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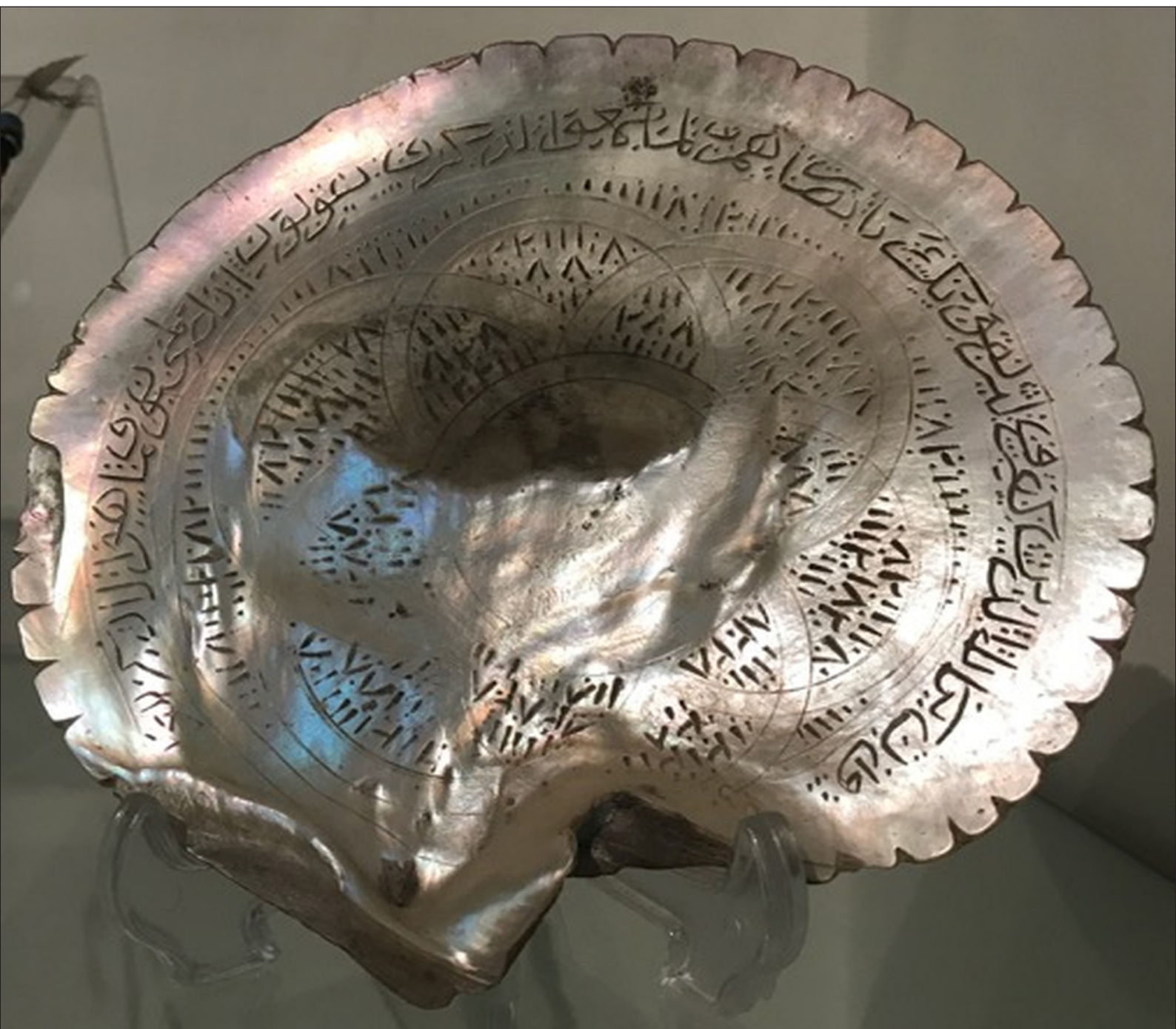
DOSSIER

TREASURES OF THE SEA: ART BEFORE CRAFT?

Edited by Avinoam Shalem

TESOROS DEL MAR: ¿EL ARTE ANTES DE LA DESTREZA?

Editado por Avinoam Shalem



MOTHER-OF-PEARL INCISED WITH VERSES 51 AND 52 OF SURAT AL-QALAM ('THE PEN') AND WITH MAGICAL NUMBERS. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF HISTORY OF AZERBAIJAN, BAKU. Photo: Avinoam Shalem.

MARBLE AND THE SEA OR ECHO EMERGING (A RICERCAR)

EL MÁRMOL Y EL MAR O EL SURGIMIENTO DEL ECO (UNA BÚSQUEDA)

Barbara Baert¹

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Abstract

In this article I discuss the artistic paradigms for sea-thinking and sea-making in four sections: marble as *emulatio* for the sea (1); the phenomenon of sea-floors or the psycho-acoustic space (2); Echo as aquatic paradigm (3); and finally camouflage and matrixial merging (4). With this approach, I reintegrate the marvels of the sea in four ontologies of the image. By delving into the substrata of ideas and material intuitions towards the sea and more generally the aquatic paradigm in theology, anthropology and psychoanalysis, I hope to offer alternative hermeneutics for what we consider as art, art-making and the visual senses, and to obelize some of the deeply ingrained Eurocentric and patriarchal paradigms.

Keywords

Genesis; *Ruach*; Marble; Echo; Camouflage; Matrix.

Resumen

En el presente artículo trato los paradigmas artísticos del pensamiento sobre el mar y su formación en cuatro apartados: (1) el mármol como *emulatio* del mar ; (2) el fenómeno de los fondos marinos o el espacio psico-acústico; (3) el eco como paradigma acuático; (4) y finalmente, el camuflaje y la fusión matricial. Con este enfoque, se reintegran las maravillas del mar en cuatro ontologías de la imagen. Mediante la búsqueda en el substrato de ideas e intuiciones materiales respecto al mar y, de modo más amplio, en el paradigma acuático en la teología, la antropología y el psicoanálisis, espero poder ofrecer alternativas hermenéuticas para lo que consideramos el arte, la creación artística y los sentidos visuales, así como resaltar algunos de los paradigmas eurocéntricos y patriarcales que están profundamente arraigados.

