

- 2 The original creators of ARC in 1980/81 were involved in the newly developing symbolic and structural archaeology.

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READING, WRITING, AND THE RESURRECTION OF THE SUBJECT

Mary Ann Owoc

No one who is familiar with deconstructionist literary criticism: the *différance* of Derrida, the "Death of the Author", the order of discourse, and the consideration it has received in archaeology (Hodder 1988, 1989; Shanks and Tilley 1987a, 1987b; Tilley 1989), can have failed to observe the overwhelming attention paid towards the *text* as an object for analysis. The writer as author is all but forgotten, de-centred, dissolved, unmade by the very fabric of the text itself. We writers have grown afraid to mention agency and the production of meaning in the past for fear of being labelled Cartesian disciples, slaves to the metaphysics of presence and power, still clinging to romantic hermeneutics, or victims of humanism.

As usual, however, archaeology's incorporation of post-structuralist tenets into its theoretical repertoire seems to be occurring just as the concept itself is going out of fashion in the philosophical and literary disciplines. The themes of intertextuality, textual autonomy and the arbitrary nature of the sign put forward by the deconstructionist movement are being abandoned by scholars more interested in the relevance of *context* for the speaking, writing, and reading subject, as well as refining and drawing attention towards the connections between speaking, writing, reference, and appropriation within hermeneutical studies. (Giddens 1987; Ricoeur 1971, 1981; Spencer 1989; Suleiman 1980). In what follows I should like to consider the actual relevance this brush with "post-structuralism" or perhaps more specifically, deconstruction, ought to have for our production of texts about the past. If we are to engage in a selective adoption of certain post-structuralist concepts it will be necessary to restore the integrity of the subject after the death of the *cogito* by resurrecting the author as *reader*. This can be effectively achieved through a consideration of Ricoeur's theory of interpretation. An adoption of a hermeneutic enterprise over one of deconstruction, stands to give us a far more enlightened perspective on our role as readers and writers of past texts in the present.

A brief run through some of the themes characterising post-structuralism might be useful here. I want to stress, at this point, that the terms "post-structuralism" and "deconstruction" are not necessarily interchangeable - the latter referring to a particular position within the former which attempts to subvert its structuralist origins through a radical critique on logocentrism and the extension of Saussure's definition of meaning as perceived through difference. The body of writers I call "post-structuralist" is, thus, by no means unified, and several writers like Barthes have changed position rather dramatically at some points in their career. Moreover, some writers like Julia Kristeva come closer to a position more reconcilable with theories of agency, such as Giddens's theory of structuration, than others. Several main threads, however, run through most of their work, and it is these which I shall concentrate upon, rather than the

writers themselves and their respective positions along some sort of deconstruction hierarchy.

The themes I plan to deal with are as follows:

- 1 The split of language, by Saussure, between the poles of *langue*, the idealised system of language and *parole*, language utilised in everyday contexts.
- 2 An attention towards writing, first as physical marks on a page, which can be studied in isolation, and second as a performative production of significance, as opposed to signification and determinant meaning.
- 3 The formulation, again by Saussure, that linguistic signs achieve their existence and identity only through difference from other signs; hence, the arbitrary character of the sign.
- 4 The extension of this difference by Derrida to the concept of *différance*, conceived as the eternal separation between the signifier and that which is signified, destroying representation and presence, and his corresponding critique on the western metaphysics of presence.
- 5 The conception of a plurality of meaning for any given sign, possible due to this eternal separation - meaning postulated as lying along a chain of signifiers.

I believe that some of these premises are irreconcilable with those under which we operate in dealing with the past and the present. The discussion that follows will hopefully reveal that archaeology is engaged in a selective adoption of some post-structuralist tenets, but one which must necessarily fall short of perceiving interpretation as infinite regression. Our ability to produce and be influenced by material culture texts and to postulate their existence in the past presupposes some sort of metaphysics of presence, some form of reality against we ourselves are continually defined. If meaning operates through signification which makes ideation and consciousness possible (Hodder 1989) (Shanks and Tilley 1987) and signification is saturated in the settings of practical action in which reference and meaning interlace (Giddens 1987:215; see also Ricoeur 1981 and below), then attempting to operate within a system of metaphysics which necessarily calls for the abandonment of our beliefs about the nature of reality seems both initially debilitating and of little long-term productive value.

