

Conference on the “durable house.” At the same time, some nagging conceptual problems pose the danger that “house” in general and the specific “house society” model articulated by Claude Lévi-Strauss may become little more than fashionable buzzwords (Gillespie 2001; see Düring’s remarks) because of the complexity of these constructs.¹ My hope is that the contributions in this volume will better establish archaeological understandings of houses and house societies and will stimulate future explorations of their multiple ramifications for theory building and substantive interpretation.

In my commentary on the conference papers I point out future prospects and continuing problems of applying the house society as a model, focusing on three major issues: (1) the implications of distinguishing Lévi-Straussian *sociétés* “*à maisons*” from other “house-centered” approaches, (2) the advantages and difficulties confronting archaeologists in using the house society model, and (3) the role of social houses in history and in societal transformations.

What Is a “House”? *Sociétés* “*à Maisons*” and Other House-Centered Perspectives

American archaeologists, most of them trained within the discipline of anthropology, have long equivocated as to whether they should rely on ethnographic constructs for their interpretations.² On the one hand, Phillips (1955: Wiley and Phillips 1958:2–3) had recommended that, in order to make productive use of anthropological theory, archaeologists should utilize social forms comparable to, or at least compatible with, those developed by ethnographers. The New Archaeologists disagreed, insisting not only that archaeologists should not limit themselves to ethnographic categories (Binford 1968:13) but also that some even suggested, they should not use such categories at all (Deetz 1972:114; Flannery 1983:361 citing Marvin Harris; Renfrew 1978:96). As Binford (1968:13) observed, nothing is added to our knowledge of the past if we simply fit archaeological remains to ethnographically known patterns of life. Furthermore, archaeological work at different temporal and spatial scales than do ethnographers (Bailey 1983; Binford 1981), a point stressed by Gerritsen in his chapter.

However, in the case of the Lévi-Straussian *sociétés* “*à maisons*” and some other approaches to social houses, for heuristic purposes archaeologists are deliberately adopting an institution derived from ethnographic or historical accounts of the more recent past. In other words, this is a situation in which etic and emic constructs may coincide (as explicitly so in chapters by Adams, Kahn, Johnson, and Nevetl). There were and still are “real” social houses, so named and so conceived as functioning entities by various peoples. Of course, this does not mean archaeologists are confined to the same objectives as ethnographers, and we can develop our own etic variations of such ethnographic entities suitable for our research questions. In fact, archaeologists can extend ethnographic understandings of house societies because of the archaeological emphases on materiality, diachrony, and multiscalar research. But employing this model does obligate archaeologists to be knowledgeable of the available information concerning this social formation.

2. When Is a House?

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Abstract: In this commentary I discuss the characteristic features and utility of house-centric approaches, focusing on the Lévi-Straussian *société* “*à maisons*.” In reviewing the contributions to this volume I point out future prospects and continuing problems of applying the house society as a model in archaeological applications, focusing on three major issues: (1) the implications of distinguishing the Lévi-Straussian model from other “house-centered” perspectives, especially for moving archaeological interpretations toward considerations of corporate agency, daily practice, interhouse relationships, and political economy; (2) the advantages and difficulties confronting archaeologists in using a somewhat controversial model derived from ethnography; and (3) the role of houses in history and in societal transformations.

In 1996, at the conclusion of our symposium on house societies at the American Anthropological Association meeting, Rosemary Joyce and I congratulated ourselves on having brought together archaeologists and ethnographers in a productive common dialogue on the Lévi-Straussian house, or *maison* (Joyce and Gillespie, eds. 2000). Our satisfaction turned to dismay, however, when a young archaeologist in the audience approached us, happily exclaiming that he had found the remains of domestic structures at the site he was excavating, so he had a “house society,” too. This was our first indication that archaeologists, with their emphasis on materiality, might have difficulty distinguishing the “house” as a social entity within a “house society” from the archaeological traces of house structures.

Ten years later, I can thankfully report that archaeologists applying the house society model, along with other house-centric approaches, are making important contributions to archaeological and ethnological theory, including those who contributed to the Center for Archaeological Investigations’ 2005 Visiting Scholar

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The usual caveats of ethnographic analogy (Stahl 1993; Wylie 1985) are brought more sharply into focus. Any time ethnographic models are to be adopted, as Sabloff (1983:418) notes, "[o]nly after the ethnographic case is fully understood and explained in its relevant variations can it be applied profitably to archaeological situations." Comprehending the nature and extent of variability in house societies is especially critical given the remarkable diversity of their manifestations. Furthermore, ethnographic analogy should not be used simply for classification or identifying objectives but instead to achieve novel insights and raise new questions (Sabloff 1983:419, 416).³ Fortunately, this course of action was pursued by conference participants. Classification *per se* was not their goal, and a number of issues were raised that have not previously been addressed or adequately addressed in ethnographic studies of house societies.

House-Centric Approaches

The word *house* designating a social, political, economic, kinship, residential, ritual, or other kind of corporate entity—both as an emic or lived structured group and as an etic analytical concept—actually appears in a wide range of literatures covering many world areas and crossing a number of disciplines. Helms (1998, 1999) has cited many of these usages. They include the well-known "household" houses of business, Hodder's *domus* (see Borté's and Durig's chapters), and even college fraternity houses. House-centric approaches are therefore built on various disciplinary foundations and points of reference, and that diversity is apparent in this volume.

Anthropologists, architectural historians, and archaeologists have focused on the residential structure itself—how its layout, materials, visibility in the landscape, and symbolic elements reflect fundamental cosmologies and shape the activities, roles, beliefs, memories, and subjectivities of its inhabitants. Classic studies on this topic are by Bourdieu (1973), Cunningham (1964), Gassie (1975), and Waterson (1990); several of the chapters here provide additional updated references, and archaeologists have already been exploring this approach, such as Bailey's (1990) analysis of "the living house." This type of investigation was proactively pursued in several conference papers, including those by Beck, Fleisher and Lévy-Violette, Heitman, Johnson, Nevelt, and Rodning. Although the symbolic meanings and values of residential structures were not ignored by Lévi-Strauss, he never developed this component in his discussions of house societies (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995:45; Gillespie 2000a:136).

