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THE ARTS OF THE EUROPEAN ANTIQUITY AND THE ORIGINS OF MOVING PICTURES

Abstract: Cinematic art is a comparatively recent art form with its birth and development inherently connected to the invention of its ever changing technology. Its origins, however, lay in the literary as much as the visual arts traditions. Through art history, many artworks executed in traditional visual arts media contain seeds of diverse aspects of film practice. Such seminal visual arts traditions, in turn, stem from several sources, among them the visual arts practices of the European antiquity. Together with these arts practices, it is essential to include the literary tradition of art historiography of the European antiquity as a literary companion to an examination of the extant artworks. Such an examination provides for an unexpected but valid theoretical framework, focused on the construct of representing time, within which the art of filmmaking can be better understood and explained.

Key words: film, visual arts, European antiquity, art historiographers of the European antiquity, Vitruvius, Pliny the Elder, Philostratus the Elder, Philostratus the Younger, Callistratus

A notion inherent in film, video, or the moving pictures imagery is of course the construct of pictures. Another notion similarly inherent in the construct of moving pictures is the construct of time as a series of moments within which the images are shown in a sequential order. This construct allows for a narrative to be told, much like in theatre arts, whilst it also allows for the imagery to evolve in an extended time frame and outside of a narrative. The individual images thus shown in motion are temporal and the construct of the duration of time emerges only as a characteristic of the process of their showing. An aspect of contemporary film theory scholarship is concerned with defining the construct of the duration of time versus temporality in cinematic art (Mroz 2013).

Through art history, however, many individual images – be them photography, paintings, drawings and prints or sculpture – contain direct references to capturing the construct of time. The most obvious example prior to the birth of cinematic arts is the use of photography as a medium

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that captures an image within a single moment. The case in point is the photo studio practice of the Parisian photographer Gaspard-Félix Tournachon known as Nadar (1820–1910) who in his many portraits, as well as landscapes (and cityscapes) and other established painterly subjects, explored the similarities and the differences between the two media (Begley 2017). His photography work, as well as that of his contemporaries, opened many art theory questions and directly inspired some painters' responses to the realistic quality of photo imagery of a captured moment. The invention of photography introduced the idea that the art of painting ceased to be required to produce documentary and realistic imagery. Such painters directly inspired by the new medium of photography include Claude Monet (1840–1926) and many Impressionists (Brodskaia 2011) who in April 1874 presented their works in the first and ground-breaking group show in Nadar's photo studio in 35 Boulevard des Capucines. The photo studio itself inspired some of the paintings exhibited, such as one of the two works by Monet titled *Boulevard des Capucines* from 1873, which captured the street view from the studio windows in fast brush strokes as the painter's sketch-like impression of the busy street scene. In contrast, some other painters of the time such as Gustave Caillebotte (1848–1894) embraced the documentary quality of realistic photo images and produced a body of paintings aiming to replicate the camera framed imagery and succeeding in using the painterly techniques outside of the monochrome medium to convey the illusion of coloured photography (Varnedoe 2000). At the same time, some other painters, like George Seurat (1859–1891), devised the painting techniques such as chromoluminarism and divisionism/pointillism based on the optical theory and the illusion of the eye (Broude 1978), in turn inspiring other artists, including some of the Italian Futurists, to explore the rules of optics in their work in a different manner.

Nadar's photography work included some of the early experimenting with the moving image, such as his revolving self-portrait from circa 1865 combined from his enface, profile and back self-portraits. However, the still pictures started moving after the photographer Eadweard Muybridge (1830–1904) devised the means of capturing as well as projecting the images in motion captured by a camera (Hendricks 2001). The notion of motion pictures by default contains the construct of the duration of time, in contrast to the notion of photography which contains the construct of time as a captured moment. A unique quality of motion pictures which differentiates the moving images from all other visual arts media is that they by default present a series of still images in a sequential order thus also enabling a sequential narrative to be told.

