Structure, Signification, and Culture

Different Logics of Representation and their Archeological Implications

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In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the field of Paleolithic art was a source of intellectual ferment and innovative interpretation. This was in direct contrast to the first forty years immediately following the recognition of graphic representations in Upper Paleolithic contexts. In this early period, all "art," from nineteenth-century impressionist landscapes to the Pleistocene painted bison of Altamira, was misguidedly viewed as "art for art's sake."[1] The only explanation required was the pursuit of aesthetic pleasure and all that was needed was sufficient time to pursue artistic activities.

Aesthetics were naively viewed as universal and culturally invariant, that is, innate. Of course at the time there were almost no available ethnographic observations on "artistic" activities and contexts in non-western cultures. If there is one point of consensus that has emerged over the past century in anthropology, it is that all representations are socially and culturally meaningful. It is no longer possible to say that an image is "purely aesthetic," if what is meant is that it is devoid of culturally specific meaning and symbolic content. To repeat, aesthetics are culturally situated[2] and no representation, regardless of how seemingly abstract, is devoid of meaning.

From our late twentieth-century anthropological vantage point, it is difficult to appreciate the revolution in thinking that occurred when the ever-richer record of Paleolithic paintings, engravings, and sculptures was viewed through the lens of emerging ethnographic observations, notably those on Australian aborigines. In the turn-of-the-century intellectual context in which the distinc-

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tion between prehistory and ethnography was already less than clear (the common assumption being that modern hunting peoples were living holdovers from the Paleolithic), Australians and Africans were not merely seen as analogues for European Paleolithic culture,[3] but rather as residues of that culture.[4] Thus when early twentieth-century ethnographers began to observe that Australian aboriginal "art" was highly functional and charged with magical, social, and religious meaning and purpose, it forced prehistorians to abandon simplistic interpretations of Paleolithic representations as "purely aesthetic" or "art for art's sake."

Viewed thus, the sympathetic magic, whether for hunting or fertility, observed in early twentieth-century Australia and Africa, served as a source of inspiration for early attempts at understanding the functions of, and motivations for European Paleolithic images. It is now obvious that, as important as it was to begin to culturally contextualize Paleolithic representations, motivations and functions of visual representation were naively transplanted directly from ethnographic Australia to Paleolithic Europe, with little concern for the dramatically different lifeways and environments of these two cultural contexts.

Although Salomon Reinach[5] is usually credited with changing the course of interpretive frames in Paleolithic art, the "art for art's sake" view endured at least into the 1920s. As late as 1929, the Count Henri Bégouen felt compelled and able, with the aid of dramatic archaeological observations, to justify the view of Paleolithic art as having been magico-religious in content and motivation:

> With every fresh discovery two facts stand out more and more clearly. The drawings are generally found as far removed as possible from the entrance of the cave, and in nooks and corners very remote and difficult of access. In the cave of Niaux the first drawings are found at a distance of 867 yards (800 metres) from the entrance. The famous clay bison are to be found at the furthest limit of the Tuc d'Audoubert, 758 yards (700 metres) from the entrance, and at Montespan the actual distance is even greater. The various engravings in the cave of the Trois-Frères are arranged at two different levels about 867 and 1085 yards (800 to 1000 metres) from the entrance, and in passages where one must sometimes go *à plat ventre*. It is at this point that I would challenge those who uphold the theory that primitive art was purely decorative, art for art's sake in fact. I doubt if they would still hold their ground after crawling flat on their stomachs to admire some engraving of bison or rhinoceros on the wall or ceiling.[6]

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It is worth pursuing further the Count's arguments with respect to the specific functions and contexts of imagery in primitive/ Paleolithic societies, for they are among the most explicit and programmatic statements ever published by a proponent of "art as magic." Bégouen saw in Paleolithic imagery evidence for three types of motivations and associated magical acts employed to fulfill them. First, in cases where natural rock forms were exploited to create animal forms, Bégouen formulates the question thus:

> Whence arose this desire to take advantage of any contour in the rock which might assist in tracing the animal form, or indeed the desire to draw at all? The answer is to be found in the notion, current among all primitive peoples, that an image of any creature is in some fashion a part of that very creature itself. It is in fact its double, and the man who possesses the image actually has some power over the creature. Hence any harm done to the image will be communicated to the living subject of that image. The consequence of this reasoning is the key to all magic and enchantment.[7]

Using Australian and African examples, Bégouen defined two primary aims of these magical artistic acts. First, he argued that animal representations were ritually wounded, animals were engraved on hunting weapons and animals were drawn without eyes and ears, all to ensure success in the hunt. Second, he proposed that the engraving and sculpting of animals (notably the molded clay male and female bison at Tuc d'Audoubert) and pregnant women were magical acts aimed at controlling reproduction and fertility.

Bégouen's interpretation of a therianthropic image at les Trois-Frères leaves little doubt as to who he thought was responsible for these magical acts of representation:

> Here we see an amazing masked human figure with a long beard, the eyes of an owl, the antlers of a stag, the ears of a wolf, the claws of a lion and the tail of a horse. It is engraved and outlined in black paint, about ten feet from the ground, in a nook most difficult of access in a small round chamber known as the Sanctuary. It seems to dominate and preside over all the hundreds of other creatures, of thirteen different species, engraved and drawn on the walls below. It is the supreme mystery of the cave. Can it be some weird deity of those primitive people? Perhaps rather it is the Arch-Sorcerer who has taken unto himself the divers attributes of the beasts he enchants, a character personified even in our own day by the Shaman of the primitive tribes of Siberia.[8]

In a final jab at the "art-for-art's-sake" proponents,[9] Bégouen reaffirms his position:

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> I cannot admit that it was merely for pleasure that prehistoric men engraved, for example, all those stones found at Limeuil. Nor do I agree with the opinion that this station was actually a kind of studio and workshop for the production of artistic fancies worked on stone, just as one finds sketches on canvas or paper in the studio of an artist of today. I rather believe that there were certain places sacred to some sorcerer where the figures of animals were designed each for a specific purpose. After this purpose had been fulfilled, the piece was abandoned, either because it became useless or because it became a votive offering.[10]

In actual fact, the Count Bégouen and the Abbé Breuil were far more strident proponents of "art-as-magic" than was Reinach, whose position was a rather qualified one:

> There would be much exaggeration to contend that magic was the sole source of art, to deny the part played by the instinct of imitation or that of the desire for bodily decoration, or again of the social need to express and communicate thought. But the facts seem to show that the impulse behind the art of the Reindeer Age is bound to the development of magic.[11]

An articulate skeptic of the "art-as-magic" view was G.H. Luquet,[12] whose considerable oeuvre on Paleolithic art has been largely ignored, perhaps because he was a psychologist and art historian, not a prehistorian. While accepting that animals with darts or wounds may well reflect acts of sympathetic or hunting magic, he argued that large numbers of images and objects provide no compelling reason for a magical interpretation. Furthermore, he argues that large numbers of cave images, in addition to lacking such ritual overmarkings, were not found in locations that were difficult of access. Whatsmore, he pointed out that there were extreme preservation problems for images that might have existed close to cave mouths.

Luquet's critique has a very modern ring to it, for example when he raises doubt as to whether Paleolithic peoples, who might reasonably be expected to use magic to improve their chances at hunting, would have also been motivated to increase human fecundity through magical acts. As P. Ucko and A. Rosenfeld would note forty years later, hunters and gatherers are generally more interested in limiting population growth than increasing it.[13] Also anticipating Ucko and Rosenfeld by forty years was Luquet's position that a multiplicity of meanings and motivations lay behind Paleolithic representations.

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However, Luquet's work is often inconsistent with modern views of indigenous systems of representation to the extent that he categorically accepts *some* art (notably "decorative" art) and *all* personal adornment as purely aesthetic, which he defines as "a pleasure taken in sensorial impressions produced by modifications or additions applied to preexistent objects, the human body, or instruments of utility."[14] Luquet's work then is coherent with his intellectual milieu in the sense that he shows implicit faith in the universality of aesthetics.

