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“Take the Beuys off”: Reconsidering the Current Concept of Ekphrasis in the Performative Poetry of Thomas Kling

“Take the Beuys off”: revisitando o conceito atual de écfrase na poesia performática de Thomas Kling

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Abstract: A portrait poem by the German poet Thomas Kling (1957-2005) about the German artist Joseph Beuys is the starting point to reconsider the current ekphrasis discourse in the light of experienced visuality by combining the concept of ancient rhetoric with modern ideas of imagination, multimodality and performativity.

Keywords: ekphrasis; visuality; performativity; semiotics; multimodality; mimesis; Thomas Kling.

Resumo: Um poema do poeta alemão Thomas Kling (1957-2005), retratando o artista alemão Joseph Beuys, é o ponto de partida para a reconsideração do discurso ecfástico atual, à luz da visualidade experimentada pela combinação do conceito da retórica antiga com as ideias modernas de imaginação, multimodalidade e performatividade.

Palavras-chave: écfrase; visualidade; performatividade; semiótica; multimodalidade; mimese; Thomas Kling.

Introduction

The imperative “ZIEHEN SIE DEN BEUYS AUS!” (“TAKE THE BEUYS OFF!”) is an emphatic quote from a German poem, written by the poet Thomas Kling (1957-2005). This poem is entitled “portrait JB. fuchspelz,/ humboldtstrom, tomatn” (“portrait JB. fox fur,/ Humboldt current, tomatos”)¹ and can be found in his second collection of poems, published in 1991.² Already the first line of the title invites the reader to imagine an absent portrait of someone who is characterized with the initials JB and a fox fur in a strange combination with the Humboldt current and tomatoes. In the following three stanzas, the poem identifies “this someone” further by his clothes (a coat in the second and a fishing vest in the third stanza). At least when the *Honey Pump* installation is mentioned, the allusion to the avant-garde artist Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) is made obvious.³ The contemporary reader memorizes easily the *gestalt* in his significant clothes, as the media celebrity Beuys performed in- and outside the institutionalized art space. Participating in the 1960s Fluxus movement, Beuys became well known for his performance *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965) or the *Honey Pump* installation, mentioned in the poem and shown at the contemporary art exhibition *documenta VI* in Kassel in 1977. Most of Beuys’ art sets focus on the healing potential of art. Due to his popularity, he had much opportunity to inscribe his expanded art concept (*erweiterter Kunstbegriff*) into collective memory as a democratic medium and a means of social transformation.⁴

¹ My slightly unusual English translation, including *tomatos* instead of *tomatoes*, follows the visual setting of this sound poem, see also footnotes 31, 61, and 73.

² The poem is part Kling’s second collection of poems. Its title *brennstabn* can be translated with “fuel rods or stinging letter” (GRIMM. *Mediamania?*, p. 9). The title entices the reader to imagine and to feel the burning pain of a wasp sting. Moreover, in a larger political frame, the title evokes the fear for burning nuclear power plants. are evoked, In contrast to an “emotion”, the “affect” precedes any conscious knowing, but causes a disruption (FYRKMAN; FYRKMAN. *Affect and Material Culture*, p. 14). Kling’s aesthetic of disruption and embodied experience is already announced in this title, pointing to his idea of socio-political engagement and an intention.

³ SCHOENE. *Beuys’ Hut: Performance und Autofiktion*, p. 126.

⁴ BEUYS. *What is art?*; BUCHLOH. *Reconsidering Joseph Beuys*, p. 75-89.

The much younger Thomas Kling was not equally known to a general public. Nevertheless, he always found an enthusiastic audience that appreciated his expressive performances and his demanding avant-garde texts.⁵ In his dramatic and multimodal live performances, he stressed his eloquent speaking body as a key medium while staging his poems in a performative language.

He strikes an elegant balance between letting the audience experience the aural or the visual modality of his sound poetry and instructing the audience in the process of embodied experience and sense-making.⁶ Rather than describing another visual representation, Kling's ekphrases heighten this process.⁷ Like Beuys, who emphasized the artifice of his body performances and the symbolic value of the material he formed (such as fat and felt) and wore (such as a hat, a fishing vest or a fur), Kling often dressed in sweaters of wasp-like colors, pointing metaphorically to the political aesthetic of his performances.⁸ Despite these ostentatious signs, these multimodal artistic performances blur the traditional binary of Western culture, namely the borderline between presentation and representation.⁹ Against this background, I conceptualize language as mode of procedural social communication and doing rather than as a "verbal representation" to eschew the old divide between world and language.¹⁰

Indeed, Thomas Kling discards the self-enclosed lyrical tongue of the New Subjectivity from the 1980s, that preferred the contemplative Kantian aesthetics, the disembodied audience and an autonomous art for art's sake.¹¹ By contrast, Kling invests both in the effect of interruption and incongruity as well as in suggestive metaphors to entice the audience both to participate in and to embody his political engagement.

⁵ LEEDER. "spritzende Brocken der Erinnerung/ versteht sich", p. 174.

⁶ BARINAGA. A performative view on language, p. 1-43; LJUNGBERG. Intermediality and Performance Art, p. 547-561. Kling combined sometimes his readings with a musical performance.

⁷ DRUCKER. Art, p. 10.

⁸ Kling's reading performances are more obviously framed and staged as Beuys public performances outside the institutionalized space of art or education, though.

⁹ BOYNE. Fractured Subjectivity, p. 58.

¹⁰ HERMAN. Introduction, p. 3-22; BOYNE. Fractured Subjectivity, p. 58-76.

¹¹ GRIMM. *Mediamania?*, p. 278; ROTARU. Contemporary German Poetry and Avant-Garde Reappraisals in the Work of Thomas Kling and Oskar Pastior, p. 364-378.

Kling's "linguistic installations" (*Sprachinstallationen*), and, in particular the poem "portrait JB", construct a similarity to Joseph Beuys' "social sculpture" (*soziale Plastik*). This modern, interactive version of the Romantic concept of a total work of art aims more or less at a unity of life, politics and society as art to produce social change.¹²

At the same time, the similarity relation becomes ambiguous because of the metaphorical density of Kling's language on the one side and the openness of Joseph Beuys' challenging visual installations on the other. Despite their emphasis on live performances, both artists profit also from the potentiality and ubiquity of new technological media, in particular, as they form their autobiographical story according to their artistic intention via repeated mediations of images, statements and performances.¹³ By consciously blurring the line between authenticity and artifice, they create a myth of "authentic artifice".¹⁴ The poem, mentioned above, will be a good example of this habit. Moreover, it also exemplarily questions the basic assumptions of how to conceptualize ekphrasis.

