Affirmation and Action: A Posthumanist Feminist Agenda for Archaeology

Hannah Cobb ⓘ & Rachel J. Crellin ⓘ

This paper explores the potential of posthumanist feminism in archaeology. We find ourselves exhausted in the face of the continuing inequalities in our discipline and the volatile political times we live in, where discrimination and xenophobia, entangled with the patriarchy, create a toxic mix. In the face of this, we draw inspiration from ongoing activism within archaeology and the emergence of posthumanist feminism beyond archaeology. We consider the juxtaposition between activism in the discipline and the lack of engagement with the same issues in our theory. Posthumanist feminism is explored as a way to unite theory and activism. It connects to and builds on existing feminisms but is argued to differ in three ways: first, posthumanist feminism widens the scope of those for whom we should be working to achieve equality; second, it suggests radical shifts in our ontology are necessary to bring about equality; third, it develops an alternative approach to difference. We explore the potential for posthumanist feminism to reshape narratives about the past, the way we do archaeology, and archaeological activism. In each, the aim is to turn away from the majoritarian subject and to make space for multiple alternative voices to emerge and thrive in archaeology.

Despair (exhausting inequalities in archaeology)

Dear Reader, how do you feel, right now, about the state of inequality in archaeology, and in the world? For us, the authors of this paper, we feel angry and exhausted. In the constant grind of the neoliberal, audit culture of academia, the privilege and dominance of the patriarchy seems ever more acute. Working with colleagues in the developer-led (CRM) sector of archaeology, the same feels true. It is heart-breaking watching brilliant people give their all to dig, to teach, to make new knowledge about the past, only to see them broken down by the system. We see them leave the work they love because their caring responsibilities, their disabilities, their race and the materiality of their bodies do not fit easily into the patriarchal structures of our practice. We see them leave the work they love because the low pay and insecure working conditions that characterize

many jobs in our profession amplify these challenges, affecting who can afford a career in archaeology and for how long. It is equally heart-breaking watching the people who stay and battle. And this is not hyperbole, for it is a constant battle, because in a system stacked toward the privilege of straight white cis men (what Deleuze & Guattari 2004 call the majoritarian), anyone who is not the majoritarian has to fight to be heard, to be seen and to be recognized. All the time. And it is exhausting. Patriarchal systems hurt and exhaust all of us.

Beyond archaeology, we have written this paper through the Covid-19 pandemic, which has cast inequalities in a new light. We have seen how poverty, disadvantage and race all intersect to allow the virus to spread and kill more quickly: who gets sick, and who cares for them whilst they are sick (meant in the broadest sense to include all key workers), shines a light on structural inequality. All of this

is visible in archaeology, too, where the economic imperatives of our sector see the Covid-exacerbated inequities of wider society mirrored in our professional practice.

Covid-19 is not just a disruptor: it is also a catalyst that exacerbates already existent problems and inequalities. The *Black Lives Matter* (hereafter BLM) movement rose to increased prominence in the wake of the killing of George Floyd and in the run up to the 2020 American election. The comparative response of the US National Guard to the BLM protests of May and June 2020, in contrast to those of the Trump supporters on 6 January 2021 storming the US Capitol building, has been perhaps the most visceral demonstration to date of how structural racism is enacted in America. In the UK, the structures of racism are performed differently. As we write, the response to 2020's UK BLM protests and demonstrations, including the tearing down of the statue of the slaver Edward Colston in Bristol, is new legislation which gives the Communities Secretary (a government minister) the final decision on the future removal of any contentious statues (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government 2021). In the wake of Colston, statues and heritage have become yet more politicized in the UK as part of the so-called Culture Wars: a reminder, if ever any were needed, of how potent archaeology, heritage and the past are in political narratives about contemporary social inequality. Yet, if the majoritarian persists, and if those who do not fit the mould continue to be broken by the battle, or unheard and trampled on the battlefield, what can we do to resist the primacy of the majoritarian in our interpretations of the past and our heritage practice of the present? Framed in such stark terms, it feels easy to despair.

Our despair is further exacerbated because these critiques are not new. Archaeologists have been addressing gendered and intersectional inequalities for nearly 40 years, beginning with Margaret Conkey and Janet Spector's (1984) revolutionary 'Archaeology and the study of gender' and extending through archaeology's movements to become engendered (Claassen 1994; Conkey & Gero 1991 and papers therein; Sørensen 2000; Spector 1993), intersectional (Heath-Stout 2020), black and anti-racist (Battle-Baptiste 2011; Brunache *et al.* 2021; Flewellen *et al.* 2021; Franklin 2001; Franklin *et al.* 2020; Society of Black Archaeologists 2020; Sterling 2015), anti-colonial (Atalay 2006; 2012; Cipolla *et al.* 2019; Colwell 2016; Watkins 2005), queer (Blackmore 2011; Blackmore *et al.* 2016; Dowson 2000; Geller

2017; Voss 2000), and to explore difference (Moore 1993; 1994) and personhood in the past (Fowler 2004; Marshall 2008; 2012). Yet, in 2021, we still see in practice many of the same inequalities highlighted by those who have gone before us and it makes our despair seem insurmountable.

