

The Radionic Object

Duncan Laurie

Alyce Santoros has proposed in *Philosoprops* that “there are illustrative works that have caused profound shifts in the way entire populations envision their place in the universe”. Termed ‘philosoprops’, these iconic images—think the DNA spiral (1952), the ‘Blue Marble’ photo of earth from space (1972), da Vinci’s ‘Vitruvian Man’ drawing of human proportions (est. 1500) fulfill the function of a bright light bulb going off in the collective psyche.

Immediately I asked myself, What was the original philosoprop? How does the information contained in the philosoprops alter consciousness? Do these seminal objects or works radiate an actual energy that is broadcast into the mind of the viewer, or is the illumination purely cognitive? In essence, what power does an image contain and project that it might alter our entire view of reality?

In general, the success of an art form is measured by how well the art form stimulates the viewer. That response is a form of resonance, what the art makes us think or feel. Alyce is taking this notion to another level. She is asserting that certain art forms, or objects in the case of the philosoprop, can completely change our notion of who we are.

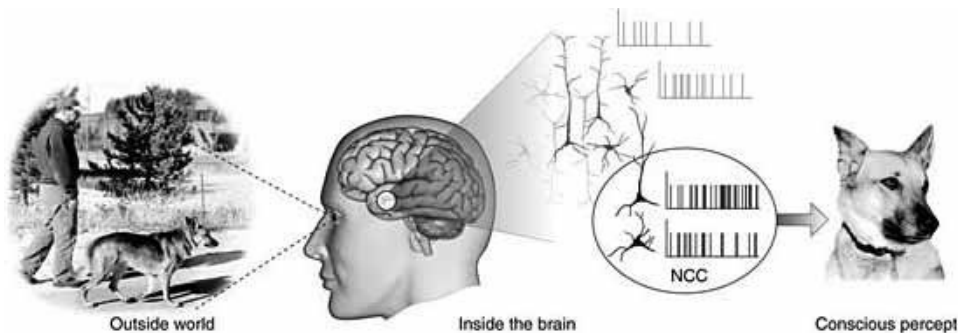
The power to alter perception contained in the philosoprop suggests information turns energetic at the point of impact on the viewer. Something radiates from the object into the consciousness of the perceiver, resonating energetically, perceived as feeling, but often with subliminal aspects as well. I employ a term for this process: ‘radionic’, for it appears the transaction is both broadcast of pure information as well as radiation of energy, in the sense work is done on the viewer, changing their consciousness. ‘Radionic’ is a hybrid term combining ‘radio’ for the propagation of mass free information and ‘radiation’ for the energy required to do so. I’m employing the term ‘radionic object’ to render in my own fashion Alyce’s *Philosoprop*, especially to describe its ancient origin and function in our artistic and historical past.

Representation of consciousness from the seventeenth century — “[RobertFluddBewusstsein17Jh](#)” by Robert Fludd - Utriusque cosmi maioris scilicet et minoris [...] historia, tomus II (1619), tractatus I, sectio I, liber X, De triplici animae in corpore visione. Licensed under Public domain via [Wikimedia Commons](#).

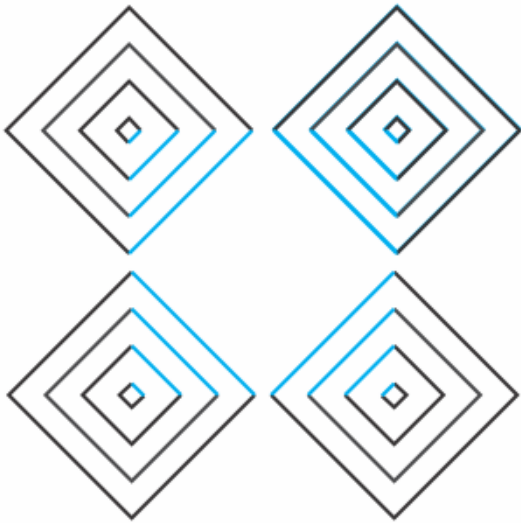
Consciousness

First, one needs to consider the medium through which such a discussion takes place---consciousness. Of the various definitions available, I particularly liked the initial description that appears in Wikipedia, because it references consciousness in terms of an external object booming manifest within ourselves: “Consciousness is the quality or state of being aware of an external object or something within oneself. [1][2] It has been defined as: sentience, awareness, subjectivity, the ability to experience or to feel, wakefulness, having a sense of selfhood, and the executive control system of the mind.” [3] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consciousness>

Much of the scientific establishment considers consciousness a byproduct of neurological and chemical reactions in the brain. Others focus on quantum mechanics for their models. The problem science has with consciousness was defined by Horst Hendriks-Jansen in 1996: “...consciousness as a research topic was avoided by the majority of mainstream scientists, because of a general feeling that a phenomenon defined in subjective terms could not properly be studied using objective experimental methods.” [Horst Hendriks-Jansen (1996) “Catching ourselves in the act: situated activity, interactive emergence, evolution, and human thought.” Massachusetts Institute of Technology. p. 114. ISBN 0-262-08246-2.]



When it comes to the topic of consciousness, artists may actually have a better grasp of the medium than scientists. After all, we must study and master our own subjective awareness in order to employ it in our work. We can't simply exclude consciousness in favor of external description and categorization.



Neon color spreading

The apparent bluish tinge of the white areas inside the circle is an illusion. "...it is clear that the relationship between a physical entity such as light and a perceptual quality such as color is extraordinarily complex and indirect, as demonstrated by a variety of optical illusions such as neon color spreading.[105]" <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consciousness>

As can be inferred from the following paragraph, also from the Wikipedia page on consciousness, there appears to be no clear consensus among scientists regarding our most fundamental experience of being:

"Despite the large amount of information available, the most important aspects of perception remain mysterious. A great deal is known about low-level signal processing in sensory systems, but the ways by which sensory systems interact with each other, with "executive" systems in the frontal cortex, and with the language system are very incompletely understood. At a deeper level, there are still basic conceptual issues that remain unresolved.[106] Many scientists have found it difficult to reconcile the fact that information is distributed across multiple brain areas with the apparent unity of consciousness: this is one aspect of the so-called binding problem.[108] There are also some scientists who have expressed grave reservations about the idea that the brain forms representations of the outside world at all: influential members of this group include psychologist J. J. Gibson and roboticist Rodney Brooks, who both argued in favor of "intelligence without representation".**

