ART FOR ARCHAEOLOGY’S SAKE

Material Culture and Style across the Disciplines

Proceedings of the 33rd Annual Chacmool Conference

Edited by

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THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
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The University of Calgary
Archaeological Association, 2005
The work of French social theorist Michel Foucault (1926-1984) represents an underutilized resource for archaeologists and art historians dealing with issues of space and artistic representation. Below, I discuss Foucault’s distinction between the modern and the pre-modern body. While the modern, disciplined body is characterized by regulation through surveillance, the pre-modern body, which I argue provides a model for certain categories of prehistoric bodies in the Americas, can be described as **spectacular**, i.e., viewed as a spectacle. The prehistoric body-as-spectacle can be identified in Peruvian art, specifically in representations of Moche prisoners. The analysis of bodily space and depictions of spatial violation illustrate the micro-mechanics of bodily spectacle among the Moche.

**Foucault and the (Disciplined) Body**

In one of his most influential works, *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault discussed how modern techniques of bodily surveillance and manipulation have been utilized to “discipline” individuals. By “discipline,” Foucault meant “a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, [and] targets” (1977:215). Such disciplines constitute the individual and regulate movement, gesture, behaviour, and speech. As Butler notes, “[s]ubjection is, literally, the *making* of a subject, the principle of regulation according to which a subject is formulated or produced. Such subjection is a kind of power that not only unilaterally *acts on* a given individual as a form of domination, but also *activates* or forms the subject” (Butler 1997:84, italics original). Thus, the individual subject is constituted through the practice of and resistance to the imposition of disciplines or regulatory institutions.

Foucault contrasts the modern creation of docile bodies in the surveillance mode with pre-modern, spectacle-oriented torture and punishment. The “architecture of temples, theatres and circuses” resulted in “sensual proximity” (Foucault 1977:216)—a jumble of bodies observing, as a unified whole, the physical inscription of penalties in the form of pain and torture. To this end, scaffolds, pillories, and gallows were constructed in public squares and the bodies of the executed were exhibited (Foucault 1977:58). Traitors, for example, might be publicly disemboweled and decapitated, their heads adorning pikes along thoroughfares (Finucane 1981).

In both modern and pre-modern modes, the architectural manipulation of bodies is a central concern. In the modern mode, surveillance and other disciplines divorce power from the body, increasing its aptitude through a network of embedded relations. This “micro-physics” of power involves supervision, education, and scheduling—it is the “anatomy of detail,” the “concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, [and] gazes” (Foucault 1977:202). In demonstrating how the modern disciplinary system functions, Foucault examines the architectural structure of the prison in detail.

His classic spatial example is the Panopticon, the carceral vision of Jeremy Bentham: “[t]his enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, in which … each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed among the living beings, the sick and the dead—**all this constitutes**
a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism” (Foucault 1977:197). For Foucault, space is fundamental to the exercise of power because the control of bodies is fundamental (Driver 1994:116). Although he discusses in detail the spatial components of the prison and their roles in bodily discipline, Foucault leaves the pre-modern space of the scaffold un-theorized (McCall 1999). His example of the punishment and execution of Damiens, the convicted regicide, serves only as a contrastive amplification of his interpretation of modern disciplinary systems.

The pre-modern spaces that Foucault neglects, however, are the primary sources of data available to archaeologists and art historians, who, I suggest, are positioned to write the prehistory of the spectacular body. We have access to the architecture of spectacle, images of the body-as-spectacle, and the physical remains to compare with iconographic evidence. Iconography, in particular, may provide a glimpse of the spectacular ideal. In other words, art and iconography produced under certain conditions—such as elite control of ceramic production—may be used to represent the ideal subject. The ideal subject in the modern mode adheres to disciplinary norms, accedes to regulation, and serves to reproduce existing institutions. A premodern ideal also exists. This ideal is the spectacular body—the body as spectacle.

An example from the iconography of the Moche will illustrate this notion. The Moche inhabited the arid river valleys that drained the western slopes of the Andes on the North Coast of Peru (ca. AD 100 to 800). They constructed massive irrigation systems as well as adobe pyramid mounds such as those at the site of Sipán (Alva and Donnan 1993). However, the Moche are perhaps best known for their production of finely-painted and modeled ceramics. Moche art is ritual in nature, depicting processions, combat, sacrifice, and burial. The iconography of the Moche is replete with images of bodily manipulation, ranging from sexual acts to combat, torture, and sacrifice. I argue that certain forms of bodily manipulation, specifically those depicted in the iconography of Moche prisoners, represent the exertion of power in the pre-modern mode through the exhibition of the body in the form of spectacle.

