

CHAPTER 6 THE QUEST FOR MEANING

THE BIASED GAZE: 'SCRIBBLES', 'DOODLES', 'DEGENERATE ART' AND 'ENTOPTICS'

The archaeological, ethnographic and historical record has proven conclusively that the ancestors of modern San inhabited the transVaal in remote times; and that from approximately 2000 years ago, the descendants of these early hunter-gatherers were sporadically joined by Khoekhoe herders and Bantu-speaking agropastoralists. Although the record does not offer positive proof of the age or authorship of the rock engravings of Redan, it nevertheless provides a plausible socio-cultural context within which the rock engravings can be interpreted. As opposed to this evidence which remains inferential, the rock engravings themselves are a positive and primary source of information. Before commencing this investigation, it is necessary to look more closely at existing methodological approaches and their historical development. This chapter will not provide an extensive account of developments in the whole of this field; rather, it will provide a broad overview of those approaches and models that relate directly to non-representational imagery in the South African context.

Early descriptions of the rock art focussed on the astonishing naturalism of the art. These life-like images possessed a verisimilitude and immediacy that observers could relate to effortlessly. There was consensus that the Bushman, although inferior in most respects, possessed remarkable artistic skills. However, there is a

second category of imagery that was not included in this favourable assessment. These images do not resemble any recognisable animal in nature, or appear to refer to any known object. These indecipherable images seldom occur in the paintings, but are abundantly present in the rock engravings, sometimes in conjunction with images of animals but frequently as the only mode of expression. They are occasionally indeterminate in shape, but the majority are geometrically constructed, frequently with a pronounced circular configuration. These non-representational images were not considered worthy of attention and ignored; the only researcher who considered them worthy of attention was George William Stow (chapter 5). The consensus was that these 'crude' images were unlikely to be the work of the artistically gifted Bushman, and consequently they were relegated to those indigenous races considered to be devoid of artistic abilities. Non-mimetic rock engravings (including Redan) are mentioned in a number of reports dating from the early 1900s, invariably in derogatory terms. Rudolph Pösch, employed by the McGregor Museum in Kimberley, expresses great admiration for the naturalistic animal engravings found in parts of the Cape Colony and compares them to the non-mimetic engravings of Stampriet (near Gobabis) which he considers to be degenerate: 'Begegnen wir hier vielleicht einer degenerierten Buschmannkunst? ... Sind nun Buschmänner die Künstler vom Zeichenfels in Stampriet oder waren es andere Völker?' ('Is this the beginning of *degenerate* Bushman art? Are the Bushmen the artists of the engravings at Stampriet or some other race?') (cited in Wilman (1933) 1968:11, emphasis added).

This early disparagement of non-representational imagery in rock art was continued by the visiting geologist J.P. Johnson (1910:48-49):

The most primitive series of petroglyphs that I have yet seen are those in the neighbourhood of Vereeniging (Redan) ... It consists of numerous geometric figures, which however, do not seem to possess any symbolical character like many of those at other localities ...

Johnson did not consider any of these 'geometric figures' worth reproducing in his 1910-publication. Instead he describes the naturalistic animal engravings of the Wolmaransstad area as 'a very fine series', includes copies of these in his publication and concludes that 'recent and inferior peckings are probably all Bantu imitations of earlier ones' (Johnson 1910:50). An innovative but problematic dimension was added to rock art studies by the contribution of the Cambridge-trained archaeologist M.C. Burkitt. He approached the art from an 'archaeological' point of view, equating the superimposition of images on the rock face with the successive layering of deposits in an archaeological site. He developed a chronology of typological and stratigraphic development in the art and defined four different 'series' (styles), dating from four different periods, each displaying a progressive development, or conversely a deterioration of technical ability (Burkitt 1928:146-149). Burkitt avoids detailed discussion of the non-representational imagery, but makes a cursory reference to the non-representational engravings of Afvallingskop in the Orange Free State, and surmises that they are unsuccessful attempts at imitating the natural appearance of objects in nature: 'Some of these may be

fanciful representations of flowers and of snakes. Others are certainly more geometric and pattern-like in appearance' (Burkitt 1928:146). Burkitt set a precedent by defining style within the narrow confines of technique only.

