

DREAM WRITING

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South African Poetry, Drama and Narrative, an Archaeology and Mythology

This essay explores the origins of poetry, drama and narrative in South Africa. It also poses questions on the status of such a search for origins. Is it science or is it mythology? To what extent does archaeology - the science of origins and evolution - overlap with mythology?

Secondly: the material investigated corresponds to similar material in other parts of the world. Interesting parallels, for instance, occur in ancient Greek mythology and literature. I will make some comparative references to these. The implications of the similarities, though, must still be developed. Greece is isolated for comparison because of its important position in the construction of world literary history.

According to Robert Graves (Introduction to the *New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology*) myths are attempts, in the form of religious or heroic legends, to tell about the origins of the universe, man and death. In its focus on origins, mythology is similar to archaeology. Archaeology also traces human origins, evolution and history.

Often myth and archaeology seem to overlap: Schliemann's 'discovery' of 'Troy' ¹ rests on his reading of Homer's *Iliad*. Before 1873, when Schliemann made his discovery the story of the *Iliad* was considered to be a myth rather than history. Another example of this mythology and archaeology intertext is D.G. Hogarth's discovery of Zeus' Birth-Cave on Mount Ida in 1900.

Archaeology reveals the artefacts of the past through excavation. These artefacts are signs of the reality, the presence, of the past. It is evidence. Carbon dating, detailed descriptions of the fragments of objects found, photographs, classifying tables and drawings clearly position the past within the narrative of human development.

Mythology, though, is not without its evidence. The tracks left in the mud or engraved in ancient times at the 'creation sites' of Kopong and Metsing in Botswana, are, to the Bechuana, those of the first-created people and their animals who according to legend emerged from a hole nearby. (Wilman, M, 1968:1). Interestingly they describe these imprints and marks, as 'lokualo' the same word that came to mean 'writing' and 'printing'.

Unlike archaeology, mythology is dreamlike. Condensation and displacement transform the events mythology refers to: its time, space and content are uncertain. It often, as in the case of Schliemann, presents important clues to the archaeologist.

As in archaeology, mythology classifies human history into broad periods and genealogies. The Greek poet, Hesiod, divided the 'story of man' into five stages: a Golden Age, a Silver Age, a Bronze Age, an Heroic Age and an Iron Age.

Archaeology distinguishes the different ages by the production of implements and the materials used. In South Africa the different ages refer to 1) the Stone Age and 2) the Iron Age. The Stone Age includes a pre-tool making phase (2 million to 500 000 years BC), an early tool making phase (500 000 to 19 000 years BC) ending with the introduction of the bow and arrow (19 000 BC to 1000 AD). Early evidence of an Iron Age is copper being mined at Phalaborwa from about 800 AD and iron at Bambandyanalo from about 1055 AD.

In the place of the mythical or orally-transmitted family tree, archaeology presents hominid development in different evolutionary stages. It reconstructs these stages according to the discovery of hominid remains. The earliest South African remains are those of Australopithecine *Robustus* and Australopithecine *Africanus* found at places like Sterkfontein, Makapansgat, Taung, Swartkrans and Kromdraai. They date back to a period of 2 million to 50 000 years ago.

The Origin / Semiotics

Hominid presence in South Africa dates back to about 2 million years. At what point did precursors to poetry, drama and narrative emerge? ¹ Poetry, drama and narrative are part of a semiotics that predates alphabetic writing. It has its roots in events and rituals indicating the emergence of semiotics itself. A number of practices such as burial and rock painting can be linked to narrative, poetry and drama if semiotics rather than language (spoken or written) is the starting point. Semiotics includes the study of these practices. The inclusivity of semiotics is clear in its etymological derivation. The word semiotics stems from the Canaanite root *sem* that refers to a mark, a name, a token, a form, a shape, a figure or a configuration. (Bernal, 1991: 60). De Saussure foregrounds this comprehensive nature of semiotics by describing it as the science that studies the life of signs within society. De Saussure defines the sign as a mental image (signifier based on a sound, a written or other materially perceived image) referring to a concept (signified). Kristeva sees the sign as not only designating a concept, but

as being motivated by unconscious drives. The sign can therefore comprise of a burial site (as mark: *gravelgraph*), a rock painting and ritual ³ insofar as these refer to meanings, unconscious motivations and other signs.

