

## Imagery beyond Representation

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Pictorial and visual elements are special types of archaeological data that transgress boundaries; between the past and us and between the material and immaterial. Imagery communicates with the observer in elaborate and often unforeseen ways. What special powers are embedded in the pictorial that seem to hold so much promise and mystery? In what ways can we study how images affect and engage the beholder, and how are images actively entangled in past social worlds? Archaeological approaches to prehistoric images have traditionally circled around representation, symbolism and meaning. By and large this has resulted in a focus on interpretations with contextually inferred meanings set within hermeneutic, phenomenological or evolutionary frameworks. In recent years, however, other ways of exploring imagery have been discussed within cultural studies and visual theory (e.g. Mitchell 1996; 2005; Evans & Hall 1999; Rose 2001; O'Sullivan 2005). Common themes are the multi-sensuous aspects of the imagery that involve issues of materiality and aesthetics, emphasizing that in many cases images evolve into something with qualities of their own.

Within anthropology and archaeology, in contrast, there are discussions of the possible agency of art and the pictorial (e.g. Gell 1998; Knappett 2002). Indeed, both objects and imagery are entangled in the social. Nonetheless, despite the power that past imagery seems to have over our minds in the present day, the study of past imagery is still theoretically and methodologically underdeveloped in archaeology (e.g. Hamilton et al. 1996:281-307; Aldhouse-Green 2004; Bradley 2009; Cochrane & Russel 2007). We need to elaborate on the different roles that the images may have in the social. That is, how can imagery work as actants and initiate or evoke thoughts and actions that are not originally intended, and how can it result in new, unintended and unforeseen consequences? There are a great number of approaches and elaborate theories on how to understand the pictorial in the social and humanist sciences. In

this introduction, we discuss a few that we believe have the greatest potential for archaeological studies. In this volume, we aim to engage with these issues and highlight the manifold, and hitherto less employed, methodological and theoretical ways in which imagery may be understood.

### Art and imagery

In traditional Art History images are generally assumed to have a content, something that needs to be decoded or unlocked (Cornell & Fahlander 2002:74). One typical example in this tradition is Panofsky's study of art as *iconography* (the identification, description and the interpretation of the content of images) and *iconology* (the analysis of the meaning of that content). Despite quite substantial criticism (e.g. Kubler 1962:127f; O'Sullivan 2005:15) iconological approaches in archaeology are generally concerned with questions of identifying what the imagery is supposed to represent, and in the second stage, to interpret how such an image may fit into a cultural cosmology or ideology. But of course, not all archaeology of imagery has worked along traditional art history; there have been several attempts to explore various (post)structural and semiotic approaches of prehistoric imagery as well (e.g. Nordbladh 1980; Tilley 1991; Mulk & Bayliss-Smith 2006:39-42). Images have much in common with words, but the strict formal relationship that Saussure and Jakobson identified in language is not really transferable to practice, things or images (Olsen 2011:40). Despite the lack of a strict visual grammar, semiotic approaches can nonetheless be useful as a way of bypassing the tyranny of meaning and representation of imagery. Leroi-Gourhan's (1967) work with Palaeolithic cave art can be inspiring here as a study of abstract signs rather than preconceived ideas about the depictions of animals and humans. From such a perspective it may be easier to distinguish patterns and relations that are otherwise masked by classification and typology (cf. Fahlander, this volume).

Also phenomenological and metaphorical perspectives can reveal interesting relationships between the pictorial and the local landscape. Chris Tilley, for instance, has recently argued for a more holistic way for understanding prehistoric rock art: from a 'kinaesthetic approach', he argues, 'the material medium – that is, the rock and its landscape context, is as fundamental in understanding the art as the imagery itself' (2008:20). In a case study of the Simris petroglyphs on the southernmost coast of Sweden he suggests that the natural 'wavy' grooves of the rock were used in a narrative sense as alluding to a 'frozen sea'. Tilley experiences imagery with the whole body, emphasizing that images are not simply for us to see but need to be experienced by all senses, including touch and feel. Although Tilley's way of approaching the imagery is novel in some respects, it is still firmly grounded in post-processual ideas of context, symbolism and meaning.

Different ways of seeing?

