

Thinking with Things

Fragmentation



Broken Objects

- Why are there so many broken things in the archaeological record that can't be restored?
 - Broken accidentally or through use
 - Thrown away because broken
 - Ritually broken & deposited
 - Fragmentation & enchainment



Mycenaean figurine fragments

Fragmentation Theory

- Developed by Chapman (2000) to explain specifics of Neolithic archaeological remains from the Balkans
- Influenced by anthropological theories of exchange & personhood, specifically from Melanesia
- Aims to explain relationships & interactions between parts & whole, which he argues explains social relations
 - "...operates on one level, as with the fragments of a vessel & the complete pot or the individual human bones & the skeleton. On another level is the relationship between complete items & sets of items..." (Chapman 2000, 7)

What is Fragmentation?

- A social practice embedded in the material world
- Linking people & the material things they crafted:
 - Deliberate acts of breakage, exchange & deposition of material items
 - Closely linked to identity construction
- How do we distinguish between fragmentation & simple daily breakage?



Inalienable Possessions

- Objects “imbued with the intrinsic & ineffable identities of their owners which are not easy to give away” (Weiner 1992, 6)
- Something that can never truly be detached (spiritually) from their owner, even if they move physically
- Not attainable, kept out of circulation
- Memories embedded in objects, real or created, providing a link to the past:
 - Objects which embody ancestors’ histories
- Provide stability & continuity in a constantly changing social (& material) world

Inalienable Possessions

- “What makes a possession inalienable is its exclusive & cumulative identity with a particular series of owners through time (Weiner 1992, 33)
- A recursive relationship:
 - Power of the object derives from association with specific individuals
 - Individuals garner power & prestige through their ownership of specific objects



Soulava necklace

Enchainment

- Selected fragments of objects used in social exchanges
- These link objects to people & places
- Refitting fragments from the same objects spatially separated perhaps over considerable distances



Neolithic
figurines Greece

Examples of Enchainment

- Objects deliberately broken to create enchainment relations between people:
 - Roman *tessera hospitalis*: 2 halves of object kept by 2 parties as a contract / commitment
 - Greek *symbolon*: a split object or token used to seal a contract:
"each of 2 halves or corresponding pieces of an astragalos or other object which ...any two contracting parties broke between them, each party keeping one piece to have proof of the identity of the other" (Talalay 1987, 164)

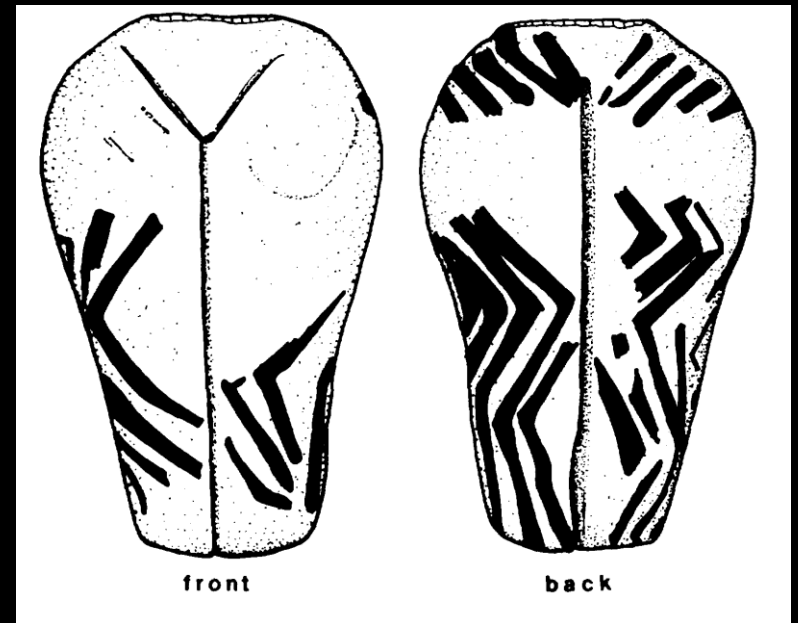


Tessera hospitalis



Neolithic Greece

- Figurine fragments of female legs repeatedly found in Neolithic settlements
- Identified as special identifying devices or contracts employed among 5 Neolithic communities” (Talalay 1987, 161)
 - Exogamous relations binding communities
 - Other food & resource alliances



