

Proposed question for Independent Inquiry

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This essay is an explorational discussion, into the relationships between narrative, synthesize, and aesthetics, and how they have played a vital role within society, incidentally, feeding into a designers' identity and role- specifically a surface pattern designer. Symbols, albeit, are transformed throughout time for the needs of societal development, their archetypal form, 'remain integrally connected to the living individual' (Jung et al, 1964, p .96)- this suggests they transcend societal change. They bring cohesion to one's self understanding, this is further instilled through structural narratives, that it naturally intertwines with. For instant, the animal symbolism referenced in this essay, has manifested through time and many cultural narratives; pattern designers synthesize and interpret these within their aesthetical repeats and patterns.

The notions of narrative constantly rebuild and shape that of the individual and us as a society, it can be universally defined as 'a spoken or written account of connected events, or, ' the practice/ art of telling stories (OED, 2020).

Narrative is an integral part of everyday life, there is and has never been a time, place or people, without the presence of narrative; it is the very essence and core to mankind itself (Barthes and Duisit, 1975, p. 237). Narrative can be seen in an infinite number of forms, some include, myths, legends, stories, film and most relevant to this essay, design, particularly pattern designing.

Exploration into the idea of the relation between narrative and that of a designer, lead to theories presented by Jerome Bruner, who expresses:

Culture is constantly in process of being recreated as it is interpreted and renegotiated... culture is a forum for negotiating and renegotiating meaning...stories are a way of exploring possible worlds out of the context of need (Bruner, 1986, p. 123).

This passage delves into the notion that storytelling is essentially a tool that has gifted people with the power to navigate themselves through the world (which can be presented via signs and symbols), as well as establish a connection and sense of others in society. Like a discovered place that is updated into the workings of a map, this tool has also given way to the ability to be able to redraw and update the needs of society, however, this would not have been possible without the Palaeolithic societies that developed the skill to synthesize and interpret the world around them, which lead to the production of art, specifically that of rock and cave paintings. This form of art has been argued to be, the earliest method of human narrative expression and is the product of a pre-literate society (Anati, 2007, p. 81-82). Many of the motifs that were discovered (seen in *fig.1* and *2*), depicted that of animals, with the suggestion of hunting practices, as well as societal interactions and occasions, such as weddings and ritual events.

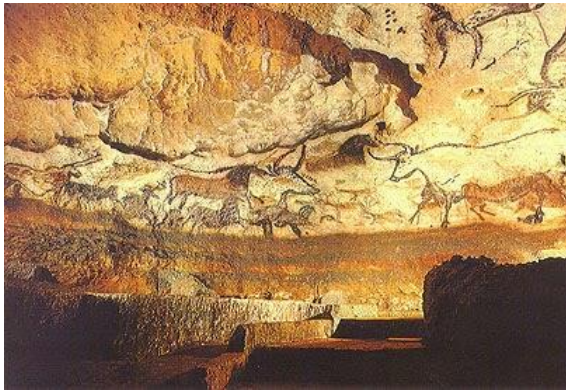


Fig. 1, Hall of Bulls. Lascaux caves, dating from 17,000 BCE.



Fig. 2, Wedding preparation, Acacus Mountain, Libya.

Alongside these commonly abundant depictions, stories revolved around that of the therianthrope figure, these were literally and metaphorically deeply rooted into the societies that dwelled within the caves- therianthrope is the word given to half-human, half- animal representation/figure (British Museum, 2019). The most famous representation of this is the 'Sorcerer' (fig.3), from the Trois Freres Cave, Ariège, France, this engraved painting depicts that of human form, with the addition of animal features and qualities (Britannia, 2020).



Fig. 3, Sorcerer. Trois Freres Caves, 13,000 BCE.

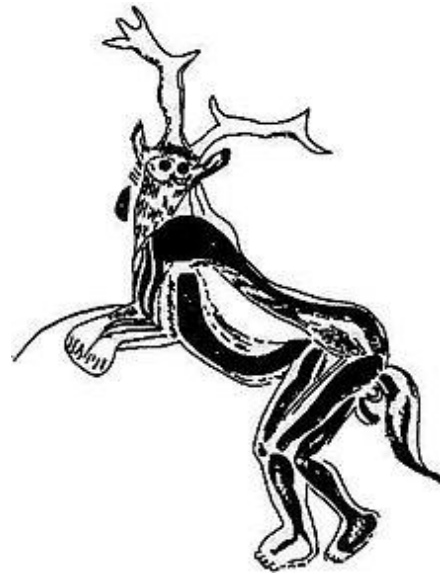


Fig. 4, Henri Breuil. Sorcerer Interpretation.

