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## SETTING THEORETICAL EGOS ASIDE: ISSUES AND THEORY IN NORTH AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

Michelle Hegmon

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*Theory in North American archaeology is characterized in terms of foci and approaches manifested in research issues, rather than in explicit or oppositional theoretical positions. While there are some clear-cut theoretical perspectives—evolutionary ecology, behavioral archaeology, and Darwinian archaeology—a large majority of North American archaeology fits a broad category here called “processual-plus.” Among the major themes that crosscut many or all of the approaches are interests in gender, agency/practice, symbols and meaning, material culture, and native perspectives. Gender archaeology is paradigmatic of processual-plus archaeology, in that it draws on a diversity of theoretical approaches to address a common issue. Emphasis on agency and practice is an important development, though conceptions of agency are too often linked to Western ideas of individuals and motivation. The vast majority of North American archaeology, including postprocessual approaches, is modern, not postmodern, in orientation. The relative dearth of theoretical argument positively contributes to diversity and dialogue, but it also may cause North American theory to receive inadequate attention and unfortunate misunderstandings of post-modernism.*

*La teoría en la arqueología de Norte América está caracterizada en términos de enfoques y consideraciones manifestados en problemáticas de investigación, más que en posiciones teóricas explícitas u opuestas. En tanto que hay algunas perspectivas teóricas definidas—ecología evolucionaria, arqueología del comportamiento, y arqueología Darwiniana—la gran mayoría de la arqueología de Norte América encaja en una categoría amplia que aquí se denomina como “procesual-plus.” Entre los temas principales que entrecruzan muchos o todos los enfoques están los que se interesan en el género, en el organismo o en la práctica, el que se centra en los símbolos y significados, el enfocado en la cultura material, y en las perspectivas indígenas. La arqueología de género es paradigmática de la arqueología procesual-plus, en la medida en que se extiende en la diversidad de enfoques teóricos para atender a una problemática común. El énfasis en el organismo y la práctica es un desarrollo importante, aunque las concepciones sobre el agente son vinculadas con mucha frecuencia a las ideas occidentales de individuos y de motivación. La gran mayoría de la arqueología de Norte América, incluyendo el enfoque postprocesual, es moderno, pero no postmoderno, en orientación. La relativa escasez de argumentos teóricos contribuye positivamente a la diversidad y al diálogo, pero también puede causar a la teoría Norteamericana el recibir una atención inadecuada y puede llevar desafortunadamente a malentender el post-modernismo.*

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**T**heory is, or should be, a set of general guiding principles that help us—as researchers and as curious human beings—make sense of specific cases and of the world around us. Confronted with infinite stimuli and bits of information, theory can help us focus on those bits that are particularly important, understand their interrelationships, and transform that information into knowledge. Theory gives us tools to identify, label, and explain. Thus, theory—as well as language, culture, and almost all human approaches to the world—is at once enabling and constraining. In order to enlighten us about one realm, it encourages

us to ignore many others; we do not see the world as it really is (if such vision is ever scientifically possible) but, rather, through the categories and labels necessarily defined by our theories.

Focus here is on theory in North American archaeology, specifically, the archaeology of pre-Columbian North America (including northern Mexico but excluding Mesoamerica) primarily as done by North American archaeologists (very few non-North Americans do archaeology in North America, although North Americans do archaeology in many parts of the world). Theory at a continental level is potentially overwhelming, but in

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mapping out this topic into an article-length treatment, I found myself grateful for the geographic constraints. Although there is plenty of theory to go around, today (in the early twenty-first century) there is much less explicit discussion of theory in North American archaeology than in archaeology done by scholars in other places, especially Britain. Throughout this article, I consider ways in which theory constrains and enables North American archaeology, and at the same time I explore the possibility that moderation in theoretical rhetoric itself is enabling. I draw on theory published in all venues, especially since 1995, but in an effort to keep the list of references shorter than the text, I emphasize examples published in *American Antiquity*.

My primary purpose is to identify what I see as the theoretical directions that help us make sense of the archaeology of North America. Thus, I include considerable discussion of issues and approaches that are not usually considered to be “general theory” but which I believe represent important theoretically informed principles and underlying ideas. This is in contrast to a straightforward review of theory, provided by several recent volumes and articles (Hodder 2001; Jones 2002; Preucel 1991; Preucel and Hodder 1996; Schiffer 2000; Yoffee and Sherratt 1993). I focus on two realms. The first is theory that helps us understand what humans do, what Schiffer (2000:1) broadly labels social theory (though see Hodder 2002). The interpretation of material culture is an important component of this realm of theory, but I do not try to cover the broad range of theory (sometimes called middle range) that focuses specifically on artifacts or the archaeological record; in this sense my direction is contrary to that set forth by Binford (2001). The second and shorter realm involves general theoretical discussions regarding epistemology.

Because this article is intended for a special section in an issue of *American Antiquity* to be distributed at the World Archaeological Congress, some background for non-North Americanists is necessary: The first people to occupy the Americas were anatomically modern humans, although the date (probably between 11,500 and 20,000 B.P.) and path of their entry are vigorously debated (e.g., Anderson and Gillam 2000; Fiedel 1999; Meltzer et al. 1997; Straus 2000). In the 1500s the first Europeans to come to North America encountered a variety of middle-range societies but no states. Finally, most

archaeologists who work on pre-Columbian North America were trained in departments of *anthropology*,<sup>1</sup> which consider archaeology to be one of several subdisciplines (the others being physical anthropology, linguistics, and sociocultural anthropology). I argue that North American archaeology is, overall, characterized by considerable tolerance of theoretical diversity, and it may be that some of this open-mindedness stems from the broad anthropological training that most archaeologists receive.

### Mapping the Theoretical Landscape

I divide the theoretical landscape of North American archaeology into two main parts. The first comprises three well-defined and self-identified perspectives, fairly closely tied to a few individuals and schools. The second, which I label *processual-plus*, incorporates the majority of North American archaeology and is more loosely defined. For other theoretical maps (which identify more splits in the processual-plus category), see Hodder (2001), Knapp (1996), Preucel (1991, 1995), and Schiffer (2000). The three self-identified perspectives, made explicit in a series of recent articles in *American Antiquity* (Broughton and O’Connell 1999; O’Brien et al. 1998; Schiffer 1996, 1999) are (1) evolutionary ecology; (2) behavioral archaeology; and (3) Darwinian archaeology,<sup>2</sup> also called evolutionary archaeology or selectionism. Behavioral and Darwinian approaches are mostly applied by U.S. scholars, and leading authors in both schools (Neff 2001; Schiffer et al. 2001) felt they were seriously misinterpreted in a recent discussion by Loney (2000), who is at the University of Glasgow. Spencer (1987) differentiates Darwinian from processual approaches to evolution, the latter including aspects of evolutionary ecology.

### *The Three Self-Identified Perspectives*

*Evolutionary ecology* (also the name of a journal) is “an evolutionary science concerned with the differential persistence of variability in behavior over time” (Kelly 2000:64). A subset of evolutionary ecology known as human behavioral ecology (HBE) involves the application of evolutionary ecology to humans and human behavior; in part it represents an attempt to address Julian Steward’s (1955) cultural ecology with rigorous evolutionary theory (Winterhalder and Smith 2000:51). Most evolutionary ecology approaches to archaeology fit this definition of HBE, but I retain the term *evolutionary ecology* because it

is used by most practitioners. Anthropological applications of evolutionary ecology proceed by developing general models—derived from evolutionary theory—that make predictions about behaviors in ecological contexts and evaluating those models with ethnographic and sometimes archaeological data (Winterhalder and Smith 2000). While earlier archaeological work in this perspective focused on how humans cope with the environment (e.g., the diet breadth model), recent applications also consider social issues, such as sharing and status (Boone 2000). Some evolutionary ecologists, particularly those doing ethnographic work, focus on notions of evolutionary fitness and the relationship between a behavior and its reproductive consequences (e.g., Hawkes et al. 1995). In contrast, most archaeological applications are less directly concerned with biological reproduction and instead focus on issues such as foraging strategies. Bamforth (2002) notes that there is sometimes only a weak link between such food-related issues and evolution.

At least in North American archaeology, evolutionary ecology is most commonly applied to studies of hunter-gatherers or small-scale horticulturalists, often involving data from California or the Great Basin, where foraging continued into historic times. For example, Kelly (2001) uses data from the Carson Sink (Nevada) to evaluate models regarding settlement and residential mobility, and a number of studies focus on diet breadth and prey choice (see summary in Broughton and O'Connell 1999:154–156). Examples from elsewhere in North America include Shott's (1996a) application of the diet breadth model to understand changes in point size in the Midwest (see also chapters in Barton and Clark 1997) and Fitzhugh's (2001) work on risk and invention in the Gulf of Alaska.

Many archaeologists who draw on evolutionary ecology also seem open to other modes of inquiry. For example, although Kelly (2000) is quite critical of Darwinian archaeology, he suggests ways in which elements of evolutionary ecology and behavioral archaeology could be used in conjunction with Darwinian approaches, and he specifically draws on behavioral insights into performance characteristics to develop an evolutionary ecological perspective on stone tools. Barlow (2001), in research on the relative advantages of adding maize to a foraging strategy in the Southwest, also considers issues of gender. And in a very different example, MacDonald (2001)

draws on kin selection theory to discuss grief and the treatment of young adults in Hohokam burials, but he explicitly sees his approach as complementary to Marxist and processual interpretations.

*Behavioral archaeology* was first set forth by Reid, Schiffer, and Rathje (1975), although today it is most closely associated with Michael Schiffer (1995), his students, and others who have worked with him at the University of Arizona (e.g., LaMotta and Schiffer 2001; Schiffer and Skibo 1997; Skibo et al. 1995; Walker 2002; Zedeño 1997). Behaviorism focuses on “the relationship between human behaviors and material culture *in all times and all places*” (Schiffer 1999:166), thus it includes modern material culture studies (e.g., Schiffer et al. 1994). As the name implies, focus is on behavior—not on more abstract concepts such as culture—and the way behavior created the archaeological record. Behavioral archaeology may be most well known for developing methodologies (e.g., the study of formation processes [Schiffer 1987] and artifact life histories [Schiffer 1995:55–66]) that advance our ability to understand the archaeological record and thus reconstruct past behavior. However, especially in recent work, behavioral archaeologists have explicitly turned their attention toward *explaining* behavior, including issues such as meaning (Schiffer with Miller 1999), ritual (Walker 2002; Walker and Lucero 2000), and complex societies (LaMotta and Schiffer 2001). For example, in developing theory to explain artifact variability, Schiffer and Skibo (1997) focus on factors influencing the behavior of producers, including everything from social processes and negotiations to the performance characteristics of the finished artifact.

