

*Fashions in Science: Opinion Leaders and Collective Behavior in the Social Sciences*, by Irwin Sperber, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis. 1990. xix + 303pp., index. \$14.95 (paper).

by

Andrew L. Christenson  
Prescott, Arizona

The author's main point is that "the scientific community, like the domains of costume adornment and automobile design, is profoundly influenced by...the play of fashion". As a radical sociologist, he clearly has an ax to grind about the organization of his discipline. Using examples of the works of major sociologists such as Simmel, Sorokin, Merton, and Kuhn and the studies of fashion by A.L. Kroeber, he argues that major paradigms in sociology have risen, come to dominance, and the simply, "keeping in step with the times") than from the critical comparison of theory and data and replacement of paradigms that perform poorly by those that perform better.

There is much here that is of relevance to understanding the history of archaeology even if you don't buy the specifics of the author's arguments. One section of interest is the detailed critique of Kuhn's idea of paradigmatic change in science, upon which many of us were "raised". Also of particular interest to readers of this journal is the role of ahistorical thought in the fashion process. This is evidenced by the preference of the new over the old, for no reason except that it is new, and by the failure to acknowledge the historical roots of ideas. The ahistorical and even anti-historical tone of much of the New Archaeology has been noted and the filling of past and current archaeological journals with articles on supposedly "new" ideas that really aren't would be considered evidence of fashion by Sperber.

Sperber is less interested in the history of social sciences, than in their current state, but his ideas about the fashion process clearly have relevance to understanding the development of archaeology. It would not be difficult to pick out several major paradigms and numerous more specific ideas in archaeology that suggest the operation of fashion; the real work is in documenting the mechanisms of the process. Ridicule of those who stick to the "old" ways, systematic ignoring the counter-examples, award of grants or tenure to those who are proponents of "new" ideas are all suggested mechanisms of the fashion process.

Sperber considers fashion mostly from a negative viewpoint even though he occasionally admits that valid or useful ideas are spread by the same mechanism. It seems to be that the spread of ideas/paradigms/techniques in science may occur by almost the same process regardless of their validity or origin. The "almost" refers to the critical step of empirical testing which would distinguish "fashion" science from "real" science. Scientists, however, can't or don't evaluate everything on the basis of direct knowledge of a good match between data and theory, but often take up ideas or techniques because of other people's recommendations or simply because they are told to do so. Student's will take on the methods and viewpoints of their instructors without question and carry many of these ideas on once they become professionals. The negative aspects of the fashion process in a discipline are (1) when ideas are taken up and become dominate without critical examination of the discipline who are listed to and (2) when negative evidence or even attempts to gather it is stifled. Those interested in hints of the operation of the latter process in archaeology should read an article in *The Sciences* (November/December 1992) by Anna C. Roosevelt where she states that Betty Meggers and Clifford Evans ignored evidence that conflicted with their theory of prehistoric Amazonian culture and "fought to prevent investigators with opposing views from working in the Amazon."

Although polemical at times, this book has many ideas for those interested in scientific change and is worth reading to heighten one's sensitivity to the operation of the fashion process in science as well as to provide some clues on how it might be examined in historical research.

*Archaeology and the Methodology of Science*, by Jane H. Kelley and Marsha P. Hanen, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, xiii + 437 pp., index, bibliography. Paper and Cloth Editions - Price unavailable.

by

Alice B. Kehoe  
Marquette University

The one book very graduate student in archaeology should read to understand how archaeology can be scientific — the one book collaboratively written by an experienced, intelligent archaeologist (Kelley) and a mature, respected philosopher of science (Hanen), both authors seasoned teachers who can distance themselves from the fads and personalized controversies of their respective fields.