

## ROTATIONS: A SLANTED LOOK AT ROCK ART

This presentation is about a different type of information than you have probably ever considered before. Because of that, there will be a number of people who may have a problem accepting some of this information as a viable possibility. So, with that in mind, let me also state that I do not want any of you to take what is being presented here seriously. By suggesting that you are not obliged to believe anything I say, you will probably learn more than if you really set out to take it seriously and were closed minded to this information.

The concepts presented here have been growing in my mind for a considerable amount of time. Each little discovery I made led me to believe there was something going on that related to this theme. But I did not have enough examples to support any theory; I only had a vague comprehension that an *intentional ambiguity* was present. It seemed that different images were hiding within other images, but they could be revealed if viewed from a different orientation. This in certain respects is reminiscent of some of Beverly Doolittle's paintings. In these, she hides images within her landscapes. During the very beginning of my research, over 40 years ago, I created files of images which seemed to fit within certain conceptual ideas or categories of symbolism. I did not have a file pertaining to these kinds of images until much later. Many of these images lay in a miscellaneous file.

During the time that I taught on the Navajo Reservation I had access to two individuals who taught me a tremendous amount about symbolism. From these teachings I learned that reversed images do not necessarily represent death. For example, Figure 1a, b, c, is an image that contains more than is immediately obvious. Put your hand over the bottom two images (b, c), in Figure 1 and look just at 1a. What is it? Why do we usually assume that there is only one way to orient an image on the rocks, and

that it is its real orientation? How do you interpret it? If you cannot see anything in Figure 1a, drop your hand down, still covering the bottom image and see *one* rotation of it. What do you see now? When the second image (1b) is rotated a *second* time, it becomes familiar to most people. Figure 1c, is rotated a *third* time. What do you see now? If you still do not see anything, don't feel bad, it's not an IQ test, it's all about how well you can see hidden images as a part of pattern recognition.



Visualize the vertical placement of this image representing the thin line between life and death. In other words, perhaps it represents the belief that “when we are alive, we are dead and even in death we are alive”. This statement depends on your belief in the proposition “we can die.”

*Figure 1. Death.*

There are others who believe that it is only the body which dies. When visualized properly this image contains both concepts of life and death. How intellectual is that? Was it done for the glory of being intellectual alone, rather than art for arts sake? Or was it being intellectualized for intellectual's sake? Or was there a deeper meaning in its purpose?

Figure 2 a-h, illustrates that the rotation of an image is not just a phenomenon that Native Americans played with. Here are a few interesting images with other hidden images redrawn from Newell (1964). Look at them and then turn the page upside down and look at them again. Even though these may seem amus

ing there is a hidden meaning, every face has two sides.

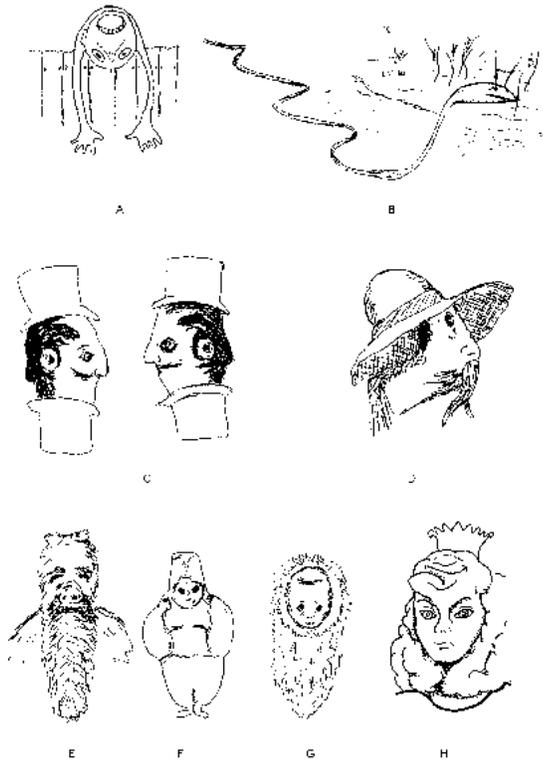


Figure 2. Redrawn from Newell. (1964)

Salvador Dali used this trick in several of his paintings. In one he used the nose and mustache of Hitler to create a serene scene. Figure 3a is the portrait of Hitler with a portion enlarged in 3b. When rotated it becomes a boat, and a mast appear and a serene seascape (Descharnes and Neret 2002:508-9). Even though Dali was considered a genius by himself and others (ibid:11,558) his work had a dark and morbid side. We only know this from our understanding of the political climate during the time of the surrealist movement.

