

Simple Forms of Image in Art History

Las formas simples de la imagen en la Historia del Arte

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Resumen

El estudio del arte prehistórico ha estado condicionado por las teorías acerca de la mente primitiva, el pensamiento prelógico o el inconsciente psicoanalítico. En este artículo, los autores desarrollan un nuevo método analítico en el que parten del concepto de las formas simples. La actividad artística comienza con el instinto lúdico, la búsqueda del ritmo y la simetría y la necesidad de "mímesis" o imitación. La expresión de las emociones, sentimientos o ideas puede acompañar o no a estas necesidades primarias. Este método se aplica a cuatro ejemplos: el desfile de los soldados, el carro de guerra, la cerámica decorada de Cnossos y los petroglifos de un pueblo de la selva amazónica.

Palabras clave

Arte prehistórico, formas simples, símbolo, desfile de soldados, carro de guerra, decoración cerámica, petroglifos.

Abstract

The study of Prehistoric art has been conditioned by the theories of primitive mind, pre-logical thought or psychoanalytical unconscious. In this paper, the authors develop a new analytical method, starting from the concept of simple forms. The artistic behavior begins with the playful instinct, the search of rhythm and symmetry and the necessity of "mimesis" or imitation. The expression of emotions, feelings, or ideas can be added or not to these primary necessities. This method is applied to four examples: the march of soldiers, the war chariot, Cnossos decorated pottery and the drawings and petroglyphs of an Amazon forest people.

Key Words

Prehistoric art, simple forms, symbol, march of soldiers, war chariot, pottery decoration, petroglyphs.

Introduction

The physician and philosopher Thomas Browne (1605-1682) stated once: “men often swallow falsities for truths, doubts for certainties, feasibilities for possibilities and things impossible as possibilities themselves” (*Pseudologia epidemica*, 1646). Doctor Browne was speaking about the countless vulgar errors performed by uneducated people but we nevertheless could illustrate this paragraph’s ideas just by reading considerations often carried out by competent historians when talking about early humankind’s art, religions, and mentality.

Borrowing his words we could hold that “human beings – or researchers – sometimes swallow falsities as truths, take doubts for certainties, mistake facts with possibilities and believe that impossible things are possible”. This is nothing but the way in which sometimes archeologists proceed. When analyzing ecological factors, technique and technical production, or habitat forms and house-building in Prehistory they take for granted the principle that people of the past they study were basically similar to themselves and to their own contemporaries. However that will be no more like that as soon as one sees through religious ideas and its reflections in the archeological register through images and objects of different kinds; the researcher as rational *homo oeconomicus* is then replaced by the mystical one.

Furthermore sometimes animals appeared to act more rationally when hunting, running away or protecting themselves against other animals than our Paleolithic hunters, supposedly shrouded in the mists of a magical or symbolic thought throughout their lives although most of this life, dedicated to hunting, harvesting, or making their tools had been impossible if they hadn’t behaved at least with the ability and the capacity of perceiving objectively the world that allows animals to survive in the fight for life.

Our purpose here is to develop the principles of a method as objective as possible, that is a method in which one starts from the least number of theoretical principles or ideas of the historiographical school to try to rough out the basic concepts from which classifying as easy as possible images, non-figurative artistic elements, or objects with an attributed artistic value parallel or on the fringes of the technical uses those objects could have fulfilled in the past.

1. Simple Forms

The concept “simple forms” was first used by André Jolles in the field of literary criticism.¹ “Simple forms” are understood as a basic element of literary creation, such as a joke, a dialogue or a verbal confrontation, an alternation between a chorus and a *choregos*, simple rhymed structures, representations of type scenes... that can be created to be used orally or written, in the folk literature, or inserted in more complex works, either through their superposition or through the integration in a complex structure, as it happened in the case of the Greek Tragedy, that starting from folk songs (“Goat song”: “τράγος οἶδη” – *tragos oide* –) evolves into complex forms that allow the

¹ André Jolles, *Formes simples* (Paris: Seuil, 1972).

development of a plot from the mythic matter of the epic cycle, as pointed out by Francisco Rodríguez Adrados.²

In a complex literary work, a simple form can be framed in the development of the main plot and it can sometimes be subsumed in it or keep its independence, when it is interspersed for instance as a secondary narration spoken through one of the work's main characters. A very well-known case of Latin literature is Petronius' *Satyricon*, in which one of the so-called Milesian Fables is included: the erotic tale of the Ephesian matron, independent of the main plot. In the case of the Greek erotic novel, on the contrary, some secondary stories are going on in parallel or inserted one inside other like *matryoshka dolls*, to flow at the end of the work into the climax of the plot development. One of the most famous examples would be that of the structure of *Don Quixote*, a work that contains many encrusted stories and that alternates those stories with dialogues in different narrative tenses as the development of the main plot goes on.

This very phenomenon is also yielded in the field of visual arts, where a decorative motif – or a succession of decorative motifs – can stay as an isolated motif or be a part of a more complex decorative whole, in the case of architecture, painting or pottery. At the same time, those motifs can be combined in a wider work with independent scenes that can just be overlapped, aligned, or framed in a pictorial or architectural weft that gives them a sense inside a whole iconographic program.

A first case could be Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. In its three panels – and as a well-structured iconographic program – dozens of independent images are gathered together, endowed with an individual sense and in each case elaborated as allegories of some moral or religious proverb, or as a symbolic representation of a vice or a virtue. The “reading” of the picture would demand an individual examination of every single figure or pair of figures in order to understand them afterwards as part of a whole or as part of a compositional form that in the medieval literature was usually called “mirror” (*Speculum*) and that we could call panorama.³

The build-up of independent images linearly organized following the temporal outline of the days of the week, the months, or the seasons of the year is very much well-known in the field of medieval illuminated manuscripts but it is also frequent in the Romanesque and Gothic iconographic programs, above all in the cathedrals' portals, where one could carry out the exegesis of every image and find on most occasions their literary and biblical origins.⁴

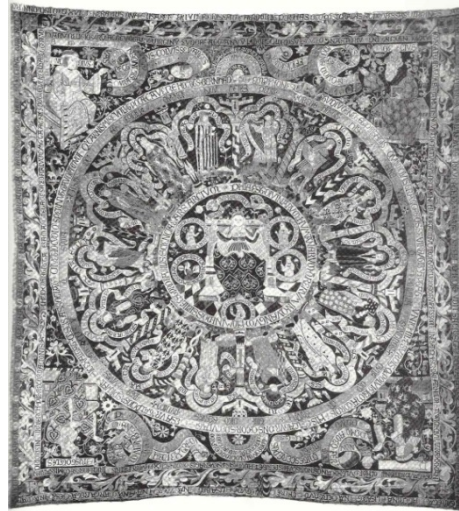
² Francisco Rodríguez Adrados, *Fiesta, comedia y tragedia. Sobre los orígenes griegos del teatro* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1972).

³ Serafín Moralejo Álvarez, *Formas elocuentes. Reflexiones sobre la teoría de la representación* (Madrid: Akal, 2004).

⁴ See C. Maritano, “Paisajes escritos y espacios representados”, 253-82; Jérôme Baschet, “Los lugares del más allá”, 283-322; Willibald Sauerländer, “Tiempos vacíos y tiempos llenos”, 113-52; and Enrica Pagella, “Ver, copiar e interpretar: artistas y circulación de modelos en el ámbito eclesiástico”, 449-96; all of them in Enrico Castelnuovo and Giuseppe Sergi (eds.), *Arte e Historia en la Edad Media. I. Tiempos, espacios e instituciones* (Madrid: Akal, 2009).

A very complex iconographic program can also obey to a didactical purpose with a learned bias, as it happens with the *Philosophy Tapestry (La Rose de Heiningen)* of 1516 in which all the concepts of Scholastic Philosophy and Theology are synthesized round a series of circles and arches (Fig. 1).⁵

Figure 1



The tapestry is a real encyclopedia that follows Isidore of Seville's model and for this reason, even though spectators can appreciate directly its plastic values, its interpretation would practically demand the use of an appropriate reading guide. Not only without texts but without a whole philosophical-theological hermeneutic tradition, this philosophical mirror would be impossible to be interpreted, because the whole doesn't have a visual but a textual logic, based on the accumulation and superposition of some images that seem spatially chaotic although conceptually they are not.

It is very important to take this into account both in the case of medieval art as in that of the classic or Prehistoric arts because it has to be avoided to fall into temptation of thinking that every set of images has always to obey to a complex and well-structured iconographic program. This is what happens sometimes but not many other times and that's why it has no sense to try to find a complex explanation to render an account of every single part of a set of graphic representations that can be the result of a voluntary accumulation at a concrete historical moment or the result of some overlappings carried out through time due to the continued use of the same building or of the same place for the same purpose. Ancient temples had got *favissae*, where disused offerings were sent, just like Jews piled up in the *jeniza* of their synagogues disused texts that would be absurd to interpret like a well-organized library.

In the case of Prehistoric art, that we are going to study with further detail, the lack of writing records prevent us from having the keys to access to the basic iconographic elements of some cultures whose languages, myths, or rites we can't know. So we will have to be modest in our aims and try to be able to distinguish what

⁵ Lucien Braun, *L'Image de la philosophie* (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2005).

we can know totally or partially from what will always be inaccessible for us starting from the analysis of proofs at the disposal of all the researchers following the common protocols of all scientific research, that advise to distinguish facts from partial interpretations and these from global macro-theories. Such anthropological, psychoanalytical or historical-religious macro-theories provide us often with a misleading security since their use guarantees almost always the success of discovering what was previously known because it was already done by the method's principles.

In a text written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1845 but unpublished until 1934,⁶ those two authors criticized Bruno Bauer's historical method that allowed to infer and predict everything starting from an abstract principle, that of the *Unique One*, as follows:

The "apposition" is Saint Sancho's ass [so is he called], his logical and historical locomotive, the driving force of "the book", reduced to its briefest and simplest expression. In order to transform one representation into another, or to prove the identity of two quite different things, a few intermediate links are sought that partly by their meaning, partly by their etymology, and partly by their mere sound can be used to establish an apparent connection between the two basic representations. These links are then appended to the first representation in the form of an apposition, and in such a way that one gets farther and farther away from the starting-point and nearer and nearer to the point one wants to reach. If the chain of oppositions has got so far that one can draw a conclusion without any danger, the final idea is likewise fastened on in the form of an apposition by means of a dash, and the trick is done.

[...] The apposition [...] can also be reversed and thus lead to new, even more complicated tricks and more astounding results. [...] Alongside the apposition we have synonymy, which Saint Sancho exploits in every way. If two words are etymologically linked or are merely similar in sound, they are made responsible for each other, or if one word has different meanings, then, according to need, it is used sometimes in one sense and sometimes in the other, while Saint Sancho makes it appear that he is speaking of one and the same thing in different "refractions".⁷

This kind of leaps in the dark is quite frequent in the interpretations of primitive religions as well as in the different theories of Prehistoric art developed up to this moment that we will now sum up.

2. Theories on Prehistoric Art

Even though they are amply known, it seems necessary to carry out a fast overview on those theories that try to give an account of Prehistoric art representations. It is quaint to realize that although the Paleolithic was evidently not the only moment in Prehistory when "art" activity was registered, all the explanation or comprehension attempts of this aspect of human activity as such are almost exclusively centered in this moment.

In some cases, these attempts of explanation are accompanied with a "theory of mind", because "art" is precisely one of the aspects in which the trace of cognitive

⁶ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *La Ideología alemana* (Madrid: Akal, 2014). English version consulted in: https://mecollectedworks.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/marx-engels-collected-works-volume-5_-marx-karl-marx.pdf [accessed 19 October 2015].