What is important to recognize in Luquet's work is that it contains a rich and thorough critique of both the "art-for-art's-sake" and the "art-as-magic" views. This work, which is almost never cited by subsequent prehistorians specializing in Paleolithic art, is especially noteworthy for its lack of reductionism; Luquet steadfastly refused to paint all Upper Paleolithic imagery with the same interpretive brush and insisted on an image-by-image, site-by-site evaluation!

Ignoring Luquet's critique (which remains valuable in spite of its outdated chronology and lack of social/semiotic insights), ethnographic-based interpretation of all of Paleolithic art by means of universalized notions of magic and enchantment dominated until the 1950s[15] when it was once again rejected, this time by Leroi-Gourhan. His reluctance to use ethnographic analogy is well known and grows directly out of the above-mentioned abuses of the first five decades of the twentieth century; notably the unwarranted transplantation of hunting magic, fertility magic, and totemism from their ethnographic contexts to prehistoric ones. Leroi-Gourhan's explicit justification for rejecting analogy as an interpretive method for understanding European Paleolithic art was as follows:

> *Sans interférence d'autres matériaux que les matériaux paléolithiques, les questions peuvent être posées à l'informateur défunt qui ne peut évidemment pas prendre la parole et répondre sur autre chose que ce qu'il a abandonné au fil des siècles, mais qui répond dans sa langue natale et non dans un dialecte fuégien ou soudanais.*[16]

Clearly, a more implicit reason for rejecting previous uses of ethnography was that, unlike the Count Bégouen and the Abbé Breuil, for example, Leroi-Gourhan did not assume that all of "primitive culture" was characterized by a limited number of universal attitudes and modes of action (e.g., sympathetic magic).

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Prior to Leroi-Gourhan's *Le Geste et la parole*,[17] a major interpretive roadblock in the study of Paleolithic visual representation stemmed from the predominant view that "art" was an innate human capacity, fixed and immutable since at least 25,000 years ago.[18] This confidence in the existence of a separate, analytically meaningful domain – "art" – among all humans, and comparable between one culture and another, prevented thoroughgoing cultural analysis in prehistoric art studies. In contrast, Leroi-Gourhan's grounding in French structuralism allowed him to see Paleolithic visual representation, like myths or techniques, as just one more culturally specific manifestation of human mental structures. He did not privilege Paleolithic representations as "works of art," and thus as more revealing of human intellect than other domains.

Nevertheless, for Leroi-Gourhan, chronological styles in European Paleolithic wall art were *evolutionary* rather than *cultural-historical* phenomena, and these styles thus constituted a trajectory toward greater and greater perfection in visual representation, culminating in the hyper-realism of the late Magdalenian. For him, the evolution of representational techniques marched on, while the underlying structural oppositions remained stable over more than 25,000 years.

Indeed, Leroi-Gourhan makes much of the fact that his Upper Paleolithic art styles evolve independently from the rest of culture, or at least that they cross-cut the classic cultural boundaries (i.e., Aurignacian, Gravettian, Solutrean, Magdalenian). It is certainly not clear from his writings that he ever imagined the existence of numerous time-graded systems of representation during the Upper Paleolithic, each with its own structure, social context, and cultural logic. Moreover, in ignoring the well known and well dated representational works from Central[19] and Eastern Europe[20] for example, he never entertained the possibility that regions outside Franco-Cantabria experienced different stylistic evolutions with respect to Paleolithic art.

It follows that, while Leroi-Gourhan was instrumental in preaching against the imposition of the content/meaning of ethnographically documented systems of representation on prehistoric images, it is not clear that he ever really advanced our

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knowledge in Paleolithic art studies with respect to 1) the form, structure, and production of the images themselves and, 2) how these changed through time and across space. This is all the more curious since, having championed the notion of the *chaîne opératoire* in studies of prehistoric technology, he never applied the notion to the construction of graphic images![21] It was truly as if visual representation (graphism) for him was not subject to the same space/time/social processes as other cultural domains.