1. University of Leuven. In 2016, Barbara Baert was awarded the prestigious Francqui Prize for her bold approach to and pioneering work in medieval visual culture. C.e.: www.francquifoundation.be; barbara.baert@kuleuven.be

Palabras clave

Génesis; *Ruach*; Mármol; Eco; Camuflaje; Matriz.

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1. INTRODUCTION. SEA AND RUACH

Even before Creation, in, as it were, a pre-cosmogonic state, the earth was covered with a 'primal flood' and there was chaos and darkness. The primal flood is here negative: it is a threatening force that stands in opposition to the power or breath –the *ruach*– of God. And God sweeps over the waters. According to some philologists this 'sweeping' (*le-rahef*, namely 'floating', 'hovering', 'moving over or upon') could mean 'impregnating', that is a fertilization with light as its seed.

The action of commanding/creation is carried out not only by God as wind but also through His voice. It is through His speech that all which happened had been brought about. Some scholars consider the *ruach* principle as a foreign element redacted into Genesis.

Daniel Lys sees in *ruach* a typically Semitic interaction between humanity and environment, between individuals in relationship to God.² He indicates that the word for wind, in the Old Arabic root (*raha*, 'to breathe'), carries the idea of enlarging and shrinking, incorporating spatial extension and diminution, just as we fill our lungs with air and then let it escape.³ *Ruach* should therefore be seen from the perspective of rhythm, of a principle of life that is not static but always dynamic. «Donner de l'air, c'est à dire de l'espace (d'où intervalle) pour pouvoir respirer (d'où 'soulagement') dans une situation critique.»⁴ As *ruach* is fundamentally related to the movement of air in a space, Lys also indicates that *ruach* in the Bible goes hand in hand with odours, with perfumes, with sacrificial offerings and with showing honour to God.⁵ *Ruach* is an elixir of life belonging both to God and to mankind. Through *ruach* humanity can come to know God and can reach him; thus, God can be grasped by us for He shares this quality with us.⁶

This notion has an important impact on creativity and art too. There is an 'in-breathedness' of things which we feel as preceding the defined, completed, empirically observable life that surrounds us. The preceding inbreathed stage forms a dynamic between the not-yet-quite but already-becoming, a mysterious dynamic of potentiality that artists in their creative process try to express, indeed, to feel and touch in its most inner self.

2. Lys, Daniel: *Rûach: le souffle dans l'Ancien Testament: Enquête anthropologique à travers l'histoire théologique d'Israël* (Études d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses 56). Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1962. On the philosophical impact of *ruach* on Jewish thought in modern philosophy and anthropology, see ARTHUR, James: «Diamond, Maimonides, Spinoza, and Buber Read the Hebrew Bible: The Hermeneutical Keys of Divine 'Fire' and 'Spirit' (*Ruach*)», *The Journal of Religion*, 91, 3 (2011), 320–343.

3. Old Arabic distinguishes *rih* (wind) and *ruh* (spirit). Hebrew does not make this distinction; Lys, Daniel. *Op. Cit.* 24. In Jewish culture the notion that God had to make himself as small (concise) as he could to make the universe possible is still held; with thanks to Prof. Dr. Dror Ze'evi, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel.

4. *Idem*, 21.

5. *Idem*, 23.

6. LEUPIN, Alexandre: «The Impossible Copula (Humanities and Judaeo-Christianity)», *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 29, 3 (1999), 11–20, esp. p. 24 develops a psychoanalytic and sexualized reading of *ruach*: «The Hebrew Bible, the Torah, posits that the very copula of Being is outside language. For me, for Freud, for Lacan, what this means is that this copula is unconscious. It is replaced by a linguistic fiction. The verb 'to be', in other words, is the first and most important metaphor. What creates meaning is in fact God's *ruach*, literally His breath, and thus His speech. (Nietzsche says: *esse* is to breathe).»



FIGURE 1. HAGIA SOPHIA, ISTANBUL. INTERIOR OF THE SOUTHWESTERN ENTRANCE. Image courtesy of the Media Center for Art History, Department of Art History and Archaeology, © The Trustees of Columbia University.

In brief, creative processes emerge in the interspaces of being-in-potential, with a fundamentally biblical ontological model of water and breath, sea and *ruach*. The pact in the first verse of the Book of Genesis is one of creation by making the sea fertile, and descent into the world of materiality. It is precisely this mysterious outpouring of the divine into materiality that becomes a model for

creative processes that can be imagined from the natural world around us. Marble provides an important paradigmatic medium of creative processes which lends itself extremely well, both by its mineral and physiological characteristics –cold like frozen water– and its semantic origins –*mare* and *mar*, connoting movement (as of waves)– to the making visual of the fundamental urge to create. Marble incarnates the human capacity to model the pneumatic inspiration (exhale) of breath into matter through artistic creation that ever and again honours God’s Creation.

The hermeneutics of thinking the image and the plastic medium through the conflation of sea-marble is the subject of this article. It is in four sections: marble as *emulatio* for the sea; the phenomenon of sea-floors or the psycho-acoustic space; Echo as aquatic paradigm; and finally camouflage and matrixial merging.

The first two sections, *emulatio* and ‘sea-floors’, consider the most important advances on this topic in the recent two decades. They are more than a mere *status quaestionis*. It is here that I seek to show that the authors who considered this issue gave art history a wider scope endorsed by insights from cultural anthropology. The broad look at approaches from Greek-Byzantine thought (see mainly the publications of Maria Luigia Fobelli and Fabio Barry), linking to broader anthropological schemata such as the sensorium and sacred space (see for example Bissera V. Pentcheva’s study), were needed before the plastic genetrix of marble could be recognized and described within the discipline. We learn, for example, how for medieval Byzantine beholders, the difference between representation and suggestion of image was quite loose and much less fixed than ours today. In medieval Byzantium, the materiality of the marble was itself an *acheiropoietos* (‘made without hands’). As mentioned in Genesis, the waters had to be ‘tamed’, so the marble floors and walls are similarly an ideogram of the mythical ocean encircling the inhabitable world (*oikoumene*). Moreover, as Pentcheva suggested, the glisteningly water-like marble (*marmairo*, ‘to glitter’) alludes to the process of *empsychos*, namely inert materials that come to life and so appear to us to be mobile or fluid.⁷

The analysis of the above research –the sea/marble conflation as a model of creative potentiality, *acheiropoietoi* and *empsychos* in sacred-liturgical space– forms the basis of the two final sections: Echo as aquatic paradigm and camouflage or matrixial merging. Proceeding from the marble sea symbolism as artistic incarnation, we can expose the deeper sensitivity to a dualistic epistemology of the image: the liquefying and the solidifying, as distinct from the finished and fully formed state. The first is the domain of Echo’s protocol of dissolution into the world, the second the domain of Narcissus’ ocular-centric projection upon the world. I explain in these sections how Echo operates according to a dazzling paradigm of dissolution, of merging, of regressing into the mineral world. She is in fact ‘marble-izing’ and ‘staining’, which demands a challenging and provocative, almost chthonic, paradigm at last: the feminine-matrixial model that brings us back to the sea.

