Articulating Hybridity
Structurating Situations and Indexical Events in North-European Rock Art

Fredrik Fahlander

*From the particular, one can carefully and boldly move up to the general; from general theories, there is no way of looking at the particular.*

Leopold von Ranke (1867–90:325)

The ‘situational event’ is an interesting but poorly elaborated point of departure in archaeology and history. The interest in the particular in opposition to the general fluctuates throughout the history of the social sciences and humanities: the postmodern epistemology of the late twentieth century typically emphasized heterogeneity in contrast to a modernist totalising and homogeneous perspective. But in the beginning of the twenty-first century the pendulum seems to have swung back to an increased interest in the long term and in generalizations. This is not to say that the choice of scale is particularly ideologically sensitive. It is a much more complex issue that cannot really be approached from a binary view. Scale and perspective are not only connected to the type of questions we ask, but also to the type of data we choose to work with. This has different implications in different disciplines. In sociology, for instance, level of scale involves different data in terms of qualitative or quantitative approaches, or of people’s subjective experience of things relative to how they actually act (Ritzer 1992:74–5). Historians struggle with similar, seemingly incommensurable, data ranging from personal letters and accounts to state archives and census lengths (White 1978). In anthropology the issue of scale revolves around the question of the subjectivity of field notes and informants, as well as of culture relativism versus cross-cultural patterns (Engelke 2008:13). Archaeology shares some of these concerns, but differs in others, which implies that there may be a typical archaeological way of dealing with questions of scale and perspective. In this text I wish to discuss the potential in departing
from the small scale as a way to get at larger processes. By elaborating on the semiotic concept of ‘indexicality’ and the ‘flat ontology’ of actor-network theory, I wish to explore the junctures and linkages of such processes – evoking the invisible spanner in the works within larger developments. The approach will be illustrated by an example concerning the hybrid relations in the rock art of northern Europe during the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age.

**Events, situations and occasions**

Historians, archaeologists and anthropologists have in various ways and from different perspectives emphasized the potential importance of events, situations and occasions (e.g. Geertz 1973; Wise 1980:164-73; Mitchell 1987; Sahlins 1991:38-40; Badiou 2005; Sewell 2005:197-70). By and large, these and other studies of the particular tend to revolve around certain propositions; one is the *event as history*. Clifford Geertz masterfully illustrates this approach in his ‘reading’ of the Balinese cock-fight as a microcosm of Balinese society (1973). Despite the interest in details, this tradition nonetheless mainly employs tangible events as a concrete illustration of the more immanent general structures. Another theme is *history as events* – that is, history perceived as causes and consequences of a sequence of pivotal events – mainly battles, inventions or catastrophes. The opposite approach, *events as events*, is developed as a critique of ‘grand narratives’ and presents history as individual fragments. Singular locales or events are studied individually without trying to make them fit a general narrative (Magnússon 2003). There is also *history in events*, in which the small scale is the point of departure in order to access larger structures. One well-known example is Le Roy Ladurie’s microhistorical study on the medieval town of Montaillou. His study focused on a single location (Montaillou) using individual and particular textual statements as a way to approach general structural processes in medieval France. Le Roy Ladurie stressed that certain events, especially ‘traumatic’ or ‘creative’ ones, constitute intersections with the potential to break patterns, and as such are critical to understanding large scale processes (1979:111-6; cf. Wise 1980:139).

