

Rock art in the Northern Cape: the implications of variability in engravings and paintings relative to issues of social context and change in the precolonial past



by

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I declare that

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is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Full name:

Signed:

Date:



I dedicate this thesis to

my wife Noeleen
and sons Jonathan and Benjamin

and

to the memory of my parents
Harold Roger and Norah Cecilia Morris



ABSTRACT

This thesis follows and builds upon a previous study at the rock engraving site of Driekopseiland (Morris 2002). The earlier findings are here contrasted with another site in the area, namely Wildebeest Kuil, as a means to highlight the variability which is a feature of the rock art of the Northern Cape as a whole. The main thrust of the thesis, which refers to a number of other rock art sites in the region, is to model the implications of this variability relative to social context and history in the precolonial past. Significant empirical obstacles, particularly the difficulties associated with dating rock art, render some aspects of the enterprise intractable for the time being. But opportunities are pursued to advance and evaluate ideas as to the social mechanisms and processes which might be implicated in the making and re-making of images on rock and in the generation of the diversity that is manifest in the rock art as it is found today. Whereas other approaches have tended to explain difference relative to social entities such as 'cultures' or 'ethnic groups', this thesis offers, as a point of departure, a critique of received concepts, reconsidering some of the fundamental metaphors and assessing the elaboration of analogies that have been used in the past. It proposes that better theoretical footholds might be those that explain variability relative to process and movement. It invokes Tim Ingold's concept of a meshwork of dynamic relationships of people immersed in the world, of 'entanglements' that refer to multiple mechanisms that might explain how rock art has changed in place and time. The pertinence of these ideas is shown with reference to specific instances in the Northern Cape.

As a parallel weave in this study, there is a concern over the social role of archaeology, with discussion on the burgeoning salience of rock art beyond the academy, in the heritage and tourism sectors and amongst descendants of the Khoes-San. The thesis gives consideration to the role of museums and research in terms of "heritage in practice," and seeks to develop a discourse in which, following Alexander, "everything can be perceived as changing and changeable" – an underlying theme throughout the study.

The thesis does not bring empirical closure to the topic but suggests a programme for future engagement, having opened up and shown the relevance of wider theoretical insights for addressing the variability in the rock art of the Northern Cape.

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Representations

“Worldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already on hand; the making is a remaking”

- Nelson Goodman,
cited by Roth 2002.

Rock art and its contexts

Lewis Carroll, in one of his lesser-known works, has a fictional German professor extolling the merits of a map so detailed, it could be accommodated at a scale no less than “a mile to the mile.”¹ The folly of the project lay in his cartographers’ quite having missed the point about maps; a misapprehension akin to the empiricist yearning that, if only enough data could be accumulated, a complete understanding of the world was sure to emerge.² The point of a map, rather, is meaningful *representation*: to theorise, symbolise, model or give structure, or order, and (in one or more of numerous possible ways, and for different possible ends) to make sense of, or contend over, the sheer abundance – even chaos – of everyday life and materiality as it stretches out, unevenly, across the landscape and through

¹ In Carroll’s *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*, farmers objected that the map, if ever spread out, would shut out the sunlight: “So now we use the country itself, as its own map, and I assure you it does nearly as well” (cited in Gardner 1962, footnote 21).

² Charles Darwin’s recollection is apposite: “About thirty years ago there was much talk that geologists ought to observe and not theorize; and I well remember someone saying that at that rate a man might as well go into a gravel-pit and count the pebbles and describe the colours. How odd it is that anyone should not see that all observation must be for or against some view if it is to be of any service!” Cited by Stark (2001:106).

time. A map may be a world version, as Nelson Goodman (Elgin 2000) would have it; the act of mapping, world-making.

It is not surprising that the idea of the map is so pervasive a metaphor for knowledge and its representation – and, as such, also an object for derision. “We have to realise the fundamental untrustworthiness of maps,” suggests Ian Sinclair (1997:142, cited by Titlestad 2001:31): “they are always pressure group publications. They represent special pleading ... [with] something to sell.” In this sceptical take on maps, Sinclair sees them as being “a futile compromise between information and knowledge.” In similarly negative vein, Nick Shepherd (2007:25) regrets the convergence specifically of the “disciplinary interests of archaeology and the workings of the state...in those primary means of control: the map, the plan, the grid line” – which determine “the differential fate of objects and consign them to particular regimes of care.” As will be seen, the rock engraving site of Driekopseiland, one of the principal foci of this study, is bisected by a cadastral line, on a map, which defines not only the boundary between two farms but also that between magisterial and local government districts, with repercussions in terms of heritage protection and management (Morris 2002, 2008). More positive connotations attach to the map on which biographies and memories are inscribed in Cape Town’s District Six Museum (Rassool 2010:88).

Maps, then, however ‘objective’ and accurate they may be, are clearly reductive representations produced with intent – and it is reasonable to enquire therefore, by whom the representation is made and to what end.

One of the central threads of this thesis will contend with the constitution, the generation of knowledge and of representations; one could say, with

mapping. Following Tim Ingold (2000:230), I will propose that in contrast to the Cartesian approach which would elevate us as observers beyond the world, a different way of mapping entails a process by which “we know as we go, not *before* we go” and that this perspective has ramifications for the choice and elaboration of analytical concepts relevant to the tasks at hand.

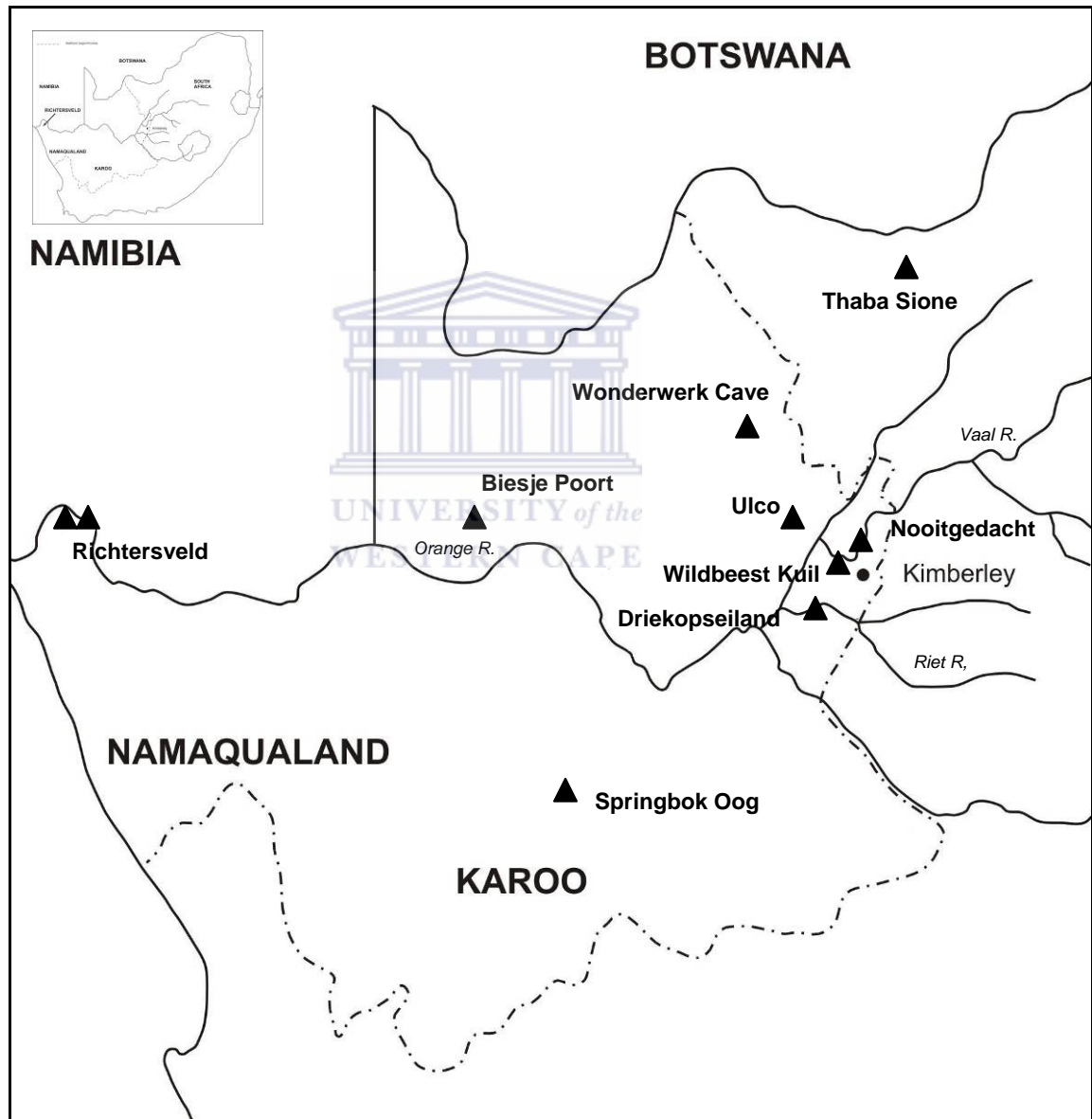


Figure 1. The principal places mentioned in the text.

To consider variability I aim to look into a cluster of problems and theoretical issues around a series of precolonial rock art sites (I focus on two such sites in particular) in the landscape in the vicinity of Kimberley in the Northern Cape, South Africa (Figure 1). These sites are ‘on the map’, so to speak: both the principal sites have been known within the ‘literary lattice’ of colonial discourse (Humphreys 1997) since the 1870s; and their place in preceding indigenous contexts is echoed in some of the early writings.³ They have been ‘mapped’ into various schemes, formally and informally, which assess and attempt to explain their significance. Ideas that have been developed around the sites and rock art in general inform a profusion of viewpoints and sentiments across a spectrum of traditions and perspectives. At the more academic end, the findings of archaeologists and rock art specialists are matters for collegial debate (including issues of the actual politics and production of knowledge – e.g. Lishiko 2004; Ndlovu 2009). The off-beat machinations of fringe and New Age enthusiasts populate another part of the spectrum, though deriving some of their claims from earlier generations of ‘mainstream’ writing on sites such as Driekopseiland (Morris in press). In tourism promotions the sites are punted as ‘experiences’ that express slices of South Africa’s ‘cultural diversity’, or even ‘extreme culture’, as per the Northern Cape’s most recent (but as yet inchoate) marketing strategy (Barnabas in prep). In the heritage sector their potential as resources for nation-building forms part of a resurgent government-endorsed discourse on ‘social cohesion’. Not least, rock art sites come to the fore more and more in the statements and rights claims of indigenous communities and organisations (e.g. Morris 2008). In their totality, this array of jostling perspectives and particularities might bewilder any observer, and one would be hard put to construct a ‘map’, even at a scale of a mile to the

³ At a greater distance in time, and much more indistinctly, fragments of this earlier knowledge may live on in certain oral traditions, or figures of speech, in the area to this day.

mile, which could capture *all* the detail there is.⁴ Yet apprehending some sense of the complexity seems crucial. That we all engage in world-making (Goodman cited in Elgin 2000), and have done so in the past (inter alia by the marking of the landscape with images on rocks in the Northern Cape) – and that in each case we have produced, one could say, our respective world versions⁵ – is one of the basic ideas whose implications and challenges this study will seek to address.

Since the rock art in question is precolonial in origin, beyond the reach of any written or oral recollection, my approach – and the discipline within which I work – is archaeological. The particular purchase that archaeology has across centuries and millennia is by virtue of its methods, to discern evidence of past worlds enfolded in complex palimpsests, at different scales, in the present (Bailey 2007), and by the theoretical insights which it brings to its interpretations. My endeavour here is – as far as is possible – to view the art and the sites in their settings and against time; to attempt to understand them historically; and to work through the implications of their variability, as my title suggests, relative to issues of social context and change in the precolonial past. None of these concepts – of setting, time or history – is a given. Epistemological concerns would be crucial in light of this and of archaeology's reliance on various kinds of models, 'middle range' case studies, and analogies, as it seeks to flesh out and discern significance in the (usually somewhat fragmented) bare bones of the material record. Like history, archaeology has not been, and cannot be, neutral in its construction and representation of the past (e.g. Parkington & Smith

⁴ David Turnbull (nd) refers to current obsessions with massive digital database-making which may aspire to this empiricist dream. He cites a 2003 proposal to link all major telescopes, creating a database of the universe ("manifest hubris," Turnbull opines, "when 90% of the matter in the universe is invisible and knowable only through the controversial theoretical construct dark energy").

⁵ "We" being people in general or as collectives with particular histories (I am not referring to 'cultures' or 'communities' presumed *a priori*).

1986:43); and hence a good chunk of what follows will comprise a critical examination of concepts and ideas, their histories and their suitability or limitations for the tasks at hand.

I will be much less concerned with fringe and New Age ideas but, to the extent that these remain part of the contemporary imaginary, they must be engaged. Certainly of relevance, in terms of the broader perspective, would be a critical understanding of the present 'use' of the sites in the contexts of tourism and education, and the ways in which a range of communities and constituencies know them and claim them. Making the results of archaeological work not only accessible but also transparent to communities and to the heritage, education and tourism sectors must be part of a research praxis which is socially concerned (Mitchell 2002:427-8; cf. Morris 2003; 2007) – and locally relevant (e.g. Parkington & Rusch 2003). There is a necessary complexity to this endeavour (McGregor & Schumaker 2006; Meskell & Scheermeyer 2008) in which practitioners must address different levels of accountability and bring into play alternative frames of reference – the inevitable multi-vocality of our subject-matter – for thinking about culture and history.

Initial concerns: beyond emics and etics

Recognition of an intellectual problem being the necessary starting point for a project such as this, its definition, and the refinement of concepts for solving it, are tasks, as Michael Banton (2005) has noted, sometimes not completely mastered until the conclusion. Tim Ingold (2007), who advances the analogies of wayfaring, journeying, and indeed mapping, as one apprehends and negotiates a topic, remarks that even at the conclusion

there would be loose ends and provocations for future enquiry (Ingold 2007:169-170) – for our knowledge can never be final.

Banton argues cogently against the framing of research questions in terms of phenomenal form – the discourse of everyday life, of ordinary language, of popular, or political, concepts. What is needed, he urges, is a more critical social science discourse which deploys appropriate vocabulary and explanatory concepts to elucidate the relations behind phenomenal form. This was not a trivial point in the context of Banton's review of recent work on *race* (an explanatory concept, or one to be explained?); and it would not be trivial in the context of matters such as *ethnicity* and *culture* (cf. Shepherd & Robins 2008), which are amongst the concepts likely to arise in thoughts on rock art and its variability being contemplated here.

This discussion alludes to the classic, though debated (see Chapter III), anthropological conception of *emics* and *etics*, of insider and outsider viewpoints (Lett nd; Ingold 2000) – the emic equating here with the “common sense” and popular everyday kinds of discourse referred to above, and the etic with Banton's “appropriate vocabulary” and “explanatory concepts.” In a gesture towards bringing greater precision to the terms, James Lett defines etic constructs as “accounts, descriptions, and analyses expressed in terms of the conceptual schemes and categories that are regarded as meaningful and appropriate by the *community of scientific observers*” (emphasis added), whereas emic constructs are the equivalent kinds of knowledge regarded as meaningful and appropriate by members of the *culture under study*. In Marvin Harris's formulation, the etic has to do with establishing objectivity, and, in anthropology, it serves to facilitate cross-cultural comparison. Etic constructs, it will be clear, are very much the products of modernist thought – universal and secular envisionings of the

human condition – which Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000:4) has characterised as “unavoidable – and in a sense indispensable.” They represent the critical, analytic tradition in social science, he observes, which has sought, for instance, to ‘demystify’ ideology and has, as such, enabled international discourses on human rights, social justice and so on.

A crucial concern highlighted by Chakrabarty, however, is just what takes place when different systems of thought – again one may call them emics and etics – meet (as they may for instance in the writing of history and, more pertinently, here, when writing about rock art). “Certain problems” are thrown up, as Chakrabarty puts it, when “a secular subject such as history” must handle “practices in which gods, spirits, or the supernatural have agency in the world” (2000:72). Discussion on how the former translates the latter into itself, into language and categories which, in the final analysis, usually treat the world as disenchanted, is clearly relevant to an archaeological approach to worlds in which humans, evidently, were not taken to be the only meaningful agents (Ingold 2000; cf. Morris 2002).

If, in anthropology, the tendency has been to consider the emic in local, non-western, ‘culture-under-study’ terms, Chakrabarty locates it alongside the analytic, in a parallel weave in European thought, namely the hermeneutic tradition. In his important work, *Provincializing Europe*, he seeks to bring these two traditions into conversation as he tries to destabilise the abstract universal human in order to make sense of questions of human belonging and diversity in the world outside of Europe.

The epistemological issues that these discussions raise are considered to be vital to the tasks at hand – the ways in which one might engage, interpret

and work with rock art and archaeological traces of past worlds – and hence these will be taken up further in the pages that follow.

In the present context, it has been suggested that a “surfeit of theory” has grown up, lately, around discourses on rock art – to cite a recent paper by David Lewis-Williams (2006). To negotiate an approach which is appropriate to the questions raised in this thesis without adding unnecessarily to the array of theory already deployed will require rigour. In some senses one may wish to return, with Lewis Carroll, to “use the country itself” (see footnote 1) – not exactly “as its own map”, but as the starting point for new perspectives, a fresh go at mapping – to reassess conventions, models, frames of reference, even method and theory more fundamentally.⁶

Previous work: picking up the threads

Looking to the ‘country itself’ was, quite literally, what was anticipated in a previous study (Morris 2002, 2010) which incorporated landscape perspectives in a new interpretation of the engraving site of Driekopseiland. It was argued that, instead of appealing to variables such as culture and ethnicity as the *principal* causes of variability between rock art sites (as several previous studies had tended to do), the *placement* of engravings in different sorts of landscape settings, seemingly variable through time, was a basic feature of the sites that was itself worthy of consideration, and one that had been generally overlooked. Drawing on the concepts of ‘topophilia’ elaborated in a Karoo setting by Janette Deacon (1988), of dynamic landscape temporalities, after Ingold (1993), and the construal of places and rock faces as meaningful supports mediating spiritual realms in Khoe-San

⁶ Carroll’s other famous map is the one referred to in *The Hunting of the Snark* – “a perfect and absolute blank”: “‘What’s the good of Mercator’s North Poles and Equators,/ Tropics, Zones and Meridian Lines?’/ So the Bellman would cry: and the crew would reply,/ ‘They are merely conventional signs!’” (Gardner 1962).

beliefs, as shown to be germane by David Lewis-Williams & Thomas Dowson (1990), it was suggested that, at Driekopseiland, the positioning of the engravings on expanses of rock that are submerged when the river rises may be a key to their meaning, and that the interpretation of this and related local sites might usefully take these perspectives into account. Accordingly, the variability between engraving sites in the region could be a reflection more of different understandings or expressions of place and of landscape (and of activities or rites in culturally appropriate settings), than an outcome of the discrete ethnic, techno-economic and/or culture contexts that much previous writing on this art implied. Furthermore, a dynamic interplay between history, rock art and the local environment could be shown plausibly to account for the differences between apparently older and younger spreads of engravings at Driekopseiland itself (the older art there being distinguished by a greater proportion of figurative imagery).

Developing a critique of earlier approaches, a theoretical framework was established and a model proposed to consider the art as part of cultural practices (specifically the female puberty rites) in particular places, that would have been negotiated by people who thereby invoked meanings which, while 'full of the past' (to cite a remark by Megan Bieseke [1993] with reference to folklore), were not a fulfilment merely of what E.P. Thompson (1978) called 'ulterior structure'. An understanding of the engraved imagery may have more to do with issues of time and place than with those of culture (Parkington *et al.* 2008:78). The processes involved, it was suggested, constituted a making and re-making of individual and collective histories. Important strands which both reinforced and constrained the argument were derived from a range of rich nineteenth and twentieth century Khoe-San ethnographies. It was predicted that the interpretation could be a challenge to the ways that variability in rock art, and in other

archaeological traces, in the wider region, might be approached. and that expectations arising from the study might be tested in subsequent work.

That study provides, then, the springboard for the present one, which will re-examine the ideas, concepts and arguments submitted then, in light also of observations at other sites. Since 2002, the debate on identity and the authorship of geometric engravings (which predominate significantly over figurative engravings at Driekopseiland) has been advanced with the publication of Ben Smith and Sven Ouzman's (2004) paper on 'Taking Stock: identifying Khoekhoe herder rock art in Southern Africa.' I had anticipated aspects of that debate (Morris 2002) by proposing, not an 'alternative ethnic' angle on the matter (as Smith & Ouzman 2004:521 took it to be) but rather an alternative *to* the ethnic approach (Morris 2004a:519). I had been motivated in part to move beyond the seemingly inevitable "common sense" trope in this country of ascribing difference to cultural or ethnic diversity, while not discounting the possibility that identity/authorship issues relative to a changing social landscape had a bearing. I was concerned to urge, though, that authorship/identity as a phenomenon be viewed as situated, or positional, and dynamic rather than as any kind of primordial ethnic given, or an ulterior feature of bounded cognitive systems. Could authorship or 'identity' in and of itself have been the prime factor, the driving force, resulting in the observed variability? And if ethnicity was operating to delineate such cultural boundaries so clearly in the visual imagery on rocks, why was this not the case with folklore whose content and idiom appeared to blend across supposed ethnic boundaries (Bleek 1875:10; Guenther 1999:128)? Certain features of ritual (see Lewis-Williams on the similarities between San and Korana rites – Lewis-Williams 1981:105-106; cf Prins 1991) seemed likewise to be common to linguistically distinct groups. There was in any case no clear-cut evidence,

as yet, for population replacement, nor for the appearance of distinctively different material culture, concomitant with geometric engravings at Driekopseiland. It was conceivable that the later geometric engravings, as a 'tradition', had evolved relatively locally (rather than being imported ready-made from afar), the earlier corpus of art on the site having, alongside older geometrics, a significant component of animal imagery.

Since 2002, there has also been further discussion on the degree to which, or the manner in which, landscape and sense of place mattered to the makers of engravings and paintings in the Later Stone Age in South Africa (Smith & Blundell 2004; cf. Parkington & Manhire 2003). This is a question deserving of further discussion, not least against the recent broader critique of post-processual 'landscape archaeology' (Fleming 2006).

These and related debates, including those concerning the appearance of pastoralism/herding (e.g. Sadr 2003; Parsons 2007; Webley 2007) in South Africa, mean that the conclusions of my previous study (Morris 2002) warrant further consideration and elaboration, or modification.

I will revisit Driekopseiland itself, but then also focus on another, contrasting place, Wildebeest Kuil. With supplementary observations from other locales, including painted shelters in the region, these sites will form an empirical grounding.

A chapter outline

Introducing these resources and contexts in more detail, and discussing the approaches touched on here – the materials and methods of this study – will be the work of the following three Chapters.

Included will be an introduction to the sites and their landscape and palaeoenvironmental settings. Nearly every aspect is marked by a palpable dynamism, through a range of both natural and cultural processes and interactions which have left present-day material residues, themselves not completely static (Chapter II).

Much of anthropology and archaeological thought has grappled with questions of approach, of models and frameworks, and of underlying ontologies, that have been appropriate (or not) for comprehending and characterising society and history. Reviewed in Chapter III, a theoretical perspective is anticipated for this study which seeks ultimately to understand the material outcomes – the archaeological traces and rock art in the veld – in terms of the social and historical processes which had led to their production; and how they themselves came to have recursive agency (which also was not unchanging) in social settings through time. My argument proceeds from an acknowledgement that one's positioning relative to theoretical and analytical concepts, and their reproduction, makes for metaphors and expectations of consequence. More than 'merely' rhetorical or evocative devices, metaphors can constitute "the very warp and weft of understanding" (suggests Code, cited in Miller 2006:457), fulfilling an important grounding, organising, and explanatory role in science and philosophy (Thagard and Beam 2004:513). They have a bearing both in the formulation of research questions as well as in suggesting what will be considered a suitable epistemology.

Relative to this discussion, Chapter IV looks to the intellectual contexts and findings of past investigations around the specific topic of the study, the rock art of the Northern Cape.

In Chapter V, moving on to the particular evidence from, and insights derived through, the sites of Wildebeest Kuil (Plates 1-2), Driekopseiland (Plates 3-5), and other locales, and in light of the aforementioned, the substance of my argument will be traced out, with the various strands being drawn together in concluding discussion in Chapter VI.



Plate 1 (above). A view from the crest of the hill at Wildebeest Kuil showing the site's proximity to pans. Plate 2 (below). One of the well-known images from Wildebeest Kuil.





Plates 3 & 4 (above & below). Views of Driekopseiland, situated on glaciated andesite in the bed of the Riet River.





Plate 5. Some of the more than 3500 ‘geometric’ images characteristic of the Driekopseiland engravings.

Praxis, approximations and world-making

For reasons already touched upon, our accountability to constituencies beyond the academy should not be a mere supplement to research but must be a crucial thread integrated at the very core of our research praxis (Mitchell 2002; Meskell & Scheermeyer 2008).

I therefore devote the remainder of this introductory Chapter to the issues arising from a commitment to accountability to context, to the positioning of this work to ‘heritage’, and to the nature ultimately of the quest.

The rock art in this region has current use and burgeoning salience well beyond the domain of the relatively small band of academic and heritage

specialists who might read a text such as this. Stakeholders in rock art today include the wider heritage, tourism, and education sectors, and the small but significant streams of interested individuals who define the 'niche' segment of the tourism market attracted by what these sites represent (Morris, Ndebele & Wilson 2009). They also include, of course, people who at present, or may in the future, make claims, more or less justifiably, as descendant or culturally associated communities relative to the resources – the *heritage* – the sites embody (Morris 2003, 2006, 2008; Morris *et al.* 2001; Ndlovu 2009). In almost all respects, continuity from the precolonial past was severely disrupted by the colonial experience. Miklós Szalay's (1995:109) study of colonization of the Cape San lays stress on the processes of "incorporation" and "acculturation" by which San people, in time, became "no longer visible" other than as "Coloureds". Szalay downplays the harshness and extent of social destruction, argues Mohamed Adhikari (2010), who assembles the case for nothing less than genocide in which those who survived extermination experienced the "obliteration of their way of life and identity as a distinct people" (2010:87). Robert Ross (1993) documents how the Cape colonial government, back in the 1830s, had moved, through the archival interventions of Moodie, to silence exposé of these events by the missionary John Philip. Stow's forthright opinions on similar events later in the century constituted "a somewhat lone voice of conscience ... largely after the fact" as his manuscript of the 1870s-80s, containing the uncomfortable truths, was published only posthumously in 1905 (Morris 2008:91; cf Adhikari 2010:81-2). Nigel Penn (2005) has examined the earlier phases of this history while Jose de Prada-Samper (2011) focuses on those atrocities of the mid- and later-nineteenth century tracked and reported on by the northern frontier magistrate Louis Anthing. Elsewhere, summarising the incidents of resistance led by Kousop, and of their brutal suppression, in the vicinity of Kimberley, I have referred to the

subsequent frequent attribution of agency in the local past to anything but indigenous involvement – a part of the process of land clearance in the longer term (Morris 2008).

Today, while some Khoe-San descendants who would claim a link with rock art might still speak Khoe-San languages, most people in the Northern Cape having Khoe-San ancestry would be Afrikaans-speaking 'Coloureds'.

Elsewhere they are Zulu-speaking Africans (Ndlovu 2009; Prins 1991).

(Because of the opportunities of an increasingly globalised world, actual descendants of the artists could now be in virtually any walk of life even beyond this continent. But where, as communities, they seek to assert an association with the rock art, they are likely to be more local, often relatively marginalised, even in the post-colonial state – e.g. Engelbrecht 2002). In making their claims these constituencies may or may not draw on insights derived from academic research. For an instance where they do not, see the *Wildebeest Kuil Story* as told by !Xun and Khwe elders (2009), who explain their views on the engravings at the site by referencing their own experience of dislocation as well as their specific knowledge as crafters.

To the extent that our archaeological understandings have worth – as considered interpretations of the evidence of the past including sensitivity towards indigenous insights; evidence which our discipline is uniquely equipped to yield up and understand – we are surely obliged to bring the results of our work and, as importantly, our hermeneutics (as in 'method as message') to wider social contexts (Leone 1983; Morris 2003; 2006; 2008). In doing so, it would be a mistake, as will have been apparent, to treat the public as a single, amorphous entity (cf. Scherzler 2007). Brian Fagan's conclusion is surely correct, that "success in the future will depend on communicating with very different audiences, especially with those with no

background in archaeology whatsoever” (2002:5 cited Watkins 2006:114). We would also have to accept that people will often prefer “to choose for themselves what kind of past they wish to believe in,” suggests Thomas (2004:191), rather than necessarily accepting the ‘authorised’ version. The !Xun and Khwe elders already mentioned are a case in point, who, contrary to information provided at Wildebeest Kuil, assert with confidence that the engravings were made with metal wire – a view not shared by archaeologists for long familiar with Later Stone Age rock engravings at many sites which pre-date the local advent of metals.

Gathering a rather different audience are fringe authors such as Michael Tellingner and Johan Heine (2009; cf Heine & Tellingner 2008), and Brenda Sullivan (1995), some of whom also propagate their brands of knowing through such media as *Youtube* (for relevant critiques of these approaches, see Morris 2004b, 2008 and Delius & Schoeman 2010). When Ciraj Rassool (2010) refers to the “scientific mystique” and “long standing heroic traditions” that sometimes accrete to archaeology and archaeologists – images that are arguably somewhat amplified by big screen stereotypes – these dispositions and forms of posturing are often especially indulged in by those who operate at the discipline’s fringe.

Their contributions are not innocent as their narratives actively downplay indigenous involvement in the local past. Tellingner (2011, in footage shown at http://wn.com/Driekops_Eiland) purports to “show off some of the oldest petroglyphs on Earth” (at Driekopseiland) where he suggests there is “overwhelming evidence that these are linked to the first human civilisation on Earth that emerged in southern Africa mining gold.” His commentary refers to “absolutely breathtaking evidence of ancient civilizations leaving behind some very important clues as to our origins – all we need to do is

open our eyes and start recognising what all this stuff means and stop putting it down to some primitive culture who were just passing time ...” Angèle Smith (2008), introducing the book *Landscapes of clearance*, highlights how interpretations such as these play “a role in absenting the Khoe-San people” from their links with the past, i.e. the point made in my chapter on Driekopseiland and on Kousop (Morris 2008) referred to above in relation to the eighteenth and nineteenth century San genocide.

Archaeologists, who in the past have also sought to explain some sites by recourse to long-distance links rather than investigating more local or indigenous perspectives, are responsible today, perhaps now more than ever, for generating the meanings that percolate out into the public domain concerning the traces of the past (Wright 1998:8). *Sans* archaeology, in a considerable proportion of cases, few people would even be aware of such heritage. This being the case, to fail to engage the issues involved, in an informed and conscious way, would not be in the best interests of archaeology as discipline, or indeed of any of the other constituencies concerned (Shepherd 2007; Morris 2008). As archaeologists – at Anne Stahl’s (2005:16) urging – we need to be critically aware of “the kinds of questions we ask, the answers we seek, and the effects of our successive approximations of Africa’s pasts on her present and future.”

Recognition that what we produce are *approximations* seems crucial. Nelson Goodman, in his philosophical study *Ways of worldmaking*, suggests that worlds or ‘world versions’ are “made rather than found” (Elgin 2000:9). People, in their daily engagements, make connections and distinctions to invest the world with meaning and order. Goodman rejects as spurious dualisms the distinctions between invention and discovery and between making and finding, and argues that, both consciously and unconsciously,

people strictly and literally *make* the connections and discriminations. Our classifications are not supplied by nature. Hence, in drawing lines – or connecting the dots (Ingold 2007) – not readily apparent or given *a priori*, we create (rather than ‘find’ or ‘discover’) world versions which can be divergent but equally viable. Knowledge is constructed and plural. Yet, notes Elgin, Goodman’s relativism has rigorous restraints: a world version must be consistent, coherent, suitable for a purpose, and while it should be in accord with past practice and existing convictions it should also further our cognitive objectives. Such features as inconsistency, incoherence, arbitrariness, and indifference to practice, ends and precedents are indicative of unacceptable world-versions (Elgin 2000:8-10).

Museums in these terms are world-makers *par excellence* and – in their displays, the sites they present to the public or in other engagements with society at large – their role is as purveyors of world versions. Much the same might be said of any academic research output. This is because what precedes displays in museums or research interpretations are systems of classification – Goodman’s making of connections and distinctions not apparent *a priori* – which recursively influence acquisition policies or data collection. And it is in these pigeon-holing processes that museums and researchers are perhaps most in danger of being ‘bastions of ideology’ (to cite the title of a paper by John Wright and Aron Mazel [1987] assessing the role of museums under apartheid). Classification in and of itself is not the problem – if Goodman is correct that it is in making connections and discriminations that people invest their world with sense and order. However, the *ways* we classify matter. And it is when knowledge-makers and knowledge-brokers (universities, museums, the heritage sector, the education system, etc) fail to recognise this, i.e. that their role is in world-making or the purveying of world versions, and instead naturalise their

endeavours in a neutral universalistic 'discovery' mode, unproblematically 'finding' pre-existing realities and histories, that they slip into a role as 'temples of wisdom' or as promoters of one or another kind of fundamentalism – often relatively benign but sometimes not (e.g. Wright & Mazel 1987; Arnold 2006).

When museums – or academics – do acknowledge (as they surely must) that they are purveyors of no more than provisional world versions, then they have crucial opportunities for relevance and activism in a world where, as Milan Kundera has said, answers are often supplied before the question is even posed. These opportunities might be to engage the multivocality of things and places; to highlight the potential for debate (acknowledging that present knowledge is not final); and to provide some sense of how it is that we can know the past. A 'method as message' approach (Leone 1983) might look to matters of consistency, coherence, best fit with evidence and so on as we negotiate the inevitable array of world versions, viewpoints and vocalities and so save ourselves from either acquiescence in the face of hegemonic narratives, on the one hand, or descent into relativism, on the other, where anything goes (Elgin 1996; Green 2008).

Heritage in practice

Broadly, heritage as it exists 'out there' is conceived as information about the past packaged for public consumption. The museum display and the public archaeology site are amongst the most obvious vehicles of heritage but they would also include books, films and so on – not excluding theses – in which writers, publishers, film-makers and others have a hand, often together with specialists such as archaeologists themselves as prime movers or as consultants. By these means, 'the past', 'history' and

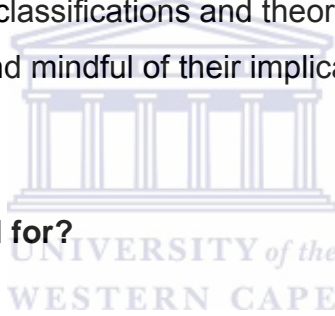
‘archaeology’ become ‘heritage’. It is a process of commodification or of transformation, above all of *versioning*, turning knowledge of the past to cultural, political, economic, touristic, educational, academic or other uses – and in light of the preceding discussion, it is clear that much would be at stake in such moments. As Gutorm Gjessing (1963:264) once observed, “in the twinkling of an eye, archaeology and political propaganda may get so tangled together that it may be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to unravel them.” In the last days of Apartheid, as Wright and Mazel (1987) had shown, museums in South Africa all too easily behaved as “bastions of ideology”; their efforts in transformation since then have been generating an even more lively awareness of the linkages and of the power relations at play (e.g. Shepherd 2003; Dubin 2006; see also Humphreys 2011).⁷ Today, it is acknowledged that there would hardly be an instance where such entanglements would *not* occur in some measure and that the distinction which is often drawn between ‘true’ history and ‘tainted’ heritage is not as clear-cut as some commentators would suppose (Rassool 2000): all of historical knowledge and all our narrations and representations of the past, after all, are constructed. Rather, as indicated above, the crucial questions revolve on just how complex historical processes, and the ways in which we can apprehend them, get to be characterised, their traces collected, and resultant ‘findings’ mediated for (and *with*) our diverse audiences.

In practice, a perennial concern for museums and public archaeology sites is the question of the level at which to pitch the messages fashioned for the public, which must convey whole worlds of meaning and complexity through the well-chosen object or illustration and its concise exhibition label. Albert Einstein is reputed to have said “make things as simple as possible, but not

⁷ Failure by government to fill posts, for example at the McGregor Museum where a potential affirmative action position for a professional archaeologist has been vacant (funded) from January 2009 until the time of writing, November 2011), severely restricts the capacity of museums to implement programmes and respond to the needs of the present.

simpler” (cited by Eriksen 2005:2) – to which many a museum researcher, under pressure to shorten text still further, might add, *Amen!*

Oversimplification is a rather serious matter highlighted by Thomas Patterson (2005) who sees it as one of the consequences of neoliberal social theory; an influence from which, he suggests, archaeology has not been immune. Where individual agency is elevated to ontological priority – a key feature of neoliberal thought – he shows that there has been a tendency to universalise history and reduce the complexity of cultures and societies. Reductionist theories which distort complexity by oversimplification have not been useful, he argues (Patterson 2005:382): and, echoing a point emerging above, he urges that we be aware of the historically specific ways in which our concepts, classifications and theories have been developed and are constructed, and mindful of their implications in ensuing representations.



What is heritage good for?

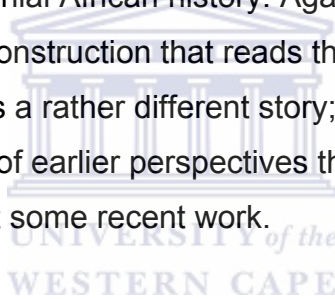
It is usually presumed that one would know what heritage is good for. But Peter Turner (2006) poses the question and contributes some timely and provocative thoughts in response. He discerns differing and at times contradictory fundamental values and structuring metaphors, namely promotion of *cultural diversity* (preservation, knowledge of human behaviour, authenticity), on the one hand; and a concern with *human rights* (personal or cultural self-determination or autonomy, the positive right of prosperity), on the other. Turner’s concern is over which should prevail “when the push for diversity comes to the shove for rights” (2006:352), and he argues that the ‘heritage movement’ would be “best served by adopting rights as its ultimate end.”

Just as with heritage itself, so also with African prehistory – some of the answers tend to arrive before the questions are asked. As an aside, the common name chosen for *Australopithecus sediba* is “Karabo”, which means “Answer” [King 2010] – a perhaps telling coincidence. Because, as it happens, Anne Stahl (2005:16) identifies, as a prime instance of this problem, what she refers to as the “project of world prehistory” – the so-called universal ‘human story’ – in which the answers about Africa’s role tend to precede the questions.

Stahl (2005) provides a opportune critique of the part scripted for Africa in this evolving western construct. In light of findings of the twentieth century, the grand synthesis hails Africa as the cradle of humankind, which now includes the origins of anatomical and behavioural modernity – but the role of Africa then trails off rather sharply as ‘our story’ migrates elsewhere to unfold in subsequent well-rehearsed episodes on the beginnings of domestication, civilization and so on. As the inclusive ‘we’ of the narrative in fact becomes more select, Stahl suggests, later periods in African prehistory become implicitly excluded, their relevance relegated to the status of the parochial, if not exactly primitive, ‘them’ – no longer part of the ‘us’ of the universal story.

Were it not for the findings of archaeology, and palaeoanthropology, Africa might not feature in the master narrative at all: Hegel, in 1822, was not the first, nor the last, to declare that Africa had “no historical part in the world” (cited by Macey 2000:115). Thus in this sense there can be no question but that archaeology has served the continent well: from often intractable – and fragile – material traces, using methods and techniques now increasingly refined and reflexive, it constructs a past which is immensely rich, and a history which stretches back far further than was once imagined.

Irony attends Africa's reappearance in the 'human story', with an explosion of literature defining the era of colonialism and the struggle, and burgeoning assessments of the post-colony. David Lewis-Williams (1993:50; cf. Humphreys 1999) worries that the temporal focus that this entails – a focus on just the last four centuries – “reproduces the colonial hegemony over the past” and “blinds historians” to a much longer, dynamic past. This unintended consequence of looking “through the wrong end of the telescope” (van der Merwe 1976:14) has yet again left relatively unilluminated the long “dark centuries” that preceded the advent of the Portuguese – to echo Hugh Trevor-Roper's (1969) notorious dismissal of the very idea of precolonial African history. Again, archaeology, as a discipline of historical construction that reads the traces where no written or oral sources reach, tells a rather different story; but, as Paul Lane (2005) has shown, the ghosts of earlier perspectives that sought “living fossils” in this continent still haunt some recent work.



Such devices operate in what is really a myth of origin for the west, suggests Tim Ingold (2000:130), working more to legitimise the present than shed light on the past. They provide a backward projection into Stone Age times of those capacities, including language and art, which are valued in contemporary civilisation, he argues, so that the universal human story turns out to be a “glorious but preordained movement” which tracks their progressive fulfilment.

Current obsessions with the transition from modernity to post-modernity have resulted in an even more “terrible compression of time-scales,” as Ingold (Jones 2002) puts it; “a compression that suggests that we should only be interested in the contemporary moment.” There is a sense in which,

empirically, “the present ... is where all history starts from and returns to” (Jenkins 1991:68) – but even the *possibility* of making the excursion to consider the past is sometimes doubted (e.g. Wessels 2010:311). Ingold’s concern, like that of David Lewis-Williams (1993) and Anthony Humphreys (1999), is with those perspectives that effectively shrink our outlook and, concerned at most with the last few centuries of colonial history, also set up an “opposition between the West and the Rest.” Ingold advocates “a more ambitious way” of writing history that embraces “a much greater temporal and geographical span.” Fekri Hassan (cited by Shepherd 2002:204-5) senses that for many African archaeologists today the motivation for pursuing their studies is indeed “grounded in a much deeper level than that of current political agendas.” Hassan envisages charting “a new future grounded in a long-term view of the past and situated on human experiences in different contexts” [i.e. as opposed to being built on the ruins of colonialism and “engaging in a futile dialogue with ghosts”].

In South Africa, students and citizens, alike, have been – as Humphreys (1999) put it – “singularly disadvantaged” where spatial and temporal frames of reference are concerned – although, a decade after his penning this assessment, the prospects seem better. Public access has since been developed at archaeological sites such as Wildebeest Kuil and Game Pass Shelter; and the Origins Centre at Wits University provides world class exhibits on rock art and its contexts, as do several of the major museums. Public awareness is enhanced through greater media coverage, not least of fossil, archaeological and rock art sites at the Cradle of Humankind, in the Ukhahlamba Park and at Mapungubwe which have been inscribed by UNESCO as World Heritage Sites (although apparently generating insufficient government awareness or concern as, instead, we witness the approval of coal mining on Mapungubwe’s doorstep, seriously

compromising the integrity of one of South Africa's pre-eminent heritage landscapes). Television documentary series such as *Shoreline* and *A country imagined* (both given prime-time re-runs and made available to the public as DVDs) look to a still wider variety of archaeological sites. With the return of history teaching in schools (after a few years of exclusion), the government-sponsored textbook, *Every step of the way: the journey to freedom in South Africa* (Michael Morris 2004; cf Humphreys 2004) includes a narration of our "First Steps", our precolonial past and, with it, an account of Wildebeest Kuil – and it is amongst books which at least some young South Africans would read. Julia Martin's book, *A millimetre of dust: visiting ancestral sites*, draws centrally on archaeological themes – although it was given a drubbing for its non-specialist encroachment onto archaeology's turf in the pages of the *South African Archaeological Bulletin* (Schrire 2009; Morris *et al.* 2009). In sum, the precolonial past is now relatively more accessible to South Africans than it was. And if archaeology and society had become "divorced" under apartheid (Shepherd 2007:24 – but had it been much of a match in the first place?), there have been some successes in engaging a broader, more diverse constituency since then.