A frequently quoted passage from Colin Turnbull's paper on Bambuti perception describes how a pygmy when taken outside the jungle confuses a distant buffalo on the plains with an insect (1961:305). The argument goes that since he lived all his life in the thick and dense jungle he lacked a developed sense of perspective. Although the event probably is exaggerated (see e.g. Friedman 1994:11), it still raises the question of whether there are different 'ways of seeing' depending on milieu, knowledge and 'cultural development'. Are there radically different ways of seeing that bias and distort our present appropriation of prehistoric imagery? New media, techniques and forms of producing imagery have certainly changed the way we 'see'. John Berger, Walter Benjamin and others, for example, have pointed out the impact of modern inventions such as the camera which have affected the Western ways of seeing (1972:18; cf. Benjamin 2007:236-7). It is thus not surprising that the contemporary western worlds are typically regarded as ocularcentric and that the visual plays a fundamental role in our lives (Jenks 1995:1; cf. Jay 1993). However, this does not imply that imagery is less relevant in past worlds. Many historians have pointed out the important and intricate roles that images, especially in spiritual contexts, have played in the past (Hamburger 1997; cf. Göransson 1999). It would thus probably be a mistake to make a distinction between a prehistoric or 'primitive' way of vision from a modern one. Instead we need to recognize that different ways of seeing, understanding and communicating with and through images not only differs between different times and places, but also between contemporary groups of people. John Clarke (2003:4), for instance, has convincingly argued that ordinary Romans and the elite used and viewed mosaics and paintings in different ways. He demonstrates how the typical evocative Roman paintings and mosaics of 'frivolous character' worked as an indication of class and status rather than being 'pornographic' in a modern sense (1998; cf. Herva 2004; Dipla & Paleothodoros, this volume).

A main problem for archaeological studies of imagery is that their 'secondary' or 'conventional' meanings are normally unknown to us. Is it then at all possible to 'see' what the other is seeing? Berger (1972:7-8) has discussed the paradox that what we see does not always fit with what we know. A simple example is how the sun appears to revolve around the earth although we 'know' it is the other way around (cf. Matić, this volume). Indeed, the way we appropriate things and images depends on what we know or believe. The question can be formulated in terms of approaching images as 'objects of recognition' or as 'objects of encounter' (O'Sullivan 2005:1). Most of us have a tendency to recognize, identify, and understand images, but the encounter normally emerges first after we have failed to contextualize the image. Since archaeology mainly deals with images of unknown origin, context and intentions, it is perhaps better to resist the urge to recognize, identify and understand and instead 'encounter' imagery. Mats Rosengren (2012) has used Plato's Cave allegory to illustrate how art historians and archaeologists have approached Paleolithic cave art as objects

of recognition. He argues that the archaeologists have been too occupied with the 'origins' and the background of the paintings, that is, what animals the paintings illustrate and represent, how naturalistic and accurately they are portrayed, instead of discussing what the practice of making images (the shadows on the wall) can actually tell us about the people crafting them. The recognition approach thus tends to restrict the creative, imaginary process of interpretation, and reduce it to a process of simply combining and depicting things that already exist in the world. There is little room for discussing difference, change and what images 'really want'. It is only by encountering imagery that interesting effects can occur, from which we can learn something new about past worlds.



Fig 1. 'Graffiti removal?', Banksy 2008.

Of course, to treat images as 'objects of encounter' is far from a strict method or consistent approach with a given set of tools and ready-made concepts. The main point is to avoid focusing too much on making them 'fit' with what we 'know' and instead elaborate on *archaeological* ways to approach past imagery. As an alternative to trying to relate the pictured to a social context (secondary meaning) or as strict representations of something real or ideal, it seems more fruitful to discuss aspects of materiality, practice and aesthetics, and examine how imagery embodies not only effects of pasts worlds but is also an active participant in social structuration.

## Encountering imagery: materiality, agency and representation

Since images generally appear to us as form and content it is not very surprising that the materiality of the pictorial is a somewhat neglected aspect. Imagery is material in the sense that it is made of matter by matter which forms integrated elements of the image as a materiality (cf. Alberti, this volume). As Bruno Latour and many others have argued the social sphere is not only an arena restricted to human discourse, but rather it is constituted in the relationships between humans and things (1999; 2005). In archaeology function, form and style are by tradition central concepts in the way we understand past material culture (e.g. Hegmon 1992). The concept of materiality, however, expands this understanding to also include a wider perspective of how these objects are integrated in the social (Fahlander 2008:131-6). For example, the materiality of a ceramic pot is often much more than its primary function as a vessel. A pot can be made to be crushed, to be put on display or to work as a surface for imagery, etc. The pictorial is no different in this respect but can have social implications beyond the intentions and ideas of producer and the consumer in a similar way to that of a certain object (cf. Mitchell 2005 on the concept meta-picture). The power of images not only lies in what it might represent or symbolise, but also in the way they interfere and are integrated in social life.

