

Session ID	4
Session Title	New feminisms? Radical post-humanist archaeologies
Start Time	Mon Dec 16 13:30:00
Room	826

We live in volatile political times: white supremacy is rising, xenophobic attitudes shape politics, homophobic and transphobic discrimination continues and the pervasive and powerful nature of the patriarchy runs through all of these. Intersectional feminist, queer, and post-colonial discourses in broader society have resurged in this context. In archaeology essential work on sexual harassment has stimulated a powerful new wave of intersectional feminist discourse demanding changes in our practice. Yet our theory has seen less radical change. This is ironic because non-anthropocentric approaches have been gaining traction in archaeology, and many arise from feminist thinking. Feminist theorists such as Barad, Bennett, Braidotti, Grosz, and Haraway have drawn attention to how the majority of the population have been excluded from the category 'human' by humanism and argue for a radical re-understanding of the human and the vibrant worlds they are a part of. The humans that emerge are deeply relational, entangled with diverse other-than-humans, and always historical. These approaches are intersectional and feminist, yet our engagement with them often overlooks their potential to radically reframe marginalized voices both past and present. We call for papers which challenge this by engaging explicitly with the potential of post-anthropocentric, new materialist and post-humanist approaches to make bold and radical changes to our ontologies and thus our conceptualisation of marginalised (human and non-human) identities. Feminism was a crucial driver of post-processualism and engaging explicitly with developments in new materialist and post-humanist feminisms is of equal importance in realising the promise of the ontological turn.

13:30	Hannah Cobb, University of Manchester; Rachel Crellin, University of Leicester	Session introduction	
13:35	Penny Bickle, University of York	New approaches to difference? Celebrating and experiencing ambiguous bodies in the European Neolithic	In this paper, I posit that radical archaeological theories require new definitions and explorations of the concept of difference. This is because while difference remains under-theorised, Freudian/psychoanalytic concepts of difference flourish in archaeology - in which we are concerned with the average (e.g. male) and deviance from the average (e.g. female). Drawing on concepts of difference developed from post-humanists such as Braidotti and Grosz, and anthropologists such as Moore, I debate how to refigure difference as inherent in becoming, as horizontal and ambiguous. I then explore how such concepts of difference can help us to write new narratives for the burial evidence and bioarchaeological data from the early and middle Neolithic of central Europe. Central to this discussion are the ways in which differences between bodies (sex, gender, age, lifeway) have been interpreted to date. I will argue that by considering range, variability, and possibility, encourages us to consider times of ambiguity, as well times of distinct policing and limiting of bodies. In conclusion, I suggest we should work towards an archaeology that accepts and celebrates ambiguous differences, that approaches differences as a positive, rather attempting to overcome them.
13:52	Yvonne O'Dell, University of Leicester	'Nobody knows what a [feminist] body can do': difference, immanence and becoming	Our question is, what can a body do? Employing feminist new materialisms this paper seeks to explore how difference opens up new possibilities for considering bodies (human, non-human and more-than-human) in the past and present. By emphasising becoming over being, and immanence over transcendence we can take up a radical feminist position which seeks to undermine dominant narratives. Doing so requires us to emphasise the becoming of bodies within an immanent relational assemblage. We need to talk of local patches, local gatherings and minor becomings. In the past, exploring these issues through two patches from our research (Chinchorro Mummies from South America and Mummies from Neolithic Britain) allows us to open up difference as a critical venue for investigation. In the present, such an approach changes how we think about climate change and our responses to it. If the body of 'Man', is fixed, essentialised and transcendent, then the bodies of feminism are open, transformative, nomadic and becoming. In contrast, we argue that we need to attend to the differences feminist bodies make, and the processes of difference that feminist bodies are.

