

Introduction

Mirrors of Passing

Sophie Seebach and Rane Willerslev

All things that live will eventually die. However, we humans are apparently the only ones who are aware of our own death. This fact is foundational to our conception of time. Time permeates everything, but we cannot experience time directly, only indirectly through the decay of all things living, which, just like us, are perishable and will eventually die (Willerslev et al. 2013). We see the leaves falling lifeless from the trees, we see day turn into night, we see others and ourselves grow older, and we experience our parents and other close ones dying. All of these material expressions of change and decay, which eventually lead to death, are what allow us to experience the flow of time. Thus, it is only through the world of death that we *as such* get to sense time. The question of the nature of death, therefore, also brings profound implications about the nature of time and its inherent dependency on material form or expression.

All life ages, all life dies. This must be so, because once an organism has given birth to its offspring, the latter will do better if the previous generation is not there to compete for resources (see, e.g., Dobzhansky 1973; Sacher 1978). In other words, death is from a narrow biological perspective *as such* integral to evolution.

However, for human beings death poses a deep existential problem: “If I am destined to die, what is the point of my life?” It is a question that we as humans cannot escape but are forced to confront. Perhaps for this reason, in the face of absolute nihilism, many of us feel that somehow, death has to make sense—that is, it has to have a meaning beyond the evolutionary explanation of the purely biological organism’s natural death. Still, this possible meaning of death remains essentially unknown and is undoubtedly among the greatest mysteries of life that might never be unlocked.

In this volume, we do not aspire to draw a conclusion to this *magnum mysterium*—why death exists and if there is an existence beyond it. Rather, we limit ourselves to examining the ways in which human bodily death and material decay are central points of reference in cultural life across time and place. This, we believe, can offer us key insights into human perceptions of time. Thus, rather than unlocking the mysteries of death itself, we hope to unlock its hidden connections to materiality and time. This will, in some roundabout manner, provide us with a better understanding of death’s nature, of why death is a necessary part of life and how we as human beings cope with the fearsome existential challenges that death poses.

The volume is thoroughly interdisciplinary in its setup, approaching the problems of death, materiality, and time from variegated disciplinary starting points, including anthropology, archaeology, Human Security, history, and media and art approaches. An impressive comparative range, stretching from ancient Egypt and

Greece, through present-day Mongolia, Siberia, and the Arctic, Papua New Guinea, East, West, and South Africa, and South America to present-day Finland, Ireland, and Denmark, also marks this volume. This multi-sited, multidisciplinary approach allows us to explore death and its many relations to materiality and time through a myriad of academic disciplinary perspectives and geographical and historical settings. On the journey, the reader will get unique insights into how humanity across different historical periods and geographical places have coped with the grief of losing a loved one and the diverse ways in which humanity have attempted to control death by manipulating the flow of time through various material means, stretching from archaic mortuary literature and poetry and elaborate burial rituals to the present-day use of the Internet and cell phones as a means of communicating with the dead.

This volume is a companion piece to the exhibition *Letting Go* at the Museum of Cultural History in Oslo, which marks the closure of a large research project headed by Rane Willerslev, "Death, Materiality, and the Origin of Time." Thus, this book is aimed not just at an academic audience, but at a general public, curious about the questions raised by the exhibition concerning the nature of death, materiality, and time. For this reason, we, along with the rest of the contributors, have deliberately aimed at a writing style that is less concerned with impressing our academic peers, and more about making ourselves understandable to an intelligent readership of nonspecialists.

The Viewpoint of the Dead

Perhaps the most pressing mystery regarding death and time is what happens after death. Are we immortal beings? And if so, then what characterizes the consciousness of the dead?

