# Eloquent Design

# Eloquent Design:

*Essays on the Rhetorics of Vision*

By

Lisa A. Baird

Eloquent Design: Essays on the Rhetorics of Vision

By Lisa A. Baird

This book first published 2015

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

**Dedicated to the memory of my mother and father whose vision of life will, always and forever, inspire me.**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# CRITICAL FRAMES

# INTO THE LABYRINTH:
# ANCIENT IMAGE-MAKING
# AND MODERN VISIONS

One of the oldest practices in human history is that of image-making. Wherever anthropologists find traces of humans hunting, gathering, burying, or celebrating, the traces of their image-making appear as well. In all cultures all over the world, humans as far back as the latest ice age have engaged in the painting, carving, engraving, or etching of images. For instance, Bhimbetka, a rock shelter in India, contains several thousand murals of "mythical cattle" and human figures painted in ochre. These murals are some 4,000 years old (Mohen 87). One might cite myriad other examples of image-making from any continent, save Antarctica.

While it is tempting to dissociate ancient image-making from our own modern practices on the grounds that the image-making of people long gone served *merely* as magical or decorative art or pre-literate record keeping or that image-making in our own literate culture has divested itself of its magical roots and *merely* serves the ends of discourse, I take up the claim made by W. J. T. Mitchell, Gaylord Donnelley Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago. He claims that images have the power to elicit certain types of actions from the creators who make them (34-38). I adopt Mitchell's claim to demonstrate its scope. That is, if his claim is valid, then humans of all ages will, in their image-making, exhibit certain actions. Because of the sophistication of design, the decorated caves of France and Spain such as Lascaux, Chauvet, and Altamira deserve attention. These sites, with their abundance of archeological and anthropological data, yield clues about the nature of image-making in prehistoric societies; of these images, more later.

Since a great many questions about Upper Paleolithic Art remain unanswered, Mitchell's claim with respect to cave art can contribute fresh perspectives on its mysteries. One mystery is the question about what led early people – perhaps as long ago as 40,000 years B.C. – to prepare such exquisite murals in the dark recesses of limestone caverns. The question is rather perplexing because the images, one would think, were created to be seen. Yet, the darkness of the caves seems to frustrate that purpose. Other mysteries abound, such as why the early artists restricted their murals to

specific types of animals – horses, aurochs, and other large herbivores – and why certain types of animals appear in certain areas of the caves. These questions are all the more puzzling when we consider that the cave itself often suggested the shape and qualities of the animal designs. An analysis of image-making that places cave art in context with our own is useful for extending and augmenting what we already know about Upper Paleolithic art.

Moreover, Mitchell's claim with respect to Upper Paleolithic Art, as it is called, is useful for understanding our own moment of image-making in the digital age. I aim to show similarities between the magical use of images in cave drawings and the magical use of images in computer - mediated communication. The visual display of the computer terminal allows users to summon personal avatars in the virtual world, a practice not unlike the shamanistic means of inviting spirit helpers through the images of animals depicted on the walls of caves.

An analysis of ancient image-making could, for instance, shed light on caves like Chauvet. Discovered in 1994, Chauvet is remarkable for its panel of lions, one of the few caves that depict large cats. Shown in profile, sketched in a charcoal-based paint, several young lions seem to be stalking a herd of bison sketched on a nearby panel. The bison in full stride seem life-like because their nostrils have been engraved into the rock surface, a technique that gives the images the impression of vitality and three-dimensionality (Mohen 59). Chauvet illustrates the fact that certain parts of decorated caves were reserved for the images of more dangerous creatures like lions. Often access to these deeper parts of the cave was difficult, suggesting that the inner chambers attracted only certain members of the social group, probably the shaman (Lewis-Williams 234-5). The fact that only certain animals were depicted in certain parts of the cave suggests the entire cave was a vast canvas, the images of which were socially controlled and governed.

The complexity of Upper Paleolithic images, the specificity of human interaction with the caves through painting, engraving, and other behaviors, and the sheer number of decorated caves in Europe, all suggest that the role of image-making in Upper Paleolithic times was complex, not just the idle scribbling of a few energetic souls. As I will show, the evidence of human interaction at the cave sites reveals the kind of relationships humans had with their images. These relationships are not so different from our own relationships to our digital images.

Before I discuss Mitchell's claim in relation to Upper Paleolithic art, I will present some of the hypotheses about the nature of cave art. Although its exact nature may never be answered completely, nor all mysteries

solved, it is, nonetheless, useful to study the work of archeologists, anthropologists, and cave art specialists who have gathered evidence about image-making practices at the sites. Ancient imagine-making can help illuminate our own, present-day image-making practices, especially those applied to digital canvases.

There are several hypotheses about the nature of cave art, and, as more evidence arises, the hypotheses continue to be refined. Some theories emphasize the paintings from a stylistic or semiotic perspective while others focus more on the anthropological evidence at the sites. The variety of insights offers a range of perspectives on the fascinating images found in European caves.

