5

The Mirror's Reflections and Refractions

The concept of separating and containing fortune has provided a window through which differing modes of relatedness can be discerned. Various things, viewed as parts that are retained to sustain the whole, command our attention to different domains of connectedness between groups or individuals. In photographic montages, individuals are dislodged to reveal multiple connections between groups of people. In contrast, parts hidden inside the chest have been extracted at moments of transformation and provide temporary vessels that gather fortune for the household and allow for future meetings between people who may be separated. When we focus on these pieces and attend to their containment, they seem to burst out from behind the static groups and draw attention to people's mobility. As people, and the places in which they live, shift throughout the year, the containment of these pieces at the household chest means that a corporal presence is not always necessary for maintaining relations (Telfer 1999). Although people may not visibly enact these different relations in one location or site, the containment of particular parts, inside the household chest, anticipates the potential for future meetings.

While people and animals move across the landscape and there is a sense of unbounded vastness, we have seen that the household chest is desired as a fixed, secure centre that reconstitutes itself in different places, gathering together different aspects of people's relations. Although contained inside the house, it is important to note that the household chest is not a stationary deposit. The whole chest complex moves, sometimes up to four times a year, and is altered according to people's positions in different seasonal places. Containment, here, has to be seen in a mobile sense, as people move the chest to inhabit different houses. Just like the fortune harnessed in the consecrated horse that is left to traverse the steppe, sometimes at great distance

from where people are located (see Chapter 2), so too does the chest move from encampment to encampment and activate those places with its pieces. Both container and contained, the household chest is a mobile and transforming site that extends people's spheres of influence beyond the confines of the house. Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995) draw attention to a similar point when they stress that houses both embody and generate different forms of sociality. In a similar way, the household chest is not simply a template from which people reproduce relations. It also generates these relations as new kinds of sociality are born out of its creation.

In this chapter I clarify what happens when people actually view and engage with the display. First, I examine the set of 'perspectives' present in the display as different modes of agency or personhood. I suggest that these perspectives are dependent on each other, but only ever appear independently. Secondly, I explore the role of mirrors in Mongolia and their capacity to reflect or deflect knowledge. Finally, we see how the perspectives viewed through the household chest can, through the technology of the mirror that stands at its centre, simultaneously reveal a whole. This is achieved when a person observes an exemplary figure through their own reflection cast back at them in the display's mirror. In conclusion, I suggest that the figure that is revealed through the chest should be viewed as an 'exemplary' person that encompasses multiple modalities (which span both official rhetoric and practical action), a position impossible for a living person to enact in life. In this sense, the household chest may be viewed as a topological entity that unites different modes of relatedness.

The figure and the ground

Let us return to the household chest, which stands on the ground at the back of a Buriad house with various objects contained inside and displayed on top. I should reiterate that because the house is generally composed of one room, the chest and its component parts are visible as soon as one enters. The way in which these objects are displayed can be taken as a template according to which people view the person. We have seen that photographic montages outwardly depict the person as embedded in a larger group with links to other groups, or networks. When we switch perspective to the hidden parts, relations that are usually delegated to the periphery momentarily become a different kind of centre (Wagner 1987). In order to understand how these two perspectives are dependent on each other, I divert briefly to examine the Rubin vase-profile illusion (Arnheim [1954] 2002).

The Rubin vase-profile illusion, developed in 1915 by the psychologist Edgar Rubin, is an image with which most of us are familiar. In this image, we see either two black profiles facing each other, in front of a white background, or a white vase on a black background. Rubin developed this image to illustrate the dynamic nature of subtle perceptual processes. Because one of the contours of the image is shared with the other, it is difficult to perceive both images simultaneously. Instead, our vision fluctuates between the vase and the profiles. As one image becomes the background, the other becomes the foreground and vice versa. The ability to see one image, and then the other, but not the two simultaneously is referred to as 'contour rivalry' (that is, we shift attention between the shape and the contour). The reversal of images that the observer perceives in the vase-profile illusion is due to their individual tendency towards biasing either the shapes or contours, making one interpretation stronger than the other. Seeing one image over another also lies in the power of the image to convince your eye to rest on it.

With regard to the chest, we have seen that things displayed on top of or inside the chest allow us to switch perspectives between different modes of relatedness. When first viewed, agnatic connections are foregrounded on top of the chest. The actual chest, as well as its contents, serves as a physical as well as a relational background for these relations. When we switch perspective to the parts contained inside the chest, however, we see that people transform and separate so that agnatic relations can continue and grow. As in the Rubin figure-ground reversal, people appear to alternate between a set of relational perspectives, or forms of subjectivity. These may be characterized as the contained, rooted, genealogical mode, and the separated, rhizomic mode, generated through blood and umbilical relations (Deleuze and Guattari 1999). Like the figure-ground reversal, these modalities are internally dependent on each other. One modality may be viewed as the shadow, support, or ground upon which the other is figured, and it is people who move between them.[1] These parallel modalities are not collapsible into some wider gestalt or whole, but must be kept separate and distinct from each other precisely because it is the movement between them that creates the distinctions needed when enacting particular kinds of social relationships (see also Willerslev 2007). By this I mean that the one perspective (or figure) can only appear in relation to its counterpart (or ground).

[1] In a similar way, I have suggested that an object may switch between being the carrier of some potent share of fortune and a representational medium through which people inscribe individual meanings and memories.

In Figure 5.1, we see that the chest and the various components contained inside it are the background by which the outer surface of the chest is made visible and vice versa, with the arrow pointing along the direction of the display's contour rivalry.

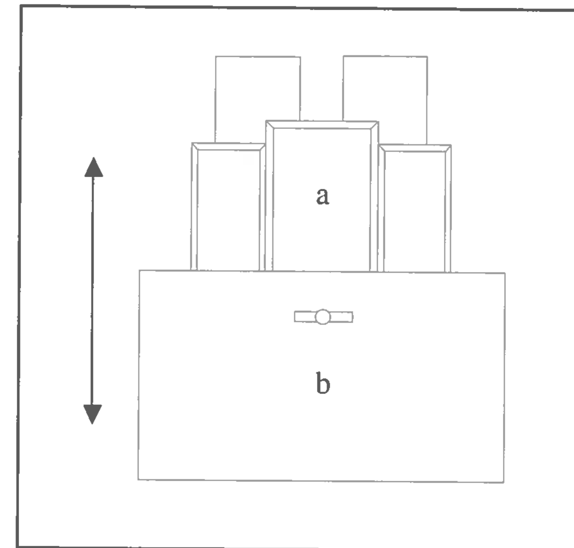

Figure 5.1 Contour rivalry.
(a) Figure/foreground/outer surface of chest.
(b) Ground/background/concealed pieces in the chest.

Because the movement of people and place is an essential aspect of the way in which people relate, analysis of the household chest has shown that relations based on affinity, separation, and difference are the necessary, yet invisible, background that supports the visibly foregrounded relations based on shared bone, containment, and sameness. So far, I have, rather crudely, referred to this as a tension between concealed 'pieces' or 'affinity' and revealed 'networks' or 'consanguinity'. It is important to note, however, that these are not always distinct gendered differences. As we have seen, infants, regardless of gender, occupy an interstitial position at the beginning of their lives among their human kin. In turn, women are a part of the montage, and thus also a part of a wider network of people on whom one draws for support. And relations based on containment are not only confined to agnates. They also include school friends, work colleagues, and people from the same place. In this sense, these distinctions include a wider set of people than was at first apparent, but pivot around a similar set of motifs.

Barlow and Lipset's (1997) work on the production and use of outrigger canoes among the Murik, a people living along the Sepik River in Papua New Guinea, appears at first sight to point to a similar idea of different relational perspectives. Murik outrigger canoes 'play a crucial role in the enactment of an aesthetic metaphor of social reproduction' (Barlow and Lipset 1997: 9). The term 'aesthetic metaphor' refers, in this case, to people's relations to each other via the creation and use of various things. Canoes allow men to extend their identities as they use the vessels to travel far out to sea and engage in trade relations. In contrast, women remain in place and protect the vessel from shipwreck as they ensure its safe passage. They see the finished canoe, and the goods that it brings back through the men's voyages, as products of their own labour. These male and female contributions to the production and use of the canoe are referred to by Barlow and Lipset (1997) as 'complementary rejoinders'. Their analysis scales outward. A focus on the gendered perspectives of the canoe also points to the mutually constitutive relationship between canoes and persons. The relations that go into making the canoe replicate relations needed for the making of a person. Here, the production of the Murik canoe 'served as a means of constructing dialogue about the meaning of personhood [and vice versa]', whereby 'canoes and persons were reciprocal metaphors of and for each other' (Barlow and Lipset 1997: 31). Canoes, like people, contain male and female components which allow for their creation and use.

This point echoes ideas about the household chest that I have presented so far. The household chest is neither male nor female, consanguineal nor affinal, container nor piece. Instead, both of these elements are needed to bring one or the other to the fore. In turn, the relations that go into the making of the household chest resonate with those that go into the making of the person. We may recall that local concepts of the person hold that people are made from the coming together of bone (from the male side) and blood/flesh (from the female side). Together, these are housed in a single body so that a person encompasses both male and female attributes (Strathern [1988] 1990: 122). Rather than see these attributes as complementary rejoinders which coincide to make a wider whole, which is in itself a kind of structural-functionalism, I suggest that these aspects, or modes of agency, are brought into view in different interactions or at different life stages, which are not necessarily indexed to the idea of an ordered linearity, such as age. In turn, in the making of the household chest, certain social forms are made to appear. While the chest may be grasped or apprehended as a person, the 'object of objectification is also [the] social relations' that go into making the chest into a site (Strathern 1999: 15). This is what I referred

to previously as a 'moral aesthetic' (see Chapter 2). The chest's alternating form, according to different seasonal encampments, reflects the various social relations that are enacted at different places. In saying this, I aim to stress that the chest complex is both a model of and a model for the creation of these different modalities.

It should be clear that the chest brings together elements that are not always enacted in shared space. Not unlike the eclectic elements that go into the formation of an *ovoo*, it juxtaposes multiple aspects of the person in a single site. The effect of these fragmented pieces gathered at a single site is similar to the effect created through the cinematic medium of montage. Montage is the technical juxtaposition of images in the production and editing of film, most notably pioneered by Eisenstein in the 1920s. Here, the juxtaposition of different images, or filmic 'cuts', allows for a new overall perspective to be generated from the intersection of these fragments (see also Willerslev and Ulturgasheva 2007; Marcus 1994; Deleuze 2003: 64–5; see also Gleizes and Metzinger 1913). In a similar way, the chest appears to bring together a hybrid of different elements. Each part of the display points to different modalities of the person, shared in common by men and women, but expressed in different modes. In this sense, the chest can be said to construct a dialogue about the multiple aspects of personhood. Taking my cue from these ideas, I would like to push the analysis beyond the idea of alternating constituent perspectives, or the juxtaposition of fragments. I suggest instead that, at certain moments, these fragmentary perspectives can be perceived simultaneously. While each aspect of the display mirrors a different way of tracing relations, together they form an ensemble of the different relations that make a person.

The triptych mirror

We may recall that at the centre of the chest stands a mirror (*tol'*). The triptych mirror is a fairly new introduction to Buriad households. It probably first appeared in the early 1960s, during Mongolia's 'Cultural Revolution' (*soyolyn huv'sgal*)—a period when homes were encouraged to be 'modern', in the Soviet sense of the word, with sheets on beds, regular dusting and sweeping, and separate cloths dedicated to the cleaning of cups and pots in hot water. Today, these mirrors form part of a woman's dowry. Not having been able to bring much dowry at marriage, Delgermaa received a mirror as a gift from Renchin's work colleagues in the 1970s, when he worked as a woodwork teacher at the local school. Prior to the availability of such

mirrors, people tended to have only very small hand-held mirrors, or pieces of mirrored glass which they kept away from view. The presence of the large mirror on the household chest stands for a certain idea of modernity and opulence.

When asked about the position of the mirror, people frequently emphasized that it is placed near to the photographic montage, behind treasured objects, and on the chest's surface so that the richness of these images may be replicated through the mirror into the household (see also Humphrey 2007). In this location, face creams, radios, consecrated horse statues, glimmering butter lamps, and lipsticks are all reflected in the mirror and appear to have doubled. Like the multiple photographs in the montage, the mirror outwardly projects this multiplicity to visitors. At certain times of the day, when in a *ger* (a felt tent), the light through the smoke hole may also catch the mirror and illuminate the household interior, drawing people towards the photographic montages that surround it. The mirror both duplicates prized possessions that stand in front of it and casts light into the house. Tümendelger, a local poet and shaman who lived in the district centre but spent many years travelling the country reciting poetry, explained that the mirror also has other capacities, beyond that of simply replicating. Its presence in the house is valued because it has the capacity to 'accumulate' (*ürjih*) fortune. The subtle difference between doubling, in the sense of reflection, and an actual increase of fortune is important. The reflections of objects, cast through the mirror, are held to gather further fortune through them.[2]

It was not simply the mirror's positive capacity to gather that Tümendelger wanted to stress. In other instances, he warned, the mirror could also accumulate less desirable things, sometimes without you knowing or wanting it to. The mirror's capacity to gather things into the house appears to be double-edged. Its capacity to gather makes the mirror a difficult and problematic object to have in the household. At times I noticed that household mirrors were covered or turned to face the wall. When there was a full moon, people placed a cloth over the mirror to ensure that the round image of the moon, which enters through the smoke hole (*toono*) at the centre top of the house, did not appear in the mirror and illuminate the path for bad spirits. In general, people warned me not to look in the mirror at night (or into a damaged mirror) because the image that was revealed would be distorted.

