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*Cinemetamorphosis:  
Toward a Cinematic Theory of Classical Narrative*

***Abstract***

The observations here advanced concern the affinities between classical literature and art on the one hand and the art of telling stories in moving images on the other. The theory of *cinemetamorphosis* here introduced, albeit only briefly, applies a filmic perspective to Greek and Roman literature and visual arts for purposes of appreciation and interpretation. The fact that the film medium was unknown and technically impossible to the ancients is not an obstacle to this approach. To use Ovidian terms: much of the storytelling in moving images is by definition a process of metamorphosis, for the individual static images on a filmstrip appear to be moving and changing in sequential order when they are being projected. As several textual and visual examples will illustrate, viewing antiquity through this particular lens of modernity can grant us new insights into the narrative and stylistic complexities of Greco-Roman visual and literary arts.

Le osservazioni proposte in questo contributo riguardano le affinità che si possono cogliere tra arte, da un lato, e tecniche del racconto tramite immagini in movimento, dall'altro, e la letteratura classica. La teoria della *cinemetamorphosis*, che qui viene illustrata brevemente, adotta una prospettiva filmica per comprendere e interpretare la letteratura di Greci e Romani. Il fatto che il *medium* cinematografico fosse sconosciuto e tecnicamente impossibile per gli antichi non costituisce un ostacolo per un tale approccio. Per dirla in termini ovidiani: il raccontare tramite immagini in movimento è per molti aspetti un processo di metamorfosi, perché singole immagini statiche su una pellicola sembrano muoversi e cambiare secondo un ordine sequenziale quando vengono proiettate. Come verrà illustrato da numerosi esempi testuali e visuali, guardare all'antichità sotto questa particolare lente della modernità ci può consentire nuove prospettive nelle complessità narrative e stilistiche delle arti visuali e letterarie del mondo greco e romano.

Few today will deny, although many did before, that psychoanalysis, structuralism, feminism, narratology, and several other areas of scholarship applied to the study of classical literature and culture have succeeded in significantly advancing our understanding and appreciation, even though none of these fields of inquiry existed in antiquity. The following observations on the affinities between classical literature and art on the one hand and the art of telling stories primarily in moving images on the other are a brief attempt to point to another such area of research.

Since the arrival of photography and cinematography, which really is cinematography, ways of seeing and reading have changed fundamentally. The analysis of moving-picture narratives has considerably influenced and advanced the interpretation of modern literature and other arts. Critic James Bridle even speaks of a New Aesthetic, according to which literary and artistic creations reflect the visual media that are now pre-

eminent<sup>1</sup>. Visually oriented analysis has also begun to influence Classical Studies, an area of scholarship that always has been concerned primarily with texts, not images. But a coherent perspective on the visual qualities of ancient narrative that goes beyond then-existing art forms like painting, sculpture, and theater has largely been neglected. The same is true for those narrative qualities inherent in ancient static visual media that go beyond Greek and Roman forms of art or literature. My comments here will be what classical scholars used to call *prolegomena*: introductory reflections supported by a few specific examples. Traditionally, scholars would have presented the matter at hand under a Latin heading such as the following: *Prolegomena in cinemetamorphosin, quae est ars et fabulas et imagines antiquas itemque hodiernas pelliculas interpretandi*.

Greeks and Romans were fully aware of the close affinities between the verbal and the visual. Simonides of Keos held that painting is silent poetry – today we would speak about *literature* rather than *poetry* – while poetry is painting that speaks. Horace's *ut pictura poesis* followed<sup>2</sup>. Ancient rhetorical terms like the Greek *enargeia* ("clarity, vividness") and the Latin *evidentia*, *illustratio*, *demonstratio*, and *repraesentatio* and Cicero's phrase *sub oculos subiectio* (in Greek: *hypotypôsis*) all refer to the visual; they express and anticipate what narratives in moving images do as a matter of course<sup>3</sup>. Listeners perceive what a speaker places before their eyes not literally but mentally. The process presupposes the concept of the mind's eye, attested in Plato and a major aspect of Neo-Platonic and later philosophy<sup>4</sup>. Just as listeners perceive what they hear, so, by analogy, do readers imagine what they read on the page. A speaker's or writer's detailed verbal descriptions incite the listener or reader towards mental visualization:

vivid descriptions are produced not so much by describing as by noting the particulars of scenes. Though auditory details as well as details that appeal to senses other than sight are sometimes used, most details appeal to sight. Rhetoricians promote

