

Andrea Pinotti

IMAGE AND NARRATION

(from Wickhoff to the Fantastic Four)

Italian Academy at Columbia University

Fellows-Lunch, Spring Semester, Wednesday 28. Jan. 2004

Introduction

- 1. Some concepts**
- 2. Some examples**
 - 2.1 *Isolating Method***
 - 2.2 *Continuous Method***
 - 2.3 *Complementary Method***
 - 2.4 *Hybrid Cases***
- 3. Some problems**

Introduction

My research project at the Italian Academy deals with cultural tradition as a heritage transmitted through images. In other words, with collective memory handed down through figures. In my first paper, moving from the German art historian Aby Warburg, I tried to interrogate the sense of a chain of images related to bodily postures expressing emotions (pathos-formulae between the two polar extremes of ecstatic mania and depressive melancholy): the analysis of the historical and formal link between Manet's *Dejeuner sur l'herbe*, Raimondi's (and Raphael's) *Judgment of Paris* and an Hellenistic sarcophagus in Villa Medici, allowed me to reflect upon the meaning of the concepts of "model" and "origin". As some of you perhaps remember, discussing Warburg's theory of images and its fruitful contradictions, I tried to oppose a *historical* interpretation of such concepts (which understands the model as a *Vor-Bild*, a pre-existing, *original* image and the origin as the first point in the chronological line) to a *morphological-typological* interpretation (which conceives the model as a never given, *originary* theme of multiple, possibly infinite variations, and the origin as a non-chronological condition of possibility of historical figurative phenomena). The opposition of the original to the originary (of the historical genesis or "Entstehung" to the transcendental origin or "Ursprung", to use Benjamin's distinction as proposed in his morphological essay on the German Baroque Drama) implies a different way of understanding temporality and memory: whereas in the historical model the single derived phenomena are more or less close to the Prime Mover and consequently memories are more or less "faithful" to it, in the morphological model each historical manifestation is conceived as a variation of a theme which in itself is never given and never existed as such in a determined historical time, i.e. it did exist in a mythical time (we could say that history is a constant variation of myth), and is therefore equidistant to its origin.

In this paper I will try – leaning on another "old-fashioned" (even if younger than Protagoras, Giovanni) art-historian: Franz Wickhoff (1853-1909¹; together with Alois

¹ Franz Wickhoff, * 7. 5. 1853 Steyr (Oberösterreich), † 6. 4. 1909 Venice. In 1880 he became "Kustos" at the Österreichisches Museum für Kunst und Industrie, in 1885 he started his teaching activities at the University of Vienna, where he became Professor in 1891. In 1904 he founded the "Kunstgeschichtlichen Anzeigen". Among his works: *Wiener Genesis*, 1895 (Einleitung und

Riegl the most important author of the first generation of the Vienna School of art history²) – to investigate how images tell stories, i.e. the figurative narration, stressing in a similar way the typological structures, the conditions of possibility of such narration. It is a field in which the personal issues in art history (*who* did *what*) yield to the impersonal, anonymous modalities (*how* something is done, regardless of who first did it).

The method of such attempt is comparison: that is why, in a certain sense, such paper – although not explicitly devoted to the *Grundbegriffe* – might also be entitled (or subtitled) “In defense of fundamental concepts (a pamphlet?)”: the simple action of comparing two images (and I think that any art historian frequently compares images while teaching and understanding art and its history) implies the recourse to general concepts shared at least by those two images taken into account. If one sticks to the mere *empiria*, he/she would not be able to utter a single word about what is seen: *individuum ineffabile*, and experience – as the morphologist and typologist (and comparativist) Goethe clearly pointed out – is only half of experience.

Kommentar); *Gesammelte Schriften*, 2 Bände, 1912/13. Literature: I. Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, *F. Wickhoff*, in: *Akten des 25. Internationalen Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte*, Band 1, 1983.

² See *Vienna School reader : politics and art historical method in the 1930s*, edited by Christopher S. Wood, New York : Zone Books, 2000.

1. Some concepts

Already Lessing in his *Laocoon*, dividing the artistic field into two (very problematic) regions – the arts of time (poetry and music) and the arts of space (architecture, sculpture, painting) – hinted at the fact that two of the most difficult and intriguing challenges of visual arts – which produce (at least produced at Lessing’s time) a fixed, immobile image – are the rendering of movement in space (translation) and of movement in time (changement, metamorphosis), two modifications strictly connected with each other. The narration of a story, developing in time through actions and passions, implies both modifications: the characters of the story move from one place to the other, and become themselves different characters both in their bodily appearance and in their psychological features.