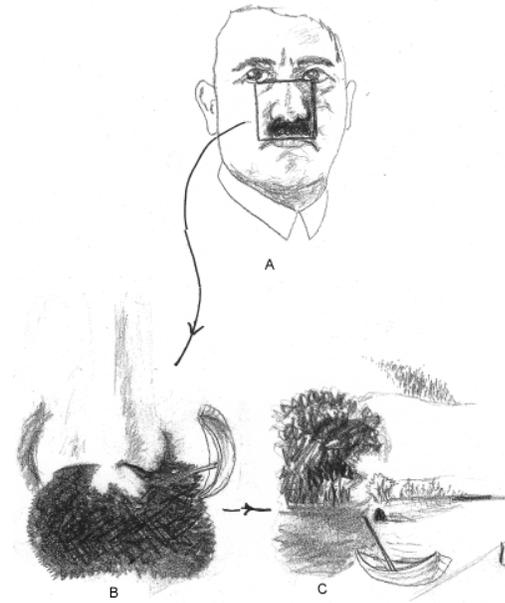


Figure 3. Portrait of Hitler's Nose and Serene River.

We are fortunate to know that the rotation was purposeful and inspired by a portrait of Hitler. So, with rock art, how do we know if the image was meant to be reversed or that sideways images may always represent death? Could they also represent concepts that have an affinity with an image that we associate with death?

### MYSTICAL SYMBOLISM

In this category, Figure 4, the images are placed upside down. There is a subcategory called *Reversed Images* that is just one category out of 30 representing concepts of *Mystical Symbolism*. Other aspects of *Reversed Images*, according to many Native American consultants, are attributed to altered states of consciousness. Many of the examples in Figure 4 seem to represent concepts of death. Notice that other little nuances of symbolism are combined that exclude the simplistic interpretation of death as the only possibility. For example, a dead man, as such, wouldn't be shooting sheep, 4B. Notice that all of the other types of symbolism they include also exude a sense of the mystical.

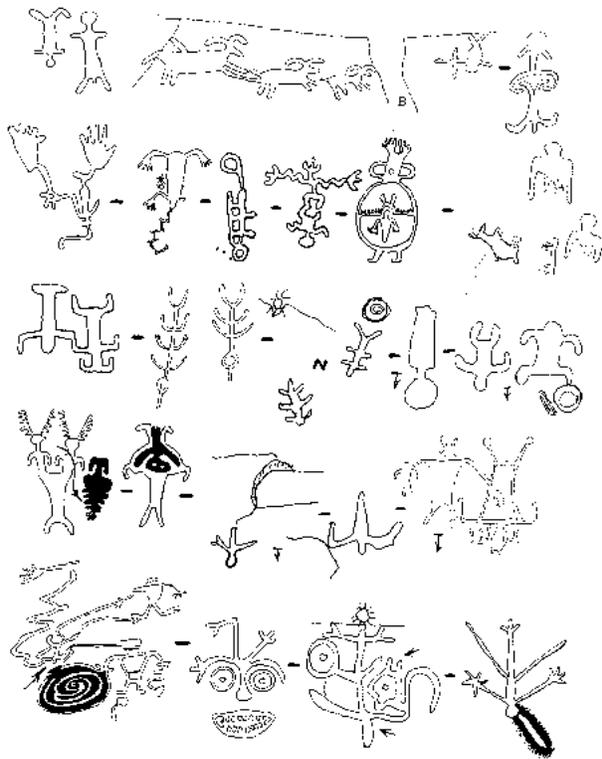


Figure 4. Reversed Images.