An End To Power?

The recognition that power is an inescapable reality as a positive and/or negative force in society (Miller and Tilley:1984) forces us to reconsider how relevant as a practice for archaeologists can be a metaphysics which calls for an understanding of speech and writing "outside

the bounds of power". The problematic of power as a force to be somehow overcome, or cheated, is a feature of much deconstructive criticism in which there is an attempt to redefine the term "text" as a continual process of *significance*, wherein final meaning and, therefore, power in language is disseminated through a writing which operates in the field of the signifier - producing endless word plays. This "text" is opposed to a limiting concept of "work", seen as a *product* which can only be read or consumed, but not re-written. This "work", unlike the text, functions as a sign, closing on a signified. It is *signification* as communication.

Barthes, like Foucault, isolates power in all forms of social exchange, from politics to fashion. "Power is the parasite of the trans-social organism, linked to the whole of man's history." (Barthes 1979:33). Naturally, language as discourse is no exception. Barthes's overwhelmingly negative portrayal of power as a constraining, limiting, stealthily controlling, force of social subjugation is revealed by the singular solution that he suggests whereby we overcome our servitude: to cheat with speech through the eternal play of the signifier, the pleasure of the imaginary sign. Thus language is separated from the medium of its development and use, *langue* from *parole*. While this might be a rather clever solution to a big problem, it does nothing to further our understanding of the nature of power in the present or past, or how we as agents operating within a signifying system of cultural production can hope to get anywhere towards generating meaning in a positive and fulfilling process by producing endless word plays.

Notwithstanding the positive contribution Foucault's analyses have made towards an understanding of power as 'power to', it still shares with Derrida and Barthes a tendency to dwell on the limiting nature of power, most clearly illustrated in his cogent critique on the author function and the metaphysics of presence, as well as his emphasis on the limiting nature of discourse (Foucault 1981, 1986). While "desire" and "the institution" are rightly at odds concerning the best mode of textual expression (1981:51), however, Foucault offers no way to escape this dilemma, preferring instead to look toward the signifier and the "transgression of the limits of writing", in a process which, like Derrida's destruction of reference, threatens to destroy agency in the reading subject as well as in the writing one (Foucault 1986).

Deconstruction and the Practice of Archaeology

M. Abrams, in a paper presented in the 1976 Modern Language Convention entitled "The Deconstructive Angel" effectively draws attention toward the discrepancy between modern scholars adoption of a deconstructive enterprise, and their practical preconceptions about textual persuasion, understanding, and the existence of a thinking subject.

...he does not entirely and consistently commit himself to the consequences of his premises. He is, in fact, fortunately for us a double

agent who plays the game of language by two very different sets or rules. One of the games he plays is that of a deconstructive critic of literary texts. The other is the game he will play in a minute or two when he steps out of his graphocentric premises onto this platform and begins to talk to us. (Abrams 1977:437)

Abrams points toward the inconsistencies between his colleague Miller's practice as a deconstructive critic and his intentional use of communication and textual organizational skills in the anticipation of an understanding audience, capable of perceiving Miller's words as meaningful. With this in mind, it is perhaps wise to note Barthes's distinction between the everyday use of language as purposive and unarbitrary, and the literary use of language, which he defines as by comparison purposeless, not designed to inform or instruct (Sturrock 1979:65). While this appears to justify Barthes's own deconstructive enterprise, it merely highlights the Saussurian distinction between *langue* and *parole* which makes such an enterprise possible.

If our concern as archaeologists is the active production and reproduction of "cultural" language then maintaining this distinction in the study of material culture signs and signifiers necessarily downplays context and reference. It now remains to decide what elements of post-structuralism we can incorporate into our practice, while still considering the production of meaning in the past by social agents through a process of interpretation in the present. If a deconstructive enterprise is incompatible with our pursuits, then what we are left with is post-structuralism defined more as a positive extension of certain elements of structuralism, rather than its subversion.

