic hordes, a meager and, for the most part, ice-bound coast which was slowly acquired, an undiversified surface, a lack of segregated regions where an infant civilization might be cradled, and a vast area of unfenced plains wherein the national energies spread out thin and dissipated themselves. The better Baltic and Black Sea coasts, the fertility of its Ukraine soil, and location next to wide-awake Germany along the western frontier have helped to accelerate progress, but the slow-moving body carried too heavy a drag.

...Owing to the evolution of geographic relations, the physical environment favorable to one stage of development may be averse to another, and vice versa. For instance, a small, isolated and protected habitat, like that of Egypt, Phoenicia, Crete, and Greece, encourages the birth and precocious growth of civilization; but later it may cramp progress, and lend the stamp of arrested development to a people who were once the model for all their little world. Open and wind-swept Russia, lacking these small, warm nurseries where Nature could cuddle her children, has bred upon its boundless plains a massive, untutored, homogeneous folk, fed upon the crumbs of culture that have fallen from the richer tables of Europe. But that item of area is a variable quantity in the equation. It changes its character at a higher stage of cultural development. Consequently, when the Muscovite people, instructed by the example of western Europe, shall have grown up intellectually, economically and politically to their big territory, its area will become a great national asset. Russia will come into its own, heir to a long-withheld inheritance. Many of its previous geographic disadvantages will vanish, like the diseases of childhood, while its massive size will dwarf many previous advantages of its European neighbors. (page 20-21)

My book review is that of a strong recommendation. Churchill Semple's work is an eye-opening journey taking the reader around the globe. Of formidable scope and depth, it lends a wealth of insights and wisdom and a sharper more critical eye to current events as they unfold. Throughout the book is a way of thinking—an attentiveness to the forces at play and how they will find resolution—which can strengthen any audience interested in place, patterns, the phenomenology of place, place politics, or place design. The more passive reader can simply sit back and enjoy the ideas and the examples given. A somewhat more engaged reader can do that and then, in addition, conjure up their own experiences and memories for consideration. But can we apply Churchill

Semple's anthropo-geography to an unexamined terrain? What if we put Churchill Semple in conversation with other voices in the study of place? To this experiment I now turn.

PART II CASE STUDY: THE SHAPED WORLD

Johann Gottfried Herder "*History is geography set in motion.*"

Questions and Answers

The unexamined terrain chosen for investigation is that of the lost-in-time Anasazi homeland and their abandoned dwellings. A few preliminary questions and answers will help orient the reader.

What does Anasazi mean? The term refers to peoples and a way of life in the American Southwest that existed roughly from 200 AD to a rather abrupt end around 1300 AD. Political correctness now demands that we forego the term Anasazi and use the clumsy textbook-ish mouthful *Ancestral Puebloans* instead. Frankly Anasazi is better: it's more precise in its designation of place, people, and relationship since it was taken from the Navajo who wandered into the southern Rockies during the 14th and 15th century after the abandonment. The term means something like *ancestors of our enemies*. The Navajo kept a wary and respectful distance from the ghost ridden ruins left by old pueblo peoples—and there was never any love lost between Navajo and Pueblo of any century.

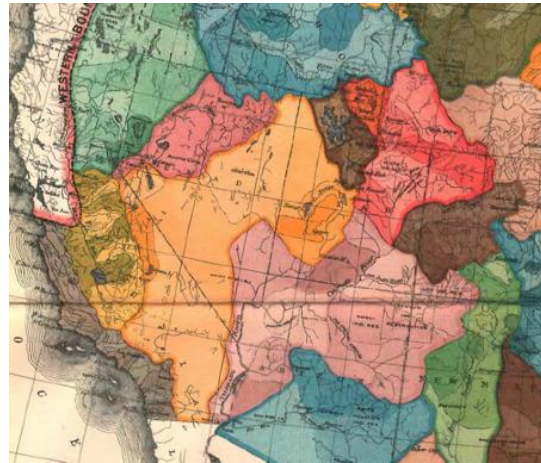
Where does the Anasazi homeland fit in Ellen Churchill Semple's framework? In the frame provided by Churchill Semple we are examining a geography of refuge: a harsh land distant from generous lands and natural highways where goods and ideas travel with ease and fruitfully mingle. Geographies of refuge have historically been sought by remnants of peoples who might enter the safety of difficult terrain from different directions, each remnant bringing their own language and gene pool. The Anasazi homeland fits the bill. A tortuous high-altitude terrain of isolation and confinement sheltered different groups of different origins and languages, some Aztecan, some Keresan, some Tanoan. Paucity of arable lands and scarcity of water limited community life. Geography heavily imposed its problems to be solved and limited their solutions: from that arose a similarity in habitat and coping mechanisms.

