Archaeological possibilities for feminist theories of transition and transformation

Yvonne Marshall *University of Southampton*

Abstract Archaeology takes up material fragments from distant and recent pasts to create narratives of personal and collective identity. It is therefore, a powerful voice shaping our current and future social worlds. Feminist theory has to date made little reference to archaeology and its projects, in part because archaeologists have primarily chosen to work with normative forms of gender theory rather than forge new theory informed by archaeological insights. This paper argues that archaeology has considerably more potential for feminist theorizing than has so far been recognized. In particular it is uniquely placed to build theory for understanding change, transition and transformation over extended time periods, a potential explored through an archaeological case study of Pacific Northwest Coast people. In conclusion, some possibilities for expanding this case study into a wider comparative perspective are sketched out.

keywords *archaeological theory, feminist archaeology, gender archaeology, gender norms and practices, Northwest Coast archaeology, performativity*

Introduction

Archaeologists are in the business of producing pasts – pasts which emerge out of the material fragments that survive the destructive filters of time. This apparently simple materiality speaks to all people; individuals, communities, nations, even humanity in general. Archaeology is, therefore, a powerful force shaping who we are and who we might become, and if the feminist agenda for social change is to be realized we will need a feminist archaeology. Similarly, if archaeology is to inform and guide us towards a new future, it will need feminist theory. Neither is currently on the horizon.

This paper asks two questions. What might an archaeologically informed feminist theory consist of, and what is needed to facilitate the development of a feminist archaeology? I argue that a critical first step is for archaeologists to rethink their understanding of the way persons are categorized by taking on board recent feminist critiques of 'women' and 'gender', and

feminist theory exploring the relationship between societal norms and performative practices. So what might an archaeologically informed feminist theory comprise? Firstly, the extraordinary temporal reach of archaeology could bring to feminist thought a unique perspective on social change, transformation and transition, and secondly, archaeology could bring to feminism the analytical potential of a comparative project with enormous scope and power – one that reaches across the globe and into the distant human past. But in order to realize this project I argue we need to theorize from a more analytically synthetic, comparative base than is currently produced within either feminism or gender archaeology.

I will expand on each of these points in turn. To begin I will outline the current state of gender archaeology and using illustrative examples show how the proposed changes can move us on toward a feminist archaeology. I then turn to the question of how archaeology might inform feminist theory. Here I employ my research into Northwest Coast societies of the distant and recent past as a case study to outline an archaeology of transitions and transformations. Finally, I will briefly sketch out how this Northwest Coast way of thinking could be placed alongside other past and present social worlds, such Strathern's (1988: 341) Melanesian 'common aesthetic', and Western ways of thinking and being, to inform comparative feminist theorizing.

Troubling woman and gender

Recent critiques of the 'proper objects' of feminist study, namely 'women' and 'gender', have fundamentally changed feminist theorizing (Butler, 1990, 1993, 1997; hooks, 1981; Moi, 1999; Riley, 1988; Young, 2005). But these debates have hardly touched archaeology. Gender, as currently investigated in archaeology, is 'feminist' in the limited sense that it seeks to understand the nature of women's lives, and the ways in which gender roles were played out in cross-cultural and historical perspectives. The object of study is women, and gender is uncritically understood as male and female social roles. There is little interrogation of either woman, or gender, as foundational concepts. For archaeologists gender follows the social constructionist understanding of sex and gender: sex is the biologically given, pre-discursive referent for social or cultural gender differences. S&ocross;renson (2000: 43) sums it up as follows:

> While there is no agreement as to the exact nature of the relationship between sex and gender, gender archaeology has nonetheless almost universally taken this distinction for granted, and to some extent defines itself by arguing that these are separate categories, and that their separation should be maintained in and inform our analysis of the past. This has been one of the most central theoretical statements of gender studies.

The resulting gender archaeology consists largely of investigations into how the categories 'women' and 'men' are constructed and what roles 'women' and 'men' were assigned in particular time/place contexts. So while most archaeologists would agree that, to engender the past, it is not

necessary to identify women in the past (Conkey, 1991; S&ocross;renson, 2000: 185–6), they would assume that, whatever the place or time under investigation, 'women' and 'men' were always primary, meaningful categories of person. Additional or confounding differences may also exist, but women and men always peopled our past. For a transformative feminist archaeology to emerge, this must change.

An early, influential study which pointed the way is Tim Yates' re-interpretation of Swedish Bronze Age rock art (Bapty and Yates, 1990; Norbladh and Yates, 1990; Yates, 1993). Yates analysed the morphological variation 'manifested in the range of different human figures' and the 'connections between these figures and other designs' with the aim of 'drawing out the ways in which the body and its sexual identity are repre-sented' (Yates, 1993: 32). Although Yates is concerned with images of bodies, this analytical procedure is no different to the analysis of corporeal skeletal bodies; it begins by measuring morphological variation, whether skeletal or representational, then searches for co-variation between morphological features and contextual evidence such as associated material items or spatial position relative to other bodies. However, while osteologists would assume observed morphological variation maps directly to male and female persons (Sofaer, 2006), and use identified variation to designate skeletal bodies as those of women and men, Yates does not. He does identify two categories of represented person, a masculine persona marked out by the presence of distinguishing features including phallus, greater height, exaggerated calf muscles and armour, and an ambivalent persona unmarked by specifying signifiers, but these designations do not follow from the morphologies of already sexed corporeal bodies. They are 'incorporeal action[s] performed by society on the body of the subject and *post-hoc* attributed to it' (Yates, 1993: 60–1).

A similar approach is taken by Alberti (2001, 2002) in his analysis of figures depicted in frescos recovered from Bronze Age Knossos, Crete, but a very different picture is revealed. Drawing on Butler's work Alberti suggests the fresco images portray a single ideal body type characterized by a pronounced hourglass shape: extremely narrow waist, swelling hips and broad shoulders. Upon this universal body, categories of person are distinguished by exaggerating features or elaborating costume; for example, rendering variations in patterning on the skirts in exquisite detail. As in Yates' study, distinctions between people are marked out through the application of signs. Even when sexual characteristics are depicted, such as the prominent breasts of the famous snake wielding faience figurines, they are an element in the discursive construction of identity, not a pre-discursive body (Alberti, 2001: 196–7).

> The sexed body is brought into being – materialises (see Butler 1993:1–23) – when a particular type of garment is combined with a body within a specific context of representation. As such, the breasts are an integral part of the costume of the figures. A 'naked' body with breasts does not occur in the Knossian imagery . . . a gendered body does not pre-exist its representation in Knossian imagery. The costumes, adornments, acts, bodily position and medium of repre-sentation combine to performatively produce gender . . . The single body shape

and the way the variables interact with it deny the possibility of male/female being the primary marker of difference in the images. (Alberti, 2002: 114)

Alberti and Yates show how normative categories of person are created through reference to clothed bodies in which costume and body form a single field of signification rather than to genitalia or secondary sexual characteristics. Western distinctions between sex and gender are collapsed into each other and their cultural specificity exposed. In this way archaeology extends to past societies anthropological critiques of normative Western gender roles, demonstrating they cannot be assumed for either contemporary or past non-Western societies (e.g. Herdt, 1984, 1987; Hewlett, 1992; Hoskins, 1998; Moore, 1986, 1994; Strathern, 1988). In short, neither women and men, nor sex and gender, are viable starting points for a feminist archaeology.

Of norms, ideals, and practices

A key limitation of Alberti's and Yates' approach is the exclusive focus on representations and ideals. We do not see people or their everyday practices. The images depict societal norms and conventions that characterize and establish socially appropriate classes of person; they do not depict people's everyday actions. But we cannot assume that these idealized depictions carved into rock or painted on to walls tell us what people actually did. Practice may be quite different from asserted ideals. Shapin (1998: 44) for example has shown that while stories extolling Isaac Newton's ascetic indifference to food circulated widely among his associates, large deliveries of rich meats were regularly entering his house and he became so fat he could hardly squeeze into his coach. Normative stories do not tell the same tale as material practices (Herzig, 2004: 131–2). A transformative feminist archaeology will need to pay heed to this disjunction and allow people of the past, and thereby the future, the space to exercise freedom of action in opposition to the political claims of dominant groups. As Joyce argues in relation to Mayan and Aztec people of Central America,

we must allow the possibility that the people living these realities entertained different understandings of their place in the world than the construals made by central authorities, or we will simply project the political claims of certain groups on reality and deliver for them a result they could never have effected in the world they actually inhabited. (Joyce, 2000: 200)

In order to expose both the social mechanisms that establish particular kinds of person, and how people respond to those mechanisms (Ingraham, 2005; Jackson, 1999, 2005, 2006), we need multiple forms of evidence that present multiple, situated perspectives (cf. Haraway, 1991). This applies to contemporary material worlds as well as to those of the past. For example, by reading the norms encoded in the materials and rituals of contemporary American white weddings, against statistics documenting actual marriage practice, Ingraham (1999) exposes heterosexuality as a highly organized, regulated social institution, not natural behaviour:

> women did not enter this world knowing they wanted to wear a prom dress, practice something called 'dating', buy a white wedding gown or play with 'My Size Bride Barbie'. Likewise, men did not exit the womb knowing they would one day have to buy a date a corsage or spend two months' income to buy an engagement ring . . . What circulates as a given in American society is, in fact, a highly structured arrangement. As is the case with most institutions, people who participate in these practices must be *socialized* to do so. (Ingraham, 1999: 4, original emphasis)

Ingraham begins with the material wedding assemblage and its representation in media such as advertising and women's magazines. To be properly married in a white wedding ceremony demands a vast array of complex and expensive material items: dresses, cakes, rings, coaches and confetti to name but a few. The crucial person created by this industry is a wife and, as in Swedish rock art and Minoan frescos, the ideal wife is referenced to the clothed, socialized bodies of white wedding celebrants, not biological bodies or genitalia. Heterosexual persons are created and naturalized through the performative deployment of white wedding paraphernalia and rituals, not vice versa.

But the vehemence with which these norms are asserted and the extravagance of the materials employed to establish, underpin and protect them, betrays their vulnerability. Social statistics documenting who is actually marrying show that large sections of the population never marry, and both age at first marriage, and divorce rates, are rising. The ideals and norms of the white wedding industry may be embedded in people's minds and imaginations, but they are less evident in practice (Ingraham, 1999: 31). Contemporary American women may be seduced by the media into desiring the fantasies of romantic love, but they do not always choose to performatively iterate them. Consequently, as the production of that crucial commodity, wives, declines, investment in the wedding industry escalates.

Similarly, in order to see both norms and practices in past worlds we need to view them through a variety of archaeological materials recovered from more than one context. A case in point is Laurie Wilkie's (2003) moving portrait of Lucrecia Perryman, an African-American woman who began her life in slavery circa 1836 and concluded it as a free woman in 1917. There is little here of whiteness, weddings or wives. Lucrecia's is a more fundamental struggle: to establish life-affirming practices that repudiate the brutal experience of mothering as a black slave. Her first children are born into slavery with little prospect of being nurtured or protected by their mother, but following the abolition of slavery, Lucrecia reclaims her right to parent.

Using a combination of textual and archaeological evidence Wilkie looks into Lucrecia's world from several vantage points. From census data, wills, tax and property records, she identifies the Perryman family as comparatively affluent given the bleak economic and social prospects of black people in the city of Mobile, circa 1850–1920. In contrast to the stereotypical images of black women in antebellum southern society Lucrecia and her eldest daughter emerge as valued, full-time mothers and homemakers supported by income from the family's men, much as white middle

class women might have aspired to be. Archaeological remains recovered from rubbish dumps near the Perryman house allow us to focus in on the family's everyday practices. Amongst discarded animal and fish bones were 166 ceramic vessels; 54 pressed glass vessels; 97 bottles for alcoholic beverages; 54 mineral or soda water bottles – quite a tally. Lucrecia's social aspirations are evident in her efforts 'to present a well-matched table' documented by the remains of four sets of matching tablewares, one a full dining service in white porcelain suitable for display in a glass-fronted sideboard (Wilkie, 2003: 96), and two 'Rebecca at the Well' teapots whose imagery at this time was a potent symbol of American women 'as the spiritual and physical protector of the household' (Wilkie, 2003: 91). Following her husband's death, Lucrecia is forced to take paid employment. She chooses midwifery, a profession that builds on her mother-working skills, allows her to remain largely independent, and which keeps her within a home-working environment where she is less exposed to potential abuse.

Wilkie shows us Lucrecia striving 'to reconstruct and resignify what it was to be a black woman following enslavement' by establishing positive 'notions of mothering, motherhood and motherwork' in her daily life as mother, grandmother, and midwife (Wilkie, 2003: 219). As in Ingraham's study of contemporary white weddings, the gap between the asserted norms and ideals of antebellum black womanhood and Lucrecia's personal practice, is made evident. In both studies we see women struggling to carve out liveable lives between accommodation and resistance to oppressive normative ideals (cf. Butler, 2004). The massive investment of work and materials put into establishing, legitimating, and perpetrating normative roles, is placed alongside the evident failure of those norms to fully constrain each person's actions, allowing us to see the vulnerability of those norms and the potential of feminist archaeology to open spaces for societal change, transition and transformation.

A feminist archaeology of transition and transformation

So how might this feminist archaeology inform feminist theorizing? As shown in the examples discussed above archaeology is unique in its focus on material worlds, and through those material worlds it offers different, sometimes unexpected, perspectives on both familiar and distant lives. In addition, because archaeology offers a window into near and distant pasts we can use it to see not only difference but also change, how the vulnerability of norms to practice opens them to challenge and transformation.

The archaeological record of the more distant past is inevitably dominated by media of long-term durability such as stone, metal, glass and ceramics, while less durable organic materials like wood and textiles are seldom recovered. When past societies compound durability with monumentality, as happened for example in Egypt and Mesoamerica, the force of their material arguments can be overwhelming, as indeed they are intended to be, and it is easy for archaeologists to be seduced into believing 'a normative view of past societies as inhabited by persons who all were

always engaged in tightly regulated gender performances' (Perry and Joyce, 2001: 69). Durable, monumental, statements can, and often do, so completely fill our archaeological field of view they begin to dominate our understanding of past societies, producing a past that is all about defining, fixing, concretizing, and constraining social lives. Against this view, I argue that at least some past societies were not consumed with a need to materially encode, police, or categorize people, and that, although as archaeologists we cannot directly witness people's behaviour, we can see beyond imposing monumental evidence to the less obvious accumulated material sediments formed by people's repeated, everyday actions.

To make this argument I examine the coastal First Nations of British Columbia, Canada. Like the people of Egypt and Mesoamerica, Northwest Coast First Nations produced monumental art and architecture, but they worked with organic media – wood, bone, bark and other plant fibres – so very little survives in the archaeological record. Today, First Nations of the Northwest Coast are internationally renowned for their remarkable artworks, including the totem poles that are so widely and mistakenly believed to be iconic of all North American First Nations. I look into Northwest Coast societies from four vantage points, two ancient and two from recent centuries, in order to explore both normative ideals and iterative practice over a period of some 3000 years.

My first view is through a collection of 136 sculptures executed in stone, which were brought together for exhibition in 1975 by anthropologist Wilson Duff. These rare, extraordinary sculptures are atypical survivals from a presumably once extensive corpus of artwork made in organic materials. They are known to have been made at various times over the last 3000 years, though few are precisely dated. To a greater or lesser degree, all consist of sculpted genitalia, mouths, eyes, ears and faces folded into functional forms including hammers, bowls, clubs and masks (Figure 1). Each sculpture combines phallic and vulvic imaginary to produce an image that is simultaneously both. 'What distinguishes and unites the 136 artefacts in the exhibition is the way they combine stone materials, functional form and graphic iconography, most of which is sexual' (Marshall, 2000a: 226).

Conventionally, Duff (1975: 91) attempted to divide the artefacts into male and female forms; less conventionally, he also sought to interpret them as 'both and neither at the same time; neither that is both'. My re-reading of these artefacts, informed by Butler and by Grosz (1994), rejects Duff's binary division, but builds on his central insight that the evocative power of these images lies in what they bring together, not what they hold apart. They do not define categories of person, they portray the potentialities of relationships formed between at least three entities: two depicted in the artefact's imagery and a third implied in the hand/body/person that grasps, uses, and thereby animates both the artefact itself and the relationships it makes material. The result is more akin to a philosophical exploration of the dynamism and instability of persons and relationships, of their mutual constitution of difference, than a normative directive for gendered behaviour.
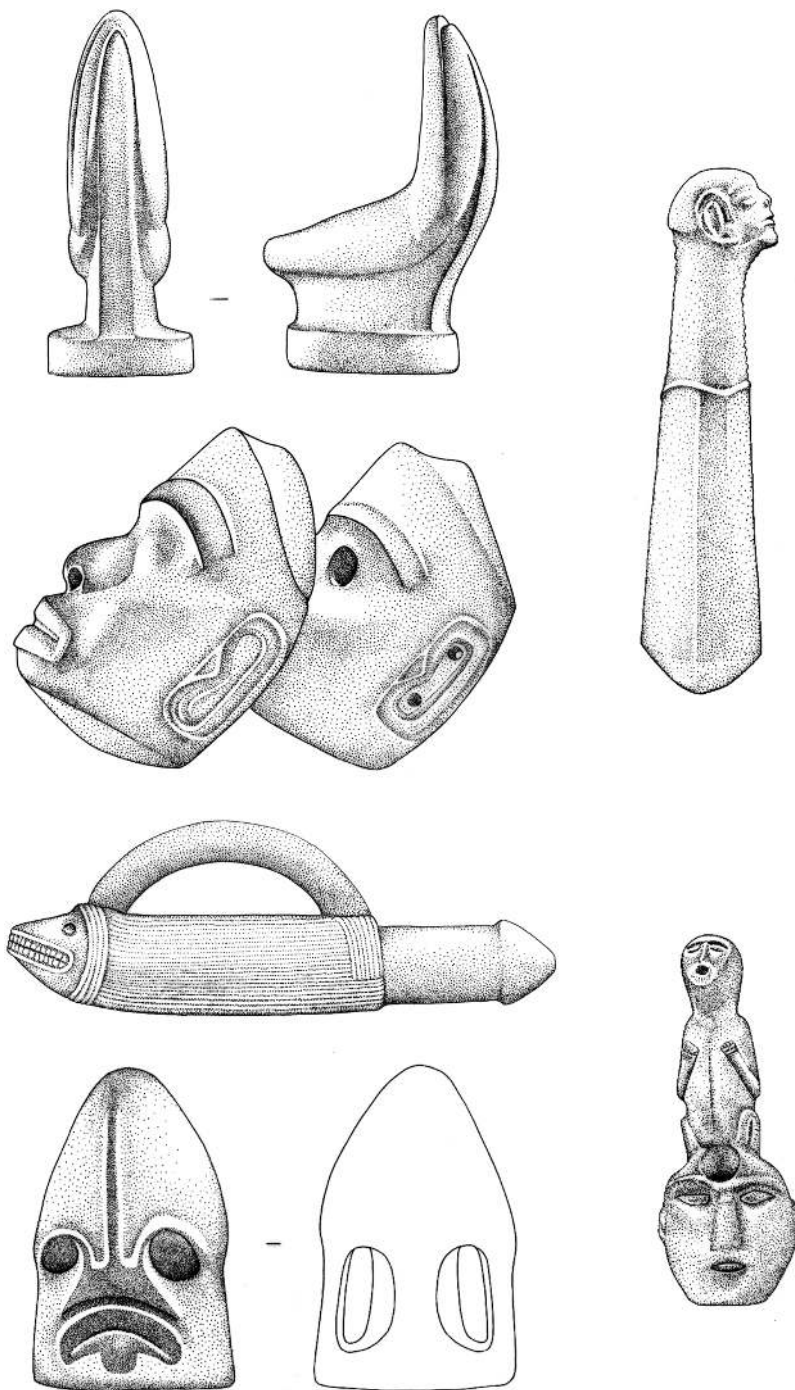
Figure 1   *Prehistoric stone artefacts from the Pacific Northwest Coast. Clockwise from top left: slope-handled maul, 23 cm high; club, 46 cm long; seated human figure bowl, 19 cm high; pile driver 39 cm high; club, 34 cm long; pair of stone masks with open and closed eyes, 23 cm high. Drawings by Kathryn Knowles from photographs in Duff 1975.*

My second view examines a far more mundane form of archaeological evidence: the spatial organization of settlements. Beginning around 5000 years ago, the formal demarcation of structures and spaces within settlements began to intensify (Ames and Maschner, 1999; Sobel et al., 2006). Among the Nuu-chah-nulth tribes of western Vancouver Island the arrangement of dwellings within villages, and the demarcation of living spaces within dwellings, became increasingly marked. Once established, the precise location of a dwelling might be maintained and curated for hundreds, possibly thousands of years (Marshall, 2006: 41–2). To maintain a large wooden dwelling over such a long period requires constant repair and replacement of component parts. In this process of repeated partial renewal, the dwelling as a whole is both constantly changing and endlessly present. In this way it is rendered as enduring as any stone monument despite its organic materials. But unlike the normative stories inscribed in stone monuments, Northwest Coast houses remain the products of many small individual iterative actions, repeated over a long period of time. As such, the materiality of dwellings, and of dwelling, is responsive to subtle shifts taking place in everyday practices. Because repeated practices performatively generate the normative, which must then emerge anew from each iterative action, materially, norm and practice are one. In this organic renewal process possibilities for change and transformation are immediate and ongoing, unlike a situation where ideals are literally set in stone for people to aspire to, and iterative practice may variously resist, reject, accommodate or conform, but these actions cannot immediately, materially affect the norms asserted. Possibilities and pathways for change are therefore different in these contrasting circumstances.

While we cannot generally read the actions of individual people from the archaeological evidence, we can recover the material structure of people's living spaces which emerges from their cumulative everyday actions. In the living spaces within Nuu-chah-nulth dwellings, we see a similar pattern of curation to that observed for dwellings within villages. Once an interior space is established for a specific purpose or group it is likely to remain so. Hearths and other activities are superimposed through successive depositional layers and house floors (Marshall, 2000b, c). In addition, the richness of material debris varies both between dwellings and between living spaces within dwellings, but these differences are relative not absolute. While there may be more or less of a particular material, such as salmon bones, there are no definitive material signifiers that mark the residence of any specific category of person. For example, the recovery of prized dentalium shells from a specific location within a dwelling does not necessarily, of itself, indicate the living space of a chief – it depends on what is found around it. So the presence of unusually high numbers of salmon bone in conjunction with dentalium, when the dominant materials in other spaces are perhaps halibut and herring bone, might suggest the living space of a family ranked more highly than others living within the same dwelling. The potential significance of recovered items depends on what is found in the surrounding context. Like the stone sculptures, this sedimented record of everyday dwelling, speaks to us of relationships

between people rather than designated social positions, and it suggests the mutual construction of social positions, of relative rank, not formal categories of person.

My third view is more recent. In 1778 the British explorer Captain James Cook sailed into Nootka Sound on Vancouver Island. Local Nuu-chah-nulth people paddled out in canoes to greet these strange newcomers. Accustomed to the clear way that Hawaiian custom unambiguously proclaimed in costume, adornments, and actions a person's precise social position, Cook and his men were baffled by their inability to read rank or status from the dress, behaviour or dwellings of the Nootka Sound people. The only material item identified as marking a male chief was a distinctive form of rain hat decorated with scenes of whale hunting (Figure 2).

Later visitors were similarly confused. When Maquinna, chief of Nootka Sound, approached Vancouver's ship the *Discovery* on 29 August 1792, he and his entourage of lesser chiefs were prevented from boarding because 'there was not in his appearance the smallest indication of his superior rank' (Marshall, 1993: 171). Several days later, Vancouver, representative of the British crown, and Quadra, representative of the Spanish crown, travelled to Maquinna's village at Tahsis for an official state banquet. Vancouver brought food, cooks and a silver dining service, while Quadra brought drinks. They feasted with Maquinna and his chiefs at a 'top table' laid with individual place settings, while everyone else followed the local custom and ate tuna and dolphin stew from communal wooden troughs. As Maquinna acknowledged in his after-dinner speech, Vancouver and Quadra not only honoured and recognized him as chief by setting him apart in the ceremony of feasting, they materially and performatively created him as such (Marshall, 1989: 18; 1993). Other accounts by early visitors make the same point. Amongst the Nuu-chah-nulth social position was not displayed in everyday material items or recognized in everyday behaviour. Status was formally acknowledged and overtly displayed in a
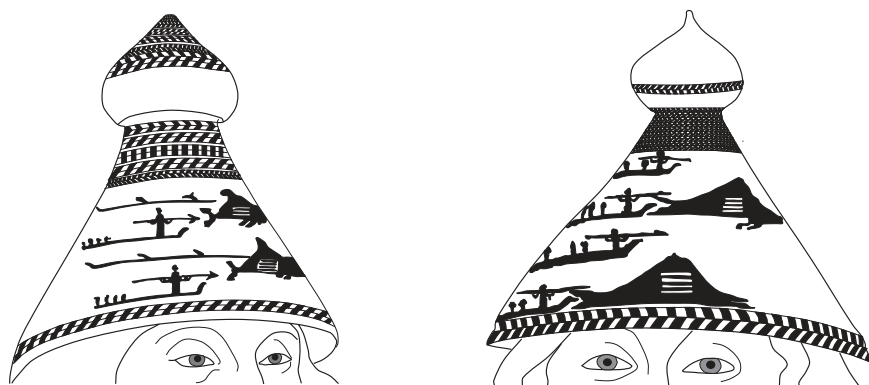

Figure 2   *Nuu-chah-nulth woven rain hats depicting scenes of whale hunting. Chief Maquinna of Nootka Sound as depicted by Tomas de Suria in 1791 (left). Chief Tatoosh of Neah Bay as depicted in the Atlas of the schooners Sutil amd Mexicana, 1802 (right). Figure drawn by Penny Copeland.*

variety of material ways during ceremonial events, particularly in the distribution of food and other wealth objects, and a state banquet with the representatives of European nation states was easily accommodated as an extension of local practice. On ceremonial occasions, whether local or international events, material culture played a crucial role in the performative enactment of status and rank, establishing political reputation, social credibility and relative rank. But it did not define categories of persons.

My final window turns to a selection of material items performed in Nuu-chah-nulth ceremonial events during the late 19th and early 20th centuries: masks, costumes, songs, dances and dance screens. From her insightful reading of ceremonial wolf masks, Moogk (1980) has drawn out the structuring principles of Nuu-chah-nulth thought. She emphasizes, just as Strathern (1988: 309) would later, that hers is 'a theoretical structure' drawn up to facilitate an outsider's understanding; it is not an insider's exegesis (Moogk, 1980: 97):

> from this analysis, I have learned the concepts elucidated by the masks, and I have increased my comprehension of the Nootkan [Nuu-chah-nulth] culture. This is exactly what the masks did for the Nootka . . . The masks are ritual forms which are used as textbooks to teach the novices during their initiation about this cosmos of dangerous transformations, and how to deal with it. We too can be novices, and learn from the masks and their context. We can 'read' the masks in the same way and learn about the Nootka and the system of beliefs which they used to deal with the problems of living – their culture. (Moogk, 1980: 101–3)

In Moogk's reading, the Nuu-chah-nulth cosmos consists of three profane realms: land, sea, and sky, and a fourth 'supernatural' realm of power, which occupies the spaces between the other three. The relationships between these realms are commonly depicted on ceremonial dance curtains (Figure 3): thunderbird (sky) grasps whale (sea) in his talons, flanked on one side by wolf (land) and on the other by lightning serpent (inbetween), embodiment of lightning and of the harpoon thunderbird hurls to capture whale. The emphasis in these representations is on transformation or 'moral travel', in which movement takes place between the profane realms via the inbetween (Moogk, 1980: 18). For example, moral travel takes place during the puberty rituals performed to guide a girl's transition to womanhood (Moogk, 1991) and during the wolf ritual performed to initiate youths, including sometimes girls, into adulthood. The transformations that characterize moral travel are enacted by dancers performing the three wolf masks (Figure 4). The initiate must leave the profane realm of crawling wolf and move into the powerful, but also unstable and dangerous, realm of the inbetween, exemplified in the dynamic iconography of whirling wolf/lightning serpent, then emerge transformed and empowered, but also stabilized, in the form of standing wolf. To survive the dangerous realm of the inbetween, an initiate must literally scrub off and leave behind their identity, including their name. The completeness of their transformation during moral travel is recognized in the taking of a new name. Repeated transformation and the risks this entails are the price which must be paid for high social status. To achieve

Figure 3   *A pair of ceremonial wooden dance screens painted with designs depicting thunderbird, lightening serpent, wolf and whale which were displayed for a girl's puberty ceremony at Port Alberni, ca 1910. Collection of the American Museum of Natural History 16/1.1892. Figure drawn by Penny Copeland.*

high rank, a person must repeatedly travel to, obtain power, and return safely from, the inbetween. It is variation in ability to travel across moral worlds that distinguishes different kinds of persons.

If we now look back to the rain hats of 1778, we can see that the same sets of relationships are depicted in the rain hat whaling scenes, in the dance curtains, and in the wolf masks. As shown on the curtains and hats, to capture whale, a hunter must travel to the inbetween and harness the power of lightning serpent to harpoon whale. The hats refer to the wearer's
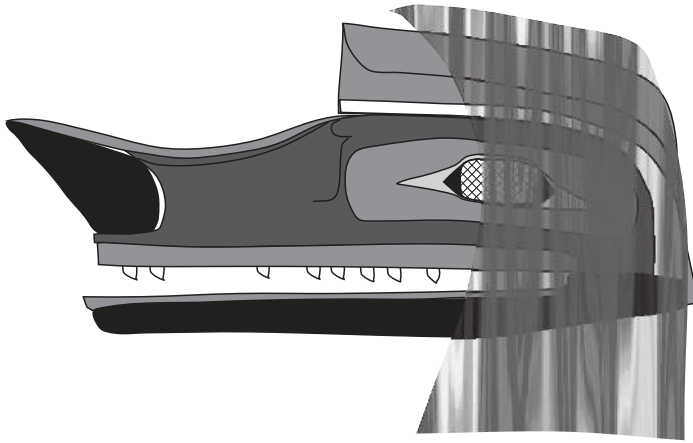
Figure 4 *Three Nuu-chah-nulth ceremonial wolf masks: (top) crawling wolf mask, drawn from an illustration in Norman Bancroft-Hunt and Werner Forman 1979 People of the Totem. London: Book Club Associates p. 118; (middle) whirling wolf/lightening serpent mask, Collection of the Royal British Columbia Museum 13254; (bottom) standing wolf mask, Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization VII-F-655. Figure drawn by Penny Copeland.*

ability to safely and successfully undertake moral travel in order to acquire
the power needed to hunt whale. They do not in any simple sense signify
or designate a specific category of person such as a chief. Like their
dwellings, a Nuu-chah-nulth person is subject to constant change, repeated
renewal, and frequent transformation. It is this movement which makes
their continuity as a person possible. To effect material and social conti-
nuity a person must continually risk themselves in the dangerous but
transformative process of renewal through moral travel.

Finally, we can return to the stone sculptures. Although these sculptures
are drawn from across the Northwest Coast region, and were created over
the vast time span of some 3000 years, I suggest the principles inherent in
their composition resonate deeply with those of the later Nuu-chah-nulth
rain hats, dance curtains and wolf masks. All depict multiple realms or
states dynamically engaged with and mutually constitutive of each other.
Just as the masks need the dancer, and the rain hats a wearer, the stone
sculptures are animated by the actions of the person using the object. In
each case, the human actor is drawn into an engagement with the moral
world. Reading the stone sculptures through later Nuu-chah-nulth ceremo-
nial worlds suggests they speak of journeys like moral travel. The person
wielding each tool, whether hammering, striking, consuming or dancing,
becomes a performative participant in the dynamic relationships embodied
by the tool and enacted in its function. In using the object, a person is both
physically and metaphorically positioned in between, journeying through
a moral world, engaged in powerful transformative action.

In Northwest Coast societies generally, and among the Nuu-chah-nulth
in particular, people moved into, through, out of and between social
positions. These positions were not marked out as exclusive, binding,
intrinsically problematic or in need of material signifiers to enable their
completion. There are no signifiers attached to figures or people in order
to mark them out as a particular category of person as we see in Swedish
Bronze Age rock art, Minoan frescos, or contemporary American white
weddings. On the Northwest Coast, what is marked out as problematic and
dangerous is the negotiation of transitions and transformations between
positions or states, and it is here that we see the social deployment and
display of an extensive repertoire of material culture items, including
artworks.

If I had begun this analysis of Northwest Coast societies with the aim of
identifying men, women, slaves, commoners and chiefs, I would have been
able to find them. I could have placed people and representations of people
into these categories, but I would only have succeeded in making First
Nations people of the recent and distant past look like contemporary white
Western people. I have tried instead to pay attention to what the objects
themselves suggest is important and begin from there. We as outsiders,
distanced in time from the social worlds in which these artefacts were
made, cannot know the precise intentions of their creators. But we can
attempt to read their work sympathetically, in a manner which draws from
the materials of the past rather than imposing upon them. In the final
instance, however, these readings will of course always remain ours, but

in reading through difference we might hope to provoke new insight into our own condition.

In my feminist reading of Northwest Coast objects and dwellings I have tried, as Moore (1994) suggests, to work back to Western categories instead of starting with them. I have highlighted the transitional and transforma- tive nature of people and materials, of their social and material worlds, because that is the message which presents itself to me most strongly. It is also a way of thinking and being which contrasts strikingly with Western notions of identity, and therefore prompts us to question them anew.

Possibilities for a comparative project

To conclude this paper I will briefly consider some possibilities for a wider comparative account of difference, one of which brings together further studies of the kind outlined above with a view to theorizing from their collective insights. Past attempts at such comparative projects have, entirely justifiably, been critiqued as colonialist and demeaning (e.g. Haraway, 1989; Kuper, 1988) and have consequently fallen almost entirely from academic favour.

Gender archaeology has not attempted such a project. Instead it has generated a vast, highly particularistic and 'unreflexively [W]estern, normative and heterosexual' literature on gender (Conkey, 2003: 876) that now outstrips 'even the most dedicated attempts at bibliographic tracking' (Joyce, 2004: 90). This literature seldom challenges or questions the disci- plinary status quo in archaeology and does not aspire to build upon contemporary feminist theorizing, although there are exceptions (Baker, 1998a, b, 2000; Bagnal, 1990; Claassen, 2000; Meskell, 1996; Perry and Joyce, 2001; Rubin, 2000; Schmidt and Voss, 2000; She, 2000; Voss, 2000; Wylie, 1992, 2002).

A few tentative moves have been made to build new kinds of compara- tive analysis in archaeology. Hodder (1990), for example, made an early attempt to develop a synthetic account of gender relations across the changing world of Neolithic Europe. However, the rigidly structuralist underpinnings of this study are antithetical to most feminist theorizing making it difficult to build from. Dobres (2000) in contrast used a practice framework to develop a general account of Palaeolithic agency, as read through the embodied social production of technology, and this approach holds considerable promise for feminist theorizing. Loosely thematic volumes, such as Pyburn's (2004) collection of essays comparing ancient worlds and Foxhall and Salmon's (1998a, b) edited volumes on gendered worlds in classical antiquity are more common, but they include limited synthetic comment. If we are to overcome the limitations of gender archae- ology we will need to work towards more synthetic cross-cultural compari- sons.

More recently Meskell and Joyce (2003) have brought together their respective insights on the construction of persons and identities in ancient Egyptian and Mayan worlds. In her work on Egypt, Meskell (1999: 193) has specifically sought out the fluidities, permeability and entanglements of

multiple strands of identity formation. A key objective is breaking down
of the 'boundaries of identity categories themselves, blurring the crucial
domains of identity formation' (Meskell, 2001; Meskell and Preucel, 2004:
121–3, 133). Meskell's account of identity in the Egyptian world is placed
alongside Joyce's fascinating study of changing regulatory regimes in
Mesoamerican societies over the last 3000 years (Joyce, 1998, 2000). Joyce's
primary interest is in gender, but her focus is on how categories of person
in general were created, defined, differentiated, and socially positioned
through sanctioned activity and representation (Joyce, 2004). Gender is one
axis of differentiation, but it is understood in the context of a 'Meso-
american way of becoming and being' and its 'radically different view of
human nature' to not only our own Western perspective (Joyce, 2000: 176),
but also that of the ancient Egyptians, and potentially I would add, the
Northwest Coast.

Two landmark studies in feminist anthropology, Strathern's (1988)
account of Melanesian societies, and Hoskins' (1998) study of the Kodi
people of Sumba, Eastern Indonesia, have been especially influential and
it is to these I will turn by way of conclusion. The appeal of these studies
to archaeologists is not their feminist theorizing or analysis of gender but
their focus on objects as powerful agents in the construction of persons,
and the contrast this offers with Western notions of self and personhood
(Gosden and Marshall, 1999: 174).

Ever since Malinowski's (1922) groundbreaking study of Trobriand
Island *kula* exchange networks anthropologists have characterized Melane-
sian societies as gift-centred, arguing that it is through the circulation of
gifts that social relationships are created and maintained. Strathern's study
extends this characterization to people, arguing it is through the circulation
of objects that personhood is established. This personhood is quite unlike
our own Western idea of the self because in Melanesia a person remains
distributed through the objects they exchange, rather than being collected
together in a bounded individual whole. In drawing out comparisons
between Melanesia and the West, Strathern (1988: 310) likens herself to an
elbow which intervenes 'between two sets of objectifications – Melanesian
and Western European ideas – in order to turn one into the other'. In
addition she makes the important point that it is, 'inadmissible to juxta-
pose this or that particular form with what we in our imagination gener-
alise as the single "society" of the West. There is no such society; there are
only generalisations' (Strathern, 1988: 343).

Hoskins' study, published ten years later, is partly written in response to
Strathern's work. Like Strathern her 'aim is ultimately comparative: to
show how a different relation to objects generates differently gendered
lives, presenting a model of identification and lived dualism that is an
alternative to our own assumptions' (Hoskins, 1998: 12). Hoskins' central
argument is that Kodi construct themselves as persons through reference
to selected objects, and she gives us six biographical stories, each focused
around an object, detailing how specific individuals have used these
objects to accomplish for themselves a sense of coherence and completion
as a person. The ways these chosen objects 'are remembered, hoarded, or

used as objects of fantasy and desire' are shown to be a process by which people 'reify characteristics of personhood that must then be narratively organised into an identity' (Hoskins, 1998: 24).

In reading Strathern's and Hoskins' studies alongside the above account of Northwest Coast societies what stands out is a common focus on the manner in which personhood is constructed, maintained and made sense of, and how gender, understood in the broadest possible sense, is implicated in these processes. Resonances of these themes are also found in Meskell and Joyce's analyses of ancient Mayan and Egyptian worlds. These are not studies of 'women' and 'men', nor do they set out to define women's and men's social roles. They are accounts of how people construct and maintain themselves as viable social persons, with liveable lives. The ways this happens are surprisingly different in Melanesia, Sumba and the Northwest Coast, but in each case personhood is revealed as shifting, fragmented, transitional and continuity of personhood is negotiated through objects which act to facilitate judicious management of change and transformation.

