

# CULTURAL LANDSCAPE: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Kaylene Fleming

## ABSTRACT

In 1925, Carl Sauer defined a cultural landscape as a natural landscape that had been modified by a cultural group (1925:46). Over the decades, anthropologists have used the cultural landscape as either a paradigm within ecological anthropology, or as a framing device giving the ethnographer a picturesque and recognizable landscape in which to place a cultural group (Hirsch 1995:1). Eric Hirsch proposes that within a cultural landscape there are two framing devices. One is the objective framework and is the "here-and-now" perception that an individual has of a cultural landscape. The problem with the objective framework is that it excludes the point of view of the people who inhabit the cultural landscape. This is found within the subjective framework that is defined as how individuals interact with, or "see", their cultural and physical environment (1995:1). This paper is an outline and evaluation of the theories underlying the objective and subjective frameworks of a cultural landscape using the Rancho San Jose Del Valle, San Diego County as a model.

## INTRODUCTION

In their introduction to *The Recovery of Meaning* (1988), Mark Leone and Parker B. Potter Jr wrote that "people (not necessarily individuals) have an active role in conceiving, making, using, discarding, and thinking about the items of material culture that have become the archaeological record. This author believes that the same line of reasoning applies to the landscape--people have an active role in conceiving, making, using, and thinking about the landscape in which they live. How we unravel this behavior and thought embedded in the landscape depends upon a variety of perspectives.

The perspective explored through anthropological theory in an archaeological context throughout this paper is expressed in a statement by Alexander von Humboldt. In 1850, von Humboldt, a German geographer, stated that, "in order to comprehend nature in all of its vast sublimity, it would be necessary to present it under a twofold aspect, first objectively, as an actual phenomenon, and next subjectively, as it is reflected in the feelings of mankind" (cited in Saarinen 1974:255-256). 145 years later, this concept was restated by Eric Hirsch in his introduction to *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspective on Place and Space*. Hirsch proposed that within a cultural landscape there are

two framing devices. The first is the objective framework, which is the presence of a person within a defined area. The second framework is one that has "imputed meaning" (1995:1). This author has called this the subjective framework and defines it as how individuals interact with, perceive, or understand their cultural and physical environment; aligning it with von Humboldt's concept that the feelings of mankind are reflected in the landscape. From an archaeological point of view, the author believes that these "feelings" are the cultural elements (whether natural or cultural) identified in the landscape, and they become that data from which we make inferences about cultural processes. Throughout the rest of this paper the objective and subjective framework will be explored and identified through the theories of perception, symbolism, and cognition, with examples applied to the cultural landscape of the Kupa-ngakitum (ethnographically known as the Cupeño of Warner Springs, San Diego County).

## OBJECTIVE FRAMEWORK

The objective framework is a familiar concept, it is the framing device in which specific cultures are placed. Generally, within archaeology this framework is described from a scientific standpoint, detailing the geographical, biological, and geological features of the landscape. These data become a crucial part of cultural landscape

studies, for changes in these features reflect the tangible interaction of a cultural group with their environment.

## SUBJECTIVE FRAMEWORK

The three theories selected to explore the meaning of the subjective framework were influenced by references made to **landscape perception, the symbolic nature of objects in the landscape, and landscape cognition**, in essays from *Landscape Meanings and Values*, edited by Edmund C. Penning-Roswell and David Lowenthal (1986).

### Landscape Perception

How past cultures perceived their environment and what it means for archaeology can be considered in two questions posed by Kenneth H. Craik in *Psychological Reflection on Landscape* (1984:48):

1. How do newcomers and natives differ in their perceptions of a landscape?
2. How do the backgrounds and prior personal environment of the observer affect perceptions of a specific setting.

To answer these questions it is necessary to understand what perception means. According to Webster's Dictionary, it can be defined as, "a recognizable sensation or impression received by the mind through the senses." For example, clouds drifting over mountains may mean bad weather to one person, while to another they may appear to give the mountains a mystic appearance. These differing opinions can be understood through two principles identified by Seagall, Campbell, and Herskovits (1966:3) that underlie perception--*cultural relativism* and *phenomenal absolutism*.

*Cultural relativism* is the recognition that other cultures have their own values and concepts of reality that are culturally conditioned. *Phenomenal absolutism* explains why an observer assumes that all other observers perceive the situation the same way--the world is exactly as the observer sees it. Seagall, Campbell, and Herskovits and other cross-cultural psychologists have concluded that the basic concepts of perception are influenced

by ecological demands and cultural practices (1966:49-68).