In the first chapter of his main work, the *Wiener Genesis*³ (1895), Wickhoff offers a phenomenology of the essential characteristics of figurative narration in its typical modalities,⁴ an articulation which is – I think – still nowadays noteworthy. He distinguishes three main types, originated in three different cultural areas and related to three corresponding modalities of literary narration:

³ *Die Wiener Genesis*, hrsg. v. Wilhelm Ritter von Hartel und Franz Wickhoff, F. Tempsky (Prag-Wien) – G. Freytag (Leipzig), Buchändler der Kais. Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, 1895; English Transl.: *Roman art; some of its principles and their application to early Christian painting*, translated and edited by Mrs. S. Arthur Strong, with fourteen plates and numerous text illustrations, London, W. Heinemann; New York, Macmillan, 1900; Italian Transl.: *Arte romana*, tr. it. di M. Anti, a c. di C. Anti, Le Tre Venezie, Padova 1947.

⁴ See F. Wickhoff, “Der Stil der Genesisbilder und die Geschichte seiner Entwicklung”, in *Die Wiener Genesis*, pp. 1-96, in part. pp. 1-13; Engl. Transl. pp. 1-21. I will quote from this translation.

SYNOPSIS

TYPE	FEATURES	CULTURE	LITERARY ANALOGON
I. Isolating method	It corresponds to the selection of the “pregnant moment” (Lessing). It “gives striking scenes either separately or else side by side, but divided by framework” (p. 13). It is the most familiar to us, if not the “exclusively in vogue nowadays” (p. 14).	Hellenistic	Drama
II. Continuous method	“The whole is set in a landscape without any division of scenes” (p. 8). The characters “pass before us in two, three, or even four representations if necessary upon the same scene, untroubled by the law of experience that only those events can be seen together which occur at the same time; and, therefore, that it is impossible for one and the same person to be seen several times at the same moment within the same space” (p. 9).	Roman (both late pagan and early Christian)	Historical <u>prose</u>
III. Complementary method	The oldest. “Without the repetition of the <i>dramatis personae</i> , it aims at the complete expression of everything that happens before or after the central event, or that concerns the subject matter” (p. 13) “It makes greater demands upon the imagination of the spectator” (p. 14).	Egyptian and Oriental	Epos

Such types identify a peculiar chrono-topical nexus: each of them articulates in a specific way the relation between the treatment of space and of sensible figures in the visual image on one side, and of time and its development through the subsequent moments of the action constituting the story. The German *Kunstwissenschaftler*, the theorists of aesthetics and “science of art”, would refer to such relation in terms of a *Nebeneinander* (literally: “one beside the other”) connected to a *Nacheinander* (literally: “one after the other”).

The fact that, according to Wickhoff, each of them was born in a specific culture, while revealing his interest in the anthropological (ethnological? racial?) issue – in the *Völkerpsychologie*, as many other art historians of the time between the second half of 19th and the first half of 20th century – does not prevent the diffusion of the three types in different cultures, as we will see with some examples. Wickhoff himself proposes eloquent parallels with different cultures and periods, last but not least with his contemporary age (he was painter himself).

More difficult is, as far as I can see, to understand the correspondence between visual and literary modalities of narration (isolating method ↔ drama; continuous method ↔ historical prose; complementary method ↔ epos): I am not able, up to now, to grasp the immediate relation between them and, while recognizing Wickhoff’s very Germanic inclination to a systematic thought (Freud would perhaps call it the expression of an *Analcharakter*) which induces him to a universalistic comprehension of all artistic (or at least of all word-related and image-related) phenomena, I shall go more deeply into such correspondence in the next steps of my research: of course, any suggestion of yours is more than welcome.

2. Some examples

Anyhow, since such types may sound pretty abstract, the best thing to do is perhaps to show some concrete examples of them, some drawn from Wickhoff's text, some which go far beyond it.

2.1 ISOLATING METHOD

We perhaps do not need many examples of such modality, since – as Wickhoff says – we have become “naturally” used to it and we tend to consider it “normal”.

I will limit the exemplification to two cases, one of the 14th century and one of the 20th century.

- The first is **Giotto's Cappella degli Scrovegni** (Padua) – which you can virtually explore on these web-sites: <http://www.padovanet.it/salamultimediale/esplorazione.htm> and <http://www.apr.padova.it/otg-en/capgiot/mencapp.htm> – , completed around 1306. These frescoes, considered the most complete cycle realized by Giotto in his maturity, are articulated in three main themes: 1. episodes from the life of Joachim and Ann, 2. episodes from the life of Mary and 3. episodes from the life and passion of Jesus. I have chosen some moment of the childhood, the life and the passion of Christ. Each pregnant and decisive moment is separated from any other moment, and rigorously framed.
- The second example deals with a typical contemporary representation: comics. I have chosen a historic, even if not mythic, subject: **the Fantastic Four** (originally they had to be named the Fabulous Four) by Stan Lee (writer) and Jack Kirby (artist). Here is a description of the characters from a web-site devoted to these super-heroes (<http://www.fantastic-four.nl/The%20Fantastic%20Four.htm> ⁵) in terms of a family-sociology: “Reed Richards developed a flexible, elastic body and became Mr. Fantastic, but remained a brilliant and aloof scientist, more at home with