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<sup>1</sup> BERRY et al. (2012, 64-71) provides an initial bibliography. This short e-book, partly outdated already, is available electronically at <http://v2.nl/files/2012/publishing/new-aesthetic-new-anxieties-pdf/view>. Appropriately, the Wikipedia article "New Aesthetics" may well be the best starting point for orientation on the topic.

<sup>2</sup> Plutarch, *Moralia* 17f-18a and 346f-347c (for Simonides); Horace, *Ars poetica* 361. I discuss the matter in greater detail and adduce further references in WINKLER (2009, 22-26).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Cicero, *Orator* 40.139 and *De oratore* 3.53.202; Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 9.2.40 and elsewhere. The ancient *loci* are collected and discussed in LAUSBERG (2008<sup>4</sup>): see § 1244 (s.vv. *demonstratio*, *evidentia*, *illustratio*, *imaginatio*, *imago*, *oculus*, *repraesentare*, *repraesentatio*) and § 1245 (s.vv. *enargeia*, *phantasia*, *hypotypôsis*) for indices. For just one example, with additional references, see WALKER (1993). In the present context see also SPINA (2005).

<sup>4</sup> E.g. Plato, *Republic* 7.533d2 (*to tês psychês omma*: «the eye of the soul»). For later Latin references (*oculus mentis* [«the mind's eye»] and related others) see, e.g., VAN FLETEREN (1999). Cf. further, e.g., LAW (1989). In general see COLLINS (1991).

visualization by noting forceful actions, particularizing actions with objects, and contrasting features of the scene – particularly light and darkness. Details are selected for their ability not only to promote visualization but also to heighten an emotional response and suggest plausibility<sup>5</sup>.

Quintilian explains how this works. Citing a particular example from Cicero, he asks – rhetorically, of course: «is anybody so far removed from mentally creating images of things being described [*procul a concipiendis imaginibus rerum*] that he does not [...] seem to be looking at the people and their surroundings [*locum*] and their clothing [*habitum*] and, moreover, himself fills in further details [*sibi ipse adstruat*] what is not even being expressed in words?<sup>6</sup>». The answer is self-evident.

The verbal and the visual are inseparable. The prologue to Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe* elegantly demonstrates Simonides' point<sup>7</sup>. Long before Longus, Apollonius of Rhodes did the same in his portrayal of Medea's initial infatuation with Jason. Medea sees, in her mind's eye, Jason's handsome figure and mentally hears his words: «Everything appeared again before her eyes»<sup>8</sup>. Apollonius' description of Phrixus and the ram with the golden fleece as depicted on Jason's cloak is another case in point. Phrixus appears to be listening to what the ram is telling him, and any viewer might well wish to preserve silence in order to be able to hear what is being said<sup>9</sup>. Nearly two and a half millennia later, Patricia Highsmith, author of highly complex psychological suspense novels, unconsciously agreed with Simonides: «painting is the art most closely related to writing»<sup>10</sup>. Hence the adaptability of any kind of narrative literature to the screen. Narrative films are visual texts. Both modes of storytelling are highly suitable for, and capable of, interpretive analyses.

A practically cinematic kind of *enargeia* was inherent in classical literature from Homer to Heliodorus, as I have shown elsewhere for these two<sup>11</sup>. But it is especially pronounced in Ovid. Literary critics, prominently among them J. Hillis Miller, have adduced, for example, the Cretan labyrinth (*Met.* 8) as an analogue to complex narrative structures<sup>12</sup>. But the Ovidian nature of labyrinthine – i.e. non-linear – plots in modernist

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted from INNOCENTI (1994, 374).

<sup>6</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 8.3.64; my translation. His quotation from Cicero, *In Verrem* 5.33.86, has been omitted here.

<sup>7</sup> On this WINKLER (2009, 22-24).

