

## **CHAPTER 7 TOWARDS AN INTERPRETATION OF THE ROCK ENGRAVINGS OF REDAN**

As this research progressed it became increasingly clear that no existing interpretative model could capture the complexity of these non-representational images. The possibility of applying the shamanistic approach, and more specifically the neuropsychological model, was abandoned at an early stage of the research; this decision was motivated in the preceding chapter. The non-San (and probable Khoekhoe) origin of rock engravings precluded the use of a model based on the exclusive trance experience of the San shaman. A more inclusive and holistic approach was indicated. In the chapter that follows, concepts and perspectives that further our understanding of the rock engravings at Redan, are explored. The art historical perspective forms the basis of this discussion. This includes an exposition of the formal properties of visual expression. Terms and concepts that are associated with a formalistic approach, and that are generally poorly understood, are also clarified. The second part of the discussion focusses on concepts developed by Rudolph Arnheim: the nature of visual perception, the function of art *praxis*, and their complementary roles in cognitive development.

### **ART HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Until recently, the voice of the art historian was seldom heard in contemporary rock art research. By the late 1980s rock art research had become the exclusive domain of archaeology with one overriding theoretical approach; dissenting voices were rare.

This hegemony was challenged for the first time in 1991 with the publication of the paper *Rock art: is there life after trance?* in an art historical publication *De Arte*. The author Pippa Skotnes is not only a respected art historian, but also a practicing artist of international repute. She emphasises the important role that art practitioners have played in assessing the expressive and aesthetic qualities of San rock art:

But the role of actively assessing the imaginative and creative traditions of the San has fallen almost entirely to practicing artists, who have probed these traditions through an artistic exploration, rather than through a process of description. If anthropologists and cognitive archaeologists have concerned themselves really only with the verifiable and verbalisable component of the art, then artists in general consider the direct apprehension of the aesthetic and expressive potential of the art to be most meaningful. (Skotnes 1994:316)

In a subsequent paper, *The visual as a site of meaning: San parietal painting and the experience of modern art* (1994:321) she pleads eloquently that the 'experience of praxis (by artists)' should 'form part of the tradition of scholarship surrounding San parietal art ...'. She asks the pertinent question: 'But what of the creative traditions and the *formal* context of the paintings that, after all, should characterise any study of the art?' (1994:316). She draws parallels with contemporary art practitioners and argues that although concepts such as 'compositional devices' and the 'manipulation of space' are Western concepts, a study of San art shows that these formal devices were also employed by San artists: 'But it is through attention to form as a site of meaning and the insights and mediation of art practice that we find another source of

knowledge about San art' (Skotnes 1994:328). Studies of rock art in South Africa have been aimed primarily at uncovering the subject matter; formal or visual qualities have been neglected or deliberately overlooked. This is partly due to the fact that the visuality of art and concepts associated with it such as 'aesthetic' and 'style' have traditionally been associated with Western art, and have therefore not been deemed applicable to the art of non-Western societies. I suspect, however, that it is also due to the fact that these terms are generally poorly understood. A brief exposition follows.

The term 'aesthetic' in its modern sense was introduced in the eighteenth century by A.G. Baumgarten (1714-1762), to denote a special cognitive domain, that of sensual thinking, which he defined as distinct from rational or logical thought. The philosophy was expanded by I. Kant (1724-1804) in his treatise *The critique of judgement* (1790). It is generally accepted as an important early study of the theory of art and beauty; it forms the basis of modern aesthetics (see Preziosi 1998:64-66). Duro and Greenhalgh (1992:32) point out that in the twentieth century the term is widely and imprecisely used as a synonym for the domain of fine art or the study of art in isolation from social or political factors. In a penetrating paper on some meanings of the term 'aesthetic' T.J. Diffey (1995:61) describes aesthetics as a 'branch of enquiry', that is concerned with the 'nature and defining characteristics of art, the meaning works of art are said to have, how they may be judged, valued or interpreted, the nature of imagination and of creativity, the kinds of experience offered by art ...'. Diffey (1995:65) further points out that 'Anglo-American aesthetics in the twentieth century has been devoted to the philosophy of art, and scarcely at all ... to the

philosophy of beauty'. Therefore, the aesthetic experience is not necessarily based on that which is perceived as 'beautiful' and 'delightful'. Read (1965:43) emphasises the decisive contribution made by non-Western art to the foundations of modern art, and the 'conscious acceptance of ugliness as a positive factor in aesthetic experience'. He points out that 'Ugliness has also been present in art, from prehistoric times and throughout all subsequent periods', but this does not detract from its expressive power.

