Sign Systems Studies 38(1/4), 2010

Mutual mimesis of nature and culture: A representational perspective for eco-cultural metamorphosis

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Abstract. Since the beginning of history humans have attempted to represent nature and culture through mimesis. This article focuses on the teleological aspects of mimesis and offers a different perspective that transcends the notion of sustainability into an eco-humanistic metamorphosis of culture and nature. Drawing from semiotics, phenomenology and architectural design the article challenges the polarization of mimetic representations of nature and culture, which are inclusive and homomorphic phenomena, and offers insight into the mutual mimesis of nature and culture. Two different empirical observations substantiate the theoretical perspective: 1) a tradition advanced by the Egyptians' stylization of visual representations of the mimicry of nature and culture; and 2) a current architectural design activity that integrates the mimesis of nature and culture. The article makes the case for a theoretical approach that integrates mimetic principles in creating a sustainable environment and an authentic eco-living. The article concludes with ethical implications on the way we perceive the mutual resemblances in nature and culture, and on our semiotic understanding of the teleological aspects of mimesis.

1. Prelude: mimesis beyond imitation and likeness

Mimesis is not a new idea. Since the beginning of history humans have attempted to describe or represent nature and culture through mimesis and image making. Humans have always expressed their desire to communicate their thoughts and emotions through visual and oral representations. In fact, prehistoric cave paintings were graphic representations of magical thinking and enactment that were intended to create new realities and therefore influence the future. But the idea of mimesis seems to have been watered down by limiting its meaning to the terms such as imitation and likeness. One problem has been the translation and interpretation of the original meaning of mimesis. Another more recent problem, which I suspect has far-reaching consequences, is the narrow understanding of the notion of "sustainability," its representation, and its link to what Juri Lotman (1990) calls "semiosphere". The erroneous interpretation of technological advances have exacerbated the latter notion and trivialized the former.

I am inclined to say that beyond the "imitation" or "likeness" of nature, not only is mimesis a representational art capable of conveying much more than sensory organs perceive, but also it embodies qualities that trigger imagination — that which it-has-not-yet-seen. However, this statement raises some challenging questions. For example, what is the role of mimesis in mediating between the two phenomena of nature and culture? How can this symbiotic resemblance transcend the environmentalism and provincialism dominating contemporary cultural practices? And why is mutual mimesis of nature and culture crucial in cross-cultural communication in a globalizing world? By way of responding to these questions, I shall focus on the teleological aspects of mimesis and offer a different perspective that goes beyond the debate between environmentalists and industrialists. My aim is to make a case for mimetic contributions with the hope that a new interpretation can, and will, transcend the

current understanding of sustainability into what I call *eco-humanistic metamorphosis of culture and nature*. "Eco-humanistic" goes beyond ecology (which has been reduced to mere environmentalism) and humanism (which while assumes the goodness of humans it emphasizes their existence as autonomous beings). And the concept of "metamorphosis" refers to the radical transformation that does not reject what exists and, at the same time, brings forth a new meaning through imaginative interpretations — just like the metamorphosis of a caterpillar emerging into a butterfly.

Most environmentalists seem to have ignored the meaningful interconnection between nature and culture. Not only is the separation of nature and culture historically invalid, but also, in fact, we can never comprehend phenomenologically the mutual interdependence of nature and culture if we limit ourselves to but one of them, or if we only use one as a privileged means to comprehend the other (see Burneko 2003). To give an example drawn from natural science, the founder of social ecology Murray Bookchin (2007) has noted that almost all ecological problems and depletion of natural capital originate in, and are symptoms of, dysfunctional social arrangements. Bookchin argues that most of the activities that consume energy and destroy the environment are senseless social practices because they contribute little to quality of life and well-being. I would add, these problems not only stem from the disconnection between cultural practices and natural processes, but are also consequences of a lack of any integrative semiotic processes of nature and culture. Kalevi Kull shares similar stance when he states:

> It is well known how the development of *ecological understanding* of ecological webs and recycling has shifted people's approach and evaluation of many common habits that concern our environment, consumption, trash. In a similar vein, the development of *semiotic understanding* of the semiosphere would lead to shifts that concern many common habits in our cultural behavior. (Kull 2005: 186)

By challenging the polarization of mimetic representations of nature and culture, which are inclusive and homomorphic phenomena, we can reach this semiotic understanding. Taking into consideration our contemporary understanding about sign systems and processes of communication, it would be impossible to overlook the potential of mimesis and its connection to semiotics (Maran 2003). What is more rewarding is that this semiotic understanding can transform our perception of natural and cultural phenomena, making them open, dynamic, and interpretable, and therefore reciprocal and diaphanous. By extension, this understanding has the potential to provide a different representational perspective that can lead to an eco-cultural metamorphosis.

But the greater obstacle that stands in the way of semiotic understanding of the mutual representation of nature and culture is the way we perceive the spectrum and the purpose of mimesis — that is, the tenuous association of mimesis with imitation. Because of the interchangeable use of terms such as "likeness" and "imitation" in the last two centuries, mimesis — as a way of thinking and representing — has become alien to most contemporary scholars. "In an age when talk of representation has become increasingly subject to both ideological and epistemological suspicion, mimesis is, for many philosophers and critics, little more than a broken column surviving from a long-dilapidated classical edifice, a sadly obsolete relic of former certainties" (Halliwell 2002: 344).