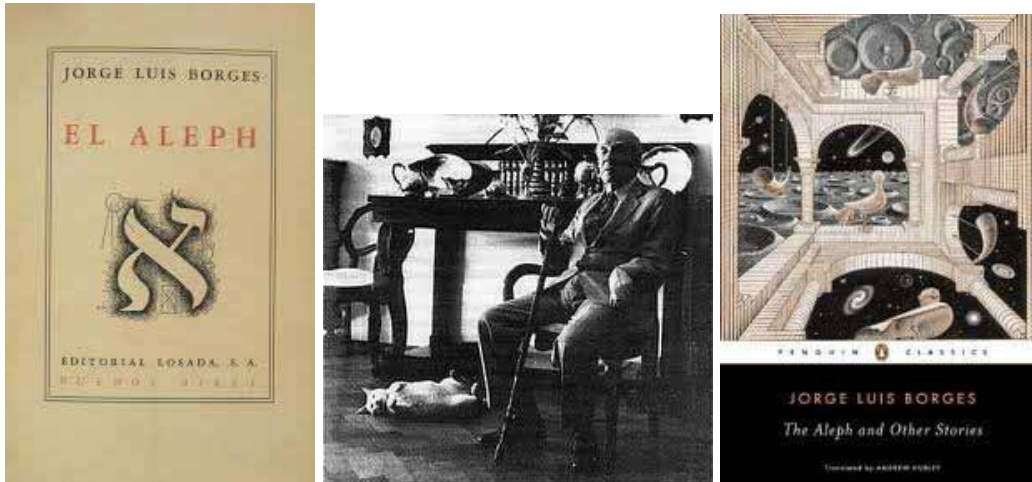
**[Rodney Brooks (1991). "Intelligence without representation". *Artificial Intelligence* 47: 139–159.[doi:10.1016/0004-3702\(91\)90053-M](https://doi.org/10.1016/0004-3702(91)90053-M)]

The upside of the confusion and disagreement among scientists regarding consciousness is that no final 'authority' appears to exist that can refute the assertion that an object can deploy information and energy across a wide swath of consciousness with profound, life changing effect.

Power Objects & The Aleph

There are many objects that appear to both contain energy or project power. The most familiar, money, comes in many forms. Other objects such as fetishes, scepters, talismans, sacred texts & objects, blessed food etc. are thought to contain an intrinsic psychic power that can be utilized to the benefit of the owner. Art radiates another mysterious form of power, producing deep feeling in the observer. Of course there are all those technological objects which employ light, electricity and other forms of environmentally based energy. All radiant objects, esoteric or practical, interact with consciousness on various levels.

In this paper, I'm concerned with the object which initiates personal transformation. One of the best literary representations of such an object has to be Jorge Luis Borges short story, "The Aleph" (1945, 1949, 1974).



The narrator has received an urgent call from his friend, a poet, whose ancestral home is to be appropriated by an adjoining salon-bar. He will be deprived, therefore of completing his most important poem, which derives its essence from a mysterious object in the poet's basement.

"He hesitated, then with that level, impersonal voice we reserve for confiding something intimate, he said that to finish the poem he could not get along without the house because down in the cellar there was an Aleph. He explained that an Aleph is one of the points in space that contains all other points.

"It's in the cellar under the dining room," he went on, so overcome by his worries now that he forgot to be pompous. "It's mine — mine. I discovered it when I was a child, all by myself. The cellar stairway is so steep that my aunt and uncle forbade my using it, but I'd heard someone say there was a world down there. I found out later they meant an old-fashioned globe of the world, but at the time I thought they were referring to the world itself. One day when no one was home I started down in secret, but I stumbled and fell. When I opened my eyes, I saw the Aleph."

"The Aleph?" I repeated.

"Yes, the only place on earth where all places are — seen from every angle, each standing clear, without any confusion or blending. I kept the discovery to myself and went back every chance I got. As a child, I did not foresee that this privilege was granted me so that later I could write the poem....."

<http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/borgesaleph.pdf>

And so the story continues, as the narrator descends the cellar stairs to experience for himself the true nature of the Aleph, he wonders, "Will I too see everything in the universe simultaneously without confusion or distortion?"



The Aleph is a story about an object that expands the viewer's experience of physical reality to infinity. Borge's story is a wonderful allegory of consciousness seeking itself. It is based upon a mathematical concept developed by George Cantor, the founder of set theory. Cantor was obsessed with ideas of infinity, and studying it drove him to depression and finally insanity. Consider this description of the Aleph by Ester Inglis-Arkell: "Imagine a thin line, almost a thread, stretching to infinity in both directions. It runs to the end of the universe. It is, in essence, infinite. Now look at the space all around it. That also runs to the end of the universe. It's also infinite. Both are infinite, yes, but are they the same? Isn't one infinity bigger than the other?"

"That's the question that Georg Cantor, a German mathematician who died shortly before World War I ended, grappled with throughout his life. Infinity was supposed to be an absolute number, especially in mathematics, where dividing infinity by a billion or multiplying it by a billion results, invariably and always, in infinity. Cantor thought about it and came up with aleph-nought, a 'number' that counts all the integers — whole numbers without fractions — that there are in existence. Aleph-nought has to be infinity, since there are an infinite quantity of whole numbers. But then what about real numbers? Real numbers include rational numbers, and irrational numbers (like the square root of five), and integers. This has to be a greater infinite number than all the other infinite numbers."

[<http://io9.com/5873581/the-odd-genius-who-showed-that-one-infinity-was-greater-than-another>].

Cantor's description of Aleph numbers (after the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet) made him few friends in the mathematical community of his time. His ideas that various sets could contain different quantities of infinity or 'transfinite numbers' infuriated many who simply refused to believe in multiple infinities. Cantor's Aleph became a philosophy that was rejected during his life, but eventually was considered of enormous importance. The Aleph then took on mass appeal through Borges' story. Where Cantor's rational mind collapsed, the artistic mind of Borges managed to express an imponderable. What clues to the nature of the radionic object did they leave?

One clue lies in the nature of a point. The aleph began as an infinitude that was contained in a point. Conversely, it was a point that expanded to infinity, only able to be accessed by transcendental consciousness, not by rational, linear thinking. It came into being, in the quantum mechanical sense, through observation. Another way to describe the experience: participation through (one pointed) concentration.

The image shows two large, stylized black characters. The first character is a bold, calligraphic 'N' with a thick vertical stroke on the left and a curved top. The second character is a simple, bold '0'.

