Division of the Earth: gender, symbolism and the archaeology of the southern San.

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ABSTRACT

Gender studies in various disciplines, particularly anthropology, have shown that the opposition of masculine : feminine is commonly used to structure other cultural contrasts, and that the representation of this opposition in cultural products is in turn implicated in the cultural construction of gender content. This bidirectional problematic, supplementing the more limited critique of gender 'bias' and masculinist models, is the focus of this research into archaeological materials. Rock art is the principal archaeological 'trace' analysed. Because the impetus to gender studies comes principally from the critical standpoint of feminism, analyses of gender and gendering in archaeological materials are evaluated in the context of gender issues in the present day, in terms of archaeological 'reconstructions' as legitimising the existing gender order. Theoretical influences include feminism, hermeneutics, marxism, (post)-structuralism, semiotics, and discourse theory.

Aspects of language, and, particularly, the oral narratives of various San groups - the /Xam, G/wi, !Kung, Nharo, and others - are examined in order to establish the way in which masculinity and femininity are/have been conceptualised and differentiated by San peoples. This is followed by an assessment of the manner of and extent to which the masculine : feminine opposition informs narrative content and structure. The analysis of language texts permits an approach to the representation of this opposition in non-language cultural texts (such as visual art, space). Particular constructions of masculinity and femininity, and a number of gendered contrasts (pertaining to form, orientation, time, number, quality) are identified. Gender symbolism is linked to the themes of rain and fertility/continuity, and analysed in political terms, according to the feminist materialist contention that, in non-class societies, gender opposition is potentially the impetus to social change.

Gender(ing) is more fundamental to San cultural texts than has been recognised, being present in a range of beliefs which are linked by their gender symbolism. I utilise a 'fertility hypothesis', derived from a reading of the ethnographies, in order to explain various elements of Southern African rock art, Well-preserved (thus relatively recent) paintings, principally from sites in the Drakensberg and south-western Cape, were selected. Features interpreted via this hypothesis include: images of humans, the motif of the thin red line fringed with white dots, 'elephants in boxes', therianthropic figures, and 'androgynous' figures, including the eland. The spatial organisation of the art, the significance of non-realistic perspectives, and the problem of the numerical male dominance of the art are also interpreted from this standpoint.

The analysis permits critique, of the theorisation of gender and ideology in rock art studies, and of the biophysical determinism implicit in current rock art studies, in which attempts are made to explain many features of the art by reference to trance states, altered consciousness and neurophysiological constitution. Rain, rather than trance, is proposed as the central element of San ritual/religious practices.

Finally, the treatment of (or failure to consider) gender(ing) in the archaeological record is situated in relation to contemporary gender ideologies, in the contexts of archaeological theory and practice.

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The painting reproduced on the page facing the title page is from the Ceres district, south western Cape, and is redrawn from Johnson et.al. (1959) Pl. 32.

INTRODUCTION

Division of the Earth

> The Captain said, the Old People (first people) should pull at a rope. Bushmen were there, white men were there, cows were there and sheep and goats. Then the whiteman took (hold) and pulled for them, and pulled (the rope) asunder and said, as the Bushman Captain divided the rope: "You take the rope and trap and eat. Trap steenbok and trap duiker and eat, and make karosses and sling them on. While I will wear clothes, when it rains will[1] wear blankets." So he said.
>
> !xuba was the Captain. The white man pulled, the Bushman pulled, the Captain cut (the rope) in two and said to the Bushman: "Take the bucks!" and to the white men: "Take the oxen!"
>
> The Bushman Captain took the rope, as !xoba[2] divided it. Then the Bushman Captain went away among the "tsama".
>
> They said to each other: "Both live separate; one go with the cows, and the other go with the bucks and trap the bucks."
>
> "The Bushman women shall gather food, the men shall make traps and eat bucks." This !xuba told the white man (in a dream) as he lay and slept.
>
> (D.F. Bleek, 1928b:47)

This tale, collected by Dorothea Bleek from the Nharo (Naron) of the central-western Kalahari, apparently deals with the resolution of conflict between the indigenous San and white settler-farmers. The solution is division of the earth: both sides retire to their separate spheres and lifestyles. The 'Bushmen' are to live among the tsama melons, trap buck for food and wear karosses, while the whites are to live with domestic stock and wear clothes and blankets.

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1 sic - perhaps the word 'I' is omitted in Dorothea Bleek's account.

2 sic

The tale may be used to introduce and illustrate some of the central concerns of this project - the way in which cultural products or texts (such as art/efacts, narratives, spatial organisation) operate in relation to social processes; how such texts *signify*, and how they may be seen as ideological products; how symbols, forms and structures may relate to power, and to 'relations of domination'.

The above tale is organised according to the opposition of the 'Bushman' and the white man, which is the theme of the tale, or its 'content'. Structurally the narrative turns on the oppositions -

Bushman	:	white man
wild buck	:	domestic stock
skin karosses	:	blankets.

The conflicting parties are defined and positioned as opposites, by their association with different clothes, resource bases and assignment each to a separate 'place'.

These associations clearly relate to 'real' conditions; their structural opposition tells us that these are points on which the white men and San differed and were seen to differ - economy, clothing and so on. It is unlikely that the San and the whites literally 'pulled on a rope' to settle a dispute, and very likely that this is a figurative expression of the concerns of the tale (conflicting interests between the two groups)[3]; yet the theme is undoubtedly partly rooted in the colonisation of southern Africa by Europeans. Analysis of opposition and difference may be analysed as relating to historical conditions, but the account is filtered through and worked by the particular ideology and cognitive set of the San.

It is, therefore, not fruitful to look to oral narrative texts as 'realistic' accounts of events. On the contrary, there is reason to suggest that the Nharo tale is an 'updated' version of other San narratives. This reworking of new themes while adhering to previous forms is suggested by the fact that the same tale is told by the !Nyae !Nyae

3 The 'pulling on a rope' is also a feature of other African narratives (Finnegan 1970).

!Kung, but those who 'pull on a rope' are in this case San and black people (Marshall 1976:336-7) .

Another narrative, structurally and formally similar (though differing in 'content'), is called The Anteater's Laws. In The Anteater's Laws, it is the interests of masculine and feminine, lion and springbok, which are opposed. The last line of Division of the Earth opposes women (who shall gather food) and men (who shall make traps) in the same way as whites and Bushmen are opposed in the rest of the tale, and in the same way as the male lion and springbok girl are opposed in The Anteater's Laws.

From the perspective of feminist materialist theory (which contains the proposition that gender conflict in non-class societies is a major impetus to social change), the relationship between San men and women, on the one hand, and that between the San people and encroaching whites, is not dissimilar: both express a hierarchical power relation. Tales from San oral tradition (as above) and the various ethnographies may be used to identify social relationships; their representation (manner of depiction) is a key to a critique of ideology. I use the San oral narratives - tales, cosmogonic versions and accounts of belief and ritual - as a key to San concepts of masculine and feminine difference, and gender ideology. The problematic is bi-directional - how economics, kinship and ritual are experienced and structured through gender, and how gender is experienced and structured through culture (Moore 1988:9). Gender has been shown to structure contrasts in a range of cultural spheres (see for example Strathern 1981; Moore 1986); 'gendered' artefacts have been shown to play a role in the construction of the meaning of the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' (for example, Welbourn 1984). Feminist researchers in a wide range of disciplines have demonstrated the social significance of gender, and the potential of research in such areas.

These then, are the themes of the project - the structured and structuring character of gender, San gender concepts, their 'expression' in cultural texts (proceeding from

narrative to art and other archaeological materials), and the relationship of gender representations to social conditions and gender relations. The emphasis is on such texts as signifying in practical contexts, according to Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977), which incorporates ideas about agency, action, intent and power.

The importance of theory, and its relation to practice and power, are emphasised in the project: '...there is no practice without theory, however much that theory is suppressed, unformulated or perceived as obvious' (Belsey 1980:4). A range of contemporary theories, particularly those concerned with textual criticism, are drawn on. Feminist theory is a major influence, but in turn draws on developments in literary theory in general, marxism, (post-)structuralism, discourse theory, hermeneutics and semiotics. The practical and political implications of theory have been a focus of much research, with an emphasis on 'the present and future worlds' (Shanks and Tilley 1987a:246) that theories and interpretations potentially contain. In this light, to make and communicate an interpretation is a practical and political action in the contemporary context. This thesis connects in various ways to current issues and situations: as discussion of the politics of gender in the archaeological discipline, and (because archaeology is obviously part of a larger world) as a feminist project, addressing questions of gender ideology in a broader context.

The project departs to some extent from 'traditional' Later Stone Age archaeology in various ways - the emphasis on language and cognition, the primary concern with social and political relationships, the approach to archaeology as 'a discourse about the past in the present' (Shanks and Tilley 1987a), and the omission of field work. Such differences relate to the emergence of archaeologies which are qualitatively and substantively different (Shanks and Tilley 1987a:246).

Because gender has been so little dealt with in South African archaeology, the project emphasises range - the pervasiveness of gendering in relation to various archaeological materials - rather than an in-depth focus on a narrower problem. The

anthropology and/or archaeology of gender is potentially a vast and productive field; hence there can be no question of this being a comprehensive handling of gender questions. At least some of the inevitable gaps and omissions are excused on these grounds.

Aims and methods

The discussion in the following chapter outlines the general thrust of this investigation of gender and the archaeology of the San. Briefly, the assumptions, aims and methods are as follows:

Gendering is a feature of social life which may organise a variety of cultural spheres; gender asymmetry in societies studied by archaeologists is an aspect which is worthy of study, not least in its relation to current research preoccupations and their ideological orientation. The problematic of this project is dual: (1) How are prehistoric texts structured by and involved in structuring gender ideology? and (2) How does this problematic relate to the practice of archaeology in the present?

An approach to the investigation of gender and San archaeology (particularly rock art) must begin with an attempt to understand how the San conceptualised masculinity and femininity. This is the aim of Chapters 2 & 3, where San language, narratives and accounts, and the gender contrasts therein, are used as a key to gender content; the classification by gender is interpreted in political terms, as it relates to symbolic power. The gender conventions derived from this analysis of language texts are useful for the analysis of rock art (Chapter 4), in terms of content, form, meaning and relation to social process. Chapter 5 continues the focus on rock art, with a comparative and theoretical emphasis, and critical examination of the trance hypothesis in rock art explanation. In the final chapter, I assess my findings and relate them to the practice of archaeology in the present day. An attempt to

relate the gender conventions to living sites and burials is documented in the Appendix. The investigation of gender thus covers cultural products (narrative, art/efacts, spatial organisation) as implements of gender ideology, and archaeological practice as an expression of a contemporary version of gender ideology.

CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL ORIENTATION/ LITERATURE SURVEY

This project relies most heavily on aspects of contemporary feminist theory, but draws also on developments in social theory in general, and in literary/textual criticism. Some background to these theories, and their use in interpretation of art, myth and gender representations, are presented in this chapter.

1 Feminist theory

1.1 Basic terms

1.1.1 The concept of gender

Feminist researchers have usefully employed the distinction between sex and gender, where the former refers to biological sex, that is male or female, and gender refers to masculinity or femininity (Oakley 1972; Delphy 1984). The distinction proved necessary as a counter to biological determinist notions about women, and was a response to the recognition that masculinity and femininity are culturally constructed. Many studies since Margaret Mead's (1950) have shown that what is considered feminine in one society might be masculine in another. Therefore there is no determinate relationship between male:female and masculine:feminine. The identification of gender as a cultural construct has the effect of making it an aspect of cultural study, worthy of attention in its own right. The cultural character of gender means that it cannot be seen as fixed or taken as given. Edholm et al. (1977) have discussed the ahistorical nature of the terms 'man' and 'woman', which ignore the fact that the content of these categories is mutable over time and space. Theorists such as Kristeva maintain that 'woman' can never be defined; Kristeva refuses to do so except relatively, as that which is marginalised by the patriarchal order (Marks and de Courtivron 1981; Moi 1985). 'Man' and 'woman' are not

absolute but sociological categories which are evaluative, descriptive, prescriptive, and, from a feminist perspective, political. Recent feminist work (such as Kristeva's) has thus focussed on the deconstruction of the categories 'man' and 'woman' (Moi 1985). Because these terms do not have single meanings, but signify differently in different cultural and historical contexts, 'there can be no analytical meaning in any universal conditions, attitudes or views ascribed to this 'woman'...' (Moore 1988:189), or 'man'.

Such a view raises the problem of how one is to say what a feminist research perspective is; this unexpectedly thorny problem is dealt with by Kuhn (1982) and Moore (1988) with reference to film and anthropology respectively. It may be partially solved by saying that feminist projects focus in general on the politics of gender.

1.1.2 Gender and ideology

The feminist view of gender and gender relations as political connects with questions of ideology. The term 'gender ideology' is often encountered, used in the sense of a particular cultural/historical set of beliefs about gender. In a stricter sense, gender ideology may be understood as referring to gender as linked with relations of domination. French Marxist-feminist Christine Delphy (1984) argues that gender is inseparable from relations of domination: to examine this it is necessary to consider briefly the relationship of feminism and marxism.

Feminism as a distinct theoretical set owes its emergence partly to male left hostility towards questions of gender, and its lack of theorisation in, for example, Marxist thought (Barrett 1980; Bradby 1977; Marks and de Courtivron 1981; Molyneux 1977). Feminist perspectives have provided a valuable critique of Marxist theory, for example regarding analyses of the family, which did not 'fit' into either base or superstructure of the then current Marxist model (Barrett 1980; Wolff 1981). Though Marxist feminism faces problems of theoretical reconciliation, and has been

referred to as an 'unhappy marriage' (Hartmann 1979; Barrett 1980), much has been achieved.

Delphy's claim that gender *is* ideology, so to speak, derives from her critique of Engels: 'having shown that all divisions of labour are the consequence of and means of hierarchy and oppression', he then went on to make his 'greatest mistake'(Delphy 1984:200). This was the inversion of the marxist causal order in his analysis of the division of labour by gender. He said that in this case and in this case only, hierarchy followed and did not precede division. Delphy argues that if this causal order can be inverted in the case of gender, why not in any other case? (Delphy 1984:200). By correcting this flaw, Delphy prepares the ground for the argument that differences in human physiology and appearance do not contain within them the necessity of a *social* division. She is questioning 'the very existence of genders' and the relationship of gender to biological sex. Gender is primarily a political division, 'set on anatomical sex like the beret on the head of the legendary Frenchman' (Delphy 1984:25).

Moore (1988) on the other hand, warns of the tendency of feminist anthropologists to interpret gender difference in non-Western societies as social and political stratification; this view is rejected in this project, and, following Delphy, gender is viewed as necessarily an hierarchical social division, though the extent of male dominance may vary.

1.1.3 'Androcentrism'

The study of the ways in which 'reality' is constructed from a masculinist perspective has long been a feature of the Anglo-American feminist tradition. The term 'androcentrism' is broadly useful, for example, in referring to the different levels of feminist criticism. Feminist research is also necessarily a critique of current gender ideologies. In this project, the analysis of gender as ideology in archaeological materials cannot be separated from an assessment of whether/ how archaeological

theory, practice and interpretation draws on and contributes to the maintenance of contemporary gender beliefs. However, it should be noted that the term 'androcentrism' is not without its problems (which need not be discussed here); the term is retained because of its general usefulness, as opposed to its specific inadequacies.

1.2 **Feminism in anthropology**

1.2.1 Early work and subsequent refinements

Feminist inputs to archaeology are indebted to developments in anthropology. The 1970s saw the publication of two influential anthologies written from a feminist perspective (Reiter 1975; Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974), as well as the work of Zihlmann and Tanner on theories of human evolution (1976). Criticism of 'man the hunter' models focussed on the selection for male activities and perspectives in research by predominantly male researchers (Rohrlich-Leavitt et al. 1975; Slocum 1975). This critique has subsequently been applied to theories of human evolution (Slocum 1975; Tanner et. al. 1976) and archaeological reconstructions in general (for example Conkey and Spector 1984; Gero 1985). However it has also become clear that 'man the hunter' models were often as much a feature of indigenous accounts as of anthropologists' accounts (Keohane et al. 1982) and other approaches have developed. Efforts to counter the omission of female perspectives - the 'add-women-and-stir' method - have also proved inadequate (Boxer 1982, cited by Moore 1988), and the focus of contemporary feminism is often 'gender' rather than, narrowly,'women'. The encounter between two traditions of thought, the Anglo-American and the French, has had a profound effect on new directions.

Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974) contained a paper by Ortner, entitled 'Is male to female as nature is to culture?', which is influenced by structuralist theory (notably Levi-Strauss on the nature:culture opposition). She argued that the universal subordination of women might be explained by a universal association of men with

culture and women with nature. This argument has subsequently been criticised as biologically determinist, and the man:culture/ woman:nature relation has been generally accepted as not universal (MacCormack and Strathern 1980, and contributors to the volume). There has, however, been enduring interest around the suggestion that the question of female subordination could be approached by looking at 'factors built into the structure of the most generalised situation in which all human beings, of whatever culture, find themselves' (Ortner 1974:71).

Much debate and theoretical refinement has followed in the wake of the early anthologies. The early assumption of separate masculine and feminine perspectives has been revised, and more sophisticated models such as Ardener's theory of 'muting' (1975a,b), and theories of the differential effectiveness of single cultural models (for example, Moore 1986) have emerged.

Leacock (1978) has pointed out that much of the early feminist anthropology was ahistorical, but this criticism is also true for Leacock's own research. She sees colonisation as the primary disruptive force in pre-capitalist egalitarian societies (see her work on the role of the Jesuits in disturbing egalitarian relations amongst the Montagnais-Naskapi Indians (Etienne and Leacock 1980)). Valuable though the account of the effects of colonisation on gender organisation is, she fails to account for gender and change before colonial incursions, and seems to refer to a golden egalitarian pre-colonial past in which gender relations were ideal. This concept of egalitarianism is problematic, taking gender and the division of labour as given. The assumption is that 'different' can somehow be 'more or less equal'. In such studies (see also Draper 1975; Lee 1974) *degrees* of difference and the extent of male dominance are focussed on at the expense of the difference itself.

1.2.2 Gender/class/race/age

Gender is not an independent variable, being closely linked to other factors (such as age) and 'everywhere experienced through the specific mediations of history, class,

race, colonialism and neo-imperialism' (Moore 1988:189). These factors form hierarchies of importance, and in certain contexts one may override the other. For example, anthropologists (for example La Fontaine 1978) have considered the interrelation of gender (permanent) with age (impermanent). Age (time) may mitigate gender categories; thus young girls may not be subject to restrictions applicable to older women, and post-menopausal women may take precedence over boys and younger men, even though generally the society gives precedence to male over female. The intertwining of gender, class and race is also crucial, and a focus of much contemporary research: class may take precedence over gender, and the position of black women is often spoken of in terms of their 'triple oppression' by gender, race and class.

1.3 **'Feminist archaeology'**

Environmental approaches in archaeology have recently come under criticism (for example Mazel 1987a), and research has focussed on archaeology as a critical discipline (for example, Shanks and Tilley 1987a,b; Leone 1981; Leone et al. 1987; and with particular reference to gender, Conkey and Spector 1984). Conkey and Spector note that environmental/ systems approaches incorporate a problem of scale - 'a disjunction between the nature of the archaeological data...and the very broad processes which are examined under the systems perspective' (1984:23). Within such a framework, prehistoric groups (particularly in 'simple' societies, such as gatherer/hunter/foragers) have been viewed as largely unitary undifferentiated entities. Differentiation within groups, as a constitutive factor of the archaeological site, has been subordinated to group-environment interaction. That divisions by gender, age or whatever may be factors as powerful as environment in the constitution of archaeological sites has been ignored in much New Archaeology, and contributed to the invisibility of women and children in archaeological reconstructions.

Feminist insights in, for example, anthropology, have been slow to permeate archaeology, and feminist perspectives in archaeology have only gained any real currency in the eighties, with the publication of critiques of gender bias (such as Conkey and Spector 1984; Gero 1985) . Hodder (1986:159) has noted the potential of 'feminist archaeology' as a critique from the margins.

Various gender related analyses have been carried out in archaeology, of which Hodder's and McGhee's in particular are worth mentioning, since they bear some relation to the problematic of this project. Hodder (1984) invokes gender in his explanation of the organisation of Neolithic tombs - he argues that 'tombs' are metaphorised 'houses', and that 'the bone organisation in the tombs might be shown to have had specific meanings in the male/female negotiation of power and authority' (Hodder 1986:75). Similarly, McGhee (1977, cited by Hodder 1986:45)) has conducted very interesting research on the prehistoric archaeology of the Thule culture of arctic Canada, showing how ideas about men and women, and their association with land and sea respectively, are translated into choices of artefactual materials - bones of marine animals for women's equipment, terrestrial animal bones for men's.

Such research is based on the idea that the fundamental social division of gender may be a factor in artefactual form and materials, in the spatial organisation of homes and villages, and in visual art - in short in many cultural spheres. However, despite the growing interest in cultural constructions of gender, studies which tackle the question fully are few and far between, and gender is taken as given in most research. Alternatively, as so often happens, gender is dealt with as a separate chapter tacked on to the end of research, and not as integral to and integrated into analysis as a whole.

In South African archaeology gender has hardly received attention. The only focussed considerations (both according to the historical materialist principle that, in

the absence of class stratification, gender conflict is an impetus to change) are Mazel's (1987b) analysis of Later Stone Age artefactual change in the Thukela Basin, and Wadley's (1986) attention to gender questions in association with an ecological analysis of Transvaal Later Stone Age sites. Wadley's approach corresponds to that of this project, in that she uses structural principles derived from the ethnographies in support of the suggestion that gender-informed spatialisation is a factor in cave sites. Other than these studies, gender has not been given attention. The broad phrasing of this project is partly a response to the fact that the field of gender studies in local archaeology is so under-researched.

As does this project, the analyses of gender which have been carried out in South African archaeology depend on the materialist contention that gender conflict is a potential impetus to change in non-class, non-lineage societies. However, in other aspects my approach diverges from those represented by Mazel and Wadley's work. In part this centres on a necessary distinction between the archaeology of gender and a feminist perspective in archaeology. For example, Wadley's recommendation (1986:165) of research into 'the possibility that meat and women are simultaneously privatised' in the Later Stone Age cannot be interpreted as a feminist treatment of the data, though it focusses on gender-related questions. This suggestion may even be seen as tending toward the commodification of women to which feminism has responded. Similarly, Wadley's definition of gender ideology ('proscriptions and prescriptions for men and women expressed through symbols...' [(Wadley 1986:10); original emphasis] does not derive from feminist theory. Firstly, expression via symbols does not define gender ideology; secondly, this formulation, though it acknowledges that gender ideology applies to both genders, ignores the particular concern with male dominance that is central to feminist theory. Description of the separation of male and female roles as 'symbolic' (1986:11), rather than political/economic/strategic, may be similarly criticised. Wadley's work nevertheless

represents the first concerted attempt to incorporate gender questions into archaeology.

Wadley refers to 'the general theory of gender relations and marriage...' (1986:7); however, though the materialist contention (above) has a certain wide currency, no such general theory really exists. There is no unitary theory of gender, just as there is no unitary feminism. For example, the origins of gender have been sought by some feminists (for example Coontz and Henderson 1986); however I follow Delphy's (1984) contention that the search for the origins of gender asymmetry is teleological[1], and do not consider the unearthing of the origins of gender to be an adequate, desirable or even attainable goal of gender studies (in archaeology or elsewhere). Feminism thus incorporates a range of theories, aims and strategies.

Functionalist explanation in feminist research in general has emerged as a major problem (cf. Barrett 1980; Giddens 1979). This tendency is present in Wadley's analysis of marriage and gender relations: 'There is a need for the symbolic expression of gender differences...[Wadley 1986:13]). Similarly, though it cannot be denied (and should perhaps be emphasised) that marriage has economic functions such as providing access to resources (Wadley 1986:14), the two should not be simply conflated so that one stands for the other. Another problem (one that is not adequately dealt with in this project either, since the focus (rock art) is not susceptible to analysis of change) is that more attention needs to be paid to the question of *how* gender conflict relates to social change.

Gender studies in South African archaeology are just emerging, and problems such as those cited are less important than those arising from research which ignores gender altogether.

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1 The search for origins cannot proceed without the projection of the present into the past; to invoke the present in the origin of a phenomenon, and then to use the origin to explain the present, is teleological (Delphy 1984:199). Barrett (1980:23) also discusses this error.

2 Social and political theory

Feminist approaches have drawn on developments in other branches of social theory, to which some background (necessarily partial) is given here. A distinction may be made between the more empirical Anglo-American tradition, tending towards Marxism, and the continental (especially French) preoccupation with structuralism, post-structuralism and discourse theory. Discourse theory has gained increasing currency in British and American academic circles, and is, for example, a major influence on the archaeological theory propounded by Shanks and Tilley (1987a,b).

2.1 Structuralism

Saussurian structural linguistics were fundamental to what has become known as structuralism, in its many varieties. Structuralism defies definition, but may be seen as 'a way of thinking about the world which is predominantly concerned with the perception and description of structures', and 'the relationship between observer and observed' as 'the stuff of reality itself' (Hawkes 1977:17). Included in the idea of 'structure' are the notions of wholeness and a sense of internal coherence; transformational capacity which raises it above the level of passive form; and self regulation in the sense that it 'makes no appeals beyond itself'(Hawkes 1977:16). It is claimed that 'the full significance of any entity or experience cannot be perceived unless it is integrated into the structure of which it forms a part'(1977:16).

The preoccupation with internal coherence, and conceptions of 'systemness', structure and change have all been challenged since the structuralist heyday circa the sixties and seventies. 'This does not at all mean that structuralism is dead, only that many of its ideas have now been accepted outside the structuralist fold itself into the mainstream of Western thought' (Sturrock 1986:ix).

The application of structural linguistics in anthropology (particularly Levi-Strauss' structuralism) focussed on culture - for example, kinship systems - as social coding equal to language. This view is no longer generally held (though comparable, culture is not a language) but the influence of linguistics remains, for example with regard to semantics.

Early structuralists held that all meaning was produced via binary opposition. Hence 'up' has no meaning without reference to 'down'; the meaning of 'hat' is established by its difference from 'bat' (opposition of voiced and unvoiced consonants) (Moi 1985:105). 'There are thus grounds for recognising that the capacity for the creation and perception of binary or paired 'opposites'...[is] a fundamental and characteristic operation of the human mind' (Hawkes 1977:24) - hence the structuralist search for 'universal mental structures'. That meaning could be generated other than by binary opposition was later demonstrated by reference to terms of degree, such as less, greater etc which relied on the unfolding in time for meaning to be established (Moi 1985).

De Saussure also considered other linguistic relationships, particularly the structural relationship between signifier ('the sound-image made by the word "tree") and signified (the concept of a tree) which make up the linguistic sign (Hawkes 1977:16; Visser 1982). From work in these areas came the conclusion that 'language stands as the supreme example of a self-contained 'relational' structure' which 'constitutes its own reality' (Hawkes 1977:26). Language also encodes different 'realities' - classification of the colour spectrum, for example, is culturally and linguistically variable. The Zulu, for example, use the same word to signify both blue and green; the relation between signifier and signified is culturally conventional (Visser 1982:54). Less controversial than the influence of language on society (the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis) is the effect society has on language (Trudgill 1983). As will be

seen, the determining centrality of language has been challenged, but language nevertheless remains important.

One aspect of Saussurian linguistics which has had enduring value in application to non-language texts, is that of the two axes of language - the syntagmatic (horizontal) axis, and the paradigmatic (associative, vertical). A linguistic unit 'enters into paradigmatic relationships with all other units that could occur in the same context and into syntagmatic relations with those which precede and follow it as they combine to form sequences' (Visser 1982:55). In the poetics of the structuralist, Roman Jakobson, metaphor is related to the paradigmatic axis and metonymy to the syntagmatic (Jakobson 1956, in Lodge 1988). Also related are the denotative and connotative functions of language, where the first is 'the use of language to mean what it says', the second 'to mean something other than what is said' (Hawkes 1977:133). The distinction between vertical and horizontal axes has been used on non-verbal texts, for example, by Layton (1981;1985) in semiological analyses of Australian rock art.

Hermeneutics, as the study or theory of interpretation, incorporating the problem of 'correct' interpretation of a text (Wolff 1981:98), is also connected with questions of meaning. Though it is not strictly within the structuralist ambit, it is convenient to discuss it here. According to Ricoeur's theory of distanciation and his analysis of the conditions of meaning, every interpretation is a reinterpretation, because of the distance (in time and space) which intervenes (Thompson 1982). Meaning can never be fixed, because it depends on the reader as much as the author. Gadamer, similarly, maintains that it is impossible to reproduce the original meaning of a text (book, painting etc) and that every re-reading is a new interpretation conditioned by the reader's different positioning (Gadamer 1975, 1976, cited by Woolf 1981:99 - 102). He describes this as a 'fusion of horizons', where every reading contains traces

of 'original' (authorial) meaning inevitably fused with the meaning(s) attributed by the present reader (Wolff 1981.).

This has implications for the interpretation of archaeological materials which are discussed in detail by Shanks and Tilley (1987a,b), and will be returned to in the course of the project. Shanks and Tilley identify four hermeneutics: working within the contemporary discipline of archaeology; living in contemporary society; trying to understand the different meaning frames of alien cultures; and transcending the difference between past and present (Shanks and Tilley 1987a:108). Hermeneutic and semiological approaches to rock art have been used by Maddock (1970), and Layton (1985).

Structuralist insights into language as structured/structuring and constituting its own reality, and into problems of epistemology and semantics are of continued interest in recent theories which can be generally subsumed under the heading 'post-structuralist' - though this tends to suggest that these recent theories form a unified body, which is not so.

2.2 **Semiotics**

The primacy of linguistic analysis has given way to the idea of a general science of signs of which linguistics is one branch (De Saussure 1974). The major insight of semiotics is that anything can carry meaning; Van Zyl (1982) cites an entire book on cucurbits in literature to make the point that 'even squashes and pumpkins can participate in semiosis'. Semiotics, or semiology, was born from the work of De Saussure and the American C.S. Peirce early this century, and has become increasingly influential, semiotic studies appearing in a wide range of fields - wherever there is something that functions as a sign. In the hands of theorists such as Julia Kristeva, semiotics becomes 'not only a linguistic theory, but crucially, a theory formation which necessarily theorizes its own production of theories' and can be deployed 'as a critique of its own suppositions' (Kristeva 1986:26). This relates to the

paradox of investigating signs when knowledge is dependent on and ordered by those same signs. Kristeva has also worked on the question of signification as a process (*signifiance*) (Moi 1985); such directions hinge on the crucial idea that meaning is not and cannot be fixed (cf. Ricoeur). Polysemy, or the existence of multiple meanings, has important theoretical, practical and political consequences; Shanks and Tilley (1987a) discuss it in relation to 'correct' archaeological interpretation, and 'objective' reconstructions of the past.

Theorists who have made major contributions to semiotics include Bakhtin/Volosinov (according to Moi 1985, probably the same person) who proposed an evaluative position in semiotics, and initiated a critique of the sign as ideology (Van Zyl 1982:73)[2]. From a materialist perspective, ideology, signs and communication must be seen as relating in some way to material conditions.

Peirce's analysis of the sign, and his well known distinction between icon, index and symbol, has been widely used - in local archaeology by Lewis-Williams (1981a) in his analysis of rock art. In general, semiotics depends on 'two fundamental insights: first, that social and cultural phenomena are not simply material objects and events, but objects or events with meaning, and hence signs; and second, that they do not have essences but are defined by a network of relations, both internal and external.' (Culler 1975:4). Thus it is that Hodder can claim that the most mundane objects can be seen as 'the node of a network of associations and oppositions which tell us about the way the world is put together'(Hodder 1987:74), an insight with considerable implications for interpretation of archaeological data.

2 A related concept, from Marxism, is that of the materiality of the sign. This, and the claim that 'ideology is material' are controversial. Barrett (1980) argues that though ideology (or signs) has material effects, it is a leap of faith to say that ideology and/or the sign are themselves material. To 'materialise' ideology/signs is to make everything material and to make 'materialism' obsolete.

2.3 Art/efacts and ideology: social versus individual origins

With the semiotic principle that anything may operate as a sign, and the idea of the sign as ideology, it is possible to approach the analysis of art/efacts as ideology.

Barthes (in Lodge 1988) and Foucault (in Rabinow 1984) both discussed the 'death of the author' and the problem, identified by the New Critics[3], of referring meaning to the author's intent (Belsey 1980; Caughie 1981; Wolff 1981). The death of the author is the acknowledgement of the wider social origin of an artefact or 'work of art', and involves the decentring of the producer, whose individual subjectivity is now viewed as a relevant but not primary factor (Giddens 1979). Art/efacts express group consciousness in a complex way, and are thus, in the loosest sense of the term, ideological products:

> 'Works of art are not closed, self-contained and transcendent entities but are the product of specific historical practices on the part of identifiable social groups in given conditions, and therefore bear the imprint of the ideas, values, and conditions of existence of those groups and their representatives in individual artists' (Wolff 1981:49).

Artefacts may be said to 'have' meaning, but this meaning is not inherent, nor is it buried or reflected. Meaning is invoked when the art/efact is 'read'; this necessitates a focus on the other half of production, viz consumption or reading, and the reader's subjectivity (Belsey 1980; Moore 1986; Wolff 1981). A cultural text is situated in time, and thus cannot be bounded off from new/different interpretations and meanings, though the range of meanings may be circumscribed in various ways. Meaning is thus relational, invoked, context-dependent, and as much related to the 'consumer' as to the producer.

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3 The American New Critics - literary criticism.

2.4 Language and linguistic/socio-linguistic approaches

In structuralism, language occupied a privileged position; from a semiotic point of view this is unsatisfactory, as language is but one branch of signification. Nevertheless, language is a particularly prominent and powerful communication system, and its importance does not diminish with the recognition that differences may exist between linguistic and non-linguistic sign systems; language is important because subjectivity is subordinate to it. Subjectivity is 'linguistically and historically constructed' (Belsey 1980:61). The primacy of language over subjectivity permits the statement by Moore (1986:170) that structures of language may be seen as a 'structures of power'; Belsey notes that signifieds are not 'pre-existing, given concepts', but linked to changes in the social formation. 'On the basis of De Saussure's work it is possible to argue that insofar as language is a way of articulating experience, it necessarily participates in ideology'; hence 'the notion of language as a neutral nomenclature functioning as an instrument of communication of meanings which exist independently of it is clearly untenable' (Belsey 1980:44). This position is one of those explored by Bourdieu (see below). Socio-linguistics is that section of linguistics which focusses specifically on the relation between language and society, on language as 'a social and cultural phenomenon' (Trudgill 1983:32).

The ongoing post-structuralist preoccupation with language centres for many feminist researchers on the psychoanalytic theory of Lacan, the most sophisticated contemporary theory of the construction of the gendered subject[4]. Lacanian theory also 'appears to be compatible with a general theory of ideology and social structure' (Wolff 1981:134). Its stress on the constituting potential of *coupure* or rupture is an important feature. The flaw of Lacanian theory is the determinism accorded to language, and the view of it as constitutive, but not as itself constituted (Wolff

4 How people are not only conditioned as subjects according to the time and place, but also emerge as masculine or feminine subjects (Wolff 1981:132-5).

1981:134). Despite this problem, Lacanian theory is of particular value for feminist research, and is drawn on (obliquely) in this project.

The semiological model has been rejected by Sperber (1975) for the analysis of symbolism on the grounds that 'symbolism has no semantics comparable to that of language'. This criticism is accepted by Lewis-Williams (1981a) in his approach to rock art interpretation, but is rejected in this project. Layton (1985:436) makes the valid point that Sperber's criticisms 'restrict semiology to the definition of the linguistic sign'; Kristevan semiotics (or, as she prefers to call it, semanalysis) acknowledges that there are problems with the linguistic model, while retaining an acceptance of the importance of language. She argues that 'Semiotics cannot go on following the linguistic model alone', and criticises the bias of 'a familiar conception of semiotics' towards 'discovering in every kind of field analogues of the systems of language'. Nevertheless:

> 'Every social practice, as well as being the object of external (economic, political etc.) determinants, is also determined by a set of signifying rules, by virtue of the fact that there is present an order of language...what semiotics had discovered is the fact that there is a general social law, that this law is the symbolic dimension which is given in language, and that every social practice offers a specific expression of that law' (Kristeva 1986:25).

This relates to her concept of intertextuality, and the character of the relationships between different kinds of texts (see below).

On such grounds I propose that language is important, and that the semantics of art and language are not necessarily false similarities as Lewis-Williams (1981a) suggests. The Lacanian proposition (that it is 'differential entry into language and the Symbolic' which constitutes masculinity and femininity and their relative positioning) is relevant to this study of gender and San archaeology, and the way archaeological materials may be involved in the construction of gender content.

2.5 **Discourse theory, marxism and the problem of 'reality'**

The re-prioritising of ideology in Marxism, particularly in the work of Althusser, was tied to a rejection of economism, and the proposition that economy and ideology were closely linked in a unidirectional determinate relationship. Althusser proposed that ideology was 'relatively autonomous', but that economy was ultimately ('in the last instance') determining (Belsey 1980; Wolff 1981). In feminism, such an approach has provided a way out of the thorny problem of how the subordination of women relates to the social formation (particularly capitalism) - solutions to which had tended to be overly functionalist. From the point of view of Althusserian marxism 'it has become possible to accommodate the oppression of women as a relatively autonomous element of the social formation', linked to but not strictly determined by economy (Barrett 1980:31). In Althusserian terms, ideology deals centrally with *representation*, and its naturalising and constitutive effects. Althusser highlighted two major problems of marxist theory: economic determinism and unidirectional causality. His argument that ideology is not always determined by the material and economic base opened the way for studies of how ideological representations may influence this so-called base. The concept of recursivity, or bi-directional effectivity, has been taken up by many people, for example Giddens (1979), whose theory of structuration addresses such questions.

Parallel to this stress on ideology is the growing influence of discourse theory - study of 'the relation between language and the object to which it apparently refers' (Marks and de Courtivron 1981:3). A discourse or discursive formation is a domain of language use subject to rules of formation and transformation (Belsey 1980:160)). A *text* is a discursive construct, differing texts being produced by different discourses (Belsey 1980:14).

Discourse theory and marxism part company particularly on the question of 'objective reality'. Marxism has been described as a fundamentally 'realist

science...predicated upon the notion that there exist real relations in the real world of which we can have reliable knowledge' (Barrett 1980:36). In discourse theory, the distinction between knowledge and the real is rejected - '*our knowledge* of the real cannot exist outside discourse' - but this is not to say that nothing exists outside discourse (Barrett 1980:35). However, Barrett argues that this concession of ontological (as opposed to epistemological) realism is useless, and frequently leads to a denial of objective reality. Belsey, addressing the question of how we are to 'privilege one discourse over another as a repository of knowledge' considers the rejection of epistemology (as proposed by Hindess and Hirst 1977) to be unsatisfactory, as it implies a completely arbitrary world in which all discourses are equal. She suggests that the way out of this problem is via the recognition that all knowledge is discursively produced:

> 'By bringing together existing discourses...and foregrounding the incompatibilities and collisions between them, we can produce new, more coherent discourses which, until their own contradictions are exposed, can lay claim to the status of knowledge. Such a knowledge, though it is tested in practice, does not seek a guarantee in an extra-discursive order of reality...it is never final, always hypothetical...To this extent it is never fixed but always in process. Its only certainty is the inadequacy of the discourses of ideology' (Belsey 1980:63).

This, again, is the theory which Shanks and Tilley (1987a,b) have brought to bear upon archaeological theory and interpretation, in opposition to approaches which claim access to an objective 'reality', and to reconstruct what 'actually' happened in the past.

This crucial debate is dealt with by Giddens (1979), who is partly concerned to reconcile the views of Marxism and discourse theory; Barrett (1980), acknowledging that both sides have a point, follows Bhaskar (1979) and opts for a middle road, whereby analysis based on 'the reproduction or transformation of structures of relatively enduring relations' may be taken as 'real'. Thus something such as the

subordination of women is seen as 'real', and not merely something existing in ideology, while the relation of knowledge and reality is recognised. To address this relevant problem of 'reality' in depth is beyond the scope of this project, though it is returned to in the concluding chapter, where the existence of an objective reality is discussed in relation to correct interpretation and theory evaluation[5].

2.6 **Theoretical problems and developments**

Giddens, criticising Geertz, makes the point that 'metaphor and metonymy, generating multivalent levels of meaning' are 'features of symbol systems in general', and to discuss them as ideology is to show *'how they sustain an existing order of domination'* (1979:192; my italics). It has been a feature of recent work to pay particular reference to how signs and meanings are involved in the maintenance of domination. Giddens (1979) and Bourdieu (1977, 1979) drawing on Marxist theory, and Moore (1986), drawing also on feminist theory, have been particularly concerned not only with the coherence of symbol systems but with the relations with 'objective conditions' (Bourdieu 1977:83). 'Objective conditions' refers not to one 'true' reality, but to divisions by age, sex or position in the relations of production. Post-structuralist theorists, while incorporating many of the basic insights of structuralism, have produced wide ranging criticisms of many structuralist principles, not least its ahistoricism. Bourdieu and Giddens both address these problems, and both focus on the lack of theorisation of agency and action/practice. Their critiques have many common factors, particularly in their views of structure, practice, and the penetration of 'actors' into their situation. Bourdieu's work in particular has important insights which archaeology can profitably take up (Hodder 1986).

2.6.1 Giddens - the theory of structuration

Giddens (1979), apart from attempting to reconcile marxism and discourse theory, has levelled criticisms against many structuralist principles, particularly the binary

5 Shanks and Tilley (1987a,b) discuss this problem in detail.

opposition, and concepts of structure and system. He argues that it is vital to replace the dualisms of Saussurian linguistics with a notion of the *duality of structure*, to 'grasp the time-space relations inherent in the constitution of all social interaction' (1979:3) and to distinguish between structure and system. His theory of 'structuration' emphasises the recursiveness of all social life, and the practical consciousness that informs action. He is also concerned to combat functionalist explanation, and this can be seen in his stress on the 'effects of the 'escape' of activity from the intentions of its initiators' (1979:215). Thus 'the thesis that the assembling of the group to engage in ceremonial helps to foster the unity of the community...identifies an unintended consequence...it does not in any way explain why the activity persists' (1979:212).

The critique of structuralist and functionalist conceptions of time/space is a major part of the theory of structuration. He argues that by replacing De Saussure's dualisms (particularly synchrony/diachrony, but also signifier/signified, langue/parole, subject/object) with the concept of the duality of structure and recursivity, time/space problems may be better dealt with. Synchrony (the study of language, for example, at one moment in time) and diachrony (study of its historical development) are, he argues, falsely opposed; static analysis is impossible as the elapse of time has to be involved. Even social 'stability' does not imply stasis, as it is necessarily situated in time. Social reproduction is inseparable from time, and as Giddens sees it, tradition and routinisation are important features. He also criticises the understanding of time and space as mere 'environments'(1979:202), which are also separate, noting that 'Social development characteristically involves spatial as well as temporal movement' (1979:206). This coincidence of space/time is, he suggests, useful in approaching 'much broader problems of social change' (1979:205).

On the theory of agency, Giddens suggests that actors have a degree of discursive penetration, and that 'every social actor knows a great deal about the conditions of reproduction of the society of which he or she is a member' (1979:5). This 'practical consciousness' is what connects his work most strongly with that of Bourdieu.

2.6.2 Bourdieu - symbolic power and a theory of practice

Bourdieu's work has given especial emphasis to symbolic systems - classificatory systems encoding particular 'realities', and thus evaluative (see also Tambiah 1985). In an article entitled 'Symbolic Power' (1979), Bourdieu connects three views of symbolic systems - as 'structured structures', as 'structuring structures' and as 'instruments of domination'. He argues that a society's 'internal classificatory systems reproduce the directly political taxonomies in a misrecognisable form', and that 'the set of implicit axioms in each field is a transmuted form...of the fundamental principles of the division of labour...The specifically ideological effect consists precisely in the imposition of political systems of classification in the legitimate guise of philosophical, religious or juridical taxonomies' (1979:82). Symbolic power is important in 'a specifically symbolic struggle to impose the definition of the social world that is most consistent with ...[sectional] interests'. The coherence of symbolic systems is not owing to their internal logic; rather they are characterised by practical logic (1979:81).

Central to Bourdieu's spatial analysis of the Kabyle house is his discussion of **habitus**, a 'system of dispositions, a linguistic competence and a cultural competence, and through these habitus, all the objective structures of which they are the product, structures which are active only when embodied in a competence acquired in the course of a particular history...'(1977:78). Structure is only instantiated in practice, only exists at the time of its enactment. Habitus 'consists' of 'durable but transposable dispositions...and structuring principles', is situated between structure and practice, and is related to a practical mastery which cannot be

reduced to rules (Hodder 1986:71). It also relates to tradition (cf. Giddens 1979), processes of socialisation and social reproduction, and may pass 'from generation to generation without going through discourse or consciousness'; it 'plays an active role in social action and is transformed in those actions' (Hodder 1976:72).