The concept of meaning as partially realized through difference must surely be accepted. It is this which opens up possibilities of meaning. However, allowing difference to become *différance* effectively draws our attention away from the subject as agent who actively references this symbolic order constituted by difference in a social context to create and fix meaning, in what can only be described as an intentional act which anticipates an effective result. Although it is necessary for us to conceive of meaning as approached through difference, problems begin when difference is isolated as the only way in which "something like meaning" can ever be approached. Derrida's concept of *différance* and, thus, the removal of language from the site of its production and use can have no productive role in an archaeological pursuit of meaningful signs and structures used in historical contexts, changing or not. If we are to recognise material culture as meaningful and effective in reproducing symbolic structures, then signifier and signified must join in practice/action, even if the character of the resulting sign as an event is contextually specific, subject to reinterpretation and necessarily fleeting. Perceiving meaning as ever deferred, conceptually lying along a chain of signifiers does nothing to further our understanding of the active connection we make in practice between the signifier

and some reality through reference. Giddens (1987) points this out when he quotes Benveniste's comments on Saussure.

When he spoke of the difference b-o-f (*boeuf*) and o-k-s (*ox*), was referring in spite of himself to the fact that these two terms apply to the same *reality*. Here then is the *thing*, expressly excluded at first from the definition of the sign, now creeping into it by a detour. (Giddens 1987:203; cf. Benveniste 1971:44ff.)

To limit the plurality of meanings for a sign would be to deny the possibility of alternative perspectives of a particular sign system in the past or present, as with that the changing contexts of use and interpretation of material culture texts. However, plural meanings must not unequivocally go hand in hand with Barthes's conception of the *subject* (Sturrock 1979:53; Barthes 1981:36), a concept largely formulated as part of a response to orthodox themes of identity, and achieved by dissolving the unity and identity of being into a plurality. If this formulation is seen together with Barthes's preference towards the "text" as a signifying practice over the "work" as a process of signification and, therefore, communication, the classical subject is both dissolved and loses the power of understanding. If the signifying practice becomes divorced from understanding, the subject is stripped of any unity of being, any *cogito*. The critiques of the Cartesian *cogito* by post-structuralist writers are numerous e.g. (Derrida 1976) (Foucault 1981). However, the *cogito* and the concept of the plurality of meanings can coexist quite happily if the subject is seen as constituting herself or himself in relation to the necessarily changing nature of social circumstances. This of course denies to the *cogito* an unchanging unity of being but it in no way denies its individuation. The subject is necessarily a subject *in process* but not one which must be dispersed along a network of signifiers. Instead the subject can be seen as continuously being reconstituted through its encounter with the world, perpetually engaging in a process of self-understanding. In a necessary critique on the classical *cogito*, post-structuralism has unmade the subject, without reintroducing a notion of self-understanding.

We must recognise the "death of the author" (Barthes 1977) along the same line as the plurality of meaning. Foucault (1986) has convincingly demonstrated that the unification of meaning in a text that stems from the single source of the author is a product of a belief formulated in 17th and 18th century literary discourse and earlier biblical exegeses, and developed in the interpretation of texts based on these premises. As such it is a fruitless enterprise where the time would be much better spent in analysing the state of the subject in the order of discourse. An enlightened position certainly, but one which sadly downplays the role of the agent in the production of the social.

Another approach more relevant to the perspective of this paper is that of Spencer

(1989), who calls for concentration upon the contexts of production and interpretation of texts, leading towards an understanding of the process of interpretation itself. The split between the author's intended meaning, and the subsequent interpretation of a given text can be found in Ricoeur's discussion of distanciation (Ricoeur 1986). What the text signifies can now no longer necessarily coincide with that which the author meant. The "death of the author" is especially relevant for archaeology, as pointed out by Hodder (1989) and Tilley (1989), since the authors of the texts we study are most certainly dead, and the products of their production have been incorporated into new contexts and accorded new meanings. "Textual meaning and psychological meaning have different destinies" (Ricoeur 1981:139). Thus, our search for the meaning of a work in its author's intentions, at least where archaeological texts are concerned, is not where we should be concentrating our attentions.

