

Art and its Responses to Changes in Society

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Edited by

Ines Unetič,
Martin Germ,
Martina Malešič,
Asta Vrečko
and Miha Zor

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PREFACE

Throughout history, humankind has witnessed the rise and decline of civilisations, governments, and regimes; ideologies and ideas; and social and cultural movements. Even in the most turbulent events, art has always been involved in history, playing various roles and serving different purposes. Processes that were triggered by sociopolitical changes have influenced all layers of society and can therefore be traced and observed in the history of art. In the chapters of this book, we follow iconographic motifs and works of art that have acquired diverse meanings within different periods of history, cultural milieus, and social circumstances, and have often been appropriated by opposing ideologies.

The authors of this book discuss the art of different time periods, from ancient times to the end of the twentieth century, in diverse media, and from various countries. The idea for the book first emerged during discussions at the first international conference for PhD students and recent PhD graduates *Decline—Metamorphosis—Rebirth*, which took place in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in September 2014. The aim of the conference was to bring together young researchers from different fields of humanities and social sciences dealing with the topic, since it is especially intriguing to observe these phenomena of changes in art at the intersection of art history and other disciplines. The topic of the conference—the decline–transformation–rebirth paradigm—is frequently encountered in writings on art and other related fields, and remains widespread in some areas of the humanities. This is understandable since this pattern has an archetypal value; it is firmly rooted in symbolic thinking and our perception of the world. If understood correctly—i.e. as a tool of symbolic logic—it can be of use in research and writing about art. Decline, transformation, and rebirth cannot be considered as distinct phenomena—all three phases of the triad are inextricably intertwined. An ending of any process in art can also be a new start. The death of the old concepts, ideas, or forms is often the very condition for new ones to spring forth. The decline–transformation–rebirth triad symbolises a constant and never-ending movement. Each sequence of the movement has its own characteristics and particularities, which have to be identified, analysed, and evaluated without defunct ideas about the evolution of art and any aprioristic judgements. The paradigm is a joint platform for the authors in *Art and its*

Responses to Changes in Society in their understanding of works of art and processes within art itself, as well as in their treatment of the different subjects presented in this volume.

In the first chapter, *The Gorgon Medusa Metamorphoses—From a Declining Pictorial Motif to Survival as a Cinematographic Motif*, Annabelle Ruiz studies various forms and meanings of the iconographic motif. She shows an increase of interest for the topic between symbolist-oriented artists at the end of the nineteenth century and again in cinematographic art in the 1960s.

Theresa A. Kutasz demonstrates in *A Hellenistic Skyscraper—The Reconceptualisation of the Lost Pharos at Alexandria and its Relationship to American Architecture at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* how the Hellenistic lighthouse that once marked the prosperous island of Pharos became a symbol of wealth and glory in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in North America. Due to the technological progress, pylons of light became a popular image in the big cities, comparing the fantasy of the old world with the wonder of the new.

In the chapter *Angelic Identities: Intersexual Bodies in Klonaris and Thomadaki's Multimedia Practice*, Laura Giudici examines the artist duo Klonaris/Thomadaki of Egyptian and Greek origin and interprets intersexuality in the historical circumstances in which their works were produced. The artists question the common understanding of sexual and gender identity as perceived today and in the past.

Gašper Cerkovnik deals with the Christian iconographical motif of the Last Judgement in examples preserved in the lands of Carinthia and Styria (today part of Slovenia and Austria, respectively). In his case study *Christoph Schwarz's Last Judgement and Counter-Reformation in Inner Austria*, the author shows close links between artists and patrons in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the changes within the iconographic motif as depicted by the artist Christoph Schwarz in different circumstances reinterpreted by other artists.

In the next chapter, *The Rebirth of the Amateur Artist: The Effect of Past Opinions on the Amateur Artist in Current Research*, Wendy Wiertz shows how the perception of the amateur artist changed through time, from its rise with *The Book of the Courtier* (1528) to its decline in the eighteenth century. Amateur artists awoke the interest of scholars in the 1970s.

In the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, individuals designed their gardens and implemented them with so-called *staffages*—specific garden elements with different functions. Such gardens were created in England, Germany, and Carniola (today part of Slovenia),

as Ines Unetič demonstrates in *Diversity in European Garden Art around 1800: "European" Landscape Garden Design with its Staffages and their Functions*.

The years around 1800 constitute the main topic in German architectural theory from the beginning of the twentieth century. As Rainer Schützeichel claims in *Tradition as a Means of Modernisation—The Crucial Role of the Time "around 1800" for early Twentieth-century Architectural Theory in Germany*, vernacular buildings of this period, believed to be the last expressions of stylistic unity, became reference points for architectural reform, modernisation, and the quest for creating a unified German culture in the early twentieth century.

Alenka Di Battista, in *Small Houses with Gardens as a Solution to a Housing Crisis*, analyses the responses of architects to the growing housing shortage in Slovenia during the interwar period of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (renamed the Kingdom of SHS after 1929). Slovenian architects were focusing mainly on providing recommendations and professional advice to the common person on how to construct their own home.

In the chapter *In Search of the National—Slovenian Art in the 1930s*, Asta Vrečko focuses on the question of constructing a national visual expression. This was one of the most discussed topics in the cultural sphere in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Due to the omnipresent political conflict in the centralistic kingdom, it has manifested in many forms, and different, even contradictory, strategies and historical references were used.

Katarina Mohar examines the relationship between nation and art on the scale of public art in *State-Commissioned Depictions of Historical Subjects in Slovenian Historical Painting of the First and Second Yugoslavia*. She compares two state-commissioned historical paintings visualising key events from Slovenian history that were executed in very different political atmospheres and for quite different ideological state structures, i.e. the monarchy and the socialist regime after the Second World War.