These approaches to the small-scale event have different virtues and problems, but although they point out the importance of the particular, they nonetheless tend to emphasize the extraordinary – the ‘structurating
situations’ in which a balance is tipped. Such an approach is, however, less appropriate in archaeological analysis since the archaeological record is disproportionate and basically non-representative, which makes it difficult to separate the unique from the normal. Even though there certainly are pivotal moments in the past they are not likely to be the sole cause of change. Change may also be the result of small, hardly noticeable divergences from the norm. Societies are always fluid to some extent, involving misunderstandings, creative and pragmatic solutions that normally are temporary with minimal or no measurable lasting effects. However, in some situations small changes and alterations in practice can gradually add up, slowly diverging from the general norms and traditions (Gladwell 2000:12; Sewell 2005:226). Over time it may come to a point where the way things are being done has diverged too much from the ideas of the same practices and tip the balance (or vice versa). Michel Foucault worked along these lines in his particular variant of ‘archaeology’ (1969). Instead of discussing formative events in history he studied the subtext of individual statements in historical texts in order to reveal the discourse in terms of social formations and epistemes (major cognitive epochs in history). His approach to the event in relation to the whole is in some respect analogous to the process of Freudian psychology. It is not the general narrative of a dream that is interesting; it is the small annoying conflicting details, the ‘symptoms’ in the language of Jacques Lacan, that are telling (Žižek 2001:192).

Le Roy Ladurie and Focault both point out that the particular is caught up in nested relations between the past, present and possible futures, and not simply constituted by the local setting but also in various ways with the ‘world outside’ (Koselleck 1985:110). The corollary for archaeologists is that failure to take account of either the specific elements of a local event or its relations to the outside will lead to the misunderstanding of past events (Knapp 1992:13). The relation between general structures and particular events is one of the Gordian knots of social science. Is the social process best understood from ‘above’, the structural level, or from ‘below’ through the experiences of the individuals? The problem is often formulated as a matter of choice, but, of course, such a binary view is merely a poor metaphor for the complexity of social life. Anthony Giddens’ structuration theory (1984) is one among many ‘middling-theories’ that have tried to find a third way between the macro – micro divide. However, as many critics have pointed out, such theories are only valid in a general sense. In real
life the social is much more complex and varied; in a given situation some agents are more powerful than others and the influence of social structure fluctuates in strength from case to case (Fahlander 2003:19). This is thus another argument that suggests particular events are more suitable points of departure than large scale generalizing perspectives. The main point is, however, to ‘open up’ particular events and also to explore significant relations that transgress the particular context of a situation.

I will elaborate on the concept of ‘indexical events’ here as a means to capture the material traces of a process in action. In the study of such events, we need not necessarily understand a particular response to a structuring situation; it may be sufficient to register a change or slight divergence from ‘the normal way of doing things’. The main point is thus not to identify pivotal moments – a specific point in time and space that tipped the balance and changed the course of a process – but to identify and discuss some of those mundane, ordinary or formal situations that show symptoms or glitches in the cultural process. In order to develop an archaeological way of working with particular and local data in order to get at large scale process we need to find ways of understanding how the local and the general refract each other. Here we can find inspiration from a relational standpoint as it is pronounced within actor-network theory. The notion of ‘flat ontology’ is especially helpful when relating the small and local displacements to a more general structural process of the large scale.

The semiotics of a flat ontology: index and oligopticon

In recent years there has been renewed interest in the semiotics of Pierce (1998) in archaeology and anthropology. Piercian semiotics is based upon a conceptual triad consisting of icon (similarity between things), symbol (determined by tradition and convention in representation) and index (relationships beyond symbolism and apparent resemblance). While icon and symbol are familiar archaeological concepts, index and indexicality may require some elaboration. Typical examples of indexical relationships are ‘thunder’ as index of ‘lightning’ or ‘smoke’ as index of ‘fire’. The phenomena are clearly related as the one is an effect and consequence of the other, but the precise forms of cause and effect are not by any means given. It is important to recognize that index need not necessarily refer to the intentions or agency of the producer;
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index can also be employed in a poststructural sense – referring to a mix of individual intentions, ideologies and material circumstances. Alfred Gell, for instance, uses index as a way of signifying ‘secondary’ agency of images and objects. The agency of the artist, he argues, is stored in the object and can have a multitude of effects in future milieus and contexts (1998:12–22). Another recent archaeological example is Díaz-Guardamino’s analysis of prehistoric Spanish stone menhirs. She employs indexicality as a way to explore the multiplicity of ways in which different objects can relate to each other in meaningful ways. She writes: ‘… besides vertical stratigraphic relations, indexicality comprises the physical contiguity between material features on the one hand, between material features and practices on the other, at varied spatial scales and beyond temporal structures’ (Díaz-Guardamino 2008:33–4). An indexical relationship thus does not rely on either apparent similarity or cultural continuity or contact. Indexical relations work within and between contexts and resonate through the local and the global in a wide network of materialized practices transcending time and space. The concept thus has a great potential to relate event to structure and vice versa. I will use it here as an alternative way of thinking about how seemingly different things may be related.