There are glimmers of hope. In the UK, the *Profiling the Profession* exercise (which has happened roughly every five years since 1997) gives an illuminating view of the demographics of the archaeological workforce. The data show that the gender gap has narrowed significantly from a 70:30 male:female split in 1997 to almost equal figures (47:53) in 2020 (Aitchison *et al.* 2021). Yet this is the lone glimmer of hope, particularly given that pay across the sector remains low. Drilling down into the data allows us to see the scars of the battle discussed above. The seemingly greater gender equality in the workforce is not distributed through the age brackets. From the age of 45 onwards, most archaeologists are men (Aitchison *et al.* 2021, fig. 2.4.2). Further, the picture painted in these figures is one which frames gender as binary, which is in itself problematic and unrepresentative. The statistics also show that archaeologists in the UK are 97 per cent white and 89 per cent able-bodied (Aitchison *et al.* 2021). Worryingly, Cobb (2015; forthcoming) has shown that the student body in the UK is more diverse than the workforce, highlighting the presence of significant barriers to progression into the profession. While these data are specific to the UK, the problems highlighted are not. Where comparable statistics exist elsewhere, such as in America (albeit a rather dated survey: Zeder 1997), Canada (Overholtzer & Jalbert 2021), Australia (Ulm *et al.* 2013) and across Europe (Aitchison *et al.* 2014), gender imbalances, particularly in senior and professorial roles, predominate in archaeology, as does a binary view of gender and a marked lack of ethnic diversity and disability across the archaeological profession (for a fuller discussion of these statistics, see Cobb & Croucher 2020, 93–102).

Statistics highlight our profession's inequities in one way, but in the last decade the capacity of social media to illuminate these has also been powerful. Hashtags employed on Twitter and Facebook, beginning with #EveryDaySexism (and archaeology's own #EveryDIGSexism), and then #MeToo and #TimesUp (including #TimesUpAcademia and #TimesUp Archaeology) have allowed some of those who previously had no form of recourse to highlight their experiences of disciplinary inequality. In some cases, these reflect the everyday grind of inequality:

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in others the real-time calling out of specific inequities has been possible. To give just one example (and every year seems to have its own), at the 2019 Society of American Archaeologists conference, a professor, expelled from his own institution for sexual misconduct, was allowed to attend the conference where his victims were due to speak, despite their protests: social media brought this to the attention of the discipline (Flaherty 2019).

In the picture we paint here, the prospect of an equitable archaeology seems bleak, and anger, exhaustion, despair and eventual burnout feel inevitable. We authors have both felt this at different times in recent years, despite our privilege as white cis-gendered women, with permanent jobs in UK academia. There are many more archaeologists whose lives and experiences are far more difficult and for them the despair, anger, and exhaustion is all the more acute. There are others who have left the profession and those who never even saw it as an option.

From despair to where?

> Despair is not a project; affirmation is.
> BRAIDOTTI 2019a, 3–4

Given all the despair, anger and exhaustion we outline above, the question then is, how does archaeology address these challenges? For the authors (writing from the standpoint outlined above) one of the most compelling answers to this can be found not in archaeology, but in the work of posthumanist feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti, and particularly in her volume *Posthuman Knowledge* (2019a). Braidotti begins with a stark argument laying out why the prevailing state of society and of academia has led her to feel such crushing and exhausting waves of despair and anger. She then builds an argument for countering this with affirmative ethics. Her message is that 'anger and opposition alone are not enough: they need to be transformed into the power to act so as to become a constitutive force' (Braidotti 2019a, 36). That is to say, we must not be consumed by despair, but instead make positive action our project.

The wonderful thing is that, in archaeology, there are those who are already doing just this. The last five years has seen a ground-swelling of activism in archaeology in the UK. This activism comes from a number of different directions, and while none of it comes from an explicitly posthumanist position it is exactly the constitutive force for which Braidotti

(2019a) argues. There are a range of grassroots organizations such as *Mentoring Womxn in Archaeology and Heritage* (hereafter MWAH!), *British Women Archaeologists*, *TrowelBlazers* and the *British Archaeology Jobs Resource* (hereafter BAJR) *Respect Campaign*. There are also several recently established foundations and societies such as the *Enabled Archaeology Foundation* and the *European Society for Black and Allied Archaeologists* (for the ESBAA manifesto, see Brunache *et al.* 2021). Equity issues are also being strongly contested by unions who represent archaeologists in the UK (*Prospect* in the development-led (equivalent to Cultural Resource Management elsewhere) sector, *Unison* in local government and the *Universities and College Union* in academia). Finally, equity issues have begun to impact 'top-down' organizations too. Archaeology's professional body in the UK, the *Chartered Institute for Archaeologist*s (hereafter CIfA) founded an Equality and Diversity group in 2015 (and, at the time of writing, is constituting a Standing Committee for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) which has led to subsequent changes in the way inclusivity is embedded throughout the organization's practice. The work of the group also stimulated the production of a pan-sectoral strategy and statement on bullying, harassment and discrimination (Chartered Institute for Archaeology 2019), produced by the Industry Group (an existing collaboration between CIfA, the *Federation of Archaeological Managers and Employers* (hereafter FAME) and Prospect). This has in turn led to some notable actions. For example, the *Seeing Red* project from the grassroots organization MWAH! has highlighted the difficulties faced by those who menstruate while working in archaeology due to the failure to provide even basic clean facilities to allow them to change sanitary products hygienically and in private. The recent decision of FAME to support this campaign and to provide period packs to all FAME members (FAME 2021) looks set radically to change this fundamental area of inequity. Meanwhile, the BAJR Respect Guide (Hawkins & Rees 2018) has highlighted sexual harassment in archaeology, and subsequent research by the authors has shown a shift in professional culture surrounding harassment (Hawkins & Rees 2020). This activism is not limited to Britain. Barbara Voss (2021a, b) has recently published about her own experiences of harassment within archaeology in the USA and outlined how we can work to disrupt this, while Colaninno *et al.* (2020) have also written about how to create and support a harassment- and assault-free field school. Organizations such as *Paye*

