

Rock-art and relationships: an introduction

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Abstract

This paper introduces to the *Before Farming* readership a selection of 14 rock-art-centric papers arranged around three key human relationships. These comprise the relationships people have with other people (colonialism), relationships people have with places (landscape), and relationships that people have with other animals and with plants (ecology). Rock-art¹ is a theoretically-informed artefact capable of illuminating aspects of past and contemporary human behaviour in new and insightful ways. The papers presented in this and the next two issues of *Before Farming* were originally presented at the Australian Rock Art Research Association (AURA) conference held in Alice Springs, Australia, July 2000. The issues these papers address represent and extend contemporary anthropological and archaeological concerns with time, place and identity. We hope that the papers will also provide material for contemplation, contestation and questing.

1 Introduction

The overarching theme of the 'Exploring relationships through rock-art: colonialism, landscape and ecology' supplement to Issues 2003/1, 2 and 3 of *Before Farming: the archaeology and anthropology of hunter-gatherers* concerns three key relationships embedded within many of the world's rock-art traditions. These comprise: relationships between different groups of people (colonialism),

between people and landscapes (landscape), and between people and other creatures (ecology). This supplement is an attempt to provide a theoretically-informed, cross-temporal and cross-cultural forum through which to investigate social and ecological place-based concepts of peoples as illuminated in their rock-arts. As concepts and practices the objects of our three key relationships - colonialism, landscape and ecology - together presuppose a common interest in resources. 'Resource', whose

root is the Latin verb *surgere*, originally implied life and life-like processes. Etymologically, 'resource' evoked a spring continually emerging from the ground. Like a spring, a 'resource' rises persistently, even if it has repeatedly - but judiciously - been utilised. The regenerative nature of 'resource' called attention to nature's prodigious creativity, and implied an ethical relationship among peoples and between humans and nature. This is the resource of ecology.

But there is another resource, the resource of colonialism and the industrial revolution. Previously, nature, places and society had co-evolved, but in the context of industrialism and colonialism, 'resources' became those parts of nature and society that were required as inputs for industrial production and colonial trade (Shiva 1992:206) – the classic Hobbes and Locke formulations. Nature, places and people were distorted by this transformed worldview. They were now viewed as raw material and as labour. Their capacities for wildness and renewal had been compromised – even denied - and the development of people became necessary for the development of nature. Colonial policy, which sought capital and raw material flows for the 'Empire', was concerned with developing natural resources, facilitating economic growth and political expansion and encouraging ever-increasing revenue generation (see Pels 1997). Since nature, places and people had to be 'developed' and 'managed', their transformation into 'natural resources', 'situational resources' and 'human resources' was an inevitable component of this new colonial worldview.

Francis Bacon (1571-1626) outlined the key features of the modern scientific method (which happens also to be a key method of colonialism): constraint of nature, dissection of nature, and reductionism. '*Vex nature*,' advised Bacon, 'disturb it, alter it, anything—but do not leave it alone. Then and only then, will you know it' (*vide* Sewall 1999). Likewise, our western taken-for-granted ontological and epistemological 'reality' is the reality of Enlightenment physics, as bequeathed to us by Isaac Newton (1642-1727). The conceptual framework of physics, emphasising external force

and passive matter divided into re-arrangeable components, provides a subtle framework for the domination and manipulation of nature and, indeed 'culture'. An ecological worldview did not have much hope within this new dualism between 'nature' and 'culture'. Now that nature was viewed as dead and inert, landscape as scenery, change as linear, and dissimilar peoples as inferior and subservient, all could be legitimately exploited within this colonial frame of reference. Matters are seldom, however, as simple as this and our relationships with nature, particular places and each other are being continually negotiated and remade. In 1859 Charles Darwin published *Origin of Species*, and Darwinian evolution became a powerful and controversial feature of ecology. Darwin proposed a 'web of life' that links all living organisms. Contemporary ecology, with its emphasis on relationships and interrelationships, is rooted in this web, but remains a subversive science (cf Shepard 1969). One of the key features of Darwinian evolution as it has been popularised is that it emphasises competition at the expense of co-operation. This, of course, serves an industrial-colonial worldview nicely. From an inter-cultural and eco-centric perspective, however, natural selection is not so much about survival of the fittest, as about survival of the *fitness* - how things fit together.

In this volume, we examine where cultural epistemologies intersect and diverge. With enduring visual imagery as our locus, the challenge is to expand our understandings, for although the relationship between seeing and knowing is complex (eg, Jay 1994), we can only see what our ideas let us see. Goethe's 'we see only what we know'? Rock-art images may seem to speak to the eye, but they are really addressed to the mind and are thus best understood as ways of thinking and relating in the guise of ways of seeing (Ouzman 2001). Each rock-art tradition represents a way of thinking presented in a dominantly visual idiom, and our challenge is to render the thought embedded in the image.

