

Quoting the Ancestors

Place is the first of all beings, since everything that exists is in a place and cannot exist without a place.

—Archytas, as cited by Simplicius, Commentary on Aristotle's Categories

If, as L. P. Hartley (1956:1) proposed, “the past is a foreign country”—“they do things differently there,” he added to make the point—it is everywhere a land that attracts its share of visitors. And understandably so. Passage to the past is easy to come by (any reminder of bygone times can serve to launch an excursion), getting there is quick and efficient (a quiet moment or two is usually sufficient to make the transition), and restrictions on local travel are virtually nonexistent (memory and imagination, the most intimate and inventive of traveling companions, always see to that). And however the trip unfolds, one can proceed at an undemanding pace, exploring sites of special interest or moving about from place to place without feeling harried or rushed. Which may account for the fact that returning abruptly to the country of the present, where things are apt to be rushed enough, is often somewhat jarring.

Just where one ventures in the country of the past sometimes depends on where one has ventured before, on personal predilections, nurtured over time, for congenial pieces of experiential terrain: the terrain of one's youth, perhaps, or of where one's forebears lived, or of decisive events that altered the course of history; the possibilities are endless. Yet whatever these preferences are, and no matter how often indulged, the past has a way of luring curious travelers off the beaten track. It is, after all, a country conducive to wandering, with plenty of unmarked roads, unexpected vistas, and unforeseen occurrences. Informative discoveries,

pleasurable and otherwise, are not at all uncommon. Which is why it can seem, as William Chapman (1979:46) has written, that “the past is at its best when it takes us to places that counsel and instruct, that show us who we are by showing us where we have been, that remind us of our connections to *what happened here*” (italics in the original). And why it is as well, for the same set of reasons, that this ever-changing landscape of the active heart and mind rewards repeated visits. For wherever one journeys in the country of the past, instructive places abound.

Many of these places are also encountered in the country of the present as material objects and areas, naturally formed or built, whose myriad local arrangements make up the landscapes of everyday life. But here, *now*, in the ongoing world of current concerns and projects, they are not apprehended as reminders of the past. Instead, when accorded attention at all, places are perceived in terms of their outward aspects—as being, on their manifest surfaces, the familiar places they are—and unless something happens to dislodge these perceptions they are left, as it were, to their own enduring devices. But then something *does* happen. Perhaps one spots a freshly fallen tree, or a bit of flaking paint, or a house where none has stood before—any disturbance, large or small, that inscribes the passage of time—and a place presents itself as bearing on prior events. And at that precise moment, when ordinary perceptions begin to loosen their hold, a border has been crossed and the country starts to change. Awareness has shifted its footing, and the character of the place, now transfigured by thoughts of an earlier day, swiftly takes on a new and foreign look.

Consider in this regard the remarks of Niels Bohr, the great theoretical physicist, while speaking in June of 1924 with Werner Heisenberg at Kronberg Castle in Denmark, Bohr’s beloved homeland.¹

Isn’t it strange how this castle changes as soon as one imagines that Hamlet lived here? As scientists we believe that a castle consists only of stones, and admire the way the architect put them together. The stone, the green roof with its patina, the wood carvings in the church, constitute the whole castle. None of this should be changed by the fact that Hamlet lived here, and yet it is changed completely. Suddenly the walls and ramparts speak a different language. The courtyard becomes

an entire world, a dark corner reminds us of the darkness of the human soul, we hear Hamlet’s “To be or not to be.” Yet all we really know is that his name appears in a thirteenth-century chronicle. No one can prove he really lived here. But everyone knows the questions Shakespeare had him ask, the human depths he was made to reveal, and so he too had to be found in a place on earth, here in Kronberg. And once we know that, Kronberg becomes a quite different castle for us. (quoted in Bruner 1986:45)

Thus, by one insightful account, does the country of the past transform and supplant the country of the present. That certain localities prompt such transformations, evoking as they do entire worlds of meaning, is not, as Niels Bohr recognized, a small or uninteresting truth. Neither is the fact, which he also appreciated, that this type of retrospective world-building—let us call it *place-making*—does not require special sensibilities or cultivated skills.² It is a common response to common curiosities—what happened here? who was involved? what was it like? why should it matter?—and anyone can be a place-maker who has the inclination. And every so often, more or less spontaneously, alone or with others, with varying degrees of interest and enthusiasm, almost everyone does make places. As roundly ubiquitous as it is seemingly unremarkable, place-making is a universal tool of the historical imagination. And in some societies at least, if not in the great majority, it is surely among the most basic tools of all.

Prevalent though it is, this type of world-building is never entirely simple. On the contrary, a modest body of evidence suggests that place-making involves multiple acts of remembering and imagining which inform each other in complex ways (Casey 1976, 1987). It is clear, however, that remembering often provides a basis for imagining. What is remembered about a particular place—including, prominently, verbal and visual accounts of what has transpired there—guides and constrains how it will be imagined by delimiting a field of workable possibilities. These possibilities are then exploited by acts of conjecture and speculation which build upon them and go beyond them to create possibilities of a new and original sort, thus producing a fresh and expanded picture of how things might have been. Essentially, then,

instances of place-making consist in an adventitious fleshing out of historical material that culminates in a posited state of affairs, a particular universe of objects and events—in short, a *place-world*—wherein portions of the past are brought into being.³

When Niels Bohr went with Heisenberg to visit Kronberg Castle, he thought instantly of Hamlet and recalled the famous play in which this figure comes to life. Then, seizing on possibilities inherent in Shakespeare's drama, Bohr went on to imagine a darkly compelling place-world in which the walls of the castle echoed an alien tongue, a shaded courtyard nook gave notice of the troubled human soul, and Hamlet uttered his anguished cry, "To be or not to be." And probably, considering it was Bohr, there was much more besides: other fancied elements, wrought in compatible terms, which endowed his somber place-world with added substance and depth. Within this foreign universe Bohr could briefly dwell, and until it started to fade, as every place-world must, the imaginative Danish physicist and a bit of Danish history breathed life into each other.

But there is more to making place-worlds than living local history in a localized kind of way. In addition, place-making is a way of constructing history itself, of inventing it, of fashioning novel versions of "what happened here." For every developed place-world manifests itself as a possible state of affairs, and whenever these constructions are accepted by other people as credible and convincing—or plausible and provocative, or arresting and intriguing—they enrich the common stock on which everyone can draw to muse on past events, interpret their significance, and imagine them anew. Building and sharing place-worlds, in other words, is not only a means of reviving former times but also of *revising* them, a means of exploring not merely how things might have been but also how, just possibly, they might have been different from what others have supposed. Augmenting and enhancing conceptions of the past, innovative place-worlds change these conceptions as well.

By way of illustration, and returning once more to Denmark, Bohr's remarks to Heisenberg could have provided Heisenberg with novel possibilities for building his own version of Hamlet's castle in Hamlet's time, a place-world that would have been different from any he might have fashioned working by himself. And if Heisenberg had then returned the

favor, describing in some detail his own construction to Bohr, the same would be true in reverse. Which is simply to say that discussing the stuff of place-worlds—comparing their contents, pursuing their implications, assessing their strengths and weaknesses—is a regular social process, as common and straightforward as it is sometimes highly inventive.