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ta Truelle in France, the *Society of Black Archaeologists* in America, the *Indigenous Archaeology Collective* and the *Black Trowel Collectiv*e have all led on equity issues. People are angry (and often exhausted) and they are turning to activism.

From activism to theory

Yet the reflection of this practical activism in published work— in both interpretations of the past and the development of new archaeological theoretical positions—is limited. Despite the major engagement in the 1990s and early 2000s with feminism and queer theory particularly, writers have been quieter since, and the current activism occurring in mainstream contemporary practice is only just beginning to be reflected in archaeological academic research (but see Atalay *et al.* 2014; Barton 2021; Supernant *et al.* 2020). In our anger (and exhaustion) we authors have been reinvigorated by engaging with posthumanist feminism. In this paper, and the other articles in this special section, we explore the potential that posthumanist feminism holds for archaeology. This paper explicitly outlines the contours of a posthumanist feminist theory for archaeology (examined through the lens of contemporary archaeological practice) and the other papers in the special section explore how engaging with this theory allows the emergence of new narratives about the past. We also consider how we can connect our theory and our activism—how can we develop a posthumanist feminist approach to our equity issues? In so doing, we note that posthumanist feminism provides one possible route forward for those working within the canon of Western academia who would like to make the world anew (and it is a route we have both found useful), but we know that for those whose background lies elsewhere this approach may be inappropriate and unnecessary (Colebrook 2020, 347).

The sceptical reader might be wondering how posthumanist feminism, another new trend in archaeological theory (Crellin *et al.* 2021), can help us solve our seemingly intractable equality and diversity problems? Feminism has always entwined critical theory with activism, from Audre Lourde to bell hooks, Mary Wollstonecraft to Simone de Beauvoir, and in archaeology this connection is most explicit in Henrietta Moore, whose activist career trajectory has taken her far beyond our disciplinary borders to become a leading global thinker on prosperity. In our discipline specifically, Alison

Wylie (1997, 81–4) suggested that there are two main forms of feminist archaeology: content critiques (focusing on the narratives we produce about the past) and equity critiques (focusing on the shape of the profession). She argued that the emergence of 'integrative critiques' connecting the shape of the profession to the shape of the narratives we produce were important, citing Joan Gero's (1993) work as an early example. In this paper we build on this legacy to argue that posthumanist feminism offers a way to develop another form of integrative critique. Critique is not enough to change things, though: if it were, we would not still be in this position. Posthumanist feminism builds on decades of feminist critique and suggests that part of what is required to bring about a more radical equality is a shift in our thinking about how the world works: in our ontology.

The philosopher Francesca Ferrando (2020, 146) argues that posthumanist feminism is not just a philosophy but can also be an ethic. She draws on the etymology of the term ethics, coming from the ancient Greek 'ethos' to mean habit or custom, to argue that ethics is about our everyday habits and customs. Posthumanism is a materialist philosophy that draws our attention away from discourse and towards lived material realities. Alaimo and Hekman (2008, 7–8) in their volume on new materialist feminism call on us to focus on material ethics and ethical practices: to think about the material consequences of specific ethical positions and to focus not on overarching ethical principles but instead on how these play out in specific practices. To construct her posthumanist feminist ethics, Ferrando takes from feminism the emphasis on situated, embodied experiences and knowledge linked to critique of the abstract and universal. She combines this with three key aspects of posthumanist thinking: posthumanism, post-anthropocentrism and post-dualism (we explore these below). Ferrando inspires us once again to turn our philosophy into our way of living: our habits and customs. We argue that there are three key differences between this and other feminisms: first, posthumanism widens the lens on whom we should be working to achieve equality for; second, it suggests radical shifts in our ontology are necessary to help bring about this equality; third, it develops an alternative way of thinking about difference. In the next section, we explore this further to show the shape of a posthumanist feminism in archaeology, before exploring how we can work it through our interpretations of the past, our practice in the present, and our affirmative ethics.

Posthumanist feminism

Kay and Haughton (2019, 7) define posthumanism as 'a gathering of intellectual perspectives that share as a basic tenet the belief that the human subject should not be regarded as a stable or bounded substance with ontological primacy over other beings/things'. Posthumanism is an umbrella term that covers a range of different approaches (Ferrando 2019). These approaches share a critique of humanism—they all argue that humans are not *a priori* the most important beings on earth. They demonstrate how this kind of thinking has led to an anthropocentric approach to the world where we are most concerned by the fate of humans. The kind of intellectual perspectives we might shelter under the posthumanist umbrella include new materialisms, object-oriented ontology and ahumanism.

