TRANSHISTORICAL DIALOGUE CONCERNING IMAGES: BALTRUŠAITIS AND KIRCHER

Summary. The article explores the works of Jurgis Baltrušaitis on depraved perspectives. In particular, it examines his references to Jesuit scholar Athanasius Kircher in the books dedicated to anamorphoses, aberrations, Egyptomania and distorting mirror’s reflections. The paper questions what led Baltrušaitis to the dialogue with the German visionary. The close reading of Baltrušaitis works reveals that in Kircher’s pre-modern thinking the art historian found those domains of between-the-two, communalities of art and science, art and nature, art and social imaginary that have become more important in postmodernist period. Kircher’s treatises, previously un-interpreted in the context of art history, encouraged the development of the broader studies of images focused on visual phenomena that remained for a long time outside the autonomous field of art history. Without privileging an aesthetic and evolutionary approach in art history, Baltrušaitis’ works reveal anthropological and ontological dimensions of images. They disclose that the image is always related to visual experience and imagination, which takes us beyond the horizon of reality.

Keywords: Jurgis Baltrušaitis, Athanasius Kircher, art history, images, visual studies, anamorphoses, aberrations, Egyptomania, nature’s art.

INTRODUCTION

Jurgis Baltrušaitis (1903–1988) is a renowned art historian of Lithuanian origin, whose research has offered new insights and subjects to a scholarly history of images. After completing a cycle of works on medieval architecture and fantastic imagery, he developed original studies of aberrations, showing that a positivist and progress-oriented art history has an inverted side – a reverse that hides an un-interpreted world of images and undetermined visual experiences: hetero-temporal phenomena, atemporal connections, mysterious survivals, latencies, fallacies, deformations of reality, deviations from truth, illusions, perversions, esoteric imagery. However, his works that cover a wide range of topics are still difficult to define in any epistemic framework. André Chastel reasonably defined his works on the deviations and “depraved” perspectives as a “metamorphology of Baltrušaitis” parallel to that of a “metapsychology of Freud.” Still this qualification does not fully describe Baltrušaitis’ efforts to transgress the boundaries of art history and to develop a broader and a more inclusive history of images.

This article offers one of the keys that can help gain a better understanding of Baltrušaitis’ methodological-theoretical perspective, highlighting relevance of his ideas.

Baltrušaitis’ intellectual biography,\(^1\) his aesthetics of the fantastic, contribution to medieval art history as well as other research fields have been studied more consistently by Jean-François Chevrier\(^4\) and Maddalena Mazzocut-Mis. Baltrušaitis’ ontology of the deformity, his interest in anti-Classical modes of art and investigations of the techniques of anamorphoses have been discussed in a special issue of Quaderni di PsicoArt – Nel cuore della meraviglia Omaggio a Jurgis Baltrušaitis (2010). This article focuses on Baltrušaitis’ polyptych of “depraved” perspectives and his scientific dialogue with Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680) developed therein. Until now, researchers of art history and visual culture did not pay attention to how consistently Baltrušaitis read the treatises of the German Jesuit by grasping in them potential subjects to the study of image, vision and imagination. Therefore this study based on the material of Baltrušaitis’ archive reconstructs
for the first time the atemporal dialogue – identifies Baltrušaitis’ references to Kircher and discloses discourses, which provide an inexhaustible resource for the studies of art and image-based visual culture that includes both material and mental picturing, seeing, imagining or visioning.

Baltrušaitis is known as a representative of the aesthetic formalism of Henri Focillon (1881–1943). However, it should be mentioned that in his search for a new methodological approach in art history Baltrušaitis closely collaborated with the members of the Warburg Institute. He himself participated in the programme of lectures at the Warburg in London for 1936 and 1937. From 1940 to 1946 he organized meetings of “focilloniens” and the members of Warburg Institute in his apartment Villa Virginie (the 14th arrondissement) every Wednesday evening.7 Likewise Warburg, Baltrušaitis used a visual method to present a certain configuration of images, to compare and confront images, to reveal their revivals, and to perceive their transformative powers. He considered the layers of image and imagination that go beyond the differences between art and sciences, culture and nature, including different visual objects that participate in the construction of knowledge. He studied a scientific iconography, popular imagery and survival of myths and legends. And he has laid the greatest stress on fantastic art forms, various deformations of reality, illusory and visionary phenomena, much like Warburg in Dionysian “arts of dreaming” and “emotive formulas” (pathosformeln).