Bourdieu's analysis of the Kabyle house 'shows how notions about men and women, light and dark, up and down, inside and outside, are contrasts which derive from objective conditions - that is, divisions by age, sex or position in the relations of production. These concepts organise and order both the conceptual and spatial domains of the Berber world' (Moore 1986:77). Bourdieu (1977) considers these contrasts as *dispositions*, rather than oppositions - polar opposites which are nevertheless manipulable and amenable to change. Thus he is able to bypass the problem of structuralism, namely accounting for change, and able to incorporate marxist ideas about conflict and social hierarchy. *Habitus* is not a rigid unchanging structure, but subject to historical process.

Another of the many useful ideas in Bourdieu's work is his characterisation of the 'body as geometer' and point of reference. Moving (orienting with the body) in space is, as Moore (1986) develops it, like 'reading', and is involved in the decoding process.

Hodder sums up the relevance of Bourdieu's theory of practice for archaeology: it 'presents an implicit invitation to archaeologists to come to an understanding of the principles lying behind other cultural practices through an examination of and involvement in objects arranged in space and in contexts of use' (1986:73). However, cultural distance is not eliminated as a problem, and Hodder seems to underacknowledge the extent to which archaeological reconstructions produce new meanings.

2.6.3 Moore - gender and practice

The potential of Bourdieu's work for the study of gender is recognised by Moore (1986), Harris (1980) and Welbourn (1984), of which Moore's analysis is the most comprehensive. Moore analysed village and domestic space amongst the Endo (Marakwet) of Kenya (space being the domain in which all other activities occur). In a practical rejection of reflectionist theories about encoded meaning, she asks, not what does the given space mean, but rather, how does it come to have meaning? The answer is, through practice. Moore pursues these questions with particular reference to gender, and suggests that the system of division of labour by gender, in this markedly male-dominant society, is expressed in spatial organisation, which is in turn implicated in the reproduction of that order. She concludes that spatial organisation helps to maintain gender ideologies, though not in a simple way. (Nor does the ideological coding of space necessarily correspond strictly to the 'real' gender relations in Endo society.)

The discursive and sub-discursive penetration that people have of the organising principles introduces the idea of negotiation: in any male- dominated society, dominance is not absolute, but is in need of continual negotiation and renegotiation; challenge is possible within the limits of the system, by purposeful manipulation of those principles (Moore 1986:183-186). This relates to the question of alternative social models. Moore rejects the notion, popular in early feminist anthropology, that men and women have different models of the world, and concentrates on the differential effectiveness of a single cultural model beyond which neither men nor women may appeal (Moore 1986:163). Thus men and women are involved in Bourdieu's (1979:81) 'symbolic struggle to impose the definition of the social world that is most consistent with their interests'. Strategy, process and time are highlighted. Welbourn (1984) offers a related piece of research, also among the

Endo; she examined manufacture, form, usage and use-context in the ceramic tradition, connecting these to questions of gender, socialisation and power.

Research along these lines influenced the problematic of this project, the aim of which is to analyse San rock art, and the representations of gender therein. Gender is seen as both structured and structuring, and fundamentally linked to political and historical processes.

2.7 **Intertextuality**

Welbourn focusses on ceramics as a text; Moore focusses on space as a 'supra-text', while acknowledging that texts are always read in relation to other texts (or as Belsey (1980:21) puts it, mediated by the experience of other texts). Meaning is produced and texts become intelligible through perception of their differences from other texts. This apparently refers to Kristeva's well used theory of 'intertextuality', which she outlines as 'the transposition of one or more systems of signs'(Roudiez 1980:15). Kristeva sees the text as dynamic, 'not the mere 'sum of structures' [as in some formalism] but rather 'a device, a practice...', the semantic components of which 'refer beyond it to other texts'(Feral 1978:273 cited by Van Zyl 1982:88-89). Intertextuality is 'a concept which replaces the intersubjectivity of earlier theories and stresses the fact that a given text always constitutes a kind of mosaic of quotations, that it is an abstraction and a transformation of others' (Feral 1978:273 cited by Van Zyl 1982:89). It does not refer to 'matters of influence by one writer upon another, or with the sources of a literary work; it does...involve the components of a textual system...' (Roudiez 1980:15). Since rock art (and other archaeological) research depends to a great extent on moving between texts (for example from the ethnographies to the art), intertextuality is a useful concept.

At this point it is necessary to say something more about the concept of the text. Originally applied to such tangible cultural products as literary works, paintings and so on, its use was extended by Geertz (1971) to refer to human activity as a text

(owing to common features of production, communication, and so on). The tendency of early textual studies was to see the text as a self contained entity which 'spoke for itself'. Hence some textual analyses risk 'reducing the problem solely to the text'; this 'privileges the artefact itself, divorced from its conditions of production and existence, and claims that it alone provides the means of its own analysis'(Barrett 1980:100). This does not render the idea of the text null and void, but is a warning that the text must be understood as the product of 'complex historical articulations' (Eagleton 1976, cited by Barrett 1980:101; Kuhn 1982). Textual analysis has been defined as:

> 'a form of reading which starts out with the aim of uncovering processes and structures at work in a text which may not be immediately discernible...It is a premise of textual analysis that the apparently natural qualities of ideology can be brought into question through 'denaturalisation' - rendering ideology visible and thus open to critical examination. It is also a contention of textual analysis that structuralist (or post-structuralist) approaches...offer a useful set of methods for doing this' (Kuhn 1982:84).

Texts and the reading of them thus both relate to a 'critique of ideology', and to the assumption that a variety of cultural products may be analysed in terms of the way in which they are invoked to practical/ideological ends.

2.8 **Masculine:feminine and binary opposition**

The use of gender as a principle organising a range of domains (cf. Moore 1986) raises again the question of the binary opposition. In a Giddensian vein, Dubinskas and Traweek (1984:15) criticise Munn's structural analysis of Walbiri (Aborigine) art on the grounds that it incorporates a series of dualities as analytical categories . They argue that the Western epistemological tradition of binary thought is problematic, that binary oppositions are themselves culturally constructed, and that Munn's work 'distorts Walbiri culture by forcing it into a dualistic mode of analysis',

thus losing the sense of 'active process'(Dubinskas and Traweek 1984:15). (Layton (1985:439) defends Munn's analysis.)

However, conceptual and methodological refinements apart, the binary opposition of male and female is constructed in some way by all known cultures; though the content of the two terms vary, the opposition stands. Helene Cixous, one of the so-called 'new French feminists' has analysed the hierarchical binary opposition as part of what she calls 'patriarchal binary thought'(Cixous 1975, in Marks and de Courtivron 1981:90-99). Her approach, which draws heavily on Derrida's work, is critical of 'binarism' while acknowledging the force of the binary opposition (Moi 1985:104).

Cixous (1975) suggests that binary oppositions are 'heavily imbricated in the patriarchal value system' and that 'each opposition can be analysed as a hierarchy where the feminine side is always seen as the negative powerless instance...For Cixous...Western philosophy and literary thought have always been caught up in this endless series of hierarchical binary oppositions that always in the end come back to the fundamental 'couple' of male/female... [whichever] 'couple' one chooses to highlight...'the hidden male/ female opposition with its inevitable positive negative evaluation can always be traced to the underlying paradigm' (Moi 1985:104-5).

Moi notes that Ortner's (1974) paper, mentioned earlier, deals with very similar questions. Cixous (1975, in Marks and de Courtivron 1981) is arguing that gender, as the most profound human social division, is elaborated in such a way that it is almost always culturally implicit; other work suggests that this may also apply to non-western, non-class societies, and perhaps to all patriarchal societies - in other words, all known societies. Durkheim and Mauss suggested that basic social divisions are important as a model for classification in general (cited by Hodder 1982:18); such approaches are in line with this.

3 Literature survey: approaches to gender in myth, narrative and rock art

Since this project deals principally with use of ethnography and oral narratives to interpret rock art, it is necessary to mention specific approaches to gender in these spheres.

Sanday (1981) considers the significance of gender in myths and cosmogonic accounts, looking at the correlation between the presence of male or female deities and male dominance in a range of societies. This is part of an attempt to correlate degrees of male dominance with a variety of observed social features, in order to arrive at general principles regarding gender asymmetry. However, there are serious problems with such cross-cultural comparisons (Kuper 1979), and the cultural specificity of the position of women is neglected. In any case, Bamberger (1974) argues convincingly that the presence of important female deities in myth is not necessarily positive nor significant. Lefkowitz (1986) has researched Greek myth with particular reference to gender, but her aim of retrieving 'original meaning' and her belief that this is possible, limits the analysis, the value of which is descriptive rather than theoretical. A problem of these accounts is their fixation at the level of content, and their situation within the 'Images of Women' stream of feminist criticism[6].

Studies specifically of African myth consider gender questions partially or tangentially. For example, Uba-Mgbemena's work on the role of oral narrative in the socialisation of the Igbo child (1985), and Curtis' comments on the gender of story and proverb tellers in Botswana (1975), approach such questions, but focus elsewhere. Okpewho's 'qualitative analysis' of African myth (1983) incorporates a very valuable emphasis on the creative aspect of oral narrative and performance; he offers pointed criticism of the narrowness and implicit ethnocentrism of western 'scientific' approaches which aim to separate 'fact' from 'fiction' (such as Vansina

6 Characterised by 'extreme reflectionism' (Moi 1985:45).

1965), at the expense of aesthetics and the artistry of African myth. But his 'qualitative approach' tends to marginalise social factors. For example, masculine:feminine oppositions are analysed as if they have little or no reference to gender relations, but relate to something else, such as the social and economic tensions sparked off by European colonisation.

The principal works on the San narratives are also, on the whole, insensitive to gender questions. McCall (1970) touches on gender in an important discussion of a hunting-mating equivalence as a feature of a pan-San cosmology; Biesele (1978:170) notes that a number of tales apparently deal with such gender-linked topics as 'marriage and marriage service..., birth and the origin of meat, and the balance of power between men and women'. However, in neither case are the analyses followed through and discussed in detail in terms of San social relations. How and why such topics are focussed on and 'dealt with' is not elaborated. Wadley has taken up the question of gender and San myth, rejecting Guenther's view (1986) that the tales express the 'subtle dominance of women', and proposing instead that male and female characters 'act out the underlying tensions between the sexes' (Wadley 1986:32). Though I agree entirely with this interpretation, I attempt to go beyond narrative content *per se*, and to focus more on the way in which the symbolic taxonomy and the idiom of the tales relate to political power and gender asymmetry (cf. Bourdieu 1977).

My approach to myth and gender has been formulated partly in response to the perceived shortcomings of these analyses; recent feminist literary/textual criticism addresses such problems, and has been a major influence. Of course, this body of theory is aimed at western written literature, and has thus been used cautiously as a guide, rather than as a transposable set.

Similar feminist theory is drawn on for the analysis of visual art. Faris' (1983) article on gender representations in Palaeolithic art addresses several of the issues with

which this project is concerned. He looks at Venus figurines and concludes that an emphasis on reproduction/ fertility is 'implied' by their form. This he takes as evidence for the appropriation of female labour in the Palaeolithic. This depends on two assumptions: that the art is (literally) man-made; and that there is an enduring association between biologistic depictions of women and the appropriation of female labour. As Breitling (1985:169) puts it:

> 'Attempts to interpret pictures which are so far removed from our cultural assumptions that *the key to their language has been lost* merely reflect our own ideologies. This comes out most clearly in descriptions of prehistoric art [Ice Age cave paintings]. Here, today's man-woman relationship is crudely applied to the distant past, and it is taken for granted that all art, even the earliest, is made by men...' (my italics).

Breitling's criticism is probably aimed at the work of people such as Leroi-Gourhan, but is equally valid for Faris' analysis. Leroi-Gourhan and Laming identify male and female symbols/principles in Palaeolithic parietal art (Ucko and Rosenfeld 1967:139-48). Their structuralist accounts have many points of interest, but they ignore the possibility of changing gender content over time; the content they propose is, as Breitling says, a transfer of contemporary gender content into a very distant past.

In contrast to such simple transfer of contemporary gender ideology, Jeffries' (1985) work on visual representations of African women in antiquity is an example of a Negritudinist approach to gender in which gender ideology is in fact subordinated to racial ideology. Representations of women in African art (including San art) are cited as support for a glorious feminine past on the African continent, portrayed as a cradle of matriarchy and egalitarianism.

Though Munn's (1973)[7] structuralist analysis of Australian (Walbiri) rock art does not focus on gender, and is subject to the criticisms (for example of ahistoricism)

7 Reprinted in 1986.

which have since emerged, it is nevertheless useful. Her identification of the multiple meanings of art forms (such as circles or lines), and the relation of these forms to gender divisions, is echoed in this project. However this account fails to relate forms and images to social process. My approach resembles Munn's to some extent (in that it depends on an initial structural analysis), but aims to emphasise the relationship between signs, ideology and 'objective conditions'.

The approach to gender in San narrative and rock art employed in this project thus differs from those cited, and following Breitling, language and language texts are seen as a key to gender content and the meaning of gender representations.

4 The potential of social theories in archaeology

In this chapter is sketched the theoretical and methodological background to this project, an outline of related literature and a general assessment of its relative usefulness. Social theories in archaeology address a number of problems: determinism (environmental/ biological); functionalism; ethnocentrism, as well as, potentially, androcentrism. Much of the social theory is explicitly anti-functionalist, and the structuralist and post-structuralist traditions contrast usefully with the more empiricist Anglo-American tradition. Social theories provide a way to address the scale problem identified by Conkey and Spector (1984); a sophisticated way of approaching questions of culture change and the framework within which that change occurs; and, via an emphasis on the political dimension of classification, a check on archaeological methods, which rely primarily on such categorisation. Recent social theories challenge traditional ideas of wholeness and unity, while acknowledging some sort of totality. Given the complexity of the theoretical field, this chapter is obviously limited, but is intended as an outline of the concerns and developments which have influenced the phrasing of this project.

Current theories on particular aspects of the archaeological record are covered elsewhere, for example, the theoretical background to Southern African rock art

studies is given in association with the rock art analysis itself. More detailed discussion of the relevance of contemporary theories for archaeology is presented in chapter 6.

CHAPTER TWO

GENDER AND TAXONOMY

> 'One of the widespread features of gender ideologies is that the distinction between what is male and what is female is also used to structure other cultural contrasts...Through such a process maleness may become associated with a series of things like 'big', 'up', 'sky', 'right', while femaleness is associated with their opposite...Such associations are, of course, culture specific, but within their specific context they form a system of meanings which is acquired by individuals on both a conscious and unconscious level.' (Moore 1986:168).

In this chapter I have two aims: firstly, to document the content of masculine and feminine gender in San thought, and to outline the beliefs and practices within which this content is constructed; secondly, to show how the masculine:feminine contrast acts as an organising principle, structuring other cultural contrasts, in both language and non-language texts. Language and the oral narratives are the starting point, and have received some prefatory discussion, as has the relation of linguistic texts and models to other cultural texts. The dual orientation of this chapter is exposition of both structure and content, which cannot ultimately be separated. My interpretation and analysis is, for simplicity's sake, kept separate, and presented in the following chapter.

Though this chapter is somewhat dense and data-laden, in it is contained the ethnographic information which is crucial to and recurrent in the remainder of the project, and which must be set out initially. The chapter is organised principally around discussion of gender as a structural feature, and description of relevant narrative content is integrated into this.

1 Introducing the narratives

1.1 The sources

The ethnographies on which this chapter draws are of several different 'types'[1]. The most important are the Bleek records, a collection of tales and accounts of customs collected by W.H.I. Bleek, Lucy Lloyd and Dorothea Bleek in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, from /Xam San informants. Some of the informants were found as convict labour working on the Cape Town breakwater, resulting in the main informants being men; however female family members joined them at the Bleek home, redressing the balance to some extent (W.H.I. Bleek 1875; Bleek and Lloyd 1911). The especial value of the Bleek records lies in the fact that they are verbatim translations made by the Bleek family. Other sources which I refer to generally as 'the ethnographies' include accounts given by visitors to San groups in roughly the same time period (for example, Orpen 1874; Dornan 1925). These ethnographies are second-hand and are not presented in the words of the San themselves. Anthropological work of the last fifty years constitutes the third set of ethnographic accounts, distinguished from the others by an explicit focus on more 'scientific' documentation of the San. The work of, for example, Jones and Doke (1937), Silberbauer (1963;1981) and the Marshall family fall into this category. The San groups referred to include the /Xam (Cape Province), G/wi, Naron (Nharo), !Kung (Kalahari), Central Angolan San, and various other Kalahari groups.

1.2 Gender and San languages.

San languages have traditionally been seen as related to Khoi languages (eg Nama, Korana, Griqua), to Sandawe and Hadza (Tanzania), and Kwadi (Angola). The relationship between the various San languages is both complex and controversial, complicated by the fact that some San groups speak mutually unintelligible

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1 See also Thornton (1983).

languages (Traill 1978). A recent view is that the original 'Khoisan language family' contains four unrelated language groups (Traill 1978). There are methodological problems associated with each view: via the traditional method Khoisan languages are related, but there are vast problems in description of the relationship. But via the method basic to the second view, it is not possible to account for obviously related dialects, and the field is thus problematic (Traill 1978).

On cultural, rather than strictly linguistic grounds, it has been suggested that a pan-San cognitive and cultural set existed (McCall 1970), and there is good reason to believe that strong similarities pertained even where language was significantly different. For example, several common features are to be found between the beliefs of /Xam and !Kung (Marshall 1957; Lewis-Williams 1981a).

Language and language texts provide a key to San gender concepts, or to what is conventionally classified as masculine or feminine. Gendering in language should not be seen as remote from social relations or as a mere grammatical rule, but in terms of language as a 'structure of power' (Moore 1986). Gendering is one of the features whereby Khoi and San languages are differentiated. With the exception of Naron, San languages are not formally sex-denoting - there is no formal alteration of words to indicate gender (Bleek and Lloyd 1911; Schapera 1930), though W.H.I. Bleek (1875) suggested that such gendering may have originally existed. This does not mean that gender is not important in San languages, but that gender is indicated by using the word for male or female in conjunction with the noun. Gendering of nouns is part of the extension of meaning. Thus in Naron:

hi (plant)	+	-ba (masculine suffix)	=	tree
hi	+	-sa (feminine suffix)	=	bush

Masculine is associated with the values of tall and slender, hence *hiba* = tree; feminine is associated with short, broad, round, hence *hisa* = bush (Bleek 1928b).

Gendering permits broader reference, and has a descriptive dimension. Silberbauer's account of gender classification in the G/wi language is extremely useful, as it shows a range of axes of gender differentiation:

Content of masculine gender:

Humans and animals of discernible male sex

Long, tall, elongated, sharp or narrow objects

The right half of the body, limbs and associated objects, eg. right sandal

Meteorological phenomena including wind, rain, lightning, thunder, in or coming from the NE and NW quadrants; driving rain; the waxing moon and other fruitful, beneficent or harmless natural phenomena

Any single person or animal, the sex of which is unknown

Names of boys, men and the deities

The caducous parts of flowers

Rifle and shotgun cartridges

Content of feminine gender:

Humans and animals of discernible female sex

Short, round, blunt or wide objects

The left side of the body and associated objects

Meteorological phenomena in or coming from the south, intermittent rain or drizzle, the sun and waning moon and other hot or cold, barren or destructive phenomena

Fluids and anything composed of very many small particles eg. sand, powder, tobacco; widespread drizzling rain

Any large number of animals or objects in one group, plural number used.

Seasons of the year

Names of women, girls and the wives of the deities

The seed forming parts of flowers

Firearms

Metals in any state previous to being made into G/wi artefacts

(Silberbauer 1981:126-7).

A number of contrasts are evident in this classification, including the round/short:narrow/tall contrast found in the Naron language. However, investigation of gender content in language is inadequate at this grammatical level alone, as context is lacking. The oral narratives collected from the San form the basis of an analysis of gender in language 'in action', by means of which it is possible to relate the content of masculine and feminine gender to the ideology and material practices of the San. To start with, the formal contrast of round (feminine)/ slender (masculine), evident in the G/wi classification, can be related to beliefs about the moon; the content of moon beliefs links them to rain beliefs and then to questions of gender, power and the position of women in San societies (dealt with in the following chapter). It will be seen that the gender contrasts in the G/wi classification are also found in the narratives of other San groups, lending credence to the notion of a 'pan-San' cognition, as suggested by McCall (1970), and utilised by Lewis-Williams in rock art interpretation (1981a). The contrasts focus on the gendering of form, orientation, number and time.

2 The gendering of form

The round (feminine): slender (masculine) contrast, found in G/wi and Naron, is pervasive in the /Xam narratives, appearing in moon and rain beliefs and animal classification; there is some evidence that it is also a feature of artefactual and decorative forms. This contrast will be discussed in conjunction with outlines of the content of the various beliefs.

2.1 Moon beliefs

The role of astral bodies in San thought was widely commented on, and it was suggested that San religion focussed on worship of the heavenly bodies (Schapera 1930:172). More recent views are that 'rather than being of primary religious importance [these beliefs] were simply an aspect of a more general attitude to nature which credited various phenomena...with non-physical attributes affecting the

lives of humans. To use the term 'worship' is to greatly exaggerate the case' (Hewitt 1986:91); Biesele (1978:163) also queries the moon 'worship' hypothesis. What is not addressed is the logic of the 'general attitude to nature', and why the moon enjoyed the prominence that it did. A close examination of moon beliefs links them primarily to social process.

The moon is prominent in many San accounts, its origin being attributed to the trickster/creator Kaggen, who made it from his right shoe in one account, and from a feather in another (Bleek 1923; Hewitt 1986:214-223). The moon is a central character in a tale which is common to all known San groups - The Origin of Death (Biesele 1968) (and is common to many other African cultures as well (Okpewho 1983)). Biesele summarises the content of the tale as follows: 'death comes to the world because the Hare denies the Moon's assertion that all men shall die but be forever reborn, just as the moon itself is' (1968:171). The moon as symbol of regeneration is discussed also by Vinnicombe (1976), who notes that it is the formal and temporal aspects (phases of the moon) that apparently form the basis of the metaphor. The same features are found in another tale collected by Bleek and Lloyd (1911:38-39n), where the sun chases the moon across the sky, stabbing it till it is no more than a backbone; then the moon swells and regenerates itself. Contemporary Nharo make the same associations between moon and death, and employ similar imagery (Guenther 1986).

In the G/wi classification (above) the phases of the moon are gendered; the same categorisation was found by Marshall Thomas (1959) in !Kung beliefs, and by D.F. Bleek among the Central Angolan San (Bleek 1928a). The !Kung and Angolan San considered the new moon to be a man or a child, the full moon a woman. Bleek explicitly connected this with the Naron gender conventions - the slender new moon as masculine, the round full moon as feminine. The formal connotations of masculine and feminine phases of the moon have not been fully explored.

In the G/wi classification it is the full and waning moon which is feminine, thus combining formal and temporal aspects. This gendering corresponds to the use of the metaphor by contemporary San, where 'moon' is a metaphor for menstruation, based on parallels of interval, cyclicity and form. Shostak (1981:376) notes that a number of !Kung metaphors refer thus. Nisa, the !Kung woman who tells her life story in Shostak's book, refers to her first pregnancy in terms of being 'cut off from the moon' by her husband; 'seeing the moon' and 'the moon left her' are related metaphors drawn from Nisa's narrative. The Nharo use a remedy for menstrual discomfort which is called the 'moon's medicine' (Barnard 1979), suggesting that this is a widely used metaphor. The moon as clock or calendar occurs also in other contexts, in the scheduling of dances (Marshall 1969) and girl's puberty ceremonies. Girls at puberty were secluded for the duration of the full moon, released at the appearance of the new, and were then expected to behave with reserve until the next new moon (Hewitt 1986:28). Whether this is literal (corresponding to actual appearances of the full and new moon) or strictly metaphorical is difficult to say, though the latter seems likely in view of documentation of seclusion lasting four or five days (Guenther 1986; Silberbauer 1963). !Kung conception beliefs echo a similar sequence. Conception is believed to occur 'at the end of the menses, when semen joins with the last of the menstrual blood' (Shostak 1981:177) - or in terms of the metaphor, at the passing of the full moon and the appearance of the new.

It seems therefore, that the equation of moon and regeneration refers not only to its capacity to wax and wane repetitively, but to a larger cognitive complex, to beliefs about time, continuity, life and death, focussing on notions about female biology and fertility.

The connotations of the masculine new moon are non-biological, referring instead to food and water as other requirements for continuity. The new moon was invoked in the food quest, for example:

Ho, Moon, lying there
Let me kill a springbok
Tomorrow

- a stanza from a 'Prayer to the New Moon' (Bleek and Lloyd 1911). Other addresses to the moon for food are given in Bleek (1929) and Schapera (1930).

Rain was also connected to the new moon. DF Bleek (1928a) described a Central Angolan San dance, where men and women stood in separate groups, both singing, the women clapping. The song ran:

New Moon, come out, give water to us
New Moon, thunder down water for us
New Moon, shake down water for us.

Other phrases included 'New Moon, raingiver', and, cryptically, 'A woman is Lusima' (Bleek 1928a).

Moon imagery is 'split' along gender lines, women being associated with biological imagery and the full moon, men with the new moon and availability/abundance of food and rain. Men and women stand in different relations to the symbol 'moon', and this different relationship is found in the use of respect words. Commenting on the !Kung Prayer to the Young Moon, an informant said that the male antelope horn was sounded, and men and women used different words to address the new moon - *!ka !karrishe* in the case of women, *!ka !karribe* in the case of men (Bleek and Lloyd 1911). Formal differentiation in language, and the phases (forms) of the moon refer not just incidentally to the masculine/feminine distinction, but are part of a complex of associations and a particular conceptualisation of masculinity/femininity. 'Linguistic sex varieties arise because...language, as a social phenomenon, is closely related to social attitudes'; such variety is the consequence of social difference (Trudgill 1983:88).

The association of the feminine moon with (menstrual) blood and the masculine moon with rain is an important contrast, which will be returned to repeatedly in this

project. Equally important are the values associated with masculine and feminine moons respectively. In the G/wi classification the feminine waning moon (from full to new) is associated with negative and destructive phenomena, the masculine moon with beneficence (Silberbauer 1981). The association of the female moon with danger is illustrated in a tale collected from Kalahari San by Dornan (1925). The (female) moon came down to earth one night to wash her face in a pool, and a man watched her. Other men woke up and watched too. As a result their enemies were able to sneak up and annihilate them. Hence, Bushmen do not like to sleep with the light of the moon shining in their faces.

This negativity of the full moon relates to the complex of beliefs about menstruation and pollution (dealt with in detail shortly). Dornan's tale may be taken as a parable about the well-documented dangers believed to be visited on men who interacted in any way with menstruating women, and particularly menarcheal girls. The danger such women pose to the hunter is spelt out in /Xam accounts; for example, if she ate meat caught by anyone but her father, her saliva would cause the arrow poison to cool, and inhibit hunting. It is this belief which is dealt with in the 'moon tale' entitled The moon is not to be looked at when game has been shot (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:66-71). To 'see the moon' after hunting was dangerous, because the 'moon's water, which was 'on a bush' and resembled liquid honey, caused the arrow poison to cool, rendering it harmless to the prey.

This reference to the 'moon's water' is interesting, but complex. It 'resembles liquid honey', which was considered to be red in three forms and white in liquid form (Bleek 1923). In one tale it is linked to blood - the 'leanness' and 'dryness' of the honey indicated to the mantis that 'blood is flowing' and that his eland was dead. Its association in the above tale with a bush (formally a feminine thing) is a further pointer to its female connections. On the other hand, Hewitt cites a tale where the dead people who are carried in the hollow (new, masculine) moon are resuscitated

by the moon's water (1986:42); the Nharo also refer to the moon in its crescent phase as a boat which carries dead souls to the deity associated with the hereafter, N!eri (Guenther 1986:246).

The full moon was also compared to a person with a fat stomach, suggesting pregnancy. In terms of the biological imagery it seems that the full moon's 'water' is connected to female physiology, and likely that it refers to amniotic fluid or blood, both of which are closely connected to rain.

Though the strands of the tale are difficult to unravel, it may be concluded that the conventional gendering of the moon and the moon/menstruation metaphor are dealt with. The 'water' of the feminine full moon is dangerous, that of the new moon equated with rain and regeneration.

The full moon is chased across the sky and 'stabbed', waning in the process (Bleek 1875; Bleek and Lloyd 1911:38-9n). The Nharo have a similar belief regarding the sun, a rhino which travels the sky from east to west, where it is killed by the people in the west. They throw the shoulder blade to the east, and overnight it reconstitutes itself as a rhino, and continues its westward journey (Guenther 1986:246). In some accounts, for example G/wi, the sun is seen as a young girl, wife of the moon, an old man. The moon chases the sun across the sky, and then the chase is reversed. This does not negate the proposed pan-San association of the moon with life and death, nor does it alter the equation of femininity with maleficence, masculinity with beneficence: the drying, sapping sun stands here in the same negative relation to the moon as the full moon does to the new.

Biological/sexual imagery is fundamental to both moon beliefs and the round:slender contrast. Like gendering as a grammatical structure, it is inseparable from perceptions of gender and, ultimately, gender relations. Language both represents and reproduces the different positioning of men and women in the

symbolic order, and the G/wi classification of round and slender things as feminine and masculine respectively relates thus.

Moon beliefs are closely connected to rain beliefs, a discussion of which expands on the gender associations and valuations I have mentioned so far.

2.2 **Rain beliefs**

Though it is the masculine new moon which gives the rain, it is women who are most closely connected to the rain in the narratives. As a /Xam informant, Diä!kwain, summed up the relationship of the girl/woman to the rain: she is 'the water's wife' (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:395). The association of femininity with liquids is made also in the G/wi taxonomy (Silberbauer 1981). Tales about the rain, a being named !Khwa, are with one partial exception, tales about young girls at puberty and the accompanying ritual seclusion. It appears that parallels between !Khwa and the menarcheal 'new maiden' are constructed here on the round:slender contrast. Tales of female initiation/seclusion conjoin moon and rain beliefs.

2.2.1 The rain theme in initiation rites and narratives

The Bleek records include sixteen narratives dealing directly with the topic of female initiation (Hewitt 1986:78) and probably more; corresponding tales about male initiation are, interestingly, apparently rare, or perhaps absent. It has been noted that among the Nharo the male initiation ceremony does not mark any clear change of social status, as does the female ceremony, and male initiation is more of a hunting ritual than an initiation *per se* (Guenther 1986:275).[2] Nharo male initiation consisted of the initiates living in the veld, with older men instructing them. Sometimes the men were taken to a hut called //Gauwa's hut, where this Nharo deity usually attended as //Gauwassa, a feminine version of //Gauwa. At the girl's initiation //Gauwa attended in distinctly masculine form, and kept men away from

2 Also Barnard, pers. comm. to Guenther (Guenther 1986).

the girl's hut (Guenther 1986:277,279). //Gauwa has many points of similarity with the /Xam rain-being, !Khwa, being both masculine and feminised, and with the capacity for both curing and inflicting sickness.

There is reason to suggest that the male initiation is an imitation of the female ceremony, with hunting as the structural and conceptual equivalent. The female initiation does not seem to be the female version of the male first kill ceremony, and appears to be of a different order of importance. Gathering does not warrant ceremonial, though the !Kung perform a ritual act of protection, *choa*, against some plant foods (such as *tsi*, a ground nut) which are considered powerful (Thomas 1959:144).[3]

The /Xam seclusion tales and accounts of puberty ceremonies show marked similarities, among themselves, and also between separate groups. They may be considered as variations on the theme of pollution and the danger posed by the menstruating woman. The core story is as follows:

A defiant girl breaches seclusion and is gathering food/ collecting ant chrysalids/ washing in the spring, when she is scented by !Khwa, in bovine form. !Khwa chases her, encloses her in a mist, and a whirlwind carries her into the air. She is turned into a frog and deposited in a pond or waterpit. Her family is likewise afflicted, signalling the threat that an errant girl poses to the larger group. Possessions also end up in the spring, where they revert to an unworked state - karosses, digging sticks and arrows revert to springboks, trees and reeds respectively.

In The Girl's Story; the Frog's Story (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:198-203), the girl's motives are clearly defined: angry at the reduced quantity of food permitted

3 The ceremony involves chewing the powerful food with another plant food. To *choa* herself, a woman washes her hands in the resulting paste; to *choa* a younger woman, she rubs on the paste on the woman's arms and chest. The ceremony is performed casually and without fuss, and protects until the next season's growth of the food in question (Thomas 1959:144).

secluded girls[4], she creeps out when everyone is away from camp, goes to the spring, kills an animal there, and cooks and eats it. Her mother becomes suspicious and leaves a child to watch the girl the next day. The scenario is repeated, and the mother informed, to her horror, for the girl has been killing the 'water's children'. (The /Xam narrator, Diä!kwain's sister, !kweiten ta ||ken, said she had not seen one, but that they were striped and very beautiful). Retribution, as above, was swift, and all landed up in the waterpit.

!kweiten ta ||ken told a version of the basic seclusion tale with interesting details pertaining to the round:slender contrast. Three girls, one of whom was breaching seclusion, went gathering ant chrysalids. Before long they were caught in a rainstorm, and surrounded by a pool of water *in the shape of* a bull (Hewitt 1986:85). Two of the girls sprinkled buchu between its horns, walked between them and along its back, and reached dry land. The guilty one became a frog (Hewitt 1986:85-6). The visual/formal parallel between the rain creature and pool of water is significant, and is echoed also in another account - 'meanwhile the rain turns altogether into a pond, because its body goes into it' (Bleek 1933:300). There is an equivalence between the pool of water and the shape of the rain animal with which it is associated. Though Bleek and Lloyd translated the term for the rain animal as 'rain *bull*', Lewis-Williams (1977:104) has suggested that there is no justification for this attribution of masculinity, and suggests that it is best translated as neuter. However, though !Khwa is somewhat ambiguous, he seems to be a principally masculine being, especially in seclusion tales. Pending the discussion I present shortly, it should be noted that !Khwa, the rain animal, is associated with women, is of rounded and bovine form, and is associated with ponds and waterpits which are round rather than long or slender.

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4 Anger at the reduced food rations in seclusion is also found in the tale of The Girl of the Early Race who made Stars (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:72-77). In disgust, she threw her food into the sky, where it became stars. (No doubt in accordance with such unseemly defiance, she came to a sticky end, being killed by her husband.)

The seclusion tale (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:193-99) entitled A Woman of the Early Race and the Rain Bull (or animal) illustrates that the relationship of women and rain applies to all women of reproductive age, not just menarcheal maidens. An adult woman, with a child, was 'ill in her hut'.[5] !Khwa scented the woman in her hut, and came to court her, carrying her away. As an older woman, she is an example of wisdom rather than folly. She rubbed !Khwa with buchu, sending him to sleep, and escaped. She then burnt buchu to disguise her scent, and the old women burnt horns to appease the rain (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:199).

Other accounts specify the various forms the danger posed by women may take. A girl's glance may turn men into trees (in the light of the Naron classification, significantly not bushes); and a young man playing his *goura*, the musical instrument made from a bow, is turned to stone by a girl's glance (Hewitt 1986:79). It seems that the menstruating woman's powers are derived directly from her relationship to the rain, as the 'water's wife'. A girl snaps her fingers and the rain imitates her - 'The rain behaves to us just as the girl does'; 'The rain lightens, killing us, because she has snapped her fingers at us as a new maiden'; 'For she does not do so from friendship, but to make the rain kill us'. Diä!kwain related a tale about a girl who insisted on snapping her fingers at her parents, until the rain became angry and buried the whole family in black mud (Bleek 1933:298-9). It is this relationship between women and the rain which seems to be the basis of beliefs about a 'fight' which travelled down a person's arm, with potentially lethal results. (This is in contrast to the interpretation (Lewis-Williams and Loubser 1986:275-9), in which the 'fight' is related ultimately to trance and supernatural potency). That the fight relates to the rain and women as the 'water's wife' is supported by an account of a rainstorm dramatised as a fight over a woman, who is in effect the 'water's wife' (the tale of Kagara and Haunu (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:112-19) - see Chapter 3). Disrespectful

5 Huts in the narratives are almost without exception references to female seclusion; the hut is referred to in /Xam accounts as 'the house of illness'(Hewitt 1986:283); both menstruation and pregnancy are referred to as illnesses.

speech to the new maiden also had serious consequences - 'The rain would thunder at us if it did not like our speech, for it also shoots just as a girl does...'; the 'rains bolts' would enter the offender or fall to the ground with the rain water (Bleek 1933:298). The powers of the new maiden are those of the rain - thunder and lightning. The fight which travels down the arm would appear to be one of these (or both). This interpretation also permits explication of the G/wi classification (Silberbauer 1981) of firearms as feminine (in contrast to western associations). Firearms are pointed at a target, make a loud noise (cf. thunder), flash with light (cf. lightning) and are potentially fatal. These features correspond with the powers derived by women from their relationship with the rain, and the association of women and firearms may be understood in terms of a pre-existing San cognitive set.

An excellent example of the relationship of women and rain is given by Diä!kwain, in his account of a thunderstorm when he was a child. Against orders, he insisted on playing his *goura*, thus angering the rain. The effects were visited on his mother, who felt 'as if the rain were tearing off her skin' (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:320).

Though these beliefs attributed to women a certain (negative) power, San women were subject to a range of restrictions on account of them. 'Therefore mother and the others do in this manner with regard to their Bushman women, they are not willing to let them walk about when the rain comes, for they are afraid that the rain also intends, lightening [sic], to kill them'. Silence was another requirement - 'Girls must be silent when they are hiding from the rain...for the rain would be angry with them if they walked about in front of it, as it came...An old woman is the one who speaks; she tells the children about it, how she used to go into the hut when she was a girl' (Bleek 1935a).

More recent ethnographies also refer to the women:rain link. G/wi girls, on their release from seclusion, were taken on a run around the camp in imitation of a rain storm (Silberbauer 1963:21). Another account describes girls painting ochre on the

men going hunting, in order to protect them from the rain (Lewis-Williams 1981a). England's analysis of San music further reinforces the connection (England 1968, cited by Marshall 1969:366-7). He found that the musical scale of the !Kung rain song was unusual, and probably very old. It was found among all extant San groups, in the Great Eland Song sung at girl's puberty rituals (England 1968, cited by Marshall 1969:366-7). An association of women and water is found repeatedly in the narratives (for example, in The Origin of Marriage (Dornan 1925); The Jackal and the Quagga (Hewitt 1986:112); The Wife of the Dawn's Heart Star (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:84-99)).

A tale about a female leopard tortoise (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:37-41) conjoins moon beliefs and imagery, the seclusion tale and the formal (round/slender) criteria for animal classification. The tortoise is 'ill in her hut', when she is visited by a hunter of the early race. She asks him to rub her neck with fat, but, when he does so, she draws in her head, trapping him so that 'The man's hands altogether decayed away in it' (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:37). Another man comes along and is similarly caught: the first victim encourages the second man to 'rub our elder sister with a little fat, for the moon has been cut while our elder sister lies ill'. The first victim then goes home, where he is rebuked - 'Did not thy parents instruct thee? The leopard tortoise always seems as if she would die; while she is deceiving us'(Bleek and Lloyd 1911:41). This tale refers to the dangers of secluded women, and contains familiar elements. The phrase referring to the 'cutting' of the moon is found also in !Kung and /Xam narratives. Again, the hunter is the one who is at risk from the person who is 'ill'.

The tortoise is an animal with primarily feminine connotations, deriving apparently from its broad round shape. Orion's Belt was known as the female tortoises, and Orion's sword as the male tortoises (Marshall 1976); Doke (1937) described a game played by Kalahari San women (only), in which they imitated tortoises on heat. A tale mentioned by D.F. Bleek (1929) tells of the female tortoise who helps the lion

to clean mud from his eye, but is then eaten by him. An obese humanoid figure painted at Ezeldjagspoort was identified by a /Xam informant as a '*water schilpad*' (water tortoise) (Lewis-Williams 1977:167). Tortoises were a taboo food for girls in particular, but also for young bachelors (Bleek 1933:303). I have found only two references to male tortoises, the male tortoises who are Orion's sword (Marshall 1976), and a male tortoise who appears in another lion and tortoise tale cited by Bleek (1929); this notwithstanding, the tortoise may be seen as principally a feminine character.

The water and leopard tortoises were among those animals which 'belonged' to the rain (the rain's animals as opposed to rain animals). Other rain's animals were the cobra and puffadder, and probably also the caterpillar and the lizard (Bleek 1933:303). Snakes are also symbols of regeneration in San thought (Vinnicombe 1976:234); these animals all slough their skins and emerge anew, giving them the attributes of cyclicity and renewal also assigned to the moon. A !Kung tale specifically links the new moon and snakes (Bleek 1935b:278-9; Vinnicombe 1976), whereas the Gikwe deity, Pishiboro, is associated with water - he died of snake bite: 'now all the water that flows in the rivers in the north, all the rain and all the water that collects in pools is the rottenness of Pishiboro, liquid made as his dead body began to decay' (Thomas 1959:81). The rain's animals exhibit the same gender contrasting as does the moon. Tortoises, as round, low, broad feminine symbols connote female biology, danger and death. Snakes are associated with masculine form, masculine powers of regeneration, and in one of Orpen's tales, with masculine aggression (Orpen 1874). (It will be seen that masculinity is not all good; masculinity also has a negative aspect, but constructed on different grounds to feminine negativity). At this point it is possible to return to the visual/formal parallel between pond/waterpit and !Khwa. Whereas !Khwa is associated with ponds, snakes seem to

be associated with rivers.[6] This association of !Khwa with pools contrasts with that of snakes (and caterpillars) with long thin rivers, and may be seen as another expression of the round:slender contrast. The apparent opposition of the bovine !Khwa and the snake also ties in with another highly important opposition, that of femininity/ herbivory : masculinity / carnivory (discussed shortly).

2.2.2 !Kung rain beliefs

The round:slender contrast is also found in !Kung rain beliefs. Marshall (1957) gives information on the Nyae Nyae !Kung gendering of the rain and associated phenomena. Rain is male or female. The spoor of the male rain consisted of deep holes (Marshall 1957:232) or 'sharp pierced marks' (Thomas 1957:137) (cf. the G/wi association of men with sharp and women with blunt objects). The male rain was considered dangerous and could kill. Female rain consisted of many smaller drops (Marshall 1957:232-33) and its spoor consisted of 'wide, soft splashes' (Thomas 1959:137); it was beneficial, encouraging the growth of veldkos. Fear of the male rain was indicated by the substitution of a respect word when addressing it (Marshall 1957:233).

Clouds were also gendered. The sparse thin rainless clouds were male, rain bringing clouds female. The huge grey clouds streaming rain and the 'soft grey clouds...which blow like mists' (Thomas 1959:147) were considered female. The very large rain clouds were called zebras, because of their fleetness (Marshall 1957:232). Apart from being further evidence for a widespread association of femininity and rain, such beliefs are yet another expression of the round:slender contrast - the shape of the spoor and formal characteristics of the clouds conform to the conventional gender contrasts, as found in the G/wi classification.

Other !Kung rain beliefs reiterate the connection of rain and femininity. Marshall found that *n!ow* was a central concept. Precisely what *n!ow* consisted of was never

6 See Orpen's (1874) tale of Qwanciqutshaa and the girl

made explicit, but it was possessed by all human beings and certain large animals - giraffe, eland, gemsbok, kudu, hartebeest and wildebeest - notably all herbivores (1957:235). It is more than likely that this association of *n!ow* and herbivory relates to the association of femininity and herbivory, and femininity and rain. Thomas (1959:149-50) records that *n!ow* is linked to women and childbirth on the one hand, and to men and the hunting of the large *n!ow*-associated herbivores on the other. When the blood of the herbivore, or the uterine fluid at birth, falls on the ground, the *n!ow* may influence the weather.

Marshall (1957:233) notes that the concept of *n!ow* was built on an antithesis between rain and cold.[7] Informants were vague as to how *n!ow* was acquired 'The child gets *n!ow* in the womb and is born with it'. Mothers had no control over the process, and it was the weather prevailing around the time of birth which determined whether a person had good, rain-bringing *n!ow*, or bad, cold-bringing *n!ow*. An informant said that 'When the mother's uterine fluid flows into the ground it makes a *n!ow* in the child...'. Rain at the time of birth signals good *n!ow*, cold weather bad *n!ow*. Both kinds lasted till death, at which time the *n!ow* might again influence the weather (Marshall 1957:233-238).

Marshall (1957:236-7) suggests that similar beliefs prevailed in other San groups, such as the /Xam, and draws parallels with a Khoi rain ceremony observed by Hoernle'(1922), in which an important parallel of rain, birth and fertility is clear. Requirements for this ceremony, the annual killing, were milk and at least one pregnant animal. The ceremony took place on the banks of a stream, or if none was available, a channel was dug to simulate one. The animals were killed, cooked and eaten, and the uteri kept intact. Then the old men took the uteri, held them over the fire and pierced them with a stick, so that the uterine fluid flowed through the fire and down the river or channel. Milk and fat was thrown on the fire so that clouds of

7 An opposition alien to westerners, but which indicates the context dependency and cultural construction of binary oppositions (cf. Dubinskas and Traweek 1984).

smoke rose (Hoernle' 1922, cited by Marshall 1957:233-4). Imagery which also refers to the potency of amniotic fluid is employed in a Gikwe tale where the deity Pishiboro's pregnant wife, an elephant, is killed by his brother (cf. the killing of Kaggen's eland by Kaggen's brother), because she had 'rolled them between her thighs' while they slept. Pishiboro was initially angry, but his brother told him he was a fool, because 'You were married to meat and you thought it was a wife' (Thomas 1959:58-9). The two dismembered the elephant wife, and the brother cut open the uterus. This made Pishiboro angry, because the foetus would go and tell the elephant's parents. Uterine fluid flowed to the *scherms* of the elephant's family, who prepared for revenge. However, Pishiboro and his brother killed them all (Thomas 1959:78-9).