A.J.H. Goodwin was a student of Burkitt and he followed closely in the footsteps of his mentor. He made a comprehensive study of the rock engravings of Keurfontein at Vosberg and greatly expanded Burkitt's stylistic series. He identifies six phases and no less than thirteen styles characterised by what he perceives as a fluctuating progressive and retrogressive development of technical ability, as determined by the precise 'mark' or indentation caused by a specific tool on the rock surface and the resulting patination; there is no attempt to describe the visual organisation or form relationships of these marks, and what they constitute. He dismisses the most recent 'styles' and believes they were 'scratched with metal tools by "herd boys"' (cited in Willcox 1963:55). Following the example of Burkitt and Goodwin a succession of rock art specialists would continue to equate style with technique, impoverishing the concept of style and ultimately limiting its potential as a heuristic tool in the assessment of non-representational imagery. In 1933 *The rock engravings of Griqualand West and Bechuanaland, South Africa*, was published. It was the first study devoted solely to rock engravings and it rapidly became the definitive study of rock engravings. The author was Maria Wilman, director of the McGregor Museum in Kimberley. Wilman's debt to Burkitt and Goodwin is apparent in her detailed and meticulous classification of engravings within a chronological sequence of technical development. She defines four separate 'classes' or styles ranging from 'classical' to

'imitations' and to 'scribblings' and includes non-representational images in this category (Wilman (1933) 1968:44). She is clearly intrigued with the naturalistic engravings of animals and invariably attempts to identify the exact species portrayed. In her description of non-mimetic imagery Wilman is less condemnatory than some of her predecessors, and she includes some of them in her classification of 'classical' engravings; however she is only able to assess them within the familiar framework of the perceived clumsy attempts of the ancient artists to imitate the appearance of the natural world:

They take the forms of lines, circles, concentric circles; some are stellar-like and when they appear on the upper portion of a picture, we may call them stars, while others may be the star-like flowers of composites on the rosette-like ones of lilies. Some seem to imitate sun-cracks in clay, others have certainly been suggested by the pattern on the carapaces of the local 'mountain', and 'geometric' tortoises, others have been equally suggested by the many strange devices painted or engraved by nature on the rocks of this area. (Wilman (1933) 1968:32)

The concept of a stylistic evolution and devolution in rock art and the denigration of non-mimetic imagery as advocated by a succession of researchers in South Africa from Pösch to Wilman was developed by the Abbé Henri Breuil. Born in France in 1887 and trained as a priest, he became the world's leading authority on the Paleolithic (Old Stone Age) art in Europe. After seeing Stow's copies of rock art (Breuil 1955:1) his interest in South Africa was aroused and he visited South Africa on several occasions where he subsequently formed close ties with the rock art

fraternity including Burkitt, Goodwin, Van Riet Lowe and the artist Walter Battiss. He finally left South Africa in 1950 (Mason 1989). Influenced by the evolutionist school of the late nineteenth century, by archaeological method, and by entrenched art historical concepts, he developed a chronological scheme of sequential artistic development. He saw parallels between archaeological stratigraphy and the superimposition of successive layers of images on the rock face, and believed that each new superimposition indicated a further stage of artistic evolution or devolution (Laming 1959:35). Adopting the nomenclature of art history he proceeded to describe with great exactitude each successive stage, particularly the colour and the degree of naturalism and movement present in the animal images. This gave further credence to the conviction shared by his contemporaries that the motive of the art was primarily that of sympathetic magic – a belief in the efficacy of realistically painted images to ensure success in the hunt (Laming 1959:156-157). Breuil believed that the rock art had developed in two independent cycles, each characterised in the beginning by crude and elementary forms and monochrome colour schemes and gradually progressing to more naturalistic and complex forms, bichrome and polychrome colour schemes, and finally deteriorating into 'degenerate' art (Lorblanchet 1977:49). He considered the non-mimetic images to be an inferior art form, inept attempts by unskilled artists to imitate the naturalistic work of master artists. He coined terms such as claviforms (key shapes), aviforms (bird shapes) and tectiforms (hut shapes) to describe these images which for him were always poor representations of real things.

