



# American Archaeology at the Millennium: A User's Guide

This article offers a brief survey of the institutional and intellectual landscapes of contemporary archaeology in the United States. It is intended as an introductory guide to help outsiders interpret and navigate the large, complex, and potentially mysterious world of American archaeology. It first offers a discussion of the system of higher education and research for archaeologists, with its implicit hierarchies of symbolic capital, its disciplinary structures, funding agencies and practices, career trajectories, networks, and rituals. This is followed by a survey of selected recent trends in the development of theoretical orientations, epistemological perspectives, and major research frontiers. An annotated list of the most widely read and cited American archaeology journals is provided for those seeking more complete information on current research trends.

**Key Words:** American archaeology, American anthropology, American universities, historical archaeology, ethnoarchaeology, colonialism, evolutionism, Marxism, feminism, feasts, epistemology, CRM archaeology.

The task requested of me is to present for an audience of Spanish colleagues a synopsis of the current state of the field of archaeology in the United States. Obviously, this is a dauntingly large and complicated charge to fulfill, and no individual could hope to present more than an impressionistic and inherently partial survey of such a large and diverse field in a brief article. However, this is an important topic that certainly merits a serious analytical effort. I say this for two reasons. In the first place, because of the sheer size of American archaeology (in terms of the number of archaeologists and the publications they turn out each year), as well as the global geopolitical forces that structure fields of power and symbolic capital within the international academic world, what happens in American contexts inevitably has global implications, for better or for worse. In the second place, as someone who has been navigating for

Aquest article ofereix una breu panoràmica de la situació institucional i intel·lectual de l'arqueologia contemporània als Estats Units. Pretén ser una guia introductòria per tal d'ajudar els no versats en el tema a interpretar i navegar en el món —ampli, complex i potencialment misteriós— de l'arqueologia americana. En primer lloc, es presenta una discussió del sistema d'ensenyament superior i de la recerca per a arqueòlegs, amb les seves jerarquies implícites de capital simbòlic, les seves estructures disciplinàries, les seves agències i pràctiques financeres, trajectòries curriculars, xarxes i rituals. A continuació es presenta una panoràmica selectiva de les tendències recents pel que fa al desenvolupament d'orientacions teòriques, perspectives epistemològiques i principals fronteres de la recerca. S'afegeix una llista comentada de les revistes americanes d'arqueologia més àmpliament llegides i citades per a aquells que desitgin obtenir més informació sobre les tendències actuals de la recerca.

**Paraules clau:** arqueologia americana, antropologia americana, universitats americanes, arqueologia històrica, colonialisme, evolucionisme, marxisme, feminisme, epistemologia, arqueologia d'intervenció.

a couple of decades between the American and European systems, it is my impression that there exists a good deal of mutual misunderstanding about even the most mundane cultural and institutional aspects of academic practice in the two contexts. Hence, an effort at cultural translation seems highly desirable.

Works of this kind generally tend to focus on recent theoretical and methodological developments and the debates between currently competing theoretical perspectives. This will certainly be one of the goals of this review, although several excellent works of this nature have already been published to which readers seeking more extended discussion are directed (e.g. PATTERSON 2001, TRIGGER 1989, WILLEY, SABLÖFF 1993; see also LAMBERG-KARLOVSKY 1989, PINSKY, WYLIE 1989, YOFFEE, SHERRATT 1993). However, the primary focus of this article lies in a somewhat different direction. Archaeological

practice is not simply an abstract world of the philosophical clash of ideas and theories in some pure conceptual space. These debates are grounded in particular contexts of practice, and I would contend that a deeper understanding of the issues in question here is not possible without first comprehending the institutional landscape within which American archaeology operates and has developed. Indeed, I would suggest that it is precisely the lack of a clear understanding of the historical development of the institutional context of American archaeology that often inhibits European archaeologists' efforts to comprehend American archaeological practice. Hence, this article will be divided into two interrelated parts, one presenting an exploration of the institutional landscape of American archaeology and the other laying out the terrain of current research frontiers and theoretical debates. Obviously, given the limitations of space, both of these will be in somewhat telegraphically compressed form.

## The Institutional Landscape of American Archaeology

One of the basic institutional differences that is immediately apparent between archaeology in European and American contexts is that the majority of American archaeologists are trained and housed in "departments of Anthropology" as one of four broad "subfields" (Archaeology, Cultural or Sociocultural Anthropology, Linguistic Anthropology, and Biological Anthropology).<sup>1</sup> In most European nations (and their former colonies which have been influenced by European disciplinary concepts) the archaeology of recent prehistoric periods has generally tended to be more closely allied to history, meaning especially national history.

This is because European archaeology developed as a professional discipline in the context of 19<sup>th</sup> century European nationalism and was seen as a backward extension of the history of the nation in a search for prehistoric origins (VEIT 1989, WOTZKA 1993). This kind of project was not tenable in the context of the United States, where the record of the prehistoric past was exclusively one of peoples who were culturally alien to the scholars engaged in the development of the discipline (and, indeed, where those scholars were members of a dominant colonial society that had decimated the indigenous inhabitants in the recent past). In this context, prehistoric archaeology developed largely as a partner to ethnography in the joint project of "salvage ethnography" by which scholars attempted to document what they saw as the vanishing cultures of Native

Americans. Many of the earlier practitioners used both archaeology and ethnography together in an attempt to reconstruct the cultures of native peoples before the dramatic transformations that were produced by European colonialism.