<sup>8</sup> Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica* 3.453-56. The translation of line 453 is my own.

<sup>9</sup> Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica* 1.763-67.

<sup>10</sup> The immediately following sentence reads: «Painters are accustomed to using their eyes, and it is good for a writer to do the same». Both quotations are from HIGHSMITH (1966, 8). There are several reprint editions.

<sup>11</sup> On Homeric epic, especially similes and ecphrases: WINKLER (2007, 48-63). On Heliodorus: WINKLER (2000-2001). Cf. also DE JONG – NÜNLIST (2004).

<sup>12</sup> MILLER (1992).

cinema has so far been overlooked. It appears to poignant effect in Alain Resnais's film *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), based on a screenplay by Alain Robbe-Grillet. A roving camera glides along apparently endless corridors that may lead nowhere. At the beginning a man's voice on the soundtrack describes to an unseen listener the surroundings and their eerie effect. He talks obsessively, returning to the same phrases again and again. I here excerpt his words, omitting most of his repetitions:

along these corridors, through these salons and galleries, in this edifice of a bygone era, this sprawling, sumptuous, baroque, gloomy hotel, where one endless corridor follows another [...] silent rooms where one's footsteps are absorbed by carpets so thick, so heavy, that no sound reaches one's ear, as if the very ear of him who walks on [them] once again along these corridors, through these salons and galleries, in this edifice of a bygone era [...] sculpted doorframes, rows of doorways, galleries, side corridors that in turn lead to empty salons heavy with ornamentation of a bygone era, silent rooms where one's footsteps are absorbed [...] flagstones over which I walked once again, along these corridors [...]<sup>13</sup>.

Like Ovid's Maeander and the corridors in Daedalus' labyrinth, the man's words and the film's narrative circle back on themselves, as if there were no escape from time or place. So do the screen images: they repeatedly show us what we have seen before.



*Last Year at Marienbad*

The visual quality of Ovidian narrative can today be regarded as downright cinematic. Russian filmmaker and theoretician Sergei Eisenstein's approach to classic and, to a

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<sup>13</sup> This and the following quotations from the film reproduce the subtitles of its 2009 Criterion Collection release on DVD. (The subtitles are not always literal translations.) For a printed version of the script, whose dialogue differs in some places from the film as released, see ROBBE-GRILLET – RESNAIS (1961), several rpts.; in English: ROBBE-GRILLET (1962). Both contain an introduction by Robbe-Grillet.

smaller extent, classical literature provides the most useful model for the kind of understanding of textual narratives that I have in mind. Eisenstein spoke of *the film sense* that he detected in epic (Milton, Pushkin) and its successor, the nineteenth-century novel (Dickens, Zola, Balzac)<sup>14</sup>. Gérard Genette's concept of hypo- and hypertexts provides a bridge from antiquity to today, especially in connection with the more recent critical concept of *intermediality*, which can readily be related to the New Aesthetic<sup>15</sup>. And the visual pleasure of narrative – I am alluding to Laura Mulvey's essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* – is equally characteristic of classical literature and of film, although not only in Mulvey's sense<sup>16</sup>.

What I propose to call *cinemetamorphosis* is a conceptual approach to classical texts and images whose purpose is to apply a filmic perspective to Greek and Roman literature and the visual arts. *Cinemetamorphosis* presents an interpretive approach to the affinities between classical texts and images on the one hand and modern visual narratives on the other. Its purview are the visual qualities in narrative literature and the literary qualities in narrative images. With their theoretical agonies over what exactly visual adaptations of literary texts are, critics have by now produced a veritable terminological jungle: “translation, actualization, reading, critique, dialogization, cannibalization, transmutation, transfiguration, incarnation, transmogrification, transcoding, performance, signifying, rewriting, detournement”<sup>17</sup>. Or, more succinctly but still rather nebulously: «Borrowing, Intersecting, and Transforming Sources»<sup>18</sup>. By contrast, the all-inclusive term *cinemetamorphosis* can provide a kind of Ockham's Razor through the thickets of that jungle – or, to stay within antiquity, a kind of Heracles' sword slashing through the necks of the Hydra. Both of the critical lists given above include terms synonymous with *metamorphosis*. They support, unintentionally and *avant la lettre*, what is being proposed here.

