

Chapter 2

More than Metaphor: Approaching the Human Cadaver in Archaeology

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ABSTRACT Developments in body theory have had a strong impact on archaeology in recent years, but the concept of the body has tended to remain abstract. The term “body” is often used as a synonym for self or person, and the remains of bodies and body parts have often been approached theoretically as signs or symbols. While this has emphasized the importance of the body as a cultural construct and a social product, archaeologists have tended to overlook the equally important biological reality of the body. Bodies are more than metaphors. They are also biological realities. Maybe this becomes especially obvious at death, when the embodied social being is transformed into a cadaver, continuously in a state of transformation due to the processes of putrefaction and decomposition. In this transition, the unity of the mindful body and the embodied mind breaks down, and cultural and social control over the body can no longer be exercised from within, but instead has to be imposed from the outside. This article explores the friction between the culturally and socially produced body and the body as a biological entity at death. Through an approach that focuses both on the post mortem processes that affect the cadaver – and that can be seen as an ultimate materialization of death – and the practical handling of the dead body by the survivors, the author suggests a way toward an integrative and transdisciplinary approach to death and the dead body in archaeology.

The title of this article, “More than Metaphor,” stresses the importance of addressing the human body and human remains in archaeology, not only as metaphors and symbols, but also in all their materiality as concrete biological entities. This might at first glance seem redundant, considering the heritage of a traditional archaeology that has tended to treat human remains as any other objects to be studied and exhibited, or an archaeology that has regarded them as sources of biological information and handed them over to anthropologists for analysis of sex, age, paleopathology, etc. Indeed, this heritage still weighs heavily on the potential for other theoretical developments approaching the body through archaeology. But while it would be a problem not to mention the shortcomings of these attitudes, I have chosen to address another problem – one that stems not from the objectification of human remains, as much as from the abstraction of their nature.

Developments in body theory and theories of embodiment have had a considerable impact on archaeology over the past 15 years. However, while these multifaceted social theories contain many different layers and convictions, the strains that have become most influential in archaeology have emphasized the cultural and social side of the equation, and ignored the biological and physical side. The purpose of this article is not to counter these insights. There is no doubt that the notions of the socially shaped and culturally produced body, as well as notions of embodiment have had a crucial impact on archaeological thought and that they have enriched our

understanding of both the body and the past. What I want to draw attention to, though, is that these developments have tended to leave out an important part of the equation – the physicality of the body. Bodies are more than metaphors. They are flesh and blood, organs, ligaments and bones, gases and fluids. This becomes especially obvious at death, when the embodied social being is transformed into a cadaver, continuously in a state of transformation, an effect of the processes of putrefaction and decomposition. I argue that the recognition of this aspect of the body – long almost an exclusive domain for bioarchaeologists – deserves the attention also from archaeologists interested in developing insights into past experience of death and the body. Through a combination of theories of embodiment with an understanding of the human body as both a social and cultural product *and* a biological reality, this paper proposes an alternative way to approach mortuary practices in archaeology.

The Body in Archaeology

In archaeology, the bodies we encounter – that is, “the human remains” – were until recently seen as static objects or fossilized remains from the natural world. They were entirely separated from the social processes that shaped the body during life and death, and most often only studied closely by physical anthropologists in order to extract biological information. For archaeologists they often remained the background for the display of burial goods, or the décor of the burial features. Today this has

