

The archaeology of death: from 'social personae' to 'relational personhood'

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ABSTRACT – *In order to understand rituals in the past, archaeology has long relied on theories and concepts developed in other disciplines. This paper presents concepts concerning burial practices and funeral rituals, ancestors, personhood, and individual and dividual identities.*

IZVLEČEK – *V članku predstavljamo in analiziramo interpretativne koncepte, povezane s pogrebni-
mi in ritualnimi praksami. Posebno pozornost namenjamo ritualom prehoda in konceptom sebstva.*

KEY WORDS – *Mesolithic; Neolithic; rites of passage; personhood; individual; dividual*

Introduction

The burial ritual is a symbolic practice *par excellence* (Žižek 1989.249). The postulate relates to Hegel's 'Phenomenology of Spirit'. Žižek's argument is that the social subject by means of a compelled choice takes upon himself the processes of death and disintegration, and symbolically repeats them, pretending that they resulted from his own free decision as he 'confers the form of a free act on an irrational, contingent natural process'. In other words, there is no denying that we are mortal beings, but we give this 'irrational' natural process a meaning by burial rituals. By repeating such symbolic practices, we try to 'transform' something traumatic, over which we have no control, by pretending that we have a free choice. The basis for Žižek's argument is to be found in social readings of Lacanian theory, and in a triad of psychoanalytical concepts – the symbolic, the imaginary and the Real. Death and disintegration are facts in the realm of the Real that we have to internalise as a ready-made symbolic order. It is left to us to create our own set of imaginings that obscure the ugly, which is often too traumatic to be reproduced without subtle alterations or sublimations, and by our actions that sustain or alter a symbolic order. The bone and skull, passive objects that we can hold and manipulate, are transformed into a 'little piece of the Real' that gives a skeleton an 'immediate effectivity of the Spirit' and makes the buri-

al 'the medium of social domination and power' (Žižek 1989.227–241). The burial ritual is thus a manifestation of ideology – that is, a collective imaginary mask – and empty symbolic gestures that make us accept a given, meaningless reality as our own social construct.

The 'social persona'

In 'new archaeology', an intellectual movement advocating logical positivism as a guide to research philosophy (Earle *et al* 1987.501), the premise that differences in mortuary treatment vary directly with the status of the person within the living community was introduced in the 1970s. Lewis Binford (1971. 19–20) embodied the anthropological concept of 'social persona', suggesting that mortuary customs and beliefs were determined in part by representations of the social identities of the individual, and in part by the extent to which other members of the social group recognised responsibilities to the deceased. It is not only that as the number of social roles an individual held during life increased, so too would the number of symbolic representations of those roles, and that they would be adequately mirrored in the treatment of the body, in grave architecture and in grave goods, but also that the variation in the structure of mortuary data reflects the degree of so-

cial structural complexity characterising the society itself. He argued that (i) 'hunters and gatherers should exhibit more egalitarian systems of status grading, while among settled agriculturalists we might expect more incidences of ranked or stratified non-egalitarian systems of status grading', and that (ii) 'age and sex should serve more commonly as bases for mortuary distinction among hunter and gatherers; while among agriculturalists, social position, as varying independently of age and sex as well as sub-group affiliation, should more commonly serve as the basis for differential mortuary treatment'. Thus 'among the agriculturalists, there are more societies that could be classified as tribes and chiefdoms, while among the hunters and gatherers, bands and tribes of minimal complexity are more common'.

Emphasising the social context of mortuary practices, Binford put forward Hertz's idea that within the same society the emotion provoked by death 'varies wildly in intensity according to the social character of the deceased'. After examining sample data from forty non-state societies Binford (1971:18) premised that 'there should be a high degree of isomorphism between (i) the complexity of the status structure in a socio-cultural system and (ii) the complexity of mortuary ceremonialism as regards differential treatment of persons occupying different status positions'.

In his dissertation *Social Dimensions of Mortuary Practices* Arthur Saxe introduced the spatial dimension of mortuary practices. He proposed in 'hypothesis 8' that 'to the degree that corporate group rights to use and/or control crucial but restricted resources are attained and/or legitimise by means of lineal descent from the dead (*i.e.* lineal ties to ancestors), such groups will maintain formal disposal areas for the exclusive disposal of their dead, and conversely' (*cf.* Carr 1995:122).

Both approaches were based on middle-range statistical generalisations of the variability in mortuary practices acquired from ethnographic and archaeological data. Both interpreted their results as indicating that as societies move from hunter-gatherer or shifting agricultural strategies to settled agricultural strategies, burial practices increase in complexity.