In antiquity, images that tell or imply a story were static; today, most of them are moving: motion pictures. *Cinemetamorphosis* equally encompasses analytical and comparative work in two directions, as it were: adaptations and transformations of classical texts to the screen, as in films based on Greek and Roman epic, tragedy, comedy, or historiography; and, conversely, the discovery and interpretation of classical themes and

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. my brief comments, with references to Eisenstein's works, in WINKLER (2009, 41f.).

<sup>15</sup> GENETTE (1997). The original: GENETTE (1982).

<sup>16</sup> MULVEY (2009<sup>2</sup>). This article was first published in 1975.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted from STAM (2005, 4), in section titled *Beyond 'Fidelity'*. Cf. further MACCABE – MURRAY – WARNER (2011).

<sup>18</sup> Quoted from ANDREW (1984, 98), title of section in chapter *Adaptation*.

archetypes in films not ostensibly based on anything ancient at all. My comments above concerning *Last Year at Marienbad* are an example of this latter side. Another area is the cinematic analysis of classical visual art.

*Cinemetamorphosis* is not an *explication de texte* (or *d'image*) as traditionally practiced since the days of the Alexandrian scholiasts. Rather – and here is a working definition – it is *a retrospective appreciation and interpretation of the complexity of classical texts and images made possible by the invention of the motion-picture camera and projector*. To put it slightly differently, *cinemetamorphosis* is an *explication filmique des textes et images anciennes*. It can, of course, also be an *explication classique des textes filmiques*, a particularly fascinating side. The fact that the narrative medium of film was unknown and technically impossible to the ancients is not an obstacle to the approach I am here advocating. To put the case in Ovidian terms: much of the storytelling in moving images is by definition a process of metamorphosis, for the individual static images on a filmstrip appear to be moving and changing in sequential order when they are being projected. To tell about changing forms and appearances – in Ovid's words: *in nova ... mutatas dicere formas ... corpora* (*Met.* 1.1-2) – is the very essence of cinema. Film is Ovidian by nature and should be of interest to classicists for this reason alone.

As mentioned, the spectacular *enargeia* of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* has frequently inspired scholars to adduce the visual arts of his time. But the complexity of Ovidian narrative calls for an analogy that goes much further<sup>19</sup>. Ovid not only paints word pictures – Arachne's tapestry (*Met.* 6.53-128) is a case in point – but he also guides and directs his reader's mind's eye in a manner comparable to a film director's *mise en scène*, with individual shots (image compositions) and editing (shot sequences). As Quintilian will put it decades after Ovid's death: «It is a great achievement [for a speaker – we might add: and for a writer] to present [*enuntiare*] the things about which we are speaking [and writing] clearly and in such a way that they appear to be seen»<sup>20</sup>. One of the most astonishing examples in Ovid is the tale of Niobe and her children (*Met.* 6.146-312), which is practically the blueprint for a screenplay and can be so adapted without any change at all. Much, perhaps most, of the *Metamorphoses* is ready to be filmed virtually as it appears on the page. Eisenstein mentioned Ovid on a few occasions, but not as extensively or systematically as one might now wish.

How the *enargeia* inherent in processes of metamorphosis can be presented verbally we both read and mentally see in Ovid: *sub oculos subiectio*. On the screen we may observe

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. the illuminating study by JAMES (2013).

<sup>20</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 8.3.62; my translation.

it with equally intense emotional involvement, for instance in Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan* (2010). Elsewhere I have demonstrated, all too briefly, the Ovidian essence of this film's climactic metamorphosis<sup>21</sup>. It illustrates, astonishingly closely, what Joseph Solodow has said about Ovidian metamorphoses in general:

A cardinal feature of Ovidian metamorphosis is continuity between the person and what he is changed into [...] Metamorphosis [...] is clarification. It is a process by which characteristics of a person, essential or incidental, are given physical embodiments and so are rendered visible and manifest. Metamorphosis makes plain a person's qualities [...]. It is [...] a change which preserves, an alteration which maintains identity, a change of form by which content becomes represented in form<sup>22</sup>.