changed. Archaeologists are becoming increasingly interested in the human body, and a steady stream of books and articles on the subject has had a considerable influence on the field (Kus 1992, Meskell 1996, Rautman 2000, Hamilakis et al 2002, Joyce 2005, to only mention a few). This interest in the body does not mainly stem from an increasing collaboration with physical anthropologists, but from inspiration drawn from body theory, developed mainly in the social sciences and humanities (Scheper-Hughes & Lock 1987, Featherstone et al 1991, Lock 1993, Shilling 1993, Csordas 1994, Oudshoorn 1994, Strathern 1996, Hillman & Mazzio 1997, Turner 1996, 1997, Asad 1997, Coakley 1997, Crossley 2001, Franklin 2002, Faircloth 2003, Berdayes et al. 2004, Shahshahani 2004, Cregan 2006, etc). These writings orbit around the deconstruction of the Cartesian divide between the body and the soul, a division established already in the classical Greek philosophy of Plato and Aristotle (Manning Stevens 1997:265) and that can be found more generally in throughout Western thought, as a divide between mind and nature and culture and nature (Franklin 2002:180). To this was often added a more or less explicitly imposed hierarchy where mind and culture dominate and control body and nature, a paradigm that was used to justify among other things the oppression of women, the strategies of colonialism, even genocide. The problematization of these relationships, as well as the increasing interest in the body in social theory today, can probably be linked to multiple factors, including the effects of postmodern critique of modernity in social theory, the reaction against minimalism in art, the preponderant place of the body in popular culture and the increasing place the body “as a project” takes in our individual lives in our culture (see for example Shilling 1993, Franklin 2002). Body theory has become a vibrant and creative subfield for the social sciences for the reflection on the relationships between nature and culture, but also of body politics, experience and the notion of self and identity.

In the 1990s, these thoughts started to penetrate into archaeological thought through the subfields of gender archaeology and through the more general reflections on structuration, agency and practice. The central message in these studies was the recognition of the fact that the body does not have an a priori nature but is created and experienced through culture and language which *reveal* it (see Thomas 2002:33). Our understanding of the body is already an interpretation and we have no direct access to the *thing in itself* (*ibid.*). This understanding of the body fits comfortably into the understanding of the past in more general terms within the postprocessual framework of the 1990s, and as a consequence, this approach to the body easily found a place within contemporary archaeological theory. The reaction against previous understanding of the body as pure biological entity also inspired archaeologists to react against the stressing of “sameness” in the past (Fowler 2002:47), and rapidly became a part of an archaeology that combined with theories of agency focused on individual experience in

the past as a reaction against previous focus on collectives of people.

Archaeology, which not only is a discipline grounded in materiality, but also encompasses long time perspectives and transgresses the disciplinary boundaries between the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences, lends itself well to be part of the theorizing of the body and is well positioned to contribute with a unique perspective. However, it is interesting to note that despite this disciplinary connection to materiality and natural science, the dominating writings on the body within archaeology long remained limited to the important yet abstract notions of the body, such as performance and identity expressed in dress, art or paraphernalia (Lee 2000, Shaffer et al 2000 etc) or produced through activities (Crass 2000, Peterson 2000, Hollimon 2000 etc), and the symbolism and objectification of the body and body parts (Thomas 2000). Even when the archaeological context for these reflections were burials, the physical reality of death and the changes of the body ensued by it, are almost completely absent. In archaeology the focus tends to remain on the individual and her or his relationships, identity, experience etc, not on his or her body *per se*. A movement toward the actual body could be seen in the introduction of the notion of embodiment and corporeality, which in archaeology came to encompass notions such as embodied knowledge, consumption (Boyd 2002) and sensory experience (Kus 1992, Hamilakis 2002, Morris & Peatfield 2002). This effort goes a long way to meet the demands of an interest in the “lived bodies” in a corporeal sense, as called for by Lynn Meskell (Meskell 2000:15). But nevertheless, with some notable exceptions – many present in the important volume *Thinking through the Body* (Hamilakis et al 2002, but see also Fahlander N. D.) – the reflections on the body produced within archaeology have retained a tendency to remain abstract (see also Hamilakis 2002:122), and while they have contributed to breaking down the mind-body split, they have nevertheless reproduced a focus on the mind at the expense of the body. This tendency of “mind over body” is by no means exclusive to archaeology, but it can be seen in many places within the critical theory from which archaeology has gathered much of its inspiration (see for example Shilling and Mellor’s critique of Giddens in Shilling and Mellor 1996, see also Franklin 2002:184).