One theory holds that cave art expresses the narrative of a magical conversion. According to cave art specialists Jean Clottes and David Lewis-Williams the narrative expresses the transformation of the local shaman into a spiritual creature that could bring rain or cure sickness or forecast future events. Clottes and Lewis-Williams argue that the images of animals inside the caves were essential for helping the shaman navigate through various levels of the cosmos. During the cosmic journey, the shaman mediated affairs between the spiritual and physical worlds (Mohen 17). The cave itself may have represented the various cosmological levels or at least expressed an important cultural belief about light and darkness. Lewis-Williams argues that

> There was a great deal more to Upper Paleolithic cave paintings than pictures simply to be looked at: some of the images sprang from a fundamental metaphor [of light and darkness] . . . It is, of course, quite possible that the genesis of the binary light:darkness metaphor took place before people ventured into the caves. Day and night might well have been a much earlier generating circumstance, each having its own connotations. Once created, the metaphor was probably extended to embrace and inform beliefs about the caves and the nether world. (221-222)

Clearly, Lewis-Williams believes Upper Paleolithic people had turned to images because of their perceived magical qualities.

Other researchers of cave art believe the images represent a mythical theme that was sacred to the people who created the art. For cave art specialist André Leroi-Gourhan, the myth was an ancient "religious system based on the opposition and complementarity of male and female values, expressed symbolically by animals figures and by more or less abstract signs" (144). The myth was expressed through groupings of images inside deep recesses of caves and guided by sign types associated with certain areas of the cave. Evidence seems to support Leroi-Gorhan's hypothesis since, in addition to images of beasts, the caves also contain

geometric signs that, according to Leroi-Gourhan, are schematized male and female shapes. The geometric signs range in shape from simple dots and chevrons to more elaborate grid marks (138-147).

Another view of cave art put forward by cave art specialist Denis Vialou attempts to explain the pattern of distribution of species of animals represented in cave art (Lewis-Williams 66). Vialou believes that:

> over and above the major themes common to all of them, each cave asserts its own cultural identity via the arrangement of the figures, their sizes and proportions. Working on different surfaces allows for an infinite subtle range of expression . . . point[ing] up the basic aim of Paleolithic artists. What is probably a foundation myth is restated by the image in line with a social and psychological identity specific to the group. (qtd. in Mohen 18)

Vialou emphasizes the variety of details that distinguish the various image-making practices from group to group. He sees a basic unity among the images, though variations were expressed through what might be a group inflection.

In fact, the images may record a myth or a transformation narrative or express the identities of ancient social groups. To some degree, aspects of all these hypotheses probably apply to cave art. It is clear from anthropological evidence, discussed below, that the creators of cave drawings were engaged in practices that stemmed from deeply-held beliefs about the efficacy of the images they were creating. It is also possible to consider the decorated caves as an example of human image-making that, for all its ancient ritual and magic, is not so different from our own. In order to examine this possibility, I turn to W. J. T. Mitchell for his work on images, particularly his argument about images as living entities. He writes:

> For better or for worse, human beings establish their collective, historical identity by creating around them a second nature composed of images which do not merely reflect the values consciously intended by their makers, but radiate new forms of value formed in the collective, political unconscious of their beholders…They are phantasmatic, immaterial entities that, when incarnated in the world, seem to possess agency, aura, a "mind of their own," which is a projection of a collective desire that is necessarily obscure to those who find themselves. . . celebrating around or inside an image. This is true no less for modern than for ancient images. (105-6)

The animate nature of images, ancient and modern, is such that their power escapes the original intention of their creators.

Mitchell argues further that image-making in a society involves the sanctioning and validation of certain images that express power, identity, and personal affiliation to images. These expressions set up specific relationships between creator and image. The relationships are expressed as one of three types: idol, fetish, and totem. These three treatments refer to "the names of three different *relations* to things, three forms of 'object relations,' if you will, that we can form with an infinite variety of concrete entities (including words and concepts) in our experience" (188). Idols, fetishes, and totems are, in Mitchell's terms, "animated icons" (195), meaning that societies invest certain images with "surplus value" (i.e. confer upon or derive from them special powers) and this overvaluation invokes certain relationships between creator and image. Mitchell notes that the idol-fetish-totem triad does not describe a rigid classification system. Rather, he intends to set up a framework that triangulates human responses to and interactions with their images. An image in a society might be treated as all three at once. Mitchell writes that

> one and the same object (a gold calf, for instance) could function as a totem, fetish, or idol depending on the social practices and narratives that surround it. Thus, when the calf is seen as a miraculous image of God, it is an idol; when it is seen as a self-consciously produced image of the tribe or nation . . . , it is a totem; when its materiality is stressed, and seen as a molten conglomerate of private 'part-objects'" it becomes a collective fetish. (189)

Mitchell, continuing, argues that "The totem-fetish-idol distinction, then, is not necessarily a *visible* difference, but can only be apprehended through a *sounding* of the image, an inquiry into what it says and does, what rituals and myths circulate around it" (189). The images of Upper Paleolithic people may be "sounded" in a number of ways. Evidence – often from the images themselves – exists for us to understand at least some of the practices involved in image-making in Paleolithic times.

Evidence from the decorated caves suggests that the totem-fetish-idol triad helps bring Upper Paleolithic art into the modern world. Soundings of cave drawings may be made since traces of the human activity that produced the images are still evident in many key sites, especially Chauvet cave that remained undiscovered for so long. Analysis of the traces reveals that Paleolithic people prepared their images and interacted with them in ways that correspond to the idol-fetish- totem triad.

