

## Categories and Principles of Proto-Art: Hypotheses on Early and Middle Palaeolithic Art, Symbol and Religion

Early Palaeolithic and Middle Palaeolithic sites throughout the world have yielded objects which been identified as non-utilitarian and which may be viewed as possible instances of "proto-art" (or "palaeo-art" after Bednarik 1997, 1994a, 1994b, 1992). In general, I use the term 'proto-art' to refer to Palaeolithic art, especially non-utilitarian and aesthetic objects, dating earlier than the Upper Palaeolithic, which may thematically survive into the Upper Palaeolithic.

Given the state of research to date, it is possible to propose some basic categories of proto-art and to derive from the archaeological evidence and interpretations by archaeologists and prehistorians a tentative list of principles which appears to inform the artifacts believed to be proto-art. Due to taphonomic preservation problems or to archaeological or other theoretical biases against the very possibility of such art, the evidence is limited. Nevertheless there is enough material to draw some inferences. The categories and principles suggested below may be viewed not as conclusions but as hypotheses for further research.

I leave aside for now the question of how this art may have provided selective advantage or generally what its role was in hominid evolution and cognitive development.

### Categories

Following Gunn (1997), the many studies of Bednarik, and others, and my own examination of proto-art objects at such sites as Koobi Fora (Kenya), Har Karkom (Israel), Pampau (Germany), and Surrey (England), I would suggest categorizing 'proto-art' into the following categories.

A. Symbolic places with unusual or numinous landscape features, presumed to have mythological or ceremonial significance, but not necessarily archaeologically visible, such as a vista, large boulder or rock formation, rock shelter, rockhole, gully, knoll, ridge, alluvial flat, and less visible features such as tree or bush, natural depression, rock face, hillside, path or area cleared or once cleared for ceremonials;

B. Ritual art, with evident human modification, such as a stone heap or mound, standing stone, stone circle, geoglyph or other stone arrangement, and quarry;

C. Rock art, made by painting, abrasion, engraving, etc. on rock surfaces;

D. Sculpture, natural or made by more-or-less-flaked stone, bone, ivory, wood or other material, figurative (iconographic) objects in zoomorphic, anthropomorphic, or geometrical-solid shape, or combination thereof, which may be micro-sized, hand-sized, or megalithic in size, whether or not otherwise modified by engraving, abrasion, painting, perforation, etc.;

E. Other ‘non-utilitarian’ and /or aesthetic object, curated, whether or not modified or marked, such as (drawing upon list in Bednarik 1997):

- (1) engravings or notches on stone, bone, ivory, wood, etc., having symmetry or other qualities suggesting aesthetic, decorative, or other intent;
- (2) items apparently collected for their exotic or unusual properties, such crystal prisms, fossil casts, unusually colored or shaped pebbles;
- (3) articles possibly used for body adornment, as suggested by perforations, natural or artificial, etc., e.g., pendants or beads of eggshell, shell, teeth, ivory, wood, vertebrae, bone or bone fragments, or stone;
- (4) red ocher and other pigment crayons and remains;
- (5) utilitarian objects that show characteristics clearly in excess of what technology and function would demand, and thus seem to have aesthetic dimensions.

[Other ‘non-utilitarian’ objects also may have a cultural function or otherwise reflect cognitive and /or spiritual capacities, such as engravings or notches on stone, bone, ivory, wood, etc., suggesting semiotic intent; human burials and bone depositions; technological capabilities that provide an idea of cognitive and /or spiritual capacities (quarries and mines, construction of stone walls, habitation and foraging sites, evidence of seafaring, etc.)(after Bednarik 1997)].

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## Twelve Principles

Further, I propose that we might characterize instances of proto-art as informed by one or more of the following principles.

1. Placement. Apparently, a distinctive innovation of proto-art is intentional placement. Humans engage in placement, the placing of something in a place in order to ritually honor through an expression of sacred awe something about the place which is sacred, awe-inspiring or has a surplus of meaning.

