

# *Pathways through the Archaeology of Neighborhoods*

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## ABSTRACT

For such a ubiquitous urban form, neighborhoods have been subject of relatively sparse systematic archaeological scrutiny or theorization. This collection starts with first principles about social vectors of cooperation, and how neighborhoods emerge not only as durable manifestations of cooperation, but as human-nonhuman assemblages for the production and dissolution of cooperation and community. Much as in the case of “community”, neighborhoods derive their social efficacy and ethos of belonging both through their seemingly irreducible affordances of quotidian interaction and through more or less self-conscious rituals or habits of affiliation. These both produce and are products of the material remains of neighborhoods that archaeologists study. With this generative view of neighborhood materiality in mind, this essay surveys the landscape of the archaeology of communities, and seeks pathways through the theoretical and methodological challenges it poses, as presented in the contributions to this volume. [Community, cooperation, assemblages, affordances]

This collection posits neighborhoods as a key *nexus* in social relations; between households and larger collectivities (cities and states, for instance), and between the social imaginary and its instantiations in assemblages of people, things, interests, and institutions. It would seem that neighborhoods should be in the wheelhouse of anthropological archaeology, as they are produced by and impinge on daily social practice in material, tangible ways, and at a scale inherently amenable to archaeological survey and excavation. Yet this volume is the first global collection focusing specifically on the topic of the archaeology of neighborhoods. Even key pioneering contributions in neighborhood archaeology from different world regions have emerged only in the last few decades (e.g., Arnauld, Manzanilla, and Smith 2012; Smith 2013; Stone 1987). As was the case for “community” until quite recently (Canuto and Yaeger 2000; Creed 2006b; Joseph 2002), the neighborhood appears to be a dimension of social life so seemingly ubiquitous, intuitive, and commonsensical that it has escaped detailed scrutiny. To that end, David Pacifico and Lise Truex have organized a

fine collection of contributions with an impressive breadth of case studies and conceptual orientations, from microscopic to comparative in scope. Given the early state of the field of neighborhood archaeology, my discussion focuses on prospects rather than prescriptions. It traces out contours of neighborhood social dynamics and promising pathways through the archaeology of neighborhoods as identified in these contributions.

## Why Cooperate? Why Neighborhoods?

A fitting way to begin an archaeology of neighborhoods is to ask about the basic parameters of cooperation or association in human societies. These are squarely at the center of the comparative paper by Fargher and colleagues (Chapter 11), which essentially asks, “why do people cooperate (at all)?” At first blush, such a framing would seem reductively functionalist, as if complex social arrangements were only solutions to problems of provisioning, personnel, or information management. But actually, power is central to their

analysis. This is so because they “assume that intermediate socio-spatial units *are not natural aspects of primordial social landscapes* that preceded state building” (emphasis added). Recent discussions on the durability of hierarchical political organization (and kingship in particular) in human societies notwithstanding (Sahlins and Graeber 2018), human societies seem to have been organized as relatively egalitarian at small scales for many millennia—many more than have passed since the emergence of intermediate- and large-scale cooperative groups. Cooperation, after all, requires sublimation of individual or sectional interests to the means and ends of a larger collectivity (an institution; in this case, a neighborhood). As Fargher and colleagues point out, humans cooperate systematically more than predicted by rational actor behavioral models (as measured experimentally) when they believe there will be equitable distribution of benefits and punishments for defection from institutions. This brings us to an essential point about achieving ideological buy-in to intermediate scale institutions: such considerations are significantly informed by experience—social memory—as they point out. Their comparative analysis traces out axes of variation and archaeological correlates for bottom-up and top-down construction of intermediate scale institutions and infrastructure, as they interact with variation in weakly or strongly collective states. It also points to the pathways by which cooperation can break down, as when perceived equitable distribution is no longer in the offing, or in the absence of punishment for defection.

But why neighborhoods? That is, why are neighborhoods a consistent and persistent unit (though with a broad range of cultural forms) in large settlements globally? Monica Smith (Chapter 4) sketches out a complementary pathway to an answer (presented more fully elsewhere [Smith 2008]): if we consider the recent nascence of cities in the full expanse of the human story (a fact that undergirds Fargher and colleagues’ point about the constructedness of intermediate socio-spatial units), and the ubiquitous division of cities by neighborhoods (rather than as undifferentiated accretions), then it would seem that in some fundamental way, people “require a compartmentalized approach to social engagement” (Smith Chapter 4). Conversely, cities—at least if they are to endure—seem to require neighborhoods as “subdivided cell[s] of interaction” (Smith Chapter 4). The neighborhood might represent an optimal scale of interaction (again, within a range, depending on a suite of contextually specific arrangements of their people-thing assemblages), or a requisite scale within the encompassing fabric of cities.

Such big picture framing points to the importance of neighborhoods—or at least to their hypothesized importance—for explaining social vectors of urban devel-

opment and the ongoing production (or breakdown) of cooperation and association in large human settlements. But of course such a comparative approach cannot (and is not intended to) explicate the diversity of forms that neighborhoods have taken, nor their historical trajectories. The bulk of this volume is composed of case studies exploring these context-specific neighborhood dynamics. They also converge on what I see as a common set of intersecting themes or pathways through the archaeological study of neighborhoods: their material and temporal dimensions, the (bottom-up and top-down) social processes by which they are (re)produced, and their affective qualities (issues of performativity and identity).

### **Pathways: Neighborhood Materiality, Temporality, Sociality, Identity**

Of course any archaeological study of the neighborhood must confront and define the materiality and material correlates of neighborhood. At issue is not just how archaeologists in the present might detect neighborhoods through (spatially) patterned material remains, but how their material and spatial attributes were produced and reproduced, and how they channeled and entrained social practice (fostering and foreclosing certain patterns of interaction, producing and reinforcing social boundaries, etc.). Entrainment through the “affordances” (in the sense proposed by ecological psychologist James Gibson [1966, 1979]) of built landscapes and built environments (*urbs*) is an emergent property of recursively discursive–pre-discursive spatial practices and performances (on inscription, see Joyce and Hendon 2000; on affordances, see Gillings 2012; Ingold 1992; Llobera 1996; Wernke, Kohut, and Traslaviña 2017). Conversely, neighborhoods as human collectivities (the social body, *civitas*) may repurpose, modify, demolish, or abandon neighborhoods through time (issues explored in detail by Pacifico [Chapter 8] and Truex [Chapter 3]). One can also imagine how the conjoint people-thing assemblage of the neighborhood might generate strong affective ties of community affiliation (a harmonization of *urbs/civitas*—a sense of belonging), since the appeals of common identity at such a scale are more than abstractions: they pull on the most tangible dimensions of daily life. In his pioneering ethnological study of the symbolic construction of community, Anthony Cohen hit upon this point:

As one goes “down” the scale so the “objective” referents of the boundary become less and less clear, until they may be quite invisible to those outside. But also as you go “down” this scale, they become more important to their members for they relate to increasingly intimate

areas of their lives or refer to more substantial areas of their identities. (1985, 13)

This insight also poses a challenge to neighborhood archaeology: as (social) boundaries define the in-group from the out-group—as they produce difference—and as one moves to the scale of the neighborhood, one would expect the (observable, material) referents of the boundary to become increasingly difficult to detect, even as they subjectively impinge most critically on one's identity (see also Yaeger 2000). Such distinctions—which from an outside observer's perspective may seem a narcissism of small differences—actually, experientially, make all the difference precisely because they bind questions of identity to concerns of everyday practice and wellbeing (see Truex Chapter 3). These considerations keep processes of neighborhood social dynamics in the foreground and can help us guard against a temptation to approach the neighborhood as the “really real” community—as a built community that is a more-or-less unselfconscious accretion of and container for patterned behavior, in contradistinction to the imagined community. That is to say, both literally (it is often not possible for all neighbors to know each other) and processually, the neighborhood is also an imagined community—a symbolic and political project (see also Isbell 2000; Creed 2006a; Pauketat 2000).

These are also among the central concerns of the contributions by Monica Smith (Chapter 4), Edward Swenson (Chapter 7), Stephen Dueppen (Chapter 5), and David Chicoine and Ashley Whitten (Chapter 6) in this volume. These papers explore how affiliative bonds of neighborhood can form quite quickly and portably (rather than as a consequence of spatially structured entrainment), and not necessarily culminating in the formation of archaeologically recognizable neighborhoods. They seek to move beyond reductive framings such as “top-down administrative districts or bottom-up corporations of affiliated households” (Swenson Chapter 7) to instead explore multiple and fluid social formations of intermediate scale. Both explore how the “‘neighborhood’ does not necessarily emanate from a particular type of built environment,” but is instead “a social concept that can be materialized in a variety of both temporary and permanent configurations” (Smith Chapter 4).

Swenson presents a strong form of this argument; he contends that despite the large, urban Moche population in the Jequetepeque Valley, they did not coalesce into what one might traditionally define as neighborhoods. But rather than approaching this seeming lack of neighborhoods (even as compared to coeval Moche settlement systems in neighboring valleys) as an absence (of a normative type), Swenson pushes for broader models of and

pathways to urbanism, neighborhoods, and intermediate-scale socio-spatial units in past political landscapes. Smith also surveys the simultaneous development of distinct neighborhood formation processes and dynamics among Buddhist pilgrimage sites, military camps, and urban centers in Early Historic period India. These readings render ethnographic and contextual understanding of the diverse intermediate scale social arrangements predicted by Fargher and colleagues.

In parallel with Smith's and Swenson's explorations of alternative forms of intermediate scale social formations, Dueppen's contribution, as well as the piece by Chicoine and Whitten illustrate varied, heterarchical accretional processes of households into “houses” (*sensu* Joyce and Gillespie 2000; Lévi-Strauss 1982). Dueppen explores house dynamics in relation to villages, neighborhoods, and wards over the last seven centuries in Burkina Faso. He notes that over the long term, a house may change significantly in identity, boundedness, and spatial and economic organization relative to larger collectivities, and how houses and even villages coalesced into large, diverse, horizontally segmented communities after the 12th century. Chicoine and Whitten explore the (initial) coalescence of segmentary, multi-generational, and multi-family social groups into enclosed compounds within the first large settlements in Early Horizon to Early Intermediate period coastal Ancash in Peru.

These pieces pose challenging problems for an archaeology of neighborhoods: they point to highly variable relationships between neighborhood sociality, materiality, and spatiality. On the one hand, strong neighborhood relations may form quickly but rather ephemerally in material or spatial expression. On the other hand, longstanding neighborhoods may house significantly different neighborhood personnel over their use-lives. What is at issue therefore—again as pointed out by Pacifico and Truex—is more than a question of behavioral correlates and their archaeological detection, but the political processes by which neighborhoods as communities are produced and reproduced. This is all the more evident with a moment's reflection about present-day neighborhoods: as anyone who has served on a neighborhood board can attest (I have the scars to prove it), the “external mask” (again from Cohen 1985) of the neighborhood papers over a welter of interests and competing visions (an issue also explored by Pacifico [Chapter 8]). The ongoing struggle over gentrification of neighborhoods in the urban core of many U.S. cities today (especially in contexts of increasing socioeconomic stratification, restrictive zoning, and declining public infrastructure) further underscores this point.

In other words, archaeologists of neighborhoods should be wary of conflating the unifying symbols and practices

of neighborhoods with consent or consensus, and instead investigate contestation and the political work done in the name of neighborhoods. This is also a common theme in this volume.

No such unifying archaeological symbol is better known than the Giza pyramids. The contribution by Mark Lehner (Chapter 2) speaks to how these monuments to a unified Egypt were built in large measure through a labor system fueled by competition among diverse populations of rotating labor gangs from throughout Middle Egypt and the Nile delta, housed in neighborhoods such as those of the Heit el-Ghurab site. Lehner argues that it was out of this competition—accelerated in a process of social fusion in the dense “social reactor” of the cityscape surrounding the pyramids—that a strong form of common Egyptian identity emerged. Thus Lehner reverses the usual question of how the Egyptians built the pyramids to address how it could be that the pyramids built Egypt (through the symbolic construction of community).

In a similar vein, Alleen Betzenhauser and Timothy Pauketat (Chapter 9) investigate the centrally ordered neighborhoods at Cahokia that were constructed following the demolition and overwriting of earlier Woodland period villages in the American Bottom of North America. Elsewhere, Pauketat (2000) explored the politicization of community itself as a political currency in Mississippian Cahokia—that is, how the key symbols and practices of affiliation of community were co-opted by Mississippian authorities and trappings of the ritual complex of the center. In this piece, we start to see diversity within an overarching plan in greater Cahokia, something akin to a confederacy or constellation of similarly constituted ritually focused complexes—neighborhoods—around medicine bundle shrine-houses. The idea of a monolithic Cahokia (the external mask) appears more friable, fragile, and dependent on rituals of affiliation. Thus, we also see—akin to the pilgrimage centers explored by Smith and Swenson—how ideological buy-in to the big idea of Cahokia was (provisionally) achieved via seasonally pulsing communal events in the Grand Plaza and rural shrine complexes. Such an exploration of diversity and the limits of the unifying symbols and practices of the constituent neighborhoods of Cahokia opens up pathways for understanding the relatively short duration of Mississippian Cahokia and its dissolution around 1200 CE.

April Kamp-Whittaker and Bonnie Clark (Chapter 10) illustrate close to the inverse scenario: how distinctive, vital neighborhoods might form even within oppressive conditions and highly regimented spatial structure of a Japanese internment camp designed and administered by the U.S. government. Their combined oral, historical, documentary,

and archaeological research again point to the complex relationship between discourse, social practice, and the spatial structure and materiality of neighborhoods. Much of the character of the social networks of the neighborhoods of the camp would have been obscure through archaeological research alone. But their contribution is more than a cautionary tale of the limits of archaeological data: on the contrary, much of the character of the everyday production of neighborhood community—“the small things forgotten” (Deetz 2010) such as children’s marbles, mochi mortars, and (officially proscribed) sake jugs—would have remained obscure in the absence of their archaeological research.

Collectively, these contributions take soundings into the archaeology of neighborhoods in a diversity of global contexts and from a diversity of perspectives. The scope of the volume both reflects and advocates an ecumenical and pragmatic stance toward theoretical framing (from the nomothetic and comparative to the ideographic and deeply contextual) and methodology (from purely archaeological to holistic oral historical-documentary-archaeological). From my perspective, the eclecticism reflects positively on the openness of the editors and contributors in these “Processual Plus” times (Hegmon 2003). There is good reason for optimism as these archaeologists from diverse communities of practice forge paths through an archaeology of neighborhoods, despite the considerable epistemological, theoretical, and methodological challenges it poses.

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