9

The presentation of self in the Late Neolithic

9.1 Introduction

The selection of grave goods, as discussed in the previous chapter, very much follows the *rationale* of the creation of social fronts (Goffman 1959; as described in Chapter 2). In certain social contexts certain types of behaviour, clothing, paraphernalia are deemed appropriate, while others are not. While some things are approved of, and even expected, others are frowned upon or even 'forbidden'. It is by adhering to these generally held cultural norms that persons can express their connectedness and integration within a community, as opposed to strangers and outsiders who do things differently.

As the objects found in graves are obviously carefully selected by the group of people burying the deceased, it is to be expected that these objects are in line with the expectations of that community of what is appropriate and what is not. So in that sense, their selection was structured by the same principles and cultural norms that would apply to an individual preparing their personal *front* for a specific social gathering. While underlying structuring principles might be similar, to what degree can we actually interpret the grave set as part of a *personal front* (Goffman 1959, 23; see Chapter 2). This chapter explores which objects are included in graves for both the LNA and LNB, taking into account their life-histories as presented in Chapters 4-6, but also by briefly looking into some items that were systematically avoided in graves. As the latter were apparently not deemed appropriate in the context of the funeral, their function or meaning might thus reflect values that were to be avoided in graves.

9.2 Presenting the self in the Late Neolithic A

It is an easy assumption to make that the objects in a grave were the possessions of the individual they accompanied. A reconstruction drawing of the 'Amesbury archer', for example, shows a man wearing and holding the key finds retrieved from his grave. It is therefore not a big leap to think that these objects were part of how this person portrayed himself, that these were 'insignia' of a particular type of personhood or *front*. But was that really the case? I will argue in this section that the objects found in Dutch LNA graves were *not* part of a personal front. However, it will be demonstrated that there is a strong connection on a structural level between the grave set and the manner

in which *fronts* are composed. Therefore, as an analytical tool, Goffman's concept of *front* can be very helpful in understanding the choices made when selecting which objects were, and which were not to be included in the grave.

In the terms of Goffman (1959, 23-24; see Chapter 2) the *personal* front is composed of those elements that are an integral part of a performer. This includes facial expressions, body language and speech patterns, but also dress and paraphernalia such as insignia of rank (tokens of personal status). I argue that the objects found in LNA graves signal the importance of specific activities and relations, but are not part of a formal attire or paraphernalia worn by a person in a specific social context. Instead they seem to represent particular core values that were deemed important but were not necessarily representative of activities in daily life.

If the objects in a grave would have been part of a *personal* front, they would comprise objects that would be carried or worn on the body by a person in a specific social occasion. It is in that respect noteworthy that the most obvious type of object to qualify as something that is part of a personal front is notably absent in LNA graves: ornaments. With few exceptions, ornaments are absent in LNA graves. As such the LNA forms a strong contrast with both the earlier Funnel Beaker culture and later BB graves in which ornaments occurred frequently. It is only at the end of the LNA – during the AOO phase – that amber beads start occurring in graves.

Also notably absent are objects related to food processing. Querns or sickle blades were common in the Funnel Beaker culture megalithic tombs (Van Gijn 2010, 129), but absent in the LNA graves, the same applies to hunting gear. Although these would have been objects used in daily life, they were not used to represent persons in death.

The objects found in graves are not part of a particular type of dress, nor do they signal activities from the sphere of daily life. They do not portray the deceased as a farmer, hunter or herder, as someone who prepares food or grows crops. Nor do they represent warfare or violence in my opinion. Battle axes and French daggers are traditionally interpreted as weapons, but although they could be used as such, their wear patterns indicate a very different usage in daily life (see Chapter 5). French daggers do not show signs of a particular use, other than display, and seem to have been late substitutes of the northern flint blades which show no signs of usage at all. The 'battle axes' are heavily worn tools that were most likely used in clearing the land of tree trunks and cutting through roots (see Section 5.6). Moreover, if martiality would have been an important quality, it is curious why archery gear was one of the notably absent categories of objects in LNA graves.