Schiffer (1999:167) emphasizes that neither behavioral archaeology nor any other theoretical approach is exclusively *the* best way to address all archaeological problems. He has explicitly tried to build bridges to other approaches in his organization of conferences and edited volumes (1996, 2000; see also Skibo and Feinman 1999; Skibo et al. 1995). Scholars associated with the behavioral perspective also write about other issues (e.g., Skibo and Schiffer 1995). Finally, although relatively few individuals (primarily those cited above) explicitly develop or draw on behavioral theory, many of the methodological and some of the theoretical insights of behavioral archaeology have been widely incorporated into various archaeological approaches, includ-

ing concepts of technological strategies (Nelson 1991) and accumulations research (Pauketat 1989; Shott 1996b; Varien and Mills 1997).

*Darwinian archaeology*, the most tightly defined perspective, is primarily associated with Robert Dunnell, now retired from the University of Washington (Dunnell 1980 is a key early statement), his students, and now some of his students' students (e.g., Leonard and Jones 1987; Leonard and Reed 1993; Neiman 1995; O'Brien and Lyman 2000). Some studies by David Braun (e.g., 1983, 1990) and David Rindos (e.g., 1989) are also often cited as examples of Darwinian archaeology, although both scholars seem to have developed this perspective independently. In addition, Hector Neff (e.g., 1992, 2000) works in this perspective, although he did not study with Dunnell. Although Neff, in his work with compositional analysis and in a recent (2000) statement, contributes to a diversity of approaches, it is my impression that most scholars who subscribe to Darwinian archaeology use this approach primarily or even exclusively. They were less than welcoming of Schiffer's attempts at bridge building (e.g., Lyman and O'Brien 1998; O'Brien et al. 1998).

The goal of Darwinian archaeology is to bring Darwinian theory to bear on the archaeological record and thus to replace general concepts of cultural evolution with a more rigorous and scientific understanding of evolution (a recent summary is provided in Leonard 2001). Focus is on the "replicative success" of components of phenotypes, what archaeologists commonly call traits. If the traits are functionally advantageous and thus increase reproductive success, then they are subject to positive selection. In contrast, nonfunctional (stylistic) traits are subject to processes such as drift. Many applications of Darwinian archaeology focus on material culture, and some are reviewed in the section on material culture below. A different example is Leonard and Reed's (1993) attempt to explain patterns of aggregation in the Southwest in terms of the differential success of strategies of labor organization.

The sources of variation and processes of selection, as conceptualized in Darwinian archaeology, are the causes of much debate, misunderstanding, and criticism. For example, Bamforth (2002:442) argues that links between archaeological patterns and Darwinian processes are incorrect because selection operates at an individual level but archaeological observations concern remains of aggregate/group

processes. He goes on to suggest that Darwinian archaeology does not apply evolutionary theory *per se*, but instead uses evolution as a metaphor (i.e., traits are like genes). I believe that one reason for the vituperative nature of many debates about Darwinian archaeology is a lack of flexibility. While most other theoretical approaches today are regarded as tools or perspectives useful for addressing certain kinds of issues, Darwinian archaeology is taken as more of an all-or-nothing proposition; one either accepts it (believes in it?) or rejects it.

The problem is compounded by a lack of agreement regarding definitions, especially of widely used terms such as *style* and *function*. Darwinian archaeologists have argued that style and function cannot be distinguished *a priori* but, rather, are identified based on patterns of change over time, which indicate whether a trait is functional and thus subject to selection (Dunnell 1978; Hurt and Rakita 2001). Most non-Darwinian archaeologists seem to ignore these definitions, and recent discussions consider concepts that would be oxymoronic in Darwinian terms, such as the function of style or the style of technologies (Hegmon 1998). One exception is recent (European) work by Shennan and Wilkinson (2001), who do not embrace the Darwinian archaeology school but who do explicitly address some of its concepts. Specifically, they conclude that while the idea of style as neutral with regard to selection is a useful heuristic, it does not account for actual frequency distributions and, thus, that there is not a radical difference between functional and stylistic variation. From a different (Darwinian) perspective, Neff (2000) also seems to soften the line between style and function. Specifically, he finds some common ground with evolutionary ecology, concluding that selection need not necessarily act through biological reproduction but, rather, that it can also be a cultural process. These kinds of perspectives are suggestive of an opening of theoretical borders, although Darwinian archaeology remains much more closed than other theoretical approaches.

#### *Processual-Plus*

A large majority of North American archaeologists do not associate themselves with one of the three approaches outlined above. Many of these scholars would probably say that they are "generally processual" but also interested in other perspectives, and some explicitly try to combine processual and post-

processual insights (e.g., Duke 1995; Preucel 1991). While some might emphasize their postprocessual leanings, theoretical allegiance is not a major issue. I use the term *processual-plus* to refer to this broad array of approaches. My use of a single label is not intended to imply that there is one unified theory. Rather, I use a single term because I believe that it is more useful to consider crosscutting trends than to seek lines of difference. In general, I argue that many concepts from the postprocessual archaeology of the 1980s (as characterized by Hodder [1991])—including interests in meaning, agency, and gender—have been incorporated into the processual (plus) mainstream (a trend Brumfiel [1992] noticed and encouraged a decade ago). Preucel (1995) notes that common trends have even been set forth in recent revisions of well-established textbooks (Thomas 1989; Willey and Sabloff 1992). This is in contrast to the situation in Europe, particularly Britain, where the processual/postprocessual separation is much greater. Recent postprocessual volumes (e.g., Thomas 2000; Tilley 1993; also the new journal *Social Archaeology*) include some North American authors but only one chapter (Gero 2000) on pre-Columbian North American archaeology. In this section I consider elements of the processual-plus approach in general terms; my characterization is substantiated below, as I consider current directions in more detail.

The New Archaeology of the 1960s and early 1970s advocated scientific (sometimes positivist) approaches and the search for general laws (e.g., Binford 1964; Watson et al. 1971). Although not explicitly rejected, these emphases were moderated somewhat as the New Archaeology matured into what is now called processual archaeology (Redman 1991). Early statements of postprocessual archaeology (especially Hodder 1982, Hodder, ed. 1982; Shanks and Tilley 1987a, 1987b) emphasized apparently different approaches involving interpretation and history. Although the idea of (humanistic) interpretation was/is controversial, the postprocessual emphasis on history coincided with a processual turn toward (or back to) the study of specific cases. For example, Braun (1991) argued that questions about why Midwestern Woodland pottery was decorated could only be understood in terms of the specific local and historical setting. More commonly, processualists focused on specific cases as examples of and in relation to the larger context (e.g., Kintigh 1982;

Steponaitis 1981; see Trigger 1989a:368), an approach that today is shared across the theoretical spectrum. General principles are not eschewed, but no longer must a study explicitly address general laws of cultural processes to be considered important and worthy of publication in *American Antiquity*. As is elaborated below, interest in specific cases fits well with Native Americans' concern with their tribal histories as well as work on cultural affiliation.

Postprocessual archaeology rejected social evolutionary typologies and conceptions of cultures/societies as entities with volition or needs. Instead, emphasis was on individuals, agency, and internal impetus for change. Similarly, many processual archaeologists (e.g., Shennan 1993) identified problems with evolutionary frameworks, though they more often revised than totally rejected typologies (e.g., Earle and Johnson 1987). Today many North American archaeologists, from across the theoretical spectrum, incorporate consideration of individuals, social strategies, and internal societal dynamics into their accounts of change (e.g., Byers 1999; Feinman et al. 2000; McGuire and Saitta 1996; Potter 2000a, 2000b; Trubitt 2000; Vehik 2002).

Postprocessual archaeology emphasized the importance of symbols and meaning. Whereas earlier processual archaeology had (very gingerly) mentioned cognition and ideas (e.g., Binford's [1962] concept of "ideotechnic" artifacts), postprocessualists declared that meaning is everywhere, in "trash" and subsistence as well as in ritual. As Robb puts it: "The question is not whether we can find symbols archaeologically, but whether we can find anything cultural that is not symbolic" (1998:331). Today, symbols and meaning are everywhere in processual (also behavioral [see Schiffer with Miller 1999]) as well as postprocessual accounts (for some overviews, see Brown 1997; Robb 1999; for recent North American examples, see Byers 1999; Gamble et al. 2001; Ortman 2000; Van Nest et al. 2001; Whalen and Minnis 2001). In his recent review, Robb (1998) even identifies a perspective characteristic of processual archaeology: the "symbols as tokens" approach, which involves an emphasis on the role of symbols in communication. There is also much recent work (mostly by processualists) on the evolution of humans' symbolic capacity and cognitive archaeology (e.g., Lindly and Clark 1990; Renfrew and Scarre 1998; Renfrew and Zubrow 1994), primarily focusing on the Old World.

Finally, postprocessual archaeology embraced critical perspectives, in that it considered the ways the present influences (or determines) interpretations of the past and how interpretations become part of the present. Recent work from across the theoretical gamut includes at least moderately critical perspectives, although often without explicit discussion of critical theory. For example, although Watson is wary of aspects of postprocessualism (Watson and Fotiadis 1990), in some of her work she has demonstrated how archaeologists' interpretations of domestication in the eastern United States reproduced an androcentric bias, including assumptions about women as passive bearers of culture (Watson and Kennedy 1991). Research on violence and warfare also often explicitly considers the social milieu of the researcher (see overview in Otterbein 2000) or the political ramifications of the research, as has been brought to the fore by the debate about cannibalism in the Southwest (Billman et al. 2000; Dongoske et al. 2000; Martin 2000; Turner and Turner 1999).

