

RESOURCES FOR A HISTORY OF THE NOTION OF GENRE

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RESUMO: *Diferentemente das explicações do mundo primitivas naturalistas ou mitológicas e literárias, a noção de gênero, implicando categorias universais de seres, tinha duas funções básicas no contexto histórico e cultural no qual surgiu: fornecer ao homem um outro critério de pensamento e entendimento do mundo como um universo racionalmente organizado, e possibilitar uma intervenção nesse mesmo universo à medida que, ao usar as classes de gêneros e as sub-classes das espécies, esta noção podia atribuir uma organização e uma hierarquia de acordo com as suas próprias perspectivas, valores e interesses aos fenômenos naturais e aos problemas humanos.*

ABSTRACT: *Unlike the primitive naturalistic or mythological and literary explanations of the world, the notion of genre, implying universal categories of beings, had two basic functions, in the historical and cultural context in which it arose: to provide man with another criterion of thinking and understanding the world as a rationally organized universe, and to make possible an intervention in this very universe insofar as, using the classes of the genres and the subclasses of the species, this notion could attribute an organization and a hierarchy in accordance with their own perspectives, values and interests to natural phenomena and human problems.*

1. Setting the problem

In the history of Western thought, or more precisely, among the Greek “pre-Socratics”, around the 5th century B.C., appear the first signs of a rational order, which is expressed by the notions of “founding element” (*arche*), “generation” (*genesis*) and, later, of “being” (*on*), concepts which are historically interrelated. These notions appear in the texts of Thales, Anaximander, Parmenides and others, and from the Socratic

period on, with Plato, Aristotle and all those, who followed them in a way or other, in the context of the investigation about being, reason and truth.

Not much defined at its beginning, and having to struggle for space with other forms of interpretations of the world, the new order is gradually assuming the function of a directing axis of the philosophical, scientific, cultural and political systems, relegating its predecessors based on sensitive impressions or on interpretations bearing a mythical, fictional or rhetorical stamp, functions that had been considered for a long time as secondary in the field of knowledge, for they were “only” responsible, especially since Plato, for *opinions*, *creeds* and *fantasies*, in the set of human values. For those who defended rational order, the things related to concrete experience, as well as everything concerning the *emotional*, the *sensitive*, the *mimetic* and the *rhetorical*, were put in equivalent fields insofar as they were opposed to real knowledge (*episteme*).

2. Ionian thought

Some of the ancient Ionian philosophers of Minor Asia, such as Thales (640-545 B.C.), Anaximander (610-517 B.C.), Anaximenes (588-524 B.C.), Heraclitus (576-480 B.C.) and others sought the fundamental elements of the universe in that which the senses revealed to them – earth, water, fire and air – all the rest would originate in a process of genetic transformation. Thales, for instance, presumes a unique original element: *water* or liquid, permeated by divine energy, whereas Anaximenes postulated that *air* was its prime matter. He claimed that all the natural elements resulted from the combination of the diverse states of the air, by condensation or rarefaction.

It is worth emphasizing that Ionian thinkers¹ shared the idea of “transformation”, as a consequence of their interest in what happened to the physical phenomena, in contrast to the mythical tradition according to which any change sounded strange, since it was based on the perspective of the gods, who were, as a last resort, the reference for man.²

In the mythical world each thing definitely occupies its place, has its meaning and function established once for ever. The variants of the mythical plots, for instance, are only aimed at adjusting the specific local and temporal determinations to the basic nuclei of myths. In an archeological perspective, the history of creation was a theogony before being a cosmogony. Only afterwards an anthropological focus will come forth, as much in the sense that the human being comes to occupy the center of the universe as in the sense that man constitutes himself by

means of his work and creation, situations which introduce new parameters according to which the relation between man and the gods is to be thought.