However, the construct of time represented as temporal (a single moment), as a period (sequential or multiple moments), or as the time itself, is inherent in many visual artworks executed in traditional media such as painting or sculpture. The representations of the construct of time in the visual arts dates back to the art practice as well as art historiography of the European antiquity. The art historiographers of the European antiquity (Bojic 2017) are Vitruvius, who wrote on architecture (*De Architectura*) 1st century BC, Pliny the Elder, who wrote on all aspects of the visual arts (*Historia Naturalis*) 1st century AD, Philostratus the Elder, who described individual paintings he claimed to have seen in a private collection (*Imagines*) 2nd century AD, Philostratus the Younger, who also wrote on painting (*Imagines*) 3rd century AD and Callistratus, who wrote on sculpture (*Descriptiones Statuarum*), 3rd or 4th century AD.¹

The construct of the flow of time in visual arts of the European antiquity can be shown as part of a consequential, sequential or iterative narrative. Time can also be shown as a single dramatic moment. The very notion of time itself can take shape of allegories and personifications or can be symbolically inherent in the artwork's subject matter. The consequential, sequential and iterative narrative is shown in artworks, and their descriptions, where the action is presented as a sequence of events or, in the case of an iterative action, as a moving image. The development of such ideas are evident in many examples of early Christian and later Byzantine or Gothic arts, but also of subsequent art works, especially those of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with this artistic tradition directly related to the beginnings of filmmaking.

Flow of time

Many visual artworks of the European antiquity contain the construct of time shown as a consequential narrative. The very term *consequential* narrative is especially coined to describe a documented art practice of the European antiquity. It denotes those artworks where the protagonist of a story depicted is shown twice in the same artwork – once before a crucial event and once after the event, with the event itself not being depicted. A

¹ The texts by the art historiographers of antiquity used here are: *Vitruvii de Architectura libri decem*, ed. F. Krohn, Lipsiae, in aedibus B. G. Teubneri, MCMXII; Gaius Plinius Secundus, *Naturalis Historia*, ed. Karl Friedrich Theodor Mayhoff, Teubner, 1897; Flavii Philostrati Opera, Vol 2. Philostratus the Lemnian (Philostratus Major). Carl Ludwig Kayser. in aedibus B. G. Teubneri. Lipsiae. 1871; Flavii Philostrati Opera, Vol 2. Philostratus Minor. Carl Ludwig Kayser. in aedibus B. G. Teubneri. Lipsiae. 1871; Flavii Philostrati Opera, Vol 2. Callistratus, *Descriptiones Statuarum* Carl Ludwig Kayser. in aedibus B. G. Teubneri. Lipsiae. 1871

telling example of such an art practice is a panel painting from the villa of Agrippa Postumus at Boscotrecase, today in the Metropolitan Museum in New York, with the story of Perseus. PICTURE 1. To the left of the image, Perseus is about to rescue the young maiden Andromeda, chained to the rock in the centre of the composition, from the sea monster shown at the bottom of the work. To the right of the composition, Perseus is represented after his rescuing Andromeda as her grateful father greets him. Philostratus the Elder described a painting of an identical subject matter in 1.29 Perseus, where again the protagonist is shown twice in the same artwork, before and after the deed. It is useful to note here that Philostratus the Elder in his Introduction stipulated that the artworks he described were of Greek origin. In this instance, this would mean that the iconography of the artwork would have been established in more ancient times than our surviving example from Boscotrecase.

The 1.29 Perseus is only one of consequential paintings described by Philostratus the Elder. However, the artworks of the same iconography which he mentioned in the other descriptions are not extant. Nevertheless, there are some other extant visual art examples of the same art practice of consequential imaging, such as the panel painting showing Cyclops, of the same provenance and today also in the Metropolitan, which similarly shows the protagonist twice within the same composition.

Visual arts traditions of the European antiquity also include the construct of time shown as a sequential narrative. These sequential representations in the visual arts practice of the European antiquity are twofold. One is the narrative told as the unfolding of a story through showing the events gradually as they evolve. The other is the imagery showing a holistic view of a landscape which includes depictions of several simultaneous events.