Neolithic figurine, Lerna

Fragmentation of Human Remains

- Deliberate sorting & movement of disarticulated human remains
- Usually long bones & skulls
- “Distribution of bodily parts enables the materialisation of kinship links through a new-found mobility after death – the mobility of ancestral bones” (Chapman 2000, 7)



Skeletal remains, Arediou



Plastered skulls, Tell Aswan

Fragmentation & Personhood

- Chapman's work assumes a causal link between enchainment & personhood, specifically **dividuality**: (divisible in nature)
 - Rejects western notions of bounded individual
 - Personhood emerges from composite relations with other things/people (& beyond our bodies)
 - "formed through the everyday activities of sharing food, touching, sleeping in the same bed, having sexual relations, exchanging words..." (Lamb 2000, 28)
- People are interlinked within complex networks of social ties including the material world: things / objects

Fragmentation & Enchainment

- Archaeologists have elided concepts of fragmentation & enchainment
- How interrelated are these practices?
- Concept based on Melanesian ethnographies (eg. kula)
 - “this process is absolutely not linked to the fragmentation of objects” (Brittain & Harris 2010, 585)
 - More akin to accumulation....?
- Therefore enchainment does not require fragmentation. But does fragmentation inevitably lead to enchainment?
- Brittain & Harris also question the relationship between enchainment & personhood

Accumulation

- Objects gathered together into groups or set:
 - Integrally related groups of objects
- Accumulation (of inalienable possessions) generates social capital
 - Association between objects a source of power & authority?
- Based upon an understanding of kula exchange



Temple Repository, Knossos

Hoards

- Discrete groups of high-status prestige objects
 - Elements linked through similar (or regularly contrasting) materials
 - Formal / functional relationship
- Deliberate removal of wealth from circulation:
 - Ceremonial foundation deposits & votive deposits



Hoard from Pyla Kokkinokremos



Haverling hoard

Accumulation

- Neolithic dominated by clay: easily breakable objects
- Shift in human-object relations with emergence of metallurgy
- Accumulation develops as a new social strategy:
 - Accumulation of wealth in hands of a few



Tôd treasure

Layering & Networking

- Concepts developed by Knappett (2005)
- Bodily & artefactual processes broadly equivalent to accumulation & enchainment, respectively
- Asking where the limits of mind, body, object are
 - “The whole body is implicated in cognitive processes - humans think through their bodies” (2005, 239)
 - Skin: boundary of the body?



Enchainment - Networking

- Enchainment': "processes whereby humans & artefacts are distributed, yet at the same time held together or 'enchained' in socio-technical networks" (Knappett 2005, 240)
- Gell's distributed body/person:
 - "spread of biographical events and memories of events, & a dispersed category of material objects" (1998, 222)
- Social systems: networks composed of nodes & links (made up of people & things)



Rock crystal vase, Mycenae

Accumulation - Layering

- Accumulation: “practices whereby identity is not distributed but, rather, ‘accumulated’ at particular locales” (Knappett 2005, 240)
- Layering: an artefactual means of creating a second skin/boundary:
 - Tattooing, scarification, henna
 - Clothing, jewellery
 - Buildings/cars....
- Body extends beyond itself



Pu-Abi adornment

Summary

- Basis in ethnographies: concepts of dividual & inalienability
- Notions of **fragmentation, enchainment & accumulation** developed to account for distinct material patternings:
 - “There can be little doubt that in many archaeological contexts deliberate fragmentation of bodies & objects plays a crucial role in how people understand identity, landscape & materiality” (Brittain & Harris 2010, 590)
- Deliberate actions: breakage, dispersed distribution of pieces & hoarding
- We need to be careful of conflating different theoretical approaches from ethnographies