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DEVELOPMENT OF GENDERED SPACE: THE ARCHAIC AND CLASSICAL GREEK TEMPLE

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Abstract:

Throughout the ancient Greek world, temples marked the landscape as a sign of Greek civilization. Although Greek temples have been examined, described, and catalogued scientifically since archaeology came of age in the 18th century, the question of their cultural significance in their original Greek context has yet to be fully answered. Many twentieth-century interpreters tended to yoke the history of Greek temples to narratives of modernism, resulting in anachronistic conclusions. Current trends in architectural history have begun to test other interpretative strategies, such as the interrelationship between architecture and the emergence of Greek philosophy. This essay explores the possibilities of a deeper reading of these architecturally stunning spaces through both current and classical theories of gendered space. Despite thorough Freudian examinations of gendered space as it relates to the body and cultural interactions in modern domestic architecture by sociologists such as Steven Pile, culturally significant buildings such as the Parthenon have remained unexamined by gender theorists. Furthermore, the recent scholarship in Classical body theory is bringing to light more and more data on the Greeks' own attitudes toward gender as it was inscribed on the body'—unfiltered by the Freudian lens. My investigation centers on the development of peristyles and cellas of signature temples throughout the Greek realm, demonstrating how culturally inscribed gender ideals influenced, and even shaped the evolution of the temple form from the Archaic through the Classical period of Greece.

The paper:

Culturally ingrained notions of gender shape the spaces of daily life. Ancient Greece was no exception; in fact, given the immense influence of classical Greek culture on the West, Greek gender practices merit close attention. As the people of Ancient and Classical Greece shaped the physical spaces of their daily lives, the idea of gendered space evolved; thus becoming a more and more significant player in architectural design. One can

view specific forms of architectural space through the Greek ideals of gender hierarchy.. Initially, the function and occupancy of certain typical spaces created structures with inherent conditions of internal and external space. Greek ideals of lived space – i.e., space lived directly through associated images and symbols – would have influenced the design of both domestic (e.g., the Greek house or *oikos*) and public venues (e.g., the agora).¹ The Greek *oikos*, the protective abode of the ideal Greek woman, hidden away from public interaction, became the archetype of what is now known as feminine space. However, the gendered “femininity” of its space does not reside in the presence of female bodies dwelling therein. Instead, it is the main characteristics of hidden or enclosed space with often very dim lighting that conveyed a sense of fixity and security, a much sought after characteristic of a residential dwelling, which genders this space feminine.² In contrast, the space of the Greek agora is masculine in that it is characterized by an unremitting sensation of openness and mobility. These qualities combine to create architectural forms that foster the idea of challenge and defiance. This idea is readily evident within the Greek culture of public debate or rhetoric which is reserved exclusively for male citizens. These spatial readings of the feminine as dark, fixed, and secure, and the masculine as open, expansive, and mobile are essentially Freudian, as sociologist Steve Pile has demonstrated.³

This essay seeks to augment these mid 20th-century readings through the use of Greek cultural definitions of the feminine and the masculine as espoused in primary sources of the time.⁴ Unlike 20th-century Western culture, Greco-Roman texts on natural science and medicine did not see gender as biologically related to reproducing. Instead, they saw gender as a spectrum of traits running from the extremely feminine to the extremely masculine. Where an individual was located on the spectrum depended not on his or her biological sex, but on his or her personal characteristics. On this spectrum, the Greeks identified the feminine body as cold, wet, leaky, and heavy, whereas the male body was hot, dry, and airy. Furthermore, rather than examine the traditionally “feminine” domestic space versus the “masculine” public space, this paper proposes to explain the

evolution of the Greek temple from pre-Achaic Greece to the Classical period in terms of gender. In so doing, it maps the temple from an original feminine space, through a period of mixed gendered space, to reveal the Greek temple at the pinnacle of its Classical development (e.g. the Athenian Parthenon) as intrinsically hermaphroditic.

