

ANTHROPOMORPHISM, COSMOMORPHISM,
METAMORPHOSIS. BETWEEN IMAGES AND MEDIA
ENVIRONMENT

*Antropomorfismo, Cosmomorfismo, Metamorfosis. Entre imágenes
y medio ambiente*

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ABSTRACT

The study explores some of the phenomena of visual culture which contribute to reinforcing the anthropocentric paradigm through a mimesis of auto-referential forms; this is based mainly on certain typologies of anthropomorphism and on specific structures of the complex of identification-projection promoted by kinetic and audio-visual media.

Key words: Anthropomorphism; Cosmomorphism; Metamorphosis; Mimesis; Environment; Media Environment; Aesthetics; Morphology; Bio-techno-aesthetics; *Sensorium*.

RESUMEN

Este estudio explora algunos de los fenómenos de la cultura visual que contribuyen a reforzar el paradigma antropocéntrico a través de una mimesis de formas auto-referenciales. Esto se basa principalmente en ciertas tipologías del antropomorfismo y en estructuras específicas del complejo identificación-proyección, promovido por medios cinéticos y audiovisuales.

Palabras clave: Antropomorfismo; Cosmomorfismo; Metamorfosis; Mímesis; Ambiente; Medio Ambiente; Estética; Morfología; Bio-tecno-estética; *Sensorium*.

1. MIGRATION OF FORMS: FROM *TECHNE* TO *PHYSIS*

In the painting contest recounted by Pliny the Elder, Zeuxis was the loser because his painting of grapes deceived only the birds but not Parrhasius and also because in turn he was deceived by the apparent reality of the curtain produced by Parrhasius. Nowadays Zeuxis might again lose the contest, but this time it would be because he might mistake for virtual birds real ones, which, along with other biological and physical beings of the environment, by now appear to be, as it were, the likeness of those depicted in technological images. The illusion that Zeuxis would hypothetically experience today would derive from a culturally and historically determined visual thinking. By a sort of “image-return effect”, this induces things to be normally seen as naturally implicated with the depictions and simulations that man has made of them - for example, this is why, as we all know, Monument Valley is often observed and considered as a “morphologically cinematographic” landscape¹. It may be that the illusion of our modern Zeuxis could depend above all on the fact that the intervention of technoscience has turned the concrete form of beings of the physical and biological world into the product, or rather the reproduction of ideal, abstract, imaginary forms that function not only as stereotypes, but also, you could say, as prototypes. By means of the direct material action of technoscience and also the immaterial indirect action of visual culture, and of an ever more incisive programming, the form of plants, animals and landscapes sometimes undergoes radical changes. They very frequently imitate the forms found in the media iconosphere, with such effects on the ecosystems as can be imagined if, like Gregory Bateson, you recall that all organisms continually turn to aesthetics, and, like Adolf Portman, that the phenomenal appearance of organic figures is connected to the complexity of their relationship with the context². For example, much of the “genetic editing” that is performed

1. Cfr., among others, BAUDRILLARD, J., *Amérique*, Paris, Grasset 1986; BERTETTO, P., *Lo specchio e il simulacro. Il cinema nel mondo vero diventato favola*, Milano, Bompiani, 2007, pp. 112-127.

2. BATESON G., *Mind and Nature. A Necessary Unity*, New York, Hampton, 2002; ROSETTI, G., *Le radici estetiche dell'etica di Gregory Bateson*, Milano-Udine, Mimesis, 2008;

more and more on plants and animals is targeted with unprecedented precision to respond to demands that are related partly to hygiene and health and much more to market interests. This is a question of productivity, but also of the growing need to mould the forms of living beings or literally to conform them, on the basis of ideals that are very often presented in advertising or, more simply, fiction.³ As is well known, the landscape, too, is ever more shaped to imitate ideal images circulating in the media. With greater or lesser awareness producers and consumers of things and images choose –and thus with time contribute to molding or actually *standardizing*– the forms of vegetables, animals and landscapes, on the basis of those shown in the spheres of advertising, fiction, videogames and, in general, the heterogeneous environment of the image and imagination.

