



*En Mouvement / On the Move / In Bewegung*  
*Mobilités des hommes, des objets et des idées pendant le Paléolithique supérieur européen*  
*Mobility of people, objects and ideas during the European Upper Palaeolithic*  
*Mobilität von Menschen, Objekten und Ideen im europäischen Jungpaläolithikum*  
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## **‘Social’, ‘cultural’, ‘boundaries’, ‘mobility of ideas’, etc.: Some thoughts on these notions in relation to late Palaeo- lithic and Mesolithic hunter-gatherers**

**« Social », « culturel », « frontières », « mobilité des idées », etc. :  
quelques réflexions sur ces notions quand il s’agit des  
chasseurs-cueilleurs de la fin de la Préhistoire**

**„Sozial“, „kulturell“, „Grenzen“, „Mobilität von Ideen“, usw.:  
Einige Gedanken zu diesen Begriffen in Bezug auf spätpaläo-  
lithische und mesolithische Jäger und Sammler**

Boris VALENTIN

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**Abstract:** This article begins by considering some very common notions in prehistoric archaeology. In this respect, it questions what current approaches and sources allow to describe and what their limits designate as inexpressible, momentary or definitive. The challenge is to establish an adequate, operative vocabulary. On the other hand, insisting at all costs on using sociological approaches can weaken this ambition, which requires highly meticulous prior palaeoethnographical studies. The fading of the meaning is, however, inevitable when discussing prehistoric ‘cultures’, and therefore the notion of ‘traditions’ is to be preferred to refer to the fragments or remains of these cultures, for which precise distribution ranges are difficult to identify. At the same time, it seems that the notion of ‘cultural currents’ is very well adapted to expressing the fluidity with which practices spread among mobile hunter-gatherers, who, according to contemporary analogues, have a reputation of social flexibility. Some reflections follow on what the impressive transmission of ideas in Europe during the late Palaeolithic and Mesolithic may reveal, focusing in particular on the fluctuating intensity of contact between the Magdalenian and late Azilian.

**Keywords:** Epistemology, Palaeosociology, Magdalenian, Azilian.

**Résumé :** Cet article s’intéresse d’abord à quelques notions d’usage très courant en archéologie préhistorique. Il s’interroge à ce propos sur ce que nos démarches et nos sources d’aujourd’hui rendent étudiable et donc dicible et sur ce que leurs limites désignent comme part d’ineffable, momentanée ou définitive. L’enjeu scientifique – et pédagogique – est de disposer d’un vocabulaire efficacement opératoire, c’est-à-dire désignant des réalités tangibles. *A contrario* prétendre à tout bout de champs pratiquer des approches