We also strive in this collection to locate new connections, and to rethink the capacities of commonplace forms of research and reason. Each of the authors seeks insight into a variety of human

encounters as expressed in rock-art, and they investigate the intersection of the external world with the cultural constructions of that world. Essentially, this supplement strives to help us better understand the mechanisms through which the world and its diverse peoples make cultural sense. The 19 contributors endeavour in 14 papers to grasp the import of human perceptions of nature and each other through examination of history and metaphor, exploration of traditional ecological knowledge, and investigation of graphic, expressive culture. One definition of metaphor is 'understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another' (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:1; see also Fernandes 1974). This definition points to a problem in the study of art and culture that is deeply ethnographic. For where metaphor is concerned, the question always arises: 'On what *grounds* is one kind of thing understood in terms of another?' In other words, what must people believe about themselves and the world around them for their metaphors to work? (Basso 1996:68). The contributors to this supplement are participants in the same basic enterprise, the purpose of which is to construct principled and informed interpretations of culturally constituted worlds that are often maximally different from our own and to try to understand what living in those worlds was and is like. For example, despite a general aesthetic appreciation for much rock-art, particularly western European Upper Palaeolithic cave art, many 'westerners' have until quite recently exhibited contempt for the worldview and material circumstance out of which the art emerged. Our overdeveloped skill in discriminating, categorising and separating permits us to appreciate the rock-art 'as is' but not its authorising worldview (Turner 1992:15); choosing instead to authorise the rock-art with the worldview with which we are most familiar – our own. The last couple of decades have witnessed a backlash, in which this scorn of the 'primitive' has given way to an almost equally troubling romanticism of the 'other' (Fabian 1983). But this trend, too, is fading in the face of more empathetic and critically aware social theories.

These new social theories are allowing us to

emerge from a bias in rock-art studies that broadly interpreted the art as symbolically and spiritually based. While it may be true that the bulk of world rock-art *is* concerned with the numinous, confining our knowledge of indigenous art to uncritically defined concepts of 'symbolism' and 'sacredness' trivialises indigenous peoples and denies what in their rock-art is most important to them. Such patronising romanticism is little more than a reductionist discontent of the civilised with civilisation. Ironically, this delimiting perspective can be considered a form of neo-colonialism in which we try to skim the cultural 'cream' - arts, spiritual wisdom, and the like - off an indigenous rock-art experience. Until recently, we collected rock-art for our museums and preserved it in our archives, while disregarding whatever we found in it that challenged how we tended to perceive others. Perhaps we can make ourselves feel a sort of multicultural satisfaction about 'saving' something indigenous. This approach de-links person from artefact and privileges artefacts above people. In other words, we feel good if we 'save' the material culture of a 'dying race' but do not stop to consider what happens to the people of those allegedly 'dying races' (see also Said 1989). Fortunately, by working together with empowered indigenous peoples, this attitude is changing. Many museums are now much more dynamic, reflecting concerns that cultures should not be portrayed as dead, static or 'extinct'.

Recently, rock-art studies also have moved in this direction, particularly when indigenous peoples are consulted and informed and often co-operative knowledge partnerships are formed (see Schmidt & Patterson 1996; Chippindale & Taçon 1998; Ross 2001). The past practice of couching our understanding of rock-art in purely spiritual terms has enabled *aficionados* to avoid perspectives that test complacent research agendas, and to sidestep the heritage of which we are a part. Rather than mindfully seeking exactitude and truth, with all the attendant messy but creative contradictions, rock-art researchers have tended to approach rock-art largely as an artefact of simpler, spiritually affluent and technologically shallow past cultures. For the

most part, indigenous peoples have no need for this brand of scholarship, which has come to be seen as another expression of exclusionary colonialism. Rock-art becomes yet another resource that academics, lay-people, 'New Ager's', governments, tour companies, and so forth can exploit without much benefit accruing to the producers and moral guardians of the rock-art. Simply put, we have not only a process of colonialism, but of cultural appropriation. Control, and therefore power, is thus central to discussions of rock-art and its relations to inter-cultural and environmental interactions, and counter-hegemonic and dissident discourses are emerging to disrupt dominant and disempowering forms of rock-art research. Included in this dissident movement are indigenous archaeologies, collaborative projects, post-colonialism, ecologism, and the like. Here we return to the notion of environment not as ontologically part of a people who draw sustenance from it. Rather, it is a notion resting on the distinction between dominating and subordinating agents, with humans sometimes exploiting it and sometimes being controlled by it (eg, Pollan 2001), or humans exploiting each other by means of controlling resources.