3. Anaximander's "boundless"

Unlike the other Ionian philosophers, Anaximander proposed an element of origin that he called "the boundless" (*apeiron*), or better, *apeiron*, where the "a" indicates "absence of limit", and he did not refer to any of the already known substances, but he presumably conceived a complex the components of which could, in some circumstances, separate from one another, resulting in the things of the sensitive world. Hence this revealed a zone of "availability" or "virtuality" anterior to the singular matters, in a stage in which these matters would still remain in their original chaotic state. It would be advisable to remember that the idea of "Chaos", that Hesiod thought to have existed before the Earth, suggested the meanings of "absence of order" or "formless". The transition to the idea of "cosmos" would imply the notions of "order, organization, ornament". In the Middle Ages the harmony and the equilibrium of the stars were interpreted as the manifestations of the divine, as forms of his love for the beauty of the visible universe. At the end of the "Paradise" Dante will refer to *l'Amor che move il sol e l'altre stelle*. The term "cosmetic" maintained these features.

As a generative factor, the "boundless" is characterized by duration in time, a condition which enables it to provide infinitely basic substance or, as Aristotle states it in *Physics* (Peters, 1967,32), a necessary condition "so that generation and destruction are not lacking". In another passage (*Physics*, III, 203 b), alluding to the pre-Socratics, the philosopher says: "... the infinite, after all, is a divine being, since it is immortal and cannot perish nor can it be destroyed, as Anaximander and many other physicists assert it". Referring to the "boundless", Conford (1952, 262) explains that it "constituted a sort of indistinct unity, out of which could arise the four other elements to occupy the places that were their share". And he remembers Aristotle, for whom the basic matter had to possess a boundless nature because, if in this stage it were composed of different and antagonistic substances, like the four elements, these elements would annihilate themselves mutually, even before they would adopt their sensitive forms, as it occurs when a cold substance joins a warm one, or vice-versa. Another scholar (Gomes, 1973, 41-2) describes pre-Socratic thought as going "from physics to metaphysics... with the goal to show, not exactly what is beyond nature, or *physis*, but what is there before it, the causes that determine, order, plan it".

Then it will be necessary to think the generating element, in the same way as the notion of genre, in a field that is indefinite or abstract enough to be able to involve attributes the distinctions or similarities of which neither annihilate themselves at the very origin nor project themselves into an indefinite repetition.

Studying the Ancients' opinions about the notion of infinite, Aristotle (*Physics*, III, 203 b) relates that Anaxagoras, one of Anaximenes' disciples, would have supposed a rational principle that would initiate the process of separation of the substances from their original chaotic state. This principle would be the one:

*...there must exist some principle that explains generation;...
...for him this principle is the one, that he calls mind or spirit;
and the mind operates in an intelligent way, resting on some
determined principle. It necessarily results from this that some
time all things must have existed simultaneously and that, at a
determined moment, they started to move.*

An interesting fact is that the tendency to reciprocal annihilation of the opposed elements, or “antagonistic” elements, as Anaximander calls them (Sousa; 1978, 17), adopts tragic dimensions in his thought. At least this is the impression we have today when we read one of his assertions made in a tone near to apocalyptic prevision, sort of original sin of the matter. He says: “Where things have their origin from, there they shall go to ground, according to necessity; because they have to do penance and be judged for their injustices, in accordance with the order of time.”

Fragments like this one have stimulated the effort of the researchers' interpretations of all times. If we base our interpretation on the ethical and religious suggestions, which would certainly be the marks of that time, there remains the abstract basis characteristic of the speculative element which is implicit in Anaximander's idea of the “boundless” that characterizes the primary substance the components of which, giving up the state of pure latency in order to transform themselves into concrete things, are condemned to assume their natural condition of antagonism (and, therefore, of injustice and destruction) when confronted with the other elements.

