

Culture



Some Postwar Theoretical Trends in U.S. Archaeology

Thomas C. Patterson

Volume 6, Number 1, 1986

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1078440ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1078440ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA),
formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne
d'Ethnologie

ISSN

0229-009X (print)

2563-710X (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Patterson, T. (1986). Some Postwar Theoretical Trends in U.S. Archaeology.
Culture, 6(1), 43–54. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1078440ar>

Article abstract

An analysis of the theoretical tendencies of U.S. archaeology in the last forty years aims at demonstrating that archeology, as other disciplines, is closely related to broader intellectual movements or paradigms.

Tous droits réservés © Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne
d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society /
Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie, 1986

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit
(including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be
viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal,
Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to
promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

Some Postwar Theoretical Trends in U.S. Archaeology

Thomas C. Patterson
Temple University

An analysis of the theoretical tendencies of U.S. archaeology in the last forty years aims at demonstrating that archeology, as other disciplines, is closely related to broader intellectual movements or paradigms.

L'examen des courants théoriques sous-jacents à l'archéologie américaine des quarante dernières années vise à démontrer que l'archéologie, tout comme les autres disciplines scientifiques, est indissociable des paradigmes ou mouvements intellectuels de l'époque.

Scientific ideas should be treated neither as independent of different social structures and historical processes, nor as epiphenomena of those structures and processes.... Analysis of social and cognitive factors cannot be restricted only to ideas within a particular scientific discipline, or to the social character of that discipline. The reconstruction must also reach beyond that discipline to ideas in both closely related fields and also to ideas in the wider social, political, and philosophical movements. In addition, it must also consider social factors in related sciences, and in the wider social and political developments (Hammond, 1977: 1-2).

Archaeology, like history and the other social sciences, is not radically disjoined from politics (Patterson, 1985). The linkages have been immediately obvious and direct in some instances, subtle and opaque in others. One important linkage between archaeology and wider social and political movements occurs at the theoretical level. The purposes of this paper are (1) to indicate that the underlying premises and ideas of the postwar theoretical tendencies of U.S. archaeologists are features of broader intellectual movements or paradigms that are incorporated in similar ways in other disciplines; (2) to outline briefly the major features of these perspectives; and (3) to suggest ways in which we might begin to examine how these perspectives reflect, resonate with, and give voice to the views of groups in the wider society.

In the interwar years of the 1920s and the 1930s, the dominant metaphor, but not the only one, for describing the development of ancient societies might well have been that of a bush with complexly intertwined branches; just such a shrub appeared in A.L. Kroeber's, *Anthropology*, that interpretive summary of the state of the field published in 1948. That same year, however, a new metaphor for describing the evolution of civilization appeared: instead of growing like branches on a bush, civilization evolved or progressed through a

ladder-like succession of stages reflecting changes in the dominant mode of subsistence and form of sociopolitical organization (Bennett, 1948; Steward, 1949). The body of ideas represented by the metaphor was hegemonic by the early 1950s and retained that position for more than a decade.

The new archaeology rose to prominence in the late 1960s; however, it never had the hegemonic appeal of the cultural evolutionists. Its metaphors were the systems, processes, and mechanisms of the emerging hi-tech machine-organisms and general laws that explained their behavior. Its avant-gardist advocates, emphasizing the innovative features of their program, stressed their break with the past; they saw themselves on the frontiers of a future with unlimited promise and potential (Flannery, 1973; Leone, 1972). By the mid 1970s, however, their optimism began to wane; their prophecies of major breakthroughs and limitless progress had not materialized. Nevertheless, the new archaeology matured slowly in the 1970s, but the sense of unity that characterized its formative years could not be sustained. It divided and reconstituted itself. Tentative, unsure of itself and which direction to follow, it returned to philosophy for clarity and guidance. In 1980, former vanguardists proclaimed it was no longer avant garde but mainstream, merely one of several competing approaches (Binford, 1982; Renfrew, 1982). Its metaphors had shifted and were now more firmly and consciously rooted in both the economic and biological forms of marginal utility theory: societies followed optimizing or satisfying strategies to adapt or evolve; catastrophes occurred when they failed to do so. Societies were no longer perceived to function and develop as smoothly and efficiently as they had earlier.

Other archaeologists also recognized the lack of consensus, the diversity of approaches that crystallized in the late 1970s (Dunnell, 1984; Kohl, 1981; Trigger, 1982, 1984). There is even substantial agreement about the identity and intellectual ancestry of the new theoretical tendencies. One, critical of the images created by the positivist perspective and reductionism of mainstream processual archaeology, is rooted in structuralist thought. Its metaphors are signs, symbols, codes, and contexts. The proponents of this symbolic or structuralist archaeology are concerned with the generative principles that unified particular cultures in the past and gave meaning to peoples living in those specific historical circumstances (Leone, 1982a, 1982b). Thus, they threaten to destroy the false divide between history and process raised by the developmentalists after the war, a dichotomy sustained by the new archaeologists (Kohl, 1984).

The other new theoretical tendency of the archaeologists of the late 1970s builds on Marxist social thought; its materialism is dialectical, not mechanical or vulgar. Its proponents accept "...a conflictual, as opposed to consensual theory of society in which the conscious political actions of social groups or classes remain central and paramount however firmly or loosely rooted they may be to their 'economic base'" (Kohl, 1981: 109). They, too, reject the distinction drawn by the processual archaeologists between history and process. They argue, instead, that the structure of a society is the product of specific historical circumstances and, further, that the structure, as constituted at any moment in the process, produces and shapes that continuing history. They explain the specific historicity of a social formation and its development by making transparent the interrelationships of structure and history. Structure and history account for each other. This eliminates distinctions based on the opposition between synchrony and diachrony. It also calls into question the utility of the synchrony/diachrony opposition sustained by both the processualist and structuralist archaeologists.