⁷ *Ibid.*, 235-36.

evolution of the different human species is searched.⁸ It seems also quaint to realize how the reflection on the definition of art, the aesthetic theories and their application to the different phases of history are absent almost in all the authors who make their efforts to identify, classify, and assign a meaning to the Prehistoric graphic representations.⁹

Since the very moment in which the Cantabrian paintings appeared and their antiquity was admitted, some authors like E. Lartet and H. Christy held that art development should be understood as a leisure activity.¹⁰ At the same time, a specialist in the first moments of Prehistory as a discipline, E. Piette, holds that the inhabitants of the caverns represented in their art (in that case over all movable art) things that were familiar to them and the animals they ate: “There wouldn’t be necessary to look for other motives to explain their preferences”.¹¹ One had to wait for the authors inspired by the anthropological theories of the beginnings of the twentieth century to find a theory that looked for the meaning of Paleolithic representations and that, at the same time, were getting away from them: theory will condition the conclusions from the very beginning. The author that defines this moment is H. Breuil, who in 1952 culminates his great work: *Quatre cents siècles d’art pariétal*.¹²

According to H. Breuil’s theory, we would have to resort to a set of basic ideas to be able to understand cave art: sympathetic magic, totemism, and the rites of propitiation of fertility.¹³ Although based on outdated and even despised anthropological premises, these ideas are still quite present today in the popular consideration of Paleolithic representations. According to them, the Paleolithic hunter-gatherers – examples of “primitive mentality” – represented the animals they wanted to hunt or eliminate, or those species (the human being included) whose plentiful reproduction they wished. Due to their pre-logic thinking, they would have been

⁸ Theories about the origins of art, technique, mind, and religion are interspersed in the study of human evolution. We are not going to go into them because what we are analyzing are the “simple forms in the art”. Two good works on them can be found in Steven Mithen, *The Prehistory of Mind. A Search for the origins of Art, Religion, and Science* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996); and David Lewis-Williams, *La mente en la caverna. La conciencia y los orígenes del arte* (Madrid: Akal, 2005). These books don’t differ a lot from each other in its structure from the big philosophic or psychoanalytic reconstructions as we will see afterwards.

⁹ On this matter, see José Carlos Bermejo and Mar Llinares García, “Arqueología y lenguaje: el problema de la definición del arte”, *Dialogues d’histoire ancienne*, 32 (2006): 9-24. Anthropology tried to solve the question of “primitive art” with relative success. See, for example, Howard Morphy, “The Anthropology of Art”, in Tim Ingold (ed.), *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 1994), 648-85; or also Robert Layton, *The Anthropology of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 2nd ed.).

¹⁰ On the consideration of prehistoric representations as “art for art’s sake”, see P. J. Ucko and A. Rosenfeld, *Arte paleolítico* (Madrid: Guadarrama, 1967), 117-9; or also Eduardo Ripoll Perelló, *Orígenes y significado del arte paleolítico* (Madrid: Sílex, 1986), 94-5.

¹¹ Edouard Piette, *L’Art pendant l’Age du renne* (Paris: Masson, 1907), 103.

¹² H. Breuil, *Quatre cents siècles d’art pariétal* (Montignac: Centre D’Études et de Documentation Préhistoriques, 1952). Even though he is usually cited as distinguished representative of this theory, Breuil is much more important for his labor of dating and documentation of Paleolithic art.

¹³ Primitive human beings’ obsession for fertility and their fear for suffering starvation and scarcity were firmly settled commonplaces in the Anthropology at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century and had got far-reaching echoes in the interpretations of Prehistoric art and religion, over all in relation with the idea of matriarchy and the cult to the mother-goddess. On this subject, see Mar Llinares García, *Los lenguajes del silencio. Arqueología de la religión* (Madrid: Akal, 2012).

incapable of distinguishing the object from their representation, the cause and the effect; due to their lack of an objective perception of space and time, they would carry out rites of sympathetic magic, similar to the curses of historical epochs and, acting on an image – for instance, drawing a wound on a body –, through which they would get to hunt animals in a more easy way. Through the realization of other gestures and the elaboration of other objects they would get, for example, to bring the rain, to help out the sun to rise, and to combat diseases or the very death. The principles of criticism developed by Marx and Engels could be applied to this theory because the only thing that has been tried to do with it is finding its premises through data observation – if they match up with it – or through the construction of analogies and the refutation at all costs of everything that could contradict it.

Since the 1960s there are two main authors considered as a reaction to the interpretative excesses of this global theory in the field of Paleolithic art: A. Laming-Emperaire and A. Leroi-Gourhan.¹⁴ The basis of their studies, in part anticipated by M. Raphaël's points of view, consists in starting by analyzing the historical panels looking for groupings of signs and associations of meanings, rejecting in general the ethnographic comparison, a bit simply performed in the previous phase.¹⁵ The starting point would be, first of all, a detailed study of all the already known rests and then an undertaking of a classification of the signs and a description of a possible evolution of them in time, establishing the frequency of their emergence, the most common associations, their situation in the space of the cavern, etc. The consideration of the cavern as a sanctuary – accepting Breuil's unprovable premise – and its homogeneous character – often without taking into account the frequency in which animals were represented – burdens to a great extent the scope of what without any doubt was the greatest contribution of the twentieth century to the study of this matter. That should be the result of the research – what doesn't seem to be like that – and not its premise, and so it could be applied on it the same methodological criticism as in the previous interpretation.

Also in the twentieth century and almost at the same time of the works of Laming-Emperaire and Leroi-Gourhan, there is another group of authors that, on the one hand, flees the unifying theories, considering art as a mass media with many motivations (that we could exemplify with Ucko and Rosenfeld's work, published in 1967, or with the works of G. Sauvet)¹⁶ and, on the other hand, re-uses in part some of the previous ideas, as it is the case of the so-called "Shamanic Theory" according to which there would be a relationship among the achievement and contemplation of these images and the ecstatic rites of shamanism. In such rites, as it is attested in many cultures, the shaman – with or without the help of drugs – would fall into ecstasy and would carry out a psychotropic travel up to heaven climbing the cosmic tree or down to hell, depending on the case. This premise is of course unprovable in the case of Paleolithic cave art because the

¹⁴ For a more detailed vision of their systems, in which we are not going to go into here, see Anette Laming-Emperaire, *La signification de l'art rupestre paléolithique* (Paris: Picard, 1962); André Leroi-Gourhan, *Préhistoire de l'art occidental* (Paris: Mazenod, 1965).

¹⁵ Max Raphaël, *Prehistoric Cave Paintings* (New York: Pantheon, 1945).

¹⁶ P. J. Ucko and A. Rosenfeld, *Arte paleolítico*; in the case of G. Sauvet, one can see for instance "La communication graphique paléolithique (de l'analyse quantitative d'un corpus de données à son interprétation sémiologique)", *L'Anthropologie*, Vol. 92, 1 (1988): 3-16.

carrying out of some realistic pictures of animals would be impossible in a state of trance and there is no possibility of showing that a similar trance were necessary for its contemplation.

The followers of the consideration of Prehistoric art as a mass media, as a conventional and therefore obviously context-conditioned semiological system, reject the idea of a unique “theory” that can explain everything, what to a large extent implies to admit that it is not possible to understand completely the “meaning,” in the sense the previous global theories used this idea. Aesthetic, magic, religious, social, or communicative motivations... all of them should have place as a trigger element for the activity of representation.

But global theories that use a principal element to explain the artistic Paleolithic activity have always been present. This is the case of the previously mentioned “shamanic theory”, displayed over all in the works of J. Clottes and D. Lewis-Williams, in which a whole theoretical corpus around this hypothesis is configured.¹⁷ The great variety that presents the pictorial activity of the caves would be explained by the interaction of four different factors: the topography, the human reactions to the altered states of conscience, the cosmologies devised by societies that occupied the caves, and the concrete exploration and use of those elements.¹⁸

In the last years and after the regression of Postmodernism there seems to be a general trend towards integration in the study of art, in the general frame of the studies of material culture, looking for little details, refining data analyses and making researchers to resign themselves not to seek big global theoretical results. The study of the sensorial/motor schemes for the elaboration of paintings, statuettes, engravings and other types of objects, analyzed in the light of neurology and cognitive psychology, is announced as a line of research, modest in its expectations but more secure in its results.¹⁹

Apart from archeologists and prehistorians but also having influence on them in a concrete field of study of the Prehistoric art, different applications of psychoanalytic theories (over all of Jungian kind) have been carried out. Although S. Freud was very keen of Archeology, he never used it systematically in his studies; C. J. Jung, for his part, did try it with his archetypes and collective unconscious theory and so did following him some of their disciples.

¹⁷ Jean Clottes, *Cave art* (New York: Phaidon, 2008); Jean Clottes and David Lewis-Williams, *Los chamanes de la Prehistoria*; David Lewis-Williams, *La mente en la caverna. La conciencia y los orígenes del arte*. The relationship of shamanism with Prehistory has got nevertheless a further haul. See S. de Beaune, “Chamanisme et préhistoire. Un feuilleton à épisodes”, *L’Homme*, Vol. 38, 147 (1998): 203-19.

¹⁸ The unity showed by the paintings of the caves we know would be related with the existence of a common frame of beliefs or similar ritual practices, that would support the thesis of shamanism; see Jean Clottes and David Lewis-Williams, *Los chamanes*, 94 and 106.

¹⁹ See, for instance, Margaret W. Conkey, Olga Soffer, Deborah Stratmann, and Nina G. Jabloski (eds.), *Beyond Art: Pleistocene Image and Symbol* (San Francisco: Allen Press, 1997); on cognitive archeology, see Colin Renfrew, Chris Firth and Lambros Malafouris (comps.), *The Sapient Mind: Archaeology meets Neuroscience* (Philos. Trans. R. Soc., 2008, 363, issue 1499); apart from the well-known Steven Mithen, *The Prehistory*.

The best known of them in the field of art was Erich Neumann.²⁰ In his works, he put into practice the comparative method with the same paralogisms denounced by K. Marx and F. Engels in the paragraph cited before, that is, jumping again from analogy to analogy to conclude finding the theory from which he started. This way he found the Jungian archetype of the mother and soul in Paleolithic art, with the famous “Venus” of the Neolithic, of the Near East, of the classical world and of the big religions of the Far East. The archetype would always be the same; different are its incarnations and configurations, sometimes full, sometimes partial but they always allow to confirm the basic theory.

Not in the field of psychoanalysis but in the psychiatric one of schizophrenia developed his work Julian Jaynes, in a book in which the material register of the Neolithic world and over all that of the Ancient East and Greece, played a central role.²¹ According to J. Jaynes, schizophrenia would be an illness developed with the beginning of the big cultures, what is not true from the clinical point of view. That arguable definition of such illness admitted by Jaynes considers schizophrenia as a universal illness, as E. Fuller Torrey – one of the best experts in his work – has shown, losing therefore his theory most of its basis.²²

For Jaynes, the birth of the State, the emerging of social classes and the development of writing and abstract thought would have caused the excessive separation in the thinking and in the functioning of the frontal lobes, among abstraction, thinking, and language, and sense, passion, and emotion, separation that wouldn't exist in the primitive world, in which one would admit the positive social role of inspiration, divination, magic, and trance. All these functions would be relegated and split in developed civilizations that would pay with the suffering of schizophrenics the abandonment of this natural and primitive state of human psyche. It's obvious that its broad use of the archeological and artistic register was carried out with the same comparative method we pointed out in the case of Neumann. Being centered in a very specific illness and in the assumption that such illness is not universal, Jaynes' theory is rebutted not for the use of archeological evidence by the author but for his own basic assumption, what doesn't happen with Neumann because his master's archetypes are nothing but a metaphysical theory.

3. The Logic of the Visible

Edmund Husserl, the great philosopher, said that the mission of philosophers was to make visible the evident, what is not easy because everything we perceive comes to us in the frame of determined cultural and linguistic traditions. The philosopher, as the mathematician, must have the capacity of seeing the essential in order to appreciate for instance the proprieties of what is a circle or a triangle and making them evident just as

²⁰ Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother. An Analysis of Archetype* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963); *The Origin and History of Consciousness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964, 2nd ed.), book supported by a prologue of Jung himself.

²¹ Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976).

²² Edwin Fuller Torrey, *Schizophrenia and Civilization* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1980).

the chemist has to analyze substances to find in them the molecules they are composed of, or as the physicist has to make big efforts to bring to light the structure of matter.

Following this method, we will start from a very simple assumption. Figured art is something that can be seen the same by any researcher. And if in this field of study something is not seen or there is no evidence for it to be seen, we will have to admit that either it didn't exist or, if it did exist, it is impossible to be known, no matter how much any aprioristic theory of history – such as Bruno Bauer's – states the inexorable necessity of its existence.

