

## Chapter 4:

### Time Matters: Faces, Externalised Knowledge and Transcendence

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#### Abstract

Prehistoric predecessors are known to us through their enduring creations. As externalised knowledge, their artefacts and art open for us windows on their relation to the time matters of impermanence, finitude and the realm beyond the lived present. Creating and re-presenting the impermanent world in solid form means the reality thus created appears as if it were immutable. As such it facilitates reflective knowledge and with it time-binding and time-distanciation practices that far exceed the capacity of spoken symbolic language. New modes of thought and expression are made possible through the visual. Importantly, it opens up the realm beyond the present and allows for free movement in time. This paper focuses on the human face as an exemplar of such externalised knowledge in relation to temporality and to notions of time and space as integral. Animated, the created face looks back at its maker. Endowed with life it becomes an interlocutor, another putative living entity through which reality can be probed and the temporal givens transcended. Through an investigation of the face in relation to these key temporal challenges the paper critically discusses existing approaches to time and history.

#### Introduction

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

Some 400 carved stone spheres, measuring around seven centimeters in diameter, have been found in the Aberdeen area and the Orkney Islands of Scotland. They vary in intricacy, decorative detail and hardness of stone, with the largest number carved of granite, the most permanent and enduring material available at the time. The fact that only stone tools were available to carve these stone spheres makes them even more astonishing and enigmatic

objects. Dorothy Marshall (1976-77) explains in her extensive study of the spheres that the majority were found in an area of good land with the capacity to support the largest populations.

Many theories had been put forward as to the uses of these carved spheres, ranging from weapons and weights to ceremonial objects and mobile testaments of masons' skills (Nisbet, 2014). When dealing with objects dating back some 4000 years, all interpretation is necessarily conjecture, with some theories more persuasive than others.

Leaving aside the spheres' social function, their geometry is sophisticated far beyond what had been associated with the knowledge practices of Neolithic Britain. As Keith Critchlow (1979: 145) explains, the carved stone balls express the major division of the unitary sphere: octahedral, tetrahedral, dodecahedral, icosahedral, cuboctahedral, icosidodecahedral (the latter two being combinations of two geometric sphere shapes superimposed upon each other to reveal 14 and 32 faces respectively). Irrespective of whether or not it was explicitly theorized by their creators, and irrespective of the use to which these spheres were put, the mathematical knowhow was embedded the creations, their associated practices and performances.

Analysis of the spheres' geometry reveals special emphasis on the numbers five, seven and nine, which all have known links to planetary movement and are recognized to hold a special place in archaic and ancient cultures the world over. Moreover, given that numbers express eternal principles (Franz, 1974), the permanence of these artifacts' material was appropriate to the mathematical principles involved. Whether or not the numbers encoded in these stone spheres convey belief in an eternal ground of being is again open to conjecture. However, when combined with the art and artifacts, temple structures and underground arrangements of burial mounds of the Neolithic, the conjecture becomes plausible. Pre-dating any written records, the combined material expression of this cultural life suggests an eternal braid of transience and eternity that seems to be woven into the very fabric of those ancient people's lives.

When looked at through a temporal lens we discern not just incredible mathematical skill but an equally astonishing temporal complexity. We detect engagement with eternal principles, permanence and longevity as well as rhythmic patterning, temporality and change. These

temporal features were activated and practiced, denoting knowhow of immense depth and complexity, thus pointing to extensive temporal mobility and prowess.

Applying a temporal lens to ‘prehistory’ tends to sidestep the more accustomed package of archaeological and historical questions around dating, usage, function and utility, taking us instead to constitutive existential issues of life and death, growth and decay, transience and permanence, where we find engagement with finitude, impermanence and efforts to extend beyond the lived present. It tends to foreground temporalities that are shared without denying or diminishing diverse and unique cultural expressions. Using earliest representations of the face, it is these temporal issues that will primarily occupy us in this paper.

Irrespective of the intended usage, as externalized knowhow, artifacts can become sources for understanding. Objectified we can get to know something with the full complement of our senses, adding several dimensions to the auditory one of speech, and the auditory-visual communication between co-presents. New modes of thought and expression are made possible through the visual. Importantly, the creation of artifacts opens up the realm beyond the present and allows for the free movement in time, given that the creation and re-presentation of the inescapably impermanent world in permanent form facilitates time-binding and time-distanciation practices that far exceed the capacity of spoken symbolic language. As such, the creation of artifacts can be seen as enabling, as opening up what is possible and what can and could be. Seen through a temporal lens, artifacts become agents of the future, temporal extensions of their makers, holders and users.