In this discursive fashion, even in societies where writing and other devices for "preserving the past" are absent or devalued, historical knowledge is produced and reproduced. And in this manner too, even in societies which lack the services of revisionary historians, historical understandings are altered and recast. It is well to keep in mind that interpreting the past can be readily accomplished—and is every day—without recourse to documentary archives, photographic files, and early sound recordings. It cannot be accomplished, readily or otherwise, without recourse to places and the place-worlds they engender. Long before the advent of literacy, to say nothing of "history" as an academic discipline, places served humankind as durable symbols of distant events and as indispensable aids for remembering and imagining them—and this convenient arrangement, ancient but not outmoded, is with us still today. In modern landscapes everywhere, people persist in asking, "What happened here?" The answers they supply, though perhaps distinctly foreign, should not be taken lightly, for what people make of their places is closely connected to what they make of themselves as members of society and inhabitants of the earth, and while the two activities may be separable in principle, they are deeply joined in practice. If place-making is a way of constructing the past, a venerable means of *doing* human history, it is also a way of constructing social traditions and, in the process, personal and social identities. We *are*, in a sense, the place-worlds we imagine.

But these and related matters are only broadly discerned and loosely understood, and the main reason why is easy to identify. A widespread form of imaginative activity, place-making is also a form of *cultural* activity, and so, as any anthropologist will tell you, it can be grasped only in relation to the ideas and practices with which it is accomplished. And because these ideas and practices may vary considerably both within and among particular social groups, the nature of the activity can be understood only by means of sustained ethnography. Yet little ethnography of place-making has in fact been undertaken, and what is known about

place-making—Navajo or Norwegian, Sinhalese or Soviet, Mexican or Moroccan—is therefore sharply limited. There is work to be done, and now is as good a time as any to see what it may involve.

This chapter, which offers an example of the work I have in mind, is soon to cross over the border into an American Indian version of Hartley's foreign land. The time has come to travel, first to Arizona and the village of Cibecue, home since the beginning to groups of men and women known to themselves as *ndee* (people), to others as Western Apache (fig. 1).⁴ And then to some of their places not far away—places with names such as Widows Pause For Breath, She Carries Her Brother On Her Back, and Bitter Agave Plain—places made memorable, and infinitely imaginable, by events that happened long ago when the people's distant ancestors were settling into the country. So let us be off, stopping here and there with one Charles Henry, age sixty or thereabouts, skilled herbalist, devoted uncle, and veteran maker of place-worlds. Niels Bohr, I like to think, would have enjoyed his company. For both men understood, though in very different ways, that castles come in a great many shapes and need not be wrought with mortar and stone.

Water Lies With Mud In An Open Container

Early morning, late May 1979, the night's redemptive chill rapidly receding before the rising sun. Silence deep and full, a blanket upon the land. I am standing with Charles Henry and one of his cousins, Morley Cromwell, at the edge of a circular swale some forty feet across. Ringed by willows and filled with luxuriant grass, it lies near a spring-fed creek which flows southeast to the gardens and cornfields of Cibecue. The earth at our feet is marked with the tracks of deer, and from high in a cottonwood tree comes the liquid call of a raven. A chipmunk creeps to the swale, secures a nervous drink, and darts away behind a rotting log covered with patches of green and orange moss. The air is heavy and moist. A small white butterfly dances in place in a shaft of golden sunlight.

Charles and Morley have brought me here at the outset of a long-range project in Western Apache cultural geography. Authorized and endorsed by the White Mountain Apache Tribal Council, the project's main objective is to record on topographic maps the approximate location of each and every place that bears an Apache name within a twenty-

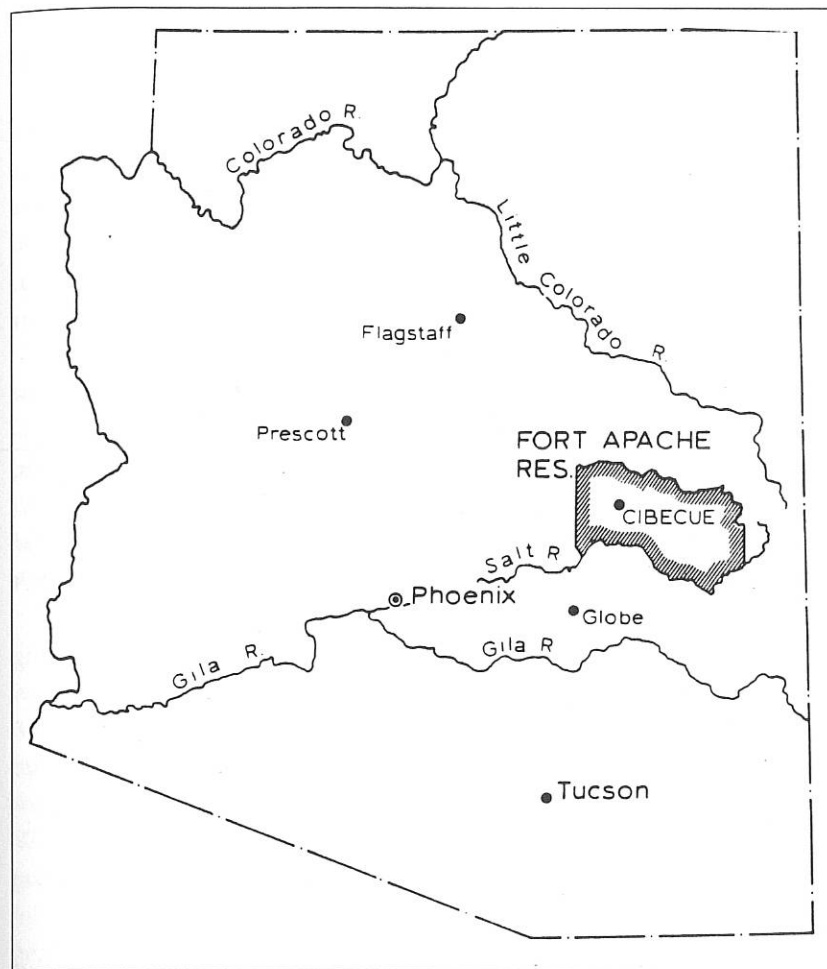


Figure 1 Location of the community of Cibecue on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation, Arizona.

mile radius of the Cibecue community. Residents of the community have never known maps they considered their own (those in their possession show but a handful of places with extraneous names in English and Spanish), and the work we have started, which is intended to lay the foundation for a local Apache atlas, is regarded by some as long overdue. A couple of weeks ago, before the work began, the three of us agreed

on a simple division of labor. Charles, who is in charge, will guide us from place to place, supply each place's proper name, and comment as he chooses on its past and present significance. Morley will translate as necessary (Charles speaks English reluctantly, and my own Apache is stiff and uneven at best) and offer additional insights. My job is to drive the Jeep, provide plenty of coffee and Reese's Peanut Butter Cups (Morley has a serious weakness for them), and try to get everything down on paper and audiotapes. It seems like a sensible plan, balanced and loosely efficient, and all of us believe it will serve our purpose well.

But already, on only our second day in the country together, a problem has come up. For the third time in as many tries, I have mispronounced the Apache name of the boggy swale before us, and Charles, who is weary of repeating it, has a guarded look in his eyes. After botching the name a fourth time, I acknowledge defeat and attempt to apologize for my flawed linguistic performance. "I'm sorry, Charles, I can't get it. I'll work on it later, it's in the machine. It doesn't matter."