In spite of some of these theoretical inconsistencies, Leroi-Gourhan's legacy to the subsequent generation of Paleolithic art researchers was his emphasis on caves as the structural unit of analysis, combined with an avoidance of ethnographic analogy in the interpretation of Paleolithic art. It quickly became apparent to his students and intellectual heirs[22] that if entire caves were to be subjected to structural analysis, precise and exhaustive inventories of the images contained therein were required. Moreover, a demonstration that the images within a cave were more or less contemporaneous was essential; and there was never much confidence that Leroi-Gourhan's style-based chronology, incorrectly founded on an assumption of an evolution from simple to complex forms and techniques of representation, was adequate for the task. An entailment of this widespread, but infrequently stated recognition of the weak links in Leroi-Gourhan's approach has been that since his death in 1986 research has focused almost entirely on accelerator dating of paintings and detailed, meticulous re-analysis and re-inventory of parietal art caves and portable art assemblages.[23]

Immediately prior to his death, Leroi-Gourhan abandoned the famous male/female interpretation of the structural juxtapositions that he had observed across more than fifty decorated caves. Indeed the veracity of the claimed juxtapositions on which this interpretation was based had never been statistically demonstrated by him[24] and was the subject of widespread skepticism. As a consequence of 1) the above-noted renewed empiricist focus making use of high-powered scientific and graphic techniques, and 2) a dearth of one or more prevailing interpretive models to fill the void left by Leroi-Gourhan's abandoned theory, the study of Paleolithic art has seen an absence of new methodological approaches and interpretations of meaning and motivation.

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Instead, strangely enough, we have seen a return to the interpretive frameworks abandoned upon the ascendance of Leroi-Gourhan in the 1960s, and even more surprisingly, to the long abandoned frameworks of the nineteenth century.[25] In the case of Lewis-Williams and Dowson, and Lewis-Williams and Clottes, a South African ethnographic shamanic context is overlain on Paleolithic European art. These modern versions of the interpretation of Paleolithic art as shamanic action, entailing magical means of impacting the physical world (with significant magical and spiritual undertones) are devastated by the same critical evaluation already provided by Luquet. Moreover, they are fortified by highly selected examples and they are not evaluated statistically. In sum, they are untestable. Perhaps more problematic is that they presume a generalized, almost universally applicable notion of shamanism that few if any ethnologists would accept.

Halverson, for his part, argues that Paleolithic art was purely aesthetic and hence devoid of symbolic meaning. It is almost unnecessary to repeat Luquet's, Begouen's, Breuil's, and Leroi-Gourhan's numerous demonstrations that parietal representations were highly structured and located in contexts refuting any notion that they were meaningless.

It would be an exaggeration to suggest that, apart from the above thoroughgoing critique, Luquet's work remains fully applicable in the 1990s. It has in most respects been bypassed by late- twentieth-century developments in symbolic anthropology and Paleolithic archaeology. However, there is one significant dimension of Luquet's thinking that has never really been pursued,[26] and which may provide a seed for new approaches to the analysis and interpretation of Paleolithic representations. I refer specifically to his distinction between *intellectual realism* and *visual realism.*[27] For Luquet, visual realism credibly represented what the eye could see. Intellectual realism faithfully represented that which the mind knew to exist.

Thus, Luquet saw most "primitive" art as *intellectually* realistic and most "civilized" art as *visually* realistic. This latter idea drew directly from early developmental psychology the notion that primitive people were mentally analogous to "civilized" children. As a result, the study of children's art, which he saw as character-

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ized by intellectual and not visual realism, could serve as a direct source for understanding both "primitive" and prehistoric art. This is an ill-founded and unfortunate twist to an otherwise interesting distinction. Recontextualized, the distinction provides a hint of some interesting new directions in the analysis and interpretation of prehistoric representations. To follow these directions however, we must employ some ethnographic insights, always keeping in mind Leroi-Gourhan's cautions regarding the use of ethnographic analogy.

The discussion that follows is premised on the following propositions:

1) Humans have been neurologically modern since at least 40,000 years ago. As a result, variability through time and across space in the Upper Paleolithic reflects not neurological/mental evolution but cultural change, replacement, and diversity.
2) The concept of "art" is not a useful point of departure for understanding the process of representation in non-Western cultures, where most frequently there is no separate term for what we call "art."