In the era of images of the world and their ever more auto-referential technical reproducibility, the question of mimesis now concerns both the relationship of the image with its real referent and the opposite relationship, namely that of the real referent with the image. This relationship now involves not only man –with deep cerebral roots illustrated by neuroscience– but also aspects of the environment, through the power of *techne* over *physis*, which is first exercised in the immateriality of imagery and then in actual material, also by visual culture and related technological devices. It primarily concerns the depiction and simulation of the forms in the media. In this sense, visual culture may be considered to be one of the factors of the disjunctive cultural paradigm of European origins, which during the Anthropocene has intensified, accelerated and extended man’s intervention on the cosmos. It is revealed symptomatically in the unprecedented quantity and

TIEZZI E., *La bellezza e la scienza*, Milano, Cortina, 1998; MANGHI S., (eds.), *Attraverso Bateson. Ecologia della mente e relazioni sociali*, Milano, Cortina, 1998; PORTMAN, A., *Animals Form and Pattern. A Study of the Appearance of Animals*, New York, Schocken, 1967; BECKLEY, B./SHAPIRO, D. (eds.), *Uncontrollable Beauty. Toward a New Aesthetics*, New York, Allworth 1998.

3. The “editing of the genome” is done by manipulations of the DNA carried out with the CRISPR-Cas9 genetic technology, discovered in the USA and now widely used all over the world. In Europe, for example, the question has arisen of the link between these interventions and the legislation of the European Union on the standardization of plant shapes –dimensions, curving, caliber, position and number of morphological details such as veining, navels, etc. On CRISPR technology cfr. REANDON S., “Welcome to the CRIPR zoo. Birds and bees are just the beginning for a burgeoning technology”, *Nature*, 531 (2016), pp. 160-163; KUZMA, J., “Policy: Reboot the debate on genetic engineering”, *Nature*, 531 (2016), pp. 165-167; TRAVIS, J., “Making the cut. CRIPR genome-editing technology shows its power”, *Science*, 350 (2015), pp. 1456-1457.

quality of the changes of physical and biological forms, also induced on the basis of cultural abstractions⁴.

New conceptual paradigms thus become necessary in the sphere not only of bioethics or biopolitics, but also of a prospective bio-anthropological reflection, which could be defined bio-techno-aesthetics, on the basis of studies focused on cultural techniques, anthropology of the media, anthropology and aesthetics of images⁵.

Mimesis is, in the broad sense, a process determined by man, a bidirectional and reciprocal “migration” of forms from *techné* to *physis* and vice versa, or from the iconosphere to the biosphere and vice versa. As such, it may be taken as one of the key factors of culture/nature and man/cosmos relationships and may thus be considered with the wide-ranging effects of its visible and even invisible consequences⁶.

2. MEDIA ENVIRONMENT, MILIEU ASSOCIÉ AND SENSORIUM

From Goethe’s *Bildung* to Mach’s *Gestalt*, from Spengler’s cultural and historic morphogenesis to Warburg’s *Pathosformel*, from Wittgenstein’s *Lebensform* and family resemblances to Husserl’s phenomenology and Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms, it has gradually emerged that the characteristic of form consists not only in the manifestation of a structure, a function

4. On the relationship between complexity and ecology as adopted here cfr. MORIN, E./KERNE, A.B., *Terre-Patrie*, Paris, Seuil, 1993; MORIN, E., *La Voie pur l’avenire de l’humanité*, Paris, Fayard, 2011; CERUTI, M., *La fine dell’onniscienza*, Roma, Studium, 2014; CERUTI, M., *Il vincolo e la possibilità*, Milano, Cortina, 2009; CERUTI, M./BOCCHI, G., *Origini di storie*, Milano Feltrinelli, 2009; MANGHI, S., *Il soggetto ecologico di Edgar Morin, Verso una società-mondo*, Gardolo, Erickson, 2009.

5. SIMONDON, G., *Du mode d’existence des objets techniques*, Paris Aubier, 2012; SIMONDON, G., *Sur la technique*, Paris, PUF, 2014; BELTING, H., *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2011; MONTANI, P., *Bioestetica. Senso comune, tecnica e arte nell’età della globalizzazione*, Roma, Carocci, 2007; MONTANI, P., *L’immaginazione intermediale. Per illustrare, rfigurare, testimoniare il mondo visibile*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2010; MONTANI, P., *Tecnologie della sensibilità. Estetica e immaginazione interattiva*, Milano, Cortina, 2014; MONTANI, P., “Nuovi compiti per la teoria del cinema”, *Fata Morgana*, 26 (2015) pp. 23-38; SIEGERT, B., *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2015.