"It's matter," Charles says softly to me in English. And then, turning to speak to Morley, he addresses him in Western Apache:

What he's doing isn't right. It's not good. He seems to be in a hurry. Why is he in a hurry? It's disrespectful. Our ancestors made this name. They made it just as it is. They made it for a reason. *They spoke it first, a long time ago!* He's repeating the speech of our ancestors. He doesn't know that. Tell him he's repeating the speech of our ancestors!

Charles's admonition, which Morley proceeds to translate without dulling its critical edge, leaves me unsettled and silent. That Charles has taken me for someone in a hurry comes as a surprise. Neither had I foreseen that my failure to pronounce the stubborn Apache place-name would be interpreted by him as displaying a lack of respect. And never had I suspected that using Apache place-names might be heard by those who use them as repeating verbatim—actually quoting—the speech of their early ancestors. This is a fair amount to take in at once, and as the quiet of the morning asserts itself again, I fear that my actions, which were wholly unwitting but patently offensive, may have placed in jeopardy the future of our project. Charles and

Morley, put off by my incompetence, may now decide they have better things to do. Dammit!

But then, unexpectedly, in one of those courteous turnabouts that Apache people employ to assuage embarrassment and salvage damaged feelings, Charles himself comes to the rescue. With a quick corroborative grin, he announces he is missing several teeth and that my problem with the place-name may be attributable to his lack of dental equipment. Sometimes, he says, he is hard to understand—his nephew Jason recently told him that and he knows he tends to speak softly. Maybe the combination of too few teeth and too little volume accounts for my falling short. Morley, on the other hand, is not so encumbered. Though shy a tooth or two, he retains the good ones for talking, and because he is not afraid to speak up—except, as everyone knows, in the presence of garrulous women—no one has trouble hearing what he says. Maybe if Morley repeated the place-name again, slowly and with ample force, I would get it right. It's worth a try. Cousin?

"GOSHTŁ'ISH TÚ BIŁ SIKÁÑÉ!" Rising to the spirit of Charles's playful teasing, Morley booms out the place-name, word by constituent word, with such exuberance as to startle into flight a pair of resident robins. All of us laugh as the birds wheel away, but for me the tide has turned. Instantly, the form of the name and its meaning assume coherent shape, and I know that at last I've got it: Goshtł'ish Tú Bił Sikáñé, or Water Lies With Mud In An Open Container. Relieved and pleased, I pronounce the name slowly, then a bit more rapidly, and again as it might be spoken in normal conversation.⁵ Charles listens and nods his head in approval. "Yes," he says in Apache. "That is how our ancestors made it a long time ago, just as it is to name this place." And then, keeping to his own language and speaking at times like an observer on the scene, he fashions a place-world in which the making and naming occurred.

They came to this country long ago, our ancestors did. They hadn't seen it before, they knew nothing about it. Everything was unfamiliar to them.

They were very poor. They had few possessions and surviving was difficult for them. They were looking for a good place to settle, a safe place without enemies. They were

searching. They were traveling all over, stopping here and there, noticing everything, looking at the land. They knew nothing about it and didn't know what they would find.

None of these places had names then, none of them did, and as the people went about they thought about this. "How shall we speak about this land?" they said. "How shall we speak about where we have been and where we want to go?"

Now they are coming! They are walking upstream from down below. Now they are arriving here, looking all about them, noticing everything about this place. It looked to them then as it looks to us now. We know that from its name—its name gives a picture of it, just as it was a long time ago.

Now they are happy. "This looks like a good place," they are saying to each other. Now they are noticing the plants that live around here. "Some of these plants are unknown to us. Maybe they are good for something. Maybe they are useful as medicines." Now they are saying, "This is a good place for hunting. Deer and turkey come here to eat and drink. We can wait for them here, hidden close by." They are saying that. They are noticing everything and talking about it together. They like what they see about this place. They are excited!

Now their leader is thinking, "This place may help us survive. If we settle in this country, we must be able to speak about this place and remember it clearly and well. We must give it a name."

So they named it Gosht'ish Tú Bįł Sikáné [Water Lies With Mud In An Open Container]. They made a picture of it with words. Now they could speak about it and remember it clearly and well. Now they had a picture they could carry in their minds. You can see for yourself. It looks like its name.

When Charles has finished speaking, he reaches down and takes from the marshy ground a heaping handful of mud. He squeezes it firmly, causing little jets of water to spurt from between his fingers. "There," he says with evident satisfaction. "Water and mud together, just as they were when our ancestors came here." He then excuses himself, explaining that he needs to procure a certain medicinal plant for use in his work at Cibecue; he will not be gone long and will join

us back at the Jeep. Walking along with Morley, I cannot contain my appreciation for all that Charles has said. "That was great!" I exclaim. "It's like we were *there*, watching them when they came!" Morley concurs, adding matter of factly that Charles is a vigorous thinker and has done this sort of thing on numerous occasions. "Do you think he'll do it again?" I ask. "It's up to him," says Morley. "I think he probably will."

Snakes' Water

It turns out Morley is right. In the slow-moving week that follows (June is now upon us, the heat a relentless foe) we travel with Charles to twelve more places, and at two of these—an open expanse named Nadah Nch'ii' Golgaiyé (Bitter Agave Plain) and a dispersion of vertical boulders called Tséé Naadadn'áhá (Scattered Rocks Stand Erect)—he slips into the past and constructs ancestral place-worlds. Much as before, and speaking often in the same eyewitness voice, he imagines his forebears arriving on the scene, studying it intently, and assessing its potential for helping them survive. Looking out on Bitter Agave Plain, the ancestors marvel at all the grass, tall and thick and laden with edible seeds, and praise it as a sign of ample summer rainfall. Pausing at Scattered Rocks Stand Erect, they wonder with a mixture of fear and curiosity why the boulders are upright, as if rammed into the earth by some gigantic hand. At both localities they make and bestow a place-name, a name describing the place itself, just as it looked a long time ago, just as it looks today. And Charles, having lodged himself in the present again, says that much is contained in Apache place-names, preserving as they do both the words of his ancestors and their graphic impressions of an unfamiliar land.

But more is contained in Apache place-names than frozen ancestral quotes and ageless images of a new and striking landscape. In addition, place-names can offer evidence of changes in the landscape, showing clearly that certain localities do not present the appearance they did in former times. More interesting still, some of this evidence points to major shifts in local climatic patterns, thus allowing inferences to be drawn about how—and possibly why—the environment of the ancestors differed in key respects from that of their modern descendants. And were this not enough, the theme of places' changing even as they endure sometimes finds expression in gripping Apache place-worlds.

I knew nothing of these things until I accompanied Charles and Morley to Tłiish Bi Tú'é (Snakes' Water), an inactive spring at the foot of a sandstone bluff some miles west of Cibecue. Hidden from view by manzanita bushes, the spring is survived by a cluster of hand-cut rocks, flat and rectilinear, which encircle a pool of whitish sand, now the home of delicate purple wildflowers and a motley assortment of weeds. A Budweiser beer can, faded and pock-marked with rust, lies on the ground nearby. Standing alone a few feet away, Charles gazes at the rocks for several minutes, as though waiting for them to speak. And perhaps somehow they do, for he suddenly declares that the spring has long been dry, that at some point in time its water went away, and that the result of this is an absence of fit (a "lack of match" is what he says in Apache) between the place itself and the way its name describes it. The name it was given a long time ago shows that it has changed. Snake's Water, as anyone can see, is no longer the way it was when the ancestors saw it first and made it their own with words.

