The relationship between people and the natural environment is of rising importance in our times. As a descendant of the people of the ancient Southwest, I believe that that relationship was the primary focus for my ancestors, who defined an intimate reciprocity with the earth and sky, mountains and clouds, and plants and animals. We, the descendants of "those gone before us," are left with a faint memory of their way of knowing, thinking, and being on this land. "Those gone before us" understood that humans are not distinct, separate beings from the natural environment but that every act and thought of any human being affects the cosmos. They moved through the land with a sensibility that allowed nuances of the wind, sun, and ground to affect their decision making. These sensibilities are visible in the exquisite ruins dotting the landscape of the Southwest and northern Mexico.

The numerous sites recorded here are but a sampling of ruins found on the hillsides, plateaus, and valleys of the region. The vast numbers of sites indicate, to me, the continuous movement of the people on the land rather than uncountable numbers of people. The scattered house units and unified village forms were places through which the people moved. They did not settle in one place for a long period of time but rather emulated the movement of the seasons, wind, clouds, and life cycles by moving frequently. They responded to the movement of floods, droughts, and social tensions. The movement of the clouds in the sky told them how they should move on the ground. Their sense of home, or place, was in the space between the earth and the sky and not within a specific human-built structure.

Structures, then, were generally not built to last forever but rather to meet immediate needs. Beliefs and values were clearly expressed in those structures. With adaptive flexibility and constant modification of structures, "those gone before us" left their legacy of people working within human scale creating aesthetically functional structures using accessible, simple materials, such as mud, wood, and stone. The unity of these forms is impressive and speaks about the concept of an inherent oneness of human beings with the land and the sky. Yet, the variety of the built forms is remarkable. The myriad expressions of house clusterings, village forms, enclosures, and plaza spaces are endless and, at the same time, give an overwhelming sense of wholeness as if one spirit pervaded them all.

I grew up in a modern Pueblo Indian community and spent much time within and around the ruins of the Pajarito Plateau of northern New Mexico. They continue to be a source of strength and power because I can breathe the breath of "those gone before us" in such places. Pueblo tradition tells us that we leave our sweat and breath wherever we go. The place never forgets us. Even more, the structures that we build also have breath. They are alive and participate in their own cycles of life and death and of those who have lived within them. The memory of "those gone before us" is, then, visually and psychically there to empower our present thoughts and lives.

William Morgan, in recording the limitless variety of architectural village plans in the Southwest, reinforces and validates a way of perceiving—a way of life. A way of life that looks to spiritual fulfillment rather than material acquisition or possession. A way that affirms that all life expressions are of one spirit or breath. The infusion of the spirit into the built form is evident in the aesthetic quality of the forms and sense of unity between the land and the village. It confirms for me the feeling that interrelations as expressed by the connected house units of that old world are necessary for our continued existence as one species of organism dependent like all others upon the breath, or spirit, that informs the whole universe.

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