A comparative analysis of methods and ideas of the two influential art historians would require further investigation. In this article it is important to pay attention to the fact that in his search for new methodological principles Baltrušaitis discovered a crucial source of inspiration in the works of the Jesuit polymath Kircher. It is likely that the title of Baltrušaitis’ project on “depraved” perspectives that he later called aberrations was also born while reading the Jesuit’s books, in which we often find the Latin aberrans, aberrare (to stray, to deviate). As is well known, Athanasius Kircher is an esoteric thinker whose works embrace natural sciences and occult philosophy, “sense and nonsense, universal rules and anecdotes.”9 It needs to be emphasized that Kircher’s books are lavishly illustrated – distinguished by spectacular engravings and amazing iconography. Recently, a memorable virtual exhibition Map of Thread. Pages of Athanasius Kircher’s books was made on the initiative of Vilnius University Library with the help of illustrations revealing an incredible variety of his activities.11

It is also worth mentioning that despite Kircher’s fame in the 17th century during the age of Enlightenment he was considered a dilettante and completely forgotten until the second half of the 20th century. What led Baltrušaitis to the dialogue with the German visionary, who continued to be at the margins of cultural studies? It seems that in Kircher’s pre-modern thinking the art historian found those domains of between-the-two, communalities of art and science, art and nature, art and social imaginary that have become more important in postmodernist period. These readings of forgotten treatises helped him to develop the studies of images focused on visual phenomena that remained for a long time outside the autonomous field of art history.

SCIENTIFIC AND ARTISTIC DEVICES

The first reference to Kircher can be found in Baltrušaitis book on anamorphoses. Contrary to the approach developed in art history that perspective is an instrument for exact representation and reproduction of reality, in his book Baltrušaitis shows that perspective is an ambivalent phenomenon – an anamorphosis is a fantastic side of perspective, transposing it into the realm of illusion. In other words, it is an artificial device that paradoxically uses the same rules of perspective to project forms outside themselves and “distorts them so that when viewed from a certain point they return to normal.”13 It is a mechanism that produces effective optical illusions, hallucinations and dreams. Optical illusions have fascinated scientists, philosophers and artists of all times beginning from the Greco-Roman world. Trajan’s Column in the 16th century was considered as an optical wonder. Kircher was particularly interested in the accelerated and distorted perspectives that transfigure nature (Fig. 1).14
The virtuosity of Erhard Schön, Leonardo da Vinci, Hans Holbein and other artists who created overlapping (puzzle) pictures and distorted images reveals that anamorphoses was not just an optical game. According to Baltrušaitis, in the 16th and 17th centuries research centres were established, in which sophisticated procedures, techniques and apparatuses have been elaborated and employed by scholars and artists to create anamorphic compositions. The optical contrivances and magic effects of distorted perspectives were passionately studied in Paris (Order of the Minims) and Rome (monastery of Santa Trinita dei Monti) by French scholars, architects, mathematicians, and philosophers (Jean-François Niceron, Emmanuel Maignan, Marin Mersenne, René Descartes, Gerard Desargues to name just a few) preoccupied with the questions of illusion, the vision of things, and the uncertainty of appearances.