⁵ Other web-sites devoted to the FF: <http://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~arlen/ff.html> ; <http://www.chivian.com/chivian/FantasticFour.shtml>

his work than with people. Sue Storm transformed into the Invisible Girl (later Woman), maintained the air of a middle class matron. These two rather restrained characters were the symbolic parents of the group, while the adolescent Johnny, an updated version of The Human Torch, functioned as their spoiled son. Ben Grimm, who turned into the hideous but powerful Thing, appeared to be the family's gruff but lovable uncle, one who came from a distinctly less privileged background." Their story: the four, when still "normal", had formed the crew of a starship capable of traveling in hyperspace. When their ship passed through the Van Allen belt they found their cockpit bombarded with nearly lethal doses of cosmic radiation (it is exactly the dramatic event represented in the fig., in framed, separated images). Reed had somehow neglected to account for the abnormal radiation levels in the atmosphere. The cosmic rays passed through the starship's insufficient shielding and they were forced to return to Earth immediately. The crew successfully landed and almost instantly found that they had all been mutated. Reed found that his skin was malleable and that could elongate any portion of his body at will. Each member of the fateful crew in turn discovered how they had been significantly changed: the woman was able to become invisible, the young man a human torch, and Ben a rocky monster. Deciding to use this unexpected turn of events for the benefit of mankind, Richards convinced the others to band together. They soon came to be known as the Fantastic Four: Mister Fantastic, the Invisible Woman, the "hot-head" Johnny Storm and the Thing.

2.2 CONTINUOUS METHOD

We have very old examples of such method which repeats more times the same character in different moment of the narration within the same scene.

- **Hunefer Papyrus** (Book of the Dead, about 1300 B.C., 5,50 mt, British Museum, 9901, 8). Left to right, we can distinguish four subsequent scenes (A, B, C, D) and five characters (1-5), some of which are repeated:
 - A. Hunefer (1) introduced by Anubi (2).
 - B. Anubi – the jackal headed god, the guardian of the necropolis and the guide of the dead as they made their way through the darkness of the underworld – weighs Hunefer’s heart;
 - C. Thoth – the god with the head of an ibis, the inventor of spoken and written language, the lord of books, the scribe of the gods and patron of all scribes – (3) records;
 - D. Horus (4) – the falcon headed god, son of Osiris and Isis – introduces him to Osiris (5) – the supreme god and judge of the dead.

Notes: the direction of “reading” is linear, left to right; Wickhoff says that the typical Egyptian narrative mode is *integrierend* (complementary), but this examples shows that they knew very well the *continuos* mode as well).

- **Dora Europos Synagogue** (Syria, around half 3rd cent. A.D.): scenes from Moses’ 2nd Book, the *Exodus* (wall paintings).

In the first fig. we can distinguish three temporal moments:

Center-Left: 1. Moses is rescued by Pharaoh’s daughter from the river Nilus (*Exodus* 2:10: "From the water I drew him," *meshitihu*, hence his name Mosheh, or Moses);

Left: 2. Moses is given to servants;

Right: 3. Moses before the Pharaoh.

Notes: we do not have here a linear direction of “reading” from left to right like in Hunefer’s papyrus. In order to respect the temporal sequence of the events, we must start from the center of the image, move then to the left and finally to the right. Moreover, the “continuity” can embrace both very close moments, immediately following each other (1. and 2., relating to child Moses’ rescue) and quite distant ones (Moses as a child: 1. and 2. With Moses as an adult: 3.).

In the second fig. we have the scene of the Red Sea Parting (*Exodus* 14, 1-28): Moses guides the Children of Israel across the Red Sea, helped by God’s hands (right to left, three narrative moments).

- **Vienna Genesis** (illuminated codex of Moses’ 1st Book, Syria-Antyochia, prob. 6th cent. A.D.)⁶:

In the first fig. (referred to *Genesis* 2, 16-17: “The Lord God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”) we find Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden: left to right, we can read three subsequent moments of the dramatic narration:

1. The eating of the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (an apple, according to Milton) (*Genesis* 3: 6);
2. The shame (*Genesis* 3: 7);
3. The hiding behind a bush (*Genesis* 3: 8).

The second fig. is referred to *Genesis* 32:22-23. Jacob is returning to the land of his birth after fourteen years of exile. There he must confront his brother Esau. Jacob had fled for his life after having ruthlessly fooled his blind, aged father, and cheated his brother out of his blessing and birthright. Jacob, after many adventures, prospers in exile, and now resolves to return home and claim his land. But it means now, that after

all these years, he must confront his brother. Hoping to placate Esau, he sends lavish gifts in advance. Jacob's party encamps on the banks of the River Jabbok, the boundary line. Sending everyone ahead, he himself crosses the river in the dark of night. And there in the cold, dark waters, experiences a dreadful encounter with what the Bible simply refers to as a "man." It is a ferocious wrestling match in which Jacob, though himself wounded, finally prevails. The mysterious entity (an angel?) over whom Jacob triumphs refuses to reveal his identity, but in turn says this: "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and humans and have prevailed." Jacob then limps on into the morning daylight. Then eventually he finds Esau and a reconciliation occurs. "...Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept."