Without specifying details, this fairly internalist account of recent theoretical tendencies makes it clear that the perspectives held by archaeologists share features or resonate with views of other groups in the wider society. In practical terms, what this means is that archaeologists respond to 'ideas that are in the air,' rejecting, transforming, or incorporating them into their own world views, often based on second—or third—hand impressions. Archaeologists live in the world like other people. They watch TV, read magazines, and talk with friends and colleagues about what's happening at work and in the rest of the world. As a result, they cannot escape the milieu they live in. Their participation in that milieu may have more to do with how they experience the day-to-day situations, pressures, activities, dilemmas, and contradictions associated with life in the United States during the late twentieth century than with conscious motivation, intention, or will. In fact, their common-sense impressions of what is happening may not even accurately reflect the relationships that underlie the empirical reality of that society in the global context. What this means is that archaeologists, like other people, are never completely aware or conscious of how their actions, values, and views are shaped and constrained by class and culture.

So far, I have indicated briefly what major intellectual movements are reflected by the post-war theoretical tendencies in U.S. archaeology and have suggested how ideas derived from wider

intellectual, social, or political movements are incorporated into the field. Let us now examine the theoretical foundations of these tendencies and social contexts in which they developed.

Cultural Evolutionism

The interest of U.S. archaeologists in cultural evolutionism after World War II derives from a concern with economic growth or development. The proponents of this view attempted to understand cultural change by focusing on those economic arrangements that determined development and shaped other aspects of social organization. They built on a model of society derived from the classical political economists, who, from Adam Smith to John Stuart Mill, crystallized the concept of civil society as an autonomous, self-regulating economy, isolated from the political sphere. Civil society was capable of progress, conceptualized in terms of a succession of stages characterized by particular modes of subsistence and associated forms of morality and political institutions. Since labour was the source of value, the motors for development were the increased division of labour and the spread of exchange (Clarke, 1982).

In their discussions during the 1950s, the archaeological advocates of cultural evolutionism generally held culture and nature to be conceptually distinct spheres. They saw people exploiting or using natural resources in order to achieve certain ends; the appropriation of nature occurred in the context of various institutional arrangements that structured the organization of work and the use of tools. From this viewpoint, change occurred when new tools and institutional forms appeared as a result of independent invention or borrowing. Occasionally, some of them adopted a weak Neo-Malthusian position, suggesting that change was a response to an increasingly precarious balance of population with agricultural resources, going so far as treating population as an independent variable.

These archaeologists rejected empiricist perspectives which viewed culture in relativistic terms as learned modes of behavior that were patterned and socially transmitted. They dealt, instead, with a succession of complex stages. These, in fact, were ideal types characterized by particular techniques of subsistence and functionally related forms of social organization and ideas. The institutional forms of integration, specific to a particular culture type, not only reflected its distinctive economic arrangements but also recapitulated, structurally, earlier forms of organization—*i.e.*, families, neighbourhoods, and village communities also occur in types with state forms of organization.

They were functionalists who accepted the distinction between synchronic and diachronic forms of analysis. Their goal was diachronic: to study how cultures changed. Their perspective was regional and comparative rather than particular or universal. To accomplish their goal, they separated the study of culture change or growth from the study of history. They were concerned with *evolutionary* rather than *historical* changes. The former were cumulative, reflecting the natural growth or unfolding of the potential inherent in the culture type itself, the gradual and continuous accumulation of small incremental shifts. When the potential of the stage was finally exhausted, a new, qualitatively different culture type with its own distinctive economic, political, and social arrangements developed rapidly. Historical changes, on the other hand, were conceptualized in terms of unique events, accidents that impinged on the normal growth and development of culture.

The archaeologists re-introduced a comparative evolutionary perspective into historical discourse. They were concerned with explaining the similarities of development in different cultural traditions rather than their unique or divergent features. They sought cross-cultural, cause and effect regularities. Their methodology, in the words of Julian Steward (1955: 88) was "...avowedly scientific and generalizing rather than historical and particularizing." They proposed to use science to replace or update historical knowledge formulated in terms of the empiricist perspective that had dominated anthropological thought in the interwar years. The scientific methodology they advocated was derived ultimately from the logical positivists, who stressed the importance of clear concepts, procedures, and standards for measuring performance. The rationality of their approach resonated with the growing professionalism of the field and with the demand for scientific knowledge about the development of civilization. The scientism of their claims must be viewed in the context of the nation-wide debates surrounding the formation and development of the National Science Foundation and the levels of support it would grant to the social sciences in general and archaeology in particular. The first NSF grants to archaeologists supported cultural evolutionist research.

During the 1950s, these archaeologists produced detailed accounts of the succession of culture types in Peru, Mexico, and the Near East. Their studies supported an elaborate conception of world history: in these areas, identical developmental processes and succession of stages led to the formation of archaic civilizations and culminated, ultimately, in their domination by the West

(Steward, 1950: 102-105). Their perspective of cultural evolution was shared by a number of economists who were involved in the reconstruction of the Japanese and West European economies in the late 1940s and early 1950s and, later, with capitalist economic development in the Third World (*cf.* Rostow, 1960). The ascendancy of the archaeologists who advocated a comparative, cultural evolutionary approach coincided with the rise and crystallization of the so-called "growth coalition" in the United States after the war and with the political and economic hegemony of the United States (Wolfe, 1981). The interests of this coalition resonated with those of the state. The policies of the state, from the end of the war through the early 1960s, were decisively influenced by the interests of international monopoly and finance capital and the Eastern Establishment.