Most surprising might be that even in the subfield of mortuary archaeology, possibly the one area where the physicality of the body might seem to be unavoidable, archaeologists have insisted on their position of sublimation. An example of this can be seen in Julian Thomas’ article *Death, identity and the body in Neolithic Britain* (Thomas 2000). When introducing his program for an archaeology of the human body, Thomas persists in focusing exclusively on the socially constructed body and makes the argument that we cannot project what he sees as modern notions of identity onto a Neolithic body (Thomas 2000:658). The purpose of the article is to

discuss death and the treatment of the dead bodies in Neolithic Britain, but in addressing bodily transformations, Thomas discusses architectural features in more detail than the actual bodies and the processes they went through (658pp). The article has many other merits, and the point of this critique is to underline a more general problem: that the actual bodies have remained conspicuously absent also in the archaeology explicitly devoted to them.

A similar tendency can be seen in a recent review article on the topic of the archaeology of the body by Rosemary Joyce (Joyce 2005). While the author argues that a more abstract and semiotic perspective on the body currently is being replaced by a more concrete notion of the experience of embodiment, a perspective that gives a more central role for an active body in the past, the review limits itself to areas of inquiry such as ornaments, performance, experience, personhood and identity. And again, while these concepts engage the body, the physical and biological aspects of it are nowhere to be found. More than anything, this probably reflects a general tendency within archaeology today: we are more than willing to discuss bodies, but we prefer to do so in an abstract way. It is also interesting to notice that the majority of the body theory oriented papers in archaeology that engage with the physical body focus on embodiment, while very few (e.g., Robb 2002) treat the human body as a biological entity in combination with their theoretical approach.

Thus, many authors have eagerly pointed out that the body is physical, corporeal and sensual, but few have taken that notion further by making it a focus for the analysis. The body as such remains conspicuously rare within the archaeology of the body. The reasons for this may be many. One explanation might be that the physicality of the body does not interest many archaeologists, despite our disciplinary focus on materiality. Many archaeologists are not trained in physical anthropology and do not see it as their task to reflect over the biological side of the human body. It is also possible that the debates concerning the more abstract concepts described above are more rewarding professionally, since they align with a now established disciplinary canon and appear to be intellectually more sophisticated. Maybe this also reflects a divide within contemporary archaeology, where those working on the development of theories on the side of social sciences and humanities and those who are more focused on the natural science side, do not communicate as effectively with each other, or share the same interests, to a degree that would really benefit the field as a whole. Finally, it is probably important to recognize the structuring power of taboos surrounding the dead and decomposing body in our society that only recently seem to be confronted in mass media culture that has pushed *post mortem* biological change in cadavers into the realm of general knowledge, through the success of TV series and books devoted to crime scene investigators and forensic work.

A Critical Suggestion

I do not argue with the insight that bodies are generated through practice and are culturally and socially (re-) produced. This is basic to theorizing about human experience. However, I want to stress the importance of complementing that understanding with a clear recognition of the biological and physical body within the archaeology of the body in general, and within the archaeology of death in particular. The body as embodied and biological reality has been undertheorized in archaeology, and I believe that synchronization of the different subfields within archaeology - encompassing the social science and humanities approaches to the body, as well as the natural science approaches to the body - would be beneficial for the field.

In her review article, Joyce (2005) makes the interesting observation that simultaneous to the interest in the body within archaeology described above, the frequency of articles devoted to the body from a bioarchaeological perspective has increased considerably as well. However, she notes that “these contributions are in no obvious way postprocessual” (Joyce 2005:141), which I interpret to mean that they are not concerned with the recent developments in archaeological theory devoted to the body and remain essentially positivist. This illustrates the current divide within archaeology today. Since the critique against processual archaeology in the 1980s, archaeological theory has moved away from the natural sciences. This move has contributed to an enrichment of archaeology, since it has instead included a range of important fields in the theorization of the discipline. Yet, it has also led to creating an unfortunate distance from the natural sciences, closing off some venues for interesting transdisciplinary developments, including those dealing with the body. In this article I want to make the critical suggestion that the archaeology of the body could benefit tremendously from an integration of these different perspectives. The focus on materiality in archaeology, which remains our cornerstone, suggests a notion of balance that in many ways defines our discipline. If we could approach the body with the complexity of recognizing the social *and* biological aspect of it within an all-encompassing transdisciplinary perspective, then archaeology could really contribute to the development of the understanding of the body over a long term perspective.