# Idol

Evidence suggests, in the first place, the cave images were esteemed as idols. This seems clear from artistic expression that approved only certain kinds of images, specifically large herbivores. Lewis-Williams believes that the images of specific animals found in decorated caves represent a cultural idea that was first present in Upper Paleolithic society and then found its expression in the practice of painting and engraving pictures of these special animals inside caves. Lewis-Williams writes that "images of a specific set of animals must have had some *a priori* value for people to take any interest in them" (185). The value seems to have been powerful enough to keep enticing people into caves for centuries, powerful enough for the creators to risk life and limb to execute the drawings. Clearly, the images were invested with what Mitchell has called a "surplus of value" (76-77) because of the diligence and specialized knowledge required for painting and preserving cave art. One may infer the high regard for image-making from the way the ancients went about gathering the materials for their designs. Cave art specialist Mario Ruspoli notes that Paleolithic people

> made good use of a wide variety of pigments, some of which had to be sought many miles away and brought back in skin bags, before being ground down, mixed with water and perhaps urine, to form emulsions. The ochres were 'burned' to obtain cooler or darker shades, black was obtained from manganese or charcoal, and red from haematite. Brushes were made from hair and bristle, and 'sponges' from fur, and the artists even cut out stencils. The techniques inherited from earlier periods developed to a startling degree and were combined with stylistic innovations. (16)

The extent of the painting/engraving techniques, the variety of pigments, the experimentation in styles and designs all indicate that the images were treated like idols. Moreover, some of the drawings show signs of having been re-painted several times, probably with the intention of preserving the image or making it more visible or keeping it from fading. Such is the case with the rectangular "grid" sign found in Lascaux. Described by Ruspoli as a "blazon" (158), Leroi-Gourhan catalogs it as a female sign (144). It seems to have been special since analysis the pigment shows that it was repainted frequently (Lewis-Williams 259), possibly out of regard for its high status, perhaps on par with a goddess.

The drive or desire to create images inside dark caves required the use of artificial illumination to light the cave passages. The specialized use of lamps and torches indicates that image-making played a central role in Upper Paleolithic societies because the lighting system demanded a great

deal of the society's resources – technical skill, resources, and effort. Study of fragments of ancient lamps has yielded information about the kind of techniques used to light the caves. Members of the society had to carve lamps from stone as well as make or collect fuel for the lamps. The famous cave of Lascaux, for example, shows that the Upper Paleolithic lamp was one of three types: a piece of limestone that had a natural cup, pieces of limestone that were modified by hollowing out a bit of the center, or large pieces of sandstone shaped into the form of a ladle with a handle and a bowl (Ruspoli 28-9). Just how many lamps were needed to light the dark recesses of the caves has been a matter of study. According to Brigitte and Gilles Delluc who have experimented with the ancient lamps, the type of fat-burning lamp could produce light equivalent to two candles. "The illumination provided by several lamps placed near the paintings made it easy to examine quite an extensive area of prehistoric rock surface, especially if the rock was light in colour, or white as at Lascaux" (qtd. in Ruspoli 30). The constant upkeep of lamps and fuel must have been a constant concern for the cave artists. Keeping the lamps supplied with fuel and the cave supplied with pigments required enormous effort, indicating that Upper Paleolithic peoples served their images as if out of duty to a local god.

The use of artificial illumination must have added to the magical/sacred conception of the images imprinted on the rock walls. Visitors to the caves often note that the play of light across the painted murals seems to animate them. The illuminated images seem to move, giving the animate life-like appearances. For the viewer who stands before the images holding the light of a flickering candle, the flames must have enhanced the sense of the godlike powers of the images. Based on evidence from numerous cave sites, it seems clear that Upper Paleolithic practices in image-making treated their images as idols.

Idols sometimes seem to possess so much power that members of a society not only worship them but also fear them as well. Mitchell notes that certain members of a society will condemn images because of the power they hold. He writes,

> The living image is not unequivocally a positive value, but . . . the object of both love and hate, affection and fear, forms of overestimation such as worship, adoration, and veneration, and of devaluation or underestimation – horror, disgust, abomination. The best evidence for the life of images is the passion with which we seek to destroy or kill them. Iconophilia and iconophobia only make sense to people who think images are alive. (93)

The desire to smash the idol is an indication that an image has become too powerful in a society. The fact that Upper Paleolithic images were created in places difficult to reach as well suggests that the images were so powerful or so special that they were removed from the view of casual observation. Viewers were required to exert extraordinary effort to see some of the more inaccessible images.

Often Upper Paleolithic images display signs of iconoclasm since some of cave drawings have been mutilated. They are scratched or marred and some are simply effaced with the imprint of other images. The images of animals may have been so powerful that they were feared. As Lewis-Williams notes, "In some rare cases, there seem to have been attempts at removing images already there. In the Cosquer Cave, for instance, handprints were deeply scored across, as if to cancel them, and in Chauvet it seems that images may have been removed by scraping the surface" (210). The marring or scoring of images, Lewis-Williams suggests, had a specific function with respect to images. He believes visitors to the deep recesses of the cave wished to cut the rock surface as though it were a membrane between the spiritual and physical worlds. Cutting the images would release the animal's spirit power (256-7). The mutilation may also suggest that Paleolithic images had a cycle of acceptance, veneration, and then destruction. Clearly, the artists of the decorated caves enacted beliefs about the images they made; the actions elicited by the images were consistent with with idol worship.