Returning to the two previous questions and applying them to Valle de San José (cultural landscape of the Kupa-ngakitum), answers can be found in Joseph J. Hill's book, *The History of Warner's Ranch and Its Environs* (1927). In 1795, when Father Mariner rode through Valle De San José, he saw a different landscape than that perceived by the Kupa-ngakitum. Mariner's vision also differed from that of Juan José who settled the valley in 1844. It also differed from ex-Governor John G. Downey, who reconsolidated the valley into one property, and from William Griffith Henshaw who purchased a portion of Warner's Ranch in 1911. Father Mariner saw a landscape that was suitable for the establishment of a presidio and mission. Warner perceived the landscape to be "unoccupied" and suitable for grazing sheep and cattle (Hill 1927:109, 187-188). Downey saw the value of the valley under one ownership, while Henshaw's vision was to develop the San Luis Rey River into an irrigation system that would develop the surrounding country-side into agricultural communities. For the Kupa-ngakitum, the valley and surrounding mountains represented their ancestral home.

From an archaeological bias we need to ask, "how are these two questions observable in the archaeological record?" The relationship of perception, the environment, and archaeology is illustrated in Karl Butzer's model--*Perception, spatial behavior, and the archaeological record* (see Figure 1). In this model, the real environment is the physical and biological environment in which people live. Information about the environment is psychologically filtered, or in other words, elements in the environment are given specific properties as to its function by the observer, creating the perceived environment about which decisions are made. These decisions in turn influence how the environment is used and will remain in the landscape in the form of material culture and land-use patterns (1990:253). A simple example of Butzer's model to Valle de San José is found in Warner's perception of the valley and the position of his ranch. Warner saw the valley as being "unoccupied," whereas in fact the village of Kupa (ancestral home of the Kupa-ngakitum) is two miles to the north. This statement

reflects his attitude toward the indigenous population that is manifested in the position of his ranch in the San Felipe Wash, creating an effective topographic barrier between himself and the Kupa-ngakitum. In some cases perception may not be observable and will remain a matter of conjecture. However, an understanding of perception may give insight into the placement of sites, for example, or the importance of natural cultural features within an area of study.

### Symbolic Nature of Objects in the Landscape

Victor Turner's theory on symbolism and ritual contains three principles that are applicable to the symbolism of landform:

1. Many things and actions are represented in a single formation.
2. Essentially distinct meanings are interconnected by analogy or by association in fact or thought.
3. Referents assigned to a symbol frequently tend to be grouped at opposed semantic poles.

At one pole (the ideological) are found meanings that refer to components of the social and moral orders of society. At the other pole (the sensory) the meanings are either natural, or a physiological phenomenon, or processes that stimulate desires and feelings (in McGee and Wams 1996:448). Many elements in the cultural landscape (physical and cultural) contain meanings that express a world view. For instance, we are familiar with the concept that geological features may be identified with the actions, creative or destructive of heroic ancestral beings (Tacon 1995:117). According to Paul Tacon this process of mythologizing or marking landscapes creates a socialized landscape which in turn has an effect on social behavior. Marking the landscape takes on many forms and is definable in the archaeological record. Examples are rock art, pathways, cairns, stone circles, and the naming of land forms. The function of these socialized parts of the landscape may be different; for instance, they may define which parts of the environment clans or tribes have access to, or they may mark centers associated with ritual, or homes of spirits associated with the land (1995:117-125).

Returning to Valle de Josè, the symbolic approach taken is that the landscapes become

socialized through myths and marking which in turn affects social behavior. Based on William Duncan Strong's 1929 ethnography, the Kupa-ngakitum clan structure originated in the myth of Kishily Pewish--legendary hero and regenerator of the Kupa-ngakitum. After returning to Kupa as a young man, Kishily Pewish married two Luiseño and had three sons. Towards the end of his life, Kishily Pewish was badly treated by his two younger sons and their wives. Calling his three sons together Kishily Pewish divided the land. To his eldest son, who treated him kindly, he gave him and his descendants the name *kavalim* and the majority of the land, while to his second son he gave the name *pumtumatulnik* and told him to live at sitcnil; the third son (who is half brother to the elder sons) was told to live in the north and call himself and his descendants *temewhanitic*.