Colonialism has, however, not abated and continues with intensity (Anderson 1991). The players, however, are different. Developers, corporations, governments, banks, real estate speculators, and yes, scholars, are among today's neo-colonialists. As a force that seeks to bring divergent values and perspectives into one singular authoritative model, colonialism is still evident in some rock-art research. Colonialist posturing in rock-art research arises from power relationships affecting the ways in which some versions of rock-art are mainstreamed while others are relegated to the margins. In the process, we undercut the integrity, the sanctity, and the real circumstances from which the art draws. It is time to re-balance the situation, and to positively redress the existing consensus. The imperative is to expand our epistemological repertoire, to unveil new forms of reason, and to rethink the implications of some older forms of reason.

The relationships between peoples and their surroundings (both human and more-than-human) often appear paradoxical. Humans create and exercise understanding and agency on the world around them, yet often operate within a web of perceptions, beliefs, and myths that portray persons and their environments as constituted in each other, with neither consistently privileged over the other (Croll & Parkin 1992:3). On the one hand, we understand nature to be those normative aspects of the physical world that are separate from the products of human action. On the other hand, we regard nature as everything that exists, and person and environment are seen as implicating each other. This latter understanding is born of a broader movement in the natural and, especially, social sciences toward methodological reflexivity. From this perspective, facts are no longer simply tested against theories, but are investigated along with the theories for their rhetorical effect (Gupta & Ferguson 1997).

Examining cultural concepts of other people and the environment are logical extensions of considering rock-art as a product of human concepts bearing on the existence and utilisation of resources. Part of this examination cuts to the quick of, for example, the relationship between 'nature' and 'culture' (fig 1). In many rock-art producing indigenous cultures the western 'nature' – 'culture' opposition is viewed with disbelief and even amusement. They see this opposition as being entirely unhelpful and, indeed, impossible. To many indigenes, what we call 'nature' is considered to be entirely cultural (Ouzman 2002). Southern African Bushmen (also known as 'San') understand the 'People of the Early Race' to have created the world, just as many Australian Aboriginal groups consider the world to be the vastly complex and inter-connected product of powerful Dreaming Ancestral Beings. This world-understanding runs counter to the Darwin-inspired evolutionary paradigm by making 'nature' the product of 'culture'. This is by no means to argue for a vague and undifferentiated concept 'culture'. Rather, this indigenous understanding of 'culture' is responsive to context and change. Culture and tradition create the conditions for innovation and for initiating and

managing change. For instance, in Australia, Ancestral Beings such as the Rainbow Serpent can bring the past into the present for Aboriginal people, in the process changing the future (eg, Taçon, Wilson & Chippindale 1996). Archaeology, with its surprising under-theorising of the concept 'time' (but see *Current Anthropology* October 2002) would do well to analyse this multi-temporal, multi-contextual notion of 'culture' further.



Figure 1 Enculturated nature.

In this way, we can also understand 'nature' as the product of the interaction between aspiring humans and a responsive environment. In one sense, nature is palpable, being made up of tangible objects and forces, but in another sense nature is abstract, being composed of our ideas of it. Constructions of nature vary according to what is being perceived, and various power relationships affect which constructions of nature are believed to be the most true and useful. Nature is understood through both science and mythology, for it incarnates the experiences and aspirations of people. Thus, industrialised people speak of nature in terms of resources and regard it as something distinctly separate from us. The western tendency is to believe that the only truly natural landscape is an unpeopled one. On the other hand, indigenous ideological systems normatively express the symbiosis and shared identity of humans and the rest of nature in an overtly cultural way. Environment is also seldom isolated from belief. In many ways, western paradigms of nature and the environment are antithetical to ecological visions

of a world remade. Writing about environmentalists, Neil Evernden (1985:124) commented that '...the very entity they defend – environment - is itself an offspring of the nihilistic behemoth they challenge. It is a manifestation of the way we view the world.' Eco-centric deep ecologists conceive of a different nature from that understood by social ecologists; Cartesian models of nature separate humans from 'the natural'; eco-centric models of nature incorporate humans; and indigenous concepts of nature embrace an inter-connectedness. Nature, then, *is* Descartes' dualism, and it *is* Aboriginal Dreaming and Bushman (People of the Early Race). Regardless of which idea of nature we adhere to, the concepts 'culture' and 'nature' at least overlap – sometimes entirely. In so far as we are able to understand nature and the environment, we construct it, one might even argue that humans and nature construct one another. In the deepest sense, ecology is not about environment at all, it is not about things, but first and foremost it is about relationships.