## Fetish

A second creator-image relationship, the fetish, focuses on the image as object. When an image's material properties are an important aspect of its value, it can be thought of as a fetish, a "'made thing' with a spirit or demon in it" (Mitchell 98). Fetishes are like idols in that they are powerful but are diminished to an object of personal use and take on the properties of a talisman. Frequently, members of a society believe the object possesses magical powers because it is a part of an idol. Mitchell writes, "In contrast with the all-powerful image of the idol, fetishism (or "making fetish"), treats the object as a prop in a ritual performance rather than a free-standing, self-authorizing thing" (160n). In the case of Upper Paleolithic art, the cave wall itself furnished the material for making the cave drawings visible. The rock wall was a physical part of the images' magical nature. Studies of the drawings show that sometimes images were carved into the cave wall. At other times, projections of the rock wall or its grain suggested animal shapes and qualities. Researchers Leroi-Gourhan

and Lewis-Williams comment on the ways ancient artists incorporated the irregular surfaces of the cave into their artistic designs. The play of torchlight on the cave wall emphasizes the material structure of the cave and the way the animals seem to be "in" the cave itself. Lewis-Williams writes that the movement of torch light creates a contrast of light and shadow, the effect contributing to the illusion of animals "in" the cave. It seems the Upper Paleolithic artists relied upon the "technique of using shadows to complete a depiction [of an animal] . . . [P]eople used the insubstantial interplay of moving shadows to seek power and create images of that power" (Lewis-Williams 220). Thus, Lewis-Williams believes, the light and shadow contributed to the overall power of the images. He writes:

> An important reciprocity is implied by these images born of light and shadow. On the one hand, the creator of the image holds it in his or her power: a movement of the light source can cause the image to appear out of the murk; another movement causes it to disappear. The creator controls the image. On the other hand, the image holds its creator in its power: if the creator or subsequent viewer wishes the image to remain visible, he or she is obliged to maintain a posture that keeps the light source in a specific position. If the viewer tires and as a result lowers the light, the image seems to retreat into the realm behind the [rock face that separates material and spiritual worlds]. Perhaps more than any other Upper Paleolithic images, these 'creatures' (creations) of light and darkness point to a complex interaction between person and spirit, artist and image, viewer and image. (221)

The light/dark binary illustrates Mitchell's notion that, to some extent, humans control their images but then the images take on values of the society and begin to control humans.

Although Lewis-Williams sees this relationship as a reciprocity, Mitchell argues that images can become so powerful in a society that humans lose control and end up serving their images. Part of the potency of images must have come from the cave itself because evidence shows the use of naturally-occurring elements is a common feature of cave art. Some examples of the merging of natural rock with artistic forms include the Spotted Horse at Pech Merle. This example suggests that the artists saw the animal forms already present in the rock and merely used their skills to enhance the natural shape. The outline of a horse's head is clearly visible from a certain perspective. Lewis-Williams believes that images were "extracted" from the rock – an important distinction from the way modern viewers might think of engraving, etching, or marking rock

surfaces. The animals seemed to exist already in the clay or rock, their shapes suggested by some of the natural formations of the cave medium.

Another indication that Upper Paleolithic images were treated as fetishes can be seen in the kinds of interactions people had with the images. It is characteristic of fetishes, Mitchell argues, "to be beheld—to "be held" close by, or even reattached to, the body of the fetishist" (194). They may have been, as Mitchell describes, "a prop" in some sort of ritual, especially a prop that called for the interaction of participants. It is clear from evidence that Upper Paleolithic images may have been not only beheld but also held or used as a prop in a ritual. The evidence of this relationship exists in the painted handprints and finger fluting that can be seen in a number of caves. The cave art in Pech Merle, for instance, illustrates the kinds of interaction with the images that involved touching the rock wall. Judging from the existence of negative and positive handprints and the traces of finger fluting that remain, part of a ritual must have involved not just touching the images but also registering the event by making a permanent imprint on the rock. Positive handprints were created by applying paint directly to the cave wall with the flat of the hand. Negative handprints were created by placing the hand on the cave wall and then blowing paint onto the surface, creating an outline. The negative hands near the outline of the spotted horses in Pech Merle, for instance, suggests that the artist might have stood facing the horse, almost embracing the image (Lewis-Williams 216-219), an indication of its use as a kind of fetish.

Another example of finger-fluting exists at Cosquer Cave. That is, the soft mud sides of the cave invited participants to make impressions with their hands. They often dragged their fingers through the mud to make designs. Lewis-Williams writes,

> People trailed two or three fingers through the mud on the cave walls wherever the surface was malleable. Above the now-submerged entrance passage that leads to Cosquer, the finger marks are several yards up and their making must have required rudimentary ladders . . . The patterns so created are rectilinear, curving or zigzagged; some were gone over twice, so we can be sure that they were not entirely random—the shapes mattered . . . In Consquer, the finger flutings form a background to the images, which are, in every case, executed on top of them. (214-215)

The numbers of palm prints and the details of the finger-fluting suggest that many hands—including those of women and children—were involved in touching or embracing the rock images (215).

Just why touching was an important part of the ceremony is not known. The images themselves record human engagement with cave art,

indicating that the images invited participation and interaction. Perhaps touching the images made a personal connection with a spirit animal to gain power. If so, then the images were fetishes, personal tokens of power. An interesting discovery in Chauvet Cave might support this notion that image-making set up a fetish relationship with the image-makers. The earliest explorers discovered the tooth of a cave bear stuck into the rock wall. Since a fetish involves a part/whole object relationship, the tooth suggests a relationship to the real animal. The tooth was stuck into the wall of the cave, penetrating the soft mud. Farther on, explorers of the cave found the partial skull of a cave bear resting on an outcropping ledge. The tooth and the skull seemed to have been used in conjunction with rituals in the cave. The placement of the tooth and skull may indicate a ritual associated with powerful, dangerous animals. The placement of the tooth and skull suggests that the ancient visitor to the cave must have felt a connection to the animal through ownership of a part of it. This again would indicate a fetish. Possibly, through the use of the tooth and/or skull, participants were also making a connection to the cave that contained the spirit animals, in the form of images, making the cave itself a part of the ritual interaction.

