

Hybrid Corporeality and the Multiplicity of Human Death A Post-Anthrocentric Perspective

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Article abstract

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Hybrid Corporeality and the Multiplicity of Human Death

A Post-Anthrocentric Perspective

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Abstract: Rapid development of cognitive and neurosciences undermined the Cartesian view on the human body as a bounded and autonomous entity. A plethora of publications on enhanced memory, external cognition, extended mind, embodied self, or distributed corporeality confirms the view that the human body and mind are not self-contained entities, producing the world as a prosthetic set of “extensions” or parts of hybrid wholes, which we interpret as cyborganic assemblages. However, in this abundance of documented entanglements of bodies and minds with their surrounding settings, of fusions of corporeality with inert matter, there is scarce, if any, reflection on the posthumous fate of these hybrids and on the multiple forms of their deterioration, that establish what the author provisionally describes as multiplicity of human death. The paper presents the analysis of various forms of human body and inanimate matter integration and their posthumous persistence or deterioration. The view on the human body as multiple provides corollary of its death as a multimodal, manifold set of events, distinguishing biological, lived, and social bodies and their heterochronous deaths. The heterochronicity of human death is illustrated with the description of private commemorative practices that form a geography, distinct from the usual public commemoration places.

Keywords: Social body; assemblage theory; death diagnostics; multiple death; technomorph; memory triggers; commemoration

Résumé: Le développement rapide sciences cognitives et des neurosciences a mis à mal la vision cartésienne du corps humain en tant qu'entité délimitée et autonome. Une pléthore de publications sur la mémoire améliorée, la cognition externe, l'esprit étendu, le soi incarné ou la corporalité distribuée, confirme

l'idée selon laquelle le corps et l'esprit humains ne sont pas des entités autonomes, produisant le monde comme un ensemble prothétique d'« extensions » ou de parties d'ensembles hybrides, que nous interprétons comme des assemblages cyborgiques. Toutefois, dans cette abondance d'enchevêtrements documentés de corps et d'esprits avec leur environnement, de fusions de la corporéité avec la matière inerte, il y a peu, voire aucune réflexion sur le destin posthume de ces hybrides et sur les multiples formes de leur détérioration, qui établissent ce que l'auteur décrit provisoirement comme la multiplicité de la mort humaine. Cet article présente l'analyse de diverses formes d'intégration du corps humain et de la matière inanimée, et de leur persistance ou détérioration posthume. La vision du corps humain comme multiple a pour corollaire sa mort comme un ensemble multimodal et multiple d'évènements, distinguant les corps biologiques, vécus et sociaux, et leurs morts hétérochrones. L'hétérochronie de la mort humaine est illustrée par la description des pratiques commémoratives privées qui forment une géographie, distincte des lieux de commémoration publics habituels.

Mots-clés : Corps social ; théorie des assemblages ; diagnostics mortels ; mort multiple ; technomorphe ; déclencheurs de mémoire ; commémoration

This is a position paper, and as such, it relies more on arguments and a motley assortment of observations, rather than on a meticulous study of a particular case or on fieldwork data. It is based on the application of some post-ANT and neo-materialist ideas in the domain of death studies. When I needed concrete data, I referred, for reasons explained below, mostly to autoethnography, and borrowed examples from available literature on the subject. The point of my departure was the simple corollary: if, according to a now well-known assertion, the body is multiple—“more than one, but less than many” (Mol 2017, 16, 122, 203; Strathern 2015, 130), so its termination should be manifold, too, although this post-mortal multiplicity might be of a distinctive, yet not described kind. Annemarie Mol, basing on Marilyn Strathern's account of interaction between different identities of the same person (Strathern 1991, 35), contrasted plurality with multiplicity. Strathern builds her example to illustrate the idea of partial connections, which she borrows from Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985). The latter writes: “My hope is that cyborgs relate difference by partial connection rather than antagonistic opposition, functional regulation, or mystic function” (Haraway 1985, 99). The ideas of these authors are essential for understanding hybridity and multiplicity of human bodies and their mortality. Haraway's image of modern technologies as “prosthetic devices,

intimate components” [of cyborgian bodies] (ibid., 97) allowed me to introduce the concept of technomorph (Sokolovskiy 2018) that I suggest for describing the diverse complex of integrated body techniques of a particular technoculture. Strathern’s (1991, 36) resourceful commentary on Haraway’s imaginary of a cyborg, whose parts “form no single system” as “its internal connections comprise an integrated circuit, but not a single unit” points to a new direction in re-assessment of gradual post-mortal “human wholes” dissolution.

