CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Archaeology studies all changes in the material world that are due to human action –
naturally, in so far as they survive. The archaeological record is constituted of the
fossilized results of human behaviour, and it is the archaeologist's business to recon-
stitute that behaviour as far as he can and so to recapture the thoughts that behavior
expressed.

V. Gordon Childe (1956:1)

In his books, *The Order of Things* (1970), *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1973), and
Discipline and Punish (1979), Michel Foucault uses the word "archaeology" in a
distinctive manner. In addition to referring to the eponymous discipline, he uses it
to describe a method of analysis appropriate for the human sciences. This analysis
involves determining the discursive practices associated with the historical devel-
opment of each episteme or intellectual sphere. These discursive practices refer
to the complex and largely hidden interrelations between institutions, techniques,
social groups, and perceptual modes. The analysis also requires revealing how the
configurations of these discursive practices are radically different from those of
the sciences. For Foucault, "it is useless, then, to say that the 'human sciences'
are false sciences; they are not sciences at all" (Foucault 1970:366). He immedi-
ately notes that this status should not be interpreted as some kind of deficiency
or an obstacle to research. Rather, what we call the human sciences constitute
distinctively different configurations of knowledge.

Foucault's use of the term archaeology and his analysis of the human sciences
raises interesting questions for the field of archaeology. What might an archae-
ology of archaeology look like? One way to begin our investigation is to start
with the epistemological standing of Anglo-American archaeology.[1] Is it a natural

science like physics or chemistry? Is it a social science like cultural anthropology and sociology? Is it a humanity like English literature and art history? Or is it something else? Perhaps a hybrid of all three? Related to these questions are a series of other questions regarding archaeology's representational practices. Is there a single "grand theory" for archaeology similar to the Unified Field Theory of physics, the New Synthesis in evolutionary biology, or the Universal Grammar of linguistics, that is applicable to all cultural contexts past and present? Or, are there multiple "little theories," each of which is appropriate to specific historical contexts? And, if the latter is the case, how do these different theories articulate with one another? What resolutions are possible and appropriate when they appear to come into conflict?

In the modern era, archaeologists have offered a multiplicity of responses to these questions. These responses have tended to be structured by the disciplinary distinctions between anthropology and history as they have been articulated on either side of the Atlantic. American scholars, like Gordon Willey and Philip Phillips (1958), Lewis Binford (1962), James Deetz (1967), and William Longacre (1970), have argued that archaeology is part of anthropology. British scholars, such as Stuart Piggott (1959), Glyn Daniel (1964), and Ian Hodder (1982b), have generally regarded it as a historical discipline. A small number of scholars, particularly David Clarke (1968), a British archaeologist, and Michael Schiffer (1976), an American archaeologist, have held that archaeology is a distinctive field of study in its own right, capable of producing its own laws and theories. The controversy over the disciplinary status of archaeology continues to this day (e.g., Gillespie and Nichols 2003; Hodder 2005). And yet, however much these approaches may diverge, all of them share something in common: the view that the defining characteristic of the field is the study of material culture.

In this book, I intervene in this debate in two ways. I begin by rejecting the artificial oppositions between different kinds of disciplines which, in the end, are the result of historical and political factors. To do this, I argue that archaeology is a semiotic enterprise. This assertion, while perhaps not familiar to many archaeologists, is not particularly novel.[2] All academic disciplines can be seen as semiotic enterprises. This is because all disciplines must attend to the linkages between their theories, data, and social practices in the pursuit of meaning. It can be argued that all archaeologists of whatever theoretical persuasion, be they processualists, behavioralists, selectionists, agency theorists, feminists, indigenous archaeologists, and so on, make use of the same procedures of logical reasoning in giving meaning to the past. To be sure, this claim can be seen as a kind of unification thesis. Some colleagues, who worry that unification is a technology of power, may even find it troubling. But, as Ian Hacking (1996) points out, there are different kinds of unification. Unification at the cognitive level does not necessarily entail unification

at the interpretive level. It is thus possible, and indeed highly desirable, to foster theoretical disunity within semiotic unity.

It is surprising that so few archaeologists have engaged with the literature on semiotics, the multi-disciplinary field devoted to how humans produce, communicate, and codify meaning. The term "semiotics" appears in none of the recent overviews of archaeological method and theory (e.g., Bintliff 2004; Hodder 1999; O'Brien et al. 2005; Preucel and Hodder 1996; Renfrew and Bahn 2000; Ucko 1995; Willey and Sabloff 1993). One reason for this neglect may be the perception that semiotics is now "passé" or out-of-date because of its intimate association with structuralism. This view may be enhanced by the fact that there are now several critiques of structuralism and various poststructuralist agendas are emerging within postprocessual archaeologies. Ian Hodder (1982b:8), for example, has identified the problems of structuralism as including the lack of a theory of practice, the limited role of the individual, the absence of an adequate model of change, and the problem of verification. For Christopher Tilley (1999:3), structuralism has been superceded by a growing interest in various forms of discourse theory, including rhetoric and linguistic tropes.