I would interpret the objects in LNA graves as part of three connected core values: inter-group contacts, intra-group contacts and the technology involved in establishing and maintaining those contacts.

The beaker, delicately made and carefully decorated, was an object related to consumption, most likely drinking, probably of alcohol in the form of beer or mead. This is not an activity done in private and alone, this is something done in public with other members of the community or when entertaining guests visiting from afar (see Section 4.8). The beaker and its particular style of decoration showed the connectedness with other groups, most notably in northern Germany and Denmark, part of the CW culture, where virtually identical types of beakers were in use (see Section 4.3.2).

If the beaker was a symbol of receiving guests, the flint blades would represent the gifts they brought. Apart from the beaker, the northern flint blade is the most frequently occurring type of object in Dutch LNA graves. Although during the AOO these exotic flint blades could be substituted for French flint blades, these were nonetheless exotic flint blades, acquired from long-distance contacts. These blades are an echo of previous practices during the Funnel Beaker culture where ceremonial flint objects (axes) were obtained from Scandinavia (see Section 5.4). The connectedness between such flint axes and these blades is illustrated by the find of the Nieuw-Dordrecht hoard consisting of both a large set of these flint blades (at least eleven) and an unfinished Funnel Beaker culture-style ceremonial axe. None of the blades found in graves (or from the Nieuw-Dordrecht hoard for that matter) showed clear signs of wear indicating use as tools. Instead, like the Funnel Beaker culture ceremonial axes, they appear to have been mostly valued as objects of exchange, tokens of inter-group contacts, signalling a connectedness with people far and wide.

The axes and battle axes were tools instrumental in establishing and maintaining such contacts. These were the tools used for clearing the forest, removing tree trunks and preparing land for ploughing but perhaps more importantly, wheeled transport. Several graves contained multiple axes of either a different size or made of a different raw material (stone versus flint). These may have had different functions. While the bigger axes may have been primarily used in heavy duty tasks (cutting down trees for example), the smaller were perhaps used primarily in crafting activities, which included the production of carts[287], wheels and even wooden trackways crossing bog lands in order to connect different communities. We know wheels and trackways must have had a special significance in the Late Neolithic as evidenced by the finds of intentionally deposited wooden disc wheels (some even specially made for deposition) and apparently even 'ritual' trackways.[288] As discussed in Chapter 3, genetic research has shown a close relatedness between CW and peoples living in the Steppes, most notably the Yamnaya culture (originating in eastern Ukraine and adjacent parts of western Russia). Interestingly, remains of wheels (or perhaps even the carts themselves) are a regular occurrence in burials of the Yamnaya culture (and other related Steppe cultures), indicating the importance of wheeled transport and long-distance contact in the ideology of those people whose genetic and linguistic heritage ran through CW Europe (Allentoft *et al.* 2015; Anthony 2007, 362-363; Haak *et al.* 2015; also see Chapter 10).

The objects in LNA graves were carefully selected. Only specific types of objects were deemed appropriate. Deeply personal objects – such as ornaments – or items used in everyday life – such as objects related to food production or preparation – were avoided. Instead a selection was made of items related to establishing and maintaining social relations, both within a community and between communities in the CW influence sphere. Although these graves represent communally held and appreciated values, this did not mean they were devoid of any expression of individuality. For each grave was subjected to negotiations and different decisions were made, which may have reflected

287 Note how graves containing cushion stones are often interpreted as 'smith's graves' but never has a grave containing flint axes been labelled a 'cart builder's grave'.

288 The Nieuw-Dordrecht trackway led into the bog for several kilometers and ended abruptly in the middle, it was hardly worn and around the trackway several depositions were found including a disc wheel and an axe.

the deceased's particular and individual role in this context. One may have been praised for their excellent role in brewing beer and receiving guests, while another was known to be a particularly gifted cart-builder. Based on these attributes it was perhaps decided whether one was buried with a beaker, or a set of axes, or a battle axe and a beaker, or any other combination. In this way the grave did give expression to the deceased's particular individuality, but within the confines of a very particular range of socially accepted spheres of activities that were deemed appropriate to be represented in a grave.

