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CHANGING

BORDERS

Contemporary Positions  
in Intermediality

Intermedia Studies Press

# Changing Borders

# Changing



# Borders

## *Contemporary Positions in Intermediality*

Edited by

*Jens Arvidson  
Mikael Askander  
Jørgen Bruhn  
Heidrun Führer*



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*To Hans Lund*



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## Editor's foreword

With this volume, consisting of a collection of analyses and reflections in the research field of intermedia studies, the editors have, of course, not strived to produce a poetics of intermediality and its theory. The reader should, rather, read the texts presented here as a wide-ranging kaleidoscope showing some aspects of the impressive breadth and depth of contemporary intermedia research.

There are two obvious reasons for publishing this collection of contemporary contributions concerning intermedia research. First of all, the articles included mark a state of the art, at least in the shape of a small sample, of the intermedial research produced today. And secondly, the book is meant to honour our friend and colleague Hans Lund, a crucial person in Scandinavian and Western interarts and intermedia research.

But there is a third, and better, reason, too. Contemporary art and literature are marked by an increased intermedial interest, and – perhaps as a result of this – a growing amount of academic research is being done, with or without the term “intermedial” directly attached, inside and outside and on the borders of the “proper” interart institutions. It could be argued that contemporary academic research is being pushed forward by the wave of (a renewed) interest in mixing the genres and media in a veritable expression of the dream of the Sister Arts – or *ut pictura poesis*. Or perhaps one should argue that contemporary art and literature is striving to, once and for all, bury the dream of the loving relationship between the arts? Is a *paragone* between the arts based on the dream of a similar existential or aesthetic foundation, leading to marriage or fight – or are the different arts simply internally untranslatable? No matter: any reader orienting herself/himself in the artistic and academic landscape in the western countries will realize that the epoch of isolated art products as well as art and media studies belongs to the past. And the idea that musicologists, literary scholars and art historians, to name but a few of the important scholars in cultural analysis, must live in isolated compartments (normally called departments) seems to be on the wane: not only as a result of economic arguments and administrative practicalities, but most of all because the idea of the autonomous academic disciplines, born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, must now be considered an outdated concept. Scholars and students around the world now realize that this compartmentalisation is no longer the most productive way of organizing cultural analysis because the obvious way of approaching cultural artefacts and aesthetic products is to consider them as being intermedial as a primary condition, not as a secondary fact. The oft-repeated dictum of W.J.T. Mitchell's saying that “all media are mixed media” has become

a commonplace, in other words.<sup>1</sup> The institutional results of this theoretical concept remain to be seen, though.

The idea that all media are mixed media has produced a number of important results in the field of interarts studies, but it has also made the very idea of “interarts” problematic. Instead of considering relations between the traditional (high) arts the contemporary heir to interart studies has been named intermedia studies (see also Claus Clüver’s contribution to the present volume). Finally, the spell of the “concealed normativity” (see Jens Arvidson’s article) of interarts studies can be broken, and intermedia studies can take its place at the centre of any conceivable humanistic analysis, not only when it comes to traditionally intermedial subjects like ekphrasis, picture books or music-word-relations in songs. One vision of intermedia studies could be to establish intermedia studies as a kind of propedeutic element in all educative plans for the humanities (or even wider, see Kathleen Lundeen’s article on intermedia aspects of the natural sciences): thus, intermedial studies should no longer be isolated as a specialised department for researchers but as a pedagogical entrance to culture studies in the broadest sense of the word.

Thus, intermedia studies do not *strive* to be an interdisciplinary field, a new discipline, nor even a modest continuation of the earlier interarts studies. The essential idea behind intermedia studies is that it is the discipline underlying any conceivable study of cultural artefacts. Needless to say, it lacks an exhaustive catalogue or an archive consisting of the intermedia studies canon. Yet it works its way through the entire archive of Western culture by slowly rereading the existing objects of cultural studies, and the current volume is a small step in that direction. Intermedia studies operate within the cultural archive and fills up the anachronistic (and illusory) gap that exist between the disciplines.

But, the reader might argue, several crucial questions remain to be answered: first of all a definition of “medium” is lacking in this new field formerly known as interart studies. What is a medium? And as a result of this: what is multimedia, what are composite or mixed media? Most scholars work with a rather pragmatic definition of the concept of medium, heading on for other questions concerning the relations between different media forms. In his introductory chapter in *Intermedialitet* (2002), a textbook for students, Hans Lund suggests an efficient, if also heuristic, schematization of different intermedial phenomena:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance W.J.T. Mitchell: “Beyond Comparison: Picture, Text, and Method” in *Picture Theory. Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, Chicago; London (p. 83–107), p. 95; “Showing Seeing. A Critique of Visual Culture,” republished on a number of occasions, most recent in his *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*, Chicago; London 2005 (p. 336–356), p. 343, 350; “There Are No Visual Media” in *Journal of Visual Culture*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2005 (p. 257–266).

<sup>2</sup> Hans Lund: “Medier i samspel” in Hans Lund (ed.): *Intermedialitet. Ord, bild och ton i samspel*, Lund 2002 (p. 7–23), p. 19–22.

COMBINATION		INTEGRATION	TRANSFORMATION
<b>Interference</b>	<b>Co-existence</b>	Concrete poetry	Verbal ekphrasis
Illustration	Advertisement	Sound poetry	Musical ekphrasis
Emblems	Stamps	Typography	Program music
Picture & title	Songs	Print picture	Novel into film
Music & title	Video	Sprechgesang	Iconic projection
Photo journalism	Comics	Conceptual art	Words into music
Picture book	Opera	Picture alphabet	Cinematic novel
	Liturgy	Iconicity	Theatricalization
	Posters	Image containing verbal signs	of text

The division of all possible intermedial relations into this triple framework has turned out to be an extremely useful pedagogical instrument, and the framework has been elaborated (in a semiotic direction) by Claus Clüver and Leo Hoek, as put together by Eric Vos (and slightly changed by Clüver as presented on page 26 in this volume):<sup>3</sup>

SCHEMA OF WORD-IMAGE RELATIONS	transmedial relation [relation transmédiALE]	multimedia discourse [discours multimédiaL]	mixed-media discourse [discours mixte]	intermedial discourse [discours synchrétique]
distinctiveness [séparabilité]	+	+	+	-
coherence/self-sufficiency	+	+	-	-
polytextuality	+	-	-	-
simultaneous production	-	-	+	+
simultaneous reception	-	+	+	+
process	transposition	juxtaposition	combination	union/fusion
schematized text-image relation	text > image image > text	image   text	image + texte	i t m e a x g t e
examples	ekphrasis art criticism photonovel	emblem illustrated book title of painting	poster comic strip postage stamp	typography calligramme concrete poetry

<sup>3</sup> Eric Vos: "The Eternal Network. Mail Art, Intermedia Semiotics, Interarts Studies" in Ulla-Britta Lagerroth, Hans Lund, and Erik Hedling (eds.): *Interart Poetics. Essays on the Interrelation of the Arts and Media*, Amsterdam; Atlanta 1997 (p. 325–336), p. 326–327.

Border cases will always trouble such a framework, and stimulate new discussions, but intermedia studies can find itself on such relatively stable divisions.

However, intermedia studies must, we believe, at the same time orient itself after one crucial fact, namely that such a framework expresses one grave misunderstanding: it seems to suggest that there exists genres or media that are *unintermedial*. Contemporary intermedia theory stresses the very impossibility of this view; all media exist on borders and the view from the borderland turns out to be the most penetrating view of the entire field giving a new perspective on the central areas of the arts.

The very existence of intermedia studies will, undoubtedly, pose new questions and perhaps even provoke new answers: from questions concerning autonomous arts to questions concerning the borders of the media.

*Jens Arvidson, Mikael Askander, Jørgen Bruhn, and Heidrun Führer  
Lund, November 2007*


## **Introductions to the Intermedial Field**





# Intermediality and Interarts Studies

*Claus Clüver*

In recent years, a sign has appeared on the backs of cars that is expected to make an immediately recognizable statement. It is composed of a short horizontal convex line connecting on the left with a corresponding concave line, while on the right both lines intersect. In many cultures it would be read as the simplest and most abstract representation of a fish. And that is how it is intended to be read; but the message it is meant to convey is an expression of faith. Those who use the sign and many who read it will know that it has a long history: it was used as a coded sign by early Christians, before their faith was elevated to the state religion. It reads indeed “fish” – in Greek; and  $\iota\chi\theta\upsilon\zeta$  (ichthys), or more correctly  $\text{IX}\Theta\text{Y}\Sigma$ , was understood to be an acronym for what in English would be “Jesus Christ God’s Son Savior,” in a world view in which this connection would appear as anything but accidental. Decisive for its effectiveness as a furtive sign was its intermedial nature, which made it possible to represent the essence of one’s faith in two easily and artlessly produced lines. The lines are part of a system of visual representation; but the “fish” they represent belongs to a complex mode of verbal representation tied to the spelling system of a particular language. Several instances of the visual sign grouped together would represent no more than a school of fish; but in isolation and in a particular context the sign stands for a Greek word which, tied to this sign, is likewise isolated from all other instances of “ $\text{IX}\Theta\text{Y}\Sigma$ ” and assumes the character and functions of an acronym. In the particular use to which it was put by the early Christians and for which it has been resuscitated in our days,<sup>1</sup> the sign belongs neither solely to a visual medium nor to a verbal medium but relies on the codes and signifying power of both; it is an intermedia sign. 

The concept of “intermedia” signs or texts, along with those of “multimedia” and “mixed-media” texts, forms part of the instruments operated by a transdisciplinary field dedicated to the study of “intermediality.” The term is relatively new, and

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<sup>1</sup> The contemporary function of the sign, now available in solid, mass-produced form, is of a more public nature and addressed to believers and non-believers alike. It has had a polemical response by the production of a sign that has added to the bottom of the fish sign four angled lines signifying feet, in a visual short-hand asserting the theory of evolution by which sea-creatures moved to land, in defiance of Genesis. This has apparently been met with another sign based on the many cartoons showing the bigger fish eating the smaller: the “walking fish” is being swallowed by a bigger one without feet but inscribed with TRUTH in large letters – which turns the intermedia sign into a mixed-media sign, as we shall see.

there are as yet only few institutions offering courses of study and carrying on research under this label. One of the earliest “Intermedial Studies” programs was the Intermedia studies (first called Interarts studies) at the Department of Cultural Sciences of Lund University, created by Hans Lund in 2001.<sup>2</sup>

The transdisciplinary discourse on intermediality that has begun to establish itself incorporates the traditions of what some fifteen years ago began to be called “Interart(s) Studies”<sup>3</sup> and the discussion of intermediality carried on within the “Media Studies” disciplines as well as the more recent investigations into the “New Media Poetries”<sup>4</sup> based on the digital media.

“Interarts Studies” has been a growing interdisciplinary area of the humanities, still dominated by investigations into the interrelations of literature and the other arts, but increasingly also involved with aspects of intermedial connections between the visual arts, music, dance, performance arts, theatre, film, and architecture, where the word plays only a subsidiary role, or none at all. The focus still tends to be on “texts,”<sup>5</sup> and the preferred kind of text, and for a long time the only one, has been the kind that could be considered a work of art. Aesthetic concerns were initially of considerable importance.

“Media Studies” have often approached issues of intermediality in the context of communications studies, where questions of production, distribution, function, and reception have always played a significant role. All the areas studied – radio, cinema, television, video, and also the print media – involve multiple media and often complex technological production processes and apparatuses. Intermediality is thus an issue both within each of these media and in their interrelations with each other as well as with the “arts” covered by the traditional Interarts Studies. Here, as in the other instances, semiotics has supplied useful concepts and methods in dealing with a number of crucial issues.

The “New Media Poetries,” a more recent phenomenon, usually rely on digital technologies for their production and for the most part on the computer for their reception. Largely based on developments in twentieth-century visual poetry, where the concept of “poetry” assumed new dimensions, texts produced in the various genres

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<sup>2</sup> Its roots reach back to a research program in Interarts Studies originally developed in Lund University’s Comparative Literature Department by Ulla-Britta Lagerroth.

<sup>3</sup> The label was internationally established by the conference on “Interarts Studies: New Perspectives” at Lund University, 15–20 May 1995; see the selected conference papers published in Ulla-Britta Lagerroth, Hans Lund, and Erik Hedling (eds.): *Interart Poetics. Essays on the Interrelations of the Arts and Media*. Amsterdam and Atlanta 1997. I myself had used the label in my introduction to the team’s previous volume: Claus Clüver: “Interartiella studier: en inledning,” trans. Stefan Sandelin, in Ulla-Britta Lagerroth, Hans Lund, Peter Luthersson, and Anders Mortensen (eds.): *I musernas tjänst: Studier i konstarternas interrelationer*, Stockholm; Stehag 1993, p. 17–47.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Eduardo Kac (ed.): *Media Poetry. An International Anthology*, Bristol, UK 2007, the revised, enlarged and updated edition of *New Media Poetry. Poetic Innovation and New Technologies. Visible Language Vol. 30, No. 2*, May 1996.

<sup>5</sup> “Text” is to be understood here throughout in the semiotic usage that refers to all complex signs or sign combinations in any sign system as “texts.”

of media poetry will produce visual, aural (including musical), and kinetic events in which the word (or parts of it) in its graphic and sometimes vocal dimensions may play a leading role or (almost) none at all. Many media (and hypermedia) texts will assign some performative tasks to the recipient, or computer operator; increasingly, texts are designed to be interactive to the point that the operator determines the course of events. Entirely dependent on the ever evolving technological possibilities of the electronic digital media, such texts are entirely intermedial; moreover, they can be instantly transmitted to receivers all over the globe, and can be designed to invite the interaction of a global community. New Media Poetries will inevitably require intermedial considerations in the analysis of individual texts even when the major interest of a study is focused elsewhere. Their connection with earlier forms of visual poetries invites comparison of the old media with the new.

The need to reconceive “Interarts Studies” as “Studies of Intermediality” or “Intermedial Studies” arose both from a realization that there had been a gradual change within the theoretical orientation and the practices of the interdisciplinary discourse and from an approximation of the areas of Interarts Studies and Media Studies. While discussions comparing what much later came to be considered as “the arts” have a long history that reaches back to antiquity, serious and influential academic studies concerned with the interrelations of the arts began to be published around the middle of the twentieth century. Étienne Souriau’s *La correspondance des arts. Éléments d’esthétique comparée* of 1947 was one of the first, equaled in impact by Susanne K. Langer’s *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art* of 1953.<sup>6</sup> Approaching the subject from a literary rather than a philosophical and aesthetic angle, Calvin S. Brown’s *Music and Literature* (1948) exercised a seminal influence in the US. The international “Bibliography on the Relations of Literature and Other Arts”<sup>7</sup> which Brown collected and began to distribute annually in 1952, eventually under the auspices of the newly founded MLA Division on Literature and Other Arts, served the literary community as an immediate source of information about the growing number of contributions to this emerging field, which in 1961 Henry H. H. Remak declared to be one of

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<sup>6</sup> American readers had been introduced to attempts at organizing the universe of the arts by Theodore Meyer Greene’s *The Arts and the Art of Criticism*, New York 1973 [1940], and Thomas Munro’s *The Arts and Their Interrelations*, 1949, rev. ed. Cleveland 1967.

<sup>7</sup> See *A Bibliography on the Relations of Literature and Other Arts 1952–1967*, New York 1968. It was continued in annual installments by a team of contributors under the editorship of Calvin S. Brown (until 1972), Steven Paul Scher (1973–1984), and Claus Clüver (1985–1998). The 1974 bibliography was published in *Hartford Studies in Literature*, Vol. 7, 1974, p. 77–96. From 1985 til 1998 published in the *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, it covered “Theory and General Topics,” “Music and Literature,” “The Visual Arts and Literature,” “Film and Literature” (1974–1984), “Dance and Literature” (1985–), since 1986 with author and subject indices and partial annotation. Bibliography not included in Vols. 39, 41, 42, and 44; Vol. 40 contains bibliographies for 1989 and 1990; Vol. 43 (1995) contains a partial bibliography for 1991–1995; Vol. 45/46 (1997/1998) a partial bibliography for 1996–1997.

the legitimate domains of Comparative Literature,<sup>8</sup> a claim tentatively confirmed by Ulrich Weisstein in 1968<sup>9</sup> and sanctioned in 1981 by Manfred Schmeling.<sup>10</sup>

Comparative Literature was at mid-century being (re-)established as an interdisciplinary program designed to deal with the interrelations among the literatures in modern (usually Western) languages which were housed in individual disciplines. Since its beginnings in the nineteenth century, the dominant orientation of literary studies at the university had been historical. Art history was the academic discipline devoted to the visual arts and architecture, and the study of music and the theatre was similarly organized; all of them were more recent academic fields than *Literaturgeschichte*. Earlier in the century, art history had been reconceived as a history of changing styles, an example followed in the literary disciplines. Comparing the concepts used in determining the visual and the literary characteristics that indicated changes of style, the literary scholar Oskar Walzel had detected parallels which he found so enlightening that in 1917 he published a treatise on *Wechselseitige Erhellung der Künste. Ein Beitrag zur Würdigung kunstgeschichtlicher Begriffe*,<sup>11</sup> parallels perceived in the light of this “mutual illumination” have been central to most attempts at constructing periods and movements across artistic media.

New Criticism shifted the focus of scholarly attention to interpretation and thus to “the poem itself,”<sup>12</sup> to the individual text as a quasi-autonomous entity. René Wellek’s and Austin Warren’s *Theory of Literature*<sup>13</sup> (1949) provided the theoretical underpinning

<sup>8</sup> Henry H. H. Remak: “Comparative Literature. Its Definition and Function” in Newton P. Stallknecht and Horst Frenz (eds.): *Comparative Literature. Method and Perspective*, Carbondale, IL, 1961, p. 3–37. This first Comparative Literature manual published in the US consisted almost exclusively of contributions by members of the Indiana University faculty, where Horst Frenz and Ulrich Weisstein had begun teaching an undergraduate course on “Modern Literature and the Other Arts” in 1954.

<sup>9</sup> Ulrich Weisstein: “Exkurs: Wechselseitige Erhellung der Künste” in *Einführung in die Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft*, Stuttgart 1968, p. 184–97; English: “The Mutual Illumination of the Arts” in *Comparative Literature and Literary Theory*, trans. William Riggan, Bloomington, IN, 1973, p. 150–66.

<sup>10</sup> Schmeling included an essay by Franz Schmitt-von Mühlenfels: “Literatur und andere Künste” in Manfred Schmeling (ed.): *Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft. Theorie und Praxis*, Wiesbaden 1981 (p. 156–74), his manual covering six “Aufgabenbereiche” of the field. – In 1979, the ICLA had made “Literature and the Other Arts” one of the major topics of its IXth triennial Congress; see Zoran Konstantinovic, Ulrich Weisstein, and Steven Paul Scher (eds.): *Literature and the Other Arts, Vol. 3 of Proceedings of the IXth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association*, Innsbruck 1981. In the same year, “La littérature et les autres arts” was the topic of a publication of the Institut de Formation et de Recherches en Littérature of the Université Catholique de Louvain; see *La littérature et les autres arts*, Louvain-la-Neuve and Paris 1979.

<sup>11</sup> Oskar Walzel: *Wechselseitige Erhellung der Künste. Ein Beitrag zur Würdigung kunstgeschichtlicher Begriffe*, Berlin 1917, English: “Mutual Illumination of the Arts,” introduced and abridged by Ulrich Weisstein, trans. Kent Hooper and Ulrich Weisstein: *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature, Vol. 37*, 1988, p. 9–31.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Stanley Burnshaw (ed.): *The Poem Itself*, Cleveland 1962, an anthology of poems from the major European literatures in their original languages, with prose translations and interpretive commentary by master critics.

<sup>13</sup> René Wellek and Austin Warren: *Theory of Literature*, New York 1963 (1949).

for an approach that insisted on the “intrinsic” study of literature as the proper scholarly activity, relegating the study of the relations of literature with the other arts, along with other non-literary concerns, to the non-essential “extrinsic” approaches. All of this was part of a basically formalist discourse that took the ontological status of “Art” for granted and was engaged in defining the essence of each of the individual arts,<sup>14</sup> which tended to confine their study to specific academic disciplines.

But the discourse also included those voices that, while sharing most of the assumptions of the dominant paradigm, insisted on the interrelation of the arts and on the long tradition supporting this view. Jean Hagstrum’s *The Sister Arts. The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray* (1958)<sup>15</sup> traced in its first chapter the history of the *ut pictura poesis* concept from antiquity into the seventeenth century, when poetry began to count on familiarity with the manner of pictorial representation to complete images sketched verbally; the Horatian formula has remained a prominent theme in word-and-image studies. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s strictures against that descriptive literary practice in *Laokoön oder: Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* (1766),<sup>16</sup> which were based on a distinction between time-based literary representation and space-based plastic representation, became a point of departure for many twentieth-century investigations into spatial properties of literary texts and temporal aspects of visual works;<sup>17</sup> Lessing’s essay has remained one of the classical points of reference in the discourse.<sup>18</sup> Brown followed his first book in 1953 with a volume on *Tones Into Words. Musical Compositions as Subjects of Poetry*.<sup>19</sup> In 1955 Leo Spitzer re-introduced the rhetorical term “ekphrasis” into literary discourse,<sup>20</sup> and studies of verbal representations of visual representations have become a major area of word-and-image studies. I later proposed to extend the definition of the term to “verbal representations of texts composed in non-verbal sign systems,” because the objects of such representations need not be representations and are often in other media besides painting or sculpture, and the manner of such

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<sup>14</sup> Examples are Wolfgang Kayser: *Das sprachliche Kunstwerk*, Bern 1948, and Roman Ingarden: *Untersuchungen zur Ontologie der Kunst. Musikwerk, Bild, Architektur, Film*, Tübingen 1962; English: *Ontology of the Work of Art. The Musical Work, the Picture, the Architectural Work, the Film*, trans. Raymond Meyer with John T. Goldthwait, Athens, OH, 1989.

<sup>15</sup> Jean H. Hagstrum: *The Sister Arts. The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray*, Chicago 1974 (1958).

<sup>16</sup> Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: *Laokoön oder: Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie*, 1766. English: *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. with introduction and notes by Edward Allen McCormick, Baltimore 1984 (1962).

<sup>17</sup> Perhaps the earliest was Joseph Frank’s essay “Spatial Form in Modern Literature,” 1945, rpt. in Frank: *The Widening Gyre. Crisis and Mastery in Modern Literature*, New Brunswick, NJ, 1963, p. 3–62.

<sup>18</sup> Most recently in Walter Moser: “As relações entre as artes. Por uma arqueologia de intermedialidade” in *Aletria. Revista de estudos de literatura (Belo Horizonte)*, No. 14, July–Dec. 2006, (p. 40–63), p. 42–45.

<sup>19</sup> Calvin S. Brown: *Tones Into Words. Musical Compositions as Subjects of Poetry*, Athens, GA, 1953.

<sup>20</sup> See Leo Spitzer: “‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’; or, Content vs. Metagrammar” (1955), rpt in *Essays on English and American Literature*, Anna Hatcher (ed.), Princeton, NJ, 1962 (1955), p. 67–97.

representations tends to depend more on the function served than on the non-verbal medium involved.<sup>21</sup> Particular forms of ekphrasis amount to intermedial or intersemiotic transposition, the transformation of a text into a self-sufficient text in a different medium or sign system. Such transpositions can also occur from word to image (e.g., certain illustrations), from word to music (e.g., tone poems, but not songs), and from the visual arts to music and vice versa,<sup>22</sup> besides other media. More common, however, is the adaptation of texts to a different medium, where elements of the source text are carried over into the target text. This can involve adapting a narrative to the stage, or plays to the operatic medium; most film studies began with analyses of cinematographic adaptations of literary sources. The methods and objectives of adaptation studies have changed considerably over the decades, but interest in this kind of intermedial relationship is unabated.

The development of film studies from investigations into the adaptations of literary sources to the medium “film” and the shifting conventions of cinematographic representation and narration, usually carried out by literary scholars, into a full-fledged discipline of its own had a remarkable impact on the interarts discourse and was one of the factors that brought about its transformation and re-orientation. Besides introducing into the study of intermedial relations the complex considerations involved with its modes of production and the apparatus supporting it, the interests of many film scholars in the Hollywood cinema boosted the growing tendency in other media to broaden the investigations beyond “high art” into areas of popular culture, ultimately to include objects of a decidedly non-artistic nature – frequently objects that defied accommodation in any one of the traditional disciplines because of their status as multimedia, mixed-media, or intermedia texts. This is a situation they share with many types of cultural production. Before presenting a quick sketch of the developments and transformations of what had gradually become established and recognized as the interdisciplinary field of the comparative study of the arts, developments that led to the recognition of “intermediality” as the central concern of all such studies, I find it useful to offer a brief introduction to the concept of multimedia, mixed-media, and intermedia texts.

Opera is one of the many areas that would not be adequately covered by the standard practices of any of the traditional single arts disciplines. It will obviously

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<sup>21</sup> See Claus Clüver: “Ekphrasis Reconsidered: On Verbal Representations of Non-Verbal Texts” in Ulla-Britta Lagerroth, Hans Lund, and Erik Hedling (eds.): *Interart Poetics. Essays on the Interrelations Between the Arts and Media*, Amsterdam; Atlanta 1997, p. 19–33. Objections have been raised both to the term “verbal” rather than “literary” and to the extension of the class of objects to such temporal media as music, dance, and other types of performance. I have dealt with poems on music in “The *Musikgedicht*. Notes on an Ekphrastic Genre” in Walter Bernhart, Steven Paul Scher, and Werner Wolf (eds.): *Word and Music Studies. Defining the Field*, Amsterdam; Atlanta 1999, p. 187–204.

<sup>22</sup> In May 2008, the Université Paris-Sorbonne will host an international colloquium on “Musique et arts plastiques: La traduction d’un art par l’autre” (call for papers by Jean-Jacques Nattier, Université de Montréal, and Michèle Barbe, Université Paris-Sorbonne, April 2007).

fall into the domain of musicology and music history. But an opera is a multimedia text that is meant to be performed. One can buy and read the libretto separately or as part of the score. To be studied as an adaptation of a literary source text and its intertextual contexts, it will have to be approached with the tools and background of literary studies; treated as part of the score, the libretto will be approached as a component of the operatic text. But a full study of an opera's reception will have to include not only the musical interpretations it has received, but also the ways it has been staged, and that involves everything that makes theatre a multimedia enterprise, besides the frequent inclusion of ballet interludes. This means considering the collaborative efforts of stage director and set, lighting, and costume designers, conductor, choreographer, and the performers on stage and in the orchestra pit.

Scores and movie scripts and a film's sound track can be bought separately, and overtures, arias, and ballet interludes can be performed in concert halls or as part of dance recitals. But as they are combined in an operatic (or theatre) production, the various media involved – such as the décor and the costumes – function only as part of the whole. In a comic strip, image and verbal text are distinct elements, but they would not be self-sufficient if removed from the strip. The same would be true of the verbal and visual elements of a poster or a postage stamp. It is therefore useful to distinguish between multimedia texts and mixed-media texts. “A multimedia text comprises separable and individually coherent texts in different media, while the complex signs in different media contained in a mixed-media text would not be coherent or self-sufficient outside of that context.”<sup>23</sup> A comic strip is a mixed-media text; an opera score that contains the libretto is a multimedia text.

There are, however, texts that are “constituted by two or more sign systems in such a way that the visual, musical, verbal, kinetic, or performative aspects of its signs cannot be separated or disunited.”<sup>24</sup> The “fish” text described in the beginning falls into this category, which is usually labeled as “intermedia discourse” or “intermedia texts,” but which might better be called “intersemiotic texts” because such texts will often be housed in one medium. Concrete or sound poems are prime examples of this type, and they are usually read as literary texts.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> I first published these definitions in Swedish in 1993. See Claus Clüver: “Interarts Studies: An Introduction” (1992); Swedish: “Interartiella studier: en inledning,” trans. Stefan Sandelin, in Ulla-Britta Lagerroth, Hans Lund, Peter Luthersson, and Anders Mortensen (eds.): *I musernas tjänst. Studier i konstarternas interrelationer*, Stockholm; Stehag 1993, p. 17–47. The unpublished English original was circulated among colleagues.

<sup>24</sup> This is the reformulation of my previous definition, published (in German) in Claus Clüver: “Inter textus / inter artes / inter media” in Monika Schmitz-Emans and Uwe Lindemann (eds.): *Komparatistik 2000/2001. Jahrbuch der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft*, Heidelberg 2001, p. 14–50.

<sup>25</sup> In Portuguese such texts have also been called “textos intercódigos,” which may be the most appropriate term but is untranslatable into most languages.

Using the criteria that I had established in my “Introduction,” Leo Hoek published in 1995 a systematic account of the relations of intermedial transposition and types of intermedial connections with regard to word-image relations; the title of his study, “La transposition intersémiotique: Pour une classification pragmatique,” indicates its semiotic orientation.<sup>26</sup> In “The Eternal Network: Mail Art, Intermedia Semiotics, Interarts Studies” Eric Vos synthesized in 1997 Hoek’s observations and mine in a table derived from Hoek (Hoek, p. 77), into which I have reinserted Hoek’s terms in square brackets:<sup>27</sup>

SCHEMA OF WORD-IMAGE RELATIONS	transmedial relation [relation transmédiALE]	multimedia discourse [discours multimédiaL]	mixed-media discourse [discours mixte]	intermedial discourse [discours synchrétique]
distinctiveness [séparabilité]	+	+	+	–
coherence/self-sufficiency	+	+	–	–
polytextuality	+	–	–	–
simultaneous production	–	–	+	+
simultaneous reception	–	+	+	+
process	transposition	juxtaposition	combination	union/fusion
schematized text-image relation	text > image image > text	image   text	image + texte	i t m e a x g t e
examples	ekphrasis art criticism photonovel	emblem illustrated book painting & title	poster comic strip postage stamp	typography calligramme concrete poetry

<sup>26</sup> Leo H. Hoek: “La transposition intersémiotique: Pour une classification pragmatique” in Leo H. Hoek and Kees Meerhoff (eds.): *Rhétorique et image. Textes en hommage à A. Kibédi Varga*, Amsterdam; Atlanta 1995, p. 65–80.

<sup>27</sup> Eric Vos: “The Eternal Network: Mail Art, Intermedia Semiotics, Interarts Studies,” in Ulla-Britta Lagerroth, Hans Lund, and Erik Hedling (eds.): *Interart Poetics. Essays on the Interrelations of the Arts and Media*, Amsterdam; Atlanta 1997, (p. 325–327), p. 325–337. I have slightly changed Vos’s sequence. The examples are (mostly) Hoek’s, who may have found “mixte” and “synchrétique” to be the most appropriate translation of “mixed-media” and “intermedia.”



I cite the table because it includes “transposition” as a category and offers a visual representation of the decisive criteria, which refer to individual instances of the types of texts listed in the examples. It does not reflect many of the subtler forms of word-image relations. And while it can accommodate more complex media connections than the binary word-image relations, it is not easily adjusted to represent the internal and external relations of more complex media, nor does it show the complexities actually encountered in the various genres of illustrated books. Many illustrations are forms of intermedial transposition, but are juxtaposed to the text; in many modern *livres-d’artiste* and children’s books, text and image are combined or even fused in such a way that the image (and often the text) are not self-sufficient, often as a result of the book’s design and lay-out. But while it may be difficult to place such a book into any one of the categories, the criteria serve to sort out a text’s internal intermedial relations. Few texts are purely multimedial. As our glance at the opera has shown, how we approach the intermedial aspects of a text (or even a genre) depends on the context and the objective of a study.

The schema is inevitably static and treats the texts as objects. It shares this approach, as Vos has shown, with the concept of “intermedium/intermedia” used by Dick Higgins and also by Peter Frank, which presents certain classes of texts as situated between the conventional media. “Thus the happening developed as an intermedium, an uncharted land that lies between collage, music and the theater,” Higgins wrote in 1965.<sup>28</sup> This is contrasted by the dynamic view of an intermedia text offered by Jürgen E. Müller, who (carefully distinguishing between “intermedial” and “intermedia”) has suggested that we should “understand the indissoluble *connection* of diverse media as a *fusion* and *interaction* of different medial processes”<sup>29</sup> – without suggesting, however, where such processes take place. Tables like the one above are certainly useful, but this schematized format offers no possibility to indicate, for example, the various performative aspects of text reception that I have elsewhere analyzed with regard to developments in text production and theory-formation during the last fifty years.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Dick Higgins: “Intermedia” in *Horizons: The Poetics and Theory of the Intermedia*, Carbondale; Edwardsville 1984 (p. 18–28), p. 22. Higgins published the first part in *Something Else Newsletter*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1966; p. 23–28 were added in 1981. Cf. Peter Frank: *Intermedia: Die Verschmelzung der Künste*, Lecture at Kunstmuseum Bern, May 31, 1987, Berne 1987. – I have elsewhere dealt more fully with Higgins’s concept and his erroneous assumption that he was using “intermedium” in the same sense S. T. Coleridge had used the term over a century before; see Clüver, “Inter textus.”

<sup>29</sup> Jürgen E. Müller: “Intermedialität als poetologisches und medientheoretisches Konzept. Einige Reflexionen zu dessen Geschichte” in Jörg Helbig (ed.): *Intermedialität: Theorie und Praxis eines interdisziplinären Forschungsgebiets*, Berlin 1998, (p. 31–40), p. 38 (my translation).

<sup>30</sup> Claus Clüver: “Concrete Poetry and the New Performance Arts: Intersemiotic, Intermedia[], Intercultural” in Claire Sponsler and Xiaomei Chen (eds.): *East of West. Cross-cultural Performance and the Staging of Difference*, New York 2000, p. 33–61.

This production includes such new genres<sup>31</sup> as the happening, not only by Higgins' definition an intermedia event – and not easily accommodated by any of the traditional academic disciplines, though certainly covered by the intermedial discourse. There are other contemporary phenomena that exceed the domains even of such multimedia disciplines as Theatre Studies. The most complex events of all times (though with a history that goes back to antiquity) are the opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games, which engage all the traditional theatrical and ceremonial media including light shows and fireworks and rely heavily on modern technologies. Though usually not directly using video effects, they are essentially staged for the cameras, because the activities of the hundreds of performers, the thousands of spectators filling the stadium, and the athletes moving into the arena behind the flags of the participating nations, as well as the ceremonies of raising the flag and lighting the torch, are simultaneously recorded and broadcast to a multi-lingual audience of many millions around the globe according to carefully planned strategies (though not as painstakingly arranged and controlled as Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens* or her film of the Berlin Olympics of 1936, both given final shape after the conclusion of the events). There are many such genres, old and more recent – such as religious and civic rituals, processions and parades, rallies and pop concerts – that are entirely based on the interaction of many media and can only be adequately approached from the perspective of an intermedial discourse, no matter what the particular interest of a study, whether ideological, anthropological, sociological, semiotic, and so forth. The interdisciplinary, intermedial approach has also opened up access to such hitherto neglected though culturally significant genres as *carmina figurata*, emblems, broadsides and even medieval plays, which are no longer approached (and largely dismissed) with the expectations of literary drama but understood to have served, within their specific cultural contexts and as multi- and mixed-media productions, significant functions for the community that created and received them.<sup>32</sup>

Broadening the field and enlarging the perspective to include these phenomena, as well as changing the questions asked and the objectives proposed for studying them, is only one of the transformations that the interdisciplinary discourse has undergone, and one of the reasons for the increasing inadequacy of the label “Interarts Studies,” which go far beyond its intranslatability into French, German, and several other languages. I have traced these developments and transformations elsewhere in somewhat greater detail.<sup>33</sup> Here are a few salient points, certainly oversimplified in their sketchiness:

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<sup>31</sup> On the questions involved in distinguishing between genre and medium see below.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. C. Clifford Flanigan: “Comparative Literature and the Study of Medieval Drama” in *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, Vol. 35, 1986, p. 56–104.

<sup>33</sup> See Claus Clüver: “Interarts Studies. An Introduction” (1992/2000); “Interarts Studies. Concepts, Terms, Objectives” (1997); “Inter textus / inter artes / inter media” (2001) – all three essays unpublished in English.

1. The developments of critical theory led to a widely accepted recognition that such concepts as “art” and “literature” are cultural constructs and not ontologically grounded. The concept of “art” has undergone profound changes in Western cultural history and is not universally known in all cultures, at least not in a form comparable to the Western “arts” discourse since the 18<sup>th</sup> century.
2. Ever since the introduction of the “ready-made” and the “found object” (Marcel Duchamp) into the artworld and their eventual acceptance by that world, the status of objects as “works of art” has become dependent on the dominant “arts” discourse. “Literariness” is not inherent in a text, it is ascribed to the text by the interpretive community.
3. Some developments in contemporary artistic production (happenings, Pop Art) tended to eliminate the distinction between “high art” and “low art.”
4. The critical interest in many forms of popular art shifted the emphasis from formalist and aesthetic concerns to investigations of audiences and their expectations and needs and to the functions served by all cultural productions.
5. Theories of intertextuality led to the recognition that intertextuality always also involves intermediality, since pre-texts, inter-texts, post-texts and para-texts always include texts in other media. An individual text may be a rich object for intermedial studies.
6. Neo-avant-garde creations in all the arts tended to highlight the materiality of the media involved.
7. Artists have increasingly tended to work in several media and to produce mixed-media and intermedia “texts,” many involving performance.
8. The range of materials and physical media increased vastly – everything could be turned into “art” (sculptures made from scrap materials, installations, earthworks, mail art, music made from all manner of sound sources such as hair dryers). New technologies gave rise to new art forms such as *musique concrète* and electronic music, holographic poetry, bio-art.
9. The interarts discourse became increasingly media-oriented and included the products of the technology-based (mass-)media in its investigations.
10. New art forms have begun to develop that are entirely based on digital media and are received via the computer, either by CD’s or increasingly via the Internet. These art forms tend to involve visual, verbal (graphic and spoken), sound (including musical) and kinetic materials either in separable or in fused manifestations, and are frequently interactive.

Once “medium” instead of “art” has become accepted as the basic category for the interdisciplinary discourse, the interrelationship of the various media is conceived of as “intermediality.” This is how this research area now understands the object of its investigations, rather than as “the interrelations of the arts.” But as any dictionary will prove, “medium” has many meanings, and several of these are involved in what constitutes “intermediality.” “Physical media” are the means by which any medium’s complex signs are produced, such as the body; flute, percussion instruments; the Moog synthesizer; oil on canvas, brush and ink on paper; marble, wood; the video camera; voice; typewriter, pen; paper, parchment, skin; etc. Corresponding “media” employing these physical media are dance, music, electronic music, painting, sculpture, architecture, video, speech, typography, writing, tattooing (although the correspondences are far from perfect, for many of the physical media above are used in several “media,” including several not listed here). Then there are the “public media” including the traditional print media (the press) and those relying on more complex technological means of production (radio, television, video, etc.) that are dealt with in “Media Studies” programs. In fact, these studies tend to restrict the term “medium” to technologically based media. But to find a general definition of “medium” that will apply to all those listed above and all others covered by the concept of “intermediality” has proved a difficult task. One of the definitions found in the 1975 edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary* offers a traditional view: “A specific type of artistic technique or means of expression as determined by the materials used or the creative methods involved,” which is exemplified by “the medium of lithography.”<sup>34</sup> Materiality and means of production certainly figure more prominently in the concept of “medium” than in the concept of “art”; but the desired definition needs a less restrictive focus. Two of the definitions given in the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary are relevant in our context: “a channel or system of communication, information, or entertainment” and “a mode of artistic expression or communication.”<sup>35</sup> The first might be more acceptable to Media Studies, the second more reflective of an arts discourse. But is it possible to find a formulation comprehensive enough to suit both – and is it desirable to find one? In his book *Intermedialität: Formen moderner kultureller Kommunikation* (1996), which deals extensively with the concept, Jürgen E. Müller accepts the formulation offered in 1988 by Rainer Bohn, Eggo Müller, and Rainer Ruppert, which defines “medium” as “that which mediates for and between humans a (meaningful) sign (or a combination of signs) with the aid of suitable transmitters across temporal and/or

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<sup>34</sup> See entry “medium” in William Morris (ed.): *The Heritage Illustrated Dictionary of the English Language*, International Edition, Boston: American Heritage Publishing Co.; Houghton Mifflin. International Edition distributed by McGraw-Hill International Book Company 1975, p. 815.

<sup>35</sup> See entry “medium” in *The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*. Available at: <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/medium> (2007–01).

spatial distances.”<sup>36</sup> There is an appropriately greater emphasis on communication here, but “music,” “architecture,” or “holographic poetry,” in fact all categorical terms, refer to more than a single text. Moreover, in the contemporary media discourse “music” covers not only the generation and transmission of musical “signs” but also the contexts of production, distribution, and reception as well as the functions served by the musical text and its production: and all of this can hardly be accommodated in a single definition. Furthermore, there are great differences between media categories, which can only be roughly indicated here. The visual media are usually indeed categorized by the means of production (especially the traditional graphic media); but are installations and earthworks to be thought of as media or genres? Opera would be a medium (like theater), and likewise electronic music, but what about song? Under what circumstances should speech and writing be treated as individual media, and what is their relation to the verbal medium? In the absence of a single noun to designate the verbal medium (comparable to “music” or “architecture”), should “literature” stand for the entire medium, or should it be considered as designating a class or type within the medium? What are the distinctions we should make between “medium” and “genre”? Generally, “genre” will refer to a sub-category, a class within a medium. Song is a type of vocal music; should vocal music be categorized as a multimedia class within the medium “music” or as a separate medium, like opera? Under the rubric of “Mixed Media” Karin Thomas lists as one of its meanings: “Collective term for all forms of collage that expand the materials involved, e.g., assemblage, combine painting, environment.”<sup>37</sup> That makes installations and environments sub-categories of collage, but is collage a medium, like lithography?

In the discourse the concept “medium” obviously comprises diverse but inter-fused categories, which will have to be carefully sorted out only when required by the respective research interest. A general definition is likely to require more than one sentence; moreover, it will only arise from the construction of a relevant media theory that would support a comprehensive theory of intermediality. This is an ongoing project, continually affected by the development of new media. It remains to be seen whether the emphasis will fall on the processes of communication or on the techniques of production, or whether questions concerning reception will assume increasing importance.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Rainer Bohn, Eggo Müller, and Rainer Ruppert: “Die Wirklichkeit im Zeitalter ihrer technischen Fingierbarkeit,” introduction to Bohn, Müller, and Ruppert (eds.): *Ansichten einer künftigen Medienwissenschaft*, Berlin 1988, (p. 7–27), p. 10 (my translation). Cf. Jürgen E. Müller: *Intermedialität: Formen moderner kultureller Kommunikation*, Film und Medien in der Diskussion 8, Münster 1996, p. 81.

<sup>37</sup> “Sammelbegriff für alle Formen einer materialexpansiven Kollagierung, z.B. Assemblage, Combine painting, environment.” Thomas, “Fachbegriffe zur modernen Kunst: Mixed Media,” in Thomas, *Bis Heute: Stilgeschichte der bildenden Kunst im 20. Jahrhundert*, Köln 1981, n.p.

<sup>38</sup> In 2006 Iwan Pasuchin published an overview of the numerous recent German-language publications concerning intermediality and Media Studies with a view to the consequences of these discussions for art and media education; see Iwan Pasuchin, “Thesen zur intermedialen künstlerischen Bildung,”

The conceptualization of literature as a verbal medium and the theoretical discussion of intermediality involving literature has been largely the domain of scholars working in Germany and Austria, several of them professors of English. A volume edited by Helmut Kreuzer in 1977, *Literaturwissenschaft – Medienwissenschaft*, was the sixth in the series “Medium Literatur.”<sup>39</sup> According to Jens Schröter, the first to have used the term “Intermedialität” was Aage A. Hansen-Löve, in 1983.<sup>40</sup> Peter Zima’s *Literatur intermedial. Musik – Malerei – Photographie – Film* was published in 1995,<sup>41</sup> preceded by *Intermedialität. Vom Bild zum Text*, and soon followed by two other books covering central areas of Interarts Studies but carrying “intermediality” in their sub-titles (Peter Wagner, ed., *Icons – Texts – Iconotexts. Essays on Ekphrasis and Intermediality*, 1996, and Werner Wolf, *The Musicalization of Fiction. A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality*, 1999).<sup>42</sup> But much of the discussion was carried on in Media Studies, with a major emphasis on film. Jörg Helbig’s *Intermedialität. Theorie und Praxis eines interdisziplinären Forschungsgebiets*<sup>43</sup> (1998) staked out a wider area. The contributions to the volume were not geared to a common definition of the concept; the label appears to have been applied to at least three kinds of relations:

1. general relations among the media,
2. transformations from one medium to another,
3. the combination (fusion) of media.

There can be no question that restricting the concept to the second or third kinds is unjustifiable. Intermediality must be seen as a comprehensive phenomenon that includes all the relations, topics, and issues traditionally investigated by Interarts Studies. It concerns such transmedial phenomena as narrativity, parody, and the implied reader/listener/viewer as well as the intermedial aspects of the intertextualities inherent in individual texts – and the inevitably intermedial character of each medium. The concept therefore extends to the literary pictorialism explored by

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<http://www.ikb.moz.ac.at/downloads/IKB-Thesen.pdf> (accessed 3 sept. 2007). I did not have access to Irina Rajewski’s study *Intermedialität*, Tübingen; Basel 2002, whose position differs from that of J. E. Müller, according to Pasuchin.

<sup>39</sup> Helmut Kreuzer (ed.): *Literaturwissenschaft – Medienwissenschaft*, Medium Literatur 6, Heidelberg 1977.

<sup>40</sup> Aage A. Hansen-Löve: “Intermedialität und Intertextualität. Probleme der Korrelation von Wort- und Bildkunst – Am Beispiel der russischen Moderne” in Wolf Schmid and Wolf-Dieter Stempel (eds.): *Dialog der Texte. Hamburger Kolloquium zur Intertextualität*, Wien 1983, p. 291–360. See Jens Schröter, “Intermedialität” in *montage|av*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1998, p. 129–154.

<sup>41</sup> Peter W. Zima (ed.): *Literatur intermedial. Musik – Malerei – Photographie – Film*, Darmstadt 1995.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Eicher and Ulf Beckmann (eds.): *Intermedialität. Vom Bild zum Text*, Bielefeld 1994; Peter Wagner (ed.): *Icons – Texts – Iconotexts. Essays on Ekphrasis and Intermediality*, Berlin 1996; Werner Wolf: *The Musicalization of Fiction. A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality*, Amsterdam; Atlanta 1999.

<sup>43</sup> Jörg Helbig (ed.): *Intermedialität. Theorie und Praxis eines interdisziplinären Forschungsgebiets*. Berlin 1998.

Hagstrum (*The Sister Arts*) and Hans Lund (*Text as Picture*<sup>44</sup>) and to the entire *ut pictura poesis* topic as well as to the “musico-literary relations” first schematized by Steven Paul Scher,<sup>45</sup> a schema refined by Werner Wolf (*The Musicalization of Fiction* – still with the questionable focus on the individual text and without concern for production, performance, and reception). The concept covers all the topics included in *Intermedialitet. Ord, bild och ton i samspel*, the textbook edited in 2002 by Hans Lund.<sup>46</sup> It covers likewise the interrelations among the “old” and the “new” media and such issues as the analog versus the digital as recently discussed by Mark Hansen, W.J.T. Mitchell, and Bernard Stiegler, and the topic of *Intermedialität analog/digital*, a forthcoming volume edited by Jens Schröter and Joachim Paech.<sup>47</sup>

Questions of transposition, transformation, and adaptation are certainly central topics of studies of intermediality. There are indeed instances of intersemiotic or intermedial transpositions that appear equivalent to interlingual translations;<sup>48</sup> but they usually serve different functions than these, and any critical approach should consider these functions. The majority of such transformations involves much more than the re-presentation of the decisive features of a text in a different medium, and the analysis becomes more difficult when this occurs between non-verbal media. Adaptation should be considered as a form of transformation that may involve intersemiotic transposition but requires a theoretical treatment of its own. Adaptations of verbal texts to the cinema have induced an extensive discussion, which includes the question whether a film is indeed a multi-media and/or mixed-media text or whether it should be compared, in essential features, to an installation, which is probably best read as an intermedia text. One can argue that even though parts of a story’s dialog and plot, as well as the “characters,” may be part of the film script (and therefore continue to exist in the same medium), once enacted and filmed, they are no longer the same: like the words in a performed song, as a part of the new composite text the words are not the same as the words in print.

Discussions of what Jens Schröter has labeled “Synthetische Intermedialität”

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<sup>44</sup> Hans Lund: *Text as Picture. Studies in the Literary Transformations of Pictures*, trans. Kacke Götrick, Lewiston 1992. First published in Swedish as *Texten som tavla. Studier i litterär bildtransformation*, Lund 1982.

<sup>45</sup> Steven Paul Scher: “Literature and Music” in Jean-Pierre Barricelli and Joseph Gibaldi (eds.): *Interrelations of Literature*, New York 1982, p. 225–250.

<sup>46</sup> Hans Lund (ed.): *Intermedialitet. Ord, bild och ton i samspel*, Lund 2002.

<sup>47</sup> “Critics Roundtable: Mark Hansen, W.J.T. Mitchell and Bernard Stiegler on Media’s Critical Space, with Kristine Nielsen, Jason Paul, and Lisa Zaher” in *Immediacy: Chicago Art Journal 2006*, p. 82–99; Jens Schröter and Joachim Paech (eds.): *Intermedialität analog/digital. Theorien, Modelle, Analysen*. Expected to be published in 2007. See <http://www.theorie-der-medien.de/>

<sup>48</sup> See Claus Clüver: “On Intersemiotic Transposition” in *Poetics Today, Vol. 10, No. 1*, 1989, p. 55–90. Cf. Gwenhaël Ponnau and Andrée Mansau (orgs.): *Transpositions, Actes du Colloque National organisé à l’Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail sous le patronage de la Société Française de Littérature Générale et Comparée*, 15–16 mai 1986. Travaux de l’Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, A-38. Toulouse 1986 (involving literature, the visual arts, and music).

(cf. Hoek's "discours synchrétique") have often had recourse to Dick Higgins's concept of the "intermedium," which, as Schröter has shown, had strong ideological implications (Schröter 1998 p. 130–35). As a noun designating a new and separate class of medium the concept has not been widely accepted. The placement of an "intermedia discourse" alongside the "multimedia" and the "mixed-media" discourses shown in the table above seems to reflect the predominant view. But questions as to whether a film is best understood as an intermedia text, especially with a view to its presentation and reception, are likely to be discussed long after the status of happenings, installations, and also "bio-poems" has been (temporarily?) settled.

These are mere hints at some of the basic issues faced by a theory of intermediality. As a concept and a label, the term has been widely accepted to designate a discourse that has not only far exceeded the parameters of the more traditional "Interarts Studies" but also introduced new objects and objectives, interests and concerns, criteria and methods. The concept of "art," however understood, has certainly not been abandoned, even though quite a few of the cultural productions within the purview of "Intermedial Studies" would not be considered by an "art"-oriented discourse.

While studies of intermediality have been variously institutionalized in Media Studies and Communications Studies programs, the Humanities have only rarely offered institutional structures for the old Interarts Studies or the new Intermedial Studies. For a long time the work has been carried on at conferences, through publications,<sup>49</sup> by such associations as the Nordic Society for Intermedial Studies, the International Association of Word and Image Studies or the International Association for Word and Music Studies with their regular meetings, and by interdisciplinary research groups such as the Núcleo de Estudos sobre a Intermedialidade at UFMG in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. Serious study of intermedial relations requires competence in dealing with the aspects of the different media involved that are relevant for the topic at hand. Until there are academics trained as students of intermediality, scholars engaging in such work are likely to approach a topic with the paradigmatic assumptions and the methods of their home discipline. But just as young artists tend to work more and more in various media, the younger generation of scholars will be familiar with the codes and conventions of several media, ranging from the traditional to the digital, as well as the many forms of media combination and fusion that characterize contemporary cultural production. They will look for institutional spaces where they can become familiar with the assumptions of the developing theories of intermediality and competent in their application, spaces that also accommodate those intermedial phenomena whose disciplinary locus has so far remained uncertain, such as the medieval Mass, the Olympic ceremonies, or the seemingly simple: "fish."

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<sup>49</sup> There are a few book series devoted to such issues, and a number of journals primarily dedicated to intermedial relations, such as *Ars Lyrica*, *Music and Letters*, OEI (Stockholm), *Representations*, *Word&Image*, and since 2003 *Intermédialités. Histoire et théories des arts, des lettres et des techniques*.



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# The Reluctant Muse: Intermediality and the Natural Sciences

*Kathleen Lundeen*

I am not, of course, referring to Hans Lund, who to our good fortune has been anything but reluctant in intermedia studies. Through his scholarship, Professor Lund has brought insight and imagination to a host of intermedia subjects. No, it is not our friend and colleague from Lund University but Urania, the muse of astronomy, who has often been a no-show at intermedia events. As the field of intermedia studies has burgeoned, publications and presentations in intermediality have celebrated an impressive range of art forms, but intermedia texts in the scientific community have frequently been missing from the celebration. Notwithstanding, amid studies of artistic intermedia at conferences and in professional journals there have been analyses of sign systems whose aesthetic dimension is accompanied by a strong utilitarian component. Lund has been prominent in that particular area of intermedia studies, exploring, for example, the semiotics of inscribed architecture. His illuminating essay “Alma Mater’s New Face: From University Seals to University Logos” (2005) shows how the shift in the self-markers adopted by universities reflects the dramatic cultural change in the conception of the university and its mission. In an earlier essay, “From Epigraph to Iconic Epigram: The Interaction Between Buildings and Their Inscriptions in the Urban Space” (1998), he lets us in on those silent dialogues embedded in public structures. If we follow the lead of Lund and other scholars who have broadened the parameters of intermedia studies, we anticipate its full trajectory into the arena of the natural sciences.

Though the natural sciences have been conspicuously absent in many intermedia dialogues, an engagement between intermediality and the natural sciences is underway. In 2002 the journal *Configurations*, a publication of the Society for Literature and Science, put out a special issue (#1, vol. 10) entitled “Media, Materiality, Memory: Aspects of Intermediality.”<sup>1</sup> The issue included nine articles on a range of subjects – models and metaphors of media, literature as a product and medium of ecological communication, the cinematic framing of the digital image, the rhetoric of the media, and the metaphor of the environment in media theory, to name a few. In 2005 the journal *Intertexts* published a special issue (#1, vol. 9) entitled “Literature and Science: The Next Generation.”<sup>2</sup> The five articles in that issue addressed female robotics, the neurodynamics of figuration, evolution and performance in an Edith

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<sup>1</sup> The website of *Configurations* is: [press.jhu.edu/journals/configurations](http://press.jhu.edu/journals/configurations).

<sup>2</sup> The website of *Intertexts* is: [languages.ttu.edu/intertexts](http://languages.ttu.edu/intertexts).

Wharton novel, Ezra Pound's art and science, and military nanotechnology and comic books. As the themes of both sets of articles suggest, the intermedia/scientific engagement has expanded our grasp of subjects in both academic areas and has uncovered latent dimensions in those subjects.

In spite of the imaginative ways scholars have contextualized science with intermedia studies, and vice versa, there has been a general reluctance among scholars to subject science – the science we depend on to keep the planets orbiting on time – to poststructuralist critique. (Analyzing the cultural effects of science is one thing; unsettling the *terra firma* of our lives is quite another.) As a result of such reticence, the natural sciences have to some degree been insulated from the cultural effects of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. Though his theory has significantly influenced the thinking and practice of natural scientists, cultural critics – who have exposed with relish the self-implicating representational systems in the humanities, arts, and social sciences – have not for the most part harassed the natural sciences. Even Foucault, whose unsparing eye sees the most instinctive human conduct as contrived, gives the natural sciences a pass. In his classic essay "What Is an Author?" he distinguishes natural scientists from social scientists by arguing that only the latter can emerge as "founders of discursivity," writers who do not just author their own work but create the "possibilities and the rules for formation of other texts." He goes on to explain that natural scientists cannot function in such a capacity since "the act that founds [the natural sciences] is on an equal footing with its future transformations."<sup>3</sup> In an elaboration on the distinction between the social and natural sciences, he writes:

[In the social sciences] one defines a proposition's theoretical validity in relation to the work of the founders – while, in the case of Galileo and Newton, it is in relation to what physics or cosmology *is* (in its intrinsic structure and "normativity") that one affirms the validity of any proposition that those men may have put forth [...]. Re-examination of Galileo's text may well change our knowledge of the history of mechanics, but it will never be able to change mechanics itself. On the other hand, reexamining Freud's texts modifies psychoanalysis itself just as a reexamination of Marx's would modify Marxism. (Rabinow, p. 116)

Poststructuralists, lurking in the shadow of Foucault, have tended to withdraw from analysis of the natural sciences in deference to the universal assumption that natural scientists uncover fixed laws, which operate independently of humankind.

The exception Foucault allows the natural sciences in his critique of culture links him, ironically, to a new breed of critics, who oppose poststructuralism altogether

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Rabinow (ed.): *The Foucault Reader*, New York 1984, p. 114.

on the grounds that the material universe is not indeterminate. One of its advocates, Roger Caldwell, states: “Critical realism [...] rescues us from the postmodernist nightmare and restores us to reality. We cannot manage without a concept of truth. There is (as most of us thought all along) a pre-existing external reality about which it is the job of science to tell us.”<sup>4</sup> Caldwell goes on to say, “A central plank of critical realism is that science can no longer be considered as just another myth or story,” and then proposes, “if nature were merely a cultural construct, all we would need to solve our ecological problems would be to change the terms of our discourse.”<sup>5</sup> Put in that way, it seems reasonable to conclude that the poststructuralist’s over attentiveness to discourse has led to a myopic view of the world. Those in the scientific community, however, argue otherwise. As a friend of mine has matter-of-factly observed, in engineering, once a problem is clearly defined, the problem is solved.

Though many outside the scientific community are inclined to revere natural laws and see them as indifferent to the vicissitudes of human perception and social convention, laboratory practitioners retain a measure of skepticism about such laws. The eminent physicist and Nobel Laureate S. Chandrasekhar writes: “There is no solid ground for the general theory of relativity [...]. We build our trust on the internal consistency of the theory and on its conformity with what we believe are general physical requirements; and, above all, on its freedom from contradiction with parts of physics not contemplated in the formulation of the theory.”<sup>6</sup> The general theory of relativity, which is presented to the public as a unitary precept, is in fact encumbered with contingencies that signal the subtle fluctuations inherent in natural laws.

In recent years scholars in various fields have spoken more radically of the fluidity of natural laws. Michael Murphy, a researcher in the field of human potential, states, “a particular state of consciousness is like a particular scientific instrument – e.g. a telescope or microscope – because it gives us access to things beyond the range of our ordinary senses.”<sup>7</sup> Arthur I. Miller, a philosopher and historian, also pursues the role of consciousness in the scientific enterprise in his illuminating study *Imagery in Scientific Thought*:

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<sup>4</sup> Roger Caldwell: “How to Get Real” in *Philosophy Now*, <http://www.philosophynow.org/issue42/42caldwell1.htm>, 2003:42 (2007–05).

<sup>5</sup> Caldwell, p. 3. Frank Pearce and Tony Woodiwiss have argued that Foucault is a realist but not a “critical realist.” Realists, they propose, believe that both the material universe and the social world operate independently of thought. Critical realists, by contrast, contend that the material universe operates independently of thought but the social world is affected by thinking. I would argue that Foucault’s distinction between the material universe and the social world, as noted earlier in this essay, is in fact consistent with the difference noted by critical realists.

<sup>6</sup> S. Chandrasekhar: *Truth and Beauty: Aesthetics and Motivations in Science*, Chicago; London 1987, p. 150.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Nick Herbert’s *Elemental Mind. Human Consciousness and the New Physics*, New York 1993, p. 223.

Since mental imagery is a key ingredient in creative scientific thinking, it is reasonable to discuss an IMAGination. The limits of the IMAGination of Heisenberg's approach are as yet unclear, and when they become established, new vistas for mental imagery may be revealed. It is reasonable to suggest that through the research of Poincaré, Einstein, Bohr, and Heisenberg, the course of twentieth-century physics has merged with that of cognitive psychology. The progress of science is linked with transformations of perceptions and imagery – for is not the history of science also the history of theories of perception and imagery?<sup>8</sup>

Miller's use of upper case letters underscores his contention that scientists do not perceive preexisting natural laws but actually create those laws in the process of imagining – that is, image-ing – them.

The arguments of writers such as Murphy and Miller suggest that the resistance to critical realism, which might be more aptly named “neo-empiricism,” comes, at least in part, from fellow scholars, many of whom show no signs of wanting to be rescued by seventeenth century philosophy. In an analysis of the science and math that underlie the art of Leonardo da Vinci, Bülent Atalay dismisses a distinction often made between the arts and sciences, and in the process, illustrates the role of perception in science:

An unfortunate banality in philosophy ascribes to science the exclusive process of analysis, and to art, the exclusive process of synthesis. The scientist, this platitude explains, takes apart his subject. The artist, puts it together [...]. [In] reality the scientist engages in both processes, as does the artist.<sup>9</sup>

As Atalay notes, many assume that “the scientist operates as if physical laws already exist, in unique form, and only need to be discovered, or to be extricated from nature [...]. in reality, the physical laws no more exist in unequivocal manner than [a] statue in [a] rough block.” He then asserts: “In the hands of different sculptors the block is destined to yield different forms. And in the hands of different scientists the laws are destined to emerge in different form” (Atalay, p. 19–20). Similar to Miller, Atalay draws attention to the unavoidable mediating role performed by scientists in the course of their research. Perception, he reminds us, is not uniform among people but always includes an imaginative component. The laws “revealed” by scientists are in truth shaped by scientists, who, Atalay proposes, are comparable to creative artists.