Volosinov in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1986) attempts to delimit the domain of semiotics and signs by differentiating it from physical phenomena, instruments of production and consumer goods. These points of delimitation, though, are the junctures where semiotics and poetics most interestingly emerge.

- 1) According to Volosinov, physical phenomena are not semiotic. Because the physical entity equates with itself it does not signify something else. It only becomes a sign when given a conceptual meaning. Burial of a corpse, though, would be an example of the transformation of the physical into a sign. While the corpse is only physical, it points to a semiotic awareness of death when buried; it indicates death becoming a sign for the living.

Some time in history, death became a sign to the living; a sign, usually, to be covered or made absent through burning or other means. The covering of the corpse became a powerful mark and meaning. From this meaning given to death, various rituals developed. The dead became potent sources of protection and fear. Important literary forms accompanied the rituals surrounding the dead. The *insinqulo*, for instance, is a Xhosa prayer whereby the living addresses the dead. While living, it was the individual's *isibongo* or praise name. The *iziduko* is a catalogue of the names and deeds of the ancestors. The Xhosa bury their dead in the sacred ground of the cattle kraal. Here the living use the *insinqulo* and *iziduko* at special occasions. The *insinqulo* and *iziduko* show death as an ultimate sign of power - a power transcending the social and the symbolic.

According to Julia Kristeva, the poetic sign is a product of the drives repressed by social and symbolic meaning. Freud defines the drives as the urges to restore earlier states of things abandoned because of social or other external disturbing forces. The *insinqulo* and *iziduko*, as addresses to the dead, are attempts to restore the dead to a position where they still affect the living. They belong to a beyond. A beyond that the living can reach through ritual and dream. This imagined beyond compensates for the loss caused by death.

The discovery of death is one of the originating points of semiotics and poetry. The graves and burial grounds endure for ages. They are fragments of performed poetry. They are evidence of poetry before the event of writing.

- 2) Volosinov excludes the instruments of production from the realm of signs: the tool only has a designated function; it does not stand for or reflect anything else.

The instrument of production, nevertheless, can become a sign. This happens, for instance, when it takes on totemic significance. Iron smelting and the instruments made from iron took on special significance for the Barolong, and is commemorated in an ancient totemic dancing ritual in honour of the founding members of the lineage: Morolong and Noto. The name of the founding chief, Morolong, means 'blacksmith' and the name of his son, Noto, refers to the 'hammer'. The totemic emblems of the Barolong are iron and the hammer.

The totemic dancing ritual of the Barolong is reminiscent of the fire-renewal rites or metallurgical mysteries and torch-races of ancient Greece (the *Panathenaia*, *Hephaestia* and *Promethia*) centring on the figures of Athena, Hephaistos and Prometheus.

The rites do not point to a scientific understanding of the iron-smelting process. Rather, it indicates an indebtedness to the ancestral realm, the realm beyond. Prometheus did not invent fire; he stole it from the Gods, i.e. the ancestral world.

Between 500 000 to 9 000 BC people made increasingly sophisticated tools of stone, bone and wood. The introduction of the bow and arrow towards the end of this period was a dramatic change. Rock paintings often depict the bow and arrow, and other instruments such as the spear, digging stick and kierie. They have assumed important semiotic significance for the painters. To them these tools were 'images of power'. In the traditional Xhosa culture two spears are an important aspect of the *imbongi's* costume. The rhapsodist in ancient Greece carried a staff or wand when they recited their poetry. In mythology Circe turned Odysseus' followers into pigs with her wand.

The staff or wand associates strongly with a transformation of consciousness, as well as the shifting of shape and metamorphoses experienced during trance and hypnotic states. In the Norwegian traditions, the word *völva* ('witch') relates to the

word *völr* ('staff'). This staff has hypnotic powers and potency. It is known as the 'wand of subjection'. (Chadwick & Chadwick, 1968:142.) These instruments link an inspired person with the spirit world. They express divine force.

