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FROM ARTIFACT TO ICON:  
An Analysis of the Venus Figurines in  
Archaeological Literature and Contemporary  
Culture

Volume 2 of 5

Louise Muriel Lander

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Durham

Department of Archaeology

2004

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## CHAPTER 5

### THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE CATEGORY

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapter has identified that although the texts provide strong characterisations of the Venus figurines, these overlook the apparent diversity that exists within the class allowing the impression of homogeneity to be maintained. In this chapter, I will contend this impression can only be maintained through literary processes. This chapter will therefore discuss the means by which the texts actively homogenise the archaeological material through techniques that serve to standardise it. Through this analysis, I will demonstrate that the literature continues to present a restricted characterisation of this material, promoting the appearance of homogeneity with regard to the class as a whole, and encouraging and maintaining a 'popular' impression of the figurines themselves.

The first section of this chapter discusses the manner in which a number of texts acknowledge the variability of the material, but nevertheless prioritise the stylistic canon. The second will examine how the standard characterisation is reiterated and consolidated in the texts through its association with and application to selected and frequently repeated examples. The third section identifies an important aspect in the process of prioritisation – the manner in which the authors present and consequently promote certain features in terms of *emphasis* and *neglect*. The fourth section will specifically discuss the role of language in the creation of an impression of homogeneity. In the fifth and final part of this analysis I will identify and explore the utilization of proto-typical figures in the literature. This draws on points made in section two, and in this section I will identify a number of figures that, through their frequent appearance in both text and illustration, may be viewed as possible prototype figures. As stated in my Introduction, I will consider their place in the operation of the category of Venus figurines, with particular reference to their uses in the literature as the basis for comparisons between figures and as representatives of the wider group. I will discuss the reasons why these figures have emerged as

prototypes, and to conclude this section I will identify and discuss the implications of this practice.

### **Prioritisation of the stylistic canon over variability**

The previous chapter has shown examples of literature that promote the occurrence of shared characteristics, while also providing evidence (from the same literature) of the diversity that exists within the class of Venus figurines. What holds the class together is a belief in the unifying nature of the claimed stylistic similarity between the figures, based on the repeated occurrence of the features that constitute the stylistic canon.

Repetition of these generalised features, at the expense of a focus on individual characteristics, has served to create this stylistic similarity as fact. The existence of the stylistic canon is perceived so strongly that it is cited to complete fragmentary figurines. MacCurdy writes of Brassempouy *la poire* (Figure 5.1a, b, c) that, “This torso is so much like the figurines from Lespugue [Figure 5.1d], Willendorf [Figure 5.1e], and Grimaldi [Figure 5.1f], that one is justified in assuming for it a head without features, diminutive arms (or perhaps none at all) and footless legs tapering to a point” (MacCurdy 1924: 260), thereby assuming that characteristics identified in other figurines can be uniformly applied to this fragmentary example. Similarly, Klima uses the Dolní Věstonice Venus I as a model on which to base his speculative reconstruction of a more recent and fragmentary discovery from the same site (Klima 1983: Fig. 2) (Figure 5.2a, b).

However, with regard to the validity of the stylistic canon, it can be shown that in certain instances, adherence to this canon, and subsequent prioritisation of those features it promotes over individual characteristics, is allowed to influence the identification, interpretation and presentation of the images. This can lead to misleading and even inaccurate generalization. The work of Faris (1983) repeats and promotes the canon, perpetuating a number of established stereotypes. His reading of the Gravettian female sculptures stresses their representation “in a caricature of physiology and reproductive dimensions”, with “some aspect of female physiology, usually in the form of some attribute of reproduction” signified “in every case” (Faris 1983: 107). His assessment stresses that “the



most conspicuous features are specifically anatomical characteristics and exaggerated breasts and buttocks (Fig. 7.17) to the exclusion of any modelling of heads, arms, hands, or feet” (*ibid*: 104). He sees this “distortion” repeated in the female figures in parietal sculpture (*ibid*: 104), and he illustrates four of the Laussel reliefs (only the Archer is not shown) (Figures 3.44-48), the La Magdeleine ‘reclining’ women (Figures 3.49f, g) and the Angles-sur-l’Anglin figures (Figure 3.49e) (*ibid*: 108-110 and Figs. 7.18, 7.19, 7.20). He later repeats that “there is a deliberate avoidance of individuation of heads or faces. Emphasis and elaboration is evident in ponderous breasts and in mid-body obesity (or pregnancy?)” (*ibid*: 106)

There are several flaws in this presentation of the material, and inaccuracies in the claims made. The caption accompanying Faris’ Fig. 7.17 mentions the wide distribution of the female images and repeats that the heads, arms and feet are “deliberately avoided”, while there is “deliberate attention to mid-body obesity and ponderous breasts”. Faris’ Fig. 7.17 is a reproduction of Leroi-Gourhan’s Chart LXV (Leroi-Gourhan 1968: 520), and shows two Kostenki figures, Lespugue and Willendorf (Figure 5.3). Even in simplified form, the head of the Willendorf figure is clear, as are the arms marked on Willendorf and Lespugue (Faris 1983: 107). Indeed, in the original text, Leroi-Gourhan uses this illustration to compare the position of the arms – a point Faris ignores in his assertions. The caption for Faris’ Fig. 7.18 – the Laussel sculptures – states that, “Arms, heads, feet and hands are again unregarded” (Faris 1983: 108). This ignores the fact that at least two of the female figures hold something in the right arm, and again have hairstyles indicated. Faris does not illustrate or mention the slender and possibly male figure (the Archer) at this site (Figures 3.44-48). In this example, Faris takes the stereotypical characterisation to its furthest limit, virtually denying any attention or importance to those features of no value to his hypothesis, and ignoring information displayed in the very examples he uses. This instance may be viewed not only as a clear example of the prioritisation of the stylistic canon over apparent diversity, but also as one of the clearest examples of the emphasis and neglect of features by the *author* rather than the *artist*. This aspect of presentation will be further discussed below.

It is the more ironic that the claim that the group of Venus figurines is homogeneous is often made at the same time as an acknowledgement that considerable variety exists. This occurs when variability and diversity are noted, but accorded less importance than the shared characteristics. Therefore, although differences between the statuettes are acknowledged, it is the extent to which they are acknowledged and the importance attributed them that is problematic. This point is exemplified by Grigor'ev, who states that, "...Clearly the figurine from Lespugue [Figure 5.4a] does differ from those from Kostenki [Figure 5.4b] as does the one from Dolní Věstonice [Figure 5.4c], but all conform to the Gravettian stylistic canon" (Grigor'ev 1993: 57).

This is a process apparent throughout the literature. Gamble (1982) and McDermott (1996) are both at pains to present the pan-European grouping as homogeneous, establishing the dominant canon and referring only briefly to variation. This homogeneity is a necessary condition for both their hypotheses, and they each refer to the work of Leroi-Gourhan (1968) to establish stylistic similarity. Having put forward the notion of a "very similar treatment of the basic design", Gamble then notes that within this treatment, "there is considerable variation in the detailing of head, hands, feet and additional decoration" (Gamble 1982: 94). This variation presumably carries and elaborates the information suggested in his hypothesis, and would therefore imply differential meanings at some level. Yet this point is not made, and the differences between figures are not elaborated, with the implication that they are of secondary significance. McDermott particularly, argues against the diversity of the figurines, promoting the characteristic "central tendency" while minimising the significance of the variability of features (See discussion individual features in the previous chapter, particularly discussion of possible male figures p.118-119). Citing Delporte, McDermott reports that regional variations do exist within the stylistic paradigm (Delporte 1993a and b), yet these are dismissed as the occurrence of "subtle variations" in proportions, details of arms and heads, and postures (McDermott 1996: 232). In a clear assertion of the prioritisation of the stylistic canon, he insists that, "claims of true heterogeneity ignore a clear central tendency defining the style as a whole"

(*ibid*: 233).

Davidson (1997) re-formulates the basic canon in an intentionally novel way, based on characteristics that he stresses are not those termed “emotionally charged” (Soffer 1985: 336) (the breasts and buttocks), yet he too acknowledges variability only to dismiss any significance it may have. His assessment of the variability is that some representations of female humans have features in common, although diversity remains, while “others have little in common other than that they represent human females” (Davidson 1997: 144). He notes that this wide diversity can be “subdivided according to the objectives of the analysis, and the criteria of recognition of membership in one class or another” (*ibid*: 144). His statement that the variability can be viewed and organised in so many different ways emphasises that it is not a constant and concrete factor that can be viewed in only one way. The statement serves a specific purpose, being placed to accentuate the contrast with the stark assertion that follows, that it “remains unchallenged” that within the corpus of female figurines “there is still a group depicting naked women in three dimensions with no faces and no feet” (Davidson 1997: 144). For Davidson, the essence of the group is naked women, carved in the round, without feet and faces. Although qualified by the number of broken statuettes, he maintains that where the ends of the legs survive, the feet are “rudimentary or absent” (*ibid*: 146). With greater certainty, he asserts that the general conventions of the female figurines are so precise that “there is no doubt for most of the figurines that we can say that there were no faces” (*ibid*: 146). In confirmation of the canon, Davidson differentiates the figurines from the chronologically earlier example of the Hohlenstein-Stadel statuette, claiming that this example is a clear contrast in that it possesses both facial features and feet (*ibid*: 146) (Figure 5.5a).

Davidson’s fundamental claim that the statuettes are characterised by a lack of faces and feet may be challenged by the evidence for these features presented in the previous chapter. In contrast to Davidson’s claim, it can be argued that a greater proportion of the Russian figurines do have feet, which are depicted in several distinct ways (Gvozdover 1989: Fig.5.1, 2, 3) (Figure 4.34e, f, g). Moreover, it is possible that their placement is particularly significant, as this

feature relates to the position of the legs and the posture of the statuettes, features accorded the status of differentiating criteria in Gvozdover's analysis (*ibid*: 33-37). Amongst the Russian examples, there are also a greater proportion of figurines with some facial features marked (e.g. Avdeev statue 77-1 and Kostenki statue 83-1, see Figure 4.31*e* and *f* respectively). At best then, Davidson's characterisation can only strictly apply to the Western and Central European figurines. In addition to this, his example of the Hohlenstein-Stadel figure (Figure 5.5*a*) is less than convincing, as this statue has been reconstructed on at least three occasions from numerous fragments (McDermott 1996: 236), and is surely speculative on this basis. Moreover, other possible Aurignacian examples, such as the Galgenberg (Figure 5.5*b*) and Vogelherd (Figure 5.5*c*) statuettes, have neither facial features nor feet.

Davidson's comment regarding variability is thought provoking. It suggests that the variability of the figurines is such that it can be organised in numerous ways. These ways and divisions are at the discretion and subjectivity of the author, and are dependent on or perhaps dictated by their aims and analyses. The implication is that the variability can be manipulated to suit – it can be made to show whatever one wants it to. A key question remains: does this make the variability itself any less important?

### **Application of the standard characterisation to selected examples**

Specific examples are selected in the literature to illustrate characteristics occurring throughout the class of figurines. This can be seen in Absolon's comparative review of 91 "Palaeolithic female statuettes" (Absolon 1949). He cites a number of features and illustrates these with reference to certain sites. Where more than one figure occurs at a site, specific figures are not indicated. The features are detailed below:

The lack of modelling of facial traits (identified as a characteristic at Grimaldi, Savignano, Lespugue, in two examples from Gagarino, and in two from Willendorf) (Absolon 1949: 214).

A negligent treatment of the arms frequently touching the body (identified at Grimaldi, in two examples from Gagarino, and in the *Vénus impudique*) (*ibid*: 214)

A “universal” neglect of legs, with the stumps schematised into a conical shape (identified in twelve examples from Mal’ta, six from Grimaldi, three from Dolní Věstonice, and at Savignano, Lespugue and Mainz-Linsenberg (*ibid*: 214).

This comparative analysis does not introduce dissimilar examples, nor does it explore features that are not shared. Indeed, Absolon states that his intention is “merely to discuss some similarities” (*ibid*: 214).

Graziosi (1960) repeats the characteristic “Aurignacian-Perigordian” features with reference to particular examples, and the frequent identification of these characteristics emphasises the stylistic coherence that he claims exists throughout the Aurignacian-Perigordian statuettes. Amongst the Grimaldi statuettes, the *statuette en stéatite jaune* is stated to display such characteristic features as a featureless head bent forward, barely sketched arms, and over-developed adipose masses, with the stomach and breasts accentuated (Figure 5.6a). The “usual characteristics” of *la polichinelle* are deemed to be the absence of facial features, the typical shape of the head, pointed legs and missing feet (Graziosi 1960: 50) (Figure 5.6b). Willendorf (Figure 5.6c) is similarly described as having a featureless face, along with missing feet and the enormous development of adipose masses, although Graziosi also acknowledges individual characteristics such as the intricate arrangement of hair, clearly marked fingers, and well modelled arms and shoulders (*ibid* 1960: 56). Finally, he states that the legs of the Lespugue statuette, “following the style of all the Aurignacian-Perigordian statuettes, are short, joined together and end in a point” (Graziosi 1960: 48) (Figure 5.6d).

The characterisation of the figurines in Clark can be broken down into a number of aspects that are frequently stressed in the literature – an emphasis on the exaggeration of certain bodily attributes, a corresponding neglect of others, and

a specific focus on pregnancy. To illustrate this Clark uses the “‘Venus’ from Kostenki” [Kostenki statuette 3] (Clark 1967: Figs 46-48), and the text accompanying the three illustrations reiterates the ‘class characteristic’ of “pregnancy, well-developed buttocks and pendulous breasts” (Clark 1967: 59) (Figure 4.34*b*).

### **Emphasis and Neglect**

A feature of the characterisation of the figurines in the texts is the presentation of a contrast between features emphasised or neglected. Describing the Italian figurines, Mussi and Zampetti state that; “Stylistically the Italian figurines are very close to those found in the rest of Europe. When they depict the whole body, heads, hands and feet are poorly characterised, while the breasts, abdomen, and buttocks are accented” (Mussi and Zampetti 1997: 218).

Several authors claim that the figures display an intentional emphasis of certain features by the original maker, alongside the deliberate avoidance of others. This is clearly seen in the work of Faris, who states, “the most conspicuous features are specifically anatomical characteristics and exaggerated breasts and buttocks to the exclusion of any modelling of heads, arms, hands, or feet” (Faris 1983: 104), and later repeats that “...there is a deliberate avoidance of individuation of heads or faces” (Faris 1983: 106). In certain cases, this is interpreted as indicating the chief concerns of the artist, and Graziosi states that, “...By and large the Palaeolithic artist scrupulously emphasized certain parts of the body, particularly the parts relating to femininity, neglecting or barely suggesting others that did not interest him ...” (Graziosi 1960: 46). This is echoed by James, who writes of Willendorf (Figure 5.6*c*) that “The large and pendulous breasts are very carefully modelled.... but the face is omitted altogether, suggesting that the interest was centred upon maternal symbolism” (James 1964: 23). Describing Lespugue (Figure 5.6*d*), Maringer asserts that, “the artist was obviously not interested in the head or feet of his creation.” He continues; “All individual and personal traits seem to have been deliberately suppressed. On the other hand, the sexual characteristics of the female body are strongly emphasized, if not exaggerated” (Maringer 1956: 109). Levy also sees

“the general unimportance among the statues of face, hands and feet” (Levy 1948: 57).

The identification of body parts, the according of ‘value’ to particular features, and the use of language to describe the figures are all subjective practices. The implications of this process take several forms, each with a bearing on subsequent perception and interpretation of the material. It is apparent that it is the authors themselves who are determining whether features are ‘important’ or not, and it could be suggested that the trends of emphasis and neglect merely reflect the opinion and judgement of the authors themselves, particularly when they attempt to attribute this to the original artist. I would suggest that this process of prioritisation could stand as a metaphor for the focus and approach of many authors, who similarly emphasise the importance of certain features and neglect the significance of others, while placing the responsibility for this onto the artists themselves.

### Language

The lack of importance or relevance accorded to features by the author is conveyed in the language used to describe those features. For example, “...legs were tapered and the feet *merely indicated*; arms were *puny*; and clothing, in *the rare instances* in which the figures were not entirely naked, was as a rule *confined* to a girdle or fringe” (Clark 1967: 57-58, emphasis added). Similarly, Collins and Onians contrast the “rounded perfection” of the breasts, buttocks and stomach of the Willendorf figurine, with legs that are “withered to nothing” (Figure 5.6c).

The language used to describe a feature has at least some influence on how that feature is then perceived by the reader. This is particularly relevant in the case of emotive responses to the figurines that are encountered in a number of texts. Graziosi describes Willendorf as featuring “huge breasts, shaped like gourds”, featuring “all that is paradoxical and grotesque in the obese human form” (Graziosi 1960: 56) (Figure 5.6c). Similarly, the breasts of Lespugue are “over-ripe gourds” (Graziosi 1960: 48), and for Absolon, they are “stupidly hypertrophic” (Absolon 1949: 218) (Figure 5.6d). The implications of such

descriptions will be considered more fully in the next chapter, in the Case Study “Ancient artifacts; contemporary meanings”.

The impression of stylistic similarity is enhanced by the repeated application of a limited number of terms to describe the features of the figurines. It has been noted in the previous chapter that “pendent” and “pendulous” are common terms applied to the breasts, and I will examine this application in more detail here. These phrases recur in a number of the texts; James states “the breasts are large and pendulous” (James 1957: 145), the Dolní Věstonice Venus I “has pendulous breasts” (Marshack 1991: 23) (Figure 5.7*b*), and the Laussel Double Figure (Figure 5.7*a*) may be identified on the basis that “one of them is a woman, recognizable by her large, pendulous breasts” (Lalanne 1911: 258). Even the fraudulent Dolní Věstonice Venus II is similarly described (Delporte 1993*a*: 143) (Figure 5.7*c*).

Such language effectively standardises the figurines. When used indiscriminately the term becomes a generalisation rather than a specific description, thereby serving to make all breasts so described seem the same. Such uses of this term again deny variation. However, a sample of examples to which these terms are applied demonstrates that there is actually difference and variety in shape, size and manner of depiction.

The Grimaldi figures are an example of the differing depiction of the breast that occurs throughout the figurines (Figure 5.8). Delporte (1993*a*) describes the figures in detail and clear differences can be seen between them. The *statuette en stéatite jaune* (Figure 5.8*a*) is described as having voluminous breasts, clearly delimited by deep incisions especially to the lower side (Delporte 1993*a*: 100). *La femme au goître* (Figure 5.8*b*) is described as having relatively voluminous “triangular” breasts (*ibid*:102), whereas the *Janus* (Figure 5.8*c*) has breasts marked only by “flat discs”, with little volume (*ibid*: 103). The breasts of *la polichinelle* (Figure 5.8*d*) are termed “narrow but jutting and a little pendent”. Delporte notes that they are clearly separated from each other and surrounded by quite deep incisions (*ibid*: 104). *Le losange* (Figure 5.8*e*) is similarly described as having voluminous but not pendent breasts, again



separated from one another and the body by deep incisions that pass beneath them (*ibid*: 104). *L'hermaphrodite* (Figure 5.8f) is described as possessing “normal” breasts, only slightly pendent but without doubt feminine (*ibid*: 105). Finally, the breasts of the *statuette non décrite* are described as conical and very projecting, again separated from each other by deep incisions (*ibid*: 106) (Figure 5.8g).

It is apparent that there are differences in the size and general form of the breasts depicted in the Grimaldi sample. As can be seen in the illustrations (Figure 5.8), in the cases of *le losange* (Figure 5.8e) and *la polichinelle* (Figure 5.8d) the breasts are actually separate orbs and ovals starkly demarcated and jutting out from a flat base. They are not the smooth protrusions observed elsewhere, and in this sense, they are schematic rather than natural representations.

Thus far, I have demonstrated that to maintain the canon, certain features are prioritised and the importance of others denigrated, creating perceptions that subsequently influence both interpretation and perception of the material. I have also shown that the prioritisation of the components of the stylistic canon, the identification and description of features, and the evaluation of their importance are all subjective processes.

### **The use of prototypes**

Section two of this chapter discussed the manner in which the characterisation of the material is reiterated through its application to selected figures. In practice, the number of examples to which the characterisation is applied is limited, and this section will further this aspect of the analysis through a consideration of these figures as prototypes. This chapter will not only identify certain examples as prototypes in Rosch's (1978) sense of the most familiar examples of the category, but it will also examine their role in the generalisation of characteristics from individual figures to the wider and unspecified class, and highlight indications given in the texts that may account for their emergence in this role.

### Proto-typical figures

Analysis shows that in both the main text and the use and placement of illustrations and photographs, certain figurines tend to be regularly used as representative of the group. It is often the case that authors both academic and popular, while referring to the Venus figurines as a large body of material, name and discuss only a handful of specimens. These frequently used examples will now be considered as possible prototype figures. Rosch's (1978) proposal for the operation of prototypes has been outlined in my Introduction (p. 13-14). In the particular instance of the Venus figurines, it can be suggested that the prototype of the category fulfils a number of roles: it is the 'public face' of the category, the most instantly recognisable example of the category; it represents the characteristics that are assumed present throughout the whole group, often involving the generalisation of the particular features of the prototype across the wider and less defined body of material; it forms the basis for comparison with and assessment of other possible members of the category. I will now discuss a number of examples with these points in mind.

Central to any discussion of Venus figurine prototypes is the figure from Willendorf (Figure 5.9). The 'celebrity' of this figurine has been noted in Chapter 2, and this figure has been the most commonly used Palaeolithic image in textbooks and popular discussions of prehistoric art (Conkey and Tringham 1995, cited in Tomaskova 1997: 278). Willendorf has been described as "the Gravettian masterpiece" (Marshack 1991: 19), acknowledged as "the most famous of all" (Davidson 1997: 146), and "the most famous.... reproduced in almost every history of art" (Giedion 1962: 437). Taylor describes it as "Perhaps the best-known piece of Palaeolithic art, and one of the most pervasive of all prehistoric art images" (Taylor 1996: 115).

The fame of Willendorf extends far beyond the academic literature. Of all the Palaeolithic figurines, it is Willendorf that is discussed first in Kenneth Clark's *The Nude: A Study of Ideal Art*, where it was termed "Vegetable Venus" in contrast with a "Crystalline" – streamlined – Cycladic figure, and in a feminist critique of Clark by Lynda Nead who states, "It is commonly recognised that prehistoric statuettes such as the Willendorf Venus were images of fertility; they

represented the maternal body, the female body in parturition” (Nead 1993: 13). As noted in my Introduction, it is Willendorf that has been adopted as the mascot of San Francisco’s *FAT!SO?* organisation, for whom the image embodies the ideals of ‘fat acceptance’ (Hainer 1996: 1-2); it is the Willendorf figure that is featured in *The Silence of the Lambs*. The appearance of the figurines and particularly Willendorf in such diverse contexts will be further examined in Chapter 7.

The popularity of the Willendorf figure is followed by that of the Venus I of Dolní Věstonice (Conkey and Tringham 1995, cited in Tomaskova 1997: 278) and this example (Figure 5.10a), along with the Lespugue figure (Figure 5.10b) and Brassempouy *la tête à la capuche* (Figure 5.10c) may also be identified as possible prototypes. In texts containing only a small number of illustrations of the figurines, the choice will often be one of these examples: Fagan illustrates the Dolní Věstonice Venus I alongside the Brassempouy *tête à la capuche* (Fagan 1998: Fig. 4.8); Gowlett uses only the latter (Gowlett 1984: 120), and this figure is the only illustration appearing on the cover of *The Palaeolithic Settlement of Europe* (Gamble 1986).

The latter example highlights the use of the class of Venus figurines as prototypes for the wider category of Palaeolithic material culture. This is particularly illustrated by the use of a number of Venus figurines on the cover and inside pages of *Hunters of the Golden Age* (Roebroeks *et al* 2000). This volume presents papers focusing on all aspects of Palaeolithic material culture during the period 30 000 to 20 000 BP. The archaeological material illustrated on the front cover consists of three Venus figurines – Kostenki 83-2, Monpazier and Lespugue – superimposed on a map of Europe. The inside cover pages features Khotylevo 1, Grimaldi *la polichinelle*, Savignano, Grimaldi *le losange* and Willendorf, blown up in size to fill two pages. The title pages feature Savignano, Tursac, Grimaldi *statuette non décrite*, Monpazier, Lespugue, Grimaldi *la femme au goître*, Grimaldi *le losange*, Willendorf and Avdeev statue 76. This usage is a deliberate attempt to attract a wider audience; the authors state that “most European citizens” are familiar with the period to a degree, namely that “they would certainly recognise the famous female

figurines as dating to the ‘Stone Age’” (Mussi, Roebroeks and Svoboda 2000: 1). These examples can thus be identified as prototypes within both the category of Venus figurines and the wider category of Palaeolithic material culture.

In addition to these individual examples, certain groups of figures may also be considered in a discussion of Venus figurines prototypes. Certain works make strong reference to the Russian figurines (e.g. Gvozdover 1989; McDermott 1996; Taylor 1996) (Figures 5.11, 5.12 and 5.13), and the statuettes from Grimaldi – always popular choices for illustration and discussion – have received renewed attention since the re-discovery of the ‘lost’ figures (Bisson and White 1997; White 1997; Mussi *et al* 2000) (Figure 3.11-25). These examples will be discussed further below.

#### *Factors in the emergence of possible prototypes*

Accounting for the use and predominance of particular figurines depends on a number of factors. The renown of certain figures, particularly Willendorf (Figure 5.9), has been noted in Chapter 2, and this is undoubtedly both related and contributory to their predominance in the literature. The rediscovery of the ‘lost’ figurines from Grimaldi has refocused attention on all the Grimaldi figurines (Figures 3.11-25), resulting in renewed analysis of the entire range of examples from this site as a distinct sub-set. For the Russian figurines, it could be suggested that the relevant factors are related to their secure chronological attribution and more demonstrable homogeneity. However, a number of texts provide subtle indications that they have sifted through the material and selected examples from the wider group according to their own criteria, which tend to remain unexplained. From the indications given in these texts, it can be suggested that the selection of certain figures is in part based on their condition and appearance, which will be discussed in due course, and on aesthetic judgements made by the authors.

Aesthetic factors are apparent in the choice of certain figures for discussion and illustration. We have seen Willendorf described as a masterpiece, and Lespugue is also described as “a very perfect piece” (Maringer 1956: 109) (Figure 5.6*d*). In contrast, the *Vénus impudique* has been described as “one of the least

attractive prehistoric figures” (Giedion 1962: 449) (Figure 5.14). Sandars describes the Petřkovice figure (Figure 5.15a, right) as being “very nearly perfect... the artist has produced a figure of touching naturalism and truth... the slim youthful figure has the proportions, and even the equilibrium (the weight on the right leg) of a late classical Venus or of the Three Graces”, and she illustrates the figure to demonstrate that “the proportions and pose fit the classical canon” (Sandars 1968: 11 and Fig. 2) (Figure 5.15a). Laussel *la femme à la corne* (Figure 5.15b, second from left, and right) is compared to the classical Venuses, illustrating this figure (twice) and Kostenki statuette 3 (Figure 5.15b, second from right) with the *Ellesmere Venus* by Titian to show a “surprising likeness of proportion and pose” (Sandars 1968: 20 and Fig. 6). Referring to the Laussel example as an “infinitely older ‘Venus’”, she states that this figure “must be allowed a place [alongside the classical Venuses] as a concentrated embodiment of woman” (Sandars 1968: 20).