The concept of periodicity and the unilinear progression of style was originally formulated by the eighteenth century German antiquarian, J.J. Winckelmann. He postulated a system of sequential stylistic development founded upon the idea of fluctuating patterns of growth and change in the history of art, and projected these categories of style onto the development of representation. His evolutionary sequence was based on the art of Greece, from an early 'stylised' and 'archaic' period, to the supreme naturalism of the 'classical' period of the fifth century BC which he considered the pinnacle of artistic achievement, to the Hellenistic, a period of slow decline, characterised by imitation and the degeneration of earlier naturalistic forms (Preziozi 1998:21-27). His contribution to both art and archaeology is succinctly expressed by Preziozi (1998:21-23):

... he was concerned with articulating ... a coherent evolutionary sequence of artistic styles modelled (as all art histories of art had been for some time) upon an organic metaphor of birth, maturity and decline. His work was a progenitor of what came to be formalized in mid-nineteenth century Europe as the academic discipline of art history. It instituted categories and paradigms which today remain deeply embedded in the structural framework and the pragmatic working assumptions of both classical archaeology (which also took Winckelmann as its chief progenitor) and modern art historical practice.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century Breuil and his contemporaries continued to apply these concepts of art historical connoisseurship to rock art studies, resulting in the qualitative assessment of the art within European realist

traditions and the inevitable disregard for the non-representational imagery. Breuil remained in South Africa until 1950 and his influence was palpable. He assisted in the compilation of the 1941-survey of rock art in South Africa (Van Riet Lowe 1941) and in a number of other projects. During the archaeological excavations at the Rose Cave Cottage in the Free State he collaborated closely with Clarence Van Riet Lowe and particularly with the artist Walter Battiss, who had joined the party on a voluntary basis to copy the rock art (chapter 2). Breuil's position as the most revered and respected rock art scholar in the world was secure and no doubt the much younger Battiss looked up to him as a mentor and absorbed many of his ideas. In letters written to Van Riet Lowe during this period Battiss frequently expressed his admiration for Breuil and even attempted to devise his own classificatory system based on Breuil's evolutionist paradigm (Mason 1989:151-152, 158, 159-160). After the Rose Cave Cottage experience Battiss withdrew from rock art research in order to concentrate on his own work. However he must have identified closely with the intangible spirit of these ancient symbols, reinventing them and transforming them and eventually devising his own personal symbolic language. Van Riet Lowe recognised the valuable contribution that an artist such as Battiss could make and formally requested the National Research Council to create a permanent position for an 'artist-archaeologist' (Van Riet Lowe 1941:4). This request was not granted and this mutually enriching partnership between art and archaeology was aborted.

Van Riet Lowe continued to be a major influence in the investigation and recording of rock art sites. In his survey of the rock engravings of the Vaal River basin (1936) he included copies of 'geometric patterns' which he considers to be 'the simplest beginnings' (Van Riet Lowe 1937:259). Regarding more recent engravings in which European implements appear to be depicted he expresses the opinion that they are 'degenerate' and can be ascribed to 'Native herd boys or Europeans inadequately employed' (Van Riet Lowe 1941:8). He describes the naturalistic engravings of animals in the Magaliesberg Valley as 'undoubtedly among the most beautiful and skilled that have been discovered ... they certainly represent the climax of artistic achievement in prehistoric art in South Africa' (Van Riet Lowe 1945:329).