The complex metamorphosis we are watching in *Black Swan* is made possible by sophisticated computer-generated images. It is convincing because it looks wholly realistic. Nevertheless, we know in our rational minds that no human can be transformed into a swan. So an apparently factual representation is nothing of the sort; rather, it is an objective presentation of an individual's subjective state of mind. An emotional state has been taken outside the mind that created it, as if it had taken on a physical and visible shape when in reality it has not.



*Black Swan*

The sequence of metamorphosis in *Black Swan* is comparable to stream-of-consciousness narration in modern literature. It also exemplifies what has been called

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<sup>21</sup> WINKLER (2014, 473f.).

<sup>22</sup> SOLODOW (1988, 174).

*mindscreen*, a realistic view – found repeatedly in Ovid – of something utterly unrealistic and purely mental<sup>23</sup>. Here is an outline of the concept:

There are [...] three familiar ways of signifying subjectivity within the first-person narrative field: to present what a character says (voice-over), sees (subjective focus, imitative angle of vision), or thinks. The term I propose for this final category is *mindscreen*, by which I mean simply the field of the mind's eye [...] the mindscreen can present the whole range of visual imagination [...] mindscreens belong to, or manifest the workings of, *specific* minds. A mindscreen sequence is narrated in the *first person* [...] *Mindscreen*, as a term, attempts to articulate [the] sense of the image as a limited whole, with a narrating intelligence offscreen. This intelligence [...] selects what is seen and heard; it is a principle of narrative coherence. The film is its visual field, made accessible to an audience through the technology of projection [...]. Even when it depicts a fantasy in the mind's eye, then, the mindscreen remains a medium of first-person visual narration [...]. It presents a personalized world [...] it is both an agency of visual telling and an expression of mind in the world; in short, it is the eye as I, the vision of Vision<sup>24</sup>.

Emotional intensity becomes visible as physical irreality that looks realistic. Film may well be the modern medium best suited to a scene as the one in *Black Swan*, showing, apparently from an objective or third-person perspective, the “narrating intelligence”, an entirely subjective and first-person image or sequence of images.

Now for something not completely different. Filmmakers who adapt narrative texts usually have to decide on specific set-ups or settings. Classicists have advanced various views, for example, about how exactly Odysseus could have shot an arrow through twelve axes in Book 21 of the *Odyssey*. The text is notoriously but fascinatingly ambiguous. Directors have presented Odysseus' shot in various ways on screen, in particular concerning the arrangement of the axes. One film, Andrey Konchalovsky's *The Odyssey* (1997), comes astonishingly close to showing how Denys Page had envisioned the shot decades earlier, even though the similarity seems wholly accidental (**Figs. 1-2**)<sup>25</sup>. The poet tells, the scholar explains, the filmmaker shows.

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<sup>23</sup> The term derives from KAWIN (1978). Kawin begins his analyses at the dawn of cinema (1903).

<sup>24</sup> KAWIN (1978, 10-12, 55, and 84; emphases in original); cf. KAWIN (1978, 18f.).