### Theoretical Directions, 1: Major Themes

In this and the following section I identify many of the major theoretical directions in North American archaeology today. First I discuss five pervasive issues, most of which have seen cumulative development in the past two decades. Then, in the next section, I characterize recent trends in terms of changing key words and phrases. Conceptually, these two sections cover the same general ground; whether issues are included in the first or second depends primarily on whether they can be characterized in terms of changing key words or phrases. One of the issues that emerges, and that I return to in the final section, is that focus on issues or concepts crosscuts theoretical approaches and thus leads to positive dialogue and dynamic syntheses.

#### *The Past Is Engendered*

The archaeology of gender is in many ways paradigmatic of processual-plus archaeology and the theoretical openness that characterizes much of North American archaeology today. Archaeological focus on gender developed concurrently with postprocessualism in the 1980s. Clearly both were part of the same theoretical current; some see the archaeology of gender as part of postprocessual archaeology (e.g., Hodder 1991), whereas others suggest that it was a separate approach that paralleled and perhaps

inspired postprocessual directions (e.g., Wylie 1992). Regardless of its initial relationship with post-processual archaeology, the long-neglected study of gender in archaeology became enormously popular by the late 1980s; today it is almost mainstream in many theoretical perspectives, although there are still skeptics and unduly harsh reviews. Much of this work is done by Anglo-Saxon researchers working in all parts of the world (see Conkey and Gero 1997). Feminist perspectives and research on gender are much less popular in other countries and traditions (Coudart 1998).<sup>3</sup>

The very idea of an archaeology of gender was a feminist concept, and many of the first applications had a critical edge and found androcentric bias (e.g., Watson and Kennedy 1991). Numerous publications have since engendered the North American past, focusing on women and more recently on all genders and on gender relations. A few scholars have linked the archaeology of gender to new ways of knowing the past. For example, Spector (1991, 1993) explores the power of narrative "ethnography" about a decorated awl and a girl's transition to womanhood among the Dakota. More than just a story, Spector's account is one a few examples of a hermeneutic approach in North American archaeology (see review in Preucel 1995). A recent review by Conkey and Gero (1997) emphasizes the importance of feminist theory and the feminist critique of science for the practice of archaeology, including issues of agency in knowledge production, the organization of research projects, and the acknowledgment of ambiguity.

More commonly, recent research on gender in North American archaeology focuses on what women (and sometimes men) did in the past, how they were treated, and the implications for gender relations. Much of this work, which Preucel (1995) classes as analytical feminism, is an excellent example of what I mean by processual-plus archaeology, in that it takes on postprocessual themes but attempts to develop systematic methodologies and generalizable conclusions. It also includes contributions by behavioral archaeology (Skibo and Schiffer 1995) and evolutionary ecology (Barlow 2001). Not all of this literature is feminist; nor does it necessarily draw on feminist theory.<sup>4</sup> But as our understanding of gender in the past increases, it raises questions relevant to feminist, gender, and social theory, and thus it has the potential to contribute to, as well as draw from, this body of literature. For example,

Crown (2000) organized a volume that explores how gender relations and the activities of women and men changed over time in the Southwest. Although the volume focuses on the archaeology of gender, the results have implications—regarding such issues as perceptions of women’s labor as drudgery or a valued contribution to subsistence and the relative status of elite women—relevant to feminist and general theory (Lamphere 2000). Other recent work that engenders North American prehistory includes that by Arnold and Wicker (2001), Claassen and Joyce (1997), Crown and Fish (1996), Eastman and Rodning (2001), Munson (2000), and Spielmann (1995).

Another link between gender and archaeological theory concerns epistemological issues. Specifically, Wylie (1992; see also Brumfiel 1996) explores issues of politically motivated research, concluding that the archaeological record provides evidential constraints that should allow archaeologists to evaluate their ideas (whatever their source) systematically. Furthermore, gender archaeology has ties to feminist research on gender politics and equity issues. Some of this work focuses specifically on the treatment of women archaeologists in terms of issues such as hiring, promotion, and fieldwork opportunities. There is also a growing body of studies that demonstrates how gender politics and sometimes outright discrimination affect archaeological practice today and historically and, thus, how politics influence our knowledge of the past (e.g., Gero 2000; Hutson 2002; Nelson et al. 1994; Parezo 1993; Wright 1996).

In sum, the archaeology of gender is an exemplar of what I see as the positive developments in North American archaeology, in that it manifests an openness and dynamism that result from dialogue across theoretical lines. In its initial stages it was at least partially postprocessual, but it also involved processual scholars, and gender research became part of many theoretical perspectives. Some of the more postprocessual aspects of gender archaeology, including a critical perspective and interests in agency, pushed processual archaeology into new realms. Conversely, processual concerns with methodological rigor and general concepts may have made postprocessual gender research more widely applicable and acceptable. Such interfaces are the essence of processual-plus archaeology, which in this sense includes aspects of behavioral and evolutionary ecology. The archaeology of gender includes

an array of theoretical approaches—ranging from postmodern narratives and overtly political statements to methodological studies and the search for general laws—that might seem antithetical. But the common interest in an important subject seems to inspire a relative lack of antagonism and even open-mindedness. In this case at least, theoretical diversity contributes to dynamism.

#### *Agency Is Everywhere*

Archaeologists (myself included) are fond of citing Bourdieu (especially 1977), Giddens (especially 1984), and Ortner (1984) regarding practice and agency. This social theory has had enormous explicit and implicit effects on North American archaeology, as it inspires conceptualizations of a past populated by people (rather than cultures or systems). However, this popularity has also led to some conceptual problems. One is an overemphasis on agency, in isolation from structure and practice, although, as Clark notes, there is no separate realm of “agency theory” (2000:97). A second is the assumed equation of agents with Western “individuals” and lack of attention to the relational aspects of personhood (Clay 1992; Gillespie 2001; Strathern 1981).

Although it has deep roots in social theory, especially Marxism, the term *agency* was brought to the fore recently by Giddens, who defines it as individuals’ capability of doing things, regardless of their intent: “Agency concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently” (1984:9). Dobres and Robb (2000:8–9) offer a list of recent definitions, as well as the useful encapsulation that agency is “a socially significant quality of action.” At least for Giddens, agency is inextricably linked to structure, and although he sees structure and agency as having a recursive relationship, his emphasis is primarily on how structure is created and perpetuated, the process he calls structuration. Bourdieu (1977, 1990) and Ortner (1984) emphasize practice, which Ortner has argued is almost anything people do that has political implications. Practice is embedded in structure, and it is through practice that agents reproduce or transform structure. However, discussions of agency sometimes forget this embeddedness (as Wiessner [2002] notes) and equate agency with the strategies or intentions of relatively unconstrained self-interested individuals. Practice and agency have to do with



similarly conceptualized processes, but the terms emphasize different components of these processes. *Agency* is more “behind the scenes,” in that it has to do with capability and is sometimes (I think wrongly) associated with motivation. In contrast, *practice* refers directly to what people do. Focus on practice, rather than agency, leads to a more dynamic and humanized picture of people’s activities and of the relations among individuals, institutions, and structure (Dobres and Robb 2000:4–5). The fact that archaeologists often focus only on agency suggests that the insights of practice theory—especially the recursive relationships among practice, agency, and structure—are sometimes overlooked, a theme I assess below.

Explicit discussions of agency in North American archaeology are probably most common in accounts of leadership and inequality. Pauketat (1994) has argued for the importance of elite-controlled ideology and symbolism in the rise of Mississippian chiefdoms. However, in more recent work (2000) he also considers how the practices of commoners and emergent elite resulted in the construction of Mississippian mounds and social hierarchies, even if the end—a powerful chiefdom—was not intended by all agents. He emphasizes that practices were based in the established structure but that, as the scale changed, the structure was transformed. Thus, Pauketat specifically draws on practice theory (not just agency) and attributes change to more than elite manipulations. In work that focuses on less complex traditions, Cobb and Garrow (1996; Cobb 2000) draw on ideas of agency and structure to understand the extent to which local developments were and were not drawn into Mississippian politics. Smith (1992a) draws on Giddens to argue that Mississippian calendrical devices can be understood as authoritative resources and structural principles. Saitta (1994)—who uses Marxist theory and argues that agency has been overemphasized—focuses on understanding the structural context of class development and surplus extraction, including what he calls communal extraction. The role of nonelites and economic factors in Mississippian chiefdoms are also emphasized by Maxham (2000), Milner (1998), and Muller (1997), though with less explicit emphasis on agency or practice theory.

Other research into the development of social inequalities also emphasizes the actions of leaders. For example, Maschner’s evolutionary perspective

views competition and striving for status as among the driving forces that lead to the emergence of ascribed inequality on the Northwest Coast (1991; Maschner and Patton 1996). A similar perspective regarding aggrandizers is developed by Hayden (1995). Kantner (1996) draws on an actor-based model of political competition to explain developments associated with Chaco Canyon. Finally, Arnold (2000; see also 1993, 1995) explicitly discusses agency in her consideration of the development of craft specialization and leadership among Chumash chiefdoms on the California coast, and she views the development of hierarchical relations as a result of opportunistic and costly reorganization by well-placed canoe-owning leaders. The authors of these accounts seem to assume that striving for status or aggrandizement is universally a characteristic of at least some members of all societies. This is in contrast to the agents conceptualized in practice theory, who are much more constrained by antecedent cultural practices (see discussion in Clark 2000:97).

Discussions of agency are also prevalent in studies of leadership and social change in the Southwest. Schachner (2001) identifies contexts in which agents were able to instigate social and especially ritual change, but reversal of those changes suggests that the leaders were not able to institutionalize them. His account specifically focuses on the recursive relationship between agency and structure, in that agents’ practices—involving Giddensian rules and resources—are derived from and may transform structure. Varien (1999) draws on Giddens’s concept of structuration to conceptualize how agency (in the form of residential mobility) was enabled and constrained by the structure (i.e., the land tenure system) and how the result (settlement on the landscape) became part of and eventually contributed to the transformation of the structure. In contrast to many archaeological applications of practice theory, Varien’s account gives particular emphasis to structure.