It is not surprising to hear scholars talk about the so-called "imitation of nature" as a main artistic principle in Renaissance, a principle that was advocated by the Italian architect Leon Battista Alberti. But Alberti's concept is a call for architects to produce beautiful buildings by emulating the principle of unity observed in the realm of nature. Architects must learn from nature and by striving to embody quasi-natural principles; and while products of design hardly produce natural appearances, they lead to insight into nature. That being said, the debate over whether mimesis fits within "world-reflecting" or

"world-simulating" (Halliwell 2002: 380) theories of representation is not very productive. "The indispensable point of mimesis is the quest for meaning, whether that meaning is a matter of discovery or invention, or most plausibly, both" (Halliwell 2002: 380). This key point about mimesis, as I shall demonstrate shortly, means that mimesis transcends mere copying and moves into imaginative interpretations that reveal the essence of nature and culture.

While my theoretical perspective draws mainly from semiotics, phenomenology, and architectural design, two different, yet interrelated, empirical observations and experiences substantiate this theoretical perspective. The first is an age-old tradition originated by the Egyptian stylization of visual representations of natural and cultural mimesis that seem to be mutually diaphanous; and the second is my own current architectural design experience and search for meaningful patterns to integrate the representations of nature and culture.

2. Unearthing the purpose of mimesis

In order to recover the purpose of mimesis, it is imperative to highlight the historical connection between mimesis and prehistoric and ancient representations. In the spirit of Juri Lotman's work, history, as an instrument for understanding human activities, impels us not only to transmit information, but also to preserve and create new knowledge; thus the "historian can select the elements which *from his or her point of view* seem significant" (Lotman 1990: 219). But the expression of point of view lies in our capacity to interpret historical fact into representation, keeping cultural memory alive. It is not my intention here to delve into an extensive historical analysis and

interpretation.[1] I make reference to historical account and interpret some historical facts not only to demonstrate that the concept of mimesis did not necessarily originate only in Greek philosophy, but also to make a case for the Egyptian mutual mimesis as a viable experience of integrating representations of nature and culture.

Much has been written about mimesis implying that the concept originates from classical philosophy (Halliwell 2002; Gebauer, Wulf 1995). Almost without exception, not only have scholars taken the work of Plato's *Cratylus, Republic, Sophist* and *Laws* or Aristotle's *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* as the point of departure for historical overview, but they have also relied on classical Greek for their conceptual analyses. Mimesis as a philosophical notion is much narrower and more infantile than mimesis as a representative means of cultural practices exemplified in human perceptions and actions since primeval times (Maran 2003). Mimesis has deeper roots in humanity. Since the dawn of time, humans have shown their desire to express their thoughts and emotions through oral tradition and visual representations. The *notion* of mimesis is new but the *concept* is not.

To illustrate, prehistoric cave paintings were not mere imitations of nature. These paintings were graphic representations of magical enchantment with reality, depicting the processes of nature, which, one can plausibly say, were intended to go beyond the experiences of existing reality into creation of new realities, and therefore, influence the future outcome. As noted above, most historical explorations of mimesis go back only to the classical work of Plato and Aristotle; this is not surprising, since pre-Greek philosophical account seems, at least on the surface, inaccessible to Western philosophy. And consequently, subsequent civilizations have had limited and biased knowledge of representations that would enable them to see beyond the inanimate ruins of former civilizations.

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[1] For an extensive historical account and analysis, see Stephen Halliwell (2002), *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems.*

In fact, Greek philosophy has its roots in the ancient Egyptian civilization (see Vernant 1982; Bernal 1987). Although the Egyptian phenomenological representation of nature and culture[2] is one of the oldest mimetic experiences, it is the most inaccessible esoteric wisdom our age has ever encountered (see Schwaller de Lubicz 1977; Seif 1990). The ancient Egyptian culture "had reached her intellectual and spiritual heights too early to develop any *philosophy* which could be transmitted in cultural heritage to the ages" (Frankfort *et al.* 1949: 131; italics added). But semiotic understanding and imaginative interpretation can provide a link to this esoteric wisdom.

Ontologically, the age-old tradition advanced by the Egyptian stylization of visual representations of nature and culture can be best described as mutually transparent mimesis embodying meaning and significance. As systems of signification, Egyptian art and architecture coalesced both the physical "form" and its "idea" into one totality that enabled the ancient Egyptian mind to use both cerebral and emotional intelligence to transmit and comprehend abstract metaphysical concepts. The entire Egyptian experience can be seen as a crossing act between two great phenomena: the natural phenomenon of the sun path and the Nile flow, and the cultural phenomenon of the stream practices and people's daily conduct (Fig. 1). And both natural and cultural phenomena expressed transparently in remarkable art and architecture. It would be naive, however, to view Egyptian artistic expressions as mere imitations of natural occurrences and direct coping of cultural practices and cast these visual expressions in the narrow sense of aesthetic persuasion, which perhaps initially had never been intended.

[2] The decision to use the Egyptian experience of representation should not be a surprise since my own cultural background has deep roots in ancient Egypt and Coptic tradition. It is believed that the Copts are the descendents of ancient Egyptians.