Another reason for the lack of engagement may be the close association of semiotics with literary theory, a field that some archaeologists regard as having limited application to the study of material culture. For example, Lewis Binford (1987:402), a leading processual archaeologist, has labeled postprocessualists as "textual-contextualists" and critiqued them for "adopting an approach that assumes that all artifacts are symbols and are direct semiotic evidence, or, in a more structuralist posture, present themselves as clues to the intellectual determinants of the ancients' behavior." Matthew Johnson (1999:226), a leading postprocessualist, has held that text metaphor is flawed since it depends upon a perceived cultural proximity, the lack of difference between the past and our own present. Both of these critiques have some valid points and thus my goal is to present an argument for a specific kind of semiotics.

The dominant approaches to semiotics in archaeology today are those offered by postprocessual and cognitive archaeologists. These are all, in one form or another, derived from the writings of Ferdinand de Saussure and the various revisions made by his structuralist and poststructuralist followers. I contend, along with many other scholars (e.g., Gottdeiner 1995; Keane 2003; Parmentier 1997), that the Saussurian model, by itself, cannot provide an adequate account of material culture meaning. This is because of its flawed characterization of the sign and its focus on codes and rules at the expense of social practice. These limitations thus pose as much a problem for Colin Renfrew (1994a) and his cognitive archaeology program, as it does for Tilley (1991, 1999) and his celebration of ambiguity and metaphor.

I, therefore, advocate an alternative semiotic approach based upon the work of Charles Sanders Peirce (Gardin 1992; Knappett 2005; Lele 2006; Preucel and Bauer 2001). Such an approach requires identifying the different kinds of signs that humans use in the semiotic mediation of culture. Here Peirce's tripartite notion of the sign relation and his famous distinction between icon, index, and symbol are especially relevant. This approach also highlights how different cultures deploy specific signs and sign combinations toward particular semiotic ends. Certain meanings are given preeminent status in the negotiation of power relations and these can be seen as semiotic ideologies (Keane 2003). Finally, this approach involves acknowledging that archaeological interpretation is itself a social semiotic act. This fact implies that our collective interpretations are, and always will be, partial and provisional. It does not imply, however, that everything is relative or that there is no growth of archaeological knowledge. As Peirce argues, science is a social phenomenon and the conception of reality "essentially involves the notion of *community*, without definite limits, and capable of an indefinite increase of knowledge." (Peirce Edition Project 1984:239, his emphasis).

My second intervention in this debate involves reconsidering material culture as social practice. I suggest that archaeology's longstanding interest in material culture needs to be augmented by a focus on *materiality*. The distinction between material culture and materiality is crucial. Material culture can be defined as the manifestation of culture through material fabrications. As Henry Glassie (1999:41) puts it, material culture is "the tangible yield of human conduct." The standard view, embodied in Childe's quote at the beginning of this chapter, is that material culture stands for beliefs, thoughts, and behavior. Jules Prown (1993:1) offers a concise contemporary statement of this position, "human made objects reflect, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, the beliefs of the individuals who commissioned, fabricated, purchased, or used them and, by extension, the beliefs of the larger society to which these individuals belonged." There is thus an inherent semiotic dimension to the study of material culture since, as a product of human activity, material culture must always signify something other than itself.

This view of the artifact as a "mirror of man" was challenged by Ian Hodder (1982c) in the context of his ethnoarchaeological study of social groups and boundaries in the Baringo district of Kenya. He originally sought to identify the spatial patterning of material culture and determine how it correlated with ethnic groups. What he found was considerable variability expressed at several different scales. In the Lozi kingdom, for example, status groups actively used material culture to establish their authority while within Lozi households family tensions were supported and continued by means of particular kinds of pottery decoration. He concluded, "whether an artifact does or does not 'reflect' a particular type of

interaction or information flow depends on how it comes to be used as part of the strategies and ideologies of particular groups" since "individual artifact types may be used to emphasise or deny, to maintain or disrupt, ethnic distinctions or networks of information flow" (Hodder 1982c:85). Material culture is thus not a passive reflection of human behavior, but rather an active social practice constitutive of the social order.

This is an extremely valuable insight, but it begs the question of how and why specific meanings come to be regnant in particular social contexts. Subsequent studies of meaning have tended to get caught up in the "style debates" (Hegmon 1992). It can thus be argued that material culture has not been adequately theorized. There have been very few considerations of the "socialness of things" and how they transform culture by their multiple imbrications in regimes of value. These issues are the subject of new studies of materiality in social anthropology (Appadurai 1986b; Buchli 2002; Gell 1998; Miller 2005; Myers 2001) and are now being explored in archaeology (Chilton 1999; Meskell 2004; Orser 1992; Tilley 1999). Materiality, or material agency, can be defined as the social constitution of self and society by means of the object world. As Lynn Meskell (2004:28) perceptively notes, it "links both to the radical ideas of mimesis, simulacra, and agency and to the more mundane notions of goods, services, and economic structures." A focus on materiality demands that we consider the myriad ways in which material culture mediates social being. We thus need to shift our focus away from material culture per se toward the whole range of material engagements with the world. An archaeology so constituted is especially well positioned to contribute to a fuller understanding of cultural semiosis.