According to the current discourse, ekphrasis is defined According to the current discourse, ekphrasis is defined mostly as a "verbal representation of a visual representation",¹⁵ modeled upon the difference between representation and presentation, the verbal and the visual, word and image, movement and stasis, which are traditionally correlated with other binaries such as art and life, fiction and fact, man and woman etc.¹⁶ Still, this poem challenges such thinking in oppositions. Rather, it

¹² JORDAN. *The Evolution of Social Sculpture in the United States: Joseph Beuys and the Work of Suzanne Lacy and Rick Lowe*, p. 149.

¹³ GRIMM. *Mediamania?*, p. 282; BUCHLOH. *Reconsidering Joseph Beuys*, p. 75-89; KORTE. "Kopfjägermaterial Gedicht": Thomas Klings lyrisches Werk in sechs Facetten, p. 28.

¹⁴ SCHOENE. *Beuys' Hut: Performance und Autofiktion*, p. 126.

¹⁵ HEFFERNAN. *Museum of Words*, p. 3. For a recent overview of the discourse see RIPPL. *Handbook of Intermediality*.

¹⁶ Usually, the current intermedial discourse assumes a rivalling encounter of two distinct art or media objects, defined as visual and verbal representations, such as paintings, sculptures are photographs in poems or narrative literature, struggling for their own identity. William John Thomas Mitchell derives the literal impossibility of ekphrasis from an assumed otherness of the visual representation. He argues not only that "words can 'cite', but never 'sight' their objects" (MITCHELL. *Picture Theory*, p. 152). See also SCHAEFFER. *Fictional vs. Factual Narration*.

addresses the reader with what I call *performative ekphrasis* to correspond with the intra-agential process of the art concept of Joseph Beuys, as Thomas Kling exemplifies it in the lyrical protagonist of the poem in question. Due to the emphasis on ambiguity, ekphrasis – as performed in this poem – shifts the focus from a formally well-defined reference object, preferred by the current discourse, to the complexity of enhanced visuality that explores seeing both as a normative and/ or, an innovative process beyond the directly visible.¹⁷ In the contrast between the first and the second stanza, the poem epitomizes ekphrasis as being able to both create and reveal the perspective of an individual seer, the former by seeing what is collectedly prefigured, and the latter in the sense of being able to go beyond these norms,¹⁸ allowing for the raising of awareness, provocation and intra-action. Indeed, this type of ekphrasis applies the ancient definition of “making the absent present”.¹⁹ In the conceptual frame of *mimesis* and *poiesis*,²⁰ this is understood as “producing into presence”²¹ rather than as imitation. This broad conceptualization of ekphrasis is linked both with Rancière’s provocation of perceptual and cognitive frames²² and with Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of *perciendum*, which theorizes the potential of seeing beyond sensual experience and the *sensus communis*.²³ Thus, the focus of ekphrasis is on the effect of the intra-subjectively acting forces, *enargeia* and *phantasia*,²⁴ which balance visuality in-between reality and re-describing reality.²⁵ As

¹⁷ The modern discourse on ekphrasis may be represented by LOUVEL. *The Poetics of the Iconotext*; RIPPL. *Handbook of Intermediality*. See the critique by CLÜVER. A New Look on an Old Topic, p. 30-44. For the complexity of visuality, see for instance JENKS. The Centrality of the Eye in Western Culture.

¹⁸ JENKS. The Centrality of the Eye in Western Culture, p. 25.

¹⁹ WEBB. *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Practice and Theory*, p. 105.

²⁰ HALLIWELL. *The Aesthetics of Mimesis*; LARLHAM. *The Meaning in Mimesis*, p. 37.

²¹ AGAMBEN. *Poiesis and Praxis*, p. 72.

²² RANCIÈRE. *The Politics of Aesthetics*.

²³ DELEUZE; GUATTARI. *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 281.

²⁴ LACHMANN. Die Rolle der *enargeia* in Texten der Phantastik, p. 225. The theatricality of ekphrasis makes the reader to a participating spectator, as already emphasized by PLETT. *Enargeia in Classical Antiquity and the Early Modern Age*.

²⁵ SPRINGGAY. *Body Knowledge and Curriculum*, p. 73.

the visual experience of the lyrical protagonist will show, both forces support visuality in its ambiguous e/affective process of becoming, opposed to a neutral seeing of something given (opticality).²⁶ Visuality, in the aspect of *percipiendum*, can even express an imperative force,²⁷ as the third stanza of Kling's poem exemplifies. Intra-acting with the contextual environment, these forces possess their own performative mode of address, articulation, and the expanse of self-showing.²⁸ The spectator's framed visual experience stresses this reader's experience of enhanced visuality. Against the background of cultural and historical shifts, the visuality is dynamically made up of perception, memory and imagination in an intra-action with its own situation.²⁹

portrait JB. fuchspelz,
humboldtstrom, tomatn

(ca. '72)

düsseldorf, aufm schadowplatz. Eines
vormittags, im niesel. hinterm tapezier-
tisch im fuxxpelz im mantel. hab ich so
aus einiger entfernung hinter flugzetteln
gesehn; da macht ich BLAU eines vor-
mittags unter-strom

(ca. '75)

humboldtgynasium, düsseldorf. ich sachs
euch: WIR BEKAMN HUMBOLDTSTROM. Doctor
august peters, (GESCHICHTE) zu meinem zuspät-
kommndn freund roehle: ZIEHN SIE DEN BEUYS
AUS! SEIN MANTEL WAR GEMEINT.

('77)

kassel. installation der HONIGPUMPE. ein-
leitung von sauerstoff, daß honigfluß wir

²⁶ SCHOLZ. 'Sub Oculos Subiectio'; FÜHRER; BANASZKIEWICZ. The Trajectory of Ancient Ekphrasis, p. 45-75.

²⁷ WOLFE. From Aesthetics to Politics, section: 3.

²⁸ CARLSON. *Performance*, p. 57; LARLHAM. *The Meaning in Mimesis*, p. 37.

²⁹ JAY. Scopic Regimes of Modernity, p. 3-23; JENKS. The Centrality of the Eye in Western Culture, p. 1-25.

sehn konntn. mittags, vorm friderizianum
bat ich den lagerndn mann bat ich die angler-
weste um den tagschatten gibst du mir
die TOMATN und kam zu mir sein tomatnhand!³⁰

portrait JB. fox fur,
humboldt current, tomatos

(ca '72)
düsseldorf, on th' schadow square. One
morning, in the drizzle. behind th' trestle
table in a foxx fur in trench coat. i saw
it from some distance behind leaflets;
then i skived OFF a mid-
morning under-current

(ca '75)
humboldt high school, düsseldorf. i'm telling
you: WE BECAME A HUMBOLDT CURRENT. Doctor
august peters, (HISTORY), to my late-
comng friend roehle: TAKE THE BEUYS
OFF! HE MEANT HIS TRENCH COAT.

