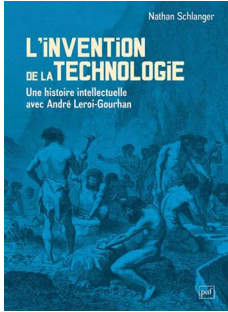


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NATHAN SCHLANGER. 2023. *L'invention de la technologie: une histoire intellectuelle avec André Leroi-Gourhan*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France; 978-2-13-083395-6 paperback €26.



André Leroi-Gourhan is widely recognised for key contributions to the study of cave art and excavation methods. In studying cave art, he considered the cave as a whole entity and in excavation he pioneered exposing and recording broad horizontal exposures. Leroi-Gourhan’s archaeological innovations drew on practices he had mastered as a young ethnographer working in Japan that emphasised the scrupulous correlation of material objects (collected for the Musée de L’Homme in Paris) with detailed contextual information, codified in index cards. The placement of paintings within a cave and the find spots of stone tools across an excavation were simply an

extension of the recording of context (what we refer to as metadata) that was central to the museological ethnography developed by Marcel Mauss and followed by Leroi-Gourhan with zeal. Even as he was dispatched to a military posting at the outset of the Second World War, Leroi-Gourhan was careful to pack his precious index cards, from which he expected order and knowledge to emerge. One of the delights of Nathan Schlanger’s book *L’invention de la technologie* is the quotation of early letters sent by Leroi-Gourhan to his mentor Jean Buhot written from 1938–9, many of which express his dedication to and enthusiasm for index cards.

Over the past 20 years, Leroi-Gourhan’s legacy has expanded with the recognition of his contributions to ‘technology’, in the French sense of the study of technology. Schlanger takes a deep dive into Leroi-Gourhan’s archives and published work to try to grasp the scope and intellectual origins of his contributions to technology. This is not a simple task as Leroi-Gourhan, unlike his contemporaries such as Claude Lévi-Strauss and Michel Lieris, left little in the way of personal records.

Schlanger brings to this study both a background as a lithic analyst and a deep knowledge of the writing of Marcel Mauss and the Durkheimian school of anthropology out of which Leroi-Gourhan developed. Leroi-Gourhan only began a full engagement with archaeology in the 1950s when he took on the post as Professor in the University of Lyon, after a long career in ethnography. His work in technology has deeper roots, with the publication of the two volumes that make up *Évolution et Technique: L’Homme et la Matière* (1943) and *Milieu et Techniques* (1945). From Schlanger’s account, however, it seems that these volumes are best understood as compilations of index cards rather than a programmatic theory of human technology. Notably in the first editions of these books, Leroi-Gourhan was dismissive of the potential of stone tools to yield any information about human technology, writing in *L’Homme et la Matière* that for early periods “On n’a rien: des silex taillés” (p. 16, transl.: “We have nothing: knapped flints”).

Leroi-Gourhan's mature work on technology is not data driven and, in fact, the inspiration he draws from the replication of stone tool manufacture by Francois Bordes and Léon Coutier is largely anecdotal. Rather, Leroi-Gourhan was pulled by a deep theoretical interest in the relationship of humanity with the natural world, and the future of humanity in the face of the increasing scale of technology. He looked to the past to understand the present and future, guided throughout by his Catholic faith and in part by his reading of Teilhard de Chardin, a French Jesuit and palaeontologist. This was a journey of exploration rather than the proposal of a unified theoretical framework, and Schlanger recounts a history of changing views as Leroi-Gourhan moves across disciplinary boundaries and his thinking develops. The clearest example of shifts in his writing is found in his perception of the taxon *Homo faber*, man the toolmaker. Initially he followed Bergson in seeing *Homo faber* as a step proceeding *Homo sapiens*, but later rejected this view in favour of seeing these two taxa as the two faces of a single species. What emerges is an articulate rejection of a privileged position for language at the expense of technicity as the key element of humanity.