sociologiques risque d'affadir l'ambition qui nécessite, au préalable, des études paléolithographiques très méticuleuses, donc sur des habitats bien conservés, ce qui exige par conséquent du temps pour l'analyse. Il convient aussi d'admettre que, même dans ces conditions optimales, ce ne sont que des bribes de sociologie préhistorique que l'on peut saisir ainsi et que nous manquons encore de moyens pour inscrire ces bribes dans des théories générales. L'affadissement est en revanche inévitable quand il est question de « cultures » préhistoriques : pour des raisons évidentes de conservation, le peu qui en subsiste est amputé de nombreuses dimensions idéelles (langues, mythes, etc.) auxquelles font fréquemment référence les anthropologues de l'actuel et qui restent inaccessibles aux préhistoriens. De plus, ces entités qu'il leur est très délicat de cerner sont impossibles à délimiter pour les préhistoriens. Avec les quelques siècles d'imprécisions du radiocarbone, comment prétendre y parvenir alors que nous nous intéressons en plus à des sociétés de chasseurs-cueilleurs mobiles réputées, d'après les analogues actuels, pour leur grande flexibilité sociale et leurs fréquents épisodes de dispersion ? Pour désigner ce que nous appréhendons véritablement, et dont les limites restent donc très imprécises, nous préférons par conséquent la notion de « tradition » – technique ou symbolique – pour désigner les fragments de cultures préhistoriques qui ont été conservés mais dont le mode initial d'assemblage nous échappe. Quant à la notion de « courant culturel », elle nous paraît très bien adaptée pour exprimer la fluidité avec laquelle les traditions observées dans différents domaines ont pu éventuellement se combiner, parfois sur de très vastes espaces géographiques. Quelques réflexions suivent sur ce que pourrait révéler l'ampleur de certains courants qui ont relayé en Europe durant le Paléolithique récent et le Mésolithique d'importants flux d'information sur des distances considérables. Quand les flux concernent des idées techniques un peu compliquées, il nous semble que leur propagation requerrait nécessairement des moments de démonstration et d'apprentissage et, au préalable, des efforts de conviction ainsi qu'un effet de séduction. Autrement dit, les durées nécessaires à ces échanges de bons procédés – à un de véritable prosélytisme quand il s'agit de symboles – furent plus ou moins longues selon la complexité des idées en question, ce qui nous donne quelques idées sur l'intensité des contacts nécessaires. Ceux-ci pouvaient se produire par exemple à la faveur des résidences post-maritales dont les règles sont très flexibles chez les chasseurs-cueilleurs mobiles. On applique ensuite brièvement ce raisonnement liant difficulté des idées et niveau d'interaction aux débuts du Tardiglaciaire : durant le XII<sup>e</sup> millénaire avant notre ère, le contenu des courants culturels constituant la phase récente de l'Azilien paraît refléter une baisse d'intensité dans ces interactions par contraste avec celles qui accompagnaient nécessairement la diffusion des idées difficiles du Magdalénien et même de celles qui marquent les commencements de l'Azilien. À propos du Magdalénien, on souligne que les observations le concernant étaient une corrélation proposée par certains chercheurs, sur la base de comparaisons avec l'actuel, entre paysages arides, ou à fort contrastes saisonniers, et phénomènes d'homogénéisation culturelle voire linguistique.

**Mots-clés :** Épistémologie, Paléosociologie, Magdalénien, Azilien.

**Zusammenfassung:** Dieser Artikel beginnt mit der Betrachtung einiger sehr verbreiteter Begriffe der prähistorischen Archäologie. In diesem Zusammenhang wird in Frage gestellt, welche Beschreibungen aktuelle Ansätze und Quellen zulassen und was deren Grenzen als unaussprechlich, vorübergehend oder endgültig bezeichnen. Die Herausforderung besteht darin, ein adäquates und operatives Vokabular zu etablieren. Andererseits kann das Bestehen auf soziologischen Ansätzen um jeden Preis diesen Anspruch, der äußerst sorgfältige paläoethnographische Vorstudien erfordert, schwächen. Ein Verblässen der Bedeutung ist dagegen unvermeidlich, wenn von prähistorischen „Kulturen“ die Rede ist. Daher ist der Begriff „Traditionen“ in Bezug auf die Fragmente oder Überreste dieser Kulturen zu bevorzugen, für die genaue Verbreitungsgebiete schwierig zu identifizieren sind. Gleichzeitig scheint aber der Begriff der „kulturellen Strömungen“ sehr gut geeignet zu sein, um die fließende Verbreitung von Praktiken bei mobilen Jägern und Sammlern auszudrücken, welche, ausgehend von heutigen Analogien, im Ruf sozialer Flexibilität stehen. Es folgen einige Überlegungen darüber, was die beeindruckende Weitergabe von Ideen in Europa während des Spätpaläolithikums und Mesolithikums offenbaren könnte. Im Einzelnen liegt der Fokus dabei auf der fluktuierenden Intensität des Kontaktes im Zeitraum zwischen Magdalénien und spätem Azilien.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Epistemologie, Paläozoologie, Magdalénien, Azilien.

**P**ART of my work involves teaching, and I am sometimes also called upon to address the general public. It seems to me that such tasks require to carefully consider the terms used. This is particularly important at a time when the use of certain words are tainted with political intentions. Fortunately, however, this critical appraisal of the vocabulary used has become commonplace in the social sciences since the 1970s.

