Facing Gender
Corporeality, Materiality, Intersectionality and Resurrection

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Abstract
This text discusses some recent trends within gender research with a special concern for their possibilities for archaeological application. It is argued that the linguistic constructionist perspective, or third wave/postmodern feminism, fits the archaeological realities poorly. Instead, a neomaterialist standpoint in combination with an intersectional perspective is advocated. However, since such an approach departs from the study of active agents, an archaeological application needs to some extent to 'resurrect' the dead. Thus, methodological aspects are discussed in relation to new advances within forensic anthropology in order to extend the amount of personal information that can be derived from the bones and associated materialities.

“...this abstraction ‘woman’ – who has seen or known it? I know we agree on certain traits to define ‘the eternal feminine’. But let's admit it - they're vague. Added to that, our era is particularly averse to such adventurous generalizations.”
Jacques Boulenger (1924)

It has sometimes been argued that archaeologists know more about death in prehistory than they do about life. Indeed, since much of our data and material come from funerary contexts it is not surprising that we tend to focus on questions of eschatology at the expense of elaborating fictions of social life in past societies. Questions of identity, gender and ethnicity are generally pursued through analysis of burial data, because it is in the graves we may establish a relation between a body and materialities (albeit not in any straightforward manner). Other archaeological material is seldom gendered. An axe or a bone needle found at a settlement site can only be assumed to have had an owner/user about whom we know virtually nothing.
One problem with burials, however, is that the dead normally have limited influence on the formation of the burial – it is principally the agency of the living that is articulated in their graves. This predicament is especially important when it comes to the issue of gender as a composite aspect of individual identity; that is, as something partly experienced, partly corporeal, and partly social, which also depends on the constitution of the social and material contexts. Another problem is that we face dead people. Or rather, we face fragmented and/or cremated parts of a skeleton. We do not face bodies, persons or individuals; we face bones. There is quite an extensive gap between the surviving mortal remains and all those components we normally attribute to a living person; the living body is so much more than its corporeality. If we wish to pursue issues of gender and corporeality through burial analysis, it could be rewarding to focus to a greater extent on buried individuals as once-living agents rather than dead objects.

In this text I wish to explore a few possibilities that may help us to put the flesh back on the bones by utilising more of the information embedded in the bones and the grave. Although we cannot ‘resurrect’ the dead anywhere close to a multifaceted living person, there are a few possibilities at hand worth investigating further. It is partly a methodological inquiry, but also involves a less tactile dimension concerning perspective and vision. If we succeed in making the dead ‘come alive’ and at least succeed in visualising a group of heterogeneous individuals as bodies, we may actually find ourselves looking at the past in a different manner. To picture a group’s corporeal composition; the tall, the short, the ‘big boned’, fragile or ‘elegantly’ built, the bald, and others yet, perhaps disfigured, will most certainly affect the way we approach them and interpret their material worlds (cf. Gheorghiu 2009, Fig. 3). I will approach these issues by advocating the potential of some new advances within forensic anthropology, as well as highlighting some recent developments in feminist theory and their implications for methodology concerning burial data.

Making sex in archaeology (or, the gender that is not)

The constructionist view of gender as something historically situated has proved quite influential in archaeology, but the incorporation of feminist thought led to problems when faced with the relativism and anti-essentialism of third wave feminism. Although such ideas were quite quickly incorporated in theory, it has not been as successful in mainstream archaeology, which still operates with rather essentialist and dual apprehensions of sex, gender and the feminine (e.g. Claassen 1992; Gilchrist 2009). One reason probably lies in some of the inconsistencies and ambiguities of third wave feminism, especially the postmodern element of emphasising the queer and the exceptions, and thus transforming any duality to a continuum of endless
variation (cf. Geller 2009). For instance, even though sex can be defined in different ways, it does not follow that there really are more than a dozen different ‘sexes’ of similar social dignity (cf. Nordbladh & Yates 1990). Rather, it is quite evident that genital sex is more than 99% bipolar, while corporeal sex with respect to body shape, body fat and hair distribution etc generally fall within two intersecting bell-curves (Harré 1998:14). From a corporeal composite point of view, sex is neither bipolar nor a continuum, but rather bimodal (Fig. 1).