Thus, the physical structure of the artwork gives us insight as to how the ancients might have experienced the caves. The entire structure of the cave, not just certain passages or walls, seemed to be important to the overall treatment of the images. The cave space represented a "conceptual unity," according to Lewis-Williams, and so the labyrinth of the cave served as a heuristic through which the beliefs and values of a group were expressed. That is, Upper Paleolithic artists "explored and adapted each cave in accordance with its peculiar topography and in terms of the particular shamanistic cosmology and social relations that prevailed at that time and place" (229). The caves dramatized the journey of a vision quest, making the process of cave painting a magical one involving the whole community.

## Totem

The third relationship established between Upper Paleolithic people and their images is that of the totem, an expression of group identity. Totems, writes Mitchell,

> are primarily objects of individual and collective identification. The totem may be a personal tutelary spirit or a clan emblem, the thing that gives a person or tribe its proper name. The naming of the object is also the naming of an individual or collective subject, as in the future of the team

mascot. As material objects, totems are generally inferior things in the hierarchy of beings: animal, vegetable, or mineral, rarely human, they are things which are adopted as counterparts to people, a kind of society of things we can use to think through what a human society is. Totems are familiar, everyday items, usually from the natural world, that have been found—singled out—usually by what Durkheim calls 'fortuitous circumstances,' and have subsequently become foundational for identity. (122)

Evidence supports the notion that Upper Paleolithic images were treated as totems, as markers of a social group's identity. For instance, the size and scope of cave art required extensive use of community resources, indicating that the imperatives for creating the cave art were shared. The shared responsibility of creating images meant that each member of the community was invested in the creation and preservation of images and probably made a personal association to the images.

Evidence of communal identity shows up within the caves, particularly when one considers that the process of image-making required considerable effort. One example is the large mural in Lascaux cave's Hall of the Bulls. Lewis-Williams writes:

That the paintings in the Hall of the Bulls were carefully 'composed' seems inescapable. But more can be said. The sheer size of the images suggests that they were communally made. People must surely have co-operated in the preparation of paint, construction of scaffolds, outlining the huge images, and then the application of the paint, even if one, or a few, highly skilled people directed the work. The space available in the Hall of the Bulls would have readily facilitated such co-operative labour. (250)

Thus, Lewis-Williams emphasizes the collective energy required to complete some of the larger works of Upper Paleolithic art, a project of many stages and many hands, indicating that the result of such work was what Mitchell has called a collective image that functions as a mark of cultural identity.

Collaboration on such a scale suggests the existence of a communal ritual that allowed communities to share their sacred practices as a group. The large chamber of the Hall of the Bulls, according to Lewis-Williams, "would have permitted a large number of people to view the images and to perform various rites, of which no evidence now remains. Such activities may well have included dancing, music, and chanting. This is the only part of Lascaux that could have accommodated a large number of people" (250). The images were "magical" in the sense that they provided the motifs for certain kinds of ceremonies.

Entering the cave must have resembled entering a labyrinth, a world different from the one of light and everyday experiences. Lewis-Williams believes the journey involved a transformation of (at least) the shaman into a power creature that intervened on behalf of the clan. But the entrance into a virtual world of spirit animals may have conferred upon all participants a stamp of identity expressed through animal images, as Vialou suggests. Participants of the ceremony may have found a connection to the gods or spirits of the place by yielding to the conditions of that world (its darkness) and enjoining the spirit there through interaction with its manifestations, i.e. by touching vital images. The journey may have been an initiation rite, as Lewis-Williams believes, or it may have been a kind of symbolic journey of the whole tribe as it celebrated a renewal of seasons or of a narrative of accomplishments or a future journey where members of the tribe would meet their animal god either through death or a looked-for visitation.

Whatever the purpose, the journey into the cave was special, even magical. That is, areas of the cave that received painted images were not spaces where people lived. Anthropological evidence shows that the habitable portions of caves was distinct from the areas marked by images (Lewis-Williams). If this is the case, then experiencing cave art, in Mitchell's description, created a "second nature" around the Paleolithic society, a nature that not only expressed a group identity but also summoned the power of spirit animals through a designated individual. Entrance to the cave was a tribal as well as a personal encounter with the spirit world.

The evidence shows that the practices surrounding the creation and veneration of the images fall into the categories of idol, fetish, and totem. The images required a great deal of effort, the kind of sacrifice required by a god. The imprint of a sacred image not only sanctified the cave but also, as participants encountered the sacred images inside the cave, became imbued with the character of the spirit god that lived there. This kind of experience must have lived in the imaginations of the people as they carried out their everyday chores and as they made plans to re-inscribe the images, to restore and maintain them, to create new ones. The life of the images became enmeshed in daily tasks so that knowledge of and experience with them created that second nature, that addition to the daily life. And that second nature was so powerful it called forth worship, veneration, sacrifice. It may even have seemed more real than real life.

