

ARCHAEOLOGICAL REVIEW FROM CAMBRIDGE

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WRITING ARC-ARCHAEOLOGY

Anthony Sinclair

One of the more pleasant aspects of working for ARC is the feeling that the journal is attempting to bring out for discussion issues that are topical and developing. ARC likes to think of itself as being on the 'cutting-edge' of archaeology, or at least with sharpening stone in hand, 'thinking aloud' and being actively involved in the creation of a more critically aware discipline. This is a view that naturally lends some degree of support to those striving to produce the published journal with deadlines pressing. In this sense, ARC is a material expression of a 'structure of feeling'; a structure that is hopefully on the rise and not on the wane.

In the past the journal has tackled themes such as politics, time, education, space, the heritage industry and gender. All of these issues have arisen out of immediate and contemporary concerns amongst members or associates of the Department of Archaeology in Cambridge. Often they have been preceded by a series of seminars (as is the case with *Archaeology and Time* 6:1) or sessions arranged (sometimes concurrently) at the annual conference of the Theoretical Archaeology Group (*Archaeology and the Heritage Industry* 7:2) and that on *The History of Archaeology* 3:1) or simply reflected matters that were immediately topical. ARC has, in this way, always been 'of-the-moment'.

Writing is now a major area of interest in anthropology, with the production of 'experimental' fieldwork accounts as well as a number of articles and books consciously concerned with the way in which anthropology is written. Recent works suggest a similar vein of conscious consideration to be developing in archaeology, although (as yet?) there have been no whole texts specifically devoted to the subject in itself. Perhaps, therefore, this edition of ARC might be seen as just a reflection of a current structure of feeling.

There is some truth in this. Writing, or to be particular, 'writing-up' (a thesis of some form), is a common topic of discussion, formally and informally¹. At another level, it is also of profound current interest. Those who have made the decision to do, or even complete, a piece of research have in many cases decided to seek employment in archaeology, and in certain cases as it exists within the framework of the university system. In the current economic and political circumstances, writing, by which I mean both the ability and also the product (to have written and to have been published), is essential. I, for instance, might be quite knowledgeable about some aspect of stone tools, but unless I can prove it, in terms of written works, then my career potential is frankly limited. As a post-structuralist (?), I might even be theoretically convinced of the 'death of the author', but as a hopeful archaeologist-to-be, no authorship is 'suicide'. We should perhaps, imagine Flannery's "Skeptical Graduate Student" (1976) spending less of his time at the keyboard of a calculator and more behind that of a word-fo

Archaeological Review From Cambridge 8:2 (1989)

processor. To merely say that archaeologists write seems somehow to miss much of what is at stake.

The birth of *ARC* is, itself, clearly related to this phenomenon. Originally created to provide a space for the writings of students and others, when such written work did not necessarily represent the product of finished research (such as the summations of theses that are so often found as articles in journals or books) and did not follow closely what was considered as "archaeology" at the time²; *ARC* was a step on the ladder to more 'formal' publication elsewhere. In some senses this is still the case, although the boom in publications and publishing firms has created a greater arena for written work.

If I return, however, to the beginning, the roots of this volume might go back to more than the immediate moment. They could be traced back over three years to a series of seminars arranged in Cambridge on the subject of discourse. In 1986, the books *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus) and *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (Marcus and Fischer) were published. Their relevance for the writing of archaeology was immediately apparent. This series of seminars on discourse was an attempt to explore this relevance.

It seemed possible (hopeful) that these seminars would end up as a publication of some form; whether it be a Cambridge University Press "New Directions" book or even a volume of *ARC*. They began well, examining Foucault. From there, though, progress was increasingly difficult. For the second seminar we thought that some form of self-knowledge was in order. After a presentation (in a manner somewhat akin to academic group therapy) of the reasons for our own individual presence within archaeology (invariably contingent), we were no further. A few more seminars followed but with no major success. Discourse in the end, died a death, much as did many of the original contributions to this volume; not as a result of a lack of something to say but rather one of knowing how to put it.