The proximity of Redan to Johannesburg (rather than the perceived importance of the site), was probably the catalyst that prompted the Johannesburg branch of the Archaeological Society to visit Redan in 1953. The party was led by M.D.W. Jeffreys, an academic specialising in African Studies, from the University of the Witwatersrand. He subsequently published a paper *Doodling - Forest Vale and Redan* (1953). Both popular and academic opinion of Redan is reflected in his concluding paragraph:

The rock engravings at Redan are coarse and lack artistry and in my opinion are the work of cattle herders whiling away time by doodling while the cattle browsed down to the water to drink. Whether the engravers were Bantu or Hottentot herders it is impossible to say but what is at once apparent is that the work is not that of Bushmen

... The doodling ... at Redan is the untrammelled doodling of cattle herders. (Jeffreys 1953:19)

By suggesting a possible 'Hottentot' and 'cattle herder' authorship for Redan, Jeffreys was unwittingly forecasting a further rock art tradition (chapter 4). Racial assumptions regarding the authorship of engravings that were perceived to be inferior and 'degenerate' had become the norm in South Africa in the 1950s. During this period Breuil attempted to ascribe a foreign authorship to some of the more spectacular rock paintings in southern Africa and made the fatal error when he claimed that the much admired 'white lady' of the Brandberg in South West Africa (Namibia) was of Creto-Egyptian origin (Bahn 1998:62).

In 1964 Alex Willcox published a paper *The non-representational petroglyphs of South Africa*. Focussing on the Driekopseiland site (with a brief mention of Redan) Willcox weighs up various theories but his conclusive remarks are non-committal. In an earlier publication (1963) he includes a chapter, *Petroglyphs - classification and sequence* and has recourse to the stylistic sequences developed by his predecessors, particularly Goodwin and Van Riet Lowe, and combines these to form his own simplified table. Echoing Breuil's dictum, his stylistic sequence is based largely on the evolution of technique and representation, progressing from 'fine line and deeply engraved geometrical designs' to 'animal and human figures in outline only ... sometimes beautifully executed' before 'deterioration in form' sets in and the whole cycle is repeated (Willcox 1963:55-56). Regarding Redan, Willcox (1963:59) reiterates Jeffreys' negative assessment: 'The Redan site also is outside

Hottentot territory and it has been suggested that all the petroglyphs there are Bantu herd boys "doodling". This is quite possible ...'. In spite of this negative attitude to non-representational imagery, Willcox nevertheless realised the importance of making a comprehensive survey of the site and he approached the artist Harald Pager to assist in copying and recording the rock engravings (chapter 2). Willcox and Pager set a precedent with their detailed inventory of a rock engraving site in which non-representational imagery predominated. In the same year Gerhard and Dora Fock commenced their comprehensive statistical survey of the distribution of all known rock engraving sites of the Northern Cape. The Focks did not attempt to assess or interpret the imagery but to provide a comprehensive record of the various sites according to the techniques developed by their predecessors (Fock 1979; Fock & Fock 1984; Fock & Fock 1989). Their research included Driekopseiland and many other sites where non-representational imagery predominates; no value judgements are made and the two categories of imagery receive the same meticulous attention. By affording equal status to non-mimetic imagery a new threshold in rock art research was reached.

After the 1980s it was increasingly felt by some researchers that quantitative studies did not contribute to an understanding of the art. The empirical research of Willcox and Pager and the Focks was discounted; distribution maps and the classification of the art according to themes was considered to restrict interpretation, and it was argued that a clearly formulated theoretical framework was a prerequisite for data-collecting (Lewis-Williams & Loubser 1986). The 1970s and 1980s also marked

the professionalisation of rock art studies and the gradual demise of 'amateurs' like Battiss, Willcox and Pagar. The seminal publication *Believing and seeing: symbolic meanings in southern San rock paintings* (Lewis-Williams 1981) and the introduction of the shamanistic approach (initially referred to as the trance hypotheses) marked the beginning of a new era in rock art research. Here at last was a convincing and clearly formulated methodological framework with a single comprehensive explanation for both the mimetic and the non-mimetic imagery in both paintings and engravings. Lewis-Williams and Loubser (1986) argue that the key to understanding the art lies in the altered states of consciousness experienced by the shaman during the curing dance (trance dance), the central religious ritual of the San. The ethnographic records of Orpen (1874), Bleek and Lloyd (1911) and Bleek (1924) are cited and compared with the modern ethnography of the !Kung San of the Kalahari; in spite of great temporal and geographical distances, it is argued that they share an underlying cognitive system. An integrative model was proposed that would elucidate the metaphorical interaction between myth, ritual and the art. Lewis-Williams postulates three stages of trance each characterised by specific mental imagery. During the first phase the shaman experiences phosphenes (luminous visual sensations) that take on geometric forms ('entoptics'); in the second stage the shaman tries to make sense of these phenomena by elaborating them into familiar objects; and during the final stage images of people and animals are produced, and subjects often perceive themselves as part of the imagery (for a more detailed exposition compare Lewis-Williams 1988:3-18; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1989:38-108; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:32-33). After returning to