Read ((1931) 1990:23-24) adds a further dimension to the theory of aesthetics, namely that of 'expression'. He defines three separate stages: 'first, the mere perception of material qualities ... second, the arrangement of such perceptions into pleasing shapes' and a third stage 'which comes when such an arrangement of perceptions is made to correspond with a previously existing state of emotion or feeling: Then we may say that the emotion or feeling is given expression'. In his classic study *Meaning in the visual arts* ((1955) 1982:14) the art historian Erwin Panofsky defines a work of art as a 'man-made object demanding to be experienced aesthetically' and emphasises the basic difference between the humanities and the natural sciences, and how research is approached: the scientist deals with natural phenomena and can therefore immediately proceed with analysis; the humanist deals with human actions and creations, and has to engage in a mental process in order to re-enact the actions and to re-create the creations:

The scientist, dealing as he does with natural phenomena, can at once proceed to analyze them. The humanist, dealing as he does with human actions and creations, has to engage in a mental process of a synthetic and subjective character: he has

mentally to re-enact the actions and to re-create the creations ... Thus the art historian subjects his 'material' to a rational archaeological analysis at times as meticulously exact, comprehensive and involved as any physical or astronomical research. (Panofsky (1955) 1982:14)

Panofsky ((1955) 1982:20-21) further emphasises the particularly daunting task facing the humanist (art historian), since he has to describe artefacts not as physical bodies or as substitutes for physical bodies, but as 'objects of inward experience' that are 'neither as measurable or otherwise determinable data, nor as stimuli of subjective reactions, but as that which bears witness to artistic intentions'.

Lewis-Williams (1996:13-21) traces the historic development of the different approaches to southern African rock art, and identifies three distinct approaches which he terms the 'aesthetic', the 'narrative' and the 'interpretative'. The 'aesthetic approach' is equated with descriptions of the naturalistic depictions of animals and the ability of San artists to portray the smallest anatomical detail, even on rough rock faces. This is 'immediately attractive' and 'gives a great deal of pleasure'. There is detailed reference to the 'realistic details' and to the 'variety of postures' of the animals; in order to appreciate all these iconographical details, the viewer is encouraged to stand as close to the art as possible. Lewis-Williams (1996:21) further concedes that the art affords 'very real aesthetic delight' but that to 'evaluate its finer aesthetic points' is a 'Western concept'. The viewer is urged to abandon 'meaningless description and praise', and 'move on from admiration to understanding' (see also Deacon & Deacon 1999:163). The trivialisation of the aesthetic is also partly due to the term's close association with

the much derided (and misunderstood) 'art for art's sake' theory that was prevalent in rock art studies in the 1970s. The term was freely and imprecisely used by early researchers, and suggested as a motive for the art (Lee & Woodhouse 1970; Rudner & Rudner 1970). Willcox (1984:263) writes that 'the art for art's sake theory which really means that the artists were moved deeply by the pleasure principle ... pleasure in the exercise of skill is the motive for the creation of all art'. The critics of the 'art for art's sake' theory are equally misinformed of the true meaning of the term and continue equating it with concepts of 'pleasure and leisure' Hall (1996:213) (see also Lewis-Williams & Loubser 1986:283). Clarification of this rather troublesome term is long overdue.

'Art for art's sake' was a philosophy that originated in France in the nineteenth century in literary circles. Without founders or manifesto, it was not an artists' movement, but 'describes a pervasive aesthetic awareness in contemporary society from the 1870s ...' (Reynolds 1985:110). It was a consciously contrived alienation from bourgeois values and the Victorian emphasis on morals in works of art. In its extreme form it became known as the Aesthetic Movement; its prominent followers included Oscar Wilde (Schneider Adams 1996:61-62); its central tenet was its 'art for art's sake' philosophy - an insistence on the autonomy of art, independent of narrative, moral or social content (Schneider Adams 1996:61-62). In England the painter James McNeill Whistler championed the formalist 'art for art's sake' philosophy; he was severely criticised by the influential art critic John Ruskin for his impressionistic style of painting, devoid of any iconographical content, and consisting only of the interplay of the formal elements