McDermott states that “all the earliest, best-preserved, and most refined pieces appear to be analog representations of women looking down on their changing biological selves” (McDermott 1996: 227). His use of the term “refined” hints that aesthetic judgements influence the selection of the material. Burkitt describes “the most notable specimens” (Burkitt 1934: 117), a phrase implying that less notable specimens exist and are excluded. Absolon states that he will discuss “only those which are either intact or possess some theoretical interest” (Absolon 1949: 206), specifying that Venuses II (Figure 2.19), III, VI (Figure 2.21), VII, VIII, X (Figure 2.23, the possibly male statuette disputed by McDermott; see p. 119) and XI “do not call for a description in this article” (*ibid*: 210). In stark contrast, the piece goes on to describe Venus XV (Figure 2.27) as “one of the greatest gems of the entire Palaeolithic art, the most valuable discovery made in Moravia, more valuable even than Venus I [Figure 2.17] called “astonishing” by Sir Arthur Keith” (*ibid*: 210). It is apparent that the authors themselves will decide what is “notable” and “of interest”, what are “the earliest, best-preserved and most refined pieces”. Obviously, such a definition will exclude those that are not well preserved or those that are not considered “refined”, and one must therefore query the validity of a hypothesis that is restricted only to the “best” figures.

In Graziosi, (1960) it is clear that aesthetic factors are related to the condition of the material. In this work, the condition of certain pieces is frequently referred to, and is a factor influencing both the assessment of characteristic features, and the selection of material for presentation and illustration. When Graziosi discusses the characteristics of the statuettes, he speaks of “the characteristics that appear as we examine the best specimens of early sculpture” (Graziosi 1960: 46), indicating that the pieces are being judged aesthetically as much as on their state of preservation. This is confirmed by his observation that among the Western European statuettes, “very poor specimens are sometimes found in the same deposits as the fine works” (*ibid*: 47). Whichever criteria are operating, such an approach means that features or characteristics of ‘poorer’ specimens may be overlooked.

Graziosi further states that his illustrations show “the most interesting, complete pieces” (Graziosi 1960: 46), and the arrangement of these photographs is worthy of some consideration. It is apparent that emphasis is placed on certain examples. While six examples from Grimaldi are shown in one photograph covering just over half of the page (*ibid*: Plate 4b) (Figures 3.11 and 3.13-17), three views of the *statuette en stéatite jaune* are illustrated (*ibid*: Plate 4a) (Figure 3.12). The Savignano figure (Figure 5.16) occupies three full-page plates, being shown in profile, from the front and back, and with a full page close up of the buttocks (*ibid*: Plates 5, 6 and 7). Four views are shown of both Willendorf and Lespugue (*ibid*: Plates 9 and 3 respectively) (Figure 5.6c and d respectively), and there are three photographs of *le torse* from Brassempouy (*ibid*: Plate 2a) (Figure 3.8). In contrast, *le manche de poignard* (Figure 3.7), *la figurine à la ceinture* (Figure 3.3), *la fillette* (Figure 3.6) and *l’ébauche* (Figure 3.2) from the same site are shown together in one picture (*ibid*: Plate 2b).

The total number of Grimaldi statuettes (Figures 3.11-25) is given as fifteen, although once again, Graziosi’s illustrations show “the more important ones”, (although he does not comment that some of the Grimaldi pieces were retained by Jullien and were unpublished at that time). This presentation is also reflected in the text, where his descriptions are devoted to the “better specimens”. In his

own words, he “passes over the more or less fragmentary and incomplete figures” at Grimaldi, and instead describes *la tête négroïde* (Graziosi 1960: 51) (Figure 3.13).

The Brassempouy pieces (Figures 3.1-9) are also divided and their ‘importance’ assessed on the basis of their condition. Thus, “the pieces of sculpture that are finished and whose state of preservation allows us to evaluate their characteristics are [the fragment known as *la poire*], two fragments of torsos, and a female head” (*ibid* 1960: 47). “Other fragments of lesser importance” are described as a deteriorated female torso, the lower half of a male statuette, and the fragmentary legs of a third. In this context, he also notes the existence of the fragmentary *la figurine à la pèlerine*, and two small sketchy figures outlined on an ivory stick (*ibid* 1960: 48), thereby designating the Piette’s entire “svelte” group (Piette 1895) (Figure 3.57b), with the exception of *la tête à la capuche*, to the rank of “lesser importance”. Of the figures from Avdeevo, Graziosi again chooses to describe and illustrate “the most complete figure” known at that time (Avdeevo statuette 1) (Graziosi: 59 and Fig.9) (Figure 5.13a; Figures 5.13b, c and d were also known prior to Graziosi’s time of writing).

In the light of these factors, it is perhaps understandable that a number of figurines are rarely shown or discussed in detail in the texts. It is interesting to note that the figure from Trou Magrite – the first anthropomorphic find - is not illustrated and is mentioned only briefly mentioned by Graziosi (1960) as “a rough human figure” (Graziosi 1960: 47). It is not described in Burkitt (1934), mentioned only briefly in Absolon (1949: 201), and absent from McDermott (1996). It is specifically excluded by Gamble (1982: 94-6) (Figure 5.17).

*The role of the prototype figures as representatives of the class; their use as a basis for generalisation and comparison between examples*

The Willendorf figure (Figure 5.9) can be identified as a prototype for the Venus figurines in the exact sense proposed by Rosch (1978). The figure is often taken as *the* characteristic or typical figurine, and the *specific* attributes of this figure are often generalised to *all* figurines (Nelson 1993: 52; 1997: 151). The central role of the Willendorf figurine is identified by Ucko and Rosenfeld,

who suggest that it has served as the basis for many generalisations about characteristics supposedly common to all Palaeolithic representations of females, and as one of the main foci for parallels with the Palaeolithic period (Ucko and Rosenfeld 1972: 170). Conkey also draws attention to the pivotal position of this figurine with respect to the wider group (Conkey 1997: 182).

The figure is frequently utilized as a means to introduce and effectively represent the category of Venus figurines. Taylor uses it to introduce his discussion of “the Venus figurines”, characterising the figure as a “large buttocked, large breasted woman” (Taylor 1996: 115, 116). The photograph of the Willendorf figure accompanying the text is one of only six showing the figurines in the chapter (*ibid*: Fig 5.1).

Marshack begins his discussion of female images throughout the Palaeolithic with an analysis of this figure, which he terms the “type image” (Marshack 1991: 18). Ehrenberg’s first reference to the figurines is a photograph of Willendorf, inserted early in the text and prior to the discussion of the group itself, remarking that it is one of the best known Palaeolithic female figurines, which are “often obese and possibly pregnant” (Ehrenberg 1989: 36-37). Pfeiffer (1982) features a picture of Willendorf in an introductory chapter dealing mainly with the discovery of cave art. The caption accompanying the illustration reads ““Venus” figurine from Willendorf, Austria: found throughout Europe, starting about 30,000 years ago” (Pfeiffer 1982: 9). This establishes Willendorf as the type image as well as promoting the notion of the widespread distribution of presumably comparable figurines.

Having noted that Willendorf “is generally recognised as the masterpiece amongst known examples in the rendering of folds and contours of prosperous flesh...”, Powell describes the arms, hands, breasts and nipples of this figurine to illustrate “the milk-giving attitude of the majority of these figurines” (Powell 1966: 16). Collins and Onians write of “so-called “Venuses”” with “pronounced sexual characteristics”, citing Willendorf (Figure 5.18a), Mauern (Figure 5.18b) and Petrkovice (Figure 5.18c) as examples (Collins & Onians 1978: 2). Of these, only Willendorf is chosen for further analysis and description; ‘her’ traits are



then described, and reference is made to the correspondence between these characteristics and those of an unspecified “majority of other female figures”. In this way, the “total neglect” of the face on the Willendorf figurine is described as being “matched to some extent on all other figures” (*ibid*: 13). Despite references to the “majority of other female figures”, only two are illustrated in support of the claims – Willendorf (Figure 5.6c) and Lespugue (Figure 5.6d) (*ibid*: Plate 1 and 2). It is these two figures that frequently represent the stylistic canon, as in Laguna who writes of “...the conventionalised European Aurignacian form, illustrated by the “Venus” of Willendorf and Lespugue” (Laguna 1932: 498).

The Lespugue (Figures 5.6d and 5.10b) and Dolní Věstonice (Figure 5.10a) figures are also frequently used to represent the group, although often only in conjunction with Willendorf. Eisenbud’s proposal that the Venus figurines are magical hand pieces acting as symbolic substitutes for the nipple, a theory suggested by (what is perceived as) their general “breastiness”, refers to and illustrates only the Willendorf, Lespugue and Dolní Věstonice figurines (Figure 5.19). Similarly, Harding suggests the presence of hypertrophy of the breasts in certain Venus figurines, mentioning only Willendorf, Lespugue and the Dolní Věstonice ‘rod’, Venus XIV (Harding 1976: 271-2) (Figure 4.1c).

These examples act as representative of the wider class not only in the text itself but also in illustrations. Here again the Willendorf figure features most strongly. McDermott’s (1996) analysis compares photographs simulating the viewpoint of modern women looking down on themselves, with figurines shown from the same angle. The Willendorf figure is illustrated in this way, and compared with a photograph of a “six-months-pregnant 26 year old Caucasian female of average weight” (McDermott 1996: 240 and Figs. 5, 8 and 10) (Figure 5.20). In an edited version of this paper, Willendorf is used again, although this time as the only example (McCoid and McDermott 1996: Figs. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9). In this instance, Willendorf represents the stereotypical Venus figurines; other examples of the group, for instance the figures termed “variant” (McDermott 1996: 236) at Sireuil and Tursac (Figure 3.53a and b respectively) would not be suitable for these illustrations, with the further implication that examples have

been carefully selected to best represent the impression McDermott wishes to convey. In creating this impression, the Willendorf figure is the clearest embodiment of the necessary attributes.

Burkitt places an illustration prior to his descriptions in the text, showing photographs of Lespugue, Willendorf and Dolní Věstonice Venus I (Burkitt 1934: 116 and Fig. 2). The images are shown side by side, without any border or background. All are face on, and their heights have been adjusted so that they are the same size. The caption describes each as “The Venus of ...” (*ibid*: 116) (Figure 5.21). Similarly, *The Encyclopaedia of Human Evolution and Prehistory* illustrates 3 Venus figurines that they contend are “made in the same style” (Tattersall, Delson and Van Couvering 1988: 422) – Kostenki statuette 3 (Figure 5.11*c*), Willendorf (Figure 5.6*c*) and Lespugue (Figure 5.6*d*). All are shown in profile facing left, thereby accentuating their similarity, and stressing this point in the geographic context of examples stated to range from Russia to France (*ibid*: 422). While it is appreciated that such presentation allows ease of comparison between examples on the part of the reader, it also exemplifies the selection and arrangement of a restricted number of similar illustrative examples to emphasize homogeneity of material across a wide distance.

In their role as representatives of the wider class, it can be suggested that not only Willendorf (Figure 5.6*c*), but also Lespugue (Figure 5.6*d*), Dolní Věstonice Venus I (Figure 5.10*a*) and certain of the Russian figures (e.g. Figure 5.11*c* and *i*) fulfil a proto-typical role, with Willendorf standing out as the most familiar example of the class for many. These figures are frequently used as the basis not only for generalisation, but also for comparison with other figures. This process serves to facilitate the entry of particular figures into the group and also allows the identification of stylistic links to be made between established figures. As before, it can be seen that a relatively small number of figures tend to be used for the basis of comparison, and that through this limited range of comparative examples, group homogeneity is established.

Comparisons between figurines are used to establish links and promote the ideal of a homogenised group, and a small number of figures are most frequently

cited when comparisons between figurines are made. As previously noted, the Russian figurines serve as popular examples for generalisation and comparison, perhaps due to their secure chronological attribution and tighter group homogeneity. The impression of a strong and widespread group identity is consolidated in Graziosi's (1960) descriptions of the Russian statuettes and through their comparison with other figures. Three ivory statuettes from Kostienki (statuettes 1, 2 and 3) (Figure 5.11*a, b* and *c* respectively) are specifically likened to Willendorf (Figure 5.9) and also to the Gagarino figures (Figure 5.12*a-c*), with a repetition of features seen in the separation of the legs below the knee, the large breasts resting on the stomach and the barely indicated arms (Graziosi 1960: 57).

Graziosi's description of the Gagarino statuettes (Figure 5.22*a-c*) also stresses the resemblance of some of the figures to Willendorf (Figure 5.22*d*) and also Lespugue (Figure 5.22*e*). Gagarino statuette 1 (Figure 5.22*a*) is said to show the clearest resemblance in the overdeveloped breasts, hips and stomach, the shape and style of the head, and in the arms crossed over the breasts (*ibid*: 58). General characteristics are again given precedence over individual features; Graziosi claims "structural similarities" between Willendorf and Gagarino statuette 2 (Figure 5.22*b*), although noting that position of the arms in the latter example is unusual in Palaeolithic art. Gagarino statuette 3 (Figure 5.22*c*) is described as possessing similar morphological characteristics in many respects, although it is noted that it is slender. Finally, Graziosi states that the 3 figures share roundish heads, leaning forwards, similarly noted at Willendorf, Grimaldi (Figure 5.22*f*) and Lespugue (*ibid*: 58).

The 4 figures from Avdeevo (known at that time) (Figure 5.13*a-d*) are described as demonstrating an "obvious affinity" with the "classical Aurignacian-Perigordian European ones", although Graziosi adds "particularly the Russian statuettes of Kostienki (Figure 5.11*a-f* were those known at the time) and Gagarino" (Figure 5.12*a-c* known at the time) (*ibid*: 59). Graziosi includes 11 female and 5 stylised statuettes from Mal'ta (Figure 4.20*a-d*), on the basis that they show "some connection" with the other figures (*ibid*: 59). His description of the statuettes as "long, rigid and crude", with features and hair indicated, is

hard to reconcile with the oft-mentioned characteristics of the Aurignacian-Perigordian group, and he specifically compares them only to the “sketches” from Brassempouy (e.g. Figures 3.2-4) and claims on this basis that a “family likeness with the European statuettes is undeniable” (Graziosi 1960: 59). Again one is reminded that a family resemblance to the prototype is all that is required to facilitate entry into the category (see Chapter 1, p. 13-14). However, Graziosi does not elaborate the more obvious differences with other Aurignacian-Perigordian statuettes, nor does he comment on any differences between the “sketches” (which as “less important” figures [See p. 146] he has not described) and the larger body of material. Abramova also compares Brassempouy *la fillette* (Figure 3.6) to an unspecified figure from Bouret’ (Figures 3.43g-i), and states that many traits are shared between the Mal’ta (Figure 4.20a-d) and Chiozza (Figure 3.28) statuettes, although these similarities are not specified (Abramova 1967: 68).

In Leroi-Gourhan’s original ‘lozenge’ composition, only three of the eight figures are from Russian sites, including two from the site of Gagarino (Leroi-Gourhan 1968: 92) (Figure 6.1). In a later work, McDermott repeats the style of this diagram in a second line drawing showing eight additional figures to further demonstrate the “central tendency of the style” (McDermott 1996: 230). This illustration includes six Russian figures – Khotylevo statuette 2, Gagarino statuette 4, Avdeevovo statuette 1, and Kostenki statuettes 1, 2 and 4 (*ibid*: Fig. 2) (Figure 6.6a). The addition of predominantly Russian statuettes is also apparent in a third illustration which expands on Leroi-Gourhan’s Chart LXV (Leroi-Gourhan 1968) by showing the three original examples – Grimaldi *statuette en stéatite jaune*, Willendorf and Lespugue, and adding beneath them Gagarino statuettes 3 and 1, and Kostenki statuette 3 (McDermott 1996: Fig. 3) (Figure 6.6b). McDermott’s only illustration devoid of Russian examples features the Grimaldi *statuette en stéatite jaune*, *la polichinelle* and *le losange*, and Brassempouy *le manche de poignard* (*ibid*: Fig. 9). Ironically, the absence of Russian statuettes from this illustration actually serves to indicate their difference from the western statuettes, as the illustration is intended to demonstrate the lateral displacement and rearward projection of the posterior masses, a feature that does not appear amongst the Russian statuettes.

Even though some variation is still apparent, the generally acknowledged coherence amongst the Russian figures is used to bolster the identity of the whole group, with features from the eastern group subtly generalised across the whole of Europe. As discussed above, Graziosi (1960) stresses the similarities of the Russian statuettes of Kostenki (Figure 5.11), Gagarino (Figure 5.12) and Avdevo (Figure 5.13a-h) to Willendorf (Figure 5.9), and these examples are predominantly compared mainly to their nearest neighbours (e.g. each other) and certain figures of Central Europe. Indeed, Graziosi's comparisons suggest that the links are strongest between the Willendorf and the eastern statuettes, rather than across the whole group. This impression is borne out in a comparative analysis by Gvozdover (1989), and this study will be discussed in the next section.

The fifteen figures from Grimaldi form a second proto-typical group (Figures 3.11-25). As previously noted, the discovery of the 'lost' figures has revived interest in the figures recovered from this site. A paper by Mussi *et al* (2000) is based on comparison between these figures and examples from Central Europe, Russia and Siberia, with a difference in approach that comparison of techniques of manufacture as well as style is intended to integrate the 'newer' figures into the existing Eurasian context. While the authors propose an interpretation of the figures linked to ideological beliefs, emphasis is laid on the Grimaldi figures as "echoes of a rich and dynamic cultural repertoire that expended across vast territories" (Mussi *et al* 2000: 120-121). This is reminiscent of Sørensen's claim that similarity becomes *the* meaning in certain works (Sørensen 1997: 182) (see Chapter 1, p. 12).

This section has identified a number of figures, and even groups of figures, that fulfil a proto-typical role within the category of Venus figurines. The next section will discuss these examples further to identify certain problems with both the use of prototypes and the specific figures chosen for this role.

### Problems with prototypes

The use of prototypes for generalisation across the broader range of figures has serious implications for the presentation and perceptions of the material. Perhaps the most obvious is noted by Bahn and Vertut, who comment that the “constant display of a few specimens with extreme proportions presents a distorted view”(Bahn & Vertut 1997: 160).

At a basic level, it can be seen that the comparisons in which prototypes are utilised are again based on the personal and subjective assessment of the features depicted. While Absolon’s (1949) division of the statuettes into groups pronounced Lespugue (Figure 5.23a) a unique type without parallel in Palaeolithic art (Absolon 1949: 218), Leroi-Gourhan (1968) frequently utilises the Lespugue figure as a “type” image, to which other examples may be compared. The Willendorf statuette (Figure 5.23b) is described as being “of the Lespugue type, a faceless head and hair treated in a pattern of lines marking out small round protuberances; the arms are folded over the breasts, the middle part of the body bulges excessively, and the short legs ended in minuscule feet, unfortunately broken off” (Leroi-Gourhan 1968: 95). The “most complete” of the statuettes and fragments from Dolní Věstonice (Venus I [Figure 5.23c]), although described as stylised, is again designated of Lespugue and Willendorf type (*ibid*: 95). At Gagarino (Figure 5.23d), the three figures are described as “fine figurines in a style in every way equivalent to that of Lespugue” (*ibid*: 95), and of the four statuettes and fragments known at that time from Kostenki, the “most complete” (statuette 3 [Figure 5.23e]) is described as possessing a “faceless spherical head covered by a kind of hairnet, a flat chest with enormous breasts drooping down to the waist, a pendulous belly, small arms, and tapering legs”, on the basis of which it is designated a “close cousin” to the Lespugue statuette (*ibid*: 95). Careful selection of those described is apparent, for the Petřkovice statuette (Figure 5.18c), which is clearly not of ‘Lespugue type’, is not described at all and Leroi-Gourhan merely notes that “a female torso sculpted in hematite was found in a Gravettian-looking context” (*ibid*: 95).

Sandars identifies a similarity of pose between Willendorf and Lespugue (Figure 5.6c and d respectively), each with the “hands on breasts, head sunk forward, neglect of the face and feet”, although she adds that there is a complete

contrast between the two in other respects (Sandars 1968: 15-16). She also sees strong similarities between Laussel *la femme à la corne* and Kostenki statuette 3, with the “same bumpy outline, the same knock-kneed stance and overall proportions” (Sandars 1968: 19 and Fig. 6) (Figure 5.15*b*, second from left and second from right respectively).

In these examples, it can be seen that comparable features are selected and noted, yet the depth of the comparison is limited to the possession of certain anatomical features, with the implication that any female figure may be successfully compared to any other. This can be seen when Giedion (1960) compares the Lespugue figure (Figure 5.24*a*) with the engraved image of a woman from Předmostí (Figure 5.24*b*). He states; “It is hard to tell if millenniums lie between the abstract figure from Předmostí and ...Lespugue. Both belong to the same long era, both have the same scheme of composition: very cursory treatment of the limbs, legs tapering to a point, absence of feet, bare indications of arms. These all serve as a kind of plastic foil to the two chief points of interest: the strongly accented downward flow of the breasts and the billowing, balloonlike spread of the pelvic area...” (Giedion 1962: 447-8). Again the emphasis is on ‘family resemblance’ rather than definitive criteria.

This ‘family resemblance’ can be taken to extremes, and certain of the Venus figures are further utilised in a diverse range of comparisons. Guthrie compares the Dolní Věstonice Venus I with examples of erotic art in an illustration intended to demonstrate that “The boots or stockings on a nude figure are seen from several different times and cultures” (Guthrie 1979: 68 and Fig. 19) (Figure 5.25). The same author also compares “common female postures in Palaeolithic art” with “common erotic postures from *Playboy* magazine”, in which examples *b*, *c* and *f* represent the Petersfels, Laugerie-Basse (*Vénus impudique*) and El Pendo figures respectively (Guthrie: 1979: 69 and Fig. 20) (Figure 5.26). Finally, the “Goddess of Laussel” (*la femme à la corne*) is placed alongside the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC Babylonian figure of “Astarte with the crescent moon on her head” (Baring and Cashford: 1991: Fig.42) (Figure 5.27). While these are admittedly extreme examples, they nevertheless raise a question mark over the validity of the similarity deduced in all such comparisons.

Even with regard to purely Palaeolithic comparisons, it seems clear that like is not always compared with like. MacCurdy (1924) also compares Willendorf with Lespugue (Figure 5.6c and d respectively). In all seriousness, he refers to their “striking similarity”, while noting that the “Venus of Willendorf” is “as much like the Lespugue Venus as a short, stocky figure can be like a tall, slender one” (MacCurdy 1924: 259-260).

In frequently presenting ‘the most typical’ prototypes, the texts actually establish what ‘the most typical’ is. Several works have suggested that generalisation based on an example such as Willendorf is not valid. Nelson argues that the Willendorf figurine is not representative of the “average” figurine, actually representing the greatest degree of adiposity, and the least stylisation (Nelson 1993: 52; 1997: 151). Ucko and Rosenfeld see the majority of parallels with Willendorf as based on no more than its general obesity, which they assume is accepted as the main characteristic of the figure (Ucko and Rosenfeld 1972: 170).

The analysis by Gvozdover (1989) suggests that the indiscriminate generalisation of the characteristics of certain figures across the wider range of statuettes is not tenable. This comparison of the characteristics of the Russian figurines (Figure 4.22c) with those of Central and Western Europe (Figure 4.22b and a respectively) stands apart from those noted above both in terms of its depth and its findings. The results of this analysis have significant implications for the validity of comparisons between the separate geographical areas and the use of any single figure as a prototype representing the wider class.

Gvozdover sees a basic similarity in the general trend of the depiction of the nude fully-grown female with the face only rarely shown and, with reference to specific features, identifies similarities between some individual figures (Gvozdover 1989: 66). However, beyond this general trend her comparison of Russian and European figures indicates clear differences between the regional groups, rather than similarities and parallels (*ibid*: 87-88). These include distinct



positioning of the legs in each of the Siberian (Figure 4.22*d*), Western European (Figure 4.22*a*) and Russian (Figure 4.22*c*) groups, and the differential accentuation of particular areas of the body (*ibid*: 78-86). In Gvozdover's analysis the exaggeration of anatomical features occurring in the figures, often presented as a uniform characteristic, is viewed as a criteria of analysis on the grounds that it occurs differentially and may be absent altogether.

The figurines of the Pavlov (Dolní Věstonice, Pavlov, Petřkovice, Předmosti, Podkovice) and Willendorf cultures are described as "not plentiful" and "difficult to classify"(Gvozdover 1989: 81) (Figure 5.28), with differences occurring both between and within sites. The finds from Willendorf (Figure 5.28*g, h*) exemplify this; of 3 possible figurines, it is stated that only one could be studied in detail and Gvozdover comments that all that may be said about the second is that "it differs appreciably from the first" (*ibid*: 81). No details of the third possible figure are given. Two figures are noted at Petřkovice (Figure 5.28*d*), with neither seen as similar "in any respect" (*ibid*: 81). The Moravany figure (Figure 5.28*f*) is also seen as distinct, featuring conical legs without marked knees, an abdomen devised as separate volume, and the depiction of the navel and vulva (*ibid*: 81).

The Dolní Věstonice figurines (e.g. Figure 5.28*a-c*) are distinguished from both the Kostenki (Figure 5.11) and Willendorf (Figure 5.9) figures on the basis the construction of the legs and the shape of the head (Gvozdover 1989: 87). The only Central European figure identified as having common features with the Russian Plain figurines is Willendorf, which is seen as the "middle ground" between the Kostenki and Gagarino types (Figures 5.11-13 and Table 4.2), and this figure is also stated to share certain elements with other Central European figures in the representation of the navel and sexual characteristics (*ibid*: 83). However, Gvozdover also draws attention to the unique features of the Willendorf figurine, in the position of the legs, the absence of a neck, the size of the head, and the position of the breasts (*ibid*: 83).

Regarding the Western European figurines, Gvozdover is virtually unique in the degree of heterogeneity she identifies, stating that the figures of Italy (Figures

3.11-25, 3.27, 3.28, 3.31 and 3.37) and France (Figures 3.1-10, 3.26, 3.29, 3.32 and 3.34) are not similar to each other, with disparities seen also between the western figures (*ibid*: 84) (only Delporte [1993*b*] similarly stresses heterogeneity; the opposing view of Mussi and Zampetti [1997: 218], who see the Italian figures as stylistically very close to those found in the rest of Europe, has been noted, p. 137). While Gvozdover sees the majority of these examples as possessing common features, these characteristics are different to those of the Russian Plain figures, particularly in the representation of the legs, and with the feet very seldom shown in the former (Gvozdover 1989: 84). In contrast to many authors, Gvozdover sees the western figures as characterised by differential rather than uniform degrees of accentuation, with emphasis predominantly of the buttocks and thighs, more seldomly the abdomen, and only rarely the breasts (*ibid*: 87).