In short, in this article I tend to reintegrate the genetrix of the sea in four ontologies of the image. By delving into the substrata of ideas and material intuitions

7. PENTCHEVA, Bissera V.: «Hagia Sophia and Multisensory Aesthetics», *Gesta*, 50, 2 (2011), 93–111, see esp. p. 95.

regarding the sea and more generally the aquatic paradigm in art theory, theology, anthropology and psychoanalysis, I hope to offer an alternative hermeneutics for what we consider creativity as such, and to obelize some of the deeply ingrained Eurocentric and patriarchal paradigms.



FIGURE 2. DETAILS FROM THE PROCONNESIAN MARBLE DECORATIONS IN THE HAGIA SOPHIA, 6TH CENTURY, ISTANBUL. Image courtesy of the Media Center for Art History, Department of Art History and Archaeology, © The Trustees of Columbia University.

2. EMULATIO

In her *Descrizione e percezione delle immagini acheropite sui marmi bizantini*, Maria Luigia Fobelli begins with literary sources describing the magnificence of the marble plates in the Hagia Sophia in Byzantium (Figures 2 and 3).⁸ These sources partially belong to the genre of *ekphrasis* writings, and partially to the 'touristic' appreciations of the time.⁹ In the first century AD the Roman poet Statius said

8. FOBELLI, Maria Luigia: «Descrizione e percezione delle immagini acheropite sui marmi bizantini», in CALZONA, Arturo, et al. (eds.): *Immagine e Ideologia. Studi in onore di Arturo Carlo Quintavalle*. Milan, Electa, 2007, 27–32.

9. MILWRIGHT, Marcus: «'Waves of the Sea': Responses to Marble in Written Sources (9th–15th Century)», in O'KANE, Bernard (ed.): *The Iconography of Islamic Art: Studies in Honour of Professor Robert Hillenbrand*. Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2005, 211–221.



FIGURE 3. DETAILS FROM THE PROCONNESIAN MARBLE DECORATIONS OF THE WALLS OF *HAGIA SOPHIA*, 6TH CENTURY, ISTANBUL. Image courtesy of the Media Center for Art History, Department of Art History and Archaeology, © The Trustees of Columbia University.

that the green marble of Laconia imitated the fields.¹⁰ In the fifth century Sidonius Apollinaris wrote in his letters that the marble from Tessaglia represents not only the fields but also forests with immobile trees.¹¹ Choricus of Gaza (active c.500) described the church of Saint Stephen in Gaza, comparing the marbles to paintings: «[...] bands of well-fitting marble cover the wall. They are so joined together as to appear to be a work of nature, and so variegated with their natural colours as to resemble altogether a hand-painted picture.»¹² In 563 Paul the Silentiary described the Hagia Sophia:

Upon the carved stone wall curious designs glitter everywhere. These have been produced by the quarries of seagirt Proconessus. The joining of the cut marbles resembles the art of painting, for you may see the [natural] veins of the square and octagonal stones meeting so as to form devices: connected in this way, the stones imitate the glories of painting.¹³

Recognizing images, animals, landscapes and even faces became a leitmotif in the accounts of travels to Constantinople, Ravenna and Venice.¹⁴ Fobelli explains the success of this ‘visual rhetoric’ on the basis of Byzantine definitions of the image.¹⁵ For the contemporaneous Byzantine beholders of the newly built Hagia Sophia at that time, the difference between a representation and the suggestion of an image was much less fixed, and therefore it is plausible that the materiality of marble was regarded as an exemplary visual evidence of *acheiropoietos*.¹⁶ Marble is a visual marvel; it contains ‘living images’. The abstraction of the ‘living images’ configures with a ‘transfer’ to the visual world and shows the artist their aesthetic and ethical responsibility and power of observation pneumatically to set down nature and the living image in their work. By doing so the artist brings the viewer to an elevated visual sight.¹⁷

The visuality breathed in by a voice, by breath, has in fact a cosmogonic character; it is essentially involved in creating mystery. To paint is to transmute: it

10. STATIUS: *Silvae* (Loeb Classical Library 206), ed. and transl. by BAILEY, D.R. Shackleton. Cambridge, MA and London, Harvard University Press, 2003, Book II, ch. 2, lines 90–91, 128.

11. SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS: *Poems and Letters* (Loeb Classical Library 296), ed. and transl. by ANDERSON, William B. Cambridge, MA and London, William Heinemann Ltd, 1956, Epistulae II, X, 14, 20–21, 466.

12. CHORICIUS GAZAEUS: *Laudatio Marciani*, II, 40, in FÖRSTER, Richard (ed.): *Choricii Gazaei opera*, Leipzig, B.G. Teubner, 1929, 38; FOBELLI, Maria Luigia. *Op. Cit.* 29. English translation from ONIANS, John: «Abstraction and Imagination in Late Antiquity», *Art History*, 3 (1980), 1–23: 8.

13. VANDENBROECK, Paul: «Matrix Marmorea. De subsymbolische iconografie van de scheppende energieën in Europa en Noord-Afrika», in PIL, Lut and DE MITS, Trees (eds.): *Materie & Beeld*. Ghent, Sint-Lucas Beeldende Kunst, 2010, 51–78: 60.