consciousness these experiences are depicted on the cave walls or rock surface, probably by the shaman himself. It is emphasised that the resulting rock painting or engraving is not a simple narrative but the visual equivalent of a metaphor (Lewis-Williams & Loubser 1986:267-268).

The correct interpretation of the ethnographic records is crucial for the validity of the shamanistic approach; the Bleek/Lloyd records are not straightforward statements but are couched in metaphor. Consequently researchers have given diverse interpretations that contradict the trance hypothesis (Hromnik 1991; Skotnes 1991; Solomon 1997, 1999). This issue has been hotly debated between Lewis-Williams and Solomon for a number of years and has not been resolved (Solomon 1997:3-13, 1999:51-60, 2000:77-78; Lewis-Williams 1999:141-145). Both Bahn (1998:244) and Skotnes (1991:16-18) also point out that the small group of /Xam convicts that Bleek interviewed had no recollection of a rock art heritage, and no mention is made in the Bleek/Lloyd records of any of the dreams, beliefs and experiences associated with trance. In order to give further credence to the shamanistic approach a second avenue was explored, namely the neuropsychological research on altered states of consciousness, conducted by Siegel and Jarvik (1975) and Siegel (1977) (cited in Lewis-Williams 1988). This research was conducted in America in modern laboratories with non-San subjects; hallucination was induced and individual subjects reported experiencing aural, somatic and visual hallucinations. The visual hallucinations take on geometric forms such as grids, zigzags, dots, curves and spirals (Lewis-Williams & Dowson

1989:60-67). The authors argue that because the nervous system is universal, all subjects will experience similar kinds of hallucinations and similar visual imagery during the first stage of trance. These twentieth-century laboratory findings are extrapolated to the prehistoric rock art and presented as incontrovertible proof that the occurrence of non-mimetic imagery on the rock face is indeed an essential part of the trance experience of the San. Whereas a large corpus of rock paintings with predominantly 'iconic' (mimetic) imagery has been interpreted as depicting metaphors of trance, the proponents of the shamanistic approach admit that the meaning of the 'entoptics' remains obscure: 'We do not yet know what meaning Bushman shamans gave to their entoptics' (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1989:62). In an attempt to substantiate the claim that the non-mimetic images are in fact 'entoptics', schematic tables are drawn up in which these images are arranged in columns next to their 'entoptic' equivalences (see Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1989:61) and according to their perceived geometric structure. Examples are selected at random and the provenances of individual engravings are not given. Skotnes (1991:21) points out that most of these examples are in fact small details from more complex paintings and engravings.

Non-mimetic imagery with a pronounced geometric structure is in fact so common in visual expression that it can be referred to as a universal mode of expression. Not only does it occur world-wide in rock art, but also in all other art forms. It is prevalent in the visual expression of virtually every known culture, including the art of the twentieth century, sometimes as underlying structure, but frequently as the

principal mode of expression; it occurs to a remarkable degree in the art of young children (see Kellogg 1969). Schematic and comparative tables, similar to the one drawn up by Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1989) could be drawn up for all these cultures and forms of visual expression. It is however a futile exercise and tells us nothing about the art or the human capacity for pictorial symbolisation. Marshack (1989:30) argues that 'abstraction and schematisation (which are essentially art historical concepts) (parenthesis added) is a far more important mode of symboling in human cultures than the depiction of hallucinatory images'. Paul Bahn (1998:238), British archaeologist and prolific author, censures the shamanistic approach. He is particularly opposed to the neuropsychological model:

... in the excitement of finding a possible key to some of the hitherto enigmatic motifs in the prehistoric art of these areas, some researchers have gone to extremes and have not only made major assumptions about the content and meaning of prehistoric art in the few cases where there is ethnographic evidence of shamans, but have also extended the hypotheses to ridiculous lengths.