The results of this analysis would seem to indicate that the Russian statuettes (Figure 4.22*c*) cannot be used as prototypes for the Western and Central European figures (Figure 4.22*a* and *b* respectively) as only Willendorf (Figure 5.9) shares their common characteristics (Gvozdover 1989: 83). If the Russian figures were hypothetically removed from the category of Venus figurines, the Western and Central European figures present a distinctly less coherent group that display great heterogeneity, as identified particularly by Delporte (1993*b*). Close analysis of the features of the Russian statuettes highlights problems with the standard characterisation and its use, as the characterisation of the Russian figures by both Delporte (1993*b*) and Gvozdover (1989) is at odds with the stereotypical characterisation presented for the wider class of Venus figurines. Gvozdover's analysis draws attention to the depiction of feet, arms and hands and decoration. These are invariably discounted in the stereotypical characterisation (See discussion of individual features in Chapter 4), yet her findings indicate that the differing ways of depicting these features may be significant and indicate particular meanings. In a curious paradox, it seems that when generalisation from the prototypes of the European and Russian groups are applied to each other, the characteristics of the European figures – in which the importance of heads, arms, legs and feet are downplayed – are overlaid over the distinct characteristics of the Russian figures, while examples of the Russian

finds – which more clearly feature heads, arms legs and feet – are used to demonstrate homogeneity amongst the European figurines.

This section has suggested that the category of Venus figurines operates around proto-typical figures consisting of both individual examples and small groups of figures. Certain figures – whether at individual or group level – are utilised as a standard for comparison, against which newer figures may be assessed and confirmed as group members. In this respect, the Willendorf figure remains the core figure around which the category operates – it is the best and widest known example of the category, the clearest embodiment of the definitive characteristics of the class, and the most frequently utilised figure in comparisons. It is also the only figure that could be said to truly fulfil the role of category prototype in that it is the only figure demonstrating similarities with distinct groups of figures such as the Russian examples. Despite this, certain other figures (e.g. Lespugue) are also utilised in the literature in a proto-typical role to a greater or lesser degree, and these figures may be said to form a core around which the wider category of Venus figurines operates. It has also been shown that the Venus figurines also serve as prototype figures for the wider category of Palaeolithic material culture.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter of the analysis has discussed a number of ways in which certain examples of this material are prioritised at the expense of the wider group. Each section of this chapter has demonstrated the process of prioritisation with respect to its own specific theme. The next chapter will elaborate these themes and the processes identified with regard to three specific Case Studies.

## CHAPTER 6

### CASE STUDIES

#### Introduction

As a conclusion to the textual analysis section of this thesis, this chapter will present three specific case studies – “The use of the ‘lozenge composition’”, “The impact of inclusion”, and “Ancient artifacts; contemporary meanings”. Each will draw together and demonstrate themes discussed in the preceding chapters.

Case Study 1: “The use of the ‘lozenge composition’” continues the themes of the previous chapter to discuss the prioritisation of the constituent features of the stylistic canon, the reiteration of a narrow characterisation of the material, and the use of prototypes in the context of a specific example; Leroi-Gourhan’s (1968) ‘lozenge composition’. In addition, it demonstrates the manner in which the credibility of the material is established in the texts through reference to previous authors, and the drifting of archaeological interpretations into different mediums, where they are cited as supporting evidence for diverse hypotheses.

Case Study 2: “The impact of inclusion” discusses the Venus figurines as an enduring and essentially unchanging category despite the variable characteristics of the material included within it. It focuses on two separate examples; a reference in Gamble’s (1982) analysis to “additional figurines”, and the incorporation of the Galgenberg figure into the category. Through discussion of these examples, this section will explicitly demonstrate that the stylistic canon is maintained by avoidance of the issue of diversity.

Case Study 3: “Ancient artifacts; contemporary meanings” takes the prioritisation of selected characteristics a step further to examine the relationship between and the transformative nature of description and interpretation in the literature. Serving as a metaphor for a theme of this thesis, this case study discusses examples including the Laussel Double Figure and Grimaldi *l’hermaphrodite* to demonstrate how differential descriptions of

particular figurines subtly recreate the archaeological material in each instance rather than merely represent it. A major factor in this recreation is a way in which the material can be made relevant to and utilised in specific hypotheses.

The conclusions of the textual analysis part of the thesis will be discussed after presentation of these Case Studies.

### **Case Study 1: The use of the ‘lozenge composition’**

This Case Study brings together a number of themes introduced thus far; the stylistic canon, the prioritisation of features, the use of prototypes, and the frequent repetition of a narrowed and popular characterisation of the figurines.

The ‘lozenge composition’ (Leroi-Gourhan 1968: 92) is the clearest representation of the notion of the stylistic similarity of the group. This discussion will identify three aspects of its use: Firstly, its original context in the work of Leroi-Gourhan; secondly, how repetition of this illustration in the literature establishes group definition and identity; thirdly, how each repetition is accompanied by increasing generalisation and inaccuracy, as the chain of references lengthens away from both the original textual source and the archaeological material itself.

In his original text, prior to the discussion of individual examples, Leroi-Gourhan specifies the stylistic principle that he sees as determining the morphology of the female figures:

“The leading convention that characterises these statuettes is the way breast, abdomen, and pelvic region are grouped approximately within a circle. The rest of the body – toward the head and feet – tapers gradually, even dwindles away along the vertical poles of the circle. As a result most of the figurines can be inscribed within a lozenge, the top of which is barely broken by a head that is usually reduced to a featureless button” (Leroi-Gourhan 1968: 90).

To illustrate this convention – the ‘lozenge composition’ – Leroi-Gourhan provides a diagram showing eight figures – Lespugue, Grimaldi *le losange*, Kostenki statuette 3, Gagarino statuette 1, Willendorf I, Laussel *la femme à la corne*, Dolní Věstonice Venus I and Gagarino statuette 3 (*ibid*: 92) (Figure 6.1). As with the paragraph in the main text, the similarity of the figures is stressed, with the accompanying caption inviting the reader to “... note, especially in the works from Gagarino, the stability of design, regardless of the variations in rendering the proportions. On the basis of this, the figures from Lespugue and from Willendorf are entirely equivalent” (*ibid*: 92). However, this equivalence is something of an optical illusion created by the style of the diagrams themselves (and Leroi-Gourhan’s confident and persistent repetition of the canon). The simplified line drawings feature examples adjusted to a similar size, and represented only in outline, with few specific or individual details marked. The further imposition of the geometric circle and lozenge upon each figure facilitates comparison and presents a homogenised group. Although Leroi-Gourhan indicates that the proportions do vary between examples, no details of actual size or medium are given.

The eight figures features in the ‘lozenge composition’ could be said to form a proto-typical ‘core’ of the category. However, in their presentation in this format, the individual features of the eight examples are subsumed beneath the uniform and simplified presentation of the diagram. In reality, the Willendorf, Lespugue, Kostenki and Laussel examples feature a detailed arrangement of the hair, although not similar in each case. The Willendorf figure has a clearly marked vulva. Both Willendorf and Laussel *la femme à la corne* have hands and fingers and the latter figure holds an object. Dolní Věstonice Venus I has additional markings on the head, face and back, not shared by the other figures. The materials utilised are diverse, including a limestone block originally attached to a cave wall (Laussel *la femme à la corne*), steatite (Grimaldi *le losange*), ivory (Kostenki statuette 3 and Gagarino statuettes 1 and 3), oolithic limestone (Willendorf) and fired clay (Dolní Věstonice Venus I). Finally, a range of colours is represented in these examples; Laussel *la femme à la corne* and Willendorf were both coloured with red ochre, while Grimaldi *le losange* is translucent green. The differences between these eight examples may be

accentuated by their representation in a number of different ways. To demonstrate this, Figure 6.2 shows the same examples in photographic form. Figure 6.3 illustrates the differences in dimensions by the addition of a scale.

In their placement in Leroi-Gourhan's diagram, these examples represent a careful selection – chosen for their similarity to each other – rather than a random choice. Presentation of similarity is the focal point, yet diversity could equally well have been demonstrated. All are examples from sites that actually feature more than one type or style of figure, as seen in Gvozdover's (1989) analysis of Kostenki and Gagarino (Table 4.2), and this diversity is even more apparent at Grimaldi and Dolní Věstonice. This means that other styles could have been chosen for representation. At Willendorf, the rarely described second figure is *svelte*, and in addition to the homogeneous group of three figures at Laussel, the figure known as the Archer is slender, and has been interpreted by some as male. Figure 6.4 therefore repeats the format of the original illustration, with Pechialet replacing Lespugue, and with alternative figures chosen from each site. In this instance, the increased diversity – an 'instability of design' – can clearly be seen.

Analyses discussing the principles of the 'lozenge composition' have produced a number of criticisms (e.g. Duhard 1995; Pales 1972). Bahn and Vertut comment that the imposition of the circle merely shows that the figures "have the same basic shape" (Bahn and Vertut 1997: 162), a "stability of design" that is actually "nothing more than a mere fact of human biological morphology" (Dobres 1992a: 10). Scathingly, Dobres stresses that for Leroi-Gourhan to substantiate his claim that the Venus figurines are "practically interchangeable" (Leroi-Gourhan 1968: 96) he found it necessary to standardise their size and "obliterate" their empirical differences (Dobres 1992a: 10). The 'lozenge composition' must, therefore, be recognised as an archaeological construct, and as an artificial imposition upon the material rather than a feature of the original design.

Despite this, subsequent authors have drawn heavily on the composition, most often to persuade the reader of the existence of the stylistic canon. When it

appears as one of few illustrations in a text, as in Gamble (1982), the 'lozenge composition' and its presentation of a portion of the archaeological material is utilised to represent the larger group, and repetition of this diagram not only facilitates the impression that it is an accurate representation of the material, but the texts utilising the diagram themselves depend upon this being the case if the claims they base upon it are to be correct.

In Demoule, illustration of the 'lozenge composition' is used to illustrate the Gravettian Venus and a stylistic identity occurring across thousands of kilometres (Demoule 1990: 39-40). Conkey reproduces the illustration with an accompanying claim that many of the figurines seem to have been made in accordance with an "isometric design target" (Conkey 1985: 309-10). She notes that the sizes in the illustration have been adjusted and elaboration removed, but maintains that apparent differences "can be reduced to a set of guidelines that have proportional integrity" (*ibid.*: 309-310). Klima employs the 'lozenge composition' to estimate the original appearance and dimensions of a fragmentary statuette found at Dolní Věstonice; using the Dolní Věstonice Venus I as a model, he refers to breasts and a head that do not survive clearly in the fragment itself, and thus presents a speculative version of the figure that exceeds the evidence (Klima 1983: 178 and Fig.2) (Figure 6.5).

In the first of two papers by McDermott, the 'lozenge composition' is cited to characterise the "structural formula" consisting of "a recurring set of departures from anatomical accuracy" (McCoid & McDermott 1996: 320). In the second, McDermott is similarly concerned with establishing the homogeneity of the group in the face of recent claims of group heterogeneity (e.g. Dobres 1992*a, b*; Nelson 1993; Delporte 1993*b*), and cites Leroi-Gourhan's designation of the 'lozenge composition' (Leroi-Gourhan 1968: 90, 92) in support of this, repeating his opinion that the figurines appear "centred on the torso, breasts, thighs and abdomen", with the rest "attenuated" or "dwindling away" (Leroi-Gourhan 1968: 207, cited in McDermott 1996: 228).

McDermott reproduces Leroi-Gourhan's original illustration of the 'lozenge composition' (McDermott 1996: Fig.1) (Figure 6.1), and his subsequent



illustrations (*ibid*: Fig.2 and 3) closely follow this form of presentation. The first of these is intended to provide a further demonstration of the “central tendency of the style”, and depicts the Grimaldi *statuette en stéatite jaune*, Khotylevo statuette 2, Gagarino statuette 4, Avdeevo statuette 1, the figure from Moravany and Kostenki statuettes 1, 2 and 4 (*ibid*: 230, Fig.2) (Figure 6.6a). The style of the illustration echoes that of the previous diagram albeit minus the superimposed circle and lozenge. As in the original, this presentation acts to standardise the images, as they are reduced to an outline and a few details and their proportions are adjusted so that they are an equivalent size. The impression of similarity is increased by the arrangement of a top row featuring figures with heads, and a lower row of figures without heads. The second illustration (*ibid*: 235, Fig.3) (Figure 6.6b) adapts and expands upon Leroi-Gourhan’s Chart LXV (Leroi-Gourhan 1968: 520), showing the original three examples – Kostenki statuette 3, Willendorf and Lespugue, and adding beneath them Gagarino statuettes 1 and 3, and the Grimaldi *statuette en stéatite jaune* Faris’ (1983) use of the same chart has been discussed in Chapter 5 (p. 132 and Figure 5.3); while Leroi-Gourhan’s original use of the chart was to compare the position of the arms, Faris utilises the drawing to stress that the heads, arms and feet of the figures are “deliberately avoided” (Faris 1983: 107 and Fig 7.17).

Several of Gamble’s publications (1982; 1985) employ Leroi-Gourhan’s original diagram (Leroi-Gourhan 1968: 92) alongside the notion of the ‘lozenge composition’ to establish the stylistic canon and the homogeneity of the group. As discussed previously (Chapter 4, p.110-111), the importance of the ‘lozenge composition’ as a factor in Gamble’s perception of the constitution of the group is shown when Gamble admits that the Abri Pataud piece (Figure 4.17c) lacks the “extreme exaggeration” of the comparative material such as the Laussel figures (Figures 3.44-48), yet maintains that “it still conforms to Leroi-Gourhan’s lozenge design” (Gamble 1982: 94).

Gamble’s 1982 paper puts forward a strong argument for the stylistic similarity of the group on which his hypothesis depends, and again draws on Leroi-Gourhan as a means to demonstrate this point. The introductory abstract states that finds of “female figurines” have been recovered from “all over Europe” and

that there have been “several suggestions to account for their similar design” (Gamble 1982: 92). This statement serves to establish that there is similarity, and that is recognised to such a degree that it is in need of explanation.

Two citations and an illustration are then reproduced from Leroi-Gourhan to present the identity and character of the group. The first describes the recurrent traits of the figures:

“No matter where found...they are practically interchangeable, apart from their proportions. The most complete figures have the same treatment of the head, the same small arms folded over the breasts or pointing toward the belly, the same low breasts drooping like sacks to far below the waist, and the same legs ending in miniscule or non-existent feet” (Leroi-Gourhan 1968: 96, cited in Gamble 1982: 93).

Gamble has already stated that these finds occur “all over Europe”, and the eight figures shown in his reproduction of the ‘lozenge composition’ (Gamble 1982: Fig.1) are referred to as “several of the complete specimens”, which implies that there are considerably more (*ibid*: 93). That Leroi-Gourhan has designated the figures as “practically interchangeable”, “no matter where found” emphasises the stylistic similarity and the coherence of the group, although Gamble does omit Leroi-Gourhan’s specification in the original text of a number of sites (Brassempouy, Lespugue, Abri Pataud, Willendorf, Dolni Vestonice and Kostienki) (Leroi-Gourhan 1968: 96), which perhaps gives a greater impression of ‘interchangeability’ than was intended by the original author (although in a more general sense the meaning is probably the same). Leroi-Gourhan’s diagram of the ‘lozenge composition’ (Figure 6.1) is then used as an illustration of this “stability of design” (Gamble 1982: 93). The second citation from Leroi-Gourhan, placed immediately after the illustration, repeats and confirms the “leading convention” characterising the statuettes, “the way the breast, abdomen and pelvic region are grouped approximately within a circle. The rest of the body – toward the head and feet – tapers gradually, even dwindles away along the vertical poles of the circle. As a result most of the figurines can be inscribed within a lozenge” (Leroi-Gourhan 1968: 90; cited

Gamble 1982: 94). This presentation places the lozenge composition and the canon it represents at the forefront of the reader's mind.

The repeated use of the 'lozenge composition' in the texts is accompanied by increasing generalisation and some inaccuracy. In Pfeiffer, Gamble's speculative conclusion is presented as concrete fact; "Widespread networks, widespread information-sharing systems, existed early in the Upper Palaeolithic, if the distribution of "Venus" figurines is any indication" (Pfeiffer 1982: 202). It is stated that these objects appear "in quantity", although no indication is given towards the actual number (*ibid*: 202). To describe the figures, Pfeiffer paraphrases Leroi-Gourhan's (1968) definition of their characteristics: "Most of them were made according to a definite convention – tapering legs, wide hips, and tapering shoulders and head, the whole designed to fit into a diamond shaped frame" (Pfeiffer 1982: 202). This not only promotes the popular characteristics, but also incorporates Leroi-Gourhan's contemporary 'lozenge composition' as an intention of the original design. The distribution of the figurines cited by Gamble is repeated and termed a "Venus zone", further strengthening the impression of intention and homogeneity (*ibid*: 202). The original 'lozenge composition' is then illustrated, although with the distinction that Pfeiffer shuffles the original order of the figurines to pair up those with most coincidence of shape, thereby adding to the impression of similarity (*ibid*: 203) (Figure 6.7). Thus, the squat example from Gagarino (Gagarino statuette 1) is placed next to Willendorf, and Lespugue is placed with Kostenki statuette 3. To complete the top row of figures, the elongated Gagarino figure (Gagarino statuette 3) is raised from its original position on the bottom row (Leroi-Gourhan 1968: 92) (Figure 6.1) and placed slightly apart from the other figures. Placed equidistant along the bottom row are Dolní Věstonice Venus I, Laussel *la femme à la corne* and Grimaldi *le losange* (Pfeiffer 1982: 203).

This chain of references is extended beyond purely archaeological texts. Pfeiffer's work is in turn cited in a work of psychology that seeks to investigate the existence of innate responses to art and considers the adaptational contribution of a heightened receptivity to the production of "art" (Kogan 1994). The Venus figurines are linked with research into factors of

attractiveness that suggest that reproductive success is equated with the possession of a low waist-to-hip ratio (Kogan 1994: 152). Information on the figurines consists of a brief reference stating that Pfeiffer has described the discovery of a series of “what have been called “Venus figurines” by the British archaeologist Clive Gamble” (*ibid*: 150). Obviously drawing from Pfeiffer, Kogan describes the figurines thus; “They appeared to be sculpted to a diamond shaped frame – tapering legs, wide hips, and tapering shoulders and head. The figures give particular prominence to the reproductive function” (*ibid*: 151). Once again, a narrow characterisation, one suitable for the author’s intentions, is repeated, and contemporary geometry is presented as an intrinsic feature of the statuettes. Furthermore, at each stage of the chain of references and citations, the accuracy of the information provided is lessened.

One final point may be made. In its original use, Leroi-Gourhan’s ‘lozenge composition’ demonstrates the proto-typical use of a small number of familiar examples – the core examples – to conceptualise the wider category. Its frequent repetition in later texts also demonstrates the proto-typical role of the ‘lozenge composition’ itself as the most familiar conceptualisation of the stylistic canon.

### **Case Study 2: The impact of inclusion**

On the basis of the characterisations I have discussed, and particularly the claimed stylistic similarity that binds them together, the Venus figurines are presented in the literature as a distinct body of material. Ehrenberg maintains that the Venus figurines “must be seen to form a group”, yet also states that they are part of “a larger, neglected group of figures of which some are also male and sexless” (Ehrenberg 1989: 67-68). It is therefore apparent that additional contemporary figures do exist.

The key questions must be whether the Venus figurines are a distinct group only because we have created and presented them as such, and whether the divisions between them and other figurines that may be contemporary are as strong as suggested or simply artificial. The role of any larger group of contemporary figurines, and how it relates the Venus figurines, must be examined, as must the

possibility that the group characteristics of the Venus figurines would change if additional figures were brought in.

This argument can be demonstrated through an examination of Gamble (1982). Ironically, this is the very analysis that promotes the notion of group homogeneity and stylistic similarity so strongly. Gamble's Table I provides details of the total number of figures from each site alongside details of associated industry and the available C14 dates (Gamble 1982: 95). Numerical totals are given for "complete figurines", "fragments", "heads" and "additional figurines", and this highlights the existence of certain figures that seem peripheral to the group. My query here concerns the nature and status of the "additional figurines". The author does not explain this term, nor are these figures explicitly (or even implicitly) mentioned or described. Thus, although they constitute a significant numerical quantity in their own right (18 "additional figurines" compared to 41 "complete figurines"), they are covertly subsumed by the larger group of "female figurines" and effectively erased from the analysis. Their relationship to the rest of the database remains ambiguous. Their designation as "additional" indicates some difference from the other figures yet this difference, and any implications it may have for the validity of the hypothesis, are not investigated or explored. To demonstrate the importance of this, I will discuss a number of these "additional figurines".

The totals given in Gamble's analysis for Brassempouy are 3 "fragments", one "head", and four "additional figurines" (Gamble 1982: 95). It is not indicated which specific figurines are complete or additional, but assuming that the three fragments are those traditionally interpreted as female (*la poire* [Figure 3.1], *le torse* [Figure 3.8] and *le manche de poignard* [Figure 3.7]), this could leave the additional figures as *l'ébauche* (Figure 3.2), *la figurine à la ceinture* (Figure 3.3), *la fillette* (Figure 3.6), and *la figurine à la pèlerine* (Figure 3.4). It should be made clear that, as the individual figures are not specified by Gamble, this assumption is not certain; this in itself is representative of a common problem in the texts. It should also be noted also that *l'ébauche de poupée* (Figure 3.9) is usually included in the Brassempouy group of figures, yet Gamble's numerical total accounts for only eight figures. The fragmentary nature of these figures is

such that they are incompatible with Leroi-Gourhan's 'lozenge' design. They are also the figures with greatest sexual ambiguity, with some authors suggesting they are male figures, and others preferring to see them as female. Certainly, it can be said that those with the stomach and chest intact do not display any 'characteristic' exaggeration.

For the site of Grimaldi, it is stated that there are six "complete figurines", one "head", and eight "additional figurines" (*ibid* 95). The eight "additional figures" are presumably the 'lost' figures, of which two were published by Breuil (1928) and six were only discovered more recently amongst private collections in Canada (Bisson and Bolduc 1994) (Figures 3.18-25). Leaving aside the questions of authenticity discussed in Chapter 3, it can be said that while the Brown Ivory Figurine (Figure 3.22) and the Red Ochre Figurine (Figure 3.23) conform to the 'usual' style, these examples also include the Flattened Figurine (Figure 3.21), the Two Headed Figurine (interpreted as female) (Figure 3.25), and the depiction of a human figure and an animal figure placed back to back (the Double Figurine [Figure 3.24]). No doubt termed "additional" as their existence was only rumoured at the time of Gamble's publication (although as noted above, the *Janus* and the Bust had been published by Breuil [1928]), the variety they display focuses attention once again on the authenticity of the entire Grimaldi group (Figures 3.11-25), and at the very least demonstrates that a greater diversity exists than previously acknowledged.

For Laussel, it is stated that there are three "complete figurines" and two "additional figurines" (Gamble 1982: 95). Assuming that the three complete figures are those generally interpreted as female (*la femme à la corne*) (Figure 3.44), *la femme à la tête quadrillée* (Figure 3.47) and the *Vénus de Berlin* (Figure 3.48), the two "additional" figurines are then the ambiguous Double Figure (Figure 3.46), and the Archer (Figure 3.45). Finally, the "additional figurine" at Willendorf (Figure 6.8*b*) lacks the exaggeration of the "complete" figure (Figure 6.8*a*). As noted in the Chapter 5, Gvozdover comments that all that may be said about the second Willendorf figure is that "it differs appreciably from the first" (Gvozdover 1989: 80).

It is therefore apparent that for Gamble, the “additional figurines” are those figures that, for one reason or another, are present at sites producing “classic” examples (See discussion in Chapter 4, p. 109 and Figure 4.14) yet are those that do not display the characteristics of the group as defined by Gamble (Gamble 1982: 92-3). The fact that they are separated from the “female figurines” that he terms “stylistically similar” (*ibid*: 91) is important, and one must question how the characteristics traditionally constituting the class would have to be amended if they were to be included.

Perhaps a further point should be made here. The question of the ‘difference’ of these figures only arises because Gamble highlights their variance by designating them “additional figurines”. In other surveys of the material, they are merely included in the total number given for each site, as in Absolon who states simply that there are two figures at Willendorf, five at Laussel and “seven” at Brassempouy (Absolon 1949: 214). Gamble’s analysis is indicative of a trend of continued and unquestioned acceptance of the Venus figurines as an established class of material defined by accepted criteria, rather than either reappraisal based on the inclusion of other contemporary figures, or reassessment of some of those already included.

Similarly, it can also be shown that re-evaluation of the traditional class does not necessarily follow from the discovery of a new and distinctive find. The figurine found in 1988 at Galgenberg (Figure 6.9) differs in both style and chronology from the characteristic Venus figurines. With regard to stratigraphy, the figurine boasts an impeccable pedigree, having been recovered “under immaculate conditions of stratigraphic documentation, by the excavation director herself, from apparently undisturbed deposits” (Bednarik 1989: 118). Radiocarbon dates on charcoal samples from the same occupation horizon have produced dates of between 31 190 and 29 200 BP (Bahn 1989: 345), around 5,000 years earlier than the upper end of the time period usually postulated for the figurines (e.g. Gamble 1982).

Numerous stylistic differences are apparent. While the ‘established’ figures are often termed static, immobile or passive (Taylor 1996: 141; Delporte 1993a:

136), the Galgenberg figure has been described as “a flat, apparently dancing figure” (Taylor 1996: 117), and “a flattish figurine depicting a woman in an animated pose” (Bednarik 1989: 118). Bahn states a number of additional differences; the figure is not polished, the vulva is marked, there is no obesity, and no emphasis of the breasts and buttocks, with the left breast depicted in profile (due to the posture of the figure) and the right marked only in low relief (Bahn 1989: 345). In contrast, Delporte sees no primary sexual characteristics (Delporte 1993a: 136). Whether or not the posture does suggest movement (*ibid*: 136), there is a clear lack of the symmetry usually associated with the figurines. Bahn draws attention to the distinct feature of the right arm resting on the hip while the left extends away from the body, appearing to be folded back at the elbow (Bahn 1989: 345). In contrast to many statuettes, the figure also features two bored openings, one between the legs, which then join at the feet, and the other between the right arm and the body. Interestingly, the lack of sexual characteristics has prompted some to consider the figure as male, and the representation of the breast itself has been disputed (Delporte 1993a: 136). At a more general level, its difference from the stylistic canon is such that McDermott does not include the figurine in his database, suggesting that an identification as human is not certain (McDermott 1996: 269). Despite these differences, the figure rapidly became known as the “Venus of Galgenberg” (Bednarik 1989: 118), the “Dancing Venus of Galgenberg” (Bahn 1989: 345), and Taylor refers to it as the earliest of the Venus figurines (Taylor 1996: 117).

Several points are apparent from this study. The class of Venus figurines is presented and recognised on the basis of the characteristics belonging to the typical and popular Venus figurines, and a ‘popular stereotype’ is still seen as a satisfactory representation of the group. As a result, some authors continue to exclude or neglect figures that do not ‘fit’ the canon. As it exists at present, the category embodies something of a contradiction. Despite the strongly promoted characteristics defining the category as stylistically similar, the category of Venus figurines operates in an extremely fluid manner, containing a diverse range of examples and allowing the incorporation of new members even when they display distinctive morphology and chronology. As long as they possess a sufficient degree of ‘family resemblance’ to allow their inclusion, such



inclusions do not subsequently affect the standard definition of the group in terms of style and chronology, as any distinctive features are simply absorbed or downplayed.