A different perspective for a house-centric approach concentrates on social groups, starting with the household itself, which is a key unit for archaeologists because it can be interpreted from the presence of domestic architectural remains. Domestic structures are also seen as the materialization of the basic kinship unit, the family. For her cross-cultural studies, Helms used the word *house* as "a convenient generic label" (Helms 1999:57) to refer to "virtually any type of kinship-defined social organization" anywhere (Helms 1998:15). Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995), on the other hand, proposed to transcend the limitations imposed by kinship in modeling social groupings. They transformed Lévi-Strauss's ideas of the

house, substituting the house itself in the place of kinship. As a building and a locale associated with certain activities and roles, the house, in their view, provides the basis for an ethnographic "language" useful for analyzing social relations within and beyond the household. This notion of house has been metaphorically extended in scalar fashion to refer to an entire village (Monaghan 1996) and even a polity, for example, considered as the domain of a royal house (Boon 1990).

Ethnographers in Island Southeast Asia have especially developed house-centered theories of social organization because in this region the word *house* (*uma* and cognates) is a term commonly used by the people themselves for an important social unit (e.g., Barraud 1979; Fox, ed. 1980, 1993; Macdonald, ed. 1987; McKinnon 1991; Waterson 1990; see Adams, this volume).⁴ However, Southeast Asian ethnographers have questioned whether the "house" as identified by the people themselves can correspond to Lévi-Strauss's notion of *maison*, because there is a great deal of variability regarding what constitutes a house, as indigenously designated, within this large culture area (Macdonald 1987:4). Fox (1987:172–173) and Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995:19) dismissed the analytic utility of the Lévi-Straussian concept because in Indonesia, "house" as an emic category is applied to various levels—from household to clan to village to polity—and to both kinship and ritual groupings. In some societies "houses" are divided into lineages (e.g., Barraud 1979), while in others lineages or clans are composed of "houses," as in Kodi as described by Adams in his chapter. Moreover, even as an etic social structural type, the Lévi-Straussian house encompasses so much variability that ethnographers cannot use it to distinguish societies with unilineal principles from those with cognatic descent or to differentiate them by degree of social complexity (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995:18–19; Howell 1995:150, 153; see Gillespie 2000b:39–40). Indeed, an early explicit attempt by ethnographers (Macdonald, ed. 1987) to determine whether the various Island Southeast Asian peoples constituted house societies in the Lévi-Straussian sense culminated with a high degree of dissatisfaction because of the extreme variability within this single world area.

Nevertheless, the recognition of *house* as a term simultaneously referring to a social unit and a physical structure has provided useful ideas for ethnographers and also for archaeologists, whether their investigations are in the same general region as the ethnographic data upon which they rely—as in Adams's and Kahn's chapters—or in places far distant. Kahn draws knowledgeably on the characteristics of house structures and the social units of their occupants from Austronesian ethnography for her interpretation of a Polynesian house group, including the widespread notion in this culture area of a residential structure having a "ritual attractor" (from Fox 1993). Adams mentions the same principle for Kodi architecture, drawing on the literature specific to Indonesia. However, this idea is also put to good use by Heitman for Chaco Canyon in the American Southwest. It could equally be applied to the "high seat pillars" and central house posts brought from the old country to Iceland described by Bolender and the hearth features at Neolithic buildings at Lepenski Vir noted by Borté, indicating the unanticipated cross-cultural utility of some specific details of house structures.

The great diversity of cultural expressions represented in these chapters—in terms of geographic region, time period, and societal scale—demonstrates the

potential productivity of this type of research focus. These studies also show that whether one starts with the structure or starts with the social group, a house-centric perspective typically involves the mutually implicating relationships between them. One advantage a house-centric approach provides is that virtually every society has such analytically defined houses, primarily as kinship and/or residential units established in discrete spatial loci. On this foundation Helms (1998) was able to construct a synthesis of recurring features of house groupings from around the globe. This perspective typically stresses the materiality and symbolism of the house, the agency of architecture and the role of houses in social transformations, and the way houses anchor social identities, creating subjectivities and relational places for individuals and groups in a network that extends outward in both space and time. Such analyses take a bottom-up rather than a top-down approach to social and political structures, as emphasized by Lopiparo and Heitman in their chapters.

The Lévi-Straussian Société "à Maisons"

The Lévi-Straussian *maison* is a specific model within the house-centric umbrella, and it refers to a unit that may or may not correspond with the indigenously termed "house." The conference participants who utilized the Lévi-Straussian model—or, at least, in Chesson's metaphor, interpreted their data by "seeing" houses according to his concept—focused less on the symbolic significance of structures and more on political and economic factors that organized social relations and how those relationships changed over time. In short, there are multiple approaches to the house in play in this volume. All of them contribute to archaeological knowledge, and they are complementary rather than competing approaches. It is nevertheless useful to recognize their analytical distinctions so that "house" does not become a generic category. For the remainder of my remarks, I focus on the Lévi-Straussian *société à maisons* (I will drop his quotation marks except for effect), and when I use the word *house*, it is in that context.

A major difference from other house-centric approaches is that Lévi-Strauss (1979, 1982, 1987) recognized that a *société à maisons*—in which the principal processes that organize society were based on the operation and interaction of social houses—apply characterizes some, but not all, premodern societies. In such societies, not every house (building) represents a house (social unit). This form of social organization evolved independently at many different times in many different places, in both egalitarian and ranked societies, a fact that, in itself, is an extraordinary thing to ponder. Not all house societies were innovated in place; this social configuration and its accompanying values were also borrowed from neighboring peoples, as Boric suggests for the Neolithic Balkans. Furthermore, the emergence of houses may also be patchy and uneven within a single society, as Joyce demonstrates for Formative period Puerto Escondido in Honduras.

Given that house societies are *not* universal, they must come into existence out of other configurations. Furthermore, houses have no singular characteristic organizing structure, meaning that they can be modified, still recognizable as houses but organized quite differently. There are conditions under which entire

societies might transform themselves into *sociétés à maisons*, only later to become less "housey" (Boon 1990:214). Houses also go out of existence—this is the outcome of historical processes emphasized by Brown in his chapter and discussed by Beck, Chesson, Düring, and Fleisher and LaViolette in theirs. They may cease to recruit new members, become absorbed into a larger house, or metamorphose into something else. Thus, archaeologists may demonstrate the "emergence" of houses at multiple times within the same region but under different circumstances and taking different forms. In some cases individual houses can be shown to wax and wane, terminate and be renewed according to their individual histories. However, in other house societies it would be inconceivable for any specific house not to exist, especially because so many people may trace their origins or ancestral history to it, and at least memory of it would be retained (Waterson 2000:183–184; Adams, Hendon, this volume).

