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Native American Pottery: Ancient and Evolving Traditions in the American Southwest

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**Native American Pottery:
Ancient and Evolving Traditions in the American Southwest**

By

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Final Project submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

Chapter 1: Introduction

Painted pottery has long played an important role within Native American cultures. When pottery making first began in the American Southwest nearly two thousand years ago, it fulfilled an important practical need for vessels to store, cook, and serve food. The earliest of this pottery is simple, undecorated, and largely unremarkable. Over time, however, prehistoric potters discovered materials and technologies that allowed them to embellish their ceramic wares with simple painted designs. As these cultures advanced and pottery became integral to daily and ceremonial life, the aesthetic functions of painted pottery grew more complex and meaningful to native peoples. Eventually, these traditions evolved to such a level of sophistication that different regions came to be known for their distinct and beautiful painting styles.

By the time Spanish explorers first arrived in the Southwest in 1540, the social and cultural importance of painted pottery traditions had long been established. Up until this point, native societies had existed in relative isolation from outside cultures. Though the organization and traditions of Native American societies were continuously changing and adapting to social and environmental challenges in the Southwest, these groups had existed in relative peace prior to foreign contact. The mid-1500s, however, marked the beginning of the historic, or “contact era” Southwest, a period that brought radical changes to the native peoples of this region.

The social, cultural, and economic changes that foreign contact introduced to the Southwest during this period are complex and often grotesque. Thousands of Native Americans were killed or forced to leave their homelands, lands that their ancestors had been living on for thousands of years. Missionary efforts sought to suppress religious practices

deemed barbaric by Westerners. Native peoples were forced to work to supply Spanish settlements with food and material goods. New plants and animals were introduced, as well as deadly foreign diseases that destroyed entire villages.

Despite these often-brutally oppressive forces, some native groups in the Southwest, including those known as the Pueblos, managed to retain their traditional ways of life, and many have even flourished in recent periods because of their distinctive pottery traditions. Early Spanish settlers, for example, relied on native pottery to store, serve, and cook food until well into the eighteenth century. When the Industrial Revolution rendered the utilitarian roles of pottery obsolete, new functions for painted wares were invented that have since allowed many native groups to remain viable in the modern world.

Today, Pueblo painted pottery has almost universal appeal to modern day viewers. On an emotional level, these paintings are compelling to us simply because of the beauty of their bold, dynamic patterns and often-mysterious imagery. They also capture our attention on an intellectual level because of their ability to provide important clues about the mythology and lifeways the prehistoric Native Americans who made them. For these reasons, painted pots are analyzed in research labs, admired in art museums, and coveted by collectors around the globe as both archaeological and cultural artifacts of an ancient culture.

My personal interest in these pottery traditions stems from my own relationship with clay. As a ceramic artist working within a modern Western perspective of art, I am particularly interested in how the value of hand-crafted pottery reflects the cultural context in which it is made, used, and experienced—and which of these factors dominates. In Western cultures, it seems that the valuation of pottery (as in other traditional crafts) is often complicated by conflicting notions about *fine art* and *craft*. Such notions, I believe,

ultimately reveal an underlying tension between the aesthetic and utilitarian functions of objects in modern Western culture—an idea I will revisit throughout this paper. In contrast, these functions seem to exist in relative harmony within traditional Native American cultures, where the aesthetic roles of painted pottery are often tied to their functions as utilitarian vessels.

Contact with Westerners in the historic era (ca. A.D. 1600-1950), however, greatly affected painted pottery traditions by removing these objects from their traditional context. Instead of functioning within native cultures as utilitarian and spiritual objects, pottery entered the Western world first as utilitarian commercial goods and later as collectible crafts, artifacts, and eventually objects of art. In addition to changing the context in which pottery was experienced, this transition subjected native potters and their wares to Western standards and values that were previously foreign to them.

The goals of this paper, therefore, are twofold. The first is to gain an understanding of how the meaning and value of pottery in prehistoric Native American cultures might have derived from its social and cultural functions. The second is to understand how this relationship has evolved over the nearly two thousand years that Native Americans have been making pottery in the Southwest. Therefore, this paper provides an examination of pottery traditions in the prehistoric era, a cross-cultural look at how these traditions were influenced by Western cultures during the historic era, and a discussion of the current state of pottery making in the Southwest today. By examining the evolution of pottery traditions across these broad periods I hope to shed light on the complexity of valuation within modern pottery traditions, where cultural boundaries are often blurred and ceramic wares often transcend Western categories of *art* and *craft*.

I attempt to answer these broad questions by focusing on the evolution of pottery traditions within a select group of Native American societies in the Southwest—specifically Puebloan peoples—because their pottery traditions are among the few that have survived into the modern era. In order to understand how the value and meaning of pottery within these groups has changed (if at all) since its use in prehistoric times, I will examine how the cultural context in which it is experienced today has changed as a result of Western contact. In doing so, I will establish how pottery has played a fundamental role within Puebloan cultures, serving as both a link to the past and reinforcing the continuity of traditions and beliefs from generation to generation. Ultimately, I aim to demonstrate how the value and meaning of these objects are subjective constructions that are both temporal and specific to cultural context.

Relevant terms

Because this paper deals mainly with theoretical understandings of native pottery traditions, it is first necessary to define some of the relevant terms used throughout this discussion such as *value*, *culture*, *aesthetics*, *art*, and *craft*. Many of these terms have multiple meanings depending on the context in which they are used and therefore their usage can often be deceiving. *Value*, for example, can refer to the monetary equivalent of a thing, or it can imply more abstract notions about its usefulness or importance. In this paper, my primary goal is to gain an understanding of value in terms of the cultural and spiritual significance of pottery. As I will demonstrate, notions of value depend largely on the criteria used to judge an item within a particular cultural context. The words *authentic* and *traditional* often accompany discussions of value, and are commonly used to increase the general perceptions of value, legitimacy, and historical significance of an object. It is

important to understand, however, that these terms—like the word *primitive*—are highly subjective, and can easily be attributed to (or withheld from) an object depending on the criteria by which it is judged. Chapter 5 addresses this issue by exploring cultural constructions of authenticity.

Another word that eludes clear definition is *culture*. Throughout history, the culture of a particular society referred to its intellectual or artistic achievements. In this sense, culture (like education or wealth) is seen as something to be attained through development or training. In late nineteenth century America, however, new notions of culture arose that supplanted the traditional idea of culture as an accessory to the social elite only. As I discuss in chapter 5, this new concept of culture came to represent the collective beliefs, practices, and traditions of a particular group, or sometimes the group itself. It is in this modern sense that I discuss culture throughout this paper.

When referring to the *aesthetic* functions of pottery, I generally mean those functions that pertain to the ways in which humans experience pottery on a sensory level. This is not limited to an appreciation of beauty, as the term often implies, but includes the wide range of emotional and intellectual responses that humans throughout history have experienced when making, viewing, and using painted pottery. I address this topic further in chapter 3, where I examine the functions of art from both biological and anthropological perspectives.

Perhaps the most difficult distinction is that between *art* and *craft*. Classifications of *art* and *craft*, however, can also be particularly elusive because these terms are often complicated by sub-classifications, such as *fine art*, *folk art*, or *fine craft*—all terms that have very distinct connotations regarding value and meaning in modern Western cultures. Depending on the context in which it is used, *art* denotes something very different from

craft, and the distinctions between these terms are often blurred. As Sally Markowitz (1994) suggests, Westerners tend to define *art* as something (usually an object or activity) that is either beautiful or thought provoking; the focus is on visual or philosophical qualities. *Craft*, on the other hand, usually refers to an object or activity that involves great technical skill or mastery of a traditional process; the focus is on physical or functional qualities. However, neither of these notions was known to Native American cultures in the Southwest until Westerners introduced them in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In fact, most Native American groups did not even have a word in their vocabulary meaning *art* until outsiders introduced this concept. What Westerners saw as *art*—painted pottery, woven blankets, or beadwork, for example—was simply a part of everyday life to Native Americans, not something outside of it that required classification. Yet, within the span of a few generations, Western notions of *art* and *artists* have significantly influenced the way that Native American potters think about their products. An examination of how this *art/craft* dichotomy emerged, and how it entered the Native American lexicon is therefore very important to this study and will be addressed in chapter 3.

All of these terms are, of course, highly subjective. There are many examples of objects that transcend distinctions of *art* and *craft*—Pueblo pottery being arguably among them. Because these terms are so value-laden, I refer to pottery throughout most of this paper simply as *pottery* to avoid any implications of judgment. For the same reasons, I refer to the people who make these wares as *potters* rather than *artists* or *craftspersons*, for I believe they exist somewhere in between these two spheres of making.

Chapter 2: Overview of Pottery Traditions in the American Southwest

The American Southwest refers to the region of North America known as the “Four Corners”—an area that covers most of Arizona and New Mexico, as well as neighboring parts of Colorado, Utah, and northern Mexico (see Figure 1). According to Kantner (2004), this semi-arid landscape was inhabited by vast numbers of Native American peoples in the prehistoric world, each sharing a common history and an agricultural way of life, but with distinct archaeological traditions. Today, archaeologists categorize these subcultures into three major groups: the *Hohokam*, and the two Ancestral Puebloan groups known as *Anasazi*¹ and *Mogollon*. As its name implies, Ancestral Puebloans² refers to those groups believed to be the ancestors of modern Pueblo peoples. Though there are no doubt connections between all three of these archaeological traditions, the Anasazi and Mogollon traditions are more directly linked to modern Pueblo traditions than the Hohokam (2004). Since this paper examines the historical roots of modern Pueblo pottery traditions, it will focus on the material culture of Puebloan groups, largely to the exclusion of the Hohokam. In order to provide a contextual framework in which to understand the evolution of these pottery traditions, I begin with an overview of the development of ceramic technologies in the Southwest. This section also explains the systems of classification used by archaeologists to describe prehistoric pottery.

¹ The term Anasazi is derived from a Navajo word that can be variously translated as “the ancient ones,” or “enemy ancestors.” Though widely used by early archaeologists, this term now raises controversy because modern Pueblos object to the use of a Navajo word to describe their ancestors. Thus, the terms Ancestral or Ancient Puebloans are now often used instead (Swink, 2004; Kantner 2004).

² In this paper, I borrow Kenner’s use of the abbreviated term “Puebloan” when referring in general to the ancestors of modern Pueblos, and reserve the terms “Anasazi” and “Mogollon” for more specific contexts. I use the term “Pueblo” to refer to modern peoples in the Southwest.

The spread of technology

Pottery making first began in the Southwest around 2000 years ago, long before Westerners ever set foot there. Many researchers believe that basic knowledge of ceramic technology was most likely introduced to this region by neighboring cultures to the south. However, Peterson (1997) suggests that fire-hardened clay may have been discovered concurrently in several regions of the Southwest when people accidentally burned clay-lined woven baskets while drying food in them. While many prehistoric pots have textured bottoms that suggest they had been pressed into baskets, there is no clear evidence to confirm that baskets pre-date pottery (p. 25).

While it is uncertain exactly how early Native Americans learned about ceramic technologies, it is evident that the spread of this knowledge is linked to the shift from foraging to agricultural ways of life in the Southwest. As Kantner (2004) explains, the advent of farming among prehistoric peoples introduced a series of related changes across the region, including a shift toward more sedentary lifestyles, greater regionalization, and the emergence of more distinctive material cultures. More reliable food sources also encouraged population growth, which in turn reinforced people's reliance on horticulture. All of these changes, writes Kantner, were accelerated by the discovery of ceramic technologies because pottery fulfilled the need for effective methods of transporting, storing, and preparing foods and liquids (pp. 60-63). The relationship between utilitarian pottery and agriculture, therefore, was one of mutual dependence; each encouraged the growth of the other.

Historians and archaeologists classify the various stages of Puebloan culture using a chronological sequence known as the *Pecos Classification*. According to Swink (2004), this system recognizes seven distinct phases of development in the Pueblo world between A.D. 1

and the present (see Figure 2). Though simple pottery forms first appear during the first of these phases, known as *Basketmaker I* (A.D. 1-500), it is not until the start of *Basketmaker II* (A.D. 500-700) that Pueblo potters first began decorating their wares with textures and painted designs. These preliminary decorations were spare and were probably inspired by earlier textile designs. Swink notes that pottery from this period shows great variations in both form and color, but little evidence of any systematic rules of design. Yet, even as potters were pushing the limits of this new medium, they were also defining its boundaries. By the end of *Basketmaker II*, painting styles had slowly begun to exhibit more organized patterns of design elements. As Swink describes it, a “ceramic language” began to develop as potters innovated new designs and refined their forms (p. 16).

Population increases during *Pueblo I* (A.D. 700-900), notes Kantner (2004), accelerated this trend toward stylization. As societies became more complex, more rigid social structures and more distinctive material cultures emerged (2004). Advances in forming, painting, and firing techniques yielded ceramic wares that exhibited much greater control than in earlier centuries. This increasing emphasis on symbolic decoration seems to have spawned new uses for pottery in social and religious activities, with pottery now being valued for its symbolic roles as well as its utilitarian functions as storage vessels (Swink, 2004). The growing aesthetic importance of pottery can be seen, for example, in the use of painted pottery as grave goods among some Puebloan societies.

Beginning in *Pueblo II* (A.D. 900-1100), Swink (2004) reports, the Southwest experienced a relative explosion of creativity. Painting styles became much more dynamic and expressive, reflecting the emergence of a sophisticated iconographic style, as can be seen in the Black-on-white pottery from both the Mimbres and Mesa Verde regions. Finely

painted pots from this period were undoubtedly highly valued as symbols of social identity, and appear to have been traded across great distances (p. 16). According to Kantner (2004), this societal and cultural florescence culminated during the first three decades of the *Pueblo III* period (A.D. 1100-1300), at which point population expansion and the increasing complexity of societies had reached its height. The remains of large village sites with massive multi-storied buildings from this period attest to this complexity, such as those found at Chaco Canyon in New Mexico (see Figure 3) (p. 13).

Immediately following this period, however, came what Kantner (2004) calls a “hinge point” in cultural development. For reasons that are not entirely clear, much of the Puebloan world experienced a sudden and significant “loss of complexity” around A.D. 1150 (p. 13). Populations in some areas declined drastically, possibly due to famine, drought, or raids from other Native American groups. Many of the pottery traditions that were so distinct during the tenth and eleventh centuries either disappeared or were absorbed into new cultures as displaced peoples traveled to new areas. Populations shifted south toward the middle Rio Grand Valley in western New Mexico, largely abandoning their former homelands to the north and south (Bernstein & Brody, 2001, p. 11). Whatever the reasons for this resettlement, it is clear that this was a period of great cultural change throughout the Southwest, resulting in a major reorganization of Puebloan society.

These social reconfigurations, according to Bernstein and Brody (2001) generated a variety of new cultural patterns in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, including new painting styles that spread across the Southwest. Pottery from this period features different paints and color combinations, as well as new designs, likely the result of displaced peoples merging to form new communities. Many of the present-day Pueblos of the Southwest were

established during this period, including the Hopi Pueblo of Arizona and the Acoma and Zuni Pueblos of New Mexico. By the start of *Pueblo IV* (A.D. 1300-1600), the Puebloan world was again flourishing. Hundreds of new settlements were home to tens of thousands of Puebloans, among which at least eight distinct languages were spoken (p. 11).