Shepherd (2003:842-4) expresses concern at the current resilience, indeed resurgence, of forms of 'hard culture' and 'hard science' which signal for him business as usual and retreat from the messiness of the present. Elsewhere he notes that archaeology's versions of the past had been almost entirely bypassed by the liberation movements in the Apartheid era (Shepherd 2002:197). The real test for archaeology in this country will be how deeply and broadly – and meaningfully – it can penetrate the consciousness of South Africans today and in the future.

Turner's thoughts about the utility of heritage are relevant to these thoughts and to the issues raised around the concept of the universal human story. Drawing together some of the threads, it is possible to see the work of archaeologists addressing matters concerning preservation and knowledge of human behaviour, falling under the rubric of Turner's cultural diversity. But it also entails issues of rights, at base the right to a past which for long has been denied to Africans, or is granted in a limited way, in terms of the continent's contribution to humanity's ultimate origins (which, as Ingold suggests, tends to emphasise themes coincident with western myths of origin). In light of this, Stahl (2005:16) issues the challenge to archaeologists working in Africa, "to use emerging knowledge of Africa's pasts in reformulating the project of world prehistory."

It is important, I would suggest, to convey also the idea that the quest is not finite and that any answers are very likely multiple and provisional. This is not only because it is philosophically so, in light of Nelson Goodman's arguments rehearsed above: it also has practical implications. In a recent consultation with a Tribal Authority on research access to sites in a prominent BaTlhaping Kgosi's demesne, the Kgosi himself finally asked the question – when would the project be finished? In a sense the best answer would have been "never." The worrying aspect of the question was the seeming expectation that the end of the project would mean the beginning of prosperity in terms of tourism revenues (betraying a disturbingly skewed sense of the 'purpose' of heritage), where actual experience is showing that, often, archaeological and fossil sites and experiences attract a niche following only, with direct job opportunities being decidedly limited (Morris, Ndebele & Wilson 2008). For Turner the right to prosperity is relevant to the human rights issues of heritage, but the linkages involve more than simply

entrepreneurial provision of a product to which tourism revenues would automatically flow. Communities have a right to know these things too.

An intangible but crucial benefit of archaeology, I would contend, is the perspective it can provide, liberating us from the “terrible compression” of timescales (Ingold in Jones 2002) and the extreme shallowness or even absence of any sense of history which effectively leaves many people today in some senses directionless – or even oblivious – as regards the future. There is truth in the saying of the story-teller in *Arabian Nights*, that “people need stories more than bread itself, they tell us how to live – and why.” Clearly, though, some of the stories have not been that helpful and need to be reshaped to be relevant.

Geoff Bailey (2007) alludes to one aspect of relevance in his discussion of the boundaries we create when we delineate the past, the present and the future. These categories, he argues, are arbitrary. Rather, we live in a ‘durational present’, an envelope of time in which phenomena of the past and expectations of the future are present to us. “What we call the past is actually part of our durational present” (2007:220) – and “a greatly expanded time perspective encourages us to envisage a much longer future, one that will also be affected, perhaps irreversibly, by actions that we take today” (2007:216).

Instead of simply replicating a compressed sense of the present into the past – or the future – one of the challenges for research in South Africa, as Neville Alexander has put it, is to develop a discourse in which “everything can be perceived as changing and changeable” (Alexander 2002:26-27).

I have sought in this opening Chapter to contextualise this endeavour and to raise the curtain on some ontological and epistemological issues.

Alexander's succinct statement on change and changeability, made in the context of a disabling nominalisation and reification that too often have characterised debates about the past and the present in South Africa, sums up what I believe should be a central thread of this thesis – which ultimately would provide not so much any final empirical account of the variability itself in the rock art of the Northern Cape (because, as we shall see, significant empirical problems remain and the philosophical expectation of final certainty is one that may never been attainable), but contribute to thoughts as to the social and historical mechanisms or processes behind the way it changes and is changeable.

In anticipation of the discussion in the following chapter, it may be noted that an acute awareness, even a celebration, of the fluidity and relationality of life, of the transformations inherent in almost every circumstance, infuses the lore and legends of the /Xam (as documented in the Bleek and Lloyd archive, and in publications of it, beginning with Bleek & Lloyd 1911) and indeed many other hunter-gatherer perspectives on the world. It can be supposed that this will have been the case for the makers of the rock art to whom this study will refer – just as much as it is (arguably) relevant in our own contexts today. And where intuitively one might seek fixity, to pin down or anchor our observations (as one might in a strongly foundationalist discourse), one of the primary goals of this study will be to account for the rock art of the Northern Cape in terms of the fluidities of historical and social process.

II

All things flow: rock art and its settings

Πάντα ῥεῖ καὶ οὐδὲν μένει

Everything flows, nothing stands still

- Heraclitus, c. 540 B.C.-475 B.C.

*... conjure up a world suspended in movement, in which names are verbs,
and in which knowing is akin to storytelling.*

- Tim Ingold 2011:169



*Time sharpens its teeth for everything;
it devours body and soul and stone.*

- Andrei Bely 1978:97

There is in reality no *terra firma*. Flows of lava, ice, water, silt, wind and sand have made and remade the landscapes and the rocks – upon which, fleetingly (in the passage of geological time), markings in the form of rock engravings or petroglyphs, and paintings, left by some of those people who have preceded us here, survive, sometimes precariously. The fixity of their stone support is only apparent for, as Bely (cited at the head of this Chapter) observed, “time sharpens its teeth for everything.”

Even in the perspective of our short human story there is evidence of staggering change. At Windsorton near Kimberley Acheulean artefacts lie

buried in a coarse alluvium beneath fully 15 metres of cemented fine sediment in an erstwhile riverine setting, up to a kilometre away from the present-day channel of the Vaal River (Gibbon *et al.* 2009). The Aeolian Hutton Sands have been more or less mobile at different periods, the dunes and troughs and exposed earlier surfaces alternately masking or revealing spreads of Stone Age artefacts (e.g. Underhill 2011). Nearer to our own time, and to the subject of this thesis, there are rock engravings at Driekopseiland that have all but gone, just visible for some of the day when the angle of the sun is low, and in the softer light of the cooler months. With some degree of regularity the river floods across the engravings and only the younger ones and those away from the most frequently silt-abraded parts of the glaciated river bed remain visible at first glance – for now. At other sites rock surfaces break up and engraved images crumble gradually away (Plate 6).



Plate 6. The breaking up of the glacially striated surfaces at Nooitgedacht – in this case part of the image of a hippo has been lost.

These landscape-making processes have implications for archaeologists who must piece together and flesh out (and exercise their role in conserving) the traces that are left over; yet, equally, these geological sequences and histories preserve, albeit selectively, and yield to our view, the very traces that render any given landscape a time-machine (Clanwilliam Living Landscape 2008), every feature in it a clue to knowing and interpreting the past (Ingold 1993; cf Bailey 2007).

Up-close, the landscape is alive with the shifts of the seasons and the ecological dynamism that sets off one day, one month and one year from the next. In the twenty-first century it is principally water availability, pasturage and agricultural yield that constitute the concerns of farmers and economists, whose endeavours are to a large extent reliant on predictable climate and other features conforming to an anticipated stable norm. The landscape becomes newsworthy today when any of a number of variables, the weather forecast and especially the actual rainfall, deviates from the expected (or at least desired) norm – with these matters now increasingly characterised relative to conference-talk and political discussion on climate change and global warming. In reality, the unevenness in quantity, localised distribution and timing of annual rainfall and temperature fluctuations have routinely influenced multiple subtle and not so subtle shifts in the growth patterns of plants and animals, triggering not always identical eruptions and swarming of brown locusts, or of armoured bush crickets, in turn attracting large numbers of bird and mammal predators. The grasses and dwarf Karoo shrubs respond as quickly and some will bloom to dapple the green here and there with yellows and purples. It is now understood that thickets of *swarthaak* (*Acacia mellifera*) grow more densely impenetrable (as they have done in the study area in recent decades) not just on account of land degradation through overgrazing (as it was conventionally supposed) but

rather with higher rainfall events and presence of soil nutrients turning out to be more important determinants of bush encroachment in test cases (Britz & Ward 2007). But there is no doubt that sedentary sheep farming replacing indigenous fauna has been detrimental to Karoo vegetation (Roux & Theron 1986; Archer 2000). Before there were farms and fences, the springbok would trek in vast nomadic herds in relation to rain and resultant vegetation response (Roche 2005); and they still give birth in patterned ways that allow those who are attentive to predict – virtually to the day – when (if not fully understanding just how and why) the rains will come (Carlstein & Hart 2007:23; cf. Roche 2005 on /Xam attention to the behaviour of springbok and related phenomena relative to rain). Other game would similarly roam across these semi-arid environments, their ranges expanding or contracting as opportunities would afford. In the dry months and through sometimes extended periods of drought populations would shrink and plants dessicate, grasses yellowing, breaking in the wind, foraged by termites, the scrub turning brown or grey, all part of a general closing down against the extremes of dryness, of heat and cold. The /Xam (San people in the Upper Karoo) were acutely sensitive and attentive to the myriad signs of life and change, as is apparent in their stories (e.g. Bleek & Lloyd 1911); sights, scents, sounds and even feelings that would have been much more a part of the warp and weft of their daily inhabitation of these landscapes, as hunters and gatherers, than would be the case for the twenty-first-century farmer. The signs, the behaviour of the elements, of clouds and varieties of rain and wind and dust, of stars and springbok and lizards, hills, snakes, tortoises, constellations of ideas and observations (Bleek & Lloyd 1911; Roche 2005), are enfolded in a world that flows and transforms constantly, and people with it (Ingold 2000; 2011).

This chapter discusses environment and the range of relationships that comprise it. What is sought here is different from the kind of mere scene-setting that such chapters usually entail. What was the standard approach to the environment in much previous archaeological writing was often neither neutral nor innocent, as Aron Mazel (1989) has shown. It marshalled rivers or mountain barriers or climate or nature in general (e.g. Goodwin & van Riet Lowe 1929) as the prior constraining forces or actual engines of cultural change or stasis – at the expense of social factors. By the 1980s the social turn in archaeology was under way (Lewis-Williams 1984a; 1993; Sampson 1988; Mazel 1989; Wadley 1989; Mitchell 2002), but some writing has challenged more fundamentally the Cartesian approach that would set up the people-nature dichotomy in the first instance (Ingold 1993, 2000, 2011; Tilley and Bennett 2001). Tim Ingold would have anthropology move beyond a still “insistent dualism”, the “sterile opposition” between the naturalistic view of landscape as “neutral, external backdrop to human activities” and “the culturalistic view that every landscape is a particular cognitive or symbolic ordering of space” (1993:152).

To the extent that this chapter teases apart the environmental setting in which rock engraving and painting sites occur, following some of the terms and categories of conventional natural history, it also anticipates clues from ethnographic sources that demonstrate the way that conceptualisations of environment by the /Xam and other Khoe-San people were wholly immersed in relational contexts of dwelling or habitation (Ingold 2011). As such, some elements of the environment emerge as having been conceived as active, nearly social ‘beings’, having agency perhaps even in the very circumstances and situations where rock art came to be made. In this sense, then, this environmental introduction may be said to present more than just the usual *mise en scène*: it might indeed be a kind of *dramatis*

personae where even the stage – the landscape, “the very ground from which things grow” (Ingold 2000:149) – is not static but full of life and agency.

The idea of ‘conventional natural history’ is itself a gloss – since, as Ingold (2000:409) points out, convention never arrives ready-made. The concepts and terminology deployed are hard-won products of on-going enquiry, living dangerously even (as has been said of scientific ideas which, to be part of science, should be constantly at risk – Herman Bondi cited by Laurie 1973:11). Our terminologies are, like words in general, “forever being built up over time, through a cumulative history of past usage” (Ingold 2000:409). Nothing stands still.

I continue this discussion via a consideration of the divide between nature and society and of the fate of the people for whom, at the beginning of the colonial era, such a distinction did not exist. I show how their subsequent history was bound up indeed in the “coercive enactment” (Ingold 2005) of, and the closures brought about by, this fundamentally questionable Enlightenment ontology.

Nature – “inherently and intensely political”

Despite the configurations of town versus country and the dichotomies that cascade from that binary, human beings do not in fact live in a world of their own which is beyond the edge of another world which is nature, where the lives of non-humans are contained. “Rather,” suggests Ingold (2005:503), “all creatures, human and non-human, are fellow passengers in the one world in which they all live, and through their activities continually create the conditions for each other’s existence.” Human life is not cut out and lived on

some plane of “history” separate from “nature” and “environment” – our history is an interplay of various human and non-human agents in mutual relationships. Yet the dominant view in modern western thought has been to configure “society” and “nature” quite separately. In this view society has, indeed, a history, whereas nature is timeless. But land, as natural substrate, is not inert; it is not some enduring surface that exists outside of history, or outside of the lives of plants and animals for that matter, merely the timeless stage upon which history, and the processes studied by botanists and zoologists, get to be acted out. Rather, as Ingold (2000:150) puts it, land is woven like a tapestry from the lives of its inhabitants – it is “history congealed” – and our histories, human and non-human, can be traced in its textures. “Nature”, like “society”, is, he suggests, “inherently and intensely political” (2005:503).

The position of rock art and of the Khoe-San people of South Adfrica relative to these opposing conceptions is significant, indeed itself highly political – for wherever history is taken to have begun with the colonial occupation of the land, the indigenous inhabitants have been construed as being people without history (in both senses, *outside of* and *lacking*); as having qualities of timelessness and inertia, responding instinctively rather than innovatively, and belonging more “in harmony” with the natural than the human end of the spectrum (Mazel 1992). It was partly a consequence of this conception, suggests Ingold, that vast tracts of land, uncultivated (as in settled farming vs hunting and gathering), came to be seen as *terra nullius*, which paved the way for colonial occupation.

The landscapes of the Northern Cape today evince this sense of history congealed very graphically, with palimpsests (Bailey 2007) affording glimpses from many ‘layers’ that yield clues to pasts in our present. Some of

the more obvious instances, plainly visible in Google Earth views, of histories congealed and of landscapes under transformation, are the diamond mines of Kimberley, dating from the 1870s, and the massively expanding iron ore and manganese recovery operations in the Postmasburg-Hotazel mining corridor. This is as true of the on-going scouring and scarring of the landscape along rivers where once relatively small-scale (including pick-and-shovel) alluvial diamond diggings are now generally somewhat larger, more high-tech (and certainly far more destructive) enterprises (Plate 7). Towns and roads and railways, with telephone and power lines, make manifest the modern networks supporting these on-going histories, in which are also the spatially segregated traces of regimes of labour and power (Weiss 2009).



Plate 7. Google Earth image of the landscape near Driekopseiland: roads, fence-lines, centre-pivot irrigation along the Riet, and alluvial diamond mining in the vicinity of Schutsekamma are recent histories congealed in highly visible impacts.

In the countryside fences and farming methods delineate in the veld the cadastral apportionments of the landscape for agricultural purposes and, now, increasingly, game farming, again a congealment of histories, of the advent of private land ownership and including those of an underclass of survivors of conquest who were incorporated into colonial society as farm labour (Morris 2008). Sean Archer (2000) has shown how windmills and wire fencing, once introduced as standard farming practice in the Northern Cape from the end of the nineteenth century, heralded a new grazing regime that supported greater numbers of sheep and other livestock based on artificial water sources and free ranging in camps. Displaced by the late 1920s were older shepherding and kraaling methods, having an obvious impact on labour needs, with social consequences.

Cadastral mapping sometimes anticipated the development and spread of colonial farming literally ahead of the fact. One map (Ford, McGregor Museum collection), overtaking the historical events of the day, laid out a grid of properties well beyond what would be the agreed northern boundary of Griqualand West – a spread of hoped-for white ownership that was stalled until much later Homeland consolidation and forced clearances made way for it in the second half of the twentieth century (Morris 2008).

North of the Crown Colony of Griqualand West (proclaimed in 1873 after the discovery of diamonds), the Tswana remained independent until 1885. But locations within the colony were set up by 1877 to contain local Tswana farming communities – these being the forerunners of the Homelands under Apartheid (Shillington 1985). Those people who were not white, did not slot into the new Tswana Locations, or who failed to find niches in the towns that were springing up as mining or farming centres – people who were often largely, though not exclusively, of Khoe-San background – found

themselves, well before the end of the nineteenth century, either living lives of servitude on farmland that was no longer their own or eking out an existence foraging for seasonal labour, or any other means of survival, as a floating rural underclass literally “on the move” (Morris 2008). These latter were the so-called *los Hotnots* (loose Hottentots) of no fixed abode, a category of persons who have persisted (known today as *Karretjiemense* “donkey-cart people”), and whose numbers grow owing to rising unemployment in the 1990s and early 2000s, as Mike de Jongh (2002) suggests. The separation of people from land, which would no doubt have included the severance of links they might have had with rock art sites and their precolonial living sites, followed the logic of a separation of culture and society from nature.

I have alluded elsewhere (Morris 2008) to the ways in which, in the archaeological record of the period, the Khoe-San ‘voice’ goes silent. Stone tool making and other aspects of Later Stone Age material culture cease to be practised. The most visible heritage traces in the countryside from the nineteenth century are “fabric-heavy” ones, mainly of white farmers (citing Denis Byrne’s useful term for comparable traces in Australia – “think homesteads and court houses”), whereas those traces reflecting the post-contact colonial underclass – especially the *los Hotnots* – are “fabric-light” and ephemeral, with the odds stacked against their survival as part of the material record (Byrne 2003:172). This relative invisibility is compounded by the fact that the scant material resources of the colonial underclass would increasingly have been a borrowing of elements from colonial society: beads, clay pipes, cheap English earthenwares, glassware, bottles, cutlery, and so on. Also included would be food, part of payment in kind to shepherds (Sampson 1992), the remains of which would show up archaeologically as sheep bones and dentition, and domestic grain,

pumpkin, and fruit pips. While the material objects themselves may not be distinctive, their distribution and density, and the behaviour patterns and economic status they bespeak, are. These spatial and economic indices would certainly underscore the fact and extent of dispossession. The “blood and brutality” (Rassool 2010) that characterised the experience of the Khoe-San in some areas of the Cape frontier left mute traces – until one comprehends the silence and absence as artefact – with the archival sources pointing ever more clearly to an appalling larger context of genocide (Ross 1993; Adhikari 2010; de Prada-Samper 2011).

Language death occurred in tandem with these processes of social disintegration and subjugation (Traill 1996; Adhikari 2011). Khoe-San personal names, amongst survivors, were lost (as were place names) and replaced by Dutch/Afrikaans ones. Despite this, it is remarkable how aspects of local idiom and lore, with roots in the precolonial past, live on amongst Afrikaans-speaking “Coloured” descendants of Northern Cape Khoe-San people (de Prada-Samper pers comm.). Myths and even rites, for example, concerning the “watersnake” (e.g. Hoff 1997; Lange *et al.* 2007; Waldman 2007) are still widely current, while in rural areas farmworkers descended from Khoe-San are the *de facto* “owners and custodians” of knowledge of /Khoba (*Hoodia* spp.) and other faunal/ floral lore (de Jongh 2002). They are not, however, party *de jure* to the recent benefit-sharing agreement between the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and the San (Wynberg 2004) – an issue that may yet come to be contested.⁸ Rane Willerslev (2004, 2007), working in another continent, has

⁸ Unilever, a consumer products company, has published results from clinical trials of a liquid-based Hoodia-derived product. Forty nine overweight women in Madison, Wisconsin, took part in the study which found that there were no significant effects on energy intake or body weight, while reported side-effects are nausea, vomiting and disturbances in skin sensation. A solid form of the Hoodia extract may be more efficacious. “NC Plant will not help shed the pounds” - *Diamond Fields Advertiser* 4 November 2011.

indicated a comparable instance of indigenous knowledge survival despite language loss.

In the same way, farm workers (as well as farmer owners) who spend time in the veld sometimes have knowledge, usually in terms no more than of location, of some aspects of archaeological and rock engraving sites. The latter today are often found to be partly obliterated by graffiti and abuse by later occupants on farms. Erosion processes, a direct result in some instances of changed land-use patterns following introduction of commercial livestock farming, often expose traces of older histories represented by stone artefacts – but frequently it requires a trained eye to notice these – they are seldom recognised in local conceptions of human pasts in these landscapes. Indeed, white farmers will often dispute the linking of spreads of broken ostrich eggshell with their having been water flasks, i.e. evidence of past human presence, even when such spreads coincide with scatters of stone artefacts, pottery fragments, lower grindstones and the like. The nature of farm workers' contracts in the current time, moreover, is such that any given more "permanent" worker will have been on a farm for no more than a few years and his "dwelling perspective" (Ingold 1993) relative to particular parts of the landscape may often be quite shallow.

There is not necessarily any direct historical continuity linking the present-day *Karretjiemense* and workers on farms with the hunter-gatherers of the precolonial era, although such links are often probable: the contemporary Karoo "foragers" are, as de Jongh shows, "a product of the modern era" (2002:446). Accommodated officially within the imposed "Coloured" racial identity, some individuals and cultural groups nevertheless begin, tentatively or more forcefully, to assert such links and autochthonous self-definitions. A woman in the Karoo quoted by de Jongh (2002:459) articulated identity thus:

“Ons is te arm om bruin te wees. Ons is die geel mense” (We are too poor to be brown [“Coloured”] people. We are the yellow [San] people). Tony Traill (1996:165) cites the ironic remark of Emma Sors, a member of a *Karretjiemense* group near Colesberg, that the only language she knew was *“hierdie Boesmantaal van ons”* (this Bushman language of ours), that is, Afrikaans! Hugh Brody (2002) refers to “men and women who looked like Bushmen, said they were Bushmen, but whose everyday reality appeared to lie somewhere between migrant farm worker and rural *lumpenproletarian*.” The extent of culture loss is not small.

The unfolding spatial aspects and congealment of the histories of these people in relation to power and identity and land had rendered their “Colouredness” in effect a nonidentity, lacking potential for any territorial claims (cf. Seirlis 2004). In contrast to Bantu-speaking groups (as de Jongh 2002 points out), “Coloured” Khoe-San descendants found themselves, at the outset of the twentieth century, with none of their land left and without an existence independent of colonial society. They were thereby also automatically disqualified from the post-1994 land restitution programme, since the historical cut-off date was 1913, the year in which the colonial government formally restricted African land ownership in the Natives Land Act. An historic exception to this was the 1998 land claim by the Richtersveld Community, which was based on an argument that until after 1913 the community held aboriginal title to land of which they were subsequently dispossessed. Despite efforts by government to exclude such claims, the South African courts were forced for the first time to confront the issue of aboriginal title (Patterson 2004). Other significant land claims have included those of the #Khomani San who were evicted from the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park in 1931 and dispersed into virtual extinction as a community, but reconstituted as such through the land claim (Chennels

2002). The Griqua have similarly succeeded in land claims at Jakkalskraal outside Plettenberg Bay and at Ratelgat in the Knersvlakte (Ratelgat website). On the whole, these cases remain exceptional.

Martin Engelbrecht (2002:244), a Kimberley-based Khoe-San activist, expresses the situation eloquently when he states:

“As Coloureds we feel out of Africa, while everyone around us is either African or Afrikaner. As Coloureds we were made to feel that we were only a mixed and bastard breed of people with no real ties to Africa, while the so-called Bantu people connect to Africa as Africans and the South African Europeans connect to Africa as Afrikaners. As Coloureds our history is overlooked and our children are effectively alienated from the reality of our proud heritage and first nation past.”

Many of the descendants of the makers of rock art in the Karoo and adjoining areas – those who are itinerant seasonal workers in particular – are today “not only amongst the poorest of the poor in South Africa, but they are virtually unknown and socially invisible to other South Africans” (de Jongh 2002:446; cf. Sylvain 2005 on related current processes of marginalization in the Kalahari). The ranks of these poorest of rural people are currently on the increase as they suffer evictions or loss of employment because of farming restructuring, including “casualization” of labour (short-term contracts as opposed to permanent employment), conversion from livestock to game farming (which is less labour intensive), and retrenchments as farmers resist new post-Apartheid laws on workers’ land, employment, and human rights (McLay 2003 – who points out that in deep rural areas law-enforcers are often also farmers).

The “coercive enactment” of powerful social claims clearly at play in this history makes for a “messy world,” suggests Ingold where “rather as in a modern city” (perhaps not the best of analogies for the rural Northern Cape, but the point is important) – “structures dating from different periods and driven by different finalities jostle for space while inhabitants pick their way as best they can between them, turning every closure into an opening for the continuation of their own life projects” (2005:502).

Rock art

The rock art which is the focus of this study occurs in this “nature”, and on these farms, where the threads linking them into the present are seldom by way of descendants of the makers of the engravings and paintings but, if anything, through the work of archaeology and more recently the heritage and tourism sectors, as indicated in Chapter I. The contemporary context indicated above has ramifications for the management of rock art sites as noted in the opening Chapter. A stark reminder of the real context of poverty even in the Platfontein setting outside Kimberley was given by Talia Soskolne (2007) in her thesis “‘Being San’ in Platfontein: Poverty, Landscape, Development and Cultural Heritage”. This prompted site management to ask: “whose interests are served by our archaeological work?” One of the challenges is that some of the images and stereotypes promoted in tourism literature “romanticise, as aspects of ‘culture’, what in reality is rural poverty” (McGregor Museum Archaeology 2007). Speaking for “Coloured” Khoe-San descendants, Martin Engelbrecht responds to the question from a different angle in his appeal that “archaeologists must understand that within South Africa everything they excavate will bring us closer to our past, a past which has until now been denied to us as we have been forcibly divorced from our heritage” (2002:242).

Nick Shepherd (2002:192) cites Mary Louise Pratt on the “curious innocence” with which men of science followed on the heels of military expeditions in the newly conquered territories. They “sallied forth to encounter colonial landscapes and native societies”; in the case of archaeology, “to excavate sacred sites, compete for the skeletons of newly deceased indigenous persons, and export the cultural treasures of Africa – all in terms of a normative definition of scientific practice.” In this way local and indigenous systems of knowledge were displaced, with “scientific” understandings serving to “underwrite colonial appropriation” (Pratt 1992:53, cited by Shepherd). It did not follow quite this sequence in the Cape interior, however, where George Stow, for example, while not being an archaeologist, described rock art near Kimberley in the context of an *exposé* of the processes of land loss (but see Dubow 2004:129 on a possible settler agenda behind Stow’s campaign on behalf of the San). In the very moments of loss – of land and of culture – moreover, Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd, with a group of /Xam informants from the Upper Karoo, were engaged in a more than decade-long conversation that resulted in the unsurpassed archive known as the Bleek and Lloyd Collection of /Xam materials, preserving, not displacing, local indigenous knowledge (e.g. Deacon & Dowson 1996; Skotnes 2007) – albeit through some of the filters of the Victorian age (Bank 2006). The more explicitly “archaeological” encounters with rock art followed from the early twentieth century and were, to be sure, “constructing archaeological pasts” (Shepherd 2002) which by a strange twist did then fail to make any connections with the rich indigenous conceptions represented by the Bleek and Lloyd material (Parkington *et al.* 2008:89).

I look into these encounters in more detail in Chapters IV and V and my task here is to give an introductory account of the rock art as it occurs in relation to environment.

Primarily the rock art that is the focus of this study consists of rock engravings (also referred to as petroglyphs), generally occurring on koppies or hills outcropping from the relatively flat and extensive plains that are a defining feature of the area through which the Vaal and Orange Rivers flow and in the Karoo southwards of there (Morris 1988). Their distribution extends to the Richtersveld and northwards into Namibia, with other engraving areas including the Limpopo basin and Botswana (Morris 1988). As to content, they draw somewhat selectively on environmental imagery in that they depict animal subjects (but, as a rule, no plants), mostly large (rather than small) mammals – such as eland, kudu and other antelope (gemsbok and even more so springbok are rare), elephant, rhino, hippo, giraffe, zebra/quagga, ostrich, and others. Human figures are not as common in the engravings as they are in the paintings. There are also ‘geometric’ images at many sites, preponderantly so at some. Occasionally the engravings occur lower down in the landscape than on hill-tops, with the most dramatic example of this latter placement being at the site of Driekopseiland where they were made, mainly as ‘geometric’ engravings, on a glacial pavement in the very bed of the Riet River. In shelters along the Ghaap Escarpment to the west of and roughly parallel with the Vaal, simple ochre daubing and designs have been found and are described as finger paintings. They occur in shelters in ranges of hills including the Asbestos Mountains/Kuruman Hills and in overhangs in valleys in certain parts of the Karoo such as near Carnarvon and Williston (Hollmann & Hykkerud 2004). Indeed they have very occasionally been found at open sites, in the Karoo, sometimes in close proximity to engravings. Subject to faster deterioration

than engravings, it is conceivable that they were once more widespread on rocks in the open, but there is no way of being certain of this. The relationship between these two types of art or markings on rocks – finger paintings and engravings – will be addressed below.

In the literature, different hunter-gatherer, herder, agriculturist and colonial rock art traditions have been discerned (e.g. Maggs 1995; Ouzman 1999; Smith & Ouzman 2004; Hollmann & Hykkerud 2004; Hall & Mazel 2005; Eastwood & Eastwood 2006; Eastwood *et al.* 2010). Some variability may reflect a dynamic interplay of other factors including history and ritual understandings of landscape, not easily resolved in purely ethnic, culture and/or techno-economic terms (e.g. Manhire 1998; Morris 2002).

Most of the engravings in the Kimberley area are made with the 'pecked' technique: a hard stone was used to chip away the outer crust of the rock, exposing the lighter coloured rock beneath. Sites north west of Kimberley are often on andesite outcrops (as at Wildebeest Kuil and Driekopseiland) while to the south, in Karoo geological settings, the koppies providing boulders and panels suitable for rock art are mostly dolerite. With time, the exposed portions of the older engravings have become as dark as the outer crust through the build-up of patina.

The pecked engravings of the area are estimated to span a period from perhaps a few hundred to possibly several thousand years ago (Morris 1988; Beaumont & Vogel 1989). Direct cation ratio dating methods applied at Klipfontein, also known as Bushmans Fountain, giving estimates spanning the entire Holocene (Whitley & Annegarn 1994), hinge on a calibration curve of uncertain reliability (Morris 2002), and the samples were too small to run more than one assay each for verification (Whitley &

Annegarn 1994). Hence the results of cation dating remain inconclusive. Hairline engravings, known from a few sites in this area and more commonly in the Karoo, are consistently beneath pecked engravings in superimposed sequences, and are thus older. Butzer used geomorphological evidence to infer bracketing ages for the engravings at Bushmans Fountain and Driekopseiland, with the resulting scenario being in broad accord with more recent work on palaeoenvironmental change at a regional scale, as well as with findings at other sites, and observations of associated archaeological material (as summarised in Morris 2002).

Amongst the earliest records of rock engravings here were the copies made by G.W. Stow who was on the Diamond Fields in the early 1870s. Driekopseiland and Wildebeest Kuil were amongst the sites he visited. In 1875 Stow sent copies of paintings and engravings, including those made here, to Dr Wilhelm Bleek in Cape Town: "their publication," wrote Bleek (1875), "cannot but effect a radical change in the ideas generally entertained with regard to Bushmen and their mental condition." Sporadic publication through the first part of the twentieth century, and a burgeoning academic interest in the second part, has seen to an eventual realisation of Bleek's wish, a veritable transformation in "the ideas generally entertained", and a significant foregrounding of rock art not only in the academic sphere but also in the consciousness of South Africans at large. That it features in the national coat of arms of the post-colonial state is indicative of the shift where its makers a century and a half previously were subjected to, many now agree, nothing less than genocide (Adhikari 2010).

The first systematic work on rock art in the Northern Cape was the survey published by Maria Wilman (1933). A very detailed account of a small cluster of sites at Keurfontein near Vosburg was published by Goodwin

(1936). Gerhard and Dora Fock followed up Wilman's work in the 1960s-1970s, comprehensively documenting the engravings at the major sites of Bushman's Fountain (Fock 1979), Kinderdam (Fock & Fock 1984) and Driekopseiland (Fock & Fock 1989), and at several hundred other locales in the Northern Cape and adjoining districts (see also Butzer *et al.* 1979). From the 1960s the focus shifted from stylistic description towards establishing a quantitative definition of sites, and an empirical understanding of them within the emerging cultural and environmental history of the region (Fock 1979; Fock & Fock 1989; see also Goodwin 1936; Morris 1988; Beaumont & Vogel 1989), while subsequent concerns have been about the theoretical positioning of research and a stronger emphasis on interpretation (e.g. Deacon 1986, 1988; Deacon & Foster 2005; Morris 1988, 1990, 2002, 2008, 2010; Dowson 1992; Taçon & Ouzman 2004; Hollmann & Hykkerud 2004; Rifkin 2005).

The sites referred to in this study were recorded at various times by several of these various researchers and by the present author. Records are held at the McGregor Museum in Kimberley.

I pick up the discussion on the engravings and paintings and the places they constitute in Chapters IV and V following some thoughts on the philosophical and theoretical underpinning of research given in Chapter III.

I will argue that their emplacement in the landscape is significant for some of the reasons hinted at already. Particularly there is a likelihood that for the makers of the engravings and paintings a relational conception of the world pertained (cf. Morris 2002), and in this context elements of the environment may have been invested with an active animist role as social 'beings' implicated in the circumstances and situations where rock art came to be

made. Ingold (2011:141) argues that ours is a world of “incessant movement and becoming,” always under construction as countless human and non-human forms and lines of life relate, becoming entangled and “comprehensively enmeshed”:

“persons and things do not so much exist as occur, and are identified not by fixed, essential attributes laid down in advance or transmitted ready-made from the past, but by the very pathways (or trajectories, or stories) along which they have previously come and are presently going.”

These myriad histories, including those already recounted above, of people and engravings, in landscapes, unfold as an ensemble.

Landscape setting

I have argued previously that some landscape processes such as those noted at Driekopseiland, where the engravings are seasonally exposed and submerged by that most potent of symbolic elements, water, might have become a locus of particular cultural and social significance. It seemed possible that the place exemplified what Tilley and Bennett (2001) describe in terms of the natural becoming ‘super-natural’ – in a process, I suggested, of incorporation rather than simply inscription (Ingold 1993:157). On this basis I suggested that a consideration of environmental features must be fundamental in any discussion of the meaning and significance of Driekopseiland and I contend that this will be so for rock art in general.

Hills and plains and the rivers running through

Landscape processes of today have their origins in deep geological time and change. Something of the order of up to 1200 m of Karoo rocks once

buried the landscapes in which the rock engravings now occur in the Kimberley area – according to a model characterising local kimberlite pipes that are about 120 million years old (Hawthorne 1975). Considerable erosion, which carried sediments down to the Atlantic, began during the Cretaceous, following the break-up of West Gondwana, and continued through the Cainozoic. Drainage systems flowing westwards and gradually evolving into the present Vaal-Orange system, initially meandered, but later cut down more steeply to become, in time, confined by exhumed and very much older pre-Karoo bedrock features which constrain the river courses in the area to this day. To the west of Kimberley in particular much of the Karoo sequence has been stripped off, often entirely exposing pre-Karoo rocks, originally formed about 1 600 million years ago, and a drainage network that was scoured by Dwyka glaciers during the Late Carboniferous, some 300 million years ago (De Wit, Ziegler & Norton 2007). Well preserved glacial pavements remain at various points along the Vaal and Riet Rivers.

In general the topography today consists of broad low-angle plains, studded, to the east and south of Kimberley, and south from the Orange River into the Karoo, with clusters of dolerite koppies – buttes and mesas – which owe their origin to intrusive volcanic dykes and sills of late Karoo age. Being of a material more resistant than the surrounding shales, they have eroded more slowly. Indurated shale at the contact zones with these magma bodies is a fine-grained metamorphic rock with excellent flaking qualities, ubiquitously sourced in the Karoo for stone tool manufacture in Stone Age times. The hills, which may rise to some 90-100 m above the plains, provided, as they weathered, canvases in the form of large boulders on which rock engravings came to be made during the Later Stone Age. To the west and north west of Kimberley low hills and ridges consist of much older rocks, outcrops of pre-Karoo Ventersdorp basement lava – the supports

there for rock engravings. This rock, known also as andesite, was used in these areas, west and north west from Kimberley, in Earlier Stone Age times for the manufacture of Acheulean artefacts. In Later Stone Age contexts where there is an emphasis on microlithic stone tools, crypto crystalline silicates, usually occurring as small nodules available in the river gravels, or quartz associated with the andesite, or chert from the dolomites west of the Vaal, were sources of choice (Humphrey 1972b) – while hornfels (indurated shale) was also used when locally available (Humphreys 1978).

Calcretes which result from chemical weathering of igneous rocks and shales form a resistant crust across the plains. These, in turn, may be clothed by other Quaternary sediments, including alluvial silts fringing the rivers; wind-blown Kalahari or Hutton sands across some of the plains, reaching up to some 12 m in depth and now largely stabilised by vegetation; and a mix of heterogeneous soils that have formed on the footslopes of hills and at the margins of pans.

The pans have formed as broad shallow depressions in the landscape, creating localised drainage basins where run-off water accumulates after good rains – before being evaporated. A deeper variety of such a depression is known as a *kuil*. Erosional in origin, pan formation appears to be from dry season deflation coupled with subaqueous weathering in the wet season. Some sediment may also be carried off from the alternately muddy and dusty pan floors on the hoofs of ungulates. The large, older pans can be more than 10 km across.

The drainage basins and the rivers themselves, having cut down through rocks and sediments, leave remnants and terraces where (in terms of Cainozoic accumulations) higher is generally older and lower younger (but,

locally, invariably more complex than this), preserving a record of the more recent geological and older human history of the area (Helgren 1979; De Wit, Ziegler & Norton 2007; Beaumont & Morris 1990; Gibbon *et al.* 2009). The Riet River, for example, incising down between surface soils and calcretes of Cainozoic/Quaternary age, flows across near-horizontal Karoo sedimentary rocks, represented in the research area by the basal shales and tillites of the Karoo System. In places, the river has exhumed relics of the very much older pre-Karoo topographies, dropping, below the Modder-Riet confluence, through a re-excavated pre-Karoo gorge, and emerging downstream of Schutsekama. From there, glaciated basement rocks of the Precambrian Ventersdorp Supergroup remain close to the bed of the modern Riet channelway and outcrop repeatedly. The pre-eminent exposure is at Driekopseiland, where the scoured and striated andersitic lavas are laid bare in the bed of the river over an area of about a hectare. Similar histories can be told of the Vaal where exposures of glacial pavements occur alongside the river at Nooigedacht and further downstream near its confluence with the Orange at Blaauwboschdrift and Katlani west of Douglas. In all of these particular instances and in many others the glacial pavements were marked with rock engravings during the Later Stone Age, i.e. at a very recent stage in their geological history.

Rain

In a region of transition and interdigitation between the Nama-Karoo and Savanna biomes (Cowling *et al.* 1986; Cowling & Roux 1987; Low & Rebelo 1996), the north eastern part of the Karoo on which this study is principally focused is semi-arid. “The place of great dryness”, the meaning of the Khoekhoe term *karoo* (Nienaber & Raper 1977:663-664), is apt, although rainfall here, ranging usually in the region of 300-400 mm annually can, be

quite variable, counter-balancing years of drought with periods when the pans are filled and rivers burst their banks. Winters are cool and dry (with frost) and summers warm to hot. Rainfall occurs typically as isolated high-energy thunder storms in the warmer months and occasionally as softer drizzle with cold fronts. While unpredictable, the hottest months may often be dry, with rains tending to fall in the autumn and spring (Hoffman & Cowling 1987). Given the area's location in the subcontinent, potential rain-bearing air masses – whether as summer or winter systems from east or south – tend, as Helgren (1979:21) observes, to be largely drained of moisture before they reach this far inland – but some years may be significantly wetter than others.

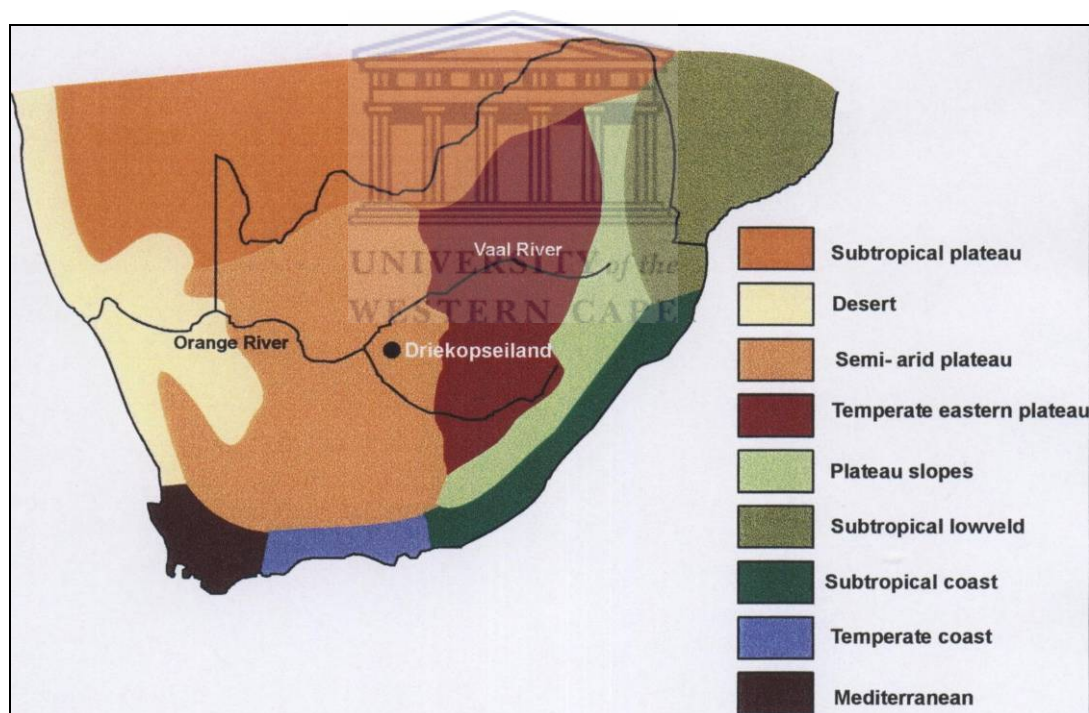


Figure 2. Climate zones: the study area falls within the semi-arid plateau characterised by cool dry winters and hopt summers with variable rainfall (after *Atlas of Southern Africa*, Reader's Digest 1984:19).