The representation of the Vienna Genesis shows us four different moments in a curve:

1. Jacob guides his family (top left),
 2. crosses the river Jabbok (right)
 3. fights with the angel (bottom center),
 4. is blessed by the angel (bottom left).
- **Codex Purpureus Rossanensis**⁷ (Rossano, Calabria, V-VI sec.): an important example of Byzantine art in the 6th century. On purple parchment, a manuscript of the Gospels in Greek, in gold and silver letters, partly lost (386 left of 800 pages). Among the purple codices executed in the late classical period, only a few had been illustrated with pictures: that is why the Codex of Rossano is so valuable.
 1. Canon of the Evangelists
 2. Mark's portrait (the oldest picture of an Evangelist in the history of illumination)
 3. Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead (John 11, 43-45)
 4. Christ's entry into Jerusalem (Mark - XI, 7-10)

⁶ Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS theol. gr. 31. It was published by Wickhoff in 1895: *Die Wiener Genesis*, already quoted.

⁷ See O. von Gebhardt – A. Harnack, *Evangeliorum Codex graecus purpureus Rossanensis*, Giesicke & Devrient, Leipzig 1880. Berlin : G. Grote, 1921.

5. Jesus chases the merchants out of the temple (Matthew - XXI, 12-16)
6. The parable of the ten virgins (Matthew XXV, 1-13)
7. Jesus heals a man born blind (John IX, 1-7)
8. The Good Samaritan (Luke X, 30-35)
9. Last Supper and Washing of the feet (Mark XIV, 12-20).
10. The Communion of the Bread (Luke XXII, 19-21)
11. The Communion of the Wine (Luke XXII, 19-21)
12. Jesus praying in Gethsemane (Matthew, XXVI, 36-46)
13. Christ before Pilate; Remorse and death of Judas (Matthew XXVII, 2-5)
14. Jesus or Barabbas (Luke XXIII, 13-25)

Notes: As one can see, the majority of these illustrations is based on an isolating method, which chooses the pregnant moment. Two of them are nevertheless continuous narrations: 9. The Last Supper and Washing of the Feet, and 13. the Remorse and Suicide of Judas.

- **Sachsenspiegel or “Saxon Mirror” (13th cent.)**

The *Sachsenspiegel* or *Mirror of the Saxons* (1220-35) is a collection of customary laws compiled by Eike von Repgow (1180-1235). Encouraged by his overlord, Hoyer von Falkenstein, from Saxon high nobility, he produced a German version of his own (lost) Latin original. Their purpose was to textualize, and thus to stabilize what up until the 13th century had been a long oral tradition of regional jurisprudence. The *Sachsenspiegel* is divided into two parts, one concerned with laws regarding the management of fiefs, the *Lehnrecht*, and the other with more general laws, the *Landrecht*, or regional law. The *Landrecht* is concerned with the space occupied by the landowning lord and the landworking peasant. In a totally unsystematic style the book touches on a score overlapping legal interests, among them the administration of the laws themselves, penal law, inheritance law, marriage law, property law, and laws governing the herding, keeping, and hunting of animals. Written for those charged with

administering the law, it saw wide dissemination, especially in North, Central, and Eastern Germany, but also beyond German borders. It was translated into Latin, Dutch, Polish, Czech, and Russian.

Of an original seven illustrated manuscripts, four remain, named after their present locations: the Heidelberg (1300) (from which I took the examples)⁸, the Oldenburg (1336), the Dresden (1350), and the Wolfenbüttel (1350-70). Dates are approximate. The illustrations have a complicated functional rather than a decorative role. On the surface they contribute to indexical and mnemonic functioning. But, even as they point to "the letter of the law," they reflect and establish societal attitudes and controls with respect to matters of gender, class, and ethnicity; and visually their effect is to take precedence over the text in these recensions.

Wickhoff is particularly interested in the representation of the judges and of scenes of controversial discussion, in which the figure is given "two pairs of hands gesticulating to either side, in order to indicate the lively intercourse of the judge with the several parties, as he turns now to the right and now to the left" (p. 12). Subsequent moments in time are rendered with simultaneous representation in space.

- **Sandro Botticelli, illustrations for Dante's *Divina Commedia*⁹, 1480-1495**

Drawings on parchment, commissioned by Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici called il Popolano (cousin of Lorenzo il Magnifico). In particular, Wickhoff refers to the illustration of *Paradiso*, canto III, vv. 1-24, dealing with souls who in their life on earth had broken vows. In this Canto Dante arrives at the sphere of the moon. The moon, which changes, is inconstant, and here, at the lowest level, are those inconstant souls who did not fully follow their vows or obligations to God).

⁸ *Der Sachsenspiegel*. Bilder aus der Heidelberger Handschrift, eingeleitet und erläutert von Eberhard Freiherr von Künssberg, Insel Verlag, Leipzig 1934.