The new materialisms draw on the thinking of Baruch Spinoza (1996), Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (2004) and are most readily associated with authors like Barad (2003; 2007), Braidotti (2013; 2019a, b, c) and Manuel DeLanda (2002; 2006; 2016). New materialism emphasizes the flow and flux of all matter and argues that matter, both human and non-human, contributes to the on-going processes of change in the world. Object-oriented ontology, most readily associated with the work of the philosopher Graham Harman (2011; 2018), is a philosophy of essences that argues that non-human things are not exhausted by their relations and always hold something static in reserve (it therefore has quite different theoretical foundations than the other approaches: see discussion in Harris & Cipolla 2017, 187–9). Despite some key differences between these approaches, they are united in their emphasis on critiquing and moving beyond anthropocentrism. At the most extreme end of the spectrum of post-anthropocentric approaches is ahumanism, associated with the work of Patricia MacCormack (2014; 2020), which argues for the gradual dying out of the human species. Some might also include transhumanism under the posthumanist umbrella (for an application in archaeology, see Caraher 2019). Transhumanist thinking focuses on the journey towards a perfected version of humanity through an increasing entanglement with technology (consider projects such as Artificial Intelligence and mind-download). Transhumanism overlaps with some areas of posthumanism but, we argue, it is actually very different because it retains an emphasis on human improvement rooted in enlightenment

thinking. More importantly, it differs because it remains firmly anthropocentric due to its emphasis on *human* improvement (for a helpful discussion, see Ferrando 2019, 27–8).

Within archaeology, some of the core posthumanist strands are becoming increasingly influential. Some archaeologists associate posthumanist approaches most closely with symmetrical archaeology (Olsen 2007; 2010; Olsen *et al.* 2012; Shanks 2007; Webmoor 2007; Webmoor & Witmore 2008; Witmore 2007). Symmetrical archaeology drew inspiration initially from the work of the Science and Technology Studies thinker Bruno Latour (1993; 1999; 2005). In what Harris and Cipolla (2017) refer to as its 'first wave', it focused on arguing for an archaeology that elevated the role of non-human things. In its 'second wave', it draws more on the object-oriented ontology of Harman (2011; 2018). The other main strand of posthumanist influence in archaeology is assemblage theory (Jervis 2016; 2018; Jones & Hamilakis 2017). Elsewhere, Crellin and Harris (2021) have argued that this multiplicity of approaches leads to confusion and some misplaced critique which is directed at the field as if it were homogenous but really only addresses a specific subject within.

The posthumanism we deploy is new materialist and rooted in feminism, drawing on work by Barad (2003; 2007), Bennett (2010), Braidotti (2013; 2019a, b, c) and Ferrando (2019). As noted above, Ferrando (2019) argues that there are three key aspects of posthumanist philosophy: we consider first post-humanism (the presence of the hyphen here is not accidental: Ferrando uses it to differentiate between the umbrella theory—posthumanism—and the specific aspect of the thinking—post-humanism). A post-humanist approach argues humanism has historically not granted the same humanity to all humans. The category of human constructed by humanism is closed and exclusionary and has allowed specific types of people to be seen as *more human* than others. Humanism upholds a very specific version of the ideal human: the white, heterosexual, western, educated, able-bodied and property-owning man—captured in the image of Vitruvian Man (Braidotti 2013, 14, fig 1.1). This idealized man is seen as the seat of agency and rationality: he stands alone, the captain of his own fate. All other humans have, historically, been compared to this 'ideal human' and in that comparison they have been found lacking (Braidotti 2013, 15, 27–8).

The traditional definition of the human is not only closed and exclusionary, but is also based on a specific vision of difference: difference that is seen as a negative lack. So, women are *not* men, similarly those with differently abled bodies are *not* able-bodied, those who are LGBTQ+ are *not* heterosexual, and those who are Black, Indigenous, Latina, Asian, etc., are defined as *not* white. That which is not 'Man' is the Other and therefore defined negatively as less-than (hu)Man, and closer to nature (see Braidotti 2013). This was, of course, how colonialism was structured and justified: Indigenous people around the world were presented as lacking the rationality and civility of the white European colonist. They were therefore viewed as nearer to nature and less human. Similarly, arguments used to justify the historical exclusion of women from suffrage were structured around the idea that women were less intelligent and rational. This posthumanist critique builds on decades of feminist theorizing about androcentrism in Western society and will feel familiar to many feminists. It differs, though, in how it specifically argues that discrimination against women is constructed ontologically in the same way as other forms of discrimination. It connects together feminist, anti-racist, anti-colonial, intersectional, LGBTQI+ and enabled activists and suggests that the root of all these inequalities lies in the way we think about the category human, the relationship between humans and the rest of the world and how we think about difference. This is a feminism that works to dismantle all kinds of discrimination. Its fundamentally relational nature means that it does not work for the equality of one individual, or one group of individuals, but works to form collectives that aim to achieve equity for all. Braidotti (2019a, c) has argued that posthumanism opens up a space for a new form of critical posthumanities that focuses on all the 'missing people' excluded from the humanist definition of the human. This new transdisciplinary posthumanities will stitch together scholars from feminist, queer, race, post-colonial, subaltern, cultural, media, and science and technology studies (Braidotti 2019c, 38–40). We suggest this posthumanities can be reflected in activism that works across traditional groups to create a larger collective working for equality for all.