6. For a reformulation of the relationship between form, nature and history cfr. CERUTI, M., *La fine dell’onniscienza*, ed. cit., in part. pp. 89-116; CERUTI, M., *Evoluzione senza fondamenti*, Roma-Bari, Laterza 1995.

or a process, but additionally and primarily in the soliciting of the sensibility given by all the aspects of its configuration. It is no coincidence that the overcoming of a certain tradition of scientism has led to the reconsideration of form and the recovery of morphology with a growing interest in aesthetics in its original sense of the study of the faculty of feeling. This is related to the crisis and the regeneration of knowledge in recent decades, with its deep environmental, social, cultural, ethical and political implications⁷. It may be remembered, *en passant*, how questions of morphology now underlie the reflection on cultural forms, on the anthropization of the environment, and, starting from Foucault and Hannah Arendt, on biopolitics.

This theoretical and epistemological background may also include the breakthrough in human sciences and natural sciences following the iconic turn or pictorial turn of studies dedicated to visual culture. While studies on intermediality, transmediality and remediation did not refer specifically to the morphological sphere, they drew on the notions of *Pathosformel* and *Bilderwanderung* introduced by Aby Warburg. Particularly after the work of Jacques Aumont and Raymond Bellour, they concentrated on the migration from one medium to another of the forms of vision, composition, figurative dynamism, *mise en scène*, etc⁸. Even more than happened with the theories of *figural* first appearing in Jean-François Lyotard's *Discours, figure* and then becoming widely known with Nicole Brenez, Philippe Dubois, Luc Vancheri and Jacques Aumont,⁹ the question of morphology has been able to evolve thanks to the assertion of notions such as media environment and mediascape. As a whole, it could be maintained that it has turned out to be a question of morphogenesis and metamorphosis of a cultural ecosystem.

7. VERCELLONE, F., *Le ragioni della forma*, Milano-Udine, Mimesis 2011; D'ANGELO, P., *Estetica della natura*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2015.

8. Cfr., among others, AUMONT, J., "Migrations", *Cinémathèque*, 7 (1995); AUMONT, J., *A quoi pensent les films?*, Paris, Séguier, 1996; AUMONT, J., *Matière d'images, redux*, Paris, La Différence, 2009; BELLOUR, R., *L'Entre-images. Photo, Cinéma, Vidéo*, Paris, La Différence, 1990; BELLOUR, R., *L'Entre-images 2. Mots, Images*, Paris, POL, 1999; BELLOUR, R., *La Querelle des dispositifs: cinéma, installations, expositions*, Paris, POL, 2012; SENALDI, M., *Doppio sguardo. Cinema e arte contemporanea*, Milano, Bompiani, 2008.

9. LYOTARD, J.-F., *Discours, figure*, Paris, Klincksieck 2013; BRENEZ, N., *De la figure en général et du corps en particulier. L'invention figurative au cinéma*, Paris, De Boeck, 1998; DUBOIS, PH., "La question du figural", in: MURCIA, C./TAMINIAUX, P. (eds.), *Cinéma, Art(s) plastique(s)*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2004, pp. 51-76; VANCHERI, L., *Les pensées figurales de l'image*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2011; ACQUARELLI L., (eds.), *Au prisme du figural. Le sens des images entre forme et force*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2015.

Much of the reflection on cultural and aesthetic phenomena of late modernity, or we could say postmodernity, has with good reason concentrated on simulacra and simulation, which could be understood as different manifestations of an ever more autoreferential mimesis. It tends to *combine morphogenesis with an autopoietic metamorphosis* and to make a marked reduction in the multiplicity of forms and the creative potential of the very *mimesis* within the closed circle of serial, standardized and standardizing repetition. The substitution of the simulacrum for the real and the reciprocal cross-reference of forms on the one hand reveal the internal processes of the ecosystem of the media environment, but on the other they reveal the potential circular and closed characteristic of these processes. Iteration and reiteration fix the form in an increasingly limited number of variants, whose semantics is restricted within ever more precise and predictable boundaries of the abstract universe of interpretations of the world. The intensification and spread of this *uniforming* aesthetic tendency, which was born at the beginning of modernity¹⁰, could be interpreted as both consequences and causes of the development of the cultural paradigm of disjunction between man and the cosmos.

This transformation could be interpreted as the attainment of a certain “referential indifference threshold” of images and their forms, which is related with what Montani defines as an “misuse of technical power” granted to the container of the images, namely the medium, or more generally, the media environment¹¹. A critical point of abstraction of forms compared to reality thus indicates the loss of awareness of interaction between sensibility and the environment, performed by technique and aesthetics in the medium. There emerges a prevalence of *techne* over *aisthesis* with a related imbalance if not actually a suspension of the complex inter-retro-action existing between the cultural sphere of the media and the natural one around it. The media environment gradually becomes an autonomous ecosystem independent of the earthly one, characterized by an increasingly “anaesthetic” praxis, if *aisthesis* is taken in its original sense, namely the faculty of linking man and the environment through feeling, perceiving and experiencing.

