



The Reception of Visual Representations

di Livio Dobrez*

ABSTRACT

This paper, focussed on philosophical principles of interpretation, offers a sketch for a reception-based hermeneutics of rock art. Generally speaking rock art studies have looked either to ethnographic or to formal (archaeological) principles or to mixtures of these, the aim being historical reconstruction. My concern is to analyse the actual perception of the rock art in the light of concepts drawn from phenomenology. What results, differs from both ethnography- and formal-oriented studies (especially formal studies of the hard-edge objectivist kind). I take note of formal elements in rock art but with the aim of defining fundamental ways of perceiving them which in turn suggest a new typology for rock art (and indeed, all) images. While this analysis cannot bear directly on reconstruction of the past, it may provide one possible philosophical ground for historical studies, including the ones undertaken by the Centro Camuno.

RIASSUNTO

Il tema centrale dell'articolo, che offre una griglia di lettura ermeneutica dell'arte rupestre, è il principio filosofico d'interpretazione. Generalmente, per gli studi sull'arte rupestre che hanno ad oggetto la ricostruzione storica sono utilizzati principi etnografici o principi formali (archeologici) o entrambi. Il mio obiettivo è quello di analizzare la percezione reale dell'arte rupestre alla luce dei concetti tratti dalla fenomenologia. Il risultato differisce da quello raggiunto dall'etnografia e dagli studi formali (in maniera particolare dagli studi formali di natura oggettiva). Ho rilevato elementi formali nell'arte rupestre allo scopo di definire vie fondamentali di percezione che una dopo l'altra suggeriscono una nuova tipologia di immagini di arte rupestre. Questo tipo di analisi non può portare direttamente alla ricostruzione del passato, ma è in grado di fornire una base filosofica agli studi storici, compresi quelli condotti dal Centro Camuno.

I want to propose a new typology for rock art images (and, indeed, for all representations) which I introduced in a 2006 UISPP paper offered in Lisbon, focussing in the present paper on its philosophical framework within Reception Theory, what German scholars have termed *Rezeptionsästhetik*. In order to do this it may be helpful to consider the role of hermeneutics in general and to bring out a contrast with what I shall simply term anti-hermeneutic approaches. About two hundred years ago the leading principles of modern interpretation theory were laid down by Friedrich Schleiermacher, notably in his *Compendium of 1819*. Somewhat paraphrasing Kant's claim in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that we may understand Plato's thought better than Plato, Schleiermacher defined the hermeneutic task as understanding the text as well as or even better than its author. Here the great aim of interpretation is historical reconstruction, a grasp of the text in its original context. Understanding the past means understanding original intentions. The idea dominated nineteenth-century studies and, for all the subsequent challenges mounted against it, it remains the basis of our practice today. When I discuss *Anna Karenina* I am bound, at least at some point, to set it in its nineteenth-century Russian context and in the still more specific context of Tolstoy. The scholar who works to recreate the context of an otherwise forgotten people – the Camuni – does something similar. One difficulty with Schleiermachian methodology, however, is its assumption that we have objective access to the past. Actually Schleiermacher's position is more complex than this, but there is a clear sense in which it allows for the possibility of an unproblematic stepping into someone else's historical shoes. While Schleier-

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macher has had his defenders in the twentieth century (one thinks of Emilio Betti in Italy and E.D. Hirsch in the U.S.), twentieth-century hermeneutics has, on the whole, questioned this, taking inspiration from Husserlian phenomenology in general and Heidegger's radical stress on historicity in particular. Hans-Georg Gadamer, contra Schleiermacher, asserted the historicity of understanding, that is to say the hermeneutic primacy not of original intention but of the present observer's role in the process. When I think about Tolstoy or the Camuni I am inescapably interpreting from my own historical horizon. But for Gadamer this does not prompt a collapse into relativism. Rather the problem is with the idea of objective knowledge, indeed, with the subjective-objective binary itself. We grasp past events in *their* terms insofar as these terms remain part of *our* living context, informing the questions we put to the past from our present horizon. The logic is both simple and difficult and Gadamer termed it *Wirkungsgeschichte*. Schleiermacher, he reasonably pointed out, failed to take into account the fact that history did not stand still for his historical reconstructions. We operate in a constantly moving horizon which connects past and present such that, for example, the past supplies many of those questions to which we give present answers. Now I am sure that Gadamer was not thinking of moving horizons of ten or twenty thousand, let alone two hundred thousand years, though with help from neuroscience his model may be extended to cover evolutionary deep-time scales. At the same time I believe he was correct in his view of historical, as of any, understanding: if we think of it phenomenologically, that is, mental-descriptively, it appears to be neither exactly objective nor subjective. The binary expresses the process much too crudely and is better dispensed with. It is precisely because our present terms of reference are themselves historical (read non-objective) that they are not arbitrary (read non-subjective).