In this paper we will investigate the face as an exemplar of externalized knowledge to explore approaches to time and history, and narrative about the past. Locating our arguments within wider theoretical and methodological frameworks drawn from the social sciences, and from visual and material culture, we will examine the shift in focus from space and materiality to space, materiality and time, and explore the movement beyond current binary distinctions between past and present to include the future. As externalized knowledge, prehistoric artefacts and art open windows on time matters of impermanence, finitude and the realm beyond the lived present.

## ***II Prehistory as Time Matter***

There has never been a period in the last 3.5 million years in which natural rhythms were human rhythms, and we have no evidence that Paleolithic groups were in tune with, or at the mercy of the environment.

(Gosden, 1994: 9)

The archaeologist Christopher Gosden's statement is echoed by the sociologist Helga Nowotny (1975: 328), who insisted some twenty years earlier, that there exist no human societies that could be said to 'lack the ability to transcend the immediate present'. Both authors respond to work that understood historical stages in terms of progression and progress, where 'earlier' tends to be associated with being less advanced, less sophisticated, less able to operate in and with time. One such categorization associates the lives of ancient cultures with cyclical time, where the past and especially the future have little significance and it contrasts this with modern societies' existence in linear, historical time. In previous work Barbara Adam (1990, 1995 and 2004) has argued that such divisions deny so-called prehistoric cultures temporal relations that biological research has shown to constitute an integral part of *all* life forms. Living being is rhythmically organized, with the processes and patterns of repetitions involved differing in their recurrence, thus signifying renewal. Such renewal is not change *in* time but it constitutes time. This directional rhythmicity endows beings with memory, foresight, and the capacity for synthesis. As such, the rhythmic temporalities of growing, ageing, healing, regenerating and reproducing are all directional aspects of the dynamics of organisms with form.

Given that temporal extension into past and future, foresight and planning tend to be fundamental to all rhythmically organized beings, it clearly makes no sense to deny these capacities to human cultures of the Paleolithic and Neolithic periods. There is, however, a need to distinguish between being one's past and future, having an awareness of it, and relating to this as an existential condition. The human potential for relating to the past and future, as John Dunne (1973) points out, has turned an existential condition into a socio-cultural achievement. The relationship to death in particular extends human beings beyond the cycles of nature even when their daily lives are dominated by concerns that do not reach beyond the growth cycle of seasons. To conceptualize ancient cultures in cyclical time — be it a 'timeless' or seasonal kind — denies those societies the human characteristic of a relationship to death and spiritual concerns with transcendence.

Equally troubling is the division of our human past into the historical world of recorded symbolic representation and a preceding pre-historical other which is defined by lack and what it is not (yet): no writing, no symbolic representation, no accounting records, no linear history. Such a conception tells us rather more about the standpoints and implicit assumptions of investigators than it does about their subject matter. As we show in this paper, an explicit focus on the temporal relations and knowledge practices of ancient cultures unsettles boundaries defined by deficit, such as those associated with the concept of ‘prehistoric’.

Those implicit assumptions of ‘our time’ are underpinned by dualisms and bounded distinctions such as mind and body, nature and culture, individual and society, synchrony and diachrony, as well as past, present and future. We can take the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss’ (1963/1972) dualistic models as a paradigm case because they still haunt the implicit assumptions that underpin studies of human societies distant from ‘us’ not just in time and place but also in cultural knowledge practices. Lévi-Strauss’ differentiated ‘our time’, dominated by history, irreversibility and succession, from the times of societies among whom cyclicity, simultaneity and even reversibility was said to prevail. These distinctions entail for traditional and archaic societies an assumed shallow past extension and a barely existent future orientation. Clear evidence to the contrary has been established by anthropologists, archaeologists, cosmologists and historians who insist that no human society could be said to live in cyclical time (Adam 1990, 1994 and 2004; Bourdieu 1979; Dunne 1973; Eliade 1954/1989; Fabian 1983 and 1993; Gosden 1994). The relationship to birth and death, the fashioning of tools and the creation of art, artifacts and architecture, both singly and as packages, all suggest a time extension and time transcendence that vastly exceeds that of the daily and seasonal cycle, even the human life cycle.

