

# 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 structuring parameters that involves a range of aspects such as memory, 'natural' features, material circumstances, as well as notions of visibility and invisibility, etc. Some structuring 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.