

The Concept of Nature: Rock Carvings and Shamanism in Arctic Norway

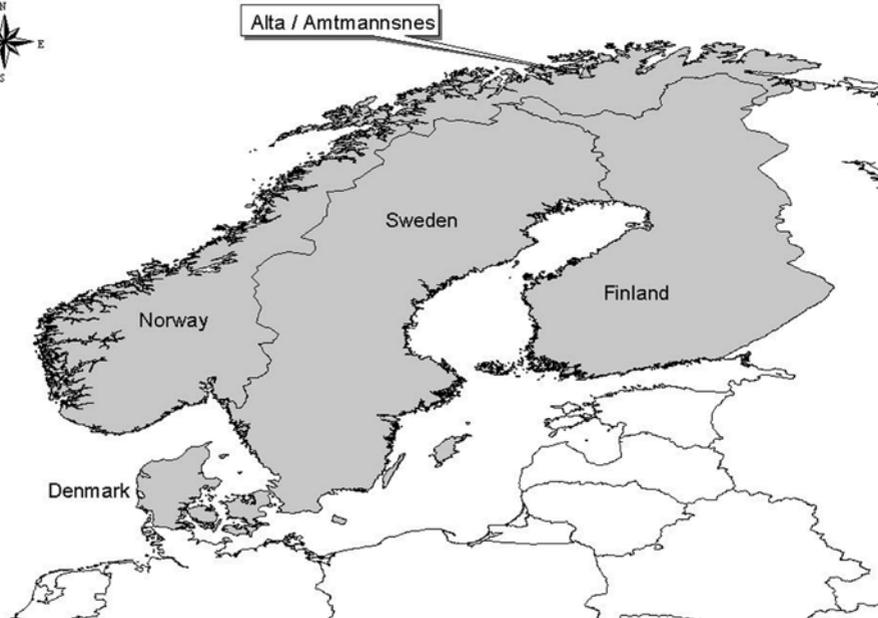
Abstract

The idea of nature that prevails today is incommensurable with shamanism, which is closely linked to animism. Animism must be handled on its own premises, which I identify to be influenced by the emotional aspects of human life, rather than the mechanical logic of the intellect. According to the science of phenomenology, as described by Edmund Husserl, the traditional split of mind and body related to human epistemology result in a view of nature that creates a world of ideals. This ideality is justified, but a problem arises when our personal bodily sensations no longer correlates to the ideal world of abstract or mathematized truths. The perceived world becomes something false, with a 'true' or ideal meaning behind the matter. This causes a gap or dilemma between life as a felt reality, and life as an ideal, or non-personal truth. These two modes, I argue, uses two different 'languages'. The phenomenological is a direct language, i.e. a language that contradicts the infamous sign-signified concept of Saussure and the linguistic tradition, which states that the connection between a sign and the signified are arbitrarily constituted. This theoretical background I use to draw some interpretations upon the rock art from Amtmannsnes, Finnmark County. These carvings I primary read as metaphorical embodiments reflecting a shamanic praxis connected to seasonal changes.

Introduction

In this paper I argue that its time to reconsider some aspects concerning the way we perceive and understand the concept of Nature. This is important because we as academics and part of an urban society must be aware of that our attitude towards 'nature' may not always be suitable in regard our interpretations of prehistoric past and people. We have to pay attention to the fact that we live in a world quite different from the life of prehistoric people. This includes people's mental life and that we today maybe comprehend the world from an essentially different view compared to people in the past. This leads to a discussion upon the justification on the use of concepts such as mind and

body, nature and human etc. My argument is that society today is extremely interwoven within this dichotomy, and that we hardly really understands views that contradicts this dichotomy, which, of course, also colors the way we interpret pre-historic society and mental life. By taking a closer look at phenomenology, we get a possibility to achieve an understanding that makes sense in the light of a *monistic* view upon nature, as opposed to a dualistic view. The important thing is that both views are proper and thereby represent a reality, which is based on certain premises. The real question is to uncover these premises. One such dominant premise is the human intellect.



This point is very touchy, but signify for me the core of the problem. On an axis stretching from dichotomy to monism, the view of what I denote as the intellect, equals a world of dichotomy. And this view is bound to miss, or at least neglect, some important parts of human life and attitude of mind. The emotional sphere of man is one such aspect, which operate on a different level than the intellect alone; intellect and emotions speaks different languages.

