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# The Ventriloquist's Dummy: A Critical Review of Shamanism and Rock Art in Far Western North America

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*Interpretive rock art studies are currently dominated by the neuropsychological or shamanistic model (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1988). The strength of this approach is assessed herein through a critical reappraisal of David Whitley's shamanistic interpretation of California and Great Basin rock art (Whitley 1992, 1994a, 1994b, 1994c, 1996, 1998a, 1998b). Whitley's work seemingly represents one of the most persuasive examples of the ability of the shamanistic model to generate compelling interpretations of rock art. His work has also been cited by Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1988) as providing important independent confirmation of the general validity of their approach. However, reexamination of Whitley's ethnographic sources suggests that they offer poor support for a shamanistic interpretation.*

**T**HE symbolic systems of other cultures constitute a potential interpretive minefield for the unwary or overly optimistic anthropologist. The complexity and manifold interpretations of symbolic systems have been well documented by Turner (1971) and Sperber (1975), and one should be suspicious of approaches that ignore the polysemous nature of symbolism. The currently popular neuropsychological model of rock art seems to be one such case. This model holds that much of the rock art produced by hunter-gatherers records "altered states of consciousness," entered for curative purposes. The origins of the current version of this model can be traced to a series of publications on the Tukano of Colombia by Reichel-Dolmatoff (1967, 1978), who suggested that specific graphic symbols were inspired by entoptic imagery experienced during induced trance states. With their analysis of Upper Paleolithic cave art, Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1988) largely popularized this model. Their basic premise was that visual percepts independent of an external light source, or *entoptic phenomena*, are manifested materially as a number of abstract, geometric signs. They argued that abstract signs that resemble entoptic phe-

nomena are, in fact, signifiers of such phenomena (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1988:202-203, 205, 208). These symbols of entoptic phenomena indicate an art's connection to trance states, and thus to shamanism.

However, others have questioned whether it is possible to differentiate entoptic forms from nonentoptic abstract motifs in rock art (e.g., Bahn 1988; Davis 1988; Layton 1988). These researchers have pointed out that the signs selected as entoptic signifiers by advocates of the shamanistic model constitute the basic elements of all systems of visual representation, thus leaving us with no clear idea of what is *not* entoptic (Bahn 1988:217; Davis 1988:223; Layton 1988:226). In many ways, prehistoric rock art can be viewed as a ventriloquist's dummy—in the absence of indigenous commentaries or informed methods (Taçon and Chippindale 1998:6), archaeologists make rock art speak. But rock art imagery by itself cannot be used to discriminate between alternative interpretations. It is therefore imperative that the models used to interpret rock art be securely grounded in anthropological theory. This was appreciated long ago by Steward (1937:409), who observed that "Petroglyphs are so variable and gener-

ally so crude in form that it is all too easy for a person bent on proving a thesis to read into them whatever he desires and to find any shapes he seeks."

The validity of Steward's observation has been demonstrated, rather ironically, by the work of Dronfield (1993, 1996a, 1996b). His work is one of the few serious attempts to rigorously isolate design elements in rock art that can be treated as diagnostic of arts produced as the outcome of states of altered consciousness. Dronfield examined arts produced by Western clinical subjects and that of the Tukano to depict their vision imagery experienced from exposure to hallucinogens. In comparison to arts known to have no connection with hallucinogens, Dronfield (1993:183, 1996b:385-386) concluded that only the square, rectangle, and triangle had diagnostic value, their presence indicating that an art was *not* associated with trance states. However, the diagnostic value of even these elements seems illusory, since rectangles and triangles occur in art produced for Reichel-Dolmatoff (1978:Fig. 8) and clinical researchers (Oster 1970: 87) by individuals recording their induced vision imagery (Fig. 1). Further, Dronfield's analyses relied upon arts produced to illustrate to researchers the internal vision imagery experienced by individuals. As such, these arts can only inform us how individuals visualize induced entoptic experiences, not how these are translated into artistic products or are interpreted.

It is clear that the actual meanings of signs and symbols derived from entoptic experiences do not necessarily refer to trance states (Bradley 1997:54-55). For example, the Tukano use narcotically derived entoptic imagery to provide graphic symbols of aspects of their social organization (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1972:106, 1978:301). Rather ironically, given the history of rock art interpretation in the Great Basin, rock paintings made by Tukano shamans represent a "shopping list" of animals desired by hunters (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1967:111).

One is therefore forced to conclude that at present it is not possible, on the basis of the art alone, to determine whether rock art depicts induced vi-

sion imagery. Whitley (1998a:40-41) has argued that despite such theoretical problems with the neuropsychological model, the abstract imagery of rock art

cannot be readily explained by any other hypothesis . . . thus [imagery resembling entoptic phenomena] serve[s] as important independent evidence in support of this [shamanistic] interpretation of the art, which is otherwise primarily provided by the Native American accounts.