We will develop now some basic ideas around the visual and artistic perception, and we will apply later the results of them to three examples: the forms and rhythms of decoration, the image of the coordinated march of soldiers, and the representation of the warrior and his war chariot.

3.1. Art and visual perception

Human sensorial perception is a very complex process in which physical factors – such as light – or chemical ones – such as those which produce flavors – take part. Those factors structure themselves in a perception-system coordinated by space-time structures that regulate the functioning of our mind, the rhythms of our body, and all our physiology. One needs to perceive the world as it is to survive, either looking for food or escaping an imminent danger, and to be able to perceive our fellow human beings and to identify them bodily and socially.

We are in front of a huge field of study, that of neurosciences and all the psychology and psychopathology, but what interests us most now it's only the case in which human beings create and perceive images, figures, and symbols made by ourselves with our own hands, with a determined end not necessarily practical or utilitarian. In that field, figured representations of Prehistoric art could be included.

We have seen in the previous section how since the nineteenth century one tended to put on the same level the supposed “primitive human being” with the civilized child or with the fool: two kinds of people that would act as living fossils of the past, either because primitives were like the childhood of the human being or because the fools got back in history plunging again into primeval chaos. There was a supposed embryological law – “Haeckel's law” – according to which ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, that is, that the human fetus in its development would be passing through all the previous phases of animals' history, from the primordial fishes up to the higher mammals.

Sometimes authors like S. Freud were conscious that these comparisons were a bit hazardous and therefore he called his book *Totem and Taboo*: “my novel”.²³ One of his most orthodox disciples in the field of Anthropology, the Hungarian Geza Roheim, developed his idea in the concrete case of schizophrenia – the most mysterious and serious of mental illnesses – setting parallelisms now not between the primitive human

²³ Sigmund Freud, *Obras completas*, Vol. 2 (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 1973), 1745-850.

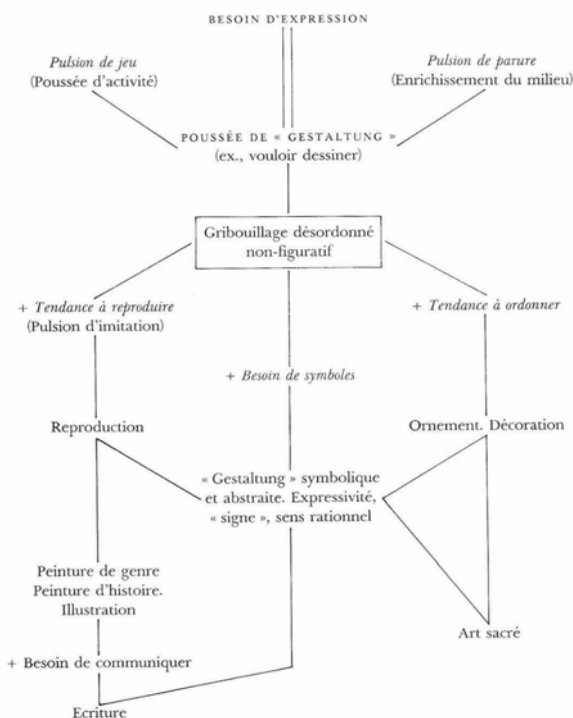
being and the neurotic one – as his master has done – but between the primitive human being and the psychotic – the schizophrenic one –, whose mentality would be similar to magic mentality because in both cases the idea of causality is absent, and because in both cases the behavior is managed by the basic body drives: hunger, sex, and fear, developed in the reduced social ambit of the family.²⁴

Following this way some other authors like Leo Navratil tried to compare schizophrenic patients' drawings with primitive art or Egyptian painting, to conclude that facts such as lack of perspective, distortion of body images and its fragmentation would be reflections of a mentality shared by patients and primitives, who through art would be letting the unconscious talk as a spontaneous designer of images.²⁵

Nothing can be further than that. In the more systematic study of this subject, Hans Prinzhorn points out that there could be common characters between both cases but reality is much more complex because the lack of perspective can also be found in drawings of healthy people due to their mere pictorial inability and it is necessary to distinguish in those works of psychiatric art – whose production was favored by psychiatrists – what can be cultural topics from what would be the expression of the illness itself.²⁶

The process of artistic creation itself is very complex and H. Prinzhorn summarizes it in the following diagram (Figure 2):

Figure 2



²⁴ Geza Roheim, *Magia y esquizofrenia* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1982).

²⁵ Leo Navratil, *Esquizofrenia y arte* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1972).

²⁶ Hans Prinzhorn, *Expressions de la folie. Dessins, peintures, sculptures d'asile* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).

The human being has got the necessity of expression or communication basically by using for it the language and the expression of the body but such a necessity is sometimes carried out in a graphic way. In that necessity, the basic element is the playing drive, the playful element to which the historian Johann Huizinga dedicated a whole book to study its importance in History.²⁷ That formal playing drive due to the mere pleasure of creating forms explains a great deal of the decorative activity and has no more psychological depth, as it happens with music and dance, that can sometimes be only rhythm, play and entertainment.²⁸

The playing drive runs parallel to the own body's and environment's drive, what explains a lot about aesthetics in body and dress, in decorative and architectural arts. Both drives come together when one wants to give a form and if one tries to do it, the steps will be as follows: firstly, non-figurative disordered scribbling that can become a tendency to order and measure and a tendency to imitate. The tendency to order will lead to the development of ornament and decoration and it will be essential in the sacred art, for instance, to distinguish spatially and symbolically what is marked as sacred of what is not. The tendency to imitation would lead to try to reproduce reality, either in a symbolic form, in an abstract way, or in an expressive way. Figuration would become concrete in historic paintings – in artwork – and run into the need of creating signs to reproduce reality through writing, where signs are joined together with concepts.

A drawing of an ill person, as that of the Figure 3, is often a reconstruction carried out after the experience of the hallucination itself in which the author tries to express what he felt at the time of perceiving how the perception of his or her own body was getting distorted.

Figure 3



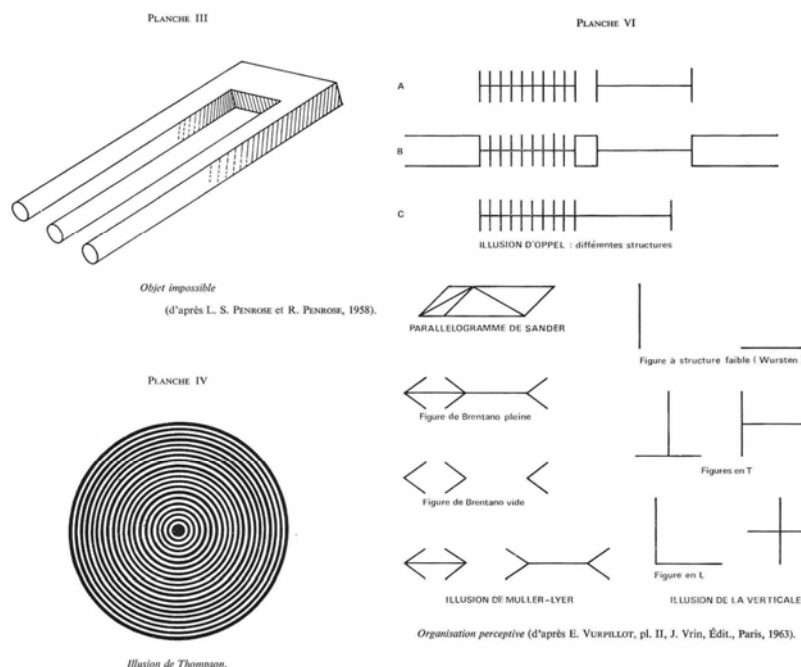
²⁷ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (Madrid: Alianza, 1998).

²⁸ See Enrico Fubini, *La estética musical desde la antigüedad hasta el siglo XX* (Madrid: Alianza, 1988); Malcolm Budd, *Music and the Emotions. The Philosophical Teories* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985); and Laird Addis, *Of Mind and Music* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1999).

In order to understand ill and healthy people’s visual perceptions it is necessary to take into account how does our visual perception works and to distinguish, in the case of illness, what can be a visual hallucination or not, if one wants to defend – as it has been done – that it can be reflected in Prehistoric art.

Our visual perceptions can be subject to great confusion at the time of identifying objects, favored by the distance to which they are, by the illumination or by the meteorological circumstances. Perception of forms can lead to great confusion as it happens in the examples gathered by Henry Ey in his monumental *Traité des hallucinations*.²⁹ This is the case of the “impossible object” (Figure 4) or of the “Thompson’s Illusion”, the so-called “Illusion of Muller-Lyer” and the rest of the images that can be seen in the Figure 4.

Figure 4



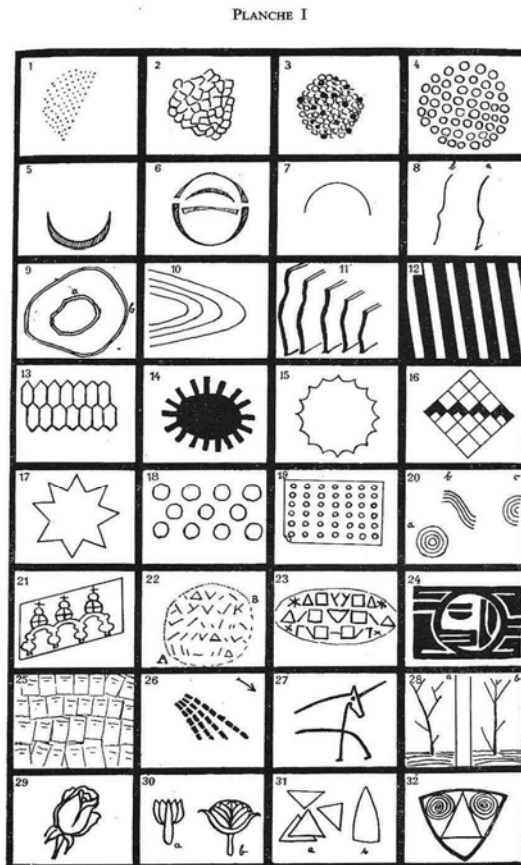
These confusing perceptions are given along our waking state in which our mind receives millions of images that pass from the eyes to the optic thalamus and from it to the receiving centers of the vision. Anyway only a very tiny part of them – less than the 10% – is to be processed by the frontal lobes.

The difference among pure and processed sensations is the key to understand the mechanism of visual hallucinations (also those of any sort) and knowing them makes it possible to support certain interpretations developed on Prehistoric art.

²⁹ Henri Ey, *Traité des hallucinations*, Vols. 1-2 (Paris: Masson, 1973).

Visual hallucinations can appear in psychoses – such as schizophrenia –³⁰ but also in other types of illnesses such as “hallucinosis” and be induced by different types of chemical substances; they usually follow certain patterns such as those one can see in Figure 5.³¹

Figure 5



Protéidolies
Images élémentaires à type géométrico-décoratif
(d'après H. AHLENSTIEL et R. KAUFFMAN, 1953).

Sometimes those images can obey to basic geometric forms that determine our visual perception and our capacity of spatial representation, and some other times they can gather culturally codified images, that is, images coming from the world of the ill people's life: objects, houses, dresses, or the encyclopedia of images of their culture: religious images, mythological images, or body perceptions. But visual images or hallucinatory olfactory sensations – very rare in psychosis but frequent in the epilepsy – or tactile and gustative sensations – not to talk about the “voices” or the auditory hallucinations – are not a creative language in which the ill person is trying to create something that could become art but something very different.

³⁰ See Henri Ey, *Traité*, Vol. 1, 101-62.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 509-701.