14. MITCHELL, John: «Believing is Seeing: The Natural Image in Late Antiquity», in FRANKLIN, Jill A., HESLOP, T.A. and STEVENSON, Christine (eds.): *Architecture and Interpretation: Essays for Eric Fernie*. Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 2012, 16–41.

15. FOBELLI, Maria Luigia. *Op. Cit.* 31.

16. TRILLING, James: «The Image Not Made by Hands and the Byzantine Way of Seeing», in KESSLER, H.L. and WOLF, Gerhard (eds.): *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*. Bologna, Nuova Alfa Editoriale, 1998, 109–127. The Byzantine *mandylion*, the *acheiropoietos* of Christ's true face, procreated itself as an imprint in stone: the *keramion*. See also the recent discussion of FLOOD, Finbarr Barry: «Animal, Vegetal, and Mineral: Ambiguity and Efficacy in the Nishapur Wall Painting», *Representations*, 133 (2016), 20–58.

17. FOBELLI, Maria Luigia. *Op. Cit.* 30; ONIANS, John. *Op. Cit.* 12–13; TRILLING, James: «Medieval Art without Style? Plato's Loophole and a Modern Detour», *Gesta*, 34, 1 (1995), 57–62: 60.

penetrates to the spirit, the *pneuma* of creation itself.¹⁸ Paraphrasing Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519): if you look at a wall crowded with stains, or pieces of stone, then you can imagine a scene, you can recognize in it the analogy with landscape, with a backdrop of mountains, rivers, cliffs, trees, plains, valleys and various hills.¹⁹ Stains and stones stimulate our imagination with respect to actual scenes and not only as a sort of *Spielerei* (a playful visual exercise). It goes deeper, back to the conviction that figuration is already contained in nature, that nature is in fact ‘pregnant’ with it.²⁰ It is the so-called *pierres imagées*, as coined by Baltrušaitis.²¹ Or as Roger Caillois says in his article «Mimétisme et Psychasthénie légendaire» written in 1935: «On peut dire que, du XIII au XVIIe, il existe une véritable passion chez certains amateurs d’art ou de singularités pour ces tableaux que la nature semble avoir enfermés au sein des agates, des marbres, des jaspes et des porphyre.»²² Moreover, in artists’ and collectors’ inventories one often finds cherished stones described as *natura depicti* (‘painted by nature’) or *a natura sine omni artis ministerio* (‘natural, without the intervention of the arts’). This art of description underscores the natural phenomenon of embedded figures within stones.

The phenomena of the *acheiropoietoi* or *non manufactum*, the iconography contained-in-nature or *a natura depicti* and *marbre faux* or ‘stained pictoriality’ (*infra*) are deeply rooted in the Christian theory of images. Within (but also beyond) Western art history, there are different variations on the phenomenon and we can encounter multifarious applications of this aesthetic-philosophical concept. It is a concept that airs the idea that the visual arts and the artist’s hand are a continuation (and perhaps only the humble completion) of an artistically animated and thus pneumatically shaped nature. Or again: the conviction that a divine hand –present, preserved and consolidated in nature– is at work. As the commentaries and the primary sources show, this mental world is considered the materialization of a supernatural drive: as the interior and enclosed rule of the *spiritus divinus*. This notion of materialization attaches to stones in particular, and especially to marble as a cosmic substitute for the sea as (artistic) genetrix.

3. SEA-FLOORS OR THE PSYCHO-ACOUSTIC SPACE

In his *Walking on Water*, Fabio Barry reinterprets the phenomenon of marble floors in early medieval churches while focusing on visual impression of these floors

18. FARAGO, Claire: «Exiting Art History: Locating ‘Art’ in the Modern History of the Subject», *Konsthistorisk tidskrift*, 70, 1–2 (2001), 3–19.

19. CHASTEL, André: *Léonard de Vinci par lui-même*. Paris, Nagel, 1952, 100–101.

20. JANSON, Horst W.: «The Image ‘Made by Chance’ in Renaissance Thought», in *16 Studies*. New York, Harry N. Abrams, 1974, 55–69.

21. BALTRUŠAITIS, Jurgis: «Pierre imagées», in *Aberrations: quatre essais sur la légende des formes*. Paris, O. Perrin, 1957, 48–72.

22. CAILLOIS, Roger: «Méduse et Cie», in CAILLOIS, Roger (ed.): *Œuvres*. Paris, Gallimard, 2008, 479–558: 502.



FIGURE 4. DETAIL OF THE PAVIMENTO IN SAN MARCO, *OPUS SECTILE*, MID-12TH CENTURY, VENICE, SAN MARCO.

as reflecting the primal substance, water.²³ He demonstrates that the marble panels in the Hagia Sophia were admired in medieval sources not only as living natural paintings and landscapes (as the church's dedication of 537 of Emperor Justinian attests –Justinian compared the Hagia Sophia to the 'glittering' (*charis*) of the Temple of Solomon) but also because of their particular effect that alludes to the notion (or concept?) of the 'frozen sea.' Just to give a few examples: a ninth-century source, the *Diegesis* or *Narratio*, comments on the marble of the Hagia Sophia as a «sea, or the swelling water of a river»;²⁴ the *ekphrasis* of Michael the Deacon (c.1140–50) sees the church as a sea with the ambo as an island;²⁵ and the *Narratio* says that

23. BARRY, Fabio: «Walking on Water: Cosmic Floors in Antiquity and the Middle Ages», *Art Bulletin*, 89, 4 (2007), 627–656.

24. MANGO, Cyril and PARKER, John: «A Twelfth-Century Description of St. Sophia», *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 14 (1960), 233–245: 234.

25. MJESKA, George P.: «Notes on the Archaeology of St. Sophia at Constantinople: The Green Marble Bans on the Floor», *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 32 (1978), 299–308: 299.

