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## **Symposium: Echoes from Eco: Authorising Readings of Art in the Past**

Maragarita Diaz-Andreu and Bob Layton

In recent years challenges to earlier readings of art have enriched our perspective of art's potential as an informative source for our understanding of the past. However, we think that a critical assessment of the achievements in archaeology and anthropology is needed in order to refine the scope for future work. We feel that a reflection on the extent to which all readings are authorised is required, and we propose to do this through a deliberation on the limits of interpretation on the art of past and present societies. Eco's arguments refer to literary texts. However, we invite contributors to explore the applications of his ideas to art. As he says unlimited semiosis does not mean that there are no criteria for interpretation. There are reasons to think that some readings of a text are more authorised than others. Those that are not authorised can be called overinterpretations. Eco proposes that it is possible to prove that some meanings are overinterpretations, even without necessarily having to know which is the right interpretation. The reader, the interpreter, cannot therefore engage in an infinite range of readings. Moreover, Eco proposes that to claim that a particular reading is an overinterpretation is not an 'authoritarian' attitude. Eco distinguishes between the intention of the author, the intention of the interpreter and the intention of the text. He asks whether the first is irrelevant for the interpretation of the text and argues that an "authorised" reading is one which could reasonably be expected to occur to members of the intended audience.

### ***Post-processual approaches to Minoan architecture***

Louise Hitchcock

Minoan buildings possess a "Labyrinthine" layout, which includes elaborate halls, and storage and industrial quarters grouped around a central court. Variability in these arrangements is created through distinctions in the placement of doorways and corridors. Previous scholarship has arbitrarily assigned functions to Minoan rooms based on form or on analogies with Egyptian architecture. Such methods are rooted in universalist assumptions that neglected the unique complexity and regional diversity of Minoan buildings. With multiple entry ways, passageways, and varying degrees of accessibility, Minoan buildings were experienced by different people in different ways. This paper analyses the function of the Minoan monumental buildings in Late Bronze Age Crete using approaches that might be termed 'post-processual' in order to examine non-verbal means of communication, function, and meaning on multiple levels. These levels include movement, experience, visual access, and an emphasis on regional differences. Several examples will illustrate the significance of both patterns and differences in the spatial arrangement of rooms as organising principles in Minoan culture.

### ***The contribution of space to the meaning of rock art - a framework for a textual analysis of rock art sites.***

Tilman Lenssen-Erz

Rock art research in Africa often neglects the sites. Interpreting prehistoric art is mainly a practice similar to that of interpreting European pictorial art: pictures are treated in isolation like framed art, the context being completely disregarded. However, the prehistoric artists did not only think about what they wanted to paint, but they also reflected on where to do it. The place of a picture comprises part of its meaning. A combined analysis of natural 'infrastructural' properties and anthropogenic features of gestaltung, assessed from the viewpoints of ideology and religious praxis, can help to allocate a specific function to any one site. The location in the landscape helps to understand various functions of rock art sites.

### ***Places, paths and peripheries: Interpreting hunter-gatherer rock art***

Sven Ouzman

In essence, the paper argues for the importance of the physical and conceptual journey in interpreting hunter-gatherer rock engravings and paintings. The discussion is given a focus by a particular image class, animal tracks and human footprints, which provide a very good metonymic and 'indirect' referent to two key aspects of hunter-gatherer life: identity and journey. The notion of margin and centre is also important to me, as often it is the more flexible and creative 'margin' that, almost contradictorily, comes to occupy centre stage.

***Style in body art: Discerning social strategies across cultures***

Claire Smith

This paper presents the preliminary results of an ethnoarchaeological study of style in the body art of selected indigenous people in Australia and Asia. One focus of the research is the type of interactions and contexts that promote the use of permanent stylistic identifiers (e.g. tattoos) or temporary identifiers (e.g. body paintings). The systematic evaluation of the relationships between a single art genre and the social contexts of production will have two benefits: identification of the potential range of factors that influence stylistic patterning in a genre and of any structuring principles (i.e. human universals) that occur in a genre across cultures. This study draws upon the distinction drawn by Eco between the intention of the author and the intention of the text, arguing that the former informs the latter, rather than being irrelevant to it - and that there is a possibility that this intention and associated social strategies can be conveyed across cultures. Knowledge of the general principles in this respect can be used to interpret stylistic variation in archaeological contexts. The results of this study will contribute to answering long-term questions through the development of archaeological theory and method.

***Environmental art and the re-presentation of the past***

Chris Tilley

The paper will discuss installation art in the landscape and its relevance for understanding the relationship between place, space and aesthetics.