

Archaeologies of Art

Time, Place, and Identity



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CHAPTER 2

Space and Discourse as Constituents of Past Identities – The Case of Namibian Rock Art

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Space and discourse belong to the fundamental experiences of the human existence: We can exist only in space, and discourse, the most complex form of communication, is that which distinguishes us from all other animals. Rock art forges these two experiences into a unified whole: Art is communication, and as rock art it retains the original spatial configurations over millennia. Accordingly, understanding the interaction of place and communication in rock art gives way to hypotheses concerning the meaning that the art – or more precisely the processes of its production and consumption – may have had for the people of long ago and the identities that they generated through the art. The significance of space can be analysed reliably owing to the property of rock pictures (usually) being highly visible artefacts that have not changed their relation to the surroundings since they were made. By contrast, discourses are ephemeral, and hypotheses as to their character can be put forth only by modelling past social bodies with their activities and behaviour. Under this perspective, rock pictures, in their capability of linking space and discourse, map onto the landscape the signs of meaningful social interaction, identities, and behaviour – thus enabling the partial reconstructing of the mental map of the prehistoric painters and with it their feeling of being-in-the-world.

Rock Art, Space, and Discourse

Discourse, as understood here, settles somewhere between the narrow linguistic concept of being closely linked to restricted speech acts and a broad understanding in, for example, Foucault's sense. Nearer to the latter and rather closely oriented on Paul Ricoeur's definition (1979), discourse encompasses not only all kinds of conversation but also behaviour and action in response to or as manifestation of varying contexts. Rock art, being a highly conventionalised sign system, is both

a prototype of discourse and a special type of material culture adding to discourse the possibility of transcending time while by its nature it is bound to a present (Ricoeur 1979:74). Studies of such a cultural asset (Tilley 1991), which has a clear focus on symbols and metaphors, are particularly apt to reveal information on identity.

Space, as the second important analytical sphere, is a category of everyday, and in this context it would seem to be without deeper theoretical implications. However, space is being constantly redefined according to changing circumstances, and it comes into being only through perception, construction, and acceptance of limits. Accordingly, space always has an imaginary component (cf Swartz and Hurlbutt 1994). In prehistoric rock art, it has been demonstrated by D. Lewis-Williams for South African art that the rock face of a shelter, which normally is understood as the limit of the space, is the medium (a veil) for the entrance into another, supernatural world (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1990; see also Keyser and Poetschat 2004). However, even if this view finds wide acceptance, it is impossible to pinpoint an umbrella theoretical stance considering the link of rock art and space in its large form of landscape, given a general divide between informal and formal methods (Chippindale and Nash 2004). This impossibility mirrors the situation of general archaeological studies of landscape in which processual and postprocessual approaches compete and only occasional attempts at a consolidation are being made (Layton and Ucko 1999). But eventually even efforts at finding a methodology through an amalgamation of methods and techniques may end up with rather general statements such as 'common archaeological techniques such as settlement pattern, distributional, historical, social formation, and symbolic analyses all can contribute toward the building of a landscape approach' (Anschuetz et al. 2001:192).

For the present study, some theoretical aspects will be selected that are linked to the symbolic representation of space that compare to and deepen forerunners such as R. Bradley's analysis of, for instance, the petroglyphs of the British Isles (Bradley 1994). For an archaeologist, rock art is the feasibly best kind of representation that is directly based on the cognition of space of prehistoric people: It is permanent, immovable, usually not underground, clearly recognizable as an artefact, almost universally readable in a denotative sense (if representational and realistic), and, in principle, can be recorded almost completely for a restricted region. There can be no doubt about the location of production and of use. Rock art is the intentional ready product of an articulation of space and identity by people.

The relation of space and landscape to issues of identity and social bodies is perhaps best known from Australia. The Dreaming of the Aboriginal people firmly associates places in the land with their own

coming into being (for example, Berndt and Berndt 1992:137; Lawlor 1991) so that they eventually assert 'that there is no separation between who we are and where we are' (Faulstich 2003:3). Stoffle and colleagues (2000, 2003) have shown how narrowly place and ritual are linked among American Indian people and that the observance of the rules of correct local sequencing of rituals is crucial for the rituals' success. In southern Africa, among the extant San hunter-gatherers, it is the term 'nlore' that expresses the link of person and land. It designates the area where someone is at home and where he or she has the rights of an owner (Marshall 1976:71). Their identity is thus based on specific features of the land, such as the peculiar quality of a waterhole. Colson, writing on the shrines of the Nkoya of Zambia, treats such holes as places of power or, if human made, like a rock art site, as shrines that are important cornerstones of identity since they '... remind supplicants that they belong to a discrete community occupying space. ... The local shrines ... supply named landmarks that define the terrain associated with the community and emphasize its distinctiveness. They serve local residents and those in their immediate vicinity as points of identification with space, around which other sites can be mapped' (Colson 1997:53).