The kind of institutional linkage to history that is common in European contexts is rare in the United States. However, it should also be pointed out that, while the vast majority of American academic archaeologists are in Anthropology departments, archaeologists studying the ancient complex societies of certain regions (especially the Mediterranean, Egypt, and the Near East) usually tend to be incorporated with other, text-oriented, humanistic scholars in highly specialized departments or institutes (e.g. Classics, Egyptology, Near Eastern Studies, Art History) often having limited contact or intellectual rapport with Anthropology. This division is reflected in the distinctive membership of the two main American professional archaeological societies and the character of their respective scholarly journals: the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) and its journal *American Antiquity* (which are primarily for anthropological archaeologists), and the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA) with its *American Journal of Archaeology* (which cater largely to classicists and Near Eastern archaeologists).

This institutional setting within Anthropology for the majority of American archaeologists, although it is the accidental product of a broader set of historical circumstances, has had important intellectual consequences. In general, it has served to orient American archaeologists towards social science (rather than humanities) research questions and modes of explanation and to devalue the study of particular historical cultures as an end in itself. Although my discussion here concerns primarily academic archaeology, this is equally true of the much larger community of what are called "Cultural Resource Management" (CRM) archaeologists; that is, those who undertake rescue excavations and survey in advance of construction projects. Most CRM archaeologists are also trained in Anthropology departments. In general, archaeologists in the United States have three avenues of employment available: universities, museums, and CRM firms (either public or private). There is no exclusively research institution equivalent to the French CNRS. In all three cases, the majority of practitioners are trained in Anthropology departments, although some museums tend to have a relatively greater proportion of scholars trained in Art History or Classics.

It is also important to understand that in nearly all university Anthropology departments, archaeologists are a minority subfield and cultural anthropology is the dominant subfield. Usually, archaeologists represent 25 percent or less of the faculty members in a department, while cultural anthropologists usually represent nearly half, or more. Among the few exceptions to this pattern are the universities of Arizona and Pennsylvania, in which archaeologists constitute around half of the department. This minority status of archaeology, both within the field of Anthropology as a whole and in most individual departments, defines the balance of power within the

1. In the context of this article, I use the term "American" to refer specifically to the United States. Obviously, this usage is less than ideal given its exclusive usurpation of this identity from the rest of the American continent, but I cannot think of a handy substitute. I should also point out that I use the phrase "American archaeology" to describe work done by scholars at American institutions (which is actually global in its reach) and "Americanist archaeology" to describe research on the archaeology of North America.

discipline and has an effect upon the implicit definition of significant research frontiers and theoretical paradigms. It is also necessary to point out that, despite the shared ideology of a united discipline of Anthropology, the degree of genuine intellectual and social integration between archaeology and cultural anthropology is highly variable from one department to another. At some departments, such as Harvard and Michigan, archaeologists and cultural anthropologists are actually housed in separate buildings and have relatively little to do with each other except at a few joint administrative meetings. At others, such as Chicago, there is a self-consciously close spatial, theoretical, and social integration between the subdisciplines, with joint teaching of classes and workshops, joint participation on dissertation committees, etc. These subtle structural features often have a marked influence on the kind of archaeology that is practiced in the different departments.

One of the things most often misunderstood by those outside the United States is the institutional framework that governs both the training of archaeologists and the generation of research: the American university system and its often implicit hierarchies and divisions. One of the first things that must be appreciated is the distinction between "undergraduate" and "graduate" education. Students first take a four year undergraduate program of studies (normally from age 18 to 21) to obtain the Bachelor of Arts (BA) or Bachelor of Science (BS) degree. This can be done at either a college (that is, an institution specializing in undergraduate education and offering only the BA and BS degrees) or at a university (that is, an institution with both undergraduate and graduate programs). Some institutions also offer programs for a terminal Master of Arts (MA) degree; but, for most, the MA is a degree that is simply awarded at a certain stage during the PhD program on the basis of having fulfilled various requirements. For those working in CRM archaeology, the BA or MA is often a sufficient credential for entering the job market. However, obtaining an academic position requires achieving a PhD, which means, on average, an additional eight to ten years of training culminating in a dissertation. Entering a graduate program involves a process of highly competitive selection, in which students apply to their preferred universities at the end of their undergraduate training and are selected on the basis of both their performance in undergraduate programs and on standardized examinations (as well as on the reputation of the undergraduate institution they attended, for which there is a widely recognized national hierarchy of prestige).

There are at least 450 colleges and universities in the United States that offer a BA degree in anthropology (from among about 1,400 institutions of higher education). Of those institutions, 98 universities offer PhD programs in Anthropology. The annual production of Anthropology PhDs by all these institutions has been relatively stable since the mid 1970s, with an average of about 400 per year, although the most recent figures show a total of 556 PhDs in Anthropology during the 1999-2000 academic year. Of this total, approximately 50 percent of the PhDs are in sociocultural anthropology and about 30 percent in

archaeology (or roughly 120 of the latter per year on average). However, as with the undergraduate institutions, these doctoral programs are highly variable in terms of their size, prestige, and influence within the discipline, and there exists a well entrenched hierarchical ranking of symbolic capital that has many structuring effects for archaeological practice. For example, if one looks at the ten highest-ranked Anthropology departments in the country, it is clear that over 60 percent of the 256 Anthropology faculty at those institutions were trained by those same ten institutions (and a significant portion of the remaining 40 percent were trained at the most prestigious foreign universities). But what is more, 71 percent of those top-ten-trained scholars were actually trained at the four highest rated departments (the University of Chicago, the University of Michigan, the University of California Berkeley, and Harvard University), and one department alone (Chicago) accounted for over 25 percent of all the top-ten-trained scholars teaching at those institutions (in comparison to less than 4 percent for the fifth-rated department).<sup>2</sup> One can debate the relative extent to which this pattern results from these departments consistently attracting and training the best students or simply from the prestige attached to a degree from these institutions; but what it does clearly indicate is that disciplinary reproduction within American Anthropology is structured by a sharply marked hierarchy of symbolic capital that produces a remarkably consistent degree of elite exclusivity at the top (e.g., see RABINOW 1991).

