

CHAPTER 4

Queer Prehistory: Bodies, Performativity, and Matter

Benjamin Alberti

Queer is a continuing moment, movement, motive-recurrent, eddying, *troublant*. ...
Keenly, it is relational and strange.

Sedgwick 1993:xii

The minute you say "queer" ... you are necessarily calling into question exactly what you
mean when you say it.

Giffney 2009:7

INTRODUCTION

The explicit aim of the organizers of the Chacmool conference in 2004, *Quer(y)ing Archaeology*, was to re-energize gender archaeology by getting back its critical edge (Voss 2009). Has queer taken the place of feminism in archaeology – the “f” switched for the “q” word – to shake up gender? The response to the call was not encouraging; there were few papers that engaged with a queer approach (Geller 2009a:67). Indeed, the literature that explicitly incorporates queer is scant, and much of what exists seems diluted of the more radical implications of the critique. Has the move to radicalize gender archaeology via queer had the reverse effect of normalizing queer, making it simply a “special case of gender” (Dowson 2009a)?

Chacmool illustrates a central issue in queer archaeology. The danger, as Yvonne Marshall (2000) has noted, is that queer’s critical potential is easily displaced by trying to define it as a nice, neat concept. There is no denying that queer has become a field,

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an object spoken about and evaluated (Giffney 2009:19). It must therefore face the tension that is created when a fixed academic subject is based on theories and objects of study that are, by the definition of most practitioners, unstable and unfixable. That tension is at the heart of queer as a presence in archaeology at all scales, institutional, personal, textual, and intratextual. It is recursively present in this paper, which attempts to adopt a queer stance in relation to a metatheoretical commentary that reflexively recognizes its own contingencies. The question of the status of queer in archaeology – radical critique or another set of norms – is not incidental, and mirrors a recurring apprehension in the literature on queer. Rather than see this paradox as a problem that needs to be resolved, however, I argue that the resulting dynamic is the heart of queer. The tension between fixed position and radical critique is productive and necessary because queer is precisely about “contingent foundations” (Butler 1993).

Attempts to write a history of queer are paradoxical (Butler 1993:22; Jagose 2009:158), and the overview threatens to fix a normative narrative, to cement contingent foundations. The contingent position I argue from and from where I read the history of queer prehistory reveals a number of apparently contradictory relationships that queer seems forever to throw up. I agree, then, that queer prehistory has produced its own kind of orthodoxy or norms (Cobb 2006), an oxymoronic “stable queer subject,” that queer can appear as merely synonymous with critical, and that a shorthand version passes for queer in some archaeology. Queer itself, however, can’t be used as a fixed position from which to critique other positions, a standard against which things can be measured as more or less queer. If, as Butler claims, “[p]erformativity is a process that implies being acted on in ways we do not always fully understand” (2009:xii), we cannot control for every element of our production, much of which can be critiqued endlessly, paranoiacally (Sedgwick 2003). Instead, we can ask after the performative effect of queer knowledge (Sedgwick 2003).

In this chapter I provisionally adopt a definition of “queer” with which to diffract the queer work that has been done in prehistory. The emergence of queer critique in archaeology is placed in relation to feminism and studies of sexuality. Even though disciplinary strategies would appear to encourage the normalization of queer and a disciplining of feminism, they also open up spaces for new issues to be addressed. Queer in prehistory has produced both critique of heteronormative assumptions and the application of queer theory to many areas of archaeological concern, especially bodies and identities. The result has been the production of strange stabilities, new foundations that themselves are now open to critique. A clear example of the productive tension of queer is provided by Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity. I trace the genealogy of the theory as it has been used to operationalize queer theoretical insights in archaeology, most often in the guise of a theory of “gender performance.” Taking my cue from Thomas Dowson (2009a), I argue that one powerful future for queer is through a critique of materiality. Consequently, I develop Butler’s insight that performativity is a profoundly ontological concept as developed in the queer materialism of Karen Barad.

DEFINITIONS, FOUNDATIONS, AND SPACES

The epigraphs to this paper make it clear that to talk about “queer” is to talk in apparently contradictory ways. Almost as soon as the term “queer theory” was

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introduced by Teresa de Lauretis (1991) it produced tension and contradiction (Butler 1997a; Jagose 2009). It is a remarkably elusive term, leading some, including de Lauretis (1994) herself, to dispense with it entirely, or to forever claim its "death" (Jagose 2009). Queer emerged from political activism to complicate the complicity of sexual identities with the labeling projects of Western medical discourse and the dissonance this produced between body and identity (de Lauretis 1991; Voss 2008:328). The term was meant to be as inclusive and non-definitional as possible to capture the complexity of identity formation, to "transgress and transcend" the "fine distinctions" in discursive protocol among people who did not conform (de Lauretis 1991:v; see also Dowson 2000a:13; Marshall 2000:222). Queer has come to mean a counter-hegemonic position in relation to the normative or dominant, one that challenges the authority of norms to fully describe or contain (Halperin 1995; Voss 2008). Contemporary society is characterized by a rigid heteronormativity that demands conformity among sex, gender, and desire and saturates the institutions of social, political, and economic life (Rich 1980; Warner 1991; Butler 1993; Ingraham 1994).

It is no accident that queer is so hard to pin down. It contains an apparent internal contradiction, the product of a simultaneous refusal to fix any kind of category that can be colonized by contemporary language and economic structures and the need to provide a foundation for other ways of life. As Giffney maintains, queer is about fluidity, historical contingency, and messiness, and is resistant to any form of easy categorization (2009:9; see also Voss 2005:60). But this has led to many searching questions, such as whether queer is effective in identity politics (Gamson 1995) given its tendency to undermine all fixed positions, or what the proper object of queer analysis should be (Butler 1997a).