According to most contemporary and ancient authors, the development of this most recognizable of ancient icons, the Greek temple, evolved along a strictly linear constructional ethos that moved from modes of wood construction translated into stone to the later translation of democratic and civic ideals into structural ethics. Vitruvius extolled this idea in his *Ten Books on Architecture*:

“And thus each element preserves its proper place, type and order. Drawing from these elements and from the art of carpentry and applying them to the construction of sacred dwellings in stone and marble, craftsmen imitated these arrangements in their sculptures and agreed that these inventions ought to be adopted. ... And thus the covered section of the joists in Doric works began to take on the arrangement of the triglyphs and, between the joists, the metopes.” (4.2.2)⁵

In the 20th century, archaeologist and architectural historian William Bell Dinsmoor attributed the first stages of development to advances in constructional technologies and methods, but he also suggested that there must be something more to the collective Greek strategy of temple building:

“Mere advances in construction do not account for the development of the shrine; it is of the aspiration of humanity toward something fulfilling their ideal of a house of God that the Greek temples speak. Building better than they wot of, one generation joined hands with another in rearing these most splendid fabrics of in-dwelling divinity.”

These ideas are clearly deeply imbued with contemporary architectural discourses on the idea of form following function or functionalism. Additionally, they reflect, anachronistically, the organization of architectural production of the 20th-century which includes the professionalization of architecture and the organization of construction into trades, neither of which existed in ancient Greece. While Dinsmoor calls for alternative interpretations, he does not elaborate further. I propose that the ancient Greeks looked to their own subconscious ideas of gender and social structure. Indeed, the idea of gendered space and its impact on the development of the Greek temple allows a more in depth reading of all aspects of a purposefully created space rather than merely an alternative way to ascribe meanings to a space.

The Greek temple, a public space of personal and collective devotion, epitomizes the idea of gendered space and its changing conception throughout ancient and classical Greece.⁶ During its

humble beginnings in the so-called “Dark Age” of Grecian history circa 1100-800 B.C.E., the typical temple resembled a small house, or earthly abode, for the patron deity (Figure 1). What would later become the cella, or inner sanctuary of the classical and archaic temple, was originally a small and simple wooden or mud brick hut-like structure with a triangular roof. Usually, columns supported a small eave over a doorway on one end of the structure. Inside this structure a cult statue would be placed.⁷ This structure is a clear embodiment of the ideals of feminine space; dark, hidden interior, protected by load bearing walls and a great sense of immobility due to the weight and closeness of the structure and the internal space the structure created. The enclosed area of veneration of the deity, augmented by low lighting due to the overhanging roof structure and eaves, amplifies the experience of the mysteries of the god or goddess within. Also, interior columns, placed to support the roof structure led to a dissection of the internal space, keeping the whole interior from being viewed at one time. These intentional design insertions all give evidence of a feminine space; identified by a strong sense of security and mystery.



Figure 1 Greek shrine, votive clay model, from Argos (Greece), eighth century B.C. (Kostof, 117)

During the Archaic period circa 600-480 B.C.E., the feminine space of the cella, dedicated to veneration of the deity, was further elaborated and further feminized. The original temple to Hera, the queen of the gods, at Samos is a clear illustration of the way in which the interior of the cella was extended axially as early as 800 B.C.E, in this case to nearly 33 meters in length, creating a hecatompedon or temple that is 100 feet in length. Also, within Hera I at Samos, the interior set of wooden columns which had been placed irregularly in the pre-

archaic temple for roof support now fell in line directly in front of the cult image.⁸ This allowed the cella to become a passage down which a believer would walk without full view of the goddess until reaching the very end of the space (Figure 2). Therefore, the hidden or feminine space of veneration at Hera I at Samos was elaborated on a more monumental scale through simple design regularizations.

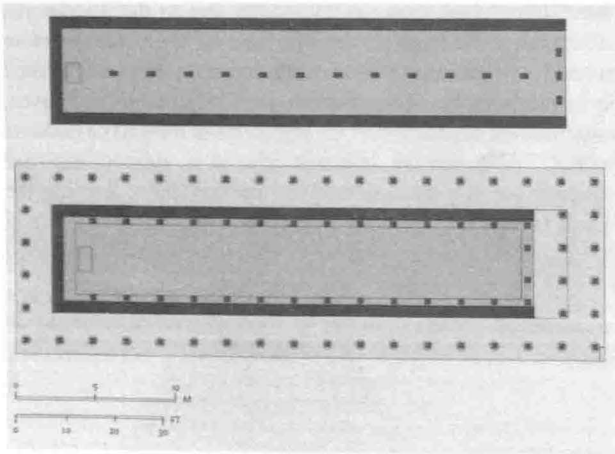


Figure 2 Hera I, c. 800 B.C., and Hera II, c. 650 B.C., at Samos, Greece (Stierlin)