In order to break down such dichotomies, J. A. Barnes (1971: 545) suggests that we need to establish continua and supply more facts instead of using oppositions ‘that dance endlessly round each other...’. However, the simplicity of the suggestion is deceiving, since following it through entails leaving behind dualistic schemes of understanding and replacing them with alternative conceptual models. The latter might involve emphasizing such key concepts as ecology of mind (Bateson 1973), entanglement (Hodder 2011; Renfrew 2004), implication (Adam 1995), material engagement (Malafouris 2013), and thinking through making (Ingold 2013). All provide ways of approaching knowledge practices, material culture and the social

life of things through non-dualistic ways of understanding and, whether explicitly or implicitly, proffer a temporal perspective on the continuity of being in, of and with time. In these perspectives, seeming opposites are no longer mutually exclusive but reciprocally implicating. Mind and matter are forming and informing each other. Past and future are gathered up in the present and bound into a constitutive relational coherence. To achieve such a perspective, the overall logic of boundaries and delimiting lines needs to be more or less abandoned (Malafouris, 2013: 36) in favor of distributed minds, emphasis on process and engagement with knowledge practices.

In this paper we seek to illuminate three key temporal relations through the focus on artifacts depicting the human face. These are the relationship to finitude, the relationship to temporal extension into past and future and, last but not least, the relationship to change, transience and ephemerality. Archaeological, anthropological and historical records suggest humans have constructed their being eternally and surrounded themselves with symbols of permanence. The development of human culture, we therefore want to argue, is inextricably tied to the relationship to time and to the quest for transcendence of the earthly condition. However, the way cultures and their members relate to time and the detail of how the complexity of temporal relations is lived, experienced and constituted varies significantly in specific contexts. In this paper the primary focus is not on detailed accounts of specific archaeological sites. Rather, it is on shared temporal principles expressed through specific representations of the face and conjectures about their impact on knowledge practices. The broad arguments surrounding approaches to finitude, temporal extension and change will be outlined first before attending in detail to the artifactual evidence of the face in the third section of the paper.

### ***II.1. Relationship to finitude***

#### **Mortality**

Faced with death we crave an afterlife

Faced with mortality we seek immortality

Faced with extinction we presume reincarnation

Faced with finitude we produce things that outlast us

(Adam, 2004: 74)

Cultural practice creates social time and, conversely, in their relationship to time human beings create culture and structure their social lives. The relationship to finitude and the many varied responses to this primary threat are an integral and central part of this acculturation. Of course, living unto death is an existential condition we have in common with other animals. Experiencing the death of others and mourning their departure we share with just a few higher animals such as elephants. However, as far as we know, human beings are unique in the animal kingdom in having a *relationship* to finitude, which changes the nature of being. Once death is related to, direct and unmediated existence is no longer possible. In the relationship to mortality and the cycle of life, both death and existence are transcended. Thus, neither in the fact that we are aware that we have to die nor in our experiencing death in others and the recognition of our own finitude do we find the source of transcendence and human time. Rather, the uniquely human aspect is rooted in our having to reflect on it, having a relationship to it, imposing meaning on it, and in having to take an attitude to it.

This is what Martin Heidegger (1927/1980) is referring to when he proposes that transcendence is the essence of *Dasein*. As concern, resolve, anticipation and projection towards death, Heidegger understands human existence as 'being ahead of itself'. To him, transcendence is the ultimate basis of all human knowing and behaving. *Dasein*'s total penetration by birth and death and the concomitant fear of non-existence are our ontological condition. Because of its centrality to human being, death has played a central role in ancient cultures. It provided the pivotal point between earthly existence and its transcendence, between finitude and the continuity of being in a different realm. In the mind, death can be endured and through it the meaning of life revealed.

One response to the finitude of our existence is the search for permanence and continuity in all that is durable, ranging from artifacts to traditions. Faced with the existential condition of finitude, it seems, people have created cultural means of achieving immortality: fashioning art, artifacts and architecture that outlive their creators; positing a spirit world that transcends earthly existence; creating rituals that connect bounded individual lives to group origins and destinies. Burial ensures safe passage to the world of ancestors and creates social continuity across generations, while the production of artifacts externalizes knowledge, thus loosening the dependence on co-presence for knowledge to circulate. Many cultural constructions and creations have outlived not just their creators but have endured for thousands of years to be

studied and marveled at by us today: burial chambers and stone circles, cave paintings and mobility art, tools and pottery, jewelry and mathematical spheres carved from stone.