The classical ecological claim that organisms position themselves within environmental niches, as if those niches existed prior to the organism, neglects the full effect of human agency. People do not just adapt to environments; they make them, shaping them from both materials at hand and the potential they perceive. As meaning-making animals, humans develop their symbolically constituted designs out of the stuff of the environment, and then re-impose in their humanly-authored form these designs back onto the external world. Intellectually, we are in the throws of a paradigmatic shift in rock-art studies. Our posturing is shifting from independence to interdependence, from autonomous to ecological, from discrete to relational. Within rock-art studies, this shift appears as a change in the focus of our research. It may be that expressive culture is the medium through which the logic of relationships finds its most compelling and theoretically-informed articulation. Despite discomfort with extreme expressions of dualism, it is worth remembering that dualism is an orientation not entirely disassociated from natural reality. Difference is the ground from which dualism

springs, and this difference is inherent in organic reality and makes possible our varied and rich relationships. Difference is intrinsic to nature and culture, and it is celebrated through relationships. Within the traditional Dineh (Navajo) worldview of the United States of America's southwest, for example, distinctions are considered bridges and ways to identify connections rather than amplify differences. Distinctions are viewed as pairs: night is paired with day, man with woman, east with west. The cardinal directions are constant reminders of a relational existence, joining the human psyche with other peoples and landscapes. The world is understood by Dineh in unified terms. Examples could be provided from hundreds of cultures, including our own.

Metaphor is based on difference, and is a particular form of patterning. When the world is perceived metaphorically, awareness of difference allows us to note likenesses, similarities in form or organisation, symmetry between patterns (Sewall 1999:144). When our senses and intellects are well tuned to affinities, metaphoric epistemologies materialise. Metaphor is a way of being informed by our relationships with the things of the world. By bridging between ourselves and the artefacts of the world, metaphor pulls things together and creates meaning. It is the stuff of kinship. We perceive objects differently when we see them in relationship, as opposed to perceptual isolation. Hence, coming to an understanding of rock-art in context (cultural, historical, ecological) provides a very different kind of understanding from a solely aesthetic interpretation. This suggests that a contextual view of rock-art yields different and richer understandings than an isolated, ahistorical and critically independent view. This is not revolutionary. We know intuitively that the context of an object reveals its significance, what it signifies, its true sign. The challenge is to articulate this intuition in reasoned, defensible discourse.

The relationship of a visual image to its contextual situation is critical. For example, the motifs on the historic 'Indian Head' and 'Buffalo' nickel from the United States of America (fig 2)

touches upon issues of both ecology and colonialism, and illustrates the complex psychology often embedded in visual images. Without any accompanying contextual knowledge, one might conclude by looking at this coin, with its Native American and wildlife motifs, that the U.S. government honoured cultural diversity and respected the natural world. A different understanding emerges, though, when we learn the history of colonial conquest and come to know that the nickel with a buffalo and Indian on it was being minted at the same time buffalo were being exterminated, and when there was a policy of genocide against Native Americans. Our attempts to interpret decontextualised rock-art traditions are equally problematic. Thus, the true or informed meaning of a thing like rock-art is comprehended only with reference to a wider web of relationships. In many ways, the key to understanding indigenous peoples is by exploring and defining their relationships — to other groups of people, to land, to other creatures, to the past and to the Ancestral Beings that created all of these. Perhaps this is also true of us, our art, in all its forms, illustrating both relationships and an incredible journey.



Figure 2 Indian Head copper-nickel cent, USA, c. 1859 – 1864 AD.

2 The AURA congress

The 14 papers in this supplement are concerned with aspects of the above. They had their genesis in three distinct sessions of the Third Australian Rock Art Research Association (AURA) Congress, held in Alice Springs, Australia in July 2000. This international forum was held to promote the dissemination of research findings in rock-art studies, and awareness and appreciation of the indigenous cultural heritage. 350 delegates from over 30 countries gathered to review what had been achieved in rock-art studies so far, to share new knowledge, and to anticipate where rock-art research may be heading in the new century. A critical component of the Congress - one anticipating the direction of the field - was the unprecedented level of involvement by indigenous Australians.

2.1 Colonialism

The 'Rock-art and Colonialism: South Africa, Australia, and Beyond' session was chaired by Sven Ouzman, Claire Smith and Sally May and comprised seven presentations. These presentations were drawn from Australia, Bolivia, New Zealand, South Africa and the United States of America. From these seven papers, four were selected for inclusion in this supplement. Sven Ouzman's 'Indigenous images of a colonial exotic: imaginings from Bushman southern Africa' considers rock-art a primary, emic source of evidence through which we may 'reverse the gaze' of colonial hegemony. John Clegg and Simon Ghantous' paper, 'Rock-paintings of exotic animals in the Sydney Basin, New South Wales, Australia' considers an intriguing site of rock-painted colonial contact from Aboriginal Australia in which four extraordinary rock-paintings merge indigenous style with western subject matter. Sally May, in, 'Colonial collections of portable art and intercultural encounters in Aboriginal Australia' uses not rock-art but the portable 'art' corpus of Aboriginal Australia as it was defined, collected and curated by the 1948 American-Australian Scientific

Expedition. We conclude the Colonialism section with Gerard O'Regan's indigenous Ngai Tahu perspective on how Maori rock-art needs to be examined and managed in contemporary New Zealand in, 'The history and future of Maori rock-art in New Zealand – a tribal perspective'.

