



McDONALD INSTITUTE CONVERSATIONS

The pasts and presence of art in South Africa

Technologies, ontologies and agents

Edited by Chris Wingfield, John Giblin & Rachel King



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Acknowledgements

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The combined funding enabled us to invite Same Mdluli, David Morris and Justine Wintjes, whose work is included in this volume, as well as Mbongiseni Buthelezi and Carolyn Hamilton to participate in the conference. We were especially honoured to hold the

very first launch of Carolyn and Nessa Leibhammer's edited volume, *Tribing and Untribing the Archive*, at the Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology as part of the conference programme.

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As editors, we are especially grateful for the forbearance of the contributors to this volume over the period of four years that has elapsed between the conference and the publication of this volume. As a mitigating circumstance, we would just note that as well as a wedding, a baby and a family relocation to Cape Town and back between us, each of us has also moved to new jobs in new cities during that period – Rachel to the Institute of Archaeology at University College London where she is now Lecturer in Cultural Heritage Studies, John to National Museums Scotland, where he is now Keeper for the Department of World Cultures, and Chris to the Sainsbury Research Unit at the University of East Anglia, where he is now Associate Professor in the Arts of Africa. We can only hope that the extended period has enabled each of the papers in this volume to develop to a fuller maturity!

Chris Wingfield
John Giblin
Rachel King

Chapter 1

Introducing the pasts and presence of art in South Africa

Chris Wingfield, John Giblin & Rachel King

On 9 March 2015, Chumani Maxwele, a fourth-year political science student, arrived at the upper campus of the University of Cape Town (UCT) – halfway up the mountain that overlooks the city, built on a parcel of land bequeathed to the nation of South Africa by Cecil John Rhodes. Maxwele had travelled from the apartheid-era township of Khayelitsha by minibus taxi, the main form of transport for the majority of the population, carrying with him a portaloop cartridge full of faeces. Bare chested, but wearing a pink hard hat and cardboard sign around his neck stating ‘Exhibit @ White Arrogance U.C.T.’, Maxwell blew a whistle and began throwing shit at the seated statue of Rhodes, who had overseen the main pedestrian approach onto the campus for the previous half century. The press photographer he invited along captured Maxwele’s protest, magnifying its impact through the global circulatory possibilities of social and digital media (Fig. 1.1).

In the weeks that followed, Maxwele’s actions reverberated around the world, initiating the #RhodesMustFall movement and prompting the largest student protests in South Africa since the end of apartheid. The movement has subsequently inspired further protests and acts of decolonial iconoclasm in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. Twenty-one years after the end of apartheid, and 55 years to the month after the 1960 Sharpeville massacre, in which a protest against South Africa’s infamous pass laws resulted in the police killing 69 people and injuring 180 others (including 29 children), all of whom were unarmed, South African student activism once again took centre stage in conversations about decolonization unfolding around the globe.

An enormous amount has already been written about #RhodesMustFall and its consequences and we do not attempt to summarize nor cite what is becoming a substantial literature. What we intend

to highlight here, however, are the ways in which Maxwele’s iconoclasm, as a political, symbolic and performative act, located art at the centre of forms of political contestation in contemporary South Africa. As the hashtag #RhodesMustFall transmuted into #FeesMustFall, and inspired subsequent hashtags such as #ZumaMustFall, what became most clear about ‘fallist’ movements was that they found their focus in negation. The anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff, in attempting to theorize the relationship between hegemony, ideology and cultural practice, as it relates to tensions experienced between official rhetoric and mundane practice, suggested in their major 1991 work, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, that:

The premises of racial and sexual inequality are no longer acceptable, at least in the official rhetoric of most modern states – although, in the world of mundane practice, the battle to control key signs and ostensibly neutral values rages on. Even when there is no well-formed opposing ideology, no clearly articulated collective consciousness among subordinate populations, such struggles may still occur. But they are liable to be heard in the genre of negation – refusal, reversal, the smashing of idols and icons – and not in the narrative voice of political argument (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991, 27).

Iconoclasm is undoubtedly a violent act, directed towards art, artefacts and objects rather than human bodies, but can this violence nevertheless serve a creative purpose? Are acts of decolonizing iconoclasm, such as Maxwele’s, simply acts of negation – outbursts and expressions of violence that result from a daily experience of structural contradictions that come to feel unbearable – or can we also understand them as simultaneously creative artistic performances through



Figure 1.1. Chumani Maxwele's poo protest at the University of Cape Town on 9 March 2015. Photograph by David Richie (<https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/western-cape/protesters-throw-poo-on-rhodes-statue-1829526>). Courtesy and copyright African News Agency (ANA).

which the possibilities of alternative futures can be glimpsed? Can acts of protest and negation make things visible that are far harder to express in what the Comaroffs' call 'the narrative voice of political argument'? Is this not at least part of the social function of art, and can we pursue Alfred Gell's (1998, 84) insight that iconoclasm is a form of 'art-making in reverse'? Does this at least partly explain Bruno Latour's (2005, 17) observation that iconoclasm frequently strikes 'sideways' with ancillary (and often creative) effects? According to David Freedberg, the iconoclastic act is so frightening because:

It opens realms of power and fear that we may sense but cannot quite grasp. When the iconoclast reacts with violence to the image and vehemently and dramatically attempts to break its hold on him or her, then we begin to have some sense of its potential – if we do not perceive it in the flash of light that blinds us, finally to its art (Freedberg 1989, 425).

Can we understand recent South African iconoclasm in the decolonizing mode as a commentary on the power of the image, on creative action, and ultimately on art itself? What light does this shed on the far longer history of artistic practices in the region, and can we use the resulting insights to explore the ways in which art has played a central role in the very long history of human life in the land now called South Africa?

This collection of essays has its origins in a conference with the same title as this volume, arranged to mark the opening of the British Museum's major temporary exhibition *South Africa: the art of a nation*, October 2016 to February 2017 (Giblin & Spring 2016).¹ All the objects displayed in the exhibition were 'framed' as artworks made by artists, whether a three-million-year-old pebble, a nineteenth-century spear, or a contemporary sculpture. In each of the sections of the exhibition, contemporary artworks were displayed alongside objects from museum collections, and juxtaposed with quotes from contemporary artists. This served to highlight the role that different periods of history continue to play

in South Africa's collective memory, engaging themes of colonial and apartheid oppression, racial segregation and displacement, as well as the denial of the accomplishments of Black South Africans. Through its overtly political choice of topics, the exhibition sought to engage with the entanglements of art in the politics of South Africa's recent past.

Although the exhibition was conceived before #RhodesMustFall, for many conference participants the questions raised by the movement underlined the conversations that unfolded at the conference in a variety of implicit and, at times, explicit ways. All of the essays in this volume have developed from presentations given at the conference, and while they draw on evidence from archaeology, rock art, and museum collections to consider aspects of art's pasts, they are nevertheless also about its presence in the present: how we make sense of, and engage with art objects and practices in relation to contemporary South Africa. The three performances related to #RhodesMustFall that we explore below, arguably exemplify three modes of art-making and unmaking that we believe can help us to better understand art's multiple pasts in South Africa, but also point to alternative futures.

Protest as performance

During his protest, Maxwele's was reported as saying:

There is no collective history here. Where are our heroes and ancestors? I feel suffocated by the presence of these colonial memorials at UCT. We take this protest across the country. Black students can't breathe on campus (Boersema 2017, 3).

The first part of Maxwele's statement might be read as a demand for the representation and memorialization of heroes of South Africa's 'struggle' against apartheid – most often the black men such as Nelson Mandela, Albert Luthuli and Oliver Tambo, who have been a major focus for the heritage industry in the two decades since the end of apartheid. It could be argued that the epitome of this movement can be found in the 'National Heritage Monument Company', established in 2011 by Dali Tambo, media personality and son of the ANC politician Oliver Tambo, which has set about creating a series of up to 400 bronze sculptures of individuals from South African history representing 'The Long Walk to Freedom'.² But the second half of Maxwele's statement suggests something slightly different. Jacob Boersema (2017) has pointed out that 'I can't breathe' emerged as a slogan of the Black Lives Matter Movement in the USA during the

previous year, following the suffocation by police of Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York, when he can be seen on the YouTube film of the event repeatedly crying out this phrase. Black Lives Matters protesters carried placards stating 'I can't breathe', as well as a quote attributed to Frantz Fanon, which read 'When we revolt it's not for a particular culture. We revolt simply because, for many reasons, we can no longer breathe' (Boersema 2017, 3).

Fanon remains the indispensable guide to the psychological impacts of colonialism as well as to the political project of decolonization, for academics, analysts and activists alike. Indeed, his description of the colonial world as 'A world divided into compartments, a motionless, Manichaean world, a world of statues: the statue of the general who carried out the conquest, the statue of the engineer who built the bridge; a world which is sure of itself, which crushes with its stones the backs flayed by whips' (Fanon 1967, 40) is an excellent explanation of the significance of the Rhodes statue. Or at least as relevant as the cartoon by the South African political cartoonist Zapiro, which provides a graphic take on why black students find it hard to breathe around the statue (Fig. 1.2).

Maxwele's question about 'our heroes and ancestors' can be read in the light of Fanon's definition of decolonization as 'quite simply the replacing of a certain 'species' of men by another 'species' of men' (Fanon 1967, 27). Fanon (1967, 30) suggested that 'there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler's place' and by extension, Maxwele's question about 'our heroes' can be seen as a demand that they be set up in the place of Rhodes. Fanon's chapter *Concerning Violence in The Wretched of the Earth* in many ways provides a somewhat prophetic explanation of the role of iconoclasm in the #RhodesMustFall movement:

The violence which has ruled over the ordering of the colonial world, which has ceaselessly drummed the rhythm for the destruction of native social forms and broken up without reserve the systems of reference of the economy, the customs of dress and external life, that same violence will be claimed and taken over by the native at the moment when, deciding to embody history in his own person, he surges into the forbidden quarters... (Fanon 1967, 31).

Furthermore, Fanon suggests that violence plays an important role in the decolonial struggle:

At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority



Figure 1.2. Cecil John Rhodes statue pelted with excrement. Originally published in the Mail & Guardian, 20 March 2015. Re-published with permission – for more Zapiro cartoons visit www.zapiro.com. Image copyright 2015 Zapiro.

complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect (Fanon 1967, 74).

But is Maxwele's protest simply to be understood as an act of negating violence directed towards an icon of southern Africa's violent colonial history? This particular statue of Rhodes has, after all, been a focus of protest action on a number of occasions over the previous half century (Schmahmann 2016).

For instance, in May 2014, less than a year before Maxwele's protest, on the eve of a student debate about the possible relocation of the statue, it was stencilled with the words 'Remember Marikana'. This referenced the killing of striking mine workers at the Marikana mine in August 2012, which saw 34 people killed and at least 78 wounded by South African police – the greatest loss of life at the hands of the South African security forces since 1976. The mine they were protecting is owned by Lonmin, a London registered company. The

words 'Remember Marikana' were accompanied by an iconic image of Mgcineni Noki, known as the man in the green blanket, one of the leaders of the protest who was killed at Marikana. The image was produced by Tokolos Stencils – a collective of anonymous graffiti artists in Cape Town, who claimed responsibility in a statement that declared:

In honour of all black UCT students whose land was stolen from their ancestors and whose natural re-sources were privatised by one Cecil John Rhodes. Tokolos reminds us that colonialism and the massacre at Marikana are not only interconnected but part of a long history of dispossession, exploitation and murder of blacks (and especially poor blacks).³

It is perhaps not surprising that such a prominent statue on a University campus, to such a controversial figure, should become the regular focus of protests,

but there is arguably something different about the nature of Maxwele's protest.

Unlike earlier anonymous acts of night-time painting,⁴ Maxwele's assault on Rhodes was a performance in its own right, staged for the all-seeing eye of the internet, which juxtaposed Rhodes's impassive metallic stare with a living, breathing, Black body. The racial contrast between these bodies was also underlined by their dress, with Rhodes in his business suit, while Maxwele's hard hat and shirtless body referenced generations of South African miners, including his own father, alongside those killed at Marikana – forced, by the imposition of government taxes and policies that systematically removed their productive land, to become the reserve army of rural labour needed by the extractive mineral economy. As well as juxtaposing breath and death, Black and White, businessman and labourer, Maxwele's protest created a confrontation between stone and bronze and the raw matter of life – piss and shit. In describing the actions that led up to the protest, Maxwell stated that:

Kasibe... suggested that we use human excrement that runs exposed through Khayelitsha so that we could speak to the urgent need for human dignity for the black people living in shacks in Khayelitsha in inhumane conditions and indignity. Kasibe said that, by throwing poo at the statue of Rhodes, we would symbolise the filthy way in which Rhodes mistreated our people in the past. Equally, we would show disgust at the manner in which UCT, as a leading South African institution of learning, celebrates the genocidal Rhodes. In short, the poo would be an institutional appraisal of UCT (Marback 2018, IV).

In their deployment of such polyvalent symbolism, Maxwele and Kasibe made the protest fundamentally about the treatment of Black people in the present, building on a recent history of 'poo protests' in the Western Cape that had developed in response to the lack of provision of basic infrastructure (Robins 2014). Pictures of state built unenclosed community toilets in Makhaza, Khayelitsha, circulated during local elections in 2011. The subsequent provision of portable toilets, which people had to use within their one room shacks, overlooked by their families, occasioned further protests in 2013, particularly when employees of the company responsible for collecting the waste went on strike. Two ANC Youth League councillors tipped the waste from one of these portable loos down the steps of the Provincial Legislature in Cape Town in June 2013 as a protest, and other protesters were arrested

on their way into Cape Town carrying buckets of waste (Marback 2018, V).⁵ What these 'poo protests' attempted to do was to subvert the spatial organization of Cape Town as a colonial city (cf. Redfield & Robins 2016). Again, Fanon suggested that:

The colonial world is a world divided into compartments...cut in two.... The zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers. The two zones are opposed... The settler's town is a strongly built town, all stone and steel. It is a brightly-lit town; the streets are covered with asphalt, and the garbage-cans swallow all the leavings, unseens, unknown and hardly thought about... The town belonging to the colonised people... is a place of ill fame... It is a world without spaciousness; men live on top of the other... The native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire... (Fanon 1967, 29–30).

South Africa's 'poo protests' relocate daily encounters with human waste from Fanon's 'native zone' into the segregated spaces of the 'settler's town'. For Maxwele, this form of movement underlined the experiences of a growing number of UCT students, who themselves had to cross the dividing lines between these zones on a daily basis, only to be welcomed onto campus by the seated and suited immortal body of Cecil John Rhodes (see also Nyamnjoh 2016). A radio interview given by Maxwele the day after his protest suggests that he was keenly aware of the possibility that his protest might be perceived simply as an act of violence, and of the dangers in the way the media might frame this:

We knew that the moment we do anything that is violent, or damaging the statue, we will be deemed with the stereotype of Black violence. We sat down and thought through this thing and – because of our lived experiences – we knew that we had to use our psychological pain, our trauma, that the statue gives to us as Black students and Black staff. I am deeply traumatized by that statue. We thought: lets take the pain of our parents, the pain of our brothers and sisters in Khayelitsha, who will be using pot-potty toilets for the rest of their lives. That is my pain. Let me take that pot-potty with feces back to where it belongs. So that the powerful people – the elite – can feel how it feels to be Black (Boersema 2017, 4).

Through its juxtapositions and redeployments, Maxwele's protest was a creative bricolage intended to

highlight Black pain, in the expectation of an empathetic response. White arrogance, as he understood it, emerged from what he described as ‘white norms, white standards and white attitudes’. Taking down the statue would be a first step in displacing Whiteness and the White experience as the assumed basis for institutional values at UCT.

The response to Maxwele’s protest swiftly picked up on issues of institutional racism that extended beyond the statue itself. Kgotsi Chikane, son of a former anti-apartheid and ANC politician, called an open-air campus meeting on Facebook to develop a ‘Plan of Action in order to change the institutional racism within this campus’ (Boersema 2017, 10). Hundreds of students came together on 12 March 2015, and following the meeting, the Student Representatives Council covered the Rhodes state with a red blanket and a sheet and released a statement. However, it was Jerome September who tweeted a photograph of the students gathering on 12 March which he tagged with the hashtag #Rhodesmustfall, initiating the hash tag that came to define the movement (Boersema 2017, 11).

Alongside rapidly unfolding conversations and consciousness raising activities, daily student-led protests at the statue developed an increasing focus on institutional racism. On 16 March the protesting students covered the Rhodes statue in black sheet plastic – another expression of negation – demanding a date for the removal of the statue from University management. On 20 March, the movement organized its largest protest yet, involving a coalition of students, staff, workers, union leaders and political representatives. Maxwele was invited to address the meeting, and his words are significant:

Amandla! On Monday, when I protested, my institution, UCT, thought I was a barbaric, a lunatic, who does not know what to do. But today you are answering that message. Our message is a cry of AC Jordan. It is a cry of Mafeje. It is the cry of Mamdani. It is a Black cry. It is a cry of the workers. It is a cry of the staff (Boersema 2017, 13).

Maxwele’s references were to black former members of academic staff who had suffered discrimination, silencing and ultimately exile from South Africa, in part at the hands of the university.⁶ When Max Price, the University’s Vice Chancellor attempted to address the protesters, his microphone was switched off and protesters stormed and occupied the University’s administrative building, which they renamed Azania House.⁷ On 27 March 2015, the UCT senate voted in favour of the removal of the statue, and the statue

was boarded up pending the final decision of the university’s council. On 9 April 2015, it was removed.

Re-staging *The Fall*

The Fall is a play, written and produced by UCT drama students to document their experiences of the #Rhodes-MustFall movement, which was staged at UCT’s Baxter Theatre and later toured to the Edinburgh festival and the Royal Court Theatre in London. Like Maxwele’s protest it is a performance, but differs in attempting to narrate the varying, and sometimes conflicting, experiences and perspectives of a group of UCT students through imaginative recollection and scripting. Cayha (The Light), one of these characters, reflected on the impact the original protest action had, stating:

Chumani, the comrade that threw pota-pota on the statue was almost at a loss for words about how shit it is for blacks at this university. Throwing some pooh on that statue was one-hundred-percent articulate. It is amazing, really, how everyone got lit over some pota-pota on a statue, but there was some very hard work around transformation long before he did that (The Fall 2017, 16).

This recognizes the power that Maxwele’s original protest carried, as what Richard Marback (2018) has called ‘An Embodied Rhetorical Assertion’, but also the ways in which this built on an unfolding conversation on the campus. However, what ‘The Fall’ captures most powerfully is the feeling that many students had that they were participating in a movement that represented a turning point in history. Kgothatso (The One Who Discovers), one of the other characters states that:

On our way to Upper [Campus] I swear I could feel the bones of our ancestors moving with us, supporting us in our first step of decolonisation (The Fall 2017, 32).

Chwaita (The Young One), expresses it another way:

When Rhodes fell, the world stopped. History was suspended in the air and continued to wash over us, like a salty healing wave... I heard the slaves who hadn’t arrived and the singing on the Mendi. I heard the cameras buzz. I heard Eric Garner across the Atlantic. The taunts of the people around me, reprimands at the excited crowd – we’re foaming at the mouth! I heard the noose pull. The tree branch snap (The Fall 2017, 34).

Boitshoko (The One Who Perseveres) describes the moment when the crane lifted the statue and everything slowed down:

Rhodes was suspended in the air and he swung a few inches above the plinth... like he wasn't sure if he should get off, or not. It looked like his ghost was fighting back, trying to make him topple over and crush our black bodies one more time. But he was gone... he was finally gone... I felt as if our land had just heaved a giant sigh of relief; a space to breathe at last. As the statue landed on the flatbed truck, I saw the look of arrogance on his face. So I jumped on that truck and gave him six lashings with my belt (The Fall 2017, 33).

The un-making of the Rhodes statue at UCT provided a cathartic focus for the desired un-making of South Africa's racial and political order. But the image of the young Black student lashing Rhodes with his belt was picked up by the media and featured in many newspaper accounts of the event. As the play re-stages events, this became the moment that incipient tensions in the student movement began to fracture. The issues of gender and sexuality had been simmering throughout the occupation and now that the statue was gone, those tensions began to boil over, with radical feminists and trans-activists asking the men to account for their patriarchal behaviour – delivering a beating with one's belt is associated in South Africa with the imposition of male violence and discipline in domestic settings:

CHWAITA (The Young One): What you guys did was to definitely derail our narrative! By jumping on that plinth, you gave the media this big photo op! We know the media do that. They're not going to focus on these little statements we made as women. The media is only interested in the dramatic picture, so when you jumped on the plinth, you immediately elevated yourselves. Now, ding! This picture is all over social media, all over the news, looking like you are the leaders of this movement.

CAMILLA (The One Who Searches): And on top of that, cadre, you should've heard what those European journalists were saying about you. You know, the minute he pulled out his belt and started hitting Cecil in the face, they called him a savage (The Fall 2017, 35–6).

It is clear that violence, manifesting as what characters in *The Fall* describe as hyper-masculinity – Africa striking back in the face of centuries of humiliation,

emasculation and infantilization – is one of the ways in which the protests may be understood, and is indeed one of the possible futures made visible by the protest actions, performances and re-stagings of the movement – but it is not the only one.

Qhawekazi (The Brave One), another of the characters in *The Fall* voices another perspective:

I remember looking at the place where the statue had been and I noticed a tiny hole filled with ash and burnt paper. I remember thinking, 'We have to fill that space with us.' Things, shapes, people we can recognise. Now the real work of decolonising starts... I remember someone yelling, 'We must replace it with a statue of Tata Nelson Mandela,' and I thought, 'No... we have enough of those, we have enough statues of men. We have enough men.' (The Fall 2017, 34).

Chapungu

Standing further back in the crowd, on her own plinth, was Sethembile Msezane, a UCT Masters of Fine Art candidate from Soweto. Numerous smart phones and cameras were trained on the Rhodes statue, but Msezane faced away, her face covered by a beaded veil, waiting, and watching the action in the reflections of other people's sunglasses. At the moment the crane lifted the statue of Rhodes, Msezane raised her arms, gaining wings – a veritable African phoenix, rising from the fall of Rhodes (Fig. 1.3).

Msezane's performance was complex and multi-layered. Like Maxwele's original protest it juxtaposed her own Black living and breathing body with the bronze embodiment of Rhodes. However, its female form added a further juxtaposition, as did her outfit. In her Public Holiday series, performed during 2013 and 2014 before the advent of #RhodesMustFall, Msezane had also stood on a plinth in various locations to underline the absence of the memorialization of Black female bodies in public spaces. Just as her choice of outfit on each of these occasions connected to the public holiday in question, what she wore on 9 April 2015 was highly deliberate.

In 1889, the hunter Willie Posselt forced his way into the hilltop enclosure at Great Zimbabwe, where he found a series of carved stone birds positioned around an altar. He set about hacking the best specimen from its stone plinth, much to the consternation of local people, who were held back at gunpoint (Hubbard 2009, 110). Posselt sold the bird to Rhodes, and some think this may have at least partly inspired the invasion of the country by Rhodes' British South Africa Company in 1891. Rhodes adopted the bird as



Figure 1.3. *Chapungu – the Day Rhodes Fell, 2015, University of Cape Town, South Africa by Sethembile Msezane. Photograph courtesy and copyright the artist.*

a personal emblem, incorporating it as an architectural element in his various houses, in Cape Town, as well as the gatehouse of the estate he purchased outside Newmarket in the UK. It remains a significant feature of Rhodes' House in Oxford to this day.

The bird most likely represented Chapungu, the bateleur eagle, which is regarded as a mediator with the ancestors in Zimbabwe. Following independence in 1980, when the country previously known as Southern Rhodesia took the name of the ancient site, Zimbabwe, the bird became a feature on the new national flag and coat of arms, also appearing on coins and notes. In 1981 the South African government returned four of the birds, removed in excavations sponsored by Rhodes' British South African Company, and in 2003 the Ethnological Museum in Berlin returned the pedestal of another (Munjeri 2009). The bird that belonged to Rhodes, however, remains in the library at Groote Schuur, his house slightly further down the mountain from the UCT campus, which until 1994 was the South African presidential residence, and is now a museum.

Sethembile Msezane's embodiment of Chapungu had been prompted by a recurring dream, and her more recent work *Falling* (2017) attempts to explore the perspective of the bird that remains in exile, and the view expressed by some Zimbabweans that there will continue to be unrest in the country until the final bird is returned. It is significant that Msezane's work connected the removal of the Rhodes statue so explicitly to the collecting and potential return of ancient African works of art, given the connections this makes between iconoclasm, collecting and the consignment of objects into museums (cf. Wingfield 2016), but also the links it makes between iconoclasm and repatriation (cf. Wingfield 2010). A number of commentators on the Rhodes statue itself stated that it had become an anachronism that belonged in a museum, rather than a University campus, and as Cynthia Kros (2015) has pointed out, the fate of the Rhodes statue at UCT was ultimately not destruction, but indefinite preservation. Msezane's refocusing of attention away from Rhodes and onto Chapungu makes the case for the importance of a

reverse move that would provide precolonial African art with a contemporary presence and significance. Indeed, much of Msezane's work draws attention to the different ways in which the past can be manifested in the present. When she was interviewed by Douglas Foster for the Atlantic, Msezane recalled her experience standing on the plinth when she tried to meditate on the deeper meaning of the historic moment:

How arrogant, she thought, to install monuments to powerful individuals across such a beautiful landscape in the first place. Permanent installations, even of heroes, eventually inflicted 'the kind of pain' associated with the Rhodes Statue... Their presence only encouraged a culture of narcissistic, bankrupt triumphalism. 'I don't really understand why we should have any of them,' she mused. 'Why do we ever litter a landscape like that?' (Foster 2015).

In a subsequent TED talk, Msezane has argued that 'The preservation and the act of remembering can be achieved in more memorable and effective ways.'⁸

Decolonization as art practice

These three examples of artistic performances, each closely connected with #RhodesMustFall, provide alternative visions of the movement, but also alternative perspectives on art-making and un-making in South Africa. Maxwele's protest, for all its thoughtfulness, represents decolonial action in the mode of Fanon, the liberatory moment of violence, arising from unbearable contradictions, but leading perhaps to 'quite simply the replacing of a certain "species" of men by another "species" of men' (Fanon 1967, 27). 'The Fall' represents performance as re-enactment, but a re-enactment which clarifies and attempts to work through the complexities and multiple perspectives lost in the heat of political action. Sthembele Msezane's work *Chapungu – The Day Rhodes Fell* looks forward to alternative futures made possible by decolonial action, futures which explicitly connect to the precolonial African past, and to modes of thought and practice that have been largely displaced and marginalized by the colonial ordering of knowledge. Each of these performances, in their different ways re-present both the past and the present, and in doing so make it possible to re-imagine alternative futures (cf. Hamilton 2017).

In his essay 'What is Iconoclasm? Or Is There a World Beyond the Image Wars', originally published to accompany the 2005 exhibition *Iconoclasm*, Bruno Latour (2010) asked, 'How is it possible to go beyond the cycle of fascination, repulsion, destruction, and

atonement, which is generated by the forbidden-image worship?' His answer, at least partly, was through embracing 'cascades of images'. 'By writing about images, objects, statues, signs and documents in a way that demonstrates the connections they have with other images, objects, statues, signs and documents', Latour (2010, 91) suggested that the argument can be made that 'Images do count... because they allow one to move to another image, exactly as frail and modest as the former one, but different'.

Through a concentration on the origins of the #RhodesMustFall movement, we have tried to indicate the ways that it embodied much of Latour's vision. Intervening in the vision of history embodied by the Rhodes statue, it was as much about art-making as art-unmaking – about intervening in the cascade of images in a way that paralleled the interventions of cartoonists such as the political satirist Zapiro.⁹ Indeed, the critic and curator Thuli Gamedze argued in December 2015 for 'Decolonization as Art Practice', suggesting that 'MustFallness is an ideology... speaking to decolonisation... as a way to make space for new ideas, and new ways of being' but also as 'an art discipline... of creative and risky thinking, and a discipline of mobilisation and activism, based on a desire to see new images, and to create new symbols' (Gamedze 2015). However, Gamedze (2015) suggests that it is an approach 'that has little to do with the art institution, with the implication that 'we are forced to deal with art outside of the institution, and to engage with images that actually affect us all.' Gamedze (2015) suggests that it is necessary to de-specialize creativity so that we can play with it more consciously as a political tool', asking:

If we seek to truly understand art as a discipline with the potential to engage all and every subject matter, then will this kind of conscious image-engagement destroy the white cube, a colonial construction that segregates 'art knowledge', and dilutes its potential to catalyze and mobilize real change? #FineArtMustFall?

Gamedze argues that we can expand art to the extent that when we talk about art, we are speaking of a conscious, creative approach that is in response to images, and through response, creates its own images. In a time when the majority of images are consumed online and through social media, when so many people carry smart phones in their pockets, the making and circulation of images, including images of un-making, has arguably already been radically de-specialized.¹⁰ Are our contemporary circumstances genuinely novel, or do they rather reflect

the de-segregated and de-specialized way in which art and image making have operated for the majority of human history, at least in South Africa?

Technologies of enchantment

We originally circulated a call for papers for the 2016 conference with the title *South Africa: 3 Million Years of Art? Reconsidering Ontologies, Technologies and Agents*. In this, we invited potential contributors to develop a conversation between three relatively distinct areas of scholarly endeavour, all of which featured in the exhibition, *South Africa: the art of a nation*. The first relates to the archaeology of human origins, where early evidence of art and ‘symbolic behaviour’ from South African sites has been widely regarded as a marker of ‘modern’ forms of human behaviour. The second is the rich tradition of rock art research in South Africa, the interpretation of which has relied on a combination of regional ethnographies and cognitive models. The third relates to contemporary South African art, which has for decades been understood as explicitly political, and engaged in projects of societal transformation. ‘Art’ is central to all of these fields of study but means quite different things in each. We asked whether it would be possible to find a common way of talking about ‘art’ that made equal sense across the span of South African human history, whether considering engraved ochre, painted rock shelters or contemporary performance art?

We suggested that one way of approaching this would be to consider ‘art’ as part of a wider suite of technological practices, drawing on ideas developed by Alfred Gell (1992) in his important essays *The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology* (1992) and *Vogel’s Net: Traps as Artworks and Artworks as Traps* (1996) as well as his posthumously published book *Art and Agency* (Gell 1998). Rather than asking whether or not ‘art’ was present in the past, or whether it correlated with forms of ethnographically described behaviour, we wanted to ask how the presence of art made a difference to the past. In attempting to develop a theory of art that could apply cross-culturally, Gell developed a notion of art as skilled practice which challenged a primarily institutional theory of art (Gell 1998, 5). In placing his emphasis on ‘agency, intention, causation, result and transformation’, Gell (1998, 6) suggested that Art was ‘a system of social action, intended to change the world rather than encode symbolic propositions about it’. It seems that Gell developed an analytical understanding of art practice which is in fact very close to Thuli Gamedze’s more programmatic conception of *Decolonization as Art Practice*.

The forms of performance that emerged in, through and around #RhodesMustFall, described above, make it clear how analytically fruitful the notion of art ‘a system of social action’ can be, but equally how restrictive an exclusive focus on either the institutionally defined art world, or on art objects as the material products of artistic practice can be, even when attempting to account for South Africa’s very recent history. It is our contention that this only becomes truer, the further one moves from nineteenth-century Europe, where many of the now commonplace conceptions of art arose. We invited contributors to use Gell’s ideas to reframe approaches taken to art in the study of the South African past, as well as to its presentation in institutional contexts in the present. The essays brought together here are a response to this challenge. They are grouped into three sections, Technologies, Ontologies and Agents, which represent the main areas we felt needed reconsideration, and we believe represent an important step in developing a framework for engaging with South Africa’s artistic traditions that attempts to displace the nineteenth-century European frameworks associated with colonial power.

Technologies

Alfred Gell’s (1992, 43–44) essay *The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology* argued that we should not approach the art object as merely ‘a vehicle for extraneous social and symbolic messages’, but rather should consider art as a technical system ‘oriented towards the production of the social consequences which ensue from the production of these objects’. This first section of the volume foregrounds discussions of skill and art production as social process.

Through the example of Wonderwerk Cave in South Africa’s Northern Cape, Michael Chazan’s chapter shows how evidence of art in southern Africa has been pushed back from 10,000 to 80,000 years ago, resulting in the southern Africa becoming identified as a cradle of symbolic artistic behaviour. Contributing to these developments, Chazan cites the isolation of South African archaeology under apartheid and the subsequent influx of international researchers, the dynamics of research funding demanding discoveries of global impact, as well as the emergence of the ‘art as cognitive capacity’ paradigm. Chazan reminds us that only forty years ago, engraved slabs from Wonderwerk were the earliest evidence of art in southern Africa, but as new discoveries have pushed the origins of art in southern Africa further back in time, the slabs have become subject to more complex

readings. In making this point, Chazan challenges the archaeological search for the origins of art, deploying Gell's (1996) ideas to explore the long processes of shifting relations between humans and materials. Chazan cites the selection and transport of quartz crystals, specularite and ironstone slabs to the back of the 140 m deep cave at Wonderwerk, 300,000 to 500,000 years ago, to argue that a 'powerful appreciation of the sensory properties of material long preceded the impetus to create networks of lines' of the types more typically cited as the 'origins of art'.

Chazan's argument resonates with the inclusion of the 300,000-year-old Makapansgat Pebble at the South Africa exhibition at the British Museum to suggest the long development of artistic thought and practice in southern Africa. In addition, Chazan's paper links archaeological research with the wider political context of contemporary South Africa, where questions of decolonization loom large. Chazan observes that the dominant palaeoanthropological 'art as cognitive capacity' paradigm perpetuates colonial thinking by presenting research into human origins and the deep past as scientific and of value for humanity as a whole, as distinct from the study of the more recent past, the value of which is regarded as more limited and local. Chazan's chapter encourages us to reconnect our approaches to the deep past with those we take to the more recent past in order to break down the disciplinary and interpretative barriers that an archaeological obsession with origins can result in.

Larissa Snow's chapter draws on a range of ethnographic, historical and archaeological evidence to consider arrows as technology, art and indexes of personhood. Like Chazan, Snow also uses Gell's (1996) ideas to argue that arrows are 'artworks in their own right' because their production brings together 'otherwise innocuous materials to create something ephemeral and yet extremely potent that anticipates and enables engagements with other species.' Building on McGranaghan and Challis's (2016) recent work on hunting in southern Africa, Snow argues that arrows are also a 'technological means of enchanting game': arrows permit the transformation of poison, into meat, into potency and wellbeing for the community, and thus are an enchanted technology made and used by 'occult technicians' (Gell 1992, 49). Like Chazan, Snow engages with the legacies of older Eurocentric frameworks, through her endorsement of Gell's (1992, 56) observation that 'the notion that technique is dull and mechanical in opposition to true creativity and authentic values represented by art is a by-product of the quasi-religious status of art in post-industrial western culture'. As Snow explains, this opposition ignores the quasi-religious role of technology in many

non-Western societies, 'dismissing arrows as merely functional tools fails to recognize how they objectify wider social values, practices and relationships.'

Like Snow, Per Ditlef Fredriksen engages with a seemingly mundane form of technology – ceramic production in the Magaliesberg valley region during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, he deploys Gell's (1992) ideas about art as technology to explore the process of making as a performance which leads to the emergence of objects. In response to an archaeological reliance on the visible surface design of pots to identify changing cultural identities, Fredriksen argues for a consideration of social factors involved in the transmission of technical skills. Fredriksen is particularly interested in relocation and movement of people and ways in which micro-level analyses of ceramic recipes may identify past networks of interaction. His approach involves analysing ceramic pastes, building techniques, and other elements not necessarily visible to the naked eye, all of which are harder to learn and thus more resistant to change than forms of decoration. Frederiksen links changes in recipes to disruptions in the household, which he identifies as the arena for craft learning. As he explains, 'craft transmission is inextricably linked to its spatial setting, and therefore also vulnerable to changes to these settings.' Such an approach makes it possible to connect the rhythmic bodily motions of the potter, as artist, to the wider social and political disruptions in South Africa over the past two centuries.

Catherine Namono and Johan van Schalkwyk's chapter also adopts an approach to the analysis of artworks that explores the performances of making and consumption from which they emerge. Through a consideration of the relationship between depictions of European dress and initiation imagery in the rock art of the Makgabeng plateau, Namono and van Schalkwyk argue that 'Africans appropriated European dress and through their rock art re-signified or symbolised it, as part of a process of reconstituting their identity to become "Northern Sotho".' Utilizing Schneider's (2006, 29) definition of appropriation, they emphasize how these artistic communities adopted 'foreign' things, such as colonial dress, as a recontextualizing strategy to create somethings new and meaningful as part of their own identity production and maintenance. In so doing, they also draw on Gell (1998, 17) to focus their interpretation on what these rock art images do, rather than what they represent.

Justine Wintjes and Laura de Harde's chapter similarly draws on Gell's ideas about art, technology and enchantment to position the production of southern African rock art as integral to the mediation of social relations, but in contrast to Namono and

van Schalkwyk, their analysis extends to the work of copyists such as Elizabeth Goodall. Goodall was employed on the Frobenius expedition to southern Africa (1928–1930) and over her career produced a large archive of rock art copies. Wintjes and de Harde discuss how, although Goodall's work has been critiqued for its selectiveness and lack of interpretative insight, it nevertheless promotes an engagement with rock art as art, instead of as the product of religion or belief. While acknowledging the pitfalls of applying a Western art paradigm to southern African rock art, Wintjes and de Harde apply Gell's (1992) ideas about enchantment and technology to Goodall's work to develop a 'greater acknowledgment of the technical skill mobilized by San artists'.¹¹ Furthermore, just as the artworks may be read as deploying artistic techniques in the service of enchantment, Goodall, and copyists like her, were themselves enchanted by these technologies, their reproductions may be read as re-enactments, but also re-enchantments, and a measure of their continuing power to enchant across a range of cultural and historical settings.

Ontologies

In our call for papers, we also suggested that South Africa was somewhere that foragers have lived alongside pastoralists and agriculturalists for at least two millennia, where states and stateless societies have engaged with one another for at least a millennium, and in which economic exchanges have involved Europeans for half a millennium. We expressed an interest in re-examining established frameworks for the interpretation of art in South Africa through exploring co-occurrence and interchange between contrasting ontological systems, and cited Philippe Descola (2013, 26) to suggest that the apparent 'puzzling similarity of Africa to Europe' in ontological matters may 'be a product of the intellectual habits that characterize all specialist studies in cultural areas'. Here, Descola is effectively critiquing a history of anthropological interventions on the continent. He writes, 'interactions between humans and other natural species' are the purview of select sets of Africanist anthropological interests (typically cleaving along economic lines particular to hunting and pastoralist peoples), and fauna are treated 'as icons that express social categories and practices and not as full subjects in the life of this world' (Descola 2013, 26). These trends 'tend to encourage ethnographers to pick out from the society that they are studying those expressions of certain realities' that are most familiar rather than looking for phenomena that do not fit within existing interpretive frameworks.

Such statements chime with Valentin Mudimbe's (1988, 18–20) description of social sciences in Africa that bear the marks of European-derived habits of reasoning and working, thereby perpetuating colonialist visions of the continent. Whether or not one agrees fully with Descola's characterization of contemporary Africanist anthropology, the suggestion that a comparative perspective can enable new ontological vistas resonates strongly with 'ontological turn' in anthropology and archaeology (e.g. Willerslev 2013; Viveiros de Castro 2015; Alberti 2016; Holbraad & Pedersen 2017). However, Africa (and especially South Africa) has been largely absent from these global anthropological debates. Contributors to the 'Ontologies' section have attempted to redress this lacuna, both through a focus on theorizations of art and ontology (Porr), and through studies demonstrating how ontological approaches to diverse artforms can offer novel insights into the co-creation of subjects and objects (Hayden, King and McGranaghan, Wingfield).

Martin Porr's chapter begins this section, appropriately, with a focus on human origins in South Africa – specifically, with a critical examination of the ways in which archaeological theorizations of cognitive development do not engage with the full range of possible roles that art objects can have in constructing peoples' realities. While the ontological turn is rooted in a rejection of a unified view of nature, characterized by Descola as 'naturalism', Porr's argument focuses specifically on the position that images have occupied in the western philosophical tradition, and the consequences this has had for dominant conceptualizations of human behavioural modernity. Through a detailed engagement with pre-Socratic and Platonic approaches to naturalism, rationality and images, coupled with a review of recent trends in southern African hominin studies, Porr argues that 'so-called art objects are not a means of adaptation to an independent nature' which only arise as a symptom of cognitive development. Rather, we should consider art as 'the means through which people socially construct their reality'. In this, Porr links his position to that of Willerslev and Viveiros de Castro, arguing that we should understand past and present behaviour not as 'abstract structures and patterns' but as 'the means that people use to make sense of the world'. Understanding art objects as ontologically implicated in how humans make, and make sense of, their worlds troubles persistent universalizing models, not only of human evolution, but also of human social life. It also potentially makes space for alternative perspectives on human pasts, presents and futures.

Miesha Hayden's paper also employs an ontological approach to interrogate prevailing models of

social relationships as constituted through artforms, with special attention to stylistic uses of rock art pigment. Southern African rock art scholarship has long emphasized the contiguity of art production and consumption with painters' cosmologies, with David Lewis-Williams and others (1981; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004; Lewis-Williams & Challis 2011) arguing that rock arts are not inert 'postcard' representations but embody the immediate and spiritual worlds of the painter(s). Hayden elaborates on this by arguing that pigment and its visual, sensual characteristics should be considered as part of this schema, employing an art historical perspective to characterize the linear, tonal, and metaphoric attributes of colour at the site of Ezeljagdspoor (Western Cape Province). Hayden combines her stylistic analysis with regional ethnography to demonstrate how colour functions as 'one of several discursive strands' in the art, bolstering visual relationships while serving as a metaphorical or descriptive agent in realizing aspects of hunter-gatherer cosmology (e.g. the ontological associations between colour and the life cycles of bees or locusts). This process is part of what she refers to as 'actualization', in which colour helps to manifest a range of abstract ideas. 'Actualization' in Hayden's sense foregrounds the 'fluidity existing between varied states of being', underscoring a crucial component of any ontological approach to the past: taking the existence of multiple realities seriously means also taking seriously ontological instability as an integral part of these realities.

Ontological instability is a core part of Rachel King and Mark McGranaghan's chapter addressing the fluidities of 'wild' and 'domestic' as ethological and economic categories of being. One of the defining features of archaeology and anthropology in southern Africa has been the study of hunter-gatherer communities, and the impacts that the arrival of food production and producers had on them. Debates over the nature of these processes have addressed thorny problems of conceptualizing changing economic and social identities through archaeological materials and ethnography, but rock art studies often treat depictions of domesticates as stand-ins for transhumant economies and their practitioners, flattening identity work done in other disciplinary arenas. In their chapter, King and McGranaghan consider how depictions of livestock and ostriches offer different perspectives on human-animal relationships that do not hinge on domesticates functioning primarily as goods or technologies. Instead, they examine ontologies beyond wild and domestic: engraved ostriches in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century art of the Strandberg (Northern Cape Province) embody

a nexus of skills, labour relations, and goods channelled by an expanding feather trade that increasingly co-opted Strandberg residents; painted cattle in the southern Maloti-Drakensberg Mountains (Lesotho) demonstrate the ambiguity of these animals as somewhere between material culture and potent, agentive beings within the second millennium AD. King and McGranaghan draw attention to what an ontological approach to changing socio-cultural and economic frontiers can offer: insight into the context-dependent relationships between first-comers and newcomers, including biota and humans.

Experiences of domesticity on expanding frontiers feature in Chris Wingfield's chapter, but carry different valences in the context of the 'missionary road' that propelled Christianity into South Africa's interior. Wingfield explores the potential for recovering pre-colonial indigenous forms of knowledge from missionary accounts and images, focusing on John Campbell's account and illustration of the interior of a Tswana house in the settlement of Kaditshwene (North-West Province). Resonant with other chapters in this section, Wingfield suggests that images and their conventions can offer insight into how humans related to themselves and others, and that within Campbell's work we can see not only how Campbell construed these relationships, but also how Senosi (the house's main occupant) construed them. Wingfield's analysis draws attention to depictions of wild animals such as giraffes in Senosi's house, which resonated both with contemporary missionary fascination with African animals and also with Sotho-Tswana associations of wild game animals with the 'cognitive resources' necessary for thinking about African leadership, ancestry, and spirituality. These resources refer to the position of animals in contemporary totemism (with animals linked to specific political groupings), and to their representations in art forms produced for local consumption, such as spoon handles. Wingfield draws attention to how images like that of Senosi's house can contain diverse ontologies within a colonial *milieu*, returning us full circle to Porr's argument that art practices have always been central to practices involved in constructions and understandings of reality.

Agents

In our call for papers we invited potential contributors to address not whether 'art' was present in the past, nor whether artefacts illustrated particular aspects of human behaviour, but rather how their presence made a difference to the past. In particular we asked how art and artefacts have been mobilized differently in the

political struggles that have characterized the region's recent history. While papers in the first section engaged primarily with Alfred Gell's (1992) essay *The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology*, Gell's work has become most closely associated with his unfinished posthumously published book, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Gell 1998). While some renderings of Gell's work have reduced it to the singular notion that 'objects have agency', his, at times frustratingly arcane book is rather more concerned with attempting to develop an anthropological theory of the operation of agency in human social life, in a way that takes account of its multiple and complex mediations. Thus, while it is true that a non-human object can operate as an agent in Gell's scheme, it is equally true that a human can operate as an index, the category typically occupied by an artwork.

The papers in this section all take artworks as their starting point, and then attempt to engage with the ways in which they have been a focus for various forms of human social (and political) activity.

For David Morris, this takes the form of three stone museum objects from the Northern Cape that were exhibited in the 2016–17 exhibition: a sculptured stone head found near Kimberley in 1899, a stone hand axe excavated in 1980 and a rock engraving sent to the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in 1886. Morris uses the disparate histories of these things, which intersected only at the London exhibition, to consider the historical development of museums and the ways in which this has embodied shifting dynamics between imperial metropole and colonial periphery. Ultimately, Morris argues that despite attempts at museological manipulation, classification and categorization, these objects have retained an independent capacity for assertion and provocation, that becomes a form of 'answering back'. Drawing inspiration from theorists such as Tim Ingold, as well as indigenous theories of ontological fluidity, suggested by indigenous oral literature and ethnography, Morris argues for a 'rethinking of things' as part of a world-in-formation, where the properties of materials, such as stone, are best accounted for in stories of how they flow, mix and mutate.

Ceri Ashley and Alexander Antonites's chapter is equally concerned with the properties of materials, in particular the different ways in which gold and ceramic artefacts from Mapungubwe graves have been differently treated. While the gold items, and particularly the sculptures such as the famous gold rhino, which was also exhibited in the British Museum exhibition, have come to stand as a symbol of indigenous artistic achievement, particularly in post-apartheid South Africa, the ceramic items from the same burials have received considerably less attention. Several of the

early excavators of the site remarked on the finesse and beauty of the black burnished open bowls found in these graves, while taking a much more ambivalent attitude to the gold objects, associating gold with the potential for looting and destruction. Nevertheless, subsequent attention, and particularly display, has focused almost exclusively on the gold items. Ashley argues that when considered in relation to the context in which these artefacts were originally made and used – South Africa of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries – the burnished pottery bowls may have had greater resonance, forming part of a distinctive ceramic tradition that stretched over an area of 30,000 sq. km. For Ashley, ceramics in their ubiquity were an essential part of development of Mapungubwe-ness, and the social and political operation of this ancient polity in ways that the rare gold items could never have been.

Catherine Elliott Weinberg is also concerned with the political significance of seemingly mundane objects, in her case a meat-platter, three headrests and four milk-pails from the Zulu kingdom, held by the British Museum, one of which was displayed in the South Africa exhibition. Through an archival engagement with the museum and its various documents, Elliott has been able to demonstrate that these items were most likely taken from the kraal of King Cetshwayo kaMpande by Field Marshall Garnet Joseph Wolseley during the Anglo-Zulu war of 1879. Although re-classified and re-categorized at the British Museum as ethnographic artefacts illustrative of Zulu-ness, Elliott has demonstrated that like the stone artefacts discussed by Morris, they retain the capacity to 'answer back', particularly when the various forms of agency that are suspended across the archival assemblage of the museum are reactivated through research of the kind in which she has been engaged. This has ultimately enabled the re-inscription of these items as the *amagugu* or treasures of Cetshwayo, unsettling the colonial framing of these objects firstly as the battle trophies of Field Marshall Wolseley and then as the ethnographic objects of the British Museum.

As for Weinberg, it is through the process of actively engaging with a series of images that Nessa Leibhammer's paper emerges. In her case, it is through considering the ways on which light and shadow were used to shape depictions of subject peoples in nineteenth-century South Africa, but also the ways in which they have been used as part of a 'decolonizing impulse' in more recent art from the region. Leibhammer shows that while nineteenth-century depictions associated light with Christianity and Civilization, an association of shade with the ancestors was drawn on in depictions of African spirituality by twentieth-century South African artists such as Simon Lekgetho.

Leibhammer suggests that recent work by Kemang Wa Lehulere, Deutsche Bank's 2017 'Artist of the Year', utilizes 'illogical' depictions of light, such as luminosity emanating from behind his chalk depictions, to disrupt the established 'wisdoms' of Western empiricism that govern the deployment of light and shadow in more conventional depictions.

The theme of disruption is continued in the final paper by Same Mdluli, who offers a reflection on the state of the nation and art in South Africa through a reflection on the #RhodesMustFall movement, returning to the events with which this introduction began but rooting these in longer histories of South Africa contemporary art. For Mdluli, #RhodesMustFall, and particularly the work of Sethembile Msezane, provides an opportunity to reflect on the intersections between art and politics over the two decades since the end of apartheid. For Mdluli, art such as Msezane's is essentially future-oriented and potentially liberatory, serving as a vehicle for activating the (South African) imagination, making it possible to explore and consider new ways of being.

Nevertheless, Msezane's work engages strongly with the African past, its politics and representation, but also its artistic traditions. For Mdluli, looking deeply at 'where we have come' from is essential to the project of understanding 'where we are, and most importantly where we are going'. It is as a contribution to this project that we hope to offer this volume on the Pasts and Presence of Art in South Africa, with the hope that by approaching art in terms of its technologies, ontologies and agents, that we may cast a different light on the past, making it easier to imagine alternative futures in the present.

Notes

1. The conference was held between the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, Cambridge and the British Museum, between 27 and 29 October 2016. It was supported financially by a major conference grant from the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, as well as additional financial support from the Centre of African Studies and the Smuts Memorial Fund at the University of Cambridge.
2. These sculptures are ultimately intended to form part of a visitor park targeted on Heritage tourism, in a complex that will also include Africa's largest water park. See: <https://www.nhmsa.co.za/sculptures.html>
3. See: <https://www.iol.co.za/news/tokoloshes-vandalise-rhodes-statue-1692902>
4. In the late 1970s, it had been painted pink by a group of students in protest at what they saw as UCT's wasteful expenditure on their 150th anniversary celebration. One of the protesters said they had directed their protest at the statue of Rhodes as this was representative of 'what

U.C.T. has done and is still doing, namely facilitating the exploitation of the majority of South Africans.' Whether pink, served simply to parody, or to signify Rhodes' alleged homosexuality either in 1970 or as the colour of Maxwele's helmet, is unclear. In 2008, graffiti appeared on the plinth which read 'Fuck your dream of Empire'. This referenced a stanza of Rudyard Kipling's 'Song of Cities' relating to Cape Town inscribed on the plinth which read:

*I DREAM MY DREAM
BY ROCK AND HEATH AND PINE
OF EMPIRE TO THE NORTHWARD
AY, ONE LAND
FROM LION'S HEAD TO LINE.*

5. It is undoubtedly significant that the Western Cape, and Cape Town in particular, is not dominated by the ANC in the way that other parts of the country are. Since 2009, the Democratic Alliance has maintained a majority in the Western Cape Provincial Parliament.
6. Archibald Campbell Mzolisa 'A.C.' Jordan (1906–1968) was a novelist, literary historian and pioneer of African linguistics, who was appointed senior lecturer in African languages at the University of Cape Town in 1946. In 1961 when he was offered a Carnegie bursary to conduct research in the United States, but was refused a passport by the apartheid government. He was forced to leave South Africa on an exit permit, and settled in America where he was appointed professor in African Languages and Literature at the University of California, Los Angeles. In 2015 the University of Cape Town renamed the Arts Block after Jordan.
Archibald 'Archie' Mafeje (1936–2007) was a South African anthropologist who was appointed Senior Lecturer in Social Anthropology at UCT in 1968, but the appointment was reversed a month later because of pressure from the apartheid government, prompting a nine day student occupation on campus involving an estimated 600 students.
Mahmood Mamdani (1946–) is a Ugandan academic who was appointed to the inaugural AC Jordan chair of African Studies at UCT in 1996. He left UCT in 1998 following disagreements with the administration on his draft syllabus for a foundation course on African Studies called 'Problematizing Africa', which led to his suspension from teaching (see <http://ccs.ukzn.ac.za/files/mamdani.pdf>).
7. Max Price was Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of Cape Town from 2008 to 2018. A qualified medical doctor, as a student Price was President of the Student Representative Council at the University of Witwatersrand from 1976 to 1978, and was arrested and detained in solitary confinement for 12 days by apartheid police for organizing commemorations to mark the first anniversary of the Soweto Uprising.
8. See: https://www.ted.com/talks/sethembile_msezane_living_sculptures_that_stand_for_history_s_truths
9. Zapiro's cartoons provide a complex visual commentary on South African politics and history, and also featured in

the *South Africa: the art of a nation* exhibition at the British Museum in the section on anti-apartheid protest art.

10. The poet Koleka Putuma, in her poem 'Dear Allen', performed on the day that Rhodes fell, and posted to the #RhodesMustFall Facebook group the following day (available at <https://cocoputuma.wordpress.com/2015/04/06/dear-allen/>), put it another way:

They drew spears in jest.

Sort to reclaim bourgeois galleries as a space to display lost and defamed lineage

And in the meantime, they were redeeming the meaning of freedom

*They wrote poems for a living and called it art
Made art and called it a living*

They romanticised about making Theatre

That reflected who they thought they were

11. We recognize that the term 'San' is a problematic, essentially politically correct term, that arose as a replacement to the older term 'Bushman/Boesman', but also as a cipher for various African-language terms such as Sonqua, Basarwa, Baroa & Balala. These are partly socio-economic descriptors, and partly ethno-linguistic categories, and do not necessarily reflect the ethnonyms used by individuals and groups in relation to themselves. However, as a homogenizing term, it has certain analytical and political uses, and continues to be used by the South African San Council, and is used at various points in this book.

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Part I
Technologies

Chapter 2

Reframing the Wonderwerk slabs and the origins of art in Africa

Michael Chazan

There is a broad consensus that the Middle Stone Age of southern Africa, beginning *c.* 120,000 years ago, provides evidence of a range of behaviours that are novel.¹ As expressed by Lyn Wadley, ‘Africa’s Middle Stone Age (MSA) is celebrated for its innovations’ (Wadley 2015, 156).

The evidence of innovation/invention include complex hunting tools and exploitation of marine resources, but the most spectacular developments are artefacts linked to symbolic behaviour, and more broadly to the origins of art, including the incised ochre from Blombos Cave and Klein Kliphuis, incised ostrich egg shell from Diepkloof and Klipdrift, and shell beads from Blombos Cave, and most recently a small painted piece of rock from Blombos – all of which are within the range of 60,000–80,000 years old (Henshilwood *et al.* 2002, 2004, 2018; Mackay & Welz 2008; Texier *et al.* 2010; Van Niekerk & Henshilwood 2016). These archaeological discoveries are linked to overwhelming evidence from a combination of genetics and fossil evidence that modern humans evolved in Africa (see Stringer 2016 for an overview).

It is thus somewhat surprising that less than forty years ago it was major scientific news when African art was shown to stretch back a mere 10,000 years. In 1981 an article presenting a series of engraved dolomite slabs from a Later Stone Age context at the site of Wonderwerk Cave in the Northern Cape Province, South Africa was published in *Science*. What made this discovery notable was the association of the slabs with dated radiocarbon samples (Thackeray *et al.* 1981; see also Beaumont & Vogel 2006; Bradfield, Thackeray & Morris 2014; Humphreys & Thackeray 1983; Thackeray 1983; Thackeray 2005).

In fact, the linkage between the slabs and an age of 10,000 years is somewhat overstated as only one slab dates back 10,000 years, the remainder are 5,000 years old or younger. The way in which the Wonderwerk

discovery was presented, particularly the emphasis on the single early exemplar, is revealing. The antiquity of the slabs is what made news, and ten thousand years was considered very old. Thus, only thirty-seven years ago an antiquity of ten thousand years for art in Africa was not self-evident. Such a perspective is unconceivable today.

Engaging with the intellectual context of the Wonderwerk discovery provides an opportunity to appreciate the extent of progress in paleoanthropological research in southern Africa over the past thirty years. In 1981, the scientific consensus was that art first appeared in Europe, most likely as the result of the local evolution of modern humans, possibly from Neanderthals. Paul Mellars (1989, 370) emphasized the novelty of cultural developments in Northeast Africa, Western Asia, and Europe during the period between 45,000 and 35,000 years ago, which ‘involved not only the well-documented shifts in stone-tool technology and associated bone / antler working but also the emergence of such features as personal ornaments, extensively traded objects, and (in at least certain contexts) complex representational art’. By the time Mellars wrote this article in 1989 views had begun to shift towards a recognition of an African origin for modern humans. A few years earlier, Fred Smith (1982, 685) was able to write that ‘the simplest and most logical hypothesis supportable on the basis of present knowledge is that the archaic-to-modern-*H. sapiens* transition in South-Central Europe was indigenous’. Only one commenter responding to this article, Christopher Stringer, suggested that the transition to modern humans in Africa might be earlier than the transition in Europe. Another example of the scientific consensus in the early 1980s is the article published by Michael Hammond (1982) in which he analysed the historical factors that led to the ‘expulsion’ of Neanderthals from the modern human lineage, an error that he felt



Figure 2.1. Map showing Wonderwerk Cave and the other sites mentioned in this chapter: 1) Cradle of Humankind (Sterkfontein, Rising Star; 2) Sibudu Cave; 3) Pinnacle Point; 4) Blombos; 5) Klipdrift; 6) Klein Kliphuis; 7) Diepkloof.

analyses like the one published by Smith were in the process of correcting. Hammond's view drew heavily on an influential article by C. Loring Brace (1964) that argued that Neanderthals were ancestral to modern humans.

The strength of Hammond's article on Neanderthals is not his conclusion about the dynamics of hominin evolution, which we now see as fundamentally wrong, but rather that he urges us to look closely at the historical context in which knowledge claims about human evolution emerge. Hammond (1982, 4) writes that, 'like any other human activity, scientific research is to some extent inseparable from the historical context in which the activity occurs'. Hammond does not try to develop a generalizing theory of the sociology of science, but rather encourages us to consider multiple factors such as the effect of mentors or the influence of rivalries. Training this perspective on the emergence of the contemporary approach to modern human origins, including aspects of modern human behaviour such as art, that stresses the primacy of Africa, and particularly southern Africa, as the place of origins, we can begin to question whether this contemporary consensus emerged simply as the result of the accumulation of information (through new discoveries) or if other factors are at play. I will stress three potential

factors in this brief analysis: 1. The isolation of South Africa under Apartheid and the rapid reintegration of South Africa into the international scientific community following the change in government. 2. The dynamics of internationally funded research projects that stress discoveries of global impact. 3. The constraining of approaches to art to an emphasis on the potential of material culture to encode and signal information, and to serve as an index of cognitive modernity.

Scientific isolation and its aftermath

When the Wonderwerk slabs were discovered and published, South Africa was subject to an academic boycott that had only a marginal impact on the internationalism of South African science. We can point to the fact that both Frances and Anne Thackeray pursued their doctoral studies at Yale University and published in the journal *Science* as clear evidence that the archaeological impact of the academic boycott was at most limited. This situation changed somewhat in 1985 with the decision by the World Archaeological Congress not to include South Africans in their meetings in Southampton, a policy that led to significant debate within the international archaeological community (Ucko 1987). Even after 1985 there continued

to be regular publications in international journals on South African archaeology and fieldwork by a small number of international archaeologists. Yet it seems plausible that the shift in attention during this period within the field of human origins studies away from South Africa and towards East Africa was in part a reaction to political conditions, although the development of argon dating methods that provided an effective tool for absolute dating of East African fossil localities also played a role.

However, if we look only at patterns of international isolation we might miss a more significant aspect, both within Africa, and more subtly within South Africa. The warfare throughout much of southern Africa, including Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe constrained the movement of archaeologists and the ability to carry out research on a regional level. I have been struck during a number of conversations with archaeologists who worked in Africa during the 1950s and 1960s, that they frequently describe driving from South Africa up to the sites in East Africa. With the isolation of the Apartheid regime and the violence across the subcontinent, such travel within Africa became untenable leading to an isolation of South African archaeology as something distinct from African archaeology. Although it is difficult to document, there is also a sense that a degree of fragmentation existed within South Africa. Baumert & Botha (2016, 127) write that South African social scientists 'isolated themselves from international developments and also from other academics in South Africa because of the polarization between English, Afrikaans and African institutions, thus creating a level of self-centeredness...'. The location of Wonderwerk Cave in the Northern Cape, an enormous territory that lacked a university, appears to have become particularly isolated. The key publication for Wonderwerk Cave came to be a guidebook put together for the 1990 annual meeting of the Southern African Association of Archaeologists (Beaumont & Morris 1990).

With the end of Apartheid there has been a rapid influx of international research teams, including our own group working at Wonderwerk Cave (Horwitz & Chazan 2015). The reassertion of the role of South Africa in human origins must be seen in the context of the rapid expansion in the ranks of international researchers drawn to the opportunity to work in South Africa. It is important to emphasize that the new post-Apartheid international engagement has some distinctive traits. The first is that international teams often bring with them major financial resources, particularly in the context of a weakened Rand. The second point is that the research in South Africa has remained largely isolated within the subcontinent, with

little expansion to neighbouring countries. Indeed, much of the international activity has been focused in near proximity to the coast. Finally, South Africa is often conceptualized in opposition to East Africa rather than as part of the whole continent (see for example Brooks *et al.* 2018). Road trips from Sterkfontein outside of Johannesburg to Olduvai remain rare. Thus, in a sense there is an odd situation where the isolationist tendencies within Africa, southern Africa, and even to a limited extent within South Africa, remain largely intact while internationalism has boomed. This combination of fragmentation within Africa together with increasing global connectivity is the background for other factors that play a role in setting the historical context for the recognition of southern Africa as a place of modern human origins.

Discoveries of global impact

The publication of the Wonderwerk slabs in the journal *Science* was a notable event because it marked the recognition of South African archaeology by one of the leading scientific journals in the world. The emphasis on publication in such 'top tier' journals is the hallmark of the rapid influx of international teams, including collaborations with South Africans and collaborations led by South Africans, since the end of Apartheid. Sites including Sibudu, Pinnacle Point, Diepkloof, and Blombos have all been the subject of one or more publications in *Nature* or *Science* (Wadley *et al.* 2011; Marean *et al.* 2007; Brown *et al.* 2009; Henshilwood *et al.* 2002, 2011; Texier *et al.* 2010). Of course, one reason for the prominence of the publications is the excellence of the research involved. There is little question that the opportunity to work in post-Apartheid South Africa has attracted innovative and ambitious researchers. The structure of international funding also plays a major motivating role in spurring 'high impact' publication. Where international archaeological projects were once built around a colonial structure, the tendency today is for funding to be based on highly competitive applications to national scientific funding sources. To be funded a project must pass muster as science operating at the highest international level. This trend is exacerbated by the increasing expense of archaeological practice as it becomes highly dependent on digital technology and costly methods of analysis. This pressure to produce research results that, by external measures, is of the highest scientific merit extends to young archaeologists working to establish a career. Thus, to sustain a project at the cutting edge of archaeological practice requires in many cases publications that validate the scientific value, as opposed to the strictly archaeological value, of the venture.

This pressure pushes researchers towards the search for origins, and more specifically those that are relevant to all humanity rather than of local southern African relevance. Research on modern human origins fits this bill perfectly, and discoveries such as the Blombos ochre or the Diepkloof incised ostrich egg shell are truly of global scientific relevance. In discussing this trend Lynn Wadley writes that ‘in South African villages there is a saying that “when roads to the village are tarred, they take our children away from us”’ (Wadley 2014, 209). In some ways this has also been the case in archaeology; now that barriers are down, major finds tend to be announced initially in high-impact international journals.

The popular media attention to origins research in South Africa also seems to be fuelled by the romance of the struggle against Apartheid. A striking example comes from the site of Naledi which has produced an enigmatic collection of hominin fossils that have sparked global interest (Berger *et al.* 2015). A centrepiece of a recent meeting of the five largest emerging national economies (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, known by the acronym BRICS) was an unveiling of some of the Naledi fossils via video link. Following this virtual visit the leaders of the BRICS countries were asked to make handprints that would be displayed at the Cradle of Humankind visitor centre alongside a handprint made by the late Nelson Mandela.² The symmetry between the fossils of Naledi and the imprint of the hand of the hero of liberation is telling. There is something satisfying about learning the common African origins of all humanity in the same country where a recognition of our common humanity has triumphed over racial injustice.

Art as cognitive capacity

The archaeological study of art is often very focused on specific historical and cultural contexts. Thus, to take an example from a completely different context, excavations at a Roman/Byzantine site at the site of Huqoq in northern Israel has uncovered vivid mosaics that have generated spirited debate over the correlation between a scene with elephants and textual sources (Dunbabin 2018). Although the debate raises some issues of general theoretical interest, particularly regarding the origin of christianity, the issues involved are largely specific to the Roman/Byzantine world in general, and the Levant in particular. Given the importance discussed above for international archaeological teams working in southern Africa to prove the global scientific importance of their research, such a humanistic approach to art plays a minor role. In the discussion of early art from sites such as Blombos and Diepkloof, the emphasis

has been on identifying a capacity for symbolic behaviour, reducing the artefacts to an index of cognitive capacity (see for example d’Errico *et al.* 2003).³ What emerges is the powerful argument that early art is in a sense fossilized language, and testament to the first appearance of modern human cognition. The earliest evidence for language certainly fits the bill for a major transformative scientific discovery, and research on novel artefacts in Middle Stone Age southern Africa has been transformed into the basis for identifying the origins of human cognitive modernity.

Taking stock

It is notable that from the perspective of contemporary paleoanthropological research, artefacts like the Blombos pebble are fixed in the deep past, lacking the dynamic of an enfolded past and present. Moreover, these objects serve as markers of a boundary in the past, with the Middle Stone Age serving as a dividing line between ‘us’ and ‘them’, the culturally modern and the archaic or primitive. I can see two problems with this perspective. The first is that any effort to draw dividing lines in the human lineage is treacherous and can unintentionally strengthen efforts to create biological distinctions within humanity. On the other hand, the grouping of Middle Stone Age humans as ‘modern’ restricts somewhat a recognition of the cultural distinctiveness of different societies, and that for us as ‘outsiders’ gaining understanding of this distinctiveness is a fundamental challenge.⁴

It is interesting that the discovery of the Blombos pebble, along with other Middle Stone Age incised objects, shifted the framing of the Wonderwerk incised slabs out of an origins narrative. Thus, the discoveries made at Blombos, Diepkloof, and other Middle Stone Age sites changes the way we look at the Wonderwerk slabs. In my own experience with the Wonderwerk slabs, I am drawn precisely to their ability to frustrate our efforts at simple ‘reading’, thus adding to a discomfort with the emphasis on art as communication, rather than a modality of material engagement. In our 2018 excavation season we have had the privilege to uncover what may be the most complex slab yet found at Wonderwerk (Figs. 2.2–2.3) As we began to examine this object, covered with a dense network of lines, we searched for animal forms but our search was constantly frustrated. We could find nets of lines, sinuous lines that seem to be elements of a representation, and lines that formed an axis of symmetry, but no image emerged.⁵ Looking at the Wonderwerk slabs reawakens an appreciation of the potential ambiguity of early art, and leaves a door open for multi-vocality in the interpretation of art. Moreover, when we shift

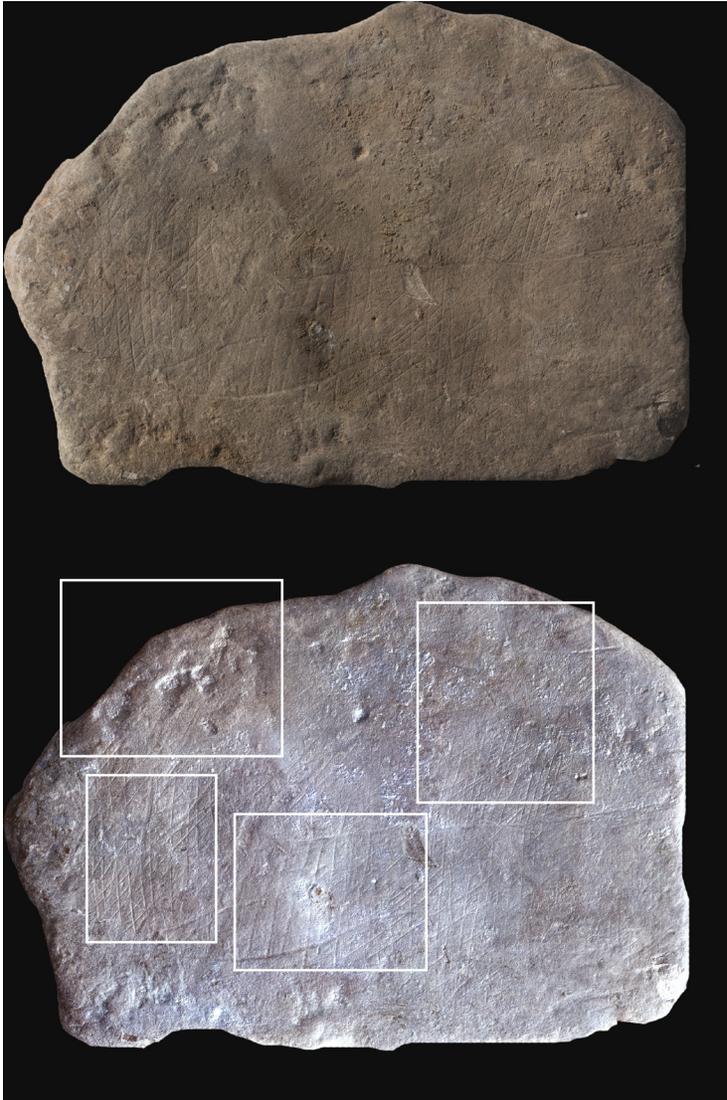


Figure 2.2. Two views of the Later Stone Age incised slabs found at Wonderwerk Cave in 2018. In the lower image the colours are inverted to increase the visibility of the lines. Photographs by Michael Chazan.

our focus away from looking for an encoded message, to take in the entire worked and altered surface, we lose a sense of certainty but at the same time we open the door to an open-ended inquiry. As the members of our research team examined the newly found slab from Wonderwerk we tilted the stone to different angles, hunting for patterns or images. We were actively engaged with the materiality of this complex object. In our excavation we are working to contextualize the object to gain insight into when it was made. These objects once stood as markers of the origin of art but as their framing has shifted, based on new discoveries that push the origins of art in southern Africa further back in time, they are in a sense set free to become subject to an open process of active examination.