Motionless in denim shirt and sweat-stained Stetson hat, Charles again falls silent. Then, with his eyes still fixed on the barren circle of rocks, he begins to fashion a place-world in which they served an important purpose.

Now these rocks are lying alone. No one comes to them anymore. Once this wasn't so. Long ago, people came here often. They squatted on these rocks when they filled their containers with water. They knelt on these rocks when they drank water from their hands. Our people were very grateful for this spring. It made them happy to know they could rely on it anytime. They were *glad* this place was here.

Now they are coming to get water! They have been working—maybe they were digging up agave—and now they are thirsty. A man is walking in the lead with women and children behind him. The women are carrying their containers. Some have water jugs on their backs. No one is talking. Maybe there are snakes here, lying on these rocks. Yes! Now the man in front can see them! There are snakes lying stretched out on these rocks. They are the ones who own this spring, the ones who protect it.

Now that man is speaking to the people. "Listen to me," he is saying. "All of you must wait here. Don't go any closer. Don't approach Snakes' Water until I talk to them and ask them to move away." The people obey this man, knowing that he will do things correctly. Now they are waiting together in a group, just as he told them to do.

Now that man has come here. He is talking to those who protect Snakes' Water, using words they understand and doing things correctly. Soon they move off the rocks. They keep going, unalarmed, until they are out of sight. Now that man is sprinkling something on the water. It is a gift to the ones who own it. He is giving thanks to them and Water, informing them that he and the people are grateful. "This is good," he is saying to them. "This is good."

Now he is beckoning to the people to come and get water. Some of them are still concerned, holding back with their children. Others are arriving now, nervously looking around. Now they see they have nothing to fear—everything was done correctly—and they start to fill their containers. Now they are happy and grateful, talking amongst themselves. "This water is good," they are saying. "It is good that it is here for us." Some of the women are smiling. They know they have nothing to fear. Now they are kneeling on these stones, relieving their thirst, drinking from their hands.

Charles says no more—there is nothing to be said. The three of us turn from the barren spring and together walk slowly away, lost in thought and the deepness of time, sojourners still in a distant world that casts a powerful spell. A short while later, seated in the shade of a juniper tree, Charles explains that what we observed at Snakes' Water is not at all uncommon; there are more places like it, scattered throughout Apache country, that have undergone physical changes and no longer conform to the way their names describe them. Many of these places, he says, were named for sources of water—springs, seeps, bogs, seasonal pools at the bases of canyon walls—which now are permanently dry. Snakes' Water is a case in point, as are Dłó' Bi Tú'é (Birds' Water), another dry spring, and Tú Nłchó'é (Foul Water), a former

seep, probably sulfurous, located far to the west. Other localities, according to their names, once gave life to species of plants that thrive under moist conditions, and these plants have either vanished or persist in stunted form. Tl'ohk'aa Sikaadé (Stand Of Arrow Cane), where today no cane exists, offers a telling example; so does T'iis Sikaadé (Grove Of Cottonwood Trees), where one small tree remains. And these are only a few.

Judging from what happened at these and other places, Charles goes on to say, there can be no doubt that the country was wetter and greener when the ancestors first explored it. This was one of the reasons, if not the major reason, they found it to their liking and decided to make it their home. For they were farmers as well as hunters—they had corn they wanted to plant—and they searched everywhere for water and its tell-tale signs. In this they were not disappointed, as their place-names plainly reveal. “The names do not lie,” Charles states emphatically. “They show what is different and what is still the same.” Like so many faithful photographers, he says, they record the look of the land as it was in ancestral times—and the look of the land was lush. It is less so today. Something must have happened. Water, obviously, began to go away.

After lighting a cigarette and pouring a cup of coffee from the thermos we carry with us, Charles volunteers that no one really knows (he implies with a shrug that no one really cares) when the water began to go away. It was sometime in the past, he says, and whether it happened slowly or fast, the people would have noticed and would have been concerned. There was water enough for life to go on—the streams still flowed and rains still came in the summer and fall—but it was definitely less abundant and its sources were less predictable. And this would have been interpreted as a punitive response, wrought by Water itself, to something the people had done. There *had* to be a reason for what was taking place, and the one most likely adduced, because it was the simplest and farthest-reaching, was that Water had been offended by acts of disrespect. Charles has wondered often what kinds of acts these were. Maybe, he says, the people were greedy, taking from springs and streams more water than they needed; maybe they were wasteful, throwing water away they should have been careful to save; or maybe they ceased doing everything correctly, neglect-

ing in haste or forgetfulness to give repeated thanks to Water for giving of itself.

No one knows for sure, Charles says again, but no one doubts that the people were greatly alarmed to learn that they were at fault. He then travels back in his mind to the place from which we have come, imagining there the difficult day when a group of his ancestors, thirsty and eager to drink, discovered to their dismay that the spring at Snakes' Water was dry.

The people came again to get water and saw that there was none. They were expecting it to be there. They were shocked! The women began to wail. The men stood silent and still. “Why has Snakes' Water dried up? Why has this happened? What have we done to cause this to happen? Water must surely be angry at us.” This is what they are thinking.

Now they are walking away, thirsty and shaking with fear. The women are wailing, louder and louder. Their children are crying, too. They are wailing as if a relative had died. “What if this happens elsewhere?! What if this happens everywhere?! What if Water takes all of itself away?!” They are deeply frightened because of what they have done.

“Our holy people must work on this for us.” This is what they are saying as they walk away from Snakes' Water. “Our holy people must help us by making amends to Water. They must help us so we may live! They must ask Water to take pity on us! What if this happened everywhere!” This is what they are thinking. This is what they are praying. They do not understand. They are terribly afraid. The women are wailing louder, as if a relative has died. Already they have started to pray.

Charles stands up and drinks the last of his coffee. The day is done. We return to the Jeep. On the drive back to Cibecue, no one says a word.

Juniper Tree Stands Alone

All ethnographers occasionally lose their snap, and so, of course, do those with whom they work. Rarely does the problem reach epic proportions, but it can happen. On a Saturday late in June, with nothing more in store than a quiet weekend in Cibecue, I was stung twice

on the nose by hornets, broke my last pair of eyeglasses, and got bitten on the hand by an aggravated centipede while playing *Aggravation*, a locally popular board game, with three Apache enthusiasts; I also managed to run out of gas, which in Cibecue is taken as evidence of dangerously low intelligence. During the same eight-hour period, Morley received a very unfortunate haircut, tore his pants on a barbed-wire gate, and bought beer for a lady from out of town who responded to his kindness by trying to lift his wallet; he later sat down on a monstrous wad of bubblegum belonging to his six-year-old niece, who flew into a rage and attacked him with a dustpan. For his part, Charles woke up with a nasty stomach flu, sliced his hand on a can of Spam, and failed to amuse his wife when he wrapped the wound in one of her favorite dish towels; he later misplaced his pocketknife, a fairly worrisome loss, only to discover it in the pocket of his jacket. Taken all together, as more and more people rushed to observe, it was little short of hilarious, and when evening finally came, with Morley nursing a tender ego and me a bulbous nose, we went to call on Charles to see how he was doing.