Adopting such a perspective is by no means a matter of promoting a so-called 'politically correct' language, but rather of attempting, where possible, to use a pedagogically correct one. For example, by using 'late Palaeolithic' rather than 'upper Palaeolithic', thus no longer confusing history and geology, it seems to me that I achieved greater clarity with my newer students.

I also gained time, no longer having to add that the persistent use of the adjective 'upper' (translated in French as *supérieur* [superior]) clearly does not denote a value judgment (see also Jaubert, 2003).

These pedagogically correct terms can also become scientifically correct ones when they constitute effective tools for designating tangible realities. I will restrict my remarks in the following lines to what I know of the realities of the late Pleistocene and early Holocene. In this context, I propose that we question the adequacy of some very familiar terms, such as 'social' and 'cultural'. Once, I myself often used them spontaneously before questioning the deeper meaning that lies behind these commonplace notions in the context of our studies, given our sources and scales of observation (Valentin, 2008).

## SOCIAL FACTS OR ‘L’INACCESSIBLE ÉTOILE’<sup>(1)</sup>

Let us begin with the adjective and noun ‘social’ and related words (‘society’, ‘sociology’, etc.). Many of us have been influenced in this regard, directly or indirectly, by the work carried out at the Magdalenian site of Étiolles and the ambition behind this research (see in particular Pigeot, 1987; Olive, 1988; Pigeot (ed.), 2004). Nicole Pigeot defined this ambition as:

‘seeing in each piece of evidence, although unique, the manifestation of a “total social fact”, the magnificent founding notion of our disciplines’<sup>(2)</sup> (Pigeot (ed.), op. cit., p. 178).

This definition was the subject of much debate between us because I reminded her of the original quotation by Marcel Mauss for whom

‘total social facts’ are those which ‘in some cases set in motion the whole of society and its institutions (potlatch, clashing clans, tribes visiting one another, etc.) and in other cases only a very large number of institutions [...]. All these phenomena are at once legal, economic, religious, and even aesthetic and morphological’<sup>(3)</sup> (Mauss, 2012).

This definition implies that in adapting to prehistoric reality, the ambition described above is necessarily limited. Therefore, I find it difficult to sustain and am of the opinion that a simple, careful description of the technical facts, as found in most prehistoric studies today, is not yet enough to take us very far down this path.

For this reason, I consider it fundamental to adopt the most refined palaeoethnographical approach, whenever possible. This can be found only in monographs on the best-preserved habitats (as a recent example, see the series on Champréveyres and Monruz, initiated by Leesch, 1997). Such volumes take considerable time to compile (in an age in which we are unfortunately under too much pressure to produce short-term publications). However, it must be admitted that even in these meticulously produced monographs we only perceive fragments of sociology since even in the best-studied cases the archaeological ‘totality’ we are referring to is very different to that which an observer of contemporary facts has access to.

With regard to ‘total social facts’, this time in the strongest Maussian sense of the term, I am nonetheless convinced that some of the lithic artefacts we now handle contributed to them. I am thinking, for example, of certain explicitly ostensible manifestations, such as the very long Magdalenian blades found at Étiolles (Olive et al., 2005), or the ‘fine’ Belloisian blades that were frequently transported from one site to another (Biard and Valentin, 2019). I am referring even more so to artefacts that were not only ostensible but probably also ostentatious, such as the large Solutrean leaf-shaped knives (Pelegrin, 2013).

However, it seems to me that we still lack a good theory for interpreting these facts, particularly the specialization required for the manufacturing of some of these artefacts (Valentin and Bon, 2012), at a time when the talent involved in some artistic creations is readily discussed (Guy, 2017). More broadly, we lack, if not a general sociological theory on hunter-gatherers (see in particular Testart, 2012), at least ways of correctly analysing our archaeological data in a way that lends itself to sociological interpretations of this kind. Jean-Marc Pétillon and I recently observed this while seeking to verify the validity of the sociological model proposed by Alain Testart with regard to the changes accompanying the late Palaeolithic and Mesolithic in Europe (Valentin and Pétillon, 2018).