Agency is a component of the corporate/network models of leadership developed by Blanton et al. (1996) and recently applied to understanding the pit-house-to-pueblo transition (Feinman et al. 2000) and other aspects of southwestern (Mills 2000) and Mississippian (Trubitt 2000) prehistory, although these applications do not all explicitly discuss agency. An important issue that could be explored from this perspective concerns agency in different kinds of leadership systems. That is, it is relatively easy for

Western scholars to conceptualize the agency of leaders—with individual power and sometimes personal glory and wealth—in network systems (though see Gillespie 2001). However, agency in corporate systems remains undertheorized, and Southwest archaeology (as well as Pueblo ethnography) would be an excellent context in which to develop such theory.

Archaeologists explicitly concerned with practice, agency, and leadership are not alone in populating the past with active people. Behavioral archaeology, though developed along a different theoretical trajectory, similarly involves focus on what people do. Explicit links between behavioral theory and the concept of agency are explored by Walker and Lucero (2000), who draw on concepts of artifact life histories and agency to consider how people manipulated social and ritual contexts.

Interest in practice theory and agency is also closely tied to archaeological interest in gender. The very idea of “engendering” the past populates it with agents (rather than faceless blobs [Tringham 1991]); engendered agents are diverse and have various interests, needs, capabilities, and structural opportunities and constraints. Practice theory often sees direct application in archaeological studies of gender (Dobres and Robb 2000:7), and it has links to feminist theory (Conkey and Gero 1997). In archaeological studies of gender in North America, practice theory is generally more implicit than explicit, although Sassaman’s (2000) account of the origins of pottery in the Southeast conceptualizes women’s and men’s activities in terms of agency. But regardless of terminology, many accounts of the contributions of prehistoric women—who planted the first domestic crops (Watson and Kennedy 1991 [though see Fritz 1999]), who used awls to work hides (Spector 1991, 1993), and who organized their lives so as to fit in pottery production (Crown and Wills 1995)—are accounts of agency.

Agency also underlies recent archaeological perspectives regarding people’s relations with the material world. For example, some of my work has involved consideration of Pueblo pottery style as a “social strategy” (Hegmon 1995). The use of food in social strategies and in power relations is increasingly considered in studies of the Mississippian (e.g., Welsh and Scarry 1995) and the Southwest (Potter 2000a). A number of studies of architecture (some drawing on space syntax theory) now conceptualize its construction and use partly in terms of practice

theory (e.g., Ferguson 1996a). Finally, landscapes are also sometimes viewed from the perspective of agency and practice; for example, Snead and Preucel consider processes of “‘place making’ which involves both the ‘domestication of the physical’ and the ‘naturalization of the social’” (1999:171).

A different perspective on agency is being explored by a small number of archaeologists using agent-based modeling. In these computer models, agents (not necessarily conceptualized as individuals) collect information, make decisions, act, and can learn and change as a result of their actions (Kohler 2000). Although agent-based modeling is not about agency per se, it does have theoretical relevance. Specifically, at least some agent-based models are generative, in that agents’ actions contribute to structure, which then sets the stage for further actions, a process not unlike Giddens’s structuration. Agent-based models are currently being developed to explore the dynamics of settlement in two parts of the Southwest (Kohler, Kresl, et al. 2000; Rauch 2002).

In various forms, agency is everywhere in North American archaeology today. Many archaeologists explicitly discuss theoretical concepts of agency and practice; others (especially in gender studies) use the concepts more implicitly. In reviewing some of this work, I have considered concepts of agency that are linked to practice theory to be particularly praiseworthy. This is because these studies help us to understand the ways that agency—part of what makes us human—is culturally constituted and thus is not immutable. In general, different perspectives on agency seem to coexist with little rancor but also with regrettably little dialogue. That is, different researchers or approaches utilize different concepts or definitions of agency, but discussion (or even acknowledgment) of those differences is minimal. Thus, the potential for theoretical dynamism exists in the varied approaches to the same word or concept, but it has yet to be fully developed.

For at least two reasons, North American archaeology has something special to offer to archaeological interests in agency. First, because of the richness of the record and quality of dating, there are many cases in which we can observe the details of practice, even cases where efforts to instigate changes seem to have failed (e.g., Schachner 2001). Second, because much of North American archaeology is about times and places in which institutionalized

inequality was not prevalent, it gives us the opportunity to conceptualize practice and agency in a world very unlike our own.

### *Is Anything Not Symbolic?*

An emphasis on symbols and meaning was advocated by postprocessual archaeology, and, as discussed above, consideration of these topics has been incorporated into the processual-plus mainstream and into behavioral approaches (Schiffer with Miller 1999; Walker 2002; Zedeño 1997). Many North Americanists view symbols as a means of communicating and manipulating specific kinds of information; thus, they might be lumped into what Robb (1998:332–334) calls the “symbols as tokens” category. However, contrary to Robb’s fairly critical characterization, these archaeologists do not necessarily assume that symbolic meanings are fixed or singular. Rather, many would also agree that meaning resides in the interaction between people and material culture (e.g., Schiffer with Miller 1999) and that all behavior is symbolically mediated and is both action and meaning (Trigger 1998a). Thus, although most of these symbolically inclined North Americanists would not self-identify as poststructuralists (though see Dunham 1999), they do have something in common with the approach Robb (1998) calls “symbols as tesserae.”

North Americanists’ treatment of symbols and meaning can be considered in terms of at least three general realms. The first, and probably the broadest, is that meaning is now seen as intrinsic to many social and economic processes, sometimes as part of ritual behavior or religion. This is probably most apparent in varied approaches to leadership and the rise of political systems. For example, following earlier work by Judge (1989), the spectacular development of Chaco Canyon (northern New Mexico) and the surrounding regional system in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries is viewed at least in part as the rise of a complex ritual system, involving pilgrimages into the canyon (Renfrew 2001; see summary in Mills 2002). While enormous effort was devoted toward the procurement and production of goods that were moved into Chaco Canyon, relatively little material (other than ritually charged turquoise) moved out (Mills 2002).

The concepts of prestige technologies (Hayden 1998) and prestige goods (Frankenstein and Rowlands 1978; Friedman and Rowlands 1977) consider

at least the general class of meanings—status and prestige—conveyed by certain goods. Although such accounts of meaning may be less than satisfying to those inclined toward interpretative approaches, the general and vague equation of certain styles or materials with prestige is not necessarily inaccurate, in that knowledge of specific meanings may have been restricted to elites or to specialist practitioners (Brandt 1994; Earle 1990). Furthermore, many accounts do attempt to get at other levels of meaning. For example, in discussing the Plateau Interaction Sphere in the Northwest, Hayden and Schulting (1997) suggest that some prestige goods may have incorporated meanings relating to specific beliefs in a guardian spirit. In another example, Pauketat and Emerson (1991) argue that Mississippian Ramey Incised pots communicated an ideology in which elites were seen as mediators of the cosmos.

The role of history and historical meanings in social processes is also receiving increasing attention. Mortuary practices have long been viewed as important means of maintaining links with the past and thus legitimating long-term claims to land (e.g., Charles and Buikstra 1983). This perspective is receiving new applications, as in Dunham’s (1999) exploration of how collective mortuary practices stretched social relations across time and thus “deepened” the past in late prehistoric Virginia. Other accounts focus on how past symbols and meanings were manipulated in emerging political processes—for example, how post-Chacoan developments incorporated symbolic links to Chaco (Fowler and Stein 1992; Kintigh et al. 1996; Lekson 1999).

A second realm in which meaning and symbols are given considerable attention is in interpretations of all kinds and scales of archaeological evidence, ranging from portable material culture to architecture and landscapes. Material culture is discussed more specifically below; here I emphasize how analyses attempt to interpret the general and specific meanings incorporated into that material, for example, the Ramey Incised pottery discussed above, the ideology associated with southwestern Salado Polychrome (Crown 1994), and the metaphoric roots of Mesa Verde ceramic designs (Ortman 2000). Production of material culture is also sometimes understood in terms of the meaning of that material—for example, the ritual demand for glaze ware pottery (Spielmann 1998, 2002).

Although archaeologists have long studied the

spatial distribution of architecture and settlements, much more attention has focused recently on the meaning of that construction and the way in which it created a culturally meaningful landscape. A number of scholars have been profoundly influenced by Basso's (1996) account of how places take on cultural meanings, meanings that are explicitly used in social interactions. Growing numbers of studies are considering the meanings of Chacoan structures and the ways that they relate to the landscape (e.g., Stein and Lekson 1992). Zedeño (1997), in developing behavioral principles regarding landscapes, incorporates aspects of meaning and the concept of place. In earlier work, Charles and Buikstra (1983) emphasized how Midwestern Archaic mortuary practices were a means of asserting land claims associated with increasingly intensive land use. More recently (and focusing on a later period), they consider how the construction of mounds and tombs "re-created the cosmos, vertically and horizontally differentiated, just as they provided a forum for the negotiation of power relations among the living" (Buikstra and Charles 1999:216).

A third realm of focus on symbols and meanings involves a revitalized interest in understanding prehistoric ideas and cosmologies, not just as part of social processes but also for their own sake. This trend is perhaps most apparent in the eastern United States, where details of shamanistic practices and the various forms of the Mississippian Southeastern Ceremonial Complex are often the focus of research (Brown 1997; Galloway 1984). The cosmological significance of everything from iconography, to architecture, to the placement of mounds on the landscape is being explored in various contexts, including the Mimbres of the Southwest (Shafer 1995) and the Illinois Hopewell (Buikstra and Charles 1999). Recent studies of rock art also often focus on understanding its meaning and content, as in Whitley's (2000) work on the art of the shaman in California. Archaeoastronomy research provides additional examples. Many of these subjects were pursued prior to the postprocessual boom of the 1980s, and most of this work is being done by researchers who probably do not self-identify as postprocessual. Nevertheless, growing interest and recent work in these arenas demonstrate openness to at least some postprocessual ideas, in the spirit of processual-plus archaeology.

