

Evolutions of Lascaux

Introduction

This paper charts the evolutions of the Lascaux cave in its various manifestations from the ‘original’ rock art discovered in 1940 to the replica construction ‘Lascaux II’ and a recent travelling exhibition ‘Virtual Lascaux’. The discussion briefly outlines these evolutions and then, employing the notion of the ‘hyperreal’ and the ‘simulacrum’, examines them and the paradoxical nature of ‘copies’ of an ‘original’ work of rock art.

It is tempting to dismiss Lascaux’s evolutions as mere touristic mechanisms, imitations valuable only as having educational merit pointing towards the ‘real’ Lascaux, shallow reiterations of one of the touchstones of Palaeolithic art. Empirical rock art research, for example, might typically consider that any copy should only direct us towards some more ‘enlightened’ understanding of a greater ‘essence’ of Lascaux. However, examining such copies through the context or frame of the hyperreal necessitates consideration of other possible conclusions. These include the acknowledgment that copies ‘bristle with paradox’ (Schwartz, 1998: 378) as they lead us, as viewers, both towards and away from the real, simultaneously. The thesis put forward here is that such movement – away and back towards – mediates all of our experience of Lascaux, and forces us to re-evaluate what we take to be significant about the ‘real’ original, and to question our assumptions about what ‘originals’ are. It also prompts us to consider new directions for the aesthetic appreciation of rock art as a science and art.

The ‘Evolutions’ of Lascaux Cave

The ‘original’ Lascaux cave, according to the most enduring and endearing account, was discovered in 1940 by four intrepid schoolboys who followed their dog Robot down a hole (Ruspoli, 1987:

188; Laming, 1959: 54-57).¹ What they encountered there was a 17,000 year-old frescoed *theatre bestiarum*: a main cavern and several steep galleries, all adorned with a splendid panorama of cavorting animals. Described by the likes of E.H. Gombrich (1985) and Georges Bataille (1955) as the ‘birth of art’, this primal artistic scene has inspired many a critic to wax loquacious. Bataille, for instance, penned the following:

We know next to nothing about the men who left behind these elusive shadows, framed within almost nothing, unprovided with any explanatory background. We know only that these shadows are beautiful to look at, to our eyes quite as beautiful as our galleries’ finest paintings (1955: 12-13).

In the years that followed this momentous discovery, many thousands of tourists (as much as up to two thousand per day, by one count) flocked to the Lascaux cave. This sudden and sustained influx of visitors wrought immediate and long-term atmospheric change to the finely balanced climate and delicate fabric of the cave (Delluc & Delluc, 1987: 191). A destructive film of algae and calcite began to cover the paintings until, in 1963, the cave had to be closed to all but the most privileged visitors who even then were admitted only after enduring a lengthy waiting period (191). So, to assuage the public’s substantial disappointment, the French government set about creating a facsimile copy of the original: Lascaux II.²

Built in a concrete blockhouse of a nearby abandoned quarry, Lascaux II is constructed of galvanised fine wire mesh and 500 tons of modelled concrete (Delluc & Delluc, 1987: 191). The two parts of the original cave, and the pictographs reproduced in Lascaux II, are the ‘Hall of the Bulls’ and the ‘Axial Gallery’ (191). The complexity of Lascaux’s ‘finely incised and entangled’ matrix of petroglyphs precluded their addition to the facsimile (191). Stereophotogrammetry and hand tracings were used to map Lascaux down to the nearest millimetre and these measurements formed the blueprint for the replica (191). Working from projections of slides and with relief

photographs, a devoted copy artist, Monique Peytral, then laboured for five years, working with the same palette of natural pigments, to recreate the famous cave paintings (192). Opened to the public in 1983, Lascaux II, as an evolution of Lascaux, now receives in excess of 300,000 tourists per year who come to admire these replicated artworks (Tournepiche, 1993). A key aim is also education of the public about the origins, discovery, and closure of the original (Delluc & Delluc, 1987: 192).

A second minor evolution occurred with the construction of a partial replica of Lascaux by Jean-François Tournepiche (1993) at Bourdeaux's Musée d'Aquitaine. This copy was in the form of a frieze that could be dismantled for intended exhibition in Japan and elsewhere. Tournepiche (1993) labels this copy 'faux Lascaux' – or what might here be dubbed 'Lascaux 2.5'.