In the chapter entitled “German visionaries: Kircher and Schott” Baltrušaitis discusses Kircher’s contribution to the evolution of anamorphosis. As a scholar and a collector of curiosities Kircher studied ancient optics, catoptrics, gnomonics and the medieval tradition of natural magic, as well as cosmography and ancient astrological doctrines. He published on magnetism, music, the celestial, terrestrial and subterranean worlds, light and shade, hieroglyphs of Egypt and a variety of other topics. Therefore he studied a perspective in a wide and pre-modern episteme “involved in systems both real and supernatural.” Baltrušaitis examined his *Ars Magna lucis et umbrae* (1646), in which the Jesuit scholar researched optical rays and discussed the problems of natural and artificial perspective, as well as geometrical and mechanical means of distorting and rectifying pictures.

These complex studies encouraged Baltrušaitis not so much to focus on the pictures in science (scientific representations and illustrative material) that surely influenced artistic life, as on the analysis of a wider sphere of vision and technical visual devices, which closely link science (arithmetic, geometry, physics) with art by drawing attention to visual perception and cognition. The study of visual techniques also led to exploration of the relationship between image and viewer, reality and unreality, and the illusory nature of the image itself.

Following the universalist tradition Kircher was principally interested in perspective instruments and optical deprivations. He himself examined various systems to calculate perspective and distort forms. He also re-made himself apparatuses, among which was a mesoptic instrument that served to put into perspective any artefact and a magic lantern – a device to project figures on the screen using light and shadows – usually displayed in the cabinets of curiosities. Kircher is not an inventor of the camera obscura, but he is the first to employ a convex lens to perfect the projected image. Therefore he is considered as a contributor to the evolution of

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![Fig. 1. J. Baltrušaitis, the scheme of Trajan’s column. Following A. Kircher’s Ars Magna (1646), around 1950s. Pencil and pen drawing, private Baltrušaitis’ archive, Paris](image-url)
projected “ghostly figures” (fantasmatas) and to a pre-cinema history itself.

From Baltrušaitis’ point of view, he was an extraordinary visionary, who sought to apply anamorphic method to the creation of cities, mountains and parks. Kircher claimed that, when viewed from a certain angle, trees and plants in a garden could form animals that would look like those in a painting. Thus in his environment “the perspective instrument is no longer a static apparatus, registering visual rays. It becomes an active force, projecting around it worlds which are broken up and then recomposed as if by magic.” On his initiative the aberrations within perspective system that produce irrational effects and depend on the act of viewing (the viewer position) moved from the representation of the space into the real space and the experience of the space itself.

Kircher investigated the methods of mirror (catoptric) anamorphoses too (Fig. 2). He integrated cylindrical and conical anamorphoses into scholarly studies and his own Wunderkammern, therefore promoting their dissemination and causing a particular fascination in wider circles of society. Engraved illustrations and diagrams of Kircher’s ten-part book “The Great Art of Light and Shadow” (containing several hundred images) convey astonishing instruments and projective techniques that have been attentively studied by Baltrušaitis. As we can see in his sketches, the art historian explored the engravings in an attempt to better understand the modes of thinking picturing and forming curious perspectives.

It seems that Baltrušaitis studies of Kircher’s (as well as his contemporaries) books helped him to unlock in a completely different way the 17th century, which he called the epoch of Niceron. Rejecting the schematic nature of art styles he succeeded in linking geometrical optics, theological reflections and artistic experiments with Cartesian doubts and mechanical automata. Thus he not only resurrected those personalities, texts, and phenomena that have been excluded from a positivist paradigm, but also revealed that the history of perspective is interconnected with the development of optical apparatuses and processes of visual mediation that are themselves the bearers of meaning and in which viewers are actively involved.