Various aspects of close relations between human bodies and their environments, be they human-made (“artificial”) or produced by non-humans (“natural”) have long been the focus of attention for philosophers, historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and biologists. Without going into the details of history, philosophy, and anthropology of technology, I would venture to name but a few scholars, whose ideas paved the way to posthuman or symmetric anthropology and served as the background for the concepts of hybridity and multiplicity of human death that are sketched in this article. These are the notions of *Organprojektion* and *Prothesentheorie* by the precursor of philosophy of technology, German scholar Ernst Kapp (1877). Estonian biologist and semiotician Jakob von Uexküll was the first to differentiate between *Umwelt* (a “near,” or species-specific environment, created by the organism) and *Umgebung* (surroundings, or general environment, encompassing various organisms and their natural resources). Gregory Bateson (1972, 319–320) suggested the hybrid concept “organism-in-its-environment” for the basic evolutionary unit, and Edward Hall (1989, 36–37) elaborated the concept of extension, further developed and applied by Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan (1978). The ideas of these authors were early statements, clarifying various forms of entanglement of organisms with their environments, exemplifying hybrids that combine organic and inert substances, or “integrated circuits” and units that are “more than one, but less than many.”

These early conceptualizations were further developed and supplemented by a plethora of achievements in neuro-, cognitive and social sciences abundant with such research findings as distributed memory, external or augmented cognition, enhanced, enacted, extended, and distributed mind, fragmented and embedded identities and bodies, situated practices, embodied or corporeal self, “shared” or “distributed embodiment,” habitus, etcetera. All these concepts support the view that the human body and mind are not autonomous and self-contained entities, or bounded units, and that human faculties depend on extraneous reality as much as on inner faculties and energies, thus producing

the “outer” world as a prosthetic set of “extensions” or parts of hybrid wholes, which we interpret as techno-human or cyborgian. These new conceptions not only underscore the psychosomatic unity of human minds and bodies, but also highlight the concomitant integration of human beings with surrounding milieus. Deleuzian *agencement*, translated into English as “assemblage,” sums up in a single term such embeddedness or entanglement.

However in all this abundance of documented entanglements of bodies and minds with their surrounding settings, of assemblages and fusions of corporeality with inert matter, there is scarce, if any, reflection on the posthumous fate of these assemblages and hybrids and on the multiple forms of their deterioration, that establish what I would provisionally describe here as the multiplicity or multimodality of human death. The under-theorizing of the body from the death studies perspective, noted more than twenty years ago (cf.: Hallam et al. 1999, vi), continues to persist. The problem of immanent demise of such integrated wholes or hybrid creatures that should be construed as partial and heterochronous as well had not so far been posed.

Human death in this perspective should not be viewed as a unitary occurrence or a single event, even though people experience and view it that way. It is multiple in a sense to be further specified. Nevertheless, in current death studies in anthropology and other disciplines, we do not encounter indications that multiplicity of death is being taken into account, beyond the usual occupation of anthropologists with the plurality of its cultural forms, the occupation that came under justified critique (Fabian 1972). It becomes also immediately obvious that the translation or transposition of the multiplicity of illness/decease, such as the variation in the atherosclerosis enactments to “multiply enacted death” could not be made in such a straightforward way. We can easily imagine or even document the multiplicity of a specific case of death diagnostics (and apparently even more so in the case of medical definitions of death), or even diverse forms of possible “death enactments” in various clinical settings, but it is a challenge to imagine the multiplicity of a particular human death beyond its medical environments and contexts, that is, beyond biological body and its decay and termination.

Author’s Position and Outline of the Argument

In this article I look at various forms of the human body’s lifetime entanglements and its evolving environments from a death-studies perspective. The main thesis, extrapolated in modified form from the Annemarie Mol’s *Body Multiple*

(if, according to her, atherosclerosis enacts different realities in different clinical settings, so one might argue that death diagnostics by various specialists creates divergent ontologies with distinctive death events) served as the initial inspiration for the approach suggested here. But I see the multiplicity of death not as a simple corollary, ensuing from the idea of multiple body. The multiplicity of death could be seen from an entirely different perspective, which entails a particular attention to the forms and types of the human body's integration with or its embeddedness in immediate surroundings. In pursuing this vision I draw upon various critical approaches and theoretical perspectives, including actor-network methodology, object-oriented and neo-materialist approaches, as well as theories of embodiment to offer a treatment of bodies as cultural, material, mediated, interacting and assembled entities, existing as parts of complex agglomerates or "integrated circuits," wherein living and inert substances interact and form durable wholes.