The definitional problems are actually informative of what queer does. Giffney (2009:17) argues that the strategic usefulness of queer lies precisely in its ability to elude definition. Jagose (2009:159) adds that queer has always had "an explicit stake in its own indefinability" in order to keep political ends open to potentiality. This she describes as queer's "strategically open-ended relational character" (Jagose 2009:159; see also Giffney and Hird 2008:5). I argue that the tension in attempting to pin down the inherently transient is productive, not inhibitive. So I do present a definition (however slippery), one which I hope "pushes discursive boundaries" (Giffney 2009:17). Again, the "attractive inaccuracy" (Giffney 2009:17) of the term is key, but only as a presupposition, not an ongoing condition. My deployment of the term, then, fixes queer in order to provoke a reaction, a particular effect. The space opened by that effect is occupied by a non-queer moment, the establishing of a foundation via a new object, materiality. If, as Giffney and Hird argue, any definition of queer necessarily becomes altered in the process of "denaturalizing its subject" (2008:4), the "queer" I define is not expected to survive its deployment within this text; it is a kind of "conceptual reagent," all used up by the process. My contingent definition of queer is as an internal, contradictory tension between two positions – the critical and continually in flux and the stable and categorical around which the former must turn.

Jagose (2009) argues that there have been two differing responses to queer scholarship and its claims to radically undermine conventional categories in academia. On one side are approaches such as Halperin's (1995:62; see also Dowson 2000a), which claim that the horizon of possibilities for the applicability of queer cannot be predefined. On the other side are those who argue that queer theoretical practice "reproduces the exclusionary effects" it claims to counter (Jagose 2009:158). I argue

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that both occur in archaeology, creating a form of disciplinary orthodoxy around the use of queer and a space in which new questions may be raised.

One can see two genealogies of queer work in archaeology: as a companion to feminist archaeology and as a work with roots in studies of sexuality. These relationships challenge authorial allegiances and present problems for linear disciplinary histories. Jagose (2009) reminds us that many of the central critiques showcased as typically queer have deep histories in feminist thought. Questions of decentered subjectivity, unstable identities, and an "anti-foundationalist impulse" had been tackled by feminists (e.g., Fuss 1989). Voss (2000, 2009) echoes Jagose when she writes that queer owes much to feminism, which was its enabling condition (see Geller 2009a:71; Marshall 2000). Voss traces queer's lineage from feminism via sexuality studies. Even if studies of sexuality and queer do not always coincide, she locates queer archaeology within the study of sexualities (Voss 2008:328). Dowson (2006:90) explicitly argues that while feminism was in some way responsible for the space that produced queer scholarship, it tended to stereotype male identity and sexuality, producing a "straw man," a foil for feminist critique (2006:90). He also cites feminist silence on questions such as the heteronormative assumptions of the family as a reason to turn to queer theory. It has been argued that feminism also failed to incorporate sexuality fully, leaving it with a shadowy existence as a secondary effect of gender (Dowson 2006; Voss 2009:31).

Voss's statement, however, that, "Just as feminist theories address not women or men, but gender, so too does queer theory seek to understand the social production of gender and sexuality in its totality" (2009:32) can also be seen as a form of temporal disciplining of feminism from a current vantage point (Jagose 2009:159–160; see also Marshall 2000). Others see a more intimate relationship with feminism. Geller (2005, 2009a) situates queer within feminism, arguing that there is no meaningful way to distinguish them. In fact, emblematic queer theorists such as Butler were incorporated into archaeological writing before they were explicitly identified as "queer" writers in archaeology (Joyce 2000; Alberti 2001). We could ask, naively, "Why did queer archaeology emerge at all?" But instead of understanding the relationship as temporally linear and hierarchical, it might be more useful to understand feminism as both the historical source of inspiration and the present-day interlocutor of queer (Jagose 2009:160). While Geller (2005) is right to remind us of the debt of one field to the other, they should not be collapsed into one another, nor should one claim some kind of "ancestor" status due to chronological precedence. Marshall (2000:223), for instance, works at the point of engagement between the two fields rather than staking out a position. What is interesting and useful is the continued movement back and forth on key questions and the productive potential of their interlocations and the different effects each "field" can provoke. Moreover, Jagose's point is not solely to set the record straight but to point to ways in which non-linear temporalities are part and parcel of queer (Dowson 2001; Halberstam 2005). It is not about proprietorship of an idea or body of material, but about critical genealogies that enable and are productive of particular types of scholarship. Queer, then, is as much a strategic intervention and the opening of a space as it is an identifier of a particular body of work.

THE SUBJECTS AND OBJECTS OF QUEER PREHISTORY

In a discussion of "proper objects," Butler contested strongly the tendency to isolate sexuality and gender respectively as the domains, or objects, of queer and feminist approaches

(1997a; see also Marshall 2000). Queer modes of analysis are antithetical to such boundary drawing exercises (Butler 1990, 1993). Eng and colleagues argue that there is no “subject *of* or object *for* the field” (2005:3). Similarly, Giffney and Hird state that, “As a proper object queer perversely challenge[s] the very epistemological ground – shaky though it may be – on which it uncomfortably rests” (2008:4). Whereas lesbian and gay, for instance, still appear as empirical categories, queer identities defy categorization (Sedgwick 1993:9). Queer, then, is more a positionality or a mode of analysis than a proper object.

Sedgwick (1993:9) has written that it matters who is using the label queer and in what direction. When used about oneself queer “signals a performative act of self-experimentation” (Sedgwick 1993:9). By this account, it is questionable whether much work in archaeology is itself “queer,” other than importing theoretical models from queer theory, with some important exceptions (She 2000; Dowson 2009b). There is a clear difference, for example, between the performatively queer subjectivity of Dowson and the more interpretive use of queer in work that uses Butler’s theory of gender performativity (e.g., Joyce 2000; Alberti 2002). The former enacts a destabilizing queer effect at the level of the text and what it demands of readers, whether questioning epistemological privilege or laying bare the role of sexuality in the production of archaeologists. The second approach need not be particularly queer: interesting new ways to understand bodies or regional archaeological histories don’t necessarily challenge the stability of the subjects produced.

Archaeologists have largely not risked their theoretical positions in adopting a queer critique or work that is identified as queer. Tellingly, Voss (2000) has observed that queer appears most often in introductions to volumes, framing the debate. There are few queer case studies (Croucher 2005; exceptions exist in historical archaeologies of sexuality, such as Casella 2000). Such “framings” are examples of queer normativity insofar as queer would not simply frame but challenge and reconfigure a project. The greatest impact has been new interpretations of existing data rather than new ways to interrogate what we mean by, say, data (see Croucher 2005). Geller (2008) exemplifies this position when she argues that osteoarchaeologists ought to incorporate recent theorizing from feminism and queer theory at the interpretive end of their work.