MIRROR SPECTACLES

In a voluminous book Le Miroir (1978) Baltrušaitis returned to the analysis of Kircher’s Ars magna, in which the German polymath considered various phenomena of light and shadow (the sun, moon, stars, planets) as well as optical instruments that use mirrors and lenses. Kircher’s purpose was to provide a universal cosmology and to reveal the order behind the whole universe, thus he studied the powers of light and shade and how to put them to diverse uses. Synthesizing scientific knowledge he followed the Neoplatonic and hermetic tradition which associates natural philosophy with natural magic. Baltrušaitis was curious how Kircher develops rational explanation of the insanities of natural magic, the marvellous, the irrational and the hidden order under the mystery of appearances. Showing the network of connections between different systems of knowledge Kircher created the metaphysics of light through all traditions of philosophy, religion and science. He also developed a theory of two mirrors, one of which is a spotless Angelic mirror reflecting the divine light, and the second one is a Human mirror reflecting Angel’s light which undergoes certain refractions and distortions. Baltrušaitis took a great interest in the second one – a distorting mirror.
His final book concentrates on scientific legends and magic mirrors. It is a work of unusual erudition, where Baltrušaitis as a diligent encyclopaedist leads down confusing labyrinths of scientific, philosophical and artistic visions. The book explores the distorted and distorting, demonic and visionary history of mirrors which includes both the areas of rational science and creative visions, the Western and the Oriental legends that have inspired exiting and innovating developments in science and technology. Cosmographical symbols of ancient cultures, optical experiments of the cabinets of curiosities, dramatic metaphors of the beyond and the in-between, phantoms and simulacrum appear in the richly illustrated book. Reflexio (Latin for reflection) turns the attention to the depths of human consciousness. As much as artistic creativity captures the magical power of distorted mirrors, the scientific creativity damages the fragile border between reality and fantasy.

In the seventeenth century catoptric apparatus pondered the laws of vision, incorporating magic and mythology into scientific experiments. Special mechanisms using mirrors were included in the inventories of rarity cabinets – Kunst-und-Wunderkammern usually possessing a mechanical and optical section. The Museum Kircherianum installed in the Roman College had the most illustrious collection of apparatuses, description of which can be found in Ars Magna. Baltrušaitis studied the technical experiments with mirror reflections by Kircher and his student Gaspar Schott (1608–1666) that go well beyond the strictly technical framework. A variety of theatrical machines and metamorphic apparatuses created spectacular performances. For example, Kircher’s “catoptric theatre” (theatrum polydicticum) is a box that encloses little models fixed on both sides of the rotating scenography. The shutters with mirrors of the box enlarge perspective and reflect the exposed objects overturned, deformed or suspended in the air, multiplying fantastic representations. Another device looks like a long box, the interior of which is covered with mirrors, and the dimensions of which are those of a small house (6.50 m x 3.50 m). Those mechanisms were associated with considerations about...
the transformative powers of reflections and magical powers of illusions, reviving ancient beliefs combined with theological and Kabbalistic doctrines.

Kircher’s book describes seven metamorphoses and sophisticated machineries, which with the help of perspectival cones added on the wall and the roof, transform the viewers and objects in different ways. As it is shown in the catoptrical installation (Fig. 3) the viewer see himself in a mirror as a living being with the head of a donkey, ox, deer or other animal, instead of human face. Special devices, conical, spherical and waved mirrors attached to walls and ceilings could substitute one image for another, deforming and restoring figures, and getting ghostly effects that have exalted imaginings.23

Following Kircher, Baltrušaitis also decrypts the legend of Archimedes’ “burning mirrors” and subsequent scientific experiments that the Jesuit performed in Rome in order to concentrate solar energy. Baltrušaitis shows that from Archimedes to Buffon and from ancient catoptric treatises to contemporary solar power plants and lasers, mirrors helped to bring unbelievable ideas into reality. In literature and in art, man’s strangest metamorphoses begin with mirrors, reviving the ancient tales and legends. It is a window into the beyond, a spring of fantasies.

Referring to Kircher and examining the various facets of magic, distorting, fallacious mirrors that link the natural and artificial, Baltrušaitis has disclosed that the mirror as a meteorological phenomenon, optical instrument and universal metaphor is a phenomenon where reality and illusion, science and science fiction, calculation and imagination meet. “A hieroglyph of truth, a mirror is also a hieroglyph of falsehood”,24 which reflects a diversity of imaginary forms and fantasies that have the potential to be realized in reality.