The Spectacular Body of the (Moche) Prisoner

Evidence for bodily manipulation among the Moche comes primarily from two sources: iconographic and skeletal evidence. The detailed iconography of the Moche permits both archaeologists and art historians to examine how space is represented in a multitude of ways. Work on the relationship between the individual Moche body and architectural spaces on the ground, i.e., within the household or the site, remains to be done.

Below I examine the pre-modern, spectacular body of the prisoner as it is depicted vis-à-vis other humans and objects, such as the rope and the rack. In this discussion, I focus on the spatial orientation of the prisoner’s body 1) intact, as a physically complete, yet subject individual, and 2) in pieces, fragmented, and dismembered. In addition to imagery, the remains of the bodies themselves provide evidence of physical manipulation, including intentional dismemberment and fragmentation, ostensibly practiced in a ritual context (e.g., Verano 1997, 2001, Verano et al. 1999).

Representations of human figures, perhaps especially those of prisoners, feature explicit hierarchical relationships. Status hierarchies are depicted visually in several ways: 1) relative size (Donnan 1978; Hill 1998); 2) dress and accoutrements (Benson 1982); and 3) association of individuals with certain architectural features, such as platforms and gabled roof structures (Donnan 1978). Other possible indicators of high status include: the association of an individual with a live feline, the transport of high-status individuals in litters (Donnan 1978:34), and the placement of the “most important human figures [at] the top of the vessel body” (Benson 1982:204). The Pañamarca mural (Donnan 1978:125)
Fig. 39), located in the Nepeña Valley, illustrates the first two of these artistic conventions. The most significant figures are represented as larger and well-dressed, in contrast to individuals, identified as prisoners, who are depicted as smaller and only partially clothed. Size differences are also apparent in fine line representations, in which the central figure may be nearly twice the size of other individuals and wears elaborate clothing, headdress, backflap, nose ornament and ear spools (see Donnan and McClelland 1999: Figs. 4.49 and 4.50).

In contrast to high status individuals, the Moche prisoner is generally interpreted as a conquered warrior, appearing both in two-dimensional, painted form and in modeled, mold-made form. Often represented juxtaposed with their captors, prisoners are depicted as naked males with clearly represented genitalia. Markers of social status—such as headdress, backflap, club and shield are removed. The hair of the prisoner is often depicted clutched in the hands of his opponent or another higher status individual (Donnan and McClelland 1999: Fig. 4.101). This motif of subjugation occurs frequently in the Moche repertoire (Hill 2000), not only in prisoner-captor interactions, but also in scenes of combat in which supernaturals and/or anthropomorphs are involved (Donnan and McClelland 1999: Figs. 4.79, 4.80, 4.81). Often the action of grasping the hair appears to be a prelude to decapitation, as the combatant who is clutching the hair may hold a *tumi* knife in his opposite hand.

The prisoner is generally shown as subject to restraint; he often has a rope encircling his neck and bound wrists. An individual may be shown holding the rope and walking either before or behind his captive. The juxtaposition of these two conditions—active versus passive, naked versus clothed—is a highly effective technique employed by the Moche to accentuate the depersonalization and corporeal subjugation of the prisoner. The rope encircling the prisoner’s neck literally ties him to his captor (Donnan and McClelland 1999: Figs. 3.51, 4.100, 4.105). In other examples, the prisoner has his hands tied behind his back (Donnan 1978: Figs. 46, 246, 247). In two dramatic modeled representations, male individuals are shown tied to racks or scaffolds (Donnan 1978: Figs. 147, 148). A rope, like the scaffold to which Foucault devotes an entire chapter in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), structures how an individual body utilizes space. The rope is used to control and restrain the movements of the prisoner by limiting the body’s potential for action. The rope, then, is the material expression of power, organizing the space inhabited by the prisoner, and duplicating, in microcosmic form, his position in the hierarchy produced by his defeat in combat. His potential for action has been undermined, negated, and his (fleshly) body has become the subject of spectacle, exposed and vulnerable to violation by the viewers.