The next stage in the evolution of Lascaux came about with the construction of a virtual reality version – a project headed by the American electronic artist and academic, Benjamin Britton. Like Lascaux II, Virtual Lascaux was a mammoth undertaking. Using measurements, plans, and photographs of the real cave, and a 'vast array of graphics tools', a precise 3D-computer model was generated. Replacing the 'copyist's brush with programmer's algorithms' (Zettl, 1996: 87), this model was then encoded with images of the animal paintings (Mahoney, 1995). Visitors 'tour' Virtual Lascaux via the familiar interface of computer screen and VR goggles (Goodman, 1996: 76-77). Débuting at the Kuangju Biennale in South Korea in 1995, this installation subsequently appeared at Walt Disney's Epcot Center in Florida, before moving on to various other locations around the world – eventually bound for France (76-77).

As with Lascaux II, a key objective of the Virtual Lascaux installation was education: to 'bring [the caves of Lascaux] to as many people as possible' (Mahoney, 1995).³ This objective (and that of the creators of Lascaux II) is a topic to which discussion shall return. But for the present it is worth considering the question of how to 'make sense' of these evolutions beyond the level of description. One likely frame for response is provided by what could be described as the 'problematics of

representation’ – various attempts to come to terms with issues of duplication and originality, appearance and reality.

Representation and Hyperreality

Anxiety over the issue of representation, and with it debates concerning copies versus originals and appearance versus reality, can be traced back at least to the writings of Plato. For unenlightened consciousness, Plato proposed, ‘the truth is nothing but the truth of shadows of artificial things’ (Plato in Bloom, 1968: 194). That is, knowledge of the world is dominated not by reality but by images or representations of reality. These sentiments were echoed in the 1960s by Daniel Boorstin who suggested that ‘the image [has become] more interesting than its original [and in fact] has itself become the original. The shadow becomes the substance’ (Boorstin, 1962: 207-208; see also Cassidy, 1996). Boorstin argues that, increasingly, experience can be designed to appear completely real but is in some way fabricated – what he terms a ‘pseudo-experience’ (Boorstin, 1962: *passim*).

These same anxieties over representation, reproductions and originals have been treated somewhat differently, although no less influentially in the work of Walter Benjamin. In his seminal 1930s essay ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, Benjamin (1968) argues that through the reproduction of culture the ‘aura’ of the original becomes ‘withered’ (Tofts, 1999: 86) and is thus, he hopes, ‘forced to relinquish its claims to represent a higher dimension offering alternative and allegedly superior values and representations’ (Kellner, 1989: 79).

However, it is the work of the contemporary French sociologist Jean Baudrillard (which is in conversation with both Plato and Benjamin) that represents the most significant (some might suggest extreme) challenge to prevailing ideas concerning representation. Earlier, established (both classical and structuralist semiotic) conceptions of representation propose that an image or sign conventionally is in some way associated with reality (a ‘referent’). Baudrillard’s critique of capital, and what he sees as the almost ‘ecstatic’ circulation of images through the media (Baudrillard,

1988: *passim*), leads him to conclude that this conventional structure is overturned. The connection between appearance and reality has in fact become dislodged or ‘unhinged’. Thus, images or signs can exist, in the end, as ‘simulacra’. This is a term Baudrillard adopts from Plato and takes to refer to images and signs that are re-produced and circulate unassociated with a referent, an original, or with reality. ‘Signs,’ he writes, ‘will exchange among themselves exclusively, without interacting with the real’ (1996: 125).

This new type of social and representational order (Kellner, 1989: 63) Baudrillard terms the ‘hyperreal’. The hyperreal is a reproduced real, the real as ‘the generation by models of a real without origin or reality’ (Baudrillard, 1983b: 2). For Baudrillard, a paradigmatic instance of the hyperreal is Disneyland (see especially 1983b: 23-26).⁴ This exists, he argues, as ‘a perfect model of all the entangled order of simulation’ (1983b: 23), a microcosm or ‘objective profile’ (24) of America where ‘all its values are exalted ... in miniature and comic strip form’ (24). In other words, Disneyland is a hyperreal site in the sense that these miniaturised ‘models of the United States in Disneyland appear more real than their instantiations in the social world ... the United States becomes more and more like Disneyland’ (Kellner, 1989: 82; cf. Eco, 1987, especially pp. 43-48). As Baudrillard states, and as is explored by Heyd (2000: 17ff), ‘Disneyland is there to conceal the fact that it is the ‘real’ country, all of real America, which *is* Disneyland’ (Baudrillard, 1983b: 25).