('77)
kassel. installation of the HONEY PUMP. in-
sertion of oxygen, that honey-current we
could see. Afternoon, facing the fridericianum
i asked the camping man asked the fishing
vest for the day-shade would you give me
the TOMATOS
and to me came h's tomatoshand!³¹

³⁰ KLING. *brennstabn*, p. 60.

³¹ KLING. *brennsmtabn*, p. 60, my translation. Imitating the changed use of lowercase and capital, of highly styled visual effects ("und kam zu mir mein tomatnhand") and colloquial German spelling in Kling's poem (*aufm, hinterm, gesehen, ich sachts euch* to take just some examples), my translation stresses the estrangement of the performative poem to create an aesthetic of interruption by visualising sound. In my view, the linguistic and semantic alienation in Kling's poems reverberates also the debate of *littérature engagée* striving to overcome the exhaustion of everyday language in poetry

What Is the Poem About?

Kling's poem "portrait JB. fuchspelz,/ humboldtstrom, tomaten" follows chronologically the development and perspective of the young lyrical subject in his process of changing his habitual seeing into becoming a subject in an intra-agential exchange of a tomato. The symbolism of the tomato will be explained below. The reader follows the protagonist as he imagines, sees, memorizes, inter-, and finally intra-acts four times with the appearing *gestalt* of the avant-garde artist Joseph Beuys.³² The salient spatiotemporal frames, parceled in three stanzas, provide salient memory images in ekphrastic zones of narrative intensity. They emphasize a process in-between absence and presence as well as in-between reality and a re-described reality. These images may refer both to directly experienced or to indirectly mediated social performances. Composed in a dramatic climax and affectively expressed in the last three verses of the last stanza, the lyrical I strangely communicates with a Beuys-*gestalt* that gives him the tomatoes he had asked for.

This poem provides not only a performative or "autofictional" narrative. In an ekphrastic gesture, it composes also, in more or less obvious ways, a portrait of the performance artist Joseph Beuys, while, at the same time, investing self-referentially in the audio-visual materiality and performativity of the spoken and written poetic language. Rather than emphasizing a self-contained performance, the poem activates the

in the late 1960. On this background, my translation as well as my interpretation differs from REUMKENS. From Work to Frame in Intermedial References, sections 3-13.

³² The term *intra-action*, coined by Karen Barad, means the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. Barad's concept of agential realism rejects the two assumptions, namely that objects possess well-defined intrinsic attributes and that subjects are alone responsible for actions (BARAD. Meeting the Universe Halfway, p. 161-194). Beuys's social sculpture of the 7,000 Oaks exemplifies such an intra-action where "subjects" and "objects" work together as agencies. At great costs, at first 7,000 basalt columns, bought by Beuys, were piled as thousands of dead bodies after the 1943 bombing of Kassel. After these columns had been sold one after another, they were visibly placed next to one of the 7,000 tiny oak trees. Intra-acting with the inhabitants over several years, Beuys changed not only Kassel's cityscape by this forestation, but his project aimed also at healing the deep psychic scars of the Third Reich. The continuously changed perception of the city should influence the people and prepare them for a new society. It's aimed at a new society in future (BARNUM. Social Sculpture, p. 2; GROYS. On Art Activism, p. 12).

audience to a participatory process of “productive imagination”³³ via aesthetic interruption and alienation. Exemplified in the reaction of the lyrical subject, the poem’s complex metaphorical structure balances the reader’s emotional and embodied experience against the cognitive process of constituting meaning.³⁴

Still, as the poem obviously deals with modern art, it also responds to the tradition of delineating ekphrastic poems in the inter-art frame. This reading was for the first time suggested by Leo Spitzer in “Ode on a Grecian Urn”, and followed up by many scholarly studies, such as by Stephen Cheeke in *Writing for Art* (2008), by James Heffernan in *Museum of Words* (1993) and by the seven ekphrasis-articles collected in the recently published *Handbook of Intermediality*.³⁵ However, Kling’s poem disrupts the desire of the ekphrasis discourse to trace “explicit references” to aesthetic artifacts, which can be credited with intrinsically aesthetic value and such oppositional criteria as time and space or iconic and symbolic signs, in order to “open the eye of the text” rather than “floating in hazy and subjective impressions”.³⁶

In fact, this often-repeated argumentation harks back to several entrenched and unchallenged presumptions. They draw from Kant’s model of the aesthetics and the possibility to frame and to define a work of art by intrinsic values, as well as from the Enlightenment’s

³³ “Productive imagination” harks back to Paul Ricoeur’s threefold mimesis concept (LEVY. Sartre and Ricoeur on Productive Imagination. p. 56-78). For the reconsidering of the modalities of imagination in cognitive research see PIPER. Impartiality, Compassion, and Modal Imagination, p. 726-757; GRANT. *The Critical Imagination*.

³⁴ MEYER-KALKUS. “Ohrenbelichtung für alle”, p. 242.

³⁵ Heffernan’s most recent article “Ekphrasis: Theory” is critiqued by Clüver in “Intermediality and Interart Studies” and “A New Look on an Old Topic”. This intermedial understanding, ekphrasis is normatively bound to static visual representations as a source medium and discussed within the three intermedial categories; media transformation, media combination and intermedial references. In this context, “media” means either an artwork or a qualified media product (see EILITTÄ. Introduction, p. viii. For a more differentiated perspective see LUND. Medier i samspel, p. 7-23; ELLESTRÖM. *Media Transformation*, p. 11; 32-34). My argumentation differs from those scholars, as I propose a procedural art concept that blurs not only the frame around the artwork but also the line between presentation and representation as well as between artworks or media products and life.

³⁶ LOUVEL. *The Poetics of the Iconotext*, p. 60.

rationalizing and normative categorizations of aesthetics and arts, although its understanding of *mimesis* is based upon a simplified understanding of imitation or representation.³⁷ The objective of these abstract categorizations is to distinguish (autonomous) artefacts from (functional) everyday objects (non-art)³⁸ representations from presentations, media products from the unmediated reality, and artistic from social performances, done along the borderline between the “outside” world and the “inside”, between the mind and the traditional fact and fiction binary.³⁹ Yet, Derrida deconstructed convincingly the paregonal frame in its capacity to guarantee a stable borderline between the inside and the outside, between the art work and the otherness of the communality life.⁴⁰ In other words, rather than a fixed concept of ekphrasis as “double representation”, relying on a given definition of art, medium or, formally, on two oppositional sign systems, ekphrasis has to tackle the ambiguity of the frame and the signifying process. When shifting the focus from the object to the affective visuality, ekphrasis gains an ambiguity, that depends on the viewer’s perspective in interaction with matter and sight. Moreover, recognizing ekphrasis requires also the participation of a sensitive audience (the reader-viewer-listener) and its active performance as embodied spectator and witness in order to perceive the absent as present.⁴¹

Against the myth of the abovementioned binary categorization, Kling’s ekphrastic poem stresses visuality as a sensual “bridge” between the subject and the object in the framework of Barad’s “agential realism”

³⁷ WALLENSTEIN. *Space, Time and the Arts*, p. 1-14.