Each of the nations discussed by the four papers is, in fact, 'two nations' as each has a long and often violent history of colonial contact between Europeans and indigenous people. Often these Victorian era 'Age of Empire' divisions are still in evidence today. But just as people fall too easily into problematic oppositions such as 'nature' and 'culture', so too we must guard against entrenching a stereotype of 'us' and 'them' and rather aim towards decolonising our methodologies (eg, Tuhiwai-Smith 1999). The papers presented at AURA contained a variety of perspectives on colonialism and rock-art, from an indigenous voice, cross-cultural comparison, rock-art in the service of contemporary identity formation and a deconstruction of the philosophy informing colonial collecting practices. The 'Colonialism and rock-art' session sought to privilege rock-art – as it exists in an informed ethnographic and ecological context – as a primary source of evidence relating to the period of colonial contact and subsequently. In other words, rock-art imagery and the specific landscapes in which it occurs, represent a subaltern voice capable of questioning the dominant colonial and even post-colonial discourse. These discourses are usually written from the perspective of the European colonists and their descendants and have as a focus of its gaze the non-western 'other'. Fortunately, we may reverse this gaze by using rock-art, which is really how 'they' viewed 'us' (fig 3). For example, it is striking that in the colonial contact-era rock-arts of many indigenous cultures, the white colonists – especially men – are depicted in a characteristic 'hand-on-hips' posture. Elucidation of this posture is forthcoming from the field of human ethology that tells us that this 'hand-on-hips' or 'hands-in-pockets' stance is a possessive, aggressive posture (eg, Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1989). Allied as it often is with depictions of domestic animals, churches, guns, wagons and

the like, we have an unflattering portrait of ourselves and of the process of colonisation.



Figure 3 Native Americans gaze on non-Native colonists, Utah, USA.

This is not to argue that overt contact-period rock-art was a passive reflection of external events. Rather, these new images were an integral part of the indigenous struggle against aggressive colonisation, functioning as highly visible and enduring icons that served to focus thought and motivate action. This thought and action could take many forms – parody – such as when Victorian women were depicted with immodestly high hemlines; ideologically – in many of the engraved and painted battles between indigene and colonist, Europeans are most often presented as losing the battle; and so on. But mostly this rock-art is an attempt to come to terms with identity. Both the identity of the colonial arrivals and self-identity. In order to understand who ‘they’ were, indigenous people had to – sometimes for the first time – formally and deliberately formulate who they were – and who they were not. Most Europeans did not engage in an equivalent process, choosing rather to act out and extend an imperialistic world view that made such contemplation unnecessary and dangerous. Bishop Colenso, who worked among the Zulu in South Africa in the late nineteenth century dared opine that the Zulus had souls – and was promptly excommunicated for his opinion (Guy 1983).

But self-knowledge is essential if we are to try to understand other cultures. By looking at ourselves through rock-art we may get a better idea of ourselves, even if much of what we perceive is

not all that flattering. Fortunately, we do not always have to think in terms of oppositions. Post-colonial theory and practice is becoming a powerful, empathetic and tolerant way of both understanding colonialism and helping with identity formation in an increasingly multiple, trans-national world. Perhaps the best way to articulate this process is to adapt Jaques Derrida’s formulation of ‘margin and centre’ (Derrida 1982). In times past, indigenous people were perceived as residing on the margins of dominant power relations while westerners occupied positions central to those power relations. But such centrality came at a price because those beliefs and practices perceived as central were rigid and could not easily cope with change. Matters on the margins were quite the opposite, and were characterised by dynamism, syncretism and a ready adaptability to change. Slowly, those marginal practices demonstrated their worth after the demise of the meta-narratives that characterised modernism and were able to oscillate between margin and centre, often displacing the central positions of the old order. We are pretty much now at that point and the future challenge will be not to replace the old order’s centrality, but keep the centre open as a stage or forum where different interests can have a voice, depending on the needs of the day.