The experience of hallucinations is accompanied by intense feelings of anguish, fear, and panic; ill people feel them as something that comes from outside in a chaotic series and something that attacks them, and they try to order those hallucinations and to give them a meaning usually after the experience, being that impossible during the hallucinatory trance because in such moments they can even lose consciousness totally. Hallucinations are confusing perceptions and memories of previous perceptions, and they can be linked to deliriums but they are substantially different to them. A delirium is a systematic and structured thinking but parallel to socially shared thinking and to the real world. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, delirium was called “lucid madness” or “reasoning madness”, and S. Freud liked to identify delirium with systematic philosophy and theology, because both of them were closed thinking systems that considered themselves perfect and irrefutable unlike science, that would be a socially shared, provisional, revisable knowledge refutable through experience. These two concepts are often mistaken when analogies appear between Psychiatry and Prehistory, and this is really dangerous. Naturally, all the cultures of the past had got their own mythologies, religions, and systems of belief and rites but those systems are real and objective for the members of those cultures because they form the base of their social perception of reality. All their elements could appear distorted and deformed in hallucinations of people of the past and also be altered or interpreted idiosyncratically, but just for this reason they could never be the origin of cultural symbolic constructions. If in some case they had had that origin – since the moment they were admitted by the people – they would have been no more than other components of culture, and archeology can give us only a partial knowledge of that culture.

Hallucinations are chaotic flows of perceptions that can only be partially reconstructed and that are the natural result of sleep – psychotics dream being awake, non-psychotics dream being asleep – and of the functioning of the mind when it stops perceiving sensations from outside for some time. To be communicated, they have to be reduced to what they are not, to already created cultural symbols, to images, to socially admitted concepts and words. Thus visual artistic creation or any other one has nothing to do with hallucinations or psychosis and trying to follow that way to understand Prehistoric art doesn't have therefore any sense.

Prehistoric art is formed, just like all the art, by works made by people with playful aims of creation of rhythms and organization or of expression of their feelings and ideas. Those feelings and ideas were also reflected verbally, gesturally, and through their own movements in the natural and cultural space: villages, houses, etc. This is the reason for it to be impossible of being reconstructed with the same depth as the art of writing cultures.

We have two ways to follow: that of already described theories – a part of which has to give account of some fragment of reality or otherwise they hadn't been credible – and that of the elementary forms. To come into this second way it is first of all necessary to clarify three concepts that are omnipresent in the language and that are sometimes badly used by historians and archeologists.

3.2. Icon, Sign, Symbol

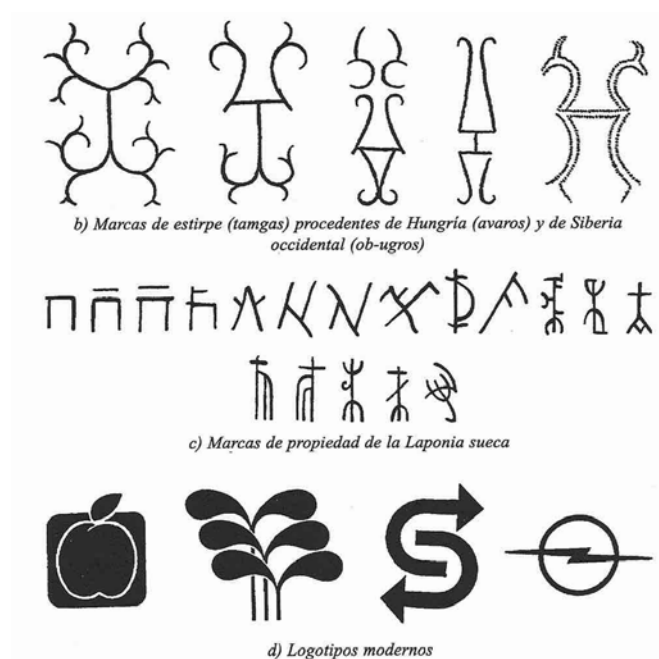
Language is the basic instrument of social communication. But this communication is not only verbal but also gestural and visual, and thus archeology and art can give us only partial accesses to the thoughts and feelings of our ancestors, that were essentially similar to ours because passions and human drives are basically the same in different cultures.

The logician and mathematician Charles Sanders Peirce developed in many of his works the key distinction among three types of elements that serve to communicate information: icon, sign, and symbol.³²

An icon is a graphic element that marks something and positions the person towards a particular object. An arrow is a graphic element that indicates a direction and so it is the drawing that shows where is the WC in a bar. Ch. S. Peirce says: “I call a sign which stands for something merely because it resembles it, an icon. Icons are so completely substituted for their objects as hardly to be distinguished from them. Such are the diagrams of geometry”.³³

In the archeological register we will often find icons and make the mistake of wanting to give them a cultural or psychological deep meaning, what can lead us to some hazardous conclusions. Examples of it can be seen in different kinds of lineage marks, propriety marks, or some modern logos (Figure 6) collected by Harald Haarmann.³⁴

Figure 6



³² Charles Sanders Peirce, *Obra filosófica reunida*, Vol. 1 (1867-1883) and Vol. 2 (1883-1913) (Mexico: FCE, 2012).

³³ “Sobre el álgebra de la lógica. Una contribución a la filosofía de la notación”, in Charles Sanders Peirce, *Obra filosófica*, Vol. 1, 272.

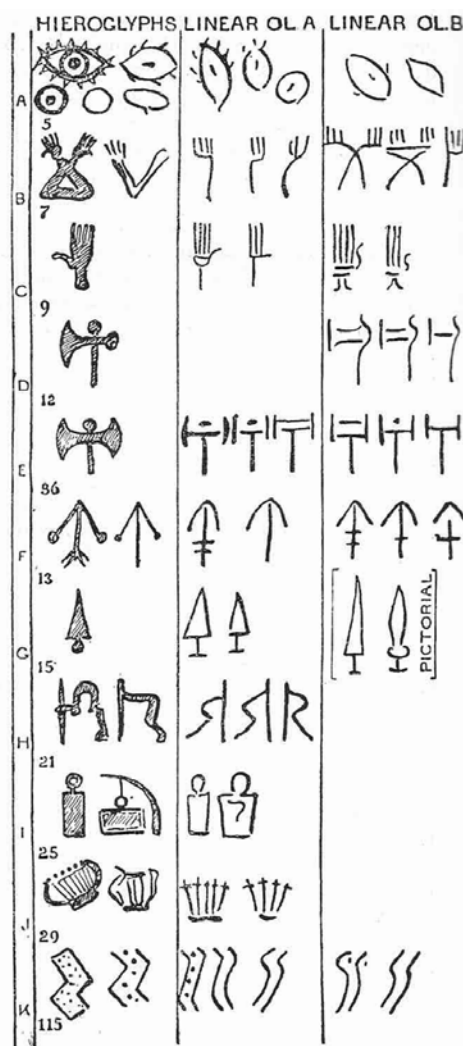
³⁴ Harald Haarmann, *Historia universal de la escritura* (Madrid: Gredos, 2001).

A very different thing is that of the sign:

A sign is in a conjoint relation to the thing denoted and to the mind. If this triple relation is not of a degenerate species, the sign is related to its object only in consequence of a mental association, and depends upon a habit. [...] They are, for the most part, conventional or arbitrary. [...] For the sake of brevity I will call them *tokens*.³⁵

Signs can appear in the archeological register and their use is essential to understand the origin of writing starting from pictograms. In some cases, one can appreciate how the same sign can be used in art: petroglyphs, steles, vases, and the forms of ideographic writing, such as hieroglyph's pictograms, Linear A and Linear B, as can be seen in John D. S. Pendlebury's table (figure 7).³⁶ There we can see how the association between sign and object and sign and mind is stable as well as it is also stable its reference to an object; therefore we will have to take great care not to fall in over-interpretation.

Figure 7



³⁵ Charles Sanders Peirce, "Sobre el álgebra", 271.

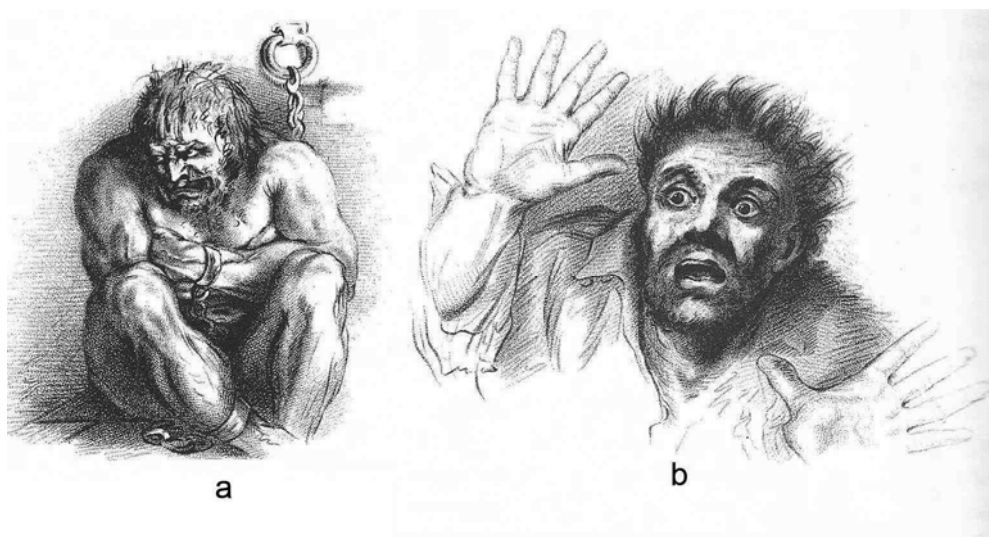
³⁶ John D. S. Pendlebury, *Arqueología de Creta* (Mexico: FCE, 1965).

Much more complicated is the case of the symbol because a symbol doesn't exhaust its meaning univocally. Symbol, the same as metaphor, lead us from one meaning to other and for this reason some authors, like Ángel Álvarez de Miranda, pointed out the strong link between metaphor and myth.³⁷ Every society lives in a net of socially shared metaphors on the body, the physical world and the social world. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have called these metaphors: "Metaphors we live by" and they have studied them in the case of the body and in everything referred to women, fire and other elements.³⁸

The whole society is a framework of bodies, people and communication systems. There are forms of communication and basic expressions and the prehistorian could have access to them without knowing the linguistic or cultural contexts through any other way but material culture.

Let's give an example. In 1806, Charles Bell analyzed the movement of facial muscles and their configuration in the expression of basic emotions.³⁹ We can neither deny that emotions are in part culturally coded nor that they have got a common human base. The fool of the engraving of page 153 (Figure 8a) belongs to an archetype of the epoch when "furious fools" could effectively live nude and chained in a loony bin, but the expression of restrained fury and violence drawn by the author would be comprehensible to any person, as well as the expression of fear and astonishment of the page 142 (Figure 8b).

Figure 8 (a and b)



³⁷ Ángel Álvarez de Miranda, *La metáfora y el mito* (Madrid: Taurus, 1963).

³⁸ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors we live by* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); *Philosophy in the Flesh. The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things. What Categories reveal about the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

³⁹ Charles Bell, *Essays on the Anatomy of Expression in Painting* (London: Wellcome Library, 1806).

The course charted by Lakoff and Johnson is more secure than the old system of codification of the symbols in encyclopedias or dictionaries of the subconscious in which the master was Carl Gustav Jung, who many times took the symbols of the treaties of history of religions or of the very alchemy to see them reflected in his psychotic patients' minds or maybe to teach them to see them in that way, as some prehistorians of the mentioned religions do.⁴⁰ Another of these examples can be seen in books like Hans Egli's, centered in a form, the snake, that would almost work like an eternal symbol.⁴¹

It is very difficult to interpret symbols without the help of language or mythical narrations and that's why one must be prudent but will also have to try to distinguish them from the mere signs or from the icons or playful decorative forms. The situation gets even more complicated if we take into account that – as old masters of Art History like Heinrich Wölfflin pointed out –⁴² artistic forms are expressive by themselves – as also pointed out Wilhelm Worringer.⁴³

According to Wölfflin, the basic categories we have to work with in the Art History would be: linear and painterly, plane and recession, open form and closed form, multiplicity and unity, and clearness and unclearness. Knowing them is essential to the analysis of simple or complex artistic forms and we have to keep that therefore in mind before trying to give an interpretation of the icons, signs, or symbols that can appear in the archeological register because these categories can be present in any of them.

Following then the course charted in the beginning, we will now see the study of the suggested cases: the image of the coordinated march of soldiers, the representation of the warrior and hunter on his chariot and the decorative forms and rhythms.