In this subsection I have explicitly mentioned

only a small fraction of North Americanist studies of symbols and meaning. Discussion of these topics, or at least acknowledgment of their importance, is everywhere. A few more examples should help to illustrate the breadth of this concern: Odess (1998) emphasizes the importance of meaning in his study of Alaskan Dorset style and exchange; Van Nest et al. (2001) consider the symbolic dimensions of sod blocks used in the construction of Hopewell (Midwest U.S.) mounds; and Wilson (1995) considers the symbolic importance of tipi rings on the Plains. Unfortunately, although I see discussions of symbols and meaning everywhere in North American archaeology, their theoretical impact is limited; Robb's (1998) recent review of "symbols in archaeology" includes very few North American examples. It may be that North American approaches receive less attention because they are less extreme (i.e., not post-modern) and thus do not appear to be "cutting-edge theory." But what North America does have to offer to the archaeological study of symbols is a diversity of approaches that, in a processual-plus sense, bring a variety of theoretical perspectives to bear on a common interest.

#### *New Ways of Viewing Material Culture*

Archaeological research has obviously always been concerned with the material remains of the past. However, in recent years archaeologists have focused on understanding material culture as a subject of interest in its own right, not simply as a kind or source of data (Chilton 1999; Nassaney and Johnson 2000). This trend takes many forms that transcend theoretical approaches (see Hodder 2001:9), and interest in material culture goes far beyond archaeology (e.g., the recently launched *Journal of Material Culture Studies*).

Behavioral archaeology is directly concerned with the relationship between human behavior and material culture. In some cases (such as the work on artifact design summarized above [Schiffer and Skibo 1997]) focus is on functional/technological characteristics. Other studies attempt to understand trends in material culture (e.g., the lack of development of the electric car) in terms of larger sociocultural currents (Schiffer et al. 1994). Material culture is also central to many Darwinian approaches: specifically, the phenotype, which comprises behavioral and material traits and is subject to Darwinian selection; and Darwinian archaeologists' attempts to

understand the cultural and selective processes that affect the persistence and transmission of material traits. For example, Braun (1983) explains decreasing wall thickness in Midwestern Woodland pottery as a result of directional selective pressures caused by subsistence and demographic changes (see also Neff 1992:173–174). Neiman (1995) examines how variation in the style of Illinois Woodland (i.e., pre-200 B.C. to A.D. 800) cooking pot lips resulted from drift and intergroup transmission. Leonard (2001) considers hypotheses regarding the cultural transmission of Casas Grandes ceramic traits (A.D. 1275–1400 in northern Mexico).

Finally, focus on material culture is part of the processual-plus trend. In a vast array of recent work, North Americanists (and others) are considering all aspects of material culture and how they relate to social, cultural, historical, and technological processes. Much of this work is refreshingly free of absolutist statements. Technology is understood to have social significance, both in the sense that some technologies are symbolically charged (following Lechtman's [1977] concept of technological style) and regarding the linkage of technological styles with social identity. Although in some cases technological styles are the result of subconscious traditions (what Sackett [1982] calls "isochrestic" variation), these same styles are seen as taking on particular social significance when the context of their use changes, for example, as a result of migration (Stark et al. 1995; see review in Hegmon 1998). Production of material culture is not simply an economic process but is also imbued with social significance. Theoretically, one of the most important components of this renewed interest in material culture is the conception—not unrelated to practice theory—of material as a dynamic *part* of culture (see Skibo and Feinman 1999). In some cases, material culture and its production are explicitly interpreted in terms of actors' social strategies, as in my analysis of Pueblo pottery design style (Hegmon 1995), Sassaman's (1995) discussion of pottery and innovation in the Southeast, Duke's (1992) discussion of innovation and conservatism in stone tools in the northern Plains, and Krause's (1995) discussion of how eastern mounds were used in the manipulation of social power. Assessments of the prestige goods model are also leading to insights in these regards. In many North American cases (i.e., nonstate societies), although exotic or labor-intensive goods may

have been "prestigious" in some sense, their distributions suggest that they were more than simply tokens of elite leadership and must be understood in terms of their roles in social and political strategies (Cobb 1993; Saitta 1999).

#### *Whose Past Is It?*

Although Native Americans' involvement in the archaeology of their ancestors has increased in recent years (Anawak 1989; Dongoske et al., eds. 2000; McGuire 1992a:829; Naranjo 1995), most archaeology of pre-Columbian North America is still done by archaeologists of European descent. Realization of this imbalance has become politicized, especially with the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990. Some of these issues are the subject of another article in this issue (see also Ferguson 1996b). Here I focus on how current theory is related to these political developments, and I emphasize that the relationship is complex and multicausal. In many ways, awareness of "whose ancestors we are studying" has made archaeologists more critically aware of possible biases and the implications of archaeological research, although formal critical theory (e.g., the work of Habermas) is not often explicitly discussed regarding pre-Columbian North American archaeology (but see Leone and Preucel 1992).

As Trigger (1980) made clear, New Archaeology, in its search for general laws, often treated native peoples as objects of research or sources of data. He suggests that more concern with the history of native peoples might help move archaeologists away from this detached view. His suggestion was applied by Duke (1995), whose emphasis on local history in southwestern Colorado is closely linked to the interest of local Ute people—who participated in his fieldwork—in their own history and ancestors. History has received much more archaeological (and general anthropological) attention since the 1980s. As I discussed above, the processual archaeology of the 1980s included growing interest in particular cases in lieu of general laws, and postprocessual archaeology explicitly emphasized the importance of history.

Concern with particular histories is also linked to the rekindling of archaeological interest in how people relate to the landscape, including issues of place, abandonment, and migration. Among other points, recent studies of abandonment now empha-

size that residential moves should not be equated with relinquishment of ownership and certainly not with the disappearance of a people (Nelson and Schachner 2002:169). In some cases, this work includes consideration of native oral histories (a subject also of interest in the direct historical approach in the mid-twentieth century) and the development of new theory for incorporating oral historical perspectives along with other sources of data (Echo-Hawk 2000; Whiteley 2002; though see Mason 2000). For example, Bernardini (2002) uses Hopi oral tradition as a source of hypotheses regarding migration processes that he then assesses with archaeological data, and Dongoske et al. (1997) discuss how the Hopi (people) did not become Hopi (the cultural identity) until they joined together at the Hopi villages (the place).

NAGPRA mandates determination of the cultural affiliation of remains and thus has directly spurred North American archaeologists to consider issues of ethnicity and cultural identity (Dongoske et al. 1997) at the same time that these issues were receiving increasing attention in anthropological and social theory. This includes work on how social boundaries and ethnicities can be recognized (Croes 1989; Jones 1997; Stark 1998); how archaeological style zones/regions should be interpreted, from both archaeological (Duff 2002) and linguistic (Shaul and Hill 1998) perspectives; and whether the concept of ethnicity is applicable in many prestate contexts (Shennan 1989). All of these issues have theoretical relevance well beyond the boundaries of North America.

### **Theoretical Directions, 2: Changing Key Words**

Terminology is both indicative of and part of theory. Here I focus on terminology—key words and phrases—as a way of characterizing recent changes in North American archaeological theory. I try to go beyond merely labeling concepts as “in style” (e.g., bell bottoms [again]) or “out of style” (everything in my closet). Rather, in many cases I argue that what were once widely used concepts (e.g., “evolution”) are now applied more narrowly but also more precisely. One term that appears repeatedly is *strategies* (organizational and leadership strategies, social strategies, land use and technological strategies); in all respects it suggests that archaeologists are conceiving of what *people* did in the past and thus

demonstrates the pervasiveness of the concepts of agency and practice, discussed above.

### *Evolution of Culture → Diverse Trajectories of Change*

Evolution will probably always be a part of anthropology, and archaeologists will always be concerned with the long-term evolution of culture. However, North American archaeologists have recently moved away from describing particular sequences as examples of cultural evolution and toward other conceptions of culture change. This shift in terminology goes far beyond mere semantics; it represents an increasingly sophisticated understanding of evolution as a theoretical concept and of what used to be called archaeological cultures, which are no longer conceptualized as bounded entities assumed to be units of evolution. Finally, this shift recognizes that many cultural changes are neither unilinear nor unidirectional, an idea with precursors in work by Steward (1955) and Sahlins and Service (1960).

Among the ideas and terminology that have come to replace cultural evolution are “paths to complexity” (see also Hayden [1995] on pathways to power) and “cycling.” One widely applied example of the former is based on the distinction between corporate and network/exclusionary modes of political action (Blanton et al. 1996). These are described in more detail below; here the point is that the switch from corporate to network strategies is not necessarily unidirectional—nor is one necessarily more complex than the other. The concept of cycling has been applied in various contexts in eastern North America. Cobb (1991) views the long-term development of Late Archaic, Hopewell, and Mississippian exchange systems in terms of Braudel’s three-level cycle of historical change (structure, conjuncture, and event). Focusing on the Mississippian, Anderson (1994, 1996) argues that cycling, specifically the rise and collapse of complex chiefdoms, is an inherent property of chiefdoms. Although Anderson’s model is not universally accepted (e.g., Scarry 1999), nonlinear developments—such as fission–fusion—do seem to characterize many parts of the Mississippian world (Blitz 1999).

There are exceptions to my generalization about the shift away from concern with the evolution of culture. For example, Richerson et al. (2001) develop a general explanation for the origins of agriculture in the Holocene (the processes they discuss are world-

wide, but they include some North American cases). And Smith (1992b) considers the development of early agriculture in eastern North America as coevolution (see also Rindos 1984). These exceptions make clear that there has not been an absolute rejection of the concept of the evolution of culture per se. Rather, the term *evolution* is being applied with more discrimination, so that every change or transformation is no longer considered to be “evolutionary” (see also Trigger’s [1998b] historical treatment of sociocultural evolution). Furthermore, different schools and approaches—including Darwinian archaeology and evolutionary ecology (as discussed here) as well as dual transmission theory (Boyd and Richerson 1985), evolutionary psychology (e.g., Barkow et al. 1992), and sociobiology (e.g., Dawkins 1976)—explore different ways evolution (in a Darwinian sense) might be manifested in or contribute to culture change.

#### *The Social Organization → Organizational Strategies*

The phrase “social organization” is by no means gone from the North American literature; nor am I suggesting that it should be. But what is mostly gone is the focus on identifying, describing, and especially classifying *the* (static) social organization of a period or place. North American archaeologists have instead moved toward understanding various aspects of social relations, including kinship, leadership, labor, and exchange, in diverse and dynamic ways, perspectives that often bridge processual and postprocessual interests (Schiffer 2000:6, 9). These interests in strategies and organizational dynamics have precursors in the New Archaeology (e.g., Deetz 1968; Freeman 1968), but they have been brought to the fore more commonly in recent years.