In summary, it could be said that Baltrušaitis’ dialogue with fantasist Kircher and the analysis of his catoptrics (visionary science par excellence) encouraged him to link the history of art with the history of knowledge, and to include non-art images and mental imagery in the field of image studies. As well as to show that the ontological couple of image and imagination is linked to the remarkable experiments and visions. And finally, to focus on the image as a spectacle and process of seeing that engages the viewer’s imagination.

FUSIONS OF ART AND NATURE

In Aberrations (1957) Baltrušaitis considers visual phenomena that superimpose visions onto reality, thus entering into the field of anthropology of the imagination. According to him, aberrations25 are positive delusions of vision leading a viewer down poetic paths. Referring to natural history and natural philosophy Baltrušaitis exposes the fluidity of the boundary between art and nature. He depicts phantasies of natural sciences and delves into a nature’s art.

The book of four essays shows that a dividing line between art and nature was not always as clear as in modernity. Rarities of nature and artworks were displayed together in Wunderkammern. “In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a common aesthetic of the marvels of art and nature emerged, one that exploited the ancient opposition of art and nature to evoke wonder”.26 In the essay “Pictorial stones” we find illustrations of marvellous stones and minerals decorated with fabulous figures. The same hybrids of art and nature have been also studied in a two volume (atlas-like dimensions) Kircher’s masterwork Mundus Subterraneus (1665).27

Baltrušaitis’ text begins with a famous quote from Leonardo da Vinci, depicting his observations of dotted areas on the wall and mural marble lines that stimulated artist to enter imaginary landscapes.28 In the seventeenth century Flemish and Italian artists used to express such visions by painting directly on the stone. Baltrušaitis reminds us: “there are a lot of pictures where the figures were painted on agates or marbles whose very texture constituted a landscape décor”.29 Examining those figural stones (agates, carnelians, chalcedonies, jasper) with the painted surface, often displayed in a Kunstkammer (a miniature Kunstkammer), Baltrušaitis considers mysterious interplays of art and nature and nature inspired pictorial visions.
Thus he returns again to the works of Kircher who lived in the times when speculations on the art of Nature and the nature of Art, reviving ancient metaphysical doctrines and legendary sources, were widespread. In Baltrušaitis' words, namely Kircher gave the most comprehensive summary of those doctrines. Kircher's work, which dates from 1664, compiles many sources and revives them in a synthesis that is part of his vast cosmogony. Reading his grandiose book about magical "Subterranean World" and looking at its striking illustrations Baltrušaitis writes: "Minerals and metals naturally do occur acquiring strange appearances. Nature is a geometer, it is an optician, who follows the progress of perspective, and it is a painter. It thinks and acts like a man, and it is subject to the activity of higher powers."30

Baltrušaitis reproduces Kircher's illustrations that depict image-bearing stones and images made by nature (Fig. 4). Kircher methodically grouped the figural stones by subjects, figures, alphabet letters, interpreting their origins in different ways (starting with fortuitous and ending with divine and angelic).31 He studied extensively how nature creates pictures by linking a wide range of knowledge. "Kircher maintained the commonly held view of his time that a seminal or seed-like power manifested at Creation was responsible for the generation of plants, animals, and even minerals. According to Kircher, God endowed the world with panspermia, or the universal seeds of nature, at Creation."32 Thus he researched the images made by chance and the fossil bearing stones, exploring secret creative powers.

Baltrušaitis claims that the ancient Roman tradition of engraved gems and cameos has been revived in the 17th century. As is well known, Pliny the Elder in his Naturalis Historia (77 AD) devoted a separate chapter to stones, and in the chapter on the history of art he drew parallels between paintings and "organic" images within rocks and minerals. This Roman tradition was continued in scientific and religious doctrines during Middle Ages, revealing the supernatural and creative powers in natural objects. Rare stones were researched with passion in the 16th and 17th centuries in the framework of minerology, which considered various forms and species of stones, trying to define the style of nature's images and the forms of visible fossil fragments. The methodically accumulated collections of minerals, stones and fossils interested not only naturalists (biologists, geologists, geographers, physicians) but also artists in awakening their creative imagination.