It's my 'hypothesis' that prehistoric people perceived the world in a far more monistic way than today. By doing so, I find it more rational to grasp concepts concerning a spiritual world, as we find by studying topics such as shamanism, which is full of concepts that contradicts our intellectual way of thinking. With this statement I also attack earlier explanations connected to 'primitive' or 'savage' thought, in the way writers such as Lévi-Strauss does. In his book 'Savage Mind', Lévi-Strauss's mission is to understand 'primitive thought' in terms of being a ra-

tional system of classification. Magic and other 'mystical' elements concerning native peoples life could therefore be viewed as expressions of peoples basic search for some kind of order or categorizing of nature and universe. Important for Lévi-Strauss is that the same kind of logic works in both cases, but are expressed in different ways. Magic and science are viewed as two parallel modes of acquiring knowledge, which require the same kind of mental operations (Lévi-Strauss 1996:13). In my view, these mental operations work on completely different levels that are incommensurable.

These problematic aspects I then transfer to a brief discussion upon shamanism and rock art from Amtmannsnes, Finnmark County in the northernmost parts of Norway. This site has frequently been seen as an expression on shamanism, without any profound discussion concerning the very phenomena of shamanism itself. An exception from this is conducted by Berg (2003, 2004). I see shamanism as a kind of animism, which is incom-

measurable with today's view of nature as something external or unfamiliar to human life and quintessence. These two points of departure I call Nature as Human (or subject) and Nature as Object. The latter represents the conventional science that prevails today. The former touches the discipline of phenomenology.

The aim for this paper is therefore to establish a plausible explanation concerning presumably incongruent world-views such as Nature-as-Object, in terms of being something alien, unrelated or external, and Nature-as-Subject, as familiar entities with inner relation to each individual human being. Concepts of so-called 'holy mountains' inhabited by spirits and supernatural power makes no sense in Nature-as-Object, but as I will argue, makes a great deal of sense in Nature-as-Subject.

Amtmannsnes and Shamanism

The rock carvings at Amtmannsnes have primary been documented and published by Helskog (1988). Other publications that in different degree handle this locality are Autio (1991), Berg (2003, 2004), Engelstad (2001), Evers (1994, 1999), Grønnesby (1998), Hesjedal (1990) and Olsen (1994). Common for all but Berg (2003) are in first place an exclusive focus on each motif isolated. Secondly, all but Engelstad (2001:275), which focus on aspects of gender and identity, existing interpretations point towards the motifs as symbols of shamans trance experiences, as an expression of the shaman ecstatic ritual and believes connected to shamanic world-views. The result, I argue, is that the carvings at Amtmannsnes have become emblems of shamanism, without an elaborative discussion concerning the phenomena of shamanism itself.

For instance, is it possible to understand shamanism and related concepts as expressions of something 'real'? For me it's not sufficient to handle the phenomena of shamanism as something people just *thought as reality*. I think it's very easy to prejudge shamanism as an incommensurable tradition that contradicts and holds no truth compared to our modern days of thinking. Shamanism

becomes superstition. This implies that whole traditions are based on false premises; we *know* that there is no such thing as 'spirits in the mountains', that people really don't have 'separate souls' etc. My intention is to show that opinions like this must be regarded as reality, from a certain point of view. And this view is more related to people's emotional aspects rather than the human intellect alone.

I feel that contemporary publications upon rock carvings and shamanism in a to far extend is trapped in old truths, focusing on the 'same trance' and to identify shamanic emblems. I see this as a problem because I experience that most of the research upon shamanism and rock art has stagnated in a reproduction of old concepts, such as the infamous three-stage-trance-theory as described by Lewis-Williams & Dowson (1988), which in its most rigid form actually does not tell us more than that every one of us are able to experience extraordinary visual or entopic phenomena by means of altered states of consciousness. This means that an identification of entopic look-alikes in rock carving by no means can be regarded as proof on a shamanic praxis. It is just an indication of shamanism. An elaborate discussion concerning this problem is conducted by Bahn (2001). Still, this does not imply that shamanism is irrelevant as a model of explanation, as we shall see.

The real problem of shamanism, in my opinion, is that there is no solid way to define the very word and meaning of shamanism. Since the middle of 19th century, when researchers first began to discuss shamanism as a topic (Price 2001:4), we still haven't managed to reach a satisfying definition of shamanism. I see this as a sign that maybe tells us to question the very search for a once and for all definition of shamanism as a phenomenon. Hence, my aim is to bring forth that shamanism must be studied as related to animism, as part of a world-view, as Pentikäinen (1987:139) writes.

My understanding of shamanism is therefore something that fetches a much broader scale of a society compared with the very restricted ecstatic trance experience of the shaman, which indeed seems highly enigmatic, and

therefore exotic and as a popular object to study. Unfortunately, as with most of what becomes popular, it stiffens and becomes rigid and full of clichés.