All this means that specific sociopolitical, economic, ecological, cultural, and historical factors prevented the formation or stimulated the innovation of house societies at certain places and times. Application of the house society model thus requires an investigation into these factors. It also means that the indigenously termed "houses" of Southeast Asian ethnography should not so quickly be assumed to represent static social forms indicative of geographically/culturally variable sociopolitical or kinship classificatory statuses (a frequent assumption of ethnographers). Historical investigations demonstrate how much these societies have changed, as noted by Adams in this volume, especially in colonial and postcolonial contexts (Gibson 1995; see Marshall 2000 for a non-Southeast Asian example). This temporal factor renders rather moot the common complaint that there is too much variability among the "houses" in Southeast Asia for the Lévi-Straussian definition of house to be of use (see Waterson 1995). The house is a player in and a product of historical forces. Clearly, complex dynamics are at work, implicating multiple facets of social life. Anthropologists, including archaeologists, should be investigating the house from a diachronic and multiscalar perspective rather than simply trying to classify variability at a specific period in time (a point emphasized by Boric, Düring, Gerritsen, and others here).

As Lévi-Strauss (1960:51) observed, "[m]odels would be useless if they did not tell us more, and differently from, the data." There has been much talk of "muddled models" in social anthropology (Lévi-Strauss 1960; Schneider 1965; Watanabe 2004), but the contributions in this volume seem to have avoided those problems by using the model to frame innovative and historically specific research questions and to suggest the likely presence of features that had not previously been looked for or, if known, had been considered to be separate phenomena. Treated as a heuristic rather than a social structural type, the *société à maisons* transcends many of the limitations of conventional social categories archaeologists might otherwise utilize, such as lineage or clan, family, household, patio group, and even chieftain. Moreover, it more firmly links agency and practice with materiality. As Joyce remarks in her chapter "House societies models provide a flexible, ethnographically grounded way to think about the effects on small-scale social relations of the practices whose material traces make up archaeological sites. These were the framework for economic and political

relations that bound households together in societies." The model is useful precisely because it focuses investigations on those complex webs of relations within their own contexts; as Durig emphasizes. In other words, in contrast with some other house-centric approaches, with the *société à maisons* the unit of analysis has shifted in scale from the individual house to the house within the larger society. The ontology of the house has been altered from an essentialist static phenomenon to a dynamic emergent and protean configuration.

As the chapters in this volume further exemplify, the house society provides an integrative framework for understanding both the agents and the processes of organizational change, adding in the dimension of history. The house is both the result and the means of social transformation (as stressed by Chesson, Fleisher and LaViolette, Gerritsen, and Joyce); as a corporate agent it can have considerable historical efficacy (see Johnson's British case). Using the house society as a model to serve these various explanatory goals is a task frankly better suited for archaeologists than for ethnographers. It is why archaeologists, along with historically minded ethnographers (e.g., Waterson 1995), will ultimately make the most of it. However, doing so requires an awareness of the advantages and disadvantages entailed in its archaeological application, which necessitates a thorough understanding of the Lévi-Straussian house.

Maison: Advantages and Difficulties for Archaeologists

So, what is the Lévi-Straussian house?⁵ Since its debut in the anthropological literature (Lévi-Strauss 1979), Lévi-Strauss always maintained the same careful definition of *maison* in his publications (see the discussion of his concept in Hendon's chapter). Significantly, he considered it to be a fundamental unit of organization of a society "of houses"—plural. Houses are often most apparent when interacting with other houses in specific cultural or historical contexts (Lévi-Strauss 1987:178; see Barraud 1979; McKinnon 1991) or engaging in actions that distinguish them from other houses, for example, by asserting claims to their own property (Kan 1989; Lea 1992). This means that in using this notion, one should not neglect the relationships of a house within a society of houses. Unfortunately, Lévi-Strauss did not further define the *société à maisons* (Gillespie 2000b:40).

This has presented a problem because, as noted above, house societies and their constituent houses can exhibit extreme variability. Subsequent ethnographic development of his concept has shown that houses need not be mutually exclusive groupings, that it is not always the case that everyone in such societies is a member of one or more houses, and that other social formations may come into play that cross-cut or supercede house membership.⁶ At times houses may limit their members and look more like lineages, or alternatively they may seek to expand and look more like kindreds. Ethnographers have also distinguished "em-bryonic houses" that lack the wherewithal to become houses (Sandstrom 2000) and "proto-houses" that strategically engage in actions to become recognized as

a house (Schrauwers 1997). Furthermore, they have observed that the existence, property, and membership of a house are often actively contested.

Even within the same society there can be status differences among houses. In this volume, Chesson refers to "Greater" and "Lesser" Houses in Early Bronze Age Levantine communities. Adams draws on ethnographic information to detail a difference between "ancestral" and "branch" houses in Kodi, West Sumatra that is similar to Durig's distinction for Neolithic Anatolia between "lineage" houses (with pedigrees) and "minor" houses that may be attached to lineage houses. Important structural units may operate above the level of the house, and large houses especially may be divided into named components. For this latter situation see Adams's chapter, in which he develops the argument that the Kodi "clan" (*paroma*), composed of four or more "ancestral houses" (*uma*), is the most important social unit. The *paroma* is the exogamous entity that contracts marriage alliances, engages in warfare (including with other clans), manages the most significant jointly owned property, and organizes the built landscape with its constituent ancestral house buildings and clan tombs in their own special village. Despite local Kodi terminology, based on this description the *paroma* better matches the house in the Lévi-Straussian sense than does the *uma* (the indigenously named "house"), even though it may encompass hundreds of members and affiliates dispersed in various settlements.

Recognizing the potential for this variability, archaeologists should be modeling these situations. They should recognize the likelihood that some houses can be quite large with internal differentiations and should investigate why and how individuals or groups can be attached to or detached from houses and house relationships and what implications this has for the larger society over time. Hendon pursues this line of research in her interpretation of the variable strategies Copan's elite houses used to create affiliations with allied or subsidiary houses. Both Kahn and Craig, working in quite different areas of the world, have archaeological evidence suggesting that higher-ranked houses may have had at least part-time craft workers attached to them, who maintained separate identities in discrete (and peripheral) spatial loci.