In conclusion, I have demonstrated that the constitution of the class of Venus figurines (e.g. those figures included in the class) presented in the literature has been variable, and the stylistic canon has been shown to govern presentation and perception of the archaeological material as a coherent and homogeneous class. Furthermore, it is possible to suggest that group membership and inclusion can be manipulated to strengthen an argument. Two implications remain; that with the inclusion of different figurines, the nature of the group itself will be shown to be different, and that the canon itself can only be maintained by ignoring certain figures.

### **Case Study 3: Ancient artifacts; contemporary meanings**

This section will expand on some of the ideas formed in the previous sections to demonstrate the principles I have elaborated. I have shown that the prioritisation of particular features in the literature leads to stereotypical characterisations of the category of Venus figurines. It is my contention that the differential identification and representation of certain features in the literature can form differential impressions and images of the same artifact. After a general discussion of the creative role of emotive language, I will compare the descriptions given in the literature for a number of examples. The features of the figures selected for description and presentation in each instance, and the varying emphasis (or neglect) applied to each characteristic will be shown to relate directly to the interpretation then provided for the figures. The aim is to indicate how the emphasis in the literature results in subtle variations in the images produced in this medium. These new images are the 'end product' (see Introduction, p. 7-8), and may bear a greater or lesser resemblance to the original artifact they purport to represent.

Descriptions of the figures range from the clinical to both the emotional and the aesthetic. Duhard's descriptions of the figurines are almost literally 'diagnoses',

re-creating the figures in the context of a language of medical and gynaecological terms:

“The ‘*losange*’ is a pregnant woman affected by generalised obesity, predominantly of the pelvic area with displayed steatopygia” (Duhard 1991: 557) (Figure 6.10a).

“The Lespugue figurine combines hypermastia, displayed steatopygia joining the iliac deposits and steatomeria. Emaciation of the upper half of the body recalls superior lipoatrophy with inferior lipohypertrophy” (*ibid*: 559) (Figure 6.10b).

Such is the effect of this language that it is hard to think of the ‘subjects’ of this description as inanimate figurines, as the impression created is one of female ‘patients’.

The emotive language used to describe the figurines tends to attribute feelings and emotions to the figurines themselves. Sandars contrasts Brassempouy *la tête à la capuche* with certain ‘characteristic’ figures; “This is a young smooth face that looks directly outwards, not sunken, blank or brooding like the obese and pregnant women” (Sandars 1968: 15) (Figure 6.11b). This theme is elaborated in the description of the Willendorf figure; “She is fat, faceless and preoccupied; collected into herself and the fecundity of which she seems the total embodiment...” (*ibid*: 9) (Figure 6.11a). Similarly, Powell purports that the Lespugue figure, “with its downcast head has an air of resignation and sorrow” (Powell 1966: 17), or that more specifically, “an atmosphere of resignation, if not sorrow and subjection, pervades this figure” (*ibid*: 16) (Figure 6.11c).

Detailed descriptions of specific figures provided in a number of texts can be seen to generate and project a particular image in each case. These examples will be discussed in the separate sections below.

#### Kostenki 83-2 and 87

Taylor identifies and interprets statuettes 83-2 (Figure 6.13) and 87 (Figure 6.12) from Kostenki as a “woman with breast straps”, and a “bound woman” respectively, in a section entitled “S & M on the Steppe” (Taylor 1996: 139 and Figs 5.16, 5.17). The former figure is described as wearing strapping falling from the neck and although Taylor admits that he has not seen the rear of the figurine, he claims that “the arms are being firmly held down behind, with shoulders back, so that the breasts are pushed forward” (*ibid*: 140). The second figure is described as showing a vulva and hands, tied at the wrist, which rest on the rounded abdomen (*ibid*: 140). This is identified as evidence for gendered or “sex-specific” clothing and, emphasizing that the breasts and vulva are exposed, Taylor introduces a parallel with a “standard convention of erotic or sexual dressing”, by which the fur strapping draws attention to the sexual aspects of the body (*ibid*: 140). The physical poses and the tied wrists are deemed to represent “a submissiveness and an inability to resist” (*ibid*: 141). Rhetorically suggesting a number of possible explanations – a scene of sexual bondage or the display of captives or initiates – Taylor’s favoured interpretation is that, “they are explicitly sexual, sharing themes of objectification and possession that I feel are inherent in all the so-called Venus figurines” (*ibid*: 141). The effect is to characterise the group by these examples and the interpretation applied to them. In this example, the figurines are removed from any original context, and placed and interpreted in terms of (Taylor’s perception of) contemporary sexual codes. For the reader, the figurines are firmly entrenched in a scene of ritual bondage.

The speculative and, indeed, imaginative basis of this description is apparent in Taylor’s admission that he has not seen the back of Kostenki statuette 83-2 (Figure 6.13), yet this does not deter him from ‘filling in the blanks’. However, while his interpretation of specific features is dictated by his belief in the themes of “objectification and possession” (*ibid*: 141), in this instance the illustration he presents depicts an inaccuracy, as the arms of the figure are not in fact held behind. The drawing he publishes, by George Taylor, is based on the photograph in Delporte (1993a: Fig.174) (Figure 6.13d), and comparison of this illustration (Figure 6.13c) with additional photographs and drawings of the same figure (Figure 6.13a, b) indicates that the arms emerge from under the breast to rest on the abdomen.

### Willendorf

A comparison of descriptions of the Willendorf figure (Figure 5.9) also demonstrates the emphasis of particular features to create a specific image. Powell perceives in the figure “a greater feeling of purpose and contentment...” (Powell 1966: 17). Writing of the Willendorf figure in terms of nurture and contented motherhood, it is stated that, “Willendorf also displays most clearly the arms and hands resting on the breasts, and these, together with the well-marked nipples, make clear the milk-giving attitude of the majority of these figurines. This point leads back to the characteristic pose of the head; for where but downwards does a mother look when nursing her child?” (*ibid*: 16).

Collins and Onians place the Willendorf figure in an entirely different context, linking the “clearly” depicted vulva of the Willendorf figurine with the activity of “love-making”, as it is “the one activity to which the vulva is completely central” (Collins and Onians 1978: 12). Suggesting that the figurine “responds to the palm of the hand” as would a real woman, they support their argument with a claim that the evidence can be found in an examination of the figure itself; “Further analysis of the Willendorf figurine points in the same direction. For those areas of her body which are shown in all their rounded perfection are precisely those which would be most important in the preliminary phases of love-making, that is the belly, buttocks, thighs, breasts and shoulders, while the lower arms, feet and hands are withered to nothing” (Collins and Onians 1978: 12-13).

### Grimaldi l'hermaphrodite

Approaches to the Grimaldi *l'hermaphrodite* (Figure 6.14a) demonstrate further the role of the author in recreating subtle variations of the original archaeological material. The figure was first identified and named by Piette, who saw breasts, an erect penis and – possibly – threads attached to a bag protecting the testicles (Piette 1902: 774). In contrast, Duhard curtly states that, “The so-called Grimaldi ‘*Hermaphrodite*’ is in fact a gracile, pregnant young woman, with the hand positioned to aid expulsion” (Duhard 1991: 557; 1993: Plate VIIIc) (Figure 6.14d). Taylor (1996) devotes a section to the piece, entitled

“The Grimaldi Figure: Masturbator or Hermaphrodite?” and while he discusses the figure at some length, he focuses on only a few features. He describes the figure as “relatively conventional” in the upper half, with “breasts and a bulging belly” (Taylor 1996: 130 and Fig.5.10). (Figure 6.14c) The arms are described as “puzzling”, as they appear to “fall straight from the shoulder, disappear (or are broken off), and reappear at the top of the thighs, then come around so that the hands can cup what appears to be a scrotal sac. Leading up from this low slung lump, a ridge runs up between the arms and ends beneath the belly” (*ibid*: 130). Taylor’s assessment is that the arms do not seem to belong to the upper torso, and that the head of the ‘penis’ is “extremely unclear”. He suggests that it is “equally possible” to see the sculpture as showing “someone else’s hands coming from behind, to insert a dildo into the vagina of the main body” (*ibid*: 130).

Delporte (1993a) draws attention to a number of features that are not noted in the above description. He notes that the head is broken off, that part of the thighs and buttocks are missing, and that the figure had been broken into three parts and stuck back together again. He describes the torso as flat, the hips and buttocks as normal and without steatopygia, and the breasts as normal and only slightly pendent (Delporte 1993a: 105). The stomach is described as voluminous, although without the volumes of *le losange* (Figure 3.16). Delporte views “two triangular reliefs” on the stomach as difficult to interpret, noting the suggestions that they could be hands placed on the stomach or fatty inguinal folds, but finding the central relief unconvincing as a representation of male genitals. He describes the “circular mass” below as “vague”, suggesting it could be a pouch as much as a scrotal sac (*ibid*: 105). In contrast to Taylor, Delporte pays some attention to the back of the statuette, noting the marked contour of the shoulder blades and arch of the lower back. He also notes a group of parallel incisions in this area, which go around the sides of the figure, suggesting that if this depicts a belt, the reliefs on the front face could perhaps be ornamentation (Delporte 1993a: 105).

The figure is differentially described in Ucko and Rosenfeld (1972). They describe the breasts as “small”, with a clear division between them (Ucko &

Rosenfeld 1972: 176). They perceive the stomach as protruding and sharply demarcated, and the “hip bones” as clearly modelled, protruding and pear-shaped. Identifying neither scenes of childbirth nor masturbation, they analytically note a “gently curved rectangular area, extending downwards” to merge with a “rounded protrusion with vertical striations” positioned between the hip bones (*ibid*: 176). Stating that the figure is not clearly either male or female, they pay greater attention to the identification of features that they see as appearing more clearly on the other Grimaldi statuettes; they link the shape of the breasts, and the vertical incisions on the protruding stomach, with the depiction of the breasts and stomach of the *la femme au goût* (Figure 3.11), and see a small hole at the base of the ‘striated protrusion’ in terms of the “deeply incised vulva slits” below the protruding stomachs of *la femme au goût* (Figure 3.11) and *le losange* (Figure 3.16) (*ibid*: 176). The analysis is concluded with the statement that, while they consider *l’hermaphrodite* “provisionally female”, the authors must exclude this figure from their analysis on the grounds that it is not a realistic depiction of a human, and because of the possibility that it contains “a non-representational recombination of elements” found on other figures’ (*ibid*: 176).

It can be seen that each author draws attention to different aspects of the statuette, and subsequent interpretations differ as a result. Taylor’s (1996) interest in the statuette is from a purely sexual angle, and he pays attention only to those areas that may be relevant to such an approach. Similarly, Duhard (1991), as a gynaecologist, perceives the ambiguous details in his most familiar terms, and presents the statuette accordingly in terms of childbirth. Ucko and Rosenfeld (1972), seeking certain and concrete examples for inclusion in their analysis of human representations, can only see the statuette in terms of elements that can be clearly identified elsewhere, and as it fails to conform to their criteria they eventually reject the figure as an unsatisfactory representation. Only Delporte (1993a) provides a rounded appraisal, noting a range of features. Illustrations of this figure similarly emphasise particular aspects, and it could be suggested that the frequent use of drawings (as opposed to photographs) (Figure 6.14b, c, d) to represent this image, rather than allowing features to be presented

in clearer detail, are actually utilised to present supporting evidence for each specific interpretation.

### La Magdeleine

The varied representation of certain figures, in both text and illustration, creates a particular impression of the material, and as noted above, this is also apparent in drawings representing the figures. This can be further demonstrated through examination of representations of the two parietal examples from La Magdeleine (Figures 6.15-18). In these examples, aesthetic judgements can be seen to influence responses to the figures. Sandars declares “astonishment” at the “mastery of perspective and easy freedom of pose with its foreshadowing of classical and Renaissance art...”, enthusing that “We must forget the fat women of Willendorf, Savignano and Gagarino... and think instead of the classical proportions of the Petřkovice torso, the harmony of the Angles-sur-l’Anglin group... a manner which foreshadows the whole train of reclining banqueters and river gods of classical art... points forward to the reclining Aphrodite... or Michelangelo’s ‘Dawn’, and a host of nymphs and Venuses...The right hand figure... would probably remind us more, in her pose of sleepy abandonment, of Bellini’s Demeter in ‘*The Feast of the Gods*’, or a Titian Venus, of whom she is not a discreditable forerunner” (Sandars 1968: 42-43). Often referred to as “reclining” (e.g Guthrie 1979: 63), this term influences initial perceptions of the figures, and some reproductions of these figures incorporate aspects of a more contemporary posture and attitude, reflected in Faris’ perception of them as “sexual” (Faris 1982: 107), and apparent in their reproduction by Pfeiffer (1982: 141) (Figure 6.17a) and particularly Guthrie, who compares them to “two reclining, spread-leg, erotic postures assumed by models in *Playboy* magazine” (Guthrie 1979: 63) (Figure 6.17b). On occasion, close-ups are provided emphasising the pubic triangle of the figures (Giedion 1962: Fig. 108 and drawing) (Figure 6.18). Interestingly, Delporte illustrates the figures as if they are bas-reliefs on blocks, presenting them as devoid of their original parietal context (Delporte 1993a: Figs.33, 34 and drawings) (Figures 6.15a and 6.16a). Drawings of these figures are often provided alongside the photographic image, allowing attention to be drawn to particular features that cannot be established from the photographs alone (Figures 6.15a, b, c and 6.16a, b, c), yet in certain

drawings there is also a tendency to elaborate features that are not clearly visible in photographic reproductions (e.g. Duhard 1993 Plate XXX; Pfeiffer 1982: 141) (Figures 6.15e, 6.16e and 6.17a respectively). The true relationship between these representations of the archaeological material, and the archaeological material itself, remains uncertain.

#### Laussel Double Figure

The Laussel Double Figure (Figure 6.19a) has also been represented and interpreted in different ways, with variation in these presentations related to the identification of particular features in each instance. As in the above example, a drawing of this figure often accompanies the description, to ‘complete the picture’ as it were. The discoverer of the figure, Lalanne, felt that the scene consisted of “...a woman, recognizable by her large, pendulous breasts... The belly is represented by a strong central projection, less strongly marked. The thighs are raised. The arms extend the length of the body and the hands appear to be beneath the lower limbs. The second figure... is in an opposite position but symmetrical... Only the chest is carefully sculptured; the rest of the body disappears beneath that of the woman” (Lalanne: 1911: 258). While Lalanne suggested that the depiction involved the representation of copulation or birth (*ibid*: 258), Levy describes the figure as a woman of “tall” type standing upright, with the “forked beard” of the supposed male head actually being the remains of her legs which end in feet set together (Levy 1948: 60). In this way Levy recreates the figure in terms of the stylistic canon of the Venus figurines, and an illustration reflecting this interpretation (Figure 6.19b) is compared with the Grimaldi *le losange* (*ibid*: Plate VIIc and d) (Figure 6.10a).

Giedion (1960) sees a “riddle” in the relationship of one clearly female figure to the other. He muses that the arms seem “to flow together with those of the male partner, who would seem to lie directly beneath her”, while the legs “may belong to the lower figure” (Giedion 1962: 237), before stating that the “curious interlocking” of the two figures “might just as well be interpreted as an androgynous being” (*ibid*: 238) (Figure 6.16g). Once again, Duhard favours an identification associated with birth, suggesting that, “the feminine subject of the



'Personnages opposés' seems rather slim; this could be a scene of parturition" (Duhard 1991: 559) (Figure 6.16e).

Hunger accuses fellow researchers of a reluctance to interpret the scene as copulation, stating that his belief that the figure has been reproduced in varying ways to support particular interpretations. He asserts that Leroi-Gourhan "felt tempted to tamper with the glyph and 'redraw' the outlines of the copulating pair until he succeeded in converting the composition into an apparently less obnoxious breech delivery" (Hunger, in Bahn 1986: 109) (Figure 6.16f). Taylor, who does not illustrate the scene, cites Hunger, describing the figure as a copulation scene representing "two figures in genital union; they are depicted in mirror image, joined at the groin" (Taylor 1996: 131); Guthrie illustrates the figure as a copulating couple, presenting his version of the original image alongside his "interpretation" (1979: Fig. 18a, b) (Figure 6.19c, d).

There are several factors should be noted. Firstly, the depth of the incised lines around the body shows clearly in the colour photograph, yet this is not as apparent in black and white reproductions, nor is it always acknowledged in the drawings. Even allowing for the weathering of the rock itself, the 'heads' are far less clearly demarcated than the 'body'. Secondly, artistic license is an obvious factor in the drawings, and only that of Leroi-Gourhan (1968: Fig. 287) and Duhard (1993: Plate XX) (Figure 6.19e and f respectively) could be said to resemble each other, although there are also similarities with Guthrie's illustration of the original, if not his "interpretation" (Figure 6.19c and d respectively). Despite Giedion's non-committal assessment of the figure in the text, his drawing seems to show that the lower figure has legs raised and resting on the chest area of the upper figure (Giedion 1962: Fig. 167) (Figure 6.19g). As this is the only option presented to the reader, it ultimately biases any conclusion they may draw.

#### Reconstructions of fragmentary figures

Reconstructions of fragmentary and incomplete figurines also clearly direct the reader toward a particular perception of the material. In Giedion's illustration of Brassempouy *la poire* as a reconstructed figure, the speculative nature of this

enterprise is not made clear, and the aesthetic description accompanying the drawing, in which the figure is described as “singularly graceful”, creates an impression entirely removed from the original artifact (Giedion 1962: 438 and Fig. 287). Although a partial torso and one thigh are all that remain of this figure, Giedion refers to ‘her’ “ripe youthfulness”, opining that, “her breasts, pelvic area and gently curved belly have almost the same kind of plastic beauty as a Maillol statue” (*ibid*: 438) (Figure 6.20a). For comparison, Passemard shows both profile and frontal views of the figure, in both present and reconstructed forms Passemard 1938: Plate I) (Figure 6.20b, c). *La poire* may also be represented in Delporte, where Champion’s placement of Brassempouy *la tête à la capuche* is placed on a reconstructed torso; the torso conforms to the canon in featuring an exaggeration of the breasts, stomach, hips and thighs, and small arms resting on the breasts (Delporte 1993a: Fig.5) (Figure 6.20d). The creation of an image by an author is clear in Klima’s use of the Dolní Věstonice Venus I as a model to recreate a fragmentary find (Figure 6.20e), inevitably overlaying any inherent features with those of the more complete, and well-known figure (Klima 1983: Fig.1 and 2) (Figure 6.20f). My final example brings together several of the points made above; Guthrie’s illustration of the Lespugue figure (Figure 6.20h) shows the image in complete form, with the addition of a marked vulva which is not apparent in the fragmentary original (Figure 6.20g) (Guthrie 1979: Fig. 16c).

In each of the examples cited above, the figures themselves have been in some way embellished as the authors project their own views and beliefs onto the material. The effect of this process is to attribute properties to the figures that are represented as intrinsic elements of the original figures. Ultimately, readers perceive only the author’s impression of the archaeological material, rather than the original material itself. In these instances, the artifact itself is removed from any archaeological context it may have had, and is interpreted solely on the basis on the features that the author identifies. In examples such as the highly sexualised interpretations of Collins and Onians (1978), Guthrie (1979) and Taylor (1996), a new context for the figurines is created, into which the figurines are placed. In Taylor’s interpretation of the Kostenki women in terms of standards of erotic dressing and Guthrie’s presentation of the figures in terms

of erotic poses, it can be seen that this new context is an entirely contemporary one.

### **Conclusions of textual analysis section**

To conclude the textual analysis, I will provide a brief overview of this section of the research and discuss the key issues raised.

#### Overview

The textual analysis section of this thesis set out to examine a number of specific research questions and more general issues relating to the presentation of the Venus figurines in the literature as a coherent category of material, and the subsequent utilisation of the category in this medium. My Introduction identified issues of archaeological context and methodology as key areas for examination. The question underlying this section of my research was Dobres' assertion that the Venus figurines can be studied through an existing body of literature dealing with style and morphology (Dobres 1992a: 250).

Using the two epistemological positions delineated by Tilley (Tilley 1993: 7) as the opposite ends of scale, the textual analysis sought to assess the extent to which the category of Venus figurines is one created and maintained solely in the literature, a medium in which contemporary meanings are then attributed to the figurines. Following on from Tilley's statement, I provided an outline of 'traditional' archaeological practice, with a view to determining whether archaeologists are adhering to the archaeological 'rules' in their treatment of the Venus figurines.

The chapters presenting the results of the textual analysis discussed two of the three themes set out in the Introduction. The first theme focused on the presentation and definition of the category with regard to naming (Chapter 2), chronological attribution and stylistic similarity (Chapter 3).

The second theme set out to demonstrate that the category is maintained through literary practices – the strong characterisation of the figures, the prioritisation of particular features and the prioritisation of homogeneity over diversity (Chapter

4), and the selection of prototypes to represent the category as a whole (Chapter 5). Rosch's (1978) proposal of the operation of proto-typical figures (the most familiar example of the category) as the core around which the category is structured, was considered.

Three case studies then elaborated specific themes (Chapter 6). "The use of the 'lozenge composition'" focused on Leroi-Gourhan's (1968) representation of the stylistic canon, and its impact on the subsequent literature. "The impact of inclusion" provided examples of the variability within the category despite the continued emphasis on stylistic similarity. "Ancient artefacts; contemporary meanings" explored certain of the Venus figurines as the 'end product' of archaeological presentation and interpretation.

#### *Archaeological context and attribution by style*

Chapter 3 demonstrated a lack of secure contextual evidence in the cases of a number of examples central to the category of Venus figurines. Not only is archaeological context lacking in these cases, but even the fact that it is lacking is sometimes difficult to determine from the literature, as many works do not discuss this subject in detail, and certain authors actively ignore or dismiss the problems of the archaeological context of these figurines. In works where this information is discussed (e.g. Delporte 1993a), there is still a willingness to accept the material and continue to utilise it. Despite the discovery of several frauds in more recent years, an unwillingness to tackle questions of context is apparent, and the impression from the texts I have studied is one of avoidance of problems and obstacles that might interfere with the utilisation of these figures as a coherent category. The most important implication of this practice is the removal of the material culture from any archaeological context it may have had.

Certain figures in the category (e.g. Sireuil, Savignano, Moravany, Chiozza and Monpazier) have no archaeological context whatsoever, yet these figures continue to be included in discussions of the Venus figurines. Other examples, such as the Grimaldi figurines and those of Brassempouy, Pechialet and Abri Pataud, have an uncertain stratigraphy to varying degrees. The question of fraud

remains in the case of the Grimaldi figures, and even if genuine, the possible young age of certain of these figures (particularly the *statuette en stéatite jaune*), themselves used frequently in comparisons aimed at the consolidation of the class, raises doubts regarding the reliability of chronological attribution of figures on the basis of this similarity. The key position of these figures in the development of category through time indicates that questions of context must be considered in the definition of the class of Venus figurines.

Archaeological context and chronological attribution give the material credibility and viability as an archaeological category, and in this sense only certain examples of the Venus figurines are credible and viable. The major means of overcoming this problem – attribution on the grounds of stylistic similarity – has also been shown to have an unsound basis, as considerable diversity exists within the individual examples of the category, contemporary figures with different features are not considered, and ‘characteristic’ features also occur outside the period.

#### Homogeneity and diversity

Dobres had claimed that all authors identify stylistic similarity as important in the definition of the material as a class. Attention was therefore paid to the treatment of homogeneity and diversity in the literature with a view to determining whether the classification of the figurines operates under a ‘rule of the same’, whereby homogeneity is prioritised over diversity.

Analysis of the texts shows that authors tend to treat the material as a homogenous group, simultaneously downplaying diversity. In a number of cases, this orientation seems to be related to the author’s hypothesis, particularly in cases where ‘universalising’ interpretations attempt to account for the entire range of material. In such cases, it is a necessary condition that the material forms a stylistically similar group (e.g. Gamble 1982; McDermott 1996). In such works, homogeneity may either be assumed as a pre-condition, supported by reference to previous authors, or diversity will be acknowledged yet accorded no interpretive importance. Once demonstrated, stylistic similarity is invariably related to the provision of one interpretation that may account for all the figures,

rather than attempting to account for any variability. Despite the varied backgrounds to research and the various interpretations provided for the material, it is striking that while social contexts change, most publications studied attempt to account for the figures with one all-encompassing interpretation. Interpretations tend to attempt to account for the class, rather than individual figures, meaning that variant figures are neither explained nor interpreted. Diversity is accorded a lack of significance, with the result that many works focus on only a portion of the class. In certain works, considerable space is devoted to the elaboration of stylistic links, as if the point to be proved is stylistic similarity.

Many authors fail to review the boundaries of the established category despite the evidence for *at least* a degree of diversity amongst those included in the group or potentially affiliated to the group through their possession of the correct chronological attribution. The popular stereotype often representing the class can only be maintained by including figures that have no archaeological provenance, excluding contemporary yet stylistically different figures, and neglecting opportunities for their inclusion and re-assessment of the group.

Despite continued presentation as such, the Venus figurines are not stylistically homogeneous. There is some awareness of this in the texts, and it is ironic that the same texts promoting homogeneity may also provide evidence for diversity. While there is an overall emphasis on female images at the expense of other forms, numerous descriptions within the texts studied have highlighted examples deviating from the standard type, and a range of exceptions have been discussed to counter the claim that the group demonstrates exaggeration of the breasts, buttocks and sexual organs, the neglect of faces, hands, feet, arms, and that the group is generally obese, pregnant or both.

### Prototypes

The category of Venus figurines operates around, and is widely represented by, proto-typical figures, particularly Willendorf. Other familiar examples were determined, and Rosch's (1978) definition was expanded to consider the part

certain individual figurines, and groups of figurines, play within the category. The popularity of the Venus figurines and their role as prototypes for the wider category of Palaeolithic material culture was also noted.

Not only is the category flexible, but the prototypes chosen in each instance may also be flexible. While Willendorf emerges as *the* prototype for the category, others such as Lespugue may be utilised in comparisons, particularly when its individual features are more suited to the object of comparison. This allows extreme flexibility in the operation of the category, and the inclusion of figures demonstrating greater variability – as long as there are points of correspondence with one of the possible prototypes, a new figure may be included on the basis of stylistic similarity.

#### *The creation of the Venus figurines in the literature*

As Tilley presents them, neither position outlined in my Introduction (p. 7-8) truly reflects the intentions or the approaches of the literature studied. However, if one follows Hill And Evans, who stressed that while their “empiricist model” did not accurately describe *any* archaeologist, it was their belief that at a less specific level the model had nevertheless gained a level of acceptance in archaeology (Hill and Evans 1972: 236), it can be seen that the claims made in my Introduction occur to a greater or lesser degree in a number of the texts studied. The category of Venus figurines has become so established that it is a “truth”, it has become *the* type or the *best* type.

