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DUALITY IN ARTS

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The exercise of thinking is based on a radical biological necessity: to maintain the duality of species and the world. During its development, human thought combated the absurdity that was gradually imposed on its lucidity: it forged a weapon to reconcile oppositions: good and evil, fear and defiance, male and female (Cassirer, 1972). Over time, each metaphysical system was able to draw strength from the complementarity of the contrasting aspects imposed by experience (Eliade, 1949). In mythology, its visual importance has been masterfully demonstrated since prehistoric times (Leroi-Gourhan, 1965). Such duality also has sociological implications in which all tasks are found in balance, as much by their differences as by their complementarity: during rituals, spiritual harmony is periodically renewed, materially and physically when opposites are united. Thus this pure abstraction becomes visible to us in both form and gesture (Malraux, 2004). The mythological key is illustrated here, but only via the plastic filter, the appearance of which is reduced to aesthetic aspects alone, an obstacle so often fatal to art historians in the most common achievements of their practice.

All exotic arts are articulated around the opposition of gender, whether explicitly opposing male and female (sometimes in a stupefying aesthetic purity), or allusive, when animals or signs take on these values. Ongoing allusions to the combination of the two genders sometimes fall within an excessively explicit schematization (Le Quellec, 1993). And even in these extreme examples, they are connected to the sacralization of a life, animal or human, in continual renewal and for which signs evidence and reinforce the action. They then themselves become the vec-

tors of existence, activity animated by idolatry, from which few believers escape, and in which the concept is reduced to a plastic form. Above all else, such perpetuity concerns human life. Transposed by mythological passage, it is always a story that explains existence and predicts the end, except for an exemplary life (which is thus extolled). All plastic expression contains metaphorical allusions to the two genders, expressed in explicit or allusive modes, because they were produced and expressed only by consciences that were themselves, from their conception, torn between these two modes that in the meantime seek only to be united. This obsession is emphasized as much by images, stories or simple vocabulary. The plastic modalities are only emergences, but still strike us by the reciprocity of our considerations and their continually imposed solidarity: from now on, we all are one.

Reduced to dimensions that can be manipulated, figurines play the role of objects to be used in accordance with ritual rules and in stable places, in contrast to caves where the permanence of the walls localize the style, iconography and the story. Figurines have an opposite function: their mobility is adapted to their mythological role alone. Thus, a sanctuary is found spatially organized according to the sacred rules of religious thought: the vast dug structures no longer have anything in common with the habitats formerly designated as such. These are now sanctuaries as mobile as the medieval portable altars or the tents of the medicine-men among the Plains Indians. Their interior structure responds to the same rigour because they correspond to the universal marks of the spirit, that are not at all random, not more than the statues in our churches; only the magical world governs them. From there on, we can perceive the role of the mistress of animals as the incarnation of nature: figurines roam its environs, planted like nature in the sediment of the periphery. Their role is clear. Other than their ostentatious position, all maternal attributes are ostensibly assigned to them – ample breasts, wide hips, generous thighs



Fig. 1 Feminine figurines across northern Europe, in which indices of fertility are exaggerated: the group has a powerful symbolic value, further emphasized by the barbed sign (masculine value) placed on the shoulder of the figurine on the right. (Left, Willendorf, Austria; Centre: Dolni Vestonice, Moravia; Right: Malta, Siberia)

– all in an impersonal mode proper to the mythological atmosphere (fig. 1) because they are fixed in an ideal model extracted from the religious conscience-but reflecting no reality.

An example are the Sepik fetishes, always identical, always strange, always far from any real forms but grouped by the unique space in the men's house (fig. 2).

Woman is not represented from common observation, but is only a form created by the religious spirit, that which presides and governs existence and thus dictates its laws to nature. Everything in Palaeolithic art is reduced to the play of symbols: specific aesthetic rules strictly governing animal representations, even more so as they are both thought and experienced. And we can recognize species as common as horse and reindeer through the traditional stylistic filters. Their proportions are aligned with cultural codes much more than with codes imposed by their

simple natural aspect. None of the waterfalls represented in China has anything in common with that of a Romantic European landscape: they are two spirits in opposition that combat one another through stylistic codes.

This complementary duality is also found in masculine forms. Shamanic figurines accompany the trance (little death) and, in the grave, they embody the living man, persist with him, embody his spirit and correspond to his spiritual nature beyond any other form of existence. The burial of Brno (Moravia) contains one, like all shaman's graves. Modern Evenks and 18th-century Yakuts (fig. 3) smoked the graves to lift the spirit to the cosmos and to mix it with the celestial sphere (Lot-Falck, 1953).

