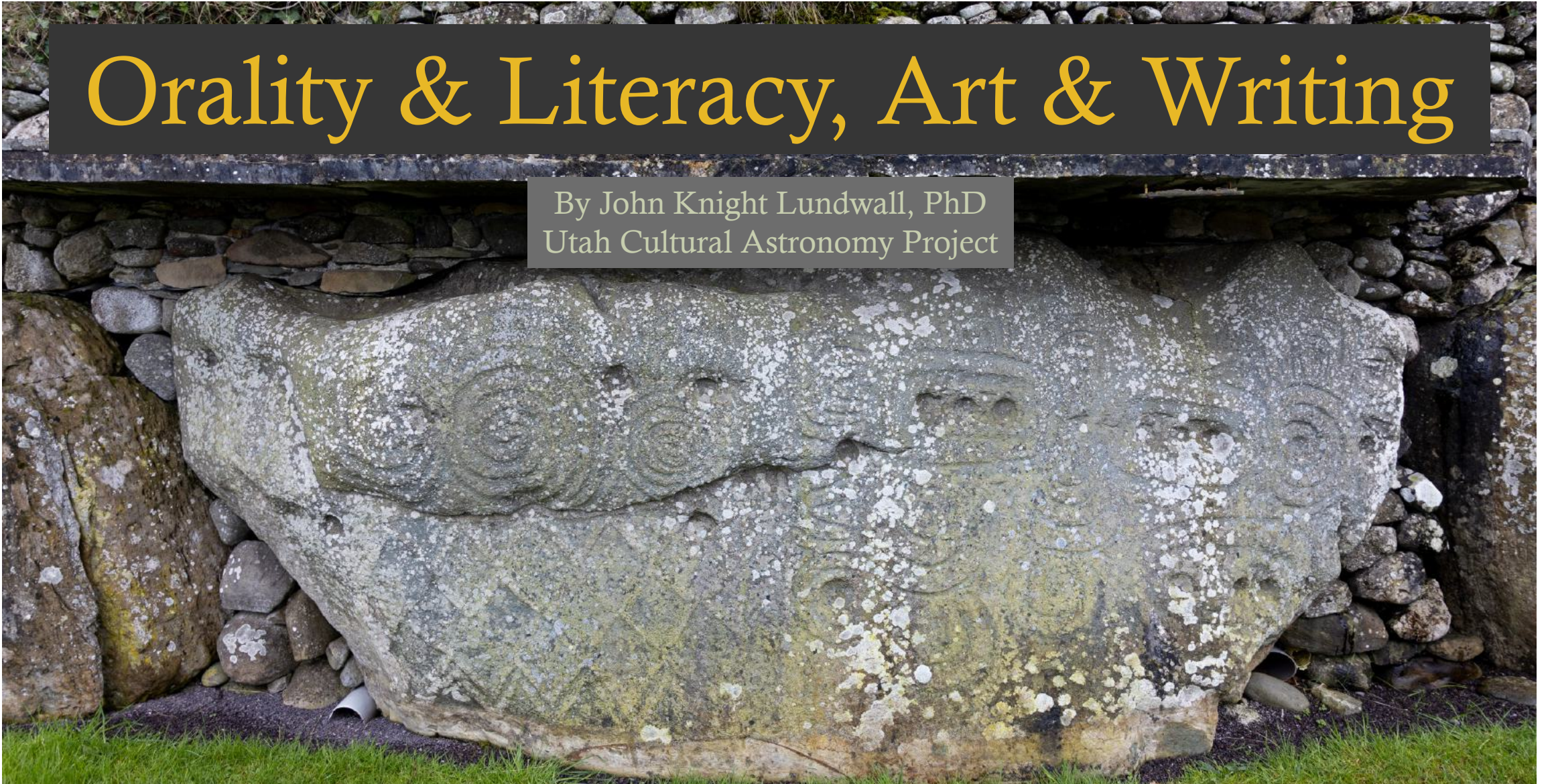


# Orality & Literacy, Art & Writing

By John Knight Lundwall, PhD  
Utah Cultural Astronomy Project





## Is Rock Art Writing?

- If we define writing as a system of codified symbols with a specific grammar and syntax (like an alphabet or logo syllabic system), **then no.**
- If we define writing as a visual system conveying cultural meaning, memory, ritual, or relationality, **then yes.**





## Art or Writing?

- \* Is it Art?
- \* Indigenous cultures often do not have a word for “art”.
- \* Is it Writing?
- \* The vast majority of rock art hails from oral cultures.