Reading Ricoeur's Hermeneutics in Search of the Subject

Post-structuralism has contributed much toward enlightening our scholarship, pointing out the nature and the history of its own social circumstances and our positions within it. Most importantly, perhaps, it has drawn our attention to the relation between speech and writing, elevating the status of writing from a mere supplement of speech to a subject worthy of study in its own right (Young 1981). I would now like to consider the status of this writing, not from the perspective of *écriture*, a performative writing by a language worker (Barthes 1981), but, to begin with, from that of *reading*. Hodder (1988:69,74) has pointed out that any material act, and we can subsume both action in the past and in the present, and the writing of the past in the present under this category, must first take place as a reading of a pre-existing text. Text comes before action. But what is the state of being of this reader who is also a writer?

In so far as we have decentred the subject, ceased to perceive the *cogito* as radical origin, master of its own "being-in-the-world" (Sartre), it now remains for us to restore its integrity by introducing the notion, principally from Ricoeur, of *appropriation* of a text by the reader who is her/himself constituted in the reading process. Concurrently, we can extend this notion of appropriation to describe the process of explanation and interpretation of the past action in the present, to the extent that the archaeological record we study is like a text, removed from the conditions of its production and its author, and the action which produced this record open to multiple readings.

Ricoeur (1981) approaches the hermeneutical problem through the notion of distanciation, specifically seen in the dialectic between speaking and writing. Writing, he says, consists of an intentional exteriorization of a speech act through grammatical and syntactical devices. Therefore, the text can be seen as a work of discourse. However, the realization of discourse in writing implies a distance between the resulting text and speech - the written material is freed with respect to the dialogical conditions of discourse - thus, opening it up for whoever can

read. As a result, the text has a different referential dimension to speech. It ceases to possess ostensive references. Instead, the references of the text are suspended. This however, is not a permanent suspension, since the reference is fulfilled though each subsequent reading.

Ricoeur describes reading as a fusion of explanation and interpretation. In the sense that reading is an explanatory act, it can recover the "sense" of a work - internal relations through structural analysis. Using Levi-Strauss's analysis of myths as an example, Ricoeur demonstrates that while structural analysis presupposes meaningful oppositions with the logic of the myth, it represses them through its methodology (ibid.:154-156,160-162). Explanation however is not a recovery of meaning. Meaning can only be achieved through interpretation, a process in which the text is actualised or given a realization in the discourse of the reading subject in the present. This is at the same time a recovery or a re-telling of what is said by the text. "To interpret...is to appropriate here and now the intention of the text." (ibid.:161). Todorov, I think, comes close to describing this duality of interpretation as he discusses the non-arbitrary reading of a text (1980). He views interpretation as being conditioned by two series of constraints, the first contained in the text itself, and the second from the cultural context of the interpreter. These cultural constraints vary over time, and this, he says, explains why interpretations vary from one period to another¹.

According to Ricoeur, *interpretation* only takes place through an act of *appropriation* - to make "one's own" what was initially "alien". This approach is not, however, to be conceived as a projection of the reading self into the text, a possession, but rather can be conceived of as an encounter, as a *dispossession* by the ego to the world of the text, which in turn gives the subject as reader a new and different capacity for knowing itself. It engenders a new self-understanding, or, after Heidegger (1962), a new "being in the world". The encounter with the text, then, restores the self to the *ego* (Ricoeur 1981:193). Therefore, appropriation combines both self-understanding, and understanding at and through distance.

Ricoeur also addresses meaningful action in his analysis of the interpretative process (1971), revealing again the relevance of literary theory for defining our role as readers of social agency, as well as its product of material culture in the past. In what is very much an analysis in the manner of the process of structuration as introduced by Giddens (1979), Ricoeur relates the distance between the intention of the speaker and the verbal meaning of a text to the distance between an agent and its action - pointing out that the action, once separated from its creator develops consequences of its own. This however, does not mean that we cannot grasp at the production of meaning in the past, because, in the same way as a text, (see above), action in the past can be interpreted without losing its meaningful character, although the meanings of the action are necessarily those realised in the present. Ricoeur speaks first of actions which imprint their mark on time, great works of culture which overcome the conditions of their social production and develop new references in the same way as a text. This is especially

relevant for the consideration of monuments (Hodder 1988) (Owoc in preparation) whose interpretations and methods of incorporation can be shown to change through varying processes of contextualisation.