In 1987 I presented two papers on *Double Entities* (Warner 1990, 1994), another aspect of *Mystical Symbolism* that seemed to deal with human forms with more than the appropriate number of body parts. The concept associated with these forms seems to suggest the emergence of the spirit from the body. One subcategory of *Double Entities*, is "Reversible Images." These images, much like those on face cards, have two manners of doing this. In one instance, the top half mirrors the bottom half. In the other instance one half is a different image but when the figure is reversed they change places. In both situations they are just as understandable right-side-up as they are up-side-down. Study, and then reverse Figure 5 and you can see what I mean. By creating such an image, it seems that they are no doubt playing with higher levels of metaphysical symbolism beyond what some simply call "death."

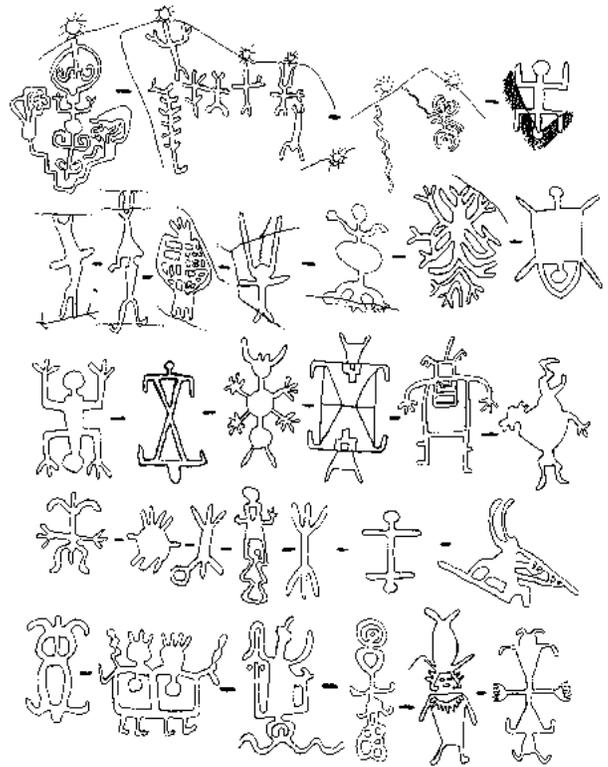


Figure 5. Reversible Images.

### Horizontal Images

*Horizontal Images*, are another category of *Mystical Symbolism* (Figure 6). How, many of them may simply be a statement of "death"? They may also express certain degrees of mysticism. Do dead men speak with light (6A)? Ok, now I'm going to throw you a curve ball (a pun for a rotated object). For those of you who have really seen 6B from Nine Mile Canyon or just a reproduction of it, *is it horizontal?* Again this is a trick question. Think about what I'm doing. For those of you who are not familiar with it, the real image has a vertical orientation. Does that help any?

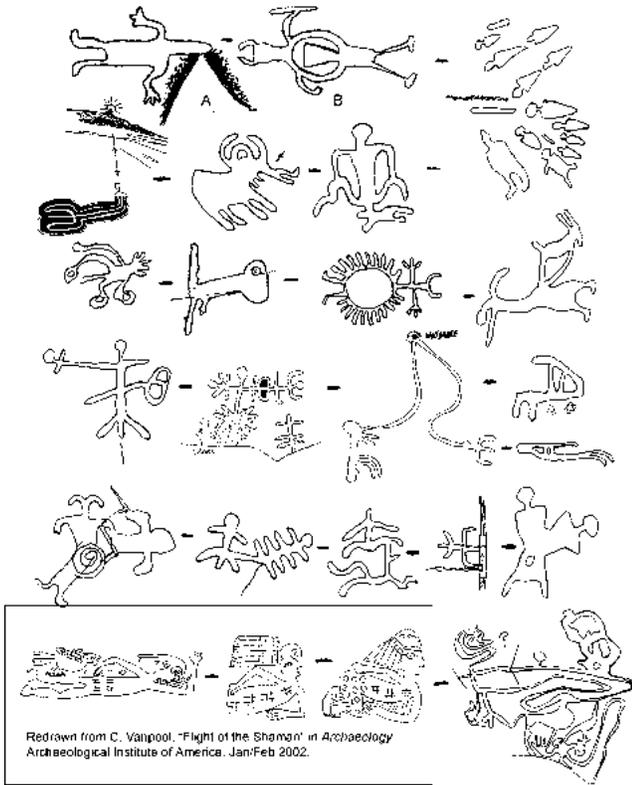


Figure 6. Horizontal Images.