In *Socialist Realism in Slovenian Architecture—Some Remarks on its Appearance and Decline*, Martina Malešič presents the context of the appearance and decline of Socialist realism in Slovenian architecture in the post-Second World War years. After the conflict with Informbiro in 1948, Yugoslavia withdrew from the Communist bloc and the Soviet sphere of influence. Socialist realism was rejected and Slovenian architecture once again turned to the West European modernism of the pre-Second World War period.

Sanja Horvatinčić, in *Ballade of the Hanged—the Representation of World War II Atrocities in Yugoslav Memorial Sculpture*, deals with a specific topic of Yugoslav (art) history—its monuments. She delineates new iconographic interpretations and artistic strategies in representing war trauma by analysing several examples of memorials dedicated to people hanged in the territory of former Yugoslavia.

In the last chapter of the book, *Reaffirmation of Christian Symbolism within the City of Zagreb*, Ivana Podnar provides an insight into the changes in the urban iconography of the capital Zagreb that occurred due to the establishment of the independent republic of Croatia in 1991 after the breakup of Yugoslavia. National independence was marked with the return to traditional social values, especially to the Catholic Church, which implied a new symbolic system, including new churches and monuments that strongly marked the urban iconography of Zagreb.

As diverse as the studies may be in their subjects or approaches, it is the idea of the permanent metamorphoses of art in its responses to the cultural milieu—as well as the search for the specific manifestations of this process—that unites them. This selection of case studies addressing various topics, discussing different problems, and offering new interpretations of works of art is a stimulating and provocative read for anyone interested in art and its metamorphoses.

The Editors

CHAPTER ONE

THE GORGON MEDUSA METAMORPHOSES: FROM A DECLINING PICTORIAL MOTIF TO SURVIVAL AS A CINEMATOGRAPHIC MOTIF

ANNABELLE RUIZ

The Gorgon Medusa feminine figure, which comes from Greco-Roman mythology, has inspired a great number of artists throughout the centuries and has been depicted in various mediums, thus showing the multiple forms it assumes as an iconographic motif. The birth of the symbolist movement in the second half of the nineteenth century gives us an eclectic pictorial vision of all the aspects of the Medusa's mythological history and the allegorical symbols that are traditionally assigned to her. Both her hypnotic gaze and her scream of horror portrayed in the different works of art analysed provoke in humankind a sentiment of fascination and dread. This can be partly explained by the divine character of this hybrid creature, which possesses the power to turn others into stone. In her book *L'Homme et la Métamorphose*, Maryvonne Perrot notes that:

If metamorphosis is worrying, it still seems associated with an almighty power, inherent in the fact of not being subjected to a principle of causality and unequivocal generation ... To a certain extent, the metamorphosis presents itself as the expression of divine omnipotent power. In fact, one of the principal divinity characteristics is to be *causa sui*, if not absolutely, at least to the extent that she is master of her existence. Yet, if the metamorphosed being is not exactly *causa sui*, nonetheless its appearance seems to be escaping the ordinary laws of generation; and this is why divinity and the power of metamorphosis are so frequently associated. This union remains one of the fundamental motivations of the structure of myths. (Perrot 1979, 10)¹

The Gorgon Medusa's monstrous origin is not described in the first Greek mythological texts.² Only her physical aspect is known—a hybrid monster

with golden wings, bronze claws, wild boar tusks, and hair swarming with snakes. The main myth concerns the quest of the hero, Perseus, with Medusa being only a secondary character. After their confrontation, Medusa's decapitated head is worn by the goddess Athena on her aegis. Later on, during the Latin era, and particularly in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Ovide 2010, 182–5), Medusa becomes a major protagonist and the cause of her physical monstrosity is finally explained. A daughter of two sea deities, Phorcys and Ceto, she has two immortal sisters, Stheno and Euryale. Medusa is the only mortal in her family. She is a very beautiful young girl with magnificent hair and numerous suitors. She is raped by Poseidon in a temple consecrated to Athena. Aroused by anger and jealousy, Athena transforms the beautiful Medusa, creating a hybrid being combining human, mineral, and animal elements. Thus, a victim of rape and an unfair metamorphosis-punishment, Medusa becomes the embodiment of a dual monster—metamorphosed and capable of metamorphosing others.

In the course of the following centuries, the phenomenon of metamorphosis—a description of physical change—embraced philosophical, symbolic, scientific, and psychological interpretations.³ This can be seen in visual and fine arts particularly, mainly during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, where we witness the birth of a new perception of an object and its representation. This modern focus on an object and its perception was stimulated by the creation of new mediums and the spreading of technical innovations. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, painters took possession of the Medusean figure and its symbols. Then, overwhelmed by the horrors of the First World War, they acquired an interest in other iconographic motifs, thus causing the decline and eventual disappearance of the Gorgon Medusa's representation.⁴ A few decades later, this representation emerged again thanks to the progress of special effects and the desire of filmmakers to seize these mythological motifs.