Where, exactly, is this place? Well, therein lies an interesting discussion. Maps, like foreign words, can invite us to perceive in new ways. The interested reader will, most often, be directed to the most inane of (ir)relevant maps, that of the Four Corners area where four state boundaries meet, a map that was indubitably drawn up in a distant and unconcerned Washington by fat bureaucrats who were in a hurry to get to a cocktail party before the *hors d'oeuvres* gave out. The boundaries correspond to nothing sensible. And these fat cats had a better option on the table. John Wesley Powell, one of the great early American explorers of the Southwest, had submitted a proposal for state boundaries based on the area's scarcest resource: water. That would make for taking into account at least one significant variable. For Powell, each state, conceived as matching a natural watershed, would be, by boundaries alone, encouraged to engage in good stewardship. What a different southwest we would have today if Powell had been taken seriously. I can just imagine the

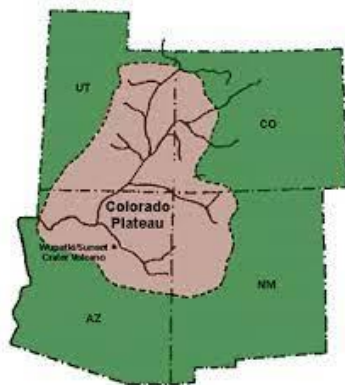
poignant conversation that could have taken place between these two geographers, Powell and Churchill Semple. The interested reader might also be directed to a map of the Colorado Plateau, the dominant geological feature of the Anasazi homeland. Archeologists might offer another map, given their interests in pre-literate cultures of North America. What a map includes, promotes, and ignores will forever determine our thoughts and decisions. For this reason, and for others to be further explained, my own preference goes to a hand drawn sketch provided by architect Vincent Scully of what he called The Shaped World.



The Four Corners.
Source. world atlas.com



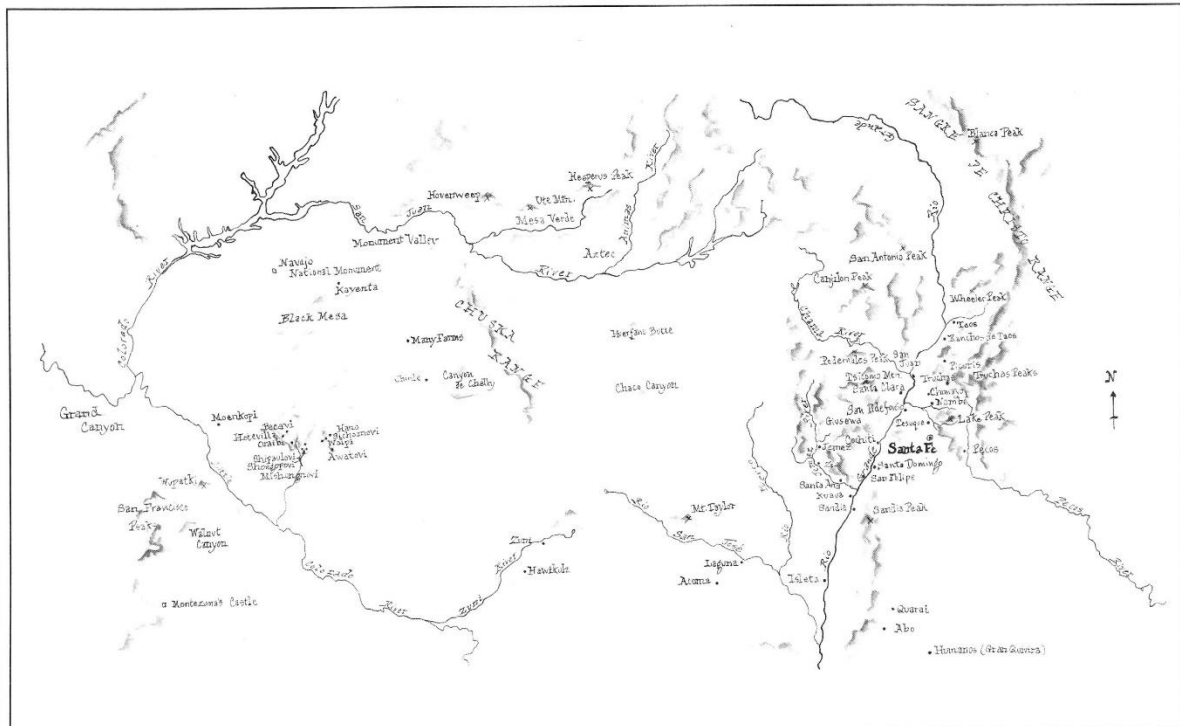
John Powell's proposal for future state boundaries.
Each state a natural watershed.
Source: <https://canyonology.com/powell-grand-canyon-water-in-the-west/>



The main geological feature: the Colorado Plateau.
Source. Wikipedia.



Early societies studied by archeologists.
Source <http://thefurtrapper.com/home/anasazi/source>



I:1 Sketch map showing most of the prehistoric and modern sites discussed. The topographical unity of this part of the Southwest and the beauty of its shape are immediately apparent in map form when the abstract grid of state boundaries is removed. (Drawing by Melanie Simo)

The Shaped World

as seen by Vincent Scully includes the Colorado Plateau and areas to the East along the Rio Grande and South.