Gadamer's is a hermeneutics of Reception, but it was Husserl's Polish pupil, Roman Ingarden, who theorized the actual reception of the text, that is, what I do when I read *Anna Karenina* or the Great Rock at Naquane. I do not intend to follow Ingarden in detail, but my approach is certainly inspired by him, as also by Husserl's. Ingarden's solution to the subject-object dilemma may be put as follows: it is I who read the (linguistic or visual) text, but my reading is not arbitrary insofar as it takes note of the text's formal properties. Again, the text needs *me* to "concretize" it, to lend it my feelings and ideas in order to bring it to life – but in the act of concretization or "active reading" I remain true to what is there *in the text*. I cannot, unless I am playing Dada, read Tolstoy or the Naquane rock as a pot of jam. The hermeneutics of the present paper operates within this paradigm. In order to explain it, however, I shall make a comparison and contrast with some very different approaches generated by empiricist and Structuralist models. My examples come from Australian archaeology. Years ago I read a significant thesis written at my university by Kelvin Officer who sought to classify rock art images in an area south of Sydney – and to classify according to a system that could be entirely processed by a computer. Officer needed to identify all items as "objectively" as possible, so he built up his units piece by piece, for example distinguishing "figure with limbs" from "figure without"; then "figure with limbs on both sides" from "limbs on one side"; then "figure with limbs on both sides/human" from "non-human" – and so on. I have greatly simplified his exhaustive letter-code typology. But my interest is in the paradigm. Officer implicitly takes the view that interpretation is liable to distort the data, i.e. make it "subjective". The way to get to the truth, then, is to minimize interpretation. This is a hard-edge anti-hermeneutic methodology which seeks to put notions of style in rock art on an "objective" basis, that is, to focus on quantitative, more or less measurable, rather than qualitative elements. In his inimitable way, John Clegg spoke along comparable lines of a "knob-blob" building up of aggregates to form an always hypothetical unit. Moving from basic units to basic categories, Lesley Maynard developed an ambitious classification of the vast diversity of Australian rock art into Non-Figurative, Simple Figurative and Complex Figurative styles. There is an oblique similarity in all this with Leroi-Gourhan's attempt to map the locations and juxtapositions of basic representational units so as to arrive at an overall structure or system. In theory Structuralist premises should not lead to historical reconstruction, but Leroi-Gourhan in fact interpreted his assemblages as "temples" and "sanctuaries" – ideas which still seem very attractive. Lesley Maynard postulated a chronology for her three styles and, I think mistakenly, read this as cultural progression, perhaps under the influence of the art historian Ernst Gombrich. Still, we can say in general terms that anti-hermeneutic methodologies are also ahistorical or at least not primarily concerned with Schleiermachian reconstruction of the past. By the same token and self-evidently they seek to reduce the role of the historical Gadamerian observer to a minimum.

Quantitative analysis certainly has its place in classification. Some decades ago Structuralism regenerated many scholarly disciplines – and, in Australia, Lesley Maynard's empiricist, pro-archaeology and anti-ethnography model stimulated much thinking about rock art. There is a certain lure of objectivity – to define for example Maynard's five elements of style ("technique", "form", "motif" or type, "size" and "character" or type-variation) in as much as possible measurable terms. But objectivity is an unreachable goal because it is impossible to remove interpretation from the process and limiting interpretation in what is termed "low-level" reading simply magnifies interpretation by concentrating it at a particular point.