The 'Bricoleur' and 'Engineer' of Lévi-Strauss

The approach to the concepts of shamanism and related topics are in my opinion colored of a certain attitude of mind as researchers such as Lévi-Strauss represents. A good example is illustrated by Lévi-Strauss while he introduce the concepts 'bricoleur' and 'engineer' to explain the difference between a 'primitive' and 'modern' rationality. A bricoleur, as a kind of do-it-yourself-man, uses whatever he or she can find in their environment as tangible tools in a process to create something new. These tangible tools are not specialized for one purpose, but can be reused for different purposes. The tools are not fixed for one use only. An engineer, on the other hand, depends on specialized tools, which first have to be invented to fit a special purpose (Lévi-Strauss 1996:17).

Lévi-Strauss argue that a bricoleur creates by a continual reconstruction from the same materials (Lévi-Strauss 1996:21). The tools are therefore 'open', not fixed. This imply that a bricoleur's world consist of an almost unlimited set of entities with a 'going together' potential. And most important; their potentials are always in retrospect, they addresses or signify elements in a *closed* world. This is not the case for an engineer. An engineer, on the other hand, first has to decide or *fix* the relations that have a 'going together' potential. By doing this, the engineer makes a specialized tool, something that does not address itself in retrospect. The result is that an engineer always tries *'to make his way out of and go beyond the constraints imposed by a particular state of civilization while the 'bricoleur' by inclination or necessity always remains within them'* (Lévi-Strauss 1996:19). The difference is also understood by referring to an engineer working by means of *concepts* and a bricoleur by means of *signs* (Lévi-Strauss 1996:20), or that an engineer (or scientist) create events, or change the world by means of structures (hypotheses, theo-

ries), and the bricoleur creating structures by means of events (Lévi-Strauss 1996:22). Concepts, he says, *'aim to be wholly transparent with respect to reality, signs allow and even require the interposing and incorporation of a certain amount of human culture into reality. Signs, (...) 'address somebody'* (Lévi-Strauss 1996:20).

The basic line, as I see it, is that a bricoleur creates abstractions from tangible entities, and the engineer creates tangible entities from abstractions. At this point I'm not satisfied with Lévi-Strauss argumentation. I don't think there is such a fundamental difference between a bricoleur and an engineer as Lévi-Strauss claims. These two approaches are in essence the same, both the bricoleur and the engineer uses hypotheses to solve problems, to establish possible relations between entities in the world. By hypotheses I mean speculations, i.e. to *imagine* what will happen if I do this or that, and so execute these speculations in real life, to see if it works or not. What Lévi-Strauss claims, is actually the exactly opposite of his own goal, namely to treat primitive thought as a representation non-less sophisticated than the modern. The engineer act on problems in advance, by breaking the limits of the outer world, whereby the bricoleur is doomed to a life only to rearrange already existing elements inside this outer boundary. By doing this, the bricoleur never really creates something new.

What's common in both these 'systems' of the bricoleur and the engineer is that we find people who deal with a world of outer objects and an inner world of the human mind. From my point of view, I think that Lévi-Strauss misses some important aspects regards certain aspect of human life. As I see it, Lévi-Strauss operate only at a strictly 'intellectual' level, that is, he neglect the fact that people through all times not necessary sees Nature as we do today, as *observers* of an *external* nature. For me this is a crucial point, which brings the subject to the infamous Nature-Human dichotomy of today. This dichotomy, or attitude of mind, I claim, is exclusive for a pure intellectual approach towards nature, and represent what I un-



View of Altafjorden. Photo: Gerhard Milstreu

derstand by the concept 'nature as object', as opposed to 'nature as subject'. The latter I state to be a characteristic of an animistic view towards nature.

Animism

Early definitions of animism often give associations to people that understood the world childishly and erroneously (Bird-David 1999:68). During the last years there have been done a great deal to understand animism as an expression of a world-view that in many ways contradicts the dichotomy between body and mind, nature and culture, supernatural and natural, subject and object etc. (Bird-David 1999:68). Tim Ingold shed some light upon this 'dichotomy problem' when he argue that *'it is as entire persons, not as disembodied minds, that human beings engage with one other and, moreover,*

with non-human beings as well' (Ingold 1996:129).

This view also works well as a description of essential elements related to shamanism, which could be viewed as an activity that embraces not just the mind, but also the totality of body and mind. Nature as object represents an opposite view to this. Arturo Escobar points out that such a view treats Nature as a passive arena where people works upon a *given* or static nature (Escobar 1999:8). This is not how things work. People in an environment act with *within* nature in a two-way responsive relatedness, as Bird-David (1999:77) argue. In such a world there makes no sense to speak of the relation between subject and object as a fixed dualism. Ingold describes it like this:

..it seems to me that organisms, through their development and through their ac-

tivities, constitute their environments; but in a sense environments constitute organisms too because, through its development, the organism (or human being, as a kind of organism) embodies its own perceptual experience of involvement with the world (Ingold 1991:29).