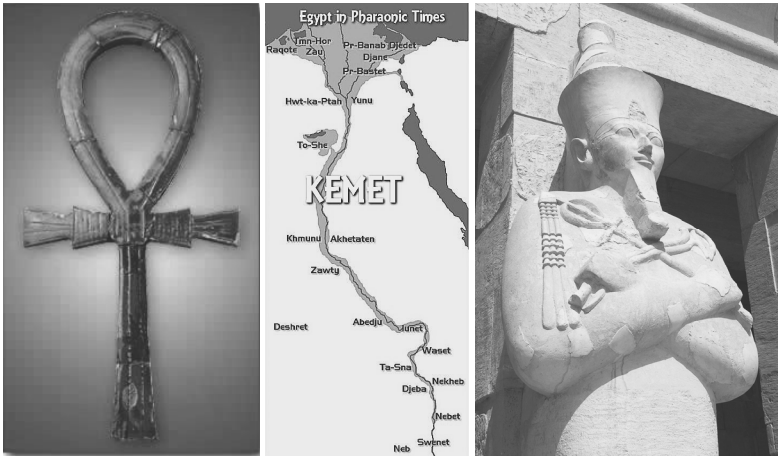


Figure 1. Figures 1a, 1b, 1c. Egyptians provided us with an excellent example of mutual mimesis of nature and culture. The hieroglyphic sign of Ankh, "The Key of Eternal Life" (1a) represents an imaginative interpretation of the striking axes in which the path of the sun from east to west crosses the Nile, with the loop on the top representing the Delta (1b). This crossing representation organized the entire Egyptian cultural practices (1c).

The Egyptian's abstract two-dimensional drawings, for instance, offer visual acuity to patterns of culture and forces of nature but also convey other phenomenological percepts. The two-dimensional expression in the Egyptian method of representation offers infinite interpretations of complex and esoteric concepts that trigger insights into the phenomena of life. Such simple representations, as Rudolf Arnheim (1974) points out, offer a fertile ground for stimulating patterns in such a way as to trigger the imagination. Interestingly, the Egyptians used two-dimensional representation not because they had no knowledge of perspective projection but because they intentionally preferred it in their mimetic worldview. The distinction between two-dimensional and three-dimensional representations did not exist from

the beginning. "Instead, the two-dimensional view, as the simpler one, is 'unmarked' and serves indiscriminately for both. [...] The relation between flatness and depth is undifferentiated, so that by purely visual means there is no way of telling whether a circular line stands for a ring, a disk, or a ball" (Arnheim 1974: 199–200). Unfortunately, our age has been intolerant of such ambiguity and transparency — qualities that are at the crux of semiotic understanding of mimesis.

This ambiguous, transparent representation is also exemplified in Egyptian monuments. As I shall point out shortly, the mimetic representation of monument as a mnemonic system (Yates 1966) of signification is to remind the Egyptians, to keep their memories of culture and nature alive. The mimetic representation of cultural practices and natural phenomena embodied in monuments plays a significant role in edifying the common ethos (Seif, Nyberg 1989) and reminding of the viewer of environmental ethics. Certainly, Egyptian monuments, temples, tombs, and obelisks appealed to both the senses and the imagination simultaneously (Clark 1959). In this sense, Egyptian monuments[3] were integrative representations of both the physical existence and the metaphysical reality, the actual and the virtual (Seif 1990).

Mimetically, the temple and "man" are one, in that the man is the temple of the act of nature, just as the temple as a human act can only be in the image of man. However, since human beings are mortal, the temple as a physical form is also mortal. What is immortal, then, is the soul that animates both humans and the temple. The Egyptian believes that every particle of the temple retains animation even when the structure has completely crumbled. The image of reality, for the Egyptian, is the only invariable datum, while physical material is

[3] In addition to being a mnemonic system, Egyptian monuments are really a system of signification in which myths and rituals are the metaphysical aspects of its genesis. Therefore, significant representation coalesces both "form" and its "idea" into one totality that enables the ancient Egyptian mind to transmit and comprehend abstract metaphysical ideas.

always variable. Therefore, the meaning evoked by mimesis is an insight into the essence of nature and culture, and the physical material on which the temple is constructed and takes form is nothing but the dust that returns onto dust (see Schwaller de Lubicz 1977; Seif 1990). Not only is the mimetic representation in Egyptian art and architecture perceived by the sensory organs, but in fact, the unseen elements behind the physical manifestation also give significance and meaning to nature and culture.

3. Mimesis of cultural identity and place-making

Admittedly, the Egyptian mimetic phenomenon has influenced my personal experience and professional pursuit. My desire to maintain cultural identity through the design of a home on Orcas Island[4] has been the most important consideration. However, in no way did I expect that my experience of designing and building my home would lead to unpredicted emergences. Nor did I consider that such emergent outcomes would be elevated to a level of mimetic insights. It has been claimed that the act of dwelling presupposes identification with the environment, which, when it is meaningful, makes us feel at home (Norberg-Schulz 1979). Home as a seat of cultural representations mirrors self and conveys ethnic identity. One's house[5] embodies mimetic representations of self and by extension conveys one's cultural identity and the spirit of place — *genius loci*.