When Lévi-Strauss classified myths into their types he chose his basic units in terms of divisions in the story line. Thus the myth of Oedipus is built up from units such as the following: "Oedipus kills his father", "Oedipus kills the sphinx", "marries his mother" and so on. The aim is to limit interpretation of meaning in favour of an explanation which might emerge simply from associations implicit in the narrative (such as blood relations, the presence of monsters etc.). But all of Lévi-Strauss' conclusions are in fact contained in the initial choice of myth unit and in the initial choice of categories. In the case of Kelvin Officer or John Clegg or Lesley Maynard the difficulty is exactly analogous. And it is not as if theorists of this kind do not know it. They are perfectly aware that their method involves them in critical choices and that these choices are, in their own terminology, "subjective". Maynard points out that her non-figurative/figurative distinction is entirely relative: a sign may look non-figurative simply because we do not know its referent. Which is obviously true. But it might equally be said that her simple figurative/complex figurative distinction is largely a matter of interpretation. It would not be so in one respect at least if the distinction were strictly quantifiable, e.g. by counting the lines in a representation. But even assuming that to be feasible (usually it is not), qualitative issues quickly arise: Maynard decides that a figure in motion is more complex than one at rest. By which logic a moving figure made up of, say, six lines, is defined as "complex", while a static figure of, say, ten lines is defined as "simple". And this is only part of the problem, since the choice of category is hermeneutic. Why "simple" and "complex"? Why not horizontal figures vs vertical ones, or thin vs fat ones? If this last sounds amusing, we need only recall that Leroi-Gourhan distinguished between "*signes pleins*" and "*signes minces*". The point is not that some categories may or may not be better than others, but that all categorization presupposes an interpretative choice. In particular I want to stress that category choices made by empirically-minded archaeologists are specifically liable to the charge of culture-specificity. We do not know how ancient peoples structured their taxonomies, but we can be sure they did not do so according to the minimalist formal principles which I wish to critique. Certainly modern peoples still close to hunter-gatherer mythic thought have no such taxonomies. Rather, as we gather from the example of an Australian indigenous classification of rock art given by George Chaloupka, their divisions are geared to such things as levels of secret/sacred knowledge, i.e. more important and less important representations.

There is one last point I want to make in connection with objectivity-oriented classifications of rock art. This is the fundamental difficulty involved in any notion of perception as additive or of any representation as an aggregate of its elements. In fact you cannot arrive at a whole figure or composition merely by adding up its diagnostic traits. The whole is always greater than the sum of its parts. Friedrich Ast demonstrated convincingly two centuries ago that when we read parts a, b and c of a whole text (capital) A, whole A is already foreshadowed in parts a, b and c. In fact if we think of reading in terms other than a process of constant interaction, simultaneously prospective and retrospective, between part and whole, then reading itself, that is, understanding itself, becomes incomprehensible. Schleiermacher thought of this as a non-vicious hermeneutic circle and the actual process was investigated by Ingarden and, more recently, Wolfgang Iser. Now neuroscience may one day prove that all these people were mistaken, but I doubt it. Whether we are describing the act of perception of a representation or the representation itself, we need, at some stage at least, to think synthetically as well as analytically. The addition of diagnostic traits in e.g. Officer's scheme results not in a living image but in an abstraction, in this case more precisely a virtual image suitable for computer processing. And Officer is well aware of it. My intention, then, is not to criticize his methodology or methodologies like it, but rather to underline the limits of "objectivity". Those theorists who seek "objectivity" are the same ones who – let's say, on and off – acknowledge the extreme "subjectivity" of their position. Anati was right, in his 1994 *Valcamonica Rock Art*, to argue that there is a time to switch on the computer but also a time to switch it off and switch on the mind – in close contact with the data out there on the rock surfaces.

Now there are as many varied hermeneutic approaches as there are anti-hermeneutic ones. But all hermeneutics has this in common, that it accepts (degrees of) interpretation not as a necessary evil but as the core of the project. This means in the first instance a notion of the object in question as a perceptual whole. Provided there are sufficient and sufficiently unambiguous formal markers, a pattern emerges. This in line with Gestalt fundamentals but without necessary allegiance to all or even most principles of Gestalt psychology. The pattern may be read as a jumble of figures or as a composition or as an intended composition or as an intended "scene", i.e. as "something happening". Any of this to be read synthetically or, in Husserl's terminology, by "intuition" (*Anschaung*), our reading being neither "subjective" nor "objective" but a mental schema that is, as philosophers say, "intentional", i.e. geared to its object of perception. Of course such interpretation is fallible: you can get it wrong because of bad eyesight, failure of concentration, excessive attachment to preconceptions about what you are seeing – or because the formal markers of the representation are blurred, ambiguous etc. But this need not be conceptualized in terms of the subjective-objective oppositional binary. And naturally the methodology may include a host of quantifiable elements, as appropriate, and much else – for example, reference to available ethnographic data.