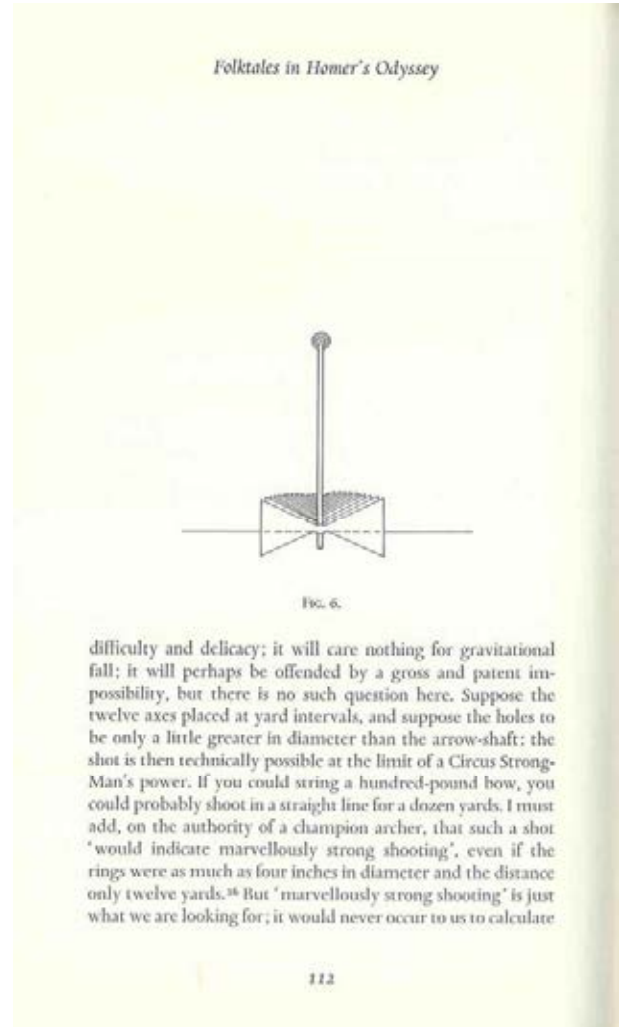
<sup>25</sup> PAGE (1973, 93-113 and 129-35: “Appendix: The Arrow and the Axes”), with illuminating illustrations. Sir Denys would have dissented from the tilted position of the handles, which, however, makes for greater dramatic effect on screen.





**Fig. 1:** The arrangement of the axes in Andrey Konchalovsky's television film of *The Odyssey*

**Fig. 2:** The arrangement of the axes according to D.L. Page



difficulty and delicacy; it will care nothing for gravitational fall; it will perhaps be offended by a gross and patent impossibility, but there is no such question here. Suppose the twelve axes placed at yard intervals, and suppose the holes to be only a little greater in diameter than the arrow-shaft: the shot is then technically possible at the limit of a Circus Strong-Man's power. If you could string a hundred-pound bow, you could probably shoot in a straight line for a dozen yards. I must add, on the authority of a champion archer, that such a shot 'would indicate marvellously strong shooting', even if the rings were as much as four inches in diameter and the distance only twelve yards.<sup>28</sup> But 'marvellously strong shooting' is just what we are looking for; it would never occur to us to calculate

during his throw. A dissolve reveals a modern discus thrower in a pose identical to Myron's. This flesh-and-blood figure then goes through all the motions of an actual throw.



*Olympia*

We see on the screen what we imagine when looking at the statue: an action carried from beginning to end. Myron showed us only one particular moment of that action, the one that is crucial and central. Photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson might have considered it *the decisive moment*, here for an activity seen as a process<sup>26</sup>. That is why the sculptor chose it. It makes it easiest for us to see, as it were, the entire throw with our mind's eye. Jean Cocteau, the great poet, playwright, painter, and filmmaker, once put the kind of case we are examining very well – not once but (at least) three times. He quoted a prophetic statement made on his deathbed by Russian composer Modest Mussorgsky about the future of art: «One day, he says, art will express itself by statues that move»<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. CARTIER-BRESSON (1952).

<sup>27</sup> My translation is taken from BERNARD – GAUTEUR (2003<sup>3</sup>, 58). The original, from 1953: «Un jour, dit-il, l'art s'exprimera par des statues qui bougent». A different wording, from 1959, occurs at BERNARD – GAUTEUR (2003<sup>3</sup>, 215): «L'art futur ce sera des statues qui bougent». A remarkable, if complementary, variant (statues that speak), again from 1953, appears at BERNARD – GAUTEUR (2003<sup>3</sup>, 148): «L'art sera un

The ecstatic but static Maenad by the Brygos Painter with her swirling dress easily evokes dancers moving on the screen (Fig. 3)<sup>28</sup>. Certain still images of, for instance, Ginger Rogers dancing closely parallel the ancient dancer (Fig. 4). A whole sequence of dance stills may be instructive as well (Fig. 5). It can demonstrate, when placed beside an individual still image, the point made above in connection with Myron's *Diskobolos*<sup>29</sup>. Particularly noteworthy are the diaphanous skirts worn by female figures in Greek vase paintings and sculptures and by women dancing on film or even by actresses posing in publicity shots. The skirt of the Brygos Painter's Maenad parallels that of actress Anne Francis in a striking publicity shot for *Forbidden Planet* (1956; Fig. 6). The photograph is the result of an especially carefully arranged pose. The Maenad is static but represented as moving. Her modern avatar is standing still but giving an impression of movement by means of the elaborate arrangement of the pleats on her skirt.