However, the entoptic model itself is not an economical explanation of rock art imagery, as it offers an unacceptably reductionist theorization of shamanism (Atkinson 1992:311). Its romantic flavor fails to recognize that non-Western religions (and their practices) are ontological systems that provide a means of comprehending and acting upon the social and natural worlds. They differ from Western ontological systems (such as science or philosophy) only in their theories of causation, which attribute supernatural forces and/or entities to causal agency (Quinlan 1993:41, 192). The shamanistic model frequently portrays the shaman's interest in the supernatural as an end in itself (e.g., Turpin 1994:76-77), rather than a means to an end (i.e., curing affliction).

Despite such problems, the popularity of the neuropsychological model has continued unabated. In part, this is because the model seems strongly supported by ethnographies from South Africa and North America. The ethnographic foundation supporting Lewis-Williams and Dowson's (1988) entoptic interpretation of southern African rock art appears increasingly shaky (see critiques by Skotnes 1991; Bahn 1997:63-64; and Solomon 1997). In contrast, Whitley's shamanistic interpretation of the rock art of California and the Great Basin still seems strongly based on ethnography and to be illustrative of the power of the model in interpreting art traditions. However, a reexamination of the ethnographic data from California and the Great Basin suggests that Whitley's model is also suspect.

Shamanistic interpretations of the rock art of California and the Great Basin are not new. Kroe-



Fig. 1. Commonly experienced entoptic motifs recorded by clinical subjects (1 through 15) and the Tukano (16 through 35) produced at the request of researchers (after Oster 1970:87; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1978: Fig. 8).

ber (1925:938), Grant (1965:64, 1978:517-518), Blackburn (1977) and Hedges (1976, 1983, 1985), among others, have all argued to varying degrees for a connection between rock art and shamanism in this region. But such work has tended to rely on the nature of the imagery itself. In contrast, Whitley (e.g., 1992, 1994a, 1994b, 1994c) has largely eschewed inferring a shamanistic context for rock

art from the presence of entoptic design elements, and instead has relied upon informed methods to establish a shamanistic context. The potential power of such an approach has been illustrated by the rich interpretations, sensitive to ethnographic context, found in studies of the rock art of western Arnhem Land, Australia (e.g., Taçon and Chippindale 1994; Taçon et al. 1996).

The model proposed by Whitley (1992:91-98, 1994a:361-362; 1994b:84, 87-88; Whitley et al. 1999:17-24) portrays shamanism as the basis of all historic and prehistoric rock art produced in California and the Great Basin. One could rightly question whether a single explanation of all California and Great Basin rock art seems plausible, given the considerable variability in the characteristics of rock art both between and within these regions (Monteleone 1998:19, 25-26). However, I wish to concentrate on Whitley's characterization of the ethnohistoric record concerning rock art and shamanism in California and the Great Basin, and examine his argument that the role of shamans in making and using rock art is well attested in the available ethnographies (Whitley 1992:91-97, 1994a:361-362, 1994b:83-84, 1994c:3-4, 1996:28-29, 1998b:144-145). The basis of all historic and prehistoric rock art production is argued to have been a "vision quest," with rock art made by shamans after trance states to depict their vision imagery. Shamans needed to record the vision imagery they experienced during altered states of consciousness because if it was forgotten, death or sickness could follow (Whitley 1994b:83, 1994c:4-5, 1996:10, 1998a:4, 1998b:148), and at the very least supernatural powers would be lost. Some rock art, however, has been argued to be the outcome of trance states experienced by puberty initiates in southern California. It has been claimed that these puberty rites are shamanistic in character, since spirit-helpers and supernatural powers are supposedly obtained by initiates during these ceremonies (Whitley 1992:94-95, 1994b:84, 1994c:4, 1996:25-27).

Rock art production is envisaged as a predominantly male activity as it is associated with shamans who are portrayed as almost exclusively male (Whitley 1994b:83, 1998b:144). Vision quests and narcotic means of inducing altered states of consciousness (primarily through decoctions of datura or tobacco) have been argued to characterize Californian and Great Basin shamanism, as well as the general process by which supernatural powers and spirit-helpers were acquired by shamans and non-

shamans alike (Whitley 1994b:83, 1998b:145-146).

However, the ethnographic picture defined by the leading authorities for California and the Great Basin poses considerable challenges to this shamanistic interpretation. As noted by previous researchers, in general, Native Americans in California and the Great Basin disclaimed authorship and knowledge of the use of the rock art in their areas, or alternatively attributed authorship to supernatural entities (Kroeber 1925:938; Steward 1929:224, 1937:412-413, 419). Direct or indirect ethnographic statements that shamans made rock art or depicted their vision imagery in rock art are very rare. In addition, Whitley's characterization of shamanistic practices in California and the Great Basin pays insufficient attention to significant regional variations. The purposeful pursuit of shamanistic powers ("vision questing") appears to have been largely unknown in the Great Basin and not universal in California (Park 1938:110, 113, 119). The role of women in doctoring practices is underplayed since, with the exception of the Kawaiisu, shamanism was open to both sexes in the Great Basin, although in southern California it was predominantly a male pursuit (Park 1938:88-90).