4. Marching Forward

Human beings perceive simultaneously the inner situation of our body and the exterior world through the five senses. Whenever we see, listen, smell, and taste, thousands of sensations come to our brain and it coordinates them all. Firstly, it associated them to the sensation of reality and thus it is conscious that it is perceiving the world and secondly it orders them spatially and temporally. All this process is called “being conscious and oriented” by neurologists. Being conscious and oriented, we can control our own body and its limbs and coordinate our movements to move ourselves, to take objects and to carry out that way all the necessary actions to be able to live. But this coordination of movements follows some rhythmic patterns, not only at the individual level but also at a collective level.

There are many types of movements in the rhythms of work, in the leisure and in other activities such as hunting or waging war; and William H. McNeill dedicated a

⁴⁰ C. G. Jung, *Símbolos de transformación* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1962; according to the 4th German edition).

⁴¹ Hans Egli, *Das Schlangensymbol. Geschichte, Märchen, Mythos* (Freiburg: Walter, 1982).

⁴² Heinrich Wölfflin, *Conceptos fundamentales de la historia del arte* (1915; Rep. Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 2002).

⁴³ Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstracción y naturaleza* (México: FCE, 1983).

book to its study.⁴⁴ This world of coordinated body movements is accessible to our knowledge through many ways; one of them can be art and the study of the historic or Prehistoric archeological register because those rhythms and movements are parallel but independent of the spoken language of which in Prehistory we can't have any proof. We have a good example for a study like this – the gestural and body communication – in the case of the so called *Harvesters' vase* (Figure 9).

Figure 9



This is a vase in which it is represented, clearly and in a realistic way, a scene where a group of men are carrying farming tools and a musical instrument while they walk singing either towards the harvest or towards a celebration. This vase shows very well the coordinated rhythms of harvesting in farming work and in some other activities in which it is necessary to coordinate common movements to which it can be very useful a chant that helps keeping the rhythm. We know many examples of chants and rhythms of this kind through ethnomusicological studies. Naturally, these harvesters are mute for us but the vase allows us to access directly to a scene of the past that we can understand without any problem and that needn't any other deep interpretation. To have an access to the content of the chant we would need a text. We don't have it but even without it we can understand perfectly the general sense of action.

Body coordination is essential in the study of dance for which it can be also useful the archeological register and over all in the field of war in which it is usually called "closed order training" or what is the same, coordinated formations of soldiers for the battle.

In a battle, two groups of soldiers that need to concentrate their forces in order to disperse, defeat, or annihilate their enemies confront each other at a determined place. With this aim, many cultures created closed formations in which men with the same weapons marched in time and setting the pace with the help of a musical rhythm of a

⁴⁴ William H. McNeill, *Keeping together in Time. Dance and Drill in Human History* (Cambridge [Mass.]: Harvard University Press, 1995).

flute, a drum, or another kind of instrument. Pace coordination is indispensable to concentrate the strength of all the bodies at the same time and to push with shields or weapons but also to maneuver in the battlefield. All these formations grouped themselves in lines and columns and had to have the possibility of marching, going forward, going back and turning round to get to the final clash, with no help or with the help of horses or cavalry. Let us see some examples.

In the Sumerian world, armies fought in closed formation, combining the phalanx of hoplites armed with spear, shield and helmet and with the help of war chariots.⁴⁵ We know it by the texts but it is clearly represented – as it is also pointed out by W. McNeill himself – in the archeological register as we can see in the *Stele of the Vultures*, that belongs to the kingdom of Eannatum of Lagash (2460 BC) and in some of the scenes of the *Real Standard of Ur* that show us the vision of the phalanx and the coordinated maneuvers of the chariots, as seen in Figure 10.⁴⁶

Figure 10



In Pharaonic Egypt we also find an infantry phalanx although here with light weapons, and this can be appreciated in many archeological examples. We will choose, following François Daumas (Figure 11) two of them: on the one side, the soldiers of the

⁴⁵ See Giovanni Pettinato, *I Sumeri* (Milán: Rusconi, 1991), 238-56.

⁴⁶ William H. McNeill, *Keeping together*, 101-50.

Prince Mesehti, a model discovered in his tomb, that belongs to the time of the dynasties of Heracleopolis, in which one can see a closed formation of Nubian infantry, and a relief of Deir el-Bahari representing the Egyptian army in Oponé, in one of the expeditions to the Land of Punt.⁴⁷

Figure 11



In the case of the cultures of the Aegean Bronze, we would find a similar representation in the case of the Mycenaean *Warrior Vase* (Figure 12).

Figure 12

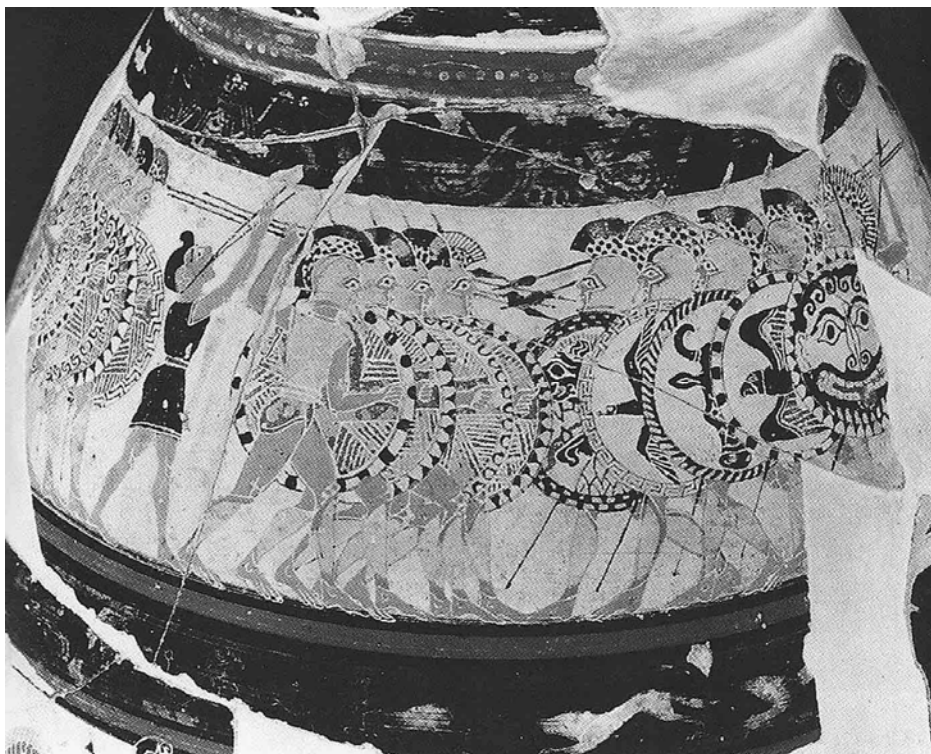


We can appreciate in it a farewell scene of an infantry formation with uniform weaponry that fits with what we know about the Mycenaean military organization through the series of Pylos tablets, known as *Oka*-tablets. Not only weaponry is uniform in this type of organization but also consists of groupings of units based on a determined

⁴⁷ François Daumas, *La civilización del Egipto faraónico* (Barcelona: Juventud, 1972).

number of soldiers.⁴⁸ The whole history of the war in classical Ancient Age is the History of closed order formations and about it we have got a sweeping knowledge through literary, epigraphical, and archeological sources.⁴⁹ Nevertheless we are now interested in emphasizing another image, that of a Corinthian vase of the 600 BC known as the *Olpe Chigi*, in which one can appreciate two phalanxes marching against each other following the rhythm of flute music (Figure 13).

Figure 13



One cannot talk about formal influences of the Sumerian artists over the Egyptians or of the Egyptians over the Mycenaeans but only about a scene-type that describes a collective behavior that can be accessible to the archeological study without having any knowledge of the language of the cultures involved. That form of organization is furthermore clearly transcultural because it was also given in such a curious case as the Zulu warriors, an army capable of defeating a British Army – that of course used firearms – and that can integrate under its Kings' command some 50.000 soldiers and cover long distances marching, draw up their battle line, build camps and supply with everything needed in a culture that lacked writing.⁵⁰ It was an army made up basically of infantry with spears and shields and that maneuvered quite similarly to the archaic Greeks (Figure 14).

⁴⁸ See Emily Vermeule, *Grecia en la Edad del Bronce* (México: FCE, 1971); Oliver Dickinson, *La Edad del Bronce Egea* (Madrid: Akal, 2000); Michel Lejeune, “La civilisation Mycénienne et la guerre”, in Jean-Pierre Vernant (dir.), *Problèmes de la guerre en Grèce ancienne* (Paris: Mouton, 1968), 31-51.

⁴⁹ A recent synthesis can be seen in Hans van Wees, *Greek Warfare, Myths, and Realities* (London: Duckworth, 2005), 166-98.

⁵⁰ Ian Knight, *The Anatomy of Zulu Army from Shaka to Cetshavo, 1818-1879* (London: Greenhill Books, 1995).

Figure 14



We could enlarge the catalogue with examples taken from other cultures but the conclusion would always be the same. Infantry closed formations are a form of infantry combat organization independent from language, from the main part of the symbolic aspects of a culture and succeed in certain areas and times because they are useful as an efficient means to coordinate forces and possibilities of infantry weaponry, either with shields and spears, with other throwing weapons or even with firearms, until the I World War, because the disadvantage of suffering the fire of the enemy on the formation became balanced since the sixteenth century with the defense that the continued and coordinated fire was capable of producing, protecting its advance and making it unstoppable.

A form of behavior and social and military organization – the infantry phalanx – can be analyzed in the past through the study of a simple scene, as we have already seen in the examples, a scene that allows to grasp the whole meaning of the event through the image preserved in the archeological register. This would be the first type of examples to study according to the suggested method of analysis of the simple forms of representation. Naturally, one can go deeper in the study of those scenes when one has got other sources such as “textual ones” but we much more prefer here to be centered on the field of Prehistory. Let us examine the second example.

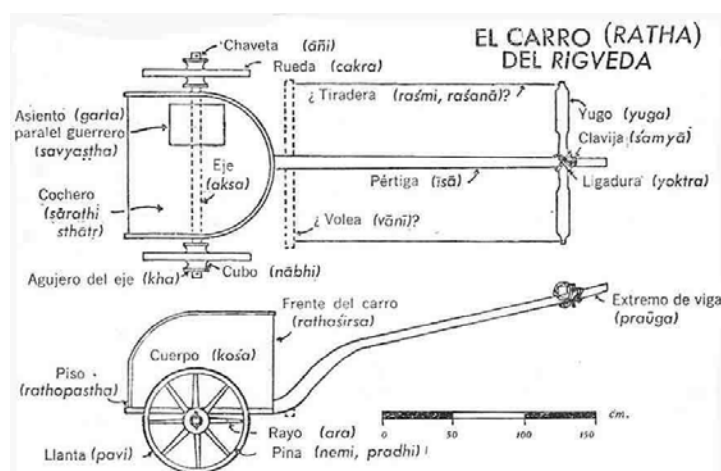
5. The Chariot and the Lion Hunting

The history of humankind is mostly the history of the development of all technical systems that enable the different human groups an adaptation to their ecological environments and a survival over time. All techniques are culturally transmitted from generation to generation and in the learning process language plays without any doubt an essential role, but the capacity to acquire them and the ability to make tools are achieved developing series of knowledge and sensorial/motor capacities that enable a potter to handle a potter's wheel, a hunter to use the spear or a warrior to drive a chariot and they succeed thanks to their efficiency.

A technique and the different types of objects linked to it are transmitted inside the culture limits but they can cross over easily the cultural limits and be assimilated by different cultures that simply use them or integrate them into their own technical systems. Indigenous Australians, who had their own lytic industry, started using axes of steel from England, that came up to the center of the country through inter-tribal trade routes because those axes were more efficient than theirs. Thus gradually they lost their technical ability in this field and started depending on the settlers, who were their suppliers.