The search for meaningful patterns to integrate culture identity and place characteristics gives birth to a representational perspective that not only has led to a sustainable environment and an authentic eco-living but also has contributed to the restoration of cultural

[4] Orcas Island is part of the San Juan Islands which are located north of Seattle, Washington, USA.

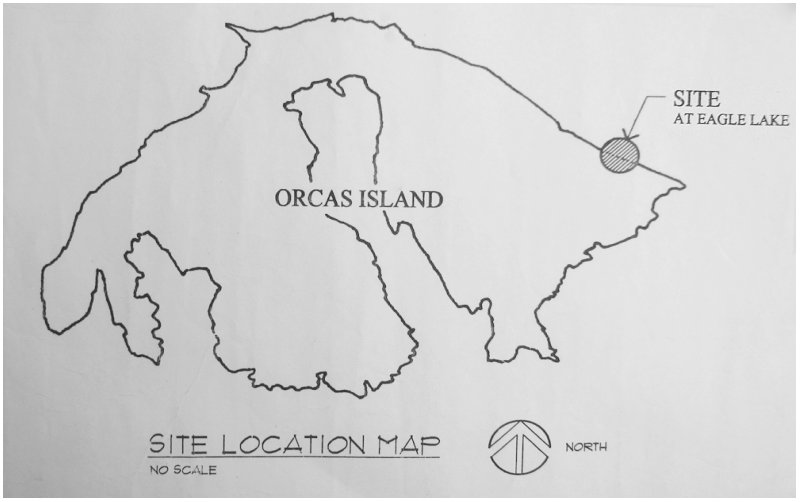
[5] Interestingly, the word ecology (eco-logy) has its roots in the Greek word "oikos" = house + logy "logia" — the study and knowledge of house.

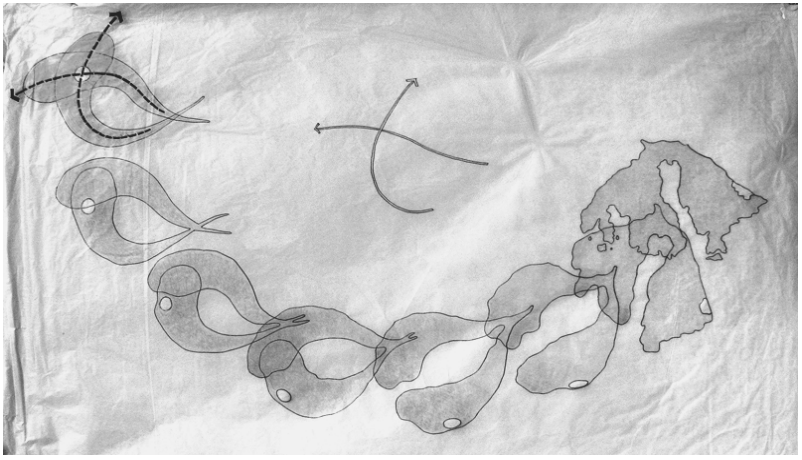
identity. At the outset of this experience, the design challenge was to bring into existence a home that simultaneously embodies cultural identity, honors the characteristics of the natural environment, and responds effectively to programmatic needs and spatial relationship.

By the integration of cultural patterns and site characteristics at the outset of the design process the subtle aesthetic qualities of ethos and mythos emerge and contribute significantly to place making, that is to say, they animate the spirit of place. The kind of integration that I am talking about is in alignment with Gebser's notion of "aperspective consciousness"[6], which is inclusive and integrative. In the context of our design process, this integration involves a stream of transcendence and an imaginative metamorphosis, expressing feelings and desires for qualities beyond the visible material world — a kind of a reflective semiotic process.

The motivation for this integration "is to make a site become a place, that is, to uncover the meanings potentially present in the given environment" (Norberg-Schulz 1979: 18). Making present, or what Gebser (1985: 7) calls "presentiation" or "blossoms forth anew," is to perceive diaphanously and integrate the presence of the past and the future. Making presence, as a contemplative seeing-through-process that involves affinity or "topophilia" toward the surroundings (Tuan 1990), which in turn leads to a metamorphosis in the features of the site (Fig. 2). In a semiotic sense, mimetic signs embody a kind of life that gives "soul" to the experience (see Deely 2004) — blossoms forth anew.

[6] According to Jean Gebser, the aperspectival world is "a world whose structure is not only jointly based in the pre-perspectival, unperspectival, and perspectival worlds, but also mutates out of them in its essential properties and possibilities while integrating these worlds and liberating itself from their exclusive validity" (Gebser 1985: 294). So, in other words, the aperspectival world is not an exclusive mode of consciousness, rather, it is sensibly inclusive of other worlds.





Figures 2a, 2b. The process of metamorphosis transforms Orcas Island (2a) into an image of two playful whales intersecting each other and revealing the Egyptian principle of crossing (2b).