The discussions on the 'socialness' of things tends to centre on the question of 'material agency' rather than on the material itself, and its potential social implications (Tanner & Osborne 2007; Ingold 2012). Alfred Gell (1992) has suggested that the lavish decoration on the Trobriand canoes worked as an extension of the producer's agency which, he argues, was an implicit but significant factor in trade and barter negotiations. He describes the imagery of the canoes as 'a means of thought-control' (1992:44). An analogous example concerns the early practice of writing, for instance, the way ancient Greek was printed as long rows of letters without spaces between the individual words. One effect of this practice was that the content became revealed first when spoken out loud. This phenomenon promoted the idea that the author, in a literary sense, 'put the words in the mouth of the reader', and thus governed the reader by using text as a remote control (Svenbro 1997:10).

The idea that images work as a prolonged arm of the initiator is indeed an interesting path to pursue, but it is important to also consider any unforeseen or unintended effects of imagery. We need to take into consideration the long life of certain imagery and how it may be used, abused, changed, modified and 'misunderstood' by different people over time (cf. Nilsson this volume). One such case has been discussed by Per Cornell (2011), concerning the relations between painted images of cities and the formation of the medieval cities in Europe. He points out how the images of the cities of the American colonies during the early period of contact was illustrated according to certain artistic conventions rather than being accurate depictions. But when these images returned to Europe they become ideals of how cities should look and the

artistic convention thus became practice. Although it seems evident that images as well as other materialities play important parts in the social sphere it is important to understand that such 'agency' is not as much an inherent property as it is a *potential* of affecting the outcome of a given situation (cf. Latour 2005:7, 159).

This type of social power that things and imagery seem to possess is referred to as 'secondary' agency (Gell 1998), 'pseudo-agency' (Knappett 2002) or aesthetics (Gosden 2001; Heyd & Clegg 2003). The concept of aesthetics signifies a broad range of ways in which imagery may impinge on people – not only in an affective or sensual way, but also in subliminal and more direct ways similar to the notions of material agency (O'Sullivan 2005:22-3). Aesthetics comprises all those aspects of images that may affect the beholder (e.g. a site of resistance, recalcitrance, particularity, strangeness, representation, imagination or pleasure), which is indeed hard to capture in words. In order to approach past imagery as objects of encounter we may need to find new ways of describing the aesthetics of material, colour, complexity, form and 'style' in general, and material relations in particular. This does not have to be in the form of abstract semiotic terminology or by formal analysis of content and form. One interesting approach that tries to capture the aesthetic effects of imagery is the distinction between *studium* and *punctum* suggested by Roland Barthes (1981). A *punctum* is a 'wound' or 'prick', something striking that sticks out from the picture, and which is poignant to the beholder. Barthes separates analyses of such qualities from the *studium*, which for him is 'a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment' to the depicted (Barthes 1981:26f). Barthes' approach is indeed quite subjective because the *punctum* is often an individual, even temporary response, but it nonetheless emphasises a dimension in how images 'talk' and can be helpful to understand how certain additions or alterations of imagery can have unexpected and unforeseen results (see Frederick & Clarke, this volume).

Recently, the idea of images as primarily recognizable and representative has been challenged by a number of archaeologists who explore non-representational and relational perspectives (Cochrane 2005; Pollard 2005; Jones 2006; Maurstad 2012; see also Back Danielsson and Fahlander, this volume). Common denominators in these works include a desire to understand the visual potency of the images and how these interact with the viewer(s). The visual potency is considered to introduce phenomenological registers that clearly exceed representation. The lived present is of primary focus, bringing with it an enhanced interest in, for instance, practice, performativity, performance, embodiment and the body (e.g. Cadman 2009). Importantly, the lived present thereby becomes '...an open-ended and generative process...' (Harrison 2000:499). Non-representational theories thus argue that representation and meaning downplay practice, and in extension events, to the degree that these are 'drained for the sake of orders, mechanisms, structures and processes' (Dewsbury et al. 2002:438). Instead, it is about letting things take place and to recognize the movement of things (Anderson & Harrison 2010, cf. Alberti and Cochrane, this volume). Thereby an

