

Suspended chronotopes: How the photographic work of Nadia Kalara and the literary work of Louisa Papaloizou undermine the dominant Modern gaze on the past.

Christos Panagiotou

Cyprus Academy of Art, Limassol, Cyprus

Keywords: Time, narrative, postcolonialism, Mediterranean, ruins

This paper examines two different media [photography and literature] in terms of how their narratives seem to suspend time, questioning human agency as defined by humanism, and how this is related to a postcolonial consideration about the area of the Mediterranean Sea.

The paper focuses more on photography, but also chooses literature alongside, in an attempt to see how the themes of the study are represented visually and in discourse.

Specifically, the paper investigates the photographic work of Nadia Kalara “Adelos” [a reference to the small Mediterranean island “Delos” and also, at the same time, a reference to ἄ-δηλος [a-delos] = un-named in Greek to denote this lack of human agency in the description of the landscape depicted (Galanopoulou, 2007). The second reference of this paper is the literary work of the Cypriot writer Louisa Papaloizou, “To Vouni” (2020), which in the third part of the book tells the story of a Swedish archaeological expedition to Cyprus in the early 20th century.

The two media examined [“A-delos” and “To Vouni”] (Appendix: Image 1,2) have in common: a reference to ruins, and to Mediterranean islands (Delos and Cyprus respectively).

According to theorists such as Susan Crane (2005), ruins were rarely depicted in paintings before the 18th and 19th centuries because the linear progression of time did not exist in the collective imagination. With the advent of Modernity, historiography and the social idea of “progress” (cultural, technological, social, etc.), a linear reconstitution of time was imagined in collective narratives, literature and art through the depiction of ruins. The narrative momentum in these Modern narratives was driven by following this chronological rearrangement of Signs along a time axis (i.e. something that happens at a given time in relation to something that happened before and something that will happen in a linear progression). The past and the future were expressed in a present via a Signifying Chain determined by a temporal continuity (for example ruins as a metaphor for the past vis-à-vis the present vis-à-vis the future, all under the temporal sentiment of “nostalgia”). This way of looking at things also signifies a less evolved state of being in the past and a more evolved state of being in the future, something that is relevant to human agency [development as a humanist ideal]. Meanwhile, temporal determinants that denote evolution (cultural, social, technological etc) exist in colonialist European art and literature from the 18th to 20th centuries as stated by postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said (1978) and Stuart Hall (2019) (for example the term “Primitive” or “backwards” to denote cultural stagnation). It is also important to note the ideological affinity of Humanism, as expressed mainly in Enlightenment, and the European colonialism.

This paper introduces the idea of “suspended chronotopes [timescapes]” to explore the idea of how time is detached from the signification of a temporal register and reinstated as a spatial register. The observing subject [reader/viewer] implied before the narratives [of the works analyzed] is detached from its temporal coordinates and becomes the ever-present eye before the perspective of a static landscape of time. The meaning in these narratives does not emerge from a chronological sequence of events, but rather from the re-imagined spatial relationships between moments. As argued, this coincides with the questioning of the humanist ideal of human agency.

In Kalara’s *A-delos* and in Papaloizou’s *To Vouni*, therefore, a different temporal reconfiguration takes place. In their simplest form, they create the impression that time just exists before your eyes, that past, future and present coexist and that you experience time as a spatial dimension. As argued this happens because these narratives remove the human agency as a

determinant for the temporal dimension. There is no nostalgic gaze to the past to determine the present, the future, nor a – humanist – subject to determine the line between the two. All time just exists “simultaneously”. As in the case of Homer's sea, all that exists is a space in which things happen, rather than things happening to the space. There is no evolution, only variation.

The research uses semantic analysis in combination with Lacanian psychoanalysis to arrive at postcolonial considerations for the above-mentioned works, which deal with the dominant colonial gaze of the Modern Northwestern European archaeology and historiography towards the Mediterranean "lake" during the 18th to 20th centuries, and the way it traditionally reconstituted time in its depiction of landscapes. In other words, the paper sees the way these works [“A-delos” and “To Vouni”] reconstitute time as a subversive postcolonial statement about the Mediterranean.

References:

Crane, Susan (2005). «The Conundrum of Ephemerality: Time, Memory and Museum». In Sharon MacDonald (Ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Museum Studies*. Blackwell Publishers, pp. 98-109.

Galanopoulou, C. (2007). *Nadia Kalara: Terra sine sanguis*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.nadiakalara.gr/> (October, 2023).

Hall, S., & Morley, D. (Eds.). (2019). *Essential essays, volume 2: Identity and diaspora* (Stuart Hall: Selected writings). Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books.

Papaloizou, Louisa (2020). *To Vouni*. To Rodakio: Athens.

Säid, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.