The second aspect of posthumanist thinking is a post-dualism. Posthumanism argues that all the different forms of discrimination have their roots in dualist ontologies where the world is arranged into opposing categories. A rejection of dualisms is not new in archaeology—the engagement with phenomenology that began in the 1990s (Gosden 1994; Thomas 1996) showed that the use of dualistic thinking in archaeology can be an inappropriate imposition onto the past (*contra* the situation in geography: see Sundberg 2013), and feminist, queer and personhood approaches to the past have subsequently explicitly sought to move away from the 'binary bind' in a range of different ways (summarized neatly in Ghisleni *et al.* 2016). Beyond archaeology, the work of Latour (1993; 2005) has shown that while Westerners often think in binaries, our reality is a world of messy hybrids that erases dualisms. Combining the post-dualist critique with posthumanism allows us to think about how binaries have often been put to work in a hierarchical manner. Embedded in our dualisms is a sense that the cultural is superior to the natural because it is associated with human exceptionalism. Our dualisms are part of the thinking that has defined a wide spectrum of humans as less-human, less rational, and closer to nature. Dualisms are replaced by a relational ontology.

The third aspect of posthumanism is a post-anthropocentrism. Our dualisms have not only led to discrimination and the devaluing of the majority of the human population, but they have also devalued everything else. The dualism between humans and non-humans in our thinking has led us to believe that we humans are the most powerful and important things in the world, and it is this position that has led to our current climate crisis and the mass extinction of a variety of non-humans. Posthumanism asks us to elevate the non-human others who share our world—from frogs to rocks, polar bears to laptops—and to see them as equally real. It asks us to stop shaping our world around humans in isolation and to consider a wider cast of protagonists and relationships. We are already seeing how the climate crisis affects the world unevenly: it is intensifying forms of discrimination and disadvantage; climate justice is an issue for feminism and posthumanism. This is a post-anthropocentrism, not a non-anthropocentrism (see discussion in Crellin 2020, 161, 177; Crellin *et al.* 2021, 121): *it is not about ignoring humans or no longer studying them, it is about moving beyond anthropocentrism to no longer treating humans as ontologically elevated and isolated.*

Posthumanism parallels a range of relational Indigenous world views by offering an approach that better understands our world not as one where humans are ontologically superior and where dualisms structure our thinking (e.g. Deloria 2003;

Montgomery 2021; TallBear 2019; Watts 2013). Discussion of these parallels highlights how much posthumanists (and new materialists) have to learn from indigenous thinking and the need to do so in a respectful, careful, and non-extractive or appropriating manner (Montgomery 2021; Rosiek *et al.* 2020; TallBear 2017; Todd 2016). Importantly, it also offers a way forward for Westerners to work towards creating better futures. Posthumanism demonstrates that part of what we need is to change how we think in order to achieve a better future for all humans, but also for Earth more broadly—simply striving for equality will not be enough.

The key feminist aspect of posthumanism, and one that is yet to have the impact it deserves in archaeology, is how it reconceptualizes difference. Difference has long been a key topic for feminist scholars (see for example, Moore 1994).[1] Grosz (2005, 5) characterizes two key approaches to difference in feminism: either difference through comparison (where men and women are measured against a standard) or difference through negation (where women are compared to men and characterized by what they lack). Deleuze (2004) reconceptualizes difference not as a comparison or a lack but instead as a productive force (for extended discussion, see Grosz 2005, 5–7; Stark 2017, 79–97). His exploration is not focused on the difference between men and women (or any other binaries) but difference more broadly as the force that produces the world. Deleuze (2004) emphasizes difference over identity, arguing that difference is primary. For him, there is nothing ontologically essential about identity—it is always in flux. This is not about denying the important differences between, for example, men and women, but instead reconceptualizing them not as a lack but as something positive and productive. Difference can 'sediment into patterns that create the effect of identity' (Stark 2017, 87), but that identity itself is not fixed and essentialized: categories of identity have changed and will continue to change: they are multiple. Different strands of feminism have often been related to forms of identity politics—where we work to improve the conditions for underrepresented identity groups. The Deleuzian concept of difference pushes posthumanist feminism in another direction, calling on us to engage with difference in itself (and difference beyond the human). It thereby creates space to expand the feminist project beyond a concern with women as a category and towards a focus on a wider range of differences. It is not about moving the minoritarian voices into the majoritarian chorus, but rather disrupting and overturning the majoritarian norm itself.

Rethinking difference over identity allows the reconceptualization of categories such as 'men' and 'women' and other forms of difference, too. This leaves space for archaeologists to explore how gender, for example, was understood differently at different times and in different places in the past and allows us to move beyond binary approaches to gender. Penny Bickle (2020) has very successfully applied this concept of difference to a study of gender in the central European Neolithic showing the potential of this approach. As well as disrupting the past, it also means that our identity categories are not fixed into the future, allowing us to work towards a time where difference is not seen negatively but valued as a productive force.