[2] A similar point is made by Chabros (1987: 268) who suggests that Mongolian household decorations symbolizing good fortune do not just represent but actually bring good fortune to the household.

One afternoon, when I was visiting Jargal, Delgermaa's youngest sister-in-law, who lives just a short walk from their summer pasture (although their dogs mean that one has to take a detour to avoid them), a loud thunderstorm broke and it began to rain. Jargal quickly covered her mirror with a large sheet. As she did so, she explained in passing that this would prevent lightning from striking the house. While we sat waiting for the rain to stop, eating freshly baked soda bread with sour cream and blueberry jam, she cited further occasions when one had to engage with the mirror in a particular way and noted them down for me on a torn sheet of paper:

- You must not look in the mirror at night when others are sleeping.
- When there is thunder and lightning, you should cover the mirror or turn it around.
- Small children should not look in the mirror because they may see their reflected image as that of a stranger and have bad dreams.
- You should not sell old mirrors as good and bad images may be attached to them and you could pass these on to the next owner. Instead, the mirror should be destroyed.
- If you really do not want to meet someone again, you can give them a mirror.

With these warnings in mind, I began noticing that people avoided actually looking at themselves for any length of time in the mirror (see also Delaplace 2007: 318). Often, someone would silently pass me a small hand-held mirror, tucked away in the cooking area, if they saw that I was about to catch a glimpse of myself in its reflection. The reason people didn't look in the mirror very often, Tümendelger explained, was that reflections in mirrors are not always replications. It seemed as though the household's mirror was valued because it could multiply and gather things, but the kind of reflections that could be cast through it had to be managed carefully.

Focus on ideas about mirrors illustrates a wider sense that people often appeared to have very firm opinions about how one should engage with various objects (Chapter 2). There were rules that must be followed. Yet, in relation to Jargal's list, we see that it is rare for people to elaborate why these rules exist. When people did elaborate, they often said that they 'had heard' (*sonsson*) of a particular reason, or 'people say' (*hümüüs yar'dag*) that this is why we do this. As Humphrey (2007) has noted, an integrated single mythical cosmological system, or world-view, as described by, for example, Viveiros de Castro (1992, 1998) for Amazonia, can hardly be said to exist among the Mongols owing to the various diverse inputs into Mongolian culture. As highlighted in Chapter 2, it may be that people do not elaborate

on why certain acts are performed because the focus on meaning is not what is important. Instead, the intentions are given in the very actions themselves. That is, the meanings are inherent in the actions and point to a moral or right way of doing things. This allows people to suspend their belief as to *why* certain acts are performed and focus instead on *how* certain acts should be carried out, without having to commit to any singular narrative of causation. In spite of this general propensity to suspend one's motivation or belief, there are a range of possible reasons why people might hold that the mirror's capacity is something which should be tended to in particular ways.

Reflections transfigured

In Mongolian, the word 'mirror' (*tol'*) also means dictionary, lexicon, encyclopaedia, or store of all knowledge (Hangin with Krueger 1986: 499; Humphrey 2007). Looking into a mirror (*tol'doh*) implies an act of examining and reviewing (Hangin with Krueger 1986: 499). While also meaning 'reflection', it includes the idea 'to hit upon or strike a target', indicating 'suddenness'. A more esoteric meaning is the 'completion of an action' (*tolind tusah*) (Hangin with Krueger 1986: 517). In this broader sense, looking in the mirror is a revelatory action that opens up normal sight and makes visible a sudden completeness that is not normally perceptible to the human eye (Melchior-Bonnet 2002: 223).[3] In relation to this, Tümendelger explained that people may see their face replicated in the mirror, 'but they may also see *other* things about themselves'. Indeed, we may recall the prohibition on young children looking in mirrors in case they are scared by the image that they see.

While the mirror can reveal things that are otherwise not visible or known, it can also capture and 'hold on to' the reflection cast through it. Tümendelger warned that 'a person visiting a family may catch a glimpse of themselves in the mirror' and this could be dangerous. 'The mirror can contain a part of you and reveal this later on.'[4] Lowering his voice, he talked

[3] In Bhutan, among Buddhist monks, the mirror is sometimes used in empowerment rituals to symbolize the open expanse of reality, free from fixation and conceptual elaboration, in which the diversity of existence is nonetheless reflected spontaneously. Here, a mirror is shown as a reminder of reality, that is, the coalescence of emptiness and appearance (pers. comm. Karma Phuntsho).

[4] In the Tibetan Book of the Dead, a funerary text used by Tibetan Buddhists, the Lord of Death consults 'the *mirror* of Karma' where a person's good and bad acts throughout life are recorded (Evans-Wentz 2000).

further about this fear of being captured or trapped, and added: 'I have heard that forensic experts sometimes take photographs of mirrors, in case the image of the perpetrator is left on its surface.' If a part of you can be left behind, buried in the glass of the mirror, you may begin to feel ill, but equally, Tümendelger went on to explain, the people whose mirror you looked into may do something bad to that part of you and cause you suffering. The capacity of the mirror to capture or trap a piece of you means that mirrors in shamanic households must be covered or removed when a shaman evokes ancestral spirits. The mirror could be confusing for them; it could trap them and cause them harm. Only the small shamanic mirror, worn around the neck of the shaman, can be present at such occasions. This mirror protects the shaman from dangerous things and 'shields' (*yümnaas hamgaalah*) him, 'blocking' (*haah*) him from 'curses' (*haraal*) and other 'bad things' (*muu yüm*).

Although different mirrors—the shaman's round metallic mirror, the shard of glass mirror kept away from general view, and the triptych mirror on display—appear to have subtly different capacities, they are all attributed with a shared kind of agency. Because of their ability to hold on to parts of people in their absence and reveal what is normally invisible to the human eye, they must be tended to in certain ways. This is especially the case when someone has recently died. Mirrors are considered dangerous at this time because they can capture the 'soul' (*süns*) of the deceased, preventing it from finding a suitable body to inhabit. 'When someone dies', Oyunaa the diviner explained to me one afternoon as we were discussing the unexpected and tragic death of her young niece, 'we close the mirror, or cover it, as the dead person's soul may stay, be captured, take shelter, hide, or be attached (*horgodoh*) to the mirror.'[5] The mirror's capacity to capture some part of a person was seen as a negative capacity. Yet, at other times, people used this feature of the mirror to ensure that a particularly problematic or 'weak' soul was not born again. For families with frequent infant mortalities, where the rebirth of a single soul is said to be the cause of a series of infant deaths, Oyunaa explained, 'We put a mirror inside the coffin of the dead child. The mirror "deceives" (*huurah*) the baby's soul and traps it in the coffin.' Trapping these difficult souls and removing the possibility of rebirth, the presence of the mirror contains the soul in the ground.

The idea that objects can abduct some part of us is not, of course, confined to Buriad perception of mirrors. Similar kinds of anxiety concern

[5] The term '*horgodoh*' (to be attached to a place and not willing to leave) is used to refer to a variety of vessels that may carry or capture some part of you.

the extension and distribution of the body beyond acceptable boundaries of the human form, such as current concerns over the use of DNA databases, the growing of stem cells, and the use of genetic sampling to determine a person's future health. Wright's (2004) description of early nineteenth-century North American and European reactions to photographs known as daguerreotypes (a kind of photograph produced without a negative/positive process) also points to similar concerns. These images were referred to as 'mirrors with memory', 'shadows', and 'captured souls' (Wright 2004: 77). Wright explains that daguerreotypes were considered '"living pictures" which were treated as detached portions of people and equated with their souls or spirits' (Wright 2004: 77).[6] Precisely because of their ability to capture something of the person, people were scared of having their photographs taken. These ideas point to a more general view: that components of the person are somehow partible, and 'capable of being transferred to certain objects' (Wright 2004: 78). In a similar way, Jargal explained, the capacity of the mirror to reveal and capture means that it is 'like an eye' (*nüd shig*). Glancing at her own rather dusty mirror, she explained, 'It must be regularly cleaned because the mirror may "see" bad things. These should not linger and accumulate on its surface as the mirror may redirect these back in the house.'

What does it mean that the mirror is assigned the capacity of a particular kind of looking? Eyes, of course, are akin to mirrors in that they both gather in and cast out (Melchior-Bonnet 2002). The mirror appears as a powerful object because, in its ability to gather in and reflect outwardly what it sees, it has the capacity to reveal more than what is normally visible. At times this could be positive, increasing fortune in the home, but it could also suddenly reveal things that were not known through normal human perception. It appears that mirrors are capable of a very possessive gaze; they capture or trap something of what they see and retain it. In this sense the mirror is capable of separating, dislocating, and holding things back that should be kept together. The capacity of the mirror to gather and release, while at the same time dislodge aspects of people, is a tension that has been noted by other anthropologists working in Mongolia (Humphrey with Onon 1996; Humphrey 2007; Heissig 1980).

In shamanic performance, for example, the small round metallic mirror worn around the neck of the shaman tends to be used in two distinct ways. Humphrey with Onon (1996) have noted that the mirror has the double

[6] Wright (2004: 77) also notes that '[i]n Europe and North America in the mid-1880s [people covered] mirrors in the house of the deceased so that they would not attract their soul and become hunted objects.'

capacity 'to both gather in and deflect at the same time' (Humphrey with Onon 1996: 226). On the one hand, the mirror is used as a shield to deflect, or cast aside, evil spirits. When used for divination, vodka is poured on the mirror to confirm links of causation and reveal images of various agents who may have caused people harm (Swancutt 2006). Here, the mirror 'encourages a progression of thoughts: looking at, looking into, and looking through' (Humphrey 2007: 175). When spiritually 'enlivened' (*amiluulah*), or 'given life' through a rite, the shaman's mirror acquires a certain power (*hüch*). As objects, these mirrors become a kind of 'super-actant' in their own right, having the ability to act on things from multiple perspectives (Humphrey 2007: 173).[7]

Mirrors, I have suggested, are held to *reveal* things that are otherwise invisible to the human eye, and to open people's vision. They also *deflect* and cast aside things that may be harmful. In this double capacity, the mirror is 'an instrument not only of containment and absorption but [is] also [used] for breaking out of the world into another state which reflect[s] the hitherto unseen truth.' (Humphrey with Onon 1996: 226).[8] The household mirror gathers and contains fortune in the household, but can also 'break out' of normal scopic regimes and reveal aspects of the world not readily visible to the human eye and to perception. Because mirrors make things brutally visible, allowing nothing to hide, people are careful about the images that are cast through it. The mirror here points to the capacity of a material object to act 'as a jumping-off point for human ... reflection' (Humphrey 2005: 43).

[7] In Tibet, mirror-divinations among female oracles allow the oracle to see into other dimensions and to discover the hidden aspects of a situation (Diemberger 2005: 134). Interestingly, children in Tibet are used for divinations with mirrors by Buddhist monks (de Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1993: 463–6; Orofino 1994: 612–15). De Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993: 463–6), for instance, mentions three kinds of mirror-divination performed in Tibet. They involve a young child preferably under eight years of age, gazing into a mirror to see apparitions which they then describe to the priest. Orofino (1994: 612–15) similarly notes that only a young person is able to 'see' the past, present, and future in the mirror. The idea that a child may see things in the mirror that others cannot is also present in Mongolia. We may recall that children should not look into the mirror in case they see their image transformed into something else, and earlier, in Chapter 4, the diviner suggested that young children can see beyond the physical world. In these instances, children are considered to have the ability, not unlike an oracle or shaman, to see things differently from lay people.

[8] Heissig (1980) notes that '[t]hese mirrors have a multiple function. In the first place, the mirrors are meant to frighten evil powers and spirits. Phrases in the shamanistic prayers and invocations refer to this task, as for example "O my mirror, offered by my mother-sister, red and decorated with dragons, O oppressor of infant demons" ... A further symbolic function of the shamanistic is that it reflects everything, inside and outside, including the most secret thoughts' (Heissig 1980: 19).

Figure 5.2 Shaman with mirror deflecting lines of sight.

Various perspectives are refracted, diverted, and scattered in different directions through the mirror as people reflect on the images cast through its form.