Archaeological interest in kinship has been moderate, at best (e.g., Howell and Kintigh 1996). However, a few recent studies that have addressed the topic conceptualize kinship not as a system to be classified but, rather, as an organizational strategy, a perspective consonant with recent work in social and kinship theory. For example, Jones (1996) sees the rise of lineal organization in California as a response to the need for women’s processing labor; McGuire (1992b) considers the role of kinship in the recruitment of much needed labor in Hohokam irrigation systems; and Peregrine (2001) views matrilineal groups as the basis of a corporate political strategy in Chaco Canyon. Some conceptions of ethnicity

(see the discussion in Jones 1997) similarly view it, at least in part, as an organizational strategy that builds on cultural traditions and inheritance.

One example of the new emphasis on organizational strategies is the conception of two modes of political organization, corporate and network (originally developed in Blanton et al. 1996 and applied to North America in Feinman et al. 2001, Trubitt 2000, and numerous chapters in Mills 2000; see also Hayden 1995 regarding leadership strategies). Although the difference between *social organization* and *political organization* may seem to be splitting hairs, the point is that the political modes comprise sets of leadership strategies that crosscut various kinds of societies and may coexist in a given social formation. Another important aspect of the corporate/network distinction is that it directs attention toward processes of leadership rather than assuming that leadership is somehow preestablished by the social structure; even when leadership is institutionalized it is not passively perpetuated.

A related development is an increasing interest in the dynamics of power. Most North Americanists—although they seem to be aware of Foucault’s work and various conceptions of power (Wolf 1990)—focus on how individuals or groups establish and maintain “power to” and “power over.” For example, Emerson (1997) defines an “architecture of power” used by the elite to signify and extend their control at and around the Mississippian center of Cahokia (see also Knight 1998; Lewis and Stout 1998). This architecture of power concept is applied by Whalen and Minnis (2001) to assess the level and scale of influence of Casas Grandes in northern Mexico. Sebastian (1992) considers how leaders in Chaco Canyon established and maintained authority and the complex relationship of these processes to surplus production.

An important component of the shift away from the study of “*the* social organization” is the disaggregation of its various components (see Mills 2000). One example is Saitta’s (1997) Marxist argument that developments at Chaco Canyon were the result of the communal appropriation of labor, rather than being controlled by ritual specialists, who had power in different realms. The concept of “heterarchy” similarly directs attention toward processes of leadership rather than organizational types, although it has seen few applications to the nonstate societies of North America (one exception is Rautman 1998).

Finally, chapters in Diehl 2000 consider the “costs and benefits,” to various social actors, of hierarchical strategies.

### *Types → Dimensions*

As New Archaeology/processual archaeologists directed attention toward understanding and analyzing artifact style in relation to social organization, many eschewed typological classifications in favor of attribute analysis (e.g., Plog 1980). More recently there has been a moderation of this approach and a renewed interest in artifact typologies (e.g., Duff 1996). Today types, attributes, or both may be the basis of analysis, depending on the question at hand. This reconsideration of artifact typologies, in conjunction with recent developments in social theory, has also moved archaeologists away from the typological classification of social forms or practices and toward an emphasis on understanding the relevant variables.

A prime example is movement away from Service’s (1971) bands–tribes–chiefdoms–states evolutionary sequence. Instead, there is much more focus on relevant dimensions that may crosscut these categories (see Feinman and Neitzel 1984), such as organizational strategies and forms of power (the corporate and network modes), as well as alternative forms of leadership, such as heterarchy and the communal appropriation of labor (discussed above). This shift has resulted in a welcome end to acrimonious debates about the presence or absence of hierarchy or whether one prehistoric case is more or less complex than another. For example, debate (centered around the sites of Chavez Pass and Grasshopper) about institutionalized social inequalities in late pre-Hispanic western Pueblos has been replaced by the conclusion that the Pueblos were both egalitarian *and* hierarchical (McGuire and Saitta 1996; Plog 1995). In a different approach, Nelson (1995) compares developments at La Quemada (northern Mexico) and Chaco Canyon, concludes that they were complex in different ways, and sets forth general dimensions of complexity.

Research on other kinds of topics has similarly involved a shift from types to dimensions. The organization of production/specialization had long been characterized in terms of categories/types such as households and workshops. However, since Costin’s (1991) seminal essay, much work has focused instead on the dimensions of specialization. Whereas

Costin’s emphasis was on high degrees of specialization—such as those associated with states—her general approach has been both modified and advanced in applications to the different kinds of specialization seen in North America (e.g., Crown and Mills 1995; Hegmon et al. 1997).

Archaeologists’ understanding of mobility is also becoming increasingly multidimensional (see Rocek 1996), in part building on Binford’s (1980) distinction between logistic and residential mobilities. Rather than classifying occupations as mobile *or* sedentary, all societies—even those that involve year-round residence in one location—may practice some kind of mobility. Relevant concepts include “short-term sedentism” (Nelson and LeBlanc 1986) and household residential mobility in the context of community stability (Varien 1999).

Although North American archaeologists have moved away from social typologies, all social categories have not been absolutely rejected. In particular, the concept of chiefdom still has analytical salience (Earle 1991), not necessarily as a precursor to the state (Yoffee 1993) or in Service’s (1971) sense as a redistributive theocracy but, rather, as an interesting and varied organizational form in its own right. For example, Gamble et al. (2001) use multiple lines of archaeological, bioarchaeological, and ethnographic evidence to argue for the early existence of a Chumash chiefdom in southern California, and Arnold (1993, 1995) and Ames (1995) consider various aspects of production (controlled by chiefs and at the household level, respectively) in chiefly societies. Interestingly, although there is much interest in the nature of complexity in the Southwest, the concept of chiefdom is rarely invoked because leadership seems to have taken different forms (Mills 2000). This selective use of a potentially controversial concept suggests a theoretical maturity, and it is likely that work on the rich database on North American chiefdoms—which often persisted into protohistoric periods—will advance archaeologists’ understanding of this social organizational form.

### *Eschewing Particularistic Explanations → Migration and Diffusion*

In their quest for general laws of cultural processes, some New Archaeologists rejected “particularistic” explanations based on diffusion and migration. Although their reasoning made theoretical sense—



diffusion is not an explanation—the result was a lack of attention to significant events such as large-scale population movements (see Anthony 1990). Perhaps as part of a renewed processual-plus interest in particular cases, archaeologists have again turned considerable attention toward the movement of people and apparent spread of traits.

Numerous studies have documented prehistoric migrations and abandonments in North America. Furthermore, rather than using migration simply as an explanation for change, much attention is now focused on understanding the social processes of population movement and resettlement (e.g., Cameron 1995; Duff 1998; M. Nelson 2000; Snow 1995). To a lesser degree, attention is being turned toward understanding what we see archaeologically as the spread of traits. A series of articles in *American Antiquity* 64(2) examines the spread of point technologies in different parts of North America, emphasizing primarily technological factors. In contrast, Sassaman (1995) focuses on the social factors involved in the spread (and restrictions on the spread) of pottery technology in the Southeast. Considering general processes rather than specific technologies, B. Nelson (2000) examines the long-distance reverberations of the collapse of Teotihuacan and its impact in the U.S. Southwest, more than 650 km distant. And from a different perspective, Darwinian archaeologists have focused on better understanding the diffusion of style (e.g., Neiman 1995; though see Shennan and Wilkinson 2001). A still mostly neglected topic in this realm is the spread of symbols and what appear to be religious ideas. Examples, such as the Katchina religion in the Southwest and the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex in the eastern U.S., have been well documented, but much work remains to be done on understanding how and why people adopted new religious practices (a few studies that begin to probe at these issues include Adams 1991, Knight 1984, and Ware and Blinman 2000).

*Adaptation as a Process → Land Use Strategies/Differential Persistence*

In earlier decades, cultures were sometimes conceptualized as “adaptive systems” (Binford 1968) or as humans’ “extrasomatic means of adaptation.” Adaptation (a process) was somehow something that happened to cultures (though the complexity of this idea has long been recognized [e.g., Durham 1976]). More recently, archaeologists working in various theoretic

perspectives have moved away from this usage of *adaptation*, although the term (as a noun) is still sometimes used as a sort of shorthand for “how humans lived on the landscape.” From the processual-plus perspective, a way of living on a landscape is often conceptualized as a result of human problem solving, a land use or subsistence *strategy*. For example, in his investigation of the increased use of rock shelters in eastern North America in the early Holocene, Walthall (1998:234, following Kelly and Todd 1988) argues that people “reorganized their mobility strategies” as they shifted toward more exploitation of non-migratory game. Similarly, Smith and McNees (1999) interpret slab-lined basins in Wyoming in terms of a long-term land use strategy that involved the exploitation of stable, predictable resources. From a Darwinian perspective, the way that humans live on the landscape is a result of evolutionary processes, specifically the differential persistence and selection of successful traits. Larson et al. (1996) argue that tactics such as aggregation and exchange were selected for during a favorable climatic period and that these tactics made the societies of northern Arizona and southern Utah particularly vulnerable to later climatic downturns.

*Rituals as Integrative → Rituals/Feasting as Strategies, Contexts for Social Action*

There had been a tendency for archaeologists (particularly working in the Southwest) to assume that rituals, feasts, and other communal events were necessarily integrative, in a Durkheimian sense (Hegmon 1989; Hill 1970; Longacre 1970), despite classic accounts to the contrary (e.g., Benedict’s [1934] description of the Kwakiutl). More recent work has recognized (again?) that rituals, especially feasting, may also have been competitive (Hayden 1995) and may have provided important contexts in which leaders could enact social change (Aldenderfer 1993). This recognition has led to focus on the context and content of ritual, particularly the degree to which access was public or restricted (e.g., Hockett 1998; Schachner 2001), as well as detailed analyses of food and cooking remains (Blinman 1989; Blitz 1993; Hockett 1998; Pauketat et al. 2002; Potter 2000b), to determine to what degree a ritual or feast might have been controlled by leaders or was otherwise competitive. One key conclusion of recent work is that ritual may simultaneously integrate and differentiate and that cooperation and competition are parts

of the same process operating at different levels (Potter 2000a). The idea of integration has not been discarded (Hollimon 2001), but it is being applied more selectively.