The aesthetic and symbolic metamorphoses of the Gorgon Medusa's iconographic motif in symbolist painting

The nineteenth century saw the rise of positivism, the development of industry, technology, and trade, and the emergence of socialism, witnessing in its second half the birth of an idealistic artistic movement called symbolism (Cassou 1979; Delevoy 1977; Draguet 2010; Lacambre et al. 2007; Ebbinge Wubben and Hammacher van den Brande 1976; Musée de l'art wallon 1996; Pierre 1991; Rapetti 2007). This movement not only reflected deep anguish about the meaning of life, but also echoed

a spiritual need. It was in opposition to the prevailing positive mentality and a society torn by de-Christianisation, as well as social and political changes. It was also against the academic approach as well as Naturalism (Ebbing Wubben and Hammacher van den Brande 1976, 21). Symbolist artists rejected representing reality in an objective way, focusing instead on entirely subjective art (Rapetti 2007, 15). This subjectivity was used by such artists to depict themes such as dream, sleep, silence, love, death, women, magic, esotericism, the fantastic, and mythology.⁵ Artists wished to relate to the antique myths, attempting to find solutions to existential anguish in order to develop the sense of spirituality needed to create their works. We can observe the rejection of historical reality in favour of the deployment of antique myths, which are considered as an ideal elsewhere. The French painter Gustave Moreau centred his work on this rejection of historical reality, returning the myth to an individual dimension:

May the great myths of Antiquity be continually translated not from a historic point of view but an everlasting poetic one, for we must free ourselves from sterile chronology which forces the artist to translate a limited passage in time rather than an eternal period. Not the chronology of fact but the chronology of the mind. (Moreau 1984, 134)⁶

At the end of the nineteenth century, painters approached the figure of Medusa focusing on the aspects of the mythological story or its allegorical dimension.⁷ However, the aesthetic element pertaining to each work differentiates and detaches itself from the specific characteristics of monsters found from Antiquity up to the Renaissance period. Gradually losing her animal features, Medusa becomes a human being, depicted as a young girl of melancholic appearance caused by the pain of her metamorphosis. Nevertheless, this creature with an unsettling strangeness retains a particular gaze from which springs a paradox. Indeed, this omnipotent power to kill, expressed by threatening attitudes and a sustained hypnotic gaze, is combined with the monster's cry of pain and distress from its transformation or decapitation. These two themes, the cry and the Medusean gaze, can be found in four particular works by symbolists.

In the pastel *Méduse ou Vague furieuse* (1897), the French painter Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer depicted Medusa with masculine features. Aquatic elements such as the sea and seaweed replace animal elements like snakes.⁸ The physical hybridity remains, but Medusa seems to feel great pain and deep distress. This emotion is revealed in her look and pathetic body language—one of her hands is wildly clutching her hair and the other her bloody chest, gripping her heart. This work shows the transformation

of a human being into a monster from which escapes a cry symbolising panic and the suffering caused by the metamorphosis (Foucart, Lacambre, and Lacambre 1973, 50–1). The violent streams surrounding this aquatic Medusa underline her internal torment. The process and creation of formal beauty greatly humanise this figure of monstrous origins.



Fig. 1.1. Carlos Schwabe, *Medusa*, 1895, watercolour on circular paper, diameter of 6.5". Chicago, Collection of Marla Hand and Jim Nyeste. © Photo: Michael Tropea. Courtesy of Marla Hand.

The watercolour *Medusa* (1895) is the only known Medusa painted by the German Carlos Schwabe (see Fig. 1.1). Its circular shape indicates the artist's reference to Perseus' shiny shield, which reflects the Gorgon Medusa's face.⁹ It is a face displaying a savage, animal-like expression, which conveys both the surprise and horror provoked by the discovery of her reflection. Her hands simultaneously suggest a step backward and petrification. This approach of representing the Medusa figure differentiates itself from Lévy-Dhurmer's, and places itself in a more ornamental style that can be seen from the design of the frame. She still has the mixed physical appearance that characterises her, but is less humanised than in Lévy-Dhurmer's work. Her attitude reveals a tendency to emphasise a grotesque image of herself. Her hair is outlined by a multitude of snakes hissing in unison, as Medusa, with mouth wide open, howls in fear, a victim of her own curse. The focus of her gaze is emphasised in this work by green eyes with elongated dark slits,

highlighting her reptilian nature. This Medusean gaze, the central theme of the myth, inspired several painters, including the Belgian Jean Delville and the German Franz Von Stuck.

This latter artist painted the oil on canvas *Haupt der Medusa* in 1892 (see Fig. 1.2). The realism and pictorial techniques of his Medusa contrast with the one previously analysed. She has the face of a young girl and only her hair, made of snakes, remains. The pictorial precision of her crystal-clear gaze and different parts of her face suggests that the artist was inspired by a photographic model.¹⁰ Medusa's corpse-like aspect underlines the transparency of her look, from which the spectator, no longer horrified but bewitched, cannot free themselves.



Fig. 1.2. Franz Von Stuck, *Haupt der Medusa*, 1892, oil/canvas, 19.68" x 18.89". Aschaffenburg, Gentil-Haus. © Photo: Museen der Stadt Aschaffenburg, Sammlung Gentil. Courtesy of Museen der Stadt Aschaffenburg.

Jean Delville's *Méduse* (1893) represents an original approach to the Gorgon Medusa figure, employing mixed techniques on paper. This emphasises the importance of lines in his work.¹¹ This composition is not only very colourful but also extremely particular due to its esoteric dimension. This aesthetic choice can be explained by Delville's affiliation to the Rosicrucian society.¹² The poppy flowers in the foreground, from which rings of smoke evaporate, symbolise the eternal rest that the Medusa's gaze grants. On each side of her head, her snake-like hair spreads out onto small trays, held in her hands like scales trying to

maintain their balance. Her fluorescent hair and blurred hazy look give her a mysterious contemplative aspect.

Medusa's pictorial symbolist figure is complex and exhibits contrasting elements—a hybrid being alternately humanised with masculine or feminine features, animal or mineral, persecutor or victim. This figure reflects a period in full social, political, and economic mutation. The works of art in this period are characterised by the construction of plastic presentation representing a detailed study of the psychology of the monstrous, in parallel to the psychoanalytical edification of the end of the nineteenth century (Colombet 2011, 174–5).