The mirror in the display

What are the implications of placing this object in the centre of the display? When standing in front of the chest, or glancing at it from the side, a viewer might see a reflection of themselves, through the mirror, looking back at them. Through this mirror reversal, looking at the display allows us simultaneously to gaze at ourselves, while at the same time construct a figure that

stares back at us with our own eyes.[9] The mirror holds the viewer and reflects an image of him/herself through its surface. Taking into account the capacities attributed to this object, the image that is reflected through the mirror is not always an exact replication of the viewer; it is transformed. For a start, the viewer sees his or her image surrounded by the photographs in the montage and the ancestral portraits above. In this sense, the viewer becomes situated as a part of the overall display rather than a separate entity. The mirror appears to structure our vision so that a very particular image of ourselves becomes visible. At the same time, keeping in mind Tümendelger's suggestion that mirrors are also held to reveal more of the person than is normally visible, the viewer may also be drawn to look, and be held in the image that is revealed, only to find that they become the object of a powerful gaze thrown back at them. In this sense, looking at the display always involves making ourselves visible in a particular form (Sobchack 1992: 51). The chest can be said to structure our vision, gathering together the different aspects of the person into a single site, allowing us to draw out the different relations through our gaze (Strathern 1994).

While viewing each of the separate parts has prompted an analysis that allows for different reflections of the person, viewing the display in full, and seeing oneself as an image made through it, makes all of these relations visible at once. If we bring in the perspective of an observer, who might see a person looking at themselves through the display, the chest can be said to reveal a person as constructed from all the parts. While the viewer's gaze simultaneously looks at and is looked back at, the observer and the viewer see a figure constructed from all the parts, so that a person appears as the complex of a number of different agencies and attributes. Here, the chest is foregrounded (or animated) as a figure owing to the viewer's gaze which acts as a necessary background. In saying this, I must stress that I am not proposing that the concealed parts are suddenly physically revealed when people look at themselves through the chest. Rather, through a person's reflection, the chest, as a whole, becomes a site that foregrounds agnatic relations as a result of the support (or background) of those relations based on movement and transformation. In this instant, the invisible, hidden parts

[9] A similar shift in perspective can be noted in Levin (1988). Drawing on the work of Jean Paris, Levin examines the history of Western painting as a transformation of human vision whereby the viewer is gradually able to gaze at the painting as an object. In Byzantine mosaics the viewer is always an object being looked at by the gods. In contrast, in Renaissance art, due to the gazes in the paintings being cast in different directions, the viewer is separated from the scene and is afforded the possibility of looking at the painting as an object from a distance (cf. Reed 1999).

generated through separation act as the contour that supports the possibility for the visible parts that constitute the group relations that are foregrounded. In turn, the viewer's gaze is needed as a background to make the chest visible as a potential person. When viewing the display in full, a person is revealed as constituted by all of these things. Each of the things that I have focused on—the fortune bag, the photographic montages, the objects on the chest's surface, the embroideries, the photograph albums, the pieces of umbilical cords, and tufts of hair—all point to different aspects of people's relations at different moments in time. When viewing oneself through the display, the parts appear together to form a site that reveals a person made possible through each of them.

At the beginning of Chapter 3, I suggested that the creation of kinship in Mongolia is achieved through the separation of bodies. The separating, merging, and remaking of bodies has been an underlying theme throughout the discussion. While much attention has been given to the necessity of separating people through the containment of parts, by viewing the display in full and seeing a person through it, what flashes into view as one glances at oneself at the centre of this display is a calling into being of the person who views it. Here, reflection acts as a kind of separation. Gazing at oneself through the display generates the appearance of a new kind of singularity. Viveiros de Castro (2009), in a chapter concerning, among other things, Piro concepts of the person, argues that the production of (consanguineal) relatives requires the intervention of (potential affine) non-relatives, and this can only mean the counter-invention of some relatives as non-relatives (2009: 242). Among the Piro, in Peruvian Amazonia, what distinguishes consanguineal relatives from affinal relatives are their bodily differences. 'If the body is the site of difference, then a difference is required in order to make bodies by means of other bodies' (Viveiros de Castro 2009: 242). Kinship is thus in a state of reciprocal dependence whereby non-relatives (affines) are needed to make relatives (consanguines) and vice versa. The discussion concerning the two constitutive perspectives (or the visible and the hidden) resonates with this point. In turn, the figure that is revealed through the display establishes a similar type of perspectival difference. As a person is revealed through the display, the chest becomes the site and instrument of this bodily differentiation. In this sense, perception, or vision of self, is dependent on this instant of reciprocal vision, whereby the chest is revealed as a figure that can be looked at, in order to be able to see our self. It should be clear that I am referring not to the varied parts but to the process of reflecting on an image of oneself that is produced through the chest (Figure 5.3).

One important result of experiencing this duality of looking while being

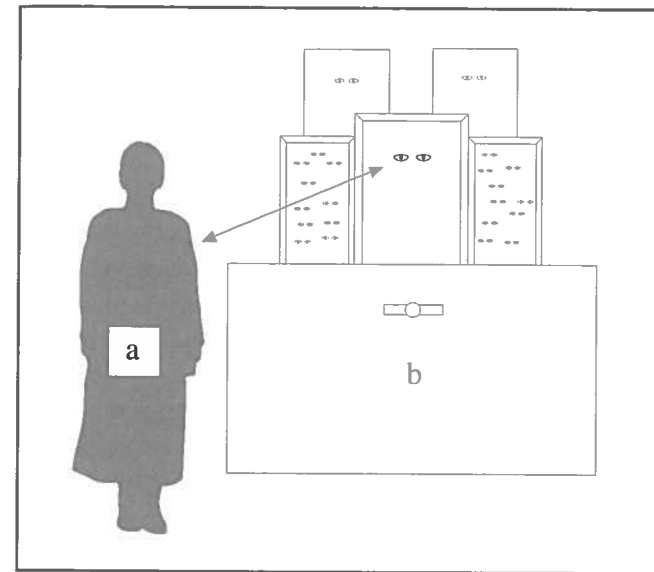

Figure 5.3 Process of reflection.
(a) Background/affine/piece (person looking).
(b) Foreground/consanguine/container (person composed of several parts).

looked back at is that the person we encounter, in the context of the mirror, is not a person as an exact replication of our self. Rather, it reveals what we may call an 'exemplary' person that can only be seen through an act that separates the viewer from their gaze.[10] Through this, the chest, not unlike the mirror discussed earlier, transfigures and refracts the visible world, rather than merely duplicating it. It should be noted that I use the term 'exemplary' because the figure revealed through the chest is impossible for a living person, who, although a mother, daughter-in-law, and sister, etc., cannot visibly enact all these relations at a single moment in time.

Indeed, we may recall that looking into a mirror also points to the idea of suddenness or the completion of an action. The idea that the mirror can reveal aspects of yourself that are not normally visible resonates with the idea that people suddenly see a constellation of relations that make a person when

[10] For a similar practice see Willerslev (2204: 639): 'Under normal conditions, a person's body is not presented to him as an object in the world, a thing that he can encounter or straightforwardly observe. Rather, it is an object only from the perspective of another, in the same way as another's body is an object from the perspective of ego.' See also Humphrey with Onon (1996: 225): 'What you see in the mirror is yourself and not-yourself. It is a depersonalised, two-dimensional, image which you do not spontaneously know, but have to recognise.'

they look at the display. This is a 'completing action' in that, when the chest is foregrounded as a figure as a result of a person's gaze, it momentarily draws these aspects or modalities together in a singular form. In this sense, we might say that a person 'is supplied with a satisfyingly unified image of selfhood by identifying with an object which reflects this image back to it' (Eagleton 2005: 150). Here, the human subject becomes an object to itself as '[t]he eye-mirror achieves both fusion and separation, identity and difference' (Melchior-Bonnet 2002: 230). This image of an 'exemplary' person (or a coherent subject) idealizes the subject's real position, displaying, in a sense, everything at once. While people may house these multiple modalities internally, through particular interactions with others, they are only activated in singular forms. Viewing oneself through the chest's mirror thus presents an image of oneself as a multiple kind of person, something which one cannot sustain in life. This is a recursive way of viewing oneself. Borrowing your own gaze, the figure that is presented to you through the chest is a transfigured and altered form.

It is important to stress that the household chest does not attempt to imitate a human person or body. Rather it renders visible a chain of heterogeneous affinities and connections through its form. The figure that is revealed can be said to crystallize some of the multiple relations that are a part of Buriad personhood. The politics of vision is here a private and momentary, almost flickering experience, rather than a gaze that attempts to dominate. While the chest as a whole can be seen as a network 'produced out of alliances between human and non-human entities' (Strathern 1996: 520), people have to engage in forms of 'cutting' that halt these connections (Bell 2001). Looking in the mirror placed on the chest, and recognizing one's difference from it, may be viewed as one such way of cutting and halting its extended form. The mirror can be said to 'cut' the network of human–non-human assemblage and separate the person from the figure that appears in the display (Strathern 1996).

The personhood of the household chest

It should be clear that because mirrors in Mongolia are assigned the capacity of revealing things that are not normally visible, the perspective afforded through the chest is not a perspective that a living person can embody. I have suggested that when a person looks through the mirror at the centre of the display an exemplary person is revealed. Not unlike the shaman discussed by Humphrey with Onon (1996: 226–7), the image that appears through the chest is one that catches fragmented and very different aspects of the person (or modes of personhood) and reveals a unity of form to the viewer. It is important to emphasize, however, that the import of vision does not have to rest solely on the presence of a mirror at the centre of the display. Elkins (1996), in a fascinating book on the nature of seeing, explores relationships established between objects and observers. He examines the ways in which observers are altered by objects, or fused with them, through acts of seeing. His point is similar to that which I have made about the mirror's capacity to reveal an exemplary person to the viewer. Through looking at the display, the chest and the observer merge into an in-between state, lost in the field of vision. In such a way, vision is not a passive activity involving a discrete viewing subject and a viewed object: 'seeing alters the thing that is seen and transforms the seer' (Elkins 1996: 11–12). Seen in this light, it is not just the mirror that reflects or deflects; other things may also send back our sight. We have seen, for example, that embroideries alter the way that visitors may perceive relations in a household and photographic montages act as 'shields of eyes' that gaze down on viewers, projecting a household's networks and connections. In these instances, the viewer is both the subject looking at the object and also an object affected by the gaze of the thing they are looking at.

We may recall Tümendelger's and Oyunaa's concerns that parts of people may sometimes be captured and held in the glass of the mirror. It is because of this that when a visitor to the chest views it and sees him- or herself in the reflection of the mirror they may, momentarily, become a part of that complex and hence a part of the network that they see. In Chapter 3, I noted that when someone's photograph is placed in a montage, they are also being placed in a relationship of obligation to those who display the image. Even though they may be absent, a part of them remains connected to these people. At the same time, for those who live with this image, they are also placed under the objectifying gaze of the person in the photograph. The same could be said for the visitor to a household who lets their reflection be cast through the mirror; they may unwittingly leave a part of themself behind. This 'relationality of image and beholder' (Mitchell 2005: 49) permeates different objects in and around the household, so that it is at times impossible to settle on who is looking at or possessing whom. Assigned lines of vision may be reciprocated, so that what you look at as an object may also make you an object of its gaze. In this sense, viewers of the chest complex are just as much subjects viewing objects, as they are objects subjected to the gaze of the objects in the display. To frame this in a Gellian way (Gell

1998), we may say that these objects are a technology that enmeshes patients in relations and intentionalities sought by those who display them.

One could equally make the point about other objects in the display. Indeed, the arrangement of things in and around the household chest differs between Mongolian groups. For example, in Halh Mongol households, a photographic montage is sometimes placed above the mirror, or the mirror may be in a different location entirely and a single image of a Buddhist god may be displayed on the chest. Among Tuvinian groups, umbilical cords are sometimes placed in separate cloth pouches and prominently displayed above the chest (pers. comm. Caroline Humphrey). In these cases, viewing the display also instantiates different modes of relatedness in a similar manner (through separation, concealing, enclosing, and revealing differing aspects); there is just a difference in the details of what people view according to their different ideas about what makes a person. This variation reflects the different ways in which Mongolians enact relatedness differently through similar means.

Notwithstanding variations between different Mongolian groups, the household chest needs a corporal presence to be seen as a person made from the different parts. In this sense, vision, situated in another person, is necessary to create this perspective. Of course, there are restrictions on the type of vision that allows us to view a person in this way. We have seen, for example, that people often place limits on who can look at the mirror and when it is possible to look at it. For example, Jargal mentioned that young children are not allowed to look in the mirror because they may be scared by the reflection. Similarly, at dusk, it would be dangerous to reveal yourself through the mirror. In the same way, a visitor to a household will not always recognize the 'body' configured when viewing him- or herself through the chest's parts, as something recognizable as themself. I suggest that in these cases, a visitor may guess and speculate as to the chest's contents and various parts, but they cannot fully see themself as constituted through them. This is because the means by which they see an image of themself does not relate to any aspects with which they are familiar. For a visitor, the image that is revealed can only ever be a replication of him- or herself in a singular, two-dimensional form.