1.1 Proto-art is not art as artifice or artifact, i.e., something that is made, fashioned or constructed. In characterizing proto-art it seems appropriate not to be misled by the modern dictionary definition of 'art,' which connotes 'fitting together, joining, making things of form and beauty, fashioning, constructing, executing a plan, artifice, artificiality' with the etymological denotation of 'fitting together, joining.' The crux of proto-art appears to be not 'making' but 'placing.'

- a. Compare placement of stone arrangements in Australian ritual art (Mowaljarlai and Malnic 1993).
- b. Compare Wallace Stevens' poem "I Placed a Jar in Tennessee."
- c. Compare Heidegger (1964) on the origin of the artwork.

2. Presencing. As an art of placement, proto-art is not 'representational,' in the sense that it is not a depiction, copy, or one-to-one mapping of something visible, but is 're-presentational,' in the sense that it functions to bring something of the invisible realm of spirit in a landscape, feature of a landscape, or living being of a landscape into presence. It 'presences' the landscape, bringing its spirit into perspective. Placement establishes or modifies land into a landscape; it brings to presence the beings that reside in it. It is how one appreciates, lives by, respects, honors and loves the land. Placement presences the land into being a landscape. This, in turn, presences the one who places, through her or his heart, breath, and spirit, which go into the placement, and, in turn, into a landscape. Placement brings into presence the living beings that reside in the landscape. In turn, through placement, which presences a landscape, those who are so presenced by the placement, are supported by the landscape in which they reside. Presencing releases heart, breath, spirit and life. Presencing is how one accesses life.

2.1. When I use the word ‘spirit,’ I mean it to connote manifestations of the life-force which moves in all things, the instinct for balance, wholeness, healing and life-affirmation, as well as their negations. To use Greek terms, it connotes *psychē*, *zoë*, *bios*, *pneuma*. Heuristically, we need such a broad set of connotations, since the maker’s of proto-art may not have had such finely differentiated concepts.

2.2 Proto-art is not representational in the sense of being “depictive.” It is neither (a) “supernaturalistic” art, intended to “represent” (iconically) deities, mythic scenes, or ritual events, nor is it (b) “naturalistic” or “realistic” art, intended to represent everyday scenes of social life or subsistence, or other things in the “real” or “natural” world.

2.3 Nor is proto-art primarily “abstract” or “schematic” representation of supernatural or naturalistic things.

2.4 Representational (iconic) art, having both “realistic” and “schematic” variants appears to be the distinctive innovation of the Upper Palaeolithic.

3. Landscape as art; art as landscape. In proto-art, the landscape may be part of the artwork placed in it; indeed the landscape may be the primary part of the artwork.

3.1 Phenomenal attribute. Like Gunn (1997), Steinbring (1992:360; 1990:67; 1988:9) notes the ‘phenomenal attribute’ of a site plays a role in its selection and may inspire rock art activity. Steinbring lists features such as dramatic sights; a commanding geographic feature, often unique; sounds, such as whistles, howling and wailing, pounding surf, echo effects and rock gongs; reflections; colors and the direction and quality of light; effect of firelight; quality of patina erasure; natural effigies; caves, shelters, natural bridges, and monoliths, which have qualities which fascinate and interrupt the ‘ordinary’ landscape; effects of lightning, thunder, rain, mirage; critical locus in regional waterways; a spontaneous discovery in the initial occupation of an area; a locus of dramatic character in interregional or intercultural relations;

3.2 Conversely, the artwork may be, or may become in being placed, a part of the landscape as with various ritual art stone arrangements.

3.3 Earth art. The earth itself may be shaped to represent something symbolic, such as animal, female birthgiver, face/head, geometric shape, or to bring forth or reveal something in the surrounding landscape or sky. The earth may be shaped into mounds, or ‘naturefact’ boulders--found objects--or other earth features may be used to re-present spirits of the landscape and the human spirit. In the latter case, the principle overlaps with the principles of naturefacts and landscape art.