Picture stones were consistently explored in the 20th century by the French philosopher and writer Roger Caillois (1913–1978) in the context of surrealism and abstract art, when there re-emerged a tendency to envisage surreal worlds in a complex nature of reality.33 This topic brought Baltrušaitis closer to Caillois who tried in a coherent way to explain how mineral structures resemble abstract paintings.

Contemporary art challenges once again the distinctions between animate and inanimate materials and features various fossils and arche-fossils, addressing new materialisms and creating new mineral ontologies (as a reference to Quentin Meillassoux).34 Thus, it can be said that Baltrušaitis was one of the first to touch on the little-explored and relevant field of mysterious associations of art and nature, bringing together nature's artfulness and artistic imagination.
PHANTASMAGORIC VISIONS: BETWEEN MYTH AND REALITY

Let’s also remember that Kircher was an orientalist-comparatist striving to create a universal language. He is the author of comprehensive book *China Illustrata* (1667) and three volume work *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (1652–1654) that stimulated the development of Sinology and Egyptology. Both works involved creative imagination in the historical (scientific) investigations and became important sources for Baltrušaitis’ studies of Egyptomania published in *La quête d’Isis* (1967).

From the point of view of the German Jesuit the most ancient civilizations of China and Egypt, as well as their deities, sacred mysteries and hieroglyphs were closely associated. Kircher drew on the authentic information of missionaries and diplomats developing spectacular narratives that indicated contacts and interaction between different cultures by entering a fantasy space. In *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* he gave overview of Egypt geography, history, religious and cultural practices, treating Egypt as a primordial source of different civilisations and eternal wisdom. Kircher tried to explain why the Egyptian gods (and particularly goddess Isis) were worshipped in ancient Greek culture and the Roman Empire, and to reveal how the Egyptian religion interacted with multiple belief systems. In search of the universality of gods, he discussed “the affinities between Egyptian religion and the religious practices and mythologies of China, Japan, India, Mongolia, and strange enough, the Aztec culture of America. The similarities, according to Kircher, result from shared ancestry.”

Baltrušaitis methodically explores how the cult of the goddess Isis survived and has been revived (since the 7th century BC in the Greek world until the poetic and revolutionary reveries of the 18th and 19th centuries). He pays special attention to how in the 17th century missionaries and scholars, who developed linguistic, ethnological, iconographic studies and created misleading interpretations of Egyptian history and fantastic imagery, which was pushed to the cultural margins in later centuries by the positivist model of scientific knowledge. However, those interpretations (as the art historian emphasizes) constantly stimulated social and cultural imaginary and remained significant sources for artistic imagination. Thus Kircher’s “mistakes” had a certain fascination for Baltrušaitis. He saw in those mistakes the revelation moments stimulating new discoveries and creations. Therefore he used to say in his interviews that falsities constitute an important part of our knowledge.

Let’s take a closer look at a few references to Kircher in Baltrušaitis’ book “In Search of Isis”. Already in the introduction we find illustrations of Kircher’s works demonstrating that Egypt is a primarily source of spirituality and wisdom. Baltrušaitis writes: “It [Egypt] is a key to dreams and a cosmogonic arcane. The Egyptian hieroglyphs, developed at the dawn of civilization, contain initial truths, including the dogma of the Trinity and the emblems of Christianity. Father Kircher (from 1650 to 1666) reaches the summit of the kind of speculations. The Egypt as well as the whole world is viewed as just like hieroglyphs. A vast literature abounds on the *symbolica Aegyptiorum sapientia* (Nicolas Caussin, 1634), which arise profound questions about figurative approach of hermetic thought in general.” It was in Kircher’s works that the studies of Christian iconography were developed with the aim to compare it with Egyptian symbolism (for example, Goddess Isis offering her breast to god Horus seated on her lap is compared nearly two thousand years BC ago. Various practices of their cults can be observed until the end of the Middle Ages. The Egypt renewed by a set of artifacts was superimposed on the historic Egypt columns and tombs which have been covered with sand and remained inaccessible.”