The concept of 'reciprocal vision'– that one has to be looked at in order to be able to look (that is, that the gaze creates a relation)—is also fundamental to the concept of fortune (cf. Brighenti 2007). If we recall previous examples, such as extracting the tail hair from a cow, something has to be given away in order for a piece to be kept back to support and increase fortune for the household. In this sense, separation is an ontological precondition for harnessing and increasing fortune for the household and its herds. Similarly the separation of people, or the ability to reflect on social relations through the containment of some part, is essential for the growing of different forms of relatedness. In turn, a person is only able to see the multiple relations that make a person as an exemplary figure in the display through their own gaze. Being momentarily separated from oneself, the different lines of vision are harnessed to make a single intelligible form through the chest. In this way, we might say that Buriad herding households rely on the separation and transformation of people in order for sameness, or consanguinity, to continue. The necessity of separation, in order for sameness, or recognition, seems to be a theme that underlies many of the social relations I have been describing.

Various things, inside and on top of the household chest, stand for and generate relations reflected through the gaze and attention of others. Through looking at ourselves looking at the display, each of the visible and hidden parts dissolve as separate channels and present themselves as a single form. The things that I have discussed can be seen, in their parts, to reference different modes of relatedness, or perspectives and points of transformation. When viewed together, they appear as a site where a combination of different ideas about the person are articulated. Attending to these things, relations outside those based on agnatic kinship have come to the fore. Instead, we have seen that the visible and invisible aspects of people's relations are internally dependent on each other. The ways in which these relations are contained in things mirrors the ways in which these relations are realized in people's interactions.

Extensions and movement

Why, we might ask, is it necessary to index relations through things, and why is this tied to the idea that a person has to extend beyond their physical or spatial location? First, owing to the practice of pastoral herding, it is necessary for people to reckon relations with people who are physically absent. The monotony of being at the winter encampment for months on end, with only one or two other people attending to the routines of daily life, can become excruciating. Feelings of isolation—that life must be happening elsewhere—often became the impetus for pondering discussions. During such periods, and when they were not away hunting, Renchin's middle and youngest sons, for example, spoke to me of the intrigues and events that had happened at the infamous 'dances' in the district centre during the summer

months, where romances began and friendships and cliques were formed. In turn, Delgermaa would talk longingly of her only daughter and when she might return home from the city. These kinds of recollections and feelings of isolation are thrown into stark relief, however, with the realization that the household's interior contains more people than at first appears. We have seen that, through the use of photographic montages, far-reaching kin terms, and the spatial layout of the house, people construct flexible ways in which to incorporate people into the house and maintain relations that cannot be enacted in shared space. These technologies act as potential modes of relatedness that are drawn upon to activate wider networks in people's absence. Underneath these visible means, however, we have seen that ways are found to distinguish bodies and create difference.

The theme of retaining relations in the absence of people is something that seems to permeate the need for locating these different forms. While people may be necessarily absent, as a result of the constraints of nomadic herding, historical pressures of migration, and political persecution, relations can be maintained through the construction of these different sites. Focus on their display in households brings to the fore some of the ways in which fortune is harnessed for the growth of people. These things are the products of relations that, in turn, allow people to make further relations when they are viewed or displayed. They transform the typically temporal aspect of people's seasonal interactions into a permanent visual site. With the continual movement of both people and place, I suggest that viewing the household chest as an efficacious container or site is necessary for the extension and creation of Buriad personhood.

In his seminal work on place, Casey (1998: 301–8) draws on Deleuze and Guattari's distinction between 'smooth' and 'striated' space. Striated space refers to a landscape with distinct points or sites that mark its surface, and can be identified and specified. Rather than residing in place, people move *through* striated space from one point or location to the next. In contrast, smooth space has indefinite extensions. People move *in* this space rather than to fixed points along a trajectory. Smooth space is filled with multiplicities. It has a non-limited possibility of localities that resist exact concentration or reproduction. The distinction between striated and smooth space can be used to highlight the ideas concerning modes of personhood that I have presented so far. With striated space, containment, permanence, and renewal over time are paramount. For example, people experience movement to domestic encampments as fixed points in the landscape along a seasonal trajectory. Family members annually attend to sites near these points (Chapter 2). Within the household different sites, such as photograph

montages and portraits of deceased elders, echo this idea (Chapter 3). Like visible places in the landscape, such as *ovoos* which are piled high on mountaintops and sacred trees which emerge with fluttering ribbons from dark ravines, people ensure these places visibly accumulate and grow in order to allow for people to attend to networks that may be drawn upon in various configurations throughout the year. In attending to these places, people merge into groups that are fixed, passed on, and contained over generations.

In contrast, people also have to negotiate an inevitable series of movements and transitions as they move about in an absolute passage without a fixed centre. Here, we find that people never return in the same way. The things hidden inside the chest provide temporary vessels or places where relations based on the premise of separation and movement may temporarily reside (Chapter 4). We may recall that exactly the same practice concerns domestic animals (Chapter 2). When separating an animal from the herd, pieces of tail hair are extracted and retained in the chest while the herd moves some distance from this site. Like the concept of fortune, these relations have the potential to extend to unlimited places. They are uncertain because they do not guarantee prolonged residence in any fixed place over time. With such varied and unpredictable residence, we find that dispersal of these relations is a constantly impending possibility. The varied location of animal fortune and the in-between position of incoming women and young infants allows for their extension to, and partial placement in, any given space as they emerge in varied relations at different moments in time.

Given these multiple ways of containing relations, the idea of 'commemoration' in the Western sense seems inadequate. It is common in European countries for relations with the deceased to be maintained through commemorative sites (or striated places in the landscape) and living people need the physical presence of each other to maintain relations (to move in a kind of smooth space). Among the ways that I have been describing, however, relations between living people are frequently maintained via the careful containment of dynamic and variable things. The household chest becomes a site that allows for relations to continue with people who are dispersed and separated throughout the year. We have seen that these objects allow for spatio-temporal flexibility, whereby people do not need to be confined to relations within particular spatial co-ordinates (Gell 1998: 222). In contrast, it is the deceased who move in an absolute passage.

Drawing on these ideas, in the following chapter we see that people can also be viewed as the containers that house others. Using the idea of 'separating in order to contain', I extend the analysis to focus on invisible things that emerge and make themselves known through people. This will be

shown when people become the vessels (alternatively the support, pillar, or backbone) through which relations with deceased kin may be continued. Although realized inside a corporal container, intra-kin rebirths, which are common to most Buriad families, like the parts hidden inside the chest, foreground a new relation to a severed past. They allow for a person's body to become the site that brings people together in a new form.

6

Housing Others in Rebirths

Once we had completed our daily chores and were in our beds, Renchin would finish his last cigarette and lean over to blow out the stub of a candle perched on a stool beside him. In the still darkness, before the dogs began to bark at things we could not see, we often had open-ended and pondering conversations before settling to sleep. At the spring encampment one evening, I reflected on the yearly movement to seasonal places and asked if this cycle could be seen as similar to a person's life. 'Yes, yes,' Delgermaa replied, 'I think so. Summer is like an infant; everything is available and things grow very quickly. Autumn is like a young person who studies and learns; things are accumulated, gathered, and prepared for winter. Winter is like a person in middle age; some things have gone missing, some things are hard. Spring is like an elderly person; things are lacking, some foods are completely missing, and some have disappeared altogether.' Delgermaa's reflection points to the similarity between seasonal movement and the different kinds of sociality that are enacted at different places throughout the year, and she emphasizes these as characterized by the abundance or scarcity of resources. Her reflection, not unlike the familiar image of age indexed by the passing of the seasons (Mead 1912), also points to something else. Given that people return to these places annually, people may be said to shift between these different generational perspectives each year.

In Chapters 3, 4, and 5, we saw that people are attached to a household through artefacts kept inside and on top of the household chest. The chest can be said to 'contain' aspects of people in their absence. Like the household chest, people can also be viewed as the containers, or 'composite figures' (Strathern 1999: 35), that 'house' others inside themselves. In this chapter, I explore the movement of subjectivities in intra-kin rebirth, as people become the vessels through which relations with deceased kin may continue. Among the Buriad households that I knew well, it was common for at least one person in each family to be viewed as the receptacle for a cross-gendered and

Figure 6.1 Moving pasture.

cross-generational soul. While people do die, people commented that they could also be reborn in another person's body. It is, then, not only material pieces that are extracted when people separate and move (as in the household chest or at the *ovoo* ceremony). The reverse can also happen. A person's body can become the container for a person who moves, over time, to different bodily containers. Through this, people are made present via the bodies of others.[1] Although realized inside a corporal container, intra-kin rebirths, like the parts hidden inside the chest, foreground a new relation to a severed past. They allow for a person's body to become the site that brings together people in a new form.

Recalling traditional Buriad genealogies, with their founders in the centre of the page (see Chapters 2 and 3), relations with the deceased are not thought of as 'before and after', or 'below and above', as in European genealogical depictions based on growing trees (with the elders at the bottom of the page and their offspring in the shoots). Instead, we see a vision of growth that imagines roots and branches growing simultaneously, mirroring each other in their outward growth. Here, the deceased are not

[1] Relations with the deceased do not just make themselves visible though human bodies. For example, it is considered dangerous to bury many family members in the same location because they may start to call on the living to join them.

behind or below, but depicted as parallel to and alongside the living. Taking this idea into account, I suggest that intra-kin rebirths may be viewed as a modality for maintaining relations between living and deceased humans as human 'souls' are exchanged across generational time spans (see also Strathern 2005).[2] While Buriad mythological accounts highlight the possibility of cross-species rebirth, in daily life people tend to intra-kin rebirths. This way of relating allows for the continuation of extended connections with people who have died or were killed in unexpected ways, irrespective of their forced or sudden separations. In this sense, rebirths allow for an extended period of reflection and interaction with the deceased in the absence of formal funerals or ceremonies that mark their loss.

Many studies of rebirth, or reincarnation, have focused on the replication or repetition of persons over generations, traced for example in the lineages of saintly reincarnations in prominent political positions (Wylie 1978; Diemberger 2007b). The person who is the rebirth-holder may wish to utilize this position in various ways, but they must also distinguish themselves from their rebirth in order that they may form new relations in the present. In this sense, it is important to highlight that relations emphasized in rebirths do not consume or eclipse the person all the time, nor do they concern everyone. Some people are not considered to be rebirths and others still reject any affiliation with the idea of rebirth. Furthermore, as children grow, they learn to 'shed', or separate themselves from, the encompassing perspective of the person of whom they are held to be a rebirth. For example, in learning gender-specific seasonal tasks around the encampment, children begin to forge their relations anew and grow as individuals. Rather than viewing rebirth as a continuum between the living and the dead, identifying a rebirth is at once a way for the Buriad to mourn those who have suffered untimely deaths, while also being something that people who are rebirths must separate themselves from in order to become the sons and daughters of people in the present. These two points create a tension. On the one hand, people value the presence of the deceased in the living. Yet there is also the desire to separate oneself from one's rebirth-self in order to forge

[2] Sometimes, parents hold that their child is a rebirth of someone, but do not voice this opinion to others. In turn, parents may fight over whom the child actually is a rebirth of. When older, children may inquire about whom they were held to have been a rebirth of and the answer to this is often embedded in who the parent longed to have been reborn in their child. The ethical dilemmas faced by parents when children want to find out about their rebirth past can be compared to the ethical problems faced in Euro-American kinship thinking, when children want to know about their birth parents' genetic history (see Strathern 2001).

new relations. This tension will be used to explore practices of forgetting or transforming memories of past people.

Containing people in people

It did not take long for me to realize that talking about deceased people was something that must be done in very specific ways and only in certain contexts. One should not directly ask about or provoke discussion of the deceased, lest one somehow call their attention. Through particular turns of phrase, people avoided uttering individual names and found alternative ways to allude to people in the past (Humphrey 2002a). These include displaying portraits of the deceased (Chapter 3; see also Appendix A), attending to ancestors in shamanic ceremonies, and the abstraction of deceased people as land masters who dwell in particular places in the landscape (see Chapter 7). Alongside these methods of tending to past people, relations with the deceased may also be maintained via a living person's body. Rebirths are one way in which people retain very individual relations with people after their physical death. Talking with Delgermaa, she often recalled detailed and cherished memories of her deceased brother via references to his rebirth in her family. When I returned one year, Oyunaa the diviner exclaimed that her deceased husband had been reborn in her daughter's daughter. 'Can't you see?' she called out in joy. 'The child is devoted to me and follows me around everywhere!' (In using the phrase 'daughter's daughter' I am following the Mongolian distinction between a son's child (*ach*) and a daughter's child (*zee*).) I felt happy for Oyunaa, but puzzled too. In a previous conversation, she had mentioned that her husband would be reborn in a family in western Mongolia. I wondered whether this meant that one person could be reborn in two people, or two people reborn in one? Not wanting to question her further, it was obvious that Oyunaa was delighted that her husband had returned to her in the form of her grand-daughter. Sharing this information was a way to remind us of her husband and reassure us that he was all right. In these two cases, we immediately get a sense that having children is not simply a way of bringing new people into the world; it also allows for the possibility that deceased relatives may reappear through them.

While things kept inside the household chest are a means by which different forms of sociality are created, people can also become the objects through which people maintain relations with deceased kin. Unlike parts contained to maintain relations and construct bodies, relations can also make people into things. Although realized inside a corporal container, rebirth, like parts hidden inside the chest, foregrounds a new relation to a severed past. During the socialist period, for example, when people were prohibited from communicating with their ancestors through shamanic performance and many men were either killed or taken away, relations with deceased or absent people persisted in other forms. Intra-kin rebirths were one way in which relations with absent people could be kept alive. As we have seen, in Chapter 4, children often become the medium through which these things are revealed, as rebirth allows for people, displaced from their original bodily containers, to become an intimate part of a person's present identity.

Before I turn to the kinds of relations created through rebirth, some points concerning terminology must be clarified. First, when using the term 'rebirth', I am not referring to 'high-level' Buddhist reincarnations (*huvilgaan*, lit. an incarnation, transformation, or metamorphosis within a high-ranking saintly lineage) among monks and prophets (Bawden 1985: 41–2; Diemberger 2007b). People distinguish between high-ranking religious reincarnations and lay-rebirths. Rebirths are referred to by a set of different terms. These include 'to be born again' (*ergej törsön / dahin töröh*), 'to change/exchange birth' (*töröl ariljih*), 'to find/obtain birth' (*töröl oloh*), or 'to be reborn' (*hoit töröldöö*). Secondly, ideas about lay-rebirths are not necessarily tied to ideas of ethical compensation, or karma, and do not exist just among Buddhists. They are also prevalent among those families who 'carry' or 'worship their roots' or 'origins' (Bur. *ug barih*) through the lineages of shamanic predecessors. Indeed, recognizing rebirths is something that is prevalent throughout Mongolia (see Oberfalzerová 2006; Humphrey with Onon 1996).

Lack of information in the ethnographic record about such ideas can be attributed in part to Buddhist scholars who have dismissed this way of thinking as a misinterpretation of Buddhist doctrine. When reincarnation is only possible within select lineages and among political elites, Buddhist scholars may claim that lay-rebirths are simply a vernacularization of this theology. But there are important differences between Buddhist reincarnation beliefs and lay-rebirths, some of which scholars have attributed to an animist origin (Matlock 1994). Among Indic religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, rebirth is often related to ethical compensation (*karma*) transferred over lives, rather than a transmigrating 'soul' (Snellgrove 2002: 25; Karmay 1998: 311).[3] In such religions one may 'be born as an animal as a consequence of one's bad karma' (Obeyesekere 1994: xxii). Buriad intra-kin rebirths are generally not linked to the effect of karmic causes and there is a strong expectation

[3] See, for instance, Snellgrove (2002: 20) who explains that the Buddhist concept of the 'non-self' is often interpreted as the doctrine of 'no-soul'.

'that rebirth will occur in relatives, especially grand-children' (Matlock 1994: 263; see also Diemberger 2007b: 245). In highlighting this, I want to make clear that I do not think it is productive to view lay-rebirth as a vernacularization of Buddhist theology. Nor should we see the fact that rebirth is prevalent among Buriad people as a response to the fact that they could not tend to their ancestors through shamanic performance during the socialist period when shamanism was suppressed and forced to exist in muted and hidden forms. In short, rebirths are neither misplaced nor diluted reincarnations, nor are they to be viewed as temporary 'shamanic episodes'. They must be taken on their own terms and understood as a particular form of sociality that generates very specific ways of relating with each other.

Lay-rebirths are identified in a variety of different ways that involve recognizing a deceased person's 'soul' (*süns*, Bur. *hünehen*) as reborn in the living and they are common to almost every family, even if not all people in those families are considered rebirths. At death, people place an ink mark on the deceased's body while it is still warm. The deceased person's soul is said to hover over the body for a while before it embarks on a forty-nine-day journey to find a new bodily vessel to inhabit. If the soul finds a new body to inhabit, the deceased person's ink markings will appear on that person's body, in the form of a birthmark (*temdeg*, a small area of pigmentation on the skin). Unlike the 'Mongolian blue spot' (*tolbo*) on a child's backside, where a child is held to have been smacked out of the spirit world, a birthmark indexes that the child brings something more substantial with them from the past: they have become the receptacle for a deceased person's 'soul' (Humphrey 2002a: 74–5; Humphrey with Onon 1996: 100–2). Rebirth, however, is not apprehended solely through indexical markings on a child's body. One middle-aged woman who worked at the post office, for instance, explained to me that her eldest son had informed his kindergarten class that he had recently shot a ferocious bear and that his friends should join him in eating the dumplings made from the meat. When his friends arrived at his home to eat the dumplings, the child's mother resisted scolding him for telling lies. Instead, she thought about what he had said and noted that he must have been talking about his previous life when he had been her husband's father, a skilled hunter. She explained: 'If a child lies and tells stories (*hudal yaridag*) as if they were real, we say they are telling us about what happened in their previous life.' It is, then, not simply marks on the body that indicate rebirth. As a young child starts to speak and move about in the world, certain characteristics, stories of extraordinary experiences, idiosyncratic mannerisms, turns of phrase, and physical characteristics may become recognizable to the living as indicators of a rebirth.

On the surface, intra-human rebirths look similar to the kind of transformations involved when ancestral spirits possess a shaman in trance. Here, a single body becomes the vehicle or container for different ancestors. On closer inspection, however, we see that when a rebirth is observed, only one person is ever visible in a single bodily form. While people within one family may claim that a person is a different rebirth, for each claim, only one rebirth is possible. In this way, lay-rebirths are not about different souls momentarily possessing a single body. Instead, a single person 'houses' another as an essential aspect of themselves.[4] When people are reborn among their kin, they may also change their gender. People may also be born into families with whom they had no previous relation. In these instances, they may also change their ethnic identity. In mythic accounts, a person's soul can also incarnate into other animate or material forms, such a tree, river, or a pile of stones at an *ovoo*. In mentioning this, I want to highlight that, in some rare and mythical instances, rebirths are sometimes held to occur across species, or human–object divides (see also Fausto 2007; Humphrey with Onon 1996).

The ability of a single soul to migrate to such diverse forms is due to the idea that, while externally different, many animals and objects possess a shared interiority. Bawden (1962), for instance, mentions that people, cattle, the house, and the ground all possess a 'soul'. For the person, their soul is said to reside in different parts of the body on each of the thirty days of the month (Bawden 1962: 83). On certain days, or months of the year, a person's soul is more or less attached to its body. If a person becomes scared or suffers some illness, their soul may leave their body (Bawden 1962; Karmay 1998). When a soul leaves the body, a person may begin to feel weak and exhausted and take on the appearance of a 'phantom shadow' (*süg süüder*). As a mobile, detachable element, the soul may seek refuge in the landscape and a monk or shaman has to 'call the soul' (*süns duudah*), as the soul is said to be able to see and hear things from a great distance. When the soul re-enters the body, a local Buddhist monk explained, 'a bright white light is said to appear and the person's inner strength returns'. The soul may be viewed as the invisible 'master' of the body, just as the invisible land masters are the masters of the land in which people live. In this light, people are the temporary custodians

[4] When focusing on lay-rebirths, I focus on a very particular concept of the person. It is important to keep in mind that other aspects also shape people. For example, the shared substances of 'blood' from the mother and 'bone' from the father also determine a person's physical body, their ethnic identity, and aspects of their personality. Nevertheless, when rebirths do occur within families, they scramble linear ideas about shared substance and allow people to contract or expand their network of kin beyond those based on shared blood and bone.

of their 'soul', just as herders are the temporary custodians of the land on which they reside.[5]

So far, I have been referring to the Mongolian term '*süns*' as 'soul' (Humphrey with Onon 1996: 213). When using a European unitary concept such as 'soul' to describe this Buriad concept certain problems arise due to the possibility that an individual may have a plurality of souls, or different soul-like aspects (Humphrey 2007: 184; Krader 1954; Bawden 1962). For example, a local Buddhist monk, who was often called to officiate at *ovoo* ceremonies, but spent most of his time gathering herbal remedies from the nearby mountains and pastures, explained that a person has several different souls, each essential for life, and these enter a child's body when it is in the mother's womb. One of these souls can be reborn and shapes a person's body throughout their life. Accordingly, some souls are reborn, while others wander aimlessly, frightening the living and trying to appropriate the fragile bodies of young infants (Chapter 4). Places where such body-less souls roam are often referred to as 'running-places' (*güideltei gazar*). In Ashinga, one such place runs to the west of the district centre, just below the old saw-mill. Along this route, accidents are frequent and strange visions may be encountered. Other kinds of souls dwell in places in the landscape, and are sometimes related to its previous inhabitants (see Chapter 7). Finally, the souls that reach the highest level of the sky become '*ongon*'—the ancestral figures that the shaman evokes, themselves always the souls of previous shamans (Humphrey 2007: 184).[6] While this rather neat distinction between

[5] In Tibetan, the term '*bla*' is often translated as soul, but also means 'lord', 'master', 'owner', 'superior', 'from above' (Karmay 1998: 311).

[6] The Buddhist monk further explained that a person has several souls, or several aspects of one soul. He listed these as follows: (1) *hiimoriin süns* (luck-energy soul), (2) *mah bodiin süns* (meat and body soul, there are eight of these), (3) *tsahilgaan / oron zainy süns* (energy/life-energy soul), (4) *harah / üzeh süns* (feeling/seeing soul of the senses). The idea of multiple souls allows for the possibility that a soul can be reborn in someone else while that person is still alive (for example, the case of the sixth Dalai Lama). People did speculate that if you lost one of your souls, that soul could be reborn in someone else. In this way you have become a 'memory' while you are still alive. But no one ever mentioned that they knew of such a case. This speculation does leave some questions unanswered. For example, if the soul is called back to the original person, will the person who the soul temporarily embodied die? Writing about the 'soul' among Buriads in Siberia, and drawing on Buriad intellectual writings from the late 1800s and early 1900s, Krader (1954: 327–8) explains that a single person has numerous souls, which can be grouped into three categories: (1) the soul housed in the skeleton which is shared with other species, (2) the soul in the organs of the body and the blood, which is readily alarmed and disposed to fleeing from the body: this soul can be reborn; and finally, (3) the soul that reaches the highest level of the sky (or *Tenger*), whose passing marks the end of life among mortal men to whom it was attached.

kinds of souls capable of transforming in different ways may be articulated by some, most people spoke of fragmentary and often contradictory concepts. In turn, it is important to note that unlike the unitary Euro-American concept of the 'soul', among the families that I spoke to, the rebirth aspect, or 'soul', was held to shape the physical body as well as the mind of the person that it inhabited. In this sense, the soul refers to an entity that encompasses a single term, leaves the body at death, and can return in another person. The 'soul' is an intimate part of a person that generates both physical and non-physical characteristics. In drawing attention to this formulation, I wish to highlight the inability of our single term 'soul' to encompass the full range of meanings attributed to the Buriad concept of soul.

Attributes of the person

Before I proceed with ideas and practices concerning rebirths, something must be said about the different 'aggregates' (Snellgrove 2002: 21) or 'attributes' of the person. As we have seen, the body is composed not simply of parts, but also of forces such as fortune and luck that flow in and out of the person and may cause them to be in or out of balance. Alongside fortune (*hishig*), which animates people, animals, and things, the 'soul' (*süns*) (or souls) is just one of several aspects that animates a person. All animals, including humans, are 'with breath' (*am'tan*), something which is generally understood as a crucial life-force (Humphrey with Onon 1996: 98). People also have their own 'luck-/vitality-fortune' (*hiimori*), which rises and falls, or increases and decreases inside their body throughout their life (*hiimori deeshee dooshoo boloh*). A female shaman in Ashinga explained to me in 2005 that

> A person's soul (*süns*) resides in their heart. It is a little round thing, like an egg that reflects light and delivers things through the body. A person's '*süld*' [spirit, Bur. *hüld*], in contrast, rides on the 'luck-fortune' (*hiimori*) that moves around the body. When a person is scared, they may become physically or mentally weak. In this case, 'luck-fortune' decreases and the spirit loses its mount. It may get lost and we have to call it back.[7]

Buddhist concepts such as fate (*zaya*), determined by the astrological date and year in which one was born, are also individual to a person and are not something one inherits from a previous life or incarnation. Fate, for instance,

[7] Spirit and luck-fortune are intimately linked and are often referred to together as '*süld hiimori*'. See also Karmay 1998 for a similar Tibetan concept.

is fixed at birth when one's 'path' (*zam*) is 'drawn' (*zursan*). In this way, fate is something over which one has little control; events are held to happen to one as a result of one's birth-fate (*törsön zaya*). In contrast, karma (*üiliin ür*, lit. the results or seeds of one's deeds) consists of a person's acts and their ethical consequences, which are sometimes held to have an impact on one's future life. If a person performs a good deed or action, this action or the 'seed of this deed' will influence their own life and can extend to affect their life in the future. Indeed, the inheritance of karma raises issues to do with how much a person can be said to act with intention and the inevitability of an act (Humphrey 2003). Although fate and karma are very much Buddhist concepts that determine ideas about cause and effect, people also stressed that fate and karma can be changed and corrected. This is evidenced in the common saying: 'If your thoughts are good, then your fate will be good' (*sanaa sain bol zaya sain*). It is even believed that if one tries hard and believes that good things will occur, then one's fate, as a sort of detachable animated entity, will also work towards achieving one's goals (*setgel züitei holbootoi*). Impending difficulties can be insured against through individual or group rituals, good thoughts, and morally correct behaviour. The inheritance of negative karmic determination can be reversed, misfortunes can be appeased and halted, and paths of fate corrected (Humphrey 2003). The idea that seemingly fixed ideas about cause and effect can be changed or altered is linked to the Mongolian concept of insuring (*daatgal*), or correcting, certain paths (*zasal hiih*).