Forms of the decline and disappearance of this mythological figure in pictorial art in the first quarter of the twentieth century

The Medusa theme lost its artistic popularity at the beginning of the twentieth century. Artists preferred current themes or historical events such as the First World War and the horrors of the battlefield. Only a few painters in the first quarter of the twentieth century continued to create different forms and visual works of the Medusa figure and her myth, assigning her various aesthetic characteristics originating from the development of symbolism and expressionism. Nevertheless, artists focused less on reinterpreting the myth than using this figure as an historic allegory or a technical experimentation motif. However, Medusa significantly kept the powerful stone-changing gaze of the Antique-era monster. The French painter, Gustav Adolf Mossa, produced his version of Medusa in a watercolour. In his 1917 work, Medusa's head has masculine features in the Art Nouveau style. It is held at arm's length by a warrior-like woman who brandishes it at a group of soldiers as if it was a weapon of mass destruction. We witness the translation of an antique iconographic motif in a contemporary situation, which is the First World War. As for the Russian painter Alexey von Jawlensky's 1923 work, it represents a less-conventional Medusa, underlining the importance of the chromatic work of this expressionist painter, as well as the influence of the art of icons in the depiction of the facial features (see Fig. 1.3). Finally, in 1924, in another Russian painter Nicholas Kalmakoff's work we can observe a contrasting white stone mask with a vast spectral gaze topped by realistic snake-like hair on a black background (Caruana et al. 2004, 26).¹³ Once more, Medusa seems to have been the victim of her own power of metamorphosis. We can see the abandoning of this iconographic motif in pictorial art in the decades following the creation of these works.



Fig. 1.3. Alexey von Jawlensky, *Tête de femme "Méduse," Lumière et Ombre,"* 1923, Oil/board, 16.5" x 12.2". Lyon, Fine Arts Museum. © Photo: Lyon MBA/Alain Basset. Courtesy of Lyon Fine Arts Museum.

The advent of the First World War and then the "Roaring Twenties," marked by important economic and societal mutations, could explain the decline of this antique figure. The field of artistic creation, preoccupied by chromatic experimentations, the destruction of shapes, and the birth of the dynamic movement, is prey to deep metamorphoses; Medusa does not belong to this era. It is only at the beginning of the 1960s that we witness the rebirth of the Medusean motif in a different medium—the cinema.

Representations and symbolic transformations of Medusa's survival in the cinematographic medium

At the beginning of the 1960s we can observe the resurrection of the Gorgon Medusa figure in cinematographic art. Indeed, this antique iconographic survival¹⁴ occurred in the fantastic and horror cinema developed by British production company Hammer Films, famous for its small-budget films with inimitable Gothic aesthetics.¹⁵

Medusa reappeared in 1964 in the fantastic movie *The Gorgon*, directed by Terence Fisher. This prolific filmmaker is famous for introducing

modern horror film conventions, and here his film has Gothic aesthetics running throughout it. Terence Fisher's principal inspirations are mythological texts and nineteenth-century Gothic literature. Nevertheless, *The Gorgon* is a contemporary adaptation of the myth, and thanks to the art of movement, specific to the cinematographic medium, it is also an aesthetic metamorphosis of the Medusa figure.¹⁶ The fascination of the executive producer Anthony Hinds with Medusa's Greek myth and Fisher's great interest in the Snake-Goddess of the Minoan civilisation of the Greek Bronze Age (2700 BCE to 1500 BCE) can partly explain the revival of Medusa's iconographic motif in cinema (Hearn 2010, 5; Leggett 2002, 2); however, this film remains a unique example in all of Hammer's productions.¹⁷

In this film,¹⁸ Medusa's representation is slightly metamorphosed. In fact, the main feminine character, Carla Hoffmann, changes into Medusa during the full moon as if she were a werewolf. The Medusa figure embodies a dual character whose successive metamorphoses from one body to another are depicted by skilled editing processes. It is only in the last sequence of the movie, during the battle between Dr Namaroff, Professor Meister, Paul Heitz, and Medusa, that the dual character of Medusa is revealed by the visual special effects. Her cheeks are riddled with scales, her eyes are wide open and injected with blood, and her serpent-like hair is animated by a mechanical process, all of which develop the cardboard aesthetics of the monstrous and successive steps of her metamorphosis following her decapitation by Professor Meister (see Fig. 1.4).



Fig. 1.4. Prudence Hyman as the Gorgon in *The Gorgon* (1964). © Photo: THE GORGON. 1964, renewed 1992. Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Courtesy of Columbia Pictures.

This last sequence underlines the various technical resources the make-up artists and special effects supervisors had at their disposal. Indeed, to get the movement effect of the metamorphosis, they first had to create a rubber sculpture of Medusa's decapitated head. Then, they had to animate it with the combination of metal cables that retract the snakes before carrying out the stop-motion special effect to depict the skin changes (Hearn 2010, 15–17). This transformation gives a very pictorial aspect to these images. Added to this, during the editing process, a double exposure effect gradually revealed Carla Hoffman's face, replacing Medusa's. Once the metamorphosis was completed, it revealed the character's double nature, giving us a different interpretation of the antique myth and developing an aesthetic withdrawal from pictorial symbolism. Even if the theme of Medusa's own battle and her metamorphosis survives the transition between paintings and the cinema, it does not have the same impact. The main difference originates from the movement and dramatisation of Medusa's figure, and her various metamorphoses will remain in cinema thanks to the birth of new special effects.

Fifteen years later, the metamorphosis of Medusa's iconographic motif continued in cinema with the advent of the British-American peplum *Clash of the Titans* by Desmond Davis in 1981. At that time, peplum as a cinematographic style was in its decline and the few movies of this type were not successful.¹⁹ Mythological or historical stories displayed in this style did not suit the public's expectations, as they preferred more realistic action and adventure movies. However, one exception, *Clash of the Titans*, was a great commercial success, which had an enormous impact thanks to Ray Harryhausen's special effects.