Implications that can be drawn from this tells us that the gaining of knowledge, as we usually see it in Nature as Object, can't be viewed as a process whereby we as human being collects knowledge from an already existing external world of prefabricated objects. It's important to elucidate what we call objective knowledge usually signify *neutral* knowledge, in sense of being something unaffected by our own thoughts and our own participation. This may not be entirely correct for all people through time and space. In case of animism, the opposite may be stated. Here we find that people treat nature in terms of being something human. The world conceals something that is related to one self as a human. An understanding of a world like this makes it reasonable to speak about human having an intentional relation with forces of nature and other entities in people's environment (Humphrey 1996:85). Hence, what affects nature, affects you, and vice versa. The philosophical basis for animism, where the world is characterized in terms of being a non-fixed assemblage of interrelated subjects, is in my opinion phenomenology.

Phenomenology

Edmund Husserl as a philosopher was one of the first to question the basis for a science that conceived the world as a fixed dualism between objects and subjects. Husserl makes this explicit by referring to the emerging worldview advocated by Galileo: *One can truly say that the idea of nature as a really self-enclosed world of bodies first emerges with Galileo. A consequence of this, along with the mathematization, which was too quickly taken for granted, is [the idea of] a self-enclosed natural causality in which every occurrence is determined unequivocally and in advance. Clearly the way is thus*

prepared for dualism, which appears immediately afterwards in Descartes (Husserl 1999:60).

According to Husserl, the dualistic view of the world is an abstraction, without a fundament in concrete experience, but from a mathematized nature (Husserl 1999:61). This implies the belief on mathematics as the highest form of truth, as an ideal. Problems concerning such an approach are that this 'ideal' world of mathematics involves an abstraction in the very moment this mathematics are used to explain the 'real' world. The gap between meaning and manifestation, mind and matter, needs to be filled, and one way to do this is by reducing the real world properties to fit the rigid rules of mathematic, which is *one* way of ordering the world. The problem is evidently that what we see is *not* what we get, the mathematized calculations expressed by numbers demands one basic premise; and that is explicit measurement or quantification of qualities of the world. Such a demand for explicit expressions suits a mechanic understanding of the world, which involves the classic chains of causality within a system of rigid logic, which belong solidly to the realm of intellect.

The aim is not to 'criticize' this approach; the logic or rationality of this system is of course valid and justified, but what we often forget is that while the mathematized approach stipulate an all embracing universality and self-evidence, so also could be said about what Husserl denote as 'life-world'.

The life-world is our pre-given sense-experiences that we take for granted and nourish the life of thought (Husserl 1999:76). This life-world represents a contrast to the dualistic ideality-reality (or phenomena) of mathematics. When Descartes started to question the truthfulness or quality of our sense-experiences, when our senses for the first time was called into question, the result was that the sense-experience, and its correlate, the world in it self, also where conceived as a deceiving factor (Husserl 1999:76). And so on with everything corporal, as a contrast to the mind. Only the 'I' who thinks becomes undoubted. Descartes thereby excludes the living body, the sensible world in general. The result is a

pure intellectual approach of reality, and the language of this reality is the mathematical rationality (Husserl 1999:79).

Nature as Object and Nature as Subject

When I speak of a 'pure' or one-sided intellectual approach upon nature, I understand this as a state of consciousness, not as a definition of specific peoples characters. It's easy to forget that each human life involves more than the very moments of intellectual speculations; as observers of a world inhabited by 'dead forces of nature'. I see the possibility that whole groups of peoples in the prehistory in a far more extent than today where 'disposed' to approach nature in terms of being something alive, and thereby much more related to the fluctuating life of emotional forces such as the feeling of rage, anger, sorrow, pleasure, good, bad, etc. These are indeed *individual* feelings, which cannot be regarded as something else than reality. Still, they cannot be regarded as objective entities in terms of being something *observable* or visible, and hence difficult to measure: i.e. to separate as a *closed* entity. *Emotional aspects do not follow the rules of mechanics in an objectified world.*

The problem, of course, is that these emotions only refers to the subject alone, and therefore difficult to use as a basis for general truths, or laws, such as the law of gravity etc. If I 'feel' that the law of gravity doesn't concern me, I soon find out that this feeling is based on false premises. But if I relate some characteristic features of a wolf or a similar animal with certain aspects of my own inner life, I establish a link of knowledge that could be shared with other people, as a truth based on our own subjective state of consciousness. We then create characteristics or general knowledge (discover connections in the world), which can be reckoned as an inter-personal reality, i.e. something that not just each individual experience as truth. And so on with other characteristics and forces in people's surroundings. The sun as a bringer of life is another example. It's not 'speculative' to claim that the forces of the sun and the way it effects life, brings forth some parallels related to inner feelings of something

that nourish each individual life. This could be called anthropomorphism, which is to say that nature consist of something that is analog to the individual human being (Peirce 1994:47). Nature is thereby conceived as related to the human soul, or Man is seen as a reflection or a micro-cosmos of a bigger macro-cosmos (Cassirer 1965:98).