Nearly fifty years after the completion of Hera I at Samos, gendered masculine space made its first timid appearance in Greek temple architecture. This came in the form of the encircling peristyle of wood columns at Hera I. This radical new development in temple construction was more than a simple awning of wood. It produced an entirely new envelope for what had once been a flat façade. Now, masculine ideas of control began to exert themselves over what was to become the inner sanctuary. This new masculine space, as defined earlier, promoted an idea of mobility by offering the space up as an analog to the space around it or as Kostof would say a mid-space object. (170) Although conceived originally as an impermanent wooden structure, the idea of the surrounding peristyle would eventually become the iconographic symbol of Grecian architecture.⁹

A more intact and well-known temple to Hera, located at Paestum, Italy was constructed circa 530 B.C.E.. This temple illustrates the archaic temple at its height according to 20th century critics. This icon is one of the first to combine feminine and masculine gendered space in the sacred enclosure of a Grecian temple through the use of permanent materials.¹⁰ The interior cella of this temple is still much like the original temple dedicated to Hera at Samos with a centralized row of columns (Figure 3). Although the temple form is now solely made of stone, the aspects of its construction are still the same. The space created by the peristyle here at Paestum, although masculine at

first glance, still displays some aspects of femininity once its structure is analyzed. The columns that make up the peristyle show a pronounced entasis or a swelling at the column's center so that the column's diameter is wider at its center than at its mid-sized base and smaller top. This entasis creates a feeling of weight and support as the structure is viewed as a whole (Figure 4). This focal component makes the structure seem heavy and tied to the ground, opposing the sense of mobility that should accompany masculine space. Although it seems an attempt was made, the later temples of Greece create the masculine envelope much more effectively by combining the femininity of the column with the idea of masculine penetration of space, giving weight to the argument that the constant search for perfection in temple design was in reality a hegemonic struggle between gendered spaces.

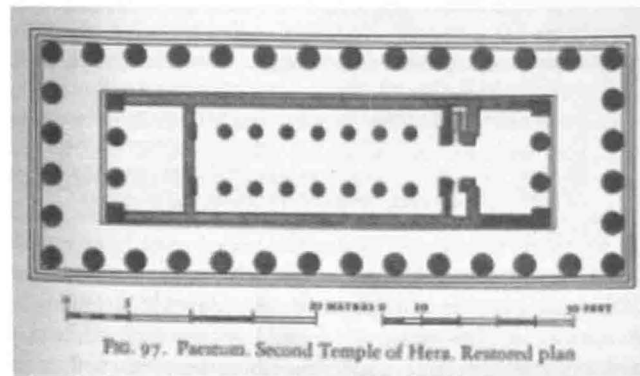


Figure 3 Plan of Hera II at Paestum (Scully, FIG. 97)

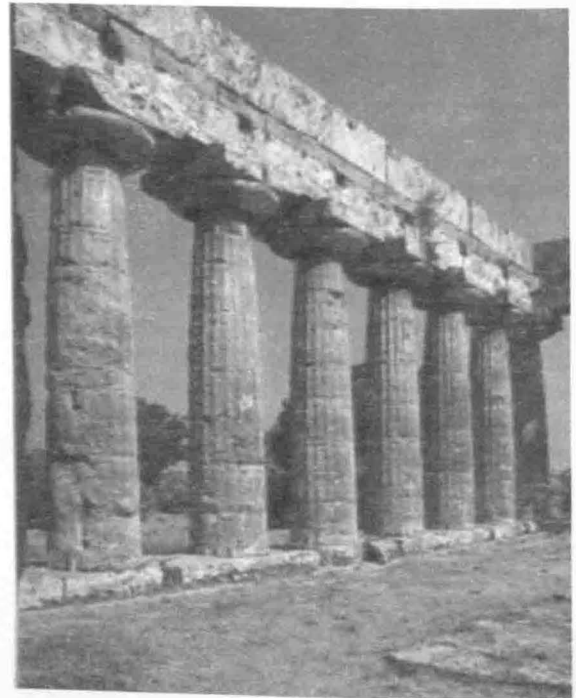


Figure 4 Hera I at Paestum (entasis in peristyle) (Stierlin)