9.3 Presenting the self in the Late Neolithic B

The Bell Beaker graves are structurally very similar to the CW/AOO graves. Not only in the sense of how barrows were constructed or graves and bodies were oriented, but also in the manner in which grave goods were selected. Although the 'Bell Beaker Package' constitutes a very particular set of objects, all made in a very particular pan-European style, no grave seems to have contained the 'full' package, nor does this seem to have been the goal (see Chapter 8). Instead, people were adorned with a *selection* of objects from this set, while clearly avoiding other items that were systematically kept out of graves.

For the LNB graves it is much harder to answer the question whether or not these items belonged to a particular *personal* front. In stark contrast to the LNA, the Bell Beaker graves contain various items that were worn on the body. These include amber ornaments worn as necklaces, on clothing and even on caps or bands on the head, copper and golden ornaments worn on the head, but also items like stone wristguards were worn on the arms. These were things that were worn on the body and were clearly meant to be seen and signal particular statuses or identities. Also the other objects were made in particular styles, where a lot of effort was spent in making things 'look good'. This for example includes the extensively decorated Veluvian bell beakers, but also the skilfully produced barbed-and-tanged arrowheads. Wear traces, moreover, indicate that these objects were not merely produced for the grave, most of these objects showed clear traces of wear, tear and repair. They were worn by the living before they became gifts to the dead. As such it seems they tick all the boxes when evaluating whether or not they were part of a *personal* front.

Especially, the objects that were worn on the body as part of a particular type of dress, in a particular style can be regarded as paraphernalia belonging to a particular type of *personal* front. However, while it may have been the case that these objects once were part of a *personal* front, in the context of the grave it becomes slightly more complicated. As was the case in the LNA, people were not buried with a full set of objects, each grave only contained a few items that were part of the set. For example, only half the graves in the LNB to contain a wristguard also contained arrowheads, and vice versa (hence not a full set of archery equipment). People could be buried with any number of objects and any possible combination of objects from the 'Bell Beaker Package'. Assuming that the Bell Beaker package represented a particular *personal* front, once worn in its entirety by an actual person – fully adorned with amber beads, copper tanged dagger, stone wristguard, a quiver with arrows and a bow, etc. – this is not how that person was buried. In most cased only a (small) selection of these items were included in the grave.

Hence, as was the case in the LNA, a burial was preceded by the mourners negotiating which objects to include in the grave. From a specific range of objects deemed appropriate a selection was made. Structurally this process was thus highly similar to the LNA practice of selecting grave goods. However, where in the LNA objects were selected associated with a specific range of activities (establishing and maintaining social contact) in the LNB the focus shifted instead to objects, many of which were worn or carried on the body and were perhaps once part of a specific front. The individual choices that were made in each grave gave expression to the individuality of each of the individual dead. However, the widespread nature of these objects and their style suggests these were not part of a specific idiosyncratic *personal* front, but rather a generally recognized and widely respected *social* front (Goffman 1959).

9.4 *Being* Bell Beaker

The realization that the LNB graves did not refer to idiosyncratic *personal* fronts but rather a wide-spread *social* front is crucial in interpreting these Bell Beaker graves. The first part of the previous paragraph may have given the impression that the Bell Beaker graves were very different from the LNA graves. Objects that were avoided in the LNA were suddenly common in the LNB and *vice versa*. Since there is so much overlap between the LNA and LNB when we look at the construction of barrows, orientation of graves and even the manner of selecting objects to be included in graves, it is difficult to understand why suddenly these seemingly contrasting choices were made. From a practice where personal ornaments and archery equipment were avoided and woodworking tools were commonplace, a transition was made to practices that celebrate personal ornaments and archery equipment and avoid woodworking tools. Did the meaning of a burial suddenly change entirely without affecting the funerary ritual on a structural level?