The prehistoric period ends in the mid-1500s when Spanish forces entered the Rio Grand valley seeking to expand their growing empire and spread their religious beliefs (Griffin-Pierce, 2000). Their arrival marked the start of a period of devastation to Southwestern peoples so severe that, according to Kantner (2004), it threatened the very fibers of Puebloan culture. Many towns were abandoned, forcing survivors to seek refuge in neighboring communities. Many more were completely destroyed (pp. 273-274). The perseverance of those that survived these challenges is, as Kantner observes, “a testament to the human spirit in the face of so many physical and socio-cultural changes” (p. 273).

As this outline shows, the earliest painted wares were simple and undecorated. Their purpose was solely utilitarian. Painting traditions did not appear until much later in the prehistoric period along with technological advances in manufacture and firing. Yet, as I will show in the following chapters, the aesthetic values that emerged along with the development of painting traditions did not simply replace the utility value of these wares. Instead, painting traditions developed complex psychic, social, and economic functions that were inextricably tied to the utilitarian functions of ceramic wares. It is not until Puebloans are introduced to Western values and concepts in the historic era that we begin to see a dichotomy emerge between utility and aesthetics in Pueblo pottery painting traditions.

Chapter 3: Aesthetic theories

Today, painted pottery provides archaeologists with important clues about the lifeways and material traditions of prehistoric Puebloans. By observing the context in which pottery is found among ancient ruins and using dating and sourcing techniques, archaeologists can often determine when and where pottery was made, and sometimes even how pottery may have been used. For example, it is clear that early pottery functioned as both utilitarian vessels for storing and serving food, and as ritual objects for ceremonial use. As I outlined in the previous chapter, we now also have a general understanding of how pottery traditions developed throughout the Southwest. However, I believe the more compelling question—and one that few scholars adequately address—is not how pottery traditions first began, but how and why their *aesthetic* functions first emerged. Given the often-harsh environments in which these early potters lived, it is remarkable that they embellished their wares at all, let alone to the degree of elegance and refinement that many of them achieved in later periods. Gathering and processing the materials to paint these pots would have required considerable investments of time and energy, and applying the paints to fragile wares would have been an equally painstaking process. What, then, would have compelled these ancient potters to spend valuable time and energy embellishing their utilitarian wares? What significance did these decorations have that caused early Puebloans to continue developing these traditions? Furthermore, how did these functions evolve over time? This chapter will address these questions by examining several theories about how the functions—and subsequently the value—of art have evolved throughout human history.

The bio-behavioral roots of art

One way of understanding why pottery-painting traditions may have evolved within Puebloan cultures is to examine the roots of these activities from a biological perspective. By taking this approach, Ellen Dissanayake has developed an interesting theory about why art making—including pottery making—has prevailed throughout human history. Unlike many contemporary scholars, she does not believe that art arose as a superfluous activity within modern culture. Instead, she takes an ethological or “species-centered” approach based on Darwinian theory that examines art as an evolved human behavior (1992, p. 2). She writes that since art—or rather the *behavior* of art—is common to all civilizations, both prehistoric and modern, it must have provided something essential to human life. According to Dissanayake, art is a function of human nature that is as natural and necessary as the need to hunt or reproduce, and thus is a “biologically endowed proclivity” that all humans possess (p. 11).

Just as the study of an animal’s behavior can provide clues as to what characteristics might have aided its adaptation, human behavior can also be studied in order to determine why behaviors of art have endured throughout human evolution. Thinking of art as a behavior is difficult because the word ‘art’ most often refers to tangible objects such as paintings or sculptures, or temporal activities such as dancing or musical performance—all associations that have visual connotations, and thus are hard to conceive as ‘behaviors’. However, Dissanayake suggests that we overcome this mental hurdle by regarding art instead as a “human need” (1992, p. 33). Most people would agree that we *need* art on some level, yet few can articulate why. Though scholars traditionally turn to the humanities (theology, history, sociology, or psychology) to discover the purpose of art, Dissanayake seeks instead

to explain this need using biology. She compares the behavior of art to other evolved traits like parenting or sex because it satisfies three criteria. The first indicator of an evolved behavior is simply that it “feels good”; the pleasure we receive from an activity—be it emotional or physical—is what makes us want to do it again, and thus gives it survival value. The second is that it requires time and energy to do it. Because these activities generally require time and effort, they must provide some biological benefit. If they did not serve a valuable purpose, we simply would not continue doing them. The third criterion is that an activity is universal—all humans engage in it. Since all known human societies throughout history have engaged in some form of art, and have done so willingly, this must be evidence that art fulfills some basic and “ultimately biological” human need (p. 34). Like food, love, or security, art is essential to our welfare, if not to our survival (pp. 33-34).

The idea that art is a universal behavior may seem incongruous in the context of modern Western culture, where participation in the arts, and especially ‘fine arts,’ is often limited to a privileged or specially trained elite. Dissanayake reminds us though, that the historic era comprises only a small fraction (approximately 1/100th) of human history. It is important to emphasize that the notion of aesthetic sensibility as something we must acquire (like fluency in a second language) is a relatively recent idea and should thus be taken in context. A species-centered view, writes Dissanayake, shows us that “the aesthetic is not something added to us... but in large measure the way we are, *Homo Aestheticus*, stained through and through” (1992, p. xix). If these proclivities seem hidden to us today, it is because modern Western culture has taught us “to ignore or devalue the naturally aesthetic part of our nature” (p. xix). Therefore, Dissanayake believes that in order to truly understand the depth of our human nature, we must first acknowledge the nearly four million years of

human existence that preceded the modern era and the emergence of “culture” in the Western sense. Only by understanding the ways of being that characterized human life throughout the whole of human history may we begin to understand the significant biological role that art has played in its development (pp. 4-5).

Dissanayake discovered what she believes is the “biological core of art” by studying the activities of play and ritual. By examining the characteristics of these behaviors, she observed that play and ritual, like art, both seem to be concerned with a realm beyond that of ordinary life. While art does not necessarily derive from these behaviors, it must have arisen from the same inclination to “make something special” (1992, p. 49). This idea of “making special” is central to Dissanayake’s claim. She suggests that the behavior of art evolved from a basic instinct to differentiate between the ordinary and non-ordinary. As humans evolved, they became conscious of their ability to make a distinction between these two realms. Thus, they purposefully started to “make things special or extraordinary” using aesthetically pleasing devices such as color, pattern, or rhythm (p. 51). Rituals involving elaborate song and dance, for example, likely developed as a means of marking important events or transitions. Similarly, special weapons fashioned with colorful embellishments might have been set aside for ceremonial hunts. The aesthetic devices used to embellish these activities—what we now call the elements of art—would have originated in “nonaesthetic contexts,” she writes, but as humans realized their aesthetic appeal they would have begun using them as “enabling mechanisms” in the performance of rituals and other behaviors of art (p. 51). Dissanayake explains the biological benefit of this adaptation as follows:

It is clear that taking serious and important activities seriously should be of immense survival value. Every bit of psychological reinforcement would count, for yourself as well as for the others who observe you... Making life-serving implements (tools, weapons) special both expressed and reinforced their importance to individuals and

would have assured their more careful manufacture and use. But equally or more important would have been the contribution of making special to ritual ceremonies (p. 52).

Rituals made special, for example, by the use of music, poetic language, or extravagant decoration would have been more memorable and thus more meaningful to its participants. The more compelling a ceremony was, the better it would be at reinforcing group values and uniting its members around a common cause. Such camaraderie would have been vital to our hominid ancestors, who often lived in small groups amidst hostile environments. A group whose members were more inclined to elaborate in this way—to “make things special”—would be more likely to bond together in order to survive these hardships than those who lacked such tendencies (p. 52). Seen in this context, “making special” would have had immense survival value to early humans.

Making pottery “special”

This species-centered view of art has much to offer an examination of pottery making traditions because it may help explain why (and how) the aesthetic functions of pottery became so important to prehistoric Puebloans—and perhaps why these traditions have endured for nearly two thousand years, despite continuous and often overwhelming social, political and environmental challenges. If we examine the very earliest examples of painted pottery in the Southwest (ca. A.D. 500), we see that potters first began embellishing their wares by applying a thin coat of clay slip to the surface of their pots and then burnishing it with a stone. This treatment would have had the practical effect of making the surface smoother and therefore more resistant to water. It also would have made the surface shinier and probably more aesthetically appealing as well. Since this result was both practical *and* visually gratifying, potters would likely have been inclined to repeat it. By experimenting

with painted slips and firing techniques—adding contrasting colors and more elaborate patterns, for example—potters eventually discovered more effective methods of making their pottery surfaces attractive. As Dissanayake might say, they learned how to make their wares “more special”.

Why, though, would prehistoric peoples have gone to the trouble to do this if their environment was such that assuring food and warmth could often consume all of a group’s resources? One reason may have been that making pottery and other tools “special” would have affected the way these objects were used. As Dissanayake (1995) explains:

The care or control required to fashion and embellish an important tool was like a metaphor for the care and control one wished to exercise in using it and the value one imbued it with. People who handled their tools sloppily, would use them sloppily, and thus be less successful hunters, warriors and curers. In this sense, art or craft is a necessary part of the technology, not a superfluous addition. (p. 42)

Ceramic wares were indeed important tools for early humans. They provided a practical means of storing food for lean winter months, allowed easier transport and storage of water, and provided durable utensils for cooking and eating. Making these wares carefully would therefore have been a vital concern for these groups. If decorating the surfaces of these wares contributed to the care with which they were crafted and used, then the time it took to do so would logically have been a valuable investment toward the wellbeing of the entire group.

Another reason that early Puebloans might have invested precious time and energy in decorating their pottery would be that they recognized the expressive power of visual imagery. Like pages from a storybook, the painted surfaces of utilitarian pottery may have served as canvases on which to express important visual narratives about Puebloan beliefs and mythology. Potters painted these “canvases” with figurative images and complex geometric motifs that would have been widely recognized among community members (see

Figure 5). Since pottery was seen and used by virtually every member of a village during daily and ceremonial activities, it was an influential tool with which to communicate shared identity. Just as a national flag can elicit great pride amongst a country's citizens and remind them of shared national values, pottery paintings would have served as visual reminders to Puebloans of their most fundamental cultural beliefs. As Caleb Crain (2001) expresses it, "The arts...would have helped to elicit a greater emotional response to whatever ritual they embellished", therefore reinforcing the importance of that ritual as well as the unity of the group (p. 32). Susan Peterson concurs this notion, noting "the physical handling of the pots [provided] emotional and spiritual awareness" to its makers and users (p. 17).

Perhaps the most obvious reason why pottery-painting traditions evolved within Puebloan cultures—and why all humans create art—is simply that it *feels good* to do so. "There is an inherent pleasure in making," writes Dissanayake (1995, p. 41). As most any modern potter (be it a novice or master) would agree, the feeling of shaping clay with one's hands is, on a sensory level alone, a deeply satisfying experience. Further, the slow, meticulous practice of smoothing and painting pottery can be also be very soothing, if not meditative. Naturally, early potters would have responded to the aesthetic appeal of this activity as well. They likely would have continued to create pottery simply because the process in and of itself was gratifying—regardless of the product.

According to Dissanayake (1992), the positive response to this experience may have something to do with a human desire to gain control over the natural world, and is an important reason why the arts have prevailed in human evolution. When we do not have physical control over our environment, it may be reassuring to exert control over *something*, even if it is only intellectual control. This impulse often finds expression in the arts; by

controlling our own behavior—such as in the creation of an artwork or the performance of dance or ritual—we may feel as though we are exerting some measure of control over a situation. “Action itself may be soothing”, writes Dissanayake, and therefore gives such behavior survival value (p. 78). From this perspective, it is easy to see how the intricately painted geometric designs on Puebloan bowls might have functioned as symbolic prayers for good weather, representing the forces of nature needed to assure healthy crops for the coming season (see Figure 6). As I will discuss in the following chapter, Puebloan cosmology reflects a deep awareness of the cyclical nature of the universe and the balance of natural forces within it. Many of the designs found on ancient Puebloan pottery, therefore, may be seen as visual expressions of their faith and respect for these forces. Though Puebloans could not have exerted physical control over the weather, the images they painted may have given them the *feeling* that they had some influence over it. It is this feeling of reassurance that mattered most, suggests Dissanayake, because it would have contributed to the well being of the group.

Dissanayake’s theories explain how the aesthetic functions of painted pottery may have first emerged in the prehistoric world from a biobehavioral impulse to make important things or events special. The value of these behaviors—and subsequently the traditions they spawned—derived from their ability to aid in the cohesion and wellbeing of a group, thus possibly helping individual groups survive. Once established, the aesthetic functions of these traditions came to comprise a large and important part of ritual and ceremonial life within the Pueblos. However, in addition to the psychological value inherent in the *actions* of making, embellishing, and using painted pottery, the *objects* themselves came to hold substantial material value in the Pueblo world. Skillfully painted wares not only became vital symbols of

meaningful events and activities within individual villages, they became highly valued trade objects that were exchanged both within and among the villages.

Pottery as Commodity

One way of understanding how this shift in the way pottery was used may have affected the value of these traditions is to examine pottery as commodity objects in the prehistoric world. According to Arjun Appadurai (1986), a *commodity* can be defined as “any thing intended for exchange” (p. 9). Exchange can take the form of trade, gift, or purchase; what is important is the context in which the object is exchanged. He calls this context the *commodity situation*, which he defines as the circumstances in which the “socially relevant feature” of an object is its ability to be exchanged for another thing (p.13). Objects can therefore be described as having “social lives” by virtue of this ability to be exchanged. Moreover, *value* is not an inherent quality of an object, but a judgment made about it based on often-changing contexts or commodity situations. As objects enter new commodity situations, they take on new and different values. Value, in this sense, is *created* by exchange (pp. 3-15).

Igor Kopytoff (1986) expands on this construct by examining the exchange of commodities from a biographical perspective. Just as one would examine the changing circumstances of a person’s life in order to write a biography, Kopytoff suggests examining the “social lives” of objects in order to understand how they are culturally coded as certain kinds of things throughout their lives (i.e. as *ritual objects*, as *art*, as *artifacts*, etc). By asking the same kinds of questions that one would ask in writing the biography of a person, we can begin to compile a “social history” of an object. For example, we might ask where an object came from, how it was used, or how it functioned in a particular time and culture. This type

of examination, he writes, can help us understand how objects are “culturally redefined” as they enter new spheres of exchange (pp. 64-67). Furthermore, just as people may have multiple biographies (professional, familial, political, etc), objects may also be seen as having different kinds of biographies. Koytloff suggests that by looking specifically at a “culturally informed” biography of things—that is, examining an object as a “culturally constructed entity, endowed with culturally specific meanings, and classified and reclassified into culturally constituted categories”—we may learn much about social systems that govern the value of objects within specific societies (p. 68).

