

**BEYOND BOUNDARIES:  
THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX IN “THE REAL STATE OF JEFFERSON”**

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*The following essay is a slightly emended version of my discussant’s commentary for the symposium, “The Real State of Jefferson,” organized by Joanne Mack for the 49<sup>th</sup> Society for California Archaeology annual meeting held at Redding, California, in March 2015. Key concepts include explanation vs. understanding, legislative archaeology vs. academic archaeology, theory vs. narrative synthesis, and men hunting vs. women gathering.*

I interpreted “Beyond Boundaries,” the theme of this year’s annual meeting, as a challenge and invitation to cross familiar boundaries into new territories, which, as Trudy Vaughan (2015) suggested in her opening remarks for our symposium, are as much a matter of “states of mind” as they are of tangible geography.

Allow me to start by sharing a frame of reference that will serve to place in context the remarks to follow. Much of what I have to say is informed by readings in the literature of Scientific Realism as it pertains to the social sciences (see especially Hollis 1994; Manicas 2006; Rosenberg 2012). Scientific Realism is the philosophy of science that replaced Logical Positivism sometime before the New Archaeology adopted the latter.

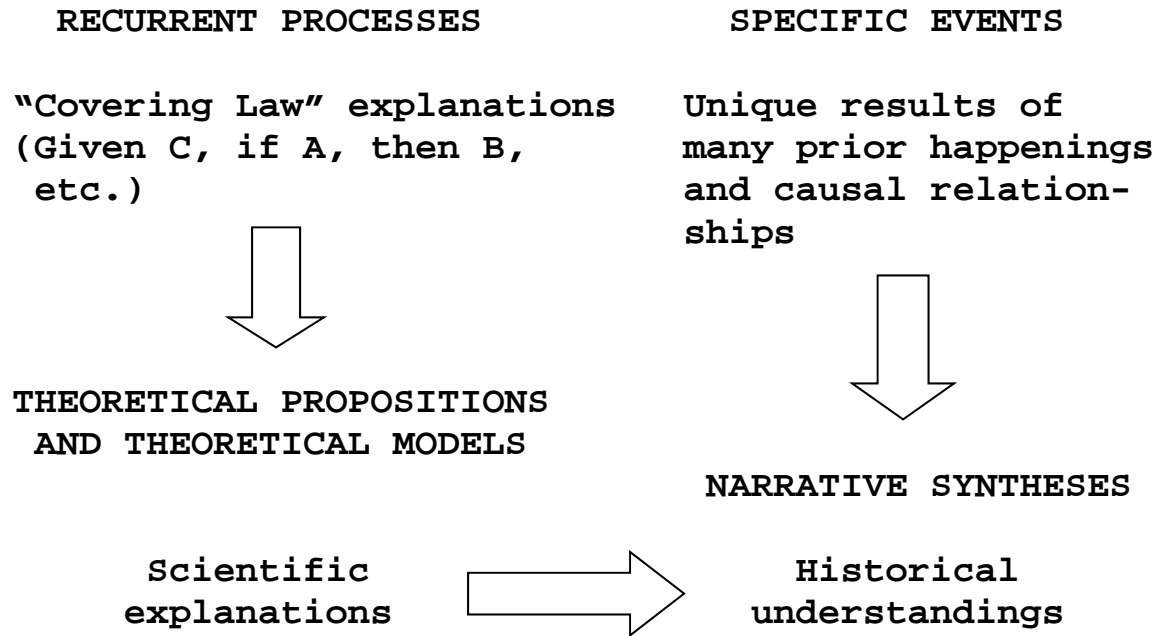
**EXPLANATIONS AND UNDERSTANDINGS**

I start with a short excerpt taken from Thomas Buckley’s discussion of A. L. Kroeber’s work on culture areas: “[Kroeber turned away from] the scientific effort of causal explanation in favor of historical understanding” (Buckley 1989:15).

This brief excerpt establishes a border between “scientific explanation” and “historical understanding.” This distinction may not be particularly important in itself, but it does pair with another distinction that does have more practical implications: the distinction between developing theories (or theoretical propositions) that pertain to recurring processes, on the one hand, and accounting for historical events, which are unique phenomena, on the other (see Figure 1). Although the insistence on this distinction between explanation and understanding is relatively recent, expressed mainly in the literature of Scientific Realism, we find an early example in the anthropological literature in Beattie (1959).