From a more pragmatic perspective, this volume appears now as a result of the "demise" of a number of other potential topics ("religion" [too vague], "monumentality" [not liked], "the self" [too theoretical] and "post-processual approaches to the archaeology of North-Western Europe" [too specific]), and the necessity to meet some form of production deadline. I, myself, end up as editor quite by chance and not through clear association between my research and the issue of writing itself.

Archaeologists have been concerned with aspects of writing (the lack of it in certain quarters) for a number of years. The approach taken by anthropologists, however, opens up the debate to areas not previously given consideration. The form in which things are written, this work argues, reveals the essential creativity involved in the production of knowledge and the relations of power between subject and object. Writing can be no longer considered as a

neutral activity. Instead it must be recognised as situated within a particular form of expression (genre) which is linked to relations of production and structures of knowledge. Writing is a political activity, even when it does not claim to be. From this it follows that anthropologists (and you can read also archaeologists) are not to be considered as mere 'linguists', the translators of foreign worlds; they are actively engaged in producing a discourse.

In the concern with writing, two strands of archaeological thought come together: (1) recent social theory concerning interpretation and meaning and (2) the epistemological status of archaeological knowledge. On the one hand, the work of post-structuralists has drawn attention to the act of reading as interpretation. Meaning resides in the difference between words and not in the words themselves. As a result, there is the possibility for an infinite number of interpretations for each reading. On the other hand, the genres in which works are written, frame a particular form of knowledge that is put forward by the practitioners of a discipline. The genre emphasises a particular claim to truth. The study of textuality revolves around an understanding of these two (Hanks 1989).

Archaeologists, like anthropologists, write; we create our subject. Now that writing has been problematised archaeologists likewise face a dilemma. It is part of our task to write, and yet the status of writing seems to undermine our ability to get at some knowledge of the past. Therefore, what are we to do? We might, perhaps, draw attention to the creative nature of writing and the 'misrepresentations' that are endemic within our current genres of expression, exploring new ways of telling; perhaps using novel, literary constructions, to attempt to convey archaeological practice in new forms. On the other, hand we might accept that all archaeological knowledge is partial, undeniably related to concerns of the present and thus flawed. Archaeological writing would then be free to play to these present concerns, perhaps becoming a form of academic liberation theology. From this point of view, 'gender archaeology' could either attempt to put women back into the past, interpreting anew evidence relating to situations where women have either been forgotten or dismissed through stereotype. Or it could use interpretations as a means of asserting women's potential in the present ("archaeology as cultural critique"). Or both. This, however, is too simplistic and the issue of writing is more complex.

Given the nature of the problem, this volume of *ARC* can be no more than a comment on one or two aspects. The range of the writings covered by papers in this issue is limited. The emphasis is very much towards the academic and not the public (as represented by such works as *Current Archaeology* or guides used to describe monuments). However, they do address a range of the problems which the issue raises. The paper by Mary-Anne Owoc explores the value of the metaphor of writing and reading the text as a means for understanding archaeological interpretation. It centres upon the attack that has been made by "deconstructive" critics (especially Derrida) on the notion of constant interpretation. Deconstruction she argues,

though, is both inaccurate and limiting. A more hermeneutic approach should be followed. Christopher Evans examines the way in which archaeology has been portrayed in Twentieth Century literature. Starting from an analysis of recent works by Raymond Williams and Peter Ackroyd he points out that there are numerous different genres within this field, not all of them sympathetic to academic archaeology. Archaeologists would do well to think carefully before adopting a literary style of presentation in the belief that it could then reveal to the public at large the true nature of the discipline. My own paper begins with a review of some of the issues raised by anthropologists in their works on writing. It argues that this body of work is particularly tied into problems which anthropologists consider relevant to their own work. The exploration of writing in archaeology, therefore, needn't necessarily follow blindly. Archaeologists should think about exploring other aspects of writing and exploit some of the diversity of archaeology. Another approach is set out which sees writing as a means of observing the archaeological 'record' (an instrument of perception) and looks at some of the effects that this creates. Ian Bapty reviews *The Meanings of Things* (Hodder 1989), perhaps the first archaeological book to draw attention to itself explicitly as a constructed text. This approach is flawed, he argues, because, although attempting to transcend the genre of 'edited text', at the same time it appears to accept a certain disbelief that one genre can ever be better than another.