![Fig. 1. The bimodal character of general distribution of biological properties such as body shape, distribution and extent of body hair, body fat etc according to sex (after Harré 1998:14).](image)

Another, perhaps even more important, reason why third wave feminist theory was never successful in development-led archaeology may lie in the very nature of archaeology itself. While social scientists can observe, conduct interviews and analyse statistics, archaeologists dealing with prehistory must work with substantially different kinds of data. From this point of view, it is quite understandable that fleeting categorisations are tricky to employ when it comes to actual case studies. Remember, archaeologists face bones, not people (in particular, we face osteologically sexed bones). Moreover, we cannot simply assume that a certain time or place is organised as a phallocratic system, that is, a system advocating masculine power and dominance, even if sex/gender may have been important social variables. It is, however, not my aim here to wholly reject the application of third wave feminism in archaeology. On the contrary, many of the arguments are valid and useful, but have been somewhat obscured by an overdose of postmodern jargon. The contemporary debate in feminist theory is much more encouraging on this matter, since there are clear indications of a desire to be less sophist and more operational.
Looking forward, looking back, walking sideways? Feminist theory in the 21st century

There is nothing substantial suggesting the emergence of a fourth wave of contemporary feminist thought that is radically different. Rather, feminist theory today faces a plurality of combinations of old and new perspectives, aims and standpoints (Hekman 2010; Hewitt 2010; Budgeon 2011). This ambiguity is not specific to feminist studies per se, but is in various respects true for the social sciences (and archaeology) in general. Fortunately, the postmodern debate of the 1980s and 1990s never resulted in total relativism where ‘anything goes’, but seems rather to have ebbed away in what may best be described as an unwanted truce (Fahlander forthcoming). The unresolved state of this controversy is quite apparent in the social theory of the new millenium and has spawned a range of different responses. There are still adherents to a postfeminist perspective arguing that other issues, such as sexuality or masculinity, are more appropriate subjects if analysed independently of sex/gender, and thus replacing them as the primal foci for feminist studies (Moi 1999; Lindberg 2009). On the opposite side of the fence, there is a conservative strand that refutes social complexity and heterogeneity altogether, advocating a return ‘back to basics’ (that is pre postmodern 1950s ideals, cf. Faludi 2007). It is, however, refreshing that an increasing number of scholars of the new millenium have begun to tackle the social complexity in more progressive ways. Recently, Hekman (2010) and others (Andersen 2005:441; Barad 2007; Browne 2007) have reacted against the post-structural idea of sex/gender as primarily a discursive phenomenon (linguistic constructivism). Similar criticism has also been raised against the ‘soft post-structuralist’ perspectives of Giddens and Bourdieu, from which sex/gender are mainly defined through practice/performance (e.g. Butler 1990). Both perspectives make some important points, but the idea that sex/gender is discursively constituted (by language or practice) opens up for a relativism that is not really sustainable. What seems to be lacking is recognition of the many slow-changing or non-negotiable aspects of life; the traditions and inert institutions (material and immaterial), which to some extent resist social hybridity (Fahlander 2003:34f). Hekman and others thus wish to turn the focus away from the body as a performing sign and instead explore the materiality of sex/gender.