In drawing attention to this complexity of different forces, I want to emphasize that for the Buriad, and for many other Mongol people, experiences in life are conceived of as the outcome of a temporary union of different parts, attributes, or forces. These attributes can be unbalanced or actually separated from the person (see Humphrey with Onon 1996: 215). In some cases, this state of being undone may be positive, while in other instances it can be threatening. It is at moments when things are going well or they appear to be out of balance or undone that people tend to reflect on their attributes and may attend to them through various ritual acts. For example, it is common for mothers with young infants to attend to the state of their children's soul because it is particularly prone to leaving their bodies (Chapter 4). Yet, people of all ages may be prone to soul-loss. When a person is scared, frightened, or experiences some polluting influence, their soul (or one kind of soul) may leave the body. When asleep, one's soul is said to wander in dreams to different places and locations. A sleeping person should not be woken abruptly in case their soul does not have the chance to return to their body. The soul can also attach itself to items such as belts and hats. These items must be placed in their proper positions when a person is sleeping, to prevent their soul from escaping (Humphrey 1987: 47).

It is important to stress that it is extremely rare for people to reflect on all of these attributes and bring them together in the way that I have done above. Only at certain moments and in certain interactions with others does a single attribute come to the fore. Like the exemplary person, which is only revealed through looking at oneself through the household chest, there is no real context that unites all these components.[8] A living person does not enact all of these components all at once. Instead, each attribute or force points to a particular way of being, or mode of subjectivity, which is revealed in distinct encounters or events (da Col 2007). In this sense, people are not defined by distinct categories (or attributes) that are fixed in a wider 'structure', but as da Col (2007) has pointed out, these attributes should be viewed as different modes of subjectivity that emerge from different encounters. Just as people move between households and places throughout the year, so too do they manage these multiple elements or attributes of themselves—activating or concealing them—in their engagements with others. Following the way in which people attend to these components, instead of thinking about them as stable attributes that can be analysed in an abstract sense, the rest of this chapter is devoted to the kind of interactions and engagements that engender attention to one such form of subjectivity: rebirths.

Mythic transformations

Before I turn to rebirths between people, which are by far the most common form of rebirth, I must briefly mention two mythological accounts that turn on the cross-species rebirth of a single soul. In doing so I want to draw attention to the fact that people do sometimes consider the possibility of rebirths occurring not just between people, but also across species, and this is not something that is always determined by karmic outcomes. In the summer of 2005, while staying with Tsendmaa and her husband, Bayar, in the district centre, a woman who was visiting told us a story concerning the cross-species rebirth of a single soul:

> Once there was a man who was told that when he died he was to be reborn as a horse. As a young gelding, he won many races. One day, just as he was about to pass the finish line, he died. This time his soul was born as an antelope.

[8] I thank Caroline Humphrey (pers. comm.) for her discussions on this idea.

> As an antelope, he ran in front of some hunters who shot him. In this instant, his soul perched on a nearby tree and he looked down to see that his body had been that of an antelope. He saw that the hunters were cutting his body into small pieces. He observed the men as they went home and made dumplings from his body. As the hunters were laughing and eating, an elderly woman came in and sat down to eat with them. After consuming some food, she learnt what kind of meat the dumplings were made from and she was shocked. Taking out her rosary, she recited prayers for the antelope's soul so that it might be reborn as a human in its next life.

While people sometimes spoke about cross-species rebirths, particularly in the context of hunting, it was rare for people to talk in such a detailed manner about a single case. This account was considered harrowing by all who heard it. No doubt the story was partially narrated as a warning to Bayar, whose prolific and persistent hunting had been seen as a major cause for his wife's recent miscarriages (see Chapter 7). The account also highlights the idea that a single soul, or force, may transform across species, a concept associated with Buddhist philosophy (Snellgrove 2002) or with animist ideas common to northern North Asia (Pedersen 2001). Of note is the point in the narrative when we are told that the soul leaves its antelope body and observes its body from a nearby tree, thereby realizing that it had been reborn as an antelope (cf. Broz 2007).

This account resonates with Viveiros de Castro's (2004) elegant description of animist ontologies among Amerindians. Here, the separation between humans and animals differs from the Western distinction between nature and culture. Among Amerindians, the original condition of humans and animals is humanity, not animality. In Amerindian origin myths, all animals are ex-humans, and all species retain a spiritual component that qualifies them as human people. The different bodily forms that each species takes can be viewed as an envelope or an outer 'clothing' that conceals a shared internal human form. Only at certain moments, or through particular skills, are certain people (namely, shamans) able to see animals and other non-humans as people. Following this logic, we may say that when the antelope was killed, his 'soul' was able to occupy a 'species androgynous' position (Viveiros de Castro 2004: 464–5), similar to that of a shaman, and observe the non-human form of his outer 'clothing'.

A second account concerning cross-species relations concerns a well-known Hori Buriad origin myth (*domog*). This myth describes how a man called Horidoi Mergen (the son of Barga Baatar) saw beyond a swan's outer 'clothing' and fell in love with her human interiority. One day, after watching the graceful movements of a swan swimming on Lake Baikal, the young man managed to coerce the swan to the bank where he was sitting. The swan approached him and, as she stepped on to the ground, she shed her outer swan 'clothing', revealing herself as a woman. As a woman, she bore the man several children, who came to be the founders of the eleven Hori Buriad sub-groups. While alone at the house one day, the woman found her outer swan-clothing hidden behind a chest in the house. She longed for her life as a swan and decided to put on her swan 'coat'. As she did, she immediately transformed and flew out of the smoke hole, leaving behind her human husband and children (see Sampildendev 1998: 22; Van Dusen 2001: 64; Curtin [1909] 1971: 98–9; Humphrey 1979).[9] This story raises certain motifs that I have already touched upon in previous chapters with regard to gender. First, the woman is considered to come from 'outside', and to retain this lingering difference among her husband's kin. Secondly, her means of attachment to her pre-marital self are hidden behind the chest. Not unlike the placentas, the pieces of hair, or the umbilical cords, which are also elements of people that are buried or hidden, when tending to her swan-clothing, she is able to reactivate her past self, allowing her to return to her natal home.

The story of a soul transforming from man to horse to antelope and the swan-woman myth both point to the idea that different species may share a single interiority and it is the exteriority of their bodies that differs. The example of the antelope and the swan suggests that humans may, at certain moments, see animals as human, but we do not know if swans, for instance, see each other as human, or if swans see humans as swans. I might speculate that it is only certain people who are able to see the shared interiority of 'souls' across species. Indeed, it took the perspective of the elderly woman to speculate about the horrifying possibility that the antelope might indeed have housed an 'internal human form' which she had been devouring in the form of steamed dumplings.

In relation to these ideas, Pedersen (2001) has put forward a convincing distinction between Siberian and Mongolian perspectives based on intra-human or intra-species differences. In Siberia (or northern North Asia), animist modes of thought are common. Here, shamans take on the 'clothing', or perspective, of different non-human species, such as the bear, eagle, or elk. In contrast, in Mongolia (or southern North Asia), shamanism is based on

[9] Some explained that morning milk libations were made towards the direction of swans, as they recited '*hün shuvuu garvaltai, husan modon tsergtei*' (my origin the swan bird, my birch wood tethering post). Curtin ([1909] 1971: 98–9) mentions the same origin myth among the Trans-Baikal Buriad where the three swans on the lake are the daughters of 'Esege Malan'.

'analogic differentiation' which pivots around intra-human continuity. Here, shamans take on the perspective of past humans, notably their shamanic ancestors. The perspectival shifts forged through intra-human rebirth among the Buriad appear to be an ability that is not confined to a particular kind of person, but extend to include, potentially, everyone. The above mythic accounts also suggest that a person's soul can be reborn across species. Through mythic accounts, we see that people appear to switch between and sometimes merge the two modalities—the intra-human and the extra-human transformations—described by Pedersen (2001). It is, perhaps, not surprising that the Buriad, who traverse the territorial boundaries between the northern North Asian and southern North Asian divide, blur these modalities and creatively produce new perspectives out of this movement. Nevertheless, accounts of cross-species rebirths stand out as extraordinary against the prevalence of intra-kin rebirths in this area. My aim in presenting them has been to emphasize that people sometimes speculate that the soul can inhabit non-human forms and inanimate objects in the landscape (see also Humphrey 2007; Bawden 1962). Predominantly, however, perspectival traffic in this area revolves around humans seeing other humans as their deceased kin.

Rebirth sociality

I turn now to focus on the ways in which intra-kin rebirths are recognized and the types of narratives that emerge when people recall aspects of deceased kin in the living. Focus on the politics of recalling deceased kin through rebirth is important because it highlights that these relations are very different from the types of narratives evoked when glancing at a photographic montage or a portrait. As already mentioned, in contrast to restrictions placed on recalling the deceased, rebirths provide a way for people to talk openly among a group of relatives or friends about particular aspects of the deceased that they would not normally discuss. Often confirming moral characteristics, these narratives also have the effect of asserting that living kin must have the same character as that of one's deceased relative. Recalling information about deceased relatives often involves exchanging knowledge about morally acceptable behaviour. In cases where a person who suffered a difficult death is reborn, such as those experienced during the period of political persecution, people are also able publicly to acknowledge cherished memories of those who were condemned by the state.

Acknowledging the rebirth of a deceased relative is something parents and elders cherish: it is charming and heartfelt, and leads to an extended reflection on the deceased person's life (see also Oberfalzerová 2006: 26). Drawing on Austin's (1975) discussion of speech acts which *do* rather than just *say* something, the mannerisms and speech of children can be said to trigger, in the minds of their elders, recollections of the life of a relative (cf. Hallam and Hockey 2001: 43–4). These speech acts may be viewed as 'performatives' in that they are not just reporting a similarity, but also set in motion and create the relations that they mimic. In such a way, rebirths do not simply trigger a recollection through a mnemonic sign (such as a birthmark or a turn of phrase). They also shape the way that people view and interact with each other. Instigating perspectivism across inter-human relations (Strathern 2005: 144) thus alters social relations between the living. In this way, identifying a rebirth can be viewed as a type of action that has an effect. This is because recognizing a rebirth is an experience that involves both the rebirth-holder and the viewer. For instance, when people recognize that someone has been reborn, they will respond to that person with the type of respect that the deceased person would demand. Enhtuyaa, who grew up in the district centre during the socialist period but has since left to find work and study in the city, explained that when her mother noticed that her eldest son's child had a birthmark similar to the ink mark placed on her deceased husband's body and that the child enjoyed playing with the radio, she revealed to her family that her son's son was her deceased husband and advised her children to respect the young child '*because he is your father*'. From this case, we see that when people treat children as elders or equals, individual memories of deceased kin are not the only thing being recalled. These recollections involve editing out memories of some in order for other people to be brought into focus (Battaglia 1990, 1995). In so doing, they radically alter people's relations with the living.

Equally, and probably because rebirths demand that people relate to someone in a particular way, knowledge of a rebirth can be something that occurs at very specific and private moments. It can be a point of contention and something that one only tentatively mentions to others. There is sometimes a tension between wanting someone to be reborn in your family, and the work involved in getting others to agree to their manifestation. In the case of a woman, for example, claiming that her son's child is a part of her own genealogy can be seen to undercut agnatic relations. In this sense, recognition of some rebirths only comes to the fore in very specific encounters. While alone with Delgermaa, for instance, she explained to me that she had noticed marks on her son's daughter's arm that were similar to those placed on her deceased brother's body, but she had not mentioned this to anyone.

