Emergence of modern cognition; modern abilities in humans since at least 100,000 years (d’Errico & Stringer, 2011)

Increase in archaeological studies pointing toward early use of symbolic representations in H. sapiens (d’Errico et al., 2001; d’Errico et al., 2008)

Understand early traces of symbolism & collective agreement on meaning, e.g. social identity (Kuhn & Stiner, 2007a)

Shift from material artefacts to cognitive functions, reasoning and culture

**Approach**

Existing approaches in cognitive archaeology

• Relate early symbols to cognitive components and abilities (Coolidge & Wynn, 2005; Henshilwood & Dubreuil, 2009)

• Consider how different categories of signs apply to artifacts (Rossano, 2010)

Our own approach

• Depart from Peirce (1935)’s distinction between ions, indexes and symbols

• Get psychological insights from modern situations

**Present and past judgments of value**

The emergence of photography

• Quest for a precise and conform representation of reality

• Divorce between the truth of a representation & its authenticity induced by
  i. the autonomous process of production of the picture
  ii. the cheap mechanical reproduction of this initial image.

→ Contrary to a painted masterpiece, the value of a picture cannot come from its authenticity and unicity (Benjamin, 1936)

→ Value - an elaborated property - is derived from primary properties

**Application to prehistoric R-media**

• Assumption: our ancestors had similar experience and judgments of value

**An evolutionary road to modern symbols?**

• A gradual rather than abrupt trajectory toward modern semiotic capacities

i. Natural R-media with a secondary function of signification

ii. Artificial R-media with intentional modifications of the primary properties for a secondary function of signification

iii. Gradual shift to artificial R-media with a primary function of signification

• Possible coexistence of individuals with differing degrees of mastery of symbols in a group, all using R-media but only some producing them

**Conclusions & Perspectives**

• A framework to consider early symbolic activities in the light of modern ones

• Emphasizes the notions of value and judgment, and interaction between R-media rather than independence

• A gradual development of our semiotic capacity

• Bolter & Gruisin (1988)’s immediacy and hypermediacy for further study

**References**