In short, it seems to me that palaeosociology is a very difficult art in a field where much advancement remains yet to be made, through an increase in studies on well-preserved prehistoric sites as well as a redoubled effort to interpret results. In other words, it is less a matter of actual achievements already at hand than an exciting research programme for the years to come – provided that we allow ourselves the palaeoethnographical means, which also implies the time necessary for this task.

## IMMERSED IN THE CULTURAL FACTS

There remains the cultural dimension of the prehistoric facts we are continuously immersed in and the somewhat exhilarating sensation that can arise from this – and perhaps mislead us about the nature of what we are looking at. We are immersed in cultural facts, that much is clear, but that does not mean that we are yet able to precisely establish the identities prehistoric groups themselves derived from this material. This does not in any way mean that we have nothing to say on the matter – quite the contrary – but it requires us once again to weigh up our words, especially at a time when some people are striving to reinforce these identities (archaeologists having been invited several times in the past to sustain ethnicist fictions, see for example Olivier, 2012). Let us therefore be careful not to lapse into fiction about prehistoric ‘cultures’ and what remains of them. And let us first consider what lies behind this fetish word ‘culture’ which I rarely ever use. In fact, it does not seem very operative to me, whereas I never hesitate to use the adjective ‘cultural’ on the other hand, because it goes without saying that we are constantly confronted with facts of this kind – like all primatologists, and many specialists of the animal kingdom (see for example Laland, 2008).

In one of our dictionaries (Leroi-Gourhan (dir.), 1988), Yvette Taborin and Stéphanie Thiébaud define the Magdalenian as ‘a prestigious culture’ while Michel Orliac describes the Azilian as ‘a Mesolithic (or Epipalaeolithic) culture’. If we then consult the article on ‘Culture’ in the same dictionary however, Jean Leclerc and Jacques Tarrête state that

‘by borrowing this term from social anthropologists, prehistorians have had to significantly modify its content [...] It goes without saying that by identifying a culture from a collection of partial and fragmented elements, prehistorians must relinquish any notion of revealing the internal coherence and unity of this potential culture’<sup>(4)</sup>.

The contrast between enthusiastic spontaneity when it comes to defining terms such as ‘Magdalenian’ and ‘Azilian’ and the rigour of this epistemological injunction reflects a play of tension that is extremely common in prehistoric studies. For this reason, the word ‘culture’ seems highly inadequate to me because it is so greatly diminished by the adjective ‘archaeological’, that is to say, reduced of many ideological dimensions that are inaccessible to prehistorians. I therefore prefer the notion of ‘cultural tradition’ for designating a system of choice and rules in the fields of activity concerned – whether technical or symbolic – which are archaeologically accessible to us. It is clear that these systems of choice that I refer to as ‘cultural traditions’ implicitly reflected value systems, and that these traditions therefore formed part of a culture in the full sense of the term. But it is equally clear that there was not necessarily a perfect correspondence between a prehistoric tradition and a culture (also defined by its language, myths and so forth; in short by a whole framework that has since disintegrated). In other words, some of the traditions we identify, in terms of stone knapping, for example, may have been shared by several different prehistoric cultures, while, in parallel, some cultures may have simultaneously adopted several different traditions. Furthermore, no absolute congruence is expected between a tradition in one sphere of activity – stone knapping, for example – and that in another sphere, for example bone working, adornment, or other symbols. This is already fully recognized, for, with regard to modern-day societies, anthropology has abandoned all fixed and monolithic conceptions of cultures. We are also increasingly aware of this in terms of the periods that concern us here thanks to an increasing accuracy in datings (see Naudinot et al., 2018; pending publications on the engravings discovered in Angoulême in an Azilian context).