Significantly, at the hands of later ethnographic analysis Lévi-Strauss's house was separated from his society of houses, thereby losing its original context (Gillespie 2000b:35). The house was further characterized by its essential components, especially by Waterson (1995:49–50), whose emphasis on the ideal of continuity and intergenerational transfer of valued property (cited in several chapters here) was sometimes mistakenly displaced from the social house to the physical house. In part this shift in focus onto the isolated house or even just the residential structure can be attributed to the growing attraction of the house-centric perspective noted above, of which the Lévi-Straussian construct is but one development. Other reasons were the lack of fit between the Lévi-Straussian notion of a society of houses (detailed above) and the rejection of Lévi-Strauss's with indigenously termed "houses" (detailed above) and the rejection of Lévi-Strauss's notion that the *société à maisons* formed a kind of evolutionary stage in human history (see below).

Furthermore, arguments among ethnographers over such details as the proper referents for indigenous categories and the role of kinship in social life have

seemed irrelevant to some archaeologists. A number of archaeologists have preferred to draw from the Lévi-Straussian house those specific aspects they can operationalize—especially materiality, continuity in place across generations, references to precedence, and strategic group agency (e.g., Joyce 1999; Tringham 2000; Diring, Gerlisen, this volume). Indeed, some ethnographers have found utility in the *société à maisons* construct only when it is not too rigidly defined (e.g., Rivière 1993:511; Waterson 1995:48).

Nevertheless, there is some benefit for archaeologists to consider the implications of the original Lévi-Straussian definition. The *maison*, according to Lévi-Strauss, is a

personne morale détentrice d'un domaine composé à la fois de biens matériels et immatériels, qui se perpétue par la transmission de son nom, de sa fortune et de ses titres en ligne réelle ou fictive, tenue pour légitime à la seule condition que cette continuité puisse s'exprimer dans le langage de la parenté ou de l'alliance, et le plus souvent, des deux ensemble. (Lévi-Strauss 1979:47).

moral person, keeper [détentric] is literally a detainee of a domain composed altogether of material and immaterial property, which perpetuates itself by the transmission of its name, of its fortune, and of its titles in a real or fictive line held as legitimate on the sole condition that this continuity can express itself in the language of kinship or of alliance, and, most often, of both together [my translation].

Certain points within this definition warrant further discussion. It is unfortunate that the 1982 English translation (Lévi-Strauss 1982:174)—upon which much subsequent scholarship has relied—used the phrase “corporate body” instead of “moral person.” While houses can be treated in certain circumstances as corporate bodies, this is not significantly different from the familiar “corporate group,” the premier social unit in Anglo-American anthropology. A corporate group is conventionally treated as a taxonomic category, one that Lévi-Strauss (1987:153) found too limiting. He instead characterized the house as a “moral person,” an entity more familiar in French anthropology (from Mauss 1985 [1938]). This term thereby invokes two other salient qualities—“morality” and “personhood”—as developed by Boric (this volume), who links the moral person of the house to Paul Ricoeur’s theorization of narrative identity and Maurice Halbwachs’s notion of social memory. Morality and personhood can also be integrated into more encompassing constructs, including “aesthetics” and “cosmologies” (Gosden 1999), far transcending the limited sociological and taxonomic parameters of a kin-based property-owning group.

The house has legal autonomy and a moral personality; it possesses rights and is subject to obligations, and it is defined by its roles and relationships to other moral persons within the larger society. As Lévi-Strauss (1982:173) put it, in certain actions and relations “it is not the individuals or the families that act, it is the houses, which are the only subjects of rights and duties.” As a moral person, the house allows us to model corporate agency, as some archaeologists

(e.g., Bianchi et al. 1996) have recently suggested that we do and as discussed in chapters herein by Craig, Chesson, Hendon, and Joyce. As Chesson states, the house “gives flesh and blood” to more skeletal mechanistic economic and political models. And although it may project a unified personhood in its interactions with others, members of the house are internally differentiated. Thus, attention should be paid to intrahouse tensions and strategic conflicts and cooperation, for example, as developed in Kahn’s chapter, as much as to interhouse relationships when it acts as a moral person at the scale of the larger society.

A second clarification following from the first is that the house is *not* a group of people. This analytical distinction between the house and a group of people is often difficult to maintain. Archaeologists tend to give primacy in social analysis to households, precisely because they can be linked to the material remains of dwellings. Households are typically modeled as the short-term coresidents of a domestic space, a unit that is redundant across a social landscape. It is not easy to model the house beyond the household (but see Diring’s and Hendon’s discussions on that point), especially when its membership may encompass residents of different settlements, as noted by Adams for Kodi. The house by its nature is different from a household, even as its living members may form a single household or multiple households. For example, Diring suggests that the Neolithic inhabitants of Catalhöyük may have had claims to membership in multiple origin (“lineage”) houses (a situation described ethnographically elsewhere), while Bolender uses historic information to demonstrate that not all residents of an Icelandic farmstead were considered members of the house (the *atli*).

Where the house presents an advantage to archaeologists over traditional kinship units is in the fact that the living people who claim membership or affiliation with a house are responsible for manifesting its existence, “keeping” and enhancing the house fortune, the prestige of its name, and its property, maintaining it so that it “perpetuates itself” (Lévi-Strauss 1982:169; see also Errington 1989:239). This is a performative rather than a prescriptive or rule-bound approach to understanding social collectivities (Marshall 2000:74), an alternative way of looking at social relations “as the product of common activity and practices rather than as a reflection of some essence,” in Hendon’s words. As Adams concludes for the Kodi (reading “house” for his “clan”), “while the presence of clan origin narratives, stone tombs, and ancestral houses may serve to preserve the long-term symbolic unity of the group, the real costs associated with clan feasting obligations and their associated benefits keep people bound to these groups from a practical standpoint.” Thus, social action is involved in maintaining a house and binding its members to it, which is archaeologically more visible than kinship ties.

Another important point to note is that *nothing* in the definition refers to a structure, a residence. Structures may be crucial components of the estate of a house, and these may or may not be residential structures. The conceptual difficulty this poses in utilizing the Lévi-Straussian construct is more peculiar to archaeologists than ethnographers, because we more typically emphasize the remains of residential structures for modeling social groups and interactions. This archaeological problem overlaps with another that arises from the definition, namely, the notion

of continuity expressed in the language of kinship and/or affinity. In house societies, kinship or kin-like ties are strategically used to create social relationships and to stake out social identities within and between houses, such that adoption and sham marriage are on par with biological descent and bona fide marital unions. But in the definition, the “language of kinship and/or alliance” applies to house *continuity*, not to house membership. Moreover, the continuity of the social house need not depend on the continued occupation or replacement of a residential structure. Residences deteriorate or are destroyed (Marshall 2000:77; Waterson 2000:184–185) and sometimes structures are picked up and moved (Carstenson 1995:107), but the “durable house” lives on as long as its defining estate is maintained across generations by means of kinship or alliance invoked as a strategic language to bind one group of caretakers to their replacements.