Studies of materiality, or the ‘socialness of things’, have been growing continuously stronger in the social sciences, and it is no surprise that such studies have gained ground within feminism as well. This is, of course, not a new observation; the material dimension of sex/gender has previously been explored quite extensively (e.g. Haraway 1991). The materialism of the 1990s was, however, predominately humanocentric, while the contemporary ‘neo-materialism’ is more concerned with the network between humans and things (Latour 2005, cf. Fahlander 2008). The corporeal body has always
been central to feminist studies, but has perhaps been seen as more of an obstacle and a problem rather than as a possibility. The body represents much of what feminists have reacted against, for example the modern view of different natural dispositions of male and female bodies and the consequences of this view in terms of a predestination the individual cannot escape. But still, the body is unavoidable in social studies; it is “a point of intersection between patriarchal structures and women’s lives” (Hekman 2010:80). The ways in which the corporeality of the body are related to social aspects are by no means given (Butler 2004:185f). Gender is not simply ideology added to a biological base. Identities, including gendered ones, are rather constituted by ideology (discourse, norms, culture) in intersection with the body (genetics, hormones, statue, appearance) and the material (technology, material culture, nature). No single aspect can satisfactorily be given dominant status here. It is thus also a matter of scale and context. Individual corporeal aspects are but a few intersecting parameters in a given analysis, and it would be meaningless to try to give them any general importance. Some sort of contextual intersectional framework is thus needed to avoid relativism, whilst still recognising a certain fluidity in the complex matrix of social life.

Although intersectionality may be a fairly new term, the idea that sex/gender intersect and depend on other parameters (e.g., race, status, descent, sexuality, etc.) dates from the late 19th century and was widely recognised by social scientists in the early 20th century (e.g. Lowie 1923). The contemporary use of the term is, however, less about social roles and more of a way to recognise the heterogeneity among individuals from different contexts (Demos & Texler Segal 2009:1; Davis 2008:68). It is thus a less relativist perspective than the postfeminist anti-essentialism, working with issues of sex/gender within a limited matrix of possible parameters, rather than a continuum of endless variation. Some raise concerns about the potential problems when sex/gender can no longer be assumed to be the principal aspect in social analysis. Indeed, the possible decentring of sex/gender inherent in the intersectional perspective may fit a little too well with the aforementioned conservative trends in contemporary society, and is perhaps bound to be misused to some extent. On the other hand, it is difficult not to agree with Davis when she writes: “intersectionality has precisely the ingredients which are required of a good feminist theory. It encourages complexity, stimulates creativity, and avoids premature closure, tantalizing feminist scholars to raise new questions and explore uncharted territory” (Davis 2008:79). In order to develop theory and keep the subject flourishing, it is perhaps necessary to take risks and have faith that it will overcome such obstacles? And, of course, one can always study those areas where gender/sex actually appear to be the most important variables (e.g. Gubar 2000:164).
There is, however, an aspect of the archaeological material that partly prevents a direct attempt to employ an intersectional perspective in the past. Such an approach needs to consider living, acting individuals while the prehistoric material generally consists of fragmented dead bodies. The dead are buried by the living and the grave is thus more representative of the agency of the undertakers and attendants at the funeral. In order to ‘sift out’ more information about the deceased’s life, we need to both improve methodology and find ways to increase the personal information that can be derived from the bones and associated materialities beyond sex, age and ‘status’. We need to ‘resurrect the dead’ and to some extent discuss them as living agents (cf. Joyce 2005). It is a small but crucial distinction. If we simply relate corporeal aspects of the bodies to the materialities in the grave, we would at best end up with a number of polythetic groups with no clear relation to the social matrix of the particular time and place. In the remainder of this text I will therefore explore some new advances within forensic anthropology, which increase the amount of personal information that can be derived from the skeletal remains. I will also elaborate on how it may be possible to avoid simple comparisons between osteological sex and materialities.

The obfuscating body

Material perspectives on the body are a well-established issue in the social sciences, and have recently been incorporated in archaeological theory (Meskell 1999; Fahlander 2001; Hamilakis et al. 2002; Rautman 2000; Sweeney & Hodder 2002; Meskell & Joyce 2003; Joyce 2005). In archaeology, the material dimension of the body is discussed in two general ways. One facet is that our corporeality is often related to the way we are able to act in the world. Our bodily constitution (height, muscles, etc.) may facilitate some tasks while prohibiting others. The other facet concerns the body as a surface and focus on phenotypical characteristics that potentially may work as imperatives for social subjectivation and categorization. The neomaterialist perspective combines those two facets by viewing the body as a node in a material and ideological network, working as a social actant like any other material object. It thus resembles the poststructuralist decentring of the cognitive subject, but instead favours the socialness of materialities over discourse (cf. Fahlander 2008).