While semiotics may offer a way of thinking about the nested relations between materialities, practice and ideology across different scales it does not offer much guidance in how to apply a relational perspective in practice. Actor-network theory might be helpful in this matter. Although actor-network theory comes in different flavours, it is basically ‘a ruthless application of semiotics’ (Law 1999:3). In particular, the notion of ‘flat ontology’ is important in this context. It objects to the view that there are different ‘levels’, such as local and global perspectives, from which social phenomena can be studied accordingly. Instead, Latour stresses that such abstractions are social constructions invented by modern sociology and that the world actually is ‘flat’ (2005:165–72). The local and the global, the big and the small, he argues, are ‘related, connected, attached and associated with local practice’. First, after we have ‘redistributed the local’, we can consider the ways in which these connections work and ‘whatever dark matter must be between them’ (Latour 2005:177). In a somewhat similar way to how Foucault studied the symptoms in the social discourse, Latour invents the notion of the oligopticon (2005:181). It is the opposite of the all-seeing panopticon made popular by Foucault (1977:195–228).
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Instead of seeing everything, the oligopticon is a space from which one can only see ‘a little bit’. In other terms, the concept signifies the junctures and the crossroads where the macro and micro intersect: ‘a place through which the world passes’. In modern society it can concern parliaments, courtrooms, offices, abandoned factories, or any localized and material places where people do things. Latour stresses that any social structure needs to operate somewhere, by someone, involving some kind of materialities (2005:220). The only way to study such an entity without resorting to metaphysical reasoning is to establish connections between the local and the global. When faced with a general structure or a large-scale process, we need to ask: where does ‘it’ take place? In what building or area? With what materialities? By whom? In what way?

Although Latour’s main purpose is to describe and simply map out the relations of a particular network (2005:136-7, 156-7, 184) it is a promising approach in relating large-scale processes with local practice.

Fig. 1. Map of north-western Eurasia with the location of sites mentioned in the text. The map is a two point equidistant projection (35N 40E & 35N 140E) and is a product of NASA’s Blue Marble project.
In fact, archaeology is in many ways better suited to employing a flat ontology approach because our primary data mainly consists of localised material traces of action. The archaeological problem is thus the reverse of sociology; connecting known, local traces of action to unknown larger processes. Instead of departing from pre-conceived large scale entities, we need to begin at the local setting, from the events, working from the ‘bottom up’ rather than from the ‘top down’ (cf. Díaz-Guardamino 2008:39; Anderson & Harrison 2010:19-22). The concept of indexicality may prove interesting here since local practices in many ways are indices of macro-structures and processes. In the following I will illustrate how such a relational perspective can be helpful in understanding complex processes in the past. This is exemplified through a discussion on the development of rock art in northern Europe during the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age.