With such point of view, we see that this demands a quite radical change of investigation in regard our understanding and explanation of presumably mystic or irrational human belief and behavior. Nature as Human involves a language that, by my words, is based on *processes* rather than isolated objects. With processes I mean some kind of forces that is analog to our emotional understanding of bodily experience connected to different aspects of each human during a lifetime. Such a language doesn't distinguish between sign and signified, the wolf *is* the fear. This language contradicts Saussure's old semiotic treatise concerning the so called arbitrarily relationship between expression and meaning. Willam Gregory Bateson touches an important core related to this problem (or language) by stating:

The distinction between the name and the thing named or the map and the territory is perhaps really made only by the dominant hemisphere of the brain. The symbolic and affective hemisphere, normally on the right-hand side, is probably unable to distinguish name from thing named. (...) For example, with the dominant hemisphere, we can regard such a thing as a flag as a sort of name of the country or organization that it represents. But the right hemisphere does not draw this distinction and regards the flag as sacramentally identical with what it represents. So 'Old Glory' is the United States. If somebody steps on it, the response may be rage. And the rage will not diminished by an explanation of the map-territory relations (Bateson 1985[1979]:38).

There is a huge difference between these two modes of attitude. One of them strongly relate to peoples emotional side, and therefore could be described as deeply rooted in the human soul, or person, the other mode respond on a different level, the intellect,

only as a neutral observer of something that does not really concern each individual at a personal level. It is extremely easy to pre-judge the 'emotional' mode as subjective, or less real reality. Of course, for the 'brain alone', the flag in the abovementioned quote could denote all sorts of 'meanings'. But this I claim is to miss the target, because we forget that emotions deals with *experiences* attached to us as persons, while the intellect deals with *descriptions* of entities detached from our self as persons. These two modes of attitude represent two ways of acquiring knowledge, and most important, they are not mutually exclusive to each other, both are fully rational, based on their own premises. If I experience a certain feeling from a certain color or a certain sound, this effect doesn't vanish if I at the same time think of the sound and light as specific physical waves traveling through a certain type of medium.

With such a background, I find it rational to handle topics like shamanism and animism as a reflection from people that is disposed to express their knowledge in terms of a more emotional language than we usually express our self today. Therefore, if we are to study a society which felt the nature as something strongly related to their own inner being, I find it reasonably to suggest that they experienced themselves as far more interwoven in the surroundings changing character during a cyclic year, and that these changes in the environment where incorporated and experienced as an element intimately related to each individual human beings character and emotional 'temperament'.

An ethnographic example from the Saami people in arctic Scandinavia could serve as a good example at this point. Among some Saami groups many important aspects connected to their life where strongly connected to and followed the seasonal changes in the surroundings (Pentikäinen 1987:138). In these arctic and sub-arctic areas, the seasonal changes where strongly felt, where the winter was denoted as a long period of *kaamos* without any sun at all, while the summer represented many months of a never vanishing sun. These aspects were also reflected in the Saami's nomadic and semi-nomadic life-style. This involved a separation between winter

and summer dwellings or areas (Pentikäinen 1987:137).

Further on, in such a cyclic society the shaman, as a kind of 'religious' leader, played an important part, especially in connection to huge seasonal sacrifices, which involved several family-groups from different areas. These sacrifices could be held at a specific time the year, such as spring and autumn, but also at mid-winter (Mebius 1968:88,100). I will not discuss the character of these sacrifices in detail; I will rather focus on aspects concerning the drive-forces behind these ceremonies, or sacrifices. Why are ceremonies like this seen as necessary at first place? To answer this question I find it necessary to take a closer look at what I previously called a shamanistic world-view. This opens up, in my view, for a more comprehensive understanding of shamanism, and that this shamanism expresses a reality that is reflected through rock art, as one medium among others.

Aspects of a shamanistic world-view; the significant life of the living dead

According to Bäckman (1975:9), Hultkrantz (1987:111) and Schanche (2000:256), *sájva*, *saivo*, or *jábmeáibmu* are important concepts connected to Saami religion. The meaning of these concepts is manifold, but one common feature is that *sájva* refers to the realm of dead souls (Bäckman 1975:67-78,84). This realm is often located to a mountain or rocks, in caves, near the sea or by the shore of a lake (Vorren 1987:95, Holmberg [1915]:31). And most important, the souls of the dead where thought as *real*, in the same way as living people on the earth. The souls of the dead where seen as a crucial part of human life, capable to bring both health and sickness to the earth and its people (Bäckman 1975:86). These spirits could also be used as the shaman's helping- or guiding-spirits (Bäckman 1975:116).