Queer in prehistory follows a dual trajectory: it provides a critique of heteronormativity, and queer theoretical insights are used to provide new perspectives on such topics as identity, bodies, art, and representation. Queer work can be grouped into three areas: first, “redemptive” (Sedgwick 2003) counter-narratives and sociopolitical critique, where the focus is most often on queer subjects and histories. Second, “queer statements” (Giffney 2009) that provoke a spinning out (Sedgwick 1993) from queer subjects; the exciting critical power of queer advances a general critique of normative categories (Voss 2005:72). Queer statements build from the insight that the normative relies on a “constitutive outside,” or process of abjection (Butler 1993:2; Kristeva 1982). Third, authors who examine bodies and identities, especially those inspired by Butler’s theory of performativity. These three areas of queer in prehistory are explored in the following sections.

Heteronormativity and narratives of redemption

If queer has a principle, it is the counter-hegemonic position that challenges and resists dominant cultural forms (de Lauretis 1991:iii; Jagose 2009:157). More than

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critique, it is an active attempt to disrupt taken-for-granted; a search for ways in which lives considered the source of abjection can somehow be made "livable" (Butler 2004). Many queer projects, then, are concerned with reclaiming histories and developing counter-hegemonic redemptive narratives that bring to light previously invisible histories of sexuality.

Dowson is clear that, "The past is *always already heterosexual*" (2009a:286, emphasis in original). One goal of queer archaeology has been to resist dominant discourses by challenging exclusionary norms and heterosexual hegemonies. Voss (2009:34) claims that a "truly queer archaeology" will challenge contemporary political identities and "seek to develop archaeological methodologies that do not depend on these problematic sexual taxonomies." The naturalization of heterosexual institutions through their "retrojection" into the past is of central concern, leading to critiques of the cultural history of the family and the role of reproduction (e.g., Dowson 2001). Similarly, a naturalized, heteronormative division of labor in reproduction, marriage, and family has also been a target (Dowson 2001, 2006; Cobb 2005; Geller 2005). Cobb (2005:634), for instance, explores the heterosexism of hunter-gatherer studies, arguing instead that the Mesolithic populations of Western Scotland "constructed their understandings ... of gender, sexuality and bodies" in a fluid, contextual way. Another element of this work is corrective, remediating blatantly inaccurate, heterosexist accounts of the past (e.g., Reeder 2000; Back Danielsson 2007). One such example is provided by Greg Reeder (2000), who carefully explores the iconographic code used in ancient Egyptian funerary depictions of the Fifth Dynasty to suggest that the standard interpretation of the intimate portrayal of the royal manicurists Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep as biological twins whitewashes alternatives better supported by the evidence. The "twin" thesis, while plausible, does not account for the conventional coding of intimacy reserved for husband and wife found in the manicurists' joint tomb. According to Reeder (2000:200), one cannot ignore the deliberate positioning of the men in the artwork as conjugal and the simultaneous sidelining of their wives, including the deliberate erasure of Niankhkhnum's wife, Khentikaus, from one frieze. The tinderbox of such imagery for contemporary identity politics is illustrated by the pointed exchange between established archaeologists Meskell (2002) and Dowson (2008).

Queer enables sexualities to be explored beyond the confines of normative histories. Gender ambiguity, fluid sexual identities, and alternative sex/gender systems are ways in which queer has opened up identity to exploration (Croucher 2005; Hollimon 2006). Schmidt (2002), for instance, defends the importance of queer anthropology – variability in contemporary practices opens our eyes to the possibility of past variability. Thus, evidence that was conventionally interpreted in ways that accorded with presumptions of heterosexuality and binary genders can now stand for empirically distinct categories (Hollimon 2000; Schmidt 2000).

Voss (2009:33) is explicit that archaeology can address the need for critical prehistories and a "queer heritage" for contemporary identity projects, as "the past is being used as a blunt, devastating rhetorical weapon" to control sexual identities (Voss 2008:328–329). To ask explicitly for an archaeology of queer subjects, however, risks producing corrective readings of the archaeological record that, while clearly important, find the non-normative but immediately reinscribe it as deviant. One of the unsettling effects of the institutionalization of queer in archaeology is that

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the study of past sexualities can have the perversely queer effect of becoming a (pre)history of deviants or "gender benders" (Back Danielsson 2007:28; Dowson 2009a; Voss 2009). The political effect is noted by Sedgwick (1993:5), who describes the anger of straight students when they discovered that the class they had enrolled in was designed with five or six gay students in mind. She interprets their response as a sense of entitlement to a parade of gay and deviant identities made intelligible for them without having to "slow down the Mercedes to read the historical markers on the battlefield." Queer in prehistory is decidedly not about a "prehistory for deviants" (Dowson 2009a) or a parade of "queers, freaks, and hookers" (Voss 2009:32). Following Sedgwick (2003), it is important that such redemptive moves become "reparative" – the sources of new modes of life.

The politics of queer in the profession is taken up forcefully by Dowson (2006, 2009a), who argues that queer content and critique are intimately linked. The experience of queer practitioners and the likelihood of their knowledge claims gaining legitimacy are related to the lack of importance given to the study of sexualities or queer in archaeology. Dowson (2006) recognizes this as a form of epistemological privilege – being "out" reduces one's claim to an authoritative reading. Moreover, the content is intimately connected: straight men produce straight pasts (Dowson 2006:96).

Queer reveals that sexuality does not stay within neat bounds but explodes into all elements of life; it is thus best understood as part of a totality (Voss 2009:32; see also Joyce 2000; Schmidt and Voss 2000; Meskell 2002; Eng et al. 2005). Explicitly or not, queer critique brings sexuality with it to the heart of fundamental questions about society. Performative acts of authorship make this relationship clear (e.g., She 2000; Dowson 2009b). Recognizing heterosexuality as the default that does not require explanation (Dowson 2009a) has led to calls for an archaeology of heterosexuality and masculinity (Voss 2008:330; Wilkie 2010). If sexuality can travel (Eng et al. 2005), though, the opposite is also true: it may not always be a meaningful category of experience or analysis. Sexuality may not have existed prior to its naming and medicalization in twentieth-century Euro-American discourse (Voss 2008:319). It may not, therefore, be the right starting point or focus for archaeological studies of "pre-sexuality" (Meskell 2002:283).