**An art of two traditions**

All over the northern hemisphere images have been carved and pecked on exposed rock faces more or less continuously from c. 8000 BC to the present day (e.g. Vogt 2006, see figure 2). In Scandinavian rock art research, a distinction is generally made between a northern, hunter-
gatherer tradition and a southern tradition emerging at the beginning of the Bronze Age (Malmer 1981). The roots of the idea of two traditions of rock art in northern Europe were already prevalent in the nineteenth century. The focus then was on the southern tradition, which through comparison with metal objects was attributed to the Bronze Age (1800-500 BC). The petroglyphs were mainly understood in diffusionist terms by relating them to contemporary ‘oriental’ and Mediterranean imagery and texts (Ekholm 1916). Although the diffusionist element is downplayed today, the main idea of the southern tradition as a continentally oriented expression, reflecting Bronze Age cosmology and ideology, still persists (Malmer 1999). What appears as peculiar in contemporary rock art research is that although overlapping between the traditions frequently occurs (e.g. Alta, Kanozero, Nämforsen and Vyg) few attempts have been made to relate them in ways other than stylistically and typologically (but see Sognnes 2001:124). This is the case despite the fact that it would seem logical that the ‘innovation’ of a southern tradition is at least in some ways related to the older (but contemporary) northern one. There are indeed a number of differences between the two, but they also have more in common than what ‘meets the eye’ (cf. Nordbladh 1980:16; Vogt 2005:226; Bradley 2009:140-1, 2010:197). The point here is that a sharp line is difficult to maintain.

Fig. 3. Left: a panel from Lake Onega in north-western Russia dated to the late Neolithic (Ravdonikas 1936: plate 13). Right: a panel from Aspeberget in south-western Sweden (RAÄ Tanum 12:1) from the Late Bronze Age. Photo montage by Klaus Kniep, SHFA, id 164.
between them, especially since the dating methods are rather blunt (Fahlender 2012:105). Instead of interpreting the petroglyphs from either a Stone Age or Bronze Age context, a ‘non-representational’ perspective (Pollard 2005:47) may succeed in opening up a space in which the two traditions are allowed intersect.

**Indexical relations: prolongation and repetition**

An interesting aspect present in both traditions is the practice of extending certain extremities of some motifs. This is clearly a significant trait considering the extra effort that such ‘unnecessary extensions’ require due to the resilient materiality of the rock (Fahlender 2012:100). Interestingly, this mode of representation is found both among petroglyphs of the circumpolar hunter-gatherers as well as in the southern Bronze Age tradition. Figure 3 shows part of a Neolithic panel at Lake Onega in the district Poudoj in north-western Russia, and one panel from Aspeberget on the Swedish south-west coast dated to the Bronze Age (RAÄ Tanum 12:1). Note how the necks of three of the bird-like figures are extended to extreme proportions. A similar trait can be observed on the Bronze Age panel on which the human character’s legs and arms (or handles of the axes) are extended in a similar manner. Such prolongations are frequently found at sites of both traditions and thus indicate a relationship across contexts that constitutes something different from iconic similarity in style or design.

Another common aspect of these two panels is a specific repetitive element. Both sites include boat motifs stacked on top of each other. At the Onega panel there are only two boats while the Aspeberget panel contains sixteen almost identical boats beside a column of five visible in the image. The stacking of boats indicates a cumulative process of recurring visits at a site, but may also represent some sort of tallying. Malmer speculated from a ritual perspective that repetitions in general mirrored an ‘urgent request’ (1989:27). Tilley interpreted the practice of stacking as a way of representing social groups – ‘boat-loads of people’ as he puts it (2004:195–6). In the hunter-gatherer context similar repetitive configurations may perhaps indicate some sort of hunting tally (Fig. 4). Whatever it may signify it is nonetheless another mutual aspect between the northern and southern traditions. Prolongation and stacking can thus be discussed in term of material indices, or as ‘citations’ (Jones 2006), that transgress temporal, cultural,
and spatial contexts. The practice of stacking boats may be a result of recurrent visits at the locale, but they differ from many other effects of accumulation since they share alignment and are clearly related to each other. In this sense, it should be safe to assume that stacking of motifs is also an intentional articulation.

It is important to emphasize that it does not automatically follow that the two types of ‘citations’ share the same meaning, intentions, purpose, or even same origin. The important aspect of prolongation and stacking is that they are more closely related to the practice of making petroglyphs that transcend simple instances of stylistic similarities. Prolongation and stacking may seem less alike than similarities in style, yet more the *same* than the apparently similar. They suggest a more intimate relationship between the two traditions that iconographical

Fig. 4. Inuit hunting tally from c. AD 1900 (Frères 1922:21).
analyses of style tend to ignore. It is also interesting to note that pro-
longation and stacking seem more or less unique for the petroglyphs
of the northern European region.