In the framework outlined here, theory is narrowly conceived to consist of propositions that state invariant (or at least probabilistic) relationships between A and B (under specified conditions, C), such that the presence of A predicts the presence of B and arguably that A causes B. Those of you who came into archaeology when the New Archaeology was really new will remember this form of explanation as a “covering law” explanation, attributable to Logical Positivists such as Carl Hempel (1965). Phenomena were said to be “explained” in this format when it could be shown that they conformed to the Deductive-Nomothetic (D-N) or Inductive-Statistical (I-S) explanatory format. Such phenomena were said to be “covered” by the stated propositions. (This narrow definition of theory is intended to draw a distinction between theory and theoretical frameworks. By the latter term, we mean the epistemological, methodological, and conceptual framework within which research is carried out. Not all “theoretical frameworks” embody tightly formulated theory.)

Of the various types of explanations commonly used in the social sciences, this form makes the best claim regarding the ability to make predictions regarding future occurrences—useful, for example, in formulating medical policies, if not as much in archaeology, where the focus is on retrodiction.



*Figure 1. Scientific explanations and historical understandings.*

In brief, theoretical or scientific explanations identify processes that recur and are useful precisely because it is the recurrence of such processes that allows us to profitably use knowledge gained from past experiences in dealing with new situations.

Note, however, that what passes for theoretical explanations in the social sciences vary in the rigor with which the postulated causal relationship between A and B has been established, extending from what might be called “theoretical sketches” to “untested generalizations.” Likewise, “theoretical models” are as often as not proposed on the basis of the analysis of single cases, leaving the testing of their universality for later. Figure 2 generalizes the relationship between academic disciplines, archaeological subject matter, and methodology.

When the New Archaeology was new, much was made of the search for “covering laws.” Today, not so much. There has been a shift to an alternate objective in the social sciences: to account for “events.” Peter Manicas (2006:1) goes so far as to say that

the fundamental goal of theory in both the natural and social sciences is not, contrary to widespread opinion, prediction and control, or the explanation of events (including “behavior”). Rather, more modestly, theory (at least in one of its clear senses) aims to provide an understanding of the processes which jointly produce the contingent outcomes of experience.

Although Manicas’s statement may not be entirely clear, I think there would be general agreement that as archaeologists and culture historians we have a vested interest in trying to account for “events” represented in our data. And events in the present view represent the unique convergence of numerous prior happenings, causal connections, and external variables, such that they do not lend themselves easily or successfully to rigorous theoretical treatment, if by that we mean replicable in numerous cases. Hence the use of the term “understandings” instead of “explanations.”

Typically, our “understanding” of such events as “the emergence of complex hunter-gatherers” and “the late adoption of marine resources” takes the form of a narrative that describes the interrelationships of the many interlacing factors (including theoretical propositions) that lead up to the subject of inquiry. Relative to this point, historians have adopted the useful term “narrative synthesis” to

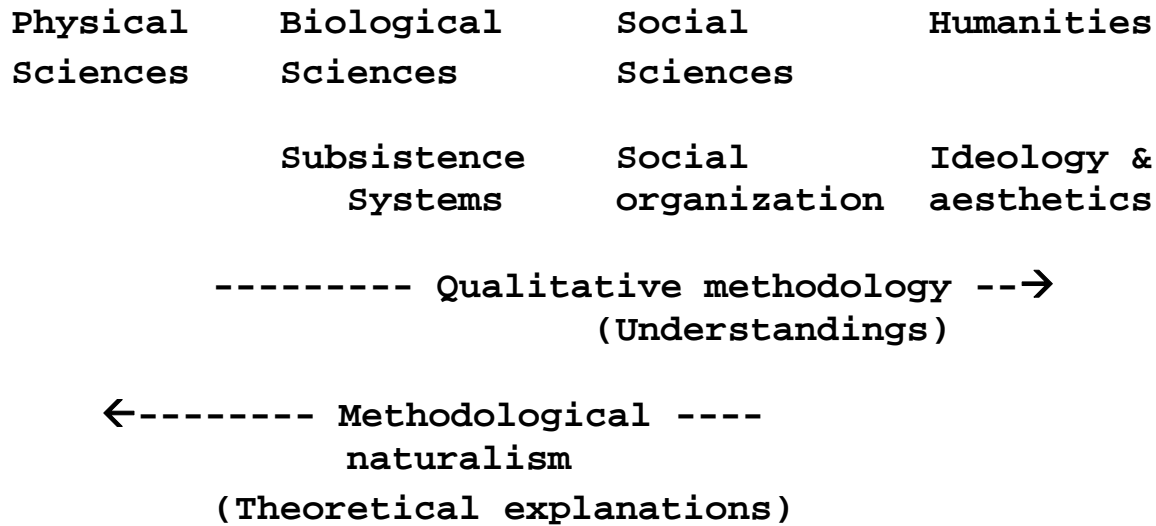


Figure 2. Academic disciplines, subject matter, and methodology.