I take the first premise to be obvious and uncontroversial. The second emerges from at least a generation of ethnographic investigation into how the process of symbolic representation is conceived, constituted, and contextualized in each different cultural instance, including our own. This source of insight has not found its way into the field of Paleolithic art, in part because of Leroi-Gourhan's proscription against reliance on ethnographic analogy. However, I would argue that not seeking insight from other cultures has placed us in the *far worse position* of using our own notion of "art," which is a complex cultural construct from a dramatically different social context, as the sole analogy for approaching prehistoric images!

It is surprising – and this is probably why Leroi-Gourhan challenged the ethnographic analogy – that all these analogical applications concerning "art" were aimed at the content and signification of the images rather that at what is more accessible: the forms, the

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structure, and the production techniques. There remains, I think, a very big and interesting lead to pursue: an exploration of the clues of the ancient cultural logics of representation based on the small number of possibilities suggested by anthropology. I can't imagine that Leroi-Gourhan, who spoke little of "art" and frequently of representation, would have refused to follow this lead.

Even though it was Luquet who first approached this problem with his distinction between *intellectual realism* and *visual realism*, he did it in too typological a fashion, and with too limited a vantage point. Indeed representation includes other aspects, such as the elements of the logic of representation, without which we would understand nothing of an image, even if we were under the impression that we did.

For example, we often judge the paintings of Lascaux to be more magnificent than the Aurignacian vulvas or the "more simple" paintings and etchings of the Gravettian era. Why such a value judgement? Because certain elements of the Magdalenian logic of representation at Lascaux seem closer to the ideal and conventions of *our conception of "art"* (with respect to perspective, color, representation of movement and dynamism, technical virtuosity, and visual realism). But in the eyes of an Inuit or an Pintupi, Lascaux would pretty much be without interest, or the interest would be of a different kind, because their values, their aesthetic, i.e., their logic of representation, are fundamentally different from our own, and, undoubtedly from that of the creators of Lascaux.

To illustrate, Alexander Cockburn has recently published an article in the Unites States on the authenticity of the Chauvet cave. Citing the artist Alexander Melamid, he suspects fraud. Why? Because the realism with which Chauvet's "artist" represented the disposition of the animals' paws in movement was, according to him, only possible by a man who had seen photographs.

In fact, it seems to have escaped Mr. Cockburn that photographic technologies are a form of representation elaborated in the middle of the nineteenth century in order to achieve the ideals of *our own logic* of representation: visual realism. Many ethnologists have noted the difficulties that arise for their preliterate subjects to "read" and "understand" what is represented in the photographs. My sense is that our own reaction to Lascaux or Chauvet has

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something to do with the fact that these artists attained a kind of visual realism that we highly value, one that was not to reappear in Europe before the Renaissance.

Nonetheless, the situation gets more complicated when considered within a cultural tradition where diverse logical systems are at play, even if some dominate others. In our tradition of representation, for example, visual realism dominates, and traditions dominated by intellectual realism are judged to be "primitive." Paradoxically, however, we have considered Mercator's cartographic projection and the exploded drawings of engineers, all exemplary of intellectual realism, as major progress!

What other elements would we consider representative of a cultural logic of representation? The best way to define them would be to present a few ethnographic examples that demonstrate that certain attributes of representation we presume to be universal are not.

The Case of the Inuit

When we observe sculpted objects and decorated caves, we imagine that the subject is universally conceived, drawn, and proportioned in advance. We thus attribute a certain interpretative value to the relative importance of different animal species. But we shall see that traditional Inuit logic, for example, is not at all like this.[28] Conceived as already existing, but hidden within the raw material, the animals are lured out to present themselves to the ivory sculptor. The raw material lives, and is filled with the spirit of the animal that ultimately emerges:

> As the carver holds the unworked ivory lightly in his hand, turning it this way and that, he whispers, 'Who are you? Who hides there?' And then, 'Ah, Seal!' He rarely sets out, at least consciously, to carve, say, a seal, but picks up the ivory, examines it to find its hidden form and, if that's not immediately apparent, carves aimlessly until he sees it, humming or chanting as he works. Then he brings it out: Seal, hidden, emerges. It was always there: he didn't create it; he released it; he helped it step forth.[29]
>
> Aivilik has no real equivalents to our words "create" or "make" which presuppose imposition of the self on matter. The closest Aivilik term means "to work on" which also involves an act of will, but one which is restrained. The carver never attempts to force the ivory into uncharacteristic forms, but responds to the material as it tries to be itself, and thus the carving is continually modified as the ivory has its say.[30]

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> Great Western artists sometimes thought in these terms and even expressed themselves so, but with one difference: they were exceptions in their own culture, independently reaching this attitude after long experience and contemplation; whereas Aivilik learn it as a mother-tongue and give it social voice and expression. It is their attitude toward not only ivory, but toward all things, especially people: parent toward child, husband toward wife. Where we think of art as possession, and possession to us means control, to do with as we like, art to them is a transitory act, a relationship. They are more interested in the creative activity than in the product of that activity.[31]

Finally, Carpenter echoes an observation made by generations of anthropologists working with traditional peoples in all parts of the world[32]:

> No word meaning "art" occurs in Aivilik, nor does "artist": there are only people. Nor is any distinction made between utilitarian and decorative objects. The Aivilik say simply, "A man should do all things properly." My use of both words here is strictly western; by Aivilik art I refer to those objects which a Western art critic would call art; by Aivilik artist I mean any Aivilik.
>
> Every adult Aivilik is an accomplished ivory carver: carving is a normal, essential requirement, just as writing is with us. Some are better carvers than others, just as some of us are better penmen than others.[33]

Is it euphemistic, this manner of designating the intuition of the experienced sculptor who senses which animal is the most reasonable to sculpt in relation to the characteristics of the material at hand? Perhaps, but we will see further on that everyone sculpts ivory, not only those who are experienced. Does the cross-section of species extracted from the ivory by the sculptor partake of chance? I don't think so, but to my knowledge the question has never been seriously studied.

In his remarkable works, Carpenter insists on another element of the logic of Inuit representation, which has a certain parallel with the decorated Paleolithic caves:

> The carver is indifferent to the demands of the optical eye; he lets each piece fill its own space, create its own world, without reference to background or anything external to it. Each carving lives in spatial independence. Size and shape, proportions and selection, these are set by the object itself, not forced from without. Like sound, each carving creates its own space, its own identity; it imposes its own assumptions.[34]

If we transpose these tendencies – the search for the animals that already exist within the material – to the decorated Paleolithic

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caves (keeping in mind the rounded sculptures and the etchings of mobiliary art) and allow the material to inform the structuration of spatial relations and proportions, we are immediately confronted with numerous examples of Paleolithic paintings and etchings that exploit and elaborate on the natural forms of the caverns and mobiliary objects, while at the same time these are structured by them.[35] And, thanks to Leroi-Gourhan, we know very well that the quantitative sampling of species, as well as their distribution in space, are far from arbitrary. Certain animals are more suggested more sought out than others.

There is no preferred orientation for sculpted Inuit objects. Spread out on a table, any which direction suits them. These ivory sculptures are made to be held, touched, manipulated, and seen from all angles. Their tactile qualities are very important, and far from being treasures, are destined either to be thrown away, or to be placed wherever. They are lost with little sadness: the pleasure and symbolism are more gestural than graphic. The sculpted objects were not traditionally seen as *works of art* and were never treated as precious objects. Their fabrication was not limited to artists or specialists, the notion of which was even traditionally unknown to the Inuit. Everyone worked the ivory.

Before the apparition of an art market, which in fifty years completely transformed the Inuit logic of representation,[36] etchings on ivory or antler took part of a process and conception or logic of representation that was totally different from ours. If a group of animals is engraved on an antler stick, it does not represent several individual animals, but rather one view from several perspectives or across different movements, in successive stages or during different seasons of the year. Far from being naive, these representations are dynamic, charged with information, but conceived according to a logic of representation that lends itself to misinterpretation because its "code" of representation is different from ours.