Meanwhile, the Marxist anthropologist Claude Meillassoux proposed the idea that 'subsistence indebtedness' is the agency which in small scale agricultural, kinship based social groups perpetuates permanent and stable links to the ancestors. This maintains

the social hierarchy of the group, and legitimises claims to the land they have settled and cultivated. He explains the idea thus: "*At all times the workers of one [agricultural] cycle are indebted for seed and food to the workers of the previous one, and this cyclical renewal of the relations of production theoretically never ends. As time goes on, it amounts to a change in generation. But at any moment, one man, the oldest of the group, owes his subsistence to none of the living members of his community, but only to the dead ancestors, while all the other members of the community are indebted to him.*" (Meillassoux 1972:99).

The status of ancestors, it has been suggested, is achieved. The dead are required to undergo a series of rites of passage before they can be considered ancestors. They are elected among those dead whom later generations regard as important. The elections vary according to patterns of kinship and property holding. Societies with strong patrilineal descent principles have different ancestors from those with bilateral kinship patterns. Jack Goody (1976; 1990) has thus suggested that ancestors and property are linked among hoe cultivators in household subsistence strategies, but kinship and marriage can be associated with plough agriculture, as part of a strategy of inheritance which safeguards property transmission. Hunter-gatherers have been hypothesised as having 'nothing to gain from a person's death'. As ethnography shows, among the Hadza, Mbuti, Baka and !Kung, ideas about ancestors are weak, and funerals less formal. Among the !Kung, the spirits of the dead (not particular ancestors) are even believed to be a serious danger. Woodburn (1982:207–208) has thus suggested 'that an immediate-return system does not provide fertile ground for the ideological elaboration of death beliefs and practices in general', nor a link between death and fertility or ancestors and community.

Lynne Goldstein (1981:61) reformulated Saxe's 'hypothesis 8', suggesting that "*to the degree that corporate group rights to use and/or control crucial but restricted resources are attained and/or legitimized by lineal descent from the dead (i.e. lineal ties to ancestors), such groups will, by the popular religion and its ritualization, regularly reaffirm the lineal corporate group and its rights. The maintenance of a permanent, specialized, bounded area for the exclusive disposal of their dead was suggested to be one means of ritualization*". If a permanent and bounded area for the exclusive disposal of the group's dead exists, then it is likely that this re-

presents a corporate group that has rights over the use and control of crucial but restricted resources. Corporate control 'is most likely to be attained and legitimized by means of lineal descent from the dead, either in terms of an actual lineage or in the form of a strong, established tradition of the critical resource passing from parent to offspring'. The more organised and formal the area for the disposal of the dead, the more conclusive is this interpretation. Goldstein (*l.c.*) admits that when "*considering the wide range of variability in cultures, there is a low probability that certain groups, even when in similar economic and environmental conditions, will symbolize and ritualize aspects of their organization in precisely the same way*". She recognised, nevertheless, that the hypothesis was both significant and useful for archaeologists, as it "*appears that if a particular situation is discovered archaeologically, then statements can be made about social structure as well as the nature of the resource utilised by the society*", and that "*if there is a formal bounded disposal area, used exclusively for the dead, then the culture is probably one which has a corporate group structure in the form of a lineal descent system*".

'Hypothesis 8' was revived in the 1990s, in the period when archaeology became 'a broader, more catholic discipline' (see Earle and Preucel 1987:501). In an atmosphere of strong criticism of 'new archaeology', when the consensus against socio-economic determinism was so strong that the names Saxe and Goldstein did not even appear in post-processualist discussions of the origins of Neolithic burials and funeral practices, Ian Morris (1991:154) reinterpreted the hypothesis such that "*the lineage members do not behave as it is predicted they should, but both ancestor cult and mortuary rituals are conducted in terms of the lineal transmission of property within the descent group: the former stressing the role of the lineage as a whole, the latter the role of household and class interests within it*". Burial contexts thus act as 'arenas' where ancestor cults and mortuary rituals work to mediate the transmission of rights to power and property. The 'cemetery-descent-power argument' was only one of several that bound relationships between people; one person's freedom of access is another's lack of freedom.

Detailed cross-cultural worldwide surveys statistics of mortuary practices of societies characterised by both 'social complexity' and 'agricultural intensity' have suggested that "*social organization and social personae are often not expressed directly in mor-*

tuary practices, but rather are filtered through the framework of philosophical-religious beliefs, world views, and their symbolic codes... Local grave location and formal demarcation of the cemetery most frequently indicated the horizontal social position of the deceased, including his/her lineal descent group". At the same time, these areas are also determined by many other social factors and beliefs about the nature of the soul, nature, cosmologies, and the nature of the afterlife (Carr 1995:189, 191–192).