The continuity of the social house, as a number of authors here argue, is represented in the “language of kinship and/or alliance” by material and immaterial references to precedence in the form of ancestors (chapters by Adams, Beck, Bolender, Boric, Brown, Chesson, Craig, Düring, Hendon, Joyce, Kahn, and Kodning). The deposition of burials or parts of human remains on house land, with or without the building of elaborate tombs, and the use of heirloomed costume ornaments and other valuables that are indexical signs of ancestral personages are means by which archaeologists can demonstrate the perpetuation of the house. Furthermore, it is not necessary to show actual biological links among the burials or continuous occupation, because even after a period of abandonment later residents can ritually claim the dead as their ancestors. The life histories of the house members are often materialized by changes to the residence or some other structure or enduring object (Bloch 1995; Waterson 2000), thereby creating a materialized house biography (see Boric’s use of “narrative identity” and Beck’s interpretation of the symbolic birth and death of architecture in the Lake Titicaca Basin). There is typically a strong conceptual overlap between the residence and the human body, as discussed by Joyce, and between residences and people as living entities (Gillespie 2000a; see Beck’s chapter).

Significantly, some chapters in this volume discuss how the structure that best materializes the house is not a residence at all but a religious building, such as Beck’s Andean platform-chamber complex and the tombs adjacent to mosques described by Fleisher and LaViolette. I wonder whether the Chaco “great houses”² and Great Kivas detailed by Heilman, the Creek townhouses investigated by Rodning, and the eighth-century B.C. Greek temples described by Nevetl can be productively modeled as nonresidential or semiresidential house-based ritual architecture. Boric’s Mesolithic hearths were apparently open-air features, but they served to sediment group identities in the landscape across generations. Bolender’s Icelandic field walls and trash mounds, like the Hohokam trash mounds mentioned by Craig, are another tangible index of the longevity of houses anchored in the landscape, although trash mounds are not something we normally think of as architecture. The administrative and ritual buildings and the village walls described by Chesson may also be nondomestic manifestations of Levantine Early Bronze Age houses. Chesson also indicates how the ethnogeography

of communities of houses provides social places for their members. Structures arranged in space may serve as a cognitive map for social relationships linking the various houses to one another (Forth 1991; Waterson 1990:91–92).

According to Lévi-Strauss’s definition, the *raison d’être* of houses is to keep, or literally detain, and enhance property, both tangible and intangible. Although archaeologists often focus on material property—the landed estates and valuable portable objects—a number of authors here also successfully modeled likely immaterial property from the material remains. These include the spirits and persons of house ancestors, origin narratives, the numinous qualities of “ritual attractors,” ritual and technological knowledge, and the right to craft or display certain objects. Names and histories are also extremely important property, as are the rights to perform certain ceremonies, songs, and dances; these also are objectified in practice as a means to continually assert ownership rights to them. As Hendon (this volume) observes, “The concept of the house provides a way to attend to the role of material goods in creating relationships between social actors and to foreground the ways histories accrue in material things and, by being anchored in those things, facilitate the continuity of particular forms of social relations.” This is a processual understanding of how houses, and house societies, perpetuate themselves.

What archaeologists could pay more attention to is how property—including material resources and labor as well as symbolic capital—is obtained and increased by houses. Marriage alliance is a key mechanism for creating relationships of various kinds among houses and obtaining property thereby (see chapters by Adams and by Fleisher and LaViolette). Such house-to-house alliances may exist across different social strata and can cross ethnic and cultural boundaries, even uniting various capitals or politics (Boon 1990), as Boric suggests with his reference to Neolithic “making networks.” Hendon discusses the likelihood that nascent houses in Yorù created external links to powerful houses elsewhere, something that could have been done through the language of alliance. In his chapter, Brown assumes that marriage exchange operated at Mississippian Etowah among a heterarchical plurality of high-ranked houses. From texts and imagery, Nevetl provides the best example here of the development of restricted marriage exchange among elite families in fifth-century B.C. Greece as a means to increase social distance between elites and nonelites.

The inalienable material property of the house is typically kept within a dwelling or a ritual structure as part of the house estate. These valuables are a source of prestige or renown, but they are subject to exchange with other houses in marriage alliances, often entailing lengthy negotiations by which marriage partners try to “keep while giving” their property (Weiner 1992). House valuables thereby objectify the affinity ties between houses, which often come into play not just at marriage ceremonies (which are rather invisible archaeologically; see Gillespie and Joyce 1997) but also in mortuary ritual (Kan 1989) that is much more accessible to archaeologists (Joyce 2000a). The potential for this last point is best explored here by Brown. In the absence of information on the symbolism or physical features of domestic structures, he hypothesizes the existence of multiple high-ranked houses at Etowah from mortuary ritual, focusing on the heirloomed copper plates as

corporate resources. He emphasizes the role of house heads as curators of these sacra and thus as the preeminent mediators between the ancestors—a principal source of legitimacy—and the people under their political domination.

As for other arenas for interhouse relationships by which house prestige and property may be gained or lost, Craig suggests that house sponsorship of communal activities, such as the Hohokam ballgame, may have implicated interhouse competition for the elevation of status. Fleisher and LaViolette examine changes in the East African “stonetowns” that resulted from heightened competition among them for trade in the sixteenth century. Düring demonstrates how choice of burial location at Neolithic Catalhöyük may have been part of a strategy to manipulate within-house or interhouse relationships to one’s advantage. In addition, raiding and warfare were not uncommon means in some house societies to acquire fame and fortune, a way for houses not only to appropriate the material wealth of their competitors but also to rob enemy houses of their named or titled persons, their intangible property (Maus 1985:8). Warfare is a mechanism that should have archaeological visibility, and it is mentioned as a factor by Adams and by Gerritsen.

On the other hand, Beck, Boric, Chesson, and Newett consider the beneficial outcomes of interhouse cooperation rather than solely competition as a means to create a “communal ethos,” mediate potential community-level conflict, or unify a settlement against its peers—at least at certain points in a long sequential development. Several chapters emphasize how relationships among houses formed the basis for integrative sociopolitical and economic relationships in the absence of centralizing authority or overarching managerial institutions. Loppiparo explains exchange relationships in Terminal Classic Honduras within a “ritual model of production” as a means of integrating society without the need for political hierarchy; Adams reaches a similar conclusion concerning a highly complex but decentralized Kogi society reliant on feasting to maintain within- and between-clan social networks, despite its superficial similarities to a chiefdom organization. Bolender develops the same argument for the emergence of houses to maintain property rights in a frontier landscape settled by immigrants whose higher-order political institutions did not travel with them to Iceland.