We think it is safe to say that in no known society are members left to face death uninitiated, without beliefs and rituals that ensure proper passage to a realm beyond death. This human relationship to finitude is inescapably embedded in historically constituted social relations and thus key to understanding archaeological finds associated with burial, the movement of bones, some mobility art and sacred monuments. As such, the relationship to finitude is synonymous with a past and future extension beyond the natural cycle of seasons and associated with a conscious striving for permanence.

## ***II.2 Relationship to past and future***

### ***Temporal Extension***

Faced with daily rounds of life we recognize our past

Faced with unbounded beginnings we embody star matter

Faced with present action domains we produce unending futures

Faced with social life now we (in)form and foreshadow future presents

All life forms, as we suggested earlier are characterized by temporal extension. They encompass an open past beyond individual and species boundaries, reaching back seamlessly to the very beginning of time. It may be helpful here to explain how a social scientist and a humanities scholar come to such a trans-disciplinary conceptual position. When cultural knowledge is approached through a temporal lens and combined with evolutionary theory and insights from theoretical physics of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, we begin to appreciate that our understanding changes with the time frame we impose on the subject matter: nano-second and less for the quantum world, a few hundred years for history, thousands of years for archaeology, millennia for evolution and geology, light years for astronomy. Opening the perspectival lens to an ever-wider timeframe enables us to recognize relations that are invisible from a narrower temporal frame of reference. It allows us to see the braid of connections that relates human beings to star matter.

While crucial, however, this widening of the frame is not enough for grasping human



temporal extension. Rather, it also requires a different understanding of the nature of the social. Here, George Herbert Mead (1932/1980) has achieved formative conceptual groundwork with his *Philosophy of the Present*. In this seminal work Mead argues, first, that sociality is a principle that permeates all of nature and, secondly, that time arises with the symmetry breaking principle of interaction. It means that the source of time is to be located in interaction *per se*. In the socio-cultural world we act on our world while it acts on us and it is in the ensuing process of mutual adjustment and re-organization that all of the past gets readjusted from the standpoint of the present. No routine action, tradition or regular recurrence, therefore, is ever the same in any of its repeats, as contexts, participants, and environments will have changed. Thus we can say that sociality is fundamentally temporal and temporality irreducibly social as both are located in the interactive process, in the active moment of symmetry breaking rather than its outcome.

Mead's path-breaking conceptualization of the mutual implication of time and sociality has a number of significant implications for understanding the temporality of human life during the Paleolithic and Neolithic periods. First, neither time nor sociality can be restricted exclusively to human interactivity. At the physical level, bodies encompass all of history while socio-culturally such continuities have to be performed and achieved. Both past and future are constituted by and bound by beings in the present. Finally, the temporality of things, events, organisms and their interactions encompasses inescapable direction: there can be no repetition of the same, no reversibility, no un-being and un-becoming.

Applied to the socio-cultural world, and in agreement with a wide range of social theorists such as John Dunne, Antony Giddens, Christopher Gosden, Tim Ingold, George Lacoff, Lambros Malafouris and Colin Renfrew, whose understanding is compatible with that of Mead, we want to argue that pasts and futures are constitutive of presents while needing to be maintained and achieved in the present. Gathering up all of the past, reconstituting and remaking it, ensures on-going continuity into open futures. Performing, enacting and maintaining knowledge practices in the present produce cultural continuity across vast stretches of time. When this performance of continuity is achieved, using permanent materials for the production of art, artifacts and architecture, then future presents of successors are secured and the material base of culture ensured for many generations.

### ***II.3 Relationship to change***

#### **Transience**

Faced with transience we hold time still

Faced with ephemerality we impose structure

Faced with impermanence we create permanence

Faced with mutability we produce art and institutions

(Adam, 2004: 74)

There are many ways to respond to change, numerous means to impose a socio-cultural will on the transience, ephemerality and contingency of human existence and the times of cosmos, nature and the body. Making time stand still, abstracting patterns, transforming cycles in to circles and re-creating the temporal world in permanent form, are all cultural means of negating change, sequence, and passage. In the process, however, time is not abolished; rather, it is culturally rendered non-temporal. The specific meanings these engagements with change carry for social groups are necessarily subject to conjecture as they differ with participants, the particular practices employed and the specific contexts within which they are enacted.