This phenomenon is also evident within a more general hierarchy of institutions in which five elite universities (Berkeley, Chicago, Harvard, Stanford, Yale) all have exceptionally large numbers of highly ranked graduate departments across a broad range of disciplines and consistently vie with these "peer institutions" for the greatest number of highest ranked departments. Other universities may outrank all of these five in particular disciplines, but none is currently able to compete on such a broad front. And "compete" is the correct word to describe the relationship between American universities. There is a constant attempt to lure "star" faculty away from other institutions, through bidding wars involving salary, research funds, and other benefits, in order to build departmental reputations (much in the way that football teams operate in Europe). Moreover, there is constant competition among the best departments to attract the national pool of the best graduate students (with a continual escalation of fellowship offers). Departments also take great competitive pride in the success of their students in the national academic job market, and, reciprocally, the relative success of placing students in academic posts plays a significant role in student decisions about which departments to attend.

2. The rankings are taken from the most recent study by the National Research Council, the most serious and respected of the organizations that publish such evaluations. The quantitative data about degrees and departments are based upon the 2000-2001 *Guide to Anthropology Departments* published by the American Anthropological Association and the AAA webpage.

This hierarchy of national prestige also determines how the balance of research and teaching is structured for faculty members. At the top universities, reputation is based almost exclusively upon the influence of one's research publications, and teaching plays a relatively minor role in the selection of faculty or the awarding of "tenure" (that is, a guarantee of permanent status). Faculty at the elite institutions also tend to teach less and are expected to devote more time to research than those at other institutions. In contrast, faculty at small colleges may find most of their time taken up by heavy teaching duties, whereas the expectations for significant publication in tenure and promotion decisions are far less demanding.

There is relative uniformity in the American system in the formal stages of an academic career, if not in the criteria upon which advancement is based. There are three levels of status for full-time faculty: assistant professor, associate professor, and professor. One normally remains an assistant professor for a period of about 7 years, at the end of which one undergoes a process of rigorous review for promotion to tenure. If successful, this marks the all-important transition from "assistant professor" to "associate professor". Those who do not achieve tenure at the time of the review must leave the university and seek employment elsewhere. Those who are granted tenure have job security for life (literally, as the imposition of a mandatory retirement age is illegal in the American system). Given the highly democratic structure of most American university departments, once tenured, there is little effective difference between associate professor and professor, except for an eventual increase in salary. There is no equivalent to the elevated centralization of power that the position of "professor" entails in many European university systems. In most departments, even the position of "chair" is merely a temporary (usually for about 3 years) rotating role in which one person is chosen as the representative of the department in dealing with the university administration. One also finds some scholars identified as "lecturers" (not to be confused with the very different status of "lecturer" in British universities). These are temporary, poorly paid positions filled on an ad hoc basis to teach specific courses, and they are not considered regular faculty (for example, they cannot participate in faculty meetings and vote on departmental policy).

Another structural feature of importance in understanding the American academic scene is the distinction between public and private universities. There are no universities supported by the national government (aside from the military academies), but each of the 50 individual states supports at least one "state university", often with multiple campuses in different cities. Some states, such as California, even have two tiers of state university systems. In addition, some major cities also support their own college/university systems (for example, both New York and Chicago have multiple "city universities" or "city colleges"). In addition to these public institutions, there are also many private universities and colleges supported by large endowments, alumni donations, and tuition fees. It is worth noting that of the five super-elite universities noted earlier, the University of

California at Berkeley is the only state university among them; the others are all private. However, it should also be noted that, of the 25 highest rated Anthropology PhD programs, 60 percent are in state universities. Tuition at private universities and colleges can range to over \$25,000 per year, while state and city universities and colleges charge only a small fraction of that or may be virtually free of tuition charges (although a large percentage of students at private universities do receive scholarship aid that substantially reduces or eliminates the high tuition fees). Private universities also tend to offer higher average salaries for their professors than all but the most elite state institutions. At the undergraduate level, state universities tend to attract a large majority of their students from within the state in which they are located, while private universities tend to serve a national, or even international, pool of applicants. At the graduate level, the more prestigious state universities also tend to attract a national and international body of students. Public universities also tend to have a much larger ratio of undergraduate to graduate students than do private ones. For example, Berkeley has approximately 23,000 undergraduates (of whom about 91 percent come from within the state of California) versus about 8,800 graduate students (from all over the world) and a full-time faculty of approximately 1,450; Harvard University has about 6,650 undergraduates (of whom 83 percent come from *outside* the state of Massachusetts) versus about 9,100 graduate students and a faculty of 1,425; while the University of Chicago has approximately 4,000 undergraduates (of whom 78 percent come from *outside* the state of Illinois) versus about 8,700 graduate students and 1,600 faculty members.