These are questions that are not usually addressed by the social sciences, which tend to stick to the conventional doctrine of "methodological atheism" (Gell 1999: 160–61), which holds that scholarship is obliged *not* to take apparently absurd religious ideas seriously, such as ideas about an afterlife. The result, as Alfred Gell pointed out, is that the notion of an afterlife "becomes a property of the relations between various elements in the social system, derivable, not from the condition that a genuine [afterlife] exists, but solely from the condition that societies exist" (ibid.: 160). In other words, ordinary people who believe in a life after death—and they include the great majority of the world's population, we might add—are really talking in metaphors when they talk about having seen this or that deceased in a dream or encountered a ghost. After all, the social sciences' commitment to methodological atheism is just a cynical way of referring to a social life in which only the living are genuinely real. Somehow, this take on questions related to the afterlife is fundamentally dissatisfactory, if nothing else because it fails to take many ordinary peoples' notions of the dead as someone living on within, parallel to, or beyond this realm seriously.

If we want to know about life after death, we need to turn to fiction, to mythology, literature, and films that seek to uncover what the world might look like from the viewpoint of the dead. We believe that social scientists could learn something important from these fictions.

One such fiction that has inspired our thinking about the world of the dead is Neil Gaiman's novel *The Graveyard Book* (2008). In this story, a toddler escapes the

murderer who has taken the lives of his entire family and stumbles into an old graveyard. Here he is adopted by the dead, who take him in, name him Nobody Owens (Bod, for short), and protect him until he reaches his teens. Through Bod's experiences, we come to learn much about the life of the dead, and the novel touches upon key themes to this anthology: the relationship of death to materiality and time.

The Dead beyond Time

Within the graveyard exists a colorful medley of characters: from the mysterious presence within the hill on which the graveyard is built, a remnant of the very first settlers on the British Isles, to a Grey Lady on a grey horse, and even a witch, buried on the potter's field just outside the wall of the graveyard. And then there are quite ordinary men and women who died over the centuries and who, despite having lived many years apart, share an afterlife in which their separate temporalities have collapsed, so that time no longer exists for them. In other words, the dead, in Gaiman's universe, exist outside the flow of time, or perhaps beyond the flow of time. The material world of the dead is unchangeable, and as they themselves no longer change, time ceases to matter. Without change, there is no sense of time, and without time, there can be no change.

Here, Gaiman touches upon one of the central arguments of this book, and of the exhibition it accompanies, albeit from the opposite direction. While we in our book show that we human beings only experience the passing of time, and indeed only grasp the concept of time, through our encounters with death and decay, Gaiman tells us that something similar happens when the dead encounter the living. Only then do the dead experience the passing of time. For only with the boy Bod is the matter of time introduced to the graveyard, because while the dead stand beyond their life, forever to remain static, Bod is at the beginning of his life, changing and growing as the years pass.

Yet since we only truly experience death through the deaths of those around us (Bjerregaard et al. 2016; Willerslev et al. 2013), and through this experience become aware of the passing of time, Bod, who despite the fact that he is alive only really knows the world of the dead, initially fails to truly grasp what time is. In an exchange with one of his ghostly tutors, Mr. Pennyworth, a six-year-old Bod demonstrates his oversight when Mr. Pennyworth notes: "'Time is passing, after all.' 'Is it?' asked Bod. 'I'm afraid so, young Master Owens'" (Gaiman 2008: 96).

Of course, nobody in the chapters of this book find themselves in Bod's unique position. Yet one thing that becomes clear as we travel through these different times and places is that the human experience of temporality is fundamentally changed when the living and the dead interact. The chapters of this book show that death influences the temporalities of the living, such as the description of the devastating Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014, which disrupted people's expected futures (chapter 5). Furthermore, several of the chapters show how the living are able to manipulate the time of the dead. This is, for example, the case with the people of ancient Egypt, who not only manipulated the bodies of their dead, but also their temporality and thus the very trajectory of their afterlife (chapter 3).

