Images in Stone: A Theory on Interpreting Rock Art
Guy Lanoue
Rome, Italy: Art Center, 1989. 224 pp. L. 45 000 (iva compresa) (paper)

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This text has two parts. The first assumes that hunters-gatherers did not change their social structure for 5000 years, so a social-structural theory of art is proposed to interpret petroglyphs on Lake of the Woods. As a symbol of inner self, rock art is seen as beyond truth, though it is both a private experience and a social gesture. Then, rather than cataloguing almost 80 images, rated as "unimpressive" (p. 7), or using cross-cultural comparison, the author invokes logic to "limit speculation" (p. 9).

Logic imposes order on the mind, so Lévi-Strauss is lauded for seeing how a shaman's healing rituals impose order on patients' chaotic feelings. Such rites, like rock-art symbols, seem to solve problems by swapping ambiguous symbols for antitheses, and letting people accept incongruities without removing the contradictions. Motives are then deduced for the "paradox of self" set up by a group's territory, whose boundaries were challenged even in this "dull landscape" (p. 15) of many fauna but few species.

Cited also are two language codes proposed by Bernstein and Barth. Elaborated (organic/integrative) codes bridge gaps between one and others, while restricted (mechanical/incorporative) codes relate members of groups. Turner saw the first used by flexible Cree bands in naturalistic idioms, stressing unity-by-sameness, and the other by rigid Australian Aborigine clans in abstract styles, stressing unity-by-differentiation.

Grant had also noted this split, but his view and those of Dewdney, Kidd, Ritter, Steinbring and Wellman are rapped for using the same sources (Densmore, Hoffman, Mallery and Schoolcraft) and arguing "injudiciously from the general to the particular" (p. 44). Dewdney, Kidd, Steinbring and Vastokas are then commended for avoiding "the archaeological trap" (p. 46), trying to identify ethnicity, by assuming Ojibwa ethnicity, since even Boas saw similarities in the arts of Algonkian- and Dakota-speaking people.

Basic here is the notion of sharing land flexibly, to foster co operation despite harsh environmental constraints. Thus many petroglyphs identify game whose migrations in seasonal variations within certain ranges also mirror human movements as noted by Dunning, who saw Ojibwa winter groups organize around brothers, while Turner saw the Cree pick a wife's brother and the Athapaskan-speaking Sekani pick a sister's husband.

Numbered figures are first cited in these "preliminary considerations" (p. 51), dominated by pictographs of land animals, with edible moose and caribou being regarded alongside inedible dogs, foxes and wolves. Alternative theories of interpretation, which propose totemism, imitative magic and making clan territories, are rejected in favour of "the idiom of boundary" (p. 63) noted between such actions as aggregation and dispersal.

Part two, called "descriptive comment," is interpretative. Symmetrical turtles are drawn assymetrically to show an ambiguity reflecting the ambivalence of an amphibious turtle's role as messenger between a world of spirits and the world of man. A sun-man is shapeless lifeline below a border and clear above it, arms forming a halo of self-spirit.

In discussing normal and abnormal, as well as changes and non-changes in state or being, Lanoue sees visual puns needing elaborated code to interpret some sexual symbols and images suggesting fertility. Perspectives showing what is near or far and what is high or low in art are seen reflecting reality acted out in life and expressed in ideology, thus revealing the "social structural configuration of art in territorial tribal societies" (p. 98).

Yet meaning is veiled in—"There is no widespread scientific idiom to provide a contrasting dimension calls the pre-scientific (or non-scientific) explanation into question" (*sic*, p. 22). Such non-sentences confuse; moreover, stilted phrasing, which replaces good clear words with somewhat esoteric jargon, may leave the uninitiated wishing for more clarity. The photographs could also have been clearer if fieldworkers had used sidelighting. Finding fault with other recording methods, Lanoue favours one described vaguely as bleaching inked photos on resin-coated paper, used in 1973 in Australia by Toronto mentor David Turner. Still, images lack scale so their sizes are a mystery.

Figure 6 just enlarges Figure 5, and such needless repetitions are climaxed with nine versions of the same petroglyph on Tranquil Lake, one of the few sites cited. Comparisons of rubbings with photo-based drawings should adjoin, and some do (e.g., 6, 7) but many do not (e.g., 3, 10; 4,8). Inconsistent orientations make comparisons difficult. Readers may wonder which side was up, since three different orientations are given for just one figure in three reproductions (42 photo-based, 44 photo upside-down, and 45 sideways).

No "List of Illustrations" identifies the 84 cited figures, no "Introduction" is listed in the table of contents, and no maps of the region appear, though Algonkian territoriality is deemed crucial. The book mentions, but the bibliography omits, authors such as Ernst Cassirer, Julie Cruikshank, Richard Doble, "Paddy" Reid and Beth Stanger.

Despite such shortcomings, the book is welcome for adding to the interpretation of rock art. No matter how faltering, such steps are necessary in any quest for meaning.

Mourning Dove: A Salishan Autobiography
Jay Miller, ed.
Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press. 1990. xxxiv + 265 pp. N.p.
Coyote Stories
Mourning Dove
Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press. 1990. xvii + 246 pp. N.p.

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