The practice of paintings showing a narrative told as the unfolding of a story is of an early date. In Greek art, a telling example is an archaic black figure hydria, today in the Louvre, from c. 520 BC showing the birth of Hermes. Here, Hermes is shown as a baby in the cradle, as well as, in a sequential image, as walking away with the cattle he stole from Apollo. The iconography and the multiple events depicted as a flow of compositions on this vase fully correspond to the description by Philostratus the Elder of one of the panel paintings he claimed to have seen, 1.26 The birth of Hermes. In Roman art, depictions of an unfolding sequential narrative is a standard feature of many public monuments celebrating Roman war victories, such as the Trajan's Column commemorating the emperor's victory in the Dacian wars, from 113 AD, Rome, in situ. Here the story of the wars is told in a

seemingly never ending sequential unfolding of battles in a continuum that spirals up to the top from the column's base. PICTURE 2. In Christian art, among the many later examples of using the same method of depicting an evolving narrative is Benozzo Gozzoli's *Journey of the Magi (East Wall)*, in the Magi Chapel of the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi in Florence, from 1459.

Imagery showing a holistic view of a landscape which includes depictions of several simultaneous events is a known feature of Roman painting. It was first mentioned by Pliny the Elder in XXXV, 10 as a subject matter developed by the painter Ludius at the time of Augustus and popular in his own time. Such paintings which often show a seascape within which many smaller differing events, multiple genre-scenes, simultaneously take place, are indeed not uncommon in Pompeian art. A brilliant description of such an artwork is also provided by Philostratus the Elder in 1.12 Bosphorus. Here, every one of the many genre-scenes within the landscape is described in great detail. In his description, Philostratus then linked the individual dispersed narratives thus forming a cohesive story. This manner of narration in Roman visual arts can be observed outside of pictorial representations of seemingly unrelated dispersed genre-scenes within a broader landscape. Many other extant compositions, such as the mosaics of the *Great hunt* from the Villa del Casale in Piazza Armerina, 3rd c. AD, show separate simultaneous events that, when connected, together form the subject matter depicted. PICTURE 3. Further, such scenes of the hunt, as well as those of fishing, which only through connecting smaller dispersed composition could be linked into a meaningful whole, were brilliantly described by the same writer in his 1.28 Hunters and 1.13 (Bosphorus) respectively.

Several examples of Pompeian painting show simultaneous genre-scenes dispersed around a landscape near a seashore or on an island. One such painting is a fresco depicted on a wall of the villa Agrippa Postumus at Boscotrecase, where the landscape painted within a window-like frame creates an illusion of an actual view from that vantage point. PICTURE 4. It is possible to assume that such artworks showing a promontory landscape in actual fact could stand for the visual arts representations of the coastal landmarks described in various *periplous* texts. The literary genre of *periplous* relates to the descriptions of the coasts and lands that the Greek sailors encountered on their many exploratory voyages. They both served as sailing logs providing useful geographical data and as a popular travelogue read. Indeed, in the same villa at Boscotrecase, another window-like view of a coastal landscape has been recognised as an Alexandrian landscape, based on the style of the buildings, statues and fountains depicted. A painting depicting the act of sailing around unidentified islands, a seemingly evolving

composition of a detailed documentary broad view of an unknown and unnamed seascape, was described in 2.17 Islands by Philostratus the Elder. Philostratus' description even prompted some contemporary scholars to attempt to identify the islands' actual geographic and topographic location (Moffin 1990: 241–261). Tradition of such imagery survived in later art practice and reappeared in the European art in the 16th century when it became known by the term the world landscape (*Weltlandschaft*) indicating paintings of landscapes and seascapes with sporadic often diminutive representations of Biblical stories.

Iterative action is not easily rendered in painting and sculpture, yet iterative action as an element of a painting is described in 1.13 (Bosphorus) by Philostratus the Elder. Describing a fishing scene, Philostratus mentioned a figure of a man on a lookout who continually turned his gaze to the horizon and away from it. However, many later artworks, especially some of those by the Russian avant-garde artists in the early 20th century, succeed in depicting an iterative action such as the painting *Cyclist* by Natalia Goncharova (1881-1962) from 1913.