Queer statements

The relationship between queer and sexuality is tellingly elusive. The big moment for many queer theorists – the strength and source of the endless possibilities of queer critique – is to spin out from questions of sexuality (Sedgwick 1993). Halperin's declaration that "queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers*" has been particularly influential in archaeology (1995:62, emphasis in the original; see also Dowson 2000a:163). As Dowson (2000a:164, 2000b, 2009a) has repeatedly argued, to limit queer to sexuality runs counter to a queer agenda; there is no specific area or subject matter to be queered. And as Judith Halberstam (Halberstam and Povinelli 2007) ironically remarks, queer subjects are not necessarily the most interesting thing going on. Even so, there is a certain anxiety about leaving questions of sexuality behind. Voss (2005:72) reminds us that theories of sexual identity are useful starting points for a queer archaeology, but we must also interrogate those

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same theories for alternatives. In line with queer's dislike for stable identities, perhaps its "object" ought not to be an identity itself but rather practices and ways of life that are susceptible to a queer mode of analysis.

Queer as a positionality or stance in opposition to the norm has resulted in the widespread acknowledgment in archaeology that both "the normative and oppositional" are the objects of study (Voss 2009:32; see also Dowson 2000a; Joyce 2000; Strassburg 2000; Voss 2000:184; Back Danielsson 2007; Ardren 2008). Voss (2008:330) claims that "Queer theory was developed to better understand the ways that normative social structures are promulgated and reproduced," so it may provide the "conceptual tools" for a general methodology to tackle heterosexual institutions. It is telling that conference sessions and papers have often oriented themselves around the theme of normative/non-normative as a way to engage archaeology generally in queer debate.¹ The reversal enacted by this position is important: the abject, or non-normative, foundation of normativity becomes key to the definition or constitution of the normative identity. As Voss notes, "Thus it is 'deviance' that is foundational and the 'normative' that is unstable" (2000:184), an important move for queer archaeology as not all "sexual and gendered differences [were] stigmatized in all past societies" (Voss 2008:329). At this level of analysis, it is important not to confuse statistical variance from the norm with cultural variance (Voss 2005:66–67). Voss (2005) references Hollimon's (2000) work among the Chumash of coastal southern California to make this point: two-spirits are recognized by the normative archaeological method of variation from norm, but that does not mean 'Aqi are culturally non-normative. That is, we ought not to confuse "our" abject with "their" subject.

Prehistoric archaeologies challenge the normative in various ways. Examples include work on shamanism (Schmidt 2000; Strassburg 2000; Wallis 2000), normative archaeological methodologies (Strassburg 2000; Dowson 2001; Croucher 2005), rock art (Dowson 2000b; Hays-Gilpin 2004), and maritime archaeology (Ransley 2005). Queer, as such, is part of "a package of approaches" that are critically oriented (Croucher 2005:611). In a rigorous exploration of burial practices and shamanism in prehistoric northern Europe, Strassburg states that his "queer materialist" goal is to investigate "historically created existing and past 'otherness' of all sorts" (2000:24). Methodologically, Dowson (2001) has critiqued the heteronormative underpinnings of chronocentrism, arguing that it is manifestly phallocentric and de-authorizes material such as rock art that cannot be dated. Similarly, a number of archaeologists have challenged the naturalization of heterosexual family structures in accounts of prehistory (Schmidt 2002; Cobb 2005; Dowson 2006). It has become common to talk about queer being able to address any concern of the marginalized. This opens up the field considerably, as it means that "queer studies ... would not be overly concerned with looking for evidence of nonheterosexuality but instead would be focused on ways in which the normative and deviant have been defined ... in all social structures in which there is a center and a periphery (in other words, everywhere)" (Ardren 2008:19). Dowson (2000a), for example, argues that rock art studies (e.g., Hays-Gilpin 2004), shamanism, and the archaeology of Greenham Common are all examples of marginal communities that are largely ignored or sidelined by dominant archaeological discourses and can therefore be addressed by queer even if "queer subjects" are not present.

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Butler's work has become known in archaeology as a theory of gender performance (Perry and Joyce 2005; Voss 2005). Johnson, in attempting to explain performativity for a general archaeological audience, writes, "what it means to be a man or woman is only partly determined by biology ... It is also determined, at least in part, by the daily performances men and women put on" (2010:140). Performance recalls backdrops, plays, dressing up, ornaments, and bodily modifications and is reminiscent of practice (Bourdieu 1977) and dramaturgical theories (Goffman 1959). As "performance theory," then, the conceptual content is readily accessible to many people.² Butler's texts have gained currency in work on bodies and general theoretical texts (e.g., Meskell 1996; Fowler 2000; Joyce 2000; Sørensen 2000; Alberti 2001; Thomas 2004; Johnson 2010; see also overviews in Perry and Joyce 2005; Voss 2008). In relation to prehistory, her work has inspired interpretations of identity, sexuality, and long-term patterns in gendered and corporeal performances among the Maya and Azteca (Joyce 2000); an analysis of the representation of sex and gender in the artwork of Bronze Age Crete (Alberti 2002, 2005); exploration of non-normative identities in the northern European Bronze and Iron ages (Strassburg 2000); and masking practices in the Scandinavian Iron Age (Back Danielsson 2007).

Butler (1990, 1993, 2004) understands gender as complicit in the processes of establishing and maintaining the ontological integrity of the categories male and female which, in turn, naturalize gender. The mechanism of that complicity is revealed through understanding gender as performative. Her more recent work recognizes this as a general process that constitutes the human as well (Butler 2004). Butler understands performativity as "*that aspect of discourse that has the capacity to produce what it names*" (1994:33, emphasis in original). Sedgwick explains performatives as "utterances that do not merely describe, but actually perform the actions they name," such as "I thee wed" or "I dare you" (1993:11). The force or authority of the performative is derived from its reiteration, or citation, of a prior set of practices. Butler gives the example of a judge who cites the law that she applies: the citation gives her performative enunciation its power, but it is also by the "invocation of convention" that the prior authority – "the figure of the judge's 'will'" – is established (1993:225). The effect of a performative is to hide the mechanism whereby it both draws from conventions and constitutes those conventions.