Run-off from storms, when they come, is rapid, feeding pans and streams. Potential evaporation greatly outstrips precipitation, however, at around

2500 mm annually. Hence on average pans do not hold water for long, and natural river-flow – prior to the introduction of dams – was episodic. Ephemeral waters in tributary streams often evaporate or percolate into the ground before they reach the major courses (Helgren 1979). The timing and quantity of rain has a bearing on the triggering of annually variable outbreaks of locusts or armoured bush crickets (*koringkrieks*) and other insects, which have ripple effects all the way up the food chain. And, comment Hoffman and Cowling (1987:2), “a single large-enough rainfall event or sequence of events at any time of the year can alter the composition of and processes within a [plant] community for years or even decades.” This has been noted by Brink and Ward (2007) recently with respect to bush encroachment in which other factors also have a role, such as variable soil nutrients as well as animal grazing behaviours.

The mean annual run-off along the major rivers is considerable, at 3.5 billion m³/a for the Vaal-Harts catchment to the confluence of the Vaal with the Orange; and 6.6 billion m³/a for the Orange-Caledon catchment to the Vaal-Orange confluence, while for the Riet-Modder catchment it is 398 million m³/a (DWAF 1999). Figure 3 shows the annual flow cycle for the Orange River at Bethulie which could be extrapolated to the Vaal and Riet/Modder catchments. In the early 1930s, prior to the implementation of major water-flow management (by way of dams and canals), run-off from the Modder River dropped in the dry months to around one third of the average annual run-off for the whole catchment, while the section of the Riet above its confluence with the Modder often ceased to flow (Humphreys 1972a:30). When Andrew Smith travelled along the Riet in December 1834 it was evidently not flowing, as he recorded that “the waters of the river were...scattered in deep pools...” (Lye 1975:135).

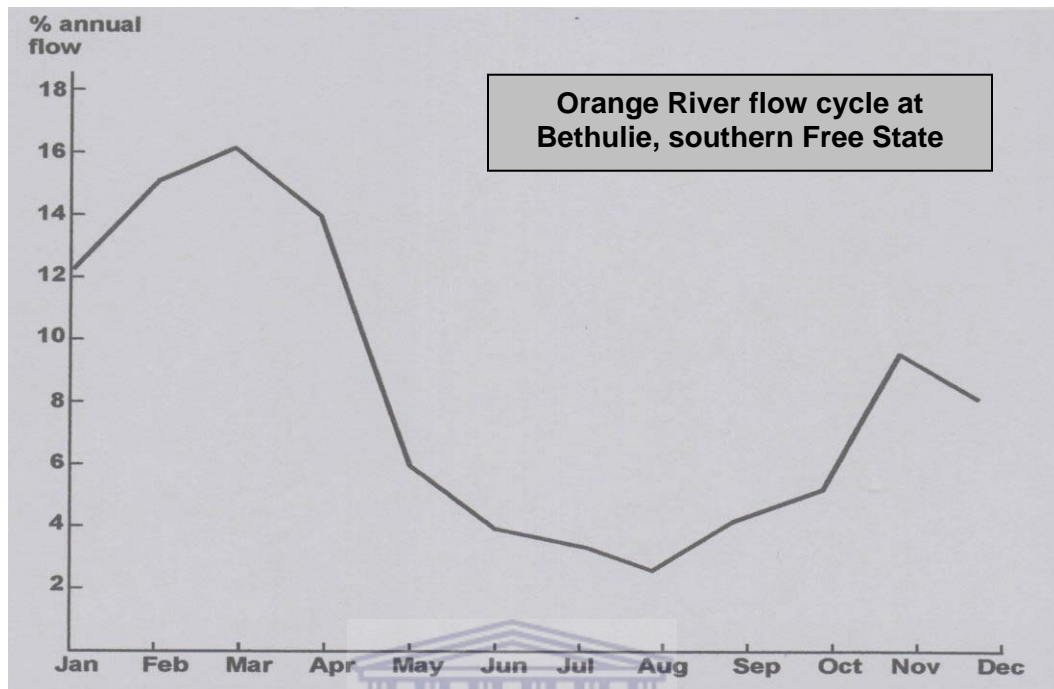


Figure 3. Flow cycle of the Orange River at Bethulie reflecting a pattern probably similar to that of the Vaal and Riet/Modder under natural conditions, showing stronger late summer and spring flow in response to rainfall and flow reduction in the dry months (after *Atlas of Southern Africa*, Reader's Digest 1984:20).

At the other extreme, flooding occurs periodically in all of these rivers (typically in late summer/autumn), occasionally high enough to inundate the lower part of a town such as Douglas on the lower Vaal, and swelling to more than a metre above the top of the +15 m silt bank at Driekopseiland (February-March 1988 – Ben du Plessis pers.comm.; July 2011 – personal observation – Plates 8 & 9). When the Vaal River flooded in February 2010 and again in January 2011, nearly all of the engravings at the lower end of the Nooitgedacht valley were submerged (Plate 10).

The construction of weirs and irrigation schemes with canals in the lower Vaal and the Riet River basins, securing a more reliable year-round water supply for farms and towns, has changed the face of the landscape. Many farmers owning or using river-side properties have switched from stock

farming to agriculture in the course of the twentieth century, mainly subsequent to the irrigation scheme developments of the 1930s-40s and following the introduction of centre-pivot irrigation from the 1990s.



Plate 8. Driekopseiland under water, March 2011. Plate 9 (below). Flood aftermath – unusual late summer rains in 2011 pushed the flood level over the top of the +15 m bank (indicated by arrow).





Plate 10. Rock engravings at Nooitgedacht under flood waters, February 2010.

Burgeoning demand for water along the Riet led to the 112 km Sarel Hayward Canal being built (completed 1987) to transfer water from the Vanderkloof Canal system on the Orange – making the further spread of irrigation possible.

All of this had been anticipated in the earlier nineteenth century when Andrew Smith, travelling in the very vicinity of Driekopseiland (then referred to as *Blue-bank*), remarked upon the “good soil” thereabouts and ventured that “if it ever prove profitable for the natives to raise the water in any quantity from the bed of the stream, rich crops of grain might be procured sufficient for the supply of a large population.” He envisaged the Cape government setting the example by encouraging “wealthy speculators to change the course of rivers ... or do it themselves” (Lye 1975:144-145).

At least one rock art site at the edge of the Vaal at Riverton appears to have been submerged completely after a weir was built downstream in 1905

(Morris & Mngqolo 1995); Driekopseiland was nearly lost when a weir was being planned there in 1942 (an account of this is given in an appendix in Morris 2002); while a third site was fed in its entirety through a stone crusher at Klipfontein near Modder River, producing material for canal construction, probably in the early 1930s (having been no more than noted as a spot on a map by van Riet Lowe in 1926). At the last-mentioned site there was also Type-R stone walling, its placement evident today only in localised spreads of once associated potsherds.

Beyond the reach of the canals and river pumping points, ground water is tapped by way of windmills and pumps as the principal source of water for farms and settlements (DWAF 1999).

The strong sense of landscape as horizontal substrate and stage for the enactment of history – and of agriculture – and upon which rain falls and runs off, if not dammed up or tapped – is often reflected in a somewhat different register by inhabitants, who reference the names of places, for instance, relative to lives immersed in this environment and the various constraints and opportunities it affords. Amongst the constraints are, particularly, the scarcity of water. It is not surprising therefore that many toponyms of Khoe-San origin (Humphreys 1993), which still appear on maps, as well as place names in Dutch and Afrikaans (van der Merwe 1987), give particular emphasis to water. In a study dedicated to B.F. van Vreeden (1961), Anthony Humphreys shows how place names based on water sources (river/spring/water-hole etc) vary geographically, implying generally more reliable sources – with obvious implications for modes of inhabitation – in the eastern parts of the Northern Cape (i.e. springs and rivers) as opposed to the western parts (where, the names suggest, it was generally necessary to dig for this vital resource). Andy Smith (1994:378)

observes that a topographic context is a frequently immanent feature in the /Xam narratives of the Bleek and Lloyd archive – whether the subject matter be people, animals or phenomena such as rain or wind. The narratives animate the landscape across which, when it comes, rain – itself a ‘rain-animal’ – could be manifest in the destructive ‘he-rain’ or the more gentle ‘she-rain’, leaving distinctive ‘footprints’ as it ‘walked’ on ‘rain’s legs’ - the columns of rain precipitating from the clouds that were its actual embodiment (Bleek 1933a, 1933b).

An abiding anxiety evident in the /Xam informant Dia!kwain’s account concerning !*khwa* (rain) and rain-making is that should rain not fall “the wild onion leaves may not sprout” (Lewis-Williams & Challis 2011:115):

“If the rain did not fall, they would not see the wild onion leaves, for these are bulbs which they dig out and eat: they are the Bushman’s food.”

This is from a narrative given as commentary on a copy by Joseph Millard Orpen of a rock painting at Sehonghong in Lesotho and is one of the key intersects between rock art and an ‘insider’ view as reflected in the testimony of individual San informants. It speaks fundamentally to issues of being-in-the-world in the Karoo and seems to implicate rock art in these concerns and in ritual practices revolving on rain and the availability of food. These ideas are linked into a constellation of beliefs and practices hinted at in another tale concerning plants and rain: a girl sets about collecting !*koa* roots (veldkos) before she has been ritually cleansed: the rain becomes angered, clouds loom, a storm breaks with lightning, and the girl is swept up as dust in a whirlwind (Lewis-Williams 2000:273-276). What is hoped for in a related account by //Kabbo (Roche 2005:19) is a gentle ‘she-rain’ falling in all the dry places, wetting the earth deeply so that bushes should sprout and

grow green, and the springbok return and “travel to all places[;] that all the people may shoot.”



Plate 11. Late afternoon rain in the Karoo.

Plants

Rain thus was and is crucial in this landscape. But together with rainfall, at the material level, soil type and topography exert strong influences on vegetation – on the sprouting of “wild onion leaves” – in what is today a transitional zone between the Nama Karoo and Savanna biomes (Low & Rebelo 1996). Like other aspects of the landscape, vegetation has been dynamic both in the long term and within documented history (cf. Hoffman & Cowling 1987 on the impacts of rainfall events, cited above). Acocks (1953) famously proposed that a northward migration of karoid vegetation had occurred in the last half millennium and it is widely evident that vegetation, environment and water-quality degradation – including “appalling erosion” along the lower Riet (Kokot 1948:67) – have resulted from particular shifts in land-use patterns – such as animal husbandry and cultivation and the

release of exotic crops, plants and trees – over the last century and a half (Roux & Theron 1987; DWAF 1999; Viljoen *et al.* 2006).

Shallower soils and calcrete lithosols across the area support karoid elements, while swathes of deep Hutton Sands promote a savanna parkland vegetation which is typical of the Kimberley Thorn Bushveld and includes *Acacia erioloba*, *A. tortilis* and, in places, *A. haematoxylon*. *A. mellifera* is found, particularly on koppie slopes and on degraded surfaces (see Brink & Ward 2007). Other species that occur are *Ziziphus mucronata*, *Boscia albitrunca* and *Grewia flava*, with grasses *Themeda triandra*, *Eragrostis lehmanniana*, *Cymbopogon plurinodis* amongst others.

Narrow gallery forests flank the Vaal and Orange Rivers but are less evident along the Riet, for example at Driekopseiland, where, however, the reed *Phragmites communis* is clearly a historical feature, remarked upon by William Burchell (1822-4:1:408, who reported that “mat rushes” were said to “grow in great plenty along the Maap⁹ [Modder/Riet].”

Alien plants and trees include *Prosopis* and *Eucalyptus* – the latter in particular having infested the immediate vicinity of Driekopseiland, where the sides of the river are clogged with *Phragmites communis*. Other changes in plant and animal life along the rivers in general include water weed settlement and encroachment, and increases in populations of

⁹ Modder River is one of several names in the region which exists as a direct translation into Dutch from an older stratum of Khoe-San names, in this instance derived from the !Kora *Gama-!ab* [*Gmaap/Maap* or *Gumaap* in early accounts], meaning ‘muddy’ [van Vreeden 1961]. *Ka-aub* [probably !a /aub] is another example, translated into the Dutch *Klip Drif* - although it possibly translates better as “stony [place along a] river” - which was an early name for the locality now known as Barkly West, whose name reflects later colonial history and a rather different sense of place in a by then imperial world. That the same place had also been called Parkerton and Nieuw Boshof illustrates contestations by various political interest groups, while the present name of Dikgatlong for the local municipality represents post-1994 adjustments in geographical naming.

blackfly and red-billed *Quelea* - now also having negative feedback in terms of agricultural losses in the area (DWAF 1999). Large areas alongside all the local rivers have been stripped of their natural vegetation to make way for centre-pivot irrigation with an associated impact being the release of phosphates that compromise water quality in the Vaal, Riet and Orange River convergence area (Viljoen *et al.* 2006).

Animals

The /Xam narratives illustrate a world which was, as Alan James (2001:151) has put it, a “geography ... alive with sound and interaction” – in which, as significant as any other feature, were animals. Indeed, a marked pre-eminence for animals is indicated by their very symbolic incorporation in the rock art (whereas plants are essentially absent), and their equally paramount place in stories (Deacon 1994). Megan Biesele (1993:61) describes how animals are named in some “almost rhapsodic” Ju|’huan story performances:

“[The story-tellers] count graphically and visually, putting successive fingers up to their lips as each animal’s name is called. There is a certain way of stressing the syllables that appears in no other context. ‘*N!hoansi* ,... *!aosi* , ... *n!angsi* , ... *oahsi*’, and so on. The list becomes a singsong. Almost, the eyes glaze over ... People love to do it, and they count off the animals at every opportunity. The effect it conveys is of a dream landscape dotted with an impossible plenty of ‘kudus, ... buffaloes, ... eland, ... giraffes...”

Colonists, in due course, also counted off the animals – in hides and ivory. Just as quickly as the “multitudes of game” were being described and assigned, each kind, its Linnaean co-ordinate – by such traveller-naturalists as William Burchell (Skead 1985 summarises the historical sightings/citings) – so they were also being shot out by hunters and traders. Elephant –

frequently depicted in the rock engravings of this area but not known from any early traveller record here – evidently crashed to local extinction before literate commentators were here to note their presence. Andrew Bank (2006) has pointed to the seeming unfamiliarity of the /Xam informants with some of the species shown in rock art, already absent from the Upper Karoo in their generation (although many continued to be named in the narratives). Even eland, /A!kunta had indicated, were only to be seen in the vicinity of the Orange River by the 1860s (Bank 2006:325). Ina Plug and Garth Sampson (1996) provide archaeological insights on the extermination of game in the Karoo, as hunting climaxed in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Farmers and professional hunters were the principal agents, but evidence in some rock shelters points to indigenous people, with firearms, participating “energetically” in the slaughter.

In the process, local places and rock shelters came to be articulated into wider colonial and world economic systems, as Carmel Schrire reminds us, her pithy observation noting that “the pianos of Leipzig rang to the tune of ivory hunted by Kalahari San” – until, that is, “there were no more elephants left in the pans” (1994:20; cf. Gordon 1984). Handsome leather-bound volumes by travel-writers, and the cabinets of curiosities in European drawing rooms and museums, connected up these networks. A classic example of the former is Emil Holub’s *Seven years in South Africa*, with its almost formulaic rendering of topography, fauna and flora. He enumerated peoples – their manners and customs – river fish, birds and animals, spotted or heard about during sundry forays out from Kimberley, across the Vaal River, and beyond. He also collected rock engravings, destined for a selection of museums in central Europe, and later referenced by Cartailhac and Breuil in their account of Altamira (Breuil 1934).

I have previously compared the nineteenth century animal sightings given in travelogues summarised by Skead (1985) with the early 1960s ungulate species list of Bigalke and Bateman (1962) for the Kimberley and Herbert districts (Morris 2002). As already noted, elephant had disappeared before the nineteenth century records began. Species which disappeared in the intervening period included buffalo, giraffe, roan, hippo, both kinds of rhino, and lion. Since the 1960s, of course, some of these species have been reintroduced, but the difference is that these animals are no longer quite “wild”, being now contained in fenced game farms, reserves, and parks, in situations from which or through which, for instance, migrations are impossible, and where anything resembling precolonial faunal patterns is unlikely ever to be reconstructed (Humphreys 1972a).

Tim Ingold refers to the “peculiarly landlocked view” that such fenced preserves present, “as if everything of significance in the world we inhabit could be pinned down to the surface of the earth” (2005:507). It is impossible, he adds, to enclose the sky and the birds flying in it; or the clouds, the wind, the rain, the water flowing down rivers – sun, moon or stars. Places are constituted in movement, nullified by containment or enclosure. Ingold suggests that “the places we inhabit have horizons, not external boundaries” and that the world “cannot realistically be divided into compartments, with some blocks reserved for society, and others set aside for nature.”

At stake are different metaphors for accounting for the world as we might perceive it. The following Chapter looks to establishing theoretical footholds, recognising the important work of metaphors in showing reality “as flowing, vital and vivid” (Taverniers 2002:177) – but recognising that some of the organising concepts in the history of science have instead conjured up

images of univocality, coherence and stability. Objectivist versus more relational ways of knowing and being in the environment have been touched on in this Chapter. The philosopher William James, critical of the objectivist perspective, suggested that “to understand life by concepts is to arrest its movement, cutting it up into bits with scissors, and immobilising it there in our logical herbarium where, comparing them as dried specimens, we can ascertain which of them statistically includes or excludes which other” (James 1909:244 cited by Miller 2006:456). Alternatively, are we not, as Tim Ingold (2000) contends, altogether immersed in these processes?





Theoretical footholds

My own view is that the concrete reality with which the social anthropologist is concerned ... is not any sort of entity but a process, the process of social life.

– A.R. Radcliffe-Brown 1952:4

Social patterns always occur in the multiform plural and are constructed in the course of historical interchanges, internal and external, over time, not in some Platonic realm assumed a priori.

– E.R. Wolf 1988:757

There is no weight of tradition, only a current of action.

– R. Fox 1985:197

E.H. Carr (1961:35-36) once wrote of the historian's position relative to the 'moving procession' of history. "The metaphor is fair enough," he added, "provided it does not tempt the historian to think of himself as an eagle surveying the scene from a lonely crag or as a V.I.P. at the saluting base" – for the historian is part, and a product, of history, his viewpoint determined by his place in the procession. Tim Ingold (2000) speaks of knowledge more generally as being continually regenerated within the context of people's practical, active engagement in the world, embedded in processes of dwelling or habitation.

The quest for universal, objective knowledge and certainty, destabilized by these more relativist perspectives, has for long been projected as a prime goal for science. The panoptic act – the proverbial bird's eye view in Carr's characterization – involves a disentangling from such processes, a construction of knowledge which is "contingent on an extrication from, elevation above and generalization of the practices of those on the ground" (Titlestad 2001:21, paraphrasing De Certeau's 'solar eye' view of those 'down below'). Across the disciplines as they emerged through the Enlightenment, the immobilizing, cartographic view, on the one hand, and the notion of some sure foundation for empirical observation and deductive reasoning, on the other, were what provided the desirable vantage point and the solid foothold for the grounding of knowledge. On these principles, positivist science held sway.

But knowledge, particularly in the historical and social sciences, can be hard to ground in any solid base, whether by way of sense experience as in empiricism or the *a priori* reasoning of rationalism. The impossibility of re-running the past, as in an experiment, renders archaeology and rock art studies particularly susceptible to uncertainties. "Neither archaeological observation nor archaeological deduction," note Christopher Chippindale and Paul Taçon (1998:93), "is usually secure with any real certainty," where "a lengthening chain of reasoning accumulates the weaknesses in its numerous links." Statistically, with archaeology's "probables" and "may wells", just two steps of *chained reasoning*, they add, could result in a "deduction" having less than 50% certainty; that is, more likely wrong than right. What are the alternatives?

The kind of epistemology that could be contemplated for this study, as previously (Morris 2002), may be defined as being more at the coherentist

than the foundationalist end of the spectrum (Thagard & Beam 2004). In contrast to approaches that would ground knowledge in a solid base (see above), coherentists would worry over weaknesses such as those noted with respect to chained reasoning, or of generalisations from individual facts. A coherentist position would place greater trust in multiple connected propositions – or threads as in a cable – that fit well, supporting and constraining one another; which provide a better warrant for holding to an argument. Pierce's famous cable analogy has been a powerful alternative to the Cartesian chain and foundation metaphors in philosophy and science, and has proven popular amongst archaeologists in particular (e.g. Wylie 1989; Dowson 1994; Ouzman & Wadley 1997:387; Chippindale & Taçon 1998:92-93; M. Hall 2000:10; Morris 2002; Lewis-Williams 2006).

A variant of the coherentist metaphor – a counter specifically to John Locke's notion of the *tabula rasa*, of a mind furnished by experience – is that of Otto Neurath. In Quine's summing up (cited in Thagard & Beam 2004:508), "Neurath has likened science to a boat which, if we are to rebuild it, we must rebuild plank by plank while staying afloat in it...Our boat stays afloat because at each alteration we keep the bulk of it intact as a going concern." As an allusion to Plutarch's paradoxical tale of the Ship of Theseus, this conception is a way of accounting for persistence through transformation and the accommodation of change in continuity. Neurath's characterization is not very different from Popper's (1959:111) view, that "science does not rest upon rock bottom", but on piles driven as if into a swamp, deeply and firmly enough "to carry the structure, at least for the time being."

The science of rock art by no means rests on rock bottom. Its propositions are not – and, because of time's arrow, can never be – dead certain in any

foundationalist sense. But assuredly, the understandings we debate are supported and carried forward by generally coherent bodies of knowledge, theories, insights; a combination of different types of evidence, data, and even hunches, which, as Bernstein (1983, cited by Koerner 2001:78-79) has observed, are the stuff of routine enquiry (cf. Elgin 1996). The weaving in and evaluation of new strands to the arguments we deploy may help us to gain new insights, to enhance or to change our understanding. Reviewing that knowledge and its ontological underpinning specifically in relation to rock art, and preparing a framework and a set of 'middle range' scenarios for a fresh consideration of why or how rock art making resulted in the variability we see, will be the principal task of the next Chapter.

For now, in this Chapter, I wish to reach a better appreciation of how some of the founding metaphors and the ontologies and epistemologies they bespeak in the social sciences – which impinge (often more implicitly than not) on archaeology – have had a profound influence on the way that society and its institutions, present and past, come to be characterized. In this manner I hope to show how, in part, a reconsideration of the metaphors in question may suggest different approaches to the way that practices, such as rock art making, might be understood; providing new insights into how such practices may have been generated and regenerated through time, and so give some account of the “variability” and “diversity” that are perceived on and between the sites that are the focus of this study. By exploring fresh approaches, it is anticipated that this thesis might help us come to a better understanding of change and continuity – and of possible ruptures – in the rock art of the Northern Cape.

Metaphors

The French philologist Michel Bréal (originator of modern semantics, cited in Ortony 1975:45) asserted that metaphors teach us nothing new. He dismissed them as being “like the sayings of some peasant endowed with good sense and honesty, but not without a certain rustic cunning.” Today many would assent to Andrew Ortony’s (1975) rather different claim that “metaphors are necessary and not just nice” – fulfilling, as they do, an important role in science (cf. Kuhn 1970; Elgin 1996). What is pertinent to this discussion is that metaphors, in framing our outlook, may more or less strongly influence the questions and expectations of scientific enquiry. They may, for instance, constitute to some degree the so-called ‘western gaze’ which could have ‘alarming’ consequences, as Ben Smith and Geoff Blundell (2004) have warned, for some approaches in rock art research. It is not for nothing, as an old adage says, that one must mind one’s metaphors.

Doubtless it was because of an awareness of this, in the history of western philosophy, that metaphors have often been scorned – perhaps most famously by Bacon and Locke. The latter regretted “the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented” as achieving nothing but the insinuation of wrong ideas, moving passions and misleading judgment: “they cannot but be thought a great fault either of the language or person that makes use of them.” They were indeed “wholly to be avoided” (cited by Turbayne 1982:239). Bacon likewise rejected those “similitudes and sympathies of things that have no reality,” described and sometimes invented “with great vanity and folly”; he favoured the accurate transmission of observations with carefully selected analogies having “real and substantial resemblances; resemblances grounded in nature, not accidental or merely apparent” (Bacon in Spedding, Ellis & Heath 1968:167). As with

Locke, he would have philosophy restricted to plain words describing actual sense perceptions. And yet, to support or to second reason, Bacon was himself to allow fable an “important, if reluctantly granted spot” – as Stephens (1975) puts it – realising that “fables work in every age ... to enchant and persuade.” More paradoxically, Locke would resort to a metaphorical assault on metaphor in his reference to the “mist” of words “cast before our eyes,” expressing his worries over the imperfections and abuses of language. It is a conundrum acknowledged in his admission that “so hard is it, to shew the various meaning and imperfection of words, when we have nothing else but words to do it by” (cited in Turbayne 1982:239).

Bacon’s ambivalence on the value of fable (Pribble 1986) and Locke’s own use of metaphor is mirrored in our era when, as Ken Baake (2003) remarks, scientists depend on metaphoric language for generating theory across disciplines and, as importantly, in making their studies “seem exciting, cutting edge, and worthy of publication and funding;” yet at the same time distancing themselves from metaphoric expressions when seeking to “appear rigorous and far removed from the social fray that discursive language inspires.” In pursuance of precision and lack of ambiguity, positivists, particularly, in the twentieth century have privileged literal language in scientific writing. Beyond science and philosophy, Habib (2005:321) perceives in Locke’s attack on figurative speech a “bourgeois refashioning of language” into a “utilitarian instrument” and a “scientistic tendency that still infects some of our composition classrooms to this day.”

However, Ortony’s (1975) argument in favour of metaphors, nay for their *necessity*, is borne out by their regular deployment in philosophy and science. Thomas Kuhn (1970 [1962]), earlier, had shown that analogies and metaphors were indeed key elements, together with bodies of shared beliefs

and models, that routinely constitute paradigms in science. More indeed than merely ornamental devices for publications or funding applications, they have cognitive force, argues Taverniers (2002:83), aiding understanding and serving as tools for effective intuition. They fulfil this role routinely in archaeology, not least in rock art research. In a careful appraisal of these devices, which rarely deliver literal, descriptive truths, Catherine Elgin (1996:204) regards metaphors, along with exemplification, emotion, fiction and even symbols, as “not the sorts of things that traditional epistemology is prepared to countenance,” but that “nevertheless they perform a variety of functions epistemology cannot afford to ignore.” Frequently they are integral, and vital, to science – just as they are to philosophy – where, as Thagard and Beam (2004:514) suggest, in work cited in the opening passages of this chapter, metaphors and analogies are a powerful mode of thought “indispensable in the founding, development, evaluation and exposition of theories.” To refer to a distinction drawn by Elgin (1996:122-4), they might not purchase *knowledge* (being an “all-or-nothing affair” admitting no gloss), but they can advance considerably our *understanding* – of a subject, discipline or field of study. They can provide conceptual resources to represent or reason about phenomena in new and fruitful ways (Elgin 2004:128). “Other things being equal,” urges Elgin (1996:204), “we have reason to incorporate them into our systems of thought.”

This being so, epistemological deployment or acceptance of metaphors, and of associated analogies, is a step not to be taken uncritically: they are of no mean consequence in shaping the way that we see the world.

Seeing the world had been quite literally one of the epistemological concerns of Locke’s day, when “mists” of words, as noted above, potentially

obstructed the view. Conveying the “naked truth” of a reality “stripped bare”, by way of descriptions that should “mirror” or “reflect”, were goals invoked from the seventeenth century, as Turbayne (1982:239-241) points out, by scientists and theologians alike. Over against these metaphors, their writings would not infrequently plead the cause of truth in cautionary allusions not only to the notion of “mist” but also of “veil” and other related concepts.

An “excessively visual consciousness,” Murray Jardine (2011:160) contends, in a consideration of Michael Polanyi’s critique of objectivism, was one of the outcomes of literacy. By narrowing experiential and epistemological orientation, literacy, whose mentality is triumphant in the printed word, he suggests, could “create a context or configuration where objectivist thinking becomes more probable.” Abstracting the word from the dynamic oral lifeworld of speakers, Jardine argues, it could “bring about impersonal thinking and abstract, context-neutral knowledge” (2011:168). Closer to home, Anthony Humphreys (1998), has pointed out the role of the ‘literary lattice’ in the colonial era in South Africa in terms of which people and phenomena were typed and ordered in space and time. As a classificatory device it required “filling up” and hence tended to induce elements of identity or distinction which need not have existed before. He cites the naming of tribes and chiefs and ways of life in the Northern Cape frontier. More broadly, one of the most influential and enduring of such templates in South Africa was George Theal’s (1919) fixing of ‘Bushman’, ‘Hottentot’, and ‘Bantu’ as fundamental racial categories. Not without irony, these ways of seeing and organizing the world are perpetuated in continuing discourse in the post-1994 era, on multicultural diversity (Rassool 2000), ethnic politics (Crais 2006) and – most surprisingly but for purposes of measuring affirmative action and transformation – in bureaucratic forms that

would have citizens classify themselves as 'A'[frican], 'C'[oloured], 'W'[hite] or 'I'[ndian].

Beyond metaphor and abstract thought, actual optical devices were expanding and opening up macro and micro fields for visual inspection – where universal laws were found to be apparently at work. This was no more so than in Newtonian physics. Science was coming of age as an objective and unambiguous enterprise; its statements seemingly definite and equally valid (and predictive) at the cosmic and microcosmic levels – in heaven and in earth. Mechanisms linking phenomena were understandable in terms of cause and effect – for the time being. There was growing certainty about the nature of the world and its place in the universe. And while electricity, magnetism and optical phenomena were found to have the same roots, in chemistry the myriad outward forms of matter were reduced to ninety two systematically connected elements.

A similar trajectory might be traced in the history of the social sciences – where metaphors commonly in play have also often been concerned with seeing, observing, perceiving. It has been suggested that the essentialist reading of 'culture' and 'society' as entities, as 'things' – as Emile Durkheim saw them, for example, and particularly with regard to 'social facts' and their functional coherence – was in a sense what allowed social scientists to render society *visible* in the first instance as an empirical focus of study. The objective characterisation of social phenomena in regular patterns, as Elisio Macamo, Ivan Krastev and Shalini Randiera (2002:15, citing Wagner & Wittrock 1991) point out, had been the necessary initial step in the establishment of the very possibility of a science of society.

The 'snap-shot' view of some given society in its 'ethnographic present' is how many of the classic, typically structural-functionalist, ethnographic monographs have been described. William James (cited by Miller 2006:456) called such conceptual interventions "cuts" made into the flux of ongoing experience. Corresponding with the respective eye-pieces of astronomy and biology, the camera came into its own as an instrument of documentation in anthropology, providing images to illustrate the outward and visible behavioural elements, and particularly the material expressions, of culture and society. Photography from the outset had also been taken up in documenting human bodies (e.g. Hoffmann 2009). Deborah Poole (2005:161) shows however that photography was not immediately and universally hailed. Indeed, some anthropologists greeted it with suspicion – with an empiricist concern about deception (how accurate was the new technology for representing 'racial fact'?) as well as scepticism about its ability to capture the intangibles of culture and social organisation. In archaeology the camera became a primary tool of representation where, as mode of depiction, Ben Smith and Geoff Blundell (2004) show, it followed on and recapitulated a long tradition which had come to define a characteristically European way of looking, the so-called 'western gaze'. Writing of the impacts of approach in landscape studies in archaeology, Smith and Blundell have traced this particular perspective which is evident in European painting and later photography through to some recent ways of contemplating rock art and its landscape contexts. They show how the theoretical or scientific perspectives of the researchers, their outlook historically and culturally contingent, are not only of import in terms of ultimate documentation but also in the very framing of the enquiry: the cultural contexts through which places came to be marked with rock art very likely were quite different. Smith and Blundell express pessimism that without the aid of appropriate ethnography – and hence also of analogy –

not even phenomenology (which seeks to empathetically rehearse, by 'immersion', the landscape experience of past actors) would provide clues for valid interpretation.

In physics, where all had seemed increasingly certain, the foundations of the emergent knowledge and scientific confidence began to be eroded following the discovery of radioactivity in the 1890s. By the late 1920s Heisenberg's notion of *uncertainty* was having to be acknowledged as a central principle in physics. Rutherford's view that no science could be good unless it could be explained to a barmaid (Hobsbawm 1994:538) belonged to a receding age – although at the supra-atomic level of everyday life Newton and Galileo remained valid. It was at the subatomic level that physics had become complicated: the very process of *observing* phenomena, it was found, actually changes them. "To look at it means to knock it out," is how Weisskopf (cited by Hobsbawm 1994:537) characterised the procedure for defining where an electron 'really' is. The new contradictions had seemingly dashed the earlier hopes for unitary theory, of a way of expressing the whole of nature in a single directly comprehensive model. A way around this was proposed by Niels Bohr in his principle of "complementarity", namely that reality should be reported in different ways, combining insights in an "exhaustive overlay of different descriptions that incorporate apparently contradictory notions" (Holton, cited by Hobsbawm 1994:539). Eric Hobsbawm illustrates the conundrum that Bohr's metaphysical concept sought to accommodate: "The effect of a Beethoven sonata can be analysed physically, physiologically and psychologically, and it can also be absorbed by listening to it: but how are these modes of understanding connected?" (1994:539). The single solid foundation and the objective exterior viewpoint recede from reach – and much more of a coherentist

perspective recognizing multiple threads keeps the scientific enterprise intact as a going concern.

Through the later twentieth century, the crisis of representation emerged across many academic disciplines. In the humanities, writing about the world and history straightforwardly, and the very presumption to speak for others (Spivak 1999), came to be questioned.

In the social sciences in particular the privileging of analytical bird's eye perspectives on 'society' or 'culture' (the entities or objects of study in much work) has undergone critique over several decades. Anthropologists, whose discipline by its methodology has sought also to take account of the 'emic' understandings of 'insiders' and so contribute to a critique of an otherwise pervasive Eurocentricism in western thought (but see discussion below on the conception of emic and etic), has for some time worked at ridding the 'culture' concept of some of its historical baggage – for example, the attributes of totality and homogeneity that were inherited from some of its more notorious earlier usages (Wolf 1999:289). Similar work has been under way in archaeology (e.g. Jones 1997; Meskell 2007). A shifting focus across various disciplines, away from the study of isolated phenomena and towards a concern with the dynamic relationships among phenomena, finds expression in anthropology and archaeology, again, in the rethinking of the 'culture' concept. In an early unsettling of the tendency to reify and animate culture as a 'thing', A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (1952:4, cited by Ingold 2011:234) suggested that "my own view is that the concrete reality with which the social anthropologist is concerned ... is not any sort of entity but a process, the process of social life." Life carries on as a current of action – not, says Richard Fox (1985, cited by Wolf 1999:61), by dint of the weight of tradition and culture as received, for culture is "always in the making." Eric Wolf

(1999:289) sums up the efforts of many strands of more recent anthropological work which, as he puts it, have been emphasising more of culture's distributive character, the variation of cultural phenomena among genders and generations, status groups and classes, and towards an understanding of the processes behind this variation or the manner in which it is coordinated. Wolf (1988:757) himself had earlier pointed out that "social patterns always occur in the multiform plural and are constructed in the course of historical interchanges, internal and external, over time, not in some Platonic realm assumed *a priori*."

Where the one pervasive metaphor arising through the Enlightenment era had been the imperative to observe, to make visible, and get at the naked, grounded truth, this in turn spurned metaphors and expectations as to what was there *to be* observed. Just as the discovery of regular patterns in physics and in nature suggested images of mechanisms with their interdependent moving parts operating according to universal laws of cause and effect, so in the social sciences models of culture and society suggested coherent systems or structures similarly observable by way of their functioning components, through the study of which equally universal laws were anticipated to pertain. A mechanistic worldview pertained which modern science might trace back to Galileo. Notwithstanding the recent critiques that have nuanced the notions of 'culture' and 'society', the consequences of their reification as entity and structure make for metaphors that continue to pervade much thinking about cultural phenomena in the present and perhaps more especially – because of their being compounded through analogy in the backward projection of observed regularities – those of the past.

Culture, society and the conception of social cohesion

If 'society' and, particularly, 'culture' have been subject to sustained debate and redefinition in anthropology and related disciplines in recent decades, the older history of these concepts, central to the social sciences, was anything but static. Their emergence was not a simple emanation from any monolithic modernism but rather the outcome of often heated contestations between proponents and opponents of the Enlightenment, as Eric Wolf (1999) has shown. And it was a contest over issues fought not just in theoretical terms in the academy but in relation to material interests represented by power and status. "While increasingly assertive commercial classes allied to expanding rationalising states presented themselves as the party of the future" in this struggle, suggests Wolf (1999:64), "besieged social classes and locally based political elites countered this claim by exalting tradition, parochialism, true inner spirit, the social bonds of intimacy, and local knowledge." The claims of rationalism, secularism and equality arose from an ascendant revolutionary and imperial France, while those on the back foot, east of the Rhine, stood their ground through traditionalising counter-claims, epitomised by the work of Johann Herder, which made appeals to spiritual and particularistic aspects of 'culture'. Resultant concepts, taken up by the social sciences as they emerged through this era – of reason and ideology, culture and society, practice and metaphysics – were "not only placed in opposition," remarks Wolf, "but were reified as emblems of contrasting orientations, each concept objectified and animated as a bounded and holistic entity endowed with a capacity to generate and propagate itself." But the terms of the debate shifted with each generation. Wholly incompatible in their origins, yet they spoke to the same issues and, in subsequent evolving discourses, they intertwined and yielded, as Wolf puts it (1999:65) to "more integrative understandings." Hence in due course

'class' and 'culture' could come to be seen to occur together and overlap as homogeneous all-embracing entities, characterised by a common outlook, with those so bound by these phenomena capable of collective agency.

In the late nineteenth century Emile Durkheim introduced the term *solidarité* to account for how society was constituted and cohered through time. He distinguished a *mechanical* form of solidarity for archaic (read pre-modern, traditional, primitive) societies, which were held together by social consciousness; and an *organic* solidarity for modern (more advanced) societies based on a self-regulating functional differentiation and interdependence through the division of labour. The dichotomy implied an evolutionist, teleological transition by which mechanical forms of solidarity would develop into the more differentiated manifestations. The former cohere strongly – 'cemented' or 'glued', as common metaphors for this suggest – through collective norms, beliefs and values which comprise 'social consciousness'. By contrast, the social cohesion operative in organic forms of society consists more in a 'magnetic pull' of mutual need, a 'web of relations', which can be manifest at the level also of individuals (Ortland 2002). As the two basic modes of social cohesion in classical social analysis (Chidester *et al.* 2003:12), they no longer necessarily imply, in latter-day usage, an evolutionary/developmental separation and have been taken to correspond, David Chidester, Phillip Dexter and Wilmot James (2003) suggest, with relations based on kinship versus those based on contract; those referring to ascribed identity versus achieved identity; or those pertaining to the face to face associations implied by *Gemeinschaft* versus those of a more abstract nature as in *Gesellschaft*. In the one set of instances the idea is that conditions are 'given' while in the other they are negotiated. Chidester and his co-authors find that notwithstanding the classic dichotomy, the two modes often overlap or do not conform to

definition – i.e. the ‘givens’ of kinship may often in fact be subject to negotiation while supposedly negotiated situations are often delivered at the receiving end of the bureaucratic chain with little room to question or manoeuvre.

Likewise, the idea of ‘society’ as “an eternal verity, an enduring essence at the heart of things,” also fails to conform, suggests Wolf (1988). The concept, like ‘culture’, has its own particular history as it emerged through the Enlightenment but the salient point to be made here is that it had come to have a place in the social sciences, and anthropology in particular – again much like ‘culture’ – somewhat reified and fixed. Wolf’s (1988:759) argument holds alike for these totalising concepts: that social phenomena need to be conceived in more “flexible and open-ended ways, relationally – in terms of relations engendered, constructed, expanded, abrogated; in terms of intersects and overlaps, rather than in terms of solid, bounded, homogeneous entities that endure without question and without change.”

Equally untenable for Wolf (1988:759-760) has been an alternative focus to that of the collective construct in the social sciences, namely the shift in emphasis to the position and role of the individual. Often resorted to, he shows, amidst rising dissatisfaction with the totalising concept of ‘society’, the switch in focus valorises the individual agent engaged in “maximizing, strategizing, plotting or creating, inventing, altering the inherited circumstances of life.” This is the rational economic man, notes Thomas Patterson (2005:375), whose roots lie early in the Enlightenment tradition, in the writings of Hobbes, “whose image was polished by the utilitarians at the end of the eighteenth century, and whose likeness was dusted off again and recycled by the neoclassical economists at the end of the nineteenth century.” The abstract individual, resurfacing again in the social sciences, is

merely another entity or monad, suggests Wolf, “a timeless and reified essence like the conceptual entity it is supposed [in the reaction to society as total system] to criticize and oppose.” Referring to the constitution of the ‘individual’ in a diversity of cultural settings, Wolf points to the way that people are in fact “differentially constructed out of ancestors, parents, kinsmen, siblings, role models, spirit guardians, power animals, prenatal memories, dream selves, reincarnated spirits, or gods taking up residence in their heads and riding them like divine horsemen.”

Yet, the normative conception of society as system, and of social cohesion, bonding or drawing in groups or individuals within it, has been highly influential in anthropology, particularly structural functionalist anthropology. In its various guises, and as further elaborated by Talcott Parsons, it echoes through much of sociology. Its impact in linguistic theory is also particularly apparent, as Johnstone (2000) shows: in structural linguistics the objects of study are shared systems, abstract entities such as languages, varieties and dialects which in themselves have been treated as agents. Rooted partly in nineteenth century nationalism, the idea of shared culture, shared history and shared language defined the nation states as they emerged from feudalism. For Elísio Macamo and colleagues (Macamo *et al.* 2002:14), who review these disciplinary legacies, the notion of social cohesion reaches its apotheosis in Talcott Parsons’ functionalist portrayal of American society as the fulfilment of the ideal of a morally, culturally, politically and economically integrated society.

On the face of it, it is in something akin to this latter form of the idea – now much more as metaphor than formal model – of social cohesion that has become part of contemporary South African political parlance. A report issued by the Presidency entitled *Social Cohesion and Social Justice in*

South Africa appeared following an earlier Human Sciences Research Council book, in which some of the same team members had been involved, entitled *What holds us together: social cohesion in South Africa* (Chidester *et al.* 2003). The report reviews data and analyses “assessing the social ‘health of the nation’.” It is, however, based on a relatively loose definition, partly that “social cohesion refers to the extent to which a society is coherent, united and functional, providing an environment within which its citizens can flourish.” The concept is also presented as a “useful prism” for gaining insights into “how South Africa functions” and follows on similar projects in Europe and Canada intended to measure “economic wellbeing,” “democratic citizenship,” and (in the EU), “solidarity.” It is partly a *measure*, then, of unity and functionality, and partly a *tool* for observing it, in the South African case. Paul Bernard (1999:2) suggests that these latter-day references to ‘social cohesion’ constitute a quasi-concept or hybrid concept having two faces, based, on the one hand, on “analysis of the data of the situation,” allowing for resultant analyses “to be relatively realistic and to benefit from the aura of legitimacy conferred by the scientific method;” while maintaining, on the other hand, “a vagueness that makes them adaptable to various situations, flexible enough to follow the meanderings and necessities of political action from day to day.” This vagueness, suggests Bernard, “explains why it is so difficult to determine exactly what is meant by social cohesion.”