³⁸ Historically, the ekphrasis discourse is influenced by the Russian formalists and their endeavour to define the properties that made literature “literary” by stressing defamiliarization and by presuming the autonomy of art. Indeed, this theoretical approach has a strong impulse toward universal abstraction.

³⁹ Derrida questions Kant for presupposing the possibility of framing the work of art and thus for establishing what art is (DERRIDA. *The Truth in Painting*). Like many other scholars, Liliane Louvel insists on a distinct artefact and an obvious reference when defining ekphrasis (LOUVEL. *The Poetics of the Iconotext*, p. 60). As a critical alternative to her view, see BORG. *Literarische Ekphrasis und künstlerischer Realismus*, p. 38; HALLIWELL. *Fiction*, p. 341-353.

⁴⁰ See also JENKS. *The Centrality of the Eye in Western Culture*, p. 3.

⁴¹ WEBB. *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion*.

and “intra-action”.⁴² This perspective provides the potentiality for a new aesthetics in this sense of Rancière’s “aesthetic regime”. Kling’s poem exemplifies the clash between the traditional and an alternative perspective on art in the metaphor of the two currents symbolizing natural forces of energy in intra-action with the subject. Kling’s ekphrases produce an enhanced mode of sensual visuality via the memory images of the lyrical subject rather than representing a given reality outside. Thus, it remains unclear whether the visualized scene is anchored in a first- or second-hand experience,⁴³ a memory image (inside) or a distinct and hermetically packaged media product of a visual “re-presentation” (outside). Instead, it is crucial that ekphrasis creates a framed zone of narrative intensity. The emphasized perspective of a viewing lyrical subject explores the paradoxical effect of “making the absent present” in the contextual frame of a multimodal live performance.⁴⁴

As is often the case, the embodied experience of the lyrical I in Kling’s poem guides the reader’s perspective from stanza to stanza and

⁴² BARAD. *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p. 162-194. For the concept of agential realism see also footnote 32.

⁴³ Virilo points to the ambiguity between “viewing” and “reviewing” in late modern culture, when he describes the often second-hand visual experiences and public representations as “the vision machine” (VIRILIO. *The Vision Machine*, p. 59-113). See also JENKS. *The Centrality of the Eye in Western Culture*, p. 10.

⁴⁴ Before technologically determined mediations pushed the relevance of the human body as relevant basic medium in the background, ancient rhetoric calculated with the potentiality and the driving force of emotional human language within the theoretical framework of *phantasia* and *enargeia*. Pragmatically, ekphrasis was theorized in the contextual frame of a vivid live performance, including voice and gestures as modalities of the body performance, understood as an *action*. In the ancient anthropological philosophy, an intra-subjective force that formed the matter of oral language could be sensed even in the written text, because reading was practiced as an oral performance. In linking poststructuralist thinking and ancient rhetoric, my reconsidered performative ekphrasis concept allows again for an open multiplicity of conceptualizing this trope as a e/affective figure of thought, not bound to a specific kind of object, such as a visual representation or media product (WEBB. *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion*). Rather, ekphrasis is recognizable as qualitatively distinguishable zone of narrative intensity which conjured the paradoxical effect of making something absent present via visualization. In other words, ekphrasis could traditionally conjure a vast range of absent subjects, such as events, human beings, places, artifacts or more abstract: time topics (SQUIRE. *Ekphrasis*, p. 1-36).

exemplifies how the immediate sensual experience of presence expands into a process of sensing “in-sight”.

The Title’s Metaphorical Density

Already the poem’s title provides Beuys’ initials, JB, in an asyndetic list of a fox fur, the Humboldt Current and tomatoes promising a metaphorical density of Thomas Kling’s poetic language. When unfolding the references, the title announces a compressed portrait of Joseph Beuys’ politically and spiritually inspired art concept, designed to construct a humanized aesthetic society in the future in order to re-establish Germany’s lost cultural reputation.

Moreover, the reader will anticipate that Kling’s ekphrases postulate more than an obvious reference to a portrait, thought of as a distinct visual representation such as a photo. Indeed, the name Humboldt and the Humboldt Current evoke not one, but many different visual sources as referential objects. In this aspect, Kling’s ekphrases respond to the ancient definition with a broad range of referential objects. Drawing on a broader modern concept of ekphrasis, understood as “pictorial model”,⁴⁵ the name Humboldt points either to Beuys’ picture *Humboldt. Inter Nationes Bonn* or to a poster with the same title, that is electronically available at the Tate Gallery.⁴⁶ Thus, as both pictures are static “visual representations”, they are consequently ideal referential “sources” according to the traditional ekphrasis discourse, although they are not explicitly or vividly described.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ YACOBI. *Pictorial Models and Narrative Ekphrasis*, p. 599-649.

⁴⁶ See BEUYS. *Humboldt. Inter Nationes Bonn*. The poster is dated 1992, one year after Kling published his poem. Thus, Kling did not know this reference that, due to modern technology, is so easily available for modern readers. This not-intended referential ambiguity exemplifies the problematics of the common ekphrasis discourse that relies on the distinction of “factual” or “fictitious” references rather than on the “productive imagination”, on which Paul Ricoeur’ grounds his threefold mimesis concept (See RICŒUR. *The Function of Fiction in Shaping Reality*, p. 12-141). For “modal imagination” as extending conception of reality, see PIPER. *Impartiality, Compassion, and Modal Imagination*, p. 726-757.

⁴⁷ For Claus Clüver, this is a necessary criterion for defining the trope (CLÜVER. *Intermediality and Interart Studies*, p. 19-38).

Multiple prints of this picture may have served as a political advertisement for the ecological reform ideas of the German Green Party, for which Joseph Beuys, the co-founder of this party, was politically active. Bonn, named in the title of the picture, was the capital town in West Germany, as well as the place of the Humboldt Foundation, a rather conservative elite organization that aimed at reestablishing German culture after the war in an international context.⁴⁸ Already in the first stanza, Beuys' politically left-winged art activism is pointed out as the protagonist sees a man, acting behind the flyers on a trestle table.⁴⁹ Recognizable by his trench coat and fox fur, this scene frames prototypically Beuys and his art activism in the political scene in 1970s. Either in the institutionalized art space or in the public space, Joseph Beuys performs his socio-political art concept in his noticeable clothes.