However, what I want to do is a little different from this general hermeneutic model which I accept and which normally leads to taxonomies of style – style understood synthetically rather than analytically – and to chronologies, that is to say historical reconstruction. I want to keep my interpretation at a level of perceptual generality, focussing not on stylistic markers (which are more or less culture-specific) but on visual markers and visual processes that may have some claim to universality. In other words I am interested in a descriptive, phenomenological account of how we perceive representations characterized by particular visual markers. I shall begin not with rock art but with a novel. When we open *Anna Karenina* we leave behind our own space/time to observe another space/time, initially that of Oblonsky who has woken up in the morning in fine spirits, as usual – until he recalls that his wife will not talk to him because she has discovered his affair with the French governess. The worst part being that when she confronted him with it, he reacted with a sheepish smile. As reader I construct Oblonsky's morning, his feelings, his memory, his embarrassing smile etc., and I experience the process as if I were observing the action, but without being a protagonist. I "frame" the narrative action and look inside, in a way comparable to watching a film. Something similar happens when I perceive the famous second panel or cavity from the Cova dels Cavalls, reproduced in the Museu de la Valltorta at Tirig. This is generally taken as a scene depicting a hunt, with a stag and does leaping, right to left, towards a line of archers. Now any interpretation has to take account of chronologies: in this case there are some superimpositions involving stylistic variation and it seems that new images were added to conform to an earlier composition. In the light of this we may continue to read it as a narrative scene, that is, to "frame" the action and as it were allow it to play out before our eyes. A number of markers make this possible and I shall list these, but briefly, since I outlined them in the Lisbon paper. Context determines that we read the composition in closeup, due to the fact that the approach is sudden (access being difficult) and that optimal viewpoint is more or less at the same level as the composition. Most important, the figures are small – and I mean this in a qualitative sense, that is, not merely as relative to the viewer's size but above all as a matter of internal proportions. Everything indicates that the figures are "doing something", the essential element of narrative. They are dynamic in that they include movement markers such as angled and bent limbs, outstretched animal legs and so on. They are viewed in profile, such that directionality enhances the sense of activity. The composition is highly asymmetrical and therefore perceived as unstable. In fact its structure is diagonal, the effect being of animals tumbling from top right to bottom left only to be brought up short by the line of hunters. Space between dynamic figures is itself unstable. It expands, opens out behind the animals, and shrinks dramatically in front, with very little of it between animals and hunters. All this makes for perception of an action unfolding for the observer, "framed" as an event in its own space/time, the frame being of a conceptual, imaginal kind. It cannot be broken because there is no movement of figures out (towards the observer) and no visual prompting for the observer to join in the action. Rather what happens moves *across* the observer's field of vision. And this is what we expect of visual narrative, just as we expect it with linguistic prompts in the reading of a novel.

All the above applies to diverse Levantine panels such as the hunter facing a goat in the Cueva Remigia (Gasulla) or the hunters apparently chasing a wounded animal in the same shelter. In the second case especially, though to a degree in all cases, there are grey areas as to whether the composition constitutes an integrated scene. Assuming we agree that the figures are contemporaneous, this will depend on factors such as the distance between e.g. hunter and hunted. It is not something measurable in centimetres, but involves an interpretative choice on the part of the perceiver based on perception of wholes rather than parts. This means that, ideally, the perceiver should be an informed one, and that analysis of the kind I am offering in this paper must defer to the opinions of experts on the spot. With this critical proviso, my perceptual analysis should apply to highly diverse styles of narrative action and widely diverse rock art locations. As brief examples we might cite a fine panel of Bradshaw or Gwion figures on the lower Mitchell in the Australian Kimberley. Here the composition features wavelike movement across what may be read as a combination of possibly separate or loosely related scenes (including some superimposition). As with other examples, I am not concerned with, and my level of analysis cannot comment on, the precise nature of the activity depicted. The visual markers on which I focus indicate narrative action, that "something is happening". But content belongs to other hermeneutic methodologies. Here let us just say that the figures may be read as dancing or levitating. The minute figures of the so-called "swimmers" at Mertons Creek on the upper Mitchell enact a narrative – probably an exchange of spears – in yet another style. As do the (possibly sorcery) figures spearing victims in a small, well-concealed space (also on the upper Mitchell). As, again, do lined warriors at Ubirr, Kakadu, action here being from right to left. But narrative action does not require group scenes. A single figure, say a graceful runner from a remote bay on the Kimberley coast, suffices to establish it and to establish us as observers. All that is required is that some – not necessarily all – of the textual and contextual markers I have outlined be present, and that these markers be sufficiently strong. The rest is a matter of reader-response or Reception. Let me add that it is not necessary for my