What Baudrillard is alluding to is the suggestion that ‘the simulacrum denies not reality, but the difference between the image and the real’ (Fiske, 1991: 57). That is, ‘the decisive difference between two elements, reality and appearance, has imploded’ (Tofts, 1999: 88) – reality and appearance both seem as if constructed, artificial. But how does such theorising pertain to the various evolutions of Lascaux? How might Lascaux II, for instance, be ‘read’ as an example or instantiation of the hyperreal?

Lascaux II and the Hyperreal

In his study of simulations and simulacra, Baudrillard uses Lascaux II as a prime example in developing his theory of the hyperreal:

It is in this way, under the pretext of saving the original, that the caves of Lascaux have been forbidden to visitors and an exact replica constructed 500 metres away, so that everyone can see them (you glance through a peephole at the real grotto and then visit the reconstituted whole). It is possible that the very memory of the original caves will fade in the mind of future generations, but from now on there is no longer any difference: the duplication is sufficient to render both artificial (1983b: 18).

The above passage by Baudrillard can be interpreted in at least two ways. First, for the average tourist, what Lascaux II is actually a copy *of* increasingly recedes from mind and view; that is to say, the facsimile cave is so close in situation and replication that it potentially effaces the original in the mind of the visitor, especially over ‘future generations’, with the result that ‘ultimately there will be no differentiation in the visitor’s mind between the absent original and the simulacrum’ (Montelle, 2000: 12).

Secondly, it is perhaps not so much that the original Lascaux will be forgotten, but that the two – original and copy – become (con)fused. One portrayal of how this occurs in practice is taken up by Yann-Pierre Montelle (2000) in his account of his own touristic experience of Lascaux II, through what he describes as the dramatic ‘postmodern performance’ of the tour guide:

The guide’s discourse was a construction of images, which in their accuracy, reflected empirical characteristics of the original Lascaux as reproduced in the replica. Yet, in the moment of enunciation no distinctions were made between the original and the copy, which can be considered deceptive (2000: 12).⁵

The effect of listening to this narration, according to Montelle, is that ‘at a certain point it becomes almost impossible to dissociate the original from the copy in the guide’s discourse’ (Montelle, 2000: 14; cf. Fiske, 1991: 57).⁶

Effacement of difference between copy and original is reinforced in a further striking example found in a recent art text, in which a discussion of the rock art of Lascaux is illustrated with an image taken from Lascaux II but dated in the accompanying caption as somewhere between ‘13,000-10,000 B.C.’ (Davies, 1997: 8). This ‘confused’ status in respect to Lascaux and its evolution, Lascaux II, is further confirmed by a further extraordinary fact, relayed to me by the official tourist guide in 1996. That is, the recreated cave paintings of Lascaux II are now being compromised by the same destructive film of algae and calcite, the ‘green leprosy’ and ‘white disease’ (Delluc & Delluc, 1987), that necessitated the closure of Lascaux in the first place.

Such a turn of events most likely represents something of a nightmare for speleological conservators. But it also poses a number of tantalising and speculative possibilities. For example, what would happen if these climatic changes affecting Lascaux II were left unchecked? Were these climatic afflictions to persist, Lascaux II could come to represent the example *par excellence* of the hyperreal: a replicant so convincing in its mimesis that it fulfils even its own conditions of destruction (with obvious echoes of the fate of replicants of a somewhat different ilk – namely those in Ridley Scott’s 1982 film *Blade Runner*). Lascaux II would thus serve as both a literal and figurative *mise-en-abyme*: a concept referring to ‘an infinite series of images disappearing into invisibility’ (Hawthorn, 1992: 105). Literally, due to the process just described, and figuratively, in the sense that one can readily envisage a time when Lascaux II is closed, Lascaux III is commissioned, opened and subsequently closed, and so on *ad infinitum* – a simulacrum of a simulacrum of a simulacrum⁷

For a copy to work as a copy, it conventionally requires some kind of fault to distinguish it from an original, to mark it off as a fake, a representation. After all, regulation ‘stipulates that art reproductions must differ in at least one major, visible, and unalterable characteristic from the original’ for them to be authenticated as copies (Schwartz, 1998: 256). But, as media critic McKenzie Wark points out, ‘in the absence of a falsifying flaw, the simulacrum ceases to be a simulacrum and becomes something else. It lacks the trace of disinformation which authenticates it as an image, a representation’ (Wark, 1994: 153). Paradoxically, by a strange kind of circular logic, in this case the ‘lack of a flaw’ is itself a flaw.