This gives great relevance and significance to the aesthetic conception of the medium as a “sensitive environment”, whose origin goes back to the term *metaxu* used by Aristotle in *De anima*, which was subsequently spread under the name of *Medium* by Averroes and then to Goethe, von Humboldt, Herder and others. It finally became a central notion to designate

10. BAUDRILLARD, J., *L'échange symbolique et la mort*, Paris, Gallimard, 1976.

11. DEWEY, J., *Art as experience*, New York, Penguin, 2005; MONTANI, P., *Tecnologie della sensibilità. Estetica e immaginazione interattiva*, ed. cit.

the techno-aesthetic environment where sensibility, technique and nature interact: that of *milieu associé* formulated by Gilbert Simondon, based on Leroi-Gourhan's idea of *milieu technique*¹². The technological advance coming particularly from photography, cinema and other such apparatus had led Walter Benjamin –but also Moholy-Nagy, Bela Balász and others– to a reorganization of the medium of perception, that is the environment where the sensory experience happens. More recent reflections on the media environments –for example, by John Durham Peters, Peppino Ortoleva, Francesco Casetti¹³– place the relationship between the medium and the environment in a broad ecological sense, steering McLuhan's idea of the media as “extensions of man”¹⁴ in a techno-aesthetic direction, that is towards an interpretation of sensibility as an agent able to mould the “medium”, in the sense of cultural and natural habitat. It could therefore be asserted that on the one hand, man's sensibility, along with his ways of relating with the environment, has been modified by the use of prostheses and technical devices much more than his other aptitudes, while, on the other hand, his very sensibility, by means of technology, has changed the environment, taken in the broad and not just human sense.

From this viewpoint, the conception of *sensorium*, which has its distant origins in Aristotle's notion of *aistheterion* and has been developed by Jacques Rancière to account for the transformations over time of the concept of sensory *milieu*, could be extended to include the physical and biological environment, as well as the human one. In this way, reflection on the “distribution

12. LEROI-GOUHRAN, A., *Milieu et technique*, Paris, Albin, 1945-1973; SIMONDON, G., *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, Paris, Aubier, 2012; SIMONDON, G., *Sur la technique*, Paris, PUF 2014; PINOTTI, A./SOMAINI, A. (eds.), *Cultura visuale*, Torino, Einaudi, 2016, pp. 135-191; MONTANI, P., *Tecnologie della sensibilità. Estetica e immaginazione interattiva*, ed. cit.; ALLOA, E., “Metaxu. Figures de la médialité chez Aristote”, *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 62 (2009), pp. 247-262; SPITZER, L., “Milieu and Ambience. An essay in historical semantics”, *Phylosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 1 (1942), pp. 1-42; COCCIA, E., *La trasparenza delle immagini. Averroè e l'averroismo*, Milano, Bruno Mondadori, 2005.

13. PETERS, J-D., *The Marvelous clouds. Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media*, Chicago-London, University Chicago Press, 2015; ORTOLEVA, P., *Il secolo dei media. Riti, abitudini, mitologie*, Milano, Il Saggiatore, 2009; ORTOLEVA, P., “You Tube, per esempio, o: Un approccio ecologico alla percezione del web”, in: DIODATO, R./SOMAINI, A. (eds.), *Estetica dei media e della comunicazione*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2012, pp. 295-312; CASETTI, F., *The Lumière Galaxy. Seven Key Words for The Cinema to Come*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2015; COCCIA, E., *La vita sensibile*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2011.

14. McLUHAN, M./FIORE, Q., *The Medium is The Message*, New York, Penguin, 1967.

of the sensible” (*partage du sensible*) and on the related divisions and organizations of experience and its objects would concern not only the aesthetic and political but also the ethical and techno-scientific implications, thus with greater consequences going from society to the cosmos. In other words, what Rancière defines as “the system of a priori forms”¹⁵ would determine “what can be experienced” and, we may add, the configuration of the forms themselves, as it would refer to a certain normativity in culture and imagery that influences techno-scientific and commercial operations.

The notion of *sensorium* in this broad sense may account for the reciprocal relationship between medium, *aisthesis* and *physis* and for the inter-retroaction existing between the media environment and the actual environment. More generally, this notion may refer to the complex dialogic where human sensibility places the ecosystem of the media and the earthly ecosystem. In other words, a wide conception of the *sensorium* would allow us to take a meta-standpoint on the exchange processes –primarily the migration of forms– between the two ecosystems, that is to observe both of them, in the bio-techno-aesthetic perspective, as if almost subsumed in a sort of cultural and natural meta-ecosystem.