The scenario is based on the myth of Perseus and the different steps of his quest, which is troubled by encounters with all kinds of monsters. It was filmed mostly against natural backgrounds and we can see real antique temples (in Paestum, Italy), especially during the fight between Perseus and Medusa. This film marks a return to the original mythological text and the Gorgon Medusa's figure assumes the physical attributes and threatening attitude of the antique monster. Hardly any of her human features remain and she portrays none of the distinctive emotional duality assigned to her in symbolist pictorial works or Terence Fisher's fantastic movie. After many centuries, we finally witness the personification in movement of the antique Medusa thanks to stop-motion animation. Invented by Ray Harryhausen, this technique, used in the fight scene, consists of recreating a miniature Medusa and moving it a few centimetres, frame by frame, giving the illusion of movement. In the fight sequence, Medusa's figure first comes into existence by the use of a strong, evocative

light and shadow effect. She is visible on Perseus' shield, which reflects her monstrous face and body. This snake-shaped body is a cinematic invention that marks its figural survival and is instrumental in the creation of a more spectacular appearance. Her fluorescent gaze, serpent-like body, and the stop-motion animation all contribute to the aesthetic elaboration and metamorphosis of this new Medusa. Therefore, what is significant is that the cinematographic art succeeds in breathing new life into this mythic creature, demonstrating a real aesthetic and symbolic revival.

Thus, between the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth, the Gorgon Medusa feminine figure was a great source of inspiration for painters through the themes she was depicted in, such as metamorphosis, the scream of horror, and the stone-changing gaze. These themes enabled them to study the monster's psyche, which is a mirror of the human psyche (Caiozzo et al. 2008, 24). She is also at the origin of plastic experimentations that fell within the *fin de siècle* symbolist circle of influence. These innovations carried on and were enriched in the twentieth century with the evolution of photographic and cinematographic techniques. The development of special effects in the film industry particularly favoured Medusa's artistic renaissance and played an important role in the elaboration of her aesthetic and symbolical metamorphosis, as studied and analysed above.

The revival of peplum as a cinematographic style since the beginning of the twenty-first century has led to an aesthetic and symbolic resurgence of the Medusa figure, notably in Louis Leterrier's remake of *Clash of the Titans* in 2010, as well as Chris Columbus' *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*, also in 2010. Here, the Medusa figure possesses a different plasticity owing to the rapid development of digital and 3D technology. This survival phenomenon is also noticeable in video games in which Medusa's character is transposed, for example in *God of War* (2005–), developed by Sony Studios Santa Monica.

Inherently a figure of metamorphosis, the Gorgon Medusa has been subject to multiple evolutions, from a mythological text to an artistic one, and from plastic transpositions to aesthetic and symbolic transformations, throughout the ages, and from one civilisation to another. This perfectly illustrates the following quote by André Malraux, a well-known French author, politician, and intellectual:

I can define metamorphosis due to the fact that we have made saints and that they have become statues, that we have made goddesses and that they too, have become statues. This is because for five hundred years our whole conception of art has been founded on metamorphosis ... (Malraux, Dumayet and Langlois 1973).²⁰

Notes

1 Author's translation from: "Si la métamorphose inquiète, elle n'en paraît pas moins liée à une sorte de toute puissance, inhérente au fait de ne pas être soumis à un principe de causalité et de génération univoque ... La métamorphose, dans la mesure où elle permet d'y échapper, se présente-t-elle d'emblée comme l'expression de la toute-puissance divine ... En effet, l'une des caractéristiques premières de la divinité est d'être *causa sui*, sinon absolument, du moins dans la mesure où elle est maîtresse de son existence. Or, si l'être métamorphosé n'est pas tout à fait *causa sui*, son surgissement semble échapper néanmoins aux lois ordinaires de la génération; c'est pourquoi divinité et pouvoir de métamorphose sont si souvent associés. Cette union demeure d'ailleurs l'un des ressorts fondamentaux de la structure des mythes."

2 We refer here to Hesiod's *Theogony*: "Et Cète conçut de Phorcys les Grées aux joues fraîches, grises dès leur naissance- Grées les nomèrent les hommes qui cheminent par terre et les dieux qui sont et qui furent -, puis Enyo aux voiles safran, Pemphrédo au beau voile, les Gorgones vivant par-delà l'Océan illustre, aux confins de la nuit, chez les Hespérides sonores, Euryale, Sthéno et Méduse au sort lamentable, qui était seule mortelle, ses soeurs ignorants la vieillesse et la mort, mais qui seule, parmi les fleurs des herbages printaniers, dort près du Dieu à la noire crinière. Lorsque Persée eut décapité la Gorgone Méduse, le très grand Chrysaor, le cheval Pégase en jaillirent: l'un était né sur les bords pégéens de l'onde océane, l'autre tenait un glaive d'or, d'où les noms qu'ils reçurent" (Hésiode 1999, 36–7, lines 270–86).

I also consulted Hesiod's *The Shield of Heracles*: "[Persée] portait son épée niellée fixée à l'épaule au baudrier d'airain. Il volait comme va la pensée. Tous son dos portait la tête du monstre terrible, la Gorgone! Un sac d'argent flottait, prodigieuse vision: les franges pendaient, étincelantes, d'or. Sur les tempes du roi était posé le casque redoutable d'Hadès, porteur des ténèbres nocturnes" (Hésiode 1999, 162–3, lines 221–7).

3 I refer to the work of Maryvonne Perrot, who developed the history of the metamorphosis concept in various disciplines (philosophy, anthropology, mythology, science, psychology, and art history). Perrot starts with the Antique period of the Middle Ages, and moves through the Renaissance to the middle of the twentieth century (Perrot 1979).