A more serious indictment comes from Kehoe (2000:72). She argues that the shamanistic approach is denigrating to hunter-gatherer societies and that it classifies them as 'unsophisticated, emotional, primitive, and unable to figure out the difference between dreams, hallucinations, and reality'. She refers to the great religions of the world, Christian, Jewish, Muslim etc. in which participants go into altered states of consciousness; as a rule these participants do not paint or engrave their experiences. She is particularly opposed to the neuropsychological model and

its belief in 'entoptics'; she refers to the widespread occurrence of so-called 'entoptics' in contemporary art, and suggests a simple formalistic approach familiar to all art historians. R. Bednarik, prominent Australian rock art specialist is equally sceptical of the neuropsychological model (see Bednarik 1990a). More recently the debate was joined by a professional neuropsychologist who faulted the model on many medical points including the use of outdated and unreliable data (Helvenston & Bahn 2001).

The art-historical voice, absent from rock art studies since the demise of Battiss, Pager and Schoonraad, was revived in South Africa in 1991. Skotnes (1991:16-24) argues that to insist that all rock art is about trancing medicine men or the images seen by medicine men in trance, is to deny all the other rich aspects of San life, and to reduce the art to mere illustrations of ethnographic concepts:

For what needs to be said, and what seems seldom to have been said before, is that the trance thesis is fundamentally an anthropological and ethnographic argument. But, inevitably, to continue to argue in the terms of these disciplines is to reduce the art to ethnographic illustrative material. It is to reduce it to anthropology and nothing but anthropology. (Skotnes 1991:20-21)

Skotnes (1991:17) further points out that the trance hypothesis fails to consider the paintings as art at all and that formalistic and stylistic characteristics are consistently ignored: 'For the art historian style is a vital aspect of investigation in analysing or interpreting works of art'. Style is also the vehicle whereby 'the religious, moral and

social values of a community are conveyed through the emotional suggestiveness of forms'. In a subsequent paper she continues her plea for a more direct visual approach: 'The visuality of the paintings is their *most important* feature, for it is this alone that distinguishes them from storytelling, narratives or ritual acts' (Skotnes 1996a:236). Archaeologist Ann Solomon (1996:292) argues persuasively that an analysis of the 'visual text' is an essential tool in deciphering meaning and that the individuality and diversity in the art is best examined by an interdisciplinary approach. This raises important questions regarding the concept of the rock art as a homogenous expression of shamanism as opposed to the concept of the individual creativity of a particular group or people. Solomon does not however advocate a formalistic approach to the exclusion of any other consideration. She argues that stylistic analysis cannot function in isolation but only within a specific cultural and historical context. She pleads for an interdisciplinary approach in which '... the insights of art history regarding the specific make-up of the visual text, and insights regarding the social production of art need to be combined' (Solomon 1996:294).

Since the introduction of the trance hypothesis in the 1980s rock art research in South Africa has advanced to a remarkable degree, with a large corpus of researchers closely following and elaborating its basic tenet – the essentially shamanistic nature of the art. The introduction of the neuropsychological model and the concept of 'entoptics' added a further dimension, offering a scientifically verifiable explanation for the occurrence of non-mimetic imagery. However, a close examination reveals that the heuristic potential of the neuropsychological

model is extremely limited and that it is characterised by the same bias as previous approaches. In its present definition it tells us absolutely nothing about the non-mimetic imagery - except as a symptom of altered states of consciousness, and further proof of the validity of the trance hypotheses. It has reduced the occurrence of these enigmatic images on the rock face to a one-dimensional biological phenomenon, devoid of meaning. This is an extreme behaviourist point of view, reducing the art to a conditioned reflex and the artist to an automaton; the unique human capacity for pictorial symbolisation is denied. These rather troublesome non-representational images have been measured, tabulated, quantified, labelled as 'entoptics' and put into cold storage while researchers get on with the more exciting task of interpreting the representational images. Since the inception of rock art as a specialised field of study, researchers have been hampered by an inability to recognise that non-mimetic imagery is separate but equal to mimetic imagery; the concept of art as imitation, and the search for literal meanings is entrenched in rock art research. A simple survey of the art of both literate and non-literate societies world-wide, will reveal that both mimetic and non-mimetic imagery occurs in the visual expression of all cultures. The one did not necessarily precede the other; they are both fundamental tendencies of the human mind, and they appear to have developed coevally. In rock engravings they frequently occur on the same rock face, as at Redan.