Schmidt (1979), on San rain animals, argues that the elements of San belief should be seen in a larger context, as part of a wider African tradition; it would thus not be surprising to find that Khoi and San shared beliefs of this nature. The recurrence of such biological imagery reinforces my argument that gender and sexuality are fundamental to San beliefs and ideology. *N!ow* beliefs make the construction of femininity/ biology and masculinity/hunting that is found elsewhere.

2.2.3 Rain-making

The rain-making ceremony of the /Xam (Bleek 1933) makes further reference to the connection of blood and water and is phrased primarily in the idiom of hunting. The process focussed on the capture of a rain animal by the medicine men of the rain. One account says that this was done at night when the animal came out to graze (Bleek 1933:379). The rain-makers fetched the animal from its pond, fed it charms and then secured it with a thong, with which it was led over the countryside. The animal was then killed. 'The medicine men cut up the water bull, they broil its flesh. They treat the rest of the flesh this way, and they throw it away on the places where they want the rain to fall. The rain does as follows, where they kill the water

bull, there rain runs along the ground.'(Bleek 1933:377). One reference suggests that the killing took place on high ground: 'you must please go and cut the rain at the great waterpits which are on the mountain' (Bleek 1933:309). Other accounts refer to the breaking of the rains ribs (Bleek 1933:387). The /Xam accounts comment partially on the characterisation of the rain as an animal. Its legs are the streams of rain on which the rain animal walks the countryside (for example, Bleek 1933:305;311).

The rain which is desired is the female rain: 'You must not arouse a rain bull, but you must make a she-rain, which is not angry, which rains gently, because it is a slow shower...For people are afraid of a he-rain, when they hear it comes thundering as it gets its legs.'(Bleek 1933:308); 'For I will cut a she-rain which has milk, I will milk her, then she will rain softly on the ground...' (Bleek 1933:309); and 'for I will milk a she-rain, I will cut her, by cutting her I will let the rain's blood flow out, so that it runs along the ground. The springbok will drink the rain's blood...'(Bleek 1933:309). Reference to the rain as 'mother rain' (Bleek 1933:310) is another indication of the benevolence of the female rain .

The similarities with the Khoi rain ceremony are striking - the killing of a (preferably) female animal, and the flowing of blood and water; the linkage of blood and water appears yet again, as in moon and seclusion narratives. That rainmaking has wider significance than simple weather control is suggested in an account of a !Kung rain dance (Marshall 1957:238), after which ceremony anthropologists were astonished by a cloudburst. However, the informants stated that the dance did not bring the rain - it would have rained anyway - but that the dance was timed to take advantage of the power of the first rain. This suggests that rain has extended symbolic significance in San thought.

So far I have outlined the associations of femininity in various closely related contexts - moon beliefs, puberty ceremonial, beliefs about the rain and rain-making.

The round:slender contrast occurs in all of these in various guises - new/full moon; herbivore/carnivore; hunter/prey; and so on. The herbivore:carnivore contrast requires further discussion.

2.3 **The herbivore:carnivore contrast**

W.H.I. Bleek (1875) noted that there was reason to believe that some animals were apparently thought of as masculine or feminine. This contrast is to be found particularly in rain-making beliefs, but also in courting narratives. McCall (1970) commented on the relation of male to female as hunter is to prey in several San courting tales, suggesting that this was characteristic of a pan-San cognitive set. I consider this to be a crucial insight, relating also to the conventional portrayal of men as carnivores and women as herbivores, and being another working of the round:slender contrast. Fat is a valued characteristic of San women and of the herbivorous prey animal, of which the eland is the prime example; one of Lewis-Williams' informants specifically linked the eland and the new maiden, both being described as fat and good (Lewis-Williams 1981a:48). The carnivore, on the other hand, tends to leanness, and is not good eating. In the next chapter I discuss this contrast more fully as it relates to gender relations and the division of labour. Here I restrict comment to description of the gender associations of the round:slender contrast as expressed in the narratives.

Examination of the narratives shows a dominant association of female and herbivore as opposed to male and carnivore. For example, a recurrent linkage is found in the phrase 'the springbok mothers'(for example, Bleek and Lloyd 1911:234; Hewitt 1986:116). In several tales (discussed under the topic of gender conflict in the following chapter) the narrative is structured around tension between a female herbivore and a male carnivore.[8] Similarly, in the tales examined by McCall (1970) the theme pivots on the hunter (carnivore):prey (herbivore) relationship, as in the

8 For example, the tale of the jackal and the quagga (Bleek and Lloyd 1911); lion and tortoise tales; and several others.

tale Wolf courts Girl (McCall 1970), or in the narrative preceding The Anteater's Laws (Hewitt 1986:116-120), where the elopement of a springbok girl with a lion is the cause of much trouble.

The association of women and herbivorous prey is common enough in the narratives as to be unequivocal. Female carnivores do occur, rarely, but the frequency is not sufficient to challenge the association, and these 'exceptions' are open to explanation. Briefly, this centres on the fact that masculinity is not presented as perfect benevolence as opposed to thoroughgoing feminine maleficence. Women are associated with weakness and passivity, and in certain contexts this is valued positively. For example, the weak female rain is seen as positive, while the male counterpart is seen as dangerous and destructive. The male parallel of feminine weakness is strength, and though this is generally portrayed as a positive trait, excess strength or aggression is also seen as negative. Carnivores are portrayed as aggressive, powerful and malevolent; Thomas (1959:43) has recorded the belief that lions represent medicine men who have chosen to be 'poisoners and magicians' rather than healers, and Lewis-Williams (1985) has connected lions and shamanistic out-of-body travel. The female carnivore thus probably refers to female power figures, and does not necessarily compromise the claim that the masculine carnivore : feminine herbivore contrast organises narrative to a significant degree.[9] There is some evidence to suggest that the pervasive round:slender contrast applies also to other cultural forms, for example artefactual form and personal decoration.

2.4 **Round:slender and artefactual form**

Bored stones have strong feminine connotations, as a tool used by women (not men) in the gathering of plant foods, but also in a ritual context. The practice is recorded, among both /Xam and !Kung, of women (only) using a bored stone or other round stone to intercede with the game spirits (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:428). The /Xam

9 See discussion of 'exceptions to the rules' in Chapter 3.

account records how, as a result of banging on the ground with the stone, a woman's husband finally came home with food (1935a:36). The bow and arrow, long slender artefacts, were exclusively male, and women were not supposed to handle them. Kirby (1937) records similar specificity with regard to musical instruments, with the same formal distinction: women (only) played the ocarina, an egg shaped instrument (Oxford Concise Dictionary); men played the *goura*, the instrument made from a bow. Ostrich eggs also have female associations, and ostrich egg shell beads are associated with women (Wadley 1986).

Another rounded 'artefact' relating to women's work is the hut, which in the oral narratives almost always refers to female seclusion. Hut-making is commonly women's work (Marshall 1976; Lee 1984). Grindstones, used by women in the preparation of plant foods, may also have feminine connotations, especially in the light of the association of women with fine textured substances. According to a Maluti San informant, the ochre for painting had to be ground by a woman at full moon (How 1962) - a dual occurrence of the association of 'round' with women .

Body decoration may also be informed by the round/slender contrast. Whereas both sexes are described as displaying the long thin scarification cuts, women are several times described as sporting circle shapes, while men do not. Jones and Doke (1937, Plate 86 no.6) include a photo of a woman with a large circle surrounded by small dots painted on her forehead, and various accounts refer to women being decorated with dots or spots. Marshall (1959) describes a young !Kung bride having circle shapes painted on her face at marriage. Also recorded are contrasting hairstyles as a sign of widow(er)ed status among men and women in one San group - women shaved circle shapes in their hair, while men had straight, linear partings (Trenk 1910, cited by Schapera 1930). In general, rounded things are associated with women, and seldom, if ever with men.

Wadley (1986) opposes ostrich egg shell beads (feminine) to arrows (masculine), and suggests that the former (along with bored stones and grindstones) are *artefacts de passage*.. Though there is reason to believe that they are very probably opposed, on two criteria - the round/slender contrast, and their use by men and women respectively - I consider the concept of an *artefact de passage* (cf. Lewis-Williams' *animal de passage*) to be problematic, since it is not made clear in what sense these artefacts are crucial to rites of passage in particular.

Things used or made by women are characterised by rounded form; however, the association of men and long slender things is less clear in the ethnographies. This may be related to a preoccupation with female behaviour in the narratives, and a lesser concern with masculinity and male behaviour.

2.5 **The round:slender contrast - conclusions**

It seems that this opposition of masculine and feminine form documented in G/wi language applies widely. It perhaps derives ultimately from the somatic distinction between San men and women, female steatopygia and steatomeria being basic to the associations of fat, roundness and broadness. The formal contrast translates into various other contrasts such as carnivore:herbivore and new:full moon - that is, the basic formal distinction is reworked in the various belief contexts.

Though the round:slender contrast is the most clearly visible, pervasive and easy to document, it is only one of several such structural oppositions[10] in the narratives. Orientation, time and number also exhibit gender associations, though these are less prominent than the round:slender contrast.

3 **Gendering of orientation**

The umbrella term 'orientation' includes both horizontal and vertical axes. Of these the gendering of left and right is most explicit in the San accounts. Reference in the

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10 Or as Bourdieu (1977) calls them, 'dispositions'.

/Xam narratives (Bleek 1932) to 'a man's wind' coming from the west (the west wind is described as not being associated with rain) suggests that compass directions may have had gender associations, as in the G/wi classification; the G/wi gendering of compass direction is according to the directions from which good and bad weather comes (Silberbauer 1981), and is therefore probably linked directly to local conditions. There is some evidence to support the suggestion that the vertical axis is gendered; the association of femininity with round broad *low* things, and masculinity with *tall* things is one such indication. Marshall (1976) notes that the two sticks used for fire making are known as male and female; the former is the vertical drill stick, the latter the horizontal stick which is drilled into. The vertical and horizontal axis of the male and female sticks respectively may be the structural principle involved. The identification of Orion's belt (horizontal) as the female tortoises, and Orion's sword (vertical) as the male tortoises (Marshall 1976) may also derive from this convention. Gendering of the vertical axis is returned to in Chapter 4.

The gendering of left and right appears to be widely conventional among San groups, among African peoples in general (Wieschhoff 1973), and, indeed, in contemporary western societies. Bleek and Lloyd (1911:328-330) and Drennan (1937) include information on the practice of finger amputation, which relates to the gendering of left/right. Women of the Southern Kalahari San told Drennan that this was a curative measure, done only on very young children in the case of serious illness. An account in Bleek and Lloyd (1911:328) states that 'a female child has this (left) hand cut, because she is a little girl, therefore she has the hand of her female arm cut; because this is her female hand. The little boy feels that he is a little boy, therefore he has this hand cut, his male arm, for they shoot with this hand.' Drennan (1937) found six Southern Kalahari San with amputated digits. The four men had all had digits removed from the right hand, the two women from the left. Drennan

(1937) comments on the weak/strong valuation attached, where the right hand is seen as the stronger (1937).

Ear piercing is referred to in terms of the same principle. 'Another man has this (the right) ear pierced; he also has that (the left) ear pierced. Another woman has this (the left) ear pierced because she feels that her female arm is here (i.e. on this side); she also has this (the right) ear pierced, because she feels that her male arm is here...' (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:328).

Lee (1979) records the gendering of left/right in the male initiation rituals of the !Kung, viz. the boy's first eland kill. If he has killed a female animal, the boy is scarified on the left arm, and an old man makes a circle of footprints with the animal's hoof in an anti-clockwise direction. For a male animal the procedure is reversed. Hewitt (1986:153-4) cites Kaggen's left handedness as an indicator of his gender ambiguity. Also it is the right shoe which Kaggen throws in the air which becomes the masculine new moon (Hewitt 1986:217).

The wide currency of the gendering of left and right testifies to its conceptual prominence. Its translation into spatial organisation is evident from a plan of a campsite drawn by a San informant (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:facing page 173). The huts are arranged in a horseshoe formation, and the female hut is apparently situated to the left of the hut of the corresponding male relative. Marshall (1959) noted that the left side of the !Kung fire (but not the *skerm*[11]) was feminine and the right masculine. Thomas (1959:49) expands on this, noting that among some groups the left (feminine) and right (masculine) sides of the fire are determined by the position of the fire as one faces the *skerm*. A man who sits on the woman's side risks becoming impotent and losing his hunting powers, while a woman might get a genital disease.[12] This is the most promising convention in relation to archaeological

11 Brush shelter.

12 L. Marshall has said that this spatial division, though acknowledged, is not rigidly adhered to (Parkington, pers. comm.).

problems, and has been used by Wadley (1986) to explain the occurrence of ostrich egg shell beads on the left hand side of a cave. However, the left/right convention is not amenable to the sort of absolutism that Wadley (1986) assumes, and it is unlikely that the right and left sides of a site are masculine and feminine respectively. Rather, as the X/am camp plan suggests, feminine space is probably to the left of the corresponding male relative's, and there is no one division into left and right.

The gendering of direction suggests that gender is a factor in spatial organisation, with investigative potential for the spatial arrangement of living sites and rock art.

4 **Gendering of time**

As a starting point for the discussion of the gender associations of time, I refer again to the G/wi gender conventions (Silberbauer 1981), where unworked metals (prior to being made into artefacts) are classified feminine. This perception of femininity as 'prior' or 'previous' is found in the /Xam narratives as well.

In the /Xam seclusion narratives women are (dis)credited with the capacity for reversionism; inappropriate behaviour on the part of the new maiden leads to her transformation into a frog (a more 'primitive', 'previous' life form?) and the reversion of artefacts and karosses to their unworked state. Hewitt (1986) interprets this as an association of women with nature and men with culture, but this is problematic. The nature:culture opposition, central to Levi-Straussian structuralism, is postulated as a universal feature of human cognition. However, such oppositions are themselves culturally constructed (Dubinskas and Traweek 1984; MacCormack and Strathern 1980). Nature and culture are constructed differently cross-culturally, and, crucially, some societies, such as the Hageners of New Guinea, have no such concept at all (Strathern 1980). In this light, the claim that the San constructed a nature:culture opposition, and more importantly, that it corresponds to female:male, needs careful consideration.

From my reading of the ethnographies I conclude that there is no evidence that such equations are made. There is nothing to suggest that men are removed from nature, or that women are situated outside culture. On the contrary,both men and women are firmly situated 'within' nature. Hewitt's (1986) nature (feminine):culture (masculine) convention is better construed in terms of the gendering of time, where women are not only potential obstacles to the future but are capable of causing regression. An examination of the positioning of men and women in time in the narratives shows a recurrent pattern of femininity as 'prior' to masculinity. For example, the feminine full moon wanes and is followed by the new moon; this pattern of a pre-existent femininity surpassed by masculinity, and its implications, are discussed in the following chapter, along with a consideration of the coincidence of space and time.

5 **Gendering of number**

The G/wi associate fine-textured substances composed of many small particles with women; similarly, 'any large number of animals or objects in one group' is classified feminine, whereas any single person or animal of unknown sex is classified masculine. This gendering of number is extended, in the case of substances (such as sand, tobacco), to include texture (Silberbauer 1981). The same contrast is found in the !Kung gendering of rain, where female rain is composed of many small drops, male rain of fewer larger drops (Marshall 1957). In the /Xam narratives, the female rain is associated with the rainbow, and the spray thrown up by the thrashings of the rain animal. The association of women with the grinding of plant foods, and reduction to a fine powder is perhaps another facet of the connection of femininity and fine textured or multi-component substances. This contrast will also be discussed further in the following chapter.

6 Gender as structuring - preliminary conclusions

The gender conventions in G/wi language are found also in the language and material culture texts of other groups, namely the /Xam, !Kung, Nharo, Kalahari and Angolan San. That they are a feature of a pan-San cultural/cognitive complex seems almost certain. The conventions are found as slightly different expressions in the various belief contexts, and display a degree of flexibility. The round:slender contrast, in particular, appears in different but related guises in a wide range of beliefs. The !Kung rain classification illustrates the conjunction of two gender conventions, shape and number - female rain is composed of many droplets and its spoor is broad and shallow, while male rain consists of fewer larger drops and pierces deeply (cf. tall). The conventions may be seen (as does Bourdieu (1977)) not as inflexible rules but as pliable generative schemes which are used to structure and organise the content of the oral accounts, and probably also a wider spectrum of cultural products. These suggestions, and examination of the conventions as gender ideology, and in terms of symbolic and material power, are the topic of the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

GENDER CONTENT, METAPHORS AND IDEOLOGY

1 Gender metaphors, difference and opposition

A structural analysis gives clues to gender content, the dimensions according to which masculinity and femininity are differentiated, and the associations of the gender categories. These are summarised in Table 1.

FEMININE	----------time--------->	MASCULINE
round		slender
fat		slim
short		tall
broad		narrow
blunt		sharp
full moon		new moon
blood		water/rain
death		life
herbivore		carnivore
prey		hunter
gather		hunt
weak		strong
left		right
'before'		'after'
discontinuity		continuity
many		few
down		up

Table 1: Cultural contrasts structured by gender opposition.

Since the axes of differentiation have been identified, the next steps are to look more closely at the way in which masculine and feminine are seen to differ, and to focus on the strategic dimension of metaphor.

'Metaphors are models for understanding the world' (Black 1962, cited by Moore 1986:76). They are produced within a particular context and work by 'the implication by likeness of a certain description of the world, which is rationalised and justified by its grounds' (Butler 1984, cited by Moore 1986:76). It may be seen that the G/wi

gender classification, for example, depends on various metaphors for the genders - it consists of a series of statements about what men and women are like, on the grounds of constructed similarities with sun, moon, individual, herd and so on. Otherwise dissimilar entities are associated by particular points of similarity. Such metaphors are not merely descriptive, but are implicated in the assignation of value - for example, the feminine full moon stands in a negative relation to the masculine new moon, situating the feminine as inferior to the masculine, and assigning positive and negative value. From this perspective, which emphasises relational positioning and strategy, I examine the San gender metaphors.

The masculine:feminine contrast is found in all of the various San beliefs. Expressed as round:slender it is seen in moon and courting beliefs, and in puberty ceremonial and rainmaking ritual. In all of these (with the partial exception of the first), the round:slender contrast corresponds to the herbivore/prey (fat):hunter/carnivore (lean) contrast, and these beliefs are expressed in the idiom of hunting. Common to all but courting narratives is the opposition of blood (feminine) and water (masculine).

The phrasing of these gender metaphors in hunting idiom is highly significant. McCall (1970) suggested that the conceptualisation of masculine carnivore:feminine prey, found in courting tales, was characteristic of a pan-San cognitive set. From my more concentrated focus on gendering, I conclude that not only is this contrast probably pan-San, but it is also apparently a conventional description of the content of masculine and feminine gender, and the relationship in which they stand to each other, which is not confined to courting terminology alone. The blood:water contrast is central to this.

2 **Blood and water**

The gendered contrast of blood:water was initially identified in moon imagery. It is also found in puberty beliefs; where the menarcheal girl is described as 'the water's

wife' - the primary feature of the girl at this time is blood, which is what links her to the rain. The menarcheal maiden is to the rain as wife is to husband, and as blood is to water.

2.1 **Blood, water and rain-making**

Rain-making ritual restates the same set of contrasts. It is phrased in hunting idiom, and the rain-makers (who were apparently exclusively male) hunted and sacrificed the rain animal to make the rain fall. As previously stated, the desirable rain animal is female. The female rain animal represents the weak, gentle regenerating rain. To catch a male rain animal was a bad mistake - the male was dangerous and destructive, and to catch it was to unleash a storm. !Khwa is the feared male rain animal, who carries off errant new maidens in a storm.

Because rain animals are the prey of the rain-makers (cf. hunters), both male and female rain animals are herbivorous, and are linked to femininity. The prey/rain is then further subdivided into weak, gentle (feminine) and strong/aggressive/violent (male). It is because of this hierarchy that the occurrence of a bovine male rain is not a contradiction of the more general male carnivore:female herbivore contrast. The hunter:prey contrast is dominant in this context. In the rock art, rain animals (identified by San informants) are characteristically herbivorous, large and fat (like hippos, elephants and buck). By form, food habits and prey status, rain animals are most closely connected with femininity; according to temperament and qualities they are further subdivided into masculine and feminine.

The same gendering of blood and water is found in both puberty and rain-making ritual. In rain-making it is the 'cutting' of the she-rain and the flow of its blood which are the prerequisites for rain to fall. The rain animal is composed of water - cloud forms its body, and streams of rain the legs on which it walks the countryside. The animal's blood *is* rain. This links the gendering in puberty/rain beliefs and rainmaking. The blood of the 'she-rain' is the structural equivalent of menstrual

blood in !Khwa tales. It is menstrual blood which links women with both the injured or dying prey and with the rain. That this is so is strongly suggested by the use of the word '!Khwa' to mean both menstrual blood and rain (Hewitt 1986:285). This linkage is found also in other ethnographic accounts.[1] The !Kung girl at puberty is said to have 'shot an eland' (Lewis-Williams 1981a:51), and the !ko female initiate shoots a ritual arrow at a piece of skin (Traill pers. comm. to Guenther, 1986, and to Lewis-Williams 1981a). McCall (1970:6) notes the relationship between amniotic fluid or blood and the blood of the slain animal, pointing out that the Bambara have a similar belief, namely that 'menstrual blood falling upon the earth is like the sacrificial blood of ritually slaughtered animals'. These instances owe their logic to an equation of mature females, herbivores and prey, and the equation of menstrual blood with the blood of the dying prey (particularly the eland, as will be discussed more fully in the following chapters).

In other words the equation of femininity and prey relates to: (a) the bleeding of mature female humans and the prey or rain animal; (b) the parallel of association with plant foods; (c) parallels of form, viz. fat and roundness (d) behavioural parallels - docility/ passivity/ subordination. Gendering and beliefs about feminine gender content and female biology/sexuality are fundamental to the suite of San beliefs. Tales about the moon and courting, the content of puberty ceremonial and rain-making ritual are all founded on and organised by the same set of beliefs, the same preoccupation with gender difference, and the same structural contrasts, worked out in different contexts as slightly different but related metaphors. The 'cutting' of the rain animal is echoed in the 'cutting of the moon' - the sun stabs the moon until only its backbone remains, at which point it begins to regenerate. The phase where the moon is stabbed/cut is the feminine - the waning phase, from the appearance of the full moon until that of the masculine new moon. 'Cutting the

1 Sun/moon beliefs relate to these beliefs as well: the regeneration of the moon is similarly phrased in hunting idiom, the full moon being stabbed by the sun (see Chapter 1).

moon' is a pregnancy/menstruation related metaphor among contemporary !Kung, used in Nisa's narrative (Shostak 1981:191;376).

2.2 **Temporal relationships and parallels**

Also common to the various beliefs (moon, rain, menarche, etcetera) is a particular temporal sequence, as the following table shows:

F	----------Time---------->	M
full moon wanes	(prerequisite for)	new moon/rain
prey dies	"	meat/group continuity
rain animal dies	"	rain
menses end	"	conception occurs
Similarly, in trance beliefs:		
trance 'death'	"	curing

Table 2: Temporal relations of gender oppositions

In each case the feminine must be surpassed or overcome for the positive outcome, which is attributed in every case to masculine agency.

The various beliefs are linked not only by the recurrent structural contrast of masculine:feminine, but also by the persistent concern with female biology. This centrality of sex and gender must be seen as an indication of a 'real' preoccupation, relating to social relations: 'it is impossible to separate a discussion of male and female as conceptual categories from the material practices in which actual men and women relate to each other' (Moore 1986:166).

2.3 **Creativity, creation and androgyny**

2.3.1 Creation tales and substances

Before discussion of the ideological character of the San symbol system, it is necessary to look at creation tales and creativity concepts, at the key symbol, the eland, and at Kaggen, the eland's creator.

Kaggen, sometimes equated with the Mantis (Hewitt 1986), is the trickster figure who is a common feature of African mythology in general (Okpewho 1983).

However there is another facet to Kaggen, that of creator, of both moon and eland. These creation tales are widely told and several versions exist (Hewitt 1986).

Kaggen created the moon from a shoe or a feather, in different versions. The moon thus created seems to have been the new moon - in one tale it is the right (hence masculine) shoe which becomes the moon, and Hewitt (1986:223) proposes that an arc-shaped feather or 'curling veld shoe' suggests further that the moon which is created is the new moon. Creation of moon and eland are linked in one narrative: Kaggen pierced the eland's gall, causing darkness, and so created the moon on his way home in order to see the way (Hewitt 1986:214).

Accounts of the eland's creation include the use of either water or blood. In Orpen's version (1874), the eland is the child of Cagn's wife, and is killed by Cagn's brother. An angry Cagn prepares to restore it to life. He tells his son to put the eland's blood in a pot and churn it, but where the blood spatters it turns into snakes. The next attempt produces hartebeests. Cagn instructs his wife to clean and refill the pot. They add the fat of the eland's heart and churn. Cagn sprinkles the mixture on the ground, where it becomes bull eland which repopulate the earth.

Other regeneration myths involve water rather than blood. Kaggen's sister, the Blue Crane, involved herself in the marital difficulties of her friends, the frog and her husband, but while searching for the husband she was eaten by two lions, only one small bone of her remaining. Kaggen took the bone to the water, where it re-grew, and the Blue Crane was restored to life; Kaggen anointed her face with his perspiration (Bleek 1923; 1929; Hewitt 1986:206). The resurrection of the ostrich also invokes water as the reviving medium - the ostrich is born from a feather which falls in the water (Bleek 1923; 1929).

The blood:water contrast in these narratives relates to the contrasts of death:life, feminine:masculine, and past:future. For example, the death of Cagn's eland and its revival as a *bull* eland which repopulates the earth, corresponds to the association of

men with continuity and the future. However, though both Kaggen and the eland are masculinised, there is good reason to believe that they are both of somewhat ambiguous gender.

2.3.2 Kaggen - an ambiguous male

Kaggen's identity as creator requires further discussion. Hewitt (1986) makes the important point that Kaggen is a character of ambiguous gender. There are many pointers to this - Hewitt (1986:217) cites his unmasculine behaviour, the fact that he carried a weighted digging stick (men used unweighted sticks), his left handedness (see below), and the ambiguity of his creative role. Kaggen was also said to live in the rainbow, which was said to be related to the female rain. Gender ambiguity in San 'deities' is further suggested by the fact that the Nharo gave the being known as Hise both masculine and feminine endings, and //Gauwa or //Gauwassa, another Nharo 'deity' had both masculine and feminine identities (Bleek 1928b; Guenther 1986). In Kaggen, the usual gender associations are blurred. His creation, the eland, is similarly ambiguous.

2.3.3 The androgynous eland.

The eland is herbivorous and exceptionally fat - feminine associations. Lewis-Williams (1987) has proposed that it appears mainly in connection with trance, but it may be argued that the contexts of its occurrence link it primarily to female sexuality. Eland songs and imagery are fundamental in female initiation, and Lewis-Williams' San informants specifically linked the new maiden and the eland: both were 'good' and 'fat'; and the new maiden was said to have 'shot an eland' (Lewis-Williams 1981a:51). Other information given by Lewis-Williams' informants points to the eland as a symbol of femininity and female sexuality. The Eland dance is related by Lewis-Williams (1981a:43-48) to eland mating behaviour, and the foreshortened rear-view eland in the rock art to female buttocks as an erotic symbol. Unprompted, an informant volunteered the information that the eland digs up roots

with its horns (1981a:107) - a parallel with female gathering that further suggests the eland's femininity. The sexual connotations of the eland relate also to the conventional metaphor (in courting narratives in particular) of the male hunter or carnivore and female herbivore/ gatherer/ prey. It is noted that the sole male participant in the Nharo female initiation (who is known as the eland bull) 'seems to be symbolic of man chasing woman' (Barnard 1980:118). Associations with femininity far outstrip those with masculinity. Vinnicombe (1976) interpreted the eland's significance in terms of temporality and cyclicity - concepts which I have suggested are associated with moon imagery, menstruation and femininity. Like the rain animal (and the eland may itself be a rain animal, as Lewis-Williams (1981a:103-116) suggests), its primary links are with femininity, though males occur. Lewis-Williams, however, increasingly relates the significance of the eland primarily to trance and trance experience (Lewis-Williams 1987), even though it is noted that the eland bull dance is not performed as a Nharo medicine dance, being reserved for the girl's initiation ceremony (Barnard 1980). This dominant femininity of the eland, the question of androgyny, and the significance of the male eland will be returned to.

3 **San beliefs as gender ideology**

Bourdieu (1979) and Moore (1986) discuss metaphor and taxonomic systems as strategic and ideological, as cultural capital and symbolic power, central to the imposition of a definition of the world that is most consistent with the interests of dominant social groups. I have identified the most common relation of masculine:feminine, which corresponds to strong:weak, hunter:prey, carnivore:herbivore, life:death, and so on. In general, femininity is portrayed as subordinate and inferior to masculinity. This does not mean that masculinity is depicted as entirely good, and femininity wholly bad, as feminine 'weakness' is occasionally positively valued, with its opposite, male strength and aggression, valued negatively. Nevertheless, overall the metaphors and taxonomy are implicated

in the differential valuation and positioning of men and women in the San symbolic order, to asymmetrical valuations of the genders, and hence to ideology. This brings me to the second claim of Bourdieu's (1979) analysis of symbolic power, namely that taxonomies derive ultimately from division(s) of labour, and are reworkings of the fundamental principles of the division of labour, presented in misrecognisable form.

The prominence of hunting metaphor is at the expense of gathering, the female contribution; hunter is opposed to prey rather than to gatherer, and femininity is defined in biological/sexual terms, rather than economic. Biological reproduction and custodianship of children is, of course, a significant economic contribution, fundamental to social reproduction; description of these as 'women's work' by both Nharo and !Kung (Guenther 1986; Shostak 1981) suggests that these activities are recognised in San society as productive work.[2] In San symbolism, the privileging of this aspect of female labour, over the plant food contribution of the gatherer, amounts to a misrepresentation and naturalisation of 'real' social relations. The contrast may be seen as one of active producer versus passive (re)producer. Barnard (1980:118), comparing Nharo male and female initiation ceremonies, states that 'The male ceremony idealizes 'man the hunter', and the female ceremony stresses the role of woman as sex object or wife'. The strong, active hunter provides the prestigious meat, makes the rain and is provider of the material resources required for continuity. Women are portrayed as passive vessels whose contributions (both positive and negative) are almost involuntary. The association of men with regeneration, the provision of food and water, and responsibility for futurity is characteristically active (hunting, rain-making), and masculine intervention/agency counters the retrogressive potential of women - female is to male as past is to future, and the sequence of beliefs depicts masculinity as that which follows and surpasses the negativity associated with femininity. Not only does the image of the hunter

2 This is in contrast to western capitalist societies in which such domesticised labour is commonly not seen as work, and hence not worthy of remuneration (Delphy 1984).

signify masculine strength, it also implies social power, corresponding to the image of men as suppliers of food and makers/ suppliers of the rain.

The herbivore:carnivore contrast (opposing female fertility and male social custodianship) may be seen as primarily a metaphoric transformation of the sexual division of labour, but also as a working of the hunt/gather distinction. Though the opposition hunter:prey is primary, the hunter:gatherer opposition is implicit. The association of women with herbivores seems to derive also from a common involvement with plant foods, and parallels with female gathering. Thus, women in the narratives are also metaphorically compared to the hyaena (which scavenges rather than hunts); the anteater (collecting ant eggs is part of gathering); and the tortoise (a non-bovid herbivore, also commonly collected by women). The association of women not only with gathered plants, but with vegetation in general, is noted by Marshall (1976); hence the building of shelters from brush, etcetera, falls within the feminine domain. Similarly, Barnard (1980) and Wadley (1986) note that male tasks relate to their association with animals, and that leather work (clothing manufacture, for example) and processing of animal products is carried out by men. The division of labour (hunt/gather) is reworked as hunter:prey, strong:weak, slender:round and so on; the distinction between hunting and gathering is at the root of these metaphors and their transformations.

The association of women with things composed of many particles (substances, for example, sand, herds of animals) and men with unitary entities may relate to the hunting/gathering distinction, and to the distribution of food. Plant foods are distributed to the household and immediate family of individual gatherers; meat is distributed to the group as a whole. Meat, and consequently masculinity, have connotations of social unity that plant foods do not. Bloch's (1982) analysis of the cross-cultural association of women and death, with particular reference to the Madagascan Merina, seems applicable here. Among the Merina, women, and

particularly mothers, are equated with division and divisiveness, whereas men are identified with the unitary group and the 'common good'. San men are similarly identified - Shostak notes of the !Kung that 'It is the men who assume responsibility for the well being of the community' (1981:297). The identification of men with unitary and women with multi-component entities perhaps relates to both the composition of male and female food contributions and the connotations and values attached to them. The single large animals contributed by men are distributed to the unitary group; the multi-component plant food contribution is associated with individual households, and though gathering is a communal activity, women gather for themselves and their families. Gathering, unlike hunting, does not have any such connotations of cooperation and group unity; rather it is associated with the disunited group.

Overall, the structure, imagery, idiom and narrative content of San narratives contribute to a consistent devaluation of the feminine, on which the positive image of masculinity is constructed. The masculine:feminine contrast is used in many contexts to convey positive and negative values respectively. The use of this contrast to structure other cultural contrasts cannot be seen separately from gender relations, ideology and power; however these contrasts are not strictly determining, being both structured and structuring.

Following Bourdieu (1977, 1979) and Moore (1986), I view the gender contrasts as generative schemes which are variously worked out in different contexts. Bourdieu emphasises that such schemes are not rigid rules - to see them as such is to marginalise human agency, and capacity to penetrate and manipulate the ordering systems of daily life. It is the creative and strategic use of the basic contrasts in practical contexts which allows for change. The coherence of symbolic sets, according to Bourdieu (1979:81-83), is not due to underlying rules, but to the

practical logic which governs them. In this way Bourdieu allows for exceptions to the dominant patterning.

The San gender contrasts display a striking consistency but also a certain flexibility. There are exceptions to the structural scheme which I have outlined, but these are minor and the logic of their 'departure from the rule' is explicable. Examples include the attribution of male negativity:female positivity within a larger order in which these valuations are reversed , and the occurrence of female carnivores. These exceptions are still governed by the broader logic. For example, the valuation of femininity as positive depends on the perception of weakness as a positive attribute in certain contexts (for example, as gentle rain; as docile and tractable prey/rain animal). Similarly, the occurrence of female carnivores may relate to the fact that they are power figures, probably representing the older women who become shamans. The female hyaena in The Wife of the Dawn's Heart Star is one such female carnivore, who evidently has supernatural powers (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:84-98). Another example is found in the tale of the lioness who kidnaps children (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:162-69); this has been related to the taking into service of children by powerful shamans (Hewitt 1986:107).

An example of the creative and strategic use of the gender contrasts and the context dependency of meaning can be illustrated by reference to San accounts (Bleek 1935a:36; Bleek and Lloyd 1911:428), as follows:

A woman uses a bored stone to beat on the ground and to intercede with the spirits of dead game shamans, asking them why her husband has not found game. The meaning of her particular action is context dependent, but depends on the negative connotations of femininity in other contexts. The association of women and death has a flip side, assigning to them a certain power (albeit negative). In terms of Giddens' 'duality of structures' and his emphasis on the unintended consequences of action (part of his critique of functionalism) every structure (or convention) contains

the seeds of and provides a focus for its own transgression (1979). By drawing on the negative association of femininity and death in other contexts, the woman is, in this context (her husband's failure to provide food), able to invert this association, and to use the association of femininity and death as a positive power strategy. Her closeness to the realm of death, where the dead game spirits dwell, gives her the power of intercession in her husband's failure, and to revalue the feminine role. By enactment in another context, the power of death becomes a power of life, and after her intervention her husband came home with food (ostrich eggs, a fact which may be significant in terms of the association of women with round things).

Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977) and his analysis of symbolic power (1979) is thus extremely flexible, wide ranging, and useful. It permits explanation of consistencies (while allowing for exceptions) and also connects symbolism to strategy, ideology, power, and political, economic and socio-cultural process.

One other apparent 'exception' to the gender contrasts requires further discussion, namely the 'key symbol' of the eland. I have suggested that the 'androgynous' eland is primarily feminine; the occurrence of the male eland needs further consideration.

If the eland is principally feminine, how can the occurrence of the male eland be explained, and what is its significance? An informant volunteered to Lewis-Williams the information that the eland differs from all other antelope in that the male of the species is fatter than the female (Lewis-Williams 1981a:50). Fat is a feminine characteristic, and the feature which makes both herbivorous prey and women desirable: the new maiden is like the eland because both are 'fat' and 'good' (Lewis-Williams 1981a:48). I wish to suggest that the importance of the eland relates to this 'abnormal' femininity of the male.

The male eland displays all the desirable features characteristically associated with femininity but in masculine form. In fact, the male animal displays the highest development of these features. The eland may be seen in terms of an ideology which

subordinates women, partly by appropriation of the feminine contribution to continuity and renewal. The male eland seems to be a symbol of this masculine superiority, representing the positive features of femininity (meat; fat) in male guise. In other words, the male eland comprises female fertility, desirability and powers under the masculine rubric, and may be seen in terms of the strategic appropriation of positivity by men. In Orpen's tale (1874) it is the bull eland which, in essence, gives birth, and repopulates the earth. The male eland is the ultimate symbol of masculine superiority, regenerative power, and command over the future.

This may be related also to what Bloch (1982) calls 'positive predation', where the killing of an animal or enemy gives to the killer the powers of the deceased. When the male rain-makers kill the (female) rain animal they acquire its powers of fertility, in this instance, rain.

Concepts of fertility and gender are the 'site of struggle' in San symbolism, 'fertility' being used in the general sense of abundance, increase, continuity and life. The eland is a fertility symbol in this sense, comprising feminine fertility (the female as source of fat/meat; rain; sexuality) and masculine fertility (men as providers of food and water; agents of abundance). Fertility beliefs contain gendering - an opposition of women as the source of fertility and men as the agents of fertility. Agency and social command are attributed to men.

> 'Women as agents of death and division...have the central role, not only the negative role, but also the creative role, since the creation of symbolic order is dependent on negation. Death as disruption, rather than being a problem for the social order, as anthropologists have tended to think, is in fact an opportunity for dramatically creating it...it is society which creates the anti-individual and hence creates the illusion of the group...on the basis of the devaluation of a particular symbolic representation of women' (Bloch 1982:218-9).

The 'striking cross-cultural recurrence' (Bloch 1982) of an association of women and death certainly applies to the San. The gender taxonomy assigns to women

properties of division and reversionism, and a subordinate position relative to group responsibility. However, women are closely associated not only with death, but also with birth (central in rain beliefs); this also has negative connotations and the word meaning 'to be pregnant' also means 'to be ill'[3] (Bleek 1956:726,745). The association of both birth and death with women is analysed by Bloch as follows: 'in Merina ideology the concepts of birth and death are systematically collapsed in...rituals, and made one by opposing them to an antithesis acted out by women, biological birth and biological death' (1982:220). He continues to suggest that 'in social systems like that of the Merina, whose ideological representation implies an unchanging permanent organisation, a kind of victory over individuals has always to be achieved, and this victory is necessary because both birth and death imply discontinuity and individuality, things which of their nature are a challenge to the permanent representation of a society based on traditional authority...'(1982: 223).

Bloch's interpretation seems entirely appropriate for the San situation also. While biological birth and death are collapsed together as discontinuity, which is 'acted out by women', continuity is enacted by men and represented by the male eland. San ideology is 'about' social reproduction, continuity and the future. Ideas about gender are inseparable from, fundamental to, and, in a sense, synonymous with this ideology: *The opposition of masculine:feminine is the fundamental contrast via which positive and negative value is conveyed, and social reproduction is defined.*

However, this is not the same as a 'fertility cult', but rather, evidence for a San cultural construction of femininity which differs from western concepts - 'in a wide range of different societies the concept of 'woman' is not elaborated through ideas about motherhood, fertility, nurturance and reproduction' (Moore 1988:28). Collier and Rosaldo (1981:275-6) noted of the !Kung and other 'simple' societies that themes of motherhood and sexual reproduction were far less central than had been

3 Compare entries for 'ill' (Bleek 1956:726) and 'pregnant' (1956:745).

assumed: 'Woman the Fertile, Woman the Mother and Source of All Life was, quite remarkably, absent from all available accounts'. Though the San accounts which I have examined do not suggest this 'earth mother' image of women, this is not to say that biology and sexuality are not central to the elaboration of the concept 'woman'. Rather, it may be said that femininity is elaborated in a different way.

Because the San symbolic/ classificatory system both represents and produces a particular male:female relation, in which the latter is subordinate, it is linked directly to relations of domination and gender conflict. To conclude the chapter I discuss the context of gender relations, presenting the evidence from ethnographies for inherent gender conflict in San society, and for the use of gender opposition as a structured/structuring principle in the narratives.

4 Conflict - the context of gender symbolism

According to materialist theory (Bloch 1983; Delphy 1984), class conflict is the 'motor of change'; in lineage or other so-called 'non-class' societies, gender conflict may be the impetus for change. Recent ethnographies document such gender conflict in San societies.

Gender conflict focusses to some extent on the division of labour. Nisa, the !Kung narrator of Shostak's book, describes the major source of conflict in her marriage as arising from her or her husband's failure to meet their respective hunting and gathering obligations, and to provide food and services (Shostak 1981:339;361;364). Control over children was another source of conflict, according to Nisa. Her mother considered infanticide, because Nisa refused to be weaned when a new child was due, but when Nisa's father heard that his wife had considered killing her newborn son he told her he would have killed her if she had done so (Shostak 1981:56). Other sources of conflict in San groups include the practice of arranged marriages for young girls; incompatibility, conflict and divorce are common in these marriages (Shostak 1981:127-131). Infidelity and jealousy are also common, and highly

disruptive (Guenther 1986; Shostak 1981; Silberbauer 1981). Guenther noted of the Nharo that conflict was a feature not only of relations with other groups but that 'a high incidence of quarrelling, spouse beating and fighting' took place among themselves (1986:53)[4]. Marital conflict is referred to also by Marshall (1976) and Lee (1984). Marshall (1976) records that four out of seven flare-ups of conflict observed by members of their expedition focussed on sexual jealousy. Other intra- and inter- group conflicts should not be ignored, but the many opportunities for gender conflict are important, especially where it is directly related to the division of labour, and definitions of gender roles. In the oral narratives several tales explicitly oppose masculine and feminine, or are directly concerned with economic and personality conflict.

The tale of The jackal and the quagga (Hewitt 1986:111-14) opposes aggressive male carnivore to female herbivore: The jackal marries the quagga and is delighted because he has 'married meat'. It is not long before he kills the quagga, who expires next to the water. He chops her up and puts her in the pot. Unfortunately, events have been observed by the quagga's daughter, who informs her relatives. They visit the jackal on the pretext of a social call, and trample him to death.[5]

This tale is structured according to conventional gender contrasts - herbivore:carnivore, and hunter:prey, as in the courting tales examined by McCall (1970). The quagga (=zebra) dies by the water, a conjunction of zebra and water which is also a feature of other San accounts.[6] The elements and forms of this tale are reworkings of those found in other texts.

The motif of family intervention in cases of marital incompatibility is relatively common. A tale collected by Orpen (1874), where Cagn's son is sent to retrieve

4 Of course this also relates to the particular situation of the Nharo in the present.

5 A Gikwe tale recorded by Thomas (1959) is similar: Pishiboro is told that he is a fool because he was 'married to meat, but thought it was a wife' (see Chapter 2).

6 Among the !Kung, the large female rain-bringing clouds were called zebras (Marshall 1957:232). In the /Xam narratives the quagga was said to smell like a human, and the 'water's child' was striped (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:199).

Cagn's daughter from her unsuitable marriage to a snake, covers this situation, as does the tale of the Nerru bird (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:206-214):

The Nerru and her husband are an ill-matched pair. She is disgusted by his dirty habits, namely putting earthy ant eggs on a clean kaross. He is unrepentant, and demands her small kaross. When she refuses he pulls it off her. Her kaross is apparently her skin, and when he snatches it, her entrails spill out. Her mother is furious and the husband is sent back to his own people. This tale also has sexual overtones, relating to the removal of the small kaross.

A similarly mismatched pair is the Mason wasp and his wife. When the Mason wasp takes off his kaross, his wife laughs at his narrow waist, and he shoots and kills her with an arrow (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:206-13).

Conflict over food occurs in a few tales. The tale of the leopard tortoise (see Chapter 1) seems to refer obliquely to sharing, via the metaphor of the 'decayed arm', namely a person who is stingy (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:125). The Hyena's Revenge (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:122-125) deals with sharing and, rather more obscurely, with gender. The hyena has a grudge against the lion, whom he believes was stingy with the quagga meat. When the lion goes to the hyaena's house, where the hyaena is cooking ostrich, revenge is obtained. The hyaena jams the pot of hot food on the lion's head, killing him. The hyaena's disappointment with the male lion is expressed as 'he felt he had married a female hyaena'. The 'decayed arm' expression occurs here as well. That the two male antagonists are arguing over quagga meat suggests a gender component in the tale.