The interesting thing about property and its continuity is that it becomes a source of difference among houses, in terms of both the individual property of the house estate and the histories that the valued items accumulate over time. Chesson cites Antonio Gilman’s view that the relationship of people to land and other property is itself a basis for social differentiation. Joyce suggests that the proliferation of portable goods worn or displayed in everyday practice also contributed to a deepening sense of different identities. Applying the house society model therefore requires greater attention to within- and between-house variations in multiple domains of the archaeological record, which have been neglected either because of our analytical techniques or because such variation was considered irrelevant to social process.

A number of authors in this volume comment on how they were motivated to discover and were able to meaningfully interpret such variation. Craig notes how differently he viewed Hohokam society in terms of houses as opposed to adopting the

archaeological convention of treating Hohokam courtyard groups as “interchangeable building blocks” of higher-level organizational units. Düring finds similar value in charting the life histories of individual domestic structures at Catalhöyük rather than treating them all as “homologous and independent entities,” as is more typically done. Loppiparo analyzes the unique or near-unique aspects of craft production and exchange among houses, interpreted as a means to materialize houses and verify house identities and interhouse interactions at multiple scalar levels. This emphasis on variation is also a consequence of paying more attention to practice. Lévi-Strauss’s construct of the house society has evident ties to notions of strategic action and practice like that which appear in the slightly earlier work of his compatriot Bourdieu (1977; see Hutson et al. 2004 for an additional archaeological example).

Difference, sometimes conceived in terms of precedence, can also be a source for ranking and hierarchy, both within and between houses, as Kahn demonstrates in her analysis of the emergence and development of a Ma’ohi house and as Hendon details for Classic Maya Copan. However, such ranked difference may not be immediately archaeologically visible in the sense of a two- or three-tiered fixed social hierarchy. “Hierarchy” is a multifaceted construct that requires careful handling by archaeologists, which is one reason the notion of “heterarchy” has become more popular. The social rank of a house may be situational, and it may be tied to its renown rather than to the accumulation of material wealth to which archaeologists are more attuned for making such distinctions. Thus, rank differences may be much more subtle, as shown by Düring in his tracing of subfloor burials over time in connection with house longevity at Catalhöyük, by Hendon in her analysis of artifact distributions at Cerro Palenque, Honduras, and by Craig in his use of labor investment in architecture as a measure of “wealth” differences at Preclassic Grewe in Arizona. Variable expressions of hierarchy and its materializations are discussed in a number of these chapters, and their authors often use the perspective of the house to contest the application of conventional monolithic models of hierarchy such as chiefdoms or similar evolutionary stages (e.g., Adams, Brown, Heitman, and Loppiparo).

The final point to make regarding the definition of the house (and house society) is how open-ended it is. There is no reference to size or the scale of social complexity, no restriction of specific kin ties, no indication of residential or marital rules. According to Lévi-Strauss (1982:184), the house is an institutional creation that exists “on all levels of social life, from the family to the state.” As noted above, this lack of specificity has sometimes been considered a formidable, if not fatal, weakness. Because house societies vary tremendously from one to the other, it is unlikely that rich ethnographic, historical, or archaeological detail from one house society can easily be mapped on to another (see the recent exchange between Hodder [2005] and Adams [2005]).

Nevertheless, as noted above, analysts who have found the model most useful are those interested not in typologies but in social processes and practices, particularly processes and practices across variously organized societies and processes and practices that transform societies over time. They have highlighted the dynamic role played by the house as a “central and fundamental organizing principle” in a diversity of societies (Gillespie 2000b:43; see Hendon and Joyce 2001; Waterson 1995:48). As Hight-Jones (1993:11-6) observed, the house “as a heuristic device . . . may allow

us to get away from such types altogether." Indeed, the flexibility of the house is highlighted as a specific advantage, not disadvantage, in several of the chapters here, given that archaeologists more typically deal with multiscale and diachronic research problems. Hendon, for example, is able to productively compare three different settlement-societal patterns in Classic period Honduras from the processual point of view of the house rather than have to fall back on the default application of assigning them to stages on an evolutionary ladder. Thus treated as a heuristic construct, the house in this volume was identifiable from the level of a single residence to a farmstead, a patio group or residential cluster, a village neighborhood, an entire community (e.g., as symbolized by the Creek townhouse and Greek temple), and even a larger unit if we consider the Kodi *parvra* as the operating house.

In other words, the same quality seen as a disadvantage by some ethnographers becomes a useful tool for archaeologists. Asymmetrical as well as peer-to-peer interhouse relationships can be modeled even across polity and cultural boundaries, as in Hendon's and Bort's chapters, and the house may have undergirded cross-ethnic trade relationships on Africa's east coast as noted by Fleisher and LaViolette. More important, because the house is not limited to a single social formation, a number of authors at the conference examined processes of societal transformation from the perspective of the house. They indicated how houses in house societies can be radically changed as the outcome of strategic maneuvers for gain and in concert with the operation of political, economic, ecological, demographic, and contingent historical factors—and can still be recognizable as houses, which leads to my final topic.

When Is a House? The Role of Houses in History

One of the more significant contributions of this conference is the serendipitously coincidental approach employed in several contributions to chart the emergence of houses, especially as part of the development of complex society. Nascent houses, the in situ development of houses, or the adoption of house organization into a new region are discussed by Beck, Bolender, Bort, Chesson, Craig, Durning, Fleisher and LaViolette, Gerritsen, Hendon, Joyce, and Newell. Most of their explanations for this phenomenon have to do with the growing importance of landed property, primarily the maintenance of specific parcels of land rights against competitors for tending crops or managing animal resources. Many of these resources required a substantial investment in labor (such as building agricultural terraces or irrigation canals) or had a relatively slow rate of return on investment (such as groves of cacao trees or animal herds). These authors typically posit the desirability of innovating social practices and concepts that recognized boundedness and durability of ownership as a value marked materially in the landscape and also, as Joyce comments, in the durability of bodies of social persons as members of houses. Entailed in the process were innovated values having to do with the nature of space and time.