Binford's premise that 'heterogeneity in mortuary practice would vary directly with the complexity of the status hierarchy' was indeed strongly criticised within the 'post-processual' intellectual milieu. Ian Hodder, Michael Parker Pearson, Michael Shanks and Christopher Tilley among others stated that mortuary rituals are frequently utilised by the living to negotiate, display, mask, or transform actual power or social relations. Parker Pearson (1982) developed these criticisms in his focus on the role of ideology in expressing or concealing the real relations of power within society. Rather than mortuary practices directly reflecting such relations, he argued that the living could manipulate the dead for their own interests. Hodder (1982:141, 146) has emphasised that a burial ritual was not a passive reflection of other aspects of life, and the dead often become what they were not in life. He found Saxe's hypothesis disregards the cultural context that is so central to ideology and ideological functions. He rejected the cross-cultural perspective on principle, saying that "*When individuals act socially, and represent their action to others, they necessarily do so within a framework of meaning, and this framework is relative and historically constructed. Without consideration of the cultural context, one cannot hope to understand the effects of past social actions.*" (Hodder 1984:53). Introducing active individuals, Hodder (2000:25) turned to the practice theory of Bourdieu, Giddens and Foucault. Within this theory, social agents are frequently conceived of as individuals with goals, intentions and subjectivities, and as historical moments in the negotiation of social structure, strategies and relations. Discussing burials, houses, women and men in the European Neolithic, Hodder argued against Renfrew's (1976) and Chapman's (1981; see also 2003) 'processual' interpretation of the social role of Neolithic megalithic monuments in western Europe as territorial markers in segmentary societies, and/or as markers of periods of imbalance between society and critical resources. He suggested instead that megalithic tombs are arenas where 'female reproduction was appropriated

by the lineage', and 'competition between maternal and paternal claims to reproductive and productive resources was resolved'. All aspects of burial and ancestral rituals can be linked to 'the same concern with legitimating control of reproductive and productive resources through an ideology of communal work and participation for the lineage resources' (Hodder 1984:66).

Parallel to this, Julian Thomas (1988) studied the social significances of burial practices in megalith chambered tombs in southern Britain. He recognised 'the transition from the newly dead person to the ancestral bones' and associated secondary burials and feasting through the manipulation of human remains and 'circulation of people, bones, livestock and other material items, in both a symbolic and a real sense'. While the ancestors were hypothesised as 'an omnipresent factor in social relations', social structuring is less evident, relating to gender and, above all, to age categories.

'Rites of passage', secondary burial and 'liminal personae'

The suggested transition from body to bones clearly relates to 'rites of passage' and to the achieved ancestors status that was discussed earlier by the L'Année Sociologique group. Hertz's and van Gennep's processual concept of 'rites of passage' relates to transition rituals that move individuals from one social status to another, reflecting physical changes and altering responsibilities. Funerary rites extend this to the other world and to the ancestors' 'invisible society', affecting both the living and the dead and involving potential danger for each as ritual changes in identity occur. Hertz's concept of 'secondary burial' associates the premise that physical manipulation of corpse relates to beliefs about the soul and the afterlife, and the active remembrance of the dead ancestors. Mortuary rites were to be understood like other rites of passage as marking a transition in the status of individuals, in this case to the 'society of souls'. The English translations of Hertz's essay *Contribution à une étude sur la représentation collective de la mort* [1907], and Van Gennep's work *Les Rites de Passage* [1909] were published in 1960¹. They are now basic and key theoretical reference points for sociological, anthropological and archaeological 'processual' and 'post-processual' work on death. Both emphasised collective representations rather than the individual self.