Only once in the course of *The Graveyard Book* do the dead get to exit the graveyard and experience the world beyond, and thus the marking and the passing of time. When the white winter blossoms bloom, which in Gaiman's universe happens every eighty years or so, they mark a very special night: the night of the *danse macabre*, where the dead march into the world of the living in order to

dance with them, an experience the living will not really remember. The *danse macabre*, a popular motif in medieval art and grave monuments (Oosterwijk 2004), is a reminder that death will take us all in the end, rich or poor, saint or sinner, and in Gaiman's book, we readers are thus also reminded about the fact of death and that for us as individuals, time passes toward a common, inescapable end.

The Materiality of the Dead

While the dead may have no real temporality, they do have a kind of physical materiality, just like the living. They are, in a sense, "classic" ghosts who operate on the threshold of the visible in a different ontological realm. They can walk through walls and appear or disappear at will. Yet they remain tethered to their material links to the world: to their remains, and the items with which they were buried. This notion is one that reverberates through many a notion of what the afterlife may be like; while we believe the spirit or soul to have left the body behind, it is nonetheless often considered to remain connected to the physical world in one way or another, as ghosts (chapter 1), ancestors (chapter 4 and 6), superstars (chapter 12), or even figures on the Internet (chapter 10).

In Gaiman's novel, the relationship between the dead and their material remains are expressed succinctly by Mistress Owens, Bod's ghostly adopted mother: "I cannot [leave]. My bones are here . . . I'm never leaving" (Gaiman 2008: 22). The dead in the graveyard can also have a strong emotional attachment to the material objects with which they were buried, and which, though they remain in the material world of the living, also become part of the material world of the dead. Thackeray Porringer, a fourteen-year-old boy who died in 1734 clutching his copy of *Robinson Crusoe*, was buried with the book, enabling him to interact with it in his afterlife. Those who were buried with nothing, and whose graves are not marked, feel this slight, as they are absolutely cut off from the world of the living. That is the case with Liza Hempstock, the witch who was drowned, burned, and buried in the potter's field outside the graveyard, with nothing to mark her final resting place. With no ties to the material world, she "might be anybody" (ibid.: 103); she loses the ties to her identity and personhood that a material memorial ensures, and thus she is in danger of entering the utterly anonymous existence that a complete cut from the material world entails.

Like the objects buried with the dead, Bod too comes to stand on the threshold between the world of the living and the world of the dead, able to interact with the materiality of both. As a toddler, he is given the "Freedom of the Graveyard," allowing him to roam the graveyard unhindered, and bestowing upon him some of the abilities of the dead: night vision, the ability to fade into invisibility and to slip through solid barriers, as well as the ability to haunt the living. With the ability to haunt, the dead are in fact able to create alternative materialities in which they can interact with the living in a way that they cannot otherwise. In dreams, the world of the dead and the world of the living can intersect. So it is in many cultures, where dreams and dreaming are seen as the entrance point par excellence for communicating with the dead. Dreams can both be a realm for receiving important advice or assistance from the dead, yet they also contain the danger, as in Gaiman's book, of being haunted by the dead.

The dead in Gaiman's book are largely forgotten by the living, except of course Bod. They are the dead of long past, buried in a closed-down cemetery. What the chapters of this book show is that this is rarely the case; indeed, we humans continue to get involved with the dead, both in immaterial and material ways. Whether

we manipulate the remains of the dead (chapters 6 and 11) or process our memories and memorialization of the dead (chapters 10 and 12), the living do not leave the dead behind (chapter 1). And in some cases, as we will show, the dead remain part of the world of the living in a very real way (chapter 13).

Evolutionary theory tells us that once people are dead, they are forever separated from the lives of the living: they cease to have an influence on the lives of the living. But people's practices, rituals, myths, cultural narratives, and indeed their literature tell another story. We continue to invest in our relationships with the dead, not only because they remain a vital part of our lives, but because they are absolutely necessary to the flow of time and the continuation of life.

The Contributions

The chapters of this book provide a myriad of scholarly perspectives into the nature of death along with its related issues, such as grief, the afterlife, rebirth, and so forth. We describe them here in turn.