Criticisms of the cultural evolutionary approach began to appear in the late 1950s. They focused on three aspects. First, they questioned the functionalist assumptions, the presumed association of given technologies with particular forms of social organization and ideas (Adams, 1960; Rowe, 1962). Second, they demanded greater specification of the relation between the economic and political spheres of particular types (Adams, 1956). Third, they attacked separating the study of cultural processes from history and advocated, instead, studies that synthesized and explained, in a convincing fashion, the historical detail of the real sequences (Adams, 1960).

These criticisms appeared at the same time as critiques of the other social sciences: political science, sociology, and economic growth and development studies (Preston, 1982). The content of the various commentaries was remarkably similar; all stressed the importance of historical specificity. The crucial question became how to promote capitalist development in the face of intense and increasingly frequent social and political reactions against it. Studies of particular culture types or their succession did not provide a satisfactory answer to this policy question. What was needed was specific historical information that would permit the identification and secure the political dominance of those groups in the Third World that would promote capitalist development. Neither the cultural evolutionists, however, nor the early economic growth studies came to grips with the real events and transformations of the historical record. They were unable to deal with the mechanisms that produced the conditions and balance of forces specific to particular societies (Bock, 1963; Smith, 1973).

The New Archaeology

The new archaeology consists of several autonomous strands of thought, which ultimately are theoretically incompatible (Gándara, 1980, 1981). These were identified in the early 1970s as attempts to formulate general laws of human behavior or to determine how human populations obeyed the laws of general systems theory (Flannery, 1973); to these, one might add those reductionist attempts of the late 1970s and early 1980s to explain human social behavior in terms of general evolutionary theory and sociobiology (Dunnell, 1980). In spite of the internal critiques, ruptures, emendations, and supplements that have occurred in the new archaeology, what has held the various theoretical tendencies together is a common reaction against the traditional empiricism attacked by the cultural evolutionists and a shared theory of science and explanation based on the tenets of logical positivism. While there was some confusion, inconsistency, and ambiguity in their approaches, the advocates of the new archaeology, in effect, adopted a logical positivist theory of science "...to define a nomempiricist alternative to traditionalism without realizing that positivism is itself an empiricist theory of science" (Wylie, 1982a).

Their logical positivism meant that the methodological procedures of the natural sciences could be adapted directly to archaeology and that explanation should be causal, subsuming individual cases under more general laws. The former implied that the phenomena of human subjectivity, volition, and will provide no barriers to treating human social conduct as an object; the latter, that explanations which attempt to account for facts in terms of intentions, goals, or purposes should either be rejected or transformed into causal explanations. Thus, certain kinds of systems theory explanations—those involving notions of function, purpose, and organic wholes but not intentionality, the types of systems explanations common in the life sciences but not the social sciences—also conformed to the precepts of their theory of science.

The form of explanation demanded by the underlying theory of science had several important implications. First, the explanations were trans-historical in the sense that they lacked reference to specific historical episodes. Consequently, the new archaeologists retained the distinction made by the cultural evolutionists between the study of socio-cultural process and the study of history, and only the former constituted real or genuine scientific activity. Second, when they successfully eliminated intentionality from explanations, people were

transformed from active agents making their own history to apathetic consumers or passive recipients, responding to processes and events beyond their control; if one word was characteristic of the new archaeology, it was *adaptation*: the activities of a society change continuously in response to and to keep step with the constantly changing processes and forces of the natural and social environments. Third, when intentionality was not completely removed from their explanations, reference was made to underlying forms of motivation or qualities presumed to be inherent in the object of inquiry—*e.g.*, the natural tendency of societies to move towards equilibrium or to exhibit optimizing or maximizing behaviour.

The new archaeology was firmly grounded in functionalism. This was most apparent in the systems theory tendency but was also true of the other currents as well. Most of its advocates employed a systemic notion of culture or society—two concepts they occasionally conflated and often used inconsistently or ambiguously. These systems were labelled cultural or sociocultural. They consisted of functionally interrelated components, often conceptualized as technological, political, or ideological subsystems. These relationships were characterized as flows of energy or information among the various subsystems. Some adopted the idea that the components were organized hierarchically (Flannery, 1972); others were less specific, viewing them, instead, merely as functionally integrated (Binford, 1972: 22-24). The idea that the components were organized hierarchically focused attention on the question of how the system as a whole was managed or controlled. Was its overall stability determined ultimately by the economic base, as the cultural evolutionists suggested? Or was system management the function of another component? A number of the new archaeologists clearly rejected determination by the economic base and located it, instead, in the political superstructure which they conceptualized as a regulator, controlling the flow of information between lower-order components. The state's natural role was to maintain equilibrium, to protect the social system from systemic pathologies—like meddling, usurpation, or hypercoherence—which promoted stress and instability (Flannery, 1972: 413-414).

The new archaeologists also accepted the distinction between synchrony and diachrony and, by conceptualizing cultural systems in terms of adaptation, they tacitly assigned logical priority to the former. Thus, their theory of change was, in fact, a theory of how social order or stability was disturbed or disrupted. It was necessary to establish how the system functioned before the

forces or pressures impinging on the system and the mechanisms and transformations they produced could be adequately explained. By formulating adaptation in terms of the continually changing ways the system maintained harmony with its social and physical environment, they postulated, in effect, that systemic change was gradual and continuous, an internal response to the stresses produced by outside pressures and forces. They also removed the culture/nature opposition of the cultural evolutionists by uniting elements of both into an ecosystem, where patterned interchanges of energy occurred. Thus, they atomized the cultural system, stripping particular productive forces and relations of their social and political contexts. The effect was that the traits or components of a cultural system, its structures and institutions, were conceptualized as reflecting the optimal or best-compromise solutions at any given moment to the problems produced by its environment (Gould and Lewontin, 1979).