4 The names of Medusa and the Gorgon Medusa (both of Greek origin) are normally interchangeable, but the Gorgon Medusa term refers specifically to the Gorgons, comprising the two immortal sisters, Stheno and Euryale, and a further mortal sister, Medusa. Let me clarify that I am referring only to the Medusa figure in this study.

5 From the aesthetic point of view, certain symbolists tried to create a very intimate universe reflecting silence and religiosity. In contrast, others developed more decadent, elaborate art (Lacambre et al. 2007, 3–37).

6 Author's translation from: "Que les grands mythes antiques ne soient pas continuellement traduits en historiographes, mais en poètes éternels, car il faut enfin sortir de cette chronologie puérile qui force l'artiste à traduire les temps

limités au lieu de traduire la pensée éternelle. Pas la chronologie du fait, mais la chronologie de l'esprit.”

7 References to the Medusa mythology or its allegorical dimension are the metamorphosis-punishment symbolising her cry of pain (Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer, *Méduse ou Vague furieuse*), her beheading by Perseus, or the moment preceding this action mirrored by Carlos Schwabe's Medusa, the circular shape of his work highlighting her cry of horror. Her figure faces us with its Medusean gaze which, together with her serpentine hair, depicted in this epoch, symbolise her fatal powers of petrification. The combination reflects our confrontation with death, reminding us of our mortality (Franz Von Stuck, *Haupt der Medusa*; Nicholas Kalmakoff, *Méduse*) (Frontisi-Ducroux 2003, 202–20; Vernant 1996, 121–9; Clair 1989, 30–2, 58–9; Rousillon-Constanty 2008, 27–33, 39–40).

8 Nonetheless, the presence of these aquatic elements is not unusual. In fact, these elements can be associated with the episode of Andromeda's release by Perseus. Chained to a rock in the middle of the ocean to be eaten by the Cetus whale, Andromeda is liberated by the hero Perseus who successfully overcomes the sea monster without using Medusa's head. After this victory, Perseus lays the head on a bed of seaweed, which reddens upon contact and is transformed into red coral. In Lévy-Dhurmer's pastel, Medusa's snake hair is symbolically replaced by seaweed, some of which is coloured red, reminiscent of coral.

9 “De la même époque date aussi une autre Méduse, peinte sur un papier circulaire, et dont le format ainsi que la composition font référence au bouclier-miroir de Persée” (Jumeau-Lafond 1994, 91). Two historical representations depict the Gorgon Medusa's face reflected in Perseus' shield: Perseus with the Medusa head (1611) to Baldassarre Francheschini known as *Il Volterrano*, and Luca Giordano's oil on canvas, *Perseus With the Medusa Head* (second half of the seventeenth century).

10 Indeed, from the beginning of the 1890s, Von Stuck had the habit of using photography as a preliminary process to his work (Mendgen 1995, 26).

11 “L'Art a commencé par le Dessin, par la ligne et la Ligne, c'est l'âme de l'Equilibre, c'est l'essence même de la Plastique ... La Ligne, dans les choses de la Nature, c'est la signature de Dieu. La Ligne, ne l'oublions jamais, est l'expression symbolique des affinités primordiales qui existent entre l'Esprit et la Matière. La Ligne, ou la Forme, est le mystère du monde physique, le mystère de l'Art, la mystère de la Beauté” (Delville 1895, 4).

12 This mystic movement was characterised by, among other things, an idealistic symbolism in pursuit of a world that praises the idea's supremacy in the artistic creation (Delville 1984, 65–7).

13 A sole monograph exists: *Kalmakoff: l'ange de l'abîme 1873–1955 et les peintres du Mir Iskousstva*, published in 1986 by the Musée-galerie de la Seita in Paris.

14 I refer here specifically to "the survival concept" developed by the German art historian Aby Warburg (Pinto [1990] 2003; Ghelardi 2011; Recht 2012).

15 In cinematographic art, the Gothic genre is characterised by such themes as deserted castles, ruined fortresses, ancient monasteries, labyrinthine mazes, and neglected cemeteries, coloured by elements including full moons, dark woods, and

mist. The irrational, disturbing atmosphere emanating from these elements is underlined by strong, evocative light and shadow, creating feelings of fear, mystery, and melancholia, or suggesting the vanity of human existence and inevitable death (Rigby 2015).

16 In this film, the Gorgon's name is Megaera rather than Medusa. Megaera is one of the Erinyes in Greek mythology. Fisher transposed these mythological characters, yet the story, combined with the allegorical elements and the physical aspects of the Gorgon, clearly represent Medusa.

17 Terence Fisher's film is the sole Hammer production to stage the Gorgon Medusa character and associated symbolism. Yet its visual dimension reflects the Gothic aesthetic characterising Hammer films. By utilising the ambivalent feminine theme, a parallel between *The Gorgon* and *The Reptile* (directed by John Gilling in 1966) is established (Hearn 2010, 2–6, 14, 17).

18 The story of this film takes place in the village of Vandorf, which has been plagued by a series of bizarre murders. Victims are discovered after a full moon, each turned into stone. Dr Namaroff and his nurse Carla Hoffmann receive the petrified corpses at the local hospital, where Namaroff controversially concludes that they died of natural causes. Paul Heitz and Professor Meister believe instead that the deaths are the work of Medusa, the mythical Gorgon. As the next full moon approaches, Meister further suspects that Medusa's spirit has been in their midst all along.

19 These genre films (characterised by mythological stories, employing spectacular setting and special effects) won recognition during the 1950s and the 1960s. The peplum subsequently disappeared in 1965, yielding to the Spaghetti Western (Pinel [2000] 2006, 168–9).