There is potential to expand the scope of reframing by finding antecedents that reach further back in time, beyond the Blombos ochre and the Middle Stone

Age. At the back of Wonderwerk Cave, in the area designated as Excavation 6, Beaumont found a range of extraordinary materials- quartz crystals, specularite, and ironstone slabs transported to the back of the cave (140 m from the cave entrance) by hominins sometime around 300,000 to 500,000 years ago (Chazan & Horwitz 2009; Watts *et al.* 2016). The selection and transport of these materials suggests that a powerful appreciation of the sensory properties of material long preceded the impetus to create networks of lines, as found on the Blombos pebble, and much later in time on the Later Stone Age slabs found at Wonderwerk. A focus on the interaction between humans and materials leads to an understanding of continuities over time, rather than marking points that separate then from now. The incision of lines at Blombos and other Middle Stone Age sites become part of this process, rather than novelties without precedent. Incised objects are not semaphores,



Figure 2.3. Details of the incised Later Stone Age slab found at Wonderwerk Cave in 2018. Photographs Michael Chazan.

they are materials that remain material with novel properties and affordances, which may or may not include the capacity to record or transmit information. In writing about the emergence of art I have drawn from Gell's ideas about nets and traps (Chazan 2018; Gell 1996). From this perspective, incising a network of lines into a material is an act of transformation through entrapment. Adopting Gell's perspective allows us to

move away from searching for a singular origin of art in favour of exploring a long process of shifting relations between humans and materiality.

In the current scientific environment, there is a powerful imperative for archaeologists working on early art in Africa to channel their discoveries into a narrative of modern human origins that privileges the symbolic as opposed to the material. These imperatives

flow from the nature of the discoveries themselves, but, as discussed above, also result from the cultural structure of contemporary research in the context of post-apartheid South Africa. There is no question that the achievements of archaeologists working on the Middle Stone Age, what Wadley (2015) describes as ‘those marvelous millennia’, is a tremendous scientific accomplishment that has changed our understanding of the later stages of human evolution. Yet, there is also reason for concern about the lack of room left for uncertainty, materiality, continuity and for a sense of interplay between past and present.

Carolyn Hamilton (2017) writing on archives provides an alternative approach to objects from the past that may apply well to the study of artefacts. Hamilton writes that:

The past that is the object of interest is thus not firmly in a place distinct from the present time of enquiry. Rather, both are folded into each other and into what lies in between, and, indeed, into the way in which a hoped for future influences how we handle traces of the past and ‘sources’ in the present (Hamilton 2017, 350).

In her discussion of archives Hamilton (2017, 35) metaphorically refers to documents as travellers, ‘travellers across time that have changed shape and accrued new meanings through time. Such travellers, I argue, were not merely affected by their contexts, but also affected them in turn’. The metaphor of documents as travellers provides a way of thinking about empirical evidence that forces us to recognize empirical reality (there is a traveller at the door) while also accepting the importance of the current context (my experience with the traveller is in large part a projection of my needs, feelings etc.).

Although there has been a trend among archaeologists working in Africa to loosen the disciplinary claim of authority, these developments have rarely reached the deep past (see review and references in Giblin 2013). Although there remain real barriers to the development of a truly decolonized palaeoanthropology, the move to decolonize the academy in Africa involves a call to increase the emphasis on pre-colonial history, which includes deep time (Hamilton 2017, Porr & Matthews 2017). Thus, we are left with the contradictory impulses to at once increase the emphasis on the deep past, but at the same time to abandon research approaches based on the colonial imposition of the enlightenment project out of which palaeoanthropology developed. There is a risk that this conundrum will lead to a tacit differentiation between the archaeology of the recent past, which will fold into heritage studies,

and palaeoanthropology that will be part of a scientific enterprise, largely buffered from social engagement. Such a solution would have the benefit of ‘keeping the peace’ but risks creating an arbitrary temporal division between past and deep past, and weakening the reach of both heritage and science.

In searching for the origins of art, a crucial task is to think about the way our research enterprise frames our objects of study. The case of the Wonderwerk slabs demonstrates how these frames are historically contingent. The Wonderwerk slabs were initially framed within the context of the origin of art in Africa in a way that no longer applies. Hamilton’s metaphor of documents as travellers allows us to question how we relate to our objects of study as material entities, to recognize the value of multiple interpretations, but also to embrace the inevitable ambiguities of interpretation.

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Notes

1. The age of the beginning of the Middle Stone Age is subject to debate both on theoretical and empirical grounds. The bulk of the Middle Stone Age record relevant to the discussion presented here postdates 120,000 years so this age is used with acknowledgment that it is to a degree arbitrary.
2. This is described in an anonymous article entitled ‘BRICS leaders get a taste of the Cradle of Humankind’ in a newsletter published on 27 July 2018 about the 2018 BRICS summit in Johannesburg: https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_documents/BRICS_Newsletter_Issue_10.pdf
3. There is a counternarrative in the study of the art of the Later Stone Age, which is equally global in its

implications, that stresses the role of shamanic visions in trance states as the causal mechanism generating artistic expression (Lewis-Williams 2004). It is striking that the search to correlate artistic motifs to entoptic phenomenon generated by human neurological processes, as opposed to culturally mediated expression, has not had a significant impact on the way that the earliest African art is seen.

4. In recent years Francis Thackeray (2005) has used one of the Wonderwerk slabs to advance an argument for a belief in the power of the wounded roan that he believes stands at the root of many African beliefs. Thackeray is taking on the challenge of understanding an ideational system that he finds to be distinctive and worthy of deep appreciation.
5. At this point the stratigraphic context from which the slab was recovered, and thus the age of the slab, remains unclear, adding an additional level of ambiguity. We remain unsure of whether this part of the site is an intact Later Stone Age deposit or if has been disturbed by later activities in the cave.

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Chapter 3

Poisoned, potent, painted: arrows as indexes of personhood

Larissa Snow

Socially, politically and economically, San arrows have greater import than any other single San artifact (Wiessner 1983, 261).

Twentieth-century ethnographies from the Kalahari region describe poison arrows as being made of three main components: a shaft made from a heat-straightened and knocked reed, a link-shaft made of wood or bone and the arrow point itself (see Wiessner 1983; Deacon 1992; Wadley *et al.* 2015). Sinew and plant-based bindings were used along with adhesives to secure these components. The introduction of fencing wire during the colonial period provided a highly malleable material that proved easy to heat, beat and sharpen into thin metal points, meaning that most arrow points observed by twentieth-century ethnographers were made from metal. Archaeological evidence from elsewhere in southern Africa, has demonstrated that arrow points were made from bone or stone during earlier periods.

These arrows are slight, insubstantial things and function not by causing heavy internal trauma to the victim, but by introducing poison into the blood stream. The link-shaft is designed to break away from the main shaft so the arrowhead, with poison applied to the tip, cannot easily be removed. There are various active ingredients used to make poison, such as juice from the bulb of the *Boophane disticha* plant, or the innards of Chrysomelid grubs (Bradfield *et al.* 2015; Wadley *et al.* 2015). Arrow production involves bringing together otherwise innocuous materials to create something ephemeral and yet extremely potent that anticipates and enables engagements with other species, and can therefore be understood as artworks in their own right, to extend Alfred Gell's (1996) argument for 'traps as artworks and artworks as traps'.

However, arrows also feature prominently in the rock art produced in the Maloti-Drakensberg region of South Africa, frequently featuring alongside

depictions of prey animals. Early interpretations of such images, where humans are depicted gesturing towards and interacting with game in non-real ways, regarded these as a functional form of 'sympathetic' or 'hunting magic' intended to increase the chance of a successful hunt (Thackeray 1983, 1986). However, this argument has largely been superseded by shamanistic interpretations, which have dominated the disciplinary field of rock art research in southern Africa for the last thirty years (Lewis-Williams 1981). However, the recent ontological turn in Anthropology has brought a renewed interest in relationships between game animals and ritual specialists, and the 'suite' of proper social behaviours intended to maintain desirable relationships between human and non-human persons (McGranaghan & Challis 2016). Most recently, Mark McGranaghan and Sam Challis (2016) have explored in great detail how proper 'nice' behaviour towards game animals, the use of plant charms and rock art itself, were all employed in South Africa to 'tame' wild game. To their very comprehensive study, this paper proposes adding arrows as a further technological means of enchanting game.

Engaging anthropology's material and ontological turns

Recent material and ontological turns in anthropology have set about demonstrating that non-human entities can possess agency, with some theorists even suggesting that biology is no longer a prerequisite for life (Bennet 2010). Radical theoretical positions aside, material objects, it has been argued, act as 'indexes' of agency, embedded in a social-relational nexus (Gell 1998). It is tempting to overlook more mundane objects in favour of artworks that appear more sublime and readily exalted. For instance, South Africa's parietal art is a greater focus for scholarly attention than

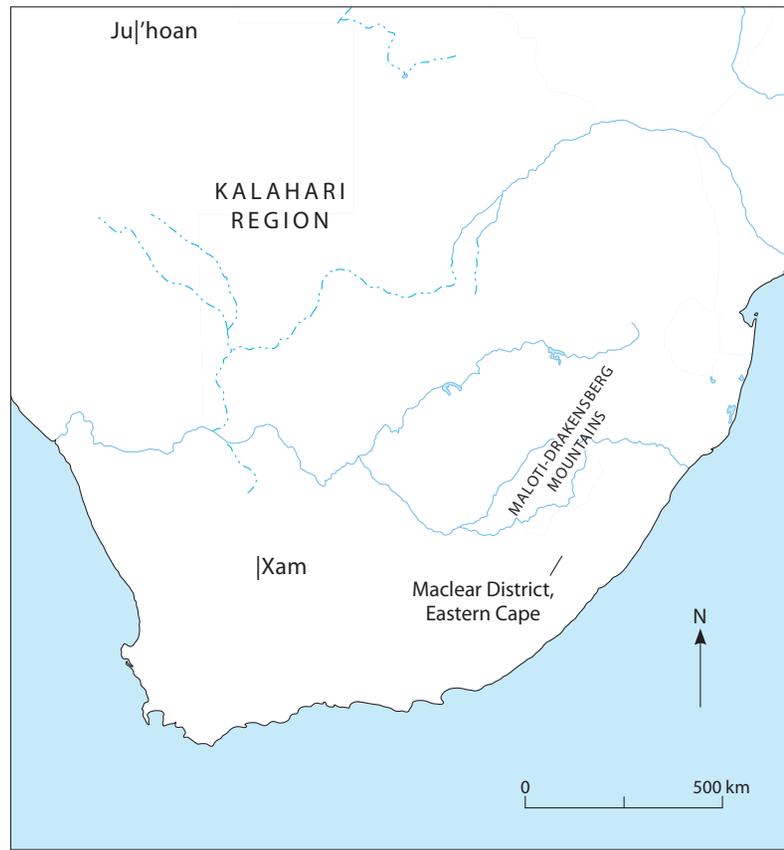


Figure 3.1. Map showing the regions mentioned in this chapter.

everyday artefacts, typically classified as tools. Yet the technological choices involved in the making of everyday objects are not determined solely by physical practicality, but also according to what is considered socially meaningful, objectifying wider practices and relationships (Lemonnier 1993). Thus, everyday tools such as arrows are as entangled in the social realm as other art forms, their utility inseparable from the ontologies associated with their production.

The ontological turn, now a widespread feature of recent theory within the humanities and social sciences, began as a backlash against the persistence of Western dualistic frameworks within anthropological analysis, particularly with regard to the agency of entities associated with the natural or material world. Philippe Descola, who is largely responsible for bringing ontology to the mainstream with his seminal book *Beyond Nature and Culture* (2013), noted that the nature-culture dichotomy was an inadequate or misleading tool to account for the ways in which his informants were talking about, and interacting with, their physical environment (Descola 1996, 82; 2013). Indeed, the different ways in which people categorize humans and non-humans challenges the idea of a 'natural species' altogether, undermining the assumption that 'nature' is a transcultural and transhistoric domain

of reality (Descola 1996, 83). Diverse ethnographies have underscored that in many parts of the world the environment is not excluded from wider principles and values governing social life (Descola 2013, 14). Humans often enter into social relations and arrange formal alliances with so-called 'natural' beings like plants and animals, which are considered to have personhood, agency and cultures of their own.

While the current proliferation of ontological studies may be regarded as simply a product of the latest theoretical trend, its basis in the understandings and perspectives expressed by anthropological informants sets it apart from other theoretical paradigms. It is not so much a theoretical approach as a way to take seriously the perspectives and lived experiences of people whose lives are closely entangled with non-human entities.

Consequently, we must be open to worlds that are full of persons, only some of which are human (Sahlins 2014, 281). Descola takes pains to emphasize that personhood is not denoted by matter or form, nor is it a fixed state of being, but rather is processual and relational:

The distinction between nature and society, human and non-human is determined not by

substance or representation, but by institutionalised expressions of relations between entities whose ontological status and degree of agency vary according to the positions they occupy vis-à-vis each other (Descola 2009, 150, my emphasis).

This is the core tenet of ontological thinking. It is not so much concerned with problematizing the intentionality of non-human entities, it is enough that this is assumed in communities the world over, as it is interested in unpicking the very real social relations that form between human and non-human persons in the course of their lives. Not only can non-humans be agents, they also have the potential to be valid and productive social partners, and therefore must be approached with appropriately social modes of mediation and behaviour (Descola 2009, 149), hence the term 'relational ontologies'.

Thinking in terms of relations expands anthropological and archaeological investigations into overlooked realms of social action. The relationships people form with other entities is as crucial to the construction and maintenance of culture and society as those formed between humans. To overlook these relations or to classify them simply as symbolic is to deny important aspects of peoples' lived experience and their understandings of reality. What relational ontologies propose is that we expand the social arena to accommodate new types of persons and social interactions wherever necessary, according to the ontologies of those whose worlds we hope to understand. Non-human persons not only include things more readily conceived of as living, such as biological organisms like animals or previously corporeal spirits, but also things often considered inert and purely material: objects. Indeed, relational networks rarely consist of direct connections between humans and other humans without things actively mediating relations between them (Latour 2005).

Material culture theorists have likewise recognized and argued for the agency and efficacy of material things in their relationships with people. These systems of relation have been described variously as networks (Latour 2005), meshworks (Ingold 2006), and art-nexuses (Gell 1998), but all share in mapping the connections between humans and non-human beings, objects included. Both ontological and material approaches are concerned with blurring distinctions between categories like nature and culture; subject and object; human, non-human and thing. They tend to employ similar terminologies and are careful to stress the primacy of lived experience over semiotics in their interpretations. It can be difficult accounting

for an object's agency because carrying their effects while being silent is what they are good at, but this should not be taken as an indication of their dormancy (Latour 2005, 79; Miller 2005).

Although anthropologists engaged in the ontological turn have come to recognize the subjectivity of non-human beings through the insights of their informants, material culture theorists often problematize the agency of things not only using ethnography, but also by engaging with objects themselves, their physical components and construction i.e. their materiality. This is precisely what Alfred Gell (1992) does in his discussion of 'the technology of enchantment and the enchantment of technology'. Gell sees the agency or social efficacy of an object as, to a large extent, derived from the skilled technical processes that brought it into being. What he calls 'the enchantment of technology' is the power of these objects that stems from the careful manipulation of materials and the complex, often meaningful processes involved in their making: 'the technology of enchantment is founded on the enchantment of technology' (Gell 1992, 44). Gell's materialist detractors somewhat miss this point in critiquing him for only being able to bring things to life by 'conjuring a magical mind-dust' (Ingold 2007, 12), labelled agency, when he is equally concerned with examining the material constitution of things in order to understand their animating principles. In short, it is the mingling of objects' material components, brought together through the skilled technique and ability of a maker, that enhances their social efficacy. Objectively embodying these techniques, agentive objects secure individuals in a relational nexus of intentionalities.

Arrows and 'the enchantment of technology'

Poisoned arrows, used in southern Africa to hunt large game animals, can be treated as compelling examples of Gell's (1992) argument about 'the enchantment of technology and the technology of enchantment'. The outcome of skilled technical processes and at the epicentre of social practice, arrows allow for the 'occult transubstantiations' (Gell 1992, 49–53) – of poison into meat and potency. Both twentieth-century Kalahari ethnographies and nineteenth-century accounts from South Africa suggest that big-game hunting was not merely a subsistence activity, but a crucial method of procuring potency (*n|om* in twentieth-century Jul'hoan and *!gi* in nineteenth-century !Xam), a substance essential to a community's well-being. As the interface between humans and intentional non-human beings, poison arrows mediate these vitally important relationships in a socially appropriate manner.

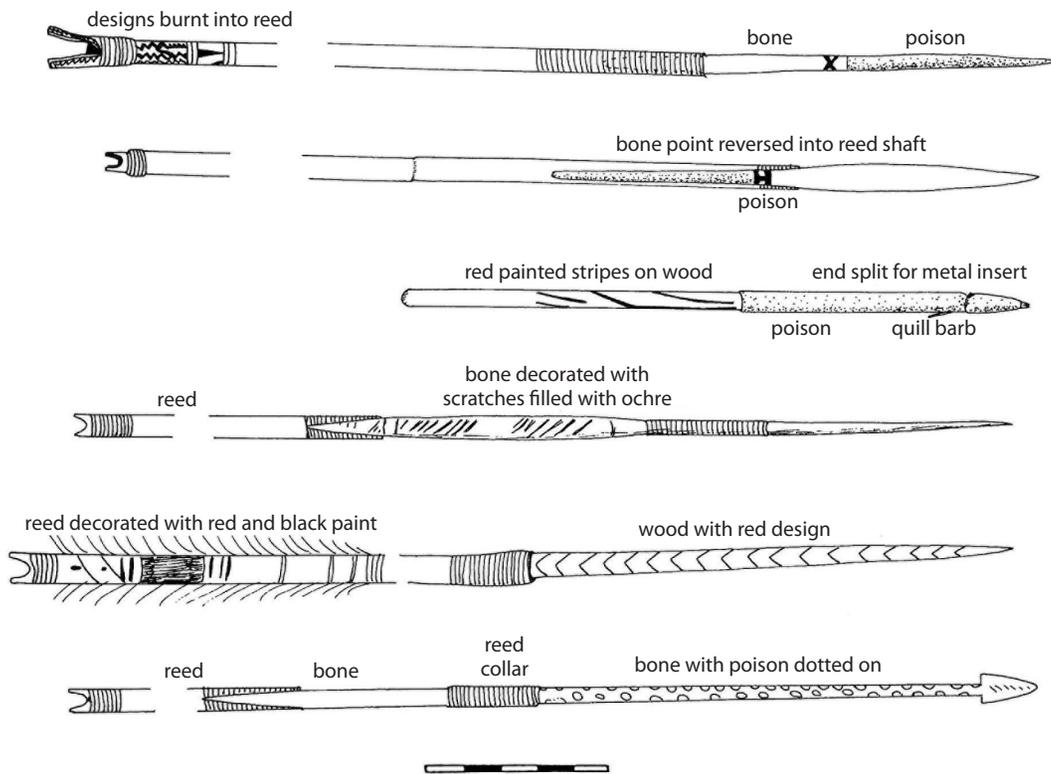


Figure 3.2. Image showing a selection of forms of decoration found on arrows in museum collections, after Janette Deacon's (1992) *Arrows As Agents Of Belief Amongst The !Xam Bushmen*. Drawing courtesy Janette Deacon.

Ethnographic accounts of mid-twentieth-century Jul'hoansi bow and arrow hunting in the Kalahari suggest that this entailed very specific inter-species social practices (see Marshall 1999, 145–61). Since arrows only have a range of about twenty meters, the greatest difficulty lay in getting close enough to animals to fire an effective shot. This required both intimate knowledge of animal behaviour and environmental conditions. Once an arrow successfully hit its intended target, depending on how long it takes for the poison to prove fatal (which could be several days), the hunting party might return to camp at night and continue tracking in the light of day. During this time there are a number of avoidances the hunter who shot the animal was expected to adhere to. The hunter was not supposed to urinate, or it might cause the animal to do so, resulting in the poison being discharged from the body. The hunter was supposed to be still and quiet and to avoid saying the name of the animal unless its tracks should fade. And he was not supposed to add wood to a fire or cook his own food as a flaring fire might give the animal strength.

When the animal succumbed to the poison and was successfully tracked, the meat belonged not to the man who shot the animal, but to the owner of the

arrow. Since arrows were swapped within groups, but also further afield between long-distance *hxaro* trading partners, these were likely to be different people. The arrow-maker would either received a large portion of the meat or was responsible for the important social duty of meat distribution (Wiessner 1983, 261). This meant that skilled hunters were not constantly responsible for distributing meat and the social stress (though potential personal gain) it entailed (Marshall 1961, 238). Individuals marked their arrows with paint or engraved patterns, to be identifiable, and despite the short manufacturing time and relatively short use life of arrows, they were rich in style and decorative variations (Fig. 3.2) (Wiessner 1983, 261; Deacon 1992, 6).

Although the acquisition of large quantities of animal protein was undoubtedly an important aim of poison-arrow hunting, and a strong motivation to adhere to proper hunting practices, big-game hunting for the Jul'hoansi was about more than just bringing food back to camp. Large game animals were also a vital source of potency, a material quality of animal fat. Whereas meat sustained the physical requirements of the community, potency ensured their spiritual survival (though the degree to which we should distinguish between the two is questionable). To hunt for

large game was also to hunt for the potency needed by ritual specialists to traverse the spirit world and successfully interact with other beings within it, whether battling bellicose spirits-of-the-dead or travelling to visit distant camps.

Gell (1992) has argued for the essential alchemy of art, which is to make what is out of what is not, and vice versa. Through processing and transforming base materials into new things, artists perform a sort of ‘occult transubstantiation’, situating themselves as ‘occult technicians’ (Gell 1992, 49). He suggests that not only do artists possess technical ability, but the things they make result in tangible social consequences; they produce things that actively create and mediate social relations between persons. As the outcome of skilled technical processes, arrows allow for the ‘occult transubstantiation’ of poison into meat and potency. This enchanted technology, which dictates social practice and sustains social relationships between both humans and non-human persons alike, enables both the physical and cosmological sustenance of society.

The enchanted materiality of poison-arrows also appears vividly apparent in painted depictions from the Maloti-Drakensburg. In particular, rock art images that appear to relate to game-control suggest that

inter-subjective relationships between humans and animals may also have been mediated by technological means during the Later Stone Age. For example, the small panel, a tracing of which appears in Figure 3.3, from a site in the Maclear District of the Eastern Cape, South Africa, shows a hartebeest and two human figures.¹ One figure seems to be reaching for arrows in a quiver slung over his back and the other is facing the hartebeest; in one hand his bow sympathetically mirrors the angle of the hartebeest’s head, while the other presents two arrows under the hartebeest’s nose. The depiction of this interaction strongly recalls Descola’s (2013, 5–6) remarks on non-human persons, whose possession of a reflexive awareness creates a ‘theatre of subtle sociability’ in which humans cajole them into systems of exchange. This scene can be interpreted as showing the human gently ‘cajoling’ the hartebeest with the bow and arrows; appropriately approaching the animal as an important social partner, demanding specific behaviour from humans. The material qualities of the arrow itself may lend it ‘taming’ abilities (McGranaghan & Challis 2016), as will be explored in the following sections.

It might seem a stretch to consider ethnographic material from the twentieth-century Kalahari alongside

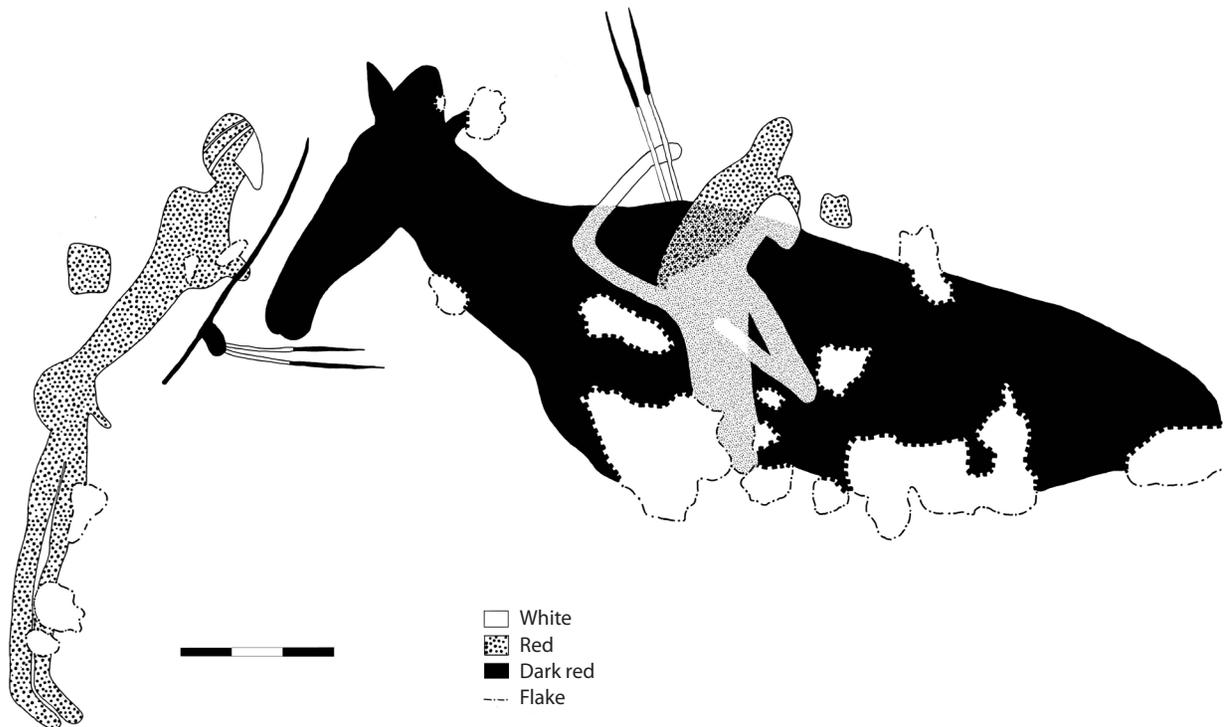


Figure 3.3. Schematic drawing of a painted scene from a rock shelter in the Maclear District, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa, which appears to show a human figure ‘cajoling’ or ‘taming’ a hartebeest with arrows. Drawing Larissa Snow (digital redrawing assisted by Stephen Van Den Heever).

Later Stone Age rock art from the Maloti-Drakensberg, but there are good reasons for this approach. Certainly, the Kalahari Debate made it clear that Kalahari groups are not 'living fossils' and have been in active contact with farming communities for the last two thousand years (Solway & Lee 1990; Wimsen & Denbow 1990; Sadr 1997). While we cannot assume that ways of engaging with the non-human world in the Kalahari should be applied straightforwardly to archaeological material further South, there is strong evidence to suggest continuities of belief and practice across much of southern Africa over a significant time-depth (Lewis-Williams 1998). The assertion of a 'pan-San' worldview has been critiqued for its assumed stasis and conservatism (Solomon 1999), but there do seem to be pervasive and enduring practices. For example, imagery suggested of trance dancing, still performed by people in the Kalahari today, is widely found in South Africa rock art. Moreover, other similarities between nineteenth-century records of !Xam mythology and more recent Kalahari ethnographies are striking. Without discounting changes that have taken place across the region over the last two millennia, continuities of practice do appear to be a feature across different hunting groups.

Making persons and managing relations

The social significance of arrows becomes even more apparent when their use in other social practices is considered. Twentieth-century Kalahari ethnographies suggest they not only played a central role in transforming poison into potency, but also in another

transformation: when a boy became a man, through a ceremony performed after he shot and killed his first large game animal. John Marshall's documentary film *A Rite of Passage*, shot in 1952–3, documents thirteen-year-old !Ti!kay's initiation after he shot and killed his first wildebeest.² His first successful hunt marked the beginning of his social maturity; a young man considered an acceptable son-in-law only once he could procure meat necessary to maintain social, and as we have seen, spiritual, relationships. During this ceremony, the arrow that made the kill was burned clean, re-sharpened and used to make small cut marks on important parts of !Ti!kay's body: his arm so that it would be flexible and strong when wielding a bow, his chest to instil the passion to hunt, his back which corresponded to calming the withers of future game so they wouldn't flee in fear, and between his eyes to help him see game quickly and clearly (Fig. 3.4). The film shows !Ti!kay's father rub a mixture of boiled fat from the killed animal and ground-up !gaowa pod, one of the ingredients in arrow poison, into the cuts. The marks on his body healed as a number of tiny tattoos, reminders to go out and hunt, not sit idly at camp.

A statement made by Silayi to the colonial magistrate, Sir Walter Stanford, in 1884 (Stanford 1910) suggests a similar link between Maloti-Drakenburg groups and arrows. Silayi was a Tembu man who united with chief Nqabayo's band of stock raiders in the Eastern Cape during the middle of the nineteenth century. He described how the men were armed mainly with bows and poisoned arrows (Stanford 1910, 435). Upon joining Nqabayo he recalled 'we received bows and arrows and became members



Figure 3.4. Digitized Film Stills from John Marshall's 1952–3 film *Rite of Passage*, showing thirteen-year old !Ti!kay being 'marked' with the arrow he used to kill his first wildebeest. The mixture of fat and !gaowa rubbed into the cuts is visible on his chest. Images courtesy and copyright Documentary Education Resources (D.E.R.).

of the tribe' (Stanford 1910, 436), before embarking on many fruitful raiding parties around the Maloti-Drakensberg. In this instance, group membership was conferred by the bestowal of archetypal hunting technology. In an initiation of sorts, outside persons were incorporated into the social group, and made substantial through their possession of arrows.

For men, arrows appear to have been instrumental in the attainment of full adult personhood. If, as in animist conceptions in lowland South America, life is apprehended as a relational process (cf. Rival 2012, 139), it seems that before becoming a full adult 'person', capable of maintaining social relationships, men first had to become adept at using this technology, embodying relevant skills and techniques. In Jul'hoansi initiation, arrows were used to physically alter the body, making openings through which both potent animal fat and poison could be incorporated. This sharing of substances created a bond not only between hunter and prey, enabling successful future interactions, but also between person and object. Arrows can also be understood as material extensions of personhood; they are a form of technology that directly facilitated a man's ability to enter into and maintain social relationships with both humans and non-human beings alike.

According to twentieth-century ethnographic accounts from the Kalahari, poison arrow hunting was a highly gendered task, performed by men. Women were expected to avoid touching hunting equipment, especially arrows, because their femaleness was said to be 'poisonous' to hunting; to weaken the poison and to 'spoil' the endeavour (Marshall 1999, 146). Wiessner (1983, 262) describes how her informants, who were well seasoned in dealing with anthropologists, eagerly awaited the slightest drop in hunting success so they could claim other foods in compensation for the animals they had failed to kill. The language used to describe the effects of femaleness suggests a potentially complicated relationship between gender and potency, perhaps explaining why bows and arrows were regarded as male items of material culture. The Jul'hoan word *kxwia* was used to mean both 'spoil' and 'to enter a deep trance' (Bieseles personal communication, cited by Lewis Williams 2002, 63), a state understood to involve potentially uncontrollable levels of potency. Lorna Marshall's (1999, 146) Kalahari informants similarly described femaleness as 'strong' potency with the potential to overwhelm and nullify the potency of hunters and their equipment.

Women, like large game animals, seem to have been understood as innately possessing high levels of potency. In Megan Bieseles's (1993; Parkington 2003) ethnography *Women Like Meat*, she noted that

in Kalahari conversations, eating and sex were often conflated, and it was difficult to tell which meat, wife or prey, a man was referring to. These associations between women and big game reinforce the position of poison arrow hunting as a paradigmatically male activity. Conceptions of full adult male personhood centred around the capacity to obtain meat (and therefore potency) making it possible to take a wife and to sustain a wider network of social relations.

Potent substances and important processes

Another way of understanding 'the enchantment of technology' is to think in terms of substances and processes; materials and the series of transformations they undergo. Whether in the Kalahari or the Maloti-Drakensberg, a number of key substances appear to have been implicated in different, but interconnected, domains of social action, that were subject to similar processes. Important substances included fat, poison, and in the Maloti-Drakensberg paint, all of which underwent processes of heating or boiling and were implicated in the different social arenas of initiation, hunting, the trance dance, and (historically) painting. The agency and social efficacy of substances was potentially amplified by their applications in different, connected, contexts. Likewise, shared processes highlight potential associations between different arenas of making and doing. By using substance and process as analytical tools, what Gell would call material and technique, we are able to further blur the divisions between mundane and sublime material culture, and between different spheres of human action. While hunting seems to have been much more of a spiritual activity than instrumental models might assume, one equally cannot make rock art without engaging in technical processes.

According to a twentieth-century oral account (Lewis-Williams 1995, 146–7), producing red pigment in the high Drakensberg mountains began with digging out ochre. This was then heated over fire until it became red hot, and was then ground between two stones. The blood and fat of a freshly killed eland was then mixed with the ground pigment. If these were not fresh, it was said that the paint would coagulate and not soak into the rock, implying that painting necessarily took place after a successful hunt. The process of heating is potentially conceptually related to the activation of shamanic potency during the trance dance. Potency was said in the Kalahari to 'boil' in the stomach of a shaman until it was hot enough to travel up the spine and out through the back of their head, resulting in trance (Katz 1982). Like dancing, arrow production took place around a fire since heat

was needed to straighten the reed shafts and harden the poison on the arrow tip.

Focusing on these shared substances and processes underlines how we should be careful in categorizing some objects as mere tools and others as art. As Gell points out, the notion that technique is dull and mechanical, as opposed to true creativity and authentic values represented by art is a by-product of the quasi-religious status given to high art in post-industrial western culture (Gell 1992, 56). In many parts of the world, 'there is an insensible transition between mundane activity, which is necessitated by the requirements of subsistence production, and the most overtly magico-religious practice' (Gell 1992, 59). Arrow-making in the twentieth-century Kalahari appears to have been as entangled in the wider cosmological order, as the making of rock art was in the Maloti-Drakensberg during the Later Stone Age. The active role of arrows in making persons and acquiring potency most likely infused them with social significance and consequence. Their potent materiality responsible for mediating relations between humans and non-humans, thus ensuring the continuation of society. In Gellian terms, action is caused directly by the material object at the centre of the socio-relational nexus. Dismissing arrows as merely functional tools fails to recognize how they can serve to objectify wider social values, practices and relationships.

Conclusion

Through transforming raw materials into the entities and vital substances of the spirit world, both arrow-makers and painters act as 'occult technicians' (Gell 1992, 49). It follows then that meat from the hunt should belong to the arrow-maker rather than the hunter. It is the agency of the arrow maker, embodied in their skilled technical abilities which ultimately enable the acquisition of fresh potency by the community. While previous explanations of this practice stress its social function, ameliorating tension surrounding the distribution of resources, an ontological and material approach enables an alternative perspective, one that acknowledges the agency of the arrow and the residue of the maker's personhood that continues to reside in the arrow itself. This steers us away from a purely instrumental economic and functional approach to hunting, bringing us closer to an appreciation of the deeper metaphysical principles that may be at play. Not only is the arrow a transformative agent, but because of the con-substantive relationship between object and person, it can also be seen as a material extension of human personhood. Person and arrow are inextricably linked.

Notes

1. In the discussion of the image, it is acknowledged that rock art does not offer a simple narrative depiction of everyday events but may represent a visual manifestation of the spirit world and happenings within it.
2. John Marshall filmed with the Jul'hoansi from the 1950s through to the early 2000s, shifts his perspective over time from conventional documentary film maker to open advocate. His corpus heavily influenced perception of Jul'hoan practices and despite later attempts to prevent 'Death by Myth', an examination of cut scenes and edits from his early films reveal the extent to which the Jul'hoansi were not the isolated and independent community presented to audiences. As a result he has been critiqued by the anthropological community for 'minimizing complex relationships and propagating monolithic views' (Bieseles in Tomasselli 2007, 126).

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Chapter 4

Relocated: potting and translocality in terminal Iron Age towns and beyond

Per Ditlef Fredriksen

‘She stopped making pots after she moved’. This factual assertion by an elderly potter in the Limpopo Province in South Africa is of a kind I have heard several times. It is not uncommon for experienced potters to refer to apprentices in the past tense in this way, relating to relocation and discontinuation in the same sentence. The simple statement hints at a complicated set of socio-environmental challenges that the apprentice (in rural South Africa still usually a daughter or granddaughter) must overcome when moving away. Regardless of reasons (often including marriage), the relocation means that the apprentice must resume craft activities in a new social and material context. In addition to being uprooted from familiar surroundings and having to set up in unfamiliar workspaces, it often involves getting access to local sources of clay and temper and making the necessary adjustments to these new materials. Having learnt and practiced in her teacher’s spaces only, the transition can turn out to be too difficult.

A typical answer to inquiries into why such disjuncture is so frequent is that the learner left ‘too soon’. This relates to the underlying tension in all potting practice, as noted by ethnographer and archaeologist Olivier Gosselain (2011, 223); between the need to reproduce links to the initial source of knowledge (teacher and learning arena) on the one hand, and the unavoidable changes the potter experiences as she goes through ensuing life stages on the other. Interestingly, in the aftermath of relocation one step in the ceramic manufacture process can be identified as particularly vulnerable. The same elderly potter in Limpopo made clear that her apprentice had struggled because ‘she could not get the shapes right’.¹ Shaping operations require the acquisition of sophisticated skills, eventually leading the apprentice into a much more formal phase during which a tight bond between teacher and apprentice is formed. Gosselain (2011, 214, 218,

221) refers to this critical threshold as the *second stage of learning*, after which the apprentice has gained the necessary skill and confidence to master the craft independently. Significantly, Gosselain notes that shaping techniques seem to change at a slower rate and relate more often to some form of group affiliation than other steps in the manufacturing process. Although usually conservative and acting as a strong stabilizing factor, the shaping stage may also create conditions for sudden shifts in techniques. In this manner, Gosselain underscores that not only is the learning of technical repertoires woven into daily experience and rehearsal (see Fredriksen & Bandama 2016, 492–5) but also that learning is vulnerable to factors that influence the transmission between generations and may result in abrupt changes or disjuncture of ceramic practices.

This vulnerability is related to the kind of knowledge acquired. As anthropologist Tim Ingold (2000, 369) notes, it is highly personal; partly intuitive, largely implicit, and deeply embedded in the particularities of experience. The only way for the apprentice to learn the challenging shaping methods is to sit next to a skilled teacher and copy her repeated rhythmic motions (Fig. 4.1). Such form-making, writes Ingold (2000, 372), ‘involves a precise co-ordination of perception and action that is learned through copying the movements of experienced practitioners in socially scaffolded contexts’. However, as the learning process is vulnerable to premature relocation, it becomes important to understand the dynamics that follow when the scaffolds are removed too soon.

In this chapter I discuss this aspect of the transmission of technical skills. The reverberations of relocation, hinted at above, are relevant from the perspective of understanding the pace of change of ceramic material culture over time, and grasping these dynamics may therefore provide novel insights, not only into the work of present-day ceramic artisans, but also for that of past



Figure 4.1. *Skilled hands shaping a pot. An experienced potter in the Limpopo Province at work. Photograph Per Ditlef Fredriksen.*

potters – for archaeological material from prehistoric and historic time periods. The following exploration rests on two closely interrelated working hypotheses. The first is that the vulnerability of sophisticated craft practices, due to the increased mobility of their practitioners, is materially visible over time as disjunctures and breaches in archaeological ceramic sequences. Consequently, there is a need to trace connections, formed through objects, materials and craft knowledge, as networks were made, remade and transformed in the aftermath of relocation. The second hypothesis is, quite simply, that in turbulent times with increased mobility there is an increased emphasis on material culture to connect people and places across distances. In present-day South Africa, relocation is a core issue. However, the profound significance of mobility can only be grasped by understanding the region's recent and deeper pasts. These two hypotheses will be explored in a historical archaeological case study of the Magaliesberg valley region in northern South Africa during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries AD. The terminal phase of the Iron Age² in southern Africa (c. AD 1300–1840) was characterized by political centralization and swift demographic aggregation into dense urban settlements. For town dwellers, this meant new ways of organizing daily life, including craft activities.

The aims of this piece are twofold. The first is to direct attention to the process of *making* in the way we conceptualize and analyse the work of ceramic artisans. An outcome of this for archaeologists is the need to shift their focus from the traditional, rather narrow concept of *style*, to the notion of *recipes* for making. An important aspect of the recipes notion is that it takes potential difference in technical repertoires into account. The second aim is to demonstrate the potential of working recursively between archaeological, historical and anthropological source material, and on this basis to present a refined approach to ceramic craft mobility, knowledge transmission and workspace dynamics. This approach is informed by my own field studies of memory work with potters, still active in southern Africa.

Craft identity and household spaces in the terminal Iron Age

The archaeological record and historical sources, written and oral, suggest that the Magaliesberg valley region (Fig. 4.2) and adjacent areas to the west and north were characterized by a high degree and mobility and translocality between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Over only a few decades,

settlements went from being dispersed and scattered homesteads to densely packed and stonewalled towns, often referred to as 'mega-sites'. At their peak, the largest towns, such as Kaditshwene and Molokwane, hosted somewhere between 10,000 and 20,000 people. Research over the last fifteen years has established that the mega-sites developed in the second half of the eighteenth century. This means that the study area had only recently experienced an accelerated sociopolitical change at the time when the first recorded European visitors arrived in the early nineteenth century, and the process lasted until the region was disrupted by the establishment of the Ndebele state under Mzilikazi in 1827 (see Hall 2012 for a detailed account).

Offering favourable conditions for agriculturalists, and rich in minerals such as iron and copper, the Magaliesberg region saw several waves of settlement relocation, mostly from regions to the south. For example, in the oral history of some of the groups that settled in the study area, a mythical origin at the specific site of Ntsuanatsatsi in the Free State Province figures prominently. Such links in oral history have

been found to resonate with archaeological evidence (Maggs 1976; Hall 2012; Hamilton & Hall 2012; Huffman 2007, 2017). At various times and on different scales, newcomers interacted with firstcomers (*sensu* Kopytoff 1987) and, in several known instances, moved on to settle elsewhere. Consequently, the processes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries should be seen against a backdrop that is geographically wider and temporally deeper. Moreover, reverberations of these processes reach far beyond the study area. This primary area was an inland nodal point in long-distance trade networks, and felt the effects of the Indian Ocean trade as well as the Atlantic commerce via Cape Town.

The archaeological record, oral history, as well as written accounts attest to the complexity of the processes of political centralization and interaction among various identity groups. The processes have been studied by archaeologists and historians, and recent work has demonstrated that the previously assumed 'Tswana' labelling of mega-sites, based on historical observations of Tswana-speakers at specific sites and the continuity of similar settlement practices

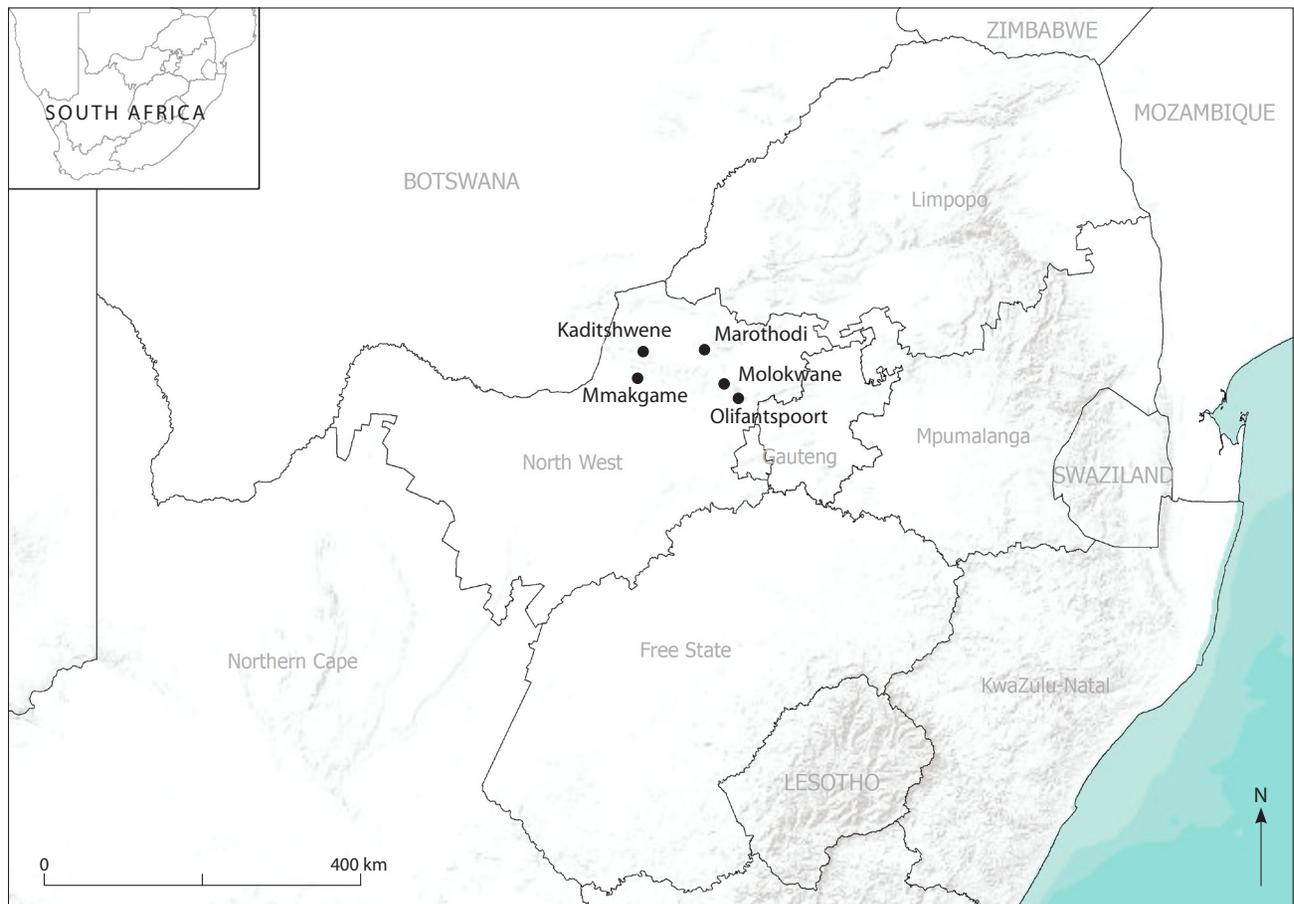


Figure 4.2. The study area and sites named in the text. Map by Mncedisi Siteleki.

into the present, is overly simplified (Hall 2012; Hall *et al.* 2008; Hamilton & Hall 2012). Importantly, the status of current research based on ceramic assemblages at settlement sites (for overview see Fredriksen 2012, 11–21) makes clear that ceramic craftwork was performed by women, for the most part in domestic spaces associated with women. At the level of the household, therefore, inquiries into identity are inextricably linked to the question of gender dynamics. More recent archaeological work has addressed the changing gender roles of craftspeople, especially the relationships between potters and metallurgists (Hall *et al.* 2006; Anderson 2009). For example, attempts have been made to understand why some cultural distinctions persisted into colonial times, by exploring increased metal and ceramic craft specialization in relation to the needs of a regional political economy (Hall 2012), as mining and metallurgy especially would have contributed to economic growth and population increase.

The aggregation of population implies substantial shifts in household organization, which, in turn, had implications for the organization of daily life. Archaeologically, this can be detected in the increased use of dry-stone walling to compartmentalize settlements, channel movement and restrict access and visibility. The ethno-historic and archaeological records attest to the broader social context within which craftspeople now lived and worked (e.g. Boeyens 2016; Boeyens & Hall 2009). However, the implications for social practices and subsistence activities remain underexplored. The few studies that do exist (e.g. Hall 1998,

Fredriksen 2007) have pointed out that ceramic crafts underwent a significant shift in parallel with the centralization process.

The pottery style known as *Moloko* (Fig. 4.3) emerged in the archaeological record during the fourteenth century AD (Huffman 2007, 183–209). For the pre-urban period, up to the eighteenth century, its makers mastered a flourishing variability of shapes and used a wide range of décor patterns that included the red-white-black colour triad. From around AD 1700, densely decorated and stylistically rich pots were replaced by less complex and more standardized vessels, and new ceramic fabrics that used tempers were introduced. Significantly, the mixing of tempers into ceramic clays was a novel technological feature and is only found in post-AD 1700 assemblages. These ceramic changes have been related to transformations of household dynamics and spatiality, specifically changes to gendered labour and increased craft specialization, within the overall demography of a rapidly transforming agropastoral society (Hall 1998; Huffman 2007; Fredriksen 2007, 2012).

A defining characteristic for the terminal Iron Age is *translocality* (as defined by Greiner & Sakdapolrak 2013, 376). The mega-sites were relatively short-lived, perhaps not for more than one to three generations. This puts learning and knowledge transmission under strain. New technological landscapes had to be learned and understood, new clay sources had to be brought into use, new and unknown materials incorporated into the process of making things. It was an ongoing process of entangling and disentangling with the surrounding



Figure 4.3. Example of *Moloko* pottery. *Uitkomst* type from the site of Marothodi. Photograph Per Ditlef Fredriksen.

environment. This put learning and knowledge into motion (Fredriksen & Bandama 2016), which may not only have fuelled the pace and redirected already ongoing dynamics, but also caused tensions.

Approaching making in everyday workspaces

Technical virtuosity is intrinsic to the efficacy of works of art in their social context, and tends always towards the creation of asymmetries in the relations between people by placing them in an essentially asymmetrical relation to things (Gell 1992, 52).

Alfred Gell's now classic anthropological treatise of art as technology is a salient departure point for my approach. In it, he pointed out that valued objects, made by artisans, visualize and underpin already existing social asymmetry, being 'surrounded by a kind of halo-effect of resistance' (Gell 1992, 48). This resistance radiates from the skilled capacity of the artisan and the beholder to construe the making process as enigmatic and thus 'enchanted'. Significantly, Gell centred analytical attention on the *emergence* of objects and the artisan's *performance* during the process of making. This resonates with Ingold's (2000, 2013) more recent argument for a shift of focus to include not only *artefact* but also *artifice*. This is not the kind of generalizable knowledge that is covered by modernist notions of technology. Rather, knowledge of making includes the skills acquired through personal experience, enabling the skilled craftsperson to find her own way in a world of human and nonhuman others, bestowing her with a specific identity (Ingold 2000, 369).

This modelling of learning and motor habits places the human body at the centre of analysis (Robb & Pauketat 2013), where material traces of technical acts are incorporated into socio-material networks at different scalar levels, as defined by the archaeologist Carl Knappett (2011, 61, 98, 124). The *micro level* is where proximate or face-to-face interactions take place, such as the household and its ties to the surrounding landscape. This is the primary analytical level in this approach, but must be intercalated into wider contextual frames: the *meso level* of interaction between households in a single community and between communities in a region, and the *macro level* of regional interactions.³ Since at least the mid-1990s archaeologists in southern Africa have understood the importance of crafts for analysing interaction at the household level (e.g. Hall 1998, Lane 1998, Segobye 1998, for overviews see Pikirayi 2007, Fredriksen, 2012, 19–21), but such studies are still few and far between. The lack of models and syntheses that intercalate small-scale dynamics into

broader regional and inter-regional perspectives, is at least partly due to the challenges involved in building robust bottom-up models. To change analytical scale is to change the perception of social life, and to move between scalar levels demands a framework for interpretation that allows for shifts in balance between qualitative and quantitative data processing.

In two recent reviews of the subject (Fredriksen 2015; Fredriksen & Chirikure 2015), informed by Ingold's perspective on making, I have described the components of future culture-historical settlement models. Such a model must acknowledge (1) a sensitivity to difference between scales of analysis and (2) the need for a critical stance with respect to template settlement models that elide contextual differences, such as the structuralist Central Cattle Pattern (CCP) model (Huffman 2007, 23–53), with its static and potentially ahistorical view of the relationship between the human mind and the material world. Broadly speaking, this kind of scientific effort may be described as a long-term study of socio-nature (Guattari 2000; Meskell 2012), a study that entangles the seemingly separate and unacknowledged agencies of politics, economics, culture, nature and ideology, that make and remake lived-in landscapes and settlements. Significantly, the effort rests on the recognition that it is not just humans who move and shape understanding and perception. Recent archaeological studies of mobility in African contexts emphasize the intimate connections between the human condition and the many nonhuman forces and agencies at play, thus recognizing the multi-layered processes that take in everyday lives (for the most recent discourse overview, see Ashley *et al.* 2016). In my opinion, this alternative view implies a dual critical approach that reflects the twofold aim of this chapter. I will here outline its two interrelated principles in brief.

The first tenet is the conception of making as a process by which artefacts emerge in a unique context in place and time, and therefore *not* as an already fixed design being transcribed onto a material. This has implications for the ways that archaeologists think about and handle pottery assemblages. The most influential definition of ceramic style among scholars working on the Iron Age in southern Africa has a firmly established focus on combinations of three dimensions: vessel profile, overall design layout and motif categories (Huffman 2007, 111). Although it is understandable that visible (and thus more readily categorizable) surface design has priority, this focus also misses potentially vital analytical dimensions.⁴ As indicated, in the chain of operations and choices made by artisans it is not decoration but raw material selection and shaping techniques that are most

resistant to change. These two are acquired through repeated practice during early learning, and thus reflect more enduring facets of identity. For example, it has been demonstrated that patterns in vessel-building techniques closely correspond with social boundaries such as those of language groups, specialist groups and gender (e.g. Gosselain 2000; Kreiter *et al.* 2017). Aspects such as paste compositions (mixtures of clay and tempers) and shaping methods are not necessarily visible to the naked eye, and ceramic studies are therefore in need of support from various types of laboratory analysis. Accordingly, social dynamics and material connections can be studied by identifying context-specific *ceramic recipes*. Informed by the notion of technological style (Lechtman 1977) and the broader archaeological and anthropological discussion of the relationship between ceramic production, social boundaries and organization of production (Gosselain 2000; Arnold 2000, 2011; Michelaki *et al.* 2015; Roux 2015; Kreiter *et al.* 2015), recipes are defined as particular combinations of specific ceramic pastes, building techniques, and ornamental elements (Fredriksen *et al.* 2014, 126–7). Technological change can thus be identified on a household level, enabling us to gain a better understanding of the spatial organization of production behaviour and ceramic use (Kreiter *et al.* 2017).

The recipe concept also has a significant temporal dimension. By attending to the changing affordances of materials and legacies of past actions (Fowler 2017, 96, 102), the performance of making through repeated acts can be described as a context-specific gathering of objects and people that cites previous events. This recurrent citation is fundamental to the process of making and remaking social memory (Lucas 2012, 195–201). This ability to cite people, places and events in the past through choices of pastes and techniques may create, for example, subtle social geographies of pottery that can be identified via sophisticated microscopic studies (Wilmsen *et al.* 2009; Wilmsen *et al.* 2019). It is a form of *material memory* (Olivier 2015; Fredriksen & Bandama 2016) that connect people and places across distances, perhaps in particular during times of turbulence and translocality.

The attention to memory brings us to the second tenet of my approach. This relates to the arenas for craft learning. In our case the primary arena is the household. Skills are acquired through repetition in inhabited workspaces and, following archaeologist Laurent Olivier (2015), this means that at the most basic everyday level, innovation and change are introduced through repetition, allowing what is new to be inscribed in what came before. Inhabited spaces such as dwellings and work places ‘owe their existence to the repetition of individual acts and transformations

that allow them to remain functional. Once abandoned, they die’ (Olivier 2015, 69). In other words, workspaces have a pulse. Craft transmission is inextricably linked to its spatial setting, and therefore also vulnerable to changes to these settings.

Seeking to fine-tune the approach in a way that is equally sensitive to the contexts of apprenticeship and learning (Miller 2012, 225–33, figure 11.1) and to various modes of transmission during intensification of ceramic production (Roux 2015), I have conducted two preliminary studies of ceramic technology and the transmission of craft knowledge at the micro-scale of households. The focus in both studies is the vulnerability of ties between knowledge and the spatial arena for learning and transmitting this knowledge, especially in relation to processes that include clay and soil in the surrounding landscape (*cf.* Fredriksen 2011; Salisbury 2012). The first is the study of present-day dynamics that I have referred to above (Fredriksen & Bandama 2016). The second, to which I now turn, is a small-scale pilot survey of archaeological material from the Magaliesberg region.

Recipes and relocation: the use of mica in terminal Iron Age potting

Work by Simon Hall with colleagues (Hall 1998, 2012; Rosenstein 2002; Hall *et al.* 2008; Kruger 2010; Fredriksen 2017) has identified significant changes in paste compositions, which underscore the importance of thinking of style as more than surface *décor*. Inspired by the concept of technological style (Lechtman 1977), their work reveals that the mixing of various tempers into the clay is a post-AD 1700 Late Moloko innovation, and a significant technological change. Before this, the clays were selected based on natural composition. The shift thus implies the need to procure raw materials from more than one source. This novelty, especially the addition of mica-rich tempers (Fig. 4.4), may be viewed as a functional adjustment to intensified and scaled up production, and thus an efficient alteration of ceramic manufacture in high-density towns under more pressure to use resources sustainably. The properties of mica, durability, mechanical strength, and thermal stability, make the resulting ceramics better suited for direct-heat boiling. This indicates a change in relation to cooking practices. However, rather than simply signalling a suite of mechanical and technical strategies, such a change may also represent new social dynamics and practices (*cf.* Roddick & Hastorf 2010, 166).

Specifically, mica tempering seems to be embedded and to connect people and places through material means in subtle ways. The distribution patterns that



Figure 4.4. *Shimmering muscovite mica inclusions in a Moloko pottery sherd.* Photograph Per Ditlef Fredriksen.

emerge make it possible to trace connections and networks in the aftermath of relocation. For example, mica is found in ceramics classified as *Buispoort* (Huffman 2007, 203–6; see Fig. 4.4), unearthed at the mega-sites Molokwane, Kaditshwene, Olifantspoort and Mmakgame (Fig. 4.2). This type is associated with western Tswana groups such as the Hurutshe and Kwena. Conversely, no mica inclusions have been identified in the Tlokwa ceramic assemblage at the contemporary site of Marothodi. Here, the dominant ceramic style is representative of the *Uitkomst* type of pottery (Huffman 2007, 431–3; see Fig. 4.3), which is part of the Fokeng cluster that came into the study area from a different direction, from the south-east. This absence of mica tempering is also significant from a wider stylistic perspective, not least since Tlokwa ceramics are decorated with comb stamping and this attribute is absent from *Buispoort* ceramics (Hall *et al.* 2008).

Interestingly, in Frans Kruger’s analysis of so-called *Doornspruit* type homesteads that are believed to have a Nguni origin, dating to the Ndebele under Mzilikazi from the 1820s, a significant number of sherds have muscovite mica inclusions (Kruger 2010, 136–43). As we have seen for the site of Marothodi, the Tlokwa did *not* use mica in their ceramics. It can therefore be argued that this is *not* an Nguni attribute. Kruger (2010, 144–76) explores two possibilities for the presence of micaceous temper at his homestead clusters. The first is trade, that the ceramics were produced by Sotho-Tswana elsewhere. The second is that it can be ascribed to Ndebele assimilation, subjugating people, and embedding refugee groups. Once the Ndebele polity was established, Sotho-Tswana women could have married into it. Consequently, women incorporated into Ndebele society may have introduced the use of muscovite mica. On this basis, Kruger argues that mica tempering may have been a way for Sotho-Tswana women to express their prior identity in a subtle way, enabling less overt learned habits of manufacture to persist.

If we return to my two working hypotheses, this discussion may offer new pathways into tracing and understanding material culture and identities across complex political landscapes and through time. Although I would argue that Kruger’s interpretation may somewhat overstate the conscious acts of resistance through potting, this is nonetheless an instructive departure point for future work. Not least since shaping techniques, as we have seen, are generally more deeply embedded in the social identity of potters than decoration. So why not start to trace and map ceramic pastes and recipes, and not just décor styles?

Importantly, using material science in this way could provide a tool for making sense of the less decorated ceramics. And, when seen in relation to the occupation history of individual settlement sites, we can start mapping indications of stress and possible breaches in transmission in a political landscape characterized by a high degree of conflict and translocality. This tracing of pastes would be a form of provenancing that links together learning arenas, through teacher/apprentice bonds, into *genealogies of craft recipes*. This can be a valuable addition to the more traditional provenancing of clays and tempers to sources in the landscape.

The distribution of post-AD 1700 micaceous ceramics demonstrates the value of tracing connections in the ways that objects were made, by indicating an increased emphasis on material culture for connecting people and places from the turbulent eighteenth century onwards. Moreover, studies so far suggest that the mobility of the people who made the pots is a significant factor, thereby underscoring the need for an interpretative framework informed by anthropological insights into the dynamics of relocation. This means that complex and context-specific social dynamics should be taken into consideration when studying each archaeological site, including processes of assimilating and merging newcomer and firstcomer groups and individuals through, for example, marriage and new ways of co-dwelling at settlements.

Concluding remarks

As we have seen, present-day examples may serve as a fruitful departure point for discussion of dynamics relating to the performance of potting, including the material traces we have from deeper pasts. In the historical example of terminal Iron Age settlements from northern South Africa, a suite of profound changes occurred within the time frame of only a generation or two. For archaeological ceramic sequences spanning several decades and centuries, the occurrences of shifts, gaps or discontinuities indicate the need to look for relevant factors that may have caused changes to ceramic practice and its underlying transmission dynamics, and thereby also one's identity as a potter. Rapid shifts may suggest that learning processes have been under more than the usual strain; that there has not been sufficient time for the individual potter to acquire the necessary skills and confidence before critical changes to her life situation and circumstances occur. Repeated rhythmic motions are the very pulse of the workspace, and if the social scaffolds of the familiar learning arena are left too soon, then the ceramic practices and networks of making that unfold there may weaken and even die.

Notes

1. The conversations with this potter took place in April 2015, as part of fieldwork in the Greater Letaba municipality (see Fredriksen & Bandama 2016, 494–97).
2. The introduction of the term Iron Age was an explicit borrowing from European archaeology and carries a problematic heritage (see Hall 1984, Maggs 1992). Several scholars have expressed reservations about its use and alternatives have been put forward, including Farming Communities (Mitchell 2002, Bonner *et al.*, 2008). However, a number of researchers based in southern Africa have found the term to remain useful as a short label for a larger concept. The term has been locally appropriated and re-defined as part of a critically aware knowledge production (for discourse overview see Fredriksen & Chirikure, 2015), rendering it significantly detached from its original meaning. Consequently, current conventional use of the Iron Age term in southern Africa refers to a regionally distinct amalgam of settled village life, food production and, notably, crafts activities such as the working of metals and pottery making (for a wider discussion see e.g. Hall 1984, Maggs 1992, Bonner *et al.*, 2008, 8–9, Bandama 2013, 14, Fredriksen 2015, 161).
3. According to Knappett (2011, 98–123), this meso-scale of socio-material interaction and networks is the level for analysis of cultural mobility and transmission of knowledge within *communities of practice* (for recent literature overview see Roddick & Stahl 2016).
4. Not to forget the important practical point that undecorated ceramics are deemed 'undiagnostic' and therefore

found to be worth much less than decorated ceramics and perhaps 'worthless'. As any excavating Iron Age archaeologist can attest, the time, energy and museum storage space devoted to this material is considerable.

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Chapter 5

Appropriating colonial dress in the rock art of the Makgabeng plateau, South Africa

Catherine Namono & Johan van Schalkwyk

The Makgabeng plateau in Limpopo Province, northern South Africa (Fig. 5.1) is one of four distinct rock art areas within the Central Limpopo Basin, aside from Soutpansberg, the Limpopo-Shashe Confluence Area and north-eastern Venda (Eastwood 2003, 14). The Makgabeng has three rock art traditions, often found in the same shelters: that associated with hunter-gatherers, Khoekhoe herders and Ntu language-speaking farmers (Hall & Smith 2000; Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk, 2001; Eastwood et. al. 2002; Eastwood 2003; Smith & Van Schalkwyk 2002). On the Makgabeng, there are 617 recorded rock art sites and 398 of these contain rock paintings made by Ntu language-speaking Northern Sotho (Namono & Eastwood, 2005, 2).

Northern Sotho rock art tradition comprises two categories: one linked to initiation and thematically gendered; the other is linked to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century political protest and colonial contact. Rock art linked to boys' initiation comprises human figures and images of about 20 different animal species, as well as crocodilian motifs called *kôma* (Fig. 5.2a) (Moodley 2008; Van Schalkwyk & Smith 2004; Smith & Van Schalkwyk 2002; Hall & Smith 2000). Imagery linked to girls' initiation comprises geometric designs and a spread-eagled motif called *kôma* (Fig. 5.2b) (Namono 2004; Eastwood & Tlouamma 2003) or *kôma ya basadi* (Namono & Eastwood 2005). The second category, of political protest and colonial contact rock art, includes depictions of figures in colonial clothing, figures mounted on horses with guns, gun-wielding figures on foot, figures with hands on their hips, as well as wagons, motor vehicles and trains (Fig. 5.3a & b).

Field research conducted by RARI staff and Edward Eastwood on the Makgabeng plateau between 1999 and 2008 indicates that of the 398 recorded Northern Sotho rock art sites on the plateau, 56 per cent have imagery mainly attributed to boys' initiation, 20 per cent to girls' initiation and 24 per cent to

colonial contact or protest (Fig. 5.4). 29 per cent of the sites have images linked to both girls' and boys' initiation (Fig. 5.5). 13 per cent of the 398 sites have images linked to all three themes while 44 per cent are associated with boys' initiation and colonial material culture. Only 14 per cent of the sites have girls' initiation imagery and colonial material culture motifs occurring together. This implies that colonial material culture and initiation imagery occur together at 71 per cent of the sites.

This paper considers the relationship between colonial and initiation imagery, the probable intention(s) of its makers, as well as the Northern Sotho experience of colonialism, particularly in relation to the introduction of European styles of clothing by German missionaries. We argue that the Africans appropriated European dress and through their rock art re-signified or symbolized it, as part of a process of reconstituting their identity to become 'Northern Sotho'.

Arrivals and departures in the landscape

According to Krige (1937), the Northern Sotho of the Makgabeng plateau include people who identify as Koni, Moletše, Birwa, Tšhadibe, Tlokwa, Tau and Hananwa (Krige 1937, 354;). Krige cites oral traditions identifying the Koni of Kgoši Matala as the earliest farming inhabitants of the Makgabeng plateau, believed to have arrived around AD 1730 (Krige 1937). The Koni were followed by the Moletše and people who self-identified as Tlokwa, between AD 1756 and AD 1760 (Morton 2013). Eastwood & van Schalkwyk (2003) suggest that around AD 1800, the Hananwa, under their founder Kgoši Sebudi Lebôhò (Malebôhò), joined the Birwa, Venda, Ralotang, Motlatlane and Madibana on the Blouberg Mountain (Eastwood & Van Schalkwyk 2003), from where they began to rule over most of the Makgabeng area (Krige 1937).

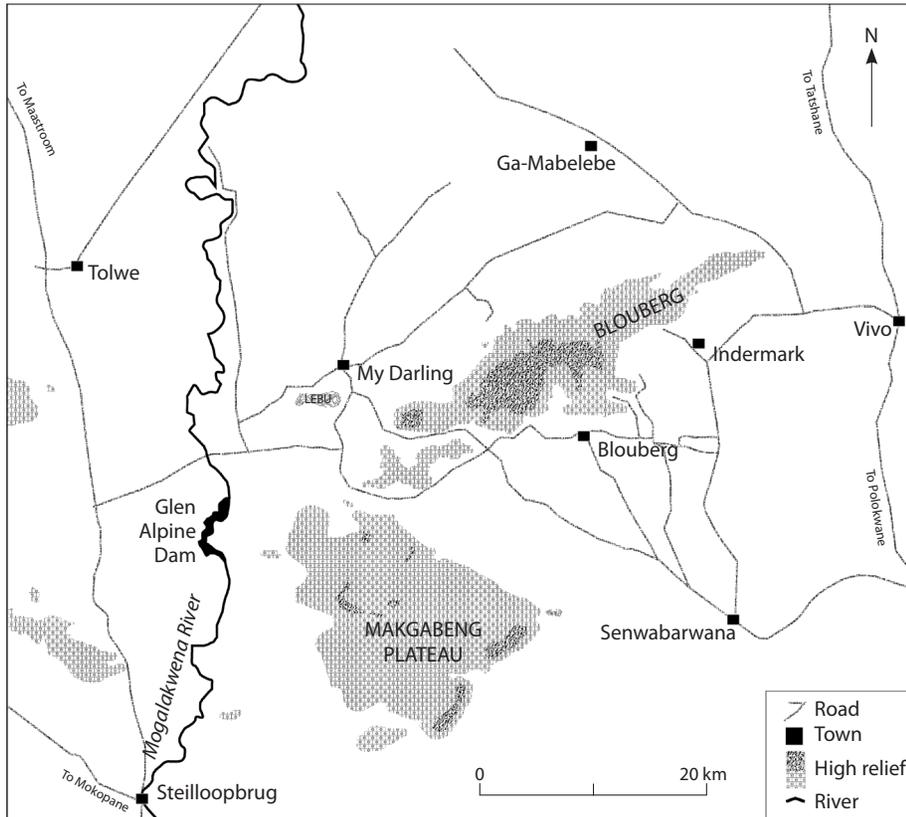


Figure 5.1. Location of the Makgabeng in Limpopo Province, South Africa.

According to Makhura (1997) and Morton (2009), Dutch-born Coenraad de Buys, leader of a racially mixed community (mainly Bastards, Corannas and Griquas) known as the Buys people, or the maSetedi, also settled on the Blouberg and the western extreme of the Soutpansberg in the 1820s (Makhura 1997, 193–4; Morton 2009, 7). Apart from individual hunters, travelers and traders, early contact with other whites was initiated by the arrival of two parties of Voortrekkers from the Cape during 1836. This contact became more sustained after the establishment of a longer lasting settlement at Schoemansdal (1848–67) in the nearby Soutpansberg mountain range, Limpopo. The rock art on the plateau depicts wagons and people dressed in western clothes that may reflect local encounters with early traders and missionaries.

Peter Delius (2001) argues that early African Christians were mainly migrant workers who had encountered Christianity during their sojourns in places like the Cape Colony and Natal (Delius 2001, 431) and who, upon their return home, converted others. According to Delius (2001, 436), early European missionaries to areas like the Makgabeng depended heavily on the linguistic, social and political skills of such migrant converts.

European missionary activity began in the area during the 1860s, after Rev. S. Hofmeyr, of the

Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in the Cape Province, obtained permission from the Hananwa chief, (Kgoši) Matseokwane, to establish a mission station in the Blouberg and Makgabeng region. Since he could not find a missionary from DRC to send, he permitted the Berlin Mission Society to establish a mission in November 1868. Rev. E.B. Beyer initiated the first station, called Blaauwberg, located at the foot of the Blouberg, where he stayed until 1874. Initially the local inhabitants had good relations with the mission, and Kgoši Matseokwane allowed the community to attend church, except during the initiation school period. However, he was later angered when his Headman, Moses Makeere, converted to Christianity and abandoned the *dipheko* (divining stick) that Kgoši Matseokwane had personally given to him. Matseokwane is said to have allowed the *Baroa* (San / Bushman descendants) to settle next to the mission station to provoke the missionaries.