They also adopted the cultural evolutionists' notion that cultural systems became increasingly more complex—*i.e.*, structurally differentiated—as they passed from one stage or level of development to the next. This meant that there were more components and more levels in the hierarchical organization of the system. Differentiation increased the stability and efficiency of that organization and, hence, of the system as a whole. The question was how did this differentiation or fragmentation along socially beneficial and adaptive liners occur? Their answers typically invoked capacities, conditions, processes, or mechanisms that were not assigned to the system or that operated at a more fundamental level than that of the system itself (Savage, 1977).

The new archaeology was born and nurtured in the optimism and confidence of the New Frontier and Great Society years. It came into prominence during the Nixon years of the late 1960s and early 1970s, which marked the end of the longest period of sustained economic growth in the history of the United States. It matured, reconstituting itself during the crises of the 1970s. It was not an isolated phenomenon, for similar movements occurred at the same time in fields as diverse as English, geography, physics, and management.

From its formative years through the mid 1970s, the new archaeology's center of gravity was situated in the academic community; as the labour market changed, other centres developed in various state agencies. The new archaeologists were, in effect, state functionaries practically involved as university professors and as technicians and bureaucrats at various levels in the state apparatus.

Their concerns with methodological issues and theoretical rigour, even their adoption of systems theory, resonated with those of a state apparatus that sought standardized concepts and procedures that could be applied uniformly with little or no regard for historical context or specificity. At professional meetings, they portrayed themselves as scientists, analysts of the archaeological record who provided knowledge of a purely instrumental, value-free form. As citizens and state functionaries, they were affected by forces and pressures that were often hard to comprehend and beyond their control. Their research touched on broader questions: how was social order maintained and why did social and political stability seem to be ensured only by continuous growth? These were questions also asked by state.

The investigations of the new archaeologists served indirectly to legitimate the activities of the state. For example, during the Nixon era, the new archaeologists were interested in the role of information control hierarchies and bureaucracies in the formation of states. From their perspective, the natural function of the state was to keep all the variables of a society within appropriate ranges, ranges that maintained order and did not threaten the survival of the system itself. This provided a form of scientific validation for the decision-making apparatus of a state that maintained a high degree of autonomy in the Nixon period, that increasingly promoted the interests of Core Culture national capitalists at the expense of those of the internationalist Eastern Establishment, and whose domestic and foreign policies provoked intense protests both at home and abroad.

The theoretical weaknesses of the new archaeology began to emerge in the mid 1970s. At the time, criticisms, largely internal to the new archaeology community, focused on three features. First, they debated which form of explanation, covering law or systems, was superior—an exercise that persists to the present day (Flannery, 1973; LeBlanc, 1973; Salmon, 1978). Second, they questioned the equilibrium and gradualist assumptions inherent in the notion of adaptation and functionalist theories of change (Athens, 1977; Dunnell, 1980: 75-82). Third, they questioned the ability of functionalist theories of change to deal with structural differentiation or the sudden appearance of new forms of organization in situations where the continual accumulation of small, incremental changes suddenly gave way to rapid qualitative transformations (Renfrew, 1978).

These criticisms coincided with the successive political and economic crises that wracked the United States in the mid 1970s. The Watergate

affair toppled a president and tarnished the image of the state. Fiscal policies, which threatened the stability of the international finance and trade structures, produced devaluations of the dollar. The 1974 oil embargo and the subsequent OPEC price increases further threatened the established social order. Things seemed out of control; the very existence of U.S. society seemed threatened. The new archaeologists responded by de-emphasizing their earlier interest in how the state maintains social order; they shifted their attention, instead, to the role of exchange (Wright, 1972; Earle and Ericson, 1977) or to catastrophe theory, when one perceptively observed that “for some human societies, stability (in the sense of peace and prosperity) is only assured by continuous growth. Zero growth does not for them represent a stable state and can accelerate the distintegration [sic]” (Renfrew, 1979: 489). These studies appeared at the same time as the world systems inquiries of some historical sociologists and the historians.

Criticisms of the new archaeology responded indirectly to the particular power relations that reappeared in U.S. society during the late 1970s and early 1980s: the rapid growth of a permanent underclass and state policies that promoted investment and profits at the expense of wages and consumption. This shift was accompanied by a shift away from Parsonian structural-functionalism—concerned with cohesion, solidarity, and order—to a social theory rooted in “natural rights” individualism, in which individual needs were defined in terms of the destiny of the U.S. state (O’Connor, 1984: 222-227, 231-247). The most sustained critique of the new archaeologists contains nothing new (Dunnell, 1980) and brings to mind the eugenics and social Darwinist literature produced in an earlier era when similar power relations prevailed and models of society, based on marginal utility theory, which see human groups as aggregates of individual consumers and producers buying and selling their wares in a perfect market. It advocates scientism, rooting its explanations in sociobiology and evolutionary biology, and rejects functionalist theories of change with their assumptions of adaptation and gradualism and their explanations of human social conduct in terms of social motors. It seeks to account for the variability within and between societies in terms of natural selection operating on the amount of information being transmitted by combined genetic and cultural mechanisms.

Theoretical Counter-Currents in the Eighties

In the late 1970s, archaeologists began to react

against the new archaeology and reject its reductionist explanations. They sought intelligibility not predictability; they refused to conflate determination in nature with that in the realm of collective social action. Their reaction coincided with the deepening crises and contradictions of U.S. society. They reacted from various perspectives. Some romanticized the past, implicitly criticizing U.S. society. Some embraced structuralist thought with its focus on unconscious structures and avoidance of power. Some adopted Marxist social thought and began to build on various currents of that theoretical perspective.