Now, given that information, I will ask again, "Is this image horizontal?" I know what you're thinking, and many of you are missing at least some of the point. If I was an instructor in an Eoptic school of mysticism, and I walked into the class and turned this figure on its side and told you that you couldn't leave the classroom until you learned the lesson for that day, how many of you, (like the Zen student who simply nodded to his teacher in understanding) would understand what the lesson was in a rose from the Master that day? The eoptic way of teaching is without instruction. Students simply meditated on the object until they understand it. I honestly believe that a lot of rock art represents this type of situation.

It was obvious that there were other possible orientations, Figure 7. For example the "little arrow" is for orientation and indicates how the image is oriented on the rocks. In these illustrations the arrows all point down.

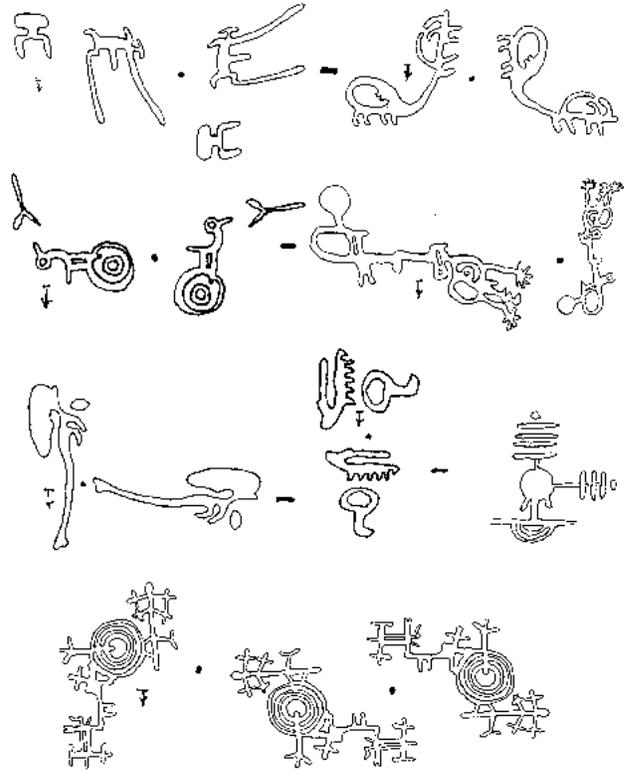


Figure 7. More or Less Obvious.

Socrates said "all I know is that I know nothing" in other words, the more that you learn, the more you realize how much you don't know. Here's what's nice about admitting that. If we really admit that we don't know anything, our mind is cleared of any preconceived notions (biases) that such-and-such a thing has to be either a this or a that. Why not a *this* and a *that* at the same time or even something totally different?

I illustrate this concept in an upcoming volume on Moab Rock Art. (in press). For example, I'm a man, a father, a brother, a son, a husband, an artist, painter, and I'd like to think I'm a rock art researcher, a student, and a teacher. As a soldier, my main occupation was a radio operator (Morse Code, encryption and decipherment), but I was cross trained in demolitions and weapons and was a paratrooper.

I'd also like to think I can help you to have several paradigm shifts to get you out of your pre-

sent mode of thinking about rock art. A study of rock art images is similar to quantum mechanics, when it begins to consider 'string' theories. It stops being science and starts becoming philosophy. If that is the case then we just have to get philosophical.

The art work of Caravaggio contained paradox after paradox. He loved to break every art canon he could. One of his critics stated that he came to destroy traditional art. He was a rebel. I love his work because he was, in my estimation, a mystical artist. I see many things going on in his art that I see in "rock art." He painted dead people as if they were alive, and living people as if they were dead. This has an application here. Some of what he did was very anti establishment, both of the Catholic Church as well as the art canons of the Western tradition of fine art.

A study of Caravaggio's work (Bersani and Dutoit 1998) reveals that his representations of people do not measure up to their models (nothing has a face value), but that the non-obvious is just as important as the obvious (ibid:8). I believe that what we identify as obvious in rock art images leads us away from the real purpose, the least obvious, often has more to do with what was really intended (nothing has a face value). Any unveiling of Caravaggio's secrets has to result in a new knowledge of one's self (ibid:66-7). True understanding or knowing - *Gnosis*, was not for the common people, but for the elite (who could understand it) and was not a form of rational knowledge. *Gnosis* could be translated as *insight*. It was an intuitive process of knowing oneself (Martin 1987:132).