Gender, Butler argues (e.g., 1990), is a very material, visible process. A gendered identity and a sexed body are produced by processes that occur on the surface of the body. The repeated stylizations of the body – everyday acts and gestures – are themselves performatives, producing the gendered identity of which they are thought to be the expressions. Through that repetition the acts of gender congeal over time and give the appearance of a substance – of ontological integrity – to gendered identities. The material aspect of these norms, repeated and taken up in cycles, lends authority to the naturalized identities.

Archaeologists have access to the material results of this regulation of gender over the long term; as Voss points out, Butler's theory has most commonly been used for the "diachronic study of identity formation" (2008:328). For example, Joyce (2000) and Meskell (Meskell and Joyce 2003) have developed interpretations of long-term corporeal regimes and the interrelationships among material culture practices and bodily identities among the Classic Maya and the Egyptian New Kingdom, respectively. They show how the performances of gender – gestures, acts, codes, norms – produce

accepted corporeal regulatory regimes that are observable to archaeologists through material remains. Joyce's (2000) work among the Aztec and Maya provides the most thorough long-term approach to gender as performance and the naturalization of particular views of bodies over the long term. Her interpretation of Butler stresses the fact that gender is not an aspect of identity, rather it is "an activity, something one does"; in addition she observes that, "As performance, gender is a way of being in the world, a way of dressing, of using the body, of revealing, concealing, modifying, and presenting the physical self" (Joyce 2000:7). Joyce's work demonstrates that any form of categorization is an act of power and a performance that does not match up with a natural body or essential identity but enforces them. Long-term iterations of accepted norms of bodily presentation are in tense relation with the incredible variability in individual bodies and individual embodied experiences (Joyce 2008). Material culture mediates that relation, enabling domination, resistance, processes of naturalization, and ways of performing identities.

Queer and feminist texts have questioned the rigidity of many binary structures, including the gender/sex model (Butler 1990; Giffney and Hird 2008:3). Butler's work supports the notion that "a body" *per se* does not exist: all we have is access to bodies through their positioning in one or other discourse (Butler 1993; Thomas 2004:215). Butler's work has thus been cited widely in support of the idea that sex as well as gender undergoes a form of construction (e.g., Meskell 1996; Alberti 2005; Geller 2008). According to Geller (2008), it is the historical context that needs to be examined to understand what counts most as a marker of sex on the skeletal body, such as how cranial measurements were superseded by the pelvic structure as sex determinates. In her view, "the specific criteria that skeletal analysts have privileged in their sexing practices of ancient remains demonstrate how 'truth' and its attached social meanings can shift over time" (2008:121).

Likewise, fixed categories of bodies such as male and female are no longer assumed as safe grounds for analysis; bodies can be understood as fluid, their boundaries amorphous or permeable. Strassburg, for example, rescues part of the original idea of sex, understanding it as "psychosomatically structured by the limits and possibilities of the materiality of bodies" (2000:43). He keeps gender apart, as the means by which normative sexual practices are disciplined, but wants sex to be about "the fearsome mix of order and chaos present in the morphology of human bodies" (2000:42). Other authors think hard before admitting the category of sex into their analysis at all. In her study of Late Iron Age Scandinavian bodily representations, Back Danielsson (2007) wants to understand bodies that escape easy categorization into male/female. She concludes that representational practices around bodies – whether human or animal skeletal remains, masking practices, miniatures, or gold foil figures – and the circulation of body parts in metaphorical associations (bones, semen, flour) are all to do with the fundamental Late Iron Age unificatory theme of transformation. Here we see themes common to queer: the dismemberment (quite literally) of fixed identity categories, an emphasis on flow and fluidity, contextual identifications rather than essential identities, and a stress on practices. Methodologically, Back Danielsson is willing to jettison the categories of sex and gender altogether in the face of ambiguous evidence. She substitutes woman, man, male, and female with specific, contextual discussions of the osteological and material features usually assigned to one category or the other (2007:49–50). Arguments that sexual dimorphism is the rule

(e.g., Sofaer 2006) "safely" sexed 20 bidding "good" horizons.

In previous work, the fluidity of identity to identity (Back Danielsson 2007) is unable to ascertain nonetheless to discern sex/gender ambiguity (2000) has offered a Bronze Age Near Eastern role in Minoan frescoes from Knossos, categorization in a crown, and griffins suggests that rather than that the Minoan own cultural not categories, a Pri service of power

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(e.g., Sofaer 2006:92) straightjacket this Iron Age skeletal material, which can only be “safely” sexed 20 to 30 percent of the time (Back Danielsson 2007:65). Therefore, bidding “good riddance” to sex actually broadens Back Danielsson’s interpretive horizons.

In previous work (e.g., Alberti 2002, 2005), I have challenged the primacy of genitality to identity when interpreting artworks from Bronze Age Knossos. Just as Back Danielsson (2007:76) detects a certain edginess in the writings of archaeologists unable to ascertain clearly the sex of Iron Age gold foil figurines but who feel a duty nonetheless to do so, Aegean archaeologists demonstrate anxiety when faced with sex/gender ambiguity in Bronze Age Knossos (see Alberti 2002). Louise Hitchcock (2000) has offered a thoughtful solution, arguing on the basis of comparison with Bronze Age Near Eastern and Egyptian data, that gender ambiguity played a sanctioned role in Minoan society. She focuses on the heavily reconstructed “Priest-King” relief fresco from Knossos (Figure 4.1), which defies conventional archaeological categorization in its association of a male physique, white body color, loin cloth, lily crown, and griffin – a confusion of male and female iconographic elements. Hitchcock suggests that rather than try to explain away these associations, we should recognize that the Minoans chose to “privilege certain images as different and distinct from their own cultural norm” (2000:83). The Priest-King may be evidence of multiple gender categories, a Priestess-Queen even, utilizing the sanctioned play of ambiguity in the service of power by taking on and mixing male and female signs.