Conceiving of interpretation in this way also allows us to reconsider the way we approach meaningful *action* in the past. Like a text, or a material culture text, human action is open to anyone who can read. "Human deeds are also waiting for fresh interpretation which decide their meanings." (Ricoeur 1971:544). Therefore our study of social agency, power and ideology in the past can be viewed as interpretative readings of a text, restoring meaning to past action in the present. Ricoeur, Hodder, and Tilley (1989) emphasise the "present" character of interpretation, or reading, (be it the "present" in the past, or our present), as an event - an *instance of discourse*, in the same way as the initial meaningful speech or action was an event. Our production of meaning in the present as an interpretation of past texts of culture and action, allows us as readers of the past to become writers in the present, producers of new interpretative texts.

The incorporation of a semiological perspective on the past, made possible through our adoption of certain structuralist and post-structuralist concepts has had enormous enlightening effects on the way in which we perceive ourselves and our data. The critiques of the "author function" and the Cartesian *cogito*, as well as the themes of plurality and difference, introduced or expanded by post-structuralist writers, can have no less than a pertinent relevance to our discipline. I believe this incorporation can be augmented and fulfilled through Ricoeur's combined hermeneutic and semiotic endeavor. Although the encounter with interpretation as appropriation by no means offers a practice to follow, it nevertheless contributes a valuable perspective on our status as readers and writers of the past. Unlike deconstruction, I believe this perspective enables us to respect and recognise the past we study, and at the same time see ourselves as situated along a hermeneutic axis which stretches from past to present.

Notes

- 1 This sense of appropriation can also be approached through Gadamer's notion of the "fusion of horizons" of past and present (Gadamer 1975:272-273).

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THE MEANINGS OF THINGS, WRITING, AND ARCHAEOLOGY

Ian Bapty

The Meaning or Meanings of Things?

The first time you glance at the cover of *The Meanings of Things* and read that title, it somehow doesn't seem to 'read' quite 'right'; you say it out loud and it feels like more of a mouthful than a phrase made up of four simple words should do. Then you realise what the problem is -- it's that pluralising 's' on the end of "meanings". Wouldn't 'The Meaning of Things' have had a better rhythm to it and still said the same thing?

That 's' is in fact central to the argument which at least superficially informs the book. The point is exactly that the 'things' of material culture are understood in relationship to culturally and historically specific groups of meanings, and cannot be adequately rationalised purely within cross-cultural, non overlapping sets of general meaning. For example, such an argument can itself be seen to fit within the particular meanings of one historical and cultural context; when Hodder chooses to link the papers in *The Meanings of Things* with the current post-modernism debate, he makes a connection as much historical as simply thematic. Indeed, the 's' of 'Meanings' in that sense sits sympathetically on a book cover design itself bound up with the post-modern cultural style. As the prominent photograph of a contemporary art exhibition explicitly references post-modernism's self-conscious awareness of style by style for style, so that is equally implicit in *The Guardian* like typescript chosen for the title lettering, the 'designer' *One World Archaeology* series logo, and the pale/pastel shades of the bands of grey and blue which bound the design at top and bottom. Style with a big 'S' accompanies meanings with its little 's'. Twenty years ago, the book would indeed have been called simply 'The Meaning of Things', and the words would have been embossed in upright letters on a plain cover of one colour.

Appropriately enough, then, the book can also be categorised in a variety of ways. On the one hand *The Meanings of Things* is the latest of a series of books written or edited by Ian Hodder in the 1980s (eg Hodder 1982; 1986; 1987), and which together have formed one of the more visible and influential strands of the emergent 'post'-processual archaeology, and its attack on the New Archaeology's attempt to build some kind of universalising frame of absolute archaeological knowledge. Alternatively, a perhaps more important series to which the book belongs is, of course, that arising from the publication of the proceedings of the World Archaeological Congress held at Southampton in 1986. There is an evident link between these two contexts; the controversy surrounding the Congress demonstrated more clearly than any theoretical argument the fact that archaeologists write the past only in terms of specific histori-