Pallo Jordan (2005), in his role as National Minister of Arts and Culture in South Africa, refers to social cohesion in terms closer to the classic definition as “the degree of harmony, cooperation and mutual confidence that exists within any given society.” Claiming culture as “a tool for strengthening social cohesion,” he cites an equally classic UNESCO definition of “Culture” as “the set of distinctive spiritual, material and

emotional features of a society or a social group and encompasses in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs". If this was sounding somewhat like the sort of totalizing and bounded 'culture' that post-apartheid South Africa ought to have been moving beyond, Jordan was quick to assert that "culture is not coded in the genes, is not transmitted genetically and is extremely dynamic, is always in motion and is never static."

An uneasy tension is evident between earlier relatively fixed 'classical' definitions of the concepts under consideration and the more flexible and open-ended understandings arising from the recent critiques of received concepts in anthropology and cognate disciplines. The often generally less than formal contemporary usages of terms such as social cohesion and culture are relevant here because they inform some of the imperatives and expectations (and, one must add, misunderstandings) of the heritage and tourism sectors of government as well as community viewpoints (which have sometimes borrowed older "authoritative utterances" – cf. A.L. Smith 2004) with respect to the management and development of rock art and other archaeological sites (Morris 2008; in press). Such popular constructs could have a bearing on the acceptability to these constituencies of different ways for characterizing, for instance, the precolonial history or the rock art of the Northern Cape – and there is already disjuncture in some instances (Morris 2008).

The mixing of older and newer, formal and informal versions of concepts that percolate from anthropology and cognate disciplines into broader usage (Wright 1998) might make for suitably malleable tools to match the "meanderings and necessities of political action" – but they also make for muddled thinking. Lesley Green (2008) notes this in regard to recent

publications on indigenous knowledge where several authors tend to set up a succession of binaries that contrast Africa versus the West: of “nature versus culture, real versus artificial environments, spiritual integrity versus alienation, enchantment versus rationality, and ecological sentience versus technoscientific detachment.” This worldview, Green suggests, draws as much from Thabo Mbeki’s conception, in a 1998 speech, of a country divided by its material conditions into a black nation and a white nation as it does from precisely the outmoded theories of culture under discussion. Upheld in this writing is a sense of culture as “bounded in space and time, and ideally sealed off from the pollution of outsiders,” remarkably reflecting – if inverting – the *volkekundige* perspectives which had undergirded the ideological apparatus of the Apartheid state (Green 2008:152).

Nature versus culture

The latter account brings one finally to confront that most fundamental of structuring metaphors defining the modern era: the Cartesian distinction between culture and nature. Upon this quintessential discrimination is built much (but not all) of the modern western intellectual tradition (Ingold 2000; 2011; Willerslev 2007; Lowney 2011). At base it derives from Descartes’ distinction between his thinking mind and his body, and rank upon rank of consequent dichotomies, between person and thing, subject and object, intentionality and instinct, humanity and animality.

This separation of mind and matter fed into the world of science at large and it is axiomatic in much of anthropology – but it is not the only way to characterise the relationships in question. In his critique of the culture-nature distinction, Ingold (2000:14-15) points out that its operation in

science and anthropology relies on a double disengagement of the 'neutral' observer from the world.

1. Firstly it assumes an independently given reality consisting of the physical world 'as it really is'. This is the subject matter of science and biology.
2. Secondly it then admits that there are diverse ways in which people in cultural settings figure out and make sense of the natural world by way of imagined or 'cognised' worlds – worlds of culturally constructed significance, alternative frameworks of belief, representational schemata and cognitive templates – in other words cosmologies, cultural systems. It is premised on "an imagined *separation* between the perceiver and the world, such that the perceiver has to reconstruct the world, in the mind, prior to any meaningful engagement with it" (Ingold 2000:178). This is then the domain of anthropological enquiry which is concerned with "those received patterns of interconnected images and propositions that, in anthropological parlance, go by the name of 'culture'" (Ingold 2000:14). In summary, at this level, people from across the spectrum of cultural backgrounds are already one step out of the world of nature.
3. Thirdly it places both the biologist and the anthropologist at a vantage point above the fray, committed to abstract or universal reason and able to deliver wholly neutral, value-free accounts of the worlds of nature and of culture.

As Ingold comments, the first of these disengagements sets up the division between humanity and nature. The second goes further in dividing humanity itself between 'native' or 'indigenous' people who live their lives by dint of 'cultures' (recalling Durkheim's mechanical solidarity), on the one hand, and enlightened 'westerners', on the other, who do not (Durkheim's more advanced organic form of society). In effect, adds Ingold, "the sovereign perspective of abstract reason" results from the compounding of two dichotomies: that between humanity versus nature and that between modernity versus tradition. It is then by virtue of the latter that modern science – including anthropology – can distinguish itself from the knowledge practices of people trapped by convention and tradition in 'other cultures'. "The anthropologist, surveying the tapestry of human cultural variation," writes Ingold (2000:15) "is like the visitor to the art gallery – a 'viewer of views'." Harking back to a point made earlier, citing Smith and Blundell, it was perhaps no accident that perspective painting and anthropology had had a shared intellectual trajectory.

Reference has already been made to 'emics' and 'etics' in these pages, which traditionally denote insider and outsider viewpoints. "Much used and abused" (Ingold 2000:41), these neologisms derive from the linguistic terms *phonetics* and *phonemics* and were coined in the 1950s by the linguistic anthropologist Kenneth Pike (Lett nd). Pike envisaged them as two perspectives by which to study a society's cultural system – just as phonetic and phonemic perspectives were two means for studying a language's system of sounds. In both cases, in Pike's formulation, it was possible to take the point of view of either the insider or the outsider. It was Marvin Harris who subsequently gave the terms emic and etic their more rigidly distinct (and familiar) connotations, summed up by James Lett (nd) in terms, respectively, of "knowledge regarded as meaningful and appropriate by

members of the *culture under study*” versus “conceptual schemes and categories that are regarded as meaningful and appropriate by the *community of scientific observers*.” (Lett nd – his emphasis). Relative to the Cartesian view of humanity’s fundamental separation from nature outlined above (after Ingold), the ‘etic’ perspective – that of observers – clearly assumes the twice removed neutral, value-free view of both the world and of culture(s) afforded by universal reason. The objectivity of etic accounts, in Harris’s formulation, was what facilitated cross-cultural comparison. By contrast, the ‘emic’ view – that of participants – represents specific cultural meanings by which people construe the physical world – their frameworks of belief, representational schemata, cognitive templates, cultural systems, cosmologies – which by the Cartesian ontology as outlined by Ingold operate at one remove from the world ‘as it really is’.

The phenomenological tradition holds that this view of the world misrepresents the way things actually are. The Cartesian model implies that “personhood as a state of being” (Ingold 2000:48), or, one could say, ‘culture’, or indeed mind, the ‘ghost in the machine’, had to be acquired at some point during human evolution as an add-on or as something superimposed (from where?). Cartesian logic, through the ascendancy of positivism and the excesses of ‘scientism’, Charles Lowney (2011) suggests, with reference to Polanyi’s critique of objectivism, could resolve the conundrum and lead indeed (in answer to the awkward ‘where from?’) to an ultimate rejection of the existence of mind. “As explanations became carried more and more by material and efficient causes,” writes Lowney of the post-World War II march of positivist science and analytical philosophy, so “mental states and thoughts became mere epiphenomena: the real wheels and springs were the chemical and physical processes.” With the human spirit banished from the body, the mind became little more than the

“ticking and clanging of parts.” Says Lowney: “meanings were lost; loves and hopes became illusions riding on hormones and endorphins” (2011:180).

The phenomenological tradition, by contrast, takes as its starting point the idea conveyed in Heidegger’s well-known phrase, “being-in-the-world.” As beings our primary condition of existence is that of dwelling or inhabiting the world; and things encountered, including our bodies, are always already integrated into our practical engagement with the world, our practices for coping or getting by. Similarly, in Merleau-Ponty’s view – having sought, like Heidegger, to reverse the ontological priorities of Cartesian rationalism – our knowledge of the body is grounded in a fundamental pre-objective and pre-conscious awareness, “given by the existential condition of our total bodily immersion, from the start, in an environment” (Ingold 2000:169).

As Ingold puts it, the world we inhabit does not confront us, it surrounds us. When encountering it we do so not as self-contained subjects confronting a domain of isolable objects which, in order to make sense of them or make them useful we must first categorise and imbue with cultural meanings or functions. Our bodies, moreover, are not mere vehicles that must at an intermediate stage be set up or charged with significance for the outward expression of meanings that emanate from an extra-somatic higher source in culture or society. Ingold suggests that “the mind and its properties are not given in advance of the individual’s entry into the social world, but are rather fashioned through a lifelong history of involvement in relationships with others” (Ingold 2000:168-171).

The concrete reality with which we should be concerned, again to echo Radcliffe-Brown, is *process* rather than *entity* – “the process of social life.”

The quest to be “true enough”

I commenced this chapter with E.H. Carr’s consideration of the metaphor of the historian’s place relative to the ‘moving procession’ of history – and his cautioning that the historian, caught up himself in the throng, should not pretend to be able to rise above or step aside and adopt an entirely objective, disengaged perspective. Much of social science, seeking its footing as science, has nevertheless made the attempt. In a climate of rising scientism, Lowney (2011) points out, reality in this view is ultimately accounted for at a basic atomic level while human meanings, as artificial constructs in a material, objective and value-free universe, would exist only in the mind. A wave of reductionism would render mind itself, in such a material context, as just another construct and hence an illusion. The post-war philosopher of science Michael Polanyi countered the rigid Cartesian dualisms that give rise to such eventualities by suggesting that knowledge is emergent and that all knowledge is founded on tacit background knowledge (Lowney 2011). Ingold’s (2000; 2007; 2011) conception suggests similarly that knowledge is continually regenerated within the context of people’s practical, active engagement in the world. That engagement, as an alternative vantage from which to characterise the world, is not necessarily tantamount to being swept along blindly with the flow.

For as Elgin (1996) shows, relativism is not the only alternative to foundationalism. There is what she suggests is a “via media between the abandoned absolutes of Cartesian epistemology and the potentially arbitrary games Wittgensteinians would have us play” (1996:100; cf. Green 2008). That via media consists in allowing propositions (these may be metaphors, perhaps even “sayings” that are “not without a certain rustic cunning”) which

in themselves are not, nor purport to be, true but which “shed light on the phenomena they concern ... and thereby contribute to our understanding of those phenomena” (Elgin 2004:128). Such propositions are “true enough” for their purpose and appropriate to context. Where Wolf (1988:760) seeks “to invent new ways of thinking about the heterogeneity and transformative nature of human arrangements, and to do so scientifically and humanistically at the same time,” the quest to be “true enough” within the constraints imposed by the evidence is probably the best we can hope for.

While we cannot stand firm on any solid foundation as we seek to expound on the rock art of the Northern Cape, at least some theoretical footholds afford us hope for some understanding.

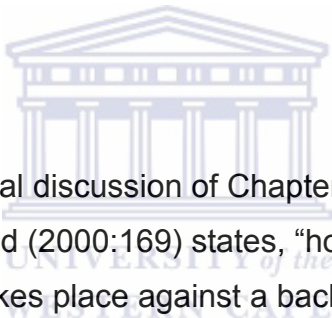


IV

Knowledge and “the vicissitudes of history”

*Even science, however detached and theoretical it may be,
takes place against a background of involved activity.*
– Tim Ingold 2000:169

Embedded activity



Relative to the theoretical discussion of Chapter III, it stands to reason that “even science,” as Ingold (2000:169) states, “however detached and theoretical it may be, takes place against a background of involved activity.” The total objective disengagement of the subject from the world is a pure fiction, he adds; a comment he makes as part of his critique of Cartesian ontology. “Involved activity” for Ingold would obviously include the social and political embedded-ness of science which has been the more focused concern of other writers interested in the intellectual contexts within which ideas have been developed. In archaeology David Clarke characterised his discipline as an adaptative system “related internally to its changing content and externally to the spirit of the times” (1979:85) – a statement which is itself very much a product of its day when social entities, here the community of archaeologists, were seen as relatively bounded and adaptive in relation to what was happening inside and outside of ‘the system’. The internalist-externalist dichotomy in the historiography of science, criticised

by Robert Young (1985:245-6), is overcome to some degree in Bruce Trigger's summing up in his wide-ranging history of archaeological thought. He suggests that while archaeological evidence acts as a constraint on interpretation and is significantly enhanced, in the history of the discipline, by advancements in archaeological method and practice, "subjective factors clearly influence the interpretation of archaeological data at every level" (1989:407). This happens despite any commitment to "neutral" science and proper procedures as advocated by the "more ardent positivists" – and may indeed function at times, he suggests, not so much as an impediment but as a creative element spurring research. Trigger (1989:410) asserts that archaeology is "neither separate from society nor a mere reflection of it." He sees it playing a role in a dialogue about the nature of humanity; a role that would be advanced by a better understanding of the relationship between archaeological practice and its social context.

I have suggested previously (Morris 2002) that implicit in this is a point made more explicitly by Keith Jenkins (1991) in the distinction he draws between 'history' and 'the past', where the present is "where all history starts from and returns to." The crux of Jenkins' argument is that "the past's hold on history is really the historian's [or the archaeologist's or anthropologist's] hold on history", because "evidence...as opposed to traces, is always the product of the historian's discourse" (1991:49-50). The one sure thing – all the more appreciated in the context of museum practice – is that 'history' is constructed *in* the present.

The timeliness of this reminder is underscored by Chris Chippindale (2000:609) in his concern over the contemporary enthusiasm for digital data manipulation, ever enhanced by advances in electronic technology. He points to a tendency "to treat the data as given things rather than to enquire after just what these given things are, just where they come from, just what

uncertainties, assumptions, classifications, and concepts their created existence depends upon.” Parkington and Smith (1986:43) made the same basic point in a different setting – hinting at some of the consequences of elaborating data uncritically – when they insisted that “archaeological facts, far from speaking for themselves, are created and marshalled consciously or subconsciously by archaeologists for a variety of purposes.” One of those purposes, the 1986 Southampton World Archaeological Congress (WAC) was suggesting (rightly or wrongly), was the bolstering of a system which was obnoxious to the world – and on account of which South African archaeologists were disinvented from the congress and the academic boycott was extended to include archaeological transactions with South Africa (Ucko 1987).

This is not the place to review the complexity of claims and counterclaims surrounding WAC’s inaugural meeting and the degrees of complicity of archaeological practice in apartheid. But it must be noted that while archaeologists of the day could not help but be socially embedded in this context (“science, since people must do it, is a socially embedded activity,” says Gould [1981:21]), many of the leading lights in South African archaeology were far from being insensitive to the political and social constraints under which they lived and worked. On the contrary, they were often “progressively engaged,” as Anthony Humphreys (2011:2) has recently indicated, and in their professional output did not shrink from pointing to the manifest contradictions between their findings and the party line – which all the while was underpinning state ideology and being hammered into young heads in history classrooms across the country. Their research “provided the tools to undermine one of the philosophical cornerstones of apartheid,” wrote Tim Maggs (1993:75). Contrary accounts to the hallowed myths enabled archaeology to continue to play its own, albeit small, “subversive part in undermining the granite wall.”

Yet to suggest that South African archaeology had been generating “underground resistance fighters” (Thurston Shaw, cited by Ucko, in Shepherd 2002:197) would certainly be overstating the case. Although by and large South African archaeologists were “openly opposed to the racial policies of the South African government” (Martin Hall, cited by Shepherd 2003:839), when the opportunity arose for taking a stand, at the 1983 meeting of the professional association in Gaborone, it turned out that “they had little taste for the explicit involvement of their discipline in the political arena.” As Shepherd has argued, archaeology occupied an ambiguous position vis-à-vis apartheid. As a discipline it was already not generally engaged with the politics of the African present when, with the advent of the ‘New Archaeology’, a narrowed, professionalised purview led to a further withdrawal: what critiques were being made, suggests Shepherd, were generally couched in the technical language and “specialist pasts” of positivist science, which posed little threat to the authoritarian state. The state for its part provided the institutional support for the discipline to grow, as part of the spectrum of scientific endeavour in South Africa (Shepherd 2003:838). The paradox ran deeper: on the one hand, archaeology worked with “politically explosive material” yet was supported by the state which the material undermined, while on the other hand it was all but overlooked by the liberation movements (Shepherd 2002). The commitment of colonial science and subsequently of the New Archaeology to objectivist agendas, suggests Shepherd, had led archaeologists, on the whole, to shrink from the view that through their own involvement in the world, their embeddedness, their knowledge was constructed; their world versions, as Goodman would have it, made, not found.

The “twin myths” of objectivity and the belief in an “inexorable march toward truth,” argues Stephen Jay Gould (1981:23), must be given up if science is to identify its cultural constraints. The argument presented here is that such constraints – and the imperatives at work – indeed have influenced the kinds of questions posed of the past (as the foregoing discussion suggests), and the types of answers that would be acceptable.

An emergent understanding of Northern Cape rock art

Hence, this chapter looks to the history of archaeological thought and the ways in which the rock art of the Northern Cape has come to be understood. As a corpus of ideas it has emerged from several generations of engagement, of observations and interpretation, mainly over the last 140 years or so. This has happened in tandem with a larger unfolding of comprehensions and expectations which, by no particularly straight, nor single path, have brought what we know of South Africa’s rock art to where it is now.

Briefly to recapitulate the introduction to the rock art given in Chapter 2, some of the earliest records of rock engravings here were the copies made by George Stow, on the Diamond Fields in the early 1870s. There had been various other early contributions and mentions of rock art, reviewed by Wilman (1933), including those by H.C. Schunke-Hollway who made tracings in the area of the Upper Karoo /Xam and whose copies Bleek and Lloyd had for a time to show to /Han#kass’o and Dia!kwain in their discussions about rock art (Bank 2006).

But the first systematic work on rock art in the Northern Cape was the book brought out by Maria Wilman in 1933, which begins with a thorough historical review of previous observations. Gerhard and Dora Fock followed

up Wilman's work in the 1960s to 1980s, documenting in detail the engravings at the major rock art sites of Bushman's Fountain (Fock 1979), Kinderdam (Fock & Fock 1984) and Driekopseiland (Fock & Fock 1989), and at several hundred other locales, including finger-painting sites, in the Northern Cape and adjoining districts (see also Butzer *et al.* 1979).

From the 1960s the analytical focus shifted from qualitative description towards establishing a quantitative definition of sites, and an empirical understanding of them within the emerging cultural and environmental history of the region (Fock 1979; Fock & Fock 1989; see also Goodwin 1936; Morris 1988; Beaumont & Vogel 1989). A stronger emphasis on interpretation has since come increasingly to the fore (e.g. Deacon 1986, 1988, 1997; Morris 1988, 1990, 2002; Dowson 1992; Hollmann & Hykkerud 2004; Rifkin 2005; Parkington *et al.* 2008).

My concern here, in light of discussion in Chapter 3, is not so much to review each of these inputs in detail but to approach two broad questions:

- Firstly, a prime concern, which I have raised previously (Morris 2002), is the bounded, primordialist conception of 'cultures' and 'ethnic' entities which have underpinned implicitly or explicitly much past discussion on rock art, particularly at sites such as Driekopseiland; together with the implications of these ideas for establishing units of study that have been adopted for the elucidation of rock art in South Africa. As will be seen, once these notions had been established, they even influenced aspects of academic division of labour (Plucienik 2001).
- Secondly, an important issue that flows from the first is the possibility of analogical reasoning. The signal role here of the Bleek and Lloyd

archive, together with the rich corpus of ethnographies, especially those of the Kalahari, and of other surviving fragments of indigenous knowledge, has given this work its strength – both in terms of generating analogies, in the first instance, and then of constraining the range of possible interpretations that might be invoked. Despite the major significance of the use of analogy, particularly in the recent history of rock art research in South Africa, its deployment has its own many pitfalls. A consideration of these will be the focus of the latter half of this chapter.

The “either-or” approach

The role of ‘culture’ and ‘ethnicity’, and indeed of ‘race’, in considerations of variability in rock art and with regard to authorship – who was responsible? – is not a new matter in South African rock art research. As soon as variability was recognised the question tended to be framed in these terms. I have noted previously (Morris 2002) that Ray Inskeep (1971) had touched on this question in a pertinent observation in his 1971 paper on “The future of rock art studies in Southern Africa.” There he referred to the hazards of an “either or” approach to the authorship issue, for “it tends to condition the mind to a narrow field of possibilities, whereas the truth may be very complex” (1971:101). The publication in which the Inskeep article appeared, the *South African Journal of Science Supplement on Rock Paintings of Southern Africa*, was, in retrospect, a rather Janus-like assemblage of papers (23 in number, selected from the 34 given at a 1969 Symposium on rock art) which marked, on the whole, a near end-of-era exhaustion of a paradigm – with many of the contributions exemplifying what Lewis-Williams (1984a) subsequently identified as the “empiricist impasse” in local rock art research. Inskeep’s concluding more future-orientated article was indeed forward-looking in identifying some key issues in a critique of trends

apparent, also touching on the role of ethnographic analogy as will be discussed below. First I address the “either or” issue, a reference to the not on the face of it unreasonable tendency – once variability is recognised – of seeking to establish cultural or ethnic affinities. But in the rather narrow terms of which Inskip was critical, this turns out to be a recurrent theme with deep roots in South African historiography.

Race, ethnicity and culture, which took central place as organizing tropes within anthropology and archaeology as these disciplines arose, were ‘given’ fields in a “literary lattice” operative in the colonial era and beyond (Humphreys 1998), in terms of which people and phenomena were typed and ordered in space and time. The long-enduring colonial distinctions between ‘Bushman’ hunter-gatherers, ‘Hottentot’ herders and ‘Bantu’ farmers – all but tabulated by Theal in terms of ranked characteristics (Theal 1919:42-46, as shown in Table 2 in Morris 2002) – may be traced back at least to the eighteenth century in the terms ‘Bushman’, ‘Hottentot’ and ‘Kafir’. The idea of some developmental or evolutionary progression between them, “from savagery to civilization ... evidently first from the hunting to the pastoralist stage” (Coleridge 1836, cited by Pluciennik 2001:743) was being expressed by the early nineteenth century, if not before. In fact, much before, Edmund Spenser warned (in this instance with reference to the Irish) that those not yet cultivating the land but who lived by “kepinge of cattel ... are both very barbarous and uncivill, and greatly given to warr” (cited by Comaroff & Comaroff 1997:124). As the Comaroffs suggest in connection with nineteenth century missionary endeavour in South Africa, “cultivation and civilization” became explicitly linked, “joined together, more often than not, in a tangled mesh of horticultural imagery, much of it biblical in origin” (ibid.:121). Mark Pluciennik (2001) goes further in pointing out how the subsistence-based categories, here made to

coincide with racial, ethnic and developmental stages, have been at the heart of much post-Enlightenment thinking and are active in the very division of intellectual labour in anthropology and archaeology. John and Jean Comaroff (1997:123) refer to the connection between evolution and cultivation finding its way into “both thesaurus and theory” (as shown by Raymond Williams), and living on “in anthropological typologies of economic systems, in historiography ... [as well as] ... in models of the modern world-system.”

In South Africa, although the terms ‘Bushman’, ‘Hottentot’ and ‘Bantu’ had been in use for some time, W.H.I. Bleek was, Andrew Bank (2000:163-4) suggests, the first “serious thinker” and “systematic theorist” to deploy them in a coherent and hierarchical way. He applied the classification primarily in a linguistic rather than a biological racial sense. While latterly he anticipated “a radical change in the ideas generally entertained with regard to the Bushmen and their mental condition” (Bleek 1875:155), remarks Saul Dubow (1995:79), it would be misleading to conclude that he had freed himself entirely from the social evolutionist preoccupations of his day.

In the Kalahari revisionist debate of the last three decades, and in the growing academic activity centred on the Bleek and Lloyd materials, these matters have been variously revisited. The range of positions taken up in archaeology and anthropology, and particularly in relation to rock art, concerning Khoe-San and Bantu-speaking farmers, through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as in the claims by the descendants of some of these groups, are relevant here. They are reflected, directly or indirectly, in the changing views on the rock engravings and paintings in South Africa, not least in the Northern Cape, and in discussions concerning particular sites, perhaps most notably Driekopseiland (Morris 2002, 2008).

The fixing of categories and stereotypes

From the end of the nineteenth century the influential historian George McCall Theal, perhaps more portentously than any other, fixed the categories that remained basic, through much of the following century, for describing and organising South African history (Saunders 1988; Smith 1988). The obvious follow-on from Theal's evolutionist account of the precolonial era (elaborated in the remaining ten volumes of his 11-volume *History of South Africa*) was the advent of European civilization – with Great Zimbabwe as a possible precursor, a 'mystery' explicable by reference, in this work, to a colonizing non-African influence (1919:410-425).

Theal's assessment of "Bushmen" was ultimately in terms of a plain dismissal – they were quite simply "pure savages" (1919:425). Although "gifted with artistic tastes," he conceded, they were nevertheless "an almost unimprovable race ... [who] had become inert and stagnant" – a condition "not sufficient to satisfy God's law of progress" (1919:19). Coming close to a retrospective justification for the genocide for which much evidence was surely to hand (e.g. Stow 1905; cf. Adhikari 2010; de Prada-Samper 2011), Theal's righteous condescension depicts a species of man teetering at the brink of extinction.

In a Spencerian sense "Bushmen" had come to occupy the lowest stage of humanity, clinging on as "living survivals of humanity's infancy" (as it was later put by Raymond Dart, cited by Dubow 1995:46, expressing an idea which itself had endured – an earlier version was given by Bleek in 1869, cited by Schoeman 1997:30-31). I have summarised elsewhere the "driving agenda" (to cite Elizabeth Dell's phrase – Legassick & Rassool 2000:3; cf.

Dubow 1995:35), and the urgent activity precipitated by the perceived decline of this – as it was increasingly considered – anthropological resource (Morris 2002). A nascent academic industry around all things “Bushman” was spurred on, especially in the wake of the 1905 meeting, in South Africa, of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. A.C. Haddon devoted a presidential address to the cause, sounding the call, that the field was large, but the opportunities fleeting. Martin Legassick and Ciraj Rassool (2001:4) suggest that it is not too far-fetched to link to that 1905 call an editorial two years later in Kimberley’s *Diamond Fields Advertiser* – on the eve of the opening of the Alexander McGregor Memorial Museum – which echoes these themes and anticipates the need, in the new museum, for a “complete set of specimens illustrating Bushman life and character, with complete plaster casts, skulls and skeletons.”

The basically evolutionist perspective that framed this discourse on “Bushmen” impacted on thinking at this time on rock engravings, renewed interest in which was clearly prompted by the same events described above. Louis Péringuey, as director of the South African Museum in Cape Town, sent a staff-member, Maria Wilman, by train to Kimberley, and on northwards, in 1906 (she was in 1908 to take up directorship of the newly opened McGregor Museum), inter alia to visit rock art sites. Her assignments included the selection of good examples of engravings for display in Cape Town (James Drury would be sent up afterwards to retrieve several that are now housed by Iziko Museums and in Kimberley). Also reported in correspondence to Péringuey, her tasks additionally included (as prelude to one of the darkest episodes in the history of museums and of anthropology in South Africa – Legassick & Rassool 2001) the identification of graves of Bushmen who had been known in life – and in one instance a

woman who had not yet died – so that skeletons reliably identified as such could be obtained.

Maria Wilman's work on the rock engravings followed into print nearly three decades later, and it reflects some of the views of a later phase of thinking about the art. But Péringuey (1906, 1909) quickly assimilated the preliminary rock art observations into a framework he was constructing for *The Stone Ages of South Africa* (Péringuey 1911, cf. Péringuey 1905) – in which he had already proposed that “two, if not three” Stone Age periods were evident, each one linked by implication with a different race (Péringuey 1905). “Bushmen and Hottentots”, associated with a “very ‘Recent Stone-age Period’”, exhibited “distinct traces of retrogression” relative to “a most powerful race” who were the makers of an earlier “Palaeolithic”. Correspondingly, Péringuey declared “conspicuous retrogression”, through time, as a defining feature in the engravings, the “better finished” examples being “*probably the most ancient*” – whereas what he called “*the decadent art*” had “*set in with the arrival of the new-comers or new races*” (Péringuey 1909:418, emphases in the original). He linked various groups with the art: in some instances Tswana (Bantu-speaking) farmers (1909:413-415); in others Bushmen; but where the art was “superior in finish and artistic merit”, as at Kinderdam near Vryburg, there was “no evidence that the Bushmen of the present time were the original authors” (1909:418). The proximity of Acheulean bifaces to these latter engravings had Péringuey concluding that the art at this site was as old as his “Palaeolithic” – a patently fallacious conclusion subsequently negated by Wilman herself (“juxtaposition of engraving and stone implement may be purely accidental,” she pointed out: it might at best ‘justify’ a hypothesis, to be tested; but it can never justify, as Péringuey insisted, “the assumption that the two must be associated”),

In line with Theal's vision, Péringuey's was of a race of Bushmen in decline. Both authors had borrowed from an idea from an earlier generation – George Stow's (1905) notion of successive waves of immigrants coming to inhabit South Africa. But while Stow (whose accounts of Northern Cape rock engraving sites is examined in more detail in Chapter 5) envisaged the Bushmen and their "remote ancestors" as being the aboriginal inhabitants, Theal was to speculate on *pre*-Bushman migrations in a fundamentally evolutionist scheme, which Péringuey's work, and that of Shrubsall (who was looking at human remains through this same prism) now appeared to support. Here indeed was hard evidence.

While Péringuey's specific readings of the evidence would soon be superseded, the idea of southward migrations by Stone Age peoples of differing racial stock, and with corresponding material culture baggage, was to be consolidated in succeeding decades. Miles Burkitt (1928), looking at the archaeological traces, envisaged a Lower Palaeolithic "trek" (1928:167) and a Neoanthropic "invasion" (1928:168), and concluded his account suggesting that: "we see the story of South Africa as a series of migrations from the north drifting slowly into the country one after the other, and, having arrived, intermixing with each other and sometimes forming new local developments" (1928:174). In geographic terms it was an "ethnological cul-de-sac", as anthropologist Isaac Schapera (1930:25) expressed it, where earlier racial stock was either replaced or hybridized. Schapera (1930:27) could even state that "the stone industries associated in South Africa with the Bushmen were not indigenous to the country, but constitute an invading element which ... superseded the two pre-existing stone cultures." In his distinctive turn of phrase, perhaps the source for Schapera's remark, John Goodwin contributed the analogy of "a pocket from which nothing tangible returns" – where "higher cultures" could "pass from north to

south and survive, but lower cultures passing from south to north are immediately subdued and assimilated...” (Goodwin & van Riet Lowe 1929:3).

Repeatedly and seriously entertained in all of these accounts is the involvement of long-distance cultural influence and actual migration, often implying agency from beyond the African continent. As primary harbinger of change – indeed of any progress – the migrationist idea had become a ‘given’, lent considerable endorsement at just this time by that doyen of the metropole, the Abbé Henri Breuil. Breuil came to South Africa in 1929 to attend the second of the British Association meetings to be held in this country and he enjoyed a tour laid on for him afterwards which was to provide much material for subsequent writing; and inducement for a later return. His notorious ‘White Lady’ speculations grew out of this extended flirtation with South African rock art. But Breuil, as already seen, was by no means the only researcher contemplating long-distance cultural influences. They were being promoted on an equally grand scale by no less a figure than Raymond Dart. Dart (1925:426), in his extraordinary ‘other’ 1925 paper, on rock art (the better-known paper of that year being that which announced *Australopithecus africanus*), argued for “unassailable evidence [in the rock art] of the impacts of ancient civilizations.” His frankly bizarre assertions were repeated in a 1959 SABC Van Riebeeck Lecture series (Dart 1959).

A continuing taste for cross-continental links is reflected at this time even in the work of C. van Riet Lowe in his thoughts on Driekopseiland (1955:769-70). His 1952 conference paper (published in 1955) was fated to become a springboard for other more extravagant speculations such as those by Lina Slack (1962) on links with Egyptian or other civilizations, and as a result is

still cited in writing at and beyond the fringes of archaeology (e.g. Hromník 1981).

The parting of the ways between what one might term 'mainstream' and 'fringe' accounts of rock engravings was signalled in the 1960s, when Slack's book on Driekopseiland received bad press in the pages of the *South African Archaeological Bulletin* (Chaplin 1962; Fock 1962) and the *South African Journal of Science* (Willcox 1965). Yet the more 'mainstream' accounts were sometimes hardly less disturbing in their perpetuation of denigrating analogies. Willcox would argue that there was a resemblance between the Driekopseiland engravings and the prerepresentational drawings of children (Willcox 1963:59), suggesting that the art was that of a people "still in the 'young child' stage of artistic development" (1964:58). In this, Willcox was not out of step with much previous work on the San as "morphological Peter Pans" (Dubow 1995; cf. Barnard 1989; Wilmsen 1995), as living fossils who, in Frobenius's (1909:132) famous phrase, represented "the last lisping utterance that reaches us from the childhood of mankind." These various stereotypes had proven remarkably resilient.

New concerns: the roles of ethnicity and culture

But the more significant archaeological arguments at sites such as Driekopseiland, I have suggested, have turned on the questions of ethnicity and culture in relation to the manifest variability that observers noted in the art.

One of the most striking examples of variance in the Northern Cape was the site of Driekopseiland with its massive preponderance of geometric engravings, few animal images and hardly any human figures, strongly

contrasted against other sites in the region, for example Wildebeest Kuil, where animal images and human figures predominate. A repeated and often persuasive response to this variability has been to invoke ethnicity as explanation; the principal debate has been, reasonably enough on the face of it, over precisely which ethnic group or Stone Age culture was responsible for which forms of engravings. Cooke (1969:100) sums up the view of several commentators with his remark that the geometric engravings at Driekopseiland bear “little or no resemblance to the true art of the Stone Age Bush people.” Ensuing discussion by Cooke hints that an evidently inferior rock art produced by racially hybrid groups could be discerned. Far from the hybridity of post-colonial discourse, this expectation seems to betray, as I have suggested before (Morris 2002), not just a committed conflation of race, ethnicity and culture: it also smacks of eugenics, that doctrine which held that the mixing of races necessarily led to degeneration or deterioration – a doctrine that deepened the political anxiety of many white South Africans through the middle decades of the twentieth century. If the earlier epics of migration and diffusion had provided comfortable pasts for those of imperial *mien*, the concerns of the 1930s-60s in some writing on rock art clearly evince those that touched some of the nerves triggering the rise of conservative nationalism.

In this period, too, one may discern a shift in approach, now no longer evolutionist in perspective, but marked by the rise of ‘culture’ as a key concept. Promoted in Stone Age archaeology by Burkitt, it was deployed throughout Anglophone Africa (Kleindienst 1967) and was later to be implicated in the terminology crisis addressed in the Burg Wattenstein and related discussions of the 1960s (Bishop & Clark 1967).

In Burkitt's (1928:3) definition, which is close to some of those constructions reviewed in Chapter III:

... culture denotes an assemblage of industries made by people of the same stock...[as well as] something more abstract that gives us an idea of the way of life and mental outlook of the people we are dealing with...it is necessary to take into account not only the various industries which occur, but also any other factor, such as art, burial customs, etc, which will help us to discover anything of the life and minds of the people.

Where an inner cohesion held sway, diffusion and "intermingling" of immigrant "stock" were still to be invoked in Goodwin's exposition, as external stimuli to account for change.

In a move towards establishing a more clearly delineated unit of study, Goodwin presents culture as meaning, in a classic summing up (Goodwin 1953:21-22; cited by Kleindienst 1967:825):

"a group of objects, techniques, ideas, words and beliefs normally associated together at a single time and in a single area";

"To the prehistorian...culture presents as closely as possible the pattern of typical tools, artefacts, paintings and engravings used by a single people at a particular period in their own area"

Trigger (1981) has traced the burgeoning application of such more mechanical conceptions of society in archaeology – coinciding with a decline in the late nineteenth century obsession with progress and evolution – and links this change in outlook to the social and economic realities of the day. Economic depression was accompanied by the realisation that the promised benefits of the industrial revolution had been less than universal.

Human nature, so it now seemed, preferred it that things remained as they were – and stability, tied by ‘social conscience’, came to be upheld as the quality most conducive to a healthy society (Trigger 1981:144). ‘Primitive’ societies’ beyond Europe, once denigrated for their inertia (Theal 1919), were now portrayed in more positive light for the workings of ‘tradition’. For anthropologists or archaeologists, this Durkheimian view of a coherent society provided a particularly defined reality with integrated and often observable parts. As exemplified in Goodwin’s usage, an adequate description of a society would be in terms of its formally distinctive customs, language, and so on, together with a type list of conventional material artefacts. In such a scheme, Binford and Sabloff (1982:141-142) have said in their critique of culture models in archaeology, “the seat of both causes and perpetuation of cultural distinctiveness is the internal, ‘collective’ characteristic of each society.”

It is precisely this conception of society, of ‘culture’, that has determined much of the debate about rock art in South Africa – framing the kinds of questions that would be asked. The variability between contrasting sites and rock art regions and between styles (regional or temporal) that were discerned came to be translated – by this logic – into cultural differences which acted simultaneously as both cause and result. I have argued previously that this approach had closed off opportunities for asking different sorts of questions which, in the case of Driekopseiland, included questions about the site’s singular landscape setting about which, arguably, relevant insights were not lacking in the published ethnography, and some of it available as early as the 1870s.

John Goodwin and C. van Riet Lowe (1929) provided the first systematic archaeological account of “The Stone Age Cultures of South Africa”, which

was published in the *Annals of the South African Museum* in 1929. It had followed a concerted empirical effort through the previous half decade to re-assess the country's Stone Age succession. Although some of the basic terminology of their resultant cultural-stratigraphic model still holds good, the theoretical underpinning has long since been rejected (Deacon 1990:43; Deacon & Deacon 1999:5-6). The idea that migration, of "people approaching from the north", was the primary stimulus for cultural change, for example, was duly jettisoned, as were the determining environmental factors represented by "desert barriers and mountain masses" (Goodwin & van Riet Lowe 1929:4).

The specific conclusions reached concerning rock art have also not endured, although the suggestion that the "Later Stone Age folk were ... the artist race of South Africa and physically can be regarded as belonging to the 'San' or so-called Bushman race" (1929:6-7) would be regarded as being on the right track, at least for a large proportion of the rock art – although today it would be expressed differently.

Within the Later Stone Age, Goodwin and van Riet Lowe derived cultural entities based on characteristic stone artefacts ordered into types, and associated types grouped into industries – on the basis of which spatio-temporal classes called Wilton (coastal and adjacent) and Smithfield 'A', 'B' and 'C' (occurring essentially in the interior) were defined. As regards rock art, their findings indicated that the Smithfield 'A' and 'B' industries were "now definitely associable with the rock engravings of the dolerite areas," while Smithfield 'C' and Wilton were "as definitely associable with the cave paintings of the Union" (1929:6-7). In effect Goodwin and van Riet Lowe had assigned archaeological identities to each of George Stow's 'sculptor' and 'painter' tribes making up Bushman society. The possibility that the

engravings belonged to a “more primitive and earlier period” than the paintings was retained at least provisionally (Goodwin & van Riet Lowe 1929:175; cf. Schapera 1925). Goodwin subsequently undertook focused research at Keurfontein near Vosburg in the Karoo to attempt constructing a more secure chronology for the engravings there (discussed in more detail in Chapter V).

Maria Wilman first visited some of the engraving sites of the Northern Cape in 1906, as noted above, and provided information which Péringuey (1906, 1909) included soon afterwards in his papers on this art. She herself continued amassing data, including tracings, rubbings and photographs, after taking up the position as director of the McGregor Museum and only much later, in 1933, brought out her book *The rock-engravings of Griqualand West and British Bechuanaland, South Africa*. Included in her text, as Parkington *et al.* (2008) have noted, are careful descriptions of engraving technique, part of an attempt, like that of Goodwin, to establish a stylistic sequence. But one of the more remarkable features of Wilman’s book, in relation to the present discussion, was her preparedness to question or depart from certain of the key formulae and conventional ideas current in her day.

Starting out from a comprehensive overview of the existing literature on the rock art of the area – as background to her own observations – Wilman engages and comments on, *inter alia*, the issues of variability and cultural affinity that are the concern in this study.

Wilman approaches the matter of variability – as had George Stow – by reviewing, firstly, the distribution of rock engravings relative to paintings, and, importantly, relative to areas where neither paintings nor engravings

were to be found. Granting Stow the benefit of not having revised his manuscript for (posthumous) publication, and expressing confidence in his sources (Wilman 1933:58), she nevertheless criticises Stow for “dividing the Bushmen into two branches according to their artistic talents (and incidentally in ignoring those devoid of them).” Where some engraving styles appeared to be earlier and others later, she is reluctant to ascribe the different discernable styles to different races (as had been the convention for Péringuey, and in which Goodwin and van Riet Lowe were clearly willing to follow). Instead, in her experience, the different subsets “tended to merge into each other.” She expresses the view that there was “a certain unity” in the engravings, “in spite of differences in the details and in the quality of the work” (1933:59). She also disagrees with Stow about the existence of “a small clan of painters” mapped into the engraving area to explain the occurrence of finger paintings at sites such as Wonderwerk Cave and numerous shelters in the scarps and hills of the Northern Cape. Rather, Wilman proposes (1933: 59-60) that:

“we are inclined to think - though we cannot of course prove this contention - that the engravings, using the work in the widest significance of the term, were the work of one and the same tribe who, while specialising in this form of art, nevertheless occasionally daubed their walls with paint in the form of animals and scribbings. That these people were the Bushmen who formerly were in possession of much of this area, and whose scattered remnants may still be found in Griqualand West and Bechuanaland, seems extremely likely.”

Wilman speculated further, with reference to work by Dorothea Bleek, that the ||n-!k’e or ‘home people’, known to have occupied areas north of the Orange River, were the particular group responsible for the art in the areas surveyed in her work. Towards the end of her book, Maria Wilman goes so far as to pose the “probability of the engraving practice having developed *in*

South Africa, among certain Bushman tribes” (1933:66, her emphasis). This was a matter, she suggests, for future investigation, but in entertaining it she effectively challenged the assumptions of a strongly prevailing diffusionist orthodoxy – still very much in its heyday.¹⁰

From Wilman’s work a number of important ideas emerge. She seems to have been sensing that some of the conventional discriminations and explanations as to how the rock art had come to vary the way it does had not been appropriate. In the phrasing of her objections and the conclusions she was tentatively drawing she hints at a degree of complexity which the more normative conclusions of most other writers of her day would not admit. She would no doubt have approved of Ray Inskeep’s caution about the narrowing of options: that the expectation that the various manifestations of rock art would be either one thing or another in terms of cultural and/or ethnic affinity could indeed be masking a more complex scenario.