- 3) Volosinov further excludes consumer goods from the domain of signs. An object of consumption only becomes a sign when it attains a meaning separate from its function. The relation between animals as food and animals as depicted within art and belief systems needs investigation.

A favourite topic of Xhosa pastoralist praise poetry is cattle. They slaughter cattle, though, only for consumption on special occasions such as the *ukukhapa* - the burial of a chief. The hunter-gatherers hardly ever depict the rock rabbit, an important source of food, in their paintings.

Fish is a forbidden form of food for many Africans. A song of the circumcision school at Leribe reads:

Nna ha ke je hlapi
Hlapi ke noha
Noha ya metsi
E ya nkudisa

I do not eat fish
A fish is a snake
A water snake
It makes me ill (Wilson and Thompson, 1975:167).

An exception to this rule is the Tlhaping ('the fish people') who abandoned the taboo, apparently because of a period of food scarcity. Their name refers to this change.

Production and consumption, the metabolism between man and nature, imply essential processes for cultural life. To transform a stone into a hammer indicates a metaphoric and poetic perception of the world. A tool in its historical founding moment is poetic. It is only through centuries of use that the poetic impact of the discovery of a particular implement becomes repressed into the unconscious. Myths, though, still commemorate the important founding moments in the history of production and consumption. These moments include:

- 1) The discovery of the bow and arrow. Egyptian myths ascribe this discovery to the god *Mntw* (the pharaoh Menthotpe or the Greek Rhadamanthys - the root word for mantis).
- 2) The domestication of animals. This, again, the Egyptians attributed to *Mntw*, the bull god and probably the origin of the Cretan Bull Cult of the Mycenaean Period. The earliest African depictions of domesticated cattle are from the Tassili Plateau in the Sahara Desert. These paintings date from about 3250-2950 BC. People brought cattle to Zimbabwe in about 300-1085 AD. Their presence south of the Limpopo followed soon. The cattle depicted in the rock paintings of Lesotho are similar and different to those depicted in North Africa. They are humped while the ones in the North are humpless. Like those of the Sahara they have a multi-coloured hide.
- 3) The discovery of fire and iron-smelting.

In Greek mythology Prometheus embodies the discovery of fire. He stole fire from the gods after being inspired by Mekone (according to Hesiod's *Theogony*). The name Mekone means poppy place and implies a narcotic condition. Prometheus, as thief who steals from the gods, is a typical trickster figure, comparable to the Irish Cormac or the South African hunter-gatherers' /Kaggen.

/Kaggen, associated especially with the praying mantis, reveals himself in many forms. Sometimes he is the Eland Bull, the Snake or the Vulture. This ability to change form is typical of the metamorphoses hallucinated by shamans in trances. The association of the shaman with the animal world finds a parallel in Greek portrayal of the costumes of their mythological heroes and gods: Hermes wears a ramskin, Herakles a lion skin; they show Zeus as a goatskin bearer, while the goddess Athena manifests herself in various bird forms such as owl, dove and gull. The Xhosa *imbongi* wears an animal skin cloak as costume.

Jack Lindsay connects the Greek trickster, Prometheus, to a shamanist phase in human and literary history. In the mythology of the South African hunter-gatherers /Kaggen, the trickster-god, was originally a shaman. The following section explores the role of the shaman in history.

Poet / Shaman

Lindsay defines the shaman as someone who controls the rituals connected with fertility renewal, illness and death. Through music, song and mimetic imitations of animals and spirits, the shaman enters a state of possession (Lindsay 1965:121) or trance - in this state he or she enacts a passage into the spirit world. He or she often carries the spirit of a sacrificed animal or a dead person to its correct destination in the underworld, or rescues the spirit of a sick person. The shaman confronts the gods, ancestors and spirits in a state of trance and 'tricks' healing powers, rain and the power to control animals from them.

The shaman was, further, a medium for divine inspiration. The Greeks called poetry, produced in these states of inspiration, *sophia* or wisdom that came from forces beyond the self. The poet was a mantis or prophet, an intermediary between people and the gods of the spiritual world. They rarely used the Platonic idea of the poet (*poietes*) as maker. Poets did not intentionally make poetry. Forces, operating within the body, but not identified with the conscious self, inspired them. Dreams are one such state of inspiration.