Source: *Pueblo: mountain, village, dance* 1989 (page xviii)

What is the geography of this place? In strict geographic and geological terms, the Anasazi homeland is the Colorado Plateau proper and some surrounding areas of highly broken or folded strata of mesas, buttes, hogbacks, cuestas, rift valleys. Throw in a few volcanoes and lava flows here and there for good measure. To the northeast the Rocky Mountains formed as crust folded, fractured, and warped. To the southwest, lie the “kicked rug” landscapes of the basin and range. The Colorado Plateau itself is highly unusual: multiple layers of flat-lying sedimentary rock lifted to 7000 feet and then cut deep into canyons by rivers and further eroded by wind and flash floods. The layers shift from the red of dried blood, to brick, to watermelon rose, to salmon, to cream, to ochre, to ash, to black. Some layers (particularly the ones the color of dried blood known as the Morrison formation) are rich in the remains of life, fossils, dinosaurs, oil and gas. The rock is dry. The sun hot. The rare color is green. It seems strictly ornamental. Tiny patches, occasional skinny lengths of creek bottom land. Mountain summits of pine. Canyon water from hidden seeps accumulate drops in a fringe of green humidity. The textures meander from razor sharp lava flows to baby buttock smooth slick rock to endlessly combed strands of pastel hair through wavy slot canyons. The shapes in this Shaped World are compact and endlessly varied: square mesa tops, two-thousand-foot ravines, hoodoos, hillocks of shapely breasts, symmetrical cones of ash, towers, and craters.

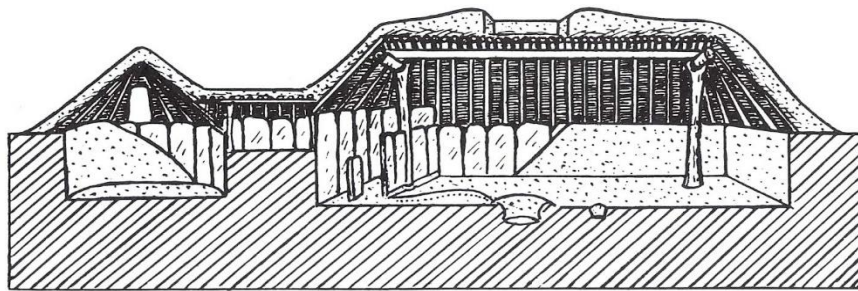


One face of many in the Shaped World. Bears Ears, Utah. Photo by author.

What would anthropo-geography tell us about culture in such a land of asylum, as expressed in political systems, built environments, or artistic endeavors? Ellen Churchill Semple notes “*Political dismemberment. . . . Lack of cohesion due to the presence of physical barriers impeding intercourse, is the inherent weakness of mountain peoples. . . . areas of isolation. . . . are regions of much labor and little leisure, of poverty today and anxiety for the morrow, of toil cramped hands and toiled old brains. . . . Never more than a small cord, because the simple, monotonous savage economy permits no concentration of population, no division of labor except that between sexes, and hence no evolution of classes. The common economic level of all is reflected in the simple social organization which necessarily has little cohesion because the group must be prepared to break up and scatter into smaller divisions when its members increase or its savage supplies decrease even a little.* (page 550)

Churchill Semple flies high and maintains a helicopter view. Although these pointers stand as broadly applicable, her anthropo-geography only takes us so far. Our case study, and perhaps all other case studies, call for more, and call for a different level of granularity. If we supplement Churchill Semple’s generalities with particularities provided by relevant archeologists, frequently working on all fours in dusty details to bring to light a bone or broken pot, we obtain a finer grained image. Now, the Shaped World shows an overall pattern of what Churchill Semple called ‘small cords’ which break up and scatter, mini-advances, mini-retreats, mini-abandonments, mini-returns.

A deep dive into the archeology of Cedar Mesa by David Roberts² shows nothing before an arrival about 200 AD; in 400 AD they walked out; around 650 they come back; they leave again a hundred years later; return in 1100; and in 1300 are part of the mass exodus. Small waffle gardens of corn, beans, and squash supplement hunting and gathering. Dwellings, for the most part, are round pit houses, kivas, with some small above ground rectangular rooms, most frequently for storage. If we think that how we build our dwellings is any indication of how we see ourselves and our relationship to the world, then we are in a cultural mind set of unity with nature. The shape of our homes echoes the shapes of the larger surrounding geography.



I:3 Mesa Verde, Colorado. Pit House, section. Modified Basketmaker. (After Roberts, Courtesy Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives)

A typical dwelling echoes the contours of the surrounding land and blends in with it.

Source: *Pueblo: mountain, village, dance* 1989 (page 4)

Can case studies feed back and enrich general theories? Perhaps the better contribution this case study can make to the discussion of anthropo-geography is less in how it develops and illustrates the general guidelines provided, than in the lessons it offers when mankind ignores the guidelines.