What is Semiotics?

Semiotics can be defined as the field, multidisciplinary in coverage and international in scope, devoted to the study of the innate capacity of humans to produce and understand signs.[3] What are signs? Signs are such things as ideas, words, images, sounds, and objects that are multiply implicated in the communicative process. Semiotics thus investigates sign systems and the modes of representation that humans use to convey their emotions, ideas, and life experiences. Semiotic analysis, in various forms, is widely used today in a broad range of disciplines, including anthropology, architecture, art, communications, cultural studies, education, linguistics, literature, political science, sociology, and psychology.

Semiotic issues have occupied scholars since antiquity (Clarke 1990; Nöth 1990). Plato, for example, held that verbal signs are only incomplete representations of the true nature of things since the realm of ideas is independent of its

representation by words. Aristotle recognized the instrumental nature of the lin-
guistic sign, observing that human thought proceeds by the use of signs and that
spoken words are the symbols of mental experience. The Stoics distinguished the
thing signifying (*semeion*) from the thing signified (*semeionomenon*). The former
was immaterial and separate from the existing object. Medieval scholars, such as
William of Ockham, considered the concepts of sign and signification to be funda-
mental to logic (Tabarroni 1989). Ockham redefined the sign by introducing the
concept of supposition. This move allowed him to reformulate traditional ontolo-
gical issues, such as the questions of universals, the number of categories, and the
ontological status of relations, as semantic questions.

John Locke, who coined the term "semiotics" from the Greek, was the first
scholar to establish semiotics as a scientific discipline. In *An Essay Concerning
Human Understanding* (1993:414–415) published in 1690, he considered it one of
the three branches of science. He defined physics (*phusike*) as "the knowledge of
things, as they are in their own proper beings, their constitution, properties, and
operations," practice (*pratike*) as "the skill of right applying our own powers and
actions, for the attainment of all things good and useful," and semiotics (*semeiotike*)
as "the doctrine of signs; the most usual whereof being words, it is aptly enough
termed also logic (*logike*)." He regarded logic as the study of "the nature of signs,
the mind makes use of for the understanding of things, or conveying its knowledge
to others."

Modern semiotics began in the 19th century and most scholars identify two
distinct intellectual trajectories. The first of these might be termed "linguistic"
and is due to the work of the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure. The second
trajectory can be considered "philosophical" and is associated with the writings
of American philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce. Of these two trajectories, the
Saussurian approach is best known and has been the most influential across the
humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. This situation is due largely to the
inaccessibility of the majority of Peirce's writings (see Chapter 3). It is, therefore,
semiotics in its Saussurian manifestation that has given rise to structuralism and
the so-called "linguistic turn" in the human sciences.

Saussure coined the word "semiology" (*sémiologie*) to refer to "a science that
studies the life of signs within society" (Saussure 1966:16). He proposed that the
true nature of language systems could only be revealed by studying what they
share in common with all other semiologic systems. "By studying rites, customs,
etc., as signs, I believe that we shall throw new light on the facts and point up
the need for including them in a science of semiology and explaining them by
its laws" (Saussure 1966:17). For Saussure, linguistics was just one branch of
this general science, albeit the most complex and universal of all representational
systems. Because of this characteristic, he argued that linguistics can serve as

"the master-pattern for all branches of semiology" (Saussure 1966:68). Saussure did not himself pursue these other branches of semiology and instead devoted his efforts to the study of language as a structured system.

Peirce, in contrast, defined "semiotics" as the science devoted to the "essential nature and fundamental varieties of possible semiosis" where semiosis is understood as "the nature of signs"(Peirce Edition Project 1998:413). Following the *trivium* of grammar, logic, and rhetoric of the ancient Romans, he distinguished three branches of semiotic – "speculative grammar," "speculative critic," and "speculative rhetoric" (Peirce Edition Project 1998:327). Here the term "speculative" can be understood as being equivalent to "theoretical." Speculative grammar thus refers to the study of "the ways in which an object can be a sign"; speculative critic refers to "the ways in which a sign can be related to the object independent of it that it represents"; and speculative rhetoric refers to "the essential conditions under which a sign may determine an interpretant sign of itself and of whatever it signifies, or may, as a sign, bring about a physical result" (Peirce Edition Project 1998:326, 327).