A gap between the archaeological material and the interpretation applied to it is clear in some works. The gap is bridged in a number of ways; while certain authors focus only on selected examples, others bridge the gap through the use of what might be termed ‘pseudo-evidence’, an example being the microscopic analysis referred to by Marshack (1991). While it is acknowledged that close examination of the figures potentially allows access to more details, the features identified and their interpretation is still a subjective process. A common factor in interpretations is that details are drawn from the figurines themselves, rather than either their archaeological context or what is surmised of their social context. For some (e.g. Collins and Onians 1978; Faris 1983; McDermott 1996)

the figurines themselves do appear to have an inherent meaning – it is within their features that any answers are sought. McDermott does seek to provide *the* answer and interestingly, the comments in response to his paper reveal others who do this, for example Duhard, who disputes McDermott's 'answer' by reference to his own.

As noted in the previous section dealing with homogeneity, in some cases the interpretation applied can be directly related to the hypothesis of the archaeologist. In certain cases, the evidence is made to fit. This may involve the neglect of certain inappropriate figures, or the prioritisation of suitable figures or features. In some cases the authors describe what it is they hope to see; certain descriptions make the figure in question appropriate for a particular hypothesis and Case Study 3 related the differing presentations of particular examples to the interpretations provided for them in each instance, highlighting both description and interpretation of the figures as processes that to greater or lesser degrees transform the original archaeological material.

The Venus figurines as they are presented in the literature are the 'end product' that results from their description and interpretation in this medium. Certain extreme examples have shown the re-creation of the archaeological material in the literature and I have discussed examples where even basic description of the features of the figurines creates differential impressions. The 'end product' in these instances differs in each case, and bears less resemblance to the original archaeological material. In these examples, I have shown that description is not neutral, and in certain cases the relationship of the 'end product' to the hypothesis has been shown. In these examples, it can be said that the latter position proposed by Tilley is applicable, although this may not have been the intention of the author. It should be noted that Tilley's two positions do not relate to a clear division between processual and post-processual approaches. An example of the latter, Taylor (1996), admits his subjectivity, yet the failing of his interpretation is due to his lack of rigour in examining the original archaeological material, a clear example of 'starting at the top'.



To a certain extent, the representation of Venus figurines as a single class consisting of female images with exaggerated sexual characteristics is one created and defined in the literature. While previous chapters have noted the evidence for diversity, and this diversity is acknowledged in the literature, for many this stereotype is still the 'end product' produced in the literature. It is the Venus figurines as 'end product' that is taken forward the next stage of my analysis, which will take up the themes of context and utilisation in respect of this material, in a chapter that explores the adoption of the figurines for various purposes in a much wider arena.

*Can the Venus figurines be studied through the existing literature?*

The textual analysis section has presented a number of problems with the presentation of the Venus figurines in the literature. Despite this, Dobres' claim (Dobres 1992a: 250) that the Venus figurines can be discussed through an existing body of literature dealing with style and morphology is true in the strict sense, as the emphasis in many works is on description of the figurines. However, there were difficulties resolving issues of context through the literature studied; even when a site and its industry are noted the precise find-spot and archaeological context of the figure may not be, and figures are not always placed in the context of the site that has produced them. Furthermore, an interpretation of those figures without archaeological context effectively places the archaeologist in the latter of the two positions proposed in Tilley's statement – no original meaning can be recovered and everything must be created solely in the texts, as there is no original context to relate to.

The literature has been shown to be conflicting in respect of issues of context and also with regard to the diversity apparent within the category, and therefore cannot be taken at face value. However, the fact that I have shown evidence for diversity drawn from the same texts that promote homogeneity, indicates that the figurines may be studied through the literature if one proceeds with an emphasis on re-evaluation rather than acceptance of the category.

*The present standing of the Venus figurines*

The present standing of the category is to be still strongly presented as a single class of stylistically similar female figurines, invariably associated with the Venus terminology. Despite this, it can be seen that there have been various constructions of the Venus figurines in the literature. Not all authors include the same figures in their class of material (e.g. the ambiguous position of the Siberian figures, which have recently been re-introduced to the class and attempts made to re-affirm their similarities to the European material), nor do all agree on the identification of some figures as male, female or sexless. While the category has expanded to admit new figures over the last 100 or so years, the Venus label is still regularly applied, the prototype images have remained constant, and a core number of figures and their characteristics are still the standard against which others are judged. The Venus figurines label, used for convenience, creates its own impression of the material, and is tied to the stereotype that it evokes. The degree of acceptance of the category is indicated by the lack of re-evaluation of the existing category. The 'end product' in many works is still a stylistically similar class of female figurines with a shared meaning and dated to the Upper Palaeolithic period.

My analysis of the literature supports Dobres' assertion that claims of the restricted chronological appearance, stylistic similarity (with sexual attributes emphasized at the expense of hands, feet, and facial features) and widespread distribution of the Venus figurines are made by virtually all researchers (Dobres 1992a: 12), and the frequent repetition of these claims is fundamental in the formation of an impression of group homogeneity. I have drawn evidence from the literature that counters each claim. The strong relationship between stylistic similarity and chronological attribution has been examined. Distribution is obviously determined by the first two claims, as figures deemed stylistically similar and chronologically relevant are then identified across a wide area. As the claims are therefore dependent upon one another, problems arising in one area must necessarily affect the accuracy of the claims made for the other two. The distribution and characterisation of the category changes if chronologically insecure figures are removed. The claim that the vast majority of the female figurines are female, with the significant opposition being between female

figurines and those with no representation of sex (Davidson 1997: 144) is based on the inclusion of figurines without archaeological context. The distinction becomes far less apparent when these are removed from analysis, and the question still remains of the relationship of the Venus figurines to other contemporary figurines.

Leaving aside questions of archaeological context, generalisation from selected examples across the wider category of Venus figurines is not sustainable in view of the diversity of its constituent members. Taking the questions raised concerning many of the French and Italian examples into consideration, it is only the Central European and Russian examples that display degrees of homogeneity, although the links are stronger within the two groups than between them. Indeed, such is the established and accepted nature of the category, with the French and Italian examples placed so prominently within it, that re-formulation of the category without them is almost unimaginable. The category of Venus figures would appear disparate were it not for the Willendorf figure forming a stylistic link between the Central European examples and the Russian figures. Similarly, substitute Willendorf 2 for Willendorf 1 and the link cannot be made, leaving the Central European and Russian figures as entirely separate phenomena. Here the prioritisation of Willendorf 1 is clear, as although both Willendorf 1 and 2 are figurines with a secure archaeological context, only Willendorf 1 is utilised in such comparisons.

Ways forward in the light of this analysis will be discussed in my Conclusions (Chapter 8), after presentation of the analysis of the WWW.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE VENUS FIGURINES IN CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT: THE WORLD WIDE WEB

#### **Introduction**

The inclusion of the Venus figurines in literary works outside the purely academic – from ‘popular archaeology’ publications such as Taylor (1996) to works concerned with “the Goddess” (Baring & Cashford: 1991) – in conjunction with the examples of popular culture references to Willendorf noted in my Introduction, has indicated that this material has considerable appeal to an audience beyond the discipline of archaeology.

To explore and further examine this appeal, an examination was undertaken of references to the figurines on the Internet or World Wide Web (WWW). This medium was chosen as one that encompasses personal, business and academic use, and allows access to a broad cross section of society comprising individuals, retailers, private companies, universities and organisations. For this reason, analysis of the WWW is the most immediate and convenient way to access a range of perspectives on the material, as use of the Internet is restricted only by the practical considerations of access to a computer and modem. Most importantly, the WWW serves as a forum where people from all walks of life place the ideas of importance to them on display for others to share.

An analysis of the Venus figurines in this predominantly non-academic context enables assessment of wider views of and approaches to them, thus providing insight into how the world beyond the strictly academic perceives and incorporates into contemporary life that which is still ultimately conceived of as ‘archaeological material’.

To investigate these ‘popular’ approaches to the archaeological material, the analysis focused on a number of issues. As the term Venus has persisted in archaeological usage despite reference to it as a misleading and inaccurate term (see Chapter 2, p. 47), my initial analysis sought to determine the extent to

which the term has permeated and become accepted in popular culture. Following on from this, the investigation explored the ways in which the figures are presented and utilised, the meanings that are created both from and for them, and the relationship of these meanings to wider trends in contemporary thought. The ultimate aim was to identify and explore any parallels between the utilisation of the figurines in this medium and approaches to them in archaeology.

### **Researching on the World Wide Web**

Access to relevant sites on the WWW was provided through use of a search engine to locate sites corresponding to the words or phrase entered. The search engine records the total number of sites found and these results or 'hits' are displayed as a list of sites, links to which may then be selected to access the sites themselves.

It should be noted that an Internet search is not a precise tool in that the results listed will not remain constant from day from day. Specifically, the total number of sites will change through time, as new sites appear and existing sites are amended or removed, with the result that there may be slight variations in the sites listed on each occasion a search is conducted. It should also be acknowledged that certain sites appearing in the list of results may become no longer accessible, most frequently due to changes in the site address, or removal of the web page altogether. To take these factors into account, the list of sites presented is numbered as it occurred on the most recent date when a search was conducted.

### **The Searches Conducted**

Searches were undertaken using the *Google* search engine (Google.com), and the findings presented are as they appeared on 6<sup>th</sup> March, 2002.

Searches were undertaken on various permutations of the Venus phraseology – “Venus figurines”, “Palaeolithic Venus figurines”, “Palaeolithic Venuses”, “Venuses” – and also on a number of individual figures with the epithet “Venus of ...” attached. The individual Venus figures chosen for analysis comprised

those listed as “Venus figurines” in the works of Absolon (1949), Gamble (1982), and McDermott (1996). The find from Galgenberg, although specifically discounted by McDermott, was also included on the grounds that a number of authors refer to the figure as “Venus” (Delporte 1993a; Taylor 1996). A number of parietal examples were included in the search for the same reason. The name of each figure was entered without the addition of italics or accents (e.g. “Venus of Dolni Vestonice”, “Venus Impudique”).

Two types of search were undertaken – general and advanced. When conducting a general search for a combination of words such as “Venus figurines”, the search engine will simply look for sites that contain both words, separately rather than together. A general search for “Venus of Willendorf” will therefore locate all examples containing the words “Venus” and “Willendorf”, without them necessarily occurring consecutively on the page. A drawback of this method is that the lack of definite relationship between the two words may result in the location of irrelevant combinations of the two words. Such examples will be discussed below.

To further investigate the occurrence of the Venus terminology, an advanced search was also undertaken, specifying that the relevant phrase be searched for in exact word order only. Therefore, instead of locating sites on the simple criteria that they contain the words “Venus” and “Willendorf” either together or separately in the text, the search engine will locate only those examples containing the exact phrase “Venus of Willendorf”.

A final group of searches were undertaken to provide comparative material against which the results of the above searches could be assessed. Similar searches were therefore conducted on a further form of archaeological material, in this instance the category termed “Stone Circles”. The results will be discussed in the section “Comparative Analysis”, after presentation of the results of the Venus phraseology searches.

## Initial Search Results

Table 7.1 lists the results of the searches on the various forms of the Venus terminology.

Of the generic labels, “Venus figurines” is the most commonly used combination, with 4,530 hits located by the general search, and 801 by the advanced. For the individual figures, the general search produced high totals for the association of “Venus” with Willendorf, Grimaldi, Menton, Malta, Brno, Pavlov, Weinberg, and Mauern. However, as only “Venus of Willendorf” produced any quantity of hits (2,620) in response to the advanced search, an initial review of the results of these general searches was undertaken to determine the accuracy of the search.

Each search produces a list of sites, and for each search either the first 10%, or the first 100 sites were examined in the order in which they were listed in the search results. Examination of the first 10% (155) of the sites produced by the “Venus of Grimaldi” general search indicated that only 42 of the 155 (27.1%) actually referred to the figures. The majority of the unrelated sites are concerned with astronomy, with the site located on the association of the *Crater Grimaldi* and the planet Venus [[www.sfo.com/~parvin/skywatching.html](http://www.sfo.com/~parvin/skywatching.html)]. Others link the pantomime clown Joseph Grimaldi with the “ballet-pantomime” “*The loves of Mars and Venus*” in sites discussing the history of pantomime [[www.btinternet.com/~nigel.ellacott/history.html](http://www.btinternet.com/~nigel.ellacott/history.html)]. Of the initial 42 relevant sites identified, 30 were located within the first sixty sites listed and only 12 appeared in the remaining 75. This indicates that a percentage of 27.1 could not be expected to be maintained across the remainder of the results.

As the Grimaldi site is known by several names, an additional search was made, however, the “Venus of Menton” search resulted in only 12 of the first 100 sites located being relevant to an analysis of the figurines. The first 100 sites were sampled for “Venus of Malta”. Within this sample, no relevant sites were identified, as all figurine references concerned the Venus from Hagar Qim, Malta. To compensate for this, the specification “Siberia” was added and the search conducted again. A total of 208 sites were located, of which only 18

dealt with the Siberian figurines. The “Venus of Bouret” search produced 171 hits in total, of which only 8 were relevant. The 10% sample of the “Venus of Pavlov” results produced only 14 relevant hits, again due to a strong association of correspondingly named researchers and the planet Venus. The first 100 hits located for “Venus of Weinberg” [Mauern] were examined, determining that no relevant sites had been found. The 10% sample of the results of the “Venus of Mauern” search produced only one relevant hit. The 10% sample of the sites listed for “Venus of Brno” produced only 2 relevant hits, with a far greater number referring to other Venus figurines at the Brno museum. As a result of this preliminary examination, the totals for the “Venus of Grimaldi”, “Venus of Menton”, “Venus of Malta”, “Venus of Malta, Siberia”, “Venus of Bouret”, “Venus of Pavlov”, “Venus of Weinberg”, “Venus of Mauern” and “Venus of Brno” figures were discounted, and no further examination of these sites was undertaken.

Examination of the results for the “Venus impudique” and “Venus of La Magdeleine” searches also led to their being discounted from this analysis. A sample of the first 10% of the “Venus impudique” results produced only 11 relevant hits. Similarly, the first 10% of the sites located for “Venus of La Magdeleine” contained only 2 relevant hits.

The greatest number of hits was produced for the “Venus of Willendorf”. The sheer quantity of sites located for “Venus of Willendorf” in comparison to other sites – 4,020 compared with only 412 for the next highest, “Venus of Laussel” – immediately confirms its position as *the* prototype figure, and it is notable that “Venus of Willendorf” has only 500 fewer hits than “Venus figurines”.

The widespread occurrence of the label “Venus of Willendorf” is confirmed by the advanced search, in which a high quantity of hits (over 50% of the general search total of 4020) again appears. Willendorf is the only figure for which this occurs. This substantial number contrasts sharply with the majority of figures, which registered few or no hits from the advanced search. The advanced search for the group label “Venus figurines” brings up less than a quarter of the



original total. This indicates that the Venus label is most strongly associated with the Willendorf figure.

### **Data Analysis**

To examine the incidences of references to the figures on the World Wide Web in more detail, the four searches that had registered the greatest number of relevant hits - “Venus of Willendorf”, “Venus of Laussel”, “Venus of Lespugue” and “Venus of Dolni Vestonice” – were chosen for detailed analysis. As previously noted, with the searches for “Venus impudique”, “Venus of Malta, Siberia”, and the “Venus of La Magdeleine” discounted, the highest number of sites are those for the “Venus” of Willendorf, Laussel, Lespugue, and Dolní Věstonice.

It must be noted at this stage that, although each of these *archaeological* sites apart from Lespugue has produced more than one figure, examination of *WWW* sites indicated that attention was focused almost exclusively upon one figure from each archaeological site – Willendorf figure 1, the Laussel *la femme à la corne* and the Dolní Věstonice Venus I. It is these figures that will be referred to in the analysis below.

### Sample size

A sample of 10% of the results for each search was taken, with the first 10% listed examined for each figure as before. Therefore, from the total of 4,020 for the “Venus of Willendorf”, the first 402 sites listed were examined; for “Venus of Laussel” the first 41 sites from 412, for “Venus of Lespugue” 25 sites from 254, and for “Venus of Dolni Vestonice” 20 from 197.

### Categorization of site type

Each site accessed was assessed and categorised according to one of a number of ‘types’. The aim of this categorisation is to highlight differences in the contexts of the various references to the figures. Sites were divided into the following types:

<b>I</b>	<b>(Information)</b> University and academic sites, Tourist sites, Museum sites, Journals, Galleries containing details or discussion of the figures.
<b>RV</b>	<b>(Retail Venus)</b> Sites retailing images and reproductions of the figures
<b>RO</b>	<b>(Retail Other)</b> Other retail sites e.g. sites retailing videos or music
<b>NWA</b>	<b>(New Age)</b> Goddess, Pagan, Wicca, Occult, Spiritualist
<b>O</b>	<b>(Organisations)</b> Mainly politically oriented
<b>FM</b>	<b>(Feminist)</b> Sites strongly oriented towards feminism and female empowerment
<b>ART</b>	<b>(Artists)</b> Artists whose work is related to the figures in some way Predominantly sculpture or painting, but also includes literature and music
<b>MS</b>	<b>(Miscellaneous)</b> Personal homepages and private companies, where reference to the figures occurs in an unorthodox context
<b>R</b>	<b>(Resources)</b> Links pages, directories and search engines
<b>D</b>	<b>(Duplicate)</b> Sites appearing more than once in the search results
<b>N/A</b>	<b>(No Access)</b> No access to site or unable to access site

Several points regarding this system of classification should be noted.

It is appreciated that any classificatory system will lead to a certain amount of generalisation. To avoid this where possible, individual examples will be discussed. It is also acknowledged that any categorisation is restrictive and artificial, and the overlap occurring between types will be noted. A page classified as New Age (NWA) may also contain strong feminist sentiment (FM) for example, and an organisation (O) may also provide retail goods (RV/RO). The categories are not intended to be mutually exclusive, and attention will be drawn to examples of overlap throughout the discussion below. It is appreciated that other forms of categorisation would be equally valid, and this system is simply utilised as an analytical tool to facilitate discussion and presentation of the sites. Themes that run through the various categories will be identified and discussed as part of the analysis.

## Results: Analysis of the Sites

Tables 7.2 to 7.9 summarise the types of site occurring for each search/figure. For each figure, the first table contains the totals for all categories, the second shows the totals with non-occurring types and types D, R and N/A removed.

Information (I) sites are the most common in all cases (with the exception of the “Venus of Laussel”), and Retail Venus (RV) the second most common. In the case of Laussel, this occurrence is reversed. It is immediately apparent that the “Venus of Willendorf” results feature the broadest range of sites, with the “Venus of Dolni Vestonice” the most limited.

Details of the sites examined for each search are shown in Tables 7.10, 7.11, 7.12, and 7.13. The information listed for each site is as follows: Site address; name of site and page (where relevant); details of the reference to the figure; type of site. References to and citation of the individual sites mentioned in the discussion will be acknowledged through placement of the number with which they correspond on the relevant results list, inside squared brackets e.g. [21]. Captions accompanying illustrations will also contain the site number within squared brackets rather than the name of the site. Sites pertaining to the “Venus of Willendorf” searches will be denoted by the number alone; to avoid confusion in the cases of the other figures, the site number will be prefixed by LA (“Venus of Laussel”), LE (“Venus of Lespugue”) or DV (“Venus of Dolni Vestonice”).

I will now discuss the sites located with reference to each figure, beginning with Willendorf.

### “Venus of Willendorf”

The large number of search hits for the “Venus of Willendorf” demands that the nature of the content of these sites be discussed in some detail.

#### *Information (I) sites*

Academic sites predominate in this category (23 in total. See, for example, 12, 187, 380). The most detailed discussion of Willendorf occurs in [2: Sweet Briar

College, Virginia site, *Women in Prehistory* page], which incorporates analysis of both the figure itself and its enduring appeal. The implications of its naming are also considered. The exceptional nature of this site is demonstrated by the fact that several sites provide a link to this article (twelve in all). Many sites providing information in relation to a wide range of subjects refer to Willendorf in the context of “Prehistoric Art” [e.g. 26, 33, 125]. There are also a number of entries in encyclopaedias [5, 13], and reference to Willendorf may be found in the web pages of galleries, museums and exhibitions [7, 9, 158]. The depth of discussion and quantity of information varies, with the some providing only a photograph and brief details [64].

There is a tendency in some sites to refer to Willendorf as a fertility figure or goddess, or to interpret in relation to fertility. There is strong identification of the figure as an “icon of fertility” [227: Leftover Magic, Humanities Page], a “fertility symbol carried by the male hunter/gatherer as a reminder of his mate back home” [241: Pasadena City College], and with “fecundity or maternity” [64: Artechistoria]. The North Park University, Chicago site [6] presents three interpretations of the figure’s significance as “suggested by archaeologists”; that it was a “Venus figure” or “Goddess” used as a symbol of fertility; that it was a “good luck charm” carried by male hunters to remind them of their mate at home; that it was a “mother goddess”.

A broader discussion of the figure occurs in the number of newspaper and television channel websites that appear within this category. In each case, reference to Willendorf occurs in reports of the Olga Soffer *et al* (2000) analysis of the clothing of figurines. Articles occur in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette [122], the ABC News website [207], Discovery Channel’s Canadian website [321], and in the academic journal Scientific American [378]. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln site posts an article taken from the New York Times [185] entitled “Furs for the Evening” by Natalie Angier, and an article in the Liguria Palaeolithic Art Magazine also discusses the figures in the context of clothing [91] (“Clothing in the Venuses of Liguria, Austria and Mexico” by Pietro Gaietto).

The Willendorf figure is also noted in the context of tourist and geographic information [16, 38, 90, 356]. These sites promote the link between the figure and the country of its discovery, with *Das Land Niederösterreich* [16] in particular referring to Willendorf in the context of a “National Symbol” [16].

Certain sites place Willendorf in a different frame of reference. Don’s Maps [11] includes the figure on a site intended to provide information relevant to the Earth’s Children series of books by Jean Auel. An article “Venus, from fertility goddess to sales promoter” from the graphic design pages of Kansas State University [318], places the Willendorf figure in a discussion of the utilisation of “the Venus” in socio-cultural history of advertising.

Although the majority of these sites provide information *about* Willendorf, certain examples demonstrate the utilisation of the Willendorf image. This occurs in a series of sites presenting and discussing experiments in quantum cryptography at the University of Vienna [80, 351, 396]. The process described is itself concerned with the transmission of an encrypted image, and the image chosen for transmission was that of Willendorf.

Other sites refer to the Willendorf figure in the context of articles discussing obesity and physical appearance [99, 153, 197, 393]. The Ancient Times page of the Media Awareness Network website [393] describes Willendorf as representing “the ideal beauty around 15,000BC”, adding that although she would be considered fat today, “in her time, her large breasts and hips were considered very attractive”. The Megareview journal article “Spring, Summer ... time to go on a diet?” by Anna Rita Mazzoli [197] also refers to Willendorf as a positive role model, stating that although she would be considered overweight today, “the beauty of its rounded forms helps us forget our present day obsession with having a slim figure at all costs”. However, an opposing viewpoint appears in two further articles. “Bulldging through history” by Dawn Debili [99] is a paper highly critical of the “culture of fat acceptance”. Citing and illustrating Willendorf as the example of early art works, the paper interprets these works as symbolic rather than realistic representations, therefore dismissing Willendorf as evidence for obesity in prehistory. A similar view is

presented in “Excessive Obesity in the Modern World” by Sam Twining [153]. The paper begins with a presentation of the physical attributes of the Willendorf figure, going on to state that “modern “iconodiagnostics” who believe that such representations are naturalistic enough to state that excessive obesity existed in the prehistoric period, are very probably wrong”.

#### *Retail Venus (RV) sites*

In these sites, images of the Willendorf figure are transformed into a variety of products for sale. Willendorf variously appears in the form of a statue with base [14, 18, 42 (Figure 7.1), 57, 201 (Figure 7.2), 217, 302 (Figure 7.3), 392 (Figure 7.4), 253, 148, 32], a statue without a base [25, 54] (Figure 7.5), 307], and a statue with a detachable base [74, 172, 196 (Figure 7.6), 220]. The figure appears in pendant form [19, 28 ((Figure 7.7), 74, 75, 173 (Figure 7.8), 175 (Figure 7.9), 257 (Figure 7.10), 282, 289], in bead form [71], as earrings [265] and as a component of anklets [316], bracelets [345], and a necklace [167]. Pendants are combined with incense and the appropriate paraphernalia to form Goddess Ritual Kits [322] and Goddess Meditation Kits [62], and a Willendorf statue is included in the “Teaching About World Religions Kit” [247].

A number of sites offer “Venus of Willendorf” soap molds [101 (Figure 7.11), 102, 104, 189, 192, 367], and Willendorf soap is available in lavender, rose, tea tree, bay rum, lime, and sweet almond scents [30]. The Willendorf figure is recreated as sparkling gold transparent soap with citrus oils [86], as a two soap basket with west coast ocean breeze scent [83] (Figures 7.12, 7.13), in marmalade form [115] (Figure 7.14) and with embedded charms, beads and amethyst, hematite and quartz touchstones [165]. There are “Venus of Willendorf” candles [105 (Figure 7.15), 341] and incense burners [35], a Willendorf Rubber Stamp [63], a Willendorf key chain [232] (Figure 7.16), a Willendorf magnet [265] and a “Love Letter to the Venus of Willendorf” [132]. The Willendorf image appears on bowls [242] and ritual glassware [282, 77], and as a glass paperweight [282] (Figure 7.17).

Finally, using the original archaeological figure as a model, Willendorf is transformed into a “Modern Venus of Willendorf” [35], into new styles named

“Earth Mother” [323] (Figure 7.18], “Artistic Goddess” (Figure 7.19) and “Radiant Venus” [323] (Figures 7.20), and into the “Lounging Venus of Willendorf Ceremonium” (Table Top Altar) complete with tea light candle, incense stick and folded prayer or offering [35]. As the title suggests, The “Lounging Venus of Willendorf” Ceremonium” [35] (Figure 7.21) has the figure reclining on its side with one arm under its head for support. Mandarava [35] transforms the Willendorf image into a streamlined “Modern Venus of Willendorf” sculpture in various finishes (including Ancient Copper, Egyptian Bronze [35] (Figure 7.22), Cosmic Dreams [35] (Figure 7.23) and Classic White).

The Goddess of Willendorf Figurines website [323] presents variations on the theme of Willendorf, inspired by “the ancient earth mother Venus of Willendorf”. Three styles are available – “Earth Mother”, “Artistic Goddess” and “Radiant Venus” – in a spectrum of colours including Indian Red and Yellow Oxide, and the figures are available with or without the addition of a spiral design on the stomach.

Arachne [71] offers a number of figurines influenced by Willendorf. The “Wooden Goddess” [71] (Figure 7.24), “Salt Glazed Goddess”, “Original Goddess in red clay” [71] (Figure 7.25), along with a selection of beads and pendants [71] (Figure 7.26), echo the original in posture, hairstyle, body shape and the placement of the arms.

The Willendorf statuettes provided by Archetypes [313] (Figure 7.27) show a smoother, streamlined version of the original with little detail. In contrast, the Spirit’s Path [385] (Figure 7.28) Willendorf statue clearly follows the original in hairstyle, arm position and body shape in the abdomen and thigh area, while deviating strongly from the original in featuring straight legs placed apart (to allow the figure to stand).