Alluding to the cultural context of that period, Conford (1952, 54) speaks of the contrast between the tendency to consider all bodies as constituted by opposed elements – designated as “*dogmatism a priori*” – and that of Hippocrates which he calls “*empirical method*”:

This polemic against Natural Philosophy is very explanatory when we consider what is historically behind it. The abstract conception

according to which bodies are constituted by opposed elements, conservation is due to a sort of equilibrium or proportion of hostile forces and its destruction is due to the undue predominance of one opposed element over the others, was formulated in the first place by the philosophers. When we analyze Anaximander's system we will see that the four cardinal opposed elements mentioned by Hippocrates – the warm and the cold, the moist and the dry – play a very important part in his cosmogony. They can be identified as the four forces of the seasons, Summer and Winter, periods of rain and dryness; and, in the order of space, they transform themselves into Empedocles' four elements, fire, air, water, earth. Besides, Anaximander had the notion of a “just” equilibrium, periodically reestablished when one of the forces suffers the consequences of its aggression against the other one. Nevertheless from this point on, Philosophy and Medicine begin to diverge, and we know who was the physician who began to react against the philosophers.

Adopting another approach, however, we cannot forget that Anaximander's “boundless”, besides its capacity to generate things, implying a relation of cause and effect, possesses as well the functions to unite and organize them in common fields, if we consider their nuclear aspects, a process which can be identified with the constitution of the notions of genre and species, concepts that complete themselves as a diagram in the same way as the things of the world articulate themselves in human perception.

4. From mythical fiction to natural world

If the search for the matrices of the universe in the physical substances shows the turning point of the Ionian period, as Vernant (1996; 87) remembers it, for *it consecrates the advent of a form of thought and of a system of explanation without analogy to myth* it is true that it lets as well foresee that the first thinkers did not precisely distinguish the difference between the singular condition of sensitive things (their concrete and particular character) and that which, implicit in them³, could embrace, organize or generate the multiplicity of things, that is, between the concrete phenomena and the abstract concept that explains and orders them, or as Kirk and Raven (1966, VI, 266-68) write:

We must constantly have in mind that pre-Socratic thinkers had not yet faced the precise distinction of the different ways of existence and that Plato's precursors could think that what for us is evidently not concrete and immaterial, for example a subjective, non-material disposition, possessed what they

supposed to be the ultimate characteristic of “being”, that is concrete magnitude. In other words, they probably did not totally distinguish the classification of ordered things, but they probably believed that this disposition possessed the same concretion and reality than the thing itself.

To this effect we could say that Anaximander’s idea of “boundless” to indicate the hypothetical original substance contains the germ of the coupling between the notions of classification (as genre or class of objects) and the “ordered things” (as species or similar objects). Therefore his formulation has archeological value as a sign of the transition from mythical thought to abstract rational thought.

5. Generation and genre

The notion of “genre” was linked by its semantic root to the term “generation”, but it seems that only from a certain moment on it adopts the meaning of rational or logic category. Studying Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, Pierre Aubenque (1966, 222) remembers that the idea of unity is the leading thread that allows us to pass from the physical meaning of the term to its logic meaning. In fact, enumerating the meanings of the term, Aristotle (*Metaphysics*, 1024 fol.), includes racial transmission among other forms of expressing the permanence of the features that define the nature and the function of the genre: a) “when a generation of beings that have the same form is continuous”; b) “prime origin of beings”; c) “the genre is the substrate of differences; “the genre is the prime element, which is included in the essence, and the differences of which are said to be the qualities”, “Prime Mover”, etc.

The fact that the first reflections about the fundamentals of universe were based on physical elements – therefore the Ionian philosophers were known as the *physikoi* or scholars of nature (*physis*) – does not only reveal the polemical character they had in confrontation with the other currents of thought of that time, but it reveals as well, and maybe this is the most significant aspect, that they hoped to find the “link” or the “way of passage”, as to say, that leads them from the sensitive things to the basic original substance. They certainly conducted their investigations with the objective to solve an ampler abstract problem, which was implicit in the idea of process or genesis, that is: which prime matter would have produced the multiplicity of existing things? Or better, how can we understand a condition capable of generating the multiple sensitive substances? We know that the initial suggestions about the four basic substances would be substituted, from Parmenides and Plato on, by the

notions of “way of truth”, “archetype”, “idea” or “being”, with all the characteristics they attributed to them: an existence which is purely intelligible, abstract, one, without beginning nor end, hence, uncreated, imperishable, eternal, always identical to itself, immobile, indivisible, divine, etc.

