The Materiality of Serial Practice
A Microarchaeology of Burial

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Abstract
The main concern of the thesis is the question of how to deal with matters of
social heterogeneity in prehistory. A social reading of psychoanalytic theory
of e.g. Jacques Lacan suggests that social heterogeneity generally is more
likely than homogeneity in most social formations. It is therefore argued that
the past is difficult to understand in a hermeneutical sense of the term. As an
alternative approach, a general theory of social practice and materialities, a
microarchaeology, is outlined. Departing from Jean Paul Sartre’s concept of
seriality, it is argued that social practice is generally performed in close
relation to materialities. The microarchaeological approach focuses on
executed practice, that is, those actions that actually were performed. Such
practice is argued to be subject to both individual agency and to more general
‘structural’ elements. From such a perspective, there is thus no need to make
awkward dichotomous distinctions between, for instance, individual and
structure, or emic vs. etic perspectives.

The potential of the microarchaeological approach is exemplified by two
different sets of data: The Neolithic graves of Ajvide, Gotland, Sweden and
the graves of Asea and Tegea in Arcadia, Greece. The first study aims to
discuss social heterogeneity and corporeal subjectivation/subjection. It is
argued that the so-called Pitted Ware Culture (GRK) expressed great social
variability and demonstrated several significant transformations, rather than
comprising a homogeneous ‘culture’. The second study concerns the place of
graves in the local ‘cultural’ and ‘natural’ landscape. It is suggested that the
sites chosen for burial generally depend on a matrix of structurating
parameters that involves a range of aspects such as memory, ‘natural’
features, material circumstances, as well as notions of visibility and
invisibility, etc. Some structurating parameters may work in concert but may
also be overruled by other parameters. There can thus not be a question of
simple relationships between, for instance, the places of habitation and the
places of burials.

Key words: Microarchaeology, social theory, social practice, landscape,
graves, Ajvide, Asea, Tegea, corporeality, Neolithic, GRK, Pitted
Ware Culture.