Ideas explored by David Lewis Williams, argue that these anthropomorphic paintings, convey metaphorical stories about shamans and other mythological symbols, in comparison to the common animal depictions (British museum, 2019). This idea surrounding metaphors, which *The Sorcerer* (fig.3) denotes within its confinements of the cave walls, can also be interlinked with the work of Jerome Bruner (1990), mentioned earlier in this section, who states ‘narrative relies upon the power of tropes- upon metaphor and metonymy’ (Bruner, 1990, p. 59). This passage ultimately reflects upon the notion that metaphors are a crucial tool used within narrative to help people connect and understand their interpretation of the world and themselves.

The function of *The Sorcerer* (fig.3), feeds into the idea that stories are an aid to negotiate and ultimately mediate these 'possible worlds' into reality for a better future. This negotiation that occurs through people's narrative, can be linked to that of a designer's role, because delving into the functionality of narrative, one can begin to see the transparency between designer and narrative. Design has been labelled as a practice that problem-solves for the needs and desires of humans (Boehnert, 2018), consequently leading to designers using narrative within their work, to formulate artefacts and other tangible objects. New stories and language manifest from these objects, they are synthesized through the symbols and metaphors of narrative within society and that of the designer- through this they connect people and improve the world around them.

Delving further into the purpose of narrative in conjunction to the workings of designers, especially surface pattern designers, the skill to synthesize, which can be defined as 'combining (a number of things) into a coherent whole' (OED, 2020), is important to pattern design, because it narratively brings together a multitude of elements (such as symbols and metaphors), with the purpose of creating a whole new story that speaks and connects to the customer- the wallpaper reflects that of the minds desire and needs.

Focusing more closely on the idea that designers bring together narratives, to create new communications between artifact and consumer, reflect theories surrounding semiotics. Semiotics is a vital tool used within society and consequently design because it is the method in which we use signs and symbols, to communicate meaning and interpretation (Hall, 2007, p. 9). These tools that we use in our daily lives are essentially the backbone to all methods of communication, they help us to understand and interpret the world, such symbols and signs that we consciously and unconsciously use within today's society, can be seen from the earliest forms of human expression, which is that of cave paintings.

Investigating further into the imagery and symbolism expressed through such cave paintings, as *The Sorcerer* (fig 3) (mentioned earlier in this essay), opens the discussion, that the early symbols revolving around these anthropomorphic figures, have deeply rooted within our society, thereby laying the foundations to our understanding of the world and self. Exploration into the idea that these paintings essentially represented the merging of animal and man, lead to the writings of Pieter Jolly (2002), who divulges the notion that the therianthropes 'represented the fusion or symbolic identification of shamans in altered states with the animal helpers' (Jolly, 2002, p. 96)- this state of fusion can be identified within the paintings of the San Rock

art in South Africa (fig 5 and 6), alongside *The Sorcerer* (fig3) of the Lascaux caves.



Fig. 5, Transformation into a bird, Cape town.



Fig. 6, Trancing therianthrope.
Pager, 1975.

These depictions of shamanic beings represent the transcendental qualities of the unconscious, evoked through the harsh, sporadic lines protruding out from the shamans' bodies- symbolising the formless plane of the unconscious, free from the veil of order and logical thoughts. This transition is further instilled through the gestural marks, expressed through the shamans contorting figures, which represent, among other things, the symbolic proximity between man and animal.

The transcendental symbolism that can be interpreted from the therianthrope figures, interlinks to the theories presented by Carl Jung, who states:

There are innumerable things beyond the range of human understanding, we constantly use symbolic language or images...man also produces symbols unconsciously and spontaneously in the form of dreams (Jung et al, 1964, p. 21).

This passage essentially reflects the function of the shamanic figures within those societies. They reflected the unconscious workings of the mind, these trances and transformation between animal and man, went beyond their representation and synthesized symbols that 'modelled human's relationship to the environment' (Winkelman, 2002, p. 1883). This relationship born out from the therianthrope figures, gave way to the understanding of our 'own sense of self, and our sense of others' (Bruner, 1986, p. 65), in relation to the world around us, and incidentally the animal symbolism within the cave paintings, has become integral to one's self, consequently becoming a tool used within society and in this context, design.

The shamanic figures that dance on the cave walls, parallel, to the workings of a designer, because both represent the process of mediating the unconscious to reality, resulting in the understanding of self and others. The signs and symbols that designers integrate within their work, are strategically used, and reflect the mental mappings of the unconscious cognition of self and environment (Kazmierczak, 2003, p. 50)- these 'maps' help fabricate ideas into

reality and enable them to be effectively construed by people. In relation to a pattern designer, animalism symbols and imagery can be seen within a breadth of wallpaper and designs, they deconstruct such symbols and formulate patterns that string together one's self to this imagery. These carefully constructed patterns, create tools that invite a new and exciting narrative to society, the synthetization of the individuals' story to symbol within pattern, aid people to shape and understand their worlds; the wallpaper and the home itself, goes beyond the decorative and represents the person who inhabits it.