Reflecting on the upshot of this metamorphic process has revealed the Egyptian principle of "crossing" I mentioned above as an inspiring semiotic representation for organizing the entire design work. This

design work utilizes the concept of notating imagination. Notations, which are really mimetic signs,[7] allow further connection and mediation among several sets of concepts. When notations are being represented through scoring, they become complex perceptual signs that trigger the transition, in a mental evolution, from perception into the sphere of limitless conceptualized thoughts. The creation and manipulation of signs often reveal a metaphor, an analogy, a similarity, or a profound isomorphism (Fig. 3). And this generative quality in the design process also reverberates between abstraction and concreteness.[8]

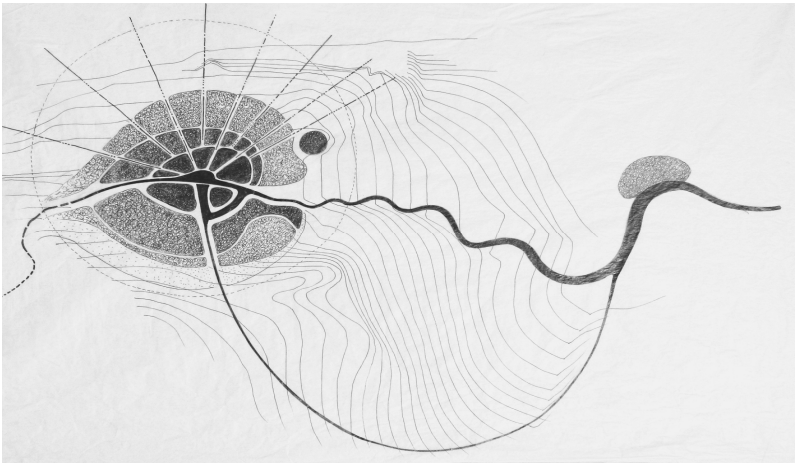


Figure 3. The process of notation and scoring composition as an expression of *topophilia* superimposed on the topographic characteristics of the site has expanded the author's cognitive understanding and visceral awareness.

[7] Notations and signs are intimately connected etymologically. Notation comes from the Latin word *nota* or *notatio,* which means to mark or to designate. This refers to the process of using visual marks by means of a special system of signs (see Hillman 1995).

[8] Farouk Y. Seif. 1999. Sign Processes and Notational Design: Demystifying Design Thinking and its Representation. A paper presented at the 7th World Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies, Dresden, Germany in 1999.

By the layering of a holographic matrix of representation — propagating transparent layers of notation including the ethnic principle of crossing, the metamorphosis of the topographic characteristics of the place, programmatic needs, and spatial relationship—a perceptible overall image of home has emerged out of a mimetic representation of cultural identity and sense of place (Figs. 4, 5, 6).

In this design experience, interpretation of signs has led to an isomorphic relationship between the material world and the unseen qualities of the natural setting and cultural identity. On the one hand this process has lead to ensouling (giving life to) the material world and a manifestation of cultural identity (Figs. 7–12). On the other, it has lead to the realization that eco-humanistic living can be achieved through semiotic understanding of the teleological aspects of mimesis.

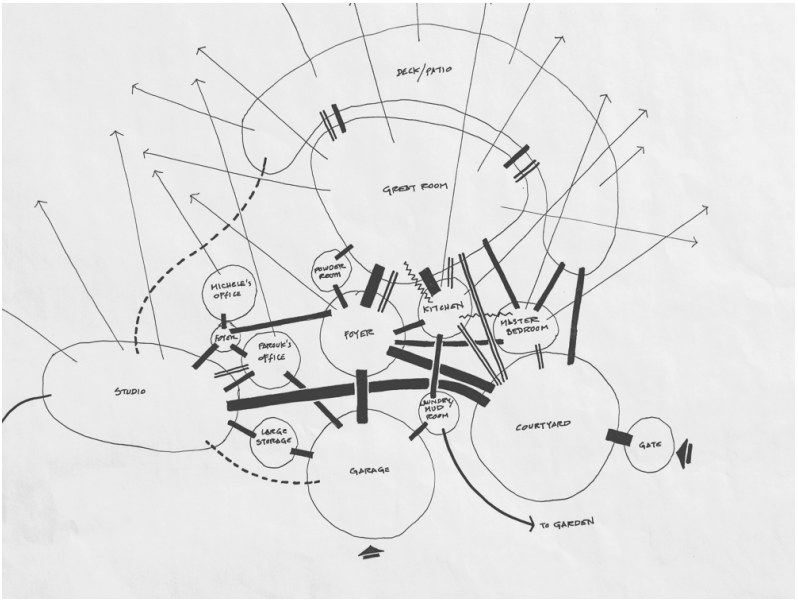


Figure 4. The process of establishing a desired spatial relationship is based on environmental issues and cultural considerations.

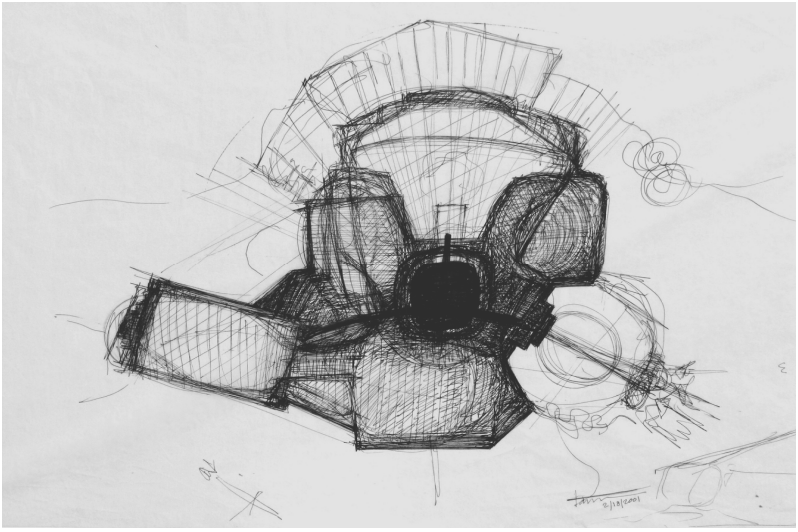


Figure 5. As a result of layering transparencies of crossing notation, programmatic needs, spatial relationship, and site topography an architectural form, *parti,* emerged.