Also implicated in this vertiginous scene is the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, whom Baudrillard (1983b) invokes in the opening pages of *Simulations*. In one essay, Borges (1970: 230-231) playfully muses on the conceptual possibilities of a cartographer of the British Empire drawing up a map of England so detailed that it ends up covering exactly the territory it attempts to document. However, as Baudrillard retells it, with the subsequent decline of the Empire, this map becomes ‘frayed and finally ruined’ (1983b: 1). Drawing on this tale to chart the ‘precession of simulacra’, Baudrillard writes:

The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory – precession of simulacra – it is the map that engenders the territory and if we were to revive the fable today, it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map (Baudrillard, 1983b: 2).

Remarkably, Baudrillard’s prediction of the precession of simulacra has, in the case of the evolution of Lascaux, been realised almost to the letter. Prior to its closure, Lascaux was documented using photography and tracing paper rubbed against the cave’s interior surface. Facsimile copies of this material survive while the original slowly deteriorates.

In a similar way to Lascaux II, Virtual Lascaux arguably perpetuates these same concerns, functioning as a second order simulacrum. As a portable, digital reconstruction, and as a project that is now accessible over the Internet, Virtual Lascaux might conceivably be seen as increasingly unhinged from the stable referent of the original rock art of Lascaux. Thus, for those South Korean, North American and other visitors who are so taken in by their experience with Virtual Lascaux, and otherwise have limited or no pre-existing knowledge of prehistoric parietal art, these simulations and the ‘original’ cave will seem equally artificial.

Considered from within the framework of Baudrillard’s theories of hyperreality, then, the examples of Lascaux II and Virtual Lascaux seem to add significant weight to the suggestion that, at least for the average tourist, copies displace the ‘original’ – or, in the words of Baudrillard, are ‘sufficient to render both artificial’ (Baudrillard, 1983b: 18). But the declared educational aims of Lascaux’s more recent evolutions complicate these conclusions.

Return of the Real?

Historically, as Heyd (1999) reminds us, rock art operates on a grand geographical scale, as ‘a memory tablet for the itinerant’ (455). It is in a slightly different, but nonetheless related, sense that the educational aims of Lascaux II and Virtual Lascaux might also be understood. For the modern itinerant – the tourist – both Lascaux II and Virtual Lascaux are constructions that, each in their own way, strive to ensure that Lascaux and its pictographs are retained as a significant site in our cultural memory, a primal scene in the history of modern European art making.

It is this line of argument that Margaret Cassidy (1996) draws as one possible response to Walter Benjamin’s statement that ‘making many reproductions [...] substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence’ (Benjamin, 1968: 221). Contrary to Benjamin’s claim, Cassidy argues the reverse is equally valid: that reproductions function as a kind of *aide-mémoire*, granting ‘more authority and respect to the original by making it known to more people’ (1996: 277). It is according to a

similar logic that, rather than ‘wither’ as a result of copies, the ‘aura’ of the original can in fact be seen to flourish. Denial of access to Lascaux for all but a select few lends the ‘original’, closed Lascaux a *heightened* ‘aura’ or significance – similar to the way in which, in some senses, a collectible is constituted as such by the very fact of its rarity. (It is also a basic principle of eroticism: that which is veiled from view is of greater intrinsic interest than that which is plainly visible.)

But given that Lascaux is unlikely to reopen, where does this leave these caves and any sense of heightened yearning for them? One possibility is that with each evolution of Lascaux there may well be a corresponding escalation in desire for the unviewable ‘original’ – a particular kind of pathology known as ‘nympholepsy’: an ‘ecstasy or frenzy caused by desire of the unattainable’ (Hughes, Michell & Ramson, 1992: 775). A second possibility is offered by the philosopher Henri Lefebvre, who once remarked that the motivation behind the creation of the pictographs of Lascaux is inconsequential. ‘These paintings were made not to be seen, but merely to “be” – and so that they might be known to “be” there’ (Lefebvre, 2000: 254). That is, in spite of its various copies, it is enough that Lascaux ‘be’ for it to maintain the aura of its originality. Perhaps this is a useful way of continuing to conceive of Lascaux in light of its closure and subsequent evolutions.