EMERGING INTERPRETATIVE TRENDS

In the second volume in a planned series of five-yearly rock art volumes, new developments in rock art research world-wide, are reviewed (Bahn & Fossati (eds.) 2003). A chapter entitled *South African rock art at the end of the millenium*, is included. The authors of this chapter point out that more than twenty years have elapsed since the introduction of the shamanistic approach; and that it continues to be widely used in South Africa, almost to the exclusion of other approaches. Elsewhere in the publication, the application of the shamanistic approach to the prehistoric cave art of France (see Clottes & Lewis-Williams 1996) is briefly mentioned and discredited: 'Virtually no specialists in the field gave the authors any support, and indeed a broad range of criticisms were levelled at the book by a wide variety of scholars' (Bahn & Fossati (eds.) 2003:6). Together with the continued dominance of the shamanistic approach in South Africa, a number of new perspectives are emerging. These include:

1. the use and abuse of ethnographic analogies, and the question of continuities and discontinuities and cultural interactions;
2. the intellectual property rights of First Peoples (Khoisan) including the testimonies of San and Khoekhoe descendants regarding rock art;
3. the recognition of the importance of rock art within the context of landscape, and the 'power of place'.

In a similar review published in *Antiquity* in 2001, Mairi Ross reviews international trends in rock art research, and suggests that 'land and landscape' is the most fundamental and essential new trend to emerge. She emphasises that hunter-gatherers have a 'specific and intimate relationship with the natural land upon which they live', and that it is based on 'acute observation and perception of the environment which is part of an integrative cognitive whole'. This intimate information is transmitted from generation to generation over a vast time-span, resulting in a 'detailed compendium of vital environmental knowledge and extremely successful economies' (Ross 2000:545). She refers to a number of prominent international rock art researchers and concludes: '... therefore I suggest that landscape be considered an essential context for rock-art studies' (Ross 2000:547).

As is revealed in this chapter, non-mimetic imagery in rock art has always been poorly understood by researchers. At the turn of the nineteenth century researchers dismissed non-representational imagery in rock engravings as meaningless scribbles, or at best, as unsuccessful attempts of unskilled 'herd boys' to emulate the naturalistic work of San master artists. After the 1920s these non-mimetic images were recorded for the first time, and subsequently also interpreted 'stylistically', together with mimetic imagery. Style was equated with technique and the art was interpreted as a chronological development of technical ability; no attempt was made to describe the art in terms of form relationships and visual organisation. Following these early attempts, the Abbé Henri Breuil devised a chronological

scheme of sequential artistic development, characterised in the beginning by crude elementary forms (non-representational), progressing to more complex and naturalistic forms (animals and people), and finally deteriorating into 'degenerate' forms (non-representational). The introduction in the 1980s of the shamanistic approach and its concomitant neuropsychological model, offered a 'scientific' explanation for the occurrence of these enigmatic images on the rock face. However, a critical examination of the neuropsychological model reveals the same lack of understanding and bias towards non-mimetic form as in previous approaches; the unique human capacity for creativity is denied and these non-representational images have been effectively removed from the realm of visual expression – 'art', to the lesser realm of Pavlovian reflexes, and dubbed 'entoptics'. The shamanistic model continues to be the preferred interpretative approach of the majority of researchers in South Africa. However, the past decade has seen a number of new directions; of particular significance for the present study is the recognition of 'landscape' as fundamental to the interpretation of the art. In the final chapter, the natural environment at Redan is one of the key concepts.