Thessaly marble is the closest to the rivers of Paradise.²⁶ In brief, the relationship between the qualities of marble and the association with the sea appears to be a *topos* in the early Byzantine period, as it is later with the German pilgrim William of Oldenburg, who visited Beirut in 1211 and described the marble in the churches as «a fine marble pavement that so well feigns water stirred by a light wind that, whoever steps over it, seems to be wading, since they leave no footprints above the sand depicted there.»²⁷ The floor of San Marco (Figure 4) is described by a contemporary between 1110 and 1150 as follows: «what is spread on the floor, and what clothes the whole space like a dress worked in colors might at first be called a sea, which, moving on all sides in the gentlest waves, is suddenly petrified.»²⁸ In a eulogy by Flavius Merobaudes (c.435–446) on the marble in a baptistery the same archetype is again expressed: «the jewel, once liquid itself, carries the liquid.»²⁹

But where does the idea that marble is a (coagulated) liquid come from? The science of stones, as developed by Avicenna (980–1037) in his «Book of Minerals», shows the conviction that conglutination and congelation (such as in stalactites) had a petrifying effect on water, namely that water ‘rigidifies’, ‘freezes’ and petrifies on the basis of a mineral power.³⁰ The etymology of ‘marble’, namely *mar/marmor/marmora*, illuminates this phenomenon. ‘Marble’ derives from the Latin noun *marmor*. *Marmor* stems from the Greek *marmairein* (μαρμαίρειν), which means to shimmer, to shine like the surface of the water. In the *Iliad*, Homer (c.840 BC) speaks of the shimmering sea: ἅλα μαρμαρέην (*hala marmareên*, 14.273). Virgil (70–19 BC), writing of the marble smoothness of the sea, turns *marmor* and *mar* into synonyms.³¹ Digging still deeper into the etymological past of *marmor*, we find the Sanskrit root *mar*, connoting movement (as of waves), and *mar-mar*, suggesting a more surging motion – which we can still hear when we speak of the ‘murmuring’ sea.³²

The sixth-century marble used in the Hagia Sophia is Proconnesian marble, which replaced the earlier marble from Carystus because of its greater affinity with the symbolism of water. The conscious application of this aesthetic effect of the marble in the floor of the church thus links the space to cosmological meaning.³³ The aesthetic and the symbolism of the material are entirely attuned to one another and bring us to the idea of the primordial waters. As we saw, the primeval ocean was, in the Semitic tradition, a chaotic principle that had to be combated by God’s

26. BARRY, Fabio. *Op. Cit.* 628.

27. *Idem*, 629–630; LAURENT, Johann C. M. (ed.): *Peregrinatores medii aevi quator*, Leipzig, 1864, 167: «Pavimentum habet subtile marmoreum, simulans aquam levi vento agitatam, ita ut, qui super illud incesserit, vadare putetur, cum tamen arene illic depicte summa vestigia non impresserit.»

28. Quoted from BARRY, Fabio. *Op. Cit.* 630.

29. *Idem*, 631; MEROBAUDES, Flavius: *Carmina* 2.8, ed. and transl. by CLOVER, Frank M.: *Flavius Merobaudes*. Philadelphia, American Philosophical Society, 1971, 11 and 60: «*gemma vehit laticem, quae fuit ante latex.*» Perhaps Merobaudes visited the Baptistery Santa Croce in Ravenna.

30. HOLMYARD, Eric J. and MANDEVILLE, Desmond C. (eds.): *Avicennae de Congelatione et conglutinatione Lapidum. Being Sections of the Kitab al-Shifa*. Paris, P. Guethner, 1927, 46.

31. VERGILIUS MARO, Publius: *Aeneid*, 7, 28: «*In lento luctantur marmore tonsae*»; Virgil also made frequent use of «*marmoreum aequor*», 631.

32. SCHWARZENBERG, Erkinger: «Colour, Light and Transparency in the Greek World», in BORSOOK, Eve, *et al.* (eds.): *Medieval Mosaics: Light, Color, Materials*. Milan, Silvana, 2000, 15–34: 22.

33. BARRY, Fabio. *Op. Cit.* 634.

ruach.³⁴ It was the first substance of creation, already present, and hostile to *ruach*. The waters had to be ‘tamed’ by God. The marble floor is similarly an «ideogram of the mythical Ocean encircling the inhabitable world (*oikoumene*). [...] The nave floor (representing the *oikoumene*) is often bounded by a decorative border. [...] A watery floor in the image of an entire sea, as presented by Proconnesian marble, promised to be the alpha and omega of such premonitory materiality.»³⁵

The floor precedes order; it is a ‘potentiality’ ready to receive creation and ordering. This is the *oikoumene*. This ‘economy’ is also rehearsed in the Incarnation: the descent of the invisible God into the visible Son. The house of prayer spans *alpha* and *omega* just as the sixth-century *Topographia* of Cosmas Indicopleustes says that God not only separated the waters but that he was enthroned over the waters to the End of Time.³⁶ The eschatological dimension can also be seen in the Book of Revelation: God’s apocalyptic throne would finally become visible to all resting on a «sea of glass, like crystal» (Rev. 4: 6; 15: 2). This chaotic primal state crystallizes and receives our footsteps before the throne of God and His spiritual presence in space. The floor visualizes Creation continually renewed in the liturgy and the experience of the space through the senses and of the space as metonym for the whole history of Salvation.

Indeed, as Pentcheva argues, the glisteningly water-like is linked to the process of *empsychos*: inert materials that come to life and so appear to us to be mobile or fluid.³⁷ Thus, *empsychos* is the work of the Holy Spirit –the *pneuma*. The medium of *pneuma* is *fluxus*, and the sense experience that it is coupled with is glittering (*charis*).³⁸ Marble and mosaics are the best performative expressions of scorching *pneuma*. Furthermore, the idea of ‘glitter’ has a long tradition in Greek literature. It can be seen in the waves of the sea, but also in the gleaming of eyes. Glittering eyes are the expression of the soul. As Pentcheva says: «Rather than using the imagination to see representation in what is abstract, the medieval viewer wanted to see the presence of the spirit in what is essentially changing appearances of matter such as glitter or shadow.»³⁹ One can go a step further, and consider whether senses other than sight contributed to the experience of *empsychos* and the performative awareness of *pneuma*: for example, hearing and the voice.

The dependence of acoustics on the shape, size and surface of an interior space is well known. The human voice of Greek Orthodox liturgical chants is produced within this space and enters into synergy with the *marmaron*.⁴⁰ Acoustic tests in the Hagia Sophia produced an exceptionally long reverberating echo of ten to eleven seconds. For normal speech this would make the words unintelligible, but in the

34. EISSFELDT, Otto: «Gott und das Meer in der Bibel», in *Studia Orientalia Ioanni Pedersen*. Copenhagen, Munskgaard, 1953, 76–84.