Charles seemed happy to see us, proclaiming as we entered his house that everyone has uneven days, one might as well expect them, and that next to pails of Crisco and double-bladed axes—his wife, he supposes, would strongly favor dish towels—the whiteman's best invention may be Pepto-Bismol. He chuckles at the thought. Ensnared on a couch with his nephew Jason, he inquires whether I am pleased with the work we have done so far. When I tell him I am, he replies that more lies ahead because places and their names are important to Apache people in many different ways. Jason here, who just turned eleven, is learning this already, and once we resume our trips into the country—Jason, by the way, will be joining us when we do—he and I can learn together; soon, perhaps, we will take up the matter of Apache social lines, those close-knit groups of kin known to outsiders as “clans,” whose names for themselves are really the names of places. Charles then changes the subject by beaming a smile at Morley. “I know my wife can't hear me,” he says loudly in Apache, knowing that Mrs. Henry, who is close by in the kitchen, will pick up every word. “Speak to me, cousin, and don't leave anything out. What's

this I hear about a beautiful widow from Whiteriver who made you tear your pants?”

Three days later, with Jason Henry in tow and the rest of us feeling revived, we are back upon the land. Rain has fallen the night before, steady and hard for more than an hour, and the colors of the countryside, no longer dull beneath layers of dust, look clean and freshly restored. The air smells sharp and fragrant. It is cool for the first time in weeks. The sky is a robust blue. On the northern outskirts of Cibecue we stop near a place named Gad 'O'ááhá (Juniper Tree Stands Alone), a large flat encompassing four Apache homes, two horse corrals, and at least a dozen acres planted in corn and beans. With coffee cup in hand, Charles surveys the scene, which could hardly be more peaceful. The morning light is soft and full, and the tilled red earth, darkened by the rain to a deep maroon, provides a striking backdrop to the bright green rows of maize. A dog barks. A door slams. A young sorrel mare rolls in some mud to keep away the flies. The land is fairly glowing in calm and radiant gratitude for the blessings brought by rain.

I cannot see a juniper tree, standing alone or otherwise, anywhere on the flat of Juniper Tree Stands Alone, a small but notable absence which prompts me to think that Charles may speak again about how the country has changed since his ancestors took it over. He does not. Reaching out his hand to the fields of growing corn, he performs a scooping motion that seems to gather them up, drawing them together as though cradled in his palm and setting the stage for a place-world about farming and the origin of clans.

They had wandered all over this country, looking at everything, searching for good places to live. They searched for places that would protect them from enemy people—the Navajo were one—so they made their homes high on the sides of valleys, nestled among the rocks. They also searched for places where they could plant their corn. They looked for these near streams or where there was runoff from rain.

By now they knew the country well. They had given names to many places—like this one, Juniper Tree Stands Alone—and they thought they would survive and raise their families here. This country is where they would live and raise their children.

Now they are settling at different places. Some of them settled here—not right here on the flat, it would have exposed them to enemy people—but fairly close by, somewhere higher up, somewhere well concealed. This was long ago.

Now they are planting their corn here, not far from the stream, here on the flat. “Corn grows plentifully here,” they are saying. “We have enough to eat and also to store away.” They are grateful to Corn and to this place for helping them survive. They prayed often. Their prayers were strong. They did everything correctly. They were happy and grew confident.

They didn’t stay here all the time. Some would make journeys to hunt for deer. Some would make journeys to dig and roast agave. Some would go off to collect seeds and cactus fruits. Some would go off for salt. But they would always return here in plenty of time to harvest their corn. They would roast and dry it. They saved its seeds to plant again. They kept dried corn to eat in winter and early spring, when they knew they would be hungry.

Now, long ago, those people who planted corn at Juniper Tree Stands Alone are coming back to harvest it. They have been off looking for acorns but have gathered only a few. Two or three older people have been left behind to watch over the corn. They are coming nearer now, the ones who have been away, praying and singing as they approach. They are praying that nothing has happened to injure or harm their corn. “What will we do if there is no corn?” they are thinking—but they are reluctant to say this out loud.

Now they can see their cornfields. There is much corn! There is corn in abundance! They are excited and happy. They know they will not go hungry. They know their prayers have been strong. “Juniper Tree Stands Alone has looked after us again.”

Later, after getting their homes in order again, their leaders are talking. “This is where our women first planted corn. They have planted it again and again. Each year we have harvested

enough to roast and dry and store away. These fields look after us by helping our corn to grow. Our children eat it and become strong. We eat it and continue to live. Our corn draws life from this earth and we draw life from our corn. This earth is part of us! We are *of* this place, Juniper Tree Stands Alone. We should name ourselves for this place. We are Gad ’O’ááhí [Juniper Tree Stands Alone People]. This is how it shall be.

Now the people spoke among themselves and agreed with what their leaders had said. They agreed to be known for the place where they first planted corn. Now they spoke of themselves to other people that way. “We are Juniper Tree Stands Alone People,” they would say to them.

This would happen elsewhere, at many different places throughout the country. Groups of people named themselves for the places where their women first planted corn. That is why our lines [clans] go through women. That is why we belong to the line of our mother. We are *of* our mother’s line and *for* the line of our father. It has always been that way.

You see, their names for themselves are really the names of their places. That is how they were known, to others and to themselves. They were known by their places. That is how they are still known, even though they have scattered and live now in many different states, some in cities far from here.

Many of the old cornfields are no longer planted. The people have forgotten about them. They say it’s too much work to plant them as before. But some, like those Juniper Tree Stands Alone People, have not forgotten. They still plant their corn in the same place, as they have always done. Their corn still makes their children strong. This place still looks after them. It shows them where their ancestors returned, year after year, to harvest their corn and store it away for the winter.

As Charles is speaking, a woman who lives at Juniper Tree Stands Alone walks from her house to the edge of one of the cornfields, carrying over her arm an empty burlap sack and a folded canvas ground cloth. She is wearing a capacious blouse and a flowing, full-length skirt, both a shade of brilliant pink, and her loosely braided hair is

generously streaked with gray. Her name is Ellen Josay Tessay. She is the leader of her clan, the oldest member and primary spokesperson of the Juniper Tree Stands Alone People. Charles watches in silence as she enters the cornfield, seats herself on her ground cloth, and begins to pull up weeds, placing them one by one inside the burlap sack. He then resumes his account, treating what he sees as a model of the past and transforming the figure of Ellen Tessay, carefully tending her corn, into a fully present symbol of what happened long ago.

The women looked after their corn, they looked after it well. The older people who stayed behind did this. They would go to their fields in the morning and stay there most of the day.

Now they are clearing the fields of unwanted plants, putting them in something to later take them away. "I am looking after you, just as I would my children," they are saying. "Because of this you will grow strong and tall and give us much to eat. I am praying this will happen."

They were careful to do everything correctly. They didn't rush or try to hurry their work. They depended on their corn, so they treated it with respect. This would help it to grow. They did everything correctly.

When Charles is done, Morley remarks that he owes two dollars to Ellen Tessay's husband, which he might as well give to her now. We follow Morley along a path to the cornfield where she is working. She greets our approach with a genial smile, inquiring of no one in particular, "What brings you here?" Morley explains the reason for our presence and goes on to settle his debt. He then delivers a compliment on the vigor of her corn. "It seems to be growing well," she modestly replies. "Last night's rain will help it even more." Moments later, she addresses Jason Henry, who is standing half-hidden behind his grandfather. "Young one, do you know what I am doing?" Caught off-guard by the directness of her question, Jason stares hard at the ground. "You are helping your corn," he responds in a faltering voice. Ellen Josay Tessay smiles again. "Yes," she says gently. "I'm looking after my children."