In 1870, a mission station was established in the Makgabeng plateau by Rev. R.F.G. Trümpelmann. In 1875, Trümpelmann left because, according to him, the area was becoming 'too dangerous' and difficult due to droughts and fever epidemics. Missionary Herbst followed Trümpelmann, but in 1894 the Blouberg mission and the Makgabeng mission stations merged, and by 1896, Makgabeng was regarded as an outstation for the Blaauwberg station. In 1892, Missionary Sonntag

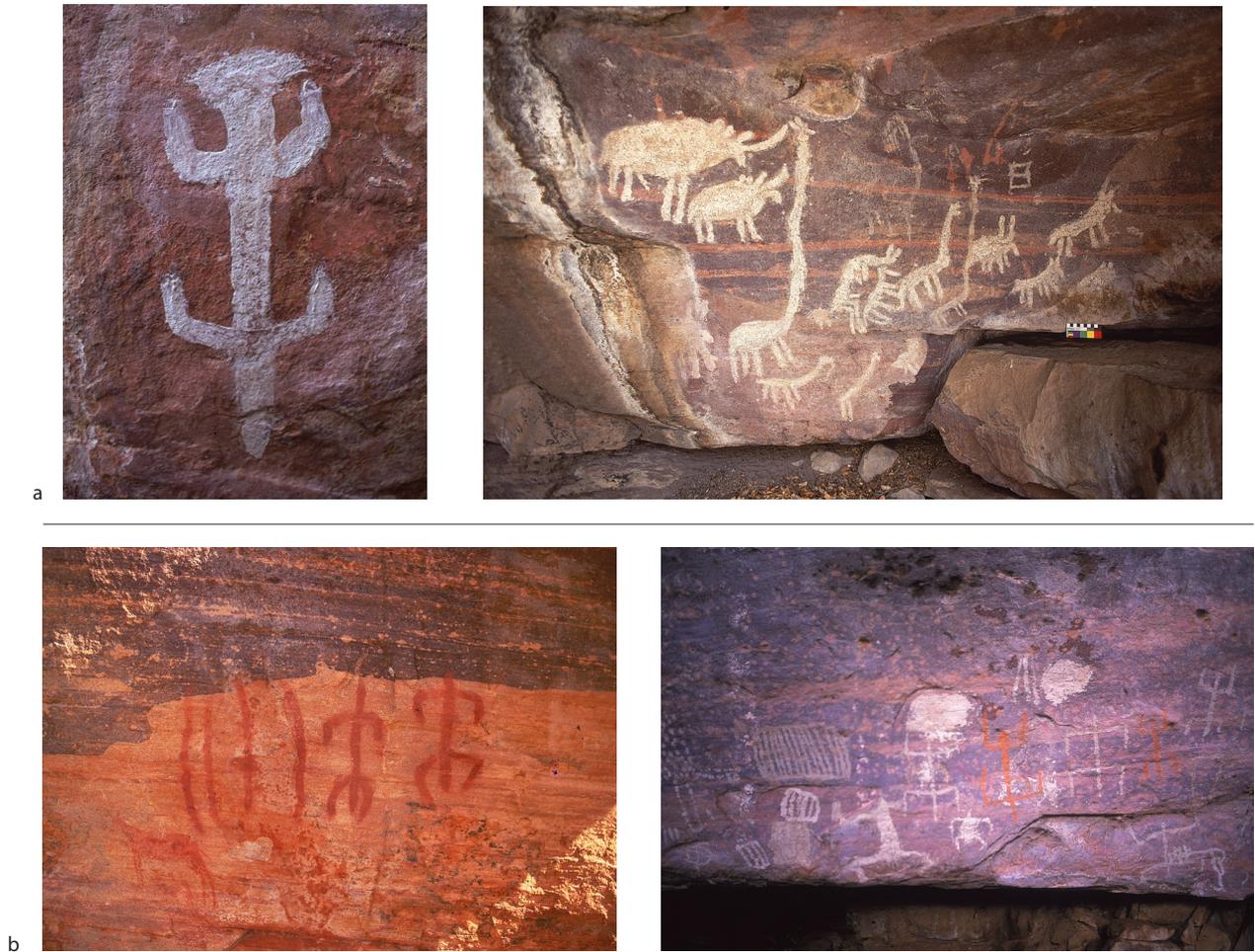


Figure 5.2. Older rock art linked to initiation; (a) images associated with boys' initiation and (b) are associated with girls' initiation. Photographs courtesy and copyright The Rock Art Research Institute, South Africa, www.sarada.co.za. University of Witwatersrand. South African Rock Art Digital Archive Ref Nos. (a) RARI-RSA-BOE5-18 & RARI-RSA-BOE8-4; (b) RARI-RSA-BOE18-3 & RARI-RSA-TOO74-8.

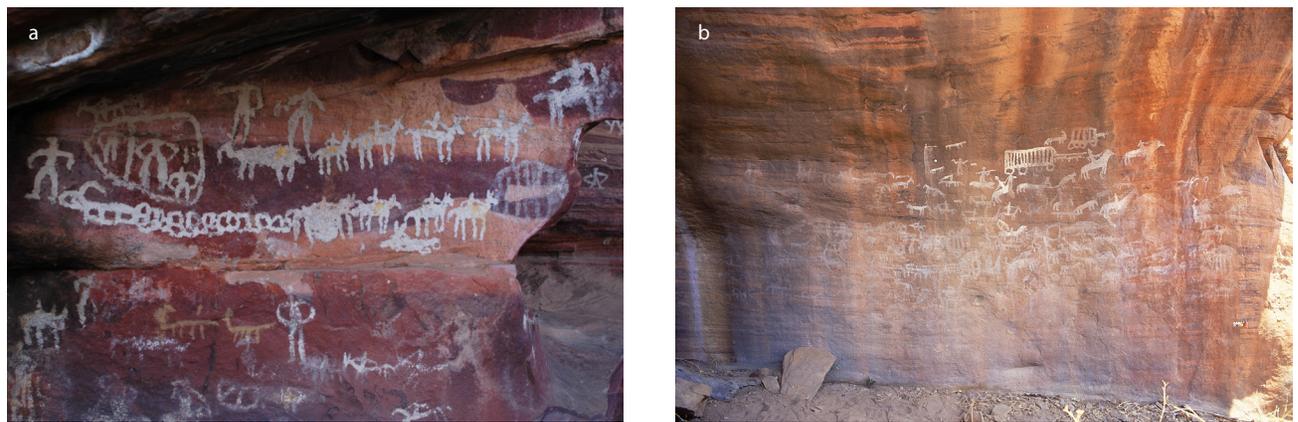


Figure 5.3. Recent rock art linked to colonial contact / political protest. Photographs courtesy and copyright The Rock Art Research Institute, South Africa, www.sarada.co.za. University of Witwatersrand. South African Rock Art Digital Archive Ref No. RARI-RSA-BOE16-27D & RARI-RSA-BOE24-1.

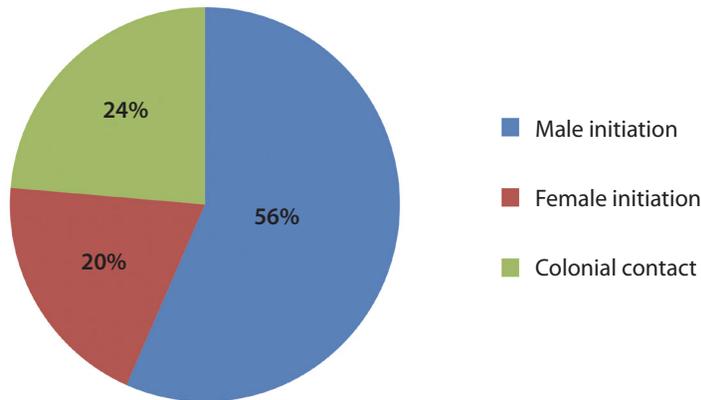


Figure 5.4. Percentage of sites where rock art motifs associated with male initiation, female initiation or colonial contact are dominant, from 398 Northern Sotho rock art sites recorded on the Makgabeng plateau.

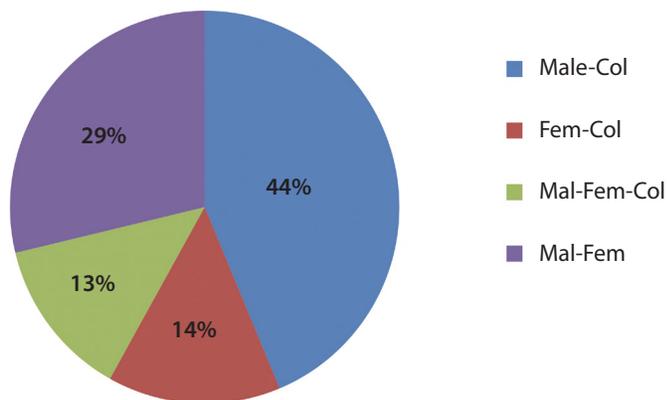


Figure 5.5. Percentage of sites showing the co-occurrences of different motif types, from 398 Northern Sotho rock art sites recorded on the Makgabeng plateau.

arrived at Blaauwberg to find conflicts between Kgoši Kgalushi Leboho, white farmers and their local representative Barend Vorster, Native Commissioner for the South Africa Republic (ZAR), based at Kalkbank, Soutpansberg, approximately 50 km south of Blouberg.

Following British defeat during the first South African War of 1880–1, the area had been regarded as part of the legitimate sphere of influence of the South African Republic (ZAR) in the Transvaal. After Kgoši Kgalushi Leboho refused to pay taxes to the ZAR, the then President Paul Kruger was determined to crush African independence in the region, resulting in the Malebôh war of 1894 (Sonntag 1983; Van Schalkwyk & Moifatswane 1991; Joubert & Van Schalkwyk, 1999). Many Northern Sotho took refuge in the Makgabeng, and the mission station became a place of refuge for Christians and non-Christians alike. Missionary Sonntag defended the Hananwa during the war but was mistrusted by both sides. During the siege of Kgalushi's capital, Sonntag convinced the Kgoši to surrender.

After the siege, Kgalushi was imprisoned for 7 years in a Pretoria prison with most of his councillors. In 1897, Sonntag left the Blaauwberg following the death of his wife and was replaced by another missionary, Rev.

Franz. In 1900, when the British overran Pretoria during the Second South African War, they released Kgalushi and his councillors. Upon release from prison, Kgalushi returned to Makgabeng and rejected the influence of the missionaries, establishing an initiation school on the land held by the mission station as a deliberate provocation. Commissioner Vorster and missionary Franz set fire to the lodge, further inflaming tension between the chief and the missionaries.

It is clear that initiation was a key point of tension in the relationships that unfolded between missionaries and chiefs. The establishment of initiation schools was a key chiefly prerogative, and participation in them is one of the ways in which subjects demonstrated their support, so missionary opposition to what were understood as pagan rites constituted a direct challenge to chiefly authority. The male and female initiation rituals of *bjale* and *bodika* are central to developing and entrenching Northern Sotho collective (social) identity. These ceremonies mark the transition into adulthood of boys and girls and involve instruction about appropriate adult behaviour. Initiation becomes a reference point for the rest of one's life; membership and the characteristics of one's initiation regiment (*mephato*), which generally takes its name from the

chief's sons who led the boys through the rites, are central to adult identity. Changes in forms of dress are one of the ways in which this transition to adulthood has typically been marked (James 1996, 4). Therefore, it is no doubt significant that, as noted above, initiation imagery and depictions of colonial material culture, and particularly European clothing, occur together at 71 per cent of sites in the Makgabeng plateau. What we have described above, from the arrival of colonial traders and missionaries, to the Malebôh war of 1894, contributed in one way or another to the new iconography found in the rock art discussed in this paper.

Rock art re-signified

Smith & Van Schalkwyk (2002) and Van Schalkwyk & Smith (2004) have argued that many of the depictions of Western material culture were made as pointed humour, to chronicle a political struggle, and to serve as a form of catharsis in relation to the 1894 war against

the ZAR government. Here we intend to consider 'struggle', in a more complex and culturally manifested manner. Rock art can shed light on indigenous perspectives on, and responses to, colonization, and we suggest that many of the depictions of European clothing may have been subtle acts of artistic rebellion against forms of imposed missionary discipline, demeanour and control.

Some of the 398 Northern Sotho rock art sites are easily visible and accessible, but most are not because those associated with initiation are often in secluded areas, far away from areas of settlement. The rock art imagery discussed here focuses on depictions of figures in Western clothing or demonstrating forms of Western demeanour, such as holding hands or standing with hands on the hips (Figs. 5.6–10). Figure 5.6 depicts human figures wearing typically male and female forms of clothing, trousers and long dresses, holding hands in a line. Those with dresses all seem to wear a black belt around the waist. This might be



Figure 5.6. *The women in crinolines, men in shirts and trousers, and men and women holding hands. The bottom part of this panel has imagery associated with boys' initiation. Photograph courtesy and copyright The Rock Art Research Institute, South Africa, www.sarada.co.za. University of Witwatersrand. South African Rock Art Digital Archive Ref No. RARI-EEC-RSA-BLA46-1.*



Figure 5.7. A close-up of the panel showing the male figure holding the female figure as if dancing. Both are wearing colonial clothing. Photograph courtesy and copyright The Rock Art Research Institute, South Africa, www.sarada.co.za. University of Witwatersrand. South African Rock Art Digital Archive Ref No. RARI-RSA-TOO1-44.



Figure 5.8. The site showing the context of the panel in Figure 5.7 and the rock art linked to initiation. Photograph courtesy and copyright The Rock Art Research Institute, South Africa, www.sarada.co.za. University of Witwatersrand. South African Rock Art Digital Archive Ref No. RARI-RSA-TOO1-1.

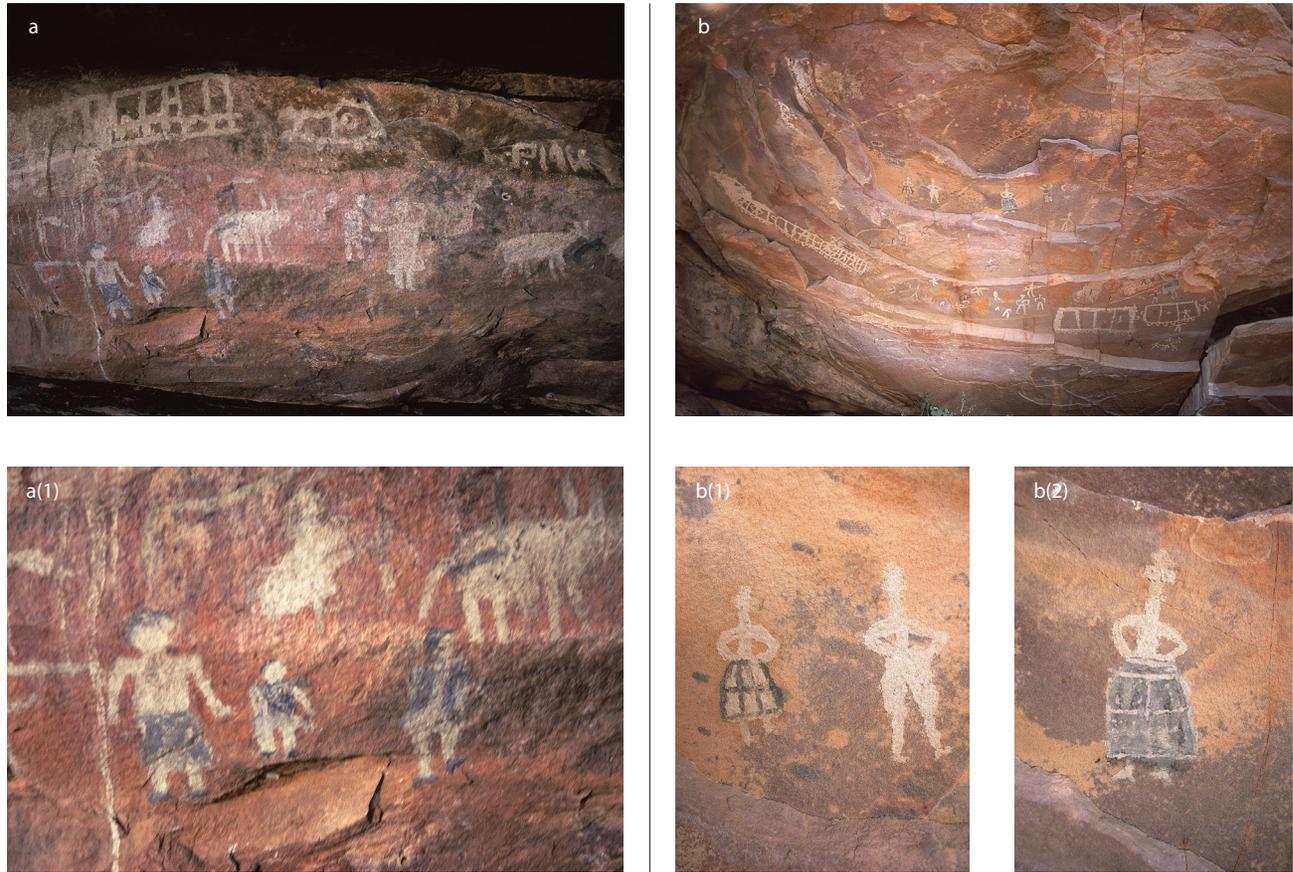


Figure 5.9. Images interspersed with animal motifs. The figures appear to be dressed in elaborate stiff skirts (b1 & 2) and knickerbockers (b1). In figure a (1), two images are dressed in what appear to be waistcoats. Photographs courtesy and copyright The Rock Art Research Institute, South Africa, www.sarada.co.za. University of Witwatersrand. South African Rock Art Digital Archive Ref Nos. (a) RARI-RSA-NIE3-35; (a1) RARI-RSA-NIE3-19; (b) RARI-RSA-LNG1-85; (b1) RARI-RSA-LNG1-18; (b2) RARI-RSA-LNG1-20.

an indication of a costume that was worn during folk dancing (Afrikaans = *volkspele*), or a maypole festival, associated with spring, and Germanic in origin. Such traditions and symbolism would likely have resonated well with the Northern Sotho given their celebration of their various communal rituals, such as the preparation of the seeds for planting (*go ntšha pēu*), first fruits ritual (*go loma lerôtse*), and other rites associated with fertility.

In Figure 5.7, a male figure is depicted wearing a hat, waistcoat, shirt, trouser, and shoes. He appears to have one hand on his waist and the other holding that of a female figure wearing a dress and shoes, probably with a scarf on her head. These figures appear to be dancing inside a house. The house appears to be a typical Northern Sotho cone-on-cylinder structure with a thatched roof, indicated by the central apex for the thatch. However, the door indicates western influence of 90-degree doorframes. The location of this panel in

a ‘pocket’ is indicated by a red rectangle in Figure 5.8, adjacent to a larger panel of colonial contact and boys’ initiation motifs in the foreground.

In Figure 5.9a & b, human figures and colonial contact imagery are interspersed with animal imagery normally associated with boys initiation. Details in (Fig. 5.9a 1) and (Fig. 5.9b 1 & 2) depict pointed or high heeled shoes, riding boots (Fig. 5.9b 1), waist-coats, hats, skirts, as well as dresses with probable crinolines (Fig. 5.9b 1 & 2). In Figure 5.10, human figures, possibly female, are depicted wearing head gear, heeled shoes, dresses or skirts; while other figures, probably male, are shown wearing boots and trousers in a stance with their arms on their hips. In the redrawing on the right of Figure 5.10, the group at the bottom are depicted in a line, holding hands.

These painted panels provide examples Northern Sotho depictions of colonial material culture in rock art, and suggest that gestural patterns and items of



Figure 5.10. Images with hands ‘akimbo’ appear to be wearing shoes; men are wearing trousers and women are dressed in short dresses. Shown alongside reverse ground redrawing. Photograph and drawing courtesy and copyright The Rock Art Research Institute, South Africa, www.sarada.co.za. University of Witwatersrand. South African Rock Art Digital Archive Ref Nos. RARI-RSA-BOE16-14D & RARI-RSA-BOE16-2R.

European clothing were key features of many of these rock art images.

Clothing, costume, dress

Robert Ross (2008, 6) has defined clothing as ‘items of apparel, generally but by no means always made of some form of textile, leather and so forth’ and dress as ‘the complete look, including for instance hair styling, tattooing and cosmetic scarification as well as items of apparel’. According to Ross (2008, 6) ‘costume’ denotes both dress and clothing; it may be peculiar to a nation, region, group, or historical period and may be regional or localized, every day, ceremonial or ritual; it demonstrates unambiguity and denotes specific identity. According to Pierre Bourdieu (1986) clothing can also function as a marker of social class, an aspect of cultural capital that allows elites to establish, maintain and reproduce positions of power, thus reinforcing relations of dominance and subordination; the well-to-do in society wear fine clothes to communicate their social status.

Clothing can be a powerful expression of identity and culture, and since these are fluid, what one wears often portrays how shifts in culture and identities are reconstituted and reflected. Clothes are ‘lived garments’ and have the ability to transform the body (Entwistle 2000; Küchler & Miller 2005) and communicate nonverbally. Particular items of clothing serve as signifiers of status and may be functional, fashionable or both. In many societies, there are special clothes for specific special events such as initiations, weddings

or funerals. Clothes can also communicate a person’s age, gender, marital status, and ethnicity, personality as well as social and economic status. For example, as a sign of mourning, a Northern Sotho widow’s body, as well as her front and back skin aprons were traditionally blackened with a mixture of fat, earth and the burnt kernel of the *motšhidi* (*Ximenia caffra*) fruit, and the tips of her double-pointed back apron were cut off (Pauw 1990, 79). Upon menopause, Northern Sotho women would turn the ‘tail’ of the back apron to the side (Wood 2002, 86).

The anthropologist Terence Turner (1980) coined the term ‘the social body’ to refer to various dimensions of body adornment, such as decorations and modifications of the flesh, hair fashion, cosmetics, masking and costumes, tattooing, piercing, and scarification, body fattening or thinning, muscular development, and cosmetic surgery and the social context in which people act and through which they are shaped. According to him, the surface of one’s body is a boundary of the individual as a biological and psychological entity, but also a frontier of the social self, the part that interacted with the rest of society, reflecting outwardly what society perceives of it:

The surface of the body, as the common frontier of society, the social self, and the psychobiological individual; becomes the symbolic stage upon which the drama of socialization is enacted, and bodily adornment (in all its culturally multifarious forms, from body-painting to clothing and

from feather head-dresses to cosmetics) becomes the language through which it is expressed (Turner 1980, 112).

Drawing on Turner's concept of the social body, alongside those who regard costume as a form of material culture, we analyse colonial depictions in Northern Sotho rock art and attempt to look beyond the purely visual to understand the intentionality and reference of what was depicted. This approach will enable an analysis of how the Northern Sotho appropriated clothes and embodied these with new symbolism and/or meaning amidst the changes and challenges of daily life brought by colonial encounters. This line of enquiry considers the socio-economic conditions that pertained between the Northern Sotho and colonial influences, in the context of what was painted and why it was depicted. This approach draws on Alfred Gell's (1998, 17) argument that we should look at what images do, rather than simply focusing on what they represent. We argue that the images of colonial material culture in the rock art form part of a process of appropriation, of narration, and of engagement with new symbols and values.

Clothing Christianity

According to Comaroff & Comaroff (1997, 222), clothing was at the heart of dialogue between Africans and Europeans in terms of the meaning and substance of colonial rule because it was through clothing that power was constituted, articulated and contested (Allman 2004, 1–10). Missionaries sought to re-shape African bodies with new forms of dress (Comaroff & Comaroff 1997, 119–220), replacing skin loin cloths and aprons with items of European fabric. Among many African communities, adornment using western clothing soon became a signifier of wealth, social status, of a successful male provider, or of assimilation of the exotic (Comaroff & Comaroff 1997, 228–9, 234).

Among the Northern Sotho, dress was associated with distinct forms of status and identity even before European and missionary arrivals. For instance, men would have been given skin cloaks to signify sexual and rural maturity towards the end of their initiation (Comaroff & Comaroff 1997, 229). However, the significance of dress and costume shifted following the introduction of western clothing. Initially, missionaries were relatively relaxed about the innovative adoption of western clothing by Africans (Ross 2008, 96–7). However, adoption of exotic material and conversion to Christianity did not occur in a vacuum, but was influenced by what Robert Hefner (1993, 4) terms 'a larger interplay of identity, politics, and morality'.

Concern arose that to European items of clothing were becoming a means to display extravagance rather than the forms of modesty that missionaries endorsed (Ross 2008, 97). In late 1875, matters came to a head in Pretoria when the Berlin Missionary Society missionary Grünberger preached against the 'misuse of crinolines', by women who appeared in church wearing them (Ruether 2002). In October of that year, he demanded that women surrender these 'fashion items' which he publicly burnt (Ruether 2002, 359). Grünberger's actions must have appeared a contradiction to many of his congregation, since missionaries had encouraged the adoption of European clothing, but nevertheless found some forms of dress distasteful.

Ruether (2002, 360) has suggested that it was no coincidence that this event took place in an urbanizing setting, where the conservative political outlook of Lutheran missions came into conflict with other influences on aspirational African converts, such as trading stores. Indeed, Ruether (2002, 373) has suggested that German missionaries in the Transvaal wanted to shape an African cultural identity that was subordinate to their own, as well as that of settler farmers, and so they particularly objected to what they saw as British forms of dress, associated with urban spaces, which they regarded as challenging these distinctions. Indeed, the wives of Berlin Missionary Society missionaries, such as that of Reverend B. Richter who was stationed at Matlala on the southern side of Makgabeng were allowed to wear silk dresses on certain occasions, when these were not permitted to African converts, even on their wedding days (Ruether 2002, 370). For German missionaries, such distinctions in the European dress became an explicit means of maintaining their own supremacy in the face of claims to equality among their congregations.

While these tensions must have been less stark in the relatively more rural setting of the Makgabeng plateau, they nevertheless provide a sense of the tensions that surrounded the adoption of European dress in German mission contexts. Indeed, Ruether (2002, 361) has suggested that 'disputes over clothing became an integral part of everyday life on Lutheran mission stations from the 1870s onwards' since missionaries increasingly 'interpreted African appropriation of European garb as a sign of opposition and inappropriate social aspirations'.

This was undoubtedly exacerbated by the increasing demand for African labour in South Africa's mines, following the discovery of diamonds in the Northern Cape in the late 1860s and gold in the Transvaal in the mid-1880s, which led to the arrival of recruiting officers on the Makgabeng (Sonntag 1983). Those men who went to work in the mines returned with forms of dress



Figure 5.11. *The smock (the blue and brown dresses in the picture) are worn by women as part of the ethnic costume of the Northern Sotho, known as ele. The word ele derives from a European unit of measure for a length of cloth used to make the smock, an ell, approximating the length of a person's arm from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger. Photograph Johan van Schalkwyk.*



associated with urban locations and were increasingly preferred in marriage to those who remained in the rural villages, because they were perceived as providers who could afford clothes that enabled women to display their status and wealth. By the mid-1920s, going to the mines became a part of the typical male's life cycle, somewhat like initiation. Women, on the other hand, frequently remained in the villages where they played a major role in sustaining rural households, raising children and in reproducing social relations between men and women, the living and the dead (James 1994, 59–60).

Deborah James (1996, 34) has argued that group identities, such as Northern Sotho, were constructed through the ongoing invocation of tradition and its opposition to modernity, resulting in 'sets of opposed dualities' such as town/country, Christian/non-Christian and *sesotho/sekgowa*. 'Traditional' female forms of dress changed considerably under these various influences, but James (1996) has argued that they nevertheless continued to be understood as expressions of Northern Sotho ways. New forms of clothing became

Figure 5.12. *A woman wearing skin apron below her cotton fabric dress. Photograph Johan van Schalkwyk.*

additions to, rather than replacements for, ethnic dress, such as the *ele* (Fig. 5.11). The *ele*, worn by married women, became fashionable in part because of its association with the hospital run by the Berlin missionary Franz. When a woman delivered a baby at a hospital, she was given a loose-fitting smock and this smock developed an association with fertility. The colours of the cloth, white and red, resonate with Northern Sotho symbolism associated with rites of passage, while blue resonates with exogenous powers. By the 1940s and 50s the smock was widely adopted by married Northern Sotho women and worn over their ethnic skin aprons as a feature of 'traditional' dress. It is perhaps significant that although women incorporated such items into their traditional costume, they kept 'Sotho-ness' close to their bare bodies and wore 'cloaks' of Christianity or Western conformity on top (Fig. 5.12).

Allman (2004, 6) suggests that the meaning of a cloth is often transformed when moved across time and space, even though much meaning ultimately remains hugely vernacular. Indeed, 'traditional' Sotho clothing was replenished and strengthened with new elements and its symbolism continuously transformed within the context of initiation (James 1996, 40–1), and it is likely that changes in western clothing and demeanour depicted in the rock art reflect this process.

Conclusion: appropriation as a hermeneutic process

According to Schneider (2006, 29), appropriation means a taking out of one context and putting into another. Broadly, appropriating something entails claiming *someone else's* thing as your own and therefore having the right to use it in the context that *you* choose. Schneider (2003; 2006, 29) focusing on the 'appropriation' of ideas, symbols and artefacts from other cultures, and on power differentials between appropriator and those appropriated from, advocates a hermeneutic procedure to appropriation as a strategy to create something new with materials from outside one's culture. This implies that cultural elements are invested with new signification, and that those who appropriate are transformed, ultimately constructing and assuming new identities (Schneider 2006, 29). In this paper we followed Schneider's hermeneutic strategy as a process that emphasizes an implicit potential to contextualize and work with 'foreign' things to create something new (Schneider 2006, 27). We argued that colonial forms of dress were appropriated through their depiction in Makgabeng rock art and were made to signify Northern Sotho-ness.

Whether one can link the depiction of items of European clothing directly to forms of rebellion against

missionary sartorial codes is difficult to determine, but the juxtaposition of these images alongside other forms of initiation imagery is surely significant. Following Alfred Gell (1998), we considered the rock art depictions as indexes of the agency of their original painter. Gell (1998) argues that images do not only express the values of their makers but inherently transmit concomitant values to produce, rather than express, meaning. So, contextually, the intended meaning or significance of depictions of European clothing resides not only in their form but also in their production and the acts of consumption for which they were intended (Layton 1992). Those viewing the imagery determine the meaning and significance of the rock art based on their own experiences and associations. Those who appropriated the clothes transformed themselves in the process, ultimately constructing new identities for themselves, not as converts or Europeanized Africans, but as initiated Northern Sotho men and women.

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Chapter 6

To paint, to see, to copy: rock art as a site of enchantment

Justine Wintjes & Laura de Harde

Rock art as technology of enchantment

A central component of Alfred Gell's understanding of technology and enchantment, is the idea that 'art is inherently social in a way in which the merely beautiful or mysterious object is not', as 'a physical entity which mediates between two beings, and therefore creates a social relation between them, which in turn provides a channel for further social relations and influences' (Gell 1992, 52). David Lewis-Williams & David Pearce (2004, 200) have applied this idea to the production of the rock art attributed to San (Bushman) hunter-gatherers:

When San of southern Africa made rock art images they intended to accomplish certain ends, and those ends, amongst others, entailed other peoples' acquiescence in specific kinds of constructed social relationships. As we shall see, San image-making was, in Gell's phrase, 'enchanted'.

Through an analysis of the painted imagery at site MK1 (Free State Province, South Africa), they suggest that the rock art was a visual device 'for securing the acquiescence of individuals in the network of intentionalities in which they are enmeshed' (Gell 1992, 43, cited in Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004, 200). Individual artists made images related to rain control that 'embodied and projected both supernatural potency and social influence' (2004, 200). By making 'real' aspects of the 'non-real' spirit world, the art did not merely reflect, but was actively constitutive of, social relations (2004, 224). Although Gell considers this to be a fundamental dimension of art's enchanting nature, he also points out that it 'brings us no closer to the art object as such'; in an attempt to understand levels of enchantment linked to materiality, he examines art as part of a 'technical

system' which functions through a recursive dynamic between technology and enchantment (1992, 44).

Researchers working on rock art have recognized that beyond the general emphasis on the social and spiritual context, there remain opportunities to integrate 'the extraordinary reality of art with the mundane realities of production' (Solomon 1995, 52). In this situation, Gell's technology/enchantment framework has potential to enable closer attention to be paid to rock art's technological, creative and aesthetic aspects, which would also have the effect of bringing it more firmly into the realm of 'art', while at the same time taking up Gell's prompt to work towards art's 'dissolution' as one of the forms under which human experience is presented to the socialized mind, alongside religion, politics and economics, which he sees as the ultimate aim of anthropology more generally (1992, 41). We summarize several key points of Gell's framework and suggest some ways in which connections could be developed further in relation to rock painting. We go on to explore historical copies as another arena in which to consider art's enchanting nature.

Gell begins by drawing analogies between the anthropological study of art and that of religion, which he sees as having taken a separate path of development, the former having largely fallen away alongside an increased interest in the latter. He attributes this to an ability on the part of anthropologists to study religion effectively without needing to accept as truths the religious beliefs on which it is founded, but conversely an inability to let go of an (ethnocentrically framed) faith in the superior aesthetic realm of art (1992, 40–2).

A similar issue may be present in the study of rock art. As rock art started to become the subject of scholarly inquiry in the late nineteenth century, as a living practice it was fast disappearing, with hunter-gatherer communities assimilated, marginalized or exterminated through the violent changes to society



Figure 6.1. Map showing the sites mentioned in this chapter.

brought about during the colonial era. Drawing from hints in the documentary record, rock art researchers have developed an elaborate ethnographically informed shamanistic framework of understanding, an example of the successes of ‘methodological atheism’ (Berger 1967, 107, cited in Gell 1992, 41), where religion ‘becomes an emergent property of the relations between the various elements in the social system, derivable, not from the condition that genuine religious truths exist, but solely from the condition that societies exist’ (Gell 1992, 41).

On the other hand, relatively few studies have been produced from within an ‘art’ paradigm. Pippa Skotnes (1994, 316) has suggested an almost total neglect of rock art by art historians, and a lack of attention paid to its formal dimensions by archaeologists. Attempts to examine rock art imagery as ‘art’ frequently meet with warnings about the dangers of such an enterprise, because of concerns around the interference of seemingly overwhelming ‘western’ ideas of what art is, linked to difficulties surrounding the definition of art more generally. And so scholars return to the worldview that informed its production, and therefore back to a centrally religious context (e.g. Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2009, 42). But it may be possible to approach the ‘artness’ of rock art through a kind of ‘methodological

philistinism’, which approaches art as ‘a vast and often unrecognized technical system, essential to the reproduction of human societies’ (Gell 1992, 42–3). This necessitates finding ways to ‘illuminate the specific objective characteristics of the art object as an object, rather than as a vehicle for extraneous social and symbolic messages, without succumbing to the fascination which all well-made art objects exert on the mind attuned to their aesthetic properties’ (1992, 43; see also King & McGranaghan this volume for their ontological approach to the art’s depictive aspects). This is a realm of enchantment that is complementary to that geared towards social consequences, and operates at a more intimate and materialistic level:

The power of art objects stems from the technical processes they objectively embody: the technology of enchantment is founded on the enchantment of technology. The enchantment of technology is the power that technical processes have of casting a spell over us so that we see the real world in an enchanted form (Gell 1992, 44; italics in the original).

The many existing studies of rock art suggest various ways in which the art might usefully be approached as

a technology of enchantment. Biochemical studies are starting to shed some light onto the complex processes of making the paint materials (Williamson 2000; Prinsloo *et al.* 2013; Bonneau *et al.* 2017). Over and above its social role in making tangible the intangible, rock art clearly embodied impressive levels of technical difficulty, where panels, and whole sites, might be understood as ‘enchanted vessels of magical power’:

not dazzling [merely] as a physical object, but as a display of artistry explicable only in magical terms, something which has been produced by magical means. It is the way an art object is construed as having come into the world which is the source of the power such objects have over us – their becoming rather than their being (Gell 1992, 46).

Gell argues that technology is enchanted when the ‘ordinary technical means employed [...] point inexorably towards magic, and also towards art, in that art is the idealized form of production’ (1992, 62–3). The ‘magical’ aspects of the production of southern African rock art are more elusive than those of Trobriand ‘garden magic’ (one of Gell’s examples), but there is enough to suggest that the imagery wasn’t simply a ‘representation’ of something in the world in any straightforward sense. Rather, the artistic process itself would have embodied a radical transubstantiation of different ingredients into figurative expressions, produced through apparently magical means. Implicated in the realm of social relations would have been an enchantment involving the *actual* technology of painting, which ‘in converging towards the magical ideal, adumbrate[d] this ideal in the real world’ (Gell 1992, 62).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to deepen an exploration of the enchantedness of rock art in its original context, but we invoke Gell’s framework because of its potential to enable greater acknowledgment of the technical skill mobilized by San artists. Each rock art panel is a ‘concrete product of human ingenuity’ (Gell 1992, 42), resulting from the manipulation of physical materials into a visual presentation whose technical means of production weren’t necessarily obvious to the viewer, and so formed a site of enchantment. That this enchantment operated through a technical system is evident because something of the technique, skill and creativity was transmitted through the art as material manifestation. Even when unaccompanied by any explanation, due to the absence of living practitioners, rock artworks have inspired numerous creative responses outside of the indigenous context.

The art of copying

The vast oeuvre of highly colourful figurative rock paintings across the southern African landscape, attributed to San communities, is by far the most studied rock art tradition in the region. Its finesse and naturalism appealed to European aesthetic sensibilities from early on (Nettleton 1984, 67), and it has continued to attract far more attention than abstract or engraved traditions. The naturalism of San rock painting, with its use of perspective and shading to create pictorial effects verging at times on illusionism, makes it distinctly different from many other traditional southern African expressive forms.

Rock paintings have been the site of an enchantment hinging on this perception of advanced painterly skill, inspiring numerous artists trained in western traditions of art-making to create copies, prior to the achievement of ethnographically informed understandings of the semantics of the art’s symbolic constituents. In this way the art has transcended its first context, generating acts of painting by artists working on paper, expressions of a technological encounter between two different traditions of image-making. Early copyists were frequently painters re-enacting gestures of painting, and so understood something of the visual power of the imagery, and its coming into being through the manipulation of coloured substances on a receptive surface. Skotnes (1994, 316) proposes that rather than ‘a process of description’, these observers were engaged in ‘an artistic exploration’, a realm of knowledge production that proceeds through looking and making, and working with materials to produce forms. Premised on the idea that the visual is itself a ‘site of meaning’, Skotnes proposes that ‘the experience of praxis (by artists) [should] form part of the tradition of scholarship surrounding the study of San parietal art’, and calls for attempts to ‘be made to assess this experience and translate it in some way so as to make its insights accessible’ (1994, 321).

The role of enchantment in this realm of knowledge production is discernible in the ways in which the art, as the objective embodiment of a technical process, as well as an enchanted form of expression produced by an artist working in an earlier context, motivates a copyist to respond creatively, activating the ‘involution’ that Gell proposes is specific to art, carrying further the enchantment ‘immanent in all kinds of technical activity’ (1992, 44). The close study of copying practices may also be a way to heed the call for an adapted aesthetic approach, reducing the risk of the potentially distorting interference of enchantment on the part of the researcher (1992, 43), because the object under examination is a trace of another person

in an ‘enchanted’ relationship with an artwork. This strategy creates a degree of remove in relation to the enchanting original; it opens the dynamic of enchantment itself up for investigation.

Elizabeth Goodall

We turn now to an exploration of these ideas through an examination of the work of the rock art researcher Elizabeth Goodall, née Mannsfeld (1891–1971), who was employed as an artist on a German expedition led by Leo Frobenius to southern Africa (1928–1930).¹ Over the course of some 20 months, the German team travelled to hundreds of rock art sites and other locales in what were then the countries of Basutoland, South Africa, Southern and Northern Rhodesia, Mozambique and South West Africa.² Frobenius employed several artists and dedicated many resources to the collection of visual materials, giving the archive a uniquely pictorial character. The artists were formally trained and highly skilled, and were sometimes considered fine artists in their own right. Frobenius felt that the process of producing copies by an artist’s hand was essential to address the challenges of recording rock artworks, due to their texture and erosive qualities, and to capture the aesthetic ‘spirit’ embodied within them; whereas a scientist would generally seek to reconstruct a work as it existed within the context in which it was produced, an artist ‘paints what is there’, ‘copying not merely a picture but a document in stone, a cultural document of which the chips, cracks and weathering are an historical part’ (Frobenius 1972 [1937], 18–9). This position characterized the ‘school of thought and action’ represented by his expeditions, and presented a technically challenging task that he felt the artists working under him were increasingly adept at tackling (Frobenius 1972 [1937], 19).

In late 1929, slightly ahead of the official end of the expedition, Mannsfeld went back to Germany to process the collected materials, and in 1931 returned to Southern Rhodesia where she married Leslie Goodall and settled permanently (Raath 1971, 1). She soon resumed her recording activities and in 1934 began an association with the Queen Victoria Museum in Salisbury (now the Zimbabwe Museum of Human Sciences, Harare), where she was later employed (Raath 1971, 1; Whyte 1973, 319). She left behind a substantial archive of rock art records, compiled over some four decades, including a large collection of copies that survive in different institutions. Over and above the field copies produced in the context of the 1928–30 expedition, now preserved at the Frobenius Institute in Frankfurt, her earliest copies also include a set of watercolours bequeathed to the South African

Museum in Cape Town shortly after the expedition (Keene 2011). This generation of secondary (or ‘beta’) copies was produced largely by her, by hand, from the original field copies created by the various artists on the expedition (Richard Kuba pers. comm. 2018). She was also involved in compiling the catalogue of copies produced on the expedition (Frobenius & Mannsfeld 1930). Over the course of her career in Southern Rhodesia, she gathered an extensive archive of sites that went far beyond those recorded by the Frobenius expedition, and it was her practice as a copyist that formed the basis of her employment at the museum. Display copies featuring in several other national museums around Zimbabwe also derive from her work, for example the Diana’s Vow and Nyambavu panels on display at the Mutare Museum, Ziwa Site Museum and the Domboshava Interpretive Centre (Munyaradzi Elton Sagiya pers. comm. 2018). When Goodall first began working at the *Forschungsinstitut für Kulturmorphologie* under Frobenius in 1925, southern African rock paintings would have been an unfamiliar form of expression to her, but by the end of her life they were a body of visual materials with which she was intimately acquainted. Although representing a substantial investment of labour and resources, this total archive can be described as a quiet legacy, largely unengaged by researchers (De Harde 2019).

Peter Garlake described the fact that Mannsfeld ‘met and fell in love with a local policeman’ as ‘the most significant result’ of the Frobenius expedition to Rhodesia (Garlake 1993, 15), recognizing her as one of ‘the two great authorities’ in rock art studies in Southern Rhodesia before 1970 alongside Cran Cooke (1993, 1). But he also commented that Goodall and Cooke spent ‘much of their time, energy and enthusiasm in recording more and more material, but doing little to advance the plot’ (Garlake 1993, 1), observing that:

To an academic, [Goodall’s] work is almost entirely unsystematic and unanalytical. She developed no theoretical framework or specific research intentions. She remained throughout her life entirely loyal to Frobenius’ ideas but did little to develop, expand or adjust them to the new material she was collecting (Garlake 1993, 17).

In their memorial papers, Cran Cooke and Michael Raath described her as a scientist who published papers in reputable journals and belonged to several learned societies (Cooke 1971, 8; Raath 1971, 6). Indeed Goodall produced a number of publications on archaeological topics over the course of her career (the rock art publications include Goodall 1946a, 1946b, 1947, 1949, 1957a,

1957b, 1959, 1962a, 1962b, 1962c, 1970). But when she has been cited by other scholars, it is generally with reference to her identifications and descriptions of particular motifs, rather than for interpretive insights as such (Garlake 1966, 113; Huffman 1983; Manhire *et al.* 1986, 22; Dowson 1988, 117; Solomon 1995; Mguni 2004, 193; 2005, 34, 36; 2009, 140). Several commentators observe a lack of historical or anthropological substantiation of her ideas, which involved guesswork and superficial parallels drawn from an eclectic range of elements of European, Classical or Indian history (Lewis-Williams 1986, 174–5; Manhire *et al.* 1986, 25; Garlake 1993, 17; 1995, 35; Solomon 1995, 36, 38; 1998, 277), what Siyakha Mguni describes as an expression of ‘dubious ethno-history’ (2004, 185). Garlake argued that ‘[b]ecause she was completely loyal to her “master”, Frobenius, in a country where he was belittled or ignored, because she felt alienated by the arguments and entrenched positions that have always characterized southern African prehistoric studies... she wrote very little about the paintings’ (Garlake 1995, 35). And yet, ‘despite her loyalties, she did nothing to tease out the essence of Frobenius’ most important contribution to the study of the art as the symbols of a coherent body of beliefs’ (Garlake 1993, 17). Moreover, her career unfolded entirely before the marked acceleration of rock art research from the 1970s onwards (Lewis-Williams 1972, 1974, 1977, 1981; Pager 1971, 1975; Vinnicombe 1972a, 1972b, 1976, followed by many others).

Her copies, too, have been subject to some critical scrutiny. In an unpublished report on the rock art of the Harrismith area (Free State Province, South Africa), Lewis-Williams assesses a copy produced by Mannsfeld at Aberdeen I. He does not identify her by name, but as ‘Frobenius’s inexperienced worker’, who missed a number of key figures, and was ultimately ‘unable to decipher the jumble of paintings’ (Lewis-Williams 1985, 27–8). Pointing also to the problem of selective copying, Anne Solomon (1995, 39) warns that in her experience Goodall’s copies are ‘not particularly reliable’ by present-day standards. Yet most published reproductions derived from Goodall’s work are highly selective monochrome redrawings of individual motifs or clusters (Summers 1959, 95; Huffman 1983, 50; Lewis-Williams 1986, 175; Manhire *et al.* 1986, 23–4; Solomon 1995, 21), and don’t reflect anything of the colourful abundance of the field copies, or the close observations they embody.

Garlake (1993, 3) felt her copies were comparatively accurate, and, considering the context in which she worked where rock paintings were considered of little interest or consequence to the Rhodesian public, successful in their ability to attract positive attention

to the art, particularly with regards to their painterly qualities:

[Goodall] felt that the best way she could share her enthusiasm for the art was by making paintings widely accessible through copies. Her main concern was to reproduce their aesthetic qualities. She was happy to adjust compositions to strengthen their effect and to transpose the thick, dry, opaque pigments of the artist into the much more fluid and transparent medium of watercolour. Despite the primitive materials she had to use in tracing and the techniques these imposed on her, her copies succeed in capturing the character of the art in a different medium while retaining accuracy, precision and detail more successfully than any other copyist, copying system or photography (Garlake 1993, 15).

Although acknowledging that no copy is entirely accurate, Garlake (1995, 35) recognized the ‘skill’ and ‘care’ of her copying practice, but he did not see her as a fully-fledged scholar, describing her work as ‘a celebration, and not an analysis, of the art’.

Her career is interesting to compare with one of her near contemporaries, and someone she corresponded with on matters relating to rock art and copying, Walter Battiss (1906–1982).³ Goodall collected newspaper articles by and about Battiss, and appears to have closely followed his achievements as an artist working with rock art.⁴ Early on in his career, beginning in the 1930s, Battiss engaged in close observation of rock art through fieldwork (Battiss 1939, 1945, 1948, c. 1950; Skotnes 1994; Wintjes 2012, 124), part of his broader study of indigenous art forms (Battiss 1942, 1958). He is well known for taking inspiration from his first-hand experiences of rock art into an autonomous realm of creative work, seeing himself as the first artist trained in the western tradition to use southern African rock art as a direct reference (Schoonraad 1976, 11). Skotnes (1994, 319) describes him as the ‘most important of South African artists to mediate and interpret the images of the San through creative exploration’. Although he became one of the most iconic South African artists of the twentieth century, in a neighbouring country Goodall was at work on a more substantial and systematic archive of rock art copies, but earned little recognition as a rock art researcher, and even less as an artist in her own right. And yet she too developed her own distinctly recognizable style, which arose from a meaningful engagement over many years with the visual and aesthetic character of the art in ways that haven’t yet been the subject of close analysis (but see De Harde 2019).



Figure 6.2. Repeat photography sequence of the main panel at Diana's Vow: a) 1928 photograph by the Frobenius expedition (negative 13 × 18 cm, FoA-09-12489). Photograph courtesy and copyright Frobenius-Institut an der Goethe Universität, Frankfurt am Main; b and c) Digital photography and enhancement by Justine Wintjes/University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (2016).

Diana's Vow

One of the sites Goodall had a particular interest in was Diana's Vow (Manicaland Province, Zimbabwe), located in a prominent granite outcrop approximately 25 km north-east of Rusape in an agriculturally rich area of the Zimbabwean highveld plateau. This landscape formed an easily navigable terrain, favoured by colonial settlers as can be seen in the particular concentration of colonial-era roads, towns, mission stations and farms.

Diana's Vow was declared a national monument in 1950 and remains one of the most famous rock art sites in Zimbabwe, well sign-posted and easily accessible (Fothergill 1953, 62–3; ZimFieldGuide 2018). The Frobenius expedition gave it the label,



'Hauptmonument B' ('principal monument B'), one of a constellation of sites to which they attributed a prominence and royal status, in the Rusape, Marandellas and Charter districts (Frobenius & Mannsfeld 1930, 97; district boundaries and names have since changed but this area falls across the highlands to the south-east of Harare). Diana's Vow is still currently open to the public, and a custodian linked to the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe by the name of Elisha Tsoka was stationed there when we visited in 2015 and 2016. The paintings on the main panel are well preserved, as can be seen in a comparison between the Frobenius expedition photograph from 1928 with 2016 photographs (Fig. 6.2).

Most of the painted figures are concentrated on a panel on one side of a large mushroom-shaped boulder, which is part of a ring of boulders interspersed with trees that encloses a grassy clearing. This configuration forms a secluded area around the imagery. The figures are arranged into a vertically oblong, roughly oval composition measuring approximately 1 × 2.5 m, often recorded in portrait-oriented formats. Goodall (1959, 98) described this panel as 'the most complicated and detailed single scene found in Southern Africa'. The composition is dominated by a large reclining figure towards the top, often referred to as a 'king', specifically a 'dead' or 'dying king' in early references (Schofield 1949, 100; Goodall 1959, 98). This trope can be tracked back to Frobenius (1930; 1931(I), 27), who pronounced an affinity with the royal burial practices of Ancient Egypt and suggested this figure represented a kind of 'prehistoric Tutankhamen', and the smaller reclining figure nearby as his 'queen'.

Cooke cites Goodall as the author of the 'first known copy of the frieze' (Cooke 1979, 115). He may be referring to the secondary copy produced by her c. 1930 (Fig. 6.3), which actually derives from a slightly earlier copy produced following a visit to the site by Joachim Lutz in 1928 (Frobenius 1931, Tafel 10). These copies are highly similar, with Goodall (then still Mannsfeld) replicating the framing of the copy as well as its style. The reclining figure anchors the composition and dominates the upper half, causing figures along the bottom and sides to be cropped. The style has an exaggerated clarity, a kind of figural crispness, which is characteristic of Lutz's style of copying more broadly, probably influenced by his practice of working in the medium of wood-cut engraving (Wintjes 2017, 40).

Despite the existence of these two detailed copies by Lutz (located in Frankfurt) and Mannsfeld-after-Lutz (located in Cape Town), Goodall produced several subsequent copies at different times. We have been unable to find the originals of these copies in Harare, but two were published (Figs. 6.4 & 6.5). The

framing of these copies is broadly like the earlier copies by and after Lutz (Fig. 6.3) but they encompass a wider view to capture more of the panel. Their texture is messier and style more tentative. Whereas Lutz's copying style demonstrates a tendency to 'repair' incomplete or broken figures, Goodall captured more accurately the fragmentariness of the original (Figs. 6.4 & 6.5). She copied the smudges and blemishes, for example the wide streak down the right-hand side of the panel, interrupting the torso of the smaller reclining figure. These qualities are consistent with Frobenius' approach to copying quoted above, guided by a concern for 'what is there', treating the rock art as a historical object located in the time in which the copyist is working.

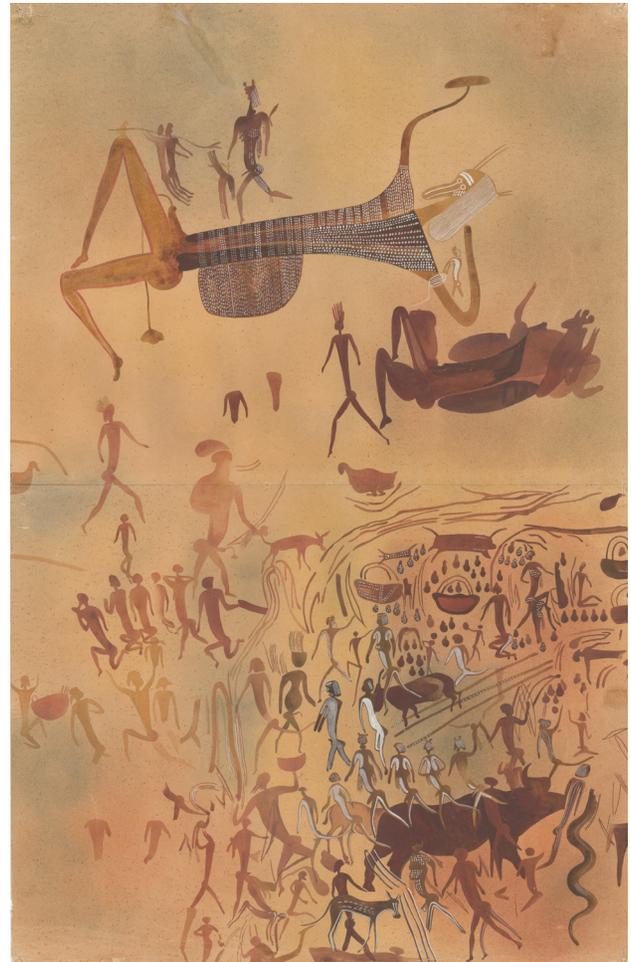


Figure 6.3. *The Mannsfeld-after-Lutz copy, c. 1930 (watercolour on paper, 65 × 100 cm). Image courtesy and copyright Iziko Museums of Cape Town Social History Collections Department, South Africa. www.sarada.co.za, University of the Witwatersrand. South African Rock Art Digital Archive Ref No. IZI-LVF-01-360HC.*

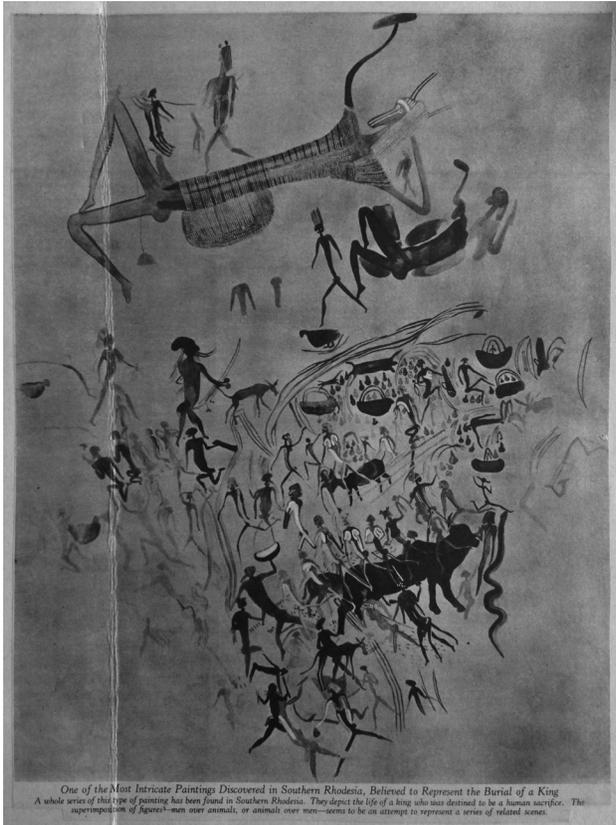


Figure 6.4. Illustration in an article by Richard Carline (1945) of an undated copy of the main panel at Diana's Vow by Elizabeth Goodall (whereabouts of the original copy unknown).

Although colour is a fundamental property of the rock paintings as well as the copies (see Hayden this volume), it is difficult to assess in this case due to the inherent challenges involved in its recording in the field. These include subjective acuity, variable light conditions, aging of the pigment, and the colour-related properties of the recording medium. Further exacerbating the difficulty is the instability of colour in the copies, which can also change over time, and colour shifts from other processes of translation the imagery may undergo (through different kinds of reproduction, including digitization). Moreover, one of the published versions was reproduced in black and white (Fig. 6.4). It is however possible to make several observations.

Lutz's copy appears generally darker and less colourful, but close inspection reveals that he mixed an impressive range of subtly different hues of paint, evidence that he paid attention to the chromatic complexity of the rock imagery. The Goodall copy published in colour (Fig. 6.5) appears brighter with

more saturated tones than the Lutz copy, and uses different techniques to modulate colour. For the figures, she used two basic hues, a red and a yellow, with some blending, and grading towards the transparent. The use of transparency highlights the figures' locatedness on a surface other than the paper, a surface whose presence is evoked by a pale greyish blotchy texture. The overall effect is that the figures are 'grounded', embedded into a material matrix. This technique is similar to that of Battiss, implying 'a continuous unframed space' behind the figures, recalling also the idea of a palimpsest through a 'sgraffito-like process of drawing into wet paint revealing colour beneath' (Skotnes 1994, 319). By contrast, Lutz's style

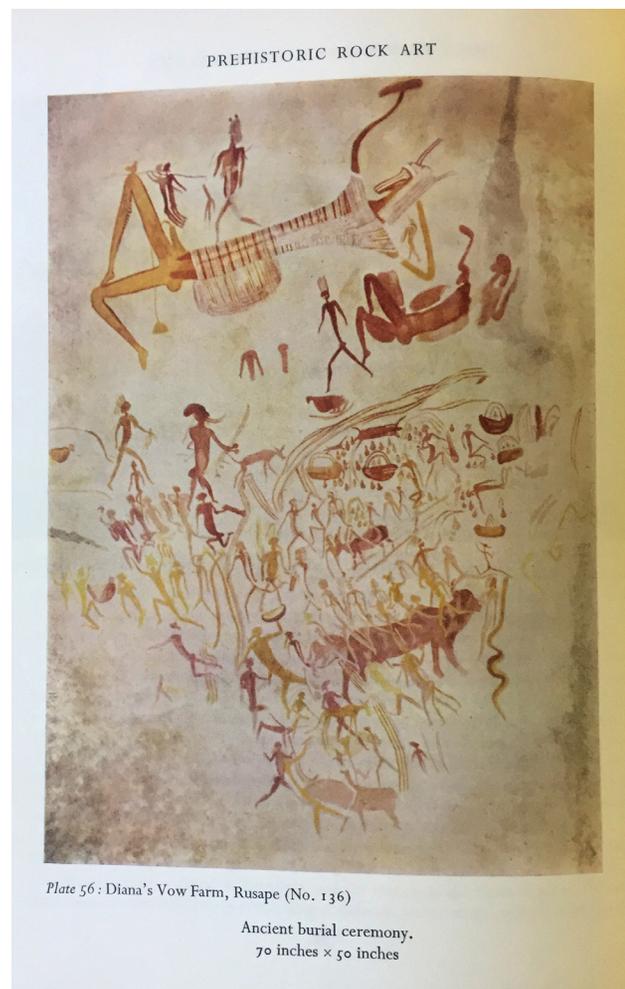


Figure 6.5. Illustration in Elizabeth Goodall's section of the book, *Prehistoric rock art of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland* (1959: plate 56) of an undated copy of the main panel at Diana's Vow by Goodall (also reproduced on the back cover of Cooke 1972; whereabouts of the original copy unknown).

exaggerates the contrast between the figures and the background, and the smoothness and solidness of the figures, making them look as though they have been peeled off the rock.

A final point of comparison is the general orientational scheme of the figures. In the field, the rock is curved and there are figures painted to either side of the main cluster, so the viewing experience implicates movement of one's body. The figures shift significantly in orientation depending on the viewer's position (Fig. 6.6). There is also a large rock lying just below the panel that can interfere with close inspection from a fully frontal position, which might explain the oblique orientation of the photographs (Fig. 6.2). The Lutz copies embody a tendency to orientate figures into alignment with an imagined orthogonal grid, with the reclining figures depicted almost horizontally, and other figures also rotated in this way. This is suggestive of the influence of understandings of the art as a kind of picture-writing discernible in other early copies, where figures are re-arranged into text-like registers (Wintjes 2011, 29; Wintjes 2016, 166–9). It is also consistent with established representational conventions associated with canvas painting, where pictorial space is constructed in relation to a horizontal plane that extends into an orthogonal three-dimensional framework. Goodall's copies maintain a diagonal

orientation, which is a compositional organization that might seem disorienting to a viewer unfamiliar with the kind of pictorial space elaborated in San rock paintings.

Goodall learned a particular copying philosophy and set of skills working under Frobenius, which she developed further on her own during the many hours spent in the presence of the art. Similar to Battiss' 'engagement with some of the formal devices that characterize San painting', which came to influence the formal arrangement of his own work (Skotnes 1994, 319), she was receptive to particular cues contained in the art, and used these to organize the composition of her copies. She developed her own style, which is distinguished by a certain painterly tentativeness, respect for the incompleteness of the figures and representation of the rock surface.

There is a clear disjuncture between Goodall's textual interpretations of this art, which contained a number of misapprehensions and seemed to remain underdeveloped over the course of her career, and her more enlightened (and enchanted) practice as a copyist, in which she developed a subtle understanding of the pictorial functioning of the imagery. Her writing entirely overshadowed and yet never came close to matching the nuance and complexity of her visual explorations.



Figure 6.6. Different views of the main panel showing how the orientation of the figures changes as the viewer moves around the boulder, 2015. Photographs Laura de Harde/University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Nyambavu

The archival trail linked to another rock art site hints further at the level of entanglement of rock art in Goodall's personal life. The site is located about 40 km west of Diana's Vow (20 km north-west of Rusape). It too enters the documentary domain after the visit by the Frobenius expedition in 1929. They labelled it 'Hauptmonument A', on a farm recorded as 'Fishervall-Springs' (Frobenius & Mannsfeld 1930, 97). Today the farm and site are known by the name Nyambavu.

This site doesn't appear on any of the maps we have seen, and was never declared a national monument. It is nestled in the same prime agricultural area that was reserved for white ownership under the colonial government, and became an intense area of focus for resettlement by members of the War Veterans Association, among other landless stakeholders, at various points during Robert Mugabe's post-independence regime. This formed part of a complex process of land reform fraught with tensions and contradictions, the meanings and outcomes of which have been highly contested (Mamdani 2009). Whereas at Diana's Vow a custodian is stationed quasi permanently, the heritage status of the land on which Nyambavu is located is ambiguous, with no signage or established

arrangement for outside visitors to gain access to the rock art. Private homesteads that are currently occupied lie in close proximity, with a clear line of sight between the painted panel and these domestic spaces. Rather than a cave or a rock-shelter, this site comprises essentially a single painted panel on the side of a free-standing rock, located near a dirt track, not far from a tar road. The painted imagery is located on a smooth vertical panel protected by a narrow overhanging horizontal ledge. The panel comprises figures in red and orange-yellow, including humans in a variety of postures, botanical motifs and an elephant, arranged to either side of the two largest motifs: a tall figure with a wide and particularly long body, reaching its hand into a natural fault in the rock, and a more abstract type of motif often referred to as a 'formling'.

The word 'formling' is a term coined by Frobenius (meaning 'moulding' or 'shape' in German), and is one of the only categories of motif identified by him that has continued to hold some validity in rock art research. As Siyakha Mguni explains, formlings are composite and diverse, but carry a particular graphic unity and constancy and are easily recognized, comprising 'vertically or horizontally compartmentalised stacks of oval, oblong or tubular cores' (Mguni 2015, 15). Frobenius suggested they might be landscape features such as



Figure 6.7. The 1928 copy by Joachim Lutz and Maria Weyersberg of the panel at Nyambavu (watercolour on paper, 242 × 133 cm, FBA-D3 01621). Image courtesy and copyright Frobenius-Institut an der Goethe Universität, Frankfurt am Main.

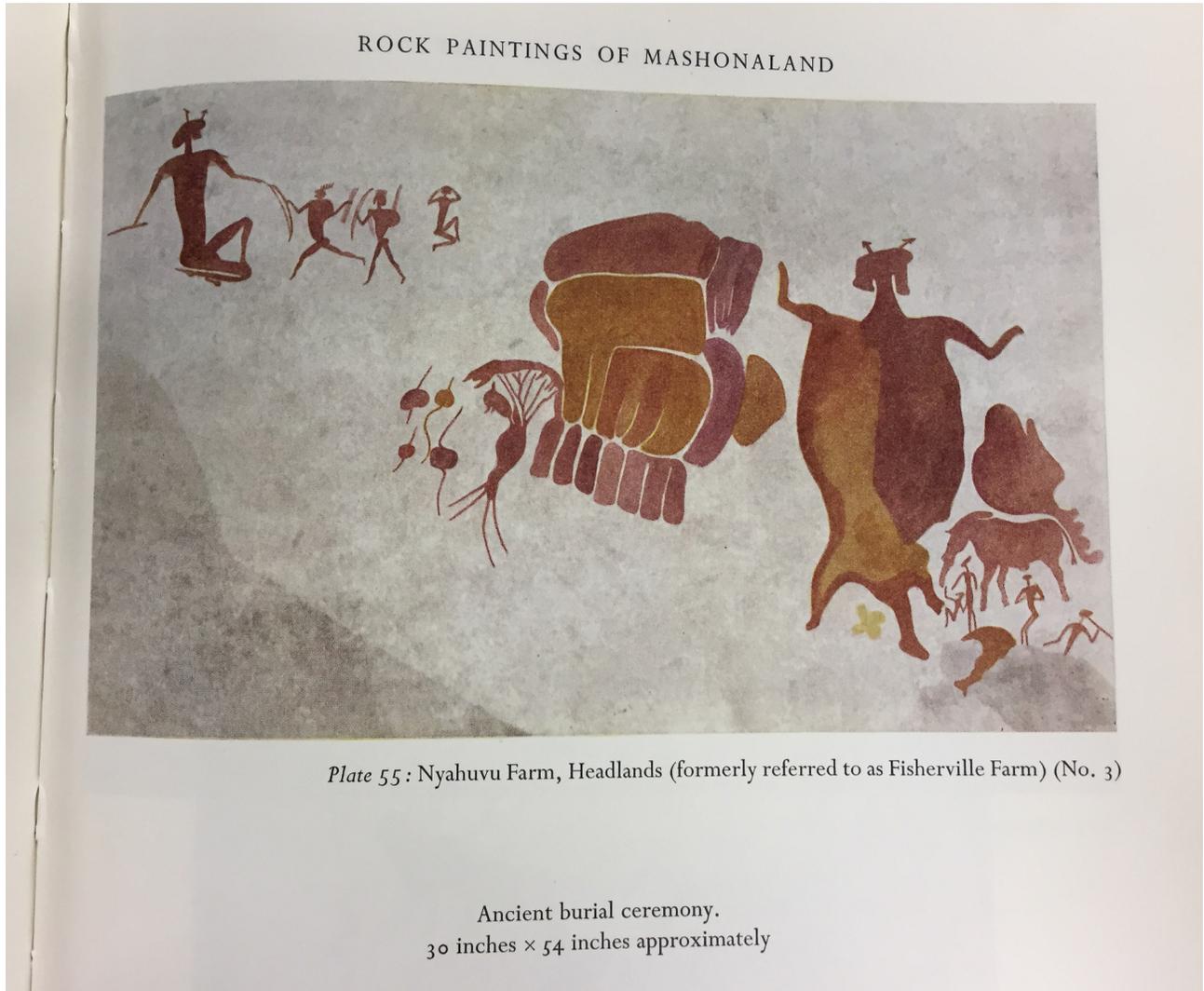


Figure 6.8. *Illustration in Goodall's section of the book, Prehistoric rock art of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (1959: plate 55) of an undated copy of the main panel at Nyambavu by Elizabeth Goodall (whereabouts of the original copy unknown).*

granite boulders or hills (1929, 333; Pager 1962, 40), and other identifications succeeded this one, guided for the most part purely by visual resemblance (Mguni 2006, 586). Based on interpretations that rely on more than one line of evidence, they are currently considered to allude to different kinds of structures in the world at different scales, such as termite mounds, bees' nests or honeycombs, or the distended fatty bodies of queen termites, needing also always to be considered 'polysemic symbols with several layers of meaning' (Mguni 2015, 26).

This panel as a whole has a high degree of visual coherence, with the same colours and patina across the rock surface. The panel's design also embodies a

particular repleteness, in terms of its internal composition, but also when viewed in its geological context, in relation to the larger rock formation on which it appears. The cluster of painted motifs is echoed by the vertical reddish-orange streaks of the sandstone and lichens that occur on the exposed rock surface visible to the right (Fig. 6.9b).

The Frobenius expedition produced a painted copy of this panel, attributed to Lutz and Weyersberg (Fig. 6.7). The clustering of figures on the rock lends itself to a landscape-oriented format and this copy captures almost the entire composition. Goodall produced a copy at some later point (Fig. 6.8; we were also unable to find the original at the ZMHS, but a display



Figure 6.9. The panel at Nyambavu: a) 1928 photograph by the Frobenius expedition (photographic negative 13 × 18 cm, FoA-09-12479). Reproduced with permission, copyright Frobenius-Institut an der Goethe Universität, Frankfurt am Main; b) Recent image of the same panel, 2016. Photograph Justine Wintjes/University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

copy is visible in the exhibits of the Mutare Museum). About this panel Goodall wrote:

At the height of the 'classical' period of art, records of happening were painted in the most dignified style and with powerful expression. The art was concerned with the death of high personages. [...] The main figure is the massive, roundish form, with a human head and arms visible; it is the dead king partly wrapped in oxhide, in preparation for the burial, which will take place within a mass of rocks, depicted in the centre, semi-naturalistically rendered. Nearby is a tree, the pods especially shown, as possibly they provide the oil for embalming. Further to the right, blood issues from the mouth of an animal, the sacrificial one necessary for the burial ceremony. The form above may be the mummified body in its final wrappings. To the left is the seated, dignified and well-poised figure of the new rule, receiving the insignia of kingship (Goodall 1959, 98).

With its undertones of cultural ontogeny, exaggerated interest in kingship and allusions to the burial practices of ancient Egypt, this interpretation is heavily influenced

by Frobenius' writings, and if we were to reinterpret the panel today through the appropriate ethnographic references we would reach a substantially different account. By contrast, the visual copy has several distinct qualities. Like the Diana's Vow copy discussed above, it includes a wider view, which pulls additional content into the lower right-hand corner, including a figure broken by the edge of an exfoliated patch. Goodall also depicted the texture of the rock and included some indication of the topography of the rock canvas.

Because of the apparent infrequency with which people have visited Nyambavu, its state of preservation is virtually unchanged since it was recorded in 1929 (Fig. 6.9). Goodall worked as a Commissioner for the Historical Monuments Commission from 1956 (Raath 1971, 4) until the end of her life, and was involved in declaring sites to become national monuments. But even though Nyambavu is arguably as beautiful, intact and accessible as Diana's Vow, it was never declared a monument. Diana's Vow served as the public face for rock art in this region. By contrast, an intimate relationship evidently existed between Goodall and Nyambavu.⁵ A single motif borrowed from the site adorns the Goodalls' grave at Warren Hills Cemetery in Harare (Fig. 6.10; Leslie Goodall was buried in the



Figure 6.10. The Goodalls' grave at Warren Hills Cemetery, 2016. Photograph Justine Wintjes/University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

same spot in 1974). The Goodall gravestone is unusual.⁶ Unlike the rectilinear forms of the surrounding gravestones, theirs is a wedge of unworked granite. The Nyambavu motif is engraved into it and painted white against the mottled pink-grey colour of the stone. Borrowed from the edge of a panel of a lesser-known site, the motif is a single seated human figure viewed in profile, its legs folded to form a triangular base, the breadth of its shoulders extended by outstretched arms. It is elegantly poised and grounded, etched into a rock that evokes the elusive, unshapeable aspects of the land.