of colour and texture, described by Russel as '... flinging a pot of paint in the public's face' (Reynolds 1985:105). In a famous lecture delivered at Cambridge in 1885, Whistler reiterated his belief that a painting should stand on its own merits, independently of anecdote, history and drama, and that 'nature contains the elements, in colour and form, of all pictures, as the keyboard contains the notes of all music' (cited in Reynolds 1985:109). Whistler's insistence on the autonomy of art must also be seen in the light of the aftermath of industrialisation and the prevailing Marxist doctrine of art as a commodity. His public support of the 'art for art's sake' philosophy was a declaration of his disassociation from Marxism and the economic reading of art (Schneider Adams 1996:61-63). It appears that both the proponents and the critics of the 'art for art's sake' approach have abused the term; this is partly due to an inability to recognise the formal components in the work of art. Whistler's emphasis on the primacy of the painted surface and the harmonious arrangement of the formal elements - devoid of a recognisable iconography, can be seen as a precursor to the formalist theories of the twentieth century.

The concept of 'form' in art, as distinct from content (iconography, context etc.) was introduced by the German art historian Heinrich Wölfflin (1864-1945). In his seminal work *Principles of art history: the problem of the development of style in later art* ((1932) 1950) Wölfflin attempted to articulate that which is essentially visual in art: two paintings of the same object and seen from the same angle, but by two different artists, can exhibit very disparate qualities of line, colour and mass; the artist is not

just a recorder of external appearances but interprets them through an analysis of form.

Summers (1998) explains:

... the non-mimetic component of art, evident in the very disparity among the paintings, pointed toward another dimension of reality altogether. 'Form', as this nonmimetic component came to be called, rather than being incidental or superfluous, is essential; it is the expression of spirit ... By the analysis of form in art, the argument runs, it is possible to investigate the structures of the human spirit itself. ... Shared nonmimetic features of works of art may be explained in terms of individual or collective 'spirit' which accounts not only for individual differences but for differences (and similarities) among the 'styles' of periods, nations and races. In this idealist matrix, 'form' thus took on a vastly important modern connotation: it became the essence of art, supplanting imitation once and for all. (Summers 1998:128-129)

In a chapter entitled *Formalism and style*, the art historian Schneider Adams offers a straightforward definition: 'A formalist analysis of a work of art would consider primarily the aesthetic effects created by the component parts of design'. She defines these component parts as follows:

These parts, called *formal elements*, constitute the basis of the artist's visual language. They consist of *line, shape, space, color, light, and dark*, which artists arrange in many different ways to achieve broader categories of design. These, in turn, consist of *balance, order, and proportion, and pattern and rhythm*, which, with the component elements, evoke certain responses in the viewer. The final arrangement made by the artist is the *composition* of the work of art. A formal analysis of the

artistic composition considers how each element contributes to the overall impression made by the work. (Schneider Adams 1996:17)

The use of formalism as an interpretative tool has its protagonists and antagonists; however, it continues to form the basis of much art historical discourse. It offers a critical framework for the analysis and interpretation of visual artefacts where no historical or cultural context has been identified. Formalism is not concerned with narrative and verisimilitude but seeks meaning in the analysis of form.

Closely aligned to the aesthetic and the formal elements in a work of art, is the concept of 'style'. Schneider Adams (1996:24) gives the following concise definition of style: 'The aesthetic differences between works of art, insofar as they are determined by the selection and composition of formal elements, have been ordered into categories of style'. In his exposition of the 'aesthetic approach' in southern African rock art, Lewis-Williams (1996:17) refers to superpositioning and its widespread recurrence in the art; he dismisses the possibility that the various layers of painted images on the same rock face, could be interpreted as 'stylistic sequences'. He also points out that early researchers believed in the 'stylistic evolution of rock art' but argues that this view has since been proven erroneous. He asserts that 'whatever its relevance in the study of Western art, "style" is valueless in rock art research', but adds that 'this may be too extreme a view' (Lewis-Williams 1996:21).