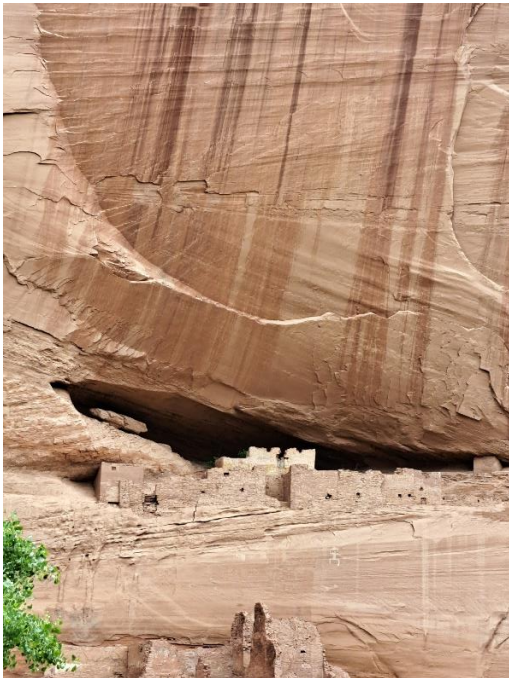
We're talking here of what we can surmise of goings-on from the 3rd to the 13th century in the Anasazi homeland. A lot of it is conjecture. A lot of it involves disagreements among specialists. However, it seems safe to say that from the 9th to the 12th century the Chaco canyon area saw the rise of a have-mores and have-less society—as indicated by dwelling size, burial artifacts, and indications of nutrition in bone remains. A fairly elaborate road system and trade items of turquoise, macaw, and shell, indicate an extensive sphere of influence. Buildings, now of finer masonry, were clearly oriented to cardinal directions and as well as key features within the landscapes. Astronomical markers indicate a thoughtful cosmology. Water control systems were in place. Population increased beyond what the land could carry.

Then, Dear Reader, there was hell to pay. Hell to pay.

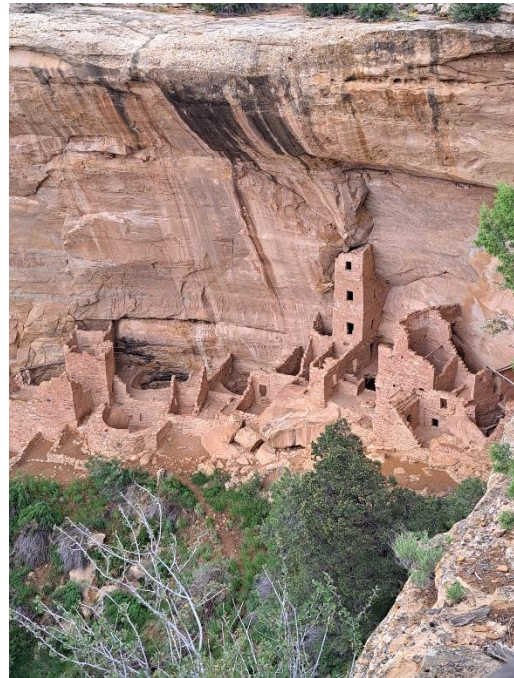
Telltale traces of the 13th century indicate a sad and vicious saga of collapse: resource exhaustion, malnutrition, stress,³ fracturing and scattering of groups, aggravation by long drought, mutual raiding, and mayhem. People left the area en masse. They seem frequently to have just walked away, moving mostly south and southeast to new spots or to join existing groups. Some places, such as Chaco itself or Mesa Verde show few traces of violence, but a lot of malnutrition. Other

sites, along McElmo creek in southern Colorado for example, tell of mass murder and, some will argue, cannibalism. Not a good time. Definitely not a good time.

Of these last difficult decades, a notable, arresting, and, dare I say, haunting feature of the built environment is the re-appearance of cliff dwellings. Looking way back, there was some very early and primitive use of adaptable overhangs in the first centuries, then the idea seems completely forgotten for a thousand years, and then resurfaces in the 12th century. Why? The first thought is safety, for why else would you do it? I have myself gingerly made my way up slick rock and a hand and toe “ladder” to reach a small well-hidden overhang with a built-in protective wall and a nearby equally well-hidden granary that still contained corn, a bit worse for the wear and the rodents, but still there. With bone marrow certitude, I declare that no woman would make that climb with a jug of water or a toddler unless she were absolutely and totally scared out of her wits. If fear has a smell (and I think it does), it still lingered in the air.



Cliff Dwelling, Canyon de Chelly, 11th Century.
Photo by author.



Cliff Dwelling, Mesa Verde, 13th Century.
Photo by author.

But the defense thesis, certainly for the larger cliff dwellings, is problematic.⁴ First of all, they are not easy to defend and very vulnerable to attack by ambush. Indeed, these dwellings are traps and with their timber roofs were fire traps: definitely not where you would want to be, if, in these old days as in historic times, setting fire to an enemy village was standard procedure. Additionally, the cliff dwelling is worse than useless if the task is to ward off raids on the mesa top, the fields, or on the granaries and raids for food supplies seems more plausible than organized warfare.