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<sup>8</sup> Arthur I. Miller: *Imagery in Scientific Thought: Creating 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Physics*, Boston 1984, p. 312.

<sup>9</sup> Bülent Atalay: *Math and the Mona Lisa: The Art and Science of Leonardo da Vinci*, Washington 2004, p. 19.



In his study Atalay notes an even more intimate correspondence between the arts and natural sciences. The visual arts, he argues, are intrinsically complex semiotic systems, because they reinscribe the signs of the natural universe:

When magnified one hundred thousand times, the spirals seen in the cross-section of the microtubules of the heliozoan resemble, in scale and shape, the spirals seen in the horns of the ram. This shape, magnified another hundred billion billion times, resembles the arms of a spiral galaxy [...]. Throughout history certain numbers and ratios in nature have been incorporated by artists into their creations. These numbers are picked up sometimes consciously, but usually unwittingly as subliminal messages from nature. (Atalay, p. 14–15, 58)

In sublime reciprocity, artists internalize nature's geometry, which enters painting, sculpture, and architecture (consciously or unconsciously); the art, in turn, showcases nature's intricate spirals, golden rectangles, and so on, and imprints in the mind their intrinsic significance in the universe. The symbiosis Atalay observes between nature and art seriously challenges any notion that scientists and artists are engaged in mutually exclusive enterprises.

It may well be that artists also internalize nature's physics. In 1818, John Keats, at the age of twenty-two, made the passing remark in a letter to one of his brothers, "there is no such thing as time and space."<sup>10</sup> The precocity of Keats is striking; but even more arresting is the prescience of William Blake, who in the early 1800's wrote in his visionary epic *Milton*, "Thus is the earth one infinite plane."<sup>11</sup> Though for nearly two centuries Blake's statement was read metaphorically, today it appears to be literally true. The theoretical physicist Brian Greene states: "there is mounting evidence that the overall shape of space is not curved, and [...] the flat infinitely large spatial shape is the front-running contender for the large-scale structure of space-time."<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, the recurring image of a "woven" universe in Blake's prophetic poetry resurfaces in Greene's discussion of string theory: "Just as a microscopic ant walking on an ordinary piece of fabric would have to leap from thread to thread, perhaps motion through space on ultramicroscopic scales similarly requires discrete leaps from one 'strand' of space to another" (Greene, p. 351). The metaphor shared by Blake and Greene points to the gaps and discontinuities in any text, verbal or cosmic, but more importantly it reveals some measure of intuitive understanding between the poet and the physicist.

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<sup>10</sup> Hyder Edward Rollins (ed.): *The Letters of John Keats: 1814–1822*, Vol. 1, Cambridge 1958, p. 298.

<sup>11</sup> David Erdman (ed.): *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, newly revised edition, New York 1988, p. 109:32.

<sup>12</sup> Brian Greene: *The Fabric of the Cosmos: Space, Time, and the Texture of Reality*, New York 2004, p. 249–250.

The assumed boundary between science and art dissolves altogether in Michael Frayn's *Copenhagen*. Through an imaginative rendering of a conversation that occurred between Heisenberg and Bohr in 1941, Frayn presents an elegiac drama that redefines the scientific enterprise. The three characters in the play – Heisenberg, Bohr, and Bohr's wife, Margrethe – relate to one another according to the uncertainty principle so that a slice of history unfolds as a verbal equation. In a postscript, Frayn offers a brief review of Heisenberg's principle, which elucidates the structural elements of the drama:

the concept of uncertainty is one of those scientific notions that has become common coinage, and generalised to the point of losing much of its original meaning. The idea as introduced by Heisenberg into quantum mechanics was precise and technical. It didn't suggest that everything about the behaviour of particles was unknowable, or hazy [...]. The more precisely you measure one variable, it said, the less precise your measurement of the related variable can be; and this ratio, the uncertainly relationship, is itself precisely formulable.<sup>13</sup>

The uncertainty principle operates as both the theme and structural logic of *Copenhagen*. Even at the outset it describes the logistics of the characters: Bohr is positioned – fixed, we might say – at his home in Copenhagen, while Heisenberg shifts around, deliberating over whether or not to go to Copenhagen. Frayn presents their meeting as though it could just as plausibly have *not* taken place and thereby eliminates any teleology from the drama. In *Copenhagen* there are no foregone conclusions; indeed, there are not any conclusions at all.

Throughout the drama the physicists are well aware that their actual lives mimic their theoretical lives. (With Heisenberg, of course, it is the uncertainty principle; with Bohr, the principle of complementarity, which argues that atomic phenomena have complementary features, both wave-like *and* particle-like characteristics.) At one point in their conversation, Bohr says to Heisenberg, in reference to a ski trip: "At the speed you were going you were up against the uncertainty relationship. If you knew where you were when you were down you didn't know how fast you'd got there. If you knew how fast you'd been going you didn't know you were down" (Frayn, p. 24). Moments later, Heisenberg states: "Decisions make themselves when you're coming downhill at seventy kilometers an hour. Suddenly there's the edge of nothingness in front of you. Swerve left? Swerve right? Or think about it and die? In your head you swerve both ways." Margrethe interrupts him: "Like that particle [...]. The one that you said goes through two different slits at the same time" (Frayn, p. 25). The notion that catastrophic events are not the product of

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<sup>13</sup> Michael Frayn: *Copenhagen*, New York 1998, p. 98.

human determination but the byproduct of incidental chance occurrences is the disturbing logic of the play:

Heisenberg: If we could build a reactor we could build bombs. That's what had brought me to Copenhagen. But none of this could I say. And at this point you stopped listening. The bomb had already gone off inside your head. I realized we were heading back toward the house. Our walk was over. Our one chance to talk had gone forever.

Bohr: Because I'd grasp the central point already. That one way or another you saw the possibility of supplying Hitler with nuclear weapons.

Heisenberg: You grasped at least four central points, all of them wrong. (Fraysn, p. 37–38)

Brooding over the drama is the suspicion that life is a random sequence of events without intentionality. When the physicists recall the drowning of one of Bohr's children, any explanation for why the accident occurred slips from their grasp, which epitomizes the dynamic of the entire play: at no point do the characters' thoughts or remarks seem to be inevitable. Since the substance of their conversation wavers between possibility and probability, the text of *Copenhagen* hovers between script and transcript. As the script of a play, it is an imaginative construction; as an imagined transcript of a conversation between the physicists, it has the character of an historical text. The indeterminate nature of the text – forever wavering between fiction and reality – leaves it in limbo, suspended between the realms of art and life. In contradiction to Foucault, who (as noted earlier) exempts natural scientists from poststructuralist critique, Fraysn shows in *Copenhagen* how the discourse of natural scientists has the reliability of quicksand.

The interplay between certainty and uncertainty is also mirrored by the temporal and spatial frames of the drama. Though Fraysn specifies the date of the action (1941), as well as the location (the home of the Bohrs), time and space seem to be perfunctory references rather than stable parameters. At the beginning of the play we learn, for example, that the characters are all dead, which throws the temporal state of the drama into question. (Are we overhearing a recollected conversation by the characters' ghosts, or are we listening in on the actual conversation by way of a flashback?) Similarly, the absence of stage directions erases a clear sense of spatial orientation among the characters, who appear and disappear on the scene without warning, and who act and interact with one another without logistical interference. As the drama advances to its unsettling close, the uncertainty principle emerges as the dominant character in the play, controlling the physicists, as well as the world they inhabit. By allowing the uncertainty principle to exert itself at every turn, Fraysn illustrates in *Copenhagen* the power of paradigm, showing how every aspect

of a person's world conforms not to intransigent natural law but to the principles s/he has internalized as truth.

Beneath the unsettled surface of *Copenhagen* is a Foucauldian question – *What is a scientist?* – which is met with a decidedly un-Foucauldian answer: a scientist at his naked core is an artist. As the drama progresses, scientific theory takes on the appearance of an aesthetic construction; but far from celebrating the camaraderie of science and art, Frayn portrays the disturbing implication of their synonymy: if science has the character of improvisation, it cannot be relied on to determine the fate of individuals or of humanity as a whole.

In a series of public lectures, published under the resonant title *Truth and Beauty*, Chandra explores the affinity between the sciences and the arts, and offers a more hopeful Heisenberg. He proposes that “in the arts as in the sciences, the quest is after the same elusive quality: beauty” and, citing Heisenberg, defines beauty as “the proper conformity of the parts to one another and to the whole” (Chandrasekhar, p. 52). In two of the lectures Chandra includes Heisenberg's description of what he felt upon discovering the mathematical consistency and coherence of quantum mechanics: “I had the feeling that, through the surface of atomic phenomena, I was looking at a strangely beautiful interior” (Chandrasekhar, p. 65). In his examination of the role of imagery in science, Miller also draws on Heisenberg to illustrate the “interplay between mathematical symbols and mental imagery” in atomic physics, as well as the more general “interplay between logical syllogistic reasoning and mental images” (Miller, p. 222, 226). Miller then offers an explanation of that interplay by quoting Heisenberg:

What quite frequently happens in physics is that, from seeing some part of the experimental situation, you get a feeling of how the general experimental situation is. That is, you get some kind of picture. Well, there should be quotation marks around the word “picture.” This “picture” allows you to guess how other experiments might come out. And, of course, then you try to give this picture some definite form in words or in mathematical formula. Then what frequently happens later on is that the mathematical formulation of the “picture” or the formulation of the “picture” in words, turns out to be rather wrong. Still, the experimental guesses are rather right. That is, the actual “picture” which you had in mind was much better than the rationalization which you tried to put down in the publication. (Miller, p. 248–9)

By privileging the scientist's imagination over his/her rational construction of an experiment, Heisenberg rouses us to see, yet again, how the objective ground of science has given way in some quarters to a subjective space.

Miller, in his discussion of the disparate pictures of an experiment, describes

Heisenberg's solution to the problem of translating an idea from one medium to another:

In 1927 Heisenberg had permitted the mathematics of the quantum theory to decide the meaning of and restrictions on the theory's symbols, which are tied to metaphors of a perception-laden language. By 1935 he permitted the theory to decide the representation of the entities that the theory purports to describe. Consequently, the course of Heisenberg's research had led to permitting the syntax of the quantum theory to determine its semantics, that is, the meaning of the symbols and the representation of the objects that the theory characterizes are determined by the grammar or in this case the rules of mathematics. (Miller, p. 259)

Subordinating rhetoric to math in scientific discovery would seem to be a move toward accuracy in representation, but it does not solve the problem inherent in representation since math, too, is a sign system inflected by culture, and numbers are inescapably encumbered with prior associations. At a simple level, numbers acquire idiomatic status within a culture, especially as certain events – actual or fictional – become part of the culture's mythology. In the Hebrew Bible and Christian New Testament, for example, the number “seven” and its multiples connote a perfect totality (in Genesis One, the creation occurs in seven days; in Matthew, Jesus instructs Peter to forgive someone “seventy times seven”); “three” indicates a completed process (after three days, Jonah is delivered from the whale and Jesus from the tomb); and “four” and its multiples signal a visionary condition (references to “four,” “twelve,” and “twenty-four” are prominent in Revelation). Even in our vernacular we find instances of numbers functioning idiomatically (“the sixty-four-thousand dollar question,” “she looks like a million bucks”). Whatever knowledge scientists and mathematicians communicate through equations and formulae is mediated by numbers. Whether in the earliest stages of civilization words and numbers enjoyed a pristine existence, untainted by cultural memory, is uncertain. Both have a mediating function today, however, and to ignore that function allows the ways they have been encoded by culture to go unchecked.

Miller's articulation of interplay between media in scientific discourse, together with Heisenberg's musing over the conflict between those media, practically summon intermedia scholars to bring their expertise to the problems of representation in the natural sciences. Intermedia studies naturally engage Heisenberg's fundamental precept since the stability – the knowability – of one medium typically results in uncertainty in the other. Famously, Blake's pictorial tyger in *Songs of Experience* undercuts the credibility of his rhetorical tyger. But even in those instances of intermediality where the media seem to be in harmony with each other, one medium is

invariably read as dominant while the other is relegated to a supplemental and less certain role. Illustrated literature abounds with subtle differences between narratives and pictures, which impel readers to assume a tacit hierarchy between the words and images. Intermedia scholars, skilled in analyzing the complexities of mixed media, are well positioned to extend their analysis to the media-rich discourse of scientists, and this is an area that deserves more of their attention.

In the 1980's, a graduate professor of mine predicted that in the near future traditional literature departments would go the way of classics departments and become havens for an increasingly small group of true believers while the mainstream study of literature would become a branch of the social sciences. Since his prediction, literature departments have, in fact, neither been assimilated into the social sciences nor have they become insular units for undisturbed musing (a characterization of classics departments that is certainly not true today, if it ever was). Indeed, they continue to thrive at colleges and universities as independent disciplinary units that have non-threatening alliances with other disciplines. My professor was prescient in one respect, however: though literature departments have remained solidly within the humanities, literary scholars have continued to encroach on the social sciences. By studying texts through a variety of cultural frameworks, scholars have closely aligned themselves with political scientists and sociologists, and in many instances their work has unwittingly argued that they are a breed of social scientists. If anything, however, my professor was too modest in his prediction. Literary scholars have not restrained their incursions to the social sciences, but, as noted at the beginning of this essay, they have steadily moved into the natural sciences, finding biology, physics, chemistry, etc. to be fertile fields for their semiotic expertise.

Though at many universities there are still administrative and geographical divisions between the humanities and the natural sciences – with science and literature departments in separate colleges and often in different areas of the campus – some universities have established interdisciplinary programs that join the two academic arenas. Brown University, for example, has a Department of the History of Mathematics; Harvard University, a Department of Visual and Environmental Sciences; and Columbia University, a Department of the Philosophical Foundations of Physics. As more disciplinary fusions between the natural sciences and the humanities take place, it is likely that the curricula of such programs will include courses in semiotics, which will require instructors who are sophisticated analysts of intermedia. In time, scholars in that area, no doubt, will be regularly enlisted to teach courses in the cultural history of science if those courses pursue what Hugo Caviola, a scholar in the field of education, has referred to as “macro-rhetoric”:

It is [...] due to the fixation of many historians of science on the accretion concept of the history of science that the interdisciplinary potential of [...] basic metaphors has long been overlooked. If an

entire period can be dominated by one (or a few) shared metaphor(s) it must be possible to lay them bare and thus integrate seemingly disparate discourses synchronically. In order to see such metaphorical ramifications, however, the history of science would have to give up its obsession with sequence and chronology. Instead, it would have to open up its perspective on the intra- and extrascientific resonance such paradigmatic metaphors have.<sup>14</sup>

Along with examining the macro-rhetoric that influences scientific discourse, there is a need to examine the micro-rhetoric of a language. In an epigraph to *Imagery in Scientific Thought*, Miller quotes Bohr: “Indeed, we find ourselves here on the very path taken by Einstein of adapting our modes of perception borrowed from the sensations to the gradually deepening knowledge of the laws of Nature. The hindrances met on this path originate above all in the fact that, so to say, every word in the language refers to our ordinary perception” (Miller, p. 1). Language, at least in Western culture, has an inherent empirical bias. The problem articulated by Bohr is compounded for those whose written texts are accompanied by visual texts since iconography is also rooted in empirical perception. Once again, it is scholars of intermedia who are poised to respond to such dilemmas since their savvy in aesthetic mediation is often accompanied by an understanding of phenomenology.

Many scientists acknowledge the role of perception in scientific discovery and the role of representation in scientific reports. Miller states: “when scientists hold a theory, they hold a particular mode of imagery as well,” and then notes, “Examination of historical studies reveals that scientists’ willingness to change their imagery is influenced by their research” (Miller, p. 312). What Miller does not mention is that a change of imagery is also caused by changes in a culture’s modes of representation. Scientific change is not propelled by scientific research alone but is motivated in part by changes in the semiotic systems in the larger culture. Intermedia scholars are needed to analyze the iconography of illustrations, diagrams, charts, and formulae of scientific discourse (especially when those sign systems are used as a counterpoint to written text). They are also needed to uncover the ways the verbal/visual discourse of scientists both surrenders to the conventions of the existing sign systems in a culture and alters those conventions. As noted at the outset of this essay, the discourse of scientists, especially the nonlinguistic signs, has been granted a large measure of immunity to poststructuralist theories of representation. But just as music is unavoidably programmatic since we live in a world of sound, mathematical symbols and scientific drawings are inescapably trapped in a pre-existing world of icons. As analysts of the discourse of chemists, biologists, physicists, and other

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<sup>14</sup> Hugo Caviola: “The Rhetoric of Interdisciplinarity” in Martin Heusser, Michèle Hannoosh, Leo Hoek, Charlotte Schoell-Glass, and David Scott (eds.): *Text and Visuality*, Amsterdam; Atlanta 1999, p. 50.

natural scientists, intermedia scholars can address such questions as: How are the visual/verbal sign systems of natural scientists involuntarily encoded? How do their different media resignify each other? What are the ideological dimensions of their intermedia discourse? How do their modes of representation affect the reception of their discoveries within the larger culture?

At present, intermedia scholars are one step behind scientists, performing the role of cultural interpreters of scientific communication. Since a scientist's rhetoric is not an afterthought but an active player in the construction of scientific theory, however, the time may well be approaching when collaborations between scientists and intermedia scholars will be a matter of course. When that day arrives, scientists will team up with experts in intermediality during the research process, and through that teamwork, they will be able to develop, in tandem with their scientific discoveries, a verbal/visual discourse that is deeply aware of its complex cultural ramifications.



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## **Intermedial “Music” Culture**



# “To Stitch the Cut...”: The Record Sleeve and its Intermedial Status

Jens Arvidson

A record sleeve is the physical enclosure of a record with the purpose of protecting it. Most often there is also some kind of graphic art on it, which is regularly considered to be its primacy – especially the front side graphics. Additionally, the sleeve has a title of the recording, information about the artist, its contents and manufacturer. All this is routinely regarded as a familiar framing for the recorded music.

Seen in a wider context the record sleeve belongs to the broader category of intermedia aesthetics labelled “music packaging,”<sup>1</sup> i.e. the combining of visual and/or verbal media to enhance the experience of the recorded music. Historically, the category of music packaging could be said to be as old as recordings of music – what Philip Auslander describes as “recordings as material objects.”<sup>2</sup> Included in these objects are the piano roll, the Edison cylinder, the 78-rpm disc, the LP, the 7-inch single, the 12-inch single, the cassette, and the compact disc – and now the “dematerialized” mp3 file.<sup>3</sup> Even the 19<sup>th</sup> century mass-produced printed score has been considered as the very first such material object, despite the fact that it is not a recording (Auslander, p. 77). The printed score has also been identified as or assumed to be the initial step towards a visual packaging of its music; hence the illustration on sheet music has been considered a genealogy of the illustrated record sleeve.<sup>4</sup> The record sleeve as such – associated with the 78-rpm disc, the LP, the 7-inch single, the 12-inch single, and the compact disc – is as old as the gramophone record from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> At that point in time the sleeve was merely a physical protection with no real picture elements; the record sleeve as music packaging for recorded music in the strict sense (the illustrated form), did not

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<sup>1</sup> Charlotte Rivers: CD-Art. *Innovation in CD Packaging Design*, Mies; Hove 2003, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Auslander: “Looking at Records” in *The Drama Review*, Vol. 45, No. 1, 2001 (p. 77–83), p. 77. Another describing term Auslander uses is “material support for the music itself,” p. 77.

<sup>3</sup> The music video is another genre that would fit the label music packaging.

<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Cook: “The Domestic *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or Record Sleeves and Reception” in Wyndham Thomas (ed.): *Composition – Performance – Reception. Studies in the Creative Process in Music*, Aldershot 1998 (p. 105–117), p. 105; Nick de Ville: *Album Style and Image in Sleeve Design*, London 2003, p. 16. See also: Jennifer McKnight-Trontz, Alex Steinweiss, and Steven Heller: *For the Record. The Life and Works of Alex Steinweiss. Inventor of Album Cover*, New York 2000, and Eric Kohler: *In the Groove. Vintage Record Graphics 1940–1960*, San Francisco; London 1999.

<sup>5</sup> In 1887 the German Emile Berliner presented the gramophone, a development of Edison’s phonograph. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this simply mass-produced round record had its commercial breakthrough.

appear until the late 1930s.<sup>6</sup>

For some time the musical object, the aural experience of recorded music, was separated from its audio-visual experience in live concerts and music hall shows. Subsequently, the musical object was and still is to some extent persistently characterized as "an assertion of the autonomy of sound"; hence it constructs an "audio-visual disjunction" according to John Corbett.<sup>7</sup> The recorded music produced its own visual lack, or what Corbett describes as a "fetishistic audiophilia" and the listening experience became primary (Corbett, p. 84).<sup>8</sup> As the illustrated record sleeve emerged, it was an attempt to bring back the visual, to make amends for the autonomy of the musical object or "to stitch the cut that separates seeing from hearing in the contemporary listening scenario" (Corbett, p. 86). The purpose of the re-entry of the visual, with the design on the illustrated record sleeve, was from the beginning, and still is, to *market* the music and catch the consumer's attention, but also to artistically *reflect* or *comment* upon the music.

At this point a development can be stated: from an original audio-visual event, through a separation of media where the mass-produced recorded music "lost" its visuals and was made primary, to a reconnection of the visuals by way of the record sleeve. Described with the typology of intermedial categories that Hans Lund, Áron Kibédi Varga and others have offered,<sup>9</sup> this development that ends with the illustrated record sleeve is a transformation from where different media was presented, for the most part, in an *integrative* instance in live concerts,<sup>10</sup> to a situation of *combined* media, co-existing and/or interfering to each other. The situation

<sup>6</sup> The usual description of the pre-illustrated record sleeves is "gray cartons," made of pasteboard and/or plain paper wrappers. There were only name of record company and retailer on these sleeves, with no proper connection to the music provided; instead it was the label on the record that was the source of whom and what on the record (shown through the die-cut hole in the pasteboard, whenever there was one).

<sup>7</sup> John Corbett: "Free, Single, and Disengaged: Listening Pleasure and the Popular Music Object" in *October*, Vol. 54, 1990 (p. 79–101), p. 84–85.

<sup>8</sup> See Dave Laing's study of the shift from the audio-visual event to a sound without vision in: "A Voice Without a Face. Popular Music and the Phonograph in the 1890s" in Simon Frith (ed.): *Popular Music. Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies, Volume 1. Music and Society*, London; New York 2004 (p. 97–107). Even a cultural critic of mass-produced artefacts as Theodor W. Adorno approved of recorded music; he was a "gramphonic enthusiast," according to Thomas Y. Levin in: "For the Record. Adorno on Music in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" in *October*, Vol. 55, 1990 (p. 23–47), p. 44. What Adorno saw and recognized in recorded music was the aesthetics of absolute music, especially when the LP appeared and freed opera from its unnecessary visual enactment, the drama. Theodor W. Adorno: "Opera and the Long-Playing Record" in *October*, Vol. 55, 1990 (1969) (p. 62–66).

<sup>9</sup> Hans Lund: "Medier i samspel" in Hans Lund (ed.): *Intermedialitet. Ord, bild och ton i samspel*, Lund 2002 (p. 9–24), p. 19–22 (see also page 15 in this publication); Áron Kibédi Varga: "Criteria for Describing Word-and-Image Relations" in *Poetics Today*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1989 (p. 31–53).

<sup>10</sup> I am relating here on Nicholas Cook's argument on musical performance as an audio-visual event that can be characterized as integrated media. See the last chapter: "Conclusion. The Lonely Muse" in *Analyzing Musical Multimedia*, Oxford 2000 (1998), p. 261–272.

signifies a reconstruction of a multimedia product of audiovisuality resulting in a redistribution of media. This change has affected how the *object* listened to (the music) and the listening *subject* (the listener) has been studied. Disciplines such as cultural studies have done much study on the culture of music and the musical object with topics of cultural commodification, popular culture, culture industry, and ideology;<sup>11</sup> and musicologists have concentrated on the music itself. Although the record sleeve is positioned in the intersection between popular culture and high culture, between advertisement and aesthetics,<sup>12</sup> and there is, at least superficially, a relation to the music, the study of record sleeves is almost nowhere to be found. The research on the record sleeve as a multimedia artefact has been overlooked, showing how it supplements the music in Derridean means and deconstructs the autonomy of the musical object. By focusing on the record sleeve as an artefact, it could be a help to understand how to reflect upon it in a larger cultural studies analysis.

Concentrating on the record sleeve from an intermedial point of view, the questions are, at least from the outset, straightforward: what kinds of media relations are there? In what way do they connect? To what extent is the record sleeve intermedial? These questions have been extracted from what is partly at the centre of my study: Nicholas Cook's and Alan Licht's different ideas of the record sleeve, as presented in "The Domestic *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or Record Sleeves and Reception" and "Record Covers as Parerga" respectively.<sup>13</sup> Cook builds his argument from the position of *reception aesthetics*; he opens up the media borders to see how the sleeve can contribute to the musical meaning: *how much of the mixed media is there?* Licht focuses as well on reception but put more emphasis on a *phenomenological* aspect when he pays attention to how the record sleeve and its music as a multimedia activity are addressed and is conceived by the receiver.<sup>14</sup> Even though he is not stating the question explicitly, he clearly argues for, opposingly and in a negating way, a firm border between sleeve and music: *is there any mixed media?* Despite the conflicting ideas, both Cook and Licht are interested in how the media are communicated and

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<sup>11</sup> Most studies have dealt with the recorded music, its cultural history of technological development, the record industry, as well as psychological, phenomenological matters and values for the listener. But these studies have not in any particular way tried to bring the music, or what ever they have studied, together with the record sleeve.

<sup>12</sup> I separate the traditional, philosophical aesthetics from what cultural studies is concerned with, as Chris Barker states: "Cultural studies does, of course, make value judgements about culture. However these are characteristically ideological and political judgements rather than ones based on aesthetic criteria." Chris Barker: "Aesthetics" in *The Sage Dictionary of Cultural Studies*, London; Thousand Oaks; New Dehli 2004, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> These two authors are chosen because they are among the few that deals with this matter.

<sup>14</sup> Differentiating Cook's argument from Licht's further: the former is more concerned with how the work establishes contact with the receiver through its concrete aesthetic statements (signs), the latter is on the lookout for how the different media actually directs and forms the receivers' idea of the phenomena of seeing and hearing "record sleeve and music." While Cook overtly argues for reception aesthetics, Licht does not mention phenomenology at all, but that is what his theory is based on.

perceived, especially concerning the question whether media borders are upheld or not by the receiver. Consequently they contribute to an intermedial status of the record sleeve.

Media borders must be considered when discussing mixed media. Inspired by Jacques Derrida's essay "The Parergon," Licht makes use of *parergon* as a guiding theory. The theory of parergon is convenient here as it offers a critical argument on frames and boundaries of artworks, of something external that complements a work by filling in what it lacks or to limit it.<sup>15</sup> A parergon is "the frame, which gives the work a border or edge," thus Licht regards the record sleeve as a framing device for the music – which is the *ergon*.<sup>16</sup> Primarily, the parergon indicates a medium that exists in the margins of the musical experience. But how far out in the margins? I have taken interest in the way that Cook and Licht mark out the border of the record sleeve towards the music. To complement the discussion on borders, I have made use of different categories of collaborative art forms to see if they can assist in how to think of the sleeve, as an isolated object from the music.

But before looking into details, I offer an overview of the intermedial dilemmas, as well as some hypothesis of how the record sleeve can "stitch the cut" between what is listened to and looked at. I will do this by problematizing the sleeve – alongside Cook and Licht – in terms of a *collaborative art form*, as its rules are set up and defined by Thomas Jensen Hines.<sup>17</sup> Subsequently some critical points can be made of the beholder-listener's perception of the "image/text/music" package.

My discussion is in principal terms, conceptually oriented and concerned with key aspects of the record sleeve. And in general sleeves for vinyl records and CDs are treated alike (the big difference being mainly the size). Crucial for my reasoning is that the listener I have in mind is or has been in contact with the sleeve; otherwise the split is without end. The example that I in due course will engage with, the record sleeve for the CD *the CIVIL warS* by Philip Glass and Robert Wilson, may seem as an exclusive case. But I take it as paradigmatic – being neither the extreme special case, nor the extreme of the ordinary, just exemplary.

## The Process of Intermediality

What is intermediality? The question is of importance as both Cook and Licht focus on the receiver, given that the "stitching" is not just between different media, but also between the combination of media and the receiver.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the relation

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<sup>15</sup> Jacques Derrida: "The Parergon" in *The Truth in Painting*, Chicago 1987 (p. 37–82). See also Hans Lund's discussion on media borders in Lund, p. 10–11 (see note 9 for complete reference).

<sup>16</sup> Allan Licht: "Record Covers as Parerga" in Thomas Millroth and others (eds.): *Look at the Music/ See Sound. A Sound Art Anthology*, Ystad; Brösarp; Roskilde 2002 (p. 54–58), p. 55.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Jensen Hines: *Collaborative Form. Studies in the Relations of the Arts*, Kent 1991, p. 164–173.

<sup>18</sup> The definition of medium I am using here is "media of expression," a distinct means of communication: word, image and music being different media. For this definition see Werner Wolf: *The Musicalization*



between different forms of media and the listener-beholder of the music and record sleeve must be considered in terms of *perceived interaction* – a process of some kind (Cook 2000, p. 106).

Cook states that pure music is a fiction, that “the real thing unites itself promiscuously with any other media that are available” (Cook 2000, p. 92). He means that only mixed media exists, that music and record sleeve will always be connected.<sup>19</sup> But what kind of “stitch” is at issue? Is there more than one kind? Initiating an understanding of how this mixed media activity is, let us turn to the listening act as described by Licht: “the record must be removed from its cover in order to be heard. You can examine the cover while the record plays, but one doesn’t necessarily hear a record at the same time as looking at the cover” (Licht, p. 55). This division of attention splits up media and seems non-negotiable for Licht.

Hines’s rules of collaborative art form can offer an idea of some media relations. His concept of a true collaboration is that it should be completed by the beholder-reader-listener, who should see a *complete* work instead of its constituent parts *separately* (Hines, p. 170–171). His first rule states that one should look for “the presence of the effects of interaction,” that “each composite form is the sum of these effects, an art form that is different from its parts” (Hines, p. 167). The record sleeve alone could be regarded as a collaborative artistic form with its combination of images and words, but the *presence of effects* becomes problematic as the second rule states, “There can be no primary form. Collaboration subordinates each constituent art to the combined effect of the whole” (Hines, p. 169).<sup>20</sup> The problem is to understand whether music and sleeve are “subordinated” in totality, or if one of the media is dominant. What Hines says is that a fragmentation of a work, understood as a partitional *perception* of it due to the separated media, destroys a collaborative work. This happens *unless* the presence of effects is created in the recollection of the effects of interaction from the sleeve alone, and into an imaginary field in the mind of the listener – enacted creatively in a cognitive, contextual perception. The presence of effects of this kind is something slightly uncontrollable and variable from time to time (not necessarily meant in a negative way). Music and sleeve can become a total work but not an organic whole as Hines’s theory aspires to, for which an active audience is required – “an audience that can ‘bracket’ its expectations and alter its ways of perceiving art works,” declared by Hines himself (Hines, p. 167). This audience can override the diachronic situation, the problem Licht demonstrated, if they are exposed to a multiple listening and beholding-reading experience. Being

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*of Fiction. A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality*, Amsterdam; Atlanta 1999, p. 35–36.

<sup>19</sup> This does not mean that we lose conception for medium specificity. See also W.J.T. Mitchell for a similar argument in “There Are No Visual Media” in *Journal of Visual Culture*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2005, p. 257–266.

<sup>20</sup> Collaboration here should be understood as *integrated* media, a *fusion* of media, not simply media in combination.

numerously exposed from looking at and reading the text on the record sleeve, and listening to the record, the experiences could form a compound of its elements: a *kind* of collaboration could emerge between sleeve and music in a performative act. The experiences can create a media fusion and make the receiver equally aurally and visually oriented.

What Hines and Licht show is that when different media are presented on asymmetrical terms, the struggle of attention between record sleeve and music indicates that the receiver does not always know *if* or *how* the two media meet and affect his/her experience; the struggle of attention indicates predomination of one media, a media hegemony or hierarchy rather than media interaction. Something substantial is required to distinguish between a "weaker" and a "stronger" form of collaboration, since the idea of alliance *just because* the music is literally placed in between images and words on the record sleeve is a displeasing one. Moreover, the bracketing situation will put a lot of pressure on the listener; though I think such situation exists in reality. Intermediality is subsequently a process, as an intermedial decoding activity extended in time. But only if it is collaboration as defined by Hines, as an ongoing negotiation between the different media and the receiver. But how and when do we know explicitly or objectively that the record sleeve establishes a concrete, strong relation with the music? If we cannot know, it supposes the possibility of being mainly an identifying and protective framing device. However, Cook has a theory: a model of multimedia as metaphor, saying that if there is a metaphorical likeness or an analogical linkage between sleeve and music, then a linkage of interaction is created. Music and sleeve must be met by a minimum of requirements, sharing some similarity, to be seen as collaborative in the act of perception.

In general, the name of the artist, band or composer, an album title and titles of the musical compositions are presented on the sleeve as interferences to the music. A record sleeve can nonetheless be "complete" in itself without the music, when it overstates or goes beyond the notion of parergon. Something would somehow be wrong if a record sleeve did not have its music to refer to. By definition a *record* sleeve always refers to music as *music* packaging, in complex metonymic and synecdochic relations: the sleeve identifies the music, just as the music is identified by the sleeve because it recognizes its need of being framed.<sup>21</sup> A "visual mnemonic to the music enclosed," as Steve Jones and Martin Sorger have called it.<sup>22</sup> The sleeve's immediate nearness to the music can remind the listener that, once the music is heard, by looking at the sleeve one "hears" the music and thus the sleeve frames the music. It signifies the music metonymically; in its indexical relation it becomes a symbol for it. This referential displacement of the music put emphasis on the sleeve. At the

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<sup>21</sup> This it is not a tautological description as it may appear. I merely point out that the different directions or positions that one can take towards the sleeve demonstrate differences in function and relation.

<sup>22</sup> Steve Jones and Martin Sorger: "Covering Music. A Brief History and Analysis of Album Cover Design" in *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, Vol. 11–12, No. 1, 1999 (p. 68–102), p. 68.

same time, the sleeve materializes the idea of listening and of music since this is its true assignment. Therefore the record sleeve articulates its own incompleteness, as being part of something larger; its synecdochic relation is thus, in some sense, an integrative function. The conclusion is that the intermedial construction of text and image on the record sleeve will always be attached to music, never free from it. How the connection is made depends on the specific example and the receiver.

### Frames and Framing: Parergonality and Intermediality of the Record Sleeve

In order to frame the record sleeve as an intermedial object, I will present an idea of how it is represented in the literature.<sup>23</sup> Simon Shaw-Miller states that the record sleeve is an “obvious example of art and music in concert.”<sup>24</sup> Regardless of this kind of acknowledgment, the sleeve is rarely discussed as the visual element that attends the sound it encloses. In relation to the recorded music the status of the record sleeve is marginalized in the literature, where the music–sleeve relation is not at all obvious (or all too obvious to be mentioned), and the relation is ignorantly displaced. Understood as an “‘accessory,’ ‘foreign or secondary object,’ ‘supplement,’ ‘aside,’ ‘reminder,’” as Derrida would ironically have characterized the sleeve, most intermedial aspects are then unsurprisingly uncared for (Derrida, p. 54). When the record sleeve appears in literature – whether it is critical writing or pictorial histories (coffee table books) – it is regularly treated separate from the music, a treatment that forms the discourse of the sleeve. Additionally, the literature on record sleeves demonstrates a clear lack of a nuanced notion of the object in question, most often it is displayed only as a frontside and/or a backside – rarely more than that.

A record sleeve consists of a folder, a booklet, an inner and outer sleeve, the case or carton itself, the shape, the label and other graphic remarks on the record.<sup>25</sup> As most of the literature ignores the sleeve as a multilayered thing, it cannot describe what the record sleeve actually is. Its main interest is in presenting front covers, the memorable or impact designs – as a *history of pictures*.<sup>26</sup> There have been attempts to

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<sup>23</sup> Framing in the sense of framing the subject matter, as well as referring to the discursive interactions of the implicated media. See Werner Wolf: “Introduction. Frames, Framings and Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media” in Werner Wolf and Walter Bernhart (eds.): *Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media*, Amsterdam 2006a (p. 1–40), p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Simon Shaw-Miller: “Visual Music and the Case for Rigorous Thinking” in *The Art Book, Vol. 13, No. 1*, 2006 (p. 3–5), p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> “On” is meant literally and figuratively: a CD can include music videos, downloadable images, and the picture-discs are vinyl records *and* pictures, as the image and the record grooves are made of the same material (sometimes the record is also cut in the shape of the picture).

<sup>26</sup> Take a look at any book that is about record sleeves, and you will see that practically every one (re)presents crippled versions. Storm Thorgerson and Aubrey Powell symptomatically write in their book: “[T]he music is secondary... Partially because we can’t easily put music in a book, partially because the relationship of music to design is hard to pin down. [...] All we’re trying to say is that the connection of visual to aural, of design to music, and how successfully that is accomplished, is an

consider record sleeves' word-and-image combinations in its relation to music. As early as 1960, Olof Lennart Praesto nicely captures the concept of the record sleeve thus:

Any categorization of the record sleeves into special groups is hardly to be thought of, because most of the compositions are comprized of a merging between drawn, photographed and typographic elements. It is this cooperation between the different graphic means of expressions that is characteristic of the record sleeve design. The greatest difficulties from an artistic point of view is to bring these completely separate components into artistic harmony, to balance picture against text and to make the final composition indicate what kind of music the record contains.<sup>27</sup>

But on the whole, literature on record sleeves is nothing but nostalgic-historical picture book-odysseys (see note 26 for a few examples), and does not contribute to any reflection on how the cut is stitched; instead it regularly removes the sleeves from its usual context and re-cuts the division between seeing and hearing, attempting at constructing an autonomized, objectified record sleeve.

### *The Record Sleeve as an Accessory Device?*

In view of how the record sleeve is represented, I turn to the centre of my study: the different ideas of the record sleeve that Cook and Licht represents. In "The Domestic *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or Record Sleeves and Reception," Cook writes:

It is a striking fact that the analytical programme note developed just as words were expunged from absolute music, as if the words were repressed in one place immediately came bobbing up in another. And when, with

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arbitrary matter..." Storm Thorgerson and Aubrey Powell (eds.): *One Hundred Best Album Covers. The Stories Behind the Sleeves*, London; New York 1999 (p. 9–16), p. 14–15. See more of this in Robert Klanten, Hendrik Hellige and Tom Hulan (eds.): *Sonic. Visuals for Music*, Berlin; London 2004; Alan Livingston and Isabella Livingston: *The Thames and Hudson Dictionary of Graphic Design and Designers*, London 2003; Frank Jastfelder and Stefan Kassel (eds.): *The Album Cover Art of Soundtracks*, Boston; London 1997; Tim O'Brien and Mike Savage: *Naked Vinyl. Classic Nude Album Cover Art*, London 2002; Graham Marsh and Glyn Callingham: *The Cover Art of Blue Note Records. The Collection*, London 2002 (1991); Michael Ochs: *1000 Record Covers*, Köln 2005 (1995) – of one thousand record sleeves, only thirty-two are commented upon with one to three sentences, and only sixteen examples are depicted with more than just the front side. An additional list of literature on the topic can be found in Jones and Sorger's "Covering Music. A Brief History and Analysis of Album Cover Design," where they present some similar arguments to mine.

<sup>27</sup> Olof Lennart Praesto: "Grafik och musik" in *Perspektiv. Tidskrift för kulturdebatt*, No. 3, 1960 (p. 112–115), p. 113 (my translation).

the advent of recording, the enjoyment of music migrated from concert hall to sitting room, the programme note was gradually transformed into the text on the back of the record sleeve. Here, however, a third artistic medium came into play, for the music was now literally sandwiched between text and image. (Cook 1998, p. 35)

Text, music and image are reckoned here as different media joined through the sleeve; the sleeve is also independently a medium. This double definition of “medium,” as a *technical channel of communication*, through which *media of expression* (verbal and visual) are transmitted, is a central aspect of the record sleeve.<sup>28</sup> More to the point, two things can be observed in the passage above: (1) the usual text on the back of the sleeve belongs to an aesthetic process (i.e. the historical origin in the music through the analytical note), and (2) there seems to be no way for the enclosed music to escape an interaction with the accompanying images and words. Further more, Cook says the sleeve has an “anchoring function,” and is made of “semiotics of packaging” (Cook 1998, p. 107–108). I consider these expressions as a framing tending to an *initial position*, providing basic information and orientation that is significant at the beginning of the musical reception.<sup>29</sup> The sleeve here is understood as preceding the musical experience. But Cook has a higher aim: he considers the possibility of how “record-sleeve images contribute to the construction of musical meanings,” and how they go beyond their starting point as packaging and become an element of the artefact, or at least “the discursive framework within which the music inside them is consumed” (Cook 1998, p. 106). This means more than initial framings. At best, the imagery has, if it share attributes with the music, a capacity of aesthetic significance to “translate meaningfully” into the music, which means a relationship of inversion (Cook 1998, p. 110–111). The imagery on the record sleeve suggests how to listen to the music. It is this kind of metaphorical transference that forms Cook’s theoretical model of multimedia as metaphor, which is thoroughly explained in *Analysing Musical Multimedia* and where he is not essentially interested in the record sleeves as such, but in formulating a general theory of multimedia. Cook argues that a record sleeve *might* be categorized as multimedia (in the sense of *fusing media*), and his short analysis concludes that it is “at least *next door* to multimedia” (Cook 2000, p. 74; my italics).<sup>30</sup> This “next door” reservation is due

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<sup>28</sup> Marie-Laure Ryan describes this as “multimedia media,” as a necessary tautological description to show that there are *several media as means of expression* involved, presented through a *channel of communication*. Marie-Laure Ryan: “Introduction” in Marie-Laure Ryan (ed.): *Narrative Across Media. The Languages of Storytelling*, Lincoln; London 2004 (p. 1–40), p. 35.

<sup>29</sup> Werner Wolf: “Defamiliarized Initial Framings in Fiction” in Werner Wolf and Walter Bernhart (eds.): *Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media*, Amsterdam 2006b (p. 295–328), p. 301.

<sup>30</sup> In Cook’s terminology, multimedia proper is something like Hans Lund’s *combination of media in co-existence*, and a combination of Claus Clüver’s *multimedia* and *mixed media discourse*. Sometimes Lund’s *integration of media* and Clüver’s *intermedia discourse* comes close to Cook’s multimedia,

to the fact that it is a static, discrete juxtaposed object, not literally experienced together with the music as in the more controllable situation of a concert. Thus he believes that *analogy* better describes the relation of attributional sharing, instead of metaphor. But he admits that if the words too are considered, there is a better possibility that an instance of multimedia (intermedia) can be accomplished.

In "Record Covers as Parerga" Licht presents a different view: "Cover, jacket, sleeve – whatever you call it, a record's packaging is meant for identification and protection (like a book jacket or cover, or clothing and as advertising)" (Licht, p. 55). The essence of Licht's arguments is difficult to pin down.<sup>31</sup> But he continues to talk about the record sleeve as something outside the music; for him the music is *the* artwork. He therefore turns to Derrida and the idea of the parergon to speak of the sleeve as a frame. A difference in interest and attitude towards the object is made clear here: Cook attributes another value to the record sleeve when he understands it as an element joined together with music, just as Licht is inconsistent when he addresses the sleeve as an identifying marker. For Licht it is nevertheless still not part of the music, be it through verbal or pictorial elements or both – just like a frame around a painting marks out a clear boundary between wall and picture, as it does not enter the (visual or musical) artwork. However, he thinks the sleeve can cross the border into the art field, which does not mean that it enters into or engages with any *intermedial* relations – it only "becomes an object desirable to the collector" (Licht, p. 54).<sup>32</sup> Licht has difficulty in regarding the sleeve as something that actually can interrelate with the music from the musical experience. His inconsistency lies in the idea that sleeve and music do affect each other's fields, but are still separated spheres: the music is safe from visuals and the autonomy of music is secured.<sup>33</sup> Cook on the other hand does not guard the media borders, as he is specifically interested in artistic *relations* between sounds and visuals from reception theory, how imagery "enters into the music-aesthetic process," of whose existence he is convinced (Cook 1998, p. 110).

Both writers regard the sleeve as a framework for the music, but Licht give the impression of not accepting the mixed nature of sounds and visuals that records and sleeves brings together. Though he is not entirely insensitive to the idea of visuals and aural being mixed, it is a bit puzzling that he states that "the frame's design

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because the process ends in fusion or union. Compare Levinson's and Shaw-Miller's *juxtapositional/multidisciplinary hybrid* on page 75–76. For Lund's typology of media relations, see note 9 for complete reference, and Claus Clüver's schema of word-image relations on pages 15 and 26 in this publication.

<sup>31</sup> Licht's article is much shorter than and not predominantly as analytical as Cook's.

<sup>32</sup> Strangely enough, he says "only the LP cover has great potential as an art space [...] Size has a lot to do with it." This quality "connotes a canvas more easily," than other types of packages. That may be, but if connoting canvas equals art then I disagree that only the LP-package has this kind of potential if "art" here means becoming an object of its own. See below on this.

<sup>33</sup> Rather than affecting in a two-way direction, Licht implies a one-way route: from sleeve to music.

is competing with sonics” and therefore “if someone is *equally* aurally and visually oriented, then both the record [the music] and cover will be important to them” (Licht, p. 56; my italic). It is puzzling because he does not mention whether the perceivers’ orientation might be based on structural relations between the media involved, or based on cognitive, contextual or hermeneutical interpretive processes. It is not clear at all what justifies his thoughts, but my conclusion is that the frame for him is just a guide and/or a rivalling medium; it does not really partake in the reception of the music (the work). The burden is put on the receiver’s decoding activity (and preferences), adjusting to the situation on the basis that music and visuals *are there*, existing side by side, but he does not give any specification regarding interpretive signals on the record sleeve.<sup>34</sup> Though he does identify the sleeve as a partial message-based framing in the same way as Werner Wolf explains “paratexts which are parts of individual works and are positioned at their borders, [...] material that forms a ‘threshold’ to the main text. [...] As liminal phenomena, paratexts possess a characteristic ambiguity: they are positioned in between text and context and belong to the ‘work’ *but not to the text proper*” (Wolf 2006a, p. 20; my italics). The sharing of space between visual and sound, where they perceptually *interact* and which Cook is open for, is hard to find in Licht. What would Licht say if the recorded music was a musical ekphrasis,<sup>35</sup> the musical interpretation of a visual art, and the sleeve presented that interpreted painting? What if there was also an ekphrasis present on the sleeve, the verbal interpretation of that painting? What happens to the ekphrastic situation: does it turn into an instance of multimedia, as an ekphrasis usually presents something absent? The sharing of space would then be hard to disregard.

The defensive standpoint I make in Licht’s arguments, a position of guarding media borders, might be because the disadvantage of the record sleeve as being a *diachronic*, structurally separate and uncoordinated technical medium from the music. The sleeve is simultaneously experienced with the music, but it is not *synchronized* to its recorded music like words and pictures in a music video and an opera. Cook is also aware of how this affects the recipients’ experience. Licht does not refuse to problematize the different media, but the aesthetics of such juxtaposition complicates the nature of experience and gets in his way, hindering him from the possibility of an audio-visual friction: the visual is an initial accessory device – but then passes the music by. Is he wrong? Cook deals with this because of his conviction that music is never autonomous (Cook 2000, p. 72; 126–129). Is it a question of belief and attitude? If there is any friction or media contest in Licht’s view, it lies within the *receiver*; for Cook the contest lies firstly within how the media share attributes: “the sense in which different media are, so to speak, vying for the same

<sup>34</sup> For “interpretive signals” and other types of framing agencies, see Wolf 2006a, p. 14–21.

<sup>35</sup> On the concept “musical ekphrasis” see Siglind Bruhn: “A Concert of Paintings. ‘Musical Ekphrasis’ in the Twentieth Century” in *Poetics Today*, Vol. 22, No. 3, 2001 (p. 552–605).

terrain, each attempting to impose its own characteristics upon the other. One might develop the analogy by saying that each medium strives to deconstruct the other, and so create space for itself," but by doing this, it all "ends in meaning" (Cook 2000, p. 103). Then it is a question of reception, because what matters is the *perceived interaction* of different media (Cook 2000, p. 106). This is the definitive fusion with its music that record sleeves can bring forth; if the attributional requirements are not met, then the simplest intermedial form is "semiotics of packaging," saying nothing about the music inside, but framing it by conforming to marketing the star; and this differentiation of what the record sleeve can do, is partly due to its occupation in an unfixed middle position between advertising and aesthetic experience. It is never "innocent," and never passes the music by (Cook 2000, p. 71). Both Cook and Licht discuss the meeting or fusion between record sleeve and music. For Cook this friction makes something happen; for Licht it is a confrontation that results in media moving away from each other.<sup>36</sup>

Though Licht tries to defend the autonomy of the music, he sees the sleeve as a deciding frame: protective against the outside while it has the function of internally unifying the work – but he still needs to see it as a conventional paratextual framing after all – destroying and contesting musical autonomy. Licht fears media crossing, he wants to uphold media borders with an either/or attitude towards the sleeve's function: either it is a harmless identity for the music, or the sleeve overstates its parergonality and makes itself an artwork, otherwise the sleeve runs the risk of "hurting the reception" of the music (Licht p. 56).<sup>37</sup> This fear represents the idea that record sleeves trample on dangerous ground and must be watched, as if images and words on the sleeve can take over the musical meaning – but it can only "represent" music, never become it! It also seems that, in the examinations of Cook and Licht, the record sleeve is partly forgotten as a sleeve, as that multilayered thing I referred to before. Both authors focus on *pictures* (though Cook shows awareness of verbal elements). Licht's definition suggests that the record sleeve scarcely transcends a function of added value; there is no other value other than the sleeve as a cover/picture and it is presented as an *autonomous* picture. Artist and designer Bob Cato shares this view, when he states that the task for a record sleeve designer means a handling of a product that is "real and human."<sup>38</sup> He claims that this product is even

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<sup>36</sup> Of course, Licht does not need to give any clues of how the specific relation between a record sleeve and its music can interrelate. But agreed upon Werner Wolf's definition of intermediality, as "a particular relation between ... conventionally distinct media of expression or communication," a relation that consists of a "verifiable, or at least convincingly identifiable, direct or indirect participation of two or more media in the signification of a human artifact," I cannot see any verifiable participation, empirically observed signals between sleeve and music at all in Licht's discussion, at least not beyond identification marks. See Wolf 1999, p. 37.

<sup>37</sup> Clearly it has to do with his belief that the sleeve cannot be intracompositionally part of the work, but if it can hurt the reception of music, it must be doing something to or with it!

<sup>38</sup> Bob Cato: "The Art of the Twelve-inch Square" in Walter Herdeg (ed.): *Graphis Record Covers. The*



more concerned with its own image – its own message on its own packaging – in contrast to other products a designer must enfold with conviction. Hence the sleeve is made into something detached from its true contents, an account associated with the majority of literature on record sleeves, and accordingly Licht has put himself in this category. The paradox is that record sleeves in this category are almost anything but covers and identifications; the cut between sleeve and music is re-opened. Recognizing this quality of independency as a feature that plays with the connection/disconnection between sleeve and music does make the sleeve something else than advertising material for the music, but positively not a single autonomous picture. In any case, there can be no doubt that the record sleeve is related to the music, whether the belief is attached to its ability of contributing to constructing musical meaning or merely being an accessory device (just framing).

the CIVIL warS: A CD-sleeve that Begs to be more than just Parergon

I am looking at the pictures and reading the texts for Philip Glass and Robert Wilson's CD-version of the opera *the CIVIL warS: a tree is best measured when it is down. ACT V – THE ROME SECTION* (recorded in 1995–99).<sup>39</sup> The sleeve consists of a carton, 12.5 × 14.5 × 1.5 cm. with a photograph in black and blue of Abraham Lincoln from the stage production. Inside is a 44-page booklet with photographs from the 1984 performance on stage at Teatro dell'Opera di Roma; historical photographs of Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln, Giuseppe Garibaldi and Robert E. Lee – main characters of the opera; some of Wilson's sketches for the stage design; explanations that mostly concerns the music and drama; the libretto; the plastic jewel case that contains the CD, with a picture and verbal elements printed on it, and a picture of Glass and Wilson. This *surrounds* the music on the record. This is what the record sleeve offers the beholder to view, read and consider before and while listening (fig. 1–3).

If one agrees upon Licht's definition of the record sleeve, it is certainly easy to see it as a frame, physically enclosing and identifying the music. Hence he entitles his article "Record Covers as Parerga," to indicate a Derridean influence. Derrida's reasoning on parergon is a matter on the idea of framing as a bordering to let something belong to and *not* belong to, to contain and *not* contain something essential for what it contains. He asks: "Where does the frame take place. Does it take place. Where does it begin. Where does it end. What is its internal limit. Its external limit" (Derrida, p. 63). These are some central questions that forms Derrida's deconstruction of the frame/framing concept; his interest is principally directed towards the idea

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*Evolution of Graphics Reflected in Record Packaging*, Zürich 1974 (p. 8–9), p. 8.

<sup>39</sup> In the liner notes David Wright uses the term post-Wagnerian multimedia to differentiate it from traditional opera or music-theatre, which it sometimes also is called. Wright: *the CIVIL warS: a tree is best measured when it is down. ACT V – THE ROME SECTION*, Nonesuch 1999 (p. 7–12), p. 9.

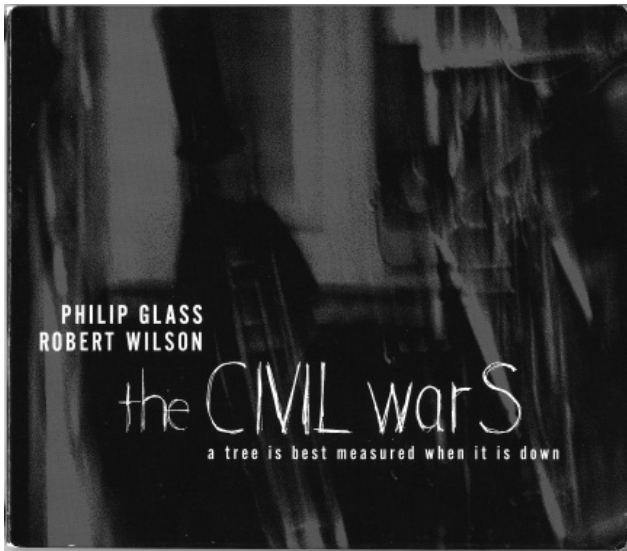
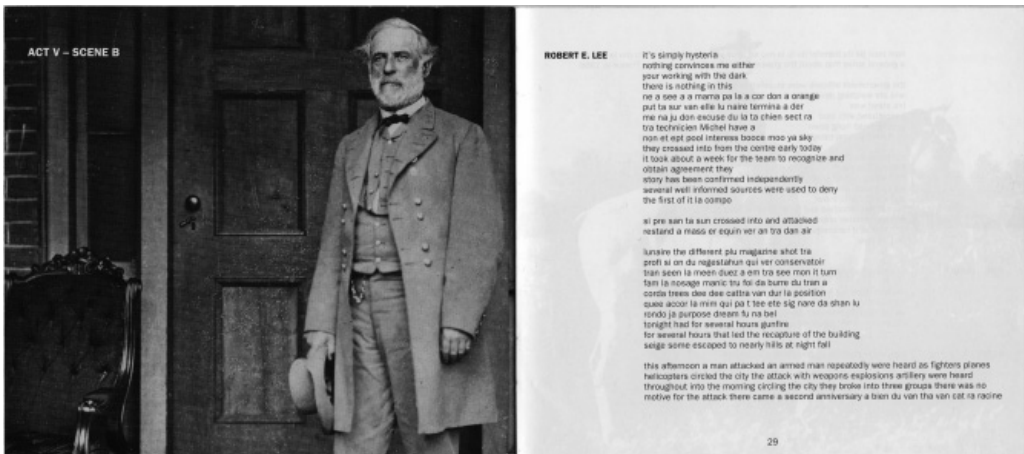
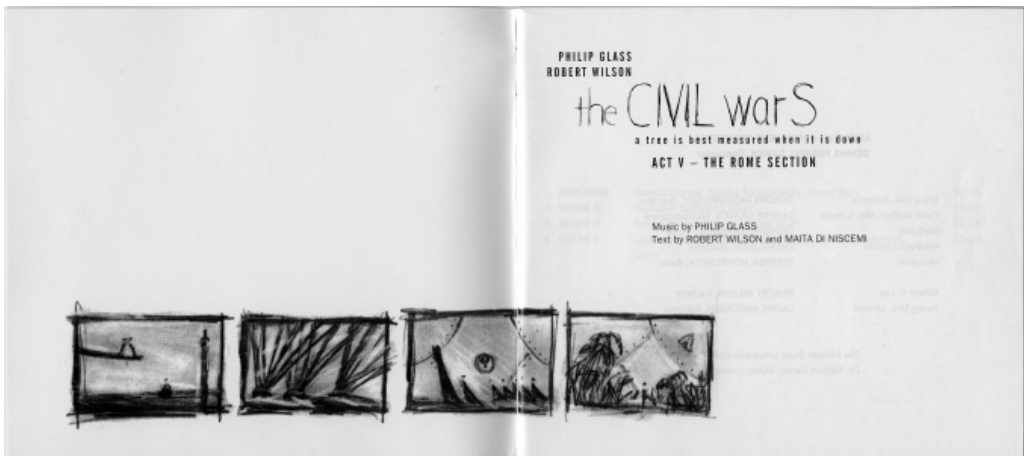


Fig. 1-3. The outer carton of the record sleeve, and pages 2-3 and 28-29 from the booklet for the Nonesuch-version of *the CIVIL warS* (1999), by Philip Glass and Robert Wilson



that it is virtually impossible to define a definitive boundary of things and objects. He does not want to destroy borders; rather he wants to destabilize them. Such questions become significant with the implication of the idea of *parergon*, which is the pointing towards a “centre.” This concerns not only *the CIVIL warS*, but also all record sleeves. When pictures, text and music are in front of the beholder, surrounding him or her, no part really emerges as less involved in the “work” – the centre that is the object questioned by Derrida (which does not mean that the media are on equal terms). The pictures and text on the carton, the booklet, and parts of the text and lyrics inside have caught the eye of the beholder before the listening of the music has begun. Why try, as Licht has, to separate the pictures and text from the music and the singing? Instead of making the sleeve discrete and isolated from music, one should ask: what relation does this frame have to the music? Is there a *framework*? Which is the work? The question is if the record sleeve really can be seen as a *parergon* of the music, or even as a *parergon* of the record. Thinking beyond the usual concept of what a record sleeve is, the record itself can be part of the sleeve as it also has text and image on it (compare the ordinary view presented at the beginning). A frame is normally regarded as an external element, not as an essential property – that which belongs to the work’s “impermeable boundary between the artwork (*ergon*) and everything that belongs to its background, context, space of representation.”<sup>40</sup> Are pictures and text on the record sleeve such a resistant and solid boundary? This is the difficult intrinsic double nature of the record sleeve: it wants to be itself, and it also belongs to the music. What *is* and what *is not* context, is there a centre of the context? Derrida says:

The *parergon* stands out both from the *ergon* (the work) and from the milieu, it stands out first of all like a figure on a ground. But it does not stand out in the same way as the work. The latter also stands out against a ground. But the *parergonal* frame stands out against two grounds, but with respect to each of those two grounds it merges into the other (Derrida, p. 61).

If a frame blends in or melts into the work, but is still not a part of it, what should the record sleeve be regarded as? Julian Wolfreys has pointed out that the frame is nothing in itself; it has a technical function to point at and provide interpretational possibilities of the framed.<sup>41</sup> Then what is its relation to the record, and to the music? As mentioned above, the frame can be thought of as determining what should be included in the work, to disconnect and exclude the outside from the inside and/or

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<sup>40</sup> Paul Duro: “Introduction” in Paul Duro (ed.): *The Rhetoric of the Frame. Essays on the Boundaries of the Artwork*, Cambridge 1996 (p. 1–10), p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> Julian Wolfreys: “Art” in Jack Reynolds and Jonathan Roffe (eds.): *Understanding Derrida*, London 2004 (p. 84–92), p. 89.

to control all exchanges in between.<sup>42</sup> Exceptional cases of record sleeves only have that function, through a mark of identification, by naming the artist and recording. The frame is therefore, as Jonathan Bordo once defined it, "both a cultural operation of binding and a material operation of bounding."<sup>43</sup> If a frame has the cultural function of bringing together and of binding through identification, but also in its material condition doing the same (Wolfrey's technical function), these functions, as relations between media, should be found within a record sleeve. I define these relations as follows:

1. Frame-as-object, pointing towards itself: Joy Division's *Closer* (1980) is visually an object in and for itself, stating its aesthetic autonomy. With a thick cardboard sleeve – for both the original vinyl LP *and* the remastered CD (2007) – it just states "Closer" accompanied with a funeral photograph on the front. It only refers to the music and the musicians indirectly and discretely (on the spine, the back and in the booklet of the CD; fig. 4);<sup>44</sup>
2. Frame-to-frame, pointing outwards to other sleeves in an intertextual relation: The Clash's *London Calling* (1979) refers by design of letters and iconography of the photograph to the first Elvis Presley LP-sleeve (1956) (fig. 5 and 6);
3. Frame-to-music as identifying mark, pointing inwards as a guiding and referential function: virtually all record sleeves integrate this relationship. The promotional CD-single called *Idiot 2 – White Sleeve* by The Wonder Stuff (1993) explicitly states this relation (fig. 7);
4. Frame–music, as collaboration between picture, text and music: New Model Army's *Thunder and Consolation* (1989). Its overall design is overtly associated with the concept of a book, of storytelling in music, with lyrics written inside the foldout placed over the illustration (in both vinyl and CD issues). Text, picture and music, each medium is intended to play a part in the work and to collaborate in the aesthetic reception of vision, sound and text. The frame is then not a frame anymore (fig. 8–9).