20 Author's translation from: "J'appelle métamorphose le fait qu'on est fait des saints et qu'ils soient devenus des statues, qu'on est fait des déesses et qu'elles soient devenues des statues. Car toute notre conception de l'art depuis 500 ans repose sur la métamorphose ..."

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CHAPTER TWO

A HELLENISTIC SKYSCRAPER: THE RECONCEPTUALISATION OF THE LOST PHAROS AT ALEXANDRIA AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

THERESA A. KUTASZ

When an original structure is lost to living memory, its recreation falls to the imagination of artists who, consciously or not, are influenced by their own built environments and architectural experiences. I hope to show how a complex historical process of give and take—in this case, involving modern builders who embraced an ancient model for their own soaring structures—inspired a backward projection of modern ideals onto the imagined image of the ancient structure of the Pharos of Alexandria, reminding us that the past is continually revised and reinvented to serve our constantly changing needs. In this paper, I examine the slow decline and eventual loss of the Pharos and how that loss has manifested in artists' ever-changing attempts to represent the structure. With this loss, I argue that the idea of wonder superseded any concrete knowledge of the historic building in its metamorphosis and rebirth in the skyscrapers and illustrations of the twentieth century.

“A great lighthouse, 370 feet high, looking like a New York skyscraper, rose from the island of Pharos” (Parsons 1934, 343). This is how Geoffrey Parsons described the ancient lighthouse at Alexandria in his 1934 book *The Stream of History*. The lighthouse, or Pharos, named after the island on which it was located in the Alexandrian harbour, was likely begun around 280 BCE under Ptolemy I Soter, and has often been attributed to Sostratus of Cnidus, whose name appears on an inscription found at the site.¹ The structure, which was severely damaged and ultimately destroyed by a series of earthquakes from the tenth to the

fourteenth centuries, was both functional and symbolic in its time, and was listed as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World (Jordan 2014, 21–3).² Today, the fifteenth-century Fort Qaitbay occupies both the site and the general footprint of the ancient lighthouse, located at the entrance to Alexandria’s harbour. The earliest accounts of the Pharos come from the Greek geographer and historian Strabo, who visited Alexandria in around 30 BCE. The Roman-era authors Pliny the Elder, Josephus, and Lucian also make reference to the Pharos, but it is the reports of early medieval Arab travellers that provide the most detailed and reliable first-hand accounts of the structure’s appearance (Bohn 1892, 46).³

During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, many architects, following a generally historicist practice common to the period, looked to the Pharos (as well as other structures, such as Gothic cathedral spires) as a model for the creation of the modern skyscraper.⁴ But, as I will show in this paper, this model of inspiration was far from a one-way street. Indeed, as new towers rose to dominate the skylines of cities like New York and Chicago, these modern “descendants” of the ancient lighthouse began to exert a visible influence on contemporary reconstructions of the lost original. In the process, modern conceptions of the Alexandrian Pharos underwent a sort of metamorphosis or imaginative remodelling, where the lost ancient structure took on some of the aspects of a modern skyscraper in the minds and drawings of early twentieth-century scholars and illustrators, as well as their audiences.

The exact height of the Pharos has been the subject of (sometimes fantastic) speculation and debate for centuries, with estimates ranging from 380 to over 600 feet from base to top (Wells 2005, 6).⁵ Some of the most useful and frequently cited visual sources we have for the appearance of the ancient Pharos come from functional replicas of the original structure, set up at Roman ports like Ostia and Ravenna, as well as from coins minted by various Roman rulers (Tameanko 1999, 59–84). While highly simplified, these depictions provide a consistent idea of the Pharos’ basic form, usually interpreted as a rectangular base topped with a circular or hexagonal tower with a third tier functioning as the beacon. The continuing commemoration of the Pharos on coins, distributed throughout the empire, signifies the importance of the building as a symbol of technological innovation, commerce, and power.⁶ It is interesting to note the similarities between coins depicting the Pharos, such as those minted by Roman emperors Domitian, Trajan, Hadrian, and Commodus, and the commemorative souvenir coins made for skyscrapers, such as the Met Life Tower, in praise and recognition of the same qualities and achievements.⁷ For centuries after the construction of the Pharos, the harbour at Alexandria was known as the marketplace of

the world. The lighthouse at its mouth became a physical embodiment of its dominion over trade, just as the cathedrals of commerce in the modern era exemplified the capitalist spirit of their patrons.⁸

Only one of the ancient Seven Wonders survives today—the Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt. But the Pharos lasted far longer than many of the others, and was remodelled several times, not disappearing until earthquakes in 1303 and 1323 that likely brought down the majority of the building (Jordan 2014, 150). While we have relatively few detailed ideas of what wonders such as the Hanging Gardens of Babylon looked like, the physical remains of the Pharos still lie in the bay where they fell.⁹ The site was "rediscovered" by Europeans in the late nineteenth century and quickly became a popular attraction. In his 1899 text *Alexandrie ancienne et nouvelle*, Abbé Suard describes his expeditions by boat, taking visitors to see the submerged remains of the Pharos, including a specific visit where divers with ropes and harpoons attempted to lift pieces of marble and stone for the benefit of the tourists (Suard 1899, 44, i–x). The scholarly application of this renewed interest culminated in Hermann Thiersch's 1909 publication of his *Pharos: Antike, Islam und Occident: ein Beitrag zur Architekturgeschichte*, which is still regarded as the definitive text on the historical significance and appearance of the structure (Thiersch 1909). In this study, Thiersch proposed detailed designs for the Pharos and outlined a direct historical lineage of towers, with the Pharos acting as the prototype for structures ranging from lighthouses and church spires to minarets and *campanili* (Thiersch 1909, 97–174) (see Fig. 2.1). Since many of these later structures, now widely understood as derivatives of the Alexandrian lighthouse, also provided inspiration (and models) for modern skyscraper designs, it is easy to see how the Pharos, in particular, came to be viewed as the archetypal forerunner of the modern skyscraper, which encouraged the aforementioned "give and take" of elements from the one to the other.¹⁰

