Drawing Upon the Past: Temporal Ontology and Mythological Ideology in South-central Californian Rock Art

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The increasing influence of New Animism is providing useful ways of interpreting rock art as well as ways to move beyond generalizing models based upon Cartesian principles. However, the increasing attention to animism runs the risk of simply replacing one generalization with another. To avoid the pitfalls of generalization, this article sets out to explore the ways in which relational ontology may have been communicated throughout indigenous society in a specific case study from south-central California. To do this requires adopting a 'third space' approach (Porr & Bell 2011) to detail the didactic and pedagogical narrative roles of rock art and mythology in south-central California. Paraphrasing Bird-David (2006), the goal is to understand how an animistic epistemology is enacted into an institutionalized way of knowing. To do this, I look closely at new information on rock-art chronology in conjunction with mythological narratives. It is suggested that the vibrant pictographs of the region drew upon ontological notions of the past embodied at specific places in the landscape and that the narrative structure of myth helps inform our understanding of the narrative structure of rock-art composition. This provides an appreciation of indigenous perceptions of time, which in turn shows that mythology was a template for human institutions while explaining rock art as another ontological institution that was part-and-parcel of relational ideologies associated with 'delayed-return' complex societies of south-central California.

> This animistic epistemology is an institutionalized way of knowing (Bird-David 2006, 44).

With the increasing influence of 'New Animism' in anthropological and archaeological theory (Alberti & Bray 2009; Bird-David 1999; Harvey 2006; Ingold 2006), the interpretation of rock art under the theoretical rubric of relational ontology and animism is showing considerably wide application across the globe (see Creese 2011; Dowson 2007; 2009; Helvenston & Hodgson 2010; Janik 2007; Jones *et al.* 2011; Wallis 2009; 2013; see Porr & Bell 2011 for wider discussion). Dowson's (2007; 2009) recent discussions have advocated the potential of animism as a means to 'move on' from the current intractability of the shamanic debate. Dowson critiques the concept of shamanism and the neuropsychological model on two core principles: first, by casting doubt upon the neuropsychological model since it is based upon questionable concepts of the universality of 'anatomically modern human'; and second, because shamanism as a construct is problematically predicated on essentialist notions of hunter-gatherers based upon modern Cartesian dichotomous underpinnings. Dowson therefore proposes that such an approach is 'fundamentally different to the shamanistic approach' (Dowson 2007, 59). Even so, while Dowson does not propose jettisoning shamanism entirely, he emphasizes that shamans have been foregrounded in narratives concerning rock art that effectively underplays other notions of supernatural potency and agency within hunter-gatherer communities (Dowson 2009, 380).

Indeed, it can be seen that a range of researchers with previously divergent views are now rethinking rock art through employing animistic considerations

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(for instance Hampson 2011; 2013; Janik 2007; Jones *et al.* 2011; Robinson in press; Wallis 2009; 2013). Indeed, Helvenston and Hodgson (2010) have proposed linking animistic perceptions to what might be termed a revisionist approach to the neuropsychological model in that their use of the term is not dependent upon altered states of consciousness. Even though some scholars are incorporating animism into rather than replacing shamanistic interpretation, the overall effect of this 'movement' is to deemphasize or side-step the neuropsychological model (see Robinson in press). This represents a significant shift from a physiological epistemology of mind to an indigenous ontology of being based upon relatedness.

In a broad Amerindian context, Viveiros de Castro (2004, 466) describes this idea of relatedness as an 'indigenous theory according to which the different sorts of persons — human and nonhuman (animals, spirits, the dead, denizens of other cosmic layers, plants, occasionally even objects and artifacts) — apprehend reality from distinct points of view'. As Bird-David (1999, S77) puts it, 'the object of this animistic knowledge is understanding relatedness from a related point of view within the shifting horizons of the related viewer'. Since animism recognizes agentive personality within environmental and other phenomena, it operates through sets of relationships between different forms of sentience (or affective forces) that constitute the environment; it thus involves multiple kaleidoscopic perspectives and interactions rather than dualistic standpoints. I argue here that in some cases rock art can be seen as occupying a relational *position* between human and other forms of sentience in the environment. This multi-relational approach is utilized to great effect by Creese (2011) in his analysis of Algonquian rock art which he argues was predicated on an intensely social landscape comprised of human and 'other-than-human' persons. However, Porr and Bell (2011) rightly warn that a misapplication of animism will only result in another essentialist (and Cartesian) view of hunter-gatherers; Alberti and Bray (2009, 338) have outlined critiques of such attempts to categorize animism or establish 'meta-schemes' (see Latour 2009) which in effect may subsume relatedness within Cartesian dualities. To deal with this issue, Porr and Bell (2011) suggest a intersecting 'third space', which is an attentive consideration of the intersections between archaeology, anthropology and material culture, in order to move more closely to appreciating 'Indigenous ways of perceiving, and ways of knowing' (Porr & Bell 2011, 39). They term this approach a 'phenomenological ecology' which promotes the 'inter-relationships and mutual constitution' of art, humans, and animals in relation to the environmental and the archaeological context (Poor & Bell 2011, 40). Thus, not only can such carefully navigated approaches provide a means to move beyond shamanic essentialism and Cartesian dualism, but can do so by including ecological and environmental perceptions without the modernist trap of environmental determinism.

As a result, relational ontology (and the re-appreciation of animism) can help towards rethinking rock art (and, of course, other aspects of the archaeological record). However, to be an effective alternative, the employment of animism needs to be wary of the pitfalls of generalizations (see Robb 2010) that universal models of abstract cognition tend to produce. One way to avoid such generalization is to look at the means by which specific indigenous societies communicate their epistemological systems. This allows animism to be a subject of study rather than an object to model. In doing so, this shifts the focus from private mental physiology to cultural communicative practices. Thus, animistic theory is not simply a model for framing and explaining phenomena such as rock art, but should be used as an *approach* to ask questions of how rock art may or may not have facilitated interrelationships between people and an environment rife with potential personality, human, animal or otherwise (see Robinson 2012). But to perceive the environment in a relational sense is not simply an abstract notion of innate *a priori* human experience, but was an ongoing pedagogical process that was learned though being an active participant within a communicative society. Thus, turning Bird-David's (2006, 44) introductory quote into a question, '*how is this animistic epistemology sustained as an institutionalized way of knowing*' provides one way to avoid generalization or essentialism by looking for the didactic ways in which ontology is promulgated in specific societies.

Here, I focus on how indigenous narratives enacted and institutionalized an animistic epistemology. First, I examine how oral narratives (e.g. mythology) operated pedagogically to instil relational knowledge across south-central Californian native communities. Wallace's (1975) seminal ethnographic study of Californian storytelling details that while no special class or 'guild' is known to have existed, those who excelled at oration certainly gained status as skilled storytellers. While stories typically were told within the storytellers' own village during the longer winter months, in some cases storytellers would travel to neighbouring villages receiving gifts such as lodging, food, furs or even baskets (Wallace 1975, 84–5). The entire population thus was enter-

tained through innumerable storytelling events where mythic tales became widely known. Importantly, myths explained the foundations of the indigenous past and the structure of the environment, an ontological temporality that was predicated upon animals-as-persons and their roles providing an analogue for human society.

Second, I examine how rock art may have been a didactic visual narrative that operated in analogous fashion to pedagogical oral narratives. The archaeological evidence discussed below will show that the positioning of painted rock art (i.e. pictographs) in specific landscape contexts was visible to the entire population, and that this positioning facilitated relations of knowledge between people and other forms of sentience as explained by myth. In short, south-central Californian narratives often concerned an ontology based upon animals that explained the structure of the physical world, established the operation of power, and defined the sequence of time. Most significantly, its importance is argued here to have been expressed as an indigenous ideology in its display and in the activation of power by drawing upon notions of the past.

The rock art of south-central California is particularly well suited for such an approach (Fig. 1). The vibrant pictographs of the region, known more recently as the South-Central Painted Variant (Whitley 2000), range across a vast region with complex and diverse linguistic groups, including the Esselen, Salinan, Tubatulabal, Kawaiisu, Gitanemuk, Gabrielino and the populous Chumash and Yokuts (Fig. 2). These paintings are traditionally interpreted within a shamanic paradigm (see Whitley 2000), but research in the last decade has focused on the relationship between land use and pictograph placement (see Robinson 2010a; 2011; Whitley *et al.* 2006). Equally, new data from a variety of researchers can be compiled in order to reconsider rock-art chronology of the region. Thus these new spatial and chronological data, in combination with the extensive ethnographic record available (see Robinson forthcoming), provide the 'third space' contexts necessary to rethink the dynamics of rock art from ontological perspectives.