Semiotics emerged as a major focus in literature and cultural studies in the 1970s and 1980s. This can be largely attributed to the influence of the writings of Roland Barthes and Claude Lévi-Strauss some ten years earlier. In 1957, Barthes (1972) published *Mythologies*, his critique of bourgeois ideology. After completing it, he wrote that

> it was then that I first read Saussure; and having read Saussure, I was dazzled by this hope: to give my denunciation of the self-proclaimed petit-bourgeois myths the means of developing scientifically; this means was semiology or the close analysis of the processes of meaning by which the bourgeoisie converts its historical class-culture into universal nature; semiology appeared to me, then, in its program and its tasks, as the fundamental method of an ideological critique (Barthes 1988:5).

Barthes followed up Saussure's idea of the semiotic study of cultural practices and published on a variety of topics including literture, art, music, and fashion (Barthes 1977, 1990).

Lévi-Strauss's interest in semiotics dates to the period before the Second World War when he lived in New York City and taught at the Free School of Advanced Studies (now the New School). Lévi-Strauss was introduced to structural linguistics by Roman Jakobson, his colleague and fellow émigré from Europe. By 1960, he regarded semiotics as central to his program of structural anthropology. In his inaugural address to the Collège de France, he explicitly defined anthropology as a subset of semiology. He stated, "we conceive anthropology as the bona fide occupant of that domain of semiology which linguistics has not already claimed for its own, pending the time when for at least certain sections of this domain, special

sciences are set up within anthropology" (Lévi-Strauss 1976:9–10). Lévi-Strauss applied his approach to the study of kinship, mythology, totemism, and history (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 1976).

In the last decade or so, semiotics has undergone a significant transformation. The field has moved away from the study of sign systems and their classification toward the study of the modes of production of signs and meanings as they are enacted in social practice. This new approach has been called "social semiotics" or "sociosemiotics" (Gottdeiner 1995; Hodge and Kress 1988; Jensen 1995; Lemke 1995; Thibault 1991, 1997). It focuses on human meaning making practices across verbal, visual, bodily, and other semiotic modalities, and their co-deployment. As Thibault (1991) argues, the basic premise is that meanings are made by construing semiotic relations among patterned meaning relations, social practices, and the physical-material processes which social practices organize and entrain in social semiosis. In social semiotics, the basic logic is that of contextualization. No semiotic form, material entity or event, text, or action has meaning in and of itself. The meanings are made in and through the social meaning-making practices which construct semiotic relations among material processes and social actions. All communities have regular and repeatable patterns of meaning-making. These patterns are thus typical of that community and help to define and constitute it, as well as to distinguish it from other communities.

Yet another important development in semiotics is biosemiotics. This subfield can be defined as the study of living systems from a semiotic perspective. Thomas Sebeok (1979) has identified the origins of biosemiotics in the work of the German biologist Jakob von Uexküll, who was one of the founders of ethology in the first half of the twentieth century. Sebeok (1986) coined the term zoosemiotics to describe the study of animal behavior in 1986. According to biosemiotics, all processes occurring in nature at whatever level, from the single cell to the ecosystem, can be analyzed in terms of sign-processes. All organisms exist within a *semiosphere*, which can be defined as a world of meaning and communication involving the mastery of a set of visual, acoustic, olfactory, tactile, and chemical signs (Hoffmeyer 1998). The semiosphere contains a variety of semiotic niches which are occupied by different populations depending upon their biological characteristics. From this perspective, the evolution of life is associated with the development of increasingly sophisticated means for surviving in the semiosphere.

Archaeology and Semiotics

Archaeology's relationship with semiotics began in the 1960s with the structuralist encounter (Chapter 5). André Leroi-Gourhan (1965, 1968) and Annette

Laming-Empèraire (1962) in France and James Deetz (1967) in the U.S. were among the first archaeologists to apply the linguistic model to archaeological data. Their influence, however, was limited to Paleolithic archaeology and historical archaeology respectively. Margaret Conkey (1978), John Fritz (1978), and Dorothy Washburn (1977) revived structuralism in the context of their engagement with systems theory and information exchange models. This form of structuralism, however, bore only a loose relationship with linguistics. It wasn't until the early 1980s that Ian Hodder reintroduced a recognizably linguistic structuralism, together with its poststructuralist critiques, as the theoretical basis for post-processual archaeologies.[4] As Michael Shanks (1990:299) writes, postprocessual archaeology mounted an attack on processual archaeology "on the philosophical grounds of semiotics and the theory of discourse." In the following section, I chart the influence of semiotics on archaeological interpretation through a sampling of professional seminars and conferences.[5]

In 1979, Hodder and his students at Cambridge University organized a series of seminars culminating in a conference entitled "Symbolism and Structuralism in Archaeology." The participants included Hodder and 12 graduate students, many of whom have now gone on to become leaders in postprocessual archaeology and postmodern anthropology.[6] In his preface to *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology*, Hodder (1982b) noted that there was a clear sense of what was wrong with existing processual approaches, but no clear consensus as to where to go. The conference was, therefore, a series of trial explorations of theories of practice, structuration theory, semiotics, gender, and ideology. Left unresolved, however, were several questions regarding verification and the relationships of meaning and symbolism.