A major theme in my Volume 1 of the Moab series (in press) states that before anyone can ever fully understand enigmatic images, one really has to have a better understanding of oneself. I tried to design that volume to help the reader with two discovery processes. First, the reader needed to assess what he or she is bringing to this subject, because that will influence how much they will understand and consequently learn. Second, to learn more they will

have to discover why they are that way, so they can learn about what remains hidden to them. This is a major lesson of Zen philosophy.

Caravaggio's secrets are both being offered and yet withheld (ibid:66). Like rock art, his art becomes the site where the world reappears, and appears for the 1<sup>st</sup> time - as the 'correspondence' of that design, and fail to design, the always mobile unity of phenomena (ibid:110). Much of what we see in these images can be understood at a higher level if we can open up ourselves to them.

The weightlessness of objects in Caravaggio's compositions reveals the horror of a solid form, the fear of the weight of material objects (ibid:58). That is no different from words used by those who have had to return to their bodies after an out of body experience. His work is an experiment with rationality (ibid: 15, 40), using symbolism that can't be metabolized (ibid:39-40), which resist being read (ibid:43) (nothing has a face value). He was just as articulate in portraying the invisible as he was the visible (ibid:51). That alone was a major part of most ancient world symbolism from art to architecture. The design of their creators was to make the invisible accessible to those who can only see the visible.

Caravaggio forced us to provide a verdict (ibid:47) after we have had to participate in his work (ibid:52). His art has its own grammar (ibid:53) just like "rock art." Those very same things could be said about the mystical artists who created rock art, especially when it concerns subjects such as life and death. It is hard to be objective and scientific when interpreting rock art. Science cannot deal with areas of abstract and metaphoric expression, an area that is not objective and quantifiable.

So, the exercise with Figures 5 -7 is to not take them too seriously. Instead, look at them without thinking about them. Let yourself *feel* them. Participate *in* them. Remember that there is no greater ignorance than contempt before any familiarity. And do we really have to decide? Not really. Why not? Because if we

have to decide, then we have to label them. That puts limits on what other possibilities and levels of symbolism are present.

They are just what they are, a *this* and a *that*, it seems. I present you with these illustrations as a rose. Learn from them what you will. If nothing more, you will be given the opportunity to get to know yourself just a little better and this exercise was worth the effort. This exercise will allow you to participate in the process of meaning. You will never look at rock art quite the same again. This exercise is an attempt to tap into your subconscious or creative mind that will provide you with your real truth. Here are some examples:

**Rotation: Man - Animal**

Figures 8 to 10 deal with the proposition that abstract elements may deal with the human form. Figure 8 contains a few abstractions that when rotated, hide a human form. Figure 9 when rotated, has forms that suggest a man-to-man relationship. These forms are upright images that contain a human-ness. When they are rotated they become other forms of human-ness.

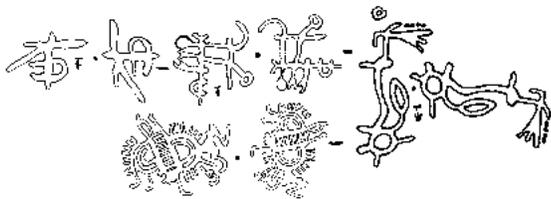


Figure 8. Abstract - Man.

The images on the left with the orientation arrow are the upright forms. The images on the right are the rotated forms.