As is well-known, our era witnesses unprecedented reciprocity between real and imaginary experience, between *techne* and *physis*, both because the medium is ever more immersed in the environment, as it has become a sort of built-in device (think of the great variety of wearable technology, above all Google Glass) and because it is ever more immersive (think of Leap Motion) and is presented as a “simulative environment”. This is particularly true where, even under the appearance of interactivity, it is not just a mere program for autoreferential and “anaesthetic” sensorial performances. The medium has therefore triggered an unprecedented dialogic between the “here” and the “elsewhere”, by means of which not only does the “here” reach out to the “elsewhere”, but the “elsewhere” also reaches the “here”. This is accounted for by the neologism “hypertopia”, which Casetti coined from the concept of heterotopia formulated by Foucault¹⁶. It could therefore be asserted that the medium has determined and is increasingly determining an interpenetration between “here” and “elsewhere”, thus activating a liminal experience and sensibility between the two environments. If

15. RANCIÈRE, J., *Le Partage du sensible. Esthétique et politique*, Paris, La Fabrique, 2000, pp. 13-14. Cfr. DE GAETANO R. (eds.), *Politica delle immagini. Su Jacques Rancière*, Cosenza, Pellegrini, 2011.

16. CASETTI, F., *The Lumière Galaxy*, ed. cit., pp. 224-227; FOUCAULT, M., “Des espaces autres”, *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, 5 (1984) pp. 46-49; SOMAINI, A. (eds.), *Il luogo dello spettatore*, Milano, V&P, 2005.

you consider these in the just mentioned perspective of extended *sensorium*, they, in turn, generate an environmental crossbreeding or in other words a unidual environment.

In the context of such crossbreeding, bio-techno-aesthetic surveillance may be exercised on two opposing tendencies of the medium: the one that increases the autoreferentiality of the *aisthesis* and its forms and as said before, indirectly conditions the operations on the beings of the environment; and the one that interacts with the physical and biological variability and multi-faceted variety, retaining the explorative and adaptive function of sensibility to the environment itself.

This surveillance, first of all, may consist not only in cataloguing the products of the two opposing tendencies of the medium which appear as migrant forms, but rather in examining some principles underlying the morphogenetic processes. Within the technologically produced image, these may favor a creative mimesis founded on complementary man/cosmos reciprocity: the anthropomorphism of the cosmos and the cosmomorphism of man.

3. THE ANTHROPOS/KOSMOS TRANSFER AND MORPHOGENETIC MIMESIS

Behind the processes of morphogenesis of the technological image that are here considered is the use of some aptitudes of mimetic thought, or, in the terms proposed by Edgar Morin, of the analogical, symbolic and mythological thought that governs comprehension¹⁷.

In the present speculative framework, this refers both to the author and to the observer of the image; it is considered as a way of knowing, recalling the notions of *Verstehen* and *Einfühlung*, originally studied in the contexts of German historicism, Husserlian phenomenology and hermeneutics. The concept of comprehension used here, however, does not only concern the empathic/imaginative simulation used by human beings to obtain theoretical and practical inferences on the other –as traditionally happened and still happens in the studies carried out by Dilthey, Simmel, Wittgenstein, Collingwood onwards.

17. MORIN, E., *La Méthode 3. La Connaissance de la Connaissance*, Paris, Seuil, 2008; MORIN, E., *Le cinéma ou l'homme imaginaire*, Paris, Minit, 2013. As regards the relationship between Edgar Morin's complex thought and the aesthetic of the kinetic audiovisual medium, I may refer the reader to some of my previous works: SIMONIGH, C., *Comprendere il cinema, comprendere la complessità*, in: MORIN, E., *Il cinema o l'uomo immaginario*, Milano, Cortina, 2016, pp. IX-XXI; SIMONIGH, C., *Su alcuni principi dell'estetica complessa*, in SIMONIGH, C., (ed.), *Pensare la complessità per un umanesimo planetario*, Milano-Udine, Mimesis, 2012, pp. 155-180.

It is rather understood *in extenso* as the original epistemic modality used by man in subjectively and not objectively relating with and knowing the cosmos and its beings. Starting from the studies of Vischer or Lipps or Wölfflin on the anthropomorphically experienced perception of objects or from Worringer's reflections on empathy and abstraction (beyond specific outcomes like the various theories of "pure visibility" or "form"), some aesthetic texts are based, as is known, on the ideas of "symbolic sympathy" and "identification with the natural and abstract forms".