Mitchell reminds us that the triad of attitudes toward images is not unique to prehistoric people; the attitudes are present in our own time as well. The virtual world evokes its own practices not so different from

those of the cave artists. In fact, the similarities are striking. Visitors to the electronic labyrinth sacrifice time and effort as if to a deity. Mitchell says the computer is both a calculating machine and a kind of idol that demands our fealty. In the surface/screen of new media "communication seems more transparent, immediate, and rational than ever before, at the same time [the new media] have enmeshed us in labyrinths of new images, objects, tribal identities, and ritual practices" (26).

In the digital age, visitors to cyberspace enter a labyrinth of virtual images in order to assume the power of a virtual identity. In the journey through the electronic labyrinth, the virtual encounters seem almost magical. One can take on godlike powers in the role playing games like World of Warcraft. One may carry around a bit of the magical labyrinth by way of an i-pod or a memory stick, establishing a fetish-like connection to the labyrinth, a connection that seems ever-present through many available terminals. One may even join a virtual community with a distinct "tribal identity" through the many networks and chat spaces online. We seem to be able to reach through an electronic membrane toward a digital equivalent of cosmic space. Just as the cave artists were able to leave their human bodies behind to adopt the bodies of the spirit animals of the cave, we are able to divest the physical limitations of human flesh and enter a digital labyrinth (Turkle).

To the many players of World of Warcraft, for instance, the virtual world is more than a game. Players can take on godlike qualities and even experience the power to kill. While some might argue that this is only a game and the objects are merely virtual representations induced by computer keystrokes, in actuality, the virtual objects of the game have power, even the power to make a virtual kill. Players can purchase charms and weapons and protection against sorcery. While it is true that the charms or weapons are simply codes in a game program, some players might argue that the results of the codes have a real impact on not only the game but in the physical world as well. For example, in World of Warcraft, a player may freeze the program by drawing a unicorn's horn toward a virtual tree. If the horn gets stuck in the tree, certain aspects of the game become disabled. When this happens, the programmers must reset the game. A matter of striking certain keys? A matter of applying some pigment to a rock? The images of cave and computer bring forth human responses, real actions from the real world. We do indeed "serve" the gods of the labyrinth (McLuhan qtd. in Mitchell 126).

Images online are especially powerful because they seem to summon the presence of the real person. Popular social media sites allow members to post their profiles along with a photograph. Often women depict

themselves in provocative poses. At other times the images seem to be variations of the same pose. The images are often invitations for sexual favors. The members of the site are all too aware of the power of the female form to attract. Is this a form of idolatry? We certainly use the female form to solicit attention, to invoke contact, practices not so different from those engaged in by our prehistoric counterparts. These practices Mitchell, argues, enmesh us in labyrinthine actions because one cannot see the real person; one encounters only avatars that seem more real, more satisfying than a physical encounter. We seem to be placing our desires and fears onto avatars only to see them staring back at us (27).

Given the fact that images create a "second nature" around us, the virtual world of the computer delivers that second nature. One has only to consider a popular online site called, ironically enough, Second Life, to realize the truth of this. Second Life has more than 4.4 million members who exist there in the form of a virtual self or a "graphical alter ego" (Wang A-1). William Gibson's imagined world seems to be realized in the experience of seeing "continents, islands, buildings of all architectural styles, expansive landscapes, spacious blue skies and lush foliage. The wind blows and birds chirp – sometimes accompanied by background music" (A-1). In this virtual world, one may create an image that others will "see." The characteristics of a "graphical alter ego" are carefully selected in order to project a certain virtual persona. One professor of media at Chicago's Columbia College, for instance, calls himself Man Michinaga (A-1). The popularity of the site indicates the desire of humans to shape (magically) their identities.

The online labyrinth holds out the promise of transforming the ordinary life to a life of grandeur, on par with the gods, so to speak. Identity need not take shape around a person's physical reality; in the labyrinth, identity can be anything the imagination might devise. Researcher of virtual identity formation, Sherry Turkle, in her study of humans and computers, analyzes the desire to shape identity. We seem to accomplish more, to *be* more in the virtual world, she argues. We may project an image of ourselves that has nothing to do with the physical reality of our bodies. Like the cave wall, the tabula rasa of the online labyrinth allows us to take whatever shape we desire, animated by imagination and the flickering screen of the computer console. We can transform our identity into a modern shaman by entering virtual space and its promise to cure the malaise of modern life.

In its ability to foster a communal identity, however disembodied it may be, the electronic labyrinth exerts a totemic force in the world. The avatars of the self are powerful enough to influence the physical world,

especially when they share a group identity. For example, members of the Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link, the W.E.L.L., connect through shared interests, a collective formed around the benefits of community, around communal interests, values, and concerns. Howard Rheingold's book on virtual communities describes the power of this group identity. W.E.L.L. seems to function more effectively than communities in real life. For instance, members offer sympathy, advice, expertise, opinions in ways that seem more satisfying than those of the real world. Based on this new-found satisfaction of the virtual, Rheingold speculates on the potential of the virtual forum for enriching public life. "CMC [computer mediated communication]," he writes, "has the power to change our lives on three different, but strongly interinfluential, levels" (72). Our personalities may be shaped, Rheingold argues, so that our sense of self merges with the "visually arresting images" of MTV, television, and the Internet. The images one finds there seem so animated that ordinary life pales by comparison. Second, "CMC technology offers a new capability of many-to-many communication," Rheingold writes. It is an opportunity to "rebuild community in the face of America's loss of a sense of a social commons"(73). The guiding force behind much of Rheingold's vision seems to be a sense of virtual community. Yoked together in the virtual community, the unified force of citizen action can be powerful enough to influence the third level of human concern, the political sphere. Within communities like W.E.L.L. there may be a rebirth of democracy in the Enlightenment spirit that spawned it, Rheingold believes. Although he tempers his enthusiasm for these changes with words of caution about the potential dangers as well as the benefits of computer-mediated communication, his zeal for the electronic labyrinth is echoed by others with a similar utopian view. In all, the electronic labyrinth seems to contain a force like the cave wall, the spirit of the community writ large, where the group congregates before it to admire the self-reflections.