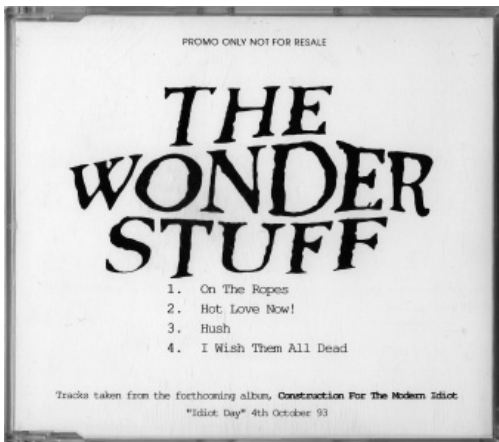
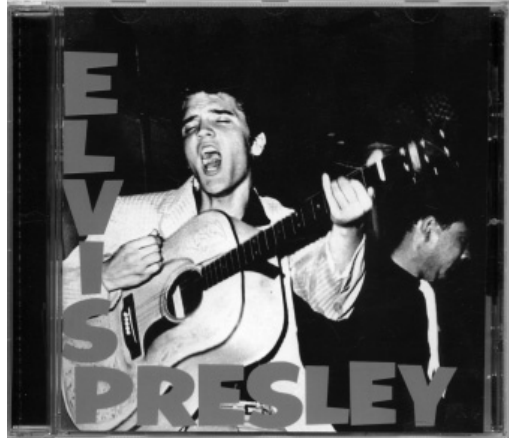
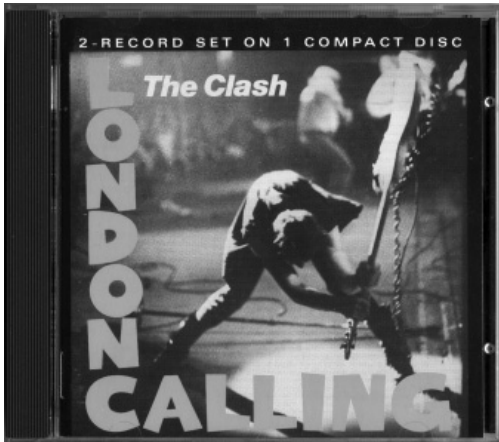
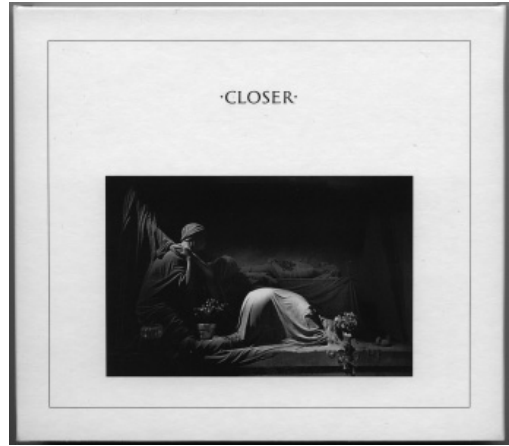
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<sup>42</sup> D.N. Rodowick: "Impure Mimesis, or the Ends of the Aesthetic" in Peter Brunnette and David Wills (eds.): *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts. Art, Media, Architecture*, Cambridge 1994 (p. 96–117), p. 112.

<sup>43</sup> Jonathan Bordo: "The Witness in the Errings of Contemporary Art" in Paul Duro (ed.): *The Rhetoric of the Frame. Essays on the Boundaries of the Artwork*, Cambridge 1996 (p. 178–202), p. 201.

<sup>44</sup> As a record sleeve, *Closer* almost empties itself from the meaning of "record sleeve" through a minimalistic design. It therefore has minimal references to its content: apart from title and photograph, the white colour drains the sleeve from the idea that there is something inside – the white as a metaphor for "nothing," "empty," "blank." Only the shape and form indicates what it is. Another record sleeve in this category, and perhaps a more known example, is The Beatles' *The White Album* (1968). This sleeve has a thick cardboard sleeve and an all white, empty outside as well, with embossed letters spelling "The Beatles," and the foldout has portraits of the band members and song titles against a white background (thus it too refers to the music and the musicians indirectly).

Fig. 4–8, top to bottom: Joy Division, *Closer* (1980); The Clash, *London Calling* (1979); Elvis Presley, *Elvis Presley* (1956); The Wonder Stuff, *Idiot 2 – White Sleeve* (1993); New Model Army, *Thunder and Consolation* (1989), frontside



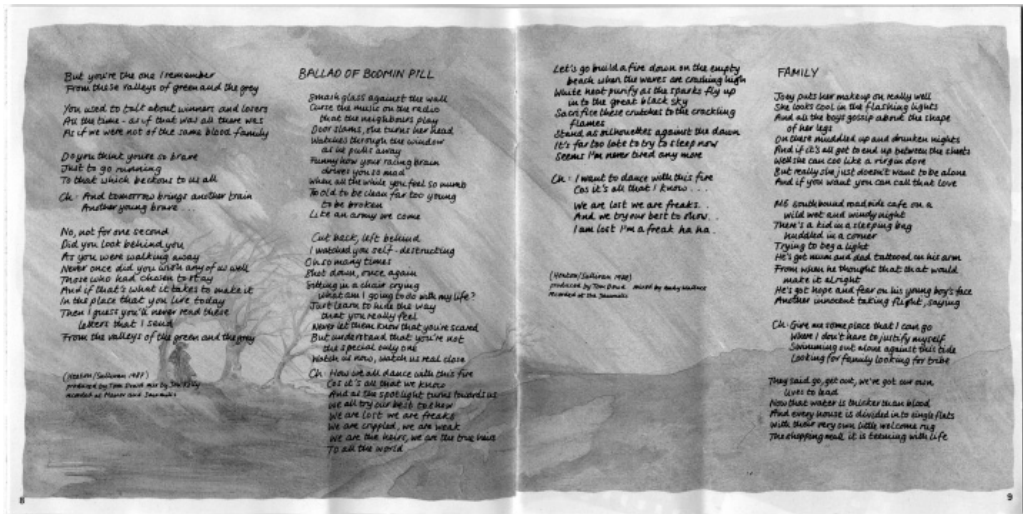


Fig. 9. New Model Army, *Thunder and Consolation* (1989), pages 8–9 from the CD booklet

It is important to distinguish these functions, because if the record sleeve is thought of as a physical frame, then it also hides itself as such within itself. As Licht reads Derrida too literally, he sees the sleeve as something outside the music, as a factual, decorative frame that has little to do with the *musical* content. Where is the *complementary* understanding that Derrida has in mind in Licht's theory of the record sleeve? Licht does not seem to see the reasoning and particularly not Derrida's questioning of borders. He does not recognize that to find and to question the borders in a true way, means that there may be *collaborations* between the record sleeve and the music, the fourth function that Cook has approved of (see above). On the other hand, when Licht sees it as sometimes becoming an "artwork" on its own, it means a process of *stepping in and out of itself as a frame*, making itself its own content instead of a threshold to the musical encounter: it becomes a frame-as-object.<sup>45</sup> It crosses boundaries or oscillates between the medium of frame and the constellation of combined media. This grants it a certain autonomy.

The sleeve for the CD *the CIVIL warS* can demonstrate the frame-as-object, being a frame and framing itself. It thus exceeds the "identify-and-protect" idea Licht proposes in his definition. I will give an idea of how this sleeve can be viewed as being a self-sufficient object, by arguing against a review of the recording written by David McKee. In doing that, I do not oppose the idea of complementing the music (one might say that the record sleeve has postponed its referential state). It is the formation of the sleeve's content that I focus upon, not the opera or the contents of pictures and texts.

In his review, McKee comments that "it's not your standard-issue opera and Nonesuch [the record company] has unwittingly muddled the issue further by

<sup>45</sup> The record sleeve cancels or makes itself invisible as a frame. It fights for its own existence.

omitting all of the copious stage directions, which I fear is a grave disservice to first-time listeners.”<sup>46</sup> Briefly, the opera “uses history freely, hopping from time period to time period, freeing history from general chronology. [And Robert Wilson mixes] different times and places to bring in any number of historical confrontations ‘which comment on man’s long journey toward brotherhood,’” as described by Carla Blank.<sup>47</sup> It is a non-narrative story inspired by the American Civil War, mixed with ancient gods and mythological figures.<sup>48</sup> McKee objects to “David Wright’s booklet notes that ‘to attempt a deconstructive catalogue of these images in a listening note would rob them of the haunting effect they have as they combine and evolve in a theater,’” although Wilson’s design sketches (see fig. 2) and few production photographs saves it, otherwise:

listeners would have little or no idea that Lincoln is first glimpsed as a giant (one who flies off when his singing is done) or that Lee delivers his text while floating inside a spaceship. Ditto the comings and goings of Hercules, as well as peripatetic processions of trees, Garibaldi taking a seat in the audience as the action begins (then stepping onto the stage for his aria), or the sight of Hopi Indians dancing on a bridge between two spaceships – alien intervention plays a big part in Wilson’s stage action. [...] I rather resent the effort made to keep it under wraps, which makes the printed text seem only more oblique than it already is (McKee, p. 708).

McKee is right in that he knows what the performance was like and expected an image-word presentation that was not kept “under wraps.” He is also wrong: this version is not designed to be similar to the original performance.<sup>49</sup> The Rome section is “an epic music/dance/theatre/visual artwork,” according to McKee himself (McKee, p. 707). Apart from the evident elimination of dance and theatre in the Nonesuch-recording, the *new* design is the juxtaposition of historical photographs of the American Civil War and libretto in the second part of the booklet (see fig. 3). The transformation is in scale too, since the recording is a performance that is experienced privately and most likely repeatedly (the reason why Cook labels the experience of music and record sleeve as a “domestic *Gesamtkunstwerk*”). Wright’s liner

<sup>46</sup> David McKee: “the CIVIL wars: a tree is best measured when it is down. Philip Glass. Act V – The Rome Section” (review of the recording) in *Opera Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 2000 (p. 706–710), p. 708.

<sup>47</sup> Carla Blank: “Notes on Robert Wilson and Anna Deavere Smith.” Available at: <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/carlanotes.html> (2007–08–16).

<sup>48</sup> The libretto is written and assembled by Robert Wilson and Maita Di Niscemi, using fragments from two of Seneca’s Hercules plays, and pieces written by Lee, Garibaldi, Wilson and Di Niscemi.

<sup>49</sup> The recording was made eleven to fifteen years after the few performances that were, with a different cast. This is not uncommon, but here I think it should be thought of as part of a rewriting of the total work (with no particular reference to rewriting as in a new arrangement of the music).

notes contextualizes the Nonesuch-recording in the first place, as the performance is a historical event which the recording and its visual-verbal presentation is based upon; thus the liner notes and performance photographs precede the libretto and are probably read before any concentrated listening. Otherwise they would distract a deepened listening and beholding-reading experience of the libretto. Here, McKee's critique resonates the fourth rule of Hines's concept of collaborative form:

The subtraction, deletion, or separation of any of the constituent arts in a collaboration destroys the form. [...] Often the destruction of the original form is carried out with the best intentions though with apparent ignorance of the fundamental principles of the art forms thus pirated. [...] Admittedly, in complex collaborations, it is difficult to reproduce (publish, display, or perform) the total work. But this should not deter us from insisting that the total work cannot be reduced without losing the original (Hines, p. 170–171).

For McKee, liner notes, libretto and photographs on/in the record sleeve are no more than *incomplete* framings (ornamental parergon) for the music. However, the Nonesuch-version should not be seen as the destruction of the original theatrical performance, but as an interpretive *reworking* of it on several levels: the mentioned downscaling and the acknowledgement of its past in contextualizing and keeping the historical theatrical performance *distanced* from the libretto. One consequence of the downscaling is the differentiation made between the *less autonomous* form of the theatrical performance, and the *more autonomous* and *moveable* form of the Nonesuch-version.<sup>50</sup> The latter form can be linked to Licht's idea of a sleeve as an object creating a space of its own. The historical photographs of Mr and Mrs Lincoln, Garibaldi and Lee, some of Wilson's initial visual inspirations, fundamentally replaces the imagery of the staged version and alters the work, giving rise to a presentation of the libretto and the portraits of the historical persons that is unique to the record sleeve. And as the study of libretto as literature is not uncommon, it should not seem strange to consider it as a plain text here, not primarily thinking in musical terms – but as a writing that relates to the photographs.<sup>51</sup> The historical photographs of the American Civil War have been interpreted for the stage production into another medium: from photographs to costumes and stage design. But now they are the main visual source in the CD-sleeve, and supplied knowledge from the liner notes and the photographs of the performance; the historical photographs are

<sup>50</sup> See Áron Kibédi Varga: "Mediality and Forms of Interpretation of Artworks" in *Neohelicon*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 2003 (p. 183–191), p. 183–184.

<sup>51</sup> For introductions to librettology, see Ulrich Weisstein: "Librettologi" in Hans Lund (red.): *Intermedialitet. Ord, bild och ton i samspel*, Lund 2002 p. 85–93; "The Libretto as Literature" in *Books Abroad*, No. 35, 1961, p. 16–22.



ready to be reinterpreted, this time not by Wilson, but by the perceiver. This is how the Nonesuch-version is presented for the CD-audience.

When considered in this light, the record sleeve should not be regarded as parergonal to the music, as it does not keep things under wraps. Only because it creates something new and being self-governing in some sense, it does not present a “veil of secrecy” for the music; it does not lie about its past, it only pushes it to the margins. If a record sleeve overstates its parergonality, as I would say that *the CIVIL warS* do, it still can activate a complementary condition for the musical experience just as well as words and images can be complemented by the music. The record sleeve contests itself, having both aspects of autonomy and complementarity present, though Licht and McKee’s difficulties of thinking complementary-wise may not be unfounded. I will look into this in my next section, where I take a somewhat different look at the record sleeve, asking what artistic form it is when looked upon separately.

### The Artistic Form of the Record Sleeve

If we want to know how the record sleeve works as an artistic form, we should try to understand it from the point of view of the perceived interaction of different media, according to Cook.<sup>52</sup> Since it always has been an art form of multimedia,<sup>53</sup> whether called a mixed media hybrid, combined media in co-existence, or something else, I here make use of Jerrold Levinson’s categories of mixed media activities as different kinds of hybrids, with Shaw-Miller’s supplemental terminology: (1) juxtaposition/multidisciplinary, (2) synthesis/interdisciplinary, and (3) transformation/crossdisciplinary.<sup>54</sup> Using these ideas, some of the record sleeve’s different features can be revealed. An extensive description of the sleeve is to a certain extent necessary. Again, this can explain why the record sleeve literature has focussed solely on “images,” and not fully grasped the artistic form: a form that I identify as intermedial.

### *The Sleeve as a Multi-Surfaced Stage for Words and Images*

Defining the synthetic/interdisciplinary hybrid, Shaw-Miller says: “In many ways this form is the opposite of the juxtapositional hybrid art work, for here the elements are brought together in order to mix, so that they are submerged into a third term.<sup>55</sup> The elements do not have a parallel existence in the same temporal-spatial

<sup>52</sup> Also argued by Kibédi Varga 1989, p. 33, and Jerrold Levinson in “Hybrid Art Forms” in *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 18, No. 4, 1984 (p. 5–13), p. 6–7.

<sup>53</sup> I here specifically mean *multimedia* as something that involves more than one medium.

<sup>54</sup> Levinson, p. 5–13; Simon Shaw-Miller: *Visible Deeds of Music. Art and Music from Wagner to Cage*, New Haven; London 2002, p. 11–29. I am aware of Cook’s dismissal of juxtapositional hybrids as a “null category,” because it is a type where no alignments, mergings or dissolutions between media occur. Aesthetically there is no such category; by definition it only put different media side by side, *but* united media are always perceived as interacting. Therefore it is worthless as a category. See Cook 2000, p. 106.

<sup>55</sup> Compare Cook’s expression “ends in meaning” on page 66.

environment... Once combined, their individual identities have been modified and forged into a new whole" (Shaw-Miller 2002, p. 13). Thus the multidisciplinary artistic form is where the sound, image and text are distinct from each other, not easily coordinated, and quite unlike one that fuses or mixes its elements; the form fits the record sleeve on the whole if put like this: the image on the front, the text on the back and the music even more separate.

Even as "the front and the back" of the sleeve is frequently mentioned, what is neglected is that it is a three-dimensional object, not a single picture as seen by most writers on record sleeves. A distinction between *single-surface visual communication* and *multi-surface graphic design* must be made here.<sup>56</sup> The sleeve acts at first as two-dimensional, but then brings its three-dimensional aspect into play. This forms the structure of how words and images are arranged and experienced on the sleeve. "If in a juxtapositional hybrid, the art forms share a temporal and spatial location but remain in other ways distinct, and if in a synthetic hybrid each art form moves to a middle ground somewhere between their respective individual positions, then in a transformational hybrid, one art form crosses over into the territory of the other(s)" (Shaw-Miller 2002, p. 17). Relating the sleeve to what is said in this paragraph I claim it to be of a *transformational* form (a crossdisciplinary hybrid). Judging by the common notion of what a sleeve is, a picture of some kind, I paraphrase Levinson's description of kinetic sculpture, an example of a crossdisciplinary hybrid: "Record sleeve can be seen as ordinary picture modified in the direction of book."<sup>57</sup> Here exists no "purity between elements" (Shaw-Miller 2002, p. 17). In this crossbreed there is always a dominance of one of the media involved, and it keeps its original media identity – a picture – but incorporates it into the characteristics of the concept of a book (a written/verbal attribute).<sup>58</sup> In its simplest form there is a sequential structure: the front side, with or without or as image, crosses over in a book-like direction. Except it is neither a book nor a book cover, but the similarity in the obsessive act of turning round, looking up or flipping through the pages of a booklet, taking out the inner sleeve, reading and viewing the spine and label, is there. The two-dimensionality is *illusory*, the booklet by its name testifies to this. This is the principal structure or platform – *the stage* – that images and words have to give in to and act upon.<sup>59</sup> Here word-and-image constructions can vary from a total separation for the eye between text and image, as a multidisciplinary form, to synthetic components as in typographic elements.<sup>60</sup> The easiest way is to see it as

<sup>56</sup> These categories are borrowed from Philip B. Meggs: *Type & Image. The Language of Graphic Design*, New York 1992, p. 98.

<sup>57</sup> Levinson, p. 10: "Kinetic sculpture can be seen as ordinary sculpture modified in the direction of dance."

<sup>58</sup> I am tempted to use terms like "sculpted" or "sculptural" picture, but that would demand further and more complicated argumentation on temporal and spatial aspects.

<sup>59</sup> The word "stage" implies both spatiality and temporality, why I think it is appropriate to use here.

<sup>60</sup> It can hold the complete chart of word-image relations: co-existences, interferences and co-

words and images put side by side, composed as a juxtapositional hybrid in total. But, that would be saying that images and words that exist in a parallel temporal-spatial situation do not interact, as if each medium is self-sufficient (see note 54). But are they separable?

The logic and advantage of this multiple-surface design is the feeling that words and images belongs to a larger whole, regardless of the number of communicative layers and how much the words and images are separated (physically and in content), because continuity is in the idea of the sleeve. Its constituent parts can never be totally disconnected. By this logic the sleeve can be placed in the spatio-temporal section of Marie-Laure Ryan's "Typology of media affecting narrativity," as it generally uses the multiple channels of the linguistic and the visual (Ryan, p. 21). Does this quality of spatio-temporality grant the record sleeve the effect of performing or as possessing a kind of narrativity?<sup>61</sup> The sleeve's images and/or words are experienced through time and interaction. Designer Richard Hales has put it like this: "the nature of the CD package means that the consumer is unable to see the bulk of the artwork until it's unwrapped. The cover should be intriguing, seducing the potential customer with possibility of what is inside."<sup>62</sup> Kibédi Varga argues that a word-and-image relation on a single object (a poster for example) belongs to the function of argumentation and is persuasive, while a series of images, together with words or not, tends to be interpreted as a narrative (Varga 1989, p. 35–36). This is the crossing over in a book-like direction, the two-dimensionality of the sleeve as argumentative, advertisement-like, and then bringing its three-dimensional feature into play – temporalizing/narrating – especially when words *and* images act on it.<sup>63</sup> The sleeve is less like a novel, and more similar to what James Elkins call *spinning stories* in modern painting: "In a way, we become the creators or co-conspirators of the story – we 'bring the narrative about' by our aimless thoughts," because as

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references. See Kibédi Varga 1989 for a discussion on these terms, and Hans Lund's typology of intermedial relations mentioned on page 56 and note 30, page 63.

<sup>61</sup> The property of "possessing a narrativity" is not the same as "being a narrative," it simply is able to evoke narrative. According to Ryan it is "narrative meaning as a cognitive construct," shaped in response by the interpreter. Ryan, p. 8–9.

<sup>62</sup> Rivers, p. 80. The difference between sleeves for vinyl records and sleeves for CDs lies in the former's emphasis on "iconic" pictures, due to larger size and weaker sequential structure, while the latter reverses it and emphasizes the sequential, but conditions and abilities to "narrate" have always been there. Rivers concisely put it: "The CD provides a slower 'user experience' than vinyl," p. 23. Nick de Ville remarks the transition from vinyl to CD and its standardized jewel case, saying that designers of CDs altered the rules of album packaging in "reducing the emphasis on a single killer image for the front cover" to extended visual essays which corresponds with the musical contents. That is exactly what happens: an *extension* of what was already there, but he fails to show this in his picture book-odyssey. de Ville, p. 10.

<sup>63</sup> My argument here matches Cook's positioning of the record sleeve between marketing and aesthetic experience (see above).

with modern paintings we do not have a pre-existing text to rely on.<sup>64</sup> John Berger describes a similar situation on photographic stories, where "The reader is free to make his own way through these images. [...] one can wander in any direction without ... losing a sense of tension or unfolding."<sup>65</sup> This is how images and texts do their work on the sleeve. The storytelling manner does not necessarily have to be straightforward on a sleeve. Rather it is what image and text do with *tension* and *unfolding*, *conceptualizing* and *presenting themes*, than actually having a story. Even though we cannot find a narrated order, we tend to look for one as "habits of reading compel us to try [...] since narration continues as a temptation, as a promise (however false), as a 'handle' for initial understanding" (Elkins, p. 358).<sup>66</sup> The format of the record sleeve, even in its most simple variety, dismantles it from being a true single-sided and "iconic" picture, and brings it into a kind of narrative form.

Taken as a whole, the design of *the CIVIL warS* is meant to create a unique narrative – actually *several* multimedial narratives. As mentioned before, the booklet is divided into two parts – Wright's introduction and Wilson's libretto – and each part relate to different sets of pictures, producing two distinct narratives. And then there is the special case of Wilson's sketches that not only act as a story of its own production of the opera, but also participates in both Wright's and Wilson's mixed media narratives. The sketch on the front of the booklet that shows the porthole of the spaceship in which Robert E. Lee acts on stage, functions as a second introductory image for the entire sleeve (after the photograph and title on the carton), but in particular for Wright's liner notes because it is in this part the reader learns about the history of the stage production for which the sketches are essential. Then there is the sketch that introduces the libretto, an expressionistic abstract and moodsetting image. Thus the sketches are integrated as creative images in the Nonesuch-version.

Further more, the writing on a record sleeve has to be taken seriously, because the word-image often produces a recognisable brand for musicians, or let its words visualize a feeling, an impact that could not be expressed in words alone. For example, the title *the CIVIL warS* is not meant just to be read. I have tried to write it as Wilson designed it – except for imitating the "scratchy" handwriting (see fig. 1).<sup>67</sup> I identify the design of the writing of *the CIVIL warS* as "design as deconstruction." That kind of design examines "structures that dramatize the intrusion of visual form into verbal content, the invasion of 'ideas' by graphic marks, gaps, and differences,"

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<sup>64</sup> James Elkins: "On the Impossibility of Stories. The Anti-narrative and Non-narrative Impulse in Modern Painting" in *Word & Image, Vol. 7, No. 4*, 1991 (p. 348–364), p. 360.

<sup>65</sup> John Berger: "Stories" in *Another Way of Telling*, New York 1995 (p. 279–289), p. 284–285.

<sup>66</sup> Record sleeves are probably more than often anti-narratives or non-narratives, as in some modern paintings that Elkins argues for. We may detect dramas and possible stories, but cannot be sure which one. They "make gestures of storytelling," p. 368.

<sup>67</sup> For an excellent and accessible overview of how to interpret such and other types of writings, see Steven Heller and Mirko Ilic: *Handwritten. Expressive Lettering in the Digital Age*, London 2004.

as Ellen Lupton and J. Abbot Miller have explained.<sup>68</sup> In short, how the verbal is visually presented. The ideas that the scratchy handwriting reflects and emphasizes could be the visuality of the work on stage, but it works just as well for the Nonesuch-version as it should compel the beholder to think while looking at the photographs and reading the libretto; this is as much a framing device for the sleeve itself as the sleeve is framing and complementing the music. The title is visually “invaded” by conflicts, just as the verbal content of civil war refers to conflict: handlettering versus type set letters is equivalent to the subjective (emotional) versus the objective (unemotional). This visual dramatization of the verbal is a help in understanding the booklet that each person in the photographs and in the libretto has conflicts to deal with. And each of the portrayed is then even better anchored to their juxtaposed “voices” in the libretto, marked by their names, and results in complementation in this specific context; images and words are contextually manipulated (for a similar argument see Cook 2000, p. 105). Here the record sleeve becomes a synthesis of media, an interdisciplinary hybrid – not a juxtapositional hybrid art form.

### Concluding Remarks

My intention has been to provide an initial basic understanding of the record sleeve from an intermedial approach. If not giving straight answers, I have problematized how the record sleeve is able “to stitch the cut that separates seeing from hearing in the contemporary listening scenario,” a cut that was made when recorded music first appeared. What the record sleeve does is that it generates a space of its own: most importantly it has a fundamental intermedial structure, upon which it creates intermediality by means of words and images. Thus it constructs a contesting relation with its music, which could be understood as cutting “audiovisuality” to a condition of “audio/vision,” without falling back into the same audio-visual disjunction as before. Though depending on the existence of similarities between sleeve and music, audiovisuality may emerge; in a less lucid explanation, the stitch is done in the receiver’s mind, where the input of music, images and words are mixed. Here intermediality is more of a process. A crucial piece for a further study of this puzzle of intermediality is Eric F. Clark’s *Ways of Listening. An Ecological Approach to the Perception of Musical Meaning*. He observes that the listener always has a pre-understanding of the music, that “music almost always has a multimedia quality to it, and musical meaning is always the consequence of a context that is wider than the ‘sounds in themselves.’”<sup>69</sup> The ecological theory has to do with an

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<sup>68</sup> Ellen Lupton and J. Abbot Miller: “Deconstruction and Graphic Design” in Ellen Lupton and J. Abbot Miller (eds.): *Design, Writing, Research: Writing on Graphic Design*, New York 1996 (p. 3–23), p. 17.

<sup>69</sup> Clark, Eric F.: *Ways of Listening. An Ecological Approach to the Perception of Musical Meaning*, Oxford 2005, p. 88. The ecological theory of musical meaning is a complementary approach to semiotics, hermeneutics, and other philosophical methods.

active engagement of a person with its environment. Thus "sounds in themselves" and "fetishistic audiophilia" never really exist(ed). If the multimedia or *intermedial* quality is ever present in music, then the case may also be the reverse: *in what way is the record sleeve intermedial, and to what extent is it an intermedial artifact?* As the listening act is central in Clark's theory of musical meaning, he says, "perception must be understood as a relationship between environmentally available information and the capacities, sensitivities, and interests of a perceiver" (Clark, p. 91). To answer the questions above, one should undertake an ecological approach to the perception of viewing and reading a record sleeve.

A final observation on what influenced some of my thinking struck me while reading and looking through the literature on record sleeves. The expression *record sleeve* that I have used is not unanimous; there is the more favoured *record cover*. Throughout this text I have used *record sleeve*. I did not want to use a word that was trapped in the immediate idea of protecting, disguising or covering something, as I felt *cover* did. One could say that they are synonymous – that this is a semantic issue – but they do have different meanings, figuratively and literally. In this context, the majority of the literature uses the expression *record cover*, essentially referring to the cover art (the front side picture). A "record cover" then is deceitful for the reason that it is not simply about a single picture, it denies what "record sleeve" acknowledges: while the former covers up or rejects anything else than a *single-surface visual communication*, the latter uncovers a *multi-surfaced stage for words and images*. Licht represents the use of "record cover," speaking about an object as a picture separated from music and words; it is verbally and visually expressed as such in the literature. Cook represents the use of "record sleeve," and he opens up for the visual, verbal, and musical outsides and insides of the object. The use of *cover* or *sleeve* signifies a contest of how to intermedially view this object that physically and visually surrounds the musical object. Though in the end and in reality, there are no record covers, only record sleeves.

In conclusion, whatever "to stitch the cut between the seeing and the hearing" means as an intermedial process, it is something the record sleeve has to deal with time and again. The stitch will never become a smooth suture, so as to be able to create a natural audiovisual object and experience.

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# Words and Music as Partners in Song: 'Perfect Marriage' – 'Uneasy Flirtation' – 'Coercive Tension' – 'Shared Indifference' – 'Total Destruction'

Walter Bernhart

The very nature of intermedia phenomena frequently tempts critics to revert to metaphorical language when wanting to define the various relationships that can be found among the media. It is human relationships that lend themselves most readily to depict such intermedial relationships and make them vividly present in our minds. Descriptive *Anschaulichkeit* is a primary aim of effective communication, and the more the communication is rooted in everyday experience the more likely it is to be successful. As an example, the venerable tradition of *ut pictura poesis* is discussed most memorably in Jean Hagstrum's early study of the "Sister Arts,"<sup>1</sup> and more recent studies extend the range of 'sister arts' beyond literature and painting: Michele Martinez sees sculpture and poetry as 'sisters,'<sup>2</sup> there is a website including another 'sister,' British gardening,<sup>3</sup> and Joachim Möller gathers a whole family of 'sisters,' including music and architecture, illustration, film and a number of others.<sup>4</sup>

The human relations which I will use to depict metaphorically the various relations of words and music found in songs take their cue from the title of an essay which, incidentally, was published in the same year as Hagstrum's book. It is by John Stevens and is called "The English Madrigal: 'Perfect Marriage' or 'Uneasy Flirtation.'"<sup>5</sup> It is not surprising that Stevens's essay discusses the Elizabethan madrigal as it was during the Renaissance period that, with the advent of Humanist rhetorical, 'trivial' views of music – in contrast to earlier, 'quadrivial' conceptions of it, on a 'speculative,' Pythagorean basis – words and music entered into new relationships in vocal music. Their connection became far more intimate than it had been before as the music was now meant to increase the rhetorical effect of the underlying text and closely work together with the words. The most frequently quoted reference to this new view of the relation between words and music is by Thomas Campion

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<sup>1</sup> Jean H. Hagstrum: *The Sister Arts. The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray*, Chicago 1958.

<sup>2</sup> Michele Martinez: "Sister Arts and Artists: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* and the Life of Harriet Hosmer" in *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 2, 2003, p. 214–226.

<sup>3</sup> "The Sister Arts: British Gardening, Painting and Poetry, 1700–1832," <http://www.laits.utexas.edu/sisterarts/sublime/index.htm> (4/3/2006).

<sup>4</sup> Joachim Möller (ed.): *Sister Arts. Englische Literatur im Grenzland der Kunstgebiete*, Marburg 2001.

<sup>5</sup> John Stevens: "The English Madrigal: 'Perfect Marriage' or 'Uneasy Flirtation'" in *Essays and Studies*, 1958 (p. 17–37).

and can be found in his preface to *Two Books of Ayres* (c. 1613), where he says, referring to the new type of songs which he introduces: "In these English ayres I have chiefly aimed to couple my words and notes lovingly together, which will be much for him to do that hath not power over both."<sup>6</sup> Apart from the pride which this shows, as Campion, significantly, was both the poet and composer of these airs, it demonstrates that the challenge of these new songs lay in finding a complete harmony between the two media, which Campion expresses by the metaphor of a 'loving couple.' It is from this image that Stevens derives his own reference to a 'perfect marriage' that may be found in the English madrigal of the period, and it will also be the guiding metaphor for my further reflections in this essay.

Of course, such a 'perfect marriage' of a 'loving couple' is likely to be more of a vision than a case of reality: the balance is always precarious, and the issue is well-known: is it as Antonio Salieri puts it in the title of his opera of 1786: *prima la musica e poi le parole*, or is it rather *prima le parole e poi la musica*? Within our metaphorical context, we may be allowed to genderize the issue and – following traditional notions – conceive, more or less playfully, of 'music' in female and 'words' in male terms (which could be justified by contrasting *la musica* and *il termine*, the latter synonym replacing *la parola*): English airs, therefore, within Humanist aesthetics, were clearly male-dominated because the words necessarily came first and there was no idea of *prima la musica*. In the hierarchy of the arts, following Plato, poetry was top as the main instrument of persuasion and the other arts came in only as contributing factors, enhancing the ethical and rhetorical effects of the words. The 'perfect marriage' of words and music was seen to be achieved when the music mirrored what the language said; it was music's function to illustrate the words' meanings, which could either be achieved in the form of 'external mimesis', such as rising melodies when the words talk of rising suns or running music for running streams etc., or of 'expressive mimesis,' i. e., by the musical expression of emotional-affective states addressed in the texts. Thus, music had primarily a copying function, and the 'marriage' was conceived of as 'perfect' when music, as the ancilla, adapted 'herself' as closely as possible to the *termini*. Such 'iconic' behaviour of the music vis-à-vis the words was seen as strengthening the 'couple' by having an increased, 'redoubled' effect on the audience.

It is interesting to observe that such a partnership, which is clearly dominated by one of the partners, with the other one adapting herself as closely as possible, was seen as 'perfect.' This may be a very pronounced 'Victorian' view of an 'ideal' partnership but, basically, all forms of songs in which 'poems are set to music' follow this model because the source of the song are always the words, which are there first and determine the music.

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Campion: "To the Reader" in David Scott (ed.): *First Book of Ayres* (c. 1613), The English Lute-Songs, London; New York 1979, p. ix.

Yet there is also a history of emancipation in songs. As early as in John Dowland's songs, music started to strive for dominance, as is indicated by a passage from Dowland's dedication of his *First Booke of Ayres* (1597), which shows a telling misreading of Plato: "So that Plato defines melody [i. e., song] to consist of harmony [i. e., music], number [i. e., rhythm] and words; harmony naked of it selfe: wordes the ornament of harmony, number the common friend and uniter of them both."<sup>7</sup> What Plato really says in *The Republic* (398 d) is the following: "[...] the melody is composed of three things, the words, the harmony, and the rhythm; [...] the harmony and the rhythm must follow the words."<sup>8</sup> While Plato clearly puts the words first, Dowland makes the words merely "the ornament" of music.<sup>9</sup> Listening to Dowland's magnificent lute-songs will strengthen the impression that in them the music, written by the best lutenist of his age, is more important than the words are. Again, there is generally no contradiction or tension between the words and the music in these songs and the 'perfection' of the 'marriage' is guaranteed by the unquestioned dominance of one of the partners – this time the 'female.'

The emancipation of music did not take place so smoothly in all cases. The 'Great Tradition' of song writing took the ambitious path of using ever more refined musical means to become a meaning-generating instrument, the music trying to express as carefully and exhaustively as possible what the underlying text is saying. The canonical body of the European song tradition consists of what I have called "interpretive songs,"<sup>10</sup> where the musical accompaniment of the singing voice acquires an increasingly sophisticated interpretive function vis-à-vis the text and becomes a more and more independent agent of reflection. While in many Schubert songs the accompaniment appears in the role of such an active partner to the text, where words and music work as two independent agencies towards the joint goal of making a unified statement – is this the 'perfect marriage'? –, it is with Schumann that the emancipatory impulse of music becomes stronger, as witnessed, among other features, by the prominent preludes and postludes that can be found in his songs. The music can be seen as making additional statements that go beyond what the text by itself is saying, and we can observe a tendency in the music to start even contradicting the words. An example frequently referred to in this respect is Schumann's "Die beiden Grenadiere," based on Heine's poem, in which the piano

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<sup>7</sup> John Dowland: "To the Right Honorable Sir George Cary [...]" in Edmund H. Fellowes, (ed.), rev. ed. by Thurston Dart, *The First Book of Ayres (1597, 1600, 1603, 1606, 1613)*, The English Lute-Songs, London; New York 1965, p. iv.

<sup>8</sup> Oliver Strunk (ed.): *Source Readings in Music History. From Classical Antiquity to the Romantic Era*, London 1952, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of Elizabethan theoretical reflections on song writing see Walter Bernhart: "Theorie und Praxis der Vertonung in den elisabethanischen Aires" in Manfred Pfister (ed.): *Anglistentag 1984 Passau. Vorträge*, Giessen 1985, p. 245–260.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Bernhart: "Setting a Poem: The Composer's Choice For or Against Interpretation" in *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, Vol. 37, 1988 (p. 32–46).

postlude comments ironically on one of the two soldiers' misguided enthusiasm about his Emperor Napoleon. In such a case the partners start drifting apart, and they may become an interesting but increasingly troubled couple.<sup>11</sup>

It is along these lines that John Stevens conceives of certain forms of vocal music as cases of an 'uneasy flirtation' between words and music (a term introduced in this context by Frank Kermode). Although Elizabethan madrigals frequently show a playful love of word illustrations (like 'dying' falling melodies, etc.), Stevens sees them as particularized cases of a "crude pictorialism" which cannot outweigh "occasional gross misunderstandings" of texts and "rhythmic insensitiveness" to the words in the music (Stevens, p. 27). In these cases they do not really enter into a partnership but are only superficially attracted to one another.

A case where there is even less of a true partnership established in a juxtaposition of words and music is quoted by Thomas Morley in his *Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke* (1597), which contains a succinct survey of "Rules to be obserued in dittyng," the first English manifesto of song setting. There Morley condemns John Dunstable for the "barbarism" of placing "two long rests" "in the verie middle of a word," thus chopping apart the word 'angelo – rum.'<sup>12</sup> It is against this kind of 'barbaric' and inimical practice that the whole Humanist programme of text setting revolted.

This last example of an (unsuccessful) partnership between words and music introduces a level of contact between the two media which has not been discussed so far in this essay. It is the prosodic level, and the example demonstrates that an important dimension of contact in songs between the words and the music is the rhythmical structure, which implies segmentation, accentuation and duration. In fact, this level was of greatest importance to Humanist aestheticians, as witnessed by the large number of metrical treatises published at the time. It is telling that the famous phrase by Thomas Campion, quoted above, about his aim "to couple my words and music lovingly together," has generally been misunderstood in terms of a semantic, expressive congruence between the two media. What Campion really had in mind was far more modest and practical, namely a "company" of syllables according to their prosody. Reflecting ancient theory, he expects long syllables to be matched by long notes and short syllables by "swift notes," as comes out in the passage immediately following the famous phrase.<sup>13</sup> In order to "keep company," word and music must have the same "waite and due proportion,"<sup>14</sup> i. e., they need

<sup>11</sup> For a case study see Walter Bernhart: "An Exegetic Composer: Benjamin Britten's *Journey of the Magi*" in *Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, Vol. 20, 1995 (p. 123–134).

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Morley: "Rules to be obserued in dittyng" in *A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke. London 1597*, The English Experience 207, Amsterdam; New York 1969 (p. 177–178), p. 178.

<sup>13</sup> "The light of this will best appear to him who hath pays'd [weighed] our monosyllables and syllables combined, both which are so loaded with consonants, as that they will hardly keep company with swift notes, or give the vowel convenient liberty." (Campion 1979, p. ix)

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Campion: "Observations in the Art of English Poesy" in G. Gregory Smith (ed.):

to share the ‘material’ basis of their articulatory, physical dimension, and it is worth noticing that Campion does not say anything about also sharing ‘ideas’ on the semantic level. In fact, he is well-known for condemning “such childish observing of words”<sup>15</sup> as can be found in external word illustration and as it was also criticised by Stevens as “crude pictorialism,” quoted above. It is true that most of Campion’s airs do not play the game of ‘expressive mimesis,’ his music generally does not try to imitate what the words are saying ‘along the text’ as it unfolds. It is characteristic of the simple style of airs as represented by Campion that they have a well-shaped, memorable tune – a tuneful ‘air’ in the traditional sense – used for all the stanzas of a song, which naturally implies that it is more distanced from and less concerned with what the words are saying. I have called such vocal music “non-interpretive songs” (Bernhart 1988), which implies that it is not their aim that the music should try to match, or enter into a dialogue with, the meaning of the words. What basically holds the song together, as a plurimedial form, is the common rhythmical ground of the words and the music. Relating this situation to our ‘couple’ metaphor, this form of partnership shows a high degree of independence of one partner from the other, yet they share a common physical ground, and it cannot be claimed that one of them dominates over the other. In fact, in these songs the words tend to be intelligible and have their own voice raising attention, yet the music is also quite independent and is not expected to serve the words in an ancillary function; it can develop its melodious beauty (‘air’) in its own rights. Is this, then, a ‘perfect marriage’?

Yet, when the music in such ‘non-interpretive songs’ does, indeed, not concern itself with the meaning of the text as it unfolds, the common ground for both media may still go beyond the mere material basis of rhythm and articulation. It is particularly in the ‘age of sensibility,’ in eighteenth-century song writing, that we find an increased concern about the ‘tone’ and the ‘mood’ of a poem which should be matched by the tone and mood of the music. This is the approach that Goethe shared with the representatives of the Berlin school of song, which is why he appreciated the settings of his poetry by Karl Friedrich Zelter or Johann Friedrich Reichardt. He objected to text-oriented ‘through-composition’ as found in many Schubert settings because, to him, it gave too much emphasis to details of word expression at the expense of establishing an overall mood which matched the mood of the poem. It is interesting that in this conception the rhythmical dimension of text and music seems closely linked to the mood dimension. In Edward Cone’s words, “Goethe [...] liked to think of the composer as merely uncovering the melody already concealed in his own rhythms,”<sup>16</sup> so the atmospheric element of a

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*Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Vol. 2, Oxford 1971 (p. 327–355), p. 329.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Campian [sic]: “To the Reader“ in Edmund H. Fellowes (ed.), rev. ed. by Thurston Dart, *The Songs from Rosseter’s Book of Airs (1601), The English Lute-Songs*, London; New York 1968, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Edward T. Cone: “The Composer’s Approach to the Text“ in Northrop Fry (ed.): *Sound and Poetry. English Institute Essays 1956*, New York 1957 (p. 3–15), p. 6.

poem, which should necessarily be kept alive in a musical setting in this view, is also inherent in the rhythm, which needs to be preserved in the song and manifests itself in the melody ('air') of the singing voice. The unity of the two media in such songs is one of tone and mood, springing from their unified rhythm, and again – as in the Elizabethan airs of the *Campion* type –, apart from this unity, the two media are independent and equal: an even more 'perfect' marriage?

Given this situation in eighteenth-century song of equality and semantic independence of the two media with a common basis of rhythm and mood, it is not surprising that it was also in this age that successful songs were produced which did not follow the conventional model of 'setting a poem to music' but in which the poem was written to an already existing tune. This practice, which became popular with the early-Romantic 'antiquarian' movement of recovering national folk traditions, produced works of a significant form of word-music combination and in which the fact of combination of media is essential for their proper appreciation. A case in point is Robert Burns, whose famous songs, such as "O my Luve 's like a red, red rose," are clearly misunderstood when they are seen merely as "poems to be read or even orally recited, however effective they may be apart from the music."<sup>17</sup> Burns wrote his hundreds of songs mainly for James Johnson and George Thompson, who – with the invaluable help of Burns himself – collected the musical heritage of Scotland.<sup>18</sup> It is particularly interesting to note that Burns, although he was free to write any verse he liked to go with the Scots tunes, found it hard to use English texts for the purpose (as Thompson urged him to do, for marketing reasons), the reason being the "wild-warbling cadence" and "heart-rending melody"<sup>19</sup> of the tunes. So, again, like in the Berlin school tradition, Burns tried to find a match between the music and the words on the rhythmic and melodic levels which were intricately linked with a particular tone that he could not find in the English language – only, in his case, the music came first and the words followed<sup>20</sup>: another 'perfect' match, this time the 'female' part taking the initiative?

So far it has been established that 'perfection' of partnership in song may either be realized by a 'fusion' of the partners (where in one case the 'male' partner is in command, with the other one adapting 'herself' as closely as possible, or in another case the 'female' dominates, in a way absorbing her partner) or by a basic independence and equality of the two partners, on a common ground of 'material' and 'atmospheric' congruence. Yet we can observe other situations in which the

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas Crawford: *Burns. A Study of the Poems and Songs*, Edinburgh 1978, p. 261.

<sup>18</sup> For an edition of Burns's works which includes the Scottish tunes see James Kinsley (ed.): *Burns. Poems and Songs*, Oxford 1969.

<sup>19</sup> J. C. Ewing and D. Cook (eds.): *Robert Burns's Commonplace Book 1783–1791*, Glasgow 1938, p. 7 (qtd. in Crawford 1978, p. 263).

<sup>20</sup> To be correct, it was Burns's practice to "assimilate the air before trying to fit words to it" (Kinsley, ed. 1969, p. vi), which was common and felt legitimate with folk tunes.



partnership is troubled by the dominance of one partner, where in one case the dominant partner forces the partner to adjust himself, or where, in the other case, the partners altogether lack a common ground.

Arnold Schönberg's and Anton von Webern's vocal music strikes the listener as a form of song writing in which the impulse of the music to 'interpret' the underlying text is weak to non-existent. The most obvious feature of this apparent unconcern of the music for textual factors is the frequent deviation of melodic lines from the rhythmical and intonational patterns of the underlying language. For example, high notes, emphatically sticking out in the vocal line, are often placed on unstressed syllables, and generally the principles of speech declamation are widely ignored.<sup>21</sup> This is particularly true for Webern's later songs and can be attributed to the demands and restrictions of the serial technique applied in these works. It can thus be argued that musical constructional principles override linguistic givens, and one can equally observe that there is no tendency in these songs for the music to respond to what the text is saying as the work unfolds. Yet, it would be hasty to postulate that, as a consequence, the choice of text is irrelevant in such works and that there is no essential link between the two media. Webern always made it quite clear that he very much depended on appropriate texts for his vocal compositions to materialize and that only the choice of a suitable text made the composition possible. But obviously it was not the surface meaning and linguistic shape of the text that decided on its suitability, but some more subtle element of expressivity in the text that triggered in the composer his artistic ambition. 'Webern takes the text into his music by elevating it to become the mental inducement and reflected counterpart of the composition.'<sup>22</sup> The composer and the text must meet 'inwardly,'<sup>23</sup> and it very much depends on the composer's situational responsiveness whether a text is able to stimulate a composition in him or not. The quality expected of a text is an expressiveness to which the composer can relate and which is carried into the composition by the constructional process, independent of surface congruence of text and music.

In terms of 'partnership', what are the implications of such a situation? There is no independence of the partners, and the music clearly dominates and overrules, even forces the text on the surface level. Yet the source of energy and ultimate cause lies in the text, and the partners thus share a common emotional ground, are even

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<sup>21</sup> See Dorothea Beckmann: *Sprache und Musik im Vokalwerk Anton Weberns. Die Konstruktion des Ausdrucks*, Kölner Beiträge zur Musikforschung 57, Regensburg 1970, p. 11–16.

<sup>22</sup> "Webern nimmt den Text in die Musik hinein, indem der Text zum geistigen Anlaß und reflektierten Gegenüber der Komposition erhoben wird." (Elmar Budde: *Anton Weberns Lieder Op. 3. Untersuchungen zur frühen Atonalität bei Webern*, Beihefte zum Archiv für Musikwissenschaft 9, Wiesbaden 1971, p. 10).

<sup>23</sup> "[...] wenn Komponist und Text sich im Innern treffen, ist die Möglichkeit der Komposition gegeben." (Elmar Budde: *Anton Weberns Lieder Op. 3. Untersuchungen zur frühen Atonalität bei Webern*, Beihefte zum Archiv für Musikwissenschaft 9, Wiesbaden 1971, p. 10).

fettered to one another by that ground. Tension induced by a forceful dominant partner is precariously kept alive by a strong, coercive basic bond between the two partners: ‘Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?’

When Webern’s songs cannot be called ‘interpretive’ in a traditional sense, as they show no significant internal dialogue between the words and the music, and as, consequently, they are only marginal cases in the long tradition of ‘setting poems to music’, even more radical cases of ‘non-interpretive songs’ can be found in the contemporary pop scene. Most frequently in modern pop songs a singer develops a style of musical performance, which becomes his trademark, and applies it to the texts he uses, which mainly serve the function of allowing him to sing (rather than make purely instrumental music). The essential irrelevance of the texts in such songs is not to be deplored as it contributes to the social purpose of pop performances, and the dominance of the music is equally no harm as the music and the text share their objective of serving the market and entertaining the masses. These partners, with one taking the lead, are indifferent to one another but are held together by a shared joint purpose outside their partnership.

The case is different when the text follows a purpose of its own and, for instance, wants to send out a message of political relevance. If such a text establishes an argument, offers vivid images and descriptions and develops a rhetorical strategy of persuasion, it is bound to perish when it is matched with droning basses, resounding drums and shrieking voices. One victim of such a situation was Linton Kwesi Johnson, who combined his fairly sophisticated texts against racial discrimination of West-Indians in England with lively reggae music and had to experience deep disappointment when his audiences completely neglected his political message and gave themselves away to the thrill of the music. In such a case we have two clearly independent partners, indifferent to one another and following contradictory objectives vis-à-vis their audience, so they become antagonists, and in this battle the music necessarily remains victorious as ‘her’ sensual presence and immediacy of impact are far more successful than the words’ rational grasp. Johnson talked about the ‘destructiveness of music’ in such situations, and one may wonder why under these circumstances the partners would ever have wanted to start such a misalliance. The fact is that Johnson at one point stopped doing performances of this kind.<sup>24</sup>

The foregoing observations have shown that there is a wide range of diverse relationships which words and music can establish in songs, and have established in the course of European cultural history. They are basically of two types: either they are primarily concerned with meaning, and therefore take their start from

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<sup>24</sup> See Walter Bernhart: “The Destructiveness of Music: Functional Intermedia Disharmony in Popular Songs“ in Erik Hedling, Ulla-Britta Lagerroth, and Jenny Westerström (eds.): *Cultural Functions of Interart Poetics and Practice*, Internationale Forschungen zur allgemeinen und vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft, Amsterdam; New York 2002, p. 247–253.

a verbal text; in such 'interpretive songs' the music is expected to relate itself to the text and contribute to the generation of meaning by the joint two forces of the song. In the other type, meaning is of lesser concern and the function of the song is in the wider sense social, with the music usually being the driving factor; what interests the critic in 'non-interpretive songs' is not so much the internal, intermedial relationship between words and music and their meaning-generating activities, but their combined, or separate, relationship to the outer social sphere and the cultural environment in general. While for the former type hermeneutic methods will be the most adequate forms of song criticism, the latter type will be best served by sociological and cultural-historicist methods – which is not saying that 'interpretive songs' may not benefit from cultural-historical perspectives, but that any assessment which does not account for their internal meaning-production processes fails to account for an essential dimension of these songs. Historically, one can observe that with the decline of art song writing in the latter part of the twentieth century and the concomitant coming to the fore of popular forms of song writing, textual analysis has tended to find diminished application in song criticism and 'historicist' perspectives have gained importance. As in social life, other forms of partnership than 'perfect marriages' take the lead in song writing, and the critical industry is well advised to face up to the situation and develop appropriate methods of assessment.

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# From Operatic “Urform” to a “New Opera”: On Kurt Weill and Musical Theatre

*Magnar Breivik*

In 1850, Richard Wagner introduced the concept of “das Gesamtkunstwerk,” as a path-breaking attempt towards the comprehensive integration of the arts – especially of poetry, music, and dance – into a supposedly new artistic entirety. Wagner described music as “the sea” that both divided and united “the two extreme antitheses of human art, the arts of dancing and of poetry.”<sup>1</sup> In his conception of music drama, the arts are considered as subordinate to a central idea according to which they fuse in order to obtain a common goal. The intention of this particular kind of mediation between the muses is a heightened artistic synthesis where the arts mutually complete and complement each other in a sophisticated play of intermediality, in which the limitations of the individual arts are overcome. This is why Wagner considered the “Gesamtkunstwerk” as representing nothing less than “the artwork of the future.”

The ambition of combining all the arts successfully in one and the same work has appeared on every occasion that the renewal of opera has been on the agenda. In the 1920s, about three quarters of a century after Wagner’s proclamation of “the artwork of the future,” opera was again much debated on German soil. This was the new era that immediately followed the traumas of World War I, and Wagner’s ideas were regarded as passé, at least by representatives of the upcoming generation of young composers, stage directors, playwrights, and authors. Kurt Weill was among the new German composers sharing this view. With the cultural life of the Weimar Republic as his springboard, Weill would go on to exert a substantial influence on the progress of 20<sup>th</sup>-century theatre music as a whole. The focus of this article is on aspects of Weill’s views on musical theatre as an intermedial art.

Kurt Weill (1900–1950) began making himself felt in German music life during the first half of the twenties. After the Nazis came to power in 1933, Weill – a Jew by birth and an allegedly radical, left-wing composer dallying with jazz – had no option but to emigrate and try to continue his career abroad. Subsequent to a transitional stay in France, he ended up in the USA, where he soon became one of the artists who exerted a significant impact on the development of American musical theatre.

In 1936, one year after Kurt Weill had arrived as a refugee in America, he described “die Schaffung eines musikalischen Theaters für unsere Zeit” (the making

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Richard Wagner: excerpt from the essay “The Artwork of the Future” (1850) in Oliver Strunk: *Source Readings in Music History*, rev. and ed. Leo Treitler, New York; London 1998 (p. 1097–1112), p. 1100.

of a musical theatre for our time) as the goal he had been heading towards since the very beginning of his career.<sup>2</sup> His own application of the term "musikalisches Theater" (musical theatre) – and not "Musiktheater" (music theatre) – is crucial for any understanding of his contribution to the stage: He always seemed to regard musical theatre not as a self-contained artistic genre but as an intermedial art containing music yet based on the laws of the theatre medium. This view also implied that each artistic medium involved contributed according to its own possibilities and limitations. Hence, Weill would never believe in Wagner's lofty ideals of an elevated "Gesamtkunstwerk" in which the arts were supposed to combine in a way that could transcend the inherent limitations of each of them. A simple token of Weill's conviction is that most of his works for the stage include some kind of spoken dialogue: As a rule, Weill would be reluctant to set to music anything he thought might be said better in words.

In Weill's writings from the late 1920s, the concept of "die Urform der Oper" (the primeval form of opera) starts turning up, often with a reference to *Die Dreigroschenoper* (The Threepenny Opera) – which is no opera at all. To Weill, "the primeval form of opera" means the combination of drama and music found in Greek tragedies, in medieval mystery plays, and in Japanese Nô-theatre, but also in what he regards as music history's first opera: Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* of 1607. In all these cases music takes part as an integral part of the drama, however always on its own premises. In Weill's opinion, from the Renaissance onwards opera started departing from the spoken drama and developed into a self-contained form culminating in the aforementioned Wagnerian music drama. His ambition was to restore the so-called 'primeval' form by re-establishing a supposedly ideal link between drama and music where both components play mutually dependent roles according to their independent modes of expression.<sup>3</sup>

Through his multifarious output for the stage Weill stands forth as a persistent explorer of territory that lies somewhere between spoken theatre and traditional opera, as also between popular music and serious music, or as his native language would characterise them, "U-Musik" and "E-Musik" respectively.

Weill thought of himself as a musical-theatre innovator throughout most of his professional career, and most his works for the stage should be described as hybrids of some kind. In his oeuvre one finds a variety of designations, such as "opera," "opera buffa," "Songspiel," "play with music," "comedy with music," "school opera," "ballet chanté," "operetta," "biblical drama," "musical play," "musical comedy," "vaudeville," "folk opera," and "musical tragedy." Occupying a new territory between the

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<sup>2</sup> See Kurt Weill: "Was ist musikalisches Theater?" (1936), notes for a lecture, German trans. in Stephen Hinton and Jürgen Schebera (eds.): *Kurt Weill, Musik und musikalisches Theater. Gesammelte Schriften*, Mainz 2000 (p. 144–147).

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Kurt Weill: "Die Alchemie der Musik" (1936) in Hinton & Schebera 2000 (p. 148–154).

opposite poles of theatrical forms and musical genres, Weill seemed to be convinced that he would also be able to reach out to a new public. For him, the challenge of the theatre medium and its audiences was always the basic point of departure. Unlike many of his composer colleagues, Weill is reported to have been quite willing to make extensive cuts in his music as long as the result might lead to a more idiomatic performance on stage. “Das Tempo der Bühne” (the pacing of the stage) was a concern that always had a prominent position in the development of his musical ideas.<sup>4</sup> Another consequence of Weill’s attitude towards artistic practicalities is that his music, despite its proven resistance to the wear and tear of time, often gives the impression of having been tailored to suit a particular public in a particular place.

After his first operatic success, *Der Protagonist* (with Georg Kaiser, 1924/1925), Weill wrote only one purely instrumental work, his Symphony No 2, which was premiered by Bruno Walter and the Concertgebouw Orchestra in 1934. As years went by, Weill’s music-theatre achievements would include about thirty works for the stage, starting with the lost one-act opera *Ninon von Lençlos* (after the play by Ernst Hardt) of 1919/1920. Due to Weill’s untimely death in 1950, the last piece, based on the story of *Huckleberry Finn* (Mark Twain/Maxwell Anderson), remained unfinished.

*Die Dreigroschenoper*, which was premiered in 1928, became one of the most successful musical-theatre works in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Weill regarded this piece, and works like *Das Berliner Requiem* (1928), *Der Lindberghflug* (1929), and *Happy End* (1929), as preliminary studies for the full-length opera *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* of 1929. All these works were the results of fruitful collaborations with Bertolt Brecht. In the extensive *Mahagonny* opera Weill saw the realisation of his ideas of what a new opera in a new age should really be.

At the time when *Die Dreigroschenoper* was put on stage at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm in Berlin, the expression a “new opera” had already appeared in Weill’s writings for quite a while. He had started to envisage a comprehensive renewal of the art of opera. In discussing the prospects of an operatic reform Weill was certainly not alone. After World War I, the issue of a contemporary “opera crisis” was frequently on the agendas of both composers and writers. In addition to a variety of musical and theatrical considerations, historical, sociological, economic, and political perspectives on opera were also prominent in contemporary debates. The allegedly ‘anti-aesthetics’ arguments associated with “Die neue Sachlichkeit” (The New Objectivity) were of great significance to the development of music at the time. Among the characteristics of musical “neue Sachlichkeit” were the use of traditional forms (such as sonata and dance forms versus the through composition favoured in late romanticism and expressionism), the predilection for “objective”

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<sup>4</sup>On “the pacing of the stage,” see Kurt Weill: “Bekanntnis zu Oper [II]” in Hinton & Schebera 2000 (p. 47–49), p. 46.

winds over "subjective" strings, the focus on smaller ensembles rather than the mammoth orchestras associated with romantic music, and a decisive urge towards narrowing the expanding gap between contemporary music and the public. The prevalent opera traditions in Germany were rooted in Romanticism, and many of the debates on opera were based on a conviction that the genre was in itself passé: the genre was readily associated with cultural conservatism and pre-war bourgeoisie, and it was thus in need of a more than comprehensive renewal in a contemporary present that looked to an even brighter future. This overall attitude also explains much of the anti-Wagnerian stance at the time and the many reactions against a "Gesamtkunstwerk" that seemed far removed from the ideals of an up-to-date new objectivity.

The views of musical-theatre intermediality, in which each artistic component should be exploited only according to its own potentialities, must also be seen in the light of a more general craving for objectivity. During the 1920s the Germans saw a Händel-opera renaissance in which the baroque operatic form in itself, as well as the old master's brilliant capacity of displaying human affects through music, gained considerable attention. A Händel *opera seria* is based on numbered sections of recitatives and arias, not on an incessant flow of music of the kind that was later found in Wagnerian music drama.