So, we can ask whether Leroi-Gourhan deserves his current reputation as the founder of 'technology'. My sense is that the material assembled by Schlanger pushes us to replace such a simplistic view with an appreciation of the subtlety of Leroi-Gourhan's intellectual engagement and the milieu within which these ideas developed. Treating Leroi-Gourhan as a figurehead does him a disservice and glossing technology as the *chaîne opératoire* strips away much of the richness that makes technology such an essential field of study. Technology does not need a mythical ancestor, but rather should be understood as emerging from a rich, diverse, and often contradictory body of thought that developed through the twentieth century and that remains vital and important today. One of the beautiful points made by Schlanger is the opposing positions brought to bear on the critical subject of the future of the human relation to technology, ranging from Leroi-Gourhan's cautious optimism to the distinctly pessimistic perspective of some of his contemporaries.

Schlanger has done an immense service by excavating the real Leroi-Gourhan through a close reading of the archives and published material, putting us in a position to discard simplistic perspectives on this complex and brilliant man. Yet Leroi-Gourhan remains in many ways an enigma, as his archives provide only grudging glimpses of his internal life. I was struck by three unlikely encounters described by Schlanger and was left wishing we knew more on how they impacted Leroi-Gourhan. The first of these was his meeting in Japan with Bernard Leach, a British potter who was a key figure in developing the Mingei, or folk craft, movement. Schlanger points to the potential influence of the Mingei on Leroi-Gourhan's perspective on the beauty of well-made objects, but one also wonders how the Mingei ideas that derived from Buddhism would have fitted with Leroi-Gourhan's Catholic spirituality. A second encounter is with the French ethnographer Deborah Lifchitz, who was Leroi-Gourhan's classmate at the Institut d'Ethnologie. Schlanger provides the complete text of a poem she wrote dedicated to Leroi-Gourhan, evidence of a close relationship. Lifchitz was murdered in Auschwitz 11 years after writing this poem. We are left with little insight into how this individual loss as a microcosm of the Holocaust affected Leroi-Gourhan. It is striking that there is little evidence of how the mechanised genocide of the

Jews, facilitated by the bureaucratic reduction of humans to index cards, shaped his view of technology. The third, and perhaps most surprising, encounter is with political figure and philosopher Frantz Fanon who was a student on Leroi-Gourhan's course in Colonial Anthropology at the University of Lyon. Schlanger recounts that it is likely that Fanon even accompanied Leroi-Gourhan on an archaeological survey, we can only imagine what they talked about!

Leroi-Gourhan emerges from Schlanger's masterful study not as a one-dimensional representative and progenitor of technology, but rather as a complex figure steeped in a milieu in which the human relationship to the material world was an urgent concern. Little has changed in this regard and Leroi-Gourhan's writings are not only an inspiration for more empirical research, but also deepen reflection on how the past can help us think about our current and future challenges.

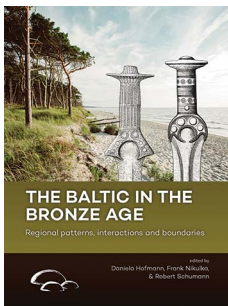
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DANIELA HOFMANN, FRANK NIKULKA & ROBERT SCHUMANN (ed.). 2022. *The Baltic in the Bronze Age: regional patterns, interactions and boundaries*. Leiden: Sidestone; 978-9-464270-181 paperback €65 Open Access.



The brackish Baltic is effectively an inland sea, connected to the North Sea and the Atlantic beyond only via the narrow Danish Straits. Today, the surrounding landmass is divided between nine different nations, each with its own archaeological tradition. This situation essentially assumes that the Baltic coastal areas of each of these countries have more in common with their respective national hinterlands than with the rest of the Baltic's long coastline. As a result, our understanding of connections across the sea and around its shores is fragmented and uneven. It might be instructive to reanalyse the archaeo-cultural map of the Baltic from first principles, disregarding modern national boundaries and focusing only on sites and find spots located within 20km of its shores.