Koytloff sees the production of commodities as a cultural process in which goods are not only material things, but also “culturally marked as being a certain kind of thing” (p. 64). He believes this process is universal to all societies, but varies in the ways in which commodity exchange is socially ordered and governed by ideology (p. 68). Every society, he writes, categorizes things into different classes of value, creating distinct (and often hierarchical) “commodity spheres” in which objects are exchanged (pp. 70-71). Subsistence items like food or tools, for example, might occupy a different sphere within a given culture than more prestigious items like cattle, slaves, or ritual objects (p. 71). Furthermore, these categories may not be enduring or culturally agreed upon (pp. 64-68). One group may regard an object as utilitarian, while another may see it as a work of art. Objects made by “primitive” societies are often good examples of this, as is evidenced by recent trends in Western cultures to celebrate primitive craft objects as works of fine art in museums.

If we examine what Koytloff would call the “cultural biography” of a prehistoric painted bowl, for example, we can begin to understand how these objects may have taken on new values as they became commoditized as objects of trade. While many ceramic wares

appear to have been produced and used locally for domestic purposes (and therefore would not have traveled outside the village in which they were made), there is evidence that regional trade networks did develop in the prehistoric Southwest. For example, as Alfonso Ortiz (1994) explains, the fact that pottery styles and technologies were so widely distributed across the Southwest suggests “that there was considerable contact between these prehistoric Pueblo groups” (p. 298).

According to Karen Harry (2005), ceramic sourcing data attained by analyzing pottery from eleventh-century sites in Southern Arizona has shown that many pots were imported to this region from villages as far as 60 km away, suggesting that pottery played an important role in economic trade systems. In her study, Harry examines evidence that some settlements in the prehistoric Southwest specialized in the production of pottery specifically for trade. She found that causes of such specialization were not always clear, but in some cases appear to be linked to insufficient agricultural lands. Villages lacking adequate natural resources to produce food crops, for example, may have developed ceramic specializations that allowed them to trade pottery for agricultural products from neighboring villages with better farming capabilities. Specialization may also have been skill-based, with some villages having particularly skilled potters whose wares were of exceptional size or quality (pp. 295-319).

Other reasons for trade may have involved the use of pottery for food service at large public gatherings. According to Brody (2004), guests traveling from great distances may have received pottery as gifts, suggesting complex relationships among prehistoric groups that extend beyond the category of simple economic trade. In cases where pots were exchanged for economic return, they may have been traded for the value of the painting on it,

for the value of the pot itself as a utilitarian vessel, or perhaps even for the value of the items it contained (pp. 176-178).

Exactly how and why these vessels were exchanged throughout the prehistoric Southwest is, however, (at least at present) beyond determination. What is relevant here is that exchange was likely one facet of valuation in the prehistoric Southwest, and must be considered in the context of how pottery functioned within this culture. As Brody (2004) aptly surmises, whatever specific purposes pottery paintings served, it is obvious that they were far more meaningful to those familiar with their iconography than they can ever be for their modern audiences (p. 178). Though the value of painted pottery is inextricably tied to the meaning of such iconography, the goal of the remaining chapters is not to determine specific interpretations of prehistoric imagery, but to understand how these systems of representation—and their use upon simple utilitarian forms—contributed to the importance of pottery within social contexts of use. Essentially, I am interested in how the ‘social biography’ of painted pots reveals the complexity of valuation across temporal and cultural zones.

Chapter 4: Pre-Contact Pottery Traditions, ca. 500 A.D. to ca. 1600

The previous chapter examined the ways in which painted pottery may have functioned within prehistoric Puebloan societies as both utilitarian vessels *and* as visual modes of expression. Many questions remain, however, about the meanings of these enigmatic images that adorn the surfaces of these vessels. Some scholars argue that pottery paintings illustrate specific myths and narratives that have been preserved in the folklore of modern Pueblo peoples, and can therefore be interpreted by studying the oral traditions of these groups. Others believe that such conclusions are beyond the interpretative limits of our knowledge because a lineal connection between modern and ancestral Puebloans cannot be proven. Most scholars agree, however, that prehistoric Puebloans held worldviews that were, at least in broad terms, shared by modern Pueblo peoples believed to be the descendents of prehistoric Puebloans. It is therefore possible to make reasonable inferences³ about the lifeways of prehistoric Puebloans by examining the values and traditions of modern Puebloans groups.

This chapter will explore the possible connections between ancient and modern Puebloans in the Southwest with the intent of better understanding the ways in which painted pottery may have functioned within prehistoric societies. I begin by examining the links between these groups, then move to a discussion of modern Puebloan philosophy and traditions, followed by an analysis of the functions of prehistoric Pueblo pottery traditions. In order to focus this discussion, I have narrowed my analysis to a group of prehistoric Puebloans known as the Mimbres, a Mogollon group that inhabited the southwest corner of

³ For a thoughtful and in-depth discussion of the interpretive limitations on our knowledge of Puebloan culture, see Kantner, 2004, pp. 15-20

New Mexico between A.D. 200 and 1150 and is among the prehistoric groups believed to have ties to Pueblo peoples living in the Southwest today. By examining the pottery traditions of this group through a lens of modern Puebloan philosophy, I identify some of the characteristics that may represent shared cosmological beliefs and traditions with modern Puebloans, and ultimately shared functions and systems of valuation.

Because prehistoric Puebloans left no written record of their cultural beliefs and folklore, it is almost impossible to know definitively if they shared specific beliefs with modern Pueblos. Yet, many scholars have found obvious references to modern mythological characters and narratives in the paintings on prehistoric pottery, suggesting that prehistoric myths may have been preserved in oral traditions passed on to modern Pueblos. Pat Carr (1979) has observed many examples of this in Mimbres bowl paintings. She argues that the continuing practice of using pottery paintings to tell a story among early twentieth century Puebloans is “a rather obvious” connection between Mimbres traditions and those of modern Puebloans (p. 42). Carr was not the first to recognize these connections. In 1924, J. Walter Fewkes reasoned that the survival of Mimbres legends in the folklore of their descendants might provide clues about Mimbres mythology (Fewkes, 1989). Like Fewkes, Carr believed that such interpretations are possible by examining the Mimbres images “with a literary eye” and then finding the survival of those myths in the stories of modern Pueblos (p. 5). She observed that Pueblos around the start of the twentieth century had retained much of their cultural heritage from previous generations. They were still telling the same folktales and using the same tools and methods of farming that they had for centuries, suggesting a similar continuity of oral traditions. According to Carr, Mimbres bowl paintings “could easily be used as illustrations for modern editions” of ancient myths (p. 7). Further evidence for this

continuity is the consistency of characters, conflicts, and plot motifs found in the folklore of modern Pueblos; though details vary from group to group, Carr believes their myths are fundamentally similar (1979). An understanding of modern Pueblo philosophy, therefore, may shed light on the possible function of these images within prehistoric societies.

Modern Puebloan Cosmology

One of the most obvious links to the past is the way in which modern Pueblos conceive of the world around them. According to contemporary Pueblo scholar and writer Rina Swentzell, the cyclical nature of the universe is integral to Native American spirituality and is reflected in all aspects of life:

In the Tewa language...the word for breath is *po-wa-ha*, or water, wind, breath. *Po-wa-ha* is the breath that gives and distinguishes form but is also the indistinct element from which everything and everybody issue. It is the immaterial giving form to the material and reclaiming it up on death. It is the creative life force that expresses itself in humans, plants, wind, and water. All these life expressions, then, return into the cosmic breath by means of death. (Brody & Swentzell, 1996, p. 21)

This notion of “cosmic breath” is fundamental to Puebloan philosophy. Everything in this world—including pottery—is made alive by the breath of the universe and eventually dies, returning that breath to the cosmos. The flow of this breath, or energy, throughout the material and spiritual world gives meaning to life, and it is accepted that death is a necessary part of this cycle (pp. 20-21). According to Trudy Griffin-Pierce (2000), Puebloans believe that their thoughts, words, and actions all have an effect on the flow of this *po-wa-ha*, and thus can either ensure or disrupt the harmony of the universe (p. 47). The focus of ceremonies and rituals, therefore, is often on insuring harmony within the natural world and within communities. While the organization of such activities varies among different groups, the underlying focus on achieving this harmony is universal (Kantner, 2004).

Mythic figures and narratives are also central to Puebloan philosophy and would likely have been to early Puebloans as well. One such example is the Puebloan creation myth, called the *Emergence*, which explains how in the beginning of the world man and woman were born from the womb of Mother Earth. They climbed up out of the center of the Earth through a hole referred to as an earth navel or *sipapuni*. To reach the present fourth world, the people had to pass through four levels of existence, each time climbing up into the next level through the *sipapuni* (Cunkle, 2000). The number four in this story, as in other myths, is significant to Puebloan spirituality because it represents the four principal directions (north, south, east, and west) that “symbolically contain” the homelands—and area often referred to as the “center place” by Puebloans (Brody et al., 1996, p. 16). As Swentzell explains, Puebloans conceive the world as having an upper and a lower half: “The lower half is as an earthen bowl, representing the mother, whose children live within,” while the upper half is represented by a basket and is associated with males (p. 20). The center of this symbolic bowl represents the “inner world” where humans, plants, and animals live and interact, and is contained by the surrounding mountains. Mountains also represent rain, a vital part of desert life to modern Puebloan peoples. Swentzell believes these elements were probably equally important to ancient Puebloans, who may also have needed a “sense of physical containment” to orient them (p. 16).

The metaphor of this lower half as an earthen bowl highlights the importance of clay to Pueblos. As Tessie Naranjo (1996), a Santa Clara potter and noted scholar, explains, working with clay has always been a sacred activity for Pueblos because clay also shares the sacred *po-wa-ha*. The potter must transform the clay into pottery with the help of “*Nung-quiyo*, or Clay-old-lady,” the mother spirit that represents the connection between the people

and the earth. “If a pot is to be beautiful and proud” the process of gathering, processing, forming, and firing of clay must be done with great care and respect, and must be accompanied by prayers to *Nung-quijo* (p. 187). As Naranjo explains, the relationship that Pueblos have with clay is elemental: “We came from the earth just as the clay comes from the earth. Our origins and the pots’ origins are one and the same” (pp. 187-190). Decorating a pot is also an important and symbolic part of this process. As Naranjo writes, “Meaning and application are brought together as a finished pot. The pot is simultaneously *utilitarian* and *metaphysical*. It is a container for water, seed, and harvest; it is *Clay-old-lady* changed in form; it is the bottom half of the cosmos, the container of life” (p. 191, emphasis added). The process of making pottery is therefore a highly spiritual experience, and seems to be as important to Puebloans as the finished pot, if not more so.

As Bernstein and Brody (2001) note, *process* is “the key identifier through time and across space of a pan-Puebloan tradition”; more than any single motif or design, the way in which pottery is made is the most important feature of Pueblo pottery (p. 14). According to Peterson (1997), the simple materials, tools, and techniques used by Puebloan potters have remained largely the same for nearly two thousand years. Though the color and composition of clays varies widely across the Southwest, methods of processing and forming pots are similar among all native peoples, even today. The process, she explains, begins with the Pueblo potter gathering clay from the hillsides of surrounding mountains near her homes. Once gathered, she will process this clay by hand, a labor-intensive procedure which requires drying and grinding it, then reconstituting the clay to make it into a workable paste with which to form the pot. To begin forming a pot, the potter presses a flat pad of clay into a rounded form, often a discarded potsherd. She then rolls out thin, even coils of clay by hand,

slowly adding them to this pad successively to build the walls of the pot. Next, she pinches each coil together and smoothes the surface to make the walls thin and strong. To achieve a smooth exterior and create the desired contour, she will use scraping tools fashioned from gourds. After the pot is allowed to dry, she then burnishes the surface with a small round stone to prepare it for painting. Paint is then applied using brushes that are made by chewing the ends of yucca leaves until they are soft (pp. 42-51).

Making a single pot is a meticulous process that often takes days or even weeks to complete, depending on the size and complexity of the form. Though women are the primary makers of pottery in traditional Pueblo societies, it is often a task that involves the whole family. According to Swentzell (1994), pottery is an important and socially binding tradition within modern Pueblos. Women come together to talk and make pottery, often while simultaneously tending the children and preparing a meal. Pottery making—like the common tasks of grinding corn or making soup—is an integral part of life, not something that is separate from it. As Swentzell puts it, “The whole experience seems to flow out of an unconscious place” (p. 34). This statement suggests, I believe, that the aesthetic functions of pottery making, as Dissanayake suggests, are not simply found in the material products of such actions, but in the action of making itself. Moreover, the value derived from these actions may be an important reason why these traditions have endured.

The Mimbres Potters

If we examine the pottery of prehistoric Puebloans, we see that many of these beliefs and values seem also to be expressed in the beautifully painted vessels made by Puebloans during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Paintings from this period are, in many cases, strikingly similar in both imagery and structural design to those used by potters hundreds of

years later in the historic era. Furthermore, the methods used to make modern Pueblo pottery appear to be largely unchanged from those utilized by prehistoric potters. All of these factors suggest that pottery traditions were an important part of Puebloan society that helped to ensure the continuity of cultural beliefs and traditions from generation to generation. The painted bowls made by the prehistoric group known as the Mimbres are particularly salient examples of these connections.

The Mimbres were a small group of farmers that lived along a remote river valley in Southwestern New Mexico until the mid-twelfth century, at which point they mysteriously abandoned their villages and seemingly disappeared from the archaeological record. When Spanish settlers reached the valley in the 1700s, virtually all knowledge of the Mimbres had been lost. They found only a tiny willow-lined river, which they named *Mimbres* after the Spanish term for the small tree. Much of what is known today about the Mimbres comes from the archaeological remains found at sites along this river (Brody & Swentzell, 1996).

The development of Mimbres pottery traditions largely corresponds with the general timeline of Puebloan pottery discussed in chapter 2. Potters began making simple, undecorated wares sometime around A.D. 200 to serve utilitarian purposes. Painted designs appear during the mid-sixth century, and by the start of the eighth century Mimbres potters had learned to make these designs stand out using a white-firing slip and black paints. This effect led to the exquisite black-on-white wares of the twelfth century known as “Mimbres Classic” for which this culture is so renowned for today (Brody et al., 1983).

Most Mimbres pots from the Classic period are shallow, hemispherical bowls. The outer surfaces of these bowls were rarely decorated. It is the highly sophisticated paintings that adorn the inner surfaces of these bowls that distinguish this pottery. These paintings

feature complex geometric patterns and stylized figurative images of people and animals arranged in often-complicated compositional structures. Hallmarks of Classic Mimbres pottery include the use of one or more “rim bands” that restrict the design to a bordered area in the center. Often, these bands are mirrored by a concentric band in the center of the bowl that borders an area of geometric design on the upper walls of the bowl and an empty space in the center of the bowl. This empty space may be left blank or may contain a figurative image (Brody et al., 1983). In other examples, rim bands isolate complex designs that fill the entire inner space of the bowl. In either case, Classic era bowls are marked by precisely drawn lines and visually ambiguous designs that balance light with dark and positive with negative to create dynamic and rhythmic tensions (Brody, 2004).