The potential of marital conflict over food is the topic of the tale of The vultures, their elder sister and her husband. The term 'elder sister' recurs frequently in the narratives and seems to refer to an adult woman, as opposed to a pre-pubertal girl or old woman. In this tale, the husband shoots game, but his wife's sisters, aptly characterised as vultures, eat too much of it. The husband, enraged, insists that his

wife accompany him to the hunting grounds, but the vulture sisters follow. The elder sister becomes angry, asking how they can behave that way to her, 'as if I had been the one who scolded you' (Bleek and Lloyd 1911). The tale acknowledges the potential for conflict over food (particularly meat), involving husband, wife and other family members.

The tale of Kagara and Haunu, who fought each other with lightning (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:112-119), also covers an unsuitable marriage. It is particularly interesting because rain imagery is central, and the ensuing conflict is compared to a bad storm. A reference to bleeding from the nose links it to the dying eland and to epistaxis experienced during trance performance, and the tale's narrator commented that Haunu's name sounded as if it referred to that which comes out of the nose. Kagara is the name of the lightning bird (the hamerkop, Scopus umbretta), which is closely associated with water and death, not only by the San, but also by the Zulu. 'It is a thing which lives at the water which is like a pool in which we see all things' (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:393). The hamerkop sees the person who has died in the water (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:391-2).

Kagara goes to fetch his sister away from her husband, Haunu, and return her to her family. She carries her husband's goods on her back - 'The things which his wife carried, they resembled water'. Kagara asks his sister what she is carrying; at this Haunu sneezes and blood comes out of his nostrils. He 'lightens' at Kagara. Kagara uses black lightning - 'that which kills us' - in retaliation. Haunu is whisked away and lies thundering as he dies. When Kagara and his sister reach home, his head hurts, and he binds it with a net. He goes to lie down while Haunu continues to thunder. Kagara rubs himself and his sister with 'buchu, buchu, buchu'. The narrator commented that his grandmothers used to say that Kagara and Haunu fought in the east; when the clouds were thick and 'lightening', they would say 'It is Kagara, with Haunu'.

Apart from dealing with the termination of the unsuitable marriage of the girl and the violent Haunu, there are other interesting points. The girl carries things 'resembling water', and is effectively the 'water's wife', since Haunu seems to be equivalent to the violent male rain. As in the seclusion narratives, buchu is used to protect themselves from the rain. The fight between Kagara and Haunu over the woman is a severe storm, supporting the suggestion made previously that the 'fight' referred to in San texts is best understood in terms of rain metaphors. Hewitt (1986) interprets this tale as dealing with conflict between in-laws, and does not comment on the rain imagery. The Nharo have a similar tale, where N!eri and //Gauwa fight in the sky with thunder and lightning (Guenther 1986:223).

Owing to the division of labour, and men and women's different responsibilities for provision and distribution of resources, food and marriage are inextricably linked; marriage is an economic arrangement. An important text in this regard is The Anteater's Laws (Hewitt 1986:116-20), which may be read as a set of rules for male and female behaviour - animal tales refer to human situations. The 'laws' are prefaced by a short narrative, relating the circumstances under which the laws came into being:

The spinster ant-eater persuaded a group of springbok mothers to let her bring up as her own the only female springbok child among them. Trouble started when the springbok girl reached puberty, and the (male) lynx crept into the anteater's hole while the anteater was out collecting ants eggs. He persuaded the springbok girl to elope with him, but the anteater found out and chased them. The 'laws' are the result of the ensuing negotiations. The list of laws is enormously long, and 'contains very specific details about who should marry whom, and what food each animal should eat' (Hewitt 1986:118). Animals are to marry their own kind - their 'equals' - and to eat appropriate food: grass for the quagga, bushes for the springbok, springbok and hare for the lynx, raw meat for the leopard, and so on, at great length.

The lynx of the tale agrees to eat flesh, and the springboks agree to confine themselves to eating bushes (Hewitt 1986:118). Guenther (1986) notes that the Nharo have similar tales about 'correct' foods and marriages.

'Those who retain human form...are also given instructions on how they will live'(Hewitt 1986:119). If it is accepted that the 'animal narratives' deal with human situations, then this narrative deals with gender conflict. The Anteater's Laws are more a codification of human social norms than of animal behaviour. The format of the anteater's laws is echoed in other tales. The Naron tale, Division of the Earth (see Introduction) relates a situation where the Bushmen and the white men 'pull on a rope', apparently to settle a dispute over domestic stock. The outcome is that the two groups agree to live separately; the Bushmen will wear karosses and eat the wild buck, the white men will wear clothes and blankets, and 'go with the cows'. Structural similarities apart, the tale is linked to The Anteater' Laws by the penultimate line - 'The Bushman women shall gather food, the men shall make traps and eat bucks' (Bleek 1928b:47). This injunction seems out of place in a narrative which refers above all to indigene-colonist relations, but makes more sense if the tale is seen in relation to, or perhaps as a reworking of, The Anteater's laws. The Hyaena's Revenge, which concerns conflict over food also concludes similarly. The first version of this tale given by Bleek and Lloyd (1911) ends with a paragraph describing how the lion marries the lioness, the hyaena marries the female hyaena, and the leopard marries the leopardess - a reiteration of appropriate behaviour, and a repetition of the link between food, sharing and marriage. The tale collected by Dornan (1925), entitled The Origin of Marriage, summarised below, deals with gender opposition, but rather differently:

Men and women were once two races. Men lived on the mountain and hunted for food; women lived in the valley by the river. The men had caught a springbok but had let their fire go out, and so were unable to cook it. A man was sent down the

mountain to get fire from the women. He found a woman gathering grass seeds by the river, and she took him home and cooked him porridge. He liked all this so much that he decided to stay. The men on the mountain sent another man down, but the same thing happened. This went on until only one man was left on the mountain. He could only speculate on what ghastly fate his companions might have met, and finally fled from the place.

Marriage is presented as centrally concerned with sharing, and the tale is told via a number of contrasts, namely, the association of men with the mountain (up) and a single springbok, and of women with water, the valley (down) and multi-component plant foods. The conception of men and women as originally separate 'races' compounds this opposition in a way similar to the herbivore/carnivore distinction (on the grounds of inherent difference). The Anteater's Laws and The Origin of Marriage, as well as other tales (for example, The girl of the early race who made stars), refer to an ancient, previous order which the present order has supplanted, and in which humans are not separate from animals.

The Nharo and Gikwe have related narratives. According to Guenther (1986) the Nharo believe in a second creation, where the people of the early race become animals and the animals become people. In the old days men and women were separate people who did not know of each other's existence. One version states that women were wild creatures who existed before men, but, unlike men, were not reversed at the second creation. They took 'their animal nature with them into the second order and were found in this state by men. The men incorporated them into human society and "domesticated" them. The women reciprocated by teaching men about sex and procreation', of which they were previously ignorant (Guenther 1986:229). In the old days men lived in huts, wore skins and hunted, while women lived in termite hills, wore grass skirts and gathered plants (Guenther 1986:229). The Gikwe similarly characterise women in terms of sexuality, and the deity Pishiboro

was similarly ignorant until he saw his wives sitting above him in a tree (Thomas 1959:80-1).

Very similar details prevail in the various versions, with the Nharo tale laying particular stress on femininity as defined by sexuality. Guenther's argument (1986:231) that Nharo tales 'reflect' egalitarian gender relations, both in this tale and others where women are portrayed as the custodians of fire or as immune to eternal death, may be seen as doubtful, because the presence of powerful or positive female figures in myth may serve to indicate the opposite (Bamberger 1974).

A number of tales pivot on gender difference and opposition, and this is interpreted here as indicative of a general preoccupation with gender, found in many spheres. The gender contrasts are not rules, but are mutable by ongoing negotiation.

5 Conclusions

From the analysis of the structure and content of the oral narratives, I conclude that San society probably does not manifest the egalitarianism which has so frequently been attributed to it; rather my analysis supports Shostak's (1981) conclusion that male dominance is (and probably was) a very real feature of the social organisation of nineteenth and twentieth century San. The analysis supports and extends McCall's (1970) 'equivalence' of hunting and mating in San thought , and links this equivalence, and the gender contrasts and metaphors, to symbolic power, gender ideology and relations of domination.

Metaphor works by means of reference to something dissimilar, on the basis of one or more features of similarity. It is strategic in that it works by 'the implication by likeness of a certain description of the world which is rationalised and justified by its grounds (Butler 1984, cited by Moore 1986). The referential capacity of metaphor is important in two ways: in terms of (a) meaning as context dependent, and (b) meaning as resulting from 'resonance' between texts and contexts. 'Texts are always

read in relation to other texts' (Moore 1986). This is apparently a reference to Bakhtin and Kristeva's concept of intertextuality - that every text is a mosaic of other texts. Meaning is dependent to a great extent on specific practical context, but also on the meaning of a motif or opposition in other contexts:

> 'the actual meaning a given set of contrasts acquires in relation to a particular universe of practice resonates with all the meanings those contrasts, or any other pair of contrasts that is interchangeable with them, might be given in other fields of practice - that is, in different contexts' (Moore 1986:78).

Intertextuality refers also to 'the reader's experience of other texts' (Belsey 1980:26). This resonance, and the connections between texts, are a focus of this project, which proceeds to examine the basis of the 'resonances' between a range of San texts.

The various gender conventions act as generative principles, but their narrow meaning is context dependent. Words are intrinsically polysemantic, and a particular practical context is a limitation on the range of interpretations/ meanings; nevertheless 'other' meanings are potentially present. Thus, 'round' and 'slender' have the general connotations of negative and positive respectively; though this may be altered in a narrow context, the general connotations remain. The circular form has polysemantic possibilities, and wide referential capacity, potentially connoting the full moon, fat, the herbivorous prey and the 'new maiden'. Though the meaning of a specific round shape is context dependent, the generalised associations of this form are always present, linked in an associative chain. Specific context is not the whole context, even if it is the most important.

It is this generalised set of gender meanings which is dealt with here, but it is nevertheless possible to discuss gender ideology, and the meaning of gender representations, because the conventions or generative schemes are themselves in a masculinist idiom, and the associations of femininity are generally of negativity or inferiority. Though the connotations of feminine negativity may be altered in

practical contexts, the gender categories, and hence the arena of negotiation, are apparently defined from a masculinist perspective. The use of the masculine:feminine opposition to categorise other cultural contrasts, especially in terms of value, is found repeatedly in various contexts, and must be seen as related to gender ideology in a more general sense.

Intertextuality does not refer only to resonances between similar texts (for example linguistic texts). The contrasts I have identified may also be applied to non-linguistic texts, as is suggested by the use of the left:right contrast in the spatial organisation of campsites, and the association of women with round and men with slender artefacts. In the following chapter I use the structural principles and the alternative interpretation of narrative content (with the emphasis on fertility, rain and gender rather than the usual stress on trance) to interpret various features of San rock art.

CHAPTER FOUR

ROCK ART

It is proposed that the reading of the ethnographies presented in Chapters 2 and 3 has potential for interpretation of rock art. Though my approach to the rock art is broadly similar to that of Lewis-Williams (1980; 1981a), in that the ethnographies are used as a key, various theoretical and methodological differences are to be found. Theoretical differences concern the theorisation of gender and of ideology, the value of language and linguistic approaches, and the use of neurophysiological data. Methodological differences include my use of formal, spatial and temporal analogies, derived from a structural analysis of the narratives, and focussing on the male/female opposition. Rather than proceeding from one particular theme of the art (trance), I consider the art as a general statement about fertility, prosperity and order, in which gender is of major importance, since the masculine : feminine opposition is used as a vehicle for these concepts and positive : negative evaluations. These departures from current approaches to rock art are discussed in some detail in the chapter which follows, as is the problem common to any use of ethnography to explain the art: the problem of contemporaneity.

Here I focus on the following suggestions: (a) that rain imagery and sexual symbolism are closely related and significantly prominent characteristics of the art; (b) that these features may be interpreted in terms of gender ideology; (c) that the same or similar schemes may organise narrative, rock art, material culture and spatial organisation.

To do this, I examine various scenes and motifs in terms of symbolic form and content, proceeding to other modes of signification which may be seen to have a gender dimension, such as space, time and perspective.

1 Gender and sexual symbolism

The testimony of San informants, identifying motifs like rain animals and the 'rain's navel' (Lewis-Williams 1977)[1] established that rain is a theme of the art. Lewis-Williams (eg 1977; 1981a) has also drawn attention to this theme, particularly in its relation to trance, for example, by interpreting hunting scenes as trance/rainmaking scenes. However, the pervasiveness of gender/sexual symbolism in the art, and the connection of rain beliefs and sexual themes, has been little acknowledged - though few fail to comment obliquely on its occurrence, no specific attention has been afforded it. This theme of the art includes a range of scenes and motifs, from puberty ceremonies, figures with exaggerated sexual characteristics to (less common) images of animal copulation (Mazel 1983) and a 'rape' scene (Vinnicombe 1976). I interpret the various expressions of sexual themes as pointers to the artistic concern with a generalised fertility concept, to which gender/sexuality is central. I illustrate my claim for the prominence of this element of the art by reference to various motifs.

2 Human figures as signs

With the possible exception of trancers, there has been a tendency to view human figures as largely iconic, simply denoting human figures, with little or no exploration of their connotative dimension. Activity has, on the whole, been focussed on, at the expense of investigation of the symbolic aspect of the human figure. I aim to problematise the human figure, and suggest that representations of humans in general, and gendered humans in particular, have been superficially treated. My alternative is to consider gendered figures as *signs* (cf. Driver 1988), connoting not only gender identity but a particular set of associations according to the context of their occurrence.

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1 Based on the unpublished Bleek records at the University of Cape Town.

2.1 **Naked and clothed figures**

In the light of the above, the depiction of clothed and unclothed figures may be considered. It is known that the San did not customarily walk around naked, and that the display of female buttocks, for example, was considered risque', if not indecent, except in ritual context, such as the Eland Bull dance (Barnard 1980; Guenther 1986; Lewis-Williams 1981a). Why then the prominent nakedness in San art and ritual?

The depiction of naked figures should be seen as a significant departure from the everyday, or in terms of ritual *inversion*. Such inversion is a common feature of ritual (Hodder 1982; Moore 1986). I suggest that it relates to the themes of gender, sexuality and fertility, and the way in which these are dealt with in ritual context. The depiction of clothed figures in the art has received more attention than that of naked figures, in relation to the suggestion that clothed figures, being larger, may represent the shamans who were believed to be more susceptible to cold (Bleek 1935a;Vinnicombe 1976). Whatever the validity of this, it does not explain the occurrence of naked figures. Such figures may be seen as part of an artistic strategy to highlight sexual difference; similarly, clothed figures effect a reverse emphasis.

2.1.1 Naked hunters

Numerous paintings depict naked male hunters with semi-erect penises (see figures 3-5). Lewis-Williams (1983) has argued that hunting scenes are far less common in the art than has been supposed, and he interprets many such scenes as trance related. That hunting scenes are iconic seems unlikely, but rather than being related primarily to trance, they may be seen as referring to the theme of fertility and abundance. Naked hunters may be interpreted in terms of the sexual connotations of hunting - McCall's 'equivalence' of hunting and mating, where hunting is a metaphor for courting (1970).

McCall, following Marshall's observation that the !Kung associate masculine hunting power and a male sexual principle, suggested that a conceptual equivalence between hunting and mating was characteristic of a pan-San cognitive set. He proposed that the equation of hunting/courting (masculine) and courted/prey (feminine) was a central metaphor in San beliefs. Both activities 'play an important part in the psychic life of these people and furthermore the two have become so intertwined that one symbolises the other' (McCall 1970:18).

The portrayal of naked hunters, sometimes with exaggerated genitals, may be related to this metaphor; such figures may be interpreted as referring to the hunter as courter, and to hunting as an expression of masculinity, male sexuality and a masculinist principle.

Such a masculinist principle is characteristic of fertility beliefs, and their phrasing in the idiom of hunting[2] (a point to which I shall return). Hunting scenes may thus be seen in terms of the dual meaning of McCall's equivalence - hunting as metaphor for the San construction of male sexuality. Scenes of naked hunters may thus refer simultaneously to the diverse masculine elements of fertility beliefs - meat, sex, rain-making. Female figures may be seen in like terms as signifying the feminine components of fertility beliefs.

2.1.2 Steatopygeous and steatomerious figures

It may be argued that steatopygeous and steatomerious figures (see figures 1 & 2; also 6; 7 a,b; 8 a-c; 17; 19c; 29) convey more than the sex/gender of the figure. Not all female figures are exaggeratedly fat, though they are generally fatter than male figures. Apart from female sex, the depiction of steatopygeous and steatomerious figures conveys the symbolic value of fat (and fertility); similarly figures with swollen torsos relate to the imagery of birth, and hence to rain. A quantitative/contextual analysis would in all probability show that exaggeratedly fat figures occur

2 For example, rain-making, courting tales, beliefs about the sun and moon.

particularly in association with rain imagery. An example is the painting of steatomerious women in association with a huge snake (rain's animal) (figure 1c). In other paintings, exaggerated round feminine form can also be related to the context of rain imagery, for the 'moon goddesses' (figures 8 b,c; 9) and the Mrewa Cave 'Mother Goddess' (figure 7a). Exaggeratedly fat female figures should be seen as referring, not narrowly to female sex, but to the components and associations of femininity, and the feminine aspects of fertility beliefs, namely the linkage of rain and female biology/ reproduction. Though the paintings denote figures of female sex, they connote the complex of associations of feminine gender.

Naked figures may thus be seen as symbols or signs which connote the associations of each gender, rather than icons which denote biological sex. The frequent depiction of naked figures is one pointer to the concern of the artists with sex and gender as elements of fertility beliefs. Large group scenes, in contrast, are often composed of 'indeterminate' kaross-clad figures, where clothing may serve to emphasise the group as a unit, rather than the gender difference which divides it.

3 **Graphic representation of the blood : water contrast**

It has been noted in previous chapters that blood and water stand in a relationship to each other which is reiterated in various contexts. In rain making beliefs there is an equation of the blood of the rain animal and rain itself; !Khwa tales and female initiation are constructed around a particular relationship between menarcheal girls (blood) and rain, and the word !Khwa was used to mean both blood and water; moon beliefs also oppose new moon and rain to full moon and blood. The contrast is also found in trance performance, where blood from the nose and sweat, probably associated with trance 'death' and curing respectively, are important substances. In short, the blood/water contrast is common to the practices and beliefs central to San notions about fertility/abundance and continuity. This opposition is helpful in

explaining several motifs, namely, figures in splayed leg posture, the Drakensberg 'moon goddess' figures, and the thin red line fringed with white dots.

3.1 **Spread legged figures**

A common posture in the art is the splayed leg posture, another pointer to the fundamental importance of sexual imagery in the art. Examples of this motif can be found in every published collection of paintings from all over southern Africa (see figures 7; 8; 16 b,c; 19c). The posture has been interpreted as 'a female symbol of potency' (Yates, et al. 1985). Though such 'explanation' by reference to an unexplicated potency is unsatisfactory (as I argue more fully below), it is safe to say that the posture has gender/sexual significance.

Most of these figures are clearly female and many have lines issuing from the genital area (see figures 7 a,b; 8c). It has been suggested that these emanations represent amniotic fluid or menstrual blood (Huffman 1983), but such interpretations are strongly rejected by Garlake (1987), who complains that this rests on an understanding of the art as representational. On the contrary, it can be argued that San beliefs are characterised by the symbolic elaboration of everyday substances, objects and practices; the 'potency' of sweat, blood and urine, for example, is well documented. In this light, the opposition of 'symbolic' and 'representational' is fallacious. It is highly likely that these figures refer to birth and/or menstruation, and that the imagery relates directly to rain beliefs (as in !Khwa tales and *n!ow* beliefs). However, the relationship between such figures and the theme of rain in general has not been dealt with in any depth, and, in general, rain imagery has been subordinated to trance-centred explanation. Consideration of another spread-legged figure extends the argument.

3.1.1 The 'moon goddess'

Vinnicombe (1976:161) discusses three similar figures from 'widely separated' areas of the Drakensberg (see figures 8 b,c; 9). Fig. 8c has been referred to as the 'moon goddess'(Ellis 1988). An examination of its features relates it to rain and moon beliefs and also to gender ideology.

The figure has a round white face, which I believe is indeed meant to represent the female full moon, and which relates graphically and conceptually to the red shape between the thighs, which likely represents menstrual blood, to which the moon is linked. Other features of the figure also link it to rain imagery. The swollen torso is a feminine feature, in terms of form, and is suggestive both of pregnancy and the imagery of birth which is a component of rain beliefs. The spread-legged posture itself evokes associations of birth/sexuality. The figure's striped legs, which terminate in hooves, are reminiscent of the zebra (quagga) in San accounts.[3] These associations are somewhat diffuse, but I propose that their cumulative associations are with femininity and rain beliefs. The dots and dashes on the body in all likelihood refer to rain (as I argue in more detail shortly). The figure shares several characteristics with the Mrewa Cave 'mother goddess'(figure 7a), notably form and posture, and the wide distribution of similar motifs suggests a pan-San preoccupation with the theme of femininity and rain. Such figures conjoin blood and water as substances of potency basic to fertility beliefs in general. The other 'moon goddess' figure will be discussed shortly.

3.2 **The thin red line**

Lewis-Williams (1977; 1981b) has drawn attention to the recurrent motif of the thin red line fringed with white dots (see figures 10; 11; also 13 & 19). In the earlier paper he suggests that it may be 'the rain's navel' identified by the San informant,

3 The zebra/quagga seems to be primarily feminine, and is supposed to smell like a human; it is associated with water in one tale, and the !Kung refer to rain-bringing female clouds as 'zebras'; the 'water's child', according to a a /Xam narrative, was striped.

/Han≠kasso, and 'might have been a concept relating to joining things by the rain's strength and supernatural potency'(Lewis-Williams 1977:166-69). In the later paper he describes this potency as an 'elusive concept' relating primarily to trance (Lewis-Williams 1981b:13). I have suggested that interpretation by reference to an unexplicated 'potency' does not constitute an explanation. However, recourse is made repeatedly to this undefined potency (see also Pager 1975; Yates et al. 1985). I propose that an elucidation of this 'potency' is overdue, and is possible from a perspective which emphasises fertility/ prosperity and gender.

It is likely that the red line and white dots represent the blood : water contrast - the red line representing blood, the white dots, water. The 'potency' represented by water and blood appears to be that of life and death respectively, and fertility in general.

That the thin red line represents blood is suggested firstly by the uses of red ochre - for example, sprinkled on the water to appease !Khwa if he was offended by menstruating women, and used by girls to paint outgoing hunters to protect them from the rain (see Chapter 2). In both these instances red ochre is linked to the symbolism of blood, and may be seen as symbolic blood. The English word (haematite) and the Afrikaans (bloedsteen) both associate blood and red ochre, and it seems that the San are no exception. The association of ochre and blood is also made in the account given to How (1962) by a Maluti San, Mapote. He insisted on the need to mix fresh eland blood with the ochre before painting, suggesting a conceptual parallel; also he stated that the ochre had to be ground by a woman at full moon. The full moon, blood (and grinding) form a logical set in terms of their gender associations. I suggest, therefore, that red paint has a symbolic value which has not been considered, and that red and white, and blood and water, have associations of death and life respectively. The association of blood and red ochre, if

inconclusive, is an indicator of the significance of the red line. Examination of the positioning of the line extends the argument.

In the Cullen's Wood and Fulton Rock paintings (figures 10 and 11) the dotted red line

(a) passes between the thighs of clapping women;

(b) crosses the rump of a foreshortened eland and joins with the nose of another eland;

(c) connects to a trance figure, which is bleeding from the nose.

The trance hypothesis can generate no explanation for all these occurrences, whereas a 'fertility hypothesis' can.

The positioning of the red line in (a) refers to female biology, menstrual blood and rain. In (b) the line's association with the eland can also be seen as referring to female sexuality. The referents of the foreshortened rear-view eland are eland mating behaviour, female initiation, and a parallel between eland hindquarters and female buttocks. I have pursued Lewis-Williams'(1981a) suggestion that the eland is a rain animal: in (c), the connection with the nose of the eland evokes the significance of the dying eland, both as requisite for rain, and as trance metaphor (bleeding from the nose). The red line occurs in conjunction with the major elements of fertility beliefs: femininity, sexuality, rain and trance, with blood/water as the common denominator of the beliefs.

Figure 9, a masculinised version of the 'moon goddess', displays a red shape between the thighs; thin red lines connect the red shape to red segments on the white arrows and to a vaal rhebok at the other end (Pager 1975). A buck also 'stands' on the far end of the other thin line. This painting may be read as a graphic representation of the parallel between femininity and prey, and the structural equivalence of the blood of the (feminine) prey and that of the menarcheal girl. The connection by the line of the red shape (blood), arrow tips and buck may be seen in relation to the tale The

moon is not to be looked at when game has been shot, where the menarcheal girl causes the arrow poison to 'cool' and the game to escape. The red line connects blood, arrows and prey as they are connected in beliefs about the effect of the new maiden on the hunter's prowess. On the basis of such motifs, I argue that it is reasonable to assume that the thin red line represents blood in other contexts.

The white dots, on the other hand, very likely represent rain. I suggested above that dots and dashes refer thus, and now argue the point further. The association of dots and liquid/rain is made repeatedly in the art. Examples include the occurrence of dots on animals identified by San informants as rain animals (for example, see Woodhouse 1985) and the depiction of sweat from a trancer's armpit as dots (for example, in figure 10). Diä!kwain's interpretation of paintings commented on by Orpen's informant, Qing, included the statement that 'The strokes indicate rain' (Orpen 1874)[4]; this indicates the representation of rain in the art. I suggested above that the dots/dashes on the torso of the 'moon goddess' represent rain; therianthropic rain-makers around a bound eland (figure 13) are similarly marked. The dashes surrounding the Mrewa Cave 'mother goddess' are interpreted by Huffman (1983) as bees, but more probably represent rain in association with feminine fertility imagery, since these are not the winged images which have been identified as bees in other paintings. Lewis-Williams (1981b:12) suggested that the dots may represent the footprints of the medicine man, thereby acknowledging the association of dots with rain imagery. However, a more likely interpretation is that dots represent the rain itself, or the footprints of the rain animal. Marshall (1957) and Thomas (1959) both comment on the contemporary !Kung accounts of the rain's footprints and the distinctive spoor of male and female rain (animals). In view of the prominence of rain imagery in the art, its depiction is very probable.

4 W.H.I. Bleek's comments at the end of Orpen's paper.

The red line fringed with white dots may thus relate directly to the imagery of rain-making, in which rain falls where the rain animal has walked, and where its blood has flowed. The thin red line with white dots may be seen as a stylised image of this, with the red line representing the blood of the rain animal, and the white dots its footprints, or drops of rain.

It is likely that the combination of red line and white dots as the graphic representation of the inter-relationship of blood and water, the opposition of which is fundamental to the larger complex of beliefs. /Han≠kasso's identification of a red line as 'the rain's navel' (Lewis-Williams 1977:166-69) evokes a suite of fertility-related beliefs, including blood, birth, rain and so on. The blood/water concept is the common factor conjoining the various facets of fertility beliefs, namely gender/sexual symbolism, hunting scenes, female initiation, rain making and trance. The pervasiveness of sexual imagery (including naked figures, the spread legged posture, exaggeration of primary and secondary sexual characteristics, explicitly sexual scenes, and the eland itself) is owing to the conceptual intertwining of beliefs about fertility and sexuality, sexuality and hunting, femininity and rain and so on. The art may be seen as various expressions of a body of fertility beliefs which has been under-rated by rock art researchers.

4 Analysing the art 'as ideology'

4.1 Outline of a 'fertility hypothesis' for rock art interpretation

I have used the term 'fertility' in the broadest possible sense, to indicate those beliefs which are central to San concepts of prosperity and strategies for its attainment. 'Fertility', as it is used here, incorporates abundance of food and water, harmonious social relations and general increase. Fertility beliefs are concerned with continuity and social reproduction, defining prosperity and the route to its achievement. While encoding conditions for social reproduction, these beliefs also inscribe the social relations of production - a particular division of labour and set of

male/female responsibilities, values and connotations. Though not rigidly determinining, the beliefs define the parameters of masculine and feminine gender. In this sense, the fertility beliefs of the San can be seen as largely co-extensive with San ideology, defined as the cultural apparatus for social reproduction, and the perpetuation of relations of domination (cf. Ryan 1984:33). The relations of domination are, as I have suggested, between men and women; gender difference constitutes a stratification in San society which has been overlooked by those who have concentrated on the fact that the degree of domination is less than in more complex socio-economic contexts. Fertility beliefs hinge on the different positions of men and women in relation to social reproduction, and a corresponding gender taxonomy, where masculine and feminine are vehicles for the evaluations positive : negative. Beliefs about fertility may therefore be considered as inseparable from (gender) ideology and the social relations of production. I propose an approach to the art 'as ideology' in which gender 'as ideology' is central.

Fertility beliefs inscribe conditions for harmonious social relations, as well as for material abundance. Rain imagery is used as a metaphor for harmony and disharmony in the /Xam narratives, where a rain storm signifies a fight, and the disruptive powers of women derive from their status as the 'water's wife' (see Chapters 2 & 3). Harmony, as an ideal related to continuity and prosperity, is a concept with gender associations, and may be related to trance, which is a practice for achieving harmony and health. Lewis-Williams (1984b) has suggested that male/female complementarity and cooperation is enacted in trance. However, rather than seeing this as a *reflection* of the cooperation of daily labour, I suggest that ritual expresses the *ideal* of this cooperation, as an inversion of the structured tendency to gender conflict in everyday life. Ritual is seen here as a forum for resolution of everyday conflict, and trance and the art are considered in this light.

4.1.1 Gender and trance

Having, in his earlier work, focussed on social process as informing the art, Lewis-Williams has subsequently moved away from the gender implications raised by his work, in favour of an approach which stresses the neurophysiology of trance. In doing so the relationship of gender and trance, which has been described by Barnard (1980), Katz (1982) and Shostak (1981), has been subordinated. From these accounts of trance among contemporary San, it is clear that gender relations are somehow implicated. In this analysis I draw on Lewis' (1971) cross-cultural study, in which he relates gender, trance and possession states to the negotiation of male/female power relations.

Among contemporary !Kung about half of the men and a third of the women become trancers/curers (Katz 1982). The Nharo practice 'physical' and 'spiritual' medicine, the latter being almost exclusively a masculine preserve (Barnard 1980). The asymmetry can be attributed to social prohibitions and gender ideology: trance is said to be harmful to unborn children, and so it is mainly post-menopausal women of relatively advanced age who are able to become trancers (Katz 1982). This primarily social barrier to female participation in trance is an indication that power relations are involved; contemporary ethnographic accounts elaborate on this.

The !Kung group observed by Katz (1982) and Shostak (1981) performed three dances, which are differentiated principally according to gender participation. The Giraffe Dance (where the women clap and sing medicine songs while the trancers dance in a circle (Katz 1982)) is the dance most commonly cited in rock art studies. The two other dances show marked gender asymmetry. The Drum Dance (in which women tranced but did not cure) is performed by women only, with a single male drummer (Katz 1982). Lee (1984) noted that the Drum dance was beginning to surpass the men's (Tree) dance in popularity. Katz (1982) interprets the Drum dance as a women's strategy to counter the restrictions on female participation in other

dances, in a way reminiscent of Lewis (1971): Lewis suggests that women, within the culturally constructed gender boundaries, use the opportunities which ritual offers to further their own ends. In contrast to the Drum dance, the Trees Dance, a recent innovation, is strongly male dominant. Its invention was attributable to a particular man, and its form influenced by its inventor's experience in the compounds of the South African mines, and contact with the markedly male-dominant gender ideology of Bantu speakers (no doubt exacerbated by the single sex hostel system).[5] That gender relations are involved in the trance context is suggested by this distinction between the dances on gender lines. Further pointers to the gender component of trance include Lee's observation that trance (*kia*) experience may be symbolically connected with sexual arousal (1984:115). It is recorded that, when healing, male trancers absorb into their own bodies the evil that is involuntarily carried by the women (Wadley 1986); trance practice thus incorporates the positive/ health-giving/ masculine : negative/ sickness-inducing/ feminine contrasts that are found elsewhere. For the Nharo, trance 'death' involves an encounter with //Gauwa, who lurks near the fire behind people's backs. //Gauwa is both the being who induces illness, by shooting the disease arrows which are believed to cause ill-health, and the potential curer of sickness (Guenther 1986:224, 256-272).

That gender relations are relevant to trance, and that the gender component is not confined to contemporary San, is suggested by a narrative in the Bleek records, an account of a dance performed by the Grass Bushmen (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:126-37). The narrative describes the circumstances giving rise to the dance, and deals with conflicting male and female views and their resolution: The male lions were upset because the lion women praised the voice of the ostrich above their (the lions') voices. This jealousy provoked a lion to attack the ostrich, which ever since has borne the scar of the lion's claw. The problem was ritually resolved by

5 See Ramphele and Boonzaaier (1988).

encouraging the women to start a dance. The dance itself involved enactment of the parts of the lion and the ostrich. Though the narrative is difficult to follow, it appears that resolution was achieved by the killing of the ostrich. The tale concludes with an account of how eating (raw) parts of the ostrich would ensure that the men or boys of the group would sing sweetly, like the male ostrich, hence ensuring the admiration of the women (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:126-37). Other accounts of dances refer to their potential for 'indecency' (Bleek 1928a), suggesting the enactment of sexual themes.

On the basis of such accounts, I suggest that dances and trance focus, at least in part, on the negotiation of power between men and women, and the ritual resolution of conflict. Gender relations are postulated as one of the most important sources of conflict in San society, with this conflict being resolved in trance. Ideas which are structured by gender concepts are proposed as basic to the idiom and logic of trance symbolism. The connection of trance and power relations is described also by Guenther (1986:291), who notes of the Nharo that prominence in trance ritual is increasingly being seen as a male prerogative, and becomes 'a vehicle for the expression of incipient male power'. Furthermore, the concepts of sickness and health, with which trance deals, are strongly linked to concepts of femininity and masculinity respectively.

4.1.2 The art as expression of conflict resolution - more on 'androgyny'

Via the identification of trance as dealing with gender negotiations, it is possible to relate features of the art, particularly 'indeterminate'/ androgynous figures, but also trance scenes, to conflict resolution.

The manipulation of gender representations in the art is indicated by the occurrence of what have been called androgynous figures. The eland and the 'moon goddess' figures belong in this category. Lewis-Williams (1981a:72) has suggested that the eland is androgynous, which term I take to imply a blurring and subordination of

gender difference. I disagree, and believe that the eland is dualistic, being used variously to signify the values associated with masculine and feminine respectively. These figures consist of the conjunction of selected features of masculinity/ femininity, and thus highlight rather than subordinate gender difference. 'Androgynous' figures are seamed; the juncture between masculine /feminine, and the selectivity the figures display, permit ideological critique. Androgynous figures may be seen as only superficially challenging the separation of male and female.

The 'moon goddess' figures (particularly figure 8c) are 'androgynous' in that they combine masculine and feminine features. Figure 8c displays primarily feminine features, but carries masculine equipment, namely bows and arrows. The prohibition on women handling male equipment is widely recorded (for example Barnard 1980), and the conjunction of a feminine figure with male equipment may represent a ritual transgression of the everyday separation of masculine and feminine, rather than being a reflection of the norm. The symbol of masculinity is hunting, that of femininity, female biology (both elements of fertility/prosperity beliefs), gathering being downplayed. The conjunction of hunting equipment and 'sexualised' features in this painting may signify the interdependence of masculinity and femininity, but it does not challenge the gender definitions in any way. This painting may also be read in terms of the dual meaning of the hunting metaphor (hunting as a metaphor for courting/sex).

The similar figure (figure 9) has been described as 'clearly male' (Vinnicombe 1976:161), on the basis of one feature only, the presence of an 'infibulated' penis. Though the figure is certainly more masculinised, the posture and probable blood between the thighs seem to refer above all to femininity, and to say that the figure is 'clearly male' is to adopt an empiricist, literalist stance, without reference to San gender concepts/ideology. The traditional criterion for identifying gender on the basis of sexual characteristics is inappropriate, in that it cannot account for the

manipulation and inversion which are often found in ritual context; it is based on the objectivist assumption that the presence of male genitals must necessarily mean that the figure 'is' male. Lewis-Williams (1980) has presented a convincing argument for the art being ritual related; the implications of this need to be fully appreciated, and literalistic description eliminated.

Figure 9 may also be seen as an expression of gender ideology. Pager (1975) has suggested that the figure is a sorceror, but this by no means accounts for the specific features and associations of the figure. From the red shape between the thighs, thin red lines lead, connecting it to a vaal rhebok. If it is accepted that the red shape and the red lines refer to blood, then the painting may be seen in terms of fertility beliefs, of the relation between masculine hunter/courter and feminine prey. The masculinisation of the figure may relate to this figure as an expression of fertility principles which emphasise the masculine fertility associations (particularly hunting) while retaining the suggestion of masculine/feminine interdependence.

Figure 8c refers primarily to female biology/sexuality and rain as elements of fertility beliefs; figure 9 emphasises the masculine component of these beliefs, namely, shamanism and hunting. Both refer to the other sex as an indication of the linkage of masculine/feminine in these beliefs, but the boundaries are left intact. Androgynous figures may symbolise gender complementarity, but only superficially subordinate the gender difference which is negotiated thereby; the sex/gender system[6] remains unchallenged. Androgyny is a concept with an ideological dimension in that it purports to address gender difference, but does not pose any serious challenge to gender definitions, thus serving to perpetuate male dominance. Texts inevitably display contradictions, but only those contradictions which can be contained by the text (Moore 1986:90). The representation of 'androgynous' figures in a symbolic order in which the genders are strictly separated and ranked does not,

6 In feminist materialist theory the source of the contradiction which is under negotiation.

therefore, necessarily threaten or contradict the notion of gender difference; such figures may be seen primarily as statements about such difference, rather than statements of its subordination. These figures might be better described as dualistic.

The eland was discussed in previous chapters as a motif which derives its significance from its associations of fat, prosperity and abundance, and which is particularly prominent because, unlike other antelope, the male is fatter than the female. Thus the male eland combines all the features of feminine positivity in masculine guise. The androgyny of the eland may be seen in similar terms, as a combination of existing male and female characteristics which does not subvert gender difference, but restates it, being dependent on the cultural constructions of this difference.

As with the masculinised and feminised 'moon god/dess figures', male and female eland in the art may be seen as referring to these respective masculine and feminine components. Breakdown of the occurrence and context of male and female eland are not available, though Lewis-Williams (1981a) began such investigation, proposing that eland gender may be a fruitful line of enquiry. On the basis of my interpretation of eland symbolism, I predict that they are likely to occur in very different contexts. The rain making scene (Figure 13) may be discussed briefly in this light.

I have discussed the equation of feminine subordination and herbivorous prey: I propose that the depiction of a female eland in this painting is significant, in that it connotes feminine subordination and the weak female rain, equating femininity with prey, and masculinity with hunting and social power. A male eland would be inappropriate to the depiction of a successful rain making ceremony. The portrayal of a male eland here would signify the violent male rain, rather than the gentle, desirable female rain. Similarly, a female eland would be inappropriate in other contexts. For example, in Orpen's narrative (1874) of the creation of the eland, it is

the bull eland which repopulates the earth. I take this to be a statement of the equation of social power and futurity with masculinity. Because masculinity is attributed with the powers of regeneration and the future, a female eland would be inappropriate in this context, as it symbolises opposing values (such as weakness; 'before').

Further work, beyond the scope of this project, is needed to establish fully the validity of this suggestion (that in general male and female eland signify differently and are found in different contexts), but I am confident that the prediction is soundly based. Thus the 'androgynous' eland, while perhaps symbolising the interdependence of male and female, is a statement of duality and complementarity rather than unity *per se*.

A final comment on the eland is necessary - it has been seen as a rain animal (Lewis-Williams 1981a), but this has been pursued in relation to the connection of rain-making to trance, rather than gender. However much evidence points to its gender significance - its depiction in rain-making scenes, its femininity (and association with girls at menarche and hence rain); and its association with water in the narratives (it is born in one tale from a shoe placed in the water). Figure 25, a buck enclosed by a line, (apparently an eland), in all probability represents a rain animal. The eland is perhaps best viewed as a generalised symbol of fertility and abundance, and is thus associated with all the facets of fertility beliefs (hunting, courting, initiation, rain and trance), rather than, narrowly, to trance alone.

5 **Male dominance in the art**

In the light of the interpretations I have offered (of androgyny and the gendering of non-human beings, forms, substances, and so on) the assertion that the art is male dominated needs to be questioned. Maggs (1967) found that of 797 human figures, 227 (28.5%) were male, 70 (8.8%) female, and 500 (62.7%) indeterminate. The fact that so many human figures cannot be assigned to a gender category means that a

simple quantificative approach to male dominance in the art is of dubious value. Though quantification can certainly provide information, it cannot account for social meanings. Paintings that have been categorised male (for example Figure 9) are not susceptible to such literalist description; those identified by associated male equipment are not necessarily masculine; and implicit gendering (such as the fundamental femininity of the eland) has been ignored. Though it is 'true' to say that the art is dominated by a masculinist principle, this statement cannot be derived solely from quantification of male and female figures.

In a north eastern Cape painting (figure 18), probably a hunting/rain-making scene, a fat female figure (and another indeterminate small figure) is situated at the bottom left. This female figure may be seen as a token representation of the involvement of the feminine in the practices of hunting and rain-making. It is perhaps also an expression of the masculine : feminine contrast which is found repeatedly in narratives and paintings. The use of feminine figures in this way (a single figure as token) may be seen in relation to the numerical male dominance of the art, and the possibility of different 'weighting' of male and female figures. In other words, quantificative approaches cannot account for the way in which context may assign 'weight'.

6 Beyond form and 'content' - other modes of signification

Spatial organisation, temporality and perspective are related alternative ways by which meaning is conveyed. The art may be seen as consisting of several codes, of which form and overt content are but two. In the analysis of modern cultural products, semiotician Umberto Eco (1972) has analysed television as consisting of three main codes (iconic, linguistic and sound) and various sub-codes. I discuss space, time and perspective here as sub-codes employed in the elaboration of gender difference via cultural products.

6.1 **The foreshortened eland**

Lewis-Williams (1981a:47) has suggested that the foreshortened eland depicted in rear perspective (see Figures 12 a,b) draws on the conceptual relationship between the pubertal female, eland mating behaviour, eland fat, and the sexual significance of female buttocks. While I am completely convinced of the parallel between eland hindquarters and femininity, it is possible to read this foreshortening in other terms than the 'symbolic compulsion'suggested by Lewis-Williams (1981a:47). Rather, it may be read in terms of ideological practice, on the grounds that ultimately symbols do not compel, but people use symbols to compulsive ends. Intent is absent from Lewis-Williams' formulation. The perspective of the foreshortened eland is an artistic choice, used to establish a correspondence between the eland and femininity. The technique of foreshortening and the rear perspective are employed to convey not simply the equation of eland and femininity, which could be achieved via other perspectives and techniques[7], but a particular facet of the correspondence: the equation of female sexuality (indicated by buttocks) and eland mating behaviour.

Thus, perspective is employed to convey information, and may be seen as an alternative and/or supplementary mode of signification, beyond overt 'content'. In the case of the foreshortened eland, perspective is used to convey gender information; non-realistic perspectives can also be related to conveying gender information.

6.2 **Non-realistic perspectives**

Split representation is a particular technique, whereby features of an object not realistically visible from that perspective are depicted, 'folded out' from a central line (Layton 1981). A painting in similar style from Greefswald, Transvaal, (figure 14b) is not typical of San art and may not be the work of San artists, but serves to illustrate the association of perspective with gender representations. Buttocks and

7 Such as therianthropy - see discussion in Chapter 5.

breasts are drawn to the side; realistically, from the frontal view, the breasts would be less prominent, and the buttocks invisible. The departure from realistic depiction in this painting is apparently directly linked with a concern to emphasise sexual characteristics.

Three paintings, more clearly of San origin, which receive similar treatment, are discussed. The female therianthrope from Klein Pakhuis, south western Cape (figure 22a) is drawn in lateral view, but in such a way as to depict both buttocks - for emphasis. This figure may be seen as an expression of the female = herbivore metaphor, depicting the same range of elements as does the foreshortened eland, namely, female buttocks (sexuality/fertility) and herbivory, but in a different way. The portrayal of the sacrum of the moon goddess is another example of this manipulation of perspective, possibly to convey sexual significance, though clues to the meaning of the sacrum are not to be found in the ethnographies. Figure 14a, a Drakensberg painting (Vinnicombe 1976), utilises a similar technique, depicting a figure in frontal view, with penis, but with lateral exaggeration of the buttocks. No doubt more examples of this technique are recorded; its presence, and its connection with accentuated sexual features, may be seen in relation to, and perhaps consequent upon, the pervasive sexual symbolism of the art, and a preoccupation with themes of sexuality /fertility as fundamental to the San gender-centred ideology.

6.3 **Gender, perspective and space-time**

A focus on the perspective from which dances are painted introduces a consideration of spatialisation and temporality in the art. I have outlined the gendering of orientation and the association of male with the (strong) right-hand side, female with the weak, left-hand side. This may be related to the coincidence of space/time - to space and time as a continuum (cf. Giddens 1979).