3.4 Further, the artifact may be shaped or engraved so as to represent in miniature a mapping of the environing landscape or features of that landscape. It may represent the 'sky' or cosmic landscape or some feature thereof (stars, planets, constellations, sun and moon, perhaps equinoxes and solstices, etc.). The sky may be intended to be part of a proto-art work, e.g., solstice sunlight penetrating through a hole in a boulder on a hillside, or into a cave. Objects, the function of which is mapping-presencing, might include engraved or non-engraved plaques, standing stones, geoglyphs, or other stone arrangements.

- a. See Quneitra Middle Paleolithic engraved flint plate, ca. 54,000 BP, Goren-Inbar's interpretation that the markings bear some likeness to a map of the nearby landscape, rather than Marshack's interpretation that it depicts a scene from everyday life (Marshack 1996).
- b. Har Karkom Palaeolithic Sanctuary, dated to transition between Middle Palaeolithic and Upper Palaeolithic, 45,000 BP. Here the stone stelae are placed in a singular gully at the eastern edge of the mesa cliff, with two hills to west, evoking the entire mesa as a female figure, with the standing stones at the vulva.

4. Fetish art (=‘effigy stones’). Proto-art, especially stone sculptures, may be referred to as ‘fetish’ art, in the sense that the power of the artwork is as much ‘magical’ as aesthetic. It has a numinous power, both evoking an experience of the sacred or numinous as such and bringing into presence spirit (‘supernatural’) beings.

4.1 As Cushing (1883/1990) observes with respect to the power of the Zuni fetishes.

“It is supposed that the hearts of the great animals of prey are infused with a spirit or medicine of magic influence over the hearts of the animals they prey upon, or the game animals (K’ia-pin-á-ha-i); that their breaths (the ‘Breath of Life’—Há-i-an-pi-nan-ne—and soul are synonymous in Zuni mythology), derived from their hearts, and breathed upon their prey, whether near or far, never fail to overcome them, piercing their hearts and causing their limbs to stiffen, and the animals themselves lose their strength. Moreover, the roar or cry of a beast of prey is accounted its Sá-wa-ni-k’ia, or magic medicine of destruction, which, heard by the game animals, is fatal to them, because it charms their senses, as does the breath their hearts. Since mountain lion, for example, lives by the blood (‘life fluid’) and flesh of the game animals, and by these alone, he is endowed not only with the above powers, but with peculiar powers in the sense of sight and smell. Moreover, these powers, as derived from his heart, are preserved in his fetish, since his heart still lives, even though his person be changed to stone.”

Six basic themes are evident in this account, the opposition between animating and turning to stone; breathing the breath of life; making beings sentiently aware; the heart's intent (good will vs. ill will) and spiritual action (wounding and killing or giving birth and presencing life. In this vision, it may be said that the heart has the power to kill or give life to the vital spirit. It has the power (capacity, potential) to set the vital spirit free, to deliver it unto life or death, i.e., unto life by animating the vital spirit of life in a person or being, and unto death, by freeing the vital spirit from the body by bringing about the person's or animal's death. All depends upon the intent of the heart and the power of one's vital spirit, and, the power of one's proto-art sculpture (artificial or naturefact) to bring about the heart's intent.

4.2 Based on the combinatoric imagery of Middle Palaeolithic stone sculptures, this conceptual metaphoric model may have arisen during that period.

4.3 Hypothesis: fetish art concerns the predatory-prey relationship and is a ritual art that brings them into relationship. This would have possibly a double function, 'hunting magic' and the healing of psychological trauma. By collecting predator and prey sculptures into one figurine or one locus (magic circle, altar), the ritual brings predator and prey into a peaceful relationship, into wholeness (tension of opposites, balance, equipoise). In Buddhist terms this is a symbolization of compassion; lovingkindness (forgiveness, metta); sympathetic joy in the beauty and mystery (*mysterium tremendum* and *fascinotum*) of nature (*mudita*); and equanimity (*upekkha*). This is Artemis Orthia and Artemis Venetia. Predator and prey together evokes wholeness, balancing of the opposites, the guilt of existence, that life requires killing for sustenance, the sorrow of the earth. Predator and prey + female birthgiver mother evokes a female divinity who holds in a compassionate holding, predator and prey as one. This suggests forgiveness, compassion, lovingkindness, joy in sorrow. Geometric form evokes this as a formal 'law', 'the way it is,' *physis*. The human head/face evokes the recognition, knowledge, self-knowledge, wisdom regarding this, a transcendence incarnate in the earth. This symbolism brings about the depth meaning of 'the heart,' the heartfelt intention of compassion and lovingkindness through which one finds revitalization, life energy renewed.