We are going to analyze now one type of simple scene that appeared in the art of different cultures and that was in relation with military technical innovation: the light horse-drawn chariot. This element was associated to different peoples – among them those of the conglomerate called Indo-European – extended from Ireland to India through an extraordinary process of expansion in which part of its war superiority was precisely due to the use of that new type of chariot, the light spoke-wheeled chariot drawn by two horses, whose ideal reconstruction was carried out by Stuart Piggott starting from the *Rig Veda* (Figure 15).⁵¹

Figure 15



A good synthesis of this process that combines the data of linguistics with those of the archeological register was carried out recently by David W. Anthony, where it is

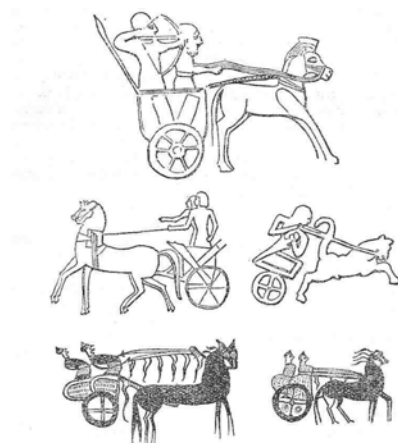
⁵¹ Stuart Piggott, *La arqueología de la India prehistórica* (México: FCE, 1966), 236.

underlined the key role of that type of chariot, that enabled infantry to attack in formation and to decide largely the destiny of battles.⁵² These chariots were introduced in other non-Indoeuropean cultures such as that of Pharaonic Egypt and those of the Mesopotamian world, transforming not only war tactics but also the very figure of the rulers that begin to be symbolically considered the best warriors who throw their arrows from the chariot and are represented on it in the reliefs and paintings either leading their armies into battle or hunting an animal endowed with a great symbolic power: in Egypt, for instance, the lion.

Ancient Egypt pharaohs were considered kings according to the complex ideology that gave them an essentially religious and administrative role. In the New Kingdom, with the arrival of the war chariot, whose use was imposed for technical and tactical reasons, the pharaoh started playing the role of a great warrior, as pointed out by W.C. Hayes, not only in the military ambit but also in the symbolic one; everything will be reflected in iconography, just as it will happen in the Asirian world, as we will see now.⁵³

In the Indoeuropean cultures, the use of the horse-drawn chariot left traces even at a lexical level. As Emile Benveniste points out, the latin verb *uehere* means transporting on a chart but it followed being used up to the construction of the expression *equo uehi*, horse riding, as it happens in the Homeric Greek, where the *eph' híppon báino* doesn't mean "horse riding" but "going on a chariot" like those in which *Iliad's* warriors went to battle.⁵⁴ In the case of the Avestan language, the word "warrior" is simply a synonym of "warrior on a chariot". This fact is very important because it reveals that warrior's identity is linked to the chariot. So it is described in the *Rig Veda*, as S. Piggot points out, and that explains the importance of the representation of the warrior on the chariot in an iconographic scheme common to different cultures, as it can be seen in the Figure 16.

Figure 16



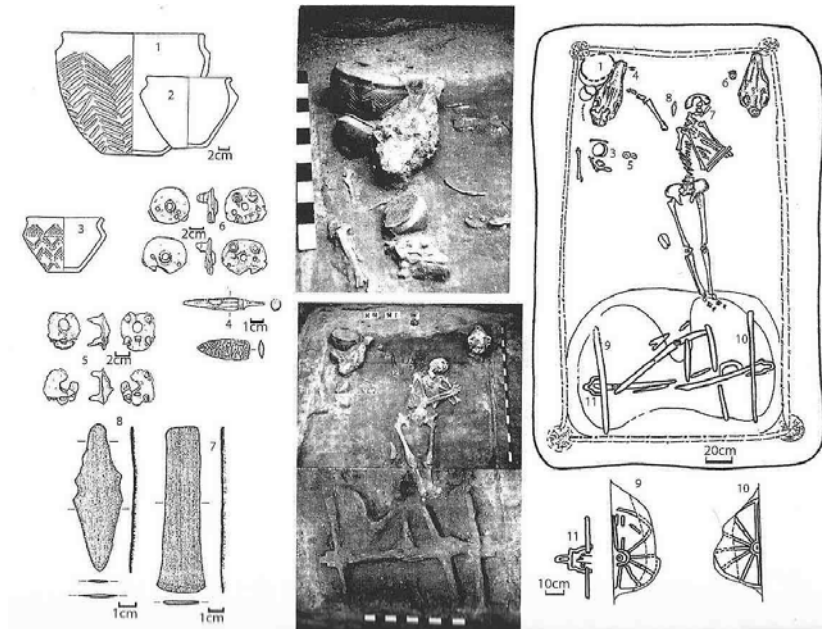
⁵² David W. Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language. How Bronze-Age Riders from the Eurasian Steppes shaped the Modern World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

⁵³ William C. Hayes, "Egypt: internal affairs from Tuthmosis I to Amenophis III", in *Cambridge Ancient History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973, 3^a ed.), 313-406.

⁵⁴ Emile Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européens*, Vol. 1 (Paris: Minuit, 1969), 286-87.

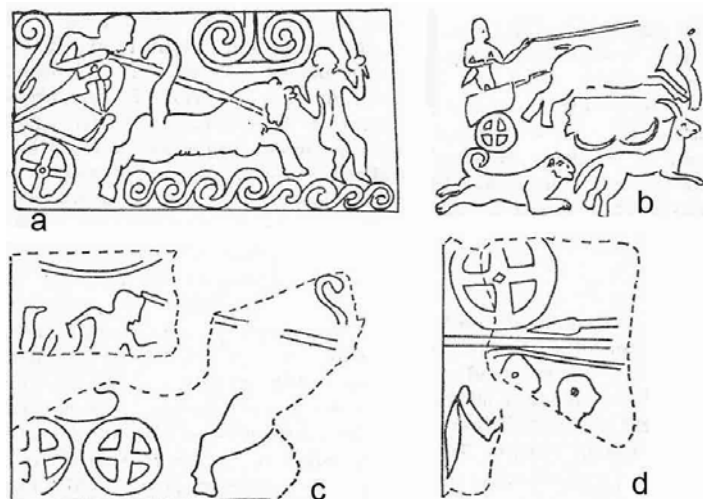
In the Bronze cultures of Central Europe, in the Kurgan Culture and in the Aegean world there was a type of tombs in which the warrior was buried with his chariot, even sacrificing for it the horses, as it can be seen in Figure 17.⁵⁵

Figure 17



Chariot and warrior can also be represented in a stele on the warrior's tomb, as it happens in the case of the Mycenaean tombs of vertical grave (Figure 18).⁵⁶

Figure 18

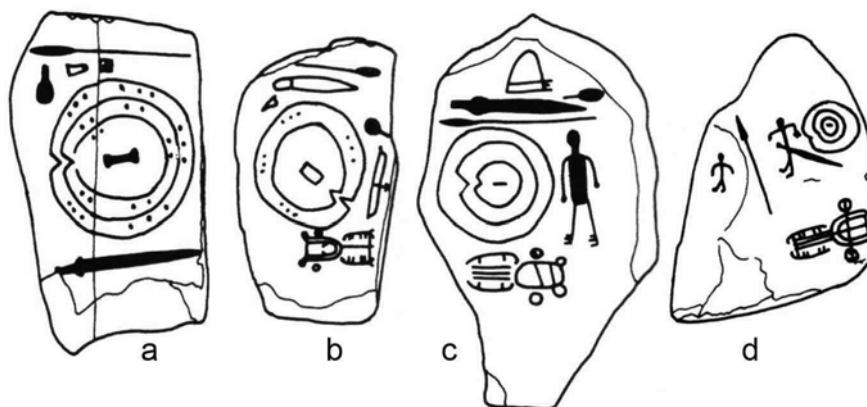


⁵⁵ See David W. Anthony, *The Horse*; see also the classic book Marija Gimbutas, *Bronze Age Cultures in Central and Eastern Europe* (The Hague-London: Mouton, 1965).

⁵⁶ Emily Vermeule, *Grecia en la Edad*, 109-39.

Something similar could have happened in ambits like the so-called *Southeast steles* of the Iberian Peninsula in which it is schematically represented all the warrior's equipment, the chariot and the human figure of some of them (Figure 19).⁵⁷ We are not going to go into the concrete problems this set of representations generates although the different authors seem to agree in the character of commemoration of the "warrior", aside from its relation with a funerary or housing context, its situation in the territory, its relation with pathways, etc.⁵⁸

Figure 19



The warrior's image in Central European Bronze cultures, among Indo-Europeans and in the Near East is inseparable of the image of the heroic hunter. Hunting and war are conceived as the same activity and they are carried out with the same weapons in many cultures. In the case of Ancient Greece, this has been thoroughly analyzed by Alain Schnapp in a register as rich iconographically as that of the archaic and classical Greek pottery.⁵⁹ We can also observe in it how images appearing in pottery match with the epic similes. Homeric warriors are also hunters and in literary descriptions are assimilated, through metaphors, to lion and wild boar.⁶⁰ We have already pointed out, following Álvarez de Miranda, the similarity between metaphor and myth. Lion and wild boar work as warrior metaphors because both animals are hunters, very strong and may be dangerous for other animals and for the human beings. Thus the quarrel of lion and wild boar works as a simile for the confrontation between two warriors and all the same happens with the isolated images of each of these animals. The fight of the warrior with the lion or the wild boar is considered to be such a great feat as a single combat, an essential deed in the epic narrations or in tragedy, where we can see the description of

⁵⁷ See Eduardo Galán Domingo, *Estelas, paisaje y territorio en el Bronce Final del Suroeste de la Península Ibérica* (Madrid: Complutum extra 3, 1993).

⁵⁸ See Marta Díaz-Guardamino Uribe, *Las estelas decoradas en la Prehistoria de la Península Ibérica* (Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2010), esp. section 7.4, where she carries out a deep run-through of the chronological problems and different interpretations of these steles and also their formal characteristics and its possible relation with other examples of sculpture of prehistoric times in the Iberian peninsula.

⁵⁹ Alain Schnapp, *Le Chasseur et la cité. Chasse et érotique dans la Grèce ancienne* (Paris: A. Michel, 1997).

⁶⁰ Annie Schnapp-Gourbeillon, *Lions, héros, masques. Les représentations de l'animal chez Homère*, (Paris: Maspéro, 1981).

seven couples of combatants and their metaphors, for instance, in Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*, because in it the warrior's force asserts over the wild animal's in mythical cycles such as Herakles' and many others'.⁶¹ It was not only a question of myths and images but also of social reality because training for hunting was a part of the very training for war, not only in Ancient Greece but also in cultures quite far away from it such as those of medieval Europe.

In the world of the Near East, this conception of the warrior-hunter became a political conception when rituals were created in which the Assyrian king or the Egyptian pharaoh ritually hunted a lion in order to assert their superiority as warriors, according to the transformation of the idea of royal power that started from the introduction of the tactic of a light chariot, very different to the heavy Sumerian chariot we have already seen in the *Royal Standard of Ur*. In the Assyrian palaces, the king hunted lions and lionesses in a ceremony inside and outside the palace, what has got as a consequence a well-known series of reliefs (Figure 20).⁶²

Figure 20



These rituals are a part of the symbolic role represented by the king's palace and the King, as Sylvie Lackenbacher has pointed out.⁶³ We can understand the symbolism of hunting thanks to the texts that describe for us the Assyrian conception of royal power, but the expression they show of wounded lions and lionesses represented in the reliefs go beyond cultural limits for two reasons. First of all, because it is an expression of physical pain, similar to which we have already seen in Charles Bell's engravings, and secondly because that very scheme is given in different institutional frames in which the ritual of the royal hunting is not so much regulated, as it is the case of Ancient Egypt, where we can see, for instance, the pharaoh Tutankhamun represented as a hunter on his chariot on the lid of one of the boxes of his funerary equipment (Figure 21).

⁶¹ See the analyses of those scenes in Eduard Fraenkel, *Die sieben Redepaare im Thebaner drama des Aeschylus* (Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philologische-Historische Klasse, 1957), Heft. 5.

⁶² Pritchard, James B., *La Sabiduría del Antiguo Oriente* (Barcelona: Garriga, 1966).

⁶³ Sylvie Lackenbacher, *Le Palais sans rival. Le récit de construction en Assyrie* (Paris: Découverte, 1990).