The following critique should be read as a substantive engagement with shamanistic approaches to prehistoric rock art, of which Whitley's interpretation of the rock art of far western North America represents a particularly persuasive example as it marshals an impressive body of ethnographic references in support (e.g., Whitley 1992:91-97, 1994b:83-84, 1994c:3-4, 1998b:Tables 4, 5). However, reexamination of these sources suggests that Whitley's enthusiasm for the shamanistic model may have led him to discount more direct, alternative readings.

#### INFORMED SOURCES OF ROCK ART INTERPRETATION

Only a very few native consultants in California and the Great Basin directly stated that rock art was made or associated primarily with shamans. While five Monache and three Yokuts consultants



volunteered direct statements affirming a shamanistic context for rock art in their territories, nine Yokuts and two Monache consultants questioned by Driver (1937:86) and Aginsky (1943:426) denied that shamans made rock art. Other Yokuts consultants offered alternative interpretations of rock art authorship and usage to other ethnographers (Latta 1977:601). Similarly, direct statements of the shamanistic context of rock art were not forthcoming from consultants elsewhere in California and the Great Basin (see discussion below).

Chumash rock art has often been interpreted as shamanistic in its motivation, largely because of the presence of rock art motifs that resemble entoptic forms and avian imagery (interpreted as depictions of the shaman's magical "soul flight") (e.g., Grant 1965:64; Applegate 1975:15; Blackburn 1977; Hedges 1985:88-90). However, this does not provide compelling evidence for a shamanistic explanation since, as noted above, it is not possible to distinguish entoptic from nonentoptic elements in art. Little is known of Chumash social and cultural practices, including shamanism, prior to the arrival of Euroamericans (Kroeber 1925:550, 567). Hence, references to Joaquin Ayala (a shaman) and Rafael Solares making rock art in the nineteenth century (Blackburn 1975:127) cannot be used to conclude that all (or even any) Chumash pre-Columbian rock art was shamanistic in character. Such reports record Chumash social and cultural practices after some 150 years of acculturation. For example, Rafael Solares was born and raised in a mission and lived "an Indian life that culturally enriched the Chumash and a Christian life that inspired admiration among Christians" (Hudson et al. 1977:125). Consequently, Solares' shamanistic use of art may have more to do with the religious significance of graphic imagery in Roman Catholicism. Other ethnohistoric references to Chumash rock art suggest that some of it was interpreted as part of a mythological landscape, having been made by the "first people" (Harrington 1926:106).

Most groups in California and the Great Basin denied that rock art was made by shamans, includ-

ing the Tübatulabal (Driver 1937:86), Kawaiisu (Driver 1937:86), Panamint (Western Shoshoni) (Driver 1937:86; Irwin 1980:32), Miwok (Aginsky 1943:426), and Eastern Shoshoni (Hultkrantz 1987:49, 53). Some groups disclaimed all knowledge concerning the origins, functions, and symbolism of rock art in their territory, thus indirectly denying any shamanistic context for its origins or uses (e.g., the Salinan [Mason 1912:155]).

More mundane native explanations of rock art include that offered by Owens Valley Paiute to Stephen Powers in 1875. Powers was told that certain motifs at one rock art site were made by hunters to record their hunting exploits. Other motifs were believed to mark the high water point of an ancient flood (Fowler and Fowler 1970:138). In central California, certain forms of rock art were associated with fertility rites. The Pomo used rock powder from cupules as a treatment for infertility (Barrett 1908:175, 1952:386-387; Loeb 1926:247; Gifford and Kroeber 1939:186).

The most detailed ethnographic accounts of rock art relate to its use in the female puberty rites of the Luiseño and Cupeño, and possibly the Diegueño (Ipai) and Cahuilla, of southern California. Luiseño (Du Bois 1908:96; Kroeber 1908:174, 176) and Cupeño (Strong 1929:256-257; Hill and Nolasquez 1973:33-34) female puberty rites were terminated when the girls made rock paintings. Among the Cahuilla, rock painting may once have been associated with the female puberty rite (Hooper 1920:347-348; Strong 1929:172-173; Drucker 1937:33). Rock painting was not recorded for either the girls' or boys' puberty rites among the Diegueño, although pictographs similar to those made during the Luiseño girls' puberty rite are known in Diegueño territory (Strong 1929:118).

Whitley has attempted to fit these rituals into a shamanistic model by arguing that initiates entered trance states, acquired shamanistic powers, and depicted their vision imagery on boulders at the conclusion of the rite (Whitley 1992:95, 1994b:83, 1994c:4-5, 1996:23). However, the symbolism employed in the rock paintings and sandpaintings of

these rites sought to secure the neophytes' obedience to social and cultural norms by providing representations of the supernatural entities that would punish social transgressions (Du Bois 1908:82-83, 89; Kroeber 1908:177-179; Sparkman 1908:223; Strong 1929:256-257, 299, 314-315; Hill and Nolasquez 1973:33-34; Oxendine 1980:42; Cohen 1987:13-14).