In spite of this negative assessment of style as an interpretative tool in rock art studies, it continues to be applied in other fields of archaeology. Ceramic typologies assist in

determining the movement and dispersal of communities, and arranging them into time series (see Hall 1996:118-120, 154-158). Hall (1996:261) describes style as 'variations in the form of material culture that serve to identify both the individual identity of the maker and the user, and the general identity of the social group'. This emphasis on a perceived practical function, rather than on the visual qualities of style, is prevalent in archaeological writings. In describing the exchange of *hxaro* gifts in later Stone Age societies in the Magaliesberg area, Wadley (1989:48) asserts that 'socio-economic stress may affect not only the quantities of gifts made, but also their styles. Stress may accentuate style'. She further suggests that environmental stress may result in two opposing needs; the need to maintain boundaries and the need to gain access to a neighbouring territory; group styles mark and maintain a group identity within a fixed boundary; individual styles express an openness and a willingness to negotiate. This functionalist approach is shared by Deacon and Deacon (1999:111) who cite research done with a contemporary society who continue to make stone tools. They confirm that people with a strong group identity make similar tools, but argue that 'it is not possible to discern which characteristics are stylistic markers and which are not, nor determine which characteristics are considered to be stylistic rather than functional'. Hall (1996:153-154) addresses the relationship between style and function: he asserts that the length and breadth of a blade are 'fundamental attributes' and its stylistic attributes are 'the decoration on its handle', inferring that style is not inherent in the structure, but is added as an afterthought.

Art historians generally have a different understanding of style and believe that it is not a quality that can be divorced from the form of the artefact. Rather, it is inherent in the artefact and inextricably part of it. This is succinctly expressed by Panofsky ((1955) 1982:41): 'History of *style* (insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, *objects* and *events* were expressed by *forms*)'. A discussion of style is incomplete without some reference to the definitive essay *Style*, written by Meyer Shapiro and published for the first time in an anthropological journal in 1953. Shapiro (1998:143) defines style simply as '... a system of forms with a quality and a meaningful expression through which the personality of the artist and the broad outlook of the group are visible'. He concedes that style sometimes also has a practical function, communicating and fixing certain values of religion, social and moral life, but adds that this comes about through the 'emotional suggestiveness of forms'. It is significant that Shapiro's description of style correlates closely with Read's ((1931) 1990:23-24) description of the aesthetic experience; both emphasise the importance of the emotional response to form. Shapiro's (1998:148) final remarks are as relevant today as they were in the 1950s; they also inform aspects of the present research:

Basic for contemporary practice and knowledge of past art is the theoretical view that what counts in all art are the elementary aesthetic components, the qualities and relationships of the fabricated lines, spots, colors and surfaces. These have two characteristics: they are intrinsically expressive, and they tend to constitute a coherent whole. *The same tendencies to coherent and expressive structure are found in the arts of all cultures* (emphasis added).

Formalism offers a critical framework for the analysis and interpretation of visual artefacts, irrespective of context. An analysis of form is especially useful where no historical or cultural context can be identified. The use of formalism as an interpretative tool makes it possible to analyse all visual artefacts irrespective of their time and place of making.

### **VISUAL THINKING**

A significant dimension was added to the understanding of the formal properties of art by Rudolph Arnheim, Professor of Psychology of Art, at Harvard. In his seminal work *Art and visual perception* (1956), he applies the principles of *gestalt* psychology and attempts to explain the nature of art, the purpose of art and its significance. The basic tenet of his thesis is that vision is a prime modality for thought, and that the act of visual perception is a cognitive process - as complex as any purely mental process. In a subsequent publication he asserts that thinking is visual, hence the title *Visual thinking* (1970):

My contention is that the cognitive operations called thinking are not the privilege of mental processes above and beyond perception, but the essential ingredients of perception itself. I am referring to such operations as active exploration, selection, grasping of essentials, simplification, abstraction, analysis, synthesis, completion, correction, comparison, problem solving, as well as combining, separating, putting in context ... (Arnheim 1970:13)

In a chapter entitled *The double-edged mind: intuition and intellect* (1986:13-29) Arnheim sums up the core concepts of his approach. The first axiom which governs his approach is that sensory experience, particularly visual perception, is indispensable to cognitive development. The second axiom is that two cognitive procedures are involved, intuitive perception and intellectual analysis:

... the human mind is equipped with two cognitive procedures, intuitive perception and intellectual analysis. These two abilities are equally valuable and equally indispensable. Neither is unique to particular human activities; they are both common to all of them. Intuition is privileged to perceive the overall structure of configurations. Intellectual analysis serves to abstract the character of entities and events from individual contexts and defines them 'as such'. Intuition and intellect do not operate separately but in almost every case require each other's cooperation. (Arnheim 1986:29)

This cooperation between these two cognitive procedures is demonstrated during art *praxis*; the act of drawing, painting, and sculpting, is a means of accessing and processing information that has been gained visually.