I have argued that the problem with interpretations of gender in Minoan art is the assumption of a strict male/female binary (Alberti 2002). Physical markers of sex are rarely present, however, so images are usually gendered on the basis of color (white for female, red for male), clothing style, and activity. Inconsistencies in assigning a clear gender identity or sex to the figures led me to argue that gender was represented in the imagery from palatial Bronze Age Knossos without recourse to contemporary Western binary categories. For example, the famous bull-leaper frescos depict white and red figures engaged in the same “male” activity wearing conventionally understood “male” dress (Figure 4.2). In interpreting this imagery I identified recurring visual codes without presuming that binary sex was paramount or that genitalia are central to the identities depicted. The most striking thing about the images is the consistency with which the body is depicted, not the differences: a single, hour-glass body shape dominates. Figures are distinguished by clothing, activity, and body position. In fact, body and clothing are inseparable in the images; as such, “meaning is derived from a complete image, not a juxtaposition of natural body and cultural clothing” (Alberti 2002:110). Clearly identifiable sex markers in the images (breasts) only appear accompanied by a certain style of clothing; a naked, sexed body as we understand it does not exist. “Sex” as we understand it was a “cultural” marker: our nature/culture formulation is reversed. A naturally sexed body versus a culturally gendered body is not present. Thus, an alternative to “privileging difference” (Hitchcock 2000) is that sexual difference in the artworks is always conceptualized in a non-binary fashion.

Sexuality may in fact be questioned as foundational to the organization of bodies and identities. As Voss (2009) argues, prehistoric societies are “pre-sexuality.” Third sexes, such as two-spirits, are often used as alternative ways of thinking on body, sex, and gender (e.g., Prine 2000; Voss 2005:60; Hollimon 2006; Joyce 2008). Hollimon (2000) demonstrates in the case of the Chumash that activity, profession, and practice



Figure 4.1 Priest-King relief fresco from Late Bronze Age palace at Knossos, Crete (from Sakellarakis 1995:119).

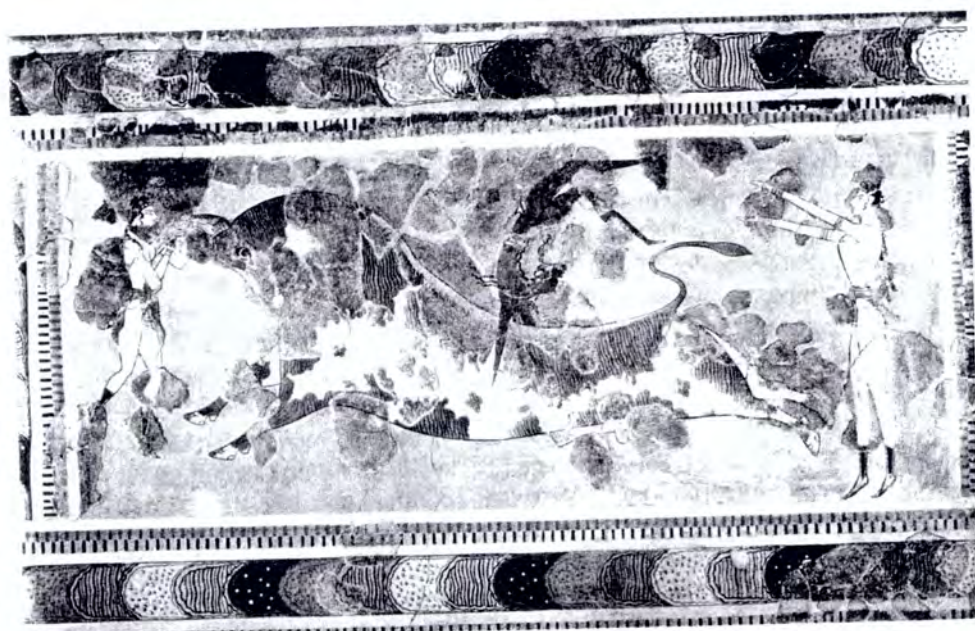


Figure 4.2 Bull-leapers fresco from Late Bronze Age palace at Knossos, Crete (from Sakellarakis 1995:121).

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were contextually significant markers of identity, not some assumed fixed biological structure. One implication of Hollimon's work is that fleeting identities may be more significant than essential identities that endure. This is very much in keeping with queer notions of identities as contingent and changing, conceptualized as empty placeholders for an identity always in progress (Halperin 1995:112–113; Giffney and Hird 2008:3; Jagose 2009:159). Rather than set up another identity category (e.g., third sex/gender) to add to the existing dominant categories, queer identities challenge the idea of stable identity "types" in the first instance.

The normalizing moment in the body of work influenced by Butler rests on the difference between the meanings of "performative" and "performance." The difference, I argue, is between a concept that alludes to a fundamental, ontological constitution of subjects and things and a voluntaristic notion that presupposes an acting subject. Emphasizing the "performance" elements of Butler's theory can obscure her insight that the sex/gender relationship is ontologically constitutional and not merely a gloss on an underlying material reality. Butler understands matter as "*a process of materialisation that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter*" (1993:9, emphasis in the original). By playing with the double significance of "matter" Butler is pointing at the non-trivial sense in which materialization is both an ontological and epistemological or ethical concern. It is this dual significance that is potentially lost when performativity is understood as performance (Perry and Joyce 2005). Performance, Butler argues (1994:33, 2009), presumes a subject, whereas performativity contests the very notion of a subject; "performance" as a bounded act is distinguishable from performativity because the latter involves the citation and repetition of norms which precede and constrain the "performer." An overly voluntaristic notion of gender performance coupled with queer's "total deconstruction" of categories of identity (Boellstorff 2007:25) can presume a neoliberal model of the individual, the perfect consumer for late capitalism. Performativity, unlike performance, does not originate from a person's "will," but rather is the enabling condition of a "subject" and "will" in the first place (Butler 1993:230–234).