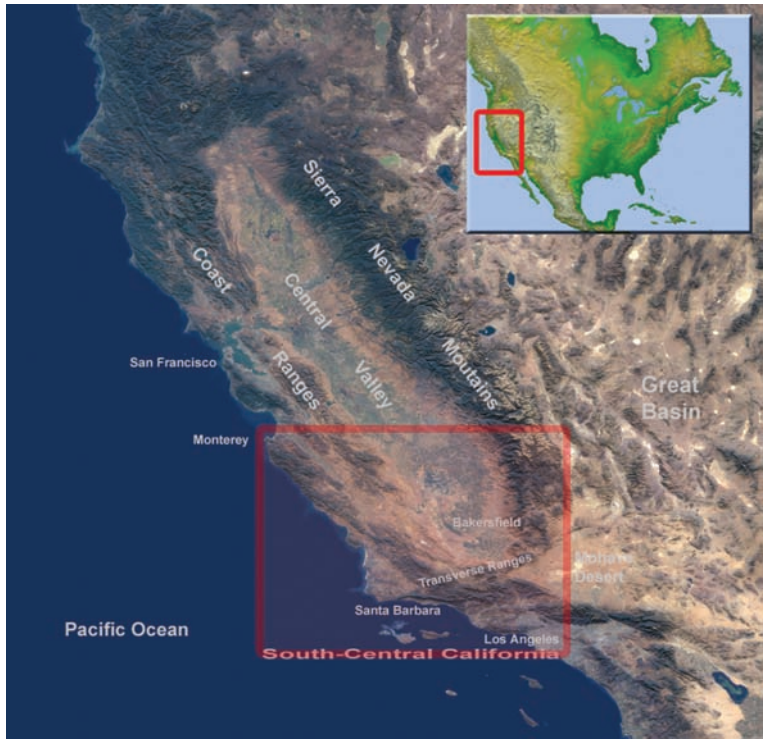

Figure 1. *Southern California showing the location of major cities and geomorphic features. (Source: NASA & USGS.)*

Figure 2. *The Chumash, their linguistic subdivisions and neighbours (Illustration: Ian Forbes and David Robinson).*

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Figure 3. *View east, within Pleito Cave. (Photograph: David Robinson.)*

Learning ontology: enacting mythology in south-central California

As Bierhorst (1985, 21) states in his classic account of North American mythology, the telling of oral narratives involved 'Shouts, whispers, sound effects, and hand motions' so that the 'narrator and audience inspire one another' to bring a story to life. As oral and bodily performances, it is well documented that California myths were theatrical enactments that took place within communal settings (Latta 1936; Wallace 1975). Traditionally performed during winter when the entire community gathered in villages, stories were retold over and over, so that from childhood an individual 'heard the traditional stories recited countless times, until he knew their basic substance and many of the salient details by heart' (Wallace 1975, 87). The performers impersonated characters in the stories by changing voices, facial expressions, hand and body movements and incorporating songs (Wallace 1975, 86). Animal movement and bird calls were mimicked (Latta 1936, 4).

Stories may take the listener on travels through supernatural worlds, but more frequently through local or distant landscapes of the region. While ambivalent celestial and terrestrial supernatural beings formed a significant population of the mythic pantheon, animals were the predominant focus of California myths (Blackburn 1975; Gayton & Newman 1940; Kroeber 1907; Latta 1936). The persona of these mythic animals was an animated blending of the character of particular animal behaviour with human characteristics. The narrative structure typically focused on a particular mythic animal as it journeyed from location to location in the physical world — this effectively detailed the landscape within the imagination of the listeners while affixing associations between animal characters and specific places. Thus, to the audience, myths functioned pedagogically to order the landscape beyond the horizon of every-day experience. Myths also provided an explanatory framework for the workings of animal power in the *quality of power* that they possessed. Panther was a good hunter; owls were doctors; Coyote was cunning yet fallible; Prairie Falcon was 'fierce' and had the ability to search out prey in hunting — his eyes were thus key and in one of the myths he loses them gambling. His house was usually in a hillside where the rock would open up or he would simply shoot into it (see Gayton & Newman 1940). Animals and their corresponding powers thus had a kind of metaphoric currency that could interlink animals, natural features, landscapes and people through narrative allusions.

As discussed further below, there are a number of recorded south-central California oral narratives concerning rock-art sites. There are two myths which may reference the rock-art site of Pleito which scholars have argued has the most elaborate rock-art paintings known in North America based upon the variety of colours utilized and number of superimposition events (Fig. 3) (Grant 1965; Reeves *et al*. 2009). Found in the San Emigdio Hills near the geographic epicentre of the south-central California, the site is famous for its wide colour palette, including the very rare blues found in some of the more spectacular polychrome panels. The myths concern a place called *Kamupau* (myths 39 & 40 in Kroeber 1907, 231–42) with one myth mentioning the use of blue rock paint. The myths were collected by A.L.

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Figure 4. *Coyote at the Wind Wolves Preserve, San Emigdio Hills. (Photograph: David Robinson.)*

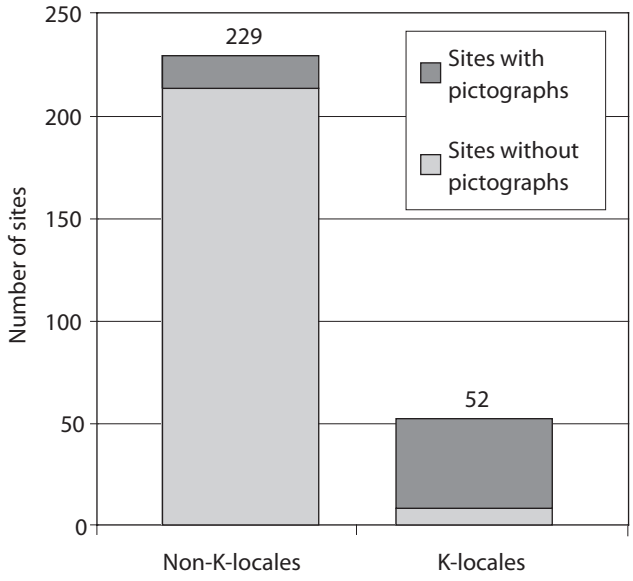

Figure 5. *Correlations between pictographs and K-locales/non-K-locales in Chumash landscapes.*

Kroeber from a man named Chalola (Kroeber 1907, 194). Chalola probably learned the myths while growing up at Tejon, a reservation only a few miles from Pleito.

Kamupau was the 'place of the cave', where many mythic people lived — both myths involve gambling events between important mythic characters such as Hummingbird, Brown-eared Rabbit, Eagle and, most importantly, Prairie Falcon and Coyote (Fig. 4). The *Kamupau* myths are landscape narratives, which combined cover a south-to-north range of about 165 air-miles from the San Emigdio Hills to the northern limit of the Yokuts territory, plus an east-to-west range of about 85 miles, across the Coastal Ranges, deep within the Chumash regions of the Santa Barbara Channel (Fig. 6). Rivers, waterfalls, lakes, mountains and village sites are all mentioned in the narratives — almost all are known actual places. In one *Kamupau* myth, Coyote travels through the San Emigdio region and then into the San Joaquin Valley: the tale then switches to Prairie Falcon who loses his eyes gambling before travelling to the northern limits of Yokuts territory (Kroeber 1907, 231–40). Space is not described as a bounded entity. Instead, space is defined as a series of important locales — moving from locale to locale involves encounters with ambiguous entities having potentially unknown powers and motivations. Arriving at a new place presented possibilities for either gain or loss, either in material culture or in food acquisition. In Coyote's travels around the lakes, he tries to catch fish only to be fooled by fish-eating birds, while Prairie Falcon travels from village to village: these stories show that travelling concerns moving through a socialized landscape rather than a depersonalized physical terrain.