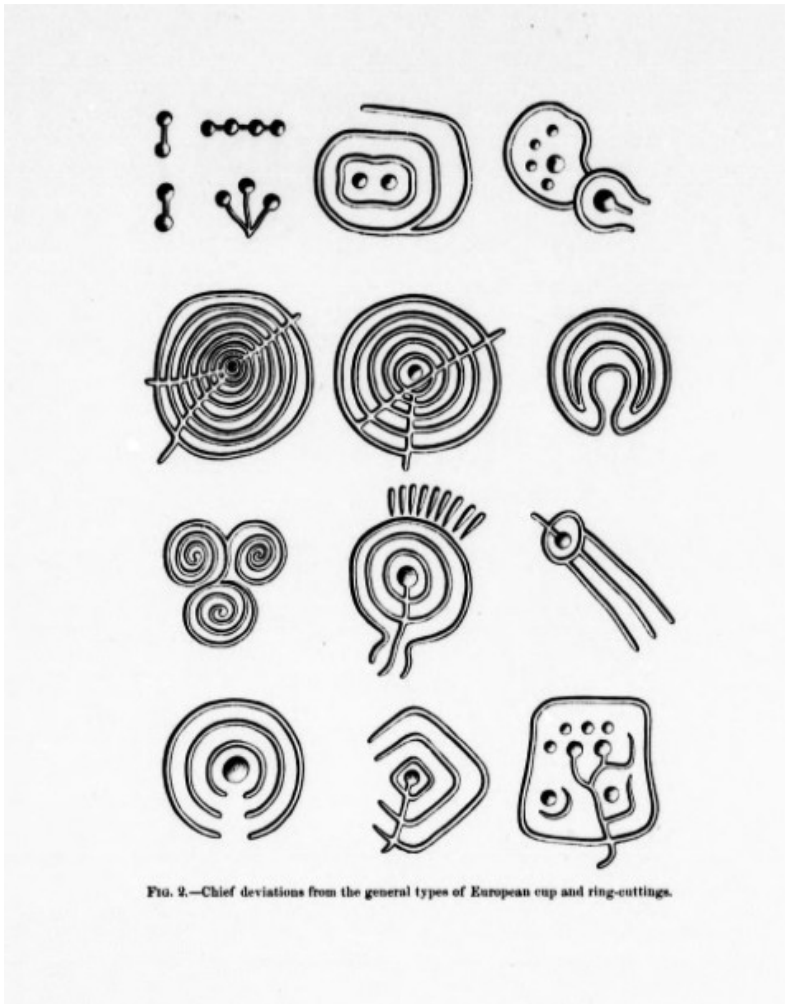
Aleph-null, the smallest infinite cardinal number

How would anyone recognize an unfamiliar radionic object today, one like Cantor's Aleph, that provoked only skepticism and derision at its introduction, or worse, was completely ignored? What would we look for? Would it be a literal representation of a sun, a moon, or would it appear symbolic, but impossible to decipher? Would it be inconclusive as to function or purpose? Would we call it art, even though it was without artistic self-consciousness? Imagine an object that conveys something mysterious, even sacred, but lacks the context of a faith or religion. Imagine coming upon a point that looks to be extremely ancient, carved into a common stone. Realize such carvings occur on every continent man has inhabited, as far back as we can remember. Consider this object for which no name has been given—nor any historical purpose, development, or clear meaning—only a physical description suitable for categorization?

I am talking about a cupule; a cupping stone. A what?? Errrrr....the first philosoprop?

Rock Art, Cupules & Cupmarks:

Does the philosoprop's origin begin in ancient rock art? Throughout the world there exists an exceedingly ancient art form. It is present on all continents upon which Man has lived and died. This art form has no name, only a description: a "cup stone" or "cupule" is basically a shallow circular indentation carved into the surface of boulders, cairns, portable rocks and large rock outcroppings. Sometimes found in patterns or lines, at other times cupules are surrounded by circles or have grooved lines emanating from or around them. Not to say the occasional cupping stone doesn't have a practical application, such as use as a mortar, a means of refining a stone pestle, a base for a weaving stick, a means of gathering rain water, marking time, collecting sacrificial blood and doubtless many other functions. I have read that practical cup markers in stone have been dated from as long ago as 1.7 million years, BCE, in the Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania.* (Varner)



However, practicality can hardly explain why other boulders are found covered with cupules. Some are found in the middle of streams, others meander in lines up cliff faces in remote settings. Still others are found in caves among other examples of rock art that have been accumulating for thousands of years. What has stunned researchers about cupules recently, however, is their extreme antiquity. Dating of cupules and other rock art of a non-functional nature in Auditorium Cave, Bhimbetka in southern India indicates their age between 230,000 and possibly as far back as 700,000 BCE! (<http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/prehistoric/bhimbetka-petroglyphs.htm>)



Auditorium Cave, Bhimbetka caves. Raveesh Vyas, Flickr / CC BY-SA 2.0

Bhimbetka was “discovered” in 1957 by Indian archaeologist Dr. Vishnu Wakankar. Overall the Bhimbetka Caves chronicle a huge slice of prehistoric art. The Bhimbetka site in southern India is over 40 square kilometers in size and contains 760 caves, 500 of which contain examples of petroglyphs, rock art and beautiful cave paintings. More recently, in 1995, at a site called Daraki-Chattan near by in the Chambal Valley, researcher Giriraj Kumar and his son found another ancient cave containing an amazing 498 cupules carved onto the walls to the height of 3.5 meters. Stone tools found at this site also suggest dates as early Auditorium—from the Acheulian and Middle Paleolithic periods.
http://home.vicnet.net.au/~auranet/cognit/shared_files/cupules.pdf

Consider the following description of Auditorium Cave from the Wondermmondo website:

“Auditorium Cave is large, some 25 meter long, horizontal cave. At the far end of the entrance gallery it widens into a larger room with three passageways diverting from it. In the centre of this hall there stands enormous boulder, “Chiefs Rock”, 2.5 m high and 3.4 m wide, whose volume is approx. 9 m³.

“Auditorium Cave was well known but it hid an unexpected surprise. In 1990 there, on Chief’s Rock, were discovered 9 cupules - simple, round hemispheric cavities with traces of red pigment. They looked very old but it seemed nearly impossible to find their true age.



Cupule and meander petroglyph on a boulder at the Auditorium Cave, Bhimbetka, Madhya Pradesh, India (c.290,000-700,000 BCE). The world's Oldest Art.

“Next year, in 1991, an important discovery was made—a tenth cupule with a meandering line next to it. These two petroglyphs were covered by deposits from the Acheulian period and later periods. Now the age could be scientifically determined; these petroglyphs were made at least 290,000 years ago. Later research by other dating methods (micro-erosion analysis) gave even more incredible result - that it was possible these cupules were made 700,000 years ago!”