Temporality

Temporal nature of the compositions depicted in the visual arts is one of the characteristics of the art of painting and the art of sculpture. In painting and sculpture, the moment frozen in time can be shown in a documentary manner or in a dramatic manner. The case in point are the artworks reproduced as PICTURE 5 and PICTURE 6. One is a documentary-like recording of the cast of a theatre play, the other shows a moment on stage. One can be seen as an example of time being shown in the visual arts as one still moment and the other as a visual artwork showing time as a single dramatic moment.

Time represented as a single still moment is by default a common characteristic of the traditional arts of painting and sculpture. Like photography, traditional painting and sculpture show a moment in time in the life of the subject depicted. However, such a still can be enriched by presenting a dramatic moment which carries an inherent unfolding narrative. The narrative itself is not represented, but it is understood. Among the many examples of Greek artworks showing a single dramatic moment is the scene of the death of Cassandra as shown on a red-figure Athenian kylix, now in Ferrara. PICTURE 7. It fully corresponds to the centrally positioned segment of a larger composition described by Philostratus the Elder in 2.10 Cassandra.

In this and many other artworks time can be shown as a single dramatic moment. Many representations of dramatic moments from myth or from the theatre stage are a characteristic of Greek art, especially common in vase painting. Both Philostratus the Elder and Pliny the Elder identified it as a characteristics of many monumental and panel paintings, whilst Callistratus identified it in sculpture. Among many other examples, the obvious case in point is the imagery of Medea in visual arts of the European antiquity. Medea features in various visual arts representations of accounts on the Argonauts stories, together with Jason or by herself. However, we will here briefly examine the iconography of the image of Medea as Euripides defined her on the Athenian theatre stage. As a subject matter of monumental or panel painting, Pliny mentioned Medea in several instances, in XXXV, 12 attributing a well-known painting of her to the painter Timomachus. There appear to have existed two such paintings by the same artist – the one that Julius Caesar had exhibited in front of the temple of Venus Genetrix in Rome and another one that the artist did not finish and that was considered an extraordinary artwork, on par with Apelles' unfinished *Venus*. It is also possible to assume that the Medea exhibited in front of the temple of Venus Genetrix was the same one that was not finished. In either case, the public display of this artwork in the 1st c. BC in Rome is possibly the reason for the appearance of the subject of Medea in Pompeian painting. Largely decorative by its nature, Pompeian painting in general rarely presents Greek mythology characters in iconography borrowed from a theatre stage. However, two such images of Medea, one from Pompeii and another one from the nearby Herculaneum, survive to this day. PICTURE 8, PICTURE 9. It is interesting to note that the figure of Medea from Pompeii is part of a larger composition also featuring her two children playing with astragals. However, the iconography of this playful scene, according to Philostratus the Younger in 8. Boys at play, belongs to a different, earlier, story of the myth of Medea, possibly indicating the artist's lack of familiarity with different aspects of the myth. In both the Herculaneum and the Pompeian paintings of Medea she is represented as contemplating the murder of her children, torn between her love for them and the inevitability of her terrible act of murdering them. She holds her sword with both hands and is shown in a movement that indicates her determination – but not rage – to accomplish her terrible deed. The subject of Medea preparing herself to murder her children is, surprisingly, also the subject of a sculpture described by Callistratus in 13. On the statue of Medea. Callistratus described the very qualities of Medea evident in Pompeian painting as the features of a stone sculpture he claimed to have

seen in the land of Macedonians. Callistratus' words describe her "exactly as if the artist had modelled the woman's passionate impulse upon the drama of Euripides." Her facial expression of a determined but grieving mother and a sword in her hand are the only attributes that define Medea's iconography. Rather, the essence of her iconography is the depiction of her at the very moment captured on stage and replicated in these artworks.