A hundred years after *Specimens*

In 2011 the centenary of the publication of *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* (Bleek & Lloyd 1911) was marked by a conference in Cape Town. Relevant to the occasion and the themes of the conference, which looked inter alia at how the /Xam and other KhoeSan oral and ethnographic sources have

¹⁰ At the 1929 meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Wilman was on the programme to deliver a lecture on *Bushman rock engravings*. This was the meeting at which Gertrude Caton-Thompson was to debunk another of the great myths, having come at the behest of the British Association to help solve, as the cliché had it, “the riddle” of Great Zimbabwe. The results of her excavations were to be announced at the conference. The *Diamond Fields Advertiser* in Kimberley reassured local readers, initially, that “it could be taken for certain that the ruins owed nothing to native tribes” (DFA 27 Jul 1929:9), only subsequently having to report at length on Caton-Thompson’s bombshell of a conclusion, given in the following week, that here was a “vigorous native civilisation unsuspected by all but a few students, showing national organisation of a high kind, originality and amazing industry” (DFA 3 Aug 1929:9). “With some heat”, it was reported, Dart lashed out at the lack of debate allowed on what were clearly, in his view, unacceptable findings (Morris 2006b).

(relatively lately) been drawn upon in relation to rock art, I once again highlighted a remark from Ray Inskeep's forty-year-old paper on future directions for rock art, as he saw them then (Inskeep 1971). Some workers in the field were citing the Bleek and Lloyd (1911) material, and ethnographic data were currently being amassed intensively in the Kalahari. It was a time, Inskeep could possibly see, when rock art research in South Africa was poised to enter a new era vis-à-vis the use of these various materials. Recognising an opportunity, Inskeep also foresaw dangers and pitfalls. He called for "a very careful appraisal of the ethnography of the surviving hunter-gatherers, of their storytelling and mythology, as well as that recorded by earlier workers." He anticipated that from such an appraisal might spring "suggestions leading to a more intelligent view of the art." "But let it be clear," he added in a famous rider, "this is no game of ethnological 'snap' to provide quick and easy answers" (Inskeep 1971:104).

Inskeep makes mention of Patricia Vinnicombe's work which had not as yet been published. When it did appear, as *People of the Eland* (Vinnicombe 1976), soon followed by David Lewis-Williams's *Believing and seeing* (1981), these landmark studies brought Bleek and Lloyd's *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* and the materials of the Bleek and Lloyd archive to a position of signal relevance for rock art interpretation – a relevance probably far greater than Inskeep might have anticipated. It is a telling fact that of the 23 papers in the 1971 collection, only three even cited *Specimens of Bushman Folklore*. And one of the most remarkable omissions in the various deliberations over rock art recounted in the pages above, including Wilman's work and that of Goodwin who visited the Karoo engraving site of Keurfontein outside Vosburg in 1926 and published a paper on it a decade later (Goodwin 1936), is the lack of any but a passing reference to the archive and published versions of /Xam oral literature amassed by Wilhelm

Bleek and Lucy Lloyd in the 1870s and 1880s. This despite Wilman having been a personal friend of Bleek's daughter, Dorothea Bleek – they journeyed to the Kalahari together in 1911 conducting fieldwork amongst the Naron (Deacon 1987) – and Goodwin having been a colleague of Dorothea Bleek who was publishing the *Bantu Studies* series of articles on material from the Bleek and Lloyd archive at the very time that he was writing about Vosburg (Parkington *et al.* 2008). This disconnect between writing about rock art and the voices that most clearly might have informed such writing could not have been more extreme. It reflects the particular stance which archaeologists such as Goodwin adopted, almost completely eschewing any attempt to understand the meaning of the art (Parkington *et al.* 2008). Wilman makes one passing reference to the Bleek archive (citing an extract in a footnote) to suggest that “there would therefore seem to be more in some of these compositions than meets the eye” (1933:64). But she cautions against ideas such as these being “pushed too far” and of reading ideas into minds “which never existed there.”

It thus remained for a rediscovery of the archive much later in the century. Once the connection had been made, Inskeep's anticipation of a more intelligent view of the art has been more than fulfilled: it has generated a great deal of scholarly deliberation, with publications in books and journals securing for rock art research a position centre-stage in the archaeological profession. It has had ramifications well beyond the sphere just of South African rock art (e.g. Lewis-Williams & Clottes 1998; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2005), also influencing directions of research in other areas of South African archaeology (Mitchell 2002).

As importantly, Inskeep was right that there are no quick and easy answers in use of these materials in rock art research; that we are indeed dealing

with no mere game of ethnological snap. The paradigm-shifting insights and analogies drawn from literature such as the Bleek and Lloyd materials, which have been taken to be pertinent to the interpretation of rock art over the last four decades, has in turn come in for re-appraisal and critique in light of quests to comprehend better the histories and the nature of the materials themselves (Bank 2006; Wessels 2010).

In some quarters pessimism comes to be expressed about whether these recent sources and the various subsequent ethnographies and living traditions *could* have anything to say about the past, such that the temptation to use the materials for “evidence about earlier phases of human history” becomes a temptation to be resisted (Wessels 2010:311). In archaeology, and material culture studies more broadly, epistemological anxieties about the use of analogy have spurred an increasing focus on the archaeologies of the contemporary past which tend to factor out the challenges and difficulties of analogical reasoning (Buchli 2007; cf. Lane 2005).

But of course history *is* made in the present, as noted above, its evidence constructed, a product of the historian’s or the archaeologist’s discourse. As praxis, archaeology cannot avoid being contemporary. The crucial distinction, we might be reminded (Jenkins 1991), is between *evidence* as opposed to *traces* and hence between *history* and *the past*. With this in mind, archaeologists have dared and continue to dare to investigate the past, to apprehend the traces and venture some considered thoughts about how things were in the past. And in this quest they have drawn insights from recent or near recent voices, sources or models – as threads to lay alongside other clues for understanding and interpreting the past. In some cases these might be the voices of people like the /Xam who “lived at least

part of their lives in pre-agricultural, pre-literate times” (Lewis-Williams & Challis 2011:7) – voices sometimes speaking in their own languages rather than in western translation. These are voices that come to us on rare occasions, as David Lewis-Williams and Sam Challis put it in a recent statement, through a chink in the wall of time. Lewis-Williams and Challis (2011:7-10; 108-109) refer to “three registers” – of rock paintings and engravings, in the first instance; the nineteenth century phonetic renditions of /Xam texts and twentieth century Kalahari ethnographies, in the second; and, thirdly, the English transliterations of these – which they liken to the three parallel texts of the Rosetta Stone, here for “deciphering ancient minds.”

Analogy

The form of argument upon which this decipherment hinges is analogy. And analogy, in one way or another, as ethnographic analogy, ‘direct historical approach’, or experimental archaeology, constitutes one of archaeology’s principal epistemological tools (Stiles 1977; Wobst 1978; Wylie 1989; Sadr 2002; Lane 2005). As Ian Hodder (1982:9) once put it, in his book *The present past*, “all archaeology is based on analogy.” Essentially, it is a form of inductive reasoning which involves transfer of secure knowledge from a well understood context or ‘source of analogy’, often in or close to the present, to another similar past context which is only partly known, the ‘subject of analogy’. “Similar cultural conditions may produce similar cultural phenomena” was a principle that supported this procedure (Curwen cited by Lane 2005:26). Putative ethnographic parallels, ethnoarchaeology and experimental archaeology are the most common sources for analogies in archaeology. They are exemplified by projections into the past from relevant archival and anthropological accounts, as in much work using Khoe-San

material as source; and by approaches such as Binford's (1972) development of Middle Range Theory and related strategies that construct models through present-day ethnoarchaeological or experimental observations in order to understand the patterns in traces from the past, both in terms of formation processes and the relationships between material and non-material elements of culture (Hodder 1982; Lane 2005).

In a sense it was the potential of analogy (as ethnographic parallel) which had turned a western gaze on matters Khoe-San from a relatively early date in South Africa. But, unlike recent work such as that which seeks to elucidate Khoe-San history by the clues and the glimpses through chinks in time's wall that analogy can afford, the early work sought to illuminate the phases of the universal human story that, while obscured elsewhere, 'survived' in the physical presence, culture and way of life of "Bushmen" – in their role as "living fossils".

None other than Wilhelm Bleek (cited by Schoeman 1997:30-31) anticipated this potential when he wrote, in 1869:

"It is to me a wonder that in our times, when so much diligent application is bestowed upon the mute remains of those races who lived in the so-called prehistoric age, the living nations in which the mind and character of probably still older times have to so great an extent been preserved should receive such scanty attention."

Before long this idea, of assembling contemporary observations to interpret ancient remains, with "Bushmen" as *the* living exemplars of past stages of human life and culture, was to give South Africa – in its anthropological opportunities, but also in its rock art and archaeology – its particular appeal for metropolitan and local scholars. Henry Balfour (1930) would touch on

this theme in his presidential address to the Anthropology Section during the 1929 British Association meeting in South Africa, when he explicitly promoted the opportunity before members to study “living races and peoples whose progress has been arrested or retarded, and who have persisted in a condition of more or less backward culture”: these peoples of “the living Stone-age,” he stated, “may go far towards illuminating the obscurities of the ancient Stone-ages” (1930:153).

Commenting on the nature of the evidence, Miles Burkitt (1928:174), had just previously declared that “the whole country, although the cradle for a number of autochthonous growths, is in its broad aspects one gigantic, wonderfully stocked, museum of the past.” Breuil commented in much the same vein in his *Autobiographie* when suggesting, albeit in more general terms, that “the old country of South Africa” had “managed to keep” various evolutionary forms “which have elsewhere been extinct for thousands of years!” (*Autobiographie* 25 Aug 1929). Breuil’s presentation at the British Association meeting in Cape Town focused on “a real relationship between the paintings of Eastern Spain and those of South Africa” where “the newest of the latter” represented “the prolongation of our European Palaeolithic art through thousands of years down to the most recent times” (Breuil 1930:151; cf. Schapera 1925). For most scholars, as intimated above, the endeavour was, from the outset, already about the *universal* human story. In South African rock art studies, right up to the 1990s, Willcox persistently linked “Palaeolithic man” in this way with “his modern representative the Bushman” (cited by Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1994:205) – although this view by then was not one that professional archaeology would have endorsed.

Archaeologists working in Africa became a great deal more circumspect and locally focused, however, by drawing analogies from the material culture and practices of local inhabitants in their research area, comments Lane (2005) – as they sought to restrict the selection of analogies to situations of assumed continuity. This more considered and particularistic “historical method” of analogy, for working backwards from the ‘ethnographic present’ in a given region, had been pioneered by Franz Boas and others in North America and Australia. Referred to as the “direct historical approach”, it was consolidated by Steward in the 1940s; and although clearly inductivist, and as such repeatedly critiqued, there has been substantial acceptance in archaeology for “judicious” use of ethnographic analogy (Stiles 1977). Where inadequacies in much of the existing ethnographic material for archaeological use was recognised, moreover, new archaeologically-orientated documentation endeavours were embarked upon for building up data relevant to modelling taphonomy or site formation processes, from contemporary settings, as well as to track the ways in which intangible aspects of culture translate into material traces and the relations pertaining to these processes (Lane 2005).

Not the least of these ethnographic projects with an archaeological angle was the Harvard Kalahari Expedition, which together with various related studies, from the 1960s, sought explicitly to identify and research isolated foragers, inter alia as exemplars of the “way of life that was, until 10 000 years ago, a human universal” (Lee 1979; Howell 1988 cited by Schrire 1990 and Wilmsen 1990; Kent 1992). It was a research focus and objective that would be strongly criticised by the Kalahari revisionists (Schrire 1984; Wilmsen 1990; Shott 1992; Kent 1992), who raised questions about the history and the regional and wider contexts of the people being studied, and about the epistemological positioning of the research itself.

Extending the critique to the wider Southern African context, the implications for archaeology were clear: much of the ethnography routinely used by archaeologists had been drawn through a mesh which recognised primordial ethnic groups, typically viewed as being isolated in an artificial ‘ethnographic present’ (Humphreys 1998; cf. Sharp 1980; 1981; Hall 1999). It was an “awkward reliance”, as Martin Hall (1999:60) put it, on an “inappropriate” body of observations.

Important applications of the direct historical method in Southern African archaeology have included the ethnographic approach to rock art. Another is the model known as the Central Cattle Pattern, developed to infer aspects of social organisation, ideology and worldview in Iron Age studies. As related approaches, they have certain features in common.

In rock art research, a key concept was invoked to bring together the Bleek and Lloyd materials, fragments offering crucial insights from the south eastern mountains, and the emerging Kalahari ethnographies (variable regionally, temporally and across language boundaries). The idea of a “pan-San” cognitive system (originally conceived by McCall 1970; Lewis-Williams & Bieseke 1978:130; cf. Lewis-Williams 1980, 1981; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1994) permitted this and provided for the deployment of these sources as a unitary corpus relevant to the rock art of the sub-continent. Striking “structural equivalences” across the different sources led to their acceptance, “with confidence” (Lewis-Williams 1984a:229), as part of the canon of usable material for this work. In terms of content narrative, detail differed, yet obscure aspects of the older /Xam material and that from the Maloti Mountains, it was found, became clearer by reference to the Kalahari material.

Providing the all-important link to the rock art was the recognition of key metaphors in remarks made by Qing and Dia!kwain concerning J.M. Orpen's copies of rock paintings which had been shown to them in the 1870s. In addition, the iconographic emphasis given to eland in the rock art over much of South Africa seemed to correspond with its prominent symbolic position relative to a range of widely practised rites mentioned in the ethnography – boys' first-kill, girls' puberty, marriage, and in rain-making. David Lewis-Williams held that, on this basis, the combined ethnographic sources could be used, in direct historical fashion, "to provide a cognitive dimension to the final stages of the southern African Later Stone Age in a way hitherto thought impossible" (1980:479).

As the reach of this procedure grew more tenuous "over millennia" (Lewis-Williams 1984a:229), so a structuralist understanding of the pan-San cognitive system was articulated, which drew on the structural-marxist theory of Friedman and Godelier. The new understanding allowed for extrapolation of ethnographic insights far further into the past – as long as it could be shown that the relations of production – tied in this formulation to San kinship and rituals – remained unchanged. Since this condition was satisfied for the duration of the South African Later Stone Age, it was asserted, there was "no reason to suppose changes in ideology" (Lewis-Williams 1984a:234), but instead to admit a conceptual unity in the rock art. This understanding embraced the 26 000 year-old Apollo 11 painted stones, and cross-cut or lay beneath variable content in rock paintings and engravings through their differing regional emphases. This ideological continuity spanned and was "compatible with diverse environments" (1984a:233).

The model of a Central Cattle Pattern in Iron Age studies (Huffman 1993, 2010) was developed along similar lines, being deployed in direct historical fashion and having a significant structuralist aspect. A criticism of these models has been their tendency towards ahistoricist projection of an 'ethnographic present' into the past (e.g. Mazel 1989; Hall 1987; 2000; Solomon 1999:52; Badenhorst 2009 – but see Huffman 2010). Aron Mazel (1989) notes of the structural-marxist theory of Godelier and Friedman that it tends to periodise history in terms of static 'characterisations' that do not account for the way such entities come into existence or undergo change. In following Godelier, Lewis-Williams had reduced social relations to kinship structure – in which there appeared to be continuity spanning the entire Later Stone Age, whereas it was possible that other features of the relations of production in the hunter-gatherer past might have altered to result in ideological shifts. Mazel (1989:35) suggested that "while not wanting to create the impression of a static hunter-gatherer past, Lewis-Williams has done just that."



In structuralist analyses, moreover, there is a danger that the cognitive templates, worldviews or mindsets that inform the structures may – and often do – result in precisely the kinds of culture-boundedness referred to in Chapter 3, that verge on reifications not unlike those in Durkheimian, functionalist culture models (Bloch 1977). And just as for Huffman cultural signature, language and worldview form a package (2001:21, 30), so for Lewis-Williams there was – at least initially – an acceptance of that construct termed the "pan-San cognitive system". David Lewis-Williams and Thomas Dowson (1994:207; cf. Lewis-Williams 1998) subsequently retreated from defending this phrase, questioning the usefulness of considering, as a 'system', the "commonalities" in beliefs and rituals in the ethnography, and doubting indeed the legitimacy of the term 'pan-San': the

citing of common beliefs “obscured regional and temporal complexity” and it “tended to separate Bushmen too rigidly from their Bantu-speaking and Khoekhoe neighbours.” Still more recently it was argued that “some beliefs are pan-southern African in that they are held by people other than the San”, while the word ‘system’ implied “too great a coherence, a fixed ‘package deal’”. The fit between the ethnographies themselves, and between the ethnographies and the art, remained demonstrable; but it could be questioned “how far, geographically and temporally, this fit extends” (1998:86-87). Since then, however, and mainly through other writers (e.g. Smith & Ouzman 2004), a stronger sense has arisen of there being quite distinct traditions of rock art additional to San rock art, namely a Khoekhoe rock art and a rock art of Bantu-speakers, which are less prolific and not as widely spread (Lewis-Williams & Challis 2011:42). The idea of San art thus prevails and, with it, a pan-San cognitive system or symbolic system is tacitly sustained. In situations of interaction processes of creolisation are posited, as in Challis’s (2009) recent work, where Homi Bhabha’s conception of hybridity has relevance. In Bhabha’s view, however all cultures are hybrid, and the introduction of this notion has implications for the separate traditions that become party to moments of creolisation.

As far as approaching San rock art is concerned, the most recent work (Lewis-Williams & Challis 2011:108-109) cements the idea of there being three registers as in a ‘Rosetta Stone’¹¹ which must be interrelated and deciphered: San rock paintings (and engravings); San language statements; and Western language translations of San texts. These are not to be seen as stages in a developing sequence of understanding but as requiring to be mutually involved in the interpretation of rock art, together with subsidiary

¹¹ Allusions to the ‘Rosetta Stone’ had earlier been made with reference to the paintings at Game Pass Shelter (e.g. in ASAPA website) as well as to the Bleek and Lloyd notebooks when they were nominated for UNESCO Memory of the World inscription in 1997.

knowledge for instance of animal behaviour, and neuropsychology which gives insight into how people, universally, experience altered states of consciousness.

An important criticism of the use of analogy in rock art research arises from the interrogation, by Andrew Bank (2006) and Michael Wessels (2010), of the particular circumstances surrounding the gathering of the /Xam narratives that make up the Bleek and Lloyd archive. Wessels cites Spivak's critique of the notion that any one individual voice could be set up as "an authentic ethnic fully representative of his or her tradition" (Spivak 1999:60, cited by Wessels 2010:43). Such a move would ignore the fact, underscored in the previous Chapter, as in this one, that "an ethnicity untroubled by the vicissitudes of history and neatly accessible as an object of investigation is a confection." Bank (2006) shows how each voice amongst the /Xam informants was distinctive – as indeed were the unique, historically contingent performance contexts in which the narratives were taken down. In response, Lewis-Williams and Challis (2011:108) acknowledge that "no informant is omniscient" and that "San statements about beliefs and rituals must ... be seen in context every bit as much as San rock art images." They suggest nevertheless that continuities and differences for constructing flexible understandings to fit local contexts can be discerned by "moving back and forth between many statements" (2011:108). Bank, however, questions the confidence which researchers have put in the statements the informants made concerning rock art when in reality their comments on the copies of rock paintings shown to them suggest that "their understanding of these pictures was often far from clear" – having, with few exceptions, little to do with religion or shamanism (Bank 2006:338-339). It might be observed also that the rather varied explanations given for copies of rock art at the time are mirrored a century later in the idiosyncratic remarks recorded by

Wilmsen (1986) from his interviews with Zu/’hoasi men in the 1980s, and still more recently the different views expressed by #Khomani craft-workers who visited Biesje Poort rock engraving sites with researchers in March 2011 (e.g. Org 2011 and other articles in the Autumn 2011 issue of *Subtext* - CCMS, UKZN). To the extent that anyone expected anything more than a disappointing disconnection in the latter instances results from the misunderstanding (as Lewis-Williams & Challis 2011:11-12 explain) that people somewhat distant in geography and time, as also from the actual practice of making rock art, would have anything clear to say about its meaning – or indeed any other aspect of it. This is not to deny that there may be significant continuities in belief and ritual in some instances.

Complicating the present, the old stereotypes have often been internalised or articulated ‘from below’, in struggles over ‘authenticity’ and access to, or control over, limited resources and indeed meanings (Waldman 1996; 2007; Robins 2001; Engelbrecht 2002; Morris 2008; Schoeman & Pikirayi 2011) – including the meanings of rock art and of specific places such as Wildebeest Kuil (!Xun and Khwe Elders 2009). These instances also demonstrate how in certain historical conditions and contingent moments ethnicity *is* mobilized, when people in groups do actively shape, and *reshape*, cultural repertoires and identities in processes including strategic essentialism where cultural identities can have “emancipatory potential” (Robins 1996:342; 2001) and where contacts with neighbours are “managed and negotiated shrewdly” to best advantage (Guenther 1999:134-5).

Approaches to culture and ethnicity, and the identity construction implied by these terms, need to recognise that such *processes* (not entities) are, by their nature, not “untroubled by the vicissitudes of history”, being indeed dynamic, negotiated, contested – above all, situated. They are not likely to

conform to essentialising tropes *a priori*, present as distinct entities “neatly accessible as an object of investigation” – self-contained, self-regulating, bundled and/or unchanging. In this context one might recall Martin Wobst’s (1978:303-304) warning of the “tyranny of the ethnographic record,” through which “spatial variability is reduced, pattern and homogeneity are artificially produced or exaggerated, and ‘cultures’ and ‘societies’ are created.” Many commentators have referred to the problems of forfeiting time in the backward projection of such constructs, as analogies, which have been known to compress the past into “a mirror image of the ethnographic present” (Meltzer 1983, cited in Schrire 1984). As Parkington (1984b:172) similarly suggested when questioning the repeated deferral to the Kalahari ethnography, “until we expect that things were different, we will always discover that they were the same.” The call to “de-!Kung” our analogies about the Later Stone Age in South Africa has been made more recently by Anthony Humphreys (2007; 2009), who points out that the Kalahari groups, reflecting the more complex social environment that has developed post-2000 BP, can be viewed as ‘aberrant’ relative to the hunter-gatherer condition of the pre-2000 BP period. They do not therefore constitute an appropriate source for analogues to make sense of the Later Stone Age or, in the case of the Type R settlements along the Riet River, he suggests, its local derivatives.

Fredrik Fahlander (2004), in his discussion of analogies in twenty-first century archaeology, cites Edmund Leach’s (1989 cited by Fahlander 2004) comment that “traditional culture is simply not available for inspection and has never been.” The remark is made in the context of recognising “outside influence” on a group but it could as well be phrased in terms of “the vicissitudes of history.” It neatly sums up the twin problems that have been the major threads of this Chapter: the difficulties that flow from the adoption

of conceptions of society and culture that are homogeneous and bounded; and the pitfalls of analogical reasoning that, without due rigour, may simply replicate such entities into the more or less deep past, forfeiting time and the possibility of change. In rock art studies in particular the lack of an adequate handle on age, as a key dimension for assessing and understanding change, is a continuing obstacle to progress. In its absence, structuralist and cognitivist analogies and metaphors (e.g. Loubser 2010) – at worst driven by a sense of ulterior structure “of which men are not the makers but the vectors” (Thompson 1978:46) – stand in, persuasively.



V

Encountering rock art in the landscapes of the Northern Cape

Attempts to carve up this area into rock art 'zones' or 'regions' while ignoring the vertical time dimension, distort the reality of dynamic traditions.

'Hermeneutic exegesis' by insiders (Vansina 1984:109-110) – like the late nineteenth century /Xam ethnography—is time-specific too; and ahistoricist extrapolation is an ever-present danger in the study of an art which for by far the greatest part of its existence lacks any such exegesis.

It might further be noted that particular expressions in art and ritual can undergo considerable change in context, meaning and implication and yet retain the same basic 'outward and visible' forms; and vice versa (Vansina 1984; Bloch 1986).

– D. Morris 1988.

I commence this Chapter by referring to three related thoughts with which I had concluded a review of variability in the rock art of the Northern Cape that was published just over two decades ago under the title “Engraved in place and time” (Morris 1988). These concluding statements which, I suggest, hold true today, echo some of the principal issues discussed in Chapter IV and they serve as a challenge now as much as they did at that time. There is now a greater consensus and sense of urgency than ever

about the need for a better *temporal* understanding of rock art. As a concern this is no longer limited to the 'misgivings' of 'incorrigible chronophiles' (cf. Smith 2010). Two recent studies report data that may significantly change previously accepted views about rock paintings in the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg in KwaZulu-Natal (Mazel 2009) and in the Drakensberg of the Eastern Cape (Bonneau *et al.* 2011). In the latter instance paintings generally thought to have been made in the last 200 years *may* instead correlate with specific images now directly dated (on pigment on flakes spalling off the painted panel) to between 2120 and 1890 cal BP. The authors comment that the new dates "have the potential to dramatically alter understandings of the historical processes that led to the making of the paintings" (Bonneau *et al.* 2011:427). The former study (Mazel 2009) pushes back to a similar period the age of the shaded polychromes of the uKhahlamba Mountains, with similarly significant implications for writing hunter-gatherer history in the south eastern mountains.

Dating of the rock engravings remains very largely the challenge that it was at the time of writing the cited 1988 review (even in the case of paintings the study reported by Bonneau *et al.* is only the second project to produce *direct* dates on pigment in South Africa, the previous instance having been that of van der Merwe *et al.* 1987). Thembi Russell (2000:61) has summed up the general situation graphically in suggesting that in the absence of a relevant chronology nearly the entire corpus of rock art is effectively consigned to the same status as a heap of unprovenanced artefacts. In their "flat manifestation" (Humphreys 1971), with a few exceptions where clues to the age of the engravings begin to emerge (Butzer *et al.* 1979; Morris 1988; Beaumont & Vogel 1989; Morris & Beaumont 1994), the rock art on the interior plains has yet to be separated out through time so that we may proceed with any confidence beyond a "pre-stratigraphic" stage.

The dating issue has relevance for the other two points made in the 1988 review: that the late nineteenth century Bleek and Lloyd materials, the twentieth century Kalahari ethnographies and other fragments of indigenous insight (e.g. Van Vreden 1955; Hoff 1993, 1995, 1997, 1998, 2011; Morris 2002; Lange *et al.* 2008) are time-specific (Bank 2006) and that ahistoricist extrapolation – especially now, towards greater-than-expected time-depths – is an ever-present danger; indeed, in Wessels' (2010:311) consideration, a temptation to be resisted. Such qualms do not arise quite so acutely, as Anne Solomon (2011a) suggests, if one accepts the assumptions inherent in the application of analogy in direct historical fashion. The idea of a pan-San cognitive system, tacitly accepted behind a three-register 'Rosetta Stone' approach, presupposing a shared San rock art tradition, renders such analogies valid. By its further coupling with the neuropsychological model, which holds that certain forms or aspects of rock art image-making are hard-wired, that is physiologically determined, still further down-plays the possible margins for change, and hence ever-sustains the validity of backward-projections from structural mind-sets extrapolated from recent ethnographies. Given the kind of time-depth in question, and given that there are studies (at the time I had cited Bloch 1986) of art and ritual performances which demonstrate change in context, meaning and implication while yet retaining the same basic 'outward and visible' forms – and vice versa – one must surely worry over how far and in what ways and contexts one pushes the analogies.

Benjamin Smith (2010) reviews these issues and difficulties in light of the quest for San history that was debated in the pages of *Antiquity*, sparked initially by Aron Mazel's (1992, 1993) challenge that draws on archaeological findings in writing about the San past, and Thomas

Dowson's (1993) riposte calling for an insider approach that would go beyond an emphasis on chronology. Smith concludes that ultimately it is not Dowson's hope for a theoretically-informed insider solution but Mazel's call for the use of multiple sources – including local oral histories, available archival sources, and local archaeological data, together with rock art, dated when this is possible – that “seems most pertinent today” (2010:356). In light of recent research, particularly that of Blundell, Mallon and Challis, Smith suggests specifically that the “historical and archaeological sources that Dowson denounced have, in hindsight, provided the basis for the most tangible advances made” (2010:356).

In the landscape

While I shall return to the matter of dating, the insecurity of our temporal frameworks (a problem in rock art research worldwide) is compensated for by security of place, comment Christopher Chippendale and George Nash (2004:7). And historically it has been through the spatial perspective – indeed the flat manifestation – that researchers initially have approached the phenomenon of variability and the research questions that spring from it.

It is perhaps relevant to commence a consideration of variability at the sort of general level that some of the first commentators noticed, and then to review different scales and the temporal dynamics as one works towards defining more closely what it is that varies. Such definition is a necessary step, but it is as well to be mindful, with Ray Inskeep, that learning *about* the art – which in Inskeep's view had been the sum of most work up to the end of the 1960s – is not in itself a sufficient end: one should also learn *from* it (Inskeep 1971:101). Beyond knowing *that* phenomena vary, one would wish to understand in what ways the variables are relevant or have meaning. The

one research focus reveals something which the other might notice only marginally, yet both are necessary. Like a gestalt switch, suggests Michael Polanyi on ways of knowing, “particulars can be noticed in two different ways:” we can notice them “*subsidiarily in terms of their participation in a whole*” or we can “be aware of the particulars *focally*” (Polanyi 1969:128 cited by Lowney 2011). By shifting attention to the parts, the joint significance of the whole is disrupted whereas in directing attention to the whole, the parts recede into a tacit dimension. Polanyi held that there is always a tacit dimension to knowledge, a factor not just of the complexity of the phenomena being investigated but because it is a feature of the way we know; indeed also a feature, as Polanyi believed, of reality itself. Some of the tacit understandings in our approaches to rock art, indeed even in the conception of “variability” (Solomon 2011a), are consequential and need to be identified and unpacked.

At a macro scale, the rock art of the Northern Cape includes both engravings and paintings. These two terms denote distinct technical approaches to making images on rocks: the former by incising, chipping or pecking away portions of the rock crust; the latter by applying pigment or paint onto the rock surface. The predominant form in which rock art occurs in the Northern Cape is as rock engravings (sometimes also called petroglyphs), situated out in the open, on boulders or exposed expanses of rock, most commonly on hills but also sometimes in other parts of the landscape, such as at the edges of rivers or even in a river bed as at Driekopseiland. At a subcontinental scale the engravings are generally distributed in the interior, particularly the central plateau (Wilman 1933; van Riet Lowe 1952; Mason 1962; Fock 1966, 1969a, 1979; Fock & Fock 1984, 1989; Rudner & Rudner 1968, 1970; Scherz 1970; Butzer *et al.* 1979; Deacon 1986, 1988, 1997; Deacon & Foster 2005; Morris 1988, 2002;

Dowson 1992; Ouzman 1996; Taçon & Ouzman 2004; Eastwood & Eastwood 2008; Parkington *et al.* 2008), rather than in the mountains and escarpment areas, where shelters occur and provide the panels on which paintings are frequently found (e.g. Lewis-Williams 1981; Parkington & Rusch 2003). There are some locales where both engravings and paintings occur in close proximity, including places in the Northern Cape (Goodwin 1936, Willcox 1963:73; Fock 1969b; 1970; Morris 1988). The finding of highly faded finger paintings on boulders in the open in the Karoo (Goodwin 1936; Morris 1988) raises the possibility that paintings in these settings, being less durable when exposed to the elements, may once have been more common. Overlapping distributions of paintings and engravings are known in other areas as well (Wilman 1933:53; Rudner & Rudner 1970; Scherz 1970; Eastwood & Eastwood 2006). There are even a few cases where it is claimed that the engravings themselves were, or may have been, painted (Peringuey 1909:417; Wilman 1933; van Riet Lowe 1945:333; Willcox 1963:72-73; Cooke 1969:17-19).

By and large, however, rock paintings and engravings tend to have distinct distributions and it was this that led several writers to argue, as did Stow (1905:12), that different ethnic or cultural groupings – ‘Painter’ and ‘Sculptor’ tribes as Stow had it – were responsible for each of the two forms of art (Wilman 1933:52- 59; Scherz 1986). Some commentators, notably Péringuey, saw paintings and engravings separating temporally as well; an idea which Schapera (1925) and van Riet Lowe (Goodwin & van Riet Lowe 1929:175) had also considered.

Today it is recognised that the situation is somewhat more complex. Notable similarities are observed between engravings and paintings – notwithstanding the differences of technique and their placement in the

landscape – particularly in relation to the large component of each which most likely is associated with Later Stone Age hunter-gatherers (Lewis-Williams 1983a; Parkington *et al.* 2008; Lewis-Williams & Challis 2011). Also cross-cutting the painting-engraving technique divide, there are what several researchers identify as distinct though less prolific and not as widespread traditions associated with Khoekhoe pastoralists (Rudner & Rudner 1959; Fock 1979; Beaumont & Vogel 1984; Van Rijssen 1984; Smith & Ouzman 2004; Eastwood *et al.* 2010); with Bantu-speaking farmers (Malan 1955; Mason 1962; Cooke 1969:19; Fock 1969b; Maggs 1976; Fock & Fock 1984:170; Evers 1981; Steel 1986; Maggs 1995); and with nineteenth century Korana raiders (Ouzman 2005). Although not as relevant here, more recent marks on rocks – those made by early travellers, soldiers and settlers from the nineteenth century, blending into graffiti and vandalism of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and applied with paint or scored into the rock, are vehicles of meaning in their own contexts. Not without interest, they sometimes chronicle regional or farm histories (Fock 1960; Ouzman 1999; Opperman 2011), often simply signalling contempt and insensitivity (cf. Adhikari 2010) towards older precolonial marking practices that not infrequently get obliterated in the process (Morris 1988; Opperman 2011).

While differences in technique at the macro level find expression in seemingly distinct rock art distributions, then, the content of the art, particularly in what has been put forward as hunter-gatherer rock art, shows that the painting vs. engraving distinction is not generally as significant as some writers have supposed. Nevertheless, Anne Solomon (2007) is surely right to wonder whether cultural, regional and historical factors coinciding with technical ones may often be underestimated. Royden Yates, Tony Manhire and John Parkington (1994:30) had earlier cautioned against the

temptation “to generalise across space and to impose uniformity on different regions,” and that although “some features of rock paintings do pervade the whole of Southern Africa ... these should not obscure the marked differences at regional or even subregional scales.” Clearly key, though, to the patterning at this level is geology and especially topography, yielding the opportunities, or setting constraints, for engraving or painting, providing a variety of potential ‘canvasses’ or ‘panels’ whether on boulders or rock surfaces, in the open or in rock shelters. These opportunities and constraints are not determining, however, but resources drawn upon. Within the ‘engraving area’, rock engravings occur primarily on dolerite and andesite, but they are also found, *inter alia*, on dolomite, granite and gneiss. Paintings occur on a similarly wide spectrum of rock types – and not exclusively in shelters. In the end it is neither ‘culture’ nor ‘environment’ in itself that explains the distributions of paintings and engravings but a complex interaction of both. Summing up, Karl Butzer, Gerhard Fock, Louis Scott and Robert Stuckenrath (1979:1203), for instance, have looked to the spreads of engravings and paintings (and they consider also the areas that lack rock art), arguing that the distributions reflect “the interactions between a complex of human communities and their available resources.” Importantly, they further highlight the need to comprehend the temporal dimension in the rock art in the Northern Cape. In these terms it is a view not at odds with a phenomenological conception in which the makers of rock art, immersed in their particular environments, would engage in lifelong histories of involvement in relationships with others – with the production of rock art being one of the expressions of these processes, of this involved activity (Ingold 2000).

‘Sites’

Up close, the places where the engravings or paintings occur are often referred to by archaeologists as ‘sites’ (it is a shorthand resorted to here already), although Chippendale and Nash (2004) advocate an alternative landscape focus as a means of problematizing both the word and the concept. The idea of a ‘site’ implies, they add, that the archaeological traces are confined to small ‘spot’ occurrences separated by empty tracts (as they usually appear on distribution maps). There are indeed places where the division of spreads of engravings into sites becomes an entirely arbitrary enterprise – as along some Karoo ridges – and it is important rather to see the engravings as nested or enfolded in topographies and relative to other archaeological traces, and as part of the working out, the processes, of the involved activity of their makers. By contrast, cadastral logic in the modern setting – perhaps reaching its epitome in the context of heritage management practices – favours the neatly circumscribed site, fenced-off, legally segregated and defined in terms of ‘use’ and as ‘protected’ management unit. One might see ‘site’ in these terms as being the reconfigured ‘place’ of modernity which, as Ingold observes, becomes the “nexus within which all life, growth and activity are *contained*” (2007:96 – his emphasis). Byrne contributes a critique of this “continued hegemony of the ‘site’ concept” (2003:188) in archaeology relative to a total “cultural landscape” which would radiate outwards to and beyond the horizon (potentially at least – see Sealy & Pfeiffer 2000), where “off-site” scatters of artefacts or rock art images stretch in variable densities over kilometres rather than metres. In the more limited (and limiting) focus, of ‘site’, the behavioural contexts of the archaeological traces would be compromised, Byrne notes, and “a continuous pattern of activity is made to look like discontinuous pods of activity: highly mobile precontact hunter-gatherers

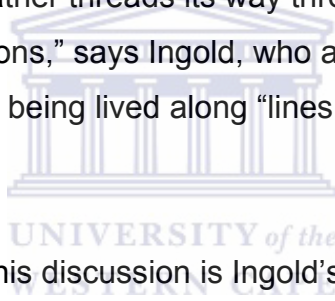
[being] retrospectively ‘settled down’ into sites.” The setting up of venues or servitudes such as the Wildebeest Kuil Rock Art Centre, around one such site, I have pointed out elsewhere (Morris 2008), represents a kind of ‘re-inhabitation’, the conjuring up of an image of a Khoe-San past in a landscape that was cleared and re-inscribed by colonisation – but in the process it unwittingly feeds into heritage and tourism tropes (e.g. West & Carrier 2004) which tend to reify ethnicity, parcelling out small portions of landscape and of history, along with their respective community stakeholders, almost as if along the rows of an organising and still potent colonial ‘literary lattice’ (Humphreys 1998).

Zones of entanglement

The archaeological contexts of engravings do indeed stretch out, in and through the actual traces which incompletely reflect (often fortuitously as left-over remnants) behaviours relative to – and indeed caught up in – topographic, environmental and of course social processes and affordances, where Tim Ingold’s (2007; 2011) use of the concept of ‘meshwork’ (borrowed from Henri Lefebvre), as opposed to ‘network’, has relevance. In his characterization, ‘environment’ falls away as a separate entity beyond or surrounding the lives of individual organisms (including persons) and instead becomes of “domain of entanglement” (2011:70-71). In relational perspectives, as Ingold points out, across various disciplines from sociology, to ecology, to material culture studies, the idea of a ‘network’ looks to the *connections* between elements in order to stress the role of each in the ongoing formation of others, underscoring their mutually constitutive nature. But this presupposes their prior separation (as elements), whereas, argues Ingold, “things *are* their relations” (2011:70): they live along “multiple pathways” in the course of their involvement in the

world, as entanglements one with another, where the better metaphor, he suggests, is 'meshwork'. Ingold remarks elsewhere that "it is in the entanglement of lines [of life], not in the connecting of points, that the mesh is constituted" (2007:81).

It is worth spelling out Lefebvre's conception of 'meshwork' to clarify Ingold's usage: it is defined as "the reticular patterns left by animals, both wild and domestic, and by people (in and around the houses of a village or small town, as in the town's immediate environs)" (Lefebvre 1991:117-8, cited by Ingold 2007a:80), where these various movements "weave an environment that is more 'archi-textural' than architectural" (Ingold 2007a:80). "Life will not be contained, but rather threads its way through the world along the myriad lines of its relations," says Ingold, who acknowledges Gilles Deleuze's notion of life being lived along "lines of becoming" in an open-ended way (2011:83).



What seems useful in this discussion is Ingold's insights with respect to life in places and environments – becoming manifest in terms of a "zone of entanglement" which is not necessarily bounded but has openings and ways through (2007a:103). Here pathways literally and figuratively converge and diverge. Elsewhere (2011:168) he suggests that places should be considered not so much as locations to be connected but as "formations that arise within the process of movement." They come into being in relation to the perpetual comings and goings of people, as a nexus of the activities in which people engage: they become, as he puts it, "a particular enfoldment of the lives of persons." Conversely, he adds, places and journeys between them are implicated in the lives of individuals as "every person would come into being as an enfoldment of the experience" that places and journeys afford. In this context, Ingold's companion concepts of

‘wayfaring’ and ‘inhabiting’ refer neither to nomadic nor settled ways nor to placeless-ness or place-bounded-ness, but to place-*making*. In the last half decade, Ingold (2005) has distanced himself to some degree from his earlier idea of a “dwelling perspective”. Responding to an “entirely just” criticism of an absent political dimension in this concept – which instead had connotations of “snug, well-wrapped localism” (Preface in 2011 edition of Ingold 2000) – he opts for the notion of “habitation”, and suggests that the impulse humans (and non-humans) have to protect themselves becomes a political impulse in place-making. Part of the nexus or entanglement of “comings and goings” would revolve, to different degrees, on dwelling in relative peace and prosperity, securing protection or power against theft, sorcery, aggression, fire, storm, disease and dangerous wild animals (Ingold 2005). In other words, part of the “comings and goings” could include the workings of cosmologies and structural power (Wolf 1999) and expressions of, for instance, somewhat territorial behaviour (Sealy & Pfeiffer 2000; Humphreys 2005, 2007, 2009). Where identity comes to be articulated it is complex and fluid – “but not endlessly so” (Smith & Ouzman 2004:522).

These thoughts on place and the preceding discussion on ‘sites’ provide pointers for taking up again the thread on rock art and the nature of the locales in which they have been found in the landscapes of the Northern Cape. The engravings and paintings are distributed widely between horizons but their distribution is by no means random, nor uniform: they often *do* cluster in the kinds of places which archaeologists have called sites. By definition they occur on rock, itself not evenly exposed. In a very few known instances images were placed on small, ‘portable’ stones which may have been carried from one place to another, but perhaps not (these documented instances are Wonderwerk Cave – Thackeray *et al.* 1981; and Springbok Oog – Morris & Beaumont 1994). As a rule, both engravings and

paintings in the Northern Cape were placed on boulders, expanses of solid rock or in rock shelters that are *fixed* features in the landscape, subject only to the gradual, and sometimes not so gradual, geological events touched on in Chapter 2. In the case of engravings, this means they occur in the open on koppies (hills) or ridges where, most typically, dolerite or andesite outcrop, or in valley situations where rock is exposed by erosion near rivers or pans. Quite often, but not always, the engravings are alongside or near to clearings or stone circles where people lived or left their artefacts. But caution is needed in reading these spatial associations: links may be inferred that are only fortuitous. Paintings in the region are found occasionally on isolated boulders in the veld or on ridges, but more typically in shelters, not always with any associated artefacts and, again, when artefacts do co-occur, the links are hard to pin down with certainty. Inskeep's 1971 prognosis remains essentially as true today as it was then, that "on the shelter walls, and in their floors, we have two worlds which cannot yet be brought together" (1971:102) – although recurrent associations become suggestive (e.g. Morris 1988; Beaumont & Vogel 1989).