Robert Hertz's (2004; for the comments see Davies 2000) main focus was on the triad of the body of the deceased, their soul, and the mourners on the one hand, and on the social construction of emotion with the relationship between the biological individual and the social collectivity on the other. The life of a person, he suggested, is a 'succession of heterogeneous and well-defined phases, to each of which corresponds a more or less organised social class'. Each promotion of the individual implies 'the passage from one group to another', which implies collective attention and 'a deep change in society's mental attitude toward him'. The death was interpreted as a 'lasting procedure and that it is a transition that changes the status of a person from being a living member to being a departed member of society'. The corpse is not only a biological entity, but also a social one, closely associated with the moral obligations that attend the treatment of the dead. For Hertz, the word 'moral' is practically synonymous with 'social'. There is a 'natural connection', he suggests, between 'beliefs concerning the disintegration of the body, the fate of the soul, and the social positions of the mourners.' The soul "only gradually severs the ties binding it to this world: it finds a stable existence again only when the representation of the deceased has acquired a final and pacified character in the consciousness of the survivors. There is too deep an opposition between the persisting image of a familiar person who is like ourselves, and the image of an ancestor, who is sometimes worshipped and always distant, for this second image to replace the former immediately. That is why the idea of an 'intermediary state between death and resurrection' imposes itself, a state in which the soul is thought to free itself from the impurity of death or from the sin attaching to it. Thus, if a certain period is necessary to banish the deceased from the land of the living, it is because society, disturbed by the shock, must gradually regain its balance; and because the double mental process of disintegration and of synthesis that the integration of an individual into a new world supposes, is accomplished in a molecular fashion, as it were, which requires time." (Hertz 2004:210). The reduction of the corpse to bones that remain more or less unchangeable relates to the transitional phase, when death has no further impact on the body. It seems to be 'the condition and the sign of the final deliverance', the final act of changing identity. The body is now 'similar to those of its ancestors', and there is no longer 'any obstacle to the soul's entering their community'.

¹ Hertz R. 1960. *Death and The Right Hand* (trans. Rodney and Claudia Needham). Cohen and West, London and Van Gennep A. 1960. *The rites of passage*. Chicago University Press. Chicago, IL.

Hertz correlates the change in identity of the dead with primary and secondary burials. The first relates to the 'wet stage', when the body has decomposed and the identity of the dead is removed from the status it held in life. The second, 'dry' stage confers a new identity pertaining to the realm of the ancestors. He describes a variety of means by which the 'first burial' takes place, whether this involves earth burial, storage in large pots until dissolution occurs, excarnation, or even endo-cannibalism, in which relatives eat the flesh of the dead. In terms of time, mummification and cremation are interpreted as the two extreme forms of funerary rites – the one a very slow and the other a markedly rapid means of coping with the immediate corpse. Secondary burial is associated with the exhumation and transfer of bones to the final burial place and the final ritual ceremony. It is not "*a mere change of place; it brings about a profound change in the condition of the deceased; it delivers him from the isolation in which he was plunged since his death, and reunites his body with those of his ancestors.*" (Hertz 2004.205). This act 'liberates the deceased from the isolation in which he was plunged since his death, and reunites his body with those of his ancestors, and frees the mourners from their mourning obligations, permitting them to return to normal social life'. Secondary burials and their associated rites thus focus on the new identity and status of the deceased and on the changed relationship between the dead and the living. Secondary burial and the recreation of life were later intensively discussed by anthropologists (Bloch and Parry 1982; Metcalf and Huntington 1991).

Using cultural data on the Dayak of Borneo, Hertz suggests that the transitional period between the initial disposal and the final burial lasts from eight months to six years. This provides time for the decomposition of the body, the purification of the bones, the soul's journey, and the liberation of the mourners. In this liminal period, the soul lives marginally in two worlds. It does not belong to the ancestor's world, nor can it resume its existence on earth. The mourners are in a precarious state; they no longer can live as others do; they do not dress or adorn themselves, or eat the same foods as their neighbours, and they may not leave the village. Hertz (2004.204) suggests that "*the final ceremony has thus three objects; to give burial to the remains of the deceased, to ensure the soul peace and access to the land of the dead, and finally to free the living from the obligations of mourning*". In some Indonesian societies, souls are worshipped and set-

led near the domestic hearth in consecrated statuette of the deceased which they animate. Among the Ostyak in Siberia, female relatives make a doll in the image of the deceased. They dress, wash, and feed it every day for two years if the dead person was a woman and, for two and a half years if a man. They then place the doll in a tomb. Mourning lasts four months for a woman and five months for a man. But it seems that the transitional period correlates with the period of doll keeping (*van Gennep 1960.149*). Among the Giriama and Miji Kenda in a Bantu area in Kenya, ancestors are regenerated and embodied in carved wooden posts; some are sculpturally modelled. They animate the power once possessed by the ancestors. While the smaller and simplified posts are placed inside family houses or in the spirit house, some others are inserted at the foot of the grave. These are never moved; even when the people move to a new site, the posts must be left undisturbed (*Brown 1980; Parkin 1991.207–208*).