The work by Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1989) on the rock paintings and engravings of the hunter-gatherers in the South African region, if proved correct, makes a better understanding of shamanistic inspiration possible. It also clarifies the role that dance and music play in the process.

Shamanism is especially common among hunter-gatherers. Nearly half of the men and a third of the women amongst the !Kung have shamanist abilities.

Hunter-gatherers

Giving a common name to the hunter-gatherers is impossible. The Europeans call them *Bushmen*, the Xhosa *Twa*, the Sotho *Roa* and the Khoikhoi *San*. The few remaining clans call themselves //Xam, //Kau// and !Kung. In previous centuries they were widely dispersed over the continent of Africa. Although they share a hunter-gatherer economy, they vary in physical type and speak a number of different languages. These are click languages, at least four of which are not related.

They live in bands of between fifty to seventy people (in previous centuries, bands might have consisted of more people). Each band is independent from the next and moves within a defined area, usually around a particular waterhole. (See Bleek 1923: *Introduction*). They encourage marriage between the different bands. At particular times the bands of related

groups gather for a few weeks in a sacred place. Lee (1984:16) writes about such a regular gathering at /Xai/Xai in the Dobe area of Botswana. This gathering usually takes place during the dry season. Its purpose is trade, dancing and the arrangement of marriages. These meetings are reminiscent of the more elaborate *panegyris* or intertribal meetings of ancient Greece. During the *panegyris*, worship, sacrifices, prayers, athletic and musical contests, trade and funeral orations (*panegyric*) and the recitation of poetry took place.

The rock art of the South African hunter-gatherers occurs especially in mountainous regions such as the Drakenstein, the Cedarberg, Outeniqua, Camdeboo, Sneeuwberg, Winterberg, Stormberg and the Drakensberg.

According to Stow (who travelled in the Queenstown district in the nineteenth century) every band of hunter-gatherers had a cave with a sacred painting as its headquarters. From this painting the band derived its name: the Eland people from the painted Eland, the Python people from the Python cave and the Springbok people from the Springbok cave.

The paintings were an integral part of the trance dances of the hunter-gatherers. Lewis-Williams and Dowson state that the hunter-gatherers believed the paintings contained power, and that this power, stored in the painted animals, flowed to the trancing dancers. The painted sites are 'storehouses of the potency that made contact with the spiritual world possible'. (Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989:36). The mixing of the blood of animals, such as the Eland, into the paint, instilled potency into the paintings. Because the hunter-gatherers in the Drakensberg are extinct, Lewis-Williams and Dowson, unfortunately, had to link the paintings to the dances by referring to the */Kung* of Botswana.

The */Kung* of Botswana usually dance once a month, especially during the full moon. They ritually eat the meat of the giraffe, eland, kudu or mongongo nuts to produce heightened experiences of power. For the dance, the women arrange themselves in a circle around a fire. It is their task to tend to the fire and to sing. The men dance around the women.

The purpose of the dance is healing, rain-making and the control of animals. To achieve this purpose the medicine owners (*n/um k"ausi*) enter a trance (*/kia*). The movements of the dancers, the music (the rattles around the ankles, the clapping of the hands by the women, the drumming and the playing of reed flutes) and the singing induce the trance.

The rhythmic sounds and movements induce a somatic energy called *n/um*. The */Kung* describe *n/um* as a substance in the pit of the stomach of the healers. The dance activates this

energy. The */Kung* describe it as boiling. In this process it rises up the spinal cord and creates a feeling of power and energy in the body: trembling legs, heaving chests, dry throats and visions follow.

N/um

The hunter-gatherers' explanation of *n/um* boiling up in the body overlaps with Julia Kristeva's view that the rhythmical aspects of poetry and poetic language derive from energy discharges. The rhythmic movements of the body and the non-referential singing, correlate with Kristeva's semiotic layer of energy activity. In Kristeva's terms the semiotic embraces the neural imprints, marks and traces manifested in the rhythmic responses of the body. These rhythmic responses are expressions of the drives. It is rooted in the infantile and in the period before language acquisition. It relates to the pleasure and pain experienced especially in the oral and anal regions of the body when the infant interacts with the mother and other family members. Kristeva's definition of semiotics differs from Volosinov's. Volosinov interprets semiotics in terms of the referential sign and conscious processes. The drives and the instinctual are central to Kristeva's semiotics.