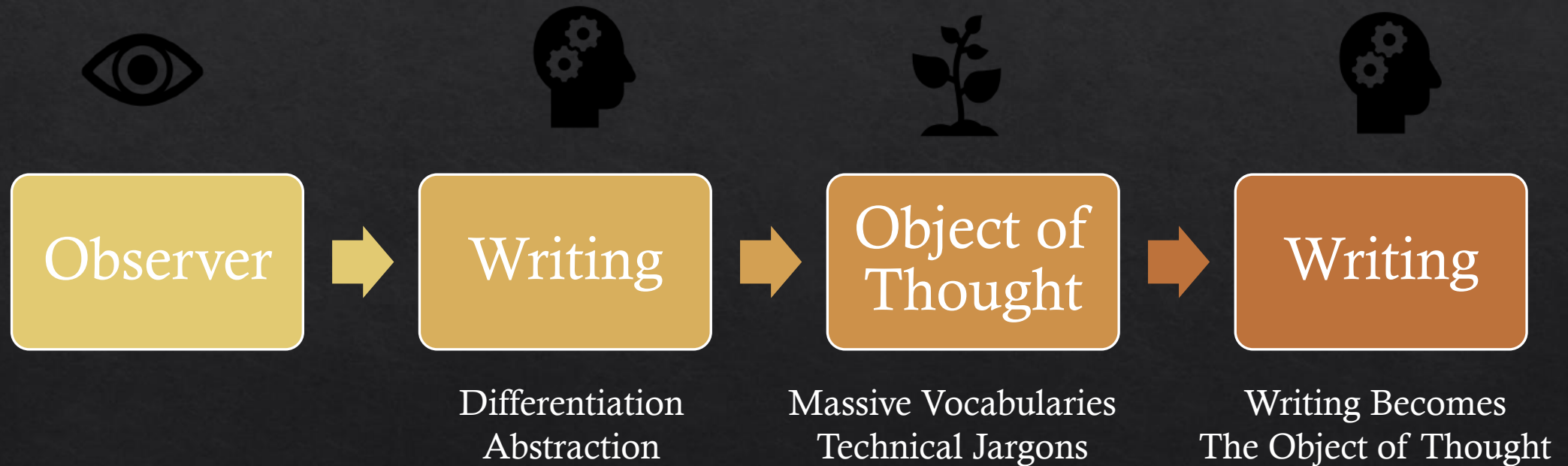


## Oral Epistemology

- Analogy
- Polysemy
- Silence
- Cosmology
- Life Ways
- Agency



# Literate Thinking





# Oral Thinking



# Landscape - Rock Art - Living Presence

- ◆ For animists, landscape is not a passive, natural blank slate in-waiting for active, enculturing rock art: “landscape” is conceived of as “living,” filled with other than-human-persons who are extant prior to human engagement, dwelling at “pre-given places” (Cruikshank 2005: 15). As such, rock art (e.g. the “Badger Stone,” Ikley Moor; see Figure 2), by virtue of its permanent locality and concentration at certain places, may cite locations of other-than-human presence, marked with the art, perhaps as offerings— to such other-than-human-persons as rock-persons (Wallis 2009). In addition to indexing pre-given places, the art may have been produced as a result of communication with or the negotiated assistance of other than-human agents.
- ◆ Robert J. Wallis. “Animism and the Interpretation of Rock Art.” *Time and Mind: The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness, and Culture*. Vol. 6, Issue. 1, March 2013, pp. 21-28.



## Inca Rock Art

Rocks were believed to possess agency and personality and shaping them was a ritual act. Carolyn Dean's work, *A Culture of Stone*, explores how Inca artisans viewed lithic monuments as manifestations of power—not just material, but metaphysical.











Rock Art is a Visual Image of an Oral Tradition