Writing just before Van Gennep introduced the concept of rites of passage, Hertz based his analysis of Dayak mortuary ritual on ethnographic data in the British Museum that relate to one area of the world. In contrast, van Gennep's approach was based on a wider cross-cultural survey and on the diversity of embodied practices which constitute rites of passage in various cultural contexts. Because of this, Marcel Mauss accused him 'of the British anthropological tendency to go galloping off through the whole of history and ethnography, instead of bringing analysis to bear on a few typical and accurately studied facts'. The critique closely relates to the view of members of *L'Année Sociologique* in the early twentieth century contra Tylor's and Frazer's notions of universal laws based on evolutionary principles as explaining social practices, for example, as historical 'survivals'. It was suggested instead that social practices should be understood in terms of their function and meaning in the present. Levi-Strauss also took this view, stating, "*Explanations by survival are always incomplete, because customs do not vanish or survive without reason. When they survive, the reason is to be found less in the viscosity of the historic process than in the durability of a function that analysis of the present should make it possible to discern.*" (*cf. Hockey 2002.210*).

Hertz and Van Gennep interpret funerary rites in a similar way. They identify the transitional phase, which is central to the trajectories in which individuals move between social positions, and are concerned with how individuals produce and manage

social change on the one hand, and how to regenerate and stabilise the social order on the other.

For van Gennep, rites of passage are transition rituals that move individuals from one social status to another, from one social and personal identity to another. They are performed in critical periods in the life of the individual, e.g., at birth, social puberty, marriage and death. He described the status passage rituals as a threefold process with phases of separation, segregation, and integration. He proposed (1960.21) “to call the rites of separation from a previous world, *preliminal rites, those executed during the transitional stage liminal (or threshold) rites, and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world post-liminal rites.*” In other words, the tripartite ritual structure comprising: passage out of a previous phase or social status; a liminal or, an ambiguous time and space between fixed positions; and an entry into a new social position or period. The spatial element is important, since change of status often involves a change of locality.

The liminal phase is central in funerals, since the individual and their survivors undergo extended processes of transformation prior to eventual incorporation into new social contexts such as the world of the ancestors. Mourning is also a transition. “*Mourning, which I formerly saw simply as an aggregate of taboos and negative practices marking an isolation from society of those whom death, in its physical reality, had placed in a sacred, impure state, now appears to me to be a more complex phenomenon. It is a transitional period for the survivors, and they enter it through rites of separation and emerge from it through rites of reintegration into society (rites of the lifting of mourning). In some cases, the transitional period of the living is a counterpart of the transitional period of the deceased, and the termination of the first sometimes coincides with the termination of the second – that is, with the incorporation of the deceased into the world of the dead.*” (van Gennep 1960.146–147). Van Gennep suggested that during mourning, the living mourners and the deceased constitute a special group embedded between the world of the living and the world of the ancestors. Social life is suspended and the length of the period depends on the closeness of their relationship and/or degrees of kinship, but not on the period of physical composition, as Hertz suggests. However, both suggest that funeral rites involve a parallel process in which the individuals become ‘part of each other’ in a way that each identity is made up of other people’s agency.

Following Van Gennep’s conceptualisation of limen, Victor Turner (1969.95) introduced the concept of ‘liminal personae’. These are not embedded anywhere, “*neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and interminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transition. Thus liminality is frequently linked to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun and moon*”. Turner attached this anti-identity to ‘liminal entities, such as neophytes in initiation or puberty rites that may be represented as possessing nothing’. They may be ‘disguised as monsters, wear only a strip of clothing, to demonstrate that as liminal beings they have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing indicating rank or role, position in a kinship system; nothing that distinguish them from their fellow neophytes or initiands’.

‘Relational personhood’

In the intellectual milieu outside archaeology, the concept of the person discussed since Marcel Mauss ([1938] 1985.20) is that the idea of the individual is unique to Western thought. “*Up to the seventeenth and even up to the end of the eighteenth century, the mentality of our ancestors is obsessed with the question of knowing whether the individual soul is a substance, or supported by a substance: whether it is the nature of man, or whether it is only one of the two natures of man; whether it is one and indivisible, or divisible and separable; whether it is free, the absolute source of all action, or whether it is determined, fettered by other destinies, by predestination.*” According to Mauss the idea that the ‘person’ equals the ‘self’, and the ‘self’ equals consciousness, and is its primordial category, are Cartesian notions. And there were philosophers – Hume, Kant and Fichte – who conceptualised the person as a well-defined, stable entity with impermeable boundaries and a unified and essential core. The concept of the bounded individual as the paradigm of the person thus gives jural, moral and social significance to the mortal human being, the empirically observable entity. It was suggested that this view was irrelevant to past communities with different conceptions of death, the body and personhood, on the one hand. On the other, we need to distinguish between the ‘individual’, ‘self’, and ‘person’ as biologist’s, psychologist’s, and sociologist’s

conceptualisations of human beings. The concepts differentiate the individual as a human, the self as the locus of experience, and the person as the agent in society (Harris 1989). The concept of personhood that recognises the important social and collective component of one's identity – although surviving in such contexts as the recognition of social persona expressed in mortuary rituals (see Gillespie 2001) – was favoured over the individual as an actor and not a reflection of the social order (Hodder 1986).