### *Explanatory Models → Modeling*

New Archaeology strived to develop explanatory models of cultural processes that posit relationships among general variables such as integration and differentiation (Plog 1974). Today the term *model* is commonly used, but it usually refers to a dynamic description of a particular case (e.g., Daniel 2001; Kuehn 1998; Lovis et al. 2001). A different kind of approach is invoked by the concept of *modeling*. Whereas models generally posit fixed/linear relationships among variables and thus can be illustrated with flowcharts, modeling involves what mathematicians call “dynamical” relations, such that the nature of variables and their interrelationships can change (i.e., agents can learn) and new properties can emerge. Agent-based modeling, discussed above, is one example, and Kohler (2000) emphasizes that agent-based models involve dynamics and relations among agents rather than variables. Another (related) perspective is based in the many versions of complexity theory (see reviews in Lewin 1999; Manson 2001). Application of some versions of complexity theory to the contemporary social world may be politically questionable, in that some argue that it naturalizes and justifies a laissez-faire attitude and processes of exploitation (see Best and Kellner 2001:123–128). Still, complexity theories may offer archaeologists new ways of conceptualizing change, in that they provide insights into how (not necessarily why) major changes can come about as a result of seemingly minor perturbations (issues also explored with regard to catastrophe theory [Renfrew 1978]). A group of researchers, working with the Santa Fe Institute, have drawn on complexity theory to examine sequences of changes in the Southwest (Gumerman and Gell-Mann 1994; Kohler, Van Pelt, and Yap 2000), and Bentley and Maschner (2001) draw on complexity theory to understand the evolution of stylistic changes in pottery.

The mathematical and computational complexity involved in agent-based modeling and complexity theory suggests that neither will become mainstream applications in archaeology. Still, they are important as new ways of conceptualizing processes of change. In addition, they may cause

archaeologists to reconsider concepts of explanation (an issue also being explored by philosophers of science [Morrison and Morgan 1999]). That is, in these approaches to modeling, change is often an emergent property rather than the effect of one variable on another. The result is that there is no simple answer to the “why” questions, but there is enhanced understanding.

### *Humans in the Environment → Humans as Part of the Environment*

The environment has become an increasingly complex concept, in social theory and politics (Castree and Braun 2001), and for North American archaeologists. No longer is the (natural) environment simply a setting for human activity, a variable in explanatory models, or a source of constraints. Archaeologists’ theories about the environment and humans’ part in it are influenced in part by developments in the “new ecologies,” which emphasize processes of disequilibrium and instability (see review in Zimmerer 1994).

This increasingly complicated understanding of “environment” has several implications in North American archaeological theory. It is increasingly evident that even the relatively small-scale pre-Columbian societies of North America had a major impact on the environment (e.g., Kohler and Matthews 1988; Minnis 1985; Redman 1999). And while impact sometimes involved negative processes such as erosion, deforestation, and salinization, it is also becoming clear that “impact” is not always the most appropriate concept. Humans contributed to the ecology of which they were a part, for example, through deliberate burning (Delcourt et al. 1998), and in least some cases, human practices may have increased biological diversity (Minnis and Elisens 2000). Not only is “the environment” partly a human creation, it is also conceived as having inseparable natural and cultural components, in that it is always occupied by other humans. Research on environmental subjects increasingly is linked to cultural concepts of symbols and meaning. Some earlier work on domestication (e.g., Ford 1977) explored how changes in humans’ use of plants involved changing cultural concepts. Recent theorizing regarding landscapes takes this perspective even further. As Knapp and Ashmore put it, no longer are landscapes/environments simply backdrops: “Landscape is an entity that exists by virtue of its being perceived, experi-

enced, and contextualized by people" (1999:1). This theoretical perspective is given practical application by the U.S. Forest Service, which has recently considered how landscapes (rather than arbitrarily defined districts) might be used as management/planning units that are sensitive to environmental-cultural dynamics (Duke 1995:209). Finally, the environment is becoming a focus for some archaeologists (e.g., van der Leeuw and Redman 2002) to expand the reach of archaeology, through interdisciplinary studies and efforts to use archaeological (especially long-term diachronic) perspectives to address issues of contemporary relevance.

### Epistemology

In contrast to the heyday of the New Archaeology, epistemological debates have been relatively uncommon in recent North American archaeology. Discussions about the virtues of various theoretical perspectives (reviewed above) have primarily focused on the nature of human society and culture change and on how they should be conceptualized. Thus, these discussions have mostly been about ontology, though they have epistemological implications with regard to the ways issues should be investigated.

In earlier decades North American archaeologists often formally applied the deductive method, evaluating explicitly stated hypotheses (and often also null hypotheses) by means of explicitly stated test implications (e.g., Hill 1970; Lightfoot and Feinman 1982). Recent approaches tend to take a less formal approach. It is still common for research questions, expectations, and means of evaluation to be made clear, but the labels of the scientific method seem to be less important, and the structure of investigation is less assertively deductive. Instead, accounts of research tend to move fairly freely among research questions, relevant information, and new interpretations and questions. For example, Whalen and Minnis (2001) apply (rather than "test") concepts regarding the architecture of power to their data on Casas Grandes. While their investigation is guided by this general idea, they also consider ways in which the concept is not applicable and probe other kinds of variability in Casas Grandes architecture. In my mind, this new style of presentation more accurately represents the real research process, although the decrease in formality may also provide fewer safeguards against logical errors. There are contempo-

rary studies that formally test hypotheses; for example, Gamble et al. (2001) explicitly evaluate arguments made by two different researchers (regarding the beginning of Chumash chiefdoms), and Richerson et al. (2001) evaluate hypotheses regarding the origins of agriculture worldwide. These exceptions suggest that the formal scientific method has not been absolutely rejected, but neither is it applied formulaically; rather, it is today used only when specifically appropriate to the research questions at hand.

Three interrelated sets of epistemological issues have received some attention in recent North American archaeology. The first has to do with the nature of science and the extent to which various archaeologies are scientific. VanPool and VanPool (1999) define science broadly, in terms of seven criteria, and they argue that "moderate" postprocessualism fits these criteria and that it (as well as processual archaeology) is scientific. However, their characterization of science and their emphasis on epistemological unity are challenged by Hutson (2001) and by Arnold and Wilkens (2001). Wylie (2000:229), reacting in part to the "science wars," suggests that we should move away from the idea that there is such a unified thing as "science" and instead should be concerned with the process of inquiry. Instead of trying to be (or not be) science, she argues that archaeology's ideal should be "that of holding ideas as well as belief, open to revision in light of experience" (2000:234).

A second related issue derives from critical theory. To what extent is our apparent understanding of the past a product of our present context and the sociology of archaeological practice? In what ways is "the past" knowable? Hot debate about these questions was part of the work of early postprocessualism and its detractors (e.g., Binford 1989; Shanks and Tilley 1987a, 1987b). But more recently most archaeologists have turned away from asking whether we can "know" the past (a yes-or-no question) toward considering ways in which the present influences research and, conversely, asking how archaeology can and should contribute to current issues (Pinsky and Wylie 1995; see also Preucel's [1995:152–153] discussion of Critical neo-Marxism). Most North American archaeologists would probably agree that our research questions (if not also our interpretations) are influenced by our present social and political context, but at the same time most also seem to eschew what Trigger (1989b) calls

“hyperrelativism.” A surge of interest since around 1990 in the history of archaeological thought and research seems to have been part of this understanding (Pinsky and Wylie 1995:viii; Trigger 1989a).

This moderate view is supported by recent statements by Wylie (1992, 1996, 2000; see also Brumfiel 1996) about the “evidential constraints” that the archaeological record places on our interpretations. While all data are dependent on *some* theory, the point is to evaluate one theory with data that are primarily dependent on another theory. Multiple lines of evidence generally produce better evidential constraints, but Wylie reasonably argues that there is no single formula that should be applied in all cases. Rather, focus should be on assessing the independence or interdependence of various lines of evidence for a particular problem.

Finally, heated debate ensued as a result of Binford’s (2001) criticism of the idea that the archaeological record should be used to evaluate theories—derived from all sorts of perspectives—about the nature of human behavior. By working in this perspective, researchers merely focus on how they can “interpret” their data, an approach Binford considers to be deplorable. Instead, he argues that archaeology’s subject matter should be the archaeological record; if archaeologists properly focus on explaining the archaeological record, they will avoid the problem of data being theory dependent. Because Binford used recent work by Odell as a foil for his criticisms, Odell (2001) countered, arguing that good research problems can be derived from many sources and that the key is reasonable and independent testing. Although this exchange was very recent, it is my impression that it will not turn into a continuing debate. Rather, depending on the issue at hand, most archaeologists will sometimes ask questions about the nature of the archaeological record and sometimes use the archaeological record to evaluate larger issues. Both kinds of questions are part of behavioral archaeology (e.g., work on site formation processes and on meaning). And although most of the processual-plus work I have reviewed here involves the second kind of question (i.e., issues beyond the archaeological record), many of the same researchers also ask the first kind of question, when appropriate. For example, Pauketat (1989, 1994, 2000) investigated the accumulation of ceramic refuse at Mississippian sites and used Mississippian remains to

investigate the nature of chiefdoms. Similarly, Cowan (1999) used lithic assemblages to evaluate theories about technological and mobility strategies, but he also devoted considerable attention to explaining aspects of the archaeological record, specifically the relationship between reduction sequences and flake assemblages.

### So What about General Theory?

By *general theory* I mean theory about the nature of the world and how it can and should be understood. General social and cultural theories (such as Marxism, structuralism, and postmodernism) cross disciplines and increasingly even encompass both the sciences and the humanities. With the exception of practice theory (which is more of a perspective than a specific theory with an underlying norm [see Cowgill 2000; Ortner 1996:2]), there is relatively little mention of general social theory in North American archaeology today. There are some exceptions, especially at the postprocessual end of the processual-plus spectrum (e.g., Duke 1992; Dunham 1999; McGuire 1992; McGuire and Saitta 1996; Saitta 1994, 1995, 1997). In addition, evolutionary approaches draw on general scientific theories. Still, discussion of general theory in North American archaeology is much less common than it is in Britain (e.g., Hodder 1991; Holtorf and Karlsson 2000; Thomas 2000; Tilley 1990).