None of these female puberty rites involved neophytes entering trance states for shamanistic purposes. The Luiseño (Du Bois 1908:94; Kroeber 1908:174, 1925:674; Sparkman 1908:224), Cahuilla (Hooper 1920:347; Strong 1929:173), Diegueño (Strong 1929:118), and Cupeño (Strong 1929:255) all subjected the girls to the physical ordeal of "roasting," which involved placing the girls in a pit lined with heated stones and putting warmed stones on each girl. The taking of tobacco decoctions (or other substances) by the girls during these rituals functioned as an ordeal, not to induce vision imagery (Du Bois 1908:94; Kroeber 1908:176, 1925:674; Strong 1929:298-299).

In contrast, the boys' puberty rites of these groups, the centerpiece of which was the administration of datura to the neophytes, did not involve rock painting. While Du Bois (1908:84) speculated that rock painting had once been a part of the Luiseño boys' rite, "no mention of this has been recorded" (Strong 1929:316). However, during the ant ordeal, in which boys were covered in ants (which seems to have supplemented the Toloache initiation), the rite concluded with a race and rock painting. Thus, the purpose of the rite was an initiatory ordeal, not to induce visions, and datura was not used (Du Bois 1908:91-92; Strong 1929:317). During the Diegueño boys' puberty rite, the neophytes did enter trance states to acquire supernatural powers (Waterman 1910:293; Spier 1923:316, 321). Nevertheless, the initiates did not take part in the artistic activities associated with the rite, and the symbolic references of the art produced (sandpainting) centered on cosmology (Spier 1923:319-320). In any case, rock art was neither produced nor used.

With the exception of the Diegueño boys' rite, visions experienced by initiates during these puberty rites were interpreted in terms of mythological entities, not spirit-helpers. This is illustrated by the Luiseño boys' rite during which spirit-helpers were not acquired (Du Bois 1908:80). The boys were culturally conditioned to interpret their visions in terms of the Chinigchinich cult. After taking datura, dancers would portray Chinigchinich messengers and avengers for the boys (Du Bois 1908:79-80). This contrasts with the function of the visions experienced by Diegueño boys during their puberty rite, since these were believed to be spirit-helpers that the boys might acquire (Waterman 1910:293; Spier 1923:316, 321). However, the symbolism of the sandpaintings made by shamans during the rite centered on cosmology (Spier 1923:319-320).

Rattlesnake designs and other symbolic elements made during Luiseño puberty rites represented Chinigchinich messengers or avengers (i.e., hostile animals and/or spirits through whom the spirit Chinigchinich worked), who punished social transgressions (Kroeber 1908:177-179; Sparkman 1908:223; Strong 1929:299, 314-315; Oxendine 1980:42; Cohen 1987:13-14). Likewise, in the Cupeño girls' puberty rite, some of the symbols depicted in the sandpaintings would protect a girl, while others would punish her if she did not follow social rules (Strong 1929:256-257; Hill and Nolasquez 1973:33-34). The sandpaintings made during the boys' ceremony illustrated Mukat's (the creator being) creatures, who also punished social transgressions (Strong 1929:260). Hence, the art produced illustrated to the initiates the dangerous consequences of not following tribal norms (Sparkman 1908:223), rather than shamanistic themes.

It seems that the Luiseño later began to interpret rock art for which they lacked positive knowledge in terms of the ethnography of their puberty rites. Du Bois (1908:159) discussed a painted rock used by the Luiseño to relieve pain. Her consultants disclaimed any knowledge concerning the authorship or meanings of the pictographs on this rock, yet Luiseños questioned in the 1950s about the same

rock attributed it to the girls' puberty rite (True and Griset 1988:274). It is also clear that Luiseños interpreted rock art as an index of the presence of the supernatural; for example, a cave where special powers, such as writing ability or music, could be acquired was believed to have contained rock art. However, specific details of this rock art were unknown (True and Waugh 1986:271-272), suggesting that the presence of rock art was inferred on the basis that the cave was a place of supernatural power.

### RECORDING VISIONS IN ROCK ART

Why shamans would have needed to make a *visual* record of their visions (Whitley 1994c:5) is difficult to explain. As Park (1938:115-116) pointed out, in California and the Great Basin, dream experiences were often primarily *auditory* experiences. In dreams, individuals were taught the songs by which their spirit-helper(s) could be summoned, or they acquired talismans. If the song was forgotten or the talisman lost, then so was the spirit-helper's assistance. Owens Valley Paiute dream experiences are typical; in dreams, a spirit-helper "spoke to the individual, promising aid and certain abilities" (Steward 1933:309). It was not graphic imagery that shamans found essential to record, it was the songs that were essential to curing performances, such as among the Yokuts (Gayton 1930:388), Tübatulabal (Voegelin 1938:64), Southern Paiute (Kelly 1939:166), Western Shoshoni (Steward 1941:320, 321), Chemehuevi (Laird 1976:103), and Kawaiisu (Zigmond 1986:406).