The reverence for ancient traditions combined with the utilization of languages of modernity is characteristic for "Die neue Sachlichkeit" in music. In 1927, however, Ernst Krenek's jazzy opera *Jonny spielt auf* (Jonny Strikes up the Band) was hailed as something decidedly new, as a "Zeitoper" revealing the true spirit of the time. Paul Hindemith's *Neues vom Tage* (News of the Day), 1929, also became an important representative of that particular genre. In Kurt Weill's oeuvre, *Der Zar lässt sich fotografieren* (The Tsar has his Photograph Taken) of 1928 may be seen as his most typical contribution to this field.<sup>5</sup>

In a brief autobiographical article appearing in the same year, 1928, Weill's thoughts on the renewal of opera were once again aired. This text, faithfully following the instructions of *Berliner Tageblatt*, was designed as a lesson for twelve-year-old children. Weill starts his lesson by pointing out that the times of (Wagnerian) gods and heroes are over, and that music is no longer a matter for the few.<sup>6</sup> In the field of opera and musical theatre he presents his wishes to start from the very beginning, and he concludes his lesson by putting forward the notion of "der gestische Charakter der Musik" (the gestic character of music) as the most important result of his work until then. This concept will be more fully discussed later. Weill gives his imaginary pupils of 1928 a set of programmatic statements strongly resembling a musical-theatre manifesto. The notion that "music is no longer a matter for the

<sup>5</sup> See Susan C. Cook: *Opera for a New Republic: The Zeitoper of Krenek, Weill, and Hindemith*, London 1988.

<sup>6</sup> Kurt Weill: "Der Musiker Weill" (1928) in Hinton & Schebera 2000, p. 68–71.



few” can always serve as a good starting-point for a presentation of his thoughts. What Weill stresses are the social functions of music and the conviction that music should be a part of everyday experience. The 1920s, the formative years of Weill’s artistic development, were times of musical experiments displaying a vigour and variety hardly surpassed by any other decade in the history of music. “Die neue Sachlichkeit” was part of this picture, and it was in 1923 that Gustav F. Hartlaub, the director of the Mannheim *Kunsthalle*, introduced this motto on the occasion of the preparation of an exhibition of post-expressionism art under that very title. The title was quickly transformed into a slogan that soon spread like wildfire both through the arts and through everyday life of the Weimar Republic.

The German musicologist Heinrich Bessler is acknowledged as the one who coined the term “Gebrauchsmusik” in the mid-twenties.<sup>7</sup> “Gebrauchsmusik” is not really an equivalent to musical “neue Sachlichkeit,” although both concepts are nourished from the same soil. To Bessler, personal participation in musical activity should be regarded as the best way to cope with what he saw as a contemporary passivity among the listeners, a compliance caused by a public concert system based on outworn traditions and commercial music consumption. “Gebrauchsmusik” was regarded as the vehicle for restoring a supposedly genuine musical “Gemeinschaft” that seemed to have been disappearing in the course of the previous decades. Bessler thus referred to another of the Weimar Republic’s widely cherished words: the warm and all-inclusive “Gemeinschaft” (community), as opposed to the cold and mechanical “Gesellschaft” (society).<sup>8</sup>

Although the functions of the arts and their societal value were discussed and described from different angles at the time, the concept of “Gebrauchsmusik” (“utility music” or “music for use”) is not easy to define. As stated by Paul Hindemith, once among the term’s productive representatives, the concept is strongly connected to, and perhaps even delimited to, the vastly expanding musical market of the post-war years.<sup>9</sup> The rapidly increasing amateur movement, the grand perspectives of the newly established broadcasting co-operations, and the excitingly novel possibilities found in the film industry played important roles in those years of artistic expansion. However, the notion of “Gebrauchsmusik” was also used as a more general protest against the supposedly dangerous and esoteric *avant-garde*; it was music explicitly written for common use and not as what ironical critics might characterize as the egocentric self-expression of the suffering artist. All in all, the “Gebrauchsmusik” term proved to be comprehensive indeed. The main point seems to be that music

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<sup>7</sup> See Heinrich Bessler: “Grundfragen des musikalischen Hörens” in *Jahrbuch der Musikbibliothek Peters* 32/1925, Leipzig 1926 (p. 35–52).

<sup>8</sup> This dichotomy was based on the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies’ antitheses of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, which he introduced in his book *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* of 1887.

<sup>9</sup> See Paul Hindemith: “Betrachtungen zur heutigen Musik” in Giselher Schubert (ed.): *Paul Hindemith: Aufsätze, Vorträge, Reden*, Zürich; Mainz 1994 (p. 131–176).

so described involved some aspects of musical utility combined with principles of musical activity, both perceived in the widest sense.

In his article "Die Oper – wohin? 'Gebrauchsmusik' und ihre Grenzen" (1929) Weill presented "Gebrauchsmusik" as an ideal basis for the development of a new opera.<sup>10</sup> His reasons lie in the conviction that high-quality "Gebrauchsmusik" aims at combining "Kunstmusik" (art music) with what he characterises as "Verbrauchsmusik" (consumer's music) into an amalgamation suiting a broad and modern musical public. The possibilities that he proceeds to discuss are founded in what in later German terminology is described as "die mittlere Musik," the music "in the middle" or "in-between." As the formulation suggests, this music tends to mediate the polarities of contemporary music: the antagonisms of high and low, tonal and atonal, autonomous and functional.

In Weill's opinion, the art of opera had developed generic characteristics that addressed a rather limited group of listeners in the modern times of which he was a part. As already suggested, he shared this view with many of his composer colleagues. Operatic music needed new and fertile soil, and Weill saw the fundamental approaches on which genuine "Gebrauchsmusik" is based as really having the potential to open doors to a wider public. He was fully aware of the dangers of making artistic concessions on behalf of short-lived popularity, and he was cautious to emphasise that artistic quality must always be the guiding star. For one thing, he warned the composers of "Gebrauchsmusik" against any competition with the makers of gramophone hits. Music is a fundamental need that must always be satisfied through artistic quality. Good music, including opera, should never be reserved for the chosen few.

Weill was never part of the Schönberg school, yet he started out by applying tonal structures and compositional principles that were not always easily accessible to a broad public. Weill's ambition to increase accessibility to opera and musical theatre in general inevitably led to a revision of his own modernist musical language. A new and more accessible style started to emerge in his music during the second half of the 1920s. A central trait of this stylistic change was a distinct swerve towards a more traditional tonality, combined with a highly creative use of popular-music idioms. Weill's inclusion of a special type of "Song" is but one remarkable result of his development.

The "Song" appeared for the first time in the *Mahagonny Songspiel* of 1927, the most direct precursor to the later, and substantially extended, *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*. The *Songspiel* title, referring to the traditions of the German Singspiel through a provocatively "modern" Anglo-American twist, is evocative in itself. While a comic or romantic story containing spoken dialogue, popular songs,

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<sup>10</sup> Kurt Weill: "Die Oper – wohin? 'Gebrauchsmusik' und ihre Grenzen" (1929) in Hinton & Schebera 2000 (p. 92–96).

ballads, and strophic arias often characterize a German Singspiel, the *Mahagonny Singspiel* has neither dialogue nor any character development. The order of the “Songs” presents a scrawny story about the destiny of a city called Mahagonny. This experimental “Songspiel” is thus a “play of Songs” to which no spoken dialogue has been added. Rather it has been subtracted, as if this were a intermedial work minus one of the media. Although Weill would never write another work in this vein,<sup>11</sup> from the time of *Mahagonny* the binary verse-and-refrain “Song” became a most vital ingredient in his music for the stage, at least while in Europe. In the context of opera this “new” melodic genre more or less replaced the traditional aria. The term emanates from the Anglo-American language rather than from German. As already suggested, Weill’s “Song” represents a blend of contemporary, familiar elements related to jazz, popular dance forms, and cabaret. However, everything is done with a decidedly modern and definitely personal twist – each song is composed in a highly sophisticated and artistically refined way. The music strives for the fusion of bountiful possibilities of popular identification and truly artistic elevation. In an interview with the *New York World Telegram*, 1935, Weill generously attributed the “Song” genre to Bertolt Brecht and himself. “It became very popular and was widely used in Germany,” he says. “Our ‘Song’ corresponded, I think, quite a lot to the genre ‘American popular song.’ It consisted of four or five verses with a refrain, it was not, however, delimited to a fixed number of bars, as is the case with your ‘popular song’ here.”<sup>12</sup>

The most common form of American popular song, to which Weill refers above, is based on the 32-bar AABA-pattern. George Gershwin wrote all his popular songs according to that outline; Richard Rodger’s “Edelweiss” is typical as is Weill’s “My Ship,” the latter concluding *Lady in the Dark* (Moss Hart, Ira Gershwin) of 1940. However, Weill would never, like many of his American colleagues, stick to one song form. One important reason is that, unlike most of his fellow composers, he never wrote a melody before he had a text at hand. Consequently, in Weill’s music an already existing text always decided the form of the song.

The “Alabama Song,” originally from the *Mahagonny Singspiel*, is typical for Weill’s contributions to the “Song” genre back in Europe. Example 1 shows a piano reduction of the first few bars of the refrain as implemented into the later operatic version. The smoothly flowing vocal line combined with a strict, repetitive rhythmical pattern in the accompaniment is a typical trait of many a Brecht-Weill

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<sup>11</sup> With the possible exception of certain similarities found in his so-called “ballet chanté,” *Die sieben Todsünden*, 1933.

<sup>12</sup> “Er wurde sehr populär und wurde weithin in Deutschland benutzt. [...] Unser ‘Song’ korrespondierte, wie ich glaube, sehr mit dem Genre des amerikanischen ‘popular Song.’ Er bestand aus vier oder fünf Strophen mit einem Refrain, jedoch war er nicht an eine ganz bestimmte Zahl von Takten gebunden, wie das bei Ihrem ‘Popular Song’ hier der Fall ist.” R.C.B. (initials unknown): “Kurt Weill hat sich mit 35 Jahren seinen eigenen Platz geschaffen” (1935) in Hinton & Schebera 2000, p. 468.

"Song." Another characteristic feature is the falling leap in "[A-la-] *ba-ma*." The use of a descending leap at some strategic point of a melodic development is quite frequently found throughout Weill's entire production. This trait gives the vocal line a sophisticated shape and at the same time some kind of extrovert singing quality that stepwise progressions do not. Among the general Weill-characteristics in this example are also the refined harmonic juxtapositions of major and minor. All these traits confirm Weill's own words: "every text I've set looks entirely different once it's been swept through my music."<sup>13</sup> Indirectly, this quotation also reveals Weill's consistent need for a good text as a muse for his music. The performance of the *Mahagonny* opera makes use of both on-stage and off-stage orchestras. An abundant use of brass and wind instruments – including soprano-, alto-, and tenor saxophones – as well as harmonium, zither, banjo, and bandoneon contribute to the characteristic sound that would become so strongly associated with Weill's works for the Berlin stage.

Here the first "sharks," six girls unblushingly lead by the masterful Jenny, make a rest before arriving in the dream-town of Mahagonny – all of them fit and prepared to deal with the desires of well-heeled gold miners:

Example 1. Kurt Weill: "Alabama Song" from *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, mm. 26–35

Music that is composed in such a vein is not superficially seductive like the gramophone hit, Weill says. It is rather annoyingly discomforting. Due to its ethical and social content it is bitter, accusing, in its mildest form ironic.<sup>14</sup> According to the "Gebrauchsmusik" idea, a broad and actively receptive public will in turn provide a

<sup>13</sup> Kurt Weill in an unpublished letter to Erika Neher (1933), made available in Joanna Lee and Kim Kowalke (eds): *Die 7 Todsünden/The 7 Deadly Sins: A Sourcebook*, New York 1997, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Kurt Weill: "Die Oper – wohin?..." in Hinton & Schebera 2000 (p. 92–96), p. 93.

fresh and fruitful soil for new music. However, music's popularity potential is certainly not the only precondition for its applicability to the stage. Still more important is its profound, all-embracing ability to render what Weill describes as the natural human condition by expressing simple, human emotions (*Regungen*) and actions. In "Die neue Oper" (1926) Weill writes about the transparent clarity of emotions in which the possibilities for the emergence of a new opera are embedded, "because from this clarity arises even the simplicity of musical language which opera demands."<sup>15</sup> Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* (1925) must be seen as the grand conclusion of a development based on Wagner, Weill says. Ferruccio Busoni's *Doktor Faust* (1924), on the contrary, represents the starting point of a new fruitful period for opera, at the opposite pole to music drama.<sup>16</sup> This also leads back to Weill's notion that "the times of gods and heroes are gone" and his general wish to make "die Urform der Oper" his point of departure. Weill's ambitious aims must be seen in connection with the innovations, or perhaps rather the renovations, that were taking place on the theatrical stage of his time. In Weill's opinion, opera might profit by successfully adhering to the ideas of contemporary theatre, which he saw as explicitly directed towards what ordinary, everyday human beings say and do. One ought to develop a musical idiom equally "natural" as that of the profoundly human, spoken language of modern theatre. On reaching this goal, music would become capable of embracing a huge range of topics central to contemporary society. These are the true cultural functions of a new opera. Weill's views on the spoken-theatre medium as a guiding star for the renewal of opera also influenced his very selective choice of collaborators. In the notes for the original cast recording of the 1946 *Street Scene* (Elmer Rice, Langston Hughes) he wrote of his continuous work towards solving "the form-problems of the musical theatre":

One of the first decisions I made was to get the leading dramatists of our time interested in the problems of musical theatre. The list of my collaborators reads like a good selection of contemporary playwrights of different countries: Georg Kaiser and Bert Brecht in Germany, Jaques Deval in France, Franz Werfel, Paul Green, Maxwell Anderson, Moss Hart and Elmer Rice in America.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> "In der durchsichtigen Klarheit unseres Empfindungslebens liegen die Möglichkeiten für die Entstehung einer neuen Oper; denn aus ihr entspringt eben die Einfachheit der musikalischen Sprache, die die Oper verlangt." Kurt Weill: "Die neue Oper" (1926) in Hinton & Schebera 2000 (p. 42–45), p. 43.

<sup>16</sup> See Kurt Weill: "Die neue Oper" p. 44.

<sup>17</sup> Kurt Weill: "Two Dreams Come True" in Joanna Lee, Edward Harsh, and Kim Kowalke (eds.): *Street Scene: A Sourcebook*, New York 1996, p. 26.

In Weill's opinion it was important to overcome what he saw as the musicians' fear of truly equal collaborators from other fields of art.<sup>18</sup> To the literary scholar the notion of music's capacity of expressing man's natural attitudes may sound like an echo of Brecht, with whom Weill had such successful collaborations. Brecht is often put forward as the driving force in their productive coalition. There are reasons to maintain that the influence must have been far more reciprocal than is commonly acknowledged. In many cases it probably has to be seen as the other way round. In a letter to Universal Edition in 1927, Weill, in the middle of his work on the *Mahagonny* opera, wrote "I am working with Brecht every day on the libretto, which is being shaped entirely according to my instructions. This kind of collaboration, in which a libretto is actually formed according to purely musical considerations, opens up to entirely new prospects."<sup>19</sup> A couple of years later Weill went even further into the nature of their professional relationship:

Music has more impact than words. Brecht knows it and he knows that I know. But we never talk about it. If it came out in the open, we couldn't work with each other any more. Brecht asks for complete submission. He doesn't get it from me, but he knows that I'm good and that I understand him artistically, so he pretends that I'm utterly under his spell. I don't have to do anything to create that impression. He does it all himself.<sup>20</sup>

Weill's fundamental ideas on opera should rather be seen as a continuation of thoughts that were introduced by his highly influential teacher of composition, Ferruccio Busoni. Weill once said that Busoni meant to him what Liszt meant to Wagner.<sup>21</sup> Weill was especially intrigued by his teacher's two operas *Arlecchino* (1914–16) and *Doktor Faust*. In Busoni's opuses for the stage Weill saw the perfect amalgamation of musical and theatrical expression.<sup>22</sup>

Already in 1907, Busoni, the prominent spokesman of a new classicism in music, wrote in his *Entwurf einer neuen Ästhetik der Tonkunst*, translated as *Sketch of a New Esthetic of Music*:

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<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, Kurt Weill: "Verschiebungen in der musikalischen Produktion," in Hinton & Schebera 2000 (p. 61–64) p. 63.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted from Joanna Lee, Edward Harsh, and Kim Kowalke (eds.): *Mahagonny: A Sourcebook*, New York 1995, p. 17.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted from Lee, Harsh & Kowalke 1995, p. 95.

<sup>21</sup> See "Der Komponist der Stunde. Ralph Winett: Interview mit Kurt Weill" (1936) in Hinton & Schebera 2000, p. 471.

<sup>22</sup> See Kurt Weill: "Busonis *Faust* und die Erneuerung der Opernform" (1927) in Hinton & Schebera 2000 (p. 54–58).

The greater part of modern theatre music suffers from the mistake of seeking to repeat the scenes passing on the stage instead of fulfilling its own proper mission of interpreting the soul-states [attitudes] of the persons represented. When the scene presents the illusion of a thunderstorm, this is exhaustively apprehended by the eye. Nevertheless, nearly all composers strive to depict the storm in tones – which is not only a needless and feebler repetition, but likewise a failure to perform their true function.<sup>23</sup>

Weill shared Busoni's views of the possibilities and limitations of theatre music. As suggested earlier, from an intermedial point of view Weill's main issue is that music, the spoken word, and the action on stage can co-operate very successfully indeed, but they will always have to be based upon their own, individual premises as fundamentally different forms of art. This fact does exclude their allegedly ideal union in a dramatic "Gesamtkunstwerk" where, in addition to the lofty goals of artistic elevation, the musical construction is based on a web of leitmotifs, expressions of extra-musical phenomena, and an abundance of dramaturgical functions that are designed to support the action. The music drama's pretended reality on the stage is bound to remove itself from tangible reality, as far as action, words, and music are concerned. In Weill's opinion, music thus had to take up its fundamentally irrational role once again. Brecht, in an essay translated as "Notes on the Opera," wrote about the concept of epic opera in connection with Weill's and his own *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*. "Words, music and setting must become more independent of one another," he claimed.<sup>24</sup>

A formal consequence of Weill's thoughts on epic opera is that he wanted to restore the number opera, in which the music is not evolving uninterruptedly and incessantly from the first beginning till the very end. In accordance with epic-theatrical principles, the function of songs and musical numbers should not be regarded as fundamental vehicles for the dramatic procedure on stage. It should rather interrupt the action, comment upon it, express an already established situation or a definite stage in the dramatic development. This is also the case with the introduction of the "Alabama Song" in the play. There may even be moments where an interrupting or mediating song seems to be the only convincing alternative to a dead end. The text and action on stage may thus even give certain excuses for the introduction of music and songs. This is what Weill regarded as music's function of irrationality in the operatic enterprise.

Weill saw *Die Dreigroschenoper*, with its spoken dialogue and separated songs, as the prototype of a renewed operatic "Urform" in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the *Aufstieg und*

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<sup>23</sup> Ferruccio Busoni: "Sketch of a New Esthetic of Music" trans. Theodore Baker, in *Three Classics in the Aesthetic of Music*, New York 1962 (p. 75–102), p. 83.

<sup>24</sup> John Willett (ed. and tr.): *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, New York 1992, p. 38.

*Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* these principles were carried further to a more elaborate musical work where each of the 21 scenes is constructed as a self-contained musical number, as a segregated musical form in itself. Brief, mediating texts open up for the next number.

According to Weill, music for operas should be basically equivalent to so-called "absolute music"; it should be integrated in its own way but still be self-supporting. The consequence of this idea is also that operatic music should be able to exist as a self-sufficient, formal entity even outside the stage. Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and *Die Zauberflöte* were, together with Beethoven's *Fidelio*, Weill's favourites in the classical repertoire of musical theatre. Weill maintained that in Mozart's music, often described as primarily dramatic, there is no fundamental difference between what is written for the stage and what is written for, say, an instrumental chamber music group.<sup>25</sup> This has all to do with the aforementioned "gestischen Charakter der Musik," which should be translated as music's capability of representing both gist and gesture. According to its inherent character, music has a fundamentally unique capacity that is in no way delimited to any dramatic action in space. This is certainly one of the most important points in Weill's thoughts on musical theatre. The notion of "der gestische Charakter der Musik" starts appearing in Weill's writings from the late 1920s. Before long one finds similar formulations in Brecht's writings as well. Weill also uses the German noun "Gestus," an expression that during the 1930s would become more widely accepted as denoting the very combination of gist and gesture.<sup>26</sup> In Weill's opinion, the musical gestus is what makes music particularly suitable for a renewal of the acting art in general. He uses the term in different ways. It may, on its own musical premises, support the action on stage, and even present a basic gestus showing the actor's attitude. The verbal text itself may in many cases possess its own inherent gestus, which it is a composer's task to reveal and set to music. Here, the rhythm of the text is important, but by no means sufficient. One of music's great advantages is its ability to both determine and to fix the gist and gestures of performance, thereby preventing all the mistakes from which Weill sees modern theatre so frequently suffering.

In his article "Über den gestischen Charakter der Musik" Weill uses the "Alabama Song" as an example of how the gestures of a text are carried out in music. In his opinion, Brecht's own melody, printed as an appendix to his *Hauspostille*,<sup>27</sup> is by no means artistically satisfying. It seems to render the rhythmical gestus and nothing more:

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<sup>25</sup> Kurt Weill: "Über den gestischen Charakter der Musik" (1929) in Hinton & Schebera 2000 (p. 83–88).

<sup>26</sup> In 1957 Brecht's discussion of some aspects of the term "gestic music" were published in his *Schriften zum Theater*; in Willett, p. 104–106.

<sup>27</sup> Bertolt Brecht: "Gesangsnoten" in *Hauspostille*, Berlin; Frankfurt am Main 1960 (p. 155–164), p. 161–162.



espressivo

tell you: we must die! Oh! moon of A - la - ba - ma we

must now say good - by we've lost our good old

Example 2. Bertolt Brecht: "Alabama Song," mm. 11-14

The combination of a concern for "the pacing of the theatre stage," the utilization of a correctly conceived "Gebrauchsmusik" concept, the recognition of music's possibilities and limitations as an art, the concept of an operatic "Urform", and "der gestische Charakter der Musik" may sum up Kurt Weill's thoughts and contributions to the musical theatre of his time.

Weill's unfortunately brief yet highly eventful career took place on both Schiffbauerdamm and Broadway. It is important to bear in mind that the musical-theatre stages of Berlin and New York were based on fundamentally different premises. One substantial challenge for a European immigrant composer arriving in the 1930s, lay in the simple fact that the USA completely lacked any significant operatic tradition. Accordingly, the American stage would require different solutions and divergent ways of expression. In his newly adopted country Weill also had to pursue his career under different cultural and economic conditions, a trivial fact that could not be ignored. This also had a discernible influence on his musical language, which preserved many of its characteristics and at the same time became closer to American popular-music idioms, and on the variety of his artistic contributions.

Weill's remarkable flexibility as a composer was deeply rooted in both his own musical personality and in his profound recognition of the cultural functions of opera and musical theatre in 20<sup>th</sup>-century society. Historically, *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* is often regarded as the forerunner of a more dramaturgically comprehensive Broadway-opera genre. In this field, *Street Scene*, written just four years before he died, became Weill's own path-breaking contribution. Through this work Weill saw his dream of creating a new type of musical theatre that combined European opera traditions and Broadway standards of popular accessibility coming true.

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# The “Scholarly” and the “Artistic”: Music as Scholarship?

Nils Holger Petersen

This article is based on my own personal experiences as a scholar and a composer and therefore, to a larger extent than normal in academic writing, marked by subjective concerns and ideas. However, the aim of the presentation is to raise and discuss a general question concerning the traditional distinction between “the scholarly” and “the artistic” which I believe to be relevant for academic work. Taking up a specific example – a musical composition of my own – I will raise the question to what extent it makes sense to claim that this piece of music also can be received as a scholarly contribution. Academic presentations are traditionally formulated in words, possibly supplemented graphically. The present discussion involves the question whether scholarship in principle must be limited to the media of words supplemented by graphic figures.<sup>1</sup> For me, the question has come up in connection with my own activities. The article attempts to extract a general discussion on the basis of my own individual background.

Since the 1930s, at least, the relationship between art and scholarship was critically taken up in humanistic scholarship and the arts. In the understanding of the philosopher Theodor W. Adorno, Arnold Schönberg’s twelve-tone music could be claimed to bring about knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Adorno and the novelist Thomas Mann in each their ways contributed significantly to discussions of music aesthetics through philosophical and fictional writings, respectively. These discussions became of importance for the course of musical modernism in the aftermath of the Second World War and belong to the general context of my personal experiences in the “new music world” in Copenhagen in the 1960s and 70s.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Obviously, music, as well as images, may be – illustrative – parts of an academic presentation. This is not what I am thinking of here. I am concerned with the actual use of the medium music *to state a point*; something that may rather be compared to the use of graphics to show connections for instance via a scheme in order to state a theoretical point.

<sup>2</sup> See Theodor W. Adorno: “Der dialektische Komponist” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 17, *Musikalische Schriften IV: Impromptus. Zweite Folge neu gedruckter musikalischer Aufsätze*, Frankfurt am Main 1982 (p. 198–203). The essay was originally written in 1934. English translation: Theodor W. Adorno: “The Dialectical Composer” in Theodor W. Adorno: *Essays on Music. Selected, With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Richard Leppert. New Translations by Susan H. Gillespie*, Berkeley 2002 (p. 203–209).

<sup>3</sup> The intertextuality between Thomas Mann’s Novel *Doktor Faustus* (published in 1947) and Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno’s *Philosophie der neuen Musik* (published in 1949) in itself constitutes an important example. However, both works on different premises take up the question of the role and

It is necessary to give a few details concerning my artistic and academic background. I had written music since I was about 14 years old and became acquainted with the modernistic crisis of the art of music through my studies of composition with the Danish composer Ib Nørholm (born 1931) in the mid-sixties at the same time as I was exposed to much contemporary music through my mother, Elisabeth Klein, a pianist performing primarily newly composed music. Simultaneously, I studied mathematics, worked as a mathematician for some years at universities in Denmark and Norway, and later went into theology and humanistic scholarship concerning the arts and the history of Christianity.

In 1980, looking – in various music books – for a quotation that could function as an “other” in a musical composition I was working on, I happened to find a chant melody from the Middle Ages which I used for the piano piece in question (which I ended up calling *A Plain Song*).

In the years which followed, I came to perceive medieval music primarily as the cultic musical basis out of which the art of music had developed and become independent of its previous collective role and character of medieval music. I understood this medieval music as fundamentally – even qualitatively – different not only from the modernistic atonal music that I wrote, but as equally different from the tonal – classical – music out of which modernism primarily had developed or from which it had broken out. All this was seen very much in the light of the understanding of Thomas Mann’s composer-protagonist Adrian Leverkühn – in *Doktor Faustus* – as a youth. He is still in high-school when, after a music-historical lecture, he is referred for the following overall music historiographic construction:

The pupil of the upper school appeared to be struck by the thought, which the lecturer had not expressed at all but had kindled in him, that the separation of art from the liturgical whole, its liberation and elevation into the individual and culturally self-purposive, had laden it with an irrelevant solemnity, and absolute seriousness, a pathos of suffering, which was imaged in Beethoven’s frightful apparition in the doorway, and which did not need to be its abiding destiny, its permanent intellectual constitution. [...]<sup>4</sup>

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possibilities (or impossibilities) of art in modern society. See Nils Holger Petersen: “Introduction: Transformations of Christian Traditions and their Representation in the Arts, 1000–2000” in Petersen, Clüver and Bell (eds.): *Signs of Change: Transformations of Christian Traditions and their Representation in the Arts, 1000–2000*, Amsterdam 2004 (p. 1–23), p. 9–16.

<sup>4</sup>Thomas Mann: *Doctor Faustus*, trans. from the German by H.T. Lowe-Porter, London 1992, p. 57. See Thomas Mann: *Doktor Faustus: Das Leben des deutschen Tonsetzers Adrian Leverkühn erzählt von einem Freunde*, Berlin 1963 (orig. Stockholm 1947), p. 65–66.

The “medieval” had become a different world for me, an “other” which asserted its importance by way of the perspective it gave on the modern and the classical. A few years later, in 1989, I wrote a music drama, *A Vigil for Thomas Becket*, in which this idea was worked out in the libretto as well as in the music, and in both cases by reference to quotations from medieval authors, very much – in my later judgement – in line with Hans Robert Jauss’ hermeneutics of medieval literature although at the time I had not read a word by him.<sup>5</sup>

Intuitive “artistic” experience in some measure seems to have anticipated what I have later tried to approach in a more strict academic way. Also, the briefly described role of the “medieval” in my music does not appear only to be found in my musical constructions. Although I was not conscious about it at the time, this was something to be heard in works of other contemporary composers as for instance George Crumb (born 1929), Alfred Schnittke (1934–98), and Peter Maxwell Davies (born 1934) to name but a few important names.

The terms “art” and “artistic” are difficult to define. The changes which the understandings and practices of art have undergone in modern times – since the rise of a modern concept of art – may lead to define art as that which the contemporary institutions of art treat as art.<sup>6</sup> In other words, I do not claim the existence of any definable inherent artistic qualities in “works of art”; even so, my use of the term is undeniably informed by traditional uses of the concept of art in Western cultural history, especially since the eighteenth century, and of the sensibilities to which such traditions and practices have given rise. These undoubtedly include ideas of artistic quality: in spite of all differences, disagreements, and – necessary – cautions, there is probably a fairly common consensus in modern-day Western cultures that what

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<sup>5</sup> See my account in “*In Rama sonat gemitus...* The Becket Story in a Danish Medievalist Music Drama, *A Vigil for Thomas Becket*” in Richard Utz, and Tom Shippey (eds): *Medievalism in the Modern World: Essays in Honour of Leslie Workman*, Turnhout: Brepols 1998 (p. 341–58). See also Hans Robert Jauss: “The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature” in *New Literary History*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 1979 (p. 181–229).

<sup>6</sup> For the ‘modern system of the arts,’ see Paul Oskar Kristeller: “The Modern System of the Arts” Part I in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 12, No. 4, 1951 (p. 496–527) and Part II in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 1952 (p. 17–46) with several later reprints. The modern crises of the concept of art are apparent in the history of the twentieth-century arts as discussed prominently, for instance, in the critical works of Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno already in the first half of the century and, of course, by many others. For recent discussions pointing to the “institutional system of the art-world,” see Eyolf Østrem: “‘The Ineffable’: Affinities between Christian and Secular Concepts of Art” in Petersen, Clüver, and Bell (eds.): *Signs of Change: Transformations of Christian Traditions and their Representation in the Arts, 1000–2000*, Amsterdam 2004 (p. 265–292), and Claus Clüver: “On Genres: Their Construction, Function, Transformation, and Transposition” in Østrem, Bruun, Petersen, and Fleischer (eds.): *Genre and Ritual: The Cultural Heritage of Medieval Rituals*, Copenhagen 2005 (p. 27–46), esp. p. 45–46. See also Hans Belting: *Das Unsichtbare Meisterwerk: Die modernen Mythen der Kunst*, München 1998, p. 13: “Nur ein historisches Verständnis schützt uns vor dem Irrtum, die heutigen Begriffe für universal zu halten.” [Only a historical understanding protects us from the error of regarding contemporary concepts as universal].

may be subsumed under the idea of "the artistic" is rooted in personal experience but must – in one way or another – rise above the mere personal.

### A Musical Composition as a Historiographical Construction?

In the following I shall comment on a very recent musical composition of mine, a piano piece written to be played in connection with a public talk I gave on 5 December 2006 in the "Theological Association" (*Teologisk Forening*) at the Theological Faculty of the University of Copenhagen. The title of the piece is *Coram Mozart* (Facing Mozart). The purpose is to discuss in what way a claim can be made sensibly that something which by most people would be described as an artwork (whether or not the same people like the piece or not) may – also – represent a historiographical construction of a scholarly nature. The first pages of the score are found towards the end of this essay.

I will not discuss the piece analytically, but – in that respect – only remark that the music is based on a number of systematic devices which all relate to Mozart, although in fundamentally different ways. My piece takes its point of departure in a quotation from Mozart's *Adagio* in B minor KV 540 for solo piano (composed in 1788). This involves a construction of a tone series derived from (the possible ones among) the letters of Mozart's name, i.e. *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*, at some point during the piece used in a construction of a twelve-tone series which is twice employed directly: one time in a short passage based on a strict – traditional – twelve-tone technique and once – as the conclusion of the piece – where it is harmonized in a traditional style of a Lutheran chorale as far as that is possible (which, of course, it is not since it is not possible to carry through a traditional tonal functionality during one presentation of a twelve-tone series). A series of chords which have been constructed in a similar way determines a large part of the overall structure of the piece providing it with an aspect – although fragmented – of mechanical construction.

The built-in stylistic inconsistencies, not only between various musical styles or materials (quotations and other musical matter) but also within the representation of individual musical constructions from the various traditions called upon and the overall form of the piece incorporating such diverse materials and musical techniques, is part of its idea: a self-contradictory system which nevertheless appears as a kind of rounded form (or course of musical events) by virtue of its – sort of traditional – chorale conclusion although this chorale also represents the impossibility of such a roundedness, as mentioned. Within this – obviously modernistic – scheme, the piece includes a number of short quotations by Mozart, mainly from the mentioned *Adagio*. These are "authentic" in the sense that they are exact and only manipulated by way of their re-contextualization, a device which, of course, is a strong kind of manipulation. In addition, there are reminiscences of quotations built in at various

points. Altogether, Mozart is referred to practically throughout the whole piece but in very different ways and degrees, some more easily audible than others.

In my understanding of music historiography, Mozart belongs to what has been called Old Europe by the Historian Dietrich Gerhard. A few years ago, trying to place Mozart in a long-term account of European cultural history, I wrote:

My struggle, as it were, regards the historiographic position of Mozart in such a narrative; and the reading I propose [...] places Mozart firmly in what has been called Old Europe. This is the traditional, Christian Europe, medieval in the extended sense of, for instance, Jacques LeGoff. It is Europe at the same time when the individualism with which many thinkers of the Enlightenment were concerned is being pronounced more convincingly than ever before.<sup>7</sup>

I would like to claim that the piece *Coram Mozart* is a historiographical contribution in the following sense: by way of traditional “artistic” means it represents a seemingly narrative construction which highlights Mozart and the traditional Old European culture as an indispensable alterity for a modern musical world which has parted with the tradition in radical ways but at the same time lives off these musical traditions although it no longer can sustain them directly. Mozart, in other words, here plays a similar role to the one which the medieval music in the before mentioned musical works played. The point is that Mozart’s music for me combines stability of form with poignant expressions of human emotions. The latter may be found in all periods of musical composition before as well as after Mozart, but the first separates him in a fundamental way from his successors in a way which for me clearly places him at the end of a long music historical period from the Middle Ages up to and including himself: my extended Middle Ages end in 1791 with Mozart’s death. It is possible, as indicated above, to argue for this understanding of Mozart’s music also in traditional academic ways.

As a musical construction, of course, the *Coram Mozart* is fundamentally different from any traditional academic contribution. In what sense, one might ask, can such a musical piece constitute an argument? Or, in terms of traditional scientific criteria, is there any way in which such a piece may be falsified? In other words, is it possible at all to relate artistic criteria or norms to the scholarly?

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<sup>7</sup> Nils Holger Petersen: “Time and Divine Providence in Mozart’s Music” in Siglind Bruhn (ed): *Voicing the Ineffable: Musical Representations of Religious Experience*, Hillsdale NY 2002 (p. 265–286), p. 280. See also Dietrich Gerhard: *Old Europe. A Study of continuity 1000–1800*, New York 1981, esp. p. 80–88, and Jacques LeGoff: *The Imagination of the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Chicago 1988, p. 7–11.

## History and Imagination

The mentioned question, however, does not seem to have anything to do with the difference in medium. The same problem occurs between academic and literary genres of verbal texts. It may be enlightening, in this connection, to make a short detour to the question of literary treatments of historical material. The recent debates – as well as general confusion – in the wake of *The Da Vinci Code* make it clear how a confusion has appeared about how to read a historical novel, as fiction or as history. Obviously, it contains elements of both. The question is to what extent we can establish criteria by which to judge this genre. Aesthetic criteria for novels are in existence – in more or less generally acknowledged ways – but fiction as historiography often appears as a problem, in spite of recent thoughts on historiography which have underlined the impossibility of sharp divisions between the historical and the fictional. Two statements from the American historian Hayden White's *Tropics of Discourse* sum up the problematic of factuality against individual interpretation:

Many historians continue to treat their "facts" as though they were "given" and refuse to recognize, unlike most scientists, that they are not so much found as constructed by the kinds of questions which the investigator asks of the phenomena before him. It is the same notion of objectivity that binds historians to an uncritical use of the chronological framework for their narratives.

[...] we should no longer naively expect that statements about a given epoch or complex of events in the past "correspond" to some preexistent body of "raw facts." For we should recognize that what constitutes the facts themselves is the problem that the historian, like the artist, has tried to solve in the choice of the metaphor by which he orders his world, past, present, and future.<sup>8</sup>

Similar concerns about the periodization of history have been raised by a number of historians, e.g. the previously mentioned Dietrich Gerhard and Jacques LeGoff. Noting that the term "The Middle Ages" was a creation of the humanists of the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries which has "been elaborated and reinforced from different perspectives from the sixteenth century to the present," Leslie J. Workman has claimed that:

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<sup>8</sup> Hayden White: *Tropics of Discourse*, Baltimore 1978, chapter 1, "The Burden of History" (p. 27-50), p. 43 and 47.



[...] medieval historiography, the study of the successive recreation of the Middle Ages by different generations, *is* the Middle Ages. And this of course is medievalism.

Further, referring to scholarly historical writing as well as what traditionally is considered as part of an artistic reception in the various media, literature, the visual arts, film, music, and even political discourses and actions, Workman maintained that:

[...] the *study* of the Middle Ages on the one hand, and the *use* of the Middle Ages in everything from fantasy to social reform on the other, are two sides of the same coin.<sup>9</sup>

Whereas White is primarily interested in the importance of the use of rhetorical styles in the writing of history, i.e. introducing the idea that aesthetics influence academic results,<sup>10</sup> Workman operates with the idea that it is not possible to make sharp distinctions between medievalism as found in creative or artistic representations of the Middle Ages – for instance in films – on the one hand and the academic historiographic construction of the Middle Ages or of particular parts of this “period” on the other.<sup>11</sup>

Recently, Eyolf Østrem has discussed the relationship between the personal history of an author and his (or her) academic construction of history in an article which precisely makes a point out of being a personal account – of the author’s youthful meeting with medieval music – as well as a scholarly discussion about historiography and the idea and practice of medieval music:

[...] the integration between individual, existence, and history makes it impossible to separate the one from the other, so that the question whether this is a personal history or a history about the early eighties, becomes fairly meaningless; the histories, the way they are represented, become a web of references, where the appropriation of the Middle

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<sup>9</sup> Leslie J. Workman: “The Future of Medievalism” in James Gallant (ed.): *Medievalism: The Year’s Work for 1995*, Holland, MI 2000 (p. 7–18), p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> Hayden White: *Tropics of Discourse*, Baltimore 1978, chapters 2 and 3 and see also Hayden White: *Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, Baltimore 1987.

<sup>11</sup> See also Paul Oskar Kristeller: “Creativity’ and ‘Tradition’” in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 44, No. 1, 1983 (p. 105–113). For further discussions of “creation” as a concept between theological and artistic discourses, discussions which are not touched upon in the present article but which have fundamental bearings upon the notion as such, see Sven Rune Havsteen, Nils Holger Petersen, Heinrich W. Schwab, and Eyolf Østrem (eds.): *Creations: Medieval Rituals, the Arts, and Creation*, Turnhout 2007, in this volume in particular, Eyolf Østrem: “Deus artifex and homo creator: Art Between the Human and the Divine” (p. 15–48) and Eyolf Østrem and Nils Holger Petersen: “Introduction” (p. 1–12).

Ages in a personal project, the loss of the innocent gaze upon existence in the early adult age (or perhaps existence's loss of innocence during the depressing eighties), and the fundamentally historical character of language, slide over and into each other.<sup>12</sup>

In the article this is shown by way of a narrative of Østrem's personal recollections from his childhood of encountering that which was perceived as "old" through his father's (re)creation of Gothic letters in the snow at Eastertide, drawn by ski poles. In the mind of the young Østrem these drawings in the snow became interchangeable with the idea of the "medieval", since both – to him at the time – signified that which was very old.

The explicit point made by Østrem here mainly concerns the overlapping of the domains of the personal and the academically historiographic. Further, however, it is also clear that there is a relation to the aesthetic of the personal experiences of the "old" letters and even to some kind of intermediality since the "oldness" obviously was manifested through the style of the letters as visual figures. In the main sections of his article, Østrem emphasizes two fundamentally different aspects which coexist in the construction of medieval music as it has been practised in what has come to be known as the Early Music movement: the striving towards authenticity, a striving from a scholarly point of view, and the creative "interior" aspect of a dream of a different world imagined in the medieval music, to some extent parallel to what I have referred to as my own experience of medieval music above.

Altogether, the point is – as in the thought of Hayden White to whom Østrem also refers – that we cannot separate between the personal and the scientific, and further that this opens up the field of academia to more general kinds of aesthetic perception.

### Intermediality

The suggestion of a piece of music as a historiographic contribution in itself involves the interaction of music and verbal discourse. As a consequence, intermediality as a concept must be dealt with.

In a discussion of the concept of intermediality, Claus Clüver has recently made it clear that any kind of intertextuality also means intermediality because of the enormous complexity of the various pre-texts and post-texts involved in the production and reception of texts (of whatever kind).<sup>13</sup> An example of such an intertextuality leading

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<sup>12</sup> Eyolf Østrem: "Interiority and Authenticity: A Glossed Medieval History About Music And The Taste For Apples" in *Universitas: The University of Northern Iowa Journal of Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity*, Vol. 2, No. 1, (2006), an Internet Journal to be accessed at <http://universitas.grad.uni.edu>. See also an earlier version in Norwegian, Eyolf Østrem: "Inderlighet og autentisitet: En glossert middelalderhistorie om musikk og smaken for epler" in *Passepartout 25 vol. 13*, 2005 (p. 30–42).

<sup>13</sup> Claus Clüver: "Inter textus / inter artes / inter media" in *Komparatistik: Jahrbuch der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft 2000/2001* (p. 14–50), p. 18.

to intermediality is at work when George Crumb in his string quartet *Black Angels* from 1970 quotes the second movement of Schubert's string quartet in D minor (D. 810) with the epithet 'Death and the Maiden.' Above the section which is based on the Schubert quotation, Crumb indicated the epithet (in the original German, "Der Tod und das Mädchen") together with a performance indication "Grave, solemn; like a consort of viols (a fragile echo of an ancient music)." The quotation was arranged by Crumb with the addition of striking modernistic sounds.<sup>14</sup>

But other associations belong in the context, which would be more or less known by different groups of listeners. In the passage in question of the mentioned Schubert string quartet (the second movement), the composer was (also) making a quotation: of the melody of his own song *Der Tod und das Mädchen* (to a poem by Matthias Claudius). In Crumb's case, the textual association to a young innocent person's confrontation with death is clearly of importance since *Black Angels* was written during the Vietnam War, "in tempore belli" as stated by the composer on the score (Crumb, p. 1). The Latin "in tempore belli" constitutes yet another intertextual musico-verbal reference, now to Joseph Haydn's *Missa in tempore belli*. Crumb has incorporated musical, literary and religious symbolism in his quartet as stated in his liner notes for a recording of the piece in which he also acknowledged a number of musical quotations (including among others the medieval *dies irae* sequence) as well as other symbols used in his work. Crumb's commentary is reprinted on the inside of the cover of the printed score, actually a facsimile of the composer's manuscript which may well be conceived of as a consciously intermedial art work considering the composer's obvious fascination with and care for the visual and verbal presentation of his music.<sup>15</sup>

In the mentioned notes, Crumb writes:

*Black Angels* [...] was conceived as a kind of parable on our troubled contemporary world. The numerous quasi-programmatic allusions in the work are therefore symbolic although the essential polarity – God versus Devil – implies more than a purely metaphysical reality. The image of the "black angel" was a conventional device used by early painters to symbolize the fallen angel.

The intermediality involved in Crumb's *Black Angels* is pervasive and could deserve a thorough examination. However, it is by no means an isolated example of such a use of intertextuality in modern music.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See George Crumb: *Black Angels: Thirteen Images from the Dark Land for Electric String Quartet*, New York: C.F. Peters no date (No. 66304), p. 4 (no. 6 of the images, entitled *Pavana Lachrymae* ("Pavan of Tears")).

<sup>15</sup> Crumb, *Black Angels*; the specific pieces of information given here are found on the inside of the cover.

<sup>16</sup> For an in-depth study of another example of the intermedial use of intertextuality, see Claus

The definition of a "medium" is, as is well known, no obvious matter. Claus Clüver refers to various models designed to help clarify relations between the media in the field of "interarts studies" (or the study of intermediality) among other things pointing to the ambiguity of the term (Clüver 2000/2001, p. 39–44). Sometimes, it is used to distinguish between for instance words, music, and visual presentations. In such uses of the term it is important to note that these distinctions at least to some extent depend on the reception: the same poster may at one point be received as writing and at another as a picture. Sometimes, however, the term "medium" or "media" refers to television, newspapers etc. I do not want to take the discussion any further in this direction, but only point out that the – general everyday – distinction between "artistic" and "scholarly" in a certain way may be taken as a difference in medium since it regards the reception of ways or means of communication, not by way of traditional lines of separation between "objectively" different media, but by way of particular expectations concerning the communication in question. This difference may be seen as similar to the distinction, for instance, between a documentary television programme and a feature film seen in television. The latter distinction is sometimes blurred nowadays as in the recent consciously mixed type of television programme called a "mockumentary."<sup>17</sup>

### Intermediality and History

For a fictional narrative in a historical frame, visual and auditive means are efficient markers of the historical. In a film, the events or the persons of the narrative are immediately perceived as belonging to a particular period through the aesthetic perception of the viewer.

Peter Shaffer's play *Amadeus* (1979, revised 1980) as well as Milos Forman's film with the same title (1984), based on Shaffer's play – for which the screen play was made by Shaffer – both in different ways combine the "historical," the fictional narrative, and the interaction of images, music, and words in a creative representation of Mozart. The following very short remarks are in no way intended to analyze the complex relationship between play and film and accepted historical accounts of Mozart's life but only to point out how – in both play and film – visual and musical effects and words are used to help create a semi fictional, semi historical representation of particular aspects of Mozart's music, of his life and death. Certain well-known historical events were – not surprisingly – consciously changed.<sup>18</sup> Conversely, in both play and film the music and – at least in the film – images of

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Clüver: "Luciano Berio's *Sinfonia*: The Creative Flow of a Musico-Verbal Collage" in Havsteen, Petersen, Schwab, and Østrem (eds.) 2007 (p. 229–46).

<sup>17</sup> Compare the definition of "media" in Werner Wolf: *The Musicalization of Fiction. A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality*, Amsterdam 1999, p. 35, and the discussion in Clüver 2000/2001, p. 40.

<sup>18</sup> See Peter Shaffer: *Amadeus*, New York 1980, "Preface", p. viii.

houses and costumes etc. from the time lend historically convincing sensuousness to the representation, incorporating interpretations of some of the music (by way of Shaffer's "modern" commentary and descriptions put into the mouth of the other historical protagonist, the composer Antonio Salieri). The music – in both play and film – constitutes the basic historical reference and is much more than just illustration or auditive effect. Mozart's music could not be replaced by modern film music (or incidental music for the play) without undercutting the delicate balance between historical and fictional. One main reason why the play and the film can be taken seriously also as a contribution to a historical interpretation of Mozart (with all due reservations) is that the words and the narrative of the play and film work as interpretative attempts at contextualizing the music. The representation is certainly not beyond discussion, but it is relevant to discuss as a – generally speaking – genuine historical scenario for the music and for its modern interpretation. In this sense, *Amadeus* – in spite of its historical inaccuracies – may well be taken as a contribution also to the academic discourse on Mozart.

The notion of "responsible historiography" discussed by the historian Richard J. Evans in a context of postmodern attitudes to history not the least concerning the so-called "Holocaust-denial" literature may be a tool of some help with regard to establishing criteria for evaluating historical representations even in a situation as discussed here with the presence of more than one medium.<sup>19</sup> Clearly, not every construction in a historical account appears as equally convincing in relation to existing documents (used as "sources"), personal memories, or, altogether, the "cultural memory" as this has been defined and discussed by Jan Assmann (and Aleida Assmann), by which is meant what in a society has been institutionalized in various physical as well as mental repositories for what is accepted as the cultural, political and/or religious traditions and historical background for that society. This cultural memory obviously goes far beyond mere words, including also images and sounds. Even though there are only few alive in the Western cultures today who are in a position to remember incidents of the Holocaust, collectively regulated receptions of the Nazi regime in various parts of the Western culture have inserted particular frameworks for historical narratives or items pertaining to this part of the past into the cultural memory in various societies and groups, thus characterizing each individual person's historical perception of the twentieth century along various dividing lines within societies, cultures and subcultures, within groups with each their different perception of a pool of particular narratives and cultural artefacts.<sup>20</sup>

For historical representations involving artefacts of different media from the cultural memory of some community of readers, I would suggest that responsible historiography would first of all consist in accountability in at least one of two ways:

<sup>19</sup> Richard J. Evans: *In Defence of History*, London 1997, esp. p. 233–43.

<sup>20</sup> See Jan Assmann: *Das Kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, München 1992, with many further references.

1) so that expectations of genre and style are established or rendered in such a way as to make readers or perceivers feel confident about what to expect in terms of imaginative non-accountable uses of the cultural memory; 2) in terms of making it clear how and where the representation in question connects to traditional historical narratives or artefacts which form part of the cultural memory relevant to the involved readers or perceivers.

For constructions of the kind I have tried to introduce here, for instance my *Coram Mozart*, both kinds of responsibility are completely possible. The use of Mozart's music can be accounted for, and this is so also for the way these musical quotations and the other musical elements of various kinds of Mozart reception together constitute the piece. The uses of all these musical parts can be outlined by way of historical interpretation, in a traditional discourse. But what is the point of doing it in music if the same may be said by words? It is, of course, not the same. What the music gives is a musical discourse which may be contextualized and outlined verbally, but which cannot be substituted by words just as an ekphrastic poem does not render a painting superfluous. Further, in a context of music history, this provides a possibility for experimental historiography where a periodization or a music historiographical construction is tried out in musical practice, something quite different from the practising of verbal historiography.

At some level, this is not quite unlike Østrem's cited essay with its deliberate experimentation in which a semi-fictional literary – autobiographical – genre is combined with an academic essay, thus not only discussing but exemplifying what Hayden White and Leslie Workman have theorized about. This is also what I am trying to do by mixing an artistic contribution with an academic in the present article. This underlines what has been said: historiography is not about truth or factuality, but about construction; the means by which it is constructed necessarily imply the use of techniques learned from the arts. Whether the criteria for judging if the musical historiography has been convincing have anything to do with the artistic criteria for the musical composition is another matter which is difficult to determine since there are no generally accepted criteria for judging a musical composition nor for evaluating whether an academic interpretation is convincing. I think that there are good reasons to accept that the criteria we actually use in such matters are not completely independent. For any particular person, the musical sensibilities involved would be the same in both cases, and would probably be the decisive component in the judgment.

## Performativity and Scholarship

Erika Fischer-Lichte's concept of performativity has its background in theatre history although it is theorized in a broad cultural context. She distinguishes between the concepts *Inszenierung* (staging) and *Performativität* (performativity).<sup>21</sup> Whereas the performativity concerns an event as something unique which even when seemingly repeated will never be exactly the same, the staging – *Inszenierung* or *mise-en-scène* in the terminology of Fischer-Lichte – regards the planning. The staging concerns aspects which belong to any performance pertaining to a particular *event* and its “repetitions”: what can be planned and rehearsed in advance. In theatrical and other artistic performances, the play or the script, the choreography, the musical score, but also the thought-through interpretations of such – most often written – “sources” for works of art must be described as staging in this view. Oppositely, what happens spontaneously or by chance during a performance, possibly by way of a momentary inspiration, or, oppositely, by mistake, or because of unforeseen interactions between the audience and the performer(s) is part of the performative aspect of the particular *event*, as is the actual embodiment of the performance in terms of physicality and personal appearance of involved performers and actual performance conditions not planned in the staging, all of this termed the atmosphere of the performance in Fischer-Lichte's terminology. The notions of Fischer-Lichte are clearly based on theatrical and other traditional situations of – more or less – public performances. However, especially the opposite pair of performativity and staging also applies to the situation I am discussing here concerning the production of a piece of historiography.

Usually, when discussing historiography or academic constructions, it is assumed that we are dealing with something that has been produced in writing or at least will lead to a written, definitive, version. The same is often assumed for musical compositions in the so-called classical tradition. My *Coram Mozart* as presented here is indeed something planned, composed, written down. A traditional scholarly contribution as well as a musical composition seems to fall into the category of staging in the terminology of Fischer-Lichte.

However, these – academic and artistic – productions are not only planned. Academic publications and for instance historical accounts may come into being also through discussions, talks – including spontaneous discussions where new insights are formed during the launching of ideas in situations which are not controlled or thought through in all their aspects. The staging will in many cases be a product of such a practice of performative thought or discussion. This may then lead to a planning or a fixation of particular points of view just as it may happen for a staging in a theatrical context. This model would often apply to completely traditional academic work, and it will be so for the mixed creative and intellectual ones to which I am giving particular attention here.

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<sup>21</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte: *Ästhetische Erfahrung: Das Semiotische und das Performative*, Tübingen 2001, p. 291–309.

Using a piece of music as an example may enhance this perspective in more than one way. The music historian Carl Dahlhaus raised questions as "what is a fact of music history?" and "does music history have a 'subject'?"<sup>22</sup> His questions have affinities to the general historiographical discussions cited above, but are also directed more specifically to the difficulties in the construction of music history, for instance as connected to the question of how to understand the idea of a musical artwork altogether:

In the aesthetics that arose simultaneously and in interaction with music historiography from the eighteenth century onwards, music was viewed, in the Aristotelian sense, as *poiesis* not *praxis*, i.e. as the creation of forms rather than as actions within a social environment. Consequently, the fundamental category is not the "event" but the "work." The categorical distinction between the two can be sketched roughly as follows. Events result from the interplay of actions based on various, and at times conflicting, motives, imagined goals and assessments of a given situation. Their significance lies less in themselves than in their consequences (there is no such thing as a political "event" without consequences). A work, on the other hand, represents – at least as an "ideal type" – the concrete realisation of an idea in the mind of an individual; ideally, and in contrast to political history, an intention is realised rather than thwarted. Furthermore, the meaning of a work resides in its aesthetic essence, not in its historical repercussions.

This however is not to say that musical events do not exist. We are perfectly justified in referring to a performance, in which a score, a style of interpretation, certain institutional prerequisites, the expectations of the audience and a sociopolitical situation all coincide, as an event, i.e. a point at which actions and structures intersect (Dahlhaus, p. 132–133).

For Dahlhaus at the time – and this may still be so for many to quite some extent today – music history was the history of the "texts as abstracted from acoustical realisations and social surroundings [...]" although Dahlhaus maintained the possibility to "hold theoretically that it is events, meaning acoustical occurrences taking place within social contexts, that constitute the reality of music and not works as boiled down into texts" (Dahlhaus, p. 133). The difference, formulated in the terminology of Fischer-Lichte, is whether to understand music as purely staged or as importantly involving performativity. Partly influenced by Dahlhaus, music history has lately been more oriented in reception history than it used to be; at the same time, the idea of a musical work – and of a work of art altogether – has been

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<sup>22</sup> Carl Dahlhaus: *Foundations of Music History*, trans. J.B. Robinson, Cambridge 1997 (1983), p. 33 and 44.



criticized and deconstructed to a high extent although this has not affected the institutional frameworks for art works accordingly.<sup>23</sup>

In my *Coram Mozart* there is a fair amount of planning (and even calculation) as should be clear from the discussion above. But the piece as it can be perceived is not only the result of careful compositional planning: it is also a result of playing, writing, and playing again. Even at the stage where I performed it (at the mentioned event on 5 December 2006), the performance led to changes, so that the last part of the writing down of a revised version – the one included here – occurred after the performance. This kind of genesis is not unusual for any type of “work,” whether artistic or academic. Staging – or planning, composing – and performativity of some kind are quite normally inextricably linked to each other. What is characteristic for music – and all artistic works which are meant for performance – is that it remains difficult to say where the “work” as such resides: in the written score, in the mind of the composer, in the minds of the listeners, or in the actual soundings of a performance?

If – as I argue – my piano piece can be claimed also to be a (modest) contribution to music historiography, this should be thought of as a performative historiography, not a fixed and only planned one. In certain respects a piece of music is not entirely determined by the score as the history of musical performances shows, at least for the modern period where recordings can demonstrate a rather impressive variety of performances of individual pieces as well as various ideologies of performance, as – for instance – referred to in Østrem’s account of the early music movement.<sup>24</sup> In the case of my piece, I would like to understand it as part of a process which is not finished. It may be taken further by way of new performances – involving both staging and performativity – and by way of planned, staged revisions, possibly resulting also from spontaneous performativity.

Concerning medieval music and the art of writing music which became a cultural practice during the ninth century – for reasons which are still being discussed in scholarship – most music historians nowadays would agree that for centuries the writing down of a piece to a large extent must be considered rather as a written performance of a staged “something” than as the actual composition of a piece; especially Leo Treitler has made this point.<sup>25</sup> Although this picture is no longer valid to the same extent in the musical culture of the later Middle Ages and even less in later and modern periods, such a perspective is still relevant as a question concerning the notion of what it means to compose a piece of music.

As mentioned, also academic constructions – as for instance historical accounts – may be considered as something in the process of coming into being. Each written account may be seen as another step on the way towards new insights, new suggestions

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<sup>23</sup> See above at note 6, and the works cited there.

<sup>24</sup> This is reflected in the account of Daniel Leech-Wilkinson: *The Modern Invention of Medieval Music*, Cambridge 2002 to which Østrem also refers.

<sup>25</sup> See Leo Treitler: *With Voice and Pen*, Oxford 2003.

of how to perceive a particular episode or part of the past. To understand a piece of music as a contribution to an academic construction implies a strengthening of the emphasis on the performative aspect of academic construction. The musical piece may in a certain sense be said to only exist in performance, thus being under the conditions of performativity in addition to its staging. This, it seems to me, is an important point of view to bring to bear for academic work altogether: its character of process and dependence on interaction with colleagues, listeners, readers...

Leslie Workman quoted the sociologist Morris Cohen (writing in the thirties) for the following statement: "History is an imaginative reconstruction of the past, scientific in its determination, artistic in its formulation" (Workman, p. 12). One question which has been added to this – not the least by Hayden White – regards whether we can distinguish so clearly between the determination and the formulation. The musical example of this article may – in my personal, subjective judgment – be characterized as an imaginative insertion of fragments of a particular part of music history into a modern musical framework which is scientific in its conception and artistic in its perception.

As already stated, the intermediality lies implicitly in the pre-texts and post-texts involved in this process, but also in the implied interference between the verbal accountability of the procedure and the musical nature of the resulting performative event.

Coram Mozart

Nils Holger Petersen  
for piano solo  
December 2006  
(20)

Adagio (♩ = 72, ca!)

pp, dolcissimo

f

mp

f, non legato

mp, poco agitato

x) cluster (end notes in parenthesis)  
please down silently!

xx) cluster (end notes in parenthesis)

This and next page: Beginning of *Coram Mozart*. Composer Nils Holger Petersen, 2006

Handwritten musical score for a string quartet, measures 29-34. The score is written in G major and 3/4 time. It features a complex rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The first three systems (measures 29-32) are for the first violin (v.), second violin (vi.), and viola (viola), all marked *mf, sempre stacc.* and *8va (sostp)*. The fourth system (measures 33-34) is for the first cello (v.), marked *p* and *8va (sostp)*. A first ending bracket labeled *1<sup>o</sup>* spans measures 30-31, and a second ending bracket labeled *2<sup>o</sup>* spans measures 33-34.

Handwritten musical score for a string quartet, measures 35-40. The score is written in G major and 3/4 time. It features a complex rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The first system (measures 35-36) is for the first violin (v.), marked *p* and *8va*. The second system (measures 37-38) is for the first violin (v.), marked *mf* and *mp*, and the second violin (vi.), marked *mf* and *mp*. The third system (measures 39-40) is for the first violin (v.), marked *f* and *mp*, and the second violin (vi.), marked *f* and *mp*. The fourth system (measures 41-42) is for the first violin (v.), marked *mp* and *mp*, and the second violin (vi.), marked *mp* and *mp*. The score includes various dynamics and articulations, including *mf*, *mp*, *f*, *p*, *stacc.*, and *sempre stacc.*

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# Bel Canto at the Californian Frontier: The Adaptation of Puccini's Opera *La Fanciulla del West* from Belasco's Play *The Girl of the Golden West*

Johan Stenström

David Belasco – “The bishop of Broadway,” as he was called – dominated the theatre life of New York in the early 1900s. His theatrical practice was associated with European naturalism but had a strain of melodrama added to it. In her study on Belasco, Lise Lone Marker maintains, “When it came to the external representation of a play, David Belasco was a naturalist to the fingertips. Belasco himself had stated, “The great thing, the essential thing, for a producer is to create *illusion* and *effect*.”<sup>1</sup> During a visit to New York in 1907, Giacomo Puccini was looking for a story with a strong female character like Tosca. He attended a performance of Belasco's *The Girl of the Golden West*. Initially, he was not enthusiastic even though he liked the Western setting. However, his friend Sybil Seligman urged him to consider *The Girl*, and after having read an Italian translation of the drama he changed his mind. Back in Italy, he started to sketch a libretto together with the poet Carlo Zangarini. In 1910 he finished work on the opera *La Fanciulla del West*.