⁹ See F. Lippmann, *Zeichnungen von S. Botticelli zu Dante's "Göttlichen Komödie"*, verkleinerte Nachbildungen der Originale im Kupferstich-Kabinett zu Berlin und in der Bibliothek des Vatikans ; mit einer Einleitung und der Erklärung der Darstellung hrsg. von F. Lippmann. Taf. III. 2. Aufl. More recently: *Sandro Botticelli pittore della Divina Commedia*, catalogue of the exhibition, Roma, Scuderie Papali al Quirinale, Skira ed., Milano 2000. 85 parchments are in the Kupferstichkabinett of the Kulturforum, in Berlin; 7 parchments are in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana in Rome.

Paradiso, canto III, vv. 1-24

<p>Quel sol che pria d'amor mi scaldò 'l petto, di bella verità m'avea scoperto, provando e riprovando, il dolce aspetto;</p> <p>e io, per confessar corretto e certo me stesso, tanto quanto si convenne leva' il capo a proferer più erto;</p> <p>ma visione apparve che ritenne a sé me tanto stretto, per vedersi, che di mia confession non mi sovvenne.</p> <p>Quali per vetri trasparenti e tersi, o ver per acque nitide e tranquille, non sì profonde che i fondi sien persi,</p> <p>tornan d'i nostri visi le postille debili sì, che perla in bianca fronte non vien men forte a le nostre pupille;</p> <p>tali vid' io più facce a parlar pronte; per ch'io dentro a l'error contrario corsi a quel ch'accese amor tra l'omo e 'l fonte.</p> <p>Sùbito sì com' io di lor m'accorsi, quelle stimando specchiati sembianti, per veder di cui fosser, li occhi torsi;</p> <p>e nulla vidi, e ritorsili avanti dritti nel lume de la dolce guida, che, sorridendo, ardea ne li occhi santi.</p>	<p>That Sun, which erst with love my bosom warmed, Of beauteous truth had unto me discovered, By proving and reprovng, the sweet aspect.</p> <p>And, that I might confess myself convinced And confident, so far as was befitting, I lifted more erect my head to speak.</p> <p>But there appeared a vision, which withdrew me So close to it, in order to be seen, That my confession I remembered not.</p> <p>Such as through polished and transparent glass, Or waters crystalline and undisturbed, But not so deep as that their bed be lost,</p> <p>Come back again the outlines of our faces So feeble, that a pearl on forehead white Comes not less speedily unto our eyes;</p> <p>Such saw I many faces prompt to speak, So that I ran in error opposite To that which kindled love 'twixt man and fountain.</p> <p>As soon as I became aware of them, Esteeming them as mirrored semblances, To see of whom they were, mine eyes I turned,</p> <p>And nothing saw, and once more turned them forward Direct into the light of my sweet Guide, Who smiling kindled in her holy eyes.</p>
---	---

Particularly the last 9 lines are interesting to Wickhoff: “Botticelli indicated the swift movement by giving the poet two heads, with as little regard for reality as the illustrators of the ancient code of Saxon law” (p. 13).

- **Masaccio, Cappella Brancacci** (Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence; about 1427):
Scenes from Peter’s life.

We have here both isolated and continuous modes.

Among the first, **The Baptism of the Neophytes** (about which Vasari wrote: " ... a nude trembling because of the cold, amongst the other neophytes, executed with such

fine relief and gentle manner, that it is highly praised and admired by all artists, ancient and modern") and **St Peter Healing the Sick with his Shadow** (*Acts of the Apostles* 5: 12-14): "At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico. But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem. And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number, to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed".

Among the second, **The Distribution of Alms and the Death of Ananias**. This episode is taken from the account in the *Acts of the Apostles* (4: 32-37 and 5:1-11): "For as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need....But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? . . . why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost." Masaccio brings together the two moments of the story: Peter distributing the donations that have been presented to the Apostles and the death of Ananias, whose body lies on the ground at his feet.

Tribute of Money. The episode depicts the arrival in Capernaum of Jesus and the Apostles, based on the account given in Matthew's Gospel (17, 24-27): "And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute? He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free. Notwithstanding, lest we

should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee”. Masaccio has included the three different moments of the story in the same scene:

1. the tax collector's request, with Jesus's immediate response indicating to Peter how to find the money necessary, is illustrated in the centre;
2. Peter catching the fish in Lake Genezaret and extracting the coin is shown to the left;
3. and, to the right, Peter hands the tribute money to the tax collector in front of his house. This episode, stressing the legitimacy of the tax collector's request, has been interpreted as a reference to the lively controversy in Florence at the time on the proposed tax reform; the controversy was finally settled in 1427 with the institution of an official tax register, which allowed a much fairer system of taxation in the city.

Raising of the Son of Theophilus and St Peter Enthroned

This scene illustrates in a continuous mode two scenes: the miracle that Peter performed after he was released from prison, thanks to Paul's intercession; and Peter's enthronisation. According to the account in the Golden Legend, once out of prison, Peter was taken to the tomb of the son of Theophilus, Prefect of Antioch. Here St Peter immediately resurrected the young man who had been dead for fourteen years. As a result, Theophilus, the entire population of Antioch and many others were converted to the faith; they built a magnificent church and in the centre of the church a chair for Peter, so that he could sit during his sermons and be heard and seen by all. Peter sat in the chair for seven years; then he went to Rome and for twenty-five years sat on the papal throne, the cathedra, in Rome.