Fig. 3: Dancing Maenad by the Brygos Painter



Fig. 4: Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire in *Top Hat*

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jour fait de statues qui parlent». (What did Mussorgsky *really* say?) The 1959 version appears in a long essay by Cocteau about his film *The Blood of a Poet* (1930), in which a statue, played by American fashion model and photographer Lee Miller, comes to life. The first version here quoted serves as the epigraph to LIANDRAT-GUIGUES (2007, 7).

<sup>28</sup> Beazley, *ARV* 2, 371.15; *Staatliche Antikensammlungen* Munich, inv. 2645. In John Huston's *Moulin Rouge* (1952) several dancers made famous by Toulouse-Lautrec may be seen coming to life as well.

<sup>29</sup> CROCE (2010<sup>2</sup>) provides the best appreciation. The book has still images that can be flipped to create the illusion of movement. Eadweard Muybridge's numerous series of photographs showing animals and people in motion are *loci classici*. Besides musical films, the concept of dance on film in general is apropos here; cf., among recent studies, BRANNIGAN (2011) and ROSENBERG (2012), both with extensive references.



**Fig. 5:** Stills of dance sequence from *Top Hat*



**Fig. 6: Anne Francis promoting *Forbidden Planet***

Also noteworthy are the standing poses and the diaphanous or even transparent gowns of goddesses and actresses, such as the famous Nike relief from the Acropolis<sup>30</sup> and Carole Lombard, even though they are facing in opposite directions (**Figs. 7-8**), or Ginger Rogers, yet again, in a perhaps unconscious imitation of the Venus de Milo, at least as far as the position of her legs is concerned (**Figs. 9-10**). A particularly glamorous studio portrait of Myrna Loy in an intricately pleated skirt (**Fig. 11**) may well be one of Hollywood's greatest, if wholly inadvertent, homages to the elegant dresses of female figures in Greek art.

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<sup>30</sup> Acropolis Museum, Athens; accession nr. 973.



**Fig. 7: Nike relief from the Acropolis, Athens**

**Fig. 8: Glamor shot of Carole Lombard**





**Fig. 9 : The Venus de Milo**

**Fig. 10: Ginger Rogers in Venus de Milo pose (with arms, of course)**





**Fig. 11: Myrna Loy in a dress that might make the Brygos Painter’s Maenad envious**

Matters can be much more complex, however. A black-figure amphora by the Amasis Painter of satyrs engaged in harvesting grapes and making wine presents a sequence of individual but related activities as one static image (**Fig. 12**)<sup>31</sup>. If read in sequence from right to left, the image becomes a *motion picture* in the term’s literal sense: four satyrs are busy at different stages of one action. Like high-class early cinema, this image now looks sepia-toned. But unlike early films, this picture is not silent: a fifth satyr is playing an *aulos*. In cinematic terms, he represents the musical accompaniment either of a silent film by an orchestra (or a single instrument, usually the organ) or of a sound film by an invisible orchestra or instrument on the soundtrack. There is also a “Preview of Coming Attractions” in the frieze above the main image – satyrs dancing, drinking, and making merry once the grape juice stored in the large image has fermented – and a full-length “sequel” on the other side of the vase: Dionysus, the god of wine, is sampling what the satyrs now have to offer

<sup>31</sup> Martin von Wagner-Museum, Würzburg, L 265.