It is true that there is a significant shift in focus from particular activities highlighted in LNA graves to referencing a particular social front in the LNB. However, it must be stressed that the function of a particular widespread social front is in fact very similar to the activities highlighted in the LNA graves. If we see the LNA beakers, blades and axes as objects related to establishing and maintaining social ties, the Bell Beaker graves are suddenly a lot less different. As presented in Chapter 2, the purpose of widespread stereotypical fronts is to establish and maintain social relations with others. Even though at heart people can be very different, a widespread understanding and appreciation of a particular stereotypical front helps to facilitate social contact. It is important to remember that these grave goods are merely part of, or even just a proxy for such a front. This front would have consisted of much more, including body language, speech (or even (Indo-European?) language), a set of structured practices or gestures (*e.g.* handshakes, inviting one to come sit by one's fire, offering a drink), etc.

Japanese and Russian businessmen, for example, can meet each other while wearing business suits, greeting each other by extending and shaking hands and talking to each other in English. This front facilitates their interaction without forcing either of them to learn or adopt cultural norms or traditions particular to either Japan or Russia. They can meet on 'culturally neutral grounds' or in a 'social bubble' as it were (see Barth

1969, 15). In this context the LNB graves too may highlight the 'tools' associated with establishing and maintaining social contact.

If the Bell Beaker package was indeed a component in a widespread social front, employed throughout Europe to facilitate social interaction, the evidence should not be limited to the mere occurrence of these objects themselves. First of all (1) we would expect to see evidence of increased widespread interaction between social groups that adopted/recognized this front.[289] At the same time, however, (2) we would also expect to see cultural differences between those groups. A social front does not only help to facilitate contact between groups, it also helps to insulate them and allows them to retain their own cultural identities. As in the example of the Japanese and Russian businessmen, in the context of the meeting they employ a mutually shared and appreciated front, but this allowed them to retain their own cultural identities that lied underneath. The shared front insulates each of their cultures from confrontation and modification (Barth 1969, 15). For both these phenomena there is ample evidence, as shall be demonstrated below.

This also provides an explanation for the apparent paradox noted by Parker Pearson *et al.* (2019c). As part of the British Beaker People Project they performed a comprehensive study that included analyses of stable isotopes, grave goods and osteology. They note that although people were buried with items that are traditionally interpreted as weapons – arrowheads and daggers – they actually found little evidence for violence (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2019a, 433).[290] Moreover, the number of Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age casualties they found was actually proportionally smaller than for the previous Neolithic period. Both Vander Linden (2006b, 322) and Guilaine and Zammit (2005, 131) report the same pattern for southern France: evidence for violence is decreasing with the start of the BB complex (compared to previous periods).[291] This pattern is actually what should be expected if these items were indeed part of a front instead of tokens of martiality. A standardised and widely adopted front would help to guide and facilitate peaceful contact and thus help to actively prevent violence.

9.4.1 Increased social interaction

In the LNA all 'exotic' objects encountered in CW context are solely coming from other CW regions, most notably north-west Germany and southern Scandinavia (also see Chapter 3). This starts to change with the introduction of the AOO beaker when both ceramic styles and French daggers are indicative of new exchange contacts. With the start of the LNB, however, imports suddenly came from everywhere (see Fig. 9.1; see also Chapter 6). Gold and copper objects come in via both Atlantic Europe (including Britain) and Central Europe. Amber comes in from the north, either from the

289 This does not mean social interaction or exchange of goods and knowledge does not occur between groups that do not share social fronts, it only states that social fronts *help*. They would merely make interaction easier, more efficient and less threatening.

290 This study included a total of 370 individuals dating to 2500-1500 BCE, they found various pathologies that could have equally been the result of violence or accidents, in only three cases violence was attested (one female displayed a healed skull injury likely caused by a blow to the head with an axe; two males were shot dead with arrows) (Parker Pearson *et al.* (2019a, 433). Three cases out of 370 is less than 1 percent, and note that the female had a *healed* injury.

291 See Christensen (2004, 136-137) for a brief European-wide overview of Neolithic graves showing signs of violent deaths.