Equal to the vast majority of prehistoric rock art worldwide, the prehistoric art of Namibia can be viewed at daylight in shelters, grottoes, and on plain vertical walls (Lenssen-Erz and Erz 2000:103-14). In regions such as the Brandberg (or 'Daureb', its vernacular name, Figure 2.1) mountain in Namibia they are a ubiquitous part of the landscape. The Namibian paintings were mainly made between approximately 2,000 and 4,000 years B.P. by hunter-gatherers (Lenssen-Erz 2001:31-35; Richter 1991:200-13). After the beginning of the Christian era until the sixteenth century, only few human activities can be detected in the mountains. Then settlement activities resumed until they decreased again in the mid-nineteenth century to stop entirely by the beginning of the twentieth century (Breunig 1989, 2003). The recent occupants of the region left rich archaeological residues but no sophisticated rock art (perhaps some finger paintings). However, these people seem to have been strongly attracted by the art, since they clearly preferred painted sites for their camps.

Because of eight years of almost uninterrupted fieldwork the late Harald Pager spent with two local assistants in the completely uninhabited wilderness of the Brandberg/Daureb, almost 80% of the rock art of this round inselberg (diameter 30 km) has been fully recorded by detailed copying (Pager 1989, 1993, 1995, 1998, 2000, 2006). The present study draws on roughly one-third of this art documentation, thus dealing with more than 17,000 figures in 327 sites from an area of

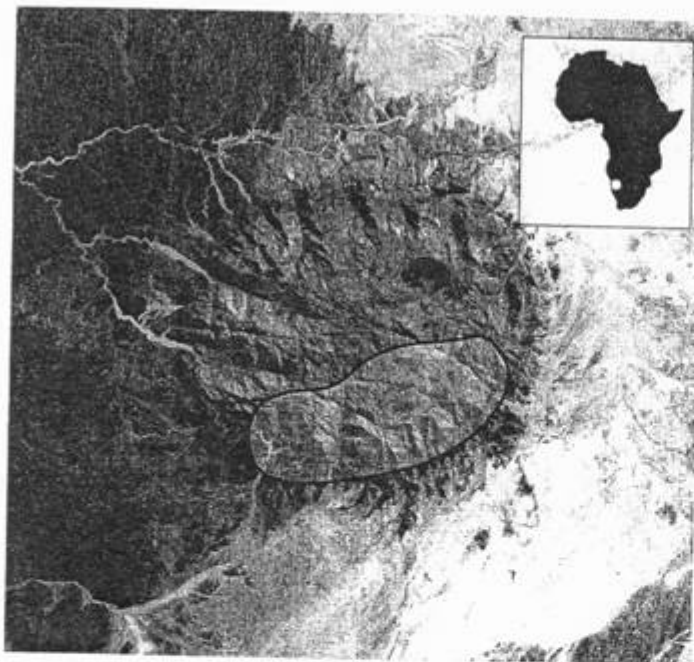


Figure 2.1 Map showing the location of the Brandberg/Daureb, which is separated from the coastline by a 80-km wide strip of the Namib Desert. The research area as indicated here extends over some 20 km in east-west direction.

roughly 135 sq km (Figure 2.1). The art in general is characterised by realistic and naturalistic depictions (Figure 2.2). Animate motifs constitute 75% of the art, wherein again 75% depict humans while 25% are animals, mainly the large game of the wider region (but not of the mountain area itself). Among the 25% of inanimate motifs there are to a very large extent remains and nonrepresentational depictions. Human figures are usually shown in scenes of superficially little specificity, mainly being on the move in single file. Moreover, humans are normally shown together with other humans, whereas animals appear only together with other animals. The only recurrent direct link between the two 'worlds' of humans and animals is their appearance on the same walls, to a small part in superpositions, without, however, interaction taking place between them (which is an extremely rare configuration; out of 2,113 analysed scenes only 25 show a combination of humans



Figure 2.2 Rock art panel from Circus Gorge in the Brandberg showing fairly clear-cut zones of display for animals and humans.

interacting with animals, for example, in a hunt; Lenssen-Erz 2001:171). A marked feature of the human figures is the lack of individualising elements: The type of social identity promoted through the art is apparently more a concept of a 'person' than anything else. 'Zero-marked' humans (Lenssen-Erz 1998) constitute the bulk of human figures (75%); these are humans without any marked features specifying age, role, rank, status, or sex (Lenssen-Erz 1998, 2001). Only 11% are marked male (by a penis), and 7% are marked female (by breasts), thus reproducing conventional gender identities (another 8% are 'wigs'; that is, only the hairdress remained of otherwise faded human figures, but, where preservation is adequate, this hairdress may be seen on men and women alike). The analysis of next to 10,000 human figures in the research area showed distinct patterns of activity for the three gender categories (Lenssen-Erz 1998, 2001:106–16). In short, men are mainly shown in association with material cultural items (that is, as a rule, carrying hunting equipment = 51%), whereas of the depicted women only 28% are associated with material goods (containers, sticks). For women, it seemed much more important to show them occupied in communication, which is depicted by means of gestures (55% of women are painted gesticulating, while this pertains to only 33% of the men). There is no place

here to expound further on action based analyses in which it could be extensively demonstrated that the 'zero-marked' humans with their activity patterns partly take an intermediate position in between the patterns of men and women, but often they also obtain an extreme position, thus evincing that these figures do not simply form the average of the two conventional sexes but instead represent an autonomous identity (Lenssen-Erz 1998, 2001).