While interacting with the forms of the technologically produced dynamic image, the mimetic thought is continually urged to use psychological identifications and projections which, following Edgar Morin, could be defined as *polymorphous*, in that they affect not only human beings but also beings of the biological and physical environment, accomplishing a transfer between man and cosmos¹⁸. In this theoretical perspective, the dynamic audiovisual image is adopted as a complex system of iconic and sound kinetic forms, which, alone or in reciprocal relationships between each other, evolve in time and space and interact with sensibility and thought. Indeed the typical dynamism of the audiovisual medium performs the semantic-aesthetic function, as it produces an incessant metamorphosis of forms, their functions, their status and their meaning –in Walter Benjamin's words: "A different nature speaks to the camera than speaks to the eye".

The metamorphic and morphogenetic *dynamis* of the audiovisual medium makes a fluid and reciprocal translation between the physical universe and that of the imagination, as it begins to interact with the aptitude peculiar to analogical, symbolic, mythological thought to establish an uniduality between the domains of perception and thought, empirics and abstraction, phenomenal and symbolic¹⁹.

This fundamental techno-aesthetic phenomenon of interaction created by the medium between *aisthesis* and *physis* and between man and cosmos embraces one of the anthropo-socio-cosmological presuppositions of the notion of *sensorium*, which, as said before, implies the inter-retro-action and crossbreeding between the cultural and natural environment.

The transfer between man and cosmos takes place by virtue of the mimesis inherent in the identification/projection complex whether by concealing the environment and its beings and its manifestations of human qualities or instead by taking man as part of the environment through a mimetic and

18. MORIN, E. *Le cinéma ou l'homme imaginaire*, ed. cit.

19. GIBSON, J.J., *The ecological approach to visual perception*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1979.

symbolic mediation between the visible and the invisible. In the audiovisual medium, this acquires innovative forms like those vast forms already identified by Erwin Panofski under the terms of “dynamization of space” and “spatialization of time”²⁰.

In the kinetic medium even before the audiovisual, that is first with silent films and then with sound films, the *anthropos/kosmos* transfer is known to have entailed a metamorphosis of real time in subjective, interior, psychological duration. This has displayed –analogically, symbolically and mythologically– the complexity of experience and of human knowledge, as Gilles Deleuze, for example, has widely illustrated, introducing notions such as “movement-image” and “time-image” especially to designate forms of time. The temporal forms of acceleration, slowing down, suspension, iterations, simultaneity, etc. first emerged with editing –think, for example, of the contribution of Russian Formalism in this sphere– and then developed with sound. They helped to establish an aesthetic founded on the innovative anthropomorphization of time, which expressed a late-modern sensibility mainly oriented to the experience of a rapid succession of more or less unrelated present moments. Much less common was the cosmomorphization of the time of the dynamic image so as to account symbolically for the irreversible, uniform and unrepeatable nature of the real chronological flow and the constant duration and cyclicity of natural time.

The kinetic and audiovisual medium has developed the *anthropos/kosmos* transfer, especially by taking up analogically, symbolically and mythologically the space and the beings inhabiting it. The cinema, progenitor of subsequent kinetic and audiovisual media, already developed the processes of identification and projection towards the environment. From the start it introduced an original dynamic *Stimmung* of the landscape, which was considered a “symbolic form” or, in Ejzenštejn’s anti-Hegelian terms, a “nature not indifferent to man”. This made it a *dramatis personae* and therefore, according to Balász and Bazin, an agent of dramatization and dramaturgy within a type of show with a totally original aesthetic²¹. The relationship of identification and projection has had a more intense effect on the biological and physical beings of the environment. Thanks to the metamorphic potentiality of the kinetic and audiovisual medium, they brought about –according

20. PANOFSKY, E., *Three Essays on Style*, Cambridge-Massachusetts, Mit Press, 1997; PANOFSKY, E., *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, London, Penguin, 1996.

21. EJZENŠTEJN, S.M., *Neravnodušnaja priroda*, Moscow, Iskusstvo, 1964; BERNARDI, S., *Il paesaggio come forma simbolica*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2002; DUBBINI, R., *Geografie dello sguardo*, Torino, Einaudi, 1994.

to Edgar Morin— a sort of neo-animism, potentially capable of turning the culture of the media into a “culture of the soul”²². In effect, time and especially space are interpreted and understood by virtue of an aesthetic reworking of the hologramatic relationship between the human microcosm and the macrocosm. This happens both with the symbolic metamorphosis peculiar to fiction and with the “revelation” given by realism—to use the terminology introduced by André Bazin— as well as with the “revelatory transfiguration” deriving from the first two, which is less and less noticed across the genres, registers, styles and formats of the media environment.