6. From the sensitive singular to the generic principle

Although the Ionian philosophers conceived the primary substances as concrete elements, they considered that the term *arche* also implied, beyond the ideas of “*beginning*” or “*starting-point*”, a generative process, which leads us to suppose that those substances had something ampler. What was lacking, of course, as far as these substances are concerned, was the means to prove that which, by analogy, revealed the empiric experience relative to the races. In other words, it seems that the time of the Ionian thinkers lacked a rational instrument that solved the problem of the relation between the levels of the sensitive and the intelligible applicable to the existing objects.

We saw that it was Anaximander who enlarged the semantic field of the prime matter or *arche*, replacing Empedocle’s four elements (*water, earth, fire and air*) by a unique substance of generic nature or “the boundless”, which is certainly the root of the idea of the universal. Thus he would imagine a substance the nature of which could have a comprehensive function, that is, capable of including other substances related to each other by common features.

E. F. Peters (1967: 36) considers Anaximander’s formulation “boundless” a considerable progress as far as the establishing of the concept of abstraction is concerned, this concept being necessary to overcome the inherent limitations of the singular sensitive beings in order to make them able to function as a basis or a common source of other beings:

The first candidates for constitutive elements of things were individual natural substances, that is, water or moisture (Thales) and air, but Anaximander’s suggestion that arche was something boundless, gave an enormous step forward in the sense of abstraction, getting away from the purely sensory impression. He gave way to the possibility that the arche be something more basic than that which could be perceived by the senses, although apeiron was, at that stage, unequivocally material.

Anaximander’s “boundless” would open the perspectives for a formulation of the abstract component developed from Parmenides and

Plato on. This component would be the common basis that would make possible the formulation of the logical and scientific principles charged to provide the uniform criteria for the comprehension and the organization of the phenomena, overcoming the inherent limitations of the sensitive and of the individual opinions. There was certainly still a long way to go, but the change of focus represented an important initial step towards the knowledge of the causes of the phenomena as well as of the mechanisms of thought, which allowed a greater control over the data of knowledge, of perception and of fantasy.⁴ Actually perception and imagination were never eliminated from the human horizon, in spite of the censure that, very early, theologians, philosophers and scientists imposed upon them.

7. Three examples

As a simple illustration, let us examine three cases which can give an idea of how the rational way of thinking developed from Anaximander's suggestions on about the "boundless" could have served as a parameter to organize sets of data or phenomena, giving them the format of a system which could be represented by a central nucleus as "being" (or genre) from which derive elements that are interrelated by formal, thematic, logical and causal criteria (or species). This connection, however, presumes some general principles, the fruits of a whole work achieved by the philosophers and which constitutes a sort of first statute of rational thought: the statute of hierarchy, through which the nucleus is considered more important than the elements it organizes; the statute of temporal precedence, by which is being affirmed that the nucleus precedes, since it is eternal, the elements it orders; the statute of generation according to which the nucleus contains the fundamental features that become manifest in the generated elements; the statute of cause according to which the nucleus is said to be (or to possess) the cause that determines the elements that gyrate in its orbit, the statute of unity, through which the nucleus possesses [is endowed with] an abstract, universal and indivisible nature, a principle that enables it to articulate distinct elements into an organic whole in accordance with the unity of origin; the statute of identity, through which the nucleus always remains equal to itself in order to serve as a measure of self-knowledge and of evaluation of what is permanent and what transforms itself.

8. Verisimilitude in poetry

A first example of the rational way of thinking can be identified in Aristotle's *Poetics*. Condemned by Plato, poetry and rhetoric are rehabilitated by Aristotle as legitimate forms of human expression.

According to him, neither the concept of “mimesis” is incompatible with the process of knowledge nor the notions of “being” and of “truth” stop being useful to understand experience and to practice interpersonal relations, naturally composed by a rich and profuse prime-matter, of the most various origins and natures.

