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2013-04-25
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PAINTING POSTURES: BODY SYMBOLISM IN SAN ROCK ART OF THE NORTH EASTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Science, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science

Johannesburg, January 2013

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Science at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

_____

(Leanne George)

_____ day of _____ 2013

ABSTRACT

Certain postures and gestures of the human body recur in fine-line San rock art. Students of southern African rock art are introduced to a number of classic postures and features of human figures during the trance dance. The movement and posture of the human body is significant during the ritual trance dance, yet the reasons for painting certain postures over and over again have not been discussed often. This dissertation examines the symbolic meaning behind painting certain recurring postures in the Maclear and Barkly East Districts of the north Eastern Cape Province. This thesis examines sets of similar pointing and gesturing postures of the human body in rock art, and also examines the symbolic role of recurring postures in both the ritual trance dance and rock art. I argue that the painters used these similar sets of images (and others) in rock art to actively maintain and negotiate the flow of supernatural potency from the spirit world into the body of the shaman to utilise in this world and that the images were not static depictions of fragments of the trance dance, and did not only represent the process, but were viewed as actively participating in this process.

For TJC

And in memory of Louise

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am infinitely grateful toward my supervisor, David Pearce, for his patience, steady guidance and relevant and helpful comments on the many drafts of this dissertation. I am also indebted to Lara Mallen, who always had a kind word and valuable advice. The staff and fellow students at the Rock Art Research Institute and the Department of Archaeology at Wits University were supportive and never hesitated to provide their helpful insights during the course of my study. I thank, in particular, Benjamin Smith, David Lewis-Williams, Azizo de Fonseca, Karim Sadr, Geoffrey Blundell, Alex Schoeman and Sam Challis. Last, but not least, I thank the wonderful, interesting people of Maclear for their assistance and support during field work.

The following institutions have provided funding during my research:
The National Research Foundation
The South African Archaeological Society

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NOTE ON NOMENCLATURE AND SITE NAMES

Nomenclature:

The word ‘San’ had negative connotations in the past, but for the purpose of this dissertation I reject any derogatory, racist or sexist connotations when using the word. Where it is relevant, I refer to specific groups of people by names such as /Xam, !Kung and Ju/’hoansi.

Site names:

This dissertation follows the method adopted by the Rock Art Research Institute to name rock art sites. The first three letters refer to the country, in this case South Africa, and the last three are an abbreviated form of the name of the farm on which the sites occur. The number indicates the numerical order in which the sites occur or were discovered. For example, the rock art site RSA MEL7 occurs in South Africa on a farm of which the name has been abbreviated to MEL, and the order in which the site was either discovered or occurs along a rocky ledge on the farm is seven.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"[There is] an immense, painful longing for a broader, more flexible, fuller, more coherent, more comprehensive account of what we human beings are, who we are and what this life is for."
Saul Bellow in his Nobel Lecture, December 12, 1976

In its most basic form, the question all scholars of southern African rock art ask is: why did the authors of these images paint them, or what are the meanings of the images? We partially have the answer to the latter, since we have known for the past three decades that the key to unlocking our understanding of San paintings lies in the voluminous ethnography (e.g., Lewis-Williams 1972, 1980, 1981a, 1983, 1986, 1995, 2006; Vinnicombe 1976; Lewis-Williams & Loubser 1986; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1988; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004). However, our interpretations often remain literal to some extent; for example, it is fairly clear from the ethnographic evidence that certain postures of the human body depict shamans in trance (Lewis-Williams 1981a:95). The painters and the viewers they had in mind must have known that their rock paintings depicted aspects of the trance dance and their related spirit world. Everyone in San society was probably aware that these postures depict shamans in trance; in fact, San rock art comprises metaphorical allusions to the trance dance. A general understanding of something by everyone within a particular group is no reason not to depict it, but there probably was a deeper meaning behind painting certain postures, which depicted shamans in trance, over and over again than just to depict what a shaman looked like in trance or to indicate that trance is present. These paintings probably had another inherent symbolic meaning. The reasons for repeatedly painting certain postures are mentioned in the literature, but have not been discussed often, and in this dissertation, I consider the symbolic meaning behind painting certain recurring postures.

Archaeology students in southern Africa are familiar with a range of ‘classic’ dance postures and features of the human figures in San rock art, which include ‘arms back’, ‘bending forward’, ‘hand to nose’ and ‘bleeding from the nose’ (Lewis-Williams 1981a:79-82; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:38-49). We are reasonably certain of two things: first, that the ancestors of the San authored the majority of

rock art in southern Africa (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:8), and second, that rock paintings depict shamanic activities and fragments of the ritual trance dance (e.g., Lewis-Williams 1981a, 1990, 1998, 1999; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:94, 95).

The word 'shaman', derived from the Tungus language of central Asia, is the generally accepted anthropological term for a person who fulfils specific functions (such as healing, weather control and animal control) in hunter-gatherer communities and who make use of institutionalized altered states of consciousness (ASCs) and trance (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:30; Price 2001; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004). David Lewis-Williams (1999:281) describes 'dance' in San communities as "…the whole complex of dancing, the singing of special potent songs, clapping their complex rhythms, healing, extra-corporeal travel, and other shamanic activities." The Kalahari San still practice the dance and this has been the subject of numerous ethnographic publications (e.g., Marshall 1959, 1969, 1976, 1999; Lee 1968; Katz 1982; Katz *et al.* 1997; Lewis-Williams 1992, 1995). The trance dance is no longer practiced in South Africa, but there are descriptions of the dance by missionaries and colonial administrators (e.g., Arbousset & Daumas 1846:210, 211; Orpen 1874:10).

Recently, various critics have argued that there is no evidence that the southern San performed the trance dance (e.g., Solomon 2007:157; Bahn 2010:101; Wessels 2010:277). Despite this criticism, Lewis-Williams and David Pearce (2012, in press) state that the overriding evidence points to the contrary: idiomatic references to the dance made by /Xam San (e.g., Bleek 1935:28, 29), eyewitness accounts of the dance or remnants of the area where the dance was performed (e.g., Arbousset & Daumas 1846:210, 211) and rock paintings and engravings which definitely depict trance dances (e.g., Lewis-Williams 1981a; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004). Lewis-Williams (e.g., 1974, 1981a) pioneered work on body postures in San rock art and conducted both quantitative and interpretative studies on San paintings in the Barkly East District of the Eastern Cape Province.

The focus and deliberation in this dissertation falls on a range of pointing and gesturing postures identified in eight rock art sites in the Barkly East District, and 24 in the Maclear District, which are located in the northern part of the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa (Figs 1 and 2). The sites are located between the modern-

day towns of Barkly East, Elliot, Ugie and Maclear toward the south, and the southern end of the Drakensberg Mountains. The south eastern Drakensberg Mountains sweep along the area where the northern Eastern Cape borders on southern Lesotho. The mountain peaks are often snow-capped, the valleys and wind-swept plains are mostly used as grazing farms, and the temperature alternates between climatic extremes. Compared to the number of known sites in this area, few interpretative studies have been done. On the other hand, compared to the rest of southern Africa, a great deal of interpretative work has been undertaken in the Eastern Cape starting in the 1970s (e.g., Lewis-Williams 1974, 1981a; Vinnicombe 1976; Dowson 1994, 1998, 2000; Blundell 2004; Mallen 2005, 2008; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2008, 2009; George 2009; Henry 2010).



Fig. 1. Two human figures which gesture and point toward an eland at RSA MEL7.



Fig. 2. A human figure, with an elongated head, holds a stick in a gesturing posture at RSA MEL7.

San-authored paintings were made in shelters found in these remote valleys up until the 19th century (Blundell 2004). Fine-line rock art is an extensive temporal and spatial tradition; it occurs throughout southern Africa, and it was made for thousands of years (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:14, 23). Evidence of hunter-gatherer occupation of the study area stretches as far back as 29 000 years ago (Opperman & Heydenrych 1990; Opperman 1996), although very little excavation work has been done, and the length of occupation might stretch back further in time. The past 500 years were chaotic, politically turbulent, and uncertain times for the San, as they came into contact with Khoe, Bantu-speaking peoples and European settlers, who were moving into the area (Dowson 1994, 1998; Jolly 1998; Blundell 2004; Challis 2008; Mallen 2008).

These tumultuous times and interaction between different groups of people, and the effect on rock art, formed the focal point of rock art studies in the area over the past few years (e.g., Dowson 1994; Blundell 2004; Mallen 2008; Henry 2010). The rock art in the area comprises classic fine-line San paintings, but also the so-called 'other' rock art traditions, which were painted in different techniques and contain different types of imagery (e.g., Blundell 2004; Challis 2008; Mallen 2008; Henry 2010; Pearce & George 2011). Examples of these 'other' traditions include the 'Type 2' and 'Type 3' traditions. The Type 2 tradition comprises mainly bi- or monochrome depictions of stiff-legged antelope in thin, powdery pigment, the morphology of which is distinctly different than the depictions of antelope in fine-line San-authored art (Blundell 2004:113, 114). The Type 3 tradition comprises cruder, brush-painted or finger-painted human figures and quadrupeds in thick monochrome pigment ranging in colour from red, pink, yellow and white (Mallen 2008:34-42). Mallen (2008) argues that these Type 3 images were the work of multi-ethnic people who had a San background or knowledge of San beliefs and painting, and that these people were trying to assert their own identity by painting in the sacred rock spaces.

I consider pointing postures and gestures at rock art sites which are generally consistent with the category of classic fine-line San-authored rock art. Although there are regional variations, it is, broadly speaking, made up of fine, brush painted, polychrome imagery of human figures in a variety of postures, animals (especially antelope) and various shamanic activities and images from the spirit world, as well as geometric shapes (Lewis-Williams 1995:144). The postures and features of the

human and animal figures are often physically unattainable in reality, such as figures with exaggeratedly spread, long limbs and shamans with animal features, or therianthropes. Many of the animal postures and postures of the therianthropes are also physically unattainable for humans. The San merged reality and hallucinatory visions and painted a combination of features, and these postures and features are therefore metaphorical (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:51, 68).

It is important to understand dance postures for several reasons. The movement and especially certain postures of the human body held great significance during the trance dance itself. There were individual variations in body movement, but certain postures kept recurring (Marshall 1969:375). Neil Price (2008:147, 148) suggests that certain ritual gestures and actions become ingrained in cultural memory, and become automatic, similar to the way we tend to nod our heads in agreement. The postures are also important in San fine-line paintings; there is a range of possible postures to select from, but only certain ones were repeatedly painted (Laue 2000:38). Therefore, dance postures were central during the execution of the physical trance dance as well as the execution of paintings depicting fragments of this dance. Certain postures represent fragments of the dance as synecdoche, where a part stands for the whole (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:99, 100). Whereas these postures have been interpreted literally, the symbolic meaning behind them remains largely unexplored. The theoretical framework weaving through this dissertation, theories on the human body, is also comparatively new to rock art study and exploring and developing this framework could prove useful (cf. Blundell 2004).

San rock art, beliefs, myths and views on the cosmos are complex, tiered and multifaceted, and this study hinges on various lines of evidence in the search for the symbolic meaning behind painting dance postures. In any study of the human mind and beliefs, arguments should comprise and be strengthened by various lines of evidence, which are tacking back and forth, or are entwined like cables (see Wylie 1989, 1993). This dissertation uses various lines of evidence to strengthen the arguments: the subject matter and composition of the paintings, a theoretical framework comprising of theories on mainly the human body, but also animal bodies, and the way in which beliefs and views materialize in the physical world, ethnographic evidence and the application of the ethnography to the paintings through analogical reasoning.

Chapter 2 explores the theoretical context and aims at creating a relevant theoretical framework and methods. The chapter investigates a conceptual starting point to consider views on the human body and the manner in which views, ideas and beliefs come into existence, or materialize, in the physical world. 'Body theory' is a fluid concept, but the focus in this study falls specifically on postures and gestures. This study thus considers the ways in which humans communicate ideas through body performance, or body language, whether subtle or explicit, conscious or unconscious and culturally ingrained, and then make representations of the human form in accordance with these ideas. I draw on various theories from anthropology, social sciences and performance theatre in order to construct a fluid framework for understanding the meaning and significance behind the movement of the human body in certain contexts – pointing and gesturing postures. Since the specific context in which some of these pointing postures and gestures occur involves animals, especially submissive, bleeding eland, I also briefly discuss the way in which the San painted animals and how their knowledge of nature and animals may have influenced the way in which they depicted animal morphology and behaviour to convey certain symbolic meanings.

Chapter 3 focuses on the paintings, and examines the painted and geographical context. The paintings are our primary archaeological source of information in rock art study, and the images on which this study focuses have been traced, redrawn and photographed. This chapter describes the area and the sites in which the paintings occur, as well as the images, postures and gestures in detail. It not only examines the general and recurring phenomenon of pointing and gesturing postures in the paintings of the area, but also considers pointing and gesturing in specific contexts: pointing and gesturing at eland, and as I shall argue, a cluster of bees.

In Chapter 4, I introduce the social context linked to the production of the paintings through ethnography and analogy. Our information on the context of the production and consumption of San paintings derive largely from ethnographical records (e.g., Vinnicombe 1976; Lewis-Williams 1981a, 1995). First, I consider the strengths and limitations of analogical reasoning and the ethnographic record and its sources: the nineteenth-century Bleek and Lloyd Collection from the /Xam San of the Northern Cape (e.g., Bleek & Lloyd 1911; Bleek 1924; 1931, 1935, 1936), the account of a south-eastern San man named Qing (Orpen 1874) and ethnographic work conducted

in the Kalahari between the 1950s and the present (e.g., Marshall 1959, 1961, 1962, 1969, 1976, 1999; Lee & DeVore 1976; Katz 1982; Biesele 1993). I also introduce the ritual trance dance, supernatural potency and shamans in San society. Shamans acquire supernatural potency during the trance dance, but there are also other ways of acquiring this potency. It takes on many forms and guises and has many uses. It can, therefore, be seen as a polysemic concept, or a concept with many meanings (cf. Lewis-Williams 1998). However, Lewis-Williams (1998:89) states that each painting embodies a "contextualised manifestation" of the range of meanings the concept has and does not embody the whole range of meanings at once.

Chapter 5 discusses the paintings in conjunction with relevant ethnographic references in the hopes of drawing nearer to an interpretation. It discusses the paintings in two sections: pointing and gesturing as a general phenomenon and pointing and gesturing in specific contexts. The focus then shifts to the link between the shaman or the hunter and the eland. The eland is a polysemic symbol (Lewis-Williams 1998:88), and the most important animal in the San frame of reference. The San also considered it to be the most potent animal. I focus on the eland hunt and rituals involving the eland, especially the Boys' First Kill, which marks a boy's transition to a man. The chapter closes by considering natural modelling, which is the way in which the San painters depicted animals to convey certain symbolic meanings through a combination of morphological and behavioural characteristics based on their extensive environmental knowledge (Hollmann 2002, 2005).

I conclude, in Chapter 6, that these images are the materialization of many complex, inextricably linked San views on the human body, pointing and gesturing postures, the spirit world, the eland, potency and acquiring and utilizing potency. These pointing and gesturing postures connote the process of using or acquiring potency. The paintings are an attempt to capture the ongoing significance of the actions themselves during the actual trance dance, the production of the paintings, and the consumption of the paintings in the time thereafter.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

The singer Madonna was quite accurate when she sang that we are living in a material world. Of course, she was referring specifically to money and possessions, but the statement also applies to our phenomenological experience of the world around us. Our experience of the physical world is in material terms. DeMarrais *et al.* (1996:16) explain that whenever a social concept becomes shared by more than one person it needs to exist outside the mind of an individual. We cannot read one another's minds, and in order for individuals to make their ideas, beliefs and views known, these need to become tangible, visible, and audible for others to physically experience. A great deal of our communication in the contemporary world is verbal or written, and we rely on the body language of others to read unspoken and unwritten messages. The San did not have a written language, and communicated by talking, singing, dancing, through body language (postures and gestures) and with rock art.

In the introduction, I stated that this dissertation is concerned with rock art figures which point and gesture in a general context, and figures which point and gesture at submissive eland and, as I will suggest, a cluster of bees, in the rock art of the northern part of the Eastern Cape. It is fairly certain that the paintings in question correspond with San-authored fine-line rock art in the area. The views and beliefs of the San authors are inextricably linked to the paintings. Thus, simultaneously, when questions arise about the meaning of the paintings, questions also arise about the San *views* on the elements present in the paintings: postures and gestures of the human body and their relationships with animals. These concerns determined both the underlying theoretical framework of the study and the methods which I shall use to apply this framework. The paintings in question depict the human body in specific postures, which I shall refer to as dance postures, and human figures interacting with animals. San views influenced the production of the art in these specific ways. Therefore, the theoretical framework is focussed on theories on the human body, and also considers natural modelling, or the way in which the San viewed and depicted animals and their physical characteristics and behaviours. The

method for applying these theories to the paintings involves our source of knowledge on the context in which the paintings were produced, ethnographic analogy.

The informing context

Lewis-Williams (1991) suggests that an approach incorporating the concept of the 'informing context' is important in any attempt to interpret the paintings. The informing context comprises the social conditions and the cognitive state of the painters and their society which gave rise to the production and consumption of the paintings. In this chapter, I shall introduce the theoretical elements and the methods I shall use to apply them. Theory and method are the tools with which we interpret various strands of evidence used to strengthen arguments (Wylie 1989, 1993). Theory creates the framework, and method creates the leverage we need to link the theory and the evidence. We cannot, therefore, disentangle theory and method from the evidence. Each strand of evidence contributes in the interpretation of the paintings and our attempts at finding the reasons why the San materialized their views on the rock face. I shall attempt to weave these strands of evidence throughout the chapters of this dissertation.

Ghilraen Laue (2000) applied the concept of informing context to interpret a posture which occurs exclusively in the rock art of the Waterberg, Limpopo Province. The posture occurs at several sites, and had never been studied before. It is a stylized posture, and depicts the side view of human figures with one, small outstretched arm and a thick muscular leg. Laue argues that the hartebeest, or the tsessebe, was significant to the people living in this area. She found that the posture possibly depicts a hartebeest therianthrope. Laue (2000:77) also argues that the posture could have been a local convention during the performance of the trance dance and thus became a stylized convention in the paintings. She considered which animals were abundant in the area, what the local San views on these animals were, the physical characteristics of the wildebeest and tsessebe, and the fact that therianthropes in rock art are depictions of shamans in trance who experience hallucinations which make them feel like they are turning into animals during the trance dance (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:68). The San believe that these shamans acquire the power or characteristics of the animal which they become (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:69). The study intertwined research on the informing context, ethnographic

analogy, and the style and manner of depiction of the paintings. Edward Eastwood (1999) uses the informing context in a similar way to prove that depictions of a red dorsal line on paintings of elephant, rhinoceros, giraffe and eland and rows of men bearing arrows in northern South Africa and southern Zimbabwe are related. The two classes of image are painted over a large area, and Eastwood (1999:25) argues that these images are part of the same conceptual phenomenon and depict activated supernatural potency and the control shamans exert over this potency. Eastwood and Cathelijne Cnoops (1999) and Eastwood (2006) also used the informing context examine images of kudu in the same areas, and supplemented ethnographic material by considering the painted context. Eastwood (2006) links images of kudu, notably female kudu and their sexual behaviour, to San beliefs and rituals, and supplements the formerly insufficient ethnography with iconography, Kalahari ethnography and aspects of animal behaviour.