The archaeology of death and burial constitutes a field within archaeology where this combined approach can be successfully applied. Burial archaeology is a field that traditionally has interested both archaeologists and biological anthropologists. While the cooperation might not always have qualified as truly transdisciplinary, the field is rich with examples of successful collaborations around the shared interest in understanding the features, the bodies buried there and the societies that left them behind. To take this approach that combines archaeology and physical anthropology even further can be extremely

interesting. Through a deeper understanding of the biological body, which is something that physical anthropology and natural sciences can provide, we can better understand what death actually is: what it looks like and smells like. A biological perspective helps us to understand the materiality of death. The dead body also offers a wide range of entries into the study of the complex relations between nature and culture. After all, it is the biological and chemical processes that transform the body after death, and it is to these changes that the survivors respond to as they take care of the cadaver. Finally, this understanding offers an interesting methodological stepping stone, since it allows us to separate archaeologically what in a burial is the product of natural processes of decomposition, erosion, or bioturbation, and what can be identified as the result of the handling of the body.

It is this methodological approach that underlies the development of *anthropologie "de terrain"* (Duday et al 1990, and for a more detailed description in English, please see Nilsson Stutz 2003). Through careful registration of the spatial distribution of human remains, structures and artifacts in the field, combined with knowledge in biology about how the human body decomposes after death, *anthropologie 'de terrain'* offers a unique approach to the detailed reconstruction of mortuary practices in the past, with its focused consideration of the treatment of the human body. The approach proceeds through a consideration of the relative chronology of the disarticulation of the human skeleton, along with the dynamics of the creation of empty volumes as soft tissues decompose, fluids drain, and the resulting empty spaces are filled in by penetrating sediment and, sometimes, mobile skeletal elements. The approach is detailed and analytical, and it aims at identifying the processes that produced the archaeological situation, noting which of these processes can be seen as part of the mortuary program (position of the body, treatment and preparation of the body, the nature of the volume in which the body decomposed, interaction and manipulation during or after the process of decomposition, etc) and which were natural processes (effects of putrefaction and decomposition, erosion, bioturbation etc). While the approach mainly has been used as an effective tool for excavating and analyzing burials, I suggest that it can also be successfully combined with two central theoretical approaches to the body in mortuary archaeology. First, this approach helps us to visualize the cadaver in a new way within the framework of archaeology. The basis for the methodology rests on a consideration of the processes of putrefaction and decomposition and thus integrates those processes at a basic level of understanding the archaeological burial feature. At the same time, it allows us to visualize the materiality and corporeality of death. Second, the constant focus on how dead bodies were treated allows us to visualize the mortuary ritual as practices in the past, a perspective that connects to the theories of embodiment. *Anthropologie 'de terrain,'*

while being an approach rooted in a biological understanding of the body, thus constitutes an interesting connection to contemporary perspectives on the body within archaeology that stem from the humanities and social sciences. An approach that combines all of these perspectives and that also can be successfully connected to the archaeological record might be one successful way of a truly transdisciplinary approach to the human body in mortuary archaeology.

The Cadaver

At death two things occur. A social being disappears and a cadaver emerges. Mortuary practices, no matter how variable, inevitably deal with these two aspects of death. Traditionally, archaeology has tended to emphasize the social loss, and most mortuary archaeology is devoted to reconstructing the living individual in the past or the context of that individual's life. The cadaver itself has received little or no attention. But by focusing on the cadaver as such we may be able to achieve interesting insights into the mortuary practices as well as into attitudes toward the body and death.

Once the vital functions cease, the body embarks on a journey of complete transformation. The first signs are relatively subtle, often starting with the formation of a film of cell debris and mucus on the cornea and a complete relaxation of the muscle tone, followed by a temporary rigor mortis and cadaveric hypostasis that contributes to discoloration of the skin. Once the processes of putrefaction and decomposition start, the changes accelerate and include further discoloration, swelling, emission of gasses and fluids, etc, all of which result in a complete transformation and eventually the almost complete consumption of the soft tissues of the body (for more details see Polson 1955, Knight 1991, Mant 1994).