This prime-matter does not properly consist in the “being” or in the “truth” of philosophy or of science, based on primal causes or on universal laws, but in something malleable and multiform that uses its similitude with the being and with truth to fulfill its function of convincing. Calling it “verisimilitude”, Aristotle moves the axis of true knowledge (*episteme*) towards that of opinion (*doxa*), the axis of the philosopher/scientist towards that of the common man, who evaluates things by the impressions they cause him and by the conditions of his immediate life. The fact that it remains on the level of simple similitude with the true being does not mean to accept the Sophists’ opinions, for whom, according to a Platonic account attributed to Protagoras, “truth reduces itself for each one to the opinion that his sensation translates”. Although Aristotle recognized that, “due to their very nature the true and the just are better than their opposites”, he admitted (*Rhetoric*, I, IV) that one could use less rigorous arguments and proofs in front of specific listeners:

In the presence of certain listeners, even if we were in possession of the most rigorous science, it would be difficult to extract out of it convincing proofs for our speeches. For speech inspired by science belongs to teaching; this speech is impossible here because of the necessity to extract the proofs and the reasoning out of common arguments, as we said in *Topics* when we spoke of the way to address multitudes.

It is in *Poetics* that he will use the notion of verisimilitude as being the place of the possible in opposition to that which exhausts itself in the event. It is the well-known passage in which the philosopher distinguishes between poetry and history, but it is worth repeating it:

From what was said, it is evident that it is not the poet’s duty to relate exactly what happened; but what could have happened, the possible, according to verisimilitude or necessity. The historian and the poet are not different from one another, because of the fact that the first writes in prose and the second in verse (for, if Herodotus’ work had been composed in verse, it would still be a work of history, with or without meter). They are different from one another, because one wrote what happened and the other one what could have happened. Therefore poetry is more philosophical and more elevated than history, because poetry remains in the domain of the universal and history only examines the particular.

We can observe that poetic verisimilitude is nearer to the idea of “universal” (*what could have happened* or *the possible*), that is why

poetry is considered *more philosophical and more elevated than history*. That which supports the poetic credibility of a *possible* event is not exactly the fact that it has effective possibility to exist, although this event has its importance⁵, but it is its basis of *verisimilitude* in terms of analogy with something logically recognized as true, in which case it integrates the category of truth in order to be accepted by the listener. This condition is reinforced by the allusion to *necessity*, that is, presuming a unity of actions or facts related in a sequence of cause and effect, while presenting one of them, the other will be considered necessary, and the whole set will seem logical, hence *verisimilar*.

Therefore the *possible*, for Aristotle, is a poetical function that is based upon the similitude that the processes of *verisimilitude* and *necessity* have with the rational being and logic. Poetry would not mimitize the singular phenomena, but the categories of the *verisimilar* and of the *necessary*, that is, intelligible entities, rehabilitating the poet's production of the pure appearance of things, an argument used by Plato to condemn artistic mimesis, claiming that it would only express a sensitive simulacrum of the being, far from the universal idea.⁶

9. Verisimilitude in rhetoric

If the similitude with the intelligible being and with the causal principle is important in poetry, it will be even more important in rhetorical activity [rhetoric], since its principal objective is persuasion, fostered before all by the fame rational means enjoy, adjusted, of course, to the logic of common-sense and of the established values.

This concern about persuasion becomes manifest in the production of rhetorical speech, from the very beginning on, when the state of the cause is being defined, that is, the main point of the dispute, - which has implications with the “genre” – or when the proceedings that will shape the arguments and the proofs are being chosen: the enthymemes, the examples, the indices, the common-places, etc. Each item represents, in his field of pertinence, a micro-paradigm endowed with a double function. In the first place, it must be identified with recognized and accepted bases, either on the level of the intelligible “being”, circumscribed by logical and rational thought, or on the level of daily experience, open to the multiple evidences of the senses or of the inherited cultural values. In the second place, once it assumes its function as a “principle” that founds, explains and articulates the events that are linked to it, that is, the proofs, a genetic process of cause and effect forms itself, a process that centralizes the force of the arguments in the internal logic of the discursive process, exempting the orator of second intentions or of the manipulation in the exposition of the facts and ways of reasoning.