Alison Wylie (1989, 1993) suggests that archaeologists construct arguments from various lines of evidence. Wylie likens various lines of evidence to the intertwining strands of a cable. Where one line of evidence is weak on its own, a number of lines of evidence strung together could build a strong argument. The interpretation of rock art rests on various lines of evidence, and our main source of information on the informing context, San society, views and beliefs, is ethnography. Theory, however important, becomes redundant when it cannot be applied to the available data; the questions we ask about the available data inform which theoretical framework we make use of. The nature of the material culture will inform the theoretical framework, and the theoretical framework is used to make sense of the material culture through methods suitable to the case. 'Doing' archaeology, specifically cognitive, interpretative archaeology, thus involves disentangling an intricate tangle of lines of evidence (e.g., Wylie 1986, 1989), and subsequently interweaving these lines in a sensible manner. The theoretical framework informs the methods, the methods inform the theoretical framework, but the material culture record, in this case rock art, informs both method and theory.

We thus interpret the paintings by making use of ethnographic material, and Lewis-Williams (1991:149, 160) suggests that inferences we make by using the ethnography to interpret the art should be tested against other lines of evidence. These other lines of evidence include considering the history of a particular area,

studying the details of the paintings themselves by making technical tracings and re-drawings, and scientifically dating the art and investigating the components of the paint (see Mazel & Watchman 2003; Blundell 2004; Bonneau *et al.* 2011, 2012, among others). As Lewis-Williams (1972:65, 2006:364) also notes, one can study and understand aspects of the art, such as superpositioning, style and theme only when they are combined with insight on the cosmology and ritual, and the views of the people who created the art. As I have mentioned before, we know, from ethnographic references, that the paintings depict fragments of the trance dance. Therefore, the informing context which applies throughout this dissertation is the ethnographic information on the trance dance, and the social conditions and cognitive state of the participants.

I shall discuss the application of ethnography to the paintings in detail in Chapter 4. First, as a fundamental starting point, I shall discuss the archaeological theoretical framework and methods underlying this study. This starting point is also the starting point for attempting to understand the process of materialization, and our vehicle for expressing ambiguous thoughts, views and belief in physical terms: the archaeological study of the physical body.

Archaeology and human bodies

Brian Fagan and Christopher DeCorse (2005:4) describe the work of an archaeologist as follows: "Archaeologists spend their lives investigating the surviving and abandoned remains of ancient societies". Of course, material remains are the only physical evidence we have left from the past, and can provide clues about the views, beliefs, ideas and other abstract mental processes of the people in the past. DeMarrais *et al.* (1996:16) argue that ideology manifests in material remains; the ideas, in essence, become encapsulated in the physical means which the people in question used to express them. Simply put, according to these definitions, archaeologists attempt to derive meaning from material remains (e.g., Brumfiel 2003).

'Meaning' is an ambiguous word, and specific to contexts of use (Shanks & Hodder 1995:14). Michael Shanks and Ian Hodder (1995:9) also remind us that when we interpret material remains (in other words try to ascribe meaning to them) we have to acknowledge that interpretation itself cannot be tied down in definitive categories,

boundaries or processes. Alexandra Alexandri (1995:57) suggests that perhaps the vagueness and ambiguity of a concept embodied in the word 'meaning' is useful because it can fit a variety of circumstances. Processual archaeologists were dissatisfied with archaeology's seeming inability to provide concrete evidence for linking the material remains we encounter in the present to the 'cultural processes' which were responsible for producing these remains in the past (e.g., Binford 1964). Joan Gero (2007:311) argues that archaeologists cling to unambiguity, facts and clear-cut right and wrong answers to interpret the archaeological record simply because there is so little of it. Gero suggests that we should, instead, recognize the value in ambiguity, because it allows greater flexibility for our arguments.

If we should adhere to the definition of archaeology as the study of material remains to help understand past societies, there are two important forms of material remains which aid to approach the archaeological study of the human body in the past: the study of physical human remains and depictions of the human form in art. In this study, the focus falls on the depictions of the human form in San rock art. Although it is valuable to recognize that our interpretations of the material record are ambiguous, as Alexandri (1995) and Gero (2007) argue, we need some form of structure to construct and make sensible arguments, however ambiguous they may be. Whereas I do not propose or favour constructing a generalized model of 'San society', some strategy is needed to sensibly string together the loose lines of evidence comprising the network of theories on the human body. For the sake of simplicity, I shall refer to this framework as 'body theory'. Dušan Borić and John Robb (2008:1) use the term 'body theory' and explain that the body in archaeology is "both omnipresent and invisible". The human body is represented throughout the archaeological record, and the body is material, concrete, tangible and visible. At the same time, they also maintain that body theory has received very little scholarly attention.

There are various anthropological and social theories on the body, generally called 'somatics' (e.g., Butler 1990; Csordas 1994; Turner 1996; Shilling 2000, 2003; Howson 2004), and some archaeological applications of these theories (e.g., Young 1993, 1994; Meskell 1996, 1999; Meskell & Joyce 2003; Borić & Robb 2008; Price 2008). Alexandra Howson (2004:167) and Geoffrey Blundell (2004:87, 88) refer to embodiment (the lived experience) as a fluid view on representations of the human

body as a stage for performing identity. Judith Butler (1990:25) argues that we perform our identities. Mike Pearson and Shanks developed a concept called an archaeology of performance, or theatre archaeology (Pearson & Shanks 2001; Shanks 2002), which considers the performative aspects of social practice. It seems there is no clearly developed definition or consensus on a term for theories on the body, and it is a fairly loose concept.

There are various words, often confusingly and interchangeably used, to describe the aspects of the study of the body in archaeology, such as 'bodylore', which is specifically applied to sacred knowledge and religion in the past (Young 1993, 1994; Price 2008) and 'embodiment', which is used in a more general sense (Blundell 2004). Bryan Turner (1996) identifies three main concerns of body theory. Blundell (2004:76) and Price (2008:148) follow these concerns, and both acknowledge embodiment as a fourth, albeit ever-developing concern. These concerns allow us to view the body as:

- A set of social practices regulated by activity
- A system of signs containing and conveying social meaning
- A vehicle with which power can be expressed

In addition, Price (2008) refers to the overarching concept as 'bodylore', and explains the body as a lived, embodied experience in terms of phenomenology (in other words, in terms of awareness of material objects, thus separating 'the body' from 'the world').

Blundell (2004:79), on the other hand, focuses on embodiment from a postcolonial point of view, which is the notion that the body is a lived experience of the individual, not merely dictated by society or objectively separated from the 'material world'. His strategy involves the following: he considers San art, certain images in particular, as the materialization of individual identity, the human body (for example the various postures) as a unit or a 'microcosm' which encapsulates the social conditions, and finally, he also explains the production and consumption of the art in bodily (or 'corporeal') terms. He uses ethnographic analogy and historic documents to attempt to link paintings with potential candidates for the painters, names and events, thus using the abovementioned strategy and the informing context, which

includes the social and psychological processes which gave meaning to the images, to support each other and strengthen the argument.

In the context of broader archaeological studies, Lynn Meskell and Rosemary Joyce constructed theoretical models for using the concept of embodiment in archaeological studies pertaining to the ancient Near East, especially Egypt and the Maya (Meskell 1999; Meskell & Joyce 2003). Meskell (1999:37) argues that embodiment is useful because the body is material, socially constructed, and an identity-marker where, for example, sex and gender are concerned. She also stresses the usefulness of the individual experience of living through our bodies. Meskell and Joyce (2003) also compare the Egyptian and Mayan constructions of the body in society.

Following Blundell, Meskell and Joyce, I have applied 'embodiment theory' to a rock art site in the Maclear District (George 2009). The site I considered contains a depiction of a very large human figure and several other, smaller human figures with varying, contrasting body shapes (George 2009). Some of these human figures have very fat bodies and exaggerated, almost swollen phalluses, as opposed to some of the other figures, which are thin, with small or no phalluses, and have red lines dangling from or around their genital areas. The big figure also has an exaggerated phallus and an unrealistic number of bows and arrows in the hunting bag on its back. I used ethnographic interpretations and argued that this panel depicts processes and moments of acquiring, transferring and using potency. The fatter figures represent humans during moments when they are full of potency, and the thinner figures represent humans after they had used or transferred their potency. Embodiment theory thus helped to understand the ongoing process of materializing, or painting, ideas about potency. I shall weave these notions throughout the following chapters as a strand of evidence; however, the depictions of the human form with which the dissertation is concerned with differs, and I shall take this difference into account.

Certain symbols in San rock art are polysemic, in other words, they are associated with more than one meaning (Lewis-Williams 1998:88). These images, for example the eland, are symbols signifying a range of elements from San cosmology. I argue that dance postures may also be polysemic. This does not mean that each painting of dance postures encompasses, or was intended to convey, the whole range of meaning of the symbol, but focuses on certain of those meanings in certain contexts.

Lewis-Williams and Pearce (2004:100) argue that these fragmentary depictions of the dance could operate by synecdoche (parts representing the whole) to indicate the omnipresence of the spirit world, indicate particularly potent moments, or focus on individual "moments of truth" or status within a community. As I have mentioned, Lewis-Williams (1991) argues that the context of the paintings (if we attempt to find explanations by considering neuropsychology and ethnographic references) is vital in unlocking their meaning. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1999) argue that the very nature of our conceptual system is metaphorical, and that reason does not transcend the biological, physical body. The ability to reason and thus metaphorical, or symbolical, thinking arises from the nature of our neurological makeup; an embodied mind. The biological makeup thus gives rise to social conditions and customs.

Gestures as cultural 'habits'

We are taught in school and at university that repetition and association with the familiar are the means by which we imprint our (unfamiliar) academic work in our memories, so that we can reproduce what we remember through our repetitive memorization for examination. I revert back to Price (2008:147, 148), who suggests that certain ritual gestures and actions become ingrained in cultural memory and become automatic, similar to the way we tend to nod our heads in agreement. Joyce (2005:139) suggests that archaeological studies of the human body are no longer semiotic, but the focus falls on the experience of the lived body in the past, and this can be traced through the study of the "effects of habitual gestures, postures, and consumption practices on the corporeal body", amongst others. Allan Pease (1988:8) states that certain movements and the words they are associated with tend to occur together across cultures almost with 'predictability' and automatically, in other words, certain accompanying gestures are ingrained, almost 'hardwired', in universal human cognition. The relationship between body language as vehicle of expression, human neurological makeup and cultural influences is complex, and attempting to extensively disentangle this relationship falls outside the scope of this dissertation. Instead, I provide an overview of research in the social sciences pertaining to body language and postures and gestures.

According to Pease (1988:7) there were few studies in the social sciences on the way people use their bodies to communicate non-verbally (in colloquial terms, 'body

language') before the 1980s (e.g., Birdwhistell 1952, 1971; Mehrabian 1969, 1971; Fast 1970; Fast & Fast 1979), although this field has broadened considerably since, and became a scholarly field in its own right and forms an important part of contemporary university programmes revolving around what we now refer to as 'Communication Studies'. Nonverbal communication also received scholarly attention where archaeological research in the ancient Near East is concerned. Gestures and postures were prominent and important in the art of the ancient Near East (e.g., Gelb 1963; Kruger 1989, 1994; Wilkinson 1994).

Richard Wilkinson (1994:192) defines 'gestures' as:

> …specifically prescribed individual movements, stances, or poses which may be used as part of a larger activity or which may function independently… most human cultures make use of specific stances or gestures in the course of everyday life and even in quite formal contexts in order to express relationships and to communicate ideas, opinions or emotions.

Social and individual ideas become systems of signs or symbols when they are expressed, so that certain people can use these to make ideas understandable and known to certain other people (Gelb 1963:1, 2).

Somatic expression

Ideas and concepts are formulated in the human mind, through a series of biological and neurological processes. Human beings exist simultaneously in three realms: we have a physical body, which is tangible, a mental internal realm, which is intangible, and a social realm, which is also intangible, but exists *between* human beings instead of solely *within* them (cf. Howson 2004:4-13). The neurology driving the intangible mental realm, however, is tangible. It is in the outside social realm where the thoughts, ideas and concepts which human beings produce within their individual minds meet the external world because they interact and communicate with each other, and thus construct culture through their bodies, for example by using language and gestures (Alexandri 1995:63).

The tangible body is, in a sense, responsible for and the seat of the origins of intangible thought and social concepts, since its neurological makeup and the brain is part of the physical, biological body, and is the centre of thought (Lakoff & Johnson 1999; Alexandri 1995). If the mind arises from the body, one of the

defining characteristics of 'being human', which is the ability to reason or to find meaning, is embodied (Lakoff & Johnson 1999:4). Thus, the flow of ideas, views and beliefs into and out of the mind of the individual forms a circular motif; the intangible, ambiguous and abstract cannot exist without the tangible, physical and material.

It is also the neurological makeup of human beings which gives rise to our ability to experience hallucinations and the San paint both real and hallucinatory, or non-real, elements in rock art (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1988, 1999). Shamans experience hallucinations during the trance dance and an example is the sensation that they are turning into animals, which, in turn, is depicted as human figures with animal characteristics (therianthropes) in rock art (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999). This is an example where biology and culture comes together: the neurological makeup allows for the generation of hallucinations, and the cultural context aids in making the hallucinations take on animal form. Specific animals, especially the eland, are very important to the San and are a part of their daily frame of reference.

Depictions of animals in rock art

The materialization of views and beliefs on the human body, as we have seen, is a complex process and is influenced by many factors. However, there are also depictions of animal bodies involved in the paintings in question. I use the concept of body theory to refer to theories on the human body. The possibility of including animal bodies under the umbrella of body theory also exists, since animals also communicate their instincts through their physical bodies; however, animal thought processes are not as complex as those of human beings. The focus of this study falls on human views of animal behaviour in specific contexts – the depiction of animal bodies in art. Therefore, I shall refer to the concept of 'natural modelling' where animal bodies come into question. David Whitley (1994) coined the term 'natural modelling' to describe symbols which seem entirely abstract, but the painters may have used these symbols to refer to natural elements; in other words, the painters modelled these apparently abstract symbols on elements occurring in reality in nature. The paintings with which this dissertation is concerned with may contain inherent symbolism which is not obvious to the naked eye, but they are very definitely not abstract forms – they are very clear depictions of eland and other animals. For the purposes of this dissertation, I shall refer to the materialization of

views and beliefs on the animal body as 'natural modelling'. Although I briefly introduce the theoretical concept in this chapter, Chapters 4 and 5 extensively deal with ethnographic references to animals, animal behaviour and human-animal relationships.

Jeremy Hollmann (2002:563) defines 'natural models' as "…detailed observations of organisms and biological processes…" and their function is "…to represent and explain psychological, social and spiritual phenomena through myth, art and mime." Hollmann (2002) applies a combination of ethnographic accounts and a study of natural models to the paintings in the south eastern mountains, and examines how natural models help to depict beliefs and views about supernatural potency, which is like an electric power that San shamans utilize for the benefit of the community. Hollmann (2005:84) also argues that the eland is the best known natural model, as it is central to San belief and thought. Hollmann (*ibid.*) stresses that both morphology (physical characteristics) and any visible behavioural details are important when we identify, interpret and attempt to understand the symbolic significance of animals in rock art. Eastwood *et al.* (1999) supplement the understanding of paintings of kudu in the Limpopo-Shahsi confluence area and on the Makgabeng Plateau with ethology, the study of animal behaviour. The symbolic significance of San rock art operates on many complex levels, and the San depicted real and unreal, natural and supernatural characteristics when they painted humans and animals. Images of eland, as an embodiment of one of the meanings of this polysemic symbol (Lewis-Williams 1998), were therefore not painted according to natural behaviours and morphological characteristics alone, but it is possible that these observed characteristics played a role.

The San are a practical and realistic people, concerned with their survival on earth (Marshall 1999:39, 40). Lorna Marshall argues that although a group of Kalahari San known as the Ju/'hoansi perform rites and rituals, and have avoidance behaviours and superstitions, they still mainly depend on their knowledge of their environment. Many of the aspects of their rituals may spring from these observances, and their environmental knowledge. The Ju/'hoansi do not paint, but rock art depicts San beliefs, and as we shall see, the painters also had a sound knowledge of animal behaviour. Their knowledge of animal behaviour was perhaps important to their beliefs, although possessing knowledge of animal behaviour does

not automatically imply that the behaviour was significant to the observer. Nicolas Blurton Jones and Melvin Konner (1976:337, 338) argue that the Ju/'hoansi take an interest in animal behaviour that goes beyond what is necessary to ensure success during hunting, and that Ju/'hoan "beliefs do not interfere with the study of animal behaviour. They seem to exist in a domain of the mind quite separate from ethno-ethological knowledge." The San attributed significance to certain eland behaviours, and I shall discuss this statement in Chapters 4 and 5. When they painted an eland, it is possible that their knowledge of the behaviour of the animal may have played a role in the way they depicted the animal, but this cannot be argued for certain.

The theoretical framework attempts to underlie the way in which the San possibly materialized their views on the human body and pointing and gesturing postures, as well as animals and natural and supernatural animal behaviour. I describe the images in question in the next chapter, before I turn to ethnographic references on these concepts as method of linking together the theoretical framework and the paintings.

CHAPTER 3

GEOGRAPHY, HISTORY AND THE PAINTINGS

This chapter describes the chosen research area, San rock art and the specific paintings in question. Lewis-Williams (1995:144) argues that we need to contextualize southern African rock art conceptually, socially and historically. Context is important in archaeology and as we have seen, the social conditions and cognitive state of the painters play an important role to help gain a comprehensive understanding of the art (Lewis-Williams 1991). However, context also includes a description of the paintings and, in certain instances, the physical placement of the paintings relative to one another. The next chapters focus on San beliefs and the conceptual phenomena which arose from San beliefs as possible interpretations for the paintings in question, as well as the placement of San beliefs within the context of San rock art in general. This chapter, however, briefly introduces the small geographical area in which the paintings I focus on occur, and aims at providing a framework for later chapters to consider these paintings not only within the context of San rock art in the area, but also southern Africa in general. Although the focus falls on a limited geographical area, it is important to note that the types of paintings in question are not necessarily restricted to the chosen research area and these chosen sites exemplify broader concepts.