Thus, this paper has the following structure. In the next section, I discuss the distinction between the body's plurality and multiplicity. I shall then consider various ways the human body integrates with its milieu and suggest a working typology of emerging links or relations between the body or its parts, on the one hand, and the environment or its elements, on the other. To elaborate my argument of human death's multiplicity, I will provide a brief overview of body studies literature, which focuses on human body plurality and/or multiplicity, and of current approaches to death diagnostics that remain predominantly restricted to the death of a physical body with a total exclusion of its cultural or social dimensions. Finally, I suggest a new concept of heterochronous deaths of "social" and "physical" bodies and briefly illustrate the consequences of death's multiplicity for the research of communication with the dead and for the study of private geography or ecology of commemoration and memorialization practices that this particular perspective opens up.

The Human Body's Plurality Versus Multiplicity

The difference between plurality and multiplicity with respect to the human body and death is not immediately evident and needs to be clarified. For Annemarie Mol, the difference is construed in plurality, pertaining to the epistemological, and multiplicity—to ontological domains. Plurality of possible representations of objects (and the concomitant epistemological problem of accurate reference, or epistemological pluralism) is contrasted with multiplicity of a single object's enactments in concrete practices (the ontological problem

of their coordination, or ontological multiplicity—Mol 2002, vii–viii). This is the reason she employs in the title of her book *The Body Multiple* a noun in the singular with a pluralizing adjective.

A number of eminent philosophers, sociologists, and anthropologists contributed to the notion of human body's plurality. Mary Douglas was probably the first among anthropologists to compare and contrast the physical and the social bodies in her essay "The two bodies," albeit her focus was symbolism and the social control of bodily expressions, not the dimensions, aspects or modes of the human body *per se* (Douglas 1996, 72–91). We also need to take account of Mary Douglas's (1996, 80) claim that "the distance between the two bodies is the range of pressure and classification in the society" that are subject to cross-cultural variation. Her cross-cultural version of plurality of physical and social bodies rests on the notion of their multiple enactments in different cultures. Douglas was a follower of structuralism, struggling with the limitations of its methodology. The dual concepts of group and grid are a case in point, illustrating her efforts to combine structuralism and functionalism and to provide a holistic theory of human action. Her ironic comment that "the freedom to be completely relaxed must be culturally controlled" (*ibid.*, 81) discloses the relationship between the two bodies, in which "natural" (mis) behavior appears to be socially and culturally sanctioned.

The notions of human body plurality have been developed in anthropology, sociology, philosophy, and the history of ideas, and became standard starting in the 1980s, when the social body concept emerged as the main focus of body studies in social sciences. In sociology, body studies has proliferated since the mid-1980s, when British sociologist Brian S. Turner (2008) founded the journal *Body and Society* and called attention to somatic aspects of social action. The concept of social body served as the core idea for a new sociological subdiscipline "sociology of the body," which contrasted social aspects of human bodies (the so called social or "civilized" body) with the physical or "naturalistic" body and demonstrated the constructed character of the former (cf.: Crossley 2001; Shilling 1993; Synnott 1993). Unlike conventional biomedical approaches to the body as an isolated, albeit differentially enacted organism (physical body), social body is more often envisioned as hybrid, spatially and inter-subjectively distributed, "infused" and constituted by culture, augmented by various extensions, and leaving behind either volatile, unstable and anonymous or durable resilient and identifiable traces.

