Chapter 9

The Anti-rhetorical Power of Representational Absence: Incomplete Figurines from the Balkan Neolithic
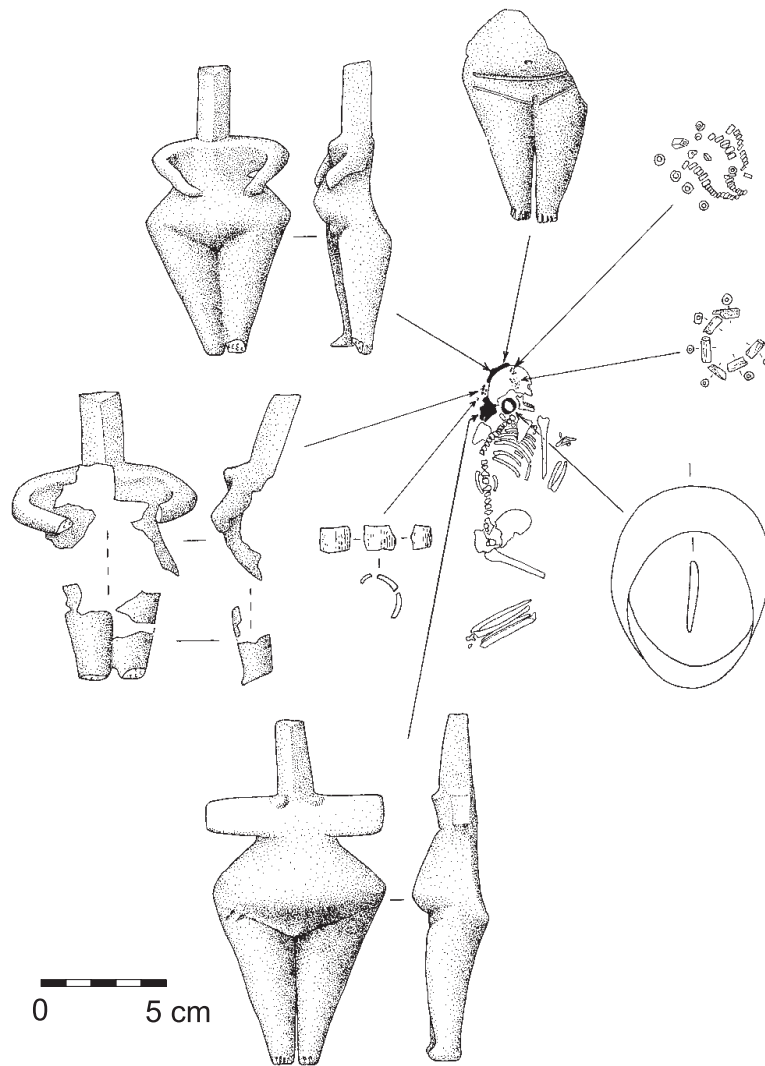
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During the excavations of the Hamangia Culture cemetery at Durankulak on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast, Henrietta Todorova's team recovered a number of figurines; Grave no. 626, for example, contained four (Fig. 9.1). The figurines were buried with a 20- to 25-year-old woman whose body was accompanied by a large *Spondylus* bracelet, three strings of copper and malachite beads and three fragments of finger rings (Vajsov 1987; 1992; 2002; Todorova *et al.* 2002, 62, 109). As with other Hamangia figurines from settlement and funerary contexts, the Grave 626 figurines are striking for the simplicity of their form and their lack of surface treatment. Necks are long, thin, triangular and without faces or heads. On the body of one figurine, two horizontal and curving incised lines form a pubic triangle and a short vertical slit suggests that the figure is female. The other three have no sexually identifiable body parts, through two have small protuberances on their chests, which may be breasts, though they may just as easily be men's as women's; indeed the potential breasts sit rather high on the chest and are as much part of the shoulders or neck as they are of the chest. Only two of the figurines have arms preserved; one has short, thick, square-ended arms that extend straight out to the sides. On the other figurine, arms are thinner, bent at the elbows with hands resting on the top of the abdomen.