Regardless, for the contemporary reader the reproducible poster of the Tate Gallery is easier available is easier to find than Beuys' "original". The printed paper version from the Tate Gallery displays the back of Joseph Beuys in his fishing vest at a gallery, an ostentatious sign that marks his performance as artist and that is also mentioned in the third stanza. He looks at an embedded picture, to which the verbal title at the top and the bottom provides a second frame. This embedded image, made by Beuys himself, appropriates modern self-contained art, as the picture features two figurative, human-animal-stone-sculptures in the style of Pablo Picasso.

In other words, Beuys' portrait in the poster of the Tate Gallery visualizes obviously two oppositional art concepts: the modern autonomous art that matches with Rancière's "aesthetic regime" and Beuys' engaged sociopolitical aesthetic that aims, in Rancière's words, at "coming to political awareness and means of undermining the legitimacy

⁴⁸ RUPKE. *Alexander von Humboldt*, p. 145.

⁴⁹ The spelling of *fuwxpelz* in verse three and *fuchspelz* in the title is alienated both by the small letters and a spelling, different from the usual *Fuchspelz*. These deviations stress the audio-visual effect and iconic, self-referential aspect of Kling's performative language that unfolds performance on the dynamic scale from authenticity to simulation.

of great art”.⁵⁰ This tension is repeated throughout the poem in the metaphor of the two currents.

Another connection with the name Humboldt offers the “humboldt current”, mentioned in the title and again in the second stanza. It links the existing Humboldt school (“humboldtgynasium”) in Düsseldorf, where a dramatic performance is staged, with the novel and metaphorical idiom “WIR BEKAMN HUMBOLDT STROM” (“WE BECAME A HUMBOLD CURRENT”), loudly exclaimed by the lyrical voice as the capital letters make one assume. The emphatic tone is also representative for Thomas Kling’s expressive readings.

Humboldt refers to a humanism that dominated for a long time the German ideal of *Kultur* and *Bildung*, once initiated by the brothers Alexander (1769-1859) and Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835). Even in the 1970s, Humboldt’s humanism was the standard according to which the arts and high education were measured.⁵¹ The Humboldt Current, on the other hand, refers to the far-off Peru Current that should be imagined in its signifying coldness, through which it is sensible and effective in its environment in contrast to the warm Golf current, closer and easier to recall.⁵²

Metaphorically, the evocation of the two currents, the warm and the cold one, corresponds with the contrasting aesthetic positions. The poem unfolds them as the collision of two oppositional cultural forces, the German neologism *unter-strom* (“under-current”) and the

⁵⁰ RANCIÈRE. *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p. 62. Rancière argues that the concept of aesthetics is based upon a particular “regime of identification of art”. Since art is always perceived differently in different periods, he outlines three regimes: “the ethical regime”, in which a sculpture is evaluated against the question of truthfulness and copy in the light of Plato’s philosophy; “the representational regime”, in which sculpture is classified in a hierarchical genre system in relation to the adequacy between subject matter and representation; and “the aesthetic regime”, in which art has neither a particular place in society nor is it defined by skill and practice (RANCIÈRE. *The Politics of Aesthetics*). Both Beuys and Kling are perfect examples for the “aesthetic regime”.

⁵¹ SCOTT; PASQUOLINI. Invoking Humboldt, p. 219; SACHS. *The Humboldt Current*.

⁵² INGOLD. *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 3. Tim Ingold argues that “activities leading to the production of what we in the West would call ‘art’ should be understood not as ways of representing the world of experience on a higher, more symbolic plane, but of probing more deeply into it and discovering the significance that lies there” (INGOLD. *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 11).

HUMBOLDTSTROM (HUMBOLDT-CURRENT). “Unter-strom” can be understood in relation to the colloquial German idiom *unter Strom stehen*. Alluding to electric power, the notion means something like “to be live, high or hyped up”. When the lyrical I comments the scene in class with “WIR BEKAMN HUMBOLDTSTORM”, this expresses the sensibly cold energy and atmosphere in the room, caused by the highly educated teacher, Dr. August Peters, as he sees the late coming friend of the protagonist appearing in a trench coat similar to that of Beuys. In the context of the Humboldt Current and the Golf Stream, the undercurrent implies the idea of a hidden current below the surface. The unusually visual spelling of the Humboldt Current in capital letters in contrast to the under-current in low letters is another form of “visuality”. It makes the reader “see differently” by means of the diagrammatic iconicity of the language.

In a more general political frame of German culture during the 1980s, the metaphorical idiom and the coldness of the Peru Current points sensitively to the geopolitical tension between East and West during the Cold War, under which German artists worked. Furthermore, both currents can be related to Jacques Rancière’s two art regimes: on the one side, the “representational system”, symbolized by institutionalized Humboldt culture and experienced through the coldness of the Humboldt Current, and the “under-current”, that signifies the invisible but growing influence of the aesthetic regime of art. The artists Joseph Beuys and Thomas Kling are two examples of what Rancière had in mind when defining the “aesthetic regime”.

Composition of an “Autofictional” Narrative

This poem suggests an identity relation between the lyrical I and Thomas Kling. It provides three different frames of time-space, in which Kling or the lyrical speaker perceives either Joseph Beuys or someone ambiguously performing in his *gestalt*. Each performative encounter is an ekphrastic “spectacle for the eyes”. Two of the independent social events are explicitly set in Düsseldorf, the hometown of both Kling and Beuys. Indeed, the pupil Thomas Kling, at the age of 15, could have met Beuys on his way to school, where the 36 years older artist could have been involved in one of his many political art events in the central public space of the Schadow Arkaden, as the first stanza proposes. No distinction

between fact and fiction can be made. Anyway, as this visual experience of Beuys' socio-artistic performance is often indistinguishable from social performances, neither is the distinction between presentation and representation made relevant. The lyrical protagonist memorizes Beuys either as a direct, authentic perception or as technologically reproduced second-hand representation because of the multiple representations of the media celebrity. In creating an equal myth or "autofiction", this affective ambiguous memory image paves the way for a climatic autobiographical composition of several similar visions and astonishing experiences that seem to cause the transformation of the lyrical subject: a development from being inspired by a distanced contact with the socio-political artist to the awakening of the lyrical subject into an artist himself. In "productive imagination", the reader adds the absent background to complete Kling's performative or "autofictional" narrative. It develops from the first stanza, when the lyrical subject breaks with his habit of going to school only to learn obeying traditional cultural norms, such as correct German orthography, an educated style and the ideals that define "good art". Consequently, Kling's poetic language provides a disturbing spelling, imitating a colloquial tongue, and novel metaphorical expressions in diagrammatic iconicity. It activates the reader to visualize the absent, such as the hidden power of undercurrent and to embody such sensual experiences like the coldness of the Humboldt Current.