In his plea for an 'anti-humanist' approach in archaeology Julian Thomas (2002.34; 2004; for discussion see Knapp and van Dommelen 2008) suggests that the greatest importance is that "once we recognise that no aspect of identity or embodiment is sufficiently knowable for their universality to be established, the potential difference of the past can be more fully appreciated". When we cast aside the 'image of the autonomous individual' a series of 'other possibilities for ways of being human' appears. He suggests that, on the basis of an examination of Neolithic burial contexts in which human bones and artefacts were deliberately broken and rearranged in secondary deposits, a Neolithic embodied person can be understood as partible and dividual, as temporary combinations of substances 'tied into encompassing flows and processes of circulation' Human bones, he suggests, "continued to have a 'life' of sorts following their transformation in mortuary ritual", and the dead were still integral parts of society (Thomas 2002.42; see also Thomas 1996). It is worth noting that a similar proposal was introduced by John Chapman (2000a; 2000b). The social relations between the living, the deceased and the ancestors are mediated 'through many material forms, one of the principal are bones', he suggests. In this interpretative paradigm, human bones and/or fragmented artefacts do not simply symbolise kinship, but constitute it with the aid of two parallel processes, of 'enchainment' and 'accumulation'. The practice of the manipulation and selective removal of body parts, with or without recombination, is "a statement about the continuity of social relations across the frontier of death" (Chapman 2000a. 144). The removal of bones to selected domestic or mortuary contexts redefines the social relations between the living and those dead who become ancestors by keeping the essence of the dead alive through the materiality of their bones. This attitude to the body relates to the constitution and transformation of identities and ways of living, to what have come to be called different aspects of personhood that are not identical to or compatible with modern

western notions of bounded individuality. Discussing the Neolithic sense of personhood, Chapman and Thomas actualise Strathern's and Wagner's concept of personhood and notion on 'dividuality'. Strathern summarises personhood as "*what is drawn out of the person are the social relationships of which it is composed: it is a microcosm of relations*" (cf. Kirk 2006.344). In the treatment of the dead, Chapman recognises a distinction between 'dividual' and 'individual' notions of personhood. While the 'individual' person is represented undivided in the burial of the complete articulated body, the 'dividual' can be associated with the burial of body parts or bone deposits (Chapman 2000a.145; see also Chapman and Gaydarska 2007.53–70 and Jones 2005).

The association of bodies with other substances, animals, and pottery and stone artefacts is to be related to the fragmented and multi-faceted 'dividual'. Marilyn Strathern (1988; 1998) describes how Melanesian people exist as 'dividual' and 'partible' persons, and that persons are constituted through social action. She argues that persons are composed of relations with others and the ongoing relationships in which each person engages. The dividual perception (feature) of the person stresses that each person is a composite of the substances and actions of others; each person encompasses multiple constituent things and relations received from other people. It is not only substances that are parts of each person, but also objects or even animals that are incorporated into the person by the agency of ceremonial gift exchange. In a funerary rite, all of these different elements of the person are brought together around the deceased. The rite thus brings the person together. The implication is that, while alive, the person is distributed throughout the social and material world, and only becomes a whole person temporarily during this mortuary rite. All the things that the person embodies are brought together and made explicit for everyone to see. They are then divided again, and these parts are redistributed through mortuary exchanges (for details see Fowler 2004). Thus personhood is neither fixed nor stable; it is a composite and partible 'artefact' that marks the handling of relationships through the possession and manipulation of things, especially those that conceptualise wealth and exchange.