overarching meaning, interpretation and/or representation is avoided. Another tenet of these perspectives revolves around questions of the material itself. Materials need to be understood in processual terms and not as substrates and essential (Conneller 2011). Instead materials are best understood through what they do, rather than what they are, and ‘the processes by which the properties of past materials emerge reveals configurations of past worlds; particular articulations of the cultural, the natural and the supernatural’ (2011:125). Conclusively, it is thus the processes of formation that are primary, not the states of matter. Such perspectives are accompanied by an ontological re-orientation. In Ingold’s terms (2010:92), there is an ontology of *relations*, not of substances (cf. Latour 1999; 2005; Barad 2007; Alberti & Bray 2009 on alternatives to an ontology of substances).

The outline of the book

The principal theme of this volume is to explore ways of dealing with imagery other than through representation, symbolism and meaning. The perception of imagery encompasses a great number of aspects, but our aim is to focus on the way images and the pictorial worked in the past, as well as how they affect us in the present. The articles in this volume do this from a number of different perspectives and by no means constitute a coherent body of thought. They comprise examples from various regions, time periods and diverse subject matter – spanning from north European Stone and Bronze Age rock art to anthropomorphic aspects of ceramic pots and figures in gold, Egyptian wall paintings, erotic themes on children’s burial pots as well as quarantined sailors’ rock art of nineteenth century Australia.

The first text by Benjamin Alberti, *Cut, pinch and pierce. Image as practice among the early formative La Candelaria, first millennium AD, Northwest Argentina*, explores the concept of perspectivism applied to anthro- and zoomorphic ceramic vessels. Alberti argues that these objects need to be perceived as animate and mobile actants instead of as static objects. They are thus changeable and always in motion. This aspect is important since it suggests that different kinds of bodies, ceramic or animal, human or non-human, can be regarded as ontologically equivalent. Decor and imagery are thus not simply ‘added’ to the objects, but both meaning and material are extensions of practice.

A similar notion of vitalism is also addressed in Ing-Marie Back Danielsson’s contribution, *The rape of the lock. Or a comparison between miniature images of the eighth and eighteenth centuries*. Back Danielsson contrasts gold foil figures of the eighth century with miniature portrait pendants of the eighteenth century through Mitchell’s concept meta-picture. While miniature portrait pendants of the eighteenth century were meant to be static and still portraits, eighth-century gold foil figures were figures in flux; inconsistent, transformative and always incorporated in acts of

doing. In this respect they were ontologically equivalent to certain human beings. However, it is concluded that when both categories were engaged and manipulated in different performances they shared vitalistic and/or animistic characteristics.

Anne Clarke's and Ursula Frederick's paper *In loving memory. Inscriptions, images and imagination at the North Head Quarantine station, Sydney, Australia*, explores nineteenth-century petroglyphs on the sandstone cliffs above Sydney Harbour. These carvings were made by people who had just arrived in Australia and who were then taken into quarantine; thus being material markers of existence in a specific, liminal environment. Although the carvings reveal information about the names of ships, ports of origin, or names of crews and passengers, and as such is a valuable historical archive, other information can be gained through the material. The authors suggest that the making of marks in the sandstone cliff served as a technology for remembrance.

Rock art is also the topic of Per Nilsson's paper *The beauty is in the act of the beholder. South Scandinavian rock art from a uses of the past-perspective*. Nilsson discusses the re-use of Bronze Age rock art sites at three different places in southern Scandinavia. From analysing the different finds and features at these places, such as hearths, fire-cracked stones and also houses, he suggests that the secondary use of the rock art sites may be understood as a method for communicating with the past. Through this continuous dialogue or process altered meanings of rock art figures were created.

In Fredrik Fahlander's paper, *Articulating stone. The material practice of petroglyphing*, rock art is viewed from a non-representational perspective, suggesting that petroglyphs are better understood as material articulations than narrative or symbolical expressions. In his study the materiality of the rock and the production processes are emphasized (e.g. patchworks, unfinished motifs, re-cuts and hybrids). The approach is exemplified by a horizontal stratigraphy of a panel in which different phases of imagery are distinguished. Such recognitions allow Fahlander to discuss how changes in practice, as well as different motifs, are related to each other and the materiality of the bedrock.