A radically different look at the cliff dwellings is proposed by architect Vincent Scully who became enthralled with the region, the pueblos, and their culture. Eschewing the obvious and practical question of defense in a time of turmoil and strife, Scully speculates that psychic malaise could be the reason for moving to the middle of the earth. He writes: *perhaps it was mankind's first holy*

conscious attempt to reach back out, or down, to mother Earth, his first major philosophical leap, or regression, not to separate himself from nature but to attempt a firmer grip on more of it. (page 24) For Scully, man had broken, as it were, the rules of anthropo-geography, royally shot himself in the foot, and had attempted redemption. Here is Scully on the cliff dwellings:

...Men cannot stand up to the sky and the earth in the Southwest, at least not without a technology that tends to destroy nature, which did not become a problem in the area until modern times.... In Chaco... the house was enclosed in the constructed shell of wall, upstanding and abstract in form – thus very much a man-made shape and one that was compulsively elaborate, even precious, in its structure. In the cliffs of Mesa Verde, the walls are entirely gone and the great house as a whole has no man-made shell whatsoever. The earth provides it now. The towers of the house probe up and the kivas probe down. This is the true magic of the houses, a complex highly evolved, and abstracted urbanism all slipped back into the earth as in some mad modern scientific dream. The shapes and sounds of rituals had to have been profoundly intensified in the setting. There is surely a true delirium of man-made geometry in the cylinders, cubes, and towers, but the ultimate order is the caverns, and to its pre-existing shape the human geometry must eventually conform. The masonry at Mesa Verde which was solid and dignified, becomes more rough and slapdash as time goes on and resembles the rubble and mud of modern pueblos. (pages 26-27)

The Anasazi peoples, having failed at redemption (or, at the very least, at finding dinner) moved out of their homeland and moved on. No doubt broken-hearted. Perhaps wiser.

PART III PERSONAL POST SCRIPT

Anxiety and Art

Churchill Semple was intrigued with the relationship between landscape and mindscape. Lands of refuge, however, did not command much of her attention: her only comment about this mindscape was that of anxiety. [lands of asylum are... *regions of much labor and little leisure, of poverty today and anxiety for the morrow...*] Precarious living naturally leads to worry. Will the rains come? Will the hunt yield meat? Will the corn last the winter? Personally, I sense much anxiety in the modern pueblo and would easily assume anxiety in the former Anasazi world: rituals need to be performed and performed precisely, lest a false move provoke bad luck. For a current day example, when a choice had to be made during COVID, elders at the Zuni pueblo opted to maintain ritual, including cramped togetherness in the kiva, rather than postpone their need to enact their part and beseech the world to do its part.

To develop this line of thought, consider the observations of Vincent Scully, who is quite eloquent in his take on the modern pueblo building and the pueblo art of communal ritual dance:

The pueblos are American and purists, hopeful, reasonable, and hard. Something true and clear, massively unsentimental, runs through all their works, and this is, at bottom, the relationship between man and nature that they embody and reveal. In this they occupy a

clear position in relation to the fundamental problem of human life: how to get along—which means in the end how to live and die—with the natural world and its laws. It is the fundamental architectural question as well, because the environment inhabited by human beings is created partly by nature and partly by themselves. All human construction involves the relationship between the natural and the man-made.... In historical terms, the character of that relationship is a major indication of the character of a culture as a whole. It tells us how the human beings who made it thought of themselves in relation to the rest of creation. Are they, in their view, unique in the scheme of things, or have no such conception? Do the buildings contrast with the forms of the earth or echo them? (page 4)

... The environmental function of Hopi architecture is not to provide complex interior spaces or a variety of individually expressive buildings but instead to use buildings to frame a plaza in which ritual dances can be performed and from which they can be watched. In Hopi buildings the human scale is precise, so that the buildings become an exact frame for ritual. The environment frames the act...

these dances... directly form human behavior and distill, in the architecture of their natural and man-made spaces, a sculptural and pictorial essence of human action and of the structure of human thought. They, like all works of art, flesh out at least two realities and live in two kinds of time—first in that of their people, and secondly, outside and beyond it, capable of any number of unexpected effects upon others, able to endow themselves with a thousand meanings and inhabiting the time of the watcher, or perhaps eternity alone.

... The dance is like an order of form not rigid but taking shape from its own inner dynamics, and therefore full of accident and variety within the ritual frame that calls it forth. Infinitely particular it can be, and even casual, but it is inexhaustibly fertile, both in disciplined force and resourceful device, because it is passion that moves it and the cooperative rhythm of a whole people that gives it form. (page 212)

... The dances themselves I believe to be the most profound works of art yet produced on the American continent. They call up a pity and terror which only Greek tragedy rivals, no less than a comic joy, at once animal and ironic, that suggests the precursors of Aristophanes. (page xiii)

That is quite a statement for Scully to make, is it not? *The most profound works of art yet produced on the American continent.* I have attended a few of the dances when the public was allowed. Not always, but once in a while there would be a dancer with the talent of a Vaslav Nijinsky, undergoing metamorphosis and becoming the deer or the butterfly. I was lucky enough to be invited to Zuni Shalako. Shalako goes on and on all night and all the next day, with anxiety, testing every fiber of those who take part. Exhausted or not, one mistake, one missed step, brings all into question. As art, these pueblo dances plumb a depth of humanity that Santa Fe's traditional Friday night art gallery openings never dreamt of. In that, I would have to agree with Scully.