## Talisman/Fetish

The modern use of and connection to the electronic labyrinth is a kind of fetish/talisman. One has only to observe users of i-pods, cell phones, and memory sticks to get a sense of the labyrinth's influence over the lives of its followers. Generation X-ers report feeling naked or disconnected if they forget their cell phones. As new technologies emerge, the bond between follower and labyrinth grows ever-stronger. By means of the invisible, electronic (magical?) connection to the labyrinth, users remain connected to their source of power and magic. The phone or tablet or

laptop functions as a status symbol, a kind of talisman. One can invoke the power of the labyrinth simply by pushing one of the many silver buttons, summoning an image out of the electronic cave onto a tiny screen.

The talismanic power of the electronic labyrinth, in all its ancient power, seems to have compressed itself, djinn-like, into the modern electronic devices. Reaching through a kind of invisible membrane, those who enter the modern labyrinth, the modern counterparts of those ancient cave painters, can invoke the power-images of the virtual world. The images there reflect humanity's deepest desires.

# Works Cited

Clottes, Jean and David Lewis-Williams. *The Shamans of Pre-History: Trance and Magic in the Painted Caves*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998. Print.

Delluc, Gilles and Brigitte Delluc. *Discovering Lascaux*. Trans. Angela Moyon. Bordeaux: Sud Ouest, 1990. Print.

Leroi-Gorhan, André. *Treasures of Prehistoric Art*. Trans. Norbert Guterman. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1967. Print.

Lewis-Williams, David. *The Mind in the Cave: Consciousness and the Origins of Art*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2002. Print.

Mitchell, W. J. T. *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2005. Print.

Mohen. Jean-Pierre. *Prehistoric Art: The Mythical Birth of Humanity*. Paris: Telleri, 2002. Print.

Rheingold, Howard. *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1993. Print.

Ruspoli, Mario. *The Cave of Lascaux: The Final Photographs*. New York: Abrams, 1987. Print.

Turkle, Sherry. *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995. Print.

Wang, Robert. "Millions Explore Virtual World of Second Life." *The Repository*. [Canton, Ohio] 8 July 2007: A-1+. Print.

# THE ENTHYMEME REIMAGINED
# FOR THE MODERN WORLD

In a recent television broadcast of *Washington Week in Review,* several media correspondents discussed the Bush administration's plan to advance a tougher military presence worldwide. One correspondent from the *Boston Globe* said many Americans believed that since the U.S. had suffered most from terrorism then the U.S. was justified in projecting a global military presence. The argument, if laid out in full, might go something like this: Nations are justified in projecting military strength in proportion to the perceived threat to their national security. The September 11 attacks revealed the extreme threat to U.S. national security. Therefore, the U.S. is justified in taking extreme military action to ensure national security.

The argument I have just given about U.S. military escalation is an example of what Aristotle called "an enthymeme." The enthymeme, so central to Aristotle's treatise on rhetoric (Grimaldi), has been the subject of much scholarship, especially so in recent times. An investigation into the nature of the enthymeme is important for modern writers and rhetors because Aristotelian rhetoric is so deeply ingrained in modern argumentation.

The standard way to view the enthymeme is through its form and content. That is, the enthymeme is typically characterized as a kind of syllogism with one or more missing premises (Gaines 7-8). The enthymeme is a powerful way to argue because the audience supplies what is missing. In terms of its content, the enthymeme is seen, typically, as dealing with the contingent and probable rather than with the necessarily true. Because enthymematic reason deals with the contingent, rhetoric is a practical art which allows reasoned discourse about matters that admit to more than one possible conclusion.

Explaining the enthymeme in terms of its form and content alone, however, does not sufficiently capture the dynamic of rhetorical exchange. How, for instance, are audiences compelled to supply missing elements of enthymematic reasoning? This essay explores a broader understanding of enthymeme as that which gives embodiment to argumentation in such a

way as to make arguments vivid and concrete. As such, the enthymeme has close ties with the metaphor. Although the characteristics of the enthymeme—its nature as contingent and probable and as an elided syllogism—have been derived from Aristotle's definition of the enthymeme as a "rhetorical syllogism" (1356b), Aristotle also defined the enthymeme as "the body or substance of persuasion" (1354a). This statement about substance and corporeality should not be read as metaphorical (Burnyeat) nor as a general kind of reasoning process (Gage). Rather, this statement should be read literally as a significant description from a thinker whose primary interest was biology.

Taking nature as his model, and looking at how living organisms were alike in form but distinct in individual detail, Aristotle used his model of Being and Becoming to inform other inquiries. Translator of *The Rhetoric*, George Kennedy notes that Aristotle believed civic and social phenomenon could attain actualities and potentialities like those of living organisms (51-2). When Aristotle used the words "substance" and "corporeal" to refer to rhetorical entities, his word choice suggests he looked at rhetorical exchange as enlivened discourse akin to animate nature. He calls the three branches of rhetoric the three "species" of rhetoric, a further indication that he was thinking in terms of natural phenomenon.

