

tors. In the case studies presented by Beck et al., agency (problematically defined only in terms of the capacity to transform [e.g., Joyce and Lopiparo 2005]) is apparent in the occurrence of the material transformations, but impetus for the changes lies in the “context”: population increase (or imbalance in the Bolivian example) is a factor in all four cases, and novel external events—the introduction of Christianity, bronze, and maize, the drought in Bolivia—are also important. Each of the historical narratives provided represents a persuasive history (within the realm of archaeological precision), but Sewell’s concept of event contributes only to our understanding of (some of) the mechanisms of change. Structures can impart directionality and pattern to historical change, and subsuming historical explanation under the concept of event fails to address this aspect of history. Beck et al. provide narratives that explicate the relationship between changes in the built environment and a given event, but their approach fails to elicit a more encompassing historical explanation. Nevertheless, this article is a step in the right direction.

Pedro Díaz-del-Río

Instituto de Historia, Centro de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales, CSIC, c/Serrano 13, 28001 Madrid, Spain
(diazdelrio@ih.csic.es). 10 VII 07

History is about structures, sequences, and events, and some events are outstanding and transformative. By framing archaeological discussion in these terms, Beck et al. have taken processual archaeology into the logics of history and vice versa, and this move should be welcome. They have chosen to focus on what I could call “Sewellian events,” on the materiality of spatial transformations and their role in historical change. I agree with them that as archaeologists we have privileged access to the past *through* and *because* of its materiality. Although the archaeological record is frequently the result of processes, it is also a combination of occurrences that can be woven into historical conjunctures. It is this triple and almost Braudelian condition of the archaeological record that may give archaeologists a panoptic perspective on time and space. But in order to recognize Sewellian events we require a detailed knowledge of structures and temporalities.

One cannot overlook the importance of structures. Beck et al. know this, for they have selected four exemplary cases of the role of canonical *contradictions* in structural change—“disjunctions of structural principles” (Giddens 1979, 141), a term unexpectedly absent considering its underlying role in the argument. Social change took place under the structural conditions detailed by their narratives of conjunctures, and the material forms that these different cases took are, as they show, concretions of historical significance. Of course, some overdetermination occasionally runs against their perception of events as *making* rather than *shaping* the course of histories (as in the Icelandic case, where formal inequality was most likely “inevitable”). Nevertheless, these four cases perfectly represent

both the creation of a brand-new materiality through agency and the weight of inherited circumstances in the way it was finally shaped. As the introduction of Christianity in Iceland, the construction of Cahokia, the enclosure movement in Thy, and the rise of the Upper House complex at Chiripa show, it is especially during *revolutionary* periods—radical structural transformations—that human beings use and transform their traditions to “present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise” (Marx 1977, 301).

Yet it seems to me that Beck et al.’s narratives would better match what the *Annales* termed “conjunctures” than the *événementielle*. This is probably because they are keen on overcoming the intrinsic limitations of the archaeological record when analyzing the three steps in which events are believed to take place: contingent happenings, ruptures, and rearticulations. They wisely take advantage of the critical disadvantages of absolute chronology. As we can only exceptionally control the sequence with detailed precision, certain processes can—or perhaps should—be analyzed in terms of events. Nevertheless, the historical significance and history of all their case studies in spatial transformation will vary depending on factors such as their tempo and the number of underlying organizational principles. One would then have to determine why and when an eventful narrative would be more enlightening than a processual one. The challenging relation between events and processes does not seem to me resolved by Sewell’s fractal characterization of the temporality of events: something “not self-evident but rather . . . constructed theoretically in relation to the time-scale of the processes being studied” (2005, 121–22). Where he pushes the argument to the limit, arguing that when we increase our scale of observation (and thus blur the details) what we may think of as “gradual processes or trends begin to look like events” (p. 121), Beck et al. seem to be more cautious. Although they do not reject “the significance of gradual, long-term processes in social change,” the connection between events and processes in their theoretical argument is somewhat vague and would benefit from clarification.

I wholly endorse Beck et al.’s call for a more historical way of thinking about our archaeological record. The flexibility of late processualism has allowed American archaeologists to flirt for some time now with history without really engaging in historicist arguments. For such a venture, a dialectical way of thinking about structures, conjunctures, and events seems to me essential.

Susan D. Gillespie

Department of Anthropology, University of Florida,
Gainesville, FL 32611-7305 (sgillesp@ufl.edu). 15 VI 07

Beginning in the 1980s archaeology experienced the same “historic turn” (McDonald 1996) that other human sciences did, taking various paths (e.g., Hodder 1987; Kirch 1992; Knapp 1992; McGlade 1999; Pauketat 2001). This article

should be considered in that context. The chief issues at hand are how well the authors have engaged Sewell's theorizing and what has been gained by bringing together disparate archaeological examples of historical events.