14:09	Rachel Crellin, University of Leicester	A post-humanist, feminist approach to power	Power is a key aspect of our volatile political times. It runs through all relationships and plays a central role in sustaining unequal and damaging assemblages that seek to marginalise those who are different. For radical feminists who seek to make the world anew it is clear that power will be central to this project. But, what is power, and how is it best understood in a post-humanist and relational approach? In this paper, I argue that all too frequently we adopt a very traditional reading of power where it is understood to be exercised by male subjects over a multitude of increasingly powerless objects; objects including things, plants and animals but also women, minorities and the less privileged. Re-understanding power is necessary to fight injustice and to combat climate change. I argue for an understanding of power in a post-humanist frame where the category human is historical and relational and difference is not about measuring the distance travelled from humanism's idealised 'Man'. Power is not something to be possessed or owned but rather something that flows through all relationships. By shifting our perspective on power we can see new ways to disentangle the assemblages of the patriarchy and build new assemblages in their place
14:26	Claudia Chang, Independent Scholar	"Nomadic subjects" and Eurasian Iron Age studies of households and feasting	<p>The term "nomadic subjects" refers to recent feminist theory that dissolves the subject-object, nature-culture dichotomies so often found in earlier feminist thought. In early feminist archaeology, the task of discovering "the woman" in the archaeological data was the goal. How are women represented in the household, or on the landscape? Eurasian archaeology of the Iron Age lacks attention to most feminist theory, so that the woman is neither recognized as a vital part of pastoral economy, nor are artifacts, households or feasting seen as expressions of gendered labor. In many archaeological studies on pastoral societies, women's roles are rendered as static subject identities subordinated to male personhood.</p> <p>In this paper I examine the households and assemblages as found at an Iron Age agro-pastoral settlement in southeastern Kazakhstan (circa 400 BCE to 1 CE) in order to explore gendered domestic labor in feasting and in the formation of households. The ethnographic analogies of contemporary Kazakh and Kirghiz feasts and households serve to better interpret the archaeological record. The ceramic and architectural assemblages are expressions of gendered labor in everyday life and during feasting events. My goal is to provide a fluid notion of gender and sexual difference in pastoral studies.</p>
14:43	Session organisers	Discussion	
14:53	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK
15:23	Marianne Hem Eriksen, Department of Archaeology, University of Oslo	Grievability, households, and violence in the Iron and Viking Ages	<p>A recurrent critique of the turn to ontology, posthumanism, and particularly symmetrical approaches in archaeology has been that they gloss over and minimize power asymmetry by viewing agency as distributed in collectives and assemblages. How can we situate violence and exploitation in the ontological turn? In 2009, Judith Butler called for a new bodily ontology, one that rethinks issues such as precariousness, vulnerability, and exposure. Bodies are crafted and given form through their situation historically and socially, she argues, in systems of power that makes some bodies more vulnerable, and less grievable, than others.</p> <p>This paper works from an eclectic dataset relating to household dynamics in the Viking Age, to consider how houses — as particular and powerful kinds of objects -- worked to craft differentiated bodies among their inhabitants. The paper makes two moves: First, I survey eclectic strands of evidence for domestic and structural violence within the Iron and Viking Age house, and how this may relate to multi-modal personhood. Second, I explore how architectural spaces and domestic practices helped to enact social and political realities of grievability in the Viking Age — and the consequences this has for the ontological turn as well as our understanding of Iron and Viking Age society.</p>

15:40	Ben Jervis, Cardiff University	Misogyny, Patriarchy and Female Labour in the Medieval Household	Medieval people were well aware of the power of materials in shaping ideas of selfhood and negotiating otherness. However, archaeologists engagement with medieval material have traditionally focussed around representational ideas of identity; at their best these approaches explore the implication of objects in identity work but at their worst they lead to objects standing for static and homogenising categories. Here I focus on a specific set of material engagements, the processing of grain and textiles, which were fundamental to economic development in medieval England. These tasks, typically organised at the domestic scale, have often been classed as female work and situated within a gendered dichotomy in which women occupy indoor, domestic spaces and their layout is termed 'by-work', a term which is intrinsically misogynistic in belittling the economic contribution of women. The paper draws on a range of historical and archaeological evidence from non-elite medieval households gathered through the Living Standards and Material Culture in English Rural Households (1300-1600) project. This evidence is read through the writing of Rosins Braidotti, Donna Harraway and Jane Bennet in particular, to consider household matter more generally, to re-cast these material engagements not as representative of a marginalised category of female, but to explore how complex forms of womanhood emerged from its implication in assemblages of domestic production. My purpose in doing so is not to deny the patriarchal character of medieval society but rather to consider how a more-than-representational approach to medieval objects can offer an alternative to male focussed, teleological perspectives of medieval economic and social development.
15:57	Craig N. Cipolla, Royal Ontario Museum/University of Toronto; James Quinn, Mohegan Tribal Historic Preservation Office	Situating posthuman feminisms in collaborative Indigenous archaeology	This paper explores the intersection of posthuman feminist theories and collaborative Indigenous archaeology via examples from the Mohegan Archaeological Field School, a long-running teaching and research project devoted to the study of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century life on the Mohegan Reservation (Connecticut, USA). Practitioners of collaborative Indigenous archaeology rarely address theory explicitly. In doing so, we find some common ground between our collaborative approach and that of posthuman feminist theorists. Key areas of overlap include: 1) strong emphases on relationality; 2) a general commitment to rethinking "the human" and our relations; 3) challenges to Eurocentrism and western defaults; and 4) an ethics of care for our "subjects," be they ancestors, descendants, landscapes, and more. We also consider how these largely separate bodies of thought challenge one another. Critics such as Zoe Todd rightfully note significant (and often unacknowledged) overlap between the so-called ontological turns and Indigenous knowledge; in this spirit, we compare the differences that critical feminisms highlighted in the session make for a collaborative project designed around Indigenous sensitivities, interests, and needs and focused on the study and critique of colonialisms past, present, and future.
16:14	Hannah Cobb, University of Manchester	Becoming Archaeologist	Post-Processual archaeologies have provoked considerable disciplinary soul searching about to how we can diversify our predominantly white, straight, male, able bodied, middle and upper class profession in the present, and how we can tell out non-normative identities in the past. There has been nearly four decades of such debate, and yet advances toward a diverse discipline are painfully slow. But what if the way we problematise this is the problem in the first place? When we discuss diversifying archaeology it is always in opposition to a norm (illustrated precisely by the first sentence of this abstract), and in turn we reify that norm. Thus, the steps we might take to diversify our profession are always caught in a tension which reproduces, and gives primacy to, the norms we seek to disrupt. Instead I turn to new materialist feminist approaches to consider how difference is emergent, and examine how, if we shift our attention to consider the assemblages of becoming archaeologist, we can move beyond foregrounding problematic constants by examining how past and present archaeological identities are materialised.
16:31	Session organisers	Discussion	
17:00	END	END	END