'I think that Altaa [her son's daughter] is my brother,' she explained. 'Although she is a girl, she plays with toy cars. My brother was a tractor driver. He was just like she is, always fixing cars. The way she walks and sways her arms is very similar to him. My brother was a very hard-working man with abrupt movements. Altaa always runs and walks with fast and wide steps . . .' Her husband, she claimed, told her that he noticed characteristics in the child that reminded him of his deceased mother. Keeping the knowledge of the marks on the child's body to herself, it was as if she continued to keep this private in order to maintain a sense that her brother was close to her, even though she lived with her husband's family.

Implicit in the acknowledgement of intra-kin rebirth is a strong notion of rights over people. Identifying someone as a rebirth involves making particular claims. This is most obviously realized when we focus on the

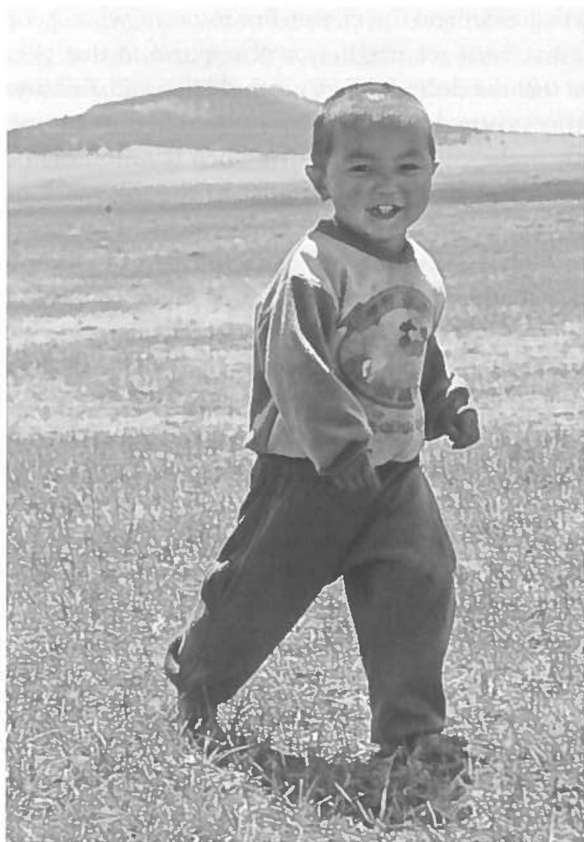

Figure 6.2 Granddaughter as deceased brother.

implications of claiming rebirth in adoption practices. While a child who is considered to be the rebirth of a woman's deceased husband does not actually have to live with her as her husband, rebirths involving deceased children often involve the rebirth being adopted by the family of the deceased child. For example, Togtoh explained to me as we were sitting on small stools in the kindergarten kitchen surrounded by boiling pots one afternoon, that in one family in Ashinga there was a young child who had died from severe burns suffered in an accident involving the family hearth. A few years later, a neighbouring family gave birth to a son with a birthmark across his torso that looked like burns incurred from a fire. The family who lost their son adopted this child as it was believed by both families that he was the rebirth of their deceased son.[10]

Focus on adoption practices raises issues about the extent to which people hold that the rebirth actually is the deceased person. We have seen that adoption practices suggest that people do, to some extent, see the rebirth as the deceased person and certain obligations flow with these claims. Yet, we have also seen that a person is sometimes held to be a different rebirth by different kin members. In these cases, people may respond to a given person in very different ways and acknowledging a rebirth does not determine how people relate to each other. For example, a person will not be given the name of their rebirth. People do not mention lay-rebirths in genealogical descriptions, nor do they claim that they have no children because their child is the rebirth of their grandfather. It seems as though attending to a rebirth is contained within a type of perspective that allows a viewing subject to see someone in a very particular way. As rebirths are usually identified through another person's perspective, a given person is very much the author or creation of the person who views them. Here, a different kind of subject is created depending on who is doing the viewing and with whom they are doing it.

In a chapter concerned with concepts of origins and ownership, Strathern (2005) has drawn attention to the fact that people may be 'owned' in different ways by different kin, and that who counts as kin may differ according to different people (Strathern 2005: 138–42). Drawing on these ideas, I suggest that when a child is held to be a different rebirth according to the person who views them, different kin can be said to count each other in different ways. For example, we have seen that a mother and a father often

[10] Commenting on Canadian north-west coast rebirths, Harkin (1994: 199) similarly notes that if a child physically resembled a child who had died, the dead child's parents would adopt him or her.

disagree on the identity of a rebirth involving their child (or grandchild) and claims of rebirth are often asserted to a select group of people. In such a way, recognizing a rebirth becomes a way of anchoring a person in relation to oneself, through a particular situated perspective, so that new and varied relations are created between the living. Examining the way in which rebirths are identified has revealed a relationship between recalling and perceiving. It has been fruitful to treat rebirths as a particular way of looking at and attending to people. This is not to suggest that the mind is simply a storehouse for memory. Nor do I see this as a psychological idea of 'projection', whereby recognizing a rebirth becomes an act of not successfully forgetting (Bolles 1988). Instead, intra-kin rebirths involve recalling personal recollections of experiences and of relationships, but in so doing, people are also placed 'under the compulsion of other people's expectations' (Humphrey1992: 386). Like the person who views him- or herself in the chest's mirror, I have suggested that vision, situated in another person, is necessary for a person to become a form other than themselves (Chapter 5). But we have also seen that this type of perspective is not the only way in which people view each other. Given the temporal aspect of the perspective involved in recognizing rebirths, the idea of 'commemoration' in the Western sense seems inadequate (Hallam and Hockey 2001). Initially, the rebirth's body becomes an object through which the deceased person is made visible. However, a person's body is not simply an object through which the past is recalled or recollected. Instead, people's bodies appear as channels that allow people to create new relations with the deceased through their appearance in the living.

Tending to the dead

The idea that rebirth allows for people to create new relations with the deceased needs further explanation. Attending to the kind of people who are reborn is revealing. Mills (1994) has drawn attention to the fact that rebirth patterns across many cultures include 'a high rate of reported violent, sudden, or premature death of the person the child claims to be' (Mills 1994: 13). The tendency of children to be the rebirth of people who have suffered difficult or contested deaths resonates with those I knew. Of the three rebirths that I knew well, one involved the daughter of Delgermaa's son, whom she believed was the rebirth of her deceased brother, a man who died in middle age from a curse levelled at him by a jealous co-worker at the sawmill. The second concerned Renchin's middle son, whom he believed was the rebirth of his older brother, a man who committed suicide in his

early twenties as a result, it was suggested to me by his daughter, of his parents forbidding his marriage to a particular woman. Thirdly, Oyunaa was overjoyed at the birth of her daughter's daughter because she was certain that she was the rebirth of her deceased husband, a warm and charismatic man who was always welcoming when people visited them and tragically died from cancer. These three examples all point to people who were reborn having suffered unusual or sudden deaths. In turn, the rebirths all occur within the same generation as the people who identify them. Not surprisingly, such rebirths are often valued and carefully attended to by parents and grandparents. It is often they who had a personal relationship with the deceased. For Delgermaa, Renchin, and Oyunaa, they had been identified as the rebirths of relatives from their parents' or grandparents' generation. Taking these points into consideration, it appears that the phenomenon of rebirth provides a way for people to mourn the loss of close kin who died in unusual, sudden, or abrupt ways.

We may recall that in the 1930s, many people in this area were charged with being counter-revolutionaries and Japanese spies and were killed or exiled (see Chapter 1). When I first arrived in Northern Hentii, I was very moved by stories of people's relatives who had been seized at night or who simply walked away under the order of the 'green hats', never to return again. At the time, and for many years to come, there had been no one to to turn to find out where people's fathers, husbands, sons, or brothers were, or indeed to confirm whether they were still alive. The sense of loss that they had to live with came out in tears, silent pauses, and empty glances that could not be tempered with any reassuring comment. Despite this lack of language to articulate their feelings, people often reflected that those who had died during the mass purges in the 1930s must have died in great fear. They were not afforded proper funerals and their bodies were dumped in open mass graves. In early 2000, a neighbouring district erected a stone monument in memory of some of those who were killed, where there had once stood a larger temple, called Serüün Temple. This temple had housed more than a hundred Buriad monks. In the 1930s, all these monks were shot. In the 1940s, the families of these monks were summoned to dismantle the temple and transport the wood to another place to build a school. As well as the stone monument, there is now a small wooden building here. Inside this building are two metal plaques listing the names of the Buriad monks and lay-people who were attached to the temple and killed. On the stone monument outside the wooden building is the following inscription:

> This stone monument has been erected for the Buriad monks (*lam*) who came,

> according to the call of their ancestors, to this furious (*dogshin*) place called Serüün Galttai to establish this building for the teaching and worship of the Buddha. The monks, along with our Buriad fathers, their offspring, and descendants were without guilt. By their unfortunate fate they were turned into guilty people and lost their precious (*altan*, lit. golden) lives at a time of political disorder. So that future generations do not forget what happened, we have erected this stone monument, and have inscribed the names of the Buriad monks as well as those of our fathers on some metal plaques, which we have placed in this new pagoda, like a flower that has grown from the ashes. We [names of four men] made this work on the seventeenth sexagenary cycle (*jaran*), year of the tiger, the beginning of autumn, the month of the white monkey.

On a metal plaque inside the building are two lists. The first list consists of approximately sixteen names of executed monks (their surname, first name, and their position in the monastery). Of note is the fact that several of the monks (sometimes up to three or four) share the same surname (their father's name), and were sons from the same family. The second list consists of more than thirty names of executed laymen (or 'fathers'), including several people from Ashinga.

This process of memorialization stands out starkly against the general absence of any other such practices.[11] With no official way to commemorate their loss, rebirths were one way in which people could tend to the disappeared. Being the incarnates of people who had been condemned and banished, those who were cast out as enemies of the state could be silently incorporated back into families through their rebirth. Clearly, rebirth as a phenomenon is here not tied exclusively to Buddhist ideas about merit and karma. It appears to be intimately concerned with maintaining a sense of connectedness between people who have been separated, sometimes in the face of great fear, so that '[p]resent bodies may at once substitute for absent bodies . . . and may be presented as composed of other bodies' (Strathern 2005: 93). It is important to note that a sense of absence is not confined to the sense of physical absence of people who were seized. It extends to include a wider sense of the absence of a meaningful explanation for why the Buriad were targeted in the first place. This point could be seen to echo Kristeva's (1982) concept of the 'remainder'. 'Remainders', Kristeva (1982: 76) explains, 'are residues of something but especially of someone. They pollute on account of [their] incompleteness.' The absence of certain people,

[11] For instance, the deaths of foreigners, such as the Chinese soldiers who lost their lives in Mongolia in 1919–1921, are likened to the abstract blackened and burnt tree stumps left behind after forest fires (*gamin mod*).

and the lack of a conclusive reason for their disappearance, persists in people's memories through intra-kin rebirths as a 'remainder' or 'residue' that generates the possibility for the imagining of new subjects.

I highlight the term 'new subjects' because I want to draw attention to the fact that rebirth does not simply mean the (re)production of the same people (like for like). Rather, rebirth here allows for people to transform the memory of a deceased person into a new kind of presence. Following Taussig (1993: 19), the ability to mime the self as infused with the presence of Others becomes the capacity to make them Other. By this I mean that the person who appears through a rebirth is always going to be different from the person they were before. It is on account of this that rebirths allow for a double transformation. First, they transform a sense of absence into a new kind of presence. Secondly, because the rebirth is always different from the past person, recognizing a rebirth transforms one's memory of the deceased. Instead of being trapped in a suspended period of mourning, rebirths allow for reflections and interactions with the deceased on new terms.

In previous chapters, I suggested that among Buriad pastoral herders, living people manage relations with absent people via certain objects that remain carefully contained or displayed inside the house. In contrast, it has been suggested that relations with deceased relatives are transformed through their appearance in another person's body. The recall of a person through another person's body has certain similarities with *malanggan* sculptures in north-east New Guinea described by Küchler (1987, 2002). *Malanggans* are intricately carved wooden sculptures produced at someone's death. The sculptures are conceptualized as providing a 'skin' for a deceased person's life-force (Küchler 1987: 240). The purpose of creating this 'skin' is to gather the composite elements of a deceased person's life-force and contain them momentarily in the sculpture. This gathered agency is then redispersed, when the *malanggan* is 'killed', or destroyed, so that the memory of a past person is forgotten, and their life-force returned to the group that they came from (Küchler 2002). Küchler (1987: 240) states: 'Like the human body after death, so the sculpture after it has been "killed" in ceremonial exchange has to decompose to set free the force so that it can be rechannelled into [new] people and sculptures.'