Beyond Originality

Or is it enough? Part of the paradox of reproduction is that ‘it is within an exuberant world of copies that we arrive at our experience of originality’ (Schwartz, 1998: 212). But ‘originality’ and ‘authenticity’ are slippery terms, for as Schwartz notes ‘our culture of the copy wants every replay to transcend the original’ (290). This is to say – among other things – that in our culture of the copy each reworking or evolution can take on its own significance (which is to acknowledge *validity* rather than the more troublesome concept of authenticity). After all, the notion of ‘evolution’ implies a change from a previous position or previous configuration – ‘iteration always involves

alteration' (Tofts, 2001: 113).⁸ For Lascaux, then, each 'evolution' can be understood or 'read' as taking on its own significance, beyond that of mere 'citation' or replication of a pre-existing 'original'.

A key advantage of this approach is that it recognises that each evolution narrates its own 'story'. For instance, a key aim of both Lascaux II and Virtual Lascaux, as already discussed, is education. But what they 'educate' us about is *not just* rock art.⁹ Lascaux II is as much about the rhetoric of the hyperreal as it is about Lascaux (I), while Virtual Lascaux (in both its installation and Web manifestations) is as much about the whole discourse of art making as it is about rock art. These are valid positions to bring to both 'evolutions' of Lascaux, and serve to enrich our understanding of Lascaux and other rock art and art making. Such 'proliferation of context and meaning' (Tofts, 2001: 113) inevitably impinges on and shapes any contemporary attempt to get at or understand Lascaux 'and what the work of art means' (Bataille, 1955: 12).

Which is to say that, for the contemporary rock art aesthete, one's engagement with and appreciation of Lascaux is *inescapably* filtered or coloured by (among other cultural influences) Lascaux II and Virtual Lascaux. But despite this proliferation of meaning, it is not the case that Lascaux (I) necessarily becomes *less* significant. Rather, *all* of Lascaux's various evolutions (including that which we take to be the first of them) both retain individual significance and take on greater collective significance. From this perspective – and regardless of whether one subscribes to the view that these copies 'wither' aura or, alternatively, *heighten* the aura of the 'original' – any discussion of the aesthetics of 'Lascaux' (i.e. Lascaux in all its manifestations) can become a shared terrain, encompassing (at very least) the aesthetics of rock art, digital art, simulation and evolution.

Is this to suggest, then, that each evolution of Lascaux in its own way is 'authentic'? Surely, there are differences between the authenticity of the copied and the authenticity of a copy? As Hillel Schwartz rhetorically asks: 'Isn't the authenticity of an original a matter wholly distinct from the

authenticity of a copy?’ (1998: 377). Nearing the end of his own encyclopaedic study of the culture of the copy, Schwartz’ response is emphatic: ‘No it isn’t, not now. The culture of the copy muddies the waters of authenticity’ (377). By which Schwartz means to say that the act of copy making has complicated the notion of authenticity.

To a certain extent, this ambivalence concerning originality is discernible in the process of rock art inscription itself. As one critic notes:

In the ‘Theory of Art’ section of the *Republic*, Plato suggests that a painted image of a bed is three times removed from the reality it purports to represent. The actual bed of which it is a likeness is merely an attempted likeness of an ideal bed, or pure form, that exists in the world of being (Tofts, 1999: 88).

Likewise, the pictographs of Lascaux are a ‘copy’ of something that was once – or perhaps was never – real. The so-called ‘original’ cave art of Lascaux is thus a mediated, constructed representation: the ‘trace of the outline’ of a parietal bison in a cave is a ‘transformative manipulation’ (Montelle, 1997: 2) on the part of the artist, a ‘representation of a remembered trace’ (6). That is, these images are a rendering of a mental image of a beast once seen, or even of a mythical perfect beast imagined; representations that are further overlain by the various layers of ‘mediation’ as a result of later evolutions via rock art practitioners and their subsequent interpretations. Admittedly a seemingly simple, even self-evident, point, but one that is all too easily forgotten. At the very least, it serves to remind and re-enforce that the art of Lascaux is an act of art and copy making (not to mention art interpretation and criticism).