STRUCTURALIST AND SYMBOLIC ARCHAEOLOGY

Several closely related theoretical tendencies rooted in structuralism appeared in the mid and late 1970s. Similar trends appeared at the same time in England. What unites the various strands is their explicit opposition to the new archaeology. Since 1980, structuralist archaeologists from England have presented papers at the annual meetings of the Society for American Archaeology on several occasions. There is a significant exchange of information across the Atlantic between the structuralist archaeologists in eastern universities and their counterparts at Cambridge University. In the United States, they have focused their research largely on the historic archaeology of the eastern seaboard, especially New England and the mid-Atlantic regions; outside the country, they have tended to concentrate on contact period societies (Deetz, 1977; Glassie, 1975; Isbell, 1978).

Advocates of the structuralist archaeology criticized the functionalist assumptions of the new archaeologists, focusing on the problems and limitations of the organic analogy, the functionalist theory of change, the distinction made between culture and function, the inadequately conceptualized relation between people and system, and the dissolution of the culture/nature opposition (Hodder, 1982). They argued that the new archaeologists did not adequately take account of the cultural context in which artifacts acquired meaning and significance for the ancient peoples who used them and how this context was reflected in the archaeological record. They also argued that the new archaeologists did not adequately take account of their own society and the contexts in which they carried out their research. They had been insufficiently concerned with how the ideology of U.S. society affected their reconstructions of past societies (Leone, 1982a).

Language is central in structuralist analysis; it

distinguishes human beings from other animals; it distinguishes the members of one community from those of another; and it is a projection into nature of the conceptual patterns in the mind of a speaker. By extension, this is also true of all other cultural phenomena—dwellings, tools, myths, food preparation, manners—which are also human products generated by human minds (Haldon, 1981: 204). For structuralists, mind is primary and culture consists of a number of systems, like myths or kinship, which are defined in terms of sets of oppositions. Structuralist archaeologists have accepted one or both of these propositions. For them, a culture can be described or defined in terms of the particular combination of rules, the underlying logical organization that structures the relations of the various sets of oppositions.

This implied that all of the objects of a culture are equally important and meaningful with regards to the overall coherence and organization of the total structure of that culture (Leone, 1982a; Wylie, 1982b). It also meant that they, like the new archaeologists, rejected the notion of ultimate determination by the economic base as the cultural evolutionists had suggested earlier. The structuralist archaeologists assumed that past cultures could be reconstructed even though particular details may have been lost. The reason was that the principles underlying the organization of those structures are indicated by what remains or survives to the present. The structuralist archaeologists are more concerned with the rules that shape structures than with the shape of those structures, with relations rather than entities, and with process rather than what is produced (Glassie, 1975: 41).

The structuralist archaeologists accepted the distinction between synchronic and diachronic analysis. Like both the cultural evolutionists and new archaeologists, they gave priority to synchronic studies, arguing that it was necessary to account for the system that was undergoing and enabling change before developing a narrative of the change that was taking place (Glassie, 1975: 8). Thus, the analysis of form is separated from the analysis of function. The structuralists provide a grammar that allows us to distinguish and to order various forms of social existence and subjective reality; however, this grammar does not specify the conditions for the appearance and disappearance of these forms (Haldon, 1981: 207). In order to deal with change or development, to explain the articulations that characterize historically determined societies, they must resort to a different theoretical framework.

Structuralism is also relativist. While the

methodology can yield valuable insights, these remain valid only for the cultural space within which they were generated. They cannot be used to explain other societies or to develop any higher-order conceptual or theoretical framework. This relativism is also accompanied by a form of methodological holism which assumes that the society being examined is an integrated entity, complete in itself, self-regulating and functionally harmonious. Conflict is temporary, the product of imbalance rather than structural contradictions. As a result, structuralism and structuralist archaeology, as some strands have been constituted, are unable to confront the reality of domination, exploitation, and ideology in historically specific societies (Haldon, 1981: 207-208).

A major stumbling block to the development of a structuralist archaeology is the inability of some strands of structuralist thought—*e.g.*, those of Claude Levi-Strauss or Louis Althusser—to deal with history. Historical change is denied or reduced to the permutations and combinations of a number of elements, which in the long run are expected to combine in different ways. If the number is sufficiently small, then all possible combinations might eventually appear. The mechanism of change is chance, the random outcome of a dice toss. This provides no dynamic for development; it fails to tell us, for example, why feudal society preceded the emergence of capitalism in England rather than following it or why tributary social forms followed communal ones in many parts of the world. Some strands of structuralist archaeology have recognized the weakness of this born-again functionalism and have moved closer to dialectical thought in order to overcome the limitations it imposes (Handsman, 1983; Tilley, 1982).

MARXIST APPROACHES

By the mid 1970s, other U.S. archaeologists were also moving away from the new archaeology. Their work built on indigenous strands of Marxist social thought and theoretical tendencies nurtured and developed outside the United States. This movement coincided in time with the establishment, begrudging recognition, and commodization of academic Marxism in the United States. Individuals trying to develop a Marxist archaeology in the late 1970s were forced to engage in theoretical discussions and debates centred outside archaeology; Marxist perspectives were poorly developed in the archaeological literature produced at the time in the United States. The stimulus and validation, the critical give-and-take that goes on as one explores and develops a viewpoint, came from

constructive engagement with scholars in other fields, colleagues, and friends sharing a similar theoretical viewpoint. This is one of its sources of strength. As a result, Marxist archaeology in the United States has a distinctly internationalist character and a tendency to blur the distinctions between academic disciplines as they are traditionally defined.