Brody and Swentzell (1996) believe that these structural elements are evidence that the Mimbres conceptualized their world much as modern Pueblos do. They see the painted bowls as symbolic of the lower sphere of the world, with geometric bands representing the mountains and other natural elements that surround the people (see Figure 6). Rim bands mark the boundaries between the upper and lower halves of the world, while the blank space in the center of many bowls represents the “stillness of any center.” In other bowls, this central plane is occupied by figurative images of people or animals, representing the interactions of people, plants, and animals in the “center place” of life (p. 20).

The complex and dynamic geometric patterns found in most Mimbres Classic paintings can also be seen as metaphors for the way the Mimbres conceived their world. As Brody and Swentzell (1996) explain, ambiguity and the balance of opposing forces were central themes in these paintings, suggesting a view of life as “a union of oppositions” (day and night, male and female, life and death, movement and stillness) that is shared by modern

Puebloans (p. 38). Dark bands and areas of hachure⁴ are often delicately balanced with areas of white. Lines create shapes that give “positive visual value” to blank surfaces of the bowl, creating ambiguity as to which image is primary (p. 32). White interlocking scrolls are created by masses of black whirling forms, making it difficult to tell which form was intended to stand out. According to Brody and Swentzell, “These visual ambiguities are deliberate abstract visual puns, and the tensions become complex and spatially dynamic, loaded with perceptual uncertainties” (p. 32).

While this balance of tensions is achieved in both figurative and geometric designs, it is most compelling in those that are predominantly geometric. Line was the dominant element, and was used to create structured patterns of triangles, squares, rectangles, circles, and spirals (Brody, 2004, pp. 127-129). The Mimbres organized these elements by dividing the pictorial space into two, three, and (most commonly) four equal segments (Brody & Swentzell, 1996, 32). While some designs are asymmetrical, these dynamic tensions are most often created by the use of opposing sets of patterned motifs arranged symmetrically. This symmetry is suggestive of the natural cycles of day and night, life and death, summer and winter. According to Brody (2004), it also suggests the interconnectedness of the natural world that is a prevalent theme among all Native Americans (p. 166). Often, these designs incorporate representational images in ways that blur distinctions between pattern and figure (see Figure 7). In some, geometric zones appear to be transforming into animal figures, while in others, the body of a figure may be made up of geometric patterns (pp. 150-152).

Ambiguities between foreground and background, positive and negative, figurative and

⁴ The term *hachure* refers to the use of thin, parallel lines drawn closely together to create shading, similar to the drawing techniques of *hatching* or *cross-hatching*. See Figure 7.

geometric strongly suggest that the delicate balance of forces in the universe was, as it is to modern Pueblos, central to the Mimbres as well.

This keen awareness of the cyclical nature of the world is also seen in their interment rituals. According to Brody (2004), around the time the Mimbres started making black-on-white pottery, they also began burying their dead under the floors of inhabited rooms, effectively creating family cemeteries beneath what appear to be ceremonial rooms. These burials were usually accompanied by offerings such as tools, stone and shell jewelry, or turquoise. The most common item placed in graves, however, was a painted bowl that had been intentionally punctured in the bottom and inverted over the face of the dead (pp. 48-49). Though present-day Pueblos are not known to share this practice, Brody and Swentzell (1996) believe this ritual represents a common faith in the notion that all objects are alive and share the breather or *po-wa-ha* that flows through the universe. Thus, they punctured or symbolically “killed” the center of these bowls during burials in order to allow this breath or spirit to escape back into the cosmos (see Figure 5). As Swentzell explains, “When a person died—stopped breathing—a whole world faded. And when a bowl was broken, or died, the world it depicted and contained also faded into the immaterial nature of the breath” (p. 21). Just as life is about doing or creating (as in the making of a pot), it is also about dying. Burying broken bowls with the dead was an expression of the acceptance of death as a natural part of life (p. 21).

Though we may never fully understand specific meanings of Mimbres iconography, it seems clear that pottery paintings represented cosmological notions that would also have been expressed in the oral folklore of the Mimbres (Brody & Swentzell, 1996, p. 38). This connection between pottery paintings and oral traditions reveals an important social function

of prehistoric pottery as a vehicle for passing on Puebloan values and mythology to subsequent generations. As James Cunkle (2000) notes, these paintings represent an “oral library of the Mimbres mythology” (p. 7). In studying vast numbers of Mimbres paintings, he found that many nearly identical images appear in Mimbres paintings despite great spatial and temporal distances. Further, the precision with which they are rendered shows that potters throughout the Mimbres region were drawing on a shared ideology and that it was very important that they recorded these stories accurately (p. 5). His theory underscores the central role that oral traditions played within Mimbres culture and the fundamental connection between pottery paintings and mythology. According to Kantner (2004), studies such as these suggest that pottery played an important role in social rituals, especially those focused on the narration of Mimbres folklore (p. 118).

Brody (2005) agrees that widely used subjects in Mimbres paintings likely had “shared social meanings” across the prehistoric Puebloan world and can provide modern viewers with important clues about the oral and ritual traditions of the Mimbres. He also suggests that, in addition to the metaphorical significance of the compositional structures of these paintings, these images may also have served “mnemonic, instructive, emblematic, illustrative, and proverbial purposes” (p. 170). Brody warns, however, that finding specific meanings for such images is beyond the interpretative limits of our knowledge, and instead suggests it is more logical to recognize universal cosmological themes and motifs in Mimbres paintings than to accept interpretations that are specifically connected to any one group or historical period (p. 183). “As a rule, the broadest sharing is on the level of abstract structure and image” (Brody & Swentzell, 1996, p. 18).

The fact that these powerfully symbolic images were painted on useful household

objects does not seem to have detracted from their value. In fact, this blending of utilitarian and aesthetic functions seems to have *added* to the symbolic value of these wares. As Brody (2004) notes, it is reasonably clear that most painted bowls were used for domestic purposes (p. 114). By depicting fundamental myths and images on the surfaces of utilitarian wares—objects that were used by all members of a group for common tasks—painted pottery became an effective means of spreading cultural values and beliefs. “Routinely used on household objects in daily life and then ritually ‘killed’ and buried with their dead, such paintings would have been constant reminders to Mimbres people of the unity of man and the cosmos, the living and the dead, and of the structure of harmony” (Brody & Swentzell, 1996, p. 38).

Chapter 5: Post-Contact Pottery Traditions, ca. 1600—1950

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which contact with Western cultures influenced Puebloan pottery traditions during the historic (1540-1880) and early modern (1880-1950) eras. Though the Spanish occupation of the Southwest during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had a dramatic effect on Puebloan cultures, this discussion will focus on the century following political absorption of the Pueblos by the United States in the mid-1800s—and the effects of the tourist trade in particular—because this period had the most visible effect on Native American culture and traditions.

The Historic Period: 1600-1880

According to Janet Berlo (1998), the history of Pueblo contact with the Western world is one of “death, pestilence, and destruction” (p. 48). The beginning of this era, known as the historic period or “Contact Era” is marked by the arrival of Francisco Coronado and his Spanish expedition to the Southwest in 1540. In the century and a half following this expedition, Spanish conquests reduced native populations from about 60,000 in the early 1600s to less than 10,000 in the 1700s (1998). Those that survived were persecuted and enslaved, and eventually rebelled in 1680, driving out the Spanish occupation. The Spanish returned some ten years later, and though the persecution continued, “a less repressive relationship developed” (Bernstein & Brody, 2001, p. 11).

Between 1600 and 1880, write Bernstein and Brody (2001), the function of painted pottery among Westerners was primarily utilitarian. Early Spanish colonists relied on pottery made by Puebloans to store, cook, and serve food, as did later Euro-American settlers.

During this period, many new shapes and designs emerged as new uses for pottery were introduced. New foods required different shapes for vessels. Forms also adapted to accommodate the use of pottery as storage and shipping containers. Overall, however, the form and design of painted pottery remained much the same as it had in the past. While Pueblo pottery was admired for its beauty, it was not considered “art” until well into the nineteenth century when industrially produced wares replaced the utilitarian functions of hand made pottery. Likewise, pottery was not purposefully collected until the Southwest became part of the United States in 1848. At first, people began collecting painted wares as curios or as ethnographic objects. By the end of the nineteenth century however, this pottery began to gain the attention of ethnographers, merchant traders, and intellectuals interested in native culture (pp. 11-12). This interest was greatly accelerated by the introduction of the railroad in the Southwest in 1880.

The Railroad Era: 1880 – 1950

The rise in consumer culture in late nineteenth and early twentieth century America brought vast changes to the Pueblos. Dispossessed of their land and resources, and forced to assimilate into American culture, many native societies became dependent on Western economic systems for survival. These changes were particularly manifest in the Southwest, where Westerners seeking a new national identity found a sense of authenticity in the traditional arts and culture of the region. Archaeologists, ethnographers, and tourists alike flocked to the southwest seeking to experience Native American culture. Trade routes opened up, and with them came a variety of mass-produced goods that native peoples were previously unaccustomed to. This influx of people and industrial goods undoubtedly altered the social, cultural, and economic systems of Native American societies in dramatic ways,

particularly traditions of pottery making. By the 1920s, these factors had given rise to a distinct market for “traditional” Native American pottery. In response to these consumer interests, potters altered their production practices and began making forms and styles to suit the demands of tourists and adapt to the cash economy.

The discovery of “culture”

The early part of the twentieth century was a period in which cultural differences began to be “discovered” in America. Until this time, *culture* was largely thought of in the singular sense, as something that one could acquire or cultivate—a notion that reflected prevailing European values and tastes (Mullin, 2001). America in the 1920s, however, was “a time of cultural and economic isolationism” in which the categories of *art* and *artist*, as well as the values attached to them, were continually shifting (Harris, 1995, pp. 16, 13). Anthropologists, writers, and artists struggling to reinvent American national identity began to think about culture in a plural sense, as a means of distinguishing groups of people around the world. Though European notions of culture were not entirely abandoned during this period, this new notion of cultural diversity took hold among intellectuals who felt that America needed a distinctly “native” national identity in order to flourish as a nation (Harris, 1995). As Mullin (1995) notes, these Americans found in the Southwest “a humble authenticity,” a reversal of the growing culture of consumption they rejected in the east (p. 169). Indian arts⁵ and culture had a distinct regional character, one that promised to fulfill their desire for a “truly American” national identity.

In turn, many of these intellectuals, mostly white, well-educated easterners, migrated

⁵ Though the term “Native American” is widely accepted, I use the term “Indian” here as it is used in many of the texts cited in this discussion. Moreover, according to Peterson (1997), many modern Indians prefer this term (see also Tremble, 1993).

to the Southwest where they became important patrons of Southwestern arts as well as activists against governmental policies of assimilation. By establishing a market for “traditional” Indian arts, these wealthy patrons sought to preserve Native American cultures—actions they regarded as “pure philanthropy.” Bringing “Indian handicrafts” into the realm of high art, they reasoned, would benefit natives by bringing them economic profit as well as respect (Mullin, 1995, p. 173). Ironically, Mullin notes, these patrons were seeking a national identity within cultures that were simultaneously being forced to assume an American identity (2001). Yet they did not consider their efforts to promote native arts to be in opposition to cultural preservation, despite the fact that the market they supported was eroding the very culture they sought to preserve (Mullin, 1995).

According to Naranjo (1996), the decline of the importance of pottery making within Pueblo societies began with the opening of the Santa Fe Trail from Missouri in 1821, which brought an influx of durable, mass-produced goods from the east. One of the results of these changes was the disruption of pottery making traditions within Native American communities. Industrially made products such as kitchen utensils and tin pails began to diminish the utility value of locally made pottery, thus lessening the need for potters to produce their own functional pots for household use (p. 192). By the end of the nineteenth century, the utilitarian functions of pottery had become largely obsolete, and potters began inventing new forms and functions for their wares (Bernstein & Brody, 2001, p. 11).

Selling the Southwest

In 1880, the Santa Fe trail was replaced by the Santa Fe railroads, bringing settlers, tourists, and more goods than ever directly into the Pueblos. Native American societies were faced with an increasing need for cash to purchase these goods. Consequently, many people

believed that Native American cultures would not survive in the face of such socio-economic changes, a notion that introduced the image of the “vanishing Indian” into the American psyche (Sullivan, 1996, p. xiv). This notion was pivotal to marketing campaigns that aimed to attract tourists to the Southwest with romantic images of the American Indian as the “noble savage.” This image, writes Naranjo, was created by archaeologists and exploited by what she refers to as “the railroad tourist industry” (p.192). Though she refers to a general industry, the most successful—and influential—of these businesses was the Fred Harvey Company, which was formed in 1876 when Frederick Henry Harvey, an immigrant from Britain, partnered with the Santa Fe Railway in opening the first chain of restaurants and hotels in America. By the turn of the century, Harvey’s business had expanded to include more than two-dozen hotel/restaurants, as well as twenty dining cars on the Santa Fe Railway. Harvey’s business grew quickly, and in 1902, he opened the famed Fred Harvey Indian Department, a museum adjoining the new Alvarado Hotel in Albuquerque. The museum housed collections of Southwestern arts and included a sales room where tourists could purchase native-made crafts (Howard & Pardue, 1996).

What lured tourists to this new museum, according to Leah Dilworth (1996), was the “the promise of an encounter” with the Indian employees who were represented as “living relics” of a by-gone era (p. 159). The Fred Harvey Company created this image by marketing a romantic, yet misleading, picture of Indian life—one that portrayed Indians as if they belonged to a vanishing race. R. Rosaldo has called this phenomenon “imperialist nostalgia,” a way of viewing history in which one innocently laments the loss of something he or she “is complicit in destroying or altering” (as quoted by Dilworth, p. 159). In the case of the Fred Harvey Company, however, this nostalgia was far from innocent. Harvey and the Santa Fe

Railway played a key role in the assimilation of the Southwest. Though they appeared to be promoting Indian arts, Dilworth believes their actions caused “profound disruptions” to Native American societies (p. 159). Furthermore, the superficiality of this romantic image ignored the struggles of Native Americans to maintain their culture and hold on to their land rights. Tourists, unaware of the tensions caused by forced assimilation into American culture and factionalism within the Pueblos, flocked to the southwest. The mystical image of the Indian had been “so clearly etched in [their] minds that they desired nothing more than to carry a piece of that life back into their urban worlds” (Naranjo, 1996, p. 193).

One of the greatest attractions at the Indian Department was the use of Indian “artist-demonstrators.” Native Americans were hired to exhibit their crafts and interact with the visitors at the museum—a “commercial formula” that both attracted tourists and increased sales (Pardue & Howard, 1996, pp. 168-169). As Dilworth (1996) describes it, visitors traveled great distances from “civilization” via the railway to visit the Indian Department. Once there, they could watch Indians at work, purchase their wares, and, “having engaged in a satisfying exchange and seen the sights,” return home with “souvenir evidence” of their experience in hand. These encounters, she notes, were “thoroughly mediated” by the Fred Harvey Company and the Santa Fe Railway and were designed to attract tourists by providing them with an “authentic Indian” experience. In these encounters, Indian artists played two roles: they were the makers of the objects for tourist consumption, and they were also commodities *themselves* (pp. 159, 163). Like museum displays, they were consumed visually, either as “main attractions” or as backdrops for tourist photographs.