QUEER MATERIALITY

In her broad-ranging survey of gender and rock art, Hays-Gilpin is probably echoing the sentiments of many when she writes, "unlike sociocultural anthropologists, we cannot directly observe or engage with embodied individuals" (2004:41); prehistory must therefore rely on biological evidence rather than "extreme constructivism," by which she means theories like Butler's. The disciplinary pathos for empirical adequacy means that trust is placed in material, physical things. Discursive-style interpretations are looked at with suspicion. I argue that queer challenges the basis for both the claim that matter is trustworthy because it is material and that discourse is untrustworthy when it is given the power to invest matter with meaning. Archaeology's specific production of queer and its way of understanding the materialization of identity drives almost inevitably toward a reformulation of the relationship between matter and identity in prehistory. That is, if "queer" arose due to bodies, desires, power, sex, and identity that do not align or stay put, then prehistory's particular foundational relationships among material, norms, bodies, and practices become similarly contingent.

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Here I return to Butler's (1993:50) claim that matter should be the object and not the ground of enquiry. Indeed, there is a notable move back to matter and materials in archaeology, matched by a rethinking of the excesses of cultural construction as the dominant model in the social science and humanities (Ingold 2007; Coole and Frost 2010; Olsen 2010; Hodder 2011). To illustrate some possible queer outcomes, I examine briefly the underlying concepts of bodies and sex in the work of Rosemary Joyce (2008), an advocate of performativity, and Joanna Sofaer (2006), who is resistant to the "discursive excesses" of Butler's formulation. What both authors stress is the importance of giving due weight to the physical, material facts of corporeal difference. Moving between the two, Pamela Geller (2008) can be read as pushing us towards a queer materialism. What becomes clear is that even theories that incorporate the agential capacity of material do not necessarily challenge the ontological basis of bodies and sex, something that a queer approach to materiality demands.

It is probably no accident that osteoarchaeologists are those pushing the barriers of what materials can tell us. Sofaer's influential book, *The Body as Material Culture*, draws on work in the social sciences and anthropology to argue for a rapprochement between the hard and soft sciences (2006). Sofaer marries theories of ontogenetic development with theories of materiality to argue that the body can be conceptualized as material culture, where characteristics such as those of gender become inscribed in the body on the basis of its plasticity and through the repeated enactment of the norms of society. Her fear is that discursive approaches dissolve the materiality of the body behind an illusion. This echoes the larger debate on the dangers of "queer nihilism" – does the body simply disappear into discourse (Voss 2000:186)? Thus, while admitting to their plasticity, Sofaer argues emphatically that sex and age are inherent in the biology of the body. Even though biological variability exists, social groups not individuals are archaeology's population. Sex, then, is a statistically relevant universal marker of dimorphic bodily difference (Sofaer 2006:96).

Joyce (2008) believes that it is precisely on account of the body's plasticity that we cannot assume a universal categorization into two sexes. What stands out about Joyce's work is her reliance on contemporary science to support the idea that bodies are not what limit identity (e.g., Fausto-Sterling 2000). Rather than try to prove that scientific truth varies historically, what interests Joyce is how sexual variation is quite natural. Scientific data supports her view that bodies are naturally sexually highly diverse so lend themselves to various means of categorization and processual understandings (Joyce 2008). People's bodily experiences, moreover, are never fully constrained by institutionalized categories; variability is never fully erased by discourse.

Geller (2005, 2008) appears to move between these two positions, arguing strongly for the incorporation of feminism (and hence queer theory) into osteoarchaeology. The dangers of unreflective assumptions in osteoarchaeological studies are signaled by Geller as particularly problematic, turning osteoarchaeologists into inadvertent advocates of biological determinism (Geller 2009a:68). Geller brings recent scientific findings to bear on that argument, stressing that some "biological indicators of sex are mutable" (2008:25). Osteoarchaeologists clearly fail to conceptualize bodies beyond narrow dualisms and timeless structures, but discursive theorists such as Butler and Merleau-Ponty overlook the material dimensions and impact of bodies. While Geller agrees with Sofaer that sex differences are not in dispute, she argues that to recognize difference we must let go of a rigid definition of sex as dichotomous and unchanging. We need diversity

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over a simple duality; privileging a population approach, as Sofaer does, may actually obscure some "important idiosyncrasies" within the larger group (Geller 2008:125).

I suggest we listen to Sofaer's concern. The matter of bodies, while essential to Butler's theory of performativity, and certainly not dependent on discourse, is nonetheless inadequately historicized (Thomas 2004:215–216; Barad 2007). Despite Butler's strong leaning toward materiality, materialization, and the very real body involved in any processes of identification, hers is still a language of material constraints (Barad 2007). I argue that Joyce, Sofaer, and Geller share the same problem. Joyce sees sex as a more flexible and naturally varying category than modern binary categories allow; Sofaer recognizes that variation is there and that the body is defined by plasticity; and Geller insists it is a measurable fact but not always the most salient one. Ultimately, however, Geller's mutable sex differences (2008) are none other than Sofaer's plasticity. They all operate at the level of a distinction between representation and some deeper material reality. For Sofaer, measurable body parts are signs of a deeper, unchanging reality, inherent in the body (sex); for Joyce, norms press down on us and our genuine experiences as embodied, living beings; for Geller (2009b), "bodyscapes" are idealities that promote certain experiences through serial representations that overlay a deeper, "true" body.

The ontology of the body has been expanded but has not actually been challenged. Materials and bodies remain inactive, only acting on people through the animating power of time or culture. A performative reading of materiality can provide a different way of conceptualizing the body-matter problem. A shared concern of the "new materialisms" (Coole and Frost 2010) is understanding the physicality of the world in ways that do not simply relegate it to the dustbin of determinism (e.g., Alberti and Marshall 2009; Olsen 2010). The interest in ontology is due to a general sense that materialism as mechanical determinism does not accurately describe the world. Feminist and queer theorists have responded by re-engaging with natural and physical sciences long characterized as their intellectual enemies (Alaimo and Hekman 2008; Giffney and Hird 2008). The possible alliances between queer approaches and these forms of materialism include the focus on questions of "becoming" over static being, and the ultimate relationality of existence. An interesting parallel is drawn by Halberstam (Halberstam and Povinelli 2007) when she suggests that queer is an "anti-ontology" because it is fully relational and not an essential kind of thing, thinking which dovetails with the relational ontologies emerging in new materialisms.