Places became defined and enculturated before being encountered in actuality: the myths taught both 'esoteric and purely practical' knowledge (Laird 1975, 23), for knowing the quality of places enabled the culturally sophisticated to understand the proper rules to follow in approaching a new locality. For instance, the quality of different places is detailed during the journey of Coyote in a segment of *Kamupau* myth 39; each place is described in terms of important resources that may be found there, such as edible fish in rivers, or waterfowl and edible reeds in lake/marsh environments, or wood for fire making in foothill ecozones (see Kroeber 1907, 237). In south-central land-use practices, where periodic movement was a way of life (see Robinson 2010a), this knowledge was essential. The location of pictographs mirrors how landscapes were conceived in myth. Like the places where mythic narrative focuses most attention, pictographs are typically found at important locales in the terrain at places of high value based upon a range of desirable attributes (Fig. 7). These attributes include accessibility to local village populations, reliable water, important food resources such as oak woodland and its acorn supply, plus wetland or riparian resources that provide the raw materials for perishable manufacturing (see Robinson 2007). Cost-surface analyses (Robinson 2010a) have shown that pictograph sites are most often located within local trail networks and would have been frequently encountered during the routine use of the local landscape.

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Figure 6. *Map of the Kamupau myths showing the journeys of Coyote and Prairie Falcon as told by Chalola: 1. Kamupau/Pleito; 2. Gonoilkin; 3. Woilo; 4. Kuyo; 5. Pokhalin tinliu; 6. Tashlibunau; 7. a 'bitter creek'; 8. Tulare Lake; 9. north of Tulamni; 10. Kaweah; 11. Chowchilla; 12. Ocean fishing; 13. Nihomo. (After Kroeber 1907, 231–42; base map source USGS.)*

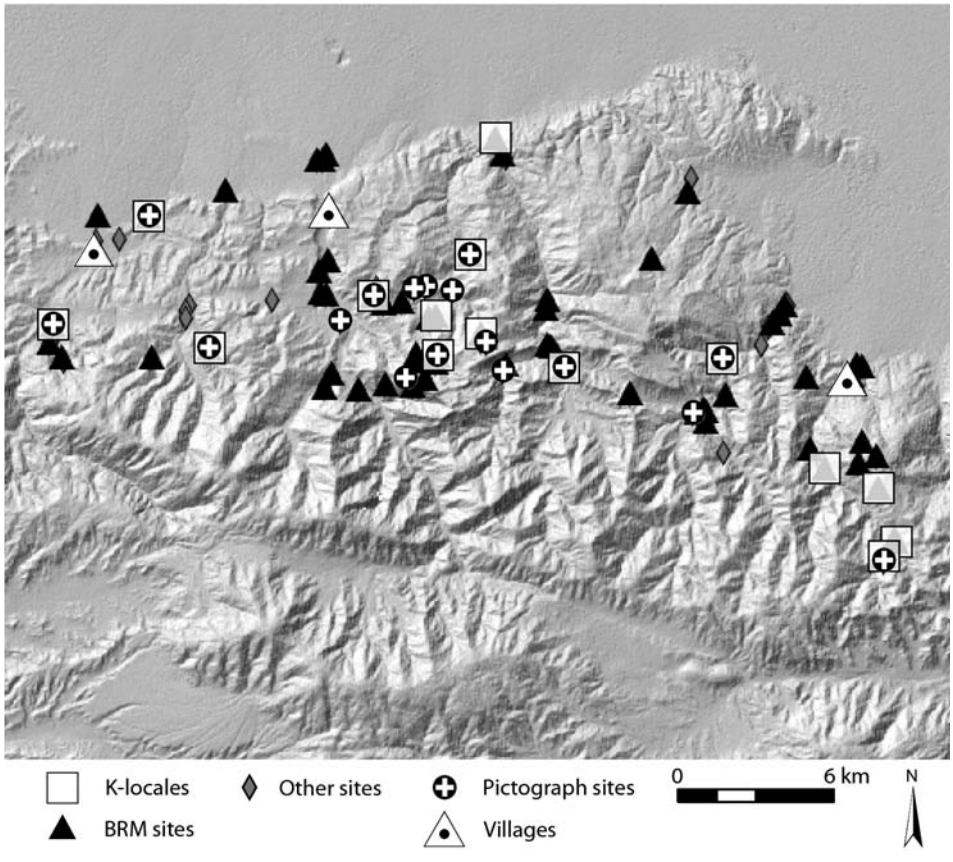

Figure 7. *Distribution of pictograph sites in the San Emigdio Hills of south-central California. Pictographs are frequently found at K-locales, multi-component complexes with abundant bedrock mortars, lithic scatters and other evidence of group aggregation. (Base map source ©USGS.)*

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That these were places of high value to local populations is demonstrated clearly by the archaeological evidence. For instance, in one study of three different south-central Californian landscapes (Robinson 2011; 2013, table 1; see Fig. 5), 84.6 per cent of all pictograph sites were located at large bedrock mortar complexes called K-locales, which are seasonally occupied intensive food-processing locations. K-locales usually have well-developed middens confirming their elevated importance as food-processing sites over smaller bedrock mortar complexes which typically do not have middens (Robinson 2011). Recent excavations at a series of K-locales in the San Emigdio Hills show that the pictographs were interspersed spatially within the practical taskscapes of daily activity that further confirms significant food preparation at these bedrock mortar facilities: cooking is suggested by the presence of charcoal and burnt stone, hunting and eating of large and small game is shown by projectile points and faunal remains, and tool fashioning or retouching is evidenced by extensive lithic scatters (see Robinson & Sturt 2008; Robinson *et al*. 2010). Micro-viewshed utilizing detailed digital modelling and spatial analyses (Robinson 2010a) have shown that the pictographs and the features they occupy are in view of both the bedrock mortars and midden areas: in some cases, middens run up against the rock surface where the paintings are located; some pictographs are within one or two metres of bedrock mortars; and some pictographs are on the same host rock as the mortars themselves. Thus it is clear that pictographs were visibly enmeshed within areas where people spent significant periods performing a variety of repetitive but important tasks. Pictograph K-locales were effective community venues for visual consumption of the images.

Narrative modularity and composition: myth-strands and set-pieces

In his seminal study of Native American mythology, Karl Kroeber (1998) showed how many Native American orators constructed their narratives by stringing together mythic 'strands'. Each myth-strand is a stock mini-tale, strung together with other myth-strands to create longer, modular multi-narratives. Decisions on how to string these modular stories together were dependent upon the orator's goals, often varying between enactments: this 'deliberate refashioning of a commonly imagined story' triggered audience reflection on subtle shifts of metaphor and meaning (Kroeber 1998, 20). In California, Wallace confirms Kroeber's observations, describing how myth performers would arrange multiple 'incidents and plots into a unique expression' (Wallace 1975, 86). Zigmond (1980, 12) likewise confirms similar tropes in south-central California: 'Some myths may be conceived of as being comprised of several independent segments which sometimes are considered separate tales and at other times regrouped to form another myth.'

The content of the *Kamupau* myths reflects this modular quality — each story is indeed a composite string of separate narrative strands. Different components of the *Kamupau* myths are recognizably more related to coastal Chumash or interior Yokuts mythological traditions (see Fig. 6). For example, the myths include Prairie Falcon, a predominant Yokuts mythological character (known as *Lim'-ik*) (see Gayton & Newman 1940; Kroeber 1907; Latta 1936). Events in the *Kamupau* myths transpire in Yokuts territory in the Sierra Nevada range and the San Joaquin Valley but also in interior and coastal Chumash country. In myth 40, *The Prairie Falcon Loses* (Kroeber 1907, 240–42), Prairie Falcon begins at *Kamupau*, and then travels to the Chumash coast where he goes fishing with two spider-brothers in a boat out in the ocean. Prairie Falcon falls into the water and drowns. Coyote, sensing Prairie Falcon's demise, searches for him. Using tobacco as a supernatural aid, he goes underwater to find Prairie Falcon's remains in an underwater house. There, Coyote sings in the Chumash language to retrieve Prairie Falcon's remains, before taking him back to revive Prairie Falcon with 'blue-rock paint' (see Reeves *et al.* 2009 for full discussion of this reference to blue rock paint). In a separate account, Blackburn (1975, 175–89) documents a similar Chumash myth called *Coyote Rescues Xelex*, told to J.P. Harrington by a Barbaraño Chumash informant named Juan Justo. *Xelex* is the Chumash name for falcon (Blackburn 1975, 344; Lee 1984, 29), so is analogous to the Yokuts Prairie Falcon. In this tale, *Xelex* goes fishing in the ocean (with two birds instead of two spiders) but is seized by Swordfish, the people of the ocean. Coyote takes tobacco and other gear to find the remains of *Xelex* in the under-sea house. Coyote then has a long series of competitions with the Swordfish before finally winning back *Xelex*, reviving him, and returning to their village. In Chalola's tale, the first segment is a common Yokuts myth-strand where Prairie Falcon first wins, then loses at gambling after his wife or sister is fooled by characters such as Coyote or Condor (Gayton & Newman 1940, 44, 78–82; Kroeber 1907, 221–3). However, the second strand (where Prairie Falcon drowns in the ocean) is an altered version of the Chumash story of *Xelex* and Coyote's contest with the Swordfish (see also Blackburn 1975, 190–93). It appears as if Chalola choose to include the Chumash strand but without detailing the contests with the

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Figure 8. *Examples of the Aquatic Motif: A. Type IIc from Mutau Flat; B. Type IIb from Three Springs; C. Type Ic from Piedra Blanca; D. Type Ib (in negative) from Pleito; E. Type Ib from Mesa Springs; F. Type 1a or 1B from Pleito. (Photographs by David Robinson.)*

Swordfish.[1] Thus, the *Kamupau* myth outlined above can be interpreted as a modular construction reflecting a creative linking of both Yokuts and Chumash mythology.