New aesthetic standards

According to Dilworth (1996), The Fred Harvey Company and the Santa Fe Railroad

played a vital role in the “cultural and economic incorporation of the Southwest” (p. 159). Together, they created a thriving market for tourist pottery in the Southwest by capitalizing on America’s growing interest in indigenous cultures. Though these actions undoubtedly benefited Native American communities by providing financial stability, Naranjo (1996) argues that they also had significant negative consequences on Native American pottery making traditions. In the late 1800s, she writes, the railway brought an influx of goods and people to the Pueblos and introduced new aesthetic values. Potters adapted to these changes by focusing on goods produced for sale to tourists. Increased production, however, sometimes came at the cost of quality. Moreover, potters began to cater their forms to suit market demands, thus creating non-traditional items such as candlestick holders and bowls with handles. Double-spouted wedding vases, for example, also became popular items and remain so today. By the late 1800s, Victorian influences such as fluted rims had appeared on Pueblo pottery, signifying a “new aesthetic standard” that reflected European tastes and values (pp. 191-192). Often, these new forms were miniatures of traditional forms, scaled down so that tourists could easily transport their purchases home with them. Hill and Lange (1982) note this occurrence at Santa Clara Pueblo, where miniature ceremonial bowls and water jars, along with new forms such as small ashtrays and figurines were produced for sale around the turn of the century (p. 90).

Demand for functional pottery within the Pueblos, however diminished, did not disappear entirely. Potters still produced vessels for ceremonial use. By the turn of the century, however, very little functional pottery was being made for use within the Pueblos (Dilworth, 1996). The tourist trade also ushered in a shift from a barter economy to a cash economy. This transition resulted in women (the primary producers of pottery) becoming

wage earners. Often this meant that women were the sole source of income for a household, a change that sometimes caused power struggles within families and communities, according to Naranjo (1996).

Naranjo also argues that the tourist trade diminished the spiritual connections to pottery making that Puebloans hold. Although Pueblo communities have maintained their traditional values with relative success despite centuries of oppression, foreign notions such as perfection and an emphasis on production have penetrated their belief systems. These notions, Naranjo observes, have threatened the sacred relationship that Pueblos have with the earth and their reverence for working with clay. For example, she believes that potters now need to sift their clay to remove impurities before using because of the lack of respect given to the spirit, *Clay-old-lady* (1996).

One of the most significant notions introduced by the tourist trade was that of individualization. According to Naranjo, this idea has seeped into all aspects of modern Pueblo life. Primarily, it is evident in the signing of pottery, but it is also seen in the need for perfection, in the catering of forms to suit the interests of outsiders, and in the pottery making processes itself. The communal nature of pottery making has been replaced by a growing trend toward isolation. Potters have become more alienated from each other, and perhaps more importantly, from *Clay-old-lady*. “Western economics (money) determines, more and more, why and how pottery is made,” Naranjo concludes (p. 195).

While most of the Indian artists working for The Fred Harvey Company remained anonymous, individualization is seen in figures such as Nampeyo (Weigle & Babcock, 1996). Nampeyo, born in the Hopi-Tewa pueblo of Hano in 1862, was well known for her extraordinary jars and bowls long before the Fred Harvey Company hired her in the early

1900s (Pardue & Howard, 1996, p. 171). In the 1890s, she began imitating the forms and designs on prehistoric Sikyatki Polychrome ware she saw at excavation sites (see Figure 10). Encouraged by collector and trader Thomas Keam, Nampeyo learned to make replicas of these wares that were so convincing that anthropologist J. Walter Fewkes⁶ expressed concerns that it would be mistaken for “authentic” prehistoric pottery (Traugott, 1999, p. 16). In the following decades, Nampeyo gained unprecedented acclaim for this revival. Ruth Bunzel (1929) referred to Nampeyo in her seminal work, *The Pueblo Potter*, as “the founder and leading spirit of the Hopi school of decoration” (p. 41). By the time Nampeyo began representing the Fred Harvey Company, the company had already been purchasing her work for several years. She quickly became “the star attraction,” and was used extensively in publications, books, and postcards advertising the Fred Harvey Company’s image of “The Great Southwest” (Weigle & Babcock, pp. 171-173).⁷

The image of the “lone artisan,” surrounded by pottery as she shapes a clay bowl was a popular representation both in catalogues and on the grounds of the Fred Harvey Company’s Indian Department (Dilworth, 1996, p. 161). These staged installations—and the endless marketing of them (see Figures 8 & 9)—were part of a larger campaign to domesticate the “hostile” native, making them “manageable and safe” for tourist consumption (Weigle & Babcock, 1996, p. 157). Moreover, by juxtaposing representations of the gentle, domesticated Indian artist with that of the hostile, wild savage, writes Dilworth, the Harvey Company constructed the Indian as “dichotomous” in order to make him less

⁶ There is much controversy surrounding the role that Fewkes played in Nampeyo’s revival of Sikyatki ware. For a thorough discussion of the myths surrounding these events, see Traugott, 1999, p. 7-20

⁷ This paper deals specifically with potters, however weavers, silversmiths, and basket makers were also featured prominently at the Fred Harvey Company. See Pardue & Howard, 1996, p. 168-171.

frightening. This marginalization effectively rendered the Indian powerless, little more than a “relic of the past” to be viewed by passing tourists. Presenting Indians in this way, she explains, made them seem “unquestionably authentic” and mysterious—an image that appealed to middle-class Americans as well as wealthy elites who were eager to “experience” the past (Dilworth, 162-163). The paradox of these “authentic” representations, of course, is that they presented Indian artists in fabricated settings, almost entirely removed from traditional contexts of production within the Pueblos. Furthermore, the Fred Harvey Company’s demand that artists and their families live on the premises of the museum created situations for Indians that were “antithetical to and potentially disruptive of the very tribal life they had put on display” (Weigle & Babcock, 1996, p. 157).

The role of culture

From one perspective, the actions of patrons and tourists in the early 1900s can be seen to have increased the value of Pueblo pottery by elevating it to the status of “fine art,” simultaneously bringing fame and financial stability to the “artists” that made it. From a second, more critical perspective, the events of this period significantly *devalued* Pueblo pottery by making its utilitarian functions obsolete and rendering its aesthetic value meaningless to Western viewers who, however admiring, simply could not understand the symbolic significance of its imagery. Which perspective is accurate? The crux of this problem, it seems, is that what Americans valued about so-called Indian arts rarely corresponded with native values for these objects. Pottery and other native-made objects deemed “art” by Westerners was valued not for the complex systems of meaning they held to Puebloans, but because they met Western criteria of value.

Chapters 3 and 4 discussed some of the ways in which the value and meaning of

painted pottery traditions may have evolved within traditional Puebloan contexts. In this section, I examine some of the complexities of how pueblo pottery took on value in the Western world. As James Clifford (1999) explains, “The critical history of collecting is concerned with what from the material world specific groups and individuals choose to preserve, value, and exchange” (p. 221). He explains how non-Western objects are assigned value within what he calls the Western “art-culture system” (p. 50). This system consists of four distinct spheres of meaning. Within this framework, one axis opposes the *authentic* with the *inauthentic*, while the other axis opposes the *artistic masterpiece* with the *artifact*, thus creating four “semantic zones” within which most objects are located (see figure 11). Objects circulate within this framework, with movement toward zones of *authenticity* and *fine art* indicating a gain in value and status. On the other hand, objects deemed to be fakes, commercial art, or tourist art are give the least value, as they are seen to be *inauthentic* (pp. 56-57).

One of the problems with this system, however, is that it distinguishes *art* from *non-art*, implying the existence of non-Western systems of aesthetics or ‘philosophies of art’ that govern the creation of these objects. As Gene Blocker (2001) reminds us, however, it is important to understand that some cultures may not even have words in their language that are comparable to Western notions of art, let alone systems of thought equivalent to Western aesthetics:

The very question, ‘What kind of art did American Indians have?’ presupposes something which may well be false—namely that American Indians not only made things which we see as fitting our concept (in English) of art, but that they, too, had a similar concept—that is, a word reasonably accurately translated as ‘art’—a word that they understood to mean something very much like what we understand the word ‘art’ to mean. (Blocker, p. 6)

In fact, in the Tewa language, like many other Native American languages, there is no word

for *art* (Peterson, 1997). The problem, therefore, with assuming that pottery functions as *art* to Native Americans, writes Blocker, is that it takes for granted that Western cultures tend to divide society and culture into “distinct functional regions” in which political, agricultural, and religious matters (among others) are understood separately. These divisions do not exist in all cultures, so therefore a concept of art as something *separate* from religion, politics, or agriculture also does not exist (p. 6).

This is not to say that aesthetic systems are wholly absent in non-Western cultures, but that they are often indistinguishable from “other modes of social activity,” to borrow a phrase from Clifford Geertz (1983, p. 97). Assigning “cultural significance” to art objects, he asserts, “is always a local matter” (p. 97). In other words, meaning cannot be examined outside of the context of everyday experience—including the range of social, religious, and political activities that Westerners often see as existing beyond the arts. Consider, for example, the bowl in Figure 6. This bowl may have functioned simultaneously as a utilitarian vessel for food, a symbolic prayer for good weather, and as a ritual offering in burial. However, as Blocker suggests, the Mimbres may have had no sense of which of these functions was *art*, which was *religion*, and which was *agriculture*. Such classifications would not have made sense to them. Naranjo’s description of the creation of pottery as an experience that seems to “flow” from the unconscious (see chapter 4) illustrates this point. It is only since the concepts of *art* and *artist* were introduced by Western cultures in the historic era that Native Americans have been able to conceive of what they do as something outside of ordinary experience.

The second problem with James Clifford’s framework is that categories of authenticity become very complex when the effects of cross-cultural influence are

considered. Within his *art-culture* system, objects may be reassigned to new categories, “but always along predictable patterns,” according to Elizabeth Coleman (2001, p. 386). An *authentic artifact* like a Mimbres Classic bowl, for example, could be “reconceptualized” as an *authentic masterpiece*, but objects that are *not-art* or *not-culture* can never become *fine art* directly (p. 386). This framework excludes objects made outside of traditional contexts of use, such as tourist art or innovations on existing traditions. However, Coleman points out that non-Western art traditions often have significantly different ontological structures than those of Western traditions (she uses the example of Aboriginal paintings) and therefore their authenticity cannot be evaluated based on Western standards. By understanding the philosophical structures of such traditions, she suggests that many objects deemed inauthentic by Westerners can actually be seen as authentic when understood from a native perspective (385-400).

As J. King (1993) notes, the problem is that many native objects that are considered nontraditional (and therefore inauthentic) “are in fact nontraditional only in use” (p. 354). A Pueblo bowl painted made specifically for sale in a sales gallery might be a good example of this. Though it may have been created in a traditional context and painted with traditional designs, it becomes “lifeless and devoid of its ceremonial context” when placed within a commercial framework (Berlo, 1998, p. 48). However, if we determine authenticity by the process by which an object is made, then King’s point is irrelevant. As Naranjo (1996) explains, the theoretical framework in which a pot is made is a fundamental aspect of Pueblo pottery making traditions. Puebloans feel a deep spiritual connection with the earth, and this relationship is embodied in—and essential to—the process of making and painting pottery. In this sense, a bowl removed from its original ritual context is still an authentic bowl, it has

simply moved into a new sphere of use.

So how do we determine authenticity? As Coleman suggests, authenticity depends wholly on the questions being asked. Like value, authenticity is not a tangible attribute of an item, but a judgment made about it based on a set of subjective criteria. Categories of authenticity and value are cultural constructions that rarely extend across cultural boundaries. The authenticity of an object depends on what criteria are valued within the cultural context in which the object is being judged. As Clifford (1999) notes, objects associated with “vanishing” cultures are more likely to move into the category of *authentic* because their perceived rarity makes them more valuable (pp. 56-57). Perhaps this explains why Native American crafts at the turn of the century were so highly valued—and why the Fred Harvey Company’s promotions of Indian artists as “living relics” were so successful. Yet it illustrates the point that *value* and *authenticity* are socially and culturally constructed categories, as we have seen in the elaborate staging employed by the Fred Harvey Company to create this myth of the “vanishing Indian.”

So what does this analysis reveal about the value of Pueblo pottery traditions in the historic era? As I have shown, in traditional Puebloan culture, value is closely tied to utility and aesthetics. In these contexts, the domestic, ritual, and symbolic uses of pottery interlace to form a complex web of meaning. Adding to this web are the centuries of tradition embodied in these traditions that give them immense cultural significance. When painted pots became commodity objects in the Western world, however, they suddenly entered new spheres of exchange in which subjected them to foreign standards of aesthetics that in many respects opposed traditional Pueblo values. As a result, the utilitarian functions became largely obsolete as Westerners collected pottery for its curiosity value, its ethnographic

significance, and eventually for its importance as “primitive art.”

More importantly, these cross-cultural influences created tensions within Pueblo pottery traditions by introducing conflicting notions about art, craft, and the relationship between utility and aesthetics. In Western cultures, *art* generally refers to objects that are associated with aesthetic qualities (paintings and sculptures, for example) while *craft* usually refers to objects associated with usefulness (weavings, furniture, or pottery). However, as Sally Markowitz (1994) observes, the distinctions between these two categories are not always clear. Part of the problem, she writes, is “that ‘art’ has a positive evaluative connotation that ‘craft’ lacks” (p. 55). She believes this distinction can be explained by the tendency of Western cultures to regard intellectual activities and attributes above purely physical or technical ones. Since *art* is typically perceived to be more cerebral (it has a semantic character that can be contemplated or interpreted) than *craft* (which is most often equated with utilitarian or practical purposes), it is given higher status (pp. 67-69).

The dichotomy inherent in this construct would naturally have been foreign to Pueblo potters, for whom pottery was an expression of the interconnectedness between these two functions. In fact, one might argue that the practical functions of pottery have been as vital to the survival of Puebloan cultural traditions as have been the aesthetic functions of pottery. Therefore, I believe the tensions introduced by Western concepts of art in the historic era highlight an important difference between Western and traditional Puebloan modes of thought. The difference is that throughout Puebloan history the relationship between aesthetic and utilitarian function is essentially harmonious; form and abstract representation are blended to create meaningful objects for both ordinary and ritual/spiritual use. However, this is not the case in Western cultures where *art* is seen as existing outside of ordinary life. As

Patricia Lange (2002) states, “The object of art in traditional Pueblo culture is not a *distant aesthetic experience* as in modern Euro-American culture. Instead it is a *weaving together* of the creative process with traditions to promote a sense of taste” (p. 1, emphasis added).

Chapter 6: Contemporary Pueblo Pottery Traditions, 1950 to Present

One question that follows from this discussion is whether Puebloan cultures have managed to retain this balance between aesthetics and utility in their contemporary pottery traditions, despite the extreme social, cultural, and economic changes they have faced in the past century. In order to explore this question, I now examine the effects of cross-cultural influences during the historic era on Southwestern ceramics today. Using the clay work and writings of contemporary Native Americans as examples, I examine the ways in which present-day potters maintain connections with traditional techniques and materials while at the same time embracing—some whole-heartedly, some reluctantly—their role as ‘artists’ within the sphere of modern art. By examining the work of two contemporary artists in particular, Nora Naranjo-Morse and Roxanne Swentzell, I aim to reveal some of the ways that contemporary Pueblos artists interpret and redefine the role of art within their societies. Furthermore, I explore some of the ways that pottery traditions now function in contemporary Native American societies.