The duality or contrast between social and physical bodies, underscoring the human body's plurality, is important in considering their post-mortal destinies, but is not what constitutes human body's multiplicity. The stated (observed) or posited (construed) differences between social and physical ("natural") bodies go against the grain of ANT ideology that decreases, if not entirely obliterates, the nature–culture gap by downsizing it to numerous other gaps between any objects or entities (Harman 2009; Latour 1991a). Hence, I envision the human body's multiplicity in terms of its multiple and various entanglements with the environment and its enactments in various techno-somatic assemblages. As is mentioned above, I elaborate the idea of an individual's body multiplicity in a distinctive way that might be incurred from Annemarie Mol's conception of multiple body, or Margaret Lock's notions of death's plurality, suggested in her book *Twice Dead* (2001). The multiplicity lies not so much in differing medical practices leading to different enactments of a disease (Mol's version of body multiplicity), or varying cultural beliefs and practices related to death and grieving (Lock's view on death diagnostics plurality), as in stipulating the human body entanglement with its immediate milieu, exemplified by the current theories of distributed perception, memory, cognition and body skills. I argue that this spatial and material distribution of body functions and multiple "inscriptions" produced by such entanglements do not immediately disappear after a person's death, but are subject to varying speeds of fading or dissolving and act as a set of stimuli for memorialization and/or commemoration of the deceased. The concrete loci of these commemorative practices produce a private geography of commemoration that has so far escaped scholars' attention. Before we turn to a consideration of this geography, we need special optics or a cognitive toolkit to capture the various types of corporeal entanglements. Additionally, we need to be acquainted with the current approaches to death diagnostics and death's criteria that might or might not be based on ideas of plurality or multiplicity of the human body.

Death Diagnostics and the Notion of Plural/Multiple Bodies

Current principles of death diagnostics are centred on the implicit theories of biological processes cessation and on the postulates of general evolution theory, embracing all living organisms or (yet one more set of diagnostic principles, centred on brain death criteria, that emerged after the appearance of life-sustaining technologies) – all sentient beings. These approaches, medical as well as legal, remain trapped in modernist ideology with its stark opposition between

nature and culture. Death is construed as a biological event, concerning all living matter, all organisms, irrespective of their capacity to have consciousness, reason, or culture. Because humans are treated as organisms, their death is construed as a biological event, and its criteria are aligned with inter-species criteria of the loss of life. In other words, the current approaches to death diagnostics are exclusively based on medico-biological views on the physical human body. However, the facts of death in contemporary clinics are complex and mediated by modern diagnostic technologies, humanitarian concerns, and economic factors. Japanese notions of death substantially differ from American notions, a fact that prior to 1997 has prevented organ donation and transplantation in Japan and restricts them to this day (Lock 2002, 130 et seq.).

Current criteria in death diagnostics evolved from circulatory cum respiratory to a set of neurological symptoms, or from such symptoms as heart failure and permanent respiratory arrest to a complex set of whole-brain functioning cessation criteria. The introduction of life-sustaining technologies, such as medical ventilators, have contributed to the advance of the neurological criteria of death; however, the clinical cases of patients with dementia, anencephaly, or PMS (permanent vegetative state) remain outside of the currently applied death diagnostics principles. As the American scholar in bioethics John P. Lizza notes (2006, ix), the definition of death is a matter for metaphysical reflection, moral choice, and cultural acceptance and should not be based exclusively on medico-biological criteria. The physical body decays and disintegrates, but personhood leaves a lasting imprint on other persons and the things that they encountered. It is noteworthy that current definitions of death and death diagnostics criteria do not take into account the plurality or multiplicity of a human body.

Types of Techno-Somatic or Cyborganic Integration

Statements that the human self and body are entangled with their environments are accurate, but not specific enough to act as a practical research orientation. Neither is the thesis that humans, unlike many other organisms, created man-made *Umwelt*, or artificial environment. Furthermore, since the time of Jakob von Uexküll's studies, we have known that all organisms modify their immediate environments and produce their own milieus. As Anna Lowenhaupt (2015, 22) Tsing notes: "Making worlds is not limited to humans. [...] beavers reshape streams [...] all organisms make ecological living places, altering earth, air, and water." Here, the von Uexküll (1921) concept of *Umwelt*, or that part of the environment that is created by the organism, a hybrid aggregate of organic and

inorganic components, should be viewed as mediating the relations between the organism and its *Umgebung*, or broader environment. In the case of humans, it is the technosphere or man-made artificial environment that mediates human bodies' relations with other environmental factors and takes most functions of the animals' *Umwelt*.