As previously mentioned, bodies may be controversial. Some corporeal aspects can be discussed harmlessly, while others tend to be personal or even reveal something about ourselves or our society of which we prefer to be unaware. The biology–culture issue is one of the most infected ones in the social sciences and many social scientists have avoided the subject altogether (Featherstone et al. 1991:8). But, wherever one may stand in that particu-
lar debate, it is difficult to wholly neglect the biological (material) aspects of the body while keeping an idealist view of the self governing autonomous agent. This said, I will test the boundaries of acceptability when it comes to the body as materiality in the study of the past.

It may not be particularly offensive to suggest, with the support of statistics or observational studies, that bodily characteristics are generally socially important. For instance, Paul Higate (1998:191f) has made some interesting notes on body size and status in hierarchical organisations such as the US military. His examples indicate that characteristics such as body height often confuse and affect otherwise formal and strict hierarchical situations. Others have pointed out how we consciously or unconsciously let appearance affect our judgments of an individual’s personality, profession, and morality (e.g. Ahola 2010; Berggren et al. 2010; cf. Thomson 2009). It may be argued that the importance of appearance is typical of western individualised society, but many have stressed its general importance throughout history (e.g. Gremillion 2005). The significance of looks (good, powerful, evil, odd, etc.) is also a frequent theme in many early texts, whether ancient Greek or Roman texts or Medieval Icelandic sagas. There is therefore no reason why appearance and looks should not have been as important in prehistory as they sometimes are today - although they probably have been experienced differently (cf. Borić & Robb 2008:2 for additional examples).

Several of the visual aspects that make up an individual’s appearance are already available to us in terms of osteological measurements, but which are curiously seldom employed in their full extent. One exception is Roberta Gilchrist’s study in which she established a relation between body height and status in medieval Britain (1997; 2009; cf. Fahlander 2003:103f). There are several additional corporeal aspects available to us if the bones are sufficiently preserved, recorded and osteologically analysed. For instance, a comparison of the width of an individual’s shoulders and pelvis in relation to the thickness of the main diaphyses will give, if not a proper body mass index, at least an approximation of body shape (Christopher et al. 2005). To get an impression of the basic ‘look’ of a person we can consider the general profile of the skull, eyebrow ridges, distance between the eyes, the shape and form of the nasal cavity, the shape and declination of the nasal bone and the shape of the cheek. New developments in the forensic sciences also allow us to make rough facial reconstructions. Previously, such reconstructions have been expensive and time consuming, suffering from a great deal of subjectivity and requiring a sculptural artist. Nowadays, however, it is possible to perform cranial reconstructions with relatively simple means and labour. The point of departure is a 3D scan of the skull, something which is easily achieved with an ordinary digital camera and software such as 3dsom™ or Photomodeler™. These 3D-models are the basis for forensic reconstruction software to put the flesh back to the bones without the need for elaborate clay reconstructions (e.g. Turner et al 2005; cf. Claes et al. 2010). Some of
these programs are also able to manipulate the result and add eyes, facial hair etc. Other software specializes in emulating the effect of aging (Faces™ or E-fit™).