The lack of support for the notion that shamans made rock art to record their vision imagery is illustrated by ethnographies of the groups (Surprise Valley Paiute, Northern Shoshoni, Yokuts, and Monache) Whitley (1994c:5) cited to support his argument. Kelly's (1932) ethnography of the Surprise Valley Paiute mentioned neither the use of rock art to refresh a shaman's memory nor any association between shamans and rock art. Likewise, in discussing Yokuts and Monache shamanistic practices, Gayton (1948a:109, 1948b:240) and Applegate

(1978:50-51) also did not mention the use of rock art to record shamans' vision imagery. Similarly, an Eastern Shoshoni shaman's visitation of a rock art site to restore his eyesight (Hultkrantz 1987:55) merely illustrates that places of supernatural power were often believed to be marked by rock art. The rock art itself seems to have played no role at all in the restoration of this shaman's "vision."

The general absence of consultant statements to the effect that rock art depicted the vision imagery of shamans is therefore not surprising. Whitley (1994b:83-84, 1994c:3) has only been able to uncover two Monache consultant statements that provide direct evidence that shamans depicted their vision imagery in rock art (Gifford 1932:52; Driver 1937:126). While these are of relevance to the Monache, they do not apply to the rest of California or the Great Basin. A Northern Shoshoni's comment that a shaman's medicine might advise him to paint (Lowie 1909:224) is difficult to accept as a direct and straightforward statement that shamans depicted their vision imagery in rock art. What was painted and where was not stated; thus, the statement seems more likely to refer to the Plains practice of shamans painting their clothing following a successful vision (Park 1938:129).

Similarly, White's (1963) discussion of Luiseño cosmogony does not provide direct evidence that rock art depicted vision imagery (Whitley 1994c:3). White (1963:141) merely noted that while the meaning of the symbol painted by a girl on a boulder at the end of her puberty rite was known only to the individual herself, it was possibly representative of some bird (e.g., Eagle, who is connected to fertility themes), animal or *ayelkwi* object.<sup>1</sup> As noted above, the symbolism associated with this rite also referred to supernaturals (Chinigchinich avengers) who would punish the initiates if they transgressed tribal customs.

### SHAMANISTIC USES OF ROCK ART

The ethnographic record does attest to the shamanistic use of rock art sites among certain groups who associated rock art with places of supernatural



power. In the Great Basin during the nineteenth century, the Northern Shoshoni (Lowie 1909:223-224, 1924:295-296; Voget 1984:302), Eastern Shoshoni (Shimkin 1953:409; Trenholm and Carley 1964:40; Hultkrantz 1987:52-54), and Gosiute (Malouf 1974:81) acquired shamanistic powers by sleeping overnight at a rock art locale. Similarly, in southern California, Cahuilla shamans and other ritual figures used places of particular and dangerous supernatural power that were frequently marked by petroglyphs (Bean 1972:75). Among the Yokuts, shamans' caches (where shamans stored their accumulated wealth) were often said to have been marked by pictographs, and "any rock with pictographs was thought to be a cache" (Gayton 1948a:113).

However, these examples do not provide direct evidence of a shamanistic basis for the origins or use of rock art. These consultant statements illustrate that rock art locales could be interpreted as an index of the presence of supernatural powers. The Yokuts (Gayton 1948a, 1948b) and Eastern Shoshoni (Hultkrantz 1987) both generally denied that shamans made rock art (also see Driver 1937:86). The Cahuilla offered no explanation of the rock art in their area, suggesting that its use by shamans was due to it too being interpreted as an index of the supernatural. In these cases, rock art served as a topographic marker of places where supernatural powers and/or entities resided, and could perhaps be obtained (Stewart 1937:412). In none of these cases are shamans actually said to have made the rock art concerned. These ethnohistoric records attest to the appropriation of the signs of the past by historically known populations. While one would not wish to deny this aspect of the use of rock art, it should be pointed out that this cannot be used to insist upon a shamanistic context for its production and use by its original makers and/or subsequent users.

#### SUPERNATURAL ENTITIES AS AUTHORS OF ROCK ART

A number of groups, such as the Northern Paiute, Tübatulabal, Pomo, Southern Paiute, Ute,

Kawaiisu, Panamint, and Eastern Shoshoni, attributed rock art to mythological figures and/or other supernatural entities (Kelly 1932:137; Voegelin 1938:58; Gifford and Kroeber 1939:186; Stewart 1941:418, 1942:321; Wheat 1967:20, 115; Zigmond 1977:71; Irwin 1980:32; Hultkrantz 1987: 49, 53). Can such statements be interpreted as metaphors asserting that shamans made rock art, as Whitley (1992:97, 1994b:82, 1994c:3, 1998b:144) suggested?

The answer seems to be no. Some of these consultant statements attributed rock art to supernatural entities that did not function as spirit-helpers in their societies, such as the Tübatulabal, Northern Paiute, Ute, and Southern Paiute (Voegelin 1938: 58, 61, 62; Stewart 1941:418, 1942:321). Alternatively, when supernatural beings that possibly had some shamanistic associations (Water Baby, Rock Baby) were cited, consultants ridiculed the idea that Native Americans had made rock art, and some, such as the Panamint and Kawaiisu (Driver 1937:86; Zigmond 1977:71; Irwin 1980:32), specifically denied that shamans made it.