We need to specify the various links of human organisms with their milieu and to outline a provisional typology of various kinds of integration between somatic and extrasomatic components of resulting assemblages. These links or relations might be divided into two large classes: 1) internalized, literally “subcutaneous” or “hypodermal” linkages (intra-associations, incorporations) and 2) externalized nexuses or somato-technical clusters (human–nonhuman associations or assemblages). In practice these classes often overlap, combine, and merge. They constitute poles of the body-environment interactions range and of the hybrid world that emerge from such continuous interactions. The first class embraces such particular kinds of body-milieu linkages as body or somato-techniques, including skills, habits, routines, and bodily dispositions, in which the interaction of the body with environmental elements quite literally molds and transforms human body. The second class includes diverse “projections” of corporeal organs and the functions and delegation of their actions to different external devices and apparatuses or complex structures, variously termed as “extensions” (Edward Hall’s (1989, 245) term), “outerings” (the early term, suggested by Marshall McLuhan before he switched to Edward Hall’s terminology; see for details: Rogers 2000), or “inscriptions.” The family of various prosthetic devices bridges these two classes of techno-somatic assemblages as they could be external (such as spectacles or hearing aids), internal (cardio-accelerators), or combine external and internal parts (medical ventilators, artificial kidneys, cochlear implants, etcetera).

Body techniques have been the focus of anthropological research since the mid-1930s. Marcel Mauss (1936) illustrated in his lecture, presented in May 1934 at the seminar of the Society for Psychology in Paris, his idea of body techniques with well-known examples of skills such as the styles of swimming and digging among different ethnic groups and age cohorts. André Leroi-Gourhan (1943; 1945) provided a typology of such techniques in his two volumes on evolution and technology.

If body techniques (sedimented via everyday routines as technomorphisms in bodily dispositions, skills, and habits, and as life-long adaptations of human bodies to particular settings or environments) are essentially “psycho-somatic

inscriptions” of environmental influences “into the flesh,” extensions reflect the reverse influence of the “embodied minds” on surrounding milieu, as they delegate certain functions or behavior programs to various instruments, installations, infrastructures, devices, and machines. Very often the boundary between psychosomatic inscriptions (body techniques or skills) and inscriptions as programs delegated to various artifacts (extensions) is blurred. A famous example of a well-integrated extension is a blind man’s cane, which merges with the lived or phenomenal body to such a degree that it becomes indistinguishable from a limb (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 167–168). Seen from the body perspective, the cane might be perceived as a skill, a well-integrated set of bodily dispositions. At the same time, we consider this cane much more often as an extension, a navigation device, enabling a person with limited or non-existent eyesight to negotiate obstacles during a walk.

The somatic inscription mechanism is based on the integration of an artifact into a body image and/or corporeal schema. American philosopher Kirk Besmer (2015, 59) summarizes the artifact–body synthesis in the following way:

Understood as an alteration that requires a re-synthesizing of the entire body schema and its inter-related elements, once a technological artifact is mastered enough to withdraw from focal attention, it becomes integrated into the body schema such that a new body synthesis emerges. Incorporating a technological artifact into the body schema implies the emergence of a renewed body with expanded perceptual powers and extended capacities for agency in the world.

Another type of techno-somatic integration is illustrated by Bruno Latour, who has meticulously described and analyzed several cases of delegation of functions or actions as a mechanism of the interaction of the human body and the environment. Most widely publicized among such cases are the Berlin key, the “sleeping policeman” or the speed bump, and the automatic door closer (Latour 1991b; 1992; 1994). He views such inventions mostly in the context of his sociology of associations, in which humans and non-humans co-produce “the social.”¹

My favorite example of such integration, drawn from my experience, is the incorporation into the body schema of a moving escalator. Back in the early 1980s, escalators were rare in the country, most of them located in Moscow and St. Petersburg (Leningrad at the time) subways. For people coming to the capitals for the first time, the trip on the metro constituted a memorable experience,

worth narrating on their return. When I first brought my five-year-old son to Moscow and we entered one of its metro stations, he was stunned, but on my suggestion that he tell his kindergarten friends that he saw “a self-moving stepladder” he sadly replied, “Nobody would believe me.” In 1990s during perestroika, the time when Soviet-style residence permits were in place and when people flocked to the capital in search of jobs, Moscow police easily located new arrivals by their behavior on the escalator: whereas Moscow residents easily negotiated the “moving stepladder,” but lost their balance on one that was not operational, newcomers usually stepped onto the “moving ladder” with caution and momentarily lost their balance. The difference betrays the fact that locals had thoroughly integrated the escalator movement, and due to this, they lost their balance on the stationary one as they unconsciously expected it to be moving, whereas newcomers treated escalators as a kind of ordinary stepladder and had to regain their balance. This assemblage “human body plus escalator,” although momentary and spurious, sedimented due to the habit formed through daily repetition. The ability to ride an escalator (as one might ride a horse or a bicycle, or similar habits formed on the basis of daily routines) joins other such capabilities in what I term a technomorph, a particular technosomatic assemblage that characterizes the unity of techno-environment and human body. As technomorphisms are associated with local techno-cultures, they create a unique set of influences that mold human bodies in particular ways. Some of them are so subtle that people cannot tell what factors are behind them, but can easily place their “avatars” (if you permit me to consider our own cyborgian nature or social body as the avatar of all accumulated skills and habits) as belonging to a particular profession or place of origin.²