35. BARRY, Fabio. *Op. Cit.* 634.

36. WOLSKA-CONUS, Wanda: *La topographie chrétienne de Cosmas Indicopleustes. Théologie et sciences au VIe siècle*. Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1962, 147–192.

37. PENTCHEVA, Bissera V., *Op. Cit.*, 93–111.

38. *Idem*, 99.

39. *Idem*, 111.

40. *Ibidem*.

context of chant it produces lengthened and ethereal dissonance. The effect must have been an auditory parallel to the pneumatic glittering of marble: *empsychos* is completed with auricular *pneuma*, which interacts with the visual to lift those present to the metaphysical level, to the ‘psycho-acoustic’.⁴¹ A mid-Byzantine commentary on the *Cheroubikon* (the Hymn of the Cherubim on the Resurrection) says: «When the singers perform that hymn together with the people, it is signifying that also the angels sing together in the highest.»⁴²

In the act of performance, human bodies become ‘representations’ of the angelic host. Just as the nonobjective figuration of the marble produced images in the imaginations of the spectators, or the phenomenal *marmarygma* of marble and gold was seen as a marker of animation, so, too, the reverberant sound produced by singing the *Cheroubikon* compelled its performers to perceive the totality of their bodies in space as icons, like *marmaron*, reflecting divine figuration. [...] Human breath emptied as chant becomes a reverberant sound perceived as a divine *acousmètre* and consumed by bodies and clothing.⁴³

This brings us elliptically to the genetic tree linking *pneuma* and *ruach*. *Ruach* in its origins still has a strong component of the supernatural voice, preserved from human breath. A breath fragrant to know God, singing as the angels do, and filling the psycho-acoustic space with the scent of candles, ointment and incense. How tempting it is to suggest that the *opus sectile* of the varied small marble floor mosaics of the Hagia Sophia, which are usually organized in patterns that suggest fragmentation and repetitions, might be symbolizing the vibrations of sound upon the waters (see Figure 3).

4. ECHO AS AQUATIC PARADIGM

The hermeneutics the psycho-acoustic space are centred on is a natural phenomenon that penetrates into and emanates from the body, and thus establishes a relationship between the creativity of the cosmos and the creativity of man. The wind reflects an associative, capricious and – above all else – fruitful source of visual creation. The creative process that is inspired by the notions of wind/breath/air affects the entire sensorium and displays, more so than other artistic paradigms, a capacity for self-reflection on the plastic medium. In exceptional cases, this self-reflection radicalizes and effectuates a ‘subsidence’ within the realm of the pneumatic, in order to ‘delve’ melodramatically into the deepest layers of petrification and solidification, manifested as marble (or coral).⁴⁴

41. *Idem*, 105.

42. *Ibidem*; *Patrologia Graeca* 87, col. 4001.

43. *Idem*, 105–106.

44. The coral paradigm would bring us much too far off-topic. Beyond the Greek waters roamed three terrible sisters, the Gorgons. One of these monsters, Medusa, who had snakes for hair, could turn living beings into stone with her gaze. Her countenance was deadly. But Perseus used a trick. Athena gave him a reflecting shield (in other versions, he used his shadow). When Medusa turned her gaze upon the mirror/shadow, Perseus took the opportunity to chop off her head. Her blood came into contact with the salt water and turned to stone: this is the

The material manipulation and pictorial integration of marble as frozen sea, as congealed fluidity, forces us to think about the relationship between prefiguration and figuration. Let loose between these two realms or 'visual fields' is an energy that constantly skips from one to the other, as if between the promises that a figure will appear out of nothing and the consolidated figure/figuration itself. According to the Neoplatonist Pseudo-Dionysius (5th–6th century), this is in fact the primordial binomial relationship on which every visual creation is based. It is experienced in the realms of *plattomenos* (πλαττόμενος, 'modelling') and *mimesis* ('representing'), respectively. In other words there is a constant shift from «figure to figure without assuming substance and thus tending towards the associative, the mystery, the processual».⁴⁵ The energetic abstraction of the *plattomenos* –the dizzying sinuosities of polished marble slabs (a cosmogonic congelation of the murmuring sea)– testifies to a deeper anthropological split between a-figurative, prefigurative, abstract (the stain) and symbolic communicability, figurative, legibility, mimetic (the figure).

Proceeding from the marble sea symbolism as artistic incarnation, we can expose the deeper sensitivity to a dualistic epistemology of the image: the liquefying and the solidifying, as distinct from the finished and fully formed state. The first is entirely dependent on the imagination and requires the viewer to rise to a higher level of seeing. It even aims at evoking a visual sense of cosmogonic involvement in him or her.⁴⁶ The second is the mirror of reality, aims at figurative completion and focuses on the representation of the human figure. The first is the domain of Echo's protocol of dissolution into the world, the second the domain of Narcissus' ocular-centric projection upon the world.⁴⁷

Ovid (43 BC – AD 17) tells the story of Echo and Narcissus in the third book of his *Metamorphoses*.⁴⁸ Echo's unreciprocated love for Narcissus led her to a cruel fate. Besides receiving the punishment of an echoing voice, the once-talkative nymph slowly wasted away until her bones became one with the rocks. Just as Narcissus ignored Echo, so art-historical literature also seemed to have little interest in the nymph. For a long time, art history was mainly interested in Narcissus' reflected phantasm, which Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472) brought to the foreground as imagery for the painterly arts.⁴⁹ Echo did not stand a chance against Narcissus, a

origin of coral reefs. Coral remains soft in water but petrifies upon contact with air and becomes hard. This effect is comparable to the coagulation of the image or the creation of the arts (crafts out of the sea) from flowing blood and the *pneuma*/breath/life force thereby released. Julia Kristeva therefore calls the Medusa myth the archetype of adopting form and matter, of incarnation indeed. KRISTEVA, Julia: *Visions capitales*. Paris, Réunion des musées nationaux, 1998, 40. See also COLE, Michael: «Cellini's Blood», *Art Bulletin*, 81, 2 (1999), 215–235.