Two contributions explicitly raised aspects of semiotics. Daniel Miller (1982, 1985) drew on semiotics to offer a critique of structuralism and functionalism. He questioned whether "the division within linguistics of syntax, semantics and pragmatics, which is in any case hard to maintain, would be at all plausible in the study of material forms, and the actual use of any such 'grammar' would probably be limited in archaeology and social anthropology to the study of formal systems such as designs" (Miller 1982:21). He then critiqued functionalism arguing that function is not absolute, but rather reflects conventional needs and desires. Here he employs Saussure's langue and parole distinction and argues that while the rules of structural generation are subject to generalization, the specific results of productive activity are not. This, therefore, invalidates the use of functionalism. He then calls for an approach to categorization that links langue and parole in order to provide a realist explanation of the past.

Alison Wylie discussed semiotics in the context of evaluating the linguistic model.[7] She suggests that material culture does not produce "meaning effects" in the sense of conveying specific messages of states of mind similar to sentences

or speech acts (Wylie 1982:40). That is to say, there is greater ambiguity involved in interpreting material culture meanings than there is in interpreting linguistic ones. Given this situation, Wylie proposed that material culture may not be intended to produce the same level of specificity. For her, the linguistic analogy holds primarily at the level of the encoding process and meanings and a mediating competence may govern the structuring of material culture. She concluded on a cautious note observing that additional work is needed to develop methodological procedures that address cognitive, semiological, and symbolic aspects of material culture.

The first major assessment of the relationships of semiotics and archaeology occurred at the 5th International Institute for Semiotic and Structural Studies in 1983. This conference was organized by Michael Herzfeld and held at Indiana University in Bloomington.[8] Jean-Claude Gardin of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) gave a series of lectures entitled "Semiotics and Archaeology." These lectures focused on the nature of the artificial languages used in creating archaeological databases and the general operations carried out on these databases in order to facilitate archaeological interpretation (Gardin and Peebles 1992b:2–3). Gardin (1980, 1987) has had a longstanding interest in metatheoretical issues in archaeology, such as categorization, artificial intelligence, and expert systems.

In 1986, Hodder organized a series of sessions on "Material Culture and Symbolic Expression" at the World Archaeological Congress in Southampton, England.[9] The resulting publication contains contributions from 25 authors from Africa, Australia and Papua New Guinea, Eastern and Western Europe, India, North and South America, and the United Kingdom. Although Peter Ucko (1989:xiv) observed that many of the contributors regarded semiotics as the most important technique for decoding the rules and grammars of material culture expression, only a few explicitly addressed semiotic issues by name. Tilley, (1989a) for example, reviewed structuralism and poststructuralism in terms of the move from language to text. He holds that "each act of material culture production and use has to be regarded as a contextualized social act involving the relocation of signs along axes defining the relationship between signs and other signs which reach out beyond themselves and towards others becoming amplified or subdued in specific contexts" (Tilley 1989a:188–189). Ana Maria Llamazares (1989) provided a semiotic approach for the interpretation of rock art. Her premise is that rock art is structured as a communication system and that the individuals that produce it are expressing themselves through preexisting structures that are part of the communities to which they belong.

In the following year, Gardin, Herzfeld, and Christopher Peebles organized a Franco-American roundtable at Indiana University sponsored by CNRS and the

National Science Foundation. The roundtable was held from October 6–10, 1987 and 20 French and Anglo-American scholars participated. The topics covered included semiotic, symbolic, structural, and cognitive approaches, the philosophy of interpretation, and computer applications. These papers were subsequently published in *Representations in Archaeology* (Gardin and Peebles 1992a). Several of the papers address semiotic issues directly.

Jean Molino (1992), a semiotician, interpreted archaeological practices in terms of three complementary modalities. The first is an aesthetic dimension by which the archaeologist engages with the data and seeks to reconstruct the underlying phenomena. The second is the classification dimension used to produce symbolic models of the data and their organization. The third is the poetic dimension where meaning is produced as the archaeological traces are linked to human activities. He concludes that "it is this triple anchorage that links archaeology to the semiology of symbolic forms" (Molino 1992:27). Michael Herzfeld (1992) examined the constraints on archaeological inference. He suggests that interpretation is predicated on typological relationships based upon iconicity, or selective resemblance and spatial forms of indexicality that can be translated into temporal sequences. He then recommends that archaeology develop models that allow the archaeological record to be read through plausible indexical and iconic relations and accept that symbolic meanings may be inaccessible.

Gardin's (1992) review of semiotic trends in archaeology is of particular interest. He identified three major intellectual trends – structuralism, logicism, and hermeneutics – that underlie interpretation. Structuralism involves making use of the methods of structural linguistics or structural anthropology, particularly as they have been developed by Saussure and Lévi-Strauss. Logicism is associated with the science of logic as devised by Charles Morris and Peirce. Hermeneutics focuses upon the actor as subject, the role of the interpretive community, and the generation of multiple perspectives. Gardin justifies placing these three very different approaches under a common semiotic heading on the grounds that they all address aspects of mental representation or "mentalities." Structuralist archaeology investigates mental organizations that determine the behaviors of past groups, logicist archaeology seeks to approximate the worldviews which facilitate our interpretations in the present, and hermeneutic archaeology seeks to reveal the operation and meaning of symbolic systems in past societies. For Gardin (1992:94), the value of the semiotic perspective is twofold – it offers a kind of unity to the discipline and it allows for new understandings of the progress of archaeology.