Drawing heavily on *gestalt* psychology, he proceeds to demonstrate how visual perception operates. Under natural conditions, vision has to cope with complex visual stimuli: more than one object at a time, objects occupying different levels within a three-dimensional space, overlapping and moving objects etc. The chief tenet of

*gestalt* theory is that an analysis of each of these various components cannot provide an understanding of the whole. Analysis and understanding must proceed from the whole, the *gestalt*, to its constituent parts: 'The basic *gestalt* law describes a striving, inherent in physical and psychical entities, towards the simplest, most regular, most symmetrical structure attainable in a given situation. This tendency has been most clearly demonstrated in visual perception' (Arnheim 1986:35). This fundamental inclination of the mind reflects a similar hypothetical tendency in the nervous system and brain function, which Arnheim refers to as 'percepts' or 'mental images'. During visual perception an optical image is projected on the retina, and a 'mental image' is formed in the brain; following the *gestalt* law of striving towards the 'simplest, most regular, most symmetrical structure', the resulting visual concept will probably be a simple geometric shape, a 'good *gestalt*'. This hypothetical ability of the nervous system to generate a 'visual percept' or 'mental image', as defined by Arnheim, bears a superficial resemblance to the neuropsychological model and the phenomena of 'entoptics' (chapter 6). However, the two approaches are diametrically opposite and operate from fundamentally different premises: in the latter, the artist-shaman is a passive recipient of stimuli while in a state of altered consciousness; in the former, the artist is a conscious participant in a complex cognitive and creative process (see also Arnheim 1966:31-37).

In his first publication (1956) Arnheim refers extensively to the universal occurrence of elementary geometric shapes in the art of young children. In early drawings, the circle, straight lines and rectangles are presented explicitly; gradually these

independent units fuse into more complex shapes, leading eventually to mature works reflecting a more highly differentiated sense of form. Subsequently Arnheim writes incisively about abstraction in the art of the twentieth century; he also refers to the abstraction in the art of 'primitive' societies:

The organized pattern of shapes and colours, which in any work of art is the main carrier of meaning and expression conveyed to the spectator, differs only in complexity from the circles, straight lines, and plain daubs of a young child's paintings, the form factor, which is so prominent in the highly abstract style of primitive representation, is equally present, though less striking, in even the most realistic work of art ... Thus, primitive pictures are particularly enlightening in showing the role that abstract form plays in any kind of representation. (Arnheim 1966:38)

Arnheim (1966:39) refers to the two extreme kinds of artistic representation: the one abstract and often geometrical, the other naturalistic, approximating photographic verisimilitude. He argues that the 'form element' is present in both kinds: 'The two types of representation are nothing but the extreme ends of a scale that allows all possible styles of art to be arranged in a sequence leading from pure geometrical form through all degrees of abstractness to extreme realism'. Arnheim (1966:41) further points out that the prevalence of abstract visual expression of preliterate societies does not mean that 'the artists of those civilizations were too primitive to develop their representational concepts beyond a certain level of complexity'. An unbiased look at the history of art, of both Western, non-Western and preliterate societies, shows a

prevalence of abstract forms. Arnheim (1966:41-42) questions why 'simple shape, so rare in nature', should have been singled out and why 'geometrical patterns' should have been developed in societies where there was no technical necessity for them:

It is entirely possible that the formation of these perceptual elements is stimulated and reinforced by the occasional observation of simple geometric shapes in nature. The basic impulse, however, cannot be explained as an urge to copy nature; *it can be understood only when one realizes that perceiving is not passive recording but understanding, and that understanding can take place only through the conception of definable shapes.* For this reason art, like science, begins not with attempts to duplicate nature, but with highly abstract general principles. In the arts these principles take the form of elementary shapes. (Arnheim 1986:161-162, emphasis added)

Having established that visual perception is a cognitive process and 'that art like science begins with highly abstract general principles', Arnheim proceeds to systematically analyse a number of well-known works of art, via their formal properties and according to *gestalt* principles. Works of art from different periods, including examples from prehistory, and child art, are included in the analysis (see Arnheim 1956, 1986). From the outset it was evident to Arnheim that there was little point in analysing the formal properties (perceptual shapes) in the arts unless the resulting pattern could be shown *'to symbolize vital aspects of human experience'* (Arnheim 1988:ix, emphasis added), in other words, disclose the meaning of the art. The striking similarity between early child art and the non-representational art of