The forms of the beings of the environment, subjected by the kinetic and audiovisual medium to the metamorphosis of close-up and editing, are gathered in their reciprocal similarities and differences and are prepared to the multiple manifestations of the analogical, symbolic and mythological (synecdoche, metonymy, simile, etc.), in other words to the translation from the phenomenal to abstraction, from visible to invisible, from feelable to thinkable.

The *anthropos/kosmos* transfer is activated particularly by the close-up, since it obliges the sensibility to use specific perceptive and interpretative parameters that involve both the assignment of the observer’s sense to beings of the environment and the revelation or rediscovery of their appearances and forms; their meaning and their status appear autonomous and independent of the ordinary, and more generally speaking, of the observer himself. In other words, if equilibrium is oriented towards projection in the identification/projection relationship, then a marked anthropomorphization of the cosmos and its aspects prevails, with a *mimesis* that tends more towards the attribution of human qualities, aptitudes and characteristics and is therefore less suited to stimulate the explorative and adaptive function of sensibility to the environment. If, on the other hand, the identification/projection relationship is oriented towards identification, the resulting anthropomorphization of the cosmos and its beings is related to a *mimesis* that is more open to otherness and its most unpredictable manifestations, including the variability of forms. This gives the kinetic and audiovisual medium the possibility, as already noted by Walter Benjamin, of “highlighting entirely new structural formations of matter”²³.

22. MORIN E., *L’esprit du temps. Névrose. Essai sur la culture de masse*, Paris, Grasset, 2008; MORIN E., *L’esprit du temps. Névrose*, Paris, Grasset, 2008.

23. BENJAMIN, W., *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. R. Tiedemann /H. Schweppenhäuser, vol. II, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1955.

Naturally, the differentiation that has been referred to is neither clear-cut nor absolute, since it concerns a relationship, that of identification/projection, which has rightly been defined with the word “complex” to indicate the reciprocity and dialogic that exist between the two terms.

More or less independently from the equilibrium between identification and projection on which anthropomorphization is based, mimesis may be anthropocentric, that is directed at an observation of biological and physical beings of the environment as objects and so, as such, subordinate or functional to man; or it may be cosmocentric, that is directed at recognizing beings of the environment in their otherness and also in their subjectivity, therefore considering man as a subject among subjects. The examples of anthropocentric mimesis are very numerous in past and current media culture, in that they are the expression of the dominant cultural paradigm, through which first the West and then the whole globalized world have related and still relate to the environment to make use of it, and, even before, to get to know it, with positive and negative implications. Beyond the examples of the more immediate anthropomorphism that leads to the personification of biological and physical beings and that is found all across the genres, registers and formats of the media environment, it is useful to note how the already mentioned important notion of “not indifferent nature” is very often expressed in the artistic praxis of its originator, Ejzenštejn, through an anthropocentric mimesis. This, for example, happens in Vakulinčuk’s famous funeral scene in *Bronenosec Potëmkin*, where the symphony of the mist in the port of Odessa composes forms aimed at “clothing the sea in mourning”²⁴. The same is also true of the symbolic forms produced by different types of editing devised by the director in the course of his aesthetic research and artistic production, where animals and natural elements are commonly used as analogies with human beings. Early 20th century research –including German Expressionism, Soviet Realism, the first formalization of genres in US cinema– gave rise to a vast range of anthropocentric symbolic forms which were one of the foundations of the aesthetics of the kinetic and audiovisual medium. Drawing on the linguistic-literary heritage, they introduced the use of the “universe as a dictionary” –to take an expression from avant garde cinema– according to a relationship marked by the *resonance* emanating from man towards the environment and its physical and biological beings. Some atmospheric, landscape, plant and animal forms have been acquired analogically and symbolically as elements of a sort of catalogue of archetypes and stereotypes designed to express in immediate audiovisual forms some more

24. EJZENŠTEJN, S.M., *Neravnodušnaja priroda*, Moscov, Iskusstvo, 1964.

easily codifiable human manifestations, such as primary emotions and some fundamental sentiments –rain and sadness, dry leaves and sense of death, puppies and tenderness, wide open spaces and freedom, etc. Thanks to their immediacy and coherence with the dominant cultural paradigm of disjunction between man and cosmos, these audiovisual forms in particular have become rooted in the processes of circulation and serial iteration within the various genres and formats of the media environment. Through variations, manifestations, quotations, etc., over time they have helped to determine the increasingly closed and autonomous uniformity regarding the environment. Anthropocentric *mimesis*, in fact, is more easily connected to the medium's misuse of technical power, which has just been indicated as a factor of autoreferential morphogenesis that tends to coincide with an autopoietic metamorphosis. In serial repetition it reduces the possibility of grasping the multiplicity of forms in the environment and man's creative potential to a standardized and standardizing praxis.