Figure 21



The same type of scene can be sometimes transmitted from one culture to another through the imitation of an iconographic scheme but it is not necessary to be always like that, because the same real situation generates the same type of representation and with the same meaning, either in its whole or in one of its parts. If we take the figure of a lion or a wild boar isolated and we represent them on friezes such as the lions of the Ishtar Gate in Babylon or the much renowned animal friezes of the archaic and classical Greek pottery it is not necessary to look for any deeper meaning. Lion and wild boar are two hunting preys but also two metaphors of strength and courage and they can be appreciated for it and also for this reason they can be considered as beautiful, as the embodiment of physical power and as expression of an awesome animal. That would be its artistic perception, logically related with the sensation of fear that the mere vision or encounter with those animals produced in the cultures that knew them, hunted them and lived the danger of a chance encounter with them.

A lion or a wild boar represented in a realistic way on a frieze or on an isolated scene are above all: an awesome lion or wild boar, beautiful and understandable inside a cultural context in which they carry out their hunting. Neither a lion has to be any other thing as a lion nor represent anything different to itself if its image is a mere sign or a symbol that doesn't embody any other thing as a metaphor. Quite a different thing would be that that lion had a partially human body or that it appeared, for instance, in a scene in which a winged woman takes it with one of her hands while holding a deer with the other. There's no reference here to any real scene, although the lion is represented in a realistic way: we would be in front of an iconographic scheme of the

Pótnia Théron, of which we can have knowledge thanks to the rich Greek iconography and to the literary texts (Figure 22).⁶⁴

Figure 22



It happens naturally the same with the realistic mixed representations of intermingled animals and men in Egyptian art or in the many seals of Minoan and Mycenaean art, not to go out from the Aegean Bronze age. Nevertheless, even when there is no doubt that the Minoan Glyptic contains representations of myths and mythical figures, there is also no doubt that only starting from those images it is possible to reconstruct the myths corresponding to “that beautiful book of images without text”, as Charles Picard had defined the Minoan religious world in an already classical book.⁶⁵ Authors like Martin P. Nilsson tried to decipher that book of images starting from a later religion: Greek religion.⁶⁶ His attempt can be arguable but one has to admit that prehistorians aren’t so lucky. They can’t try to pass from the later to the previous without further ado, without the risk of falling through. The only thing they can do is to resort to the comparison or to big theories we have already synthesized before. The risks of those adventures are evident and thus we think that turning to the analysis of the simple forms of representation is still in this case the most appropriate.

⁶⁴ Jean Charbonneaux, Roland Martin and François Villard, *Grecia Arcaica (620-480 a. de J.C.)* (Madrid: Aguilar, 1969).

⁶⁵ Charles Picard, *Les religions préhelléniques. Crète et Mycènes* (Paris: PUF, 1948).

⁶⁶ Martin P. Nilsson, *The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion and its Survival in Greek Religion* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1927).

It's not a question of denying that all the cultures have had myths or that they have used symbols, sometimes enormously complex but recognizing that it was like that in the lived social world and basically through language. Our archeological registers can't give us access to those worlds. We have to accept that and admit that our knowledge has got relative limits that can improve our research but also absolute limits that will always be inaccessible. Inside our possibilities is nevertheless the access to the world of gestures, bodies and simple forms in which we will follow in the next section.

6. Simple Forms: Decoration and Representation

After many years of fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands, the anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski published the article "Myth in primitive psychology", where he emphasized something many others don't want to see maybe for it's being evident: that this "primitive people" lived and behaved almost the whole day as perfectly rational human beings either in their work or in their social relations.⁶⁷ They had got myths and believed in them but they did it in certain moments and contexts and knew always to distinguish what was real and evident in the daily world from what myths said, only true at a different level outside the concrete world of life. It is very important to keep that in mind in this case because just as – following Prinzhorn – we can say that the main part of the simple artistic representations belong only to the playful instinct, to the search of proportion, rhythm, and symmetry, to the need of reproducing and imitating objects of the real world, reaching only in the end the level of symbol. In the world of Prehistoric art, decorative forms are essential in pottery, architecture, clothing and body ornament. And it is starting from this decorative forms that figures can be generated later. The elements from which we have to start are basically those of Euclidean geometry and spatial perception, namely:

- a) The straight line, with its parallels, perpendiculars, tangents, or secants.
- b) The curved line, basically in form of a circle, and semicircle.
- c) The basic figures: circle, triangle, square, rectangle, and rhombus.
- d) The basic solids: cylinder, cube, pyramid, and sphere.

If we take as a reference a well-known archeological sequence, the decorative evolution of Minoan pottery (Figure 23), we will see how in the primitive Minoan the surface is simply filled with parallel straight lines, with circles and concentric semicircles, or diagonally interweaved lines.⁶⁸ If we pass to the Middle Minoan, we will see how from these simple geometric forms one starts developing figuration of plants and animals and building more complex geometrical forms such as crosses, swastikas, or friezes of fretwork following a regular rhythm.

In the same period and in the way to later phases, figuration becomes more realistic and reaches greater complexity and aesthetic values with the representation of sea animals and the progressive substitution of straight lines and forms for curved ones in the recent or final Minoan, coming back to the simplification of forms, to the predominance of straight lines, and to the schematism in the Geometric and Orientalizing period.

⁶⁷ In Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magia, ciencia, religión* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1974).

⁶⁸ See John D. S. Pendlebury, *Arqueología de Creta*, 67 and *passim*.

Figure 23



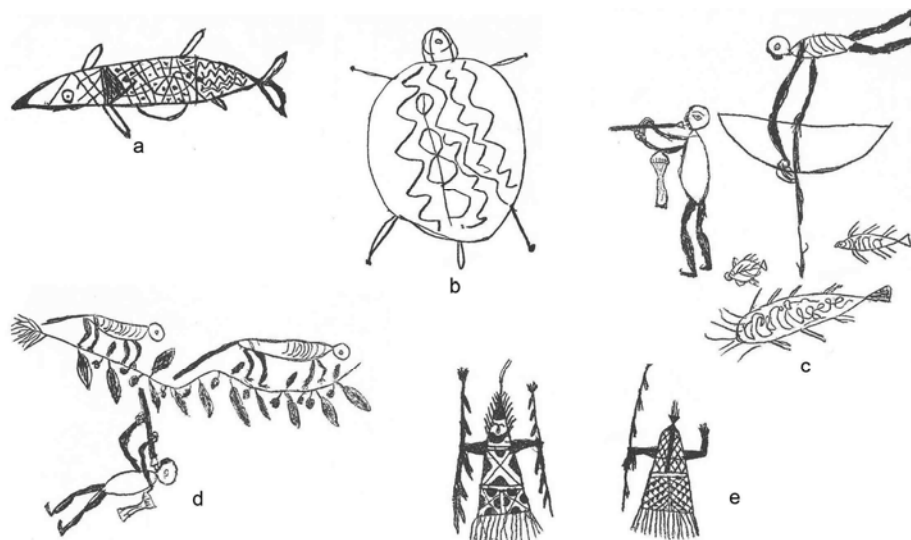
Pendlebury's book goes very well as an example because it offers a continuing sequence of the same culture starting almost from an only site, Knossos palace. We can see in this example that, in pottery, forms and colors have got a value by themselves. Neuronal mechanisms of spatial perception, of forms and of colors are essentially the same in all cultures. And the perception of forms and colors, apart from giving us information, give us a certain sensation of liking or rejection that would be the basis of aesthetic pleasure in its elementary components. That formal sensation is valid in itself, as they are body rhythms of dance, coordinated march or basic musical rhythms, and language rhythms, its assonances, its intonations and its rhythmic oscillations.

Human beings live in a weft of communicative nets but inside them spoken language is only a little part because sometimes it is the pragmatic situation that gives

more information – namely, the context in which one speaks, who speaks and when – than what it is said. A whole branch of linguistics – the pragmatics – dedicates itself to the study of it. And just as the body gestures, representation forms of the body with cloths or ornament, or the movements, give basic information for social life. Archeology and art can give us a partial but often secure access precisely to these worlds that are outside or parallel to the spoken language. Ernst Cassirer said that we would have to change Aristotelian definition of human being as rational animal for: “the human being is a symbolic animal”.⁶⁹ We would have to amend that a little adding “sometimes”, as stated by B. Malinowski, and pointing out that Aristotelian definition was that human being was an animal with *logos*, that is, that uses the language and thought with the rest of the tools, what is not the same as being “essentially” rational.

We have always to look for more simple explanations and over all to turn to the experience to – as we had said – “make visible the evident”, according to Edmund Husserl. Thus we will analyze now how has it been studied in Anthropology by Theodor Koch-Grünberg Amazon Indians’ ability for drawing although they belonged to oral cultures without any figurative tradition.⁷⁰ Koch Grüneberg’s work consisted on collecting all kind of drawings carried out spontaneously in his presence by individuals of the Ipurina people, Tukano people, etc. In the hundreds of drawings collected by him we can observe the following sorts of representations: decorative type or figurative type of realistic character. The drawings, as one can see in the selection of Figure 24, are schematic and clumsy and sometimes distort images but no more than a western child or adult that doesn’t know how to draw.

Figure 24



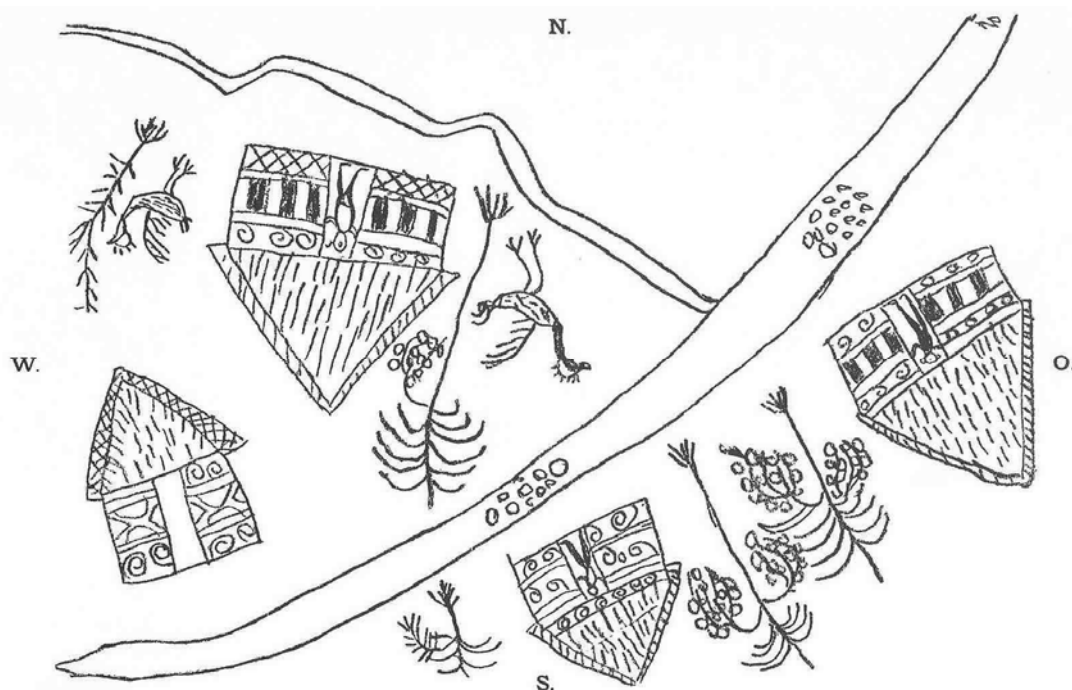
In those drawings, there are plants and animals of all sort represented, distinguishing groups or species and perfectly recognizable, what shows that the need of imitation and representation of objects is common to all the human beings. Simple

⁶⁹ Ernst Cassirer, *Antropología filosófica* (México: FCE, 1945).

⁷⁰ Theodor Koch-Grünberg, *Anfänge der Kunst im Urwald. Indianer-Handzeichnungen auf seinem Reise in Brasilien gesammelt* (Oosterhout: Anthropological Publications, 1969).

persons and scenes, ships, houses, hunting scenes, and river fishing are represented as well. It is curious that they also represent people dressed for ritual dances perfectly recognizable as such comparing them with the headdress used for it, just like they get to represent the map of Namokoliba hamlet upon the river Cuduiary (Figure 25).