In a series of essays, some of them appearing in a 2005 anthology, William Sewell thoughtfully detailed the theoretical concepts and methods for conjoining structure and eventful temporality, integrating signification and materiality. He reworked, to great effect, Giddens's (1984) theory of structuration and Sahlins's (1981, 1985, 1991) anthropology of history, producing modifications of it that could advance archaeological interpretations. Giving credit where it is due, this is Sahlins's theory of the event, as Sewell (2005) states. Not starting with Sahlins means that his singular conceptualization—resulting in an “*indispensable* theory of history” (Sewell 2005, 224)—has been played down in these analyses.

“Event,” long opposed to “structure,” was treated in dialectical fashion by Sahlins (1985, xiv, 153; 1991, 45, 82) as a “relation” between a happening and a structure or structures. This “structure of the conjuncture” is key to explaining the dialectical relationship between structures as schemas and as material and other resources (the “world”) (Sahlins 1985, xiv, 138). Events must be interpreted by human agents and typically instantiate structures, which are otherwise only potential (p. 153). For historians, however, events are disruptions to reproductive order (Sahlins 1991, 45; Sewell 2005, 100). Thus, it is important to distinguish “historical events” that transform structures as a rare subclass of all events (Sahlins 1991, 45; Sewell 2005, chap. 8).

At the heart of Sahlins's theory of the event, endorsed by Sewell (2005), is an interpretivist paradigm. Sewell's schemas are semiotic codes (2005, 167–68), and “symbolic interpretation is part and parcel of the historical event” (p. 245), necessary to explain *how* structures become disarticulated and rearticulated as played out in the world. Absent a “thick” synchronic understanding of pre-transformation and post-transformation structures, there can be no convincing demonstration of a historical event (p. 185). This interpretive approach linking semiotic practices and the “built environment”—the latter treated by Sewell (2005, 362) as an epistemic metaphor for the entire material social fabric—is not developed by Beck et al., and therefore Sahlins's/Sewell's eventful history is not sufficiently engaged.

In these case studies, notable relatively rapid changes in settlement or architectural patterns are treated as “the close of an event” whose beginning is then searched for. However, the structural transformations are more asserted than demonstrated; how structures were rearticulated through novel interpretations of happenings in the world is not explained. As a result, the explanations look mechanistic, which is what Sewell (2005, 369) was trying to avoid. In contrast, Barrett's (1999) study of structural changes in early Britain is a more satisfying example of the dialectic between semiotic schemas and continually reshaped landscapes, although he drew his inspiration from Giddens.

The four cases demonstrate the difficulties recognized by Sahlins (1991, 86) and Sewell (2005, 121–22, 211, 228, 260) in distinguishing historical events. Rapidity of change is not a necessary criterion, for historical events may endure for centuries, nor is the scale of the structures whose transformation results from such events (Sewell 2005, 121, 211). Beck et al. do not always make explicit which event in a long sequence of changes is the point of rupture, a “novel conjuncture of structures” (Sewell 2005, 223) that resulted in their transformation. Only Brown mentions that singling out one such event is a judgment call (Sewell 2005, 211, 260). He seems to suggest that structural ruptures began with the growing reliance on maize agriculture, the establishment of Cahokia's town plan being one of its “cascading” ramifications—a contingent event with its own transformations.

Sewell (2005, 111) introduced his eventful temporality to conjoin sociologists' concerns for comparison and causal regularities with historians' emphasis on unique, contingent events. An important contribution of Sahlins's cross-cultural investigations (e.g., Dirks 1996, 23) is recognizing that different cultures have different modes of historical production (Sahlins 1985, x, 34, 53). However, here the opportunity for cross-cultural comparison has been missed, as there is no synthesis or basis for comparison.

Finally, it is not a good trade-off to give “prehistoric” people back their history only to take away their agency except in rare moments of a historical event. Everyday events that reproduce structures are “the practical realization” of structures in specific contexts “expressed in the interested action of historic agents” (Sahlins 1985, xiv). Agency is critical; “reproduction is never automatic” (Sewell 2005, 143). Indeed, archaeology can also contribute to the human sciences by paying attention to processes neglected by historians—namely, the reproduction of structures, especially over long periods of time, even during episodes of historical transformation (e.g., Sewell 2005, 271). This would require taking more seriously Sahlins's (1991) articulation of higher- and lower-order structures (see Sewell 2005, 209–10), akin to Shore's (1996, 53) “foundational schemas” that structure multiple specific cultural models.

Danny Hoffman

Department of Anthropology, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195, U.S.A. (djh13@u.washington.edu). 18 VI 07

The stakes of Beck, Bolender, Brown, and Earle's “eventful archeology” became clear to me with their third case study. Here they specify that eventful archeology represents a third mode of temporal analysis, contrasted with a gradualist, evolutionary approach, on the one hand, and a synchronic snapshot of the archeological record, on the other. When it comes to theorizing change, they suggest, neither of these two approaches “problematizes” the site “in an *eventful* way, as con-