- **Michelangelo, Cappella Sistina, Vaticano 1508-1512** (the ceiling)

In this detail, a moment of the Creation: God Father appears twice in the same scene, “once borne in triumph by angels in order to separate light from darkness, and again as He floats away to new deeds of creation” (Wickhoff, p. 12).

2.3 COMPLEMENTARY METHOD

Wickhoff refers to a sort of encyclopaedia of mythology, the so-called **François Vase** by Kleitias, around 570 B.C. (a black-figured crater, Florence, Museo Archeologico n. inv. 4209).

Characters:

Priam, King of Troy
Troilus, son of Priam
Polyxena, daughter of Troilus
Anthenor,
Thetis, Achille's mother
Hermes, protector of Achilles
Athena, protectress of Achilles
Hector, Priam's son
Polites, Priam's son
Apollon, to whom the sanctuary-fountain is devoted

The Kypria (based on): *The death of Troilus*

By the murder or capture of members of Priam's own family the Greeks intended to sap the Trojan ruler's will to resist. His youngest son Troilus was an especially desirable target for it had been prophesied that Troy would never be taken if Troilus survived to his twentieth year. The siege forced the Trojans to go outside the walls to draw water from a fountain house in the temple of Thymbrian Apollo. The temple itself was considered to be neutral ground, and both sides worshipped there. It is said that Achilles had seen Polyxena, daughter of Priam, when she came to worship at the shrine with her mother Hecabe, and had fallen in love with her. This did not prevent him from setting an ambush for her and her brother when Troilus escorted her to the fountain to fetch water. Both of Priam's children attempted to flee, Polyxena dropping her hydria as she ran. Achilles' famed speed of foot enabled him to outrun and bring down Troilus' horse and Troilus was slain, desecrating the sanctuary. Neither the god nor the sister ever forgot or forgave; years later, Polyxena lured Achilles into a honey-trap at the same fountain; Apollo was on hand to steady the aim of her brother Paris, and Achilles fell. And when they caught her, the vengeful Greeks cut her throat on the tomb of their fallen hero.

On the vase we find the following moments:

1. the scene of the fountain, sanctuary devoted to Apollo (a Trojan is fetching water with a hydria);
2. Achilles (fostered by his mother Thetis, and his divine protectors Hermes and Athena) runs with his spear riding after Troilus; a Trojan woman with raised arms is anguishing because of the ambush;
3. Polyxena (who dropped the hydria) and Anthenor tell Priam of Troilus' death; Priam asks Hector and Polites to avenge his son's death;
4. Apollo is offended by the and plans to take revenge.

- I have not found yet other examples of such type of narration in the history of art of different periods and cultures. Wickhoff (p. 14), besides the François Vase, quotes the literary description of **Achilles' shield** shaped by the blacksmith Hephaestus in Homer (Book 18 of the *Iliad*, whose 130-line description: 18.478-608, a bit too long to be quoted here, you can read in the translation by Samuel Butler on this web-site: <http://www.uoregon.edu/~joelja/iliad.html#b18>). **John Flaxman** tried to imagine it, following Homer's *ekphrasis* carefully. The work, which Flaxman's contemporaries considered his masterpiece, was originally modelled in plaster. From the plaster, four silver-gilt casts were made, for George IV, the Duke of York, the Duke of Northumberland, and Lord Lonsdale.

The hypothesis that I would like to develop is that in contemporary visual culture *movies* took over such complementary tradition, with the technique of the flash-back and flash-forward. It is certainly true that film is made of single photographic pictures (what would make it an isolated articulation of images), but our eye does not perceive them.



THE ITALIAN ACADEMY
for Advanced Studies in America

Image and narration
(from Wickhoff to the Fantastic Four)

2.4 HYBRID CASES

As often happens in a systematic approach, intermediate cases are mostly interesting because, while not perfectly fitting within the general frame, they enlighten the schematic principles themselves. There are different degrees of hybridation between different modes:

- a) sometimes two modes are alternatively used in different moments of the same narrative cycle (as we have already seen in the examples of the Codex Purpureus of Rossano, in Masaccio's Cappella Brancacci, and in Michelangelo's Sistine ceiling);
- b) sometimes the single scene itself does not clearly belong to a specific mode, but seems to oscillate between two different modes, mainly because of an architectural element performing as a frame within the continuous scene. This is the case, for example, of Raphael's *The Freeing of Saint Peter* and of Carpaccio's *Legend of St Ursula*.

- **Raphael's *The Freeing of Saint Peter*** (1513-14), Stanza di Eliodoro, Palazzi Vaticani, Rome.