Palimpsests

What is apparent in this patterning is precisely what Ingold characterizes as entanglements in a kind of meshwork, which collapses the dichotomy between culture and environment or landscape and in which a 'site', a cluster of engravings for instance, together with other associated archaeological traces, in relation to their 'off-site' contexts, define a nexus of converging threads including human activities, geological contexts and the life worlds of plants and animals. 'Thread' as idiom indeed is prevalent in Khoe-San conceptions, relative to hunting, for example, where wind

connects the hunter with his prey, like a thread leading from one body to another (Lloyd 1889:203 cited by Low 2007:575); and as hallucinatory “threads of light” or threads like paths to the spirit realm (Lewis-Williams & Challis 2011:79-80). Ingold’s (2011:96, 126) important further insight that people and other life forms inhabit weather worlds – which are also the contexts of eroding landforms – brings to such a nexus yet further convergences. These, or their traces, have mounted up or been swept away through time, often quite literally by weather, so that we might concur with Geoff Bailey (2007:209) that palimpsests have become an inherent feature of the world we inhabit. Because of weather, the land is “continually *growing over*,” adds Ingold – “which is why archaeologists have to dig to recover traces of past lives” (2007b:533). Palimpsests in a sense correspond with what Ingold calls the “formations that arise within the process of movement.” In a modern city, citing the analogy referred to in Chapter II, one might envisage “structures dating from different periods” jostling for space as “inhabitants pick their way ... between them,” working out their own life projects (Ingold 2005:502). Whereas palimpsests are often regarded negatively as the transformation of traces for which some correction is needed in order to read the past, Geoff Bailey emphasizes a contrary view. They are “not some degraded or distorted version of a message that needs to be restored to its original state before it can be interpreted. To a large extent,” he insists, “they *are* the message.” This is so; but archaeologists may also be seeking messages that require an unravelling of palimpsests. In the Karoo an erosion regime dominates, such that artefacts accumulate routinely as palimpsests on open sites rather than in stratified “growing over” contexts. They need somehow to be separated out if the episodes they represent are to be understood (Parkington *et al.* 2008). Rock art sites equally present palimpsests, in themselves an important feature, but it is

crucial to understand their nature (for instance, do the layers separate out through hours or centuries?).

Bailey (2007:203-208) defines different forms of palimpsest – true palimpsests in which successive layers of activity obliterate preceding ones, completely or nearly so; cumulative palimpsests (common in open sites of the Northern Cape) in which successive layers build up or are winnowed down, such that deposition episodes mingle and become ‘mixed’; spatial palimpsests in which the traces of spatially discrete events are difficult to correlate chronologically, or where spatially clustered materials disaggregate through time; temporal palimpsests in which objects of differing age are deposited in a single event, as in a burial, or a shipwreck; and finally, palimpsests of meaning revealed in the life histories or cultural biographies of objects or places which, as they endure, may be put to continuous or changing uses or acquire different meanings through shifting contexts or associations in time which blend, potentially, across many generations of human life. An example of the last-mentioned is Stonehenge, not only a Neolithic and Bronze Age monument but also an Iron Age one, a Mediaeval one, and a modern one, with multiple meanings, even within a single episode, depending on the perspective adopted. Sven Ouzman (1996, Taçon & Ouzman 2004) and Nick Walker (1997) have noted this effect in the rock engraving sites of Thaba Sione near Mahikeng, and Matsieng in Botswana, dating from the Later Stone Age but associated with Tswana creation myths and rites in the contemporary setting. In terms of the different kinds of palimpsests that occur, Bailey suggests, it is hard to think of any situation or place either in the archaeological past or in the contemporary world which is not, one way or another, a palimpsest. He further sees any given object typically being characterised in terms of “moments in time”. A stone artefact, for instance, might be perceived

relative to the moment(s) of raw material acquisition, through knapping, its use(s) and eventual discard; while further moments might then include recovery by an archaeologist, its curation or display in a museum, its use in publications, its place in scholarly debate, and potentially also, as museum contexts and politics change, its repatriation; and so on.

The palimpsests are entanglements that archaeologists may then unravel or alternatively view as instances amongst many, following microscopic or macroscopic scales or paths of interrogation and interpretation, viewing them against longer or shorter timescales. The very fact that they exist at all and are available to us in the present, Bailey goes on to suggest, referring to the key quality of *duration*, challenges us to rethink the conventional distinctions between past, present and future – which cannot be sharply separated. He proposes the concept of a “durational present” in which parts of the past – and of the future – are accessible to us, as envelopes of time varying in depth from hours to light-years, according to whether our perspective is as journalists, social anthropologists, archaeologists, palaeontologists, geologists or astronomers.

The conception of sites as “formations that arise within the process of movement,” as Ingold has it, in contrast to their being somehow marked-off places containing or reflecting a particular range of manifestations of this or that culture, is here brought alongside what Bailey shows in the quality of duration of the ancient traces accessible to us. Together, these perspectives provide ways for approaching rock art in spatio-temporal terms that accommodate dynamism at a fundamental level.

Although particular kinds of place-making get to be disrupted, changed, or may cease as active social processes, their traces endure; there is no final

closure for the places themselves, and sometimes for the enduring stories about them, since “life is open-ended,” says Ingold (2011:83): “its impulse is not to reach a terminus but to keep on going.”

End times

The particular kind of place-making which the marking of rocks represented, on the hills and other locales where rock engravings and paintings occur in the Northern Cape, was disrupted – enough, at least, to end a tradition of making rock art (there are more recent markings of rocks but of a different set of contexts) – during the era of colonial conquest, probably at least a generation (or more? – Solomon 2007), before Dia!kwain referred to his fathers having “chipped gemsbok, quagga and ostriches “ on the rocks, “before the time of the Boers” (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:xiv; LL 5963). The colonial advance closed down the possibility of hunting and gathering as a way of life, constituted by those pathways and those activities converging and radiating out, ‘off-site’, from the clusters of living sites and nearby engravings and perhaps places for ritual activity.

A rising tide of scholarly enquiry is being undertaken and debated across several disciplines, looking into various aspects and moments of the disruption experienced by the /Xam and other indigenous groups of this region. The struggle stretched through at least the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries, and is now agreed by many to have included episodes of genocide (inter alia, Wright 1971, 2007; Szalay 1995; Skotnes 1996, 2007; Penn 2005; Adhikari 2010; de Prada-Samper 2011).

Also burgeoning, and debated, is research into and around the wealth of materials obtained in the 1870s-80s in the form of the Bleek and Lloyd

archive (e.g. Vinnicombe 1976; Lewis-Williams 1981; Hewitt 1986; Deacon & Dowson 1996; Guenther 1999; Hollmann 2004; Bank 2006; Parkington 2007; Skotnes 2007; Solomon 2007, 2011a, 2011b; Wessels 2010; Lewis-Williams & Challis 2011). Aspects of it “remain under-researched” (Solomon and cited by Wessels 2010:12). Obviously, none of this particular scholarly endeavour would have been possible were it not for the amassing of the material in the first place. Some of the research, in lauding the “commitment” and the “personal sacrifice” by the Bleek family, and noting the “remarkable relationship” that ensued in the course of the documentation (e.g. Deacon 1996; Deacon & Dowson 1996) has been referred to critically in other academic commentary as evincing a “politics of atonement” (Rassool 2010:93), “couched in the language of recovery and authenticity,” and failing to engage “the blood and brutality” of the Khoe-San experience. Yet as Andrew Bank (2006:397) has shown, the notebooks of Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd do constitute an extraordinary achievement. The participants in the extended conversation, the “patient narrations” of the /Xam (Solomon 2007), surmounted radical differences in language and ways of life, negotiating a *modus operandi* across an immense social divide which was set against a backdrop of appalling settler violence and dispossession. As Bank suggests, it was a meeting of worlds which “deserves to be celebrated and recounted again and again”: the sustaining of more than a decade of dialogue “is without precedent in the history of this country and perhaps that of the world” (2006:397).

It has already been noted, in Chapter IV, how this resource came to be essentially hidden to those working on rock art up until the 1970s, but once a reading was discovered that looked beyond mere ‘snap’ coincidences between text and rock art image (Vinnicombe 1976; Lewis-Williams 1981),

research concerning, or inspired by, the /Xam materials in relation to rock paintings and engravings has poured out through books and journals.

As a general observation echoing one of the points made at the head of this Chapter, Parkington *et al.* (2008:56) remind their readers that “tantalising ... insider comments come at the tail-end of long trajectories of changing practice and must be read as such.” The resultant texts were drawn through the filters of their particular performance contexts, and at a general level through those of the Victorian world, as Bank (2006) and others (e.g. Wessels 2010; Lewis-Williams and Challis 2011) note; the translations particularly diffracting the voices of the individual informants. While these are analysed by others whose work is cited here, I wish to consider briefly the matter of the temporal proximity of the last acts of engraving to Dia!kwain’s commentary, which is significant since he is the only one of the /Xam informants to comment directly (in the texts) on the presence of rock engravings in his home territory. It is simply stated in a dictation, apparently an aside, from Dia!kwain to Lucy Lloyd that !Kann was where his “fathers chipped gemsbok, quaggas and ostriches etc at a place where they used to drink, before the time of the boers” (LL 5963). One can but wonder whether these matters were elaborated upon in the notebooks missing from the archive, but here Dia!kwain in fact has little to say about the chippings (Deacon 1994:253); and what he does say, arguably, is wrong – for there are hardly any engravings that are certainly of *gemsbok* (one of the very rare examples is a clear and highly distinctive depiction of a gemsbok which occurs on the ridge between Groot Kolk and Jagt Pan west of Vanwyksvlei; another is in the vicinity of Marydale north west of Prieska). The large antelope that feature in the rock art of the area are, with few exceptions, eland. Hartebeest and kudu are both distinguished by the way the horns are shown and their body shape; the feature signalling the depiction of gemsbok

is the showing of the distinctive dark stripes on the face. The images identified in Fig 9.8 in Bank's (2006:239) account are most likely both in fact eland (rather than gemsbok and hartebeest).



Plate 12. Scraped engraving of gemsbok, Grootkolk, Upper Karoo.



Plate 13. Scraped engraving of eland, Springbok Oog – the pronounced dewlap is a distinguishing feature commonly shown.

The /Xam commentaries on the Stow copies of rock paintings (and on Schunke's fairly crude tracings of Karoo engravings) are, it has been shown, decidedly subjective. Bank (2006:329) points out that by the 1870s several of the species depicted in the rock art copies may no longer have survived to be seen in the Upper Karoo, thus compromising the informants' ability to give identifications based on personal experience. Eland, even, /A!kunta had said, were only to be seen near the Orange River by the 1860s (Bank 2006:325). The remarks recorded on rock paintings amount to "culturally informed guesses," as Anne Solomon (2007) suggests, and the commentary becomes tangential to rock art *per se* as elements in the copies trigger thoughts, duly annotated, on other matters, such as dancing. Janette Deacon (1996:253) has noted that the general lack of reference to engravings in the narratives points to their "no longer [playing] an active part in [the] belief system" of the /Xam informants.

And it is indeed in other detail in the rich narratives, especially in /Xam perceptions of their place in their environment, that valuable insights are to be had that are arguably relevant, if not directly so, to the rock art. (The testimony of Qing, a San person in Lesotho interviewed by J.M. Orpen [1874], has proven more pivotal to rock art interpretation, with significant resonances in comments by the /Xam informants – Lewis-Williams & Challis 2011; cf. Mitchell 2010). The extent to which the stories in the /Xam narratives link into the landscape was realised pre-eminently by Janette Deacon (1986, 1988; Deacon & Foster 2005) after she began visiting the Upper Karoo whence Bleek and Lloyd's /Xam informants had come. She has demonstrated in particular cases how the stories are, one might say, entirely enfolded in the landscape and indeed evince the movement that Tim Ingold refers to whereby any given place comes into being as "a nexus

in the perpetual current of comings and goings” of persons. A key, oft-cited instance is the legend, “The Death of the Lizard” (/Han#kass’o in Bleek & Lloyd 1911:214-217), which is associated directly with the Strandberg hills north of the modern Vanwyksvlei. It tells of the !*khau* (Agama lizard), who was a man of the early race before people and animals were differentiated, and who, walking across the dry plains, was caught by the mountains and squeezed. Broken, his upper body became the hill called !*guru-na*, his lower body and legs, the hill /*xe-!khwai*. This tale tells literally of the mythical *coming-into-being* of this place. The knowledge of it was a “*storied knowledge*” (Ingold 2011:168; cf. Green & Green 2009) – and no doubt this would have been true of all places named in the land which the Bleek and Lloyd informants referred to as /Xam-ka !xau.

Unfortunately the stories of the Bleek and Lloyd archive are finite in number and in spatial scope, and they derive from the very end-times of the /Xam people as they fell away to genocide and acculturation (Szalay 1995; Adhikari 2010). Although the materials now form a vital register with other fragments alongside rock art and western translations in the ‘Rosetta Stone’ scheme of Lewis-Williams and Challis (2011), they survive (considerable as they are) as but a fragment, serving to indicate all the more poignantly how much knowing was cut short.

From Driekopseiland, along the Riet River, some 400 km north east of the Strandberg, there is a hint of another story – but it comes at least second- or third-hand through the pen of Stow: the provenience of the information is not known. For Stow (1905:398), Driekopseiland constituted evidence of an ancient and aboriginal “Bushman” presence in the area, where he characterised the engravings as:

“... the grand testimonials of the great antiquity of their occupation ... recorded on the polished and striated rocks of the Blaauw Bank [Driekopseiland]...a spot that must have been, during the time of their undisturbed sovereignty, a place memorable to their race, where thousands of square feet of... rock surface are covered with innumerable mystic devices, intermingled with comparatively few animal figures. This must have been a palace residence of the most highly mystic of their race...a high place, where they gathered for their festivals of dancings and mysterious rites or counsel, a place where for generations their leaders who were the most skilled in the emblematic lore, the symbols of which were engraved around, awed their less initiated brethren with frantic orgies, or vehement recitals of the traditions of the renowned and daring hunters from whom they themselves had sprung, or still more ancient myths of times yet more remote, when, as they believed, men and animals consorted on more equal terms than they themselves, and used a kindred speech understood by all!”

If there was a hint here of some performative or ritual context (and I have argued elsewhere that there is – Morris 2002), Stow himself soon dropped the thread, in a letter to Wilhelm Bleek, in favour of writing about the “mystic” aspect in terms that anticipate much future speculation on, as he put it, “the great similarity which some of them bear to the religious symbols used - by some of the most ancient, but more civilized nations” (letter to W.H.I. Bleek, Vaal River, 12 December 1874, cited by Fock 1970). But, unlike many other accounts of rock art, Stow’s casts discussion of Driekopseiland (cited above) as part of an exposé of Trekboer encroachment in the mid-nineteenth century and with reference to the violent context and the heroic struggle engaged in by the Khoe-San resistance leader Kousop (Morris 2008; cf. Solomon 2006).

From the area in which Wildebeest Kuil is situated – from 1871 the centre of the Diamond Fields, and the hub of South Africa’s modern industrialised

economy – the records of the Berlin Missionary Society, working initially amongst the !Kora at the nearby Pniel, have yet to be investigated in detail. As regards the Wildebeest Kuil hill, however, a comment made to Péringuey (1909) by the missionary Westphal refers to the last ‘Bushman’ occupants of the hill, known from the 1870s as the Halfway House Kopje. Westphal indicated to Péringuey that “‘Scheelkoos’ and his family” had resided there. Although this gives no particular or immediate insight into the rock art, it links the site into written records and the violent history of the mid-nineteenth century – for Scheelkoos was the colonists’ name for Kousop, who led resistance to colonial encroachment and who in consequence came to be tracked in colonial records – and in the writing of George Stow. He was killed with 130 of his followers, on the banks of the Vaal River near to Wildebeest Kuil in July 1858 (Morris 2008).

Implicating the archive

Where the storied knowledge contained in the Bleek and Lloyd materials provides vital insights into the life of the /Xam and may be implicated in our interpretations of the ways that places came to be marked with rock art – providing pointers for an approach conceived as privileging a San sense of being-in-the-world (see Solomon 2011b:113 on the way this conception may perpetuate assumptions of a pan-San core identity) – what are the prospects for extending such an approach to areas where specific ‘insider’ knowledges died with the disappearance of the way of life (and, to a large extent, the people) which had sustained the knowledge?

Benjamin Smith and Geoffrey Blundell (2004) highlight the difficulties involved in the interpretation of rock art by purely formal rather than informed methods and are sceptical that *without* some sort of reliable

‘insider’ perspective we would not be able to reach beyond our own conceptual filters. Their own experiment in ‘immersion’ in landscape had suggested that the key problem in phenomenological approaches, which assume that valuable insights would flow from the immersion itself, was “the considerable extent of cultural variation in people’s landscape experiences and perceptions” (2004:244). Indeed as they, as well as Christopher Chippendale and George Nash (2004), have noted, the very idea of ‘landscape’ is not a ubiquitous concept in human experience, and emerges in its modern usage in the late Renaissance of Europe as a genre of art, only later, in the early eighteenth century, being extended to the actual subject of depiction. Vanishingly rare, Chippendale and Nash point out, are images in rock art that depict landscapes “in the modern painterly sense.” Four particular filters and biases that Smith and Blundell identify in many archaeologists’ encounters with rock art and landscape are: the places chosen for focused observation; the western bias in fixing attention on macro-topographical features of the landscape; a sense of boundedness often imposed on the data with boundaries being linked to the idea of ‘identity’ – indeed even the “impression that identity-formation is the ultimate goal of all cultural processes – including the making of rock art” (2004:253); and finally the *a priori* expectations on how rock art images would relate to the landscape. Tacit assumptions in each of these and especially in the last can result in logical circularity.

Building a case study in a region rich in rock art where it occurs as a palimpsest with three distinct traditions that have been discerned in terms of different “sets of conventions”, technique and content, each corpus is shown to be satisfactorily accounted for only with reference to models derived from ethnographic sources. Thus a “San conceptual landscape” relevant to the San rock art is said, figuratively, to ‘float above’ the “topographical material

landscape.” Smith and Blundell suggest that this conceptual landscape was then “‘projected down’ onto the topography where the topography allowed for the making of images.” They claim that the reverse procedure is not possible, i.e. to construct the conceptual San landscape from “the places where it happens to have been ‘projected down’ onto the material world” (2004:257).

It should be clear that the downward projecting conceptual landscape invoked here can only exist by assuming that there is a pan-San cognitive system which renders it relevant to what are assumed on stylistic (“sets of conventions”) grounds to be San paintings. As hypotheses these may be assumptions one must make to achieve any progress – but it is as well to be aware of them. One would need to venture similar hypotheses in applying any ethnography in this manner, for instance, in the Kimberley area, somewhat distant from the Karoo of Dia!kwain, //Kabbo, //Han#kass’o and other informants – whose individual insights, together with those of Qing (Orpen 1874), are further assumed to speak (*from historically contingent moments* – Bank 2006; Wessels 2010), in this approach, for the conceptual San landscape as a whole.

Benjamin Smith’s (2010) more recent assessment of the “problems in the reading of San history in the rock art of the Maloti-Drakensberg Mountains” – a text which endorses Mazel’s (1992, 1993) call for the writing of San histories based more widely than on just one set of ‘insider’ sources – signals an important shift in outlook by taking on these various assumptions squarely. He here argues that only to the extent that the view can be sustained that San across much of Southern Africa and through millennia held a conceptual system in common, can it be acceptable to apply such a cosmology to interpret “society level understandings of symbolism and

meaning within individual panels” (as David Lewis-Williams has done). There is a level, he suggests, at which reference to the generalised view of San cosmology and symbolism may be unavoidable – the limitations of the data, an outcome of the histories outlined above, make it so – but as one seeks to construct local San histories and contextually specific understandings of rock art production and consumption, Smith (2010:355-356) argues, the essentialising view of San ‘tradition’ would thwart our efforts. Thus revising somewhat his earlier conclusions, he urges that we need to move beyond a reliance on /Xam and Kalahari ethnographies. Solomon (2011b:115) expresses concern that the alternative approach implied continues nevertheless to be under-girded by “an ahistoric baseline of shamanic meaning” deriving from this ethnography.

Where Inskip, four decades ago, worried that “at every turn we may take but a few steps before the path becomes too treacherous to tread” (1971:103), and posed the question, “what then may we attempt ... ?” – the answer undoubtedly remains that which Smith sums up, and which was Mazel’s, that we proceed by “responsible use of multiple sources” (Smith 2010:356). Solomon (2011b:117) argues that at a fundamental level there remains an “image of almost timeless San-ness” that must be part of a conceptual unpacking, indicating contra-Smith that there continues to be a role for social theory.

Connections in regions

As is patently apparent from the literature and what has been indicated here, the greatest difficulties lie precisely in making meaningful connections that provide pertinent contexts for the rock art. So visual and seemingly accessible, yet it is frustratingly hard, and problematic, to relate the art to

contiguous archaeological traces, to known histories, to oral traditions or to ethnographic resources as rich as those that are available.

It has been largely at the intermediate level in rock art distributions – that between the ‘micro’ level of sites and the ‘macro’ scale of paintings vs engravings – that researchers have sought to make sense of “variability”, both regionally and temporally, while also, and indeed through this, defining the distinct traditions that have been referred to above. In the process, elaborating types and styles, many wrong turns were taken and the outcomes were justifiably dubbed an empiricist *impasse* (Lewis-Williams 1984b).

Miles Burkitt (1928) plotted out a first approximation of styles through time and place and this quintessentially archaeological *modus operandi* was replicated – more as method than in actual results – through much of the twentieth century. Goodwin (1936), Van Riet Lowe (1952), Jalmar and Ione Rudner (1968, 1970) and Alex Willcox (1984) sought to firm up the spatial and temporal patterning. But “style”, or the Rudners’ “schools”, proved to be difficult to pin down. Combinations of technique, form and content were used, along with assumed cultural traditions, and, depending on which variable was being fore-grounded, different regional definitions resulted (Hampson *et al.* 2002; Smith 2006).

What appeared to make this approach attractive in the Northern Cape was the occurrence of relatively distinct techniques, some of which appeared to separate out temporally. In a hierarchical and elaborately coded matrix constructed by Gerhard Fock and his wife and co-worker Dora Fock (Fock 1979:18-19), these were defined primarily in terms of technique:

- Incised engravings, also referred to as 'hairline' or 'flineline', were engraved – *sensu stricto* – with a pointed stone (Fock 1974; Fock 1979:18-19). Incisions into the dark rock crust would result in sharply visible yellow/orange/brown lines resulting from their penetration into the zone just beneath the outer crust – but these would patinate with time until they eventually became indistinguishable in colour from the surrounding rock surface. This provided a way of establishing the relative chronology for engravings since the same patination processes pertain, by and large, to the other techniques indicated below (although variability in weathering and patination processes turned out to render this a less than certain approach – Goodwin 1936).



Plate 14. One of a pair of roan antelope made in the hairline technique, Vaalpan, near Kimberley.

The hairline engravings of the Northern Cape are generally fully patinated, and when in a sequence of superimposed engravings they

occur, as a rule, at the bottom. Figurative images in this technique tend to consist of outlines only and include finely engraved naturalistic and stylized images of animals and humans, often with detail like body markings and eyes. There is also a range of geometric forms and many apparently random lines which are often in palimpsests with figurative art in the same technique.



Plate 15. Cross-hatched motif in hairline technique, Springbok Oog.

- ‘Scraped’ engravings, sometimes called ‘scratched’, were made by “scraping with a fine pointed object (stone) and placing the lines very close to each other” (Fock & Fock 1984:163). They are thus technologically similar to the hairline engravings; but are distinguished from them in that the animal, human, geometric and inanimate figures depicted in this technique are not merely outlined but, by definition, are fully scraped (*‘geschabt’* [Fock] or ‘scratched’ [Deacon 1986, 1988]), creating a silhouette. They are often but not

always considerably less patinated than the hairline engravings. In a few instances the Focks noted a 'polychrome' effect where the pre-existing patina on a rock surface was scraped to differing depths, giving a sense of shading (Fock 1969c, Fock & Fock 1984:163). Some scraped engravings were further polished or rubbed.

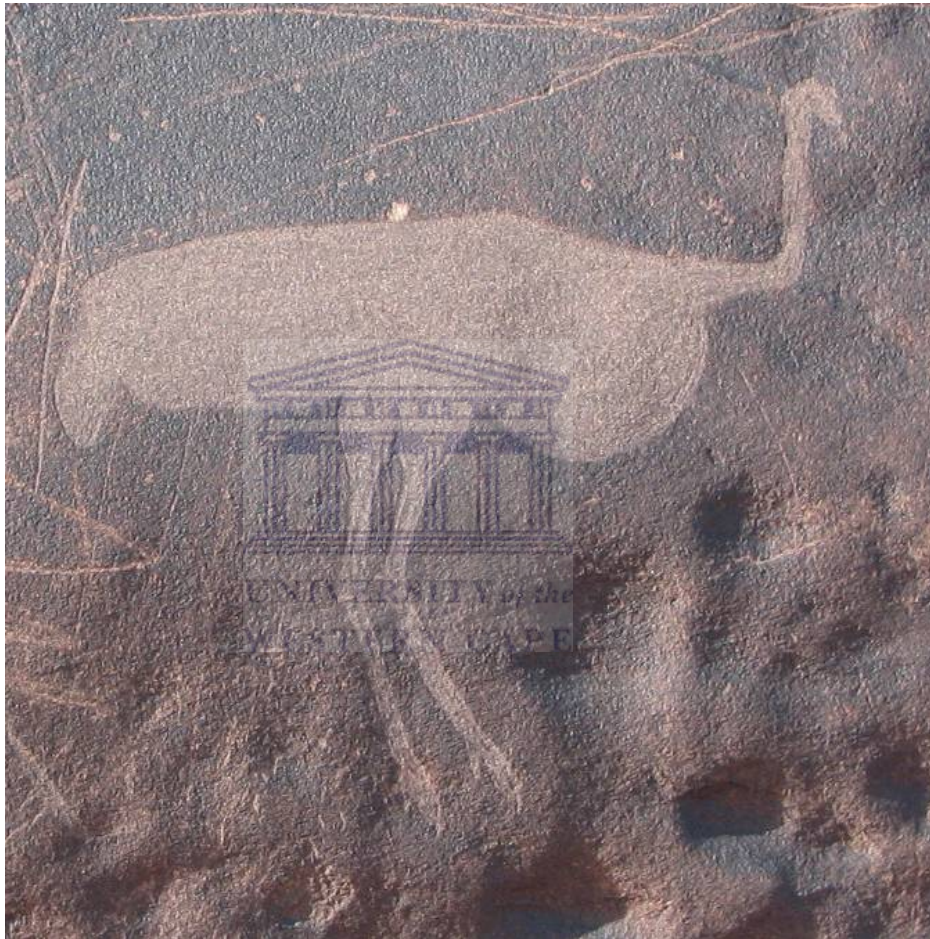


Plate 16. Scraped engraving of ostrich, Springbok Oog.

- 'Recent scratched' engravings (Morris 1988) are fresh or very lightly patinated, again technologically incised, but in this case comprising essentially 'engravings' made in modern times with metal tools and including markings by nineteenth and twentieth century frontiersmen, soldiers, farmers, farm-visitors and farm-workers. Usually better termed as graffiti, they are a reflection of a range of motivations,

attitudes and “entanglements” often in the same places where precolonial rock art occurs.



Plate 17. ‘Recent scratched’ horses and other markings incised over older engravings, Kalabasput, Upper Karoo.

- Pecked engravings, making up the largest and most variable category with numerous nuances in technique were produced by percussive ‘pecking’ with a pointed tool. The peckings can be in dots (vertical percussion) or dashes (slanted strokes) and vary through a range of sizes from the coarse, irregular ‘hacked’ engravings where the individual holes are commonly larger than 10 mm across, to the very fine, controlled peckings typical of, for instance, the so- called ‘classical’ engravings (Fock 1979:18-19; Morris 1988).



Plate 18. Outline pecked engraving of blue wildebeest, Wildebeest Kuil.



Plate 19. Fully pecked engravings of eland, near Vosburg.



Plate 20. A panel with pecked engravings of elephant, human figures and rhino, near Petrusville.



Plate 21. Coarse-pecked rhino at Nooitgedacht.

- Paintings in the area, almost entirely in the ‘finger painting’ technique preponderantly consist of finger-daubed designs in a variety of ochres with white and black images as well.



Plate 22. Finger paintings at Rietfontein, Ulco.

The Focks' hierarchical classification of *techniques* (Fock 1979:18-19), includes, at a lower level in their matrix, a distinction of *formal* elements within the overarching pecked group.

In terms of this scheme Gerhard and Dora Fock were able to discern (Fock 1969b) a fairly sharp contrast between the engravings north of the Orange River (which are predominantly pecked, and include the so-called ‘classical and related’ engravings) and those in the Karoo, to the south (where the scraping technique is widespread). Pecked engravings (but few “classical” ones) also occur in the Karoo, whereas scraped engravings are extremely rare, or absent, north of the river (Morris 1988). Hairline engravings occur both in the north and south (Fock 1974) – but are very rare in the Vryburg/Kalahari region in the north (Fock & Fock 1984:170) while being most numerous in the Karoo, predominating at some sites (Fock 1974;

Morris 1988; Beaumont & Vogel 1989). The finger paintings were not considered by the Focks in this particular regionalisation, perhaps because they believed that the paintings belonged to a separate tradition: they noted their occurrence in caves and shelters in the Kuruman Hills (where Wonderwerk Cave contains rare animal depictions in this technique), the Asbestos Mountains, the Ghaap Escarpment, and the Langeberg and Koranaberg ranges; and at scattered sites in the Karoo, sometimes on dolerite boulders in the open; or in shelters in ranges like the Kareeberge (Goodwin 1936; Rudner & Rudner 1968; Fock 1969a, 1970; Fock & Fock 1984; Hollmann & Hykkerud 2004; Hykkerud 2006).

Whereas the Focks were hinting at regional distinctions running north-south on the basis of *technique*, Alex Willcox (1984), by contrast, favoured an east-west pattern on the basis of *content* and the presence or absence of paintings. Either way, a rather more complex mosaic, overlaid through time, is a more likely scenario (Morris 1988; cf. Lewis-Williams 1983b).

Connections through time

Approaches to dating the engravings, implicit in some of the above schemes, have been based on sequencing the kinds of 'styles' discerned, at site level (e.g. Goodwin 1936) or as regional syntheses (e.g. Burkitt 1928), and these were based on a combination of typology, superpositioning and relative patination. In resultant scenarios the fully patinated hairline engravings were generally placed as the oldest in a linear progression with various 'styles', 'classes' or 'periods' of the pecked and younger scraped engravings (Burkitt 1928; Goodwin 1936; van Riet Lowe 1937, 1945; Fock 1969b, 1974, 1979; Butzer *et al.* 1979; Fock *et al.* 1980). Some presumptions came to be complicated by a better appreciation of variable

patination rates (Goodwin 1936; Mason 1962; Butzer *et al.* 1979; Fock 1979) and questions on the nature of superpositioning (Lewis-Williams 1974). Constructions of stylistic growth and decline, moreover, were notoriously subjective and difficult to replicate (Lewis-Williams 1983a, 1987). As in the paintings, uncertainties in the relative dating of rock engravings led to the distinct pessimism regarding the dating of rock art in general that was being expressed by Ray Inskeep (1971) and others from the late 1960s (Humphreys 1971; A.I. Thackeray 1983).

The Abbé Henri Breuil, writing informally about his 1929 visit to rock art around Kimberley, at Wildebeest Kuil, Pniel and Nooitgedacht, gives a sense of how some of the early syntheses came to be assembled, and of the elements that made some sites more “significant” than others. As a delegate at the British Association meeting in South Africa, he was no stranger to the findings of archaeology here, which were regularly reviewed in French journals (Schlanger 2006). Some two decades previously, indeed, engravings collected here by Emil Holub were used by Cartailhac and Breuil (1906, cited in Breuil 1934) to illustrate their publication on Altamira; and Breuil (1910, 1911, 1934) reviewed work on South African Stone Age and rock engraving sites. He was familiar with much of the new work, not least through Burkitt’s (1928) book. The comments in the unpublished *Autobiographie* are more anecdotal than ‘scientific’, however, assembled from notebooks and memory during the return passage to France (Kelley to van Riet Lowe, 1932, cited in Morris 2006b): but his remarks reveal preoccupations and expectations, shared by local scholars, which help to explain the direction in which rock art research was going at this time.

Intriguingly, Breuil found the engravings at Wildebeest Kuil to be “often mediocre.” (Burkitt [1928:33] had already noted that there were none of the

“earliest series” as found at Vosburg – the Wildebeest Kuil engravings were all “fairly late”). So also at Pniel. Excursion leader Maria Wilman, known herself for judging a site “important” by its attributes of style and content (Morris 2006a), concurred, her own first impressions of Wildebeest Kuil in 1906 having been coloured by a recent encounter with so-called ‘Classical Engravings’ at Kinderdam near Vryburg. The latter were the pinnacle of achievement, in her view, in the rock art of the region (Wilman 1906, 1933; cf. Péringuey 1909:403; Breuil 1934).

Nooitgedacht turned out to be a different matter altogether, where Breuil described the “magnificent rock surfaces striated and polished by glaciers” having been “visited by prehistoric artists at various times during the South African Stone Age.” His eye sought and found phases, not evident in his view at Wildebeest Kuil or Pniel: the earliest characterised by images “of a very good linear style, including a fine rhinoceros, elands and zebras;” these being succeeded by “images of animals hammered [*piquetées*] on part of, or on all their surface;” with a third phase, “eventually ... a great number of oval, rectangular or circular signs” which Breuil found to be “absolutely unintelligible”. At Stowlands, on the banks of the Vaal River, a few weeks later, and at Afvallingskop in the western Free State, Breuil again would venture relative chronologies for rock engravings. At Stowlands, he suggested the art “belonged to numerous series of very diverse ages” (*Autobiographie* 25 Aug 1929).

At Wildebeest Kuil Breuil noticed the “remains of huts, ash and minute fragments of agate and quartzite” but made no further comment, whereas he recounted scrambling over the slope at Nooitgedacht with “Miss Caton-Thompson” collecting “Middle Stone Age and Stellenbosch (local Acheuléen) pieces.” His *premiers impressions* (Breuil 1930b:218) would

suggest that “it is probable enough that this art started in the Middle Stone Age and subsequently developed...” Much later, Breuil (1955:1-2) would write “I was convinced that many of the engraved rocks of the high plateau of South Africa, and the painted rocks which encircle it, were earlier than the Late Stone Age, to which they had been attributed.”

This latter attribution, postulating a Later Stone Age context for the engravings, included that by John Goodwin (1936) at Keurfontein near Vosburg, a rich cluster of sites in the Karoo (Parkington *et al.* 2008) which he first visited in 1926 and subsequently introduced to his Cambridge mentor Miles Burkitt (1928). (British Association delegates passed through the Karoo by train in the dark in 1929. Possibly Goodwin shared some thoughts with Breuil?).

Goodwin’s detailed analysis of the Keurfontein engravings, which he mapped and copied, suggested that there were no less than eleven “styles” which could be grouped into seven “general phases”. He additionally looked to the living sites co-occurring with or near the engravings and suggested possible associations of some engravings with ‘Vosburg’ (what would now be referred to as Lockshoek); the bulk of the rock art with later Smithfield assemblages; while the most recent styles of rock-marking originated in “the age of metals” (1936:208-209). Though “tentative”, Goodwin was confident that the relative order of styles based on patination was in accord with that obtained from superimposed image sequences (which he calls palimpsests). He was not unaware of the challenges associated with relative dating by patination, discussing the diverse processes involved in rock crust formation: “it is not time which produces patina,” he cautioned, “but the various [weathering and patination] factors ... acting alone or together, and more or less intensely over varying periods” (1936:166).

Sequences of styles such as these, it turned out, were not readily transferred from one area, or even site, to another. The idea of rock art 'zones' or 'regions', in various guises but essentially as spatio-temporal entities of ill-defined extent, were what various writers settled for – none ultimately being “taken up for wider use or discussion,” as Benjamin Smith (2006:84) has noted.

Writing with Gerhard and Dora Fock and colleagues, Karl Butzer (Butzer *et al.* 1979) summed up a general recognition that the causes of spatial and temporal variability should be sought not so much in terms of regional styles and sequences in themselves, but relative to a more holistic framework that saw the art as a complex and dynamic tradition influenced by a number of potential social factors including those relating to environmental resources. Some of these remained to be counted in, or eliminated, by future contextual archaeological research (Butzer *et al.* 1979:1211).

Images and variability

The tendency, then, has been to move away from seeking clear, formal boundaries, to set up definitive regions. And instead, “variability”, in “San art” at any rate, has come to be seen as a “steady and progressive rate of art change” through space and time (cf. Smith 2006). The sense of this finds support as much in the way the repertoire of depicted animals varies in the engravings and paintings, as in the way the human form is shown, Smith adds: and although regional patterns may appear marked when comparing different parts of the sub-continent, up close they generally merge with no sudden changes.

The engraved imagery on the Northern Cape sites might be said to conform with this view by and large. It comprises, mostly, depictions of animals – but not animals in general: they are a quite selective mix, about half of which can be identified with confidence to genus/species level. They include mostly large mammals, shown, as a rule, in side view and often singly or in small ensembles: and they comprise principally eland, rhinoceros, elephant, hippopotamus, zebra, quagga, giraffe, kudu, hartebeest and ostrich. Unambiguous depictions of gemsbok seem to be rare as are, perhaps more surprisingly, springbok (Fock 1966; Fock & Fock 1989). Smaller animals like steenbok are virtually absent. Less common and ‘idiosyncratic’ (Dowson 1988) appearances of a variety of other species/subjects do not seem to follow any clear pattern: they simply crop up in different sites – lizards (e.g. Plate 23), a small variety of birds including vultures in flight (see Plate 17, above), tortoise, fish, and so on.

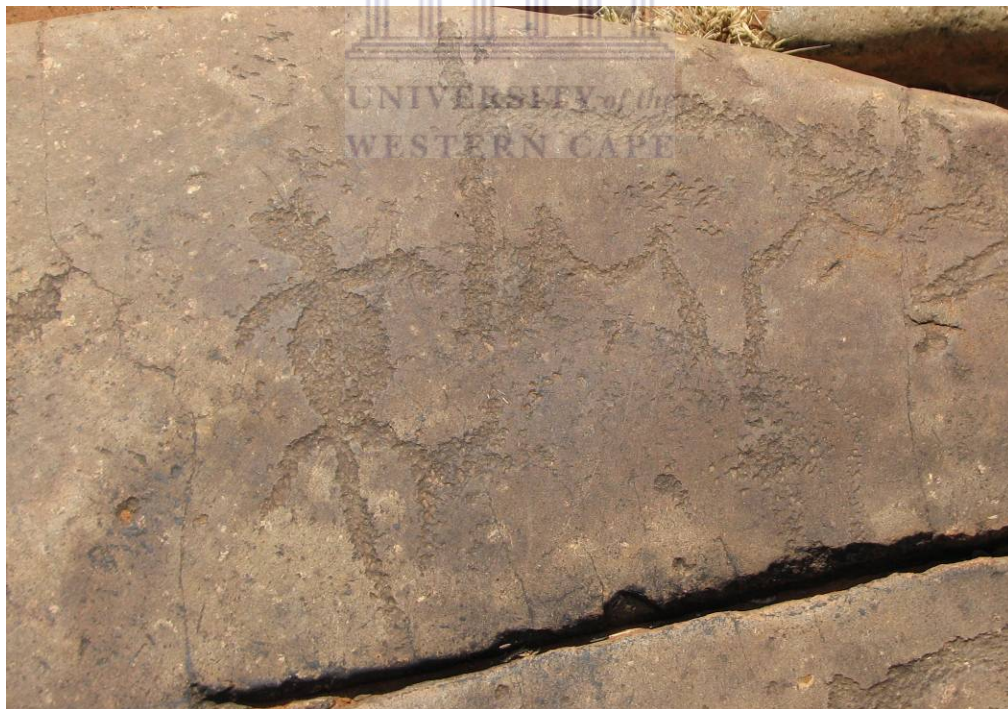


Plate 23. Rare engraving of an agama lizard, Klipfontein near Kimberley

The eland is markedly the most commonly engraved species in this region, and many of the less certain 'antelope' are probably stylized renditions of it. When quantified, its relative incidence drops westwards from the area around Kimberley (Fock 1979; Fock & Fock 1984, 1989) and they are less frequently depicted than giraffe, ostrich and zebra in the engravings of Namibia (Scherz 1970, 1975). In the Richtersveld, elephant are found to the total exclusion of eland (Fock 1979:102). While culturally selected, Butzer *et al.* (1979:1205-6) sought to see to what extent the repertoires of animal images that are included might compare with broad ecozonation in given areas or with the microhabitats around particular sites. In general they found that the fit was good, but that there are anomalies which, they argue, in a temporal perspective, might match hypothesised shifts in past climate. Giraffe, hartebeest, blue and black wildebeest, zebra and ostrich, characteristic of open grassland or grass savannah, and hippopotamus, white rhino, impala and buffalo, more characteristic of bush or thicket and margins of wooded or aquatic habitats, turn up in the rock art distributions of the west-central interior more or less as expected in ecological terms (1979:1205-6). But some occurrences are out of sync in terms of the modern setting, and have been taken as indicative, as a working hypothesis, of faunal shifts in response to palaeoenvironmental change at an earlier time (Fock 1973; Butzer *et al.* 1979; Morris 1988) preceding incorporation into local hunter-gatherer symbolic repertoires (Deacon 1988). Images of giraffe, extremely rare in the scraped and pecked Upper Karoo engravings, for instance, occur there in older hairline engravings, along with roan/sable, kudu, rhino, elephant, hippo, blue wildebeest and zebra, all generally south of their historical range, and unlikely to thrive under conditions similar to today (Skead 1980; Morris 1988). Of temporal significance too are the domestic animals, including fat-tailed sheep and

cattle, and, of colonial context, horses (Fock 1972, 1979; Fock & Fock 1984, 1989; Morris & Fourshé 1994).

Convention is clearly at work in the way that animals are shown, often just one image per rock (although greater numbers and more complex panels are not uncommon when rock surfaces afford this), remarkably 'true to life', depicted in profile, sometimes with head turned to the viewer. Occasionally body features may be contorted or elongated – or with limbs or horns or other appendages connected to other animals or images (e.g. Plates 24 & 25).



Plate 24. Connected motifs, Keurfontein.

Convention, or conventions, play out also in the choice of what gets to be depicted in general: animals, human figures, and a class of 'geometric'

images (the latter occurring variably in the engravings and predominating in the finger paintings) are included; but generally there are few small animals, no plants (with minor possible exceptions), no topography, no depiction of streams or water holes (Parkington *et al.* 2008). There are no rain-clouds – though, as ‘rain-animals’, perhaps they are symbolised throughout.