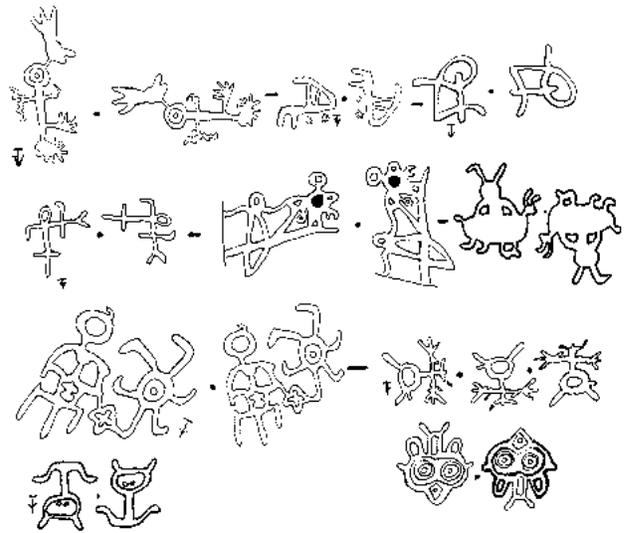


Figure 9. Man-to-Man Relationship.

Figure 10A illustrates upright images that are rotated in 10B. These human like images conceal a possible animal-ness when rotated. Many of these may represent one aspect of a symbol while another image appears when rotated. This exercise allows one to see another aspect of the image that was not obvious before. There is a clue there.

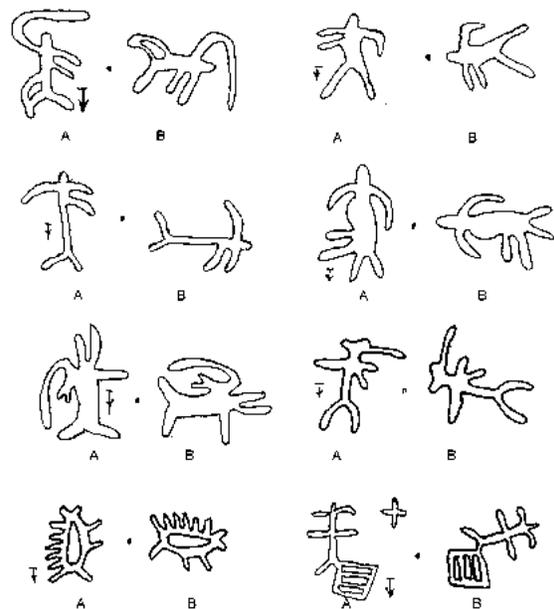


Figure 10. Man - Animal. A is the original position and B is the same image rotated clockwise 90 degrees

### Abstract – Animal

Figure 11-1 and 11-2 contains many abstract images as they appear on the rocks, but when rotated seem to have an animal likeness. The rotated images are often abstract, but still contain additional symbolism that is not as obvious from its original "upright" position.

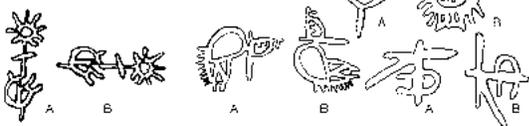
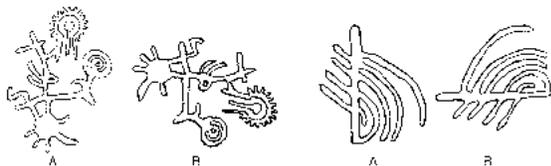


Figure 11-1. Man and Animal.

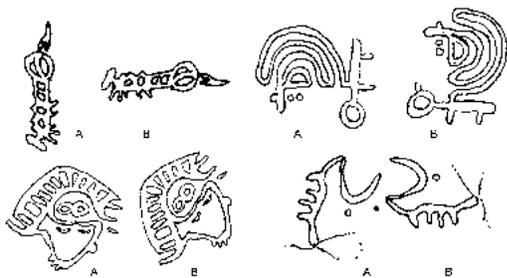


Figure 11-2. Abstract Animal.

### Animal – Animal

Figure 12 depicts animal-like images that are more animal-like when rotated.



Figure 12. Animal – Animal.

### Animal – Human

Figure 13 contains animal-like images that when rotated create a human-like image.