The vision of the human that emerges from posthumanist approaches is quite different from the humanist vision. Humans are unseated from the 'ontological apex' (Bennett 2010: ix) and relocated in and among the non-humans with which they share the world. They remain an open rather than closed concept—open in that different types of people are allowed into the category and open in the sense that the human is seen as embedded in, and inseparable from, the rest of the world. They are part of, and affected by, ecologies. Humans are always relational beings who emerge from the relations that they are entangled within: those relations are with both humans and non-humans. Importantly for archaeology, this means that what humans are is always historically specific: who counts as human, and what human is, is understood to be always changing (see Cipolla *et al.* 2021). The human is no longer a closed category defined by a certain biology that we 'achieved' 500,000 years ago and is instead illuminated by our embedding within relations with all kinds of non-humans from hand-axes to fitbits.

What can a posthumanist feminist archaeology do?

Taking a posthumanist feminist stance has consequences for the kinds of pasts we produce, and it calls on us to make our profession more diverse by amplifying new perspectives. This requires us to rethink our practice both as archaeologists and as educators. Cobb and Croucher's (2020) work on pedagogy, for example, examines how the structures and processes of contemporary neoliberal higher education can act to homogenize students and the

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learning process artificially, compartmentalizing types of learning and often connecting pedagogic success with financial/labour market output. Instead, they illustrate how teaching, learning and becoming an archaeology graduate involves a complicated and messy entanglement of materials, things, places, people and often temporalities; where bodies, trowels, lecture theatres, laptops, sexualities, pint glasses, tampons, postmedieval ceramics, prehistoric lithics, graph paper and more are entangled in rhizomatic 'learning assemblages' at multiple scales (Cobb & Croucher 2020). By exploring how learning is material, multiple and active, the explicitly posthumanist feminist stance that they take sets out a way to resist the homogenization of our students, reconsider teaching and learning in non-linear ways, foreground contemporary diversity in the student body, and highlight the constant process of becoming an archaeologist.

Rethinking our pedagogy is one way to make space for more diverse voices to flourish in our discipline; but posthumanist feminism also asks us to move away not just from teaching majoritarian histories, but also writing majoritarian histories, and instead to write about the minoritarian: the forgotten stories and pasts from the 'missing peoples' and the missing non-humans. This might mean thinking about the role of women, or people of colour in the past, areas that feminist scholarship has long called on us to address. It can also involve thinking about how non-humans have played key roles in history. The materialist nature of posthumanism means that there is fertile ground for studies that trace material histories and consider how specific materials are entwined with various historically emergent phenomena; for example, we might map material histories of the patriarchy, exploring how this phenomenon changes and adapts over time, its differing effects and the cracks within it. These changes require us to ask different research questions. The same old questions will not do, if we are to actualize new narratives. Braidotti (2019a: 125) argues that using posthumanist qualitative criteria (such as supra-disciplinarity, non-profit, critical reflexivity, material locations, community-based transversality, non-linearity, the powers of memory and the imagination, the strategy of defamiliarization, an emphasis on generative forces and affirmative ethics) for evaluation and analysis in our work is key to this. An important move is to begin rethinking *the* grand narrative archaeology has produced (a narrative of linear progress) and replace it with multiple alternative grand narratives (plural) (Crellin 2020). We imagine a future-oriented archaeology (see below) where we use our work to highlight how current inequities and damaging structures are not permanent. We need to reveal the histories that produced them, both showing why they are so powerful and intransient and demonstrating how things could be otherwise. Critiquing existing models is only ever a first step, though; our affirmative ethics require us to be creative, producing new stories rather than simply critiquing old ones. This is, of course, challenging—it is easier to critique than it is to build something new.

Papers in this section begin to show us the shape of the positive new narratives that can emerge from an engagement with posthumanist feminism. In his paper, Jervis explores changes to the economy in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in England. He critiques patriarchal narratives of progress in this period. By focusing on the processes of grinding grain, he develops an alternative gendered narrative that rethinks the embodied and material experience of medieval life. O'Dell and Harris, drawing on thinking from Spinoza, encourage us to explore the question 'What can a body do?' in the different times and periods we study. Their call, illustrated through case studies of Chinchorro mummies in the Atacama Desert in South America and burials at the Neolithic site of Wor Barrow in England, is to explore the immanent and historically contextual capacities of bodies at different times and in different places: to move beyond universalizing assumptions about a generalized majoritarian body to reveal the changing histories of bodies. Morris and Bickle consider how the posthumanist re-conceptualization of difference can be employed together with the emphasis on relationality and emotionality in *Archaeologies of the Heart* (Supernant *et al.* 2020). Drawing on case studies from the LBK in Neolithic Europe and nineteenth-century mourning practices in England, they utilize the concept of 'emotional communities' to think about how groups of women with shared experience might have related to each other. Chang offers a personal critical reflection on her own career and research in light of her recent engagement with posthumanist feminism. She has carried out both ethnographic and archaeological work with nomadic societies and considers the role of gender in this work and the potential of the philosophical concept of nomadism (drawn from Braidotti 2011) to help her re-approach nomadic societies. Eriksen and Kay take us to the worlds of Iron Age and Viking Scandinavia to explore the concept of grievability (following Butler 2016), considering what we can learn about relationships between people and things,

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and people and animals, as well as those people in the period who were not treated as human or considered grievable. These case studies allow them to offer a critical reflection on posthumanist feminism and ethics.