It can be argued that the prolongation of certain elements of a
motif is a graphic way of emphasizing elements in a ritual or narrative
communication. In a hunter-gatherer context prolongation may be
related to hunting magic, depicting the birds in a certain way in order
to increase the probability of capturing some. In a Bronze Age context
this element may be transferred to fit the different social circumstances
and instead indicates ‘war-magic’ or even ‘trade-magic’ depending on
which element, the axe or the human, may have been of importance.
It is thus interesting that it is not the same elements or motifs that
have been extended, but that prolongation has ‘moved’ from animals
to humans.

A similar reasoning is also valid for the practice of stacking boats.
In the Stone Age panels there are rarely more than two boats in each
column, but in the Bronze Age tradition the number of stacked boats
generally increases over time and may reach over a dozen in total. If
such relations were to be quantified comprising a larger number of
locales and studied in detail, we may be able to discuss what such
displacements may signify in social terms. So far, however, the examples
of prolongation and stacking are but two material articulations that
emphasize relational aspects of the practice of making petroglyphs
in northern Europe. There is clearly some ‘dark matter’ between the
two traditions that cannot solely be attributed to simple acculturation
– there lies a much more complicated process behind the two ways of
articulating images in stone. To continue to elaborate on what the ‘dark
matter’ may consist of we need to be more specific and find a suitable
oligopticon.

Iconoclash as an index of general developments

In order to trace indices of a general development in the rock art of
northern Europe, we need to find a juncture between the local and
the global as suggested by the flat ontology of actor-network theory.
We need to go into detail and study specific places, materialities and
practices in which the local and the global were articulated. Although
it may be difficult to identify particular network relations between
things and people in the past, it should be possible to utilize the
evidence of practices and sequences of events at a certain time and place as tangible, localized traces of indexical events. Such a locality could be situated almost anywhere in the south Scandinavian zone, but one locale is particularly interesting in this context: Hemsta in the county of Uppland on the Swedish east coast. Uppland comprises one of the densest concentrations of petroglyphs of southern Sweden. Hitherto 7,721 ships, 190 human, 185 animals, 309 ‘foot soles’, 128 circle features, and 612 other/indeterminable motifs together with over 19,000 cup marks have been registered in this county alone (Goldhahn et al. 2010:7). The highest density of figurative rock art in Uppland is situated outside the modern city of Enköping about 100 km north-west of the Swedish capital Stockholm (fig 1 & 6). The area comprises a great number of different motifs ranging from animals, foot soles, human figures and, of course, lots of boats in many different shapes, sizes and forms. It is difficult to precisely date the petroglyphs, but they generally span from the Late Neolithic to the Iron Age of which the majority are from the Bronze Age (Kjellén & Hyenstrand 1977:105).

The Hemsta panel (RAÅ Boglösa 131:1) is a small rock outcrop located at the entrance of what was a shallow cove during the Late Neolithic and Bronze Age. The highest point of the outcrop is c. 25.2 m.a.s.l., which suggests that it was submerged until the end of the third
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millennium BC when it gradually became visible above the surface. There is a broad range of different motifs present at the site, including animals and geometric figures, but the vast majority of the figurative images consist of various boat-like motifs. The Hemsta panel is informative in this discussion because a horizontal stratigraphy has been established consisting of three main phases (Fahlander 2012:106-8). In Figure 5 the phases are illustrated in different colours. The first motifs consist of two shallowly, smoothly pecked boats with hatched hulls together with a group of animals (red). The second phase consists of the two columns of distinctly cut stacked boats (blue) that superimpose the hatched ones. The third phase (green) consisted of a number of smaller boat images that also superimpose the red, but are adjusted to fit the gaps between the blue ones. The black, light-blue and grey coloured motifs are not discussed further here (but see Fahlander 2012:109).

