Compositions in the figural rock art of the Daureb, Namibia

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The Cologne record of the rock paintings of the Brandberg/Daureb (Namibia) is uniquely suited for identifying and explaining patterns in rock art without having to rely on a presupposed cultural context. Our case study exploits this rich database on rock art by combining information theory and statistics with archeology. This rock art data has been recorded with a textual methodology and includes all rock paintings in an area of c. 300 km² on the Inselberg, which contains over 840 sites with more than 39000 individual figures in 4863 scenes. Individual figures are conceptualized in terms of the linguistic notion of a proposition (subject, predicate and object relation). Our formal approach provides a rigid framework for the definition of scenic coherence encompassing Gestalt and interaction. With the majority of interactions enacted by human figures, our data suggests that combination of different gender roles may produce narratives of distinctive hierarchical agency. In the long run we aim at grasping the structures of scenic narratives with the means of computer science, exploring whether algorithm based data mining enables us to identify underlying rules of scene formation. This research, details our approach of statistical pattern analysis and give examples concerning a variety of research questions, such as gender roles, similarity and relationship networks.

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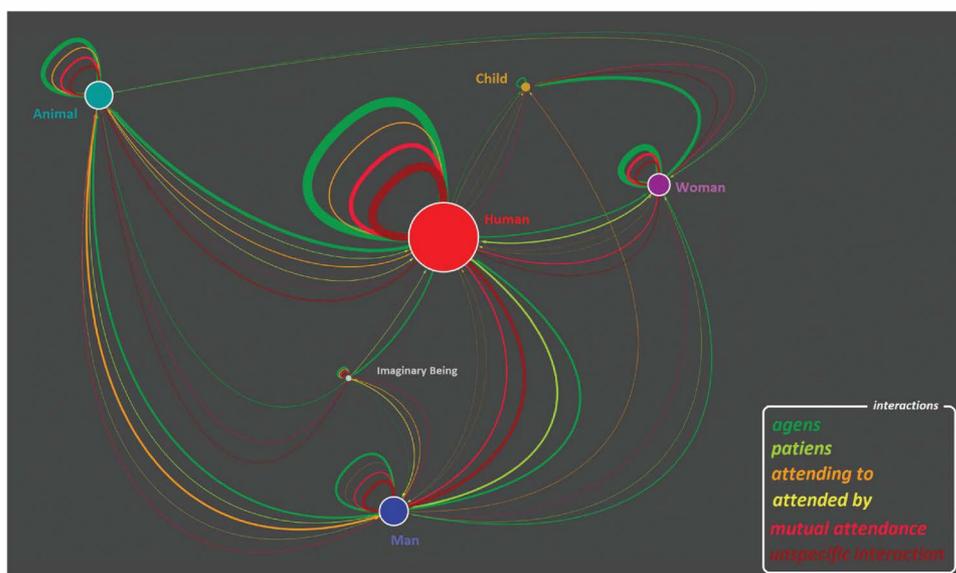

Fig.1 - Network of hierarchical and non-hierarchical interaction between depicted figures of the forager rock art of the Daureb. (Eymard Fäder)
Fig.2 Panel with complex and multiple interactions, Daureb, Namibia. (Heinrich-Barth-Institut)