The advocates of a Marxist archaeology sought to reunite the study of social process with the study of history. They shared a belief that the only way to understand particular social arrangements or institutions is to understand how they developed historically. They have generally adopted the perspective that human societies have underlying structures conceptualized in terms of a mode of production or a combination of modes of production, an abstract concept which expresses the theoretical relations and linkages between the forces and relations of production and between the economic, political, and ideological aspects or moments of those relations. Each mode of production is theorized to have its own distinctive dynamic. In the historic specificity of a given society, these relations are dialectical, complex, and continually changing; they cannot be reduced to simplistic views that ideology or politics are mere super-structural reflections of economic relations. The structures that exist at any moment are the product of specific historical circumstances; they, in turn, shape and channel the further development of that society (Kohl, 1981; Patterson, 1981: 30-32). By viewing society in terms of structures continually in the process of being formed and transformed by the activities of people whose actions are constrained by those structures, Marxist archaeology eliminates the synchronic/diachronic opposition maintained by the positivists.

Their theory of society begins with the notion that human beings are social animals whose activities and very existence cannot be understood apart from society, from their membership in that group and participation in its activities. Human society is part of the natural world, which is the real basis of all human activities. The production and reproduction of material life involve both natural and social relationships. The relation between society and nature hinges on work, human labour, which simultaneously transforms the raw materials of nature into useful items and creates and transforms social relations among human beings. This process involves both the development of the productive forces and the relations of production. The former expresses the relationship of a society to its environment—their level of development, the extent of its control over nature. The latter

constitute the changing social division of labour. In combination, the level of development of the productive forces and the corresponding relations of production determine the characteristics of different types of society or modes of production.

The proponents of this approach view society as active not passive; its members work to provide for the material conditions of life rather than adapting passively and stoically to the world around them. As a result, they have tended to focus their research on activities represented in the archaeological record, on the sociocultural contexts in which they occurred, and on the social relations that structured the activities and contexts. They have devoted more attention to the relations of production that prevailed in ancient societies than to changes in their productive forces. They have examined the various moments or aspects of the social relations: production, exchange, distribution, and consumption. They have considered the effects of intensification. They have studied stratification and the processes of class and state formation.

These archaeologists, for the most part, do not seek universally valid explanations of change. They are not concerned, for example, to develop a general theory for the transition from classless to class society and, hence, the rise of the state. They are concerned, however, with developing a theory about the conditions which set the stage for such transitions. Their method is simultaneously particularist and comparative. They use the insights gained from detailed examination of one case to shed light on other, similar cases. As additional insights are gained through further study of the latter, they are used to elaborate and refine understanding of the structures, contradictions, and processes of the former.

The advocates of a Marxist archaeology will have to develop a concept of culture which does not reduce simply to material production or to symbolic systems. Culture is more than political economy or ideology, on the one hand, or society, on the other. The new archaeologists' concept of culture was so under-theorized that some of them dispensed with it altogether. The structuralist archaeologists have shown the potential importance of culture; however, they have weakened their argument by conceptualizing it in a holistic manner, assuming some sort of one-to-one correspondence between culture and society: a way of life that is shared by all the members of the community. A Marxist concept of culture will have to begin with the notion that it is socially constructed and, at any moment, contains both residues from earlier epochs and emergent features that can support the established order or provide the basis for dissent.

Culture provides ways for thinking and organizing the world, it also consists of ways for judging that world and designs for living. In stratified societies, culture will be simultaneously elitist, holistic, hegemonic, and pluralist (Worlsey, 1984: 41-44).

Archaeologists advocating or adopting non- or anti-Marxist theoretical positions have generally been critical of dialectical or deterministic strands in Marxist social thought and more receptive to structural Marxist analyses (Conrad and Demarest, 1984: 210-225). The reason for this is that the latter's concern with holistic models of societies, separation of the study of history from the study of social process, functionalist assumptions, conceptualization of the relations of production in terms of timeless categories, and scientism make it ripe for appropriation and incorporation by various post-war schools of thought in U.S. archaeology, both materialist and idealist, that oppose or resist dialectical thinking in any form.

Discussion

Archaeology in the United States is traditionally portrayed as an abstract and specialized super-structural activity, whose linkages with the economic infrastructure and political superstructure are by no means obvious or apparent and, hence, must occur through a host of intermediary connections. In this perspective, it is virtually autonomous, standing above or outside the rest of late twentieth-century U.S. culture and society, and is only tenuously linked with them. In this paper, I have suggested an alternative view: the linkages are much closer and direct than is usually recognized or acknowledged. The theoretical tendencies in U.S. archaeology are a mirror of U.S. society. They provide a way of perceiving and understanding the world. They make change intelligible by inventing or using new categories and dynamics to reconstitute social theory.

If archaeology is not radically separated from the politics and economics of U.S. society, as I have suggested, then the mirror is multi-faceted. It reflects simultaneously the views of the state and those of two historic blocs: one dominated by the interests of national capital; the other by those of international monopoly and finance capital. The power relations of the three—their alliances and contradictions—have changed in the Post-War years as the linkages between the social world of production, on the one hand, and the vast realm of ideology and politics, on the other, have developed and been continually reconstituted both globally and in the United States (Patterson, 1985). Thus, at any moment, the archaeological profession has

simultaneously promoted an array of theoretical perspectives, each of which reflects and gives voice to a world view shaped and constrained by the cultural and class perspectives crystallized in those blocs.

The diversity of theoretical approaches in U.S. archaeology has been promoted in universities—the locus of professional training and certification. Pluralism, in theory if not actually in practice, has been the dominant ideology of the academy in the postwar era. The various theoretical tendencies and their representations were valorized in this setting. They were produced, repeated, exchanged for a fee, and consumed. Each was a commodity, continually improved to meet new market demands and expectations. The world views of these producers and the consumers were shaped, transformed, and reconstituted as their relation to power, both nationally and on a global scale, changed.