This dearth of explicit discussion does not mean that North American archaeology has no theoretical perspective but, rather, that it is often taken for granted. My goal in this section is to briefly characterize North American archaeology in terms of recent social theory, a discussion that requires some background and at least basic definitions of the various “posts.” Although the paragraphs that follow (modernism explained in one paragraph, poststructuralism and postmodernism in two) may seem elementary to some, I am convinced that they are necessary. I have too often heard otherwise well-informed scholars assume that postmodernism is either everything new (often everything new they do not like) or everything critical of science.

Modernism, a product of the Enlightenment, is based on the belief that the world is knowable through reason and that “reason advances knowledge; knowledge enables science; and science serves the liberatory aims of society” (Peet 1998:194). Modernist approaches—including Newtonian physics, Dar-

winian evolution, Freudian psychoanalysis, and structuralism—seek understanding and explanation in terms of underlying principles. Marxism is also modern in its emphasis on progress, though because of its historical and dialectical approaches, Marxism is less positivist and less concerned with universal truths than most other modern approaches. Modern art, such as Cubism, attempted to “reduce painting to a few basic principles accessible only to the intellect” (Cassou 1965:269).

The definitiveness and optimism of modernism were challenged early in the twentieth century, intellectually by work on entropy, quantum mechanics, and relativity theory and more generally by stark realizations of the destructive potential of science. Physicists themselves began to declare that they should “abandon all attempts to construct perceptual models,” renounced “the classical ideal of causality,” and argued that what they observe “is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning” (Best and Kellner 1997:214–215). Philosophically, these developments in the “hardest” of sciences—physics—are representative of postpositivism and sometimes seen as the precursors of postmodernism (Best and Kellner 1997, 2001).

Socially and philosophically the turn toward postmodernism and poststructuralism is often traced to the failure of the 1968 radical upheavals in France, which led to interest in *post-Marxist* and *poststructuralist* ideas. “Truth” was no longer seen as liberatory. Rather, poststructural philosophers such as Foucault emphasized the link between power and what is *represented* as truth. Poststructuralism (like structuralism) is little concerned with the subject (which is seen as decentered) but, rather, focuses on structures and forces. But unlike structuralism, which focused on revealing a singular underlying structure that explains particulars, poststructuralism posits a multiplicity of fragmented structures by which the subject is buffeted. There is little interest (or belief) in agency or the ability of actors to intentionally act and affect the world. Some of Bourdieu’s work can be classed as poststructuralism; in particular, his oft-cited *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977) emphasizes how structures (i.e., habitus) come to be embodied through practice, but agency is seen as having little or no importance.

Poststructuralism overlaps to some extent with postmodernism, which is broader and perhaps even more difficult to define. In contrast to modernism,

which seeks to understand underlying and generalizable processes and is sometimes referred to as “totalizing,” postmodernism (as set forth by Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* [1984]) is concerned with multiple surficial representations. Postmodern knowledge also emphasizes differences, including acknowledgment and tolerance of the incommensurable. Postmodern knowledge is not just the purview of experts but is a product of many little narratives and peoples’ practices and interactions at a local scale. The point is not that narratives and representations can somehow be decoded and stripped away to reveal a “true” underlying reality but, rather, that representations *are* the reality (what Baudrillard [1983] calls a hyperreality). The force of this hyperreality (“true” or not) is seen in the (very real) power of the media, such as images of “smart” weapons in the Gulf War. Many scholars distinguish between postmodernism, as an approach, and analyses of postmodern times from Marxist (e.g., Harvey 1989; Jameson 1991) and other perspectives.

Many of the theoretical approaches that are relatively new to North American archaeology are definitely modern, not postmodern. These include Marxism (though there is some discussion of Marxism in the postmodern age [Saitta 1995]), structuralism, critical theory (especially following the Frankfurt School), and, very importantly, Giddens’s work on agency and structuration. Feminist approaches span the modern–postmodern spectrum, but feminists have found much to criticize in poststructural and postmodern theory (e.g., Mascia-Lees et al. 1989). There are a few exceptions (e.g., Dunham [1999] explicitly draws on poststructural concepts), but the vast majority of North American archaeology, even approaches classed as post-processual, is *not* postmodern. Although some post-processual archaeologists, again, especially in Britain (e.g., Holtorf and Karlsson 2000; Tilley 1990; Turner 2001), are addressing poststructuralism and postmodernism directly, post-processual archaeology should *not* be equated with postmodernism (contra Duke 1995:211; VanPool and VanPool 1999). Perhaps ironically, some of the most computationally complex approaches in North American archaeology—complexity theory and agent-based modeling—may be the closest to being postmodern in their willingness to probe indeterminacy.

Is “not postmodern” equivalent to modern? In the case of North American archaeology, the answer is,

“Yes, generally.” Emphasis on generalizable principles and scientific reasoning (characteristic especially of earlier processualism as well as evolutionary ecology and behavioral and Darwinian archaeologies) is definitely modern. The processual-plus interest in specific cases as they relate to the larger context or in comparative perspectives is also generally modern, in that it involves a search for underlying truths. A modernist approach is often taken for granted, enabling researchers to proceed with their particular studies (in the tradition of normal science) but also disabling their ability to imagine other ways of viewing the world, especially when “postmodernist” becomes the appellation for new and often misunderstood approaches, issues I address in the final section.

### Conclusion

In this review I have grouped most North American archaeology into three self-identified schools—evolutionary ecology, behavioral, and Darwinian—and a broad array that I label processual-plus. Combining all four perspectives, there is considerable use of various kinds of evolutionary theory as well as practice theory and the concept of agency. North American archaeologists also are contributing to many theoretically interesting issues, including gender, symbols and meaning, new approaches to conceptualizing society and material culture, and local/native histories. However, in contrast to the New Archaeology of several decades ago, and in contrast to some postprocessual work in Britain, North American archaeology today involves relatively little discussion of general theory and relatively few attempts to build or contribute to such theory. North American archaeology is not atheoretical, but most North American archaeologists today seem to be more interested in applications—and in exploring the archaeological record and its implications—than in theory alone (see also Barker 1999).

I am not suggesting that there is a theoretical rapprochement, such that most North American archaeologists subscribe to the same theory; nor do I think that this kind of homogeneity would be a good thing. Some degree of theoretical disunity contributes to dynamism (as has been argued in many recent statements [e.g., Hodder 2001; Hutson 2001; Schiffer 2000; Spencer 1997]), and focus on theoretically relevant issues—such as gender and agency—that crosscut various theoretical perspectives contributes to this dynamism. Optimistically, many North Amer-

ican archaeologists have pushed their theoretical egos to the side, are not excessively attached to or dismissive of any particular approach, and seem to be open to multiple ways of viewing the past (Preucel 1991; Trigger 1989a:369). Instead of theoretical animosity, there is refreshing dialogue.

Lack of focus on general theory contributes to open-mindedness, on the one hand, but at another level this lack of focus can also disguise the importance of theory. Theory is omnipresent; it is how we make sense of the world, even (or especially) if it is not explicit. This is an issue particularly regarding modernism and postmodernism: many North American archaeologists seem to take a modern perspective for granted, as the only way of knowing the world, and dismiss postmodernism (sometimes assumed to be a synonym for “antiscience”) out of hand. The result is that powerful and relevant ideas from postmodernism are not brought to bear, even when they might be particularly relevant to North American issues. Examples include perspectives on local knowledge and incommensurability, especially with regard to Native American views of the past, and alternative approaches to causality, especially with regard to new techniques of modeling.

There are many developments in North American archaeology that are of broad relevance worldwide, at both theoretical and applied levels. For example, the North American ethnographic and archaeological records provide great detail on various forms of social complexity in nonstate societies; these include a variety of chiefdoms (Mississippian and on the western coast) and alternative complicated leadership strategies in the Southwest. The great detail and precise dating possible in some parts of North America have facilitated careful investigations of agency and practice, as well as gender issues. The detailed record and links to ethnography have contributed to important studies of symbols and meaning, in portable material culture, architecture, and the environment and landscape. The list could go on, but while there is a great deal to praise in North American archaeology, I fear that it is not getting the recognition it deserves outside of North America, perhaps because of a lack of attention to general theory. It is my hope that this review will draw more attention to recent developments in North American archaeology, especially regarding theoretically relevant issues and applications. I also hope to prod North Americanists to direct a little more focus toward general theory,

not to open the floodgates of argument but, rather, to become aware of the way theory conditions the manner in which we see the world.

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## Notes

1. Prominent exceptions include Boston University, Stanford, Simon Fraser, and the University of Calgary.
2. Many practitioners of this approach prefer the appellation *evolutionary archaeology*, but this usage results in terminological confusion, as it is often unclear whether *evolutionary* includes evolutionary ecology. For example, Schiffer's (1996) discussion of the relationship between behavioral and evolutionary archaeologies focused on the Darwinian school, prompting a comment by Broughton and O'Connell (1998), who noted that there are other kinds of evolutionary approaches. For purposes of comparative discussion, *Darwinian archaeology* seems to be the best term, though not all approaches that draw on Darwinian theory (e.g., Barton and Clark 1997) subscribe to this approach.
3. Gender studies, including the archaeology of gender, simply involve focus on issues relating to sex and gender. While some may believe that interest in gender is inherently feminist, I believe that it is possible for research that involves gender to be apolitical or even sexist, for example, when women are considered only in terms of their relational roles as wives and mothers. In contrast, feminism is political and antisexist. As I define it, feminism is the belief that one should act to improve the lives of women and to increase the chances that people (of all genders and ages) not only can meet their basic needs but also will have the opportunity for self-actualization, to create lives that satisfy them and make use of their inherent gifts and talents.
4. I agree with Preucel's grouping, though not necessarily his label, for some of what he calls "analytical feminism" involves fairly apolitical study of gender and, therefore, does not fit my definition of feminism.