Table 1. Comparison of legislative (CRM) and academic archaeology.

	<b>LEGISLATIVE (POST-1970 CRM) ARCHAEOLOGY</b>	<b>ACADEMIC ARCHAEOLOGY</b>
<b>Function</b>	<b>Management / research</b>	<b>Teaching / research</b>
<b>Funding</b>	<b>Public / private</b>	<b>Research grants</b>
<b>Stakeholders</b>	<b>Multiple (the public)</b>	<b>Single (academics)</b>
<b>Specialty</b>	<b>Narrative syntheses</b>	<b>Theory</b>

describe this form of presentation—“synthesis” because it integrates theoretical insights (to the extent available and appropriate) with “humanistic” understandings and substantive social and individualistic data (see McPherson 1996). Realistically, this is what most of us do.

### IN PRAISE OF NARRATIVE SYNTHESSES

To repeat, most of us routinely do narrative syntheses. One reason why this is the case has to do with the fact that much of the archaeology done in California these days (and elsewhere in the United States for that matter) is done in the framework of what can be called Legislative Archaeology. Legislative Archaeology is essentially CRM archaeology, but CRM archaeology post-NEPA, CEQA, NAGPRA, etc., i.e., legislation that shaped the archaeological infrastructure in ways that were not characteristic prior to the early 1970s. Table 1 outlines a few of the salient characteristics of Legislative Archaeology contrasted with traditional or academic, pre-1970 archaeology. (The distinctions outlined here pertain to the early years of Legislative Archaeology. Since that time, the differences have become blurred, especially as large-scale private consulting firms have entered the scene to alter the infrastructure).

To be sure, this is an overly simplified view of the matter. The critical point is that Legislative Archaeology is supported by the public at large, and as such, it creates multiple stakeholders with different expectations concerning the dividends from their support. These stakeholders span a broad range of interests—from Native Americans and other ethnic minorities to local history preservationists, built-environment enthusiasts, shipwreck explorers, Ken Burns and National Geographic fans, and military enactment buffs, as well as professional and avocational archaeologists. Needless to say, these varied interests have differing expectations, realistic or not, regarding their support of Legislative Archaeology.

Even under the best of circumstances, it would be difficult to simultaneously satisfy all these expectations.

But if there is a common denominator crosscutting all these interests, it would be an appreciation of—guess what—narrative syntheses. Wanting to know how things came to be appears to be a crosscultural, even panhuman characteristic.

A clue as to why this should be the case is to be found in the following: “Narratives are the way we make sense of the world. We parcel existence into events and string them into cause-and-effect sequences” (Birmingham 2014:226).

These words were written by a biographer, but they echo the ideas of evolutionary psychologists and cognitive scientists, who maintain that the proclivity for narration represents evolved (i.e., established by natural selection) and universal characteristics shared by all humans. In other words, the reason that we fall easily into the narrative synthesis mode and why it has such widespread appeal is that it is embedded in our and everyone else’s DNA! (See, for example, Gottschall and Wilson 2002; Pinker 2009).

To sum up, it is part of our responsibility as culture historians and archaeologists, the beneficiaries of Legislative Archaeology, to present its stakeholders with the results of our activities in a form that is both usable and understandable (see Brown 1991:153-156; Martinez 2012). And I would suggest that for archaeologists, the narrative synthesis type of final presentation is perhaps one of the best ways to fulfill this responsibility, and the many of you who are actively engaged in providing this public service are to be commended for this effort.

However, to anticipate a point to be made later, the term “narrative syntheses” implies the melding together of particularistic, historically contingent data and theoretical insights. These insights serve the purpose of rewarding recipients of our research results by providing additional levels of explanation as to the “whys” of the events in question.