For example, since Coyote was said to have made rock art as a "trick" (Stewart 1941:418), Honey Lake Paiute (Northern Paiute) descriptions of petroglyphs as *tumadi* ("magic" or "tricks"; Riddell 1978:84)<sup>2</sup> metaphorically place rock art in mythic time. Since Coyote did not serve as a shaman's spirit-helper among the Northern Paiute (Park 1938:19), such statements cannot be construed as a metaphor that malicious shamans made rock art. Interestingly, some Northern Paiute consultants identified poorly made or broken projectile points recovered from archaeological projects as "Coyote Points," those made or broken by Coyote. Chronologically older projectile points were attributed to the Time When Animals Were People (Fowler 1992:106, Fig. 50).

Only the Chemehuevi stated that rock art was made by spirit-helpers, since the native term for petroglyph translates as "marked by spirit-helper." However, the Chemehuevi disclaimed knowledge concerning the origins and functions of rock art in

their territory (Laird 1976:103, 123, 1984:276). Laird (1984:302) suggested that since there was a taboo on naming the dead, this may have been a circuitous way of stating that prior to the coming of Euroamericans, Chemehuevi shamans had made rock art, since in mythic times spirit-helpers had been shamans. This interpretation forms the basis for her association of a series of myths that seem to refer to the acquisition of shamanistic powers with rock art (Laird 1984:303-317).

However, while her principal consultant, husband George Laird, believed that rock art had been made by spirit-helpers, he was unable to offer any further information concerning the origins and functions of Chemehuevi rock art. Further, he himself never made any connection between the Chemehuevi myths he narrated to his wife and rock art (Laird 1984:302). Since George freely discussed Chemehuevi religious concepts (including shamanism), it seems unlikely that he withheld information concerning rock art from his wife. While the taboo on naming the dead would have prevented him from identifying rock art as the work of specific shamans by name, it would not have prevented him from stating directly that rock art was connected with shamanism. Therefore, it seems that George's statements recorded the perceived antiquity of Chemehuevi rock art, since its production and use were believed to have ceased long before the coming of Euroamericans (Laird 1984:276), and not a cryptic statement of its connection with shamans.

Consequently, these consultant statements attributing rock art authorship to supernaturals seem more plausibly interpreted as metaphors of the perceived antiquity of rock art. It seems unlikely that the dearth of direct and indirect ethnographic information concerning the shamanistic context of rock art can be explained by such things as fear of shamans, taboos on naming the dead, or a reticence to discuss religious matters with outsiders as Whitley suggested (1994b:82, 1994c:3, 1998a:36, 1998b:144). As an example, Steward (1941:257) found that his Western Shoshoni consultants did not hesitate to name deceased relatives, although they were

theoretically subject to a taboo on naming the dead.

Certainly some shamans found it difficult to disclose details of their activities to ethnographers. In some cases, this derived from their experience of imprisonment for practicing shamanism (e.g., Gayton 1948b:149), or from fear of retribution since they were believed to be responsible for causing illness and death in their communities (e.g., Kelly 1939:157, 189). However, it is clear from the wealth of information supplied by shamans to ethnographers that such fears did not deter most from disclosing the arts of their vocation. Likewise, fear of shamans did not prevent most nonshamans from discussing shamanism with ethnographers. As noted earlier, taboos on naming the deceased would not have prevented consultants from stating a connection between shamanism and rock art.

Therefore, it is difficult to support the notion that the shamanistic nature of rock art is well documented in the ethnographies of California and the Great Basin. Instead, in general, a shamanistic context for the production and functions of rock art is denied.

#### RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ROCK ART AND ETHNOGRAPHY

Whitley's shamanistic model also fails to consider whether there is, in fact, any relationship between the subjects of the available ethnographies and the rock art of California and the Great Basin. The ethnographies collected in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in this region refer to native societies that had been devastated by the impact of Euroamerican contact and colonization. In California, many coastal groups were forcibly incorporated into Spanish missions, where brutal efforts were made to enforce Catholic moral codes and culture (e.g., Castillo 1978:101-102).

In the Great Basin, the settlement of Utah by Mormons in 1847 significantly increased the pressure on traditional native societies. This pressure increased with the discovery of gold in California in 1848, which resulted in a massive flow of immigrants passing through the Great Basin. The sub-

sequent discovery of the Comstock lode had a disastrous effect on native societies (Malouf and Findlay 1986:508-513). From the 1870s onwards, reservations and government schools were significant forces of acculturation (Clemmer and Stewart 1986:539), completing the devastating effects of American settlement. Consequently, the ethnographies collected in the first half of this century in California and the Great Basin cannot be assumed to be representative of aboriginal cultural practices prior to Euroamerican colonization (Voegelin 1956:4; Heizer 1978:4).