The funding of archaeological research is another structural feature of major significance in determining the character of American archaeology. Aside from very small amounts provided by universities, funding for academic archaeology is derived primarily from a few central institutions to which one submits research proposals that are judged and funded on a competitive basis. Of these, the most significant is the National Science Foundation (NSF), an organization supported by the federal government. NSF disburses about \$12 million annually for archaeology and archaeometry research (out of a total budget of \$4.47 billion for all the sciences) and funds approximately 35 percent of the archaeology proposals it receives. Other funding agencies that are potential sources for archaeological research grants include the Wenner Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Social Science Research Council, the Fulbright Foundation, and a host of smaller agencies focused on specific domains of research. The amounts available for academic research from all these sources, although significant, are only a small fraction of the money spent on CRM archaeology. Moreover, CRM is the largest and fastest growing segment of employment for archaeologists. Hence, many Anthropology departments (especially at state universities) operate CRM extensions that tap into this pool to provide additional graduate student and research support. There are several subtle constraints imposed by this

funding system. In the first place, most funding agencies do not like to support projects for more than about 3 years duration, although longer support can sometimes be achieved with some creative grant proposal writing. This mentality operates against long-term investment in the excavation of particular sites and tends to encourage a kind of superficiality in research strategy such that seemingly significant results must be produced within three years before moving on to other projects. I suspect that this also lies behind the recent dominance of survey, as opposed to excavation, within some schools of American archaeology. Another constraint derives from the way that grant proposals are judged. They are sent out to be reviewed anonymously by a large number of other specialists. This tends to produce a certain conformity and conservatism in research designs because scholars are trying to anticipate the preferences and biases of other scholars who represent what are perceived to be dominant paradigms within the field. It also means that there is a kind of language in which grants are written that may eventually differ dramatically from the publications resulting from the research funded by those grants.

Because of the way that Anthropology departments are structured in the United States, it is rare that one finds congregated together in the same department or university multiple specialists working on the archaeology of one region. Most departments select faculty who provide a diverse range of geographical specialties (what is sometimes referred to sardonically as the "Noah's Ark strategy" of representation). There are some exceptions: for example, the University of Arizona has a large number of archaeologists who work on the local archaeology of the Indians of the American Southwest, Vanderbilt has a concentration of archaeologists who work in Mesoamerica, and the University of Chicago has an even larger cluster of archaeologists who work in the Near East (mostly in the well-known Oriental Institute rather than the department of Anthropology). But such concentrations are unusual. In most cases, there will be only one (or perhaps two) archaeologist doing research in a given region at any one university. At state universities, at least one archaeologist will normally be specialized in the archaeology of the local area, although this is not necessarily the case at the major private universities (which often aim primarily for a strong international profile). At the University of Chicago, for example, one finds archaeologists who do research in Latin America, the Near East, Europe, the Caucasus, South Asia, and Africa, but no one who works within the state of Illinois. This pattern of geographical diversity has important intellectual consequences. In the first place, it means that one deals on a daily basis primarily with colleagues and students who do not share one's regional interests and who must seek commonality in shared theoretical issues or methodological interests. For example, a graduate student working in Bronze Age Germany will normally have only one or two members of his/her dissertation committee who are specialists in this field, while the other committee members will be archaeologists who work on similar theoretical topics in places such as South America or China, or cultural anthropologists with relevant

theoretical expertise. Hence, this tends to reinforce the idea of the importance of theoretical discussion as the binding medium of the discipline and to further enhance the relative valuation of theory over regional culture history. It also means that, in the context of seminars, student dissertation committees, and workshops, one is continually exposed to the archaeological record of other regions of the world and obliged to deal with these data in a reasonably detailed way. This tends to reinforce a strong comparative perspective on one's own regional data. One is always forced to explain the significance or relevance of one's own regional research problems and data to those working in other areas in broader comparative terms. It also means that regional specialists are spread around the country at different universities and face-to-face communication among them tends to take place mostly at the annual national meetings of the major American anthropological and archaeological societies, or in special ad hoc conferences arranged around precise themes.

These meetings are a very important part of the institutional landscape of American archaeology, but not simply for the intellectual content of the formal presentations. They are a major venue for young scholars just finishing their dissertations to enter the market for university jobs. Responding to notices published in the society newsletters, these candidates submit their dossiers to universities seeking new faculty in advance of the meetings and wait hopefully for invitations to be interviewed there. The meetings also provide a venue for departments seeking new faculty to discreetly scout for talent by listening to the papers presented by these young scholars. There is also a great deal of "networking" that takes place over dinner or in the bars, where more senior scholars line up support for their political maneuvers within the societies and the discipline in general, organize research or publication projects with others, talk with officials from the grant agencies, and trade the latest gossip and scientific information. The numerous academic presses are also on hand with displays of all their recent publications. In addition to vibrant book sales, the publication hall also serves as a venue in which presses vie with each other to attract the most prestigious authors to publish with them and in which the less well known scholars attempt to interest the presses in publishing their books. The largest and most important of these meetings, such as those of the American Anthropological Association or the Society for American Archaeology, will draw over 5,000 scholars from all over the country (as well as from abroad) and will offer thousands of brief presented papers in hundreds of parallel sessions spread over five days. For example, the most recent SAA Meeting, held in New Orleans in April of 2001, had 2,028 presentations grouped into 233 sessions (CHAMBLEE, MILLS 2001). The redundancies in titles of these sessions and their papers are often a good key to the shifting fashions within the discipline, highlighting the currently popular research issues and theoretical "buzzwords" and the emerging popularity of particular paradigms.

The official sessions at these national conferences also provide clues toward the shifting implicit

hierarchies of prestige within the discipline, by noting who is selected to organize and participate in “plenary” or “opening” sessions, who is chosen to deliver honorary addresses, which scholars are asked to be discussants, which sessions draw especially large crowds, etc. They also highlight the sometimes-conflictual relationship between what Bourdieu (1984) called “academic capital” and “intellectual capital” in the structuring of power within American archaeology. As Bourdieu noted, those scholars who invest heavily in the acquisition of “academic capital” (that is, administrative power within departments, universities, national scholarly organizations, funding agencies, etc.) are not necessarily those with the greatest “intellectual capital” (that is, those whose power derives from the respect for, or popularity of, their ideas and research); and vice-versa. Hence, the meetings are a ritual arena where both of these forms of power are in operation and on display, and where competition between them is worked out on a national stage. The meetings are also an important ritual of identity in which the far flung networks of scholars are annually reconstituted as a single “imagined community” of American archaeology (indeed, given the geographical scale of the country, the national meetings are often the only place one encounters a good many old friends and colleagues; hence the meetings have a constant feeling of reunion and renewal of community).

Another important structural feature of American archaeology to be considered is the gender balance within the field. Although American archaeology, like many academic disciplines, used to be dominated by men, recent studies have shown a significant transformation. A recent study of the state of women in American Anthropology (BURTON *et al.* 1994) showed that by 1992, gender composition at the assistant professor level had stabilized at around 50 percent. It also showed that, although women still represented only about 34 percent of the associate professors and about 21 percent of the professors, this constituted a slow but steady increase from previous years as the increased number of women at the entry level gradually moved up through the system. The study also noted that there were no statistically significant differences in salary between men and women at any faculty rank, which represents a further amelioration of earlier patterns from as recently as the 1980s. The situation is roughly comparable for archaeologists within this larger disciplinary pool. Indeed, a 1994 survey indicated that a higher proportion of women than men were being hired at lower level academic archaeology positions (ZEDER 1997). This is not to say that subtle forms of discrimination do not still exist, or that subtle differences in prestige hierarchies and career trajectories are not structured according to gender. For example, it is clear that women are more likely than men to become faunal and archaeobotanical analysts (ZEDER 1997), and, consequently, they are often viewed as technical specialists who work on the projects of other scholars rather than as project leaders. Moreover, women are still underrepresented as invited discussants at national conferences (CHAMBLEE, MILLS 2001), they are less often cited by men than by other women (BEAUDRY 1994), and there are skewed gender patterns in such

things as faculty representation at the most prestigious departments, grant and publication success, and prominence within certain regional traditions of archaeology (NELSON *et al.* 1994) that indicate that not everything is quite as homogeneously open as the more general statistics imply. Hence, although great progress has been made over the last couple of decades in rectifying practices of gender discrimination, there remain some subtle barriers to be overcome.

## The State of Theory and Method in American Archaeology

In contrast to the late 1960s and 1970s, when the positivist, ecologically oriented, neo-evolutionary intellectual framework of the “New Archaeology” came to dominate large segments (although by no means all) of American archaeology, there is currently no hegemonic “school” or theoretical paradigm guiding research. Rather, there is a tremendous, and often contentious, diversity of approaches being explored. Some view this as a regrettable fragmentation of consensus, while others view it as a healthy and exciting period of experimentation. The binary scheme of “Processual” and “Post-Processual” (or, more accurately, “Anti-Processual”) archaeologies has become one of the more common ways of imposing a rather simple-minded categorical order on this diversity. Processual, in this sense, means those positions that trace their intellectual genealogy to the erstwhile “New Archaeology” of the 1960s, through some combination of positivist epistemology, ecological orientation, or neo-evolutionist explanatory framework. “Post-Processual” implies simply a diverse set of reactions against one or more of these features without any necessary adherence to a common alternative approach. In fact, these polarizing labels are little more than political slogans mobilized in careerist polemics as individuals navigate the institutional terrain outlined earlier. They do little to clarify the genuine state of the complex theoretical landscape in American archaeology and they cannot be considered coherent or useful analytical terms. Consequently, in order to avoid further reifying these rhetorical illusions, I generally avoid using these terms, opting instead for a more relational understanding of the range of theoretical positions. As I suggested, these diverse positional fields often intersect in complex ways, rather than lining up neatly on either side of a great divide. Hence, in the brief space available here, I will simply attempt to introduce some of the approaches and research frontiers that are currently popular, along with a few key references for those who wish to undertake more detailed exploration.

A substantial number of American archaeologists do still maintain a nuanced adherence to many of the theoretical and epistemological positions that were dominant during the 1970s, albeit usually without the doctrinaire insistence upon the hypothetico-deductive, nomological aspects. These conservative approaches are now most notably associated with the programs at, for example, the universities of Michigan and Arizona, although they are by no means exclusive to these institutions. The neo-evolutionist perspective underlying much of the research conducted by

archaeologists of this persuasion has been heavily criticized and rejected by two quite different groups of archaeologists. On the one hand is a large body of scholars of quite different theoretical orientations, but who share a common interest in human intentionality and agency and in historical contingency. They see the neo-evolutionary framework (derived from the particular evolutionary theories of Leslie White, Elwin Service, and their followers) as being a rather clumsy and outmoded intellectual dead end. They characterize neo-evolutionism as being overly static, as indulging in a kind of fetishism of essentialist stage typologies, as being excessively homogenizing and ahistorical, as being structurally overdetermined and unable to accommodate human agency, and as lacking genuine explanatory power for understanding social and cultural transformations. Much effort has been expended by such scholars in trying to expose the lingering implicit neo-evolutionary premises underlying many forms of explanation and trying to develop new ways of explaining historical transformations without reverting to the older sets of universalizing stage categories (e.g. see YOFFEE 1993). For many, the word "evolution" (in anything but a strict biological context) has come to be viewed with extreme suspicion and is avoided in discussions of culture.