45. VANDENBROECK, Paul. *Op. Cit.* 68.

46. HADOT, Pierre: «Le mythe de Narcisse et son interprétation par Plotin», *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse*, 13 (1976), 81–108.

47. See also: BAERT, Barbara: *In Response to Echo: Beyond Mimesis or Dissolution as Scopis Regime (with Special Attention to Camouflage)* (Studies in Iconology 6). Leuven and Walpole, Peeters, 2016.

48. VINGE, Louise: *The Narcissus Theme in Western European Literature up to the Early 19th Century* (Unpublished doctoral thesis), University of Lund, 1967; GÉLY-GHEDIRA, Véronique: *La nostalgie du moi: Écho dans la littérature européenne*. Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 2000.

49. WOLF, Gerhard: «'Arte superficiem illam fontis amplecti': Alberti, Narziss und die Erfindung der Malerei», in GÖTTLER, Christine, et al. (eds.): *Diletto e Maraviglia. Ausdruck und Wirkung in der Kunst von der Renaissance bis zum Barock*. Emsdetten, Edition Imorde, 1998, 11–39; PFISTERER, Ulrich: «Künstlerliebe. Der Narcissus-Mythos bei Leon Battista Alberti und die Aristoteles-Lektüre der Frührenaissance», *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 64, 3 (2001), 305–330.

seemingly indestructible paradigm of masculine-sopic art history. The nymph remained the ‘blind spot’ of art history.

Interesting enough, Ovid’s myth concentrates on exactly the intertwining of the key elements of water and stone, sea and mountain. Echo’s regime indeed can be a paradigm to understand the marble/sea metaphors we looked at. But even more, she can embody an alternative scopic regime, one that fights against an obsession with the visual medium as mirror and ‘*finito*’ in the arts.

In his book *Thalassa*, Hungarian psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi (1873–1933) considers the sex act –*Huc coeamus*, ‘let us copulate’ in the Narcissus myth– as a return to the sea, to the boundlessness of the uterus from which all life has sprung.⁵⁰ «The purpose of the sex act can be none other than an attempt on the part of the ego [...] to return to the mother’s womb, where there is no such painful disharmony between ego and environment as characterizes existence in the external world.»⁵¹ Gaston Bachelard (1884–1962) also refers to the water paradigm in the myth: «*Devant les eaux, Narcisse a la révélation de son identité et de sa dualité, la révélation de ses doubles puissances viriles et féminines, la révélation surtout de sa réalité et de son idéalité. En effet, le narcissisme n’est pas toujours névrosant. Il joue aussi un rôle positif dans l’œuvre esthétique, et par des transpositions rapides, dans l’œuvre littéraire.*»⁵² Alexis Wick goes even further: «In other words, the aquatic is female, because the womb is the ocean: both are the motherly givers of life, the one ontogenetic, the other phylogenetic. This is evidenced at multiple levels of coitus: the soporific effect of ejaculation evokes oceanic tranquillity, the penis (the ego’s ‘narcissistic double’) is a symbolic fish, the secreted sperm (and potentially the foetus) lives in a little sea of amniotic fluid, the genital secretion of women has a fishy smell.»⁵³

Likewise Echo’s fate –invisibility and sclerosis– is an *Ur*-return to a primordial genetrix. In what follows I explain how she operates according to a dazzling paradigm of dissolution, of merging, of regressing into the mineral world. She is in fact ‘marble-izing’ and ‘stain-ing’.⁵⁴

5. CAMOUFLAGE OR MATRIXIAL MERGING

The ‘matrixial space’ is a term coined by the Israeli-French psychoanalyst and visual artist Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger. It is a space that may be characterized first and foremost as containing an energy or potentiality that has *not yet* manifested itself

50. FERENCZI, Sándor: *Thalassa: A Theory of Genitality*, transl. by BUNKER, Henry Alden. New York, W.W. Norton, 1968, 18: «The reestablishment of the aquatic mode of life in the form of an existence within the moist and nourishing interior of the mother’s body.»

51. According to Luce Irigaray, the sense of touch stands for unity and aquatic surroundings. The unborn child in the womb is surrounded by fluidity. Thought detached from touch, argues Irigaray, leads to the banishment of human beings from paradise. IRIGARAY, Luce: *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, transl. by BURKE, Carolyn and GILL, Gillian C. London, Continuum, 2004, 137; DERRIDA, Jacques: «‘Le toucher’: Touch/to touch him», *Paragraph*, 16, 2 (1993), 122–157.

52. BACHELARD, Gaston: *L’eau et les rêves. Essai sur l’imagination de la matière*. Paris, Librairie Jose Corti, 1941, 34.

53. WICK, Alexis: «Narcissus: Woman, Water and the West», *Feminist Review*, 103 (2013), 42–57: 50.

54. See also BAERT, Barbara: «About Stains», *Zeitschrift für Medien- und Kulturforschung*, 7, 2 (2017), 29–45.

at the phallic level, only at the feminine, internal, uterine level.⁵⁵ Here, a prefigurative knowledge model unfolds that is not geared towards distinction (*krinein*, *symbolon*) but precedes it, and thus taps into a different kind of spontaneous intuitive energy in terms of ‘borderlinking’, ‘borderspace’. She refers to it as «a minimal sense of differentiation-in-togetherness», as might be encountered in an unborn child inside its mother’s womb.⁵⁶ Borderlinking is, in essence, a ‘matrixial’ concept, comparable to the melding of two entities, as occurs uniquely in the maternal womb. Here Lichtenberg Ettinger introduces the notion of ‘metramorphosis’. «The matrixial affect, which creates the metramorphosis and is created by it, is the affect of the Thing that Marks together: an I with a non-I in co-emergence and co-fading.»⁵⁷ In short, Lichtenberg Ettinger sees room for another type of episteme –«It is a chief silenced hole in the phallic paradigm»⁵⁸– that makes use of the process instead of the static, that is ‘metramorphosis’ rather than metamorphosis, that is ‘fluid’, foamy, ungraspable rather than stable, and that goes beyond the *krinein* (*κρίνω*) that divides yet embraces the chaos as an alternative knowing/feeling in a forgotten and suppressed world.