Much queer theory is implicitly humanocentric (Giffney and Hird 2008). It has often presumed a sexualized subject whose human, bodily contours are fixed in advance (Giffney and Hird 2008). Jeffrey Cohen asks what would happen if the sexual was lodged "firmly in the non-human" (2010). That is, queer theory need not stop at the limits of biological life (Giffney and Hird 2008). As Haraway observes, "Queering has the job of undoing 'normal' categories, and none is more critical than the human/non-human sorting operation" (2008:xxiv). It is the conditions that produce the human as a material-discursive fact that are of interest to queer materialism. For example, physicist Karen Barad (2003, 2007; see also Alberti and Marshall 2009) draws out the ontological implications of Butler's work. She diffracts performative theories of power and subject creation through quantum physicist Niels Bohr's theories of indeterminacy. Her reading is actively relational, moving with the image of the diffraction of waves that combine to form something new, neither one the ground

from which the other can be critiqued (Barad 2007:71–74). The consequence is a relational ontology in which all matter is performatively produced, including the human. The limits of what counts as human cannot be known in advance and in fact are constituted by the acts and practices of knowing. To queer materiality, then, is to make performativity not just a theory of the subject, of how genders and identities come to take on the appearance of natural facts, but to understand matter itself to be ontologically determined by ongoing acts. Marcus Brittain (2007), in a detailed examination of the materials and practices incorporated into Welsh Bronze Age barrows, argues that the barrows do not matter. In the contemporary context they are buried below layers of representation. Drawing on Barad's ontological diffraction of Butler's dictum that "to be material means to materialize," Brittain demonstrates that the materiality of barrows comes to matter (ethically and materially) through the practices and materials that constitute it (2007:154). That is, what counts as agent, practice or significance cannot be presumed ahead of the practices in which "mattering" itself "acquires meaning and form" (Barad 2003:817; Brittain 2007:154).

Barad's work provides an answer to worries about where to find "sex." The central issue is how to argue that biological variability means that categories are never absolute, and that the plasticity of the body means that organisms are not faithful reproductions of a blueprint, while at the same time reassuring us that sex nonetheless is a measurable fact. That problem disappears when reformulated by Barad: sex is a measurable and iterative performative category. That is, it is both materially stable and recognizably a product of our measuring practices. In the labor of excavating, cleaning, measuring with calipers, referring to standard tables, and publishing, the sex of the bone/skeleton is brought into being as both a specific phenomenon and as a general category. The fact that we can repeat those measurements, often reliably, makes that act a fairly stable one; but it does not mean the category exists prior to its measurement or is an inherent property of the bone. Sex, rather, is the property of the relations in which it is embedded – the "phenomenon," to use Barad's language (Alberti and Marshall 2009). Osteological sexing of skeletons is perfectly possible, but this does not mean sex is essential; likewise, to argue that sex is a product of the encounter between material and measuring apparatuses does not mean it cannot be accurately and repeatedly measured.

CONCLUSION

De Lauretis's (1994:297) refusal to use the term "queer" merely three years after inaugurating it should be embraced as central to its meaning. Queer is not a new orthodoxy. Queer "anything" runs the risk of paradox: histories of queer establish normative accounts; queer identities threaten to stabilize what is posited as inherently unstable; and queer archaeology establishes a legitimate subfield out of something that is anti-foundational. In addition, if this chapter has anything to do with its content, then it must be an example of what it purports to explain rather than a simple telling of a disciplinary narrative. That is, it is performative: at once establishing its own contingent foundations and attempting to dissolve them.

Some things are remarkably straight about queer archaeology. Theories of performativity, as my case in point, can normalize as performance theory. But I have

also argued that the reproduction of ways," there is no remaking of gender (2009:i). It's the "condition for action" with Halberstam from the object. Rather than a queer prehistory, how it is that alternative of that mode is as Dowson maintain to startle, to surprise Giffney encourage unintelligibility" effort and thinking the previously invisible "for the possibility

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- 1 For example, Archaeological Theoretical Archaeology
- 2 Goffman (1953) acknowledging embodied performance Bourdieu's, while a constant reinforcement

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also argued that this is not really a problem. Just as there is “no gender without [the] reproduction of the norms that risks undoing or redoing the norm in unexpected ways,” there is no queer without queer norms, thus “opening up the possibility of a remaking of gendered reality,” or, in this account, any kind of material reality (Butler 2009:i). It’s the internal tension between norms and queer statements that are the “condition for action” (Riley, cited in Jagose 2009:161) of queer critique. I also agree with Halberstam (Halberstam and Povinelli 2007) that “queerness” does not come from the object of study but from the mode of analysis required to understand it. Rather than a search for “cool queer subjects” (Halberstam and Povinelli 2007), queer prehistory as a mode of analysis traces the genealogy of queer socialities and how it is that alternative forms of family, kinship, and bodies can come to exist. Part of that mode is an emphasis on surprise, on something new and previously unthought. Dowson maintains that queer archaeology’s potential lies in “reinventing its capacity to startle, to surprise, to help us think what has not yet been thought” (2009a:290). Giffney encourages us to think of queer as the practice of “invention to the brink of unintelligibility” (2009:20), which challenges and provokes the reader to further effort and thinking. Can archaeology produce creatively queer effects by documenting the previously invisible and, as importantly, by challenging archaeological fundamentals “for the possibility of becoming other to ourselves” (Giffney 2009:20)?

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NOTES

- 1 For example, “Feminist, masculinist, and queer visions of the past” at the European Archaeological Association’s annual meeting, 2010; or “Stone Walls and Queer Sites” at Theoretical Archaeology Group New York, 2008.
- 2 Goffman (1959) admits that his usage of performance is ultimately metaphorical. While acknowledging the similarity between her theory and Bourdieu’s, Butler’s emphasis on the embodied performativity of speech acts and the *habitus* itself distinguishes her work from Bourdieu’s, who assumes a conservative notion of previously established norms rather than a constant reinvention of context (Butler 1999:192, 1997b:142).

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