These recombined and reconfigured myths have subtle differences between tellings, and from one teller to the next. Well versed within their own oral traditions, the audience already know the stories (Wallace 1975, 86): the addition or omission of particular details or the creative combining of modular motifs are not errors, but cues for audiences to pick up altered meanings. These creative alterations are conscious re-imaginings within mythic traditions (see Kroeber 1998, 62–78). Instead of set-in-stone static dogma, myths are flexible, adaptable cultural narratives firmly enmeshed within a matrix that nonetheless allows for adjustments to changing social and cultural circumstances. Through this narrative process, myths engaged within and helped direct cultural discourse.

There are several parallels between the structural character of myth and the structural character of rock art. Like myth, rock art was typically situated within

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public realms at K-locales with an audience comprised of the entire population. As mentioned above, previous assumptions based on ideas of shamanic exclusion that rock art was not situated within public contexts (Whitley 2000) have not held up to scrutiny (see discussion in Robinson 2010a, 793–4). While Whitley argues strongly that rock-art sites were 'owned by individual shamans' and avoided 'by the local populace' as 'even looking at them would result in "sore eyes"' or worse (Whitley 2000, 82), the placement of pictographs within the confines of community aggregation sites clearly indicates that the entire society provided an audience for the paintings.

Secondly, the visual composition of the painted elements has close parallels to the oral composition of myth. Like myth, rock art employed particular characters, which some rock-art researchers term 'elements', repeated across time and space, embedded within and directing *visual* discourse. Across the South-Central Painted Variant, these common elements appear at sometimes quite distant rock-art sites. Like myth-strands that are more frequently utilized regionally, some elements are predominately found in regional clusters, often corresponding to linguistic divisions (see Grant 1965; Lee 1984). Rather than a straight-forward reflection of trance-derived imagery, many element types appear to be 'stock characters' in the possible repertoire available to the painter. An example of this repertoire includes the ubiquitous 'aquatic motif' (Fig. 8) — a pan-Chumash element found in various guises at a great number of rock-art sites and on portable media including portable rock-art (Hudson & Conti 1981). Also, just as myth-strands are utilized creatively across trans-linguistic boundaries, some elements occasionally interpenetrate other linguistic rock-art corpuses. For instance, the aquatic motif can be found at rock-art sites in Yokuts territory, albeit in much lower frequencies. Equally the 'teddy bear' figure is a well-known Kawaiisu element that, likewise, can be found occasionally interpenetrating Chumash border regions (Fig. 9).

Across the region, it is clear that elements were sometimes used in modular formulations to form compositional pieces much like myth-strands formed compositional narratives. Just as these myth-strands were repeated in various guises by storytellers

Figure 9. *'Teddy-bear' figure Chumash site of Sapaski. (Photograph by David Robinson.)*

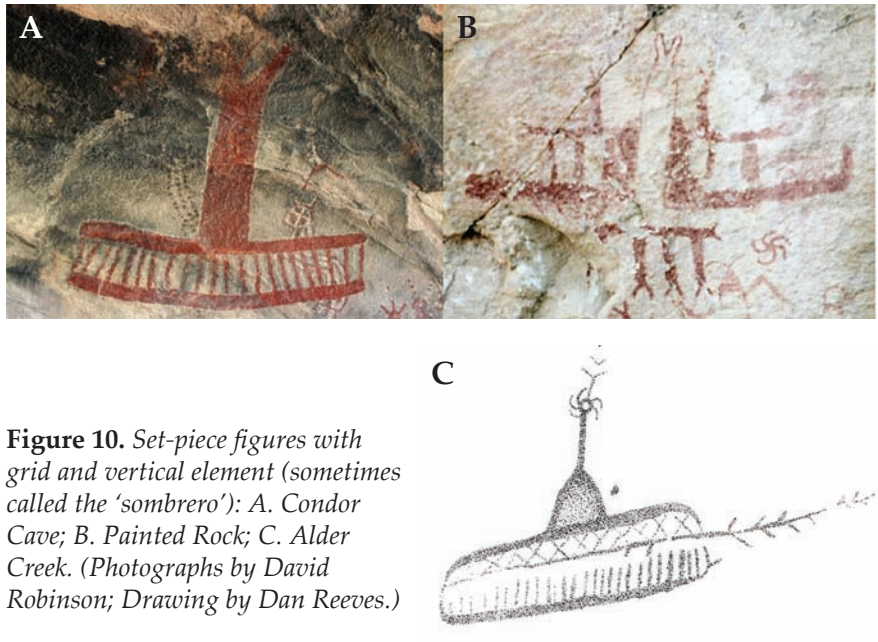

Figure 10. *Set-piece figures with grid and vertical element (sometimes called the 'sombrero'): A. Condor Cave; B. Painted Rock; C. Alder Creek. (Photographs by David Robinson; Drawing by Dan Reeves.)*

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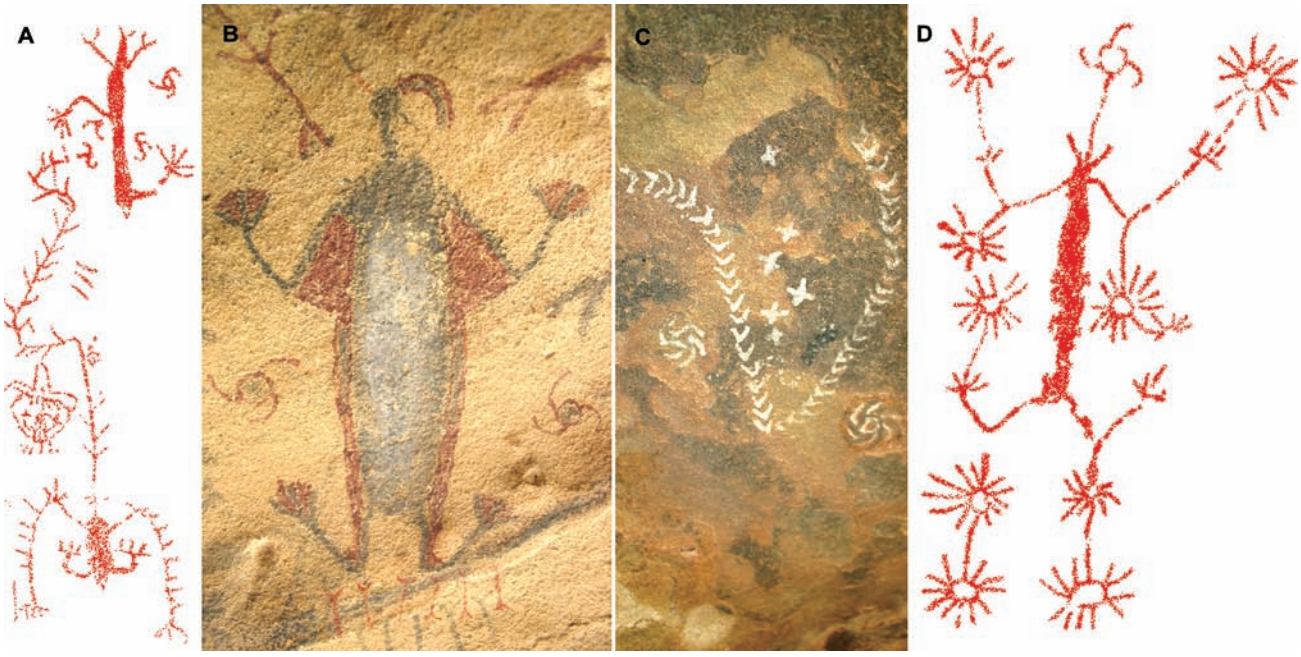