This alternative knowing/feeling in a forgotten and suppressed world can be linked to Echo’s final fate and death: actually physically disappearing. The dissolution-death of the nymph, her becoming one with the world surrounding her, forms a scopic regime that has been underexposed (‘the silenced hole’), because the paradigm is sidelined by the so-called phallogocentric ‘sharpness-sight’. It demands a way of looking that vaporizes, that confuses, that forgoes edges, but instead aims for a smudged unification or dismantling between the ‘self’ and the world (supra: metamorphosis that is ‘fluid’, foamy, ungraspable rather than stable). Moreover, it makes the self-dissolve into the ‘outside world’, thus sacrificing the subject to a constantly misleading and boundless blending in with the world around it.⁵⁹ This ocular magic is also a functional means of protection in nature and atmospherology⁶⁰ called ‘camouflage’. Camouflage is both a visual paradigm as a *Gefühlsraum* and an interesting alternative within the scopic regime.⁶¹

55. AGAMBEN, Giorgio: *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, transl. by HELLER-ROAZEN, Daniel. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1999, 177–184.

56. LICHTENBERG ETTINGER, Bracha: «Art as a Transport-Station of Trauma», in *Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger: Artworking, 1985–1999*, exhib. cat., Brussels, Palais des Beaux-Arts. Ghent and Amsterdam, Ludion, 2000, 91–115; 97.

57. *Ibidem*.

58. LICHTENBERG ETTINGER, Bracha: «The With-In-Visible Screen: Images of Absence in the Inner Space of Painting», in DE ZEGHER, Catherine (ed.): *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art*. Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1996, 89–113; 101.

59. ERIKSSON, Kajsa G.: «Sea Harbour People – Mimesis, Camouflage, Masquerade», in «The Politics of Magma», *Art Monitor: A Journal of Artistic Research*, 5 (2008), 17–25.

60. Tonino Griffero defines atmospherology as a power that surprises, space that becomes place; GRIFFERO, Tonino: *Atmospheres. Aesthetics of Emotional Spaces*, transl. by DE SANCTIS, Sarah. Farnham, Ashgate, 2014; INGOLD, Tim: «Earth, Sky, Wind, and Weather», *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 13 (2007), 19–38; INGOLD, Tim: «The Eye of the Storm: Visual Perception and the Weather», *Visual Studies*, 20, 2 (2005), 97–104; GIBSON, James J.: *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1979.

61. With this ‘feelings space’, Hermann Schmitz means the philosophical locus of emotions, as they stretch between the subject and the world; SCHMITZ, Hermann: «Der Gefühlsraum», in *System der Philosophie*, vol. 3: *Der Raum*, part 2: *Der Gefühlsraum*. Bonn, Bouvier, 1981, 264–276. See also: BAERT, Barbara: ‘Locus Amoenus’ and the *Sleeping Nymph: ‘Ekphrasis’, Silence and ‘Genius Loci’* (Studies in Iconology 3). Leuven and Walpole, Peeters, 2016.

Indeed, Echo disappeared and fused with nature, she turned to stone, and became an ecstatic transcendence of the scopic spectrum. She dissolved and disappeared into a different visual scheme: that of camouflage and dissolution.⁶² Echo, the nymph of camouflage and visual fusion with nature, thematizes becoming nothing and the silencing of the self, and thus radicalizes a visual paradigm of loss, sacrifice and camouflage.

In his book *Camouflage*, Neil Leach proves that the dissolving syndrome (or visual inertia) can expand our horizon of visual understanding.⁶³ Camouflage is a life principle and a sacrifice strategy that interweaves life and death closely. The action that seems nihilist pays off in the self-sacrifice to the world. From a visual standpoint, camouflage is firstly a manifestation, but secondly 'latent' enough to remain exchangeable. There is a certain 'prefigurability' in the carriers and materials that mimesis has not yet 'attained'. Marble, for example, vacillates between abstraction and figuration, between liquid and solid. The image is 'being shaped in the cocoon'.

Camouflage teaches us about another and completely new relation between medium, self-identification (Echo's 'self' as loss, or at least as repetition of the other voice) and a visual (re)presentation as 'blending into the world'. The world becomes the carrier of the image as loss and as an empty space, and the medium becomes an act of 'dissolving', of vaporizing. That is why the diaphanous of water and sea, the almost-materiality of foam and vapour, the invisible yet haptic sense of wind and breath, even the anti-sopic power of speech is perhaps the most pure form of 'camouflage' as alternative to the artistic mirror paradigm,⁶⁴ and therefore the chain from *ruach* to sea to marble is an archetypical paradigm for prefigurability as creative potentiality, for the arts and crafts emerging *ex nihilo*, yes, for 'iconogenesis'. It is there, in the dissolution of veins and stains that Echo finds voice, finds nest, must sit and wait, silently, in a solidified state.

62. From a psycho-pathological point of view, camouflage is closely related to psychasthenia or neurasthenia: a spatial confusion affecting the distinction between an individual and the surrounding environment that results as a type of dissolution, or loss of self. It concerns an «instinct of abandon or the desire for ego dissolution and inertia»; CAILLOIS, Roger: «Mimétisme et Psychasthénie légendaire», *Minotaure*, 2, 7 (1935), 4-10: 9-10.

63. LEACH, Neil: *Camouflage*. Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2006, 246-247.

64. *Diaphanos* has a very deep and rich semantic genealogy. Aristotle (285-322 BC) calls *diaphanos* the portal between humankind and the world. BYNUM, Terrell Ward: «A New Look at Aristotle's Theory of Perception», *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 4, 2 (1987), 163-178; VASILIU, Anca: *Du Diaphane. Image, milieu, lumière dans la pensée antique et médiévale*. Paris, J. Vrin, 1997, 277-300. Of course, the diaphanous also has a very intense paradigmatic energy when it comes to visual hermeneutics, which would bring me too far off-topic. DELL'ACQUA BOYVADAOĞLU, Francesca: «Between Nature and Artifice: «Transparent Streams of New Liquid»», *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 53-54 (2008), 93-103; ALLOA, Emmanuel: *Das durchscheinende Bild. Konturen einer medialen Phänomenologie*. Zürich, Diaphanes, 2011; STOICHITA, Victor I., PORTMANN, Maria and BOARIU, Dominic-Alain (eds.): *Le corps transparent*. Rome, L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2013.

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