In a gross simplification, one might pinpoint the gender roles and the identities thus established as promoted by the art as follows: Men were the specialists of everyday, being competent in everyday, universal reality and causalities; women were the specialists of the extraordinary, being the masters of the symbolic codes with particular competence in the culture-specific realities and causalities, for instance, ritual and ceremonies; the 'zero-marked' humans were the generalists of everyday, shown in configurations that again and again contain and apparently promote the ideals of community, equality, and mobility (ibid.). These repetitions give the art a liturgical character, and, since the canon of motifs as well as the combinations of motifs are rather restricted, there are strong indications that producing rock art was either ritual activity itself, was closely linked to it, or it was the result of rituals. This is further corroborated if viewed in the light of ethnographic analogy (for example, Layton 1992; Lewis-Williams 1981; Stoffle et al. 2000). Whatever definition of ritual one adheres to (Mitchell 1996), as an artefact that cannot have a direct physical function such as a stone tool, art will always establish a metaphysical relationship between action and purpose, its causalities – by the logic of rituals – need not follow the universal physical laws.

The investigations into the rock art of the Brandberg/Daureb have been sided by archaeological excavations (Breunig 1989, 2003), but this has been restricted to a relatively small number of sites. To qualitatively and quantitatively grasp the presence of artefacts, for each site a form sheet was filled in. Since artefacts of the Later Stone Age, as the period during which most of the art was created, usually remain on the surface, the quantity of these artefacts is a reliable indicator of the intensity of presence of people during the times of rock art production (see also Richter 1991).

The Power of the Place and the Magic of Discourse

One does not fully understand prehistoric art if one has not understood the space around it. From the understanding of small spatial units (the sites) grows the understanding of entire landscapes as the spaces for life and use of resources, that is, the lifeworld (Schütz and Luckmann 1975).

Among the various spatial entities, it is certainly the lifeworld that plays an important role in forming identities. A significant step toward comprehending the sense of space of prehistoric people can be done by reconstructing their mental map. The mental or cognitive map in the understanding of Downs and Stea (1982) can be a structured, physical, or mental representation of a spatial configuration, but here the term should be seen as a metaphor, since instead of a real map in our understanding it stands rather for a plan for spatial behaviour (ibid.:86). A mental map is strongly influenced by the cultural background of a person, and, yet, among people of the same culture, it has individual characteristics. However, the subjective part of it diminishes corresponding to the needs of the mental map to serve for communication purposes. If a mental map contains information for others it has to draw on the codes of the respective society (cf Hyndman 1994).

Rock art as a phenomenon lodging immovable in space and thus defining it, can be understood as a metaspace; that is, rock pictures are spatial phenomena that articulate spatial concepts and spatial cognition. They are a spatial phenomenon making an indirect statement on space. Painters and engravers did not choose rocks arbitrarily for their art but because of certain properties and preconception. In the case of shelters and caves, some superficial properties become tangible, and they have to do with space people wanted to use, for instance, as living places. This holds true in small spatial units regarding the distribution of pictures in the site: which character of room was desired, the nature of access, how many observers should be able to view the pictures at one time. In larger units, however, the quantity and distribution of sites with different functional features permit one to set up hypotheses about how the landscape was perceived, conceptualised, and used (Lenssen-Erz 2001). (For an actual collection of approaches towards linking landscape and rock art see Chippindale and Nash 2004.) For example, was it seen primarily as a resource that helped to satisfy the basic needs (Maslow 1970) for food, water, raw materials, living or mobility, or was it rather a source of power in mental, religious, and mythical issues? This apart, as a region that was visited repeatedly and played an important role in the livelihood of the painter people (Breunig 2003; Kinahan 1991), the Brandberg/Daureb landscapes for certain also formed part of the identity of these people – perhaps taking the function of the *nlôre* as among the recent San (Marshall 1976:71).

What is the way of living that we can read from the patterns of use of the spatial configuration? On the one hand, rock art sites communicate unintentionally cognition of space of its creators, whereas, on the other hand, the art is an intentional means of communication and the sites are places of communication, since most of them were living sites.



Figure 2.3 A rock art site in the Brandberg/Daureb mountains. Approximately 1,000 sites are scattered over an area of some 500 sq km, indicating the comprehensive appropriation of the area by prehistoric people. The study presented here relates to one third of the body.