The uncritical use of ethnography to interpret prehistoric materials runs the risk of presenting deeply ahistorical accounts (Hodder 1991:148-149). By directly imposing these ethnographies on several thousands of years of rock art over a vast area, Whitley seems to have portrayed Native American societies in western North America as remarkably static (Monteleone 1998:25). By using Californian and Great Basin ethnographies interchangeably to interpret rock art and shamanism over the entire region, Whitley also appears to imply a degree of cultural homogeneity that denies the distinctiveness of native groups. Further, it runs counter to common sense that rock art made and used over several thousands of years would have only had a single function and interpretation throughout that time (Steward 1937:419; Monteleone 1998:25).

In the Great Basin, there is the added difficulty of identifying rock art made by the historically known Numic populations, their ancestors, or preceding populations. Estimates of the date of the Numic spread into the Great Basin are a matter of great controversy (see Madsen and Rhode 1994), but suggest that a significant amount of rock art is related to pre-Numic populations (also see Heizer and Baumhoff 1962:14-15; Bettinger and Baumhoff 1982:493). As such, one could interpret Great Basin consultant statements that rock art was made by supernaturals as plausible explanations of phenomena of which Numic populations were aware, but not why it was made or what it meant.

### SHAMANISM IN CALIFORNIA AND THE GREAT BASIN

The general model of California and Great Basin shamanism presented by Whitley is also problematic since it is too reductionist and ignores significant regional variations in shamanistic practices. Particularly difficult to support is the assertion that shamanistic powers were universally acquired purposefully through a "vision quest" (Whitley 1994b:83-84, 1994c:4-6, 1998b:145-146). The acquisition of supernatural powers in the Great Basin was predominantly involuntary and generally came unsought in ordinary dreams (Park 1938:110), such as among the Northern Paiute (Kelly 1932:190; Park 1938:22), Owens Valley Paiute (Steward 1933:308, 312), Southern Paiute (Kelly 1939:166), Western Shoshoni (Steward 1941:320, 322), Washo (Downs 1961:370; Siskin 1983:27-28), Ute (Callaway et al. 1986:354), and Kawaiisu (Zigmond 1986:406). Despite this, individuals among groups such as the Northern Paiute (Kelly 1932:190; Park 1938:22), Western Shoshoni (Steward 1941:258) and Ute (Callaway et al. 1986:354) could go to places of supernatural power (e.g., mountains or caves) to seek a vision. Nevertheless, these purposeful pursuits of visions were not the preferred method of obtaining supernatural powers (Park 1938:110).

In contrast, the Northern and Eastern Shoshoni are the only Great Basin groups for whom the purposeful pursuit of shamanistic powers was the usual method of acquiring such powers. While supernatural power could come unsought in dreams, it was usually acquired purposefully by sleeping at sacred places or through the Sun Dance (Steward 1943:282-283; Shimkin 1986:325). However, such pursuits of supernatural power were adopted from Plains tribes (Steward 1943:282-283; Shimkin 1953:406-407, 1986:325, 327), disguising the fact that the aboriginal means of acquiring dreams and supernatural power was via spontaneous dreaming (Hultkrantz 1987:49). In this century, the pursuit of shamanistic powers was largely abandoned by



the 1910s, replaced by the traditional means of spontaneous dreaming as the source of such powers (Hultkrantz 1987:52).

In California, the purposeful pursuit of shamanistic powers was far more common, although not universal. In southern California, "vision questing" played no role in the acquisition of shamanistic powers (Park 1938:119), as noted among the Cahuilla (Hooper 1920:334-335; Strong 1929:64, 168) and Cupeño (Strong 1929:252). In central California, shamanistic powers generally came unsought in dreams, although for groups such as the Monache and Yokuts it was possible to take steps to induce dreams (Gayton 1930:388-389, 1948a:passim, 1948b:passim).

Also at odds with the general nature of shamanism in California and the Great Basin is the portrayal of shamanism as a predominantly male activity (Whitley 1994b:83-84, 1994c:21-24, 1996:8, 1998b:144). In the Great Basin, the Kawaiisu were the only group where shamanism was restricted to men (Driver 1937:102). Both sexes could become shamans among the Owens Valley Paiute (Steward 1933: 311), Southern Paiute and Chemehuevi (Kelly 1936:134, 1939:151, 156-161), Northern Paiute (Park 1938:20; Riddell 1978:76, 79), Northern Shoshoni (Steward 1943:344), Ute (Callaway et al. 1986: 354), and Washo (d'Azevedo 1986:491). In contrast, while women could become shamans, it was usually men who practiced among the Western Shoshoni (Driver 1937:102; Steward 1941:258, 320).

Central and southern California offers a strong contrast to the Great Basin, since it is there that shamanism was predominantly a male activity. Groups such as the Monache, Yokuts, Serrano, Luisefño, Cahuilla, Costanoan, and Miwok (Gayton 1930:389; Driver 1937:102; Drucker 1937:41; Harrington 1942:39; Aginsky 1943:444) illustrate the rarity of female shamans in central and southern California. Yet, even in this area, among certain groups shamanism was open to women, such as the Tübatulabal (Voegelin 1938:62)<sup>3</sup> and some Diegueño subgroups (Drucker 1937:41).