Death's Time

This anthology's central hypothesis is that our human awareness of death and/or awareness of time are deeply connected. While it is our awareness of our own deaths that allows us to experience the flow of time, this also urges us to take control over the flow of time and the processes of aging and decay implied, and bend it toward our own desired futures. In *The Graveyard Book*, the dead do not experience time as such; they exist in a moment of collapsed temporality where nothing ever changes, and where there consequently is no future. The desire of the living to take control of the flow of time, to manipulate it, and to attempt to create a desired future is thus perhaps not only what makes us human, but what defines us as distinctly living human beings.

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that all over the world, people employ various social technologies such as rituals and myths that are designed to regenerate life after death through symbols of fertility and rebirth (Bloch and Parry 1982). Indeed, there is an important sense in which death not only forces us to face the hard fact that time simply passes, that nothing living is eternal, irrespective of human interfering; it also offers a unique opportunity to take control over time itself (cf. Leach 1966). The mere fact that "timing" is a key aspect of every mortuary ritual, which is structured to slice the flow of time into different stages, intervals, and rhythms, bears witness to this fact (Willerslev et al. 2013).

In the first two chapters, we take a step away from what we might call the empirical reality of death's time and enter the world of literature and mythology. In both chapters, the authors draw on works of fiction in order to make claims about the relationship between time and death. Engaging with literature set in the Irish countryside, Stuart McLean (chapter 1) argues that the dead can never truly be left behind; indeed, they are and will always be a crucial component to our being-in-the-world. More specifically, he uses James Joyce's short story "The Dead" to demonstrate how a radical suspension of the linear chronology underpinning the temporal order of modernity is possible, and argues that anthropology stands to learn much from literature about different ways of understanding and expressing time, and consequently understanding the relationship between the living and the dead.

Marina Prusac-Lindhagen (chapter 2) juxtaposes two texts crucial to Orphic beliefs, the *Legend of Orpheus* and the *Orphic Theogony*, in order to explore the relationship between death and time. The two texts represent quite different versions of this relationship. The *Legend* constitutes an account of an individual's experience in the encounter with death—death as sudden, definitive, and brutal. In the *Theogony*, on the other hand, each death is part of an eternal cycle based on the transmigration of souls, a process that is quite the opposite of definitive; indeed, it is crucial for the upholding of the human race and the creation of the future.

Egyptologist Rune Nyord (chapter 3) addresses this issue of timing and the human desire for regenerating life after death by exploring how the ancient Egyptians manipulated the time of the dead. He urges the reader to turn away from the allure of well-preserved mummies, and instead look to ancient Egyptian “mortuary literature” in order to discover how the living work to deliberately turn the dead into ancestors, and even gods, through ritual and physical manipulations of the dead. The cyclical nature of the world in ancient Egyptian cosmology entails that as the dead become gods, they then become involved in the continuous creation of the world. Thus, the living, through manipulating the physical remains of the dead, create the entities that will in turn create the future of the world.

While human timing in mortuary rituals is of paramount importance for guiding the flow of time toward a desired future, the wrong timing can be disastrous. The dead are rarely regarded as simply good, but as both the source and the destroyer of life. While they can bring fertility and rebirth, they can also bring disaster and despair. Tragic deaths pose a special case in point, as the dead from the outset are agitated and unfulfilled and therefore prone to bring harm. This is the focus of Per Ditlef Fredriksen's chapter (chapter 4), which takes us to northern KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, and places associated with tragic death, such as sites of fatal road accidents. These places become gravitating nodes that attract more tragedy. Ancestral spirits in such places are dislocated and malcontent and will cause new accidents to happen at the same place. A death site may thus end up with a new sinister layer added onto its already troubled history. People attempt to prevent accidents and misfortune by providing containment and transport of spirits to “proper” spaces in the homestead. With the help of witch doctors, healers, or herbalists, the bereaved revisit past events in order to improve the present and prevent future troubles or misfortune.