Being and becoming

Goodall worked tirelessly in her role as curator of rock art until the day before her death (Raath 1971, 3). The art was intimately entangled in her life, as her life was creatively entangled with the art. She figures among a number of copyists engaged in a dedicated practice of close looking and creative translation, in what can be described as an enchanted relationship. Her copies embody an immersive and repetitive practice of close looking at what is there, how it was composed, and how it has changed over time, through the technical challenge of reaching towards a faithful translation in a fundamentally different medium.

Compatible with Gell's notion that artworks operate through enchantment, WJT Mitchell (2005, 47) proposes that pictures want something from us, and prompts us to think about them as much more than a by-product of social reality, but as actively constitutive of it, participating in a dynamic, recursive relationship of 'visual reciprocity'. Similarly, Keith Moxey calls for a widening of the time of the artwork beyond the horizon of its creation, in order to allow 'its status as an agent in the creation of its own reception, its *anachronic* power, [to shine] through', allowing for the "'presence" of the work of art – its ontological existence, the ways it both escapes meaning yet repeatedly provokes and determines its own interpretation – [to come] to the fore' (2013, 3; italics in the original).

Goodall's oeuvre provides powerful examples of rock art panels acting as focal points in the landscape, and as sites of visual reciprocity between people and things, capable of inserting themselves into different times. Goodall was receptive to their visual power, despite the fundamental differences between her practice as an artist and the earlier painting practices she sought to emulate, many aspects of which remained for her deeply elusive.

Our examination of Goodall's work might appear to be primarily about histories of research rather than helping, in the first instance, to deepen understandings of the work in the moment in which it was created.

Nevertheless, it points to the tangible agency that southern African rock paintings possess to influence their own destiny, to enchant observers of different generations and to inspire further creative acts, whether these take the form of pictorial replication, ethnographic interpretation or creative re-interpretation. This enchantment is something that has surely been at the heart of the art's power since its earliest manifestations.

Notes

1. The copies discussed in this paper and Goodall's wider body of work are dealt with in greater detail in De Harde's doctoral research (2019).
2. The rock art archive at the Frobenius Institute counts some 8500 copies, of which around 1193 were created in southern Africa (Schöler 2011: 105).
3. De Harde examines their relationship and respective archives in greater detail in her doctoral research (2019).
4. As shown in various documents she collected, filed unnumbered in boxes labelled, 'Goodall Papers' and 'Rock Paintings & Engravings', rock art archives of the Zimbabwe Museum of Human Sciences, Harare.
5. We benefitted from discussions with Jonathan Waters on these points.
6. We gratefully acknowledge Edward Matenga's recommendation to visit the gravestone.

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Part II
Ontologies

Chapter 7

Art, rationality and nature: human origins beyond the unity of knowledge

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Southern Africa holds a special place in the study of the deep past of humanity. From the 1950s onwards, it has become increasingly clear that the deepest roots of the human lineage can be found in Sub-Saharan Africa. While the situation certainly became more complicated after roughly 2 million years ago and the appearance of hominins in Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa remains at the centre of attention regarding the origins of both the genus *Homo* and *Homo sapiens*. While the search for one origin region for humanity is increasingly rejected as a valuable research goal, Southern Africa remains a key region for archaeological evidence that is regarded by many authors as the earliest to reflect fully modern human cognition and capacities (Scerri *et al.* 2018; Marean 2015). This situation is partly a consequence of the intense long-term research that has been conducted in the rich Middle Stone Age deposits of a number of key archaeological sites. The latter include complex sites with deep stratigraphies such as Klasies River, Blombos, Diepkloof, Pinnacle Point, Sibudu or Apollo 11 (see overview in Will *et al.* 2019).

These sites produced some spectacular and widely known artefacts, including the famous incised ochre pieces, an ochre ‘painting kit’ and an abstract drawing from Blombos Cave (Henshilwood *et al.* 2004; 2009; 2011; 2018). Research during recent decades, however, has also produced an impressive wealth of contextual information on different levels and scales. Most of the sites mentioned above contain finely stratified occupation levels that allow unprecedented high-resolution insights into past lifeways and behaviours. At the same time, long-term research in Southern Africa has generated a crucial amount of regional data that allow insights into large-scale and long-term trends and their relationships with landscape and environmental changes (see overviews in Lombard 2012; Will *et al.* 2019). The importance of Southern Africa in the context of research into the deep human past

is located not simply in its potential to be unravelled as the cradle of humanity or the origin location for all living humans. The richness and complexity of the known archaeological evidence rather creates a situation that enables a critical assessment of long-standing ideas about human origins and the processes of human cultural and biological evolution. Relevant aspects include the ability to observe the dynamics of cultural change at different scales and within different classes of objects (lithics, organic technology, personal ornaments, organization of spatial behaviours etc.) as well as their interrelationships with environmental conditions. These latter aspects have important relevance on a conceptual level because they relate to fundamental ideas about the causalities of human behaviours and their material expressions.

As mentioned above, some of the most well-known objects from the Middle Stone Age of Southern Africa are decorated ochre objects, personal ornaments (shell beads) as well as the ochre painting kit. These items are regularly described as ‘art objects’ and they are equally often related to the unique human ability for symbolic communication. In this paper, I want to discuss some general issues related to the understanding of ‘art’ in the context of human origins and deep time archaeology. I believe that this approach is not only relevant in relation to general epistemological aspects, but – as I hope to demonstrate – as a contribution towards a recalibration of the study of human evolution and origins as a global, theoretically informed and reflective endeavour. Such an orientation appears to be very much in the spirit of this edited volume, which is bringing together deep time archaeological issues with approaches and perspectives from more recent time periods. I want to draw attention here to some links between the current view of modern human origins, the dominant frameworks in this field and some deeply engrained and mostly unacknowledged views about



Figure 7.1. Map showing the sites mentioned in this chapter.

culture, nature and the nature of reality. Furthermore, I want to argue that this situation is reflective of an implicit oppressive ideology. As such, this is deeply problematic and if human origins are constructed in this way it will continue to naturalize a historically situated way of being. To emphasize the deep historical and epistemological structure of these aspects I intend to discuss some convergences between the current most widely accepted narratives of modern human origins and Plato's ideology of the ideal state with its respective consequences, contradictions and instabilities. After discussing these issues on a more general level, I will relate them back to a case study from Southern Africa and discuss their wider significance.

The paradox of modern human origins, art and culture

So-called 'art' or symbolic artefacts apparently continue to play a central role in recent discussions about modern human origins (i.e. 'people like us'). In a recent survey of the respective debate, Nowell (2010, 441) found that 'for the majority of researchers [...] it is symbolic behaviour including language and codified social relationships that defines modern behaviour'. A key aspect within this vast field has been

the conceptual and widely accepted 'decoupling of modern anatomy and modern behaviour', which was a reaction to the perceived 'lag' between the emergence of modern anatomy and modern behaviour (Caspari & Wolpoff 2013; Nowell 2010, 438). This development was seminaly influenced by the volume *The Human Revolution* and its editors C. Stringer and P. Mellars (1989). Since the 1990s, the discussion has shifted foremost towards 'cognitive archaeology', with a heavy emphasis on behavioural aspects and archaeological signifiers, at the expense of anatomical and biological-taxonomic aspects. A wide range of authors have summarized the relevant aspects of these discussions and it is not necessary to repeat them here (Hoffecker 2011; Iliopoulos & Garofoli 2016; Mellars *et al.* 2007). Overall, most researchers explicitly or implicitly equate behavioural modernity with the presence of a biological capacity or potential for modern or symbolically mediated thought/thinking (Porr 2014). Following Deacon (quoted in Henshilwood & Marean 2003, 635), symbols are 'representative of social conventions, tacit agreements, or explicit codes that link one thing to another and are mediated by some formal or merely agreed-upon link irrespective of any physical characteristics of either sign or object'. Therefore, following this definition, objects are of symbolic

significance when they are purposely formed, but do not have a functional dimension beyond an assumed reference to an immaterial meaning. This definition explains the significance that is being attached to the presence of patches of pigment in Middle Stone Age sites and engraved pieces of ochre or ostrich eggs as well as pierced molluscs or beads (Henshilwood & Marean 2003; Henshilwood *et al.* 2011; Wadley 2001). One could consequently expect that a concern with symbolic forms and processes would be at the centre of attention and the variability and mechanisms of cultural expressions would form the focus of models and analogies in Palaeolithic archaeology and palaeoanthropology. However, looking at the dominant approaches and research strategies within Palaeolithic archaeology and human evolutionary studies this is clearly not the case. In fact, the treatment of symbolic items within those fields is patchy, unstable and contradictory. Rather than being at the centre of attention, they tend to disappear in myriad studies about adaptations, raw material procurement and resource exploitation strategies, etc. (Porr 2013; 2014; Porr & Matthews 2017).

This orientation relates to the deep Western tradition that identifies humanity with the presence of reason, rational thought and syntactic/symbolic language (Corbey & Roebroeks 2001; Stoczkowski 2002). Furthermore, I want to argue here that this kind of structure is related to deeply held convictions about the structure of nature, or even reality, and the respective human relationships with it. In turn, these convictions largely determine the role of human language or culture. As I will argue below, in a quite paradoxical fashion, the current orientation effectively devalues 'culture' or language as an independent causal factor. This configuration appears to have no alternative. The status of nature and the status of rationality remain non-negotiable to such an extent that they are not even included in the negotiation (Porr & Matthews 2017). These foundations are certainly related to a modernist orientation, but they also have a long history. It seems to me that these aspects have been undertheorized within the field of human evolutionary studies. To start a conversation along these lines and to make a very long and complex story very short I want to present a brief discussion of Plato's understanding of the epistemological status and value of images. This is a small but significant aspect of Bredekamp's (2010) 'theory of image agency', *Theorie des Bildakts*.

Art, nature and humanity

I want to begin my exploration with the pre-Socratics' view of nature, rationality and Plato's attitude towards

images, which leads to the latter's ideas about an ideal state. The so-called pre-Socratics were an assorted group of thinkers from different parts of the Greek speaking world, who were active over a period of more than 150 years from the sixth to the fifth centuries BC. Although they never formed a unified movement, most of them were interested in finding new material explanations of nature and in replacing traditional ideas of the cosmos that were dominated by anthropoid deities 'with newer, "scientific" models based on the properties of material substances' (Whitmarsh 2015, 53). Although the pre-Socratics' contributions should not be understood as a victory of rationalism over myth along the steady march toward objective truth about the world, they nevertheless represent a significant shift in the ways of conceptualizing reality and its relationship with the divine. During this time, new types of questions were also being asked. Anthropomorphic gods were increasingly replaced by abstract embodiments of nature and celestial order. Although the sources are incomplete, it is possible to reconstruct a picture of a kind of radical materialism that is compatible with modern atheistic naturalism (see, e.g., Descola 2013). Consequently, the pre-Socratics proposed an understanding of the cosmos that is independent from an individual's perspective and that continues to exist irrespective of the fate of individual elements. In order to understand reality, one has to take a neutral and detached view of it (Whitmarsh 2015, 58–9). In the early fifth century BC, Parmenides argued forcefully that the evidence of the senses cannot be trusted and truth could only be achieved through reason alone. He was succeeded, for example, by Zeno, who is famous for his paradoxical arguments that were designed to deny the possibility of motion. For Zeno, the perception of movement was an illusion and reality was constant and unchanging. Within this philosophical tradition, observation became overall misleading. This emerging distinction between the material cosmos and the realm of abstract reason (*logos*) was to have a fundamental and lasting influence on the development of Western philosophy and theology. In fact, although the original intention was to question the influence of anthropomorphic deities, this overall orientation allowed the re-emergence of a new form of theism. While the material world was downgraded and the value of the senses was denied, reason itself was deified. Parmenides himself saw the discovery of truth as a mystical journey. A hierarchy was thus created between mind and body, the rational and the sensory, divine truth and mortal experience. This hierarchy would ultimately shape the development of early Christianity and Christian theology. The evangelist John's opening of the gospels is in fact

very Parmenidian in spirit: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. "Word" is *logos*, which could also be translated as "reason"' (Whitmarsh 2015, 62).

Plato developed exactly those pre-Socratic writings and ideas further and promoted an ever more powerful metaphysical agenda that proves to be highly influential into the present day. To illustrate the relevance of this thinking in the context of the questions of this paper, I want to briefly present art historian Horst Bredekamp's discussion of Plato's understanding of the epistemological status and value of images. This is a small but significant aspect of Bredekamp's 'theory of image agency', *Theorie des Bildakts* (Bredekamp 2010). In contrast to theology, images have never gained a central position in philosophy. One of the main reasons for this situation is usually related to Plato's alleged attitude towards images, which he saw as an expression of minor importance or as having a negative influence. It is Plato's well-known cave allegory that is given central importance. In this, Plato imagines a subterranean space in which people experience the shadows that are cast against the cave wall as reality whereas they are only secondary reflections of objects that are not directly perceived. According to this allegory, the people in the cave take the experience of the shadows for granted and they do not realize that they are only reflections of a world that is far removed from the truth. The people are consequently not aware of their delusional condition and only wise men, who are near the cave's entrance, are aware of the full situation. The significance of this allegory for the theme of this paper and an assessment of the role of images in human evolution is related to the relationship it constructs to notions of truth and rationality.

Following the ideas mentioned above, Plato argued that the whole world that is accessible to the senses are just epiphenomena of a true hidden reality. Images and, indeed, any artefacts consequently either obstruct or misrepresent reality. This thinking was enhanced in relation to the evaluation of images and sculptures, because art itself was seen as having originated from the act of shadow play (in the sense of the cave allegory). Consequently, Plato is known for his hostility towards images as a tool for knowledge representation or acquisition. This was foremost directed at images that supposedly replicate reality and are produced as its imitations. In *Politeia* he develops the argument that artists can only ever achieve the status of manufacturers of shadows (following the logic of the cave allegory) and consequently are guilty of perpetuating an illusionary and wrong perception of reality. It is because of this orientation that Bredekamp (2010, 42–3) argues that Plato's ideal state would in

fact be a totalitarian and oppressive system that would strictly censure individual, creative and artistic expressions. In short, it would suppress individual voices. The assumption of one universal nature leads here ultimately to oppression and violence, because the universal and objective nature is logically accessible only through one rational method of epistemology.

However, while Plato is widely known for his hostility to creativity and images, Bredekamp has further argued that this hostility is in fact very much fuelled by a recognition of the *power* of images. This power is related to images' ability to tap into childish, sensuous and ordinary desires, which are removed from the more developed mental abilities. Bredekamp makes clear that Plato's cave allegory presents *ex negativo* a strong acceptance of the power of images. However, this power is related to deception and in their ability to hide and distort reality. The power of images is clearly constructed as being in their power to seduce. They are related to their ability to create strong emotional reactions. Not surprisingly, there is clearly a hierarchy of human experiences involved and an evaluation of how knowledge and insight can be achieved. According to Plato, images are powerful, but deceptive devices. Although Plato himself has not developed a 'theory of art' in explicit form, all of his statements make clear that he was convinced about the active power that is inherent in images (Bredekamp 2010, 38).

It is because of this mostly implicit acceptance that Plato's attitude towards images is deeply ambiguous. Because of the power of images, they can also act as educational devices – as long as they represent true or desirable features or aspects. Despite his general hostility towards images Plato nevertheless used them to illustrate the central features of his ideal state and in their ability to selectively represent, which allows the artist to draw attention to important and crucial features of reality. One can therefore say that Plato is almost cynically aware of the power of images to manipulate, which makes his vision of the ideal state even more problematic.

Behind this understanding, nevertheless, stands a view of human beings as being partly outside of nature themselves. This is the product of the dualism that was proposed by Plato according to which human beings have the ability (due to their soul) to know reality through rationality. In Plato's case, clearly his idea of the value of art and images is related to a conscious and rational human being, who is actively interpreting the world and makes inferences based on his or her situation or perspective. This position is inherently unstable and open to manipulation or insight. There is no mechanistic 'information transfer' here between people and (art) objects. This is further

elaborated in Plato's line allegory in which he sees graphical representations and images as secondary to higher thoughts and ideas, but at the same time necessary to develop and understand them. It seems that they serve as mental scaffolds or launch pads for more complex, higher and purely mental rational elaborations (Bredekamp 2010, 41). Bredekamp therefore argues that according to Plato, images are seen simultaneously as the foundations of human thought and successful actions and as obstructing knowledge of the truth. Between those two poles, his understanding of the world took place. Plato was only hostile to those images that he regarded as a threat to the community, whereas he welcomed, defended and supported those images that he saw as support to the civilizing process. Behind both extremes lies a deeply held fear of encountering within images a sphere that the philosopher cannot control (Bredekamp 2010, 42).

I believe that this thinking has been preserved until the present day and can be seen in the equally ambiguous treatment of so-called art objects within Palaeolithic archaeology and human evolution. On the one hand, images and art are the ultimate markers of humanity, the origins of symbolism and modern symbolic thought. But at the same time, they are viewed with deep suspicion and are excluded from the actual explanations of human behaviour. It is ultimately the underlying rational structure of reality that is significant and not the dissenting voices that contradict it, which will ultimately be brought back in line by the secret police of natural selection. It is in these general aspects that the convergences emerge between the logic of Plato's ideal state which rests on a universal structure of nature and the current most widely accepted narratives of modern human origins and the accompanying evolutionary explanatory framework. To explore these links further, one can engage with an aspect that has not received any attention so far in this paper. This is the question how both of these perspectives conceptualize human beings themselves and their relationship to reality and perception.

In his writings of the middle period, Plato develops his most famous theories that depend on a series of parallel oppositions: body/soul, matter/spirit, this world/the next, senses/mind, particulars/forms. The so-called 'forms' that are mentioned here are 'otherworldly, abstract distillations of all of the things what we witness with our senses in the world around us' (Whitmarsh 2015, 133–5). His dialogue *Phaedo*, set on Socrates's last day, argues for a kinship between the soul and the forms. On death, the souls of the virtuous are permanently released from the confines of the body, whereas those that are beholden to bodily

pleasures are condemned to reincarnation. Plato had by this stage begun to correlate this distinction between particular instance and abstract form with a distinction between the mundane and the supernatural. The forms exist not in this world, but in a higher plane, accessible only to the mind. For Plato, consequently, human beings are ultimately characterized by an immortal soul that is separated from the mundane and physical world. But at the same time, this soul is primed for understanding the actual and true characteristics of the world, because the soul is in touch with the forms that lies beyond the world as perceived through the senses. Because of these qualities, human beings can become those wise men, who are able to understand the whole arrangement described in the cave allegory.

This understanding sounds far too mystical to have any relevance for today's evolutionary understanding of modern human origins. However, this is not the case. Within archaeology there has been a lot of discussion about the exact processes and the character of the origins of modern humans. Apart from arguments about the dating of evidence and events, the discussion has been divided into an argument between a gradual and a sudden appearance of fully modern behaviour as well as the existence of a clearly identifiable package of modern human behaviour and so on (Henshilwood & Marean 2003; McBrearty & Brooks 2000; Mellars & Stringer 1989; Nowell 2010). However, it seems to me that it is often overlooked that despite the differences that are expressed by the researchers involved, modern humanity is currently understood implicitly and explicitly as a genetic capacity for modern human thought or symbolism. This idea of a capacity appears to move under the radar of critical engagement. As it is required by Darwinian principles, it is assumed to be present as a genetic endowment that is shared by all members of the modern human species, *Homo sapiens sapiens*. This capacity is assumed to be present even if it is not expressed. As such, it really is something immaterial (Ingold 1995; Porr 2014). At the same time, it is also regarded as something that has very specific characteristics because it is seen as incredibly powerful in that it allows modern human beings to *efficiently adapt* to all kinds of environments. In this respect it does not reflect one kind of environment, but basic and fundamental aspects of reality itself. As *Homo sapiens sapiens* is the most successful species on the planet, one could argue that *Homo sapiens sapiens*' cognition also most comprehensively reflects nature. In fact, this idea is virtually a necessity if it is assumed that organisms ultimately reflect a process of adaptation to a material environment. The most modern and

recent version comes in the form of a 'capacity' for modern human behaviour, which is constructed as a genetic and biological endowment, and which is supposedly shared by all members of the modern human species. This immaterial capacity (that is different from anatomical/physical modernity) is constructed in a fashion that is surprisingly like Plato's idea of an eternal soul. Furthermore, according to modern human evolutionary thinking, this cognitive capacity is also a reflection of adaptive processes and therefore, in a sense, a reflection of 'real' and universal physical pressures over time.

In this context, even more similarities can be observed, which can again be illustrated by the treatment of so-called artistic or non-utilitarian objects. The modern evolutionary framework is as suspicious towards images as Plato was. The reason for this similarity can again be found in the understanding of the relationship between nature and human beings and their products. Images and artistic objects seem to establish a realm that the philosopher/scientist cannot control. Their relationship to precise mathematical calculations is questionable and they are also tied to an individual's perception and perspective. They can therefore confuse others. Because of these reasons, Plato wanted to ban images from his ideal state and only wanted to allow those that enable access to the truth (even if *per definitionem* they can never truly represent the reality of the 'forms').

Interestingly, a very similar situation exists in the narratives about modern human origins. In this literature, we find two solutions to the problem of how to deal with the strange issue of artistic objects and their evaluation in the context of the origins of humanity. The first is to exclude them from the ideal state – that is, from full modern humanity. This is exactly what is currently being done with those unfortunate individuals, who only produced art items but not Upper Palaeolithic/Late Stone Age technology in Africa and the Near East. They might look like modern humans, but they were not fully modern (Klein & Edgar 2002; Mellars 2006). Similar processes can also be observed in the context of Eurasian Neanderthals (Nowell 2010; Villa & Roebroeks 2014). The status of these human beings remains unclear, but there is certainly widespread reluctance to allow them inclusion in the ideal state of modern humanity. The second solution is represented by the widely known analyses of art items as actually functional or utilitarian. Only those items are deemed relevant that have an underlying function. An example would be Gamble's (1991) seminal explanation of the distribution and function of the well-known Gravettian female statuettes where the actual form, context, materiality and

sensual experience, etc., is unimportant for their role in information exchange and social insurance policy networks. The current framework consequently tends towards the same ambiguous and contradictory attitude towards images or art objects as Plato's vision of an ideal state.

Art, nature and the unity of knowledge?

From the considerations above, one can deduce that the ideal human being who fulfils humanity's capacity is a rational *Übermensch*, who cannot be confused by false imagery or expressions (Ingold 2000). In fact, these *Übermenschen* are very much the same as Plato's wise men (and, indeed, they are mostly men). They can understand the whole situation that was illustrated in the cave allegory. As was mentioned above, according to Plato, people can do this, because it is already a metaphysical and divine characteristic of the human immortal soul. In the modern version of human origins, this is presented in the end very much in the same way. The justification is no longer metaphysical and divine, but rather because of adaptive processes and the supposed fit that the Darwinian mechanism provided for human beings between their cognition and the physical world or nature. Modern wise men are then also able to judge the status of other people's knowledge and the realism and value of other people's images and other cultural expressions. This evaluation is done not in relation to their own view or perspective, but effectively in relation to the relationship between reality/nature and the Other's statements and material expressions. The wise man himself is outside and beyond these relationships. Consequently, and paradoxically, culture and language – those elements that ultimately made humans human – are devalued and taken out of the equation as irrelevant. Statements of the Other are indeed not important in these contexts. These are ultimately treated as false ways of knowing and perceiving. I have drawn attention to this aspect elsewhere in the context of Palaeolithic archaeology, human evolution and hunter-gatherer research (Porr 2001; Porr & Matthews 2016). However, they are also regularly expressed in claims for the possibility and necessity of unifying knowledge (cf. Kuper & Marks 2011):

Without the instruments and accumulated knowledge of the natural sciences – physics, chemistry, and biology – humans are trapped in a cognitive prison. They are like intelligent fish born in a deep, shadowed pool. Wondering and restless, longing to reach out, they think about the world outside. They invent ingenious speculations and myths about the origin of the

confining waters, of the sun and the sky and the stars above, and the meaning of their own existence. But they are wrong, always wrong (Wilson 1999, 49).

This almost completely reflects a Platonic attitude towards knowledge and the differential access to universal nature. It is not those people in the cave that have access to true knowledge. They are deceived by the primitive power of cave wall images. The illusions of those people cannot be taken seriously. They are misguided and based on a false understanding of nature and reality, as well as false inferences about those relationships. They do not realize that they live in an illusionary world. They do not realize that they do not understand the universal characteristics of nature. It is this configuration that provides the implicit or explicit justification for excluding statements by Others from explanations of human evolution. In human evolutionary publications, statements from research subjects, i.e. ethnographic partners, are usually completely absent. They are cleaned and silenced. Both in narratives of human evolution and in Plato's ideal state, these aberrations of the individual are excluded. Only clean rationality counts and remains. Surely, those strange and weird statements, those expressions of alterity, cannot be taken seriously. Of course, science can still reflect on these curiosities and can establish their value in functional, economic terms, so that they still might have some value for the community. We can also respect these on ethical and moral grounds, but we surely cannot take them seriously epistemologically or ontologically.

These considerations, questions about cultural universalism and relativism, have been recurring themes within social and cultural anthropology for the last 150 years (see e.g. Engelke 2017 for a recent overview). How do language and culture relate to external reality and people's thought processes? Recently, these aspects have been discussed more extensively in the context of the so-called 'ontological turn' in which basic categories of anthropological research have received extensive and critical attention (Alberti *et al.* 2011; Holbraad & Pedersen 2017). Should we take anthropological research statements by Indigenous people seriously, how and under which conditions? For example, Viveiros de Castro (2015, 77) has discussed an argument by Rorty in which he asserts that 'Western liberal intellectuals' have to accept the fact 'that there are lots of visions which simply cannot be taken seriously'. This statement was made in the context of the validity of different perspectives and views in the intercultural encounter and the choice that must be made between 'solidarity'

and 'objectivity'. Viveiros de Castro argues that Rorty's distinction rests on the idea of a universal nature that is opposed to a multitude of different cultures. These differences between cultures can possibly be accepted on moral or ethical grounds. However, in comparison to Western science, the multitude of cultures is nothing but Pandora's box, 'full to the brim with fantasies, delusions, and hallucinations – world worthy of "the Nazis or the Amazonians"' (Viveiros de Castro 2015, 79). Consequently, Viveiros de Castro's solution is a radical break from these foundations. To arrive at a deep and serious appreciation and understanding of cultural variability, he proposed the adoption of 'multi-naturalism' and perspectivism. One needs to question the idea of the world as being composed of one universal nature and many cultures. If this understanding prevails, there is no escape from an ultimately violent and exclusive ideology (see also Viveiros de Castro 2014).

Graeber (2015) has criticized Viveiros de Castro's arguments as exclusive themselves and essentializing the Other's ontology and worldview. A related point has been made by Willerslev (2013), who has argued further that it is very important to take the Other's perspective seriously, but not too seriously. Those critiques are both related to the acknowledgment of the actual ongoing processes of the creation of social and human life. Both argue that what we are aiming for in terms of understanding past (and even present) behaviour are not abstract structures and patterns, but the means that people use to make sense of the world. As such, they are inherently unstable, dynamic and possibly contradictory. The same applies consequently to the material remains that are visible, which are themselves ways to make sense of and shape and reshape the world, with all possible contradictions and inconsistencies that are inherent in dynamic life. The tension that has been identified by Bredekamp (2010), the agency of the relationally established object, will not go away and it will not be silenced.

Bredekamp (2010) argues in his book that it is the artefact, the art work, that establishes humanity and human thinking. As such, it very much precedes so-called modern human origins. I would add that such an approach effectively undermines the idea of a human existence that is mainly driven by rational considerations. As was mentioned above, the introduction of so-called symbolic thought seems to have virtually no impact on human behaviour within current evolutionary studies (because the latter is still mostly explained in terms of efficiency criteria). Culture and art seem to only get in the way and only become useful as tools to further enhance the adaptability and fitness in terms of those deeper rational

algorithms that drive organic evolution. In contrast, with a rejection of a universal understanding of nature, rationality, in the modern western sense, is a possibility, an option, not a necessity. Such an understanding also means that culture does not just become a noise at the edge of the stream of human evolution. As a fundamental possibility and problem, it should move to the centre of attention.

Back to South Africa

In the light of these considerations, I want to draw attention to a recent paper on the Middle Stone Age of Southern Africa (Kandel *et al.* 2016). The authors examined contexts, which are roughly dated between 190,000 to 30,000 years ago, which appears to be highly significant, because for most researchers it was during this time in Southern Africa that the characteristics of modern human behaviour evolved (see recent overview in Hoffecker 2017). The authors conducted a comparative analysis of a range of sites from the chronological contexts mentioned above and concentrated on assessing cultural complexity. They also related their findings to a sophisticated analysis of the respective environmental conditions through time. The summary of their findings is as follows:

*The geographical analyses show only minor differences in landscape selection for localities among the four analytical classes, while the ecological analyses indicate no dramatic shifts in habitat preference overall. These factors suggest that MSA people were not specific in their habitat choice, and that cultural adaptation functions independent of environmental change. Since climate is not the driving force, we propose that cultural performance steers the expansions and contractions of populations. While the range of cultural capacities gradually increases over time, the process is discontinuous; as fashions come and go, innovations are not necessarily maintained. These data suggest that flexibility in behaviour represents the single most successful adaptation of MSA people (Kandel *et al.* 2016, 659).*

Because of the failure to establish correlations between environmental conditions and cultural practices, the authors concluded that ‘cultural adaptation functions independently of environmental change’ and that ‘cultural performance steers the expansions and contractions of populations’. This is a curious set of conclusions because it seemingly contradicts the most basic assumptions about the supposed and generally

accepted causalities of human evolution and modern human origins. They seem to question the dominant explanatory framework that views culture and cultural practices primarily as adaptations to an external natural environment. It rather seems that there is independent cultural variability all the way down. Of course, these insights would not be at all unusual in social anthropology, sociology, in the wider field of the social sciences or within the humanities (Ingold 2007). In the study of the deep human past, however, such a reorientation has significant consequences.

These considerations call for a new engagement with the characteristics of ‘culture’, how it relates to human cognition and how it relates to the natural environment. If we cannot refer to rationality, efficiency and adaptive mechanisms, what are the processes that cause cultural traditions and practices to emerge, persist and disappear? Does this imply that culture effectively adapts to itself? Does this mean that culture constructs nature? These are significant and important questions that free our vision of the deep human past from the tyranny of mono-causal explanatory schemes that allow only one frame of reference. So-called art objects are not means of adaptation to an independent nature, they are rather the means through which people socially construct their reality. These processes are fundamentally and ontologically variable. This insight draws attention to the undertheorized fact that a unified view of nature has played and continues to play a crucial role in suppressing cultural variability and viewpoints.

The modern narrative of the origins of modern humans is an imagination of what happened in the deep past. But this origin event is still understood to be encapsulated in the present, within the universal capacity for modern human behaviour that arose thousands of years ago in our deep time ancestors. Both views are projections and imaginations. They are both fantasies that mirror each other, because they are products of the same logic of a timeless nature and reality. Because of this uniting structure, the future becomes the fulfilment of the origin. Origin and future are nothing but reflections of an eternal and universal understanding of nature and humanity’s relationship to it. In that sense, the origin, present and the future are ideal reflections of each other, and both are ideal reflections of supposedly universal characteristics of nature (see also Ingold 2000, 2004). As outlined above, this understanding has a very long tradition within Western thought. In contrast, as I have argued in this paper, archaeology must be about integrating voices and perspectives beyond the Western academy and rationality (Rizvi 2015). It is about taking local cultural variability fundamentally seriously. It argues against

universal explanations and the imposition of totalizing schemes. It argues for bringing back those many voices and perspectives that have always been there.

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Chapter 8

Birds, beasts and relatives: animal subjectivities and frontier encounters

Rachel King & Mark McGranaghan

In southern African rock art, depictions of animals are often treated as indices of subsistence strategies and, by extension, as markers of identities associated with those strategies. Sheep and cattle are perhaps the best examples of this: the former are linked to the arrival of pastoralists in the sub-continent around 350–150 BC, and the latter to material culture associated with Bantu-speaking agropastoralists arriving as early as AD 253–453 (Orton *et al.* 2013; Orton 2015; Sadr 2015; but see Lander & Russell 2018).¹ Rock arts featuring these animals have been interpreted as disclosing relationships between indigenous hunter-gatherer painters and livestock-keeping newcomers (Manhire *et al.* 1986; Campbell 1986, 1987; Morris 1988; Dowson 1994; Loubser & Laurens 1994; Jerardino 1999; Jolly 2007). In these interpretations, and amidst the serious weight given to the cosmological potency of the livestock depicted, these animals are also read as a sort of technology: as mechanisms enabling new means of subsistence, of interaction with other humans and the environment, and of transforming notions of property and ownership. There is further chronological value to considering these figures as signalling socio-economic change: the earliest faunal remains of sheep and cattle in southern Africa, and archival evidence suggesting that horses introduced into the subcontinent in the seventeenth century AD had arrived in the Maloti-Drakensberg by the first decades of the 1800s (Challis 2009; Swart 2010, 31–4, 41–2), mean that paintings of these animals can serve as a *terminus post quem* for some of the art.

However, interpreting this art often puts rock art scholars in something of a bind with regard to the ethnographic data that we draw upon. Iconography in the art directs us to the suites of ethnography that best ‘fit’ the imagery in question, and to constructing analogies between the two bodies of evidence. Depictions of nasal bleeding and non-real somatic sensations

are cues to link these paintings with ‘trance’ dances documented in the Kalahari and elsewhere in southern Africa, notably in Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd’s ethnographic archive of interviews with !Xam Bushmen (San) (Lewis-Williams 1981, 2002; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004). Women painted wearing bandoliers and participating in ecstatic performances have been seen as indicating divination practices common amongst southern Nguni-speaking communities (Prins & Hall 1994; Hammond-Tooke 1998, 1999; Jolly 2005). Rock arts featuring sheep and cattle amidst well-established iconography such as bees and eland direct us to hunter-gatherer ethnographies to identify the paths through which domestic(able) newcomers may have been connected to more familiar biota (Lander 2014; Russell & Lander 2015).

The interpretive process thus begins with an inference about the painters’ identity, albeit on a broad scale. If iconography leads us to a particular corpus of ethnography, we tend to stay within that corpus for the course of our interpretation. There are exceptions to this: Sam Challis (2012, 2014, 2016) and Pieter Jolly (1996, 2006), for instance, have suggested that we should not be so narrowly-focused on a small selection of ethnographies and instead broaden our scope, observing that there is no one-to-one correspondence between makers of rock art and the people described in the literature. We should be willing to follow iconographic cues throughout multiple ethnographic corpuses, bearing in mind the dangers of creating false equivalencies or essentializing cultural features as we move across diverse bodies of evidence. We should also be prepared to interrogate our basis for excluding some ethnographic material from our interpretation.

These suggestions force us to confront the problems with approaching pieces of iconography as refracting identity, acknowledging that in reality there

is very little in much imagery to indicate that it was exclusively the preserve of one distinct group of people in the past. For instance, Khoekhoe art has been treated as distinct from ‘traditional’ San and Bantu-speaker arts – despite the historical, anthropological, and linguistic evidence that clearly establishes far-reaching cultural connections between Khoe-speaking pastoralists and hunter-gatherers. Instead, the partitioning of Khoekhoe art is based on its perceived ‘stylistic’ distinctiveness – especially the presence of often engraved geometric motifs – from fine-line art, although the two styles can exist within the same panel. This interpretive relationship between identity, art, and ethnography may indicate where rock art scholarship is vulnerable to accusations of essentialization: the analogical reasoning employed here looks as though the art is being taken as representative of identity, and particularly of an identity contained by the parameters (historical or geographical) of a given ethnography.²

As one means of circumventing this bind, we put aside questions of identity in this paper. Instead, we focus on relations between humans and non-humans depicted in rock arts of the last two millennia. This was a long era of frontiers – domesticate, economic, colonial, and so on – in which humans were accompanied by animals newly arrived in the sub-continent or shifted from long-standing ecological roles. We suggest examining how relationships between humans and non-humans were disclosed iconographically *without* first recourse to establishing ethnographic analogy. Of course, this is not to undermine the work already done on frontier rock art, nor is it to deny the value of analogies such as the shamanistic model in rock art studies. Inasmuch as rock art interpretations attempt to recover statements about what it meant to *be* a ‘Bushman’, Khoe pastoralist, farmer, and so on, we ask whether there might be other ways of *being* that we can glimpse without an ethnographic lens – or at least without a narrowly-defined one. Thus, we dwell at length on the relationships disclosed through imagery and iconography, and resist interpretation through formal ethnographic analogy.

Our approach draws on the recent anthropological and archaeological turns toward animal subjectivities. We consider whether these approaches emphasizing the relationships between animals and their humans can offer a way of describing past painters without resorting to subsistence-based identities that reaffirm economic partitions among contemporary populations. We suggest that although some rock arts and specific panels may index identity, this is not the only useful analytical framework available.

We focus on corpuses of rock art in two different regions of southern Africa – the Strandberg and

the Maloti-Drakensberg Mountains (Fig. 8.1) – and specifically on conflationary images there: depictions of, for instance, ostrich-horse hybrids and human-cow therianthropes. These arts are in many respects very different from one another (one engraved and one painted, one very recent and one perhaps older, focused on a different range of species), but they both contain useful insights into the ways in which different materials, physicalities, and beings interacted on southern African frontiers. As such, we consider these arts as describing past communities whose identities may have referenced relationships other than those contained in current considerations of economic or ethnic affiliations.

Relatives and relativism

John Knight’s (2005, 1, emphasis original) statement that animals are ‘*parts* of human society rather than just *symbols* of it’ encapsulates the anthropological turn towards human-animal subjectivities: the argument that animals have agency and active social roles, rather than being just resources or representations. This perspective resonates with previous southern African rock art studies, which have long suggested that painted animals not only indexed the worldview of the painter(s) but were also actively involved in creating it. The efflorescence of interest in how ‘personhood’ in the present and past could be accorded to humans and non-humans – constituting the ‘new animisms’ within a broader interdisciplinary ‘ontological turn’ – encourages taking these observations further (Bird-David 1999; Descola 2013 [2009]).

Among the most compelling calls to take ‘seriously a plurality of worlds and not just of worldviews’ (Candea 2010, 243) are those that have come from anthropologists specializing in hunter-gatherer and horticulturalist societies of South America and the circumpolar north (Descola 1992; Viveiros de Castro 1998; Willerslev 2007). This scholarship has focused on how these groups attribute personhood status and agency to non-human actors, commonly through the circulation and exchange of a similar core ‘vital force’ shared among beings (Ingold 2000, 113). In these ontologies, animals are particularly well-suited to personhood: their capacity for willful, independent motility affords them a major means of inter-species communication (Hoffmeyer 2008, 15–6), and hunting emerges as a primary means whereby humans can acquire animals’ vital forces, or interact with non-humans more generally. The reverse exchange – from humans to animals – has been described in terms of ‘shamanic’ practice, with ‘shaman’ serving as a term for a specialist who conducts relationships with non-human beings and



Figure 8.1. Regional locator map showing the Strandberg Hills and Maloti-Drakensberg study areas, also indicating the wider area of historical rock engravings around the Strandberg.

regulates the forces that flow between human and non-human society (Harvey 2010).

These ‘animic’ ontologies – and in particular their intersection with shamanic practices – almost beg comparison with southern African hunter-gatherer and rock art studies, not least because of the prominent position that shamanism has occupied in the latter. David Lewis-Williams’ (2002) seminal interpretive work in the region has cast hunter-gatherer art as essentially religious, concerned with the actions of specialists who mastered trance experiences to regulate flows of potency from animal sources. However, proponents of animic ontologies and shamanistic interpretations have both emphasized that these models should not be applied in a simplified or universalized manner to hunter-gatherer societies (Dowson 2009; Descola 2013 [2009], 129): in formulating generalized ontological models, Ingold and Descola both allow for differences *between* hunter-gatherer ontologies and, conversely, similarities shared by groups practicing markedly

different subsistence strategies (Ingold 2000, 69, 112–3). Indeed, Descola (2013 [2009], 121–2) divides his ontological types by how they describe combinations of the interiority and physicality of beings rather than by the socio-economic relations between them. In other words, ontological differences come from the biological and immaterial ‘stuff’ that exists within a unique actor, and where this interfaces with the surrounding world; subsistence and economic differences come from how different actors apprehend this interface and seek to control it. In this, Descola’s schema resonates perhaps more strongly than other animists with the posthumanist or anti-anthropocentric suggestions of, for instance, Giles Deleuze (Deleuze & Guattari 1980) and Donna Haraway (1997): we should consider where ontologies are characterized by transition and process, by their suspension between categories such as nature/culture and human/non-human, which in turn help to show how unstable those categories really are (Braidotti 2006, 199–200).

This last point is especially important for our discussion because we explore rock art corpuses pertaining to animals that can be described as wild, domesticated, and something in between. Elsewhere (McGranaghan & Challis 2016), one of us has argued that animic or relational ontologies offer a useful conceptual vocabulary for understanding how southern African rock arts disclose notional associations of ‘nice’ behaviours and tame relationships between humans and non-humans. This taming framework – drawn from an understanding of animal ontology rooted in detailed linguistic analysis of relevant ethnography – offers a way of overcoming a longstanding dualism between shamanism and hunting magic in southern African rock art studies, a dualism that ultimately describes a debate over how to understand *control* of animals in the art and in the past. Taming rejects control as a governing relational ontology in favour of right conduct, describing specialized knowledge of how ‘to inculcate or maintain desirable relationships between human and non-human persons’ (McGranaghan & Challis 2016, 580; cf. Hill 2011).

This ontological shift indicates a way beyond another enduring dualism: wild/domestic, describing both the ethological, genetic, and physiological distinctions between animal species, and the economic distinctions between agropastoral and hunter-gatherer economies (Ingold 2000, 61–76; Oma 2010; Mlekuž 2013). Again, these shifts in thinking about the nature of humans and animals urge us to explore a new conceptual vocabulary to describe not just how wild and domestic economies differed, but how they co-existed. This, in turn, refers us to the African continent’s ‘moving frontiers’ (Lane 2004; cf. Kopytoff 1986), places where different populations and economies encountered, accommodated, and clashed with one another, and how these encounters were felt over varying durations.

The arrival of domesticates (cattle, sheep, goats, and cultigens) and associated technologies (metallurgy and pottery) in southern Africa, associated with several migration episodes between c. 350 BC–AD 400, has spurred lively debate over the nature of the relationships between these ‘newcomers’ and ‘firstcomers’ (Whitelaw & Hall 2016; Russell 2017). Two major archaeological debates over the nature of hunter-gatherer interactions with new pastoralists implicate questions about whether the former were capable – physically, technologically, socially – of incorporating new, domesticated animals into their economy and worldview more broadly (Solway & Lee 1990; Wilmsen & Denbow 1990; Hall & Smith 2000; Mitchell 2004; Fauvelle-Aymar & Sadr 2008; Mitchell *et al.* 2008).³ Archaeological evidence distinguishing

between forager and pastoralist signatures in the western subcontinent is ambiguous, and more often than not leads to the conclusion that, materially speaking, hunting, gathering, and livestock transhumance all *looked* broadly similar (Arthur 2008; Sadr 2008). Meanwhile, historical ethnographic work on nineteenth-century communities of hunter-gatherer-pastoralists in the interior Karoo suggests that, in terms of technological and cosmological knowledge of animals, there is not enough difference between wild and domestic beasts to separate these into two distinct lifeways (McGranaghan 2015; cf. Russell 2017). Looking to the Maloti-Drakensberg Mountains, archaeological evidence from the late first and early second millennia AD demonstrates that people living in the highlands (a space that challenged crop cultivation and was better-suited to hunting game) were capable of keeping cattle and sheep. These finds have fuelled discussion of more ‘networked’ relations between farmers in the lowlands and more mobile highland dwellers, perhaps of an assimilationist nature (with farmers subordinating or absorbing foragers) or (as more recent scholarship supports) something more supportive and symbiotic (Mitchell 2009a, 2009b).

Indeed, the suggestion that past people were capable of incorporating new technologies and new beings into worldviews finds support from rock arts pertaining to the last few centuries. Sam Challis’ (2012, 2014, 2016) work on rock arts of the Maloti-Drakensberg incorporating horses (introduced to the region in the early 1820s) has demonstrated that cohorts of cattle raiders – with constituents from diverse cultural and economic backgrounds – forged cohesive communities around the functional utility *and* spiritual potency of horses. Pieter Jolly (2007) has likewise argued that we should not view economy as a fixed predictor of the role that animals could have in the past, drawing on archaeological and modern ethnographic evidence to deploy a range of case studies illustrating how cattle and their associations could be mobile across time and socio-economic contexts.

The debates over how human-animal entanglements emerged and varied in southern Africa have taken on different tenors and shapes, implicating analytical frameworks that alternately emphasize rupture, adaptation, assimilation, creolization, or coercion to describe the ways in which past people ‘figured out’ non-human newcomers. For us, these debates foreground a need to nuance our discussions about the precise nature of the relationships between humans and non-humans rather than grouping these under the broad rubric of economy. By this, we mean recovering the sorts of intelligence and technical knowledge necessary to manage relations with animals, as well

as the ways in which people could figure out their non-human colleagues, acknowledging that these experiences were not wholly new but rooted in other understandings of landscapes and animals. In the two examples that follow, we highlight how animals could be embedded in human life and thought while still occupying ambivalent positions. In doing so, we reject a common dualism in discussions of animals in the past: whether we should treat them as technologies or agents. Instead, we suggest (following Candea 2010 and White 2011) that part of the power of ontological insight is that it can illuminate where animals may remain inscrutable but provoke reflection on value and personhood.

Horse-ostriches of the Strandberg

Of all the rock arts of southern Africa, the historical rock arts of the Northern Cape Karoo may, on face value, appear best suited to the application of interpretations drawn from historical ethnographies. After all, the Bleek–Lloyd interlocutors – whose testimonies have been so influential in shaping our understanding of southern African rock arts – originally came from this area (Deacon 1986). However, by comparison with the painted sites of the Maloti–Drakensberg, these engraved rock art sites have not featured prominently in rock art studies in the subcontinent (Deacon 1994; McGranaghan 2015); here we focus on one of these sites, the Strandberg hills (Fig. 8.1) (Deacon 1986, 1988, 1997; McGranaghan 2016).

One reason for this relative lack of attention is probably that historical rock art sites are just that – defined by the presence of historically attested forms of material culture and the inclusion of dates or inscriptions in Afrikaans and English. Historical contextualization provides a wealth of potential authors for the art. From the late eighteenth century, the Northern Cape Karoo became home to a diverse array of groups: colonists of European (or mixed indigenous–European) descent moving up from the Cape; Xhosa expanding northward from the frontier conflicts of the eastern Cape; southern Tswana agropastoralists looking southward across the Orange River to trading networks with the colony; in addition to numerous indigenous pastoralists and foragers (Penn 1995, 2005; Legassick 2010 [1969]; Zachariou 2013). In such a milieu, it can be difficult to formulate a case for including or excluding people of specific backgrounds from image production; for an interpretive paradigm that relies upon linguistic, socio-economic and ethnic identification to discriminate between competing readings, this inability to definitively assign authorship poses a clear problem.

Historical context provides a broad framework within which to consider rock art; particular suites of imagery may allow for narrowing this. For example, some facets of the Strandberg art appear largely contiguous with the visual tropes of putatively hunter-gatherer rock art found elsewhere on the subcontinent; one of us (McGranaghan 2016, 164–6) has previously discussed a Strandberg panel that consists of snakes, a possible rain animal, and a reclining human figure within the analogical context of Bushman rain-making, as described in the Bleek–Lloyd archive. We return to this point below when discussing hybrid figures (composite animals or human–animal confections). By contrast, one detailed scene on the Strandberg, which makes use of Westernized (almost cartoon-like) forms of visual literacy to convey motion and perspective and uses a form of ‘speech bubble’, involves a diatribe in Afrikaans about the jackal as a ‘bokker wat die skaap so vang’ (‘a bugger that catches sheep’) (Fig. 8.2). This panel clearly relates to the frustrations of livestock farming in the Northern Cape, and was produced by someone who – at a minimum – was drawing more heavily on European, colonist traditions of image composition than is typical at the Strandberg site as a whole.

Ostriches form a major component of the historical rock art of the Strandberg, and were equally important to the nineteenth-century Cape Colony in general. Following the British acquisition of the Cape at the beginning of the nineteenth century, ostrich feathers emerged as an important export commodity for European markets (Keegan 2013, 40–1); this initially involved hunting wild birds, and was broadly contiguous with the extraction of other animal resources such as ivory or hides (van Sittert 2005, 274). At this stage, feathers represented high-value goods extracted in relatively small numbers by specialized hunting parties, or as a by-product of colonial cattle-purchasing expeditions or commando raiding parties; the availability and quality of the feathers was governed by the season (Sampson 1994, 396). There was considerable scope for indigenous participation in this earlier form of trade, especially because these groups already possessed the necessary ethological and technological knowledge to successfully hunt this wary, fast prey, particularly when combined with colonial technologies such as horses and firearms: Ikabbo’s discussions of ostrich hunting strategies with Lucy Lloyd, for example, records !Xam participation in this trade, exchanging feathers for tobacco with itinerant colonial pastoralists (McGranaghan 2012, 236, 333–4).

Over the course of the nineteenth century – and particularly after the discovery of the mineral wealth of interior of southern Africa from the 1860s – colonial control over the Northern Cape solidified and

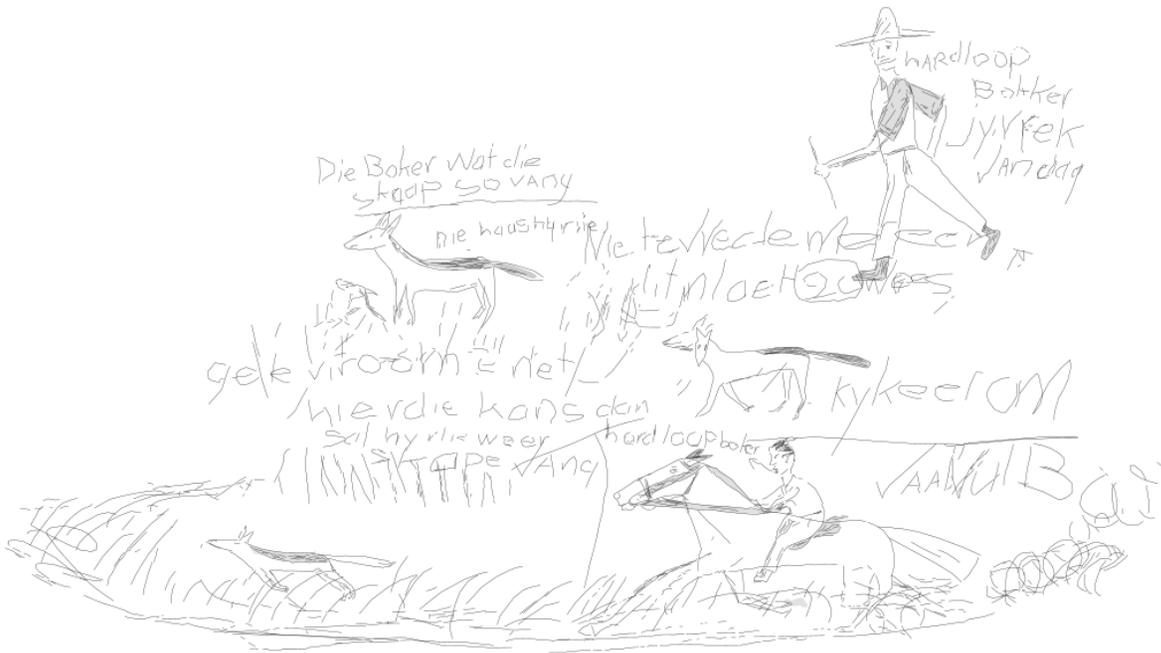


Figure 8.2. Jackal hunting scene with Afrikaans text. Digital re-drawing Mark McGranaghan.

brought with it magistracies, expanded road and rail networks, and an increasing alienation of private land from indigenous ownership (Penn 2005). For ostriches, this consolidation was also accompanied by major transformations, as feather extraction shifted from the exploitation of wild populations to the establishment of domestic ostrich herds. This shift underpinned a marked rise in the quantity of feathers exported, as ostrich farming permitted the maintenance of ostrich populations at high densities – primarily in better-watered regions of the Karoo (particularly in the Klein Karoo around the town of Oudtshoorn), which could support fields of lucerne (alfalfa) that could be used as a high-quality supplement to wild forage. These better-watered regions therefore became hubs that dominated the feather trade, and set the terms of price and quality for ostrich feathers. In more arid regions, ostrich farming was possible but required populations to be kept at a lower density on larger areas of land (Sampson 1994, 397). This effectively marginalized some areas (such as the Strandberg) in terms of ostrich feather production, as it affected the quality and quantity of the feathers produced; ostriches needed to be corralled before feathers were removed (with overcrowding damaging feathers) and arid regions could not produce supplementary forage to maintain feather condition (Archer 2000; Beinart 2003, 220).

Although Strandberg rock art contains a wealth of ostrich imagery, it is not an indiscriminate reflection

of ostrich appearance and behaviour – no images of nesting or feeding behaviour, for example, have thus far been identified in the area. Instead, the images concentrate on a restricted suite of visual tropes that disclose the interests of image-makers, and their attitudes toward these birds. First, these image-makers (whoever they may have been) paid an obvious attention to ostrich feathering, particularly of the wings and tail feathers – precisely those feathers that (in male ostriches) were the primary focus of nineteenth-century trade in ostrich products. Figure 8.3 provides a sampling of these feather-focused depictions, which hint at a desire on the part of the engravers to specifically indicate male ostriches; they are reminiscent of the courtship displays of these birds. Second, historical Strandberg ostrich imagery also evokes the cursorial prowess of these birds, focusing on sprinting postures or otherwise emphasizing the powerful, muscular legs of this formidable runner. Even when stripped down to their very simplest form (in which the form of the ostrich is limned using only two or three strokes), these birds are shown with legs outstretched and convey a palpable sense of alacrity (Fig. 8.3a). Connected with this, running ostriches are also often shown pursued by mounted horse riders who are carrying or firing guns (Fig. 8.3b).

Third and by contrast, the Strandberg also contains a distinctive suite of ostrich images that emphasize the bulk and fat of the ostrich body (Fig.

8.4), characterized by an in-filling scraping technique and by a relatively more-patinated condition that possibly reflects a greater age.⁴ These ostriches are found in panels that include eland (notably fat game animals; Fig. 8.4), and together convey a different way of thinking about ostriches and their characteristics to that disclosed in the pursuit scenes. It is tempting to assign these differences a chronological and socio-economic significance, in which the fat ostriches reflect an earlier, hunter-gatherer focus on the gustatory qualities of ostriches (an observation that has substantial ethnographic backing in the Bleek–Lloyd archive, McGranaghan 2012, 235–7) or, following the analogical reasoning of shamanic interpretations, the numinous potency of the fat they contain (Lewis-Williams 2002, 81). However, even if we refrain from applying

analogical interpretations, the images themselves support at least the notion that two forms of ostrich ontology – two ways of thinking about ‘ostrichness’ – are conveyed in the Strandberg art.

Without drawing conclusions as to the identities of nineteenth-century image-makers, we can thus see that the more-obviously historical aspect of ostrich art at the Strandberg depicts a confluence of feathers, horsemanship and firearms that is closely tied to the expansion of global mercantilism, and the ontological repercussions this engendered even at a marginal colonial frontier. Whether we are speaking of the ways in which indigenous individuals adopted and adapted new technologies to deal with familiar animals, or colonists attempted to control the new environments and biota they encountered, the leggy, feathery ostriches



Figure 8.3. Historical-period ostrich engravings showing feathers on wings (a); tail feathers (b); and pursuit or ‘driving’ of ostriches (b, c). Digital re-drawing and photographs Mark McGranaghan.



Figure 8.4. 'Fat' ostriches in a panel with eland.
Photograph McGranaghan.

of the historical period embody the ways in which this species was valued, managed, cared for and mobilized as the market for ostrich feathers exploded in the late nineteenth century.

We have already seen that some elements of the historical Strandberg art may be amenable to interpretation within ontological frameworks derived from Bushman ethnographies; it is tempting to group with these several hybrid figures that conflate either multiple animal species, or humans and animals. Animal-human confluations (therianthropes) in Maloti-Drakensberg rock art have generally been interpreted within shamanistic models as statements regarding the acquisition of particular kinds of spiritual potency on the part of ritual specialists (Pager 1971; Lewis-Williams 1981; Jolly 2002; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004, 166–75). Confluations between indigenous antelope (especially eland) and horses or cattle have been read as part of a process whereby domesticates came to replace or supplant the cosmological and socio-economic potency of wild fauna (Campbell 1987; Dowson 1994).



Figure 8.5. A 'swan-necked' horse. Digital re-drawing and photograph Mark McGranaghan.



Figure 8.6. *Horse-ostrich conflation.* Photograph Mark McGranaghan.

Setting aside these ethnographically informed interpretations of conflationary animals or animal-human hybrids, we can also consider the visual conventions used at the Strandberg to depict these entities. At a basic level an amalgamation of this kind reflects some form of equivalency, in the bringing together of two visually distinct entities into a common frame of reference. We have already seen that in the historical Strandberg art, compositional and stylistic traits provide a general link between ostriches and horses; the above-mentioned scenes of mounted pursuit both relate the particular technological skills required to manipulate ostrich behaviour to particular ends, and (directly or indirectly) comment on the shared physical capacities of each species for swift movement. In stylistic terms, we might look to the arching and exaggeratedly long necks common to horse depictions in this area as an echo of similar features in ostriches themselves (Fig. 8.5). A horse-ostrich conflation (Fig. 8.6), which was produced at the site of Witpits (Arbeidsvreugt; Deacon 1997) about fifty kilometres north of the Strandberg, may be seen as the apogee of this kind of stylistic association, and lends credence to the notion that Northern Cape rock artists chose equids as a suitable referent for understanding and thinking about ratites (and vice versa) – whether from a playful, spiritual or some other motive.

Examples of similarly hybrid imagery from the Strandberg itself include a man with clawed feet juxtaposed with a toothy, maned lion, as well as a human with the head of a bird (Fig. 8.7); both of these panels are of an historical date (the bird-headed man carries a gun, while the lion scene contains lettering as well as armed horse riders). By drawing on ethnographically restricted historical contextualization, it is possible to suggest plausible motivations for some of these inter-species juxtapositions – the Bleek-Lloyd archive, for example, provides ample evidence that nineteenth-century !Xam Bushmen used lion referents as a way to discuss social propriety and to castigate anti-social Others (McGranaghan 2014), which would (if we had some way to ascertain authorship) seem to offer an obvious interpretive frame for the lion panel. However, even without turning to these ethnographic specifics, the wider historical context allows us to draw some broader conclusions. The lion panel, for example, strongly emphasizes the predatory mouth and teeth of the felid, and includes both horses and guns. From at least the late eighteenth century onward, these latter two constituted technologies of violence in the Northern Cape; violence that was waged against indigenous pastoralists and foragers, and against local fauna.⁵ In this context, the juxtaposition of a leonine



Figure 8.7. Bird–human conflation (a) and lion juxtaposed with a man with clawed feet (b). Digital re-drawing and photographs Mark McGranaghan.

predator, armed riders and clawed human may be read as some form of commentary on the inter-related nature of violence perpetrated among, and between, human and non-human agents.

Between beasts and goods in the Maloti-Drakensberg

Turning now to the Maloti-Drakensberg, we described above that sheep and cattle bones dating to the late first and early second millennia AD were recovered from sites attributed to hunter-gatherers in the highlands there (Fig. 8.8). These finds (derived from Sehonghong and Likoang) represent the earliest evidence

of domesticated animals in the mountains, appearing roughly 500 years after agropastoralists implanted in the lower-lying midlands to the east (Mitchell *et al.* 2008). A third highland site (Pitsaneng) yielded the largest known assemblage of domesticated fauna in the Maloti-Drakensberg, including cattle, sheep/goats, and dogs and dating to the mid-second millennium AD (Hobart 2004). Taken in combination with other montane sites containing metals and domestic crops – finds associated with agropastoralists but here not always found in a coherent ‘package’ – from the last two millennia, we are left with the impression that the Maloti-Drakensberg were home to people who could selectively incorporate animals and other elements

of new domestic technology within an environment that was somewhat hostile to settled farming (Mitchell 2009a, 2009b).

Rock arts in the Maloti-Drakensberg can elaborate on this picture somewhat, but suffer from a lack of chronological precision, especially with respect to the older end of this sequence. Interpretations of arts featuring cattle often emphasize the stress of this period of contact, suggesting that the appearance of painted cattle points to fundamental changes in hunter-gatherer society and economy. Campbell (1987) has argued that the arrival of cattle – physically and in art – signalled the transformation of forager life from one of egalitarianism to hierarchy, as cattle represented a form of ‘exotic good’ that created a path for skilled cattle raiders and shamans to distinguish themselves in a new, livestock-driven order. While Campbell maintained that painters likely did not keep or herd cattle for any length of time, Loubser & Laurens (1994) argued that art featuring cattle in the Caledon River valley pertained to painters who *had* achieved a measure of technical knowledge around keeping livestock, albeit on an *ad hoc* basis. Ouzman (2003) has similarly posited that paintings of cattle superimposed on or otherwise conflated with eland illustrates some contiguity between pastoralist and hunter-gatherer cultures.

Underpinning this body of rock art research, then, is the implication that the arrival of cattle in the subcontinent was a fairly calamitous event for aboriginal hunter-gatherers, precipitating economic and social transformations that usually ended in their assimilation, marginalization, and/or subjugation, and which was exacerbated during the colonial period (Dowson 1994). Certainly, the view that mobile cohorts of mountain-dwellers existed at the periphery of large agropastoralist chiefdoms and colonial governments is not inaccurate, as demonstrated by both pre-colonial archaeological finds, and colonial-era rock arts and historical evidence (King & Challis 2017; King 2019). However, characterizations of these early encounters among hunter-gatherers, farmers, and cattle as pernicious are based in large part on generalized economic models of farming and foraging rather than on direct evidence. Indeed, finds from Sehonghong, Likoeng, Pitsaneng, and (across the Escarpment) Moor Park disclosing a mixture of foraging and farming resources illustrate that relations among these constituencies may have been more supportive or collaborative, especially during times of climatic stress (Whitelaw 2009). What is necessary, then, is a greater focus on the nature of the relationships between humans and domestic animals,

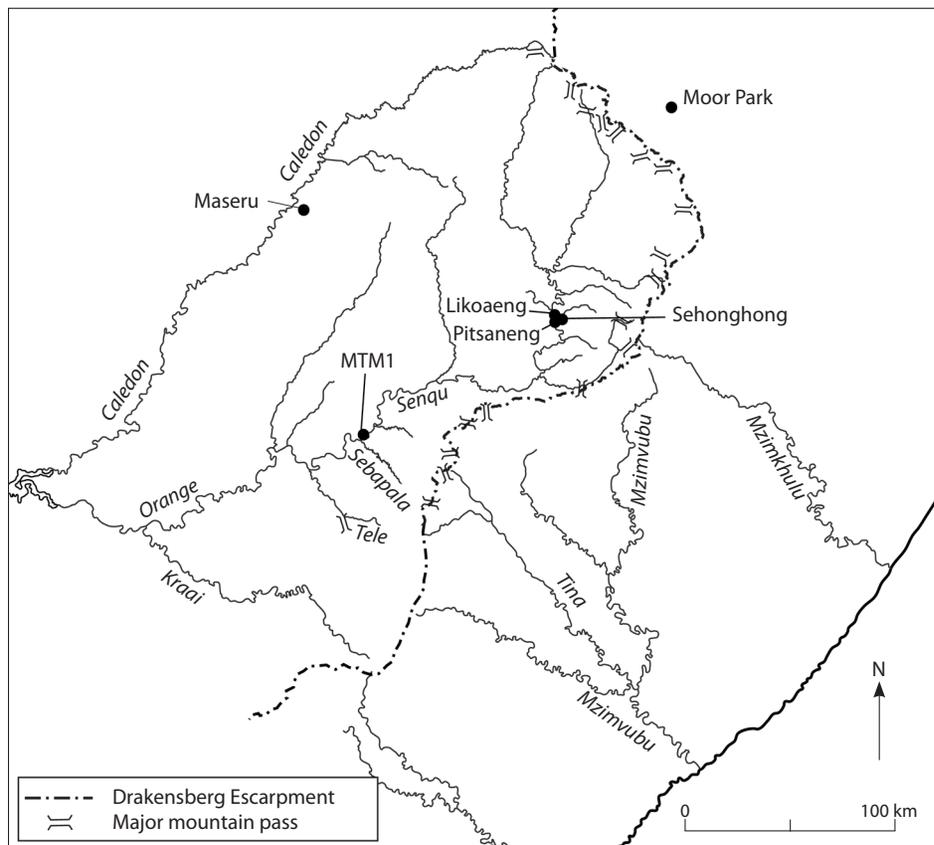


Figure 8.8. Map showing significant archaeological sites in the Maloti-Drakensberg.



Figure 8.9. Re-drawing of MTM1 Panel. Image courtesy and copyright The Rock Art Research Institute, South Africa, www.sarada.co.za. University of Witwatersrand. South African Rock Art Digital Archive Ref No. RARI-LES-MTM1-1R & 2R.

both as economic resources and as agents capable of instigating social change. The past ten years have seen arguments along this line from zooarchaeology, particularly highlighting the need to take greater cognisance of animal behaviour when attempting to describe herd management strategies (e.g. Badenhorst 2002, 2010). While animal ethology has long been a major concern of rock art studies, this has not been extended to domestic stock.

We explore these ideas through one rock art site in the southern Maloti-Drakensberg, designated MTM1 (Fig. 8.9).⁶ MTM1 consists of one major vertical panel featuring over 130 distinct images and a second smaller panel with only a handful of painted figures. While MTM1 contains an impressive array of material culture, and human and non-human figures, none of these offer much evidence to give a tight chronology. The presence of painted cattle in combination with

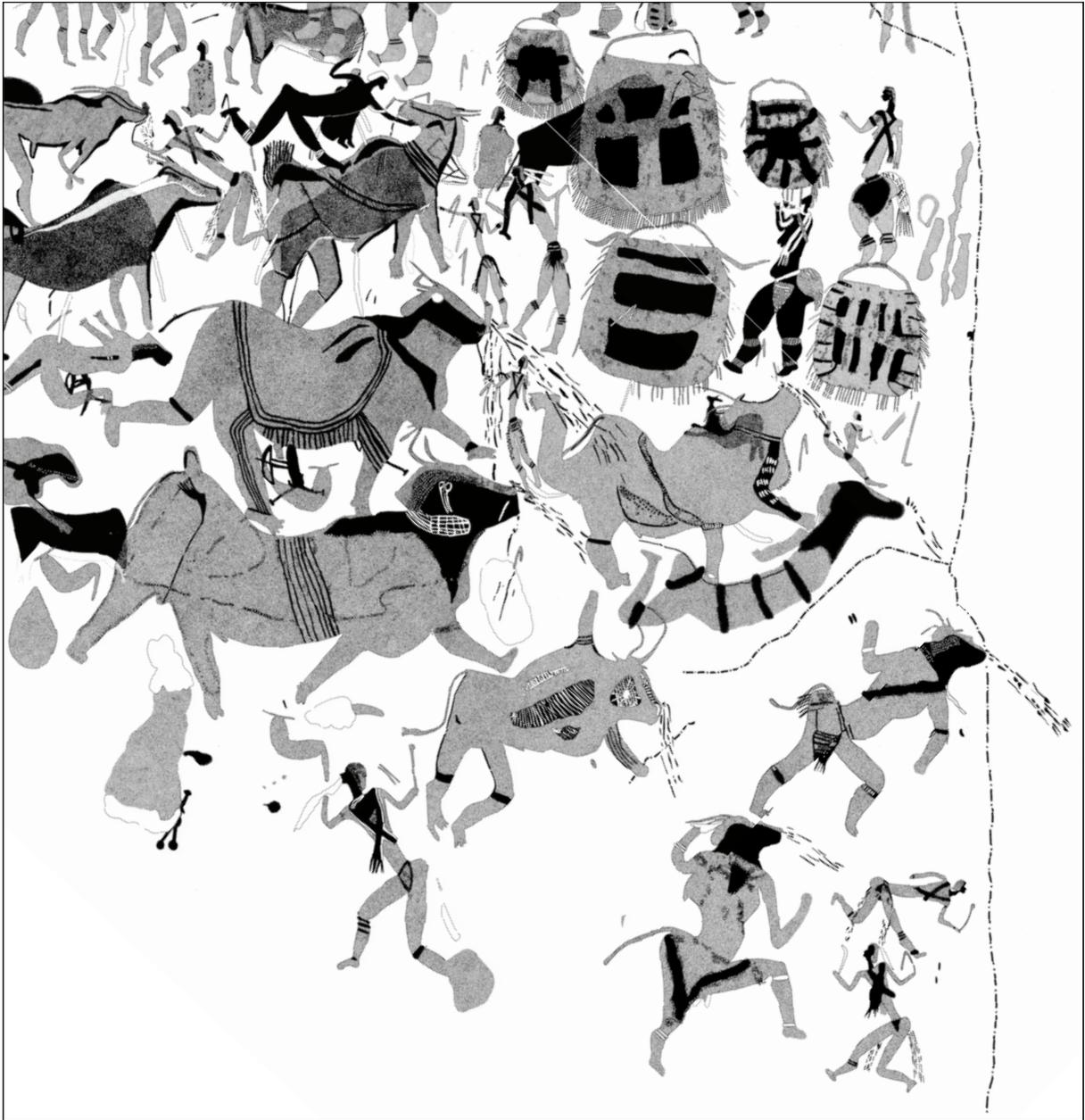


Figure 8.10. Detail of cattle therianthropes and bags at MTM1. Image courtesy and copyright The Rock Art Research Institute, South Africa, www.sarada.co.za. University of Witwatersrand. South African Rock Art Digital Archive Ref No. RARI-LES-MTM1-1R & 2R.

the earliest known archaeological evidence of cattle from Sehonghong and Likoaeng allows us to posit that much (if not all) of the MTM1 main panel was painted in the last 1,000 years.

Among the most distinctive features of MTM1 are cattle therianthropes (Fig. 8.10). These therianthropes and other features of the panel – processions, seated figures, clapping, figures bent at the waist and bleeding from the nose – fit comfortably within shamanistic interpretations of rock art that link these images with trance-based spiritual practices (described in the preceding section). Similarly, the presence of human figures engaging with the therianthropes by touching their chins and holding lines emanating from their bodies reference gestures that McGranaghan & Challis (2016) have described as ‘taming’: behaviours that demonstrate respect, moderation, and competence and thereby engender docility or ‘nice’ actions in other beings. For the moment, however, we want to set aside this interpretation and the bulk of the ethnography underpinning it, and suggest that minimally we can treat these images as describing cattle situated somewhere between the ‘real’ and the ‘non-real’ – as ambiguous or ambivalent beings clearly capable of action within the space of the panel.

