

FROM IMAGE TO IMAGO - FLORA'S & FAUNA'S ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES

Katerina Karoussos

This paper analyses the conceptual media of late antiquity which have built the entire imaginative sphere of the time and seem to be profound and flexible enough to meet the recent imagery strategies. Antiquity images are comprised of elements that have been chosen for the sake of their significations, as data of mutation not necessarily characterized by their aesthetic values but rather as aggregate spaces which could serve telematic mechanisms.



Fig.1. 'La Primavera', Botticelli (1445-1510) Galleria degli Uffizi (Creative Commons license)
<http://www.arteyfotografia.com.ar/1397/fotos/9259/>



Fig.2. Polygnotan Vase 430 BC. License by Creative Commons.
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/peterjr1961/5168147253/sizes/z/in/photostream/>



Fig.3. 'Laocöon' Royalty Free Stock Photos http://www.123rf.com/photo_590906_the-statue-of-laocöon-and-his-sons-also-called-the-laocöon-group-is-a-monumental-marble-sculpture-no.html

From Image to Imago - Flora's & Fauna's arrivals and departures

Visual Tendencies

In *De pictura* (1435), Leon Battista Alberti famously initiated to consider the frame of the painting as an open window. Alberti's single-point perspective has been, for most of the twentieth century, the dominant form of the image. Imagery has been operated as a single image in a single frame. However as Joseph Masheck points out "Alberti's window shares a larger problem of the so-called postmodern culture that deserves to be faced; hence the failure of postmodernism to defend its claims to the culture of the past, resulting in its closure and containment as just another movement".(Masheck, 1991).

The most important thing concerning this failure is the interpretation of things and phenomena according to terms of length, width and high, using Cartesian coordinates with one vanishing point as view-point. Consequently, as the development of technology and science required a more extensive vision for interaction and immersion, the concept of image, as it has been established by Renaissance and Enlightenment, has been proved inadequate. Actually, from pre-historical period up to Renaissance there is a completely different approach of visual aspects and even though it was inherited and implemented during 16th to 20th centuries, it was subject to persecution, being regarded as inferior to Modernity's brand new ideas.

However, with this narrow, one perspective, vision it is very difficult to understand the words of Chloris, the Nymph and mythological figure who said, while her lips breathe spring roses:

'I was Chloris who I am now called Flora'.(Ovid, 8th c BC)

Chloris, as a mythological figure presents the uprising of spring thus the celebration of life against the death. Did Ovid wrote a tender poem while Chloris in her description said that she was raped by Zephyrus? She said:

'It was spring, I wandered; Zephyrus saw me, I left. He pursues, I run: he was stronger; and Boreas gave his brother full rights of rape by robbing Erechtheus' house of its prize. But he makes good the rape and I have no complains about my marriage'.(Ovid, 8th c BC)

In Botticelli's "Primavera" one can see the scary face of Chloris as Zephyrus trying to grab her. Even if he extent his arms in a polite way as if he wants to embrace her, his face and his chest assure that he will going to catch her up as she was his victim. From the other side the ghostlike figure of Chloris testifies the impending rape. So Ovid's poem said that a girl was raped and a house was robbed. Is this a manifestation of life? Is Chloris a symbol of revival and joy just because she is surrounding by flora? In the same view, is Duchamp's urinal also corresponding to a source of life because is called fountain? (fig.1) Accordingly, we can say that frescoes in Lascaux caves are a celebration of nature, since they depicting fauna and flora. The evidence suggests that there were not merely decorations but codes of communication with others, humans and spirits. Additionally, those who create Nazca geoglyphs in Peru they were thinking of just a decoration that is visible from the sky? Undoubtedly the purpose of these designs related to astronomy and cosmology but with a perspective which is different from our common spatiotemporal interpretations.

Aggregate space

Images – which includes fauna and flora and by fauna I include the human genre - comprised of elements that have been chosen for the sake of their significations, as codes of something not necessarily implied of their effect as works of art, or arrangements of forms and colors. They devised from different aspects than that which is termed aesthetic.

In his Treachery of Images, Rene Magritte was more accurate from Botticelli's Primavera. He said: "This is not a pipe". This is something absolutely true. It is not a pipe; it is an image of a pipe. It does not "satisfy emotionally" - when Magritte once was asked about this image, he replied that "of course it was not a pipe, just try to fill it with tobacco" (Spitz, 1994). Indeed, this pipe which is not a pipe has been traversed from its physical status to the sphere of a form or a figure. In a quick historical review one can meet the elements of an image as codes of signification.