A selection of pendants each show slight differences in the rendering of the figure [28, 71 (Figure 7.29), 75 (Figure 7.30), 77 (Figure 7.31), 78 (Figure 7.32), 173, 174, 257, 281 (Figure 7.33), 282, 326 (Figure 7.34)], while

acknowledging Willendorf as the model. Lunamyst's more angular "Venus of Willendorf" beeswax candles, in contrast, recall the Palaeolithic Willendorf figure only in the most general sense [105]. Only the shared name identifies the contemporary product with the archaeological original.

The context of certain retail pages containing Willendorf images is worthy of note. The Attachment Parenting site [326] provides advice on creating a "close, loving and understanding relationship with your child". The retail section includes "Fertility Love Charm Pendants", a fertility figure inspired by the "Venus of Willendorf", with a suggested appeal to those hoping to conceive, are already pregnant or in labour. This site, which would be categorised as "Miscellaneous" (MS), were it not for its reference to Willendorf being so specifically related to a retail product, is indicative of sites overlapping between categories. Arachne's work, displayed on The Hawkdancing Studio site [71] is difficult to place between the "Retail Venus" (RV) and "Art" (ART) categories, as the works are all hand made. In addition to products for sale, it also displays Arachne's "Sacred Remembering" medicine wheel with a Willendorf image at the centre [71] (Figure 7.35), pointing out that this image was used on the cover of *The Seven Daughters of Eve* by Brian Sykes, a work of non-fiction proposing that European ancestry can be traced back to one of seven women.

The *FAT!SO?* site [100], as a political organisation campaigning for "Fat Acceptance" (with a motto "For people who don't apologise for their size"), yet also featuring a retail gifts page, is a clear overlap between categories RV and O. Displayed there is a *FAT!SO?* t-shirt in which "the Venus of Willendorf wears her black leather biker jacket" [100] (Figure 7.36), and a Willendorf paper doll book, containing a cardboard doll, 13 "glam outfits and a scenic backdrop" [100] (Figure 7.37). In this site, the Willendorf image is not only transformed and placed in a contemporary context with contemporary outfits, but she is also associated with a political message – the Venus of Willendorf does not apologise for her size. As a well-known "Fat" image, Willendorf becomes a role model. In this instance, re-interpretation of the figure, and its utilisation, are made explicit.



The association of Willendorf with such strong political and/or personal messages occurs in several other retail sites. Mandarava [35] promotes the figure as representing “powerful, uncompromising femininity – highly sexual and fertile”, “the power of the ego-less female, whose power is used to create and sustain life”. The Hawkdancing studio [71] describes the figure in terms of personal empowerment, development and awareness, as being “about empowerment, about the sacredness of being woman...as having everything to do with Self-love and the ability for Self-acceptance/forgiveness. I associate her with Protection and Abundance; feelings of security; and with the healing that only comes from being your own Sacred Mother”. In certain sites a clear factor in the presentation of the product is its association with a positive female body image. The By Goddess! site [110] provides products that “empower through women-positive imagery”. The site features a “Venus of Willendorf Gallery of Beauty” containing “validating images of women’s bodies that include larger and fat women”, the aim of which is to overcome self-hatred, body hatred, and weight slavery to “help you to love your body just the way it is”. The retail pages of “Beautiful Roundness” [398] similarly state that their products aim to help women appreciate their own bodies and to ignore social pressures to lose weight. The site offers a “Venus of Willendorf” statue, “with a poem to help for self-esteem”. The Wacky Jac site [115] provides a marmalade soap in the image of Willendorf. Willendorf is described as a “goddess statue”, whose exaggerated body parts are viewed as representing “the appreciation of the true female form” and “female power, undaunted by what our society deems to be beautiful and refined”. The site notifies its readers that a donation from each sale is given to the About Face organisation, which works to combat negative and distorted images of women.

The predominant association of the Willendorf figure on the RV sites is with *the* goddess or as *a* goddess. The “Venus of Willendorf”, as she is invariably referred to, is frequently listed as a “Goddess statuette”, and many of the sites strongly identify the image as, or with, “the goddess”.

Willendorf often appears as one of a number of “goddesses” on offer, ranging from the Nile River Goddess, the Minoan snake Goddess, and Ishtar [14], to

Rhiannon, Morrigan, Artemis, and Aphrodite [172]. Willendorf is variously identified. She is deemed as the representation of “the earth and its fertility and continuation of life, the Mother Goddess, the universal female principle” [14: Heidelberg Editions International; also 172,], and as “the primal Mother Goddess” representing “abundance and stability of earth” [18: Beyond the Rainbow]. Beginning with an invitation to “Call upon your first Grandmother”, the Ancient Circles site [19] promotes Willendorf as the “Divine Ancestress, the Clan Mother, a symbol of the Bounty of Nature, Our Lady of Abundance: a dramatic portrayal of female power to provide and procreate”. The Goddess House [25] refers to the “first Goddess of Creation, the Earth Goddess” embodying the earth, the symbol for “harmony and peace”, “the Mother of all living things”. Labyrinth Work [28] identifies their Willendorf pendant with “Life Giving Powers”, describing the original as “the Great Palaeolithic Fertility Goddess”. She is “Mother Earth”, “Gaia, the Great Nurturer” [57: Medieval Mayhem], the “symbol for the eternal woman” [317: Gypsy Silver], and “the symbol of life itself, and the creative side of womanhood” [174: Sandi’s Boutique]. To some, she is simply “the Goddess of Willendorf” [196: the Goddess Gallery], and to Mandarava [35], “the Great Goddess of Willendorf”. A frequent feature is an emphasis of Willendorf as the *first* or oldest goddess or religious icon [25, 57, 74, 75, 217, 265, 312, 317].

The significance of these sites is not simply in what products are offered for sale, but the manner in which these products are marketed and sold, in their presentation of and the claims made for Willendorf. Is the strong association with the goddess an exploitative and commercial selling point based on the identification of a target market to whom the symbol will appeal, or simply a reflection and indication of the power and appeal of the Willendorf figure? The “sales pitch” is made explicit by West Coast Designer Soaps [83], who suggest that a fertility idol and goddess of love and beauty [Willendorf] is “a great gift for pregnant and expecting mothers”. Glisco’s retail page [75] attracts potential customers with the slogan “Jewellery for empowered women”. On another level, these indications suggest that a Willendorf goddess soap is not simply a bar of soap, as the Willendorf image brings with it a set of associations and meanings and at the very least, potential customers are encouraged to identify

with what is both promoted and perceived as a positive image. It is clear that the association of the Willendorf 'label' with a product is an important promotional factor, perhaps precisely because of these associations.

Despite this wide range, the products offered can be divided stylistically into two basic types. These two types can be identified as those that *replicate* the Willendorf figure with a degree of accuracy (although it could be suggested that, as many place the figure on a base or support absent from the original, even these show strong deviation from the model), and those that offer a *re-interpretation* based on aspects of the Willendorf figure.

There are many examples from sites that replicate the original Willendorf image although, as noted above, it should be remembered that even this replication involves the re-making in new media, materials and colours.

#### *Retail Other (RO) sites*

A small number of retail outlets offer products that include only a brief reference to the Willendorf figure. These include Ambrose Video [374], who offer scenes made for television series entitled "*The Nude*" on video; several sites offering art works for sale (not Willendorf images) [394, 211]; Amazon books [275], whose site makes passing reference to the Willendorf figure only in comments accompanying the "*Complete Idiot's Guide to Wicca and Witchcraft*"; and a wine company [Freie Weingartner Wachau: 222], which includes the Willendorf figure in a time-chart of the area in which their wine is produced.

#### *New Age (NWA) sites*

The RV category has included examples strongly associating the Willendorf figure with "the goddess". The NWA category contains sites in which the reference to Willendorf is made purely in terms of this association. Willendorf is often referred to as the oldest, the first, the most famous [196, 217, 67, 75, 265] and the earliest incarnation of the goddess [19]. The Blue Planet site [67], names Willendorf as "the most ancient piece of evidence which has been found, dedicated to the goddess". This mother goddess, "worshipped by our ancestors"

is seen as symbolising fertility, maternity and generosity. The site is concerned with the protecting the environment, and the Mother Goddess is linked with this interest in, and preservation of, the environment.

Missgien.com [133] identifies Willendorf as “the Mother Goddess”, and MotherGoddess.com [88] lists the “Venus of Willendorf” as the “Great Goddess of the Old Stone Age and Palaeolithic Fertile Mother”. Kathy Jones’ “The Goddess in Glastonbury” [360] identifies Glastonbury as the “Isle of Avalon”, home to the goddess who is represented in the surrounding landscape, with Willendorf mentioned as an early example of the “Birth-Giving Goddess”. WHUUPS, the Web Home for Unitarian Universalists and Pagans [213] refers to Willendorf as a symbol of fertility and abundance on pages discussing pagan rituals to increase fertility.

The Spiral Goddess page [15] describes Willendorf as “the Great Mother Goddess, full and bountiful” representing “prosperity, security and the sacred powers of feminine divinity”. The author urges both male and female readers to “celebrate the goddess” as “an affirmation of your life, the planet, your heritage, and the future”.

The Hobs Green “The Temple of the Goddess” site [73] discusses Willendorf, “the Mother Goddess, fertility of the earth, the essence of life, the mother of creativity”, in an “image shrine” to the goddess [73] (Figure 7.38). An image of Willendorf appears as part of the page title logo, and it is the only figure discussed. The page discusses the author’s reappraisal of the Willendorf figure in the light of her interest in paganism, and she reinterprets the figure in the light of her own experience, seeing the figure as “representative of the spiritual needs and forces that drive and empower us”, a “symbolic representation of the feminine”.

As occurred in a number of RV sites, these sites associate Willendorf - the symbol and representative of the Goddess – with wider contemporary issues relating to female empowerment and the environment.

The GATE (Global Awareness through Experience, sponsored by the Franciscan Sisters of La Crosse, Wisconsin) website [356] offers a series of “Goddess Gate” tours, including the Goddess Gate Eastern Europe, which includes reference to Willendorf as one of the earliest goddess images. The tour is intended to “visit the sacred places of the Ancient Mothers in a feminist context”, and to integrate “women’s spiritual quest with goddess mythology”.

The Willendorf figure is strongly featured in sites concerned with the “Goddess 2000” project. The aim of the project is to put “A Goddess on every block” with public display of goddess images to greet the millennium, [98: Moonbeams and Pixie Dust]. One such goddess image is Marewindrider’s “Venus of Willendorf” dolls [130] (Figure 7.39) (see discussion under ART sites). Graphics for the project appear on the official Goddess 2000 site [262], including an animated “Venus of Willendorf” clip in which the figure moves backwards and forwards. One of the graphics associates images of Willendorf with the caption “Once Long Ago, We knew the Great Mother, Re-member her now, She has returned” [262] (Figure 7.40), highlighting both the strong identification of Willendorf with the goddess and the importance of Willendorf on these sites as a popular and recognisable representation and symbol of the goddess.

The pages of the spiritual and feminist site The Crone Chronicles – A Journal of Conscious Aging [271] includes an account “We walked with the Goddess” by Ann-Rosemary Conway, recording the first Summer Solstice Arts Festival and Goddess Walk in Victoria BC, Canada. The author “has dedicated her life to honouring the resurrection of the goddess in our time”, and the aim of the march is to “make tangible a focus for the re-emergence of the honouring of women and the earth”. The focal point of the march is a large “Venus of Willendorf” statue carried along the route and then placed at the centre of the Irving Park Labyrinth, to symbolise the “centring the spiritual link to ourselves and our universe” [271] (Figures 7.41, 7.42). The dominant theme is “the Sacred Feminine”, and Willendorf here is a very visual representation of “the goddess” – a clearly recognisable image publicly displayed, again confirming Willendorf as the predominant representation of the Goddess.

An article “My Goddess” by Ann Rothwell appearing on the Lesbians on the Loose site [305], features an interview with Anique Lamerduc, the Coordinator/High Priestess of a contemporary female religious group who worship the Goddess, aimed with a view to creating a “new female reality” in which all women are given a platform to express themselves. Willendorf, referred to as a “prehistoric Goddess deity”, is mentioned because the author reports that a huge clay version of the figure is placed on Anique’s porch. The author describes the statue as encapsulating art, culture, religion and female power, and as symbolizing Anique’s worship of a matriarchal culture.

Certain of the sites contain more nuance than traditional archaeological goddess interpretations would lead us to expect. This is apparent in the Metro’on pages [40], with the site name taken from the Greek word for temple of the Great Mother. A large picture of Willendorf appears in the “Great Goddess” section of “The Museion of Ancient Art”. The authors of the site refer to themselves as “Gallae”, taking the name from the original Greek term for the adopted daughters of the Great Mother, the “gender variant priestesses of Cybele”. While the site is intended to “honour the Ancient Mother of Gods”, a declared aim is also to revive the myths of “our gender variant heritage”, and the site is authored by, and aimed towards, the “gender variant” as they describe it – the gay, lesbian and transgendered. While this site is ostensibly geared towards the goddess, there is a deeper theme of the celebration and empowerment of individuals, and the respect of human rights. Willendorf emerges as one of a number of symbols for those who consider themselves marginal to society.

A number of themes are drawn together in a site presenting a strongly personalised view of the goddess. The “Venus of Willendorf” page on Chris Chapman’s website [47] begins with a poem identifying the “Venus of Willendorf” as “the Mother, the Earth, the Bringer of Joy, Love and Abundance, and a reminder of the divinity in us all”. The figure is of obvious importance to the author, as the “Venus of Willendorf” page is the only section of the site not directly or obviously related to the author’s family and personal interests. Willendorf is described as “an empowering spiritual and inspirational tool”. She goes on that cite Witcombe’s [2] assessment that the figure exhibits “a physical

and sexual self that seems unrestrained, unfettered by cultural taboos and social conventions, an image of “natural” femaleness, of uninhibited female power”. These factors indicate the appeal of the Willendorf figure for the author. The authors re-use of Witcombe’s analysis also demonstrates her attribution of contemporary responses to the figure itself. It is by our standards that she seems unrestrained and unfettered. Her own standards are unknown (and unknowable).

The relationship between artifact and author – the relevance of the artifact to the author’s life – is made explicit as Chapman asks “Do I use her as justification for my “overweight” shape?” She replies that she does not, but that she does “allow her to remind me that at one time, this shape was deemed significant, desirable, powerful and sought after, not something to be feared or hidden”. This is the author’s response to the figure, and the attributes the author perceives in it. While the meaning of the figure is still obscure, the author creates one by placing her own desires into the context of the figure, which is then seen to embody those desires. The author validates herself through an interpretation of the Willendorf figure.

These sites indicate that while Willendorf is a clear symbol for “the goddess”, both Willendorf and the goddess she is deemed to represent are linked with themes of empowerment, self-discovery and spirituality rather than any worship in the strict sense. Many of the pages devoted to the goddess themselves encompass a variety of opinions and standpoints, perhaps illustrating that there is no one systematic “worship of the goddess”, and “the goddess” appears in differing contexts.

#### *Organisations (O) sites*

The Internet searches highlighted that a number of organisations affiliate themselves with and utilise images of Willendorf. As noted in the RV section, images of Willendorf are utilised as retail gifts on the *FAT!SO?* website [100], an organisation promoting fat pride and acceptance. The Canadian Women’s Health Organisation [203] refers to Willendorf in a favourable review of the *FAT!SO?* products. Several organisations utilise an image of Willendorf as a “mascot” – the Woman Spirit Conference 2002 [218], Obesity-Online [255],

and the 11<sup>th</sup> European Congress on Obesity, 2001 (organised by the European Association for the Study of Obesity) [142] (Figure 7.43).

The WomanSpirit 2002 conference logo features “nine goddesses”, of which the “Venus of Willendorf” is stated to be a “Mother Goddess”, “the oldest image in art of the female fertility goddess” [218] (Figure 7.44). The conference theme was “Nourishing the spirit within”, and the logo features goddesses of various religions and cultures, including Gaia, the Irish Celtic goddess Danu, and the Hindu Goddess Durga. Willendorf is the image chosen for “Venus”. Obesity-Online [255] provides a page of information about the Willendorf figure, in which it is clinically described as “a beautifully modelled, morbidly obese female”. The Willendorf figure appears as the conference mascot at the 11<sup>th</sup> European Congress on Obesity, held in Vienna, where the Willendorf image appears in a contemporary pose - viewed from the rear with tape measure around the waist. The National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance [87] includes a photograph of Willendorf in the NAAFA Hall of Fame, alongside Louis Armstrong, Miss Piggy (from the television programme *The Muppets*), Golda Meir, Agatha Christie and Orson Welles.

While the NAAFA reference to Willendorf continues the association of Willendorf with fat acceptance, other references in these sites are more diverse. The Colombian Association of Obesity and Metabolism [32] refers to the figure in an article examining obesity throughout history. Bioetica [306] (The Defence and development of biological, cultural and social diversity), includes Willendorf in an article “El regreso de la Diosas” (The Return of the Goddesses) by Sandra Roman, on its Creeds and Religions page. The Alliance for Nature site [320] mentions the Willendorf figure in the context of a campaign to have the Wachau Valley designated a World Inheritance Site. The Andaman Association [334] “aims to further the scientific study of all aspects of the Andamanese Negrito and of all other Asian pygmy people”. The site contains an article “Lonely Islands: The Andanamese” by George Weber, and the Willendorf figure is illustrated in Chapter 5 “A physical examination” of the Andaman people, where the figure is noted in connection with its “convincingly” displayed steatopygia, a feature noted to be common among



Adamanese women. The Stormfront organisation [391] promotes “White Pride World Wide”. The site contains a history of “the white race”, in which Willendorf is illustrated and briefly mentioned as the earliest art.

#### *Feminist (FM) sites*

Certain sites occur with a specifically feminist orientation. While they tend to overlap with other categories particularly NWA sites, their strong association with female empowerment and equality, and their placement of the Willendorf figure within this context, sets them slightly apart.

The Women of the Third Millenium site [24] illustrates and discusses Willendorf in a gallery entitled “Fascinating Histories”, where the figure appears alongside a selection of renowned women including Cleopatra, Hilary Rodham Clinton, Margaret Thatcher, Mother Theresa, Pocahontas, Virginia Woolf and gymnast Nadia Comaneci.

The Yoni.com site – the self-named “Gateway to the Feminine” – includes an article “Dreams of being Lucid” by Karol Ann Barnett discussing the inspirational impact of Shannon Lucid, a 53 year old mother of three weighing 150lbs, who had just completed a 188 day stay in space. Lucid becomes a positive role model for the author, who refers to herself as resembling not the Barbie image of her youth, but “the weighty, menopausal Venus of Willendorf”, described as “an unlovely sight – a sight that we had been conditioned to believe was ugly and unlovable. Everybody said so – especially the men”.

The Cybergrrl website [170] contains “The Love Yourself Diet”, by Kirsten Anderberg. As part of the diet, Willendorf is chosen as a role model, a body image in the author’s likeness termed a “large, womanly shape”, on the grounds that “it’s important to see your body shape glorified in statue and art form”. The result of associating yourself with such images, the author claims, is that you will begin to feel like a Goddess instead of “overweight”“ and to feel good about being fat. Willendorf is therefore associated with the message of “empowerment instead of punishment, inclusion instead of ostracism, body acceptance instead of weight loss diets”.

Krista's home page [161] is devoted to weightlifting, and the sense of empowerment that can be achieved through this activity. A page entitled "Some philosophical thoughts on strong women" discusses bodily ideals for women, and the changing construction of the ideal through time. A paragraph is devoted to the Willendorf figure, where it is suggested that it may have been desirable to be fat in the Palaeolithic, perhaps a time when voluptuous female sexuality was encouraged and permitted.

The most overtly feminist website is entitled "Hmmm – Must be Venus Envy" [46]. On this page, the Goddess is strongly linked with feminism, female empowerment and fat acceptance. The page itself is dedicated "to all of the big, beautiful, strong women who stride this earth on Goddess feet, and the author of the page names herself "Willendorf"". The picture of Willendorf on this page is accompanied by a caption stating that "The Willendorf Goddess dates from approximately 25,000BC. Many small statues of her were unearthed, and deemed to be "fertility figures" by mainstream archaeologists". In response to this, the author makes her own statement that "The Venus of Willendorf stands for much that is dear to my heart, and fertility is only one of her metaphors. In this page I would like to share my feelings about women of size, women's inner strength and power, matrifocal spirituality, and to help women remember – restoring the long lost part of ourselves – to become whole and FREE". Willendorf, it seems, symbolises all of these feelings and beliefs.

#### *Artists (ART) sites*

The work of artists' displayed on the WWW draws on and re-interprets Willendorf in a variety of ways. There is a strong association with the figure: Willendorf provides both model and inspiration for a number of works. The recreation and reinterpretation of the Willendorf figure, already seen to a certain degree in a number of the RV sites, is taken a step further here. The sites can be roughly divided into three types:

1. Those citing the Willendorf figure as an influence on the style of work produced, where Willendorf is acknowledged as the model for the work, or

where similarity and influence is inferred and the association made by others. Similarity to the original figure may or may not be immediately apparent.

2. Those taking elements of the original as they perceive them, and creating a new form or art work, while specifically utilising the title “Venus of Willendorf” or making explicit reference to Willendorf in the work. This is often specified as an interpretation of Willendorf geared towards the elaboration of particular themes or features.

3. Similar to the previous type, works that utilise the original image, or a recognisable and accurate copy, transposed in a new context or combined with other images.

Of the first type, River Moon’s *Altar Art Goddesses* [191] (Figure 7.45, 7.46), modelled on Willendorf, resemble the original to the extent that the figures produced are virtually reproductions. Referring to the “Venus of Willendorf”, Jan Glover [48] (Figure 7.47) comments that “the palpability of her form and shape is ever present within my works”. The influence of Willendorf can be strongly seen in the works *Bathsheba Liberated*, and *Bathsheba and her Handmaiden*.

Willendorf is cited as inspiration for Irving Penn’s *Nude No. 1* [145, 269], a work deemed to resemble the figure to such an extent that Penn “presumed he had been struck by that image”. An article “Irving Penn’s Modern Venus” by Maria Morris Hambourg [145] (Figure 7.48) describes Penn’s *Nude No 1* as “an archaic fertility goddess existing outside time”, created from the same instinct as Willendorf itself – “the recognition of the mysterious, procreative power of the female body”.

Mary Heebner’s series of “Dark Venus” paintings [278] draw their name from the Venus statuettes, with Willendorf cited as the example. Works such as “Perpetual Motion” focus the relationship between inner and outer worlds, and the correspondences between the human form and the surrounding planet. There is little resemblance to the original Willendorf figure itself.

Willendorf is cited as inspiration for several different forms of art, including Marc Hudson's Venus series of pots, inspired by the shape of the figure [311] (Figures 7.49, 7.50). Similarly, Rochelle Nicholas' [379] (Figure 7.51) "Four Breasted Vessel" is seen by the artist as "an evocation of, and variation on, the "Venus of Willendorf"", utilising the notion of "woman as a vessel to be filled, a container of life as well as the source".

Turning to the second type of artwork, the "Venus of Willendorf" occurs as a title for works of sculpture, painting, and literature. In many cases, the use of this name allows both the artist and viewer to identify certain themes or features, and make connections through use of the well-known label. Indeed, in some re-interpretations, such a link would not be recognisable without the use of the name.

This is the case for the "Venus de Willendorf Teapot II" by Kya [37] (Figure 7.52), and French Smith's "Venus of Willendorf" [162] (Figure 7.53). In certain works, only the nudity of the figure and an elaboration of the abdomen are shared with Willendorf, as in Mahendra Singh's "Venus of Willendorf" [127] (Figure 7.54). Although K R Gilman's abstract watercolour collage "Venus of Willendorf" [163] (Figure 7.55) has a resemblance to the original in the presentation of the body shape around the abdomen, hips and thighs, identification with Willendorf, rather than any other large female form, would not perhaps take place without the aid of the title.

In several works, the impression created is one of a more realistic symbol of womanhood, if not specifically Willendorf itself. This is seen in C.S. Poppenga's oil on canvas "Frau Willendorf" [308] (Figure 7.56), where "Venus" is replaced with "Frau" to emphasise the subject matter as a the "mature life-giver", rather than the idealised beauty often associated with "Venus". Allen Hermes' oil on canvas entitled "Venus of Willendorf" [295] (Figure 7.57) depicts a naked and mature woman, without specific resemblance to Willendorf other than in general body shape. Certain works imbue this mature image with the attitude of empowerment seen in previous sections.

Harriet Casdin-Silver's holographic image "Venus of Willendorf 91" [85 (Figure 7.58), 243, 366] utilises a contemporary model, possessing a similar body shape and adopting a posture akin to the original, the clearest difference being in that the model holds her head erect, with her hands rested behind her back. Similarly, C. Whitehorn's "Lynn Willendorf" [310] is a bronze statue of a large woman sat naked and slightly forward on a vanity stool, viewing herself in a hand held mirror. The back of the mirror and the legs of the stool are decorated with bas-relief images of Willendorf. The image is a positive one, her look clearly of one of self-admiration.

In several less formal works, the "Venus of Willendorf" is recreated in unusual forms. Two works appear on the Fantasy and Science fiction site, Elfwood. Entitled the "Venus of Willendorf" [44] by Paula Fletcher, and the "Rodent of Willendorf" [260] by TC Gail, these cartoon style depictions present the original as a vivacious contemporary blonde and a standing rodent respectively. A copy of the original Willendorf figure is used in a series of five glazed ceramic brocades by B.F. Postel, entitled "The Venus of Willendorf" I-V [50] (Figure 7.59), and Kristine's "Venus of Willendorf II" [169] (Figure 7.60) copies the original figure, setting it against a variety of backgrounds.

Images of Willendorf are created in widely differing materials; Todd Runfeldt's "Venus of Willendorf" is a fertility design in fossilized walrus tooth [49], Marewinder [130] creates "Venus of Willendorf" cloth dolls as part of the Goddess 2000 project, and Nancy's Nanlet's [192] (Figure 7.61) include a crocheted figure, named "Venus of Willendorf's Cousin".

The "Venus of Willendorf" occurs as a name or title in a number of additional forms of art. It occurs as the name of a band, whose track "Feather, Fur and Bones" appears on an album featuring various artists, entitled "The 3<sup>rd</sup> Man" (1987). A film entitled *La Venere di Willendorf*, (*The Venus of Willendorf*) by Elisabetta Lodoli (1997), is discussed in several sites [20, 22, 65, 108]. The film is a psychological thriller concerned with an obese and bulimic woman, Elena, who is reunited with her cousin Ida. A soundtrack album containing music

composed for the film by Savio Riccardio, is also entitled *La Venere di Willendorf* [338].

The “Venus of Willendorf” appears in literary works as both the subject of the work, and in more peripheral references. The label is a title for poems by Yusef Komunyakaa [10] and Rita Dove [69]. The former describes the figure itself as a powerful symbol, the latter outlines a summer trip to the Wachau Valley by a woman of colour where she muses on the nature of the figure, and is herself compared to it. In a somewhat different style, Harry Moor utilises the “Venus of Willendorf” as the title for a short story of erotic fiction [135]. In an explicitly sexual storyline, the leading male character describes sexual intercourse with a woman weighing 110 kilos, who is referred to as – amongst others things – the “dream of man”, and the “Venus of Willendorf”.