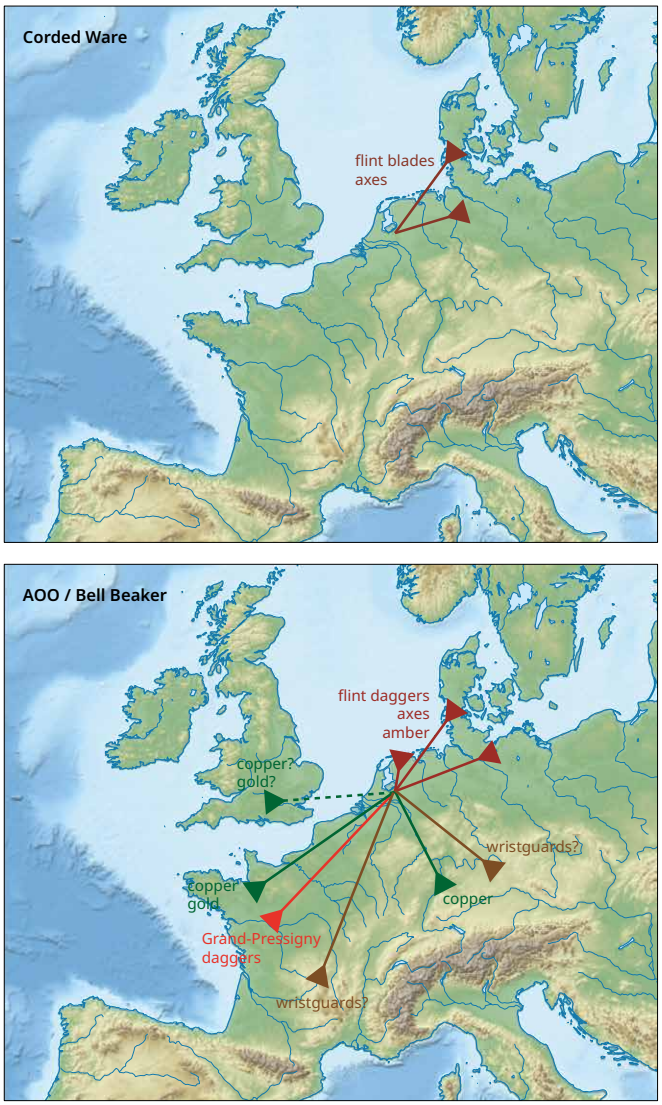

Fig. 9.1 Maps showing the origins of different 'exotic' objects occurring in the CW and AOO/BB (base map: Wikimedia Commons).

northern Netherlands or Baltic coasts. Well over a hundred Scandinavian flint daggers have been found in the Netherlands (see Van Gijn 2010, 189).[292] It is clear that the regions that adopted the Bell Beaker package did not only share burial customs, in fact, the origins of many of the components of this package can be physically traced to the various regions of 'Bell Beaker Europe'. As such, these items are not only indicative of a shared social front but also of the exchange that took place between the agents that adopted these fronts.

Recent genetic research yielded spectacular results indicating large scale and widespread human mobility. Samples from CW individuals indicate a strong genetic relation to Yamnaya populations from the Eurasian Steppe, north of the Black and Caspian seas. The similarities are so strong that researchers currently speak of 'mas-

292 Interestingly not in graves but often deposited in waterlogged locations.

sive-migration' with CW individuals from Central Europe tracing ~75% of their ancestry to the Yamnaya herders (Haak *et al.* 2015). The later Bell Beaker and Bronze Age samples, despite still showing a clear relation to the Steppe peoples, also show evidence of an Early Neolithic ancestry implying intermarriage between the local pre-existing population of Neolithic Europe and the Steppe migrant new-comers (Allentoft *et al.* 2015; Haak *et al.* 2015; Olalde *et al.* 2018).