Shades Of Shit

It is now mid-July and our topographic maps of the Cibecue region are getting increasingly crowded. Dozens of dots and shaded areas mark the locations of places bearing Apache names, and numbers next to these index the names themselves, which are listed in separate notebooks. Morley says admiringly that some of the maps look like they were blasted with a shotgun—and more than once! Charles, modulated as always, expresses his approval in less effusive ways. Jason, who studies the maps whenever he gets a chance, has yet to voice an opinion. I am struck by the mounting number of named localities—we have charted 109 in only five weeks—and the consistent manner in which they cluster, mainly around sources of water and past and present farmsites.

But what impresses me most of all is the rich descriptive imagery of Western Apache place-names. Lately, with ear and eye jointly enthralled, I have stood before

Tséé Dot'izh Tęnaahijaahá (Green Rocks Side By Side Jut Down Into Water; a group of mossy boulders on the bank of a stream)

Tséé Dit'ige Naaditiné (Trail Extends Across Scorched Rocks; a crossing at the bottom of a canyon)

T'iis Ts'ósé Bił Naagolgaiyé (Circular Clearing With Slender Cottonwood Trees; a meadow)

Túzhı' Yaahigaiyé (Whiteness Spreads Out Descending To Water; a sandstone cliff next to a spring)

Tséé Yaadit'ishé (Line Of Blue Below Rocks; a mineral deposit)

Yaahiłbigé (Stunted Rising Up; a small mountain)

Kaiłbáyé Bił Naagozwodé (Gray Willows Curve Around A Bend; a point on a stream)

and a number of other places whose handsomely crafted names—bold, visual, evocative—lend poetic force to the voices of the ancestors.

Just as expressive are other Apache place-names, different from these, that do not give close descriptions of the places to which they refer. Commemorative in character and linked to traditional stories,

they allude instead to historical events that illuminate the causes and consequences of wrongful social conduct. And in this important capacity, as I would discover at a place named Shades Of Shit (Chaa Bi Dałt'ohé), they invest the Apache landscape with a sobering moral dimension, dark but instructive, that place-makers can exploit to deeply telling effect.

The shades, or brush-covered ramadas, are no longer standing. They collapsed, Charles says, a long time ago. Yet the place where they stood, a tree-covered knoll southwest of Cibecue, is avoided to this day. "No one wants to come here," he explains, as we slowly approach a vantage point a hundred yards away. "The people who lived here had farms down below, probably next to the creek. This was long after they settled in this valley. Then they did something bad, very bad, and they came close to dying. There is a story about it I was told by my grandfather. It's short." And it is . . .

It happened here at Shades Of Shit.

They had much corn, those people who lived here, and their relatives had only a little. They refused to share it. Their relatives begged them but still they refused to share it.

Then their relatives got angry and forced them to stay at home. They wouldn't let them go anywhere, not even to defecate. So they had to do it at home. Their shades filled up with it. There was more and more of it! It was very bad! Those people got sick and nearly died.

Then their relatives said, "You have brought this on yourselves. Now you live in shades of shit!" Finally, they agreed to share their corn.

It happened at Shades Of Shit.

An uneasy silence settles over our group. Jason looks suddenly wan. Morley spits in disgust. A soft breeze, recalling a terrible stench it could not possibly carry, ruffles the morning air. When Charles speaks again, he says that he wonders what really happened here: it couldn't have been as simple as the story suggests. And even if it were, he adds, the story gives no sense of why events unfolded as they did or how the people involved might have reacted to them. "What were they *think-*

ing?" he asks rhetorically in a tone of disbelief. "How must they have *felt?*" Charles would like to know these things, he says, though he doubts he ever will. And then, speaking as if he knew them very well, he tells his grandfather's story again, fleshing it out at length and constructing for us an astonishing world as surely revealing of Apache social values as it is violently offensive to their most basic sensibilities.

It must have been late in the summer. Those people had harvested their corn and were drying it and roasting it. They must have been grateful and happy. "Now we have much to eat," they are saying.

Their relatives envied them. Their own corn had not grown well. (Sometimes it happens that way. Some fields produce a lot, and those right next to them do not. It happens that way, and no one knows why, and sometimes they talk of witchcraft prompted by revenge for something that was done to them in the past.) Their own corn was meager and small but they were not yet afraid or angry. "Our more fortunate relatives will help us," they said, speaking among themselves. "They have more than enough corn. They will want to share it with us. We have always helped each other. That is how it should be."

Then they waited for their relatives to help them. They waited in vain. Their relatives kept their corn to themselves, eating it every day and making big shits when they went off into the brush. They did nothing for their relatives, although they noticed their plight. "They have enough food, even though they harvested little corn. They probably have plenty of beans and squash. Some of them are skilled hunters. Soon they will have plenty of deer meat to eat. We will keep our corn for ourselves, so that our children will not be hungry during the winter."

Now their poor relatives are becoming scared and puzzled. "Why do they not offer to help us?" they said. "They're treating us like we don't exist, as if we are nothing to them. We will have a hard time unless they change their minds and give us some of their corn."

Then they sent someone to talk to the people who lived here. "We are your relatives," he said to them. "We must help

each other. You have plenty of corn. We have seen it. But we have only a little and soon it will be gone. Soon our children will be crying because they have nothing to eat. Give us some of your corn. Give us some of your corn. We will be grateful. This is how it should be.”

Then they waited again, and still their relatives did nothing for them. They talked again among themselves. “Our relatives are not going to help us,” they said. “They have become greedy and stingy. They think only of themselves. They have put themselves above us, ignoring us like we don’t exist. We have waited long enough. We must do something!”

Then they became angry at their own relatives. “We will make them stay at their homes. They will not go anywhere. We will make them live with their own big shits!” This is what they decided to do.

Then they came over here and surrounded their relatives’ homes. They told them to stay there. They did this day and night. “We will harm you if you try to leave,” they said. “You have brought this on yourselves. You can eat all you want. Only now you will shit at your homes. This is not how it should be, but we are doing it anyway,” they said.

Then those people must have thought they were joking. “They don’t really mean what they say,” they said. “They will not harm us,” they said. So they chose a man to leave his home. He was forced back by his relatives. Another man tried to leave. He was also forced back. “They mean what they say,” they said. “Now we are in for trouble,” they thought.

Then they started to shit in their shades. Some of them said, “This is very bad. We should share our corn and put an end to it.” Others said, “No! If we give away some of our corn, they will want it all. We must not give in to them. This is their way of leaving us with nothing.”

Then they ate less and less but still they fouled their shades. There was more and more of it! It was visible everywhere! The sight and smell could not be avoided! There were swarms and swarms of flies! Huge swarms! They no longer cooked in

their shades. Eating became something they detested. It was terrible!

Then they started to get sick from the sight and smell of their own filth. Some of them were constantly dizzy. Others had trouble walking straight. Their children started moaning. They themselves were moaning. “We could die from this!” they said. “We could die from our own filth.”