The theme of tragic death and its implication for the living's conceptions of time is also the theme of Theresa Ammann's chapter (chapter 5), which describes how one of the more devastating cases of mass death in recent years, the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, changed the flow of life for all those affected by it. With a background in Human Security, Ammann details the shattering hardships and material life changes experienced by three individuals living in Monrovia, Liberia, who were each to a varying degree in contact with the Ebola virus, and shows how the flows of their lives, or “riverscapes,” are forever changed. In Ammann's chapter, death is the rupture altering expected temporalities and changing or destroying expected futures.

Materialities of Death

In Western popular imageries, the dead, insofar as they exist at all, manifest themselves in some airy, foggy, or soul-like form, characterized by an essentially dis-

embodied existence. Presumably, this view is part and parcel of a Judeo-Christian discourse, which rests on the ontological opposition of “inner” and “outer,” “spirit” and “matter” (Valeri 2000: 24). Here the soul is thought of as *spiritus*, “breath”—“what is most invisible in the visible, most immaterial in the material” (ibid.). The physical body and the immaterial soul are seen as two radically distinct substances; the former disintegrates while the latter might continue its disembodied existence in another realm. Plato was an early advocate of this view and thought of body and soul as fundamentally different by nature: “The immortal soul’s residence within the corruptible body is an exile” (Plato, quoted in Alliez and Feher 1989: 47). Plato’s followers within the Judeo-Christian tradition have emphasized ever since that, as a soul, one is never really at home in a body and must make an effort to extricate oneself, most notably in the act of death (ibid.: 51). It comes as no surprise, therefore, that when a Christian philosopher such as Henry Habberley Price ([1953] 2001: 447–57) had to describe what the afterlife might look like, he imagined a condition of disembodied human souls who would communicate telepathically, and have dreamlike perceptions of reality.

However, among so-called indigenous animist peoples around the world, there are apparently no examples to be found of a belief in an altogether immaterial soul (Pedersen and Willerslev 2012; Willerslev 2013). Souls are embodied entities that eat and drink, and can be preyed upon and eaten in turn (Valeri 2000: 24). This is the theme of Rane Willerslev and Jeanette Lykkegård’s piece (chapter 6), which takes us to the tundra of northern Kamchatka, which is the home of the Chukchi, an indigenous Siberian population of large-scale reindeer herders. Here the mortuary ritual is all about controlling the deceased’s physical body so as to prevent it from being eaten and thus abducted by alien forms of life. The Chukchi inhabit a fearsome world in which every class of being, humans, animals, and spirits, are prey and predator to each other. Life here is all about eating and avoiding being eaten. This is not only a matter of filling one’s stomach; consumption is also a form of abduction in which a hostile class of beings take possession over another being’s body and turn it into one of their own, which means leaving the cycle of human rebirth. The great concern of the Chukchi, therefore, is to contain the body of the dead and enhance it, turn it into an armor of sorts, so that it may effectively resist alien attacks.

Matthew J. Walsh and Sean O’Neill (chapter 7) provide a cross-cultural ethnographic and archaeological overview of the materiality of death among societies inhabiting the North American Arctic from Alaska to the eastern margins of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago. Their study provides insights into the remarkable flexibility and pragmatism with which traditional Arctic peoples treated the vicissitudes of time and the dead in the dynamic environs of the north. Across regionally congruent and highly complex animist cosmologies, Inuit societies navigated a social environment filled with living objects, places, and material and immaterial beings—even the artifactual interface between life and death—by adhering to strict (but not too strict) rules governing the treatment of all living things, which actually included the dead and their possessions. Ultimately, the impermanence of life was mediated by the “incomprehensible” persistence of the soul in nearly every aspect of the experienced world.