N/um, further, matches the Greek *menos*. *Menos* refers to a force or a power-heightening felt in the chest and 'thrusting up pungently' into the nostrils of the shaman (Lindsay, 1965:70-1). It enables him or her to confront the gods.

The trance evokes the *//gangwasi*, or spirits of the deceased ancestors. The healers 'cajole, plead, argue and do battle' with the *//gangwasi*. (Lee, 1984:103). These trance confrontations with the spirits of the underworld are typical of shamans or the 'defiers of the highgods'. (Lindsay, 1965:118.)

Megan Biesele recorded, in Botswana, a report of the trance experience from an old */Kung* healer called *K"xau*. A translation of this report is found in Joan Halifax's book *Shamanic Voices* (1979). The Drakensberg rock paintings and the transcription made by Biesele point to shared motifs, a shared world view - despite the great distance between the Drakensberg and Botswana. This transcription, although far removed in time and space from the paintings, is a key to understanding them. Matching the motifs in the paintings and the transcription with those from ancient Greek mythology further highlights shared aspects of a broader shaman culture.

Universal movements of the trance

The trance experience consists of three movements that recur universally as motifs: an underwater, underground and in-the-air movement.

During the first movement, God, the giraffe, calls *K"xau* and takes him 'to a wide body of water' that he enters by lying on his back in the direction the water is flowing. His body stretches out with the flow of the water. The rock paintings depict this by means of elongated figures lying on their backs and surrounded by fish, eels and crabs. (Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989:54.) Greek mythology refers to the waterleap of a variety of figures. (Lindsay, 1965:216). One of them, Glaukus, the fisherman, seized by a divine madness, flung himself into the sea after eating a powerful grass. He then became a seagod with prophetic powers.

K"xau describes the going under water as a struggle with the water: 'I fought the water for a long, long time'. (Halifax, 1979:56).

While *K"xau* is psychologically going under water, the spirits are dancing. *K"xau* describes his own dance as hopping. Later he refers to the spirit Dwamananani who misses one leg and hops about. This image also recurs in the paintings. It is also found in ancient Greece. The ancient Greeks called the one-legged shaman dance *askoliasmos*. (Lindsay, 1965:332). Vases depict satyrs in this posture. Supported on the right foot they straighten out the other to the tip of the toes and then bend the knee and cross hands. (Lindsay, 1965:41).

K"xau enters the earth in the second movement. Painted figures disappearing in the grooves or folds of the rock surface indicate this travelling underground. (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1989:88.) Hades and Chthonic spirits conjure up images of going underground in ancient Greece. (Lindsay 1965:41).

Thirdly *K"xau* climbs a 'thread into the sky'. In the paintings the lines emanating from the dancers' heads probably refer to the thread of energy that pulls them into the sky. Birds and birdlike figures also represent the trance movement into the sky. (Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989:56 & 73).

Climbing into the sky is a universal theme in ancient cultures: in Genesis, Jacob dreams of a heaven-ladder. The symbol of the heaven-ladder (*klimax*) is widespread in Greek culture. An Attic *kylix* of about 470-460 BC depicts Thracian women tattooed with the symbol of the ladder. (Lindsay, 1965:104). Mythological figures portrayed as birds are common in ancient Greece. Various dances such as the *geranos* or crane dance use bird costumes.

Pictographic language

The rock paintings form a pictographic language. The pictorial aspects of the rock paintings correspond to the thetic level of energy activity identified by Kristeva as a source of poetry. The thetic roots in the mirror stage, the stage when the infant recognises him- or herself as separate entity. The pictorial nature of this discovery of the self as object is important. This is also a discovery of the separateness of the world and its objects from the self.