Assemblages and Their Post-Mortal Destinies

For the results of the various ways and types of human–nonhuman and somato-technical integration, scholars make use of terminology, highlighting the hybridity and assembled character of “products” of such synthesis: cyborgs (Clynes and Kline 1960; Haraway 1985), post-humans, embodiments, entanglements, assemblages (DeLanda 2016; Deleuze and Guattari 2008; Latour 2005, 2; Law 2004, 41), etcetera. At the same time, looking from the perspective of bodies, entering such integrative entities, we start to see them as “dividuals” (Deleuze 1990, 150; Simondon 1964, 1989; Strathern 1988), enacted by partial connections (Haraway 1985; Strathern 1991), or “dividuations” (Ott 2018), and as multiple bodies (Douglas 1970; Mol 2002; Synnott 1993;). These “multi-directional

cross-connections and subdivision of single humans” (Ott 2018, 32) enter into numerous associations with humans and non-humans (animals, plants, instruments, machines, stones, atmospheres) to form sometimes contingent and ephemeral, but in other cases quite stable “integrates,” “agencements,” or assemblages that might survive the demise of physical bodies, which had been parts of such stable arrangements. The post-mortal “survival time” of different types of cyberorganic composites with the human body as a component differs. Admittedly, body techniques disappear with the death of a physical body, although the assemblages they were a part of transform and survive. Analogously, skills and habits die with their bearers or “avatars,” or sometimes even earlier, due to non-practice or trauma, but the artifacts that were instrumental in the enactment of such skills continue to exist and bear traces of their former users.

Contemporary spread of assemblage theory across many disciplines contributed to the development of its multiple strands and numerous applications in a range of social sciences and humanities. Brian Massumi introduced the term to render Deleuze’s concept (2008) of *agencement* (cf.: Buchanan 2015, 383; Nail 2017, 22). Now, with the branching and ramification of the concept’s content, it has acquired diverse meanings, even within the context of (post-)ANT methodology (cf.: Law 2004, 41). For present purposes, it is important to underline that assemblages are an arrangement of heterogeneous elements that differ from (organic) unities, for their logic “rejects unity in favor of multiplicity” and “essence in favor of events” (Nail 2017, 22); they are defined by “their external relations of composition, mixture, and aggregation” (ibid., 23).

Private Geographies of Commemoration

Margaret Lock (2002, 235–257) and John Lizza (2006, 98–99, 171–174) analyze special cases when “bodies outlive persons,” thus describing heterochronous events of a physical body’s death and the loss of personhood due to severe trauma or a genetic disorder, such as a permanent vegetative state and anencephaly. However, if we pay close attention to person’s material entanglements, one’s body’s inscriptions and extensions, we commence to see much more frequent, if not universal, cases of “persons outliving bodies.” This might be framed as a natural law: interaction leaves traces. Some traces are anonymous: we cannot establish, do not remember, or do not care enough to recollect who or what has left a particular trace, but when we do, the attribution or ascription of the trace with a particular human or non-human turns out to be

not only the acknowledgement of the link, but simultaneously contributes to the stability of the assemblage that we encounter and recognize. When this concerns a departed person, such recognition contributes to sustenance of his/her social body.