Figure 11. *Paired pinwheel/concentric elements bisected by a figure: A. Alder Creek; B. Three Springs; C. Alder Creek. (Photographs by David Robinson; drawings by Dan Reeves.)*

across south-central California, these compositional pieces were also replicated at multiple sites. Examples of this modular use of stock motifs can be illustrated in what I have termed 'set-pieces' (Robinson 2006). One such 'simple' set-piece is composed of two widespread elements: the aquatic motif and a horizontal grid. Nick-named the 'sombrero motif' by researcher Dan Reeves (see Robinson 2006), this set-piece has a vertical bifurcated aquatic motif extending upwards at the centre of a horizontal grid (Fig. 10). While there are differences in the precise format of this set-piece, examples can be found distributed throughout Chumash territory such as at Condor Cave in the Santa Barbara backcountry, in Ventureño country as illustrated by Grant at his V-1 site (probably Mutau) (Grant 1965, pl. 20) and by Reeves at Alder Creek, and by Lee (1985) at Painted Rock in the interior Chumash-Yokuts boarder region.

A further example of this element/modular composition can be seen through the use of another widespread element — the diminutive star-like concentric radial, which can have straight, swirling or, more rarely, 'pinwheeling' extensions (see Bury *et al*. 2003, 7.7). Like the aquatic motif, this element appears on its own but also in set-pieces (Fig. 11; see also Fig. 18, lower left): a particular application in set-pieces is to use paired concentric radials to 'frame' a central figurative element. Sometimes the radials connect to those figures via appendages, or are placed near joints or appendages. Examples can be found in Chumash San Emigdio territory at Three Springs, Main Cave, Right Panel; Pleito Main Cave, Panel E; Pleito Side Cave, Panel 1; Barbareño territory at SBA-1318, Locus 8, Panel 1 (Lee 1984, fig. 45); in Chumash Ventureño at Alder Creek, Panel 2, element B and Mutau Flat (see Eberhart & Babcock 1963, fig. 9). The sombrero grid panel at Painted Rock is sandwiched between two swirling radials before vandals removed one of the swirls. Like the aquatic motif, the concentric radial or pinwheel is sometimes incorporated into the body of a figure: this is most common in the Ventureño area at the sites of Piedra Blanca (Fig. 12) and Mutau Flat, where the head is frequently depicted as a swirling radial.

Individuality is indicated in idiosyncratic attributes of each design, but overall likenesses in element form and set-piece design show that the artists were depicting similar narratives, or were serving to enact similar relations. Structurally, rock art seems to have operated in a visible format in a modular fashion similar to the way that myths use strands in their oral format. Like myths, variations upon common themes indicate great latitude in the artists' 'tool-box' of elements. Just as elaborate oral narratives combined multiple myth-strands, the combining of numerous elements into larger compositions on the rock surface made allusions and complex statements through multiplying, complementing or altering specific shapes

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Figure 12. *Bird figure with pinwheel head, at Piedra Blanca. (Photograph by David Robinson.)*

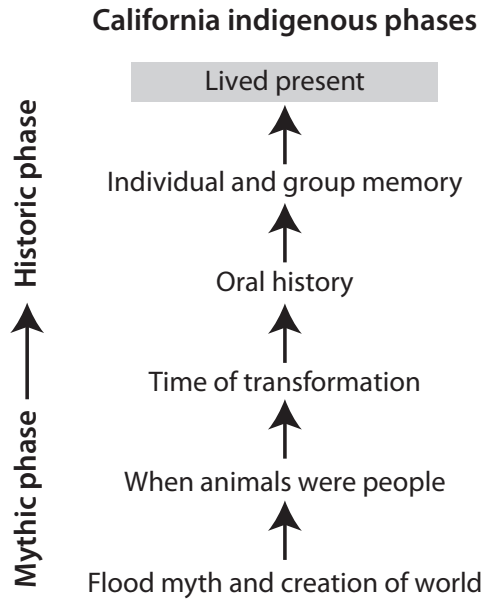

Figure 13. *Chronology of indigenous mythic and historic phases.*

and combinations. What specific meanings elements may have alluded to are mostly elusive to us; but it is evident that elements were employed knowledgably and relationally, inter-referencing a discourse distributed throughout south-central Californian landscapes. These elements and set-pieces were visible to the entire community. Pictographs therefore would have been didactic, not only reflecting but emplacing ontology within the lived experience of all members of society.

'When animals were people': an emic chronology of indigenous time

Mythic narratives also provide the ontological basis for understanding temporal dimensions of the landscape. In order to better appreciate how the art may have been viewed within Indigenous ontology, consideration of time depth from both indigenous and archaeological perspectives is necessary. For instance, the blues at Pleito were previously hypothesized as being derived from Spanish Mission pigments from the Chumash revolt of AD 1824 (Lee 1979). However, recent research has shown that at least some shades were an 'optical blue', made by careful mixing of black and white pigments to produce a greyish-blue hue (Scott *et al.* 2002). Experiments have shown that other Pleito blues can be reproduced using mineral from a local azurite quarry (Reeves *et al.* 2009). Finally, analysis of superimposition and surface exfoliation indicates that blue hues are not amongst the later phases of rock-art production (Reeves *et al.* 2009), calling into question the chronology of the rock art. Understanding this rock art is therefore at least in part a temporal issue. Even so, there are no absolute dates yet obtained from the site to date the making of the art. To come to grips with this problem requires a deeper consideration of temporality, not just in terms of chronology but also in terms of ontology.

As detailed in south-central Californian mythology (Blackburn 1975; Gayton 1935; Gayton & Newman 1940; Gifford 1923; Heizer 1978, 655–6; Kroeber 1907; Latta 1936; Zigmond 1980) there was a distinct myth-time when animals were people in a separate in-the-distant-past. At the end of this myth-time, the animal-people were transformed into their current animal forms. This brief transformational period was also when humans were made. Then followed the present — the world of lived experiences. Thus, in south-central mythology, there is a chronology from Myth-time, to Transformation-time, to the Lived present.

It is important to understand this emic chronology in greater detail since it explained the indigenous view of the landscape and the differential distribution of power residing there. Each period was characterized by significant events (Fig. 13). The world began as an open sea or a flooded world: various myths

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chronicle how different animals dived under the waters to retrieve a tiny amount of mud used to create the mountain ranges that become the framework for the topography of California (for instance Gayton & Newman 1940, 20, 28, 38; Kroeber 1907, 199–200, 204–5, 209–11, 218–19, 229–31; Latta 1936, 13–25). The next phase, after the creation of land, is when most mythic events transpired. Animals performed many supernatural stunts and/or engaged in contests, often employing various techniques of power-display and manipulation: these myths established the rules-of-operation for power and the ability to wield it (Blackburn 1975, 63–88).

Importantly, the landscape was also altered during this post-flood myth-time. Rock features — outcrops, shelters and caves — figure prominently in many mythic narratives: for the Yokuts, Prairie Falcon is particularly associated with caves or outcrops (Gayton & Newman 1940; Kroeber 1907). Distinctively shaped formations were often explained as animal turned to stone or formed through supernatural feats of mythic beings. Based upon his extensive work with many Chumash and other California Natives, the ethnographer J.P. Harrington (1927, 235) stated:

> The country in Indian times was literally populated with 'petrified' 'first people', who lived at the beginning of the world and were transformed to stone for one reason or another, as special legends tell. There is a rocky pinnacle on a hilltop which used to be a person and evidently still has some life in it. ... Two more petrified people shot arrows across a canyon, with the result that one of the rocks are badly shattered. Another rock has horns. Even a whole house is petrified; a ghastly magical wood-rat … is said to live in a rock that looks exactly like a primitive Indian wigwam. Another rock is the home of a magical beaver. Still another rock is a warclub left by the first people. Up another boulder two petrified rattlesnakes are crawling, seen as streaks in the formation of the rock.