Throughout the nineteenth century, lists suggesting a canon of wonders for the modern world proliferated in both popular magazines and scholarly publications. These lists were primarily of two types, the first focusing on the natural or God-made wonders, and the second listing innovations in art, architecture, science, and technology.¹¹ The ancient wonders of the world were similarly separated from the medieval ones, which constituted a very fluid list including nearly anything of consequence constructed before 1900. At the turn of the twentieth century, almost the exact moment that the skylines of Chicago and New York started to see major changes, another category of modern wonder, the human-made marvel, began to appear on such lists with greater frequency.¹²

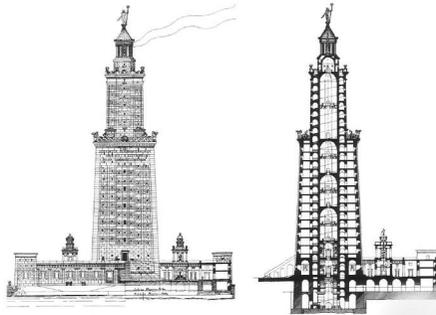


Fig. 2.1. Hermann Thiersch, *The Pharos at Alexandria in Elevation and Cutaway Views*, 1909, illustration. Source: Thiersch 1909, tafel VII, VIII.

Within these new lists of modern wonders there was terrific interest in creating tension between the new and the old. Some comparisons between modern structures and technologies and the ancient wonders cite the superiority of modern marvels such as skyscrapers as both utilitarian and for the benefit of the masses, an accolade which could be applied only to the Pharos among the ancient wonders (Wheeler 1928, 11; Barrett 1914, 1099). One article from 1913 suggested that the list of new modern wonders should include the Brooklyn Bridge, the Washington Monument, the Capitol Dome, the modern steel skyscraper, the Echo Mountain searchlight, and the United States Steel Corporation (New York Press 1904, 99). It is worth noting the emphasis here on height, light, and massive construction, elements that are all equally applicable to the Pharos, perhaps justifying its place among the wonders of human power and innovation over two-thousand years after its creation, and explaining why the idea of it remained so vital in a time when a premium was placed on size and innovation.¹³

Numerous late nineteenth and early twentieth-century writers directly and indirectly compared the city of New York, with its harbour and architecture, to the cities and ports of antiquity associated with the seven ancient wonders (Kay 1877, 135; Osgood and Co. 1881, 117; Wheeler 1898, 665). One author noted that, “a slight acquaintance with archaeology is sufficient to show us that the Statue of Liberty Enlightening the World is a duplicate in principle of the *Colossus of Rhodes*” (Brown 1885, 105).¹⁴ Similarly, the Hanging Gardens were compared to the Brooklyn Bridge; “the greatest hanging structure now in existence,” while the height of its skyscrapers was measured against the Great Pyramid (Ibid., 106).¹⁵ The

direct incorporation of aspects of the seven wonders into the architecture of skyscrapers can be seen in the stepped pyramid atop the Bankers Trust Building, built in 1912 by Trowbridge and Livingston, as well as the rooftop gardens of Madison Square Garden, built in 1890 by Stanford White, and the Rockefeller Center, finished in 1939 and designed by Raymond Hood. Such buildings highlight the desire of both patrons and architects to employ the theatricality and fantasy of antiquity as well as move beyond that history to conquer it in their modern building projects (Korom 2013).

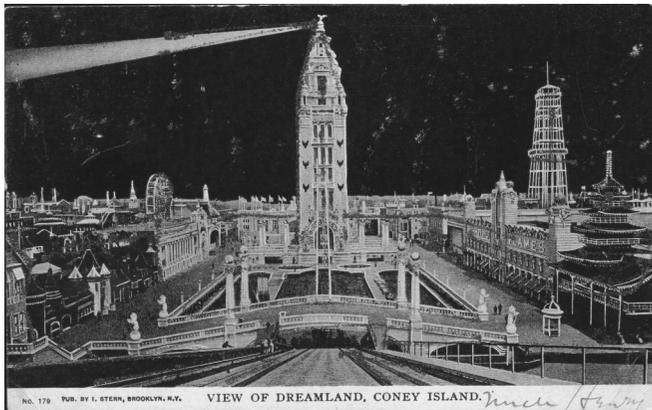


Fig. 2.2. Anonymous, *View of Dreamland, Coney Island*, 1906, paper with tinsel, The Strong National Museum of Play. Image Courtesy of The Strong®, Rochester, New York.

Popular interest in comparing the fantasy of the old with the wonder of the new can be seen in the attractions built in the first decade of the twentieth century at Coney Island’s Dreamland. The famous amusement park included a replica of one of the Seven Wonders, offering visitors a walk through the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.¹⁶ One of the most visible structures in the park was the 375 foot high Beacon Tower, the form of which was based both on the design of the Giraldula tower in Seville and the lighthouse at Alexandria (see Fig. 2.2).¹⁷ As Rem Koolhaas and others have noted, the top of the Beacon Tower, referred to as “an ocean of electric fire,” was adorned with the brightest beacon on the Eastern Seaboard, which temporarily functioned as a lighthouse for those at sea, visible for up to 30 miles (Immerso 2002, 68; Koolhaas 1994, 61). The Beacon Tower, built in 1904, also owed a debt to the towers of the nearby Luna Park built in 1903 and, perhaps more significantly, to the