Conclusion

Given archaeology's unique perspectives on material culture, and its reach into the distant past, it should be making a special contribution to feminist theory, but this contribution has so far failed to materialize (Conkey and Gero, 1991: 6; 1997; Perry and Joyce, 2001; Robin, 2006; S&ocross;renson, 2000). Despite an explosion of work on the archaeology of gender there have been only a tiny number of archaeological contributions to feminist journals (e.g. Conkey, 2003; Perry and Joyce, 2001). The reason for this failure lies with the normative gender archaeology produced (Bender, 2000; Conkey and Gero, 1997; Joyce, 2004: 91; Meskell, 1999; Wilkie and Hayes, in press). As Conkey and Gero (1997: 24) observe, the gender archaeology approach adopted by most North American (and other) archaeologists simply adds gender as 'just another variable' into traditional archaeology, 'without reconfiguring archaeology in any way'. The price we have paid for mainstream recognition of gender archaeology is the political dimension of feminism and the upshot has been acceptance into the academy of a well-defined, highly productive, but utterly normative subdiscipline of gender archaeology. My aim in this paper has been to point the way towards to a different kind of relationship between feminism and archaeology, one that reclaims the political dimension of feminism, and that looks to develop the potentialities of a comparative feminist theory of transition and transformation.

References

Alberti, B. (2001) 'Faience Goddesses and Ivory Bull-leapers: The Aesthetics of Sexual Difference at Late Bronze Age Knossos', *World Archaeology* 33(2): 189–205.

Alberti, B. (2002) 'Gender and the Figurative Art of Late Bronze Age Knossos', pp. 98–119 in Y. Hamilakis (ed.) *Labyrinth Revisited: Rethinking 'Minoan' Archaeology*. Oxford: Oxbow Books.

Ames, K. M. and H. D. G. Maschner (1999) *Peoples of the Northwest Coast*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Bagnal, R. (1990) 'The Experience and Identity of "Woman": Feminism after Structuralism', pp. 103–26 in I. Bapty and T. Yates (eds) *Archaeology after Structuralism: Post-structuralism and the Practice of Archaeology*. London: Routledge.

Baker, M. (1998a) 'Feminist Post-Structuralist Engagements with History', *Rethinking History* 2(3): 371–8.

Baker, M. (1998b) 'Italian Gender Theory and Archaeology: A Political Engagement', pp. 23–33 in R. D. Whitehouse (ed.) *Gender and Italian Archaeology: Challenging the Stereotypes*. Accordia Specialist Studies on Italy 7, Institute of Archaeology, University College London, London.

Baker, M. (2000) 'Gender: Enabling Perspective or Politically Correct Term? An Analysis of How Gender and Material Culture are Viewed by 1990's Academia', pp. 56–68 in M. McDonald and L. Hurcombe (eds) *Gender and Material Culture in Archaeological Perspective*. London: Macmillan Press.

Bapty, I. and T. Yates, eds (1990) *Archaeology after Structuralism: Post-structuralism and the Practice of Archaeology*. London: Routledge.

Bender, B. (2000) 'Introduction', pp. xix–xxix in M. McDonald and L. Hurcombe (eds) *Representations of Gender from Prehistory to Present*. London: Macmillan Press.

Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1993) *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. New York: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1997) 'Against Proper Objects', pp. 1–30 in E. Weed and N. Schor (eds) *Feminism Meets Queer Theory*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Butler, J. (2004) *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge.

Claassen, C. (2000) 'Homophobia and Women Archaeologists', *World Archaeology* 32(2): 173–9.

Conkey, M. W. (1991) 'Does It Make a Difference? Feminist Thinking and Archaeologies of Gender', pp. 24–33 in D. Walde and D. Willows (eds) *The Archaeology of Gender*. Calgary: The Archaeological Association of the University of Calgary.

Conkey, M. W. (2003) 'Has Feminism Changed Archaeology?', *Signs* 28(3): 867–80.

Conkey, M. W. and J. M. Gero (1991) 'Tensions, Pluralities and Engendering Archaeology: An Introduction to Women and Prehistory', pp. 3–30 in J. M. Gero and M. W. Conkey (eds) *Engendering Archaeology*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Conkey, M. W. and J. Gero (1997) 'From Programme to Practice: Gender and Feminism in Archaeology', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 7: 1–32.

Dobres, M. (2000) *Technology and Social Agency: Outlining a Practice Framework for Archaeology*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Duff, W. (1975) *images stone b.c.* Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Foxhall, L. and J. Salmon, eds (1998a) *Thinking Men: Masculinity and its Self-Represenation in the Classical Tradition*. London: Routledge.

Foxhall, L. and J. Salmon, eds (1998b) *When Men Were Men: Masculinity, Power and Identity in Classical Antiquity*. London: Routledge.

Gosden, C. and Y. M. Marshall (1999) 'The Cultural Biography of Objects', *World Archaeology* 31(2): 169–78.

Grosz, E. (1994) *Volatile Bodies*. London: Routledge.

Haraway, D. (1989) *Private Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*. London: Routledge.

Haraway, D. (1991) *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*. London: Routledge.

Herdt, G. H., ed. (1984) *Ritualised Homosexuality in Melanesia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Herdt, G. H. (1987) *The Sambia: Ritual and Gender in New Guinea*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt College Publishers.

Herzig, R. (2004) 'On Performance, Productivity, and Vocabularies of Motive in Recent Studies of Science', *Feminist Theory* 5(2): 127–48.

Hewlett, B. S. (1992) *Intimate Fathers: The Nature and Context of Aka Pygmy Paternal Infant Care*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Hodder, I. (1990) *The Domestication of Europe*. Oxford: Blackwell.

hooks, b. (1981) *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism*. Boston: South End Press.

Hoskins, J. (1998) *Biographical Objects: How Things Tell the Stories of People's Lives*. London: Routledge.

Ingraham, C. (1999) *White Weddings: Romancing Heterosexuality in Popular Culture*. London: Routledge.

Ingraham, C., ed. (2005) *Thinking Straight: The Power, the Promise and the Paradox of Heterosexuality*. London: Routledge.

Jackson, S. (1999) *Heterosexuality in Question*. London: SAGE.

Jackson, S. (2005) 'Sexuality, Heterosexuality and Gender Hierarchy: Getting Our Priorities Straight', pp. 15–38 in C. Ingraham (ed.) *Thinking Straight: The Power, the Promise and the Paradox of Heterosexuality*. London: Routledge.

Jackson, S. (2006) 'Gender, Sexuality and Heterosexuality: The Complexity (and Limits) of Heteronormativity', *Feminist Theory* 7(1): 105–21.

Joyce, R. A. (1998) 'Performing the Body in Prehispanic Central America', *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 33: 147–65.

Joyce, R. A. (2000) *Gender and Power in Prehispanic Mesoamerica*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Joyce, R. A. (2004) 'Embodied Subjectivity: Gender, Femininity, Masculinity and Sexuality', pp. 82–95 in L. Meskell and R. W. Preucel (eds) *A Companion to Social Archaeology*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Kuper, A. (1988) *The Invention of Primitive Society*. London: Routledge.