5. Communion. The placement of the art in a sacred place establishes communication with the spirit of that place, i.e., the nature spirits, ancestors, dreamtime or creation time beings, who are still present as if in a parallel world to this one, or as the invisible reality of this visible world, or as the true essence of a sentient being becoming who it truly is, in its embodied power. Proto-art establishes this presencing itself to itself for its own sake and for the sake of availing oneself of that power, as in the case of predator and prey. This is the double edge of the power of communion.

6. Symbolism. Proto-art is symbolic, though its symbolic modes were distinctively different than that of the Upper Palaeolithic or subsequent cultures. I take the metaphorical organization of symbols to be a right-brain function and the syntactic organization of symbols to be a left-brain function, with both working together to form symbols and symbolic constructs.

6.1. Based on the current archaeological evidence and interpretations as well personal examination of artifacts, and considering various efforts to develop cognitive archaeology (prehistory of the human mind) (Wynn; Donald; Deacon; Mithen), briefly, I would propose the following schema for the evolution of proto-art symbols and mind (after Donald, modes of mental modeling).

<u>Archaeological Tool Mode</u>	<u>Proto-Art Symbols</u>	<u>Mental Model</u>
Oldowan	metaphor of 'core' crystals, rhomboids	Mimetic Modeling (Donald) 'preoperations A' (Wynn applying Piaget)
Dev. Old., Proto-Handaxe	symmetry	Conceptual-Meaning-Gesture-Modeling 'preoperations B' (Wynn)
Acheulian Handaxe	birthgiver, animals head / profile, geometrics	'concrete operations' (Wynn)
Middle Palaeolithic	ditto + combinations symbolic landscapes ritual art, rock markings geometric signs	Abstract Idea Modeling 'concrete operations' (Wynn) proto-language
Upper Palaeolithic	ditto + representational rock art culture encoding symbols geometric sign systems trance representations	Mythic and Linguistic Modeling (Donald) 'formal operations' (Wynn) formal linguistic, computational, and notational systems, oral and inscribed

6.2. I have reconstructed the metaphorical system informing Oldowan sense of proto-art (Harrod 1992), in which the first concept and first metaphor of ‘core essence’ arose, perhaps with the founding of ‘mind’ itself.

6.3 Artifacts from Acheulian and subsequent sites in Northwest Europe (Benekendorff et al 1990) and the Levant (Berekhat Ram), along with Wynn’s (1996, 1989) Piagetian reconstruction of the minimal cognitive capacities required for Oldowan, proto-handaxes, and Acheulian handaxe production, allow identification and reconstruction of the symbolic system of the Acheulian period. As I have presented (Harrod 1988), there appears to be an Acheulian symbolic system comprising the handaxe (biface), and stone sculptures which appear to represent four basic themes: female figure, which I have called the birth-giver, animals, head / skull, and geometric shapes (sphere, disc, teardrop, rhomboid, tetrahedron, pyramid, hexagon, etc.). In addition, there is evidence for strokes, hatches, criss-cross, nets and red ochre. At the center of this symbolic system is the bifacial core, which appears to represent a birth-giver or the process of being-born (or maybe reborn). The symbolic power of this symbol system implies the co-evolution of conceptual-meaning modeling in the mind. The concept of ‘meaning’ and ‘reference’ may have preceded the development of language. The evolutionary adaptive function of this symbol system is explicable in terms of the theories of neocortical and group size evolution (Aiello 1993; Aiello and Dunbar 1993). In this proto-semiotic system, each “symbol” is a token of the system as a whole, and the symbols may well have functioned to mediate intergroup conflicts. If so, this neatly fits the etymology of the Greek word symbolē = a bringing together, joining, meeting; symbolon = a sign, mark to infer a thing by, signal, token; and symbola = two pieces of a coin or other object, divided between host and guest, friends in different cities, two parties bond by contract, as tokens of good will.