According to Lange (2002), that which is now labeled *art* in Pueblo societies has always existed, it simply is not conceptualized in Western terms. Instead, it is expressed as creative capability—something believed to be intrinsic to all life (p. 5). Just as the breath or *po-wa-ha* is shared by all objects in the world, so is the creative spirit, which is expressed in all actions, from grinding corn to making pottery. Lange suggests that one important reason why Pueblo peoples have been so successful at passing on what Westerners would label their *aesthetic traditions* to subsequent generations is that they do not “compartmentalize” creativity or *art* as something that is separate from the rest of daily life (pp. 4-5).

It is only since outsiders have projected Western labels onto native peoples and

objects that expressions of creativity have come to be known as *art*. As Ortiz (1994) explains, the popular image of Pueblo peoples as artists first emerged in the late nineteenth century, largely because of promotions by Fred Harvey and the tourist industry. While these constructed realities undeniably had negative effects on Pueblo cultures, as I have shown in chapter 5, they did create an identity for Pueblo peoples unlike that of other Native American groups in the United States. According to Ortiz (himself a native of the San Juan Pueblo in New Mexico), this image likely played an important historical role in helping his people revitalize Pueblo culture. If we doubt this, we need only look at the importance of this image in Pueblo culture today; for many Southwesterners today, selling artwork is the only identity they know (pp. 301-302).

Tradition and innovation

According to Susan Peterson (1997), curator of the 1997 exhibition *Legacy of Generations* at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, this revitalization is seen today in the pottery of many talented female Pueblo artists who continue to live and work in traditional contexts⁸. Clay work is still seen as a spiritual process representing a collaboration with *Clay-old-lady*. Many potters still honor this belief by continuing to dig the clay, form vessels, and fire them using traditional methods rather than adopting modern technologies.⁹ For many of these potters, a strict adherence to tradition is an important aspect of their work. Others see the spiritual connections with clay more metaphorically, thus largely abandoning the labor-intensive process of gathering clay from the land. These artists instead choose to innovate on traditional Pueblo ideals and values by creating work that stretches and blurs the

⁸ While many Pueblo men are also known for making pottery, it is considered primarily a women's art (see Peterson, 1997, pp. 15-17).

⁹ See chapter 4 for a description of traditional forming and painting techniques.

boundaries between Pueblo and Western cultures, while at the same time maintaining connections to time-honored processes of working with clay (pp. 13-19). Whether traditional or avant-garde, these contemporary artists represent the survival of prehistoric traditions despite more than four centuries of brutalities and acculturative pressures by Westerners.

Yet, as Peterson notes, the modern world has had a considerable impact on Pueblo cultures. Cars, television, running water, and electricity are just a few of the modern conveniences that have “cluttered” Pueblo life. In addition, factors such as drought, lack of adequate resources, adverse social conditions, and deplorable governance by the United States have created a rather unstable economy, making it very hard for Pueblo communities to continue to be self-reliant (p. 13). Nevertheless, she notes that certain aspects of Pueblo cultural life continue unchanged. Pueblos continue to conceptualize the world in much the same way as their ancestors did, with a strong emphasis on harmony and the balance of natural forces in the world.¹⁰ Song and dance rituals that embody these beliefs as well as oral narratives are still taught to younger generations. Pottery traditions are also still a strong and binding aspect of Pueblo society (pp. 13-14).

Many modern Pueblo artists are therefore faced with the challenge of living and creating artwork “within two worlds.” To do so, they must reconcile traditional Pueblo values with the often-opposing values of Westerners who purchase their work. One way that some contemporary artists bridge these two worlds is by adopting Western genres of art as a means of expressing Pueblo attitudes. For example, some artists now create sculptures and figurines that act as social commentary or satire. Though innovative in form, these works draw on Puebloan traditions by emulating the functions of public ritual. As Ortiz explains,

¹⁰ See chapter 4 for a more detailed description of Pueblo cosmology.

dramatic display such as burlesque, caricature, and parody has long been used by Pueblo peoples to both educate and enlighten. Sometimes these rituals poke fun at community members, and sometimes they are used to draw distinctions between themselves and others. Often these performances satirize outsiders—everyone from government officials, to anthropologists, to the Spaniards that invaded in the 1500s—in ways that are both comical and informative (p. 303). Ortiz explains that, through these performances, Pueblos are able to “neutralize” history by dramatizing important events. Thus they have the effect of “rendering what may have begun as a disturbing and disruptive historical intrusion into a permanent...and, therefore, unarmful part of [Puebloan] communal experience” (p. 303).

Though satire is traditionally articulated through dramatic performances, some modern Pueblo artists have learned to communicate these values very effectively using the medium of clay sculpture. Among these are two remarkable women whose works bridge the Western and Pueblo world in ways that blend innovation with traditional Pueblo values. The first of these is Nora Naranjo-Morse, a gifted potter, poet, and video artist from Santa Clara Pueblo whose work tackles social issues in both serious and playful ways. According to Peterson, her work is “generally concerned with satirical notions playing on Anglo and Indian lore” (1997, p. 184). Early in her career, Naranjo-Morse became famous for a series of sculptures entitled “Pearlene”, a Pueblo character she created. Like many of her other characters, “Pearlene” can be seen as a parody of any modern Pueblo woman struggling between Western ideals and Pueblo values. According to Naranjo-Morse, “Pearlene” was a way of finding meaning in her own struggles to live in two worlds: “Pearlene fluctuates between confusion and clarity, reverence and mischief, while searching for her niche in life” (Naranjo-Morse, 1992, p. 14).

Naranjo-Morse's sculptures often reflect personal situations in her life. For example, her poem, *Mud Woman's First Encounter with the World of Money and Business*, expresses her disdain for the commercial aspects of the contemporary art world. Through the character "Mud Woman", she describes the vulnerability she felt as a young woman taking artwork to a gallery to be sold and realizing that the market value of her work had nothing to do with the personal and cultural values it represented for her. She writes: "The center of what Mud Woman knew to be real was shifting with each moment in the gallery" (1992, p. 35). The disconnect between the "world of business and money" and the spiritual context in which Pueblo pottery is made is also represented by Naranjo-Morse's 1987 sculpture of this character (also titled *Mud Woman's First Encounter with the World of Money and Business*), in which an anxious "Mud Woman" stands, hands clutching two small pottery figurines and an expectant look on her face, perhaps in anticipation of the gallery owner's judgment (see Figure 12). Together, both works express the dehumanization that Naranjo-Morse sees in the business of buying and selling Pueblo art.

Reading her book *Mud Woman: Poems from the Clay*, one is immediately struck by the deep spirituality with which Naranjo-Morse regards simple daily rituals of sifting and shaping the clay. The actions of coiling clay forms are metaphors to her of the "symmetry of life cycles" held sacred by Pueblo peoples (1992, p. 11). "The simple act of doing opens creative channels," she writes (p. 10). Though these channels often lead Naranjo-Morse to create non-conventional forms, her work is very rooted in the traditions of her people. Gathering and processing her own clay, she writes, keeps her connected to "Clay Mother" and to "the Pueblo worldview". This "cultural rooting" inspires Naranjo-Morse's artistic explorations by heightening her awareness of the cycles of the earth, nature, and of human

life (pp. 10-11). Her poem, “When the clay calls” expresses her reverence for working in clay:

*This clay starts calling me only days after I've sworn it off
wishing to leave tired hands to rest,
wanting to release myself from the browns and reds
that bend easily into gentle curves,
instantly becoming a child's face,
a woman's skirt, or her husband's smile.*

*Resting from lines I review,
have reviewed,
and will review again.*

*Dusting off the sanded earth
as coarse surfaces level into fluid forms
I had not yet discovered,
so smooth and yet richly textured with life of its own.*

*I am in awe of this clay that fills me with passion
and wonder.*

*This earth
I have become a part of,
that also I have grown out of. (Naranjo-Morse, 1992, p. 24)*

Naranjo-Morse's large installation pieces are also very culturally rooted, though they function in different ways than her characters. These works are often towering abstract forms made of clay that are suggestive of Pueblo architecture and, in some ways, of the human figure as well. These works reflect the artist's interest in how our homes and where we live shape our ideas: “In a way we really are a reflection of our buildings,” she writes, “and the buildings are a reflection of how we decipher the world, especially a long time ago” (Wroten, 2007). One of Naranjo-Morse's most recent explorations of this topic, *Always Becoming*, is an outdoor installation at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in

Washington D.C. (see Figure 13). Working with several other artists, she created a series of tall structures dotting the lawns of the museum that are made of clay and other earthen materials. Some resemble tee-pees, others are undulating organic spires evocative of traditional Pueblo architecture. Naranjo-Morse explains, “Pueblo people believe that they came out of the ground, so it would only make sense that they're making their homes, their most important shelter, as a reflection of themselves again” (Wroten, 2007). In this sense, the forms in *Always Becoming* can be seen as a metaphor for Pueblo cultures: perhaps slowly eroding, but not entirely disappearing. As Naranjo-Morse says:

It really is about the way we look at ourselves and the way we look at our homes, and the fact that these are going to melt down and they're going to transform; that is the idea of *Always Becoming*... In ten years, those pieces will be half the size they are now maybe, or they'll just be something else. That doesn't make them any less, that'll make them just different. (Wroten, 2007)

Naranjo-Morse describes herself as someone “interested in asking questions” (Mithlo, 1999, p. 18). Her work is often aimed at interrogating both her own community and the world around her. Works like *Always Becoming* therefore operate on many levels at once; on one level, questioning notions of home and identity, while on another, perhaps more subtle level, questioning the political policies surrounding reservation housing. As Mithlo notes, “Since Naranjo-Morse’s recent installation pieces no longer fit physically or thematically into the standard native arts venue, she becomes an outsider twice—from both mainstream and ethnic arts arenas” (pp. 18-19). Yet, rather than limiting her, Mithlo suggests, this position permits her access to “wider artistic debates.” Moreover, Naranjo-Morse’s unabashed approach to political issues such as housing rights or the environment speaks to her “resiliency and creative determination” to make her voice known (p. 19).

Naranjo-Morse’s niece, Roxanne Swentzell, is also known for her ability to

communicate through her clay sculptures and installation pieces, which have been exhibited around the world. Like Naranjo-Morse, Swentzell comes from a family of famous Santa Clara potters. Her mother, Rina Naranjo Swentzell, is a recognized scholar, activist, potter, and architect whose insights on Pueblo clay traditions are quoted throughout this paper. What sets Roxanne apart, however, is her innovative use of the figure to bridge cultural differences. Swentzell's Anglo American father was a professor at nearby St. John's College, so she had a lot of exposure to Western art and culture as a child. According to Swentzell, the experience of living in a "mixed racial family" caused her to recognize "a need for social change" early on in her life:

My father being of German decent and my mother being Native American made the world be one of obvious differences. They never could understand each other's culture and early on I became aware that most conflicts were due to misunderstandings. I longed for a world that could bridge these gaps. My art became a medium for me to figure out these gaps in myself and to communicate what I was seeing to others. I was looking for a way to communicate beyond culture, beyond race, beyond gender. (Anonymous, 2007)

Sometimes humorous, sometimes deeply touching, Swentzell's work is able to speak to its viewers using the language of feeling. According to Swentzell, this choice was very deliberate. To her, the "world of emotions" represents "a universal language" that allows her to speak to viewers of every culture (Anonymous, 2007). Swentzell's 2003 sculpture, *Bridging Gaps*, for example, shows the poignant clarity with which her figures are able to communicate her ideas (see Figure 14). In this sculpture, a single figure represents two distinct people, one half light-skinned, and the other half dark-skinned. Each side seems to be struggling to connect with the other; their hands meet, but only through sheer determination are they able to remain connected. Like many of her works, this figure functions as a metaphor for Swentzell's struggle to find a home between the Pueblo world of her mother

and the Western world of her father.

Swentzell's sculptures are created using traditional pottery techniques. She begins coiling the base of the figure, working her way up to the head or out to the feet if the figure is seated. She then burnishes the clay with a knife until the surface develops sheen. The whole process is "like building a fancy pot", she says (Peterson, 1997, p. 197). Swentzell does not gather her own clay, however, because her work requires a much stronger clay body than that which is found near her home of Santa Clara Pueblo. According to Peterson (1997), the ideas behind her work are more important to her than following the custom of gathering clay (p. 197). Yet, so much of her work is about remembering and returning to the traditional ways of life that she feels her people are forgetting. She worries that all of the "subliminal messages" about how we should look and act in the modern world are causing people—not just Indians—to chase after a false sense of identity. "It is time for *everybody* to get back home," she writes. Swentzell's figures are a way for her to reach out to people with this message: "I try to reach people's emotions so they can remember themselves" (1997, p. 221).

"Her work is experiential," writes Lange (2002), "mothers and children or family members, subtly burlesquing and exaggerating the universal human condition through representative expression of sadness, happiness, or anxiety" (pp. 122-123). Often, Swentzell communicates these feelings using Pueblo themes and motifs. Clowns, for example, are important symbols in the ritual, social, and political lives of Pueblo people, and frequently appear in Swentzell's work. One of her earliest and most popular pieces, an installation called *Emergence of the Clowns* (see Figure 15), shows four Pueblo clowns, or *koshares*, emerging from the earth through an imagined *sipapuni* or 'earth navel'. In their eyes you see all the wonder and amazement of a new world as they each look in a different direction. On

many levels, this piece represents important symbols of Puebloan worldview, and is perhaps a reminder to Pueblos that they can rediscover this world as well.

Swentzell's use of clowns to communicate this message is important. One of their primary roles in Pueblo ritual life is

to teach lessons about life. Clowns understand human nature very well. As symbolized by their black and white stripes, they represent the state of balance between opposites. But they don't teach directly. Instead, they imitate the kinds of behavior they see all around them in the world. It's up to those of us who watch to recognize ourselves in the Clown's activities and to grasp the absurdity or danger in our ways of thinking" (Fauntleroy, 2002, p. 42)

According to W. W. Hill (1982), clowns function as agents of "control and socialization" in traditional Pueblo societies (p. 295). In order to teach their lessons, they are allowed special privileges to satirize all aspects of society—even the most sacred and serious religious or political figures. "No one was immune to their pranks," he writes. Clowns, therefore, were able to influence public conduct by engendering a fear of being mocked or ridiculed for unacceptable behavior. The humor with which clowns impart their lessons is critical—it both added to the "effectiveness of the ritual" and functioned to release social tensions. Moreover, the "victims" of a clown's ridicule is considered fortunate, since the clown is symbolic of "general health, fertility, rain", and abundant crops (pp. 294-295).