(**Fig. 13**). Here, too, we have a music track or musical accompaniment, provided again by a musician-satyr. A cinematically trained viewer will appreciate the full measure of the painter's cleverness, both in the first large scene itself and then in the sequence of the two large scenes and the small frieze linking them; others might not, or not quite as readily. The same point may be applied to one of the earliest images of a dramatic action, the Minoan fresco of bull jumpers (**Fig. 14**)<sup>32</sup>. Here a cinematic analysis can uncover even greater complexity than on the Amasis Painter's amphora. We see the initial, central, and concluding phases of one action, but how complex or simple is this scene really? Are we looking at three jumpers, two females and one male, or are there only two, one male and one female?<sup>33</sup> And is only one jump across the bull's back depicted in three stages, or do the postures of the vaulters' bodies hint at different ways in which Minoans could accomplish such an amazing feat? There may be no conclusive answers, but a careful look by someone with a trained cinematic eye might discover much more than a casual viewer could do.



**Fig. 12: Satyrs making wine. Side A of the Amasis Painter's amphora**

<sup>32</sup> On Minoan bull-vaulting (or bull-leaping) see SCANLON (2014), with extensive additional references and an addendum (pp. 56-59) to this article originally published in 1999. SCANLON (2014, 36 n. 24 and 50-52), provides references to and discusses the Cretan "Toreador" fresco.

<sup>33</sup> YOUNGER (1976); YOUNGER (1983); YOUNGER (1995). Younger sees three different styles of leap in this single image. INDELICATO (1988) argues that the Toreador fresco shows a time sequence for a single leaper.



**Fig. 13: Sides A and B of the Amasis Painter's amphora tell a continuous story**



**Fig. 14: The Minoan bull-vaulting fresco from Knossos**

The well-known Roman Alexander mosaic, based on a Hellenistic painting, is a whole action spectacle *in nuce*. We can practically imagine the drama of a heroic Alexander facing his doomed enemy, King Darius, presumably during the Battle of Issus, even if we have not recently watched Robert Rossen's *Alexander the Great* (1956) or Oliver Stone's *Alexander* (2004), epic films that contain whole battle sequences<sup>34</sup>. Two Roman monuments, the columns of Trajan and of Marcus Aurelius, display detailed sequences of campaigns from beginning to end; they are visual battle epics replete with longshots, medium shots, and close-ups<sup>35</sup>. Sound is implied as well. On a smaller scale but no less fascinatingly, the series of Roman frescoes in the Villa of the Mysteries near Pompeii shows the different stages of a religious initiation rite in sequential order. Viewing it is comparable to examining the unmoving images on a filmstrip.

We may conclude from even these brief observations that interpreting antiquity through the lens of modernity can grant us important insights into the complexity and depth of Greco-Roman visual and literary arts. *Cinemetamorphosis* is a specific theory that may be subsumed under the general heading of *classical film philology*, a term and concept I have previously advanced<sup>36</sup>. Both *cinemetamorphosis* and *classical film philology* evince, by their nature, an immediate practical applicability, but both must be based on close familiarity with classical and cinematic sources across their respective histories. (Dabblers, be gone!) So it is sensible, and entirely in the spirit of ancient narrative authors from Homer to Heliodorus, that classicists should consider *cinemetamorphosis* a useful and fertile *ancilla* to philology, just as they can consider all forms of moving-picture adaptations of, and homages to, classical narrative texts as instances of *cinemetamorphosis* in the other direction, that of reception. The perspective I am advocating can even help resolve, finally and decisively, the hoary Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns. *Cinemetamorphosis* proves that both sides can equally enlighten each other. As Horace had asked, not wholly rhetorically, in *Epistles* 2: What would or could now be old if there had never been anything new?<sup>37</sup> So I submit to you, *candide lector*, that *philología* can only profit from *phileikônía* or even from – dare I say it? – *kinêmanía*.

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<sup>34</sup> See, in this context, SPINA (2011).

<sup>35</sup> The classic study of Trajan's Column, regrettably unpublished, is MALISSARD (1974). Part of his material is accessible in MALISSARD (1982). WADDELL (2013) presents a narratological perspective on text (Tacitus) and image.

<sup>36</sup> In WINKLER (2009, 57-69).

<sup>37</sup> Horace, *Epistulae* 2.90-91. I have previously addressed this issue in WINKLER (2009, 68f.) and WINKLER (2010<sup>2</sup>, 161f. [Engl.], 175f. [Ital.]).

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