Having set the stage thus, I shall describe the paintings themselves. I briefly consider the diversity of San rock art in southern Africa, and thereafter the study area, which is the northern part of the Eastern Cape Province. The main focus, however, falls on the images themselves, and I consider the general phenomenon of pointing and gesturing, as well as pointing and gesturing in specific contexts in certain sites in the Barkly East and Maclear Districts.

Fine-line San rock art

Fine-line rock art, which was authored by ancestors of San hunter-gatherers, is dispersed throughout southern Africa. Its spatial distribution ranges throughout South Africa in the eastern Free State Province, the Western Cape Province, the Waterberg and the Soutpansberg Mountains in the Limopo Province, the

Drakensberg Mountains and the Maloti Mountains in Lesotho and Swaziland, and there are also paintings in Zimbabwe, and parts of Namibia, Botswana and Mozambique (Mitchell 2002:192-210). The production of the art ranges roughly between 27 000 BP (Wendt 1976) and the latter half of the 19th century (Jolly 1986; Lewis-Williams 1986; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:21). Bonneau *et al.* (2011) obtained three results using accelerator mass spectrometry (AMS) dating of black pigments from RSA TYN2 in the Maclear District, and argue that the most likely date range is between 2120 and 1890 years old. Fine-line San-authored rock art is the most frequently occurring kind of rock art, the best understood and, until recently, received the greatest deal of scholarly attention in southern Africa.

There is a remarkable visual consistency in the manner of depiction and subject matter of San rock art, regardless of its vast temporal and spatial occurrence. This is not to say that regional variations in manner of depiction and subject matter do not occur (Hampson *et al.* 2002; Pearce 2009). Examples of variation include: depictions of hoofed domestic animals, which were painted in powdery pigment in the Free State Province (Loubser & Laurens 1994), depictions of hartebeest therianthrope in a posture unique to the Waterberg (Laue 2000), and a range of Y- and triangular-shaped motifs in the Central Limpopo Basin, which were linked to animal skins, aprons and loin cloths (Blundell & Eastwood 2001; Eastwood 2003). Other regional phenomena include 'formlings' in the rock art of the Bongani Reserve in the Mpumalanga Province and Zimbabwe (e.g., Garlake 1990, 1995; Hampson *et al.* 2002).

'Formlings' are generally oval or longer, finger-shaped cores, are capped with a white semi-circle at one end or both, and could be covered in dots, lines or grids. Researchers used to think that the 'formlings' represented beehives or honeycombs, but more recent research postulates that they could be the metaphorical depictions of the areas where potency resides in animals (Garlake 1990, 1995; Hampson *et al.* 2002). However, Siyaka Mguni (e.g., 2004, 2005) argues that certain formlings are related to termites and termite mounds. Hampson *et al.* (2002:23) also discuss a posture, where human figures have one leg raised and bent at the knee, which occurs in two different regions: the Bongani Reserve and at one site, RSA LIN1, in the Eastern Cape Province. In some variations of this posture, the arm of the figure is outstretched while it points with one finger.

There are also regional variations unique to the Maloti-Drakensberg Mountains and the south-eastern Drakensberg Mountains. Challis (2008) describes and discusses paintings of horses, baboons and armed men in the Maloti-Drakensberg Mountains, and Blundell (2004) argues that figures which were painted physically larger than the other human figures at sites in the Maclear District, that he calls Signigicantly Differentiated Figures (SDFs), or Large Headed-Significantly Differentiated Figures (LH-SDFs) (sic), are depictions of important shamans (Blundell 2004 & cf. Dowson 1994).

Despite the appearance of definite regional variations, there are nonetheless definite similarities in manner of depiction and subject matter. The diversity in subject matter suggests, according to Lewis-Williams (1995:145), that the authors did not intend the images to have a single meaning, but rather "...closely interrelated sets of meanings, a broad diversity linked within an essential unity." San rock art generally consists of a range of fine brush-painted, mono- or bichrome, or carefully shaded polychrome images (Fig. 3). The subject matter is made up of human figures which appear in a variety of postures and expressing various gestures, animals (especially antelope, notably the eland), therianthropes (human figures with animal features or vice versa, which depict shamans transforming into animals), shamanic travels to and encounters in the spirit world, hallucinations and geometric forms (Lewis-Williams 1981a, 1995:144).



a) b)

Fig. 3. Examples of fine-line San-authored rock art: a) is an upside-down, polychrome, shaded eland from the Maclear District, and b) is an eland which bleeds from the nose from the Barkly East District (photograph in b): RARI).

The variety of dance postures and gestures include: ‘arms back’, ‘bending forward’, ‘bleeding from the nose’, ‘hand-to-nose’, ‘kneeling’, ‘raised knee’, ‘upheld hands’ and ‘pointing finger’ (Lewis-Williams 1981a:79-82; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:38-49) (Fig. 4). The explanations of these postures mostly comprise of literal interpretations, and it is noteworthy that these postures generally occur in San rock art throughout southern Africa.



a) b)

Fig. 4. Example of dance postures: a) arms back and b) raised knee and pointing finger. (photographs: RARI).

Examples of common denominators unifying San-authored rock art despite regional variations thus include the occurrence of the dance postures and gestures of the human figures throughout, and the conceptual principles underlying the production and consumption of the art.

As a result of ethnographically informed research, we now know that San-authored rock art depicts San beliefs in the form of fragments of the ritual trance dance and the visions and experiences of the shamans in trance (e.g., Lewis-Williams 1981a); similarly, the paintings depict the actual postures of the shamans during the trance dance, and sometimes a blend of reality and the sensations and visions they experience while they were hallucinating (Lewis-Williams 1981a:95).

Regional variations occurring in San rock art can only be identified by comparing detailed local studies in various areas with one another. Whereas focusing on the

regional variations could greatly broaden our understanding of San rock art and San societies in general, the similarities and consistency throughout could also prove illuminating. Many of the sites where the breakthrough in linking the art with the ethnography came from occur in the northern part of the Eastern Cape Province.

San rock art in the north Eastern Cape Province

The San rock art which occurs in the northern part of the Eastern Cape Province is prevalent in the high mountains and the inland plateau, and many of the sites are spectacularly well-preserved (Henry 2010:33), perhaps because the high mountains are so remote and inaccessible. It is in this area that Lewis-Williams (e.g., 1974, 1981a) conducted the pioneering quantitative and interpretative work on body postures and gestures which ultimately led to our ethnographic interpretations becoming the primary source for understanding the meaning of these images in San rock art in southern Africa.

The variation in both rock art authored by San and non-San in these south eastern mountains received a fair amount of attention from a number of scholars over the past two decades (see, for example, Dowson 1994; Blundell 2004; Mallen 2008; Henry 2010; Pearce & George 2011). In contrast, this study focuses on the better known fine-line paintings. Amongst these, I examine a range of pointing and gesturing postures in the Barkly East and Maclear Districts. The Barkly East and Maclear Districts are nested in the valleys of the southern part of the Drakensberg mountain range, south of Lesotho, and in the northern part of the Eastern Cape Province. The nearby towns include Barkly East, Maclear, Elliot and Ugie (Fig. 5).

The Drakensberg escarpment is the imposing, outstanding topographical feature of the area and is made up of a primary escarpment 1900 meters above sea level, an inland plateau 1300 meters above sea level and a secondary escarpment 1100 meters above sea level (Feely 1987:28-29, 46). The temperature ranges between climatic extremes, with summer rainfall (*ibid.*:33, 46). The vegetation consists mainly of grasslands with remnants of grasslands and forests in mountain valleys (Mitchell 1992:5).

Game occurred in abundance during historical times, especially antelope such as eland (*Taurotragus oryx*), hartebeest *(Alcelaphus buselaphus*), mountain reedbuck

(*Redunca fulvorufula*), rhebok (*Pelea capreolus*). There were also large numbers of migrating wildebeest (*Connochaetes gnou*) (Opperman 1996). The animals started disappearing during the 19th century, around the same time that the numbers of different peoples who entered the area in a relatively short period of time significantly increased and horses and firearms arrived, which made hunting considerably less of a challenge (Challis 2008:58).

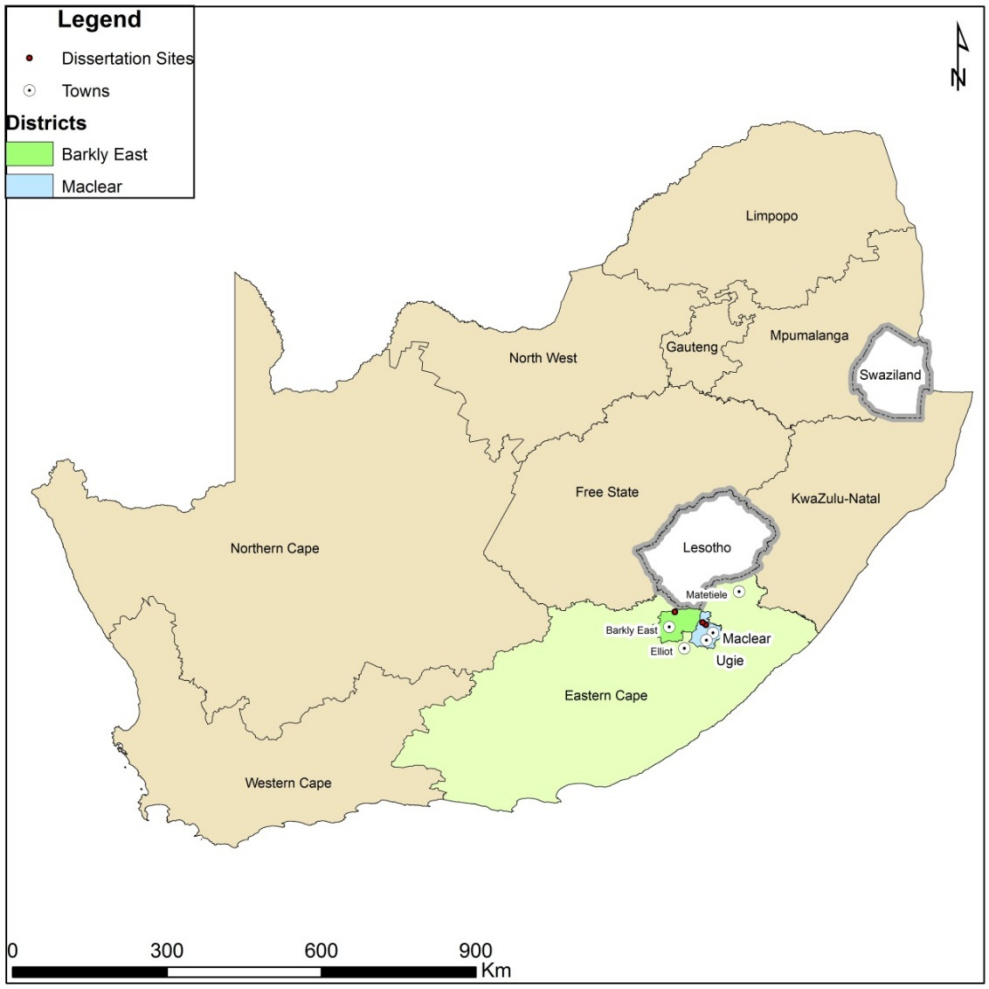

Fig. 5. Map of South Africa indicating the research area. The red dots indicate the areas where the chosen sites are located (map: Tobias Coetzee).

Although the influx of peoples into this relatively small geographical area only reached its peak over the course of the past 500 years, hunter-gatherers had already occupied the south eastern mountains and adjacent areas during periods of time for thousands of years. There have been very few excavations in the area, but the available data indicate that there were already hunter-gatherers living in the area 29 000 years ago, and possibly for longer, although possibly not continuously (Opperman & Heydenrych 1990; Opperman 1996; Mitchell 2002:29). The study

area, which encompasses an area previously called 'Nomansland' (see Blundell 2004), was arguably a 'frontier region' of South Africa during the past 500 years at least (Derricourt 1977:xv). Although the San had previous contact with Bantu-speakers, there was an influx of Bantu-speakers, Khoe, Griqua and Europeans into the area during the colonial period (Blundell 2004:34), and these peoples encountered the San and each other during a time of political turbulence.

There was already a notable increase in population density in the northern Drakensberg area around 2000 years ago (Mitchell 2002:294). Southern African hunter-gatherers encountered a variety of peoples, including the Khoe, who possibly entered the southern African scene roughly 2000 years ago, who either bought with them sheep and pottery (e.g., Barnard 1992, 2008), or acquired the use of the latter around that time in any event (e.g., Sadr 1997, 2008). The Khoe peoples and the Bantu-speakers also produced rock art in southern Africa (e.g., Hall & Prins 1993; Prins & Hall 1994; Smith & Ouzman 2004), but not, as far as we know, in the Drakensberg Mountains.

The San-authored rock art in the south eastern mountains could provide an attractive theoretical means to study the interaction between peoples in the area. Blundell (2004), for example, suggested that the physically bigger figures with exceptionally big heads, SDFs or LH-SDFs, were possibly painted during the tumultuous past 500 years as a way for San shamans to reclaim the painted space, and in doing so, also their physical space and identity. The substance of such arguments, however, depends on whether the chronology of the art can be determined with greater certainty.

At the moment, the only directly dated paintings in the area are approximately 2000 years old and probably predate historical contact (Bonneau *et al.* 2011). San hunter-gatherers found themselves not only in the minority, but also in a marginalized position, as their way of life was compromised by the influx of peoples into their small geographical area (see Blundell 2004; Challis 2008; Mallen 2008; Henry 2010). Derricourt (1977:3) hails rock art in the area and it surrounds as the most visible form of archaeological evidence, and scholars have, for the past two decades, been considering changes and variations in the imagery in the context of the tumultuous social backdrop of the past 500 years (e.g., Dowson 1994, 1998; Jolly 1998; Blundell 2004; Challis 2008; Mallen 2008).

During the course of field work in the Maclear District, it was noted that specific body postures recur in strikingly similar fashion at numerous sites. There are various human figures positioned in pointing and gesturing postures. Some of the figures point with one finger, whereas others simply have an outstretched hand or gesture toward, for example, an eland, with three of the fingers. There are also figures which point or gesture with sticks or bows. In order to identify all of the sites containing such images, I examined all photographic slides and digital photographs of known sites in the Barkly East and Maclear Districts in the Rock Art Research Institute (RARI) archives. There are 78 digitized site records for the Barkly East District and 195 for the Maclear District. These primary archival and digital searches yielded eight sites in the Barkly East District and 24 in the Maclear District where possible pointing postures and gestures occur (Fig. 6).

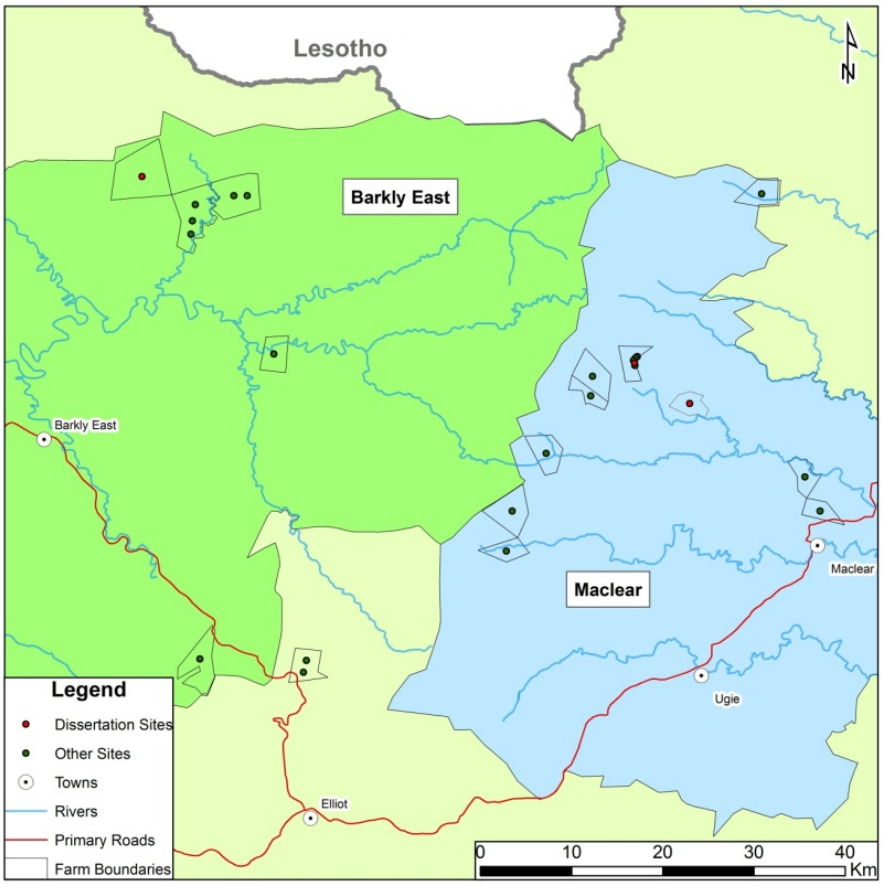

Fig. 6. Map of the research area indicating the site distribution. The map indicates the position of the sites on various current farms. The red dots indicate the chosen sites, and the green dots indicate the other known sites in the vicinity (map: Tobias Coetzee).

It is often difficult to discern exactly what the figures are pointing at, as many of these figures are simply pointing at something in front of them, and occasionally at other human figures. There are three cases at the sites RSA MEL7, RSA BLL2 and RSA WLL1, where some of the human figures gesture or point at animals as well (see Table 1 below for a list of sites).

Table 1: List of sites at which different categories of pointing occur

Description	**List of sites**
Pointing and gesturing as general phenomenon and at other human figures	RSA CAR1 RSA WAR1 RSA BUX1 RSA ESP1 RSA LIN1 RSA MEL1 RSA MEL4 RSA PLU3 RSA ROY2 RSA TYN1 RSA WAR5 RSA WAR7 RSA WEL1 RSA FEN1 RSA HAE1
White translucent figures pointing and gesturing	RSA DIN1 RSA DEE1 RSA WAR1 RSA LAB1 RSA MEL3 RSA MEL7 RSA MEL9 RSA WAR5
Pointing and gesturing at eland	RSA BLL2 RSA MEL7
Pointing and gesturing at bees	RSA WLL1

I shall describe pointing and gesturing in a general context and at other human figures first, and then move on to describe the abovementioned three sites, focussing on RSA MEL7, which serves as a good example of a site containing almost all of the imagery around which the main questions of this dissertation revolve. Finally, I mention two other sites, RSA FET4 and RSA LAB1, where certain images may cast greater understanding on why the human figures point toward the head of the eland in each case, and the process of transforming into a therianthrope.