Dia!kwain’s sketch of !*Khwa:-ka xoro*, the conceptual ‘rain-bull’ used by rain-makers “when they want to make rain” (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:224-225) is remarkably evocative of the images in rock engravings.



Plate 25. Elephant and man, Wildebeest Kuil.

Depiction of the human form is not as common in the engravings as in the paintings and, as Butzer *et al.* (1979) report, they are seldom found in sites with less than some two dozen engravings. Where they do occur, they appear singly as well as in groups and with animals (Plate 25). Males

predominate. Therianthropes comprise a small component on some engraving sites (Plate 26 shows an example from Klipfontein).



Plate 26. Kudu-cow therianthrope at Klipfontein.

At a sub-continental level, as Smith (2006) has noted, the ratios of human forms to animal forms, and of male figures to female figures, vary progressively from region to region. In the engravings of the Northern Cape as a whole the ratio of human figures to animals is about 1 to 6 (Butzer *et al.* 1979) – with some variability in their prevalence, relatively higher in the Vryburg area (16% of images at Kinderdam), and lower in the Kimberley area (3% at Klipfontein) – whereas in the Drakensberg different samples suggest that between 5 and 6 out of every 10 images are human figures (Willcox 1984:195). A striking contrast is found in Namibia, where the ratio is some 6 human figures to every 3 animals in the rock paintings whereas in the – often contiguous – engravings the ratio is 0.2 humans and 0.5 human

foot/hand motifs to 3 animals (Scherz 1970:123, 1986; Willcox 1984:161), and both these classes having low occurrence relative to geometric images – suggesting more of a “sudden change” scenario. Engraved human foot and animal spoor occur in a swathe around the Kalahari margin from Botswana, through the Northern Cape and into Namibia (Walker 1997).

Gerhard Fock (1997) noted that equipment, clothing and ornaments are often portrayed in association with or on human figures. These include bows, arrows, quivers, sticks, spears, fly whisks, bags, karosses, and probable strings of beads, bangles and rattles (Fock 1977). Some of these items are occasionally engraved separately, e.g. bags and spears (Sharples 1937; Fock 1969b), with a significant component of the ‘geometric’ art potentially representing aprons (Smith & Ouzman 2004).

Geometric rock art: entoptics and non-entoptics and a Khoekhoen rock art tradition

In the engravings both in the Northern Cape and Namibia there is a substantial additional component of ‘geometric’ forms.

The difficulty of the above various comparisons is the old one of “flat manifestation” (Humphreys 1971) and resultant uncertainty as to which comparisons are meaningful. Thus flattened in time, a further problem is that it includes a corpus of rock art (‘geometric’ forms) which, it has now been argued, belongs in an entirely separate tradition (Smith & Ouzman 2004) or at the least separates out as a generally later and perhaps regionally fragmented range of rock art making practices (Morris 2002; Parkington *et al.* 2008).

Existing definitions (or lack thereof) for describing images that are not “animal” or “human” in form bedevil this debate. Historically the “geometric” art has been described as including “schematic” or “non-representational” forms as well as depictions of actual objects or object classes such as bags and aprons (e.g. Fock 1979; Smith & Ouzman 2004; Eastwood & Eastwood 2006). Many of these very same images (some are not unambiguously “bags” or “aprons”) had also been included amongst the “signs of all times”, that is, as entoptics, when David Lewis-Williams and Thomas Dowson (1988; cf. Lewis-Williams 1988; Dowson 1992) first proposed the neuropsychological model which explained the occurrence of this class of images in terms of optical sensations experienced in altered states of consciousness. Generated by the optic nerve between the brain and the eye, a variety of “shapes” are “seen” universally by people as they enter a state of “trance” – and these include grids, dots, zigzags and crenellations – often matching forms to be seen in the engravings and paintings.

Subsequently, a category now identified as “non-entoptic geometric” images in the rock art of South Africa has been separated away from this class and set up as a distinct tradition of rock art (Smith & Ouzman 2004). Benjamin Smith and Sven Ouzman have sought to explain this latter form of geometric rock art – typified by finger paintings and rough-pecked engravings – in terms of a Khoekhoen herder rock art tradition deriving from a rather different context which is not to be interpreted in the same terms as is San rock art (Smith & Ouzman 2004). The distribution of this “geometric” art, “in bands along ... watercourses and sources,” appears to follow closely route(s) that have been proposed for a migration of Khoekhoen pastoralists, believed to have entered north eastern South Africa in the early first millennium AD. The origins of this geometric rock art tradition are seen to lie to the north of the Zambezi River and the Namibia/Angola border,

designated in rock art terms by Desmond Clark as the “Schematic Art Zone” – now dubbed Central African geometric rock art (Smith 2006). A high incidence of form correspondence is alluded to between the Central African rock art and the geometric engravings and paintings in South Africa. That similar rock art, with seemingly matching practices of body decoration, was still current in the late 1800s amongst Nama and !Kora (Anderson 1997; Smith & Ouzman 2004) was taken to lend some strength to the model (Smith 2006).

The distribution of this form of rock art is shown as occurring in a swathe of sites from the Limpopo Basin in the north east, to the Vaal-Orange Basin in the centre of the country, westwards to the Richtersveld area, and southwards to the south western Cape. As mentioned, the proximity of this form of rock art to rivers has been emphasised; however, almost all rock art can be shown to be “near water” (compare, for instance, the distribution maps for fineline rock painting sites in the Cederberg in Parkington & Manhire 2003).

Parkington *et al.* (2008) question whether the “superficially similar images” defining these linked sites really do constitute the “concrete trace” of Khoekhoen herders moving across the subcontinent. Similarities in form may be found between some finger paintings and rough-pecked engravings, but these are often the more basic forms (e.g. crossed circles and grids) that show up in many different contexts in Southern Africa and beyond.¹² More complex forms of images tend to be unique to particular sites. But if the sites were linked along a route of migration, a more fundamental question revolves on dating, an issue raised also by Peter Mitchell (2004). Present evidence suggests that the handprints and finger dots (assumed to

¹² Tellinger & Heine (2009) and other fringe writers speculate on long-distance links at Driekopseiland on the basis of similarity of basic design (e.g. crossed circle = Celtic Cross).

be associated) in the south western Cape (Manhire 1998), and taken in this model to be the local manifestation and an end-point of Khoekhoen expansion, may be of relatively early date, some 1 500 years old. This would imply that dates for sites further back along the route would need to be earlier, which remains to be shown. It may well be that relevant engravings at Driekopseiland, mid-way between the Limpopo and the south western Cape, are later, perhaps younger than 1200 or 1300 years (Butzer *et al.* 1979; Morris 2002). The difficulty of dating the rock art itself makes these questions hard to address. A further implication is that one might expect evidence of population and cultural change concomitant with the emergence of Khoekhoen rock art in each region, which does not seem to be the case at Driekopseiland (Morris 2002), while Mitchell (2004) mentions areas with evidence of such change but which lack the 'geometric tradition' rock art. There are also some indications that certain of the geometric forms at Driekopseiland may *predate* 2000 bp (Butzer *et al.* 1979) and hence would ante-date the hypothesized advent of Khoekhoen pastoralists in South Africa. Much in the way of multiple sources remains to be assembled in order to test the hypothesis.

One of the implications that has offered some promise of being tested was suggested by Benjamin Smith (2006): he has argued that, given the proposed origins of the Khoekhoen rock art tradition in Central African rock art – believed to be authored by Pygmy-like groups – the rock art migration model predicts that “some Khoekhoen groups will retain remnant southern Pygmy genetic markers, alongside a recent genetic admixture from recent interactions with southern San and eastern Bantu-language speakers” (2006:94). The study reported by Soodyall *et al.* (2008) has not as yet found such evidence. In a sample of different self-identified San and Khoe groups, they find clear pointers to genetic admixture, as predicted, from

recent interactions with Bantu-speaking people, as also from sea-borne immigrants. But this only complements evidence of a shared gene pool indicating “a recent common ancestry” for Khoe and San, who could not therefore be distinguished as yet in genetic terms (Soodyall *et al.* 2008:46).

“Fusion” or response to complexity?

Smith and Ouzman (2004:512-3; Smith 2006) have proposed “cross-cultural ‘conversations’” or “elements of fusion” whereby an “older, more homogeneous [Khoekhoen] artistic canon took on local developments,” (2004:512), such that some of the rock art in the Northern and Western Cape can be seen as being “somewhere between Khoekhoen and San art in their subject and manner of depiction” (Smith 2006:93). Smith further cites Waldman’s (2001 [2007]) work on Griqua history and culture, and my own previous work at Driekopseiland (Morris 2002), as indicating complex social fusion across the Khoe-San spectrum in the Northern Cape.

At Driekopseiland I have been concerned to propose an alternative to the ethnic explanation which tends to prevail and arguably remains implicit in a concept such as “fusion”. Recognising that the engravings there probably belong to a period of increasing social complexity in the wider landscape, I have sought ways for framing the discussion other than by way of social concepts – or ideal ethnic types – whose credentials (Chapter III above) may be questionable. Currently (as noted in Chapter IV), it is understood that at least three major, distinct rock art traditions existed in South Africa: San rock art, and smaller bodies of rock art associated with Khoekhoen and Bantu-speakers (e.g. Lewis-Williams & Challis 2011:42). Some researchers look into interactions between groups and express their findings in terms of creolisation and hybridity. These various characterisations, referencing

received ethnicities, even as they become hybridised, arguably lend credence to old categories which thus prove remarkably resilient as the fundamental entities having populated South Africa's past (Chapter IV). Indeed, a certain emphasis on authorship, of identity and of category, has been topical in the post-1994 period when, as Smith and Ouzman (2004:499) put it, "many forager and herder descendants consider separate identities of prime importance." The workings of "strategic essentialism" (Robins 2001) relative to current struggles over "authenticity" and access to resources (including traditional leader status) has favoured the projection, and even invention, of identities and vested interests backwards from the present (Morris 2008). The important point to be made, I believe, counter to the identity claims and presumptions about fundamental social entities, is that analogy from any ethnographic present can only serve to pose questions for archaeological and historical enquiry: the existence and nature of any group in the past cannot be assumed *a priori*.

The debate as to how pastoralism emerged in South Africa is indeed a matter much debated beyond the sphere of rock art, over the last decade or so. In Later Stone Age sites, the issue turns largely on the presence of ceramics and of sheep bones, which are taken to signal some sort of herder presence. But upon consideration it is not clear to what extent (and when) pottery and livestock remains in a site reflect true pastoralism (Sadr 1998, 2003), and, when it does, how it arrived. To the conventional notion of a migration having taken place (e.g. Smith 1990a; Boonzaier *et al.* 1996), an alternative argument is posed that diffusion of ceramic technology and herder practices (Sadr 1998, 2003; Sadr & Smith 2001; Sadr & Plug 2002) might account for the initial emergence of these elements in Later Stone Age sites. The seemingly unsynchronised first appearances of sheep remains and of pottery, together with the lack of a clear 'stylistic chain'

linking the Cape ceramics with those in a putative area of migratory point of origin, count against the migration theory. The formal continuity in Later Stone Age lithic artefacts before and after the appearance of sheep and pottery (Sadr & Smith 2001) in the first millennium AD is also more consistent with the notion of diffusion than of migration in that period. There is however growing support for significant change (and possibly some form of Khoekhoe-speaker migration) around the end of the first millennium AD (Sadr 1998, 2003). Recently added to the published evidence are the results of stable carbon and nitrogen isotope analysis on human skeletal material, by Judy Sealy (2010), which shows that before 2000 years ago the diets of hunter-gatherers living along the Cape coast comprised varying mixes of marine and terrestrial foods, with terrestrial C4 grasses (and animals grazing on them) making up a relatively minor component of what people were consuming. Domestic animal remains (mainly small stock as opposed to cattle) appear in archaeological sites from around 2000 years ago, but the isotope ratios in human skeletons from the first millennium AD indicate no significant shift in diet. It is only from the early second millennium AD that a marked change towards greater consumption of C4-based foods is apparent – and this, Sealy suggests, must result from people consuming more products such as meat or milk from animals grazing on C4 grasses. Sealy argues that the most likely source was domestic stock, particularly cattle, which, the results suggest, had become significantly more important in peoples' diets from this time.

Relative to these emerging histories the rather monolithic categories recognised in the colonial era are likely to have had complex, dynamic roots (cf. Humphreys 1998). With respect to pastoralism in Namaqualand, Lita Webley (2007) charts a changing history in which, she shows, a

Khoekhoe identity may have emerged only consequent on a lengthy phase of interaction between hunter-gatherers and people who preferred herding.

Karim Sadr (2003:208) advocates a case by case examination of each instance where herding or pastoralism was taken up and equally where hunting and gathering continued to be the preferred option. In proposing use of the term 'Neolithic' for the phenomena in question, he argues in favour of its neutrality and open-endedness, whereas the term "pastoralism" has carried with it, as he puts it, the "subtext of Khoekhoe migration." He suggests, further, that "the specific word 'pastoralism' can mask a lot of interesting local variability in subsistence strategies and, worse, it seems to force us into a conceptual dichotomy of Khoekhoe pastoralists versus thieving Bushman hunter-gatherers,"¹³ leaving us little room to recognise other cultural and economic combinations in the Later Stone Age of southern Africa" (2003:209). Social groups and cultural phenomena are the outcomes of historical processes rather than manifestations of ideal cultural-economic or ethnic types.

It is in terms of such a perspective that I have tried to approach the variability of rock art in the Northern Cape, with Driekopseiland representing one striking part of the spectrum.

Driekopseiland revisited

At Driekopseiland (Morris 2002) I have been concerned to view the site relative to the complex historical contexts apparent in the wider region in the

¹³ The very term *San* in its historical pejorative Nama usage reflects this situational perception of Bushmen being 'vagabonds' (Barnard 1992). A variant was given to the author by a Khoe spokesman visiting the McGregor Museum, who confided that the San, relative to the Khoe, were "soos straatkinders" – "like street children." Genetically of common ancestry, some descendants do indeed "consider separate identities of prime importance" (Smith & Ouzman 2004:499)

last two millennia. I also suggested that the specific location of engravings in quite particular parts of the landscape, generally, appears to be significant. Their placement on glacial pavement in the riverbed at this site, being submerged by water from time to time, may be an especially graphic illustration of this aspect of the location of rock engraving clusters. The notion of a “zone of entanglement” (Ingold 2000) with that of the “temporality of landscape” – and of places coming into being in movement (Ingold 2011) – suggests ways for drawing together different insights from multiple sources of information for the interpretation of the rock art and the place as a whole; an approach to interpretation that is not subject to the limitations of approaches foregrounding ‘culture’ and ‘ethnicity’. This perspective looks to the contexts of image-making in a particular locale and historical context, in a “meshwork” of various “entanglements”, rather than focusing on authorship as such. Indeed, the idea of authorship would, in this approach, be framed more in situational terms than in conformity to some ulterior type determining *beforehand* how people should or would respond via image-making in places in general.

It is true that Driekopseiland is rather different from other kinds of sites in the area, not least because of its location in the bed of the Riet River. More than 90% of its over 3500 engravings, moreover, appear to be completely abstract rather than being intended to indicate any 'real' thing, for example, animals or people – although some commentators believe that a proportion of the engravings are stylized aprons (e.g. Ed Eastwood, pers.comm.). The remaining less than 10%, generally amongst the older engravings on the site, are animals, highly abraded from long exposure. They include eland, rhino, elephant – a range of species that would not be out of place on other sites in the area, such as Wildebeest Kuil. The individual engravings (both abstract images and animals) tend to be relatively small, some 10 to 40 cm

across, clustering usually in groups of vaguely similar forms and probably covering the extent of rock that was available in the bed of the river when they were made. There is a repetitive, almost ritual, feel to the engravings, although no two images are precisely similar, other than in the simplest of the forms which are circles with crosses.

Gerhard Fock and Karl Butzer, and colleagues (Butzer *et al.* 1979; Fock *et al.* 1980), sought to construct a broad chronology for rock art of the area that includes both Driekopseiland and Wildebeest Kuil. Their approach was based on palaeoenvironmental studies along the Riet and Vaal Rivers and in local pan deposits. The resultant framework has been reviewed (Morris 2002) relative to more recent research on climate and environment history (e.g. Beaumont *et al.* 1992; Tyson and Lindsay 1992; Lee-Thorp *et al.* 2001), in light of which it seems likely that all the engravings at Driekopseiland are of late Holocene age. Convex surfaces of basement rock in the bed of the river are unlikely to have been available for making engravings, it is suggested, before about 2500 years ago. Any exposed surfaces were possibly obscured again by silt from about 2200 to some 1300 years ago, after which the entire engraved rock surface, it is hypothesised, became exposed, perhaps to its fullest extent during the somewhat drawn-out Southern Hemisphere Little Ice Age (Lee-Thorp *et al.* 2001).

One consequence of the site's location in its distinctive environmental setting is that when the river rises in the wet season, the engravings are submerged. Drought, almost a defining feature of late Holocene local geography, leaves the site high and dry for most of the year, an impressive expanse of rock extending, in two main exposures, some 160 m along the riverbed. An inherent 'power of place' in terms of these environmental

processes is seemingly echoed in the placement of the engravings (Morris 2002)..

A dynamic interplay is proposed between rock art and environment (in the particular processes of this place), with the most concerted episode of rock engraving making having coincided with a period in the archaeology of the area when a previously exclusive hunter-gatherer world was becoming more complex through the emergence of herding and encroachment, in the north east, by Sotho-Tswana farmers. The Type R Riet River Settlements (Humphreys 1972, 1988, 2009), mainly further up the river, were part of this process although it is not clear how they might relate to Driekopseiland.

I further draw on a cross-section of ethnography concerning water (implicated because the engravings were placed such that they become seasonally submerged) and concerning the 'new maiden' (a girl at first menstruation) who is "the rain's magic power" (Dia!kwain, citing his mother, Lewis-Williams 2000:273-4) – and is linked with water in similar contexts in several other narratives from across the Khoe-San spectrum.

There is no direct record of people making rock engravings on expanses of rock in a river bed; nor is there any record of engravings serving as parts of rituals. But, I argue, ethnographic sources do yield evidence relating to:

Firstly, the way 'special' features in the landscape have been imbued, historically, with meaning. Thomas Heyd (1999) indicates that where rock art is made on a geological substrate, fixed in a determinate relation to its surroundings, this in itself becomes a feature worthy of analytical consideration. Consonant with this is the idea that places and rock faces were construed as meaningful supports mediating spirit worlds

(Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990; cf. Morris 1996): that the surfaces, specifically, on which images were placed, constitute a “most fundamental part of the context”. Instances of myth and legend in the /Xam ethnography in which features in the landscape are imbued with meaning or agency have been touched on above, particularly the legend, “The Death of the Lizard”, given by /Han#kass’o (Bleek & Lloyd 1911; Deacon 1986; 1988; 1997). I have suggested (Morris 2002) that if fresh insights are to be had on the significance and meaning of rock art sites, a consideration of their placement in the landscape would be a good place to begin.

Secondly, ethnography of the last century and a half refers to ritual practices, specifically the female puberty rites, which have (or had) a geographical focus at the water source (the literature is vast, from across the Khoe-San spectrum - see Morris 2002 for an overview: e.g. Bleek 1933a, 1933b; Hewitt 1986 for a /Xam context, Hoernlé 1918 for a Nama example; Waldman 1989; Hoff 1995, 1997, 1998; Lange *et al.* 2007 for more recent examples in the area). Common to almost all recorded accounts of the rites are the ritual markings (with pigments, tattoos, cicatrisation, scarification, tonsure, mud or ash) – of the initiate, of her group, and also of objects – and the strewing of ochre or buchu on persons, plants, animals and/or the water source in rites of reintroduction or reaggregation. As common an element is a “dancing out” which, in various Northern Cape examples, is a “stap” or “step dance” directly to the water to seek the acceptance and protection of/from a mythical great watersnake (e.g. Waldman 1989; Lange *et al.* 2007). In this, these rites echo strongly the rationale behind the /Xam observances respecting !Khwa, and “the rain’s magic power” of which the “new maiden” was an embodiment (Bleek 1933a, 1933b; Lewis-Williams 2000:273). Guenther (1999:174) comments that in these rites, “all of the symbolic and affective stops – of liminality,

inversion, celebration – that accompany the transition phase generally are pulled out, creating a ritual performance of great emotional intensity and symbolic density, akin in this regard to the trance dance.”

A third strand is the bi-axial cosmology (Lewis-Williams 1996) that is evident in /Xam and other ethnography, namely a ‘horizontal’ axis between camp and hunting ground, and a ‘vertical’ one between spirit worlds over and under the earth, which are mediated by water – the rain and the waterhole (Lewis-Williams 1996). Thus, for instance, an animated landscape – its waters “alive”, its hills expectant as the agama awaiting the rain (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:214-217; Deacon 1997; van der Merwe 1987:26) – additionally was traversed (when it came) by the destructive ‘he-rain’ or the more gentle ‘she-rain’, which left distinctive ‘footprints’ as they ‘walked’ on ‘rain’s legs’ – the columns of rain precipitating from the clouds that were their actual embodiment (Bleek 1933a). Hence meanings were incorporated, not only *across* the landscape, and *inwardly* through ‘portals’ at rock shelters or at waterholes – and probably at hills where rock penetrates above surrounding sandy plains; but also *upward*, into a realm over the landscape. At Driekopseiland the nearly palpable ‘power of place’ (cf. Deacon 1988), and the rich field of social meanings in Khoe-San beliefs in relation to the rain (or its manifestation as the watersnake – Schmidt 1979; cf. Orpen 1874) and the ‘new maiden’, appear to converge at precisely the intersection of those schematic ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’ axes. In these terms, this place was a quintessentially apposite locale for the ritual practices under consideration.

The objective geography of Driekopseiland, I have noted, is a unique sequence of events that led to the exposure here, probably in late Holocene times, of glacially smoothed basement rock, aligned with the flow of the river

– which ‘bulges’ and ‘dips’ above or below the water according to the season. As such, the site resonates with environmental rhythms, and these, in turn, were very likely resources for cultural construal – the natural becoming ‘super-natural’ (Tilley & Bennett 2001) – in ways that are consistent with the ethnography. Upon this great undulating surface, more than 3500 rock engravings are densely placed such that they become submerged when the rains come in the wet season, but equally are left high and dry when it is cold and the river flow dwindles, or ceases altogether. It could be that these striking expanses of smoothed rock, lying length-wise in the bed of the river, came to be identified, not quite as the “great whales lying in the mud,” as Battiss memorably described Driekopseiland, their backs “decorated with innumerable designs” (1948:58), but indeed as a manifestation of !*Khwa*, the ‘Rain/Water’ in the form of an immanent giant Great Watersnake (Schmidt 1979). As such it appears to emerge from the depths in the channel of the *Gama-lab* (the Riet River), and to dip down beneath the riverbed again a few hundred metres further downstream. George Stow, who recorded the site in the 1870s, had also sensed that the “perfectly polished and striated” rocks, with “their wonderful and unwonted appearance” and “unexplained smoothness” might, in terms of these qualities, have moved the Stone Age engravers. Beautiful stripes, fat, and smoothness are amongst the celebrated attributes of a fecund python, the subject of Ju|’hoan tales (Bieseke 1993). Mythic snakes associated with rivers and waterholes (in some instances it is clear that the snake and the water are synonymous – van Vreeden 1955; Schmidt 1979) feature widely in Khoe-San repertoires, with particular prevalence in the Northern Cape, at least during the last century (e.g. Engelbrecht 1936; Van Vreeden 1955; Schmidt 1979; Waldman 1989; 2007; Hoff 1997; 1998; Lange *et al.* 2007). The combination of geological features and riverine processes – in a semi-arid region often parched by drought – make for a potent congruity

with beliefs associated with !*Khwa* and the watersnake. Imagery engraved at Driekopseiland arguably reinforced an inherent power of place, directly at that intersection of structural axes in Khoe-San cosmology.

A 'powerful place', then, it is plausible that Driekopseiland became a focus in rites, perhaps specifically those associated with the 'new maiden'. It is possible that the place itself – in the context of a relational 'animist' epistemology (Ingold 2000; Morris 2002) – was an active element in the redefinition, in these rites, of social personhood (Houseman 1998). And, it appears, the power of the place was enhanced, in particular periods of its history (perhaps periods of ritual intensification in response to environmental and/or social stress), by marking with engravings, which themselves may be a residue of ritual sequence (Morris 2002).

Ingold's (1993) concept of a 'dwelling perspective' (in which the totality of features and objects in the landscape are taken to be clues to meaning) has been a theoretically apposite means for bringing together several different strands – archaeological, palaeoenvironmental, ethnographic, structural, phenomenological – that variously reinforce and constrain one another, to introduce a new interpretation for the engravings at Driekopseiland (Morris 2002). Here indeed is a place coming into being in movement, in a zone of entanglement as Ingold (2000; 2011) puts it, as a nexus of activities which are "a particular enfoldment of the lives of persons" (2011:168). In this, in an animic reading (referring to belief not so much *about* the world but as a way of being *in* it – Ingold 2007b:531) which is clearly appropriate in the Khoe-San context, persons are not limited to human persons. More than just people have agency, or rather *are* agency in this history (Ingold *ibid.*). Changing metaphorical understandings of place – and the possibility that different parts of the landscape might vary in ritual significance – may be

factors more germane to the questions of variability in the rock art of the region (and the history of this site) than appeals to ethnicity and cultural difference.

Ultimately, also, people are the knowledgeable makers of their histories, not the mere vectors of “ulterior structure” (Thompson 1978) – although, to be sure, their action is conditioned and constrained by the world they inhabit. At Driekopseiland there will have been “deep, long-term underlying assumptions” (Bieseke 1993:77) that resulted in similarities in imagery within the site and between here and some other sites in the region. But at the same time, specific cultural practices at the site (ritual events, perhaps, of which engravings, I argue, may have formed a part) would have been negotiated and acted out by people who thereby invoked meanings that, while in some ways “full of the past”, may have been fulfilling new needs, addressing new concerns and stresses specific to their place and time.

Hence there is a socio-political angle. Perhaps much as in the late Holocene rock art in Northern Australia (David *et al.* 1994), where processes of intensification, including territorial concerns, may have been driving change in local rock painting traditions, so it is possible, I have argued (Morris 2002), that increasing population and a landscape that was becoming much more complex through the last 2000 years, resulted in shifts in ritual practices here and in the way the landscape was being marked. There is evidence of the development of a ‘mosaic’ (Beaumont & Vogel 1984; Humphreys 1988) of local responses to changing circumstances that suggest intensification of inter-personal relations consequent on the emergence of herding and agriculturist modes of subsistence in the region, represented by communities with whom hunter-gatherers would have articulated. Interlinking exchange networks are indicated by the introduction

of metal items into the valley of the Riet River during the last millennium from areas of pastoral-agriculturist settlement to the north (e.g. Humphreys 1970; 1982; Humphreys & Maggs 1970; Maggs 1971; Morris 1981; Miller *et al.* 1993). Other items including sea shells were also being traded in (Humphreys 1970). At the hunter-gatherer end of these transactions, such as at shelter sites along the Ghaap Escarpment (Humphreys & Thackeray 1983 - Fig. 23), there are hints of increased ostrich eggshell bead production in the upper units perhaps meant to meet the requirements of more intensive exchange with people or groups beyond local social spheres.

Aron Mazel (1989:144) has drawn attention to the potential impacts of hunter-gatherer/farmer contacts on gender relations amongst hunter-gatherers, which in turn could spur change in ritual practices (Prins 1991). It is relevant to note Linda Waldman's (2007) observations on the reduced status of women in modern Griquatown where performance of the *hokmeisie* (female puberty) ceremonies, in asserting women's autonomy in their space, contests the status quo, while at the same time serving as a core symbol of continuity and/or of identity for the community as a whole. If threats to the social status of women were a feature of the late Holocene history in the Riet River valley (which quite probably they were), and if the link between particularly the later rock engravings at Driekopseiland and female puberty rites can be sustained, then in terms of such a model this may well have led to heightened assertiveness and intensification in women's rituals.

Arising from this, I have suggested that – if the various threads in the scenario outlined have relevance – one may entertain the idea that perhaps each of the engravings represents a ritual action by a different individual as

part of her rites of reintroduction to !*Khwa* or its local equivalent at the water source. Each engraving – or engraving cluster – may therefore be a residue of a ritual sequence (cf. Manhire 1998 for a comparable scenario regarding handprints in the western Cape).

If each of the engravings was the work of an individual, and insofar as no two images at Driekopseiland are identical, each engraving represents, in this view, some kind of assertion of individuality. As a quality that Guenther (1999:135) sees as characteristic of a 'foraging ethos', a "dynamic, nonconservative bent of Bushman religion and art", this is an idea to which I return in the final chapter.

Ubiety

Stow (1905:28-29, 398) gives a lyrical description of Driekopseiland as a place, "wonderful and unwonted" in appearance, the extraordinary rock "perfectly polished and striated": to the San, he suggested, this "unexplained smoothness" would have made it "a place memorable to their race." I have used the term "ubiety" to characterise not just the particular "place-ness" of it (2002:198) but also in reference to the unique combination of circumstances, pregnant with meanings, that surround and constitute Driekopseiland as an assemblage of engravings in a setting of dynamic forces – forces which include the social circumstances which may have driven change in ritual and, through it, change in forms and symbols. While one's inclination is to seek a pattern, and ubiety implies the utterly unique and particular, I believe the term has some utility in expressing an attribute which one can sense in virtually every engraving or painting site (cf. Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2009 who refer to the uniqueness of each panel and site). At Driekopseiland the 'once-off' singularity just seems more accentuated, more contingent. There are numerous other sites on glacial

pavements, for example Nooitgedacht on the Vaal River near Kimberley – which, as it happens, is also partially submerged when the Vaal comes down in flood – but the glaciated rocks do not lie in the very bed of the river as they do at Driekopseiland and the confluence of processes and indigenous perspectives is not as apparent. In a sense, Driekopseiland is the ‘Rosetta Stone’ for insights into other similar kinds of places with rock engravings that are often also similar, though in their way unique, in the lower Vaal-Orange-Riet River convergence area.

Wildebееst Kuil

The site of Wildebееst Kuil is in a sense much more typical of engraving sites that are most commonly on hills or ridges in this area – higher up in the landscape, rather than lower down as in the case of Driekopseiland and Nooitgedacht. It is situated on a low andesite hill or koppie that rises above the surrounding plain on the western side of the modern city of Kimberley. The other obvious major difference between it and sites such as Driekopseiland is in terms of the rock art itself. The images are much smaller in number – some 230 engravings, with a further hundred or so human markings in the form of smoothed and pitted surfaces, some of which might be traces of utilitarian activities while others are hard to explain in such terms. The engravings are preponderantly of animals with some human figures and a small number of ‘geometric’ engravings including grids and sunbursts. In a sample of 91 sites in the Vaal-Riet-Orange River Basins, 20% of the sites have no ‘geometric’ engravings, more than half (including Wildebееst Kuil) have a mix of up to a third of the engravings being ‘geometric’, whilst a quarter have some 30-95% ‘geometric’ engravings (these sites of course including Driekopseiland at the extreme end of the spectrum).

In terms of dating Wildebeest Kuil may represent a slightly older stratum of rock art making, relative to Driekopseiland, although the two sites may partly overlap in time. Breuil, in remarks cited above, had not detected any obviously diverse 'styles' of engravings here, but it is likely that the rock engravings accumulated over a period of perhaps centuries. There are no clear indications that the geometric engravings are necessarily older or younger than any of the animal and human figure engravings: while no significant superimposed sets of images provide clues on the relative ages of the engravings, they are all fairly uniformly patinated.

In the 1980s, one of several clearings amongst the stones at the top of the hill was excavated by Peter Beaumont (Beaumont & Vogel 1989). It yielded Later Stone Age stone tools, Wilton in character, with rare potsherds at the top of the shallow sequence. Uncalibrated radiocarbon readings from upper and lower units in the excavation span 1790 ± 60 bp to 1230 ± 80 bp (Beaumont & Vogel 1989). If one assumes (as did Stow) that there is a link between the art and the occupation (or activity) represented by these traces, then the readings would provide a plausible, if coarse, estimate for the age of perhaps the bulk of the engravings. An unexcavated stone clearing at the south end of the site contains seemingly younger material including pottery, and better preserved organics including ostrich eggshell and small bone fragments, so that the upper dating limited suggested by the above date of ~ 1150 - 1300 bp should not be taken as reflecting the most recent occupation. Indeed, the last known indigenous inhabitants, as cited above, are known to have been Kousop and his family, probably in the late 1840s-early 1850s (Péringuey 1909).

J.H. Power had found a tanged arrowhead here (Burkitt 1928:33), which situates Wildebeest Kuil within discussions on these unusual “trace objects”, found in post-2000 BP sites distributed across the central interior to Lesotho (Van Riet Lowe 1947; Humphreys 1991; Mitchell 1996). These artefacts have been interpreted as stone skeuomorphs of iron originals (Mitchell 2002:294), products of a more complex social landscape at that period in the subcontinent. They have relevance in relation to recent discussions on territorial patterning in the Later Stone Age (Humphreys 2007).

Nearly all the engravings at Wildebeest Kuil are in the pecked technique and many are finely crafted – differing from the “rough” feel of the geometrics and other associated images at Driekopseiland. In a few instances traces of older hairline engravings are visible under the pecked engravings, hinting that once there were a greater number of such older images. The engravings reflect what Parkington *et al.* (2008; cf. Smith 2006) refer to as “a limited and, through time, changing small set of repeated images” – principally large mammals, mainly antelope amongst which eland predominate, with hartebeest, wildebeest, and roan, along with markedly smaller numbers of other large mammals such as rhinoceros, hippo, elephant, and rare felines including lion. There are also ostrich, relatively common on engraving sites, and human figures.

In comparison with Driekopseiland, the convergence here of natural processes and their potential symbolic construal is not as obvious. However, the points made by Heyd (1999) and by Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1990) about the need to consider placement and the relationship of images to rock support are borne out by findings at Wildebeest Kuil (Morris 1996, 2002; Taçon & Ouzman 2004).

These are that several of the engravings here that were previously considered to be 'unfinished' (Fock & Fock 1989:62), arguably depict animals (eland, rhino and ostrich) that *emerge* from within the rock onto its surface – or *enter* into it – implying that these surfaces were understood, as in some rock painting sites, as something akin to a 'veil' behind which lay a spirit realm from which animal spirits might be drawn (Morris 1996): David Lewis-Williams and Thomas Dowson refer to the act of art-making, in relation to similar images in the paintings, as a luring of images from within the rock (1990:15). San religious experience consists fundamentally, Lewis-Williams (2010:7) suggests, in a constant movement between levels of the San cosmos which these spirit worlds imply. An ostrich engraving on the site has its neck end (where the head should be) in a small fold in the surface of the rock – where the *intention*, rather than a mere failure to 'finish off' the image – is much more explicit (Plate 26). Eland heads, moreover, are engraved at the edges of two rocks, one of which could be said to 'emerge' from a crack (Plate 27). Engravings at other sites indicative of this kind of 'emergence' include those recorded at Stowlands (Morris & Mngqolo 1995 – some of the Stowlands images are reproduced in Taçon & Ouzman 2004 but are wrongly attributed to Wildebeest Kuil). In another example at Wildebeest Kuil there is a finely engraved eland which is headless and positioned such that it appears to *leave* the rock (Plate 28), from the 'real' world, as it were, into the realm that is above or over the landscape (Morris 1996). An interaction between image and support (and in the last-mentioned example, more than merely the support is implicated) is demonstrable in the engravings, as certainly as it is in the paintings. It is consistent with the idea that the support itself, the rock emerging from the landscape, and the hill above the surrounding plain, has meaning. More than this, it points to a sense of surfaces being quite permeable, in a context where indeed the metaphor of a "veil" implies too much of a boundary (Skotnes 1994:327).

David Lewis-Williams indeed writes evocatively of how spirit realms in such situations “overflowed into the level of daily life” (2010:7).



Plate 26. Ostrich engraving – interaction of image and support.

Attending to these curious features in particular rock engravings on the hill at Wildebeest Kuil provides important clues to meanings that are perhaps implicit in all or most of the engravings there, but without which these understandings might well have been missed. It is as if these animals bubble up, as does the hill, from a world that is underneath. A sense at least that the watersnake would “creep under the ground” is captured in a local

story recorded by van Vreeden (1957:175) half a century ago, in which an appeal was made to this creature for guidance “where our footsteps should go.”



Plate 27. Eland emerging from crack.

I have argued previously, and others have also noticed, that this animic logic may have extended to thinking about landscape features, as in hills, at a more macro scale (Deacon 1986; 1988; 1997; 1998; Ouzman 1995; 1996; 1998; Walker 1997). One ventures here with Tilley and Bennett (2001:335) into “considering ‘natural’ form as ‘cultural’ form”, and treading all too easily into realms of subjectivity (Smith & Blundell 2004). Again, the well known /Xam legend, “The Death of the Lizard” (/Han#kass’o in Bleek & Lloyd 1911:214-217), provides ethnographic grounding for such interpretations – but how far can these be extrapolated out of the Karoo or even beyond the particular instance recounted by /Han#kass’o, namely the

hills now known as the Strandberg? It is possible that symbolic linkages implied by these animations of geographical features were enhanced by those places being marked with rock art, but the argument does not work the other way around.



Plate 28. Surfaces and spiritual dimensions at Wildebeest Kuil: a finely engraved eland, its neck ending, headless, at the edge of the rock.

There is, however, some independent support in place names, some of which are known to be of Khoe-San origin and hint – just hint – at these kinds of connotations being widespread. *Renosterkop* near Kakamas is a direct translation of *!Nawabdanas*, meaning 'rhino head' (Morris & Beaumont 1991); and in the same vein many other Dutch-Afrikaans place names, including the name *Wildebeest Kuil* itself,¹⁴ may represent the traces in translation of earlier Khoe-San understandings of place and of “topophilia” (Deacon 1988, citing Tuan). Although the naming of places

¹⁴ When Wildebeest Kuil was developed as a public heritage site this possibility was considered in discussion towards giving it a Khoe-San name, e.g. Gnu-kamma, as a translation “back” to what it “might have been”. In the end the decision was made to stick with the Dutch farm name Wildebeest Kuil which enfolds both this possibility as well as the colonial history that so largely erased the precolonial past.

could be relatively quotidian, //Kabbo told Lucy Lloyd (Bleek & Lloyd L.II.28.2541) that place names were given by /Kaggen, the trickster deity, as “the Bushmen did not give the places names;” and /Han#kass’o (Bleek 1923:67) mentioned how /Kaggen named “three places of water” – whose meanings were unknown (James 2001).

Whether the late nineteenth century ethnography of the Karoo might be applied beyond any but the most recent engravings and the specific area to which the narratives relate is a question that has been raised a few times above. Janette Deacon (1988:131) expressed these concerns and thought it inadvisable to discuss religion and beliefs except by reference to particular groups, places and historical times (cf. Mitchell *et al.* 2008). While some features seem very specific and local, there are yet aspects of a Later Stone Age worldview which appear to cross-cut dramatic language and dialectal barriers. Evidence of this includes the similarity of stories collected from the Karoo and Drakensberg, separated by hundreds of kilometres and in distinct rock engraving and rock painting regions (Orpen 1874; Bleek 1875). There is indeed also a basic similarity in the rock art imagery across these same tracts, merging without “sudden changes” (Smith 2006). “Widespread, unified but spatially variable” is how Parkington *et al.* (2008) characterise what is conventionally referred to as San art. David Lewis-Williams’s (1996) discernment of a bi-axial scheme informing nineteenth century San thought – of a San cosmos – was derived from clues scattered throughout the Bleek and Lloyd and Orpen texts (Lewis-Williams & Challis 2011:159) and as such he has regarded it as “not ineluctable”, better conceived as “resource” than as “structure”, something that could be manipulated in performance (1996:137-141). It has served as a means to think about convergences of ideas at Driekopseiland and I refer to it again in the context of Wildebeest Kuil.

The 'vertical' dimension in the cosmos emergent in /Xam narratives may be quite palpable in some aspects of places such as Wildebeest Kuil (already noted in specific engravings) where rocky eminences materialise out of sandy plains, reaching into the domain of clouds, as an *axis mundi* mediating realms over and under the earth. When there are springs or waterholes, in this case a *kuil* (deep depression where water collects), close to such rocky "outgrowths" from the sand, their potency may well have been enhanced. As David Lewis-Williams (1996:126) points out, the /Xam word !*Khwa* means both rain and water, precipitating out of clouds, and welling up in springs and waterholes.

!*Khwa-ka xoro*, the rain-bull, is said to have dwelt in the waterhole. Drawn in a sketch by Dia!kwain in Mowbray in 1875 (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:224-225), in an image remarkably like rock engravings on Karoo hills (Deacon 1994:253), it was "an animal which is said to live in the water, and to be captured by the sorcerers and led about the country by them when they want to make rain." Another narrative has the rain-maker "ride the rain up the mountain" to "cut the rain ... so the rain's blood flows down" (Bleek 1933a:310). At the approach of thunderstorms "the darkness is very dark on the Brinkkop's summit," narrated //Kabbo (cited in Lewis-Williams & Challis 2011:179) – evidently referring to the dolerite-capped koppies of the Karoo. Janette Deacon (1988; 1997) has shown that the association of hills and waterholes and of rain is very clear, including their mutual involvement in rain-making. At the rock engraving site of Thaba Sione near Mahikeng, Sven Ouzman (1996) has referred to the behaviour of rhinos moving between pools in the nearby Tlhakajeng River and rubbing stones at the base of the engraved hill, which might link movements of animals and

seasons and the activities of performers of rituals whose actions might also have been the making of engravings.

Contrasting entanglements

What is suggested here is a rather different kind of ritual context for Wildebeest Kuil from that which has been advanced with respect to Driekopseiland. It is a context in which a preponderance of animal images makes more sense. The entanglements here of activities by people and animals, of geography, and of weather, are different, and contingent in different ways. Importantly, the social and historical contexts may be related – some of the explanatory concepts, I believe, may relate broadly within the same ‘system’, with the two sites having rather different gender associations. But, more significantly, the two sites may additionally be signalling different, perhaps temporally separated, responses to the changes that characterise the last 2000 years.

People have lived in the vicinity at both places broadly contemporaneously with the rock art (there are also in both places much older Earlier and Middle Stone Age traces). At Driekopseiland the relevant living sites, the domestic spaces, are necessarily up on the bank and away from the engravings, which are situated in an active river bed, sometimes inundated by torrential flooding. The suggested ritual context is not one that would be centred in a domestic setting: the rites of association with *!Khwa* or the watersnake would take place at the water, not at the home, and there would be social exclusions as have been documented in the ethnography (e.g. Waldman 2007).