Abundant information has been collected on Yokuts beliefs on rock formations (see Weinberger 1983). A cluster of rocks is a funeral procession. Others are burden baskets, one formation is a group of petrified women gamblers with a tray, El Capitan in Yosemite Valley 'grew in one night'and so on (see Latta 1936; 1977; Gayton & Newman 1940, 97). Animals were organized in village groups, with chiefs (known to the Chumash as *wots*, or to the Yokuts as *tiyas*), other officials (such as criers or messengers), plus other identities such as doctors, hunters, gamblers, etc. This reflected the social order and personal concerns of the people telling and listening to the myths, so that the template of human society was mirrored in and constituted by the mythic animal society.

The next phase was the Time of Transformation, when humans were created, usually by Coyote and Lizard (Blackburn 1975, 95). Animals took on their present forms and dispersed into the landscape. It was during the Time of Transformation that the present human social order was established, albeit merely a reflection of the order seen previously in animal society during myth-time.

The next phase is less clearly defined, yet constitutes human history before living memory. This is a time of legends: stories of droughts, migration, warfare and the formation of political alliances — some of these tales may have some connection to actual past events (see Librado 1977). The Chumash differentiated between myths and 'historic' tales: these latter were called *timoloquinaš* (Blackburn 1975, 21). There continued to be tales of supernatural deeds and happenings associated with this time-out-of-mind.

The next phase is within the lived memories of groups and individuals. This is the core of everyday life with both mundane and exceptional events constituting the yearly round. As each generation lived and then died, passing onto the next, the mythic time remained just a little beyond the horizon of the past few generations. It is a picture of a steady-state temporality: time did not progress. There seems to have been no need to conceptualize time as accumulative. The myth-time was always some unknown generations ago, with the present as an event that just kept happening.

Archaeological temporalities

Until recently, the conventional view was that pictographs in south-central California dated to within the last one thousand years (see Whitley 2000). However, recent research indicates that south-central Californian pictographs were made in multiple periods over approximately the last three and a half thousand years. In the Vandenberg region, excavations at the Chumash site of Swordfish Cave found extensive ochre deposits dating to the last half of the Early Period (approximately 1540 to 1625 cal. BC) (Lebow *et al.* 2000; 2005, 12.10–12.11). The excavators found 190 pieces of ochre weighing 908.5 g in these early contexts (94.8 per cent of the total ochre from the site) with evidence of ochre processing within the cave underneath the paintings: this density of ochre is not found in later contexts at Swordfish Cave, nor indeed in any other site excavated in the Vandenberg region (Lebow *et al.* 2005), suggesting that many of the paintings were probably made within this phase of the Early Period. However, a direct connection between the ochre deposits and the paintings is still absent,

and superimposing of the Swordfish panel suggests multiple painting episodes (Bury *et al.* 2002; 2004). A similar pattern has been suggested for the Esselen site of La Cueva Pintada (with its famous hand-print designs) which has two stratigraphic components. Radiocarbon dating of the two components suggests the upper one dates to the Late (AD 700–1769) or Historical Periods (AD 1769 to mid-1800s), and the lower to 1942–1436 BC (2 sigma calibration) (Breschini & Haversat 2004, 141). Different styles and height above ground surface again suggests multiple periods of pictograph production.

On the Carrizo Plain, where numerous Chumash and Yokuts pictograph sites are located, Whitley and colleagues (2006) have found 98 per cent of the ground-surface archaeology dates to the Middle Period of that region (beginning *c.* 4000 BP to 800 BP) while only 2 per cent is from the Late Period (800 BP to AD 1782). They argue for a ten-fold reduction in human population due to drought effects of the well-documented Medieval Climatic Anomaly between 800 BP and 1200 BP. The association of rock art with Middle Period sites, the disintegration of some panels and covering of pictographs with mineral skins, and an AMS date of 1500 BP from the nearby Carneros Rocks all support the suggestion that much of the rock art was made during the Middle Period. Late Period (post 800 BP) occupation focused on spring sites; pictographs found there were likely made during this later period as communities shifted their focus onto reliable water sources.

Across south-central California, much evidence has accumulated indicating Late Period use of pictograph locations. Horne and Glassow's (1974) survey and excavation of rock-art sites in the Chumash region of the Sierra Madre Ridge gave evidence for strong 'late occupation' at rock-art sites also associated with extant contemporary springs such as the famous site of *Sapaksi* (Horne & Glassow 1974, 108–9). Other Chumash regions have similar patterns. Excavations at VEN-196, a Chumash Ventureño pictograph site, yielded evidence of only Late Period occupation (Gibson & Singer 1970) as did those at the extensive Ventureño site of Mutau Flat (Eberhart & Babcock 1963). Berger and Libby (1966, 471–2) reported that a radiocarbon date from charcoal 'associated' with an unspecified Ventura cave painting is 'likely late prehistoric or early historic (early 1800's)'. Excavations in other linguistic regions yield similar results. Analysis of material recovered from excavations at the Kawaiisu site of *Tomo-Kahni* (Sutton 2001) found evidence of occupation only within the last 500 years and Elsasser's (1957) excavations at the Yokuts site of Rocky Hill also indicate Late Period occupation.

There is even clearer evidence that rock art was made in the Historic period. Horse and cattle imagery is found at several rock-art sites (for instance Pleito, Rocky Hill, and LAN-717 amongst others) while images of European vessels are found at two Chumash Vandenberg sites (Robinson 2004). A Chumash arbour glyph has recently been discovered on an oak that likely dates to the historical period (Saint-Onge *et al.* 2009) while Deetz (1964) reported a painted slab in historical deposits which he found during his excavations of a Chumash inland village. A Chumash account (in Hudson 1979, 360) states that a man named Andres (from mission Santa Barbara) made cave paintings to induce illness sometime in the late 1700s or early 1800s while a recently documented pictograph on a milling structure at Mission Santa Ines has been dated to AD 1823–1829 (Padgett & Watchman 2001). This date closely matches the purported abandonment of Meadows Cave (MNT-250), an Esselen pictograph site with evidence of proto-historic and historic occupation terminating in about AD 1825 (Meighan 1955). Indeed, Swordfish Cave was re-occupied in the Protohistoric and Historic periods: it may be that rock art was made then. Recent excavations at Pinwheel Cave and Santiago in the San Emigdio Hills also indicate Late Period and Historical occupation (Bernard *et al.* in press; Robinson & Sturt 2008).

While directly linking occupation with rock-art manufacture remains problematic, there are two reported direct absolute dates of pictographs in the region. Both dates are firmly within the Middle Period: a date from the Yokuts site of the Carneros rocks was approximately 1500 BP (see Whitley *et al.* 2006, 203) while Garfinkle and colleagues (2008) report an AMS date of about AD 1000 from the Tubatulabal site of *palakuč* in the Sierra Nevada. The evidence in total suggests that the South-Central Painted Variant started to be made at least by *c.* 3500 BP in the Early Period, with subsequent manufacture in the Middle, Late, and Historical periods. It is unlikely that the purpose behind making rock art remained static during this expanse of time. Changes in environmental and archaeological records in combination with changes in pictograph location and styles through time indicate periodic but dynamic and significant changes in rock art and society across south-central California over these 3500 years. But certainly, this new picture of south-central pictograph chronology supports the notion that people moved about a landscape enculturated with rock art for several thousand years and that, increasingly through time up to and including Historical period, that art was interpreted within an indigenous animistic ontology.

Figure 14. *The white linear formation of Piedra Blanca snaking through the landscape. (Photograph by David Robinson.)*

Figure 15. *White (with red outline) rattlesnake pictograph at Piedra Blanca, Los Padres National Forest. (Drawing by David Robinson.)*

Drawing upon the past: indigenous perceptions of rock art and place

As Gosden and Lock (1998, 2) have proposed, some prehistoric societies oriented their actions in the present with the past in mind (see also Bradley 2002). Evidence suggests that rock art and these archaeological chronologies were understood within the indigenous temporal sequence outlined above. Pictographs occur in specific places: rock shelters, outcrops, often distinctive formations within their landscape setting. These are the same types of places said to have been formed by mythic creatures and events during myth-time. As such, these were not inert rock formations or depersonalized places, but localities relationally associated with mythic events: as discussed above, these rock formations may have been made through the action of mythic beings, contain or 'house' mythic beings, or more often be the actual petrified bodies of mythic beings. The long linear white rock formations of Piedra Blanca are associated with a white rattlesnake pictograph, perhaps a representation of an unrecorded myth equating the formation with a mythic snake (see Figs. 14 & 15). The application of imagery smeared onto the bare rock surface associated with mythic contexts would have been an act performed on a stone canvas redolent with the past. These rock formations may

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Figure 16. *Pictograph of a bear-human at Chumash site of Mutau. (Photograph by David Robinson.)*

have already had mythological narratives associated with them: thus, pigment may have been smeared onto the stone bodies of mythological beings. This intimacy established a direct relationship between the artist and the embodied past. However, the application was made by people in a living present. Further, the imagery was more than a reference to the surface it occupied: it was a reformulation of that surface by adding a new layer of indigenous history. Thus, pre-existing narratives could be reiterated, appropriated or actively altered, creating an ongoing process engaging within indigenous notions of temporality. Where over-painting occurred, this process continued, with new layers referencing the past while creating new narratives (see Fig. 18).