Pointing and gesturing as general phenomenon and at other human figures

Figures which point with one discernible finger occur at five of the sites in the Barkly East District and 14 of the 24 sites in the Maclear District. There are three kaross-clad, seated figures at RSA CAR1, and the figure second to the left points with one finger at the figure toward its right. These images are superimposed on top of two larger, cruder, faded red human figures (Fig. 7).

There is a human figure which points with one finger while its legs are sprawled into an impossible, exaggerated running posture (the run-run posture), as well as another human figure which also points with two fingers and it is possibly superimposed on top of a quadrupedal animal at RSA WAR1 (Fig. 8). Other sites where there are human figures which clearly point one discernible finger include: RSA BUX1, RSA ESP1, RSA LIN1, RSA MEL1, RSA MEL4, RSA PLU3, RSA ROY2, RSA TYN1, RSA WAR5, RSA WAR7, RSA WEL1.

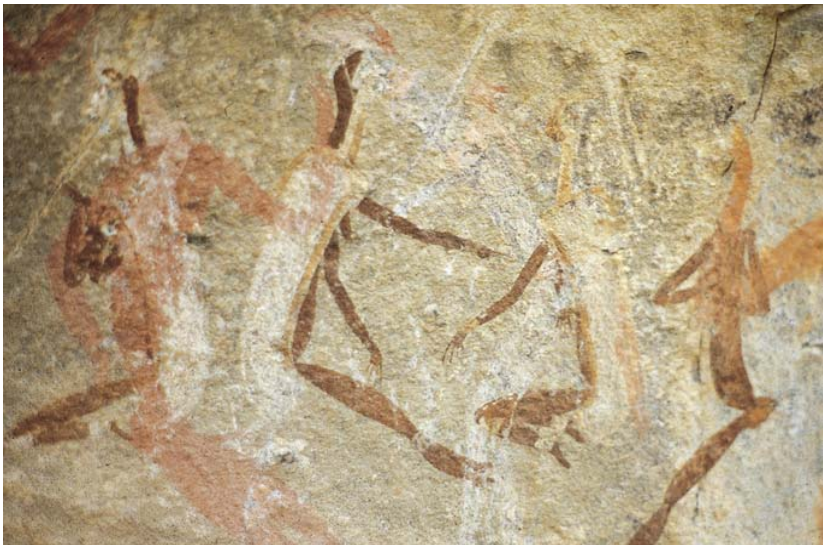

Fig. 7. Kaross-clad figures at RSA CAR1. The figure second to the left clearly points a finger at the figure toward its right (photograph: RARI).



Fig. 8. A human figure superimposed on top of the belly of an eland at RSA WAR1. The figure points with two small fingers (photograph: RARI).

In some cases, there are depictions of figures of which the arms are outstretched and gesture with a blunt hand, or more than one finger. It is uncertain whether this posture, which creates the impression that the figure indicates, or reaches for something, is part of the same conceptual phenomenon which possibly linked the human figures which point with one finger, or the pointing posture. There is one such gesturing figure at RSA CAR1, and a whole row of these figures at RSA FEN1 (Fig. 9) and RSA WAR1, similar to a row of pointing figures which occur on the main rock face of RSA MEL7, as we shall see (Fig 10).

The figures at RSA CAR1 gesture with blunt hands. As discussed above, there are pointing figures at RSA WAR1 as well, and a human figure which holds the leg of an upside-down, floating eland in the vicinity of the row of gesturing figures. At a site similar to RSA WAR1, there is another human figure which holds the leg of an eland, while another gestures into a rock crack in the vicinity. There is a crude, red figure at RSA HAE1, of which all of the fingers are outstretched, and perhaps it gestures toward invisible things behind the rock face (cf. Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990), or other, already completely faded images.



Fig. 9. Row of figures which point and gesture at one another at RSA FEN1 (photograph: RARI).



Fig. 10. Row of pointing men at RSA MEL7 (photograph: David Pearce).

There are also a number of figures across the districts in question which gesture or point with a stick or a bow. As I shall discuss at length below, there are human figures on a side panel at RSA MEL7 which are positioned on either side of an eland and they carry bows in one hand. A row of pointing figures on the main rock face of RSA MEL7 also each carry a bow in the hand with which they are not pointing.

A trance dance surrounded by red flecks, which possibly depict flecks of supernatural potency (Lewis-Williams 1981a; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004) occurs at RSA HAE1 in the Barkly East District (Fig. 11). A crude, red figure at the site stretches toward another with both arms and clearly defined, sprawled fingers, while another figure gestures or points with a stick (Fig. 12). There is a faded, dark red human figure at RSA WAR5 which also gestures with a bow and another figure at RSA WAR7 glances backward over its shoulder and gestures forward with a stick.



Fig. 11. A trance dance surrounded by flecks, which may depict supernatural potency, at RSA HAE1 in the Barkly East District (photograph: RARI).



Fig. 12. A crude red figure with outstretched arms at RSA HAE1 (photograph: RARI).

There are also several sites, including RSA MEL7, where white, translucent images point with one clearly discernible finger. At RSA DIN1, for example, two of these white figures bend forward while both point downward with one finger. At another site, RSA DEE1, one of these white figures squats and points a finger upward, while another reaches upward with both hands, its fingers sprawled. White figures similar to these also occur at RSA WAR1, RSA LAB1, RSA MEL3, RSA MEL7 and RSA MEL9. There are two white figures which gestures into a rock crack holding sticks at RSA WAR5 (Fig. 13).



Fig. 13. Examples of a white figure which gestures or reaches into a rock crack at RSA WAR5 (photo: RARI).

There is a very faded human figure which possibly points with one finger at RSA FET1, but it is too faded to discern whether it points with one finger, or gestures with a blunt hand. There are floating figures, known as 'flying buck', which are depictions of the sensation of floating or transformation during trance (see Lewis-Williams 1981a). There is another figure with its one knee raised. The latter is one of the classic dance postures, and is occasionally associated with pointing one finger (see Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999; Fig. 4).

Specific sites

In most of the cases I have described, the human figures are pointing or gesturing at one another, into rock cracks or simply forward. However, I shall discuss three

cases where the pointing and gesturing is clearly directed: in two of these, two human figures are positioned on either side of an eland, and point and gesture at the eland, and in the third, a 'winged' human figure points at what seems to be a cluster of bees.

The eland is a central figure in San beliefs and rituals, and for this reason, it was often painted in rock art (Lewis-Williams 1981a). Most of the figures which point at eland, as I shall discuss, seem to point or gesture at the head of the eland. We know from ethnography that eland are important, but the head and forelock of an eland and the head of a human are also significant. The base of the spine and the base of the skull have to do with the areas where potency resides during the various stages of trance, and the human soul is pulled out of the top of the head during out-of-body travels and after death (e.g., Marshall 1999). The San also used the forelock of an eland in very specific ways during the rituals marking a boy's entry into manhood.

I shall discuss these statements in greater detail in the next chapters, but first, I shall discuss the imagery at RSA MEL7, as all of the imagery central to this dissertation occurs at this one site, and then move on to RSA BLL2 and RSA WLL1. The figures at RSA MEL7 and RSA BLL2 which point and gesture toward eland seem to point and gesture specifically at the heads of the animals. There are also sites where only eland heads occur, but it is often difficult to discern whether the bodies had faded away and the heads remained or whether these are rows of heads without bodies. I shall, thus, also briefly mention RSA FET4, where a large figure holds its head, and RSA LAB1, where a therianthropic antelope is depicted in a pointing posture, as these images potentially relate to the conceptual phenomena in question.

RSA MEL7

RSA MEL7 is an extensively painted site situated along a rocky ledge on a grazing farm in the Maclear District. There are three main painted areas, or panels: the main rock face, a panel at the southern end, which is almost perpendicular to the main wall of the rock shelter, and a few paintings of eland toward the northern end, beyond the point where the main rock face breaks off. At a first glance, the site, most notably the perpendicular panel, but also the main rock face, contains densely superimposed, classic San-authored images of various sizes of human figures and

antelope. There is a variety of human figures in pointing or gesturing postures at the site.

There is a row of figures on the main rock face, which is positioned about 1.5 m above the ground. Two of these definitely point with one clearly defined finger and two are too faded to be exactly certain, but are in the same position, all in a row. These figures form a visual unity; all of them were painted in monochrome, dark red pigment, turned to face in the same direction, in more or less the same stance and are facing in the same direction (Fig. 10). The figures are upright, and point with one finger, perhaps to gesture at or indicate the faded antelope which were painted behind them, while all of them hold a bow in their other hands. One of the figures was depicted with white bands around its upper arms, and the figure next to it has a white band around its wrist, which is still visible. It seems likely that all of the figures in the area once had similar white bands, since the conventions of depiction in the area are similar. Three of these figures have erect penises, and the penis of the figure second from left is infibulated, which means it has a stripe painted through the front tip.

There are various other human figures painted in a variety of pointing postures on the perpendicular side panel. One of these is a small figure which was painted in red pigment, and has an elongated head with a protruding, prominent nose. The figure gestures with a stick, while its other arm is behind its back. Another, dark red figure points with one finger, and it presumably had a white face that has faded away. There is a translucent white figure which points with one finger at seemingly nothing in particular. It is possible that the human figures could point at invisible things behind the rock face, as the San believed the rock face is a veil between this world and the spirit world (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990). Blundell (2004:98, 99) refers to these translucent, and often skeletal or even monstrous figures as ‘eldritch images’ and argues that these images depict spirits of the dead.

Amidst the densely painted images on the side panel, there are two cases where human figures are pointing at antelope, within a specific context, and these sets of images are remarkably visually similar to another set of images at a site in the Barkly East District, RSA BLL2. The visually striking set of images at RSA MEL7 is positioned fairly centrally and at the top part of the side panel (Fig. 14).



Fig. 14. The side panel at RSA MEL7. The red arrow indicates the visually striking set of images.

If one should look at the panel from a distance, this set of images is visually striking and catches the eye. The painters did not necessarily intentionally paint these images to stand out among the others, and the effect could be due to unequal fading and preservation of the images over time. One human figure was positioned in front of and a second behind a lying, bleeding eland (Fig. 15). The polychrome, shaded eland lies down with its knees tucked in and its neck is turned to face behind it, almost as if it is turning its face away from the figure in front of it. It bleeds from the front quarters, belly and nose, and the blood was painted in fine, jagged strokes, which creates the illusion that it is steadily trickling. The image could be either a hunted eland dying or an entranced eland, which is under a shaman's control.

It is fairly certain that these red strokes are blood, because we know from ethnographic accounts that dying eland foam or bleed from the nose and mouth (e.g., Lewis-Williams 1981a), and I shall discuss this statement in greater detail in the following chapters. The strokes which were painted around the belly area correspond with those which were painted as though they are emitting from the nose in technique, manner of depiction and colour. The strokes are also similar to images of people bleeding from the nose and this blood is also depicted in the same manner; red strokes coming out of the nose (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:40).



Fig. 15. Drawing of the set of images at RSA MEL7 where two human figures point at a seemingly submissive eland.

The human figures were painted in monochrome dark red pigment, which has become faded over the course of time. The human figure in front of the eland gestures toward the eland with three thin, spindly fingers, the arm level with the eland's neck, while it holds a bow in the other hand behind its back. There are narrow red bands around the neck, waist, knees and ankles of the figure. The human figure was superimposed over a faded eland to its right. This eland is depicted from the front, and it turns its head as if to face the human figure. The legs of the other human figure are splayed in an exaggerated running posture, which creates the impression that the figure could be running swift and fast (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:105). The front arm bends at the elbow while it holds a bow in a vertical position and points with one small, also thin and spindly, finger toward the eland. It has a red band around its arm, and red lines drawn vertically across its torso and thigh.

Four small, faded dark red human figures surround the belly and front quarters of the eland. One of these small figures holds a bow, and it seems as though these figures reach toward, touch and interact with the bleeding eland. Due to the fading in certain areas, it was difficult to tell whether these small figures were painted on top of the eland or vice versa. It seems as though they became more clearly visible after the white and light red pigment of the eland's belly started fading, thus creating the impression that the eland was painted on top of the small humans. During the course of tracing, it was resolved that the eland was indeed painted on top of the small figures.

A similar set of images occurs in the bottom half of the panel, about half a meter below this first set of images (Fig. 16). Two human figures were, again, positioned in front of and behind a bleeding eland, which stands upright with its ears drawn back. The shaded, polychrome eland also bleeds from the forequarters and the belly; the blood was painted with similar strokes and in a similar technique to that of the eland in the top set of images. The human figures were painted in a monochrome, brown pigment. The front figure holds a bow and gestures far enough toward the eland to touch its nose with the tip of the bow. The human figure which stands behind the eland points with one finger at the eland's tail or hindquarters. The other arm is bent, while it holds a bow in a vertical position.

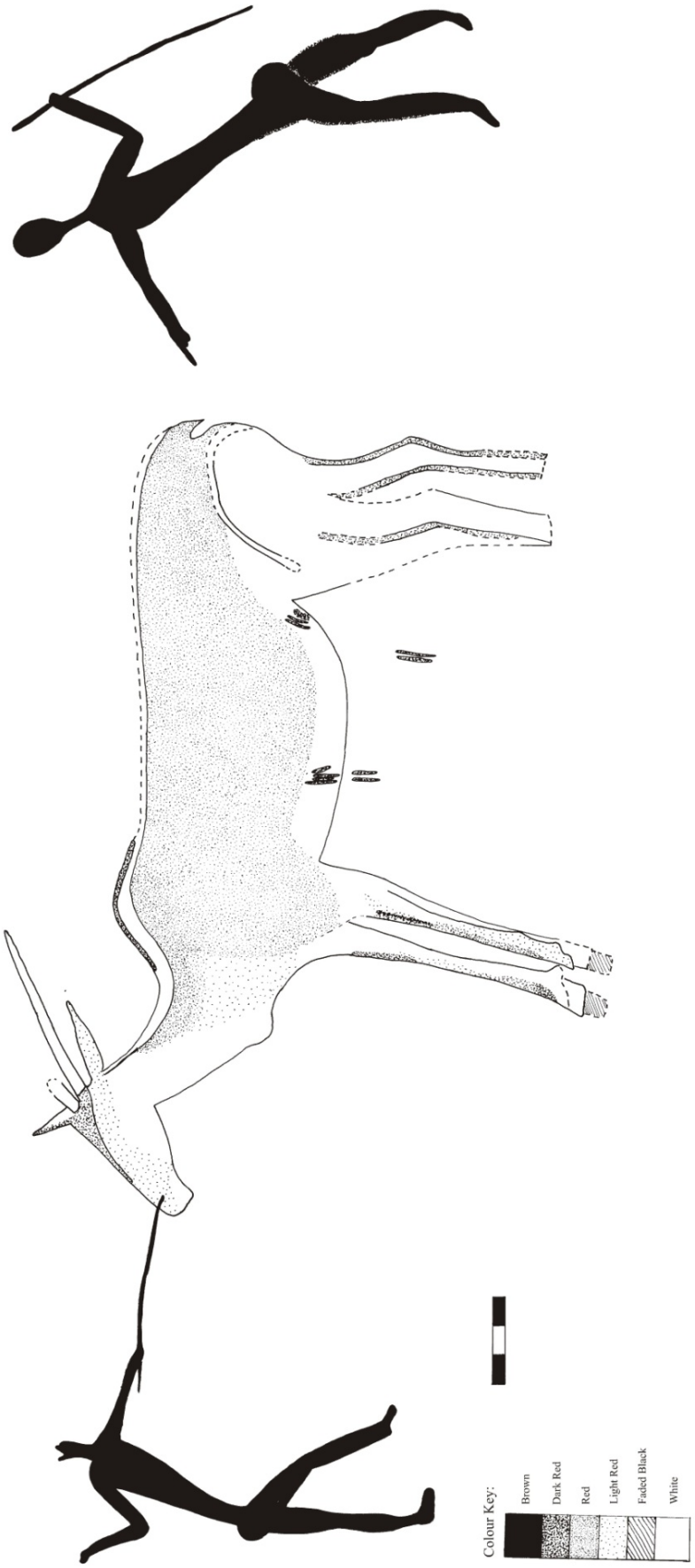

Fig. 16. Drawing of the second set of images at RSA MEL7 where two human figures point and gesture at an eland.

There are other noteworthy features of this specific side panel, including a number of comparatively large, faded human figures, which occur on the right-hand side of the panel. These figures were painted in dark-red, monochrome pigment, are each approximately 500 mm in height, and, in the course of tracing the panel, they were discovered to be positioned behind some of the smaller, denser clusters of human figures and antelope. Superpositioning, which entails painting certain images on top of one another, commonly occurs in San rock art and is a deliberate act. Specific images, for example eland, are placed on top of others in a recurring manner (Lewis-Williams 1972, 1974). This placement of one image on top of another was not merely due to lack of space, as there often are open spaces available on which the images could have been painted instead. The painters also sometimes went to the trouble of creating the illusion of superpositioning by painting images in two parts (Pager 1971; Lewis-Williams 1987; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2008). Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1999: 149, 150) argue that superpositioning depicts the kind of layered images shamans would have experienced during trance.

However common superpositioning is, completely remodelling the first layer of existing images is not. There are four overpainted images on the side panel at RSA MEL7, and this is another noteworthy, strange feature (Pearce & George 2011; Fig. 17.). Three of these are rhebok, two of which were painted below the top set of bleeding eland and human figures. The two rhebok are turned to face one another, but it is not discernable whether this relationship was intentional or not by the original painters, since there are quite a few other rhebok in the panel.

The other overpainted rhebok is slightly below, and to the right of the others. The rhebok were painted in fine brush strokes, and were bichrome, which correlates with the usual San-authored depictions, but the whole antelope, notably the neck and head areas, were at a later stage crudely overpainted with dark red paint. Several small, faded dark red human figures seem to crawl all over and interact with the third antelope; similar to those surrounding the top depiction of the submissive eland. The fourth image is partially overpainted, and is that of an eland toward the left of the panel. It seems to be a large, polychrome, shaded bull eland; again, a typical San-authored depiction, but its head and torso are also partially remodelled in crude, dark red paint.



Fig. 17. One of the overpainted rhebok figures at RSA MEL7.

There is an image of what is possibly a dassie, or a rock rabbit (*Procavia capensis*), in the central area of the panel (Fig. 18.) A white line fringed with white dots protrudes from its mouth, and has small, red spurts of blood which were painted in red brush strokes coming out of its nose. The dassie was carefully painted with fine brush strokes, and is polychrome – similar to the manner in which the San depicted antelope. I argue that this figure is indeed a dassie for two reasons. The first is that its facial features, the shape of the nose, tucked rabbit-like hind legs and the fact that it lacks a tail resemble the features on photographs of dassies and live dassies quite closely. The second is that an old woman who lived in the area, to whom researchers referred to as 'M', told researchers while she was providing assistance in interpreting some of the paintings, that shamans in the area could point at dassies to make them freeze and fall over, so that they could easily catch them (Lewis-Williams 1986:11). As we shall see, dassies are associated with supernatural potency, and the presence of a dassie in this panel may be significant.