The idea of gendered spatial formation within Greek temples was not just limited to temples of female deities. Unlike in today's society, biological sex and gender were not as intrinsically linked in the classical era of Grecian culture.¹¹ Femininity was not seen as just having female sexual organs, but as a mind set or a way of life separate from reproductive organs. Culturally determined gender ideals are inscribed onto bodies, buildings, and things animate and inanimate. This idea is readily evident when switching to temples of male deities. One example is the Temple of Poseidon, a Greek god of the sea, located in Sunium overlooking the Aegean Sea. This Doric temple, constructed in the 5th century B.C.E., measured 100 feet in length including a peristyle that enclosed a central cella (Figure 5). Once completed, the entire structure was composed of marble. It is one of the best examples of how Greek architecture used the surrounding landscape to imbue a building with a sense of a true link to the natural world.¹² This sense of presence, afforded by the peristyle's challenge to the natural world was a totally masculine ideal. The repetitive light and shade of the columns contrasted starkly with the flat plane of the sea beyond, offering a dynamic feeling of challenge and defiance capitalizing on the Greek understanding of the impact of the natural landscape (Figure 5). Also, the cella was constructed without the interior set of columns, allowing the space to become even more stark and cave-like than its predecessors. This cave-like interior harkens back to the idea of a feminine space as an analogue to a "mother earth" condition. Thus, the ideal temple creates an enclosed interior which is nothing like the expansive nature of the god of oceans and seas that it resides within, demonstrating that the form of the cella was a continuous act of historical design in line with other temples and not specific to the sex of the deity



Figure 5 Temple of Poseidon, Sunium, Greece (columns against Aegean Sea) (Stierlin)

The epitome of classical Greek temple design is most widely thought of as the Parthenon, the renowned temple to Athena Parthenos, the impenetrable maiden goddess. An icon of the Greek nation, the Parthenon is the crowning temple of the

Acropolis in Athens, Greece. A huge Doric temple in its own right, the Parthenon dominates the city of Athens from its high position on the ancient acropolis. The columns creating the peristyle respond to the challenge of the environment through their large scale and logic-defying entasis (Figure 6). According to Indra Kagis McEwen the peripteral elements of the classical temple became like sails or *ptera*, a Greek word meaning wing.¹³ The change from a heavy and deeply grounded reading of space, structure, and peristyle such as at Hera I at Samos and Hera I at Paestum to a space filled with tension between the reality of load and support and a conveyed sense of uplifting and lightness allowed the peristyle to become a more masculine space, embodying all of the fundamental characteristics of challenge and defiance as well as the airiness of the model elite Greek male body. The interior of the Parthenon however retains its fundamental femininity. Indeed, in its proportions, its frieze, and its double row of porch columns, the "feminine" Ionic order is introduced into Doric temple architecture. Even Vitruvius imbues the creation of the Ionic order with a feminine identity:

"...the Ionians built a temple to Diana; seeking a new type of appearance, they applied the same ratio based on footprints to a woman's slenderness, and began making the diameter of the columns measure one-eighth their height, so that their appearance would be more lofty. Instead of a shoe, they put a spira underneath as a base, and for the capital, as if for hair, they draped volutes on either side like curled locks..." (4.1.7)

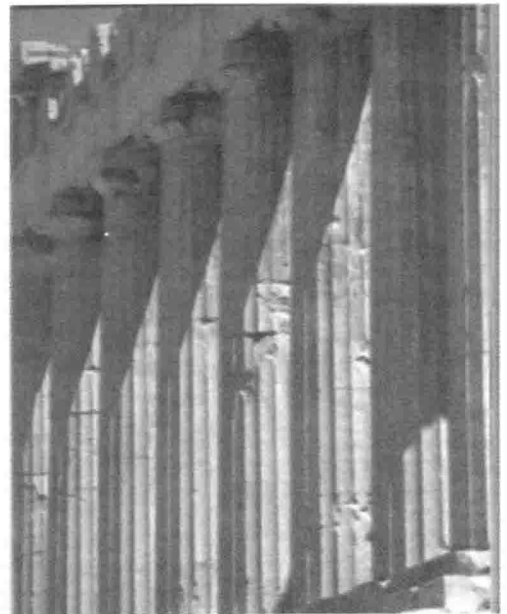


Figure 6 Temple of Athena Parthenos, Athens, Greece (Stierlin)

Furthermore, the interior engaged columns allow the space to become subdivided, but without blocking the view of the grandiose gold and ivory cult image of Athena that once dwelled within the cella (Figure 7). Although the view of the cult image

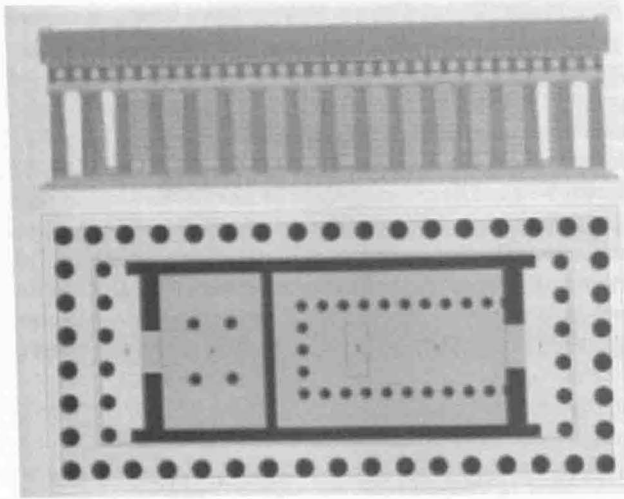


Figure 7 Temple to Athena Parthenos, Athens, Greece (Stierlin)

is no longer blocked, the interpenetration of space and column within the cella allows the space within the structure to seem dense and heavy obscuring the plainer wall with deep shadow.

The transition from the Archaic to the Classical era in Greek temple design created an iconic building type that has lasted throughout the ages. The exterior envelope created by the peristyle of columns produced a space which seemed to hermaphroditically and protectively hug the interior cella space of veneration of the god or goddess. Although initially feminine in structure and feel, the peristyle became a more masculine space as the search for perfection generated an envelope that protects the inner space of the cella structure while still celebrating its own separate identity. The internal cella was in every aspect a feminine space, perfect for representing the earthly presence of a deity. This was essential in all structures from the Archaic to the Classical era, as the interior of Grecian temple remained a space retained for symbolizing the fixity and continuity of an unearthly being. This idea was even represented in the archaic temple through the chaining of the cult figure to keep it from escaping the cella space¹⁴. Each of these specifically gendered spaces allows a fuller, more dynamic reading of cultural advancement in Grecian design; from the Archaic to the Classical era and beyond.

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Endnotes:

¹ This is a reference to Henri Lefebvre's tripartite theory of space and special meaning in which lived or representational space is the "space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users'." (39).

² In *Landscapes, Gender, and Ritual Space*, Susan Guettel Cole explains more thoroughly the idea of home as related to femininity through the idea of gendered language. "For the Greeks, the earth (Ge or Gaia) was mother of all—not only feminine in grammatical gender but female in function: a source of nourishment and birth mother of the gods." Also, Cole illustrates the Greek idea of female and male space. "The undifferentiated earth was mother, but the land bounded by recognizable borders and a territory to be defended was a fatherland." (1-2)

³ Steve Pile's discussion and exploration into the different ideas of Freudian gender as related to space and interpretation of space confronts the uses of the horizontal plane, nature and home to represent the feminine. This can be interpreted as fixed and restful ideal. Pile also discussed the use of the vertical plane and symbols of challenge and defiance as forms of male gendered identity. Although these ideas are inherently phallic, they can also be interpreted as symbols of power and mobility when compared to the horizontal plane and restful nature of the female symbols. (215–217, 221, 223)

⁴ Dale Martin discusses at length his interpretation of classical source material, especially medical treatises of the Greco-Roman world, in his work *The Corinthian Body*. (3-37)

⁵ This citing refers to Book 4, Chapter 2, Section 2 of the Vitruvius translation by Rowland and Howe. All other citations of Vitruvius follow this format.

⁶ In the third book of *Ten Book on Architecture* written by Vitruvius, the intentional design of temple structures as relating to personal devotion is clearly evident: "When matrons climb the steps of the pycnostyle temple to make their prayers, they cannot walk arm in arm through the intercolumniation; they must go in single file. Furthermore, the view of the doorways is blocked by the close placement of the columns, and the cult statues themselves are half hidden; also because of the restricted space, movement round the temple portico is hindered." (3.3.2)

⁷ Cult statues, their placement and the relative spatial practices surrounding them are discussed by Kostof in *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals*. (117-118); McEwen, 4-6, 56, 115-16.

