

Rebecca Simpson

Niaux

for Jean Clottes, anthropologist

In the Grotte de Niaux, a cave in south west France, there are markings and paintings at least 13,000 years old. A vast tunnel, which turns at various points, leads to a high vaulted chamber with animal depictions on sections of its walls. This is the *Salon Noir*, where the acoustics invite the use of the voice and permit the creation, through clapping and echo, of an aural hallucination that may have been used in ritual.

gradually inwards
to a place of no season
we follow the burning wicks

little flames in stinking fat
shadows rear and crouch
big hunched bison people

fingers inspect walls
soles shift over stone
we breathe with care

shapes in rock
turn heads

on again
awe in our tread

space opens
and on the great cavern walls
Bison Horse Ibex Deer

eye meets eye
They quiver and breathe above the flames
They watch from year to year

red adorns the niche
crawl into the recess
into rock spin un-turning

colours spiral burst
nausea surges abates rises
hands merge with skin of stone
spirit being on the other side

cracks in the rock
the creature takes hold
enters body inhabits soul
call replies

hot breath down the tunnels of its
nostrils
muzzle soft as moss horse that snakes its
neck shakes its heavy bearded
head triangle of an
eye

the animal floats drifts settles
mane jawbone withers
fetlock

time to trace the Spirit of the horse
charcoal stick
slick black paint

Bison Horse Ibex Deer
we bring Them light
and another of their kind

flute whistle and voice
wake the Voice of the cave
handclaps!

call them from the other side
Spirit herd
joy of the Great Spirits!
the clapping must be sharp clear fast
so walls respond and the Beasts can pass

bring the herd galloping
galloping out of the dark