Then a man of the people who had little corn went and talked to them. “You have brought this on yourselves,” he said. “You should have shared your corn with us as soon as you knew you had more than enough. You didn’t do this! You gave us nothing at all. You were greedy and stingy, thinking only of yourselves. Because of this we had to beg you to share your corn with us. Even then, you did nothing. You just kept on eating, more and more, knowing that we had little food of our own. You ignored us—your own relatives—as if we were nothing! This is not how it should be. As relatives we make each other rich because we help each other in times of need. It has been this way since the beginning. What made you forget this? What made you ignore us? Well, I don’t know. But now you live in shades of shit! Now you are getting sick!”

Then he laughed at them. He laughed at them.

Then those people talked among themselves. “What he says is true,” they said. “*Look what has become of us! We were thinking only of ourselves. Our greed is responsible for our trouble. We looked down on our own relatives and gave them nothing. Look what has become of us!*”

Then they shared their corn. Finally, they did this. Their relatives took the corn away, saying nothing, saying nothing. Now those people were allowed to leave their homes.

Then those people said, “We must leave here and go somewhere else to live. This is a bad place. It stinks with signs of our stinginess and greed.”

“It could have happened that way,” Charles says almost casually. And then, a bit sternly, “Let’s move on. We’ve been here long enough.”

During the next two weeks, we visit other places with Apache commemorative names, and Charles relates the stories that explain their origins and supply their cultural backing. At several of these places, as at Shades of Shit, he finds the stories threadbare and proceeds to enlarge upon them, building historical place-worlds with ease and consummate skill. Each story is concerned with disruptive social acts, with everyday life gone out of control, and each concludes with a stark reminder that trouble would not have occurred if people had behaved in ways they knew they should. Each depicts the anguish of those who erred and the depth of their regret. For me, riveted and moved, the country takes on a different cast, a density of meaning—and with it a formidable strength—it did not have before. Here, there, and over there, I see, are places which proclaim by their presence and their names both the imminence of chaos and the preventive wisdom of moral norms. “Don’t make mistakes,” these places seem to say. “Think sensibly and do what is right. For therein goodness lies, the goodness inherent in established patterns of social order, and therein lies survival.”

These are my thoughts at Widows Pause For Breath (*’Istaa Hadaanáyoké*), a grassy flat with sunflowers, where three Apache sisters keened for several days after learning that their husbands, with whom they had violated sexual proscriptions, had died in a raid against some Navajos. And again at They Piled On Top Of Each Other (*’Iłk’eejjieedé*), a former gambling ground where a man was killed and others injured in a furious brawl triggered by unfounded accusations of cheating during a high-stakes match for horses. And again at Navajos Are Coming! (*Yúdahá Kaikaiyé*), a winding draw where four Apache families avoided certain ambush when an alert young woman heard a horse whose nicker she did not recognize; a complacent sentry, supposedly on guard, was asleep at his post, having drunk too much *túłibai* (literally, ‘gray water’), a native beverage made from corn.

The commemorative place-names, accompanied by their stories, continue to accumulate, each one marking the site of some sad or tragic event from which valuable lessons can be readily drawn and taken fast to heart. And these names too, like their more descriptive counterparts, have a poetry of their own, a song they sing, haunting and provocative, in a voice as old as Apaches on the land. Place-names such as

Sáan Łeezhiteezhé (Two Old Women Are Buried; a hill)

Tú ’Ahiyi’ee Nzíné (They Are Grateful For Water; a small flat close to an arroyo)

Na’ishó Bitsit’iiyé (Lizards Dart Away In Front; the eastern face of a mountain)

Kolah Dahch’ewoolé (She Carries Her Brother On Her Back; a steep slope)

Sá Silí Sidáhá (She Became Old Sitting; a cornfield)

Ták’eh Godzigé (Rotten Field; another cornfield)

’Ihi’na’ Ha’itin (Trail To Life Goes Up; a butte)

Chagháshé Bik’éé (Children’s Footprints; a rock in an evanescent stream)

Dó’ Bigowané (Fly’s Camp; an ephemeral spring)

and many more besides.

On the second day of August, while drinking coffee near a sandstone formation named Tséé Łitsog Deez’áhá (Yellow Rocks Jut Out), Charles announces that he will work with us no more. There are plants he needs to collect, medicines he must make, and he is counting on Jason to help him until the start of school. He also notes that Morley and I have yet to translate some of the tapes he made during the summer, and this, of course, will take time; it would not be wise for us (he means me) to do it in a hurry. Charles seems relieved with his decision to leave our project, glad that his time will again be his own to do with as he chooses. Autumn is not far off—the clouds have told him that—and now is none too soon to begin to prepare for winter. He is obviously eager to get on with other things.

But Charles is not finished teaching. Fingering his hat and looking at the ground, he recalls the day in May when he explained to me that Western Apache place-names were created by his ancestors, that they were—and are—his ancestors’ very own words. Now, he believes, I know this to be so. He also wants me to know that our travels together were planned by him to reflect the changing conditions under which the names were conferred. Descriptive place-names came first,

he reminds me, bestowed at a time when his ancestors were exploring the land and deciding to make it their home. The names of clans, which are based upon descriptive place-names, came later, when the land was being settled and people had gathered in the vicinity of farms. Commemorative names were awarded last, after the Apaches had made the land their own and were experiencing the rewards—and also the painful problems—that come with community living. (Additional names, he goes on to say, have been coined in recent times, in English as well as in Apache, but these are fairly few and of relatively minor consequence.) The point Charles wishes to make is one he made before—that whenever one uses a place-name, even unthinkingly, one is quoting ancestral speech—and that is not only good but something to take seriously. It is something, he says, to think about.

And now it is time to go. Morley looks downcast and I am feeling sad. We will miss our days in the country with Charles. Stumbling over my words, I try to thank him for all he has done. He listens, nods, and once again takes steps to relieve an awkward moment. “Jason needs to drink pop,” he says brightly. “Maybe Orange Crush. Morley, you need a Reese Cup!” And then, adjusting his well-worn hat, Charles Henry smiles and turns to walk back to the Jeep.

Place-worlds and Western Apache History

In 1962, the distinguished anthropologist Edward N. Spicer observed somewhat wistfully that Western Apache people, while plainly interested in their own tribal history, showed very little interest in becoming tribal historians.

Curiously enough, the Western Apache are one of the most written about peoples of the Southwest and yet they remain, in my opinion, the most poorly understood by whitemen. Apaches complain constantly that all the history in print misrepresents them, yet so far no Apache autobiographer or even a rough chronicler has emerged. Perhaps we may expect that development within the next few years. (Spicer 1962:593)

Today, more than thirty years later, one could still maintain that the Western Apaches have yet to produce a tribal historian—but only

were one to judge, as Spicer did, by Anglo-American standards of what historians are and how they practice their craft. And there, of course, is the rub. For by now it should be clear that Apache standards for interpreting the past are not the same as our own, and that working Apache historians—Charles Henry among them—go about their business with different aims and procedures. It may also have been surmised that few Apache people would wish to change these procedures, much less abandon them, and that Spicer’s call to adopt another approach will probably go unheeded for quite some time to come. But why? Why the resistance? What is it about established Apache practices for exploring tribal history that Apache men and women find so attractive and rewarding? And why are certain Anglo-American practices, such as crafting extended chronicles and presenting autobiographies, tangential to their interests and unsuited to their tastes? What, in short, creates the evident gulf between these two conflicting perspectives on making useful visits to the country of the past?