⁸ Placement of the cult statue of Hera is determined according to diagrams of Hera I at Samos included in Stierlin's *Greece from Mycenae to the Parthenon*. (72, 104)

⁹ McEwan cites Vincent Scully on the mid-space element theory: "Vincent Scully says that the peristyle was intended "to articulate, penetrate, and extend the exterior envelope of the building so that it should become a true mid-space element, at once bounded and boundless ... setting up with its columns ... a regular standard of measure whereby distant horizons could be grasped." Although this premise is refuted in McEwan essay, I proposed that this reading is correct, yet only as it applies to the tensions and challenges established as a characteristic of male gendered space. (101)

¹⁰ Hera I at Paestum is an early and well-preserved Doric temple completely built of stone; a characteristic that would come to symbolize the Greek temple. The earliest known entirely stone Doric temple was the Temple of Artemis at Corfu, built circa 580 B.C.E.

¹¹ Refer to Dale Martin's interpretation of classical conceptions of

gender and the body in *The Corinthian Body*.

¹² In Scully's *The Earth, the Temple and the Gods: Greek Sacred Architecture*, the Temple of Poseidon at Sunium is described as follows: "The temple of Poseidon is a double boundary, a kind of fence, first against the empty sky and the sea and then against the land.... As the worshipper mounted toward the colonnade, the stoa opened a perspective to the right toward the island of Patroclus and the horned promontory opposite it, blocked off the land behind it and directed the eye, as did the columns of the temple itself, toward the closely bounded sea view to the west." (162-163)

¹³ McEwen authored *An Essay on Architectural Beginnings* which traces the development of the phonetic culture of the Greek temple.

¹⁴ This point is briefly discussed in McEwen's *Socrates' Ancestor*: "The Heraion at Samos was the home of the cult image of Hera, a xoanon that was kept chained up in order to reveal the fearful dynamism of its divine life. The first mud brick Heraion, with its interior hearth place, was a house writ large, and it is in the nature of houses with their hearths to be fixed, to be anchored to the soil." (101) "

Editor's note:

This paper won the 2006 Pella Student Writing Award--a juried competition open to all students in the school of Architecture.

Faculty comments:

Dr. Kim Sexton makes a cogent case for the excellence of her student's work. She writes,

Ms. Williams wrote this provocative essay as a research project in fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors section of History of Architecture I in fall semester 2005. In spring 2006, enrolled in my interdisciplinary Honors Colloquium, *Medieval Bodies / Medieval Spaces*, Ms. Williams proceeded to refine her argument through the addition of Greco-Roman body theory introduced in this seminar. She revised her paper for submission on her own, independently of the Honors Colloquium course requirements. Thus, this essay is the product of one-year's research. I have advised Ms. Williams and reviewed her progress throughout this year.

I would like to highlight five qualities of Ms. Williams' essay which place it among the best research produced by undergraduates (and by graduate students for that matter):

Ms. Williams' account of the evolution of Greek temple form through gender theory is utterly original research. No scholar has yet inscribed the Classical sex-gender pyramid on Greek temple architecture.

Ms. Williams' agile handling of sophisticated theoretical paradigms - Freudian spatial analysis and body theory - structures the analyses throughout her essay. Here, theory is no mere introductory distraction or flourish.

In the formal analysis of architectural remains - still the key interpretative tool of architectural historians - this essay shows Ms. Williams to be not only competent, but progressive and original.

Ms. Williams clearly defines the position of her research within the historiography of the Greek temple.

Finally, what truly sets this essay apart is Ms. Williams' avoidance of the pitfalls of essentialist reasoning that ensnares many undergraduate researchers. She works deftly with a sliding spectrum of traits rather than giving undue credence to artificially constructed categories such as masculine vs. feminine, sacred vs. secular, etc.

Ms. Williams' submission, "Development of Gendered Space: The Archaic and Classical Greek Temple," is a model essay of undergraduate research on a topic of fundamental importance - gender and architectural design - both for the discipline and for society at large.