In my paper, I intend to discuss the notion of adaptation in relation to the inter-medial transformation of Belasco's drama *The Girl of the Golden West* into Puccini's opera *La Fanciulla del West*.

The study of film adaptations of literary works was one of the first fields of academic cinema studies. Sixty years of writing about adaptation have at worst resulted in tiresome plot comparisons, and at best in advanced contributions to adaptation theory. Notable contributions to adaptation theory in the field of film criticism include Brian McFarlane's *Novel to Film. An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (1996)<sup>2</sup> and Robert Stam's appropriation of intertextuality in *Literature and Film. A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (2005).<sup>3</sup> The latest contribution to the development of general adaptation theory has been made by Linda Hutcheon in her recently published study *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006).<sup>4</sup> She is not restricted to the study of film adaptations but explores adaptations in all kinds of media incarnations. She asks herself why there is such a demand for stories.

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<sup>1</sup> Lise-Lone Marker: *David Belasco. Naturalism in the American Theatre*, Princeton; London 1975, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> Brian McFarlane: *Novel to Film. An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*, Oxford 1996.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Stam: “Introduction: The Theory and Practice of Adaptation” in Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo (eds.): *Literature and Film. A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*, Malden 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Linda Hutcheon: *A Theory of Adaptation*, New York; London 2006.

“[T]here must be something particular about adaptations *as adaptations*,” she maintains. One of the explanations to this pleasure of telling the same stories over and over again “comes simply from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise” (Hutcheon, p. 4). Linda Hutcheon notices three different aspects of adaptations: 1) A formal entity or product, 2) a process of creation, and 3) a process of reception. The third category represents a form of intertextuality, the adaptations as “palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation” (Hutcheon, p. 9).

Within the field of opera studies the most elaborate analysis so far is Michael Halliwell’s discussion of the relations of opera and the novel.<sup>5</sup> Other works that deserve mention are Gary Schmidgall’s *Literature as Opera* and Herbert Lindenberger’s *Opera. The Extravagant Art*.<sup>6</sup> A Librettology or libretto study is another area where the relationship between the libretto and its source text is studied. Patrick J. Smith, Ulrich Weisstein, and Albert Gier have made significant contributions in this field. In the following I intend to profit from their results.<sup>7</sup>

In the process of being adapted into the opera *La Fanciulla* the text of *The Girl of the Golden West* has undergone the usual drastic compression. In spite of these cuts, a summary of the content of Belasco’s source text and Puccini’s operatic adaptation have much in common. One scene has been altered and moved by Puccini from the fifth act of the drama to the first act of the opera. The composer also made up the scene with the manhunt at the end and invented the final scene where the heroine Minnie rescues her love, Dick Johnson, from death by hanging. Still, the plots look very much the same. When it comes to a closer examination there are – of course – many differences between text and adaptation.

Belasco’s play takes place in the harsh environment of a mining camp in the Sierra Nevada in 1849. Lawlessness and primitive passions rule. Drinking and gambling are the only distractions enjoyed by these lonely men far from home. The girl Minnie is the owner of The Polka saloon where the miners gather to listen to the minstrel singer, to drink and to play cards. They adore her and do whatever she tells them.

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Halliwell: *Opera and the Novel. The Case of Henry James*, Walter Bernhart (ed.), Amsterdam 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Gary Schmidgall: *Literature as Opera*, New York 1977. Herbert Lindenberger: *Opera. The Extravagant Art*, Ithaca, New York 1984.

<sup>7</sup> Patrick J. Smith: *The Tenth Muse. A Historical Study of the Opera Libretto*, New York 1970. Ulrich Weisstein (ed.): *The Essence of Opera*, London 1964. Albert Gier: *Das Libretto. Theorie und Geschichte einer musikoliterarischen Gattung*, Darmstadt 1998.



## Naturalism and Opera

The rude, naturalistic language is a characteristic feature of *The Girl of the Golden West*. Belasco uses idiomatic spelling to convey an impression of the base language spoken within the mining camp. Even though the many rude expressions have been translated into Italian in the libretto, it has not been possible to render the idiom of the miners, the Mexican-Americans, or the Indians in a really credible manner.

It is possible to preserve the realism of the drama in the discourse of the libretto, but when music is added, the crude atmosphere becomes somewhat smoother. As Herbert Lindenberger has pointed out, opera tends to elevate its subject. This raises the question of textual fidelity, so often brought up for discussion in film criticism. At plot level, Puccini and his librettist are true to the original, but where language is concerned they are not. "Realism does not come naturally to opera," as Peter Conrad says.<sup>8</sup> In film criticism, the discussion of fidelity has often been patronizing, reflecting the opposition between high and low culture. Antagonism between literature and opera similar to that between literature and film does not exist, at least not today. Therefore, the notion of fidelity seems less appropriate in a discussion of operatic adaptations. To quote Robert Stam, "crucial to any discussion of adaptation is the question of media specificity. [...] Are some stories 'naturally' better suited to some media rather than others?" (Stam, p. 16) Such a question is more relevant to the discussion of operatic adaptation. *The Girl of the Golden West* is in many respects a naturalistic drama, and it is obvious that opera has its limits when it comes to naturalistic representation. When studying the transformation of Belasco's drama into opera it is necessary to take into account the generic conventions of opera and how opera tells a story. Fidelity in operatic adaptation is literally impossible. An operatic adaptation is by its very essence different and creates, in artistic terms, a new original work due to the intermedial transformation involved.

## *La fanciulla del West* and Opera's Ability to Narrate

The success of Puccini's previous operas rested upon his sense for effective musical theatre, beautiful melodies, and emotional strength. With *La Fanciulla del West* he chose a more or less seamless form, resembling the techniques of Wagner, late Verdi and Debussy. As compared to *La Bohème* or *Madame Butterfly* the reduction of arias and other closed numbers is striking. What the composer has tried to achieve is "natural" musical declamation more or less reminiscent of the dialogue of spoken drama.

In spite of this reduction, there are a few closed numbers. Two contrasting moods are displayed in the arias by the sheriff Rance and by Minnie in the first act. One follows immediately after the other. The robber Ramerrez, disguised as Mr. Dick

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<sup>8</sup> Peter Conrad: *A Song of Love and Death. The Meaning of Opera*, New York 1987, p. 1986.

Johnson from Sacramento, has only one full-length aria, “Ch’ella mi creda.” Other closed numbers are more distinctly integrated into the plot. In the beginning of the first act of *La Fanciulla*, in the exposition, a camp singer, Jack Wallace, appears with his guitar and sings a sentimental song about the old folks at home. While he sings, the harpist of the orchestra is playing an arpeggio. The strings of the harp are prepared with paper in order to damp the resonance and make the sound more guitar-like. A literal song, dance or performance within the operatic narrative is a common phenomenon throughout the history of opera. This is, as Lindenberger puts it, an attempt to “guarantee that music ‘refers’” (Lindenberger, p. 139). Carolyn Abbate has named this “phenomenal” music, in contrast to “noumenal” music.<sup>9</sup> Jack Wallace’s song is the only number of this kind in *La Fanciulla*.

American folk music plays an important part in Belasco’s *The Girl of the Golden West*. “He brushed aside the conventional theatre orchestra and put in its place the concertina, banjo and bones.”<sup>10</sup> Puccini has taken advantage of this but at the same time brought his own practice into the foreground. As in *Madame Butterfly*, and later in *Turandot*, there are elements of quasi-authentic music in *La Fanciulla*. In the short prelude a syncopated cake walk melody is heard. This theme is repeated several times throughout the opera. During the exposition at the Polka saloon the orchestra is playing the theme while the men are playing cards. Now and then they repeat the words “Dooda, dooda, dooda, day.” This is a reference to one of the songs in Belasco’s play: The famous “Camptown Races”, with its even more famous refrain “Dooda, dooda, day.” Thematically, this song is associated with what the men are doing at the saloon: winning or losing money. Since the cake walk-theme repeatedly is heard while the scene is laid in the Polka saloon, it becomes a *leitmotif* related to this environment.

In opera, the meaning is provided both by the words and the music. The narrative voice of the orchestra plays an important role in *La Fanciulla*, as in all Puccini’s operas. There are several other leitmotifs or reminiscence motifs. For example, Dick Johnson, alias the road agent Ramerrez and his Mexican “greasers,” are musically identified by a Spanish bolero. Musical mimesis occurs when the pony express arrives and the sound of clapping horse hoofs is heard from the orchestra. During the decisive card game, when Minnie and the sheriff Rance are playing for the wounded Johnson, an ostinato indicates the sound of an agitated heartbeat. Another recurring musical device is the whole-tone scale, often used to signify something dangerous or threatening, quite often in connection with the sheriff. The tritone interval is heard whenever the composer wants to convey an experience of pain or grief. The meaning

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<sup>9</sup> Carolyn Abbate: *Unsung Voices. Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century*, Princeton 1991, p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> David Belasco: *Six Plays. Madame Butterfly. Du Barry. The Darling of the Gods. Adrea. The Girl of the Golden West. The Return of Peter Grimm*, with an introduction by the author and notes by Montrose J. Moses, Boston 1928, p. 306.

of the leitmotifs is coded for this particular opera, and must be interpreted within context, while the mimetic themes can be understood more or less by themselves. According to W.J.T. Mitchell, the iconic character of such “ ‘sound images’ is a nonverbal form of ekphrasis. These images (onomatopoetic thundering, studio sound effects) might be said to provoke visual images by metonymy, or customary contiguity.”<sup>11</sup> Mitchell’s argument also holds true of the mimetic sound effects of the operatic orchestra.

### The Mechanics of Narrative in *La fanciulla del West*

In his survey of different approaches to adaptation studies, Robert Stam makes suggestions “for dealing with the narrative, thematic, and stylistic aspects of filmic adaptations of novels” (Stam, p. 31). One of these aspects can easily be applied to such an operatic adaptation as *La Fanciulla del West*. The temporal structure of fiction is an often-discussed question. Gérard Genette’s theory of the mechanics of narrative has, of course, been very influential.<sup>12</sup> In order to determine the relations between story and discourse – “between the events recounted and the manner and the sequence of their telling” (Stam, p. 32) – Genette has identified three principal categories: order, duration, and frequency. The second category, duration, is of particular interest for the study of adaptation and of operatic discourse.

According to Genette, there exist four different relationships concerning duration between story and discourse. *Scene* means that “the narrative discourse time coincides with the imagined story time of the diegesis” (Stam, p. 33). In opera the literal, “phenomenal,” song belongs to this group, for example Jack Wallace’s song in the first act of *La Fanciulla*. *Ellipsis* refers to events of the story that are completely left out in the discourse. In Belasco’s drama, Minnie tells the story of old Brownie who died:

He was lying out in the sun on a pile of clay two weeks ago an’ I guess the only clean thing about him was his soul – an’ he was quittin’ – quittin’ right there on the clay – an’ quittin’ hard... (*Remembering the scene with horror.*) Oh, he died – jest like a dog... you wanted to shoot him to help him along quicker. Before he went, he sez: ‘Girl, give it to my old woman,’ and he – left. She’ll git it. (Belasco, p. 347)

This event is cut in Puccini’s opera. The harsh realism of Minnie’s narrative would not be relevant to the plot-oriented discourse of opera.

The next category, *summary*, is related to ellipsis. Discourse time is less than story

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<sup>11</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell: *Picture Theory. Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, Chicago; London 1994, p. 153.

<sup>12</sup> Gérard Genette: *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method*, Ithaca, New York 1990 (1980).

time. Most of the events of Belasco's play have been transferred into *La Fanciulla*, but in the adaptation they have been made shorter and less elaborate. The fourth group, *pause*, signifies that discourse time lasts longer than story time. This narrative device is typical of and rather unique to the opera genre as a whole, or as Michael Halliwell writes, "Opera [...] tends always to slow down narrative time" (Halliwell, p. 47). Wagnerian opera with its slow pace and endless melody is constantly within this class, while the number opera with its recitatives and arias oscillates between the *scene* and *pause* categories. This is what Lindenberger calls the stop-and-go convention (Lindenberger, p. 62). *La Fanciulla* as a whole employs Genettian *pause* while its source text belongs to Genette's category of *scene*.

The aria is one among several means by which the narrative speed of opera is slowed down. Minnie's first aria, "Laggiù nel Soledad," is a short narrative in which she recalls her happy childhood. The drama text upon which the words of the aria are based goes as follows:

I can see Mother now... fussin' over Father an' pettin' him, an' Father dealin' faro – Ah, but he was square... and me, a kid as little as a kitten, under the table sneakin' chips for candy. Talk about married life! That was a little heaven. I guess everybody's got some remembrance of their mother tucked away. I always see mine at the faro table with her foot snuggled up to Dad's an' the light of lovin' in her eyes. Ah, she was a lady! (Belasco, p. 333)

Some of the lyrics are sung in a vivid parlando in the low or middle range of the soprano's voice. When the narrative moves on to emotionally more aroused content the character of the aria changes. Wide leaps upward and high, sustained phrases are heard. Within this aria both *scene* and *pause* co-exist. A comparison with some of the soprano arias in Puccini's early operas would probably show that the style has changed from *pause* to a combination of *pause* and *scene*.

Musically grounded elements such as high-pitch, repetitive parts, melismas, coloratura, sustained high notes promote the slowness of operatic narrative discourse. A further investigation of the narrative aspects of these features seems like an important task for a more complete understanding of the narrative discourse of opera.

The success of Belasco's play *The Girl of the Golden West*, which had its first evening on Broadway in 1905, was due to vigorous naturalism as regards both language and stage representation. The opening night at The Metropolitan on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1910 of *La Fanciulla del West* was an immense success. This was the first world première ever held at The Metropolitan. The cast was headed by Emmy Destinn (Minnie), Enrico Caruso (Dick Johnson), and Pasquale Amato (Jack Rance). Arturo

Toscanini conducted and Belasco himself was stage director. Puccini received 55 curtain calls.

After this initial triumph, the work was put on at the major opera houses in the United States and Europe. The First World War broke out, and for a long time *La Fanciulla* was not very much heard of, but during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the work has enjoyed a kind of renaissance.

*La Fanciulla* never obtained the esteem of a *Tosca* or a *Turandot*. One reason was the new puccinian mode of lyrical declamation and lack of closed numbers: arias and ensembles. There is only one operatic highlight in this work, the tenor aria “Che’lla mi creda.” Another reason for the restricted success of *La Fanciulla* was the happy ending. The public, used to the tragic destinies of Manon, Mimi, Tosca, and Cio Cio San, did not expect the victory of Minnie in the final scene. One last reason is the expansion of a new medium. During the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the first films set in the Wild West were made, and quite soon Hollywood’s dominance in this field was overwhelming. The presentation of the Wild West in an opera sung in Italian seemed gradually more and more strange.

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## **Intermedial “Visual” Culture**





# Everlasting Agonies: Baudelaire and Goya (on *Les Fleurs du mal*, ‘Duellum’)

Els Jongeneel

## A Metaphysics of Grace

Baudelaire’s masterpiece, *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857), is imbued with images: portraits of women, sketches of social characters, impressions of Paris, dreamlike and visionary images, images of animals, of objects and abstracta. The more astonishing the fact, however, that this volume of poetry comprises a relatively small number of picture-poems.<sup>1</sup> The lack of direct access to the visual arts for the general public at the epoch of Baudelaire only offers a partial explanation for this meagre harvest. As a well-known art-critic, Baudelaire frequently visited the big Parisian art-exhibitions and was acquainted with many artists. Thus he certainly did not lack direct contact with the visual arts.

The scarcity of ekphrastic poems in *Les Fleurs du mal*, I would argue, has to do in the first place with Baudelaire’s aesthetics. Baudelaire considers art a spiritual mode, a ‘surnature’ enabling the artist to escape from earthly spleen and to gain access to higher things, “l’idéal.” Because of its liberating faculty, Baudelaire’s aesthetics,

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<sup>1</sup> The term “picture-poem” is the English equivalent of the German “Bildgedicht.” The Bildgedicht is based on the rhetorical figure of “ekphrasis,” the depiction of a real or fictive work of visual art in literature. See G. Kranz: *Das Bildgedicht* (3 vol.), Köln; Wien 1987. On ekphrasis, see Valerie Robillard and E. Jongeneel (eds.): *Pictures into Words. Theoretical and Descriptive Approaches to Ekphrasis*, Amsterdam 1998. In *Les Fleurs du mal*, all picture-poems refer to real works of art. Among the 162 poems of *Les Fleurs du mal*, only ten are generally recognized as “picture-poems”: 1) “Bohémien en voyage” (on two engravings by Callot); 2) “Le masque” (on a sculpture by Ernest Christophe); 3) “Duellum” (on Goya, “Los caprichos” no. 62); 4) “Une gravure fantastique” (on an engraving by J. Haynes); 5) “Les aveugles” (on an engraving of Brueghel’s “The Parable of the Blind”); 6) “Danse macabre” (on a sculpture by Ernest Christophe); 7) “L’amour et le crâne” (on an engraving by Hendrick Goltzius); 8) “Les plaintes d’un Icare” (on an engraving by Hendrick Goltzius); 9) “Lola de Valence” (on a painting by Manet); 10) “Sur *Le Tasse en prison* d’Eugène Delacroix” (on a lithograph of Delacroix’ painting of the same name).

The last two poems were published in *Les épaves* (1866), a small collection of originally repudiated verse, appended to later editions of *Les Fleurs du mal*. This inventory is based on two leading authorities in Baudelaire-studies: C. Pichois (see his critical notes in Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes I*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Paris 1975) and A. Adam (see his annotations to the Classiques Garnier edition of *Les Fleurs du mal*, Paris 1972). For a detailed essay on the role of the visual arts in *Les Fleurs du mal*, see Jean-Guy Prévost, *Baudelaire. Essai sur la création et l’inspiration poétiques*, Paris 1964. For a short overview of Baudelairean aesthetics in the context of late-Romanticism, see my “‘Bohémien en voyage’: een eigenzinnig beeldgedicht” in M. van Buuren (ed.): *Jullie gaven mij modder, ik heb er goud van gemaakt. Over Charles Baudelaire*, Groningen 1995 (p. 236–265).

according to the literary critic Henri Lemaître, may be seen as a transposition of a “metaphysics of grace.”<sup>2</sup> This does not imply the loss of the poetic self in mystical contemplation. Although he frequently employs a religious vocabulary, Baudelaire never strives for wanderings in heaven. In his poetry everything turns around the “envol,” the moment of escape from earthly misery. Paradoxically however, the sublimation of the envol implies the incessant recording of past sorrow; in his poetry the earth never vanishes from sight.

Thus Baudelaire’s poetry offers a mixture of rationality and spirituality. Art in general, visual art as well as poetry and music, according to Baudelaire, mediates between earth and heaven, between spleen and idéal, between the beast in man and the angel in man. Art provokes curiosity and thanks to the intervening imagination liberates the self of the artist from spleen by means of “envol” and “ascension.” Baudelaire interprets mimesis in terms of poesis: the response to art will always be a new work of art. Significantly Baudelaire condemns sharply contemporary photography and several times rebukes the Horatian adage “ut pictura poesis.”<sup>3</sup> Rejecting realist aesthetics that seeks to subordinate imagination to perception, he abjures ekphrastic imitation and emulation.<sup>4</sup> This explains why Baudelaire does not practise the picture-poem in the strict sense of the word. When he takes a work of art as a source of inspiration for his poetry, he is not in search for a transposition in words of the visual model. On the contrary, he tries to convert themes, forms and colours into a new poem. He manipulates art for the sake of a fascinating, new adventure of the imagination, and among other things uses the apostrophe as an expressive means to patronize the outside world and to gain insight into his inner I. I will comment on this creative process by examining one of the picture-poems in *Les Fleurs du mal*: “Duellum.”

*Baudelaire’s capriccio*

Duellum

Deux guerriers ont couru l’un sur l’autre; leurs armes  
Ont éclaboussé l’air de lueurs et de sang.  
Ces jeux, ces cliquetis du fer sont les vacarmes  
D’une jeunesse en proie à l’amour vagissant.

<sup>2</sup> H. Lemaître: ‘Introduction’ to Baudelaire : *Curiosités esthétiques. L’art romantique*, Paris 1990, p. XIII.

<sup>3</sup> See ‘Le Salon de 1846’ and ‘Le Salon de 1859’ in *Curiosités esthétiques*, p. 115, 313–324.

<sup>4</sup> This does not contradict Baudelaire’s search for the so-called ‘correspondences’ between divergent sensorial impressions. In his poems Baudelaire does not strive in the first place for intermedial effects, such as musicality or visual presence (enargeia). The correspondences are the stimulators of the poet’s imagination.

Les glaives sont brisés! comme notre jeunesse,  
Ma chère! Mais les dents, les ongles acérés,  
Vengent bientôt l'épée et la dague traîtresse,  
– Ô fureur des cœurs mûrs par l'amour ulcérés!

Dans le ravin hanté des chats-pards et des onces  
Nos héros, s'étreignant méchamment, ont roulé,  
Et leur peau fleurira l'aridité des ronces.

– Ce gouffre, c'est l'enfer, de nos amis peuplé!  
Roulons-y sans remords, amazone inhumaine,  
Afin d'éterniser l'ardeur de notre haine!<sup>5</sup>

### The Duel

Two warriors have run one into the other; their weapons  
Have splashed the air with glimmers and with blood.  
This game, this clink of iron is the din  
Of youth preyed upon by keening love.

The swords are broken! Like our youth,  
My dear. But the sharp nails, the teeth gnashing,  
Will avenge the traitor epee and dagger's tooth.  
– O fury of hearts ripe with ulcers of passion!

In the haunted ravine where ocelots and snow leopards gambol  
Our heroes, in seizures of wickedness, have rolled,  
And their pelts will be flowers to decorate the brambles.

– This gulch, this is hell, with our friends it is peopled!  
Roll in it without remorse, inhuman amazone  
So that the ardor of our hatred is never gone.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ch. Baudelaire: *Les Fleurs du mal*, éd. Classiques Garnier, Paris 1961 (1857), p. 39; 40.

<sup>6</sup> Ch. Baudelaire: *Les Fleurs du mal*, éd. Classiques Garnier, Paris 1961 (1857), p. 39; 40. Trans. W.A. Sigler: *The Flowers of Sickness and Evil by Charles Baudelaire*, <http://home.carolina.rr.com/alienfamily/35.thm> (2000–02–06).

“Duellum” is part of “Spleen et idéal,” the first and largest section of *Les Fleurs du mal*. In this section Baudelaire most clearly expresses his ideas on what he calls in Pascalian terms the “double postulation of man,” the dualism in mankind of beast and angel, as a means to escape from spleen. In “Duellum” Baudelaire obviously exploits the beast as it manifests itself in the most fundamental of human relations, love. He therefore has chosen as his model one of the “Caprichos,” a series of 80 subtitled etchings published in 1799 by the Spanish painter Francisco de Goya.

With his sketches, Goya intended to ‘banish pernicious superstition by giving a good testimony of truth,’ according to the subtitle of the first image of the series. As a committed artist working in a period of transition between Enlightenment and Romanticism, Goya wanted to demonstrate what happens when reason is trampled underfoot by human follies and corrupt social customs. In his “Caprichos,” he improvises on the social caricature characteristic of the period (Hogarth, Gillray). He also gives free reign to his satirical vein by means of subtitled comments or by inscriptions in handwritten style.

Actually the “Caprichos” do satirize social abuses of various kinds, such as magic and witchcraft, prostitution and the giving in marriage of young girls, lamentable education and the spoiling of children, charlatanry, the debauchery of the clergy, the fatuousness of nobility, the practices of daubers and the ridiculous demeanour of mob orators. Meanwhile the etchings breathe a dreamlike atmosphere of fantasy and sometimes even of horror (Baudelaire calls them the “débauches du rêve,” “les hyperboles de l’hallucination”). They announce the romanticist preoccupation with the fantastic products of the mind, like in the “Capricho” no. 43 (“Dreams”) for example, that was originally meant by Goya as the frontispiece of the whole series (fig. 1). The fabulous animals surrounding the dreamer represent the chimaeras born of his fantasy.

Goya’s etchings belong to the capriccio genre which originated in 16<sup>th</sup> century Italy and was based on improvisation in music, literature and the visual arts. It became very popular during Romanticism. In the capriccio the artist follows his own fantasy, in defiance of conventional artistic schemata. Originally the musical capriccio consisted of an instrumental improvisation on existing musical styles and motifs. Later on it developed into a free musical form without pre-existing model. In literature too we encounter the capriccioso improvisation, such as E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *Prinzessin Brambilla. Ein Capriccio nach Jakob Callots Manier* (1820), and Aloysius Bertrand’s *Gaspard de la Nuit – fantaisies à la manière de Rembrandt* (1842). These are fantasies or reveries that often take a work of art as starting point and use this as a structural framework. In the visual arts, 18<sup>th</sup> century Venetian painting and engraving offer striking examples (Piranesi, Tiepolo, Canaletto).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> ‘Quelques caricaturistes étrangers’ in *Curiosités Esthétiques*, p. 297 (my translation).

<sup>8</sup> See Ekkehard Mai (ed.): *Das Capriccio als Kunstprinzip. Zur Vorgeschichte der Moderne von Arcimboldo und Callot bis Tiepolo und Goya. Malerei-Zeichnung-Graphik*, Milan 1996. On the literary capriccio,



Fig. 1. Francisco José de Goya, “Capricho” no. 43 (“Dreams”), 1796–1797. Etching, burnished aquatint, and burin. First edition, 1799

Baudelaire became acquainted with Goya’s etchings thanks to Delacroix who owned some “Caprichos,” and with the help of the author friend Théophile Gautier, who wrote an article on Goya.<sup>9</sup> Moreover he visited the Musée espagnol founded by Louis-Philippe in 1838, where twelve of Goya’s etchings were exhibited. In his essay “Quelques caricaturistes étrangers” that appeared in the same year as *Les Fleurs du mal*, Baudelaire gives a short description of the plate no. 62 (fig. 2) which he has chosen as a starting point for “Duellum,” one of the darkest and most terrifying caprices indeed:

Light and darkness play within these grotesque horrors. [...] One [plate] represents a fantastic landscape, a mixture of clouds and rocks. Is it an unknown and remote corner of Sierra? A specimen of chaos?

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see *ibid.*, the contribution by Günter Oesterle, “Das Capriccio in der Literatur,” (p. 187–191).

<sup>9</sup> Published in 1842 in *Cabinet de l’Amateur*, Vol. I, p. 337 sqq.

There, in the midst of that abominable scene, a heavy fight is taking place between two witches suspended in the air. One is sitting on the other; she is mugging her, she is breaking her. The two monsters are rolling through the dark atmosphere. Their faces express the entire hideousness, moral abjection and all vices that the human mind can conceive of; their faces stand midway between man and beast, according to an incomprehensible procedure frequently applied by the artist.<sup>10</sup>

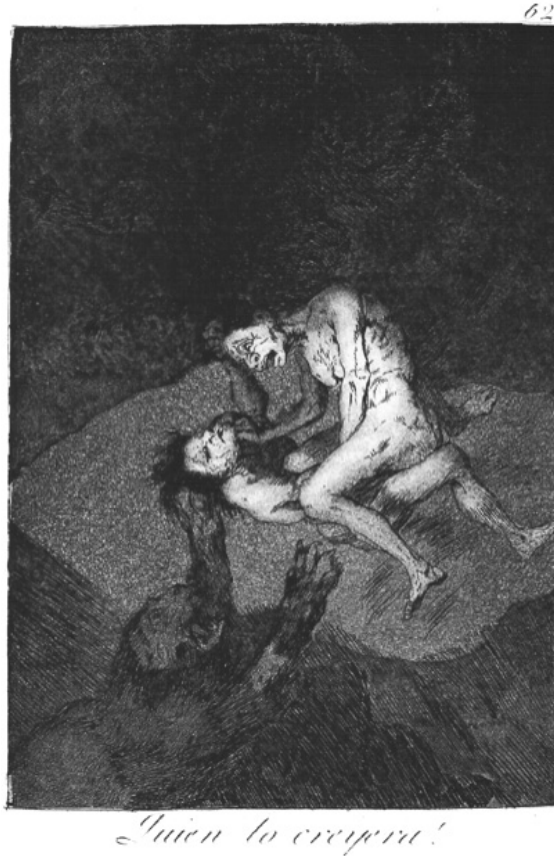


Fig. 2. Francisco José de Goya, *Who would have thought it!*, “Capricho” no. 62: (“Quien lo creyera!”), 1796–1797. Etching, burnished aquatint, and burin. First edition, 1799

Strangely enough, Baudelaire does not mention here the beast of prey beneath, whose claws are touching the head of the overmastered witch, ready to drag her and her torturer into the ravine. He does not quote either the ironic subtitle, “Who would have thought it!,” a cynic comment on human relationships. The abyssal monster makes one think of the chimerical animals escaping from the dreamer’s head in the

<sup>10</sup> ‘Quelques caricaturistes étrangers,’ p. 297 (my translation).

“Capricho” no. 43 quoted above, and thus may connote a fantastic context. Indeed, Goya’s allegorizing commentary on “Capricho” no. 62 is suggesting a non-realistic interpretation: “See here is a terrible quarrel as to which of the two is more of a witch. Who would have thought that the screechy one and the grizzly one would tear each other’s hair in this way? Friendship is the daughter of virtue. Villains may be accomplices but not friends.”<sup>11</sup> Whereas by means of the subtitle Goya still gives human behaviour the benefit of the doubt, Baudelaire makes it his own by rejecting the fantastic and by converting the image into a hideous setting of love-making: “This gulch, this is hell ... roll in it without remorse” (ll. 12, 14).

Goya’s witches-fight constitutes a rather provocative picture, because it represents a fall. The pictured fall mirrors the paradoxical nature of the figurative still-moment, an isolated instant in a sequence of events. This stirred flash of horror cries for a story and Baudelaire, fascinated by its enigmatic appeal, has taken up the challenge, by metaphorising and metamorphosing Goya’s nightmarish scene into a “flower of evil,” the battle of love-making, a battle fought by youngsters as well as mature lovers.

“Duellum” is part of a cycle of love-poems in the second part of the section “Spleen et idéal.” The Latin title “Duellum” refers to the archetypical character of the scene. It combines the private atmosphere of the poem, rendered by the apostrophe to the “amazone,” the current epithet for the beloved Jeanne Duval, with human behaviour in general. The allegorical setting is reinforced by the persistent use of definite articles and of metonymy in the second stanza, and by the recurrent interpretative explanations throughout the poem (of the type: a equals b, “Ces jeux ... sont les vacarmes” l. 3, “Ce gouffre, c’est l’enfer” l. 12, “les glaives sont ... comme notre jeunesse,” l. 5).

As most picture-poets, Baudelaire integrates the here and now of the picture into a temporal sequence: in the first stanza, he stages the beginning of the battle with soldiers and arms – “deux guerriers ont couru l’un sur l’autre” – in the second stanza, he represents the here and now of the picture, the heavy battering by the two adversaries, in the third he interrupts the still-moment and lets the two fighters tumble into the abyss, in the last he prepares himself to follow them together with his beloved.

The poem tells the story of an intensifying battle: first the innocent sexual activity of young lovers, then the bestiality of mature lovers torturing each other, finally a desperate and never-ending ardour and hatred. As in other love-poems in *Les Fleurs du mal* (“De profundis clamavi,” “Le vampire,” “Sed non satiata,” “Tu mettrais l’univers entier dans ta ruelle”), Baudelaire represents the tenacious battle of love as a heavy fight, woman as a cruel machine, an implacable animal, a vampire using teeth

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<sup>11</sup> Tomás Harris: *Goya, Engravings and Lithographs, Vol. II*, catalogue raisonné, San Francisco 1983, p. 139.

and nails,<sup>12</sup> and even the devil himself,<sup>13</sup> her eyes as swords, her bed as hell. Moreover, we have to do here with one of the most pessimistic love-poems of *Les Fleurs du mal*. In contrast with other poems, the erotic relationship ends in a cynic resignation (“my dear”) and a desperate desire for intoxication. Thus Baudelaire appropriates Goya’s capriccio by converting it into his own cynic vision of love. He translates the conflict that is represented into a degenerated erotic combat. He sonorizes the image, he narrativizes it, and makes it familiar to himself and to the apostrophized beloved. He voids the model of its contents and transforms it into new scenery with new instruments and creatures (weapons, brambles, several monsters).

However, Baudelaire’s ekphrastic interpretation of the engraving is not only a moralistic response to Goya about human love, but an aesthetic reaction as well. Love figures in *Les Fleurs du mal* in the first place as a possibility of what Baudelaire calls “l’envol” (the flight), an expedient to escape from spleen. Eager to free himself from ennui and mediocrity, the lyrical I experiments the bestial as well as the angelic way. In “Duellum” obviously bestiality reigns. In order to liberate himself from spleen and ennui, the I strives for the new and the unexplored and therefore is constantly in search of a provocation, of a crossing of boundaries, in this case by experimenting even more cruel ways of lovemaking. Cynically “Et leur peau fleurira l’aridité des ronces” (l. 11) constitutes the only positive line of the poem. The horror of the skinned pelts sticking to the brambles of the gulch<sup>14</sup> is slightly attenuated by the blossoming metaphor, which in *Les Fleurs du mal* generally connotes the success of poetic “envol.”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> See for example ‘Causerie’ (p. 61):

[...]  
 Ta main se glisse en vain sur mon sein qui se pâme;  
 Ce qu’elle cherche, amie, est un lieu saccagé  
 Par la griffe et la dent féroce de la femme.  
 Ne cherchez plus mon coeur; les bêtes l’ont mangé.  
 Mon coeur est un palais flétri par la cohue;  
 On s’y soûle, on s’y tue, on s’y prend aux cheveux!  
 [...]

Your hand gropes in vain upon my swooning breast;  
 What it seeks in that place, my friend, has been plundered  
 By the claw and the ferocious tooth of woman.  
 Look no longer for my heart; the beasts have eaten it.  
 My heart is a palace defiled by the mob,  
 A place of drunkenness, murder, hair-pulling cat fights!

<sup>13</sup> See “Le vampire” (p. 37), and the last line of “Le possédé” (p. 42): “O mon cher Belzébuth, je t’adore.”

<sup>14</sup> One could also interpret this line in a figural way: the pelts of the lovers look like flowers in the midst of the naked brambles. For an analogous metaphor of things stuck to prickly objects, see “Je te donne ces vers” (p. 45): “Ta mémoire ... reste comme pendue à mes rimes hautaines.”

<sup>15</sup> See for example “Bohémiens en voyage,” p. 21: “Cybèle, qui les aime, augmente ses verdurees, Fait couler le rocher et fleurir le désert” [in this poem the bohemians are a metaphor of the poet].



The final invitation addressed to the beloved, “Roulons-y sans remords,” refers in Baudelaire to the restless, transgressive search for the “exotic” that we have already mentioned. Like the other French Symbolists somewhat later, Baudelaire frequently employs a religious vocabulary for his aesthetic experiments. The religious term “remorse” designates commonly, in *Les Fleurs du mal*, the suffering in the prison of spleen.<sup>16</sup> Whereas hell is associated with remorse and grinding of teeth, Baudelaire devises an insouciant dwelling on the battleground of hell. The oxymoron underlines the paradox of the infernal paradise that Baudelaire is projecting in his poem. This stepping into the picture is a rather modern way of responding to art. It simulates a change of diegetic level that mirrors Baudelaire’s conception of art as springboard toward a new aesthetic (and moral) experience. Remarkably the self-made scenery is fixated as a *perpetuum mobile* in the last line of the sonnet. One could interpret this poetic solution by Baudelaire as a genial transposition of the paradox expressed by Goya’s etching, the paradox of the still-moment of a fall. Meanwhile one should also take into account that Baudelaire’s aesthetics do not admit the stasis of the image. On the contrary, they demand for a restless transcendence, the unknown spot having become familiar and therefore expelling the I again and again toward other unexplored regions.

The ekphrastic translation of the engraving consists of a progressive appropriation of the image by means of a definitional and constative style that we encounter also in other non-ekphrastic Baudelarian poems: “Deux guerriers ont couru”... “leurs armes ont éclaboussé”... “Ces jeux ... sont les vacarmes” “Les glaives sont brisés”, “Ce gouffre, c’est l’enfer.” Moreover, the decryption of the Goyan figures turns out to be a kind of familiarizing presentation: the anonymous adversaries are successively designated as ‘two warriors,’ ‘our heroes’ and ‘our friends.’ Possessive and familiarizing too is the use of the apostrophe. The I calls the ‘amazon’ as a witness of the event that he is staging. The apostrophe creates an ironic distance as well as an intimacy (“ma chère,” l. 6, sounds rather colloquial) regarding the events evoked within the here and now of the poem, and as such exceeds the ekphrastic description of Goya’s etching.<sup>17</sup> Many poems in *Les Fleurs du mal* are apostrophic. Baudelaire uses the apostrophe as a means to conquer the extraneous and to integrate it into his own poetic programme.

Not only the beastly fight but also the new existential scenery that Baudelaire creates out of Goya’s horror scene reminds one of other Baudelairian infernal asylums. The predators refer to human vices, in *Les Fleurs du mal* (one could interpret ‘de nos amis peuplé,’ l. 12, as ‘peopled with the two warriors with whom we are familiar’ as

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<sup>16</sup> See “L’irréparable,” p. 60: “Connais-tu le Remords, aux traits empoisonnés, A qui notre cœur sert de cible?” and “Moesta et errabunda,” p. 69: ‘...loin des remords, des crimes, des douleurs, Emporte-moi, wagon, enlève-moi, frégate.’

<sup>17</sup> On the role of the apostrophe in lyrics, see Jonathan Culler: *The Pursuit of Signs*, London 1981 (p. 135–154).

well as ‘peopled with our familiar monsters’ – the second interpretation is underlined by the synonymy of ‘hanté’ l. 9 and ‘peuplé’ l. 12). The sterile ravine full of brambles connotes the misery of the state of melancholy and spleen (see also ‘De profundis clamavi’).

More than on visual imagery, Baudelaire concentrates on acoustic effects. “Duellum” is extremely rich in assonances and alliterations. The sonority of the verses is enhanced by onomatopoeia (“cliquetis,” “vagissant”), by inversions of sounds (“fureur des coeurs mûrs,” “fleurira l’aridité”) and by a vocabulary containing repetitive vowels (“vacarmes,” “acérés,” “traîtresse,” “ulcérés,” “chats-pards,” “aridité,” “amazonne”). In the sextet the echoes of the void of hell are heard thanks to a great number of nasals (“ravin,” “hanté,” “onces,” “s’étreignant méchamment ont,” “ronce,” “l’enfer,” “roulons,” “afin”). Prosody is more irregular here than in other Baudelairean sonnets. The tenacious fight is rendered by several enjambments that disturb the regular cadence of the alexandrine (ll.1/2, 3/4, 5/6, 6/7, 9/10). Moreover the punctuation (the semicolon in l.1, the dashes in ll. 8 and 12) does not fit the straightforward metre of the sonnet, but rather connotes the emotive and irregular style of the prose text. Obviously, Baudelaire is constructing ‘on the spot’ a new imaginary place out of Goya’s image. His is a construction in progress that comes to life thanks to the expressivity of poetic language.

Thus “Duellum” manifests the transition from representation to expression which takes place in literature in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>18</sup> Because of the autonomization of the arts that starts with Romanticism, literary language no longer gives way to the object represented, but more and more offers expressive alternatives which make the literary ‘substitute’ of reality more opaque. Meanwhile the literary text opens up new ways for the imagination. Baudelaire’s picture-poems exemplify the symbolist way in which he transforms reality into a new imaginative world, a world in which he succeeds to survive. This is not a spiritual world – Baudelaire is not a metaphysical poet, nor are the French Symbolists who claim him as their great predecessor. It is an infernal or a celestial elsewhere that perspectivizes the here and now of daily life, its emotions and anxieties.

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<sup>18</sup> On this important development in Western literature, see Jacques Rancière: *La parole muette*, Paris 1998.

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# Albert Camus' *L'Étranger* Revisited by Illustrators: Visual Artists and Literariness

*Sonia Lagerwall*

Prelude. From Markus Raetz's anamorphoses to literary reading

Springtime 2006. A retrospective of Markus Raetz's work at the Carré d'Art in Nîmes, France. Raetz is a Swiss artist fascinated with the principle of anamorphosis and the way the spectator's gaze and movement transform the work. Many of his pieces incorporate verbal elements, expanding the anamorphic operation to the realm of reading texts as well. On a plinth opposite a mirror are some fragile 'sculptures.' They form the English word "SAME." In the mirror reflecting them we again read: "SAME." As the visitor walks around the plinth reading, the word and its reflection stay unchanged.

A few steps away, on a different wall, there is another group of 'sculptures.' Here the word reads "TOUT." This time, however, the French word is metamorphosed as the visitor passes: "TOUT" changes into "RIEN"; "everything" becomes "nothing."

The two pieces – one radically resisting transformation under the eye of the observer, the other just as radically emphasizing the change brought about by this gaze – deal with the question of interpretation in art in a form which allows the interrogation to encompass both visual and verbal works. So let us heed the invitation and for a moment imagine what Raetz's pieces may suggest if we make them deal with verbal art and literary reading. Which of the two pieces comes closer to illustrating what happens to the literary text when it is being read? Is it the first – in which the word reads "SAME" regardless of the observer moving around it, suggesting that the text has a fixed meaning inscribed within which stays unaffected by the reader's passage? Or is it the second – where the visitor participates so strongly in the work of art that she transforms it, her passage altering the text to the point where the "TOUT" may literally come to read "RIEN"?

Raetz's pieces could serve, as it were, to illustrate two extremist understandings of how meaning arises in literary texts. One, belonging mainly to the first half of the twentieth century and the schools of New Criticism and early Structuralism, states that meaning is a function of the text alone. The other, gaining momentum in the 1980's through reader-response critics like Stanley Fish, argues instead that meaning is what *a reader* projects onto a text. According to the former stance the textual structures are solely determinant and the reader pole is of no pertinence.

The latter stance, in turn, makes the individual reader the measure of all things and even questions the relevance of speaking of the text as an object, given the multiple responses the text may give rise to.

In this article I wish to defend neither of the stances described above but an intermediary position, arguing with reception theorists like Wolfgang Iser and Umberto Eco that literary reading is rather to be conceived as an *interaction* between the text and the reader.<sup>1</sup> And it is by looking at painters' readings of literary texts that I wish to address the issue of reception. I am interested in the impact that illustrations may have on the reader's perception of the aesthetic qualities of a literary text. If literature is to have the estranging potential that the Russian Formalists saw in it, if it is to challenge our perception of the world through the deautomatization<sup>2</sup> of the familiar, the text must resist the reader's drive to apply an overly subjective reading and yet still solicit the reader's personal engagement. When a novel is illustrated, another reader interposes him/herself between the text and ourselves: in many respects, illustrating a text means nothing less than interpreting it. The question I want to examine here, however, is to what extent the work of an illustrator can be understood in the sense that Roland Barthes' gave the term interpreting – serving not to delimit textual meaning but, on the contrary, to highlight the plural of the text and to open up *multiple ways of reading it*: “Interpréter un texte, ce n'est pas lui donner un sens (plus ou moins fondé, plus ou moins libre), c'est au contraire apprécier de quel pluriel il est fait.”<sup>3</sup>

Edward Hodnett observes that not only the choices of “aspects of text to illustrate” but also the illustrator's “medium, the techniques of reproduction of the illustrations, and the format of the book” are parameters which will affect our reading of the illustrated narrative.<sup>4</sup> Hans Lund reminds us that the visual medium has its own established conventions which the artist may exploit in elaborating the designs.<sup>5</sup> According to the reception theorist Wolfgang Iser, the reading of a verbal text is informed by textual strategies whose function it is to guide readers in their construction of meaning. Such strategies become perceptible for instance through the writer's choice of narrative techniques (Iser, p. 87). When illustration is added to a narrative, will the medium specificities of the visuals diminish the impact of such verbal strategies and undo the rhetorics of the text?

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<sup>1</sup> Wolfgang Iser: *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, Baltimore; London 1980 (1978); Umberto Eco: *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*, Bloomington 1979.

<sup>2</sup> Victor Shklovsky: “Art as Technique” in David Lodge (ed.): *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, London 1988 (p. 16–30), p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Roland Barthes: *S/Z*, Paris 1970, p. 11. In Richard Miller's English translation, the passage reads: “To interpret a text is not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what *plural* constitutes it,” Roland Barthes: *S/Z*, Oxford 1990, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Hodnett: *Image and Text. Studies in the Illustration of English Literature*, London 1982, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Hans Lund: “Illustration” in Hans Lund (ed.): *Intermedialitet. Ord, bild och ton i samspel*, Lund 2002 (p. 55–62), p. 59–60.

Using two illustrated editions of Albert Camus' novel *L'Étranger* as my cases in point, I want to suggest that the opposite could, actually, be possible; I will consider the illustrations of visual artists as a means of potentially strengthening the textual rhetorics of narratives. I will argue that a painter's images may reinforce certain aesthetic qualities of the text and thereby help to maintain a balance between the text's rights and the reader's rights.

### Literariness and Genre

To understand reading as an *interaction* implies that one posits the existence of textual strategies inscribed into the text, which may influence and guide the reading in different directions. Which strategies we are sensitive to as individual readers and actualize in our reading is, however, highly dependent on our personal repertoire, in other words, on our prior reading experiences and our cultural and socio-linguistic identity.

I will postulate that the more clearly we recognize the verbal text as *literature*, as an artifact with aesthetic intentions, the better are the chances that balance may be achieved between the reader pole and the text pole, and that the literary text may exercise its estranging potential. Genre-specific traits may play a certain role here in determining our attitude as readers. The risk that a reader will apply a non-literary reading to a sonnet in its classic Petrarchan form is probably less than for the same reader approaching a modern realistic novel as if it were a *récit factuel*.<sup>6</sup> The form of the sonnet would be imposing enough to alert us to the artistic intentionality of the composition, urging us to apprehend form as significant. In messages where the poetic function is dominant, the reader is directed to the message for its own sake, as Roman Jakobson has argued.<sup>7</sup> The *literariness* of a prose narrative is likely to be less overt.<sup>8</sup> Compared with poetry, the general tendency of the narrative is syntagmatic

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<sup>6</sup> I do not want to imply there is a difference *in nature* between literary and non-literary reading, but rather a difference *in degree*. As Louise Rosenblatt puts it: "the operations that produce the meaning, say, of a scientific report and the operations that evoke a literary work of art [...] are to be understood as representing a continuum rather than an opposition" (p. 1065). Depending on the reader's purpose, the reading stance is either predominantly *effere*nt or *aesthetic*. In what Rosenblatt calls the efferent stance (from the Latin *efferre*, to carry away) the reader's focus is on the utility of reading, on what can be "extracted and retained after the reading event" whereas, in the aesthetic stance, focus is "on what is being lived through during the reading event" (p. 1066–1067). See Louise Rosenblatt: "The Transactional Theory of Reading and Writing" in Robert B. Ruddel, Martha Rapp Ruddel, and Harry Singer (eds.): *Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading*, Newark, Delaware 1992 (p. 1057–1092).

<sup>7</sup> Jakobson's famous definition of the poetic function of language is the following: "The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination." Roman Jakobson: "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics" in Thomas A. Sebeok (ed): *Style in Language*, Cambridge 1960 (p. 350–377), p. 358.

<sup>8</sup> Referring to Jakobson's discussion of the paradigmatic and syntagmatic aspects of language (also known as the metaphoric and metonymic) and their association to poetry and prose respectively, David Lodge rightly observes that, whereas texts written in the metaphoric mode overtly present

rather than paradigmatic; the artfulness of the text can be better concealed in a novel's illusion-making fiction prompting the immersion of the reader more than it solicits a distant reflective attitude. Poetry, Jakobson observed, "is focused upon the sign, and pragmatical prose mainly upon the referent."<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the foregrounded elements through which the composition gives itself away may be less manifest in a first reading of a novel than of a sonnet.

I want to discuss illustrations by visual artists as ways of heightening the 'poetic' aspects of the predominantly syntagmatic narrative. I will argue that, in showing the reader to the text's *artfulness*, a dimension often less overt in a novel than in a poem, the images which illustrate a novel may highlight textual rhetorics and intensify the reader's aesthetic experience of the text. Accordingly, I hope to challenge the idea that artists' illustrations are didactically reductive when applied to longer narrative texts while aesthetically expansive when relative to poetry.<sup>10</sup> Illustration, I believe, is just as capable of foregrounding the complexity of a narrative in emphasizing aspects that we tend to think of as the text's *literariness*.

My scope will be limited to French literature. In order to better contextualize the two illustrated editions of Camus' novel used for the analysis in the final part of this article I will try to give a brief outline of the modern history of French illustration before turning to the two artists' works proper.<sup>11</sup> As one of the most influential books in twentieth century French literature *L'Étranger*, from 1942, has been illustrated quite a few times.<sup>12</sup> It has also been adapted to the screen by Luchino Visconti whose film *Lo Straniero* was presented at the Venice film festival in 1967. The two illustrated editions from 1946 and 1966 which I will look into here are exceptional, not only through the care put into the editions, but also through the number of

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themselves as literature, "literature written in the metonymic mode tends to disguise itself as nonliterature." David Lodge: *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature*, London 1977, p. 93.

<sup>9</sup> Roman Jakobson: "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Linguistic Disturbances" in *Selected Writings II: Word and Language*, The Hague 1971 (p. 239–259), p. 258.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Renée Riese Hubert and Judd D. Hubert: "Reading Gertrude Stein in the Light of the Book Artists" in *Modernism/Modernity*, Vol. 10, No. 4, 2003 (p. 677–704), p. 702: "While abundant mimetic illustrations such as those of nineteenth-century novels prevail upon readers to adopt the point of view of the artists, modern and postmodern graphic commentaries tend to problematize the text and thus to complicate rather than impose an interpretation." While the authors have initially made an interesting statement about artists' illustrations in general: "As a rule, artists, mimetic or other, give close readings of the texts they illustrate and thus have much in common with critics and translators" (p. 702), they here introduce an opposition which seems to insist, among other things, on genre-specific traits. The passage seems to suggest that there is a necessary correlation between the narrative genre and graphics that weaken the text's signifying potential, a correlation which, furthermore, increases proportionally to the number of representational images displayed.

<sup>11</sup> Albert Camus: *L'Étranger*, with etchings by Mayo, Paris 1946; Albert Camus: *L'Étranger*, with original lithographies by Sadequain, Paris: Les Bibliophiles de L'Automobile-Club de France, 1966.

<sup>12</sup> Other illustrators include Edy Legrand, Alexandre Garbell, Bernard Buffet, Alain Korkos, Mireille Berrard, Eduardo Urculo.



images, important enough (twenty-nine in the case of the Mayo edition, thirty-five in the Sadequain edition) to result in visual ‘narratives’ running parallel to the text with which they are in continual dialogue.<sup>13</sup>

### Textual Rhetorics: The Text as Composition

The “primary function of the illustration of literature, Edward Hodnett states, is to realize significant aspects of the text” (Hodnett, p. 13). But what are we to understand by that term? “The most important decision an artist has to make about an illustration is the *moment of choice*,” Hodnett declares, a decision concerning “the precise moment at which, as in a still from a cinema film the action is stopped” (Hodnett, p. 7). The artist must determine “which of the possible moments of choice are the ones that are most significant in terms of contributing to the reader’s understanding of the text and of reinforcing the emotional effects sought by the author” (Hodnett, p. 8). “Ideally, Hodnett concludes, each illustration would reflect and sustain the tone of the work as a whole” (Hodnett, p. 8). Logically, form and content must then be of equal importance to the illustrator’s decisions.

A written text is a material object and reading is consequently always a function of the way the text is presented in print. Hans Lund formulates it in the following way: “[w]riting is a visual medium. It is object-like and static, permanent and surveyable and much more dependent on physical context than speech is.”<sup>14</sup> The book as an object hence imposes on the reader a linear reading and allows the author an important amount of ‘composition,’ by way of textual structure as well as through the *mise-en-page*. As Rudolf Arnheim has observed, the verbal text thus controls the reader’s sequential processing of it to a degree that the visual text cannot.<sup>15</sup>

A reception theorist like Wolfgang Iser stresses that both the material selected for the repertoire of a literary text and the way this material has been horizontally distributed throughout the work is likely to influence how the reader constructs meaning from a narrative (Iser, p. 96). The author’s choices of plot, characters, narrative voice, themes and motifs thus belong to the textual features which may be apprehended as ‘reading directives,’ or textual strategies, guiding the reading in certain directions.<sup>16</sup> If applying narratological concepts instead, with Gérard Genette, we may consider

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<sup>13</sup> Camus’ novel amounts to less than 190 pages. Given that their series of illustrations comprise a minimum of twenty-nine pictures, the two artists have thus been given that “adequate scope” necessary for the illustrator to make “a full contribution as an interpreter of the text,” Hodnett, p. 21.

<sup>14</sup> Hans Lund: “From Epigraph to Iconic Epigram: The Interaction between Buildings and Their Inscriptions in the Urban Space” in Martin Heusser, Claus Clüver, Leo Hoek, and Lauren Weingarden (eds.), *The Pictured Word. Word & Image Interactions 2*, Amsterdam 1998 (p. 325–335), p. 335.

<sup>15</sup> Rudolf Arnheim: “Unity and Diversity of the Arts” in *New Essays on the Psychology of Art*, Berkeley 1986, (p. 65–77), p. 70.

<sup>16</sup> Iser, p. 86: “the strategies organize both the material of the text and the conditions under which that material is to be communicated [...]. [...] the strategies can only offer the reader *possibilities* of organization.”

choices of genre, order, duration, frequency, mode etc.<sup>17</sup>

In discussing films based on novels, Brian McFarlane argues that elements which are relative to the story lend themselves to transfer to a larger extent than do elements relative to discourse, often requiring adaptation within the visual medium.<sup>18</sup> McFarlane's dichotomy is roughly applicable to the case of illustration and narrative as well. As a result of the picture's medium-specific properties it would seem that illustrators depict characters, settings, key scenes etc. with ease, whereas rendering the discursive qualities of the text may cause them some difficulties. Since the discursive qualities are relative to *how* the story is narrated, they are indeed often medium specific. One would hardly be surprised, then, if the visual artist were to focus first and foremost on story content when illustrating a literary narrative, and stress referential dimensions rather than aesthetic ones.

Then again, one might also argue that it would be precisely on *matters of form* that the work of the artist and the work of the writer instantly touch common ground. Hypothetically, the artist's natural interest in *form* and *composition* could predispose him/her to be particularly attentive to the discursive qualities of the text and to the organization of elements within the work which may serve as reading directives. Though not always directly transferable into images, the discursive organization of the text may still play an important role in the decisions and final choices that the illustrating artist makes.<sup>19</sup> In this respect, the pictures may be decisive in directing the attention of the reader to textual composition.

### Illustrators as Readers

As Philippe Kaenel reminds us in *Le Métier de l'illustrateur*, the blanks on the printed pages of a book – the whites of the margins and the gaps between words – are traditionally spaces where the owner of the book, its reader, may inscribe personal marks.<sup>20</sup> Notes, scribbles or other signs of the reader's passage may thus fill in blanks and constitute traces of the act of reading. The same blanks, Kaenel points out, were long the privileged place to put illustrations. This coincidence is worth emphasizing for two reasons: first, because it reminds us that wherever there is an illustration, *a reader* has passed; and, second, because, in the terminology of Wolfgang Iser, the *blanks of the text* metaphorically refer to the places explicitly reserved for the reader's imagination and activity as a co-author. Such blanks are a function both of textual structure – in as much as disconnections between segments have been inscribed into

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<sup>17</sup> Gérard Genette: *Figures III*, Paris 1972.

<sup>18</sup> Brian McFarlane: *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*, Oxford 1996.

<sup>19</sup> In "Structural Isomorphism of Verbal and Visual Art," *Semiotica* I, Mouton 1969 (p. 5–39), B. A. Uspensky discusses a series of examples of "[s]tructural analogies between the composition of literary work and the organization of work of fine art," p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Philippe Kaenel: *Le Métier d'illustrateur 1830–1880: Rodolphe Töpffer, J.-J. Grandville, Gustave Doré*, Paris 1996, p. 318.

the text through ellipses, narrative order, mode etc. –, and of the individual reader's repertoire as this engages with the repertoire of the text (Iser, p. 196–203).

The illustrated narrative is a hybrid and this influences the semantic content of the pictures and determines the artist's work. The images are conceived in order to function as a complement to the text proper, that is, in a joint discourse with the verbal medium, never without it. Although word and image appear *simultaneously* from a reception point of view in a relation of *interference*, it is determining that from a production point of view they appear *consecutively*, to use the terms of Kibédi Varga.<sup>21</sup> As opposed to “collaborative forms” where no medium is primary over the other, the illustrated narrative installs a hierarchy between image and text in so far as the visuals are necessarily secondary to the text in terms of production.<sup>22</sup> Kibédi Varga sums it up in the following observation:

What comes first is necessarily unique; what comes after can be multiplied. One image can be the source of many texts, and one text can inspire many painters. These secondary series can become the objects of comparative study, which makes us aware of the fact that illustration and ekphrasis – in fact, *all* manifestations of subsequent, secondary relations – are just different modes of *interpretation*. The interpreter is never an exact translator; he selects and judges. And this, precisely, happens whenever a poet speaks of a painting or a painter illustrates a poem (Kibédi Varga, p. 44).

Hence, in an illustrated version the iconic code will naturally fill in some textual blanks, just as it may create new places of indeterminacy. Certain textual strategies will necessarily be altered in the illustrated text as compared to the original novel. Hans Lund discusses illustrations in terms of a *rewriting* of the target text, stressing that the images always operate changes in the semantic field of the text.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, he strongly insists on the *dialogical* relationship between interreferring media: “[t]he label influences our reading of the picture. That is obvious. But the contrary is obvious, too: the picture and its context will always influence our reading of the label” (Lund 1998, p. 329). In other words, Camus' text determines the images, but these, in turn, exercise a role on the way readers process the text. An illustrator who decides to highlight textual composition, then, could promote readers' awareness of structure. Such illustrations could maybe be said to be in line with Barthes definition of *interpretation*, in so far as they less impose a meaning on the text than visualize the

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<sup>21</sup> A. Kibédi Varga: “Criteria for describing Word and Image-Relations” in *Poetics Today*, Vol. 10, No. 1, Spring 1989 (p. 31–53), p. 33 and 39.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Jensen Hines: *Collaborative Form. Studies in the Relations of the Arts*, Kent, Ohio 1991.

<sup>23</sup> Hans Lund: *Text as Picture. Studies in the Literary Transformation of Pictures*, trans. Kacke Götrick, Lewiston 1992, p. 25; Hans Lund 2002, p. 58.

text in its singular composition, as a concrete object which proposes to the reader different ways of reading it. The idea that “[o]ne text through its clarity *gives access to another*,” we learn from Wendy Steiner, is intimately linked with the practice of illustration.<sup>24</sup> Steiner stresses the “rootedness of illustration in interpretation and intertextuality” and states: “Hermeneutics and the interartistic comparison may truly be called the sister arts!” (Steiner, p. 141 and p. 21).

If there is to be any sense in discussing pictures in terms of *visualizing literariness*, one should be able to argue that a figurative image, all while concretizing elements of story (an inevitable effect of representational illustration), highlights the character of verbal artifact of the text. Instead of fixing meaning, then, the illustrations should show the reader how the text suggests for meaning to be constructed. For a prose narrative like *L'Étranger* this would mean that the images would underscore the text's potentially *estranging* qualities, ‘estranging’ the text rather than naturalizing it as is often the case with didactic illustration.

“L’illustrateur [...] ne doit voir qu’avec les yeux d’un autre...”<sup>25</sup>

Originally published in 1942, Camus' modern classic was illustrated for the first time in 1946 by the painter Mayo in an edition released by Gallimard/N.R.F presenting a rich series of etchings. The second illustrated volume I want to discuss was published in 1966 by a society of bibliophiles and it comprises a large set of lithographs by Sadequain.<sup>26</sup> In order to gain a better understanding of how these two editions relate to the tradition of modern French illustration, let us begin by looking at how the conception of illustration had evolved in France since the days of the romantic novel.

Illustrated literary works have long occupied an important place in the history of French edition.<sup>27</sup> Gordon N. Ray does not hesitate to call French illustration “the richest in the world” and Antoine Coron reminds us that in France, “since D.-H Kahnweiler at the beginning of the twentieth century, book illustration by painters is inseparable from the most modern literature, in particular from poetry.”<sup>28</sup> The

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<sup>24</sup> Wendy Steiner: *The Colors of Rhetoric*, Chicago; London 1982, p. 141 (my emphasis).