This land division is reflected in marriage customs that Strong's informants described as having its origins in terms of distance. Members of the *kavalim* and *pumtumatulnik* clans cannot intermarry. However, both clans can marry members of the *temewhanitic* clan because at one time they lived further away. From an anthropological point of view the reason can be explained by consanguineal relationships. The founders of the *kavalim* and *pumtumatulnik* clans are half-brothers to the *temewhanitic* clan. This mythologising and socialising of the landscape may be rationalized by Turner's theory. For instance, division of the land may represent management of economic resources and exogamous marriage customs, while leadership may be reflected in who owns the larger share of the land.

### Landscape cognition

Cognition is the cultural knowledge that is embedded in words, in stories, and in artifacts, which is learned from and shared with other humans (D'Andrade 1996:xiv). Language expresses this cultural knowledge; therefore, it is through this expression that cultural ideas, beliefs, and values, can be identified. To quote Keith Basso, "Language emerges as a powerful vehicle of thought and a crucial instrument for accomplishing social interaction, as an indispensable means of knowing the world and for performing deeds within it" (1990:xii).

What Basso is referring to has been called the "invisible landscape" by Kent C. Ryden (1993), who states that through words, the landscape is perpetually kept alive, and the flat objective landscape is given identity. For example, when a Cibecue Apache says, "tse hadigaiye yu 'agodzaa" (It happened at line of white rocks extends upward and out, at this very place), a historic narrative that occurred at a certain geographical point is recalled. It is a suggestion, "to remember ancestral wisdom and apply it directly to matters of personal concern," for within Cibecue culture it is considered impolite to talk directly about other peoples' problems (Basso 1990:158). By recalling historical events or mythical stories, a Cibecue Apache can express empathy or displeasure to another within their cultural boundaries.

Returning once more to Valle del Josè, all actors within the valley have created an "invisible landscape" with imputed meaning. During the 1795 expedition, Father Mariner named the valley "San Josè." This naming passed the valley into the history of California. Across the "invisible landscape" have marched representatives of all the cultural phases of California. The prehistoric period is represented in the names given by the Kupa-ngakitum to certain features of the landscape. Hot Springs Mountain is known as *Su'ish paki* (Jack-rabbit hole)--the home of a fabled black-and-white four foot rabbit. The undulating

topography of the northern area of the valley is "burrowing owl's territory," while a small hill in Lost Valley canyon is the ancestral area where the ancestors of the Kupa-ngakitum first saw Kupa.

Archaeologically, the Entrada and Mission Phases are represented in the mission outpost at Santa Ysabel and Saint Francis chapel at Warner Springs. Secularization and the annexation of California is represented in the use of Warner's name for the prehistoric village of Kupa, while the modern progressive age of San Diego County is implied in Lake Henshaw, which originally was called Warner's Dam.

## CONCLUSION

This paper outlining the objective and subjective framework of a landscape is exploratory, with the data based on the built environment, ethnography, and history. By using this perspective there is a greater potential to understand the behavior and thoughts embedded in the landscape.

---

## REFERENCES CITED

Basso, Keith  
1990 *Western Apache Language and Culture Essays in Linguistic Anthropology*. University of Arizona Press, Tuscon.

Butzer, Karl  
1982 *Archaeology as Human Ecology*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

D'Andrade, Roy  
1996 *The Development of Cognitive Anthropology*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Hirsch, Eric  
1986 *Landscape: Between Place and Space*. In *Landscape Meanings and Values*. Editors Edmund C. Penning-Roswell and David Lowenthal. Allen and Unwin Cambridge.

Hill, Joseph  
1927 *The History of Warner's Ranch and its Environs*. Privately printed, Los Angeles.

Leone, Mark and Parker B. Potter, Jr.  
1988 *The Recovery of Meaning*

McGee, R Jon and Richard L. Warms  
1996 *Anthropological Theory*. Mayfield Publishing Company, Mountain View.

Penning-Roswell, Edmund

1986 *Landscape Meanings and Values*.

Editors Edmund C. Penning-Rowell and David Lowenthal. Allen and Unwin, Cambridge.