purpose to use the terminology of nineteenth-century Realism or Naturalism (though this may constitute a temptation). Such Realism is certainly narrative, as, say, in a painting by Jules Bastien-Lepage. It frames the action (which, incidentally, may include the action of being at rest), in this case not merely conceptually but literally (nineteenth-century pictures have material frames). And it underlines imaginal space by means of post-Renaissance perspective. However, some of these elements, critical to the definition of Realism, are entirely culture-specific and so do not suit my present purpose, which is to indicate what may be universal visual markers and universal aspects of perception. From my point of view it is enough to find ways of describing figures and scenes which are “alive” rather than “realistic” – and I consider Realism as a time-specific European style. Still, I certainly want to extend my analysis of visual narrative to any style and so to make connections between rock art and, say, Jules Bastien-Lepage or, again, an Impressionist scene by Pissarro.

Now for an entirely different perceptual category. Here I suggest a literary parallel not with narrative prose, a novel for example, but with genres such as lyric poems, invocations and the like. If I read “*pater noster qui est in caelis, sanctificetur nomen tuum*” etc. I do not position myself as an outside observer. Rather the text has a performative quality, its linguistic markers prompt me to some kind of interaction, an *ich und du* relation in which action moves not as it were *across* a conceptual frame but in and out of it. I am bound to interpret an invocation or prayer (say St Francis’ “Cantico delle creature”) as requiring me to engage directly in a form of address which breaks the limits of any framed act in a way comparable to the breaking of the so-called “fourth wall” in theatre, when an actor steps out of character to address an audience. This applies with Shakespeare’s sonnet “Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?”. Now I want to argue for an analogous visual situation which defines an entire category of images which at Lisbon I termed non-narrative Hieratic but which could equally be termed Performative.

The visual markers in this case would be as follows. On the basis of an example of Wandjinas from the Chamberlain gorge we could argue for contextual markers such as an approach from some distance, with placing of the figures at some height and optimal viewpoint requiring the viewer to stand directly in front of and below the composition. All this implying the figures’ position of dominance with respect to the observer, and a sense of increasingly dramatic impact as you approach. It is made possible by the fact that, in contrast to dynamic narrative figures, these tend to be large and therefore imposing. In addition – and I quickly list other textual markers – the figures are static (there being no movement markers), symmetrical and vertical (rather than asymmetrical/horizontal) in composition – and viewed full-frontally. An example of upper Barnett Wandjinas makes the same point, in this case especially emphasizing the role of prominent, large eyes. I argued at Lisbon that this combination of features and the viewer-response they prompt establishes a quite different, in its way equally dynamic, perceptual relationship. Indeed it is rather as in the literary examples just quoted. The image is charged with presence through stress on its eyes and its dominant frontality. This encourages the sense of it as unframed, i.e. not something we observe but which breaks out of its two-dimensionality, producing an effect of “coming forward” towards the viewer, or “interacting” with the viewer. It implies not the viewer’s imaginal access to a fictive space/time but the image’s entry (in a perceptual and not empirical sense, of course) into the viewer’s own space and time. I think this constitutes a very important representational category, one which, we readily see, has characterized any number of stylistically-diverse religious images in varied cultures. In Lisbon I used the example of the great panel at Barrier Canyon, Utah. The superb panel at Courthouse Wash (Moab, Utah), which requires gradual approach up a rocky slope and therefore gradual revelation of the figures, provides another good example. For size alone the Tassili Grand Dieu de Sefar must rate as a major African example. But a smaller image in a very spare style may do as well – and I am thinking of the *sorcier* or *stregone* in the Vallée des Merveilles who looks across from the *onde di roccia* to Mont Bégo. This figure, too, requires some sense of encounter or interaction from us and I would therefore term it Hieratic/Performative. Adding that in this case contextual markers probably play a greater role than textual ones. As with my examples of narrative/Dynamic figures, I need to emphasize that my method of analysis is not directed to specific content but to a categorization of perceptual acts and their visual correlates. It is not necessary for my purpose to speculate, perhaps with the help of ethnography or general historical reconstruction, on the precise or even general meaning of Hieratic/Performative figures, or to specify higher-level responses the viewer may make. For a start, I am sure it is not even necessary to think of these in however broad terms as religious. The well-known poster of General Kitchener visually breaking out of the poster frame to address you with an aggressive “Your Country Needs You!” makes the point.