One of my anonymous reviewers, whose input I gratefully acknowledge, noticed that “it is unclear what concept or theory of the person underlies the author’s claim [of “persons outliving bodies”]” and suggested the paper be improved by explaining “the underlying concept of a human person and what it is that actually dies.” It is in agreement with this suggestion that I provide these brief points to further clarify my “post-anthropocentric” and “anti-Cartesian” position in stating the heterochronicity of the death or disintegration of such “techno-somatic assemblages” that we continue to associate with either biological bodies or social selves. It seems to me that anthropocentrism (literally, positing the self or person at centre) underestimates the degree of our entanglement with the social-cum-material world and the force of “inscriptions” or traces that we leave due to our continuous social and material engagement as embedded and distributed “technomorphs.” Hence, I suggest seeing the self or the person as always already inscribed and integrated with its material-cum-social milieu. A person or self is anchored in narrative identity, which in turn depends on memory, distributed across embodied brains and evocative objects (Turkle 2007). That means that “selves” or “persons” are very much intertwined with other peoples’ memories and artifacts that scaffold our narrative identities. The death, annihilation, or demise of a part of such complex “wholes” does not automatically involve its cessation, as the disappearance of a part does not mean the loss of the whole. To trace the fate of such gradually dissolving entities and identities is precisely the objective that is posed here as a problem in need of further research.

Such assemblages and their surviving parts form private geographies of commemoration that form hitherto unexplored commemorative landscapes and communication channels between the living and the deceased. These assemblages or parts thereof serve as memory triggers for the relatives and friends of those who have left us, but not entirely. Russian poet Aleksandr Pushkin (1959, [1836]), in his free translation of Horatio’s *Exigi monumentum*, famously remarked: “No, never will I die in full – the soul in sacred / lyre will ashes mine survive and decay will escape / and famous will I be until below the moon yet / there lives at least one poet left” Great poets and artists, travelers and inventors, scientists and politicians are not alone in securing material

memories of their deeds. Ordinary mortals with their daily routines, skills, habits, inventions and continuous entanglements with surrounding forces and entities cannot escape leaving lasting traces of their existence that have literally formed parts of their human cyborgian bodies and minds. The triviality and everydayness of such traces prevent us from seeing them as such, but if we concentrate on the task for a moment, we immediately recollect numerous and practically daily instances when we remember, revive, and commemorate our friends, acquaintances and relatives and communicate with them. As such practices are normal, spurious, and private, they are not visible and do not attract the attention of scholars, which usually encompasses only publicly visible or official commemoration sites: cemeteries, cenotaphs, monuments, museums, etcetera. We encounter the descriptions of private commemoration practices only in memoirs, autobiographies, family chronicles, journals and diaries, and so the prevalent academic genres for their discovery would be autoethnography and discourse analysis (cf.: Grant, Short, Turner 2013; Turkle 2007, 252–305).

The idiosyncratic nature of most stimuli or triggers that invoke our memories of the deceased prevent their systematic study or even their appearance as the objects of research. Another reason for such oblivion is the scientific tendency to focus on the universal, repetitive, and common and to neglect the unique, particular, personal, and private. Subject to this modernist ideology we tend to forget that the private and personal could simultaneously be common and universal, or that things common and universal originated as personal in the sense that their invention, manufacture or discovery could always be attributed to a particular human person, to use Norman Denzin's (2019, 4) phrase, "a universal singular." This tendency to emphasize and privilege universality over particularity, and the abstract over the concrete, underlies such traits of the globalized Western culture as the obliteration of personal connections and links between humans and non-humans, the disguising or covering of such links with universal anonymity. Whereas in folklore and the daily life of many traditional societies (especially among animists, as well as among children of a certain age) such links preserve their personal dimension, connecting unique persons, living or dead, with other unique humans and non-humans, we as a rule tend to forget who invented, created, made or used this or that particular thing that we encounter. This anonymity and depersonification is nonetheless not absolute, and I will provide some pertinent examples, illustrating the idiosyncrasy of private commemorative practices and habits.

In his regular review of fiction, New York Times columnist Ryan Holiday mentions some personal memories he had of a friend. In a comment on the book by Tetsuko Kuroyanagi, *Totto-Chan: The Little Girl at the Window*, Holiday (2014) writes:

It's the story of the extraordinary childhood and education of Tetsuko Kuroyanagi, basically the Ellen or Oprah of Japan. She was precious and strange and met exactly the right kind of teachers who knew exactly how to cultivate those virtues in her. This book has a special place in my heart because it was a favorite of my friend Seth Roberts, who died suddenly a few years ago. I think about him every time I think of the book.