In these circumstances, knowledge can only be cumulative in three situations: (1) within a theoretical tendency; (2) when a particular approach occupies a hegemonic position within the profession, as the traditional empiricists did in the 1930s and the cultural evolutionists may have done in the 1950s; and (3) when a hegemonizing trend subsumes another approach, claiming to be the true heir to mainstream thought, as the new archaeologists attempted to do in the late 1960s. The conditions for establishing hegemony were more propitious in the 1940s and 1950s. They began to break down in the 1960s and have yet to be re-established as the contradictions within and between the historic blocs and between them and the state have intensified. There were various reasons for this breakdown: the extension of the educational franchise after World War II, culminating in the rapid growth of the archaeological profession in the 1960s, and the decline of U.S. economic and political dominance beginning in the late 1950s are two obvious ones.

The profession is also characterized by uneven development. U.S. archaeologists have traditionally specialized and carried out their research in particular geographical areas. For historically specific reasons, the majority of the archaeologists working in some areas adopt and promote a particular theoretical approach—*e.g.*, the traditional empiricism and structuralism of the Eastern Establishment provide the underpinnings for Maya research, while cultural evolutionism provided the foundations for investigations in the Mexican highlands. When the research being carried out in an area is guided by a single theoretical approach, interpretations of the archaeological record seem

more coherent and consistent, and knowledge seems to grow steadily with each new excavation. In other areas—like Peru in the 1970s and 1980s—U.S. archaeologists have advocated a variety of theoretical approaches, and none have re-created the kind of hegemony that existed in the 1950s or 1960s. The results are less consistent, the interpretations less clear. Archaeologists working in situations dominated by theoretical pluralism can either ignore the data and interpretations of their competitors or attempt to reinterpret and incorporate them into their own perspectives. Knowledge only increases when they choose the latter course of action.

The various Post-War theoretical tendencies in U.S. archaeology reflect wider social and intellectual movements. They are also shared with other academic fields. This suggests that there is no social theory that distinguishes archaeology from other fields and that the only theory that is strictly archaeological relates to methodology. This should raise questions about the nature of professional training and about the utility of the distinctions traditionally drawn within and between the social sciences.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

An abridged version of this paper was presented at the XI Congreso Internacional de Arqueología del Caribe in San Juan, Puerto Rico, July 28 to August 3, 1985. Various parts of it have profitted from discussions with Barbara Bender, Christine Gailey, Joan Gero, Peter Gran, Xiarong Gu, Philip Kohl, Mark Leone, Juan José Ortiz, Peter Rigby, Maurizio Tosi, Bruce Trigger, and Gorgon Willey. I thank them for their clarity of thought and absolve them of responsibility for any errors I have made.

REFERENCES

- ADAMS, R. McC.
1956 Some hypotheses on the development of early civilizations, *American Antiquity*, XXI (3): 227-232, Salt Lake City.
1960 The evolutionary process in early civilization, IN, Sol Tax (ed.), *Evolution after Darwin*, vol. II: 153-158, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press.
ATHENS, J.S.
1977 Theory building and the study of evolutionary process in complex societies, IN, L. Binford (ed.), *For theory building in archaeology; essays on faunal remains, aquatic resources, spatial analysis, and systemic modeling*, 353-384, New York, Academic Press.