We should not, however, let ourselves get carried away here. Although this is a fairly easy and inexpensive process, we will not end up with true images of the dead. Craniofacial reconstruction still “balances between the worlds of Art and Science.” (Claes et al. 2010:144). Forensic scientists struggle with a number of issues that are simply impossible to estimate from the skull alone. The shape of the nose, for instance, can be predicted with only about sixty per cent accuracy and the shape of the tip with only about forty per cent (Fig. 2). The problem of knowing the crucial tissue thickness has, however, been reduced by a massive sampling of tissue depth measurements from medical CT-scans (e.g. Cavanagh & Steyn 2011). Besides these general problems there are, of course, also a great many factors involved in making up our appearance that cannot simply be inferred from the bones alone. For instance, it is difficult, if not impossible, to infer the hairstyle, mouth and pigmentation – not to mention scars and other superficial wounds. In addition we also need to consider facial expressions and cosmetic manipulations such as tattoos, piercings, etc.

Fig 2. An illustration of the 52 landmarks used in digital craniofacial reconstruction (left). (B) and (D) are examples of model bias from choosing poor facial template; (A) is based on an average generic template while (C) is based on similarity in ancestry, gender and age. In both cases unwanted facial features of the template remain visible in the final reconstruction (indicated by ellipses). In order to reduce the model bias multiple reference heads can be used (Claes et al. 2010:141).
Notwithstanding the apparent objections and difficulties, some of these problematic issues are actually within our reach, with the aid of forensic genetics. Eye colour, hair colour, hair type and male baldness, facial morphology and ethnic origin are some of the visual traits that can be directly or indirectly inferred from the DNA (Graham 2008; cf. Kidd et al. 2006, Keyser 2007; Liu et al. 2009). Some of these corporeal aspects can be tested through a ready-made kit that simultaneously analyses multiple markers, similar to the medical SNP panels by which one can test dispositions for a range of genetic disorders. The kit is already in use by law enforcement and the procedure is no more time consuming or complex than, for instance, genetic sex estimations. The range of other phenotypic traits that have genetic bases continues to expand, but, of course, many of them suffer from source-critical problems. Physical appearance is generally complex, derived from multiple genes and in some cases environmental factors. Moreover, ancient DNA is generally highly degraded and fragmented and the absence of a certain genetic marker is therefore not necessarily indicative at all. It is nonetheless interesting to follow the rapid developments in forensic biology and the possibilities they might offer us in terms of visualising individual phenotypical features. There are thus no obvious reasons, besides source critical problems and financial costs, why archaeology should not seek to incorporate forensic techniques to reconstruct the bodies and faces of the dead. At the very least, there are few general scientific arguments (besides research traditions) for choosing to finance genetic sex estimations at the expense of information regarding e.g. skin, hair or eye colour. We also need to remember that the goal here – in contrast to forensic anthropology – is not primarily to reconstruct an individual identity as closely as possible. It would be tremendously helpful and inspirational if we could simply reconstruct a general body shape (BMI, body posture) and a broad image of the head (general looks).

The tell tale bones? Hormones, bodies and personality

Bones are not simply a static support for our bodies, but are also shaped by our way of life. Anne Fausto-Sterling (2005) provides a range of examples of how the lifestyles of different groups (urban ultraorthodox Jewish adolescents or Chinese female farmers) may result in significant, measurable traces on bone shape and composition. Of course, there are numerous source critical problems involved. Variations in bone structure normally have many different reasons which exclude any direct causal relations between a typical lifestyle and the composition of the bones. The main point is, however, that the bones contain a wealth of information about an individual’s life that can be retrieved in order to do intersectional analysis. The bones can be analysed in terms of injuries, wear or certain diseases, but also to infer, for example, diet and to some extent, heredity and lineage. Moreover, studies of enamel
hypoplasia and cribra orbitalia can indicate periods of illness or stress over the course of an individual’s life (Kjellström 2011:204f). More recently, strontium or oxygen isotope measurements have increasingly been employed to establish if a certain individual died at the same place as s/he grew up (Sjögren et al. 2009). These are all well known procedures, but may not always be available due to the demands of expertise and financing.