This pictographic language has features that are significantly different from the features of spoken language. Unlike spoken language there are no syntagmatic links between the signs. The rules underlying the production of sentences, positing causal relationships are absent. The pictorial points to a thetic and spatial realm of objects. It implies a subject and object position in spite of the first person being absent from the painting. The painting does not contain the eye that determines its production. The 'I', clearly identified in spoken language, is not explicitly indicated in the pictograph. We assume that the figures portrayed as animals, or half-animals, or apparently undergoing transformations, refer to the painter as subject who underwent these shape-shifting experiences. The relation between the figures portrayed and the painter is however not clear. The figure depicted with the most vivid attention to detail, and situated in the centre usually indicate the subject. This figure is often larger than the rest.

Dream-interpretation is one methodological approach to these paintings: they stem from the dream or trance hallucination. The paintings, like the dream, are pictographic. They further share a common instinctual intermediary in the painter who transposes the signifying elements of the dream onto the rock painting. The instinctual intermediary is also collective or cultural. The recurrence of motifs in the various paintings and in the oral reports of trance experiences seems to point to the trans-individual deep structure from which these motifs stem.

Oral reports of trance experiences, such as that of *K"xau*, or the painted reports, are what Freud calls secondary revisions: the oral reports and the paintings as representations of the dream are different from the original dream material. The transposition from the dream system to the system of paint or orality leads to distortions and falsifications. It is impossible to reconstitute the material dream. It is possible, though, to recover the dream-thoughts, beliefs and ideas that prompted the dream. The various revisions contain traces of these.

Interestingly the differences between the rock paintings and the dream are not real for the traditional Venda. To them the rock paintings at Tombo-la-Ndou are not paintings but 'things in the eyes' that only become visible when gifts are left there. (Buijs, 1992:12).

The dream is different from the static painting in that it depicts scenic action: the dream constructs the images into situations that dramatise ideas. The images form a narrative in which scenes follow on one another. The situations are disconnected, full of contradictions and impossibilities. The dreamer, who is usually the protagonist in his or her own dream, experiences it with pleasure or fear.

The dreams and the paintings are a pictorial form of writing. It is tempting to view the hieroglyphs of Egypt as a development from the North African rock art. The dream is a vanishing, fleeting form of writing, spontaneously happening inside the sleeping person or trance. The painting, on the other hand, is an object, concrete and durable.

Seeing, hearing and thought

Alphabetic writing is phonic in contrast to visual pictorial writing. This phonic aspect is decisive for thought. Through words such as 'because' and 'if' the phonic can link concepts causally. This is difficult to express pictorially. The phonic is closer to thought. Heidegger points to the difference between seeing and hearing in thought processes. He states that one can see a situation clearly and yet not grasp it. Grasping means hearing distinctly. It means retaining the seen in the ear. Thought is a transposition of the seen into the heard, of the pictorial into the verbal: 'thinking is a grasping by the ear that grasps by sight' and 'thinking is hearing and seeing'. (Ricoeur, 1986:281).

Pure seeing belongs to Kristeva's semiotic phase: it implies a certain infantile, erotisation of sight. Thinking, on the other hand, as a combination of internal hearing and seeing, points to thethetic and symbolic, to the emergence of self-presence - the recognition of the self as subject-object in the mirror and the naming of the world.

The seeing-hearing constituents of thought are also important in Freud's description of the contrast between dream and waking states. In waking states, perceptual and sensory imprints (principally visual and pictorial), move towards memory where, through selection, it gains entrance to consciousness.

Consciousness transforms the visual imprint to verbal form. An opposite movement, from verbal form to perception, constitutes hallucination. This is rare in normal waking states.

Dreams are the product of a similar regressive movement in the nervous system. Verbal ideas change into pictorially experienced situations.

The dream, according to Freud (1980:699), regresses on three levels: 1) topographically from one place in the nervous system to another: from idea to perception; 2) formally, a 'primitive' pictorial form replaces the verbal form; and 3) temporarily in that vision (before it combines with hearing in the formation of the thinking subject) refers to the pre-verbal semiotic stage of development.