Seagall, Marshall H, et al

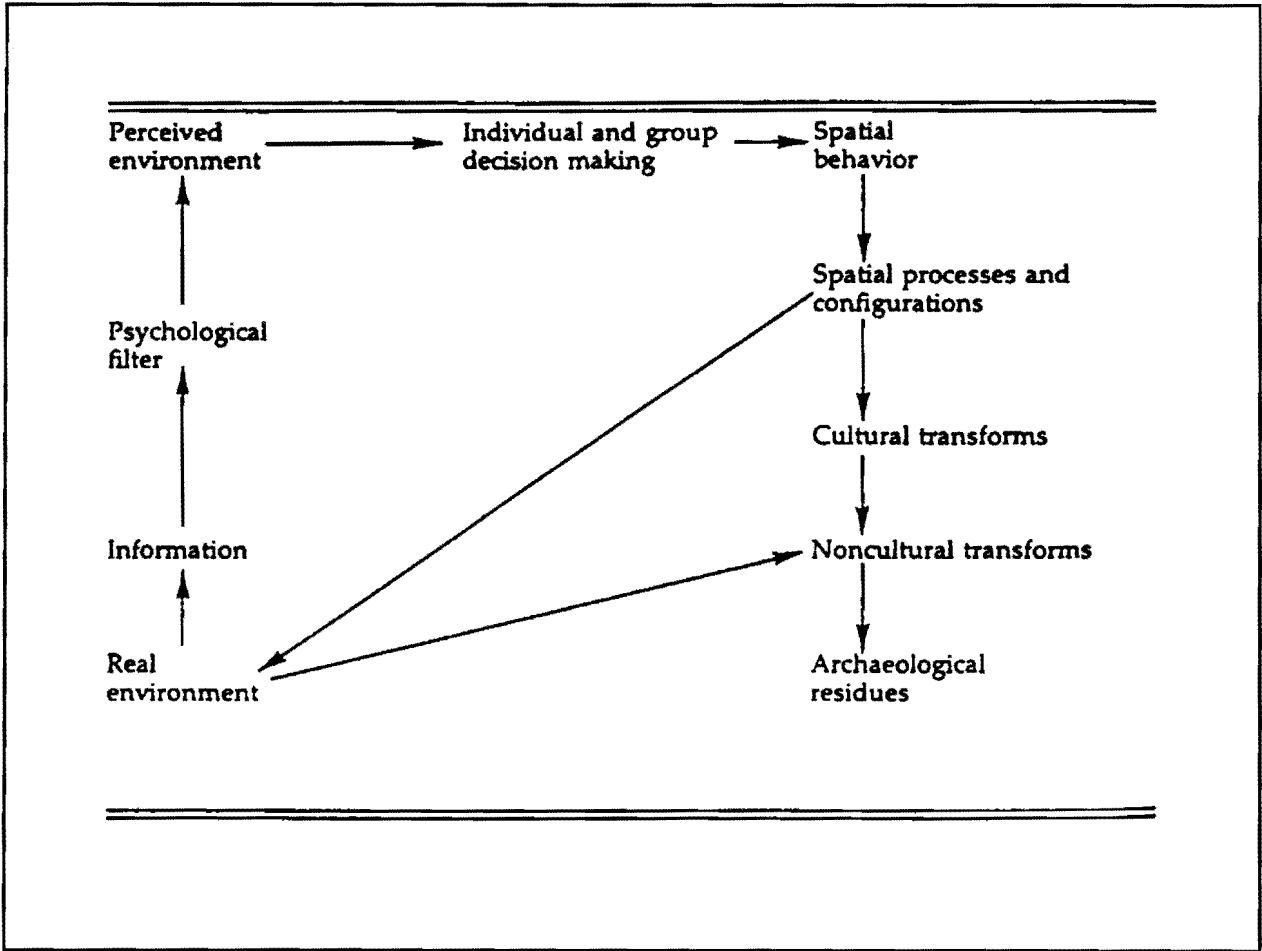
1966 *The Influences of Culture On Visual Perception*. Editors Marshall H. Seagall, Donald T. Campbell and melville J. Herskovits, The Robbs-Merrill Company, Inc., Indianapolis.

Strong, William Duncan

1929 Aboriginal Society in Southern California. *University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology*, Vol.26.

Tacon, Paul S.C.

1995 Socialising landscapes: the long-term implications of signs, symbols and marks on the land. In *Archaeological Oceania* vol 29:117-127.



**Figure 1: Karl Butzer's Model;  
Perception, Spatial Behavior, and the Archaeological Record**