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According to Baltrušaitis, Egyptomania was developed by scientists who, like Kircher, created science-fictions and "mummy novels" by linking carefully collected facts with pure imagination. Those fantastic images, which were disseminated by philosophers, archaeologists and historians, were also taken over by artists, who transferred the images of mythical Egypt and esoteric signs into literature, theatrical scenography and figurative art.

Kircher in his *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* compared Isis with druid goddess, depicting her with many breasts. Such an iconography of Isis multimam-mia intensified comparisons between pagan Celtic and Christianity beliefs by giving birth to insane fables in France, Germany, and Italy (Fig. 5). A lot of fantastic images were born in comparative studies of civilizations. Kircher's work is a great example of this. Compiling information of missionaries and ancient treatises in his first study (*Prodomus coptus sive aegyptiacus*, 1636) he already claimed that the Indians worshipped the same gods as the Egyptians and built similar temples, and thus he relocated the Egyptian myth to the Asian region.

Kircher did not hesitate to distort classical texts and historical facts in developing his theory of the "Egyptian colonies" in India and China, which cultivated similar forms of religious life. Baltrušaitis defines his method as follows: "A display of erudition, personal names and incontestable facts constitute a framework for creation of fiction – this is the point of Kircherian method. He was providing glosses and rewriting ancient texts as needed while upholding their prestige. He took multitude quotations from different sources, accumulated exclusive information with a passion, an inflexible dialectic he changed in favour of confusions to give demonstrations conducted at will. The whole corpus seems to be the last acquisition of modern knowledge that corresponds to the time aspiration." As a consequence of such research and the spread of pan-Egyptianism, it is not surprising that the images of mystical pyramids and worshipped sacred cows have spread to the artistic representations of world creation and other iconographic compositions.

Decorated with wonderful illustrations Kircher's *China Illustrated* (shortly after its publication in Latin in 1667 translated into German, Dutch, English, and French) continued his scientific fantasies. Chinese pagodas in his work are associated with the pyramids of Egypt providing mystical representations, in which historical narratives are freely interpreted, synthesizing pictures and supplementing images carved in ancient intaglio with new symbols. In this way he created fanciful figures that combine symbols of different cultures and civilizations.

In Baltrušaitis’ words, a multi-layered cultural imaginary always has "a calculated dosage of authenticity."
that determines the validity of legends. This is perfectly illustrated by the scientific works of Athanasius Kircher, study of which help us understand little researched visual representations and iconographic curiosities of the 17th as well as the 18th and 19th centuries entrenched in the history of art.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Once in an interview with a writer and director Sandra Joxe Baltrušaitis stated, “A German publication once called me a 20th-century Kircher. That pleased me a lot, but I doubt Athanasius Kircher would have liked it. Essentially, I approve of the comparison. This German Jesuit, a great erudite, was a contemporary of René Descartes, a universal thinker, whose thought spanned theory, mysticism and magic... An unacknowledged genius. Although, to tell the truth, one may come across some absurd follies in his treatises as well <…>. He is a true visionary, the opposite of Descartes in a sense, even though the latter's Treatise on Man also contains wonderful statements that illuminate the powers of human reason in a different way. In other words, Descartes had a visionary side, which is usually ignored.”44 However, the aim of this article was not so much to compare the authors as to reveal what Baltrušaitis took from Kircher’s treatises. One should not overestimate the references to Kircher in Baltrušaitis books, which are rich in references to little-researched historical sources, although the fact that the Jesuit scholar is quoted in all four works of the cycle shows that the art historian found in his treatises relevant topics for a broader study of images and their formal, technical, anthropological and intellectual character.