Accepting the notion of difference as being appropriately dependant only on a context, rather than as an *a priori* given, is essential if this post-colonial process is to succeed. Often indigenous knowledge systems and post-Enlightenment science are not at all contradictory – witness how most western medicines are manufactured by utilising embedded indigenous ethno-pharmacology. It is essential that such initiatives are mutually acceptable and do not constitute an unacceptable cultural appropriation. Not all cultural appropriation need be bad – the ‘blues’ music genre was appropriated largely from Afro-American music, yet is a great source of pride and inspiration for those people. Similarly, rock-art in the public domain has the capacity to help rehabilitate the intellectual and cultural status of indigenous people who have usually been known only by virtue of their

physical 'peculiarities' and 'closeness to nature' – whatever that means. In this regard the incorporation of Bushman rock-painting imagery into South Africa's new coat of arms (fig 4; Smith et al 2000) shows an official sanction of a nation's pre-colonial past and of the place its indigenous people have in the present.



Figure 4 South Africa's new coat of arms with central Bushman rock-painting inspired figures and /Xam Bushman motto.

Despite its history of dispossession, conflict, genocide and loss of identity, colonial-era indigenous rock-art – and indeed, most rock-art – enjoys a great deal of goodwill. Rock-art by its nature is clearly an informed class of material culture and a strongly visual and translatable metaphor to boot. It is our strongest weapon in overturning racial stereotypes. Perhaps the final stereotype that needs overturning is that indigenous people produce 'rock-art' and that westerners produce 'art'. Westerners have a proud and varied rock-art tradition (Reisner 1971). Whether it be the quotidian names and regiment numbers etched by bored soldiers at their encampments, the New Age appeals to higher powers engraved and painted at places perceived to be powerful or everyday 'graffiti'

(eg, Chippindale 2001), which provides us with a great deal of information on people perceived as today being at the margins of power relations, it would be wrong not to call these forms of visual expression 'rock-art'. Indeed, it does seem as if the urge to mark and commemorate places powerful and mundane is an enduring and universal human concern.

2.2 Landscape

'Constructed Landscapes: Rock-art, Place and Identity' was organised by Bruno David and Meredith Wilson. Unfortunately, they were unable to attend the congress – perhaps because they were busy with another landscape compendium (David & Wilson 2001) - but the session proceeded with various people stepping in to chair the 12 papers presented in this session. Five papers from that session are presented in Issue 2003/2, which begins with Yann Montelle's attempt to quantify in nine steps how a 'natural' place becomes 'culture' in, 'Rock-art as mapping'. Still conceptual, but grounded in the northern Australian landscape, is the next set of papers. Ken Mulvaney's, 'Transformation: rock walls to canvas: representations of totemic geography in Aboriginal Australia' demonstrates that the trinity of story-image-landscape need always be kept in mind if the 'art' is to be interpreted successfully. Margaret Grove addresses similar issues but from a more overtly phenomenological position in, 'Woman, man, land: an example from Arnhem Land, North Australia, Ben Gunn's, 'Rock-art in the Tolmer sandstones, Northern Territory, Australia' then proceeds to ground the Mulvaney and Grove notions in a nuts-and-bolts empirical case study.

One of the main intentions of the Landscape session was to explore different ways people across the globe articulated their relationships to landscapes through rock-art. As they pointed out in their session rationale:

Landscapes are not around us; they are with us. Ours is a world where place is defined – 'wilderness', 'grazing land', 'residential land' -

by the values and meanings we ascribe to our surroundings. It is not just an external world that we map in geographical space. It is, rather, our relationships and familiarity with, and our perceptions of, places that are charted. In the process we attribute meaning to, we define, we construct and transform abstract space to the theatre of our lives... (David & Wilson 1999:64)

It also should be emphasised that all of us create landscapes (fig 5) – it is not just artists or geographers that define, describe and depict tracts of land. Indeed, landscapes are more a function of the human mind than we realise, with each of us reacting to particular places or sets of places in ways defined by our individual and cultural experiences. In one sense, there is no such thing as a landscape but rather jumbles of components ordered and bounded through human thought, choice and experience. The choice of which elements, places and spaces are included in particular landscapes is, in turn, determined by our ‘mindscape’. In other words, choices are affected by our minds. Indeed, for many groups of people, landscapes are not constructed solely on the basis of what is seen. Instead, they use a combination of visual cues mixed with sound, smell, temperature, emotional reactions and other features. Thus, there can be an infinite number of landscapes that reflect the varieties of human relationships to place. Landscapes are also difficult to define in a strict scientific sense. For some people, landscapes consist of natural features only, that is, the topography of an area of land. For others, landscapes are cultural creations or are defined as a mix of natural and cultural elements. Landscapes are political – they are contested, defended and celebrated. They can be places called ‘home’, exotic locations or barren wastelands that should be avoided. To be known, they must be experienced but they can never be fully described. This is because not only are they perceived differently by each observer but also because they are constantly and continually changing. The passing of seasons, weathering, human intervention and catastrophic forces of

nature and culture combine to transform each and every landscape continually. Thus, for many of us, landscapes exist only as ideals held in the mind, pictures composed of key reference points woven or mapped together through the nature of experience (see also Ingold 2001).