Rock Art Aesthetics and the ‘Culture of the Copy’

All of this is to suggest that an exercise aimed at clarifying an ‘authentic’ or ‘original’ must be a fraught one. Rather than become embroiled in debates concerning these concepts, perhaps there are further positions and criteria from and by which to develop a rich and productive rock art aesthetics

that accommodates rock art in its many manifestations (i.e. Lascaux / Lascaux II / Tournepicche's 'faux Lascaux' or 'Lascaux 2.5' / Virtual Lascaux / and so on). The need for such an aesthetics is becoming all the more pressing given Western culture's voracious consumer appetite for 'museums of copies', to use Hillel Schwartz' phrase.

Manufacture of facsimile caves (like Lascaux II) and related installations (such as Virtual Lascaux) are unlikely to cease—if anything they will burgeon (witness, as just two examples, the creation of Altamira II in Spain and the relatively recent park of pre-historic art at Tarascon-sur-Ariège in the French Pyrenees). Moreover, allegations of alleged faking – such as André Breton's infamous charge that the cave paintings of Pech-Merle were faked (Bataille, 1955: 138), and similar more recent reservations concerning the apparent authenticity of the art of the Chauvet cave (Cockburn, 1995) – will undoubtedly continue to surface from time to time in relation to rock art, so long as authenticity and originality remain key measures.

Given the above developments, it is no good spurning the more recent evolutions or copies of Lascaux as having little or no pertinence to rock art research. On the contrary, the 'culture of the copy' can provide fresh approaches to aesthetic appreciation of, and engagement with, Lascaux. These approaches prompt us to challenge our assumptions and question the value we place on this site and its artwork. Consider, for instance, the following three speculative provocations that draw from the logic of the 'culture of the copy'.

First, this paper has hitherto privileged only *later* evolutions of Lascaux. Might Lascaux (I) be *not* the *origin* or *beginning*, but rather the only cave art remaining from many evolutions preceding it? As Baudrillard puts it, 'The real is not only what can be reproduced but that which is always already reproduced' (Baudrillard, 1983a: 146). In some quarters this might seem an explosive suggestion, at least in so far as it threatens to undermine the aforementioned 'birth of art' theory, not to mention Western culture's general obsession with origins and moments of inauguration. This is not to say

that such incendiary impact is undesirable. In fact, the reading of Lascaux (I) as itself an evolution in a chain of artistic works holds a great deal of merit, particularly in the way that it hints at a *continuum* of rock art production. Accompanying such a perspective is a shift towards rock art aesthetic research as more than the sum of its parts, towards ‘Lascaux’ (in its broadest sense) and research into it as a field of textual relations between places and artistic manifestations.

Secondly, there is Heyd’s (1999) description of rock art as a constantly overwritten palimpsest created through a ‘multiplicity of interventions ... a kind of multiauthored collage’ (455). In other words, to adopt a principal *leitmotif* of this paper, collage, as Heyd discusses it, functions according to the logic of evolution with rock art images added to over time through a process of ‘accretion’ creating a ‘palimpsest’ through the ‘skilful integration of new works with previously existing ones’ (455). This understanding can be developed further if one (re)conceives of Lascaux’s ‘Great Hall of the Bulls’ as the ‘Great Hall of *copies of the Bulls*’.

Accordingly, and notwithstanding the preceding discussion of mediation, Lascaux (I) becomes not just ‘a kind of multiauthored collage’ or constantly overwritten palimpsest, but, also, and more precisely, a parietal artist’s preparatory sketchbook or tutorial space (a Palaeolithic Warhol Factory, even) where later images within the caves are repeated – that is, *copied* – from earlier, existing images within the same space. To conceive of Lascaux (I) as already comprised of copies, as itself a rock art of repetition, is to provoke a reconsideration of what is held to be significant in these images. Moreover, to think of Lascaux (I) in this way – as already comprised of copies – casts a somewhat different light on its place within a chain of later evolutions or copies. That is to say, it arguably ‘normalises’ later evolutions, such as Lascaux II and Virtual Lascaux, reframing them not as some kind of contamination of, or movement away from, Lascaux (I) but, on the contrary, a perpetuation, an extension of what is intrinsic to this art: copy making, repetition.