The therianthropes at MTM1 are covered in elaborate geometric designs, which are echoed in the bags painted throughout the panel (Fig. 8.10); the fringes on the bags and on the patterns of two therianthropes offer particularly compelling evidence of this. It is too reductive to read the visual linkage or analogy between bags and cattle as a statement that cattle are equivalent to bags or material goods more broadly: the therianthropes themselves have no material or physical counterparts, which precludes a neat equation between object and beast. Instead, we suggest that the sense communicated visually in this panel is that, for the image-makers and for many image-consumers, cattle were related in some fundamental way with material culture. Put differently, some innate quality or qualities of cattle could persist across material culture and therianthropes.

If one utilized McGranaghan and Challis’ ideas of ‘taming’ as an interpretive framework, one could expand upon this to suggest that cattle (especially their ‘non-real’ associations) also demanded certain behaviours from humans, and that these relationships were somehow contiguous with the animals’ transformation into a bag or a hide. But whether one subscribes to this theory or not, from an ethological perspective it is clear that managing and moving cattle requires a knowledge of cattle behaviour and ecology. Cattle ‘retain instinctive traits around food and water procurement’, and so controlling cattle is

less a matter of getting them to move than of keeping them contained (Beinart 2007, 19). Herding cattle, then, at a minimum required an awareness of where palatable grasses and adequate water sources were, and vigilance to ensure the animals did not wander off into the veld or become vulnerable to predators or to other herders. Additionally, and especially in the latter half of the nineteenth century, moving livestock involved traversing territories of chiefs, settlers, and government entities, often requiring herders (as well as cattle raiders) to move livestock quietly without attracting notice (Beinart 2007, 20). This is before delving into the nuances of extracting secondary products; recent evidence demonstrates that people in the Maloti-Drakensberg highlands were capable of extracting and perhaps storing dairy products in the late first millennium AD, and raises the question of whether hide processing accompanied this practice (Fewlass *et al.* 2020).

However, MTM1 should give pause before drawing a straight line from thinking of cattle as agents entangled with humans to cattle as material culture. At MTM1, the therianthropes can certainly be interpreted as placing humans and cattle within the same ontological frame, suggesting some sort of innate relationship between the two. But, visually and compositionally, this does not extend to bags: the bags are kept distinct from the therianthropes, and there are no instances of humans or cattle transforming into bags. This is not to deny a connection linking these three entities at some level, but rather to underscore that the connection does not take the form of human = cow = bag, therefore human = bag. In the panel’s imagery, something puts a distance between hybrid beings and material culture but something else works to bridge that distance. The aesthetic, affective qualities of the cows’ hides – their patterns and possibly even their colouring – relates beasts to bags but on terms that are visually different from hybridization.

This is the sort of ambivalence or ambiguity described at the beginning of this chapter: at MTM there is enough information to suggest that the ontological relationships among humans, cows, and material culture are uneven, but perhaps not enough to understand the point where beasts became goods. Of course, the wide array of ethnography surrounding cattle and the ‘bovine mystique’ in southern Africa could provide a pathway to complete this picture (Ferguson 1985; Comaroff & Comaroff 2005; cf. Hoag 2018). But the point here is, in part, to return to earlier discussions of the wild/domestic dualism in southern Africa. If this dualism is reaffirmed by economic models that keep hunter-gatherers separate from pastoralists and agropastoralists, and if this separation is based largely

on understandings of cattle as short-term resources *versus* durable goods in a pastoralist or agropastoralist economy, this re-framing of cattle as serving socially significant roles that *do not* rely on relationships of exchange or value may offer a way to shift the terms of the wild/domestic debate.

Conclusion

Our two case studies demonstrate the potentials of framing southern African experiences of new domesticates in ontological terms. In a sense, this involves closing off some familiar lines of enquiry in order to open new ones: setting aside subsistence-based identities like ‘hunter-gatherer’ and ‘pastoralist’ and the packages of language and technologies that they connote, and choosing not to follow these designations into their respective ethnographies and formal analogies. Making these interpretive choices helps to keep a focus on context-dependent relationships between humans and non-humans, newcomers and first-comers, and the agencies involved in negotiating or experimenting with these actors in changing circumstances. This is not to say that understanding frontiers through the lens of subsistence and economy is incorrect. Instead, we suggest that changing markets and resource availabilities entailed transformations in how animals and their humans circulated, valued, and were managed – and thus to their conditions of being.

In this, we join conversations both within southern Africa and the continent more broadly that seek to understand frontiers as places not just of assimilation, accommodation, or conflict, but as places where personhood itself was re-shaped (e.g. Monroe & OgunDIRAN 2012; OgunDIRAN 2014). These discussions have largely been confined to mercantilist hubs in West and East Africa; we suggest that the views from the Strandberg and the Maloti-Drakensberg can offer some enrichment. To the extent that coping with new materials and beings on frontiers often demands that people re-examine their tastes, their historical self-awareness, and their desires for the future (Stahl 2002), the ontological glimpses of ambiguity and environmental change described here represent a useful vocabulary to bring to our discussions of encounters and exchanges.

Finally, and turning to the historical aspect of our discussion, this paper sits suspended between two compelling but somewhat oppositional disciplinary forces. On the one hand, Africanist scholarship in history and anthropology has encouraged critical revision of how we conceptualize different forms of consciousness, personhood, and spirituality in past African populations (e.g. Coplan 2003; Schoenbrun 2006; Straight 2008). These critiques have interrogated

the degree to which our ability to examine these sorts of consciousness is limited by the disruptive roles that religion and belief have played on the African continent over the last few centuries: as instruments of power, as epistemologies, as schema that sought to supplant or obscure indigenous ways of conceiving personhood (Landau 1999; Crossland 2013, 2014; Arndt 2016). On the other hand, archaeology is moving in what can appear as an almost oppositional direction increasingly concerned with developing a more-detailed picture of how past people experienced the world around them by exploring the natures and capabilities of a broader range of actors, including non-humans. This necessitates interrogating the relationships between humans, biota, and the collection of agents that together make up environments – which lead us squarely into discussions of where the dividing lines between humans and non-humans lie, and in turn are questions that tread close to the terrain of consciousness and spirituality. Our argument here is that within this terrain there is space for both historical awareness and ontological possibility, and that rock arts – their content and materiality – afford a valuable means of navigating or even bridging these disciplinary debates. Without wading into a discussion of religion or belief and their impacts on African material and spiritual life (see King 2018; King & McGranaghan 2018, 638–9), we have illustrated a way of recovering some senses of being and personhood available in peoples’ domestic worlds, and the non-human actors that helped to shape these worlds.

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Notes

1. At the time we write this, the authors of a 2012 paper reporting early sheep remains from Leopard’s Cave have announced that this identification was mistaken, and the date of *c.* 2200 BP for the arrival of sheep is invalid; see Pleurdeau *et al.* 2012. Earlier cattle remains dated to *c.* 149 BC–AD 51 in Botswana are not associated with this package of agropastoralist material culture, see Lander & Russell 2018.

2. Although it bears noting that where 'Khoe' rock art has been postulated as a corpus distinct from hunter-gatherer art, the suggested distribution area for this art has no associated Khoeh ethnography; see comments in Smith & Ouzman 2004.
3. Climate events such as the Little Ice Age (c. AD 1500–1800) provide some of the most compelling evidence for this while also describing an extreme set of circumstances. Particularly in the KwaZulu-Natal midlands, Iron Age scholarship has suggested that cyclical drought during the mid-second millennium AD, coupled with declining overall temperatures, made crop agriculture untenable and forced otherwise settled agropastoralists to re-locate to higher elevation, including higher into the Maloti-Drakensberg Mountains and on the southern Highveld. Once here, archaeologists have hypothesized that accommodating relationships with hunter-gatherers would have facilitated the now-mobile agropastoralists' transition to less settled economies that relied more heavily on game and gathered foods (Whitelaw 2009).
4. Dating engraved rock art is notoriously challenging, and patination can be affected considerably by local micro-environmental factors (e.g. Morris 1988). Nonetheless, this difference remains suggestive.
5. Indeed, campaigns of eradication of mammalian predators in the Northern Cape drew heavily on tropes established by the 'total extinction confidently hoped for' of local forager groups (Beinart 2003, 196, 205–7; Storey 2008, 80–1; Adhikari 2010).
6. The site's full name on the African Rock Art Digital Archive is LES MTM1, but it has also been referred to in the literature as 'Mount Moorosi' (Mokhanya 2008). Its archaeological deposit has been called by yet another name: 'Woodlot'.

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Chapter 9

Art, animals and animism: on the trail of the precolonial

Chris Wingfield

In the wake of the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall campaigns in South African universities, and as calls to decolonize institutions and particularly curricula continue to be heard around the world, questions of how we can come to know precolonial forms of knowledge are becoming increasingly urgent (see Hamilton 2017). There is, however, an inherent danger that the precolonial comes to be treated as a blank screen onto which understandable fantasies, that attempt to invert the violent distortions of colonial forms of knowledge, come to be projected. As the colonial increasingly becomes the 'other' against which contemporary constructions of the 'self' are contrasted and defined, the precolonial acquires the allure of a romantic lost past with the potential to inspire both the present and the future. Arguably, however, at least in scholarly contexts, this makes it all the more important to question how we can know the precolonial past, and what potentials and affordances are offered by various forms of evidence. When it becomes necessary, as it inevitably does, to deploy the imagination in our reconstructions of the precolonial past (cf. Collingwood 1946), we need to be clear about the grounds on which we proceed. Many archaeological interpretations of material evidence from southern Africa's precolonial past have depended, to a very large degree, on colonial and apartheid era ethnographies. These were, themselves, very often exercises in the historical (or at least anthropological) imagination – attempts to imagine a tribal social system operating outside of the contexts of colonial encapsulation in which the ethnographer invariably encountered them. Frequently, the precolonial emerges from exercises of this kind as a residue – what is left when what can be directly attributed to conditions of colonial and indirect rule have been subtracted. But such exercises were invariably limited by the range of imagination that was possible within the ideological frameworks of colonial and apartheid contexts, and

in many cases that range is insufficient to respond to the increasingly urgent demands of the postcolonial present. How can we enable our understandings and imaginings of the precolonial to escape the structures and modes of thought that developed in the service of colonial and apartheid political projects, while at the same time ensuring that we proceed on a sound evidential basis, rather than falling into flights of fantasy of the kind that are an inherent danger in so many romantically inspired attempts to recover lost pasts?

In order to contextualize and concretize these introductory remarks I will discuss an image of a colour plate (Fig. 9.1), printed in 1822, and bound into the Rev. John Campbell's (1822a, opposite p.268) published account of his *Travels in South Africa Undertaken at the Request of the London Missionary Society*. An accompanying caption describes the image as the 'Interior of Sinosee's House, Kurreechane', and the image seems to depict, from within, a circular, or possibly oval, thatched structure with a number of vertical wooden columns that reach from the floor to the roof in front of a low exterior wall, which rises to the height of the thatch. At the centre of the image, and of the structure, is depicted what can only be described as a rectangular mantelpiece with two forward projecting pavement type structures and three vertical rectangular panels, decorated with large silhouette images of elephants and giraffes, and what could be an ostrich, painted onto a white background. Above these images is a reddish-brown vertical panel that extends across the whole width of the structure, and above that is a white-edged ledge upon which a number of what appear to be white vessels are standing. Emerging from behind the ledge, what looks like a round stupa-type structure rises to the roof, ringed by five white bands immediately below the thatch. As well as the paintings on the vertical panels of the central structure, the perimeter wall of the house is also decorated with a

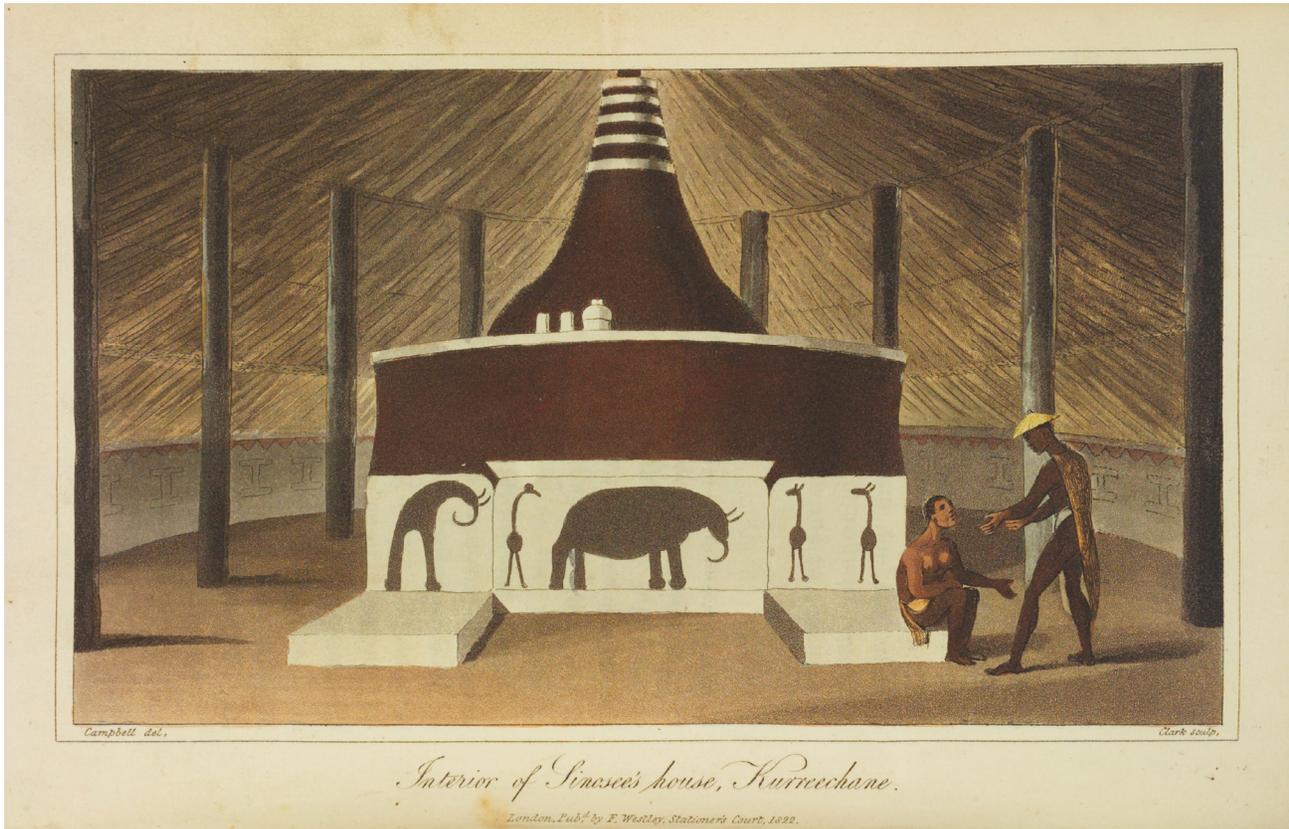


Figure 9.1. 'Interior of Sinosee's house, Kurreechane', originally published in John Campbell's 1822 *Travels in South Africa*. Image courtesy New York Public library (<http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47da-6d8f-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>).

repeating geometric motif, which cannot be seen in the black and white version that accompanies more recent editions of the book, but are clear in the original colour plate, as is a red or pink geometric border of repeating triangles around the top of the exterior wall. A male and female figure are shown conversing within this space, the man wearing a conical hat and cloak and gesticulating towards the woman who is shown seated on the forward projecting pavement structure, with what may be a tasselled apron around her waist. The place this image is supposed to depict is a long-abandoned settlement, now known as Kaditshwene, in the Northwest Province of what is now South Africa, though long before this area was encompassed within a colonial political order. The image was produced to accompany a description by John Campbell, one of the first Europeans to visit this place, of his journey as a representative of the London Missionary Society (LMS), scouting for new locations to which missionary activity could be expanded in the interior of the African continent. What is perhaps most remarkable is that this image depicts an interior domestic space

quite unlike those found in the region today, but also unlike those recorded by colonial era ethnographers. The image appears to document not only the use of figurative painting in a domestic interior, where twentieth-century house painting in the region was largely external and dominated by geometric designs, but also suggests that depictions of large mammals may have been central to this practice. Does this image provide us with a glimpse of the precolonial, of art and painting practices that have not survived the violent confrontations that unfolded in the region over the last two centuries?

If human relationships with animals are central to the operation of different ontological frameworks (Descola 2013 [2005]), and the forms taken by their representations provide an insight into the operation of alternative ontologies, as suggested by Descola in his 2010 exhibition *La Fabrique des Images*, can this image tell us about not only precolonial art making, but also precolonial modes of thought? Descola (2010) has suggested that beyond what 'images represent and depict, beyond their content, they display the

conventions according to which these prototypes are depicted. These conventions teach us a lot about the way in which humans conceive relations of continuity and discontinuity between themselves and other beings'. Can the manner in which these animals are depicted tell us about the ways in which the world, and perhaps particularly non-human animals, were understood and related to at the time these images were produced, but also some of the ways in which this has changed over the past two centuries? Descola (2013, 26) has elsewhere suggested that the apparent 'puzzling similarity of Africa to Europe' in relation to ontological forms described by ethnographers may 'be a product of the intellectual habits that characterize all specialist studies in cultural areas', but might it also be, at least partly, a consequence of a shared colonial history – a history in which the mass slaughter of large wild mammal species was integral to the establishment of subsequent economic formations? Might the precolonial past in southern Africa be understood as one in which relationships with animals were shaped as much by animistic, totemistic and analogistic ontological understandings, as they were by naturalistic ones? Before we leap too far into this flight of the historical imagination and anthropological speculation, let us return to the evidence before us. Can we really even

begin to say something fundamental about the way in which people in precolonial Kaditshwene understood and related to animals on the basis of a plate that was printed in London in 1822? How much is this image of a domestic interior, complete with its paintings of elephants and giraffes, simply a missionary fabrication or fantasy, intended to display the residents of Kaditshwene in the best possible light for potential supporters of the mission in England?

Disentangling the nexus

This plate can be understood in Alfred Gell's terms as an 'index', located at the centre of what he called an 'art nexus' (Gell 1998, 12). If one mode of engagement with art objects proceeds through the abduction of agency, as Gell has argued, whose agency can we actually 'abduct' from this particular index? Immediately beneath the image at the left and right corners are two smaller textual fragments 'Campbell del.' and 'Clark sculp.', Latin abbreviations that suggest the image was originally drawn by John Campbell himself, but the engraving was made by Clark (most likely John Heaviside Clark, author of *A Practical Essay on the Art of Colouring and Painting Landscapes* in 1807). Below the central caption is a further line of



Figure 9.2. Map showing the sites mentioned in this chapter.

text: 'London. Pub.d by F. Westley, Stationer's Court, 1822'. These short inscriptions evoke a series of mutually embedded *Gellian* Agent-Patient relationships. Let us consider the image in relation to Gell's 'Four Basic Terms' – Artist, Index, Prototype and Recipient. Starting with the Recipient, this is the reader of the book, who was presumably originally anticipated primarily as a nineteenth-century European and potential or actual supporter of the LMS (but now includes the twenty-first-century reader) and is therefore the primary patient upon which the plate, as index was intended to act. The plate, as index, would presumably have been printed by F. Wesley who might therefore be understood to act as the artist, agent in relation to the print itself, but acting on F. Westley was the engraving, as prototype for the printed image, and the artist in relation to that was Clark, the engraver. Clark himself was acted upon by a further prototype, the drawing by Campbell, who is the artist in relation to this. Nevertheless, behind Campbell lies a further prototype, Senosi's house itself, which as an index was patient to an unknown African artist. Finally, that artist represented the prototypical African mammals (for diagrammatic representation of this nexus see Fig. 9.3). To use this image to abduct the nature of the agency exerted on the artist by the original prototypes, the elephant and giraffes, or rather by the ontological category of 'elephant' or 'giraffe' in nineteenth-century Kaditshwene, involves at least nine levels of abduction.

What this image encodes about the ontologies that shaped human relationships with animals in precolonial South Africa is highly mediated by many forms of re-presentation, but there is nevertheless a trace, and a trace that I would argue is worth pursuing, as long as the steps taken in its pursuit are acknowledged. Arguably, the prototypical human mode of abducting the agency of large mammals, at least in a southern African context, is tracking. Although tracks are mediated by the surface on which they appear, and may be overlain by subsequent activity, it can be possible to follow a trail, even when only a fragmentary residue remains, if enough is known about the animal being pursued and its patterns of behaviour. The tracker must use imagination to reconstruct the movements of the animal from the traces that remain, but that imagination is informed by prior experience following similar tracks in other contexts, as well as by detailed knowledge of the behaviour of particular animals. Some trackers, in following a trail, come to know the character of the individual animal they are pursuing, which can make it easier to predict their movements when no trace remains. Tracking, as a form of abduction, necessarily involves making some leaps of the imagination, but these leaps are not necessarily blind or uninformed. The more that they are informed by knowledge, experience and ultimately by the development of related skills, the more likely they are to lead to the prey. If the quarry we are pursuing in this example

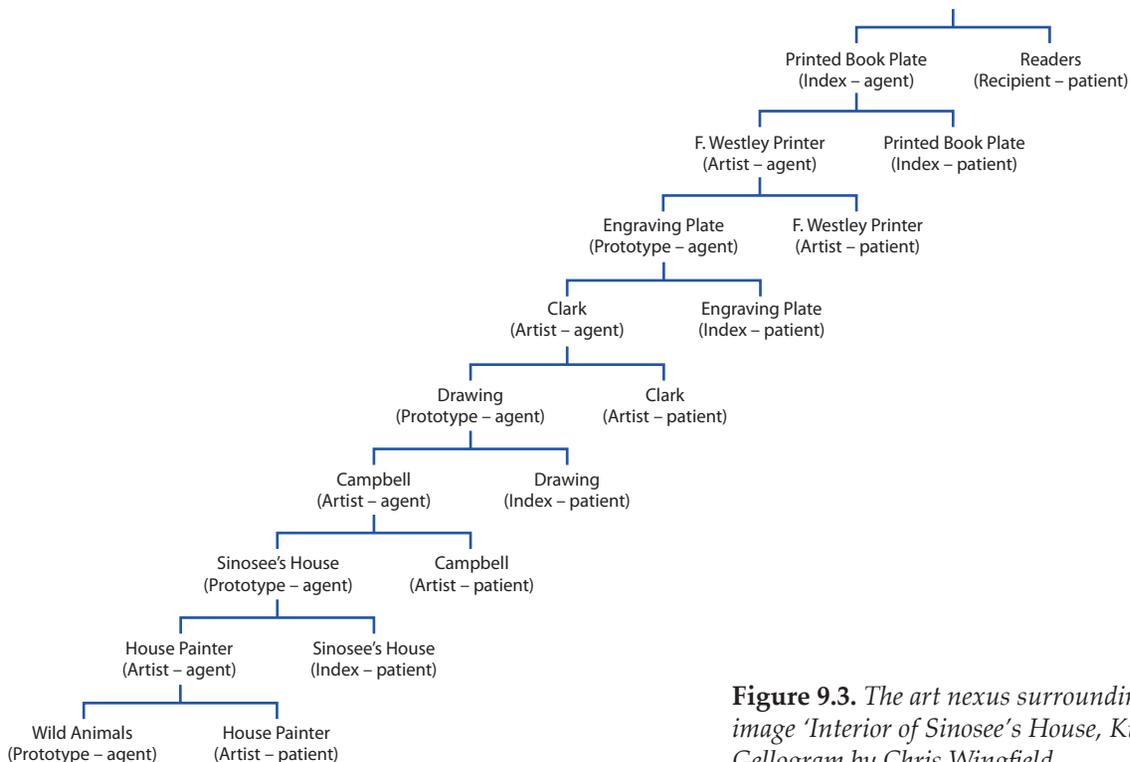


Figure 9.3. The art nexus surrounding the image 'Interior of Sinosee's House, Kurrreechane'. Gellogram by Chris Wingfield.

is the precolonial, and particularly precolonial modes of relating to and understanding wild animals, then the trace we find in this image represents the starting point for a trail that can be followed.

On Campbell's trail

Understanding the degree to which the content of the published image was shaped by its anticipated recipients, potential missionary supporters in 1820s Britain, involves following Campbell's trail – in the first instance to his published text. There, Campbell (1822a, 221) tells us that he arrived at Kurreechane [Kaditshwene], the capital of the Marootzee nation [Bahurutshe], at 4PM on Thursday 4 May 1820. It was both the furthest and the largest settlement he visited on his travels north from Cape Town, and he estimated its population to be between sixteen and twenty thousand people – as large as Cape Town at the time. After breakfast the following morning, Campbell was invited by a rain maker who had travelled with him from Lattakoo (Maruping, near present day Kuruman) to visit the place from which he came, over a mile from the centre of Kaditshwene. There Campbell visited the home of Senosi, which he describes as a neatly finished circular hut, the walls of which were plastered inside and out, including the inside of the roof. According to Campbell's published account:

The wall was painted yellow, and ornamented with figures of shields, elephants, camelopard's (giraffes), &c. It was also adorned with a neat cornice or border painted of a red colour...

In some houses there were figures, pillars, &c. carved or moulded in hard clay, and painted with different colours, that would not have disgraced European workmen. They are indeed an ingenious people. We saw among them various vessels, formed of clay, painted of different colours, and glazed, for holding water, milk, food and a kind of beer, made from corn. They had also pots of clay, of all sizes, and very strong. Every part of their houses and yards is kept very clean. They smelt both iron and copper (Campbell 1822a, 227–8).

As himself a resident of early nineteenth-century London, Campbell seems to have taken the industriousness, cleanliness and ingenuity of the people he encountered in Kaditshwene as an index of their civilization, but also of Kaditshwene's potential as a Christian city, suggesting later in his account that 'By the blessing of God it may prove a Jerusalem to the surrounding nations' (Campbell 1822a, 253). The art and

artistry exhibited in the manufacture and decoration of houses and pots, as well as in the production of metal goods, suggested that the residents of Kaditshwene shared certain values with his evangelical supporters back in Britain. Campbell's role as a missionary propagandist involved actively communicating a positive message about missionary activity in Africa to supporters and potential supporters of the LMS. Even at the time, others involved in the missionary enterprise, such as Robert Moffat, who accompanied Campbell on some of his journey, though not as far North as Kaditshwene, felt that Campbell's description of Kaditshwene may have been overly rhapsodic, suggesting in a private letter written in January 1821 that Campbell was 'building so many castles in the air about the Maharootze nation' (Moffat & Schapera 1951, 13).

Although he was sent to South Africa to adjudicate on a number of accusations of impropriety that had been made against LMS missionaries, including several of a sexual misconduct, these did not form a part of Campbell's published narrative. Instead, it focused on descriptions of his journey to places like Kaditshwene, beyond the colonial frontier. Having made a similar journey of inspection to South Africa for the LMS less than ten years earlier, of which he also published an account, Campbell's journey seems to have been undertaken in anticipation of potential recipients back in Britain, even whilst making his journey. As well as keeping a handwritten journal in which he recorded his encounters, he also kept a sketchbook, both of which thankfully survive at the National Library of South Africa in Cape Town. This makes it possible to compare the published to the unpublished text, but also to compare the original drawing to the published image, as way of considering the degree to which these indexes were shaped by the anticipation of their recipients in ways that made them less like their prototypes. Campbell's handwritten journal is similar to his published text, though a number of differences emerge:

Sinosees house is neatly finished – it is circular like all the others – not only the wall plastered outside and in, but the roof also, and the inside wall(s is struck through) painted yellow, with shields and various figures of elephants, camel leopards very well painted upon the whole round of the wall, and a wide cornish painted with(inserted above) red, immediately under the roof... In some houses, saw carved work in hard clay painted different colours, pillars &c that would not have disgraced European workmen. They are indeed an ingenious people. There

were various vessels for holding water, milk, victuals, a species of beer made from corn. The vessels were made from clay painted different colours, and glazed or burnished that might have been mistaken for Japanning – Every part of their houses and the yards around them are kept extremely clean. They are flat and smooth being used as threshing floors.

They smelt both iron and copper (National Library of South Africa, Special Collections, Campbell Travel Journal, MSB 77 2 (2), p. 19).

This makes it clear that it was the interior wall of the house that is described as painted in this way. The journal also makes it clear that the red painted cornice was immediately under the roof and suggests that it was the interior architectural features such as hard clay sculpture and pillars that ‘would not have disgraced European workmen’, and not simply the painting, as in the published version.

An early page in Campbell’s sketchbook is inscribed ‘To be copied for the engraver–’ and lists the relevant page numbers selected for the preparation of plates. Many of these relate to Campbell’s visit to

Kaditshwene, which he appears to have regarded as one of the most significant elements of his account. The image upon which the plate is based appears on p.114 of Campbell’s sketchbook, and is not wholly unlike the engraving produced by Clark for publication (Fig. 9.4). The main difference is that the human figures are absent. The pots and people in the image are similar to those that appear in other of Campbell’s sketches, but also to pots and conical hats that were deposited in the LMS museum, and therefore could potentially have been consulted by Clark when producing the engraving as something of a composite image. Nevertheless, the essential features of the interior were copied fairly faithfully – while Clark’s image shows the ledge sloping down towards the outside, Campbell’s drawing has this sloping down towards the centre, with the pots positioned slightly more centrally. The figure to the left of the central elephant looks rather more like the other two giraffes in Campbell’s sketch than in Clark’s engraving, and given that the text only refers to elephants and giraffes it seems sensible to conclude that this is what it was intended to be. What is much clearer in Campbell’s sketch is the red cornice around the top of the low wall, which takes the form



Figure 9.4. Original sketch by John Campbell showing the interior of Senosi’s house, alongside a sketch of his compound. Image courtesy and copyright Special Collections, National Library of South Africa Cape Town (ARP 9, p.114–15).



Figure 9.5. Original sketch by John Campbell showing the corn store of Mocketz, son of Senosi. Image courtesy and copyright Special Collections, National Library of South Africa Cape Town (ARP 9, p.107).

of a repeating series of red triangles, and below these a repeating pattern, which could be a geometric pattern, but approximately corresponds to a form taken by leather shields, documented in other images, so must be the shields to which Campbell refers in the text. In the sketch it appears as if the central wooden beam emerges from the centre of the stupa-like structure, which is not as clear in the plate, where the centre of the roof appears as a source of light. Is this what Campbell was referring to as a hard clay pillar that would not have disgraced European workmen? In addition, comparing the two images makes it clear that Clark has added two additional vertical pillars to the image in his version to frame the image, and the absence of these, together with the absence of the human figures which provide a scale for the plate, means that the interior space appears less expansive in the sketch than in the published image. Campbell's sketch also includes a handwritten caption, which reads:

Inside of one of Sinossee's houses containing his principal cornstore composed of a frame of timber covered with hard brown clay, smooth on the outside

On the opposite page of Campbell's sketchbook are sketches of two pots said to hold about one and a half gallon as well as a sketch of 'Sinosee's yard in front of his houses' (Fig. 9.4). This includes four houses around the edge on an enclosure where a number of people are engaged in threshing. Two of the houses have wooden pillars on the outside of their exterior walls, which would suggest that the image shows the interior of one of the smaller houses, quite possibly the one immediately behind the threshing area. The shape of the thatch has a raised rectangular section at the centre which is suggestive of a central pillar, as shown in the interior image.

It is unclear how many houses at Kaditshwene Campbell actually entered, but on another visit to Senosi's district three days later, on 7 May, he seems to have visited several (Campbell 1822a, 243–4). On p. 107 of Campbell's notebook, several pages before the image of Senosi's house, another image of a house interior (Fig. 9.5), captioned 'Vessels containing store of corn in Mocketz's house – of clay', shows several large ceramic vessels. Mocketz was Senosi's son, and the image appears to match a description given by Campbell in relation to his visit on 7 May:

I admired the cleanness and flatness of all their yards. The ground is first covered with soft wrought clay, and smoothed by rolling hard clay vessels over it. In most of them the women were employed in thrashing out the corn. Every family has a house for storing it up, containing rows of large clay vessels, neatly manufactured and capable of holding ten or twelve bushels each. They are arranged like casks in a cellar, are a little elevated from the ground, and many of them reach to the roof. For the sake of convenience, some of the vessels have a small door near the top, and another near the bottom for more easily filling or emptying them (Campbell 1822a, 244).

One of the vessels in the sketch appears to have been built around a central wooden pillar and the two largest vessels feature white panels at the front, which are presumably the doors described by Campbell, while the smaller vessel appears to have a lid. Above the image on the same page is sketched another image of the outside of a house with the caption 'House of Mocketz, Son of Senosee'. This house is shown with wooden pillars outside the external wall of the house,

and given that the image of the interior below does not show any pillars apart from that at the centre of the image, it is tempting to suggest that these images represent the interior and exterior of the same house. What is interesting about these images is that they suggest variations both in the form of housebuilding, and in the manner of storing corn, between the households of linear descendants in the same family. Indeed, the exterior image of Senosi's compound (Fig. 9.4) suggests that various different types of house were also constructed within the same household.

On p.119 of the sketchbook another interior image (Fig. 9.6) shows a very similar architectural feature to that which appears in the published plate, albeit with no suggestion of animal paintings. The central pillar has seven white bands around it, and only four vertical wooden pillars are shown, suggesting that this is a different house. Apart from the uniform colouring of the central structure, there is no suggestion that the interior was decorated, apart from a small + sign that appears on the right of the image in the space of the exterior wall, although what this was intended to signify is unclear. The central structure is much more globular in appearance, and would appear fit with a

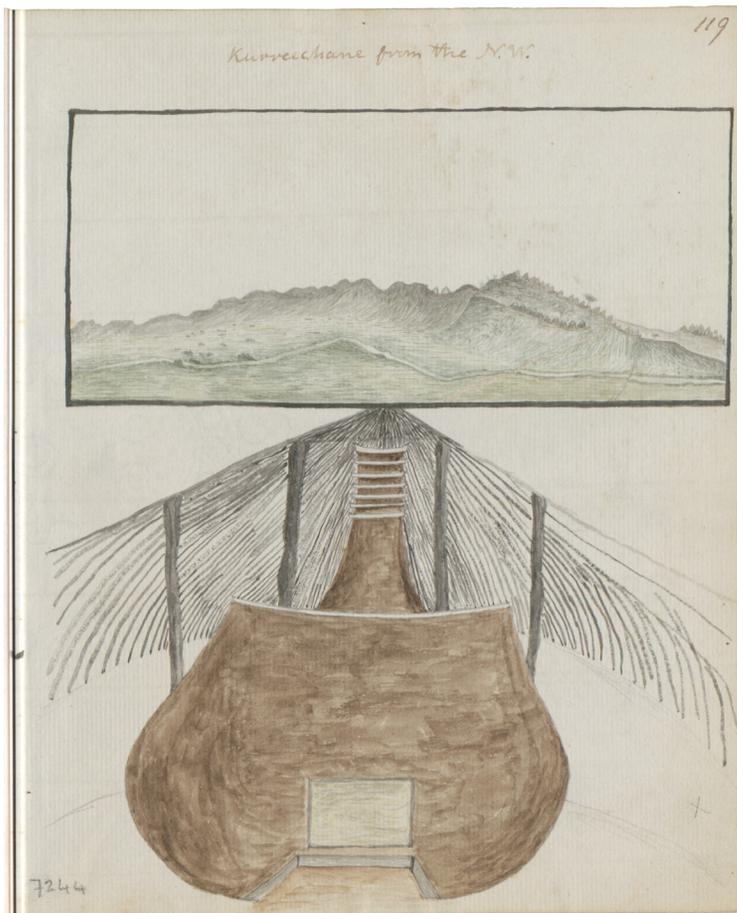


Figure 9.6. Original sketch by John Campbell showing the interior of another house at Kaditshwene. Image courtesy and copyright Special Collections, National Library of South Africa Cape Town (ARP 9, p.119).

description as a corn store, although it is very hard to understand how this globular shape relates to the rectilinear fireplace-type pavement in front of it. Above this is a lighter coloured rectilinear panel, reminiscent of the doors on the large corn storage vessels and not unlike that painted with the central elephant in the published plate. It is therefore possible that the central panel in the initial image, on which the large elephant and ambiguous giraffe are painted, may also represent a door or hatch through which the interior space was accessed. Of the three house interiors depicted at Kaditshwene by Campbell, only one includes the clear representation of figurative painting of large mammals, although a number of other architectural features were shared by the other two houses. What are we to make, then, of these images? Is it a singular example recorded by Campbell, or an example of a more widespread practice of painting?

Other travellers

John Campbell was not the only European traveller to visit precolonial Kaditshwene before it was sacked in April 1823, and the area subsequently occupied by Nkosi Mzilikazi's Ndebele in 1827. A Wesleyan Methodist missionary, Stephen Kay, retraced Campbell's steps to Kaditshwene in August 1821, just over a year later. At that time, the Bahurutshe, whose capital was at Kaditshwene, were at war with the Bakwena and Kay (1833, 226) suggested that as a result 'a gloom spiritlessness sat on every countenance'. Compared to settlements he visited further in the West, Kay (1833, 225) remarked on the greater variety of timber, which enabled people to manufacture 'different kinds of wooden utensils for household purposes'. Like Campbell, Kay (1833, 227) remarked on the cleanliness and taste of people's domestic habits, suggesting that houses were more 'substantial' and 'commodious' than those of isiXhosa speakers, with whom Kay was acquainted from his time in the eastern Cape. He then gave a description of a typical Batswana building, with a conical roof built 'on a circle of mimosa poles, forty to sixty feet in diameter, and about nine feet high' (Kay 1833, 227). Three or four feet within this, he suggests an inner ring of poles formed the basis of a wall, about seven-foot-high, creating a gap under the thatch for the flow of air and smoke. His description of the internal division of space, however, is interesting:

within this walled inclosure, an inner chamber is constructed of brush-wood, plastered with mud, round the central pole which supports the vortex of the roof, nearly a perfect parabolic conoid in shape, perhaps from four to six feet

diameter, and having a small entrance of from eighteen to twenty inches square, closed by a wicker gate. This is the hidden shrine of the Bootchuana Penates, the sanctum in which the more important domestic vessels and property of the inmates are preserved; and during the winter months it is employed as a sleeping apartment by the family (Kay 1833, 227–8).

It is clear from this description that Kay encountered houses at Kaditshwene that were constructed in the same way as those described by Campbell, and it is significant in connecting the inner chamber of the house with the Roman *penates* or household gods, suggesting that it was not simply corn that was stored there. However, Kay describes a more complicated structure behind this inner apartment:

At angles of about sixty degrees from the outer mud wall, and joining to the small parabolic conoid structure just described, two round walls are also raised... The open space at the back of the conical chamber thus detached from the dwelling-part of the house, is devoted to the storage of corn, which is preserved in large jars, similar in shape to those used for Portugal grapes, made of clay, and generally from five to seven feet high (Kay 1833, 227–9).

Kay includes a sketch plan with his account (much like that provided by Burchell, Fig. 9.7) which designates an area, open to the rear courtyard as the corn store. This makes it possible that Campbell's image represents the central apartment of the house, not from the front, inside the house, but rather from the back of the house, although the depiction of the roof and columns makes this unlikely. Kay (1833, 230) suggests that this structure was widespread, and may have been intended to 'withstand the fury of the tremendous electric storms with which this country is visited'. On the topic of decoration, he suggested that:

In the way of embellishment, however, each has his own taste to direct him; and the walls are usually decorated with pictorial and moulded representations of the native animals and human inhabitants, in a style that shows the germ of genius lies unexpanded for want of a proper stimulus to bring it into active and useful exertion.

In the course of our tour, we met with the wife of the young Chief who detained me at Mashow, and whom I now found to be the 'heir apparent'. She led me into the interior of her dwelling, which was remarkably neat. The

floor was particularly clean, and in the verandah mats were spread for us to sit upon. On the walls without, were painted a number of fantastical figures, representing animals of different kinds (Kay 1833, 230).

As well as supporting Campbell's description and images, Kay's account parallels that given by an earlier traveller to the region, William Burchell, who did not get as far as Kaditshwene, but did describe

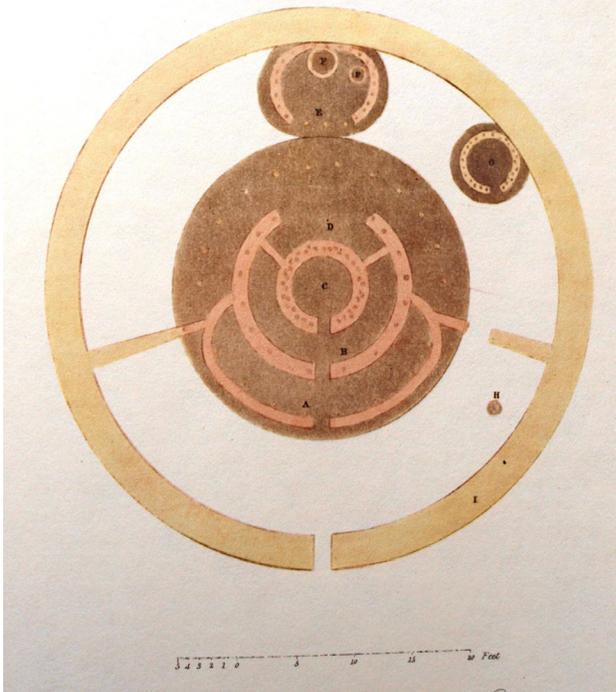


Figure 9.7. 'Section & plan of a Bachapin house', originally published as plate 9 in William Burchell's 1824 *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa (Volume 2, facing p. 515)*. According to Burchell 'Plate 9 is a plan, with a geometrical elevation, or rather section, of a Bachapin dwelling. In order to show its structure, it is here represented as cut through the middle, in a direction from the great corn-jar to the side of the door-way in the outer fence. In the ground-plan, A is the veranda; B, the outer room; C, the inner, or central room; D, the storeroom; E, the corn-house; F, F, corn-jars; G, the servants' house; H, the fireplace; and I, the outer fence.'

the domestic architecture at Dithakong, a Batlhaping settlement further West, which he visited in July 1812. Burchell also described an inner apartment, which he depicted in a plan that was published in his account of 1824 (Fig. 9.7). He suggested that this was used as a place to sleep in winter, but also as 'the bed-room for the parents' (Burchell 1824, 365) and that the internal structure and arrangement of the houses he saw varied 'according to the wants or inclinations of its owner' (Burchell 1824, 364). At Dithakong:

This inner or central apartment is frequently built in the shape of a cone, or of a half-ellipsis, the point of which reaches up to the height of the roof, which it serves to support and strengthen. In other instances, as in the Plate, its form is cylindrical; and this appeared to be an improved construction (Burchell 1824, 395).

Although Burchell does not mention encountering any form of internal decoration, other than plastering with prepared clay, his description does confirm that what is depicted in Campbell's drawing is most likely the central apartment of Senosi's house. The top section at least, appears to have a conical form, and being used to store grain certainly does not prevent this functioning as a location of ritual or ceremonial significance. The allusion Kay makes to the Roman *penates* makes this clear through comparison, and the association between clay vessels and ancestors, through the brewing of beer, is a common feature of southern African ancestor veneration practices. The notion of this inner space as a *sanctum* is significant, as is the description of this place as the 'bedroom for the parents', which suggests that it may be regarded as a significant locus of both generative and ancestral power. Indeed, Jean Comaroff (1985, 56) has suggested that the female body served as a metaphoric referent for the Tswana house as a whole, with the same linguistic terms used to refer to the conjugal house and the uterine interior of the body. The homestead was, she suggests 'the site of delicate transformative processes associated with procreation and nurture' (Comaroff 1985, 56), and she represents this in diagrammatic terms as the meeting place at the centre of 'Male and Female Space-Time', associated respectively with the male chiefly court and the fields, where women spent their time engaged in cultivation. However, if the wild was associated primarily with the far peripheries of social space, as suggested by Comaroff (1985, 70), what does it mean for wild animals to have been indexed so explicitly at the literal and metaphorical centre of domestic space – the inner sanctum of the house, where connections were made between present, past and future generations?

BaHurutshe art

If the intended purpose of Campbell's sketch was to become a prototype for Clark's engraving, what was the intended function of the paintings Campbell saw in Senosi's house? They undoubtedly had an impact on Campbell, who compared them favourably to the work of European craftsmen and was prompted to sketch his own version of the scene, and Kay seems to have abducted the 'germ of genius' from the paintings and decorations he encountered, but it is clear that these two missionary travellers were not the anticipated or intended recipients of the paintings. Contemporary residents of Kaditshwene would surely have abducted some other form of agency when encountering images of this kind. It may be that the particular location and identity of the house depicted by Campbell can offer some clues in relation to the significance of these paintings. Jan Boeyens' (2016) has recently suggested that what Campbell described as Senosi's district was in fact the parallel settlement of Tswenyane, of which Senosi was head of the most senior family. He has argued that the establishment of a settlement at nearby Kaditshwene by the BaHurutshe booMenwe was a defensive measure that brought them back together with the BaHurutshe booMogatlha at Tswenyane, a branch that had separated around a hundred years previously. Boeyens suggests, on the basis of oral histories recorded by Breutz, that the BaHurutshe booMogatlha were in fact the custodians of an extremely powerful place, in some renderings the location of origin for the BaHurutshe, where a spring, waterfall and pool formed a sacred place 'intimately connected with the demigod Thobega and the rainmaking beliefs and rituals of the Hurutshe' (Boeyens 2016, 12). According to Schapera, such demigods were associated with caves and engraved footprints on rocky outcrops (Schapera & Comaroff 1991, 53). Thobega was a one-legged weather deity associated with the symbolic colours black and white. In addition, Tswenyane was the location of the mythological water snake *kgogela*. It is surely significant that it was a rainmaker, returning from service for the Batlhaping at Maruping, who was Campbell's guide to Tswenyane.

Boeyens has linked the custodianship of Tswenyane to the practice of acknowledging special relationships that existed between original inhabitants and the land, and their power, through mediation with spirits and ancestors, to ensure adequate rain, even when subjugated by or incorporated into larger political entities (Whitelaw 2015, 125–6). Should we therefore understand the paintings in Senosi's house as indexing, not simply the large mammals that could still be encountered in the surrounding landscape,

but also an earlier form of representation, rock art, associated with caves and the original inhabitants of the land? Is the prototype for the interior of Senosi's house a painted cave, and should the paintings be understood as a form of rock art that mark the inner chamber as a place of significant power? How significant is it then that Campbell appears to have been taken directly to this place by the rainmaker? Prins & Hall (1994) have suggested that the depictions found in 'late white' rock art of Bantu-speaking agriculturalists embody 'conceptual associations linking them to fertility' but also with earlier hunter-gatherer inhabitants. Should we understand the paintings apparently witnessed by Campbell in Senosi's house as a domestic equivalent to the 'late white' paintings found in caves in other parts of South Africa? The shields recorded by Campbell are possibly significant here, since they also feature in later-period rock paintings of the region. Is it significant that Campbell appears to show the animals painted in black, on a white background, since black and white can be associated with thunder clouds and the coming of rain? Is it possible that the animals, and particularly the elephant as a migratory animal, index the arrival of rain? Or are there other associations held by these particular animals that are indexed by the placement of their images in this specific location?

Conclusion: art and animals on South Africa's northern frontier

The paintings in Senosi's house are not the only indigenous representations of animals documented by early European travellers to the region. Indeed, Kay (1833, 231) described the manufacture of knives at Kaditshwene, with handles 'generally made of ivory, and sometimes carved in a superior manner; bearing the figures of different animals, large and small, from the elephant to the jackal.' A number of images of such knives were made by early European travellers to the region, including one by Robert Gordon, who travelled North from the Cape in the 1770s (Gordon 1777). This shows a bird on the handle, with a lizard on the upper scabbard and giraffe at its base (Fig. 9.8). William Burchell (1824, 575) also published three images of Batlhaping knives, for which he gave the term *tīpa*, and one of these had an animal carved into the ivory handle, as well as possibly what may be further animals on the sheath. A number of carved ivory handled knives with early nineteenth-century provenances exist in several museum collections. One of these, with a zebra on the handle, was presented by Robert Moffat to the South Africa Museum in Cape Town (S.A.M. 330b), and has a historic label associated



Figure 9.8. A Tswana or kora knife with its sheath. Drawn by Robert Gordon between October 1777 and March 1786. Image courtesy Rijks Museum (<http://hdl.handle.net/10934/rm0001.collect.435015>).

with it, suggesting it was presented to Moffat by Kgosi Sechele of the Bakwena.

As well as carved knife handles, early European travellers also remarked on the carved handles of spoons. In Moffat's (1842, 509) *Missionary Labours and Scenes*, he includes a plate showing two wooden spoons, one of which has a handle topped with a carved giraffe and the other of a carved animal that looks suspiciously like a pig. They are captioned simply 'Wooden Spoons manufactured by the Bechuanas', and may have formed part of a larger set of seven spoons deposited by Moffat at the LMS museum, the handles of which were described as 'ornamented with carvings of the giraffe, elephant, buffalo, bird, human head, &c.' (LMS 1860, 36). A spoon (1910.62.32) carved with the figure of an ostrich was acquired by the Pitt Rivers Museum from the LMS museum in 1910 (1910.62.43). This shows the localized use of burning

to create decorative patterns on the bowl of the spoon, but also to create the colouring of a male ostrich. The early nineteenth-century traveller Lichtenstein (1812, plate opposite p. 322) was also struck by the carved spoons and their burnt patterns (Fig. 9.9), suggesting that they 'are remarkable as the first essays of an uncivilized nation on the art of sculpture'.

Whereas for European observers, the naturalistic form taken by these representations, whether as wall paintings, knife or spoon handles, often seems to have indexed potential in relation to art and sculpture, it seems that there was a fairly restricted range of forms taken, most of which related to large wild animals. I would argue that these forms of art were definitely produced for local consumption and predate the development of tourist art, such as is produced in the region today, in which associations between Africa and large mammals have been secured through a significant safari industry. What does it mean, then, for giraffes, elephants, buffaloes and other large animals to be depicted in these types of material culture, before such depictions became established conventions in re-presentations of Africa to the rest of the world?

The Comaroffs have argued for the centrality of cattle in Batswana social relationships, as commodities that were both economically valuable and symbolically significant (Comaroff & Comaroff 1990). Given this, it is perhaps surprising that cattle are not included in the representations from Senosi's house, or in the carvings

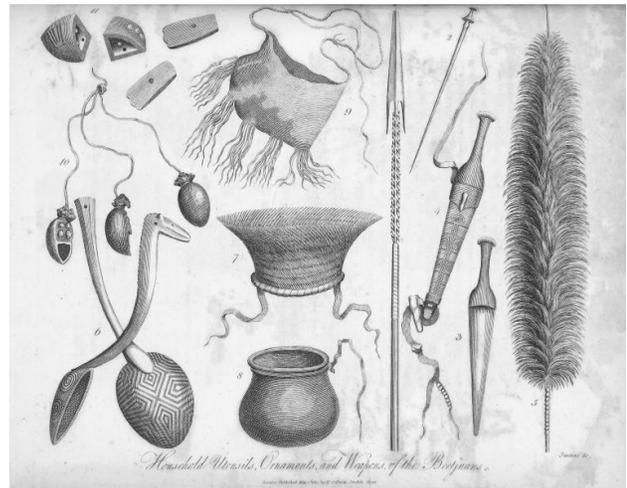


Figure 9.9. 'Household utensils, ornaments, and weapons of the Beetjuans', originally published in Hinrich Lichtenstein's 1812 - 1815 *Travels in southern Africa in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805 and 1806*. Image courtesy New York Public Library (<http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47da-73ad-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>).



Figure 9.10. Original sketch by John Campbell showing the regent Diutlwileng and Moilwa the second, son of late Kgosi Sebogodi, addressing the kgotla at Kaditshwene. Note Diutlwileng's porcupine crown, as well as the leopard skin cloaks with genet tails. Moilwa is also carrying an ox hide shield. Image courtesy and copyright Special Collections, National Library of South Africa Cape Town (ARP 9, p.122).

on the handles of knives or spoons. Indeed, there is little suggestion of a 'bovine' aesthetic, of the type identified by Jeremy Coote (1992) among Nilotic cattle keepers such as the Nuer and Dinka. The forms of ceremonial dress sketched by Campbell at Kaditshwene (Campbell 1822a, see plates opposite p. 260 & p. 264) incorporate porcupine quill headdresses, leopard skin and genet tail cloaks as prominently as an ox-hide shield (Fig. 9.10). Animal skins were, it seems, an important part of economic transactions for precolonial Tswana as was the contribution to the diet provided by hunted meat. Indeed, Burchell argued that:

The great and powerful cause which will long operate to check the extension of the cultivation of grain, is the abundance of wild animals to be met with in all parts of the country; and until these shall be reduced in number or driven out of the land, it is hardly to be expected that the natives will turn to settled agricultural pursuits (Burchell 1824, 369).

Campbell recorded a conversation that took place during his return journey from Kaditshwene with his guides, 'Pelangye', 'Munameets' and 'Maketzee'. They asked:

if the King of England kept cattle, and if there was much game in England, and plenty of

rhinoceroses, elephants, cameleopards, quachas (quaggas), knoos (wildebeest), &c. They were surprised to hear there were none of these, and that the only animals hunted were hares and foxes. It must have appeared inconceivable to them, how the inhabitants could subsist in such a land, for huge animals, in their estimation, form the glory of a country (Campbell 1822a, 284).

Jan Boeyens (2014) has demonstrated the ways in which the rhinoceros provided a significant resource for thinking about the operation of leadership in precolonial times. However, the rhino was not alone in providing cognitive resources that enabled people to think about relationships between humans. The incorporation of zebras as shield bearers into the coat of arms of the modern nation-state of Botswana, alongside an elephant tusk, is reminiscent of Sechele's gift to Moffat of a knife with a zebra carved on the handle, but also speaks to the way in which animals continue to play a significant role as markers of identity in the region. For Setswana speakers, animals are also used to stand for particular forms of common identity – the Batlhaping are the people of the Fish, the Bakwena the people of the crocodile – but beyond that, different groups are identified with specific totemic animals. Although Tswana totemism did not necessarily fulfil what early twentieth ethnographers expected of totemism (Willoughby 1905), and was



Figure 9.11. *Staircase of the old British Museum, Montague House, 1845, drawn by George Scharf (BM 1862,0614.629). Two of the giraffes shown, as well as the rhinoceros were presented by William Burchell. Image copyright Trustees of the British Museum (Image AN384492001).*

overshadowed by the significance of cattle in many ceremonies, it certainly fulfilled Levi-Strauss' (1963 [1962]) understanding of totemism as the deployment of the variation between animal species as an analogue for the differences between groups of people. Indeed, the animals involved were not arbitrary and it is tempting to link the original totem of the Bahurutshe, the eland, to the significance of this animal for autochthonous hunter-gatherer groups, while their later adoption of the baboon may have been related to the place name, Kaditshwene. Whereas elements of totemism and animism were very likely at play in precolonial relationships between Setswana-speaking

groups and indigenous first peoples, it seems that a new regime of relationships with animals was heralded by the arrival of expeditions such as Campbell's, on the missionary road. Hunting to provision these expeditions was largely undertaken by Khoe guides on horseback such as Cupido Kakkerlak and Stoffel Speelman, armed with rifles, and the meat of animals shot by them was regarded as the common property of all members of the caravan – attempts by individuals to hoard meat were criticized. Although Campbell managed to secure some specimens of local animals for display at the LMS museum, the impression given by his journal is that by the time he got to them many

had already been stripped of meat (Wingfield 2015). Burchell, who travelled in a similar manner, was somewhat prophetic in asserting that:

The introduction of fire-arms among them would ultimately operate to the promotion of tillage, notwithstanding that their first effects might occasion the neglect of it. By hunting, this people would at first obtain food in a manner so much more agreeable than by agriculture, that grain would probably become but a secondary resource; but the evil would remedy itself, and the more eagerly they pursued the chase, and the more numerous were the guns and the hunters, the sooner would the game be destroyed or driven out of the country (Burchell 1824, 369).

It is undoubtedly the case that cattle were extremely important in precolonial South Africa, and were subject to regular raiding during the period in question (King 2017). However, this importance increased during the nineteenth century as hunting with rifles and horses depleted populations of large mammals, and with them the availability of both ivory and rhino horn. Major social and economic disruptions, including the sack of Kaditshwene and other major settlements, severely impacted on the production of other exchange goods, such as metal knives, while the arrival of industrially produced goods, and subsequently colonial rule meant that some major forms of artistic production never recovered.

It is ironic that the expeditions that supplied museums in Europe with the remains of large mammals from southern Africa – giraffes were sent by Burchell to the British Museum and by Campbell to the LMS museum – themselves heralded the beginning of a period that saw the large-scale destruction of many of these species, and a decline in the forms of potency associated with these animals, both literal and metaphorical. Nevertheless, it is tempting to speculate whether we can read contemporary images of interior spaces in London, such as those in the British Museum (Fig. 9.11) and the LMS museum, not simply as indexes of a European fascination with newly encountered species, but also as an index of a contemporary preoccupation with these same animals, felt by precolonial South Africans. Just as the despatch of Polynesian ‘idols’ to the LMS museum can be read as an extension of continuity with pre-existing Polynesian practices of religious transformation, can we understand the predominance of large mammals from African in the collections of returning travellers as an indication of pre-existing African attitudes and practices? In an account not included in the published version of his

journal, John Campbell recorded an incident when James Read presented him with ‘a very curious animal for the museum nearly the shape of a fish’, apparently a pangolin. ‘Munameets’ and ‘Seretz’, who had travelled with Campbell to Kaditshwene, were able to supply him with quite a bit of additional information about its habits and the ways in which it could be hunted (National Library of South Africa, Special Collections, Campbell Travel Journal, MSB 77 2 (2), 114). Although South Africa’s northern frontier can be understood as a zone of cultural and religious dialectic (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991, 1997), it must also be regarded as a zone of ecological transformation (Jacobs 2003), where relationships between humans and animals were fundamentally reshaped following the arrival of guns, horses and wagons. The apparent disappearance of figurative depictions of large mammals from the art produced in the region in the two hundred years since Campbell’s journey, is therefore perhaps best understood in relation to the disappearance of large animals themselves from the surrounding landscape.

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Chapter 10

A discourse on colour: assessing aesthetic patterns in the ‘swift people’ panel at Ezeljagdspoor, Western Cape, South Africa

M. Hayden

The rainbow. It is yellow, its place which lies above; a thing which looks red [...] while the Mantis is the one who is also yellow; he is the one who lies above; while !kwammaṅ-a lies underneath [...] the Mantis is the one whose part which is uppermost, it is yellow; while his part which lies underneath it is that which is red ... the people say, the rainbow stands yonder, and the rain will break. !han#kass’o, March 1878 (Bleek & Lloyd 1879, 6600–1 & 6603–4).

The aesthetic role of colour

Colour significance has been demonstrated through studies related to African material culture (Turner 1967; Jacobson-Widding 1979; Drewal & Mason 1998; d’Errico *et al.* 2005; Henshilwood *et al.* 2011) evidenced through both universal paradigms and cultural specificity. Colour use, in the creative process, is an essential facet of expression in southern Africa rock paintings, despite its appurtenant role in interpretation. In this paper, I examine the role of colour with explicit reference to indigenous pictorial traditions. The disciplinary focus of rock art research has centred on the formal iconographic elements in the art, which, correspondingly, is reflected in the monochrome redrawings that have been ubiquitous in the field for many decades.

This paper considers the aesthetic and metaphoric dimensions of colour within southern African parietal art, with special emphasis on the ‘swift people’ motif, and its wider pictorial context at Ezeljagdspoor. The coloured elements in this imagery are highlighted in the 2011 ‘true colour’ photograph by Kevin Crause (Fig. 10.2). This vignette considered alongside the descriptive use of colour in the opening excerpt, suggestive of a metaphoric dimension, initiates my inquiry. The remarkable specificity of colour association in the reference is part of a larger passage concerning the

prolific Mantis character of Khoisan cosmology, often associated with the trickster persona, and his son-in-law, with an emphasis on their designated positioning within the spectrum of colours present in the rainbow (Bleek & Lloyd 1879, 6600–4). Might the association of colour and key figures within Khoisan cosmology point to a pattern of colour significance? A discourse on colour and the relevant impact on interpretation might lead to an examination of the fundamental function of form and content, inextricably interrelated as evident in this opening passage and other indigenous colour references relevant to this study. My approach to exegesis is facilitated through the theoretical premise of hermeneutics (Ricoeur 2006), which allows a consideration of the relationship between different translations, as well as a tool for navigating the complex terrain of multiple interpretations.¹

Evolution of a motif

Ezeljagdspoor is the name of a farmstead located just north of the city of George, near Oudtshoorn in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. It also refers to the site at the centre of this study (Fig. 10.3), which is situated in a ravine near the Brak River. The ‘poort’ part of the name refers to a pass through a mountainous ridge, and ‘ezeljagd’ translates from Afrikaans as ‘hunt of the zebra,’ (Hugo Leggatt pers. comm. 2016, although *ezel* literally means ‘donkey’). The Ezeljagdspoor site is most famous for the presence of a therianthropic motif (combining human and animal features) (Fig. 10.2), which has been viewed through an evolving nomenclature from ‘watermaiden’ to ‘swallow people’ from the nineteenth century to the present day (Lewis-Williams *et al.* 1993).

The first recording of this site occurred under the direction of British officer James Edward Alexander in 1835, published as an incidental part of his account



Figure 10.1. Map showing the location of Ezeljagdspoor.



Figure 10.2. Ezeljagdspoor 'swift people' motif, true colour enhancement, 2011. Photograph Kevin Crause.

of a larger expedition which included coastal regions and islands of northwest Africa in addition to southern Africa and his documentation of the Cape frontier conflict of 1834–5 (Alexander 1837). The drawing was one of several executed by surveyor-general of the Cape Colony, Major Charles Collier Michell, based on sites made familiar to him in the course of his work in the Uitenhage and George districts. A single colour lithograph² of the 'swift people' motif was published. Included in the publication was a suggestive association of the motif, steeped in racial proclivities of the era, as potentially illustrating the 'amphibious nature' of whites (Alexander 1837, 317). This initial public dissemination of this imagery made attempts at translating colour distinction (Wintjes 2014, 700). In fact, Alexander made note of the colour variance of the red hue that he deemed to come from the 'rust of iron,' suggesting this was a primary ingredient of the pigment (Alexander 1837, 315). It is now known that haematite is the source of hues that range from red, orange, yellow and brown in rock paintings, but the close visual interest in colour that this example demonstrates would not be picked up by subsequent generations of researchers.

Rock art researcher Jeff Leeuwenburg's confluence of this imagery and an 1870s 'legend' recorded by Bleek and Lloyd has had a significant impact on this motif and its subsequent reading and interpretation as myth manifest pictorially (Leeuwenburg 1970). The intersection of this legend and its correlation to the 'swift people' imagery stems from a tale conveyed by a Bushman by the name of Afrikaander, who lived in the area, about a young girl submerged into a dark pool by water maidens only to be salvaged through the herbal remedy applied to the water by her mother, returning unharmed but with cheeks licked white due to the affection of the mystical creatures (Bleek 1875; Leeuwenburg 1970; Lewis-Williams *et al.* 1993, 276–7).

Leeuwenburg essentially perpetuated an ideology framed a century earlier based on theories that some of the paintings depicted San myths (Orpen 1874; Bleek 1874). He explained this legend and others, provided by Afrikaander, were depicted as illustrations of folklore (Leeuwenburg 1970, 146). Although his work forms part of a larger history, his juxtaposition of 'folklore' and rock paintings correspond with prevailing theories that 'enigmatic' imagery could be interpreted through a narrative framework. This has had an effect on a near-century-long association of this painting with the mermaid context and the designation as watermeide, Afrikaans for water-maiden.

Rock art scholars David Lewis-Williams, Thomas Dowson and Janette Deacon provide a telling composite of four renderings of the 'swift people' group to



Figure 10.3. Ezeljagdspoor site, 2011. Photograph Hugo Leggatt.

track its varied construction over the years, based on the bias of artists and researchers of the time (Fig. 10.4) (Lewis-Williams *et al.* 1993, 275 fig. 1). Examination of the site by Lewis-Williams *et al.* sought to broaden the perspective of the enigmatic motif to include the curious lines that foreground and frame the figures along with the dots that are also repeated across the full width of the panel. Although they established a more inclusive panorama of site imagery, their main focus was to convey the hypothesis of entoptic, or optically derived imagery being present in the paintings, based on neurological research. For example, they propose 'somatic hallucination' (Lewis-Williams *et al.* 1993, 282) to explain the undulating attenuated figure, and refer to the sinuous lines and dots as entoptic geometric forms visible at the onset of trance (Lewis-Williams *et al.* 1993, 281).

Examples of similar circles or geometric forms exist in other areas of the panel and have been noted by other scholars such as Justine Wintjes (2014, 700) as

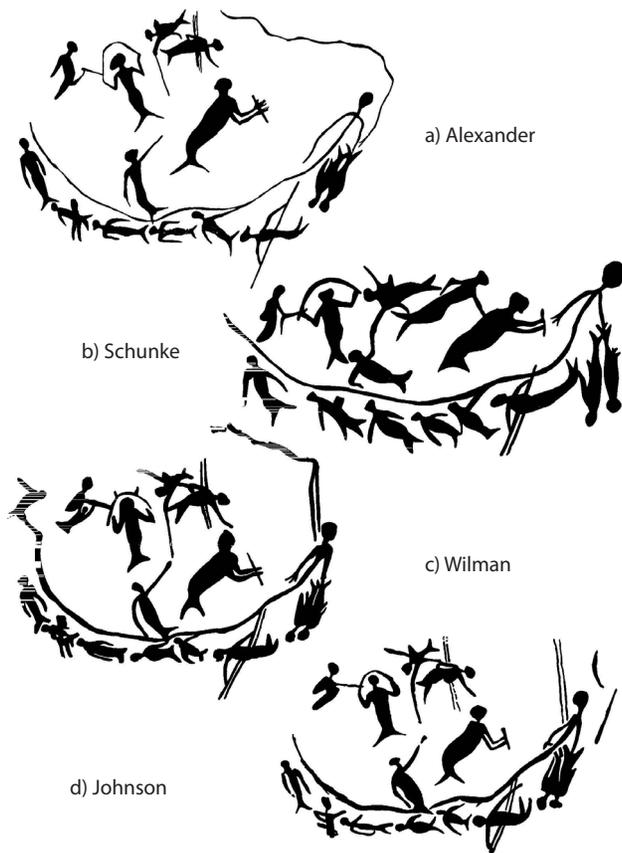


Figure 10.4. Four copies of the Ezeljagdspoor rock painting: a) Alexander, 1837; b) Schunke, 1870s; c) Wilman, 1917; d) Johnson 1979. Taken from David Lewis-Williams *et al.* (1993, 275: Figure 1).

potentially a border demarcation or fulfilling some kind of scenic role. Visually, these dots don't always appear wholly circular, possibly due to paint loss, and like the 'swift-people' motif, also lend themselves to more than one plausible explanation. A different ethnographic source – a conversation between Mapote and Marion How in 1930 in south-eastern Basutoland – indicates that in some contexts the paint was prepared with fresh eland blood at the full moon (How 1970 [1962], 26–42; Lewis-Williams *et al.* 1993, 286) and suggests that the creation of some imagery might correlate to a hunt. Additionally, the Bleek and Lloyd archive contains passages on the moon that reference the hunt as well, which may then implicate lunar cycles and therefore the passage of time.³ The circular forms range from whole circles to arcs of circles, something that might evoke different phases of the moon. These subtle aspects are most visible in the enhanced photography of Kevin Crause (Figs. 10.2 & 10.8), but this possibility requires further examination.

The most recent designation of the hybrid figures as 'swift people,' is due to extensive research involving natural modelling by scholar Jeremy Hollmann (2005a) at sixteen sites in the Oudtshoorn area. He convincingly conjoined the avian behaviours of swifts not just in relation to the individual motifs, but to the movement of the figures in relation to each other. Furthermore, he extrapolates symbolic association between the 'swift people' motif and San ritual practitioners (Hollmann 2005b).

Interpretations have become progressively complex and nuanced from one generation of researchers to another, weaving together increasingly different strands of ideas. However, focus remains on the clearest, uppermost layer of painting, which researchers translate into a black-and-white diagram, and does not explicitly address the ambiguous motifs, or other aspects of the visual appearance of the paintings such as colour. The selective focus has always been on the red figures only, when there are many other figures in other colours. Furthermore, upon closer inspection, figures outlined in black and white (Fig. 10.5) are also evident and likely an addendum to the initial layer of paintings due to the divergent visual appearance.

Polysemic implications

The identification of Ezeljagdspoor site imagery as 'swift people' is the current iteration of a motif translated through aquatic to aerial connotations from the early nineteenth century to present. The recent recognition of the polysemic qualities of this particular imagery by Lewis-Williams *et al.* (1993) and Hollmann (2005a,b), with its enigmatic ambiguity, has definitively challenged many of the assumptions built into the nineteenth-century interpretation of this imagery. And yet, even though this interpretation derives from the western mythological being of the mermaid in the first instance, it also links in convincing ways with San ideas about creatures that exist and operate between earth and water. The most recent studies (Lewis-Williams *et al.* 1993; Hollmann 2005a,b) steeped in close readings of the ethnography have led to a range of other tenable and complex readings to, arguably, a current situation of polysemic meaning (Lewis-Williams 1998), where the motif can no longer be seen to have a simple, single meaning. And yet, all of these interpretations remain narrow and achromatic, focussing on the figural shape of the clearest and most obviously depictive motif from within the wider composition.

The overview of interpretations of this single motif is site-specific, yet also provides a window into the regional history of rock art research. It exhibits a prevailing interest in a motif singled out from the



Figure 10.5. 'Swift people' motif outlined with subtle use of black and white pigment, 2016. Photograph M. Hayden.

complexity of the comprehensive pictorial design. And yet the mobilization of colour forms an integral part of the creation of any visual expression in paint, and should play a central role in the investigation of meaning.

Colour analysis

My colour analysis at Ezeljagdspoor begins with a wider perspective (often eschewed in previous interpretations), which is centred on the group that has attracted so much attention, but includes in its field many other coloured figures and natural rock colouring. Ezeljagdspoor rock-shelter is generally composed of grey and black sandstone, with patterns of brighter, more colourful hues in certain areas as schematic bands of pigment in orb and oval shapes dominate the visual plane. At this distance, the complexity of the panel is created largely by an articulation of colour hue and intensity rather than figural delineation. The clarity and cohesiveness of this cluster of motifs, may have been the reason for its dislodging from the compositional whole in previous studies.

I see colour functioning in the composition through three key attributes: linear, tonal and metaphoric. The paintings are created through a 'closed-boundary' use of colour, described in other contexts as 'linear painting'

(Wölfflin 1915; 1950 [1932]), where forms are clearly outlined and filled in with flat colour. Most motifs created by this technique at Ezeljagdspoor appear in varying red hues and most easily relatable to a narrative approach due to their figural clarity. This hard-edge modelling of form, displayed in the 'swift people' motif as well as other animal and human forms, provides the concrete visible presence of a natural entity. The tonal application of colour is more ethereal and significant visual component of the wider composition than the linear motifs. These often orbital and indiscriminate bands of colour diffuse from a highly intense red hue, circular in nature, to a more muted and atmospheric tone of yellow, and often undergird more linear and definitive figures in the composition. The metaphoric application of colour emerges from drawing links between colour references in the ethnography and the articulation of colour in the rock art, along with colour references that emphasize the relationship between colour and maturation and development. For the purposes of my analysis, I have divided the composition into four quadrants (Fig. 10.6), with some peripheral paintings occurring at the outer boundaries, not visible in this view.

The linear use of colour, applied throughout the composition provides clarity and autonomy of form.

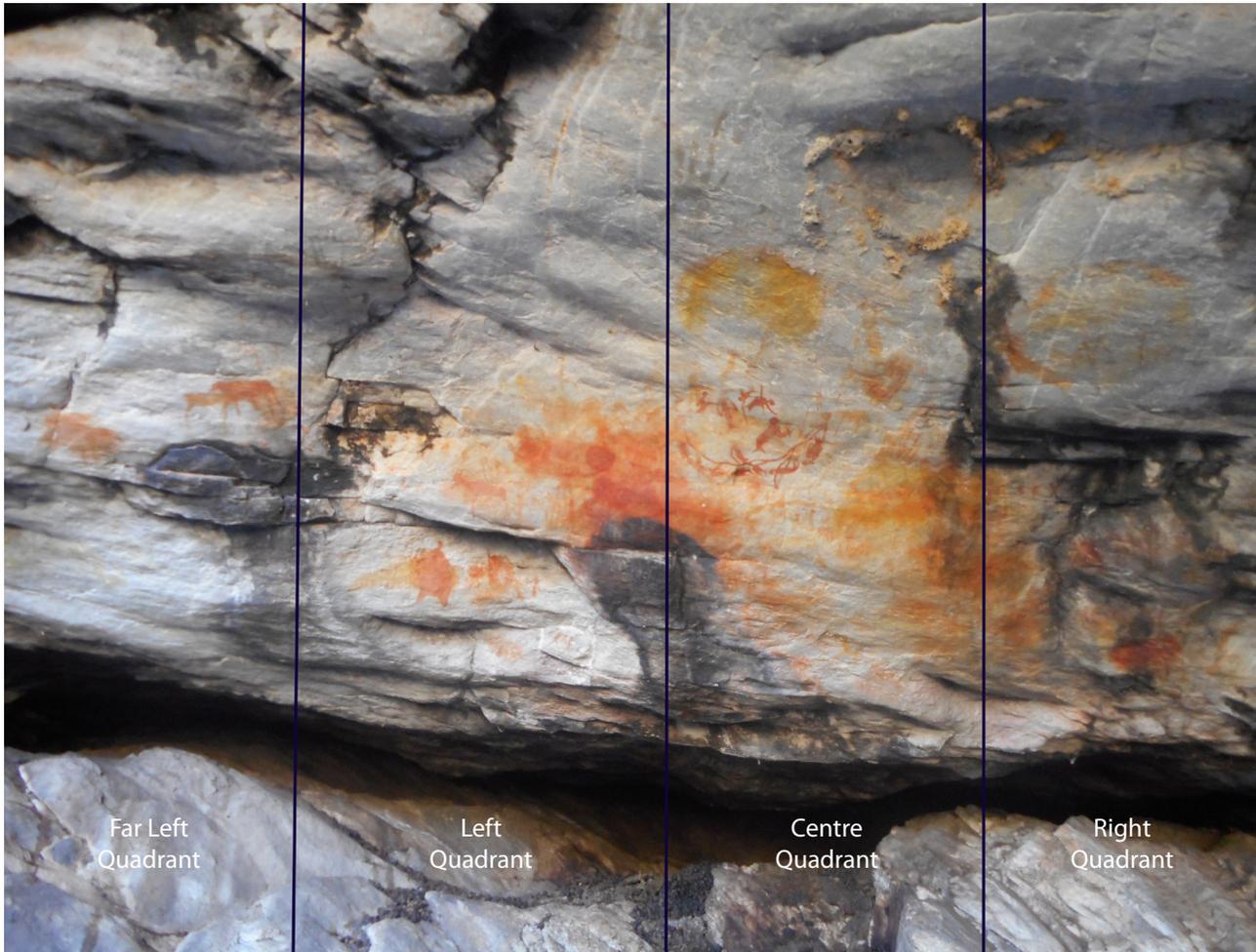


Figure 10.6. *Ezeljagdspoor site, Quadrant division of painted panel for colour analysis, 2016. Photograph M. Hayden.*

Across all quadrants, animal and therianthrope figures have all been modelled in a 'closed' boundary style in red pigment. This is in contrast to a general pattern of a more painterly approach discernible in the fleeting immersion of subject and background in yellow-orange which has apparently been deployed as an interesting coupling device, or intersection of forms. In the far-left quadrant moving from left to right, the first vignette is an intermingling of indeterminate figures in hues of red and orange. The second pulse of colour contains two indeterminate antelope that are also intertwined, as the yellow-orange antelope is immersed into the abdomen of the red animal (Fig. 10.7). This integrated use of colour as a coupling device might suggest an intermingling of a relationship between animal figures in differentiation or symbiosis of some kind, such as, male/female, doe/calf, etc. Similarly, the intermingling of human and animal figures may highlight the paradoxical relationship between prey and predator, or the

sympathetic relationship between hunter and hunted. Anitra Nettleton remarks on the common use of superimposition as suggestive of 'a relationship [...] set up between the two images' (Nettleton 1985, 51). Additionally, the transformative nature of the human-animal attributes of therianthropes, in indigenous cosmology, might be evoked here visually (cf. Skotnes 1996).

Further towards the right, in what I have called the central quadrant, as mentioned above the 'swift-people' cluster emerges from the panel as the clearest and darkest set of motifs (Figs. 10.2 & 10.6). Its figures are modelled in sinuous unbroken lines of a dark red hue. Intriguing abstract figures underneath this group, most visible in the enhanced photography of Kevin Crause (Fig. 10.8), are constructed in a muted yellow-orange, systematically ignored in interpretation and analysis, despite their linear, although hazier properties as substratum providing a foundational base or background.



Figure 10.7. *Indeterminate antelope depicted in integrated use of colour through 'coupling' device, 2016. Photograph M. Hayden.*



Figure 10.8. *Ezeljagdspoor site, the 'swift people' group, enhanced false colour, 2011. Photograph Kevin Crause.*

And finally, another design element unacknowledged in previous studies and further illustrating the linear use of colour is located at the bottom left and upper right of the 'swift people' group (Fig. 10.9). Here discrete figures in yellow appear to float together in an elliptical formation that echoes the configuration of the 'swift-people' group. The stylistic difference and faded appearance of these other clusters suggest their construction at a different period. This mirroring sequence may, therefore, be indicative of a re-engaged visual dialectic between different painting episodes, reinforcing the notion of cyclical time through a return to the original.

These examples of sharply defined forms retain a clear distinction between background and foreground, subject and placement. This was not necessarily a deliberate choice on the part of the artist, as the diffused character of some of the colour might be due to differential fading of the paint, while other aspects may have been created through a deliberate grading in the application of paint. However, I proceed with

my analysis of the panel on the basis of what is visible currently, on the assumption that at least some of these devices and effects were deliberate, or observed and used to inform subsequent acts of painting. The aesthetic vacillation between a predominately linear use of a red hue with the subtle painterly yellow pigment calls forth the tension between visibility and near invisibility or visual liminality. In this duality the figures either manifest themselves through an assiduity of line or they defy boundaries, and emanate in and out of clarity. This dynamic echoes Wölfflin's (1950 [1932], 156, 163) ideas on the differentiation of 'linear' and 'painterly' brushwork of the Classical and Baroque periods in Europe, one use of colour imposing 'limits', while the other is 'limitless'. The visual fading of colours back into the rock also resonates with the idea of the rock surface as a permeable veil (Lewis-Williams 1990) from which the paintings emerge, but into which the paintings also wane. Digital enhancement techniques like those practised by Kevin Crause have the potential to show elements that are not visible

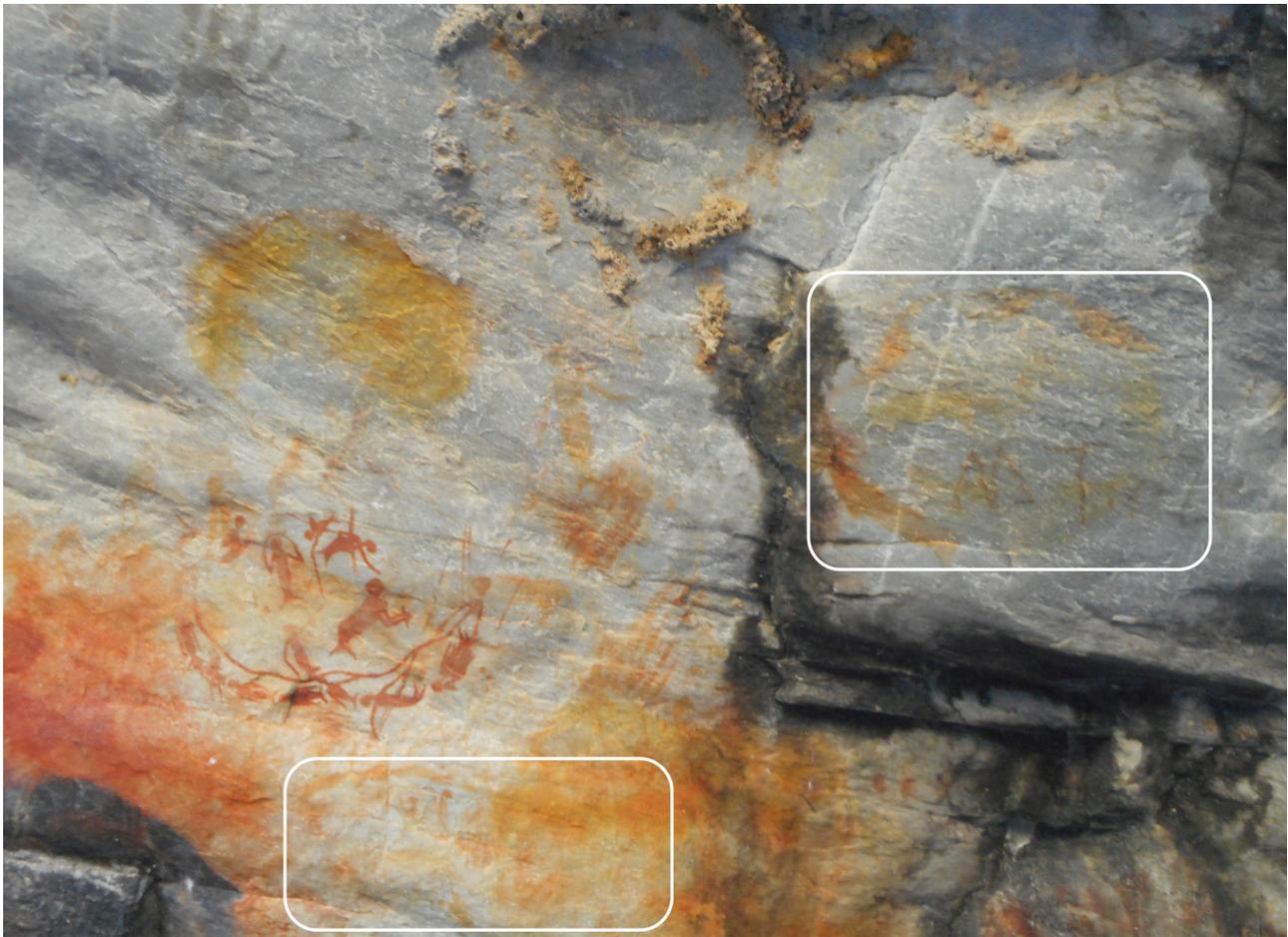


Figure 10.9. *Replicated oval-like composition that is similar to the 'swift people' motif, 2016. Photograph M. Hayden.*



Figure 10.10. *Figurative images superimposed on swaths of red or yellow colouring, 2016. Photograph M. Hayden.*

or recognizable to the naked eye, and therefore bring this register of hidden and liminal into the realm of what we can study (e.g. Hollmann & Crause 2011).

The function of colour through tonality is particularly evident in the left and central quadrant, and stands as a recurring aesthetic device unifying linear elements. Moreover, the display of tonality defines the picture plane and influences the figural positions within these planar spaces. For instance, in the left quadrant swaths of red or yellow-orange pigment act as a foregrounding counterpoint for the more linear figurative imagery (Fig. 10.10). These zones of colour are often diffused in intensity, calling forth a sense of the ephemeral and atmospheric, a state of the undefined.

This use of variable colour intensity is apparent in the central quadrant where the 'swift people' cluster is surrounded by diffused yellow pigment above and on the right and red pigment on the left (Fig. 10.6). The integration of these complementary colours has a unifying effect, while the varying intensity conveys depth. Embedded in the application of this paint is the circular and elliptical use of a pure colour source radiating shadowy counterparts that appear both as ethereal mist and indeterminate silhouette figures.

As mentioned above, the boundless ethereal effect of the colour modelling is suggestive of the ephemeral. The loss in clarity of line is precisely its agency, expressed by Wölfflin (1950 [1932], 157) as '[c]omposition, light and colour no longer merely serve to define form, but have their own life'. Distinctive orbs of red and yellow pigment form an integral part of the main 'swift people' arrangement and anchor the figures. The colour vibrancy conveys energetic resonance in pigment. The tonal use of colour here has the capacity to envelop or transmute light in various ways and create continuity and tension, and perhaps, even negotiate the relationship between motif and background.

Metaphoric implications of colour valence

In an attempt to explore the metaphoric dimensions regarding the colourful imagery at Ezeljagdspoor site, I employ Lewis-William's (1993, 277) position that 'the art does not "illustrate" the ethnography, nor does the ethnography "explain" the art in any direct sense. Both contain, in their own ways, metaphors that lay at the heart of Bushman belief'. Just as the figured spiritual metaphors contained in the archive can be explored in

relation to the figural content of the imagery, the use of colour as descriptor and metaphor in the archive can be used to investigate the use of coloured paint on the rocks. For example, there exists some correlation to didactic patterns of categorical designation and developmental stages (Bleek & Lloyd 1879, 6879–84 [stars]; 4071–4 [bees]; 8744–54 [locusts]). Archival references to the maturing stages of bees and locusts use colour terms, like, white (bees), red and black (locusts) to refer to primary, intermediate and adult stages of growth respectively. Furthermore, the sun and moon are associated with colour as a condition of age or culmination of time. Colour use in these instances may potentially allude to colour significance through implicit connotation by association and its adjectival affiliation. Colour metaphors discernible in the ethnography seem to find visual correspondence in the imagery, as gradient colours (red, orange and yellow) are regularly depicted with lighter hues as tonal foregrounding for darker more discrete forms. For instance, the linear use of colour both in abstract and figurative content at the site is predominately allocated in red, a colour frequently associated in the ethnography with processes of transformation and mature stages in the development of various entomological and atmospheric phenomena (Bleek & Lloyd 1879, 2517, 4074, 8753):

She threw up a scented root (eaten by some Bushmen) called !huin, which became stars; the red (or old) !huin making red stars, the white (or young) !huin making white stars. This root is, !kabbo says, eaten by baboons and also by the porcupine (Bleek & Lloyd 1911, 76) (BC_151_A2_1_034_2517).

Little bees when chewed are white like milk. They are still in their cells; these latter are red (BC_151_A2_1_052_4074).

... for the benne [locust with newly developed wings] is red like the earth. The grown up locust is black (BC_151_A2_1_106_8753).

The use of red therefore seems to reinforce the clarity and wholeness of form metaphorically as well as visually. In addition, the ways in which the interplay between the linear and tonal aspects of the imagery through vignettes in hues of red and yellow-orange allude to pictorial relationships, also seem to be reflected in the ethnography. In the opening passage, the Mantis and his son-in-law are emphasized and situated in relation to one another spatially as well as through their colour designation ('The rainbow. It is yellow, its place which lies above; a thing which looks red [...] while the

Mantis is the one who is also yellow; he is the one who lies above; while !kwammaŋ-a lies underneath'), perhaps also a metaphor for social hierarchy or behavioural proclivity. Dorothea Bleek (1929, 305) describes !kwammaŋ-a as 'quiet, and brave' and the Mantis as, 'talkative, nervous'. Furthermore, the Mantis is described in the ethnography as yellow and above his son-in-law, !kwammaŋ-a who is red and remains underneath. This adjectival mutuality exhibits a potential confluence of colour and meaning readable within a broader narrative context. Colour can then be understandable as one of several 'discursive, symbolic and ideological strands [that] converge to form a narrative' (Wessels 2010, 246). Therefore, colour isn't separable from its referent, forming one strand of a wider narrative and understandable only in a situated, relational manner.

These writings reveal pleas with the various astrological bodies to shift their positions, in a call to usher in a new phase or season. An example of this is a description regarding the breaking of the dawn (young) or new day referred to as white and the setting of sun (old, retired, or culmination of time) as red:

*!gabbuken
!game-ta !gabbuken
The Day- Break's great tani?
!goro- ta or goro-ttwai This last name refers to
the Bushwomen singing to the stars with their
throats, making it set
!oin-si-Tkunken The Sun illuminates it, mak-
ing it white. When the sun has set, it again
becomes red
(On Page 37/ January 1873 Venus).*

The relationship of young to old, implying a process of transformation, is frequently conceptualized as a shift from white to red.

Exploring the concept of actualization

Through this close analysis of the panel at Ezeljagds-poort, I have opened up an exploration of the function of colour in visual and metaphoric terms through the conceptual lens of actualization, which might reveal a pattern that could be seen to hold at other sites reflecting a potentially 'pan-San' (Solomon 2008, 61; cf. Lewis-Williams 1980; Barnard 1992; Guenther 1989) aesthetic. In other words, the concept of actualization, emerges as an overarching way of exploring the patterns of colour associations drawn out of the ethnography above. My use of the concept of 'actualization' was inspired by Wessels (2010), who explores the themes of 'non-European' representation by Jacques Derrida through the 'actualisation of the

potential facilities that slept inside man' (Derrida 1976, 257; Wessels 2010, 52). Although the context of this excerpt is related to the complex paradox of nature and culture in a teleological structure (Derrida 1976), for me it solidified a way of conceptualizing colour as a dormant, yet evocable, vehicle for meaning. Due to the often episodic rather than linear framework of indigenous oral traditions (Wessels 2010), it would not be a far stretch to imagine these aesthetic patterning devices being used in a visual context. With this in mind, repeated engagement with, including the physical renewal of, the imagery over time by a community (Jolly 1986; Lewis-Williams 1986; Lewis-Williams *et al.* 1993; Lewis-Williams & Challis 2011) would suggest a continued interaction with the visual cues through some aspect of an ongoing practice of actualization.

Actualization, or the essence of being, denotes liminal and potentially temporal stages within a visual vocabulary. I propose actualization as a concept to bring together seemingly disparate ideas collected across different authors, concerning the auspicious nature of paint preparation (How 1962); the duality of the therianthrope, never discussed in ethnography only manifest aesthetically (Skotnes 1996); the intercession of imagery by the shaman during trance (How 1970 [1962]) and the temporality/liminality of the three-tiered cosmos (Lewis-Williams 2002; 2010b). Colour plays a significant role in the manifestation of actualization. The findings of my analysis of the panoramic composition at Ezeljagdspoor immediately recall the agency (Gell 1992, 52) of the paint as a reservoir of potency explained by a woman of Bushman descent, as 'harnessed by the shaman during trance' (Lewis-Williams 1993, 287). In this respect, I see the 'harnessing' of colour use as a method of visualizing liminal states in this particular panel because colour, among other visual aspects of painted imagery, participates in bringing into a concrete expression a range of abstract ideas.

Indigenous southern African paintings have often been interpreted through a cosmological lens. An important aspect of this framework is the three-tiered ordering of the cosmos as spiritual, secular and intermediate or subterranean spiritual (Lewis-Williams 2002, 144–51; Hollmann 2005b, 30; Lewis-Williams 2010, 7&14).

The concept of actualization, albeit subtle and not always explicitly stated, has been a facet of reviewing temporal states of being (e.g. Pager 1971, 1975; Vinicombe 1976; Solomon 1997) and their relevance for the meaning of the imagery. Scholars have further noted that the visual, 'process and transition [are] as significant as [the] product' of creative work (Wintjes 2014, 693). Pippa Skotnes, who has done extensive work with the Bleek and Lloyd reference material,

asserts that transformation was a fundamental aspect of Xam belief with occurrences related to the sympathetic relationship of hunter and prey, people of the Early Race, rain, women during menarche and the trickster god *lkaggən* (Skotnes 1996, 240). She understands therianthrope imagery as representative of a transitive state articulated visually rather than orally: 'The therianthrope or the zoomorph in the paintings is thus an indication of a change from one state or form to another, attributes of both being reflected in its morphology. Yet this liminal state, this process of becoming, is never witnessed in the ethnography' (Skotnes 1996, 243). Perhaps, the articulation of change is more accessible and poignant through a visual device than an aural or verbal one.

I propose that interpretations can be enriched through a consideration of colour. Rock art scholars continue to struggle with the unwanted but unavoidable imposition of an outsider perspective to an infinitely nuanced and yet complexly and fragmentarily accessible worldview of southern Africa's indigenous people. The 'swift people' panel provides an extraordinary opportunity to expand our understanding of the use of colour in southern African rock art.

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Notes

1. This paper forms part of the larger corpus of my doctoral research.
2. The choice of a single colour for this reproduction would have been determined by the available lithographic technology of the time. Multiple colour, or chromolithography, came later, and the illustration of rock paintings by Joseph Millerd Orpen was the first published instance of this technology in South Africa (Dubow 2006).
3. BC151 E5.1.1, 8-9.

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Part III
Agents

Chapter 11

Unsettling narratives: on three stone objects answering back

David Morris

This article engages three stone objects from the Northern Cape in South Africa, brought together for the 2016–17 exhibition in London, the British Museum's *South Africa: the art of a nation* (Giblin & Spring 2016). Two of the objects, a sculptured stone head¹ found originally at the outskirts of Kimberley in 1899, and a stone handaxe² excavated in 1980 from an archaeological site at Kathu, were borrowed from the McGregor Museum in Kimberley, while the third is a rock engraving³ brought out from the British Museum's own storerooms, and known to have come from a rock art site near Kimberley, sent to London for the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886 (Figs. 11.1–11.4). Disparate in their individual histories, they reflect changing contexts in the development of museums and the gathering of the past, redolent also of the geo-political dynamics between imperial metropole and colonial periphery and the ways in which this would play out in conjurings with traces from the past (e.g. Schlanger 2002).

As display elements in the London exhibition the three objects were mustered to weave some of the threads 'From origins to early art', through to the emergence of 'First sculptures', in a narrative of South Africa's art through time. But other than through the coincidence of their apparent material commonality, as 'stone' objects, and their derivation as variously 'archaeological' finds⁴ from a particular part of the South African interior, they do not in fact easily cohere as a given set of objects extracted from the exhibition or from their respective longer-term storage places. Their beginnings are separated by millennia, in contexts unrelated. Rather than converging, their stories merely intersect as in the exhibition – and here. They do so by forms of contrivance – both in the exhibition (which nuanced the narrative by juxtaposing the artefacts of the past with contemporary artworks) and in this article – having been made available by

the circumstances and contingencies of history and of museological endeavour at different periods, through practices of assemblage, classification and display. Their intersection, or entanglement (*sensu* Ingold 2011), in this present, reiterates the destiny of many an individual thing in the museum. Part of the *modus operandi* of museums has been precisely that of contrivance, of worldmaking (Goodman, in Elgin 2000), variously to establish, bolster, or indeed to challenge succeeding generations of master narrative. Tony Bennett (2005, 525) paraphrases the title of a paper by Bruno Latour to express this worldmaking capacity: 'Give me a museum and I will change society.' This article engages the three objects as a provocation, to tease out ways in which, by their manifest agency, as 'things that talk' (Daston 2004), established views and the taken-for-granted typologies (starting with 'stone') may get to be unsettled.

If the life histories of artefacts are dynamic (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986; Bailey 2007), this is no less true, it has been said, of their 'afterlife' in museums. Never quite settled within the collections – assemblages and gatherings – of things, the more evocative 'special finds', some even manifesting a 'charismatic' allure (Wingfield 2010), jostle for narrative priority – even as they are disciplined by curatorial regimes. Expanded knowledge and shifting perspectives and paradigms in museums and academia will have had the curatorial process itself re-scripting many an individual object's place, for example, in evolutionary or chronological typologies; in its perceived functional designation as part of a 'culture'; its purported purpose in some 'etic' adaptational strategy of the past; or its 'emic' role as vehicle for meaning and having a communicative or symbolic dimension (Buchli 2004, 180–2; see also Wingfield 2017 on the assembling and reassembling of archaeological ages). Objects become this pliable



Figure 11.1. Map showing locations from which artefacts originated.

because of their ‘doubleness’ (Thomas 2016, 50), being traces of their own pasts yet detached from them, and freed (perhaps more typically pinned to an exhibition panel) for manipulation. Changing senses of significance, salience, or political ideology, will have seen artefacts literally moved in or out of display or storage spaces, alternately hidden or brought before the public gaze. The accumulated patinas of meaning and associations, unevenly ‘present’ as in palimpsests (Bailey 2007), however, lend objects something of an unruly capacity for assertion and provocation independent of museological intention, to trigger reactions, and senses of the relations at play, to ‘answer back’. Some objects (and monuments), given their haptic properties in situations of conflict, have become themselves embroiled in violence and destruction (Hall 2016).

A point of departure for this article is the challenge that classification has tended to substitute for understanding (Jones 2012, 183). A deeper, more fundamental level of subversion by things that ‘answer back’ is afforded by the ontological turn in which the material world can no longer be conceived as typologically passive and inert (Olsen 2007; cf. Malinowska & Lebek 2017). The pre-given categories of modernist science become untenable. Where an engraved rock, a sculptured stone head, and a knapped lithic handaxe may have been defined matter-of-factly in an archaeological report, or in the display label or catalogue entry of a museum – descriptive of the mindful human manipulation of stone in different times and places – these classifications and characterizations may turn out to be, in significant respects, inadequate, if not wrong. Benjamin Alberti makes the cogent

observation with respect to conceptual or ontological alterity, that ‘archaeological categories can capture only part of what is significant about an object’ (Alberti 2016, 172). He cites work with the Maori concept of *Taonga* which enfolds far more than property, artefacts, land and resources but also all the attendant aspects of how these relate amongst themselves and with people: it is ‘both covering talk and physical entity.’ Key to the perspective adopted in this article is Tim Ingold’s (2007, 14) insistence that humans participate as skilled practitioners within a world of materials, rather than engaging or acting upon a material world independently given. Materials do not so much exist as occur, he urges, having properties that are not fixed or essential but rather are historically emergent in processes and relations.

Dramatis personae

As already intimated, the three objects, the key figures of this article, have rather different histories, which may tend to be flattened by the bland characterizations and ready classifications of museum practice as they are brought within the universalizing (if changing) institutional purview. At the same time, the records sedimented around each one – the paper trails of collections management, scientific literature and public media, following the movements of each within and beyond the museum – reflect uneven histories of their use and changing senses of significance, and constitute the further entanglements that life ‘afterwards’ entails. The article presents an engraved quagga, a carved head, and a knapped cutting tool.

Engraved quagga

The rock engraving or petroglyph featuring an image of a quagga (a sub-species of the plains zebra) is not the oldest of the three objects discussed, but was the earliest one to enter a museum. It was extracted from amongst other engraved rocks on a hill outside Kimberley in South Africa, most likely about 1885. 'From a natural mound about 8 miles N of Kimberley, on cracked boulders' is how the accession card at the British Museum provenances the quagga engraving, which arrived there via the Colonial and Indian Exhibition that opened in London in 1886. At the exhibition's conclusion it was 'presented [to the British Museum] by the Kimberley Local Committee' through the agency of F. Schute Esq, Royal Colonial Institute. A companion engraving accompanied it to the museum.

That there were more engraved rocks sent from the same site to the exhibition is hinted at by the Catalogue entry which enumerates: 'Zebra [quagga], ostrich, elephant, rhinoceros, hippopotamus, hartebeest, crane, bull' – with some of these animals not

depicted on the two rocks preserved at the British Museum (Cape of Good Hope 1886, 20). They are described in the catalogue as 'Bushman carvings – Representations of animals, chipped in the surface of greenstone boulders'. Cundall's *Reminiscences of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition* refers to a 'collection of Bushmen antiquities' (sic) including 'very curious pictures on stone' which 'prove of interest' (1886, 84).

As it happens, in the early 1870s, over a decade before, the geologist George William Stow (Skotnes 2008) had visited rock engraving sites near Kimberley and, using large sheets of card, assembled depictions of what he took to be the most remarkable images at each of the sites. One of the Stow copies, preserved at the McGregor Museum, bears the caption: 'Wild animals from the rocks on Bushman Kopje on the farm Wildebeest Kuil' (Fock 1965). It includes the quagga engraving which had ended up at the British Museum. When in 1963 McGregor Museum archaeologist Gerhard Fock visited the British Museum he reported seeing 'two South African rock engravings



Figure 11.2. A block of andesite with engraved quagga, removed from the site of Wildebeest Kuil, c. 1885. Image copyright Trustees of the British Museum (BM Af1886,1123.1; Image AN1325491001).

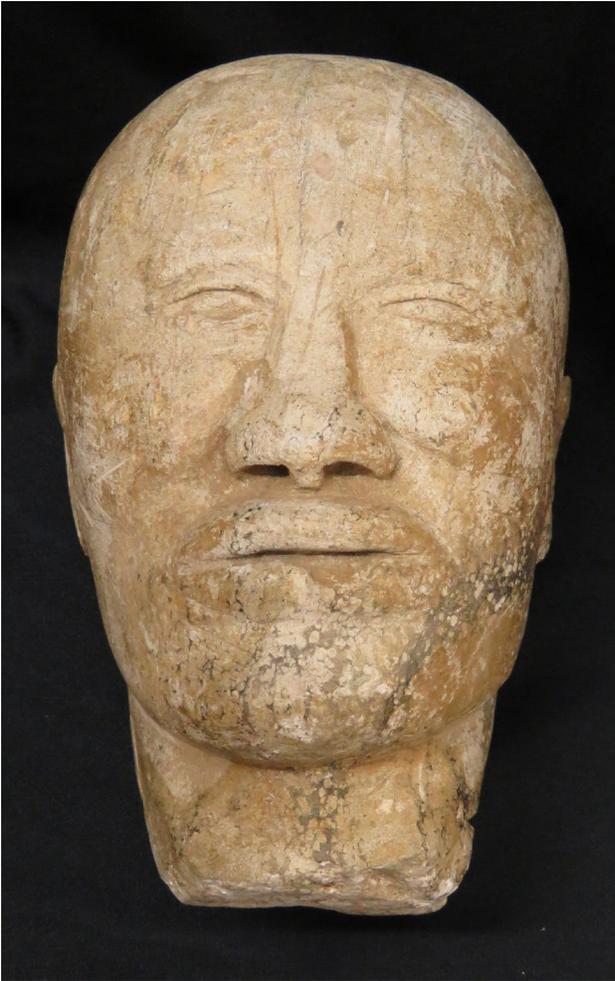


Figure 11.3. A sculptured stone head found originally at the outskirts of Kimberley in 1899. Photograph courtesy and copyright the McGregor Museum, Kimberley (MMK 85).

in the Ethnographical Gallery', his enquiries revealing the locality as being near Kimberley. Later consulting the Stow copies he was able to confirm the presence of the British Museum's quagga engraving on site in the early 1870s. Today, some 200 engravings remain on the hill, which was developed for public access in 2001 as the Wildebeest Kuil Rock Art Centre (Morris 2012; Weiss 2012).

Carved head

The Kenilworth Head, sculpted in a kaolin-like stone (Wilman 1933, 24), was donated to the McGregor Museum in 1908, and, as accession MMK (McGregor Museum Kimberley) 85, was one of the museum's earliest acquisitions.⁵ The first page of the original register has accessions 1–31, copies of 'Rock Paintings'. The next, accessions 32–63, comprises 'Implements', including

'arrow head', 'scraper', 'mullers' and 'grinders', clearly all objects of Stone Age derivation. What is today generally known as the Kenilworth Head appears on the following page under the heading 'Native Curios'. Inscribed at a later date, between red pencilled lines scored diagonally across this page, an annotation indicates: 'Transfer to Ethnology'. The original single accessions series would at that later date be separated by discipline as the museum's broadly anthropological collections grew, while this very first register was retained for what was, in time, designated Archaeology.⁶ For MMK 85 (which has since returned from Ethnology to Archaeology) the register provides scant information: merely 'Head of Bushman'. The permanent record (in Indian ink) suggests no locality, identifies no donor or date of acquisition (though bracketed by other accessions dated 1908), and offers no remarks. Later pencilled entries indicate 'Kenilworth' [a white miners' township at the edge of Kimberley] as provenance, and a single further comment: 'Display'.

Descriptions of it published later in the century (Wilman 1933; Power 1951), clearly having benefited by access to some other, perhaps oral, source or personal recollection,⁷ provide a little more detail: the stone carving was 'found eight feet below the surface at Kenilworth' it is claimed (Wilman 1933, 24–5) ... 'when Siege Avenue, Kenilworth ... was being constructed during the Boer War' (Power 1951, 54). These added insights would render this most singular object 'archaeological' by definition – but they shed little useful light on its context.

Maria Wilman, first curator/director of the McGregor Museum, and responsible for the 1908 accessioning, would later refer to the Kenilworth Head in her 1933 book, *Rock engravings of Griqualand West and Bechuanaland*. Here she appears to doubt the original ethnic attribution of this 'portrait head of a ?Bushman' (sic) (1933, 24); but adds a tantalizing anecdote, that: 'From an elderly Boer visitor to the museum we learned that, in his youth, the Bushmen on his father's farm in the Orange Free State, just across the border [from Kimberley], had a similar head, which they were in the habit of bringing out on festive occasions and dancing round' (Wilman 1933, 25).

Knapped cutting tool

The Kathu Pan Handaxe, an Earlier Stone Age large cutting tool (LCT), is the only one of the three stone objects having what would now be considered by archaeologists and curators as a reasonably adequate provenance: it was excavated from Stratum 4b in Square D21 at the site of Kathu Pan 1. The site is part of a series of in-filled sinkhole deposits in a pan or shallow depression near the town of Kathu north west

of Kimberley. Late Holocene material at and near the surface overlies a deep stratified sequence through Middle Stone Age and Fauresmith horizons, to a basal Acheulean unit dating to at least or beyond Early Middle Pleistocene times – in which both stone tools and associated animal bones are preserved (Beaumont 1990; Porat *et al.* 2010). Research at this remarkable site and in the surrounding landscape continues (e.g. Porat *et al.* 2010; Wilkins & Chazan 2012; Wilkins *et al.* 2012).

The relatively complete identification and Carlesian assignation for the Kathu Pan Handaxe in



Figure 11.4. A stone handaxe excavated in 1980 from an archaeological site at Kathu. Photograph courtesy and copyright the McGregor Museum, Kimberley (MMK 6538-4b0001).

relation to an archaeological grid and the stratigraphy of the site is a reflection of the time and context of its discovery. It was found in 1980 during systematic excavations by Peter Beaumont, archaeologist at Kimberley's McGregor Museum. As an organized discipline, archaeology had come a long way from its antiquarian beginnings in the previous century, and from its institutional establishment in South Africa through the 1920s and 1930s (Shepherd 2003). What was acceptable practice when the engraved quagga and the carved stone head were received into their respective museum holdings, had long since been repudiated by the profession. Legislation here from 1911, refined several times subsequently, protected what were initially referred to as 'Bushman relics', and regulated the practices of archaeology and curation.

Strikingly different, as well, in the case of Kathu was that, whereas the engraving and carved head had arrived in museums as individual items, the handaxe was part of an excavated assemblage of many thousands of individual stone artefacts, contained in 267 museum storage boxes. The Kathu collection archive includes paper records, with maps, section drawings and photographs, today enhanced by a burgeoning digital archive as work at the sites continues.

Becoming iconic

Remarkable features of the Kathu Pan Handaxe, best defined by reference to its aesthetic rather than any particularly archaeological properties, combine to have it stand out from amongst other handaxes from Kathu and from many other Acheulean find-sites in South Africa. A high degree of lateral symmetry has been noted often enough for handaxes (although by no means all have this 'archetypal' characteristic); but this one example, also distinguished by its relatively large size (230 mm long), is exceptional: it is 'technically superb,' as Beaumont (1999) would put it. Uniquely, moreover, it has a lustrous glaze, the result of fluctuating geochemical conditions peculiar to the deposit in which it was preserved, which precipitated a coating of silica on bone and stone alike (Beaumont 1990, 80). If ever there was a handaxe destined for display, this was it. Indeed, rather than being simply 'a handaxe from Kathu Pan 1' (where there were at least 25 in Str 4b – Beaumont 1990, 79), this most perfectly formed teardrop-shaped biface was soon hailed as 'The Kathu Pan Handaxe' – a singular piece, now widely travelled, featured in a postage stamp, and celebrated in poetry and prose.

A certain aura arose around this one specimen from the start, with Beaumont giving it virtually iconic prominence, in talks, lectures and reports.

Figure 3.12 in Peter Mitchell's *Archaeology of Southern Africa* (2002, 60) shows an ensemble of show-and-tell pieces, including *the* handaxe, which Beaumont would typically take on excursions to the site or have at the ready for talks in town or elsewhere. It featured as a prop to handle in television documentary appearances. It became itself – the 'master hand axe' (Cope 2005) – symbolic of the Earlier Stone Age of Southern Africa. When Tom Phillips of the Royal Academy of Arts in London was scouting for works for the proposed major exhibition, *Africa: art of a continent* (1995–6), the handaxe from Kathu was one of those borrowed (Phillips 1995). A second Acheulean piece from the continent went from Namibia. The Kathu Pan Handaxe was accompanied from Kimberley on that occasion by two rock engravings. Together they travelled on, after the exhibition's run in London, to the Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin, and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York.

Following the British Museum's 2016–17 exhibition, the Kathu Pan Handaxe has been on yet a further venture as part of the 2018 *First sculpture: handaxe to figure stone* exhibition at the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas, Texas (Berlant & Wynn 2018). Los Angeles-based artist Tony Berlant and University of Colorado anthropology professor, Thomas Wynn, collaborated in curating the show with the object of highlighting the aesthetic qualities in handaxes as the earliest forms of human artistic intention.

Depicting early South African history was the motivation behind a series of South African postage stamps issued in 1998; and here, in this different context, the Kathu Pan Handaxe features to represent the Earlier Stone Age. Not only is it in one of the ten stamps, but is also emblazoned as the major motif on one of the two First Day Covers (RSA 1998 Early SA History FDC 6.77 & 6.78). A replica of the handaxe was introduced into the McGregor Museum's *Ancestors* permanent exhibition opened in 1999, as part of a narration of South Africa's deepest past (Morris 2003).

Beaumont would bring the original specimen out of its box to show to people in other less public encounters where *inter alia* the handaxe inspired literary engagement, through poetry (Cope 2005) and travelogue (Martin 2008).

A quite different 'iconic' moment for the Wildebeest Kuil quagga engraving had occurred a century before. It, too, had travelled, but it would not return. The Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886, to which the engraving was sent by a 'Kimberley Local Committee', was timed as part of the run-up to the 1887 Jubilee of Queen Victoria, by then also styled Empress of India. The purpose of the exhibition, stated at the opening by the Prince of Wales, was to 'stimulate commerce

and strengthen the bonds of union now existing in every portion of her Majesty's Empire.' A 'flourish of trumpets' and a royal procession led by the queen and her son signalled the 4 May opening, at which 14 000 onlookers later witnessed the queen seated upon an Indian throne of hammered gold, imperial booty taken in the capture of Lahore (Mathur 2001, 494–5). Yet the empire was not quite secure, with challenges in evidence in India as elsewhere: in South Africa the years 1878–80 in particular had been marked by resistance to conquest on several fronts, including a signal defeat for the British at Isandlwana.⁸ Kimberley's hinterland was restless (Shillington 1985). Against this backdrop, exhibits bent on strengthening bonds and stimulating trade emphasized, among other things, empire's civilizing mission, by a parading of both the 'primitive' in relation to a sophisticated metropole, as well as instances of colonial progress, and commercial promise in 'exhaustive and varied resources' from the imperial periphery. One observer, notes Kruger (2007, 23), 'mixed praise for colonial industry with delight in primitivist ornament'. The Kimberley exhibits contained both elements.

Most prominently they featured the mines (Cape of Good Hope 1886, 116–18). Working models demonstrated methods and technologies of mining; the exhibition catalogue detailing statistics of diamond yield (with values in pounds sterling), loads of ground moved, and depths dug. A new feature for these kinds of fairs, highlighted by Kruger (2007), was a repositioning of Africans, not as 'savages' in tableaux that reinforced the distance between primitive and modern, policed for the 'authenticity' of performers' mien and attire, but rather in displays that recast the African as modern subject. Here their roles were enacted as workers in mines, dressed at least partly in European clothing, but with enough native ornament to type them tribally. Kruger draws attention to this tribal typing through an illustration of a 'diamond washing' tableau in Cundall's (1886) account of the exhibition. Not lumped as a generalized category of 'Zulus', each participant, in his description, is named, classified, and even measured as if against an anthropologist's rule. There are: 'the Gcakela Kafir, Silos by name, 6 feet 2 inches in height ... Mafena, the Fingoe ... the little bushman Klaas Jaar,⁹ 4 feet 6 inches in height ... Jeremiah, a Tambookie Kafir, a man who has faithfully served the Cape Government for 20 years [who happens also to be the most completely assimilated in terms of European dress] ...' (Cundall 1886, 88; cf. Kruger 2007, 23).

The compound system for migrant workers on the diamond mines, anticipating future organized segregation and apartheid, had been initiated in the

previous year, so that labour management in terms of tribe and homeland was incipient (Worger 1987). Government's interest in anthropology as handmaid to administration had already been signalled some years previously by High Commissioner Sir Bartle Frere (1878), who delivered a Presidential Address for the Philosophical Society on the topic of 'The Native Races of South Africa'. His expressed concern for 'preservation' would sound hollow and ironic, however, against his government's policy of 'disarming hostile and rebellious tribes' (Davenport 1972, 244): conflicts were breaking out on every front in the late 1870s. This was not the last time that government in South Africa would take an interest in anthropology, a discipline that was to be ever more 'useful' to 'Native Policy'. Smuts, a half-century later, prefaced the study *Realm of the Rain Queen* (in Krige & Krige 1943, xi), approving 'the kind of realism that [would] go far towards making the conclusions of social anthropology more acceptable to practical men and more useful to the administrator' (see Schlanger 2002 on Smuts' role in archaeology. Much literature pertains to later entanglements of anthropology and *volkekunde* with the state; see also Shepherd 2003).

As depicted in the 1886 exhibition, a forward-looking Cape Colony transformed by the diamonds of Kimberley, also glanced backwards to its former status as a colonial backwater, indexed, Kruger notes, by an arcadian 'Kafir Kraal and Bushman Hut', situated in the exhibition grounds (Cape of Good Hope 1886, 7; Kruger 2007, 24). This, the catalogue reveals, was 'occupied by four Kafirs, and by a bushman and his wife,' (upper and lower case usage in the original), who would 'carry out their respective native industries ... the manufacture of weapons, sticks, baskets, wickerwork, mats, sieves, beadwork and wire ornaments' (Cape of Good Hope 1886, 7). The Cape Colony's 'Native Department' – by which this exhibit was arranged – was additionally responsible for displaying 'Collections of Stone Implements', amassed by the pioneer road builder Thomas Bain, and by E.J. Dunn who loaned a considerable assemblage (Cape of Good Hope 1886, 7–20; Parsons 2013). There were also copies of 'Bushman drawings' (i.e. rock paintings); and, not least, the Wildebeest Kuil 'Bushman carvings' from the hill just beyond the outskirts of Kimberley.

At the British Museum in 1963 the two engravings from Wildebeest Kuil were exhibited, as Fock notes, in the Ethnographical Gallery, arguably maintaining them in a similarly timeless relation to the modern world as they had been in the exhibition of the previous century, although doubtless re-scripted, a subtext now more than likely functionalist. At the time, engravings at the McGregor Museum in Kimberley were on display in a

rock garden, a gesture not only at making a generic hill but also suggestive (though not necessarily intended) of the relation of primitive (in the garden) to civilized (indoors); as nature is to culture. This exhibit was situated in a courtyard at the Duggan-Cronin Bantu Gallery (as it was then called), in an assemblage more ethnographical than archaeological, and separated entirely from displays on the unfolding history of colonial South Africa. It was later noticed (Morris 2005) that, following the official split between 'Ethnology' and 'Archaeology' in 1948, several clearly archaeological objects (in the sense of having been excavated) had slipped across the divide into 'Ethnology', principally, it would seem, to augment sparse 'Bushman' material in displays. Assuming timelessness and cultural stasis had rendered quite unproblematic the use of artefacts up to perhaps thousands of years old in what were otherwise exhibits of twentieth-century material culture.

Concerning the Kenilworth Head, it has already been mentioned that uncertainty and re-scripting had been a feature of its particular history from the start, the original 1908 accession having provided nothing but that it was a 'Head of Bushman' – sans locality, donor, or context. What little is known about it comes from details seemingly remembered by Wilman and Power when they set pen to paper in 1933 and 1951 respectively. The object's movements between what became 'Ethnology' and 'Archaeology' might just as well have included 'Miscellaneous', which happens to be the heading at the top of the page following that for 'Native Curios' under which the entry for 'Head of Bushman' MMK 85 is to be found. MMK 95, 'Coin George III', and further down the page, MMK 109 'Boer shell – the last that fell into Kimberley 15 Feb 1900', provide a sense of these miscellany – the Boer Shell of course referring to the Siege of Kimberley and the very moment of the Kenilworth Head's allegedly being found in the course of a public works project – in Siege Avenue.

Miss E.M. Shaw, ethnologist at the South African Museum in Cape Town, helped to order the McGregor Museum's Ethnology collections in 1948, which spurred a greater rigour in classifying material culture more generally at the museum: new posts were created in due course for Keepers of 'Anthropology and Ethnology' and of 'Archaeology and History' (Morris 2005). The fragmentation of broadly anthropological subject-matter and of academic labour was a feature of the discipline's wider twentieth-century history (Ingold 1992; Lewis-Williams 1993; Pluciennik 2001), but there was a particular political salience to it in South Africa where Apartheid was being entrenched, with compulsory population classification by race on the statute books from 1950.

A not insignificant footnote may be added to the biography of the Kenilworth Head, namely that the photograph of it in Wilman's (1933) book is attributed to Rudolf Pöch. Pöch was the Austrian anthropologist and anatomist now notorious for advancing the racial study of human (particularly 'Bushman') skeletons from South Africa, including by plundering the remains of known-in-life individuals (Legassick & Rassool 2000). No other evidence has come to light concerning Pöch's examination of the carved head during his 1909 visit to Kimberley. But, he being regarded as perhaps *the* specialist of the day to adjudicate on what was or was not 'Bushman' in the morphological sense, this adds a previously unremarked twist to the history of the Kenilworth Head. Was it perhaps Pöch's opinion that led to Wilman's doubting the alleged '?Bushman' identity (1933, 24) inscribed at the artefact's reception into the collections in 1908? Could it also have been that this object implied, as a figurative sculpture, a level of intellectual sophistication not known or regarded as likely in Bushmen? What seems clear is that ambiguity as to its origin and context would have afforded the Kenilworth Head little traction in discussions on racial types; and it was in any case the more direct evidence of actual skulls and skeletons that fuelled the racial science in museums and academia, in and beyond South Africa, that spanned the first half of the twentieth century (Legassick & Rassool 2000). Coincidentally, turning the page in the old museum register, the next heading is 'Human Remains'.

Answering back: an ontological turn

Carved stone

The Kenilworth Head, in the end, defied these classifications; it was no match for the existing categories and, having been on display (there is no record of a caption), by the later twentieth century it was in a box, biding its time, in the museum's Archaeology storeroom. In a sense it had done some of its 'answering back'; and it assuredly may have opportunities for more. For a brief time in 2016–17, on display in London, its exhibition caption acknowledged that, while little was known, there was yet this possibility (based in part on what Wilman had said¹⁰) that it could once have belonged to a San/Bushman or Khoekhoen, and had perhaps been made shortly before European settlement. 'Figurative sculptures from this period are normally associated with Bantu-speakers,' the label continued, 'but the Kenilworth Head is a reminder that South Africa's first peoples may also have made figurative sculpture and that there is still much to discover about pre-colonial art in South Africa.'

An archaeologist's response might confirm that nothing strictly comparable had been found before or since in the region (see Morris 1990 on a small number of further, but stylistically different, sculptured stone heads from diverse and similarly equivocal contexts¹¹), and that, being largely devoid of viable associations,¹² the Kenilworth Head remains for now essentially an unexplained curiosity. If uniqueness should be an issue, the response might also acknowledge that other unique or rare objects do exist, such as the set of seven ceramic heads found at Lydenburg and the gold rhinoceros and related items from Mapungubwe graves (these also having featured in the British Museum's 2016–17 exhibition). The difference is that these latter objects – now complemented by subsequent finds of Iron Age figurines from other sites – are enmeshed in evidentiary strands sufficient to afford an empirical toehold and a lively debate (e.g. Maggs & Davison 1981; Whitelaw 1996; Boeyens & van der Ryst 2014).

In order to rescue unique instances (for example, the Kenilworth Head) from analytical oblivion, and to accommodate 'the mess, fragments and complexity' of which the record of the past is composed, Andrew Meirion Jones (2012) proposes an approach rooted in case studies indeed of such unique artefacts and sites. Most consequential in his approach, however, is a reconfigured ontological perspective – referencing, and advancing, the ontological turn cited in the introduction to this article – and within which he considers afresh the selected instances of sites and artefacts whose material agency, previously overlooked, becomes apparent in relational and performative ways.

Jones's argument sets out from a critique of the empiricist dream that infused archaeology in the earlier twentieth century. Its commitment to 'true facts' untrammelled by theory and speculation had been coupled with a devising of typological schemes which tidied up the record in chronological series.¹³ Perhaps *the* key concept to emerge in the discipline through these efforts was that of culture – defined, in one formulation (after Childe), in terms of repetitive associations, or constantly recurring forms. Critically, notes Jones (2012, 4), where culture was characterized on the basis of such regularity and association, 'those artefacts and sites that were irregular, or were not recurrent, could not be fitted into a culture group'. The result was their exclusion. Further, enshrined in prevailing Enlightenment thought was the even more fundamental position as to the relationship between a mute, even brute material world and a thinking social and cultural realm acting upon it. The combined 'epistemological legacy' of this, of categories cultural and ontological, Jones asserts, 'haunts archaeology to this day' (2012, 4). The forms of 'hard culture' and 'hard

science' that Shepherd (2003) had seen as resurgent in post-Apartheid South African archaeology constitute one, perhaps surprising, instance of this legacy.

Categories tend to fix artefacts and sites in stasis, frozen as types – as intended end-products of mind-imposed-upon-matter – established to reflect segments of archaeological time and space. Later, more sophisticated, modes of archaeological thought have not been immune to the pitfalls, Jones (2012, 190) points out. Symbolic analysis, he argues, has often sustained an underlying distinction between material things and their cultural connotations, such that artefacts serve as vehicles or conduits for symbolic communication; as mere carriers of meaning. The material things themselves remain passive and inert.

There is, however, a liveliness to things which is sensed and known through the lived experience of people, not passively observing, but actively interacting with them (Ingold 2007). Far from being static and fixed, things are in process; are mutable and changing. Moreover, to the extent that they are caught up in what Jones terms alliances or active partnerships with humans, in the performance of myriad tasks and activities, they are the co-makers or co-producers of the social group, of society (Jones 2012, 192–8). Contrary to Marx (and Childe), comments Olsen (2007, 586), man did not make himself.

A consciousness of this seems strongly evident in the fluid ontology, or way of being, of the !Xam Bushmen in South Africa (Guenther 2015), as indicated in nineteenth-century oral sources, with comparable insights from twentieth-century G!wi of the Central Kalahari. Stories in the Bleek and Lloyd archive (e.g. Bleek & Lloyd 1911; Bank 2006) are testimony to this ontological alterity. A few of the tales in question tell of an unravelling of the social order amongst individuals of the 'Early Race', in a fabled primal time (Guenther 1999, 66–70),¹⁴ when their material possessions also come undone, and revert to their constituent 'raw' materials. In one instance a family, taken by a whirlwind, is turned into frogs in a spring, the father's arrows transformed back to reeds that grow alongside, and their mats returned to grasses waving in the wind (Bleek & Lloyd 1911, 198–205). In another legend it is an 'angry' rain that deposits people and their possessions in a pool, where their karosses become living antelope 'which lie down and roll ... shaking out the water from their skins'. The sticks and branches of their hut become bushes; their 'arrows just stand about (as reeds),' while their leather quivers 'turn into springbok and ... get their ears' (Bleek 1933, 300). These simultaneously social and material 'undoings' reveal the logic clearly, if in reverse, of the mutual constitution of society by people and things.

Underscoring the argument is a linguistic equivalence in the !Xam, !Auni and G!wi languages between the names for some artefacts and the materials from which they were made (Lewis-Williams 1996, 128). In terms of this, acts of manufacture 'would not sunder the link' between artefacts and their origins, suggests George Silberbauer (1981, 132) in his study with the G!wi: 'the essential identity and nature of the material used' gets preserved. In Jones (2012, 186; cf. Ingold 2007), however, the point would be not any essential property persisting but rather the way materials 'unfold in time and space'; having a role in concert with people in the 'unfolding nature of events'. Such events would include processes of manufacture. It is relative to events in a world of becomings, as people and materials interact – events not predetermined by cultural or cognitive templates or *a priori* worldviews – that Jones conceives the emergence of artefacts and sites of all kinds; and the *making*, rather than the imposition or inscription, of meaning.

This is the crux of Jones's argument, which has particular pertinence for thinking about not only the Kenilworth Head but all expressions of 'material culture'. What appear to be 'categories' are composed of series of repetitions: of events, being citations or iterations of previous actions or performances (2012, 192). It is in relation to this that some kinds of events and artefacts, the 'unique' or rare ones, had failed to 'stick' or become the vogue. Although having arisen in reference to practices and materials that had come before, they had not, for a variety of possible reasons, been reiterated and widely shared. It is beyond the scope of this article to speculate further about the Kenilworth Head itself in these terms, save to suggest that further work focusing attention on materials and events, as advocated by Jones, with grounding in local insights (Alberti 2016), may yet yield results. Lorraine Daston (2004, 15), writing of *Things that talk*, suggests that 'the language of things derives from certain properties of the things themselves'. One (re)starting point for comprehending this mysterious stone head may well be a more thorough investigation of the stone itself: from its beginnings, being portable and workable; the traces of workmanship it bears in relation to its properties and the tools for the task; its attributes that are not fixed but emergent in its history (Ingold 2007, 15).

Engraved rock

The properties of rock surfaces and places were obviously central to questions as to where and how people of the Later Stone Age, skilled practitioners in the fashioning of rock art, produced the images that make up the corpus of South African hunter-gatherer engravings and paintings. This is not to mention the

assemblage of accoutrements: pigments and brushes (sometimes fingers daubed the stripes); the tools for chipping and engraving. Qualities of hardness, smoothness, and durability of the chosen surface would have been part of the equation for engravings, while a dark rock varnish, or patina crust over lighter stone colours within, were opportunities evidently appreciated for enhanced visual contrasts in chipped or incised images. The Wildebeest Kuil rock engraving is on a particular rock type – andesite – commonly exposed in the landscape north and north-east of Kimberley, on rises and outcrops across the plains and near rivers, where many hundreds of known rock engraving sites occur. In the Karoo, south-westwards, dolerite occurs as darkly patinated boulders on ridges and hills, bearing engravings as numerous there. But not every cluster of boulders is marked: locations and distributions seem patterned, with rock art often focused at or around distinctive features which themselves may have a numinous or ‘powerful’ quality (Deacon 1997; Morris 2002). Where there are rock shelters, possibly used as living spaces, available ‘canvases’ were painted rather than engraved (see references by Deacon, Morris 1988, and Parkington *et al.* 2008 for overviews of rock art in the Northern Cape and Karoo).

In his discussion of the linguistic features of Glwi, Silberbauer includes the tantalizing remark that, in the absence of grammatical distinctions between human and non-human, animate and inanimate, it becomes ‘structurally possible to express the idea that a stone might possess some of the characteristics of a man...’ (1981, 132). Although he immediately dismisses this as it ‘might make cultural nonsense’, the idea would not be considered off the wall today, given what is now appreciated about hunter-gatherers’ relational or animist (Bird-David 1999; Guenther 2015), and shamanic (Lewis-Williams 2014), understandings of how the world is, and how the properties of rocks enumerated above would be situationally active, their significance emergent in narratives and performance. Within landscapes animated by myths, where hills once were living creatures (witness the !Xam legend, ‘The Death of the Lizard’, explaining the origin of the Strandberg hills – Bleek & Lloyd 1911, 214–17; Deacon 1986), the gathered rocks and shelter walls where rock art was placed are considered not to be a mere ‘silent support’ with fixed physical attributes. More likely they would be, in some instances, portals into spirit worlds that might be negotiated as if via a ‘veil’ (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990; cf. Morris 2002). The ‘power of a place’ palpable in many a !Xam narrative (Deacon 1988; cf. Bleek & Lloyd 1911) is part of a perspectivist conception of the environment in which active agents were not only people but also other ‘beings’, both

animate and inanimate (Guenther 2015). In the oral literature landscapes appear wholly alive, infused with powers or influences, to be acknowledged in people’s everyday doings with animals and ‘things’. Clouds, ‘beings’ of the sky, as were the sun, moon and stars, walked as ‘rain animals’ on ‘rain’s legs’, while water also welled up in springs and rivers which were foci for ritual and respect. Guenther (2015, 296) refers to encounters experienced by humans with antelope prompting the sensations of a bond and ontological merging of hunter with prey. Throughout there is an ‘abiding sense of ontological connectedness’ (2015, 295) linking humans with enveloping animate and inanimate worlds.

The relational epistemology of ‘new animism’ (Bird-David 1999) together with the ontological insights of the !Xam were drawn upon to interpret the rock engraving site of Driekopseiland near Kimberley, where more than 3500 ‘geometric’ engravings occur on an expanse of glacially smoothed and undulating basement rock in the bed of a river (Morris 2002). Salient physical properties of the place, and riverine processes appear to converge relationally with beliefs concerning a mythic watersnake and practices around the coming of age rites of young women who are linked with the snake in local lore. The smoothed serpentine surface, carpeted with rock engravings, dips and rises above or below the water as the rains fluctuate seasonally, seemingly becoming itself the great watersnake, !khwa.

Hence the engraved rock from Wildebeest Kuil is unlikely to be any mere ‘representation’, as assumed in the exhibition of 1886 and after. Even ‘illustrating’ or ‘reflecting’, more abstractly, the beliefs of Bushmen, as exhibition captions might later suggest, would fall far short of comprehending what would have been a powerful ‘thing in itself’ (e.g. Hampson 2013, 368). More plausibly, the engraving’s resonances – quite literally in the moment or event of its manufacture, stone chiselling stone – would be of the ontological alterity and fluidity surfacing through stories, hunting experiences and rituals of ‘real’ life on the hill at Wildebeest Kuil.

While rock engravings such as this, much more readily than the Kenilworth Head, would slot into a category with other similar things, it is as well to recall Jones’s insistence that categories are best thought of as dynamic series of repetitions, citations and iterations – a little like Gabriel Tarde’s ‘differences’ and ‘inventions’ – in which social change could be ‘caught in the act’ (Tarde cited by Barry & Thrift 2007, 512; Candea 2010).

Catching the makers of the engravings in the act is what Silvia Tomášková seeks to do in a project at Wildebeest Kuil which steps back from questions of ‘meaning’ to understand more squarely the practices

of engraving production – where manufacture itself is ‘embedded in social practice and simultaneously creates subjects who shape the social realm’ (Tomášková 2015, 224). One may never know the individual who made any one of the engravings, suggests Tomášková, but by investigating the image-making in detail it might be possible ‘to discern traces of the temporality of production’. This would include the possibility that some engravings were not created in singular events but in a sequential process; where, through digital techniques that track the modification of stone blow by blow, one might also discern learning stages and adjustments, apprenticeships and mastery.

Knapped banded ironstone

The method Tomášková employs is akin to that of the *chaîne opératoire* deployed in stone tool analysis, following production techniques in the life cycle of artefacts through manufacture, use, maintenance, and discard. In stone tool analysis, useful particularly for remote periods where lithics are often the only surviving cultural trace, it allows archaeologists to appreciate knapping skills and techniques, where choices made recurrently might be characterized as technical traditions – taken to be the cultural attributes of a given group. Michael Chazan (2018), working on Earlier Stone Age assemblages in the Northern Cape including Kathu, cautions that, beyond technique *per se*, materials matter: they can shape technological outcomes ‘at least as much as learned skill and knowledge’. Peter Beaumont (1990, 80) noticed this in the case of handaxes from Kathu Pan (including the Kathu Pan handaxe itself), where, as he remarked, ‘the laminated nature of banded ironstone has affected the thickness parameter,’ so that ‘thin slabs [of banded ironstone] were sometimes merely trimmed laterally to produce the required form’. Chazan (2015) echoes and elaborates on this observation in his analysis of the bifaces from the nearby Wonderwerk Cave, also produced preponderantly on banded ironstone. Generally, rocks most suitable for knapping would be those that fracture easily and predictably: hence those that are brittle, homogeneous and isotropic (having uniform properties in all directions) are good; where those that are tough, flawed or have bedding planes are less so. Banded ironstone, with its alternate banding of iron and chert-rich lamina, leading to its natural fracturing from bedrock into flat slabs strewn across the landscape, is something of an exception. Despite its cleavage plains it in fact does flake well and has been described as ‘well suited for biface reduction’ (Chazan 2015, 708). The very way the raw material tends to occur in broken slabs obviates, for knappers, the prior production of large flake blanks, observes

Chazan; and eventual biface thickness is determined by the thickness of the selected piece – independently of the skill of the knapper (Chazan 2015, 708).

Jones’s (2012, 192–8) sense of an alliance or active ‘participation’ of materials as ‘co-producers’ with artefact-makers is well exemplified in this instance. The material’s ‘contribution’ to handaxe morphology poses a challenge moreover for comparison with other African assemblages, as Chazan (2015, 724) adds, since patently human skill at knapping would not be the only agency in contention.

Suspicion that assemblage-wide metrical analyses were missing important aspects of manufacturing technique at Wonderwerk Cave led Chazan to apply a ‘biographical’ approach to each of the bifaces individually, bringing the investigation close to the level of particular events. In one specimen, the traces of two stages of working was revealed, the first showing ‘considerable skill’, the next a lesser degree of workmanship. The ‘stark difference’ between the two has Chazan speculating on more than one hand being involved in its manufacture and use: ‘an intriguing hint’ into the life of handaxes and ‘perhaps variation in skill among members of the social group’ (2015, 719).

‘Things that talk’: three concluding remarks

Through processes of assembly and research in museums and archaeology – including investigations that reach back to the moments of manufacture and use – successive narratives and exhibition captions get to be interrupted or unsettled. The ‘afterlife’ of objects in museums is not static. Some have been pressed into service initially as avatars of the primitive against which metropolitan sophistication could be aggrandized; while subsequent more sophisticated study has rehabilitated many such objects to embody significance in Southern African pasts (Parsons 2013). Artefacts in museums were part of an enlistment referred to by Bennett (2005, 533) in the creation of abstract entities such as ‘prehistory’, ‘heritage’ and even ‘community’. Caught up in new forms of ‘objecthood’ they projected evolutionary stages and teleologies aligned, Bennett suggests, with programmes of social management. He goes on to consider contexts in the present century in which art objects are ‘re-socialized’ in situations of racial conflict for ‘diversifying the social’, where they act to change rather than simply encode symbolic propositions (2005, 535–6). In this, one could say, there is a kind of ‘answering back’. But much of the focus in these discourses on material culture in museums has been of the kind that foregrounds *consumption* and deployment of static pieces and finished works, where instead Ingold (2007) and Jones (2012), amongst

others, call for a turn to considering the materials of which they are constituted in concert with skilled practitioners, in *production* and in *process*, to apprehend them and their properties as active constituents of a world-in-formation. As Olsen (2007, 586) puts it, these ‘other entities’ were not just sitting in silence ‘waiting to be embodied with socially constituted meanings’. A rethinking of things has been a central concern here, where, in the spirit of this symmetrical approach, each of three concluding comments addresses a different aspect of the problem of classification and categorization – a pre-eminent mechanism for fixing both materials and concepts in place and rendering them inert – and which, in Jones’s critique, had tended to ‘substitute for understanding’. The challenges arising out of the histories of the three stone objects in relation to these issues constitute their ‘answering back’.

There is no such thing as ‘stone’

The first, a point alluded to at the outset about typologies and classification, is neatly encapsulated in Chantal Conneller’s (2011, 82) statement: that ‘there is no such thing as “stone”’. The universal substance of nature, reified and essentialized most notably in Thomsen’s Three-Age System, is best characterized, as Conneller urges, in terms of properties that are not fixed, but emergent in practice (cf. Ingold 2007; Jones 2012). Ingold (2007, 14) puts it that any given material ‘is neither objectively determined nor subjectively imagined but practically experienced’. Properties of materials arise in their being brought into conjunction with particular technologies, or with other materials. Indeed in some situations varieties of stone, as they emerge in their relating, may even be considered quite distinct in substance. A stone to be carved – and the stone with which to carve it; a basalt boulder embedded in the landscape or the rock wall of a cave – and the points and pigments that make the images on them; or a lithic chunk ready and suitable for knapping – and the hammer stone for effecting each flake removal: this variety of material manifestations of ‘stone’ may in diverse times and places be considered, each one, different in kind. Other materials and things incorporated or conjoined historically, for example eland blood with pigment, or sticks, hides, bone, water (or its absence), even mythic watersnakes, could make for other ‘assemblages’ involving stone. Banded ironstone, ideal for the knapping of handaxes a million years ago at Kathu, is the host rock to haematite which may also occur as sparkling specularite, crushed and mixed with animal fat for cosmetic and ritual purposes and smeared on their heads by !Xam men in the nineteenth century (Bleek & Lloyd 1911). Another form of haematite is ochre, powdered as an ingredient for body marking

and cave paintings. In the current era, the Banded Ironstone Formation is best known as the parent rock to iron and manganese ores, stone materials blasted from the earth at Kathu (one of the world’s largest open pit mines), and shipped by rail and steel-plated seaborne carriers to refineries in China, Europe and the Middle East. ‘To describe the properties of materials,’ Ingold (2007, 14) argues, ‘is to tell the stories of what happens to them as they flow, mix and mutate.’ They ‘cannot be uncomplicatedly grasped by an analyst,’ comments Conneller (2011, 8), given the very wide variety of interactions between people and matter through which they arise.

On the way things come to be known

Secondly, categories of knowledge and ways of knowing have been pertinent. Specifically, narratives from !Xam and G!wi oral literature and ethnography were introduced to bring local ways of knowing, and of being, to bear upon questions of ontological alterity, and how people and materials are mutually involved in constituting society – an idea centrally present in the quoted excerpts. Benjamin Alberti (2016, 171–2) discusses issues as to how indigenous theory, rather than mere analogies based on ethnographic content, should be taken up in archaeology, proposing, with Viveiros de Castro, acceptance of perspectivism, which ‘posits a “multinatural” metaphysics that inverts the culture–nature relation’, where instead of assuming multiple cultures and a singular nature (the world of science), one conceives of ‘multiple natures (worlds) and a singular culture (way of knowing those worlds)’. Lesley Green (2015) presents a sustained critique of the multiculturalism in question, including an unpacking of the dualism of ‘indigenous knowledge’ (along with the patronizing responsibility often taken up to ‘preserve’ it) and ‘science’ which, as categorizations of difference, are ‘deeply rooted in the history of coloniality, race, and power’ (2015, 234). Pertinent here is Shepherd’s (2003, 829) comment on the long pedigree and persistence of the idea of Bushmen as a ‘remote race or evolutionary “hold over”’ being the ‘authors of prehistory’, which had indeed been encoded in South Africa’s 1911 ‘Bushman Relics’ heritage conservation legislation.

From a multiculturalist position, assuming a universal nature, the ‘reason for difference is “culture”’. Green argues. But by rethinking these fixed, given (and outmoded) categories, different sets of questions arise, providing for anthropological and archaeological work to accommodate a wider spectrum of ‘intellectual heritages on all sides of the table’. Instead of pitting scientific nature against indigenous culture it becomes possible to acknowledge multiple ways – ‘naturings’

in Green's term, equivalent to ontologies – by which nature might be represented. To illustrate the point, Green cites, on the one hand, the phenomenon of movement – conceivable as flows and motion, integrating space, time, and bodies – which need not then be disaggregated and reassembled as physical components, as Cartesian rigour would demand. On the other hand, there is also in this view, 'nothing inherently wrong or untrue with Cartesian "naturing" – other than the claim that it is the only way of "naturing"' (Green 2015, 239). Jones (2012, 200) advocates the role of 'archaeological scientists' as invaluable for understanding the properties and potentials of different materials; and characterizes the work of theory and of science as not so much complementary as 'components of an intertwined multiplicity'. Green expresses a similar view in her appeal for 'a different archaeology': one not of nature (materials), nor of culture (cultural ideas), 'but an archaeology of the ecologies of knowledge and knowing, an archaeology of intellectual heritages and their value in grasping multiple ways of knowing and making' (Green 2015, 242).

Enacting society

Lastly, the very nature of society, and what it is to be social, comes into contention. Looking at the history of museums through object biographies, Samuel Alberti¹⁵ presents the classic substance ontology (distinguishing matter from thought), attributing only limited agency to things themselves: paramount were 'the humans in the story,' insists Alberti (2005, 561), while material culture, put in its place, 'was acted upon' (his emphasis). A foil to the view taken up by symmetrical archaeology, this nevertheless exemplifies the somewhat hegemonic construct that posits an always already existing social entity and cultural order which categorizes, structures, and inscribes an inert material world. Associated material culture would be assumed to represent corresponding stable identities, functions, meanings and events. Against this, as noted above, Jones (2012, 196–7) argues for a concept of society enacted or performed through events with materials as active 'co-producers'. A shift in focus away from a reified 'society' disengaged from the material world is envisaged, to consider a dynamic object-centred sociality. Things, artefacts or sites, are considered as actors – things that do things – such that people and things enter into alliances (some long-lasting, some just fleeting) in which they are co-performers of events (processes not reliant on *a priori* scripts) carrying-on or perpetuating social life (2012, 184–5, 197). Gabriel Tarde, refusing the prior existence of 'society', and striving to conceive social life differently, similarly considered collectivities and contagions as aggregates

not confined to humans, whom themselves he also argued are composite and in process (Candea 2010).

The concept of 'assemblage' has been invoked to work in similar ways to 'alliances' (B. Alberti 2016, 167), in one usage to replace 'context' as it connotes a greater sense of openness (where 'context' may imply closure); in another, being deployed to describe relational communities of humans and nonhumans – extended socialities that include animals, spirits and things – which may change in composition through time.

Today the three stone objects are part of *our* assemblage, their testimony challenging the ways we conceive the ontological and theoretical dispositions of our present. Having variously provoked, challenged, borne witness and implicated, in ways to which this article has attempted to respond, they have been and are 'things that talk'. But it should also be recognized how, as Benjamin Alberti (2016, 174) ventures for other instances, they can be 'withdrawn, taciturn, [and] reticent'; and that, taking their alterity and Otherness seriously, they, and all artefacts and sites of the past in our present, deserve our care and respect.