A central question is whether or not we can assume that the death of the body and the emergence of a cadaver is a crisis only in our contemporary society or if it can be seen as a more universal aspect of human experience. Chris Shilling argues that the death of the body is a crisis exclusively in late modern society, a phenomenon that he links to the dominant notion of the body as a project (with death being the ultimate failure of that project), and to the fragility of the body as especially problematic for Westerners to accept (Shilling 1993). One reason for this crisis, according to Shilling, is the decline in religious faith and the absence of meaning-structure. Through the study of historical mortuary practices, Sarah Tarlow has been able to show convincingly that the crisis of the death of the body can be established quite early in the modern period and is not necessarily connected to a decline in religious faith (Tarlow 1999, 2002). I suggest that we can take this notion even further and look at death and the emergence of a cadaver as a general human experience – something that people in all cultures and all times have

had to deal with. This is not to say that all human societies perceive human cadavers in the same way, but rather that their presence in all cultures appears to require action of some kind.

While cadavers are not perceived by all cultures in the same way, the cadaver has interesting and fundamentally general characteristics that might reveal a universal crisis. A cadaver is not neutral. The post mortem changes in a dead human body transform it progressively, and these changes are irreversible. Again, this is not to say that a cadaver is necessarily always problematic or traumatic for the survivors. The place given to the post mortem changes may vary; they can be denied and hidden (as in our own society), accelerated (for example, through incineration), partially stopped (as in mummification or embalment) or played out and quite publicly exposed (as described for example in Hertz 1960 and Huntington & Metcalf 1979). But no matter the strategy, the cadaver is never ignored. It is always taken care of and disposed of in some culturally and socially structured way.

The biological changes are of course not the only things that have changed. Seen from the perspective where body and mind are inseparable, where the body is created and experienced through and revealed by culture and language, the cadaver poses an interesting problem. The cadaver is a body without life, without mind. It is a body incapable of communication and practices. The duality of the mindful body and the embodied mind has broken down, and it can no longer conform to social and cultural norms. Those have to be imposed from the outside through the mortuary treatment of the cadaver. From having been nature and culture, subject and object, it is now suddenly neither. Still, for a time, it remains recognizable as the person it used to embody. Thus, through the emergence of the cadaver, that person is neither present nor absent. Being no longer subject nor object, it qualifies into the category of the abject, as proposed by Julia Kristeva. In her book *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* Kristeva (1980) designates the cadaver as the ultimate abject, something outside of the order, something that cannot be categorized and that is threatening. This is not unlike the liminal category within Arnold van Gennep's (1999) and Victor Turner's (1967) ritual structure – where the liminal phase designates the “no longer” and “not yet defined.” As the natural processes of decay proceed, the cadaver will become less and less like the person it used to embody, and in response, the living – the survivors – act to control the transformation. As a response to the inevitability and irreversibility of change in the cadaver, the cadaver and death have to be created, staged and produced by the survivors. In this process the friction between the natural processes and the socially and culturally desired product create an interesting field of investigation for the archaeologist.

Rituals as Redefining

From this perspective, mortuary rituals do not only deal with the emotional and societal crisis that death causes, but also with the materiality of death: the cadaver. As I suggested earlier, I find it useful to envision the presence of the cadaver as part of the liminal phase within the ritual structure (Nilsson Stutz 2003:95pp). This idea in itself is not new but can be found already in the work of Robert Hertz from 1907, but what is new is the archaeological focus on the treatment of the cadaver as a significant phase for the understanding of the mortuary practices. Through the ritual structure, mortuary practices contribute to redefining the cadaver and transform it from the subject it used to embody, into an object from which the mourners can separate. The rituals thus redefine the cadaver and stage it in order to reinstall order and produce a proper death. Following a theory of ritual that draws on practice theory (Bell 1992), I have suggested that archaeology should focus on the actual ritual practices rather than underlying meaning (Nilsson Stutz 2003, 2006). The meaning given to the practices might change from one participant to another. It might change substantially over time, but the embodied knowledge about how to deal with death and the dead is shared, as is the experience of taking part in mortuary practices. And it is through the bodily engagement in the ritual practices that a world and structure is created. The participants have an embodied sense of how the ritual should be performed correctly. In the example of burials, this means that while the significance and meaning of the ritual might not be shared by all in a society, there is a shared sense of how humans should be buried. This embodied knowledge constitutes a core of practices that are so fundamental that they might not even be up for negotiation, except maybe in specific cases. At the same time, the experience of taking part in the ritual would also be embodied by the participants, possibly perceived as comprised of semantic references, but also as sensory experiences. They will carry the experience with them as embodied memories throughout their lives. In this way the rituals also contribute to structuring the world of the living community. The framework is by no means static and allows for change over time. However, it is important to recognize that this possible change also takes place within the dialectic framework of structure and practice. Archaeologically this should translate into recognizable patterns of the treatment of the body that we should be able to identify.