6.4 The proto-art of Middle Palaeolithic Har Karkom includes all the categories of proto-art listed above. There is a veritable ‘creative explosion’ apparently attributable to *Homo sapiens archaicus*. Both at Har Karkom, as elsewhere in Northwest Europe, stone sculptures, especially those of the Mousterian of Acheulian Tradition, reveal frequent combinations of two or more of the distinct Acheulian themes in a single stone sculpture. This suggests that Middle Palaeolithic proto-art is informed by a re-framing of the Acheulian artistic-symbolic paradigm, perhaps now to represent a typical hunter-gatherer ‘mother-of-animals’ as well as a shamanic tutelary spirit (Siberian ayami). It is amazing to see that such a sophisticated religious and artistic tradition has arisen so early in human evolution, some 200,000 years before the Upper Palaeolithic. This complex symbolic tradition, along with the expanded variety of signs

(zigzag, chevron, arc, funnel, meander, maze, cupules, grooves, spirals, in addition to strokes, dots, cross-hatches, and nets) appears to reflect the evolution of abstract idea modeling and sign representation, which would have been facilitated by the development of proto-languages.

7. Naturefacts. Naturefacts may also be proto-art. Of course, this raises some problems for identifying the full array of proto-art at any given site.

7.1 I acknowledge the almost century and a half long controversy about 'eoliths,' 'Kafuan' tools, 'naturefacts' and more recently termed 'tephrafacts,' with respect to whether flake tools are nature-made or human-made and the various approaches to resolving this question (e.g. Dennell 1998). With respect to identifying stone sculptures, the problem is more complex, though may be partially resolved by scaling representational quality. However, in the case of proto-art we find a further paradoxical element. The proto-artist seems to judge the value (spiritual power) of a stone sculpture not on a simple linear scale of degree of resemblance, but on the following grading scale (letter grade in parenthesis):

- (B) a masterpiece of human craftsmanship, showing special qualities of representation, beauty, etc. and which is of unknown maker, such as a found object, pre-made, or one handed down through the generations so that now the maker is unknown;
- (C) next best, a stone with many natural resemblances, which requires only a flake or two to fully indicate or highlight the resemblance or to place sacred intent into the object, each of which presupposes a familiar, canonical tradition of stereotypes;
- (D) lesser value, a representation which requires extensive flaking and which creates a resemblance sufficient enough to identify the species or type;
- (E) of least value, an image of poor craftsmanship; the flaking result is only vaguely anthropomorphic or zoomorphic, with species or type indeterminate;
- (A) the best sculptural representations would be natural, found object no matter how vague the resemblance;
- (A+) best of all, a natural stone with some resemblance that has evidence of being flaked by nature!!

7.2 This scale is derived from personal observation and from Cushing's (1883/1990:12) comment about Zuni fetishes:

"... those fetishes most valued by the Zunis should be either natural concretions, or objects in which the evident original resemblance to animals has been only heightened by artificial means. Another highly prized class of fetishes are, on the contrary, those which are elaborately carved, but show evidence, in their polish and dark patina, of great antiquity. They are either such as have been found by the Zunis about pueblos formerly inhabited by their ancestors or are tribal possessions which have been handed down from generation to generation, until their makers, and even the fact that they were made by any member of the tribe, have been forgotten. It is supposed by the priests of Zuni that not only these, but all true fetishes, are either actual petrifications of the animals they represent, or were such originally."

7.3 Note that the fetish most highly prized by a Zuni is the natural concretion that bears a resemblance to an animal. Most non-Indians would regard such an item as a mere curiosity. For the proto-artistic mind, curiosities are more than exotic curiosities.

7.4 Following the same principle, apparently, the Berekhat Ram figurine was partly natural and partly abraded and flaked. It appears to have applied to later Upper Palaeolithic European zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figurines.