The role and function of a rock art site (Figure 2.3) are inseparably linked to the communication for which and through which it was designed; space and discourse are interactive constituents of the art's meaning.

The Brandberg/Daureb Case Study

The spatial design of a southern African hunter-gatherer campsite is described by Parkington and Mills (1991:357) as a 'sociogram of San society', hence carrying information on societal processes that again, one may add, necessarily involve communication. For them, rock art sites are repositories with 'socially informed images' that communicate 'harmony, belonging, and origins' (ibid.:362). In front of this background, the distribution and patterns of use of rock art sites can be interpreted in terms of (a) the expressions of identity through spatial behaviour, (b) the communicative processes linked to particular behaviour, and (c) the cognitive map of prehistoric Brandberg/Daureb (Lenssen-Erz and Erz 2000). In the research area of 135 sq km (Figure 2.1), hardly a site is missing from the records (Lenssen-Erz 2001:254–325, 2004; Pager 1989, 1993, 1995; Scherz 1986), so this study takes not only a sample into consideration but instead well over 90% of the extant art.

With an evaluation of 62 features in 11 categories, the vast variety of sites has been classified in the following 7 classes (the sequence is arbitrary and indicates no hierarchy; Lenssen-Erz 2004:145–46):

- Class A: Landmark or waymark site, located along natural travel routes or near remarkable features along such a route
- Class B: Short-term living site, small shelters with few human traces, may have been, for example, an overnight station for a small hunting party
- Class C: Long-term living site, large shelters with a lot of space and useful natural infrastructure nearby, relatively few paintings but ample traces of presumably mundane activities (stone tools, bones, charcoal)
- Class D: Aggregation camp, similar characteristics to Class C, but significantly more paintings
- Class E: Casual ritual site, similar to Class B but significantly more paintings
- Class F: Deliberate ritual site, sites that are clearly larger than Class E but smaller than Class D, with a relatively large number of complex paintings
- Class G: Sanctuary, hermitage, isolated sites off from the usual natural infrastructure, with unusual depictions

It should be emphasised here that sites will hardly ever have been monofunctional; rather, most of them will also have had functions other than the one under which they are filed (Lenssen-Erz 2001:308). Nevertheless, all sites produced profiles of features that allowed allocating them to one specific class as their primary functional sphere.

For an assessment of the variety of sites, one may also take a look at the intensity of painting activities: the average number of paintings per site is 53, but the median lies at 18 figures; that is, half the sites have fewer than 19 figures. The 20 largest sites, making up 6% of the sites in the research area, contain 42% of the paintings, whereas the 163 smallest sites (exactly 50% of all sites) contain only 8% of all paintings (Lenssen-Erz 2001:275). These figures indicate that, on the one hand, the art is highly concentrated, whereas, on the other hand, it is widely scattered in small quantities. Rock art is ubiquitous in the landscape, but its peak power obviously unfolds only in few places.

In the discussion to follow, some classes of sites are picked to demonstrate how, via the modelling of discourse based on spatial and contextual analysis, hypotheses as to the social identities of the painters can be forwarded.

Rock art sites of Class A, labelled 'landmark' or 'waymark' (Lenssen-Erz 2001:285, 2004:145), make up 13% of the corpus of sites, and they have the following characteristics:

- located along natural travel routes
- no or very poor accommodation
- no further natural 'infrastructure' nearby (for example, water, open field)

- near to conspicuous landscape features (for instance, a pass or a saddle in the mountain)
- few human traces (rock art, artefacts)

Sites of this class are strongly shaped through the natural surroundings; the logic of reference comes from the landscape as the space for mobility and not from the potential of the site and its environs as a place for living. Since these sites do not provide the features that made people stay at other places (for example, shelters), the site itself – that is, the painted rock – is communication, the place is the message. It is not a place to stay at and communicate as at the sites where people camped. Besides the intentional communication through a language of pictures, they too convey information about the use of space and the sense of space of the prehistoric people by signifying certain features of the landscape. Certainly, people would be naming landscape features with special terms in relation to their use when walking the landscape, as the San in Botswana do (Silberbauer 1981:97). But this apart, if we take mobility as the processual appropriation of space and its natural infrastructure (that is, pathways and the like), it seems that Class A sites give a shape to mobility as an asset that played an important role in daily and spiritual life of the prehistoric painters. Bradley and associates (1994) have shown how rock art sites demarcate 'traffic routes' through a landscape and 'emphasise the importance of mobility' (383). The motifs of the art support this view: 75% of the human figures are mobile, whereas among animals – dependent on species – only about a quarter is shown while moving. This suggests a scenario wherein appropriation of space through mobility was highly ranking; at the same time, we can be sure that the prehistoric painters did not need any 'traffic signs', since the abilities for orientation of hunter-gatherers do not require that kind of help (cf. for example, Liebenberg 1990; Silberbauer 1981:198). Rather, rock art sites of Class A, besides being a means for the organisation of space, express a high esteem of pathways and of being-on-the-way. In her work on the Nkoya shrines, E. Colson points out which role can be attributed to the dialectics of mobility and locale:

Movement, passing, and boundary-crossing are the very characteristics imputed to the natural forces associated with places of power which relate to the world at large and not to a localized community. Yet natural features that attract veneration are most commonly fixed in space, conveying permanency rather than movement: here, right here, one can expect power to manifest itself. Permanency and immobility are elements of the definition of a shrine. (1997:50)

Mobility is not only a precondition and necessity for the life of hunter-gatherers, but it is also a means of communication. Through

moving-to one can express nearness and connectedness, whereas going away expresses distance, for example, in order to solve a conflict (which is practised among southern African hunter-gatherers, Marshall 1976:198; Shostak 1981). Accordingly, signifying a rock as a waymark would have been partly an expression of the identity of a hunter-gatherer fostering a nomadic lifestyle and celebrating mobility.

It should be emphasised that the art motifs at different types of sites only exceptionally give a hint at the site function, such as site Hungorob 2 (Figure 2.4; Pager 1993:56–57). This is an obvious waymark site on the side of a pass that one has to cross inevitably if climbing the region with the most prolific water pools from the south. Here the depictions show people moving with their gear. Usually, however, one cannot make predictions as to what kind of depiction can be found at a site of a specific function (only exceptions: depictions of women at Class D sites and extraordinarily elaborate and unique technique on motifs at Class G – see below). This adds to the hypothesis that the spatial configuration of a site contributes importantly to its meaning and function – may be more than the art; the great variety of sites has been addressed above, suggesting that they cannot all have had the same function. If now, as is the case in the Brandberg/Daureb, paintings at any given site are chosen from the whole corpus of the art instead of being a selection of specific motifs – hence normally referring to the art's meaning in total – then the differences between the

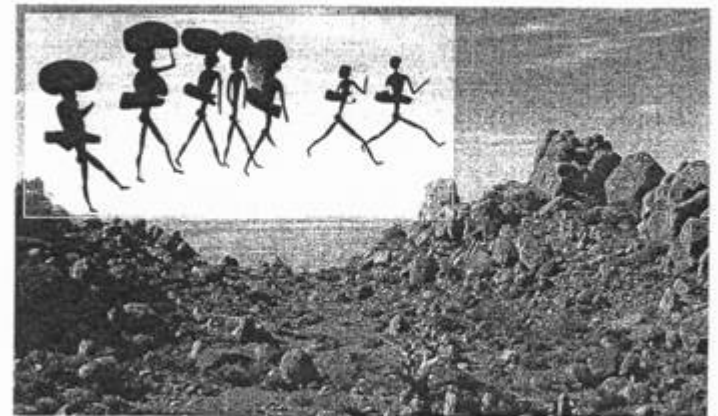


Figure 2.4 Site Hungorob 2 is a typical waymark; untypical is the motif that shows people transporting their gear. The leftmost figure is 38 cm tall, painted red.

sites is not established through the paintings but through the spatial configuration.

The next example of rock art sites is Class E, which attain a ratio of 33% among all sites, being labelled 'casual ritual sites' based on the following characteristics (Lenssen-Erz 2001:286, 2004:146):

- rather small site
- mediocre accommodation facilities (level roofed area not sufficient for more than five people)
- mediocre access to natural 'infrastructure'
- low intensity of usage
- medium to high number of paintings (> 50 figures)
- rather complex paintings
- public presentation of art

With this pattern of characteristics, Class E sites are places that fit very well into the daily conduct of life of prehistoric hunter-gatherers in all its facets (Lenssen-Erz 2001:318–20, 2004). Sites of this type are not distributed in concentrations but can be found in a rather homogeneous scatter all over the mountain area. They materialised in no particular local environment or 'neighbourhood'; they were ad-hoc creations that could become real according to an unforeseen natural, social, or ritual necessity. Judging by the relatively small quantity of artefacts, they were places for short-term living. But compared to this rather low intensity of mundane usage, the traces of ritual activities (that is, paintings) are fairly numerous. Consequently, these sites did not serve only for staying but had a function as hot spots of communication among people as well as among other world beings. The communicative function is enhanced by the fact that they are almost never isolated or far away from the natural travel routes; that is, they lie amidst daily life. Class E sites respond particularly well to the usual patterns of behaviour and mobility of hunter-gatherer groups. While on their nomadic trips in small groups (around 15–20 people as the estimated minimum number of members of a hunter-gatherer group that can survive over long periods under problematic ecological conditions – see Lenssen-Erz 2001:267–68 for a list of references on this issue), they may have camped at such a site for a short while of no more than a few days. Rituals taking place here were largely the result of unexpected necessities or opportunities. These were not the places for special, well-prepared rituals such as initiations or other rites de passage; more likely they were spontaneous, like healing or rainmaking (cf Stoffle et al. 2000:22). The communicative character of the rituals could easily have involved the whole group by way of a public mode of presentation of the art. This suggests a scenario wherein rituals were the continuation of everyday discourses into formalized, ritual discourses (Tanaka 1980:113). As among the recent

San of southern Africa, the leisurely playing and chatting may turn into a common singing that eventually ends as a common ritual dance (Bieseke 1993:75), be it for healing, rainmaking, or just to celebrate the presence of powers. Marshall-Thomas (1988:141–42) reports the example of the !Kung San who started a rain dance because they knew rain was coming (of which the surprised anthropologists were not aware); thus they could celebrate the powers of the rain coincidentally becoming available. They would not believe that their dancing could generate rain on demand.

The likely starting point for the ritual activity at a Class E site would have been discourses without a predefined frame that can touch on any topic and in which there is no control over who participates or who is entitled to contribute, since they originate at a place of everyday (a campsite) and presumably in situations of everyday (Tanaka 1980:78). Such discourses can be the background to routine activities of everyday, which is why they are unpredictable and open ended.

According to this scenario, one can conclude that these were the sites where identity was negotiated, established, or confirmed on the level of the band without excluding anyone. All members of the group would have participated and would thus have shared their sense of identity with the others. The contradictory option that these were sites of exclusive identities by, for instance, declaring them as a taboo for certain people, is particularly unlikely, since, owing to the wide scatter of this class of sites in consequence, almost the entire region would have been inaccessible to those to whom the taboo applied (see Lenssen-Erz 2001:428, map XXVII). Instead, masses of artefacts and the customary use of shelters for habitation point out that the whole landscape seems to have been used as a complete lifeworld for all.

As a contrast to the sites just mentioned, one may list the sites of Class D identified as 'aggregation camps' (Lenssen-Erz 2001:285–86, 2004:146). They attain only a ratio of 2% among the sites of the research area, but they account for 15% of the rock paintings, and their identification is unambiguous owing to the following features:

- large living sites
- a lot of open areas in the immediate surroundings
- masses of paintings and of other artefacts (stone tools, pottery, ostrich eggshell)
- strong emphasis on women in the paintings
- high intensity of usage
- good natural 'infrastructure'
- many small satellite-sites in the near vicinity

When analysing activity patterns in the rock art, one notices that, in contrast to patterns observed among twentieth-century San of southern

Africa, women seem to have played an active and leading role in ritual dances of prehistoric times (Lenssen-Erz 1998, 2001). This is suggested by the ratio of women in coordinated, non-everyday gestures and body postures (which could be labelled 'dancing'), which is between 50%–100% higher than that of men (depending on the type of gesture, Lenssen-Erz 2001:125). In Class D sites there is a basically 'female' character owing to the emphasis on women in the pictures (the ratio of women against men is up to three times higher in these sites than in broad average, Lenssen-Erz 2001). Moreover, the entire setting of Class D sites contributes to the identity of women as evoked through the art. This identity suggests that they were the custodians, as it were, of the community and the masters of the social codes – in a complementary analogy to the men among the twentieth century !Kung San, who were labelled 'masters of meat' and 'owners of hunting' (Marshall 1976:178; on another dichotomic view of the male and the female sphere see Bieseke 1993:79–81). The social codes may have included language, songs, dance, ritual, ceremonies, and not at least also painting. Because of the wide social effects of this all-encompassing ability to communicate, not only may women have occupied themselves with 'women's affairs' (Marshall 1976:179), but likely they also established and stabilized the links between the members of single groups and between groups. This role they could best attain during the large aggregations, where they could lead the 'big' discourses. Accordingly, aggregations at Class D sites could have been in as much a market for communication as a medium for the stabilization of large social bodies (for example, from various central Kalahari San groups see Guenther 1986:173; Silberbauer 1981:179–80; Tanaka 1980:30). Discourses led at these sites likely were preconceived through the symbolic power of the place (evinced by the outstanding number of depictions); everyone coming to a Class D site would have been aware of the special status of the locus (cf Stoffle et al. 2000:22–23). Form and content of communication and behaviour would have been strongly regulated through conventions; these were the places where the cultural knowledge with all its rules of conduct between all agents of the physical and metaphysical world was implemented. Probably they were places well known to everyone in prehistoric times – comparable to a cathedral in European context – and it was not only possible to agree on a meeting at such a place in advance, but it was also important to meet there for the maintenance of the social networks and the care for the social capital (see Lenssen-Erz 2001:270 for several references on this issue relating to the Kalahari San). The identity that people may have sensed and fostered during meetings at Class D sites was at the most encompassing level owing to recourse to the whole cultural knowledge in exchange

with social partners coming from remote places. Such an identity would have been that of a clan or, even more general, that of a forager.

As a final example, Class G is presented here (14% of the whole corpus of sites); sites in this class are labelled 'sanctuary, hermitage' (Lenssen-Erz 2001:286, 2004:146). However, these terms are meant rather to stir associations than to be final definitions of site function. The characteristics of Class G are these:

- special position (vantage point providing panoramic views of wide stretches of the landscape)
- isolated location
- partly difficult access
- peculiar rock formation (for example, cavelike seclusion)
- small number of artefacts
- little intensity of usage
- disadvantageous natural 'infrastructure'
- few but extraordinary depictions (motifs or styles that occur only once or very rarely)
- roofed area for only very few people, no open area outside
- pictures relating to inner room of site, private mode of presentation

Although there are no deep and dark caves in the Brandberg/Daureb, sites of Class G (Lenssen-Erz 2001:321–23) may be the only ones that could partially be compared with the palaeolithic art caves in Europe. As is obvious in a deep cave also in sites of Class G, a certain introvertedness and deprivation were obviously desired, and a liminal position between inside and outside was advocated. Apparently, the 'consumer' of the art should concentrate on the inside of the shelter, that is, the unconventional depictions that can be found in there (for example, rain giraffe, richly decorated 'medicine men' Figure 2.5). These special pictures stand for a special part of the cultural knowledge. The character of Class G is dialectic, since at the sites with their elevated and remote location one was withdrawn from the natural infrastructure of the landscape and therewith from its live-giving assets; however, sensually one was almost 'supreme' to it, which was emphasized through the often-attained vantage point of such sites – the landscape was a somehow abstract (re-)source 'out there'. Apparently, neither the natural infrastructure nor other features that are advantageous for a stay (such as open area, water resources, and neighbouring sites) were of importance. A scenario for Class G sites suggests that they were focal points of a discourse too complex to link it to the immediate surroundings and to the everyday. More than any other of the seven classes of rock art sites, those labelled 'sanctuary, hermitage' seem to be suited for initiations (Barnard 1992). Their location, the motifs with their extraordinary character, the private mode of presentation of the art (see, for example, Bahn 2003), low intensity of

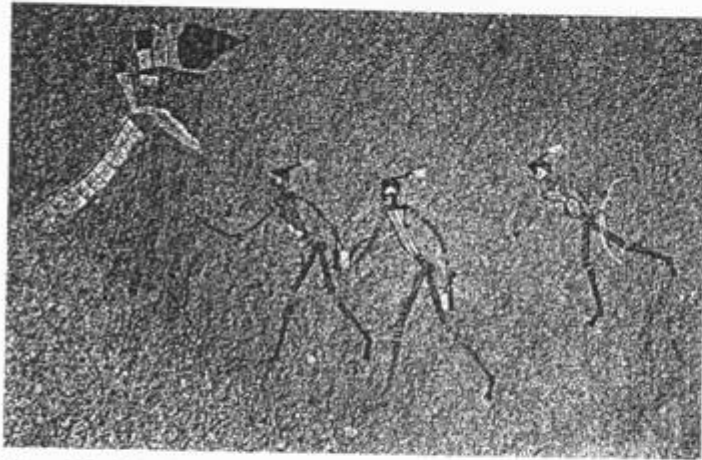


Figure 2.5 Paintings of such complexity are exceptional in the Brandberg/Daureb rock art and are typical of sites with properties of a 'hermitage, sanctuary' (left human 25 cm tall).

usage chiefly for the ritual purposes of art production (few 'mundane' artefacts but elaborate paintings), and finally the disadvantageous surroundings are all indications that mainly contemplative and meditative religious and ritual activities and discourses seem to have taken place here. These sites were retreats that were not directly connected to the secular use of the landscape as habitat and resource. Also, social events at Class G sites did not involve many people, since most of them do not provide enough space; rather there was a clear selection and control of those who visited these places (for instance, through a dangerous ascent) and how long they could stay. The length of stay, for example, can be concluded from the natural 'infrastructural weakness' of the surroundings of Class G sites, where water supply usually is problematic. However, for a planned visit with predefined duration of stay, this lack of water is no obstacle. This, in turn, would match an initiation (Barnard and Spencer 1996), and accordingly the sojourn at a Class G site would have taken place in a context that strengthened the identity of a person as belonging, for instance, to a certain age class or to a certain sex.