The persuasive function of the rhetorical instruments explains Aristotle's concern about situating, at the beginning of the first book of *Rhetoric*, the similarities (or simulacra) which this art has with other fields of knowledge, that are sufficiently accepted so that they do not awaken suspicion. And his analysis shows that: the efficiency of the rhetorical enthymeme results from its similarity with the dialectic syllogism; the use of arguments based upon human passions and customs are supported by the science of customs; the disputes between citizens can simulate political activity; events or real facts assume a generalizing function of examples and can be applied to other singular facts; phrases and thoughts are categorized under the rubric of "common-places", etc.

Summing up, we can say that such linguistic and representative mechanisms, based upon their similarity with the rational process of cause and effect, move the machine of rhetorical persuasion. Each one fulfills in its way the function that Aristotle attributes specifically to the rhetorical syllogism, that of an "apparent syllogism", a function which Chaïm, Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Titeca extend to a whole set of procedures calling them "almost-logical".

10. The technique of perspective

This example was extracted from one of the many Renaissance texts of the 15th century which discuss the relation between sciences and painting. It is the study about the theory of perspective written by the Italian painter Piero della Francesca. Its importance for my exposition resides in the fact that it was the first treatise that developed a method satisfying a common aspiration of painting, sculpture and architecture at that time, that is the aspiration of capturing, so to say, the "real" form of nature, thus renewing the ancient classical concept of imitation⁷, now based on scientific laws, especially on mathematics and geometry. Besides the treatise shows that science was considered an instrument and manifestation of rational thought that could order the multiplicity of the real and educate the senses to the similarity of the Unitarian being. Such ambition fitted into the greater project of Renaissance scholars, whose aim was to recuperate the classical origins of culture, reactivating the epic euphoria of dominating the world by the universalizing action of reason.

In Piero della Francesca's treatise *De prospectiva pingendi* the study of painting is divided into three parts: drawing, which has to do with the profiles and outlines of objects; commensuration⁸ or perspective, which deals with the distribution of the profiles and outlines of the objects in the space of the painting; and coloring, which discusses the application of clear and dark colors and tones, according to how they appear in the objects, considering the greater or lower incidence of light on them.

Of these three parts, perspective is the one that concentrates the greatest interest of the system, since its basis of representation is formed by lines, angles, geometric figures and proportions that are responsible for the illusion or verisimilitude between the order the objects have in the tri-dimensional space of reality (height, width and depth) and the order they seem to have in the bi-dimensional space of the painting (height and width). Therefore Piero della Francesca was said to present a conception of art as the “mirror of the world”, or his work was said to offer the means to guarantee a “graphic formulation of a mathematically organized world”. In both cases it is suggested that the basic function of the perspective technique of the Renaissance was to simulate a precise correspondence between the sensitive configuration of the real and its intelligible fundament expressed by numbers and by geometric relations as rational formulas of the bodies situated in space, thus, equivalent to the being they represent.

Perspective, in its turn, is composed of five parts: sight (that is, the eye), the shape of the thing one sees, the distance between the thing and the eye, the lines that link the thing to the eye, expressing geometrically the size of the objects in accordance with the distance that separates them from the eye and, finally, the point where things are being represented. Piero della Francesca considers the eye as the most important part. And he explains:

because in the eye all things are seen under different angles; that is, when the things one sees are at the same distance from the eye, the largest thing presents itself under a larger angle than the small one, and, in a similar way, when things are at the same distance from the eye, the nearest thing presents itself under a larger angle than the farther, the decrease in size of the things results from their differences.⁹