Just as significantly, some contributions explore transformations in the organization and/or material expression of houses. These include Chesson's expla-

nation of the shift from shaft tombs to above-ground charnel houses, the latter serving as "body libraries," icons of house history. Fleisher and LaViolette's delineation of changes to Swahili houses is rather unusual in arguing for a growing internalization of display for the reification of intrahouse subjectivities at a time of political-economic crisis. For late fifth-century B.C. Greece, Newell details a similar move toward private areas of display within residences, but in her case it is within an area of the dwelling utilized for visitors of a certain parallel status. This alteration presaged the Macedonian conquest, which further reified the symbolization of rank and power through the materiality of the palace. Bolender demonstrates how the introduction of Christianity in Iceland resulted in a material shift in the placement of burials to mark house property, while Gerritsen charts a change in settlement patterns in the Late Iron Age that seems related to later Roman period developments but cannot be explained simply by Roman colonization. By starting from a larger spatial scale, Bort shows how the emergence of persistent places (fishing camps) within the Mesolithic Balkan landscape seemingly gave rise to more definitive house architecture in the Neolithic, architecture that nevertheless shares affinities with earlier Mediterranean cultures, indicating processes of both in situ development and long-distance interaction.

In other words, archaeologists are productively using the house society model and other house-centric approaches to interpret social change at various temporal scales, linking microscale processes and practices at the level of households to macroscale and multifaceted processes. More notably, several authors pointedly demonstrate how these changes contradict the usual disciplinary assumption that we can unproblematically project better-known formations from later periods back into the past in some less evolved form, as in the case of Fleisher and LaViolette's Swahili stone houses, Gerritsen's Roman farmsteads, and Johnson's abrupt, as other longitudinal studies of house societies have also done, especially in the context of colonization (Marshall 2000).

Alone among the conference participants Johnson insists that while the Lévi-Straussian "house idea" is quite useful for synchronic analysis, it "is less useful . . . in specifying and understanding change"—despite his access to a well-documented case for demonstrating societal transitions from the point of view of house agency. His chapter indicates the complexity of attempting to explain social change, indicating the need to look beyond the house itself. Nevertheless, although Johnson characterizes the reasons for Henry VIII's attack on Roman Catholicism as "personal and contingent," every schoolchild knows the story of Henry's breaking with the Pope over his desire to divorce his first wife and acquire a second who might give him a son. This momentous decision arose within a set of strategic actions engaged in by the House of Tudor to maintain its continuity through a descent line seen as legitimate in the eyes of its subjects, even if, in the process, Henry had to violently destroy the foundation of moral legitimacy in terms of the sanctity of marriage and create a new religion, which he and his son he did have forcefully imposed on the kingdom.

This example of the historical efficacy of house action goes beyond the mere "subversion" of kinship, which Lévi-Strauss (1982:187) indicated must happen in house

societies, giving their members "freedom to disguise social or political maneuvers under the mantle of kinship" (Levi-Strauss 1982:176; a good example is the manipulation of Icelandic family histories described by Bolender). Henry VIII exercised what Brown in his chapter calls the "capacity to treat societal rules instrumentally and conditionally to family interests," which Brown considers the "hallmark of the social house . . . when it can break the rules while simultaneously espousing them." Of course, the context in which Henry acted was far more complex—there were "deeper cultural and social shifts" in British politics, culture, and society, as Johnson notes. Nevertheless, the point to be made is that houses are *in* history—they are not isolable redundant structural-functional taxonomic categories or "cogs in a state-level machine" (in Lopiapano's words). This means that the outcomes of their members' actions *make* history, including unintended consequences. Brown suggests that archaeology change the terms of its discourse from a normative taxonomy to one "grounded in political economy," having to do with access to material and symbolic resources, labor, power, and legitimacy. This is the course of action advocated in Levi-Strauss's discussions of house societies and reiterated by many of the authors of this volume's chapters. Lopiapano notes that from the bottom-up perspective of the house, we realize that "what we think of as high-level constructs—like 'politics' and 'economy'—are actually constituted in everyday life."

I make this point to highlight the contributions archaeologists can provide to archaeology and to anthropology at large but also to call attention to a long-standing misconstrual of the Levi-Straussian model. Levi-Strauss (1987:158, 193–194) believed that the house society is most apparent when observed through the long lens of history rather than in short-term ethnographic research and that historical documentation could reveal how strategic choices and actions made by houses had consequential effects (Levi-Strauss 1983:1231). It is therefore appropriate that archaeologists are exploiting this aspect of his construct. Indeed, although the *maison* is represented by some ethnographers as merely an outgrowth of Levi-Strauss's well-known interests in elementary and complex forms of kinship and marriage (e.g., Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995:9; Watanabe 2004:164), he himself saw it as contributing to another major topic that had long figured in his writings—the relationship of anthropology to history, with the house as an instrument for the rapprochement between the two disciplines (Bucher 1985:366; Levi-Strauss 1983:1224).

Levi-Strauss pondered why house societies are recurrent but not universal. He proposed that the house emerges within a certain historical trajectory at a point when "political and economic interests, on the verge of invading the social field, have not yet overstepped the 'old ties of blood'" (Levi-Strauss 1982:186, drawing on a phrase by Marx and Engels). That is, house societies tend to appear when property and political power become salient values in organizing social life but in the absence of contractual or class-based relationships binding people to one another. In these situations, he suggested, kinship was employed as a "language" for maintaining the cohesion of the house, even if kinship itself (as we tend to think of it) was subverted in the process (Levi-Strauss 1982:186).

This is Levi-Strauss's "evolutionary" hypothesis, which was strongly and rather immediately rejected (Gillespie 2000b:51) on the basis of the view that the was proposing house societies as some sort of stage in a universal evolutionary

sequence: egalitarian kin-based society → house society → stratified class-based society (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995:10). This quick dismissal of the diachronic component of his model by ethnographers has not served archaeology well nor other historically minded anthropologists. As Waterson (1995:51) observed, the integration of the materialization and perpetuity of houses "must lead us to consider the relation of houses both to systems of economic stratification and to hierarchies of status, prestige or ritual power." She went on to say:

Levi-Strauss's writings about the house do raise the very interesting question of the ways in which the 'house,' as institution and ideology, can be harnessed to the 'enterprises of the great' in societies which are in the throes of a political transition towards a greater concentration of power in the hands of a few, with a shift from kinship-based to more complex political, economic and religious structures of organization (Waterson 1995:67).

McKinnon (1991:31) concurred: "Rooted in the elementary structures of kinship, house societies provide the missing link between kin-based societies and those governed, presumably, by the forces of the market." In fact, Levi-Strauss (1987:151) specifically proposed the house as a construct to analytically bridge the traditional divide between simple and complex societies.