Forced to Break the Habit

In fact, the main subject of the poem is the collision of two oppositional cultural forces that make the lyrical subject break with old habits, such as going to school and following the dominant stream of the Humboldt culture. Alternatively, he senses an undercurrent as a warm energy stream, evoked by the visualized scene of a man acting like Beuys in the public place. This is the energy that forces him to see and act differently. Due to the drizzle and his distant position, far from the man, the protagonist detects the other via a pre-received, auratic image of the significant persona rather than by direct sense data.⁵³ However, while the low visibility hampers the identification, it enhances the beholder's

⁵³ RICCEUR. *The Function of Fiction in Shaping Reality*, p. 133.

affective imagination and the constructiveness of the narrative subject.⁵⁴ Moreover, Kling's performative language and aesthetic of interruption embodies the reader as much as the protagonist: both stop when perceiving this man. In fact, the reading flow is disturbed by the unusual full stop after drizzle.⁵⁵ In a sensitive reading, this audiovisual sign can be heard as a silence. It emphasizes the framed space that provides the protagonist's emotional sight of the man. Dependent on the "invisible" frame around the man's being "out there", the scene becomes an ekphrastic spectacle for the eyes, balancing between presentation and representation. In contrast to the staccato style and the asyndetic descriptions of the setting of the other verses, the last stanza pushes the reader to rush through the verbal flow of a long sentence to the very end of the poem. Without interrupting punctuation, the reader is likewise forced to follow the dynamic force that the lyrical subject experiences and exemplarily intra-acts with. Thus, the intra-action between the verbal performance and the sensitive reader equals that between the lyrical I and the force of the undercurrent. In diagrammatic iconicity, the performative language imitates the action of the protagonist as an aesthetic of interruption.

This image of an alternative energy exemplifies the embodied experience of Kling's aesthetic concept of interruption and estrangement. Like the lyrical subject, the reader is forced to follow an "undercurrent" that discloses the potential to change and to develop alternative perspectives against the dominant stream. At the same time, the metaphor of a current also relativizes the free will of the subject.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Despite its ambiguity of the text, the reader can string the identifying attributes and the allusion to the mentioned referential sources to construct a "portrait" of Joseph Beuys. While the fox fur points to Joseph Beuys as artist, the trestle table and the form of the leaflets evoke images of the political Joseph who performs like the holy carpenter St. Joseph, planing and slicing wood, to form a new and better society. This image corresponds with the spiritual ideas of Beuys' art. See also REUMKENS. *From Work to Frame in Intermedial References*, section: 21.

⁵⁵ The introductory frame of time and space is set after the verse "Eines/ vormittags, im niesel." ("One /morning, in the drizzle"). Then, in a frame of its own, the protagonist's perspective of the performance is given. This embedded image is, in a way, similar to the poster with Beuys in the Tate Gallery, providing a "double visual representation".

⁵⁶ DELEUZE; GUATTARI. *A Thousand Plateaus*; CLARKE. *Land-scopic Regimes*, p. 50.

Michel Foucault also uses the metaphor of clashing energy streams, proposing that the “most intensive point of lives, that in which they concentrate their energy, is right there where they clash with power, struggle with it, try to use their forces or escape its traps”.⁵⁷ Deleuze and Guattari theorized this clash between the perceptible and imperceptible as *percipiendum*.⁵⁸

The intensity of affects in its two-sidedness “as virtual synesthetic perspectives”⁵⁹ crystallizes only momentarily into signifying units.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, this embodied experience can evoke new ways of constructing meaning beyond what is directly seen or what is expressible in words. The first stanza (verses 1 to 6) expresses this experience by asyndetically stringing together the signifying attributes (*tapeziertisch, fuxxpelz, mantel, flugzettel*) in short sentences around the verb *seen* and the idiom *blau machen* (“skive off”).⁶¹ This stanza visually exemplifies the ineffable of *percipiendum* in its potential force to unsettle programmatically familiar perceptual and embodied cognitive schemes according to Deleuze and Guattari, and “the distribution of the sensible”, described by Rancière as aesthetic practice.⁶²

⁵⁷ FOUCAULT. *Power, Truth, Strategy*, p. 80.

⁵⁸ DELEUZE; GUATTARI. *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 281.

⁵⁹ MASSUMI. *The Autonomy of Affect*, p. 96.

⁶⁰ THIELEMANS. *Beyond Visuality*, p. 3.

⁶¹ The colloquial expression “da macht ich BLAU” (then I skived OFF) means that someone cuts out of his duties, such as the pupil going to school. Furthermore, the capitalization suggests a relation between all capitalized words in the poem. They might be considered akin to loud voice putting emphasis on affects or suggesting alternative meanings. A similar estrangement comes with the astonishing juxtaposition of “eines vor-/ mittags unter-strom” (a mid-/morning under-current).

⁶² RANCIÈRE. *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p. 7 ff. For Rancière, “the distribution of the sensible” defines the conditions of visibility and invisibility, sayability and unsayability within a particular social system, is integral to the representational regime, in which the arts occupy a particular place (RANCIÈRE. *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p. 12-47). “The essence of politics consists in interrupting the distribution of the sensible by supplementing it with those who have no part in the perceptual coordinates of the community, thereby modifying the very aesthetico-political field of possibility” (RANCIÈRE. *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p. 3).

The Distribution of the Sensible

The second and even more the third stanza further illustrate this distribution of the sensible. The second stanza features another young man, influenced by the undercurrent, according to another memory image of the lyrical I as a complex ekphrasis that emphasizes divergent perspectives in an affective visualization of what is perceived as a given “reality”. The friend of the lyrical I who suddenly appears in school evokes strong emotions and an outburst of the teacher, “Doctor august peters”.⁶³ Obviously, the pupil breaks the rules of the institutionalized authority and of the required decency, both by coming too late and by performing in Beuys’ trench coat in the class. For the angry and philistine Humboldt authority demands the pupil to take off the coat – “ZIEHEN SIE DEN BEUYS AUS!” (“TAKE THE BEUYS OFF!”). The pupil’s body appears neither a sign carrier (*representamen*), providing the material interface of medium,⁶⁴ that is, the material ground on which simulation, mimesis, imitation or fiction is taking place, nor seems Beuys to be an artist “deep” enough to imitate. However, blending with the associated attributes of the invisible and deep undercurrent and the dominating stream on the surface, the undercurrent produces or brings to the light and to surface those artists who engage in the performative art of appropriation to challenge the myth of origin and originality, as Beuys tried to do.

This traditional, “Humboldt” perspective continues to live on in the discourse of ekphrasis. Thus, the performance in which a *gestalt* stages the ostentatious signs of Beuys’ persona is ignored as referential artefact, even though it provides a (mimetic) work of its own. Admittedly, the borderline between artistic and social performances is hard to draw in the “aesthetic regime”, in particular, as the contested and shifting concept

⁶³ The capital letters of the teacher’s profession stress his high education, anchored in the Humboldt tradition, while his first name (august) and its spelling ridicules him, in particular, when the name is understood as indexical allusion to the song “Oh du lieber Augustin, alles ist hin” (“Oh, you dear Augustin, all is gone”). In this case, it announces the demise of the Humboldt system.