Numbers are ideally placed to unify the eternal and the temporal, existence and experience. They combine symbolism with temporal practice. In agreement with Marie Louise v. Franz (1974) we suggest that numbers give access to patterns and facilitate their cultural reproduction. Importantly, patterns can only be perceived by standing outside the passage of time since they freeze and hold still what is moving and transient. An example would be the patterns created by the stars' movement over time. However, we need to appreciate that the geometry of the Neolithic was unlikely to have been an abstract enterprise. Rather, it was more likely to be performed and practiced: externalized in artifacts, temple structures and the underground arrangements of burial mounds. Re-presenting and creating the temporal world in permanent and unchanging form means the reality thus created appears as if it were fixed and immutable. As such, it facilitates reflectively based knowledge and with it a time-distanciation that once more far exceeds seasonal cycles and the lifespans of individuals.

Archaic practices that made time stand still thus need to be recognized as *creative* acts of time transcendence and as collective engagements with transience and associated

uncertainties. The ensuing products became invaluable sources for reflection and understanding as well as supra-individual means of accumulating and passing on knowledge. Such knowledge practices bear little resemblance to an inescapable condition of existence of 'pre-historic' cultures defined by lack, bound by seasonal cycles and locked into an eternal present. Instead, they ought to be understood as responses to the earthly condition and appreciated as significant cultural achievements. As we show in the next section of this paper, the creation in unchanging form what is moving, changing, and interconnected, is most explicitly realised by our earliest human ancestors in and through their art.

### **III. Faces in Time**

[INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]

'Abstract art is only important if it is the endless rhythm where the very ancient and the distant future meet.'

(Delaunay, 1978: 56)

Faces are deeply associated with time. As a complex communication device the face has always played a key role in social values and relationships and acted as an interface between past, present and future. In art, history generally acknowledges three primary interpretations of faces: as emblematic of personhood and for individual psychological readings; as exemplars or icons to shape social behaviours or religious ideals; and as effigy or momentum, for commemorative purposes after the person is dead (Kemp, 2006).

In the context of prehistory, as traditionally defined, figurative art appears to have been rare, and little is known about the origin and interpretation of artifacts representing the human face. However, surviving examples suggest that the earliest depictions of human faces, and especially masks, demonstrate our embeddedness in an existence of different temporal and material dimensions: tangible and intangible, inner and outer, past and present.

Although not a manufactured artefact, the Makapansgat pebble or the pebble of many faces (ca. 3,000,000 BP) possibly comprises one of the earliest examples of symbolic thinking or aesthetic sense in the history of human heritage (Bednarick, 1998). This pebble, which has

natural wear patterns that resemble a human face, was found along with human skeletal remains at a distance from any possible natural source. As a result some speculate that its keepers may have recognized it as a symbolic face, and retained and brought it back to the cave for this reason (Kleiner: 2009). According to psychologists, we are drawn to looking at each other with a sustained intensity and complexity accorded to no other field of visual acuity (Bruce, 1998). Part of the allure and mystery of the face exists in the inextricable combination of inner and outer, and consciousness and countenance. The human eye looks for and can detect the slightest deviation from the accepted norm in another's face.

We have no way of confirming the pebble's provenance or the specific social and environmental contexts of the other examples discussed below. Nor should we seek to understand these with mainstream European aesthetic tools and conceptions of art, primarily developed from the classical civilizations of Greece and Rome. In the earliest known forms of art there are no distinctions between art and craft and the word 'artist' does not equate with contemporary notions of individual and unique makers. A useful working definition of such art would be 'meaningful objects shaped by human hands' (White, 2003: 20). However images and artworks have always been vibrant shapers of knowledge and the knowledge we abstract from the body continues to be one of the most powerful ways in which we define and transform our sense of what it means to be human. Writing about the North European bog bodies from around 8000 BCE, Karina Coucher (2012: 4) describes them as 'human time capsules capable of connecting past and present in ways different from other archaeological artifacts'. By analogy, as material metaphors, faces may always have been used to sustain our need for significance, continuity and identity.

The specific cognitive, perceptual, affective and performative qualities of visual and material thinking are crucial to our investigation of these early constructs of the face. Do images script the future and do we become extensions of them, or them of us? Do artworks mediate the world or shape it? Visualization has always been a way of forming, manipulating, understanding and transmitting knowledge. Objects and artifacts transform themselves into catalysts for ideas, philosophies, vision and imaginaries in every epoch. Looking at facial legibility and the role of representations of the face in art and artefacts as externalised knowledge practices in the creation of cultural time takes the argument beyond the delimiting standard historical lenses of the binary and the cyclical as outlined in sections I and II above.