7.5 This principle applies not only to sculptures; it applies equally as much to rock art. Compare the way cave wall protuberances, curves, and cracks were utilized by Upper Palaeolithic Franco-Cantabrian cave artists.

7.6 On the grading scale of proto-art sculpture value, artifacts having the highest spiritual or religious value (A+, A) would not be easily recognizable in the archaeological record. For general inventorying of human-flaked stone sculptures as to degree of resemblance, I suggest a reduced scaling

90% = beyond a reasonable doubt; 'specials,' species clear and distinct; may have evident facial features such as eye, nose, mouth, ears; may have other distinguishing species traits; has aesthetic quality, or excellent accuracy, or dramatic representation of movement or aliveness; catches the spirit of the animal; 95% = 'masterpiece' of aesthetic beauty;

75% = clear and convincing; species is identifiable; aesthetic or representational qualities are fair;

50% = definite; genus is identifiable, but may lack distinctive species identifying traits; e.g., it appears to be a bovid, an equid, a proboscid,

or a primate or hominid; degree of certainty may be due to circumstantial evidence--(a) may be associated with other zoomorphic sculptures; (b) may have some features which fit similar or canonical zoomorphic representations; (c) may be a curated nature-made;

25% = probably; genus indeterminate; human flaked and has some zoomorphic or anthropomorphic features, such as head/body shape, curve of back, etc.; likelihood strengthened by context (a) may be associated with other zoomorphic sculptures; (b) may have some features which fit similar or canonical zoomorphic representations; or may be a curated, nature-made sculpture with vague zoomorphic or anthropomorphic features, and (a) or (b);

10% = possibly; appears zoomorphic or anthropomorphic, but neither genus nor species is identifiable; uncertain if human-made or nature-made artifact; has hominid archaeological context; may be an atypical tool; 5% = possibly but probably not; has no archaeological context or associations; e.g., a single surface find; found at natural flake site; etc.

8. Self-referring art. Some proto-art may be self-referring as well as environment referring. There is evidence for a schematic “marking tradition” in which engraved marks respond to, or reflect--using mental operators, such as contiguity (e.g., lines mimicking edges), similarity, opposition, inversion--the geometric shape of the object upon which the engraved markings are made. In other words, such “art” may refer to the geometric shape of the material (the frame and the canvas, so to speak) itself as a signified.

- a. Bilzingsleben Early Palaeolithic engraved bone, ca. 350-300,000 BP and Stránská skála (Bednarik, R. 1988: “unequivocal responses to the physical aspects of the artifacts . . . *These marks document a response to geometric aspects of the object . . . [and evidence that] Lower and Middle Palaeolithic people possessed a marking tradition* ”)
- b. Quneitra Middle Paleolithic engraved flint plate, ca. 54,000 BP (Marshack 1996)
- c. Summary of finds in Bednarik (1992).

9. Art for art's sake. Some proto-art also appears to have served three art's for art's sake functions: (a) pure aesthetic value (symmetry, pure beauty in itself); (b) the interesting (curio, oddities, surprising or remarkable, something to talk about); and (c) decoration.

Some proto-art may have had a 'decorative' function, although in the context of proto-art 'decorative' probably implied more than its modern dictionary definition as 'adornment, adding beauty or grace to something, ornament, mere external display.' Considering the primacy of the principle of placement, proto-art would have been 'adornment' in the sense of placement, honoring, bringing into existence and presence the spirit of the person or thing so adorned.

Perforated objects, such as wolf and fox teeth or phalanges or sharks teeth, might have served this function as well as functioning as amulets which had special powers. Other objects such as perforated discs, shells, and ostrich eggshell beads may have had similar adorning functions. Some engraved decorative markings may have served to highlight something delightful, awe-inspiring, interesting, graceful or beautiful displayed in the immediate material itself--and thus be self-referring art. Or such markings might have served to highlight the gesture of ornamental marking in itself--and thus be 'art for art's sake.' It is likely that red ochre was used for human 'adornment' as tattoos or body painting as well as its known use for marking ('adorning') plaques and other objects.