The privileged position of sight is symptomatic of the way of perception of the Renaissance. We can observe, however, that the perception of things *when the things one sees are at the same distance of the eye, the largest thing presents itself under a larger angle than the small one or when things are at the same distance of the eye, the nearest thing presents itself under a larger angle than the farther one* already incorporates in its description the elements of its logical basis which is expressed in the relations between distances, sizes and proportions, “principles” that take upon themselves to orient or to correct the illusion of the senses. This possibility is given by the mathematical and geometrical sciences that divide spaces and distribute the objects in these spaces according to their corporal mass and the place they occupy in the whole set. It is in this sense that, the eye, while, looking in the direction of the object, articulates the whole area [sphere] around a central axis which has its equivalent in the “being” of the philosophers belonging to the essentialist

tendency (let us remember Anaximander, Parmenides and Plato). Nevertheless, in a rhetorical posture [attitude], the author puts a doubt into the mouth of his supposed reader: “And if you said to me: why do you put the eye in the center?” And he anticipates this question in his answer;

because it seems more convenient to me in order to see the work; nevertheless, you can stand wherever you want, as long as the limits that will be shown in the last figure will not be exceeded [from the first book, theorem XXX], and wherever you situate it it will result from that very proportion [...] ¹⁰

The “eye in the center” actually represents a sort of abstract, rational supra sensitive “universal spectator”, therefore the appearance of the object does not modify itself even if the empiric spectator changes his position, as long as some rules are being respected, that is, the individual observer must adjust himself to the impositions of the “laws” offered by the scientific system of the representation of the object. Since the tri-dimensional perspective of reality is represented in the bi-dimensional space of the painting, the use of the perspective technique guarantees that the dimension of depth does not get lost in the new space. In other words, depth, which is an exclusive property of the real begins to be part [in the form of representation] of the plane surface [superficies] of the painting, that does not possess that dimension. Objects and rational laws begin to coincide in the representation of the painting.

To conclude, we can say that the process of perspective in painting that was developed during the Renaissance was one the numerous applications that preceded rational functioning as a factor of the organization of real phenomena around a central nucleus (the being, the genre), given as an irradiating element of these very phenomena.

Notas

¹ The history of the search for the elements which founded the world allows us to think that it rose out of the desire to overcome an anxiety early developed among the Greeks, as a result of the observation that all things are perpetually being transformed, according to Heraclitus’ assertion, referred to by Plato, that *you would not step twice into the same river* (*Cratylus* 402a). At the same time, the Sophists express a totally opposed tendency, considering the world and society as spaces of action to be conquered by man, without the tragic polarization between mind and matter, being and seeming, eternity and time, according to the interpretation Plato left us of them.

² The idea of immobility, inherent to the mythical world, turns back with Parmenides and Plato, related to the “being”, as if it were an impersonalized version of the divine attribute. In other words, there would be a homology between the divine “being” and the rational “being”.

³ Actually, mythical thought as well as the first pre-Socratics’ thought seek the origins and the functioning of the world in the natural phenomena, with the exception that in

myth they appear behind the veil of allegory, they are anthropomorphized and move according to the gods' will or fancy, similar to the motivations of human beings, whereas for the first pre-Socratics substances act according to their inherent virtues.

⁴ The possibility of thinking abstractly by using constant parameters found in the whole of nature represents without any doubt one of the greatest discoveries yet accomplished by man.

⁵ To name characters or to refer to facts that really occurred can reinforce credibility, for, as Aristotle says (*Poetics*, chap. IX): "In the tragedy, poets use the names of existing characters, because the possible inspires confidence. We do not immediately believe that what did not happen is possible; as far as past facts are concerned, we do not discuss their possibility, for, if they had been impossible, they would not have happened".

⁶ The incompatibilities between universal and particular, ideal and real were always problems the philosophers tried to solve. For Hegel, art is the place of conciliation between the concrete individual and the abstract universal, for it allows the access to the idea or to the spirit in its very essence.

⁷ The term "imitation" is replaced by the term "representation", following the characteristic spirit of the Renaissance.

⁸ The verb "commensurate" has mathematical implications and means to measure two or more sizes using one and the same unit.

⁹ *De prospective pingendi*, p. 101.

¹⁰ The "eye in the center" has the function of an abstract, intelligible, "universal spectator", therefore the appearance of the object is not modified even if the empiric spectator changes his position. Since tri-dimensional perspective is represented in a bi-dimensional space, the technique of representation allows the recuperation of depth in the new space.

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