The extraordinary expressive repertoire of facial representations and their unrivalled ability to communicate across cultures and centuries makes them a fascinating exemplar of how material things exist in time by means of both time-binding and time transcending qualities. In this chapter we argue that focus on shared temporal attributes of some of the earliest figurative artworks across each set of unique cultural contexts avoids the pitfalls of post-hoc generalizations based on incomplete knowledge. The temporal focus also avoids placing the multi-vocality and representational ambiguity of all prehistoric art as traditionally defined into the culturally homogenized category of ‘prehistoric’. Edward Burnett Tylor (1871: 1) defined culture as “That complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” The fundamentally relational character of material things is a route into a web of social, economic and ecological relationships. Reading temporality through material expression allows for commonality of consciousness and of some practices, but differences in meaning, interpretation and context.

[INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE]

*“It is not merely the likeness which is precious in [the daguerreotype] – but the association, and the sense of nearness involved in the thing, the face of the very shadow of the person lying fixed there forever.”*

Barrett Browning, 1843: 2

Human lives are lived in relation to the finitude of existence. Our search for permanence and durability is inseparable from the inevitability of death. Death is often considered the pivotal point between earthly existence and transcendence. Responding to death by fashioning objects that outlive us, or by positing a spiritual world that transcends earthly existence and has social continuity across generations, are important ways of reflecting, controlling and changing our relationships with time. Out of attempts to circumvent death we create culture and the structures of social life.

Faces are intimately associated with death. From the earliest times faces have been associated with shamanism, necromancy and trafficking with the dead. Amongst the first known representations of faces are those constructed from both the dead body of a person and from

artistic materials. These comprise one of the oldest art forms associated with burial practices. About 90 skulls dating from 7000–6000 BC found in Neolithic Jericho have faces that were built up in plaster over the facial region of the skull (Croucher, 2012, 94). When plastered, a layer of lime, gypsum or mud plaster placed over the face creates a flesh-like appearance. Many of these plastered skulls were also painted and had accentuated eyes, either outlined with eyeliner or decorated with shells set into the eye sockets to simulate eyes. Most of the skulls are from adult males but some belonged to women and children.

Similar practices can be found elsewhere – most obviously in the case of Ancient Egyptian mummies of the Old Kingdom; or in the surviving flattened stone masks with minimal features of the great metropolitan center of Teotihuacan (Mack, ed. 1994: 69). These are also believed to have been intended for funerary use, covering the faces of the dead. The Teotihuacan stone masks were encrusted with turquoise and coral mosaics or inlays of obsidian pyrite, with mother of pearl around their eyes and teeth.

It is no accident that the plastered skulls were made during the Neolithic period as this was a time of significant social development and enhanced understanding of the surrounding world, probably as a result of the migration of peoples and identification and exchange within and across groups. The destabilizing of the correlations between human being and artwork, life and death in the plastered skulls evidences complex relations with time. As Croucher (2012: 58) notes: ‘Ultimately perhaps what we see is the desire in this period for the living to make the dead accessible, recreated and resurrected though the plastering of the skulls and the curation of the dead close to their living kin’. By combining real body and artificial materials in these ways, funerary faces acted as an interface between life and death, past, present and future, and – in some instances – between mortal and immortal. The Jericho plastered faces were buried under the floors of their homes but death was not considered as an ending – the faces became part of a new life cycle, curated and displayed by the living. In addition to burial, scholars believe these plastered skulls and stone masks were placed on public buildings and displayed within private living spaces to commemorate family ancestors (Croucher 2012; Starzecka 1994; Whitley 2002). They sometimes represented the deities with which those ancestors were most closely associated (Croucher, 2012: 96). The plastered statues of Ain Ghazal and Jericho were designed to be viewed face on, with a flat profile. Additional usage and rituals associated with the plastered skulls as masks further corroborates this.

*The world the mask exists in is not a truthful reflection of the world but another form of reality.*

John Mack, 1994: 26.

[INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE]

As part of the funerary practices, the constructions of some Neolithic plaster and stone masks, such as those from the Judean Hills suggests that these also had interactive and performative functions during the Stone Age, constructing and maintaining relations between the living and the dead. A plaster mask from Jericho is perforated around the circumference indicating that it was tied onto the face. Three-dimensional modeling has shown that most of the Judean stone masks could have been placed comfortably on the face: "The eye holes allow for a wide field of vision, and the comfortable apportioning of the mass is suited to human facial contours." (Williams 2014). These remodelled facial structures in Jericho transformed the bare skulls into life-like representations of the individual, ancestor or deity. There is evidence to suggest that these were used to communicate with as well as represent these entities (Croucher 2012; Starzecka 1994). In ritual or religious use, users were thought to be possessed by, or become, a god or spirits. Anthropologist Victor Turner's (1967: 94) liminal phase theory conceptualised access to other forms of reality and new identities acquired during masking ceremonies as a paradoxical status 'between and betwixt'. For the Makishi in Central Africa in the nineteenth century, masks were thought to be the dead in resurrected form and the word itself translates as 'ancestral spirit' (Mack 1994). These traces of human visage render spirit or identity astonishingly visible. Ancient Peruvians covered their faces with golden masks to demonstrate the continued existence of their power (Sung 2006).