Going back to the imagery of the death of Cassandra as described by Philostratus the Elder in 2.10 Cassandra, a particular idea voiced out by the writer emerges as essential to our discussion. Having described a rich banquet scene staged for the return of Agamemnon and the tragic destiny that befell Agamemnon and his officers, Philostratus the Elder focuses on the central scene of Clytemnestra killing young Cassandra with a still warm axe. Philostratus here makes a comparison between the drama presented on stage and the dramatic moment shown in painting:

If we observe this scene as a drama, my boy, a great tragedy evolves in a brief span of time. But if we observe it as a painting, you will see more than a drama in it. (Philostratus the Elder: 2.10 Cassandra)

What differentiates a theatre stage composition from the one represented in a painting? The painting shows a detailed overview of the place where the drama evolves and includes depictions of simultaneously happening movements and gestures of fallen returned warriors, broken furniture, and untouched food laid on tables, cups overflowing with blood and scattered plates, as well as Agamemnon, wrapped in a mantle, still dying by the same axe. Indeed, described here is not a mere theatre stage scene. Instead this image shows a quality shared by the art of painting and the art of cinema: their ability to show the time-framed images.

Time itself

The construct of time can be shown by itself and can also be a subject in its own right of a painting or a sculpture. Philostratus the Elder mentioned the personifications of the Day and of the Night in 1.11 Phaeton. Many artworks of the European antiquity show personifications of time, such as the imagery of the Greek god of time Chronos or the four seasons depicted as maidens (and often rendered as portraits, especially popular as floor mosaics). Philostratus the Elder in 2.34 Horae described the imagery of four seasons, the sweet divinities of hours. The painting he described showed them dancing together and luring the painter to fall into the picture and join them in their dance. The iconography of the personification of

opportunity, the god of good moments Caerus, shows him as a young bald man with just a lock of hair on his forehead – to catch the opportunity one must seize him at the right moment as he approaches or else he would fly away. In 6. On sculpture of Caerus in Sicyon, Callistratus described such a statue which he attributed to the Greek sculptor Lysippos.

The construct of time can also be shown symbolically. One such example is the genre of still life popular in Roman painting of which many examples are extant (Bojic 2017: 171-179). This imagery that depicts the time itself is especially poignantly described by Philostratus the Elder in 1.31 Still life and in 2.26 Still life. The same author described another painting with the subject matter of the construct of time in 2.28 Looms, in which he observed a spider spinning its web. These, as well as other examples of visual arts imagery showing the construct of time in its own right contribute to our better understanding of the importance of the dimension of time in the visual arts of the European antiquity.

The categories of depictions of time in the visual arts of the European antiquity include imagery showing the flow of time, the imagery showing time as a single moment, and the imagery that represents the time itself. The first category enables visual artworks to convey a narrative, the second enables them to convey a rich dramatic moment and the third one provides a form to the dimension of time. Painting is often understood as two-dimensional artform, sculpture as three-dimensional as it includes the dimension of space. The dimension of time, however, can also be an element of visual artworks. A flat surface of a painting as much as a 3-D sculpture can deliberately contain, examine and present the dimension of time. Contemporary art practice includes a category of time-based art, often understood as new media art, which covers artworks executed in a variety of media not excluding the two-dimensional and three-dimensional forms. To better understand contemporary art practice including the art of filmmaking, it is essential to consider the manner in which the visual art practices of the European antiquity paved the way for the artists to extend the limitations of their media.

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Зоја Божић

ЛИКОВНЕ УМЕТНОСТИ ЕВРОПСКЕ АНТИКЕ И ПОРЕКЛО ФИЛМСКЕ УМЕТНОСТИ

Резиме

Филмска уметност је релативно новија уметничка форма која је својим рођењем и развојем инхерентно повезана са њеним технолошким изумом и сталним иновацијама. Порекло ове уметности, међутим, лежи колико у књижевности толико и у традицијама ликовних уметности. Кроз историју уметности, многа уметничка дела створена у традиционалним медијима ликовних уметности садрже семе различитих аспеката филмске праксе. Такве традиције визуелних уметности потичу из неколико извора, међу којима су и ликовне уметничке праксе европске антике. Приликом анализе сачуваних ликовних дела европске антике неопходно је укључити и књижевну традицију историографије уметности европске антике. Такво испитивање даје неочекивани, али валидни теоријски оквир чији је централни појам конструкт времена, помоћу ког се уметност филма може боље да разуме и објасни.