Like other Hamangia figurines, the examples from Durankulak are remarkable objects and there would be value in devoting all of the present paper to the role that any one of these four figurines, or any one of the many others like it from this or any other contemporary site, may have played in communities of the Neolithic in the Lower Danube region (6500–3500 cal. BC).[1] Here I wish to focus on one aspect of these figurines from Durankulak: the absence of any facial detail, indeed the absence of a head. While I have chosen to begin this discussion with an object from one particular region of southeastern Europe and

a particular set of communities who shared similar ways of living, of making objects or burying their dead, it would have been just as feasible to use other figurines from other cultures in the region: from northeastern Romania, Moldova and the Ukraine (i.e. the Cucuteni/Tripolye cultures); from western Bulgaria, Serbia, southeastern Hungary, and Macedonia (i.e. the Starčevo and Vinča cultures); or from Thessalian Greece. In all of these places, it is not unusual to find figurines that have very little, if any, representation of faces or even heads (Fig. 9.2). Furthermore, I could have focused on the absence of body parts other than the head and face: on the absence of hands or feet, of arms or legs, of genitalia or buttocks. Indeed it is impossible to find a Neolithic figurine with all of its body parts represented. Why is this? Why were particular body parts not represented? What might be the significance of not representing the head or the face? This paper attacks these questions by investigating the representational importance of absence, by considering first the role that the process of abstraction plays in the creation of figurines, then by looking at the processes of cropping and disembodiment (especially in pornography), and finally by thinking about how psychoanalysis and experimental psychology have examined the ways that humans construct subjectivity and engage with incomplete or unsettling visual stimuli. Finally, I will turn back to the specifics of the Neolithic in southeastern Europe and examine how thinking about absence helps us to better understand Neolithic figurines and to understand better the ways in which Neolithic people lived in their world, thought about themselves and thought about each other.

Abstraction

To get to grips with Neolithic figurines from southeastern Europe requires getting to grips with a set of constitutive processes: 1) the making of something

are not shown everything nor are they shown the full detailing of those elements that are selected for representation. The fact that some elements are not included in a miniature object such as a figurine critically warps the relationship between the observer and the representation and, unavoidably, radically alters the observers' understanding and comprehension of the object. The brevity that comes with abstract representation forces the viewer beyond the information that is provided. The abstraction of a miniature demands that the spectator draws inferences. Thus, a person who gazes at a Neolithic figurine in its museum vitrine or as it is uncovered in an excavation trench, is drawn, almost without realizing it, to think of what is not there, of what has been left out. In the Hamangia example from Durankulak, described above, one is forced to ask: Where is the detail of human expression, the face, the head?

Through abstraction, representational objects are made active; abstraction forces the viewers to do something that otherwise they would not do.[2] Making the viewer draw inferences about what is not represented in a Neolithic figurine has important consequences for the understanding that the viewer develops about the miniature, abstracted object. The range of inferences that any one viewer can draw are almost limitless; the only constraints come from each individual viewer's particular beliefs, understandings, interests, backgrounds and desires. The potential for an abstracted representation to stimulate different inferences means that the responses and understandings of an abstracted representational object, such as a figurine, are many.

Elsewhere, I have drawn a distinction between a miniature object and a model and I have suggested that abstracted representations such as figurines do not present the exactitude, complete knowability or comprehensive meaning that is inherent in a model (Bailey 2005, 26–35). Models seek factual reproduction (for example, architects' models or model boats) while miniatures create a non-existent entity that is neither accurate nor faithfully representative. A model

Figure 9.1. *Figurines from Grave no. 626 of the Hamangia cemetery at Durankulak. (Redrawn by Howard Mason; after Vajsov 2002.)*

0   5 cm

small; 2) of representing one object in another medium; and 3) of reproducing the human form. These are all processes of significant complexity and, having written about them in detail in a recent book (Bailey 2005), I will not devote space here to discussing them further. However, one of the constitutive processes, abstraction, warrants comment here because abstraction plays a fundamental role in the exclusion of particular features of the human body as represented in Neolithic figurines.

As part of the process of miniaturization, abstraction demands selection; it works through the inclusion of some features and exclusion of others. As a result, people looking at (or, just as significantly, holding) a miniature object such as a figurine are cheated. They

proposes a single meaning and limits the range of variation that a spectator's perception may experience. Via forced inferences, any one miniature (e.g. a figurine) can create many different meanings and the reactions, all of which, within reason, are equally valid. Absence is part of the power of miniaturism to provoke multiple interpretations. In their absences, missing body parts or facial details play a paradoxically strong role in stimulating the inferences forced upon a person looking at a figurine. In their absences the missing components release the viewer from the restrictions of a set meaning; the viewer is thus freed to imagine and provide his or her own feelings and emotions. These absences provide the real stimulus for thought (probably at an unconscious level), and, as I shall argue in the rest of this paper, it is in these absences that one finds the true meaning of miniature representations such as faceless figurines.

Cropping and disembodiment

Abstraction though miniaturization is one way in which absence comes into play in representational objects. Absence can also result from the processes of cropping, segmenting or disembodying the whole. In this section and the one that follows, I step away from the local Neolithic contexts in which this paper began and discuss representational mechanisms such as cropping and disembodiment, moving first to late nineteenth-century painting and then to debates concerning modern pornography before looking, in the following section, at the ways in which police interview victims of child-abuse.

Linda Nochlin has drawn interpretive attention to the ways that the Impressionist painter Édouard Manet (1832–83) selectively cropped many of his paintings, intentionally cutting off parts from bodies (Nochlin 1994). By doing so, an arm or leg was left truncated at the painting's edge. The fragment of the whole body which Manet represented within the physical dimensions of the painting alluded not only to the rest of the body (often a female one) but also to other worlds that existed beyond the boundaries of the picture frame, worlds of sexualized bodies and body parts. Thus, Manet greatly increased the representational presence of a leering man in *Nana* (1877), a dancing girl in *The Beer Server* (1878–79), and a trapezist in *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1882). While cropping alludes to what is absent (and thus titillates the viewer) it also urges the viewer to draw inferences about what is missing, to create other worlds based on the suggestions made in the partial representations. For Nochlin cropping is a way of playing with the normal borders of reality, a tool for questioning and for suggesting contemplation.

Figure 9.2. *Faceless figurines from Cucuten/Tripolye site of Dumeşti; height* c. *20 cm. (Photo: George Dumitriu; after Mantu* et al. *1997.)*

The process of disembodiment has similar results. By working with fragments of the human body which have been removed from their normal contexts and expected scales of representation, it is possible to denaturalize the body and to allow it to be reconstructed in unusual and provocative ways (Pultz 1995, 162). Dismemberment invites redefinition outside of any commonly accepted understanding of the object in a way and to a degree that can never be possible when encountering the unfragmented whole/closed/finished object as it normally appears. With the collection, ordering and assembling of disembodied parts, the body can be built up from one piece into a reconstituted whole and may turn out to be very different from the original, pre-fragmented being. Many different whole bodies can be built from the same isolated parts and no single reconstructed body need be the correct whole. In this way, disembodiment of the body invites creation of the ungeneralizable, of the particular and discrete, and of series of differences rather than creations of completenesses (Nochlin 1994, 56).

Cropping and disembodying the human form focus the viewers' attention on particular body parts. In doing so these processes isolate those parts and invite a scopophilic consumption that often would not be permitted in more natural, complete, contexts. Importantly, cropping implies a control over the body via fragmentation; repetition and unnatural cropping produce decontextualized body fragments (Pultz 1995, 68). In this sense, cropping is a mechanism that, unintentionally, can create and exploit absence to create and exploit desire. Disturbingly, each part is invested with the power to evoke the whole with more perfection than any original, empirically unified, whole (Mercer 1999, 440). In many senses, cropping makes the fragment more exciting than the real thing.[3]

Pornography, disembodiment and absence

Cropping and the disembodiment are salient features and representational codes of pornography (Kuhn 1985, 36–8; Soble 1986, 56–67; Mercer 1996). In pornographic representation, the cropped image invites scopic interest onto areas of a body such as the breasts, buttocks and genitals in a fetishistic way (Coward 1982, 17). Disembodiment isolates one part (a breast) of something else (a body) and allows that part to be controlled and manipulated in a way that would not have been possible or permissible in the body's original location or context. By removing the part from its context, disembodiment strips it of any power or authority or association that it may have derived from its original context and position. By not showing the whole person, the pornographic code of dismembering the body depersonalizes the individual represented: the person (and their body) are decontextualized.[4] Understanding how some pornography works via the codes of cropping and disembodiment is important as it introduces us to the ways in which parts of the human body can be manipulated and repositioned in representation in ways that affect the authority or autonomy of the complete, whole body.

The absence of a body part from a representation is different from disembodiment as used in pornography, but the issues of authority of the body are of similar relevance. The important difference is that, with disembodiment, although the body is dissected into disconnected pieces, the parts remain visible, though they are out of context and out of order. Representational absence is different: particular body parts have been omitted from the representation altogether. Intriguingly, representational absence performs the inverse of disembodiment; the original contexts (with its associated power and authority) of the now absent part remain intact but the body part itself is missing.

Critically, absence creates a gap in a place, and in a context, where something should be. It creates a representational vacuum that needs filling and which usually contains a high potential for the generation or contestation of meaning, thought and debate. The gap needs to be filled and whatever fills it will feed on the rhetorical power of the original representational context; in the example of the Hamangia figurines at Durankulak, the particular context is the human body and more specifically the face and head, both sites of extraordinary power within the constitution of meaning in definitions of identity, self and personhood.

Furthermore, in the vacancy created by absence, there rests the potential for the enrichment of the meaning and the values of the place left empty. Absence prompts intensification in the potential for thought and for the production of meaning, indeed for the production of multiple, conflicting and irresolvable meanings. Absence does not proscribe thought within the spectator (as disembodiment does with the pornographic voyeur), but invites, demands even, discussion and debate; in this sense, representational absence is a liberating process. Pornographic disembodiment of the body had the opposite effect; it offered a single, restricted meaning and weakened the potential for open thought and contemplation. If pornography runs with the code of disembodiment, then the Hamangian figurine from Durankulak runs with the code of absence.

Police interviews of child sex abuse victims

By thinking about what happens when bodies and body images are cropped and dismembered, when abstraction excludes some body parts and includes others, and when representation works through a code of absence, we are better able to recognize the power of these processes. But how might the results of these processes, especially the exclusion of particular body parts, affect people looking at or handling objects such as the figurine from Durankulak? Part of the answer is found in the practicalities of modern police-procedures and victim-interviewing technique.

As you will imagine, the procedures by which police, lawyers or judges interview children who may be victims of sexual abuse are complex. Problems of communication arise because children are reluctant to talk about abuse; reluctance comes from fear, embarrassment, the limits of children's vocabulary, or their span of attention (Morgan 1995, 12). Language differences between child and investigator also hamper communication (Morgan 1995, 40). Since the 1970s, law enforcement agencies have been using anatomical dolls during interviews (Morgan 1995, xiv) because the

dolls help remove the difficulty or embarrassment that children experience when describing abuse (Fig. 9.3). These dolls offer an efficient bridge of communication that links child and detective, judge or prosecutor (Morgan 1995, 2, 40). The dolls succeed because they create an environment in which the potentials for child trauma and emotional damage have been lowered (Morgan 1995, xiv, 2).

The dolls used in interviews and court questioning are specially made. They are less toy-like than play-dolls, most obviously as they are more sexually explicit. Normal, off-the-shelf, children's dolls are particularly unsuitable as they vary greatly in morphology and have inappropriately proportioned, or inadequately detailed, genitalia. Acceptable, purpose-made anatomical dolls are soft cloth figures that present a general replica of the human body, complete with sexual body parts such as a penis and testicles for male dolls, vaginal openings for female dolls, oral and anal openings, and pubic hair on adults. A set of dedicated interviewing dolls includes adult and child dolls and represents not only the abused child and the abuser but also the victim's siblings and other adults of the child's daily environment (e.g. grandparents).

Though these dolls are sometimes referred to as anatomically complete or anatomically correct, they are not biologically accurate as not all body parts are represented. The dolls provide only a basic map of the human body and, as such, are representations and not exact replicas or factual models (Morgan 1995, 3, 65). More importantly, where normal play-dolls have faces that bear precise expressions (smiling, frowning, laughing, crying) that represent particular emotions (happiness, displeasure, pleasure, fear, pain), anatomical dolls have faces intentionally left expressionless.

The relevance of interview dolls for our examination of the faceless figurines from Hamangia lies in understanding the rationale for the manufacturer's inclusion of certain body parts and their exclusion of others. The neutrality of the doll's facial expression is essential as it allows the child to communicate a full range of emotions and ensures that the doll cannot be blamed for suggesting to the child a particular reaction or feeling, suggestions that could jeopardize court prosecutions (Morgan 1995, 4). The expressionless face of the doll allows the child to demonstrate a variety of emotions depending on the child's experience and not on the toy designer's intention (Morgan 1995, 8). The inclusion of genitals and anus is as expected. Critically, these body parts must appear in a standardized form; they are not open to negotiation or interpretation by child, interviewer, prosecutor, judge or jury. They are the firm ground of the interview; they are the evidence. They must be unequivocal parts of the
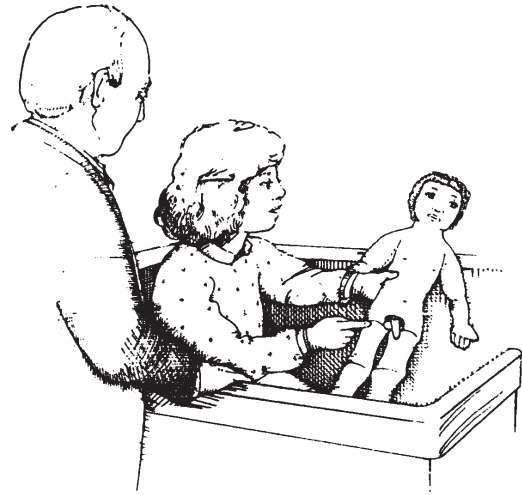
Figure 9.3. *Doll used in police interviews of child victims of sexual abuse. (After Morgan 1995.)*

investigation and the subsequent court proceedings.

The absence of other body detail, however, is suggestive. On the one hand, their absence is a factor of the legal exercise in which the dolls play a part and are a product of law enforcers' and prosecutors' efforts to prevent objections made in court by defence lawyers: for example, that a particular part of a doll's appearance either led the child to think about sexual things that he or she would not have noticed otherwise or led a child to think of a particular person as the abuser (Morgan 1995, 6). Thus, the faces of anatomical dolls are intentionally left expressionless. The expression and emotion must be supplied by the child. These elements are not fixed or agreed; in their description lies the maximum variability. It is up to the child to fill in these details. The abstract, emptiness of the facial expression forces the child to come up with the answers, to fill in the blanks, to supply the evidence.

Therefore, the body parts that are represented (the genitalia) are fixed and not open to negotiation or alteration; the parts of the body (such as the face) that are left undefined invite consideration and imagination. This has direct bearing on our understanding of representational absence: what is left out determines the areas about which people must draw their inferences. Thus, the empty, undecorated or unmodelled parts of the Durankulak figurine and the body parts which are not depicted are the areas of the figurines that provoke thought and contemplation. Paradoxically, in their absence, they are the elements that invite maximum attention and consideration. The static and fixed parts that are represented offer no room for such contemplation.

Psychoanalysis and experimental psychology

Although thinking about abstraction, cropping, disembodiment and the inspiration to inference that the code of representational absence possesses helps us to start to get to grips with absence, we still have little idea of how absence works within the ways that people think and perceive. Two lines of approach are of value: the psychoanalytical theorizing of Lacan (and Freud) and the experimental psychology of Richard Gregory. The works of Freud and Lacan are complex and the literature of subsequent Lacanian and Freudian scholars is even less straightforward. While there is much of interest to be found in these works, for our study of absence it is the psychoanalytical attention to loss and desire as a means of constituting subjectivity which is of most relevance.

Drawing on the work of Freud (1899), Lacan (1966; 1973) and others, Patrick Fuery (1995) has written in detail about the role that absence plays in constructing meaning, about how absence is a constitutive process, about how it is deeply tied to the idea of self-consciousness and self-reflexivity, but also about how absence disrupts. Fuery argues for a dialectic of absence as developed from Lacan's 'Mirror Stage'[5] and from Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*: that there exists the idea of a site of subjectivity which is absent and which is desired precisely because of its absence. The desire is to rejoin and regain a seeming lost sense of wholeness. For Fuery, absence is a powerful and central constituent of being. Such an understanding of absence is a paradox: that which is not present is fundamental to understanding of our existence, and, perhaps, is even more fundamental to our conceptions of reality those things which are present and which, one would otherwise assume, are the more important (indeed perhaps even the only) components of our existences.

Psychoanalytic work on absence and loss suggests that there is a deep subconscious link between our understandings of who and what we are and what we lack, how we are incomplete, and thus what we desire. Work by psychologists such as Richard Gregory provides another, equally provocative, understanding of what happens to the human brain when it confronts examples of incompleteness and missing parts. A useful strand of Gregory's work investigates illusions and particularly the ways that the brain deals with visual illusions (Gregory 1968; 1977; 1980; 1997; 1998; Gregory & Harris 1975; Gregory & Heard 1979).

Illusions are distortions, fictions, ambiguities, and paradoxes; they are discrepancies from truth which present the human brain with particular problems of comprehension: one of Gregory's examples of an illusion is a hollow mask of a human face with facial features painted on both the convex and the concave surfaces (Gregory 1998, fig. 1).[6] Because our brains hold a hypothesis of what a human face looks like, the spectator sees both sides of the mask as if they were convex (i.e. the facial features are sticking out) when in fact one side (the 'inside') is concave.

When a person encounters an illusion (such as the hollow face), the brain tries to understand it by using the limited information that it has accumulated from past experience. When encountering a situation (such as a human form) that is similar to a situation encountered in the past (such as another human form, living or ceramic), the brain will process the form as it has in previous situations. If in the new situation, however, there is information missing (i.e. things are absent) then the brain fills in what is missing by using information from previous experiences. In attempting to fill in the gaps, the brain tries out possible alternative solutions. In a merely ambiguous situation where little critical information is missing from the new experience, the brain will eventually find a solution. However, in a situation where critical information is absent, the brain has trouble and is prevented from finding a solution that is complete. Importantly, the brain is not content with a partial or slightly unsatisfactory solution; it continually looks for a better answer. The brain seeks closure. As the search for a better solution continues and as satisfactory answers are not found, the intensity of the interest in finding (and in the desire to find) the solution increases. The longer the search goes on, the greater the interest and the greater the desire.

The valuable thing to take from Gregory's work on illusion is, first, a recognition that absence may work in the same way as illusion does in presenting the brain with a problem and, second, a recognition of how the brain responds to the problem presented by representational absence and how the brain struggles to fill in the missing information. The problem presented to the human brain by its encounter with the faceless Hamangia figurine is that here is a clearly human form but one that is missing important features which the brain wants to see. The brain has to deal with this problem. What does it do? It searches for answers; that is its nature, to attempt to create a coherent perception, to supply missing information. The insurmountable problem is that the missing information is not to be found in the figurine; it must be supplied. The longer that the brain struggles in its quest to find the answer and to resolve the problem created by the absence of needed information, the greater becomes the significance of the search and the greater becomes the importance of the subject of the search (i.e. the features of the face).

Absence as anti-rhetoric

From these examinations of abstraction, cropping and disembodiment, psychoanalysis, and psychology, the following potential consequences of representational absence emerge:

1. In relation to the processes of abstraction, absence is a stimulus for thought and an inspiration for spectators to draw inferences.
2. Spectators will draw inferences about the parts that are missing.
3. The parts not represented become more important than those that are present.
4. As a process that is the inverse of disembodiment, absence creates a powerful representational vacuum that requires filling.
5. Although the human brain will try to fill this vacuum by calling on its accumulated perceptual experience, it will not succeed.
6. The continuing failure of the brain to fill the vacuum will fundamentally enrich the potential for meaning and significance of the absent features.

From these suggestions, a further point emerges: representational absence is anti-rhetorical. Though it stimulates thought and inference, absence does not persuade or convince. If anything, it invites questioning and uncertainty, promoting open-ended interpretations of representations and preventing the fixing of any closed, secure meaning or interpretation of the parts that are missing, or about what should fill the gap. Absence makes the human brain work and forces people to think on and on without resolution; it keeps things moving and in flux. As such, representational absence has tremendous potential to disrupt and subvert expectations about that which is accepted in a particular historical context.

The Neolithic figurines, and the corporeal politics of being

How does this examination of representational absence help us to better understand the local historical contexts of the face-less Hamangia figurine from Durankulak? The answer lies in understanding the dynamics of daily life in this region at this time (the fifth millennium cal. BC). Fundamental to the Neolithic was a way of arranging people, things and places (over specific durations and within particular boundaries), that was distinct from what had come before, in the Late Upper Palaeolithic, as well as what was to came after, in the Early Bronze Age.[7] Similarly distinct were peoples' particular capacities, desires and needs to understand who they were as individuals and who they were as members of household or village group.

Then, as now, to know oneself was to know one's relationship to others.

While there was nothing specific to the Neolithic in the human need to understand social relationships, there were specific material and political conditions that characterized Neolithic manifestations of human identities. Specifically, new conceptualizations of society were created in new media, including the built environment and the formal deposition of the deceased; however, Neolithic perspectives on society found their most powerful manifestations in the repeated, daily, visual experience of people seeing representations of the human body in the miniature, durable, three-dimensional form of anthropomorphic figurines. Far from being defined in terms of a new economy (i.e. Childe's original shift from food gathering to food producing: Childe 1936), the Neolithic is better understood in terms of a particular appearance of the human body and in the articulations of corporeality, identity, community and individuality. The Balkan Neolithic was a particular corporeal politics of being, and figurines were at the core (see Bailey 2005, 197–204).

In Neolithic communities, anthropomorphic figurines were potent manifestations of the body. Whether or not they represent conscious, intentional acts of doing so is irrelevant. I am not seeking to uncover original intended uses or meanings; I doubt that a search of that type would produce results of any interpretive value. In this sense, the figurine's importance rests in its frequent (perhaps continuous) circulation and visibility in people's daily lives. Figurines were important because they were the habitual presentation of the human body. Regardless of any superficial function they may have played (as goddesses, as votives, as portraits, or as objects to be broken and deposited) figurines saturated communities with specific images/senses of being human. The ever-presence of these senses of being human was fundamental to the Neolithic understanding of being.

Importantly, in most (but critically not all) respects, the Neolithic corporealization of the self and the person was a homogenizing process which rejected and suppressed diversity and differences between individuals as well as within and between communities. Across these Neolithic landscapes, within village boundaries, and between individual buildings, the corporealized individual (and its representation) became one of the cores of social community. In this sense, the actual physical diversity among the living, breathing, flesh and blood individuals should be seen as a significant threat to community cohesion. The existence and long-term success of specific, fundamentally similar and repeated forms of household

and village social aggregations (i.e. the 2500-year survival of a Neolithic way of living) depended on the continuous, unintentional, suppression of the risks that diversity among living bodies posed for social division and disintegration. This is one of the incredible paradoxes of the Neolithic: the individual body, through its repeated visual representation, was the essence of the communal.

Conflicting presentations of the Neolithic body

On the one hand, these Neolithic communities performed dramatic public ceremonies linked to burials, and possibly related to rituals of deposition (as suggested by Chapman 2000), as well as to events of house building and destruction (Tringham 2005). Communities shared the socially organizing facility of the built environment. The rituals of architecture (and, to a more limited extent, of burial[8]) had particular effects on how people understood their relationships to others, whether those relationships were defined by prestige, status or hierarchy (as could be contested via burial ritual) or whether they were defined in terms of what activities one carried out where and with whom (as facilitated by the boundaries of houses and villages). The built environment and the treatment of the deceased were loud and obvious ways in which social and political relationships were guided and fashioned; both treated the body in particular and highly visible ways either by decoration and deposition (or incineration) or by the choreography of movement into, across, and out of a site. The occasional public ceremonies which accompanied death, burial, house construction and destruction, explicitly proclaimed intra-group distinction and intra-community division.

At the same time, however, figurines were working in much subtler and, thus, much more powerful ways, and made people think more deeply (probably without conscious recognition that they were thinking at all) and absorb the ways in which each person fitted into the larger social groups. Figurines were saturating the visual worlds of these communities with particular images and arrangements of the human body. As such, figurines were the quieter rhythm of an unspoken corporeal reality. In this way, figurines did not actively proscribe systems of identities nor even did they represent preferred systems of identities; if anything, figurines were identity.

Figurines as subversions
As abstractions, figurines represented particular body parts and neglected others and, more importantly, forced viewers to draw inferences from what was represented and what was left out (i.e. the unbalanc-

ing provocation to inference). More provocatively, figurines generated a series of contradictions and paradoxes within Neolithic spectators and it is from these paradoxes that they may have had their greatest effects. As partial and unnatural combinations of body parts, figurines unbalanced viewers and put them on edge; as representations, they preferred the complex and convoluted to the straightforward and clear. Figurines provoked spectators to think around issues such as identity and being (most probably without their realizing that they were thinking about them at all) without offering a complete answer or solution to the enquiry. As representations of the human form from which particular body parts were absent, many figurines (such as the examples from Durankulak) drew on the power of the apparent contradiction that the most important areas of a figurine's surface may have been those without any decoration: figurines with little surface treatment were most open to thought and (Neolithic) interpretation. Similarly the cropping of figurine bodies (the frequent absence of heads and faces) provoked thought about what was not represented, of what could not be seen and, thus, what must be imagined.

By recognizing that Neolithic figurines worked in these ways, had the potential to stimulate thought, provoked inference, and facilitated entry into other worlds, we come closer to understanding their meaning. Figurines were philosophies in the politics of being in the Neolithic. Figurines do not mean any one thing, yet they meant everything. They questioned familiar and comfortable orientations and made people aware of their contact in the world. They altered the ways that people saw the world around them. Figurines were part of people's (possibly subconscious) definitions of the edges of their visible realities and of what made each person distinct (if they were distinct at all) from those other places, times and individuals. Figurines made people question who they were, where they were, what they were, and what their relationships were to others. In the Neolithic Balkans, figurines were at the core of a physicality of being that became visible in new conceptions of corporeality; the body became the key to understanding identities and relationships in the world. Therefore, if there is a meaning of figurines, if they had a function, then it is that they were philosophies of being human.