In 1988, Ian Bapty, Tim Yates, Frederick Baker, and J. D. Hill organized a conference entitled "Discipline-Discourse-Power: The Cambridge Seminar on Post-Structuralism and Archaeology." The conference, held over a three-day period, from June 29 to July 1, at Cambridge University, examined the impact

of poststructuralist thought on archaeology, specifically Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction. The conference generated considerable debate and some of the tensions are indicated by the fact that it resulted in two separate publications (Baker and Thomas 1990; Bapty and Yates 1990a). Sarah Taylor (in Baker et al. 1990:1) has called Baker and Thomas' volume a "salons des refusés" containing contributions the conference organizers felt fell outside the bounds of their poststructualist agenda.

Several authors took critical stances on interpretation and indeed some question the very possibility of archaeology. Yates (1990), for example, challenged Hodder's idea of the archaeological record as text and his emphasis on context. He suggests that this approach depends upon the priority of the signifier and the role of context in closing off the chain of signifiers. However, he proposed that the past has a relative autonomy that requires that we retheorize past and present, silence and voice, self and other using psychoanalytic perspectives on the unconscious and conscious. He writes, "like Narcissus gazing into the pond, we mistake what is actually our own image for that of another, the self for other, out of a desire to break with that which imprisons us – within our own bodies, which is always our own space and our own time" (Yates 1990:159). Maley (1990) has argued that archaeology needs to embrace deconstruction even at the risk of undermining its most cherished assumptions about representation and culture. Similarly, Bapty (1990) has called for a return to innocence where finding meaning in the past does not depend upon some ultimate security. In his concluding commentary to *Archaeology After Structuralism*, Shanks (1990) leveled a series of rhetorical charges against the individual authors such as the fetishism of poststructuralist authors, making too much of theory, hypocrisy, political naiveté, elitism, and relativism. He then suggests that archaeology needs to take seriously issues of emotion, experience, creativity, and imagination.

In 1991, Ian Hodder, Michael Shanks, Alexandra Alexandri, Victor Buchli, John Carman, Jonathan Last, and Gavin Lucas organized a conference on archaeology and the interpretation of material culture at Peterhouse, Cambridge University (Hodder et al. 1995). Over 140 archaeologists from Britain, United States, Europe, Africa, India, Japan, and Australasia attended for the three days of meetings. Among the topics discussed was the applicability of the text idea for archaeology. Buchli (1995:183) raised a series of questions – does it refer to a semiotic system (Saussure), a structuralist system (Lévi-Strauss), a hermeneutic system (Gadamer and Ricoeur), or something else? Is text best conceived as a metaphor or an analogy? Criado (1995) critiqued the text metaphor in favor of a visual one characterized by strategies to inhibit, hide, exhibit, and monumentalize. Parker Pearson (1995) discussed the durability of material culture compared to text and the risks in fetishizing material objects and inappropriately attributing meaning to them.

Thomas (1995) accepted the text metaphor but advocated an approach that examines how things are incorporated into personal biographies and group myths in the production of identity.

More recently, in 2001, Alexander Bauer and Uzma Rizvi, graduate students at the University of Pennsylvania, organized a symposium at the Society for American Archaeology meetings in New Orleans entitled "Artifacts as Signs: Semiotic Approaches to the Study of Meaning." The symposium, held on April 21, included papers by Jean-Claude Gardin and Christopher Peebles, Sarah Tarlow, Lawrence Coben, Uzma Rizvi, Giovanna Winchkler, Alexander Bauer and myself, and Margaret Conkey. Ian Hodder and Jean-Claude Gardin were the discussants. The session focused on exploring semiotics as a means of moving the debate over meaning forward and evaluating some of the ways in which material signs, such as objects, architecture, and landscape, are different from linguistic signs.

Two of the symposium papers have now been published. The first of these is my article with Bauer in which we develop an argument for a pragmatic archaeology based on Peircian semiotics (Preucel and Bauer 2001).[10] We suggest that it helps us appreciate that all fields and indeed all knowledge-seeking activities share a common logical structure. We also propose that it has the potential to contribute to the current semiotic discourse on cultural pragmatics. Although much of this discourse has been taking place within the field of linguistic anthropology, archaeology's focus on material culture well positions it to advance this developing dialogue. This is because material culture is tightly interwoven with language, and shares some of its semiotic properties. What makes material culture unique is its "materiality" and the ability of material meanings to be alternatively transformed or maintained over time depending upon context.