Rebecca O’Connell’s “Myrtle of Willendorf” [296] is the story of an overweight adolescent seeking self-discovery of the goddess within and self-acceptance. Elena Wolff’s poem “Venus” [327] describes a rendezvous between two people in a tavern. When one states that they know nothing of art, the other mentions “a harder piece” – the “Venus of Willendorf”, which is simply referred to as “short, fat queen”. Gordon C. Fisher’s short story “Goddess” provides an elaborate explanation for how the Venus of Willendorf came into being, and the woman on whom she was based [325]. The story relates a (male) archaeologist’s tale, in which he is transposed to the Palaeolithic, where he passes on healing and artistic skills to a young woman who later becomes immortalised in art as the “Venus of Willendorf”.

One final example of this type should be noted. While it may not be deemed art in the strict sense, the application of the label “Venus of Willendorf” as the name for a species of flower, as occurs on the Lilywood Farms website [364], ultimately demonstrates the utilisation of the Willendorf name and its transformation into an entirely new medium.

The third type of art, as indicated above, is closely related to the second type. While the title “Venus of Willendorf” is not used, a reproduction or likeness of

the original figure is. Many works of this final type place images of Willendorf in a specifically contemporary setting. A. Clarke Bedford's photographs [210] show an "oversized mock copy" of Willendorf pictured performing such activities as eating a fast-food meal and posing provocatively in a bikini. Henk Schiffmacher produces a series of five stylised illustrations based on Willendorf [267] (Figures 7.62, 7.63, 7.64). Hildegard Hahn [52] creates a series of collages with Willendorf superimposed in different contexts. Use of the Willendorf figure against a new setting also occurs in Lisbet Olin-Ranstam's 1998 textile "Venus" [379], and in Judith Anderson's etching "Ave in My Own Way" [274], where an image of Willendorf is superimposed onto a skull, itself centrally placed within the outline of a woman's body. A tree sprouts from the head of the Willendorf figure, with the ensemble suggesting birth, death, the womb and renewal. Jack Reilly's film "Masterpiece Action Theatre" [70] features an animated Willendorf image, "speaking out" on the subject of being a woman in contemporary society.

The Willendorf figure is returned to a truly archaeological context in Herbert Langmueller's 1997 exhibition "Cromagnon" [384] (Figures 7.65, 7.66). In this work, a series of photographs simulates the excavation of the Willendorf figure, capturing frame by frame the gradual revelation and exposure of the figure.

Several works of this type once again link the Willendorf image with themes of empowerment and ideals of beauty. Two works by Mary A Harman, "Mix and Miss" [149] (Figure 7.67), and "A Woman's House" [149], employ the image of Willendorf. "Mix and Miss" shows three female images with sections of their bodies interchanged. "A Woman's House" incorporates recognisable segments of the Willendorf figure as the "blocks" of the house. The exhibition in which these works were shown was entitled "Breaking the Mold", and dealt with issues of identity and the pressures to conform.

The theme of contemporary ideals and definitions of beauty is particularly strong in Jamé Anderson's "Venus" [252] (Figure 7.68). Utilising a range of makeup (lipstick, foundation, eye liner, eye shadows and nail enamel) on canvas, Anderson places a recognisable image of Willendorf alongside a figure

representing the contemporary ideal of beauty, with the intention of juxtaposing one world's beauty with another. Again, Willendorf is employed as the recognisable symbol of a past ideal of beauty.

#### *Miscellaneous (MS) sites*

The MS sites demonstrate the wide range of contexts for the references to the Willendorf figure. Although a number of these sites could be included in other categories, the personal or unusual nature of the references to Willendorf warrants their being discussed separately. Interpretations and uses of the Willendorf image in these sites are particularly varied.

The Solace list [370] of romantic quotations refers to Willendorf only in terms of “fertility and fat”, while in Jolique’s discussion of hairstyles through history [157], Willendorf is described as a “famous hot mama”, and used to illustrate that “lovely ladies around the world have been braiding and curling their hair since the dawn of time”. In “The Pygmalion Project” [181], a site aiming to present the “truths” about women, a photograph of Willendorf appears captioned as a pregnant woman in a section entitled “Comprehending Human Nature”, “Women’s role in the history of humanity”. Steve Jacksons Games Illuminator [121] illustrates Willendorf in connection with the artwork for a role-playing game *GURPS Dinosaurs*, while the figure is mentioned on the Clayton-le-Moor Harriers site [272] in connection with a trip to the Wachau Valley. The Saxakali website [290] aims to connect communities of colour across the world. Willendorf appears in a page identifying “Black Messiahs”, where it is stated that “Although she is found in most art history books, none mention that she is Africoid: her entire faceless head is covered with woolly hair like that of Buddha’s” (also identified as black on the same page). The Surreally site [199] is a forum for discussion of articles posted and reflections on current news and events in the US (with the varied subjects under discussion including gay adoption and wrongful convictions). An article “On playing with dolls” puts forward the view that “you can read too much into the archaeological evidence”, proposing instead that Willendorf figure may have been a doll or sex toy.



Several of these sites are personal webpages, ranging from Beveley Dennis' Art Appreciation page [266] and Erika's Web Page [335] to Jeff Subhumyn's "Harmful Matter" site [402], where a personal photo gallery contains pictures of Jeff's Willendorf tattoos, one of which bears the label "Mom" [402] (Figure 7.69). Stella Jones' homepage [155] typifies the personal response to the Willendorf figure. Although the page is part of a university web site, this is a personal web page of the Administrative Assistant to the Classical Studies and Philosophy department. A small picture of Willendorf appears without explanation on the home page. When selected, the link provides brief information about the figure and the author's personal feelings regarding it, where she writes that she takes "great comfort in knowing that this body type has been around since the beginning of human existence, and in wiser cultures, was even appreciated".

The websites of several private companies refer to Willendorf in some way, occasionally as part of a gallery of images or Prehistoric Art page [375: Numbat Incorporated, 23: Swale Community]. Willendorf appears in the "Bodies" section of Art Tech Design's [76] pages. As an art and website design company, the intention of the page is to demonstrate their design features, with Willendorf chosen as one of the images to do this.

In these sites, Willendorf is variously interpreted. On the Netkin Bereavement Centre site, offering comfort and community to the bereaved, the Willendorf figure appears in a History of Portraiture where it is stated that "It is believed that Palaeolithic tribes worshipped images of fertile women to encourage pregnancy in the women of their tribe". Willendorf is the only figure shown. In The Erotic Traveller's "Secret Gallery" [27] Willendorf appears as an example of sexual and erotic art in museums. The Fertility Care Clinic [188] places a picture of Willendorf on its home page, describing it as the oldest symbol of fertility.

It has already been seen that many references to Willendorf occur in the context of body types, and this continues amongst MS type sites. A Salon.com [202] article, entitled "The Saga of the Bra Ball", notes that more women resemble the

Willendorf body type than that of the “ideal” Barbie doll. “Publicly Mundane”, an article posted in the “Women seeking Women” section of the San Francisco Bay Area Online Community [371], also makes a connection between the Willendorf figure and the Barbie doll, although from a different viewpoint. The author is critical of what she perceives to be a number of lesbian and feminist stereotypes. Her accusation, that “You think the Venus of Willendorf is more beautiful than the modern day Barbie”, indicates the perception of Willendorf as a feminist ideal of beauty in contrast to the contemporary norm, adopted as the ideal by this particular group of women.

From a different viewpoint, similar sentiments are expressed on the pages of strongly anti-feminist pages of Thinkbomb [198]. Willendorf is mentioned on a page entitled “Feminism: double standard incorporated”, as part of “Double Standard No. 11: I never said fat... honest...pleeease!!” Here it states that “Feminists claim that the prehistoric rotund figure of the Venus of Willendorf is an important fertility symbol from an era when women were still respected. She is representative of true beauty from a period in human evolution when there was female power and peace and spirituality and women weren’t objectified and blah blah blah... So I said to her... “Well I’m glad to hear that, because you’re looking like the Venus a little more everyday”. Thwach! POW! #?!&% Blam! Ouch!!” The passage contrasts perceptions as Willendorf the symbol of female empowerment with Willendorf the negative body image.

On a page within the same site [198], opposing viewpoints are again contrasted in “Herstory Deconstructed”, which aims to “debunk the majority of feminist claims about the social relations of power between men and women”. A picture of Willendorf is used as the logo for the page, and a caption reads “Venus of Willendorf: a 25, 000 year old fertility symbol? Nope. A pornographic icon designed exclusively to get cavemen rocks off”.

The Beauty Walk site [118] also puts forward a different perspective from that of the feminist. Noting that the “ideal” of beauty changes through time, Hollywood “beauty expert” Peter Lamas suggests that the Willendorf figure could have been “the Stone Age equivalent of Pamela Lee”, the “equivalent of a

favourite photo from Playboy”. The meaning of Willendorf is queried in an article “Disordered Beauty: Anorexia” appearing on the Beauty Worlds website [339], again pointing out the contrast between the figure and the contemporary ideal. The identification of Willendorf as admirable body type appears in both the Rund, na Und? site [117] and the German Fat Pages [166], where Willendorf appears in galleries of images of the larger figure.

The association of Willendorf with the politics of body imagery is encapsulated in the wide-ranging Law Nerd Site [120], on a page entitled “Venus of Fat Activism”. The Willendorf figure is not discussed in the text, which puts forward the reasons for the author’s affiliation to “the Fat Liberation Movement”. Yet the use of Willendorf is highly symbolic, in that the text is superimposed on a picture of Willendorf, arranged in its shape, and thus clearly linked with its message. A major feature of the MS sites is clear in this example - that they represent a *choice* by the author, a specific selection of the Willendorf image and the recognition that Willendorf is well-known enough to be used to symbolise particular themes.

The above summary of the number and types of sites utilising the “Venus of Willendorf” as, for example, “symbol”, “goddess”, or retail commodity highlights how site authors have shifted the interpretation of the figure from its archaeological context, and instead redefined Willendorf and put the figure to use for their own personal, political or commercial ends. The contrast between the voluminous and multi-various sites referring to and appropriating the “Venus of Willendorf”, and those pertaining to the “Venus of Laussel”, “Venus of Lespugue” and “Venus of Dolni Vestonice” is stark, as the following examination of sites related to the latter examples demonstrates.

#### “Venus of Laussel”

Of the 41 sites examined for the “Venus of Laussel”, none pertained to the RO or FM types.

### *Information (I) sites*

The I type sites occurring for “Venus of Laussel” mirror the results for “Venus of Willendorf” in comprising academic sites, Prehistoric Art pages and sites providing tourist information [LA1, LA6, LA11, LA14, LA16, LA18, LA20, LA25, LA29, LA30, LA35, LA40, LA41]. Of the articles discussing Laussel [LA10, LA29, LA30], the first is concerned with providing comparisons for a “vulva” symbol identified in the Chauvet Cave. “Lucy Lippard’s Overlay” [LA30] and “Light Before Dawn” by Robert Adler both discuss Laussel in terms of an ancient lunar image. A review of the work of Joseph Campbell on the Clarin X site [LA14] also links the Laussel figure strongly with the lunar, and menstrual cycle.

### *Retail Venus (RV) sites*

Only a narrow range of products are linked with the Laussel figure, namely statues or wall hangings [LA3, LA7 (Figure 7.70), LA12, LA17 (Figure 7.71) [LA36] and pendants [LA26] (Figure 7.72), LA33 (Figure 7.73). In each case, the products aim to replicate the original figure rather than reinterpret it, and only the pendants depict the Laussel figure devoid of its original context as part of a block.

There is clear identification of the Laussel figure with “the goddess” in these sites [e.g. LA33]. Both Heidelberg Editions [LA3] and Historic Impressions Products [LA12], for whom Laussel is “the Mother Goddess”, link the figure with the moon, lunar months, menstruation and the “fecundity of the womb”. The Goddess Gallery [LA17] refers to the “Goddess of Laussel”, designating her “the earliest image of a goddess associated with the Moon”, and also noting that the position of the hand on the “pregnant” belly may imply “fertility or the creative power of the goddess”. Medieval Mayhem [LA26] refers to the “Venus of Laussel” as the “Palaeolithic Moon Goddess: keeper of all life forces”. In other sites, the Laussel figure is described as a “fertility goddess” [LA36] and although appearing on a page entitled “Stone Age Goddesses” [LA7], Laussel is referred to only as a “female form” and “the Palaeolithic Venus of Laussel”.

### *New Age (NWA) sites*

The “Genesis of Eden Wisdom Encyclopaedia” [LA28] is linked to “a democratic ecological movement of world renewal and transformation” with a view to “heal jihad, crusade and religious and social violence; to end dominion over nature and woman, and in so doing to seed a new consciousness in humanity to cherish the Earth and replenish its biological and genetic diversity”. The Laussel figure is here described as the “Goddess of Laussel” in a description identifying her with the lunar and menstrual cycle. In the “Altar of the Great Goddess”, the Spiral Goddess Grove [LA27] refers to the “Venus of Laussel” as one of the names of the Great Goddess. The Mystica encyclopaedia mentions Laussel only briefly in a section concerned with the early history of the goddess” [LA37].

### *Organisations (O) sites*

Two organisations refer to the Laussel figure – The Colombian Association of Obesity and Metabolism [LA23; see discussion in the “Venus of Willendorf” section], and the Syndicat National des Sculpteurs et Plasticiens, who mention Laussel as an early work in a discussion of sculpture. There is, therefore, no association of Laussel with political causes.

### *Artists (ART) sites*

Of the two ART sites located for Laussel, one reinterprets and one replicates the original figure. The oil on canvas “Laussel Venus” by Louis le Brocquy [LA24] (Figure 7.74) is one of a series titled and concerned with “Human Image”. Although highly interpretive, it echoes the original in focussing attention on the protruding abdominal area, while the head and lower limbs are barely distinguished, appearing to slope away into the fuzzy background. In contrast, Gravany’s depiction of Laussel [LA31] is a reproduction of the figure in its original bas relief form.

### *Miscellaneous (MS) sites*

Two personal webpages refer to Laussel. Donald Miller’s homepage [LA9] illustrates and describes Laussel as a fertility figure linked with the moon, while Bruce Johnstone-Lowe [LA38] includes the figure on the “Favourite Images”

page. One site, a transcript of a talk by Vibeke Sorensen [LA22] entitled “A feminine perspective”, mentions the Laussel figure as a personal inspiration, although with specific reference to the interpretation of the figure in terms of nature and lunar cycles by Joseph Campbell. While being closely linked to the moon and fertility, the Laussel figure lacks political associations.

### “Venus of Lespugue”

No sites of the NWA, MS, RO, ART or FM types of site were located for the “Venus of Lespugue”. Neither is the “Venus of Lespugue” referred to or used in any political sense. However, Lespugue often appears on pages in association with Willendorf [LE1, LE3, LE7, LE12, LE16, LE19, LE23, LE24, LE25].

### *Information (I) sites*

Several of the sites on which the Lespugue figure appears have also been noted in the results for Willendorf and Laussel [LE1: the Ice Age Art exhibition page on the Texas Humanities Resource Center site; LE3: Witcombe’s *Women in Prehistory* pages; LE7: Artehistoria]. Lespugue appears on Prehistoric Art pages [LE16, LE19], and a tourist information site [LE10: Ville de Saint-Gaudens site]. In the Smithsonian Institute’s National Museum of Natural History [LE4], the “Venus of Lespugue” is illustrated and briefly referred to as a female image. Only one site focuses specifically and in detail on the Lespugue figure. This occurs on Ralph Abraham’s page [LE8], which provides a specific comparison of the Lespugue figure with the ancient Greek Doric artistic canon.

### *Retail Venus (RV) sites*

Products featuring the Lespugue figure are again restricted to statues [LE6] (Figure 7.75), LE15 (Figure 7.76), LE18 (Figure 7.77), LE24 (Figure 7.80), LE25 (Figures 7.78, 7.79), a pendant, and earrings [LE14] (Figure 7.81). In a style that may be described as interpretive, with one exception all sites show the figure in restored form – they are interested in the whole, the figure imagined as complete rather than the fractured form that is the reality. Only Fine Art Publishing [LE18] presents the Lespugue figure in the incomplete condition in which it was recovered. Model Specimens [LE25] state that they produce “high quality replicas and detailed models” for museums, galleries, film, TV and

commercial use. Examples of their work range from mounted dinosaur skeletons and skulls to full size model Neanderthal skeletons and a replica of the Victorian musclemán Eugene Sandow. However, with regard to the Venus figures they reproduce, there appears to be a strong degree of artistic license, with a vulva added to the Lespugue figure and the legs, knees and feet shaped and marked. The figure is referred to as the “Lespugue Venus”.

Only the latter example and the Psychic Eye Bookshop page [LE24] refer simply to the “Venus of Lespugue”. Elsewhere there is a consistent identification with the goddess. Fine Art Publishing [LE18] refers to the figure as a fertility symbol and female divinity. As in the “Venus of Laussel” results, the Talaria Enterprises page [LE6] places the Lespugue figure on the “Stone Age Goddesses” page, while referring to it as the “Palaeolithic Venus of Lespugue”. Snake and Snake [LE14] displays a Lespugue pendant on the “Ancient Goddesses” page, describing the breasts as “egg-like” and stating that she “inspires creative fertility”. The Goddess Gallery [LE15] indicates that “Her bird-like head, fan-like tail feathers, and repetition of the egg shape suggest a bird goddess”.

#### *Organisations (O) sites*

The Andamese Association [LE23] recalls early twentieth century racial theories in its discussion of steatopygia, size and physical characteristics compared with a contemporary people (See also Willendorf [334]). In addition to this echo of former archaeological practice, the site is also interesting as brings together the traditional archaeological trio of prototype figures - Willendorf, Lespugue and Dolní Věstonice.

#### *“Venus of Dolni Vestonice”*

As with the Venus of Lespugue, no ART, MS, FM, or RO types of site were identified.

#### *Information (I) sites*

Over three-quarters of the total number of sites identified for this figure were I type sites. Reference to the Dolní Věstonice figure is included on a number of

Prehistoric Art and exhibition pages [DV1, DV9, DV14, DV15]. The Dolní Věstonice figure is also included in the Wielka Internetowa Encyklopedia, with reference to both the image and the site itself [DV17]. Similarly, Dolní Věstonice is also included in Don Hitchcock's Resources for the Study of the Palaeolithic, a site already noted for the previous figures as providing information to support the fictional works of Jean Auel [DV4].

A striking feature of the Dolní Věstonice results is the number of sites that focus specifically on aspects of technology. A radio programme, "Engines of our Ingenuity" deals with "the Dolní Věstonice ceramics" [DV6], and an article discussing the firing of these ceramics appears on the Ceramics Web [DV15]. Blake Edgar's article "The Symbol and the Spear", appearing on the California Wild site [DV3], describes the Dolní Věstonice figure as an introduction to a discussion of technology and culture in the Upper Palaeolithic. The BBC website [DV18] carries an article reporting Olga Soffer's identification of clothing, and Antiquity [DV20] contains an article by Soffer, Adovasio and Klima discussing woven finds from Pavlov (although it should be noted that of these two sites, only the latter clearly makes a specific reference to the "Venus" of Dolní Věstonice). Within these sites the discussion of the Dolní Věstonice figure is strongly related to its archaeological context.

#### *Retail Venus (RV) sites*

The "Venus of Dolni Vestonice" appears on only one RV site, that of the Celtic Art Co [DV7] (Figure 7.82), where a replication of the figure is portrayed on a rounded base.

#### *New Age (NWA) sites*

As was the case with RV and O sites, there is only one site of this type: "Spirit Project's description of a visit to the site of Dolní Věstonice [DV10]. The aim of this trip is to avoid a commercialised and packaged tourist visit, and instead discover experiences "which the famous archaeologist Marija Gimbutas called archeomythology". After visiting the Dolní Věstonice museum, the author visits the site at Pavlov, where they try to imagine the site as it was in Palaeolithic



times, effectively “communing” with the site and the earth, imagining the “image of an earth mother” in its original context.

#### *Organisations (O) sites*

The Dolní Věstonice figure is linked with only one organisation - the Andamense Association [DV19: also appearing in the searches for Willendorf [334] and Lespugue [LE23], where Dolní Věstonice is illustrated alongside these figures].

The next section will now identify and discuss a number of points and themes emerging from this analysis.

#### *Comparing representations, appropriations and uses of the figures*

As the previous descriptions of the types of sites reviewed have necessarily presented a detailed analysis of the data, this section will briefly identify and review the main points. The data presented has clearly demonstrated that Willendorf appears in this medium as the strongest possible prototype. It is apparent that Willendorf is the most popular figure, with the greatest variety of sites making reference to her. Indeed, only Willendorf features in examples of all categories of site. The variety of the sites in which Willendorf is mentioned is important because it demonstrates the variety of uses to which the figure is put. These contrast with the more limited usage of the other figurines. To elaborate these differences, I will now discuss them with reference to each category of site.

#### *Information*

While I type sites are strongly represented for each figure, they dominate the search results for Lespugue and Dolní Věstonice (the figures with the least overall hits). The number of this type of site is particularly high for Dolní Věstonice, where a greater proportion of sites deal with technical aspects of the figure and the archaeological site and context associated with the figure. Indeed, it could be said that only Dolní Věstonice is presented on the WWW as a predominantly archaeological artifact. With reference to Willendorf, it is notable that even in this category, Willendorf appears in a number of different

contexts, where the figure is utilised for diverse purposes from information transmission to the discussion of obesity.

### *New Age*

Each figure is associated with a “goddess” or “earth mother” at one time or another. While the association is strongest for Willendorf and Laussel, the nature of the association is different for each figure. The Laussel figure is identified as Moon goddess, Mother Goddess or fertility goddess, being specifically linked with the lunar and menstrual cycles. However, in this category also the Willendorf figure is put to additional uses in that she is not simply associated with a goddess or specific types of goddess (e.g. Gaia, the Mother Goddess etc.), but she is also frequently used to symbolise, or represent, “*the goddess*” [see, for example, 262 and 271].

### *Retail Venus*

Turning to the RV sites, the Willendorf figure is associated with a far wider range of products than the other figures. Furthermore, the retail versions of Laussel, Lespugue (although this appears in reconstructed form) and Dolní Věstonice are distinctly more standardised and less interpretive than those of Willendorf, with Willendorf also being ‘reinvented’ into a greater variety of saleable items. This suggests that the popularity, and widely recognisable form of the Willendorf figure allows an element of recreation to take place. It also suggests that Willendorf is an extremely saleable item – a strong product with a recognisable name. However, there is a factor underlying this commercialised appropriation that should be noted. What is the significance of giving someone a bar of soap in the shape of Willendorf, as opposed to any other shape? The answer lies in the connotations the image brings with it. Willendorf is deeply meaningful. The Willendorf figure is now a *brand*, one specifically associated with a range of meanings embodying spirituality, freedom, acceptance and empowerment. She is therefore marketed accordingly to attract and appease particular audiences, especially those who will identify with her in some way.

### *Miscellaneous*

Some of the MS sites utilise what might be termed ‘trademark’ qualities of Willendorf. The lack of any strong associations between the other figures and, for example, political causes or geographical areas, could mean that Willendorf is preferred for these purposes as she represents a more familiar ‘label’ or mascot; this could explain her appearance on, for example, the Netkin Bereavement website. The choice and selection of the Willendorf image certainly indicates awareness of her as a popular and recognisable image. This is apparent in the number of casual references made to the Willendorf figure in the context of forum and online community sites such as Craiglist. However, in addition to this the sheer range of the sites on which she appears indicates that the figure possesses or is associated with distinctive factors that draw the attention of a wide range of people.

### *Artists*

The above claim is reflected in the number and range of artists who either cite Willendorf as an influence on them, or who adapt and portray images of her in their work. In stark contrast to the other figures, the “Venus of Willendorf” is used as a title for many different things including numerous works of art and works of fiction in which the original figure is recreated and reinterpreted, and works of poetry in which Willendorf is both subject and inspiration. The name is even applied to a flower.

### *Organisations*

Willendorf’s strong association with personal and organised politics is entirely lacking for the other figures. None of the authors of the sites for Lespugue, Laussel or Dolní Věstonice relate these latter figures to their own thoughts and lives. It is only Willendorf who appears to carry such inspirational and motivational qualities. Her appearance in the pages of the *Fat!So?* and Obesity Online websites indicates her power as a symbol.

### *Feminist*

This point is equally applicable to the feminist sites. Of the sites of this type located by the search, only the Willendorf figure appears. Here the figure is

again associated strongly with issues of personal empowerment, whether they are related to fat acceptance or sexual freedom for women.

#### *Retail Other*

Sites of this category contained only passing reference to the figures in terms of retail products such as videos.

#### *Conclusions: analysis of the sites*

This analysis has confirmed the figures of Willendorf, Laussel, Lespugue and Dolní Věstonice as prototypes for the category of Venus figurines in the medium of the WWW. While the Russian figures are now a focus a greater attention in the archaeological literature in recent years, the WWW analysis reflects the traditional French and Central European ‘core’ of the category, in many cases associating them with traditional interpretations as fertility figures and goddesses.

Throughout these sites, meanings are attributed to all four figurines, and this is clearest in the case of the Willendorf, which again emerges as the predominant prototype. While to a certain extent all four images analysed are simply appropriated, it is apparent that Willendorf’s meanings have grown far beyond the figure’s original context (be that geographical, archaeological or academic) and terminology. In particular, these meanings associate the figure with power and empowerment, often positioning her in direct opposition to contemporary norms and ideals. In many of these sites, the Willendorf figure is perceived and promoted as representing a particular (political and personal) stance or attitude, and a similar attitude is attributed to the figure itself. Whereas certain archaeological works have perceived the figure as submissive or passive (e.g. Powell 1966; Taylor 1996), Willendorf is here seen as bold, open and challenging. The figure is perceived as both proud and strong, and it is perhaps this perception that attracts the numerous viewpoints and issues that are focused upon and around the figure. For such broadly and predominantly feminist reinterpretations, Willendorf appears to be the perfect vehicle.

However, it cannot be overlooked that many sites regard Willendorf as the *first* woman, the *first* art or the *first* goddess. It is Willendorf's association with the Palaeolithic and her archaeological context that benefits her "users", hence the constant references to her age. Indeed, it is the *age* of Willendorf that gives her power *as* a symbol. Were she to be proved the creation of an early twentieth century forger, her value as a symbol would recede. However, this is the *only* aspect of the figure's archaeological context that has any relevance for the uses to which Willendorf is put in this medium. Willendorf is a symbol of (and for) the personal, the political, the national and the feminist, as well as the archaeological. In this, perhaps the most appropriate interpretation of the association of Willendorf with such a diverse range of individuals, sites and meanings is as "commodity" – a product that can be put to use for any purpose.

Although this section has discussed the meanings and appropriations of the Venus figurines in the medium of the WWW, it is perhaps significant that the discussion has nevertheless contained reference to the importance of the archaeological context of the Willendorf figurine. Points of correspondence between the archaeological and popular media will be examined in more detail after discussion of a comparative WWW analysis.

#### Comparative analysis: Stone Circles

The role of the Willendorf figure in this medium as *the* prototype example of the Venus figurines is the striking feature of this analysis, suggesting that it may be the trend in such a medium to focus on one particularly celebrated example. To test whether this is a common pattern, a similar analysis was undertaken of sites relating to a different type of archaeological material – "Stone Circles".