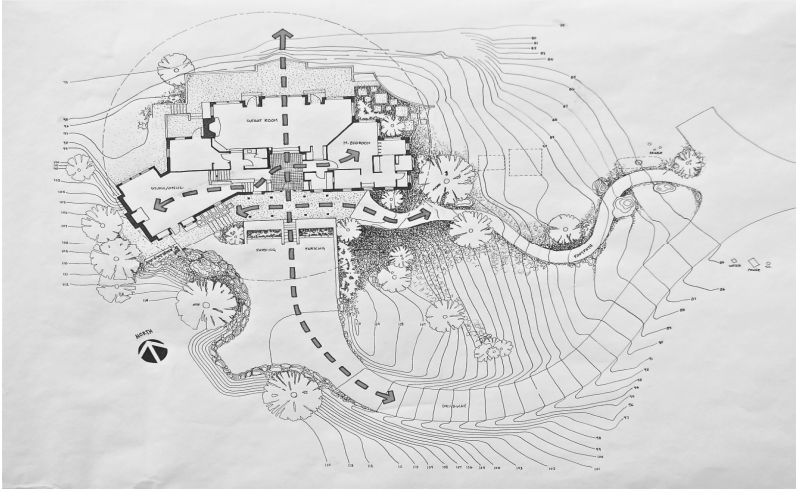


Figure 6. Site and floor plans show the driveway, the footpath, and the atrium where crossing organizes all spatial elements of the entire home.

Figure 7. Construction utilizes Insulated Concrete Form (ICF) wall systems that are energy efficient and environmentally friendly and, at the same time, the block units evoke the ancient Egyptian stone masonry.

Figure 8. A view of the home from the footpath responds to the desire notation.

Figure 9. The entrance to the home calls attention to the portal and pylon of the Egyptian temple.

Figure 10. An interior view from the dining area toward the foyer infuses Egyptian feelings.

Figure 11. A view of the great room looking from the living area toward the dining area and the kitchen. Colors and sustainable materials celebrate cultural identity.

Figure 12a, 12b. Fireplace is constructed with sustainable materials (12a) with an anthropomorphic representation implicitly expressing the Pharaoh's face and headdress (12b).

While the described design process seems to be sufficient for the context of this article, I am aware of the double binding situation here. On the one hand, in order to avoid providing a method that should be construed as "the way" to mimetic representation, I do not intend to elaborate on how the detail of this experience took place. On the other hand, not enough description of details and specific could give the impression of triviality and discredit the value of this experience. One important issue here is that this design experience should not be taken as a method, or a recipe, for utilizing mimesis in representing nature and culture. Perhaps this kind of ambiguity, which is inherent in any design situation, is indeed part of mimetic representations. The design experience has led to an approach for integrating ecological sensibility and cultural sensitivity, rather than providing a strategic or methodological description for mimesis.

4. Mimesis: toward ecological sensibility and cultural sensitivity

Under the banner of sustainability and "greening", buildings have become inanimate artifacts, often conveying technological achievement and ingenuity, yet deprived of cultural representations and in turn devoid of meaning. Environmental study, which is rooted in methodologies of mechanics and dynamics, as Kalevi Kull (2005) points out, is quite different from the semiotic approach that is characterized by meaning and significance. Ironically, sustainable materials, which are intended to serve an ecological purpose, are often superficially and self-indulgently used by the wealthy as an ostentatious mark of social status. This has been an incredible backfire on sustainability.

Moreover, as Kalevi Kull (1998) argues, it is ecological semiotics or "ecosemiotics," not ecological knowledge, that is sufficient to face environmental challenges which human beings experience in

contemporary time. Take for example the concept of biomimicry (Benyus 1997), it calls for emulating the processes and systems of nature but seems to have overlooked meaningful cultural aspects of human conduct. This environmental approach is insufficient and seems to miss the purpose and advantages of mimesis. Nor has environmental admonition been an effective strategy. But as I have shown above, by mutually representing nature and culture, the primordial purpose of mimesis is to give meaning to life. This meaning can be manifested in the act of integrating ecological sensibility and cultural sensitivity.[9] We cannot just rely on existing knowledge of ecology and physical concepts. In making a distinction between the concepts of environment and semiosphere, Kalevi Kull writes:

> Environment as a physical concept is not the same as semiosphere. But the situation is different if we speak about the ecosphere as a semiotic concept. According to the biosemiotic view, semiosphere coincides with ecosphere. Hence, this is a concept that can deal with environmental problems without the nature-culture opposition; instead, these problems can be formulated in terms of specific features of sign systems (Kull 2005: 184).