An interesting aspect of this sequence is the abrupt change from the first two delicately pecked boats to the columns of distinctly cut boat-motifs which effectively fill the available surface and prevent any additional images. The almost monumental style of the two columns of stacked ships superimposing the shallow ones may indeed constitute a classic example of an iconoclash (Latour 2002; cf. Bradley 2010:199). The large boats dominate the space, not only by size and depth, but also by their consistent alignment: in a sense they ‘kill’ the previous images. The subsequent third phase of smaller boats, seemingly adjusted to the large ones, may represent a case of relating to the past – perhaps in a similar way to how secondary burials sometimes relate to a previous burial mound.

Another important aspect to note is the joint boat and animal of the first phase. This is another link between the Bronze Age and Stone Age traditions. Different configurations and transformations of animals and boats are well known from Neolithic contexts (Sjöstrand 2011:123), but are quite rare in the southern tradition. This instance is important since it hints that the first phase at Hemsta may actually pre-date the Bronze Age (cf. Ling 2012:52). There are, of course, many ways to interpret this sequence of events, but it is difficult not to view the second phase as aggressive towards the first. This also suggests that the different phases may be material articulations of different groups of people, with or without first-hand knowledge of each other.
**Material articulations of a middle-ground?**

The Hemsta sequence does indeed add some interesting aspects to the discussion. We should not, however, make the mistake and directly attribute certain styles or practices to either the northern or southern tradition, nor to any particular collective of people. Whether petroglyphs were produced by settled locals or by visitors is a persistent question in the research-history of rock art. Kjellén and Hyenstrand advocate a local origin of the Upplandic petroglyphs, suggesting that different clusters of images were made by people of different local ‘territories’ (1977:28–9). Others have promoted the idea that such clusters are instead to be associated with some kind of gatherings or meetings between locals and outsiders (e.g. Käck 2009:147). The common boat motif and the close spatial relation to water have lead many to suggest that the petroglyphs were primarily made by ‘maritime groups’ during departing or disembarking, at initiation rituals, or while waiting during

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**Fig. 6.** The location of the Hemsta panel showing its contemporary water level (c. 20 m above present level). The dots represent panels with figurative motifs in the area (based on Wessman 2010:30).
temporary stops ashore on the journey (Ling 2008:242, 2012:92-7; cf. Nordenborg-Myhre 2004; Wessman 2010:56). However, the question of who was involved in the production of the imagery is difficult to answer from a general point of view. Presumably, this is likely to have varied over time and between locales.

In the case of the Enköping petroglyphs, however, we might be able to elaborate a little on this with the help of spatial patterns and the information gathered from the Hemsta sequence. Figure 6 shows the distribution of figurative motifs in the area in relation to an approximate Bronze Age water level. A large island in the west made the waters around the main area of petroglyphs a shallow cove well suited for both landing and coast-bound activities. It is apparent that the main concentrations of petroglyphs are situated on the mainland generally facing the cove. In contrast, the island in the east is practically devoid of images – it only comprises two small panels with a few boats (RAÄ Vallby 17:1 and RAÄ Vårfrukyrka 226:1) located at the northern and southern entrances to the cove. The lack of figurative motifs on the rocks in this quite large island is especially striking when comparing the abundance on the eastern shores of the bay (cf. Ling 2012:89).

Fig. 7. A tentative illustration of how the Hemsta outcrop may have looked at the beginning of the second millennium BC (viewed from the mainland towards the island in the west).
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Upon closer inspection it is also evident that the majority of the carvings generally face the waterside and judging by the local rate of shore regression they were produced very close to the water’s edge. During the transition from the Neolithic to the Early Bronze Age the Hemsta site, for instance, was nothing but a small rock at the entrance to the cove, probably mainly frequented by seals and sea birds (Fig. 7).