Return to the Hamangia figurine from Durankulak

One of the most striking elements of the material record from Durankulak and other Hamangia cemeteries (e.g. Cernavoda), and from other contemporary communities in southeastern Europe, is the effort di-

rected towards the adornment of the human body and, especially, of the face and head. At Durankulak, for example, Grave 626 contained not only four figurines but also a *Spondylus* bracelet, three strings of copper and malachite beads and fragments of finger rings. Other graves contained similar concentrations of similar items (especially shell jewellery) as well as copper and gold objects such as finger and arm-rings. *Spondylus* and hundreds of *Dentalium* beads were also used in elaborate belts, diadems, plaquettes, and stringed-capes. Deer teeth, stone and clay were also made into beads and pendants. It is clear that the ceremonies and places of death were significant foci for activities, material deposition and the performance of shared community beliefs. Though there does not appear to be evidence for disproportionate distribution of grave-goods when compared with the sex of the deceased, burials with adult bodies are better kitted out than are children's graves. The inclusion of particular materials such as *Spondylus*, copper and gold and their use to make body ornaments marks the beginning of wide-spread and increasingly dramatic attention to burial ritual and, especially, extraordinary deposition of large quantities of gold, copper and shell grave-goods in cemeteries dating to the subsequent cultural phases (e.g. the Varna culture phases at both Durankulak and at the type site, further to the south).

Hamangia practices, ceremonies and materials of living and of dying rest uneasily between two mark-edly different ways of being. On the one hand there are clear and deep links to traditions that can be traced into the local Early and Middle Neolithic and perhaps even to the Mesolithic (e.g. the continued presence of microliths in the flaked stone assemblages and the striking presence of animal bones — especially of deer and boar — in burials). On the other hand, the use of gold, copper and *Spondylus* in particular burials hints at patterns of activities and social belief systems that intensify in the succeeding centuries. If we think of Hamangia perceptions of identity and perceptions of social relationships among individuals, perhaps the facelessness of the figurines begins to make sense. Perhaps, these communities were run through with diverse and contesting conceptions of appropriate appearances of the human body and especially of how particular parts of the body were implicated in definitions of socially acceptable (or claimed) descriptions of reality. The codes of representation that worked via gold, copper and *Spondylus* may have followed (and promoted) a tightly constricted understanding of how particular individuals or members of a community should appear. The codes that worked through the representation of the body via figurines may well have moved in other directions, where a

less-restricted understanding of human appearance and identity allowed more fluid interactions between people. Neither of these versions of reality precluded the other and it is most likely that these two must be seen in addition to others that we have yet to uncover within Hamangia society.

Notes

1. The interested reader will find such a discussion in Bailey (2005, 45–65).
2. Of course it is equally possible to argue that all material culture is active in this way (Hodder 1982); here, I am focusing on the physical and constitutive particularities of figurines that make them especially powerful as stimuli to inference.
3. Writing about the ways in which he tried to represent his live performance art into a static two-dimensional medium for a book on site specific art (i.e. Kaye 2000), the late Clifford McLucas suggested that the spectator of the cropped fragments may prefer to retain the charged erotics of incompletion by leaving things as they are — forever unfinished (McLucas n.d., in Kaye 2000, 125).
4. And it is for these and other reasons that conceits such as fragmentation and disembodiment are favourite devices within postmodern approaches to reality: the intention is to disturb and unsettle, to prevent existing, long-standing power relationships from continuing.
5. Lacan used the term 'Mirror Stage' to describe a stage in infant development occurring between the ages of approximately 6 and 18 months, when a child begins to react to its image in a mirror as a separate entity (see Lacan 1966).
6. The best representations of the Hollow Face illusion can be found on the world wide web. At the time of writing, the following websites had video clips of the illusion in action: http://www.michaelbach.de/ot/fcs_hollow-face/index.htm.; http://www.grand-illusions.com/hol-lowface.htm.
7. For an extended discussion of this interpretation of the Neolithic in southeastern Europe, see Bailey (2000).
8. In other contemporary communities (e.g. Kodzhader-man-Gumelniţa-Karanovo VI) in which figurines were present in similar numbers, formal disposal of the dead focused on extra-mural cemeteries. The same distinction can be found there between occasional, loud, public ceremonies proposing differentiations within communities and the quieter, continuous presence of body imagery that was at the core of social cohesion.

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