One biological issue not normally discussed in osteoarcheology, but which may be worth considering, is the effect that hormones can have on the bones. The interesting thing about hormones is that they also, to varying degrees, seem to affect our personality, disposition and preferences. It is perhaps a bit of an uneasy subject, since our personality and the ‘I’ are things we generally like to view as chosen or appropriated, not given to us by biology. It is a tricky subject since genes, hormones, milieu and lifestyle generally depend on one another. There are few, or no, causal effects between them; genes and hormones are rather mediators in a complex system of impulses and feedback (Fausto-Sterling 2005:1495). It is thus easy to get caught in circular arguments here, confusing the influence of social and psychological factors on hormone secretion with the influence of hormones on behaviour (Rossi 1977:10). We do not, however, need to take a position in the debate on biology versus culture; it will suffice to be open enough to discuss some statistically measured probabilities.

One interesting example is the statistical correlation between the ratio of the length of the index finger and the ring finger and certain dispositions or personality traits (e.g. Voracek et al. 2007; Manning & Fink 2008; Caswell & Manning 2009). For instance, if your index finger is longer than the ring finger, statistics suggests an increasing risk of breast cancer (if you are female), as well as a propensity to suffer from eczema, allergies, and fever. So far so good, but researchers also claim that such a person is generally more interested in men than women (regardless if they themselves are a man or a woman), and apparently also has a better chance of holding down a job, becoming wealthy and reaching a high age. If, however, you have a longer ring finger, you suffer an increased risk of developing prostate cancer (if you are male) or cardiovascular disease, but be more interested in physical activities and a propensity to build muscle. However, you will also be more prone to aggression and at greater risk of going to prison, being murdered or developing a drug addiction. Furthermore, such a person will probably have more interest in women than men (irrespective of gender) and have less difficulty learning to play musical instruments.

This kind of statistical probability measuring balances on the border of pseudo-scientific mumbo-jumbo – not least because of the obvious problem of discerning which of the many inputs and feedbacks from life-style and milieu are important in any given case (cf. Oudshoorn 1994). But it is nonetheless evident that hormones affect our bodies and minds more than we normally wish to acknowledge. Archaeology is very much about correla-
tions, deviations and patterns within a specific set of data, and there is little sense in refraining from utilising as much information as possible. The ratio between the length of the index finger and the ring finger is thus only one of many potential variables that, of course, need to be correlated with other independent indications before any possible effects on personality traits can be inferred. I am therefore not suggesting that we should measure the finger bones of buried individuals in order to determine their possible sexual preferences or aptitude for playing guitar. It does, however, suggest that there are correlations between some personal traits and phenotypical elements of the body that may be interesting to pursue further. After all, osteological sex is also very much an effect of hormones (Fausto-Sterling 2005).

The resurrection: materialising sex and gender

As I pointed out in the beginning, my main focus here concerns burial analysis. The question is not only how we can expand our knowledge of the dead’s corporeality and life, but also how we can employ this methodologically. The general problems with burial archaeology are quite thoroughly discussed (e.g. Fahlander 2003:71-86; Fahlander & Oestigaard 2008). Although burial analysis can never be a simple process, if carried out from a generally accepted set of procedures it still holds a great potential to tell us something about prehistoric life, both individually and generally. We would certainly prosper by considering a greater array of bodily parameters than those traditionally applied (sex, age, stature, etc.). However, in order to really make use of an extended body of data, I suggest a less mechanical approach in which the dead become living acting individuals as opposed to dead objects. The bottom up approach, taking each and every single individual as a starting point is important in order to be able to discuss how bodily aspects, material culture and ideology intersect. This is thus partly a methodological issue, but also a perceptual one. The methodological aspects will involve a series of associations and interpretations of both what the materialities linked with the dead individual may represent, but also what different bodily characteristics may hint at in terms of dispositions and preferences.