The episode is narrated in the *Acts of the Apostles* (XII, 6-9). The story in the New Testament says that King Herod took Peter prisoner and intended to have him killed. In prison the Apostle was chained to two guards, but an angel of the Lord freed him despite the close watch. The story is broken down into three distinct episodes:

1. the first (at the center) the appearance of the Angel of Freedom in the saint's cell;
2. The second shows the dismay of the guards; at the left a soldier asks his sleepy and bewildered comrades what is going on.
3. the third, the bewildered Peter led by the hand of the divine messenger. at right, the angel leads the stunned and still-sleepy St Peter past another sleeping guard.

The narration is continuous and non-linear (left ← center → right); but there are architectural separations of the three moments which act as sort of temporal frames.

- **Vittore Carpaccio, The Stories from the Life of St Ursula** (1490-96) Accademia, Venezia

In 1488 the Confraternity of St Ursula in Venice decided to commission a series of large canvases recounting the story of St Ursula. Vittore Carpaccio was asked to do the work. The legend of the northern saint Ursula was extremely popular in the Middle Ages and had been the subject of several pictorial cycles. Carpaccio drew his inspiration for the cycle from the Lives of the Saints (*Legenda Aurea*) published in Venice in an Italian translation in 1475. In painting the nine canvases, today in the Accademia in Venice, Carpaccio was not able to follow the chronological order of the story, he was forced to paint the scenes in the order that the wallspace was available for him.

The elements of the story:

1. the arrival of the ambassadors of the pagan King of England at the Court of the Christian King of Brittany, to ask for the hands of his daughter Ursula for the son of their Lord (canvas No. 1);
2. the conditions Ursula sets out before accepting the marriage proposal: she asks for three years to better understand God's will (canvas No. 2);
3. the ambassadors return to the English Court (canvas No. 3);
4. the farewells and Ursula's pilgrimage (canvas No. 4);
5. the dream in which Ursula is forewarned of her martyrdom (canvas No. 5);
6. her encounter with Pope Cyriacus in Rome (canvas No. 6);
7. her arrival in Cologne, occupied by the Huns (canvas No. 7);
8. the slaughter of the pilgrims and Ursula's funeral (canvas No. 8);
9. St Ursula in glory above the host of martyrs (canvas No. 9).

Notes. While the other canvases are painted with the isolating method, the nr. 8 canvas employs the continuous method. But the column functions as a separating element between the two subsequent moments of the assassination and of the funeral of St Ursula.

c) Going back to the hybrid situations, we have seen that in the continuous narration, in order to underline two subsequent moments of the story, sometimes the character is completely repeated in its whole bodily figure, sometimes only parts of the body

(mainly the head, as in Botticelli's Dante; or the hands, as in the Mirror of the Saxon) are doubled – reaching what Wickhoff calls a degeneration “into abnormal images” and an “aberration”(p. 12). It would be nevertheless wrong to always identify the redoublement of a figure or of parts of it with a temporal sequence: in the case of the **Mirror of the Saxon**, for example, whereas four-hands figures refer to a person in firrent moments of a controversial discussion with different interlocutors, two-headed female figures are used to distinguish sisters from half-sisters (the artist evidently preferred not to represent half-sister with half heads...). Let alone of course the thousands examples in the history (and prehistory) of image of multiple-organs figures employed to stress a particular feature (multiple breasts on the same female figure to indicate exceptional fertility and so on).

d) a particularly challenging case is in my opinion offered by the representations of the ages of man or woman, as in the cases of:

- **Titian, *The Three Ages of Man***, 1513-14, National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh;
- **Baldung Grien, *Three Ages of the Woman and the Death*** 1509-10, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; **The Three Ages of Man and Death, 1539**, Museo del Prado, Madrid; ***The Seven Ages of Woman***, Museum der Bildenden Künste, Leipzig.
- **Gustav Klimt, *The Three Ages of Woman***, 1905, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome).

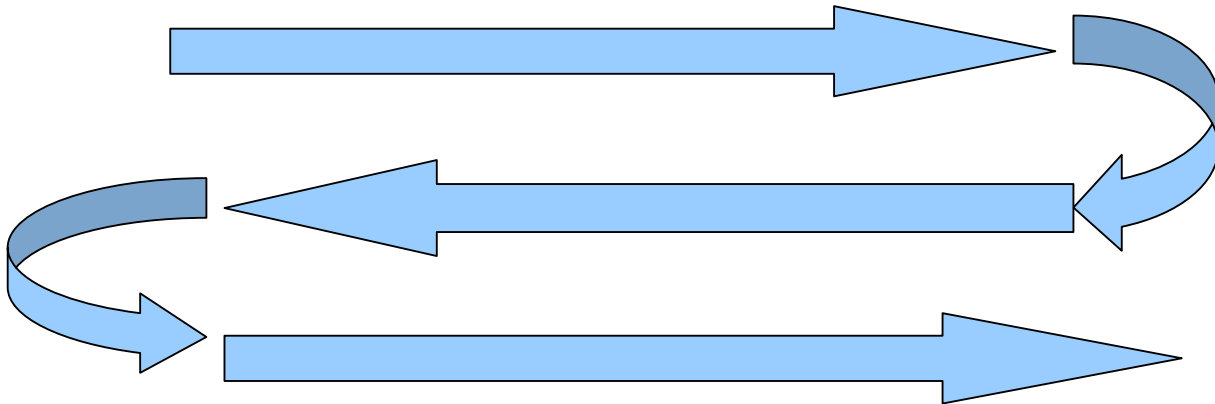
Is it the same person in different periods of her/his life (continuous narration) or are these figures three different persons (isolating narration)? Different senses (and tenses) of temporality would be implied in the two cases. In Klimt's painting the elderly and the mature woman could be the same person, but probably not the child and the mother, since the latter holds the former. Moreover, could we speak in such cases properly of a “narration”?