The paper of Bapty raises what is, from this academic perspective, perhaps, the heart of the problem; the relationship between power and knowledge and the issue of truth. A criticism raised by post-processual critics of the New Archaeology is that it is founded on a positivist/empiricist conception of the world, wherein disciplines need not think about the effect of the knowing subject in analysis. Knowledge can be learned and judged objectively. Put simply, there is no relationship between theory and data. Criticisms of writing stands counter to this. They accept the subjective element and the creation of knowledge.

Certain anthropologists have stressed that knowledge is partial, undeniably present and framed from a particular point of view (Clifford 1986). From a positivist perspective, knowledge is knowledge *for all time*. It might need refining but it is still knowledge. This implies that science increases its understanding not through research conducted within a paradigm, but through the gradual revelation of knowledge that is there, waiting to be discovered (an excavation of knowledge!). Here we have the problem. If archaeology accepts the subjective element in writing it apparently forfeits any right to be considered a Science, a valid discipline. Moreover, it loses its right to pronounce the meaning of the past, from a position of Scientific status.

If we turn to the anthropological writings, there is something of an inconsistency on this matter. At first sight it would appear that they are in favour of this forfeiture. They write of partial truth and the misrepresentation that occurs within the genre of "ethnographic realism". Yet at the same time these criticisms necessarily entertain an assumption that there is still a

truth, one against which current expression can be judged. For instance, without the idea of dialogue and "data given", the anthropological encounter is misrepresented. Does this mean, however, that the experimental texts wherein dialogue is represented do in fact present truth? Likewise, partial truth seems very damning; but does it not also imply 'part of truth'? This seems a true double-bind. If archaeologists follow anthropologists on this matter we will clearly face the same problem.

I feel unable to suggest an end to this apparent impasse. However, we might take heart from the neighbouring discipline of history, where personal involvement with the subject of study and disciplinary rigour are not conceived as so diametrically opposed. The work of the British Marxist historians is particularly relevant. In the work of Dobb, Hobsbawm, Hill and especially Thompson we see rigorous historical enquiry into the development of the 'working class' and the relations between the aristocracy and the up and coming 'middling orders' that is clearly influenced by a Marxist understanding of the workings of society and also makes a commentary upon the contemporary situation. These writings both develop new knowledge and examine theoretical concerns, yet at the same time do not lose sight of the need to support their claims to truth/understanding through recourse to the evidence. *Albion's Fatal Tree* (Thompson 1975) is a fine example of an examination of the relationship between the creation of law and the relations of production and power within a society (the relationship between base and superstructure in Marxist terms) as well as being a close examination of a particular law and its consequences (the "Black Act" of 1723). Clearly, the writings of the Marxist historians of Early Modern England are not to be taken as a blueprint for all archaeological writing. Prehistoric archaeology does not have the same degree of evidential support which is so central to these works, for instance. However, it is clearly of relevance to the writing of historical archaeology; once again reflecting the need to see the writing of archaeology as potentially variable and not to be restricted to a new theoretically-aware genre.

Writing brings us to the heart of the debate which post-processual approaches have started. In that sense, this issue can clearly be no contemporary structure of feeling, to be neatly packaged and published and then left for pastures new. It is a matter which must be played out and explored in action.

Notes

1 There is now a 'writing-up' seminar held regularly in the Department in Cambridge, which might be taken as a reflection of a preoccupation both with funding and funding bodies and their desire to see a prompt completion of work. Such seminars encourage people to talk about ways of writing work (the genre of the 'doctoral thesis' is a popular topic) and, hence, perhaps encourage them to do so. It also provides (self-)help for students engaged in what is considered by many to be a very solitary pursuit.

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 *differance* 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 *differance*. 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