One step in such an approach would be to actually try to ‘resurrect’ the individuals via their bones and associated materialities. This can never be a direct and objective process, but still may prove worthwhile, as it most will certainly make us view them in a different way in relation to one another (Fig. 3, see also Bergerbrant 2007:51ff). For instance, if we were to ‘resurrect’ the hunter-fishers of the middle Neolithic Pitted Ware Culture on the island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea, we would immediately recognise the similarities in body shape and faces between the men and the women (it is quite difficult to make standard sex estimations based on general body and skull shape alone in these individuals). We could also easily discern the rela-
tively older individuals (60-70 years) from the younger. Such a ‘resurrection’ would most probably deepen our understanding of why traditional comparisons between osteological sex and grave interments at this site show no clear correlations (Fahlander 2003:119). On a methodological level we may use such ‘images’ of the living dead to make composite categorisations based upon different corporeal aspects. For instance, just as a fishing hook found in a grave may be classified as fishing gear and share the same category as a harpoon from another grave, individuals can be classified in different groups according to body shape, traces of wear, slender posture and perhaps even according to subjective judgements of general looks. Of course, ‘looks’ are not only subjective, but can be enhanced and manipulated in many ways that we can no longer reconstruct (hairstyle, makeup, dress, gait or ‘attitude’, etc). Still, we continuously evaluate material culture according to aesthetical standards, and there is no apparent reason why we could not discuss the materiality of the body in similar ways. By going deeper in detail (and in a way ‘beyond’ osteological determinations of sex and age) we may, for instance, be able to discuss individuals of the ‘bimodal gap’; that is, those who phenotypically lie in between ‘general’ sexual body characteristics (Fig. 1). Analysis of such individuals may prove telling with regard to, for instance, how masculinity and femininity are articulated in a particular group, and even how materialities are employed to enhance or mask such ‘ambiguities’.

Fig 3. A hypothetical ‘resurrection’ of bodies at Greby Iron Age burial ground on the Swedish west-coast (montage by the author).
Besides employing polythetic categorisation of materialities, features and bodily aspects, an intersectional approach also needs to ensure that we do not, consciously or unconsciously, prioritise some matters over others. Mary Whelan (1995) has conducted an interesting analysis of an Indian burial ground using a less presumptuous approach. Instead of initially departing from the osteological analysis of age and sex, she began the process of categorizing individuals from each grave according to the types of artefacts they were buried with. In this way, she ended up with a number of groups of individuals which she then correlated with the osteological sex assessments. Whelan could thus present a far more complex picture of gender relations and social structures during the period than if she had followed the traditional procedure of comparing sex and age with the artefacts. This approach may be termed associative, forming categories based upon ‘what seems to go together’. Another way would be to depart from certain single variables that for some reason seem to be especially significant, and investigate which bio-data are generally associated with such materialities (cf. Sofaer Derevenski 2002). Both are interesting ways of distinguishing intersectional parameters at a given time and area – especially when employing a wider range of bodily parameters as indicated in this text.

“Return to gender”?

In this text I have sought to explore how to employ a wider corporeal perspective which does not necessarily depart from predefined ideas of sex or gender. The idea is simply to add more bodily characteristics to the analysis, both discrete and composite, (body shape, facial attributes, ‘looks’) than those usually considered (sex, age, height and status). Such polythetic categorisation may open up for discussions of how these aspects may (or may not) intersect with sex/gender and associated materialities. We may also, if we feel comfortable doing so, employ less visible traits such as the relation between finger bones and other hormonal manifestations in the bones to get a hint of individual dispositions and preferences. Of course, such inferences need to be supported in some way by other evidence. I have also argued that visualising the osteological data in the form of three-dimensional bodies may be helpful in a less tangible way to confront the dead as bodies as opposed to bones and tabular data. By emphasising the life of the dead rather than death and bereavement we surpass the classical division between social and ritual analyses in the archaeology of death. The neomaterialist perspective of the body in combination with an intersectional standpoint also transcends polarities such as biology versus culture and male versus female.
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To Tender Gender
The Pasts and Futures of Gender Research in Archaeology

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