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Notes

1. McGregor Museum MMK 85.
2. McGregor Museum MMK 6538-4b0001
3. British Museum Af1886,1123.1.
4. Only one of them was recovered by archaeological methods, however.
5. The McGregor Museum had been officially opened in September the previous year (Morris 2007).
6. Natural history specimens were in a separate series from the start.
7. Maria Wilman and J.H. Power were respectively employed by and associated with the museum from 1908.
8. Fuelling a 'Zulu warrior' myth on the eve of conquest.
9. Jaar is a version of Cape Dutch Jager = hunter.
10. Which had also prompted the British Museum's loan request.
11. The one stone head with any reasonable context is that known as the Transvaal Road Head (Morris 1990), which was found in a burial, along with rusted iron bangles

- bearing 'trade cloth' impressions. Notwithstanding a radiocarbon reading taken to date the burial to the mid-seventeenth century, the subsequent finding of a large early 1870s African migrant-worker burial ground immediately adjacent suggests a possible link with the first years of the cosmopolitan diamond digger town of Kimberley, founded in 1871.
12. The claim that the Kenilworth Head had been recovered from 8 ft below the surface in what was open veld (Hutton Sands overlying calcrete) at the northern outskirts of Kenilworth (a white mineworker township dating from the 1890s) has never seemed plausible. Pre- and proto-colonial land use in the area by San or Khoekhoen would have generated traces near to water sources (springs or pans) or features (such as the hills at Wildebeest Kuil). Typically in the palaeo-dune fields such as at Kenilworth, Middle to later Pleistocene Age sites, e.g. Fauresmith material, tends to be the principal archaeological trace, occurring at the base of the Aeolian sands, as at Roseberry Plains (Beaumont & Morris 1990, 4).
 13. See Wingfield (2017) for a nuanced view of the histories of assembling and reassembling of archaeological ages – much like events discussed below.
 14. Guenther (1999, 66–70) explains the 'primal' and 'present' [ontological] orders of existence referred to in !Xam narratives, where a First Order of things, inchoate, fluid and ambiguous, gives way to a Second Order of present 'reality' in which people and animals and inanimate 'beings' are more distinct yet still pervaded by primal time myth and ambiguity.
 15. Not to be confused with Benjamin Alberti whose work is cited above.
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Chapter 12

Art and the everyday: gold, ceramics and meaning in thirteenth-century Mapungubwe

Ceri Ashley & Alexander Antonites

[A] remarkable discovery in the Transvaal: a grave of unknown origin, containing much gold-work, found on the summit of a natural rock stronghold in a wild region (Illustrated London News, 8 April 1933).

Towering into the sky, the Mapungubwe Gallery demands attention, bringing Africa's glorious ancient past right into today's discussion about art and heritage, art and value, and art and the human condition (University of Pretoria 2019a).

Mapungubwe – ‘discovered’¹ on the eve of 1933, is now a World Heritage Site, managed by the South African National Parks, and widely regarded as home to the first state society in southern Africa. It was here, according to site lore, that four European farmers persuaded a young boy to lead them to a fabled hill, long known and revered by the local community, and where they found gold rich burials, which we can now date to around the thirteenth century AD. Jerry van Graan, the nephew of the lead protagonist, was a student at the University of Pretoria, and informed the university of this find, leading to a series of excavations undertaken to explore this ‘remarkable discovery’ (Fouché 1937; Gardner 1963). Three of the burials stand out. The original gold burial – M1 – was found by van Graan *et al.*, and included within the spoils were the fragments of gold foil that were refitted to form the now famous gold rhino as well as a hollow gold bowl. Two other burials that contained gold were later unearthed during early excavations – M5 associated with a gold sceptre and M7 where c. 100 gold bangles and ±12,000 gold beads weighing six pounds were found (Steyn 2007). These lavish grave finds led to the assumption that the interred individuals were of high status, royalty even. This

gold, particularly the rhino, has come to stand as a symbol of indigenous history and artistic achievement (e.g. Carruthers 2006; King 2011). The government of Thabo Mbeki introduced a new national honour in 2002 – the order of Mapungubwe – with Nelson Mandela as its first platinum recipient. It’s perhaps then no surprise that when the University of Pretoria was planning the ambitious new Javett Art Centre and gallery, opened in September 2019, the decision was made to have a dedicated space for the Mapungubwe gold, valorizing the achievements of the past alongside contemporary arts. For the curators of the British Museum *South Africa: the art of a nation* exhibition (27 October 2016 to 26 February 2017), these objects are significant for their place in an emerging sculptural tradition in South Africa, and are clearly symbols of aesthetic achievement, innovation and power:

The sculptures found in the grave testify not only to the appearance in South Africa's artistic heritage of a new sculptural medium, gold, but also to a new purpose for figurative sculpture, as an indicator of royal status (Giblin & Spring 2016, 57).

Similarly, the curator responsible for the Mapungubwe gold at the University of Pretoria has described them as ‘South Africa’s crown jewels’ (Tiley 2004), and in the run-up to the British Museum exhibition, compared them with the Staffordshire gold hoard or Tutankhamun gold mask. She concluded ‘The world needs to see this rhino. The world needs to see this collection’ (Smith 2015).

However, more than just gold was found by these early visitors. One photograph of the original gold burial stands out; a depression in the soil from where the human remains have already been removed, metal bangles poking out from the cut section, and in

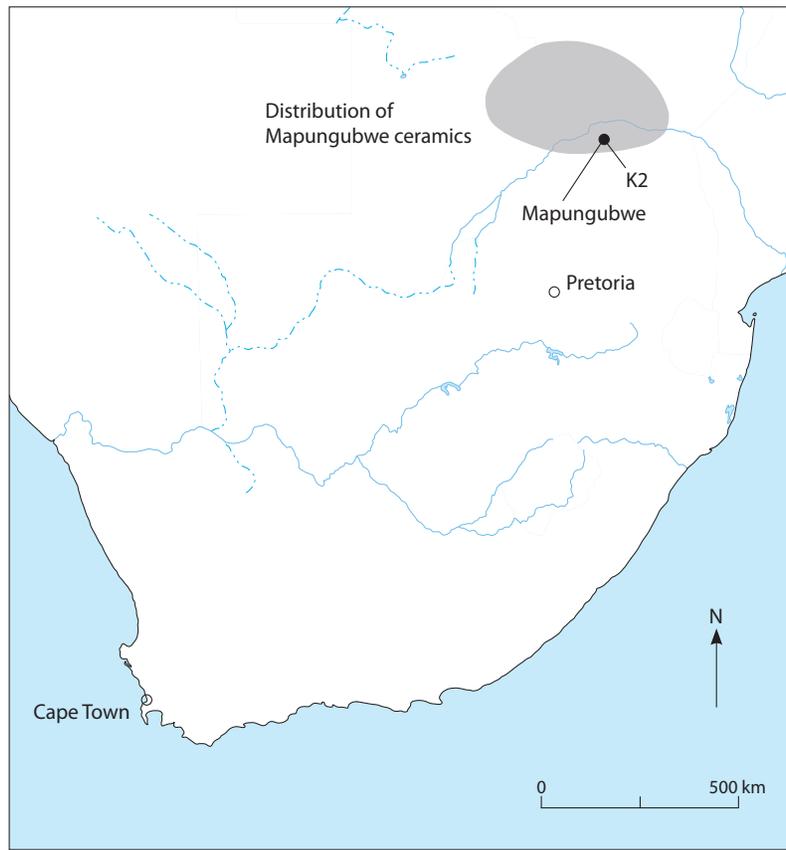


Figure 12.1. Map showing the sites mentioned in this chapter and the distribution of Mapungubwe ceramics following Huffman (2007, 285).

the foreground, the rim of a complete circular bowl (Fig. 12.2). As Fouché later described it ‘Under the left arm or, as it seemed to the searchers, on the left hand, a beautiful black bowl, exquisitely made and polished, was found’ (1937, 2). Photographs from the later excavation in September 1934 of M5 – the sceptre skeleton – show the excavator, Van Tonder, next to the grave, with human remains clearly visible,² as well as the gold sceptre itself (Steyn 2007, 143; Fig. 12.3). Once again a circular open bowl is clearly discernible, while another complete example was also found inverted. A number of pots were also found near the M7 burial (Steyn 2007).

Echoing Fouché, early commentators and researchers of Mapungubwe consistently remark on the finesse and beauty of the Mapungubwe ceramics. Schofield, who analysed the ceramics for the 1937 excavation report, described the characteristic ceramics which he terms M_1 as ‘A fine ware of which the best examples are beautifully decorated and burnished a deep black’ (Fouché 1937, 36), while an open bowl from the grave 11 is described as ‘one of the most beautiful pieces of pottery discovered there’ (Fouché 1937, 37). Indeed, this red burnished and elaborately decorated bowl is reproduced in one of the few colour plates in the volume, juxtaposed against the gold bowl

from the original gold burial creating a sense of equal value and symmetry between the gold/ceramic forms (Fouché 1937, Plate C).

In contrast, comments on the gold objects themselves are much more sparing in their aesthetic praise. Describing the original grave discovery, Fouché states:

They found large pieces of plate gold, some of them shaped. These were the remains of little rhinoceroses which had consisted of thin plate gold tacked by means of little gold tacks on to some core of wood or other substance which had perished. Solid gold tails and ears, beautifully made, had likewise been tacked on to these figures (Fouché 1937, 2).

Van Riet Lowe, recounting the later excavation by Van Tonder, notes the recovery of ‘70 ounces of finely wrought gold ornaments’ (1936, 285). Whereas the craftsmanship and beauty of the ceramics is remarked on, for the gold, its volume is the primary distinguishing feature in most narratives. Fouché seems to be mainly alone in describing the ‘beautifully made’ ears and tail, and by and large, where a descriptive qualifier is required for the gold itself, a slightly affectionate diminutive tone emerges in the sprightly



Figure 12.2. Image showing partially excavated grave, including gold grave goods, at Mapungubwe. Note the circular rim of the ceramic bowl in the foreground. Depictions of human remains remain sensitive, especially in southern Africa (see also Note 2) and are only reproduced here as this image is already in wide circulation and clearly demonstrates the direct association of ceramics with the burial. Photograph courtesy and copyright Mapungubwe Archive, University of Pretoria.



Figure 12.3. Photograph reproduced in Fouché showing Van Tonder triumphally positioned alongside the excavation of the M5 sceptre grave at Mapungubwe. Depictions of human remains remain sensitive, especially in southern Africa (see also Note 2) and are only reproduced here as this image is already in wide circulation and clearly demonstrates the direct association of the gold and ceramics together. Photograph courtesy and copyright Mapungubwe Archive, University of Pretoria.

'little' rhinoceros. Indeed, with characteristic withering eloquence, Gertrude Caton-Thompson, clearly had no time for the little gold rhino at all, and outlines its malevolent influences (in contrast to that of the 'fine pottery'):

Potsherds lay everywhere and search in the loose soil yielded the explorers iron tools and copper wire and gold ... gold the bane of archaeology, responsible for more pitiable destruction of historical evidence than ever followed in the wake of savage armies. Here the vile metal consisted of thin gold plates beaten into sheathing for carved figurines of rhinoceros and other objects, fixed with small gold tacks; of bangles, beads. And, more important, iron and a fine pottery bowl. These lay with burial remains which, in the circumstances of the excavation, did not survive intact (Caton-Thompson 1939, 325).

The ceramics from Mapungubwe were clearly remarked on by the archaeologists of the time, and were arguably more aesthetically valued than the gold objects. And yet none of these ceramics travelled to the British Museum for the exhibition, nor, at the time of writing, are they displayed in the prestigious new art gallery at the University of Pretoria. What makes these ceramics seemingly less valuable to museum visitors? Or to ask it another way, why is the gold such an object of public desire? There is undeniably a question of rarity; ceramics are ubiquitous across the landscape, whereas gold is rare, and with a few minor exceptions, only found at Mapungubwe during this period. Gold is also an easy comparative medium – Tiley-Nel using it to translate the value of Mapungubwe to a non-Africanist audience by comparing it to the gold in the Staffordshire hoard. And it seems to be this apparently universal value that continues to draw people's attention back to the gold rhino and its kin, and away from the humble pottery.³

The value of gold for many therefore seems axiomatic; would the Illustrated London News have written about Mapungubwe if there had just been ceramics? While the importance of gold as a new commodity of social hierarchy cannot be ignored (cf. Giblin & Spring 2016), we cannot make *a priori* assumptions about past material value systems. Gold is a globally recognized resource in the contemporary world, but there is great danger in projecting contemporary values onto the past, values which are often borne out of entrenched western praxis and ideas of wealth and success. In this paper we make the case for ceramics and their social importance, arguing that they, like the gold, need to be recognized as objects of art and significance.

What is art?

Like gold, the idea that art is a universally recognized commodity has come under sustained attack. In his 1996 paper, 'Vogel's net: traps as artworks and artworks as traps', Alfred Gell lays out three different approaches to the recognition of 'art' and artistic merit. The first, and the most widespread, is the universalist approach, which asserts that aesthetic quality is an achievement that is innately recognized and shared across humanity – the beauty of art transcends context. Art is undeniably art. This approach, he argues however, may have limited utility in many non-western and historic contexts where the very idea of art as an abstracted concept may not even exist (see also Gosden 2001). A more embedded definition might be that of what Gell terms the 'interpretive' approach, in which art is recognized as art, not because of some selective idea of aesthetics or material skill, but because it is articulated within a body of art historical thought that verifies its status. Gell uses Damian Hirst's shark in a tank as an exemplar. But once again, Gell offers the trenchant critique that this approach is still reliant on western tropes, in this case the privileging of the art historical academy as an arbiter. The final option is the 'institutional' definition, which frees itself from the constrictions of western art history, and rather demands that art is something that can be triangulated within some form of conceptual and symbolic milieu. To illustrate his arguments, Gell draws on Susan Vogel's curated exhibition 'ART/artifact' in the Centre for African Art in New York, and which featured Central African material culture (Vogel 1988). The opening gallery contained a Zande fishing net and nothing else. For Gell, this is a powerful act – the traditional idioms of 'African art' as accepted by the academy are ignored, and a seemingly functional item, or 'artifact' in Vogel's parlance, is elevated to the status of art. Gell argues that this functional artefact captures and entwines meaning for the Zande, just as it entwines the fishes it is designed to catch, and as such is an object of art.

One of the other examples provided is that of the Angave eel traps from Papua New Guinea studied by Pierre Lemonnier. These objects are nominally made to catch eels, but as Lemonnier (2016) demonstrates, they are intricately connected with the mythical story of the origins of eels and masculinity. In his recent volume *Mundane Objects: Materiality and Non-verbal Communication*, Lemonnier (2016) returns to these traps, setting them alongside a series of other case studies – from garden fences to dinky car toys – to explore the valency of these seemingly mundane and functional items. As Lemonnier expounds, while the

eel trap appears to be a functional object – designed to catch eels as part of an end-of-mourning event – their construction and the level of power harnessed in the spring that closes the trap around the imprisoned eel, goes well beyond the essential mechanical requirements of the object, and instead shows the ‘extravagant precautions’ (Lemonnier 2016, 55) taken in the making of this object. Or as he summarizes in another chapter about garden fences among the nearby Baruya, the objects under study are ‘too sturdy to be mundane’ (Lemonnier 2016, 21–44). What does he mean by these statements? In essence, Lemonnier is making the case that everyday objects can be imbricated in wide-ranging and powerful social mores, and are actually often agents within these practices, creating and enabling meaning and symbolism. For the garden fences, the elaborate and extended construction is a means of cohering social groups, for the eel traps, the latent power of the trap actually *creates* the power of the eel. However, as Lemonnier notes ‘There is nothing new in the idea that objects “render tangible” or “actualise” in a performative way important aspects of social organisation, culture, systems of thoughts, or actions’ (Lemonnier 2016, 128). Introducing the idea of the perissological resonator, Lemonnier instead argues instead that these objects are also able to distil and concentrate larger norms through the repetition and reinforcement of these rules for living, acting at different registers. However, these objects cannot stand alone in creating meaning they are tied up (or ‘bundled’ as Lemonnier suggests in reference to Webb Keane’s ideas) with other ideas, memories, practices and protocols, and thus need to ‘thought together’ (Lemonnier 2016, 129).

What does this mean for the Mapungubwe gold objects and ceramics? As Gell and others have argued, there is a powerful reason to reject the universalist notion of art as aesthetic or visual, not least for the Eurocentric foundations on which aesthetics is built. Similarly, we cannot rely on a system of value that draws from tropes of modernity and privileges certain world views and cosmologies. One might argue that the focus on the Mapungubwe gold rhino, well intentioned as it has been, falls within this latter category as it presupposes the importance of gold as an axiom of success, a notion that is steeped in the brine of modern society. Instead, Gell and Lemonnier are suggesting that everyday objects, functional objects apparently far removed from abstracted notions of art, can be viewed as art for their positionality within larger a nexus of meaning and resonance (Gell), and their perissological ability to create and interpret such webs (Lemonnier). And it is here, we suggest, that we can re-examine the ceramics from Mapungubwe. In the

remainder of this paper we will use the examples of Mapungubwe ceramics to argue that these mundane objects, were, like Lemonnier’s garden fences, too beautiful to be mundane, and in fact, were reservoirs of meaning that helped create and reinforce the very idea of Mapungubwe-ness. If the gold rhino encapsulates a system of value and prestige that makes it art, then so too, do the humble ceramics.

Exploring Mapungubwe

In order to make this argument, it is necessary to explore the larger context in which these ceramics were made and used. To date, our conversation has been focused on the objects themselves, and the responses of excavators and curators to specific items. However, following Gell and Lemonnier, this approach is potentially limited, and such objects need to be appreciated through a situated understanding of the socio-political context of their creation and use.

Mapungubwe is widely regarded as the capital of the first state system in southern Africa (Huffman 2000, 2009; although see Chirikure *et al.* 2013).⁴ Occupied in the thirteenth century, it was a hub for trade networks, including objects flowing from the Indian Ocean such as glass beads that were originally produced in south Asia (Robertshaw *et al.* 2010). According to this model, such material wealth latched onto older prestige systems such as cattle ownership, and facilitated the emergence of an elite class, who occupied the hilltop in a spatial and conceptual expression of their distance from the commoner classes who lived at the base of the hill. And it was on this hilltop that the elite were buried, complete with their gold, ceramics, and imported glass beads. Crucially, this period also marks a time of expansion into distant hinterlands, as the authority of the hilltop elite was pushed further into new territories with a tiered systems of settlements spreading across the landscape of northern South Africa, southern Zimbabwe and eastern Botswana. Communities from these sites were instrumental in reinforcing the power of the central elite as they would have provided tribute in the form of crops and animals to help maintain the core economy, as well as rare goods such as gold, ivory and cotton, which were needed to barter for the Indian Ocean exotics. This integrated political economy did not appear from a pristine landscape however. From the eleventh century until around AD 1220, the nearby site of K2 was the largest community in the area, and it was here that nascent state system emerged with shifts towards increased socio-political inequality, as well as an increase in wealth driven status over older forms of gerontocratic and/or patriarchal authority. In

the early thirteenth century this build-up of seething wealth seems to have become consolidated in one lineage, and under their influence, the whole community shifted *en masse* a kilometre to the east, to occupy Mapungubwe, where the new elite formalized institutions of inequality through occupation of the hilltop and the creation of a ruling class.

Importantly, in contrast to other seismic political ruptures within this area, this shift is not attributed to the effect of incoming populations and social take-over; rather the K2 to Mapungubwe shift is one of internal political dynamics. This, it has been argued, can be seen in the pottery which shows close similarities between the K2 facies of the ceramics and the Mapungubwe facies (Huffman 2007).⁵ There is a continuation in many of the forms and shapes of the vessels and decorative continuity in patterns of incised lines and geometric motifs on the shoulders of the vessels. However, the transition is not without significant shifts, a point that was recognized by early excavators. Gardner (1959) devoted a whole paper to the ‘shallow bowls of Mapungubwe’ (albeit only two pages long!) in which he recounts how the 1939 excavation season confirmed his hunch that it was only in the later Mapungubwe period that the distinctive open bowls, mentioned at the outset of this paper, were found. This contrasts with the story of the distinctive beaker form of the K2 facies, which largely disappears in the Mapungubwe facies. Other forms that all but disappear include spouted vessels. Technologically and stylistically there are also other shifts at this time. Schofield, defined K2 ceramics as M_2 and Mapungubwe as M_1 , and notes the difference in clay and production quality: ‘The clay also varies greatly; occasionally pieces were found which equalled in finesse anything in Class M_1 ...but more often it was very coarse’ (Schofield in Fouché 1937, 38). In contrast, Mapungubwe pottery is frequently burnished to give the surface a polished sheen and shine. Decoration on both is the same in essential technique (incised decoration) and layout, with bands or triangles and lozenges located on the shoulder and neck. However, there is a subtle shift, (which provides an easy shorthand for surveying archaeologists to date sites they find!) for whereas the triangles/crescents of the K2 pottery generally point upwards, on Mapungubwe pottery there is a shift towards downward pointing motifs. These are very crude summaries of a very complex body of data, and variations occur which contradict these broad brush patterns, for example the intermediate TK2 facies (Huffman 2007, 282–3), which remains poorly understood. Nevertheless, on a macro scale, it is clear that whilst there are clear continuities in the ceramics – discernible similarities

that a user or archaeologist could identify from K2 to Mapungubwe – there are certain shifts, which we suggest may be meaningful.

How are pots being used?

Mapungubwe period pottery is ubiquitous. It has been estimated that during the height of Mapungubwe as a settlement, an area of *c.* 30,000 sq. km came under the influence of this polity; a distribution map has been built on the recovery of Mapungubwe ceramics across this region. In other words, for the archaeologist, Mapungubwe period sites are so-designated in the first instance because of the identification of their distinctive ceramics. This type of pottery then was made and used across the state. It has also been demonstrated that while ceramics conforming to the stylistic template were produced locally at the web of sites that constitutes the Mapungubwe state, some individual pots were also moving long distances within the Mapungubwe polity, and indeed, beyond. Compositional analysis of the ceramic fabric has shown how individual artefacts made at, or near, Mapungubwe travelled far to the south, to the Soutpansberg mountains, and west into what is now eastern Botswana. In the latter case, they moved beyond the area associated with Mapungubwe’s sphere of direct influence (Jacobsen *et al.* 1995; Jacobsen 2005; Wilmsen *et al.* 2009). Ceramics were thus being used across the polity on an everyday basis. Indeed, the repertoire of forms and sizes seems consistent with familial use patterns, with shapes that might be used for cooking, serving and storage. Outside of what might be described as commensal/communal use, ceramics were used in special event contexts such as the burials described above. Other examples of ceramics moving beyond the mundane include the use of sherds as crucibles in metal working at Mapungubwe itself, upsetting the traditional gender dynamics assumed for metallurgy (male) and pottery (female) (Chirikure *et al.* 2015). Another perhaps overlooked use is the frequent re-use of sherds as spindle whorls for spinning, presumably of cotton, and thus textile production (Antonites 2019). Interestingly, there appears to be little substantive difference between ceramics found at elite sites/elite areas and those which are associated with communities of lower social status. In recent work at the political hinterland, and at tiny sites which, according to the settlement hierarchy would have been at the very bottom of the model, we find the same forms re-appearing, and beautifully decorated and burnished ceramics are relatively frequent (e.g. Antonites & Ashley 2016). Mapungubwe ceramics were thus equally used by elites/commoners, in the core and periphery and in

a range of roles that goes beyond quotidian practice of food preparation, serving and storage.

Understanding Mapungubwe ceramics

The significance of ceramics within Mapungubwe society, above and beyond their functional role, has long been debated. A well established and enduring argument is that ceramics reflect ethnic and linguistic identity, an approach that has widespread application across eastern and southern Africa. Tracing patterns of similarity and divergence, pioneering archaeologists sought to piece together a family tree of ceramics as a proxy for population movement and the creation of distinct ethno-linguistic groups (e.g. Huffman 1970; Soper 1971; Phillipson 1976). For southern Africa, the work of Tom Huffman has been invaluable in fitting together the stylistic inter-relations between different ceramic branches and facies, and their concomitant producers (e.g. Huffman 2007). In a series of challenges to Huffman's approach, however, arguments have been put forward that suggest such direct one-to-one relationships are unrealistic, and assume a fixed approach to identity that is at odds with historic and modern lived experiences and ethnographies (Hall 1984a, b). Critiques have also been directed at the idea that ceramics are passive mirrors of an identity, and that this identity is imposed and then un-thinkingly repeated generation after generation by the use of the same styles of pottery. This critique chimes with more recent discourse which challenges the human/non-human binary and the notion that only humans can have affective agency and the ability to influence society (e.g. Olsen 2010; Witmore 2007). Within such an approach, ceramics and other non-human agents, are regarded as capable of influencing their surroundings through the emotional, physical or sensory effect they have.

So how can we think about the Mapungubwe ceramics, and the archaeological patterns observed? While there is clear continuity and overlap between K2 and Mapungubwe ceramics, it is perhaps worth trying to untangle the changes we do see, and the possible reasons behind these shifts. Why does the ceramic change in decoration from the upturned motif to the downturned, and why the shift in forms? The change of orientation is intriguing. It clearly refers back to a well-known and well established visual structure, but it subtly usurps it; it recalls the memory of something reassuringly familiar (upturned), but clearly signals a new iteration (downturned). This co-opting of a shared and accepted iconography would have helped create a sense of authenticity that under-wrote the new design, softening the difference, and embedding the

new ceramics within an authorized visual history. In effect, the augmented layout both heralds a changing political order of Mapungubwe, but at the same time draws legitimacy through the echoing of the earlier designs of K2.

The changes in the vessel forms is perhaps harder to untangle. Hattingh & Hall (2009) used ethnography to try and understand the role of beaker forms during the K2 period, and particularly their presence in burials. They found that beakers are most commonly found with juvenile burials, and there is some indication that the size of the vessel corresponds to the age of the deceased. Drawing on well-established ethnographic symbolism for ceramics more generally, they suggest the beaker is a metaphor for the womb and the process of procreation, and in the case of juvenile deaths, represents the incompleteness of the process with individuals that failed to reach maturity. With the shift to Mapungubwe, there is a noticeable decrease in the burial of juveniles. It is perhaps tempting to argue that this change could be attributed to a shift in political structure; Huffman (2007, 2009) has argued that the burial of juveniles with rich grave goods can be used as evidence of a focus on inherited status and wealth (children could not 'earn' such wealth in their lifetime), compared with previous gerontocratic authority structures at K2. If we shift forward, it may be that the change in burial from K2 to Mapungubwe also marks the political shift as a single lineage claimed absolute authority, with no space for competing lineages to lay claim to status through burials and hereditary rights.

As well as beakers, spouted vessels also disappear from the archaeological record at this time. Interestingly though, unlike the beakers which are frequently found in graves, these forms are recovered in domestic contexts and presumably would have been used for serving and pouring liquid. There is then perhaps a link between the disappearance of a liquid serving form (the spouted vessels) and that of a drinking vessel (the smaller beakers), which may mark a shift in certain ceremonies of consumption, be they domestic or special events (e.g. associated with burial). At around the same time, we see open bowls and plates appearing, another form whose shape strongly suggests a role within consumption and sharing, in this case solid/semi-solid foods, rather than liquid. While the precise uses of the beaker/spouted vessel versus the open bowl remains open for further investigation, they nevertheless form part of a similar continuum of food/drink consumption, and the shift from one set of practices and vessels to another marks a further example of subtle but significant disruptions in the ceramics at the twelfth/thirteenth century transition.

These shifts could be seen as part of a new world-order and political structure at the time of Mapungubwe's establishment. It is notable that this is a period of geographic expansion of influence into new areas. Ceramic use in these far flung areas might thus be regarded as part of a harmonizing strategy to forge connections between these new communities, as well as potentially providing a safety net of familiarity for new settlers in alien areas. It is also probable, that as the sphere of activity extended further and further away, new settlements would have involved those who were not directly familiar with the site of Mapungubwe and its structures, possibly even those who did not share an ethnic or linguistic heritage. Research in recent years has emphasized, for example, the continued importance and role of hunter-gatherer communities during this period, with evidence of coeval settlement on the same landscape and even co-settlements (e.g. Forssman 2013; Hall & Smith 2000; Van Doornum 2008). Ceramics in these contexts could have served as a visual and mental anchor for new settlers. It is also possible, that the emphasis on open bowls and plates – presumably designed for food serving and sharing – was a response to the need to create and reinforce new social relations and harness the emotive power of food sharing and exchange. Ceramics in this case, as Huffman (2007) has argued, may have been tools in the maintenance of identity. However, we suggest that this identity was not a primordial born-in identity of genetics and linguistic heritage, but a fabricated political identity created in a mosaic landscape of movement and new settlement and social relations. Moreover, there is no fixed nor centrally controlled identity that the ceramics passively reflect; ceramics were creatively used within the negotiation of localized dynamics, harking back to a sense of shared memory and unity, but like Lemonnier's perrissological resonators, capable of channelling and funnelling emotion to create new iterations of Mapungubwe-ness. Elsewhere we have argued that traditional understanding of the Mapungubwe state as a hierarchical top-down model fails to recognize the agency of its citizens (Antonites & Ashley 2016). Archaeology in the eastern hinterlands, for example, has demonstrated that tiny, seemingly insignificant communities, were tapping into long-distance trade networks and acting out their lives far away from the direct control and reach of those at Mapungubwe. At these sites, ceramics continued to be used, not as a sign of subjugation and suppression, but as a way to bring the distant community of Mapungubwe into local perspective, *choosing* to co-presence Mapungubwe, but yet politically and socially articulating at a local level. Ceramics were not mute vessels, pouring homogenous

symbolic meaning into their host communities; they were inchoate, bound up in a created memory, but not constrained by it.

Conclusion

In this examination of Mapungubwe ceramics we hope we have offered some thoughts on ways we might re-think the importance and significance of the ceramics made and used across the polity. We started by suggesting that the lustre of gold has unfairly put the accompanying ceramics in the shade, but by expanding our scope of understanding of what constitutes art, we can broaden our appreciation of the material realm. In closing, we offer a quotation from the introduction to Lemonnier's volume:

This book is about artefacts that aren't much to look at and yet are of crucial importance for those who make them, manipulate them, and also – but only 'also' – look at them. It is about objects that would not find their way into museum cases (Lemonnier 2016, 13).

Perhaps, in the future, we will come to appreciate these ceramics as objects that were carefully and complexly made, and were integral to the creation of the ancient polity of Mapungubwe.

Notes

1. The story of Mapungubwe's discovery is well known in popular archaeological narratives (e.g. being used by tour guides at the site) albeit with some minor variations. The term 'discovery' is however something of a misnomer as it presupposes no one was familiar with the site before Van Graan and colleagues visited. As the accompanying narrative clearly demonstrates, this was not the case, and the local community were long familiar with the locale. Indeed, there is also evidence that other European travellers had visited the site before the van Graan's, including the famous German ethnographer Leo Frobenius (Wintjes 2017) and a party of settlers from the town of Louis Trichardt in the Soutpansberg mountains (Tiley-Nel 2011; Wintjes 2017)
2. The depiction of human remains in public spaces and fora is an issue that has rightly attracted criticism and concern over the dehumanization of the individuals in question, and the legacy of colonial/apartheid regimes of oppression and othering (e.g. Rassool 2015). In the case of the Mapungubwe and K2 human remains held in Museums and Universities (including the University of Pretoria) all individuals were restituted and re-buried on site as part of reparations to descendent communities (e.g. see Schoeman & Pikirayi 2011). The photograph used here is in wide currency and freely available online, and offers an example of the attitudes of the period that

did not the same respect to buried individuals that would be offered now.

3. It should be noted that the curators of the British Museum exhibition actively included other ceramic objects from around this period in the exhibition, including anthropogenic and animal figurines from the nearby site of Schroda, as well as the Lydenburg Heads from kwa-Zulu-Natal in their narrative around the emergence of sculptural expression (Giblin & Spring 2016, 45–53). Sian Tiley-Nel from the University of Pretoria is also an advocate for the importance of archaeological ceramics from Mapungubwe, and curated an exhibition – Letsopa – in the UP Old Arts Building dedicated to these materials (University of Pretoria 2019b). However, it is notable that while the gold will travel to the new Javett Art Centre for the new display, there are no plans to include any ceramics.
4. The perspective offered here is what might be termed the standard narrative of Mapungubwe history. Recent work has challenged the primacy of the central site as the nexus of all power and authority (e.g. Antonites & Ashley 2016; Chirikure *et al.* 2013). While these perspectives add undoubted nuance, the aim of this paper is to offer a macro –perspective on larger socio-political dynamics.
5. Detailed description of ceramic typology is not included here as the intention is to examine large-scale patterns and possible meaning. For more details of typology see Huffman (2007).

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Chapter 13

Presences in the archive: *Amagugu* (treasures) from the Zulu kingdom at the British Museum

Catherine Elliott Weinberg

The British Museum houses a particular group of Zulu objects of impressive physical appearance and presence, gifted just over one hundred years ago – three headrests, a meat-platter, four milk-pails and two further vessels (Fig. 13.1).¹ Not unusually for items then deemed ‘ethnographic’, little was documented about these carved wooden objects at the time that the Museum acquired them. Now curated by the Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas, they form part of the British Museum’s South Africa collections. Although ‘Zulu’ objects are one of the major constituents of these collections, most historical pieces appear to have originated south of the Thukela River, within the British Colony of Natal. Strong evidence, however, suggests that this group of objects comes from within the independent Zulu kingdom, north of the Thukela.

A single milk-pail from this group was included in the British Museum’s major exhibition, *South Africa: the art of a nation* (27 October 2016 to 26 February 2017). In the exhibition the pail was displayed alongside other examples of ‘[a]rtworks as bodies’, where the accompanying text panel drew attention to the vessel’s anthropomorphic, specifically ‘female features’, attributing it to a ‘Zulu’ artist whose name is unrecorded.² The exhibition catalogue describes the pail in a similar way and discusses it alongside two others in the group (Giblin & Spring 2016, 123–4).

By focusing on this distinct assemblage of items, and without wishing to downplay their artistic merits rightly highlighted in the exhibition and catalogue, this chapter aims to trace various forms of agency, of both persons and things, associated with the collection. This extends to the agency of the objects themselves, their presence, and that of numerous players in their life story so far – including a range of individuals, ranging from their possible originating source, to their field-collector, to their donor, as well as

to researchers such as myself. In a further theoretical step, building on recent scholarship that following the ‘archival turn’ seeks to bring ethnography collections ‘into the ambit of archive’ (Hamilton & Leibhammer 2016, 415), this collection is considered as archive. It will be shown that treating the collection as archive facilitates re-engagement, re-historicization and the recalling of obscured presences, thus reclaiming the objects in question as *amagugu* (treasures) of the Zulu kingdom.³

Presences (and absences) in the archive

My first proper encounter with the objects in question was some years back during my master’s degree in Museum Studies, when I had elected to study an aspect of the British Museum’s South Africa collections first hand. Working through the collections in one of the Museum’s offsite storage facilities, I was struck by the workmanship of these objects; in Gellian terms (Gell 1998) one might say I was a recipient of their presence or agency (discussed below). A cursory glance at the computerized catalogue (database) revealed that one Dowager Viscountess Wolseley gave them to the Museum along with other African items, a fact confirmed by the accessions register from which this information had come. Given this provenance, which suggested a link to Field Marshall Garnet Joseph Wolseley, a preeminent colonial-era soldier, coupled with the appearance of the objects themselves, I began to sense their significance; their association with the Zulu kingdom and possibly with King Cetshwayo kaMpande himself (Fig. 13.3).

The items are described in the accessions register as three ‘pillows’ (headrests), a ‘globular 4-footed vessel’, four ‘sub-cylindrical vessel[s]’ (milk-pails), a ‘spherical 4-legged vessel’ and a ‘food-trough’ (meat-platter). They are notably well made, aesthetically



Figure 13.1. Amagugu (treasures): three headrests, a meat-platter, four milk-pails and two further vessels (British Museum accession numbers Af1917,1103.1–10). Note objects are not to scale (for dimensions and other details see https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/search.aspx). Photographs Catherine Elliott Weinberg, copyright The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.

appealing and redolent with status. Stylistically, they appear to conform to what might be considered examples of Zulu material culture, and later annotations in the accessions register give this identification for a few of the objects, bar the four milk-pails, which are ‘said to be MATABILI’. Museum labels tied on to these objects evidence this past uncertainty over their cultural attribution, indicating either firmly or tentatively ‘Matabele’⁴ for just over half and ‘Zulu’⁵ for others. The tribal paradigm, although problematic – not least because it builds on the colonial invention of the notion of ‘tribe’,⁶ whereby the ‘tribe’ rather than the responsible individual comes to be seen as producer (Ravenhill 1996, 266) – is still an inherited feature of the organization of many African collections. Notwithstanding these concerns, this collection might be considered Zulu in the strictest sense, for reasons to be discussed below, unlike many other items described in this way (Elliott Weinberg 2016).

However, before exploring the objects’ pre-Museum life story, it is necessary to briefly turn to consider the theoretical underpinning of the present contribution.

Agency and archive

The meaning of the term ‘agency’ is rooted in the Latin for ‘doing’ (*Oxford English Living Dictionary* (OELD); see also Thomas in Gell 1998, ix) and relates to the term ‘agent’, defined as ‘[a] person or thing that takes an active role or produces a specified effect’, in other words, having power to act, while ‘agency’ can be seen as ‘[a]ction or intervention producing a particular effect’ (OELD). Significantly, Alfred Gell’s theory, which he called ‘an anthropology of art’, is geared at ‘everybody’s art’, that is to say it includes objects usually described as ethnographic and more typically studied by anthropologists (Gell 1998, 1), such as the items under consideration here.

Recently, Sarah Byrne and colleagues (Byrne *et al.* 2011) have drawn on Gell's and others' ideas about agency (for a summary see 2011, 7), usefully extending the theory by exploring 'multiple kinds of agency expressed within the complex long-term processes that contribute to museum collections' (2011, 7). This idea of 'multiple agency' is appealing in that it takes into consideration the wide range of agents involved in museum collections, including what they term the 'creator community' as well as what might be considered the field-collector, museum source, 'museum/curator' and 'public' (2011, 7).

In a move informed by the recent work of Carolyn Hamilton and Nessa Leibhammer (Hamilton & Leibhammer 2014; 2016) in particular, this collection might be considered archival. But why bring one type of collecting domain, the museum – in this case, an assemblage of objects formerly considered ethnographic – into the ambit of another collecting domain, that of the archive? Archives and museums have similar histories and functions. Like archives, museums, and especially ethnographic museum collections, are products of uneven power relations and have been shown to be far from neutral repositories. Similarly, archives have conventionally been thought of as places, the buildings or structures that house items, as well as their content where, as Hamilton points out, 'we imagine that...a collection is preserved

relatively unchanged for posterity' (Hamilton 2011, 319).⁷ By contrast, 'the archive' (in the singular and usually including the definite article, sometimes rendered 'the Archive') as a theoretical concept has wider scope. It is used figuratively (Zeitlyn 2012, 462) and often leads elsewhere (Stoler 2002, 87). The archive can be understood as a changing and generative space, not unlike more recent thinking about museums.

The 'archival turn', traceable most notably to the writings of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, has informed critical theory over recent decades. This is not to suggest that use of the archive is a new phenomenon, indeed, the archive has long been seen as a place to 'mine[...]... 'nuggets of fact'' (Hamilton *et al.* 2002, 9). What is newer is the figuring of archive-as-subject (Hamilton 2013, 1; Stoler 2002, 86), as 'historical artifact' (Hamilton 2011, 320) and also, as noted above, as a productive space. David Zeitlyn recognizes that while 'Derrida and Foucault...see archives as hegemonic, characterizing ways of thought, modes of colonization, and the control of citizens... they also make clear that archives can be read subversively' (Zeitlyn 2012, 461). He identifies two such strategies adopted by scholars, namely 'against the grain' and 'along the grain' readings. For against the grain reading, Zeitlyn cites the joint work of John and Jean Comaroff who advocate an ethnography of archive that works both in and outside of 'the official record' (2012, 464). Staying within

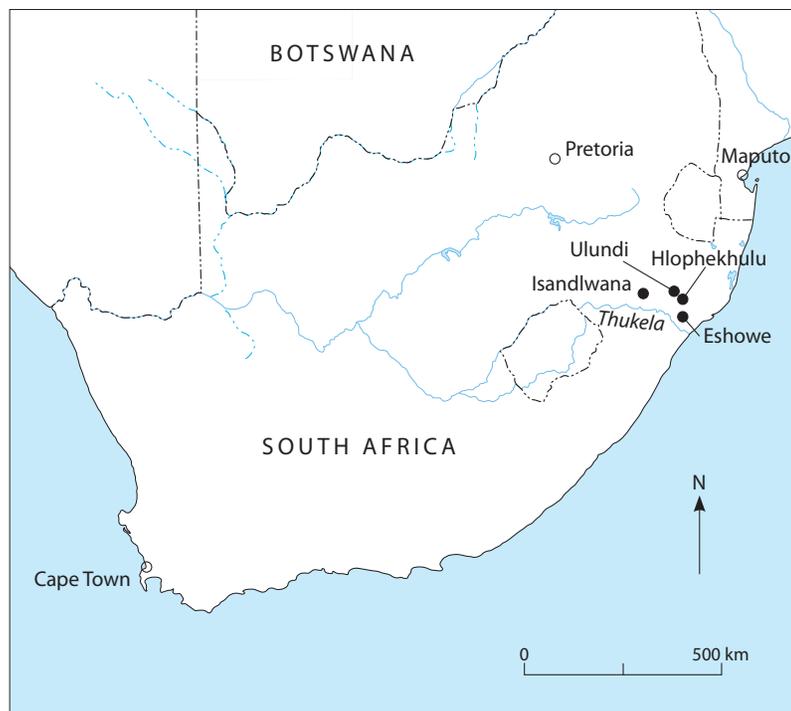


Figure 13.2. Map showing the sites mentioned in this chapter.



Figure 13.3. ‘Cetshwayo ka Mpande’ by Alexander Bassano, half-plate glass negative, 1882. This studio photograph of a finely attired Cetshwayo was taken in London, where he caused quite a sensation, during his 1882 visit to England. Cetshwayo’s trip was a success – he achieved his primary objective of visiting Queen Victoria, at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight, in order to lobby for his return from exile to Zululand. Here we see the royal, remembered for his intelligence and dignified manner (Marks 2004 [2006]), at ease in the studio (props creating a suitably luxurious ambience) and composed before the camera in an act of self-curation. Note especially the sitter’s direct gaze and fine, fashionable formal attire: one hand removed from an expensive, sleek glove in a genteel gesture, a possibly silk handkerchief peeping out of the breast pocket of a sumptuous, tailored double-breasted coat as well as the *de rigueur* top hat, removed to reveal his *isicoco* (head-ring), a potent symbol of his identity as a married Zulu man of high rank. This picture captures and conveys a particular image, that of an individual adept at navigating and negotiating life in two realms, here self-fashioning himself through hybrid attire. Photograph courtesy and copyright National Portrait Gallery, London (Photographs Collection, NPG x96403).

the archive, Ann Stoler’s ethnography advocates an examination of the ‘form’ and ‘context’ of documents, a reading ‘along the archival grain’ (Stoler 2002, 90 & 99). Stoler asserts that ‘[w]e need to read [the archive] for ... regularities, for its logic of recall, for its densities and distributions, for its consistencies of misinformation, omission, and mistakes – *along* the archival grain’ (2002, 100). Importantly, Zeitlyn reminds us that ‘Derrida sees the archive as containing excess, disrupting its own bounds’ and that ‘[w]ith care and assiduity, it is possible to understand [subjugated] people from archives in ways never intended or envisaged by those creating or maintaining the archives’ (2012, 464). He suggests that ‘counter-readings allow the excavation of the voices (sometimes names) of subaltern and otherwise suppressed others from the archive’ (2012, 461), which seems particularly relevant to material assembled during the colonial period.

Methodologically, treating a collection – things – as archive entails the close study of the objects themselves, examining them for physical inscriptions and labels. This activity is necessarily undertaken alongside the investigation of the textual deposits more usually understood as archival. Owing to the fact that ethnography moved around at the British Museum (both physically and departmentally), these paper collections comprise material held at various archives across the institution. Employing an extended view of the archive, it has been necessary to gather pertinent information not only from the objects themselves and from Museum documentation, housed both within and without the responsible Department, but also from the wider textual and visual archive.

Biography and backstory

Hamilton (2011) has developed two linked concepts, ‘backstory’ and ‘biography’, to describe what might be considered the life story of an item or collection. Borrowed from the world of theatre, film and television, backstory is a device that creates a background or history for a fictional character. Within the archival context, backstory underscores the history crafted for an object once it is conceptualized as an archival object (Hamilton & Leibhammer 2014, 167; cf. Mbembe 2002, 21), a history left out of the ‘archival script’, i.e. in this instance the Museum records, or only partially glimpsed. Biography, as developed by Hamilton, is the life story of the museum object from the moment that it is recognized as an archival object, which I adapt and take to be the point of its accession into a museum collection. These two concepts, ‘backstory’ and ‘biography’, provide the means of tracking back and forward in time and of opening up what Hamilton and Leibhammer

term the ‘archival potential’ of objects (Hamilton 2013, 13; Hamilton & Leibhammer 2014, 155). This is not unlike Paul Basu and Ferdinand de Jong’s concept of ‘archival affordances’ (Basu & de Jong 2016), whereby we might seek new voices and narratives by revisiting and reworking historical material.

Briefly, the objects’ biography, their life story within the British Museum to date, can be traced from the Museum’s agency in accepting and registering them into the collections in 1917, to various acts of curatorial agency, which includes several ‘outings’ from storage for exhibition. A handful of these objects feature in the British Museum’s 1925 *Handbook to the Ethnographical Collections*, which suggests they were on display at around that time, where they were deployed as illustrative of the ‘fighting’, ‘warlike’ ‘Zulu’, the ‘dominant people’ of ‘British South Africa’ (British Museum 1925, 222–3). Fast-forward to the present and one of the headrests (Af1917,1103.3) can be seen on long-term display in the ‘Woodcarving’ section of the Museum’s Sainsbury African Galleries, its label simply reads ‘[w]ooden headrest Zulu people, South Africa, 20th century’. As mentioned above, a single milk-pail (Af1917,1103.8) from the collection was included in the exhibition, *South Africa: the art of a nation*.

But what of the objects’ backstory, their life story prior to their deposit at the Museum, a narrative seemingly overlooked by their biography thus far and omitted from the Museum’s archives?⁸ Correspondence traced to date within the Museum appears to be partial. It gives no details regarding these ‘African things’, also referred to as ‘South African specimens’.⁹ Rather, the primary information is apparently limited to copies of two letters to the donor (held by the Department of Britain, Europe and Pre-History), a note in the *Book of Presents* (in the British Museum’s Central Archive) and the accessions register entry, which simply states ‘[g]iven by Dow[ager] Visc[ountess] Wolseley... brought from Africa by F.M. [Field Marshall] Viscount Wolseley’.¹⁰ Of the twelve objects gifted by Viscountess Wolseley on this occasion (two are from Ghana), items one to ten are mostly annotated (probably historically) as originating from South Africa.¹¹ Closer inspection of the ten objects themselves also links them to their (field) collector, since the underside of each bears the inscription ‘Wolseley’ in white lettering. Here, we are presented with only a partial aspect of the objects’ provenance, as a further absence, or rather erasure, tantalizingly suggests – next to each inscription is another name, word of phrase, which in every case has been removed. The inscription as it stands, like the Museum documentation, recalls Wolseley’s agency, and to a lesser extent that of his wife as donor. Nevertheless, an exploration of the wider archive – including at the

British Library, online and at Hove Library (which houses the Wolseley Collections) – makes it possible to uncover further traces of agency.¹²

Backstory (pre-museum life story): Wolseley, no ordinary ‘Tommy’, and Cetshwayo kaMpande

Lauded as ‘the leading British soldier of his generation’ (Beckett 2004 [2008]) and ultimately commander-in-chief of the army (1895–1900), Field Marshal Viscount Garnet Joseph Wolseley (1833–1913) was a ‘self-made’ Anglo-Irish army officer and military reformer who became a household name thanks to the Third Anglo-Asante War (1873–4) (Fig. 13.4). Following the so-called Ashanti campaign in present day Ghana, Wolseley served twice in South Africa where he was primarily based in what is now KwaZulu-Natal province: firstly, in an administrative capacity (1875) and, secondly, as the general in charge following British defeat at Isandlwana during the Anglo-Zulu War (1879). Although dispatched to South Africa twice, archival and other material held outside the Museum suggests that the objects in question almost certainly derive from his second visit. The primary purpose of Wolseley’s return visit was to secure victory over the Zulu, but, much to his disappointment, this was achieved before he arrived at the front. Instead, Wolseley was tasked with hunting for King Cetshwayo who had fled his capital, Ulundi (also known as Ondini), which had been burnt at the hands of the British following the Zulu defeat.

Cetshwayo kaMpande (c. 1826–84) was the fourth in a line of kings, succeeding from Shaka kaSenzangakhona, to reign over the Zulu people. Cetshwayo inherited from his father, Mpande kaSenzangakhona, a still largely independent, self-sufficient kingdom, although for tactical reasons he allowed the neighbouring British colony of Natal to become progressively more involved in its affairs from 1861 onward (Marks 2004 [2006]). Cetshwayo had effectively reigned alongside his father as co-regent, but was formally installed as king in 1873, some time after his father’s death, at a ceremony presided over by Natal’s secretary for native affairs, Theophilus Shepstone (later Sir), at the instigation of Cetshwayo. It was this close relationship with the colony that would sow the seeds of Cetshwayo’s downfall, and ultimately see the destruction of the Zulu kingdom. Considering the Zulu kingdom an obstacle to confederation following the British annexation of the Boer republic of Transvaal in 1877, British authorities issued Cetshwayo with an impossible ultimatum in December 1878. Unable, and unwilling, to comply with its impossible demands, which included disbanding his army within 30 days, Cetshwayo became defiant. The British responded by invading Zululand in January



Figure 13.4. ‘Garnet Joseph Wolseley, 1st Viscount Wolseley’ by Paul Albert Besnard, oil on canvas, 1880. In this image Wolseley, the leading figure in the British army at the time, is depicted wearing military regalia. His calm, steely countenance displaying a sense of heroic accomplishment, while behind him smoulder Zululand homesteads, burnt out by British forces during the Anglo-Zulu War (1879). Completed in 1880, this full-length portrait undoubtedly commemorates British victory and what was seen as Wolseley’s success in suppressing the Zulu people by capturing their king and carving up the kingdom, which eventually paved the way for the incorporation of their territory into the Union of South Africa. Like Cetshwayo (Fig. 13.3), the sitter is shown with one glove off. However, Wolseley’s long gloves are decidedly less refined, while his bare hand, which reaches over the back of his spent horse in a gesture of control, suggests he has successfully completed the task at hand. In both the Cetshwayo and Wolseley portraits, dated within two years of each other, the exposed hand signifies the respective subjects’ agency. Photograph courtesy and copyright National Portrait Gallery, London (Primary Collection, NPG 1789). An equestrian statue of Wolseley stands at Horse Guards Parade, London.

1879 and after a series of humiliating British defeats, eventually secured victory at the Battle of Ulundi on 4 July 1879.

Correspondence housed in Hove reveals that during the pursuit of the King, and following his arrival at the ruined royal homestead, Wolseley wrote home to his wife, Louisa, saying ‘I am after bigger game & I hope my bag may not remain empty’.¹³ This hunting analogy relates to his hopes of ‘bagging’¹⁴ Cetshwayo and might equally be applied to his quest for high status ‘curiosities’,¹⁵ which he actively sought for himself and others, including no less a figure than Queen Victoria.¹⁶ Writing to his wife later the same month, once again from Ulundi where he had set up camp, Wolseley advises ‘I am picking up a few [K-word] curiosities to add to our museum’¹⁷ (i.e. the Wolseley’s own domestic display of objects, many of which had been acquired as campaign souvenirs during his career to date). Such was his penchant for collecting, that Wolseley advised his wife to seek the services of a jobbing coachman and carriage at the end of November that year, explaining ‘I shall have a lot of barbaric curiosities by the time I reach home’.¹⁸

While British authorities apparently did not officially condone trophy hunting during the Anglo-Zulu War, the army having ‘a decidedly ambivalent attitude towards loot’ during the nineteenth century (Knight 1992, 39), contemporary accounts suggest that the practice of seeking out and taking battle relics was rife.¹⁹ The rank and file generally picked up what they could, taking ‘pains to conceal anything they did take, as they were afraid of being made to disgorge’ (Tomasson 1881, 139) – presumably into the hands of their superiors. As Wolseley’s above-mentioned letter suggests, officers were more inclined to have the means to transport objects, large and small, and in greater quantity.

That the group of objects in question is by no means ordinary, and that Wolseley was no ordinary Tommy, is of import. Wolseley’s letters to his wife reveal that, true to form,²⁰ he was particularly keen on acquiring royal objects – articles intimately associated with Cetshwayo, including a lock of the King’s hair²¹ and one of his ‘necklaces of lions claws’²² – items charged with agency. However, the letters are strangely silent with regard to his acquisition of the objects now at the British Museum. Be that as it may, further evidence points to the extent of their significance, for Wolseley publicly disclosed further information about these items during his lifetime.

Eager to be kept in the public eye, on several occasions Wolseley welcomed the press into his home where his trophies were featured. Although the Wolseleys moved house a good deal, it seems that care was taken to display the ten objects in question more or less

as a group. Surveying the 'relics of [Wolseley's] latest campaigns' on view in his Mayfair, London home, a newspaper article describes the hall where:

Against the wall is a large slab of Italian marble... on which is placed a reduction in bronze of the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius... flanked on either side by Zulu milk pails, while beneath the table repose in peace the Brobdingnagian beef dishes and beer pots of ill fated Cetywayo (New York Times, 14/11/ 1885, 2).

Several years later, when the Wolseleys were living in Ireland, another visitor described how:

[O]n the marble slab [of a table in the entrance hall] are a couple of Cetewayo's milk-pails – yellow vases about one-and-a-half feet long. Underneath are more milk-pails, a wooden dish big enough to hold half a sheep, and some Zulu

pillows of wood. These were all taken from Cetewayo's kraal (How 1893, 157).

Crucially, this article also includes an illustration of the milk-pails, meat-platter as well as two headrests from the collection, in what appears to be an outdoor arrangement, identifying them as 'CETEWAYO'S...' (How 1893, 180) (Fig. 13.5).²³ Two later photographs, now at Hove, dating to 1905 and 1907 respectively, when the Wolseleys were living in a grace-and-favour residence at Hampton Court Palace in greater London, show at least some of the objects in a similar configuration (Fig. 13.6).²⁴

Wolseley was clearly keen to display Cetshwayo's property prominently and did so according to what can be described as the 'trophy method', which Annie Coombes suggests functioned 'to the glory of those Europeans associated with them' (Coombes 1994, 71). In other words, they commemorated Wolseley and his actions, just as his wife's donation of the collection to

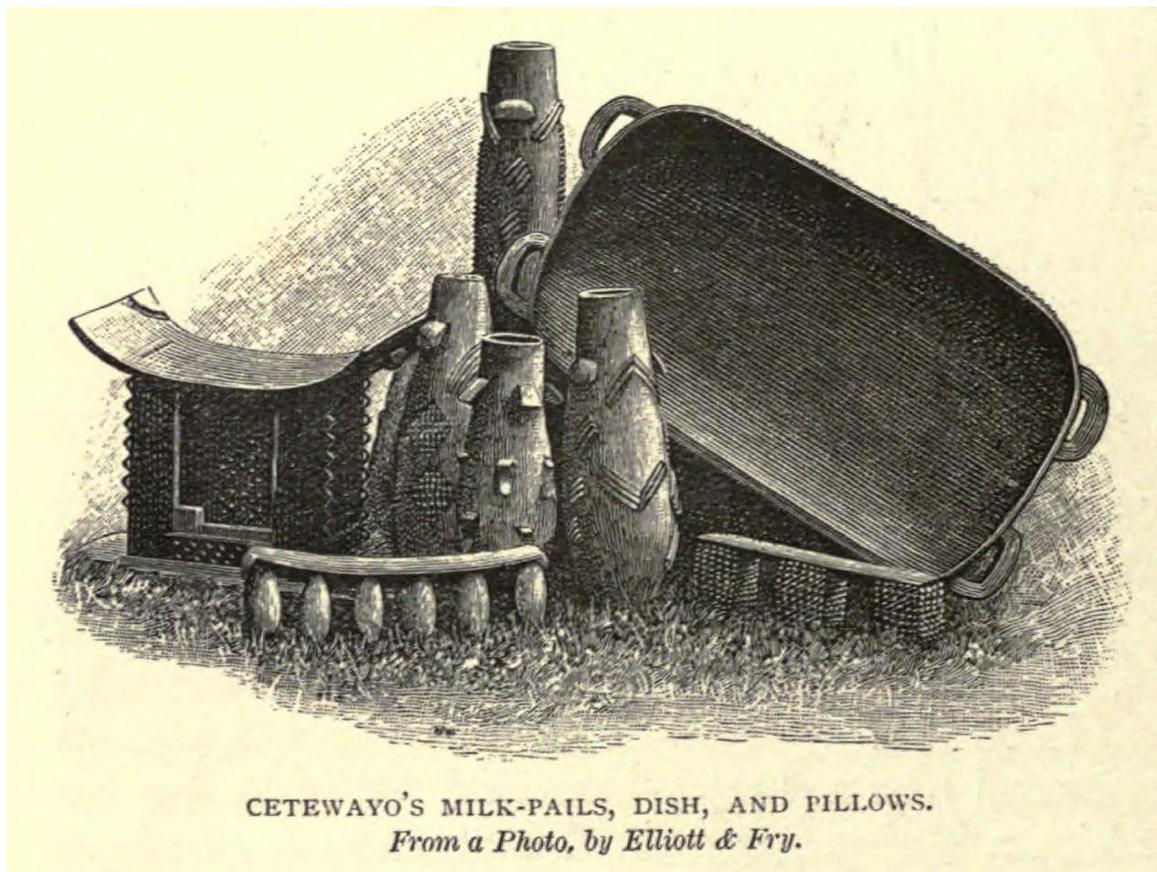


Figure 13.5. An illustration of the milk-pails, meat-platter and two headrests from the collection identifying them as 'CETEWAYO'S...'. This image, copied from a photograph, was published in journalist Harry How's 1893 *Illustrated Interviews* p. 180. The publication featured a chapter dedicated to Wolseley, a famous figure, which first appeared as an 1892 article by the same author in *Strand Magazine*.



Figure 13.6. Two photographs from the Wolseley family, dating to 1905 and 1907 respectively, showing some of the objects on display in their home, then a grace-and-favour residence at Hampton Court Palace. Images courtesy and copyright Wolseley Collection, Brighton & Hove City Libraries (scrapbook vol. 15 [1922], unpaginated).

the British Museum may have been intended to commemorate him, regardless of whether or not she was fully aware of their provenance or significance. For Wolseley, these objects likely served as reminders of his own agency in capturing the King and subsequent ‘settlement’, or carving up, of Zululand. Rather frustratingly, the exact circumstances surrounding their field collection remain uncertain.

In the personal letters consulted at Hove, which appear to have been weeded and are in places subject to redaction, there seems to be no mention of these important objects. It is likely that, in the face of the British advance, they had been hidden in an attempt at withholding them, which might be regarded as a form of indigenous agency (see Byrne *et al.* 2011, 7).

One possibility is that they were uncovered by British soldiers among other personal belongings in a cave where they had been hidden – an incident depicted in an *Illustrated London News* engraving (11/10/1879, 328) (Fig. 13.7).²⁵ Paulina Dlamini (a Zulu

woman who later converted to Christianity, having formerly served as an attendant to Cetshwayo within the *isidoglo*, the King’s private enclosure) is recorded as stating that as the British closed in, the ‘*isidoglo* girls were ordered to collect all the king’s personal belongings and to take them to a safe hiding place’ (Filter & Bourquin 1986, 70). With the help of two manservants, whom she names as Lugele Sibiya and Mfezi Thwala, they secreted the King’s belongings ‘into a deep cave’ at Hlophekhulu (Filter & Bourquin 1986, 70). Dlamini continues:

On our return we reported to the king that all goods were safely hidden. In reality, however, the king’s possessions had been taken to safety for the benefit of those in charge; because when the king was captured and taken away, his possessions were retrieved by the men who had hidden them, and who enriched themselves thereby (Filter & Bourquin 1986, 70–1).

Dlamini's testimony is striking, for it seems to implicate Sibiya and Thwala as agents in the 'collection' of objects, possibly including those that would end up in Wolseley's hands. While we might reasonably imagine that African agency is absent in the majority of cases of looted material, Dlamini's account may suggest otherwise in this particular instance.

Another possibility is that some or all of the Wolseley objects had been buried within the royal homestead for safekeeping, sparing them from the flames. Writing in his journal on Sunday 10 August, the very day he reached 'the Royal Kraal of Ulundi' (Cetshwayo's homestead) where he set up camp, Wolseley casually remarks: '[t]here are large quantities

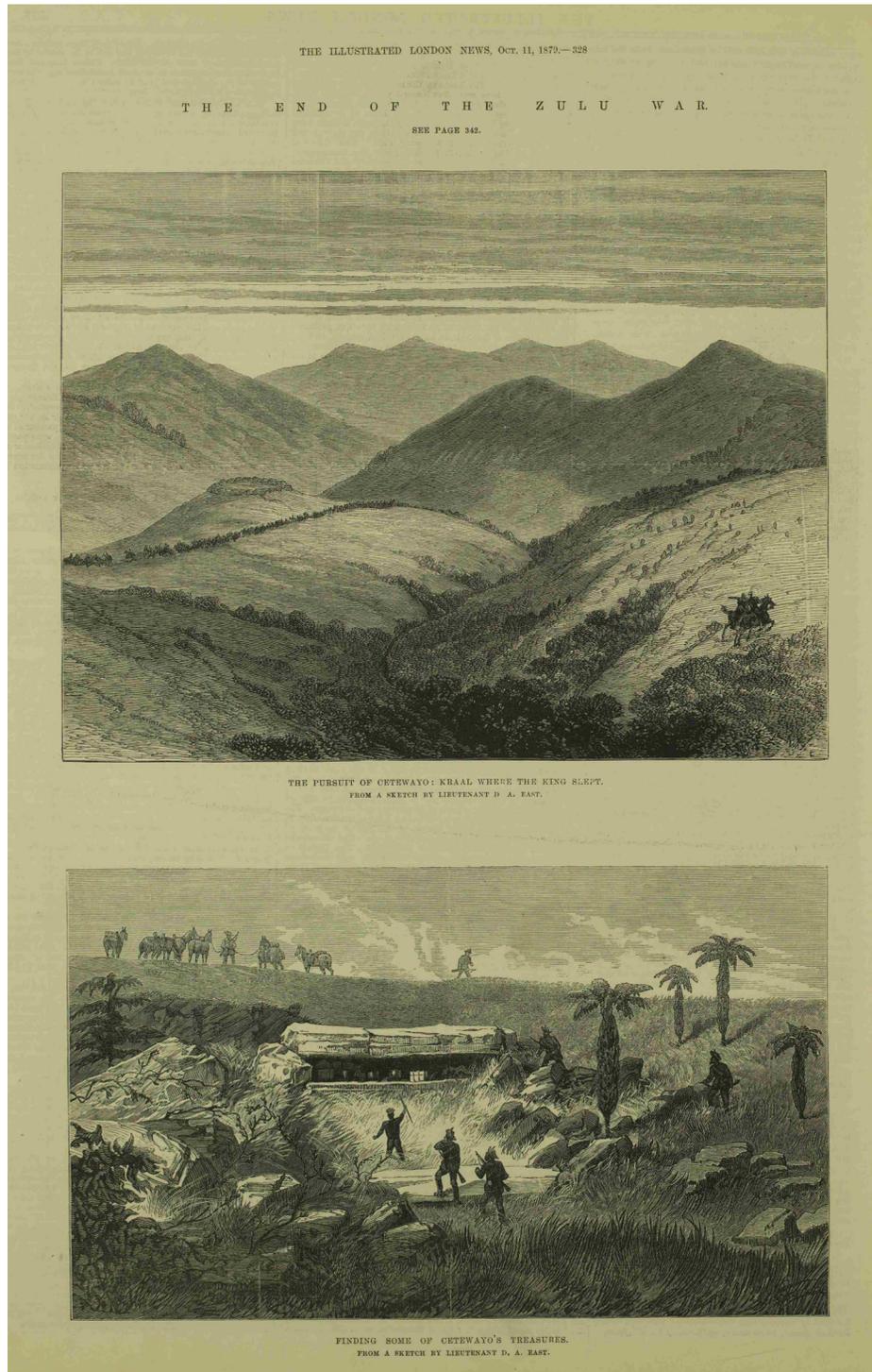


Figure 13.7. Possible find-spot?: 'The End of the Zulu War...finding some of Cetshwayo's treasures', Illustrated London News engraving, 11/10/1879, p. 328. Events of the Anglo-Zulu War were closely followed 'back home' and the prospect of Zulu treasures must have sparked interest as the (lower) scene imagined for a popular audience suggests.

of corn here: we opened some of the pits & found all sorts of private property concealed in them' (Preston 1973, 81). Unfortunately, he does not divulge any details regarding the 'private property', although a newspaper reported that '[a] day was spent [after Wolseley's arrival] in unearthing His Majesty's domestic furniture – beer pots, grease pots, beads, spoons, snuff boxes, &c., &c.' (*Friend of the Free State and Bloemfontein Gazette*, 11/12/1879, 4).²⁶ According to another nineteenth-century source, grain pits were capacious and had fired 'sides...as hard as stone' (Drayson 1858, 28).²⁷ They also had the additional benefit of being secreted within the cattle byre, a 'place visited by the ancestral spirits' (Hooper 1996, 74), making them an ideal hiding place for valuables.²⁸

After more than a month on the run, the fugitive King was captured and sent into exile, while his kingdom was divided into thirteen chiefdoms. Eventually successful in his appeal, Cetshwayo was later allowed to return to Zululand following a diplomatic visit to Britain to meet with Queen Victoria in 1882. He died at Eshowe less than two years later. Wolseley, on the other hand, had swiftly concluded his tour of duty in South Africa and returned to London, presumably with his booty.²⁹

Closer scrutiny of the erased element of the inscriptions underneath each object, almost certainly applied before the collection arrived at the British Museum, reveals that these objects had, at some time or other, been wrongly identified as spoils from another of Wolseley's campaigns, that of 'Coomassie' (Kumasi).³⁰ Wolseley's still visible name acts in much the same way as his name within the Museum records – it underscores his link with the collection, effectively memorializing him by prioritizing his agency, while any mention of Cetshwayo remained absent.

Biography (museum life story): 'ethnographization' and beyond

The association of the collection with Wolseley was not necessarily always the primary one at the Museum, where this material was immediately re-categorized as 'ethnographic'. Since its establishment in 1753, the British Museum has housed African-made material – at least one 'artificial curiosity' from South Africa survives from Sir Hans Sloane's founding collection. Early beginnings notwithstanding, the South Africa collections only began to grow significantly a century later (well after the British wrestled the Cape from the Dutch and started settling in the region), by which time the term 'ethnographical' was increasingly applied to this kind of material.³¹ Although it is not always clear exactly what was meant by the terms 'ethnography'

or 'ethnology',³² the British Museum's own *Handbook* (1910 and 1925), provides some insight:

[e]thnography is that branch of the general science of man (Anthropology) descriptive of the manners and customs of particular peoples, and of their development from savagery towards civilization...especially...those races which have no written records and are unknown to history (British Museum 1910, 10; British Museum 1925, 9).

Ethnography, or museum ethnography to be more precise, which Anthony Shelton critiques as an 'imperial science' (Shelton 2000) and calls the equation of 'material objects with specific cultures' (Shelton 1997, 33) – is embroiled in the colonial past and has had a fraught relationship with the idea of history. History was effectively denied to many non-Western cultures (inasmuch as the existence of written records – a textual archive – were understood to constitute history). Similarly, history was largely denied to their material culture, which was, and sometimes still is, presented as 'frozen in a historyless stasis' (Pietz 1996 cited in Byrne *et al.* 2011, 14). The privileging of tribal identifications in museum records, alongside the details of the (almost invariably white) donor/seller and, where known, field-collector, has left us with collections that are burdened with the weight of inherited colonial frameworks and assumptions.

The ethnographic collections at the British Museum were built up largely through fortuitous donations, as in the present case, and to a lesser extent purchases. These have been closely associated with what British Museum curator Ben Burt broadly defines as 'the colonial enterprise' (Burt 1998, 10). Prior to acquisition by the Museum, African objects had, for the most part, been collected as 'curiosities' in the field by amateur collectors such as travellers, missionaries, colonial officials and, like here, military personnel. Over the history of the British Museum, the ethnography collections were located within various departmental formations, emerging as a defined section in 1866 and finally as a department in its own right in 1946. In 2004 the Ethnography Department, as it was then called, was restructured and given its present name, the Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas, ostensibly signalling the end of ethnography at the British Museum. However, large parts of the new department's collections, from South Africa and elsewhere, remain the legacy of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century colonial collecting, having been subjected within the Museum to processes of 'ethnographization', which have asserted tribal identifications

over historical ones. These museum practices have served to compound collecting processes, obscuring especially (but not only) forms of African agency.

Conclusion

If, as former Keeper of Ethnography at the British Museum, John Mack has suggested, '[i]t can be argued – indeed it has been argued elsewhere – that there is no such thing as an 'ethnographic' object, merely objects regarded ethnographically' (Mack 2000, 25), then this account has attempted to regard these objects differently. In aiming to uncover an alternative view on this collection, I have drawn upon two distinct critical interventions, namely the current theories of 'agency' and 'archive'. Through sustained engagement with the 'extended archive', the present contribution sets out the type of detailed research into museum collections urgently required amidst the current cultural climate.

Little was recorded or known about these ten objects when they were regarded as 'ethnographic specimens'. However, the present archival engagement has made it possible to re-inscribe the agency of various Africans – including possibly the two alleged artefactual abductors and most significantly perhaps Cetshwayo – in relation to these objects, allowing them to be added to a small corpus of items that can be provenanced to Ulundi, the royal homestead of '[t]he Last Independent Zulu King' (Wood 1996, 62).³³ As head of the homestead, it is likely that Cetshwayo would have commissioned the milk-pails and meat-platter from a highly-skilled carver, who himself as an agent would have made various decisions,³⁴ whereas the headrests were possibly presented to the king as gifts. One of the headrests and the two vessels standing on legs (of a type previously thought to have been made for Europeans) open up intriguing questions as to their function and origin, addressed elsewhere (Elliott Weinberg 2019).

Undoubtedly, Wolseley would have considered these ten objects of commanding presence to be his treasures, but there is every suggestion that they are Cetshwayo's *amagugu*.

Acknowledgements

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access to the British Museum collections. I also wish to acknowledge my PhD supervisor, John Mack, the staff at Hove Library and elsewhere, as well as colleagues who commented on my paper at the conference and particularly Chris Wingfield for feedback on an earlier draft of this contribution.