How may we interpret this particular development of the rock art during this period? The two different examples presented here emphasize different aspects of the practice. The case of prolongation and stacking illustrates the apparent relations between the northern and southern traditions. The Hemsta sequence adds to this example by indicating some sort of conflict or radical change during the early formative phase during the Late Neolithic – Early Bronze Age. This, however, does not necessarily suggest that the hypothetical antagonists were travelling hunters versus settled farmers – the petroglyphs in the Enköping area may be the result of any marine-oriented constellations moving about in a ‘middle-ground’ articulating their worlds by making images in stone at the water’s edge. The meaning, purpose or choice of motif for these images is at this stage somewhat irrelevant. Rather than attributing a particular style or a phase to a specific constellation of people it can suffice to view the development as comprising local and material indices of hybridity.

A typical feature of such a process is often that new practices and ways of doing things emerge because of a mixture of misunderstandings, pragmatics, opportunism, conservatism and power struggle (Fahlander 2007). The idea of making images in stone was certainly known in southern Scandinavia long before the Bronze Age, but the incitement to start making them was probably a part of changing social and material circumstances during the beginning of the second millennium BC (cf. Sognnes 2001:125). The relational links with the old northern tradition suggests that northern hunters played some part in this development, but the actual production may have been enforced by any of the fractions in the area to suit their aims and purposes. The south Scandinavian Bronze Age style may thus be neither a continuation or acculturation from the Stone Age tradition, nor an indigenous invention, but rather a ‘hybrid effect’; an implementation of an old practice that takes new forms and meanings in the course of the Bronze- and Iron Ages in southern Scandinavia. The Hemsta sequence supports this hypothesis through the aesthetic differences between the first
and the second phases of petroglyphs, and through the iconoclastic index of conflict over the limited, but apparently important, space at the top of the outcrop.

**Summary: rock art as indexical events**

In this text, I have elaborated on the relations between the small-scale situation and large-scale processes. Recognizing the differences between the different social sciences and their varying types of data, I have argued for a specific archaeological approach. Instead of categorizing the problem in binary terms of micro and macro I have found inspiration in the concept of a ‘flat ontology’ as it is formulated within actor-network theory. It suggests that large scale processes are always materialized somewhere, directly or indirectly associated with particular materialities and practices. Of pivotal importance for archaeological studies of processes is that it needs to be specific rather than general, and to move from the bottom up rather than from the top down. If not, there is a great risk of falling into circular arguments in which the event confirms the general rather than being independently analysed. The traditional historical concepts of events, moments and situations tend to be significant mainly when discussed from the top down. In a prehistoric context, where the general structures are less known, there is a need for a different approach. I have suggested reasoning in terms of ‘structurating situations’, somewhat similar to ‘formative events’ in episode-based history, but which operate on a more mundane level of everyday practice. However, since such situations are generally difficult to establish archaeologically, I have suggested that change and ruptures in large scale processes can be studied implicitly through ‘indexical events’. Such situations comprise the small alterations and displacements in everyday practice, which directly or indirectly may be interpreted as indices of a changing social and material context.

The relations between the Stone Age circumpolar hunter and the south Scandinavian Bronze Age rock art traditions are employed here as an illustrative example. These two traditions are generally perceived as more or less different articulations. In particular, the research on south Scandinavian Bronze Age rock art has neglected the evident relationship between the two and instead favoured a continental frame of reference. However, the examples provided here concerning aspects of a common ‘visual grammar’ (prolongations and stacking), point to a
much closer relationship between the Stone Age and the Bronze Age rock art traditions. This is not an argument for turning the gaze from the south to the north in the search for comparisons or origins. The shared grammatical aspects are instead seen as relational indices of hybridity rather than the result of diffusion or acculturation. From such a ‘non-representational’ perspective, the southern tradition is not necessarily a continuity of the earlier hunter art, nor a continental inspired innovation, but rather a hybrid effect, the emergence of something that was partly new, originating from encounters between different groups in the flux between different lifestyles and traditions during the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age.

References

Abbreviations


RAÄ number= according to the ancient monuments registry (Fornminnesregistret), based on parishes and current number within the parish.


Literature