Thus, in choosing the term ‘traditions’ to designate the fragments of cultures we are studying, the initial construction of which is not clear to us, I have found a notion which no longer requires me to make continual excuses regarding its use, because it seems of appropriate scale for the sources concerned. It is also of appropriate scale for our perception of time, because the other major problem lies therein: how, with two to five centuries residual imprecision in radiocarbon dating, can we ‘group together a set of significant disparities for which experience has proven that the limits approximately coincide’<sup>(5)</sup> as Claude Lévi-Strauss (1958, p. 325) invited us to do in order to define a culture – who, like many anthropologists, was not very comfortable in carrying out the exercise. What boundaries, even those that approximately coincide, can we claim to perceive in prehistory, given the extent to which these boundaries can be hazy even

among modern-day societies? Most of the time of course, it is a matter of gradual and continuous variations that can rapidly fluctuate over time, these boundaries indeed being the result of frequent renegotiations, reminding us of the great quote by André Leroi-Gourhan:

‘ethnicity [...] is not so much a past as a future’<sup>(6)</sup>  
(Leroi-Gourhan, 1973, p. 308).

So, if even modern-day boundaries are so hazy and changeable, we can imagine that this kind of geometry is particularly difficult to grasp for those of us studying nomadic societies known for their great social flexibility, particularly when we are approaching them through long units of time, artificially frozen by at least two centuries of imprecision.

In summary, the essence of my discomfort with the notion of culture in prehistory probably lies in the area of this question of limits, or boundaries. Whether we like it or not, the use of ‘culture’ is still sometimes highly charged with an essentialist vision that Gustaf Kossinna helped to popularize in archaeology. It is therefore a potentially dangerous vision (which currently sharply contrasts with that of many anthropologists), accompanied by a false hope of establishing borders, obscuring a fluidity that is both synchronic and diachronic. This illusory hope can still be detected on a few maps in general literature, which, while useful in establishing the distribution of technical ideas within a few centuries, inaccurately present themselves as population maps. The other reason for my discomfort is that a prehistorian’s use of the notion of culture is highly dependent on technical facts, masking all fluidity under the reification of certain contrasts which the prehistoric ethnicities did not necessarily consider at all symbolic of their identity or of that of other groups.

### IDEAS DO NOT HAVE WINGS OF THEIR OWN

I even wonder if we do not still invest a little too much effort into studying these local particularities, which, moreover, are so difficult to identify. For there have also been some impressive phenomena of cultural homogenization across a large part of Europe since at least the beginning of the late Palaeolithic which deserve more attention. These are ‘globalization’ phenomena, a rather anachronistic term that I risk using here in order to stir my readers. To describe the result of these phenomena, I rather like the notion of ‘currents’, as used by André Leroi-Gourhan (1983, p. 114), with all the fluidity it implies: the term seems to me to be ideally adapted for describing the spreading, of varying intensity and geometry, of practices and therefore ideas<sup>(7)</sup>. Let us take the example of the Magdalenian: there are several currents, both symbolic and technical, which coincide in various ways, but not systematically (see for example the absence of harpoons, or the extreme rarity of art objects in the



Magdalenian in the Paris Basin: Valentin, 2011). When they coincide, these currents signal specific moments and areas of ideological unity at a very large scale (see, for example, the Magdalenian ‘schematic female figures’ in the form of engravings and statuettes from the Aquitaine to the Czech Republic). And let us note in passing that the intensity of certain phenomena of this kind only heightens the difficulty we have in grasping the more restricted characteristics, in other words, in establishing geographical limits around the cultural facts.

My research has made me very sensitive to these phenomena of technical, and even symbolic, globalization, which become perceptible as soon as we attempt to make long-distance comparisons. I am convinced that the existence of such vast currents, which transcend and blur any local particularities, reflects a fundamental aspect of the social forms of the late Palaeolithic and Mesolithic. Furthermore, this aspect seems to me insufficiently discussed and studied, doubtlessly because of the major efforts invested – although currently somewhat unproductive (see above) – in seeking to identify what divided these prehistoric societies (i.e. their particularities), while neglecting what sometimes powerfully connected them.