Figure 5 Vista from Hohokam petroglyph, Signal Hill, Saguaro National Park, Arizona, USA.

Essentially, landscapes are interconnected with mapping and constructing models of reality (Harley 2001). Today, it is valid to say there are no truly ‘natural’ landscapes left on planet Earth. For hundreds of thousands of years, humans have explored, charted, categorised, settled, harvested, named and defined every corner, nook and cranny of the globe. People mapped, marked and presumably mythologised every landscape they encountered. Today we find the globe covered with rich and culturally meaningful landscapes. These locations are, of course, usually populated with humans, plants and animals but they are often also inhabited by spirits or fantastic creatures – the elves

and trolls of Ireland, the fairies at the bottom of English gardens, the Yeti 'snow-people' of the Himalayas and parts of China, the Loch Ness monster, the //Gauwasi Spirits of the Dead of southern Africa, the Mimi spirits of Arnhem Land, Australia or the races of giants in North America, Africa and Europe. In some places, old forms of rock-art are attributed to such creatures.

Landscapes now have lengthy histories associated with them. Rock-art, oral histories, topographic maps, books, movies and computer programs commemorate some of the more significant events that took place. Some landscapes have become sacred for particular peoples or for humanity as a whole. Perhaps the reason that many places with rock-art are considered special today is because it is this profound form of visual evidence that expresses ancient human links to these places. It is these sorts of links that are explored in the landscape papers of this volume. For relationships to place and to landscape are part of the defining features of who modern humans are. As Ross (2001:547) notes:

Rock art has been inherited by all of human-kind as a message from our ancestors. We will never perhaps be able to decipher the exact meaning of these paintings and markings on stone, nor perfectly recreate the cultures and environments in which they were made, because those times have disappeared. But the places remain. Let us begin there.

2.3 Ecology

The symposium 'Rock-art and Ecological Knowledge' was chaired by Paul Faulstich, Paul Taçon, and David Bennett, and included presentations by ten researchers, half of which address ecological relationships. Paul Faulstich considers rock-art, bush fires and land management then and now in his, 'Dreaming the country and burning the land: rock-art and ecological knowledge'. Then David Bennett's, 'Often crude and quaint' derives its title from Baldwin Spencer's colonial utterance and how

notions of ecology affected European imaginings of Australia. An empirical grounding of the ecological context of some North Australian rock-art is presented by the Paul SC Taçon, Ken Mulvaney, Sven Ouzman, Richard Fullagar, Paddy Carlton and Lesley Head consortium's, 'Changing ecological concerns in the rock-art subject matter of North Australia's Keep River region.' David Welch takes up ecology overtly in, 'Plant motifs in Kimberley rock-art, Australia', examining the range of ways plants and people interact to the extent of plants shaping human identity. Finally, Polly Schaafsma concludes the contributions 'on the edge' with the Pueblo of the American Southwest – people on the cusp of foraging and farming in, 'Out of the underworld: landscape, Kachinas, and pottery: metaphors in the Rio Grande / Jornada tradition in the American southwest.'

Starting from peoples' own categories, a highly varied picture emerged of the relationship of humans to their habitats as reflected in rock-art (fig 6). Through its inquiry into rock-art, this symposium sought to illuminate diverse cultural interactions with the environment, thereby giving us greater appreciation of the depth and scope of knowledge systems as they relate to the natural world. Vignettes of ecological knowledge are precious in their own right, but they also provide grist for a new environmental ethic that we so urgently need. In this light, some of the goals of this session of the conference were to help us:

- be exposed to the diversity of indigenous perceptions of 'natural' divisions in the biological world
- understand and appreciate the origins and uses of ecological knowledge and resource management practices
- appreciate the connections between aesthetics and human ecology develop the tools to acquire effective ways of recording, analysing, and applying traditional ecological knowledge to rock-art research

- discern the variant approaches that peoples have developed to cognitively understand the world around them
- understand the intersections and disjunctions between knowledge and practice
- explore ecological beliefs about relationships between humans and the environment that are shared by western sciences and indigenous cosmologies.

