

## Book and Film Reviews

### Listening to Six Generations of Chumash Women

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*6 Generations*. Film. Produced, directed, and photographed by Paul Goldsmith, ASC, in conjunction with the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. Script by Ernestine De Soto and John R. Johnson; edited by Jim Edwards; music by Snuffy Walden. Executive producer, John R. Johnson. 2009.

"I'm haplo D group, which is one of the more ancient . . . I'm 13,000 years old and you can tell [self-conscious laugh] . . . it's an honor." So begins *6 Generations*, with Ernestine Ygnacio-De Soto's voice. Her great-great-great-grandmother was born by the river behind the Santa Barbara Mountains in 1769, the very year that Fr. Junipero Serra founded the first Alta California mission (in San Diego, 220 miles to the south). "I'm not a full-blood Chumash. There are none," she cautions, "but I think of myself as Chumash, first and foremost, even though I do have Hispanic and English in me, and those are not by my choice." A self-described "living link," she remembers her great-uncle, the last pure-blood Chumash. "I am their voice."

Thirty years ago, Ms. De Soto ran into John Johnson, working on his doctoral dissertation in the Mission Santa Barbara archive. When she saw the original mission records, Ms. De Soto found herself confronting a very personal family history. Her mother, recently deceased, was the last native speaker of the Chumash language. "This is just stepping back in time, like a time machine . . . more of a puzzle than a mystery, and all the pieces now fit . . . completely."

Years later, the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History (where John Johnson is now a curator) invited Ms. De Soto to become a model for their diorama on early Chumash lifeways, and she agreed. As their relationship prospered, they eventually teamed up to craft a first-person performance called "Voices from the Indian Orchard: Six Generations of Chumash Women Speak." In *6 Generations*, filmmaker Paul Goldsmith captures this gripping narrative on film as it welds together these multiple ways of knowing the past: a friar's handwritten mission record, 2 centuries of Chumash oral

tradition, and the lifework of anthropologist John Peabody Harrington.

The documents still survive. Wearing white museum gloves, Ms. De Soto stares down at the faded mission registry, an entry from April, 3, 1807, when a priest at Mission Santa Barbara mission assigned the baptismal name María Paula to her great-great-great-grandmother (1769–1855), first of the six generations.

A century later, this same Chumash family began a long-term relationship with J. P. Harrington. On the recommendation of Alfred Kroeber, Harrington sought out Ms. De Soto's great-grandmother, Luisa Ygnacio (1835–1922), whose father had been a violinist at the Santa Barbara mission. He also collaborated with Lucrecia Garcia (1877–1937), Ms. De Soto's grandmother, who spoke Chumash at home and learned Spanish but was never very proficient in English. Ms. De Soto's mother, Mary Yee, "spoke only Indian" until the age of 12. When she went to school and learned English, the elders warned her to "never to trust a white man."

Such admonitions aside, these women and Harrington all recognized the threat that Chumash history and culture would pass away forever, and they worked together to capture the culture's essence, still around and still remembered. For the rest of his life, Harrington recorded the lives and stories of these Chumash women, becoming an additional member of the family. Ms. De Soto remembers him as someone who could walk into an Indian village and "blend right in, and just be accepted. . . . He had that thing, that Indian people know."

Mary Yee had always spoken Santa Barbara Chumash with an uncle. But after he died, there was nobody left who "spoke Indian" until Harrington returned after retiring from the Bureau of American Ethnology in 1952. Ernestine De Soto remembers Harrington as "obsessed with Indian culture," but she did not much like him. He was this "big, old, boring Ichabod-looking guy. . . . he would look upon me as an annoyance too, and I viewed him in the same fashion, because he took my mother's attention away from me. . . . I was just a brat to him. . . . He'd never speak to me if he could help it."

But Harrington kept speaking with Mary Yee, translating and amplifying the Barbareño Chumash texts recorded by her mother and grandmother. Even after he contracted Parkinson's disease, Ms. De Soto's mother nursed, bathed, and fed him until he became bedridden and died. But she kept on, recording her own notes and diaries in her own language. This is how a single Chumash family came to work with Harrington across 5 decades, each committed to recording a lifeway becoming extinct.

In *6 Generations*, Ernestine Ygnacio-De Soto brings these stories alive, playing each role "myself, personally, . . . I feel that I am speaking for my ancestors. I am their voice; . . . there's no other way that they can pass on the knowledge that they've been passing through our generations of women."