It is precisely for the purpose of investigating the rise of complex or middle-range societies and their transformation—including whether or not they lead to the state—that many archaeologists seek processual models, like the house society. Archaeologists, along with historians, are also charting the demise of the house with the development of class-based societies, contractual instead of kin-like bonds, alienation of property from people, and wage labor (e.g., Marshall 2000). This is the pivotal historical moment treated in Johnson's chapter, which demonstrated abrupt change in society and in house-based architecture. Interestingly, Marshall (2000) showed that Northwest Coast chiefs' houses rapidly became more elaborated precisely when the older notions of house-based organization were under attack as a result of new socioeconomic conditions, a situation similar to that described by Johnson for sixteenth-century Britain. This is a better way to understand Levi-Strauss's "evolutionary" argument: treating it as a historical one, especially in such a way as to allow for cross-cultural comparisons and multiscalar research, what Boric in his chapter refers to as "grand narratives."

Conclusion

I have elsewhere described the treatment of the *société à maisons* construct in the ethnographic literature since it was first sketched out by Levi-Strauss (Gillespie 2000b, 2000c). Here, drawing in large part on these conference papers, I have attempted to point out certain archaeological advantages and difficulties of a model not originally designed for archaeological application. The latter include our general tendencies to confuse archaeological remains with social groups

without theorizing the relationship of materiality to sociality, to ignore variability if it gets in the way of typologizing, to flatten temporal difference in the interest of identifying evolutionary types, and to simplistically project later formations back into earlier time periods. Furthermore, the *société à maisons* construct is most effectively used when combined with complementary research interests, especially, the burgeoning literatures on practice, place, personhood, embodiment, identity, and social memory, as explored in many of these chapters.

As for its advantages, several authors explicitly indicate a preference for the house society model because it overcame conceptual difficulties posed by alternative, usually typological, constructs more typically employed in their research areas or in conventional archaeological research questions. These include the chieftdom stage of evolution, models of urbanism, Hodder's *domus*, the analytical separation of ritual from domestic contexts, and the division of ritual from political economic sources of hierarchy. Some of these chapters emphasize how deployment of this model should compel us to move away from the categorizing of social forms or types to focus instead on the relationships that are forged between peoples as they engage in various and overlapping social fields, in terms of contingent and contextual situations by which they define themselves, valorize their and others' actions, and reproduce (or transform) their society. This is the most salient reason the house, as a model, is not commensurate with other models against which it is, nevertheless, often compared (e.g., the lineage or household, as in Hagenan 2004).

The *société à maisons* provides a means to understand collective forms of agency and strategizing without having to fall back on such taxonomic categories as "elites" and "commoners," categories that lack emergent properties. It overcomes the artificial separation of agency from materiality and the essentialist analytical division of society into static and redundant corporate groups. Another advantage is that it allows researchers to link household, community-, polity-, and regional-level processes in multiscalar fashion (chapters by Borró, Chesson, Craig Hendon, Lopiparo, and Rodning). As Lévi-Strauss (1983) argued, the house is a useful means to link structure and event, macroscale and microscale processes and phenomena. Importantly, it can become central to the study of social transformations in history as the cumulative effects of the strategic actions of houses (e.g., Boon 1990; Chesson 2003; Errington 1989; Joyce 2000b; Kirch 2000; Marshall 2000; Moore 2005; Oyuela-Caycedo 1998; Waterson 1995). In short, although the house society is certainly not a panacea, this volume demonstrates that it is more than just the currently fashionable buzzword, as its usefulness is being thoughtfully extended across various analytical domains in archaeological practice.

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Notes

1. In fact, the inutility of the Lévi-Straussian house concept for archaeological purposes has already been asserted, with conflicting claims that it is merely a cognate descent group or, conversely, only a residential unit with no kinship implications; that it disregards the assumed primacy of "real" kinship ties; that it too ambitiously attempts to model a total social system; or, again conversely, that it is inadequate to explain a total social system. In each of these cases, those diagnosing its failures have failed to read the appropriate literature and fully comprehend the implications of the model (e.g., Chase and Chase 2004; Hagenan 2004; Houston and McAnany 2003; Watanabe 2004).

2. In their chapters, Düring, Gerritsen, and Johnson draw a contrast between *anthropological* and *archaeological* models and objectives, which makes sense from their European perspective. Here I follow American practice and treat ethnology and archaeology as two branches of the more encompassing discipline of anthropology.

3. In somewhat the same vein, Stahl (1993:236) distinguished two types of analogy. *Illustrative* analogy merely maps ethnographic details onto an archaeological case, using the former to flesh out the latter. This, Binford, Sabloff, and others observed, does not tell us anything different about the archaeological case that we did not already know. In contrast, *comparative* analogy requires the archaeologist to assess the fit of the analogy to look for similarities and dissimilarities between them as a way of expanding knowledge of both cases (see also Binford 1967). This distinction is not exactly the same as that drawn by Düring (this volume) between "strong" and "weak" analogies.

4. This was a common practice worldwide (Gillespie 2000a:135–136); see Gerritsen's chapter. In this volume Johnson, Hendon, and Newett more explicitly demonstrate the same extension of meanings in the Old English *house*, Maya houses, and the ancient Greek *oikos*, respectively.

5. Lévi-Strauss developed his notion of a *société à maisons* in a lecture series in 1977–1978 in the Collège de France (Mardonald 1987:3). He gave an early public presentation of his model in a lecture in Mexico in 1979, because, it is said, he hypothesized that "houses" would have existed in ancient Mesoamerica (Neurath 2000:116; see Hendon's chapter for examples of Mesoamerican houses).

6. As Lambek (2001:303) observed, "people subject themselves to, participate in, and identify with large social groupings and categories in a multitude of ways that are sometimes incommensurable with one another." Gearing (1958) drew attention to the fact that a community's social structure consists of a series of sets of roles and groups that may appear and disappear according to the task or situation, a condition he called the "structural pose." Some ethnographically described houses come into play only in very limited contexts, otherwise remaining latent (e.g., Lea 1992).

7. The word *fortune* in English and French can mean both "destiny, chance" and "riches, wealth." Both sets of meanings are encompassed by Lévi-Strauss's choice of the word *fortune*.

8. This is a reference to Lévi-Strauss's (1982:187) final sentence in the chapter in *The Way of the Masks* on house societies: "By gluing together real interests and mythical pedigrees, it [the house] procures for the enterprises of the great a starting point endowed with absolute value."

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