Fig. 18. The image of the dassie is on the left of the photograph. During the course of tracing it was resolved that the image resembles a dassie. Note the rabbit-like hind legs.

There are two other noteworthy features at the site, which, as we shall see, relate to the presence of supernatural potency in a similar way to the dassie. A thin red line, fringed with white dots, comes out of a rock crack on the far left hand side of the perpendicular panel. It weaves across the panel, and seems to come to an end toward the middle of the panel. There is a red, rainbow-like arch on the main rock face, which consists of two visible painted strokes. The top part is thick, and it is almost underlined by a thin, delicate stroke (Fig. 19). There are some faded images behind the lines.



Fig. 19. The rainbow-like arch at RSA MEL7.

There are also paintings of eland alone at RSA MEL7. There is another panel, almost hidden away, toward the northern end of the shelter. The main rock face breaks off and juts inward to form a separate rock face. Several large, polychrome eland were painted on this rock face next to a crack in the rock. The eland were painted in awkward positions, some upside down, some facing into the rock crack, almost creating the illusion that they are falling out of or into the rock crack in a spiralling motion. Another site, strikingly similar in terms of the context, arrangement and positioning of the pointing and gesturing human figures, occurs in Barkly East.

RSA BLL2

RSA BLL2 in the Barkly East District is not as extensively painted as RSA MEL7. It contains but a few images high up on a rock wall, which can only be reached by making use of a ladder or climbing onto a very narrow ledge. There are a few antelope and human figures, and, strikingly, two dark red human figures positioned on either side of an eland which bleeds from the nose and the front quarters and belly. There are also numerous other human figures surrounding the two figures (Fig. 20).



Fig. 20. Several human figures at RSA BLL2 surround an eland, which is bleeding from the nose (photograph: RARI).

The eland was painted in the manner in which the San usually depicted antelope: carefully shaded and polychrome. It stands upright, and is lying as is the top eland at RSA MEL7. However, its ears are nonetheless drawn back, it is bleeding from the nose and its head is slightly lowered, suggesting that this eland is also either dying or entranced. The blood around its forequarters and belly was painted in fine strokes, visually corresponding with those at RSA MEL7. The figure in front of the eland points toward the eland's head with one small, thin finger, while the figure at the back gestures at its back legs with a bow. The figure at the back holds a white and red stick above its other shoulder. Both figures were painted in a dark red pigment and have well-preserved white faces. The front figure has visible white

bands around its knees. In addition to the two pointing and gesturing figures, there are eight other visible human figures around the eland, all facing toward the eland. One is directly behind the figure at the back of the eland, while four others are behind this figure in front of the eland. Another was painted directly above the eland, and has white bands around its upper arms, wrists and waist.

There is another dark red figure superpositioned over this figure, of which the front arm is bent and it holds a bow. A figure looms toward the right of these images. It is bending forward slightly and carries a hunting bag with arrows and a bow. Only the dark red outline of this figure is visible, suggesting that the rest may have faded unevenly or was painted in white, which fades faster. All of these human figures were painted in the same manner: with dark red bodies and white faces. One of the figures in the line in front of the eland carries what seems to be a dancing rattle, and three others behind it carry hunting equipment comprising a hunting bag filled with arrows and a bow. There is also an image which seems to resemble a hunting bag hovering between two of these figures. The two figures in the front of this line are positioned in a manner similar to those on the main panel at RSA MEL7: they point or gesture at the eland, are in the same stance and hold a bow or a stick in the other arm, which is positioned behind them.

There is another eland with a human figure which gestures at it at the site. This set of images was painted in a slightly cruder, rougher manner, meaning that the brush strokes were less neat and fine, than the others, which were as carefully painted and shaded with fine brush strokes as those at RSA MEL7 (Fig. 21). The eland is also polychrome and shaded, but the brush strokes are not as fine and its tail seems to sand upright. The human figure is quite crude, meaning the brush strokes were rough and not as small, neat and carefully applied as those of all of the other paintings. It was painted in dark red paint with a partially white face and has short, thin limbs with a protruding belly. There was possibly another image above it, but it has faded to only two dark red stripes and the original shape is indiscernible with the naked eye. There is a white figure, which is bent over, behind the eland, and several smaller faded human figures and antelope surrounding the human figure in the front. these smaller figures are very faded.



Fig. 21. A second set of paintings in which a human figure points toward an eland, which is bleeding from the nose, with a stick (photograph: RARI).

RSA WLL1

A different case, albeit perhaps conceptually similar, is that of RSA WLL1 in the Maclear District. There is a human figure with which point one finger toward what seems to be a cluster of winged insects (Fig. 22). These images are positioned between two other red human figures. The insects resemble numerous white flecks at a first glance. They consist of one vertical white stripe with two parallel, horizontal stripes which were painted more or less in the middle of the vertical stripe to resemble a winged insect (Fig. 23).

Green *et al.* (2007) argued that similar images of insects at a site nearby RSA WLL1, RSA MEL4, are depictions of termites (*Trinervitermes trinervoides*), based on their own observations, the opinions of entomologists and entomological texts. They compared the morphology and behaviour of various types of insects and concluded that these insects are most likely termites, based on the argument that the morphology of a termite, especially the wings, which are the same size and the legs, which are invisible during flight, closely resembles the images (Green *et al.* 2007:77). Additionally, the swarming behaviour of termites in the area resembles the formation of the images (*ibid.)*. The authors mention that the cape honey bee (*Apis mellifera capensis*) and the African honey bee (*Apis mellifera scutellata*) occur in the area (Green *et al.* 2007:74 after Picker *et al.* 2004:420), but rule out the

possibility that the images could represent bees, as, among others, the wings are not the same size and appear as one wing when bees fly (Green *et al.* 2007:74).

The authors, however, note that should the images be termites, it would be unique to South Africa (Green *et al.* 2007:78), as the only other known paintings of termites occur in Zimbabwe and Botswana (e.g., Mguni 2005, 2006), and acknowledge that there are noted paintings of bees in closer sites in the Drakensberg and surrounds (e.g., Pager 1975; Vinnicombe 1976; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:62, 64). Furthermore, the authors base their argument that the flecks in question depict insects and not flecks of potency on the fact that they resemble these known paintings of bees in size and other visual criteria (Green *et al.* 2007:72).

Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1999:62, 64) mention two different depictions of bees: one where black flecks, some with rounded white wings, accompany curved, u-shapes, and another where bees are depicted as a swarm of white flecks resembling crosses. First, I argue that bees are depicted in diverse ways and these images, which the authors evidently accept are depictions of bees, do not necessarily mimic reality; depictions of bees do not necessarily represent the wings as they would occur in nature.

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, although the San had extensive knowledge on the behaviour of animals, they painted both real and non-real images and did not necessarily stay true to reality. The authors recognize that experts in other fields, such as entomologists, "...are not always familiar with San painting conventions." (Green *et al*. 2007:73). Second, the bees in the paintings mentioned by Lewis-Williams and Dowson (*ibid.*) are also in a swarming formation, and the images at RSA WLL1 and RSA MEL4 are not necessarily based on true observations on swarming behaviours of insects, as bees are also known to swarm, and the San believed, for example, that the swarming of bees can help them harness potency (e.g., Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:64). I argue that these insects at RSA WLL1 and RSA MEL4 are more likely depictions of bees and related to the symbolic value of bees and honey in the context of the panel in question, as we shall see.



Fig. 22. The pointing human figure at RSA WLL1 (photograph: RARI).



Fig. 23. The white flecks at RSA WLL1 (photograph: RARI).

RSA FET4 and RSA LAB1

A looming, kaross-clad figure at RSA FET4 holds both hands on top of its head, almost as if it tries to hold or grip the head (Fig. 24). This figure was painted physically larger than the other figures at the site. According to Dowson (1994) and Blundell (2004) figures in the Maclear District which were painted physically larger than the other figures are pre-eminent shamans or LH-SDFs, respectively, and possibly were particularly powerful shamans. These figures have unnaturally large heads and were painted physically larger than, almost as if to overshadow, the other human figures at the sites where they occur. This image may be relevant to understand the various ways in which the San depicted shamans who possess a large amount of supernatural potency, especially pertaining to the head. As we shall see, the images central to this dissertation are also involved with obtaining large amounts of potency, and certain images point and gesture toward the head of an eland. Blundell (2004) argued that the paintings of large human heads without the body

related to the way these shamans were trying to claim the rock space and also reclaim the social identity of their people during politically tumultuous times. One of the sites to which Blundell (2004) pays particular attention is RSA LAB1, or Storm Shelter. Storm Shelter is also an extensively, densely painted site, and imagery at the site includes the skeletal eldritch images, figures with disproportionately big heads. There are three therianthropic antelope which seem to point into the sky at the site. These figures are hunched in a seated position with the knees drawn up while one arm is outstretched and one finger points into the sky (Fig. 25). Their necks are tilted, as though they are looking in the direction of the pointing, but they have antelope heads and bodies.



Fig. 24. A kaross-clad figure at RSA FET4 with its hands on its head (photograph: RARI).



Fig. 25. One of the therianthropic antelope at RSA LAB1. Note its pointing human-like finger.

Analytical categories

There is thus a great variety of pointing and gesturing postures in the chosen study area. However, certain themes seem to occur over and over again. Classification and categorization are contested topics in archaeology; some researchers use classification to order data, whereas others emphasise that meaning originally attributed to material remains is capable of changing and attempt to understand the meanings or classifications the producers of these remains may have attributed to the latter (see Henry 2010:25). This study does not engage in a debate on the classification of material remains, more specifically, of rock art. Whereas it is true that the researcher will always be subjective to some extent in categorizing data, some structure is needed in any study. For analytical purposes, I create artificial categories within which I place these recurring postures and gestures. Furthermore, I divide these categories between pointing and gesturing as a general phenomenon and pointing and gesturing at other human figures, eland and bees.

Table 1: Categories of various pointing and gesturing postures in the Barkly East and Maclear Districts.

Category	Description
Pointing and gesturing as a general phenomenon	These figures point at visibly indiscernible, faded images, or images behind the rock face, and comprise: • Pointing and gesturing with one finger. • Pointing and gesturing with more than one finger, the whole hand or a blunt hand. • Pointing and gesturing with bows or sticks.
Pointing and gesturing at other human figures	These figures point with one finger, a blunt or a whole hand at other human figures.
Pointing and gesturing at eland	The figures clearly point or gesture at a submissive eland, either with one or more

	fingers, a blunt hand, or a bow or a stick.
Pointing and gesturing at a cluster of bees	The figures point with one clearly defined finger at a cluster of bees.

It is possible that the figures which seemingly gesture at nothing or indiscernible subject matter with bows or sticks may simply be holding sticks and bows, but I argue that they hold the latter in a gesturing posture; the figures which point and gesture toward a specific subject as, for example, antelope hold their sticks and bows in similar fashion, and the absence of a subject, or nothing discernible to gesture at could simply mean that they gesture toward faded images behind the rock face.

Although these categories do not necessarily represent the views or intentions of the painters, I shall argue in the subsequent chapters that these postures and gestures are variations of the same conceptual phenomenon, as certain pointing postures and gestures were in San society. In the following chapters, I consider the ritual trance dance, and the postures and gestures of the shamans during the execution of the dance, while paying specific attention to pointing and gesturing postures. The next chapter introduces the role of ethnographic analogy in gaining an understanding of San authored rock art, and subsequently considers the ritual trance dance and hunting practices and beliefs among the Kalahari San.

CHAPTER 4

SOCIAL CONTEXT: ETHNOGRAPHIC ANALOGY, THE TRANCE DANCE AND SUPERNATURAL POTENCY

The process of contextualizing the images with which this dissertation is concerned involves various lines of evidence: first, I have placed the question I pose about these images within a theoretical framework, then I have explored the physical and geographical context, and I have given a description of the images themselves and their painted context, or the relationships between the images in one panel, and of panels with each other. In this chapter, I use the concept of 'informing context', as proposed by Lewis-Williams (1991). The informing context comprises elements which directly influenced the production and consumption of the images in question, namely the social conditions and the cognitive state of the painters and the society. Views on the social conditions and the production and consumption of the images have to materialize first through the human body in order to become a part of the social realm.

The focus in this study falls on specific social activities where the social aspect of the informing context is concerned: the ritual trance dance and relationships with animals, notably hunting practices. This chapter is divided into two sections. First, I briefly consider ethnographic sources and the application of and criticism against ethnographic analogy. Then, based on the concept of the informing context, I create a framework for the social context by considering the ritual trance dance, supernatural potency and shamans in San society.

Ethnographic analogy

The main ethnographic sources are the nineteenth-century Bleek and Lloyd Collection from Cape Town, a collection of notebooks, manuscripts, drawings and photographs, which arose from interviews with /Xam San prisoners, who originally hailed from the Northern Cape Province (e.g., Bleek & Lloyd 1911; Bleek 1924, 1931, 1935, 1936), a magistrate's account of his travels with a south-eastern San guide named Qing (Orpen 1874), and publications arising from ethnographic work conducted among the Kalahari San from the 1950s until the present (e.g., Marshall 1959, 1961, 1962, 1969, 1976, 1999; Lee & DeVore 1976; Katz 1982; Biesele

1993). Other sources of information from the south eastern mountains are a book on the 'Mountain Bushmen' by Marion How (1962), the wife of a District Commissioner who served in the old Basutoland during the period between 1910 and 1942, the account of a Thembu man named Silayi as given to Sir Walter Stanford in 1884 (Stanford 1910) and more recent interviews with an old woman of San descent, Maqindi Diyanti, who scholars called 'M' (Jolly 1986; Lewis-Williams 1986; Jolly & Prins 1994).

For the past three decades, scholars of southern African rock art have used information from these voluminous collections to understand and interpret the paintings (e.g., Lewis-Williams 1972, 1980, 1981a, 1983, 1986, 1995, 2006; Vinnicombe 1976; Lewis-Williams & Loubser 1986; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1988, 1994). Whereas bits and pieces of ethnography had been cited before, Vinnicombe (1976) cited quite a few ethnographic works, and subsequently Lewis-Williams (1981a) was the first to systematically link the paintings to references from the ethnographic work which had been conducted among the southern and northern San. The ethnography yields information which explains the painted postures as depictions of actual postures which occur during the ritual trance dance (Fig. 26). Lewis-Williams (1974, 1981a) led the way in the interpretation of these body postures through the use of ethnographic analogy.

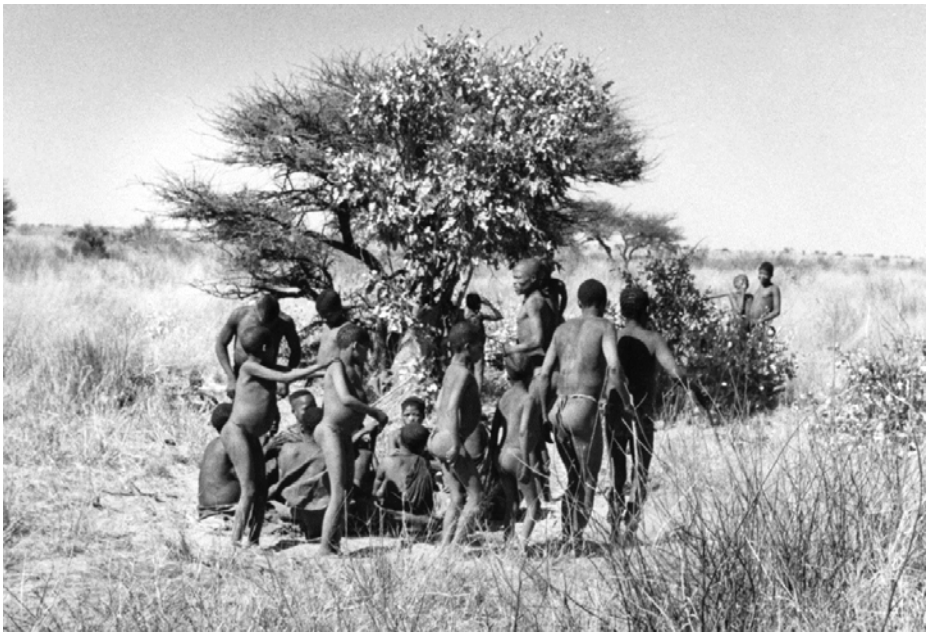

Fig. 26. A photograph of a daylight trance dance performed for researchers (photograph: The Marshall family).

Most researchers now accept that San paintings express San beliefs, and often depict fragments of the ritual trance dance during which shamans are believed to enter the spirit world, change into animals, undergo out-of-body travels, and experience visions (Lewis-Williams 1981a, 1990, 1998; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:94, 95). The trance dance is physically and mentally very taxing and painful, and the dancers enter altered states of consciousness, during which they experience hallucinations (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:89). This may account for the surreal, unrealistic depictions of humans and certain shapes in rock art (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1988). Archaeologists link ethnographic references and the archaeological evidence with analogical reasoning. In the case of the south eastern mountains, there is very little direct ethnographic information on the paintings in the area, except for the interviews with M and the interpretations of Qing further north (Jolly 1998:252), and therefore, rock art researchers rely on analogical reasoning to link, for example, the trance dance, with the paintings.

It is thus first necessary to dwell on the meaning and criticism of 'ethnographic analogy'. When there are certain similarities between sets of archaeological data, scholars argue that there may be other similarities as well. When ethnographic information is used to interpret archaeological data, scholars assume that because there are certain similarities between the set of ethnographic data and the analogous set of data, there may be others (Stiles 1977:94). The interpretations are, of course, uncertain (see Wylie 1982; Pearce 2008), and this can be limiting. However, archaeologists study the human past, a *former* material realm which nobody in the present could ever access again in material form, except by hypothesizing about it. Joan Gero (2007:311, 313) argues that right or wrong answers and plausible evidence are rewarded in archaeology, simply because there is so little of it. Gero suggests that we should rather reward ambiguity, because uncertainty can create possibility for greater reflexivity within our arguments. The human mind is still not entirely understood, and an ambiguous domain in itself. Due to the very nature of the human mind, attempting, in the *present*, to assign concrete explanations to possible functions of the ambiguous mind's *past* creations will therefore not be very productive.

Critics of ethnographic analogy in archaeology over the years include Anne Solomon and Richard Gould, who argue that certain similarities between sets of data by no means guarantee other similarities (Gould & Watson 1982:374, 376; Solomon 1998). However, this contradicts the very aim of analogical reasoning. The aim of analogical reasoning is to make *inferences* to fill gaps in the sets of data, and if we assume that certain similarities imply universal similarity between sets of data, there would logically be no questions left to answer. Analogies indicate that there are *limited* similarities. Solomon (e.g., 1992), ironically, makes extensive use of ethnographic analogy to support her own arguments.