Representational pictographs of animals may depict important mythological animals (see Lee 1977) (Fig. 16). Indeed, many images are collages of human and animal characteristics: as such, rather than therianthropic representations of shamans in trance, an alternative interpretation is that such combinations are transmorphic images. Transmorphism elides certain characteristics of plant, animal, human and other sentient 'beings' into a composite being (Robinson in press). The characters of the myth-time were such transmophic characters in that they embodied both animal and human characteristics, so that it may be that some of these paintings represent mythic beings 'when they were people' (Robinson in press). It is certain that, once made and in place, at least some pictographs were interpreted by indigenous people as being made during the Mythic phase. The Chumash Sierra Made Ridge site called *Sapaksi* is a good example of a myth directly relating rock-art to the Mythic phase (in Lee & Horne 1978, 221):

> Bear, Eagle, Xelex ... There animals were people and [*Sapaksi*] was their house ... and they turned into stone — no one did it ... There was a big painting of the sun in the cave and at a short distance the Coyote turned into stone and is still to be seen.

A further account concerning *Sapaksi* also states that the paintings represent mythical animals: 'They're all painted there on the rock, all the animals are there' (in Lee 1984, 29). A Yokuts myth concerning a circular formation in the Coast Range similarly states that mythic animals were turned to stone (Kroeber 1907, 212–13). This may refer to the large site of Painted Rock with its circular internal natural amphitheatre: the pictographs in the myth are said to be the face paintings of the animals that they were wearing when they became petrified (see Cummins 1992). Another Yokuts myth links the origination of basketry designs with rock art during myth-time (Latta 1936, 78) — a girl born supernaturally makes rock art and basketry

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Figure 17. *Pictographs overlooking bedrock mortar food-processing station at Chumash rock-art site of Pool Rock. (Photograph by Rick Bury.)*

designs at the same time. More significantly, the Kawaiisu site of *Tomo-Kahni* (KER-508) is explicitly linked to both the Mythic phase and the Time of Transformation (Sutton 1982). Zigmond (1977, 76) details a narrative of the site:

> In mythological times the animal-people held celebrations at [two rock-art sites]. It may be that each of the participants painted his own picture. In any case, it was at the rock shelter that the world was created. A mortar hole marks the spot. It was Grizzly Bear who called the animals together. … He still lives in the rock and there is a fissure through which he can come and go. … Here the animals decided what they wanted to be.

Oral narratives also link rock art with subsequent periods. An account of a painted tablet made by a sorcerer causing a drought was certainly an example of a Chumash *timoloquinaš*, or historical tale — not directly experienced by living members of the community, but passed down as legend (Blackburn 1975, 276). The account of Andres making cave paintings near Santa Barbara Mission shows that the sequence is indeed multi-temporal, extending into the living memory of Chumash people (Hudson 1979, 360).

It is clear that the pictographs of south-central California were understood to have been made in relation to the perceived temporal chronology, which itself was framed by an animistic ontology. Pictographs not only drew on rock surfaces redolent with the past, but also upon the past as a source of power within societal dynamics. As potentially powerful supernatural ancient beings, a semi-dormant ambivalent power resided in such rock outcrops. Transformed long ago into stone, they nevertheless retained a degree of accessible sentience and power. For instance, a Tachi Yokuts myth states that one can speak to and be answered by a rock formation made from bodies petrified in the myth-time; however, the rock-people can conjure rain and wind to avoid being seen (Kroeber 1907, 212–13). Rock art may have been desirable as a means to establish a relationship with the past as a source of potential power. Drawing on rock would have drawn power from rock. However, this was not simply an esoteric act that concerned only ritual specialists. Knowledge of the past, and the manner in which the physical environment was constructed in part through the petrified remains of mythic beings, was known throughout society as performed in public oral narratives. As the ethnographic accounts detailed above attest, people were knowledgeable about the landscape and the ontological principles upon which the world operated. Pictographs also were placed to have a strong presence within indigenous society, and were visual narratives that implicitly reinforced the underlying ontology at key locations in the landscape (Fig. 17). Relations were enacted between people and mythological animals where rock was literally the embodiment of a past: the same places where supernatural power was performed by the very animals which were turned to stone and remain to this day. This ontology structured the present.

From ontology to ideology

Drawing upon the past drew upon that mythical supernatural power, but only made sense because of the knowledgeable relations between members of indigenous society in the living present. The practice of making rock art likely served to legitimize the use of these specific spaces by those who made the art and the wider communities of which they were members (Robinson 2013). This could be done because the paintings occupied a specific position between society and places deeply imbued with a mythological presence.

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Relational ontology thus translates into a malleable indigenous ideology, enacted between the past and present, between oral and visual narratives, between human and animal correspondences, but most of all between members of the indigenous community.

The role of animals is fundamental to the indigenous ontology of south-central California. Expressed and constituted though a range of epistemological performances and practices, this ontology underpinned an ideology that used the mythological past to institutionalize indigenous society and appropriate power. For instance, it is clear that the mythic past was an analogue for the human present. For example, in mythic tales, Eagle was the personification of chiefly power; for the Yokuts, Gayton (1930) has pointed out that a Yokuts chief (*tiya*) would have considered his position in human times to be as a 'successor to Eagle himself' because the personification of Eagle as chief was an 'an institution of prehistoric antiquity' (Gayton 1930, 371, 412–13). Animals also were tutelary helpers, seen in trance or called upon for power and assistance (Applegate 1978). Certain animals bestowed particular powers upon those aligning themselves with that animal (see Blackburn 1975). As an ideology, the personification of animals thus became a template for how to access and employ power on a personal level, but also legitimated differential power throughout society in its institutional structures. This was played out not only in mythic winter tales, but integrated trans-regionally at fiestas organized by *wots* and *tiyas* where communal dances were performed; these dances were often named after a particular animal (i.e. the Swordfish dance, the Coyote Dance, Bear Dance, Rabbit Dance etc.) with dancers taking on the personae of animals in their movements and noises (Blackburn 1974; Hudson & Blackburn 1978; Librado 1977; Robinson 2006). That ontology became institutionalized ideologically is further seen in the Chumash institution of the *'antap*, a multi-regional political and ceremonial organization whose members included local hereditary chiefs, economic elites and members of craft guilds; Chumash fiestas were organized by the *'antap* (see Bean & King 1974; Hudson & Underhay 1978). Underpinning the ceremonial system was a 'delayed return' (i.e. Woodburn 1982) economy based upon wealth and storable food supplies, the raw materials of which were derived from the wider landscape.

Rock art was placed within the same landscapes where these materials were gathered and in many cases were likely stored (Robinson 2007; 2010a; Sutton 1982). This effectively emplaced a visual ontology that likewise underpinned an ideology at important economic and social locations in the environment. Barnard and Woodburn (1988, 28–9) use the term 'ideologies of mystical dependence' in their discussion of hunter-gatherer delayed-return ideology in relation to economy and politics. However, they point out that such ideologies are employed within restricted contexts, usually concerning forms of delayed yields on labour. K-locales, with their attendant pictographs and archaeological evidence for intense food production and a range of other tasks, provided precisely such contexts. In sum, the pictographs of south-central California mediated relations between communities and animistic locales laden with the past while integrating subsistence with mythology, and ontology with ideology.