Cosmocentric *mimesis*, on the other hand, is more easily connected to a use of the medium as an agent of interaction between the different components of the *sensorium* and thus fosters the explorative and adaptive function of sensibility, resulting in a metamorphosis and morphogenesis open to the variability and multiple physical and biological varieties of the environment. Through a use of the medium characterized by *aisthesis*, the *anthropos /kosmos* transfer may create an authentic reciprocity or a symbolic exchange between the two terms, which occurs according to a relationship characterized by *consonance*. Some of the most important aesthetic contributions from this standpoint are made by many screen artists who have wanted to share with the spectators the observation of the human being as a living form among other forms of the cosmos or as a subject-form among subject-forms, especially by means of a creative *mimesis* that relates more easily to symbolic exchange and exploration of the environment through the multiple, unpredictable and variable forms of its beings. This is a perspective that has been conspicuous since the birth of documentarism –naturalistic or not– and is still developing today in explorative and experimental terms in the wider field of non-fiction and also in the fake documentary, particularly in those cases where the question arises of man/cosmos reciprocity –the work of, among others, Errol Morris, Bill Viola, Nuridsany and Pérennou. The perspective of cosmocentric *mimesis* has also concerned the development of the imaginary since the first decades of the 20th century, when the explorations of Dadaism and Surrealism found analogies between human bodily forms and those of beings of the environment. In multiple manifestations of the symbolic, they expressed a reciprocal

relationship between man and cosmos –among other examples can be included the juxtapositions in Buñuel and Dalí's *Un chien andalou* of the eye and the razor blade with the moon and the thin cirrus clouds, or the roundish dark shape of armpit hair with that of the sea urchin. Historically it is known that Italian Neorealism and the French Nouvelle Vague programmatically explored the reciprocity between man and context, with the aim of using the kinetic and audiovisual medium as a factor of “revelation”, again to use André Bazin's terminology. We may recall, for example, how in the last sequence of Rossellini's *Paisà*, the partisans are shown as forms immersed in and almost blended with the vegetation at the mouth of the Po. The same is true of Antoine Doinel, when he goes into the wood in the last sequence of Truffaut's *Les quatre cents coups*.

Moreover, where the analogy is found between dynamic forms, it may propose the thematization of reciprocity and complementarity between man and environment, fostering not only the consonance but also the *recognition* of a biological being that is first observed in its otherness as an *ego alter*, and then recognized as a similar subject and *alter ego*. This is what happens, for example, between the child and the kestrel in Ken Loach's *Kes*, through the dynamic forms drawn by the body movements of the former on the meadow and the latter in the sky; or also in Luc Jacquet's *Le renard et l'enfant* with the child's behavioral forms gradually mirroring those of the fox.

There are naturally very numerous examples to be mentioned of the different types of formal analogies implying symbolic reciprocity between man and cosmos; these can derive from a use of the kinetic medium able to stimulate the explorative and adaptive function of *aisthesis* towards the environment.

In general, it could be noted that where the overcoming of the figure/background and of the observer/picture relationships is related to the experimentation of the multiple possibilities of exploring the environment typical of kinetic and audiovisual media, there is a proportional increase in the possibility that the experience becomes authentically immersive and reveals a multiplicity of unforeseen and changeable physical and biological forms. The interaction between media environment and environment could be fostered by the aesthetic revelation of plastic (Ejzenstejn) and tactile (Benjamin) dynamic qualities of the kinetic and audiovisual media –from dolly to depth of field, from zoom to stereoscopy, from 3D to enhanced reality, to wearable technology, to simulated environments, etc. This could result in a morphogenesis and a metamorphosis that are more open to natural uncertainty, and equally in a more creative visual aesthetic and culture, more consonant with a biotechno-aesthetic perspective.

The ecological look may perhaps be opened when traveling not only along the way of rational knowledge and thought, but also the way of sensory exploration and aesthetic amazement –*aisthesis* goes back to the Homeric *aion*, *aisthou*, meaning “I perceive”, but also “my breath is taken away, I can’t breathe”– in order to move culture towards a bioanthropological paradigm and an authentic reciprocity between man and cosmos.