The gendering of orientation also has a temporal dimension. Schapiro discusses the different weighting of left and right in visual art in terms of 'directedness' as arising from, amongst other things, 'the task of representing an order of time in an order of space' (1969:215). Cultural conventions, including right- or left-handedness (see Wieschhoff (1973) for a discussion of the cultural character of handedness), and whether the society conventionally reads from left to right, right to left or top to bottom, influence such weighting. Right-handedness seems to have been the San norm - the ethnographies refer to the right arm as the hunter's strong arm with which he shoots - and right is more positively valued in San thought. The gendering of left and right may correspond to the temporal sequence in which masculine : feminine are related. The order of time (female precedes male) is represented in the order of space by female = left, male = right.

It is likely that this classification is expressed in the art. In several paintings seated clapping women are depicted on the left, and dancing men on the right (Figures 15; 16a; Johnson et. al. 1959:pl.20; Yates et al. 1985, figure 7). Though it is not a rule that women are depicted left and men right, regardless of the scene type, where this marked contrast of male and female dancers occurs it is not commonly found in reverse; (though I found two such paintings with seated women, right, being approached by dancing men, left).[8] Similar spatialisation is seen in two paintings copied by Stow (Figures 6; 16 b,c), where female figures tend to the left and male dancers to the right. In the light of this, I suggest that the situation of men to right and women to left in these paintings is informed by the conventional association of masculine and feminine with right and left respectively. In these paintings there is no suggestion of a trance circle, as recorded ethnographically (for example, by Guenther 1986; Marshall 1969), and the scene is represented two-dimensionally,

8 A painting that does not conform to this left (feminine) /right (masculine) contrast was copied by Alexander (1837), and is reproduced in Lewis-Williams (1989); the other is from the south-western Cape (BTJ 19), in Yates, Golson and Hall (1985). My (belated) discovery of these paintings does not necessarily render my interpretation invalid: for example, Lorna Marshall noted that m/right: f/left spatialisation around hearths was 'correct' but nevertheless, not always conformed to.

with no attempt to depict depth. Thus I propose that the depiction of women left and men right may be in accordance with the conventions of the San gender ideology, and that the depth plane was irrelevant to the artist, whose emphasis falls principally on the horizontal axis. A similar analysis may be applied to other paintings, such as that reproduced on the frontispiece; also to a scene from Sevilla, where rows of male figures turn into trancers toward the right (figure 17). Thus from the sample examined in this project[9] the situation of feminine (left) and masculine (right) occurs in 6 of 8 paintings where distinct separation of male and female figures appears.

A convergence between the left/right (spatial) convention, and the temporal (prior/future) positioning of male and female, rests on the conceptualisation of space and time as a continuum. Central to Giddens' (1979) critique of social theory is the proposal that the relations of space and time should be considered.

One way of considering the two together is from the perspective of the reader of the painting, who is an important contributor in the construction of a painting's 'meaning'. The assumption on which I depend is that the art was read from left to right. Reading the above paintings from left to right means that the female figures are encountered first, and the meaning of the scene as a whole can only be constructed once the eye has travelled on and encountered the male figures. Reading is temporally situated, and meaning depends in part on temporal relationships. Thus, the meaning of the male figures is constructed in relation to what has just been read. The male and female figures present an obvious contrast in terms of activity, but other contrasts in terms of spatio-temporal situation are also present. Women are represented in the narratives as 'prior', associated with the past, whereas men are associated with futurity and the responsibility for continuity. This relative temporal positioning is found repeatedly, in the narratives (see table 2), in

9 Principally published paintings.

ritual (for example, women must grind the ochre before painting can proceed; women as initiators of the dance (Bleek and Lloyd 1911; Guenther 1986; Marshall 1969); and in the scheduling of the day (among contemporary San, women are the first to leave the camp in order to gather, whereas men go about their activities later in the day). The association of women and men with past and future respectively must be considered in relation to such temporal contrasts (cf. Moore 1986).

The same temporal patterning is produced if the painting is read from left to right. Thus, femininity (left) is principally associated with primitivity/reversionism, the past, passivity, death and so on, and masculinity (right) with regeneration, futurity, continuity and action. The positioning of seated women to left in the paintings may thus be an additional expression of this chain of related associations and metaphoric transformations.

The paintings in Hunter's Cave, south western Cape (illustrated in Johnson 1979), may be similarly analysed. The scene depicted is that of a hunter with raised kierie (right) pursuing a small (juvenile?) antelope (centre) and a larger antelope, perhaps the mother (left). The question raised by this scene is: Why do the figures proceed from right to left? Would the inversion[10] of this scene affect its meaning? At the level of overt content (hunting scene) the meaning would not be altered by inversion. However, if temporality and directionality are viewed as other signs or codes, inversion would effect an alteration. I suggest that the spatial organisation of the scene perhaps proceeds according to the San gendering of left and right. Hence, the (feminine) antelope is situated left, the hunter on the right. The spatial ordering introduces a temporal dimension, with the antelope representing past or present, and the hunter the future - the deed that is to be done, and the continuity of the group which is secured by the successful hunter.

10 Schapiro (1969) discusses inversion in painting.

Such an analysis is experimental, and dependent on the assumption that paintings were read from left to right. I present it as an argument for the examination of the art as signifying in various modes (such as perspective) complementary to the subject matter (as in the case of techniques of representation which effect an emphasis on the gender content). The art may be seen as having an iconic code (what images are depicted, and in what form), a space/time code (how images are organised in time-space), a colour code (depending on the symbolism of colours and substances) and so on. As such, perspective and spatial organisation are context-dependent - the left/right factor is not applicable as a general law of the art (and the existence of such immutable laws is dubious). Nevertheless, the gender conventions identified in the oral narratives may be seen as informing the art, that is, as general organising principles permeating various texts and acting as a common code.

7 Up/down

There is some evidence that the vertical axis is also gendered in San thought, as the association of men with tall (cf. high) and women with short, low things suggests. The conceptual spatial map of contemporary San identifies sky and earth, mediated by water, which wells up from the ground and falls from the sky (Biesele 1975, cited by Lewis-Williams 1977); the Gikwe believe that the bottom of our earth is the sky of another world, connected only 'through certain deep waterholes, for it was through a waterhole that the great god climbed from that world when he first came here' (Thomas 1959:137). A gendering of the vertical plane seems likely, on which femininity is associated with down, the water-holes/ underwater and the past, and masculinity with up and rain. This gender contrast (up/down) is found in Dornan's tale The Origin of Marriage (1925), where women are associated with the valleys, and men with the mountains. Similarly, reference is made to men leading the rain animal up to a *high* place where it will be 'cut'. The dead are seen in the water pit, and a woman beats the ground to communicate with the game spirits (Bleek and

Lloyd 1911). In a tale collected by Orpen (1874 - see Qwanciqutshaa and the girl, below) a girl sinks into the ground and comes up at another place.

These clues lead me to suggest that there is a gendering of the vertical plane. The Gikwe 'great god' appeared from a waterhole, which joins that world and this (Thomas 1959); the other (previous) world seems to be conceived of as existing at the bottom of the water hole, where the dead go. In these terms, 'underwater' relates to the spatialisation of the San cosmos, and to the death which is associated with women in cosmogonic and !Khwa beliefs. On such grounds, I relate underwater/death imagery to femininity rather than to trance alone. That 'underwater' is a metaphor for death is beyond doubt; but ethnographic accounts utilising the metaphor may be seen as having gender connotations rather than (or as well as) being trance expressions. A summary of the tale of Qwanciqutshaa and the girl (Orpen 1874) illustrates this:

Qwanciqutshaa saved a girl from an amorous baboon, and she fell in love with him. Her other suitors were jealous, and poisoned Qwanciqutshaa's rhebok meat with snake venom; nevertheless, Qwanciqutshaa states that it was because of a woman that he died. The motivation for his killing is the jealousy and aggression of her suitors, but the blame is assigned to the girl. This illustrates two previous points, namely that sexual jealousies are a significant cause of conflict, and that death is associated with women. Qwanciqutshaa became a snake and cast himself into the river (that is, he dies). Yet it is the girl who aids his return to life, phrased in the metaphor of regeneration and cyclicity of the snake sloughing its skin and being reborn. Snakes are symbols of both life and death (dangerous poisonous animals; animals of the rain). Qwanciqutshaa dies by snake poison and is revived with snake charms; the girl is the cause of both his death and his rebirth. This accords well with Bloch's (1982) analysis of the collapsing of birth and death into an antithesis enacted by women. This antithesis is more fundamental to the tale than the theme of trance,

and suggests that underwater death relates to the perceived properties of femininity rather than (or as well as) to trance.

Lewis-Williams has interpreted 'underwater' purely in terms of trance, with the similar sensations of 'Being submerged and being in trance...' forming the basis of the metaphor (Lewis-Williams 1980; 1989:49). An alternative view is that 'underwater' refers to the waterhole as the sphere of the creator deity, the rain, and the girls - the water's wives' - whom !Khwa takes there. In other words, the derivation of the 'underwater metaphor' is as likely to relate to the wider belief complex as to trance alone. Discussion of another basis of Lewis-Williams connection of 'underwater' and trance, the Ezeldjagspoort ichthyoids (Lewis-Williams 1989), extends this point.

7.1 **Ezeldjagspoort**

The 'underwater imagery' in the Ezeldjagspoort paintings (figure 27a), namely fish tailed figures, has prompted ongoing discussion of the scene. Another fish-tailed painted figure is recorded from the same area (figure 27b). A nineteenth century San informant told an enquirer that the painting depicted *watermeide*; Lewis-Williams (1977) rejects this as the response to a leading question based partly in western ideas about mermaids, and cites /Han≠kasso's alternative explanation as a warning against the imposition of western concepts. Though such transfer is indeed a problem, it is not entirely avoidable; however the Ezeldjagspoort paintings can accommodate both explanations.

This painting may be read in two equally valid ways, in terms of:

(1) the *practice* depicted (trance performance/rain ritual), or (2) the *subject matter* and *symbolic constituents* of the practice. /Han≠kasso's interpretation falls into the first category, but there is no reason to believe that his interpretation is complete.

The fish-tailed figures are irrelevant in a category (1) explanation, but are important in the other.

/Han≠kasso identified the central line/figure as the 'rain's navel' (which I have previously interpreted as a concept incorporating the relationship of blood (of prey/rain animal, menstrual blood) and water (rain, amniotic fluid/birth)). /Han≠kasso said that the Ezeldjagspoort scene showed rain medicine men addressing the rain 'so that the rain's navel may not kill them' (Lewis-Williams 1977:166). In !Khwa tales the rain animal, which is attracted to menarcheal girls by their smell and physical state, may manifest in the violent form of a rainstorm or whirlwind. I conclude that the Ezeldjagspoort rain's sorcerors are perhaps acting to appease !Khwa, who is liable to be attracted by the 'rain's navel'; if they fail, !Khwa whisks away and kills not only the girl, but also her relatives. The scene as a whole relates to other girls' initiation scenes, in which people dance around a prone central figure (for example, figure 28). Therefore I interpret the long central figure as perhaps a conflation of a female figure and a flow of blood; the circular head of the figure may refer to the full moon (cf. the 'moon goddess'). The 'blood motif' is not at all out of place in a scene which has been identified as a rain scene, but is rather to be expected, in view of the close relationship of blood and water. The ichthyoid figures, and their connotations of underwater, may thus be seen in relation to beliefs about gender, rain and the spatial conceptualisation of the San universe. If trance is depicted in this painting, it may be seen as informed by these wider connotations, rather than as the origin of the metaphor (this directionality is discussed further in Chapter 5).

The fish tails may thus relate to the subject matter, and to the fate of those who fail to persuade the rain's navel to 'be favourable towards them' (Lewis-Williams 1977:166) - that is, death and deposition underwater in the waterpit, visited upon people by an angry !Khwa. In this light, it is likely that the fish tails refer to a level of

meaning which /Han≠kasso did not discuss, choosing to focus on the ritual *means* (trance), rather than the subject of the ritual. In these terms, the identification of '*watermeide*' is in line with the association of women, !Khwa and underwater, and is also compatible with /Han≠kasso's explanation - whether or not it was prompted by a belief in mermaids.

Another Ezeldjagspoort fish-tailed figure relates similarly to the gender/rain theme (see figure 27c). This is an obese figure, identified by /Han≠kasso as a *waterschilpad*. The water tortoise is referred to elsewhere in the /Xam accounts as one of the rain's animals. Tortoises in general are associated with women (see Chapter 2), and are principally feminine characters in the narratives. One tortoise narrative (Bleek and Lloyd 1911) centres on a female tortoise who is secluded in her hut, and the danger she poses to men during her 'illness'. The obesity of the Ezeldjagspoort *waterschilpad* relates it to feminine form, and to the imagery of fertility, fat, pregnancy, birth and rain and so on.

On these grounds, I propose that the Ezeldjagspoort paintings may be interpreted as part of gender/rain imagery, and that the underwater (fish) motif probably refers primarily to the femininity/death connection. Trance 'death' cannot be ruled out as one of several potential meanings, but is differently implicated.

There are further reasons for suggesting that death imagery relates strongly to gender and rain, rather than necessarily deriving from trance. Death imagery in the art is associated with rain imagery. As both femininity and trance are closely linked with rain beliefs, and both refer to some sort of death, the association of death imagery with trance alone is questionable.

Vinnicombe (1976) includes various scenes which relate to death. For example, 'ethereal figures' (Vinnicombe 1976, figure 147) are associated with an animal bleeding from the nose (very similar to those in my figure 23, which I interpret as rain animals rather than trance symbols). Similarly, dying eland (Vinnicombe 1976,

figures 101;102), associated with human figures showing skeletal features (ribs?), may be seen as rain animals, and the skeletal characteristics of the humans as a mimesis of and identification with the animal (as in positive predation). In another painting (Vinnicombe 1976, figure 67), white figures, similar to those in her figure 147, are depicted in association with a massive snake, rain's animal, and symbol of both life and death.

Does the death imagery in these paintings relate to trance, as Lewis-Williams (1989) suggests, or to rain? Again, the distinction perhaps needs to be made between the *subject* of the practice depicted (rain-making) and the *means* of practice (trance). I propose again that the death imagery relates equally to the subject of the practice, namely to the death of the rain animal and death as represented by femininity, to which rain beliefs are closely allied. Discussion of another painting illustrates this. A Drakensberg scene (see figure 29) depicts ghostly figures, a strange eland, a fish and a therianthrope. The eland has rib-markings on its chest, and stripes on its legs. The latter feature relates it to the moon goddess, and to zebra-rain imagery (see Chapters 2 & 4); the peculiar posture may indicate the bound rain animal. The two features of the painting which I believe connect it most strongly to rain beliefs and !Khwa tales are the all-white 'ghost' figure and the fish. The 'ghost' figure is exaggeratedly steatopygeous, thus feminine by form, and may be seen as a graphic expression of the association of femininity and death. The fish may again relate to the underwater imagery associated with !Khwa, who takes girls who have broken seclusion into the waterpit to die.

In the belief set in general, the category of femininity is utilised to convey negative value, and is associated with death. It cannot be conclusively argued that 'underwater' and death relate to gender/rain beliefs, on the one hand, *or* trance, on the other; indeed, the intersubjectivity and intertextuality of San beliefs suggests that it is fruitless to delimit in this way. However, it is equally fruitless to attempt to limit

the meaning of the art and narratives to trance. Why should the pervasive association of femininity and death in the ethnographies *not* be applicable in the case of the Ezeldjagspoort paintings, when concepts of good and bad are elaborated in general through the gender categories? Does the social importance of trance override the conventions of the wider belief set? Is it not more likely that trance is constituted in terms of the same conventions? These questions are returned to in the following chapter. With reference to the art, death imagery can be related to themes which are broader than trance, and the trance origin of the underwater metaphor should be seen as one possible interpretation, rather than fact.

8 Conclusions

The interpretation I have presented leads me to the following principal conclusions:

(a) that though the narratives and art are not illustrative of each other, there are formal and structural relationships other than narrative/ graphic content. The concept of intertextuality is used to argue that, though the verbal and graphic texts are undeniably different, they inevitably draw on each other, and on other aspects of San culture which may be analysed as texts. It should be emphasised, though, that this view of art and narrative etcetera as intertextual still fails to solve the problem of contemporaneity of art and narrative. However, the systems of transposable signs, to which intertextuality refers, may be shown by further research to be more amenable to historical enquiry.

(b) that masculine : feminine contrasts *structure* the content, forms, spatial organisation and even colour choice (red:white) of the art to some extent; (c) that rain, gender and sexual symbolism have been unjustifiably neglected in rock art studies, resulting in a different assessment of what the art 'means'; (d) that the art is male dominated but in a far more complex way than has been assumed on the basis of quantificative analyses; (e) that the art relates directly to the San narratives, not in the simplistic sense of 'illustrations' of the tales, but in terms of their structural

organisation and social meanings; and (f) that the art may profitably be seen in terms of gender ideology and social hierarchy, since it is not only structured, in accordance with prevailing gender conventions, but potentially *structuring*.

My reading of the ethnographies and the rock art both point to a common and pervasive concern with questions of gender and fertility, rather than trance (though trance remains indisputably important). This difference is one of several (theory; method; interpretation of the content and 'meaning' of the art) which are dealt with in the next chapter, an examination and assessment of the ways in which this analysis departs from the dominant model in rock art studies today.

CHAPTER FIVE

ROCK ART - A CRITIQUE

The approach to the rock art, as outlined in the previous chapter, differs in several respects from other current approaches. In this chapter I present a critique of rock art studies, with particular reference to the theorisation of gender and ideology, but covering also other questions of interpretation, in relation to the alternative I have adopted. Though the chapter focusses on problems I perceive in the work of Lewis-Williams and his colleagues, this work, and that preceding it (Vinnicombe 1976), has effected a permanent revolution in the field of rock art studies, and opened up new research worlds. Nevertheless, it is argued that from within this perspective in general, there are different ways of looking at the data, particularly with regard to gender and the centrality accorded to trance.

1 Theorisation of gender and ideology

Though gender has been outside the interests of rock art researchers, various positions have been implicit. For example, the early hypothesis that sympathetic hunting magic was the motivation of the art[1] may be seen in terms of a 'man the hunter' model, characterised by selective emphasis on masculine activities. Such models relate to the objectivist/empiricist paradigm, which does not acknowledge the need to safeguard against unexamined transfer of gender ideology and/or ethnocentrism. Lewis-Williams' (1983:7) rejection of the hunting hypothesis as an explanation of rock paintings, in favour of a symbol-oriented approach, represents a rejection of this paradigm, and an (unintentional?) blow to the 'man the hunter' model. However, his insistence on proceeding from San concepts and symbolism does not extend to gender, and the possibility of marked difference between San and

1 Commented on by Lewis-Williams (1983).

western contemporary gender content/ideology is not taken into account. Any erosion of the androcentric model is thus superficial. The interpretation of hunting scenes as trance/rain-making, while a valuable rejection of the empiricist/ objectivist assumption, fails to account for the fact that rain-making is nevertheless represented in the idiom of hunting - a fact of some significance in terms of gender and power relations.

Omission, i.e. failure to consider gender, is a primary feature of androcentric research. Though Lewis-Williams (1984b) has paid some attention to male-female relations and the division of labour, his work is characterised in other areas by the related error of subsumption of the feminine under the masculine. His emphasis on medicine *men* (for example, Lewis-Williams 1981a:76-7; 1982:433) (despite acknowledgement that half of the men and a third of the women among a contemporary San group become trancers (Katz 1982; Lee 1968)) subsumes the feminine, which is only occasionally given separate consideration. No attention has been paid to the gender asymmetry of trance; the gender identity of trancers, and the significance thereof, has not been explored in relation to rock art and ritual. It appears that, of the various categories of shaman, women were excluded from being rain shamans. This is in line with the idiom of hunting and the concern with female negativity that characterises rain beliefs. Such divisions, asymmetry and the social mores governing differential gender participation in ritual are significant in relation to the importance of trance in general, and are worthy of attention.

Social divisions are central to any discussion of the ideological dimension of the art. However, in the trance hypothesis the extent to which gender is a social division is under-acknowledged, and this is seen in Lewis-Williams' understanding and use of 'ideology' and his idealist perspective on gender. Giddens states that to discuss 'ideology' is to discuss the operation of beliefs in terms of relations of domination (1979:192); Lewis-Williams uses the term more in the apolitical sense of 'world

view', with no reference to conflict, asymmetry or unequal social relations. Mazel (1987b) has criticised Lewis-Williams' confusion of 'kinship ideology' and the social relations of production; another criticism is the functionalist conception of ideology as something 'required' by a given social formation (1984b:231), where the constitutive facet of ideology in the social formation is underestimated. Though my primary concern here is the failure to consider the ideological dimension of gender, this can be related directly to such criticisms of the understanding of 'ideology' in rock art research. Lewis-Williams' treatment of gender and ideology is well illustrated in the following quotes, where he employs Godelier's (1977) 'symbolic labour concept' to 'show that much of the Southern San rock art was associated with a religious practice which articulated San ideology with the infrastructure...[and that] many [paintings] are, in fact, dealing with the social relations of the production process' (1982:431).

> 'The second function of the relations of production is to regulate and allocate the labour force. Traditional San labour essentially involves hunting and gathering, tasks that are largely performed by men and women respectively. This dichotomy is reflected in the trance dance, in which women clap and sing potent medicine songs while dancing men encircle them. In the same way that men and women perform their allotted tasks in the daily process of labour, so in the ritual context the distinctive contribution of each (singing and dancing) is essential for the symbolic work to be effective. Thus, the cooperative enterprise of symbolic work parallels the cooperation of daily labour.' (1984b:232)

There are several problems with this formulation. The description of the hunting/gathering distinction as 'traditional' is appropriate only in a narrow sense. Giddens (1979) emphasises the importance of tradition in the sedimentation of ideology, and there is little reason to doubt that the San division of labour is thus traditional and sedimented. However, in the context in which it is used above 'tradition' has a transcendent sense, in which the staticity rather than the fluidity of

the hunt/gather system is emphasised, and no time limit to the depth of the tradition is envisaged. Among contemporary San a certain fluidity is evident in the fact that women collect and snare small game, and some !Kung women have hunted (Katz 1982); among the G/wi the hunt/gather distinction broke down (albeit unilaterally) in the dry season, when bands separated into household units, game was scarce, and men became gatherers (Silberbauer 1981). Thus, even at one point in time the hunt/gather system is not as rigid as it appears. More importantly, the mutability of the division of labour over time is ignored; it is only speculation that the hunt/gather distinction extended into the very distant past. That gender content and the division of labour is not immanent is not considered. Within a view based on 'traditional' labour organisation, there is no room for a view of gender content and organisation as negotiated or negotiable, nor for the materialist contention that it is precisely such gender negotiation which may afford potential for change in non-class societies.

Lewis-Williams (1984b) idealistically postulates gender relations as fundamentally cooperative and harmonious (this view is reiterated by Wadley (1986:25)), and the two genders as 'different/ separate but equal' - the 'egalitarianist' view criticised in Chapter 1. Giddens, in terms of his theory of the duality of structures, argues that 'the very notion of contradiction...involves that of system integration...'(1979:144). Similarly, the notion of gender cooperation implies non-cooperation; feminist materialists argue that gender is a structural principle of society which is inherently contradictory and potentially conflictual (Delphy 1984). The failure to consider gender relations as potentially non-harmonious derives from an idealist view of gender relations as apolitical and beyond power relations. Lewis-Williams (1984b) uses the symbolic labour concept to argue that male-female cooperation in ritual and trance mirrors that of the daily process of labour, and fails to consider that idealist inversion, rather than mimesis, is a well documented feature of ritual. In other words, it is a mistake to conclude that ritual mirrors 'reality'. I have suggested

that such inversion and manipulation of 'reality' is characteristic of San ritual, as indicated by depictions of naked figures, androgynous beings, non-realist perspectives, and so on, and conclude that this reflectionist view of gender relations is inadequate. This relates to a major problem of the symbolic labour concept - it has been criticised, validly, for its failure to account for the differential valuation or devalorisation of female labour, and for its general non-consideration of gender factors (Bradby 1977). The same criticism may be made of Lewis-Williams' conception of religion as Asad has made of Geertz's, namely that it 'omits the crucial dimension of power...[and] ignores the varying social conditions for the production of knowledge...' (Asad 1983:237).

2 **Trance and context**

Trance has not been contextualised in relation to other aspects of the belief set, and the trance hypothesis begins with the particular (trance) and proceeds to general social context. The analysis I have presented inverts this: I proceed from the general (fertility beliefs/ ideology/ social organisation) to the particular (trance, sexuality, hunting and rain as specific components of fertility beliefs). The trance hypothesis, by privileging one aspect of fertility beliefs (trance) cannot integrate other themes of the art because by definition it excludes and/or subordinates them. Thus, Lewis-Williams is unable to incorporate the extensive and astute documentation of the significance of the eland (as sexual symbol, in initiation and marriage) which makes up a large part of *Believing and Seeing* (1981a). He is unable to explain the occurrence of the eland in 'disparate contexts' because the trance hypothesis hierarchises and sets up boundaries between the various aspects of San beliefs. In terms of a fertility/gender hypothesis, the eland as generalised fertility symbol is the common denominator in a range of 'prosperity practices' (initiation, marriage, hunting, rain-making, trance/curing). The eland dance among the Nharo 'At its most obvious level...suggests the celebration and restoration of life and fertility...This

symbolic interpretation is one that the Nharo have themselves articulated' (Guenther 1986:280).

Two operations have been proposed, firstly, the decentring of trance, effecting a de-hierarchisation of San practices - or, at least, a refusal to set up a single hierarchy in advance. Secondly, I suggest that the boundaries between the practices of the San are largely a construct of researchers, and should be 'deconstructed'. San practices and texts may be seen as 'intertextual' in that each constitutes a mosaic of others. The separation of gender/sexuality (especially from rain beliefs) is also androcentric, and an artefact of western research (in contemporary western society such questions are commonly considered private and domestic, not relevant to the public and the economic).

Such flaws have contributed to Lewis-Williams' failure to situate trance in relation to ideology and socio-cultural/economic context. This pertains to his view of trance as somehow co-extensive with ideology, and to the relationship he envisages between ideology and neurophysiology. Thus, the key to the difference of my approach is the question I ask, namely: *Under what conditions and in relation to what ideology does trance attain its (undoubted) importance?* I conclude that trance is important in relation to fertility beliefs and gender ideology. Lewis-Williams does not adequately consider trance in relation to other elements of the belief set, and this disjunction is exemplified in his proposal that trance dramatises 'kinship ideology'. This claim for the dramatisation of 'kinship ideology' rests on the role of the medicine 'man', on out-of-body travel, as affirming ties and economic obligations with distant kin, reminding them of 'the wider, invisible nexus of which they were part' (1984b:232). The obscurity of this connection with 'kinship ideology' is excused on the grounds that kin groups are not distinguished during the dance, and 'reports of trance experience are seldom couched in explicit kinship terms'(1984:232). I suggest that the problem arises because this aspect of kinship is **not** what is

dramatised - the social relations which are dramatised are more immediate, namely gender division. The separation of men and women (spatially; temporally; activity-wise) in dances and art, and in the symbolic order, is indicative of a far greater pre-occupation with the ever-present gender relations (the most significant social division, corresponding to the division of labour). Trance is far more likely to focus on the closer-to-home - gender rather than kinship ideology - than on relations with absent kin, who are removed from the immediate economic arena. Even if gender relations are not the only problem addressed by trance performance, the use of gendering in this context to signify good/bad or weak/strong nevertheless connects ultimately to gender ideology.

This is in contrast to Lewis-Williams' (1984b) claim that no social stratification is to be found in San society. According to Delphy's (1984) materialist theory, hierarchy precedes division, and the division of labour by gender is inseparable from social stratification. My perspective on San symbolism and gender taxonomy suggests that gender is indeed a stratified social division in which the feminine is, generally speaking, subordinate to the masculine.

The identification of gender relations and the division of labour as dramatised (overtly and implicitly) in trance, enshrined in the symbolic taxonomy and elaborated in all spheres, is the key to the contextualisation of trance in relation to socio-cultural and economic process.

3 Neurophysiology, ideology and explanation

Though the use of neurophysiology in rock art studies is an attempt to overcome the temporal discrepancy between the ethnographies and the rock art, it also represents a move away from social explanation. The neurophysiological (or neuropsychological) hypothesis only avoids biological determinism via the argument that the decision to depict hallucinatory images is a cultural choice, reflecting the importance of hallucinatory experience in social life. However, a number of

problems remain, and their implications need consideration. To begin, the model is neuro*physiological* rather than neuro*psychological* because psychology demands historical contextualisation, while physiology/neurophysiology does not.

The relationship between neurophysiology and ideology is distant. Neurophysiological process, i.e. the operation of the nervous system, is the basis of *ideation*. *Ideology*, as the cultural apparatus for social reproduction, can only relate to neurophysiology in the sense that without a functioning nervous system, ideation, cognition and hence ideology would be impossible. Ideology refers above all to cultural factors, and does not interface with neurophysiology in the sense that ideation does.

The relationship which Lewis-Williams sets up between neurophysiology and ideology is unsatisfactory. This correspondence arises in the attempt to project the trance hypothesis back in time. It is argued that the San ideology is 'compatible' with diverse environments, and that the similar 'ideological system' of the southern San and contemporary descendants (!Kung) indicates temporal depth and continuity to the ideology - 'specific representation of trance performance permit[s] us to project Later Stone Age ideology at least two millennia, and possibly as much as 26000 years into the past' (1984b:248). (Two initial problems are present here: firstly, the conceptualisation of ideology as a system, which it is not, because it is necessarily incomplete; secondly, the interchangeable use of 'ideology' and 'cognitive system', unsatisfactory in that it ignores the 'relations of domination' to which 'ideology' refers, and 'cognitive system' does not). The central problem, however, is that the documented continuity of San beliefs extends only from the later nineteenth century to the present, about a century. To generalise this continuity back several hundred years might be acceptable; to project it back 26 millennia is highly problematic.

In order to argue convincingly for such continuity, it would be necessary to demonstrate that the context of trance performance and the meanings attached to

trance had remained constant. I have proposed above that trance acquires its meaning in *particular* cultural and historical contexts, and not vice versa. Semantic shifts and changes in the social context in which trance is performed need to be accounted for. For example, in the time period for which Lewis-Williams claims continuity, two historical processes of major importance were under way - competition between hunter-gatherers and herders in the south western Cape (Parkington et al. 1986), and European colonisation (Marks 1972). These two events may have had major influence on the social context within which trance was performed. Lewis-Williams incorrectly equates the continuity of trance performance and ideology, as parallel to neurophysiological structure and capacity. In other words, he argues that the performance of trance for 2 - 26 millennia indicates the continuity of an ideology which he sees as ultimately inseparable from the neurophysiology of trance. This conjunction of trance and ideology is founded on the belief that the hallucinatory experiences of trance are primarily neurologically rather than culturally controlled; neurophysiological state (such as trance) seems to be associated with ideology in a **causal** relationship. Hence, it seems that as long as neurophysiological process remains unchanged, there is no way for the associated ideology to change.

Thus, Lewis-Williams attributes a staticity to trance performance, and by logical extension, to the cultural context which informs it. Though he states that he does not wish to suggest a frozen past, this is contradicted by his linkage of trance performance with neurophysiological operation, and the failure to see trance (as a practice, as opposed to a neurophysiological state) as subject to change. Lewis-Williams stresses that he refers to continuity of form, not content, of kinship ideology; but can it be assumed that only formal change indicates ideological change? On the contrary, it can be argued that ideological change may take place within existing forms.

The work of Bourdieu (1977) and Moore (1986) is based on the principle that meaning is context dependent; the example given in Chapter 3, of the woman using a bored stone to communicate with the game spirits, illustrates the use of context to alter meaning, and the manipulation of meaning and gender ideology within existing forms. Because there is limited means of appeal beyond the existing symbolic order, change takes place within it. This is one way in which semantic shifts may occur; they are also historically induced. Semantic shifts go hand in hand with changes in the social formation; Belsey (1980:43) cites shifts in the meaning of the word 'nice', which has meant 'lazy', 'foolish' and 'lascivious', acquiring its present meaning of 'agreeable' in the late eighteenth century; Belsey relates this to historical circumstances. Changes in gender content and gender ideology, that is, semantic shifts in the 'meaning' of 'femininity', have taken place since Victorian times, or since the 1960s; yet they have occurred without radical alteration of the *form* of gender organisation. Similarly, ideological change may have occurred *within* the formal organisation of male=hunter/female=gatherer. The effects of conflict (colonialist incursions, for example) on gender relations and hence gender ideology have been extensively documented by feminist researchers (for example, Etienne and Leacock 1980; Leacock 1978). Interaction with Khoi and European colonists may well have affected gender organisation/content and ideology, as these processes affected economic and demographic patterns, while the hunt/gather distinction remained. Thus, though I have postulated that trance deals with gender, I cannot project this argument back into the more distant past, when very different circumstances might have prevailed. Interpretations of the art which draw on the ethnographies are temporally bound to the period approximately contemporaneous with them. This, of course, introduces a problem of this project, namely that as the art is undated, I cannot be sure that the paintings which I discuss in terms of my hypothesis were not executed at a time beyond the range of the ethnographies.

However, as the paintings used are those which are well preserved, a good case can be made for their relative recency.

The identification of 'trance metaphors' on the art mobilier, as evidence for the continuity of trance performance (whatever its meaning), is also problematic. Firstly, these trance 'metaphors', as has been mentioned, may not only be metaphors for trance; secondly, they lack the context and associations which are the best indicators of meaning. The buck with the lowered head, and the spread-legged and other feminine figures, on the Robberg and Coldstream stones respectively (figure 20 a,c) might equally be interpreted in terms of rain/gender beliefs without reference to trance; similarly the feline therianthrope from Apollo XI (figure 20b) is a metaphoric conflation which may stand alone (see below). Even if the art mobilier motifs represent trance, their meaning two millennia ago might have been very different, as the persistence of the practice does not indicate ideological continuity.

4 **Social versus neurophysiological explanation**

Thompson (1982:33) argues that the use of biological or physiological data 'to explain some aspects of human social behaviour (whether a lot or just a little) as the direct result of biophysical causes' is inadequate as it is 'biophysical reductionism'; similarly, to ignore that an interface with biology exists, and to insist on the sole primacy of social explanation, is sociological reductionism. Thompson, and other contributors to the volume[2] (Rose 1982), nevertheless consider social factors to be more important, as 'biological influences are inevitably filtered by the socialisation process and a person's perspective of herself in her social world' (Thompson 1982:33). One of the concerns of this section is to consider whether the trance hypothesis is an adequate account of this filtration.

2 Against Biological Determinism: The Dialectics of Biology Group - a collection of essays on biological determinism and its ethical and political implications

Lewis-Williams (1984b), Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1988), and Maggs and Sealy (1983), following the work of Siegel (1977), have identified various motifs as hallucinatory images/forms and 'phosphenes' (Figure 19). Therianthropes, eland and elephants in boxes are examples of the former, whereas the latter refers to visual phenomena which are entirely neurophysiologically controlled. Lewis-Williams concedes that an element of cultural control informs the first category - in which case their meaning should be studied primarily in relation to social practices other than trance, rather than neurophysiology.

The second category, phosphenes, includes 'non-representational' motifs, such as geometric patterns, wavy or zig-zag lines, dots and enigmatic 'boat shapes', described as entoptic phenomena - visual hallucinations produced according to human neurophysiological constitution or structure, as a result of intra-ocular pressure (Maggs and Sealy 1983; Siegel 1977).

A major problem here is the coincidence of this category of non-culturally controlled hallucinatory images with those motifs which have not been deemed accessible to western researchers.[3] Recognisable motifs are seen as 'representational' and culturally controlled; those that are opaque are viewed by default as neurologically controlled. To avoid freely labelling 'non-representational' motifs as entoptic or phosphenic, criteria for distinguishing between hallucinatory images and inaccessible abstracts are needed. But this seems impossible - how does one distinguish between an abstract design (where design implies intent) and a neurologically controlled one? It is this impossibility of identifying a neurologically controlled image that makes it problematic; and in a sense *all* images are made possible by neurophysiological functioning. The neurophysiological model can perhaps identify some of the *conditions of existence* of the art (if it is to be believed that the capacity for depicting images can only derive from an altered state of consciousness), but

3 Though Lewis-Williams & Dowson (1988) claim that because their model does *not* explain all Palaeolithic geometrics, the criticism that almost any abstract can be seen as entoptic is rendered null and void.

these conditions are separate from their meaning. Even if it is accepted that San, Coso and Palaeolithic art forms are derived from the imagery of altered states (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1988), the meaning of art is social and not neurological; the neurophysiological model cannot expound on this social meaning (since there is no continuity between neurophysiology and social meaning) nor on the social conditions within which this meaning is constructed. Where meaning can be attributed to the art in terms of social rather than neurological conditions, this meaning should be seen as the preferred goal of rock art studies. As Layton (1988) has suggested, altered states of perception do not inevitably produce rock art. Hence, the meaning of the art cannot reside in universal images experienced in altered states. From this perspective, the attribution of the art to neurophysiology seems to be a dead end. *People*, in determinate social and historical contexts, produce the art, but this is reduced in Lewis-Williams and Dowson's model (1988) to a relationship between the structures of the brain and art forms, which is not subject to history. Explanation in terms of the neurophysiological determination of art forms denies the San the capacity for deliberate abstract visualisation, leaving them only the option of construing their visions in particular cultural terms, compelled to 'make sense' of that which they cannot explain.

The same tendency is to be found in interpretation of therianthropes (Lewis-Williams 1980; 1984b; Lewis-Williams and Loubser 1986; Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1988). It is argued that they are trance-induced conflations of culturally controlled motifs, but that they may be metaphors (statements of similarity between, for example, human and animal) that need not originate in trance, but may stand independently, has not been considered. I have suggested that the equation of woman and herbivore relates variously to association with plant foods, fat, docility, prey, and so on, that is, on the basis of consciously and intentionally constructed parallels. In this light, I criticised the suggestion that the depiction of the

foreshortened rear-view eland was a 'symbolic compulsion', in favour of seeing it as a strategy for conveying a particular parallel between femininity and the eland, and a particular representation of femininity. I discussed the Klein Pakhuis female therianthrope (figure 22a) as another way of signifying the same thing. This therianthrope exhibits habitual and formal parallels between women and buck which relate to fertility beliefs in general, and to the ideological dimension of the symbolic taxonomy in particular. The metaphor is in no way necessarily dependent on the existence of altered states or perceptual disturbance, drawing instead on material practices and realities (regarding meat, sex, rain). Male therianthropes may be seen as a conflation based on the perception of similar properties of fertility/continuity possessed by both buck and curer/rain-maker. I suggest that therianthropic conflations are deliberate cultural constructions, and that trance content draws on the meanings associated with everyday material practices, rather than vice versa. In other words, the cognitive set, based in everyday materiality, structures hallucinatory form and content. Lewis-Williams inverts this to claim, in effect, that hallucinatory experience structures cultural content.

Therianthropes, the thin red line fringed with white dots, elephants enclosed by lines and 'boat shapes' are illustrated by Lewis-Williams (1984b) as examples of 'hallucinatory forms' (Figure 19). The first two have already been discussed in non-neurophysiological terms; cultural, rather than neurophysiological explanation is possible also for the remaining two.

5 **'Elephants in boxes'**

Maggs and Sealy (1983) have interpreted the occurrence of elephants enclosed by lines (see figures 19; 23) as 'hallucinatory forms'. I propose an alternative explanation, rooted in San cultural concepts, without recourse to neurophysiological explanation. Examination of a range of features of the elephants in boxes leads me to suggest that they relate most closely to rain, gender and fertility beliefs. The

connection with rain has been suggested by Woodhouse (1985); in terms of the fertility hypothesis I have outlined, I am able to support and extend his argument.

Basic to my discussion is the proposal that the elephant is a feminine symbol. In terms of the formal gender conventions (fat/round/broad = feminine), the elephant is feminine, fat/roundness being its most prominent feature. The femininity of the elephant in the art has been proposed by Van Rijssen (1980), although the basis of his analogy (the 'matriarchal' character of elephant social organisation) is unsupported by the ethnographies. The fact that elephants are very commonly depicted with young is a further pointer to its femininity. Maggs and Sealy (1983) suggest that in the south western Cape, where elephant were a more prominent species, the elephant is a symbol parallel to the eland. I agree, but believe that the substitution is possible primarily according to the formal and substantial parallels of roundness and fat, and connotations of fertility. Like the eland, the elephant may be seen as a fertility symbol. Also like the eland, it has connections with rain - Woodhouse (1985) interprets an elephant from Aliwal North, decorated with dots, as a rain animal, and Pager (1975:47) makes the same connection with regard to another elephant painting. The Gikwe tale of Pishiboro and his elephant wife (see Chapter 2) contains the elements of fertility/rain imagery - pregnancy, the flowing of uterine fluid (c f. *!now* beliefs, the Khoi annual killing) - as well as McCall's (1970) equivalence of women and meat.

Features of the elephants in boxes relate them to rain imagery. The Keurkoekkloof elephant (Trew 1984; see figure 19) is associated with a 'sinuous line', following the contours of the body, enclosing the hindquarters but not the head, and connecting with the posterior part of the belly. I suggest that the line joins the body at the navel, and is another representation of the 'rain's navel'. The line 'the Mantis entered her (elephant's) navel' (Bleek 1956:394) strengthens this connection. The association of the line with the hindquarters may relate to the similar emphasis on this part of the

anatomy given to the foreshortened rear-view eland and female buttocks - that is, as a sexual referent.

The Monte Cristo elephants in boxes (figure 23; see also Maggs and Sealy (1983)) can be similarly viewed. Formally they relate to other rain animals (figures 24;25). They are associated with smaller elephants, perhaps juveniles. Several are depicted with emphasised bellies, suggestive of fat, fertility and pregnancy. Lines, this time zig-zag, issue from the posterior and centre of the belly. That these lines represent liquid, rather than hallucinatory patterning, is suggested by a formal analogy described in Chapter 2: the rain herbivore is associated with still ponds and waterpits, whereas the long slender undulating (c.f. zig-zag) snake is associated with flowing rivers. The formal characteristics of these animals seem to be involved in these associations, as in the statement that 'meanwhile the rain turns altogether into a pond, because its body goes into it' (Bleek 1933:300). In other words, the equation of snake and river has connotations of form, liquidity and movement, which are equally applicable to zig-zag lines in the art. Woodhouse (1985) interprets zig-zag lines as rain, and I see no reason to reject this explanation, especially with regard to the Bethlehem painting (figure 26), which very likely depicts rain animals - fat buck which do not correspond to known species. The 'boxed' eland (figure 25) may be interpreted in terms of rain-making beliefs, and the capture of the rain animal by the rainmaker: a man appears to be leading the eland by the nose, as is recorded in the /Xam accounts of rain-making. The elephants in boxes, which are similarly enclosed, may equally be seen as rain animals. Since rain beliefs are central to gender representations, the elephants in boxes may be seen as relating to gender ideology rather than to trance. Though Lewis-Williams (1980) believes that the capture of the rain animal takes place in trance, and that trance is thus the origin of the metaphor, there is little evidence that rain-making ritual is only in the heads of the trancers. Pager (1983) records the practice of ritual hunting of large herbivores by the Kxoe'

San, and it is possible that rain-making is a symbolic elaboration of the supreme importance of hunting (and men) in San society, rather than a construct of an altered state of consciousness.

Woodhouse (1985) also suggests that the twin semi-circular lines enclosing one group of Monte Cristo elephants might be a rainbow, and cites examples of other similar depictions. In the ethnographies, the female rain animal is associated with the rainbow (which is also where Kaggen is supposed to live); the occurrence of a rainbow was related to the spray raised by the thrashings of the hunted rain animal in its attempts to escape its captors. That rainbows are depicted is both possible and probable, in the light of the prominence of the rain theme in the art.

I suggest that detailed examination of a range of features relates the elephants in boxes to rain, femininity and fertility, rather than directly to trance. Hence, I see no reason to reject Woodhouse's identification of the 'boat shapes' as clouds, from which, in the Bethlehem and Calvinia paintings (Woodhouse 1985, figures 1,2), rain is falling. The striping of the Bethlehem, Salmanskraal and Brakfontein 'phosphenes' may relate to the 'rain bringing clouds = zebra' metaphor, and the more general association of zebra stripes and rain; the wavy and zig-zag lines may be seen as representing the liquid component of the cloud, and the denticulate margins of the Brakfontein boat shapes are consonant with the outline of clouds. These motifs are stylised, perhaps even influenced by neurophysiological distortion, but not necessarily true abstracts, as Maggs and Sealy (1983) suggest. There is little reason to suppose, in the presence of associated rain imagery, that their meaning is directly related to neurophysiology.

Johnson (1979) notes that there seems to be a tendency for elephants in the south western Cape to face right (as do the Monte Cristo elephants), and that this might

have been an artistic convention. If so, then this might be related to the femininity of the elephant, on the one hand, and to spatio-temporal considerations on the other.[4]

It is unfortunate that Woodhouse's response to Maggs and Sealy's article has not attracted more of the attention it deserves. I surmise that this relates mainly to two things: the subordination of the rain theme in the art in favour of trance explanation, and objections to such interpretations on the grounds that the art is viewed as 'representational' (see Chapter 4 for the fallaciousness of this argument). In the case of the elephants in boxes, the failure to acknowledge the parallels with rain imagery relates to theoreticism, and the way a theory such as the trance hypothesis may exclude, hierarchise and set up answers in advance.