Looking alongside what these cave paintings symbolically depicted and served as, on a primal level, these caves can also be interpreted as a purely decorative outlet, narratively expressing the world around them, a wallpaper designers role, essentially reflects the decorative purpose of these paintings, which is achieved through the skill to craft beautiful and aesthetical, which can be defined as 'giving or designed to give pleasure through beauty' (OED, 2020), objects and paintings. Exploration into the functionality of decorating one's self and primarily surfaces, lead to the writings of Henrik Hogh-Olesen (2018), who investigated within his work that 'the aesthetic impulse appears to be like language and tool making- an innate disposition of human nature' (Hogh-Olesen, 2018, p. 5), focusing on the idea that this impulse contributes to the prosperity of our language and tool making abilities, correlates to the first

section of this essay, revolving around narrative. Looking at greater depth into the relationship between this impulse and narrative, both are the tools that aid the accomplishments of the hand and mind (Bruner, 1986,p. 122); without them, we would not be able to perfect the art of self-identification, nor the sense of others.

In addition, the connotations surrounding the natural instinct-like characteristics of this impulse, further feeds into Jung's ideas (1964), whereby the symbols and imagery designers' use, among other elements, are essentially naturally occurring products, which manifest within the unconscious, ultimately becoming integral to life itself (Jung et al, 1964, p.59). Consolidating both interpretations, this is suggesting that the aesthetic to decorate and embellish, goes beyond the pure decorative physicality, and transcends (as did the shamans) into the unconscious sublime- this provides the tools to formulate new communications of understanding on all levels. Further discussion leads to the inter-weaving of these innate attributes of aesthetic and symbols, to the purpose of a pattern designer, and the skill set required to produce artefacts that encompass both the decorative and symbolic references.

This form of decorative meaning can be seen within the contemporary designs of Emma J Shipley, who beautifully crafts hand-rendered wallpapers. *Protea*

(fig 7), is a design within 'The Wilderness Collection' (2019), it abundantly explores imagery depicting therianthrope inspired creatures, with symbolism towards the hunter-gather characteristic (Shipley, 2020).



Fig. 7, Protea Wallpaper.

(2019)

Within the design of *Protea* (fig 7), one can begin to see the links to the therianthrope figures, these are expressed through the human-like posture of each animal, the antelope especially reflects the bodily movements of *The Sorcerer* (fig 3), with how the animal is standing on its hind legs. Moreover, each depiction symbolises the transformation and relationship of man to animal, this is expressed through the hybridity of animal features, alongside the human tools and accessories that tightly caress each one.

Though this design reflects upon the importance of how the animal symbolism has integrated its way into modern society, thus resulting in a greater understanding of self, the sheer aesthetical pattern of this wallpaper, further instils the importance of how art/design, 'does not just merely emphasize the importance of the symbol; it shows how vital it is for men to integrate them into their lives' (Jung et al, 1964, p.239). For a pattern designer, the expressions of such symbols, is best reflected through their skills of 'working with identity, spirit and purpose' (Boehnert, 2018), and are represented through their decorative patterns, which similarly to stories, evoke narratives of understanding and construed reality for others.

Finally, throughout this essay, discussions have arisen, in regards to, how narrative is ultimately a tool, that contributes to symbolic representations across time, these reflect a designers' role because they integrate structural

narratives and the use of semiotics, through symbols- in this case animal symbolism- in order to formulate new communication and a better understanding of sense of self and society.

Through the likes of Jerrold Bruner's work (1986), who explored the notion of narrative, acting as the means for us to discover new worlds through the structure of stories, interlinked to the Palaeolithic societies who essentially developed the skill to narratively express their interpretation of the world and themselves through the production of cave paintings. These paintings brought around the discussion of how they went beyond their decorative forms within the walls, the discovered therianthrope figures, that expressed depictions of half-human, half-animal creatures, represented the unconscious, through the transcendental qualities evoked from the animal symbolism of the paintings.

This form of symbolism reflected the works of Jung (1964), who divulged the idea of how such symbols were an innate product that reflected life itself, and like the shamans that transcended, these symbols manifested within the unconscious and presented themselves in the forms of dreams. Alongside the symbolism held within the figures dancing on the walls, the decorative implications, further led to discussions of the aesthetic impulse and the transparency noted within the natural occurrence of such symbols to the possessions humans hold to aesthetically decorate and embellish their

surroundings. In regards to a pattern designer, with reference to designer Emma J Shipley, they embody the qualities of evoking symbolism through the form of aesthetical patterns, to satisfy the beholders' eyes, as well as emulating new language and stories, that embody the tools for understanding self and others.

The discussions presented and explored within this essay, has led to the future investigational question of: *How designers interpret/integrate symbols and narrative within the physicality of the ornamental pattern?*

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