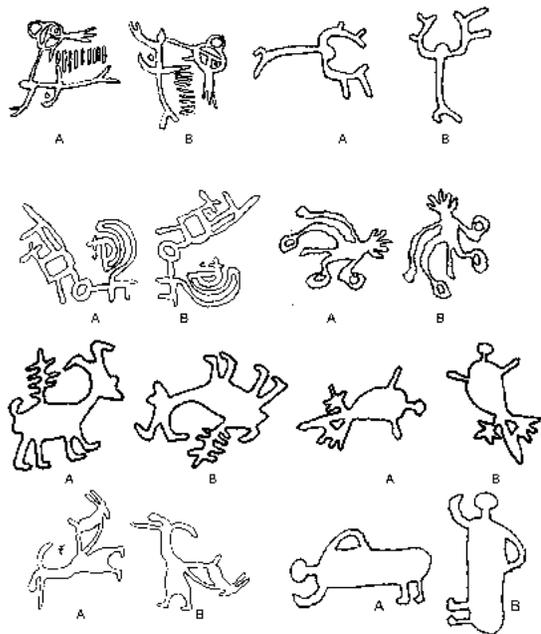


Figure 13. Animal – Human.

Figure 14 illustrates a more complicated concept by adding three or four different orientations.



Figure 14. Images in Three Directions.

According to Vastokas and Vastokas, (2001) a human form in petroglyphs found with legs spread out horizontally, sideways, or curved upwards, might represent a floating sensation, and, also represent the belief that the spirit is floating in that out-of-body experience or ecstatic state.

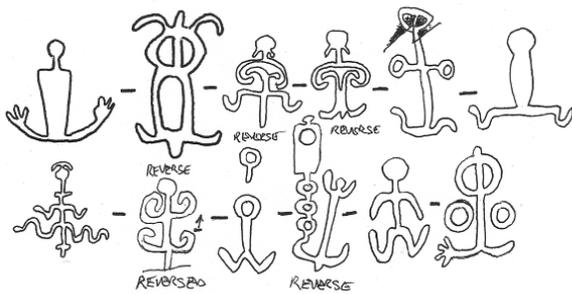


Figure 15. Images with Legs Spread Out of Curved Upwards.

### CULTURAL FILTERS

In Navajo ceremonial language many words describing movement use an aquatic metaphor.

Embedded in these metaphors are concepts of “horizontal”. The name of the town at the mouth of Canyon de Chelly, is Chinle. In Navajo it is Ch’inili. In Navajo the third person singular pronoun includes three beings, he, she, and it. Ch’inili means “the water (it) is flowing out” (of the canyon, understood with a horizontality implied). So if I said, ch’inili (the exact same word) in a ceremony, it could refer to any person (he or she) as “flowing out of” a hogan. The horizontal is implied, but not observed as such. Another example is the word for river, tooh nilini that translates as horizontally flowing water.

### MULTIPLE MEANINGS

Snakes are prime examples of a symbol with multiple concepts associated with them, two of which are wisdom and horizontal movement. A snake is a sacred image in mystical symbology. Flowing or floating on water is another metaphor of these sacred images for the mystical experience. In American Indian sign language, the word “river” is signed by a horizontal movement of the hand with slight wave-like fashion extending outward as if flowing. Note without the horizontal aspects in all of these examples, the ideas they portray would not be understandable.

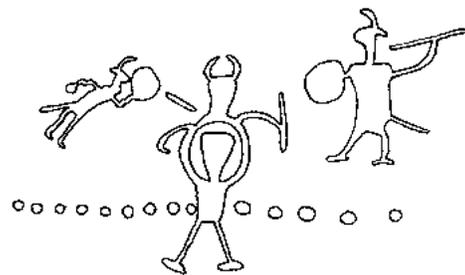


Figure 15. Figure 6b rotated counterclockwise.

Rotate 6b counter clockwise and you get the top figure in Figure 15. Even if upright, is he still horizontal if he is in a metaphysical state of being? Notice that his arms are up around his head to create the “emerging being” that is doing the fighting for him. Can you feel that he is not in a normal frame of reference? What his exact state of being really is isn’t necessary to

know if we just understand that it is not normal. If that is so, it isn't important whether he is having an out-of-body experience or just an altered state of consciousness. Or is he just one of those mystical warriors who have more abilities than a normal warrior. Could this image then be translated as both horizontal and in an out-of-body experience/visionary, or whatever word they used to describe such a state in their language? Yes, he is horizontal if horizontal simple refers us to the idea of his being in a state of metaphysical awareness. One of the contenders seems to throw a projectile at him. They seem to be up in the air, up above his ground line and around the emerging aspect's head. The one on our left is off kilter, at a 45 degree angle, more or less horizontal. Is he then a mystical warrior as well? Look at all of these other illustrations in that light. They are all mystical to various degrees.