Figure 25



Representations try to reproduce objects, animals, or persons. Drawings would be basically signs, or “tokens” – in Ch. S. Peirce’s classification we had already cited – and their authors don’t try to tell anything different to which they are representing; thus a dancing person, that in reality performs a symbolic act, in the drawing is not a symbol but an image that tries to describe reality. This is very important and we have to keep it in mind specially when studying Prehistory because in it the imitation as such, the game and the search for symmetries, proportions and formal beauty by itself – although on occasion that beauty is clumsy and improves with the evolution of the technique – can be sometimes the only thing the authors were looking for and the only thing we would have to aspire to find.

The first study of Koch-Grünberg was completed by another one dedicated to the Amazon Indians’ petroglyphs.⁷¹ From this second book, we can draw two interesting conclusions. The first one is that if we compare the forms of the engravings with those of the drawings of their sheets, the formal schemes for representation of human beings and animals are the same. Those petroglyphs are grouped in rocks that were used as meeting points or piers, for instance. In the case of the Tipiaká-Cachoeira Indians we can see how some human figures are represented on a rock and they are people dressed

⁷¹ Theodor Koch-Grünberg, *Süd-amerikanische Felszeichnungen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

up for ceremonial dances, similar to those of the cited drawings (Figure 26).⁷² Those who lay their hands on the rock know what is seen in it; they know how to reproduce those drawings and perceive them as what they are. Once again we have to conclude that those petroglyphs, in this case, are signs and not symbols because they copy the object and do not refer to any other thing than what they are imitating: the dancer, whose symbolism is perceived in the act of dancing and in the ritual context but not transferred to the petroglyph, which wouldn't be a stand-in of the dance, as some defenders of Prehistoric art theories we have already seen could have sometimes upheld.

Figure 26



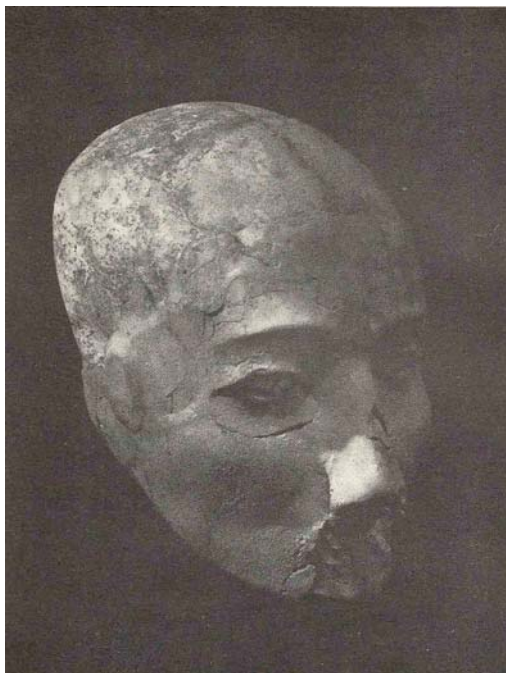
Sigmund Freud said once that a cigar is sometimes only a cigar and that a Zepellin can be a phallic symbol but it is pretty useful to go from Berlin to New York. We should have in mind this observation in the study of Prehistoric art and follow in its research the levels we have suggested in this work, assuming modestly in addition that neither historians nor archeologists will ever be able to reconstruct totally the past in our texts.

The past was not a text but a concrete physical, biological and social process, impossible to be comprised and of which we have nothing but rests: documents or archeological rests with which we have to work following our academic traditions.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 54-5.

Neither we will be able to bring the dead back nor to try to reconstruct our ancestors' faces, as the Neolithic inhabitants of Jericho did with their plaster skulls (Figure 27).⁷³

Figure 27



Patrician Romans kept the *imagines maiorum* of their *gens'* masculine ancestors at home. At first, they were their funerary images to which a certain cult was dedicated as Lar gods of the family.⁷⁴ It was the need of keeping remembrance of those faces, what would explain the Roman origins of the realistic portrait, after Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli.⁷⁵ Again in this case the wanted thing was simply to reproduce an image inside a context that gave it sense. Roman sculptors' artistic ability got to improve the quality of imitations; archeologists and historians can only lean out of that Past through those objects, having to avoid the risk of wanting to see sometimes more than they have in front of their eyes.

We wanted to finish this work by paying a tribute to the great Spanish thinker and writer Miguel de Unamuno, who in his treatise about the art of making paper birds – his Cocotology Treatise – imagined this way a paper bird contemplating the sunset (Figure 28). This treatise was a complement to his novel *Amor y pedagogía* (*Love and Pedagogy*) in which he set up a scientific and positivist pedagogy, that a father applies to his son from his first years of life, with the values of poetry for which in the end the son is going to be inclined.⁷⁶ As Unamuno, after all, was a Greek Professor, I suppose that he imagined so this curious sunset using the decorative motives of Greek pottery.

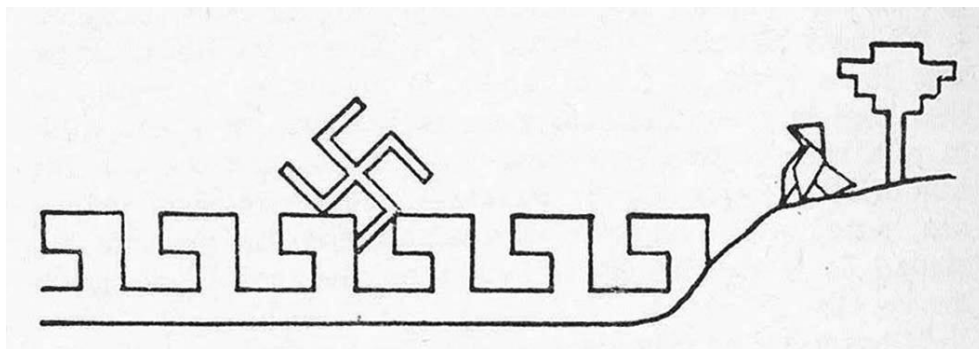
⁷³ Kathleen M. Kenyon, *Desenterrando a Jericó* (México: FCE, 1966), figures 20-21.

⁷⁴ Erich Bethe, *Ahnenbild und Familiengeschichte bei Römern und Griechen* (1935, Rep. Osnabrück: Zeller, 1974).

⁷⁵ Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli, *Roma, centro de poder* (Madrid: Aguilar, 1970), 57-101.

⁷⁶ Miguel de Unamuno, *Amor y pedagogía* (Madrid: Alianza, 1979).

Figure 28



7. Concluding Remarks

Throughout the centuries Art History has been written from two different perspectives. The first one has been of a merely formal character, quite close to the study of technical problems involved in the elaboration of architectural, sculptural or pictorial works. The second one has been dedicated to the study of the contents (symbols, mythological or religious representations and concepts, and aesthetical ideas) establishing this way very close ties with the study of economic, social and intellectual history.

The same as general history, Art History has been developed in different schools and historiographical traditions very close to anthropological and philosophical approaches and to political ideologies (historical materialism, Hegelian idealism or psychoanalytic doctrines and sociological and anthropological theories). After considering the main historiographical traditions, we have intended here to show how to replace the study of Art History methodologies – understood as metanarratives – with the study of the basic components of visual representation, either figurative or not.

Through the study of the previously examined cases, one can see how the sensory-motor schemes allow to explain the development of symmetries in decorative arts, as well as the apparition of the same forms in very different cultural contexts, isolated in space and time, as it happens with the march in formation or the use of war chariots. The distinction among the different levels of artistic action – from the playful instinct to the expression of ideas and feelings, passing through the search for symmetries – enables the integration of different methodologies – historically developed throughout history of art – and the understanding of such integration with different disciplines that would encompass from the field of neurosciences and the study of the history of the body and body rhythms up to the study of ideas.

Figures

- Figure 1.** Reproduction of the *Philosophy Tapestry* (L. Braun, *L'image...*, figure III.3).
- Figure 2.** Scheme of the *Gestaltung* trends according to H. Prinzhorn, *Expressions de la folie*, 69.
- Figure 3.** “Air appearance”. Hallucination (H. Prinzhorn, *Expressions de la folie*, 147).
- Figure 4.** Examples of illusions of visual perception (H. Ey, *Traité des hallucinations, II*, figures III, IV and VI).
- Figure 5.** Elementary images of geometric-decorative type (H. Ey, *Traité des hallucinations, I*, figure I).
- Figure 6.** Examples of icons according to H. Haarmann, *Historia universal...*, 65.
- Figure 7.** Cretan writings according to J. S. D. Pendlebury, *Arqueología de Creta*, 196.
- Figure 8. a-** Madness; **b-** Amazement, astonishment, fear, terror, horror and desperation (Ch. Bell, *Essays on the anatomy...*, 153 and 142).
- Figure 9.** *Harvesters' Vase*, Hagia Triada (1500 a.C).
- Figure 10.** *Stele of the Vultures* (W. H. McNeill, *Keeping together in Time*, figure II), and Real Standard of Ur, War panel.
- Figure 11.** *Soldiers of the Prince Mesehti* (left) and Egyptian infantry in closed formation (F. Daumas, *La civilización...*, figure 54).
- Figure 12.** Mycenaean Warrior Vase.
- Figure 13.** *Olpe Chigi* (W. H. McNeill, *Keeping together in Time*, figure III).
- Figure 14.** Zulu warrior equipped for war (I. Knight, *The Anatomy of Zulu...*, 193).
- Figure 15.** Aryan chariot according to the Rig Veda (S. Piggott, *La arqueología...*, 236, Figure 32).
- Figure 16.** Chariot representations (fiftieth to twelfth centuries B. C.) of Zincirli, Egypt, Mycenae and Cyprus, according to S. Piggot, *La arqueología...*, 231.
- Figure 17.** Kurgan 9 of Krivoe Ozero, tomb 1 (2000 B. C.) (D. W. Anthony, *The Horse...*, 398).

- Figure 18.** Steles of tombs of the Mycenaean circle A: a: nr. 5, tomb V; b: nr. I, tomb V; c: nr. VIII, unknown context; d: nr. IX, unknown context (from E. Vermeule, *Grecia en la Edad...*, fig. 17).
- Figure 19.** South-East Steles: a. Brozas; b. Torrejón el Rubio I; c. Zarza de Montánchez; d. El Viso IV (E. Galán Domingo, *Estelas, paisaje...*, Catalogue nrs. 16, 17, 25 and 61 respectively).
- Figure 20.** Asurnasirpal hunting lions, bas-relief of the ninth century, Nimrud (J. B. Pritchard, *La sabiduría...*, figure 40).
- Figure 21.** Tutankhamun in his chariot, hunting gazelles and ostriches (J. B. Pritchard, *La sabiduría...*, Figure 41).
- Figure 22.** “Lady of the Beasts”. François Vase (J. Charbonneaux ; R. Martin; F. Villard, *Grecia Arcaica...*, Figure 69).
- Figure 23.** Evolution of the Minoan pottery according to J. D. S. Pendlebury (selection): a. motives in the pottery of the Primitive Minoan I; b. motives of the Middle Minoan I, East part of Crete; c. motives of the Last Minoan Ib; d. and e. motives of the Knossos Geometric Period; f. motives of the Orientalizing Period (J. D. S. Pendlebury, *Arqueología de Creta*, Figures. 4, 18, 37, 49 and cont. and 52, respectively).
- Figure 24.** Drawings of the Ipurina peoples (a: bicudo [Great-billed Seed-Finch]; b. turtle); Kobéua (c. hunting with blowpipe and fishing with bow; d. monkey hunting with blowpipe); Bahúna (e. dancers with masks) (Th. Koch-Grünberg, *Anfänge der Kunst...*, Figures 4 (a and b), 46 (c and d) and 50 (e)).
- Figure 25.** Map of the Namokoliba Hamlet, Kobéua people (Th. Koch-Grünberg, *Anfänge der Kunst...*, Figure 54).
- Figure 26.** Petroglyphs of the Tipiaká-Cachoeira (Th. Koch-Grünberg, *Süd-Amerikanische...*, 54, Figure 24).
- Figure 27.** Plaster skull of Jericho: *imagines maiorum?* (K. M. Kenyon, *Desenterrando a Jericó*, Figure 21).
- Figure 28.** Paper bird contemplating the sunset (M. de Unamuno, *Amor y pedagogía*, 168).

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