Courtney Nimura's paper also concerns Bronze Age rock art. Her paper *Rock art and coastal change in Bronze Age Scandinavia* is inspired by Gell's theory of art and agency. She explores the relationship between rock art and coastal change in southern Scandinavia. Nimura maintains that the rock carvings were not only directed towards a living audience, but also to the seemingly capricious nature of water itself. Based on a number of rock art localities in Østfold, Bohuslän, Uppland and Simris she argues that the carvings were considered to have 'magical' powers. The increase in rock art over the course of the Bronze Age is argued to have been due to stress over the receding shore-lines, and that the carvings were created as a means to halt this process.

Andrew Cochrane's contribution, *The immanency of the intangible image. thoughts with Neolithic expression at Loughcrew*, focuses on the imagery of the Loughcrew passage tombs, Ireland. He argues that the motifs perform as sources for invention and belonging, which sometimes served as being creative and reasonable and at other

times played at being inept and unreasonable. Gaps and absences were thereby created within the appearances of the world. Such processes could lead to affections of both engagement and disengagement. The performances connected with the tombs are maintained to be carnivalesque in character, relating in specific ways to the site and its imagery.

Ylva Sjöstrand's paper, *A quest of questions. On the paradigm of identification within rock art research*, also scrutinizes the idea of representation in Stone Age imagery. Sjöstrand emphasizes the importance of reflection and the often complex relations between an image's meaning and its pictorial content. As an alternative, Sjöstrand suggests that some motifs, such as the common elk figure in circumpolar rock art, work as a key symbol which does not need to have any particular essence, but can be employed as a vehicle for the mind for a variety of purposes.

In *Metaphors and allegories as augmented reality. The use of art to evoke material and immaterial subjects* Dragos Gheorghiu seeks to explore how art metaphors may be used to evoke different visualizations of procedures or events. This augmentation of reality allows the real and the artificial to merge, developing the imagination of the performer. From the example of the multi-period site of Vadastra, in the south of Romania, it is demonstrated how closely related metaphors may result in immediate bodily and sensorial perceptions and evocations.

Ruth Nugent's and Howard Williams' paper, *Sighted surfaces. Ocular agency in Early Anglo-Saxon cremation burials*, also explores the link between imagery and bodily experience. Moving away from thoughts of cremation urns as reflecting early settlers from Germanic areas, the authors seek to explore the imagery of decorated pots in terms of material agency and the urns' haptic and visual qualities, mediating memory and mourning. They suggest that the decoration was made to establish and maintain an idea of the dead person as a sensing and sighted subject even after the cremation was fulfilled.

Burial pots are also the point of departure in Anthi Dipla's and Dimitris Paleothodoros' text, *Selected for the dead. Erotic themes on grave vases from attic cemeteries*. Their study concerns the relationship between erotic motifs on funeral vases and the buried individual. It has been assumed that the erotic imagery of the pots was perceived in the same or similar ways as was intended by the producer. However, the authors argue that the choice of erotic images must have had other symbolic meanings, especially where the burial pots of small children are concerned. Such cases suggest that the imagery refers to presumed activities, expectations or fantasies for the dead.

Uroš Matić's contribution, *Out of the word and out of the picture? Keftiu and materializations of 'Minoans'* also concerns imagery from the Mediterranean area. Matić discusses the Egyptian notion of 'Keftiu' and 'Minoans' based on wall-paintings of Eighteenth Dynasty Theban tombs. In his discussion, using the visual grammar of Alfred Gell, he argues that the interpretations of the imagery lack an understanding of decorum, context and restricted knowledge of the tomb visitors. Matić suggests

that the Keftiu were associated with the Egyptian notions of ‘north’ and ‘Asia’, and thus did not refer to ‘Minoans’ only.

The final text in the volume, *Designed surfaces* by Ole Christian Aslaksen, focuses on the concept of design as observed in a study of turban rimmed bowls from Balkan and Central Europe. The polysemic nature of the concept, Aslaksen argues, has eluded the interest of archaeology. Design has been comprehended as if it were a simple synonym for the word ‘construction’, and the many definitions that have been formulated in order to pin down the concept has thus been overlooked. This lack of awareness leads to serious implications when discussing mass-produced materials, as for example the turban rimmed bowls. Aslaksen suggests that common and ubiquitous materials can benefit from an expanded awareness of the concept of design.

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