Категорије приказивања времена у ликовним уметностима европске антике укључују ликовна дела која приказују ток времена, ликовна дела која приказују време као један тренутак и ликовна дела која представљају само време. Прва категорија омогућава ликовним делима да пренесу наратив, друга им омогућава да пренесу одређени бременит драмски тренутак, а трећи даје физички и ликовни облик димензији времена.

Обично се сликарство схвата као дводимензионална уметност, скулптура као тродимензионална пошто укључује димензију простора. Међутим, и димензија времена може да буде елемент ликовних уметничких дела. Равна површина слике колико и скулптура може намерно да садржи, истражује и представља димензију времена. Савремена уметничка пракса обухвата категорију *time-based art*, уметности засноване на времену, често схваћену као уметност нових медија, која обухвата уметничка дела изведена у различитим медијима, и не искључује дводимензионалне и тродимензионалне медије. Да бисмо боље разумели савремену уметничку праксу, укључујући и уметност филмског стваралаштва, неопходно је да размотримо начин на који су ликовне уметничке праксе европске антике утрле пут уметницима да прошире ограничења својих медија.

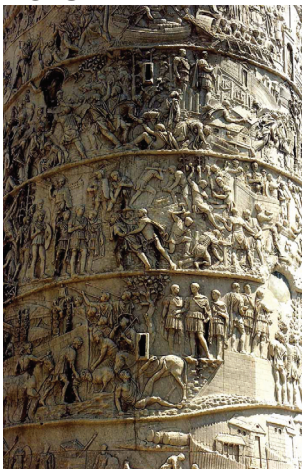
PICTURES

PICTURE 1



Artist anonymous, *The panel showing Perseus and Andromeda*, from the villa of Agrippa Postumus at Boscotrecase, last decade of the 1st century BC, fresco mounted on wood panel, 159.39 x 118.75 cm, acquired by the Rogers Fund, 1920, today in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum, NY

PICTURE 2



Artist anonymous, *Trajan's Column*, detail, 113 AD, Rome, in situ

PICTURE 3



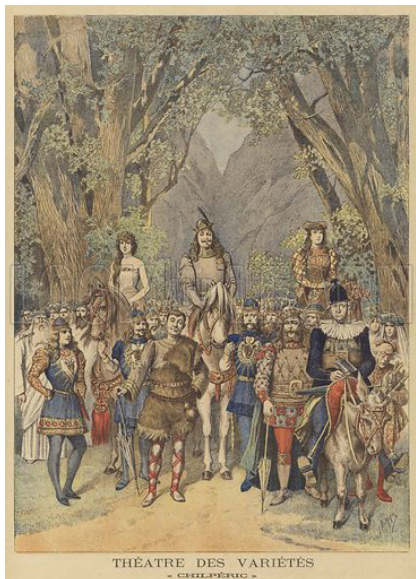
Artist anonymous, *Great hunt*, mosaic from the Villa del Casale in Piazza Armerina, 3rd c. AD, in situ

PICTURE 4



Artist anonymous, *Landscape with a genre-scene*, fresco, from the villa of Agrippa Postumus Boscotrecase, last decade of the 1st century BC, in situ

PICTURE 5



Henri Meyer, *The cast of Herve's comic opera Chilperic at the Theatre des Varietes*, Paris, Theatre des Varietes, Chilperic, colour lithograph, Illustration for *Le Petit Journal*, 24 February, 1895.

PICTURE 6



Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *Marcelle Lender Dancing the Bolero in Chilperic*, 1895-1896, oil on canvas, the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

PICTURE 7



The Marlay painter, *The Death of Cassandra*, red-figure Athenian kylix, 425-400 BC, 30.5 x 11.5 cm Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Ferrara

PICTURE 8



Artist anonymous, *Medea*, fresco from Herculaneum, 42 x 133, today in Museo Archeologico in Naples

PICTURE 9



Artist anonymous, *Medea and her children*, fresco from the House of the Dioscuri Pompeii, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples