

Abstract

The Roads In-Between: Causeways and Polyagentive Networks at Ichmul and Yo'okop, Cochuah Region, Mexico. Published in GOTARC Series B, Gothenburg Archaeological Theses, No 45, ISBN 91-85245-30-5.

This dissertation has two aims: (1) To characterize and abandon the humanocentric archaeology that relies upon quasi-objects and to develop the polyagentive archaeology that relies upon actualizations of the virtual. (2) To exemplify the latter approach by studying how causeways (sakbeob) in the Maya area relate to temporality and materiality at, and around, the two neighbouring sites of Ichmul and Yo'okop in the Cochuah region of southeast Yucatan and west-central Quintana Roo in Mexico.

It is suggested that transcendental, hierarchical and static quasi-objects commonly used in archaeology (for example culture and practice) are not suitable ways to begin our approach to the archaeological data. Polyagentive archaeology works from an ontology based in temporal movement rather than one with the basis in substance (classic materialism) or social constructions (idealism). The basis of this dissertation is to be found in Bergson's ideas of an unbreakable duration, a virtual multiplicity which our mind breaks down to static fragments (actual multiplicities) from which we reconstruct the world through representations and social constructions.

Polyagency is a term for what generates becomings, differentiations and repetition. It lies in-between the virtual and the actual. This intensive process produces individuations that are called polyagents (actualizations). Quasi-objects are our way of trying to find patterns among these actualizations. This is an actual ideology which consists of both arbolic thought and nomadic thought. However, the unity comes from within the virtual and not from transcendent structures. As a contrast, the virtual ideology is directly connected to matter and the immanent.

Deleuze's reworking of Bergson decentralizes the importance of the human being. It heads toward a posthuman condition and a neo-materialist and neo-realist ontology where the archaeological object is separated from its past human agent. However, the virtuality and polyagency of the object has continued unbroken from the past to the present. Materialities are part of a polyagentive phylum of increasing differentiation of artefacts. The object is also seen as an index and a prototype of other materialities where the human being is reduced to being a catalyst in polyagentive networks. This reflects a relationship between polyagents in nested rhizomatic networks.

Ichmul and Yo'okop have been investigated through surveys, mapping, test pit excavations and ceramic dating. Yo'okop has four documented causeways and Ichmul has five causeways. The causeways of the two sites seem to have been contemporaneous, constructed during the Terminal Classic period (A.D. 800 – 1100). Particular focus is set on five polyagentive assemblages; the triadic causeways and the aligned causeways of Ichmul; and the beads-on-a-string causeways, the non-aligned causeway and the unfinished causeway of Yo'okop. A local approach is used and it is shown that the material nodes around Ichmul evolved very differently compared to the ones at Yo'okop.

Rather than seeing the causeways as cultural reflections of either centralization, social organization, cosmological maps or ceremonial avenues as humanocentric archaeology has done (and thus limiting their studies to the past), the polyagentive analyzes see them as de-cultured actualized polyagents that have initiated, and still initiate, tendencies in their vicinity.

Keywords: agency, architecture, becoming, Bergson, causeway, Cochuah, culture critique, Deleuze, difference, duration, event horizon, evolution, humanocentrism, Ichmul, ideology, in-between, index, materiality, Maya, Mexico, multiplicity, neo-materialism, network, polyagency, polyagent, posthumanism, practice, rhizome, road, sakbe, settlement archaeology, technoscience, temporality, Terminal Classic, virtuality, Yo'okop