As well as representing the boundaries between life and death, masks embody new realms of interaction and experience. In a variety of different and culturally specific ways, ancient societies used them to handle ambiguous boundaries and linkages of space, time and society (Wang, 2006: 255). For many cultures without a written language, mask ceremonies were a means of strengthening social links and relational identities, reconstituting time through interactions. In the tension and interplay between what they reveal and conceal masks can also embody a range of primary animating functions, such as rituals of healing and of driving

out demons. Moreover, the earliest masks were used for hunting as well as for funerary, religious or agricultural cycles and social rites of initiation (Mack 1994). Just as the face is a slender and fragile boundary, where interior and exterior worlds meet, masks demonstrate the uncertain boundaries between the real face and the image, the animate and inanimate, and agility in and across time. As a means of social intervention, masks embody the transformative value of aspirations, empowering social and cultural change. They are objects which carry a memory and intelligence of the future.

[INSERT FIGURE 5 HERE]

However mobile in time, masks also involve irreducible social relations in which past and future are constituted and bound by human beings in the present. As Gosden (1994:180) has argued, time itself is not the medium through which human relations unfold: human action and interaction *produce* time through anticipation and recursive reflection. Seen in this context the making of masks and of other artifacts represents a sophisticated form of time consciousness. On the one hand, art is capable of holding time still in context and of negating change and the passage of time. On the other hand, by arresting change through the creation of lasting artifacts, art allows for the accumulation of a past and the opening up of a future in the present. In this latter respect, art creates a new relationship to time in which the past is as revocable and hypothetical as the future in the light of new knowledge and understanding.

The notion of the present as that in which past, present and futures are continually altered and reconstituted is clearly evident in artworks which outlive their makers including some of the earliest undisputed forms of Paleolithic figurative art. At about 25,000 years old, the French Venus of Brassempouy, an ivory figurine depicting only a female head from the Upper Paleolithic period, also known as the *Dame à la Capuche* or *La Figurine à la Capuche*, is one of the earliest known sculptured realistic representations of a human face. It was discovered in a cave at Brassempouy in France in 1894 (White, 2006: 278). Exquisitely sculpted from the hard central core of the tusk, there is evidence to suggest that it was made in an atelier for ivory sculpting (White, 2003: 300). As a result of textured rendering of her eyes and hair the figurine's expression seems to change in different lights.

We don't know who the *Dame à la Capuche* was or what her image represents (White, 2006: 251; Collon, 1995: 96). As argued in our introduction above, we should not make



assumptions based on contemporary aesthetics about the extent to which she may be a proxy for symbolic communication; nor on whether her form is emblematic of individual personhood. As with the plastered skulls, a diversity of alternative interpretative frames have been applied, including fertility, ancestor worship, social status or the activities of daily life, such as hunting etc (White, 2006, 252).

However, the demonstrably intentional qualities behind the enormous skill of this and other artworks traditionally defined as prehistoric are arguably early markers of culture with respect to human consciousness. The *Dame à la Capuche* was made using a pointed flint tool, or a stone burin, deployed with great dexterity. The surface shows evidence of cutting, grinding, polishing, scraping, gouging and chiseling (White, 2003: 87). In addition to creative and communicative power, the ability to select characteristics and forms and apply them in different media and contexts has profound organizational and adaptive implications for social groups. We have perhaps lost touch with the alchemy involved in being able to create the illusion of a real world object out of strokes of the chisel (White, 2003). Our nearest 21<sup>st</sup> century equivalent is perhaps the new architectures of perception made possible by today's digital avatars and our embeddedness in an increasingly immaterial world of 'smart' interworked things (Kemp, 2004: 101-147). The ways in which the *Dame à la Capuche* and other Paleolithic artworks such as the Venus statuettes and figurines discovered in the area of Blaubeuren, Ulm and Niederstotzingen on the Swabian Alb, in Ice Age Germany and made around 40,000 years ago are seen to be in dynamic relationship with, and subject to, transformations of the natural world. They comprise an early example of representational thought in which people and things circulate in exchanges which contribute to the identity of both (Thomas: 1996).