Although *Discipline and Punish* (1977) examines the creation of docile bodies and the formation of disciplinary institutions in Western Europe, Foucault’s observations are nevertheless relevant to archaeology in the Americas. In particular, Foucault’s insights have potential applications to spatial and iconographic analysis. In both subjects of study, the archaeologist and art historian have access to data on bodily potentials—that is, the range of motions, movements, and gestures available to the individual in the body. Thus, we may contrast the flexed body placed in an individual grave that closely approximates the body’s corporeal dimensions with the extended body placed in a spacious tomb of pharaonic proportions. Likewise, the body’s use of space within an enclosed structure differs qualitatively from its potential for action upon an open platform mound. As Lefebvre observes “Space commands bodies, prescribing or proscribing gestures, routes and distances … this is its *raison d’etre*” (1991:143).

Art and iconography, perhaps in contrast to space, may represent “ideal” bodies. Bynum has
suggested, for example, that medieval European body-part reliquaries serve as representations of the ideal—the intact, the complete, the restored (Bynum 1995:211-212; Bynum and Gerson 1997), in contrast to the decay and corruption of human flesh. Moche iconography may also represent an ideal, but one that is quite different from that of the medieval saint. Rather, the spectacular ideal of the prisoner is one in which the body has been emptied of its potential for individual action. The ideal body, in this case, is one that has been made vulnerable to profound violation and brought into line with the institutional agenda. As Judith Butler observes, bodily disciplines force the subject to “approximate an ideal, a norm of behavior, a model of obedience” (Butler 1997:85).

Thus, the limitation of gesture and movement in Moche art is a spatial expression of the prisoner’s position within the Moche social system. The rope is also a visible marker, a symbol of defeat, of passivity—of the wholesale appropriation of the body (Foucault 1977:137). The modeled vessel in Figure 1 (drawn from photo in Donnan 1978: Fig. 148) represents the prisoner naked, tied to a scaffold. Through such measures, the body is rendered a spectacle. The external surface of the body, the last protective boundary of bodily space, has been exposed on two levels: 1) to the gaze of the viewers and, 2) to corporeal violation of the body’s surface.

The public executions discussed by Foucault serve as analogous cases—large crowds gathered to witness corporal punishment in a public forum. The space of the scaffold or the gallows and the presence of an executioner served to simultaneously restrain and exhibit. In Moche art, the condition of the naked prisoner is dramatized by the presence of a fully costumed captor—representative of the Moche elite in all its ritual glory. Likewise, the prisoner’s body is restrained by the captor, the rope, and/or the rack. Each of these forms of restraint expose the body to view and simultaneously facilitate violation. The spatial autonomy of the individual body has been compromised (Schneider 1996).

The bodies of prisoners are not always depicted intact. In several cases, the fragmented body is represented—the body in parts, organs and limbs removed from their proper positions in space and time. The dismembered body represents the violation of bodily space taken to extremes: not only has the space surrounding the body been breached through the use of restraint (rope, rack, or grasping of hair), but the body’s corporeal intactness has been completely annihilated. In Moche art, the body of the prisoner is routinely depicted being dismembered, with heads, arms, legs and genitalia separated from the torso. The Moche routinely depicted decapitation (Cordy-Collins 1992; Moser 1974), perhaps most prominently in the complex image called the Presentation Theme. Several elaborately dressed figures adorn the upper register, while two prisoners in the lower register are represented in the process of having their throats slit (Donnan 1975: Fig. 1).

Although the Moche are noted for their attention to the human head—the Moche produced “portrait” vessels and may have utilized human crania as drinking cups (Verano 2001, Verano et al. 1999)—they also represented other body parts removed from the bodily context: specifically arms, legs and genitalia. In Figures 2 and 3, trophy heads appear, respectively, above and to the left, while legs and arms hover nearby. These examples demonstrate clearly that the bodies of the prisoners are the source of these parts. In Figure 2, the prisoner is shown intact, attempting to flee (Moser 1974; see also Donnan and McClelland 1999: Fig. 4.85). The body parts surrounding him may be interpreted as representative of his condition in the near future. As I have suggested elsewhere, the Moche represent “before” and “after” within the same image. In other words, the prisoner is shown before and after his own dismemberment in a single representation. This use of image is particularly effective given the medium of Moche
painted pottery, in which events are depicted in the round.

In addition to representing entire scenes of dismemberment, the Moche also produced modeled pottery. Three modeled vessels in the collection of the Museo Rafael Larco Herrera represent body parts divorced from their bodily context: one modeled arm and two lower legs. Longbones protrude from the stumps of the two legs. These vessels may represent the bloated limbs of a prisoner, severed from his body. In all of these images—those of the prisoners, naked and exposed—and in the modeled representations of disembodied limbs, the Moche demonstrate an acute preoccupation with the body and its manipulation. In particular, the severed, decapitated head is a recurring motif.