Notes

1. British Museum accession numbers Af1917,1103.1–10.
2. The text indicated that the piece was made 'before 1880', which is less broad than the Sainsbury African Galleries' date for the headrest (discussed below).
3. For an overview of known objects from the Zulu kingdom see Wood 1996.
4. Suggesting a Northern Ndebele provenance, associated with groups that today occupy western Zimbabwe.
5. Various 'ZULU', 'Natal/Zulu' and '?Zulu'.
6. The notion of 'tribe' has been well critiqued by scholars working on southern African material. See for example Vail (1989) and more recently Hamilton & Leibhammer (2016).
7. See for example Zeitlyn 2012, 462; Enwezor 2008, 11; Mbembe 2002, 19; Stoler 2002, 94.
8. Anitra Nettleton's (2007) discussion speculates that the headrests from this collection were acquired following military action, but does not pursue this line further.
9. See C.H. Read to Lady Wolseley, 13 and 16 October 1917, British Museum, Department of Britain, Europe and Pre-History archive (BEP), 'Letters Out' 1916–1918. Curiously, no letters from Lady Wolseley pertaining to this donation were to be found in 'Letters In'.
10. BM BEP Read to Lady Wolseley 15/10/1917; Read to Lady Wolseley 16/10/1917.
11. 'SOUTH AFRICA' appears against item one (and presumably applies to item two to four); 'S. AFRICA' appears against items five to eight and no country is indicated for items nine to ten. It should be noted that at this time 'South Africa' was often used in much the same way as today's 'Southern Africa'.
12. The Wolseley Collections, housed at Hove Library, East Sussex comprise the Wolseley Papers and Wolseley/RUSI (Royal United Services Institute) papers. The history of the Wolseley Collections (of correspondence and papers) is complex and Hove's holdings are incomplete. However, they form probably the largest part of the greater 'Wolseley archive', now dispersed (see Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts 1970, 2 & 187).
13. 12 Aug 1879, Hove Library W/P 8/12-19.
14. Wolseley to his wife, 13 Aug 1879, Hove Library, W/P 8/12-19.
15. See for example Wolseley to his wife, 26 Aug 1879, Hove Library, W/P 8/20-28.
16. Wolseley to his wife, 29 Aug 1879, Hove Library, W/P 8/20-28.
17. 26 Aug 1879, Hove Library, W/P 8/20-28. The highly offensive term 'kaffir' (also 'kafir') was commonly used to refer to black South Africans.
18. 30 Nov 1879, Hove Library, W/P 8/20-28.

19. Such as examples cited in Knight 1992; Stevenson 2005; Maritz & Maritz 2008.
20. Wolseley acquired Asante royal objects during his previous campaign in Ghana, including famously an umbrella.
21. The lock of hair was intended for Frances, their young daughter (Wolseley to his wife, 30 May 1879; 4 June 1879; 13 August 1879, Hove Library, W/P 8/1-11).
22. Wolseley announces to his wife 'I have managed to secure one of Cetewayo's necklaces of lions [sic] claws – none but a very few of the highest in the land were allowed to wear such a distinction' (29 Aug 1879, Hove Library, W/P 8/20-28).
23. The composition includes an Asante stool. There is possibly also a ninth object, obscured.
24. Hove Library, Wolseley Collections, scrapbook vol. 15 [1922], unpaginated.
25. The etching is captioned 'Finding Some of Cetewayo's Treasures. From a Sketch by Lieutenant D.A. East'. The cave depicted bears some resemblance to an illustration of 'Cetewayo's Gunpowder Magazine' in another publication (*Graphic*, 11/10/ 1879, 365).
26. Wolseley's wife accused him of 'composing his letters with an eye on posterity' (Beckett 2004 [2008], 5) and it is possible that Wolseley wished to keep secret the circumstances surrounding the acquisition of these objects. Regarding the find-spot, it is possible, but less likely, that the objects were found elsewhere. For example, Wolseley writes to his wife about 'a pillow [headrest] taken in the hut where Ketewayo [sic] intended to sleep in when he was taken prisoner' (Hove WP 8/20-28, Wolseley to his wife, 3/09/1879). However, he indicates that he would be sending this headrest as a gift to Lady Constance Stanley.
27. This account by Captain Alfred W. Drayson, who records having fallen, along with his horse, into 'an old corn-pit, about twelve feet in depth and seven in diameter. The sides were as hard as stone, for a fire is always kept burning for a day or so in the interior when the pit is first made' (Drayson 1858, 28). Although this incident occurred in Natal (Drayson 1858, 27), rather than within the Zulu kingdom, grain-pits appear to have been of similar construction across the Thukela River in what was termed 'Zulu country'.
28. Here Hooper cites Berglund (1976).
29. It is possible that the objects were sent home at another time. For example, on 29 August 1879 Wolseley writes to his wife telling her that he 'shall send home a few of the claws [from Cetshwayo's lion claw necklace] by Gifford [aide-de-camp, Edric Frederick Gifford] (Hove Library, W/P 8/20-28).
30. Based on my own experience of studying the South Africa collections first hand, these inscriptions are not characteristic of British Museum markings of the period or later and were almost certainly not carried out at the Museum. The inscriptions all appear to be done by the same hand; one particular to this group of objects. The erased inscriptions for objects five through 10 were examined under ultraviolet light and appear to read 'Coomassie 1873'. The erased inscription under object

one was illegible, an adhesive label covers the erased portion of object two, while objects three and four were examined with the naked eye.

31. According to H.J. Braunholtz, who from 1913 worked with the collections and eventually became Keeper of Ethnography, the word 'ethnographical' was first used in official reports at the Museum in 1845 (Braunholtz 1938, 5).
32. The British Museum always preferred the term to 'ethnology'.
33. According to Wood's exhibition catalogue 'few authenticated artefacts associated with the [Zulu] kings have survived' (1996, 43) and less that a handful of objects are said to have been taken from the King's homestead following the Battle of Ulundi.
34. For a discussion of these object types, see Klopper 1991, 85. Historically, within South Africa certain materials and/or technologies would have been the preserve of either men or women, as were the creation of various types of objects. Women, for example, were beadworkers, while men were carvers (Nettleton 2012).

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Chapter 14

Considering the consequences of light and shadow in some nineteenth-, twentieth- and twenty-first- century South African images

Nessa Leibhammer

We all know that Art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth, at least the truth that is given to us to understand. The artist must know the manner whereby to convince others of the truthfulness of his lies (Picasso, quoted in Barr 1946, 270–1).

There is no knowledge, political or otherwise, outside of representation (Bhabha 2004, 23).

Introduction

This chapter explores how artists have harnessed light and shadow in images in order to shape meaning. Positioning the discussion in relation to work done within Western canons, I draw on the nineteenth-, twentieth- and twenty-first-century visual lexicon of South Africa. I will look, in particular, at how light and shadow convey subliminal messages about subject peoples in eighteenth and nineteenth century South Africa and how, more recently, they are used as a ‘decolonizing impulse’ in contemporary art from the region.

Images offer explanations about the world, ordering information as well as presenting what is imperceptible to human vision (such as sound waves, the Higgs boson particle or unicorns). Brought together in an infinite range of combinations, pictorial renderings present possibilities of the ‘knowable’. They encompass observed reality articulated in faithful mimesis to scenarios that seek to simulate inner states of consciousness or capture abstract conceptual imaginings that bear no resemblance to observed reality. Images rendered as if to faithfully capture observed phenomena might well present a scene that is entirely fictional. The power of the image lies in its ability to persuade.

In place of the graphic morphemes of the written alphabet, pictorial representation uses line, colour,

tone, form, light, shadow, perspective and other elements to convey information (Leibhammer 2001). Like language, this lexicon must be mutually intelligible to both artist and viewer. Humans do not automatically comprehend pictorial conventions but learn to interpret them. Once learnt the viewer enters into a state of optical complicity (Desiderio nd., 1) with the image, participating in its decoding and transfer of information. Viewers bypass subliminally present aspects such as the phenomenological weight of light (or its absence) as they surrender to pictorial illusionism. In order to raise awareness of how images create ‘truths’, it is necessary to understand how pictorial narrativity is achieved. This involves accepting that images are not value-free windows through which ‘realities’ are presented. They are subject to the intention, purpose and intended meaning of the artist.

Light, and its corollary, shadow, plays an important but little recognized metaphoric role in the range of Western imaging and imagining.¹ In the production of the comprehensible, the articulation of light does not merely illuminate a scene but serves as a ‘root metaphor’ (Edgeworth 2003, 13) shaping understandings of the spiritual and secular world. As an augur of the immaterial it is frequently used to register the presence of the supernatural. Importantly, in classical Western canons of depiction it is inextricably wedded to Christian ideology. However, artists may use light and shadow in subversive ways. It can be manipulated to suggest the demonic and, used transgressively, fulfil an iconoclastic role.

Artists and illustrators most commonly feature multiple rather than single light sources in an image. There are also very different types and qualities of light such as electric light, diffused light, light from a hearth, sunlight, moonlight and starlight. This complex scenario must be the subject for another discussion. For the sake of brevity my focus will be on the main



Figure 14.1. Map showing the sites mentioned in this chapter.

source and quality of light, which determines how an image is read and received.

Scope and aim

I begin with a study of works by the nineteenth-century artist-travellers, Charles Bell (1813–1882)² and Thomas Baines (1820–1875),³ both renowned for documenting scenes ‘from life’. Their images were used to illustrate travel narratives read both locally and abroad. The accepted authenticity of their works, of showing how it ‘really was’, is linked to their naturalistic style as well as their having purportedly witnessed the scenes they portrayed. Baines, however, is known to have painted scenes he did not observe (Kennedy 1961, xviii). He also made preparatory sketches with annotations that he worked up much later into final oil paintings.

This is followed by a discussion of two different copies of the same rock art image. Joseph Millerd Orphen, a late nineteenth-century colonial administrator was the creator of the first, and South African archaeologist Patricia Vinnicombe the second. One hundred years separates the two copies and they show a vast difference in their understanding of the content and intention of the original image. This can be read from the pictorial languages used in the two copies.

As with these copies of the rock art image from Melikane, striking differences in appearance are evident when comparing a late nineteenth-century photograph of *induna* and headman Umdamane taken by the Trappist Mission in Natal and an engraved portrait copied from the same image. The divergence between the two renderings is intensified when the engraving is read as an illustration embedded in a missionary text – the purpose for which it was created.

The Modernist era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries brought with it a shift in the cultural order and visual languages of the West. A loss of conviction in the superiority of Europe and the ‘manifest bankruptcy of the ideology of progress’ (Clifford 1988, 119 & 121) followed its descent into the barbarity of the First World War. Early twentieth-century artists looked for alternative ways to imagine and articulate, and the cultural theorist James Clifford has suggested that Surrealism, as an art movement, deliberately flouted classical and traditional laws of representation, undermining inherited Western wisdoms. Fracturing the idea of a unifying metanarrative it valued fragments, unexpected juxtapositions and extraordinary realities drawn from the erotic, the exotic and the unconscious. Clifford (1988, 118) links these to the defamiliarized encounters of early ethnographers and writers with African and

other non-Western cultures. European artists such as Giorgio De Chirico and Max Ernst in particular used the genre to explore notions of the uncanny and the irrational. Surrealism provided an aesthetic language in which the non-logical and non-Christian could be legitimately realized. Using this opportunity of transcendent inclusivity, twentieth-century South African artist Simon Lekgetho celebrates African spirituality in his still-life paintings.⁴

Following the iconoclasm of Surrealism, the disrupted fields of authority in the work of contemporary South African artist Kemang Wa Lehulere are read to reveal a de-colonizing impetus, a strategy evident in the work of many contemporary South African artists.

Seeing the light

Our most familiar Western conceptions of light are associated with Judeo-Christian beliefs, though further research may trace its origins back to the Zoroastrian stories of creation, where the deity of wisdom existed in light above the chaotic, destructive principle that prevailed in darkness and ignorance below. The biblical narrative of creation tells of how:

*In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth,
And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep...
And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.
And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.
(Genesis 1¹⁻⁴, King James Version).*

Thus, not only does light allow us to see – it carries powerful emotive and metaphysical information (mental, textual and visual), so much so that in Enlightenment thinking light became a proxy for God, divine wisdom, saintliness and salvation – its denial or disruption evoking conceptual opposites. In fact, the Enlightenment is another key metaphor for light-based progressive thinking in the Western world (Leibhammer 2001).

In October 1834 Charles Davidson Bell (1813–1882) sketched a scene titled *Evening Prayers at Moriah*, also known as *Morija* in present day Lesotho (Fig. 14.2). At the time he was the expedition artist travelling with Andrew Smith on a two-year journey into the interior of Southern Africa (Lye 1975). Smith describes the occasion at *Morija* as a fine night with a bright moon in an unclouded sky. Some hundred individuals seated on the ground around them were enveloped in their skin cloaks so that it was ‘difficult to discover anything in the dark circle anything like a human form amongst

them’ (Lye 1975, 61). However, once the first words of the preacher, the French Protestant missionary, Jean-Eugène Casalis were uttered, the crowd elevated their heads and listened steadfastly to what was said.

Bell’s sketch of this scene shows the preacher to the left, his face well lit by the moon behind. The gathered crowd are seated, many with their backs to us, their faces invisible. A clouded heaven (in contrast to Smith’s ‘unclouded’ sky) brackets the orb of the moon – conjuring what could be read as the eye of God above. Viewed from the back with the moon directly ahead, the silhouette of each seated figure is fringed with light. Although we cannot see them, we know the listeners’ faces are fully illuminated. The moon appears to be in league with the preacher bestowing spiritual radiance on the crowd who now glow in the light of Christian faith... no longer inhuman!

There are many paradigms for the depiction of numinous light in Christian religious images. Dutch artist Rembrandt van Rijn’s (1634) etching *Annunciation to the Shepherds* shows the heavens opening with divine light emanating from the left, thwarting the darkness of night.⁵ A radiant white angel brings the message of the birth of Christ to a group of shepherds and their flocks. The illumination used by Rembrandt is similar, albeit more dramatic, to the one used by Bell. However, both are the light of evangelical revelation.

Some 14 years after Bell’s rendering of *Evening Prayers at Moriah*, Thomas Baines, also on an expedition into the interior sketched a ‘Fingo Village’ at Fort Beaufort in the Eastern Cape (Baines 1964, 39), completing the oil painting of the scene some 7 months later (Fig. 14.3). The year 1848 fell between the 7th Frontier War of 1846–7 and the 8th Frontier War of 1850–3. Raging for a hundred years, these wars saw violent conflicts between British forces and Xhosa-speaking people over ownership of land in what is now the Eastern Cape region. Baines’ sentiment is well known to have been with the colonial enterprise (Kennedy, in Baines 1964, xvii).

In his notebook Baines describes how he ‘sallied forth’ at dawn on the morning of 20 March and ‘sat down before a collection of beehive habitations’ (Baines 1964, 39), making a derogatory aside on the industriousness of bees and the opposite quality of the human inhabitants. He describes how in the scene unfolding before him the ‘inmates, warmed by the beams of the rising sun’ ... crept out from their dwellings ‘into the light of day’. He observes that these people had made no further advance in civilization besides changing their skin *karosses* for blankets (Baines 1964, 39).

The morning sunlight is cast from the right falling between the dwellings. While western trained artists do not universally apply the convention of light radiating



Figure 14.2. Evening Prayers at Moria by Charles Davidson Bell, 1834. This image appears on p. 61 of Andrew Smith's Journal of his expedition into the interior of South Africa 1834–1836. Image courtesy and copyright Museum Africa (MA2432).

from the top left-hand position, it is generally favoured (Stoichita 1997, 143).⁶ A light source emanating from the right-hand side of the image is often associated with scenes of angst, uncertainty and melancholy, as in early Renaissance artist Masaccio's (born Tommaso di Ser Giovanni di Simone) *The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*, a fresco in the Cappella Brancacci, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence, Italy, painted between 1426 and 1428.⁷ Similarly, in the painting *Charon Ferrying the Shades* by Pierre Subleyras (c. 1735 to 1740), now in the Musée du Louvre, Paris, France, the mythical figure of Charon, the ferryman of Hades, rows two souls of the dead across the Rivers Styx and Acheron to the underworld.⁸ A dramatic light enters from the right hand side while an ominous hazy black and reddish destination looms ahead – a portent of the hell fires to come. Those of us educated in a Western tradition are comfortable moving our eyes from left to right

across a page. Having to cast our eyes from right to left – against the grain of reading – subliminally alters our relationship with the image, to one of unease.⁹

If we were to imagine that north was above us, then the easterly direction from which the morning light is shining would be correct. However, this does not lessen the pall of lassitude cast by this image. The field of light takes centre stage and its power, rather than a positive force, seems to enervate the villagers, rendering them torpid in its rays. Pressed up against the sides of the woven dwellings, many seem pinioned by the light and warmth. A seated figure in the right foreground leans, head in hand, as if in despondency while a male figure on the left is tightly wrapped in his *kaross* smoking a pipe.

Baines describes the central female figure delivering, with 'impassioned' and 'eloquent' gestures, a 'harangue' (Baines 1964, 39). She is a target of his ridicule

by his insinuation that she considers her 'oratory' on menial tasks as deeply important. The men, those that did not attend their cattle, are described in an equally unfavourable light. According to Baines they dispose 'their limbs so as to enjoy with the least possible inconvenience to themselves the luxury of the warm sun and their tobacco pipes' (Baines 1964, 39). The tone of Baines' textual description is sarcastic and deprecating and his negative sentiments are evident in his rendering.

While the oil, painted towards the end of 1848, could be taken as a reliable rendering of the scene, a comparison with the original and earlier sketch done *in situ* on 20 March shows a strikingly different scenario (Fig. 14.4). In the sketch, light floods the whole scene rather than channels selectively into the space between the dwellings, and the mood captured is one of activity and purpose. The person to the right foreground sits up attentively, rather than slumping with head in hand. A walking figure, left out of the final painting, is raked by light and is moving purposefully with their cloak billowing to the left. The seated male figure is dressed

in what are clearly Western work clothes (straps crossed over the back supporting what are trousers or overalls). He sits upright and is not smoking. A man can be seen wearing a wide-brimmed western-style hat. These are indicators that defy Baines' claim that the villagers have made no advance into civilization beyond some swapping of their *karosses* for blankets.

In 1848 Fort Beaufort lay within the colonial frontier and the settlement housed a number of people referred to as 'Fingo' or 'Mfengu'. Consigned to the region to act as a buffer between the British and the Xhosa they are usually, and mistakenly, thought of as refugees from Shaka's wars of expansion (Webster 1995, 241–76).¹⁰ In contrast to Baines' portrayal of the Mfengu, historian Paul Maylam writes that in the '1840s and 1850s it was the Mfengu who were the most vigorous and enterprising peasant farmers. They sold tobacco, firewood, cattle and milk as well as surplus grain' (Maylam 1986, 105). In the later nineteenth century many Mfengu, such as John Tengo Jabavu (Oakes 1988, 283) and the Mbeki family (Gevisser 2009,



Figure 14.3. Fingo village Fort Beaufort 1848 by Thomas Baines (45 × 65 cm). Oil painting completed 7 months after the sketch illustrated in Figure 14.4 on which the painting is based. Image courtesy and copyright Museum Africa (MA 6322).



Figure 14.4. Fingo village Fort Beaufort 1848 by Thomas Baines (14 × 23 cm). Wash and ink sketch made on 20 March 1848. Image courtesy and copyright Museum Africa (MA1955_937).

14–17), became leaders of the black intellectual elite (Maylam 1986, 109).

The initial sketch by Baines fits better with reports of the industriousness of the Mfengu, both by contemporary and later writers. Unfortunately, these two images are seldom seen together, and the sketch would not have been circulated widely. Rather than show the view he witnessed by ‘being there’, Baines’ has changed his original graphic response to cast the Mfengu in an unfavourable light. The *in situ* sketch, one of activity and energy has, in the oil painting, become a scene of stupor, apathy and romanticized hopelessness. Why he may have done this is a matter for speculation. Nevertheless, his pro-settler sentiments are well known.

Away from deterministic frameworks

By the twentieth century ties to linear logic and perspectival laws had been loosened. Mitchell (1986, 8) explains how language and imagery were no longer what they promised to be for critics and philosophers of the Enlightenment – ‘perfect, transparent media through which reality may be represented to the understanding’. Ultimately, the scepticism of Postmodernism

followed. Moral relativity in the studies of non-Western societies brought an increased appreciation that Western ways of thinking were not necessarily normative or universal. An expanded potential for evocation in the depictions of light accompanied these ontological changes. To demonstrate this, I compare two separate copies of the same rock art image – one completed in 1874 and the other in the mid-twentieth century.

In 1874, colonial administrator for the British Empire in southern Africa, and self-taught anthropologist, Joseph Millerd Orpen transcribed onto paper three figures painted on the rock face of the Melikane Shelter, Lesotho (Fig. 14.5). The visual language of his depiction suggests that the rendering was informed by pervading ideological norms of the time. Rock art images were thought to be depictions of customs and daily life, or of people wearing masks, costumes or hunting disguises (Lewis-Williams 1990, 50).

This is reflected in the way the copy has been rendered – smooth, evenly applied solid planes of colour block in the bodies within well-defined edges. The figures are corporeal and tangible with layers of opaque paint lending a sense of physical weight. This is partly the result of the solid colour, but also a consequence of the way the figures have been positioned

within the format of the paper. Two have their legs perpendicular to the bottom edge and their backs parallel to it, a position that stabilizes the forms within the horizontal and vertical structure of the rectangular frame. Although no background detail is visible, the sticks held by the two left hand figures have their lower ends lined up with an imagined ground plane. A sense of balance in a determinate realm with gravitational forces, as per Newtonian law, is implied. The illusion is that of solid, static bodies occupying space in the physical world.

There is neither natural nor supernatural light implied nor any shadow visible. This non-light associated with the timeless 'Primitive' (Leibhammer 2001,

77) is reminiscent of Henri Matisse's *La Danse* (1909).¹¹ Perhaps Orpen was implying that for hunter-gatherer societies, such as those depicted in the image, time does not change – imagining that they existed in an anachronistic state repeating the same rituals since time immemorial.

When comparing Orpen's copy of the three figures at Melikane, made in the late 1800s, to Patricia Vinnicombe's from the mid twentieth-century (Fig. 14.6), significant differences are evident. Firstly, Vinnicombe has given the image a sense of being out of balance, one that counters the rectangular register of the sheet of paper. The top figure leans forward precariously. Behind are the hindquarters of an eland that

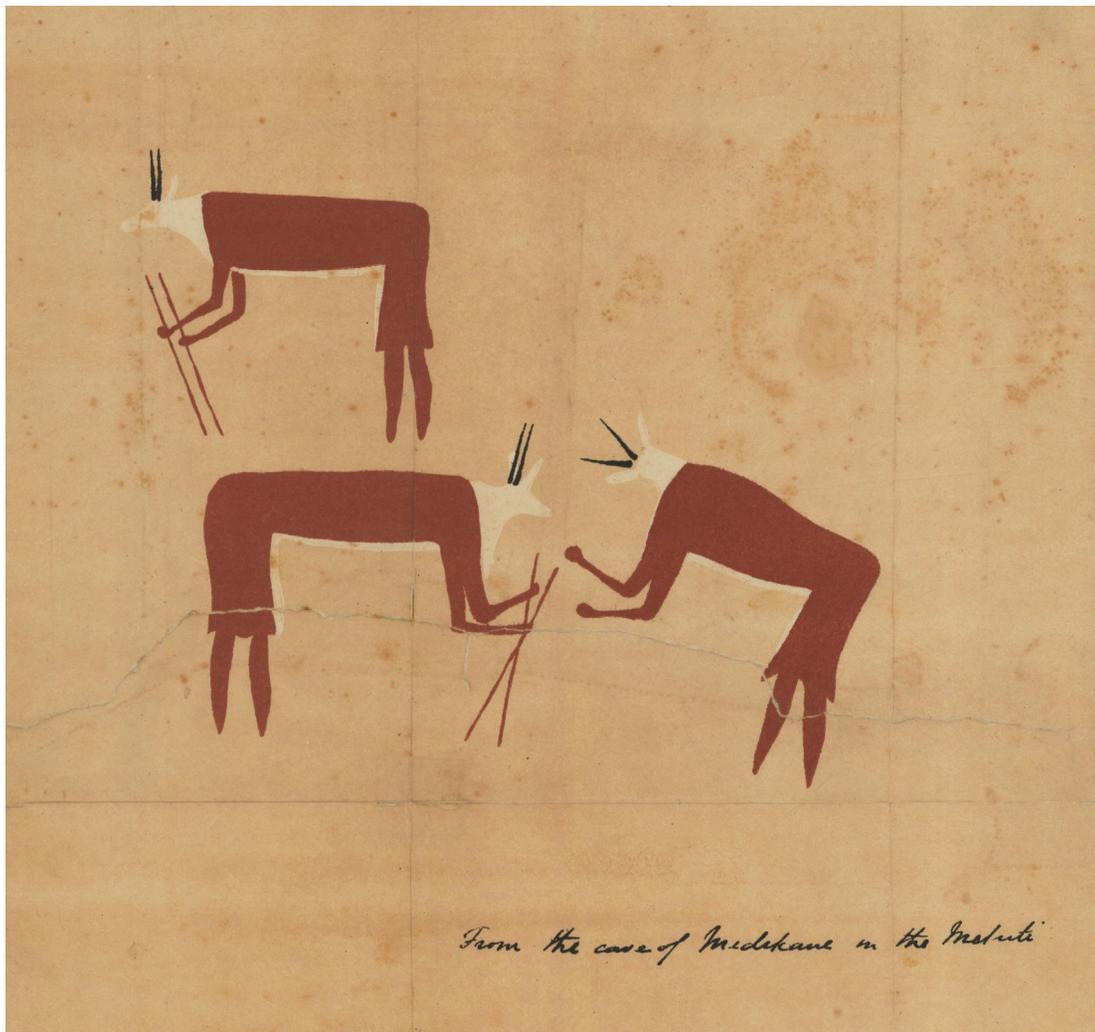


Figure 14.5. Three trancing shamans by Joseph Millerd Orpen. Detail from Orpen's 1874 painted copy of the rock art panel 'therianthropes, sticks, karosses, buchu (aromatic herbs), rain animals, spears, dogs and head-dresses...' at Melikane, Qacha's Neck, Lesotho. Image courtesy and copyright Iziko Museums of Cape Town Social History Collections Department, South Africa. www.sarada.co.za. University of Witwatersrand. South African Rock Art Digital Archive Ref No. IZI-02-281HC.



Figure 14.6. Copy of section of rock art panel by Patricia Vinnicombe. Poster prints on acid-free watercolour paper. Mid- to late twentieth century. This is a section from the panel 'therianthropes, sticks, karosses, buchu (aromatic herbs), rain animals, spears, dogs and head-dresses...' at Melikane, Qacha's Neck, Lesotho, the same rock art panel that was copied by Orpen illustrated in Figure 14.5. Image courtesy and copyright Natal Museum, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. www.sarada.co.za. University of Witwatersrand. South African Rock Art Digital Archive Ref No.NMSA-PJV-166HC.

slant forward and loom large in the background. Onto this, the three 'shaman' figures have been imposed – a detail totally absent in Orpen's copy. The vast shift in scale between the hindquarters and the three figures accentuates the unreal nature of space in the Vinnicombe copy. But, of most interest to us is that, in the Vinnicombe copy, luminosity radiates from within and behind – a glowing light in which these figures float. A sense of the supernatural is evident in the figures and the implied radiance of the picture plane. Even the original, painted onto the solid, opaque rock face of a cave would not have possessed this quality of light.

Vinnicombe's pioneering research work in the 1970s suggested that a sacred dimension existed in southern African rock art, with recurring motifs of spirit-travel and trancing shamans shape-shifting into animals, birds and elongated figures. Clearly Vinnicombe has imbued her rendering of the image with

her understanding of the scene. The two copies, in their different articulations, particularly that of light, reveal a striking divergence in the meaning communicated by the image.

Invocations of immanence

The eclectic South African artist Simon Lekgetho (1929 – 1985) painted a varied range of subject matter including wildlife scenes, portraits, landscapes and still lifes, each treated in stylistically different manners. However, the works for which he is best known are his renderings of divination objects in contexts saturated with immanence – light and its absence, darkness and shadow, playing a large part in the ambient invocation of the scenes.

In *Still-life with Sangoma's bones and other objects* (1964; Fig. 14.7) a tenebrous background fills the upper

two-thirds of the picture plane.¹² There is no horizon line to ground the viewer in known space and darkness curves slowly forward from above and behind, merging into a brightly lit foreground plane on which objects rest. Low light from the right falling on the cowrie shell, bones, divination dice and other paraphernalia casts long shadows. Suspended from unfathomable points above the picture plane, an animal hide and a string of beads with draped herbs float. A moth punctuates the dark surface with its pale presence. Smoke rises from the interior of a small hollow object – most likely the fragrant herb *mphephu* (*helichrysum*) burning to attract the ancestors with its scent.

While the direction of light in Lekgetho's painting recalls that of the surrealist work *Mystery and Melancholy of a Street* (1914) by metaphysical artist De Chirico,¹³ it lacks a sense of alienation and anxiety.¹⁴

While the register in Lekgetho's work is the paranormal, the light that bathes the objects is warm and glowing. Colour tones conjure the earthy domain of the all important ancestral 'shades' who dwell below ground. It is to these spiritual shades that respect must be shown, and small offerings of beer and tobacco made by their living relatives. If the ancestors are pleased by the respectful behaviour and the offerings of their descendants they will assist their family members. If not, misfortune will fall upon them.

Diviners are there to assist in interpreting messages from the ancestral spirits. The voluminously-lit spherical vessel in the painting most likely holds an offering of beer, while the hanging herbs are possibly tobacco. Together with the box of matches, the beer and snuff are a promise of pleasurable smoking and social drinking for the ancestors. In this way the



Figure 14.7. Still life with Sangoma's bones and other objects. Oil painting by Simon Moroke Lekgetho, 1964. Image courtesy and copyright the Homestead Collection.

inflection of meaning in the light and shadow of the painting that could be read as ominous take on a reassuring tenor.

Symbolic meaning aligned with psychological and metaphysical models hold clues to this alternative understanding of the portent of shadow. Art historian Victor Stoichita (1997, 133) discusses the demonization and investment of negativity in the cast shadow in Western painting. Following the tenets of Sigmund Freud, it is the double that replicates the self, becoming the uncanny 'other' and 'a thing of terror'. It is also perceived as a place in the soul where 'inner negativity, suspicions and doubts are born' (Stoichita 1997, 133).

Different to the inflection of Western understandings, the translation of 'shadow' in isiZulu is '(i) isi-thunzi' which not only describes 'the absence of light' but also refers to the 'idlozi' or ancestral shades. 'Thunzi' has a further translation that includes that of 'Moral weight, influence, prestige, soul, personality' (Doke and Vilikazi 2005, 433 & 809). This alternative spectrum of meaning intensifies the positive inflections that can be sensed from Lekgetho's painting.

Line and light: mission images

Most nineteenth-century missionaries in South Africa considered belief in the ancestors to be heathen superstition. They made it their calling to persuade 'non-believers' to reject the old ways of understanding and accept a Christian way of life. Those who had not accepted conversion were often referred to by the opprobrious term 'kafir'. Anthropologist Christoph Rippe (2016, 384–9), whose work looks closely at missionary photography in South Africa, has written extensively on the image of a man by the name of Umdamane, one such 'non-believer'. His photograph was taken some time around 1891 by one of the brothers from the Mariannahill Mission Station in Pinetown, Natal and it exists in the Mariannahill archive as a glass plate negative that, at some stage, was printed up into a photographic positive (Fig. 14.8).

A second image of the same man – a mirror-inverted engraving, 'Ein Kaffrischer Häuptling' (headman or chief) copied from the photographic image – was first published in the *Mariannahiller Kalender* in 1893 (Fig. 14.9). This publication (Anonymous 1893) was aimed at the support communities of the mission, both locally and abroad in Europe, and the image accompanies an article titled 'Physical and Mental Features of our Kafir Environment.' This discusses the differences between Christian and non-Christian Africans (Rippe 2016, 384–9). Here, unlike on the glass plate negative, the sitter has not been named and so loses his personal identity.¹⁵

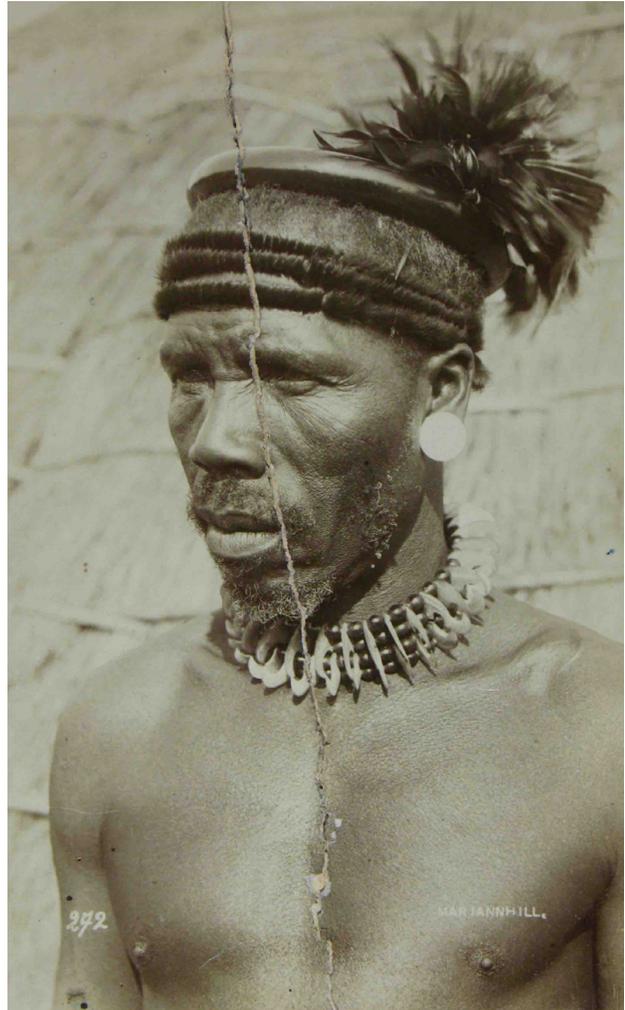


Figure 14.8. Portrait of induna/headman Umdamane by unknown photographer. Digital inversion of the original glass plate negative produced by the photographic studio at Mariannahill Mission, Pinetown, in 1891 in what was then the Colony of Natal. Photograph courtesy and copyright the Congregation of Mariannahill Missionaries Archives.

If analysed in terms of the graphic language of light and line, the two images – photograph and engraving – communicate tellingly different information. The photograph has been taken in natural light, out of doors. It is most likely around midday given the position of the light from the sun high in the sky. The sitter's head is turned towards his right and he stares into the distance. There is no focus as the eye details are not clearly visible, being shaded over by the brows and perhaps slightly closed against the light. It is a portrait of an individual with a strong face and inner composure. His features, the details of the

feather decoration in his hair and the articulation of the necklace he is wearing are soft, and the edges not crisply defined (possibly a result of the glass-plate photographic process). A large portion of his chest, including nipples, is visible – its smooth muscularity aesthetically pleasing, the illuminating light giving the portrait a sensual quality.

This softly molding light is entirely absent in the printed engraving. Here the image has acquired a hardened graphic quality. The engraver has gone to much trouble to articulate the three-dimensional form of the head, defining detail with the edges of things emphasized through definitive outline. The highlights and dark areas of the face are starkly contrasted, lending harshness to the portrait that is not

present in the photograph. The slightly wrinkled brow in the photograph has become heavily creased and the pupils of the eyes emphasized with pale corneas. The face now has an expression that could be read as troubled, brooding, and perhaps even menacing.

While the necklace he is wearing emphasizes the curvature of his neck, in the engraving Umdamane's naked torso becomes flattened as the eye travels down. The image has been cropped horizontally to just below the shoulders so that there is no longer a smoothly modulated chest and breast. What is left of this section is now as flat as the text into which it has been inserted. Facilitating this 'fit,' the vertical outer edges of the cropped shoulders are now the same width as the text on the page. The engraver has further flattened the area above and behind the shoulders with linear scribblings, visually reducing the contrast between the background and Umdamane's chest and shoulders.

All these pictorial devices have the effect of sinking his body back into the page while projecting the head out of the picture plane, offering it, and its headgear, up for close inspection – the head being of particular interest to those now discredited eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century 'sciences' of physiognomy, craniology and phrenology.¹⁶ The lighter background of the page behind pushes Umdamane's darker head forwards, while his torso sinks into the shadow of the crisscrossed lines behind.

The light catches the high points of his face, throwing the creased folds and wrinkles into shadow, so that it appears aged. This strong contrast effect of black line against a white background is the authoritative language used in engineers' technical drawings, or specimens in biology textbooks. Subsumed into the graphic language of the text, Umdamane's corporeal body is effectively reduced, and his individuality denied. The image has been 'disciplined' losing its sensuality and individuality opening it up for scrutiny as a specimen of a heathen.

Kemang Wa Lehlere: disrupted fields of authority

The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries are marked by iconoclastic, subversive and ironic framing of the visual, with artists taking apart grand narratives and subjecting them to disrupted fields of authority and logic.¹⁷ One contemporary artist working in this mode is South African Kemang Wa Lehlere, who was Deutsche Bank's 2017 'Artist of the Year'.

Lehlere's work often takes the form of installations, combining both two and three-dimensional elements. The two-dimensional drawings, executed in

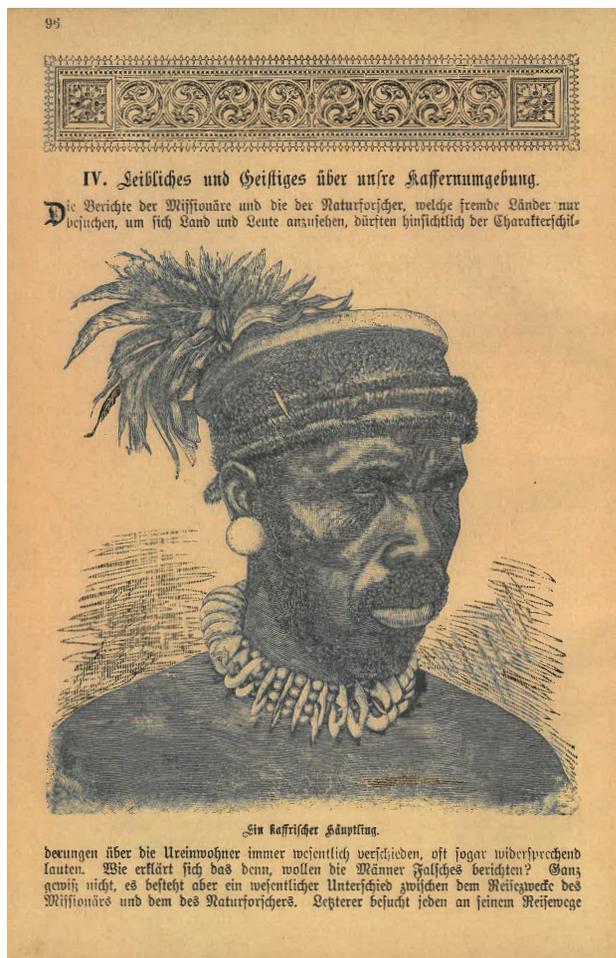


Figure 14.9. *Mirror-inverted engraving, 'Ein Kaffrischer Häuptling', from 'Leibliches und Geistiges über unsre Kaffernumgebung' that appeared in the Mariannhiller Kalender V, 1893, p.96. The image is a copy of the photographic portrait of Umdamane illustrated in Figure 14.8. Image courtesy and copyright the Congregation of Mariannhill Missionaries Archives.*



Figure 14.10. The grave step by Kemang Wa Lehulere. Section of 2014 chalk and paint on blackboard installation at the 8th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art. Image copyright Kemang Wa Lehulere. Courtesy Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg.

white chalk on black painted surfaces, are a visual recall of the school blackboard. However, here the blackboard is no longer about instruction and construction, but about disruption and destruction – the ephemerality of fact played out in the idea of chalk and its constant erasure. An illusionist surface plane is eschewed – instead writing, cartoon drawings, odd and randomly placed motifs are juxtaposed – multiple elements from which the viewer must attempt to construct narratives.

Visual constructions in the works, including the element of light, make no sense if approached from classic canons of Western depiction. The image cannot be read in a linear fashion, as there is no horizon line or directional light or shadow to guide the eye. Sequential reading is impossible. Time is suggested through series of written numbers, drawn arrows and the appearance of signs that read ‘Act 1’, ‘Act 2’, etc., as if the scenes were from a chaotic theatre production.¹⁸ Depicted light is ‘illogical’ and frequently features Lehurele’s recurring motif of blank/dark page with luminosity emanating from behind. Here no light is

reflected off the surface – no words of past wisdoms come ‘to light’. In effect his pictorial gestures deny the ‘wisdoms’ of Western empiricism.

In ‘The grave step’, a 2014 installation at the 8th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art (Fig. 14.10), Lehurele renders a building by simulating the positive/negative reversals of light in a photographic negative. This is juxtaposed with a mountain of pencils drawn in linear graphic fashion as if it were a technical or engineering plan, with the matrix of the black surface visible through the lines of construction. Both graphic convention and scale are out of whack with the huge pencils and the ‘photographic’ negative in an ‘illogical’ relationship. A different visual dialogue is set up – one where mass dissolves, emptiness is dense, and solid form empty – a ghostly trace of matter.

One and a half apples float on top of the picture surface resting on what seems to be a crochet doily. Form and shadow both play with, and ignore, classical rules of depiction. Directional light falls on the fruit from the left hand side and shaded edges and dark

elements are defined both by no line and by double lines. Shadow and shape gloop into one, in a vignette of visual absurdity and graphic agility.

The eye and mind move in and out of a plane of coherence and incoherence – playful, cartoon-like, unsentimental, post-Apartheid images – a strategy perhaps to preclude the reconstruction of the unbearable.

Conclusion

Since the fourteenth century visual languages have sustained the metanarratives of the West. Conceived to carry particular phenomenological weight that sustained these narratives artists have, for centuries, played out the drama of light and dark in the service of good and evil, positive and negative. Perhaps the greatest role of light in the Western lexicon of images has been that of Christian spirituality.

The evangelical light in the image *Evening Prayers at Moriah* by Bell speaks of the conviction of early travellers and missionaries, who believed they brought Christian salvation to darkest Africa. Dramatically conceived light of Christian salvation lights up the faces of the gathered crowd. The positive force of Christian light is further dramatized through the dark shadows cast behind the listeners, possibly a pictorial metaphor for putting heathen beliefs behind them.

In contrast, there is no presence of the numinous in the image of the 'Fingo Village' by Baines. Here heat and light radiates from the rising sun. The villagers creep out of their dwellings to be warmed by its rays. Through his pictorial narrative of light, supported by written text, Baines has cast those portrayed in an unsympathetic way. In contrast to his original sketch, which shows an active and industrious group, those in the final painting appear indolent succumbing to the sensual gratification of the sun.

Two instances in this chapter illustrate the infinite degree to which images are open to interpretation. The first is the comparison of the three trancing shamans by Orpen, and the copy from the same original by Vinnicombe. Equally it can be witnessed in the photographic image of Umdamane and the engraving of his likeness used in a missionary text. In both cases the original was the same yet the copies differ significantly from each other. And in each, the choice of portrayed light plays a significant role in creating and registering these differences.

In comparing the image by Orpen to that of Vinnicombe, two very different understandings are evident. Where Orpen portrayed a scene of secular activity, perhaps one he imagined performed unchanged since time immemorial, the fruits of Vinnicombe's later research suggested a metaphysical

world of trancing shamans, experiencing out of body travel to other dimensions. The illumination used in each underpins the divergent understandings of the same original.

In the case of Umdamane, the photograph and the engraving appear different because their creators, using different media for replication, intended them for different purposes. Rippe has written extensively on how the mission brothers at Mariannhill created their ethnographic portraits for sale to local and international museums and tourists, in order to generate income for the mission. These needed to have a wide appeal. The engraving, however, was made to illustrate an article on the physical and mental features of the 'mission's "Kafir" environment', which served as mission propaganda. The soft sensual light of the photograph has been replaced by a harshly contrasting black and white image that has the effect of demonizing the subject in the published article.

As relativism permeated Western ontological awareness, opportunities arose where non-Christian and non-empirical phenomenon could be celebrated and portrayed without a negative slant. Lekgetho, using the visual language of Surrealism, a European genre emerging in the early twentieth century, was able to celebrate his African spirituality. In this instance and in other similar works Lekgetho has colonized a Western art style to acclaim his own spiritual reality. This was perhaps only possible once a scepticism towards Western certainties had begun to take hold.

Increasingly, contemporary artists have taken Classical, Romantic and other canons of Western representation and undermined them to generate iconoclastic images. Driven by the urge to do things differently, late twentieth and early twenty-first-century artists have unpacked the 'taken for granted' framings of colonial knowledge. One such artist is Kemang wa Lehurele who continues to unseat the grand narratives of the West in transgressive visual critiques.

Neither 'objective' nor 'subjective' modes can make claims to possess 'absolute knowledge' or to 'capture truth'. This reinforces my contention that all images must be approached in a reflexive manner, in relation to the conventions through which they are rendered, to the contexts in which they are created and illustrated, and to any new contexts. The conventions of representation carry knowledge in and of themselves, not least the depictions of light and shadow or their absences. In observing diverse uses of light and shadow in pictographic images, I would argue that such images raise thought-provoking questions regarding the choices of conventions and their implications for the representation and assertion of knowledge.

Notes

1. While other visual phenomena are equally bound up in the making of meaning many have received substantial scholarly attention. See, for example: Edgerton 2009, Damish 1995, White 1953, Kubovy 1986, Panofsky 1939, Van Straten 1994, Kern 2003, Ackerman 1991, Harris 2005 & Gage 1995.
2. Bell was a Scottish civil servant who became the surveyor general of the Cape Colony in 1848.
3. A self-taught English artist and explorer of British colonial southern Africa and Australia.
4. Lekgeto was born in 1929 at Schoemansville near the Hartebeespoort Dam.
5. Image available at: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Print,_Annunciation_to_the_Shepherds,_1634_\(CH_18383897\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Print,_Annunciation_to_the_Shepherds,_1634_(CH_18383897).jpg) (Accessed 6 April 2018)
6. The direction of the light also facilitates the reading of the image – from left to right – following the direction someone reading according to Western conventions would move their eyes. As such the image embeds comfortably in the textual matrix of page and book.
7. Image available at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Masaccio,_The_Expulsion.jpg (Accessed 5 April 2019)
8. Image available at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pierre_Subleyras_-_Charon_Ferrying_the_Shades_-_WGA21957.jpg (Accessed 5 April 2019)
9. A study of cultures that read from right to left or from top to bottom is still to be made, but it is interesting to note that many Chinese, Japanese and Korean images present us with a nearly shadowless world, with details of form delineated by line.
10. As slavery was illegal at the time, Webster traces a cover-up by the colonial government of the true origin of the Mfengu. He argues that the Mfengu were a heterogeneous conglomeration of people including Rharhabe and Gcaleka, many captured by the British to serve as a labour force for farmers in the region Webster 241–76. He explains further how the ‘Fingo’ could be separated into 3 types – ‘labourer, collaborator (peasant farmer) and groups trained by the British as military corps’ – with most groups containing all three. In 1835 the group at Fort Beaufort were largely transitional – some waiting for land to be allocated to them, some to be sent to farms to work as labourers. However, after only one year, they had already produced enough corn to be selling their surplus (ibid p. 271).
11. Image available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dance_\(Matisse\)#/media/File:La_danse_\(I\)_by_Matisse.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dance_(Matisse)#/media/File:La_danse_(I)_by_Matisse.jpg) (Accessed 5 April 2019)
12. In the Bruce Campbell Smith collection: <http://www.revisions.co.za/>
13. Image available at: <https://www.wikiart.org/en/giorgio-de-chirico/mystery-and-melancholy-of-a-street-1914> (Accessed 5 April 2019)
14. See the description of the De Chirico painting by Arnheim quoted in Stoichita 1997, 147.
15. While the glass plate negative has the sitter name ‘Umdamane’ written on it, the subsequent photographic reproductions and the engraving do not.
16. An eighteenth-century champion of physiognomy claimed that ‘it is not ... the human face that is the reflection of the soul, but the shadow on his face’ (Lavater, quoted in Stoichita 1991, 157).
17. See the works of Nandipha Mntambo, Zamaxolo Dunywa, Tracy Rose, Athi Patra-Ruga, Dineo Sheshee Bopape and Mohau Modisakeng.
18. I would like to thank J. Maingard for this idea. My appreciation also to all the participants of the Archive and Public Culture Research Initiative workshop held on 27 March 2018 who read and offered comments on this Chapter.

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Chapter 15

The day Rhodes fell: a reflection on the state of the nation and art in South Africa

Same Mdluli

In March 2015 the #RhodesMustFall (#RMF) movement began, a protest action where students were calling for the removal of the statue of Cecil Rhodes on the campus grounds of the University of Cape Town. The movement subsequently evolved into the #FeesMustFall (#FMF) movement in 2015 and 2016 where thousands of students protested against increments to university tuition fees and calling for free quality decolonized education from both university managements and the ruling government. The protests led to an impasse between students and university managements at institutions of higher learning in South Africa, which eventually led to the government's intervention.¹ The two movements revealed different aspects indicative of the state of the nation in relation to education and other economic and political issues since democracy.

In *History After Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa*, Annie Coombes brings attention to the difficulties of dealing with contested histories in the public domain where different stakeholders must be considered in the context of a 'new nation' or becoming part thereof (Coombes 2004, 5–6). The period following the new democracy in South Africa she makes reference to, is not only characterized by a political shift but also one that is shaped by a moment of addressing the atrocities of the past, finding ways of healing through the agenda of reconciliation, social cohesion and nation building, and finally formulating a new national identity. The issues raised in Coombes' discussion of this moment, however, appear to explore the grey areas between public culture, citizenship and nationalism, and how visual art has played an intersectional role between art and politics, and an even more critical role in redressing notions of contested histories and memory. In visual art the sentiments of this moment are best articulated by art historian and writer Rory Bester, who, in his contribution to a publication highlighting a decade

of the South African National Gallery permanent art collection, notes the two critical moments in what he refers to as 'the art of a democratising age in South Africa' (Bester 2004, 24–5).

The first instance that could be considered part of 'democratizing' art is Albie Sachs' controversial essay of 1989 titled *Preparing Ourselves for Freedom: Culture and the ANC Constitutional Guidelines* (Sachs 1991 [1989]) on the role of arts and culture at a point where change was imminent. The second is the moment after democracy, best encapsulated by Okwi Enwezor (1997) in his essay *Reframing the Black Subject: Ideology and Fantasy in Contemporary South African representation*. Both these essays did not only prompt public debate but also, as noted by Bester (2004, 25), 'represent important shifts in understandings of the "political" and their various relationships to visual arts practice'. While the issues Sachs' essay presented form part of a historical debate centred on the role of culture as weapon, it also highlighted a critical aspect of the debate which presented a dilemma for mainly white artists, who until then had centred their practice on anti-apartheid subject matter. At the centre of this dilemma is Enwezor's argument that for white South African artists the new political order presented a new struggle of having to relinquish control over the representation of Africans (Bester 2004, 25). The characteristics of the historical narrative highlighted by the #RMF and #FMF movements are thus placed against the backdrop of these two strands of understanding the intersection between art and politics, which this essay aims to illustrate as oppositional to Bester's views as attendant to 'the notion of public intellectual life and perceptions of its crisis in South African visual arts' (Bester 2004, 25).

The #RhodesMustFall (#RMF) movement offers a moment to reflect on what institutes and constitutes public participation in the politics of public art and public culture. This essay therefore focuses on two



Figure 15.1. Map showing the sites mentioned in this chapter.

works by Cape Town based artist Sthembile Msezane, namely *Chapungu – The Day Rhodes Fell* (2015) and *Chapungu – The Return to Great Zimbabwe* (2015), to illustrate how the notion of *fallism* or the *fallist* idea is employed to evoke an intellectual authority of understanding the epistemological structure of the institution – be it the university as an institution or art as an institution. The two works thus offer a useful departure point that does not only exemplify a significant moment marked by the literal *falling* of the Rhodes statue, but is also representative of the beginning of dismantling institutional structures and the image documenting this moment (in history) to reflect upon history.

Chapungu – The Day Rhodes Fell (2015) (Fig. 15.2) is of Msezane photographed at the moment when the statue is suspended by belts attached to cranes and about to be lowered. She is pictured possibly standing on a podium, elevated above the eye level of the rest of the spectators who have their cell phones out ready to snap the moment. Her arms are stretched out wide mimicking the furry wing contraption attached to them with rope. She is wearing a black swimsuit, her face is covered with a beaded Zulu bridal veil and there is something anticipatory about her posture and presence. It is an image that I argue represents a pivotal moment upon which the students anchored their

protest action to decontextualize the role of art as a critical component of political rhetoric. It is thus also employed in the overarching discussion of this essay to elaborate on one of the ways in which historian Cynthia Kros notes the protesters' actions 'was sustained by a substantial archive of iconoclasm' (Kros 2015, 150).

The second image *Chapungu – The Return to Great Zimbabwe* (2015) (Fig. 15.3) situates within history itself and by extension a memory of history. It is site specific and in the same manner as the image of the Rhodes *falling*, it captures the viewer to move dually back between the past, present and future. The past is referenced through the location of the shoot – the great Zimbabwe Ruins – that have over the years become an important cultural capital attraction for tourist, researchers and scholars. The medium of photography situates it within a contemporary setting that allows it to be contemplated by the audiences it seeks to captivate. It becomes a futuristic fantastical symbol of a Black woman superhero, one that has the ability to fly and transcend history and the patriarchal baggage it imposes on the Black female body. The uses of these images in this essay is therefore an extension of the question posed by political studies scholar Lwazi Lushaba, in which he asks whether or not our (South African) imagination is adequate enough for the task

of decolonizing the university. While Lushaba is referring to 'imagination in its different forms; intellectual, cultural and political imagination' (Lushaba 2015, 2), my extension focuses on artistic imagination and whether or not it makes an adequate contribution to the process of decolonization. The task of accounting for the broader historical narrative of South African art is itself a contentious one, given that this history has mainly been based on the separatist spatial ideals of apartheid, that permeated even beyond perceived 'liberated' spaces such as the arts. This task also includes interrogating how art is valued, how it is categorized, by whom is it categorized and more importantly who is it meant to serve and within which institutional structures is it validated and considered part of a larger narrative within the cultural landscape. In the South African context this becomes a complex topic, in as far as measuring the extent to which art is able to drive debates around pressing issues, and its impact on the greater imagination of a new nation. The discussion on art and politics thus prompts a larger

philosophical proposition that situates art works and art exhibitions as platforms for showcasing artworks as pivotal to debates and insights on the possibility of new ways of seeing and looking at art, as well as new ways of being.

During the #RhodesMustFall protest actions there was a noticeable detachment of art schools from the institutional politics driving the ideological thinking of collective mobilization. As a result, they became these anomalies with a peculiar sensibility and approach to dealing with the protest actions. It was during the #FeesMustFall movement, however, that art students became more prominent participants in creating forums and spaces for challenging the managements of the universities. At the University of Cape Town, the *Umhlangano* collective shut down the Michaelis School of Fine Art Hidding campus in solidarity with the protest action and the call for *free decolonized education*. It became an intellectual thinking space to articulate the ways in which the art school is complicit in exclusionary policies and therefore a



Figure 15.2. *Chapungu – the Day Rhodes Fell, 2015*, by *Sethembile Msezane*, University of Cape Town, South Africa. Photograph courtesy and copyright the artist.



Figure 15.3. *Chapungu – the Return to Great Zimbabwe, 2015*, by Sethembile Msezane, Great Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe. Photograph courtesy and copyright the artist.

repository for its archival legacy. Parts of this historical legacy are, as previously noted by artist and curator David Koloane, based on the fact that ‘visual art is a relatively specialized activity, which even amongst the white populace is to a large extent dependent on educational qualifications, class and ambience of environment...’ (Koloane 2003, 119).

Chapungu – The Day Rhodes Fell (2015) becomes an important reference to how art is understood from the current institutional framework. While in South Africa art has always been exclusionary, in that it was essentially based on the separatist ideals of a classist system, it also immediately disqualified most Black practitioners from being considered as visionaries in the same light as their white counterparts. This disparity is furthermore emphasized by the exclusionary mechanisms of art history and art criticism, which

Koloane argues has maintained a consistent omission of Black artists from its historical narrative. *Chapungu – The Day Rhodes Fell* (2015) physically inserts itself into that history, but more importantly inserts a Black woman into a largely patriarchal narration of art history. This is expected given that the role of art during the struggle is implicated by the historical baggage pointed out by Koloane, who noted that even under apartheid ‘...the art fraternity never protested when their black colleagues were denied opportunities to share facilities such as libraries, art museums, through the Separate Amenities Act and other similar repressive legislation’, (Koloane 1998, 71) – at least not until the MEDU Ensemble² initiated the *Culture and Resistance Symposium and Festival of the Arts* in 1982.

It can be argued that the views expressed in Albie Sachs’ essay were in many ways directed at movements

such as MEDU, which since the early 1970s had clearly defined the role of culture as a weapon for resistance. And although MEDU was often criticized for being too narrowly political it became one of the leading cultural movements to mobilize art and culture as a tool against, and in resistance to, oppression. It did not only create a discursive space to articulate resistance through creativity but also offered a means for art and artists to refashion and redefine their role in a society through a communist, collectivist, and non-materialist approach. MEDU's historical significance thus presents an opportunity to explore how art lent itself to a critical engagement with the community through political rigour that highlights issues of inequality, social injustice, exclusion and redress, while remaining imaginative approaches through creativity. Through its activities centred on cultural activism it managed to create the possibility for a more inclusive space for the arts, but in so doing created a new role for the function of art more closely situated within the needs of the community. It also fostered a heightened consciousness of and commitment to 'giving birth to a new culture' (Serote, cited by Wylie 2008, 236), one that would prompt a new approach to art making and introduce a new crop of cultural revolutionaries.

One must recall that prior to this, South Africa's artistic cultural landscape was characterized by an exclusionary model based on ideas of separate development, that on the one hand led to a fragmented and somewhat displaced narrative of South African art history, but on the other raised questions regarding the role of art and culture in contemporary South African society. The moment of the symposium was as much about refiguring the meaning of art and culture, as it was about determining its role within a repressive system. The objectives of MEDU in convening this gathering were therefore based on the idea that 'if culture was democratic and non-racial, it can be used as a weapon of the struggle and become entrenched in democratic spaces that would foster change and become an integral part of a democratic South Africa' (Serote 2009, 194). While this may seem like an idealistic understanding of how art and politics merge, MEDU was nonetheless arguably an ideal South African art collective, precisely because of the manner in which it allowed for collective creative thinking and intellectual artistic thought centred primarily on its care for, and delivery to serve, the needs and desires of the majority of the people. The *1982 Culture and Resistance Symposium* was thus a critical moment in 'placing culture at the forefront of the resistance to apartheid', and in so doing 'allowed its participants to envisage the role for culture in a liberated South Africa' (Kellner & González 2009, 156). As part of the

symposium MEDU also organized an exhibition of art works by South African artists titled *Art Toward Social Development: An Exhibition of South African Art* (10 June – 10 August 1982).

The founding of MEDU was according to one of its co-founders Thami Mnyele 'soaked in the conscious language of revolution' (Mnyele, cited by Wylie 2008, 236). However, this was later nullified by Sachs' paper, which in its delivery read as a kind of manifesto on the imagined role of art and culture in a liberated South Africa. Although it can be argued that his address was based on a particular political audience and ideological framework, one that was partisan and located within the ethos of the African National Congress (ANC), it is important to point out the moment of contestation it presented because it became emblematic of the kind of attitude, and broader understanding of the significance of art and culture, adopted by South Africa in the new democracy. On the one hand it presented an idea of how the arts could function in a 'liberated' and transforming society, but on the other it pointed to the dangers when art is imposed and over simplified, to determine how people (particularly Black people) should think of the world creatively and in their personal lives. Given the context Sachs maps out in his paper, perhaps the title should have been 'Preparing Ourselves for Change' as it assumes a collective consensus, one that appears to be condescendingly aimed at dictating a political mandate to artists of what ought to happen in the arts once freedom was achieved. It evades the fact that in as far as the arts goes, the majority of Black artists were already in a handicapped position, as a result of the discriminatory laws imposed by apartheid. How then was it possible to have a debate about culture when the relationship between the culturally dominant and culturally dominated was not even on the table? Furthermore, it ignored the possibility of questioning who determines the terms under which this debate should take place. This scepticism towards defining art alongside political ideological thinking, is thus dangerously premised upon what Diana Wylie notes is the 'modernist and socialist realist representation that art tends to presume a new world that – albeit more just, economically stable, and beautiful – could be imposed upon people, whether they wanted it or not' (Wylie 2008, 239). For this reason, the debates raised in Sachs' paper stand at a complex political and cultural nexus, ushered in by the rigorous ideological foundation established by collectives such as MEDU.

The politics of the student movements can be understood as the current struggle against this backdrop of artistic intervention, but this is not to suggest that the ideological frameworks of movements like

MEDU are necessarily the only approach to defining the role of art in society. Rather, in this instance, art is employed to demonstrate the intersectionality between art and politics; the fluidity the two seem to share in a conversation between past histories and present tensions. Within an institutional framework, MEDU thus enables a lens through which to probe and dismantle the epistemological roots of art and culture as instruments for formulating a sense of nationalism and identity – national identity. The perception that art making is an elitist activity has also played a major role in the wider narrative about how art is understood by the majority of the South African population. While there may be a widely shared perception about the conventions of art appreciation in general, it is worth pointing out the scholarly merit of considering cases like MEDU and the way this challenged the notion of art as a sophisticated leisure time activity, appreciated solely by members of the bourgeoisie and upper classes. It also enables an interrogation of what happens when art detaches itself from the political prism of being burdened with a social responsibility, in which case it is either rationalized in a socialist sense, or categorized through the individualistic idea of the ‘authentic’ African artist. In both instances, scholarship can become a critical means of critiquing the longstanding historical estrangement of art from the real cultural politics of the South African public, particularly those rooted in studies around representation and the redefinition of art from a western paradigm to an African perspective.³

Thami Mnyele was an artist and one of the founders of MEDU, who defined the ideal cultural worker as ‘someone with clear political insight, a skilled hand and firm revolutionary morality’ (Mnyele, cited by Wylie 2008, 236).⁴ This may appear as somewhat restrictive of ‘the artist’ as an individual with agency, however it is also an intentional declaration on Mnyele’s part that aims to steer away from the often romanticized and accented exceptionalism, afforded to the notion of the artist as universal genius, though usually western, white and male. The collective approach adapted by MEDU is not only a counter to an individualistic approach, but also one that students were able to employ to tackle a collective goal of sending a visual message in protest action, that aimed to achieve *free decolonial education*. Out of the #FeesMustFall movement emerged a number of other hash tags on social media platforms, including #Shackville. #Shackville was protest action led by students from the University of Cape Town who built a makeshift shack and placed it at the entrance of the main campus of University of Cape Town to highlight the plight of students, without proper housing or access to accommodation. When the

demands of the students were not heard they resorted to burning paintings that had been displayed in one of the nearby buildings on the university premises. The reaction that followed from the university management, civil society and the ‘art community’⁵ not only revealed some of the underlying concerns in relation to the ways that value is ascribed to art in relation to economical, social and political issues, it also demonstrated the increased need to generate a conversation around the role of art in the public domain. This is not to suggest that the sole responsibility of art is to validate a sense of social or political consciousness by addressing public matters, but rather that art must be and can be imaginative and liberating in raising awareness around pertinent issues as well as pleasurable. In attempting to address the question of whether our imagination is adequate enough for the task of de-colonizing the university, and their art schools, a closer examination of the state of South African art and art history is required, to interrogate the trajectory of the socio-political conditions that have culminated in this moment of reflection.

Discussing the state of art in relation to the student protest movements is as conscious of the synthesis between art and politics, as it is of the means that art offers as an emancipatory expression and political act. The ideology and fantasy in South African representation that Enwezor (1997) referred to in his essay, is thus key to explaining the use of the Black (female) body in the student movements, and in Msezane’s work. By using photographs, Msezane’s work situates itself within a canon that problematizes photography and the role it has played in the colonial project. *Chapungu – The Day Rhodes Fell* (2015) in particular is part of a trope of photographic imagery that Henri Cartier-Bresson calls ‘the decisive moment’ (see O’Hagan 2014). In recalling the performance piece and the moment the photographic image was taken, Kros (2015, 158) notes how Msezane explains ‘she had timed the raising of her arms (since she had her back to the action) by looking at “the reflection of the statue coming down” in the sunglasses and cell phones of people standing in front of her’. This is an important aspect to note in the process of making of this image, and the fact that the act of falling is not only suggested in title of the work, but also embodied as part of an anticipated action that literally and figuratively depicts the Black woman figure as a key component of weaving the connections between the past, present and future.

The second image *Chapungu – The Return to Great Zimbabwe* (2015) appears to be a lot more orchestrated, especially as it is not set against the backdrop of an event. Here the artist is pictured standing on a white podium in the Great Zimbabwe Ruins, which

not only represents a significant narrative of ancient African civilization, but also evolved into an important archaeological site (and tourist attraction) that has played a critical role in shaping the perception of Africa, as measured against a western epistemological framework of history. Although it also references history, it evokes this in a more political sense than the image of Rhodes falling, in its relation to power and knowledge as well as narrative and hegemony. The power relations the image invokes can be said to have informed an argument such as Enwezor's (1997, 23), that 'although today these are thought of as things of the past, in reality they remain perversely lodged in popular culture texts, in films, novels and art. In films the fantasy is of the menacing [B]lack criminal and prostitute.' Enwezor is here pointing out how 'historical scenes in which the [B]lack body has been tendered as display, reproduce the abject as a sign of [B]lack identification' (Enwezor 1997, 23), while in contemporary art, he notes, 'we have Robert Mapplethorpe to thank for furthering the illusion of the [B]lack body as an object of enjoyment and spectacle, in short for helping restore it to aesthetic state of grace' (Enwezor 1997, 23). Enwezor's argument raises a critical question around appropriation, in particular, 'what images in a decolonizing South Africa should look like, and who has the right to use which images, and what the authorizing narrative ought to be' (Enwezor 1997, 26).

Msezane's photographs thus stand as a reference to a history that is as much about the past as it is about the present, in their attempt to tease out the complex discourse of decolonization in a pro-longed post-colonial era. They are part of a lexicon of imagery that not only inserts itself into a historical narrative, but more importantly highlights the relationship between the medium and the narrative of the past. The specificity of the content in the imagery requires a level of criticality from the viewer, but it also prompts a consciousness around contested notions of history, and the ways mental geographies have influenced events both in the past, and in the present. The institutional structures both images make reference to include art institutions, such as galleries, museums and art schools, whose failures are made glaringly visible by the debates around #RhodesMustFall in particular. Not only have these institutions failed in generating a scholarship, or better yet a broader understanding of how art and culture can function to inform a more inclusive national (art) history, they have also in many instances inadvertently taken a position that overlooks topics that tackle this kind of subject matter.

For this reason, the role of art in a society such as South Africa has become an idea estranged from

the urgency of prompt positive change. It is hoped that following the issues raised by students of the #RhodesMustFall movement, art institutions might in some way take up the challenge of becoming a means to reclaim what has gradually eroded, in providing structures for marginalized communities to become consciously empowered through access to creative and artistic expression. One might think that twenty years post 1994 these structures ought to exist. In many ways they don't, however, because the government in power is still dealing with problematic issues of transition two decades late – be they ideological, financial, and /or procedural. The importance of art in a society such as South Africa has not been prioritized. The lack of engagement in the arts thus points to a larger deficiency in public participation, in building a more critical conversation that is inclusive and an acute voice regarding matters of national concern.

Within both the #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall movements various artistic interventions encouraged public engagement and advocacy in support of the students' cause. The student protests, particularly the #RhodesMustFall movement, signalled the deficiency in wider public engagement through the critique it received on various platforms. This criticism was later reiterated in other instances, such as the #Shackville movement, which sought to highlight the plight of lack of affordable accommodation for students. During this protest students built a makeshift shack on campus, a deliberate act that was aimed to disrupt the pristine visual appearance of architectural façade of the university's administration block. The protest action intensified and led to the burning of painting which students felt where offensive and a symbol of the institutional oppression. This led to the establishment of an Artworks Task Team, whose responsibility included facilitating a platform for dialogue between the university management and students on the removal of other art works students felt were offensive in terms of representation and their historical connotations. The task team also set up dialogues between students and some of the artists, whose works was found wanting by the students and the Artworks Task Team.

The presence of the Cecil Rhodes statue at the University of Cape Town became an important signifier of a general state of the nation, generating a ripple effect of events which questioned the symbolism of other artwork and statues. The protest actions prompted a debate exploring the intersection between art and politics; two elements at the centre of the symbolism created around the ideology of nation and nationalism. #RhodesMustFall protest actions once again positioned the arts as a tool for inspiring change, while at the same

time illustrating the ways in which universities have become the final frontiers, a contested terrain of scholarship, knowledge production, and artistic imagination. The protest actions expressed how artistic imagination and the state of visual art in South Africa have long gone past a stage that needs to be formally addressed on account of transcending the current mental geography of what it means to be South African. In order to overcome the cultural recession we now face, the actions of the students must serve as a reminder, but also an inspiration, to move beyond the fallacies of a state regarded as diverse, in terms of cultural identity, to look more deeply at where we have come from, where we are and most importantly where we are going.

Notes

1. Not only did the government intervene by allowing the universities to use state force in the form of armed police, it eventually had to enter into discussions with student representative bodies and university managements to agree not to institute fee increases in that year.
2. The MEDU comes from the Sepedi word meaning 'roots' and was adopted as a name by a collective of cultural workers who lived in exile in Gaborone Botswana. The organization consisted of six units: Publications and Research, Graphic Art, Music, Theatre, Photography and Film (Kellner & González 2009, 76).
3. The phrase 'African perspective' is used loosely in this instance to describe the point of view from which a western paradigm is set against as a polarity.
4. Thami Mnyele was part of a collective of cultural workers who made up MEDU based in Gaborone Botswana. On 14 June 1985 Mnyele was amongst 11 other people killed after the South African Defence Force raided Gaborone Botswana.
5. The 'art community' is used here to refer to a small establishment of influential artists, art schools, art dealers, art writers and critics, art historians and art auction houses. Together they make up a chain of what constitutes the art market. In South Africa the majority of this art market is still predominately white.

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The pasts and presence of art in South Africa

In 2015, #RhodesMustFall generated the largest student protests in South Africa since the end of apartheid, subsequently inspiring protests and acts of decolonial iconoclasm across the globe. The performances that emerged in, through and around #RhodesMustFall make it clear how analytically fruitful Alfred Gell's notion that art is 'a system of social action, intended to change the world rather than encode symbolic propositions about it' can be, even when attempting to account for South Africa's very recent history.

What light can this approach shed on the region's far longer history of artistic practices? Can we use any resulting insights to explore art's role in the very long history of human life in the land now called South Africa? Can we find a common way of talking about 'art' that makes sense across South Africa's long span of human history, whether considering engraved ochre, painted rock shelters or contemporary performance art?

This collection of essays has its origins in a conference with the same title, arranged to mark the opening of the British Museum's major temporary exhibition *South Africa: the art of a nation* in October 2016. The volume represents an important step in developing a framework for engaging with South Africa's artistic traditions that begins to transcend nineteenth-century frameworks associated with colonial power.

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