This discovery was later confirmed by renown rock art researcher Robert G. Bednarek. Quoting his 1993 paper Bednarek states: “The oldest currently known rock art is clearly in Asia. Eleven petroglyphs occur in Auditorium Cave, central India, of which two were excavated in an Acheulian occupation deposit directly covering them. The overlying Middle Palaeolithic stratum is so solidly cemented by calcite deposition that the stratigraphy could not possibly have been disturbed, hence we have no choice but to attribute at least two of the petroglyphs (one of which is a cupule) to the Lower Palaeolithic. However, I have argued that the remaining nine motifs (all cupules), although found above ground, are almost certainly of similar age.” (Bednarik 1996b).

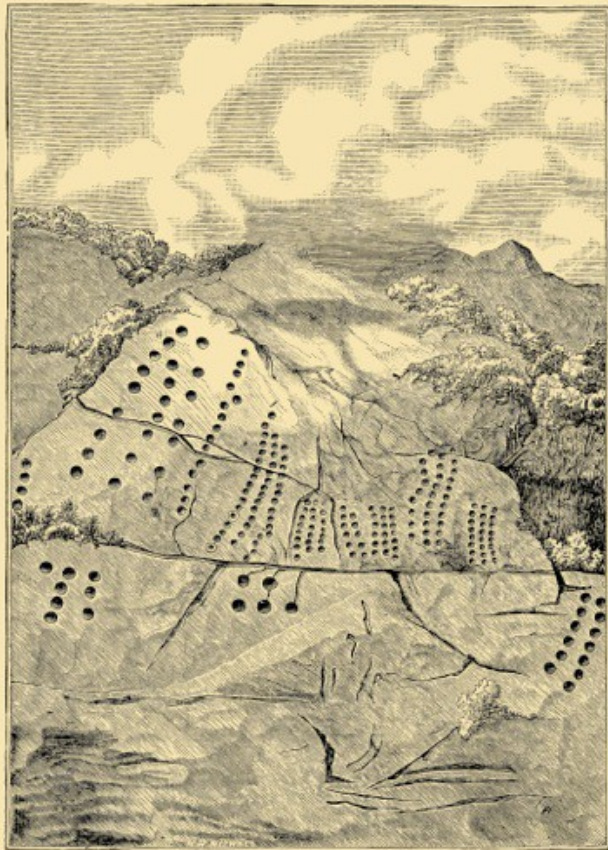


FIG. 35.—Cup and ring-cuttings at Chandeshwar, India.

“The Auditorium Cave petroglyphs occur on heavily metamorphosed, extremely hard quartzite that was extensively mined in the Lower Palaeolithic. Most Acheulian hand axes and cleavers at the site are made from it. The petroglyphs occur in the central part of the cave, well protected from weather, yet they are extremely corroded due to their extraordinary antiquity (Fig. 3). Although there is no radiometric dating available from the rock art site, the Acheulian of India is of an age similar to that in Africa and Europe, and all radiometric dates it has yielded so far are in excess of 290 000 years. It is thought to have given way to Middle Palaeolithic technologies some time between 200 000–150 000 years ago, which is thus a minimum age for the petroglyphs.”[‘Cupules - The Oldest Surviving Rock Art’, Bednarek,1993]

Bednarek goes to lengths explaining cupules may not be the OLDEST art form but they are certainly the oldest SURVIVING one. Importantly, cupules are also the most common form of ancient rock art numerically, despite being generally ignored by archaeologists. That is not to say they are exclusively an archaic art form; from Australia to California, reports exist that describe cupule making by aboriginals for purposes as far ranging as musical instrumentation (cups as tuned cavities producing notes) to increase rituals for bird populations whose eggs were needed for food.

(http://home.vicnet.net.au/~auranet/cognit/shared_files/cupules.pdf)

Bednarek points out that hominids possessed a high level of cultural sophistication back as far as the Lower Paleolithic. Homo Erectus crossed open water to colonize islands perhaps as far back as 830,000 years ago, indicating language and symbolic thinking. However, even these impressive survival skills don't begin to address the wonder of finding completely abstract art forms created by cup making emerging from the ancient world. What could they possibly signify?



FIG. 32.—Pitted stone found near Franklin, Williamson County, Tennessee (Mus. No. 19053).



FIG. 33.—Pitted stone from Muncy, Lycoming County, Pennsylvania.

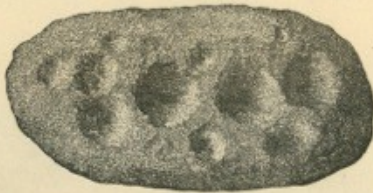


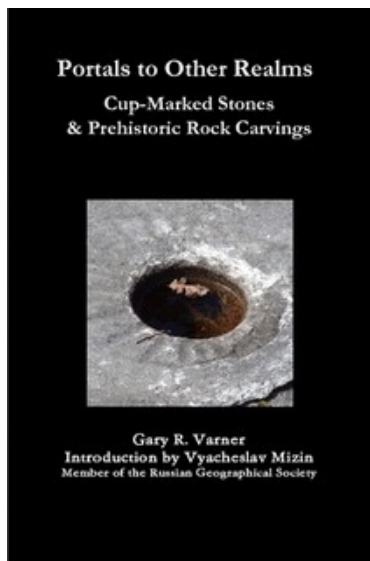
FIG. 34.—Nut-stone from the neighborhood of London, Loudon County, Tennessee (Mus. No. 21647).

As the most ancient form of human artistic expression we have--and an abstract one at that—cup indentations and their occasional surrounding grooved lines are ready made for artistic and metaphysical speculation. Is not our digital world today composed of dots of light and line? In considering the source of an artistic impulse, the imagination is not bound by the limited number of facts left on site after thousands of years. For an artist, the objects must stimulate wonder? What impulse led to the creation of these mysterious cup markings? They defy critical or scientific analysis. We best relate to them as abstract art. However, as singular or multiple depressions occasionally surrounded by patterned grooves, there is also a suggestion of technology or symbolic function. They took effort to make, but to our sensibilities seem pointedly irrational. And why are they scattered through out the world and across time with so little variation? What was their purpose?



One observation; our earliest surviving artistic activity appears connected to techno-shamanic process still in use today. Shamanic technology employs directing intent through a device or ceremony towards completing a task. Essentially the shaman converts information to energy. Shamanic technology is also used to explore consciousness. The outcome of the exercise is subjective, but the process often leaves a signifier or representation of itself behind. This signifier is often considered art. So in the context of cupule making, what first becomes visible culturally as an artifact, is also considered an art form, possibly as a vector for self-reflection or other function. That human effort applied to expanding consciousness should also be intertwined with efforts to manipulate and control natural forces for survival seems likely. Cupule creation for sacred and pragmatic objectives may well be the earliest unified expression of spiritual, scientific and artistic expression.