<sup>25</sup> Théophile Gautier cited by Antoine Coron: “The task of the illustrator is to see with somebody else’s eyes” (my translation). Coron: “Trois termes, trois moments: illustrations, livres de peintres, artists’ books” in *Le Livre illustré*, Cahiers de la Serre, No. 19 octobre 1987, Saint-Etienne: École Régionale des Beaux-Arts de Saint-Etienne, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Etching is a technique of engraving in a metal plate, which is subsequently plunged into an acid bath that attacks the selected parts of the plate for the duration of the immersion. Lithography is a printing technique on stone resulting from the repulsion of oil and water. Cf. *L’Atelier du peintre. Dictionnaire des termes techniques*, Paris 1998, p. 96–97 and p. 194–196.

<sup>27</sup> The first illustrated book printed in France was the *Miroir de la rédemption de l’humain lignage*, printed in Lyon by Mathieu Husz in 1478. Cf. Bruno Blasselle: *A pleines pages. Histoire du livre. Vol. I*, Paris 1997, p. 57.

<sup>28</sup> Gordon N. Ray: *The Art of the French Illustrated Book: 1700 to 1914. Volume I*, Ithaca; New York

prestigious tandem of poet/painter and the conception of illustration that goes with it and which has become consecrated through the *livre d'artiste* or *livre de peintre*, constitute but one link, however, in the chain of modern illustrated books in France whose beginning we may retrace to the romantic novel around 1835. If the illustrated narrative is a rarity today, it was the dominating genre in the nineteenth century and held its appeal for both the bibliophile societies and the main publishing houses until at least the beginning of the 1930's.<sup>29</sup>

The nineteenth century was the time of the democratization of reading and of the commercialization of the book in France. Simultaneously with the illustrator's, the publisher's profession was born (Kaenel, p. 318). Images accompanying the texts played an important role in attracting new readerships. Illustration being costly, however, publishers often opted for reissues of the classics rather than risk putting considerable sums into untried titles by contemporary writers (Ray 1982b, p. 248). *Don Quixote*, *Paul et Virginie* or *Gil Blas*, illustrated by popular talented artists like Tony Johannot and Jean Gigoux, are among the most remarkable editions of this era. Contemporary literature in elaborate editions did not come into vogue until the 1870's, when relentless publishers finally succeeded in catching the interest of the bibliophile societies. Having created the first society of bibliophiles back in 1820, these book amateurs had long been concerned only with beautiful rare editions of the classics. Now, limited deluxe editions of contemporary works by authors such as Alphonse Daudet, Théophile Gautier and Émile Zola made them widen their scope considerably.<sup>30</sup> From 1870 onwards a great number of bibliophile societies were created, making texts by contemporary authors rapidly become objects of speculation (Parinet, p. 104). If this collector's zeal gave an important momentum to the book industry, the bibliophiles' conservative choices, however, were not likely to reform the aesthetics of the illustrated book. For that to happen the art dealers themselves had to get involved in publishing.

#### From a Narrative Style to the "illustration parallèle"

Nineteenth-century French book illustration excelled in a predominantly *narrative* style. An illustrator like Louis Morin could state that "Nous ne croyons pas qu'il soit possible d'illustrer un livre plus raisonnablement que par la représentation de ses principales scenes."<sup>31</sup> The "pregnant moment" as Lessing had defined it, pointing

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1982b, p. xiv and Coron, p. 5 (my translation).

<sup>29</sup> Balzac, Flaubert, France, Huysmans, Maupassant, Mérimée and Musset were the authors whose works were most often illustrated in France between 1880-1914, all names which indicate the strong place occupied by narratives. See Gordon N. Ray: *The Art of the French Illustrated Book: 1700 to 1914. Volume II*, Ithaca; New York 1982b, p. 461.

<sup>30</sup> Élisabeth Parinet: *Une Histoire de l'édition à l'époque contemporaine: XIXe-XXe siècle*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, coll. "Points histoire," 2004, p. 104.

<sup>31</sup> Cited in Rolf Söderberg: *French Book Illustration 1880-1905*, Stockholm 1977, p. 151. "We do

back into the story as well as forward to coming events was the principle which guided the illustrator's approach.<sup>32</sup> The graphic artist did not hesitate to work from photographs of costumed models posing in a *tableau vivant* to get the gestures and expressions of the characters right.<sup>33</sup> The pictures, then, were clearly subordinate to the text's subject. Grandville's daring attempt to turn the hierarchy upside down in *Un Autre monde* was way ahead of its time; in his proto-surrealist enterprise from 1844 he had the drawing-pen tell the pencil to kindly stay at home while the pen ventured off on a journey to assemble the images that the pencil was asked to verbally 'illustrate' only on the drawing-pen's return. Twentieth century authors like Michel Butor or Claude Simon have made this 'commenting' practice or 'verbal illustration' by a pencil an important part of their writing activity, proving, if necessary, its literary potential.

In the 1880's, the conception of illustration gradually moved from meaning the "literal reinterpretation" of a text to what Kaenel calls a *decorative* aesthetics (Söderberg, p. 10; Kaenel, p. 316). The "traditional anecdotal manner" of a Tony Johannot or Gustave Doré was rivaled by the decorative style of the likes of Maurice Denis, whose declaration "l'illustration, c'est la décoration du livre" became *le mot d'ordre* for a generation of Symbolist artists such as Carlos Schwabe, Odilon Redon or Art nouveau artists like Eugène Grasset and Alfons Mucha (Söderberg, p. 151; Kaenel, p. 316). The decorative aesthetics of Denis meant the autonomization of the arts in the sense that the pictures freed themselves from the text's subject. The illustrations were to exist "sans servitude du texte, sans exacte correspondance de sujet avec l'écriture" (Kaenel, p. 316).<sup>34</sup> Denis compared them to "une broderie d'arabesques sur les pages, un accompagnement de lignes expressives" (Kaenel, p. 316).<sup>35</sup> And in certain ornamented works of Octave Uzanne the traditional separation between typography and graphic illustration is undone; the deconstruction of the page allows for a perfect interpenetration of verbal and visual elements (Kaenel, p. 306 and 318).

In 1900, Ambroise Vollard, the art dealer for the impressionist painters, published what today has become one of the most famous illustrated books of the modern era, Verlaine's *Parallèlement*, illustrated by Bonnard's lithographs. It was with this title in mind that the critic Clément-Janin forged the term "illustration parallèle"

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not believe there is a more reasonable manner to illustrate a book than to represent its principal scenes" (my translation).

<sup>32</sup> "[P]ainting can only make use of a single instant of an action, and must therefore choose the one, which is most pregnant, and from which what has already taken place, and what is about to follow, can be most easily gathered," Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: *Laocoon. An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. E. C. Beasley, London 1853, p. 102.

<sup>33</sup> Antoine Coron: "Livres de luxe" in Roger Chartier and Henri-Jean Martin (eds.): *Histoire de l'édition française IV*, Paris 1986 (p. 409–437), p. 412.

<sup>34</sup> "Without servitude to the text, without exact correspondence to the verbal subject" (my translation).

<sup>35</sup> "An embroidery of arabesques on the page, an accompaniment of expressive lines" (my translation).

to describe the new fin-de-siècle aesthetics. Instead of being dictated by the text the artist now let himself be inspired by it. Clément-Janin noted that the obvious links between text and image were no longer present in the “illustration parallèle.” Commenting on Mirbeau’s *Le Jardin des Supplices*, illustrated by Rodin, the critic was stunned to find the meeting of verbal and pictorial elements “as random as the encounter between a clock and a bottle of perfume at the bottom of a suitcase” (cited in Söderberg, p. 151; my translation). As Rolf Söderberg puts it: “The paradoxical aim of the new book design seem[ed] to be the expulsion of the illustrative element from book illustration” (Söderberg, p. 151).

The development from the romantic illustrated novel with its *narrative* style to the fin-de-siècle “illustration parallèle” is a considerable one in terms of aesthetics. Also, thanks largely to the authority of the bibliophiles societies the illustrator’s profession met with general respect at the end of the century. Works of contemporary authors were considered worthy of elaborate illustrated editions which became collectors’ items. Modern book illustration had moved from being a means to primarily attract the masses to reading to become a select part of contemporary edition.

### The Twentieth Century: Painters and Poetry

The beginning of the twentieth century was a Golden Age of the French illustrated book, one during which the painters were finally to supersede the traditional illustrators.

When in 1931, after years of continually rising prices on the market for the illustrated book, the speculators’ bubble burst, the crisis affected just about all players involved. As Antoine Coron has pointed out, the editorial landscape of illustration in France was characterized by great heterogeneity. Apart from art dealers such as Ambroise Vollard, D.-H. Kahnweiler, Jeanne Bucher, Christian Zervos – specialized mainly in poetry – there were also many small occasional publishers of illustrated books.<sup>36</sup> Equally important were the big publishing houses like Gallimard/N.R.F – among the leaders in illustrated volumes between 1919–1931 – which had special deluxe collections for such works and still gave an important place to narratives (Coron 1986, p. 417). Last but not least there were the bibliophile societies. The crisis led to many of the small publishers going bankrupt, and even major publishers of literature like Gallimard/N.R.F put their deluxe collections on hold during much of the 1930’s (Coron 1986, p. 417). The 1946 edition of *L’Étranger*, illustrated with etchings by Mayo, is one of the first volumes to be released by Gallimard/N.R.F as the publishing house again begins to invest in illustrated books after a long period on hold (Coron 1986, p. 435).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Joining the group of publishing art dealers were Albert Skira in the 1930’s and Tériade and Aimé Maeght in the 1940’s.

<sup>37</sup> Gallimard/N.R.F’s position as the most prestigious French publisher of belles-lettres is reflected in

The societies of bibliophiles were just about the only ones to remain fairly unaffected by the 1931–1936 crisis. Indifferent to the market since they relied on membership fees, they continued their activity and regained some of the influence they had exercised at the turn of the century before the arrival of the art dealers (Coron 1986, p. 416).<sup>38</sup> Among them was the Société des Bibliophiles de l'Automobile-Club de France, founded in 1929 and the commissioner of our second edition of *L'Étranger*, printed in 1966.<sup>39</sup>

Published within the close interval of twenty years (1946–1966), our two illustrated editions of *L'Étranger* thus inscribe themselves into a history of modern French illustration which, in the course of hundred years only, had moved from a narrative style to book illustration being primarily reserved for poetry. Poetry, we remember from Jakobson, essentially gives priority to the message itself over the referent. Wendy Steiner, in *Colors of Rhetorics*, suggests that modernist literature and painting are indeed characterized by a shift in focus from reference to sign, or rather, from a traditional understanding of representation to one where the text itself becomes emphasized in its concrete dimensions, as an *object* (Steiner, p. 24). In modernism, “[t]he true means of representing reality was not to represent at all, but to create a portion of reality itself. And the way to do so was to stress the properties of the aesthetic media in question, since these are palpable, thinglike” (Steiner, p. 17).<sup>40</sup> To the “significant aspects” which illustrations must realize according to Edward Hodnett one can thus count the discursive organization and structure of a modernist text (Hodnett, p. 13). Given the above outlined history of modern French illustration it would hardly be surprising if the painters chosen to illustrate Albert Camus' avant-garde novel sought to combine representational images with a certain emphasis on concrete literary form.

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the many titles present in the catalogue of Monroe Wheeler's influential exhibition *Modern Painters and Sculptors as Illustrators*, held at the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1936.

<sup>38</sup> From four in 1900 their number had risen to an impressive thirty-four in 1932. Coron 1986, p. 418.

<sup>39</sup> Among the Society's most remarkable volumes is the *Odyssée* illustrated by François-Louis Schmied, an art-deco book commissioned shortly after the Society's founding and considered today to be one of the finest works of its era. The *Odyssée* was one of the last books to come out of Schmied's exceptional one-man art-deco atelier before he was forced to close down in 1933. Cf. Coron 1986, p. 423.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. p. 123: “[...] poetry, in the modernist period at least, stresses phenomenon (the work of art as a thing, an unmediated experience of things, etc.) in order to achieve a higher realism, a more intense experience than the mere reference of science can achieve.” Steiner continues, p. 124: “The poetic function dominates in literature (poetry and fiction); it focuses attention on the linguistic utterance itself (the message) rather than upon its referent, as in communicative language. [...] The fundamental trait of poetic language is its thoroughgoing iconicity.”



## The Two Painters

The Gallimard/N.R.F edition is the only illustrated version of *L'Étranger* to have been published during Camus' lifetime. It followed only four years after the novel's first publication and Camus personally chose his friend Mayo to be the illustrating artist for the volume, printed in 310 copies.<sup>41</sup> The Greek-French painter had begun his career under the influence of Surrealism in the late twenties. Camus and Mayo worked together for the first time in 1944 at the *Théâtre des Mathurins*, when Mayo designed the costumes and the set for Camus' play *Le Malentendu*.<sup>42</sup>

When, exactly twenty years after the Mayo etchings, the Pakistani painter Sadequain was asked to illustrate Camus' novel again, the pictorial rendering could not have been more different. Born into a family of calligraphers in 1930, Sadequain was to become one of Pakistan's most influential painters within his generation.<sup>43</sup> In 1966, the Bibliophile Society's choice fell on Sadequain to illustrate Camus' modern classic. Printed in 150 copies in an in-4° format, the volume alternates a set of thirteen black and white semi-abstract lithographs with twenty-two figurative full-page color lithographs, one of which is a frontispiece.<sup>44</sup> Sadequain's images give a seemingly very different vision of the novel than do the Mayo etchings. Our two illustrated editions hence invite us to make an interesting comparison of two artists' visual renderings of the same literary text.

## *L'Étranger*: The Narrative Stance

Albert Camus' *L'Étranger* tells the story of Meursault, a Pied-Noir in colonized Algeria in the 1930's.<sup>45</sup> In a language which is both highly refined and suggestive of a simple diary, it relates his banal life. Situating the text in the existentialist movement of the time or in a literary tradition of the absurd is highly relevant but cannot answer all

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<sup>41</sup> *Les Peintres Amis d'Albert Camus*, Les Rencontres méditerranéennes Albert Camus Lourmarin, 1994. Catalogue publié avec le concours du Conseil général de Vaucluse, 1994, p. 41.

<sup>42</sup> The same year that he did the etchings for *L'Étranger*, Mayo illustrated a work by another friend, the poet Jacques Prévert: Jacques Prévert and André Verdet: *Histoires*, Paris: Éditions du Pré-aux-Clercs, 1946. Mayo, born as Antoine Malliarakis, also left his marks as a set and costume designer for the theatre and for the cinema of Marcel Carné and Jacques Becker in particular. Cf. Patrick Waldberg; *Mayo*, Milano: Edizioni Annunziata, 1972 and Nikita Malliarakis: *Un peintre et le cinéma*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *Sadequain*, Yunus Said (intr.), Karachi: Pakistan Publications, 1961. The retrospective dedicated to his work at the Mohatta Museum in Karachi in 2002 attracted 85 000 visitors. It was at the *Biennial de Paris* in 1961 that the young painter first caught the attention of the French and European art scenes when he won the first prize in the category of best foreign artist. Cf. <http://www.dawn.com/2003/08/10/local4.htm> (accessed on April 1, 2007)

<sup>44</sup> The copy I have been working with comprises 2 volumes since it includes a suite in which the black and whites are also reproduced separately. An original signed by the artist makes the lithographs amount to 36 in all.

<sup>45</sup> The term Pied-Noir refers to the population of European descent in Algeria.

the questions raised by this enigmatic text. Among its more intriguing aspects, we must clearly count the narrative stance.

Meursault himself tells us his story: how, shortly after his old mother's funeral, he kills an Arab on a beach in Algiers without any apparent motive and is sentenced to death after a parodic trial. As readers, we soon come to realize that Camus' Meursault is a highly unusual narrator. Despite the use of the first person narrative and internal focalization, his discourse is void of true reflections and emotions. Where one would expect the internally focalized discourse to give some insight into the psychology of the narrator it consists instead of detailed descriptions of the concrete, material world and of the way Meursault either interacts with it or perceives it. Leaving out just about every sentimental and psychological dimension, *L'Étranger* radically violates the reader's expectations of what an internally focalized narrative should be. The deviation from the norm is such that Gérard Genette has proposed to consider the stance in *L'Étranger* not as *internally* but as *externally* focalized.<sup>46</sup> Of course, Genette acknowledges that a narrative "taken on by the hero", which nonetheless adopts "the point of view of an (anonymous) external observer incapable not only of knowing the hero's thoughts but also of taking on his perceptual field" is generally "considered incompatible with the logical-semantic norms of narrative discourse." But the critic immediately adds:

What the "linguistic feeling," always one sentence behind, rejects today, it could indeed accept tomorrow under the pressure of stylistic innovation. [...] Cézanne, Debussy, Joyce are full of features that Ingres, Berlioz, and Flaubert would undoubtedly have declared "unacceptable" – and so on. No one knows where the "possibilities," real or theoretical, end, with respect to anything (Genette 1988, p. 126–127).

Highly innovative, the mode and voice in *L'Étranger* may thus be considered to have an estranging quality for readers, whether or not they are familiar with literary conventions. In *The Act of Reading*, Wolfgang Iser suggests that the choices of narrative techniques and devices are essential for the textual strategies which guide our

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<sup>46</sup> Gérard Genette: *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, Ithaca; New York 1988, p. 123–124: "The narrative mode of *L'Étranger* is 'objective' on the 'psychic' level, in the sense that the hero-narrator does not mention his thoughts (if any). It is not 'objective' on the perceptual level, for we cannot say that Meursault is seen 'from the outside,' and even more, the external world and the other characters appear only insofar as (and to the extent that) they enter into his field of perception. [...] In this sense, of course, the mode of [...] *L'Étranger* is, rather internal focalization, and the most accurate overall way of putting it would perhaps be something like 'internal focalization with an almost total paralipsis of thoughts.' Most accurate, but extremely cumbersome [...]. 'Meursault tells what he does and describes what he perceives, but he does not say (not: *what he thinks about it*, but:) *whether he thinks about it*.' That 'situation,' or rather, here, that narrative *stance*, is for the moment the one that best, or least badly, resembles a homodiegetic narrating that is 'neutral', or in external focalization."

reading in certain directions.<sup>47</sup> Camus' obvious break with the logical-semantic norms *and* with literary conventions constitutes what Iser calls a "minus-function", and as such it is an essential part of the novel's literariness.<sup>48</sup> Let us quickly look at how the artists have dealt with the literary categories of voice and mode in Camus' text, critical for the reader's perception of the character Meursault.

If we first turn to the Mayo edition from 1946 (fig. 1–3) we notice an important point of convergence between text and images: the pictures repeat and corroborate the limited focalization chosen by Camus. Each of Mayo's etchings offers what, using a cinematographic term, one might call a 'point-of-view shot': the visual field reveals nothing but what the narrator and main character Meursault sees. That the pictures render *his* vision becomes perfectly clear by way of four of the twenty-nine etchings where we actually see parts of Meursault's body investing the visual field. But the passage between hors-champ and champ is minimal since no more than his hands, feet, shadow, and silhouette in the mirror are visible.<sup>49</sup>

Turning to the Sadequain edition (fig. 4–9) we find that the artist deals with the issue of point of view quite differently. Opting for an omniscient, that is, a non-focalized narrative, Sadequain introduces Meursault into the visual field next to the other characters, thus operating what Genette calls a *defocalization* of the perspective.<sup>50</sup> But if we were to expect an emphasis on the physical reality of Meursault, we have to think again. In a rather consistent manner the pictures relating to the first of the novel's two parts represent the narrator seen from behind and with his head turned in three-quarter profile but void of facial traits.

<sup>47</sup> Iser, p. 87: "The strategies can generally be discerned through the techniques employed in the text – whether they be narrative or poetic."

<sup>48</sup> Iser, p. 207–208: "a literary text [may] not fulfill its traditionally expected functions, but instead use[...] its technique to transform expected functions into 'minus-functions' – which is the deliberate omission of a generic technique – in order to invoke their nonfulfillment in the conscious mind of the reader [...] Modern texts fit these expectations into their communicatory structure in order to transform them. The charge of esotericism often leveled at such texts therefore seems at least partially unjustified, for if the alternative is fulfillment of expectations, literature would, in fact, be totally functionless."

<sup>49</sup> B. A. Uspensky, p. 11, notes that "[s]ince the Renaissance the position of the artist in European fine arts as regards the picture has been, generally speaking, external." And he points out that it was not unusual in "Ancient and Medieval painting" that "the artist located himself inside the work, picturing the world around him," p. 11–12. Compared to the internal perspective offered to us by Mayo, this pre-Renaissance internal position, however, allowed for a vision "as if one saw simultaneously all around oneself," Steiner, p. 62. Commenting on Uspensky's discussion, Steiner makes the following observation: "Interestingly, after the Renaissance, paintings were predominantly limited and therefore subjective views of a scene, even though they were governed by the 'objective laws' of optical perspective; literature, in contrast, could comfortably link the points of view of many characters into a composite fabric of knowledge simply by having the universal access of omniscience. With modernism, the trend seems to have reversed itself. Literature became obsessed with the first-person narrative and the limitations of knowledge implicit in it, whereas painting became much more intent on an omniscient perspective," p. 65–66.

<sup>50</sup> Gerard Genette: *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, Lincoln; Nebraska 1997, p. 284–292.

The pragmatic function of both artists' choice to present a deliberately anonymous character, then, is that Camus' unconventional use of the internal focalization is further emphasized.<sup>51</sup> The images may hence sharpen the reader's awareness of the way the text deautomatizes a familiar device. In doing so, the iconic medium points the reader towards an essential structure within the text.

Though narrated in a style which brings to mind the impressionism of a diary, Meursault's story is meticulously constructed. Poetic principles of composition inform both the structural and the thematic level of the text. In poetry the play of contrasts and parallels between constituent parts is a privileged means to convey significance, we know from Jakobson. This paradigmatic (or *metaphoric*) principle of composition is exploited at all levels of language in poetry, be it at the phonetic, syntactic, semantic or referential level. Sound figures establish phonological coherence, tropes produce analogies between signifieds, parallelism and antithesis can be found in both syntax and thematics. Narrative literary discourse, on the other hand, tends to give precedence to an overall syntagmatic (or *metonymic*) organization, Jakobson argues. He illustrates his point with the nineteenth century realist novel where elements are combined less on the basis of *similitude and opposition* than on the basis of semantic *contiguity*: "Following the path of contiguous relationships, the realist author metonymically digresses from the plot to the atmosphere and from the characters to the setting in space and time" (Jakobson 1971, p. 255).

However, as has been noted by critics like Steiner and Lodge, the metaphorical principle is often emphasized as a means of representation in modernist writing, including in narratives (Steiner, p. 65–66). David Lodge has demonstrated how poetic principles of composition have been particularly fecund for an experimental twentieth-century prose seeking new forms and means of expression (Lodge, p. 93). In the remaining discussion of the two artists' illustrations I will attempt to show how the images can stimulate the reader to examine Camus' text not only as metonymically organized but also as composed according to such metaphoric principles, hence foregrounding the text as an artifact.<sup>52</sup>

The verbal medium is first and foremost linearly experienced by readers. An illustrating artist, on the other hand, may synthesize elements from different parts of the text in the same visual image. This makes illustration particularly well suited to illuminating the equivalences and divergences between textual segments, laying bare Camus' use of poetic principles like the play of contrasts and parallels as a means to convey significance throughout the text (Jakobson 1971, p. 239–259, especially p. 254–259).

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<sup>51</sup> According to the critic Pierre Billard, Camus agreed to an illustrated version on the condition that Meursault was not to be represented. See Pierre Billard: "Face à face Sartre Camus" in *L'Express*, Octobre 23–29, 1967 (p. 114–116), p. 116.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. note 9 and 10.

## The Mayo Edition: Gazes and Bodies

In approaching Camus' novel, Mayo and Sadequain present themselves as artists with very different temperaments and styles. Compared with Sadequain's often expressionist lithographs, the detailed, subtly naturalistic Mayo etchings seem congenial to the objective language of Meursault. The twenty-nine etchings are distributed as follows in the text: the novel's two parts are each preceded by a vignette placed *en-tête* (ex. fig. 1); each of the eleven chapters holds an initial *bandeau* (ex. fig. 2 and 3) as well as a full-page illustration; finally, we find a *cul-de-lampe*, a vignette marking the end of a chapter, in five of the eleven chapters.

We rapidly note that nature, the element with which Meursault is so intimately connected and bestows with such vivid descriptions in the novel, is never a subject matter in its own right in Mayo's pictures. If the water and the sun are not iconically foregrounded in the outdoor scenes, Mayo's generous use of white surfaces, however, plastically evokes the reverberation of the Algerian sun. The elements of water and sun are never isolated from the characters represented in the pictures; nature – harmonious or disharmonious – thus becomes a constitutive part of the human condition.

Adopting the point of view of the narrator, Mayo privileges human subjects within Meursault's field of vision. It is striking that twenty-six out of the twenty-nine etchings deal with human characters contextualized in a scene. The illustrations are thus saturated with the figures, and often probing faces, of the human beings in whose company the reader learns that Meursault repeatedly feels he behaves improperly and is being judged: we meet the staring faces of the elderly people waking in the morgue (fig. 1), the staff at the home for elderly, Meursault's neighbors, his boss (fig. 2), lover Marie (fig. 3), lawyer, the judges, the journalists, the audience at the trial and the prison chaplain. These characters are always rendered at a certain distance from the beholder. In staying close to the temperament of Meursault, Mayo's illustrations help to underscore the detachment of the narrator, all the while stressing the curious gazes of people he engages with. Congenial in tone, the painter's visual transposition thus emphasizes the paradox of a both evasive and all imposing narrator. In having to share Meursault's visual field, the reader/spectator is placed in the position of the character, invited to perceive the world the way he does.

Marie is depicted in five of the etchings and her character is given a particular presence and aura. In perfect consistency with Camus' *mise-en-texte*, we meet her for the first time at the Algiers bathing establishment in an image which conveys her sensuous beauty (fig. 3). The girl who is to become Meursault's lover is shown lying on the float in the water; she is on her back, her right leg pulled up, one hand on her stomach, the other half open alongside her body in an inviting gesture; turning her head to face the spectator, she delivers a radiant smile. The picture has something of a 40's pin up, the girl offering herself to the beholder in a flirty and

self-conscious pose, an impression that is heightened by the slight, yet palpable, plunging perspective that allows the viewer to dominate the figure lying down. The contrast with her final appearance – Mayo last depicts her at the trial, shrunk into a sad black bust waving out of the audience and wearing an unflattering black hat over her hair – is strong and stresses the radical change in Meursault brought about by the imprisonment. This man, whose existence is first and foremost sensuous, is here deprived of every physical dimension of human life and expected to put his trust in God and the spiritual afterlife to come to grips with his death anxiety. In the text we read that, having initially suffered not being able to hold Marie's body against his, Meursault eventually gets used to her absence in prison (in the same way he has had to give up cigarettes!), finding that there is actually no difference between a person being physically absent and a person dead.

The topics of intimacy and love and the problematics of human relationships are examined in a complex manner by Camus, notably through the three couples formed by Raymond and his mistress, Salamano and his dog, and Meursault and Marie. Mayo takes care to underline this thematic parallelism and all the variations it embodies in dwelling on Raymond and Salamano in six of his images. He represents them alone as well as in scenes where the violence characterizing their respective relationships is clearly foregrounded (the police knocking at the door as a result of Raymond's beating his mistress and Salamano seen in the staircase bent in rage over his trembling dog). The mirroring effect which they exercise in Camus' text is thus further brought to the reader's attention.

Mayo's choice of illustration does not only highlight the important intertwining between the North African nature and the lives of the characters, as well as the peculiar narrative stance and the realist tone of the detailed descriptions of the physical world; it also, while in keeping with Camus' linear chronology, incites a reflection on the way the secondary characters have been elaborated, either in radical contrast, or analogy, to this strange narrator.

### The Sadequain Edition: The Use of Different Pictorial Registers

If we now turn to the Sadequain edition, we find that the artist alternates between figurative color lithographs (such as fig. 7 and 9) and black and white semi-abstract images (such as fig. 4, 5, 6 and 8).<sup>53</sup> Except for the black and white full-page lithograph placed in an en-tête position at the beginning of each of the novel's two parts (fig. 4 and 5), this abstract register is reserved exclusively for smaller images, namely the eleven culs-de-lampe marking the end of chapters (ex. fig. 6 and 8). While Mayo had rather emphasized the text in its continuity, Sadequain stresses the novel's dual composition. For the full-page en-tête lithographs which divide the novel in two parts, the artist reiterates a similar theme, taking care to introduce a variation. The

<sup>53</sup> The color lithographs are all full-page images except for three which have a double-page format.

white humanlike figure standing solitary as the novel begins, separated from an animated background of humanlike figures in black (fig. 4), turns up in a slightly different setting at the opening of the second and final part (fig. 5). The animated black back-ground has here been exchanged for an inanimate wall with a barred window. From themes of liberty and human relationships we move to captivity and isolation. The white figure remains the same, but its body and position in the image are reversed.

Repetition and modulation is also the guiding principle for the black and white *culs-de-lampe* at the end of each chapter. Here the humanlike figure from the two *en-tête* images, which the reader encounters at the threshold of both part one and two, is depicted in continuously changing morphologies, its eleven modulations ranging from abstract to semi-figurative. In these often dark, tormented images the figure sometimes appears alone, sometimes in the midst of other figures. Some forms may evoke an embryo twisting in a womb, others bring to mind a crucified body or graphic characters, indeed words (ex. fig. 6). Sadequain's eclectic influences become clearly manifest in this series: sensitive to European modernism, above all to Cubism and Surrealism, he is well acquainted with traditional oriental art and, in particular, Kufic calligraphy.

By employing two different visual registers, the artist alerts the reader to variations and changes in tonality within the text proper. These haunting semi-abstract images suggest there is an insistent existential theme in Camus' text (ex. fig. 6 and 8). Placed at the end of each chapter, they emphasize the strategic place where the narrative has been temporarily interrupted and where the reader, facing textual silence, pauses a moment before turning the page. Setting a radically different atmosphere than the color lithographs inside the chapters proper, they introduce a contrast which can be said to be consistent with Camus' writing in so far as the closing lines of chapters are often characterized by a particularly *estranging* quality: for instance, coming from a man who has just had to bury his mother, Meursault's expression of "joy" at the perspective to "sleep for twelve hours" at the end of the first chapter is certainly curious, if not to say disconcerting.<sup>54</sup> So are the closing lines of the next chapter where we learn that "Maman was buried now" and that Meursault is thus "going back to work, and that, really, nothing had changed" (Camus 1988, p. 24). Still other chapters end with the narrator leaving, in his usual dry tone, the reader to linger on poignant snapshots of human solitude. An example among others is the end of chapter four where the cries of the old Salamano, whose dog has just run away, are heard through the wall at night; and, "for some reason" which Meursault leaves for the reader to sort out, the narrator comes to think of his dead mother (Camus 1988, p. 36).

Camus' chapter endings create textual blanks, prompting the reader's personal

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<sup>54</sup> Albert Camus: *The Stranger*, trans. Matthew Ward, New York 1988, p. 18.

engagement and interpretative activity in a radical way. The change of visual register operated here by the artist, going from figurative color illustration to black and white abstract designs, is not likely to go unnoticed by readers and may incite us to rest a while within the awkward final lines just read. Hence, Camus' strong use of chapter endings is made evident.

Sadequain's two registers furthermore work in a dialogic manner. Figurative and semi-abstract images mutually clarify each other. Perhaps the most significant examples of how this also points to complexities in the text are the two lithographs which portray the murder of the Arab on the beach (fig. 7 and 8). This sequence closes the first part of the novel. The first of the two images is the color lithograph (fig. 7). We see Meursault with Raymond's gun in his hand, facing the Arab. In the text we read that, having gone back down to the beach a third time, the narrator can think of nothing but the implacable African sun flashing its fiery swords around him and turning the sea into a block of heated metal. Meursault has been walking towards a spring of cool water flickering in the rock behind the Arab. Sadequain depicts Meursault with his back turned to the beholder outside of the image, and facing the Arab who is getting up from the sand while drawing his knife. Consistent with Camus' words the reflection of the sun in the blade of the knife strikes Meursault in the forehead.

The following image is the black and white cul-de-lampe closing the chapter (fig. 8). Sketching two humanlike figures facing each other under the sun it seems to be the black and white replica of the color lithograph described above. However, on second view, we realize that the forms have been inverted. Where the angular aggressive forms had applied to the sun in the first image, they are now used to depict the humanlike figures. The sun in turn has taken on the round shape of the humans in the first lithograph. The inversion points the reader to the radical confusion with which the text evokes nature and man in the passage illustrated. On this beach, nothing is more set in contrast than man and nature, and yet they fuse into the same aggressor in a moment of perfect ambivalence. Textual strategies conjure the reader to be aware of this complexity. And through their dialogic relationship the two images reiterate the suggestion.

### A Proleptic Frontispiece

The Sadequain edition is furthermore adorned with a frontispiece (fig. 9). To a reader familiar with Camus' novel, this frontispiece immediately announces that here the artist's illustrations will not be limited by the repertoire of the text but will add new repertorial elements to the discourse. In a palpable manner we are thus reminded that the reception of an illustrated volume will necessarily differ from the reception of the work in its non-illustrated form. The visual transposition



always results in a more or less important redistribution of the textual material or repertoire compared with the original, a change that will affect the reading strategies presented to the reader and alter the reading process. But Sadequain goes further and introduces new repertorial elements in dialogue with the written narrative. The question we must ask us here is whether these additions are textually motivated and uncover pertinent aspects of the novel.

The full-page color frontispiece opening the volume shows two male characters turned towards the beholder; one is holding a ghastly mask in front of the other's face which is thus half hidden behind it. Read in the light of Camus' text, where religious and judicial institutions become the representatives of moral values, the red coat worn by the older man holding the mask could bring the scarlet garments of a cardinal as well as the red gown of a judge to a reader's mind. Regardless of which, the all-obtrusive presence of the mask suggests we are about to witness a ritual, or perhaps a grave spectacle at the theatre. Do textual strategies corroborate such a reading of Camus' text?

The lithographs illustrating the first part of the novel all remain closely related to the text as it reads *literally*. But as the second part begins, Sadequain becomes considerably freer in his interpretation. With the same consequence with which he had avoided representing Meursault's face in the first part, he now depicts him with simple facial features and externalizes the narrator's anxiety in twisted body positions. Elements not found within the repertoire proper of the text now enter the images: masks, monsters, devils and various other symbolic figures which have no direct correlate in the text turn up in Sadequain's pictures. The kinship with the frontispiece is obvious and the mask motive is next reiterated and varied in an image relative to the trial. The visuals thus direct us to the 'theatre' of the court and to the judicial system's desperate effort to temper the irrational by giving it a form and a plausible narrative.

As the trial begins, the French colonial court is far more interested in finding explanations for Meursault's insensitive behavior at his mother's funeral than in hearing about the murder and Arab victim. The portrait that is being given of Meursault by the court is preposterous. Banal events from the first part (such as Meursault's declining to see his mother's dead body, drinking café au lait and smoking during the funeral wake) are evoked, and end up being given an outrageous official interpretation by the French colonial court, an interpretation that the reader – having experienced the scenes through the viewpoint of the narrator – recognizes as obviously erroneous. The Camus scholar Brian Fitch has argued that the elusiveness of the narrator, the lack of explanations or motives for his acts, prepare for a reading process in which the reader is likely to make assumptions about Meursault during the first of the novel's two parts which must be reassessed in the second as they

become horribly explicit in the mouth of the prosecutor during the trial.<sup>55</sup> The court scenes, Brian Fitch argues, remind the reader of his or her own shortcomings in trying to grasp the elusive narrator and thus function as a *mise en abyme* of the reading process itself. The previously unidentified is here given a face, but it is a ridiculous one sketched by a hypocritical legal system escaping the absurdity of Meursault's act by grasping at clichés and reducing the stranger to an antichrist. Moreover, the grotesque trial shows the Christian court as no more righteous and morally upright than is Meursault, who feels no regret for his act, only a certain annoyance. As Sadequain adds a "poetic reading" to the referential in his images he may be understood to be foregrounding stylistic aspects of the text: the dramatic illustrations render concrete the distance between the banalities evoked and their dreadful repercussions, giving an important resonance to the irony in Camus' text.

If Mayo's etchings supported the general atmosphere of the text, Sadequain's lithographs rather play the card of contrast. The choice of a non-focalized representation allows the artist to be less conditioned by the subjectivity of Meursault for his images than is Mayo. This distance with respect to the narrator results in a more analytic, and radically interpretative, reading. We have seen how Sadequain emphasizes the metaphoric play of contrasts and resemblances, which governs *L'Étranger* at both a thematic and a structural level, by using two pictorial registers. Both within a same register and between registers the images simultaneously repeat and modulate each other, in a manner analogous to Camus' own textual organization. Hence, even what at first glance could appear as expressionist lithographs at the antipode of the language of Meursault may end up triggering the reader's attention to the complex symmetry of the novel's two parts and incite us to question our initial impression of the text as homogeneous, in order to discover textual tensions, ambivalence and irony.

## Conclusion

Through this brief discussion of a few pertinent aspects of the pictures I hope to have given a rough survey of each painter's particular approach to Camus' text. I have argued that artists' illustrations, while necessarily changing the semantic field of the text, may simultaneously reinforce textual strategies and highlight the literary composition of a narrative. We have seen that important themes and motifs in *L'Étranger*, as well as stylistic and narrative qualities of the text, have been foregrounded in the images in various ways. Camus' character Meursault defies any reader's attempt to 'pin him down' and sort him into a familiar category. In consistency with this textual strategy, we have seen that it is indistinctness of form that characterizes both artists' rendering of Meursault. Although opting for different formal solutions in adapting the mode and voice of Camus' novel, Mayo and

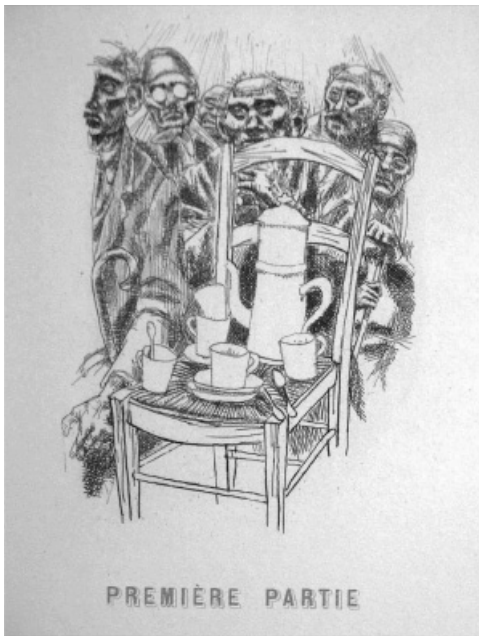
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<sup>55</sup> Brian Fitch: *The Narcissistic Text: A Reading of Camus' Fiction*, Toronto; Buffalo; London 1982, p. 49–67.

Sadequain both seem to have understood the untypical use of the internally focalized narrative to be an essential part of its literary strategies and therefore fundamental to the reading experience. Regardless of their actual reasons for doing so, they have chosen to foreground this narrative device in their pictures. Here, then, the images not only leave open a fundamental blank in the text but they encourage the reader to take notice of it and explore it. Instead of fixing the meaning for the reader, the illustrations stimulate one to further explore the literary text as a way to estrange one's own vision, as a new way of seeing and experiencing the world.

The reading experience of the illustrated narrative is a particular one. The artist becomes the Other Reader we are constantly in dialogue with during our processing of the text. In searching for the motivations of the illustrator we are irrevocably referred back to the text itself. If sensitive to form, an artist's eye may help to uncover the work, allowing for its many complex layers to become visible and so promote a more aesthetic reading. In that case, the illustrations could truly be said to *interpret* the text for us, in the sense that Roland Barthes understood the term. Through their various subject matters and styles, our two painters have emphasized different textual aspects. Their works illustrate the possibility of multiple readings of the same text which may all arise as a response to textual cues.

Fig. 1–3. Mayo, Albert  
Camus, *L'Étranger* ©  
Éditions GALLIMARD



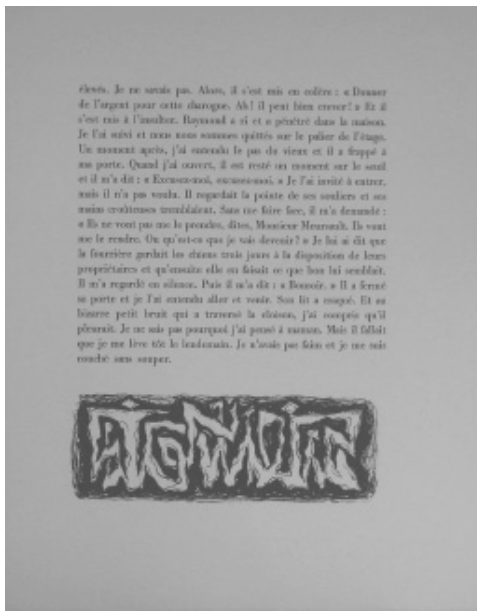
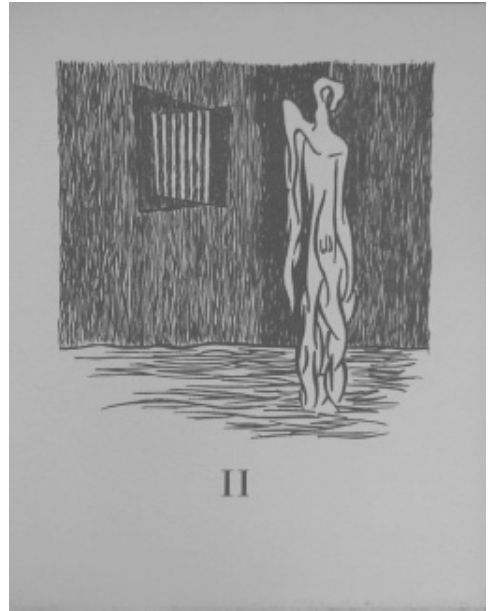
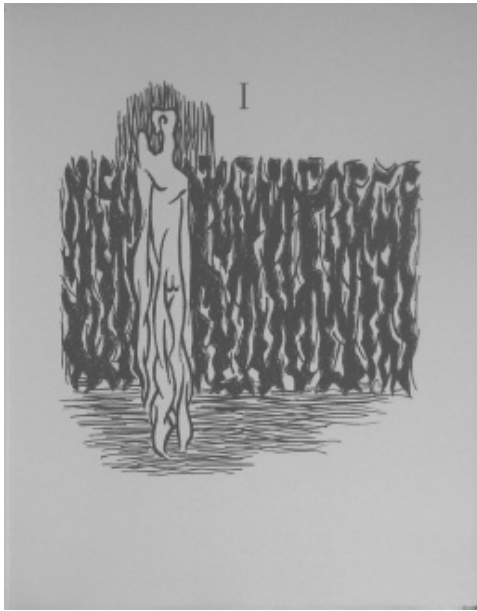


Fig. 4–6. Sadequain, Albert Camus, *L'Étranger* © Éditions Les Bibliophiles de L'Automobile-Club de France, 1966



Fig. 7-9. Sadequain, Albert Camus, *L'Étranger* © Éditions Les Bibliophiles de L'Automobile-Club de France, 1966



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# Photos, Fiction and Literature

Arne Melberg

What happens to the fictional character of the literary text when it is interrupted and infiltrated by photographic images? What happens to the narrator when he/she is transformed into photographer? What happens to fiction? No single answer can be given to those questions; in this presentation I will instead show some examples that only have one thing in common: the use of photos in literary texts of fiction. And the photographic problematizing of fiction.<sup>1</sup>

The starting-point for questions like these is my impression that the boundaries of contemporary fiction is relativized or exceeded by autobiographical life writing and that photographic images contribute to this historical change and thereby to a fictionalization of reality – or is it reality invading fiction? My own starting-point for this observation has been the writings of W. G. Sebald and the frequent and original use that Sebald is making of photos. And Sebald is by no means alone. Two recent Norwegian examples are Espen Haavardsholm and Nikolaj Frobenius, both publishing autobiographical novels 2004 including photos. Haavardsholm's *Gutten på passbildet* (*The Boy in the Passport Photo*) has of course a small boy from a passport-picture on his cover and we understand that it is Espen himself although he calls himself something else in the novel. Frobenius exposes himself in different ages on front- and back-cover to his *Teori og praksis* (*Theory and Praxis*). Like Sebald, although in a smaller scale, both writers include documentary photos and especially Frobenius installs an interesting dialectic between the novelistic quasi-fiction and the quasi-documentary photos. Like Sebald, both writers write about themselves in a fictional form while problematizing the boundaries of fiction. And both have found themselves to be targets and actors in “debates” on the relation between literature and reality. They have defended their books as fictional novels while exceeding the boundaries of fiction with their biographical projects and the photographic documentation.

There is of course nothing remarkable with having photos in an autobiography. The autobiographical image underlines the claims for reality and verifies the past, that the autobiographer remembers from the presence of his or her writing position. The image can be called a support for memory or a function of memory demon-

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<sup>1</sup> Due to the limited scope of this presentation I have to resist the wider implications of the interaction photo-text that are pursued in recent anthologies like *Photo-Textualities* (ed. Marsha Bryant 1996) and *Phototextualities* (ed. Alex Hughes & Andrea Noble 2003); or the even wider implications of intermediality discussed for instance in the Swedish anthology *Intermedialitet: ord, bild och ton i samspel*, Hans Lund (ed.), Lund 2002.

strating the temporal exchange between now and then that is the precondition of autobiography. One of my autobiographical favourites, Vladimir Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* (1967) illustrates this: already the title indicates that we meet a speaking memory, the actively working memory of the narrator. In the spirit of Proust, Nabokov searches and interrogates the past and has the memorized detail carry a world – at the same time as he is the magician conjuring up this world. Memory arranges a creative meeting between the two selves of the autobiography: the self of Now, sitting in his American garden, remembering, thereby meeting the past and almost forgotten Russian self. “*I am going to show a few slides.*” In such a casual manner Nabokov starts a chapter in order to remind us that he, the narrator, chooses the images, shows and arranges and constructs them.<sup>2</sup>

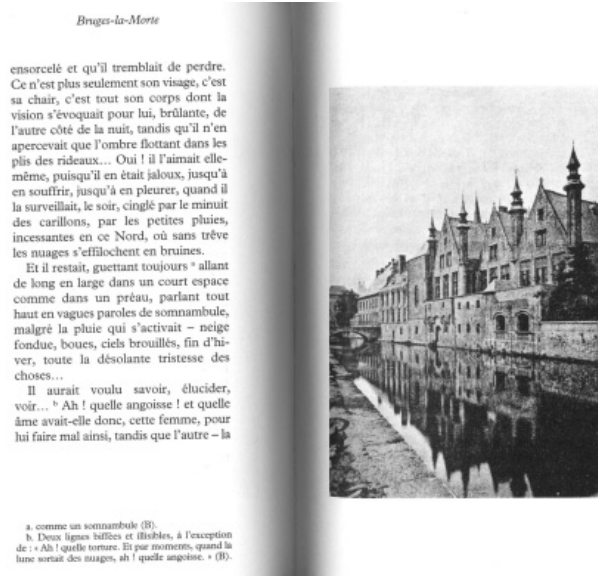


Fig. 1. Georges Rodenbach's *Bruges-la-mort*, 1892

Nabokov also includes a couple of photos but he does not seem to slip into fiction. The first modern example on photographic intervention in fictional text is probably Georges Rodenbach's *Bruges-la-mort* (1892; fig. 1). Rodenbach was a fin-de-siècle-writer of some distinction, friend of Mallarmé, and his book caused some stir including public discussions on the literary use of photos. (Mallarmé looked forward to having living pictures in text!) Rodenbach's book includes an array of street photos from Bruges (Brügge), most of them showing house façades and only one of them showing human beings. The reason for this was probably technical but the result emphasized the theme of the book, that was based on the popular myth of Bruges as a “dead” town, coordinated by Rodenbach with a topical plot about a lonely man being haunted by a fatal woman, who is mysteriously connected with

<sup>2</sup> Vladimir Nabokov: *Speak Memory: An Autobiography Revisited*, London 2000 (1969), p. 120.

the narrow streets of the town and with death. The photos converge with the fiction while giving it an uncanny touch of death and reality.

More advanced examples turn up in the heyday of Modernism and Surrealism. In 1928 Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and André Breton's *Nadja* were published, both using photos but in quite different ways. Woolf's novel about androgynous Orlando's adventures throughout the Centuries may be read as a parody of biography, although with some "serious" touches. The text is interrupted by a set of photos that underline the parody: the photos are supposed to be related to the different historical epochs described in the book and they are either taken from Vita Sackville-West's family album or portraying Vita her-self (who was the model for Orlando) in different costumes [fig. 2]). Interestingly, these photos were removed from later editions, probably in an attempt to emphasize the "serious" dimensions of the novel (but they are back again in some editions from the 1990's).



Fig. 2. Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, 1928

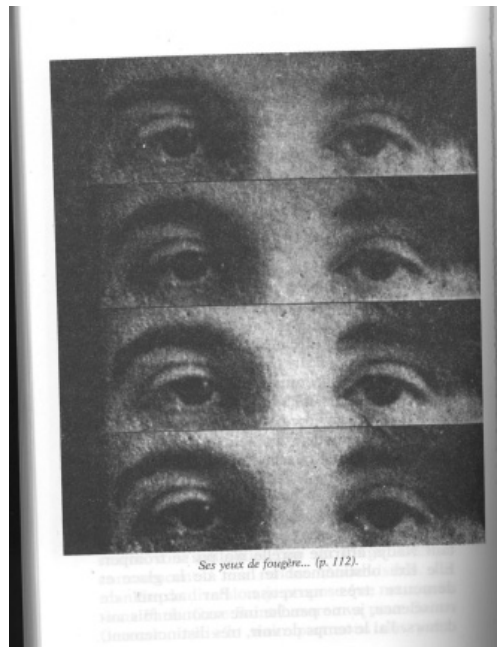


Fig. 3. André Breton's *Nadja*, 1963 (1928)

Breton kept revising his *Nadja* until the final edition in 1963 (fig. 3). Here Breton tries to mythologize his meeting with the elusive Nadja, although it is a meeting that is presented as authentic and a woman not only presented in text. We meet her eyes in a photo-montage (that only turned up in the final edition) and she is said to have contributed to the book with the childish drawings that are supposed to illustrate her mental state. And she is given at least one line of words, addressing the writer in a way that shows the literary construction at work: "André?

André? ... You are about to write a novel about me.”<sup>3</sup> It is a matter of opinion if André really writes a “novel”: the text could also be called a biographical *rêverie*, an array of memorial fragments with documentary pretensions. Photos by Man Ray give the text a surrealistic flavour, while other photos are simple documentations of addresses and locations mentioned in the text. In a preface to the final edition Breton informs us that the photos, together with *l’observation médicale* of Nadja’s mental metamorphoses, are the principles *anti-littéraire* of the book. The photos are meant to eliminate *toute description* and give the impression that the text is *pris sur le vif*, meaning that Breton claims to give us instant pictures, *snapshots*, of a reality that really was real.

W. G. Sebald, who gave me the starting-point for this meditation, is also problematizing literature as fiction and his extensive use of photos contributes to this. He inaugurates this strategy in *Schwindel. Gefühle* (*Vertigo*, 1990), where he mixes two texts of literary criticism and anecdote, on Stendhal and Kafka, with two autobiographical stories; all four are documented in photos of train-tickets, hotel- and restaurant-bills, passport-photos etc. Also his next book, *Die Ausgewanderten* (*The Emigrants*, 1992), consists of four texts and here Sebald fully develops his literary strategy: he starts in an autobiographical perspective that merges with a portrait of a character that the narrator has met or known (fig. 4). This character is portrayed in a mixture of identification and reconstruction, and the narrator traces the character’s complicated and elusive history going back to the black spots of European history from the 20<sup>th</sup> Century – and there is no shortage of these. The form is seemingly documentary: interviews, diary notes, letters, travels, research; all of this fused in a text that is interfoliated by black and white photos. The last chapter of the book is characteristic: here Sebald remembers his first time in England and Manchester, his meeting with the painter Max Aurach, but also later meetings with the same man, who is slowly foregrounded and who finally hands over his family album of photos to the narrator. The person and name Aurach seems like an elliptical version of the actual painter Frank Auerbach, while “Max” is the name used by friends to Sebald himself.<sup>4</sup> In this way Sebald merges his fiction with reality and so to speak puts his signature in the picture. The painting presented in a photo as made by Aurach is certainly close to paintings actually made by Auerbach. (Maybe it is an Auerbach; Sebald never gives references to his photos so we cannot know about their origin).

Sebald continues to develop this quasi-documentary strategy in his “English pilgrimage” *Die Ringe des Saturn* (*Rings of Saturn*, 1995) and in the book that was to be his last, *Austerlitz* (2001), being the first to be called a “novel” (fig. 5). Both contain quite an amount of black-and-white photos, including some that are said to portray the fictional character Austerlitz himself as a child and school-boy. Still (or perhaps

<sup>3</sup> André Breton: *Nadja*, Paris 1998 (1964), p. 100. ”André? André? ... Tu écriras un roman sur moi.”

<sup>4</sup> Sebald changed the name in the English edition.

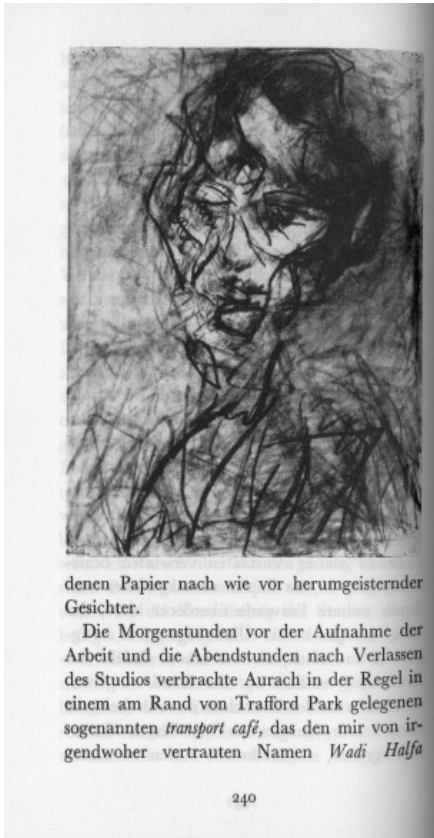


Fig. 4. W. G Sebald's *Die Ausgewanderten*, 1992



Fig. 5. W. G Sebald's *Austerlitz*, 2001

because of that) the reader feels unsure about his status: who is looking at us in the photos that are said to be of Jacques Austerlitz? Could it be Sebald himself, who has found some pictures from his childhood and youth?

In other words: the reader does not know if the novel *Austerlitz* is meant to be an autobiographical project. Or perhaps an imaginary construction portraying a novelistic character, who is mainly searching his own biography and history. The extensive use of photographic documentation invites us to regard even the novel *Austerlitz* as non-fictional; but we are also led to suspect that Sebald develops his own autobiographical project through a more or less fictitious autobiographical project. Sebald's (or the publisher's) calling this book a "novel" does certainly not put a stop to the problematization of fiction with the help of photos. Between *Die Ringe des Saturn* and *Austerlitz* he also published two books that were not designed as fiction but are made according to the same strategy as the explicitly literary books: a mixture of text and picture, autobiographical fragments merged with a critical presentation of a character or a phenomenon. I am thinking of *Logis in einem Landhaus*, a collection of literary criticism from 1998, and *Lufkrieg und Literatur* from 1999: afterthoughts on his lectures on the grand theme of Germany

during World War II. The political essays insist on the priority of a documentary presentation while the literary essays indulge in biographical anecdote; and just as in those books that are closer to fiction Sebald tries to merge biography and history. One essay is called “To the memory of Robert Walser,” who is portrayed with an amount of photos in a text that includes the following passage, where I think that Sebald implies himself:

Walser himself once said that he is actually always writing the same novel, from one piece of prose to the other, a novel that could be characterized as a “in many ways disrupted and disseminated book of myself.” One must add that the main character, the I, in this book of I myself, is hardly ever to be seen, but is rather spread out or hidden among all the others passing by.<sup>5</sup>

In analogy to this we can imagine Sebald himself as “hidden” in his own text, as “spread out” among his more or less fictitious characters in about the same way as his character Jacques Austerlitz, who functions as a ghost in his own novel, or to use the better French word, a *revenant*, someone who keeps coming back: Austerlitz is turning up unexpectedly and without evident reason on unpredictable junctures and settings. Sebald’s use of black-and-white photos emphasizes a kind of *revenant*-motive. That is the case when he occasionally puts in a picture of himself: in *Schwindel. Gefühle* as a photo of an outdated passport-photo, in *Die Ringe des Saturn* standing at the foot of a Lebanese cedar, “still not knowing about the ungood things that since have passed.”<sup>6</sup> It is even more the case when we come to those photos in *Austerlitz* that are said to portray the main character as a boy, pictures that emphasize the ambivalence of both pictures and character. A photo of a fictional character seems in itself to be a contradiction in terms; and in this case the fictional character Jacques Austerlitz cannot know for sure if it is actually himself that he sees in the photo. So how are we to know?

Jacques Austerlitz is presented as collector of photos showing excerpts from his family album to his narrator. For both – for the narrator and his character – the pictorial interest is taking part in the work of memory aiming to reconstruct the past. The photos themselves are seldom remarkable, often unfocused and vague, and this amateurish touch strengthens the documentary effect and the ghostly character.

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<sup>5</sup> W. G. Sebald: *Logis in einem Landhaus*, Frankfurt 2000 (1998), p. 147 (my translation). “Walser hat selbst einmal die Bemerkung gemacht, er schreibe im Grunde, von einem Prosastückchen zum nächsten, immer an demselben Roman, einem Roman, den man bezeichnen könne ‘als ein mannigfaltig zerschnittenes oder zertrenntes Ich-Buch.’ Hinzufügen müßte man, daß die Hauptfigur, das ich, in diesem Ich-Buch beinahe gar nie vorkommt, sondern ausgespart beziehungsweise verborgen bleibt unter der Menge der anderen Passanten.”

<sup>6</sup> W. G. Sebald: *Die Ringe des Saturn*, Frankfurt 1997 (1995), p. 313 (my translation). “In Unkenntnis noch der unguuten Dinge, die seither geschehen sind.”

According to the analysis of Mark M. Anderson they “seem to come from nowhere, serving not as illustration of the text but as a slightly out-of-sync counterpoint, a kind of punctuation that subtly irritates and challenges our notion of what is real, what is fictional.”<sup>7</sup> When Jacques Austerlitz researches his own past he describes his work as an arrangement of photos: “What was still left to some degree I began to cut up again and to arrange, to see it for my eyes, as in an album, so that the picture of the landscape that the wanderer had crossed, that had already sunk in oblivion, would emerge again.”<sup>8</sup>

When Austerlitz finds a photo of himself as a child he feels “*durchdrungen*” (pierced, penetrated) by the “searching gaze” that he imagines to see in the eye of the boy (Sebald 2003, p. 268). *Durchdrungen* is actually a recurrent term used to describe the effect of the gaze that seems to emanate from the old photo: “As far back as I can see, said Austerlitz, I have always felt as if I had no room in reality, as if I was not there, and never was this feeling stronger in me than that evening in Šporkova, when I was pierced by the gaze of the page of the Rose queen” (Sebald 2003, p. 269).<sup>9</sup> The picture commented upon (shown above) shows – perhaps – the boy Austerlitz dressed up like a page and it is also used on the cover of the book.

One suspects Roland Barthes in the background with his famous distinction between *studium* and *punctum* in his book on photography, *La chambre claire* (1980) – Sebald actually refers to Barthes in an interview from 1999 concerning his relation to photographic pictures.<sup>10</sup> Barthes’ *punctum* has to do with the appeal of the photographic picture, the expressive detail, the gaze that so to speak “jumps out” of the picture (and makes Jacques Austerlitz feel “pierced”). When the photo is situated in a text the documentary character is strengthened but also curiously displaced. The photo hovers between fiction and documentation, it belongs not quite to an imaginary realm (of death), nor to any evident reality. The photo rather shows us a *revenant* and its “*punctum*” reminds us of past reality and while demanding new reality.

In his original and frequent use of photos in literary text Sebald develops the autobiographical possibility of ignoring the traditional boundaries between literary fiction and biographical reality, i.e. the very distinction that the institutionalized understanding of literature claims to be an *either-or*. The pictures emphasize

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<sup>7</sup> Mark M. Anderson: “The Edge of Darkness: On W. G. Sebald” in *October*, Vol. 106, Fall 2003, p. 109.

<sup>8</sup> W. G. Sebald: *Austerlitz*, Frankfurt 2003 (2001), p. 179 (my translation). “Was einigermaßen standhielt, begann ich neu zuzuschneiden and anzuordnen, um vor meinen eigenen Augen noch einmal, ähnlich wie in einen Album, das Bild von dem Wanderer durchquerten, beinahe schon in der Vergessenheit versunkenen Landschaft entstehen zu lassen.”

<sup>9</sup> My translation. “Soweit ich zurückblicken kann, sagte Austerlitz, habe ich mich immer gefühlt, als hätte ich keinen Platz in der Wirklichkeit, als sei ich gar nicht vorhanden, und nie ist dieses Gefühl stärker in mir gewesen als an jenem Abend in der Šporkova, als mich der Blick des Pagen der Rosenkönigin durchdrang.”

<sup>10</sup> According to Heiner Boehncke: “Clair obscur. W.G. Sebalds Bilder” in *Text + Kritik*, Vol. 158, April 2003, p. 55.

the *both-and* that you find many examples of in the autobiographical and self-presenting tradition from Montaigne onwards, including for instance Breton: the pictures contribute to the texts being *both* documentary *and* fictional.<sup>11</sup> The pictures contribute to giving Sebald's writing a ghostly character: the pictures both show and conceal, they cross the boundaries that they imply, boundaries between Now and Then, I and Him, reality and fiction.