The second publication is Lawrence Coben's (2006) study of Inka performance spaces and their role in imperial expansion and control using Peirce's notion of a replica. He suggests that the Inka constructed Cuzco, their capital city, as a physical representation of their worldview. The Inka then replicated this city at strategic locations throughout their empire, thus expanding their control by making multiple Cuzcos. He suggests that one of the principle roles of these sites was to serve as the settings for a calendar of ritual ceremonies and spectacles that referenced certain repeated material attributes of these sites and were performed by and for an audience of the Inka. He also suggests that these Cuzco replicas were strategically placed in areas of war and rebellion where the utilization of ritual performance to maintain, reinforce, and manipulate Inka ideology and identity was a critical element of imperial strategy as the polity expanded from a single valley in highland modern Peru to encompass an empire extending from Ecuador to Chile.

This brief review of archaeology and semiotics highlights several key points. While archaeology has engaged with both Saussurian and Peircian versions, until

recently its most sustained focus has been on structuralism and its subsequent poststructuralist critiques. From the first Cambridge conference, there has been an emphasis on approaches that go beyond structuralism such as Giddens's structuration theory and Bourdieu's theory of practice. This has led to explorations of text, writing the past in the present, and rhetorical tropes and has even generated critiques which have questioned the very possibility of doing archaeology. As important as these approaches are, they have not adequately addressed the semiotic processes by which things come to mean what they do. They have not examined the multiple modes of sign relations enabling semiotic practices.

Theorizing Material Culture

One of the most exciting developments in contemporary anthropology is the revival of interest in material culture studies. There is a growing recognition that objects are not passive reflections of society, rather they are active participants in social practices that constitute selves and others (Appadurai 1986b; Hoskins 1998; Myers 2001). Significantly, postprocessual archaeology has played a key role in facilitating this reengagement. Daniel Miller, one of the leaders in the field, was one of Hodder's students at Cambridge. Miller, along with Tilley and Victor Buchli, teaches at the University College, London, perhaps the leading center for material culture studies today. There are now several edited volumes that define the interests and agendas of this school (e.g. Buchli 2002; Miller 1998). UCL is also home to a new interdisciplinary *Journal of Material Culture* focusing on the role of artifacts in the construction of social identities and the production of culture.

An influential theoretical perspective informing contemporary material culture studies is *objectification*. This is the view that in making things people make themselves in the process. Borrowing the idea from Hegel, Daniel Miller (1987:33) suggests that objectification is the foundation for a dialectical theory of culture. It merges the subject/object and individual/society dualities by insisting that both pairs of oppositions are as much constitutive of culture as constituted by it. Because it is not merely reflective, Miller does not consider it to be a process of signification. He holds that "objectification is therefore an assertion of the non-reductive nature of culture as process" (Miller 1987:33). For Hegel, objectification involves externalization and sublation, processes by which self-alienation becomes the instrument of the historical making of culture. Miller proposes that more than self-alienation, praxis understood as material strategies based upon objective conditions is central. For example, he suggests that mass produced goods are the ways in which we create our identities and social affiliations in modern culture. The key issue is the

process of alienation by which goods become transmuted through consumption into desires.

A second approach is *materialization.* Elizabeth DeMarrais et al. (1996) have defined materialization in the context of elite ideology and power. They suggest it is related to the production, control, and manipulation of highly visible, elaborate symbols and icons, events and monumental architecture. DeMarrais (2004) has recently sought to extend the discussion beyond elite strategies suggesting that the materialization of ideology is part of a broader process – the materialization of culture. She draws attention to the idea of *sedimentation* whereby people make use of local knowledge to solve various problems. In some ways, this view recalls Judith Butler's (1993:9) observation that the materiality of gender requires "a return to the notion of matter, not as site or surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter."

Yet another influential direction is the *social life of things* approach. This approach includes both the "cultural biographies of things" and the "social history of things," which can be differentiated with respect to temporality and scale (Appadurai 1986b:34). The cultural biography approach is the analysis of specific things as they are exchanged among people and accumulate biographies. The social history approach refers to whole classes of things that may shift in meaning over the long term. According to Appadurai (1986b) these two forms of object identity are interrelated since the social history of things constrains the cultural biographies of things. Most research has focused on commodity exchange within the cultural biography approach. Igor Kopytoff (1986), for example, has drawn attention to how commodities are perpetually subject to classifications and reclassifications in an uncertain world of categories. Charles Orser (1992) has used this approach in his study of slave material culture in plantation contexts. In addition to use and exchange value, he identified esteem value where the very presence of the object helps perpetuate certain ideas and beliefs. Here things have agency, not through consciousness, but by virtue of the effects they have on people.

All three of these approaches share a set of common problems. There is a rather loose use of the terms sign, symbol, and signification. Because of this, certain aspects of meaning are ignored, simplified, and, in some cases, misidentified. Miller implies that objectification is not a process of signification. DeMarrais argues just the opposite, but fails to provide an account of how the materialization process works. Appadurai identifies synchronic and diachronic axes of difference, but he neglects the semiotic modalities underlying meaning production. As Myers (2001:23) notes, things are objectifications or materializations in a more complex sense than the doctrine of the arbitrary sign would imply. The materiality of things is overdetermined and this allows things to mediate indexically social processes.