On many occasions, these societies have been capable of sharing a significant flow of information over considerable distances. Let us also add that, despite the many historical contrasts, one cannot help but be struck by the very long-term stability of certain elements: those at the basis of the multi-centennial coherence of the technical traditions in question. What is perhaps even more impressive is the multi-millennial duration of certain values structuring the symbolic systems of the late European Palaeolithic (see the limited range of shells used for adornment for example, or note, in terms of art, the perpetuation if not of all the themes represented, at least of those not represented, etc.). Clearly, this perpetuation of values shows that the transmission of information has always been significant despite any likely fluctuations in intensity.

So, let us think for a moment about the way this information may have spread, period by period. For the moment, this crucial aspect has been approached essentially in terms of symbols and adornment, the circulation of which at times indicates vast networks of contact and probably exchange.

But what remains to be determined is the intensity of these contacts – in short, if they were other than brief and sporadic, and what kind of cohesion they reflected. In terms of the transfer of somewhat complex technical ideas (which are therefore not simply a matter of technical convergence sensu André Leroi-Gourhan), it seems to me that their propagation necessarily required episodes of demonstration and learning, and, prior to this, being attracted to these ideas and convinced of their value. In other words, the time required for these *exchanges of best practices* would have varied in length depending on the difficulty of the ideas in question, which gives us some idea of the intensity of contact needed. The same applies to the sharing of symbols, which sometimes went hand in hand with efforts related to a real proselytism.

In my opinion, this provides us with some very general information about the prehistoric sociologies in question. Flexibility is known to be one of the fundamental characteristics of the sociology of such mobile hunter-gatherers, resulting in a well-known succession of fusion and fission episodes. As we know, these episodes reflect various economic, political, matrimonial and ceremonial demands, which went more or less hand in hand. It is interesting to note, in terms of one aspect of the question of how such techniques – in some cases related to weaponry – actually spread, that a broad study has reviewed the dominant ideas about post-marital forms of residency and found them to be much less virilocal than previously thought:

‘Most hunter gatherers are multi-residential; in certain camps the couples live with the wife’s parents, at other times with the husband’s parents, and sometimes with neither of them’ (Marlowe, 2005, p. 60).

As a result, these studies of modern populations allow us to envisage the frequent movement of individuals among prehistoric hunter-gatherers of both genders. And if these days, prehistorians frequently evoke ‘the mobility of ideas’ (including in the title of the round table that preceded this article), it is an indirect way of referring to the mobility of prehistoric hunter-gatherers themselves, since ideas could not have travelled on their own.

## CONTACTS OF VARYING INTENSITY

This frequent mobility of individuals might explain the continuous spreading of practices during the late Magdalenian, following the initial large-scale population movements during the expansion of the Magdalenian currents (see in particular Grimm and Weber, 2008). The rather abrupt abandonment of several Magdalenian ideas in favour of new practices introduced by the ‘Azilian’ currents might also have happened in a context of contact through limited but frequent movement during the 13<sup>th</sup> millennium cal. BC (see in particular Valentin, 2008; Grimm, 2019). Following the wide adoption of these new ideas however, rapid imitations could have been enough to explain the apparent uniformity in the highly-simplified techniques that were predominant in the 12<sup>th</sup> millennium cal. BC (see, in particular, Valentin, *op. cit.*; Grimm, *op. cit.*; Naudinot et al., 2019). For example, perhaps it was just the idea that flint could be knapped without looking for many blades that was passed from one group to another during the late Azilian, at a time when tools were only briefly used in comparison with the Magdalenian. And this decreased interest in blades may even have spontaneously developed in different places, connected to major changes in economic organization. The hypothesis of less intense contact during the late Azilian is confirmed by bibliographic research on the circulation of raw materials (Valentin, *op. cit.*, p. 77–82) at a time when there were

also slightly more marked regional differences with regard to the few bone artefacts and symbolic practices observed.