I had never met my granddad, who was sentenced by troika and shot in 1933. I knew him only by his portrait in my grandma's house. Nevertheless, he was a person who accompanied my every meal as we fought with my cousin for the right to eat with the tin spoon that was known to be his, marred with tooth marks on one side. My granddad, as well as all family members on my mother's side, was a member of the Old Believers (a Christian group of Russian religious dissenters who maintained the liturgical and ritual practices of the Russian Orthodox Church as they were before the reforms of Patriarch Nikon of Moscow of 1666), who always used their own personal cutlery and tableware. So it was a real privilege to use his spoon, and my connections with my granddad felt lasting and real. I still have vivid memories of when the spoon was lost forever. I was about twelve, and our boat overturned on one of our fishing trips on the confluence of two rivers at the head of the great Ob, the biggest waterway of Western Siberia. In such an immense body of water, there was no chance of ever finding the spoon again. It felt as if my connection with granddad had been irreversibly severed.

Sometimes character traits and propensities of the deceased serve as perpetual memory triggers. My aunt, who all her life taught math to her village pupils in Altay, recently passed away at the commendable age of eighty-six, but never left me in my Moscow apartment, which she was never able to visit, as she feared the long journey from Siberia to Moscow. Whenever I use the electric igniter on my gas stove, I imagine how she would have been amazed and overjoyed at seeing such a wonder, for throughout her life she preserved a childlike ability to marvel at what seemed to other people the most trivial of things.

A brief survey among my acquaintances and friends on the subject of such spurious commemorative acts revealed a broad range of stimuli, from olfactory to haptic and visual, that triggered memories of the deceased and/or communication with them. Most of my respondents were of the age that their parents were still alive, but their grandparents had passed away, so their memories were often related to their own childhood. One of my friends told me that she always thought of her grandmother, who died many years ago, whenever she smelled creosote, a wood preservative used for railroad sleepers or ties to prevent their rotting. As a child, every summer she travelled by train with her grandma to visit relatives who lived in a neighboring region, and the pungent smell of railway ties had fused with memories of her granny. When she narrated this story, tears of disappointment welled up in her eyes, as she told me, “I rarely recollect her now; there are no wooden ties left. Nowadays they use concrete sleepers, so the days of creosote have passed, together with my memories.”

Conclusion

The individualism and egotism of our age, as well as the modernist tendency to reduce the body to “skinbag boundaries” and the mind to the brain’s “grey matter” prevent us from acknowledging and fully appreciating the crucial parts that various material things and other persons, including humans, animals, or herbal species play in such reminiscences. We regularly downplay their roles as we see them as mere triggers of memories, instead of treating them as avatars that, via their ability to enter into intimate relationships with our persons and bodies and to be parts of assemblages that we have been a part of, as well, support and carry us as persons, both dead and alive. Good literature and films (Marcel Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913–27), or Peter Mayle’s *A Good Year* (2004), directed by Sir Ridley Scott (2006) instantly come to mind) are full of such flashbacks and memory props.

Unlike official places that were specially designed for the practices of commemoration and have stable spatial co-ordinates, like cemeteries or museums, the geography of private commemorative triggers is rarely spatially stable and has as its anchors – instead of places in material assemblages – sets of practices and private encounters or events that formerly included both those who remember and those who passed away. We tend to interpret our commemoration as purely mental acts, or “cerebral events,” whereas it certainly has its material side (it is “materially extended”), without which we tend to lose our contact with the deceased. These kinds of extended or materially enhanced memories are yet

one more kind of “extension” or rather human–nonhuman assemblage that inconspicuously prolongs the lives of dispersed human social bodies, which slowly pass away when anonymity and amnesia obliterates their multiple “inscriptions” or traces of their material entanglements. As our bodies are partible and easily permeated by various others, both human and non-human, our deaths are heterochronous, and our memories extended, entangled and embedded in environments that we as humans create and inhabit together with other beings.

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Notes

- ¹ If we add to these descriptions of delegated functions or inscriptions a biographical dimension of their inventors, a point I discuss in more detail in the final section of the paper, we shall see particular assemblages (or their parts) of their creators’ “dispersed” social bodies that often serve as memory triggers for their friends and relatives after their death.
- ² One example of such subtle adaptation and of the unforeseen consequences of such “placement” comes from the tumultuous years of civil conflicts in Tajikistan in the early 1990s, when one of the warring parties recognized its “enemies” in the street by their particular gait and bearing: Badakshani developed a gait with slightly drooping shoulders to adapt to the Pamir highland landscapes. One might say, using the trope of corporeal schema change, that they incorporated the landscapes of their place of birth.

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