It is now a fairly established insight that objects are not automatically inert things, but can possess powerful agencies (cf. Bjerregaard and Willerslev 2016; Gell 1997, 1999; Latour 2005). As extensions of human persons, objects can themselves act as persons and enter into personal relationships and provoke feelings of love,

hate, desire, or distress. Likewise, the agency of the dead can be present in objects and places in the landscape that possess the power to influence the living, to make them act as if they are engaging not with objects, but with deceased persons in the present. This is the theme of Malthe Lehrmann's contribution (chapter 8), which takes us to Mongolia, where the landscape is dotted with stone cairns, *ovoos*, at which people pay their respects to the spirits and sacrifice food, drink, stones, and other items in the hopes of a brighter future. By engaging with the materials of the *ovoo*, Lehrmann circumvents the pervasive taboo in Mongolia regarding speaking of the dead. Rather than exploring the symbolic nature of the *ovoo* and the objects they attract, Lehrmann argues that we must explore the material properties of the *ovoo*, and in fact change our perspective to that of the *ovoo*, in order to understand people's relationships with the world of the dead.

The presence of the dead through actual materialities is also the focus of Clarissa Martins Lima and Felipe Vander Velden's piece (chapter 9), which compares two peoples of lowland Brazil, the Karitiana and the Xukuru. The materialities of the dead that can be detected within these two communities point to a need to rethink how the relationship between the living and the dead has been understood in much of lowland South American ethnography. What has been emphasized is the fear of the dead, causing people to relinquish property and personal belongings of the dead, and at times even entire villages where death has occurred. These practices have been explained as a process of alienation, in which the dead are made into "Others." However, Lima and Velden argue that while some aspects of the dead are associated with radical alterity, other aspects are not. Being dead is in fact multifaceted, just as the relationship between the living and the dead is not static but changes over time. Some aspects of the dead are intimately incorporated into the world of their living kin and take on concrete material expressions. Among the examples mentioned is the name of a person, which, as in the case of other indigenous peoples, like the Siberian Chukchi and the other circumpolar peoples described in other chapters, is regarded as the material expression of the soul. A deceased person's name is given to a newborn, and thus the dead continues to exist in the one who bears his or her name. Likewise, the dead are believed to be present at burial places in the forest that are used as key markers in present-day legal fights for indigenous land rights and in objects and images, which have now been translated into the pantheon of Catholic saints. All of this points to the need to rethink dominant narratives in Amerindian ethnographies of the dead as simply being Others and to do so by taking their material presence in names, objects, and the landscape seriously.

Life after Death

Post-Christian modern Western understandings of death have largely seen it as the absolute endpoint of life. For Martin Heidegger, just to mention one modern thinker for whom death was a major theme of philosophical inquiry, the character of our being is a "being-towards death" (1962: 247). Life ends in death, after which there is no more. As such, Heidegger argues, death, or rather the anxiety it causes, is the primordial source of all human anxiety. In a similar vein, Sigmund Freud ([1917] 2009) developed his theory about how to handle the grief of the bereaved on the assumption that death leaves no possibilities open for establishing a relationship with the dead. Instead of investing emotions in the dead, the mourner should cut all emotional bonds to the deceased and move on within the

real world of the living (as opposed to the fantasy world of the dead) (ibid.: 244). If the mourner did not get his or her head around the fact that death is final, he or she would eventually fall into depression—which would eventually lead to suicide.

In other words, Western thinking about the dead has been dominated by a scientific view of death as being the endpoint to life and thus to invest in one's relation with the dead has been seen as something people do out of ignorance, at best or at worst as an expression of mental illness (Willerslev 2013: 86).

This view is fundamentally challenged by Dorthie Refslund Christensen and Kjetil Sandvik (chapter 10), who show how investing in the dead helps parents who have lost a child deal with their grief. They describe the online afterlife of deceased children on the Danish website *Mindet.dk*, where bereaved parents can engage in ritualized grief work in order to maintain a contact with their deceased child. Through maintaining the website dedicated to their child (lighting online candles, writing personal messages, and communicating with other bereaved parents), the parents at *Mindet.dk* maintain a continued emotional link not only to their deceased child but also to their very parenthood, which is existentially and socially challenged at the loss of their child.