For this reason, we must explore indexicality more fully in developing a theoretical account of material semiosis.

Organization of the Book

This book is organized into three parts and these are best read in sequence to gain the greatest appreciation for the potentials of archaeological semiotics. *Part I* provides a general overview of the two main intellectual trajectories in modern semiotics and their impact on anthropology. I introduce Ferdinand de Saussure and the linguistic tradition in Chapter 2. Here I pay special attention to the dyadic concept of the sign, the principles of arbitrariness and linearity, and the ideas of value and meaning. I also review the influence of structuralism on linguistics in the form of Russian Formalism, the Prague Circle of Linguistics, the Linguistic Circle Copenhagen, and American Structural Linguistics. I then turn to a consideration of the relation of structuralism to structural, symbolic, and cognitive anthropologies. In Chapter 3, I discuss the semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce and the philosophical tradition. I introduce his view of synechism and the pragmatic maxim which underlies his distinctive view of science. I also present the doctrine of categories, the triadic sign relations, and the ten sign typologies. I then consider his enduring influence on philosophy, linguistics, and biosemiotics. In Chapter 4, I characterize "pragmatic anthropology," the field devoted to pragmatic view of culture and the study of the culturally specific ways in which sign relations mediate social being. This is an increasingly influential movement in cultural and linguistic anthropology that draws inspiration from Peircian semiotics. Here I discuss such topics as deitics, referential and nonreferential indexes, reported speech, linguistic ideology, social identity, and material meanings. Pragmatic anthropology provides an essential bridge between philosophy, linguistics, and archaeology.

Part II is a consideration of the three roots of a semiotic archaeology – structuralism, poststructuralism, and cognitive science. In Chapter 5, I review the history of processual archaeology with special attention given to its engagement with structuralism. I then discuss several key issues such as rules and codes, information exchange, and structural Marxism. In Chapter 6, I examine the relationships of poststructuralism and postprocessual archaeologies. I then discuss the shift from structuralism to practice theory, the idea of reading material culture, the material culture as text model, and the material metaphor approach. In Chapter 7, I provide a brief history of the relationships of cognitive science and cognitive archaeology. I review the two main approaches that can be broadly characterized as evolutionary and processual studies. This section demonstrates that semiotics is not limited to

postprocessual archaeology. Indeed, it is implicated in all theoretical approaches from processual and behavioral to cognitive and hermeneutic.

Part III is devoted to demonstrating the value of a Peircian semiotics to archaeology using two historical case studies. The first of these, in Chapter 8, is an analysis of semiotic ideologies at Brook Farm in West Roxbury, Massachusetts. Brook Farm was the site of the famous utopian experiment made popular by Nathanial Hawthorne (1852) in his novel the *Blithedale Romance*. My concern is to identify how architecture and the built environment mediated the different philosophies of Transcendentalism and Fourierism. The second case study, in Chapter 9, is a consideration of how Pueblo Indian people reconstituted their world following the Pueblo Revolt of 1680. Here I pay special attention to the semiotic deployment of rhetoric, settlement, architectural form, and pottery design as material practices that collectively enabled the Pueblo cultural revitalization movement.

Throughout the book, I have made liberal use of case studies. I have done this in the firm belief that examples are the best way to demonstrate complex theoretical ideas. This can be seen as a form of pragmatism because if theories cannot be shown to have an effect on the interpretation of actual data then they are indeed of limited value. I have also emphasized certain studies to highlight the numerous connections between the various chapters. For example, Roman Jakobson's work on shifters (Chapter 3) was extremely influential for Michael Silverstein's work on indexicality (Chapter 4). Similarly, Ian Hodder's characterization of postprocessual archaeology (Chapter 5) was important in Colin Renfrew's development of cognitive archaeology (Chapter 7). Richard Parmentier's discussion of temporal modalities in Belau (Chapter 4) is significant in my own Pueblo Revolt case study (Chapter 9).

At the end of this book, I hope the reader will have developed some familiarity with a series of questions about the interrelationships between semiotics and archaeology. What is modern semiotics and what are its historical roots in linguistics and philosophy? How has semiotics been developed within anthropology and its subfields of linguistic, cultural, and biological anthropology? What are the relationships of semiotics to processual and postprocessual archaeologies? What are the relationships of semiotics to the recent moves toward a cognitive archaeology? Is the linguistic model an appropriate model for the study of non-linguistic objects (e.g., sites, landscapes, monuments, artifacts)? How do the processes of objectification, materialization, and the social life of things work? Is it possible or desirable to construct a comprehensive or universal theory of material culture meanings? The exploration of these questions constitutes the domain of archaeological semiosis and forms the building blocks of a pragmatic archaeology.