⁶⁴ ELLESTRÖM. *The Modalities of Media*, p. 13.

of performance and conceptual art employs both ordinary objects and everyday activities.⁶⁵

Emotionally touched, the lyrical subject follows Beuys' provocative art concept according to Beuys' dictum "Everybody is an artist".⁶⁶ Like Beuys' body performances, the boy's performance at school is part of his process to become a socio-political artist. Rancièrè's two systems are visually expressed in the spelling. Indeed, like mimesis, both seeing and imagining are active processes which bring to light those similarities that help to construct an alternative image beyond the direct replica of the real world, understood as direct realism. Formally classified as time-based art, the complex multimodality of performances, like that of installations, goes beyond the binaries of space-time, stasis-movement or of the opposing sign systems.

Even the recent ekphrasis discourse is busy with these oppositions. Instead, the intra-action with the audience and a permeable frame around the artwork is as crucial for Kling's "linguistic installations" as for the ekphrastic evocation of Beuys' artistic installations. By contrast, an ekphrasis discourse that limits itself to the encounter of two formally different genres of art, or "double representation" excludes this performative and multimodal aesthetic as otherness. Yet, performance has the potentiality for change and innovative art forms. In the second stanza, the dramatic clash of the oppositional perspectives, personified in the teacher and the pupils, exemplifies the collusion of the above mentioned two currents. Moreover, it juxtaposes different perspectives of framing reality to enhance the complexity of sense-making that is densified in poetic realism. The emotional comments of the lyrical voice, spoken from another historical frame, mark the emphasis in the capital letters ("WE BECAME A HUMBOLDT CURRENT" and "HE MEANT HIS TRENCH COAT") to illuminate the invisible and emotional force of the undercurrent. Etymologically, *enargeia* means "bringing into light". This scene embodies the possibility for change through the colliding affects and illustrates the transition from the "representative regime" to the "aesthetic regime" and its innovative art forms. As in the first stanza, no clear line can be drawn between fact and fiction or between presentation

⁶⁵ LJUNGBERG. *Intermediality and Performance Art*, p. 548-589; TURNER. *The Anthropology of Performance*; CARLSON. *Performance*, p. 19.

⁶⁶ BURGBACHER-KRUPKA. *Beuys Joseph Prophet Rechts Prophet Links*, p. 63.

and representation, because the scenes serve the myth of, what can be called an “authentic autofiction”. In other words, Kling’s performative language produces this performative image by heightening innovation and disruption in vivid ekphrastic scenes. Social performance and the invisible concept of an art activism are symbolized by the undercurrent. They can be sensed via an embodied act of “seeing differently”.

Handing over the Baton

The third stanza describes the artist’s performance in- and outside of the *documenta* in two different ekphrastic frames. The first narrates how the lyrical I participates in the well-known event of Joseph Beuys’ *Honey Pump* installation in 1977, the second how the lyrical protagonist “intra-acts” with the man in a fishing vest, either being or performing as Joseph Beuys outside the institutional art space. As said before, Kling’s performative language illuminates this intra-action in disturbing diagrammatic iconicity. The installation, fully titled *Honey Pump in the Workplace*, illustrates Beuys’ process- and dialogue-oriented work. Those scholars who recognize the title *Honey Pump* and the short description of the installation as ekphrasis, need to limit the event to an isolated spatial and visual object rather than “seeing” it differently in the broader time frame of a 100 days event in which Beuys’ educational workshops, teaching his idea of a Total Work of Art, took place as an intra-action with the audience.⁶⁷

Against this reading, I emphasize that ekphrasis stresses the embodied experience of the lyrical I and visibility imbricating the invisible and the visible, the absence and the presence, in a zone of narrative intensity: the first frame underlines the invisible metaphoric function of the artefact, that is, the honey pump as a heart, giving life by circulating honey like the vital oxygen in the humanized “body of society”.

⁶⁷ The intra-actional practice and performance is only recognizable *after* the act have been achieved. Beuys concept of a Total Work of Art reinterprets Marx’ idea of capital and men’s being as production in the Romantic framework of an all-embracing and processual *poiesis* and *play-drive*, as proposed by Friedrich Schiller, Novalis and Wagner’s “Artwork of the Future” (FINGER. *Das Gesamtkunstwerk der Moderne*, p. 36; ROBERTS. *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism*, p. 76).

Seen simply as a machine or a sculpture, the honey pump is incomplete. Beuys' art of the future both presents and represents the abstract rules of society. In his art concept, he propagates alternative energy processing against the main technology current and the dominant discourse, that insists on the necessity of nuclear power plants. According to Beuys, it is not the artist, but the audience that creates this socio-aesthetic change, as the second part of the last stanza illustrates.⁶⁸

In intensifying the experience of the first stanza, the second frame of the third stanza provides another encounter of the lyrical I with Beuys in the *gestalt* of the "lagerndn mann". This image refers ambiguously to Beuys' action of being or "camping" in the art space of the *documenta* where he performed in a "permanent conference" in order to construct a new free, solidary and creative society.⁶⁹ Either Thomas Kling was one of the visitors, as the lyrical subject suggests, or Kling refers to a secondhand experience, collected from photos and TV-shows.⁷⁰ More relevant for the interpretation is that the *documenta* in Kassel is the very space in which Kling started to perform his own "linguistic installations" only a few years later.

It takes the reader's participation and the "productive imagination" of multiple visual images, either technologically or perceptually mediated, to construct Kling's "autofictional" story that tells about his awakening as artist and is modeled upon the established "autofictional" myth of Joseph Beuys into a "double portrait". In countless performances and installations, Beuys created his own story about how he "became" reborn as an artist after an air crash in Crimea in 1944. His preferred working materials of fat and fur are anchored in this story.⁷¹ Following the same habit, Kling recalls and fuses a "data-patchwork" of personal memories and cultural images into a cohesive frame of autobiographical-sense-making.⁷²

This performative construction is illustrated in the second frame of the last stanza, as the lyrical subject communicates with the man in the fishing vest directly. He asks him twice for what the poem strangely calls

⁶⁸ JORDAN. *The Evolution of Social Sculpture*, p. 150.

⁶⁹ GROYS. *On Art Activism*, p. 12.

⁷⁰ BEUYS. *What is Art?*, p. x.

⁷¹ SCHOENE. *Beuys' Hut: Performance und Autofiktion*.

⁷² WALTENBERGER. "paddelnde mediävistik", p. 146.