So far I have discussed two categories of what Peirce would call “iconic” representations, that is, representations that “look like” the thing they represent. (“Iconic” of course not to be confused with Realism which “looks like” its referent, but in highly culture-specific stylistic ways.) I intend to turn now to what Peirce terms “symbolic” representation, one which involves no resemblance to its referent. The Bégo *stregone* features two daggers, themselves iconic. But these are not held in the hands, so we cannot perceive



the composition as a whole iconically, i.e. as “looking like a man wielding daggers”. Rather the non-iconic juxtaposition suggests we might read the daggers as symbolic, that is, not as *looking like* something but as *signifying* something. In fact we might hypothetically read *all* the figures, compositions etc. referred to in this paper as in any number of ways symbolic. The point is that whereas there are visual markers, specified above, for the first two categories of images (narrative/Dynamic and Hieratic/Performative), there are none for symbols. Symbol-designating is a mental act which may attach itself to any object. I can say that the room in which I read the present paper symbolizes the unity of a symposium or that the chairs on which we sit symbolize the solid foundation of our scholarship or, again, that this room is a *signe plein*, a female space, a womb etc. The Fontanalba petroglyph (one of a type) featuring a minuscule anthropomorph and a zigzag focussed on a natural hole in the rock suggests a non-iconic association. Failing other options we may well agree that it has probable symbolic significance. The point being that, in the absence of visual markers, symbol can only be inferred negatively or contextually. Of course if we have culture-specific information (directly or indirectly accessed) we will know for sure that something *is* symbolic and also, presumably, we will know its content, *what* it signifies. But without culture-specific information, we are in the situation of reading Egyptian hieroglyphs without the help of a Rosetta stone. It is the same with literary texts. The sentence “it was a dark and stormy night” may or may not be symbolic – and only context will allow me to decide one way or the other. This seems to me to be the position with e.g. the Rivière panel at Bègo, or the Newspaper Rock ensemble at Petrified Forest (Arizona). Doubtless there are myths, stories, narratives *associated* with these. But you need extra-textual culture-specific knowledge in order to decipher the text. Writing – of many kinds but superlatively the alphabetic variety – is paradigmatically symbolic in Peirce’s sense. I think that most Scandinavian, most Bègo and most Valcamonica petroglyphs are best regarded as belonging to this category which is as conceptually fundamental as the first two categories for which I have provided a phenomenological sketch but at the same time quite different from them in its mode of operation. Interestingly, Anati, in a programme televised in Australia on 8 October 1999, referred to rock art as “*la scrittura prima della scrittura*”. While some Valcamonica petroglyphs – and here I would look to Anati and other local scholars for specifics – doubtless fall into my first two categories, the general impression they make is of a form of written communication, one using frequently iconic images to be read as symbols. Thus, taking the example of the *Roccia dei Cinque Pugnali* from Capitello dei Due Pini we have a series of iconic representations (stag, weapons etc.) forming a vaguely anthropomorphic ensemble but one which demands to be read as symbol, if only, initially, by default. Comparison with the Centro Camuno logo, which is of course based on the Five-Daggers rock, makes my point about the category of the symbolic with utmost clarity. The images are identical. But they signify entirely different things: the first something I leave to Anati, the second something I can decipher for myself, since I possess the requisite culture-specific knowledge. Whatever the meaning of the Five-Daggers rock, the logo signifies neither more nor less than “Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici”. In short, one icon may carry quite diverse symbolic meanings – because symbol-designating is independent of visual markers.