Up to Date

The case study proper ends with the abandoning of homeland at the end of the 13th century by the Ancestral Puebloans when the survivors limped out of the hills in their respective language groups, headed south and south east, and are now, so many generations hence, in Hopi, Zuni, Acoma, Taos, and so on. It seems only fair to complete the story for the Reader and bring things forward to modern times.

Shortly after the abandonment of the homeland, the Navajo came, by dribbles and drabs, into the Shaped World. With their dispersed habitat and pastoralism, they took to pockets of more open land and took to a lifestyle of raiding the pueblos for stashes of corn and beans. *Raiding is the natural thing to do* would be the comment of Churchill Semple: *the desert makes them do it*.

We know about the Navajo's attachment to the land both through historical records and modern-day commentary. Consider Medicine Man, John Begay, speaking to author Douglas Preston: "*You have the Bible, we have the land. The land is our book. The four sacred mountains. . . are what maintain b'ozb'ò or balance in the world. Everything we have as a people came from those mountains. They give us our physical and mental health. They give us long life and happiness. Every day, when I pray I think of those mountains just pouring blessings and health into the Navajo people. You find your origin in words, and we see our origin in those mountains. They exist so we exist. If someday they die, we die too.*"⁵ Who, among Whites, took the Navajo relationship to the Shaped World most seriously? The military. Take as an illustration the comments of a certain Commander Carlton of Civil War days who was assigned (by his boss Kit Carson) the duty of ending the pesky Navajo marauders who galloped off with military horses and supplies. He wrote that it was the land that provided all to the Navajo. "*They will never be crushed until they are ferreted out of the haunts, and hills, and hiding places of their country and transferred to a distant reservation under the eye of the Army.*"⁶

On the heels of the Navajo, came Hispanic settlers who had worked their way north from Mexico. They took to the small patches of river bottom for subsistence farming. But consider how it is the Shaped World that shapes them and not the other way round. Churchill Semple reminds us more than once that geography works less by sudden force than by long slow erosion. *It is the persistent effect of remoteness which counts*, she writes. *It is the long reach which weakens the arm of authority, no matter what the race or country or epoch.* (page 13) This land was too remote and too insignificant for Mexico City or the Catholic Church to bother with these settlers. Left to their own devices, the Hispanic communities made up their own laws for home rule, put their own (rather dark) spin on Catholicism, and many a Hispanic man fathered his children with a Pueblo wife. The crypto-Jews among the settlers professed Christianity but continued to quietly do some of their own things, such as make unleavened bread at certain times of the year. But after a while, deprived of their resources and authorities, they couldn't remember why. The remote and disconnected Shaped World shaped them as well.

Then Whites came, not because anyone thought the location a choice morsel, but, propelled by Manifest Destiny, it lay between any place important and what they did want, which was California. There were miners and Mormons and railroad men and then oil and gas men: an

economic showcase of Joseph Schumpeter's creative destruction, one economic technology rolling over the previous one.

Unlike the Navajo who stringently avoided Anasazi ruins, and the Hispanics who seemed to find them of little interest, the Whites did mess with the ruins. Some, like the colorful Weatherill brothers, were enthusiastic and curious amateur archeologists working with the ideas and tools of their time. Excavating sites with the Weatherills, was the Swedish scientist Gustaf Nordenskiöld, who had come to New Mexico's high country to cure himself of tuberculosis, but caught the archeology bug instead. He shipped back to Scandinavia two railroad cars full to the brim with found treasure and provoked the first American legislation curbing theft and removal. The Mormons of Blanding, Utah get dubious recognition for having runs-in with the new laws and holding on to the idea that a shovel for recreational grave digging was a normal part of a family picnic. There still are the run of the mill scoundrels looking for a pot or a mummified body that might sell. On the whole, however, nowadays is the heyday of the entrance ticket, the museum displays, the state employed archeologist and the uniformed park ranger. These professionals claim that they have an oxymoron of a job: they must protect the sites and educate the public. If you want to protect the sites, so their argument goes, the best thing to do is exclude the public. The latest coined word among those in-the-know is *touron*: a combination of tourist and moron.

Aesthetics and Wholeness

Although my mind boggles at Churchill Semple's accomplishments, I am also perplexed by what she left out. There is, in all her six hundred pages, nary a line about aesthetics. Should aesthetics be a natural part of anthropo-geography or should it be, as Churchill Semple provides, strictly a reflection on geographic affordances?