“den tagschatten”, “the day-shade”.⁷³ This notion points to the shifting time levels in the poem, the day-time of the events, told in each stanza, and the different timeframes of the lyrical voice. Moreover, it helps to characterize and establish the undercurrent by shedding light on a strange analogy created between tomatoes and potatoes and between light and darkness. Both plants belong to the Family of Nightshades. However, Kling’s replacing of potatoes with tomatoes evokes Beuys’ famous performative dictum, according to which “everybody is an artist” and “[e]ven the act of peeling a potato can be a work of art, if it is a conscious act”.⁷⁴ By doing so, Beuys emphasizes that art is the product of a cognitive framing process rather than a clearly recognizable product and closed entity of high value. In substituting tomatoes for the German’s beloved potatoes, Thomas Kling in his turn evokes a complex color metaphoric of opposing brown (symbolizing the conservative political parties), red and green (an alternative socio-political thinking based on Marxist theory providing an aesthetic for the future).

The force of the undercurrent pushes the tomato over to the lyrical protagonist, helping him to define his new identity is another type of

⁷³ The German expression *tomatn* is attuned to the spoken language due to the loss of the unstressed *e* in the last syllable (apocope). In the third stanza, *TOMATN*, visualised in capital letters, intra-acts with the *tomatn* (“tomatos”) in the title and facilitates the neologism *tomatnhand*, an expression that densifies the performance of the Beuys-persona to an independent acting of a hand delivering tomatoes. The two lines of the poem, “tagschatten gibst du mir/ die TOMATN und kam zu mir sein tomatnhand!” (day-shade would you give me/ the TOMATOS and to me came h’s tomatoshand!), exchange *tomatoes* with the name of the Plant Family *Tagschatten*, “Nightshades”, (metonymy). By modifying *Nightshades* into *day-shade* this oxymoron evokes the paradoxical effect of simultaneous state of light and darkness and opens for the ambiguous relation between tomatoes and potatoes that compresses Beuys’s left-winged political art in a complex image. Thus, not only the antonym but also the construction of the last strange sentence interrupts the reader in the flow of reading, as it avoids naming a direct grammatical subject. Indeed, the acting man is reduced to his salient signs of his clothes and his hand delivering the fruits like a baton. The passive construction of this verse, that is not possible to translate into English, emphasises the limitation of the concept of the free will and of a sovereign subject. Instead, it stresses the invisible force of the current subduing the lyrical I as agent in an intra-action with forces and objects. In short, this image is a metaphor for *enargeia*, that is, the force on which ekphrasis is based.

⁷⁴ BEUYS. Interview with Willoughby Sharp, p. 87.

ekphrasis that describes the process of how he becomes a live-giving artist by taking the tomato like a baton. This performative ekphrasis does not refer to a specific art object, but to Kling's and Beuys' idea of constituting themselves in an aesthetic performance. The out-stretched "tomatohand" expands the metaphor of live-giving food provided in the *Honey Pump*. While the fishing vest symbolizes Beuys as performing artist, his other descriptive attribute "camping" can be read both as an iconic allusion to the very popular image of Beuys sitting and facing his art object and as eponym of Beuys' installation "Before Leaving Camp I" (1970-1980), in particular, as this installation of loosely arranged objects represents Beuys' foundational myth of being reborn as an artist. In other words, this dense ekphrasis evokes at least two different materialized artifacts. Furthermore, it also plays a role in re-constructing multiple social-cognitive "realities".

In short, following the perception of the lyrical protagonist, Kling's portrait of Beuys does not domesticate this ambiguity of ekphrasis to static visual representations and clearly identifiable objects. Instead, despite the realistic setting of the poem, Kling's ekphrases frame and enhance also how perceptual experiences are layered with memories, artifice and media products. The act of visibility blurs any categorical distinction between directly perceived reality and fiction.⁷⁵ In addition, both the body, considered as a basic medium,⁷⁶ and Walter Benjamin's "medium of perception",⁷⁷ embrace the sensual experiences of the lyrical protagonist and of the reader. They conjure a salient "spectacle for the eye", defined as ekphrasis already in ancient rhetoric. At the same time, Kling's ekphrases emphasize "the paradoxical status of *truth*

⁷⁵ Although this frame does not need to be a material, physical thing as Heidegger's *Gestell*, it functions as a structuring device, separating the world outside "as an object lying in wait" from the subject viewing the world. This framing function descended, as Castillo and Egginton state, "from a culture whose fundamental media are theatrical in form" (CASTILLO; EGGINTON. *Medialogies*, p. 192).

⁷⁶ Elleström defines "basic media" by their modal properties and "qualified media" are also by historical, cultural, social, aesthetic and communicative facets (ELLESTRÖM. *Media Transformation*, p. 5).

⁷⁷ According to Benjamin's media theory, human sensory is always organized by rhythms of perception, coordinating the visible, audible and tactile, as well as by different forms of material, technical, and discursive mediation. All these influences change throughout history (SOMAINI. *Walter Benjamin's Media Theory*, p. 7).

and *authenticity* in a world that has lost its traditional anchors”.⁷⁸ Thus, ekphrasis in this poem has the function to stimulate the reader into a participatory process of creating meaning against the foil of Beuys’ ethical and socio-political art concept.

In conclusion, Thomas Kling’s ekphrastic poem composes an autobiographic narrative by elaborating with the metaphor of an undercurrent that grows more and more as sensitive force. It provides several framed portraits of Joseph Beuys, either as still images or as performances. Visualized from the protagonist’s point of view, they are part of Beuys’ conceptual art. Kling’s ekphrastic poem highlights the protagonist’s visuality of conjuring images in-between directly experienced ‘reality’ or remembered mediated images. In any case, the lyrical protagonist imagines the extraordinary of everyday events within the frame of his memory. In drawing on Beuys’ artistic and socio-political performance concept, Kling’s ekphrases disturb the traditional habit of distinguishing between presentation and representation, between fact and fiction, and between art/media and life as much as the undercurrent disturbs the Humboldt Current, and the “aesthetic regime” disrupts the “representational regime”.⁷⁹

My critical engagement with the contemporary ekphrasis discourse was meant to break with the habit of limiting the referential objects to art objects or qualified media products, defined according to their inherent features. I wanted to show how Thomas Kling applies ekphrasis to provide an epistemological process of viewing and judging phenomena that become salient events or signs for those who are interacting with them, but not for others. Thus, I turned the focus from a provable reference source, restricted to a distinct canonized painting or sculpture of the representative system, to the affective and imaginative process of becoming, of constituting mental images from many sources.

As all scenes refer to Beuys’ life performances, which blur the distinction between art and life, the paradox of balancing between presentation and representation is doubled. Moreover, Kling’s poem densifies ekphrasis in a way that several artifacts can be recalled to give a broad image of Beuys’ extended art concept for those readers that are familiar with the art historical background.

⁷⁸ CASTILLO; EGGINTON. *Medialogies*, p. 3-4.

⁷⁹ RANCIÈRE. *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p. 49.

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