In the briefest of summaries, I would like to put forward a new and Reception-based typology for all images, including rock art ones. For the purpose I have placed my methodology within the broad hermeneutic enterprise and, for the sake of what in these consumer times I must term product-differentiation, I have contrasted it with empiricist taxonomic approaches. Finally I have offered a sketch for three visual-interpretative categories, two of them operating within the framework of iconic and one within the framework of symbolic representation. It may be that the present methodology in some respects bridges the distance between self-styled objective formal studies and the historical reconstruction which for two centuries has been the central aim of any hermeneutics.

CAPTION OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- fig. 1 Bradshaw figures (lower Mitchell, Kimberley): photo L. Dobrez
- fig. 2 Sorcery (?) figures (upper Mitchell, Kimberley) : photo L. Dobrez
- fig. 3 Wandjinas (upper Barnett, Kimberley): photo L. Dobrez
- fig. 4 Your Country Needs You! (Recruiting poster, 1914
- fig. 5 Fontanalba petroglyph (Bègo): photo P. Dobrez
- fig. 6 Five-Daggers Rock & logo (Valcamonica): photo Centro Camuno



fig. 1

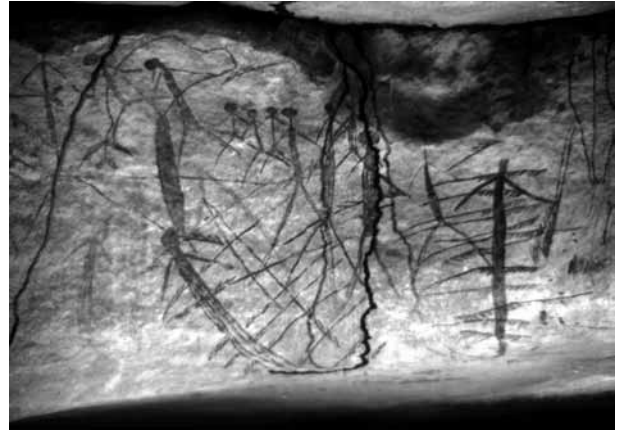


fig. 2



fig. 3



fig. 4

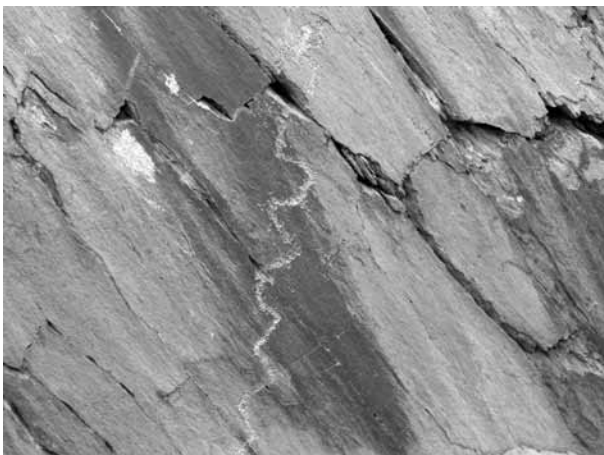


fig. 5

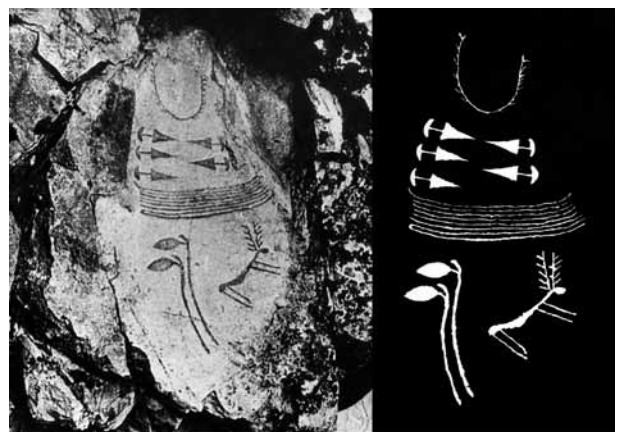


fig. 6