I chose this place as my case study because I love it so very much. I revel in its sensorium of shapes, textures, silences, smells, its mesmerizing beauty—a surround of abstract art with insane colors, minimalist lines, and subtle complexities. But are my feelings relevant? “*When we look at a landscape*”, says Robert McFarland, “*we do not see what is there, but largely what we think is there. We attribute qualities to a landscape which it does not intrinsically possess—savage-ness, for example, or bleakness, and reevaluate accordingly.*”⁷ In a similar vein, Simon Schama declared, “*landscape is a work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock.*”⁸

What I see in the Shaped World (whether there or not) is aloofness. Unlike Holland—where I spend much of my time and where the Dutch quite literally made their surrounds themselves and in their own image—this land is not me and does not care about me. A case of unrequited love. I love it and it couldn't give a tinker's damn about my love. I sense quite deeply its distance and disinterest and its corollary (whether there or not) of appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

*Dry wash, truck tracks in the riverbed
Coiled sand pinyon
Sea bottom
Riverbank
Sand dunes
The floor of a sea once again.*

Gary Snyder, *The Back Country*

I feel appropriateness in this landscape to be about time. This is a land of eons and eternity carved into its cliffs and caverns. Its shapes are the traces of its time. There comes with that a natural hierarchy to be respected. The long-lived pine tree suffers the idiocy of the short-lived squawking jay. The mountain suffers the pine tree. Mankind rates only slightly above the jay. It's best for him to construct his nests with a nod to eternity and go with the flow. The Ancestral Puebloans built with adobe mud bricks that melted back down. Their stone walls

tumbled. Their wattle and wood had their own limited time horizon. All that is well and good, as is Hispanic village mud brick and Navajo hogan. Even the modern trailer has some wisdom about its relevance. What jars is plastic grass and metal siding with pretenses of longevity and supremacy, or take the preposterous fifteen floor towers of hotel chains in Page, Arizona or Moab, Utah. Moab, by the way, is now a verb. *To moab or not to moab, that is the question.* There is a bumper sticker made by the not-so-distant town of Bluff which reads: *Do not moab Bluff.* Moab was an abandoned Mormon settlement and then an abandoned uranium mining operation, it now offers neon lights and delights to *tourons*: sushi bars, karaoke, latte take aways, sporting goods new and used, and ATV rides through the sandstone cathedrals. Might as well roller skate with a boom box through Chartres. What are they thinking; or are they not thinking at all? It just isn't appropriate. If Moab provokes sardonic laughter, to contemplate the HUD housing on reservations is to weep: such levels of insult, tawdry ugliness, ignorance, and deep inappropriateness.

And, finally there is the delicate and subtle question of wholeness. Although I would strongly contend, as I did in the first section, that Churchill Semple allows us to more firmly ground our thinking about habitat and inhabitant, and that she both precedes and strengthens place authors such as Christopher Alexander on patterns and Jane Jacobs on organized complexity, I don't sense in Churchill Semple much of a sensitivity about wholeness. She does offer a plethora of reflections on boundaries but not on the whole which is bound.

My case study does not readily elucidate the question either. It is Vincent Scully, who, once again, offers some insight. The map that he proposes isn't of a place clearly framed. The Shaped World has no formal or informal boundary markers. It is a whole, but a subtle one revealing itself slowly and only to those with patience and attentiveness. One learns to feel the edges. Driving north out of Albuquerque one must climb La Bajada hill and that always feels to me like a steep entranceway. Going on the east-west highway 140, if you dare take your attention off the speeding trucks, you might sense that you are skirting some large breathing body just to the north. Many segments of the Shaped World have been kept intact because they are reservation land, national forest, or parks. Other segments have been injured through industrial drilling and fracking for oil; and there is the curious history of Los Alamos and the Bomb made in the Shaped World, but only because Oppenheimer came camping here as a boy and remembered its remoteness and beauty.

The pueblos, modern and ancient, are one with the land, indeed, part and parcel of it. Here is Scully on the topic. The operative word in the following quote is *oneness*.

European architecture has come to explore multiple themes, many of them having to do with the victorious exercise of human energy and with dominating the world. A glorious architecture, yes, and counting many victories, but now clearly required by mortal necessity to exhibit a renewed reverence for nature's realities and to explore ways for decent interaction with the earth and its forces in the crowded years to come. Not least with the force in the sun. North American Indian architecture, on the other hand, whether because his builders are less 'developed,' less powerful, considerably wiser, or merely more practical than their conquerors, has for many centuries been concerned with nothing less than the cosmic theme: celebrating a vast human and natural concordance, oneness, and peace—the same for relentless Apache raiders as for the farmers of the pueblos. Perhaps, especially in the case of the Pueblos, this is so in part because they have seen it all before: the failure of resources, the desolation of the earth; the death of the proud towns—and then their patient, humble, indomitable resurrections. . . . (page 206)

I've walked and contemplated much of the Shaped World. I've walked many of the places left by the Old Ones. I have sat quietly in spots untrampled, dusty, undisturbed, and also in sites prepared for public consumption. I have sometimes commented to friends and colleagues who love this land as I do: *You know, the unexcavated unmarked ruins are one kind of place, but when you visit the parkified archeological sites with the swept paths, the explanatory panels, the shelved artifacts, each object catalogued and numbered. . . . The places seem dead. It went sterile. The ghosts have gone. You know what I mean?* My friends nod vigorously, *Yes, Yes*, they say, *We know exactly what you mean.* Well, it is—in some ways—comforting that they know what I mean, but, the problem is, I don't know what I mean. After all, what is a ghost? I don't know what a ghost is. I sometimes feel in these untouched places that there is a presence, a sentience. I am aware of it and it is aware of me.