As a matter of fact Hegel and Derrida referred to Natural Religious Consciousness thus the first stirrings of religiosity within the minds which saw Nature as God, or as a series of gods. There are today many religions which still insist upon a minimum reverence to certain animals and/or elements in their rites. He spoke about flower religion as a neutral state of unification. And this is what these images depict.

'The state, in which spirit sees itself outside, apprehends itself as its own proper object in a natural and immediate figure. The spirit loses itself and finds itself again in these external natural objects.' (Derrida, 1990)

From the standpoint of this concept all things known to us—men, plants, animals, planets—are unstable, and they differ by the magnitude of their fluxions. But the thing, changing continuously in time, sometimes very much, and quickly, as in the case of a living body for example, still remains one and the same. The body of a man in youth, and the body of a man in senility, these are one and the same, though we know that in the old body there is not one atom left that was in the young one.

The image of invisible in antiquity was succeeded throughout noetic rather than esthetic perceptions. The image space was an aggregate one, not following a systematic order; this of a coordinate system. The aggregate space that Panofsky points out is this stage that all elements (figures, landscapes, motifs, etc) are in juxtaposition as consecutive signs.

One can meet this kind of space in archaic reliefs such as the horsemen of Parthenon. In this frieze there are sixty riders arranged in ten ranks. Each rank is marked by a figure placed nearest the observer and not overlapped by another. It is important to mention that the original word translated in English as

“frieze” is “zoforos” meaning something that brings and/or carries life. Thus, it is about energy and flow. This of course refers to the entire image and not a piece of it. You cannot extract an object as a central issue because aggregate space requires an overall visual syntax, as a signifying composition on several levels. This is something similar to emergence as a spontaneous organization in which every element involving into it maintains its object orientation while it is a part of a unit.

Parthenon frieze was a very good field research for Aristotle who in his “Metaphysics” claimed that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. This concept formed the idea of Holism (from ὅλος holos, a Greek word meaning all, whole, entire, total) meaning that all the properties of a given system (physical, biological, chemical, social, economic, mental, linguistic, etc.) cannot be determined or explained by its component parts alone. Instead, the system as a whole determines in an important way how the parts behave.

In his book “Perspective as Symbolic Form” Panofsky said that:

'...the art of classical antiquity the objects were not merged in painterly fashion into spatial unity, but rather were affixed to each other in a kind of tectonic or plastic cluster ...space was still perceived not as something that could embrace and dissolve the opposition between bodies and nonbodies, but only as that which remains, so to speak between the bodies. Bodies and the gaps between them were only differentiations or modifications of a continuum of a higher order. The represented space remains an aggregate space; it never becomes that which modernity demands and realizes a systematic space.' (Panofsky 1997)

The idea of this space is similar to the concept of a “stage”; or better to both its concepts, thus both of noetic layers in phases and of the stage as an area of performing. It is what Panofsky called: the lateral staggering; thus the disposal of all elements and their energy in a single unity no matter their position in time and space. Dickson’s film with Sioux natives produced in Edison’s Black Maria Studio, shows an organic movement of objects grouped together to suggest a unity of a single body. The idea goes back to ancient Greek drama and the chorus. The Greek chorus (or chorea) is a group of performers which are acting in one piece. The group comprised of twelve or fifteen members in tragedies and twenty-four members in comedies. They operate as intermediates in unison, in specific key frames into the play that considered of high importance.

The very same structure was used in visual arts. An important example is the Polygnotan vases. (fig.2). Here we can see the horses in a real time staggering;

'... all the body of the horse is presented in a single image, the rear elevation is placed alongside the front elevation, just as when entire figures are staggered.' (Panofsky 1997).

And in this united stage objects and figures operate in the same exact matter. Having a better look at those horses and bringing back in mind the Parthenon Frieze, one can indicate a kind of time- sequence and a notion of motion which is embodied in them as there is an inner principle that animated them.

In his contemplation on the Laocoon, Goethe states:

'To seize well attention of the Laocoon, let us place ourselves before the groupe with our eyes shut, and the necessary distance; let us open and shut them alternately and we shall see all the marble in motion; we shall be afraid to find the groupe changed when we open our eyes again'. This flicker effect that Goethe suggests is actually the mechanism of all the above images. Even if an image is one instant frame or a multiple of frames, they both comprised a mutable unity.

But is this a time sequence animation? It is more about a trace or a path rather than a structure of linear time sequence. This is something that can be easily understood through the stereoscopic analysis of movement by Etienne – Jules Marey.