Among the Iron Age Celts of northern and central Europe, the decapitated head has been interpreted in terms of “synecdoche”—that is, the part is understood to represent the whole (Petres 1972:379). In other words, the head symbolizes the whole person and embodies the desired traits, whether they be supernatural powers or prowess in warfare. Nasca presents a Peruvian analogue to the Celtic head cult. Helaine Silverman, integrating Nasca iconography with archaeological evidence, has suggested that Nasca trophy heads may have been obtained in ritual combat (Silverman 1993:224; see also Browne et al. 1993; DeLeonardis 2000). The removal and curation of the head may have functioned as a form of confirmation or legitimation of warrior status.

The analysis of the available Moche evidence suggests a similar interpretation. Those individuals represented being decapitated are generally male. They are consistently shown juxtaposed with warriors in elaborate costumes. The removal and curation of the head, indicated by the rope passed through the mouth and the foramen magnum at the base of the skull, suggests that the head retained its value after separation from the body.

A second interpretation of these images of dismemberment is that the prisoner, as an individual, is being destroyed and dispersed in lesser form. Thus, by dismembering the body, the powerful essence of the individual is being fragmented, effectively neutralizing the threat to the status quo posed by the individual as warrior. However, the individual subject has already been depersonalized through the removal of clothing and in the uniformity of prisoner representation (Hill 2000). For example, the life-size mural at the Huaca El Brujo complex in the Chicama Valley represents prisoners as members of an depersonalized and anonymous group. No markers of status are apparent to distinguish one from another. If we assume, following Foucault, that the dismemberment of the body fulfilled an institutional imperative, then bodily fragmentation does not represent an attempt to destroy the power, strength, or “essence” of the prisoner. Rather, fragmentation is a re-casting of the body in a new role. Dismemberment fulfills a transformative function. As with the bodies subjected to torture and execution in pre-modern Europe (Merback 1999; Smith 1996; Spierenburg 1984), the body of the Moche prisoner becomes a spectacle. This transformative aspect of power is perhaps its most profound feature, for the subject’s own body both provides and becomes the spectacle.

Dismemberment is thus the wholesale conversion of the body of the prisoner into raw material for institutional discourse, the conversion of the individual into an ideal subject and the utilization of body parts to fulfill institutional objectives. One such objective may have been communication with the supernatural. Body parts may have formed a very special medium of exchange—the sacrificial offering. Thus, through dismemberment, Moche institutions created a subject in pieces, on display, fragmented and spectacular.
Conclusions

I have suggested here that Foucault’s insights into subjectivity, power, and bodily discipline provide the basis for an analysis of archaeological and art historical evidence. Although Foucault focused on the formation of the modern, docile, disciplined body, he also provided a contrast in the pre-modern, spectacular body. It is this latter subject that I suggest archaeologists and art historians must dissect. In particular, two avenues of inquiry are especially promising: the exploration of the body in space and the iconography of the ideal, spectacular subject—the subject exposed, vulnerable, and violable. The Moche example presented here has employed Foucault’s work as a heuristic point of departure (McCall 1999:19) in an effort to begin writing the prehistory of the spectacular body. Painted and modeled Moche vessels depicting the body tied and restrained illustrate how the control of movement, gesture, and behaviour meets institutional objectives through exposure—the violation of bodily space. A more extreme form of the spectacular (Moche) body is created through radical violation of bodily boundaries in the severing of the throat, decapitation, and dismemberment. In conclusion, by exploiting the dynamic interplay between art and archaeology, we may begin to examine the spatial components of our bodily evidence: the body intact, the body in pieces, the body transformed.

Figure 1. Moche captive displayed on a scaffold. Drawn by Steven Wallace from a photo of a modeled vessel in Donnan (1978: Fig. 148). Vessel is housed at the Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin, Staatliche Museen Prussicher Kulturbesitz.

Figure 2. After Moser 1974:33.

Figure 3. After Moser 1974:33.

Acknowledgements

I thank Garth Bawden and John McCall for their insights into Foucault. Steven Wallace drafted Figure 1, and Jon Hageman assisted with Figures 2 and 3. Thanks also go to Geoff McCafferty, who encouraged me to participate in the 2000 Chacmool Conference.
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