In this context, Swentzell's *Despairing Clown* (see Figure 16) sends a powerful message. In this work, a clown looks sadly down at his arm as he peels off his stripes, looking to see what lies beneath. Swentzell sees this as a metaphor for looking within: "Our veneer, our mask, can sometimes become a prison in which we forget who we really are inside. We can spend our lives working to hold our outside image in place" (Fauntleroy, 2002, p. 44). In this sense, Swentzell's sculptures are about remembering. What makes her work so poignant, however, is that it speaks to everyone, reminding us *all* that perhaps we

are forgetting our connections to the earth and to the fundamental values that make us who we are. “I try to reach people’s emotions so they can remember themselves,” writes Swentzell (1997, p. 221).

Each piece is part of a sacred process to Swentzell. Though her work commands very high prices from buyers, she does not work continuously in order to profit from them. Instead, she creates when she is moved to do so, often waiting months before an idea inspires her (Lange, 2002, p. 127). As Rina Swentzell observes, her daughter’s figures are “imbued with life” that flows back into her community. She writes, “older people say, ‘Here is an exceptional gift working through this person. She has gotten in touch with the spirit of an old person’ who is recognized as an intermediary or conduit mediating between spirits and people” (Lange, p. 127).

As Lange (2002) notes, contemporary artists are able to hold on to art as a vital part of their lives because of the Western world’s “continued intrigue” with Native American cultures (p. 127). However, not all contemporary Pueblo artists maintain connections with traditions as successfully as Swentzell and Naranjo-Morse do. Rina Swentzell sees much of the art produced by Native Americans today as being commercially driven, and is critical of the changes taking place within her culture:

I think Native Americans are running after sophisticated art. They want to become studio artists, which takes them away from the real essence of native art. A lot of recent work involves highly contrived objects that are out of context... The best native work is about remembering, and I think we’re starting to forget. (Swentzell, 1996, p. 32)

Others are troubled by these shifts as well. Robert Tenorio, a potter from Santo Domingo Pueblo, believes his work is primarily functional and prefers to be called a potter rather than an artist. Yet, while he is uncomfortable with his work being called “art”, he understands the

reality of modern life: “In today’s world, we do have to survive. It’s totally up to the outside world, and they look at it as an art form. So that is now what I create” (Bernstein & Brody, 2001, p. 10) Tenorio’s reluctant acceptance of the labels imposed by Western culture is common among Native Americans. Many maintain the belief that the utility of their forms is as essential to their meaning as the imagery they paint on them. Swentzell (1994) agrees with this idea, emphasizing the interconnectedness of pottery with life that she feels some artists are losing:

Artists today are so self-conscious—they go into their studios with these big plans in their heads about what they’re going to do and how they’re going to do it and it’s all very rational, very self-conscious. Art today is a very deliberate act. I feel, however, that art comes from a deeper source somewhere—it’s part of the act of just living: you know, let’s put on the beans and get the clay out. (p. 34)

Chapter 7: Conclusions

What, then, can this study show us about the changing value and meaning of pottery traditions over the past two thousand years? As I have shown, throughout their history in the Southwest, Puebloan cultures have maintained a harmonic balance between the social, ritual, and practical uses of pottery. Ceramic traditions developed primarily to fulfill the need for utilitarian vessels to store and serve food. The utilitarian functions of these wares remained vital, even after aesthetic functions of painted pottery emerged and assumed significant psychological value. Rather than hindering the symbolic functions of these paintings, their importance as domestic tools in fact helped to disseminate Puebloan values. The images adorning these practical objects—and their inherent ability to be seen by virtually *all* members of a society—aided in the transmission of Pueblo identity from generation to generation. Useful objects, adorned with fundamental iconography and used in both practical and ritual contexts, therefore become important and socially binding traditions, providing prehistoric Puebloans with both a link to the past and to future generations.

The functions of painted pottery, however, changed drastically after foreigners entered the Southwest during the historic era. Cheaply manufactured goods caused the utilitarian functions of pottery to become obsolete, and the introduction of Western values caused a radical shift in the way potters conceived of their work. Though methods of pottery construction remained largely the same as in the pre-contact era, the functions that pottery served changed dramatically as these objects entered new spheres of exchange in the Western world. While pottery continued to hold significant cultural symbolism for Native Americans, its movement across cultural boundaries—and the continually shifting interpretations of importance and usefulness that accompanied it—introduced conflicting notions about the

value and function of “art” in the Western world. In turn, Pueblo potters began adapting their traditions to meet the demands of Western audiences.

This shift was particularly evident during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when the idea of culture as commodity gave rise to the marketing of the Southwest as the source of a new national identity for Americans. One of the lasting mythologies of this era has been the notion that Native American cultures are static and unchanging. Yet, for as long as Puebloan peoples have been making pottery in the Southwest, their traditions have shown evidence of continuous response to changing social and environmental circumstances. Cross-cultural influences and subtle modifications of foreign styles characterize pottery from all periods and styles. In fact, some of the most distinctive features of the famous Mimbres Classic pottery appear to have developed as modifications of non-local innovations (Brody, 2004).

As sedentary societies, Native Americans have also had to be adaptable in order to protect their welfare. Long before contact with Westerners, Puebloans dealt with nomadic attacks from neighboring southwestern tribes. During the historic era, they struggled with ongoing domination by Spanish, Mexican, and American populations. As Gill (1976) explains, native populations have faced challenges such as these for centuries by “developing adaptive measures” (p. 105). Rather than simply vanishing, however, he suggests that “many native art traditions avoid succumbing to the pressures of the dominant culture, and a synthesis occurs in which the tradition continues its own development though decidedly influenced by the alien presence” (p. 104). Steven Trimble (1993) also sees the modification of tradition as a natural and often beneficial process. Cross-cultural interactions, he writes, have helped shape pottery making into “a viable Pueblo profession” (p. 97). As one Hopi

artist says, “We still maintain the Hopi point of view—just using a Western tool” (Trimble, 1987, p. 99). Trimble sees market-inspired artistic innovations as positive expressions of Pueblo worldviews that speak to their culture’s ability to adapt. Nampeyo of Hano established a legacy with her revival Sikyatki ware that her family still carries today. Maria Martinez, an equally renowned potter, “single-handedly” created a successful market for the revival black-on-black pottery she developed, consequently bringing prosperity to her Pueblo and others. Today, artists like Naranjo-Morse and Swentzell draw on what Lange (2002) calls “the unleashed freedom of aesthetic power” to create forms that transcend cultural boundaries, at the same time, continuing to explore “the nature of Pueblo reality” through the medium of clay (p. 129).

“Revitalization,” writes Alfonzo Ortiz (1994), has therefore been a way of life for Pueblos “for as long as we can trace their presence on the peculiar landscape we know today as the American Southwest.” (p. 304). Moreover, the value of these traditions within Puebloan culture has always been derived from the balance of practical, social, and economic functions they have performed throughout history. Though Western standards of value have threatened to overturn this crucial balance by introducing a dichotomy between utility and aesthetics into Pueblo cultures, I believe contemporary Pueblo artists like Naranjo-Morse and Swentzell are showing how native peoples can overcome these challenges by finding new uses for pottery that allows them to exist in “both worlds”. While this shift may mean that the utilitarian functions of pottery are waning in importance in the modern world, I believe the *value* of this work—to both Pueblo peoples and to wider Western audiences—continues to derive from its ability to disseminate native values. In prehistoric times, this meant reaching an entire community by means of utilitarian pots. Today, the vehicles for transmission are

numerous—sculpture, poetry and video expressing Pueblo ideas are disseminated via books, museums and the internet. The recipients of these messages are no longer a single village or region of the Southwest, but rather a truly global community. While the means of reaching out to this community are, indeed, non-traditional media, I believe the underlying urge to relay Pueblo identity to ever-widening audiences is something that has been fundamental to the continued success of Pueblo cultures for centuries, and speaks to the resiliency of Pueblo peoples throughout history.

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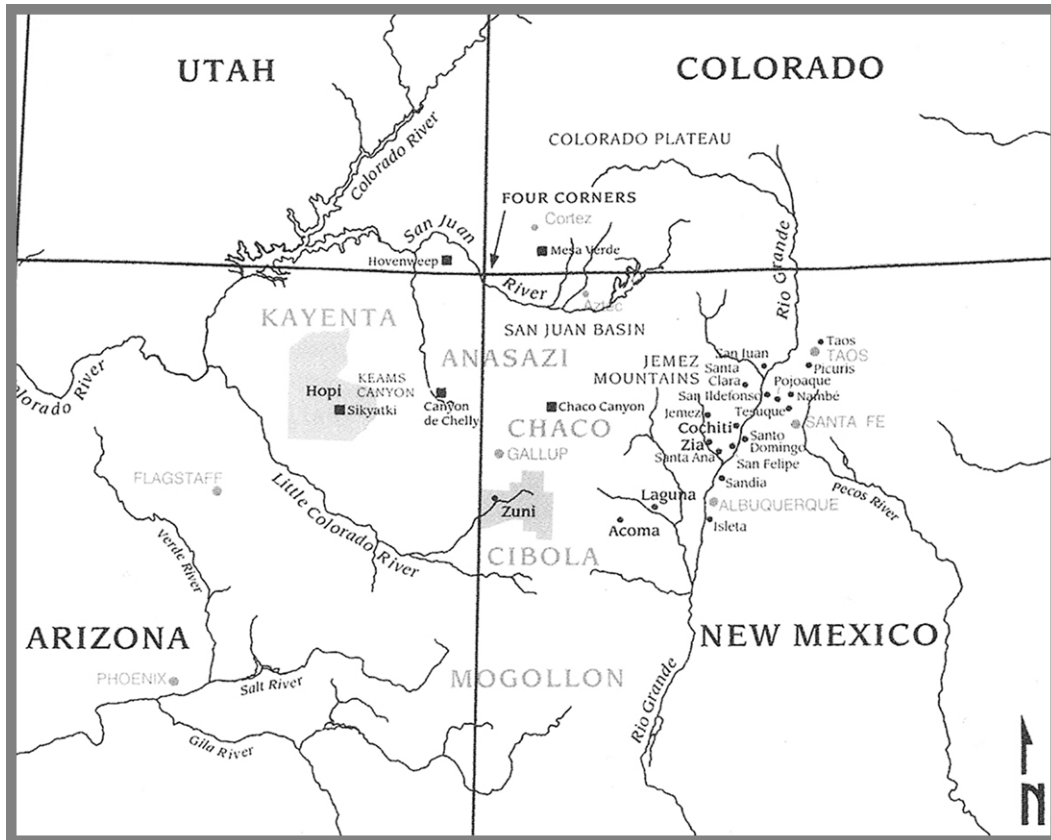
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Illustrations

Figure 1: Map of contemporary Southwestern United States¹¹



¹¹ Image adapted from *Voices in clay: Pueblo pottery from the Edna M. Kelly collection*, (p. 18), by B. Bernstein, & J. J. Brody, 2001, Oxford, OH: Miami University Art Museum.

Figure 2: The Pecos Classification.¹²

The Pecos Classification

Basketmaker II	1 A.D. – 500	
Basketmaker III	500-700	Pre-Contact Era
Pueblo I	700-900	
Pueblo II	900-1100	
Pueblo III	1100-1300	
Pueblo IV	1300-1600	
Pueblo V	1600- present	Contact Era

¹² Adapted from *Messages from the high desert: the art, archaeology, and renaissance of Mesa Verde pottery*, (p. 16), by C. Swink, 2004, Bayfield, CO: Redtail Press.

Figure 3: Photo of Pueblo Bonito, one of the remaining “great houses” at Chaco Canyon, New Mexico¹³.



¹³ Photo by Megan Conner, June 26, 2005

*Figure 4: Classifications of Pottery Styles since A.D. 1600*¹⁴

Pottery Style	Time Period
Historic	1600-1880
Modern	1880-1950
Contemporary	1950-present

¹⁴ Adapted from *Southwestern pottery: Anasazi to Zuni*, by A. Hayes & J. Blom, 1996, Flagstaff, AZ: Northland Publishing.

Figure 5: Mimbres Black-on-white bowl, Style III, two male figures, A.D. 1000-1150.¹⁵

While these two figures appear to be swimming based on their posture and the fishtail-like elements in the painting, “no convincing suggestion has been made” about the meaning of this image, according to LeBlanc (2004, p. 64). We can surmise, however, that this painting represents elements from Mimbres mythology or folklore.

Note the “kill hole” present in the center of this bowl.



¹⁵ From *Painted by a distant hand Mimbres pottery from the American Southwest*. By S. A. LeBlanc, 2004, Cambridge, MA: Peabody Museum Press, p. 65.

Figure 6: Mimbres Black-on-white bowl, Style III, geometric, A.D. 1000-1150.¹⁶

The geometric patterns in this painting may have represented forces of nature to the Mimbres: Zigzag lines and scrolls, possibly symbolizing wind and lightning, are delicately balanced with patchwork-like squares evoking crop configurations. These symbols may have represented the balance of forces required for a bountiful harvest.



¹⁶ From *Painted by a distant hand Mimbres pottery from the American Southwest*. By S. A. LeBlanc, 2004, Cambridge, MA: Peabody Museum Press, p. 101.

Figure 7: Mimbres Black-on-white bowl, Style III, pronghorn deer intertwined with geometric design. A.D. 1000-1150.¹⁷



¹⁷ From *Painted by a distant hand Mimbres pottery from the American Southwest*, by S. A. LeBlanc, 2004, Peabody Museum Collections Series, Cambridge, Mass.: Peabody Museum Press, Harvard University, p. 88.