A different kind of afterlife, although equally full of emotional attachments, is described by Susan Matland (chapter 11). Tackling a rather macabre case, Matland traces the "afterlife" of the severed heads of Aslak Hætta and Mons Somy, two Sámi men executed in 1854 for their involvement in the Kautokeino Rebellion in Norway in 1852. Their heads were first taken to the Anatomical Institute at the University of Christiania (Oslo). Later Hætta's skull was traded for two Inuit skulls, and lastly, in 1997, the skulls were repatriated and buried in Sápmi. Matland traces the social identity of the two men, and how it shifts as the skulls change hands, status, and worth.

Johanna Sumiala (chapter 12) looks at a different kind of afterlife, namely, that of the celebrity. She tells the story of Finnish cross-country skier Mika Myllylä, from the pinnacle of his career through his public humiliation, when he was embroiled in a doping scandal, to his premature death in 2011. Through the media's covering of his rise and fall, Sumiala argues, Myllylä attained immortality. She reflects upon the nature of death in today's media-saturated society, in which the deaths of public figures and celebrities become public events and their deaths are ritualized in the media.

Christiane Falck (chapter 13) takes a radical new perspective on the potential lives of the dead: here, the anthropologist herself is considered a deceased person. When she arrives in Timbunmeli village in Papua New Guinea, she is surprised to find that the locals see her as one of their own, returned in a new body. To the people in Timbunmeli, the dead live on in an invisible realm identified with whiteness. Here, the dead go to "white men countries," so when Christiane Falck, a white woman from Germany, arrives, she is interpreted as being a dead person come to visit. In Timbunmeli, the time, and indeed the materiality, of the dead are not separate from the world of the living; instead, the dead remain a part of the lifeworld of the living and can be communicated with through the use of white technology, most notably cell phones.

Exhibiting Death, Materiality, and Time

In the last contribution (chapter 14), Alexandra Schüssler, artist and cultural anthropologist, chronicles the messy and complicated process of creating an exhibition

on death. Her text describes how in the process of making the exhibition *Letting Go*, she turned from a mere exhibition designer into a curator. Reflecting on design experiments that were part of the methodology of the “Death, Materiality, and the Origin of Time” research project, she comes to the conclusion that the relationship between the curator of an exhibition project and the designer ought to be structured like a love affair, in which finally both parties lose themselves in each other. Eventually they should grow into a team carrying out one vision. Through a series of e-mails, workshop notes, and exhibition proposals, Schüssler gives a rare insight into the creative work that lies behind the finished product.

Questions about the nature of death have been debated since the birth of *Homo sapiens* and will continue to be debated as long as human beings exist. The chapters making up this volume should be read as diverse disciplinary takes on the same enigma: what is death’s relationship to materiality and time? While no final conclusion is reached, it is our hope that the chapters together will provide a myriad of perspectives on this question, thus providing data and analysis for how we might go about getting a better understanding of what death entails for human beings across history and geography and its significance for shaping our understandings of time.

Sophie Seebach is the curator of the Ethnographic Collections at Moesgaard Museum in Aarhus, Denmark. She holds a PhD in anthropology from Aarhus University, and has conducted her fieldwork in Gulu, northern Uganda. The title of her PhD dissertation is “The Dead Are not Dead: Intimate Governance of Transitions in Acholi” (2016). The focus of her research is death, dying, and burial rites, and how the practices surrounding death are affected by social change. She has been a visiting scholar at the African Studies Center at Boston University. She has been affiliated with the research projects “Death, Materiality, and the Origin of Time,” and “TrustLand: Governing Transition in Northern Uganda.”