As conceived by Apaches from Cibecue, the past is a well-worn ‘path’ or ‘trail’ (*’intin*) which was traveled first by the people’s founding ancestors and which subsequent generations of Apaches have traveled ever since. Beyond the memories of living persons, this path is no longer visible—the past has disappeared—and thus it is unavailable for direct consultation and study. For this reason, the past must be constructed—which is to say, imagined—with the aid of historical materials, sometimes called ‘footprints’ or ‘tracks’ (*biké’ goz’áá*), that have survived into the present.⁶ These materials come in various forms, including Apache place-names, Apache stories and songs, and different kinds of relics found at locations throughout Apache country (the hand-cut stones surrounding the spring at Snakes’ Water provide a good example). Because no one knows when these phenomena came into being, locating past events in time can be accomplished only in a vague and general way. This is of little consequence, however, for what matters most to Apaches is *where* events occurred, not when, and what they serve to reveal about the development and character of Apache social life. In light of these priorities, temporal considerations, though certainly not irrelevant, are accorded secondary importance.

For people like Charles Henry and Morley Cromwell, the country of the past—and with it Apache history—is never more than a narrated place-world away. It is thus very near, as near as the workings of their own imaginations, and can be easily brought to life at almost any time. It is history constructed in spurts, in sudden bursts of imaginative activity, and it takes the form of stories delivered in spoken Apache, the language of the ancestors and most of their modern descendants. Answering the question “What happened here?”, it deals in the main with single events, and because these are tied to places within Apache territory, it is pointedly local and unfailingly episodic. It is also extremely personal, consistently subjective, and therefore highly variable among those who work to produce it. For these and other reasons, it is history without authorities—all narrated place-worlds, provided they seem plausible, are considered equally valid—and the idea of compiling “definitive accounts” is rejected out of hand as unfeasible and undesirable. Weakly empirical, thinly chronological, and rarely written down, Western Apache history as practiced by Apaches advances no theories, tests no hypotheses, and offers no general models. What it does instead, and likely has done for centuries, is fashion possible worlds, give them expressive shape, and present them for contemplation as images of the past that can deepen and enlarge awareness of the present. In the country of the past, as Apaches like to explore it, the place-maker is an indispensable guide.

And this in a powerful sense. For the place-maker’s main objective is to speak the past into being, to summon it with words and give it dramatic form, to *produce* experience by forging ancestral worlds in which others can participate and readily lose themselves. To this engrossing end, as Charles Henry showed repeatedly, the place-maker often speaks as a witness on the scene, describing ancestral events “as they are occurring” and creating in the process a vivid sense that what happened long ago—right here, on this very spot—could be happening *now*. Within this narrative frame, all is movement and animated talk: the ancestors come and go, voicing their thoughts and feelings, always engaged in pressing activities (naming places and clans, cultivating corn, guarding against enemies), occasionally elated, often subdued, constantly concerned with staying alive. Leaders lead, followers follow, and most of the time

things are done correctly. But now and again mistakes are made, serious trouble ensues, and social life is shattered. Pathos reigns and the air is charged with suspense. What will happen next? What will the ancestors do? How will they survive?

Thus performed and dramatized, Western Apache place-making becomes a form of narrative art, a type of historical theater in which the “pastness” of the past is summarily stripped away and long-elapsed events are made to unfold as if before one’s eyes. It is history given largely in the active present tense (“Now they are arriving. . .”), and it makes extensive use of quoted speech to enter the hearts and minds of those whom it portrays (“Our relatives will not harm us,” they said; “Now we are in for trouble,” they thought). It is typically concise, tends to be closely plotted, and rarely becomes redundant. It thrives on verisimilitude (“There were swarms and swarms of flies. Huge swarms!”), and what it may lack in subtlety is more than offset by moments of intense urgency and involvement with its subjects (“*Look what has become of us now!*”). Its principal themes are the endless quest for survival, the crucial importance of community and kin, and the beneficial consequences, practical and otherwise, of adhering to moral norms. Accordingly, one of its basic aims is to instill empathy and admiration for the ancestors themselves—they came, they settled, they toiled, they endured—and to hold them up to all as worthy of emulation, except, of course, when they fail to do what is right and threaten by their actions the welfare of the group; then they are punished or killed.

By comparison, Western Apache history of the Anglo-American variety strikes many Apache people as distant and unfamiliar.⁷ Unspoken and unanimated, it lies silent and inert on the printed English page; it is history without voices to thrust it into the present. Removed from the contexts of daily social life (reading, Apaches have noticed, is an isolating activity), it also seems unconnected to daily affairs and concerns; it is history without discernible applications. Detached from the local Apache landscape, it has few spatial anchors, and when places are identified, as often they are not, their names are not their own; it is history loosely situated, geographically adrift. Obsessed with dating historical events, it packs them into tightly ordered sequences which it then may try to explain by invoking abstract forces (“mounting tribal aggression” and

“outbreaks of cultural disarray” were two of Morley Cromwell’s favorites) in which no one can quite believe; it thus becomes remote, intangible, divorced in suspect ways from the forces of human agency. Commonly qualified and sometimes hotly debated by persons who construct it, it appears to be in search of final historical truths, of which Apaches believe there are very few indeed; it can therefore seem arrogant and misguided, pretending to large discoveries it could not possibly make. And it does go on and on, persistently uninformed by the views of Apache people, suggesting quite improbably that useful accounts of history can and should be fashioned without consulting those whose history it is. Add to this that it has almost nothing to say about the people’s early ancestors, and that recognizable place-worlds are virtually nonexistent, and you have a set of practices which by Western Apache standards rather miss the mark. Apache tribal history as crafted by Anglo-Americans proceeds on different assumptions, produces a different discourse, and involves a different aesthetic.⁸ Mute and unperformed, sprawling in its way over time and space alike, it strikes Apache audiences as dense, turgid, and lacking in utility. But far more important is the fact that it does not excite. It does not captivate. It does not *engage* and provoke a measure of wonder. As Charles Henry said once in English, summing up quite a bit, “It’s pretty mainly quiet. It stays far away from all our many places.”⁹

Staying away from places is something that Western Apaches would not recommend, and in this pervasive conviction they are not alone. As Vine Deloria, Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux), has observed, most American Indian tribes embrace “spatial conceptions of history” in which places and their names—and all that these may symbolize—are accorded central importance.¹⁰ For Indian men and women, the past lies embedded in features of the earth—in canyons and lakes, mountains and arroyos, rocks and vacant fields—which together endow their lands with multiple forms of significance that reach into their lives and shape the ways they think. Knowledge of places is therefore closely linked to knowledge of the self, to grasping one’s position in the larger scheme of things, including one’s own community, and to securing a confident sense of who one is as a person. With characteristic eloquence, N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa) suggests that this has been so for a very long time.

From the time the Indian first set foot upon this continent, he centered his life in the natural world. He is deeply invested in the earth, committed to it both in his consciousness and in his instinct. The sense of place is paramount. Only in reference to the earth can he persist in his identity. (Momaday 1994:1)

In the Western Apache case, this is certainly true. The people’s sense of place, their sense of their tribal past, and their vibrant sense of themselves are inseparably intertwined. Their identity has persisted. Their ancestors saw to this, and in the country of the past, where the ancestors come alive in resonating place-worlds, they do so still today. Their voices are strong and firm—and sometimes it is unclear who is quoting whom.¹¹