Conclusion

Rock-art research in the last decade has advanced our understanding of south-central Californian pictographs. We now know that rather than being exclusively private, the majority of the art was positioned in public arenas across the region. We also have new evidence that points to a much deeper antiquity for the origination of the art, and that it was multi-temporal. This new research allows us to investigate the role that rock art played within communities through time, and how indigenous people conceived their own past (see Bradley 2002; Gosden & Lock 1998). Just as new research changes our views, so contemporary notions of animism and relational ontology are providing a means to rethink that research. Power was derived from knowledge about relations between animals and their characteristics, and relationships between the past and present as immanent power immured within rock formations. Rock art, because of its positioning on rock formations found where communities would visit over and over again, drew upon those relations while making new statements in a visible format. This has wider importance beyond appreciating relational ontology as a means to an end, as rock art ultimately occupied a relational position within indigenous society. It therefore played a vital role within the internal societal dynamics of identity formations through the employment of a form of displayable power. Archaeological research on the coastal Chumash has, for some time, been concerned with understanding the development of differential power under the rubric of complexity as seen in hierarchies, specialization and the establishment of institutions such as guilds and the *'antap* (Arnold 2001; 2004; Corbett 2004; Gamble 2008; Kennett 2005; Rick 2007). Understanding how relational ontology may underpin ideology as a form of legitimization can inform the manner in which Chumash complexity may have developed (see Robinson 2007; Robinson *et*

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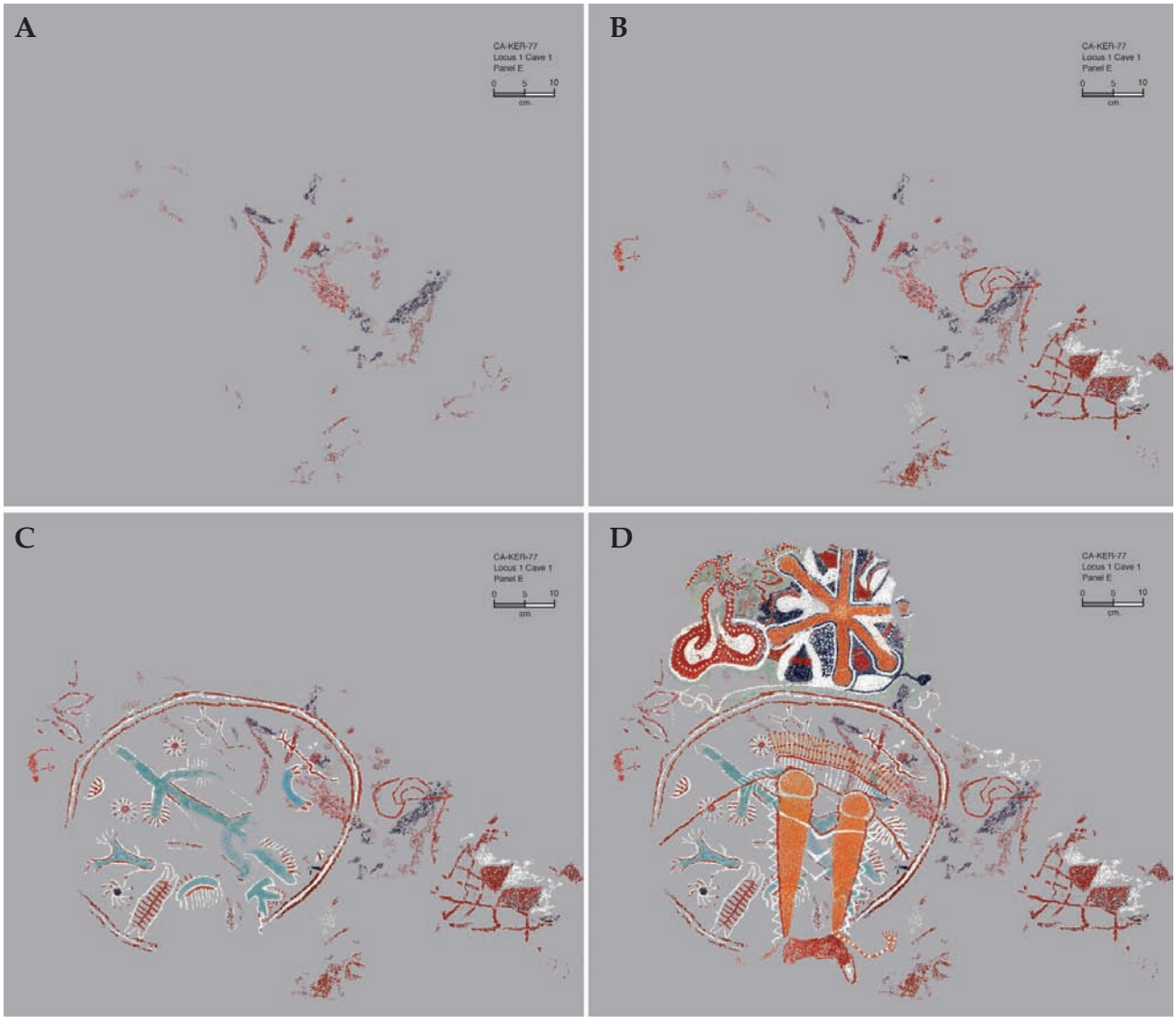

Figure 18. *Dan Reeves' layer drawings of superimposition sequence from Panel E at Pleito, Main Cave: A. first discernible but ephemeral traces in red and black; B. second layer is characterized by a grid and a pinwheel element, with red, black, white, and a trace of creamy-white; C. a composition set-piece is superimposed over the earlier elements, aqua blue is introduced, outlined in white and red, a red-white-red circle encompasses a classic set-piece: a central figure is flanked by concentric radial elements with an aquatic figure in aqua-blue and red; D. a final composition caps the earlier elements: lavishly applied orange, white, red and black interplay with the earlier circular composition. Two plummet-shaped elements, perhaps representing charmstones, are superimposed over the earlier set-piece. One plummet has a white-dotted foot as an appendage. (Drawings by Dan Reeves.)*

al. 2011). Such ontological ideologies were manifested or actualized in media such as rock art with wide distributions within inland terrestrial environments; this indicates the importance of non-coastal indigenous groups in trans-regional developments.

When and how does this mythological ideology emerge? This of course brings up issues of tension between ethnography and archaeology. I have explored this issue in detail elsewhere (Robinson 2010b), but it is worth noting that David's (2002) analysis of Australian rock-art sites calls into question the time-depth of ethnographic versions of Dreamtime, perhaps placing its origin only 900 years BP. Without many direct AMS dates of individual paintings, it remains difficult to

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track the emergence of this Californian mythology. However, based upon the discussion above, it appears that pictographs were likely made during the Early Period, with evidence suggestive of pictograph making by approximately 3500 BP. It may be that paintings incorporating elements such as the aquatic motif and concentric circles, plus transmorphic images and set-pieces could have been produced during this early period, but there is gathering evidence that they were most likely being made at least by the Middle Period (*c.* 2200 to 700 BP). Another 'pulse' of rock-art production appears to have occurred sometime after this point in the Late Period and continuing until Historical times, with the aquatic motif still in use as evidenced by portable artefacts containing that element found in dated deposits (Hudson & Conti 1981, 230). If the rock art was both a reflection of ontology and a practice that enacted it, then superimposition analyses can provide a means to identify changes in the relational underpinnings of indigenous ontology. For instance, the complex superimposition of panels at Pleito (Fig. 18) clearly shows the incorporation of set-pieces in the middle stages of rock-art production. Further work at Pleito and other sites with superimposition will be able to tease out changes in imagery, which will enable a rethinking of ethnography and interrogate how animism, mythology and ideology developed in south-central California.

However, as stated at the beginning of this article, the application of animism and relational ontology runs the risk of becoming a generalizing model, or worse, of insinuating an essentialist view of hunter-gatherers. So while Ingold (2000, 130) states that hunter-gatherer depictions are meant to reveal rather than represent, the pictographs discussed here were meant to draw from and enact. In this sense rock art plays an active role within society more so than just a reflection of inner mind. Rock art provides one means for 'animism [to] be put to systematic and deliberate use' (Viveiros de Castro 2004, 469) and so become an institutionalized way of knowing (cf. Bird-David 2006). In this case study from south-central California, a 'third space' approach focusing on how knowledge was transmitted throughout society offers a way to consider the role of relational ontology in specific circumstances. Other relational third-space approaches incorporating embodiment (cf. Hampson 2013), personhood (cf. Fowler 2010) or concepts of agency (cf. Robb 2010) offer alternative means of investigating indigenous and non-Western archaeologies. Like the modular composition of mythological narratives and rock-art imagery discussed in this study, multi-relational approaches that look in depth upon specific past societies offer fluid theoretical possibilities to keep moving on from essentialist generalizations.

Notes

1. Perhaps the tale was altered because story was told to an anthropologist rather than the usual Native audience.

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