To paraphrase Leroi-Gourhan, a single "language of forms" does not exist, several do. Many interpretive problems have come from our not recognizing this.

If, for example, the paintings of bison of the Salon noir at Niaux, the ethology of which has recently been studied by J.

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Clottes and other authors,[37] do not represent different individuals, but only one or a very small number of individuals, in different moments or in different contexts, the signification/meaning of the wall is considerably modified. The same is true for certain walls of the Chauvet or Lascaux caves. From this perspective, the wall of horses of Chauvet is quite interesting. Our eye assimilates them as several different horses, drawn in profile and in perspective. A very satisfying construction according to our aesthetic. As evident as this seems for us, it is incorrect!

Working with Mrs. Gerri Sawicki, a horse breeder, we noticed the ethological impossibility of this scene. From left to right, one horse is walking steadily; another is aggressive, with ears bent backwards; a third seems to be resting - perhaps sleeping - with ears pointing forwards; finally the fourth, alert, mouth open, perhaps neighing or sniffling, looks like a pony.

In nature, four individual animals so close to one another would never present such a diversity of postures. Apparently then, this is not a scene, but more logically represents the same individual animal with four different attitudes, or it is a representation of the postures themselves. Regardless of whether it is about one individual animal or several, time – and not space – is what is represented.

What's more, our cultural logic and aesthetic values influence us to recognize a scene of horses in perspective to such an extent that we close our eyes willfully on one fundamental contradiction: the relative size of these four horses is exactly the opposite of what it should be if they were seen in perspective. The question that arises here is that of whether the Aurignacians of the Chauvet cave shared our conventions regarding perspective illusion, which constitutes most of our cultural logic of representation.

Other Ethnographic Cases

The lessons from South Africa complement those of the Inuit but begin with a conception of the surface to be painted. As Lewis-Williams and Dowson have showed, the rock is not merely perceived as a neutral material support. Its surface is seen as a veil or a frontier between the human world and the spirit world; a border

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that shamans must pass through in order to meet the spirits, especially the spirit of the "eland." For us, what is essential is that this conception leaves visible traces for prehistorians. The logic of representation is such that certain figures, especially the therianthropes, seem to traverse this rocky frontier.

Finally, the classic case that is at the origin of totemic interpretation and the idea of magic as linked to hunting presents us with a striking example of a system of representation that is neither our own, nor that of Lascaux, nor that of the Inuit. For the aborigines of Australia's "Western Desert" the world of representations is turned ninety degrees with respect to our own. It is a world seen from above and not in profile. If you do not understand it to begin with, you will not understand a thing.

Nonetheless, as Nancy Munn has clearly demonstrated, it is a logical and structured language of representation.[38] The iconography is more often than not elusive to us, but in fact there is continuity between what we call signs and identifiable images, that is, between icons and symbols to borrow Charles Pierce's classic terms.

Essentially, the conception of the image differs from our own. The images themselves transmit a power to the beholder. And the visual representation is not all that there is; other meanings are implied. An image is not merely a representation of something.

For once in disagreement with Leroi-Gourhan, I do not think that we can question our far-away ancestors directly. Up until now, we have read their works through lenses derived from the logic of representation that is our own: "art." What I have tried to do here is to bring us to consider other possibilities, not in order to explain Paleolithic representations, but paradoxically to begin to understand (and even see) what is represented when the cultural logic that underlies the representations themselves can be seized. In the meantime, it seems to me futile to go back to the general models of the beginning of the century, already abandoned, and that explain nothing but a tiny fraction of the images at our fingertips.