In contrast, in northern California shamanism was usually associated with women. Shamans were nearly always women among groups such as the Shasta, Yurok, Wiyot, Hupa (Kroeber 1925:63-66, 117, 137, 301), and Tolowa (Gould 1978:135). Indeed, the association of women with shamanism was so strong that male shamans among the Tolowa were usually transvestites (Gould 1978:135). Thus, portraying shamans as exclusively male in the recent past and prehistory is misleading for the Great Basin as well as central and northern California.

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

I would therefore suggest that the ethnographies of far western North America provide scant support for a shamanistic interpretation of all prehistoric and historic rock art in this area. Accounts that actually link the production of rock art with shamanism are limited to a handful of Californian groups. The known symbolic references of the art produced in puberty rites of southern California revolved around themes of adulthood and punishment. The few metaphoric statements that supernatural entities made rock art seem to be better interpreted as plausible explanations of phenomena for which consultants lacked detailed knowledge of the origins. These statements seem to assert the timelessness of the rock art—it had always been there, made in mythological time.

One of the weaknesses of the shamanistic position is its monolithic nature. All rock art, irrespective of context, can potentially be claimed as shamanistic, as in the example of the hunting magic model. Even in commonsense, terms this is highly improbable—it is unlikely that a single explanation will ever do justice to the rich and varied nature of the rock art of California, the Great Basin, and elsewhere. Theories of symbolism (e.g., Turner 1971; Sperber 1975) concur on the numerous and potentially unlimited connotations of a single symbolic element. Likewise, symbolic systems are capable of an unlimited range of native exegesis, perhaps demonstrated in California and the Great Basin by those groups that attribute a supernatural



or sacred quality to petroglyphs and pictographs that they did not make. Also, by treating universal design elements as entoptic signifiers, the neuropsychological model runs the risk of making the model a universal one.

Since it is not possible to determine design elements that uniquely refer to trance states, all rock art, as well as other systems of visual representation, can potentially be construed as the outcome of shamanistic practices. In fact, the shamanistic model has provided an outlet for romantic and decontextualized conceptions of shamanic practices current in Western popular culture. Julian Steward's comments concerning the exotic interpretations of rock art current in his day seem as relevant today. Such interpretations are "reluctant to entertain commonplace and common-sense explanations, [as] they first concoct a story of mystery and glamour and subsequently seek facts to support it" (Steward 1937:407).

#### NOTES

1. *Ayelkwi* translates as "knowledge," but, in fact, refers to a mana-like power, the manifestations of which are sometimes expressed as knowledge (White 1963:138).

2. One of Riddell's Honey Lake Paiute consultants associated putative "snake" elements in rock art with the actions of rattlesnake shamans (Riddell 1978:84). Given that wavy lines are frequently identified as snake depictions when, in fact, they could be anything, one should treat Riddell's information with circumspection.

3. Although in this case, women's shamanistic powers were limited to witching.

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## Response to Quinlan

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I am pleased that Angus Quinlan's article, *The Ventriloquist's Dummy: A Critical Review of Shamanism and Rock Art in Far Western North America*, is finally in print. I first received a manuscript copy of it within a few days of its original presentation at the 1998 Society for American Archaeology meetings, from a colleague who had attended Quin-

lan's session where it was distributed to the audience. Shortly thereafter, I began to hear about it from archaeologists stretching from Berkeley to France who had received unsolicited copies in the mail, with no explanation attached. A number of them called to ask, "What is going on? This guy Quinlan says that you got it all wrong." When I received a review copy of Quinlan's manuscript a year later from the *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology*, I quickly replied. Publish it as-is, I responded, but allow me to comment in detail, especially inasmuch as citations to his manuscript had already begun to appear in other researchers' papers, thereby lending implicit legitimacy to his claims, if not implying outright acceptance (e.g., Gilreath 1999; Chippindale et al. 2000). It is a pleasure to finally have an opportunity for a formal response.

To start, it is necessary to clarify the nature and purpose of Quinlan's argument. It operates on the principle that, because science is necessarily conservative, most readers will award more weight to criticism than to original research and, thus, commentaries such as his can get away with implausible claims and misrepresentations of the evidence, because they themselves are rarely scrutinized. Such a position assumes that if long lists of citations are included, no one will bother to check the assertions it makes. And although Quinlan claims that his article is an assessment of the shamanistic rock art interpretation, in fact it is anything but. It is instead simply a protracted and confused effort to disagree with anything and everything I have published, and then some: Quinlan wanders from a discussion of neuropsychology (pp. 92-93), to ethnographic evidence for shamanism (passim), to shamans' sex (p. 102), to Euroamerican acculturation (pp. 96, 101), to Carobeth and George Laird's relationship (p. 100), and so on—leaving me to wonder whether Quinlan would have objected if I had claimed somewhere in one of my papers that the earth revolves around the sun!

Quinlan's article plays on the fact that the ethnographic record contains occasional inconsis-