- BENNETT, W.C., (ed.)
 1948 A reappraisal of Peruvian archaeology, Memoir of the Society for American Archaeology, no. 4, Menasha.
- BINFORD, L.R.
 1972 Archaeology as anthropology [1962], IN, An archaeological perspective, 30-32, New York and London, Seminar Press.
- 1982 Meaning, inference and the material record, IN, C. Renfrew and Stephen Shennan (eds.), Ranking, resource and exchange; aspects of the archaeology of early European society, 160-163, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- BOCK, K.E.
 1963 Evolution, function, and change, American Sociological Review, 28 (2): 229-237.
- CLARKE, S.
 1982 Marx, marginalism and modern sociology from Adam Smith to Max Weber, London and Basingstoke, The Macmillan Press, Ltd.
- CONRAD, G.W. and A.A. DEMAREST
 1984 Religion and empire; the dynamics of Aztec and Inca expansionism, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- DEETZ, J.
 1977 In small things forgotten, New York, Anchor Books.
- DUNNELL, R.
 1980 Evolutionary theory and archaeology, IN, M.B. Schiffer (ed.), Advances in archaeological method and theory, Vol. 3: 38-100, New York, Academic Press.
- 1984 The Americanist literature for 1983: a year of contrasts and challenges, American Journal of Archaeology, 88 (4): 489-513.
- EARLE, T.K. and J.E. ERICSON (eds.)
 1977 Exchange systems in prehistory, New York, Academic Press.
- FLANNERY, K.V.
 1972 The cultural evolution of civilizations, Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics, 3: 399-426.
- 1973 Archeology with a capital S., IN, C.L. Redman (ed.), Research and theory in current archeology, 47-58, New York, John Wiley and Sons.
- FRIEDMAN, J. and M.J. ROWLANDS (eds.)
 1977 Introduction, IN, The evolution of social systems, ix-xiv, London, Gerald Duckworth and Co., Ltd.
- GÁNDARA, V.M.
 1980 La vieja "nueva arqueología" (primera parte), Boletín de Antropología Americana, 2: 59-97, Mexico.
- 1981 La vieja "nueva arqueología" (segunda parte), Boletín de Antropología Americana, 3: 99-159, Mexico.
- GLASSIE, H.
 1975 Folk housing in middle Virginia; a structural analysis of historic artifacts, Knoxville, The University of Tennessee Press.
- GLEDHILL, J. and M.J. ROWLANDS
 1982 Materialism and socio-economic process in multi-linear evolution, IN, G. Redfrew and S. Shennan (eds.), Ranking, resource and exchange; aspects of the archaeology of early European society, 114-149, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- GOULD, S.J. and R.C. LEWONTIN
 1979 The spandrels of San Marco and the Panglossian paradigm: a critique of the adaptationist programme, Proceedings of the Royal Society of London, ser. B. 205: 581-598.
- HALDON, J.F.
 1981 On the structuralist approach to the social history of Byzantium, Byzantinoslavica, tome XLII (2): 203-211.
- HAMMOND, M.F.
 1977 the rise of presapiens theory in French and British paleontology: a study in the sociology of scientific ideas, Ph.D. Dissertation (Sociology), Toronto, University of Toronto.
- HANDSMAN, R.G.
 1983 Historical archaeology and capitalism, subscriptions and separations: the production of individualism, North American Archaeologist, 4 (1): 63-79.
- HODDER, I.
 1982 Theoretical archaeology: a reactionary view, IN, I. Hodder (ed.), Symbolic and structural archaeology, 1-16, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- ISBELL, W.
 1978 Cosmological order expressed in prehistoric ceremonial centers, Actes du XLII^e Congrès International des Américanistes, Paris, 2-9 septembre 1976, IV: 269-297.
- KOHL, P.L.
 1981 Materialist approaches in prehistory, Annual Review of Anthropology, 10: 89-118.
- 1984 Symbolic cognitive archaeology: a new loss of innocence, Unpublished manuscript, Wellesley.
- LEACOCK, E.
 1982 Marxism and anthropology, IN, B. Ollman and E. Vernoff (eds.), The left academy; Marxist scholarship on American campuses, pp. 242-276, New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company.
- LEBLANC, S.A.
 1973 Two points of logic concerning data, hypotheses, general laws, and systems, IN, C.L. Redman (ed.), Research and theory in current archeology, pp. 119-214, New York, Wiley and Sons.
- LEONE, M.P. (ed.)
 1972 Preface, IN, Contemporary archaeology; a guide to theory and contributions, pp. ix-xiv. Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press.
- 1982a Some opinions about recovering mind, American Antiquity, 47 (4): 742-760.
- 1982b Childe's offspring, IN, I. Hodder (ed.), Symbolic and structural archaeology, pp. 179-184, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

- O'CONNOR, J.
1984 Accumulation crisis, New York, Basil Blackwell.
- PATTERSON, T.C.
1981 Archaeology; the evolution of ancient societies, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall Inc.
1985 The last sixty years: towards a social history of Americanist archaeology in the United States, *American Anthropologist*, 87 (4).
- PRESTON, P.W.
1982 Theories of development, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd.
- RENFREW, C.
1978 Trajectory, discontinuity, and morphogenesis; the implications of catastrophe theory for archaeology, *American Antiquity*, 43 (2): 59-76.
1979 Systems collapse as social transformation: catastrophe and anastrophe in early state societies, IN, C. Renfrew and K. Cooke (eds.), *Transformations: mathematical approaches to culture change*, pp. 481-506, New York, Academic Press.
1982 Discussion: contrasting paradigms, IN, C. Renfrew and S. Shennan (eds.), *Ranking, resource and exchange; aspects of the archaeology of early European society*, pp. 141-143, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- ROSTOW, W.W.
1960 The stages of economic growth; a non-communist manifesto, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- ROWE, J.H.
1962 Stages and periods in archaeological interpretation, *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, 18 (1): 40-54.
- SALMON, M.
1978 What can systems theory do for archaeology?, *American Antiquity*, 43 (2): 174-183.
- SAVAGE, S.P.
1977 Talcott Parsons and the structural-functionalist theory of the economy, IN, B. Hindess (ed.), *Sociological theories of the economy*, pp. 1-27, New York, Holmes and Meier Publishers.
- SMITH, A.D.
1973 The concept of change; a critique of the functionalist theory of change, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd.
- STEWART, J.H.
1949 Cultural causality and law: a trial formulation of the development of early civilizations, *American Anthropologist*, 51 (1): 1-27.
1950 Area research; theory and practice, *Social Science Research Council Bulletin* 63, New York.
1955 Theory of culture change, Urbana, University of Illinois Press.
- STEWART, J.H. *et al.*
1955 Irrigation civilizations: a comparative study, Pan American Union, *Social Science Monographs*, No. 1.
- TILLEY, C.
1982 Social formation, social structures and social change, IN, I. Hodder (ed.), *Symbolic and structural archaeology*, pp. 26-38, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- TRIGGER, B.G.
1980 Archaeology and the image of the American Indian, *American Antiquity*, 45 (4): 662-676.
1982 If Childe were alive today, *Bulletin of the Institute of Archaeology*, 19: 1-20.
1984 Archaeology at the crossroads: what's new?, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 13: 275-300.
- WOLFE, A.
1981 America's impasse; the rise and fall of the politics of growth, New York, Pantheon Books.
- WORSLEY, P.
1984 The three worlds; culture and world development, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- WRIGHT, H.T.
1972 A consideration of interregional exchange in Greater Mesopotamia, IN, E. Wilmsen (ed.), *Social exchange and interaction*, University of Michigan Anthropological Papers, 46: 95-105.
- WYLIE, M.A.
1982a Positivism and the new archaeology, *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 42 (98): 3636-A.
1982b Epistemological issues raised by a structuralist archaeology, IN, I. Hodder (ed.), *Symbolic and structural archaeology*, pp. 39-46, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.