In a case study of the late Mesolithic mortuary practices in Skateholm in Southern Sweden, published more in detail elsewhere (Nilsson 1998, Nilsson Stutz 2003), I applied this approach of a double consideration of the body. Through a focus on the handling of the dynamic cadaver as a central component of mortuary ritual *and* an understanding of ritual rooted in notions of embodied practice, I approached these burials with the methodology of *Anthropologie 'de terrain.'* It was central for this approach, both on the methodological and theoretical

level, to focus on both the changes that the cadaver underwent after death and the way in which the survivors treated the cadaver as part of the mortuary practices. Through a careful analysis of the burials, I was able to reconstruct the handling of the body during specific instances in which mortuary rituals were carried out. Yet, I also identified a core set of practices that appear to be so fundamental that they were not even questioned by the participants. In the case of the burials at Skateholm, the great majority of the bodies were buried relatively soon after death. There is no indication that the processes of decomposition and putrefaction were advanced at the time of burial. The body was placed in a pit which was immediately filled with sediment. In a few instances there are indications that the body was wrapped before the burial or placed on top of some kind of material or platform in the grave. It thus seems as if the dead at Skateholm were buried in a way that denied or hid the processes of decomposition. On the site there appears to be three cases of incineration. While these have not yet been studied in such detail that a detailed account of the practices can be established, the use of incineration per se does not necessarily contrast to the dominating pattern, since incineration of the body also has the effect of hiding decomposition—it rapidly accelerates the process. Thus, we have an impression that most often, the death ritually staged at Skateholm in Late Mesolithic times had the effect of resembling life. We can further see this in the arrangement of the bodies in the burials. The bodies were placed in life-like positions, either as lying on the back or the side, or sitting up. The impression that they are arranged in positions that resemble those of living individuals is emphasized when two bodies are simultaneously placed in the same grave. In these instances the bodies are arranged to face each other or even to hold each other. It is of course still possible that these positions actually signaled death, but the point that I am making here is that the death that was staged in this way was not radically different from life. The integrity of the body – and maybe also the individual – was respected. This respect for the body seems to have persisted after burial since very few of the burials – placed in a zone close to the occupation site and other burials – were disturbed during the subsequent period of occupation. However, when we consider the few times this disturbance occurred (indeed, there are a handful of instances where the disturbances appear to be Mesolithic in age), it is interesting to notice that the living made no effort to correct the arrangement of now-skeletonized remains. It seems that as time passed after burial, the respect for the remains of the body became less important. Maybe this also coincided with a notion that some substantial time after burial, the dead individual had truly been separated from the living, having completed the passage to the next phase, integrating with the realm of the dead; in this stage, the remains of the dead would have become unproblematic for the living.

If the treatment of the body was based on a denial of decomposition and a respect for the integrity of the body,

it is interesting to take a closer look at two burials that stand out as exceptions. Grave 28 (fig. 1) contained a skeleton missing several bones, including the left radius and ulna, the left os coxae and the left femur. The analysis of the otherwise perfectly articulated remains has shown that these bones were removed at a late phase in the process of decomposition.



Fig. 1. Grave 28 of the Skateholm I cemetery with skeleton missing several bones, including the left radius and ulna, the left os coxae and the left femur (photo: Lars Larsson).