- a. Bednarik (1988): "*Homo erectus* decorated 'interesting' aspects of the immediate physical environment."
- b. Compare finger-flutings and meanders. Gallus, Bednarik, Marshack. Koonalda Cave, Pech de l'Azé, etc.

10. Trance art. It has become generally accepted that some proto-art represents and/or records trance experiences.

- a. For discussion of phosphenes in North American rock art, see e.g., Wellman (1981);
- b. For comparisons of South African rock art trance representations to European Upper Palaeolithic art, see, for instance, Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1988); Lewis-Williams and Clottes (1998);
- c. For hypothesis that cupule and linear ('cup and groove') art can induce trance through sonic driving and repetitive movement see Meldrum (1992), Steinbring (1992).

11. Passage art. Some proto-art objects and engravings suggests the theme of passage, the gesture and movement of passage.

This aspect of proto-art could signify a seasonal migratory passage of hunter-gatherer bands or of game animals through a landscape; or life passages, such as birth, group affiliation, and death; or the passage of life itself. It could evoke a passage between realms of this world and the invisible, spirit world.

- a. Quneitra Middle Paleolithic engraved flint plate, ca. 54,000 BP (Marshack 1996). Marshack interprets it as signifying the rainy season arrival of a migratory band in a land of rainbows; and thus, passage. The image might be interpreted as worlds or levels of shamanic ascent or descent journeys. It might also represent a vulva, a passageway through which we each are born, through which all life is born, emerges, arrives, or comes into being.
- b. For hypothesis that cupule and linear ('pit and groove') art, which may be the first rock art, may have symbolized 'change from one state to another' see Steinbring (1992:359): "An edge is the end of something and the beginning of something else. The act may have commemorated a rite of passage."

12. Social utility, cooperation and exchange. A proto-art objects may have been a symbol (emblem) of intergroup exchange and cooperation and / or differentiation, or of the spirit of such an exchange, such as a totemic spirit, and / or may have been circulated in such exchanges.

12.1. Proto-art, including stylistic features, likely served a function in "information exchange, social integration, and social differentiation" (Smith 1992) and "territorial marking" (Steinbring 1992).

12.2 Some proto-art stylistic features may evidence a dialectic between cultural hegemony and individualistic affirmation (Lanteigne 1992).

Considering the above principles, proto-art, whatever its material and form, appears to have had six kinds of referents (dimensions of meaning), with any particular artwork embodying one or more of these:

- 1) a place, sacred landscape, responding to the qualities of the environment or macrocosm in which the proto-art is placed;
- 2) a presence, presencing a spirit of place, animals, the human heart and breath, supernatural powers, etc.);
- 3) a passage or passages (seasonal or game passages, rites of passage, both individual and social group, social status passages, etc.)
- 4) an intergroup exchange and cooperation and/or differentiation, or the spirit of that exchange, such as a totemic spirit
- 5) self-referrent, responding to the shape or geometry of the immediate material object of art (the mesocosm);
- 6) 'art for art's sake,' that is no referent other than itself, responding with joy or adorning gesture to the inner spirit of the person or material object itself, (the microcosm.)

In all these dimensions, proto-art institutes a communication, a communion (dialogue) with the 'spirit' or 'life' of a landscape; a being residing in the landscape, a material object; a person, a spirit, etc.

In all these dimensions, proto-art is not primarily 'representational'; proto-art is primarily the depth mode of representation in the human psyche or mind. It is representation as re-presentation, that is, making present that which enspirits the landscape, prey or game animal, art medium, or inner self of a person.

In a philosophical and theological sense, these five referents are five spirits of life, five transcendences. They may be thought of as comprising 'the ultimate referent,' 'ultimate meaning' as re-presented by the Palaeolithic mind. This "for its own sake" is, as in Kantian terms, not a means to an end, not utilitarian, but an end in itself. Accordingly "for its own sake" can only find its acknowledgement and validation through non-utilitarian artifacts, that is through art, proto-art.

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