Consider some of the research of cup stones for medicinal purposes. The curative function of stone art can be examined from two entirely different contexts--historical record and scientific placebo study.



Researcher and author Gary R. Varner in his book *Portals to Other Realms: Cup Marked Stones and Prehistoric Rock Carvings* offers some interesting insights on the curative function of cupules. “There is much in the way of anecdotal evidence suggesting that cup marks were regarded as holy and medicinal. The water which would naturally collect in the cups was dispensed and consumed as medicinal in nature. One cup marked stone near Arisaig in Yorkshire has eight cup-marks on its surface and folk legend states ‘that an apprentice blacksmith could gain additional skill and strength in the craft by washing his hand in the water collected in the largest cupmark/basin on the stone. This act was to be performed at sunrise on the first of May.’”

Varner goes on to describe other healing venues ascribed to water collected in cup stones around the world. Collected “charged” water from cups in many cultures include treatments for infertility, rheumatism, warts and especially eye ailments. In a more mundane context, one particularly telling story is given about a stone in Blood Run, Iowa, that is covered in cups. “Prevailing thought is that the Blood Run stone was used to produce kaolin, which is the active ingredient in Kaopectate. Kaolin has also been proved to cure amoebic dysentery. In addition the stone can be ground into a fine investable powder which is similar in appearances to talcum powder and is an excellent wound care product. In the past Native American would include this powder in their diets to enhance fertility.”



Cup and ring petroglyph at the 'Laxe das Rodas' ('Stone of the Wheels'), Louro, Galicia. Photo by Froaringus.

In his paper, “Ethnographic Analogy and the Folklore of Cup and Ring Rock Art © 2000” Kevin L. Callahan, of the Department of Anthropology, University of Minnesota, elaborates of the use of rock powder for medicinal purposes:

“Pica (“pie-ka”) is the desire to ingest non-food substances such as rock powder, clay, chalk, dirt, and other material, by some humans, most commonly pregnant women, young, and patients with chronic kidney disease. It is a common phenomenon also seen in many animals. Geophagy (“gee-off-a-gee”) has been defined as “a practice in rural or preindustrial societies of eating earthy substances ([such] as clay) to augment a scanty or mineral-deficient diet” (Merriam-Webster 1999:488).



“In Pomo and Shasta ethnographic accounts, cupmarks are sometimes equated with fertility and are referred to as “baby rocks” (Id.). According to Merriam the powder from cupmark production was ingested by women in the belief that it made them more fertile (Merriam 1955). The production process for cupmarks was thought to release the underworld’s spiritual power that resided in the rock. The action of making the cupmarks was also believed to be able to bring benefits such as game and rain (Loubser, in press; Merriam 1955). The Pomo of Northern California also used dirt in their diet. They mixed it with ground acorn and this neutralized the acid (Rosenberg 2000).

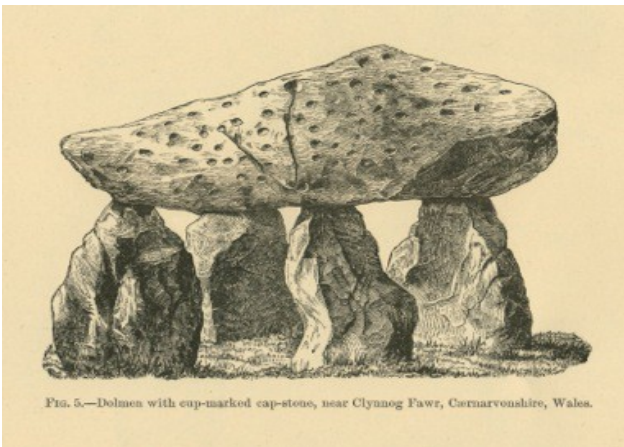


“In many animistic religions, underground spirits are associated with curing sickness and fertility so there are pervasive religious aspects as well as practical uses for the rock powder medicines found in nature. Native American shamens were knowledgeable about the health benefits of minerals as well as plants. For example, Ojibwe shamens undertook vision quests to determine from the underground spirits which, of 40 minerals of the earth, should be used to treat their patients (Rajnovich 1989). Jack Steinbring has told me that the northern Ojibwe ground up imported conch shells and drank the powder in a tea considering this a spiritual event (Jack Steinbring, personal communication).”



Placebo Cures

Thanks to recent efforts made to understand placebo cures, we now have a growing body of scientific evidence that demonstrates the efficacy of the power of suggestion alone in healing numerous illnesses. Could similar results be forthcoming from ancient rituals involving stone art? (The placebo effect occurs when a non-medicinal substance or procedure is successful in relieving pain, fever, nausea, and other symptoms---the proverbial “sugar pill.”)



Nicholas Humphrey is a theoretical psychologist, based in Cambridge, England, who is known for his work on the evolution of human intelligence and consciousness. As Emeritus Professor of Psychology, London School of Economics, Visiting Professor of Philosophy, New College of the Humanities, Senior Member, Darwin College, Cambridge, Humphrey is well regarded as an evolutionary psychologist. In a recent production on placebo studies for YouTube's Ri Channel titled "If we can effectively cure ourselves by taking placebo medicine, why don't we just heal ourselves straight away?" (humphrey.org.uk) Professor Humphrey states he believes Stonehenge is an example of what he calls an ancient "placebo hospital". Humphrey states that he believes in antiquity the Stonehenge stones were rubbed with water, and the recovered water was then used for healing. No doubt sites used for ritual sacrifice would carry similar placebo success.