On such a background the shaman, or the Saami *noaide*, play a vital part as a kind of negotiator with the dead. Sacrifices of different animals, such as reindeers, could be viewed as a negotiation with the dead. Only the *noaide* had the knowledge and skills to

treat the remains of the animal in a proper way. By doing this they control the reindeer's regenerative powers, and therefore to secure the forthcoming resurrection of other reindeers (Schanche 2000:265).

Another important aspect connected to this is that the sacrifices depend on the seasonal character of the year. Each time of year demands different sacrifices, which correlate to the access of game, such as sacrifices connected to reindeer at autumn and sacrifices connected to fishery at spring, when the rivers and freshwater melts (Mebius 1968:100-101).

Activities like these could be viewed as a ritual that follows the ecological cycle, and are a common feature among several societies (Helskog 1999:84). Based on the view of shamanism and animism, in a world that is experienced as a nature as subject, I argue that an understanding of these rituals can be compared to what Victor Turner (1999) describes as *liminales*, or *rites de passage*, which exist in societies all around the world. An essential attribute is the ambiguous or indefinite character connected to the expressions or appearance related to these transitions. Turner denotes these ambiguous features in terms of representing a structural invisibility with a two-sided characteristic (Turner 1999:133).

This statement points to the transference from one condition to another, and works both on an individual and an environmental level, such as for instance the change from juvenileness to adulthood and the seasonal transformation from winter to summer (Gennep 1999:22-23). These circumstances of liminales occurs through a combination or blending of qualities associated with the previous and forthcoming state, as the case is at spring, when both the qualities of winter and summer emerges at the same time, as a two-sided characteristic connected to the phenomena.

On the individual level the same principal works. An example on this is for instance that the neophyte or the 'shamanistic apprentice' at a certain level is associated with characteristics connected to death and destruction of the body, followed by a renewal of the body

(Eliade 1998:48). This case also refers to two-sided or ambiguous conditions, where both life and death are represented in the journey of the neophyte from one state of being to another (Turner 1999:133-134). Besides the references to life and death, there is also a third-sided aspect connected to this.

According to Turner the neophytes could be connected neither to death, nor life, but as something in between, as a *living dead*. They are viewed both as alive and dead at the same time, and therefore place themselves beyond all traditional categories (Turner 1999:134). In the case of shamanism, this 'third category' is a frequently observed attribute related to the shaman's praxis and ways of expression. One example is that a shaman by means of trance, or altered state of consciousness, combine different characters from the environment into hybrid-expressions, such as the combination of a human-animal (Clottes & Lewis-Williams 1998:17).

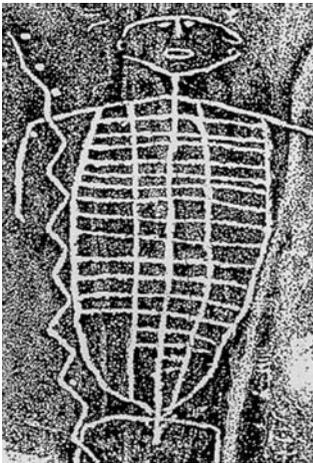
Based on these concepts, there is possible to line up a few headlines for a shamanistic praxis that focuses on the nature understood in a language that resonate to personal experiences of life as a series of processes which is *felt* emotionally, as a concrete 'life-world'. Additionally; it makes sense to speak of this language as *metaphorical*, where individual experiences seeks an equivalent side in the processes of outer nature. Processes of nature are in term of this understood as something that resembles the inner qualities of human life and emotional state. I will focus on a few, but central aspects related to all kinds of life, namely growth and decay, understood as processes of life and death.

Negotiations with the dead as a re-vitalization of life, expressed as rock carvings

If animism is to be taken seriously, and not as some kind of misunderstanding of the world, with 'spirits' and 'souls' etc., i.e. concepts which usually doesn't give any meaning at all, we must be aware of that this animism actually isn't *that* mystic or unrealistic, compared to what we normally regard as a concrete reality. But, in the moment we understand the basis of animism, which in my point of

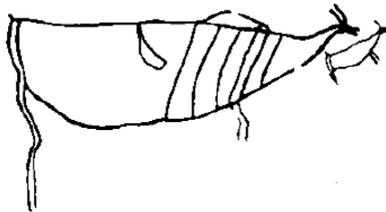
Fig. 3. Amtmannsnes II (Helskog 1988:66-67).