Semiosphere through the mutual mimesis of nature and culture holds the promises of integrating ecological sensibility and cultural sensitivity. Susan Petrilli's two fundamental principles of "depossession" and "extralocalization"[10] are in order here. "These principles allude to the condition of the human individual as a living body interconnected to

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[9] By cultural sensitivity I mean the ability to deal compassionately with the paradoxical relationship between one's own culture and the culture of others, and the tension of the differences and similarities between self and others. Ecological sensibility implies the ongoing meaningful relationship with one's own physical and metaphysical environment.

[10] According to Susan Petrilli, the term "depossession" refers to the need to get free of the techniques that subjugate the body to the political-technological power and the term "extralocalization" suggests the need to get free of projects, structures and roles that function to reproduce socioeconomic order (see Petrilli 2004: 205).

all other forms of life over the planet" (Petrilli 2004: 205), and these principles are at the core of ecological sensibility and cultural sensitivity.

The nagging question now is, which comes first, the representation of nature or the representation of culture? In other words, what is the role of mimesis in mediating between the two phenomena of nature and culture? In reflecting back on the Egyptian phenomenon and my own design experience, I conclude that one cannot claim that the Egyptian cultural-natural phenomenon emerges from physiographical causes; this would be unwarranted naturalism (see Frankfort *et al.* 1949). Nor can one, with some degree of certainty, conclude that the Egyptian culture superimposed its unique characteristics over the physiographical elements of their land. Rather, one can only extrapolate that the interrelationship between culture and nature exists intimately, inclusively, and transparently.

For the Egyptians, culture is not to be used as a privileged means to comprehend nature; nor is nature taken as a privileged means to give birth to culture. Both nature and culture depend on cosmology. For the Egyptians, natural phenomena are conceived in terms of human experience, and human experience is conceived in terms of cosmic events (Fig. 13). Learning from the Egyptian mutual mimesis, culture is embedded in nature as much as nature is ingrained in culture — and both depend on human experience, which in turn, is conceived in terms of cosmic events and cosmic forces. Human beings, as the makers of signs, often tend to superimpose culture over nature, but they nonetheless continue to listen for the larger, more-than-human context of nature (see Halliwell 2002).

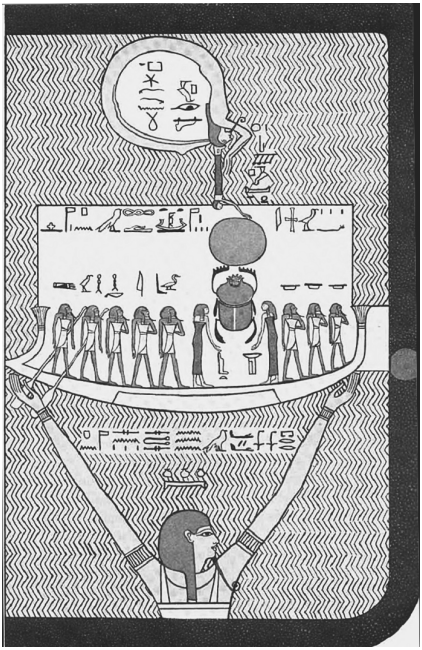

Figure 13. Egyptian cosmology as representation of ecological sensibility and cultural sensitivity. Nun, the primordial waters, raises the sun boat. Illustration from the Book of Gates, Tomb of Ramesses VI.

Since the semiosphere is viewed as the space of the sign process for generating meaning through multiple simultaneous representations and interpretations (Kull 2005), it makes, no difference what we begin with, ecological sensibility or cultural sensitivity. The sign is not a static representation of pre-established relationships, but an infinite process of deferral (Petrilli 2008); and mimetic representation as a sign has unlimited capacity for deferral. Then, what matters is our awareness that the process is integrative, inclusive, dynamic, and diaphanous. Considering the diaphanous perception, it is reasonable to say that cultural sensitivity, as a semiotic sign, defers or refers to the sign of ecological sensibility and vice versa.

The interpretation of one set of signs becomes, in turn, the expression for an additional set of signs in an "infinite semiosis" (Peirce 1958). When a visual expression is gazed upon, there is a flow of semiotic process in which further details or trivia of the expression may be attended to while interpretations are being developed (Seif 1990). John Deely articulates this point succinctly:

> Every sign acting as such gives rise to further signs. Semiosis is an open process, open to the world of things on the side of physical interactions and open to the future on the side of objects. Thus [we] need to consider further that sign-vehicles or representamens, objects signified or significates, and interpretants can change places within semiosis. What is one time an object becomes another time primarily sign-vehicle, what is one time interpretant becomes another time object signified, and what is one time object signified becomes another time interpretant, and so on, in an unending spiral of semiosis [...]. (Deely 2004: 47)

In this sense, sign processes do not produce the same sign and, therefore, do not render identical contents. This view of mimesis as a semiotic process (Maran 2003) has the capacity to move freely and evolutionarily between representations of cultural and natural systems, and even across the world.