A general search for "Stone Circles" produced 369,000 hits, and an advanced search 48,300 hits. General searches were then made for four specific examples - "Stonehenge", "Avebury", "Castlerigg" and "Stones of Stenness". "Stonehenge" produced a greater number of hits than "Stone Circles" itself (396,000 compared to 369,000), followed by "Avebury" (91,600), "Castlerigg" (9,520) and "Stones of Stenness" (1,980). An advanced search for "Stonehenge" and "Avebury" would obviously produce the same number of sites as the

general search, so the advanced search was varied from that conducted for the Venus figurine examples, in that the search located those sites containing the exact phrase “Stone Circles” in association with the name of each example. Thus, the advanced search for “Stone Circles” with “Stonehenge” produced 9,420 hits, with “Avebury” 5,410 hits, with “Castlerigg” 1,120, and with “Stones of Stenness” 501. A further search was undertaken to test whether “Stonehenge” was indeed the predominant example and appeared on the WWW in contexts removed from the strictly archaeological; an advanced search was undertaken for each example with the specification that the phrase “Stone Circles” was *not* included on the page. In this search, “Stonehenge” still achieved 312,000 hits, while “Avebury” produced only 48,800. In this respect, it appears that “Stonehenge” fulfils a similar role in the category of “Stone Circles” to the “Venus of Willendorf” in the “Venus figurines”.

These results indicate that focus on one celebrated example of an archaeological category may indeed be a pattern common to the use of archaeological material in the medium of the WWW. However, a further examination of the first 100 hits appearing for “Stonehenge” identified a key difference between the nature of the sites located for “Stonehenge” and those for the “Venus of Willendorf”. While I type sites predominate, and some RV sites occur (e.g. the Stonehenge pocket watch [[www.stonehengewatch.com](http://www.stonehengewatch.com)]) the strongest association of “Stonehenge” was not with NWA type sites, as perhaps might have been expected, but with sites termed MS in the “Venus of Willendorf” analysis – the association of the name “Stonehenge” with private companies and businesses. Examples include Stonehenge Partners Inc. [[www.Stonehenge.org](http://www.Stonehenge.org)] who describe themselves as “your rock solid partner for information technology solutions”, Stonehenge Web Design [[www.stonehengeweb.com](http://www.stonehengeweb.com)], and a company in Arizona providing office and warehouse space called Stonehenge Management [[www.bldgrent.com](http://www.bldgrent.com)]. An image of Stonehenge is frequently utilised in the company logo appearing on these webpages.

While the appearance of Stonehenge in these contemporary contexts shows the integration of archaeological material into contemporary contexts in a similar way to that shown for the Venus figurines, the above examples indicate a

different form of appropriation to that of the Willendorf figure. This usage is neither as political, nor as personal, as the utilisation of Willendorf on the WWW. In this instance, it is the image of Stonehenge as a symbol of solidity, constancy, reliability and permanence with which these companies wish to associate themselves. However, the key point of similarity is that in both cases the desire exists for such an association with an iconic image from the past. Both Stonehenge and Willendorf are utilised as recognisable symbols intended to strike a common chord with a particular audience. The comparative analysis therefore points to the occurrence of similar patterns for different types of archaeological material in this medium.

### **Comparison of the utilisation of the figurines on the World Wide Web and approaches to them in archaeology**

The aim of the Internet analysis was to provide data that could be used as a standard of comparison against which archaeological approaches to and interpretations of the figurines might be re-evaluated, with a view to determining the role of the Venus figurines in both archaeology and popular culture and examining the place of archaeology within contemporary society. This section will therefore review this data in terms of its relevance for providing insight into the contemporary practice of archaeological interpretation. I will first indicate the extent to which the websites reflect the archaeological treatment of the figurines in terms of reference to archaeology or archaeologists as supporting their interpretation of the figures. Secondly, I will seek to establish the nature of the relationship existing between the two mediums and how they might perceive each other's approaches. This involves consideration of how archaeology views itself and its role within contemporary society, and of how the practice of archaeology is viewed by the users of the WWW. Thirdly, I will highlight the more obvious parallels between the archaeological treatment of the figurines and the ways in which they are utilised on the WWW, noting significant divergences in their respective perceptions where relevant. Finally, I will make explicit the correspondences that can be shown to underlie *both* sets of approaches to and utilisations of the material.

#### *The influence of archaeology on the WWW*

Several sites refer to the views of archaeologists concerning the figurines: the North Park University of Chicago page [6] reports that archaeologists have identified the figurines as mother goddesses or good-luck charms; Hmmm – Must be Venus Envy [46] states that archaeologists have “deemed” the figurines to be fertility figures, contesting this view as limited and proposing that there are many different aspects of the figurines. Only a small number of sites refer specifically to archaeology and archaeologists as the supporting evidence for their claims. One such example states, “Modern archaeologists have discovered many statues and artifacts that verify the worship of ancient female deities” [15: Spiral Goddess]. Similarly, Spirit Project’s visit to the site of Dolní Věstonice [DV10] is intended to discover the experiences “which the famous archaeologist Marija Gimbutas called archeomythology”. Both examples make explicit reference to archaeological goddess theories particularly associated with Gimbutas and no longer current within the discipline itself. Similarly, it is in the context of steatopygic characteristics and their relationship to living peoples that reference is made to Willendorf, Lespugue and Dolní Věstonice by the Andaman Association [e.g. LE23], recalling the racial theories of Piette at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The only specific references to more current trends occur in I type sites, consisting of a number of news articles reporting the identification of items of clothing on the figurines by Soffer *et al* (2000). While this indicates the filtering of a recent archaeological trend into mainstream consciousness, there is no mention of it on any other type of site.

#### *The nature of the relationship between archaeology and the WWW*

Bearing in mind the rather dated examples of archaeological theory current on the WWW that I have provided above, there seems to be little in the nature of a direct relationship between the two mediums. Much of the overt appropriation of the figurines on the WWW takes place without acknowledgement of or regard for archaeological considerations. However, Rowlands notes the popular base that archaeology has, particularly in respect of its provision of access to the past on which a common sense of identity and unity can be based (Rowlands 1997: 34-5) and this aptly describes the role of the Venus figurines and Willendorf in many WWW sites.



A relationship of sorts necessarily exists in that the sites of the WWW are ultimately appropriating an *archaeological* material for a variety of purposes of a completely different nature. More specifically, the appropriation of the material is most frequently utilised as part of a process of legitimisation, in which the past is cited as justification for present conditions and aspirations. This occurs particularly in the example of the Willendorf figure. This practice is viewed by traditional archaeology as the misrepresentation of the past, the removal of the archaeological material culture from its true context and its use for purposes for which it was not intended, frequently raised as an issue in feminist identifications of androcentric bias in previous research (e.g. Dobres 1992a; Nelson 1993), and specifically condemned in relation to goddess interpretations and political uses (Bintliff 1991; Meskell 1996). On this basis, it would seem that any relationship between the two mediums must necessarily be an uncomfortable one.

It is recognised within the discipline that archaeology must maintain a relationship with the general public, that people *care* about ‘their’ past and that questions of the ethical and political responsibilities of the archaeologist must be considered (Wylie 1994: 15). While many perceive the ‘duty’ of the archaeologist to contemporary society is to provide objective accounts of the past that maintain interpretive integrity in the face of such appropriation from outside the discipline (Moore 1994; Bintliff 1991; Meskell 1996), it has also been suggested that the archaeologist’s real duty is to interpret the archaeological data “actively in the present” (Thomas and Tilley 1992: 109), and Tilley sees popular novels of archaeological fiction as “the revenge literature takes on the archaeologist for failing to provide a past relevant to the present” (Tilley 1993: 24). Whether the latter suggestion is entirely accurate or not, it seems appropriate to many of the uses of the Venus figurines on the WWW, particularly those examples where site authors associate the figures with aspects of their own lives and attitudes.

#### *Obvious parallels between the archaeological literature and the WWW*

The clearest parallel between the archaeological literature and the WWW sites is the existence of identical prototypes in each, the most striking aspect of this

being that Willendorf is central to both. Indeed, it may be suggested that a focus on celebrated examples or prototypes is a feature of both WWW and archaeological approaches.

Both mediums have been seen to focus on aspects of the nudity of the figures as significant. However, with respect particularly to Willendorf there is a clear difference in the perception of this factor. While various archaeological approaches have equated the nakedness of the figures with submission (Taylor 1996) or the grotesque display of an obese body (Graziosi 1960), with the exception of specifically oriented sites (that may be termed for convenience anti-obesity and anti-feminist), the nudity and stance of Willendorf are perceived of in terms of a powerful and independent physical and sexual presence, unrestricted by our cultural constraints. In this view, Willendorf's freedom – symbolised by her nakedness – is power.

Both mediums identify the figurines strongly with the Venus terminology, again with particular reference to Willendorf. Once again there is divergence in the perception of the term; while in archaeology this usage is accompanied in some cases by queries of the relevance of the term for the figurines, there is little questioning of the term on the WWW, where – ironically intended in its original application or not – Willendorf is a “Venus” in the classical sense of the term. For many the identification of Willendorf with an ideal of beauty is a way of retaking control.

However, in one final respect there appears to be a complete correspondence between the two mediums. On the WWW, as in archaeology, Willendorf is a contested symbol – her meanings and appropriations are mutable, and the figure is malleable enough to be interpreted in many ways and for a variety of purposes. Just as I have demonstrated diverse identifications and interpretations of the same figurine or feature (see Chapter 6, Case Study 3), I have also shown that both sides of the ‘fat acceptance’ issue interpret this figure in a manner entirely appropriate to their own standpoint; similarly, Willendorf is perhaps the only figure that could be included on the pages of both a Neo-Nazi group

promoting “White Pride” (Stormfront [391]) and a site identifying the figure as a “black Messiah” (Saxakali [290]).

*The identification of underlying correspondences in approaches and interpretation*

Despite the potential opposition between the two mediums suggested above, a number of less obvious correspondences can be suggested. The first of these may perhaps be superficial; the apparent echoes of several archaeological approaches in the specific uses of the Venus of Willendorf. The first of these concerns the transmission of the encrypted image of Willendorf as part of a scientific test [80]. In this experiment, Gamble’s (1982) hypothesis of the role of the Venus figurines in the exchange of information comes full circle; in this instance the information exchanged is the image of the Venus of Willendorf.

A second example recalls the sexualised interpretations of Collins and Onians (1978), Guthrie (1979) and Taylor (1996). In Harry Moor’s erotic fiction entitled “The Venus of Willendorf” [135], the author describes intercourse with a woman he refers to by the same name. A final example is that of the Andaman Association noted above. In these two examples, it could be suggested that an archaeological hypothesis is taken and applied in the extreme.

However, the fact that such a correspondence in the utilisation of the figurines occurs at all, suggests that closer analysis could identify examples of less obvious yet nevertheless fundamental similarities occurring in the approaches of the two mediums. This can be explored through a reconsideration of the manner in which Willendorf is utilised to support a range of personal and political viewpoints expressed on the WWW. In these instances, Willendorf ‘herself’ is now associated with new meanings devoid of any archaeological context beyond the assertion of her great age. However, throughout this thesis I have drawn attention to the lack of significance accorded by archaeologists to contextual factors with regard to the Venus figurines, and it is apparent that at a fundamental level there is a clear parallel in the two seemingly distinct approaches. In certain of the archaeological hypotheses I have discussed, there has been little systematic analysis, and the figures are simply selected on the basis of a general suitability to a specific hypothesis. Chapter 6 has presented a

number of examples in which archaeologists similarly appropriate the figures, decontextualise them, and remake them as required. In these examples, it has been seen that the major evidence offered as support is a subjective identification of the features of the figurines themselves.

A further aspect of correspondence between the archaeological and WWW utilisations of the Venus figurines, particularly Willendorf, is the reflection of wider contemporary trends in the purposes to which the figures are put and the interpretations and meanings applied to them. While many of the WWW sites overtly declare their personal/political stance and beliefs, contemporary trends will have no less influence on the archaeological literature produced. Archaeological approaches and concerns change with the development of new theoretical paradigms, allowing each generation to view the figurines with ‘fresh eyes’, and this accounts for the variety of hypotheses applied to the figurines in the texts. The changing social contexts of archaeological approaches are apparent in the hypotheses applied to them – this thesis has made reference to the figurines as the depiction of specific races, as symbols of fertility, as a form of communication in mating networks, as views of women looking down on themselves, as bound and subjected women, and as symbols of the high status of particular women. The impact of the feminist movement is particularly clear in the political uses of the Willendorf figure on the WWW outlined above, and this is also apparent in some later archaeological texts dealing with the figures (e.g. Dobres 1992*a*, 1992*b*; Nelson 1993), where the Venus figurines are the means by which the authors can put forward a critique of androcentric bias in previous archaeological works. The ‘end product’ of this is that in both mediums, the figurines are made to speak for us. This is overtly done in the WWW sites, where personal feelings and injustices are attributed to the figures and played out through them, but it is also apparent to some degree in the latter archaeological examples.

The Willendorf figure has been identified as a “commodity” in its use on the WWW, and this usage is also applicable to the role of the figurines within archaeology. The variety of interpretations applied to the figurines in archaeology has been noted above, and their role in such wide-ranging

hypotheses indicates their malleability. It is an interesting thought that while the contexts of approaches to the figures change, the figures themselves display a consistency in that they are always available for, and inevitably appropriate to, the next potential set of meanings applied to them. Indeed, it is apparent that in both archaeology and the WWW the figurines are an object of fascination and great interest, whether this fascination takes the form of a new product for sale or the latest hypothesis seeking to explain the figurines.

In conclusion, therefore, it can be suggested that there are more basic similarities in the way that both the archaeological literature and the sites of the WWW appropriate and create meanings for the Venus figurines. As my evaluation of the archaeological literature has consistently indicated that archaeological principles have been effectively abandoned in the avoidance or dismissal of contextual difficulties with the Venus figurines, it would seem that to a degree the WWW use of the Venus figurines simply parallels archaeological practice with regard to this material. Although prompted by different motivations and priorities, and with their results intended for a widely different audience, it can still be said that the figures are appropriated in both the archaeological literature and the sites in exactly the same way. It can therefore be suggested that in both mediums, the Venus figurines fulfil a need. While the figurines are an appropriate vehicle for political and personal messages in contemporary society, in archaeology they are utilised in the continual and necessary generation of new hypotheses, and (in certain works) as a means of attracting a wider audience to the discipline.

The next section will present a brief concluding summary of the results of this analysis of the WWW.

### **Conclusions of the WWW analysis**

As the results of the examination of the WWW sites have already been presented in a previous section, and a comparative analysis of WWW and archaeological approaches to the material has been conducted above, it only remains to summarise the importance of this analysis for my research, and to draw together the overall implications of this analysis.

This section of the thesis was concerned with demonstrating the spread of the Venus figurines – an archaeological category of material – into popular culture and a wider contemporary context. It was also intended to view the Venus figurines as a category of material that has gone beyond the bounds of the discipline of archaeology, to have widely different meanings and relevance in contemporary culture.

This analysis of the WWW has indicated the wide range of uses that the Venus figurines are put to in the medium of the WWW. Indeed, both the quantity and diversity of sites dealing with the figurines in general, and Willendorf in particular, far exceeded my expectations. In addition to my previous discussion of the results, I would emphasise only one point; that the Venus figurines are no longer the exclusive preserve of the archaeological domain, and that Willendorf particularly has as active a role in the modern world as in the context of prehistory. In this sense, the Venus figurines are no longer simply an archaeological class or type, but an archaeological *brand* – a body of archaeological material that has a meaning and relevance for many beyond the discipline. The wide-ranging role of the Venus figurines on the WWW sites, and the lack of reference to their original place in the discipline of archaeology, indicates that archaeology may be failing to provide interpretation of this material that has relevance and interest to a wider audience. Unrestricted by any rules of archaeological practice, the users of the WWW sites have grasped the principle of the contemporary creation of meaning, utilising the figurines as means to define themselves, and providing the Venus figurines with meanings geared specifically to their own situations.

As stated in the Introduction to this section, the aim of this analysis was to facilitate a comparison between the WWW sites and the archaeological literature that could provide insight into the approaches of archaeology itself with reference to the Venus figurines. This comparison has identified that while the WWW sites and the discipline of archaeology exist for the most part independently of each other, their shared interest in this material virtually determines that parallel practices will occur in the two mediums to a greater or

lesser extent, and my analysis has demonstrated their occurrence at both an explicit and implicit level. More specifically, the implications of this research indicate that the gap between the material itself and the interpretations we apply to it may be as great in archaeology as it is on the WWW. There, it is clear that meanings with contemporary relevance are created in *this* context and applied to the material with the specific intention of supporting a pre-determined purpose or cause, whether it is political or personal. However, substitute “hypothesis” for “cause”, and this process aptly describes the practice of interpretation with regard to the Venus figurines in certain cases.

Chapter 8 will now draw together the final conclusions of my research.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CONCLUSIONS

This concluding chapter will contain three sections; an overview of the research, a discussion of the possible ways forward for approaches to the Venus figurines in the light of this analysis, and a closing section in which this thesis is subject to an ‘auto-critique’.

#### Overview

As detailed conclusions have been provided in the analyses of both the archaeological literature and the WWW, this section will briefly recap the main points discussed in each chapter.

This thesis aimed to enhance our understanding of archaeological practice through examination of the archaeological category of Venus figurines. My research aimed to examine this category with regard to two areas: firstly, the way or ways that archaeologists have presented and made use of the Venus figurines; secondly, how usage of the category has permeated beyond the discipline of archaeology into more diversified contexts of contemporary culture.

My methodology consisted of two separate analyses: firstly, a detailed and critical textual analysis of the archaeological literature through which the material culture is presented; secondly, an analysis of the occurrence and utilisation of this same material culture in the contemporary medium of the Internet or World Wide Web.

The textual analysis highlighted a number of factors involved in the construction and consolidation of the category of Venus figurines. Through an examination of the terminology applied to this material, Chapter 2 demonstrated how a process of labelling fulfils a number of roles in the construction of the category. The first of these was that through the association of the Venus label, the existence of the figurines as a similar and coherent body of material was



emphasized. The second was that, once established as a referent for the material, the well-known label was increasingly linked with a popular impression of the material. Thirdly, that the association of the established Venus label with the category served to predetermine that which it sought to represent. Ultimately, the repeated application of this terminology to the material has the effect of homogenising and standardising the material itself, allowing the continued perception of it as a clear and distinct archaeological type.

Chapter 3 examined the association of the Venus terminology with chronological designations and reviewed the evidence for archaeological context and chronological attribution in the texts. This demonstrated that despite strong chronological labelling of the group, the archaeological contexts of the majority of the Western European figurines are not secure. It further identified that the majority of texts respond to this in one of two ways: by either failing to adequately acknowledge the problem in their approaches to the material, or by utilising an argument based on the perceived stylistic similarity of the group to provide chronological attribution. Both chronological attribution and stylistic similarity were identified as major factors in the construction of the category.

Chapter 4 contrasted the continued emphasis of homogeneity in the literature with evidence for diversity contained within the same texts to indicate that the stylistic similarity of the group is not as widespread as is claimed. Furthermore, it indicated that diversity is accorded less attention as a feature of research, and is generally treated as being of less interpretive significance than similarity.

Chapter 5 examined the consolidation of the category through the use of literary techniques serving to homogenise and standardise the material. This identified processes of prioritisation in the literature that serve to maintain the impression of the stylistic homogeneity of the group at the expense of diversity within it. Chief amongst these was the identification of Willendorf as the prototype figure around which the category of Venus figurines operates. However, a certain number of additional figures, and groups of figures, were identified as fulfilling similar roles in some respects.

Chapter 6 concluded the textual analysis section of the thesis by presenting three specific Case Studies demonstrating the processes previously identified in the literature. The Case Studies were used to demonstrate a number of factors: the prioritisation of the stylistic canon and the establishment of the credibility of the category through explicit reference to previous authors; how the characteristics of the category would necessarily change if all relevant figures were considered and included in the group; identification of the *recreation* rather than the representation of the archaeological material as a process occurring in the texts.

Chapter 7 sought to investigate the uses of the Venus figurines in a wider contemporary medium: the Internet or World Wide Web. Relevant sites were located and examined to identify differential utilisations of the archaeological material. The Willendorf figure was again identified as the Venus figurine prototype, with the sheer quantity of sites located for this figure in comparison to the other figures indicating its position as the most familiar example of the category. Detailed analysis of the sites demonstrated a multiplicity of uses of the figurines by a range of individuals, organisations, groups and retailers. The strong emergence of a prototype figure was tested against the comparative material provided by an analysis of the category of stone circles, with the results indicating that such a focus on one example may be a common pattern in this medium. Having identified the uses to which the figurines, and particularly Willendorf, are put and the meanings that are created for them by site authors, the analysis went on to compare and contrast these uses and meanings with the utilisation of the figurines in the archaeological literature. This comparison identified certain similar processes occurring in both the archaeological literature and the WWW sites, particularly concerning the creation of context for the figurines and their role as a ‘commodity’ in both media.

#### *Ways forward for the Venus figurines*

I will now propose three possible ways forward for the study of the Venus figurines, and discuss the implications of each.

1. Continue with present approaches. The value of contextual evidence is dismissed, it is admitted that while many of the figurines have no context or archaeological credibility, we will proceed with our interpretation of them anyway. In this scenario, the figures remain detached from any archaeological context, and it is accepted that any interpretation is only a contemporary meaning attributed to the figures, as there is no way of testing any such proposal. We accept that meanings created in archaeological interpretation are contemporary, and recognise that the Venus figurines are simply a vehicle reflecting contemporary trends and attitudes.

2. Re-evaluation of the established class. Those figures with poor or no archaeological context must be abandoned in order to maintain the archaeological viability of the class. Questions of context cannot be written off as “positivist assertions of verifiability” (Dobres 1992a: 249). Archaeology must attempt to relate this material to an archaeological context so that the interpretations we produce are a) not limited to only what can be seen in the figures themselves and b) have an archaeological basis, without which we have no authority to claim that our interpretations have greater validity than those provided outside the discipline. Apart from the Tursac and possibly Lespugue figures, this will leave a focus only on those Central European and Russian figures with secure archaeological context. In addition, credit must be given to the value of contextual evidence in the interpretations put forward for the figurines. Works such as Soffer *et al* (2000) suggest that the place of archaeological context in the Venus figurines is becoming less important. However, while acknowledging that the manner of an object’s disposal may not tell us everything about its life, it must also be remembered that it tells us *something*, not least that the artifact is a genuinely ancient item. It cannot be disputed that a figure found in a pit alongside Gravettian implements in a domestic dwelling tells us more than a figure found on the surface of a path. We must therefore not only re-align the category of Venus figurines, but also re-align what it is we want from the archaeological record, and what we are prepared to consider as relevant information to aid interpretation.

A final aspect requiring attention is the diversity apparent within the category. If variability is the result of differential choices, these possibilities must be explored, once again allowing attention to be given to the particular rather than the general.

3. Identify the Venus figurines as contemporary symbols in both archaeological and popular approaches and continue to examine our use of them as a means of exploring ourselves and our relationship to the past. The past is part of us, especially when utilised, discussed and sold on the WWW, and the appropriation of the Willendorf figure raises the question of to whom the past belongs. The figurines are a contested and (in the strictly archaeological sense) a controversial body of material that have been made relevant to a wide range of people, and this aspect of the figurines could be explored in other contemporary media. The Venus figurines have been identified in this thesis as a body of archaeological material that has interest for a wide range of people. I have identified use of the figurines in archaeology as prototypes for the wider category of Palaeolithic material culture. This is therefore an opportunity to make archaeology a part of peoples' lives. If the figurines are no longer the exclusive preserve of archaeology – if they are recognisable symbols beyond the discipline – then this material can be used to raise the profile of archaeology. As a body of material through which wider post-processual issues can be explored, the Venus figurines are also the perfect archaeological material. Attitudes to women and their role in society are revealed in approaches to the figures, as were attitudes to races in earlier works. It is in the public interest to discuss these issues and explore our wider attitudes and aspirations.

While the latter approach may be of value in its own right, my own feeling is that it need not be the only way forward for the Venus figurines if re-evaluation of the established category is undertaken and proceeds with attention to issues of context and diversity, and I feel that the second approach is a viable option. This approach would allow attention to be paid to specific contexts of production, such as at Dolní Věstonice. Furthermore, this unique association of the Pavlov culture figurines with ceramic technology indicates a distinct difference from the contexts in which the Russian figurines were discovered, indicating that

over-arching interpretations of the wider class of figurines may no longer be appropriate. Concerning the Russian figurines, Dobres has suggested that figurines are exclusive to certain sites (Dobres 1992b: 257). There has been little further attention to this suggestion in the literature, yet a comparison between sites that are associated with figurines and those that are not may allow inferences to be drawn concerning one of the key reasons why we practise archaeology in the first place – to investigate why the figurines were initially produced and their place in their contemporary context.

### Auto-critique

It is ironic that this thesis, as a critical work, undoubtedly displays a number of the failings identified in the literature studied. Discussion of some examples in detail leads to the neglect of other examples, and to generalisation from a small sample that is used to represent the whole. While much of the work has concerned the identification of prototypes, it is ironic that I also perpetuate their use – much discussion is concerned with these celebrated few figures, particularly Willendorf. As the figures included in my work are drawn from those discussed in the texts, this tends to limit the figures discussed – if they are ignored in the literature, I too ignore them. It is also apparent that there is a tendency to treat certain texts as proto-typical, using them as an example of the wider body of literature on numerous occasions. A desire to present the ‘whole story’ in the cases of some texts has led to the over-representation of some works, the neglect of others, and the over-simplification of certain issues.

The method of presentation of this thesis was the result of an unwillingness to reduce the nuances of the literature to numerical representation in tables, and it is accepted that some areas of analysis could have been presented in a simple format e.g. how many of the texts discuss examples in detail, how many examples are discussed. However, the presentation of the information contained in and obtained from the archaeological texts is a complex issue.

The aim of the textual analysis was to seek answers within these texts regarding information concerning the Venus figurines. For this reason, information provided in Table 1 was sought only in those texts already included for study.

This attempt to present a synthesised and unequivocal account of the Venus figurines proved to be the most demanding and least satisfactory aspect of this thesis, as a detailed re-examination of the texts to find this information produced only more conflicting evidence, and in such a table, it is difficult to present three possible versions of any given piece of information. The texts are contradictory to the degree that even different heights are given for certain figures. A table does not allow room for discussion, nuance or variable opinions. It would have been better, though more expansive in terms of both time and length, to present an account of each figure, setting out to show exactly what the texts do and do not say with regard to each. Such an approach was considered and rejected on the basis that it would simply have been an attempt to condense much of the information discussed in whole chapters into an extremely abbreviated form. This identifies a conflict at the very heart of this thesis, and one which impacts upon the presentation of the information it discusses throughout.

With this in mind, it is perhaps appropriate to conclude by noting that these points of auto-critique once again draw attention to a central theme of this thesis – the difficulties in dealing with the Venus figurines at both first and second hand in a truly objective manner.