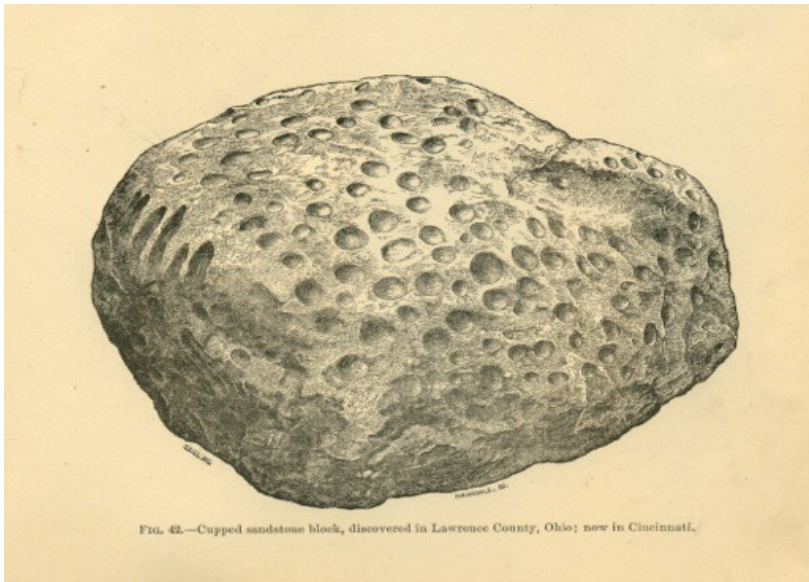
Consider the article by Ben Schiller for Co.Exist "The Placebo Effect Is Real. Now Doctors Just Have To Work Out How To Use It". The author makes a case for why placebo studies are now taken seriously today:

"In the last decade, the study of placebo has moved from the backwaters of medical research to nearer the mainstream. There is now a Program in Placebo Studies at Harvard. NIH and nonprofits like the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation fund placebo work. Journals publish papers. What used to be dismissed is now taken increasingly seriously.

"It's fair to say this shift wouldn't have happened without Ted Kaptchuk, who heads Harvard's placebo program. Over 35 years, he's been investigating placebos, which are medical interventions without active drug ingredients, in various contexts and expanding the scope of the field—including, for a time, to his own acupuncture practice.

"Kaptchuk credits the growing respectability of studying placebos down to the wider availability of neuro-imaging techniques. By demonstrating physiological impact in the brain when a patient takes a placebo treatment, researchers can move beyond conjecture about how the effect works. "The discovery of neurobiology has made physicians in the medical community more comfortable that something is going on that they have to pay attention to," he says. "Before it was just the imagination. Now, the imagination has a real neurobiology."

"In some ways, it's already happening. A survey from the U.K., recently showed that many doctors are already prescribing placebos on a regular basis. Out of 783 doctors, 12% said they had used "pure" placebo (sugar pills, saline injections) while 97% had used "impure placebos" (prescribing drugs without scientific basis, like antibiotics for viruses). More than three-quarters said they did so at least once a week, and many didn't have an ethical problem with deceiving patients if treatments were effective."



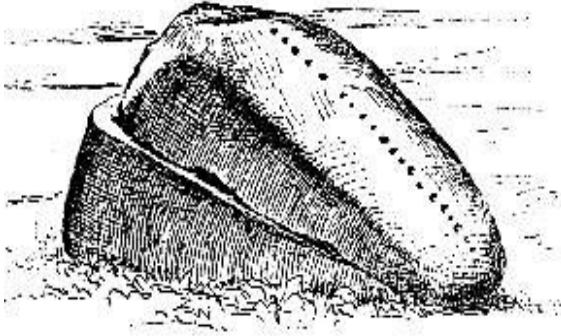
Shirley S. Wang writing for the Wall Street Journal in “Why Placebos Work Wonders, From Weight Loss To Fertility, New Legitimacy For ‘Fake’ Treatments” (2012) makes these observations:

“Studies across medical conditions including depression, migraines and Parkinson’s disease have found that supposedly inert treatments, like sugar pills, sham surgery and sham acupuncture, can yield striking effects. A 2001 study published in *Science* found that placebo was effective at improving Parkinson’s disease symptoms at a magnitude similar to real medication. The placebo actually induced the brain to produce greater amounts of dopamine, the neurotransmitter known to be useful in treating the disease.

“At times, a weaker placebo effect might be desired. In trials of experimental drug treatments for dementia, depression and other cognitive or psychiatric conditions, where one patient group takes medication and the other takes a sugar pill, it can be difficult to demonstrate that the medicine works because the placebo effect is so strong.

“With depression, an estimated 30% to 45% of patients—or even more, in some studies—will respond to a placebo, according to a review published in December in *Clinical Therapeutics*. An additional 5% of patients were helped by an antidepressant in cases of mild depression, and an additional 16% in cases of severe depression. (The clinically meaningful cutoff for additional benefit was 11%.)

“Fertility rates have been found to improve in women getting a placebo, perhaps because they experience a decrease in stress. A recent randomized trial of women with polycystic ovarian syndrome found that 15%, or 5 of 33, got pregnant while taking placebo over a six-month period, compared with 22%, or 7 of 32, who got the drug—a statistically insignificant difference. Other studies have demonstrated pregnancy rates as high as 40% in placebo groups.



The Witch's Stone

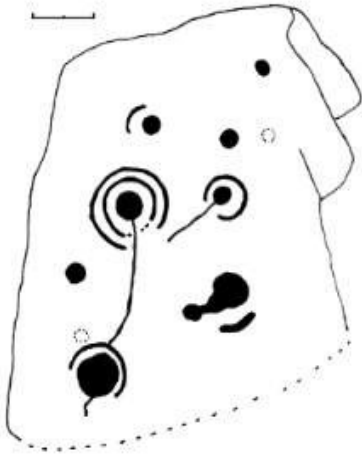
The Witch's Stone - This was the name given to a now destroyed cup marked boulder on Tormain Hill near the village of Ratho (7 miles west of Edinburgh). The sloping upper surface of the rock had a line of 24 cup marks and this surface had also become highly polished due to the practice of people sliding down the stone. A similar practice took place a few miles away in the Kings Park, Edinburgh, which was the site of a large recumbent stone along which barren women slid in the hope that they would become mothers. Whether this was the reason for sliding down the Witch's stone is not recorded but this activity and the stone's name suggests the possibility, before their persecution the town and village wise women (later deemed witches) were the keepers of traditional lore relating to fertility and barrenness (Chapell 1999).

“Do placebos work on the actual condition, or on patients' perception of their symptoms? In a study published last year in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, Dr. Kaptchuk's team rotated 46 asthma patients through each of four types of treatment: no treatment at all, an albuterol inhaler, a placebo inhaler and sham acupuncture. As each participant got each treatment, researchers induced an asthma attack and measured the participant's lung function and perception of symptoms. The albuterol improved measured lung function compared with placebo. But the patients reported feeling just as good whether getting placebo or the active treatment.

“Right now, I think evidence is that placebo changes not the underlying biology of an illness, but the way a person experiences or reacts to an illness,” Dr. Kaptchuk says.

“Placebo can be more effective than the intended treatment. In a trial published in the journal *Menopause* in 2007, 103 women who had menopausal hot flashes got either five weeks of real acupuncture, or five weeks of sham acupuncture, where needles weren't placed in accepted therapeutic positions. A week after treatments ended, only some 60% of participants in both groups reported hot flashes—a robust immediate placebo effect. Seven weeks post-treatment, though, 55% of patients in the sham acupuncture group reported hot flashes, compared with 73% in the real acupuncture group.”