Paradoxically, another strong critique of the neo-evolutionary approach has also been launched recently by some archaeologists with an even more fervent faith in the explanatory power of evolutionary theory. This "school", known as "neo-Darwinian", stems from an approach first developed by Robert Dunnell (1980) at the University of Washington. Neo-Darwinians claim that neo-evolutionists have simply misunderstood evolutionary theory and have adopted a Spencerian rather than Darwinian model of selection. Hence, this approach attempts to reassert a Darwinian orthodoxy and champions the universal applicability of Darwinian biological evolutionary concepts to explain all aspects of culture and society in terms of processes such as selection and drift (see, for example, BARTON, CLARK 1997, TELTNER 1995). Neo-Darwinians generally seek to purge such things as human intentionality from consideration as causal factors in their explanations of change. Neo-Darwinian archaeology has had almost no impact in Europe yet and, to date, it has attracted only a modest following in American archaeology, being largely confined to the University of Washington and several departments at which some of Dunnell's former students are now faculty (for example, at the universities of Hawaii and New Mexico). However, its proponents have been quite zealous advocates, organizing multiple sessions at national meetings, publishing prolifically, and managing to secure editorial influence in prominent national journals (such as *American Antiquity*). Critics, of whom there are many, have dismissed neo-Darwinian evolutionism as little more than the revived corpse of long-discredited social Darwinism disguised in new clothes. Some have also claimed that it looks suspiciously like another form of sociobiology and that its adherents exhibit a kind of fundamentalist mentality that generates polemic rather than dialogue. All of these charges are, of course, hotly denied by the neo-Darwinians.

Marxism, at least in its orthodox forms, never had a particularly strong following in American archaeology, and its appeal appears to have suffered greatly following the demise of the Soviet Union (in a striking, and curiously bizarre, example of the effects of geopolitical events upon intellectual trends). On the other hand, it is clear that Marxist concepts (whether recognized or not) have certainly had a major impact upon most domains of research such that many Marxist insights and terminology (especially those deriving from the cultural Marxism of such scholars as Gramsci, Thompson, etc.) are now commonplace in the discourse of those who would not otherwise identify themselves as Marxist. Among the more self-consciously Marxist archaeologists have been Tom Patterson (1991) of the University of California at Riverside (working in South America), Antonio Gilman (1989) of California State University at Northridge (working in Spain), Randall McGuire (1992a) of the State University of New York at Binghamton (working on North American Indians), and Mark Leone and a number of his students (e.g. see LEONE, POTTER 1999) at the University of Maryland. The latter group has been a remarkably strong and long-lasting pocket of Marxist analysts in the otherwise staunchly anti-theoretical, intensely empiricist field of "historical archaeology". In the American context, "historical archaeology" usually has meant the study of European colonists in America (and sometimes their impact upon indigenous peoples). With a few exceptions (such as James Deetz's pioneering use of structuralism in archaeological interpretation back in the 1970s), this has generally been a somewhat insular field with a heavy (some would say an almost fetishistic) focus on the study of objects and object typologies, and an antipathy to larger theoretical trends in Anthropology. Historical archaeologists have their own national society (the Society for Historical Archaeology) and their own journal (the *Journal of Historical Archaeology*). However, in recent years one has begun to witness an opening up of historical archaeology to larger theoretical debates and a growing realization of the immense potential that the field has (given its rich textual and material data base) for addressing issues of wider interest to Anthropology, such as colonialism, the transformation of identity, and the workings of capitalism (e.g. see BEAUDRY 1988, CUSICK 1998, LEONE, POTTER 1999, LITTLE 1992, RUBERTONE 2001).

Aside from the two evolutionisms and Marxism, most other American archaeologists in recent years have eschewed the attempt to propound sweeping "theories of everything" and have focused upon more modest goals of trying to improve understanding within more restricted domains of theory, practice, or regional history. Indeed, in line with broader trends within the social sciences, there has been a growing suspicion of the hegemonic claims of "metatheory" of all forms. Hence, in the rest of this article, I will content myself with pointing out a few of the fields that have attracted a good deal of recent attention and where interesting new developments seem to be happening.

—Ethnoarchaeology is a very active field that has seen significant recent advances in both methods and

theoretical development and in which American scholars have played a major (indeed, a foundational) role. By ethnoarchaeology I mean ethnographic field research among living peoples with particular attention to the social understanding of material culture and the ultimate goal of developing general material culture theory that may be useful for archaeological interpretation. The necessity for such research was first articulated by Patty Jo Watson back in the 1950s (under the name of "action archaeology"). There were a number of projects undertaken, especially in Latin America, during the 1960s and 1970s, but it has only been in the past couple of decades that the field has begun to come of age as a coherent set of research practices with a substantial body of representative projects. Indeed, the first major synthetic textbook on ethnoarchaeology appeared only this year (DAVID, KRAMER 2001). Unfortunately, some of the early studies were undertaken by archaeologists whose comprehension of ethnographic participant-observation techniques was rather underdeveloped, resulting in the production of sweeping generalizations based upon impossibly brief periods of fieldwork. However, there now exist a number of major projects with the kind of long-term immersion necessary to begin to penetrate the complexities of social life and culture. The Kalinga project in the Philippines executed by William Longacre and his students at the University of Arizona, the work in India and the Near East by Carol Kramer of the University of Arizona, the Luo project in Africa undertaken by Ingrid Herbich and Michael Dietler of the University of Chicago, and the Camerounian project carried out by Nic David and his students at the University of Calgary are all good examples of American (and, in the last case, Canadian) contributions to what has now become an international field of research. Among the themes that have proven particularly fruitful subjects of empirical examination and theoretical exploration are the nature and meaning of material culture style as a social phenomenon, the operation and social embeddedness of ceramic systems, the nature of social boundaries and ethnicity, and the production and meaning of settlement organization (e.g. see DEBOER 1991, DIETLER, HERBICH 1998, HERBICH 1987, KRAMER 1997, LONGACRE, SKIBO 1994, STARK 1998).

