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## **COMMENTS ON MICHAEL SHANKS' ARTICLE "THE LIFE OF AN ARTIFACT"**

Empiristically oriented archaeologists think that their task is the thorough description of the finds, constructing the chronology and distinguishing the regional and temporal sequences or groups, "cultures". The philosopher of archaeology takes his point of departure from a philosophical system, be it positivistic, deductivist, realistic or whatever. He or she tries to show how the theory and method of archaeology are or should be in correspondence with that system. Michael Shanks' point of departure is very heterogenous "post-philosophy" or "post-modernism" which is easier to define by saying that it is against empiricism, positivism, essentialism and with it realism than in any positive terms. Partly in connection with "post philosophy", and partly as a project of his own, he tries to impart feeling and emotions to archaeology, "life, death and the ghosts". He thinks that "legitimate archaeological approaches sometimes also neutralise and sanitise their object".

But textual communication needs terms. What kind of words Shanks provides for this project. One of them is "aura". "Aura refers to the sense of associations and evocations that cluster around an object.; correspondence and interrelations engendered by on object. Aura is a sense of distance etc.," Shanks says. How does this increase our understanding of specific problems? Instead of clarifying what I think to be essential in science Shanks confuses and mystifies. Or should one say in the spirit of Derrida that there is text, only text?

Surely the expressions of feelings concerning "life, death and ghosts" are missing from archaeology but to my understanding the dualism between the arts and the sciences is as necessary as the one between, say, fire and ice. I had the opportunity to see a multimedia presentation which Shanks had made during a TAG congress in Gothenburg. In my opinion the comments of Shanks

between the performance were unnecessary. They diminished the power of the performance in explaining the work of art. Art needs no explanation, you take it or leave it. The place of explanations and criticism is in other forums. On the contrary, attempts to make feelings and emotions, the basic devices of the arts, part of archaeological discourse create only conceptual confusion and muddles. Shanks seems to think that he can have the best of both, but the result is both bad science and bad art.

Many of the dualisms Shanks says to be historical contingencies are as a matter of fact the basic metaphysical fabric not only of our culture but of any human culture. I try to illustrate this by some examples of the relationships between symbols, the social sphere and materiality the basis of metaphysics which is in accordance with our everyday conceptual scenes and scientific practices. The examples are taken from our culture, but as you can see, they are valid wherever there are material social human beings in the material world.

For example, with a traffic sign it is possible to limit the maximum speed to 30 km per hour. This is a social restriction. There is nothing to prevent you from using your free will and driving 120 km per hour. Of course, if the police catch you, you will be fined and perhaps lose your driving licence. On some other road there may also be a big bounce obstacles in addition to the speed limit. You can still use your free will and drive over it at 120 kph. As an effect, your shock absorbers will be broken and in the worst case you will driven off the road. The effect will follow necessarily and immediately. In this case not even a expensive advocate can help you. The bounce has causal power to make a wheeled material object in straightforward motion turn off its course. The social sign does not have any causal powers for material beings. It needs social human mediation.

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You can command a door to open. Nothing will happen in this or in any other culture where there are doors. This is not a consequence of the door not listening to you. Unlike human beings, it is impossible to have an effect to material things only by symbolic means. You have to use your materiality and open the door with your hand. There are, however, other, social means to have the door opened without direct material interference by ourselves. You can use the social mechanism of using symbols and ask another person, if he or she could open the door by saying: "Please, open the door". If you are socially in a higher position in a rank, for example an officer in the army, you can say to a soldier: "Open the door!", which is a socially different case. If you are of very high rank, a king for example, you will not even have to use the material limbs of your mouth. Some other persons will see to it that the door will be opened. From the king's perspective the door was opened by social structures, not by symbolic mediation. In a way that happens wholly as an effect of social structures. The causal powers of a door depending on its structure and relationships to frames etc. are dependent on the nature of wood, metal and the motions permitting for example round pins to turn round in hinges to keep the door in its position. But among the causal powers of doors or any other material objects there are none that could initiate motion and could be called agents. People and animals have these powers as also separate radioactive atoms. The same holds true of those objects whose powers are purely and exclusively social, such as a sceptre. It is a sceptre only because people regard it to be a symbol of power. This is dependent on a particular culture, unlike the power of a bounce to place heavy objects in straightforward motion to change their direction. We do not have any possibility to sense the "aura" of a symbol of power of some other culture. The wish for this is parallel to the dream of empiricism to find certainty and to form bases for

knowledge from sensory data.

Why should we regard the artefacts as living things and social in nature? How does it help us to understand our culture and other cultures? It would be sensational if the artefacts were alive. What reasons does Shanks give for this? The only reason he gives is that both people and artefacts have a life-cycle. I agree, they have. But I do not agree that this is enough for the analogous inference that people and things should be analogous in other respects as well. As mentioned above, there are too many differences.

There are other dualism than those between living things and artifacts that Shanks wants to collapse. One of them is that between metaphorical and literal expression. Unfortunately for him, the logic of our ordinary language does not allow that. Metaphorical is a term which gets its meaning from its opposite, literal or realistic expression. If everything is metaphorical, nothing is metaphorical, because it means something which is not literal or realistic.

Shanks' perspective is not oblique. The term is all too moderate. I would use the name "hodgepodge perspective" instead. He tries to solve difficult conceptual problems by reducing the meaning of many terms to a mess. What reason can we find behind this? The tabloids sell best. It seems that the philosophy of science is an area where sensationalism is often more popular than mundane or prosaic thoughts. This also holds true for empiricism.

On the other hand I do not know if Shanks is only creating post modern jokes, texts which are not meant to be anything more than texts which look scientific but have no deeper meaning. Archaeologists do not write novels and short stories, but he seems to be doing so. He has succeeded in generating many feelings and emotions in me while reading his text. This is what a novel or short story can do. Perhaps he is only writing in the wrong forums?