I conclude that trance imagery is entirely culturally controlled, drawing on conventional, pre-existing metaphors, derived from everyday reality and materiality, and known to the group as a whole, rather than the esoteric visions of trance. Trance is not an origin, but a means to an end, that of fertility, prosperity and continuity, and its forms and content derive from cultural definitions. It is principally the trance hypothesis' inversion of directionality (trance experience structuring cultural forms, rather than cultural forms structuring trance experience) which brings it to the brink of bio-physical reductionism. It is an inadequate account of the social filtration[5] of biological influences, which is simultaneously ahistorical.

6 Neurophysiology, agency and intent

A further problem is the way in which neurophysiological explanation marginalises agency in a way which is ethnocentric. Moore (1988:8) discusses the inability of the anthropological critique of ethnocentrism to contain other issues, since 'they are not engaged by the terms of this internal critique. Anthropology talks about the 'ethnocentric' assumptions of the discipline rather than the 'racist' assumptions'. No

4 Cf. the interpretation in Chapter 4.

5 Consens (1988), commenting on Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1988), similarly concludes that neurophysiological/psychological explanation is not social explanation.

student of western art would accept neurophysiology as 'explanation', and to apply it to non-western cultures is a double standard. In this sense, neurophysiological explanation is almost certainly ethnocentric, and, carried any further, might even amount to racism. Distortion of perspective in the work of, for example, Van Gogh, may indeed relate to mental/neurological disturbance, but it is not determined by it. Roman Jakobson's discussion of cubist painting, the novels of Uspenkij and the relation of symbolic production and neurological (aphasic) language disorder illustrates this point (Jakobson 1956, in Lodge 1988).

Jakobson identified metaphor and metonymy as 'models for two fundamental ways of organising discourse that can be traced in every kind of cultural production' (Jakobson 1956, in Lodge 1988:31). Aphasia may affect the ability to use either metaphor or metonymy; the Russian novelist G. I. Uspenkij suffered in later life from 'mental illness involving a speech disorder', specifically a similarity disorder, affecting use of metaphor. This did not mean that the onset of his illness determined his use of metonymy; on the contrary he had always used it. Jakobson interprets this in terms of predisposition - 'the metonymical style in Uspenkij is obviously prompted by the prevailing literary canon of his time...; but the personal stamp of Gleb Ivanovic [Uspenkij] made his pen particularly suitable for this artistic trend in its extreme manifestations and finally left its mark upon the verbal aspect of his illness' (Jakobson 1956, in Lodge 1988:60; my parentheses).

Thus Jakobson integrates the neurophysiological and the cultural without biological determinism. He discusses the 'manifestly metonymical orientation of cubism' as an intentional innovation, without suggesting that Picasso was neurologically unsound. Using the theoretical orientation of the trance hypothesis (that neurophysiological factors determine an aspect of artistic content or organisation) one might have to conclude that Picasso's cubism was the result of perceptual distortion arising from neurological disorder. Though the intentionality attributed to Picasso perhaps

overprivileges the 'author', consciousness, agency and choice are not marginalised. To avoid determinism, neurological structure and neurophysiological process should be seen as limits to perception and ideation, or as a structured *tendency*; though neurophysiological alteration may predispose the artist toward other choices, choice and intent do not disappear. Even the schizophrenic artist is not merely the instrument of physical functioning, and artistic products reflect this agency and the socio-cultural framework within which they are produced, over and above neurophysiological considerations. Thus, I believe that neurophysiological data should be used with extreme caution, and preferably hardly at all. If it could be established, for example, that trance paintings depend on either metaphor or metonymy, or can be related to other documented perceptual/aphasic disorders, then neurophysiological approaches may have some value, but the way in which such approaches have been used in rock art interpretation tends strongly in the direction of biological determinism, and a dismissal of agency and intent. Even if many art forms are construals of entoptic phenomena, the question which rock art researchers need to address is why they were construed in the way that they are. To pursue this question is to situate meaning in relation to social, not neurophysiological conditions. Neurophysiology is not a bridge to the past, since it cannot generate a historical explanation.

7 Polysemy

A large part of this chapter has been devoted to criticism of aspects of the trance hypothesis. To qualify this position, I wish to emphasise that the fertility/prosperity hypothesis does not aim at discreditation of the trance hypothesis, but at its recontextualisation. Though Lewis-Williams adheres in theory to the principle of polysemy, or multiple meanings of features of the art (and follows in part Victor Turner's polysemantic approach (Lewis-Williams 1981a)), in practice this is contradicted by the insistence that various motifs 'mean' trance, and nothing else.

The fertility/prosperity hypothesis that I have suggested has the potential for similar narrowness, that is, the insistence that a scene/motif refers to gender/sexuality and nothing else. Though I consider gender, as a structural feature, as possibly a more fundamental concern of the art than trance, I aim not to exclude other interpretations, on the basis of my view of the art as intrinsically polysemantic (both then and now, in current interpretation), and intertextual. 'Intertextuality' refers to the use of the term by Bakhtin and Kristeva (Kristeva 1986:37) to argue that every text is a mosaic of others; Eco (1986) uses the concept to refer to 'stereotyped situations derived from preceding textual tradition', and discusses 'intertextual archetypes' as serving 'to indicate a pre-established and frequently reappearing narrative situation cited or in some way recycled by innumerable other texts' (Lodge 1988:448). I suggest that the art is such a mosaic, composed of elements of ritual practice (rain-making; initiation; trance), everyday operations (hunting/gathering; gender relations), narrative, and so on, in a network of inter-relationships. It is via this network that a motif or scene may refer to multiple aspects of San ideology, not only to trance or gender or the division of labour, but potentially to all of these simultaneously. Therefore, I view the art as fundamentally polysemic; to privilege trance explanation is to view trance as detached from the network within which it is situated. (The practical implications of polysemy are discussed in Chapter 6).

Many features of the art which have been interpreted as trance metaphors may be seen as equally, and in some cases perhaps primarily, related to gender-ideology. For example, Lewis-Williams has interpreted exaggeratedly elongated figures as representing the perceptual distortions accompanying the altered state of trance. An alternative view, in terms of gender, is that elongation on the vertical plane is an index of masculinity (tall/slender versus round/broad). Both these interpretations are compatible, especially in the light of my interpretation of trance performance as a practice which expresses male dominance and social power/responsibility. On the

other hand I propose that cultural perceptions of gender are primary in the 'elephants in boxes' motif, and that hallucinatory form in this, and other instances, is a less powerful explanation. That trance is a feature of the art, that it is closely associated with rain-making and ritual, and that it is a powerful explanation, is not denied, but the argument that the forms or content of rain-making are trance-derived, rather than based in the material practices and conditions of existence of the San, is rejected.

8 **A 'fertility hypothesis'- assessment**

A fertility/prosperity model allows for hierarchies of meaning, (identification of primary denotation and secondary connotations), but does not set up the hierarchy in advance, by postulating one element as always primary, as the trance hypothesis tends to do. Though emphasising gender, this hypothesis does not privilege it as the trance hypothesis privileges trance (that is, in a determinist manner). Rather, a fertility hypothesis proposes a lateral range of inter-related beliefs about social reproduction, where gendering is used to convey positivity or negativity - even in the symbolism of trance performance itself. The emphasis on gender is justified in terms of the centrality of the social division by gender and the corresponding division of labour.

The stress on multiplicitous rather than monolithic meanings of the art is one of the advantages of the model I have proposed. The fertility hypothesis is an outline of the relationships between San ideology, ecology, ritual and production. Other advantages include incorporation of a wide range of motifs (including trance); a more strictly materialist interpretation; a non-static and politicised theorisation of gender; and elucidation of the relationships between the various themes of the art, and between the art and other 'cultural texts', such as narrative and space.

CHAPTER SIX

THEORY/PRACTICE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This project has approached the problem of masculinist models, or androcentrism, in two ways - as a 'property' of archaeological materials and as a characteristic of contemporary research. The former is the focus of the project, but cannot be separated from the latter; similarly, the gender ideology in archaeological theory and interpretation cannot be separated from the practical dimension and consequences of such ideology.

1 Androcentrism and San ideology

Beginning with a structural analysis of the masculine/feminine opposition in the oral narratives, a focus on language as encoding social hierarchy, and examination of the ideological dimension of the metaphors in the symbolic taxonomy, I have identified an androcentric idiom common to narrative, the structure of language and rock art. It is the androcentrism of the central metaphors on which I base my conclusion that a significant, pervasive and entrenched male dominance was characteristic of San society. Moore (1988:2) criticises researchers who interpret 'difference and asymmetry as inequality and hierarchy'; but in the case of the San the accounts given by the San informants themselves associate femininity with negativity and masculinity with positivity. Thus, there can be little question of the hierarchy involved. Silberbauer (1981) asked G/wi informants whether the negative associations of femininity in the gender taxonomy referred to women in the 'real world', and this was denied. While Godelier's injunction that informants are not necessarily 'saying something else', and that such statements should be taken at face value, is important (Bloch 1983), it is doubtful whether the G/wi comments on the

relation of gender classification and the 'real' character of women can be taken unproblematically. Firstly, Silberbauer consulted the men, not the women, as to whether the relationship existed. Secondly, according to Bourdieu (1979), classifications impose political systems in taxonomic guise in 'misrecognisable form'. Thirdly, given the constitutive power of language, it is problematic to assume that linguistic forms and the conceptual categories 'masculine' and 'feminine' have no bearing on real conditions. Hence, I suggest that gender stratification is and was a real condition and effect in San societies.

Metaphor, far from being confined to literature, is a feature of the organisation of cultural products in a wide sense (Jakobson 1956, in Lodge 1988), and is implicated in the assignation of value. In San texts, hunting idiom is central to the 'description of the world' on which metaphor draws, and according to which the symbolic order is constructed. Though the symbolic order is shared by both men and women, 'What they do not share is the same position vis a vis this order' (Moore 1986:163). This differential positioning is achieved in part by the dominant hunting metaphor, associating women with prey, and men with the hunters who, by providing highly valued meat, are seen as the custodians of the future. In this sense, the hunting metaphor is strategic, in that it produces, rationalises and naturalises a particular representation of gender relations, and particular valuations of masculine and feminine gender. As Bourdieu argues, 'notions about men and women, light and dark, up and down, inside and outside are contrasts which derive from objective conditions - that is, divisions by age, sex or position in the relations of production' (Moore 1986:77). The symbolic system of the San associates women (whose contribution is plant foods) with qualities, properties and values associated with plant eating animals and prey - docility, passivity and subordination, meat, blood, the blood (rain) of the rain animal, and so on. Men are associated with the hunting role, provision, aggression (potentially negative) and active social powers. The

structuralist preoccupation with the nature : culture opposition is rejected, and Hewitt's (1986) association of these with masculine and feminine respectively is better interpreted in terms of the gendering of time, the association of women with the past and with discontinuity (birth and death), and of men with futurity and the responsibility for continuity. The G/wi metaphoric association of women with unworked and men with worked materials may be seen in terms of this gendering of time, which is also implicit in other metaphors (hunting; rainmaking; moon imagery etc) where the sequence involves a prior femininity and a future enabled by masculine action and intervention. The 'man the hunter' model in academic research 'is only one culture's articulation of a very general pattern' found with monotonous regularity cross-culturally (Rosaldo and Atkinson 1975:43; Keohane et al. 1982).

The symbolic taxonomy implies the minimal involvement of children in the social relations of production (social division by age), in that the symbolism and metaphors relate primarily to mature sexuality and adulthood. Macherey's concept of the 'not said' - that of which the text 'cannot directly speak', and which reveals 'a given text's ideological framework' (Clingman 1986:14) has been utilised. Sub-adults are not 'spoken about' in the San symbolic order (not to be confused with their occurrence in the narratives); an even more notable omission, determined by the dominance of the hunting model, is that of the female economic contribution of plant foods. The female contribution is defined in principally biological and reproductive terms.

The 'model of the world' that San metaphors represent is a model of a masculine world, and this relates to economy in that the power to impose the definition of the world, or symbolic power, is a major dimension of material power (Bourdieu 1977; Moore 1986). The encoding of this masculinist taxonomy in language, art, narrative, ritual, in spatial organisation and artefactual form, serves to naturalise the representation, as does the biological determinism (for example, the causal chain

between female biology and rain) which it contains. 'It is through language and other systems of signification that ideas about masculinity and femininity are constructed (Moore 1986:166); the structures of language *are* the structures of power in Endo society, and...that identity operates on both a symbolic and a material level to position men and women differently within social discourse and social relations' (1986:170; emphasis in original). The formal, substantial, temporal and spatial metaphors in the linguistic gender taxonomy are also present in non-linguistic signification - artefactual form (round : slender); in the temporal order (female before, male after) in the daily process of labour, in ritual and narrative, and in the ideal spatial order (such as the /Xam campsite). Thus, to grow up in a San group would have been to internalise these schemes, and the content and associations of the genders, by practical involvement. To speak the language is to reproduce the gender metaphors and the hierarchies which inform them; however, a discursive or sub-discursive apprehension of the principles enables their manipulation and subversion from within. Dominant language, discourses, forms and representations are not closed determining systems, but *tend* to reproduce the existing order, and define the area within which ongoing negotiation may occur.

To say that the San symbolic taxonomy is an expression of masculinist gender ideology is to make an interpretation, and thus to make a statement about its meaning. In hermeneutic terms, this meaning is temporally bound, and is, at best, a contemporary interpretation producing a meaning which is a fusion of past meaning and present perspectives.

The question of meaning, as developed by Bourdieu and Moore, is a complex problem, and the strategic character of metaphor needs further discussion. The gender conventions of the San are metaphoric, based on various axes of similarity (form, substance, time, orientation, value, etcetera); however they should not, according to Bourdieu (1977), be seen as rules; rules have no existence outside of

practice, and to talk of rules is to bracket the question of how change might occur, and to marginalise human agency and intent. Such conventions are seen by Bourdieu (1977) as generative principles, pre-existing the individual, but providing a framework for action. These metaphors are basic to 'systems of social meaning which [are] not just the products of action, but act also as generative principles which inform action' (Moore 1986:77-8). The relationship of metaphor, strategy and practice pivots on the referential capacity of metaphor, to the fact that 'meanings invoked in one context have the ability to refer to meanings invoked in another...' (Moore 1986:79). This referential capacity is important in two ways: with reference to meaning as context dependent, and to meaning as a result of 'resonance' between texts and contexts.

The instance of the woman who uses (inverts) her negative association with death by communicating with the dead game spirits was used to illustrate the context dependency of meaning. It also illustrates the way in which the gender conventions act as generative schemes rather than rules. Because there is no recourse for women beyond the shared symbolic order, it is the shared gender conventions which both circumscribe and enable her response. By enacting the associations of femininity in another context, their valuation is inverted; context is thus fundamental to the meaning of the action. Thus the negative definition of femininity is not monolithic, and meaning is context dependent. 'However, the actual meaning a given set of contrasts acquires in relation to a particular universe of practice resonates with all the meanings those contrasts, or any other pair of contrasts that is interchangeable with them, might be given in other fields of practice - that is, in different contexts' (Moore 1986:78). It is this resonance between texts, or intertextuality (the fact that every text is a mosaic of others) that has been the focus of this project.

However, the analysis of meaning in Moore's and Bourdieu's work depends on observation of practice and context which is not entirely possible for archaeological

materials, where precise contexts are remote by virtue of their removal in time. The various gender conventions are generative principles, but their narrow meaning - their meaning in any particular situation - is context dependent. A particular context limits the range of meanings (Moore 1986:119); nevertheless the other meanings are not far away. Thus, though it is the general set of gender meanings which are dealt with in this project, rather than specific meanings in narrow contexts, it is nevertheless possible to talk about gender ideology, and the meaning of gender representations, because the conventions or generative schemes themselves are in a masculinist idiom, and the associations of femininity are generally of negativity or inferiority. Nevertheless, application of the principles of the theory of practice has limitations, since the practical context is inferred rather than observed.

Another problem is that of change, presently impossible to accommodate properly, owing to the fact that the rock art is undatable. Nevertheless, it is important that the theories brought to bear on rock art interpretation can potentially accommodate the problem of change, even if study of the art and change is currently out of reach. The theory of practice incorporates a way of understanding how change may occur, and how semantic shifts may take place within the symbolic order and existing forms. This represents an advantage over the trance hypothesis, which, regardless of authorial intent, presents a static past corresponding to neurophysiological constitution, and which is essentially ahistorical.

Though it seems highly probable that the generative principles may be useful for interpretation of other archaeological materials, namely material culture, spatial organisation and burials, in practice this is difficult, owing to problems of variability and archaeological resolution. An attempt to use the gender principles to interpret features of burials is documented in the Appendix, along with some possible future directions for gender research; it became clear that such research requires more focussed consideration than was possible here.

Nevertheless, the hypothesis I have presented has value for rock art interpretation: this centres on assessing the interpretation that much of the art deals with trance, rather than the far better documented and pervasive theme of rain. The identification of gender as basic to San ideological productions permits explanation of various features of the art, as well as serving as a basis for a critique of aspects of the trance hypothesis.

2 **Ideology and prehistoric actuality**

A potential criticism of the 'ideological critique' approach is that it is not an account of the facts/events/realities of the past. The text's relationship to the ideology which informs it is that of 'produced representation', meaning that 'what the text speaks about or works over is not 'real/objective historical relations, but the same historical relations construed in terms of an ideological production' (Moore 1986:192). The analysis I have presented is an account of gender ideology, but not necessarily an account of 'real' gender relations:

> 'Cultural ideas about gender do not directly reflect the social and economic positions of men and women, although it is true that they originate within the context of those conditions. This is because gender stereotypes are developed and used in the strategies which individuals of both sexes employ to advance their interests in various social contexts...'; [they help] 'to reinforce the social and economic conditions within which they are developed and employed' (Moore 1988:37-38).

The approach I have employed has potential for explanation of patterning, and the cognitive schemes which generate patterning, but is not an account of Later Stone Age actuality. However, as Shanks and Tilley point out, archaeological research which aims at reconstruction of what happened in the past similarly lacks access to that 'reality', as there is 'radical discontinuity at the root of archaeology/history' (1987a:17); 'There is no direct route to the past and we must remember that archaeology is something done in the present (Shanks and Tilley 1987a:15). The

archaeologist's object of study is not the past, but the texts produced by archaeologists, based on the traces of the past in the present - 'There is difference[1] between the objects of the past and their representation in the archaeological text' (Shanks and Tilley 1987a:17). The approach adopted in this project corresponds in all major respects to that advocated for archaeology by Shanks and Tilley (1987a,b) and, in defence of my approach, I re-present their arguments[2]. Such approaches are based on hermeneutic insights into meaning; the discourse theorist perspective on archaeology as textual production and contemporary discourse about the past; the critique of positivism; the replacement of the polarisations past/present, subject(ivity) : object(ivity), etcetera, with a dialectical formulation; and a particular perspective on 'reality'.

The complex argument presented by Shanks and Tilley (1987a,b) is grounded in both discourse theory and Marxism, and closely related to the critique of empiricism and positivism - 'logical positivism rests on precisely the kinds of metaphysical claims about the world it shrugged off as being invalid' (1987a:40). It is in relation to the critique of positivism that 'the recognition of anthropology as narrative or ethnography as fiction' is important (Scholte 1986:8; cf. Thornton 1983); archaeology is subject to the same conditions. Therefore, the inability of a critique of ideology to give an account of 'what really happened' is also a feature of more traditional approaches which claim to give an account of that actuality. Because of the discontinuity and distance between past and present, neither approach can claim superiority, because (according to Ricoeur's theory of distanciation; Gadamer's 'fusion of horizons') the meaning of the past in the past cannot be the same as the meaning of the past in the present; temporal distance is bridged by theory. One of the fallacies of logical positivism - the fact that verification 'rests on the idea that there is an objective world to test or verify a hypothesis against' - means that 'any

1 Apparently a reference to Derrida, and not the obvious statement criticised by Kristiansen (1988).

2 But am not in a position to criticise them.

formal criteria for theory choice - verification, confirmation, falsification - become discredited' (Shanks and Tilley 1987a:40.). In hermeneutic terms, all reconstructions of the past are mediated by the present; 'readings' of archaeological materials must be seen in terms of a 'fusion' of original and contemporary meanings. The internal coherence and logical consistency of interpretations acquire increased importance in relation to the rejection of positivism.

A criticism of such approaches is that they permit subjectivism, but it may be noted that, as Shanks and Tilley (1987a,b), Giddens (1979) and others see it, the opposition of objectivity and subjectivity is false; Shanks and Tilley opt for a mediation or dialectic between the two, whereas Giddens proposes a 'duality of structure'. Because there is no 'objective world', all interpretations are necessarily partly subjective; the search for scientific objectivity is futile because 'there can be no objective link between patterning in material culture and processes which produced that patterning' (Shanks and Tilley 1987a:14). Thus, in this project I am unable to claim objectivity because I am unable to speak from an objective, extra-ideological position, or to escape from the contemporary ideologies which condition my (and everyone else's) subjectivity. In this sense all archaeological research is mediation between objectivity and subjectivity, past and present.

Various criticisms have been made of such hermeneutic approaches, centring on the problem of relativism. These criticisms include (a) fears that the way is opened for free play with meaning; (b) dissatisfaction with the criteria proposed for theory evaluation; (c) rejection of the political implications of such theory, and concern about 'the present's use of the past...as just another source of bias' (Leone 1973, cited by Shanks and Tilley 1987a). These criticisms require further discussion.

2.1 **Semantic anarchy**

Hermeneutic theory proposes that there is no such thing as unitary meaning, since meaning is dependent to a large extent on the interpreter, and is variable according

to his/her positioning in space, time and within particular societies. Thus a swastika would signify differently to a Nazi and a Jew in 1945; it would also signify differently to someone in Asia, where the swastika originated. A range of meanings is always possible. The same applies to archaeological materials, which may be variously interpreted by different people in different times, places and social positions. Because there can never be only one interpretation of the past, 'there can be no monolithic undifferentiated PAST' (Shanks and Tilley 1987a:11). Kristiansen (1988:473) summarises this view as follows: 'the past is constantly re-created and re-arranged as a critical social activity in the present...'. Even in the past, different meanings would have been attributed by different people to the same object or event. Temporal separation compounds this for contemporary interpreters of the relics of the past. The fact that the representation of the past in the present is partial (only traces remain) further complicates the reconstruction of the original meaning, or even meanings, of the past.

At this point it is necessary to make the distinction between archaeology as reconstruction and construction. Reconstruction as restoration or replication is impossible, because of the partial character of the 'evidence'. Archaeological interpretation is principally the construction of meanings. From Shanks and Tilley's perspective (1987a,b), the material traces of the past do not tell us how the past *was*, but form the material base for the production of texts about these traces, and the construction of analogies of what the past was *like*. This analogical character of archaeology is inevitable, because what the past was for people in the past cannot be the same as what the past 'is' for contemporary people. Archaeology is thus textual, constructive and interpretative, rather than descriptive and reconstructive.

Reconstructing the past has certain parallels with reconstructing a broken pot, in that the preferred reconstruction accounts for the greatest possible number of pieces according to logical criteria. The materials (sherds) limit the range of possible

reconstructions (there is not an infinite number of ways it can be stuck together while satisfying logical criteria, but there may be more than one). However, whatever the interpretation placed on the completed construction, it remains a ceramic container, and cannot be interpreted as a copper bangle or a handaxe. The materiality of the traces of the past thus both enables particular constructions/ interpretations to be made, while simultaneously limiting the range of possible interpretations. Similarly, archaeological reconstructions are subject to accepted criteria of logic, inclusiveness and so on, but there is always more than one logical construct which may be put onto the materials. Archaeology does not remain at a reconstructive and descriptive level, but attributes to prehistoric peoples motives and responses to material, historical and environmental conditions; beyond description and quantification of material remains (and even description has a marked interpretative dimension), archaeologists are *con*structing, rather than reconstructing the past, since past motivations cannot be excavated and pieced together. Archaeological *re*construction is limited to description of the material conditions which prevailed. Beyond description, archaeologists work with contemporary constructions of the significance of material remains, which are informed by theory. How are the interpretations produced according to particular theories to be evaluated?

2.2 **Theory evaluation**

At this point the analogy of the pot breaks down, because 'the past' is not simply a material object, but includes social, cognitive and ideological environments. If the intact areas of a pot are formally identically to other known pots, then the contour of the missing areas may be inferred. However inferences about the 'contours' of the past are derived not from contemporaneous materials, but, for example, from analogy with modern San peoples; there are no other empirical pasts to use for inference. According to the critique of positivism, there is no way in which to

confirm or verify a particular construction or interpretation, because there is no way that the archaeologist can travel in time to see whether one construction is 'correct' (cf. Shanks and Tilley 1987a:9). Thus, no theory or interpretation which satisfies criteria of logic and explanatory range is *objectively* better than another which does the same. Even if one construction of what the past was like corresponds closely to the original, this is unverifiable. Evaluation of the theory/interpretation is impossible on 'objective' grounds: though one interpretation may be closer to the reality of the past, there is no access to this reality, no possible objective confirmation, and no final solution (Shanks and Tilley 1987a:29-45). This is not to deny the 'facticity' of the traces of the past, and their existence as a result of real events and practices, but to argue for the logical impossibility of access to this reality. The problem arises at the level of theory, interpretation and construction, rather than description and restoration. Though interpretations may be equal in terms of their logical consistency, and inclusiveness, this does not mean that all interpretations are ultimately equal, but that the grounds for evaluation are ultimately non-objective (Shanks and Tilley 1987a,b).

The problem hinges on ontological as opposed to epistemological reality. Discourse theorists acknowledge an objective reality to which there is no access, and postulate an epistemological reality which is known only through discourses. Marxism, on the other hand has been called a fundamentally realist science (Barrett 1980), though marxists have been forced to concede that access to reality has to be through discourse.[3] While acknowledging that the marxist 'realist' position has a certain force, its flaw (the concession that discourse *is* our only access to 'reality') is perhaps greater than its strengths, namely, the criticisms it generates. The problems of objective reality, of discourse theory versus marxism, and the 'facticity' of

3 Barrett, from a Marxist perspective, argues that the discourse theory view nevertheless tends to deny any objective reality; she also notes that to privilege discourse is to make it the 'site of struggle', and asks 'Are we really to see the Peterloo massacre, the storming of the Winter Palace in Petrograd, the Long March, the Grunwick picket - as the struggle of discourses?' (1980:95).

archaeological materials is not going to be solved in the pages of this project, and I will devote no more space to it. Such problems should be part of ongoing archaeological debate.

2.3 **Relativism, truth, politics**

If there are no objective and absolute grounds for evaluation, the way is apparently open for radical relativism, and the assumption that the absence of *objective* evaluative criteria means that there are no criteria at all; either there is no truth, or all truths are equal. This position means that archaeology is impossible, since research is dependent on evaluation and categorisation of truths and fallacies. However there is an alternative to the position that all truths are equal, or that truths do not exist. This solution is the recognition that there is no unitary truth - truths are situated (Shanks and Tilley 1987b; cf. Belsey 1980).

'Truth is to be conceived of as a series of coded rules which permit divisions to be drawn between various types of discourses in terms of a polar truth/falsity opposition. We should not do battle for truth, but rather situate truths...' (Shanks and Tilley 1987b:199). Truth, like meaning, is context dependent, and what is 'true' for academics and their audiences is not necessarily also true for non-academic, religious, indigenous or other audiences; similarly what is true for men may not be true for women, and vice versa. Truths cannot be detached from power and the imposition of definitions of the world according to the interests of people in particular situations. Texts are ideological products which are potentially constitutive, playing a part in constructing perceptions of the world that are tied to sectional and political interests (whether this is intended or not). Hence 'There is no way of choosing between pasts [or truths] except on essentially political grounds, in terms of a definite value system or morality [;]...criteria for truth and falsity are not to be understood purely in terms of the logic and rationality or otherwise of discourses, but require judgement in terms of the practical consequences of

archeological theory and practice for contemporary social change' (Shanks and Tilley 1987b:195; my parentheses).

The radical relativist position may be discussed in relation to 'productive co-existence' versus 'productive conflict'. The former is linked to liberal humanism: 'The ideology of liberal humanism assumes a world of non-contradictory (and therefore fundamentally unalterable) individuals, whose unfettered consciousness is the origin of meaning, knowledge and action' (Belsey 1980:67). This is apparently the position taken by Hodder[4] - tending towards radical relativism, and emphasising knowledgeable social actors. The notion of productive conflict is linked to marxism, and the critique of humanism to the work of Althusser: according to this position, conflict is the impetus to change, and without it there is stagnation. The crucial difference between the views of co-existence (as exemplified by Hodder) and conflict (as proposed by Shanks and Tilley) is, in the latter case, the adherence to and judgement according to a defined value system, morality or politics. This does not imply that liberal humanists have no morality/ politics, but that (a) it is largely implicit, and that (b) there is a discrepancy between 'having' a morality/politics, and professing relativism, which is characterised by a reluctance to assert particular values as 'true' over and above other 'truths' and values. This is a disjunction between theory and practice. The same criticism that Kristeva has made of Derrida's theory of *differance* (Kristeva 1986:15) is applicable to radical relativism, namely that it positivises everything; radical relativism implies that Von Daniken's archaeology, or Afrikaner Nationalist history, is as good as any other, 'relatively true'; whereas in terms of a definite value system in relation to which truth is situated, it may rather be seen as false, or, at least, as 'relatively untrue'.

4 Shanks and Tilley (1987b:195-6) discuss Hodder's emphasis on the role of knowledgeable actors.

2.4 **Ideology and its exposition**

The demand, then, of such social theories is that truths be situated 'in relation to the social, economic and political roles they play in society (Shanks and Tilley 1987b:199). However, the introduction of political criteria into archaeology is controversial. Leone has commented on the the false premises on which is based concern about 'the present's use of the past...as just another source of bias, with consciousness-raising or self-reflection allowing the archaeologist to control for this' (Leone 1973; cited by Shanks and Tilley 1987a:14). This argument is inadequate in discrediting the approach, because it rests on a reductionist view of ideology, which is conceptualised as 'false consciousness' rather than 'lived reality' (cf. Moore 1986). An archaeology which refuses to acknowledge the range of lived realities is 'unable to comprehend the notion of qualitatively different archaeologies, archaeologies other than those written by middle class white western males' (Shanks and Tilley 1987a:11).

Sampson (1988a,b) adheres to both the positions criticised. He assumes that there is, somewhere, an extra-ideological place from which to speak objectively; he engages in his own ideological diatribe on the sub-political nature of archaeology, while simultaneously ridiculing those who replace 'sound scholarship' with 'polemical assertions' and who are 'ideologically engaged'. In doing so, he exposes the paradox of his own position. Similarly, he dismisses even *discussion* in South African archaeology of the question of objectivity because it is 'just the standard cry of the cultural relativists, but with a new twist' (1988a:61). His faith in objectivism, and conception of knowledge as detached from other spheres, precludes his attempting in any way to situate his truths in relation to power.

Leone, on the other hand, has paid particular attention to situating truths (for example, Leone 1981). Shanks and Tilley (1987a) offer theoretical analysis of the ideological assumptions of archaeology, rather than practical suggestions for

adressing it. Drawing on the (post-) Althusserian emphasis on the importance of representation, Leone proposes that the mediation of past and present, and the subjectivity/ context-dependence of archaeological interpretations should be exposed in practice, made explicit, and opened for discussion, not only for academic archaeologists, but also for the museum-going public. Shanks and Tilley are unable to improve on this, except via the criticism that Leone does not take sufficient account of the non-uniformity of the present (1987a:95).

Textual analysis and the critique of ideology, from discourse theory and marxist perspectives respectively, offer methods and theories for 'denaturalisation' and critical assessment of assumptions. Proposals for the exposition of ideology take this out of the narrow academic field and to the public who have customarily been expected to believe that museums are repositories of absolute truth (whether they actually believe it or not is irrelevant here) (Shanks and Tilley 1987a,b). So, at present, the best *practical* response to the problem of relativism and objectivism is that archaeologists must represent the problem, bringing to the fore and exposing the mediation of subjectivity and objectivity, and past and present, which is characteristic of all archaeology; to do so is to invite participation, and to erode the hierarchical 'expert syndrome', where academic interpretations take on an unchallenged mantle of 'truth'.

2.5 **Social theories and the future**

The emphasis in the work of Shanks and Tilley (1987a,b) is primarily theoretical and political. However it appears that Shanks and Tilley adhere to the 'everything is political' school, since they pay no attention to recent work by discourse theorists on the limitations of 'an exclusively political discourse'(cf.Moi 1986:8).[5] However, it may be unfair to expect the early infusions of discourse theory into archaeology to

5 Kristeva, for example, has paid attention to this question (the concept of 'desire').

be comprehensive (especially as I am unable to pursue such problems within the limits of this project, let alone solve them).

Shanks and Tilley (1987a,b) may be criticised for a failure to consider the consequences for archaeological practice in more detail. They make apt criticism of the way archaeology is harnessed to the politics of contemporary capitalism, and propose that it is possible and desirable to disengage, and to attach archaeological truths to a political future. However nowhere is there to be found any explicit statement as to their vision of this future (or the place for which they envisage it), though it is clear that it is, broadly speaking, anti-capitalist. They urge consideration of the potential 'future worlds' contained in archaeological texts, yet fail to apply this in a more than generalised and sketchy fashion to their own work, or to assess its implications for the future of archaeology.[6] For example, they criticise Hodder's faith in debate as an element of his (ideological) ideal of the discipline of archaeology (1987b:193). However, Shanks and Tilley do not adequately consider the practical consequences of their theorising (in this case the 'management' of productive conflict).

Rudimentary attention will be paid here to the consequences of the theories employed in this project for the practice, and particularly the everday practice, of archaeology. Theory is constitutive: therefore different theories imply different archaeologies. Assessment of how the application of social theories is likely to change archaeological practice depends crucially on what is defined as a difference, since the *techniques* of archaeology (excavation; physical analysis and so on) are unlikely to change. The difference is orientational, and substantive, rather than technical; however the assumptions and expectations accompanying the various techniques are open to criticism, even if the techniques themselves are not.

6 Kristiansen (1988) similarly notes that the critical self-reflection which Shanks and Tilley advocate is only taken to a certain point in their own work.

The 'archaeology of commitment' which Shanks and Tilley (1987a:246) propose implies different ways of 'doing archaeology': archaeologists may address different problems, and focus on different aspects of the past. For example, this project departs from the more usual practice of archaeology (which typically involves excavation, identification and quantification of material finds), with regard to the problematic, and the techniques utilised.

Insofar as 'doing archaeology' in the wake of the New Archaeology commonly involves ecological studies, shifts are likely if social theories and investigations geared to answering 'social questions' gain ground. To begin to assess the problem of 'social versus ecological' explanation in archaeology, the way that they are currently perceived largely as polar opposites should be recognised. However, it is important that the conflicting approaches should not be simplistically opposed; Kristiansen (1988;477) points out that, while ecological archaeology has its flaws, Shanks and Tilley's work goes to the opposite extreme, almost to the point of cultural determinism. As purely social or biological explanations are respectively sociological and biophysical reductionism, so is a polarisation of social : ecological approaches reductionist. It would be fruitless to deny that ecological/ environmental conditions are important (though not determining); but cognition(s) of the environment need to be accounted for as well. Thus, in the fertility hypothesis I have outlined, I consider the San gender ideology as linked to ecological cognitions (fertility, rain, availability of veldkos and game), conditions and practices.

Without abandoning the notion of productive conflict, it may be argued that a certain amount of integration and mutual accommodation of 'social' and 'ecological' approaches is possible and unproblematic. Beyond this, productive conflict still applies, as primary adherence to one or other approach will no doubt continue. Conflicting interpretations from the different perspectives may thus generate valuable criticisms.

The effects social theories in archaeology may herald include :

1) differences in research orientation and design, and accompanying shifts in techniques used;

2) deconstruction of the boundaries between archaeology and related disciplines such as anthropology, history, literary theory and so on;

3) differences in the texts which archaeologists produce, with space and time devoted to the situation of truths, rather than (or as well as) the production of reams of empirical, 'scientific' data, such as tables and graphs quantifying the material base;

4) more attention paid to theory, and perhaps less to excavation;

5) greater consideration of archaeological audiences (as is already underway), and of archaeology as part of wider discourses.

Such differences proceed inevitably from an acknowledgement of the extent to which archaeology has 'mythic' qualities, in the Barthesian sense of 'forms of representation which naturalise certain meanings and interests' (Barthes 1973, cited by Moore 1986:3). This point, and the need for a less evolutionist conception of history, may be further illustrated by discussion of the 'mythical' character of gender representations in ancillary archaeological sources.

3 Gender representations as myth

With reference to South African historical documents and travellers accounts, Gray (1979) discusses the mythologisation of the indigenous woman as 'a manifestation of the white man's feelings about and interpretation of the interior', and her literary transformation over time. He begins with Sir Thomas Herbert's Some Years Travaile, based on southern African travel experience in 1627. Herbert 'presents the Hottentot woman as immodest, anarchic and brutish because each of those characteristics is schematically opposite to those which might be called admirable in European concepts of feminine grace and courtesy' (Gray 1979:42). Not surprisingly, biologism is one of his techniques - 'Anatomical details are stretched into gross

libels...'(Gray 1979:41). A very fuzzy boundary between 'fact' and 'fiction' is characteristic of the work, which Gray links to the literary fashions of the time. Herbert's gender representations have a dual orientation, though Gray only focusses on one. They constitute a body of opinion which aimed to convey that conquering the colonies-to-be was 'not only a matter of defence, but of duty' (Gray 1979:42; cf. Hall 1984). They also reaffirm, by means of contrast, the contemporary European ideal of femininity, and are as strongly related to gender ideology as to racist and expansionist justifications.

By the late eighteenth century, Le Vaillant, under the influence of Rousseau, had turned the Khoi woman into a noble savage, a romantic, pastoral ideal of charming femininity (Gray 1979:45). The same figure in the nineteenth century had changed face again, and the vastly steatopygeous 'Hottentot Venus' had become a key symbol of sexuality in the art and literature of the time (Gilman 1985). Driver (1988) offers a related analysis of woman as sign - of the conflation of the biological category 'female' with the cultural category of 'feminine', and the use of the female-feminine *sign* to reproduce other categories of patriarchal discourse.

Gender representations are tied to the time, place and context of their production, and the historical accounts are both unhelpful and unreliable sources of information on the realities of San gender organisation. However, while all such accounts are in a sense fictional, some are more fictionalised than others. Herbert (c.1627) fantasises about the 'dromidaries' to be found at the Cape (Gray 1979:40); at the other end of the spectrum is a comment on indigenes at the Cape, made by Etienne de Flacourt (1648), that has a very contemporary ring: 'They have the custom both when they are eating and when they are talking, that the men come together in a separate circle squatting on their heels, the women separately, the girls and the children also separately: by this it can be seen that they have a sort of political order among themselves' (Raven-Hart 1967:175). This variation in 'accuracy' is thus a

function of place as well as time. Herbert, using sensationalism for sales of his travelogue, writes from a different position, and according to literary convention and public tastes, in a way that De Flacourt had no need of (cf. Thornton 1983).

Gray describes the transformation of the 'Hottentot Eve' in southern African historical literature (in somewhat evolutionary terms) as her 'gradual humanisation'. In the earliest accounts of peoples at the Cape (for example, those pre-dating Van Riebeeck, in Raven-Hart 1967) women and men are seldom differentiated, but with time this alters, and if anything, indigenous women come across as even less appealing than the men, being portrayed as not only 'savage' and dirty, but unfeminine also.

The change in tenor from the early accounts to the more 'scientific' accounts of twentieth century anthropologists should not be seen as a necessary evolution towards truth, or the elimination of bias. The masculinist bias in, for example, Silberbauer's account of the G/wi, relates more closely to the European gender ideology of the nineteen fifties than to preceding anthropological tradition. Silberbauer describes female 'tasks' which are boring and monotonous but 'not strenuous' (cf. Conkey and Spector's (1984) critique). Yet shortly afterwards he states that the gatherer's load may be close to her own weight (28 kg. of plant foods, plus firewood). Hunting is an 'activity', and described as neither strenuous nor boring ('G/wi men have remarkable powers of endurance') and biltong hunts 'are looked on as something of a holiday for the men, who enjoy a brief spell away from their families' (Silberbauer 1981:214-5). The G/wi woman is remarkably like a suburban housewife doing the ironing, while the G/wi man resembles the suburban husband who escapes the wife and kids by going to the pub on Friday nights. Silberbauer's account is as much rooted in contemporary ideology as any other writer, and formal differences relate thus, and not to any advance towards objectivity. Similarly, the apolitical view of cooperative gender relations, as put

forward by Lewis-Williams (1982) derives from the prevalence of that opinion in the present. According to Gray (1979:41,45), Herbert's 'vision of Africa coincides with what he needs to see'; this is at the root of the mythopoeic process (the construction of myths) and the inseparability of fact and fiction. An attempt to separate fact from fiction in these accounts can be no more than a mediation of subjectivity and objectivity, and past and present. The same applies to the interpretation of more strictly 'archaeological' materials (though the separation of archaeology from history and anthropology is increasingly less meaningful); archaeology must be seen as a contemporary discourse which is not immune from making myths according to gender, class and other affiliations.

4 Theory and practice

The idea that meaning is practice dependent, and that change occurs via the competition between interpretations in practical contexts, applies, for example, not only to the Endo spatial text which Moore (1986) analyses, but also to the text produced as a result of the study. I have proposed that this is a problem within rock art studies, where, for example, the rock art text is analysed according to the principle of polysemy (for example, of the eland), but the same principle is not applicable to the resulting research text, which proposes and permits only one meaning (trance). This is a disjunction between theory and practice - one rule for the art as text, another for the practice (interpretation as textual and practical). The academic text denies the polysemy it proposes as a property of the rock art text, and is an attempt to fix or impose meaning. This has a political and economic dimension - within academic politics (prestige, authority, funding), and in relation to rock art studies as a whole (for example with regard to the gap between professional (salaried) and amateur rock art researchers). Similar political problems exist with reference to gender.

4.1 **Gender/theory/archaeological practice**

Gero (1985) has identified a division of labour within archeology, where fieldwork is undertaken primarily by men, and non-field work by women. She argues that fieldwork fulfills the 'archaeologist as cowboy' masculinist stereotype - 'We are alerted to certain strong parallels between the male who populates the archaeological record - public, visible, physically active, exploratory, dominant and rugged, the stereotypic hunter - and the practising field archaeologist who himself conquers the landscape, brings home the goodies and takes his data raw' (Gero 1985:344). The lesser involvement of women in field work relates to choice, but was seen to be exacerbated by funding bodies which favoured male would-be fieldworkers over female; both factors are interpreted by Gero (1985) in terms of the public/masculine : private/feminine contrast, as part of a 'woman-at-home ideology'. This division of labour is to be found equally in South African archaeology, where field work remains largely a masculine preserve.

The definition of field work (excavations, surveys, etcetera) as somehow the 'truest' practice of archaeology, is under-addressed in Gero's approach. Historically, archaeology has its roots in relatively 'pure' practice, uncluttered by detailed theorisation - the collections of the European antiquarians, Dilettanti and gentry (Daniel 1981). An emphasis on method post-dated archaeology as practice (peaking in the fifties and sixties, and in the New Archaeology), which is in turn being succeeded in the eighties by an emerging preoccupation with theory. But theory has remained somehow secondary to the practical (field) side of archaeology. The popular conception that archaeology is synonymous with digging is little challenged, and the relatively short-lived practical aspect has been privileged by media and archaeologists alike over the protracted period of analysis and writing up/publication. In other words, the aspect of exploration, discovery and recovery of the material traces of the past is given precedence over the character of archaeology

as the production of texts (cf. Shanks and Tilley 1987a,b). This view permits another approach to the problem of the gender division of labour.

Gero (1985) argues that the archaeological division of labour reproduces the gender stereotyping in contemporary society - the implication being that no such division should exist, and that men and women should be equally involved, and in a position to become involved, in both field and non-field work, theory and practice. However, these are two rather different propositions - the ideal of equal participation takes no account of the fact that women tend to *choose* non-fieldwork projects. It is based on the assumption that both are potentially in a position to become equally involved - a premise which may be seen as false. The archaeological division of labour may depend on a stereotype, but the force of the stereotype, and its embedding in a far wider social context, means that reform of funding structure and similar moves are inadequate for the equalising the positions of male and female archaeologists/ students. The different position in which women stand in the archaeological, academic and social order is so entrenched that there can be no question of a simple equalisation of their position.

Women tend to avoid field work by preference; to insist that women reverse their preference to undermine the 'woman at home' stereotype is unrealistic. The choice of laboratory or 'library' projects should be seen, not as the refuge of those discriminated against, but as evidence of a different research orientation. The problem is not so much the division of labour between field and base, but the devaluation of the non-field work done more often by women. Delphy (1984) argues that tasks and activities have no intrinsic valuation, but that a sphere of work becomes devalued *because it is done by women.* This has been documented in secretarial and clerical work, where these positions were originally apprenticeships for the bosses job; with the large scale entry of women into these professions, the apprentice element fell away and such jobs have the relatively low status of today.