The notion of the power of the place and the magic of discourse forms a bracket that embraces especially these sites labelled 'sanctuaries, hermitages', and in this may even help us to understand the Palaeolithic picture caves of Europe. There seems to be an anthropological constancy that characterizes places with a nonmundane function – characteristics

that can be found even in the most modern architecture (Lenssen-Erz and Neubig 2003). The specific features are these:

- restriction of access or the possibility of access control through infrastructural properties (either natural or artificial)
- unusual shape of room
- 'interaction' of place and landscape (mastering view of the landscape)
- deliberate utilization of an inner, secluded space

Especially in the introvertedness the kind of discourse being led at such a place becomes discernible: such discourse is related to an interior, that is, to the deepest personal levels of knowing and with it to the entire wealth of cultural knowledge. Also here, the link to initiation is evident, which serves the ultimate introduction into the cosmology of a society. It appears as though thinking back to and reconfirming the own cultural knowledge – particularly in view of identity and the genealogy linked to it – are effectively achieved in a spatial sphere with dialectic character (Lenssen-Erz and Neubig 2003): On the one hand, there is spatial secludedness with a certain deprivation from sensory stimuli; on the other hand, there is an almost mastering view of the landscape as the physical milieu of the lifeworld. Yet the landscape is no priority in this process; it constitutes a fully present background that is visually directly accessible from the sites. In these contexts, landscape is much more than a resource (which it is in other classes of sites), but it is like a map at scale 1:1 (however, unlike Eco 1997) that is strongly loaded symbolically. Being signified by rock art makes the landscape significant. This fact applies particularly in those sites that provided a comprehensive command of all aspects of the landscape; it was in these places where discourses on the substance of landscape, human identity, and the cosmos probably took place.

Conclusion

Following the allocation of a primary function to each of the 327 sites according to the classification listed here, a pattern of usage can be discerned. This pattern hypothesizes about the cognitive map of the prehistoric people. Their perception of the natural components they encountered and the options for behaviour they could choose result in one out of many possible mental maps of the mountain area. In the following, a scenario is modelled that is based on the properties of a fictive average site (which, of course, has many features of Class E, since this class dominates the corpus of sites). Such a site induces the performance of 'average behaviour' for the painter people, that is,

the behaviour and actions that normally would have occurred. The behavioural pattern that emerges comprises these components:

- The Brandberg/Daureb was a landscape in which people found the resources to satisfy their basic needs (after Maslow 1970), so they went here first of all to exploit the natural infrastructure;
- People moved around in small groups and kept a high intensity of mobility, which made them change camp every few days. This can be concluded from the averagely low intensity of use of the sites and the restrictedness of resources in the vicinity;
- There seem to have existed a constant readiness and a constant need to become ritually active; the result of these activities can be seen in rock art (cf Toupal et al. 2001:175);
- As a rule, rock art was a public issue, so that whole groups could be included in the production and the use of the art.

This pattern of behaviour is based on specific mental conditions that are associated with not just any kind of discourse related to the entire lifeworld. Apparently, prehistoric people saw the Brandberg/Daureb not only as a resource and an advantageous ecosystem but also as a system that can fall into crisis. The rainy season may be a complete failure any year, and in the whole of central Namibia there is no perennial open water. The Brandberg/Daureb is the most advantageous ecosystem in a surroundings of thousands of square kilometres, but it may also be hit by drought, being a region that at present receives no more than at average 100 mm of precipitation per year. This situation would not have been much different at any time since 5,000 B.P. (Deacon and Lancaster 1988; Gil-Romera 2006; see also Lenssen-Erz 2001:27–29 for more references), so that the landscape in which their identity was rooted always implied the negation of this identity and existence. Accordingly, the mental condition of the people may often have been in a critical state, and the stability of the group, which is a guarantee for survival, became labile. Therefore, prehistoric people developed the following strategy against the multiple crisis (a crisis in the ecosystem affecting their identity basis and potentially resulting in additional crisis in their social system):

- restriction of group size
- high mobility
- increased ritual activity
- formalized communal activities
- liturgic repetition of the central values 'community, equality, mobility' (Lenssen-Erz 2001)

Activities and mental condition were not born from the moment, but they were patterns that to a large extent were preconceived and

controlled by the mental map, since this map shapes the view on the options that one has in a landscape for living (see, for example, Diamond 2004 on Norse settlers in Greenland). Nevertheless, the mental map was probably under constant revision and adaptation. The picture people had in mind was the landscape as a whole, but it was neither a two-dimensional sheet nor a chaotic complex, which is difficult to overlook and hard to grasp. Rather, people configured it with landmarks of a special type, namely, rock art sites. Not only in the Brandberg/Daureb but probably worldwide at all times people made a landscape 'good to think' by 'mapping' on it their identity mediated through signs of their highly esteemed values, such as mobility, social relations and interaction, and religiosity as well as mythical and historical epistemes. All these are different discourses that may be led separately or overlapping. The multitude of meanings of a landscape (cf Stoffle et al. 2003 on 'layered landscapes') is 'mapped' through a variety of sites being the tokens of a likewise great variety of discourses and identities. Accordingly, the signs of these discourses can also be found separately as well as overlapping in the rock art sites and in the landscape.

As is the case today in any given society, also in the prehistoric past identities were not labels that fit once and forever. Rather, identities and the symbols that represented them were chosen context-related ones, which again was largely defined through space and discourse. Identities underlie a constant dynamics of redefinition through social interaction, which we find inscribed in the landscape in rock art.

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