It is clearly not insignificant however, that this possible reduction in social interactions took place in parallel with major transformations in the natural environment between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> millennia cal. BC in a well-known context of increased plant cover and faunal changes. At the same time, the observation of more intense contact during the Magdalenian supports a correlation proposed by some researchers based on modern day comparisons between arid landscapes or landscapes with strong seasonal contrasts and phenomena of cultural and even linguistic homogenization among hunter-gatherers. This correlation is

‘attributed to the greater environmental risk that characterizes these [...] regions, within which human groups have had to develop long-distance social relationships in order to ensure, through appropriate strategies (diversification of the resources used, storage, mobility, and exchange), their means of subsistence throughout the year’<sup>(8)</sup> (d’Errico et al., 2006, p. 269).

According to these authors, this same correlation might explain the apparent correspondence in the late Palaeolithic between the coldest phases, the repeated Heinrich events, which each led to a vast expansion of the steppe landscapes, and the start of each major technical – and possibly symbolic – currents at a European scale. As such, the correlation between the last Heinrich event (HE 1) and the vast initial spread of the Magdalenian currents is highly striking. For the late Palaeolithic, this environmental avenue deserves to be carefully explored, bearing in mind that very subtle dynamics (seasonal variability and concentration of resources, predictability of their possible movements and therefore their availability, etc.) may have played a role in addition to the simple alternation between increasing and decreasing plant cover. In this respect, it is necessary to pay equally close attention to other vast cultural currents (the ‘Sauveterrian’, for example) that spread after the start of the Holocene, this time in a context of a very significant reforestation and an attenuation of the climate oscillations.

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## NOTES

- (1) ‘L’inaccessible étoile’ is a metaphor from a well-known song by Jaques Brel. Nicole Pigeot often liked to use this homage to the French singer to reflect both the extent and difficulty of the palaeosociological ambition of which she was the main proponent. It is to her that I dedicate this fragment of a discussion that I would very much have liked to continue further.
- (2) « voir en chaque témoin, même unique, la manifestation d’un « fait social total », magnifique notion fondatrice de nos disciplines » (Pigeot (ed.), 2004, p. 178), author’s translation.
- (3) « les faits sociaux (...) mettent en branle dans certains cas la totalité de la société et de ses institutions (potlatch, clans affrontés, tribus se visitant, etc.) et dans d’autres cas, seulement un très grand nombre d’institutions (...). Tous ces phénomènes sont à la fois juridiques, économiques, religieux, et même esthétiques, morphologiques, etc. » (Mauss, 2012), author’s translation.
- (4) « en empruntant ce terme aux ethnologues, les préhistoriens ont dû en modifier sensiblement le contenu (...) Il va de soi qu’en reconnaissant ainsi une culture dans l’assemblage d’éléments partiels et disparates, les préhistoriens doivent renoncer à faire apparaître ce qui faisait l’unité et la cohérence interne de cette culture éventuelle » (Leroi-Gourhan [dir.], 1988, p. 295), author’s translation.
- (5) « regrouper un ensemble d’écarts significatifs dont l’expérience prouve que les limites coïncident approximativement » (Lévi-Strauss, 1958, p. 325).
- (6) « l’ethnie (...) est moins un passé qu’un devenir » (Leroi-Gourhan, 1973, p. 308), author’s translation.
- (7) At the suggestion of one of the reviewers, I would like to point out that the notion of ‘currents’ is close to that of ‘civilization’. I hesitate to use the latter as it is highly equivocal because of possibly persistent linear evolutionary connotations. Moreover, its use in the sense of vast cultural entities presents, at another scale, the same problems of demarcation as the use of ‘culture’. My use of ‘currents’ is also close to that of ‘techno-complex’, but the latter one – aside from the fact that it is not very attractive – is somewhat reductive since it does not take into account the circulation of symbols.
- (8) « attribué(e) au plus fort risque écologique qui caractérise ces (...) régions, au sein desquelles les groupes humains doivent développer des liens sociaux à forte distance leur permettant d’assurer par des stratégies adaptées (diversification des ressources exploitées, stockage, mobilité, échange) leurs moyens de subsistance au cours de l’année » (d’Errico et al., 2006, p. 269), author’s translation.

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