Affirmation and action

As we have shown, posthumanist feminist theory has the potential to change the narratives we write about the past and we can use it to change how we teach and practise archaeology in order to create space for more diverse voices. We close this paper by considering how it can inform our activism to continue to make archaeology a place where more diverse voices can survive and thrive.

We began this paper with despair, but what posthumanist feminism brings to the table is an explicit countering of despair framed through affirmative ethics (Braidotti 2019a, 156; 2019b). Affirmative ethics are about turning to the potential of positive, affirmative, action ('what the world needs now is heavy doses of counter-negativity': Braidotti 2019b, 464). Affirmative ethics demonstrates that there is always something we can do to effect change, be it on a personal, organizational or wider structural level, and that in this the *we*, the communities of change and positivity (including humans and non-humans), are important (Braidotti 2019a: 166). Ferrando's (2020) call (discussed above) to connect our theory to our ethics, seen as habits, is helpful here: we act the changes we want to see. This is not a neo-liberal move that seeks to shift the burden of solving structural inequality onto each individual, but an affirmative move to allow us to go beyond despair and exhaustion and make a positive difference embedded in our communities of practice. We do this in two directions—by shifting our thinking and our practice to move beyond humanism, dualism, and anthropocentrism so we might clear conceptual ground for equalities to emerge, and by addressing the material world itself, working with non-humans to effect change. Structural inequality is not only a concept: it can be found in material realities.

How, then, do we enact an affirmative ethics? Braidotti (2019a: 166) argues that '[a]ffirmative ethics builds on radical relationality, aiming at empowerment. This means increasing one's ability to relate to multiple others, in a productive and mutually enforcing manner, and creating a community that actualizes this ethical propensity.' To increase our ability to relate to multiple others around us, we

need to listen more. We need to listen to the problems of others (including non-humans) and hear their alternative perspectives. This means looking to those who are not the majoritarian (Deleuze & Guattari 2004), who are constantly fighting the battle with which this paper began, and asking them how they need archaeology (and the world more broadly) to change, and critically examining our own privilege and positionality. At this stage we encourage you to consider what this means for you. Who are you, readers, and what communities and materials affect you and do you affect? We encourage you to lay this paper aside for five minutes and to use the *Intersectional Galleries Libraries, Archives and Museums* (GLAM) privilege quiz to consider your own positionality. This quiz is a simple set of questions that encourages self-critical reflection on positionality (you can find the quiz at https://intersectionalglam.org/privilege-quiz/). Whilst the quiz itself is not posthumanist, it neatly demonstrates the purchase posthumanism has for demonstrating how inequalities emerge. The quiz focuses on your body, the material world you live in and the experiences you have: which spaces can you enter, where can you feel safe; where do you see yourself represented? It is not about a nebulous set of principles, but about a material reality where structural inequality and privilege are made real.

Having increased our ability to relate to others, how do we go about building our affirmative communities of action? We argue that a key step is to build communities based on the Deleuzian concept of difference as a productive and positive force in the world. This works in two directions; first, it invites us to collaborate with non-humans to build these communities. In a world where activism arises from and works best through being an ally and an accomplice (cf. Flewellen *et al.* 2021), a posthumanist feminist approach emphasises how non-humans can also be allies. The differences between non-humans and humans allow us to build communities that can be more productive and effective. An example here is how social media has been a key driver of recent activism both within and beyond archaeology: phones, computers, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and more act as allies to connect minoritarian communities, in the midst of the battles they face, so that support can be found in the darkest of moments, and to call out discrimination and amplify difference and lived experience where once such things were almost impossible.[2] Second, we can think about how a Deleuzian approach to difference encourages

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us to build our communities outwards. The humanist definition of man is exclusionary, our activist communities need to be the opposite—they cannot be built on a negative definition of difference and identity, but instead should focus on the potential of difference. How powerful can our activism be when it focuses on the strength of our differences? How powerful can our reconception of the past be when we make space for, stand with, and amplify the voices and the lived materialities of archaeologists who are enabled, LGBTQI+, working class, neurodiverse, Black, Indigenous, and people of colour. The minoritarian community built in this way is not a minority, but a powerful multiplicity calling for change.

Once we have built, rebuilt, or expanded our communities of action, what comes next? Our hope is that we come together with these communities to 'build on' (Alaimo & Hekman 2008, 6) existing activism. This is a key strength of an affirmative, ethics-led, posthumanist feminism—it does not seek to overturn or abandon the feminist activism that already exists, but acknowledges its interweaving in the lines of flight of this already powerful corpus of work, and opens space to take inspiration from the activism that is already underway. The relational foundation of posthumanist feminism calls upon us to broaden those for whom we work to achieve equality. It asks us to not to focus on ourselves in isolation, but to consider all those others who are excluded from the humanist category of Man. In the activism that is already under way, we find inspiration.