Startling conclusions, to say the least, but significant to anyone with an interest in alternative healing. One can readily imagine a placebo symbol or cupule being carved onto a rock in antiquity for healing—and working! A curative function also explains why rock carvings exist in such great numbers throughout the world. Their utility, decorative and ceremonial aspects suggest broad cultural adoption among disparate peoples the same way potent images traverse the world today. Not to say native healers couldn't possess powers well beyond the placebo effect. But if you are an individual in a primitive society and you believe that drinking water from a cupule or carving an image on a stone will improve your life—and then it does—well, that makes for popular success in both art and healing.



The Fertility Stone - This is the name given to a large cup and ring marked slab built into the base of a dry stone wall on a farm near Pateley Bridge, North Yorkshire. The carving is situated on the southern valley side of the river Nidd with a fine view along the valley. Enquiries are being pursued to trace the origins of the name, which may connect the carved rock with some kind of folklore practices in the area. (Chapell 1999)

Death, Consciousness, Art

If ancient cultures successfully used rock art to cure, what's to say artists couldn't do the same today? One often encounters among 'primitive' or folk artists a momentum within their work that takes on a spiritual or curative direction, as though 'art for art's sake' wasn't enough to constrain their particular vision. Perhaps artists who feel uncomfortable marketing their work as a commodity would find using their work curatively more satisfying.

At the beginning of the Modernist movement, Apollinaire, Picasso, Duchamp and others turned art in the 1920's back towards the cathartic and therapeutic functions of the classical and ancient worlds. They portrayed art as its own religion and the artist as a healer of the spirit. Yet the notion of artist as actual doctor curing various illnesses has not been embraced outside of selective native cultures. Legally, the complications are obvious. However, when one considers curing sicknesses of the environment, crops, animals and the soil can all be addressed by radionic methods similar those of the ancients—without incurring legal jeopardy—doesn't the potential of art to heal become more interesting?

However, if cup marks were used only for curative or artistic purposes, why would they appear on the underside of burial stones of truly ancient origin? Writing on cupules, Robert G. Bednarek, quoted earlier, offers the following example for our consideration:

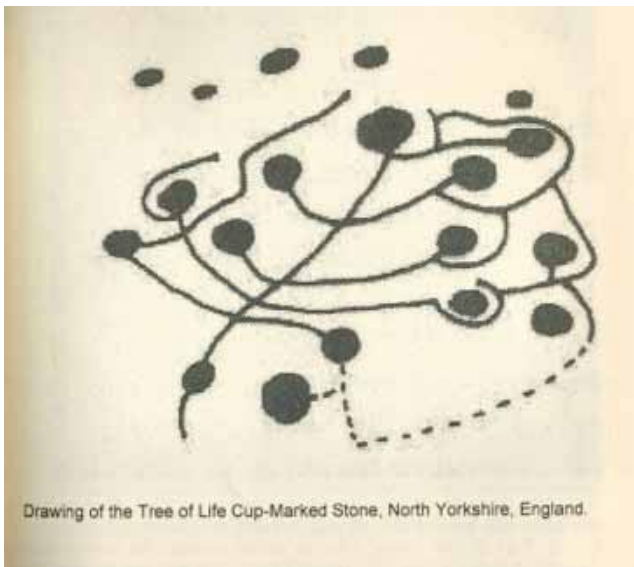
“The oldest cupules known in Europe are also the oldest rock art we have found in that continent. Neanderthal burial No. 6 of the French cave La Ferrassie is of a child. After the corpse was placed in the grave, a large limestone slab was deposited over it in such a way that the 18 cupules on its surface came to be on its underside, i.e. were facing the child's corpse (Peyrony 1934: 34). This burial is part of a Mousterian graveyard of unknown age, but is in all probability between 70 000 and perhaps 40 000 years old. It is particularly interesting that 16 of the cupules are clearly arranged in pairs. The entire find suggests great cultural complexity (Fig. 5).”

http://home.vicnet.net.au/~auranet/cognit/shared_files/cupules.pdf

The association of sacred ceremony with cupule carving has long been a factor in theories regarding

their creation and purpose. What could carving a cup indentation into a rough stone surface have to do with death and consciousness? According to personal communications with a Pit River [California] Indian acquaintance, Floyd Buckskin, “The concentric circles shown above mark the place where spirit beings or very powerful shamans can pass through the rock from one world to the next.” (Benson and Sehgal 1987:6-7; cited in Patterson 1992:67). The notion a cupule provides an access point to another realm of consciousness bears a striking resemblance to Borges’ Aleph point on the basement stairs. There is also evidence cup holes have been used to guide the dead to the world beyond.

In *Portals to Other Realms*, Varner cites eight ancient examples of cup stones in Great Britain associated with cremations, tombs and burials, some with astronomical alignments: Barbook II Stone Ring, Debyshire (Early Bronze Age cairn and cup-marked curbstone associated with cremation); Loanhead of Daviot, Aberdeenshire (Neolithic to Middle Bronze Age, cup stone with alignments by stone circle); Sudhoney, Aberdeenshire (83’ D. stone circle with astronomically aligned cup stone and nearby cremations); Monzie, Perthshire, near Monzie Castle (burial in stone circle with stone covered with 46 cups); Llanerch Farm, Powys (32 cup boulder marking grave of four kings); Castledamph, County Tyrone (cup-marked slab cover of burial in the center of stone circle); Bohonagh, County Cork (stone circle with 20 ton boulder-burial capstone with 7 ancient cup-stones, possible alignment); Dromberg, County Cork (stone circle with cup-marked 3’ high by 7’ long monument known as the “Druid’s Altar”).



‘Tree of Life’ stones such as this one from Yorkshire, England are associated with fertility and May day rites. (Varner, P. 58-59, *Portals to Other Realms*.)

The mysterious artistic intent first expressed by cup formations is also a visual convergence of sacred, medicinal, utilitarian and artistic functions into one universal symbol, the dot. Today, we still speak of matter being composed of dots called atoms, and points of light as photons, and proceed to engineer technology from those deductions. The pixelated dots on our screens are the medium by which electronic energy and light, modulated by human intent become information and communication. The dot matrices constitute a background field through which any form of information can be rendered. Numbers themselves suggest a collection of points, or equal units. Behind visual reality, quantum field descriptions also suggest pointillist imagery (“quanta of light”, Einstein, “quantum dots” Ekimov, Brus & Reed, subatomic or elementary particles: protons, bosons, fermions, electrons, neutrons, quarks, etc.). Not thoroughly appreciated in any instance, is the factor of consciousness itself: our own personal dot, or how it becomes imbedded in form and function. I’ll include that mystery in my continuing

analysis of human dot carving onto stone.