Malinowski, B. (1922) *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. London: Routledge.

Marshall, Y. M. (1989) 'The House in Northwest Coast, Nuu-chah-nulth, Society: The Material Structure of Political Action', pp. 15–21 in S. MacEachern, D. J. W. Archer and R. D. Garvin (eds) *Households and*

Communities. Proceedings of the 21st Annual Chacmool Conference, Calgary, University of Calgary Archaeological Association.

Marshall, Y. M. (1993) 'Dangerous Liaisons: Maquinna, Quadra and Vancouver in Nootka Sound, 1790–5', pp. 160–75 in R. Fisher and H. Johnston (eds) *From Maps to Metaphors.* Vancouver: UBC Press.

Marshall, Y. M. (2000a) 'Reading *images stone bc*', *World Archaeology* 32(2): 222–35.

Marshall, Y. M. (2000b) 'Transformations of Nuu-chah-nulth Houses', pp. 73–102 in R. A. Joyce and S. D. Gillespie (eds) *Beyond Kinship: Social and Material Reproduction in House Societies.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Marshall, Y. M. (2000c) 'The Changing Art and Architecture of Potlatch Houses at Yuquot', pp. 107–30 in A. L. Hoover (ed.) *Nuu-chah-nulth Voices, Histories, Objects and Journeys.* Victoria: Royal British Columbia Museum.

Marshall, Y. M. (2006) 'Houses and Domestication on the Northwest Coast', pp. 37–56 in E. Sobel, A. Trieu and K. Ames (eds) *Household Archaeology on the Northwest Coast.* Archaeological Series 16, International Monographs in Archaeology, Ann Arbor.

Meskell, L. (1996) 'The Somatisation of Archaeology: Discourses, Institutions, Corporeality', *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 29(1): 1–16.

Meskell, L. (1999) *Archaeologies of Social Life: Age, Sex, Class in Ancient Egypt.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Meskell, L. (2001) 'Archaeologies of Identity', pp. 187–213 in I. Hodder (ed.) *Archaeological Theory Today.* Cambridge: Polity.

Meskell, L. and R. A. Joyce (2003) *Embodied Lives: Figuring Ancient Maya and Egyptian Experience.* London: Routledge.

Meskell, L. and R. W. Preucel (2004) 'Identities', pp. 121–41 in L. Meskell and R. W. Preucel (eds) *A Companion to Social Archaeology.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Moi, T. (1999) *What is a Woman? And other Essays.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Moogk, S. (1980) 'The Wolf Masks of the Nootka Woolf Ritual: A Statement on Transformation', unpublished MA thesis, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

Moogk, S. (1991) 'The Construction of "Woman" in the Nuu-chah-nulth Girl's Puberty Ceremony in 1910', pp. 103–7 in D. Walde and D. Willows (eds) *The Archaeology of Gender.* Calgary: The Archaeological Association of the University of Calgary.

Moore, H. L. (1986) *Space, Text and Gender: An Anthropological Study of the Marakwet of Kenya.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Moore, H. L. (1994) *A Passion for Difference: Essays in Anthropology and Gender.* Cambridge: Polity.

Nordbladh, J. and T. Yates (1990) 'This Perfect Body, this Virgin Text: Between Sex and Gender in Archaeology', pp. 222–39 in I. Bapty and T. Yates (eds) *Archaeology after Structuralism: Post-structuralism and the Practice of Archaeology.* London: Routledge.

Perry, E. M. and R. A. Joyce (2001) 'Providing a Past for *Bodies that Matter*: Judith Butler's Impact on the Archaeology of Gender', *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies* 6: 63–76.

Pyburn, A., ed. (2004) *Ungendering Civilization.* London: Routledge.

Riley, D. (1988) *Am I that Name? Feminism and the Category of Women in History*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Robin, C. (2006) 'Gender, Farming and Long-term Change: Maya Historical and Archaeological Perspectives', *Current Anthropology* 47(3): 409–34.

Rubin, G. (2000) 'Sites, Settlements and Urban Sex: Archaeology and the Study of Gay Leathermen in San Francisco', pp. 62–88 in R. A. Schmidt and B. L. Voss (eds) *Archaeologies of Sexuality*. London: Routledge.

Schmidt, R. A. and B. L. Voss, eds (2000) *Archaeologies of Sexuality*. London: Routledge.

Shapin, S. (1998) 'The Philosopher and the Chicken: On the Dietetics of Disembodied Knowledge', pp. 21–50 in S. Shapin and C. Lawrence (eds) *Science Incarnate: Historical Embodiments of Natural Knowledge*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

She (2000) 'Sex and a Career', *World Archaeology* 32(2): 166–73.

Sobel, E., A. Trieu and K. Ames, eds (2006) *Household Archaeology on the Northwest Coast.* Archaeological Series 16, International Monographs in Archaeology, Ann Arbor.

Sofaer, J. R. (2006) *The Body as Material Culture: A Theoretical Osteoarchaeology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

S&ocross;renson, M. L. S. (2000) *Gender Archaeology*. Cambridge: Polity.

Strathern, M. (1988) *The Gender of the Gift*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Voss, B. L. (2000) 'Feminisms, Queer Theories, and the Archaeological Study of Past Sexualities', *World Archaeology* 32(2): 180–92.

Wilkie, L. A. (2003) *The Archaeology of Mothering: An African-American Midwife's Tale*. London: Routledge.

Wilkie, L. A. and K. H. Hayes (in press) 'Engendered and Feminist Archaeologies of the Recent and Documented Pasts', *Journal of Archaeological Research*.

Wylie, A. (1992) 'The Interplay of Evidential Constraints and Political Interests: Recent Archaeological Research on Gender', *American Antiquity* 59: 15–35.

Wylie, A. (2002) *Thinking from Things: Essays in the Philosophy of Archaeology*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Yates, T. (1993) 'Frameworks for an Archaeology of the Body', pp. 31–72 in C. Tilly (ed.) *Interpretative Archaeology*. Oxford: Berg.

Young, I. M. (2005) *On Female Body Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Yvonne Marshall is a senior lecturer in Archaeology at the University of Southampton and has published on the archaeology of New Zealand, Fiji and British Columbia, and she is currently working on the archaeology of the Women's Peace Camps at Greenham Common. Yvonne has always been interested in politically committed archaeologies, particularly the intersections of archaeology with feminist theory, and has been teaching feminist theory to archaeology students since 1994. The present paper is a part of work in progress towards a book on feminist theory and archaeology.

Address: Archaeology, Department of Humanities, University of Southampton, Highfield, Southampton SO17 1BJ, UK. Email: ymm@soton.ac.uk