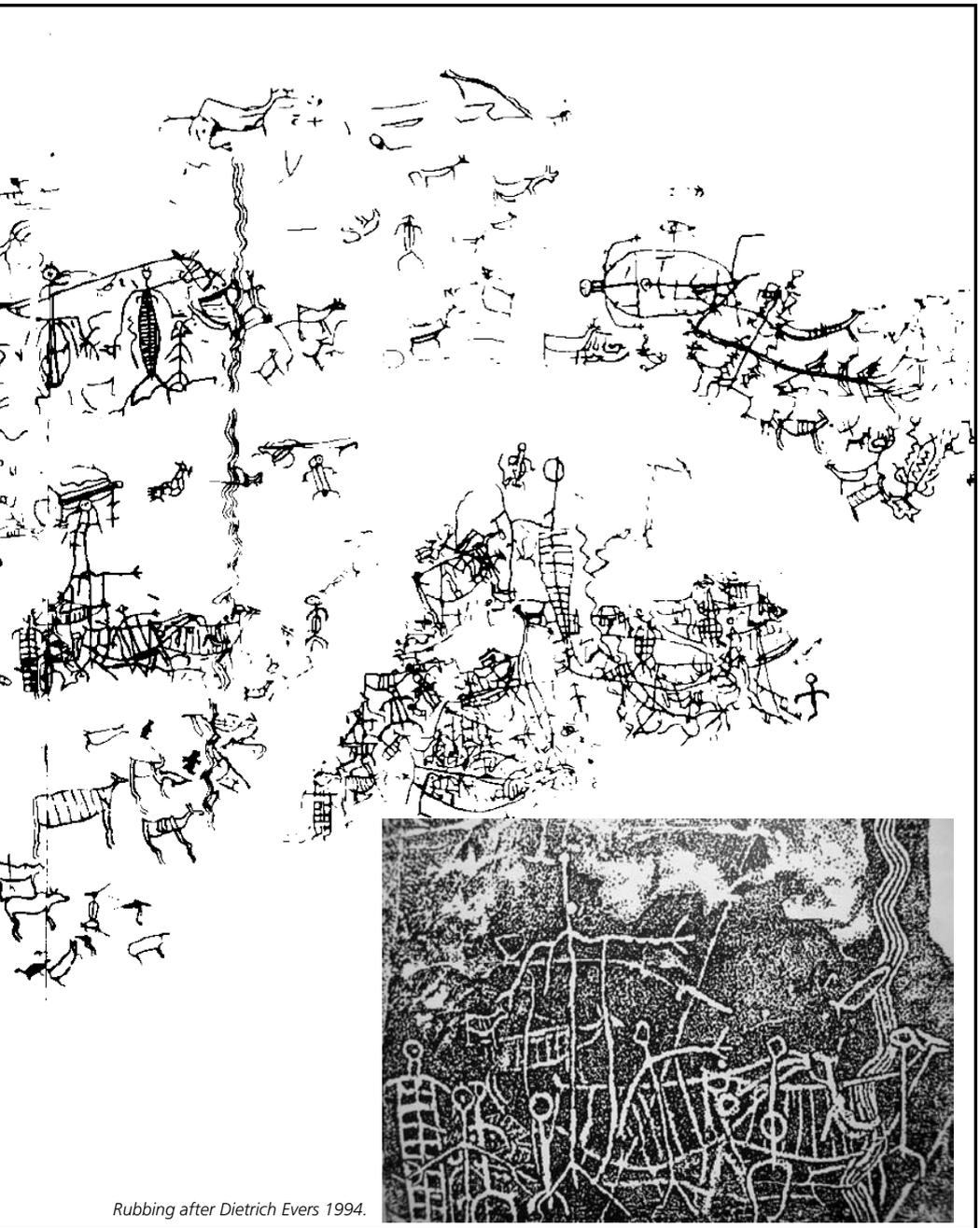
Dietrich Evers



Rubbing after Dietrich Evers 1994.

'Shamanic rock carvings: The rise and fall of spirits among the living'.





Rubbing after Dietrich Evers 1994.

view represent a more aesthetic or artistic world-view, which cannot be reduced down to a rigid system of logically interrelated entities, we see that animism in its own peculiar way represents a fully rational, and thereby realistic world-view.

To understand the 'magic', or 'unrealistic' part of shamanism as animism, such as the helping spirits of the shaman, I find it appropriate to compare this to the Saami *joik*, as a kind of singing that in many aspects is an expression that not only *signify* something, but also must be regarded as an expression that shares some similar qualities with the 'object' or phenomena itself. By doing this, it is possible to express a *joik* that resembles the qualities of for instance a juvenile reindeer. The basic line, as I see it, is that a tradition like this shows a tendency for a profound knowledge of the natures living qualities, which I would describe as 'contemplative observations'.

It is possible in the same manner to understand the shaman's expressions and ideas concerning the world of spirits. If the belief in these *saivos*, as I described earlier, were thought of as especially important and 'loaded' with potentially harmful spirits, as living forces with certain qualities, there is possible to understand these spirits as contemplative observations reflecting the forces of nature, which, in terms of anthropomorphism or a phenomenological-monistic view upon nature, is closely related to the emotional aspects of human life. Thereby, the spirits resemble and resonate to the individual life of each personal being.