### DEGREES

After having fun playing with these images, I decided to go back to other images I would not have thought to look at as rotatable in 180 degrees. Figure 16 illustrates examples of two legged animals which when rotated are almost, for the most part, identical as if they were "up-right." Remember that the image without the orientation arrow is the reversed image. The middle set in the 4th row illustrates that there are some which just do not belong or that just do not work. They are what I refer to as beyond the limits of the variation of this two legged, two eared/horned, theme.

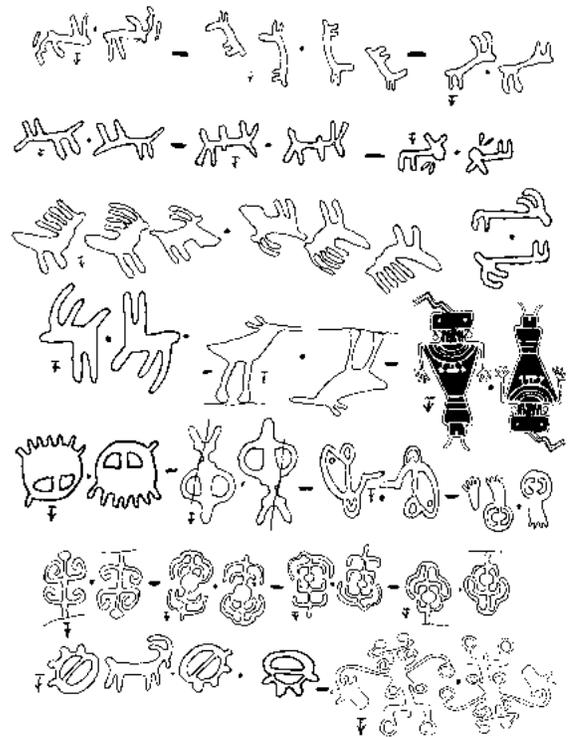


Figure 16. Rotated 180 Degrees.

Figure 17 starts you out with one that is very obviously a candidate in the reversible category, but the rest are not all that obvious unless you are more of an abstract thinker.

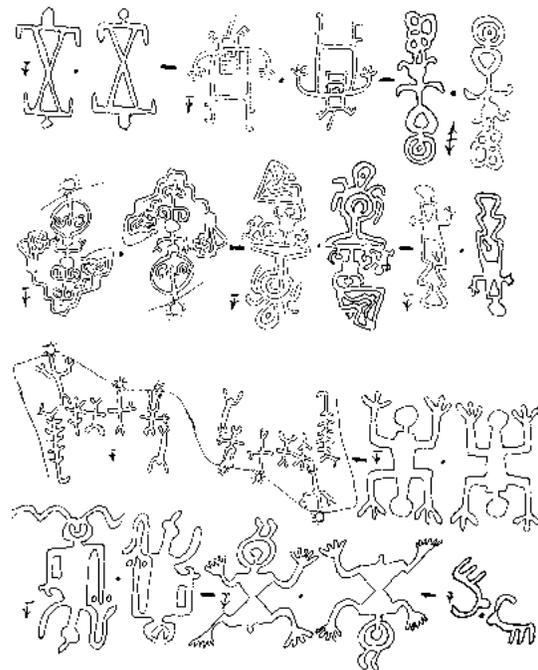


Figure 17. More Rotated 180 Degrees.

Remember, in the words of Bersani and Dutoit (1998:72) about Caravaggio's secrets, that "truth" is just the appearance of being. It is his illuminated rationality; there is nothing to know. The only thing we need be consciousness of is the movement or moment in which we participate.

### REVIEW

This paper has challenged how you determine the truth. Your truth is what you understand from what you see. What you see depends on the personal filters you have and ultimately your understanding. You only see what you

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want to see. That is your reality. It may be just an illusion, as it is in the realm of mysticism and quantum physics.

For an even better understanding after you have read this, let it sit for a while and then come back and go through these illustrations, and without thinking just let your eyes take them in without any judgment as to what this or that may or may not be. But just let your imagination play with them. Then give up the idea that they have to be anything at all, but might just have the possibility to be more than what we can possibly imagine.

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