This implies that during the first half of the 3rd millennium BCE, CW people with an extremely strong genetic link to the Yamnaya Steppe populations must have lived in Europe with only minimal genetic interaction with existing Neolithic populations. This matches with the observations presented in this thesis that in the CW culture all 'exotic' objects[293] came from adjacent CW territories and evidence of interaction/exchange with other regions/cultures is absent.[294]

This changes drastically with the adoption of the Bell Beaker social front when suddenly objects are exchanged over large distances throughout Europe. Genetic evidence moreover indicates that it is not just objects that were exchanged, as Bell Beaker individuals appear to have a genetic signature indicative of both a Steppe and Early Neolithic ancestry.[295] These aDNA results open interpretive doors that have long remained shut: can the beaker phenomenon be simply explained by massive migrations? The data certainly indicates that migrations took place and played an important role in the spread of peoples and cultures. Apart from the CW people (or their direct ancestors) who seem to have migrated to Europe from the Steppes, recent aDNA research indicates a missive transition in Britain during the second half of the 3rd millennium BCE. With the arrival of bell beakers in Britain, new research shows that all of the tested British individuals suddenly have Steppe ancestry, something that was absent among the pre-Bell Beaker Neolithic farmers. This suggests migration from the continent (particular the Lower Rhine area) resulting in a replacement of >90% of Britain's Neolithic gene pool (Olalde *et al.* 2018). Such data clearly indicate that (large-scale) migrations took place and must in some situations be linked to the spread of material culture, language and practices. Interestingly, the same research also clearly demonstrates that this Steppe DNA was virtually absent in Iberian populations, ruling out migration as the cause for the adoption of bell beakers in Spain and Portugal (Olalde *et al.* 2018). In later research it is reported that some Steppe ancestry individuals co-existed with local people in the Iberian Peninsula between 2500-2000 BCE, but it was not until after 2000 BCE that a significant influx of Steppe DNA (~40%; linked to incoming males with Steppe ancestry) took place (Olalde *et al.* 2019).

These new aDNA research projects are currently just getting started and the information they provided so far is nothing less than spectacular. With respect to the BB complex they clearly prove that, although migration took place, the BB package is not linked to a specific genetic group. In fact, it proves that beakers were adopted by

293 This mainly involves the finds from graves in the Netherlands, but the author is also not aware of any such finds from other CW contexts in the Netherlands (also see Chapter 3).

294 It must be stressed that the main research for this thesis was performed between 2008 and 2012. The patterns described in this thesis were thus established before the first of these new aDNA researches was published.

295 This is also corroborated by new – currently not yet published – extensive research on a dataset from southern Germany where over 150 individuals have been subjected to aDNA research (Philipp Stockhammer pers. comm. 2017). Part of this research is currently published, see Knipper *et al.* 2017.

genetically unrelated groups (Central and north-west European groups with Steppe ancestry, but also by Iberian groups without Steppe ancestry) but also coincided with the admixture of different groups (CW populations with Steppe ancestry and pre-existing local Neolithic farmers) resulting in a mixed European/Steppe ancestry in Bell Beaker individuals.

The influx of the Steppe migrants is also related to the spread of the Indo-European languages, the spread of carts, horses, wool sheep and alcoholic drinks (see Chapter 3). According to Anthony (2007), Proto-Indo-European (PIE), the mother language from which all other Indo-European languages derive, was spoken between 4500-2500 BCE. By 2500 BCE PIE was a dead language and all daughter languages had split away. This means that while the CW people may still have been speakers of a late variant of PIE, with the start of the Bell Beaker complex in the second half of the 3rd millennium BCE, PIE was already a dead language. Bell Beaker people therefore must probably have spoken PIE-daughter languages. In case of north-west Europe this would probably have been proto-Germanic (see Anthony 2007). The spread of the Bell Beaker package therefore seems to coincide with the spread and adoption of Indo-European, which may very well have been part of the non-material aspects of the Bell Beaker social front. A common – or at least linguistically related – language would have been an extremely powerful tool in establishing and maintaining long-distance (trade/exchange) contacts.