It would be interesting at this point to introduce what Knapp and van Dommelen (2008.20) recognised as 'taking the same ethnographic cases for arguing and opposing points of view'. They point out a different reading of Strathern's understanding and

interpretation of the dividual and of the partibility of persons. They suggest that “*Thomas (2002a.34) maintains that the concept of ‘individuality’ is incomprehensible in the Melanesian situation where ‘dividual’ identities emerge from various pre-existing relationships, and persons are conceptualized only as amalgams or hybrids of different relations and substances.*” For Thomas (2002.34), Strathern is arguing that individual agency can only be understood in relational terms, and that one person’s actions can only be seen in terms of another’s: the corollary is that “*no aspect of identity or embodiment is sufficiently knowable for universality to be established*”. For Meskell (1999.33), Strathern is describing “*multiple selves that are aspects of individual persons: the corollary is that agents act within relationships and are revealed as a result of those actions.*”

In an interview published recently in the *Journal of Social Archaeology*, Marilyn Strathern elucidates the dilemma, suggesting “*In fact, that is very much like one colleague’s complaint that he has never met a dividual. No, of course, of course dividual and partibility are to do with how people discriminate and classify different dimensions of the person. So, yes, I can look at this colleague and if I were a Papua New Guinean, I would probably be very interested in his relationships with his maternal kin and his paternal kin and be interested in how he embodied these two relations... because the way you relate to your paternal kin is very different from the way you relate to your maternal kin. Here is the dividual. When the difference becomes materialized, and you then give gifts to your maternal kin that you derived from your paternal kin, and you then trace that chain of relationships, there is a sense in which the maternal kin have extracted those gifts from you, but it does not imply my good colleague cutting off his arm... I comment on my understanding of the partibility of persons, and the way the person in Melanesia is in a sense owned, not in the sense of property but in the sense of being owned by another person. Let me give you an example. If you are in a patrilineal context your maternal kin are very important because they supply supplementary nurture, so without your maternal kin your paternal kin cannot flourish, and you cannot flourish. You are forever in debt. So you repay with wealth and whatever, giving pigs and food and money, and so forth. The gifts stand for that bit of you that your maternal kin own and own completely. That is, you are them, so this goes back to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s perspectivism. The*

maternal kin have a perspective on their nephew: this is my man, this is my nephew, and that relationship is a complete one. So, how the nephew appears is as a whole entity, you know, the nephew isn’t at that point divided, the nephew appears complete and totalizing in the regard of his maternal kin. And, reciprocally, they to him. Which is very different from the fact that he can then switch perspective, and he can then think about his paternal kin, to which his maternal kin are simply an adjunct – this is changing perspectives. So, the kind of literalism of parts and wholes that we English-speakers have, that language won’t do; in other words even when one starts to talk about parts and wholes, we are introducing a whole trail of assumptions from our own cultural nexus.” (Borić 2010.286–287).

Strathern argues that the irreducibility of the individual is a peculiarly modernist notion. Not all cultures regard the individual as a single entity “*bounded and integrated, and set contrastingly against other such wholes and against a natural and social background*” (Strathern 1988.13, 57, 131). The Melanesian ‘person’ is conceptualised as a ‘composite of relationships, a microcosm homologous to society at large’. Thus, in contrast with the ‘western individual’, this ‘dividual’ person objectifies relationships and makes them known.

Nurit Bird Dawid (1999) has introduced into the discussion the concept of relational personhood. The notion is based on an agency of ‘relatedness’ that creates personhood by producing and reproducing sharing relationships with neighbouring others, humans and spirits. Bird Dawid relates this concept to the Nayaka, forest dwelling hunter-gatherers of Tamil Nadu in South India. By maintaining relationships with other beings to reproduce their personhood, they reproduce the ‘devaru’ – a dividual person – of the other beings with whom they share. The ‘devaru’ is drawn into interrelating and sharing, and so into Nayaka kinship relations. Nayaka thus refer to both the spirits that inhabit the landscape and the spirits of their own predecessors by terms that translate as ‘big father’ and ‘big mother, and to themselves in relation to these spirits as sons and daughters. Relational personhood makes the Nayaka descendants of the spirits of the landscape. Grandparent are ancestors, because they were there before you, and because they guide you through the world, but you are not descended from them. A certain stone and/or animal may reveal itself to be ‘devaru’ if it ‘comes towards’ or ‘jumps up onto the lap of Na-

yakas'. The stone is brought back to its places 'to live' with them.

It is important to note that Strathern and Bird-Dawid have focused on systems of relations and their role in the constitution of both person and culture, and have been dealing with abstract forms of relationality, or modes of relating which make persons composed dually of 'dividual' and 'individual' elements. We must be careful, Andy Jones suggests, totalising neither the 'dividual' nor the individual (Jones 2005: 196). He focuses on social practices, on the ways in which persons are produced and performed through networks of relationships, differing in each historical context and involving both people and materiality.