Rane Willerslev is the director of the National Museum of Denmark. He was the lead researcher of the research project “Death, Materiality, and the Origin of Time,” on which *Mirrors of Passing: Unlocking the Mysteries of Death, Materiality, and Time* is based. He is also the author of *Soul Hunters: Hunting, Animism and Personhood among the Siberian Yukaghirs* (University of California Press, 2007) and *On the Run in Siberia* (University of Minnesota Press, 2012). He is the editor (with Christian Suhr) of *Transcultural Montage* (2013); (with Ton Otto) of “Value as Theory” (special issue of *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 2013); and (with Dorthe Refslund Christensen) of *Taming Time, Timing Death: Social Technologies and Ritual* (2013).

Note

The two authors contributed equally to the work.

References

- Alliez, Eric, and Michel Feher. 1989. “Reflections of a Soul.” In *Fragments for a Human Body*, part 2, ed. Ramona Feher and Nadia Tazi, 47–84. New York: Zone.
- Bjerregaard, Peter, Anders Emil Rasmussen, and Tim Flohr Sørensen. 2016. “Introducing Materialities of Passing.” In *Materialities of Passing: Explorations in Transformation, Tran-*

- sition and Transience, ed. Peter Bjerregaard, Anders Emil Rasmussen, and Tim Flohr Sørensen, 1–26. London: Routledge.
- Bjerregaard, Peter, and Rane Willerslev. 2016. "Assembling the Spark of Life." In Bjerregaard et al., *Materialities of Passing*, 221–38. London: Routledge.
- Bloch, Maurice, and Jonathan Parry. 1982. "Introduction: Death and the Regeneration of Life." In *Death and the Regeneration of Life*, ed. Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry, 1–44. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dobzhansky, Theodosius. 1973. "Nothing in Biology Makes Sense Except in the Light of Evolution." *The American Biology Teacher* 35 (3): 125–29.
- Freud, Sigmund. (1917) 2009. "Mourning and Melancholia." In *On Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia"*, ed. Leticia Glocer Fiorini, Thierry Bokanowski, and Sergio Lewkowicz, 19–32. London: Karnac Books.
- Gaiman, Neil. 2008. *The Graveyard Book*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Gell, Alfred. 1997. *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 1999. "The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology." In *The Art of Anthropology: Essays and Diagrams*, ed. Eric Hirsch, 159–80. Oxford: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1962. *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper & Row.
- Leach, Edmund R. 1966. *Rethinking Anthropology*. University of London: Athlone Press.
- Latour, Bruno. 2005. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Oosterwijk, Sophie. 2004. "Of Corpses, Constables and Kings: The Danse Macabre in Late Medieval and Renaissance Culture." *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 157 (1): 61–90.
- Petersen, Morten, and Rane Willerslev. 2012. "The Soul of the Soul Is the Body: Rethinking the Concept of Soul through North Asian Ethnography." Symposium Fuzzy Studies, part 3, *Common Knowledge* 18 (3): 464–86.
- Price, Henry Habberley. (1953) 2001. "The Soul Survives and Functions after Death." In *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Writings*, ed. Michael Peterson, William Hasker, Bruce Reichenbach, and David Basinger, 447–57. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sacher, George A. 1978. "Longevity, Aging, and Death: An Evolutionary Perspective." *Gerontologist* 18 (2): 112–20.
- Valeri, Valerio. 2000. *The Forest of Taboos: Morality, Hunting, and Identity among the Huauilo of the Moluccas*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Willerslev, Rane, Dorthe R. Christensen, and Lotte Meinert. 2013. "Introduction." In *Taming Time, Timing Death: Social Technologies and Ritual*, ed. Dorthe R. Christensen and Rane Willerslev, 1–16. Farnham, U.K.: Ashgate Publishing.
- Willerslev, Rane. 2013. "Rebirth and the Death Drive: Rethinking Freud's 'Mourning and Melancholia' through a Siberian Time Perspective." In Christensen and Willerslev, *Taming Time, Timing Death*, 79–98.