Thirdly, and to build on the preceding point, it might prove valuable to reflect on the *labour* of copy making itself. What can be learnt, for example, from Monique Peytral's five-year undertaking to laboriously duplicate in painstaking detail the pictographs of Lascaux (I) in Lascaux II? Or the trials and tribulations Benjamin Britton endured (including authoring a customised virtual-reality-modelling language) in order to capture and reproduce electronically the images of Lascaux (I) in Virtual Lascaux? Might the difficulty of the task of replication reveal an inherent complexity in rock art inscription itself? And might it be this inherent difficulty or complexity to which we attach significance? In any case, it would seem that the very act of digitally (in both senses of the word) replicating this artwork prompts a return to familiar artistic considerations: reflection upon the *formal* qualities of this art – form, outline, texture, perspective, and so forth. Such deliberation might well provide (further) valuable insight into what, aesthetically speaking, we hold valuable in Lascaux (I), what lies behind or structures this interest.

These directions and suggestions, while potentially an unpalatable path for many empirical rock art researchers, point toward shifting attention away from a 'hierarchy of images' to a focus on the relations between these images or evolutions (Tofts, 2001: 113). Implicit in this preference is a threefold insistence: first, on the significance or validity of each individual evolution within these relations, and the contribution that each evolution brings to an understanding of what 'Lascaux' is in *all* its manifestations; secondly, on the *inseparability* of these relations; and thirdly, on the layering of mediation that filters all investigative experience of and engagement with these relations.

Moreover, it is useful to conceive of this relationship as Hillel Schwartz does, as 'bristling with paradox' (1998: 378), as 'at once *degenerate* and *regenerate*' (257 – emphasis added): degenerate in that copies increasingly distance us from originals and originality (withering aura); regenerate in the sense that, paradoxically, in other ways they appear to return us to and mingle with the original and the authentic. But 'regenerate' also in the sense that the culture of the copy presents the

possibility for a conscious enabling or opening up of a wider critical space for discussion of rock art aesthetics, one that learns from the logic of the culture of the copy; one that is democratic, recognising the significance and contribution of each evolution as part of a larger whole; one that prompts us to question assumptions and reflect anew on what it is that we hold to be of aesthetic significance in rock art inscription; and one, it almost goes without saying, that will continue to evolve.

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Endnotes

¹ A particularly fitting name for this dog it would seem, as one source notes that robots ‘by historical origin [...] had been guardians of pyramid tunnels and subterranean labyrinths’ (Schwartz, 1998: 139).

² In his classic art primer *The Story of Art*, E. H. Gombrich (1985) suggests that the rock art of Lascaux can be explained as a symbolic representation of man’s attempt to gain power over beast. Developing this line of thought, Lascaux II could be read as man’s attempt to gain power over a new beast: the tourist dollar. For such a reading, see Delbanco (1989: 8-12).

³ While not discussed in this paper, a further evolution of Lascaux is found in the Australian print-based experimental publication *Name-Evolution* (*Name* magazine, volume 4, 1999). *Name-Evolution* involves three experiments organised around the theme of ‘evolution’. The second of them concerns the evolution of visual communication through space and time. Fifteen 5 cm x 5 cm pieces of paper, bearing images from the caves of Lascaux were pasted in various street-level locations around Melbourne: on footpaths, lighting poles, and so forth. Following a process of natural selection or attrition, only one pasted image survived. This solitary remaining image then formed the point of departure for the first of a series of evolutionary treatments through time by several collaborators. *Name-Evolution* is the fruit of this enterprise. For a fuller discussion of this project, and its aims and achievements, see Wilken (2000).

⁴ And so it has been, in a variety of ways for many other critics also. See, for example, Eco (1987), Bryman (1999), Gottdiener (1995), King (1981), Rojek (1993), and Wallace (1989).

⁵ I am indebted to Yann-Pierre Montelle from Brown University, U.S.A., for making known to me his two written reflections on Lascaux (1997, 2000).

⁶ ‘Accordingly,’ Montelle adds, as a rock art researcher able to gain admittance to Lascaux (I), ‘when I visited the original Lascaux, the copy had become the contrasting point of reference – [it had become] the original’ (2000: 15).

⁷ Or, as Hillel Schwartz might put it: ‘what’s done, if it can’t be undone, can be redone, once more [or more], with feeling’ (Schwartz 1998: 250).

⁸ Conceiving of rock art as ‘scores awaiting performance’ (Heyd, 1999: 454, quoting Paul Ziff) is similar in this respect, with the notion of a musical score open to transcription to other registers and for other instruments, and with an emphasis on the *interpretation* of a score and the possibility of each performance being ‘unique’.

⁹ As one critic puts it, ‘repetition is quotation, but it is also dissemination, a proliferation of context and meaning’ (Tofts, 2001: 113).



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