3. Some problems

- Is it true, as Wickhoff stated in 1895, that “in spite of the varied means of expression at its disposal, pictorial art has only three ways of telling a story” (p. 13)? Are there any other narrative types besides these three (and their hybridations)? Will perhaps the new visual media (Alessandra and Sarah!) introduce (have they already introduced) new types of figurative narration or will they simply adapt to the old ones, “simply” varying them *in infinitum*?
- Wickhoff maintains that the continuous mode is “a method of pictorial narration which has now grown strange to us” (W, p. 12). But the comics reveal pretty the opposite, as the Fantastic Four can prove, showing a very modern oscillation between an isolating and a continuous modality of narration.
- Do such types belong to any past, present and possible figurative culture or are they an expression of – let’s say – a “Mediterranean” or “European” or “Western” culture in specific ages? In other words, is it possible to describe a general, universal grammar of narration through images based on such types? Are they immediately understandable to anybody or do we need a specific, even if not necessarily conscious and deliberate training and a corresponding encyclopaedia to comprehend their meaning (for example, we must already know the story – the old Panofskian iconographic and iconologic issue – to be sure that the direction of “reading” that we take is correct)?
- What kind of relationship is there between the direction of “reading” of the handwriting and that of the images? Do they always correspond, according to the specific culture? The first figure of Dora Europos (center --> left --> right) seems not to foster such hypothesis, since the Greek is read from left to right. The linear direction from left to right of the Hunefer papyrus is not necessarily determined by the reading of the hieroglyphs: Normally, hieroglyphics were written from right to left (with the birds, mammals, and people facing to the right). Hieratic (script hieroglyphics) was always written from right to left. Often, hieroglyphics were written from left to right, to identify a person or god who is speaking, or who is being spoken about. If a person, in a picture, is facing left, then the words

concerning him/her are usually written from left to right. Also, hieroglyphics may be written from left to right for artistic purposes. Moreover, as the second figure of the Vienna Genesis shows, although the text is Greek, the movement of the image-reading reminds us rather of the archaic “bustrophedic”¹⁰ (very economic, since the eyes work without interruptions) hand-writings:

Bustrophedic movement:



- Since such types seem to be shared through centuries, what kind of *memory* (of Mnemosyne) is involved here? Their apparently anonymous character seems to imply a collective, social memory. But in what sense? Are such types a sort of Jungian narrative archetypes? Or cultural genes, *memes* in Dawkins’ sense? Do they rather root in a biological memory of the human species? Are they somehow impressed in our nervous substances like Richard Semon’s (and, more recently, Daniel Schacter’s) *engrams* and as such inherited through generations? Are they generated at a certain point in history (as Wickhoff seems to maintain: “Our theory of the rise of a new style of pictorial narration in the second cent. B.C. ...”, i.e. the new, original, Roman continuous method), or do they belong to human nature as such?

¹⁰ Greek: “boustrophedòn”, composed of “bous” (*ox*) and “stropho” (*to turn*). It is said of an inscription in which writing direction changes from one line to the next (as ploughing oxen turn): if, in the first line, it is sinistrorse, it is dextrorse in the second and so on. Even letters follow line direction.

- Are such narrative types the only way to convey a sense of temporality through images, or is any image (regardless of the fact that it narrates a story or not) a temporal phenomenon? For example, is it not true that any line (even the so-called “abstract” line, regardless of what it represents) tells the story of its genesis in time (Klee as a modern anti-Lessing)? We could also remember that, according to Georg Simmel, each single self-portrait of Rembrandt, although being an immobile image, is able to synthesize the whole life of the artist, concentrating in the image every single moment of his past¹¹.
- Is art *history* in the sense of an interrogation of the chronological origin and development of such visual narrative modalities an appropriate approach to their understanding? Who was the first to introduce each of the narrative types? When and where was each of the types generated? What is the chain that leads from the *original* model of each type through centuries and various mediations to the contemporary examples?
- Would perhaps rather a *morphology* or typology of the artistic phenomena be able to offer a more adequate understanding of such *originary* structures, which seem to be much more impersonal than personal, without denying the uniqueness and irreducibility of each single work of art?

¹¹ G. Simmel, *Rembrandt; ein kunstphilosophischer Versuch*, Leipzig, K. Wolff, 1919; *Rembrandtstudien*, Basel, B. Schwabe 1953.