When Aristotle called the enthymeme the substance of proof, he established the enthymeme as a principle of embodiment. Aristotle, the biologist, used the term "substance" to describe the resulting union of form and matter; substance refers to the means by which a thing is recognized as a "this." As W. J. Bate writes, "Aristotle conceived of reality or nature as a *process of becoming or developing:* a process in which form manifests itself through concrete material, and in which the concrete *takes on form and meaning,* working in accordance with persisting, ordered principles" (14, emphasis in the original). Moreover, Kennedy's translation of *The Rhetoric* notes the term *entechnic pisteis*—proofs created by the rhetor— literally means proofs "embodied in art" (1355a).

In his opening of *The Rhetoric,* Aristotle writes "Let rhetoric be [defined as] an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion" (1355a). Here, Aristotle emphasizes the nature of persuasion, that its means are specific as well as diverse. That is, persuasion must become a particular if it is to be perceived by an audience. Of course, Aristotle says that rhetoric is a productive art and so does not concern itself with specific subjects; it is a general method which, when applied to specific cases, yields proofs that are unique to time and place. These proofs have the distinction of being concrete because they arise

from the milieu of a specific case. In other words, proofs are particulars and are therefore distinctive.

If the enthymeme is the central tenet of the *Rhetoric,* as Grimaldi has argued, how, exactly, does the enthymeme relate to "all available means of persuasion," specifically to the three types of appeals? What part do the auditors play in the acceptance of an enthymeme, for Aristotle writes that the judge must reach a judgment through the persuasion of the rhetor? And how is enthymematic reasoning related to Book III wherein Aristotle discusses style?

Books I and II of the *Rhetoric,* describe in great detail the material "stuff" of persuasion. Persuasive elements derive from the occasions where rhetoric is practiced, specifically, from the rhetorical possibilities that arise from situations where there are gathered auditors of a certain rank and age, where specific kinds of decisions are to be made, such as the need to wage war. These social and situational conditions form part of the material that a rhetor can use in the creation of proof. Aristotle then describes the form into which the material must be combined. These are the *konoi topoi*—the inferential forms (Grimaldi)—that a rhetor consults in regard to the way people habitually reason about their circumstances. In the original example about the U.S. military build-up, a reference to September 11 serves as a powerful trigger of memory. It is a substantive event which contributes material information to a rhetorical situation. Knowledge of the events of September 11, coupled with an inferential form, produced the enthymeme: "Because the U.S. has suffered most from terrorism, then the U.S. is justified in advancing global military might."

At one level, then, the enthymeme as a corporeal frame of proof is the resulting combination of the material of a rhetorical case and the inferential form of the *konoi topoi.* Enthymematic thinking is specific to the case and this specificity comes from the material stuff of the social context. The context is already familiar, already part of the thought process of a specific category of auditors.

At another level, the enthymeme as "substance of persuasion" needs to be explored in more detail. The enthymeme is a substance, a specific thing actualized within a specific setting and perceived by a specific group of people. As a kind of vital entity the enthymeme is energized at the level of rhetorical exchange, creating in the audience a response to the reason and the character of the rhetor. Referring again to the original example, the enthymeme about U.S. military escalation is a *this* for people who can measure the violence of September 11 against future military violence and then agree that proportionate action is justified. They will give their

consent to such reasoning because they, by nature or training, are convinced by arguments of proportion.

Thus, the enthymeme is a principle of embodiment at more than one level: first, when the rhetor joins the matter and form of the rhetorical stuff through the *konoi topoi,* second, when the rhetor adopts the enthymeme into his or her unique character and style of expression. Through the materiality of each case and through the expressiveness of the rhetor, proof itself is made a substantive reality for an audience. In order for an audience to make a judgment, proof must be perceived as such. Aristotle says, in the opening of the *Rhetoric,* that audiences are persuaded when they observe a demonstration: "The persuasive is persuasive to someone (and is either immediately plausible and believable in itself or seems to be shown by statements that are so)" (1356a). Thus, perception is a key part of persuasion.

Perception of proof must be enacted rapidly, says Aristotle. Book III of the *Rhetoric* underscores the nature of the enthymeme as something apprehended quickly, without going through the process of formal logic. In other words, because the enthymeme does not require the auditor to go through the reasoning process of a formal syllogism, proof is realized in a kind of sudden insight.

With regard to this sudden insight, Grimaldi notes that Aristotle characterizes the enthymeme as a means to impart knowledge to audiences succinctly. Grimaldi writes, "Aristotle is concerned that the audience acquire knowledge, but knowledge which he qualifies as *mathesis taxeia"*(98) or a method of efficient learning. This efficiency, writes Grimaldi,

> is achieved in three ways: 1) by enthymeme with respect to thought, 2) by antithesis with respect to style, and, 3) in language by metaphor. The point at issue here for Aristotle is the most effective way to convey to an other this quick, comprehensive insight, and he centers his attention on the three components which mediate it, namely, thought, language, style. (98)

In other words, when examined in terms of an effect in the audience, enthymematic reasoning is efficient as well as aesthetic. Rhetors, then, are skilled at turning what audiences have experienced or already know into vivid impressions that make arguments concrete.

In many ways, the qualities of efficiency and creativity also describe the use of metaphors. Since Aristotle described metaphors as the power to "bring-before-the-eyes"—making the distant more present—it seems reasonable to think that Aristotle wished to show a parallel or complementary relationship between the vividness of stylistic display of