### **TELLING THE STORY OF “THE REAL STATE OF JEFFERSON”**

With this overly long prologue, let us proceed to the papers in our symposium. Fortunately, our co-discussant, Joe Chartkoff, provided an excellent commentary on the individual papers of our symposium, eliminating the need for me to do the same. To justify my role as discussant, I offer the following summary commentary.

All the papers in the symposium contributed meaningfully to our “understanding” of an “event” (stretching the meaning of “event” more than a little for the sake of the present discussion)—i.e., the populating of North America by successive groups of people, each with its own distinctive culture. By providing informative details of the different chapters of the overall “narrative,” these papers have contributed to our appreciation and understanding not only of the lives of these various groups but also of our own. This is a narrative that in our region goes back to 13,000/12,000 years ago at Paisley Cave in Oregon (Jenkins et al. 2012) and extends to the Chinese at Waldo, the Euro-American settlers with their various medical practices, and their predecessors such as the Shasta, Achomawi, and Northern Paiute, whose boundaries Joanne Mack, Mary Carpelan, and Gerry Gates have endeavored to establish.

The intricacies of the many “border crossings” and interactions among these different groups tell a story fascinating in its own right. But if I might, allow me to proceed to this year’s conference theme, “Beyond Boundaries”—the challenge to explore new frontiers. More specifically, we ask, how do we enrich the historical narrative at hand by incorporating additional theoretical insights and comparative data being generated elsewhere outside the “Real State of Jefferson?”

For suggestions, we might consider some of the major issues with which those in the Evolutionary Ecology or Human Behavioral Evolution camp, arguably on the current frontiers of theoretical exploration, are grappling these days (see, for example, Jones and Perry 2012)—issues such as:

- What role does a particular food resource play in the pattern of resource use through time?

- How does a commitment to a particular kind of subsistence activity affect settlement patterns, gender-based division of labor, and inter-tribal relationships?
- What is the relationship between subsistence systems, technological innovations, and the evolution of new cultural systems?

These are issues that I am sure you will recognize as having direct relevance to “the Real State of Jefferson” and the projects that are being undertaken and have been undertaken within its boundaries. The point is, though, how these projects can be enhanced by bringing in additional insights from “Beyond the Boundaries.” One thought that occurred to me in the few days preceding this conference came from reading Susan Gleason’s paper, “Geophyte Use along the Upper Klamath Canyon.” This one caught my attention because it brought together a couple of topics that had intrigued me in recent days, namely, the belated but welcomed increased attention that evolutionary ecology is paying to plant (as contrasted with animal) resources and the equally appreciated boost directed to social factors and processes in the explanation of ecological adaptations. To be more specific, I recalled the following passage from Couture, Ricks, and Housley (1986:151-153):

During the spring...groups including predecessors of the present Warm Springs Indians, Bannock, Yakima, Northern Nevada Paiute, Shoshone, Umatilla, and Surprise Valley Paiutes joined with the Harney Valley Paiutes at a place where spring roots were collected.... These groups converged upon the area in late April ... to engage in root digging, socializing and trade for ... about six weeks. Communicating through sign language, they traded ... horses, furs, buckskin, blankets, beads, roots and obsidian.

(After the conference, my attention was called to a passage in Thomas Garth’s 1953 monograph on the Astugewi that records a similar “Rondezvous at the Potato Patch,” but one closer to home. My thanks to Lowell Thomas for calling my attention to this reference.)

This passage in turn reminded me of “Large Game Exploitation and Intertribal Boundaries on the Fringe of the Western Great Basin,” by Frank Bayham, Kelly Beck, and Kim Carpenter (2012), in which it was argued that the nonrandom distribution of settlements in the Eagle Lake area could be explained on the basis of “buffer zones” that had been established to allow for the maintenance of a viable deer population in the face of “resource depression” within respective territories and so as to minimize intertribal conflict by keeping neighboring groups spatially segregated.

The contrast between the two situations gives new meaning to the phrase, “Men Hunt, Women Gather”!

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

First, collectively, the papers in our symposium demonstrated that the “State of Jefferson,” real or otherwise, attracts talented and committed researchers with interests in a wide range of subject matter, methodology, and conceptual approaches. Second, this diversity speaks to a variety of continuing opportunities for productive research in the region. Third, to capitalize on these opportunities, there is a need to enlarge the data base, to cross existing “states of mind” boundaries, to identify issues relevant to the region, and to continue exploring new analytical and theoretical ways of dealing with them.

In “The Real State of Jefferson,” much has been accomplished; much else remains beyond its boundaries.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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