Some might find Ms. De Soto's singular narrative a bit monotone and flatline expressive, even tedious, perhaps making it difficult to separate the women as individuals. Johnson comments, parenthetically, that many family members spoke (and speak) exactly the same way, so maybe this is a Chumash cultural trait. The producers could have hired professional voices and staged lurid recreations to make the final product familiar for the modern TV-viewing audience. To their credit, the *6 Generations* team stuck to the real stories of real women, not wealthy or powerful or household names but actual people whose lives can still be told today.

When Paul Goldsmith sent me a rough cut of *6 Generations*, I screened it with my archaeological field crew. It took my breath away. If a video can be a page-turner, this is it. For decades now, anthropologists—of both scientific and humanistic persuasions—have railed about the importance of multiple perspectives and “Native voice,” but this call is still answered too rarely. In this elegant, hour-long film, that long-lauded goal is been realized—and then some. This is history as autobiography, foregrounding the power of language and telling a checkered tale of cultural survival in the extreme. The time depth is simply astonishing, and the narrative is frank and true and sometimes stark. *6 Generations* is a home run. I cannot recommend it highly enough.

## Buildings That Speak

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*Indispensable Eyesores: An Anthropology of Undesired Buildings.* By Melanie van der Hoorn. New York: Berghahn, 2009.

What role does public architecture play in the lives of urban residents? Melanie van der Hoorn undertakes an anthropological investigation of buildings society rejects—its “eyesores”—to explore the relationships people create with material culture. In narratives and debates over the value and disposition of what she calls “undesired architecture,” people construct buildings as social entities and give them a place in society. The author finds worthy subjects in the built landscapes of postsocialist Europe, which during the twentieth century witnessed multiple wars and major shifts in political regimes. In their wake, many deteriorating architectural remnants whose original functions have long been abandoned or altered endure. These three-dimensional and very public remains are complex physical objects that local citizens both love and hate, want to reject but cannot eliminate, making their meanings ambiguous and contradictory and the buildings “indispensable eyesores.” Van der Hoorn seeks out “witnesses” to these eyesores and their stories by interviewing local

citizens, officials, and critics; consulting historical archives and analyses, news accounts, and critical reviews; and making site visits to compile records for six case studies of rejected buildings and several others that have been recuperated.

Central to van der Hoorn's argument is the recognition that architecture not only has representational qualities, with which anthropologists are well acquainted, but also is materially constituted in time and space, a dimension given less attention. The precise nature of the mutually constituting relationships people have with built forms, especially large-scale public edifices, is the subject of her investigation. Drawing on Alfred Gell, van der Hoorn argues that the material world functions to mediate human intentions and that humans, by acting through artifacts, give them a kind of secondary agency to affect social life. Part of that agency is attributable to the buildings' material properties: buildings continue to stand long after their creators and occupants have departed. Their physical presence marks events and bears scars of historical change, and as witnesses ascribe significance to them through storytelling, they come to embody complex meanings and provoke polemics, especially when their existence is questioned. To interrogate the meanings embodied in rejected buildings, van der Hoorn draws broadly on a range of theories from architecture history and criticism to geography, political science, and anthropology, often asking how a building might be theorized as a social entity.

In one case study, van der Hoorn focuses on the siege of Sarajevo (1992–1996), when Serbs attacked the headquarters of an independent multiethnic newspaper and the National and University Library. Although Serb aggressors found the buildings undesirable, occupants who witnessed the attacks became attached to the buildings as they collectively focused on their preservation. Van der Hoorn contends that the buildings provided a distraction from the violence and physical support for surviving the trauma of conflict and overcoming the liminality of war. An unseen Serbian enemy committed “urbicide,” the systematic destruction of monuments and their physical spaces shared by multiple ethnicities that had made a heterogeneous Bosnian society possible. Serb perpetrators targeted the buildings, van der Hoorn argues, not to destroy the objects themselves but to destroy their agency, a secondary agency because it “involves people's capacity to exert their own agency through the material world” (p. 73). Despite ruined offices, a united multiethnic crew of journalists continued publishing, reasserting their own agency and subverting the perpetrators' goals.

Van der Hoorn frames her investigation of undesired architecture in terms of a building's “life span,” which culminates in a final disposition, or “burial.” Once a public building ceases to function and its continued existence is questioned, narratives and public debates assess its significance and the contradictory meanings it embodies to enable acceptance of a final decision regarding its disposal. It took 25 years for the never-completed Troisdorf Kaiserbau, a 19-story hotel between Cologne and Bonn, to be demolished. It was loved by