I also find I have increasing problems with my own kind of people—the pedigreed scholars. Sure, it's easy enough to dismiss the scumbag pot hunter and the tourons out moabing, but I'm finding that professional excavation and analysis equals autopsy. Sure, there are reasons to do it; information to be gleaned. But it is, at the same time, a dismantling of a whole, a breaking apart of connections, an estrangement and reification. Henri Bortoft, the British philosopher of science who had a lot to say about wholeness makes a distinction between inauthentic and authentic wholes.⁹ Inauthentic wholes are the reconstruction of parts that were never separate to begin with. Maybe that is what we are doing: running around making inauthentic wholes.

To walk the Anasazi homeland is to walk a land of refuge. It also is to walk a land where the laws of anthropo-geography were ignored and where climate change, in the form of drought, brought a final blow. It is a place to acknowledge a tragic reset in human history. It is a place to pay respects to ghosts. It is a place to take onboard another Navajo word, *Nahodishgish*, which, if I understand it correctly, means something like: *some places are better left alone.*



Balcony House Mesa Verde. Still untouched and complete with ghosts.
 Photo from 1891 taken by Gustaf Nordenskiöld. Source: Mesa Verde National Park
[nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/Smith/chapter 2](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/Smith/chapter_2)

FOOTNOTES

¹ *Africa begins at the Pyrenees*. The phrase is most often attributed to Dominique Frédéric Dufour de Pradt. His account of France's dreadful experiences during the then recent Peninsular War, *Mémoires historiques sur la révolution d'Espagne* (1816), contains a sturdy exposition of the substance behind the slogan: *It is an error of geography to have assigned Spain to Europe; it belongs to Africa: blood, manners, language, the way of life and making war, in Spain everything is African. The two nations have been mixed up for too long—the Carthaginians who came from Africa to Spain, the Vandals who left Spain for Africa, the Moors who stayed in Spain for 700 years—for such a long cohabitation not to have confused the race and customs of the two countries. If the Spaniard were Mohammedan, he would be completely African; it is religion that has kept it in Europe.*

² Roberts, David. *In Search of the Old Ones: exploring the Anasazi world of the southwest*. Simon and Schuster. 1996.

³ David Stuart worked out an ingenious system for a more careful study of the demise of the Anasazi culture. Calories could be accurately assessed and serve as a stand-in for energy consumption. For example, how many extra calories did it take for a woman to bring a pregnancy to successful birth. How many calories did a man expend walking ten miles cross country versus ten miles on a road. Masonry work on a second story requires more calorie expenditure than on a

ground level. As the hunting and gathering brought in fewer and fewer calories, they depended increasingly on corn which required more and more hard labor to produce. The Anasazi had, in a word, eaten themselves out of house and home. The title of his book, *Anasazi America*, lets the reader know that he is making a parallel between the demise of the Anasazi and the pending demise of America. Source: Stuart, David. *Anasazi America: Seventeen centuries on the road from center place*. University of New Mexico. 2014.

⁴ Cordell, Linda. *Anasazi Nucleation for Defense: Reasons to Doubt an Obvious Solution*. University of Boulder. 1976

⁵ *Talking to the Ground*, Preston, Douglas. Simon & Schuster, 1995, page 129

⁶ *ibid.*, 195

⁷ Quote from Gulliford, Andrew, *Bears Ears: Landscape of Refuge and Resistance*, University of Utah Press, 2022. Page 14

⁸ *Ibid.*, 355

⁹ Seamon, David. "Holism and the Gurdjieff Work: Henri Bortoft's Authentic Wholeness and J. G. Bennett's Systematics," in *Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review* (special "Gurdjieff" issue, editor Carole Cusack), 2024.

REFERENCES

Churchill Semple. *Influences of Geographic Environment*. first printed 1911. Reprint. The Perfect Library. 2018.

Conner, Mary Ellen. editor. *Colorado Plateau: the story behind the scenery*. KC publications (national park books.com) 1995.

Ford, Andrew Gullah. *Bears Ears: landscape of refuge and resistance*. University of Utah Press. 2022.

Lekson, Stephen. *A History of the Ancient Southwest*. A School for Advanced Research Book. 2014.

Preston, Douglas. *Talking to the Ground*. Simon & Schuster, 1995.

Roberts, David. *In Search of the Old Ones: exploring the Anasazi world of the southwest*. Simon and Schuster. 1996.

Scully, Vincent. *Pueblo: mountain village dance*. University of Chicago press. Second edition. 1989.

Seamon, David. "Holism and the Gurdjieff Work: Henri Bortoft's Authentic Wholeness and J. G. Bennett's Systematics," in *Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review* (special "Gurdjieff" issue, editor Carole Cusack), 2024.

Stuart, David. *Anasazi America: Seventeen centuries on the road from center place*. University of New Mexico. 2014.