9.4.2 The differences that remain

Despite all the evidence of increased social contact, migration and exchange in the second half of the 3rd millennium BCE, there is also a lot a variability. In fact, this variability has always led to speculation on the nature of the Bell Beaker 'culture'. Although the bell beakers themselves (particularly the maritime type) and the associated 'package' can be extremely uniform and are found in graves throughout Europe, there is much variation in other forms of material culture. The non-beaker pottery, for example, often has a distinctive local style and is usually referred to as *Begleitkeramik* (see Fokkens and Nicolis 2012 for an entire volume dedicated to regional signatures in Bell Beaker Europe). It is, however, not merely the local pottery that is different. Although people may be adorned in graves with items from the 'Bell Beaker package', the actual graves are varied. They are locally, distinctively different and retain elements of previous local cultures (*e.g.* burial mounds in the Netherlands, rows of flat graves in Central Europe, the use of megalithic tombs in France; see Chapter 3). Likewise, subsistence strategies and settlement patterns are locally different and varied (see Vander Linden 2006b, 323).

From a traditional point of view – where pots equal people and archaeological 'cultures' were explained as the result of migrations – it is impossible to understand and explain all these local differences. How is it possible that you find nearly identical bell beakers throughout Europe while at the same time there are so many regional differences? This, however, is exactly what we would expect if the Bell Beaker package is interpreted as part of a widespread *social front*. As mentioned before, a social front actually helps to insulate local cultures during contact with *others*. In the context of their meeting, the Japanese and Russian businessmen (mentioned in the example above) behave according to strict norms and adopt a specific cross-culturally accepted front, but after they return home, both of them can resume their own ways and traditions.

This also helps to explain the 'popularity' and rapid spread of the 'Bell Beaker phenomenon'. Adopting this particular front in specific social settings (while with *others*, *outsiders*, *travellers*) had clear benefits as it enabled and facilitated social interaction and the exchange of goods and knowledge. However, this social front only needed to be employed in those contexts, allowing local communities to retain their own identities and ways of life that were rooted in their own local histories.

9.5 Conclusion

This chapter set out to investigate whether the objects found in graves should be interpreted as the physical remains of *personal fronts*. Similar to fronts, the objects in graves were carefully selected and arranged for the occasion, where some objects were deemed appropriate but others were avoided time and again.

For the LNA it was argued that the objects in graves were not part of a *personal front*. The objects selected for deposition in graves were not worn or employed by a person in specific social contexts. Instead these objects can all be interpreted as playing a role in establishing and maintaining social contacts. They include objects obtained from afar (flint blades), receiving and entertaining guests (beakers), and the objects needed to maintain those contacts (axes for clearing the land, building trackways and constructing carts). The focus of these contacts was directed towards other CW groups. Although the range of objects deemed appropriate for inclusion in graves was highly restricted, individual choices were made in each burial.

The second half of the 3rd millennium BCE is marked by the widespread adoption of a highly standardized way of personal representation. Although the objects found in Bell Beaker graves may be interpreted as referring to a stereotypical *social front*, they do not represent a *personal* front. As was the case in the LNA, for each grave a selection was made from the range of objects deemed appropriate to be included in a grave. At first glance the objects selected in the LNB seem to indicate a radical break with the LNA. Objects that were avoided in the LNA became common grave goods in the LNB and *vice versa*. This apparent 'break' is all the more curious as all the other aspects of the funerary ritual show so much cohesion and continued tradition.

However, if we accept that the objects in Bell Beaker graves refer to a widespread *social front*, this 'break' can be explained as merely a change in the material idiom used to give expression to the same values. A social front functions to facilitate social interaction and as such the values highlighted in LNB graves are not that different from LNA graves. While a wheeled cart may have been the most important 'tool' to maintain contact between different CW communities, the Bell Beaker social front was a 'tool' to establish and maintain contact on a much wider scale. This is evidenced, for example, by the highly diverse origins of exchanged items. A widespread adopted social front also insulates and protects local cultures, which explains the local variation and diversity between contemporary Bell Beaker communities, as well as the level of continuity in practice that can be observed between Bell Beaker communities and preceding 'cultures'.