—On the philosophical front, as the unitary vision of science underlying the positivist epistemology of American archaeology in the 1970s has come under increasing skepticism, epistemology has again emerged as a major focus of debate. To be sure, there are many scholars who have maintained a steadfast adherence to the positivist program. But many others have attempted to adapt to archaeological practice versions of scientific realism (e.g. GIBBON 1989) or other positions grounded in the evolving broader field of "science studies". While it would be difficult to characterize any trend as a position of even moderate consensus, there has been something of a retreat on the wings from both doctrinaire empiricism and from some of the more extreme constructivist and/or relativist positions popular a few years ago to a somewhat more optimistic espousal of various kinds of dialectics or of "limited objectivity" grounded in the

evidential constraints emerging from the "disunity of science" position within science studies (e.g. see GALISON, STUMP 1996, PINSKY, WYLIE 1989, WYLIE 2000). Given the comparative anthropological foundations of American archaeology, the role of analogy in archaeological interpretation has been a longstanding issue of epistemological debate. Not surprisingly, this has continued to be a subject of recent discussion, with considerable attention given to the types of analogical reasoning (e.g. formal versus relational) and to the improvement of the source side of analogies. Equally unsurprising is that much of this discussion has emerged in the context of the justification of ethnoarchaeological research (e.g. see DAVID, KRAMER 2001, WYLIE 1985).

—One of the things that has led to the crumbling of confidence in the positivist position has been a growing interest in the socio-historical analysis of the development and functioning of archaeology and, following the seminal article by Trigger (1984), the realization of the often uncomfortable links that exist between archaeology and nationalist and colonialist projects. Hence, there has been a desire to understand how archaeology has been implicated in the politics of identity and memory, and how archaeological practice has been influenced by this relationship. American analysts have focused their attention on both North American archaeology and innumerable other situations around the world (e.g. see ARNOLD 1990, DIETLER 1994, KOHL, FAWCETT 1998, PATTERSON 2001). To date, most such studies have been relatively brief treatments, but two outstanding book length analyses are Susan Marchand's (1996) study of the institutional context of the rise of German Romantic Hellenism and the creation of Classical archaeology and Nadia Abu El-Haj's (2001) ethnographic study of Israeli archaeology. The engagement in this kind of political and ethical analysis has been further stimulated, for Americanist archaeologists in particular, by the emergence of a highly politicized response by Native Americans to the archaeology of their ancestors. This has resulted in the passage of legislation (known as NAGPRA) by the United States government mandating the return of Native American bones and archaeological objects by universities and museums. Most archaeologists are now obligated to work in close collaboration with Native American groups in order to obtain permission to excavate and they have been forced to become increasingly sensitive to Native American perspectives on the past (e.g., see MCLAUGHLIN 1998, MCGUIRE 1992b, THOMAS 2000).

—Another major development in American archaeology in recent years has been the mobilization and validation of a feminist perspective. This has included, on the one hand, a critical analysis of the status of women within the discipline and the political project of rectifying problems of bias and discrimination and, on the other hand, an attempt to operationalize a feminist perspective in the interpretation of the past. The latter project has proved considerably more difficult than the former. Critiques of inherent gender bias in interpretation were relatively



easy to mount, and much of the early work consisted primarily of this. However, replacing these flawed interpretations with improved ones that benefited from developments in feminist theory proved more difficult and contentious. Particularly in periods of deeper prehistory, without recourse to texts, the empirical problems of constructing a gendered vision of activities and relations were recognized to be often severe, especially if one rejected, as some feminists have, current ethnographic analogies as a basis for modeling the past. In any case, this continues to be an active and lively area of debate in American archaeology, and one can point to both a number of excellent studies in which feminist perspectives have enriched interpretation considerably (mostly where texts or iconographic evidence can supplement the other forms of material culture) and a growing sophistication in the nuanced deployment of different strands of feminist theory (e.g. see NELSON *et al.* 1994, WRIGHT 1996).

—As the interests of archaeologists have turned away from older neo-evolutionary explanations of social change, there have been various attempts to rethink ways of understanding social organization and political process. This has involved attempts, on one hand, to reconceptualize structures of power in more flexible and subtle ways, such as the discussion of heterarchy and hierarchy provoked by Carole Crumley's work (e.g. see EHRENREICH *et al.* 1995), and, on the other hand, attempts to better comprehend political action and agency and the role of ritual in politics. It is in this latter context that feasting has arisen as an increasingly popular focus of attention. Although barely taken seriously a decade ago, rituals of food consumption and the politics of commensality have been invoked recently in a wide variety of contexts in North and South America, Africa, Asia, and Europe as central arenas of political action and there has been a great deal of effort devoted to both the empirical documentation and identification of feasts and the theorization of their operation (e.g. see BLITZ 1993, CLARK, BLAKE 1994, DIETLER 1990, DIETLER, HAYDEN 2001, POTTER 2000).