Thus, the problem becomes one of the revaluation of the more 'feminised' archaeological tasks, and the decentring of field work as what archaeology 'is'.

Theory predates excavation, informing research design and associations deemed significant during excavation; post-excavation it is only through the theories that underpin analysis that the excavated materials acquire meaning. This enveloping character of theory implies the secondary importance of excavation, which is basically only a set of techniques and methods for establishing the material base for the textual production which, according to Shanks and Tilley (1987a) is the 'real' object of archaeology. This is not to say that meticulous excavation is not crucial - no quantity or quality of theory can compensate for poor excavation - but to argue that, if anything, archaeology is more crucially dependent on theory than excavation. The theory which pre- and post-dates excavation is constitutive in a way that mere excavation is not. Viewed in this way, excavation loses, not its importance, but its centrality.

Fieldwork and excavation have a masculine veneer; in contrast, sorting is perceived more as women's work. It is no accident that archaeologists (for example, at the South African Museum) employ mainly women as sorters, part time. This perhaps relates to the ideology that women are better suited to tedious and monotonous tasks (seen in one manifestation in Silberbauer's account of the G/wi, above); also to the fact that the vast majority of part-time workers in all spheres are women - the myth of the male head of household underlies this (Barrett 1980), and the perception that men are more needful of full time employment than women. The tedium of sorting is its primary feature, obscuring its importance, which is at least equal to the importance of excavation - bad excavation and bad sorting are equally detrimental to the final product of archaeology. Given this parity of importance, the devaluation of the sorting stage (the 'archaeological housework', done in private (Gero 1985:344)) may be seen in terms of its relationship to excavation, which is as

amanuensis (feminine) is to master (masculine). Since there is no good reason for the valuation of excavation over sorting, the assignation of value may be seen in terms of its connotations of tedium, domesticity and femininity, and the gap between them as ideological rather than to do with intrinsic value.

A recognition of archaeology as textual production, revaluation of theory and sorting, scaling down of the importance of field work, and the communication to the public of the false centrality of the latter are more likely to affect the reproduction of gender stereotyping and the archaeological division of labour than would the colonisation of the field by female archaeologists. Female students are disadvantaged in the field in various ways. Minor examples include the fact that the pace is frequently set by the fittest male; at the campsite, even if gender blind cooking rosters are drawn up (and this is not always done in my experience), male students take charge of the more sociable activity of braaiing, while female students do conventional cooking which generates dirty pots and pans that braaiing does not. Such examples are the tip of the iceberg: a wide range of feminist criticisms might be levelled at archaeological practice, but such examples suffice.

The masculine/feminine division and hierarchy in archaeology cannot of course be separated from the larger university context, and the social context which encompasses both. At the University of Cape Town, women were found to hold the majority of lower status and more temporary positions (piecemeal work paid for by grants; research assistantships), but this majority reverses as the ladder is ascended (Simons 1987; White 1988)). In 1987, four departments, including Archaeology, had *solely* male academic staff (Baumbach 1987; Simons 1987). This cannot be attributed to women choosing to leave academia to raise children - the choice itself (if taken) is conditioned by the lack of alternatives. The University hierarchy echoes that of the world within which it is situated. It remains to be seen whether the female predominance among M.A. and Ph.D. students in Archaeology will translate into an

alteration of this pattern, but it seems unlikely as long as the different social positioning of women is generally ignored.

Universities are structured to favour masculine aspirations. The claim that appointments are made on merit regardless of gender, race or creed is unrealistic, because merit is defined according to the standard of the middle class white male. Criteria of merit include qualities which are already socially defined as masculine, for example, assertiveness, initiative and drive. These are traits which are characteristic of male socialisation, in the family and in schools. Women are socialised for secondary status, passivity and submissiveness (Oakley 1972), and little emphasis is laid upon exercising initiative. Thus, female students are at a disadvantage comparable to that of black students (cf. White 1988) who have endured an education which aims to prepare them for inferior positions in the job market. The truth of the latter has led to affirmatory action on the part of the university, but the disadvantaging of women has not been countered in any way. Moreover, in archaeology, academic merit appears not to be the only criterion for academic advancement. Of nineteen undergraduate class medals awarded in the years 1981-1987, 12 were awarded to female students and only 7 to male students (at an institution where, even in Arts and Social Science faculties, male students outnumber women). At U.C.T. women students perform proportionally better academically than do male students (Simons 1987); yet in archaeology this does not apparently translate into prominence of women[7] at higher levels, or departmental longer-term employment, where field skills, self confidence and the push to forge ahead acquire more importance.

In archaeology the fieldwork emphasis exacerbates this. Skills which are more likely to be possessed by males (such as vehicle maintenance) contribute to the perception of masculine superiority, versatility and responsibility. Research programmes which

7 Especially younger women.

emphasise field work create job opportunities for which males are perceived to be more suitable, creating a self-perpetuating situation. The extent to which extra-curricular skills are deemed important and valuable is more marked in field oriented disciplines, but unacknowledged. Anthropology appears to be something of an exception here, with both white and black women represented in the upper echelons. This perhaps relates to the fact that anthropology emphasises communication and 'people skills' in field work, rather than stamina, strength and capacity for manual labour. The almost non-existence of black women in archaeology may be seen in terms of their 'triple oppression' (gender, race, class).

The male dominance in the South African archaeological profession may thus be attributed in part to the passive and uncritical reproduction of the existing gender order, exacerbated by the fieldwork factor. The view that gender is unworthy of much (or any) attention, and the masculinist/ androcentric implications of archaeological theory and reconstructions, act as tacit support for the dominance of white middle class males.

The success of such early twentieth century women archaeologists as Gertrude Caton-Thompson and Kathleen Kenyon is no indication that archaeology is not a male centred profession, or that progress towards non-discrimination is necessarily occurring. In fact the reverse may be said to have occurred. The success of Caton-Thompson and Kenyon (and women in other disciplines at the time) must be seen as a product of the historical situation in Britain of the twenties and thirties - following intense female suffragist agitation on the one hand, and in the context of a social order in which upper class membership mitigated gender factors. In other words, the class criterion took precedence over gender, and opportunities were available to upper and upper middle class women (as were Caton Thompson and Kenyon (Caton Thompson 1983; Wheeler 1956)) that were not available to lower class men. This situation prevails with respect to race in South African academia (white women have

better access to university education than most black men), but the disappearance of class discrimination among whites means that there is no remaining basis for the privileging of white women over white men. The flourishing of women in early twentieth century archaeology is thus a function of context, rather than a sign of an archaeological egalitarianism which can but improve with time.

An awareness is being generated in South African archaeology of the way in which national ideology is substantiated, but the primary emphasis is on race and class (for example, Hall's (1984) analysis of the 'burden of tribalism' in archaeology). But race, class and gender are not independent variables - one illustration of their linkage has been mentioned: the early travellers accounts' message that conquering the colonies was 'not only a matter of defence but of duty' may be seen also in terms of the cementing of European gender ideology (Europeans being the target audience of these works). The colonial archaeologist was, in the practice of his profession (exploration, discovery), as much laying physical claim to the landscape and its contents, as to establishing justifications. The flip side of the colonist/colonised opposition is the archaeologist as claimant of the masculine colonial outdoors, in opposition to the feminine domesticity of European society. Women, indigenous South Africans and the landscape itself are all defined as the 'other', in relation to white male European norms.

5 'Feminist archaeology' or 'critical archaeology'?

Androcentrism in archaeology has been analysed here in three dimensions: firstly, in terms of research orientation and the definition of what the traces of the past can and (arguably) should be used for; secondly, in terms of the masculinist assumptions of archaeological theory and ancillary sources; and, thirdly, in terms of the substantiation of gender ideology in practice, and the susceptibility of archaeology in this respect. These considerations need, in conclusion, to be discussed in relation to the idea of 'a feminist archaeology'.

An awareness of the consequences of archaeological androcentrism should not be confined to a side branch of archaeology labelled 'feminist' (for example, by Hodder (1986), Shanks and Tilley (1987a)), but incorporated into the mainstream. The aim of what might better be termed a feminist perspective *within* archaeology is not to reform and eliminate bias, in order to approach the 'truth' more closely. The danger of sidelining a separate 'feminist' archaeology is that it will stand in a customary relation to the mainstream - feminist archaeology as the 'wife' of the dominant tradition. Nor should a 'feminist archaeology' be detached from questions of race and class; a feminist perspective in archaeology is one strand of a more general critical archaeology which should not be compartmentalised and artificially separated from other factors. In South Africa the interlinkage may be seen in terms of contemporary political issues. Though sexism and gender are beginning to receive a more sympathetic hearing, there is a general hostility to 'bourgeois feminism' - not entirely without justification. Black women have argued that western feminism privileges the discourse of gender over other discourses, and feminism has been seen as potentially divisive, and a drain on the national liberation struggle.[8] Claims for African matriarchy (for example, those based on the theories of Senegalese Negritudinist historian, Diop - see Jeffries 1985; Qunta 1987), and denial of any inferior status of women, may be seen in terms of the staking out by some political groupings of class/race as the only valid foci of political struggle, and the privileging of the discourse of race over gender. (Though archaeologists have not paid much attention to gender in prehistory, the same charge cannot be made of others). Such claims, centring on the suggestion that gender-based discrimination is a western import, introduced with colonialism, are not supported by the findings of this project. The San, who of all African peoples, are held up as prime models of gender equality, do not match up to these claims. The cultural texts of the San, at least in the time period covered by the ethnographies, and probably several hundred years

8 For example, see interview with Amanda Kwadi in Lipman (1984).

prior to them and to colonisation, were apparently structured according to a distinctly male dominant model. Even if the degree of domination was less than among other African peoples, and other gatherer-hunter groups (for example, contemporary Australian Aborigines), such representations tend to give the edge to men. Though more attention needs to be paid to the relationship of gender and other factors (for example, the mutual mediations of gender, race, class and age), and to questions of change than has been possible in this project, the representation of social division by gender in archaeological materials is a potentially profitable line of research.

Shanks and Tilley urge consideration of the 'present and future worlds' contained in archaeological work (1987a:246): it is hoped that the 'implicit world' of this research is one where the consistent evaluation of the feminine as negative is countered, and where there is recognition of the gender-political criteria involved in theory and the assessment of interpretations in archaeology.

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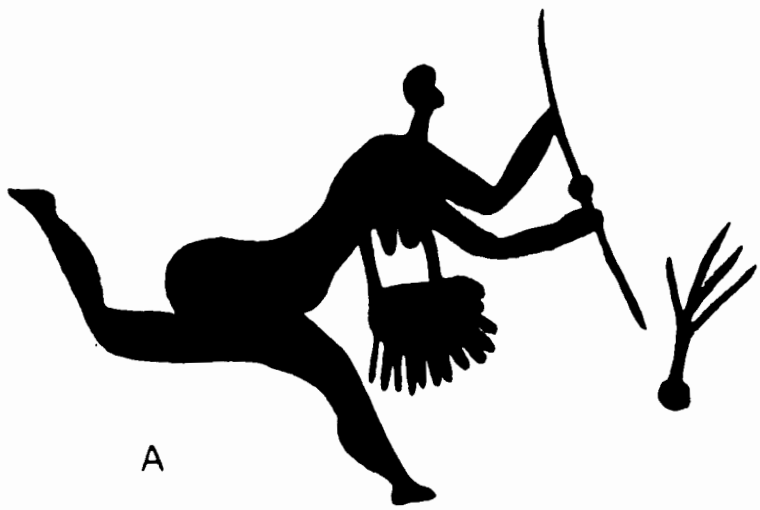
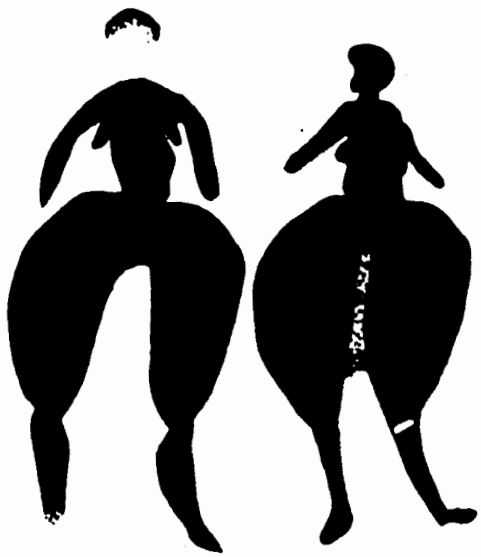


A

B



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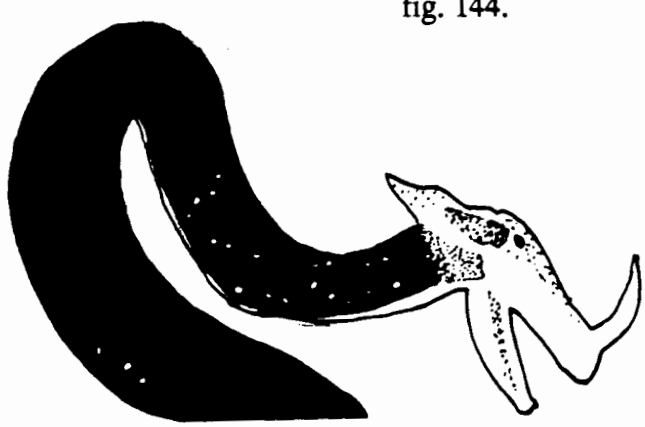


Figure 1: Feminine form

A: Rounded female figure with digging stick, Drakensberg. After Vinnicombe (1976), fig. 188.

B: Steatopygeous woman decorated with dots, Drakensberg. After Vinnicombe (1976), fig. 164.

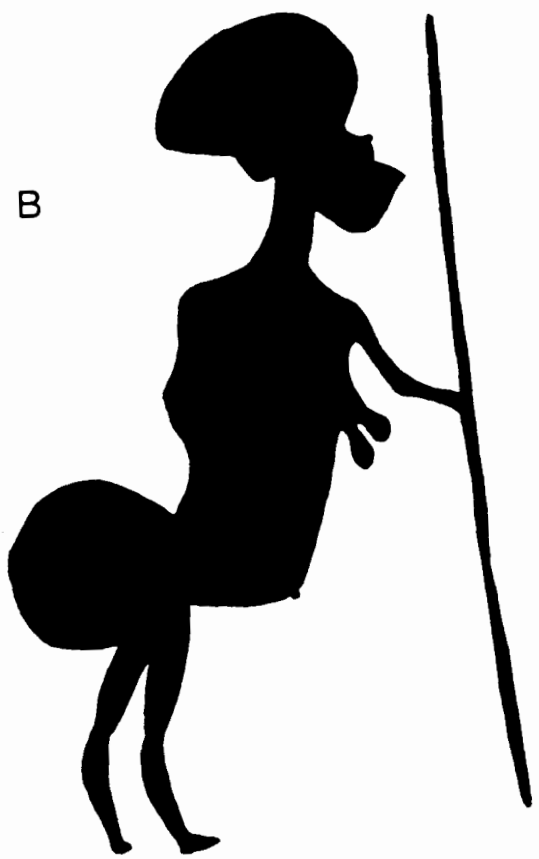
C: Steatomerious women and snake, Drakensberg. After Vinnicombe (1976) fig. 144.

A

Figure 2: Feminine form

A: Steatopygeous figure, Boontjieskloof, south western Cape. After Yates, Golson and Hall (1985) fig. 11.

B: Steatopygeous figure, Kanolvlei, Clanwilliam district, south western Cape. After Johnson (1979) fig. 81.



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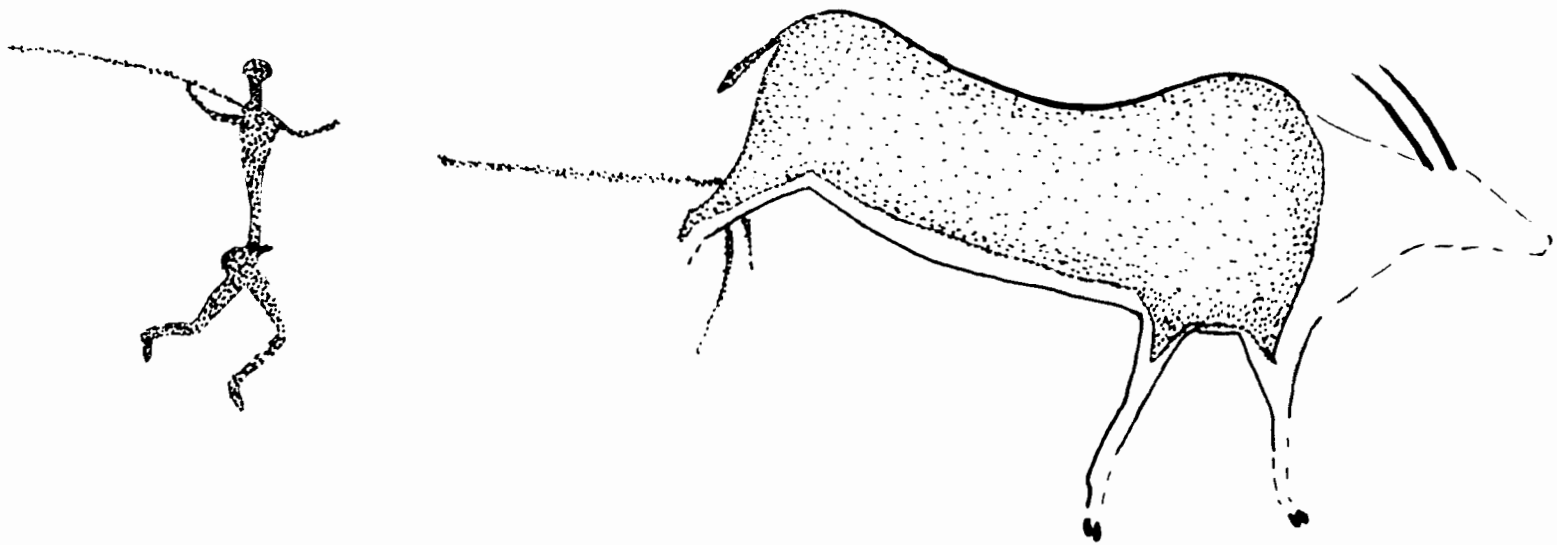


Figure 3:

A naked hunter pursues an eland, Drakensberg. After Vinnicombe (1976) fig. 205.

Figure 4: Naked hunters/masculine form.
One of a line of naked hunters,
Drakensberg. After Vinnicombe
(1976) fig. 178a.

Figure 5: Masculine form.
Elongated naked hunters, Drakensberg.

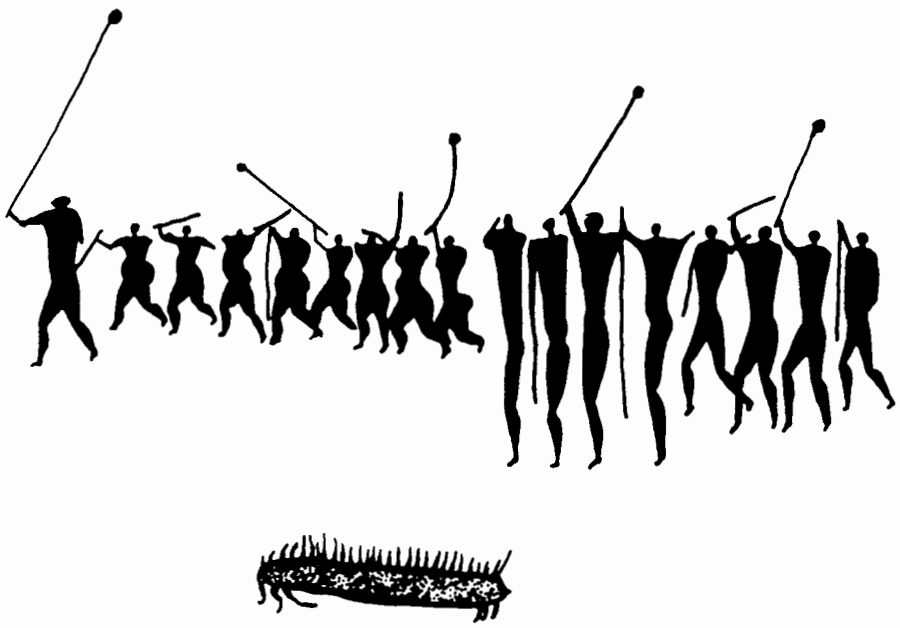
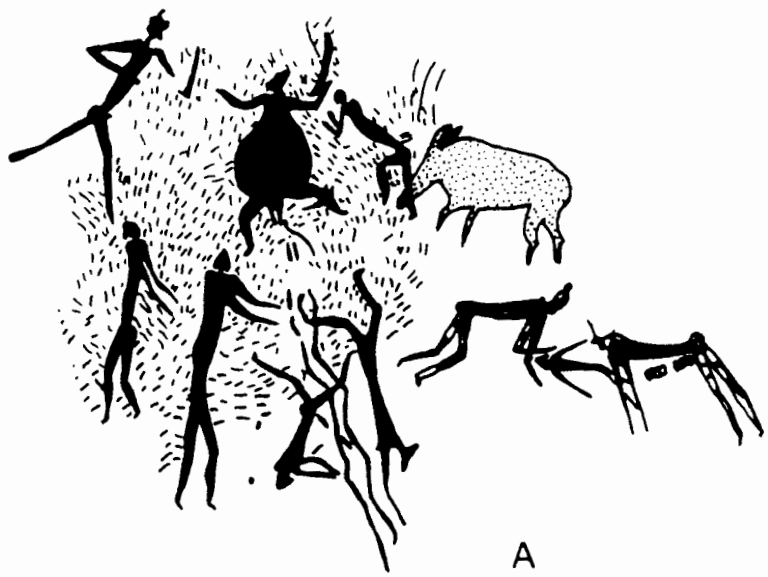


Figure 6:

Contrasting masculine and feminine form, Orange Free State. After a drawing by Stow, in Rosenthal (1953) fig. 22.



A

B

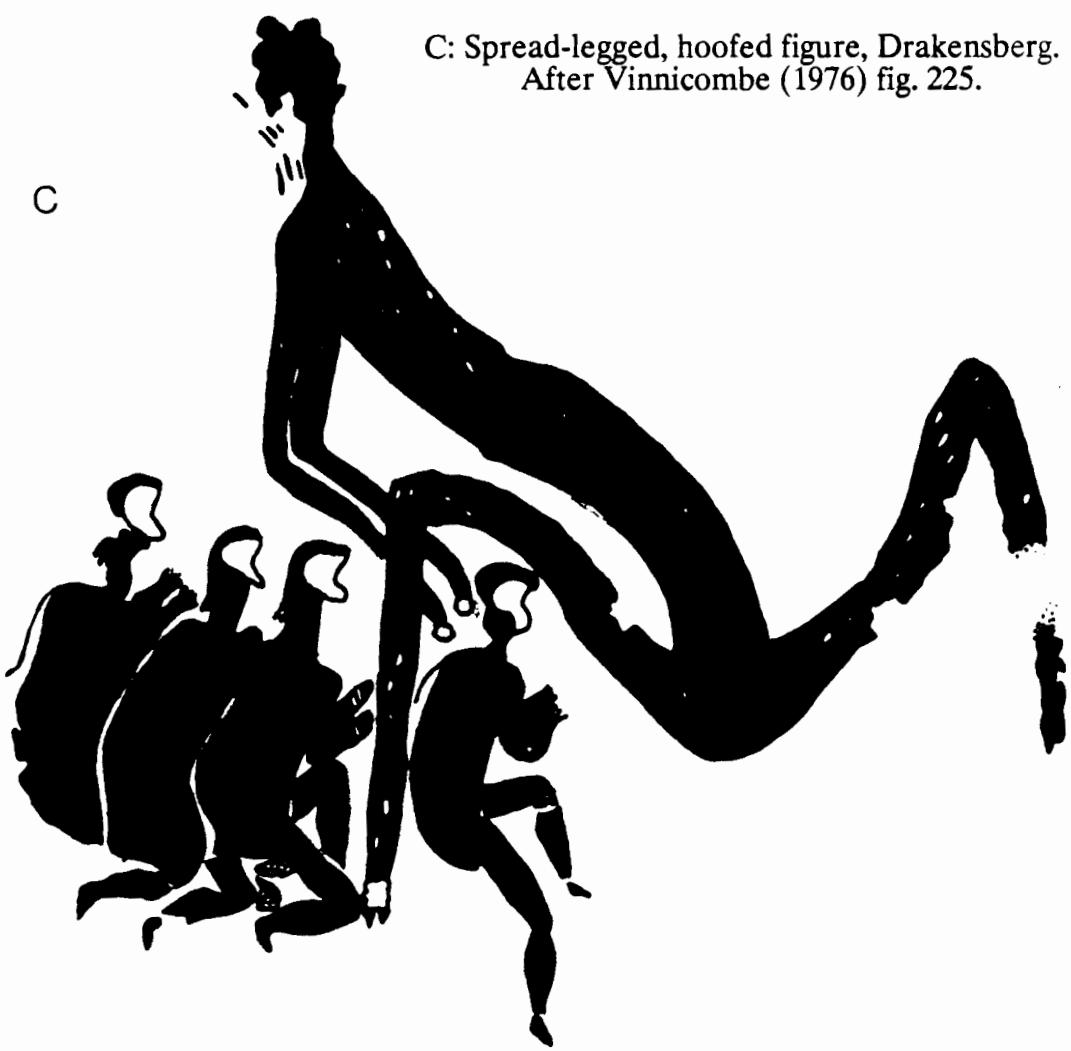
Figure 7: Spread legged figures.

A: Obese figure with spread legs (the 'mother goddess') from Mrewa Cave, Zimbabwe. After Huffman (1983).

B: Spread-legged figure with genital line, Prinswillemsklip, south western Cape. After Johnson, Rabinowitz and Seeff (1959) fig. 30.

C: Spread-legged, hoofed figure, Drakensberg. After Vinnicombe (1976) fig. 225.

C



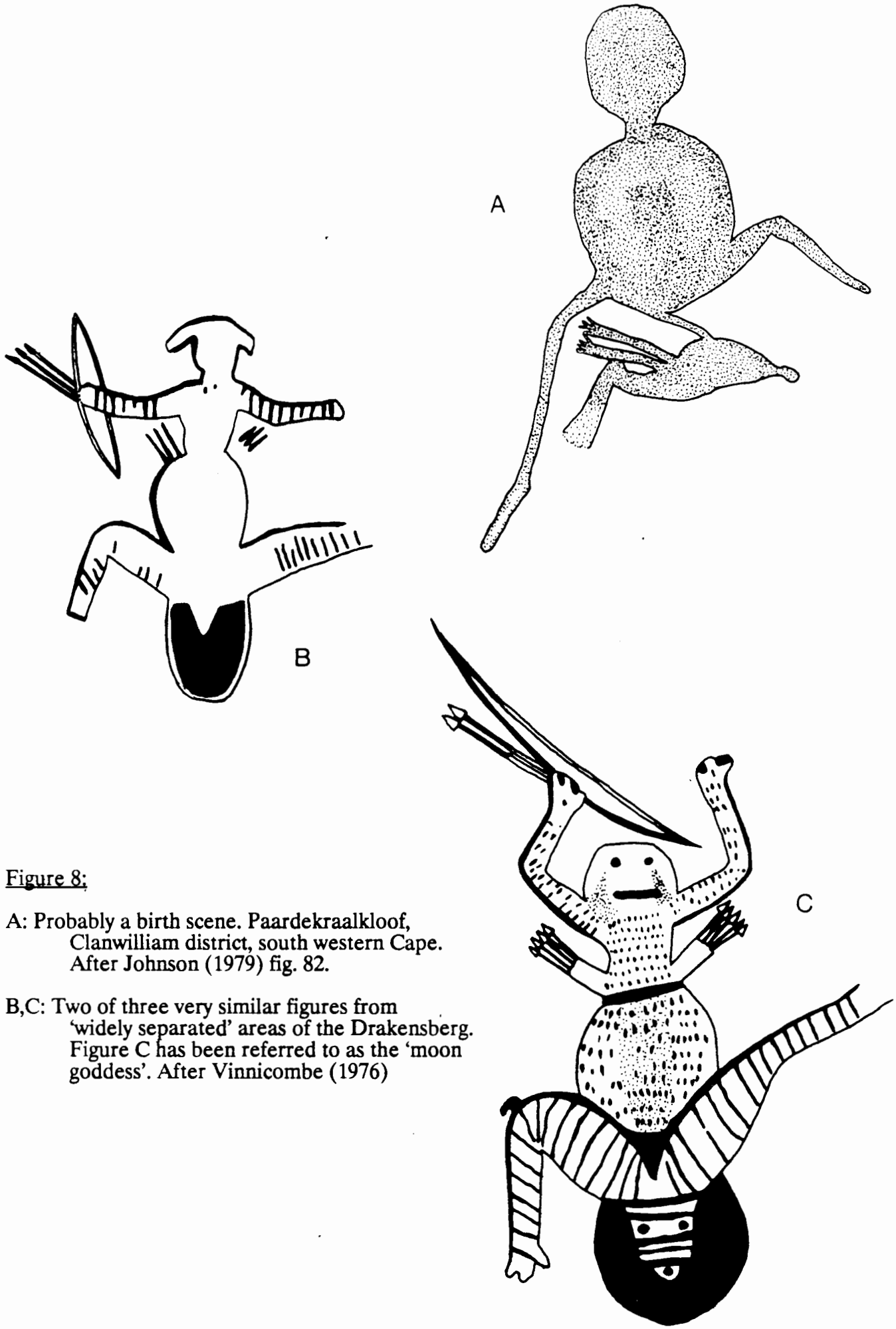


Figure 8:

A: Probably a birth scene. Paardekraalkloof, Clanwilliam district, south western Cape. After Johnson (1979) fig. 82.

B,C: Two of three very similar figures from 'widely separated' areas of the Drakensberg. Figure C has been referred to as the 'moon goddess'. After Vinnicombe (1976)

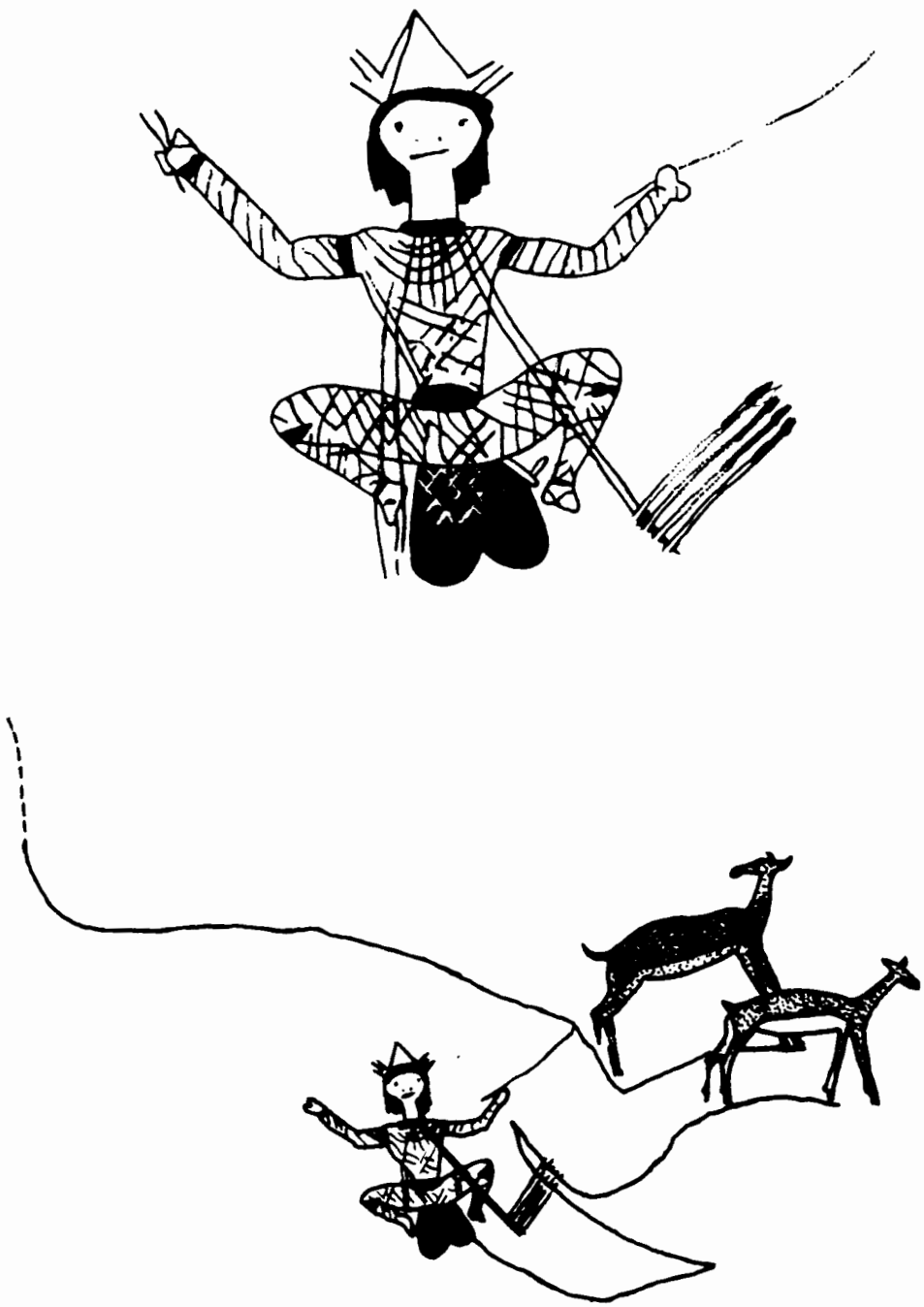


Figure 9:

A,B: The third 'moon goddess' figure, Drakensberg.
A - detail of scene, after Vinnicombe (1976) fig. 87c.
B - with associated motifs, after Pager (1975: 107).

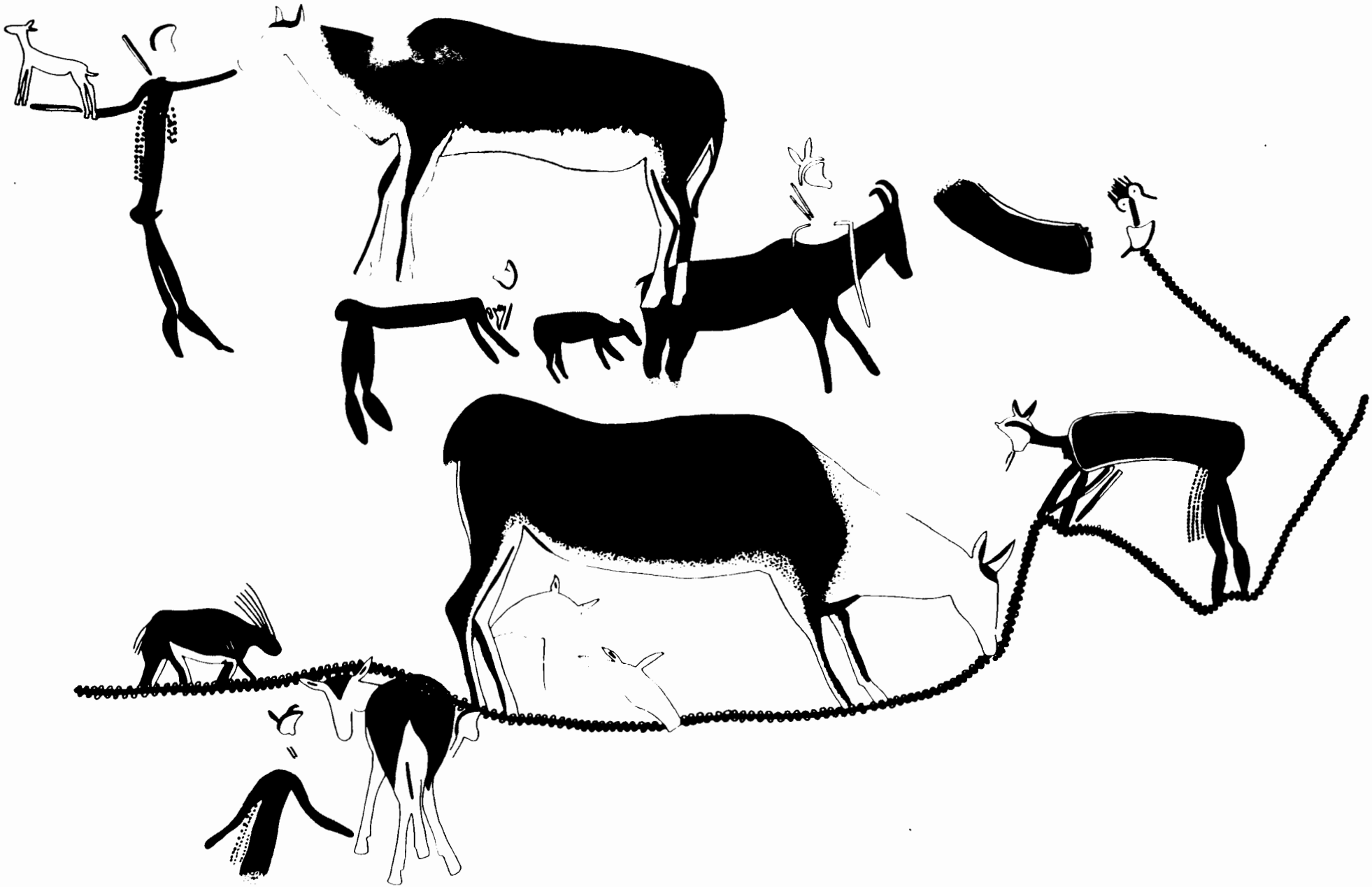


Figure 10:

The thin red line fringed with white dots, Drakensberg. After Lewis-Williams (1981b), fig. 2.

Figure 11:

The thin red line fringed with white dots, Drakensberg. After Lewis-Williams (1981b) fig. 1.

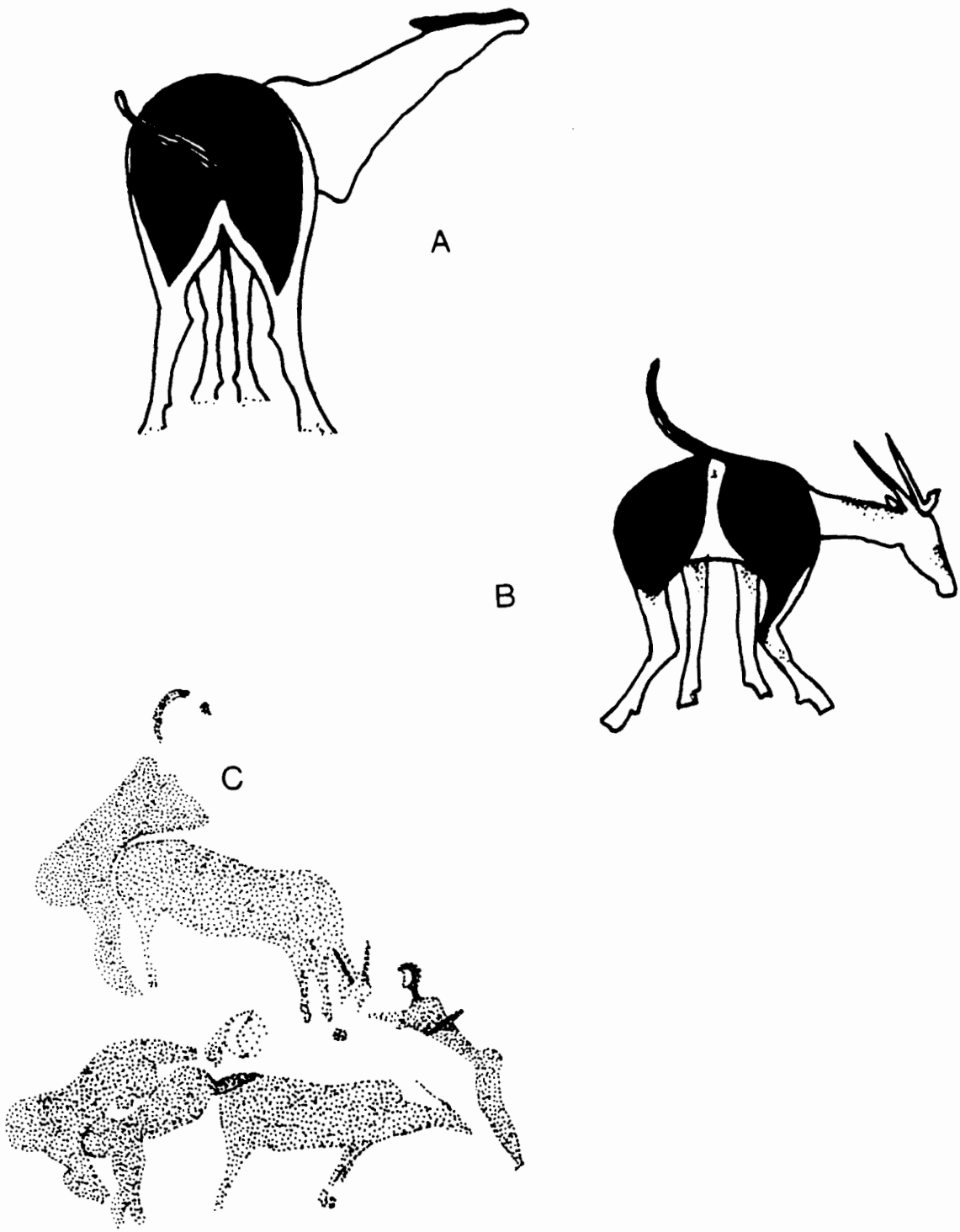


Figure 12: Eland
A,B: Foreshortened rear-view eland.
A is from Harrismith (after Lee and Woodhouse 1970);
B is from Ndedema Gorge (after Lewis-Williams 1981a.)
C: Steatopygeous women (left) leaning over the hindquarters of eland.

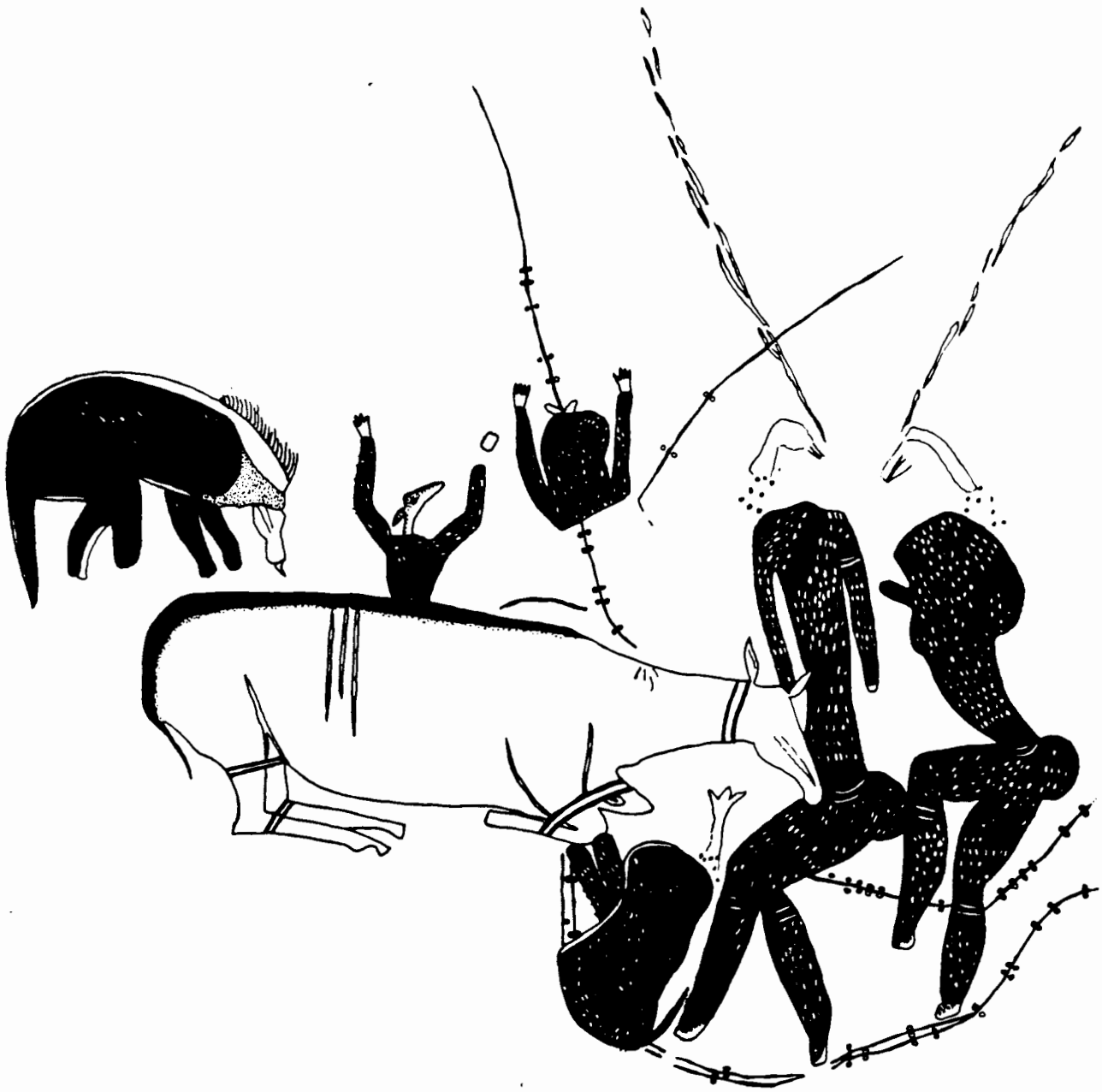
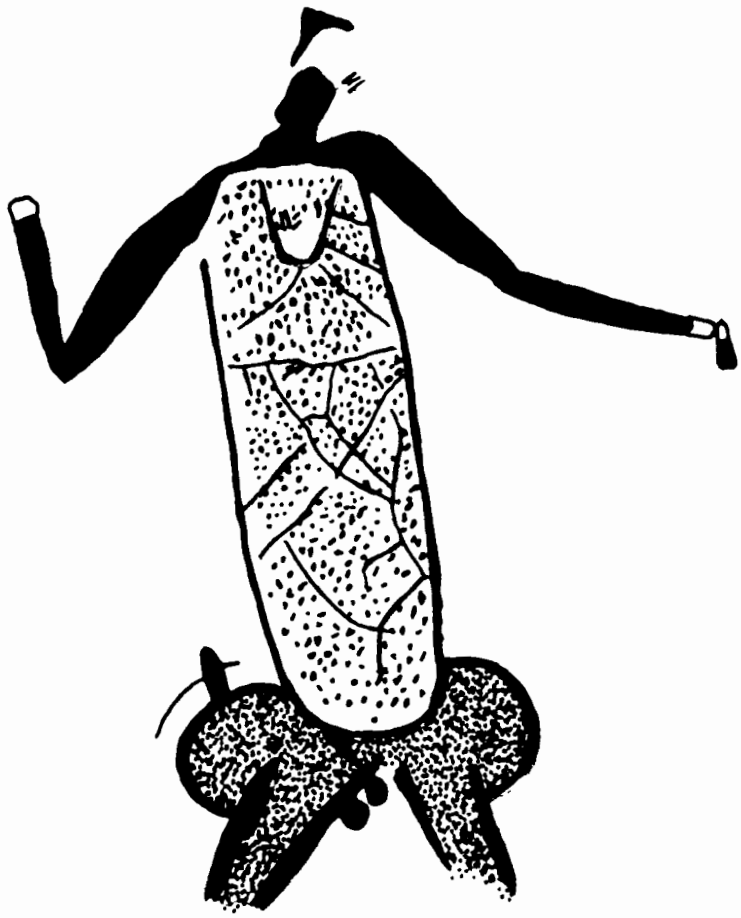


Figure 13:

A rain-making scene, Drakensberg, with bound eland and dotted therianthropic rain-makers. Redrawn from Vinnicombe (1976) figs 109-10, and cover of the South African Archaeological Society Goodwin Series 1983 (4).