The fundamentally relational character of material things and the technical virtuosity of the the *Dame à la Capuche* also represent the past preserved in the present as the legacy of our predecessors transcendence, and imaginative frameworks as future alternatives to the makers' empirical environments and the potential to change them. It is this magical act of endowing matter with apparent life, making of it an interlocutor, another putative living entity, which underlies and links the most disparate art practices from the most primal and animistic portrait mask to the uncanny digital programming of 21<sup>st</sup> century computer avatars (Kemp, 2008). The face's diversity, versatility and unrivalled ability to communicate make it a profoundly fascinating enigma.

#### IV. Conclusion

“We need to find ways to carry the mute body of prehistory with us rather than step over its corpse on the road to civilization and the lure of texts.”

Gamble, 1996: 24

In light of theoretical and empirical material relating to key temporal challenges, we have used our investigation of faces in prehistory in this chapter to shift the focus from matter and space to the matter-space-time interdependence. In addition to highlighting the inappropriateness of binary distinctions between space and time, and past and present, the specialization of time demonstrates the need to move beyond current polarities between past and present to include the future. Alfred Schütz (1945) described this process as dynamic or ‘reconstructive’ time in which the present is regarded as a sliding ensemble configured on pasts and futures, which are constantly altered in light of new knowledge and understanding. Notably, the movement beyond binary temporal distinctions emphasized the shared features that are an integral part of all difference, uniqueness and particularity. It addressed the problem of then and there as ‘other’ to the here and now and de-essentialized notions of the ‘universal’ in which pasts and futures and their inhabitants as perceived as ‘other’, and distinct from us in some absolute way. It encompasses full temporal extension to past, present *and* future without prediction and determinism.

Reconstruction – or re-constitution – was shown as part of the dynamism of time-space-matter in relation to artworks through which we relive the past in externalized form in light of the present while foreshadowing the future. It is as if the whole of time is contained in the DNA of each artwork. By asking different questions of the archaeological record through this focus on the porous borders between past, present and future, we have offered an alternative to the linearity described by Randall White (2003: 23) in which ‘The category of “primitive” art lumps together all non-Western and prehistoric imagery into a manageable culturally homogenized category presumed to be accessible to the universality of our aesthetic tastes and susceptible to our judgments of aesthetic value.’

Reading temporality through diverse material expressions of the face across cultures reveals

differences in meaning, context and variables of practice. At the same time, the fundamentally relational character of material things – between people and material worlds, between humans and animals, and between the living and the dead – demonstrates continuity and commonality of anticipation and recursive reflection. This is particularly the case in relation to artworks and objects. Bound by nature but produced by culture, artifacts with faces have particular resonance as the embodiment of time through communicative power of the human countenance as focal points for narratives of social agency and identity, or of past, present and future. As Gosden points out (1994:180): ‘This involvement leads to the creation of time in the form of joint anticipations of the human and natural worlds. Here we can see how materiality and mutuality are linked: a fundamental juncture giving shape and trajectory to life, providing a means of creating history’.

As externalized knowledge, art and artifacts open windows on impermanence, finitude and the realm beyond the lived present. Such works facilitate reflective knowledge and with it time-binding and time-distanciation practices that exceed the capacity of spoken symbolic language. We have argued that new modes of thought and expression are made possible through the visual: as the realm beyond the present is opened up, art and artifacts allow for free movement in time. Endowed with life, the human face is an exemplar of such externalized knowledge. Animated, the created face looks back at its maker, another putative living entity through which reality could be probed and the temporal givens transcended. Importantly, the temporal lens seriously unsettles the taken-for-granted division of history and prehistory and requires it to be reframed and re-conceptualized.

In locating our arguments within wider theoretical and methodological frameworks drawn from the social sciences, and from visual and material culture, we have found that trans-disciplinary perspectives have much to contribute to approaches to the conceptualization of time and history, and to the intersection of the material, the spatial and the temporal.

## **Figure Captions**

Figure 1: Neolithic Scottish stone spheres, measuring around 2.75 inches in diameter.

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Figure 2: the Makapansgat pebble, c2.5-2.9 million years old

© University of Witwatersrand, South Africa

Figure 3: Plaster Skull from Jericho, c7000-6000 BC

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Figure 4: Neolithic stone masks from the Judean hills

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Figure 5: Brassempouy Venus

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