preliterate societies has frequently been commented on; yet this puzzling phenomenon has never been adequately explained, and a common ground has not been established. The artists of prehistoric works of art are long since dead, and there is no way of accessing their minds. In contrast to the remote world of the prehistoric artist, the young mind is more accessible; child art, particularly, has been a rich source of information in tracing cognitive and emotional development. The young mind is confronted with an unknown and bewildering world, and must gradually make sense of it; this is largely a perceptual journey in which all the senses, particularly vision, is crucial. This is not the place for a detailed review of child art and how it reflects this journey. However, of the many youthful works Arnheim analysed, one example will suffice. Trees are seen in nature as a bewildering entanglement of overlapping branches and moving foliage; it takes intelligent structuring for the child to discover the basic *gestalt* of a vertical trunk from which branches issue at clear angles, serving as the basis for individually defined leaves: 'Intelligent perceiving is the child's principal way of *finding order in a bewildering world*' (Arnheim 1986:144, figure 16, emphasis added). Arnheim's contention that visual expression offers a means of making the environment understandable, has important implications for the understanding of non-mimetic rock art. Equally, the prehistoric mind was confronted with a vast and unknown world; an intimate understanding of the environment was crucial for survival:

If however, abstract representation accomplishes interpretation, then the style of primitive art may have to be related to the fact that *man's orientation in his environment*, so essential for his survival, takes place at first at an essentially

perceptual level. In the child as well as the primitive, theories about the forces that govern nature and life are derived from sensory observations ... The simpler these patterns, the easier the understanding will be ... *representations in simple form are attempts of the young mind to make the sensory environment understandable by presenting it as well-organized form.* If this be so, it will be evident that *art, far from being a luxury, is a biologically essential tool.* (Arnheim 1966:42, emphasis added)

Arnheim emphasises that not all configurations are based on observed visual stimuli, and that the principles he developed for the perception and cognition of the physical world, are equally true for the non-sensory world:

Actually, the kind of highly abstract pattern I have been discussing is applicable to non-physical configurations as readily as to physical ones, because there again the concern is with patterns of forces, a purpose best served by exactly the same means. (Arnheim 1970:279-280)

As the 'outer eye' scans the horizon gathering information of the material world, the 'inner eye' is also confronted with information of an immaterial nature, those structures and concepts that shape human existence - religious beliefs, socio-economic circumstances and cultural practices. These abstract concepts are also made concrete by means of well-organised form:

Visual thinking calls, more broadly, for the ability to see visual shapes as images of the patterns of forces that underlie our existence - the functioning of minds, of bodies or machines, the structure of societies or ideas. (Arnheim 1970:315)

In support of this contention, Arnheim refers to the universal use of the sphere in visual expression. He argues that the nature and origin of the physical world has occupied humanity from remote times; the earliest models of science were invariably conceived through visual images of the circle and the sphere. Equally, early philosophers and Christian thinkers used the sphere and circle to make visible the non-visible:

The image of the sphere may serve as an example. It has been used through the ages to depict physical, biological, and philosophical phenomena. Here again one can observe how such a conception develops from simple beginnings to more refined conceptions. *Roundness is chosen spontaneously and universally to represent something that has no shape, no definite shape, or all shapes.* (Arnheim 1970:280, emphasis added)

In the foregoing chapter I have outlined the main points of Arnheim's thesis and discussed some of the formalist principles he developed. Imagery without subject matter in rock art is notoriously difficult to interpret. At Redan, this problem is magnified by the lack of a verifiable socio-cultural context. An interpretative tool that has been insufficiently explored is that of formalism. Terms associated with a formalistic approach are generally poorly understood, consequently, the concepts are seldom applied. 'Form' is that component of a visual artefact that may be described purely through the configuration of its elements such as line, mass, colour etc. The concept of 'form' as a methodological tool in the quest for meaning, is the basis of the

formalistic approach. Since the introduction of the formalist approach in the 1950s by Wöllflin, it has been developed and refined by a number of prominent theorists. A significant further dimension was added by the sustained and life-long research of Arnheim (1956, 1966, 1970, 1986, 1988). Applying his considerable knowledge, covering a wide field of human endeavour, particularly psychology and art, Arnheim developed his theory of 'visual thinking', namely that sensory experience (especially visual perception and art *praxis*), is indispensable for cognitive and creative development. Of particular significance for Redan, is his contention that the combined acts of 'perceiving' and 'making', are crucial for man's orientation in his environment. In the final chapter this concept of the significance of 'place', and the formalist principles he developed, will be applied to an analysis of the rock engravings of Redan.