5. Extrapolation: the mimetic promise for eco-cultural metamorphosis

Going back to the concept of infinite semiosis, human beings as "semiotic animals" (Deely 2010) are capable of developing awareness, relationships, and mediation toward semiosis over the entire earth. Such being the case, humans have unlimited "semioethical" responsibility toward others (Petrilli 2004) — not just toward other cultures but also toward more-than-human systems. We must develop such awareness for the full recovery of the ethical dimension of semiosis that embraces not only humans but also more-than human forms of

life (Petrilli 2004). This urgent ethical implication depends, I believe, on the way we understand and practice the representation of the mutual mimesis of nature and culture. But this means we need to pay more *attention,* to notice, the *qualities* of things. I use the notion of "paying attention" here in the spirit of *nota,* or *notitia*,[11] the attentive noticing of the essence of things, exemplified in the mutual mimesis of nature and culture.

Not only does the mimetic representational perspective offer an opportunity for eco-cultural transformation, but considering the globalizing world, this perspective also augments more-effective communication by revealing resemblance between different sign systems across semiotic boundaries. There is a reciprocal relationship between the notion of cultural ethos and the practice of sustainability, highlighting the phenomenon of diversity in unity. A diverse society that sustains different ethnicities promotes long-term stewardship and unity. In order to achieve genuine sustainable living, individuals and societies need to rediscover their sense of belonging in their engagement with the natural world and built environment. Surprisingly, a purposeful integration of cultural sensitivity and ecological sensibility in the creation of a place eliminates self-indulgence in ethnocentrism and radical views of environmentalism.

Mutual mimesis within the sphere of ecosemiotics seems to be a significant element in what Ervin Laszlo (2009) calls "world shift" in our consciousness. This shift in consciousness would not have materialized "without the interpretive meaning domain that, in turn, is not

[11] *Nota* may be linked to the Latin word *notitia,* in which the original meaning has much to do with the human capacity to authentically conceptualize through attentive noticing. The very nature of the act of noticing, as a formal substitute for seeing and perceiving, may convey the idea of understanding meaning and significance which, indeed, is the essential nature of semiotics. "Attention to the qualities of things resurrects the old idea of *notitia* as a primary activity of the soul. *Notitia* refers to that capacity to form true notions of things from attentive noticing" (Hillman 1995: 115).

separate from nature and that does not reduce to certain locales or states and statuses" (Burneko 2003: 159). And this world shift in consciousness — the manner in which we engage in meaning-making — depends not only on our knowing and feeling the interdependence of nature and culture, but more urgently, it depends on our imaginative interpretation and praxis of integrating the mimesis of ecological sensibility and cultural sensitivity. This diaphanous integration offers the opportunity for dealing mindfully with the current paradoxical situation of homogenization and heterogenization prevailing in our globalizing world. More significantly, it has the potential for a truly eco-cultural metamorphosis.

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Взаимный мимезис природы и культуры: репрезентационный взгляд на экокультурную метаморфозу

С давних времен люди пытались репрезентировать природу и культуру через мимезис. Эта статья сосредоточивается на телеологических аспектах мимезиса и предлагает альтернативную перспективу, которая расширит понятие устойчивости (*sustainability*) в сторону эко-гуманистической метаморфозы природы и культуры. Основываясь на работах по семиотике, феноменологии и архитектурного дизайна, статья бросает вызов поляризированным разработкам инклюзивных и гомоморфных явлений и предлагает понимание взаимного мимезиса природы и культуры. Теоретический аспект поддерживают два эмпирических исследования: 1) традиция, исходящая из стилизованных визуальных репрезентаций мимикрии природы и культуры, созданных египтянами, и 2) современная практика архитектурного дизайна, которая соединяет мимезис природы и культуры. Данная статья предлагает теоретический подход, в котором соединяются миметические принципы, создавая устойчивую среду и подлинное эко-проживание. В конце статьи предлагаются этические импликации о том, как мы ощущаем взаимные сходства в природе и культуре.

Looduse ja kultuuri vastastikune mimees: representatsiooniline vaade öko-kultuurilisele metamorfoosile

Ajaarvamise algusest peale on inimesed püüdnud taasesitada loodust ja kultuuri läbi mimeesi. Käesolev artikkel keskendub mimeesi teleoloogilistele aspektidele ning pakub välja alternatiivset lähenemise, mis laiendab jätkusuutlikkuse mõistet kultuuri ja looduse öko-humanistliku muutumise suunas. Tuginedes semiootika, fenomenoloogia ja arhitektuuridisaini alastele töödele, küsimustab looduse ja kultuuri kui olemuselt üksteist sisaldavate ja homomorfsete nähtuste mimeetiliste esituste polariseeritud käsitlusviisi ning pakub omalt poolt välja arusaama kultuuri ja looduse vastastikusest mimeesist. Teoreetilist perspektiivi toetavad kaks

empiirilist uurimust: 1) traditsioon, mis lähtub looduse ja kultuuri mimikri stiliseeritud visuaalsetest esitustest egiptuse kultuuris; ja 2) tänapäevane praktika arhitektuurilises disainis, mis lõimib looduse ja kultuuri mimeesi. Käesolev artikkel pakub välja teoreetilise käsitluse, mis ühendab mimeetilised printsiibid, luues jätkusuutliku keskkonna ja autentse ökoelamise. Artikkel lõpeb eetiliste implikatsioonidega sellest, kuidas me tajume vastastikuseid sarnasusi looduses ja kultuuris ning millised on mimeesi teleoloogilised aspektid.