Like *malanggan* sculptures, intra-kin rebirth can be said to harness memory of the deceased. It also allows for a redistribution of a deceased person's life-force. Through rebirth, the deceased can be said to display themselves in people's bodies. The form in which this display occurs is temporary and varied depending on who is viewing the subject. But it is also repeated over generations. As long as someone is able to recognize a rebirth, the

deceased person continues, irrespective of the person's temporary existence in different forms. Being able to recall knowledge of the deceased person is an important factor in what makes this continuation possible. When the recognition of a rebirth has occurred, it transforms the temporary objectification of a person's body and the subject is revealed as a version of another. In that moment, the viewer sees the embodiment of a memory and through recalling it they literally bring that memory to life in a new form. It should be clear that rebirths are not solely to be viewed as a means by which people replicate relations with the deceased. Earlier in this chapter, I noted that although rebirths frequently provide a way for people who may have been separated, through untimely deaths, to be united, rebirths are not simply a model for immortality, whereby people are rendered endless replications of past people. The process of recognizing a rebirth, like the act of carving and then destroying a *malanggan* so that the power of the person may be redistributed back into the community, involves transforming one's memory of that person into something new, allowing them to live a new kind of life *through* someone else. In this sense we may say that, in their appearance through another, the deceased are not asking for recognition of what they were, but attempt to solicit a new kind of becoming (Butler 2006: 44). Here, death occurs not so much when a person dies, but when their memory has been altered through their rebirth in someone else.

Shedding rebirths

We have seen that the switching of people in different bodies allows for those who have been separated to become an intimate part of a person's present identity. Frequently, this leads to inversions of hierarchy and status. When visiting a neighbouring family at the summer pasture, for instance, I once observed a four-year-old girl publicly chastising her grandfather for the way in which he was drinking his tea. This was thought to be acceptable because she was believed to be the rebirth of the man's deceased mother. Attending to this example, children appear not so much as 'blank' ahistorical bodies waiting to enter culture.[12] Instead, a child is seen already to have certain knowledge and ways of being in the world from a previous

[12] For conventional Western ideas about the child, see Durkheim (1956): 'Society finds itself, with each new generation, faced with a *tabula rasa*, very nearly, on which it must build anew' (Durkheim 1956: 72, italics in original). But for an alternative approach to children as both innocent and all-wise, see Plato's (1985) notion of anamnesis in *Meno*.

life. Such a view challenges widespread Euro-American ideas that knowledge is indexed to age, by the fact that children who house a rebirth actually are their elders (cf. Gupta 2002).

A result of holding that children are born into the world with knowledge and skills is that during the day, younger children, up until five or six years of age, are left very much to themselves as they play outside the house and around the encampment. I often stumbled across Altaa engaged in what to me seemed like a dangerous activity. Once, finding her standing precariously in a secluded part of the river balancing on a rock, I grabbed her and brought her back, telling her grandparents what had happened. To my surprise, they simply laughed and told her to change her wet clothes, jokingly calling to her that if she did it again the monsters (*mangas*) would get her. Threats of monsters or outsiders (the term '*mangas*' is also a slang word for Russians, along with the term '*Ivanuud*') taking away children are used frequently by parents and older siblings to discipline young children.[13] Rarely do adults or older siblings actually instruct children. Rather, left to their own devices, and by making their own mistakes while following others, children learn how to navigate different kinds of environments. Making sense of what being the rebirth of a particular person means, children are encouraged to enact adult characteristics as a consequence of their parents actively expecting them to have particular adult qualities and skills.

In spite of the idea that children are born with certain kinds of knowledge, children do not live doubly as themselves and someone else all the time.[14] While children do sometimes make the deceased appear, they have to separate themselves from their rebirth-self in order to become sons and daughters of people in the present. Mills (1994) has commented that across many cultures 'the fading of the apparent past-life memories [occurs] by the time the child is between seven and nine years old' (Mills 1994: 13). Among the Buriad, a marked transition occurs around seven or eight years of age when the emphasis on the child as a possible rebirth shifts. At this age, children are expected to carry out gender-specific tasks, such as corralling the calves during milking, chopping wood, and bringing daily water from rivers and wells to the house. In turn, when a visitor arrives at a house, young girls from the age of seven or eight years of age know that they are expected to

[13] See Guemple (1988: 137) on the threat of outsiders coming to get you as a scare tactic employed to control Inuit children.

[14] Certain individuals are able to maintain such a double perspective throughout their lives (for example, hunters, diviners, shamans, and bone-setters). Such was the case for one skilled hunter who could speak with birds, but even the shaman who is the 'super-adult' *par excellence* cannot live both as himself and in trance, as a vehicle for the spirits, all the time.

bring out fresh bread, cream, and jam, and offer the guest a bowl of tea.[15] Learning socially acceptable behaviour based on gender and age forges a sense of situated place in the household, so that whether residing in the district centre with extended relatives while attending school or in the countryside with one's parents, girls and boys consistently know what behaviour is expected of them. In learning to take on these tasks, we may say that it is a child's ability to *perform* these particular tasks that forges their own position among their kin. Performing gender-specific tasks in and around the household goes some way towards ensuring children become sons and daughters, persons gendered through productive relations in particular spaces, rather than simply embodying a rebirth. In learning how to perform such tasks, children gradually separate themselves from their rebirths.[16] While people may be born as multiple, they experience a gradual separation from this multiplicity as they learn when it is appropriate to act according to their different attributes, rather than being eclipsed by them.

Figure 6.3 Preparing wild onions.

[15] Generally, women of a household prepare one hot meal a day. The rest of the time people eat bread, with cream or butter and any jam, and drink milk tea.

[16] Learning how to enact this separation goes some way in preparing children for the movement and separation they have to experience later in life when they move between places and groups of people while remaining tied to a single home.

For some, expressions of rebirth may be fleeting and only present when they are young. For others, rebirths continue to influence their social relations throughout their life. Many people remain proud custodians of their rebirths and are quick to recount characteristics of these people to others. Others are less fortunate, especially if their rebirth is someone who suffered a sudden or difficult death. For example, although Renchin's elder brother's death through suicide had left a great gap in his life, as he had greatly admired and looked up to his brother when they were younger, his rebirth in Renchin's middle son was generally considered to be a source of joy. At the same time, however, this rebirth was also tinged with a lingering sense of fear, lest his son be tempted to repeat his brother's tragic death. His son's excessive drinking in adulthood, for example, was viewed as an outcome of his being the rebirth of his father's brother. Indeed, Renchin's brother's suicide was retrospectively viewed as an indication of his calling to be a shaman, something which they believed the son had inherited. In turn, the suicidal hangings of two teenage girls at the same time in 1999 (in trees in the forest), and later another in 2007 (in the home), were described as having been partially determined by a kind of haunting of their rebirth- or ancestral-selves, whereby the girls were not actually acting wholly on their own intentions, but were being driven to perform these acts by their deceased relatives.

Noting that rebirths are not simply copies or reproductions of past people, we may recall the case of the woman who insisted that her grandson was the rebirth of her deceased husband and asked her family to respect him as their father. In this example, as in many of those noted in this chapter, the child was both her deceased husband and not her deceased husband. He was both alike and not alike, the father was both present and yet in some way absent. Likeness, here, does not make for 'one' person, as much as 'unlikeness' makes them other (Montaigne, quoted in Melchior-Bonnet 2002: 224).[17] Identifying with one's rebirth, while at the same time differentiating oneself and making decisions and actions based on one's own volition, appears to be a tension that characterizes the idea of rebirth in many areas. As Willerslev (2007) has noted for the Yukaghir, a small hunting group in northern Siberia who also claim intra-kin rebirths, 'the somewhat paradoxical issue that we have to grasp . . . is that while the Yukaghir person is

[17] On the one hand a rebirth must 'set up the illusion of its own previousness to itself' (Wagner 2006: 1) in order to be convincing to others that it is indeed the rebirth of a person they are familiar with. Yet, with every such act, the person must also step outside this performance so that they learn how to be the sons and daughters of people in the present.

defined by the deep relationality of his being, he is also conceived of as a person in his own right, with intentionality and agency of his own' (Willerslev 2007: 186). Focusing on this tension, Willerslev (2007: 190) makes the broader point that while animistic modes of relatedness such as intra-kin rebirth pivot around the blurring of boundaries between self and other, object and subject, it is the ability to stand apart from the world, to exercise difference rather than similarity, that is a prerequisite for experience and for perception. This power to differentiate and stand apart from, while at the same time maintain the appearance of sameness, is what seems to characterize the kind of sociality that I have been describing. Like the mirror, which both distorts and reveals, in this liminal position, deferring indefinitely between being both a woman's brother and her son's daughter, new subjects appear.

Let me return to Delgermaa's reflection, presented at the beginning, about seasonal territories being similar to age sets. Here, encampments remain in place and it is people who move between them. In so doing, a person may experience life as an infant, a young person, a middle-aged person, and an elderly person in a single year. Delgermaa's analogy appears as a miniaturization of the potential return that a person's 'soul' achieves when it moves to different bodily containers over several lifetimes. Rebirth is a way of relating that allows for the memory of people to continue. Yet I have suggested that this is not an entirely closed or repeated cycle. Although people enact multiple kinds of relations throughout their life, and may relate to their reborn-self at different periods, they also have to separate themselves from this kind of circularity. I have suggested that the process of separating oneself from one's rebirth is a precondition for becoming a person in the present (Moore 2007: 7). Through this, people and memories are laid to rest as new people emerge from them.

Objects kept on top of and inside the household chest anchor people who may be physically absent or silenced to particular households. In a similar way, intra-kin rebirth allows people to tend to the deceased as their life is extended in a new bodily form after their physical death. In the early 1990s, Humphrey (1992) suggested that Mongolians were in the process of rethinking their 'deep [pre-socialist] past' as a source of moral authority for the present. Since this knowledge was not presented through any single institution, it had to be sought through means of diverse and individualized actions (Humphrey 1992). Focusing on these diverse actions, Humphrey (1992) suggests two types of enactment by which various past-orientated meanings may be evoked. The first, termed 'historical mimicry', refers to the reproduction of events or physical objects that are held to have the symbolic

or metonymic capacity to represent ideas from the past. Here, the aim is to recreate a copy of an event or object that represents a past idea, and the reproduction of ideas is more important than the need to reproduce the features of the past in its entirety. The second enactment defined by Humphrey (1992) is referred to as 'embodiment'. This involves the identification of living people or actions with those of the past. Here, an event or person is said to be of essentially the same nature, or to have the same identity, as some past event or person. Regardless of their different outward appearances, then, the manifestations are all of a single spiritual entity.

The material discussed echoes these two kinds of enactment. When separated in life, people are able to maintain relations with each other by distributing themselves through things that are carefully contained inside the house. Photographic montages reproduce relations between agnatic groups. These images are not an exact replication of the networks themselves but, like the genealogical diagrams which they succeed, they outwardly project the idea that people who are tied to the house have infinite links to other groups. They could be said to act as 'biographical objects' (Hoskins 1998) in that they serve as vehicles by which people narrate stories about themselves to others and project different kinds of subjectivity in different seasonal places. In such a way, photographic montages appear as 'supplements to an existing self [and] means that help selves become what they are' (Keane 1999: 183). Artefacts kept inside the chest draw attention to alternative relations that facilitate movement and transformation. Relations may also be contained in people as links with the deceased are mediated through the living. Here, memories and subjects are mutually constitutive through ideas about embodiment as a living person's body is necessary for maintaining a relationship with the deceased. By rendering the body an object to be observed, a person is able to recall the memory of a deceased person. They then bring the memory of that person to life through the body of another, reconfiguring a new relationship to the subject. This way of making the deceased visible allows for memories to be made into present realities. Such ways of evoking the past may also run counter to secular memories that have been preserved by the state.[18] In the present day, rebirths are often used to recall events and people that are not present in wider public debates. In turn,

[18] Humphrey (1992) notes that '"Embodiment" as a type of enactment does not, of course, only occur in situations of oppression [such as the Soviet-dominated period in Mongolia], as can be seen from the political prominence of the reincarnations of Buddhist saints in Tibet and Mongolia in the past, but its more secular and grass-roots manifestations often run counter to more secular forms of the state (not only the socialist state)' (Humphrey 1992: 383).

photographic montages became popular at a time when genealogies and ideas about individual or familial differences were prohibited. Today, they serve to exhibit networks that differentiate status and prestige.

What kind of similarities can be drawn between the household chest as a person and the person as a rebirth? At first sight, they both appear as containers that gather different things together. Like the perspective needed to see the chest as a person, a person is also needed to recognize the rebirth of another. In both cases, a tension emerges between the gathering together of people in certain sites and their potential movement or separation. By focusing on the containment of people within people, we have seen the politics involved in revealing or concealing knowledge and the different ways in which this knowledge is reproduced and communicated to others. With the multiple senses of absence and loss created by the politics of migration, I suggest that viewing the body or objects in the household as enlivened containers is necessary for maintaining relations in the face of different kinds of movement and separation.

PART THREE
ABSENT PRESENCES