A

B

Figure 14:

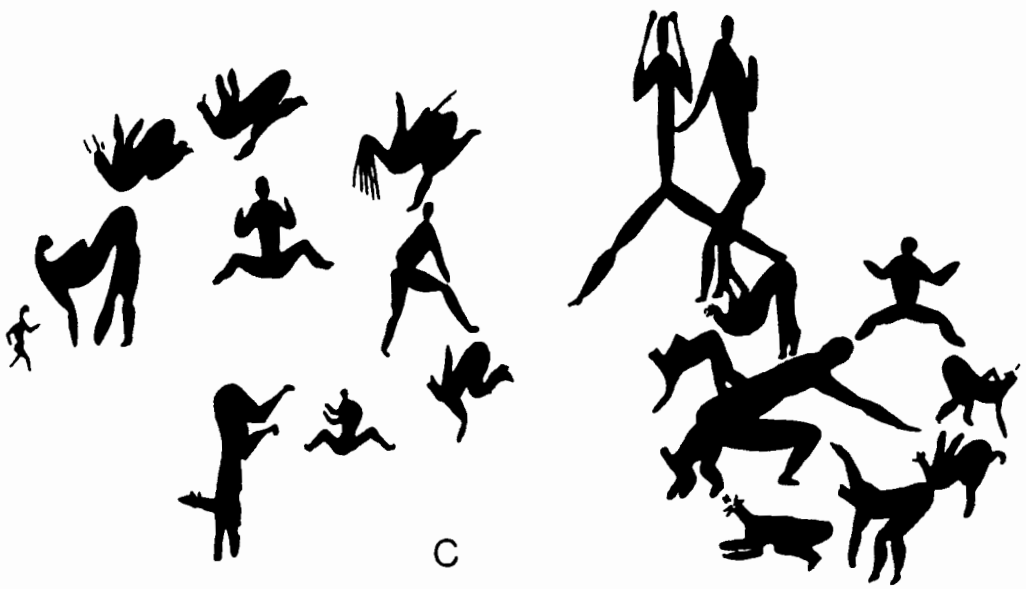
Two figures drawn in non-realistic perspective.
A, from the Drakensberg, shows lateral exaggeration of the buttocks. After Vinnicombe (1976) fig. 167.
B, from Greefswald, Transvaal, shows similar lateral displacement of buttocks and breasts. From a copy by Pager, reproduced on the cover of the *S. Afr. Arch. Bull.* 33 (1978).

Figure 15:

Left/right spatialisation of male and female figures, Drakensberg. After Vinnicombe (1976) fig. 219.

A

B



C

Figure 16: Left/right spatialisation.

A: From the Drakensberg. After Vinnicombe (1976) fig. 222.
B: Spread-legged figures left, dancers right, Orange Free State. After Rosenthal (1953) fig. 7
C: Spread-legged figures left, elongated figures right, no locality. After Rosenthal (1953) fig. 47.

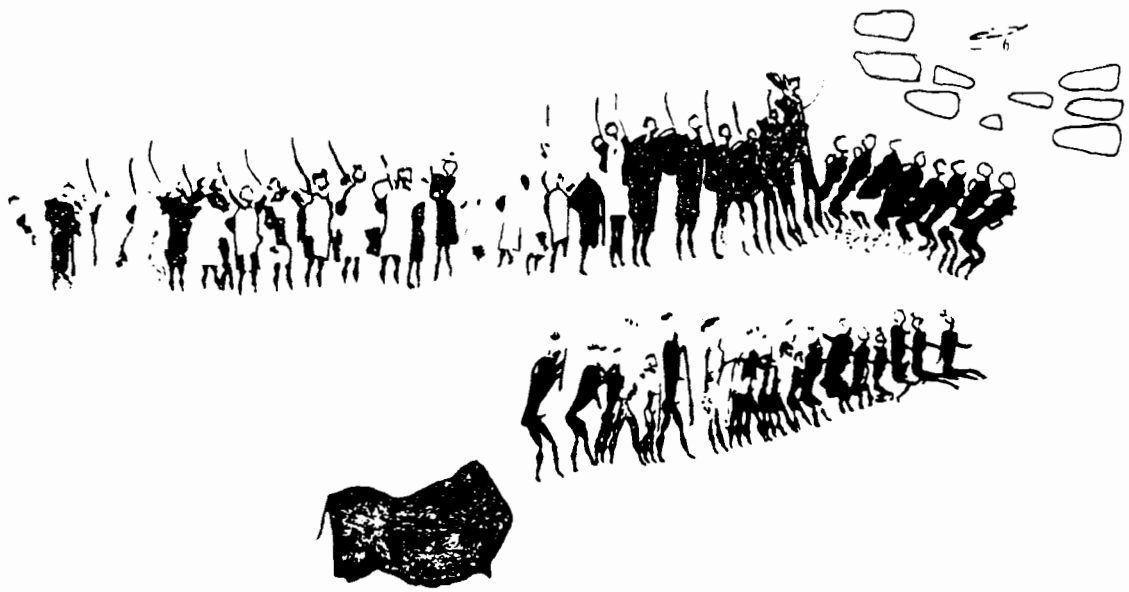


Figure 17: Time and space.

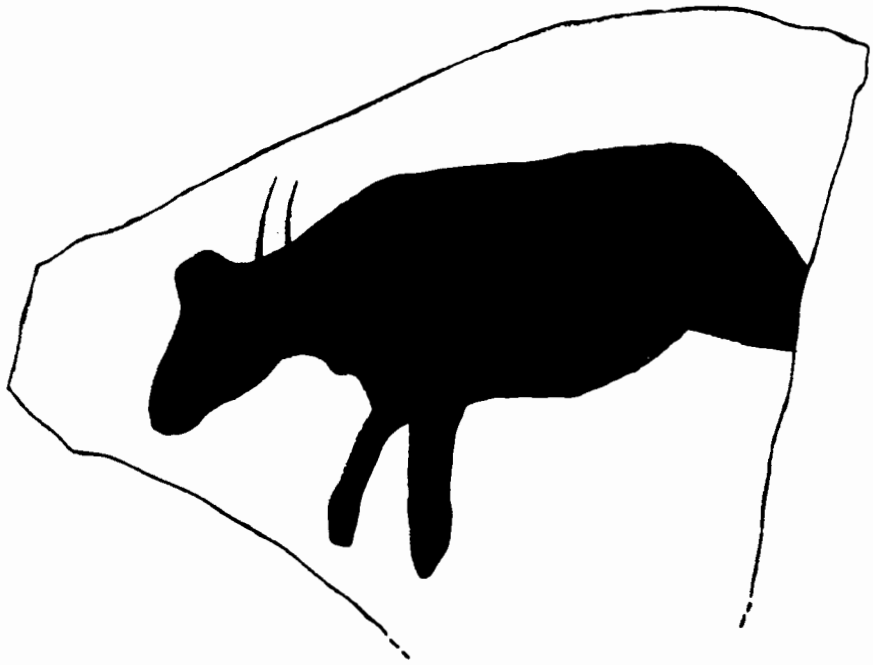
Row of figures, apparently going into trance on the right hand side of the painting. Moving from left to right may represent time. Sevilla, south western Cape. After Yates, Golson and Hall (1985) fig. 9.

Figure 18:

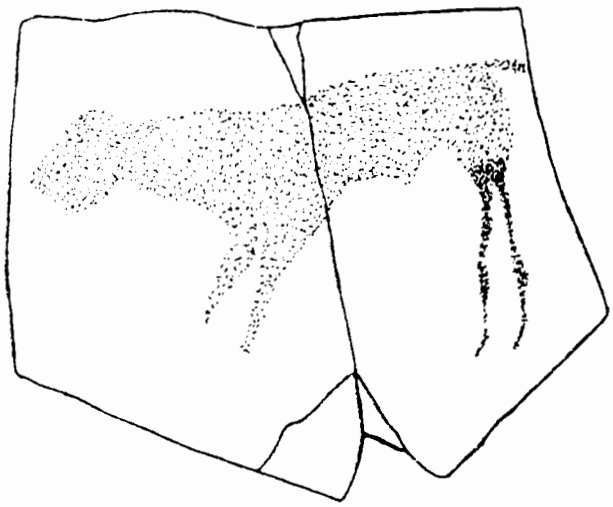
'Token' female figure, lower left, in a hunting/?rain-making scene from Molteno, north eastern Cape. After Johnson (1979) fig. 27.

Figure 19:

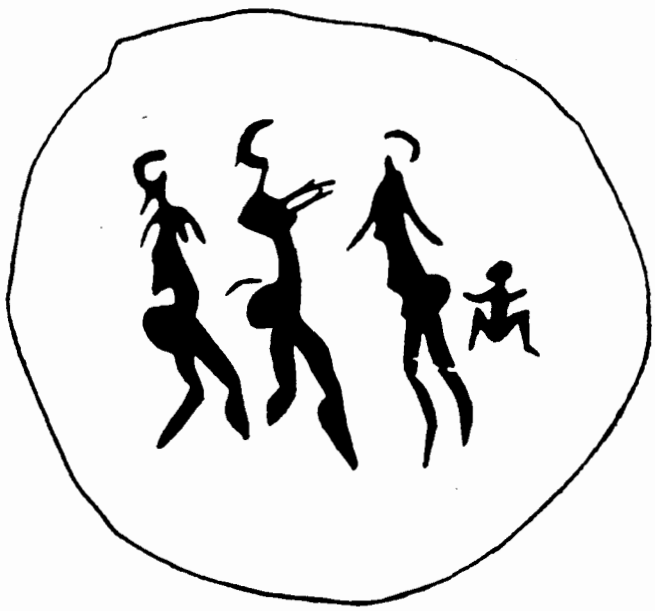
Motifs identified as 'hallucinatory forms'.
After Lewis-Williams (1984) fig. 9.2.



A



B



C

Figure 20: Art mobilier.

A: Buck with lowered head on a stone from Robberg, southern Cape.
B: Feline therianthrope on stone from Apollo XI, Namibia.
C: Steatopygeous women and spread-legged figure on a stone from Coldstream, southern Cape.
All after Lewis-Williams (1984).

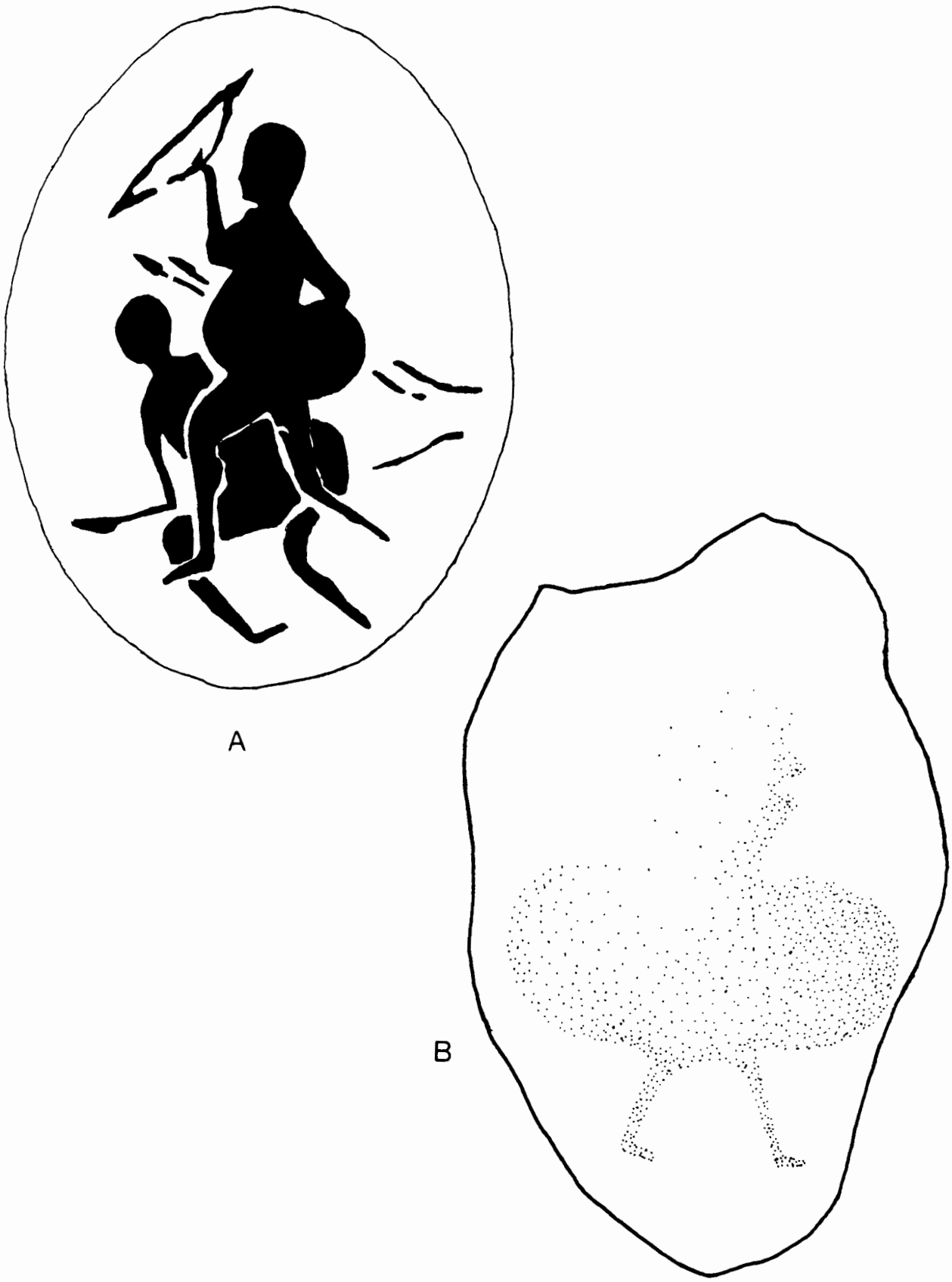


Figure 21: Art mobilier.

A: Steatopygeous figure on stone from Uniondale, southern Cape.
After Johnson (1979) fig. 57.

B: Possibly also a steatopygeous figure, on a stone from Boomplaas, southern Cape.
After A. Thackeray (1983).

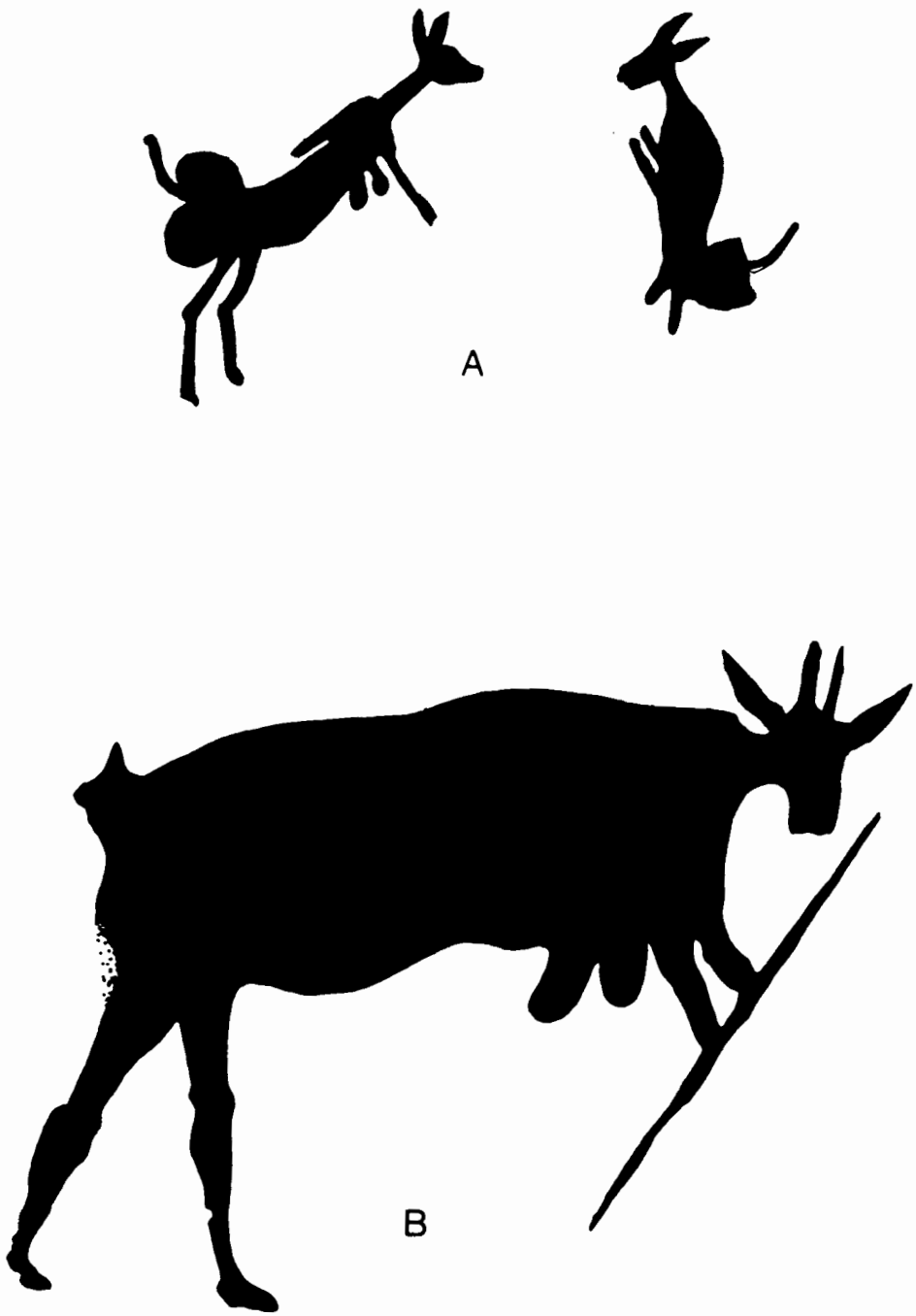


Figure 22: Female therianthropes.

A: From Klein Pakhuis, Clanwilliam district, south western Cape.
After Johnson, Rabinowitz and Seeff (1959) fig. 35.

B: From Syfer se Kop, same district as above.
After a copy by Johnson, reproduced on the cover of the *S. Afr. Arch. Bull.* 32 (1977).

Figure 23: 'Elephants in boxes'.

Monte Cristo, south western Cape. After Johnson (1979) fig. 75. Note elongated trunk of elephant, upper left.

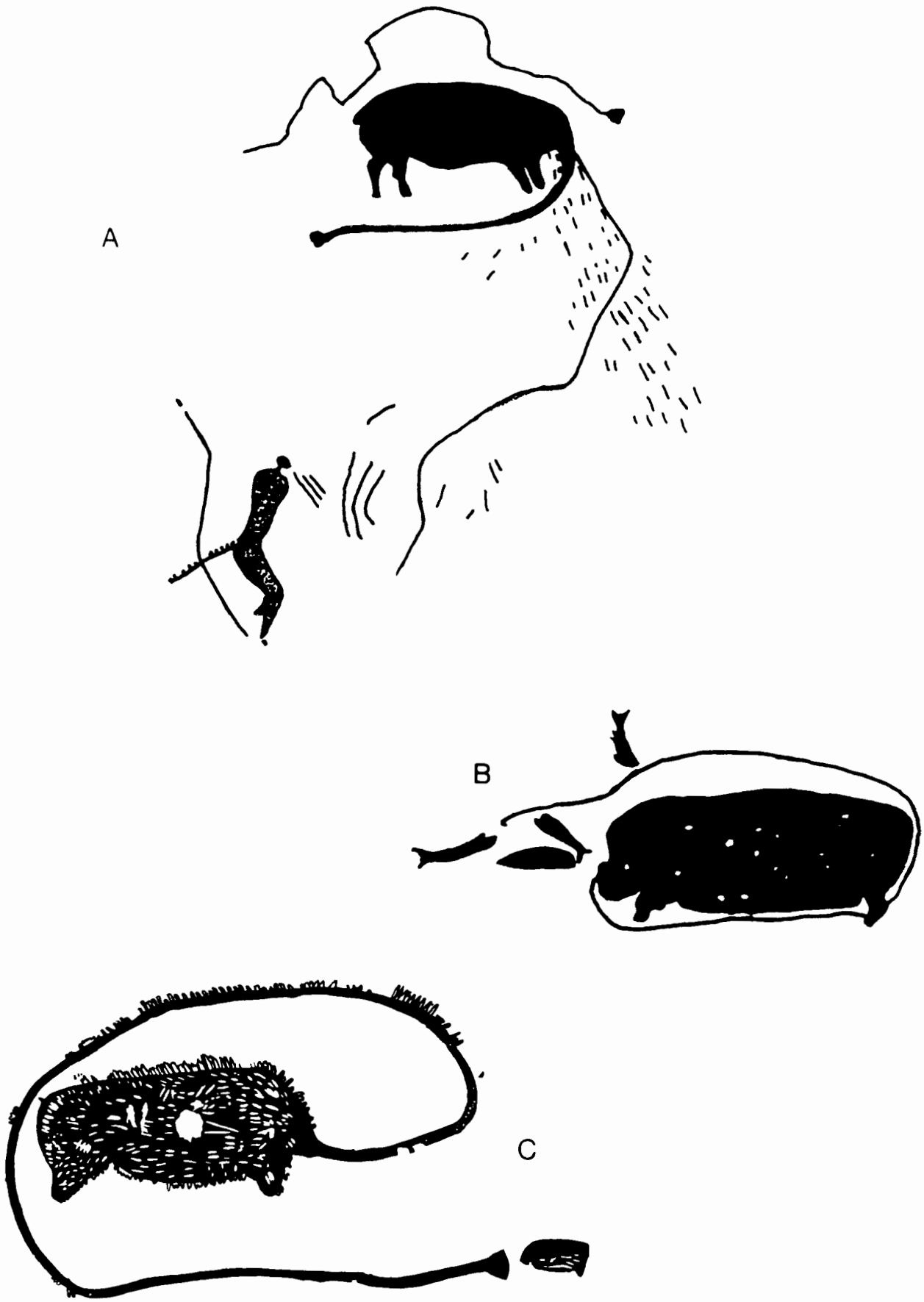


Figure 24:

Rain animals, cf. elephant in figure 23.
A: Drakensberg, After Vinnicombe (1976) fig. 241.
B: Zastron, Orange Free State. After Lee and Woodhouse (1970) fig. 192.
C: Herschel, Cape Province. After Pager (1975:47).

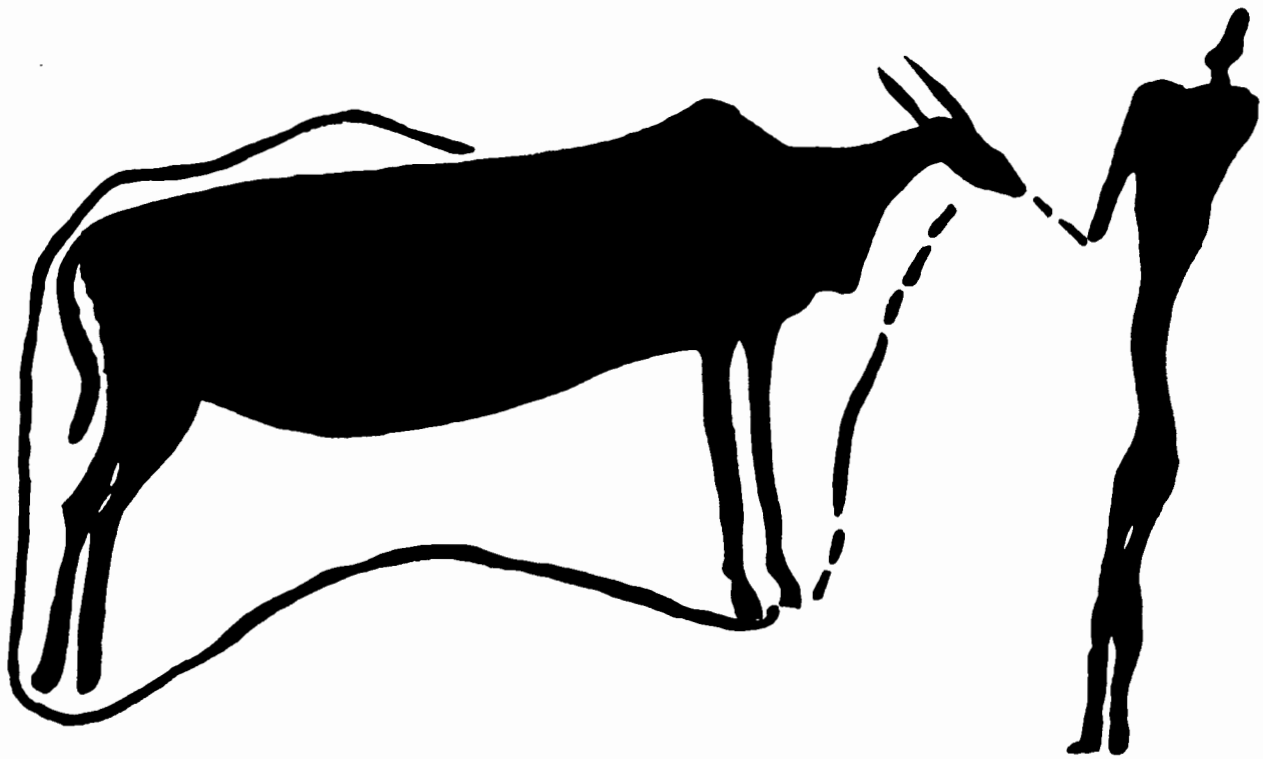


Figure 25:

Buck (?eland) in 'box', from Clanville, eastern Cape.
From a tracing by Schoonraad, reproduced on the cover of the *S. Afr. Arch. Bull.* 144 (1986).

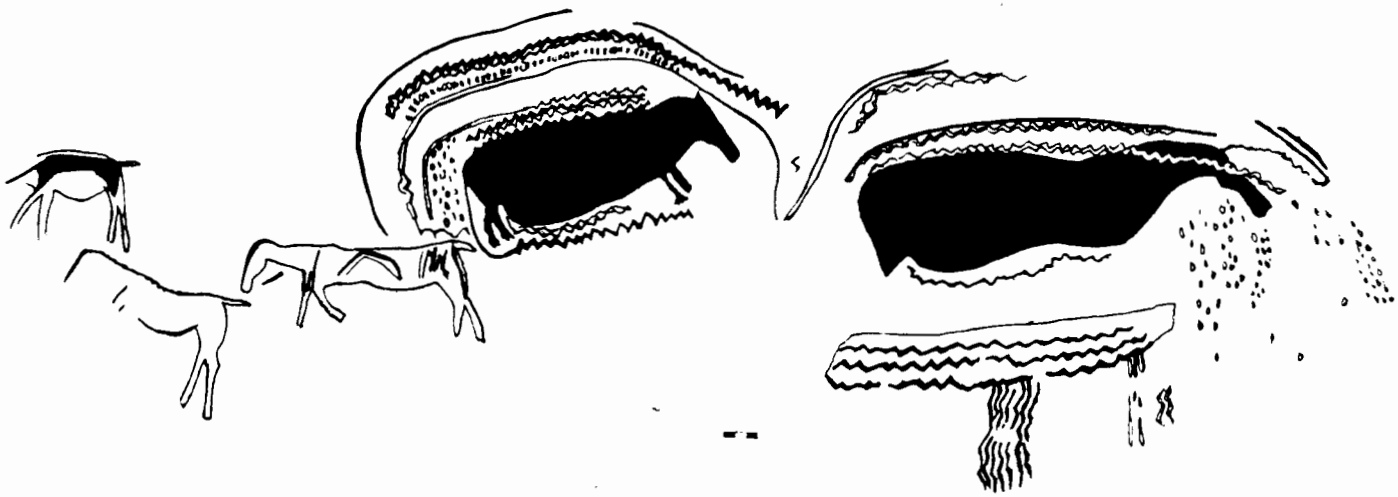
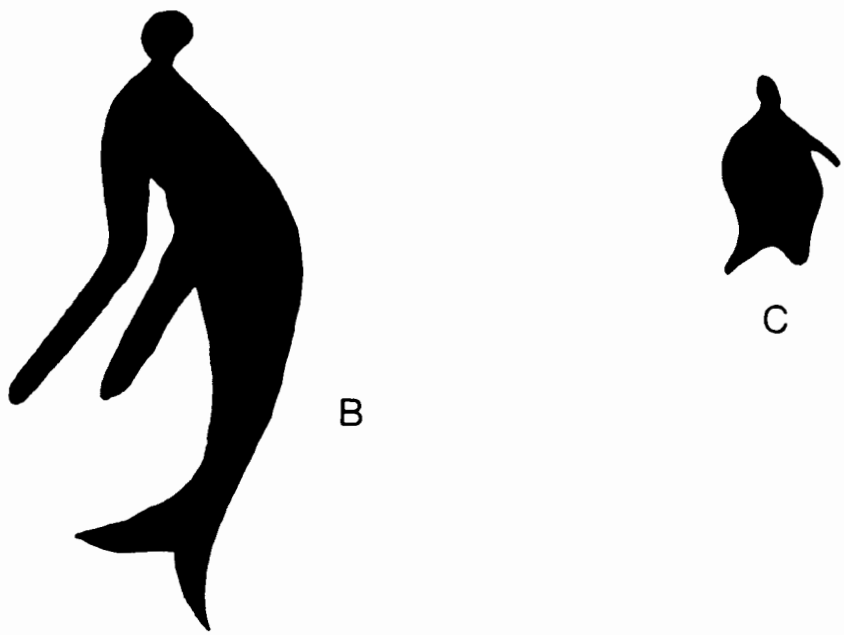


Figure 26:

Rain animals in 'boxes', cf. Woodhouse (1985).
After Lewis-Williams (1989).

A



B

C

Figure 27: Fish-tailed figures.

A: Ezeldjagspoort, southern Cape. After Johnson (1979) fig. 60.
B: Similar figure from Skilpadbeen, same area. From a copy by Johnson, reproduced on the cover of the *S. Afr. Arch. Bull.* 147 (1988).
C: Motif identified by /Han≠kasso as a 'water tortoise'.
After Lewis-Williams (1977).

Figure 28:

Initiation scene, Drakensberg. After Lewis-Williams (1981a) fig. 10.

APPENDIX

It was not possible to explore in any depth the potential of the approach for the analysis of other archaeological materials. Given the gendering of the concepts of life and death, it seemed likely that gender symbolism might have been invoked in burials and living sites. As I began to recognise the complexity of transferring the approach to these archaeological materials, so I realised also that the topic could not have justice done to it in the space available. In this appendix, I outline the way in which I considered gender might be applicable to archaeological sites, and the problems involved.

Burials:

Unfortunately, using burials as a source of cultural information is highly problematic: the preoccupation of early skeleton collectors with questions of 'racial affinity' precluded careful excavation and provision of contextual information, and where such information is available, the wide variation (between regions and even within sites) makes identification of cultural 'norms' very difficult (Inskeep 1986). The absence of dates and sex identifications on many skeletons exacerbates the problems.

The early obsession with 'racial identities' has given way to an interest in the cultural information which burials may provide. Lewis-Williams' analysis of painted burial stones (1984b), as a link between shamanism and burial practices, is one example. Hall and Binneman's (1987) relation of grave good variability and *hxaro* exchange networks represents an approach which stresses economy and social organisation, while Wadley (1988) has interpreted grave goods in symbolic/trance terms, noting also the problems of variability involved.

Gender and grave good variability

It is interesting that no differences have been identified between grave goods associated with male and female burials. Morris (1984) noted that grave goods were marginally more common with the female Riet River burials (52% as opposed to 41%), but did not consider this difference significant. If personal adornments (ostrich egg shell beads, earrings, pendants, bangles etc), which may have been on the body at the time of death, are removed, and only other artefacts counted, then it seems even more likely that gender does not determine frequencies of associated grave goods. 17.8% (5 of 28) of female and 17.6% (6 of 34) male burials were associated with worked objects other than personal adornment.

The motives for interring particular goods with corpses appear obscure, and ethnographic accounts are generally unhelpful. Lebzelter (1928/9, cited by Schapera 1930) found that among the !Kung such goods were interred, not for the use of the dead, but because people didn't want to use things which had belonged to a loved one. Bleek (1928b) observed that the Naron were buried with all their possessions, Dornan (1925) that the 'tame Bushmen' were buried with a little food (meat; berries) and water. The problem with the explanation that people were buried with their own possessions is that one might then expect to find more gender differentiation in the kind of goods associated with male and female burials; and such asymmetry does not seem to apply. A symbolic rather than functional approach may contribute to the solution of this problem.

There is some evidence to suggest that the gender conventions I have described in previous chapters may have been invoked in the context of death, in accordance with the fundamental concern of the symbol set and gender taxonomy with life and death. One example is Trenk's account of death customs, where a widow shaved a circle shape in her hair, and a widower made a central parting (Trenk 1910, cited by Schapera 1930). This is in accordance with the round/feminine : slender/masculine

convention which I have related to moon (and other) beliefs, and have suggested organises San cultural products to a significant extent.

Following the suggestion that the same conventions and symbolism which characterise the gender taxonomy are drawn on in burial practices and customs proved difficult. Bored stones, ochre and grindstones, three common features of burials, may be interpreted in terms of the rain/ gender/ fertility model I have outlined previously, but owing to the variability of burials, this interpretation is problematic.

Trance, death and bored stones

I have suggested in previous chapters that the symbolism of death, while potentially referring to trance death, connects more strongly with San notions about femininity and negativity. In this light, I consider Wadley's interpretation of the goods associated with a burial from Oakhurst Cave (Wadley 1988:5-7).

A male burial from Oakhurst was associated with a bored stone containing resin and fish vertebrae, and a grindstone with ochre staining. Wadley (1988:6) makes a valuable attempt to interpret grave goods in symbolic terms, seeing the Oakhurst burial in terms of trance symbolism, with the fish bones symbolising underwater and the sensations of trance death, and acting as 'a metaphor for the dead man's state of consciousness'. However in terms of my analysis, all these associated goods, and particularly bored stones, have feminine connotations. As Wadley (1988) notes, bored (or round) stones were used by women to communicate with the dead game spirits (Bleek and Lloyd 1911). This usage links women, bored stones, 'down' and death, and has been interpreted elsewhere in this project as a feminine power strategy within the boundaries of the gender conventions. The fish remains in the bored stone may be seen in relation to my interpretation of 'underwater' as a metaphor for death - not necessarily that of trance, but that visited upon errant girls and their families by an angry !Khwa, the rain being. The fish and the bored stone

may thus both have feminine associations, as may ochre and grindstones also (see below). Within the trance hypothesis, the significance of the bored stone cannot be explained, let alone its association with fish remains. From a perspective focussing on gender symbolism, both the fish and the bored stone have connections with femininity and death; and at Oakhurst they are found in association in the context of a grave. I propose that the symbolism refers above all to the gender conventions, and refers to the general linkage of women and death, rather than (only) to trance. In other words, because of the association of women and death, feminine-linked artefacts may have had a symbolic significance in the burial context, and death may have been perceived in 'feminised' terms. However, not all graves have bored stones, and though a 'feminisation of death' may explain their occurrence, the problem remains that the hypothesis cannot explain variability.

Ochre and grindstones

Similar conclusions may be drawn via an examination of the significance of ochre and grindstones. Ochre seems to function as symbolic blood in a number of contexts (see chapters 2-4), and may symbolise death, in contrast to water, a symbol of life. The association of skeletons with ochre may relate thus and be interpreted accordingly. In other words, ochre may be seen as occurring with burials because of its generalised connotations of death. Grindstones, often ochre-stained, are associated with burials, and these artefacts, by form and function, are associated with femininity. The association of these three things with male as well as female burials is not explained by the accounts which claim that burial goods are the personal possessions of the deceased, since neither bored stones nor grindstones are masculine equipment. What these artefacts, as well as ochre, have in common is an association with femininity and death. The fish in the bored stone apparently has a dual connection with femininity and death.

This interpretation, linking burial features to the set of beliefs about life and death, and the symbolic associations of artefacts (according to who uses them, formal characteristics, etcetera) may explain the occurrence of these grave goods, the lack of distinction between male and female graves, and the association of male burials with artefacts customarily used by women. The pervasive linkage of women and death is seen as perhaps informing burial practices, over and above the more remote linkage of trance and death. The painted 'burial' stones which Lewis-Williams (1984b) has interpreted as trance-related (see figures 20,21) probably refer to rain - the animal with lowered head may be seen as a rain animal, and dancing and spread-legged figures as likewise connected to rain beliefs. The Uniondale, Coldstream and perhaps also the Boomplaas art mobilier may depict feminine imagery because femininity is particularly associated with birth and death. However variability cannot currently be accounted for, whether the symbol-oriented approach is that of trance or gender.

Living sites

The gender conventions may be useful in explaining features of living sites, but as Moore (1986) has shown, this is a complex task. Moore describes Endo burial patterns, and their relation to gender conventions. This is contingent to the Endo distinction between three kinds of refuse - ash, dung and chaff - which 'have specific disposal positions relative to each other and to compound activities' (1986:102). Associations are made between refuse and burial, which relate to the everyday associations of these substances; men and women are buried in the places where dung (animal; masculine) and chaff (plant; feminine) respectively are disposed of. Other burial customs include burying men to the right of the man's house, and the woman to the left of her house. Age at death is another factor, and younger adults are buried further away from the house, to left or right, depending on gender. Moore (1986:102:105) describes these principles as a set of ideals, and notes that the actual

distribution of graves was very variable, because it was not always possible to meet the criteria - or at least not all of them. Men's and women's houses are not arranged in the village according to the left : right convention; thus if a woman dies, whose house is situated to the right of her deceased husband's house, then she will be buried to the left of his grave. This means that she cannot also be buried below her own house, but the ideal that she should lie on the left of her husband takes precedence. Thus the three ideals - burial to the left of her husband, with the chaff, and below her own house - may not all be fulfilled. Her burial conforms to the convention(s) which are most highly ranked. So, 'the actual positioning of each burial is the practical working-out of a set of principles within a particular context' (1986:104). The ranking of conventions, contextual limitations and the fact that conventions are not rules, account for burial variability and departures from the ideal.

From this account, the difficulty of correlating social conventions and observable site features may be appreciated; the problem is exacerbated by the temporal distance of archaeological sites. Yet the approach is clearly valuable, since it 'copes' well with the problem of variability. For archaeological sites it is unlikely that hierarchies of conventions can be accounted for, and only the most pervasive principles are likely to be identifiable. The left/right and round/slender conventions are the most prominent and promising.

Round/slender:

This prominent convention has been used in previous chapters to interpret features of rock art. I have suggested that artefactual form may be governed by this convention. A further avenue of enquiry might be opened via the association of grindstones with women and feminine activities, especially because grindstones are not carried about by contemporary San, but are left at sites (Yellen 1977). Distribution of grindstones may therefore be a key to identifying gender

spatialisation of sites. Slender (arrow-related; masculine) artefacts are more problematic, since it is likely that those remaining in sites qualify as refuse, and may therefore be situated according to conventions regarding refuse disposal (see below), rather than indicating male activity areas.

The symbolism of round and slender may be implicated in the form of artefacts used by men and women, and might act as a key to the style of some stone artefacts, where technical/functional explanations do not account adequately for formal characteristics. Formal shifts between the two poles over time may also be related to gender questions, but such directions are very difficult, and possibly not worth pursuing.

Left/right:

This is the most promising convention in relation to archaeological problems, and has been used by Wadley (1986) to explain the occurrence of ostrich egg shell beads on the left hand side of a cave. However, the left/right convention is not amenable to the sort of absolutism that Wadley assumes and it is unlikely that the right and left sides of a site are masculine and feminine respectively. Rather, as a camp plan drawn by a X/am informant (Bleek and Lloyd 1911) shows, feminine space is to the left of the corresponding male relative, and there is no one division into left and right. The distribution of artefacts around hearths may be ordered in this way, according to Marshall's (1959) observation that left and right of the hearth were associated with women and men respectively.

Artefacts and materials found in association with bedding and sleeping hollows may be approached in similar fashion, though there is no cast iron evidence that husbands and wives slept to right and left of each other. Artefacts and materials which may (in later sites) be fairly confidently associated with the genders are few,

but include :

F - grindstones, bored stones, ostrich egg shell and ostrich egg shell beads, and plant debris. If women used adzes to sharpen their digging sticks then adzes and woodshavings might have feminine associations.

M - arrow-related artefacts; animal product debris, not including remains of meals.

Concepts of rubbish and rubbish disposal:

As noted, cultural attitudes towards rubbish may interfere with attempts to identify masculine/feminine spaces and activity areas. Identification of such attitudes among contemporary San would be a necessary beginning, including investigation of categorisations of kinds of rubbish. Deliberate deposition of wastes in particular places would be interesting in itself, and might be connected to conceptualisations of the world in a general sense. However, it is not clear to what extent archaeological finds are discards, though unretouched and unutilised flakes, cores, stone chips and chunks, and wood shavings might unproblematically be seen as waste. Formal tools are another problem altogether, and spatial analysis would have to account for their presence, and decisions made as to whether they qualify as waste or not.

'Before' and 'after':

The G/wi associate men and women with worked and unworked materials respectively, and this might be brought to bear on artefactual analysis. Though no directions spring to mind, the temporal order of activities may be represented in sites; again it is a complex problem.

Symbolic attributes of the landscape:

Site situation, orientation and distribution is likely to have been influenced by the culturally specific conceptualisations of the landscape. Orientation relative to sun, moon and prevailing weather might be considered - for example, in the light of the the statement that a Kalahari San group did not like to sleep with the moon shining

in their faces (Dornan 1925). Such considerations should be integrated with functional factors, such as the quality of a shelter as a protective environment. Similarly, high and low places might have had different social meanings for San peoples, and do not necessarily relate solely to practical considerations such as value as a vantage point; closeness to water, and so on.

Conclusions:

The problems of symbolic approaches to archaeological sites are many. Primary amongst them are (1) site complexity and 'overprinting', complicating identification of spatial patterning (Halkett, Parkington, pers. comm.); (2) the variability attributable to the fact that patterning results from 'the practical working-out of sets of principles' in particular contexts. Yet there is ample evidence that gender conventions act as generative principles in many societies, including contemporary San. Hence, though this patterning may be difficult, or even impossible, to identify in archaeological sites (as opposed to other cultural texts), the approach I have outlined is not necessarily misplaced or useless. Concentration on low intensity occupation sites, such as one currently being excavated in the south western Cape) may compensate for the first problem (above); the implications of the second problem may in fact be profitable for archaeological research. The theory of practice has extra-ordinary potential for addressing the question of variability; however variability in living sites and burials cannot presently be accounted for by the approach adopted. The gender conventions may be identifiable in archaeological sites by means of a more rigorous analysis of these materials than has been possible in this project.