On the contemporary cultural scene there are many versions of a tendency that from one point-of view can be regarded as a fictionalization of the life-world, from another point-of-view as an invasion of reality into fiction. The popular "blogs" give many examples ignoring traditional boundaries of fiction as well as distinctions between private and public, between picture, text, commentary, quotation. The "blogs" give a web-version of a tendency that has been prominent in the visual arts at least since the performances of Joseph Beuys in the 1960's: the stylization/construction of the artist as an act and as an aesthetical event. In that way the visual arts can approach literary fiction as demonstrated today by artists as Sophie Calle and Tracey Emin. A comparatively early and interesting example of such tendencies came in 1982 in the little book *Dictee* by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (fig. 6); it has now the reputation of being "cult" in the US. Cha was born in North Korea, educated in Berkeley and Paris and tragically murdered in New York right after the publication of the book. It is a charming and touching and upsetting book that mixes languages (English/French), mythology, autobiographical memory, poetry, politics, history and, of course, photos taken from the family album as well as from historical events and from movies. Here all possible boundaries between literature and history and image are exceeded in order to stylize a self-portrait – or perhaps we should call it a *performance* of the self, the self being created in an aesthetical event. Still, this self-portrait is not the ironic self-presentation you find with for instance Cindy Sherman, nor an advertising of a self, rather an effort to sketch the historical profile of a Korean exile.

A visually inspired performance of the self can obviously contribute to the extensive fictionalization and aesthetization of the life-world that is going on today. (Since I have restricted myself to literary examples I have also excluded the massive impact of this tendency in contemporary mass-media, specially visual media). But the examples that I have given do not unanimously contribute to such a tendency; they also show that the literary use of images can go in the other direction, so to speak, giving the individual experience a historical dimension and critical relevance. Sebald's writings is a powerful effort to develop a critical strategy combining literary and visual impulses into a comprehensive strategy. Another example, which will be my final, is given by the

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<sup>11</sup> In my book *Life Writing* (forthcoming) I discuss "both-and" as the master-trope of self-presenting and autobiographical writing.



French writer J.M.G. Le Clézio with *L'Africain*, a book of autobiographical memories from 2004. In 1991 Le Clézio wrote *Onitsha*: a novel about a boy travelling with his mother to Nigeria in order to meet the father, who seems to be lost in mythological phantasies about the origin of civilizations (fig. 7). In *L'Africain* we meet the same story, although stripped from fiction as well as from mythology, but still with a father who is *L'Africain* in the sense that he invests all his energy in escaping Europe and finding authentic life in Africa. The novel gives a fascinating image of the meeting of the European fantasy with the African reality as it could have taken place in the 1950's.

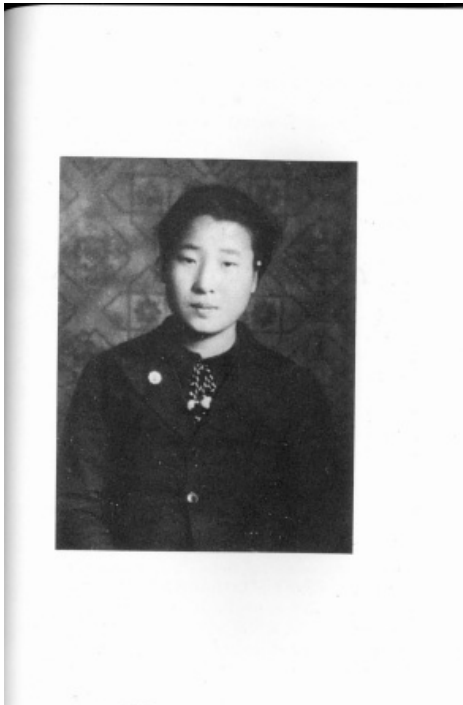
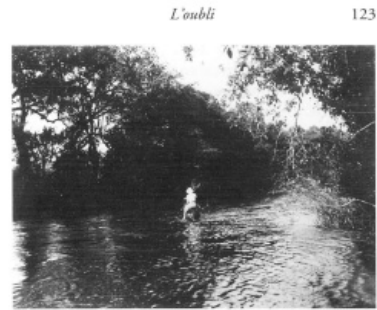


Fig. 6. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee*, 1982



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les royaumes de l'ouest du Cameroun. La mémoire des espérances et des angoisses de mon père, sa solitude, sa détresse à Ogoja. La mémoire des instants de bonheur, lorsque mon père et ma mère sont unis par l'amour qu'ils croient éternel. Alors ils allaient dans la liberté des chemins, et les noms de lieux sont entrés en moi comme des noms de famille, Bali, Nkom, Bamenda, Bansa, Nkongsamba, Revi, Kwaja. Et les noms de pays, Mbembé, Kaka, Nsungli, Bum, Fungom. Les hauts plateaux où avance lentement le troupeau de bêtes à cornes de lune à accrocher les nuages, entre Lassim et Ngonzin.

Peut-être qu'en fin de compte mon rêve ancien ne me trompait pas. Si mon père était devenu

Fig. 7. J. M. G. Le Clézio's *L'Africain*, 2004

But the overtly autobiographical book is perhaps even more fascinating – and that depends to some degree on the black-and-white photos that interrupt and accentuate the text. The photos all come from the family album and are shot by the father. They do not illustrate the text in any detail and they are never intimately personal: the reader can barely glimpse the writer as a young boy. But the photos comment on the text and they document the father's intense fascination of Africa as the site of authentic life, a fantasy that obviously is bound to break.

Le Clézio uses the photos in order to strip the fiction that he was trying out in *Onitsha*. He thereby subdues the mythological phantasies and pretensions that are prominent in the novel but he also demonstrates something that is easily forgotten in pure fiction. His photos contribute to what I would like to call the literary task: to remember, produce, perform and develop experience.

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# To Frame or not to Frame, that is the Question: An Intermedial Study of Achim von Arnim's "Die Majoratsherren," its Frontispice and Robert Campin's Mérode Altarpiece

Ulrich Weisstein

"Jedes Kunstwerk bringt den  
Rahmen mit auf die Welt"  
(Each work of art is born with its frame)<sup>1</sup>  
*Friedrich Schlegel*

"My frames I have designed as  
carefully as my pictures"<sup>2</sup>  
*James McNeill Whistler*

While I was working on an English version of Arnim's proto-surrealistic novella, published in the *Taschenbuch zum geselligen Vergnügen* for the year 1820, my attention was called to the "Titelkupfer" (engraving used as a frontispice) which accompanies that work in its original printing (fig. 1).<sup>3</sup>

Underneath the frontispice I have placed the pertinent passages from Arnim's text:

*Esther herself was lying on her bed, her head drooping, and her entangled tresses trailing on the floor. A vase filled with blossoming branches of all sorts stood nearby, as did a goblet with water from which she had probably taken the last draught in her desperate struggle with death. [...] The old Vasthi settled down like a nightmare on poor Esther's chest and placed her hands around the dying girl's neck. [...] As Esther ceased to struggle for life and folded her arms over her head, it grew darker and, out of the depth of the room, there appeared with gentle greeting the figures of the first, pure Creation – Adam and Eve – standing underneath the calamitous tree and, from the*

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<sup>1</sup> Cited from Schlegel's *Fragmente zur Poesie und Literatur* in Wolfgang Kemp's essay "Heimatrecht für Bilder: Funktionen und Formen des Rahmens im 19. Jahrhundert" in Eva Mendgen (ed.): *In Perfect Harmony: Bild und Rahmen 1850–1920*, (the catalogue of an exhibition held, in 1995, at the Vienna Kunstforum), Zwolle 1995, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Cited by Eva Mendgen in her "Introduction" to the catalogue. See footnote 1, p. 251.

<sup>3</sup> *Taschenbuch zum geselligen Vergnügen auf das Jahr 1820*, Leipzig 1821 (p. 20–83), Frontispice on p. 1, created by Wilhelm Hensel and C. Büscher.

*sky of eternal spring overarching Paradise Regained, looked compassionately at the girl in her mortal agony, while the Angel of Death with a sad mien, and dressed in a gown strewn with eyes all over, wielded the flaming sword by his side [...] and waited for the moment at which to pour the last, bitter drop.<sup>4</sup>*



Fig. 1: "Titelkupfer" to Achim von Arnim, "Die Majoratsherren" (see also fig. 2)

Acting on that clue, I made up my mind to undertake a close reading of that text in the light of its illustration, and vice versa. In the initial phase of my intermedial game, I had focused on the thematic aspects of this project<sup>5</sup> and in the light of that center of gravity I refrained from considering formal, i.e. largely structural, elements. It is to redress this wrong that I now wish to ponder the applicability of some basic concepts relevant to that issue understood both in their literal and their figurative sense, to the novella, to its visual transcription and, by way of a *tertium comparationis*, to a somewhat unusual painting dating from the 1420s: Robert

<sup>4</sup> All quotations in English are taken from my, still unpublished, translation of Arnim's novella, to be published by the Edwin Mellen Press in Lewiston, NY.

<sup>5</sup> Ulrich Weisstein: "Achim von Arnim's 'Die Majoratsherren' aus neuer Sicht: Ein Interpretationsversuch im Lichte einer bisher unberücksichtigten Bildquelle für das Titelkupfer" in: *Neue Zeitung für Einsiedler: Mitteilungen der Internationalen Arnim-Gesellschaft* 3, 2003 (p. 7–26).

Campin's celebrated Mérode Altarpiece now in The Cloisters, the New York Metropolitan Museum's *Dependance* in suburban Fort Tryon Park.<sup>6</sup>

For methodological reasons, what was urgently needed, to begin with, was a reliable definition of the key term 'frame' in a standard reference work such as *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, where it is said to mean "a kind of open case or structure for admitting, enclosing or supporting things like windows, doors or pictures"<sup>7</sup> while another, more broadly conceived version speaks of "anything composed of parts fitted or united together." For the present purpose, however, the scope of this definition had to be substantially narrowed insofar as its pragmatic component – that which pertains to craftsmen such as joiners, carpenters and cabinet makers – does not apply since my emphasis lies exclusively on the visual arts. In this instance, that is to say, my points of reference will be three *objets d'art* – an engraving, a literary opus and a triptych – and I must stick to a formulation according to which a frame is, quite simply, a total or partial enclosure serving as a borderline separating fact from fiction.

Historically, the use of frames was taken for granted following their invention, for the purpose of installing them, in the early Renaissance, together with the pictures, in private collections and, subsequently, in the burgeoning public museums. But a radical change occurred in the mid-nineteenth century, when they began to play an entirely different role either by being integrated into the picture or altogether dispensed with. Nor must we forget that frames and half-frames exist in the other arts (primarily literature and music) as well – a circumstance that makes intermedial comparisons of their structural components possible or even plausible, albeit in ways dictated by the different media. Among such compatible and/or comparable genres, we have, especially in the pragmatic ones (fiction and drama), prologues and prefaces with or without epilogues or postscripts, and vice versa, as well as the *Rahmenerzählungen* (= framed tales), where the compartmentalization is fairly strict. In music we have, to name but a handful of outstanding examples in addition to such rare doubly framed *Tonbilder* (sound pictures) as Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, operatic overtures unmatched by final 'covertures' and, on a much smaller scale, arias preceded or followed by dialogues or introduced by recitatives. In the instrumental strain of music, finally, there is Bach's *Wohltemperiertes Clavier* with its regular alternation of clearly marked off preludes and fugues.<sup>8</sup>

Before proceeding to the core of my paper, I feel obliged to touch upon a remarkable and relevant feature of "Die Majoratsherren" ("The Lords of the Entail") found both in the text of and the illustration to its climactic scene as depicted by a two-

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<sup>6</sup> *The Cloisters: The Building and the Collection of Medieval Art in Fort Tryon Park*, third ed., New York 1963.

<sup>7</sup> *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, thin paper ed., Springfield, Mass. 1949, p. 329.

<sup>8</sup> For the whole question of frames and framing see Werner Wolf and Walter Bernhart (eds.): *Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media*, Amsterdam; New York, NY 2006.

some of designer and engraver.<sup>9</sup> What I have in mind here is a work which, firmly embedded in the narrative, is a painting, presumably framed, that is real enough on the fictional level but whose dimensional data (width, height and breadth) are withheld from the reader. (As for its frame, it will be dealt with in due time.)

The picture, whose subject matter (in German, “Motiv”) is Adam and Eve in Paradise, thematically deviates from the stereotypical norm of depicting them as found in the large repertory amassed by Lucas Cranach.<sup>10</sup> In Arnim’s novella, its actual existence is underscored by the fact that it is said to have been part of a vast private collection, from where it was inexplicably transferred to the humble dwelling, in the ghetto, of the female protagonist, Esther, but, after the latter’s death, was stolen by her gipsy stepmother, the old Vasthi, who – so we are told in the brief epilogue – sells it at a public auction and, “Treppenwitz der Weltgeschichte” (historical paradox), uses the proceeds to build a factory emblematic of the dawning Industrial Age. (One can easily gather from this description why I have called “Die Majoratsherren” a proto-surrealistic story in which logic and absurdity clash.)

This much for the ‘objective’ side of said painting. As for the subjective one, which dominates the scene in question, its verbal description runs as follows:

Esther sprach mit gebrochener Stimme zu ihnen: ‘Euretwegen muß ich so viel leiden’. Und jene erwiderten: ‘Wir taten nur eine Sünde, und hast du auch nur eine getan?’ Da seufzte Esther [...] und nahm Abschied von dem schmerzlich geliebten Aufenthaltsorte.<sup>11</sup>

Esther, in turn, told Adam and Eve in a broken voice: ‘It is for your sake that I am suffering so much’, to which they replied: ‘We sinned but once, but did you, too, commit one sin only?’ Esther sighed and, as she opened her mouth, the bitter drop fell from the Angel’s sword into it.

What, given the apparent surreality of this scene, interests me at this point is not so much the ambiguity resulting from the fact that the locus of Esther’s verbal sparring with her ancestors combines the Biblical Paradise, having been lost already, with the Miltonic one, meanwhile regained, or that we are exposed to the hallucinations of a moribund person but, rather, a structural anomaly, namely, the seeming absence of

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<sup>9</sup> For the history of this frontispice see Renate Moering’s “Commentary” on “Die Majoratsherren” in the section “Entstehung” (p. 1032–33) of Achim von Arnim’s *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. IV (*Sämtliche Erzählungen*), ed. by her, Frankfurt am Main 1992.

<sup>10</sup> For an assessment of Cranach’s representations of Adam and Eve see Ulrich Weisstein: “Was noch kein Auge je gesehn: A Spurious Cranach in Georg Kaiser’s *Von Morgens bis Mitternachts*” in Clayton Koelb and Susan Noakes (eds.): *The Comparative Perspective on Literature: Approaches to Theory and Practice*, Ithaca 1988 (p. 233–259).

<sup>11</sup> All references to the original German text of “Die Majoratsherren” are taken from Achim von Arnim, *Erzählungen*, Gisela Henckmann (ed.), Stuttgart 1992 (p. 211–251).



a frame out of which Adam and Eve should, logically, have stepped and which, once their conversation with Esther was over, should have, just as logically, have stepped back into again. I say 'should' because, like the ghost of Hamlet's father, revenants that they are, at least in this respect, they slip away unnoticed by the voyeuristic observer as well as by the perplexed reader.

When I characterized the alleged absence of a frame in the frontispice as being but apparent, I did so advisedly; for, although there is not the slightest trace of such an object to be found in Arnim's novella, in the frontispice at least the rudiments of such a formal encasement are evident in the small segment at the upper left in which Adam's and Eve's predicament is visually manifested. This small portion of the engraving, which, measuring a scant five by six centimeters (= roughly two by two inches) as compared with the approximately eleven by sixteen centimeters (= roughly four by six inches) of the total space available, turns out to be neither more nor less than an innocuous, non-descript and colorless stripe functioning as a minimal border. On the other hand, one might argue, however, that the highly decorative, ornamental and possibly symbolic arch-like construction at the top, executed in the manner of the German Romanticist Philipp Otto Runge, could be interpreted as a kind of frame. As it turns out, this procedure is in keeping with the standard usage in the book illustrations of its time. For as, referring to the most influential English art critic of the nineteenth century, the author of the lead article in the catalogue of the Frankfurt exhibition puts it:

Wenn die Bilder so klein ausfallen, so etwa als graphische Illustrationen, dass man den idealen Abstand, der Sehfeld und Bildfeld zur Deckung bringt, nicht einnehmen kann, dann verbietet John Ruskin überhaupt eine klare seitliche Begrenzung.<sup>12</sup>

In cases where the pictures are so small, as is customary in graphic book illustrations, that they cannot reconcile the range of vision with the field of vision, Ruskin altogether rules out any clear lateral boundary.

But, as a second glance at the frontispice reveals, there is no easy solution for the framing puzzle in this case, insofar as, in contrast to the left and upper portions of the frame, the complementary right and lower ones serve a structurally similar but thematically different purpose; for they do not refer to the painting, which has its own frame within the larger, all-encompassing one, but are part and parcel of the setting, the right one being defined by a slender column which keeps the Angel of Death and Adam and Eve apart while the bottom one belongs to a parapet on whose

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<sup>12</sup> Wolfgang Kemp's paraphrase of Ruskin's opinion as found on p. 21 of his essay "Heimatrecht für Bilder: Funktionen und Formen des Rahmens im 19. Jahrhundert" in: *In Perfect Harmony*, see footnote 1 above.

front, facing the viewer, the two tables of the Mosaic law are mounted. Here, then, we have a second internal half-frame; but, as happens so often, and that not only in art, two halves do not always make a whole (fig. 2).

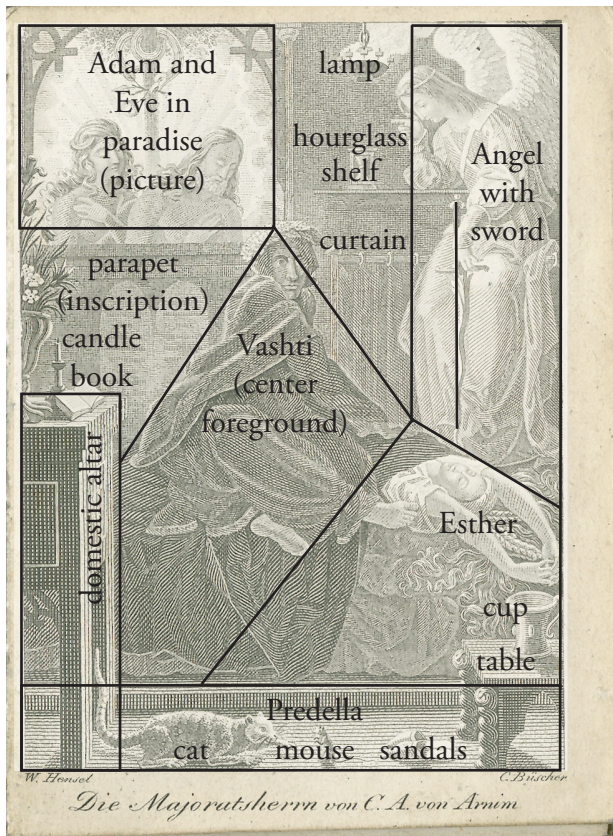


Fig. 2. Structure of the “Titelkupfer” to Achim von Arnim, “Die Majoratsherren”

Having consumed (and, hopefully, digested) my intermedial *hors d’oeuvre* in the guise of a structural comparison across generic lines, involving Arnim’s stunning novella and its correlational frontispice, I now say farewell to the Hensel/Büscher engraving and pass on to the principal topic of this paper, a comparison, on a larger scale, also featuring “Die Majoratsherren” but linking it to another work, namely, the *Mérode Altarpiece* (fig. 3), created by the painter formerly known as the Master of Flémalle but since identified as Robert Campin, citizen of Tournai. Such a confrontation cannot possibly rest on thematic or stylistic grounds, and that regardless of the fact that Arnim was a connoisseur of Flemish art<sup>13</sup> and in a weak hour even confessed that he would have liked nothing better than being, himself, an artist.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Vide the essays “Genrebilder, Staffage” (1830) and “Antwerpen” (1831) in his *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. VI (*Schriften*), Roswitha Burwick et al. (eds.), Frankfurt am Main 1992 (p. 1045–1049 and 1062–1076, respectively).

<sup>14</sup> See Arnim’s letter of December 26, 1820 to Wilhelm Grimm, as cited by Roswitha Burwick from



It is, however, entirely possible, or even likely, that while putting the final touches on his novella, Arnim came to realize that the famous triptych had recently changed hands and actually may have seen a black-and-white reproduction of it in a German newspaper or almanac, without being able to see the original. As for the details of this transaction, the opening sentences of the pertinent chapter in the Cloisters handbook, give the following account:

The Mérode Altarpiece has been world-famous, an acknowledged masterpiece. Purchased in 1820 by the Prince of Arenberg, it was later inherited by the Mérode family, who held it for two generations. Until it was acquired for The Cloisters [in 1956], it had been inaccessible for decades to art lovers and art historians, though illustrated and discussed in countless publications.<sup>15</sup>



Fig. 3. Robert Campin, Mérode Altarpiece

Even though there may have been some casual contacts, it is most unlikely that Campin's *chef d'œuvre* exerted any measurable influence on "Die Majoratsherren"; and it is on that assumption that I pursue my goal on an analogical rather than a literal or historical level. For the purpose of a study that is not exclusively addressed to art historians it will be necessary to preface it with two propaedeutical questions, namely, 1) what exactly is a triptych and how does it function and, once a satisfactory answer has been found, 2) how, if at all, does a work of this nature lend itself to a meaningful comparison with a verbal construct? Needless to say that in what

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Reinhold Steig's *Achim von Arnim und die ihm nahestehenden*, Bern 1972, *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. III, p. 481.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted from the chapter "The Spanish Room" in *The Cloisters: The Building and the Collection of Medieval Art in Fort Tryon Park* (p. 185–193).

follows all objects should be almost automatically regarded as structural elements whose interrelation is governed by the general character of the whole whose parts they are. By the same token, their borders should be viewed as *Nahtstellen* (seams rather than interstices) joining and, concurrently, distancing each other.

To show the feasibility, in whatever terms, of a valid comparison involving two phenomena belonging to different artistic realms and pitted against each other, one must begin by assigning each its proper place in the hierarchy of values established in its own discipline. This is, in most cases, a fairly simple task but in ours a rather complex one. Even in the preliminary stages of his endeavor, the intermedialist, clinging to his Flying Trapeze, must, therefore, always remember that in such matters “Vorsicht ist die Mutter der Porzellankiste” (= caution is the mother of the China box), an expression whose equivalent in English is contested, my personal preference being “curiosity kills the cat.”<sup>16</sup> Before the investigator engages in transmedial speculations which may take him to a point where a methodological decision must be made, he should catch his breath, for initially it is hard to believe that a prose narrative like “Die Majoratsherren” might be dubbed a triptych. I, for one, accept that equation with the proviso that it would be more sensible to call it a polyptych, for the simple reason that it is equipped with three instead of the customary two pairs of outer ‘wings’ embracing the central panel. (A perfect example of such an outsized work is Rogier van der Weyden’s *Last Judgment Altarpiece* (fig. 4) as reproduced and discussed in Shirley Neilsen Blum’s useful monograph.<sup>17</sup>)



Fig. 4. Rogier van der Weyden, *Last Judgment Altarpiece* in the Hôtel-Dieu of Beaune

<sup>16</sup> In an Internet discussion, listed as “Unsolved Query, English Missing” and held on May 25, 2005, no agreement was reached on the most adequate translation of the German proverb, but “curiosity kills the cat” was not even mentioned.

<sup>17</sup> Shirley Neilsen Blum: *Early Netherlandish Triptychs: A Study in Patronage*, Berkeley; Los Angeles 1969 (p. 37–49).

In order to settle the issue of rank within the confines of this study, I shall begin with the definition of “genus” – in biology a class of individual “species,” of which in our case the winged (originally: folded<sup>18</sup>) altarpieces constitute the most prominent subdivision. What I have in mind here is the so-called retable, in ecclesiastic parlance “a raised shelf or ledge above the table of an altar” on which are placed such fitting paraphernalia as candles, flowers and the sacred books needed for the religious service, whether in church or at home – all of them to be found both in the centerpiece of the Mérode triptych and, though much less prominently so, on the domestic altar half visible in the Hensel/Büscher frontispice. Generally the most sizeable and noteworthy objects of which the retable is a *Träger* (support) are the altarpieces mounted upon and topping it as its crowning glory and routinely characterized by their virtual three-dimensionality effected by the moveable hinges (hence the German designation “Klapp-Altar”) which enables the wings, painted on both sides (front and back) of the respective panels to be closed on weekdays and open on church holidays.

It lies clearly in the nature of pictures that, being *simulacra* of the objects they depict – *vide* René Magritte’s justly famous “Le trahison des images” – which, in their blatant two-dimensionality (length and width), roughly correspond to a written text or printed score. The pictures lack the solidity and volume shared by *realia* and, in consequence, are victims of their own flatness. This is the time, then, to remember that the two-dimensionality in painting that was prevalent in the supposedly dark and primitive Middle Ages ultimately succumbed to efforts, on the part of scientific-minded Renaissance artists aiming at verisimilitude, to develop a technique capable of suggesting (or shamming) the missing depth. This method, which, in the Italian Renaissance, came to be known as three-point perspective, was, of course, unsuited to the graphic arts including that of book illustration both on account of the small size and the lack of a ample surface such as is needed to accommodate the mathematical calculations required for the basic grid.

In view of this built-in handicap, Hensel/Büscher, in planning their frontispice (see the chart fig. 2), looked for a solution by positioning their cast of characters, strategically but without the help of a systematically constructed grid, in relative size among the various, partly overlapping strata (or *couches*) in such a way as to form an irregular pattern of geometrical shapes arranged so as to suggest the existence of fore-, middle- and background. The most eye-catching shape of this sort in their frontispice is the triangle at the center of their illustration, showing the thematically upgraded old Vasthi at its apex, with the Angel of Death and the dying Esther forming its base, all of this as a counterpoint to the rectangular shape of the painting-within-a-painting that features Adam and Eve. It goes without saying that, given the

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<sup>18</sup> For a definition of the diptych (= twice folded writing tablet, the *Urform* of all polyptychs), see the entry on “Diptychon” in Vol. VI (*Begriffe und Register*) of *Kindlers Malerei Lexikon*, Munich 1971 (p. 241–242).

constellation of figures in Arnim's novella, the Lord of the Entail, at once observer and narrator of the scene, could not be catapulted into this scene to become part of its framed architecture.

It is high time now to say farewell to the Hensel/Büscher frontispice and turn energetically to the first of my two major exhibits, the Mérode Altarpiece (see fig. 3), which, as far as triptychs go, is an amazingly small object,<sup>19</sup> measuring but 110 cm (= 43 inches) in width and but 65 cm (= 26 inches) in height and, as it were, fenced in by one outer frame and six inner ones, four of them paired. This yardstick I shall try to use for furnishing the proof of my pudding which, as the saying goes, lies in the eating, by presenting a number of graphic schemata (fig. 6 and 7) whose equivalents in Arnim's novella will be tested shortly.

In anticipation of this move, I would like to emphasize, once again, that any attempt to make partners out of these two strangers on the thematic level would be tantamount to failure unless, that is, contactual ties could be ascertained. (In our case, for instance, it would make precious little sense to bring the right wing of the Mérode Altarpiece, featuring Joseph in his capacity as a maker of mouse traps and presumably chaste husband of the Virgin Mary, into play, while, on the other hand, one might well be tempted to compare the objects displayed in the 'predella' of the frontispice.<sup>20</sup>)

A rare – perhaps the only fully preserved – specimen of such a generic anomaly which, precisely for that reason, lends itself to a paradigmatic intermedial study, the Mérode Altarpiece,<sup>21</sup> being what it is, supports my thesis insofar as its existence greatly enhances the possibility of a meaningful comparison between a two-dimensional work of art and a piece of literature. This exceptional type of triptych was unearthed and labelled by Professor Blum, who, setting it off from the ordinary triptychs and polyptychs, defines the pseudo-triptych – thus the name she assigns to this group – by declaring that what characterizes it, though having two wings like their better known cousins, “are not painted on their backs, have no hinges and whose pictorial statement is therefore always visible” (Neilsen Blum, p. 4).

If one takes one's clue from this definition, one immediately sees that such objects, while routinely classified as triptychs, lack a number of features usually taken for granted but the sum total of which amounts to the absence of the third dimension, depth, and with it that of volume and, for that very reason, reduces

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<sup>19</sup> Regarding this issue and all others concerning the Mérode Altarpiece, see Felix Thürlemann's *Robert Campin: Das Mérode-Triptychon: Ein Hochzeitsbild für Peter Engelbrecht und Gretchen Schrinemachers aus Köln*, Frankfurt am Main 1997. Additional information about that work is found in Thürlemann's book *Robert Campin: Eine Monographie mit Werkkatalog*, Munich 2002, especially p. 58–76 and 269–272.

<sup>20</sup> Regarding the *Stoff* of this most unusual panel, see Meyer Schapiro's brilliant interpretation in a paper entitled “*Muscipula diaboli*: The Symbolism of the Mérode Altarpiece” in *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 27, 1945 (p. 182–187), as summarized in the section “Joseph bohrt Löcher” [Joseph drills holes”] on p. 27–30 of Thürlemann's *Taschenbuch*, see footnote 20 above.

<sup>21</sup> One little known specimen was discussed by Margaret B. Freeman in an essay published in the *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, Vol. 16, 1957 (p. 130–139).



the medial distance of the *comparanda* by one dimension. Speaking of the Mérode Altarpiece, for instance, it has no hinges or, more correctly, what hinges it has are merely painted on.

This means, however, that there was no way for these makebelieve hinges to move the wings; and since, under these circumstances, the pictures facing the viewer/worshipper were “always visible” there was no room for those which, judging by the standard triptych or polyptych, might have been painted on the reverse side as well. By meeting the requirements for the pseudo-triptych and being, as it were, all surface and no depth, the Mérode Altarpiece would actually seem, at least in certain ways, to anticipate the framed canvases on the walls of our modern museums and open to the inspection, if ever so cursory, by the the spectators, who, standing in front of paintings hung in such a way are accustomed to meeting them at eye level.

Thus, all things considered and all the evidence weighed, Campin’s singular creation may well be viewed as the cradle or incunabulum of such twentieth-century pseudo-triptychs as Francis Bacon’s near-blasphemous *Three Studies for a Crucifixion* (1982), whose panels abound with the disiecta membra of what seem to be chunks of freshly butchered meat, Otto Dix’s *Die Großstadt* (1927/28) and *Der Krieg* (1929–32) – the latter aptly subtitled *Ein Triptych mit Predella* – and Max Beckmann’s *Abfahrt* (1932/33).<sup>22</sup>

As for the rest, the attempted reconstruction, in the Spanish Room of The Cloisters (fig. 5), of the Mérode Altarpiece’s original setting clearly indicates that the Campin triptych was the focal point of a private chapel built expressly for the use of its donors, whom one must imagine as kneeling before it (hence the low level on which the work is placed) and worshipping while looking at their painted likenesses in the left wing of the altarpiece.



Fig. 5: Spanish Room in the Cloisters, as reproduced in the Cloister’s catalogue

<sup>22</sup> Bacon’s numerous triptychs were well represented in a recent exhibition called “Francis Bacon und die Bildtradition” (Vienna Kunsthistorisches Museum), mounted in 2003 and are reproduced in the catalogue, which includes a paper by Verena Gramper entitled “Das Motiv der Kreuzigung und der Bildtypus des Triptychons” (p. 324–338).

All this by way of an art-historical footnote largely concerned with the dialectic of two- and three-dimensionality which plays such an important role in this intermedial study. But now, in conclusion, I shall proceed to the actual confrontation in structural terms of “Die Majoratsherren” and the Mérode Altarpiece. Here, then, are the schemata (or skeletons) of these two *comparanda* which, when weighted against each other, clearly demonstrate up to what point the structural analogy between them holds and where it breaks down and, in so doing, either obscures (claudet) or altogether negates the results of my inquiry.

A	B	C	B	B
left wing outer frame	left wing inner frame	centerpiece	right wing inner frame	right wing outer frame
author/ narrator	Cousin and Lady- in-waiting	Lord of the Entail and Esther	Cousin and Lady- in-waiting	author
Prologue (210–215)	Episode 1 (212–216)	Main action (216–248)	Episode 2 (212–216)	Epilogue (212–216)

Fig. 6: Structural chart of Achim von Arnim, “Die Majoratsherren”

To begin with the blueprint of Arnim’s novella – the page numbers I have provided in the chart are conforming to those found in Gisela Henckmann’s Reclam edition of the text –, we should keep in mind that the information provided can be used for two different and alternative readings, namely, 1) a dynamic, sequential, linear and essentially temporal one (ABCDE), which does not concern me here, and 2) one that is static, symmetrical (qua polyptych) and predominantly spatial (ABCBA), which does the trick.

As for C, which makes up the bulk (ca. 70 %) of Arnim’s narrative, it offers a wealth of material related to the supernatural experiences undergone by its two protagonists, Esther and her soul mate, the Lord of the Entail, some of them expediting and others deterring the progress of its action. In the former group we have Esther’s fairly evenly spaced and framed or sometimes half-framed attacks of social madness (“geselliger Wahnsinn”) – as is the case with those which are initiated by the sound of a pistol shot reminding the girl of her late fiancé’s suicide but concluding much less spectacularly – as observed and, implicitly, narrated by the Lord, who is himself a visionary. Let me list them in their actual order:

1. Esther's quasi-ritual toilette (222) assisted by a swarm of Rococo putti milling around her dresser,
  2. her 'Mad Hatters' party (230–231), and
  3. the Masked Ball (238–239), a harrowing episode which one could easily mistake for one of the stories featured in Edgar Allan Poe's *Tales of the Grotesque and the Arabesque*,
- all of these leading up to
4. Esther's deathbed scene climaxing in the dying girl's visionary encounter with Adam and Eve – a tableau that ends abruptly with the girl's demise and the Lord's sudden disillusionment.

In stark contrast to these well organized and tightly structured episodes featuring Esther, those featuring the Lord of the Entail's countless visions betokening his gift of second sight (his "zweites Augenpaar"), in addition to being brief, fleeting, largely ad hoc, and but loosely framed, cover a broad spectrum of persons, objects and events – optical ilusions (or delusions) of a madman ranging from trivial to exalted.

Viewing these seemingly random disturbances and disruptions of the narrative line, one can easily see that at least this one segment of the microstructure of "Die Majoratsherren" is much too complex and wilfully disorganized to fit into the compositional scheme of a work like the Mérode Altarpiece which, having been carefully planned and executed – can lay no claim to being, in any way, surrealistic.

left wing	central panel	right wing
donors	Annunciation (Mary, Gabriel, Holy Spirit; Jesus child with cross)	
	+ books (2), vase, flower and candle	Joseph, maker of mousetraps

Fig. 6: Structural chart of Achim von Arnim, "Die Majoratsherren"

Thus, since what is good for the goose, that is to say, for those aspects of “Die Majoratsherren” which justify a structural comparison across medial borderlines, is not necessarily good for the gander, i.e. the Lord of the Entail’s diffuse and distorted world. And here my story ends, as T.S. Eliot might have put it, “not with a bang but a whimper.”



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## **Intermedial “Verbal” Culture**



# Intermediality in Culture: Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig*<sup>1</sup>

Heidrun Führer

The growing research in intermediality is not only concerned with analyzing the transformation, integration or juxtaposition of modern multimedia products, it explores also the relational aspect of the medium in human understanding and the relational aspect of art (and non-art) in the historical and present culture.<sup>2</sup> These intermedial focuses have also led to a re-examination of classical “mono-media”-products of art or non-art in a wider perspective wherein intermediality is seen as relevant to culture formed by different kinds of social interactions and ways of communication.

In this context, I reread and reinterpret Thomas Mann's novella *Der Tod in Venedig* (*Death in Venice*, 1911) – the allegoric story about the elderly writer Gustav von Aschenbach and his tragic homoerotic love-death (*Liebestod*) – in the light of how art and media are employed in this self-reflective narrative. Through the voice of an omniscient narrator the implied reader learns first about the tragic fate of the literary hero. Throughout, it is difficult to distinguish his inner focalizations from the narrator's in order to focus on the subjectivism of reality. The narrator points out that the respectable middle-class bourgeois society of the fin de siècle raised the protagonist to nobility for his heroic writing. Exhausted from his work and suffering from writer's block, this reputable artist travels to Venice, where in search for new inspiration he encounters the beauty of the boy Tadzio. The writer falling in love with this “masterpiece of beauty” is compelled to remain in Venice, the town of romantic “beauty in decay.” The writer's intense passion for the boy overcomes even the pain caused by the insalubrious weather and his fear for the menacing plague concealed by the town representatives. After having written a new masterpiece in the presence of Tadzio, Aschenbach dies lonely, still absorbed in his dream to achieve

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<sup>1</sup> For great help with the English language and useful comments on a draft of this paper, I wish to thank Carmen Arévalo.

<sup>2</sup> A summary to the discussion of the term “medium” not only as a technical device but also as a shifting conceptual frame, depending on whether the recipient understands it as a responsible body of meaning, is given by Werner Wolf: *The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality*, Amsterdam; Atlanta 1999, p. 35–36. Cf. also Joki van de Poel: *Opening up worlds. Intermediality Reinterpreted*, Utrecht 2005; David Chandler: “Processes of Mediation” in *The Act of Writing. A Media Theory Approach*, Aberystwyth 1995. Hans Lund: “Medier i samspel” in Hans Lund (ed.): *Intermedialitet. Ord, bild och ton i samspel*, Lund 2002 (p. 9–24), p. 19–22; Irina O. Rajewsky: *Intermedialität*, Tübingen; Basel 2002.

a stable union with this beautiful, always distant boy. The story ends with society respectfully receiving the news of the sudden death of the noble writer.

Although Thomas Mann's narrative does not provide the reader with an art product belonging to multimedia, my paper raises the question of how Thomas Mann's text deals with a re-representation of other media such as music and images – an indirect intermediality<sup>3</sup> – and their role in communication. Secondly, I state that the medial discourse within the story is combined with an aesthetic reflection on mimesis and art. This discourse mirrors the historic controversy between the normative idealists and their critics, such as Schopenhauer or Nietzsche, philosophers most relevant to Thomas Mann.<sup>4</sup> Verbal art as represented by the writer Aschenbach emphasizes the pooriness of romantic-idealistic aesthetics in favoring Platonic a-historical and a-personal “pure form” and a moralistic and uncritical content. Verbal references to visual arts, to paintings or sculptures, given by the protagonist and the narrator, draw not only on a particular style and on philosophical intertexts such as Plato, Xenophon, Schiller, Nietzsche etc., but invite the reader to ponder also Aschenbach's lack of credibility as artist. He blurs the borders between life and art, illusion and reality. In the alternative aesthetic concept presented in the novella by the narrator, art is always tied to an individual perception and as being an illusion in general. Competing in the same medium, the narrator emphasizes the superior aesthetics of representing the process of creation and reception of art beyond the traditional dichotomy of true and false.<sup>5</sup> In extending the borders of art, he also implies that art is an act of communication between a subject minding its body and the implied audience in a historical framework of multimedial culture. The narrator's markers within the fiction, both in the covert visual and verbal communication, aid the implied reader in noticing that the fearful fate of Aschenbach the artist is a parody of the limits of romantic aesthetics. Thirdly, I assert in this essay that the omniscient narrator or implied author<sup>6</sup> of *Death in Venice* takes a stand in a *paragone*

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Wolf, p. 41–42, 74. This form of intermediality is even called “transformational intermediality,” a term coined by Philip Hayward, also used by Rajeswsky, p. 13–15, 206. She neglects, however, the relevance of this form of “covert” intermediality calling it “mediunenspezifische Wanderphänomene” (rambling phenomena independent of the medium, my own translation).

<sup>4</sup> There is no doubt about the tremendous influence of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche in Thomas Mann's writings along with the music of Richard Wagner, cf. for example Donald Prater: *Thomas Mann. A life*, Oxford 1995, p. 113.

<sup>5</sup> Mimesis is not only “an artistic tool to make art look like reality,” but is also concerned with the representation of factual or ideal realities or with “distinguishing between ‘real’ (or true) and ‘fiction’ (or false),” cf. Ernest Mathijs and Bert Mosselmans: “Mimesis and the Representation of Reality: A Historical World View” in *Foundations of Science, Vol. 5, No. 1*, 2000 (p. 61–102), p. 81.

<sup>6</sup> While the implied author is an abstract agent outside the narrative fiction, the constructor of the protagonist's world and responsible for the tension between the protagonist and the commenting narrator, the omniscient narrator is a fictional and contemporary recipient within the narrative and whose perspective can be outlined in its increasing ironic relation to the main character's perception of the world. From now on, I do not distinguish between either of the agents, as I am mostly inter-

debate between verbal, visual and musical representations within this aesthetic context. Whilst Schopenhauer, in *The World as Will and Representation*, (1819), gives music a prior value to verbal arts due to the capacity of music “to replicate the experience of willing,”<sup>7</sup> the narrator defends the verbal arts as a primary form of communication. However, both agree that an artist who also depicts “cultural realities”<sup>8</sup> through mimesis as an integral relationship between art and nature has to enlarge the Classicistic-Romantic frame pondering the irrational quality of the world. In *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (*Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik*, 1872), “a Post-Schopenhauerian metaphysical system [and] a polemical history of Western culture,” Nietzsche aligns this irrationality with a musical or “Dionysiac mood” in opposition to a sculptural “Apollonian mood.”<sup>9</sup>

### Shifting the Borders – Indirect Intermediality

Indirect or covert intermediality questions the relationship between the dominant medium, here the text of a novella, and the media represented within this dominant medium, where the decisive criteria of their typical signifiers are partly missing.<sup>10</sup> While intertextuality deals with the drawing on different texts of verbal media in order to compose and transfer meaning, indirect intermedial relations within a text can be outlined when different media texts, i.e. nonverbal sign systems, are verbally represented.<sup>11</sup>

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ested in the growing tension between them and the main character. This narrator tells about the events around Aschenbach from inside the story as if they were real, a series of actual events, whereas they are fictional for the reader to whom the events are reported. As this impersonal and omniscient narrator is implicit and not identifiable as a character with a specific gender, I call him (or her) “he” in the general meaning. Due to his overall perspective he is also able to “see” and report Aschenbach’s thoughts. The narrator structures Aschenbach’s visual and acoustic perceptions and he guides the reader towards his alternative aesthetics by stressing the effects of the tragicomic main character.

<sup>7</sup> Rupert Wood: “Language as Will and Representation: Schopenhauer, Austin, and Musicality” in *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 1996 (p. 302–325), p. 302.

<sup>8</sup> For the term “cultural realities” see J. Mertens: “Ars imitatur naturam?” in *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 46, 1984, quoted after Mathijs and Mosselmans, p. 81.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Silk: “Das Urproblem der Tragödie: Notions of the chorus in the nineteenth century” in Peter Riemer and Bernhard Zimmermann (eds.): *Der Chor im antiken und modernen Drama*, DRAMA, Vol. 7, Stuttgart; Weimar 1998 (p. 195–226), p. 198. Subsequent references to Friedrich Nietzsche: *The Birth of Tragedy*, see the e-version, transl. by Francis Golffing; Walter Kaufmann, Ch. 16 at <http://www.geocities.com/thenietzschechannel/bt5.htm>. Jan. 2007. This work will be denoted with BT plus the number of the chapter. References to Arthur Schopenhauer: *Die Welt als Wille und Representation* (quoted usually as WWR) are taken from the ebook-version at: <http://www.schopenhauer-web.org/textos/MVR.pdf>, Jan.2007.

<sup>10</sup> Wolf’s definition has been criticized for preconditioning a dominance of one medium, cf. Poel, p. 48.

<sup>11</sup> For the problem of drawing lines between intertextuality and intermediality see Wolf, p. 1–3, Clüver in this book, and the divergent position by Rajewsky. In defining “medium” generally as “the use of one or more semiotic systems serving the transmission of cultural ‘messages’” (Wolf, p. 35–36), a reflection on the unifying of different genres within the dominant medium of the verbal

Thomas Mann's novella, being a verbal medium, draws from two other semiotic systems. One, hitherto called "genre,"<sup>12</sup> merges epic and dramatic elements, and the other, hitherto called "medium," is concerned with a semantic patterning of imagined media on the level of *histoire*. These are works belonging to visual arts and musico-dramatic performances. Those visual-literary creations, in which the two semiotic systems can not be disunited from each other, are called according to Hans Lund *iconic projections*.<sup>13</sup> And in analogy, those performative-literary acts, referring to visual and acoustic media, are called dramatic projections. In addition, on the level of *discourse*, musico-literary structures, hitherto called *leitmotif*,<sup>14</sup> are also integrated into the verbal medium of the novella launching a meta-aesthetic reflection about the border of ("high" and "pure") art, a structure that includes the questioning of generic categories defining medium and genre. In other words, the novella focuses on the main character as "a particular artist" (145)<sup>15</sup> creating his art through his perception of reality with a purely *aesthetic* gaze, divorcing the objects from its original context. In doing so, he excludes and denounces what might be described as "inferior" or "impure" art or as non-art. Thus, the novella deals with the relative character of conventional borders that generate separable semantic features. These are valued as aesthetic products without questioning the presumptions of aesthetical codes.<sup>16</sup> In order to scrutinize the main character's aesthetic gaze, I highlight on his *mental* intermedial process of giving meaning to an object by combining two semiotic systems according to his subjective intentions.

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sign system is part of intermedial studies.

<sup>12</sup> Genre is traditionally divided into three autonomous "conceptual structures that treat genres as quite separate compartments," cf. Joseph Farrell: "Classical Genre in Theory and Practice" in *New Literary History*, Vol. 34, 2003 (p. 383–408), p. 389. Farrell assesses, however, that already the ancient poets were aware of the instability of generic categories in spite of the "desire to believe that the practise of ancient poets was perfectly congruent with the [...] theories of ancient literary critics," p. 389.

<sup>13</sup> "The act of decoding a framed field of vision in the exterior concrete world of objects as if it were a picture is called iconic projection," see Lund 1992, p. 73. This definition includes also the projection of three-dimensional art-products.

<sup>14</sup> Due to the necessary restriction of this article I exclude most of the "contextual thematization of music," see Wolf, p. 56, regarding Gustav Mahler, Richard Wagner and in particular the Tristan motif.

<sup>15</sup> Original in italics, (Ch. 2). Quotations given in parentheses refer to *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, trans. Jefferson S. Chase, New York 1999. As quotations of the German original, Thomas Mann: *Der Tod in Venedig*, are taken from "Project Gutenberg eBook online" at [www.gutenberg.net/](http://www.gutenberg.net/)Jan.2007, I refer only to chapters (1 to 5).

<sup>16</sup> This reflection about the instability of generic categories applies to all hybrid forms that lead to an uncertainty in the reader's expectations, in his understanding and in his acceptance of the presented "art" product. As known at least from the activist cultural practice emerged in the mid-1970s, hybrid forms have always had difficulties to be accepted within the normative canon of art, see Nina Felshin: "Introduction" in *But is it Art*, Washington 1995, p. 9–30. A "process of change" and a "distrust of 'closure' may be seen at work, [...] a concern with various kinds of 'Others,'" when new forms of artistic creations and research find their way into the public, see Wolf, p. 2. The relation between distinctive reader-expectations and success is an explicit issue in the novella.



In a contrast-relation to the aesthetic perception of the main character, the narrator of the novella depicts acoustic and visual media that Aschenbach excludes or denounces. Aschenbach is presented both as a spectator experiencing the world mainly through his eyes, to the cost of his other senses, and as an isolated bourgeois writer reproducing his conceived reality as “depoliticized speech.”<sup>17</sup> Aschenbach’s visual perceptions are represented often in a series of static or dynamic artifacts, as *tableaux vivants* or as moving pictures, also called *attitudes*.<sup>18</sup> Due to the omniscience of the narrator, the fiction provides two contrasting perceptions of an intermedial reality. Firstly, I shall demonstrate the protagonist’s visual imagination on a chain of three short scenes taken from the beginning of the narration; secondly, I present Aschenbach’s *iconic projections* onto the most important antagonist Tadzio. Thirdly, I note that the text offers pictorial framings of the observing omniscient narrator. At last, Aschenbach’s and the narrator’s relation to music and sound is outlined in a separate chapter. As we will see, it is often impossible to draw a clear borderline between the perceptions of Aschenbach and the narrator.

Let us start by asking which media and what kind of images and sounds the novella *Der Tod in Venedig* conveys and to what account, since images and sounds as artistic and non artistic media precondition the debate on the interrelations between the arts.

## Visual Representations

In the first of three short scenes that illuminate the main character’s visual imagination<sup>19</sup> the narrator depicts Aschenbach on his solitary walk in search for creation and inspiration by “something exotic and disconnected” (152) in the strangely utterly quiet surroundings of Munich. Aschenbach is absorbed in his musings about an inspiring inscription on the wall of a cemetery, or “a formula of shimmering mysticism.”<sup>20</sup> The sudden appearance of a stranger with an attitude of being “alien and far-away” emerging “out of nowhere,” awakens him from his day-dreaming. He stares intently at the solitary man with “milky-white, freckled skin” standing silent and motionless in the doorframe of a chapel, “with his grey overcoat slung over his left

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<sup>17</sup> Roland Barthes: “Myth Today” in *Mythologies*, ed. and trans. Annette Lavers, New York 1984 (p. 109–159). Aschenbach’s “depoliticization” should be considered in the context of Thomas Mann’s own apolitical stance during WWI, developed in *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, (“Observations of an apolitical man”), 1912–15.

<sup>18</sup> With these terms Lund distinguishes between the frozen and the moving type of visual representation, cf. Hans Lund: *Text as Picture. Studies in the Literary Transformation of Pictures*, trans. Kacke Götrick, Lewiston 1992, p. 44. First published in Swedish as *Texten som tavla. Studier i litterär bildtransformation*, Lund 1982.

<sup>19</sup> The following quotations without parentheses refer to pages 140–142, Ch. 1, of the translation of *Death in Venice* by Chase 1999.

<sup>20</sup> “They shall enter the house of God” or “May the Eternal Light suffuse them.” (p. 140). (“Sie gehen ein in die Wohnung Gottes” oder: “Das ewige Licht leuchte ihnen”).

forearm, which he held tightly pressed just below his ribs, and a metal-tipped cane in his right hand, against whose handle he leaned, feet crossed, with his hip.” The only striking action of this snub-nose faced stranger, with a remarkably big Adam’s apple and colorless eyes, is his looking intensely “out into the distance”, his “gazing down from his height” and his “staring back” at Aschenbach “so militantly, so directly [...] forcing the opponent to avert his [Aschenbach’s] eyes, that he [is forced to] turn away.” With a sense of shame, the voyeur, who had carefully observed the odd bodily features of the man, immediately dismisses the object of his gaze. This wordless visual experience triggers a lustrous daydream in Aschenbach, an “imagination” (ein Gesicht) marked by the narrator as an “illusion” (Sinnestäuschung). Aschenbach has a visual imagination of a timeless tropical landscape of picturesque qualities. He perceives a mental image, a fictional world as if it were a picture, an exotic landscape of primeval wilderness with a crouching tiger. This new mental image includes only faint impressions of the other senses of hearing or smell. The effect of the tiger vision is designated as “a strange expansion within him,” a “form of a visual longing.” It forces the restless artist to a standstill as he ponders on the silent experiences “with his head down and his hands behind his back.”<sup>21</sup>

The second form of visual representation I want to deal with refers to Aschenbach’s perception of Tadzio, because here the visual markers in terms of pictorial or plastic art are even more obvious. As Aschenbach carefully contemplates every line of Tadzio’s body, he makes an iconic projection of the boy’s “physical perfection” to “Greek sculptures of the best period” (164) or more generally to Greek mythic figures. The boy appears to him “like a tender young god born from the depth of air and sea – the sight conjured up mythic images” (172).<sup>22</sup> Tadzio is depicted posing motionless by the sea as a static artifact: “[i]t was the head of Eros, its repeatedly skin the lustrous yellow of Parian marble” (168) or sitting in the hotel “in semi-profile ... one patent-leather-clad foot before the other, his elbow propped on the armrest of the wicker chair, check glued to a closed hand” (165).<sup>23</sup> Tadzio is also projected more dynamically like an actor in moving pictures – attitudes –, when he, in “graceful” movements, walks from one or the other side, within the frame of Aschenbach’s sight. Inside this frame “he would rotate his body in a most charming way, in one graceful taut twist – one leg bearing his full weight, the other extending its toes – embarrassed at being so adorable, anxious to fulfill his aristocratic duty

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<sup>21</sup> ([E]ine seltsame Ausweitung seines Innern ward ihm ganz überraschend bewußt, eine Art schweifender Unruhe, ein jugendlich durstiges Verlangen in die Ferne, ein Gefühl, so lebhaft, [...], daß er, die Hände auf dem Rücken und den Blick am Boden, gefesselt stehen blieb, um die Empfindung auf Wesen und Ziel zu prüfen, Ch. 3).

<sup>22</sup> ([W]ie ein zarter Gott, herkommend aus den Tiefen von Himmel und Meer, dem Elemente entstieg und entrann: Dieser Anblick gab mythische Vorstellungen ein, Ch. 3).

<sup>23</sup> (Er saß, im Halbprofil gegen den Betrachtenden, einen Fuß im schwarzen Lackschuh vor den andern gestellt, einen Ellenbogen auf die Armlehne seines Korbsessels gestützt, die Wange an die geschlossene Hand geschmiegt, in einer Haltung von lässigem Anstand, Ch. 3).

and please the visitor” (184);<sup>24</sup> or he would silently and solitarily pass across the dining room of the hotel (168). Several times Tazio reacts on Aschenbach’s framing by turning and smilingly glancing back with his “twilight-grey eyes” towards the “watching Aschenbach.” The first time Tazio invites the artist by eye-contact into the subtle reality of a love-adventure on the threshold of the dining room; the last time the boy, “an utterly isolated figure”, again “rotated his upper body, one hand on his hip, in an elegant twist from his basic position and looked back over the shoulder toward shore.” There Aschenbach is sitting again in a chair, “as he had sat once before, when those twilight-grey eyes first glanced over that fateful threshold and met his own” (218).

The third form of visual representation I am concerned with, provides *iconic projections* even from the narrator’s point of view when framing the diegetic world in sculptural qualities for “the gazing reader.” The detailed description of the stranger’s gestures, clothing, settings and eye-contact is the narrator’s verbal cast of Aschenbach’s ambiguous view, evoking emotions and subtly transmitting meaning without words. Deictic terms explicitly hint at a spatial orientation in a nonverbal medium from the particular perspective of an implied observer: According to Aschenbach’s lines of vision Tazio enters the room from the left side (168, 169, 170, 183), whereas the omniscient narrator visualizes Aschenbach gazing down from a window, moving his head to the “right” in search for Tazio (171, 184), or trying to lift his eyes to the level of Tazio’s gaze. The reader follows the narrator’s lines of vision again when Aschenbach or the boy are outlined in a romantic visual paradigm as “dreaming into the void” (170). Christian pictorial patterns are more obviously projected onto Aschenbach in the description of his gestures and posture as defined by illness or sickness. For instance, he holds his head at “somewhat of an angle, as though in pain” (152) and he is referred to as the Christian martyr Sebastian. Deictic terms are embedded in a communicative act when the narrator quotes and then affirmatively reflects a “keen observer’s” comment on Aschenbach’s bodily attitude, “‘Aschenbach, you see, has only ever lived like so’ – clenching the finger of his left hand into a tight fist – ‘never like so’ – unclenching it and letting it dangle relaxed from the arm of his chair” (146).<sup>25</sup> All in all, the reader, who “gazes” through the narrator’s comments on different point of views, is led to reflect on the fact that perception is not absolute, but preferential, a matter of belief. The narrator encourages the reader to question appearances and to respond to different levels of meaning by providing an allegoric structure of mimetic playfulness, concealed to the main character.

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<sup>24</sup> ([E]r lief herbei, lief naß vielleicht aus der Flut, er warf die Locken, und indem er die Hand reichte, auf einem Beine ruhend, den anderen Fuß auf die Zehenspitzen gestellt, hatte er eine reizende Drehung und Wendung des Körpers, anmutig spannungsvoll, verschämt aus Liebenswürdigkeit, gefallsüchtig aus adeliger Pflicht, Ch. 3).

<sup>25</sup> (“Sehen Sie, Aschenbach hat von jeher nur so gelebt” – und der Sprecher schloß die Finger seiner Linken fest zur Faust – ; “niemals so” – und er ließ die geöffnete Hand bequem von der Lehne des Sessels hängen. Das traf zu, Ch. 2).

## Transformation of an Audio-Visual Medium: Musico-Dramatic Performance

Taking into consideration the transformation of acoustic elements, the narrative deals three times with musical events, divorced from Aschenbach's aesthetic norms. The reputable artist regards the folkloric street singers only as "a boatload of musical pirates" presenting "profit-hungry tourist lyrics" (161). Two of these events are just mentioned, while a transposition of a multimedial event is presented as a climax in detail. This grotesque musico-dramatic performance acted out on the stage (terrace) of Aschenbach's hotel,<sup>26</sup> is not only a form of implicit musico-literary intermediality, "a verbal imitation of (effects) of music" (Wolf, p. 55), but even a *dramatic projection* with a structural analogy to a three-act comedy: the narrated event mentions three different parts of song performances. In this scene, the visual focus of the narration sways between the depiction of performative acting of several actors and their auditorium, emphasizing the different effects of music on different listeners. On one side, the solitary Aschenbach sits in spatial closeness to Tadzio, who stands in his statuesque posture of feet crossed, his right hand on a supporting hip; both are placed elevated by a balustrade and thus unified in a state of intimacy and critical agreement. Both are in contempt of the musical event and of the spatially separated group of the other naïve, enthusiastic guests on the opposite side of this balustrade. These had settled with their chairs downstairs in the garden, "in a semicircle," "to be nearer the performers," with which they join in with the sound of laughter. The actors' first number is "a searching love ballade" sung by a young woman "lending her sharp squeak to the tenor's sweet falsetto." The main comedian is described as a pale and snub-nosed stranger with a remarkably large Adam's apple. The entertaining acting of the singer who "grotesquely makes the rounds, clowning and shaking hands," gives quality to the merely silly sound of his words and "the tooting and jangling, the vulgar pinning melodies." Their "indecent ditty" finishes with a suggestive and lascivious laughter-refrain. In spite of not paying attention to the meaning of their dishonorable words and indecent gestures, Aschenbach's nerves "lapped up...the vulgar melodies" (200). In his state of intoxication the emotional arousal of music overwhelms him.

Corresponding to the musico-dramatic performance, Aschenbach's last sensual dream conveys the instrumental tones of tambourines, cymbals, and flutes and the increasing howling of wild dancing animals, women, boys and men with horns. These disturbing sounds and the assaulting odors dominate the shifting, indistinct dream-images. In contrast to these events, both placed near Aschenbach's end, the protagonist appreciates the quiet and "solemn" (167) natural sounds in the beginning of his journey: while he enjoys the soft noises of splashing water or muffled human voices, when watching the beautiful sight of the sea (159, 160, 161,

<sup>26</sup> For the definition of multimedial and mixed media texts, see Clüver in this book. The following quotations referring to this scene are from page 200–202 in Ch. 4.

163), he is able to control the emotional power of sounds through his aesthetic gaze. The sounds of the gondolier, his “muttering” and “hissing through his teeth,” or his “talking in spasmodic phrases” (159) in his incomprehensible dialect, are connected with an intensive observation of the man’s features and exaggerated gestures. The narrator outlines a similarity between his visual appearance, his performance and his sounds and those of the main comedian. Appreciating the soft melody of the incomprehensible Polish language, Aschenbach even imitates the name of Tazio as “two melodious syllables, ‘Adgio’ or more often ‘Adgiu’ ... with drawn-out u like a call at the end” (171), sounds that reoccur in his last bacchanal dream before his death, the “shrill cheering, too, and a certain howl like a drawn-out u – all permeated and at times drowned out by the deep warbling of a gruesomely sweet, ruthlessly insistent flute, which mesmerized his very innards with its shamelessly cloying tone” (210).

#### The Function of Visual, Verbal, and Acoustic Sign Systems in the Diegetic World

Despite the concreteness of the novella and the described scenes, the embedded pictorial and phonic links have an abstract, connotative character. They expand the semantic structure of the text and shed light on the contrasting frames between the protagonist and the omniscient narrator. In illuminating the protagonist’s perception of the world in its intermedial dimension, the main character’s motives for his actions and his perception of the world can be understood on the foil of the contemporary aesthetic discourse with its intrinsic hierarchic valuation of artistic and non artistic media.