If we combine the concepts *nature as subject* (as the theoretical base of animism), *saivo and shamanism*, *seasonal sacrifices* (where the life of a society strongly follows the climatic and ecological changes through a year) and Turner's *liminales* (connected to rites de passage), this gives us an opportunity to draw some interpretations of the rock carvings at Amtmannsnes. The first factor important for an elucidation of a potential background of the rock carvings concerns the interrelation between the individual human life and changes in the nature.

So, my first explicit hypotheses state that people's mental life (or focus) strongly cor-

relate to the character of the environment. The fact that different time of year demands different types of sacrifices, as I mentioned earlier through Mebius (1968:100-110), is one example. I would also suggest that people saw these changes in the environment as an increase and decrease of qualities that in essence is similar to human emotional sphere of experience. To describe the sun as 'dying' when it is fading away at nightfall, the autumn as something that 'dies' and the winter as nature 'sleeping' are some examples of my point. These expressions must be taken literally, not as some kind of 'romantic tittle-tattle'. It's my conviction that a person with a character that is deeply 'tuned' towards nature, in some way would develop a language that embraces the qualities of nature in a more organic (and hence *vivid*) mode than a person who study the nature as a kind of 'mechanical machinery'.

The second hypotheses deals with the expression of such an 'organic language'. If nature is sensed and perceived as animated, as processes of *life* and *death*, this involves a focus on *conditions* rather than entities as isolated objects. If an expression is ambiguous, for instance a carving that appears as a hybrid between man and woman, as figure 1 shows, where the central motif is a depiction of a human that could be viewed as bi-sexual, displaying attributes of both male and female character at the same time.

This specific expression could be understood in terms of shamanism, and the carved motif depicts a felt reality of an animated nature, as a particular power of nature at a specific locus and time of year, like for instance the spring, which could be described as a liminalistic third category, like a state of being expressed as a combination of the winter and summers qualities.

Based on what I previous wrote, where the shaman works as an important operator connected to seasonal sacrifices, my claim is that this specific carving could be understood as an emblem of a spirit (or power), that is located to what I described as a *saivo*, as a powerful place. Further on, the shaman is the one who can intervene, and thereby negotiate with these powers. To carry out a sacrifice is a proper way to do this. If these powers were

experienced as phenomenological reality, this reality would resonate to the emotional aspects of human life. The very character of a sacrifice could be viewed as a deliberately act that connect and establish a link to two very important factors related to a society's survival, namely life and death.

If the survival and reproduction of natural resources and human health are understood as guided or governed by different kind of spirits or forces, I find it rational to extend these concepts, and to propose that some specific types of spirits, or forces of nature characterizes each specific time of year. A world-view like this could therefore be described as constituted by a waxing and veining of different kind of spirits through the cycle of a year. One example that serves as a description on this is the view of autumn as nature that dies or fades away. In terms of a phenomenological/shamanistic/animistic view of nature, this is actually a quite precise and adequate description of a natural process. Again, this is a different language that is inspired from organic *life*. Therefore, the expression of this language deals with differentiations of life and death. If we take a closer look at figure 3 in the upper left frame we see a motif that consist of a human figure with 'two folded potency', with female and male characteristics. I read this as an explicit symbol of fertility, as an accumulation of life, in contrast to death. Therefore, this motif could actually be viewed as the sign of spring, or at least as a sign of power, as a potent condition.

Another aspects that gives strength to this view, is the motif of a relatively big human figure oriented horizontally compared to the majority of the other human motifs. I read the underlying zigzag line, which stretches from the horizontally oriented human motif towards the vertically oriented human motifs, as a line of connection, and that the motifs therefore can't be studied as isolated entities alone. The relative orientation affects therefore the motifs meaning.

The horizontally oriented human figure could be understood as an emblem of nature as a force of death at winter. In fact, this is a quite precise expression of something dead or inactive, as a corporal metaphorical symbol

of death. On an individual level, as praxis connected to shamanism, these motifs also works as a description of experiences related to the shaman or the noaide's 'negotiations' with the powers of nature, in form of helping and guiding spirits, as I wrote earlier. The carvings of Amtmannsnes could therefore be understood as an animistic expression of changes from one condition to another, both on an individual and a 'dividual' level, as seasonal changes through the cycle of a year.

Conclusion

Much more could and should be said about Amtmannsnes, but I will conclude this paper by stating that the shamans personal experiences deals with forces of nature, expressed as metaphorically embodiments referring to a corporal reality of life and death. One purpose of this paper is to show that the study of rock carvings and prehistoric culture in general, must release itself from the boundaries of a science, that in many cases reduces nature to an entity alien to human essence and life.

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