The dream as regression is an instrument of the drives in so far as it implies a harking back to older psychical structures. In the trance dance, and the rock paintings, older psychical structures become manifest in the form of the ancestors and the dead. God and his wife confronting *K"xau*, in his vision, with their massive sexual organs ('lo-o-ong' penis and wriggling labia) indicate the regressive, semiotic and pre-oedipal domain of trance.

'Formless areas of luminosity' and the 'vivid and rapidly changing images' (hypnagogic hallucinations) that appear within the closed eyelids, especially, when people fall asleep, instigate dreams according to Freud (1980:93-95). To Lewis-Williams and Dowson the geometric shapes (zigzags, chevrons, dots, grids, vortexes and u-shapes) depicted in rock paintings refer to the early formless stage of trance, identified as the entoptic stage. A construal phase follows when entoptic phenomena transform into familiar objects: the zig-zag, for instance, becomes a snake. During the final, iconic phase, spontaneously produced hallucinations of people, animals and other objects occur.

The entoptics represent the physical experience of pure *num* and energy. The thetic and symbolic consciousness has not transformed and interpreted it into the familiar. The construals and iconics are mental translations of this force. It indicates the way in which the mind makes sense of the energy produced within itself. To Derrida the translation of this internal energy into images is original because of the great metaphorical difference between force and image, and because the image does not derive from something outside the mental system. (1981:207).

The transformation of force into images constitutes the dream-work (i.e. the process whereby energies, drives and thoughts gain dream-content). Condensation and displacement structure the dream-work.

Condensation, or the compression of a large number of possible associations, meanings and ideas into a limited number of images, occurs in the construction of collective and composite

figures. Animals referring to clans, and animal names functioning as kinship names, or composite figures such as the therianthrope (human beings with animal features) and superimpositions would be examples of condensation. Ideas treated as things also condense: for instance, when a kinship group, named after an animal, is depicted as the animal itself. Composite figures function as neologisms and are a common feature in dreams.

Displacement coincides, to some extent, with condensation. It points to the transferral of a value attached to one object onto another. The lineage group condensed in the image of the animal points to the fact that the value of that lineage invests in that animal. This explains the logic operative in totems and taboos: the identity and value of the group displace onto the animal. Eating the flesh of that animal is equal to eating someone from the own group. The painted animal referring to the totemic clan, further, displaces the clan name onto the pictorial image.

Painting also presupposes a displacement of energy, from the eyes to the hands, onto the surface of the rock. Both the hands and the eyes are infantile zones of pleasure. The power to produce paintings indicates a strong investment of the drives and energy in these organs.

The painting of the trance experience implies a return of the repressed: or a semiotic material gaining signifying form. Repression refers to a blocking of infantile impulses that would under different conditions contradict the purposive ideas of secondary thinking. These impulses, charged with energy, continuously seek outlets. They find these outlets in the unintended, the non-communicative and mysterious aspects of symbolic life: in obsessive behaviour, ritual, dreams, jokes, literature and slips of the tongue. Ritual, jokes, art and literature are socially sanctioned manifestations of the repressed. The various manifestations of the repressed point to a distortion of conscious language.

The Formalists refer to this distortion, but without indicating its basis in repression, as *ostranenie* (making strange of language). Psychoanalysis shows how drives and pleasure motivate *ostranenie*.

The inaccessibility of the *hylic* (the real outside human consciousness) suggests an ultimate repression. Because of this inaccessibility of the real, we know force only through the imaginary, through the perceptual and symbolic constructions thereof. In so far as the self is such a repressed and inaccessible real, name and identity always refer to the other, or to the

outside. This is why a particular kinship group takes on the identity of an animal or object. The repression of the real, and the energy invested in it, inscribes poetry in all semiotic systems. Language is always strange.

Conclusion

Although the oral traditions, predating writing, have disappeared, the early stages of South African poetry, drama and narrative can be studied through the rock paintings and other semiotic remains, such as burial sites.

Notes

1. This has recently been contested by archaeologists.
2. The term 'literature' as an overarching term is too narrow to use here. It is too specific to the written letter and the book.
3. De Saussure stated: '(b)y studying rites, customs, etc. as signs, I believe that we shall throw new light on the facts and point up the need for including them in a science of semiology and explaining them by its laws'. (1959:17).

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