Another potential source of criticism on the application of ethnography collected among the northern San people is the Kalahari Revisionist Debate, which started during the 1980s. In short, the main argument of the 'revisionists' is against the traditional view of the Kalahari San as a simple, peaceful and egalitarian people, untouched and undiscovered by other groups of people until colonial times. The 'revisionists' argue that the San had contact with Bantu-speaking farmers for long periods of time, well before colonialism (cf. Lee 1979, 2002; Denbow & Wilmsen 1986; Wilmsen & Denbow 1990; Barnard 1992, 2006, 2008; Kent 1992, 2002; Sadr 1997, 2008). This notion could lead to the suggestion that scholars blindly apply ethnographic material from the Kalahari to interpret the rock art in the south eastern mountains based on the presumption that the San communities in question shared mirror histories and socio-political conditions (e.g., Solomon 1998:268).

This is not true. Firstly, scholars like the Marshall family started to collect ethnographic material during the 1950s, and this ethnographic material is already the result of long periods of time during which the Kalahari San came into contact with both Bantu-speakers and colonialists, although this does not necessarily mean there was a great deal of meaningful interaction. Secondly, the San people who were living in the south eastern mountains also extensively interacted with Bantu-speakers and colonialists over the course of at least 500 years, and scholars have taken into account the variations in the rock art of the area, taking into consideration that some of these variations could have been the result of the changes in socio-political circumstances (Dowson 1994; Jolly 1998; Blundell 2004; Mallen 2008; Challis 2008; Henry 2010; George 2009; Pearce & George 2011). Thirdly, all San groups shared beliefs and rituals in remarkably similar ways (e.g., Schapera 1930;

Lewis-Williams & Biesele 1978; Barnard 1992). Analogical arguments do not require historical continuity or identical histories between source and subject contexts; they require empirical parallels between certain aspects of the two contexts. San rock paintings, for example, unquestionably often depict trance dances and, therefore, San ethnography related to trance dances aids in the interpretation of these paintings, regardless of the histories of the two groups of people.

In Chapter 2, I discussed the approach suggested by Wylie (1989; 1993), who metaphorically compares various lines of evidence to cables. Wylie suggests that archaeologists make use of several lines of evidence and tie them together to construct a strong argument. The critics of ethnographic analogy also fail to take into account that ethnographic analogy is often not the only line of evidence used in rock art studies.

The geographic distribution of fine-line San rock art is vast and there are regional differences, yet there is enough consistency in the subject matter and manner of depiction in all of the regions where it occurs to argue that it could have sprung from remarkably similar belief systems. There are also enough similarities in the rituals and beliefs of the groups of people who are the descendants of the painters to argue this case. The southern and the northern San share many beliefs and rituals (Schapera 1930; Marshall 1962; Lewis-Williams & Biesele 1978; Barnard 1992; Lewis-Williams 1992). Before publishing the accounts of his informant from the south-eastern mountains, Qing, J.M. Orpen sent his notes to Bleek in Cape Town for additional comments by their /Xam informants, who originally hailed from the Northern Cape. Schapera made comparisons of the various hunter-gatherer peoples in southern Africa, and all San groups are shamanistic, and believe that there is a supernatural realm and various ways of accessing this realm through shamanic practices (Blundell 2004:91). Some of the myths and beliefs generally shared by many San peoples are the myth of the moon and the hare (Marshall 1962:221), and as we shall see, the rituals involved in boys' and girls' initiation to man- and womanhood respectively (Lewis-Williams 1981a:62). One of the central shared rituals in San society is the trance dance, and although it is no longer performed in the south, there are a few witness accounts of the southern San performing trance dances.

The trance dance

The missionaries Thomas Arbousset and Francois Daumas (1846) portrayed the trance dance as a "form of amusement" in their account on their encounters with San people in the south-eastern mountains, in the present-day country of Lesotho. Arbousset and Daumas (1846:246, 247) described the dance as "the only amusement" of the people, who danced with "irregular movements", until they fell down from exhaustion with blood pouring from their noses. They also called the dance the "dance of blood". Although the dance also had certain positive social functions such as bringing people together, and seemed to be enjoyed by all those present (Katz 1982:35, 36), it had deeper meaning. In broad terms, the main function of the trance dance was to cure 'sickness' and to 'heal'. The concept of 'sickness' in San society encompassed minor and major physical ailments and the 'sky sickness' sent by the great god, and 'healing' encompassed curing body and mind, managing any social unrest, and protecting the people (Katz 1982:35; Marshall 1999:40).

Richard Katz, a clinical psychologist who was interested in cognition, spent three months in the Kalahari observing and recording healing among the Kalahari San. The people among whom Katz lived are more commonly referred to as the Ju/'hoansi today, but Katz and a number of other ethnographic publications refer to these people as the !Kung. I shall henceforth make use of the name Ju/'hoansi to denote these people. During this time, he realized that, to the Ju/'hoansi, there was a difference between a European man who wanted to learn *about* healing and one who wanted to learn *to* heal (Katz 1982:7). As Katz became increasingly involved in everyday Ju/'hoansi life, he began to understand a different dimension to healing. He describes the symbolism behind the trance dance as not merely symbolic, but also real, and uses the example of fire: the fire which cooks the food of the gods also cooks the food of the Ju/'hoansi at the same time (Katz 1982:30). Katz describes his experiences of the trance dance in great detail (*ibid.*: 33-80), and also the shamans, or healers, which he had encountered (*ibid.*: 80-158).

There were about four dances a month over the period in which Katz lived in the Kalahari. Usually, the women sit around the fire singing medicine songs, or *n/om* songs, and rhythmically clap while the men dance around them. The dance intensifies until the supernatural potency, or *n/om*, is activated and the men reach

altered states of consciousness (ASCs), or *kia*. Potency, *n/om*, is best described as a boiling, electric kind of energy, which comes from the gods, and exists in the stomach and the base of the spine of a shaman (Katz 1982:40). Katz describes how painful it is for shamans to reach *kia*, or the state where the *n/om* has risen from the base of the spine to the base of the skull. As painful and difficult to control as it may be, the experienced healers have learned how to control the boiling *n/om* so that they can direct the energy toward healing or performing other functions in the community, like controlling the game for the hunt. The older shamans train the younger shamans how to control and use their *n/om*, and sometimes shoot *n/om* into the students with "invisible arrows", by snapping their fingers at them, and *n/om* can pass from person to person (Katz 1982:49).

The dance moves through different stages from the moment the women start clapping and singing at dusk until the men have reached *kia* once or over and over again at dawn, and Lorna Marshall (1999:67) describes the recurring circular motif: the women sit and the men dance in a circle, and the horizon and the stars almost create a circular illusion in the flat, wide Kalahari desert. The dance started out in a line. The men made small, shuffling movements, always with controlled, small steps, and with remarkable consistency of movement – even if a few individuals broke out of the line (Marshall 1999:72).

There is no specific posture required for a shaman to heal someone during the dance and yet the dancers move in "fundamentally the same way" (Marshall 1969:375) and certain postures and gestures keep recurring during the trance dance, although there are individual variations in body movement (Marshall 1969:375, 1999:72). Certain postures also occur over and over again in the rock art, as we have seen, such as 'bending forward', 'bleeding from the nose' and 'arms back', to name but a few examples (Lewis-Williams 1981a:79-82; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:38-49). These dance postures could possibly have become a similar phenomenon to the San as Price (2008:147, 148) suggests, and the meaning attached to these postures and gestures became ingrained in cultural memory. Perhaps, where San groups who produced paintings and performed the trance dance are concerned, there was a recursive relationship between postures in the paintings and the dance and people adopted postures they had seen in the paintings during the trance dance.

While they are healing someone, shamans constantly flutter their hands, place one hand on the chest and another on the back, and make sounds, the *n//hara* sounds, in the form of grunts, cries and gasps (Katz 1982:40; Marshall 1999:59, 86). Touch is seemingly important; when a shaman reaches the final stage of trance, the observers would sometimes aid him, support him, blow into his ears, rub their foreheads to his and massage him with their own underarm sweat (Orpen 1874; Katz 1982:67; Fig. 27). The observers could also massage the shamans with animal fat to ease their agitation (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:70; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:167).



Fig. 27. Two men support a third, who collapsed due to exertion during the trance dance (photograph: the Marshall family).

The three stages of trance, according to Marshall (1999:85-88) and Katz (1982:65-67), were initially an unsteadiness on the legs and slight swaggering, followed by deep trance when the men began to hallucinate, lose their senses, shout and point, and the final stage, when they lost consciousness, seized, excessively sweated and sometimes experienced nosebleeds.

Human consciousness exists over a spectrum (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:30) and all human beings share the same cognitive makeup, and therefore have the ability to hallucinate (Lewis-Williams 1991; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:60).

The spectrum of consciousness ranges from a state where one is entirely aware of one's surroundings to being deep in thought and a deep state of trance where one is unable to control thought at will and starts to hallucinate. Neuropsychological and ethnographic research, for example the work of Reichel-Dolmatoff (1971, 1972, 1978, 1979, 1988), Siegel and Jarvik (1975), Siegel (1977, 1978) and Dobkin de Rois (1986) contributed to the understanding of the stages of trance and the possible interpretations of hallucinations in shamanic practice. As mentioned, the word 'shaman' is a word in the Tungus language of central Asia, and usually denotes people in hunter-gatherer communities who enter ASCs, and believe that in doing so, they obtain power in order to fulfil functions in the interest of the community, like healing and making rain (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:30).

It is possible to enter altered states of consciousness by taking psychoactive drugs (see, for example, Siegel & Jarvik 1975; Siegel 1977, 1978; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1972, 1978), but San shamans generally danced around the fire with repetitive movements until they entered ASCs because of physical exertion, repetitive movement and audiodriving. There is the possibility, however, that these shamans used a type of snuff to induce the frequently mentioned nosebleeds which associated with the final stages of trance. Guy Butler (1997) argues that shamans used snuff in order to purposefully induce nosebleeds, as it is not always medically possible experience nosebleeds simply from physical exertion, and also argues that the reason for inducing nosebleeds is the spiritual link between a shaman and a dying eland. The hunters would presumably also induce nosebleeds in a dying eland (Butler 1997:85), and obtain the eland blood, which was sacred to them. Hollmann (2004:219, 221) shares Diä!kwain's account of a sorcerer sneezing the blood from his nosebleed into his hand and making the young protégés smell it. As we shall see below, the /Xam associated scent with transferring potency and the ability to transform into certain animals (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:120).

This links with the concept which Katz (1982:30) had encountered when he shifted his approach from wanting to learn *about* the trance dance to wanting to learn *how to execute* the trance dance: symbolism in San society, and especially during the trance dance, is not merely symbolic. For example, the shaman's blood does not merely represent the blood of the eland; it *is*, at the same time, also the blood of the eland. However, during the period most scholars collected their ethnographic work

in the Kalahari, the various stages of trance and altered states of consciousness were usually reached without the aid of any substances (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:89).

Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1988, 1999) describe the neuropsychological, presumably universal, model of the stages of trance which the human mind experiences: during the first stage, people see geometric shapes and forms, entoptic phenomena; migraine sufferers also experience these visions. The second stage is the construal stage, and is marked by the mind attempting to make sense of these geometric shapes through cultural filters; it construes or interprets some of the shapes as familiar objects or forms in the real, material world (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:33). The third stage may be entered into via a vortex, and during the third stage, the iconic or hallucinatory stage, cultural filters again cause the brain to construct iconic hallucinations from personal or cultural experiences. Therefore, the first stage is entirely neurological, and the cultural element comes into play during stages two and three. These stages can be linked to the stages which Marshall (1999:85-88) and Katz (1982:65-67) described during the actual trance dance, because San shamans have described similar experiences, such as seeing geometric shapes, being sucked into a vortex and finally experiencing iconic hallucinations during which they especially see antelope and people changing into antelope (cf. Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1988).

The shamans shout, yell insults and point at creatures known as the spirits of the dead, which are attracted to the trance dance, and have to be dispelled from the ring of the fire. According to Marshall (1999:4, 7), the Ju/'hoansi believed the spirits of the dead live where the sun rises, and they were the "children of the gods" who were tasked to carry the spirits of dead humans to their "father in the sky", one of the two gods. These spirits and the gods were both helpful and harmful to humans. The two gods were a greater god (*Hishe* or *≠Gao!na*) in the east and a lesser god (*//Gauwa*) in the west and the spirits of the dead serve the latter, which could be why they were called the *//gauwasi* (Marshall 1962:223, 238). Lewis-Williams (1997) and Lewis-Williams and Pearce (2004:51-53) explain that the San cosmos is complicated and layered, but in short, it is best understood as functioning on two axes. The vague, vertical axis includes the gods and the spirits who live in the sky, the shamans who travel to the sky, the people who live on earth and the dead who are underground.

The horizontal axis encompasses the spectrum of daily life on earth, and moves between the camp where the people live, the hunting grounds and the water holes.

The gods send the spirits of the dead to interfere in the affairs of the humans on earth and their eyes look like glowing stars, which also represent death. The spirits of the dead travel to earth using fine strands or lines and collect the spirit of a dead person by pulling it out through the head, along with the heart and the blood, so that the great god can "make" these into a spirit of the dead (Marshall 1999:27). The spirit of a shaman exits the head in similar fashion during his or her travels to the spirit realm. The spirits of the dead are not contented creatures; they long for companionship, and are constantly on the prowl to find an attractive human partner which they can kill and take as a potential lover. They lurk around the edges of the fire during a trance dance to shoot the people with arrows of sickness, which a shaman then has to "snort" out of a person (Marshall 1962:244; Blundell 2004:93). The shamans shout insults, point and snap their fingers at the spirits of the dead, and hurl sticks into the darkness beyond the fire (Marshall 1999:40, 87).

In addition to the Ju/'hoansi, various northern and southern San groups also believe in the existence of the spirits of the dead (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:13), for example the //Xwegi San and the /Xam San (Blundell 2004:94, Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:173). The San informant Diä!kwain told Bleek and Lloyd (1911:482) that the spirits of the dead are angry creatures and could also be shamans, which blurs the boundaries between shamans and the spirits of the dead even further: the spirit of a shaman exits the head during out-of-body travels, shamans "die" seemingly metaphorically when they enter trance and they can also turn into animals, like the spirits of the dead (Blundell 2004:89). Blundell (2004:97, 99, 112) argued that the so-called translucent, white eldritch images, which occur in the Maclear District, could be representations of spirits of the dead.

The Ju/'hoansi associate spirits of the dead with sickness and death (Marshall 1999:29), two very weighty concepts in their society, as the main concern they face is staying alive (*ibid.*:39). Marshall goes on to mention that the rites they therefore most often perform to meet this end are for the protection of health, curing of sickness and success in the hunt. Various dances they perform as a part of rites include the Trees, Drum, dwa/Giraffe and Gemsbok Dances (Katz 1982:35, 50, 81; Katz *et al.* 1997:115). Important rites include the Rite of the First Kill, or Boys'

First Kill, and the girls' menarcheal rite, during which the San women perform the Eland Bull Dance (Lewis-Williams & Biesele 1978; Lewis-Williams 1981a; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:95). The eland is an important part of these dances, as it plays a central role in the dances the San perform during rites of passage in the form of the Eland Dance and the Eland Songs, and each of the trance dances listed above is also danced to a different song (Marshall 1999:156). There is also the Honey Dance, and while this dance is performed the shaman "becomes" the honey; honey and baby bees were said to contain strong potency (Marshall 1999:55, 73, 76-77).

Supernatural potency

Potency is an enigmatic concept with many sources and many meanings. There are various words in San languages synonymous to *n/om* which denote supernatural potency, for example *//ke:n* and *!gi* (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:171). Although everyone in the community shares potency, there are different types of potency, for example, Kinachau, one of Katz's informants, explained that he and his nephew each has their own type of *n/om* (Katz 1982:85). The trance experience is supposedly similar for everyone; men and women alike (Katz 1982:6). Two informants told Katz *et al*. (1997:117) that the potency which men and women access is the same *n/om*, but another informant said that although the *n/om* is one *n/om,* the men's Giraffe Dance and the women's Drum Dance, which is a more recent version of the trance dance, each has its own *n/om*.

Activating potency through the trance dance and entering the spirit realm are not the only ways of accessing or obtaining potency. Potency is also present in rain, young virgins, animals (especially large game animals), animal fat, honey, blood and other bodily secretions (e.g., Lewis-Williams 1981a; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:120; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:114, 163). Potency is a complex concept; it can take on many forms and meanings.

The concept of *n/om*, the potency accessed by shamans in trance, is also associated with rain and fat; the shamans obtain the volatile, powerful potency and this gives them power to control the weather so that the animals and the people can prosper and become fat. One of the Bleek and Lloyd informants, Diä!kwain, said: "People do evil and fight when they have grown fat after the rain has fallen" (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:110). 'Fight' is a metaphor for the volatile, dangerous

nature of potency, especially a high concentration of potency. Potency is like electricity, and although shamans 'possess', or 'own' potency, they still have to take care to control it and use it for the good of the community. Bringing rain, for example, is positive; it is a good way of utilising potency and benefits the community. A 'great fight' means a great amount of potency and 'eland fight' means an eland has a great amount of potency, or that the eland has a great amount of fat (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:59).

Fat and potency

There are many uses for fat in San society, and I briefly list only a few. The San drink and eat both antelope fat and honey (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:114), and 'fat' and 'honey' are also associated with sex and sexual secretions and serve as metaphors for the sex act (Guenther 1999:156). Onlookers rub agitated shamans with fat to help soothe them during trance (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:70; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:167).

Fat contains potency (Lewis-Williams 1981a), and Orpen's informant Qing told him that eating snake fat can cause supernatural transformation (Orpen 1874:7). Fat is also connected to the rain; the rain supplies life-giving water and all of the animals and humans have food and can become fat and prosperous. The San consider young virgins to be potent because they are linked to the 'new rain', and even equate their potency to that of a shaman (Lewis-Williams 1981a:50-52; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:163). Healthy young girls are also supposed to be quite plump, and this fat is equally as potent as eland fat (Lewis-Williams 1981a:48). The /Xam and Ju/'hoansi make a distinction between 'male' and 'female' clouds, and believe that the 'female' clouds bring the rain (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:138).

Diä!kwain said that the rain 'shoots' someone when a virgin girl snaps her fingers at them (Bleek 1933:297, 298). It is unclear what exactly he meant with the word 'shoot' (Hollmann 2004:133), but it could mean that the /Xam believed that when a girl is angry with someone, she can snap her fingers at them and the rain will 'attack' the person or that the person is struck by lightning. Young girls, it seems, controlled a potency to be feared and respected, and Diä!kwain continued to say: "It would shoot at our speech, for it also shoots just as a girl does for it feels that a girl is accustomed to shoot at us." He also explained that a young maiden can curse

someone when she is angry, and that the 'rain's bolts' will want to 'kill' that person (Bleek 1933:298, 299; Hollmann 2004:134).

Scent and potency

The San also strongly associate potency with scent, especially the smell of blood and sweat, and refer to shamans who 'snort' potency, which could be linked to induced or natural nose-bleeds and the belief that shamans have the ability to transfer potency by 'snorting' it (Butler 1997; Hollmann 2004:219; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:120). A man may not sneeze after he has shot an eland, because the animal may run away, as Diä!kwain told Lloyd in 1875. The poison would be rendered ineffective and the animal would get away, because sneezing is linked with the poison and potency. When the spirits of the dead shoot people with the arrows of sickness, as I have mentioned above, shamans also have to 'snort' out these arrows (Marshall 1962:244; Blundell 2004:93).

Painting potency

Rock art is also seen as a source of potency (Lewis-Williams 1986), and Dowson (1994:333) describes this notion quite aptly: "The images did not merely depict things, they also *did* things" (my italics). M told Jolly (1986) that the paintings are powerful, and one can access this power by touching the paintings. The painting in itself was potent (Lewis-Williams 1986), and the San believed that the rock face was merely a 'veil' between this world and the spirit world (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990); possibly also because potent substances, such as eland blood and fat, formed part of the composition of the paint (e.g., How 1962; Jolly 1986; Lewis-Williams 1990; Blundell 2004; Mallen 2005). The *act* of painting, or the *process* of painting, as well as the paintings themselves thus contain 'painting potency', which is the same as the potency obtained during the trance dance.

The 'thin red line' motif, which occurs at RSA MEL7, is also associated with depicting, or painting, potency. Lewis-Williams (1981b) first argued that the red lines, which are often found threading through panels at certain rock art sites, represent the material manifestation of potency and the out-of-body experience, or */xau*, of shamans in trance. This line motif may well originate from hallucinations the shamans see during altered states of consciousness, and metaphorically represent

the pathways and lines shamans use to climb all the way to heaven when they travel to the gods' dwelling (Lewis-Williams *et al*. 2000:123, 132). There are a number of references in the ethnographic material to 'threads of light' and lines shamans use to climb to the dwelling of the gods (e.g., Biesele 1980:55-61; Katz *et al*. 1997:108, 113; Keeney 1999:62, 105, 109).

The painting of the dassie at RSA MEL7 has an 'emission' protruding from its mouth. This line is visually similar to the 'thin red line' at the site, and is white in colour and covered in red dots. This line could possibly also be linked to potency; the potency of the dassie. M told researchers about shamans who could freeze a dassie in its tracks when they pointed at it (Jolly 1986:7); I shall expand on this statement in the next chapter. First, however, I consider the types of shamans and their function in San society.

Shamans

According to Lewis-Williams (1980:470; 1981b:5), the /Xam San believed there were four types of shamans: the healers (*!gi:ten*), the game-controlling shamans (*pwaiten-ka !gi:ten*), the rain-controlling shamans (*!khwa-ka !gi:ten*) and malevolent shamans, who intend on hurting others with their powers (*//xi:ka !gi:ten*). The San believe that the shamans of the game exercise magical control over animals, thereby 'possessing' animals, and this magical control is known as the notion of */ki* (Stow & Bleek 1930:42; Lewis-Williams 1980:475; Jolly 1986:6; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:143).

'Possession' in this context is metaphorical, and means the shaman can control and capture the animal. This is best illustrated by the interpretation of Qing's well known, and often quoted, phrase: "They were the men who had died and now lived in rivers, and were *spoilt at the same time as the elands* and by the dances of which you have seen paintings" (Orpen 1874:2). 'Spoil', along with other concepts such as 'death', 'underwater', 'flight', and 'fight' are metaphors for trance, or entering a state of deep trance, understood and used by both the southern and the northern San (Lewis-Williams 1980:474; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:50-59). Kinachau told Katz (1982:85): "I wasn't breathing. I was dead according to the custom of this num."

There are human figures in the rock art of regions other than the south-eastern mountains which seem to be wearing springbok-eared caps. Jolly (1986:8) relates that M interpreted the therianthropic images in the rock art as shamans who are wearing disguises made from animal skins, especially antelope scalp masks and caps. He cites one of Bleek's informants who interpreted copies of paintings of therianthropes, which were made by George Stow (1930), as people who are wearing caps made from gemsbok scalps and horns while they are performing the trance dance, and especially while an older shaman is busy teaching his protégés the finer details of trance dance and acquiring and handling potency (Jolly 1986:8; Hollmann 2004:218). Both Jolly and Lewis-Williams also refer to one of Bleek's (1936:144) informants talking about hunters who make scalp caps from springbok heads, and look like they have antelope ears when they wear these caps (Bleek 1936:144). The original paintings are some of the rare paintings where the figures are clearly *wearing* the caps or headdresses, and are not completely *changing into* animals, or turning into therianthropes (Lewis-Williams & Challis 2011:67). Lewis-Williams (1986:10) argues that we should distinguish between depictions of the real and the unreal: depictions of antelope scalp caps worn by men are easily distinguishable from therianthropes.

The San associated climbing into an animal skin bag, or wearing the skin of an animal with transforming into that animal, acquiring its potency and entering trance (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:120). The scent of the animal also lingers in and around the bag, and potency can be carried or transferred with scent (*ibid.*). The San also believed that the wearers of antelope-eared or –horned caps could exert power over herds of antelope and lead them into an ambush (Marshall 1959; Lewis-Williams & Challis 2011).

An important consideration which may resolve this confusion is the kind of power the San attribute to antelope skin. The /Xam San believed that people can, under supernatural conditions, transform into an animal, or acquire some of the attributes or potency of that animal, if they wear its skin or climb into a bag made out of the skin (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:120). There is a /Xam myth of the Mantis (/Kaggen), who climbed into a skin bag to tease a young lion-cub, which is also linked to metaphorical transformation. Lewis-Williams and Pearce (2004:169-171) argue that therianthropes and depictions of human figures wearing scalp caps are

different: the former *merge* with an animal and become part-human part-animal, while the latter remain fully human while simply *wearing* the caps.

Therianthropes are depictions of the blurred boundaries between shaman and animal where a shaman is both human and animal. Men wearing antelope scalp caps clearly have human bodies, limbs and heads, and the caps are painted so that the lines where the cap fits over the head are visible. Although animal skins are associated with transformation, scalp caps in rock paintings do not necessarily depict shamans *transforming* into an animal, rather, the wearers of these caps can acquire some of the animal's potency, and can gain some control over the animal during the hunt (Fig. 28 and Fig. 29). The human and animal features of the figures in Fig. 28 are blending, as the figure is changing into an antelope; the same as the pointing antelope at RSA LAB1 (Fig. 23). The figure in Fig. 29 is still fully human, with human facial features. The cap is painted to sit on top of its head, and is not merging with the head. The figures wearing antelope eared caps are associated with shamans of the game, whose main function is to control game (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:131), and especially antelope such as gemsbok, springbok, and eland.



a) b)

Fig. 28. Examples of therianthropes: the figure in a) is an antelope therianthrope, and the figures in b) wear animal skin karosses, with human limbs and antelope heads (photograph b): Chriselle Bruwer).



Fig. 29. A shaman of the game wearing an antelope eared cap (photograph: RARI).

Having created a theoretical, physical and geographical, and social context in the past few chapters, the next chapter is aimed at bringing all of these strands of evidence together to create a better understanding of the pointing and gesturing postures in question. I turn to the artificial analytical categories I have created in Chapter 3, and consider each in the light of relevant ethnographic references.

CHAPTER 5

CONCEPTUAL CONNECTIONS

There is a great variety of recurring pointing and gesturing postures at various sites in the study area, as we have seen, and I have grouped these into artificial categories for analytical purposes. This chapter considers two questions: what the meaning of the images, or each category of similar images, could be, and how these image categories relate to one another. I divided the images into categories in Chapter 3: pointing and gesturing as a general phenomenon, pointing and gesturing at other human figures, pointing and gesturing at eland and pointing and gesturing at a cluster of bees.

The artificial categories prove useful for two reasons: to highlight and keep track of the similarities and the differences between images within the category, and to show whether these individual images and sets of images might potentially form part of the same conceptual phenomenon and are thus related. I suggest that the key to understanding the relationship between these pointing postures and gestures lies with the concept of supernatural potency, which is a complex concept and is accessible through, amongst others, the various means I have discussed in the previous chapter. Pointing postures and gestures seem to play an important role in the management of this supernatural potency, and I shall discuss this statement throughout this chapter. Bearing this in mind, this chapter discusses pointing and gesturing in San society and the paintings with reference to relevant ethnographic material. I first briefly discuss pointing and gesturing as a general phenomenon in San society. I then consider the eland, hunting practices and animal behaviour in an attempt to understand the figures which point at an eland and a cluster of bees. Finally, I provide possible interpretations for the range of pointing and gesturing postures and close with specific reference to RSA MEL7.

Pointing and gesturing in San society

The previous chapter considered movements, postures and gestures during the trance dance, and as mentioned, shamans sometimes point at the spirits of the dead to dispel them during the trance dance (Marshall 1999:40, 87). Because *n/om* can pass from person to person, an older, more experienced shaman can point or snap his

fingers at young protégés to shoot *n/om* into them with invisible arrows (Katz 1982:46, 49). Katz (1982:263) recalls one incident where a shaman stopped dancing, suddenly stretched out his arm and pointed his finger at another, and the latter instantly fell down. Toma Zho, one of Katz's informants, said: "Every time I give num to a person, I lose a little of my own. The num comes out of you. And then it can become nothing... If you give a lot of num to a lot of people you are teaching, you can give it all away" (Katz 1982:183).

Pointing is also significant during the eland hunt and capturing dassies, presumably as a source of food. As mentioned, Maqindi Diyanti, whom scholars referred to as M, spoke of shamans who killed dassies by pointing their fingers at them (Jolly 1986:7). There is a depiction of what may be a dassie at RSA MEL7, and as I described in Chapter 3, it bleeds from the nose and a dotted line emits from its mouth. Dassies served as a source of food, and the southern San believed the dassie was the wife of /Kaggen, who was said to be the creator of all things, a trickster and the first shaman (Lewis-Williams 1997:201; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:112, 113).

M described an eland hunt to Jolly (1986:6). The hunting party was usually accompanied by a girl who controlled the eland, when found, by pointed at it with an arrow. Jolly also mentions the account of one of Bleek's /Xam informants; apparently a /Xam hunter could point a burned stick at a springbok to slow it down (Bleek 1936:147). Jolly (1986) and Lewis-Williams (1986) both note that finger-pointing might be a way in which shamans exert magical control over animals. Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1999:80, 81) mention that a posture of a human figure with its one knee drawn up is often depicted in the rock art where it points or gestures with its whole hand outstretched or more than one finger, and they suggest that these figures possibly represent shamans shooting or transferring potency (see Fig. 4). Perhaps the images which point or gesture with one finger, more than one finger or the whole hand, and with bows, sticks and arrows depict the same conceptual phenomenon related to the use of potency; shooting potency at another, controlling the game or obtaining potency from an animal.

Bearing these comments in mind, it is safe to assume that pointing is a significant action: an upset young maiden points at a person and the rain will 'shoot' them, shamans never point at young children, because the potency can kill them, shamans

point at dassies and eland to ‘hypnotize’ and freeze them in their tracks to make the hunt easier, and a shaman can ‘shoot’ potency into another dancer by pointing at the dancer (e.g., Bleek 1933:298, 299; Katz 1982:46, 49; Jolly 1986; Hollmann 2004:134). The San believe one can transfer supernatural potency by pointing the finger at another human or animal.

Relevance during interpretation of the paintings

If pointing is a significant action which holds inherent meaning in certain circumstances in San society, pointing postures and gestures in the rock art are also significant. Considering that these postures and gestures recur in the study area, I argue that the pointing and gesturing figures in the rock art, too, holds deeper symbolic significance than merely gesturing toward one another or to indicate something in the spirit world, or the spirit world itself behind the rock face.

I argue that these images could be ‘shooting’ or transferring potency, and form part of the same conceptual phenomenon. Some of these images point with one finger, and some gesture with two or three fingers or the whole hand. Others gesture with bows and arrows. I argue that these could possibly symbolize a similar concept to the pointing or gesturing figure with the knee drawn up, in that these images may all depict the process of shooting or transferring potency, as suggested by Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1999:80, 81).

In addition, the depiction of this process is not necessarily limited to figures which point with only one finger; the paintings comprise of many forms of pointing and gesturing, as the analytical categories I have created suggest, and the ethnography backs up this suggestion, for example, shamans point and snap their fingers to transfer potency, and these snaps represent arrows (e.g., Katz 1982; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:48). Pointing and making hand gestures, and shooting invisible arrows are all linked to the transferral of supernatural potency. Although there is no direct mention of sticks in the ethnographic record, I include images of figures pointing and gesturing with a stick in the general interpretation, as it is also a form of pointing and gesturing. Based on these observations, I suggest that the analytical categories I created in Chapter 3 form part of the same conceptual phenomenon.

Animals

The images in the last two categories definitely point toward eland and, in one case, a cluster of white flecks which I have argued are bees.

The eland hunt

There is no question that the eland is a very important animal to the San. It is one of the most numerously depicted animals in rock art, and plays a central role during hunting ceremonies and rituals, boys' and girls' rites of passage into adulthood, and marriage ceremonies (Pager 1975; Vinnicombe 1976; Lewis-Williams & Biesele 1978; Lewis-Williams 1981a). A boy's entry into manhood is marked by his first eland kill, and women celebrate womanhood by performing the Eland Bull Dance (Marshall 1999:199; Hollmann 2004:65). Although the bulk of the diet of the southern and the northern San is made up of plant foods and small animals, hunting big game is about more than just finding a source of meat, it is a religious and social practice (Hollmann 2004:65).

Jolly (1986:6) describes M's account of an eland hunt: the young girl 'hypnotizes' the eland by pointing at it with an arrow, which was treated with 'medicine' by the shaman, or medicine man, and the hunters easily lead the dazed, dizzy eland to a cave. They kill the eland by cutting its throat. The dying eland makes soft, murmuring sounds, and foam and liquid drips from its nose. While the eland is dying, the men make cuts across its forehead, neck and bottom of the ribcage to collect its blood. These actions are reminiscent of the bleeding cuts on the torsos and bellies of the eland at RSA BLL2 and RSA MEL7 (Fig. 30 and Fig. 31).



Fig. 30. The eland at RSA MEL7 has bleeding cuts on the torso and belly.



Fig. 31. An enlargement of the the cuts on the belly and torso of the eland at RSA MEL7. The cuts on the eland at RSA BLL2 are remarkably similar (photograph: RARI).

When the people wish to acquire the potency contained in the blood, they have to mix the blood with fat from the eland stomach and various other ingredients, and rub it into small cuts on their own necks and throats. This mixture also comprises a part of the pigment used to paint lines and patterns in rock shelters, and these lines and patterns also protect the San from various dangers, including lightning. As mentioned before, M also recounted how one can obtain potency from rock paintings; if one places a hand on the rock paintings, one acquires their potency. Jolly notes that M might have interpreted the effect of a poison arrow as 'hypnotization'. He also mentions, however, the various instances where pointing seems to be a powerful action, and takes into consideration that the action of pointing could indeed exert an inexplicable form of magical control.

Marion How (1962) interviewed an old Sotho painter, named Mapote, who learnt to paint with his San half-brothers. Mapote told How that eland blood is a very important component of the paint they make. Eland blood is potent, and used for a variety of means. One example is where the San rub a mixture containing eland blood and fat on cuts in a boy's skin during his initiation into manhood, the first kill ritual, and I shall discuss this ritual in greater detail below (Lewis-Williams 1981a:48-52).

The /Xam believed that one should respect the game, as they belong to /Kaggen; they are /Kaggen's 'things' (Hollmann 2004:66). During boys' first kill rituals, or any other antelope hunt, the hunter and the antelope become linked (Lewis-Williams 1981a:66) and the hunter's actions determine the outcome of the kill. Hunters have to follow a certain protocol before /Kaggen will allow their hunt to be successful. /Kaggen likes to break the link between the hunter and the animal, to save the animal. The /Xam and the Kalahari San share many similarities with regards to their respect behaviours during the hunt (Lewis-Williams & Biesele 1978; Hollmann 2004).

Lewis-Williams (1981a) divides the hunt into two stages: the first is the search for and stalking of the prey and the other begins as soon as the poison arrow penetrated the animal. The men use certain avoidance words during the first stage of the hunt. Avoidance words are words which the San use when they believe that they are not allowed to call something by its original name; the men refer to the eland as *tcheni*, or 'dance' during the hunt (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:118). Hunters are not allowed to cross eland's spoor on their way back once they have shot an eland – they have to walk alongside the spoor (Lewis-Williams 1981a:59; Hollmann 2004:68). Lewis-Williams (1981a:58) also mentions the Ju/'hoansi belief that the hunter should not walk or run fast, because in doing so, the eland would run or walk fast as well. The hunter returns home slowly and composedly with the link-shaft of his arrow, while the poisoned arrowhead remains inside the animal (Lewis-Williams 1981a:55; Hollmann 2004:69). The hunter must not speak loudly, and he has to whisper and not announce that he shot an eland. An old man usually takes care of the hunter during that night, especially to ensure that the hunter does not scratch or rub his itches or pains, or urinates. If the hunter urinates, so would the wounded animal, and the poison would be expelled from its body.

The next day, the hunting party then start tracking the wounded animal. Once again, as M also told Jolly, the sweat and foam which falls from the dying animal's mouth is very potent, and contains powerful *n/om*. Only once the hunters have removed the eland's heart may the boy or man who shot the animal approach the animal, prior to this, he must not come into contact with the potent foam. Once the hunting party have brought the eland home, the Ju/'hoansi light a fire in front of its forelock, and this fire is considered a 'medicine fire' on which they place the boy's bow and a

'female stick' to 'drink the fire' and ensure success during subsequent hunts (Lewis-Williams 1981a:60). Lewis-Williams (*ibid.*) also mentions that the 'medicine' parts of the eland include the dewlap, a third of the tail, the lower part of the hind legs and the middle of the neck.

People cook these parts overnight, along with the stomach, and the older men eat this concoction after they have thrown away the stomach. The women make cries similar to those which they make during girls' menarcheal rituals. The men make transverse cuts on the boy's skin, similar to the cuts M described which the men in the south eastern mountains make on a dead or dying eland, and rub medicine into these cuts. The cuts are made in the right arm if the boy has shot a male eland and in the left if he has shot a female eland. They brew the medicine from eland fat and burnt eland hair, among other things. The boy then has to point his bow, with the string facing upward, in front of him and an old man makes prints with the eland's hoof all around the boy. The rest of the ritual includes rubbing eland fat into the boy's skin. The ritual is made up of various small components, which ultimately leads up to a boy's acceptance in the community as a man.

Lewis-Williams (1981a:62) argues that there are many parallels between the boys' first kill ritual and the girls' menarcheal rite, and also between the southern /Xam and northern Ju/'hoansi versions of these rituals. The Ju/'hoansi practice various 'avoidance behaviours' to ensure success in the hunt, such as avoiding saying the words for 'lion', 'leopard' and 'mamba', and the Rite of the Meat Fire, where an old man lights a fire, performs certain rituals and addresses the spirits of the dead outside the ring of the fire (Marshall 1999:146-153).

I shall not discuss the girls' menarcheal rite in detail here, as it goes beyond the scope of this dissertation. During the girls' menarcheal rite, a girl is left in a secluded hut while the women perform the Eland Bull Dance. Lewis-Williams (*ibid*) also mentions here a key concept: *n≠um*, which means 'create'. The new hunter 'is created' by performing the first kill rituals, and in performing the Eland Bull Dance, the women 'create' a new woman out of the young girl. The eland is a polysemic symbol (Lewis-Williams 1998:88); it has many meanings, and is therefore difficult to understand, and especially difficult to know exactly which of these many meanings the painters in specific rock art contexts intended. To consider

the context of the entire painting and the other images is, of course, integral, but so is the morphology, or the physical characteristics, of the eland in question.

It is as if the link between the hunter and eland is reinforced by cutting both the boy and the eland. This also links the rock art (Fig. 30 and Fig. 31) and the ethnographic accounts of these rituals. The boundaries between shaman in trance, hunter and eland become blurred: both the shaman and the dying eland tremble and shiver, and both the hunter and the eland are cut. When men hunt eland, they hunt not only meat, but also potency. In the light of this, it will be useful to further consider the behaviour of the eland in this context.

Eland behaviour

I have briefly touched on natural modelling in Chapter 2. Natural modelling is "the symbolic and graphic use of natural phenomena to communicate ineffable concepts" (Hollmann 2005: 84). Since the eland is central in San beliefs and thought (Lewis-Williams 1981a:41), the 'dying eland' is an important example of such a symbol. In some cases, a combination of ethology, the study of animal behaviour, and ethnographic references to San views on animal behaviour could provide the clues to interpret why San painters painted certain animals, for example the eland, to exhibit certain behaviours (Hollmann 2002:264), and could possibly help clarify which of the many meanings the painters attributed to the eland in aspecific context.

As mentioned above, 'fight' is also metaphorical for high concentrations of dangerous potency; 'eland fight' intensifies this concept by adding the highly potent eland (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:59). Hollmann (2002:564) interpreted a painting of two fighting bull eland in the Bergville District in the Kwa-Zulu Natal Drakensberg Mountains by using a combination of ethnographic references and ethology. These eland were painted with, as Hollmann (2002:264, 265) argues, feline characteristics: one has bristles around its mane and neck and the other has bristles around its dorsal ridge, one has feline-like ears and the tail of one of the eland is also more feline-like than eland-like. These characteristics are metaphorical: when eland are very angry, they turn into beasts of prey, lions or felines, which Hollmann (2002:265) links with the dangerous nature of the potency denoted by the use of the concept 'fight'. The /Xam also believed that a shaman who becomes violent during trance changes into a lion (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:119).

Felines are thought to express antisocial behaviours, therefore, perhaps shamans of the game rely on a similar dangerous concentration or kind of potency as that which is contained in 'eland fight' to control game, and vice versa; they need to acquire the 'eland fight' from game in the first place.

Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1999:50-52) describe the behaviour of a dying eland. The animal staggers, trembles, lowers its head, bleeds from the nose, sweats, its hair stands on end and it finally collapses as its legs give way and it can no longer support itself while it is dying. Shamans in deep trance, as we have seen, are also very agitated and display the same behaviours. They also stagger and tremble and sweat excessively, are rendered incapable of controlling their movement and sometimes collapse. They also bleed from the nose, whether it is from the agitation and exertion or induced to further establish the connection between a dying antelope and themselves. Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1999:51) also mention that the /Xam believed men in trance sometimes grow hair on their backs. The painters focus on these shared behaviours when they paint eland, and do not paint some of the other behaviours of a dying animal (*ibid.*:52). There is thus a link between the shaman in trance and the dying eland; similar to the way in which there is a link between the man who has shot an eland and the dying eland which he has shot. Shamans acquire potency during trance, when they behave like dying eland and access the spirit world and see visionary elements, but they also acquire potency from the eland in the real, physical world. Another link exists between the shaman and bees, which are also believed to be potent, during the performance of a trance dance called the Honey Dance in the Kalahari.

The Honey Dance, bee potency and the dassie

While the Honey Dance is performed in the Kalahari, the shaman "becomes" the honey (meaning that the shaman acquires the honey's potency), and honey and baby bees were said to contain strong potency (Marshall 1999:55, 73, 76-77). The Ju/'hoansi even call the Great God the 'Mother of Bees' (Thomas 1959; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004). Amongst /Xam, the dassie is also linked to bee potency in a few myths. The Dassie, also called /Huntu!katt!katten, is the wife of /Kaggen, and they had a porcupine, !Xo, as adopted daughter (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:114), and all three of these creatures are associated with fat and honey, because porcupines and dassies possess large amounts of fat, thus serving as sources

of food, and /Kaggen, as the hunter, provided the fat and the honey (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:114).

The San associate antelope fat with honey, because they are the only two substances that are both solid (edible) and liquid (drinkable), and especially associate dassies with honey and bees because they live in the rocky cliffs where beehives occur (Bleek 1924:145; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004:114). Both the northern Ju/'hoansi (Marshall 1999:55, 73, 76-77) and the southern /Xam (Hollmann 2004:172) associate honey and bees with potency. Therefore, perhaps pointing at a dassie is not just about capturing a source of food, but also about capturing a source of potency. Similarly, pointing at a cluster of bees possibly leads not only to acquiring honey, but also acquiring potency.

The paintings, shamans and control

I have argued that images in the rock art which point and gesture are linked under the same conceptual umbrella, and these postures and gestures depict the 'management', or the transferral and acquiring, of supernatural potency. As we have seen, it is believed that shamans can control another human being by pointing or snapping their fingers at them; whether they simply want to transfer potency to the other person or purposefully harm them is not always clear. The images which point and gesture at eland and a cluster of bees, then, could possibly exert some form of magical control over these animals. I have described the account of shamans pointing at dassies in order to freeze them; whether to control the animals to acquire a source of food or potency. Similarly, I have described the account of young girls 'hypnotizing' eland before the hunt. I argue, in the first place, that the similar sets of images at RSA MEL7 and RSA BLL2, and the figure which points at a cluster of bees at RSA WLL1 also fall under a similar conceptual umbrella: these human figures are either exerting some form of control over animals, or are drawing potency from them.

The different eland at which the human figures at RSA MEL7 and RSA BLL2 point have many similarities. Although the eland at RSA BLL2 and the eland in the bottom set of images at RSA MEL7 stand, their heads are lowered, their ears are pulled back, and they bleed from their torsos, bellies and noses. The top eland at RSA MEL7 lies down, with its legs tucked beneath it and its head turned away from

the front human figure. It also bleeds from the nose and belly. The eland seem to be tame, submissive and relenting, almost as though they allow themselves to be hypnotized and ultimately, we can surmise, killed. The shamans of the game, the □*pwaiten-ka !gi:ten*, are usually associated with controlling game. These shamans, we have seen, utilise their potency to control the game for a favourable hunt, among other things. If the human figures at especially RSA MEL7 and RSA BLL2 point and gesture at eland in order to control the animals, I argue that they are shamans of the game. Shamans of the game are associated with depictions of shamans wearing antelope-eared caps (Fig. 28), but it does not state anywhere in the ethnographic record that shamans of the game exclusively wear antelope-eared caps during the trance dance and otherwise; merely that one of their overlapping functions is to control game. The figure at RSA WLL1 is, as yet, unique. I argue that this could also be a form of animal-controlling shaman, although there is no direct association with game animals. The figure is possibly in the process of controlling and drawing potency from the animals.

San rock art depicts many non-real things and relationships. I therefore argue, in the second place, that it is possible that there is more to the depictions of human figures pointing at animals than the exertion of one-sided control. Perhaps this is an instance of 'managing' potency – using, at the same time, potency activated during trance to control the animal, while acquiring the potency of the animal. Is it a case of investing potency in order to acquire, perhaps, more or stronger potency?

I suggest the following options, in no particular order, as interpretations of the range of pointing and gesturing postures in the study area:

- Using potency: These figures could be depictions of shamans who are in the process of using the supernatural potency they have already acquired during the trance dance, or otherwise. The figures which point and gesture in a general context could, for example, be transferring this potency either to another human, a possible protégé during the trance dance, or could be pointing at something in the spirit world or at the spirits of the dead lurking beyond the ring of the fire during a trance dance. The figures pointing at eland and a cluster of bees could be using their potency to control these animals, as the shamans of the game would, in order to ensure a successful

hunt, or to obtain foodstuffs like honey and meat, or more potency (or both foodstuffs and potency), which leads on to the next point.

- Acquiring potency: The images which point and gesture at eland and a cluster of bees could be depictions of shamans in the process of acquiring potency from these animals, as they are believed to be very potent.
- A combination of using and acquiring potency: The previous two options imply a one-way process, but the images could also be depictions of shamans engaged in a two-way process of transferral. The figures could be simultaneously using potency they have already acquired, while acquiring the potency of the animal.
- The possibility exists that the processes of potency exchange, use or transferral are not the only ongoing processes depicted. Shamans are believed to have the ability to turn into an animal and acquire its potency; for example, during the trance dance, by climbing into the skin of an animal or at will. The figure which points at the cluster of bees at RSA WLL1 has a pair of wings on its back and seems to be a sort of bee therianthrope, perhaps pointing at the cluster of bees in order to acquire their potency and this becoming more bee-like at the same time. I have made the distinction between depictions of therianthropes and shamans of the game in San rock art, and I argue it is possible that the sets of images where the figures point and gesture at eland and at a cluster of bees also depict the process of transformation. The figures which point and gesture at RSA MEL7 and RSA BLL2 may be shamans of the game, but perhaps the eland are depictions of shamans who have completed the transformation from human to therianthrope to animal. We know the San depicted therianthropes, as they believed humans can transform into animals and acquire their power, but San rock art is complex and contains polysemic symbols and therefore we cannot tell for certain whether the process of transformation is ever completed, and whether all of the animals in San rock art are merely animals or transformed shamans.

Bringing it all together: RSA MEL7

As we have seen in Chapter 3, most of the imagery relevant to this dissertation is present at RSA MEL7. All of the categories I have created in Chapter 3, except the figure which

points and gestures at a cluster of bees, are present at the site. The first two categories are exemplified by the row of pointing figures with erect penises on the main panel (Fig. 10): some of these figures point and gesture at one another and others at visually indiscernible objects or seemingly invisible things behind the rock face. There are also human figures which point and gesture at visually indiscernible, faded objects, or objects behind the rock face present on the side panel. These figures, I argue, are acquiring, transferring or using supernatural potency.

RSA MEL7, as a whole, depicts views and beliefs on supernatural potency. Potency is possibly materialized in the form of a thin red line and a rainbow-like arch (Fig. 19), while the transfer and various uses of potency, such as exerting control over other human beings and eland, are materialized as ongoing processes through the range of pointing and gesturing figures. The two sets of similar images where two human figures point and gesture at submissive eland represent control over animals; men hunt animals for meat and potency, but they also need potency to control the animals. However, I have also argued that the eland in question may be shamans who have completed the transformation from human into animal. I conclude, in the next chapter, that the boundaries between humans and animals in rock art are blurred and that there is more than one symbolic meaning behind the sets of images central to this dissertation.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

"...myself creating what I saw."
William Cowper, *The Task (Volume IV)*, 1785

Although there are regional variations in rock art, as we have seen, Lewis-Williams (1995:145) argues that San rock art is nonetheless a unified corpus of art bound by interrelated sets of meanings. I argue that a similar phenomenon occurs within the corpus of San-authored rock art in the chosen study area. The meanings of the variety of recurring pointing postures and gestures are interrelated and, I argue, form part of a similar conceptual phenomenon.

We associate pointing with a gesture used to indicate something - similar to the way in which we accept that nodding our heads means we agree and shaking them means we disagree. Yet, we rarely ponder whether humans have always automatically accepted that nodding means yes and pointing or gesturing indicates something. Nowadays, for example, showing someone your thumb pointing upward is an indication of positive feelings, but in Shakespearean times, showing your thumb to someone was an insult. Gestures, words and concepts which have become culturally ingrained operate on many levels and societies using them do not ponder these complex symbols or the origins of the meanings which they automatically associate with them. Biesele (1993) uses the example of "buzzing", a concept which, to the Kalahari San, denotes both tea and the sound that bees make: they associate tea with the honey which they use to sweeten it.

This is reminiscent of the incident related by Katz (1982:263), where a shaman pointed at one of his fellow dancers one night during the trance dance, and the dancer instantly fell down. This could be, as Price (2008:147, 148) suggests, a result of the possibility that certain rituals and actions become ingrained in the cultural memory and these rituals and actions and the reactions they generate become almost automatic over time. The dancer automatically associates the action of pointing, specifically when a shaman points at you, with transferring potency. When a shaman points at a person, he shoots potency into them and they are supposed to feel the disabling, powerful effects. The dancer falls, perhaps simply as a physical

reaction to feelings of fear and anticipation, although we can never assert that this is the only cause.

The San believed that shamans, young maidens and people in possession of supernatural potency can transfer the volatile supernatural potency to another through pointing, gesturing or snapping the fingers at the person. Humans can also point at animals to exert control over them, or to acquire potency from them. San views about the cosmos and their myths and beliefs are complex and tiered – similar to the layers upon layers of paint on the rock surface. I suggest that the symbolism inherent in the range of recurring, similar postures and gestures is equally as layered. It is also possible that the people in the societies who were responsible for the paintings automatically knew what these layered meanings and associations were without considering their origins. These postures and gestures are metaphorical, and I argue that the metaphor is constructed out of three levels of symbolism. I do not consider these complex levels in any particular order or hierarchy, as the society who used them, I argue, automatically attributed meaning to them without considering a hierarchy of importance.

The levels of a metaphor

The first symbolic level, as we know, reveals that the sometimes surreal, physically unattainable range of dance postures in San rock art depict shamans in trance and fragments of the trance dance (e.g., Lewis-Williams 1981a, 1990, 1998, 1999; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999). Lewis-Williams and Pearce (2004:99, 100) explain that these fragmentary depictions act by synecdoche: parts of the trance dance are enough to indicate that the whole is present.

Based on this argument of synecdoche, I argue that on the second level, the pointing postures and gestures indicate, or act as references to, the presence and transferral of supernatural potency. The first place of expression we have in the physical world is our bodies. As I have mentioned in Chapter 2, ‘embodiment’ can be seen as the materialization of the lived experience. The San shamans materialize their views and beliefs on the significance of the human body and their knowledge on animal behaviour and supernatural potency by performing the trance dance. Similarly, the San painters in the northern part of the Eastern Cape materialized their beliefs and views on specific pointing and gesturing postures, its significance and their

knowledge on and beliefs about animal behaviour by painting the human and animal bodies in these postures.

Depictions in San rock art were not static layers of paint to the authors; the rock face connected this world to the spirit world (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990). The authors believed that the depiction of, for example, an eland, was simultaneously a representation of the eland *and* the actual eland. The images had an inherent, ever-present power and "did not merely depict things, they also did things" (Dowson 1994:333). Katz (1982:30) explains that the symbolism in Ju/'hoan society are both symbolic and real, as the fire cooks the food of the gods and the food of the people at the same time. If we consider pointing postures and gestures in the light of this approach the authors had toward the art, these images both depict the materialization of and *are* the ongoing, ever-present process of transferring and acquiring supernatural potency. The rock face is merely a veil, and the figures which do not point at anything clearly discernible may still be part of this process; as are the images which point and gesture into rock cracks.

On the third level, these images deal with the relationship between the hunter or the shaman and eland. If the recurring sets of images in the Maclear and Barkly East Districts where human figures point at eland, or any other animals, such as a cluster of bees, depicts a form of magical control over animals, then beliefs and the San "study of animal behaviour" are indeed intertwined. The hunter needs to understand the behaviour of his prey and the San believed that hunters can exert magical control over animals.

Acquiring potency, becoming animal?

Eland contain a large amount of fat, and to the San, fat is potent and eland are potent. By killing an eland, the San believe they can obtain supernatural potency from the eland, and that the fat which they can extract is potent and powerful. If a large, very fat eland contains a great amount of 'fight', it would potentially require a very powerful, experienced shaman of the game, to first 'tame' this eland and second to be able to handle the great quantity of volatile, dangerous potency. Shamans can transfer 'fight' via pointing. I suggested in the previous chapter that these pointing figures can also be depictions of □*pwaiten-ka !gi:ten*, or shamans of the game. I also suggest the possibility exists that these submissive eland may be

more than an actual eland, but a shaman or a hunter in eland form. The eland is a polysemic symbol and there is a very strong link between the hunter or the shaman and the eland; thus, the possibility exists that the eland can also be a symbol for a transformed hunter or shaman, and the pointing figures are shooting potency into the shaman perhaps to aid in his transformation.

Therianthropes, figures depicting a blend of animal and human bodies, are commonly found in San rock art. San rock art consists of a blend of real and non-real, or hallucinatory, images, and shamans believe they turn into animals when they enter altered states of consciousness during the trance dance. It is difficult enough for an observer outside of San society to understand where the real and the non-real elements meet one another and how they overlap, and perhaps this is true for the beginnings and the end of anthropomorphism as well. Shamans are believed to have the ability to turn into animals, and therianthropes depict a snapshot, a moment in time, during this transformation. The question arises: is this transformation ever depicted as complete, and would we be able to identify such images?

The boundaries between human and animal become blurry at some point, especially where the physical connection meets the spiritual and ritual connection. The actions performed by the corporeal body of the hunter determined whether the eland would die; for example, the hunter is not allowed to talk loudly, or to urinate, or the eland would urinate and rid its body of the poison. Blood is potent, significant and important enough to induce nosebleeds and make bleeding cuts in the skin of both the hunter and the eland (e.g., Butler 1997). Shamans adopt the characteristics and acquire the power of the animal which they are supposed to transform into during trance (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1999:69). This connection could also extend to the rock art.

The range of pointing postures and gestures central to this study, I argue, depict various levels of the San views on the process of transferring or acquiring supernatural potency in the northern part of the Eastern Cape Province. As I have undertaken a regional approach to this study, due to practical limitations, future studies could perhaps expand the research area and consider pointing postures and gestures across broader geographical regions in southern Africa. The potential also exists to consider other images in San rock art by examining the different levels

symbolism in depth. Attributing multiple meanings to symbols is, it seems, the human condition.

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