In the case of Wildebeest Kuil, by contrast, there is evidence of much Later Stone Age activity on the hill besides the making of rock engravings. Just what this activity was, what these traces meant – assuming that they were contemporary with the rock art – was the subject of some debate in the early discussions of archaeologists visiting here. It will be recalled that the Abbé Breuil had noticed stone circles and clearings on and around the hill, the bases of dwellings, he surmised (but see Jacobson 2005; Parsons 2005), which contained ash and microlithic stone artefacts (Breuil 1929: Ch XXXVII). Both Miles Burkitt (1928), on an earlier visit, and Desmond Clark (1959), on a much later one, were similarly drawn by the combination of apparent dwellings and Later Stone Age debris alongside rock engravings. Clark went on to include the site in his discussion not so much of rock art but of seasonal aggregation and dispersal which he believed was a behaviour pattern, noted ethnographically, that could be detected in the distribution and nature of Later Stone Age sites in Southern Africa. The Halfway House Kopje (i.e. Wildebeest Kuil), with its evidence of 'living floors' in addition to the art, must, he suggested, have "supported a larger population and may have been a wet season camp when family groups and bands came together for annual hunting" (1959:218).

As it happens, the idea of a larger population aggregated here was not new: George Stow (1905) suggested it with reference to the same numerous circles and semi-circles of stone which, indeed, he exaggerated into a 'town', implying somewhat greater substance and permanence than would Clark. Louis Péringuey (1909:409-412) contested the interpretation at some length: from missionaries he mustered evidence that 'Bushmen' and 'Korannas' may well have lived there in recent times; but, unlike Stow, he was inclined to assign the engravings to a pre-'Bushman' era; and, in terms

of specific observations on the ground, he believed that Stow had “allowed his imagination to run riot.”

These matters will be taken up in the next concluding Chapter.

Rock paintings

The rock paintings of the Northern Cape and Karoo, distinctively finger-painted or daubed and mainly comprising a limited repertoire of geometric designs, deserve more in-depth study. One of the first of the archaeological investigations germane to finger paintings was that by John Goodwin (1936) at Keurfontein near Vosburg. A shelter amongst boulders at the top of a hill, overlooking a landscape with many engraving sites, has a few simple finger painted designs in it. Goodwin excavated the shallow deposit finding "Smithfield B" artefacts with a few sherds of grass tempered comb-stamped pottery. Similar material was recovered from the immediate surrounds, Goodwin reporting that "there are no signs of any earlier or later inhabitants of the shelter" (1936:202-3). Much the same kind of scenario emerges from subsequent work, for instance the surveys by Jalmar and Lone Rudner (1968) and by Gerhard and Dora Fock (Fock 1969b). Numbers of Karoo sites with finger paintings appear to have associations with late Holocene "Smithfield B" assemblages that include coarse grass-tempered ceramics. Some sites, however, were found to contain finer thin-walled, grit-tempered wares with lugs usually regarded as having herder associations (but see Parsons 2007).

At Glen Elliot Shelter near the Orange River, Garth Sampson found faded paintings including grid designs, as well as what may be cattle, on a scar left by the collapse of a roof slab in the shelter. Excavation revealed that the

slab had fallen onto the upper surface of level IV in the deposit, whereafter levels III-I had accumulated (Sampson 1967). It could thus only have been during this latter accumulation, dating from the early 17th century (Sampson 1970:70), that the paintings were made. Anthony Humphreys' (1974) excavation at Burchell's Shelter in the Ghaap Escarpment has relevance, a small site affording one of the rare instances where historical and archaeological evidence could be used in tandem in the reconstruction of local hunter-gatherer life. This was made possible by W.J. Burchell having met, conversed with, and described in some detail a group of "Bushmen" here during two days in November 1811. Excavation of the only likely shelter in the vicinity established an association between "at least some of the archaeological materials" and the people whom Burchell met. Finger paintings in the shelter, which may or may not have been made by the said "Bushmen", consist of vertical ochre smudges across the entrance. Also potentially keyed into documentary history is a site with an associated finger painting which has been excavated by Mark McGranaghan (in prep), above the London Missionary Society mission site on the Zak River, south of Williston. The archaeological associations of these various sites, vis-à-vis establishing hunter-gatherer or herder authorship, are ambiguous. They all however seem to date from recent centuries when identities in the Karoo were in flux and (so far) not clearly separating out in archaeological terms as unambiguously "hunter-gatherer" or "pastoralist" (Parsons 2007). Martin Hykkerud (2006) is much more emphatic that the wealth of finger paintings recorded in the Williston area are Khoekhoen. Hykkerud draws inter alia on work at Driekopseiland (Morris 2002) to suggest that the context of these paintings was female puberty rites.

Some of the sites show careful and surely meaningful placement of images relative to features of the rock, perhaps demonstrating some continuity in

thought (if not of San cosmos) from other rock art genres as to the relationship of image to place or to landscape. This is particularly apparent in one of the shelters at Ulco Kloof (Plate 29), where daubs and designs repeatedly follow the steps in the rock that form the low roof of the shelter in question.



Plate 29. Finger paintings at Ulco Kloof placed at edges and steps in the rock.

Summing-up

This Chapter has been about encountering rock art in the Northern Cape from a range of perspectives and scales, in place and in time and in relation to the 'end times' in which rock art ceased to be made, and when 'insider' knowledge was just fleetingly available to less than a handful of people with the passion and capacity to receive it, from a correspondingly small and fragile number of individuals courageous and patient enough to impart it. It has considered the difficulties of approaching a phenomenon which for the most part still cannot adequately be fixed in time and was no longer part of

the personal experience of the /Xam informants whose testimony seems otherwise so richly relevant. It retraces the trajectories along which past enquiries have sought to anchor the making of rock art in regions and in time. In this sense one can recognise how researchers have hoped and grasped after difference and variability in anticipation of linking rock art with other variables or insights of which they believed they had some spatio-temporal understanding or the epistemological sanction to apply available analogues. Karl Butzer, Gerhard Fock, Louis Scott and Robert Stuckrath (1979:1211) saw “the several rock art genres of southern Africa [as forming] part of the archaeological record of the flexible cultural system represented by the Southern San” and that “Systematic temporal and spatial variation of the engravings appear to reflect processual change and distinct identity-conscious groups within that system.” Debate since then has revolved on instances where variability, otherwise involving no “sudden changes”, does sometimes congeal into comprehensible entities, possibly involving “identity conscious groups”, that now implicate multiple authorships even beyond the “system” that Butzer *et al.* anticipated. It has been in relation to these various discussions that I have looked at case studies that conclude this Chapter.

In my final Chapter I will attempt to draw some conclusions about the meaning of variability in relation to social context and change.

VI

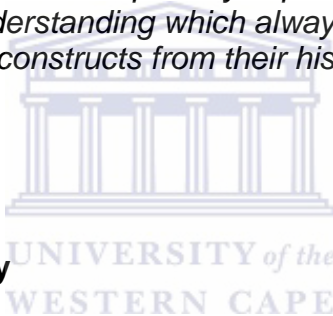
Powerful places revisited

“...there is no opposition, in terms of the relational model, between continuity and change. Change is simply what we observe if we sample a continuous process at a number of fixed points, separated in time.”

– Tim Ingold, 2000:147

“Relational approaches are especially important when we deal with ideas, an understanding which always threatens to divorce mental constructs from their historical and physical contexts”

– Eric Wolf, 1999:67



Change and continuity

Culture does not reproduce all of its attributes uniformly from generation to generation. In the realm of ideas, Dan Sperber has said, “mental representations have a basically unstable structure: the normal fate of an idea is to become altered or to merge with other ideas; what is exceptional is the reproduction of an idea” (Sperber 1985:31, cited by Ellen 1996). This is at least partly because ideas and other cultural features are historically contingent upon events and the contexts of place and of material circumstances. It stands to reason that this would be the case in rock art production – as well as in story telling, in ritual performance, and in the realms of artefact production and other spheres of cultural activity – and this much can be and has been demonstrated empirically. What is surprising indeed is the degree of *continuity* in rock art, as seems to be apparent, both across the landscape and seemingly through time (or through at least some

periods of time) – notwithstanding on-going issues regarding the actual dating of rock art. Remarkably, indeed, this sense of conformity – which is noticed also in certain similarities in stories that have been told in different historical and geographical contexts – extends across significant and even radical linguistic boundaries. Benjamin Smith (2006) refers to the “steady and progressive rate of art change” in San art across the subcontinent, with David Lewis-Williams and David Pearce (2009:58) suggesting that where change tends to be “incremental” rather than catastrophic, existing rock paintings in a panel would have had a tendency to stabilise religious concepts. As art-makers accessed altered states, however, they could bring idiosyncratic experiences into play, generating new elements in belief and new images.

The issue of change has been one of the main points of debate in constructing accounts of South Africa’s precolonial past (see Chapter IV), where some models adopted to explain it, as critics point out, constrain the possibility of change except in terms of outside influence, for instance. Models adopting ‘culture’ and ‘ethnicity’, for example, have often tended to project primordial, homogeneous forms through history, in which individuals take on cultural or cognitive templates which are given *a priori*. Much of this thesis has been devoted to a critique of such schemes. And yet, how is one to account for the continuity which seems to be a significant feature of the rock art, as well as of the technology, the social life and indeed the cosmology of the makers of San rock engravings and paintings in particular?

One may observe, however, that the overlapping cultural features in Later Stone Age and historically recorded San groups manifestly do not co-vary. Language barriers do not clearly correspond with material culture

expressions; and the material record does not mirror social realities in any simple or obvious way. Shifts in stone tool technology that are consequent on available raw materials, for example, may correspond with other aspects of social life, but social life as a whole would not necessarily co-vary with geological substrate – raw material differences generally have presented options to which people responded. A striking example is the case of Powerhouse Cave at Buxton on the Ghaap Escarpment along which inhabitants of many small shelters would usually have sourced chert for stone tool production. In the immediate vicinity of Powerhouse Cave, however, a hornfels source drew the inhabitants of the cave whose Later Stone Age assemblage thus takes on a somewhat different character (Humphreys 1978). Similarly, Later Stone Age people living close to the Vaal River preferentially sourced small nodules of cryptocrystalline materials from the gravels for flaking “Smithfield C” microliths whereas those further away were reliant on hornfels which promoted a “Smithfield B” appearance (Humphreys 1972b) – yet these were probably not signalling different identities. Elsewhere in the Northern Cape, the Swartkop and Doornfontein industries have been proposed as indeed signalling distinct hunter-gatherer and herder identities (Beaumont *et al.* 1995); yet examination of the Doornfontein industry shows the evidence to be less than unequivocal (Parsons 2007), partly owing to the fuzzy boundary between the quartz- and hornfels-dominated assemblages in question, together with variability in all artefact classes.

There is a curious lack of continuity between the themes of the /Xam narratives and the engravings in the area from which the narrators came, which led Deacon (1994) to suggest that the engravings constituted an episodic activity enhancing beliefs but not essential to them: they appeared to symbolise the bond between people and landscape.

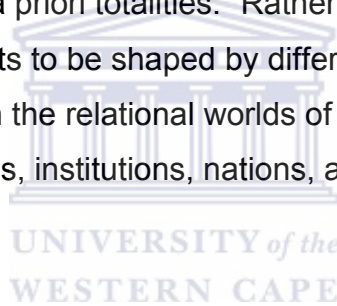
At a larger geographical scale, spatial and temporal continuity in cosmology and social ways may have come to be overstated in Later Stone Age and rock art studies, hence the calls for caution in use of – or even for avoidance of – the Kalahari analogue (Parkington 1984b:172; Humphreys 2007; Mitchell *et al.* 2008). Similarly the generalisation of the /Xam narratives and the insights of Qing (Orpen 1874) should be undertaken with care, as has been stressed in the pages above. In light of work in eastern Lesotho revealing hunter-gatherer/farmer interaction as early as the late first millennium AD, Peter Mitchell and colleagues (2008:17) issue the reminder that the late nineteenth century ethnographies “have a history and derive from historically constituted processes of social change.” In the case of the Maloti-Drakensberg, a key element in such processes will have been “not just 2000 years of sustained interaction with farming communities, but also the incorporation of domestic livestock, at least once, perhaps many times, into forager economies.” The reminder is that we should be aware that some aspects of continuity may be an artefact of our use of analogy and our assumptions as to what they mean – which is not to say that the materials cannot be used. In some cases there may be genuine consistencies across the Khoe-San spectrum, as Chris Low (2007) finds in his work on environmental features, where indeed he asserts that “anthropology has fragmented Khoisan ideas”: recognising the need to be specific in analysing separate Khoe-San linguistic groups, Low nevertheless believes “the evidence points very strongly towards a consistent pattern of like thought and behaviour” (2007:572).

Apposite to this discussion is a rather striking metaphor which Mathias Guenther (1999:82) invokes. He draws it from Dorothea Bleek’s Nharo ethnography in which she describes the singing of the women in a trance

dance. I have referred to it previously (Morris 2002) but here wish to bring it more centre-stage for the insight it seems to provide concerning the tension between continuity and change in these histories and particularly in the rock art of the Northern Cape. “The time is perfect,” observed Bleek (1928:22): “but no two in a chorus seem to hit the same note, though the general burden of the tune is kept up.” The singers “go up together, and all go down together, each hitting any note they please.” For Guenther, “the performance style of the women’s trance dance song expresses in crystalized form the nature of Bushman expressive culture” (1999:82). Under-girded by a spirit of individual agency, the imperatives towards freedom of expression find a balance, he suggests, somewhere between harmony and dissonance, against the collective constraints that pertain in particular group contexts. This metaphor provides a vehicle for thinking about diversity or variability which is highly palpable as one moves from rock to rock, image to image – and even from site to site – on the engraved landscapes of the Northern Cape, but which, at a distance, keeps up the burden of a tune.

Dorothea Bleek’s characterisation of the song is echoed by an account by Nicholas England (cited by Guenther 1999:138) of !Kung men, joining another man playing his musical bow – imitating, adding to, and embellishing the melodic motifs. The “interchanging of melodic phrases,” comments England, “... epitomizes the Bushman way in general.” As does Guenther, England points to a dynamic expression of independence while simultaneously “contributing vitally to the community life.” These metaphors express something of the quality of individual rock art images – each an event, defining a moment in time – relative to the ensemble; and of how a site may be “on one level, unique” as Lewis-Williams and Pearce (2009:57) put it, “and, at the same time, underpinned by the San belief system.”

Pondering these sorts of points about culture, Eric Wolf (1999:66) quotes Anthony Wallace's insight that social relations, through which life carries on, depend not on a "replication of uniformity," but on the "organisation of diversity." Observed through time, culture is not constituted by a shared stock of cultural content; rather, any emergent coherence results from social processes through which people, as Wolf puts it, are "organised into convergent action or into which they organise themselves." Wolf proposes that to understand how such processes of organisation occur it is useful to consider the concept of power - "but", he cautions, "to think of power as an all-embracing, unitary entelechy would merely reproduce the reified view of society and culture as a priori totalities." Rather, power should be thought of relationally, where it gets to be shaped by different relationships, "brought into play differentially in the relational worlds of families, communities, regions, activity systems, institutions, nations, and across national boundaries."



It is possible to think of power as residing in the relations of place, particularly in the way that Tim Ingold (2007a:103; 2011:168) conceived of places as "zones of entanglement" and as "formations that arise within the process of movement," each 'site' a nexus in a meshwork, a drawing together of the activities of people. Knotted here, like threads stretching in and through sites, would be, precisely, (as per Wolf), relational worlds of families, communities, regions, activity systems, institutions ... and if not exactly nations in the precolonial world of the Northern Cape, then ripples from states to the north through which it is possible that the cowrie shells (*Cypraea annulus*) had come, that ended up in Riet River burials (Humphreys 1970), their backs cut away for attachment to clothing (Maggs 1976; Voigt 1983). In items from far away may have resided power, as in

relationships with the nearer people involved in the exchange. And these were not the only objects being transferred to and from, at various scales (Humphreys 1988, 2009).

Aggregation or territoriality?

It is in light of these points that I recall the debate about the archaeological traces on the hill at Wildebeest Kuil.

Essentially there were two views:

- George Stow's (1905), that the stone circles on and around the hill amounted to a fairly permanent settlement to which he even gave the term "town". Péringuey (1909) contested this notion, allowing missionary testimony that 'Bushmen' and 'Korannas' had lived there in recent times; but asserting that the engravings were pre-'Bushman' in age: Stow had "allowed his imagination to run riot."
- Desmond Clark's (1959), that the combination of apparent dwellings and Later Stone Age debris alongside rock engravings pointed to this site being part of a seasonal aggregation and dispersal pattern, noted ethnographically, and evident in the distribution and nature of Later Stone Age sites in Southern Africa. Wildebeest Kuil, with its 'living floors' and rock art, seemed to have "supported a larger population and may have been a wet season camp when family groups and bands came together for annual hunting" (1959:218).

This disagreement has reference to a current debate already alluded to in previous pages. On the one hand there is the model articulated by Lyn

Wadley (1989), drawing on the Kalahari ethnography (inter alia Silberbauer 1981 and Wiessner 1982) which builds on the same sort of notion expressed by Clark back in 1959, referring to a cycle of 'public' aggregation and 'private' dispersal phases in San social life, which she relates to a study of Later Stone Age sites. On the other hand, there is the view that Kalahari analogues may not have general applicability (e.g. Humphreys 2007), more especially on this point of seasonal mobility, for which Deacon (1986) was finding no evidence in the case of the late nineteenth century /Xam. Similarly, Humphreys (1987) was suggesting "an impression of 'permanence' and even territoriality" in records of Later Stone Age inhabitation in other parts of the Northern Cape.

Variations on these two views were raised in thoughts which I and my colleague Peter Beaumont (Morris & Beaumont 1994) were contemplating at sites with rare 'portable' engravings at Springbokoog in the Upper Karoo, at the southern fringe of the area from which the /Xam informants came. The analogy based on the first of the above two scenarios came via Simon Hall and Johann Binneman's (1987) social study of southern Cape burial variability, where painted stones were sometimes included in focused cave burials. They had invoked Wiessner's (1982) model of *hxaro* exchange to explain the elaboration of burial ritual. Evidence for *hxaro* exchange was in turn one of the principal criteria Wadley (1989) had spelled out for identifying aggregation phase sites. The point was made (Morris & Beaumont 1994:26) that the portable engravings at Springbokoog, in combination there with a high density of engraving sites as a whole, and of surface scatters of Swartkop stone tool assemblages, of lower grindstones, of evidence of ostrich eggshell bead manufacture, of use of ochre and specularite, and of stone tool manufacture, might together indicate the kind

of scenario which Wadley had proposed for an aggregation site/s in light of the Kalahari ethnography.

But in fact the context which Hall and Binneman (1987) had built up for the southern Cape sites, within which *hxaro* was just one component, was actually of subsistence intensification within contracting resource ranges – which then was the alternative scenario we pondered. We cited Deacon's (1986) finding, mentioned above, that there was no hint of Kalahari-type seasonal movement in the Upper Karoo, with the /Xam extended family groups inhabiting areas not larger than 600 hundred square kilometres, and the places considered as “home” being centred on springs, all within a day's walk from one another. We also referred to Anthony Humphreys' (1987) suggestion of greater permanence and even territoriality in Northern Cape settings where variable rainfall and a greater availability of water sources presented a wide range of exploitation options, with flexibility rather than a regular cycle of aggregation and dispersal being the more likely long-term theme. The increased late Holocene archaeological visibility in the Upper Karoo region, climaxing around AD 1500-1800, might reflect population increase in response to environmental amelioration and coeval social pressure relating to greater social and economic complexity (cf. Parsons 2007). We argued that with these processes “one might expect that some kind of intensification along the lines of contracting alliance networks and heightened territorial definition ... would have pertained” (Morris & Beaumont 1994:27). This could have resulted in amplified artefact production and an escalation in ritual activity. Providing a plausible context for the making of rare portable engravings, it could also be taken to account for the proliferation of scraped engravings in general in this period. Furthermore, such a scenario could explain the spatially localised lion-like fantasy animal engravings that are so distinctive of the main site at

Springbokoog; as well as a set of characteristic elephant cow-with-calf motifs which occur both in the portable engravings as well as on a number of other sites in the vicinity. We wondered whether these might “represent some form of emblematic element associated with a particular group and time” (1994:25). In a progressively contested social landscape there might have been imperatives towards more concerted signalling of territory by these means. It might also shed light on the evident importance – including a “power of place” – that was attached to at least some physical features of the landscape in /Xam beliefs, ritual and folklore (Deacon 1988).

At Wildebeest Kuil, in a somewhat more watered landscape, there would appear to be even less necessity for hunter-gatherers to range widely across the plains in seasonal rounds of aggregation and dispersal; and in fact historical records cited by Humphreys (2009:171) suggest that they would not have done so. Clark’s explanation of Wildebeest Kuil, with its “living floors” and engravings constituting “a wet season camp when family groups and bands came together” seems an unlikely scenario. On the other hand, Stow’s reference to the site as a “town” does seem an exaggeration, but the notion of more permanent inhabitation by people of the Later Stone Age, with missionary records indicating that some version of this occupation extended into the mid-nineteenth century, is not implausible. The life history of Makoon, a Bushman styled as a “chief”, who lived not far north of Wildebeest Kuil in the early nineteenth century, indicates that he had lived on the banks of the Malalareen (Harts River) “all his days” (Campbell 1822, cited by Humphreys 2009:121). Such long-term residence at one spot may or may not be typical. The missionary T.L. Hodgson’s observation (ibid.) that the language of “Bushmen” south of the Vaal differed “materially” from that spoken to the north, however, indicates a context in which it is likely that people were more settled down in places, and less apt to range widely.

Fewer especially distinctive features that might signal territoriality have been documented at Wildebeest Kuil than at Springbok Oog, perhaps at least partly because the site has been “exploited” by museums and archaeologists visiting it from the 1880s or earlier. Engravings were removed from here for exhibition, including some that showed up in the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London in 1886 (Wilman 1933). One of Stow's copies made on the site in the 1870s enabled Gerhard Fock (1965) to provenance an engraving now in the British Museum. Doubtless many visiting amateurs and archaeologists “scrambled” (as did Burkitt at Pniel¹⁵ and Breuil at Nooigedacht) to pick up artefacts, gradually depleting the hill of its traces, which may have included items of some significance. One such item, as mentioned, had been picked up on the hill by J.H. Power, an amateur who made a name for himself as collector and naturalist, much later as director of the McGregor Museum. Miles Burkitt (1928:33) records that Power had found a “small flint arrow-head, tanged and winged,” on the hill at Wildebeest Kuil. As mentioned above these unusual “trace objects” from post-2000 BP sites in the central interior and Lesotho (Van Riet Lowe 1947; Humphreys 1991, 2007; Mitchell 1996, 2002; Close & Sampson 1999) are subject to debate on possible territorial patterning in the Later Stone Age. Because they have often been “picked up”, their contexts are “dubious”, but Humphreys stresses that as rare items in large otherwise, fairly uniform assemblages they may hold important clues for “unmasking” patterns that are otherwise hidden (Humphreys 2007:101-102).

¹⁵ “It was impossible to bring away even a tithe of what we saw and it was extremely difficult to make a satisfactory choice so as to produce a representative collection...” lamented Burkitt (1928:33). Breuil tells of how “Henry Balfour remained seated on the edge of the gravels looking at them with the melancholy of not being able to collect more than three or four pieces,” while he himself, and his companions Harper Kelley and his wife, “set about making piles of the best pieces seen, and filling my backpack to capacity; and when this burst at the seams, making a stretcher from my khaki jacket to transfer the 197 voluminous pieces up to the mission school – for shipping to Cape Town and to France” (Breuil 1929).

The engravings noted from here (Chapter V) that appear to mediate “inner and outer worlds” (Taçon & Ouzman 2004) are distinctive and may in their way mark some aspect of territoriality, but such motifs are not unknown further afield (e.g. Morris & Mngqolo 1995).

Relative to these ideas as to the manner in which Wildebeest Kuil came to be used and marked, its Later Stone Age traces discarded within or between living spaces or engraved on rocks, one may conceive that relations of power were relevant, particularly if or when questions of identity, for example, were in play. On current evidence this is difficult to demonstrate. However, with respect to Driekopseiland, where it has been proposed intensification of ritual may be implicated, it has already been suggested how issues of gender status and power may have had a role.

It would appear that both Wildebeest Kuil and Driekopseiland fell within the same language area (Humphreys 2009) so that conceivably the same //kxau-speaking people were involved in both sites. Humphreys (2009) gives an account as to why the Type R Settlement Area arose along the Riet River, the most important of which was perhaps that the Riet was “beyond ‘striking distance’ of the Tswana” who “attacked” southwards and from the west, in conflict recounted to Campbell by the Bushman ‘chief’ Makoon. Of significance are clues from Campbell’s interaction with Makoon, that these attacks by the Tswana as well as !Kora had resulted in a reduction of the Bushman population at the northern end of the //kxau-speaking territory. Humphreys (1972, 1988, 2009) has demonstrated in relation to the above historical factors, how hunter-gatherers practising an “immediate-return system” had switched, in the case of the Riet River Settlement Area, to a “delayed-return system”. Evidently others of the same group in the

Wildebeest Kuil area did not take this step – for reasons made apparent above.

It is uncertain how the Driekopseiland engravings relate to the Type R Settlement Area and the //kxau-speaking Bushmen, but it has been suggested that the site is of a period when the social landscape was becoming more complicated to negotiate in the ways suggested here.

The arguments I have presented have situated the engravings relative to female puberty rites, not politics of identity nor references to histories of conflict. Even so, the point was raised in Chapter V that they may address politics of gender (and that amongst the Griqua in Griquatown today the continuing enactment of the rites has even been invoked as denoting community identity). The significance of *place* in these rites, I have earlier suggested (Morris 2002), is underscored in the Griquatown ethnography (Waldman 2007) – where women re-negotiate their roles, ritually, relative to domestic spaces as well as at the water source (cf. Hoernlé 1918). In this connection I saw it as noteworthy how the rituals were situated relative to a wider set of politics surrounding what the Griqua call *boorlings* and *inkommers* (local people and people coming in). Waldman (2007) shows that, relative to the *hokmeisie*¹⁶ ceremonies, the *places* any individual could enter in the course of the rites depended not only on gender but also on whether he or she was born of the town or was an *inkommer* (from whom the women were “sheltered” during the ceremonies). I suggested that some intensification in this sphere of the rituals might be expected to have occurred in the precolonial past, for example at and in the social world of Driekopseiland, as *inkommers* came to include ever expanding circles of social distance through contacts and exchange, and social complexity. Alan

¹⁶ Amongst Afrikaans-speaking Khoe-San descendants who still practise the female puberty rite, the menstruating girl in seclusion is referred to as the *hokmeisie* - meaning “enclosure-girl”.

Morris's (1992) model of interaction based on a morphological study of skeletal remains (including those from along the Riet River) indicates an essentially uni-directional gene-flow from the low-status (one could say, *boorling*) San/Khoe-San in relation to incoming Sotho-Tswana farmers to the north – which is in turn supported by historical evidence of tolerance by the latter, at times, at the fringes of their expansion, to the acceptance of Khoe-San women as wives (e.g. Burchell 1822-24).

In these histories – those coming down to us in the writings of missionaries and travellers, in the traces of artefacts and engravings and paintings in the hills and scarps of the Northern Cape, in places arising at different times and having variable duration, each a nexus of activities, congealments of natural and cultural processes, in the trading of objects across and within cultural boundaries and areas, in cosmologies and ways of doing things, in stories, and in many more kinds of events and processes – we can comprehend that relations of power at family, community and regional levels are apparent, articulating place and space at domestic through regional scales, and beyond. Process and movement, the perpetual comings and goings of people, as Ingold has it, are the mechanisms – not entities.

On thinking through variability in the rock art of the Northern Cape

We can recognise these various processes as being behind or involved in what has resulted in variability in the rock art of the Northern Cape. We can attempt to understand them historically and work through the implications relative to issues of social context and change in the precolonial past.

But demonstrating these points precisely is hard. It is in part because of the nature of rock art. As Lindsay Weiss (in press) puts it, our approaches to

rock art do not always have “the same historical traction as disciplines that rely on ample written resources.” The record is ‘thin’ and generally falls short of the “chronocentric” expectations even of our own discipline. Indeed as was shown at the commencement of Chapter V, when chronological control is achieved it may significantly change accepted views (Mazel 2009; Bonneau *et al.* 2011). There are largely “unanchored historical circumstances” surrounding sites and individual engravings and paintings. Hence we make the “discursive shift from the ‘events’ that the creation of each rock art panel represents – specific renderings at moments in a socio-political history – to an emphasis on the narrative that binds these painted and engraved panels into a meaningful *theoretical* corpus.” Grant McCall (2007) makes just such a discursive shift in his summing-up, that the making of rock art results from many short term and local contingencies; but it then endures to affect human behaviour at scales beyond individual lifetimes, its accumulation in landscapes representing long-term intergenerational processes. The long-term thematic consistencies are, he adds, easier to see. It is of course crucially relevant to recognise how the location of older rock art can structure the production of newer rock art (or other behaviours); how in the *longue duree* it has a recursive role in the places where it has been made. No doubt this has had an impact on the continuities one senses through time and, if there has been a drift of linguistic populations across the landscape over millennia, this aspect, of a cultural phenomenon fixed in place relative to otherwise portable culture, could account for the spatial similarities transcending otherwise marked cultural boundaries.

The individual events are tacit in McCall’s reference to the larger joint comprehension, to use Polanyi’s conception (recalling from Chapter V that “particulars can be noticed in two different ways:” we can notice them

“subsidiarily in terms of their participation in a whole” or we can “be aware of the particulars *focally*” – Polanyi 1969:128 cited by Lowney 2011). Lowney (2011:182-183) has clarified further that

“because we always rely on tacit clues for our focal knowledge, knowledge cannot become completely explicit. Knowledge (like a skill) can be deepened by analytic breaking down of theory (where the joint comprehension or meaning of the data is no longer in focus) and a synthetic reformulation of the theory (where the data can once again be ordered and understood in terms of a new theoretical picture).”

A quality of gestalt pertains, it will be recalled (Chapter V). By shifting attention to the parts, the joint significance of the whole is disrupted whereas in directing attention to the whole, the parts recede into a tacit dimension.

Prevailing models of culture and society – or of rock art – have generally assumed tacitly how events are constituted, and what the role of individuals would be in a general way, and focus instead on the longer term or culture-wide trends. Renaud Ego (2001) remarks provocatively that in such a joint comprehension, or focus on the whole, the individual works “are always considered secondary, like the passive illustrations of a culture.” He questions: “can one postulate in this way that they are exactly appropriate to the culture that bears them? Is one not running the risk of turning them into the redundant manifestations of other forms of cultural activity?” These and other questions are cut off, he implies, when it is already assumed that the content of the art would turn out to be “the shared, transcending beliefs and values on which individual artists drew and which made their handiwork intelligible to the entire community” (Lewis-Williams 1983:6). Ego advocates “a return to the walls, the places where the ‘works’ occur” to consider the

acts of rock art being 'worked', the local context, tools, materials, positionality – "in short," as he says, "everything that makes a painting or an engraving into an event and an advent in which the singular language of a 'work' is expressed and devised. The work of art works through the work put into its production." This is of course more easily said than done – but it is the necessary analytic intervention through which we might, for instance, interrogate otherwise tacit steps in the application of overarching narratives of culture or society. The analysis of Driekopseiland has gone beyond any previous work at the site in terms of considering the physicality and the processes of the *place* itself, and some consideration of these features is attempted in other settings such as Wildebeest Kuil and in looking at the placement of paintings relative to steps in the shelter roof at Ulco Kloof – and elsewhere.

David Lewis-Williams and David Pearce (2009:58) have indeed referred to the way that making rock paintings was itself a complex ritual, manipulating substances and surfaces held to be infused with supernatural potency. In "dynamic, evolving panels" which were simultaneously unique and, cumulatively, meaningful (2009:43), images might sometimes stabilise belief or generate new ideas and images (2009:58). In the process of communication it is envisaged that the art was both reifying and developing religious concepts. More recently, Lewis-Williams (2010) has suggested an analogy relative to doctrinal versus imagistic exegesis, where varied art, in an "imagistic web" of San myth and art in the landscape "acted in some ways like sacred scriptures" which, citing Megan Bieseke (1993:72) rendered "individual kerygmatic accounts [or trance experiences] into culturally shared images" (Lewis-Williams 2010:15). An individual's religious experience would be "preconstrained" by tradition" (Bieseke 1993) but they could also add to it. Ultimately, Lewis-Williams suggests, "both rock art and

myths are tightly woven webs of reality and purely conceptual elements” – both being “set in specific meaningful landscapes” (2010:15).

But are the webs so tightly woven? There is a line of thinking (e.g. Miller 2006) that emphasises the multiple and relational qualities of space – for instance in worlds filled with change, transition and motion – where the condition of *vagueness* is a variable to be contended with; a variable usually written out of the equation in the way that representation is enacted.

“Representations by their nature are precise,” suggests Vince Miller (2006:464), and it is this act of precision that works against the vagueness and ambiguity of the world and, therefore, the openness of social life.” He adds that “it is that movement from vagueness to precision where power relations are enacted.” From this we may recognise roles for *power* in the past (in representations constituted by rock art, for instance) as in the present (in heritage and tourism projects, in academia, etc). But my concern here is with how we model the past in relation to vagueness.

Rane Willerslev (2007) contributes a critique of the concept of ‘worldview’ which is pertinent to the discussion. He argues that the notion of ‘worldview’ – one of a range of representational schemata including cultural systems – is “fundamentally misleading” (2007:156). He shows that it rests on the assumption that religious representations of a given culture or society are an integrated and consistent set of abstract principles such that the ideas of different individuals about, say, spiritual beings would be connected and constitute an overall system or cosmology. Assumed is some kind of cultural grammar somehow implanted in people’s heads like a cosmological ‘map’, ahead of their engagement with the world – or at the wall of a shelter or boulder in the Northern Cape veld. Willerslev shows that “far from being a stable corpus of conceptual knowledge imported into various contexts of experience, [representations, e.g. spirits] are in fact *generated within these*

contexts in the course of people's everyday practical activities" (my emphasis). Citing Ingold, he suggests that "they *subsist* in the flow of the activity itself" (Willerslev 2007:156, his emphasis). In reality, in Willerslev's observation (he lived amongst the Siberian Yukaghir hunters for up to a year and a half over a seven-year period), so long as daily activities go smoothly "spirits simply cease to exist in their awareness altogether" – but in crises they are evoked. But even then there are only limited conceptions, not adding up to "anything like a cosmological map, a synoptic whole that encompasses all spiritual beings and their distinctive characteristics and interrelations" (2007:157). In most cases the spirits exist as prototypical notions. People do not express their awareness of them in terms of detailed series of characteristics particular to this or that spirit, such as might be "codified as dictionary entries or as checklists of features" (as an anthropologist might do). In most cases people entertain loosely associated features linked by a general idea of what a spirit is like (Willerslev 2007:156-157). He suggests that an unfortunate consequence of conceptions such as 'worldview' is that they imply that people's ideas are structured – whereas ambiguity (usually accounted for as "noise" – or blamed on outside influence) is the often normal state of things (cf. Guenther 1999 for a similar argument with respect to the San). Instead, Willerslev shows, anthropologists in fact did seek to codify belief, in the case of the Siberian hunters, "taking the various disconnected statements of shamans and weaving them together so as to produce ideal models of the indigenous peoples' *patheons* of spirits, which they then presented, with all the rough edges and contradictions edited out, as the 'religious ideas' of 'the Yukaghirs,' or 'the Yupik,' for example" (2007:146). Willerslev adds: "my point is that these ideal mappings of the spirit world are more likely to belong to the imagination of the ... anthropologists than to the thoughts of

the indigenous peoples themselves (with the possible exception of the shamans)” (ibid.).

The imperative to construct representational schemata, cosmologies, cognitive templates and the like, as was discussed in Chapter III, was in a sense part of a quest to render society visible (Macamo *et al.* 2002:15), available for study – equivalent in some ways to the “physics envy” said to have infused biology (Lowney 2011:182). Internally consistent, mechanistic social formations turn out in reality to be more ambiguous, more vague – more “shades of gray” than “lines of black and white” (Miller 2006:464). Above all, society is more of a process than an entity.

Terms such as ‘norms’, ‘customs’, ‘conventions’, ‘traditions’ and so on, widely used in the social sciences, are, Todd Jones (2010) has argued, imprecise catch-all concepts that are better discarded in favour of more precise characterisations that draw attention to the different social and psychological mechanisms and processes actually at work. “Instead of convention,” writes Jones (2010:529), “we should speak of conditioning. Instead of norm we should speak of imitation.” And to refer to expected repercussions would be better than to defer to ‘custom’.

The French sociologist Gabriel Tarde, eclipsed historically by Durkheim, but now enjoying a degree of “rediscovery” (e.g. Kinnunen 1996; Toews 2003; Katz 2006; Barry & Thrift 2007), similarly stood one step back from the construction of social totalities and insisted on the study of observable interpersonal processes. He argued that societies are not made up of invisible, evolving, quasi-physical substance, but “at all times and places the apparent continuity of history may be decomposed into distinct and separable events, events both small and great” (Tarde cited by Toews

2003:90). His quest was in part to document the moment, the location, and the mechanism, through which difference or invention are produced, where social changes might be “caught in the act” (cited by Barry & Thrift 2007:512). Tarde’s ideas could serve to refocus analysis at the level of events where “repetitions and resemblances ... are the necessary themes of the differences and variations which exist in all phenomena” (Tarde cited Toews 2003). In the course of repetition, his argument suggests, inventions arise, “generally anonymous and usually of obscure birth; which are simple or abstruse; which are seldom illustrious, but which are always novel.” They operate below the surface of large “culminating events” (conquests, invasions, revolutions), where Tarde invokes an archaeological analogy of a “daily and indefinite drift and piling up of the sediments of true history, the stratifications of successive and contagion-spread discoveries” (Tarde 103:91 cited by Barry & Thrift 2007:515). In this process, Tarde considered the social individual as composite and in process – not an isolated autonomous being nor a cog in a global system but a point of “intersection or interference” between diverse lines of imitation, rich in difference and complexity. This is a view which clearly resonates with notions of movement and entanglement drawn in this thesis from the work of Ingold.

In the performative quality of rock art it is possible to appreciate a repetitiveness that accounts for a great deal of the continuity which extends across the landscape and through time, very much as in the “burden of the tune” noted by Dorothea Bleek in her description of the women’s dance. But, as in the dance, novel “inventions” – the singers going “up together, and all go[ing] down together,” yet “each hitting any note they please” – so in the rock art, the imagery would continually vary, rich in difference and complexity. Ingold (2000:149) usefully characterises a way of seeing difference or variance, in a relational model, “not as diversity but as

positionality” – “Change is simply what we observe if we sample a continuous process at a number of fixed points, separated in time” (2000:147) – or in place.

At the outset in this thesis I alluded to maps and mapping. I commenced with a reference to Lewis Carroll’s mocking parody of the empiricists’ dream of total data capture to produce a map that would be of the scale 1 to 1. By contrast, representations of culture and society have usually been reductive, inter alia via taxonomies and panoptic assemblages of knowledge, as suggested in Chapter III and as shown in their respective applications not least in the explanation of rock art. Arguing for a kind of ‘mapping’ that does not reduce variability to an optical or theoretical blueprint, Titlestad (2001:31) suggests that “we need to conceive of a map which announces the ‘creaking’, the strain of representation, while celebrating fluidity and the divagations of meaning, force and signification.” It appears that in any case “the brain does not construct Cartesian space or topographic space, but units of space connected to action,” as Alain Berthoz, cited by Lesley Green and David Green (2009:175), has found in studies of brain structures and spatial memory. “Memory of space is memory of movement in space” (ibid.), he adds, which again is in line with Tim Ingold’s (2000:42) phenomenological account which draws the distinction between views *of* the world versus immersion and views *in* it.

In conclusion

In this thesis I set out to consider the rock art of the Northern Cape in terms of its variability and seeking to address the implications of this relative to issues of social context and change in the precolonial past.

From the outset I recognised that epistemological issues were likely to be crucial where western objectivist and universalist perspectives have tended to prevail in much past thinking about rock art.

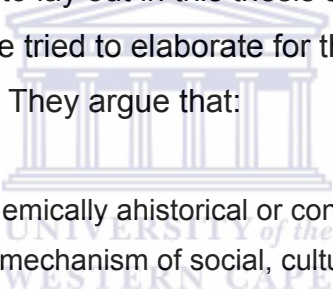
This study follows a previous engagement with one of the major sites of the area, Driekopseiland, and part of the on-going debate currently in rock art studies still revolves on the issues previously discussed. The previous work has thus served as a springboard for this study, and some interdigitation between the two has been inevitable – the present work seeks to extend some of the earlier findings to new material, particularly in discussion of the site of Wildebeest Kuil, as well as in elaborating some of the theoretical aspects.

I also established from the outset, as a parallel weave in this study, a concern about the social role and accountability of archaeology and studies such as this. I noted particularly the burgeoning salience of rock art beyond the academy in the heritage and tourism sectors and amongst descendants of the Khoe-San. I thus devoted some thoughts to the role of museums and researchers in terms of “heritage in practice” and went on to consider: “what is heritage good for?” The grand narrative tends to script a role for Africa in which the continent features prominently at first but recedes from view as the plot moves elsewhere. I link some remarks about the reformulation of Africa’s part in the “human story” with Geoff Bailey’s insight that our present is a durational present and one which is permeated by change and changeability. Knowledge itself takes place in a performative context.

Significant empirical problems remain, particularly with regard to dating of rock art, in light of which this thesis is unlikely to achieve anything approaching a comprehensive empirical account of the spatio-temporal

variation in rock art in the Northern Cape. Within these constraints, some account has been attempted to show in what way variability is manifest and what its cultural and social correlates might be. Emphasis is placed on theorising possible processes and mechanisms behind it which might provide directions for future enquiry. The quest is on-going, in which any breakthrough with dating in particular would advance the appreciation of the rock art historically.

John and Jean Comaroff (2004:534) have written about a performative context, namely ritual, in terms which I suggest are relevant to the contexts of rock-art making. Their characterisation of it expresses many of the concepts I have sought to lay out in this thesis and which I believe resonate with the scenarios I have tried to elaborate for the sites that have been case studies in this research. They argue that:



“..ritual is not an endemically ahistorical or conservative species of action, let alone an autonomic mechanism of social, cultural, or moral reproduction; ...it is often a site of experiment and social invention, a site for the production of novel understandings of the world, indeed for making history anew; ... technicians of the sacred... regularly deploy the heightened sensitivities of ceremonial occasions to distil order out of the ambiguous, inchoate forces that configure any social environment. Especially a troubled, changing one.”

The Comaroffs were writing of a particular troubled and changing post-colonial social environment, but indications are that some at least of the rock art of the Northern Cape was hammered into rock in moments similarly of contestation.

The terms they suggest, I contend, are entirely relevant to the themes that this thesis develops – ultimately the making of rock art, defining the

moments or events – and advents – out of which the variability that we observe is one of the consequences. These are moments not of mere reproduction, in which people are no more than vectors of ‘culture’ or ‘worldview’ given in advance of their inhabitation. They are moments indeed of experiment and invention.

This thesis defines not the closure of a question but a programme for future engagement with rock art and the places and associated traces where it occurs.



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