—Another area of major activity in American archaeology has been the study of colonialism. In part, this has been due to an awakening of historical archaeologists to the potential of their data to contribute to an understanding of European colonialism and its effects on both indigenous colonized peoples and colonizers. To a certain extent, the celebration of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the voyage of Columbus to America in 1992 and the debates this set off served as a catalyst to much reflection and research (see THOMAS 1989-1992). However, it has also been a result of broader concerns within the discipline of Anthropology since the 1970s, and contributions have been forthcoming from archaeologists working on a variety of colonial situations, including many precapitalist empires. Research has centered around things as specific as the impact of colonialism on Native Americans and the understanding of American slave plantations to broader theoretical issues of conceptualizing macro-structures of power, the role

of consumption in colonial processes, and the comparative structure of empires (e.g. see CUSICK 1998, DIETLER 1999, PATTERSON 1991, ROGERS 1990, ROGERS, WILSON 1993, RUBERTONE 2001, SCHORTMAN, URBAN 1992, SCHREIBER 1992, SINGLETON 1995, SINOPOLI 1994). World-systems theory has had an important impact on studies of colonialism and empires by American archaeologists (e.g. see ALGAZE 1993, SCHORTMAN, URBAN 1992), but it has also been heavily criticized by those advocating less structurally determined ways of understanding colonial processes (e.g. see DIETLER 1999, STEIN 1999, WELLS 1999). This continues to be a very active research frontier generating a large number of empirical studies and theoretical discussions.

—Another very active new area for American archaeology that combines both methodological and theoretical developments has been the proliferation of "landscape" studies. The term landscape tends to get used in a variety of often imprecise ways, but in general it implies an emphasis on regional spatial analysis, often with a phenomenological component. It has been associated with two methodological features in particular that have become omnipresent in American archaeology: innovations in systematic regional survey and the use of GIS and other computerized cartographic databases and representational systems. The combination of these features has produced some powerful new analyses of regional phenomena, such as the colonial transformation of landscapes (e.g. see ALCOCK 1993) or long-term relational analyses of urban spaces, regional ecology, and socio-political processes (e.g. KOUCHOUKOS 1998). However, it should also be said that the enthusiasm for such analysis has sometimes led to overinterpretations of surface data that need to be tested by more extensive long-term excavation.

Clearly, in such a short piece, I have been able to do little more than point to a few themes that have struck me as particularly active and important foci of research and debate in contemporary American archaeology. This is a vast academic domain with thousands of scholars pursuing diverse projects, and my choices are obviously constricted by personal interests and my own position within professional networks. It should be obvious as well that I have left out far more than I have included. There are, for example, exciting new developments in technical analysis (such as DNA identification and bone chemistry, soil micromorphology, paleobotanical analysis, ceramic contents analysis, etc.) that deserve mention as well as a host of debates about the first peopling of the Americas, the rapidly evolving decipherment of Maya inscriptions and the interpretation of Maya political relations, the development and intensification of agriculture, the nature and significance of craft specialization, the interpretation of funerary ritual, and the interpretation of Cahokia and other Native American mound sites, among many other things that merit exploration (e.g., see DILLEHAY 2000, HOUSTON *et al.* 2000, KIRCH 1994, MILNER 1998, WAILES 1996). Moreover, there are a variety

of other positions in the theoretical and epistemological debates that I have alluded to that deserve a fuller hearing. Nevertheless, despite its inadequacies, I hope that this brief exercise has served at least as a practical introduction to navigating and translating the complex world of contemporary American archaeology. I hope, in particular, that it helps to put the intellectual terrain of its theoretical debates and research themes in a more comprehensible perspective by providing a working understanding of its institutional landscape. This latter is all the more difficult for foreign colleagues to acquire (and hence mysterious), because it is the kind of implicitly shared knowledge that is rarely voiced or put in print.

## Appendix

For those seeking to penetrate more profoundly the most recent research in American archaeology, I have appended an annotated list of a number of the most widely read and cited journals in which American archaeologists publish their work. By perusing these (as well as the recent book lists of the American university presses and the programs of the national meetings of the major scholarly societies), one can gain a good sense of the state of the field and what to pursue.

Journals of note: *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* (one of the prime journals for interesting theoretical issues and debates in American archaeology; widely read and cited). *American Anthropologist* (the journal of the American Anthropological Association; perhaps the most widely read and cited venue for American archaeologists). *Current Anthropology* (a journal published by the University of Chicago Press with international participation and a distinctive critical response format; widely cited). *American Antiquity* (the journal of the Society for American Archaeology; no longer the venue of choice for

theoretical discussions that it was during the 1960s and 1970s; but lots of regional coverage of Americanist research; many methodological articles). *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* (a journal dedicated to reviews of theoretical and methodological advances in different domains). *Annual Review of Anthropology* (a yearly publication providing very useful comprehensive review essays on the recent literature in different domains of anthropological research, including a good deal of archaeology). *American Journal of Archaeology* (journal of the Archaeological Institute of America; mostly classics and art history). *Journal of World Prehistory* (an American based journal with largely, though not exclusively, American authors providing synthetic summaries of recent research in regions around the world). *Journal of Field Archaeology* (publishes mainly empirical research results). *Journal of Historical Archaeology* (the journal of the Society for Historical Archaeology; much about colonial America). *Latin American Antiquity* (another journal of the Society for American Archaeology; articles about Latin America by North, Central, and South American archaeologists; in English and Spanish; these would formerly have been published in *American Antiquity*). *Journal of Archaeological Science* (prime American journal for archaeometry research).

Web addresses of the major national scholarly societies for American archaeologists, with information about conferences, etc.: American Anthropological Association (<http://www.aaanet.org/>); Society for American Archaeology (<http://www.saa.org/>); Archaeological Institute of America (<http://www.archaeological.org/>); Society for Historical Archaeology (<http://www.sha.org/>).

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