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Notes

1. Lartet, E. et H. Christy, "Sur des figures d'animaux gravées ou sculptées et autres produits d'art et d'industrie rapportables aux temps primordiaux de la période humaine," *Revue archéologique* 9 (1864): 233-267.
2. In this paper I try to avoid the term "art" wherever possible, as I take "art" and all that it entails to be a particular and privileged context for symbolic representation that is characteristic of the so-called Western tradition. For me, it has no social scientific or analytical value that allows it to be usefully applied cross-culturally.
3. See Breuil in Breuil, H. and H. Obermaier, *The Cave of Altamira at Santillana del Mar, Spain* (Madrid:, 1935), pp. 145-225 and 236-243.
4. Indeed, it was commonly accepted that some European Upper Paleolithic peoples, like those at Grimaldi, Italy (Bisson and White 1997), were physically African, representing movements out of Africa by early populations of *Homo sapiens*. By the 1930s attempts were made to see historical connections between Paleolithic Europe and the Eskimo world. There was such a strong desire to see such connections that, in her "A comparison of Eskimo and Palaeolithic art" *(American Journal of Archaeology* 36(4): 477-511 and 37(1):7 7-107), after being clearly frustrated that her analysis showed no evidence for historical connections, she left open the possibility anyway, hoping for more supportive evidence in the future!
5. Reinach, S., "L'art et la magie. A propos des peintures et des gravures de l'Age du Renne," *L'Anthropologie.* 14 (1903): 257-266.
6. Bégouen, H., "The magic origin of prehistoric art," *Antiquity* (1929), p. 7.
7. Ibid., p. 8.
8. Ibid., p. 17.
9. These always remain unnamed, but Bégouen is almost certainly referring to Marcelling Boule who steadfastly argued the "art-for-art's-sake" position into the 1930s in *Les Hommes Fossiles.* 2nd ed.
10. Bégouen, (see note 6 above), p. 18.
11. Reinach, (see note 5 above): 257-266.
12. Luquet, G.-H.. *L'art et la religion des hommes fossiles* (Paris: 1929); *The Art and Religion of Fossil Man* (New Haven, 1930).
13. Ucko, P. and A. Rosenfeld, *Palaeolithic Cave Art* (London: 1967).
14. Luquet, (see note 12 above), pp. 200-201.
15. See Breuil, H., *Quatre cents siècles d'art pariétal* (Montignac: 1952).
16. Leroi-Gourhan, *La préhistoire de l'art occidental* (Paris: 1965).
17. Leroi-Gourhan, *Le geste et la parole* (Paris: 1966).
18. Again, Luquet was a notable exception to this trend.
19. For example, Vogelherd in Germany and Dolni Vestonice in Moravia.
20. For example, the Kostienki sites in the Don Valley.
21. However, it can be argued that he did take this approach to painted/engraved caves, treating them as highly structured, purposeful constructs.
22. Vialou, D., *L'art des grottes en Ariège magdalenienne. Gallia Préhistoire,* XXe supplement (Paris: 1986); *Les cavernes de Niaux* (Paris: 1995).
23. A notable exception is to be found in the work of Denis Vialou, who of all current French cave researchers is the most theoretically oriented.

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24. We need to keep in mind here that Leroi-Gourhan was working in a period before computers and digital calculators. Given that he was using only edge-punched sorting cards, his control of this enormous mass of data is quite remarkable.
25. See especially: Halverson, J., "Art for art's sake in the Paleolithic," *Current Anthropology* 28 (1987): 63-89; Lewis-Williams, D. and T. Dowson, "The signs of all times. Entoptic phenomena in Upper Palaeolithic art," *Current Anthropology* 29 (1988): 201-245; Lewis Williams, D. and Clottes, J., *Les chamanes de la préhistoire.* Paris: (1996).
26. Luquet, G.-H., *L'art primitif* (Paris: 1926).
27. Ibid.; see also Luquet's *L'art et la religion des hommes fossiles* and *The Art and Religion of Fossil Man.*
28. Carpenter, E., *Eskimo Realities* (New York: 1973).
29. Ibid., p.59.
30. Ibid., p. 62.
31. Ibid., p. 63.
32. Ibid., p. 58
33. Ibid., p. 71.
34. Ibid.
35. Although this represents but a small minority of the total sampling of known images.
36. E. Carpenter, (see note 28 above), pp. 192-197.
37. Clottes, J., Garner, M et G. Maury, "Magdalenian bison in the caves of the Ariège," *Rock Art Research.* 11, 1 (1994): 58-70.
38. N. Munn, *Walbiri Iconography* (Chicago: 1979).

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