As can be seen from the analysis of the atemporal dialogue, it encouraged Baltrušaitis to expand the boundaries of art history into the domain of the history of ideas and a wider field of visual studies. As a consequence in Baltrušaitis’ books visual arts are included in a more historically neutral discourse on images and in a complex domain, in which interact mental and material pictures, social imaginary and artistic imagination. Without privileging an aesthetic and evolutionary approach in art history, visual art is linked to science, nature, fantasy, imagination, and memory. It functions in an open discourse, reminding us of the tradition of Plinian natural history, in which arts (artes) encompass a variety of fields, including a variety of figurative and visual objects.

As a result of the study of Kircher’s treatises and other lesser-known historical sources, in the series of Baltrušaitis’ works dedicated to “depraved” perspectives the image (as formal and informal, material and psychical phenomenon) has been researched not only as an iconological support, but as a complex, vital and vivid structure. The art historian revealed that images have anthropological and ontological dimensions, a study of which requires use of heuristic methods. However, he also disclosed that the image is always related to visual experience and imagination which is linked to illusions, deformations, fallacies, and deceptions that take us beyond the horizon of reality – although arising from historical reality and affecting it in one way or another. Summing up, his works showed that aberrant visions (hiding metaphysical truths) enter a phantasmagorical field which is an important source for a specifically human cognition (embracing order and disorder).

References


Notes


8. Baltrušaitis’ letter to Chastel witnesses that he had an intention to title his book on aberrations *Formes et Fables*, but Chastel himself was already thinking to entitle his work *Fables, Formes, Figures*. Thus Baltrušaitis had to look for another title. See Hochmann, 8.


10. Images and visualisations were of major importance in the Jesuit discourse. The visual expressions seeking to create a memorable visual spectacle were related to the Spiritual Exercises of Loyola. Kircher’s books illustrated with countless images clearly demonstrated an effort to engage a reader in visual narratives. The execution of the illustrations was supported by the Jesuit order. Kircher executed many preparatory sketches and drawings on which the illustrations were made by professional engravers. Three kinds of images populate Kircher’s treatises: experimental, hypothetical and allegorical images. See more: Walter S. Mellion and Ralph Dekoninck, "Jesuit Illustrated Books" in *The Oxford Handbook of The Jesuits*, ed. Ines G. Županov (Oxford University Press, 2018), 521–552.


14. The word anamorphosis refers to Greek *ana* which means the return of, and *morphē* – the form or shape. The words ‘anamorphosis’, ‘anamophotica’ appear tardily in Kircher’s disciple Schott’s four-volume *Magia universalis naturae et artis* (Wurzburg, 1657–59), in the third part of the book *Optica* (1657), called *De magia anamorphotica*. Schott, like Kircher, treated optical phenomena and visual effects in the context of the natural philosophy, and defined perspective as ‘anamorphic magic’. However, the term ‘anamorphosis’ was introduced long after the practice itself existed. Anamorphic drawings, engravings and paintings were particularly numerous in the sixteenth-century Germany. But a consistent and clear definition of the artistic practice did not exist: the pictorial technique was usually described as ‘curious perspective’ or ‘reversed...
13 Jurgis Baltušaitis, Anamorphic Art, 79.
14 Athanasius Kircher, Ars magna lucis et umbrae in decem libros digesta (Romae: Hermanni Scheus, 1646).
16 Jurgis Baltušaitis, Anamorphic Art, 91.
18 Ibid.
19 Jurgis Baltušaitis, Anamorphic Art, 91.
20 Ibid.
21 Athanasius Kircher, Mundus subterraneus, in XII libros digestus (Amsterdam: Johann Jansson, 1665), 238.
23 Ibid., 15.
24 Ibid., 15.
27 Jurgis Baltušaitis, Quête d’Isis. Introduction à l’Égyptomanie, the dust cover.
28 Santrauka

TRANSISTORINIS DIALOGAS APIE VAIŽDŲ GYVENIMĄ: BALTRUŠAITIS IR KIRCHERIS

Santrauka


**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** Jurgis Baltrušaitis, Athanasius Kircheris, meno istorija, vaizdų tyrimai, vizualinės studijos, anamorfozės, aberacijos, egiptomanija, gamta ir menas.

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