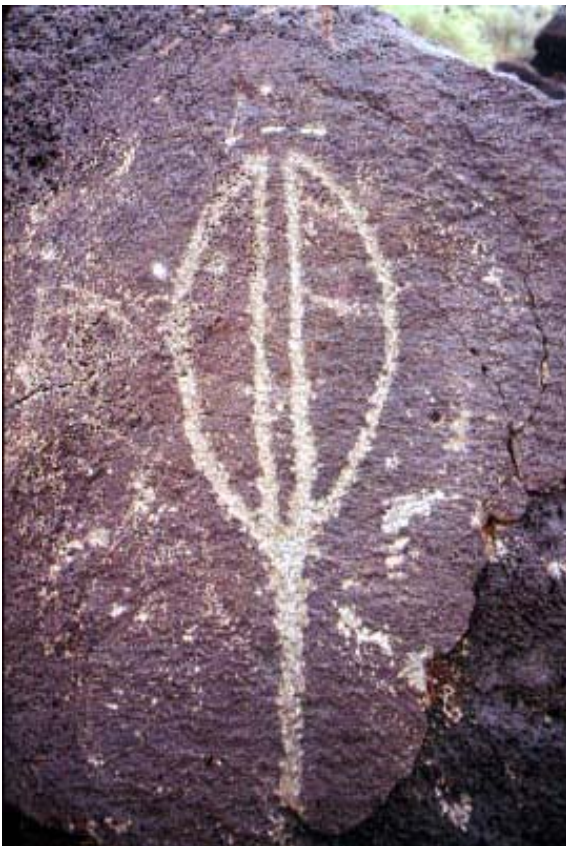


Figure 6 Rock-engraving of a possible *Yucca* cactus seed pod, West Mesa, New Mexico, USA.

The application of rock-art research to conservation management and cultural survival warrants exploration, and the contributors to the 'Rock-Art and Ecological Knowledge' symposium are forging this path. Traditional ecological knowledge is being lost rapidly as elders die and their cultures undergo tremendous change. Ethnoecology – the process of recording, understanding,

and appreciating this knowledge - is thus an urgent and pressing matter. To interpret traditional ecological knowledge with care, and in the interest of its guardians, was one goal of the symposium and remains an objective of this supplement. Many anthropologists write *of* culture, treating it as an object separate from the world of nature. Likewise, many ecologists write *of* nature. But this symposium approached peoples as inhabitants *in* their landscape, and thus as inhabited *by* it as well. We explored how the physical world is the backdrop for expressive culture relating to the interface between humans and nature. Arts, rituals, and metaphors arouse emotions; they heighten awareness, bring fresh insight, and enable us to become conscious of connections between ourselves and the world. Through investigating rock-art and ecological knowledge, the presenters in this symposium were suggesting that ecology can provide a model useful in the interpretation of expressive culture.

3 Conclusion

Human interactions with nature, landscapes and with each other take place through the medium of culture. It may be that there is an inverse relationship between colonialism and diversity (both cultural and biological) and that colonial encounters necessarily reduce diversity. The elimination of place and the worldwide homogenisation of indigenous peoples necessarily depletes human epistemologies (but see Appadurai 1996), and this supplement is an attempt to re-prioritise our relational knowledge and the value of integrative ways of knowing. As human beings, we seek to understand our connection to each other, to the world, and to the cosmos. To comprehend ourselves in relation to other people and the natural order is a profound ability we have. But it is also a need we have. While our desire to understand our place in the natural and social orders may be predicated on aesthetics, our need for this understanding is deeply cultural and biological. Because of this, the contributions

in this volume are anything but trivial or purely academic. This is a necessary but not sufficient part of the process – along with intellectual comprehension we need a full and frank

understanding of who we were, who we are now and what we may become. It is necessary also to understand where we have come from, where we are now and where we are going.

¹ We use the compound term 'rock-art' as follows:

"The group has not attempted a specific definition of 'rock-art'. We hold it to refer to human-made marks on natural, non-portable rocky surfaces; the more common being those which are either applied upon the rock and called pictographs – including paintings, drawings, daubings, stencils, prints, beeswax motifs – or which are cut into the rock and called petroglyphs – engravings, incisions, peckings, gougings, symbolic grindings, etchings, and so forth. 'Rock' will do as a term for the surface that bears them, although sometimes the rock is a geological surface as soft as mud. 'Art' is a less happy term, because art has a rather specific meaning in recent western societies, not suited to those many societies where the crafty making of images and pictures was a business centrally integrated with other concerns. In the absence of a better term – for 'rock image', 'rock picture', 'rock marking', 'rock trace', 'rock glyph', and so on are also unhappy – we stay with rock-art. (In consequence we have to tolerate the confusion by which the term 'rock-art' also refers to the iconography of rock-and-roll music!) We hyphenate 'rock-art', against common modern habit, in a slight attempt to make this term into a portmanteau." (Chippindale & Taçon 1998:6).