'Marey though it necessary to reconstruct movement by making its physical wrapping abstract, based on a combination of visual formulas that do not prepose figurability, but on the contrary condition it.' (Micheaud, 2004)

Furthermore one can meet the whole concept in Duchamp's "The Nude Descending a staircase" (1912). Duchamp choosed to depict the motion of his nude in a single frame in order to posed the idea that time can be frieze for the sake of an augmented image. Therefore if the stage is one and only –as the single horizontal line of Polygnotan vase- and the objects into it are all in one unfolded, there is no need of change or movement. In this energetic space the venture is that of the appearance and disappearance of scene's elements, just like the flicker effect of Goethe's description for Laoccon's statue; hence the effort to demonstrate its exclusion of physical appearance and its modification to an abstract form. So we can say that Flora who was once Chloris had traversed herself throughout her modification, rather than changed herself. What we see in the stage is her path, her trace and not her portrait. The path, which is many time unsuccessfully interpret as serial movement, reflects the three stages that Hegel and Derrida raise in order to construct a unification.

'The concept of religion fills itself up, determines itself in opposing itself to itself, then reconciles itself with itself; in three moments that fulfill the absolute spirit. In the first moment, absolute spirit finds its existence in religion, but in a religion whose concept yet remains empty indeterminate. The second moment is that of natural religion which the spirit looses itself and finds itself again in these external natural objects.' (Derrida, 1990)

Media Res

The flower is neither an object nor a subject, neither a not I not an I, among all these opposites, the essence of the flower appears in its disappearance as a neutral stage. This absolute time of modification is depicted in all the above images and it is similar to the archaic concept of "in media-res".

In media res or media in res means to be into the middle of things is a Latin phrase concerning a narrative technique in which the story begins most of the times in the mid-point in where there is the most critical point of the narrative. In the house of Dioscouri at Pompeii there were two significant frescoes that one can see them now at the National Museum in Naples. The first one depicts Laoccon and the second one portrays Media. (fig.3) .We know from the narratives that both characters were in a very bad position the very moment of their depiction. Laoccon is dying from the snake's bite and Media is going to kill her children after a second. Each image has capture a moment in media res in which all phenomena whose nature is suddenly to break out, disappear and appear again in another mental stage, presented as unified in an unconditional and unchanging duration. Media stands to the right of the composition, frozen forever rather too "posed" to be natural. Their condition reflects the theory of flower religion which is followed by that of sun religion. The latest concerns the stage in which "the sun does not set, or it sets immediately", like Goethe's flicker effect. Hegel placed this procedure in natural religion in where the sun is not yet a subject. 'In order to become a subject in effect' he said that 'the sun must go down.' But Zarathustra, Laoccon, Media, Chloris and all the other elements that had been mentioned before, stand beyond the route that Derrida called: from orient to occident with its double meaning, that is they are in a media res stage in where orient and occident is included, birth and death, east and west, male and female and all other opposite doubles, with no reference in vector magnitude in their spatiotemporal circumstances. One can assign meaning to Chloris' words: 'I was Chloris who I am now called Flora' by replacing the concept of image with the concept of imago.

Conclusion

In biology, the imago is the last stage of development of an insect, after the last ecdysis of an incomplete metamorphosis, or after emergence from the pupa where the metamorphosis is complete. As this is the only stage during which the insect is sexually mature and, if it is a winged species, has functional wings. In conclusion, in a neutral time all elements in an image reached their pick, performing in a gestalt effect while their depiction is of their absence rather than that of their re-presentation. What is to be shown, is the traces of their appearance and disappearance throughout an organic process of their unified mutation.

References and Notes:

1. Derrida, J, Leavey, J.P. & Rand,R., 1990 "Glass", University of Nebraska Press, USA
2. Goethe, J.W. 'Goethe on Art' 1980, trans. John Gaze, Berkley: University of California Press, USA
3. Masheck, Joseph., 1991 "Alberti'sWindow": Art-Historiographic Notes on an Antimodernist Misprision", *Art Journal* 50 no 1,(1991),34-41 College Art Association , <http://www.jstor.org/stable/777083> (accessed June 2010)
4. Michaud,P.A., 2004 "Aby Warburg and the image in motion" Zone Books, MIT Press, Massachusetts, USA
5. Ovid "Fasti" Book V, May 2, 8th c.,BC, trans. A. S. Kline 2004 <http://poetryintranslation.com/>
6. Panofsky, E. & Wood, C.S., 1997 "Perspective as symbolic form" Zone Books, MIT Press, Massachusetts, USA
7. Spitz Ellen Handler., 1994 "Museums of the Mind", Yale University Press, USA