The analysis has also shown that the body was not placed in a coffin (a practice that would have made the extraction of the bones easier). However, in order for the extraction of the bones to be made without any significant disturbance of the anatomically articulated elements, the feature must have been prepared in advance. I have suggested that the body might have been covered by a

hide that could be removed to expose the remains for extraction. This practice shows that despite the denial of the processes of decomposition in the dominating mortuary program at the site, decomposition was familiar to the living, even as they acted to control and – in most instances – hide it. Grave 28 thus illustrates an interesting tension in the images of death and the dead at Skateholm. It is interesting to reflect over the role of the human bones extracted from the burial as they re-entered the world of the living. Did they represent the individual from which they were extracted, were they caught in their abject status, or had they become objects of death? It is possible that all these levels could be associated with the remains. This case is interesting to contrast with the discussion by Thomas, in his work of human remains in the British Neolithic (Thomas 2000, discussed above). For Thomas the human remains became objects and economic units when they circulated among the living. The nuance that he introduces focuses mainly on the relationships created between the giver and the receiver of these remains in the Neolithic society. The practices studied at Skateholm can add another layer of complexity in the archaeological understanding of human remains among the living. While they could be symbols, metaphors and objects of exchange, they should also be seen within the context that produced them: the cadaver, the post mortem processes and death. A reflection over these objects should probably include consideration of the sensory experience of decomposition and the embodied knowledge of this dimension of their origin. Of course, this does not need to be a necessary component of every understanding of them in the past or the present, but it seems nevertheless to be a central component of how we should approach them. This might even become increasingly important in the Neolithic, where the decomposition of the human cadaver seems to have taken on a strong presence among the living in the staging and visualization of death.

Another burial that stands out at Skateholm is burial 13. Here, the remains of an incomplete and partially disarticulated skeleton of a man were found in a small feature. The practice of so called secondary burial (or burial in multiple episodes) can be excluded, since many of the labile articulations (such as those of one hand and one foot) were preserved, while some more persistent anatomical connections had become disarticulated. One hand and one foot were also completely missing. Everything seems to indicate that the body was placed in the feature in a partial state while still being fresh. The spatial distribution of the bones could also indicate that the remains were placed inside a container. This burial contrasts very sharply with the dominating practices at the site. The integrity of the body is violated and the distribution of the bones indicates that the positioning of the body parts did in no way resemble that of a living person. There are several possibilities for an interpretation of this burial. One possibility could be that the body of the dead was treated intentionally in a way that violated the integrity of the person, and thus contributed to dehumanizing this individual. The reasons

for this could be a sanction for crimes committed in life, danger associated with the individual or the way of death. This kind of scape-goating is known from both the historical, ethnographical and archaeological record and could also be associated with strong individuals who were feared in death (see for example Artelius *N. D.*, Wickholm *N.D.*). If we consider this possibility we can also reflect over the structuring power of mortuary rituals had on the survivors who took part of them and embodied the memories, memories that could be recalled later on in life as reminders of the importance of staying within the boundaries of the structure. An alternative understanding could be that the individual was disfigured or dismembered in a violent death – whether accidental or not – and the survivors acted to hide this state in staging the transition to death ritually. This would indicate that the survivors spared themselves from being exposed to the abnormality of this particular burial. According to this interpretation, the burial would thus be an example of invention and change in order to stay as close to the norm as possible under exceptional circumstances. Whatever the interpretation we chose for this burial, the case remains an interesting reminder of the power associated with treatment of the cadaver – whether negative or positive.

Concluding Remarks

The interest in the body in contemporary archaeological theory has had a positive impact on our understanding of the past. Archaeology is a discipline grounded in materiality, encompassing a long term perspective and transgressing traditional disciplinary boundaries. As such, it also has the potential of contributing to the theorizing of the body. However, while archaeology has integrated many interesting thoughts inspired by the social sciences, it has not yet truly achieved the potential of its transdisciplinary character, and it has tended to disregard the materiality of the body. The ideas presented here, which bring to the fore a consideration of the body as a social construction *and* a biological reality, with a focus on the handling of the cadaver, is an attempt to make some modest steps in that direction within the realms of mortuary archaeology.

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