Ramana Maharshi, the renowned 20th century mystic has an interesting observation regarding “dot phenomena” and the emergence of higher awareness. The following from a discussion with a questioner regarding the nature of consciousness, where the universe is said to be condensed in the body, and the entire body in the Heart. (C.5 Sri Ramana Gita, verses 11 & 12)

“The source is a point without any dimensions. It expands as the cosmos on the one hand and as Infinite Bliss on the other. That point is the pivot. From a single vasana [a latent tendency or impression] starts, multiplies as the experienter “‘I’, the experience and the world.” (P.578) A bit further on in his analysis, Ramana adds: “Just as the eye sees the darkness which remains enveloping all objects, so also the Self sees the darkness of nescience which remained covering the phenomenal world. This darkness was experienced when it (the Self) emerged in dots of supreme bliss, shone a trice and fled away in such fine subtlety as the rays of the moon which peer through the waving foliage. The experience was however not through any media (such as the senses or the mind), but bears out the fact that consciousness does exist in deep sleep. The unawareness is owing to the absence of relative knowledge, and the happiness to the absence of (seething) thoughts.” [P.581 Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi Vols. I to III]

It is interesting to hear that our very consciousness of ourself and the world around us can be eclipsed by a transcendental “Self” that originates and appears suddenly as “dots of supreme bliss”. Such an experience would not necessarily be limited by brain capacity or intellectual ability, making its spontaneous occurrence very possible in the earliest periods of human existence. Likewise such experience would not be constrained by any timeline or geographical or cultural boundaries. Would such a significant ‘shift’ of awareness take on a contextual significance, resulting in repeated markings in a common location? What better way to represent an experience of expanded awareness that begins with an emanation of dots than to literally carve dots onto a stone! Not only does the dot signify the beginning of an encounter with the sacred, but also the return back to individual identity. One could speculate the dot is also an expression of our unique sense of individuality within Nature: “I think therefore I am.” [Descartes, 1644]

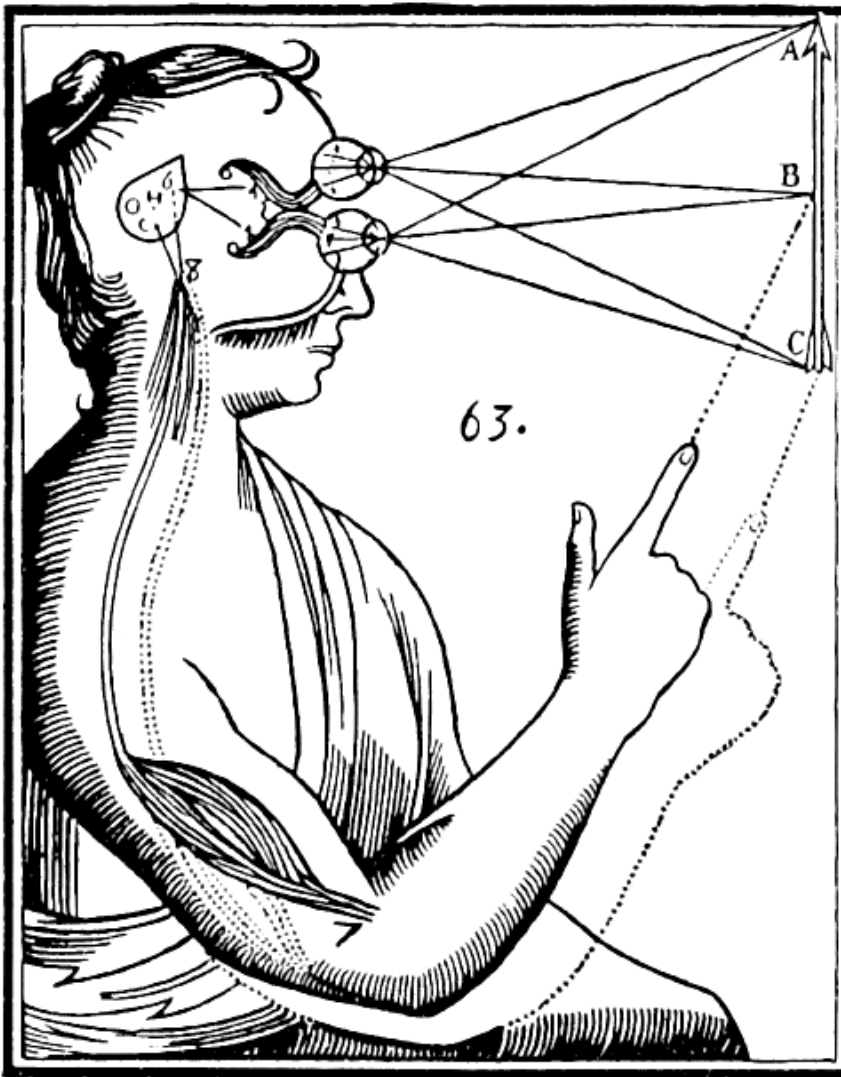


Illustration of dualism by René Descartes. Inputs are passed by the sensory organs to the pineal gland and from there to the immaterial spirit.

Through ancient cup-points the souls of the dead pass to the other world. Likewise, the energy of healing, fertility, agricultural magic and sacred vision pass from that mysterious domain back into this world. Is it possible through ritualized cup stone carving, we may have first utilized symbols to engineer a distinctly human reality?

Consider the ancient glyph at Auditorium Cave, with its point and serpentine groove. Where do we see it today? That's right, here: "?". The point symbolizes the paradox of who we are: individual ego or universal "Self"? The squiggly line—the inquiry; the perpetual question: "Who am I?" The first Philosprop—a lightening flash to the brain?

?

"Lynne Truss attributes an early form of the modern question mark in western language to Alcuin of York.[2] Truss describes the punctus interrogativus of the late 8th century as "a lightning flash, striking from right to left".[3] (The punctuation system of Aelius Donatus, current through the Early Middle Ages, used only simple dots at various heights.)

This earliest question mark was a decoration of one of these dots, with the “lightning flash” perhaps meant to denote intonation (or a tilde or titlo, named after the Latin word titulus, as in “ ~ ”...”

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Question_mark



Cupule and meander petroglyph on a boulder at the Auditorium Cave, (c.290,000-700,000 BCE)

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