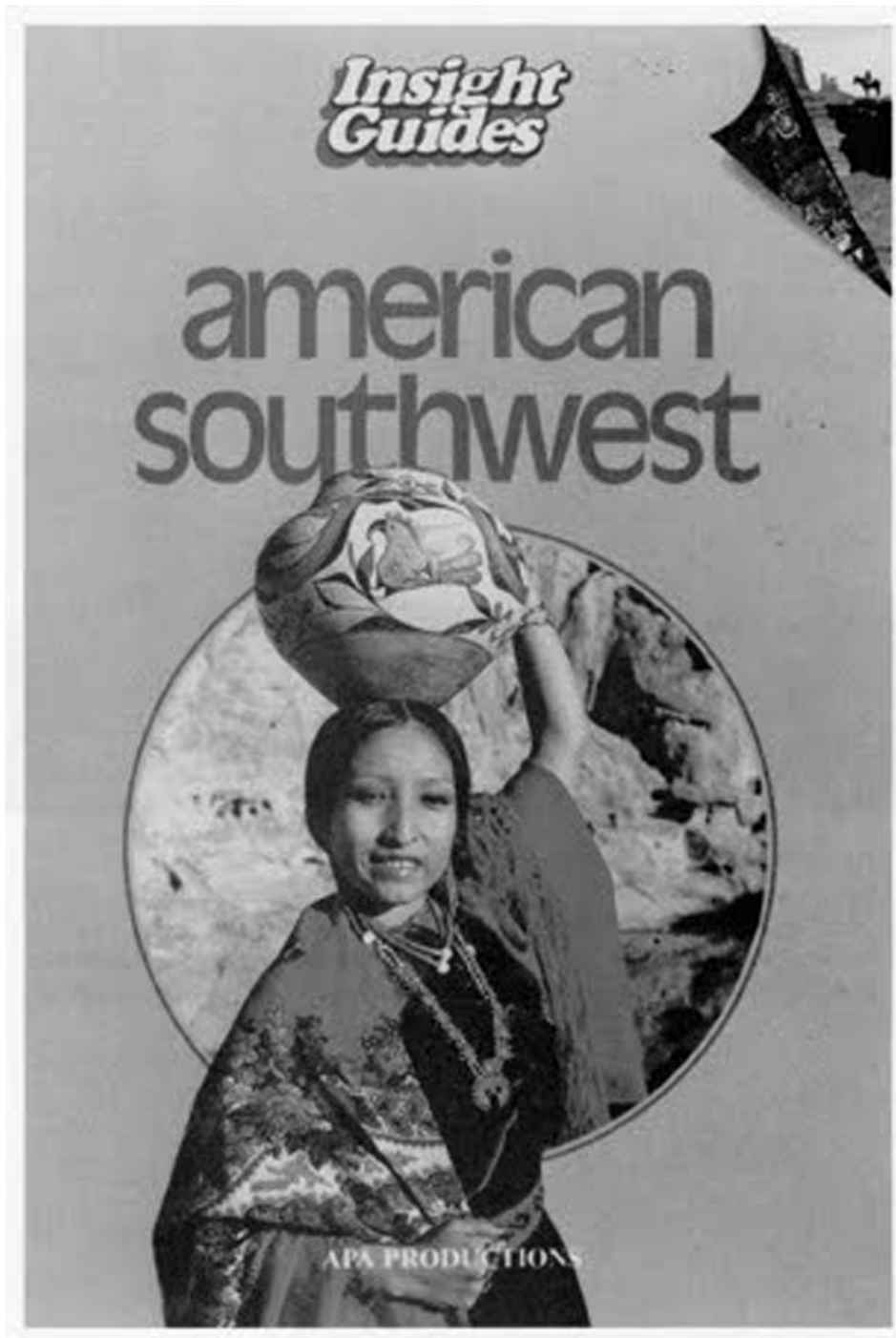
Figure 8: Postcard: "Pueblo Indians Selling Pottery in New Mexico," 1902, made only by the Detroit Publishing Co.

Reverse side caption: "*Comely Indian maidens and aged squaws meet the train and sell their wares. This pottery is made by hand in their crude ways, moulded without a wheel, and often decorated with geometrical or symbolic designs. The Pueblo Indian is a true pagan—superstitious, rich in fanciful legend, and profoundly ceremonious in religion. His gods are innumerable—gods of war, and gods of peace; of famine, and of plenty; of sun, and of rain*"¹⁸



¹⁸ From "Bearers of Value, Vessels of Desire: The Reproduction of the Reproduction of Pueblo Culture," by Babcock, B., 1993, *Museum Anthropology* 17(3), p. 45.

Figure 9: Olla maiden cover illustration for *Insight Guide: American Southwest*.¹⁹



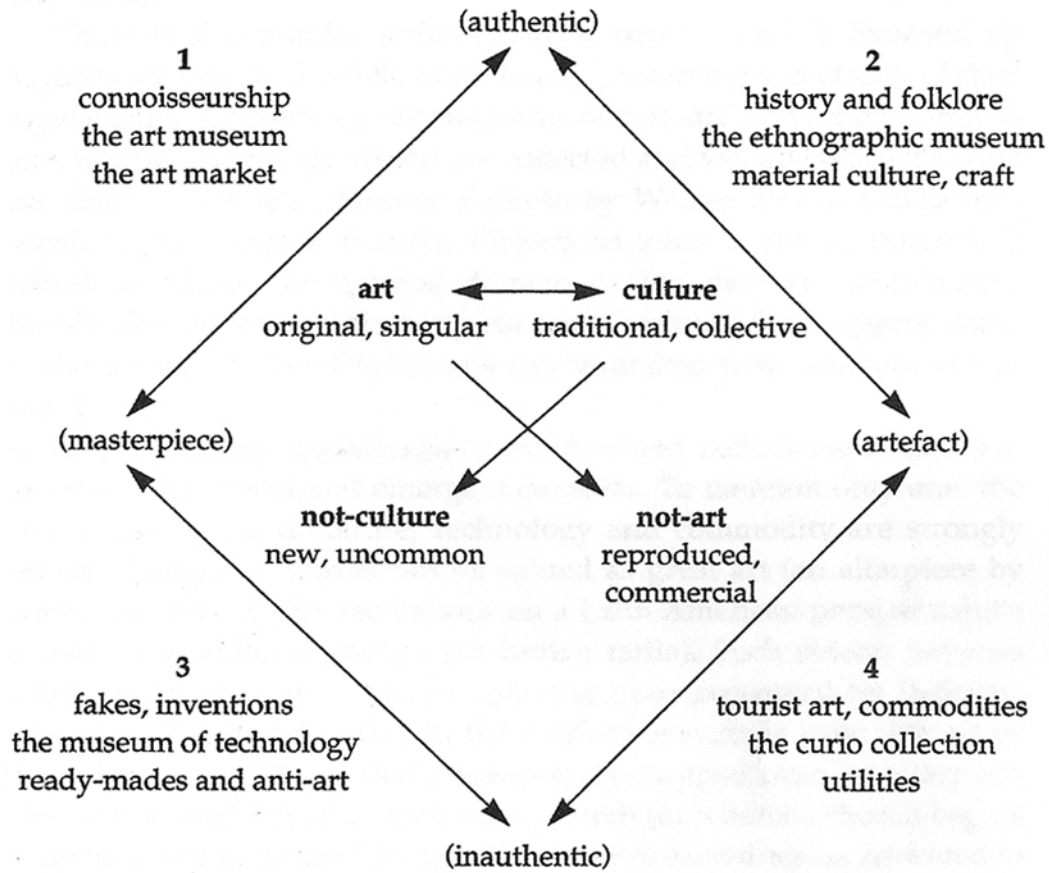
¹⁹ From “Bearers of Value, Vessels of Desire: The Reproduction of the Reproduction of Pueblo Culture,” by Babcock, B., 1993, *Museum Anthropology* 17(3), p. 44.

Figure 10: Sikyatki style Hopi jar by Nampeyo, ca 1910.²⁰



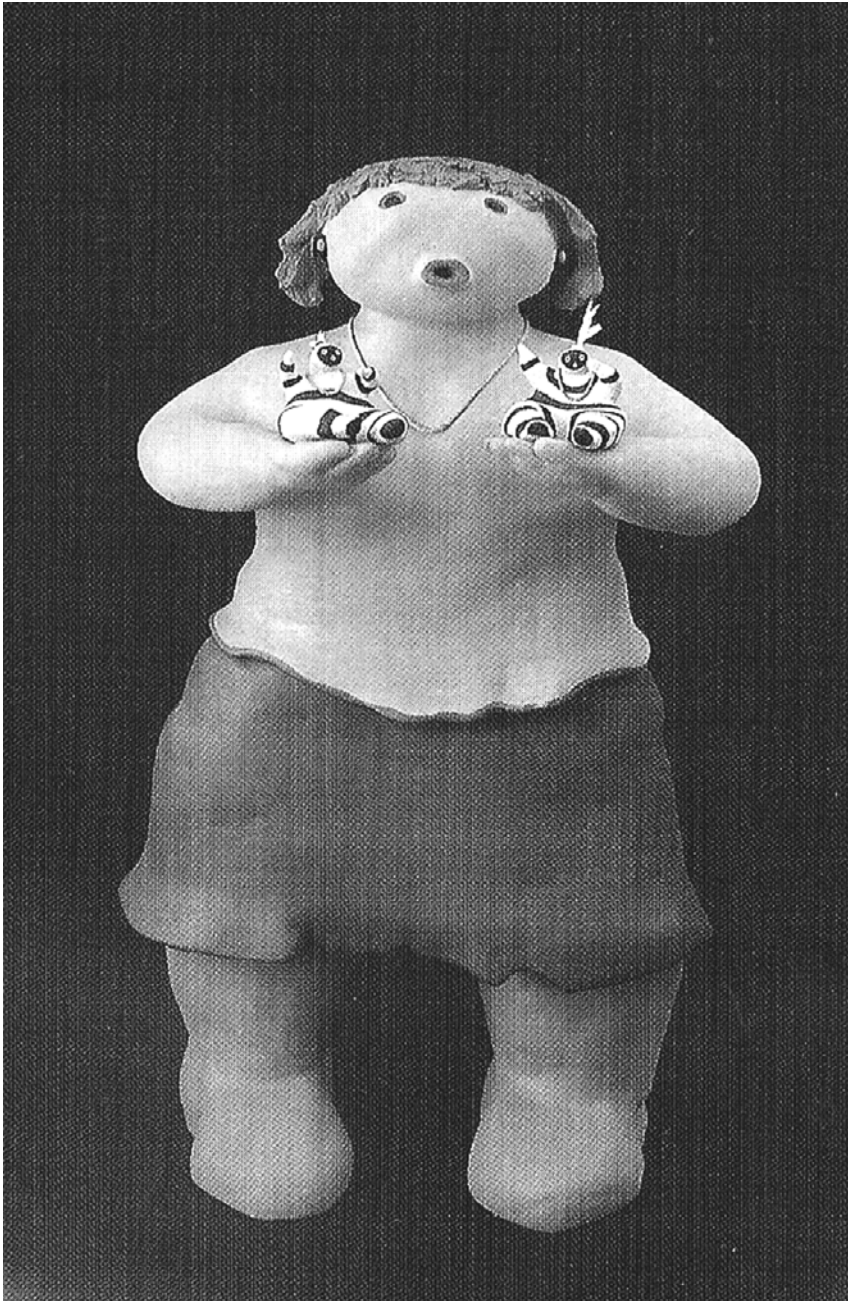
²⁰ From *Voices in clay: Pueblo pottery from the Edna M. Kelly collection*, by B. Bernstein and J. J. Brody, 2001, Oxford, OH: Miami University Art Museum, p. 25.

Figure 11: James Clifford's "modern art-culture system" classifies objects within semantic zones and assigns them relative value.²¹



²¹ From "On collecting art and culture," by J. Clifford, 1999, *The cultural studies reader*, Ed. D. Simon, New York: Routledge, p. 57.

Figure 12: “Mud Woman’s First Encounter with the World of Money and Business”
by Nora Naranjo-Morse, 1987.²²



²² From *Mud woman: Poems from the clay*, by N. Naranjo-Morse, 1992, Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, p. 34.

Figure 13: “Always Becoming” 2007 by Nora Naranjo-Morse²³



²³ From “Sculpting her vision” by N. Wroten, October 2007, In *Smithsonian Magazine*. Retrieved November 17, 2007 from <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/200711-sculpting.html#>

Figure 14: “Bridging Gaps” by Roxanne Swentzell, 2003²⁴



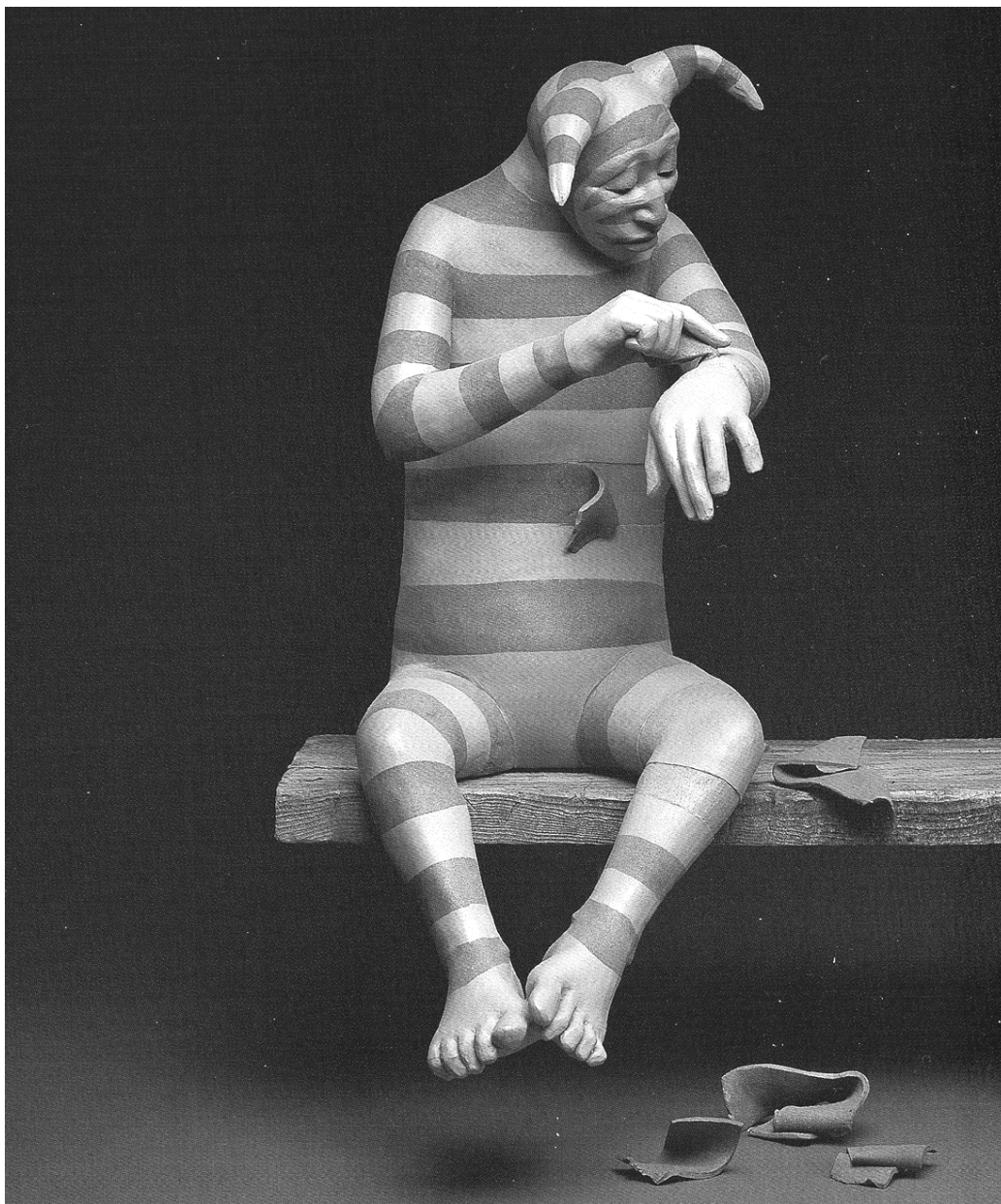
²⁴ From “Towa Artists: Roxanne Swentzell.” (n.d.). Retrieved November 23, 2008, from <http://www.towa-artists.com/roxanne-swentzell/art-work.php>

Figure 15: "Emergence of the Clowns" by Roxanne Swentzell, 1989.²⁵



²⁵ From *Roxanne Swentzell: Extraordinary people*, by G. Fauntleroy, 2002, Santa Fe, NM: New Mexico Magazine, p. 21.

Figure 16: “Despairing Clown” by Roxanne Swentzell, 1991.²⁶



²⁶ From *Roxanne Swentzell: Extraordinary people*, by G. Fauntleroy, 2002, Sante Fe, NM: New Mexico Magazine, p. 45.