The Seeing Red (Mentoring Women in Archaeology, 2020) campaign is a great example of existing activism we could build on from a posthumanist feminist perspective. It is already a campaign that directly addresses the leaky materiality of menstruating bodies and has built momentum by bringing to the fore the hidden experiences of the minoritarian subject during fieldwork. It shows one of the specific forms that structural inequality takes (a lack of private facilities for menstrual hygiene) and provides a material solution (literally packs of tampons, pads, tissues and hand sanitizer). Building on this means thinking about the other kinds of minoritarian bodies on archaeological sites and how humans and non-humans alike can be better allies to them, be it in the form of better toilet facilities, different break routines, adjustments to digging tools, PPE that fits bodies other than the majoritarian, spaces for expressing milk, spaces for prayer, or first-aid kits with plasters and bandages for skin tones that are not 'pink'. Building on means asking how other non-human things and

spaces can be part of the activism that helps those minoritarian bodies entwined in archaeological practice to stay in archaeology. To lessen the sense that such minoritarian bodies always have to battle. Building on means extending our care beyond the human to think about the wider effect of our profession on the environment and consider how we can better support one another to use less ecologically damaging products. Seeing Red is a brilliant example of activism that is relational, thinks about others, and explicitly addresses the non-human world. It is not, in and of itself, a posthumanist feminist project, but it opens the door and inspires future posthumanist feminist activism by demonstrating how relatively small, practical, material changes can make tangible differences to challenging structural inequalities.

Conclusion: Exhausting inequalities in archaeology

Feminism has long fought to address the inequalities that exist within society. Theory and practice should always be connected; in archaeology, since the 1980s, feminism has both moulded the shape of our discipline for the better and reshaped the kinds of narratives about the past that we write. In spite of this work, however, our discipline is still structured by inequalities. Posthumanist feminism suggests that part of the solution lies in changes to our ontologies. Changing how we think about the category human, and the relationship between humans and non-humans, has the potential radically to shift how Westerners in particular relate to each other. Posthumanist feminism both critiques the exclusion of minoritarian subjects from the category of human and suggests a way forward to address this. That route forward, grounded in an affirmative ethics, ask us to build diverse communities of humans and non-humans to bring about our agendas for change. The volatile politics of recent years has given rise to new waves of activist practice: our hope is that this shapes new theoretical agendas over the next decade and that from this new archaeological narratives emerge.

To end, we argue for the importance of seeing archaeology as a future-oriented discipline: one that works to build better futures. Archaeology is traditionally thought of as the study of the past, a subject concerned with past worlds and past lives, yet it happens in the present, and the present is a world of deeply embedded structural inequalities. In her work, Braidotti (2019c: 464) talks about the need to be accountable to the present in our research; and

she demonstrates that, rather than turning our back in exhaustion and despair at the state of the world, we should instead be invested in the present and alive to its problems. For us, being accountable to the present drives our future-oriented archaeology. Archaeology is always political (Shanks & Tilley 1987): the pasts we create have consequences in the present (whether we intend them or not). We argue that posthumanist feminist archaeology provides one explicit way to be both accountable to the present and to practise a form of future-oriented archaeology that actively works to build a new, equitable and kinder future for all of us, where humans are not the centre of all things. Recognizing the power of non-humans to be allies in our activism is fundamental to this, as is working with them to ask questions that are concerned with revealing the diversity of our contemporary practices *and* our past. Posthumanist feminism shows that our world is never static: things can and have been different from how they are now. And by working to make our subject more diverse, to make space for different kinds of archaeologists and to value their different voices, a future-oriented posthumanist feminist archaeology aims to make the world anew and make our archaeological study of the past part of that through its revelling in difference.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. There are some really interesting parallels between Henrietta Moore's discussions of difference and those of Braidotti. Braidotti (2011, 151–7) talks about differences between men and women, differences within groups of women, and differences within individual women. In an essay on difference and sameness, Moore (1993) draws out difference at these three scales in relation to anthropology. She also states that 'persons are constituted in and through

difference' (Moore 1993, 204), a statement that fits neatly within a posthumanist feminist frame.
2. We recognize that the non-human assemblages of social media can also be deployed in negative ways too, but in this paper, in the spirit of affirmative action, we want to draw out the positive, allying properties of social media.

Hannah Cobb
School of Arts, Languages and Cultures
University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester M13 9PL
UK
Email: hannah.cobb@manchester.ac.uk

Rachel J. Crellin
School of Archaeology and Ancient History
University of Leicester
University Road
Leicester LE1 7RH
UK
Email: rjc65@le.ac.uk

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Author biographies

Hannah Cobb is Professor of Archaeology and Pedagogy, Associate Director for Teaching and Learning in the School of Arts, Languages and Cultures, University of Manchester and University of Manchester Lead for Academic Development. Her research explores both the British Mesolithic and contemporary archaeological practice and is driven by a passion for teaching, learning, equality, diversity and inclusion. She is co-director of the multi-period Ardnamurchan Transitions Project (2006 to present), Chair of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists Equality and Diversity Group, and author (with Dr Karina Croucher) of *Assembling Archaeology: Teaching, Practice and Research* (OUP 2020).

Rachel J. Crellin is Lecturer in Archaeology at the University of Leicester. Her research interests' centre on archaeological theory, especially new materialist and post-humanist approaches rooted in feminism. She is also a specialist in the Neolithic and Bronze Age of Britain, Ireland, and the Isle of Man, and a metalwork wear-analyst. She is the author of *Change and Archaeology* (Routledge 2020) and a co-author of *Archaeological Theory in Dialogue* (Routledge 2021).