Everything is asymmetric in this dual world: man is represented here with anatomically precise details while woman is reduced to a symbol of universal procreation. Men and women are clearly associated

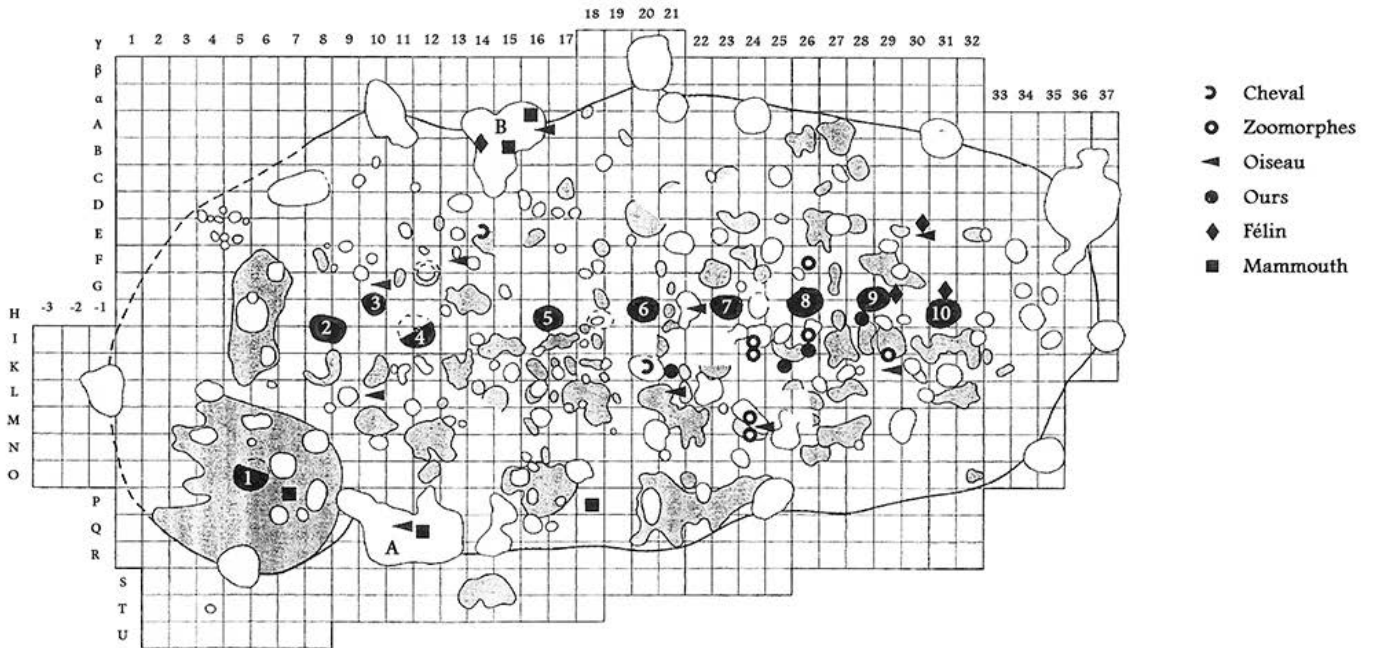


Fig. 2 Comparison between collective layouts, elaborated and ritualized by the use of mobile art: among the Sepik and in the European Palaeolithic (Kostienki, Russia, after Iakovleva, 2004).

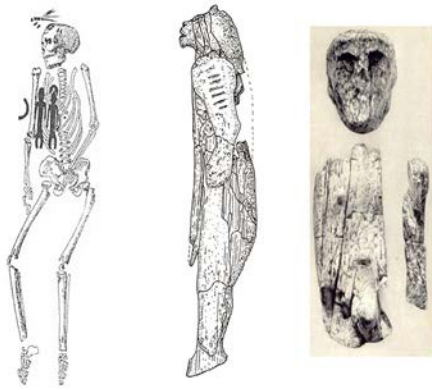


Fig. 3 Masculine value of the figurine, reduced and embodying the spirit of the shaman during his trance: Yakut Shaman (top), Evenk shaman's grave, (18th-century), Stadel figurine (Aurignacian, Jura Souabe), Brno figurine (Moravia, Gravettian).

with different and opposing animal species, varying by traditional codes, from the ass and cow in Christian crèches to the snake and the eagle in Mexican by them that moves symmetrically from illusion to frightening reality. And all is combined in the firm myths. Structured spaces group these forms, both on cave walls and in the large quarried structures of the Eastern Palaeolithic (Iakoleva, 2004, fig. 2). The values of one or the other appear to be transposed in isolated animal representations, exactly as if the mythological spirit had devoured the human image to the point of obliterating its form. It takes a metaphorical role, like the lions on our flags, bears, eagles, snakes: all fearsome animals but absent in the contexts where they intervene in symbolic mode. None of these species has an authentic identity va-

lue but their images play on ambiguity, because the terror they inspire is shared by the clan confronted with the evocation of the divinities, male and female, enriches in turn the combat of physical love between men and women, always gained, always lost.

Even in this attempt, the combat itself becomes mythological. It sublimates instincts to reach ecstasy, once again in the shamanic mode. Banners decorated with terrifying monsters embody the natural forces with which they are identified. Thus the destiny of man is aligned with the destiny of the gods, like the national colours, by forming the ultimate schematic reduction. But the imperial and cruel eagle still reigns, through its symbolic function, over collective minds in which mythological disenchantment persists, like the eagle of the shamans overlooking the battle against natural spirits. It is disheartening to note how much the strength of the symbol still governs us, without resorting to daily politics, all advertising use nothing else, but their ends are obviously less metaphysical.

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WHY ART?

Rock engraving of Har Karkom, Negev Desert, named "The Thinker"
(from Anati 2015, *The Rock Art of the Negev and Sinai*, figure 150)