It seems that Whitley's (2002) intervention in post-processual archaeology in terms of saying that Neolithic ancestors are 'omnipresent and omnicompetent' correlates accidentally with the new interpretative trajectory in which the dead body can be seen as another form of material culture manipulated by the living, perhaps mourners. Both artefacts and bodies were governed by the principles of the agency of partibility and circulation. Thomas has suggested (2002: 42), similarly to Brück (see below), that artefacts and bodies "...formed elements in a more general 'economy of substances', which involved other materials. Both artefacts and bodies could be broken down into parts, and artefacts at last were made by putting different substances together. The strong inference is that human bodies were not understood as bounded and separate entities, but as temporary combinations of substances, tied into encompassing flows and processes of circulation. The fleshed body of a living person might not have been perceived as the 'normal' state of affairs, or even as the only configuration of the body which had a social presence."

Joana Brück (2001a) has conceptualised 'relational personhood' archaeologically. She emphasises power as an agency which is located either 'within the wider set of social relationships', or 'in the natural world or in gods, spirits, and ancestors'. This leads her to hypothesise that not only a 'number of different sources of power and the range of social identities' existed in the Neolithic, but also that different agencies of power 'produce socially adept and active persons who work within the flexible milieu that constitutes society'. The practices carried out at Neolithic monuments thus might have 'produced forms of authority and identity that were contingent or temporary' parallel to those within areas of profane

practice. She argues that the social technologies of pottery, animal and crop husbandry and metalworking were also technologies of the self, conjoining the person and the world. (Brück 2001b; 2004; 2009). She has postulated that the exchange and circulation of both artefacts and the remains of the dead, "*facilitated biological, social, and material reproduction through sequences of fragmentation, mixing, and amalgamation. As such, the circulation of objects during the British Bronze Age did not result in the production of elite individuals. Instead, it constituted the person as a relational entity, an aggregate of substances that could be combined, reordered, and dispersed through exchange with others.*" (Brück 2006a: 93)

Despite critics who suggest that recent archaeological studies of death and burial have perpetuated the hegemony of the living over the dead in understanding past mortuary practices, and that the tendency to see the dead body as simply another form of material culture manipulated by the agency of mourners is "*one of the most unhelpful cross-cultural generalizations implicit within contemporary archaeological theory*" (Williams 2004: 265), the interpretative postulates of 'relational personhood' remain stable (see also Ingold 2000: 132, 151).

Treatment of the dead has been shown to be important for the realignment of personhood after death. It is believed that the manipulation of dead bodies was associated with ancestral rites and monuments on the one hand, and was used to reinforce the existing social order through the construction of collective memory on the other. It was recently demonstrated how body parts or bones acted as metaphors for the dividual nature of the person, and how they were central to the affirmation of identities, and the power of the living (Berggren and Nilsson Stutz 2010; Brück 2001; 2004; Chapman 2000b; Morris 2000; Fowler 2001; 2004; Fahlander 2008; Fahlander and Estigaard 2008; Graham 2009; Guerrero et al. 2009; Kuijt 2008; Nilsson Stutz 2003; Thomas 2000). It has been suggested that in the re-creation of a new body for the deceased, objects with metaphorical connections to the maintenance of the person were used; and artefacts, and human and animal bones acted as extensions of the body, and as metaphors for the transformation of the deceased and the realignment of the self of both the living and the dead, and the reproduction of society through cyclical processes of fragmentation, dispersal and re-incorporation (Williams 2003; Brück 2004; 2006a; 2006b).

Instead of a conclusion

Hertz argued long ago that death is not an event, but a process of transition in which the physical body and the changing identity of the deceased continue to be closely connected throughout the primary and secondary funeral and within ancestral rites. In different cultures the dead are often believed to influence and control the manner of their treatment, their identities and remembrance through a dialogue with the living during the mourning. Recently, in relation to this dialogue, perceptions of bounded and autonomous individual have been rejected in favour of persons who are not static, but socially relational. They are 'dividual', owing 'parts of themselves to others'. They may be 'partible' and reconfigurable through the extraction or receipt of objects or substances; or they may be 'permeable', permea-

ted by qualities which alter the composition of their own substance (Fowler 2004.8–9). In other words, it has been suggested that "the person was thought of as a fractured and relational entity interpermeated with other selves and containing traces of past places, people and events brought together in novel combinations" on death (Brück 2006b.311). This certainly has implications for an understanding of both social reproduction and social transformation. The exchange of artefacts and of human bones facilitates the production of the self and the reproduction of society through cyclical processes of fragmentation, dispersal and reincorporation on the one hand. On the other, both people and artefacts 'can be thought of as materialized memory, where memory is neither fossilized nor static but a constant productive process'.

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