As a recurrent motif Aschenbach is described as the passive observer who “projects pictorial structures onto the visual surroundings from his aesthetic distance.” This attitude is, as Hans Lund points out, a factor “important to the transformation of iconic projection in literary texts,” a common technique to present “people’s relations to the world around them” (Lund 1992, p. 109, 198). Contrasting Aschenbach’s *Weltanschauung*, his Platonic primacy of visual perception and his desire for transcendental Beauty and Divine Love, the omniscient narrator presents in his verbal images the 19<sup>th</sup>-century epistemological world-picture of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche stressing the irrational forces beyond human minds. These forces are linked to the compelling power of the primordial oneness and expressed in the nonverbal medium of both body and music.<sup>27</sup> By means of *iconic* and *dramatic projections*, the

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<sup>27</sup> “[Nietzsche’s] argument rests on the idea that there is a musical mood, a physiological state, which precedes linguistic enunciation in lyric and tragic verse, and from which lyric and tragic verses come. The musical, ‘Dionysiac’ mood, which he yokes to lyrical and tragic verse, is described as dynamic and forceful, and stands in contrast to the calm and contemplative mood of the ‘Apollonian’ artist.” Wood, p. 304.

narrator destabilizes Aschenbach's neo-platonic mental images as restricted to an idealized, rational world-view in harmony with the conventions of the bourgeois society.<sup>28</sup> Aschenbach fails – as a human being and as an artist – to live up to his idealistic concept of individual autonomy, collective moral and objective truth due to the irrepressible power of his body and its needs. In chasing the romantic illusion of “pure” form, Aschenbach dies, having succumbed to the illusion of transcending the earthly, as an “inferior” tragicomic rather than as a noble tragic hero. When illuminating phenomena beyond the border of “pure” and idealistic art, the narrator stresses the relational aspect of art (and non-art) dependent on a historical accepted culture. He emphasizes a complementary meaning concealed in the ugly side of earthly life: both the body and the “impure” hybrid forms of art are more involved in the context of the real world and contemporary communication, and are thus able to interact on a more equal level with other subjects. These statements follow from the argumentation below.

#### The Beholder Aschenbach as a Dishonest Apollonian Idealist

When scrutinizing Aschenbach's relation to the world, the narrator labels him ironically as “onlooker” or “keen observer” several times, as he reveals the protagonist both as inadvertent, mute and disembodied viewer who strives to control or dominate reality with his aesthetic gaze.<sup>29</sup> The writer Aschenbach who has lost his verbal creativity expresses himself now in the polysemic of the visual sign system, though striving to follow the same aesthetic taxonomy in his gazing as in his writing. This is most obvious in his projections on Tadzio. However, already the three opening scenes convey Aschenbach's weakness and lack of credibility. He is more influenced by his day-dreams and his “mental” or “suggested images” of a world beyond time and space, than by the “presented images” of the exterior diegetic reality in its historic condition.<sup>30</sup> As the art world of dreams best represents the Apollonian element according to Nietzsche, Aschenbach is outlined as an Apollonian artist. Countering Aschenbach's inner experiences, these non-reflected perceptual images often store, however, the narrator's ironic point of view, stressing the might of the Will, i.e.

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<sup>28</sup> The term “bourgeois” as used by Nietzsche embraces the connotations of reactionary unthinkingness as well as false Christianity.

<sup>29</sup> Aschenbach does not appreciate the relevance of other senses as signifiers meant to explain the exterior reality. Smell is, for instance, only noticed and valued as disgusting, as a clear indexical sign pointing to illness and decadence, an association Aschenbach strives to ignore. Taste is not mentioned at all.

<sup>30</sup> I follow Lund's terminology of “presented image” and “suggested” or “mental image,” based on Thomas Munro's terms “preventative” and “suggestive factors.” Included in the first are “those elements, aspects, or qualities in the work of art which are or can be directly sensed by a normal human observer. The suggestive include those which, as part of the work of art, cannot be directly sensed, but can be called up to the observer's imagination through association with the presented factors.” Lund 1992, p. 51; see also p. 25, 77.

another substratum of the world beyond the representations (*Vorstellung*) of the world as object of human knowledge, of the subject's rational understanding. In his state of day-dreaming he unconsciously perceives mental images within his interior reality different from experiences in the exterior reality of his ascetic life of writing. In his dreams Aschenbach expresses visually his longings and suppressed bodily needs in the framework of Schopenhauer's correlation between body and Will. Since his dream images, denoted as "imagination," "illusion" and "visual longing," represent absent things as present with an emotional catharsis-effect, transforming even unpleasant emotions like fear into insatiate desire, dreams obviously point at a meta-reflection about *mimesis*, an imitation or representation of reality.

The stranger's transfixing and Tadzio's smilingly responding eye contacts on the threshold are both a warning and an invitation to enter into the fragile realm of conscious mental images and unconscious dream images of the interior reality. The result is an inversion of the intended power relation: Aschenbach is masterminded by images and sounds coming from a realm beyond his conscious will. As a result, the noble artist blurs the border between life and art, since he perceives reality selectively with regard to codified standards of moral and aesthetic decorum: while *mimesis* is "an artistic tool to make art look like reality" (Mathjis and Mosselms, p. 82), Aschenbach makes reality look like art, as he gazes on an objectified reality measured by the aesthetic taxonomy of transcendental idealism (Truth, Beauty, Love). Unaware of the intrinsic illusionary character of Apollonian art, Aschenbach lives at the expense of a crucial alienation from his body and from an ordinary, real life in society. Preferring separated and elevated places behind barriers like a handrail, a balustrade or a window frame, he withdraws into a state of tranquil contemplation of "formulas of shimmering mysticism" belonging to this idealistic transmedial meaning. He transforms rather than reflects the "presented images" of real objects in the exterior reality, when wandering with "his mind's eye" about these isolated objects, regardless of their visual and spatial context, that has – like the cemetery in the first scene – a more or less obvious correlation with death.

When Aschenbach strives to control the world with his aesthetic gaze, he assumes the role as a solitary ingenious artist. Rapt in a disinterested contemplation of the world, the genius is the only one who – unconcerned of his real body and the limits of (simple) realism – is able to unfold the world unseen or the lost oneness for the "noninitiates" (147).<sup>31</sup> He is the suffering Apollonian dreamer who – in Nietzsche's terms – veils reality and himself in a delightful illusion to redeem himself and the

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<sup>31</sup> In opposition to Aschenbach, Schopenhauer assumes this state of serene contemplation of the Platonic Idea, identical with the beautiful and the sublime, as an unstable short moment, merely a brief liberation from the Will. Moreover, Schopenhauer's "principle of individuation," identified as "the primary evil" by Nietzsche, forces the genius to turn away from empirical individuation, cf. Bart Vandenabeele: "Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and the Sublime" in *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 2003 (p. 90–106), p. 96.

represented society (BT: 4). Due to this assumed role of a unified, will-less subject, Aschenbach overemphasizes cognition while he marginalizes the significance of the emotional dimensions of his body – an unconscious power that takes on a life of its own. While embracing purity and the eternal truth in “ethical indifference” (150) he excludes any critical reflections about society and its representation in art. Thus, Aschenbach gains the elevated and solitary position of a national (genial) poet of high art and the desired everlasting fame.<sup>32</sup> Obviously, this neo-platonic bourgeois works with the verbal medium in the written and oral form as a selective mediator of reality. He serves his own self-presentational needs and those of the higher bourgeois society.<sup>33</sup> In doing so, the writer neither faces nor represents real life in its profanity, materiality and ugliness beyond his restrained conventions of seeing. Following Lessing’s aesthetic universals, Aschenbach represents Nietzsche’s mediocre Socratic or Apollonian artist, whose “stock in trade is talk of destiny and the triumph of the moral order.”<sup>34</sup> Even worse, Aschenbach loses his authenticity as Schillerian genius, since he does not reflect the intrinsic illusionary character of art. He immerses himself in his own illusions. Already the title of his novel, “Maya,” gives away that he, the solitary artist, striving for purity and truth, remains trapped in the “veil of Maya” – the realm of illusion or deception due to the impersonal irrational might of Schopenhauer’s Will.<sup>35</sup> Thus Aschenbach’s aesthetic lack of credibility is emphasized as he blurs the borderline between (illusionary) art and (real) life due to his limited (or false) perception of life, and as his acts – his love and chase of Tadzio – contradict his philosophical and aesthetical attitude. Aschenbach confuses the ethical and the aesthetical when he changes from a passive admirer of art (Tadzio) into an active pursuer of him, thus losing his state of assumed disinterestedness.

Symbolically, the sight of the alleged ingenious artist is often blurred to stress his individual limits of visual perception and, as a consequence, the limits of his writings. On the abstract level of the meta-aesthetic discourse, it emphasizes a critical

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<sup>32</sup> Aschenbach’s conversion to the classic idealistic aesthetics in his writings is rewarded with the addition of “von” to his name. By then he had successfully advanced to the top of the elite culture that reveres in particular the German Classicists and Romantics of high esteem like Friedrich von Schiller, Johan W. von Goethe or Hugo von Hofmannsthal. These poets are not mentioned by name in the fiction but are obviously referred to.

<sup>33</sup> Aschenbach condemns explicitly moral relativity (“moral scepticism”) and individual and psychological sensibility (“sympathy with the abyss”) (146) in his mature writings, discussed in the second chapter of the novella.

<sup>34</sup> Jarry Clegg: “Mann contra Nietzsche” in *Philosophy and Literature*, Vol. 28, 2004 (p. 157–164), p. 162.

<sup>35</sup> Schopenhauer: “A person who lives in the moment, utterly within the folds of the veil of Maya, sees only phenomena, individual and particular objects, innumerable dichotomies: pleasure is distinct from pain, the murderer is distinguished from the victim, yet the person seeks justice or retribution. Mired within Maya, the superficial person, a prisoner of the will, is incapable of realizing that wickedness is actually an aspect of the will to live, for s/he thinks such evil must be opposed to nature. In other words, the veil of the Maya is the metaphysical underpinning of the *principium individuationis*, ‘the principle of individuality,’” quoted after: <http://www.schopenhauer-web.org/textos/MVR.pdf>.



statement against Lessing's idea of transparency, a denial of the medium, his "theory of representation that establishes the sign by making it invisible."<sup>36</sup> Because of his shortcomings in written and oral media, the mute Aschenbach starts his fatal *rite de passage* with a visual confrontation of the objectified world, the eye-contact with the stranger:<sup>37</sup> leaving his safe position as a rational, disembodied gazer, respected by the elite, he ends his life collapsing intoxicated, an object for the gaze of others, in a foreign place. Aschenbach's fate outlines the romantic formula of the soul's progression to self-fulfillment through suffering.

A condition for Aschenbach's state of serene contemplation is the aesthetic distance that protects his emotional self-effacement. Obviously, the mutual eye-contact between him and Tadzio (or the stranger) demands a form of reciprocal relationship that arouses uncontrollable emotions and changes the hierarchic dominance of the "minded subject" over the "embodied object." Given this background, the stranger's provoking gazing back symbolizes his refusal to be objectified by Aschenbach's voyeurism of stated purposelessness. On a more abstract level, it is also the denial of the established supremacy of the mind over the body, of the established primacy of images over words, and of the definition of art by elite culture over popular culture.

### The Challenge of a Reciprocal Communication

When the voyeur Aschenbach repeatedly averts his eyes or ears in shame, leaves a place, and immediately tries to forget, he wards off the unpleasantness of reality and refuses a reflecting communication with "inferior" humans who insult the artist's dignity. Such "toxic" phenomena of reality are, for instance, the repelling stranger, the strange gondolier, the disgusting "old fop" on the boat or the vulgar street musicians, all of whom try to deliver a veiled prophesy of his fate by visual or verbal means. The effect is an arousal of unpleasant and uncontrollable emotions, like fear and the insatiable sexual desire, that are obviously related to his neglected body, not to his mind. Due to the ugliness of these figures and their involvement in the banality of contemporary life, they represent to him the depravity of society and, moreover, the loss of Oneness. In addition, they challenge his solitary position, his aesthetic code and his aesthetic gaze of control, as they pull him out of his absent-minded state of contemplation, the realm of mere mind, and intrinsically unmask the indeterminacy of his mental images as beautiful illusions. Any reciprocal form of visual or verbal communication with those "bodies of society" would break the

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<sup>36</sup> See Liliane Weissberg's "Review on David E. Wellbery: Lessing's 'Laokoon.' Semiotics and Aesthetics in the Age of Reason" in *MLN*, Vol. 101, No. 3, 1986 (p. 725–726), p. 725. Sign is meant here both in its aesthetics and semiotic constraints.

<sup>37</sup> This term, taken from the anthropologist Arnold van Gennep, is successfully used in literary studies to designate man's ritualised change from one state into another. In the case of Aschenbach's passage it demonstrates his changed relation to reality. Cf. Lund 1992, p. 73 and Maria Nikolajeva: "Literature as a rite of passage: A new look at genres" in *Compar(a)ison*, Vol. 2, 1995 (p. 117–129).

“spell” of the writer’s mystifying gaze.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, reality with sounds or visions belonging to a different, powerful code rooted in ugliness and provocation is not considered to be art by this artist representing the bourgeois society. Moreover, he refuses to fix or anchor the terrifying flow of visual and verbal information by integrating it in his life and in his art.

The abandoned camera on the beach witnessing the final battle between Tadzio and his comrade Yashu<sup>39</sup> visualizes a semantic complex symbol. This technical medium, that, divorced from acoustic means, takes a picture distanced from the represented object, emphasizes visual perception as preferential, due to its message being concealed on different levels: the *perceptual* connotation (i.e. the identification of the object depicted); the *cognitive* connotation (the recognition of the codes linked to the objects to allow a more exact cognition of the scene depicted); and the *ideological* connotation (the identification of the historical values of the image).<sup>40</sup> When only focusing on the main character, the isolated camera hints at Aschenbach’s failing position as a purposeless gazer unconscious of being both “contemplator and participant”<sup>41</sup> in a conscious act of reciprocal communication. His dualistic position of observer and co-creator of reality is at stake, since he does not reflect the conditions of perceptual and ideological connotations when he perceives reality. The camera, designed as a medium to reproduce an optical object within a frame, is equivalent to a man’s eyes; and the photographer, the master of the optical instrument of framing, is equivalent to a man’s head, responsible for coding the exterior world as iconic signs within the mind. Obviously, the head participates creatively in the process of producing optical frames, i.e. mental images. The connotations are already part of the act of production, not only of perception. The fact that the producer of the frame is missing foreshadows Aschenbach’s death and his failing concept of communicating through his aesthetic gaze. The verbal image of the isolated camera on a tripod by the sea invites the reader to decode the visual enigma of this “single emblematic scene” (“Sinnbild”) by reflecting on the auratic aspects of a photograph.

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<sup>38</sup> On the boat to Venice, Aschenbach is repelled by the looks and the words of an “old fop” (158; Ch. 3), his morally doubtful behaviour, his indignant and blurred words, and intoxicated appearance. He wears the mask of a made-up youngster, as Aschenbach does later, and providently wishes Aschenbach good luck in his upcoming love, a truth Aschenbach disgustedly averts from. Aschenbach even ignores the truthful words of a respectable clerk advising him to leave pest-stricken Venice and thus embraces the “lying society” (208; Ch. 5).

<sup>39</sup> On an abstract level, the final fight between the boys point to Nietzsche’s aesthetic theory that art needs the productive tension of the antagonistic power of Apollo and Dionysius; the shaping hand of the first one gave it its form, the power of the latter gave it its depth. The creativity results from a union of rational structure and the chaotic power of emotional arousal or in Nietzsche’s wording – “from the Apollonian Dionysiac duality”, BT: 1. The tripod, an attribute of the camera, is a linkage to Apollo’s tripod and a marker for his prophetic character.

<sup>40</sup> Roland Barthes: “The Photographic Message” in *The Responsibility of Forms*, trans. Richard Howard, California 1991 (p. 3–21).

<sup>41</sup> A quotation by Wolfgang Iser, cited by Lund 1992, p. 71.

Building on Mitchell's assumptions about the "relationability of image and beholder" in *What do Pictures Want*, we may say that the power of the observed object presented in the verbal image expresses its desire to "be interrogated or (better) invited to speak."<sup>42</sup> Otherwise, the object overpowers the gazing subject through its ability to arouse emotions. Instead, the "gazing reader", situated in a spatial relationship to the representation, is invited as an interlocutor to a verbal-visual communication by questioning and reflecting on the shifting perspectives dependent on the context. For instance he is led by the narrator who considers a nameless observer's response to Aschenbach's gestures (e.g. his clenched fist), or by a diegetic reader's critical response to Aschenbach's literary heroes. Thus, the narrator emphasizes the influential position of an *interpretant* and his perceptual mode, guiding the implied reader on the way to understanding through the complexity of visual meaning by means of verbal signs. All in all, he counters Aschenbach's closed and centered perception both by anchoring it with labeling verbal comments (e.g. about his lacking physical conditions or his intoxication) and by relaying it with (verbal) images emphasizing the relativity of spatial and temporal contexts. This difference unmasks the suppressed part of Aschenbach's perceived reality: the body as physical medium and as a consequence its emotional and sexual needs.

### *Mental Intermediality*

Tadzio is the crucial example how exterior reality is transferred in Aschenbach's mental images by the means of his preconceived aesthetic codes. As he is strongly attracted to the boy's beauty and his educated manners, Aschenbach "conjures" mental images of mythic qualities to project onto ordinary phenomena of daily life. He perceives the real boy from the exterior world in an *iconic projection* as an aesthetic product of visual art, in particular, in different forms of Greek and Roman sculptures.

To make his correlation with statues of the often life-sized divine or human figures likely, certain visual signs of the boy's features are recognized as indexical signs pinpointing the canonical code of Classic Style of plastic art: Tadzio's head, his curly hair, the tranquility and sensual perfection of the surface of his body, and his weight-baring stance of contrapost, the rotation of his upper body, and the gesture of his hands. To transfer a *cognitive* connotation, the artist makes an active, paradigmatic choice among many possibilities deducible from the boy's presented optical determinacy. These identified visual similarities allow him to link the boy to classic sculptures. This objective aesthetic correlative<sup>43</sup> (a symbolic object conveying aesthetic

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<sup>42</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell: *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*, Chicago 2005, p. 49, 33.

<sup>43</sup> Following T. S. Eliot, Judith Williamson singles out the "objective correlative" as the bridge to deliver the transfer of meaning from an exterior referent system to an initially meaningless product. After a while this product starts to represent these abstract ideas or feelings, even generate them

emotions and other abstract concepts), permits the disembodied viewer Aschenbach the aesthetic pleasure of voyeuristic gazing at the objectified body, divorced from the forbidden, non-aesthetic sexual desire. Like a “currency,” this generated conceptual relationship guarantees Aschenbach not only the pleasure of a beholder of visual art, but also promises the Ideas of Beauty, Love and Joy in the supposed framework of a-historical aesthetics, as the Platonic aesthete is the “master of erotics (...) [who] ascends from the love of beautiful bodies to the love of beautiful deeds and discourses, and finally to a vision of Beauty itself from which he himself can give birth to the beautiful.”<sup>44</sup> He affirms his connotative link to the aesthetic framework of Romantic idealistic style<sup>45</sup> by designating his *iconic projection* with a verbal label. By entitling Tadzio Apollo (such as Apollo of Belvedere), Eros, or Il Spinario, (the sculpture of a peasant boy of the third century BC), he transfers an iconographical meaning to the image. When a bi-medial message forms in Aschenbach’s mind, meaning and myth are produced in a *mental* intermedial act comparable to the way messages are conveyed in advertisements consisting of text and image. Aschenbach’s verbal labels anchor his mind in the ambiguity of the visual image by emphasizing certain bodily features. Even his quotations from Plato’s *Symposion* and *Phaidros* – texts of asserted truth according to bourgeois culture – serve in the same way to anchor Aschenbach’s understanding and to restrain his ambiguous emotions. These verbal texts extend the meaning of the individual boy’s image with an *ideological* connotation by applying a certain co-textual and cultural knowledge. In doing so, he anchors the present with the past, one of the most important functions of myth,<sup>46</sup> to enforce his mental distance to the boy. Having turned the boy’s body into a mythical statuesque beauty, Aschenbach, however, loses himself in this myth that can neither be reached nor renounced. As a consequence of the temptation of the mask of antiquity, his flesh gives rise to mystical feelings of perdition.

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or serve them as currency. Judith Williamson: *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising*, London 1978, p. 29–31. Roland Barthes: “Rhetoric of the Image” in *Barthes Image, Music, Text*, select. and trans. Stephan Heath, New York 1996 (p. 32–51); for Tadzio as aesthetic correlative cf. also Gary Johnson: “Death in Venice and the Aesthetic Correlative” in *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 2004 (p. 83–96), p. 85.

<sup>44</sup> Richard Shusterman: “The Aesthetics” in *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 23, 2006 (p. 237–243), p. 237. Plato’s *Symposion*, consisting of six pieces on Eros and praise on Socrates, deals with a lover’s striving for the knowledge of beauty and immortality. Cf. Ludwig C. H. Chen: “Knowledge of Beauty in Plato’s Symposium” in *Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 1, 1983 (p. 66–74), p. 66. According to Plato the primary object of love is Beauty and the form of Beauty is identical with that of God.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Gunnar Berefelt: “The Regeneration Problem in German Neo-Classicism and Romanticism” in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 18, No. 4, 1960 (p. 475–481), p. 476. Berefelt reminds the reader of the arbitrariness of the terms “classical form” and “romantic content,” p. 479. For a background see Carol Jacobs: “The Critical Performance of Lessing’s Laokoon” in *MLN*, Vol. 102, No. 3, *German Issue* 1987 (p. 483–521), or Meir Sternberg: “The ‘Laokoon’ Today: Interart Relations, Modern Projects and Projections” in *Poetics Today*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 1999 (p. 291–379.)

<sup>46</sup> Ian Watt: *Myth of Modern Individualism. Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe*, Cambridge 1996, p. 233.

In the eyes of Aschenbach, the beholder, Tadzio's body is the medium of aesthetic communication carrying a culturally specific meaning. He sees in the boy "sculptural" features and "sculptural" *attitudes*, iconologically coded as inwardness, pure serenity and deeper spirituality.<sup>47</sup> Aschenbach's projecting him as sculptures makes use of properties of pictorial art: to evoke the presence of an imaginary figure with whom the viewer is invited to identify and to stress tractability as an intrinsic quality of sculptures. While the Tadzio framed in *tableaux vivants* underscores the ideal beautiful lines of tranquility as paragon and symbol of artistic harmony and cosmic orderliness, the dynamic visual perceptions of Tadzio might not only be related to the esteemed "Vielansichtigkeit" or many-sidedness of realistic Greek and Roman sculptures, when the beholder actively moves around. In opposition to the normally closed frame of paintings, the dynamic of Tadzio's movements refer also to the open frame of (three-dimensional) plastic arts, taking space and originating an illusion of moving through space.<sup>48</sup> In this context, the deictic terms confirm to the reader both of the spatiality of the artistic medium of plastic arts and of its intrinsic narrative (temporal) flux; facts that Lessing explicitly discussed when differentiating between the visual, natural signs in space and the verbal, arbitrary signs in time, and when stressing the dynamics of spatial and temporal relationships.<sup>49</sup>

When Tadzio seems to Aschenbach "beauty itself, form as divine thought, the one true, absolute perfection, which resides in the realm of the sublime" (185), Aschenbach refers to the ideological aesthetic veneration of Greek and Roman art by German humanists of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century such as Winkelmann, Schiller, Goethe, Schlegel, Lessing or Hegel. On the background of the idea of the (now lost) naivety of the ancients and their unity with nature, those humanists praised the neo-classicistic iconic patterns of the idealized male nude in Greek and Roman plastic art as sublime beauty. The "archaic figure of idealized normative human form" was in particular appreciated for its "dreamy retrospection of a highly esteemed past or nature" (Johnson, p. 87) its alleged "edle Einfalt und stille Grösse" (noble simplicity and quiet grandeur). Their features and gestures were supposed to represent the sensory appearance of the Idea, the Platonic beauty, Schillerian pure form and the restrained emotions.<sup>50</sup> Apart from the supposed a-historical aesthetic implications

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<sup>47</sup> See the definition of medium as "a mode of artistic expression or communication" in *The Merriam Webster Online Dictionary*, entry "medium."

<sup>48</sup> Intrinsic to the medium of human sculpture is its embodiment of space in opposition to painting, and its focus on the materiality and the form of the human body, cf. Diana Konopka: "sculpture" in *Theory of Media* in <http://humanities.uchicago.edu/faculty/mitchell/glossary2004/sculpture.htm>, Jan.2007.

<sup>49</sup> Lessing, emphasized also narrative sequences in images giving them a temporality very much like that of poetry, see Frederick Burwick: "Lessings 'Laokoon' and the Rise of Visual Hermeneutics" in *Poetics Today*, Vol. 20, 1999 (p. 219–272), p. 224, 229.

<sup>50</sup> Sternberg, p. 307. Cf. also Schiller's 22. Letter of his "Ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen" (1795).

of the “ideal of absolute transparency,”<sup>51</sup> this historic discourse connotes a political message: the assessment of the depravity of the contemporary political and cultural system compared to the esteemed democratic spirit and individual freedom of the old Greek society.

In contemplating Tadzio in the illusion of being a Greek sculpture of the god Apollo, the boy, now generalized into the (visual and verbal) abstract meaning of a personification of Mankind and the Divine, becomes an object of worship,<sup>52</sup> even Apollo himself. Thus, as an Apollonian artist Aschenbach benefits from a Tadzio equipped with Apollonian characteristics: as the important god of poetry and the bearer of life, light, logos, dreams and prophecy to his loved-ones, the projected boy inspires Aschenbach to his new masterwork of supposed truth, since the writer assumes – like one of Schiller’s naïve poets – the experience of being “miraculously reborn” in the inspiring image of a god.<sup>53</sup> His overwhelming jubilation is a result of the formation of his Ego in the process of visual identification with the body (mirror stage), leading to a sense of regained mastery of the verbal language. He experiences the mesmerizing effect of the sublime, a manifestation that should concern the mind rather than the body, following the tradition of Kant’s resilience and comprehensive powers of rational thought.

Aschenbach’s writing and gazing depends on the same idealistic concept of *mimesis* that gives primacy to form over content, to Beauty over reality, to sensual, non-intellectual immediacy over critical, intellectual reflection, and to a clear and centred perspective over shifting multiperspective images and narratives. Ignoring the fact that any mimetic work of art always provides just “a distorted imitation of the ideal rational Forms that constitute true reality” (Shusterman, p. 237), Aschenbach, the artist and connoisseur of art, surrenders to the emotional power aroused by his mental image. Blurring the borderline between art and life like Pygmalion, who falls in love with his own creation of an ideal human being (Galathea), Aschenbach collapses into the frame of his representation of embodied Beauty due to his increasing emotional involvement. Aesthetic illusion occurs not only when the sign is identified with the thing signified but also when the artist is identifying himself with the thing (Burwick, p. 224).

While Aschenbach ponders the object’s autonomy, its being more an expression of his thoughts, the object changes to a subject, gazes back and finally transforms the former subject into a (mute) object. In order for Aschenbach to become the

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<sup>51</sup> David E. Wellbery and Robert S. Leventhal: “Review on: Lessing’s Laokoon and the Rise of Visual Hermeneutics” in *Eighteenth Century Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 1986 (p. 424–429), p. 428.

<sup>52</sup> Mitchell, p. 253. Cf. also Giorgio Vasari’s warnings that sculptures of human bodies are the most dangerous of art forms since they “elevate the human body to a status of god, reify mortal men into immortal idols, and degrade spirit into dead matter” in *Lives as Artists* (1568) quoted after Mitchell, p. 248.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Johnson 2004, p. 85. The narrator does not outline the content of his new masterpiece in an expected ekphrasis to emphasise the emptiness and the stereotype quality of Aschenbach’s writing.

object of Tadzio's admiration, the objectified boy must become a subject and the disembodied gazer has to convert into an object of art. Thus, in his desire to be like the ideal, Aschenbach models his own body in the barbershop after the image of statuesque youth and beauty with the result that he transforms in a copy of the disgusting "old fop." At the end, together with Aschenbach's assumed superiority or sense of "uniqueness," and his self-imagination as a subject to whom the world is given merely as an object of knowledge, also Kantian autonomy, agency and responsibility turn out to be a most fragile and vulnerable construct. The narrator demonstrates through Aschenbach's fate and his writer's block that "instability at the juncture of self and body profoundly affects what and how we perceive."<sup>54</sup> Moreover, he shows that this loss of stability also influences the borderlines between the different forms of art and media.

### Meaning Generated by Intermediality

The general relational effects in perception are dramatized when the narrator provides Aschenbach's *iconic projections* with "a life of their own."<sup>55</sup> In stressing the intrinsic polysemy of images, the narrator verbally stresses other visual elements of Tadzio's features as well as the surrounding stimuli in the intermedial context. Thus a broader concept of *mimesis* is emphasized. It also implies "the process of depicting cultural realities, those things that are real according to a certain point of view," provided by the cultural order and assumed "to be *about* reality, by re-presenting it" (Mathijs and Mosselmans, p. 81; original in italics). Shifting between Aschenbach's point of view and his own, the narrator illuminates both Aschenbach's closed frame of perceiving and representing reality and his unconscious dependence of certain historical cultural conventions that he re-presents. Thus, Aschenbach's reasons for framing are undermined, as the narrator stresses parts of the reality excluded from Aschenbach's cognitive perception. On the one hand, Aschenbach's destabilization is an effect of the discrepancy between his idealised image of himself and the world and, on the other hand, it results from the discrepancy between his idealisations and what he actually perceives in presented images.

This incongruence between perspectives is the basis on which the narrator modifies and ironizes the abstract meaning that the beautiful and innocent youth Tadzio is given by Aschenbach. In particular, his neglect of Tadzio's contrastive relation to the

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<sup>54</sup> Stephen G. Nichols: "Laughter as Gesture. Hilarity and the Anti-Sublime" in *Neohelcon*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 2005 (p. 375–389), p. 384.

<sup>55</sup> Michael de Montaigne formulated already in 1580 the inversion of the hierarchical relation between the creator and his art product "the work, by its own force and fortune, may second the workman, and sometimes out-strip him, beyond his invention and knowledge" in *Essays*, trans. Charles Cotton: "Of the art of conferring" III, 8, quoted from David Chandler: "Montaigne and the Word Processor" paper presented at Aberystwyth 1993, at: <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/short/montword.html>. June 2007.

nameless figures claims the boy's reinterpretation as Apollo. This shall be exemplarily shown from a probable identification of the anonymous stranger. Because of his characteristic attributes (the cane, hat, cloak and traveler-like appearance), he can – in spite of his indistinct description and the lack of a distinctive verbal title – not only be identified as a personification of Hermes/Mercury; he might, moreover, be recognized as an *iconic projection* of the Roman statue of Mercury of the 4th century BC from the “frozen moment” of his static position (his counterbalancing body, the posture of his hands and his feet crossed),<sup>56</sup> when stressing the same ambiguous visual markers Aschenbach used for Tadzio's iconic projections. Also his posture in an architectural frame might easily be related to the origin position of sculptures within architecture (Mitchell, p. 169). On one crucial point, however, the stranger differs from traditional visual representations of Hermes: he is not represented as a young male figure, but as an old man with milky-white skin, colorless eyes, and long teeth that suggest a skull and thus death. Evidently, the narrator does not exactly transform a *specific* object of visual art as realistically and truthfully as possible, but enigmatically imbues it with incongruous pictorial motifs that correspond to the common symbolism of the intermedial surroundings. If the architectural context of the man standing under the doorframe of a chapel between “two apocalyptic beasts” (140)<sup>57</sup> is considered within the common symbolism of a passage between death and life, or even of an intermediary of dreams, then the personification of Hermes – both in his role as the god of travelers and as Psychagogue, the leader of souls to Hades, – is even made evident; the stranger-Hermes is the one who, in the abstract context of ideological connotations, inspires Aschenbach to take his voyage, causes his perpetual state of dreams, and – finally – his death.

The unfamiliar deviation from classical beauty of the antique sculpture of Hermes counters the normative and clichéd view of the beautiful, harmonious and serene Greek and Roman art, associated with the Apollonian principle of visual and verbal art. Nietzsche extends this ideological connotation to include the Apollo-Dionysus-dichotomy by stressing the marginalized vulgar, irrational and intoxicating forces in Greek art and culture. The “keen observer,” not contemplating these details, reacts bodily with an arousal of fear towards the strange appearance of the sublime, as neither this place nor the presented image of the stranger can be related to Aschenbach's aesthetic codes of the beautiful. The narrator, protected by the canny Hermes – also the god of eloquence – extends the field of his aesthetic gaze by facing the body as the expression of the irrational Will, the “primordial oneness of his painful contradictory nature” (BT: 5). Finally, it is the omniscient narrator who

<sup>56</sup> There are even several “copies” in the same classicistic style actualizing aspects of the common myth. Cf., for instance, the classical statue; in the Uffizi, Florence or the sculpture of the Roman god Mercury by 17<sup>th</sup>-century Flemish artist Artus Quellinus.

<sup>57</sup> These beasts – a variation of the serpents from Mercury's caduceus – can for instance be found in Quellinus' statue mentioned above.



leads Aschenbach to death. These shifting perspectives on the allegorical level lead to the effect that the narrative suggests a dynamic, open attitude beyond its clear and symmetrical structure. This dis-orderliness might be related to the “Dionysiac mood” as a representation of the Oneness within the verbal medium that tends to puncture bordering visual and narrative spaces.

Regarding the reinterpretation of Tadzio, the narrator applies the technique of combining several symbolic semantic levels by casting different standardized pictorial motifs against one another to reveal Tadzio’s intrinsic relation to Hermes. Such a “Sinnbild”<sup>58</sup> – known as “disguised symbolism” in visual arts and as “poetic vision” in verbal arts – extends its meaning beyond Aschenbach’s control. The narrator constructs his counter-myth in which the representation of the natural is exaggerated by removing objects from their historical context. Aschenbach – in spite of the ambiguity of visual signs – is confident in his projections of Tadzio as Apollo Belvedere, Eros or Spinario in the framework of innocence and beauty, purity and truth. The narrator’s contrasting projections result in a conceptual relationship between Tadzio and Hermes that destabilizes Aschenbach’s illusionary myth of a static border between (beautiful, pure) art and (ugly, mixed) non-art. For instance, Tadzio-Apollo converges to a personification of Hermes as he sits in a “position of his patent-leather-clad feet one before the other.” Applying the iconological knowledge of his posture and clothing of his feet to the visualized “pregnant moment” of art, the boy might, however, be identified as the Mercury-sculpture by Lysippos.<sup>59</sup> When Tadzio is explicitly referred to as Hermes-Psychagogue in the final scene, his fixed identification undermines Aschenbach’s myth of Tadzio as the beautiful light-bearer Apollo pointing at the sea with an upraised arm. The worshipped boy, “gliding ahead into the looming immensity, full of promise and content,” (218) is an intermediary between the two realms. Aschenbach understands their last eye-contact and Tadzio’s indexical gesture towards “the nebulous vastness” as an invitation to the realm of mythos or the idealised state of Oneness limited only to Beauty, Truth and death.<sup>60</sup> This is the result of the diminishing distance between the observer Aschenbach and the illusion of an art work created by him. To the narrator, however, Tadzio’s deictic gesture emphasizes not only the spatiality of a sculpture,

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<sup>58</sup> There are several such emblematic scenes composed in the same technique of intertwining different pictorial motifs into *one* iconic projection, e.g. the depiction of the St. Sebastian, martyr, who is Aschenbach’s idol, is combined with pictorial patterns belonging of the suffering Maria: this exaggeration ironizes Christians virtues that devalue body and life, aligned with Nietzsche’s attack of bourgeois decadence. Thus, this reference to visual art is used to emphasise Aschenbach’s pathetic self-image and his staging as a suffering artist, full of psychological self-constraint, and to put an ironic distance between him and the narrator.

<sup>59</sup> Other visual markers, like his hand supporting his cheek, not belonging to this particular sculpture, extend the allegorical meaning within the same framework by applying the same technique of intertwining different visual patterns.

<sup>60</sup> The allusion to Plato’s idea of ideal Beauty and Truth is also confirmed by Aschenbach quoting Plato. Due to the ambiguity of the isolated pattern, Tadzio’s gesture allows associations to other sculptures like the bronze statue Youth, capturing also the ancient conceptions of perfect beauty.

demanding that the spectator adopt of a shifting viewpoint rather than single, immobile one, symbolized by the sitting Aschenbach; he also refutes the limits or closeness of a pure medium when he highlights its intermedial framework, generating an enlarged and modified meaning beyond the coherent and static Apollonian order. Instead of being guided by Tadzio into “the idealized image of nature, an allegory for the unity of self that has been lost” (Johnson, p. 87), Aschenbach is guided into the infinite vastness of the sea, symbolizing the sublime Will or the primal Oneness, utterly devoid of rationality, beauty and harmony.<sup>61</sup> Tadzio’s posture on the borderline between shore and deep water also supports the ideological context of being like the stranger Hermes/Mercury, the mediator between the conscious and unconscious, between life and death. Aschenbach, ignorant of the context and the ambiguity of artistic illusion, does not realize the delusions of the alleged cunning Hermes. Symbolizing the divine that can neither be fixed nor reached, this mythic god, known for his shifting shapes, allegorically motivates Aschenbach’s fate (apart from psycho-logic). Sounds and music are the media that illuminate the unrestrained emotional power of this strange god.

### The Emotional Power of Nonverbal Media

With the same destabilising technique Aschenbach’s neo-platonic writing is undermined by means of acoustic or mixed media. Thus, light is shed on Aschenbach not only as he changes under the increasing influence of the Dionysiac dramatic power but also as he generates meaning in an overt or covert intermedial process in dependency of presupposed codes. When sounds and images are perceived as natural (the soft sounds of water or the incomprehensible grumbling of the gondolier), they arouse in him pleasurable feelings because he believes that these pure expressions perfectly communicate pure emotions, unhindered by the logic of verbal meaning.<sup>62</sup> Foregrounding the acoustic dimensions of the verbal signifiers as “word music” (Wolf,

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<sup>61</sup> The symbolism of water is not only a conceptual marker for Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, stressing the irrational power of the body and the contemporary music called the “infinite melody”, cf. *Nietzsche contra Wagner*, 1. The terrifying vastness of the sea is also a place of delightful horror and a marker for the sublime by Burke, see “Sublime” in Trevor Pateman: *Key Concepts: A Guide to Aesthetics, Criticism and the Arts in Education*, London 1991, p. 169–171. Aschenbach’s travel by boat to Venice pictures emblematically the Socratic artist who – according to Schopenhauer’s famous allegory quoted by Nietzsche – is able to ride calmly through the stormy life (man’s separation from Chaos) due to the protective influence of Apollo and trusting the “principle of individuality.” This principle is undermined by the narrator’s ironic dramatization of the travelling Aschenbach, outlined as weak and as instinctively and indulgently submitting to the will of the strange Dionysian gondolier.

<sup>62</sup> The gondoliers’ shouting or grumbling in an odd and incomprehensible dialect are pointed out by the narrator as being similar to the natural noises (or quietness) of water, a natural “language” contrasting Aschenbach’s (artificial) artistic style of wordy writing or lengthy quoting of classical texts. The incomprehensible words of the gondolier can be related to Schopenhauer’s assumption that music must be prior to words when the sign comes in the (less accepted) mixed form of music and words. There is a long idealistic tradition stating that music is the only artistic medium unburdened by materiality and thus of heightened beauty.

p. 58) and entrapped by the euphoric connotation of their symbolic “Naturalness,” Aschenbach contemplates not only Tadzio’s body cut off from its intermedial context but also the melody of his name as isolated beautiful tones of “a” and “u” that – “both sweet and wild” – appeal to the senses as natural, pure, unagitated signs.<sup>63</sup> In a changed context, however, their meaning shifts to the opposite. As neither visual nor acoustic signs “possess a fixed or essential meaning”<sup>64</sup> when neglecting their deictic character, the same sounds change their (supposed absolute) meaning depending on the narrative time and on the increasing power of the narrator’s focus. Destabilising Aschenbach’s arbitrary conceptual relationship with a counter-myth, the narrator correlates the sounds of the language and their forces with the metaphysical conception of music given by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche: in their concrete, definite form, these sounds incarnate a verbal musicality similar to the immediate expression of the fateful Dionysiac Oneness that is responsible for the suffering of the world and for the ambiguity of nature. Aschenbach is trapped in his illusion when the cunning narrator shifts the arbitrary meaning of those sounds just as he has done with the protagonist’s iconic projections. While at first Aschenbach appreciates them as a pleasant Apollonian melody, equalling “a regular beat like that of waves lapping the shore, a plastic rhythm,” (BT: 2) and enriching the Apollonian image of harmony and measure, he finally senses the paradox emotions of fear and desire, as these sounds, together with the dream images, announce the boundless dynamics of Dionysiac cries signifying now the name of “The Other God.” Thus, the effect of these sounds – not the sounds themselves – seems changed when they reoccur announcing now the opposite Dionysiac might beyond Aschenbach’s conscious will. However, he motivates this shift as he, as an act of free will, imitates these sounds in a “mimetic desire.” In doing so, he strives to overcome the distance between the subject and the desired far-away object, or – in Nietzsche’s wording – to touch “the Dionysiac world substance,” understood as the musical “External Existent.”<sup>65</sup> Playfully enlarging the acoustic similarity of the isolated and reduced sound-pattern of “a” and “u” to Bacchus, the Latin name for Dionysus, or even to the name of Yashu (who also possesses other attributes belonging to the counter-world), this polysemantic sound underlines the ideological communicative intent and the emotional effect of each conceptual relationship. In other words, the musical effect depends on a reader or listener who is not only involved in a process of signification of the sounds but also in the construction of a causal network, “gained from the temporal pattern of

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<sup>63</sup> The sounds of Tadzio’s name have the effect of being the currency that “generates meanings beyond anything that is said (and sometimes anything that *can* be said)” as Cook analyses the function of music in commercials. Nicholas Cook: *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, Oxford 2001, p. 22.

<sup>64</sup> Stuart Hall: “The work of representation” in Hall (ed.) *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, London 1997 (p. 13–74), p. 31.

<sup>65</sup> S. Morris Engel: “An Early Nietzsche Fragment on Language” in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 1963 (p. 279–286), p. 285.

forces we are exposed to and engaged in in reading.” (Wood, p. 321). Thus, the sounds and images of the dream enigmatically foreshadow the tempting magic of Dionysiac ritual shattering the Apollonian world that “is constructed on illusion and moderation and restrained by art” (BT: 4). As Aschenbach “myopically” excludes the sublime Dionysiac terror, encountered through visual and auditory media, his unstable construction of individualism is destroyed by the Will, finally revealing the truth through its excess (Vandenabeele, p. 98).

### Hybrids in Contemporary Life

Aschenbach’s fate unveils the myth of a self-satisfied bourgeois culture, in which high art excludes non-bourgeois social reality. Behind the veil of a supposed invisibility of means, this art represents only a romanticized conception of morality, purity and harmonic beauty as “depoliticized speech.” Aschenbach’s attitude towards other realities is most evident when he twice pays off greedy “musical pirates,” representatives of a supposed depraved society and its folkloric culture. Offending the representational norms of nobler people, the fine arts of formalistic romanticism these people and their art depict aesthetically and ethically the Dionysiac otherness revealing a truth different from the hegemonic norms of bourgeois art.

Revealing Aschenbach’s ideological assumptions, the narrator’s contrasting perception of popular culture is embraced at length in a *dramatic projection* of a musical comedy. Underlining the body and the music as media, the performance strongly relies on nonverbal acts of communication to transfer its message. Contrasting Aschenbach’s muteness and serene isolation, this dramatic projection visualizes an interactive communication between artists and audience, and among the male and female singers united in a grotesque love song. The audience is spatially separated into two groups: on one side, the two solitary Apollonians, Aschenbach and Tadzio, who in their state of “self-forgetfulness and self-destruction by becoming one with the whole of reality” have turned into a work of art (Vandenabeele 2003, p. 100); on the other side, the gregarious group who overcomes its individuation by uniting with the actors both in space and in the illusion of the play. Moreover, when applying Nietzsche’s ideological metaphysics they reconcile in their laughter both with the Dionysiac Oneness and “this world of suffering” (BT: 9). In particular, the final laughter-song of the main comedian, performed with exaggerated gestures, is the climax in which a precise, rational meaning is relativized through the context of sounds and mimicry.<sup>66</sup> Signalling a disjunction between appearance and essence, the

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<sup>66</sup> As hilarity rarely is solitary but usually gregarious, already the social settings raise issues of intention and implication as to whether the laughter is tended *at* or *together with* someone. Thus, the visual-acoustic signs of laughter need to be fixed by other verbal or visual signs. In particular the disconcerting laughter “veers off into related spheres of mind-body dynamics that articulate various forms of non-rational expression via the body.” Nichols, p. 377. Thus, neither visual nor acoustic signs generate meaning solitarily but draw it from the context and from relative, often concealed codes.

orgiastic and subversive laughter mocks the hypocrisy of the self-satisfied bourgeois culture and their intention of producing everlasting art.

This dramatic projection, a text within a text, represents a multi-media event of a faulty folkloric performance, in which ugly “street-beggars” play out vulgar passions of love with intensity. Instead of glorifying the formula of tragic love through artistic Apollonian vision, the idyllic myth of fine arts, this musico-dramatic action, full of Dionysiac symbolism of wild emotions, makes concealed cultural codes and relations immediately perceptible as tragicomic play.<sup>67</sup> The performance of vulgar actors, recognisable by their goat-like features as satyrs, companions of Dionysus, delivers – like the political and social satiric style of Aristophanes’ comedies (Old Comedy) – a grotesque dramatic inversion of the romantic formula of insatiate love-desire and of a love-reunion in death implying Aschenbach’s or Tristan’s fate. The staging of white powdered faces of comic and unheroic “types” implies the facial archetype of a comic, intoxicating Dionysiac-Aristophanic sort rather than the esteemed serene Apollonian-Platonic sort.<sup>68</sup> Conveying the ideological de-idealization of nature and humanity, these types, their vulgarity, their false singing and their laughter represent another truth and art. They copy in their performance both “the primal contradiction,” that is for Nietzsche, “the pleasurable/painful quality of dissonance,” and also the “primal unity as music.”<sup>69</sup>

The dramatic projection consciously plays with the artistic illusion and the subjective involvement in art as it applies an older variant of a *mimesis*-concept in which the actor is always conscious of assuming a particular role.<sup>70</sup> Even this implies a critical hint at Aschenbach’s blurring of life and art. Including the lesser “un-pure” forms of (folkloric) music and words, this older, devaluated genre of a grotesque mimic art of political nonconformist style is depicted in its original hybrid form to attack the Socratic Method or the bourgeois idea of purity and morals in art and life. The visual-acoustic signs of the performance puncture the boundaries between art and non-art, between dramatic and epic genres and between sublime and grotesque styles.

The relevance of myth-making-devices, interacting with different media texts, is stressed in contrast to hegemonic norms of the a-historical and a-personal one and pure form. Moreover, it treats a transfer of aesthetics from sounds and visions to fiction as part of cultural reflections discussing mimesis.

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<sup>67</sup> The “Dionysiac frenzy [...] gave rise to tragedy and comedy alike” according to Nietzsche (BT: 4).

<sup>68</sup> The Old Greek comedy with its vulgar sexual issues is positioned in the intersection between high and popular culture. Nietzsche extols Aristophanes lauding his “profound instinct” when attacking the more rational Socrates and Euripides at the same time.

<sup>69</sup> Béatrice Han-Pile: “Nietzsche’s Metaphysics in the Birth of Tragedy” in *European Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 12, 2006 (p. 373–408), p. 387.

<sup>70</sup> G. M. A. Grube: “Mimesis” in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 3, University of Virginia 2003 (p. 225–230), p. 226 at: <http://etext.virginia.edu/cgi-local/DHI/dhi.cgi?id=dv3-62.Jan.2007>; see also Han-Pile 2006, p. 384.

### Thomas Mann's Novella – a Covert Hybrid

In spite of its classicistic structure, Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, representing Apollonian clarity, contradicts the traditional idea of "pure form" both on the level of *histoire* and of *discourse*. Revealing how dominant cultural norms become embedded in media messages, the novella, a genre of a short narrative of highly artistic composition and realistic content, takes a stand in the contemporary *paragone* debate and attacks the limiting norms of neo-classic aesthetics by intertwining epic, musical and dramatic elements. The conflating of different genres and media into a covert hybrid, an un-pure form, reflects not only Nietzsche's concept of the reunion of both art-making deities but also the relativity of conventional borderlines between genres and their correlation with a hierarchical ideology.<sup>71</sup>

In contrast to the prized long epic genre of the novel, this short novella has the complex structure of the highly esteemed classical five-act tragedy.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, according to Nietzsche the tragedy is the proclaimed supreme genre "of a redeeming compromise between Apollo and Dionysius, whereby the destruction of the individual in his boundaries is articulated, exquisitely, within the new boundaries of Apolline art." The *dramatic projection* is constructed with three separate song-performances similar to a three-act comedy. The group of singing and dancing comedians convey the Dionysiac emotions and dark truth about diversity in life and about "the destruction of its finest individual specimens" (Silk, p. 199). Braiding tragic and comic elements and structures, the fall and destiny of the unfaithful "heroic" individual Aschenbach is thus outlined in its tragicomic ambivalence.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, musical elements and structures are symbolically represented not only by the mention of sounds and music but also in the rhythmical recurrence of the Dionysiac "types," recognizable through their goat-like features. This group of

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<sup>71</sup> The phenomenon of impurity or hybridism has been valued as a symptom of decadence both by poets and critics in history, whereas tragedy has long been idealised as a paradigmatically pure genre, aligned with an idealisation of the Greek polis, cf. Farrell, p. 392 and my note 16. Well-known is the historic discourse about the primacy of pure instrumental music over the mixed form, including songs in symphonies.

<sup>72</sup> Apart from the dramatic structure a fictional autobiography is also embedded in the literary genre of a novella in the classical style of Alexandrian biography cf. Frederic Amory: "The Classical Style of 'Der Tod in Venedig'" in *Modern Language Review* 1964 (p. 399–409), p. 309–310.

<sup>73</sup> These Dionysiac "types," that at the end are set out as a Dionysiac chorus mirroring the essential, musical spirit of the tragedy according to Nietzsche, reoccur in the narration in different transformations of the same group of nameless figures (the stranger, the gondolier, the "old fop," the barber, etc.). They are visually marked by their ugliness, by their vulgar gestures and by other characteristics. At the end they may be recognized as variations of Hermes' shifting shapes actualizing different mythological characteristics through the symbolism of their surroundings. The different servant figures or the greedy musicians with their satyric features recall the power of the god of merchants and of Dionysus. Moreover, according to a popular etymology of tragedy, *tragoidia*, as "goat-song," the goat-like figures refer ambiguously to both the tragic and the comic aspects in Aschenbach's fate and to the mirroring of this ambiguity in the "un-pure" form of the novella.

“returning strangers” can be categorized as personifications of death and are part of the *leitmotif*, a literary device linked to music through structural analogy with the purpose of unifying and of augmenting thematic implications and of overcoming the laws of time. Belonging to the dance-of-death motif these figures reoccur in an increasing tempo, with slightly modified attributes to amplify their meaning. As “retarding factors of the narrative flow” (Lund 1992, p. 40), they do not only give rhythm and structure to the narrative but also mirror Aschenbach’s influence under the metaphysic power of music/Will.<sup>74</sup> These figures can be read as allusive formulas and as an inversion of Wagner’s romantic themes of spiritual love and fervent death wish.<sup>75</sup> Even on the syntactic level the increasing rhythm of music is mirrored in the fact that the long clauses of epic-tragic style are reduced after the turning point into a less high-flown style. To provide meaning, this structure needs to be recognized in the succession and discursiveness of text (or music) by an active reader. When the reader has an a-historical (mythological) form in mind and correlates it with isolated historical phenomena, he applies his visual and musical literacy in an aesthetic communication with the text.<sup>76</sup>

In spite of the importance attributed to music, this medium is not axiomatically given priority over language or visual arts because images arouse the same emotions as sounds. Following the narrator’s point of view, the ideological connotation of Nietzsche’s and Schopenhauer’s conceptions is unveiled. For both, the nonverbal medium music and its verbal “brother,” the tragedy, are the direct expressions of the Will, the “true universal language superseding speech.” Loosely applying their ideas in the verbal medium, the tragic plot included in the epic narrative mirrors this “complex relationship between the Apollonian and the Dionysiac” (BT: 21).<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> In the first long sentence at the beginning of the second chapter the complex architectonic structure is responsible for a slow rhythm. The narrator outlines in this long sentence the Apollonian character of Aschenbach’s work and his excessive intellectualism to the cost of his suffering body, cf. John Richard and Morthon Gledhill: *Strategies in Translation. Helen Lowe-Porter and David Luke Translations of Thomas Mann’s ‘Tonio Kröger,’ ‘Tristan’ and ‘Der Tod in Venedig’ within the Context of Contemporary Translation Theory*, Erfurt 2001, p. 68–69. For the *leitmotif* by Thomas Mann in general, cf. Agnes Schlee: *Wandlungen musikalischer Strukturen im Werke Thomas Manns. Vom Leitmotiv zur Zwölfstufenreihe*, Frankfurt am Main 1981.

<sup>75</sup> Stevie Anne Bolduc: “A Study of Intertextuality: Thomas Mann’s ‘Tristan’ and Richard Wagner’s ‘Tristan and Isolde’” in *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, Vol. 37. No. 1–2, 1983 (p. 82–93), p. 89, 92.

<sup>76</sup> Wolf, p. 58. In opposition to Aschenbach’s isolation of visual and acoustic phenomena, the implied reader connects the different figures belonging to the Dionysian counter-world due to their attributes and the meaning-giving context in a chain of Death-figures.

<sup>77</sup> Schopenhauer values tragedy as the highest poetical art due to its ability to represent “the war of will with itself,” the evil sides of life, and even Nietzsche believes in music as universal language superseding speech. Nietzsche claims in his early fragment “On Words and Music” (Über Worte and Musik), 1871, that the “word” is an inadequate instrument to express the realities they designate in contrast to “the primal melody of the pleasure – and displeasure basis”, the manifestation of the Will. Cf. Engel, p. 282.

Both the poet and the reader can maintain the aesthetic distance to Apollonian visions and plastic arts, while at the same time they experience the mesmerizing emotional effect produced by the Dionysiac chaotic might of music and drama. As Nietzsche insists, by overcoming the antagonism of the gods the narrator produces an art that generates a fleeting “truth.” Nevertheless, this might also be understood as the writer’s obligation to represent – beyond any claim of metaphysical truth – the “exuberance of life” encompassing mind and body, art and non-art. In contrast to the dead, formal language of the disembodied Aschenbach, the writing process of the embodied narrator includes, in its musicality, the knowledge of universal, timeless forces beyond the conscious will. Thus, with his ironic attitude the narrator underlines the necessary intellectual distance to the intrinsic illusionary character of art that turns real phenomena into a desired (untrue) aesthetic world.<sup>78</sup> By means of a well structured composition the narrator unmasks Aschenbach as writer of emotional dishonesty (in the same way Nietzsche does with Wagner).

Instead of the Nietzschean rebirth of the tragic element in music, the novella can be seen as an attempt to regenerate verbal art by integrating the tragic and musical elements in the epic genre. The sublime tragic pathos found both in the philosophic framework and in Wagner’s mythological “total work of art” – carrying the romantic middle class ideal of a healthy, natural and uncorrupted “free individual” (Siegfried) – is avoided by means of the narrator’s irony and the integrated satiric comedy.<sup>79</sup> Whereas Nietzsche believes that music protects art against the decadent and bloodless Socratic art, Thomas Mann presents a text as a counterpart to music. His short novella is a contesting response to Wagner’s predominant use of lengthy mesmerizing music. Text composed into an artistic structure undergirds the power of rationality. In Mann’s novella the advantages of different arts are combined in a theatrical alliance, like an epic version of Wagner’s utopian dream. The crucial difference is however that, in order to solve man’s alienation, Wagner promotes the unification of art and life, while the narrator refuses to blur this distinction between them.

The novella stresses the advantages of verbal art by presenting the different points of view of the developing tragic character, embedded in a psychological background and unfolded throughout actions in which the change of rooms and the course of time are constitutive elements. The hybrid structure of the narrator’s

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<sup>78</sup> Benjamin Bennett: “Nietzsche’s Idea of Myth: The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics” in *PMLA*, Vol. 94, No. 3, 1979 (p. 420–433), p. 423.

<sup>79</sup> Aschenbach’s love-death changes the Tristan motif into a homoerotic relationship to focus on the hollowed romantic aspect with the amorality of his wishes as well as on Nietzsche’s attack on Wagner who unfaithfully emphasizes the sublime in the romantic love-death in his musico-dramatic compositions full of unrestrained emotions. Moreover, also the death of Gabriele Klöterjahn in Thomas Mann’s *Tristan* after having played the “Liebestod”-motif from Wagner’s opera is merely a variation of the mute Aschenbach abusing images for his unrestrained emotions. According to Nietzsche, Wagner’s music lacks an “organic form” and his “dramatic style” aims to persuade masses by his alluring ideas resounding in great mystic symbols hidden in “foggy distances.”



verbal medium “grasps the principles that make up an organic whole while offering a reassuring sense of the mind’s powers for aggregating, sorting, and classifying the most disparate quantities of data” (Nichols, p. 384). Thus, the catharsis effect of being overwhelmed by the totality of the world and its vital forces depends on the reader who imposes quieting unity on disquieting multiplicity.

This essay about the novella *Death in Venice* was concerned with verbal, visual and musical aesthetics. Nestled within the philosophy of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the discourse on art, mimesis, beauty and the sublime is correlated with different media texts. Enlarging borders of genre and style, Thomas Mann’s novella integrates – in spite of the use of strict classical forms – other media and excluded non-romantic topics. Art, then, exists at its best, according to this novella, not as a discrete medium, but in an interconnection with other media. The novella includes hybrid forms or multimedia texts, stressing their function in cultural communication and in unmasking the idealized myth of elative bourgeois self-representation. Even if the novella is limited to one medium, intermediality is embraced as a main source for generating meaning and disclosing concealed ideological codes.

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# “Ein, ganzer, großer Eindruck füllte meine Seele”: The Gothic Façade in German Romanticism

Stephanie A. Glaser

The eighteenth-century rediscovery and re-evaluation of the Middle Ages opened the way for the Romantic glorification of the medieval period as the time when the European nations were born and when their national artistic styles flourished.<sup>1</sup> As a result, the most imposing medieval artefact, the Gothic cathedral, stood out as the symbol of the nation and of Art, and as such it provided inspiration for writers and artists both in scholarly and popular domains.<sup>2</sup> Out of this meeting between the medieval architectural structure and the modern mind arose theories and understandings of medieval architecture that have remained at the basis of our contemporary understanding of the Gothic. Thus, verbal and visual representations of Gothic architecture provide examples of the ways in which such transcriptions impose meaning upon an existing building and reveal a particular understanding of its structure. Rightly has Hans Lund observed, literary – and I would add visual – representations of objects are dependent upon conventions of perception, which are intertwined with the worldview and aesthetics of a particular socio-cultural milieu and time.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, in the Romantic period correspondences between a writer’s linguistic strategies and an artist’s techniques of line and shading can be explored in order to more fully comprehend the meaning the Gothic cathedral possessed at this time.

Examining the representation of Strasbourg Cathedral’s façade in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s “Von Deutscher Baukunst” (1773) and in an 1812 architectural drawing by Karl Friedrich Schinkel, principle architect to the Prussian king, this study shows that Goethe’s text and Schinkel’s drawing incorporate strategies which permit the reader or the beholder to visualize the edifice in a manner which accords with the philosophical and political aims of their creators. Comparing these strategies gives insight into the manner in which an architectural monument can be verbally and visually transposed. Furthermore, in juxtaposing three media: word,

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<sup>1</sup> These points are brought out in my article “‘Deutsche Baukunst,’ ‘Architecture Française’: The Use of the Gothic Cathedral in the Construction of National Memory in Nineteenth-Century Germany and France” in Claus Clüver, Véronique Plesch, and Leo Hoek (eds.): *Orientations: Space / Time / Image / Word* (Word & Image Interactions 5), Amsterdam; New York 2005 (p. 77–91).

<sup>2</sup> This is discussed at length in my doctoral dissertation: Stephanie A. Glaser: *Explorations of the Gothic Cathedral in Nineteenth-Century France*, Ann Arbor 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Hans Lund: *Text as Picture. Studies in the Literary Transformation of Pictures*, trans. Kacke Götrick, Lewiston 1992 (p. 63).

image and architecture, this study aims to offer a paradigmatic example of the types of questions raised by intermedial inquiry and thereby illustrates the richness of such investigation. By underlining the differences in literary and visual strategies of representation, especially how each renders temporal and spatial relations between the beholder and the monument, it calls attention to the reader's and the beholder's participation in these representational strategies.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the word-image interactions analysed will point to themes upon which images and texts concur and expose the means by which texts and images work together to form a particular discourse, in this case the sublime character of the Gothic and the concept of the ideal cathedral.

### Johann Wolfgang von Goethe at Strasbourg Cathedral

Strasbourg cathedral loomed large in the Romantic imagination, primarily due to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's (1749–1832) "Von Deutscher Baukunst," written from 1771 to 1772 and published in 1773.<sup>5</sup> Actually a dithyramb to the cathedral architect Erwin von Steinbach, the text's main concern is aesthetics, and it hails Strasbourg Cathedral as the privileged product of the German genius and a powerful example of a forgotten aesthetic which countered the neoclassical principles predominant in Goethe's day. Structured around the description of the cathedral, the text consists of five sections: after celebrating Erwin von Steinbach as the genial and god-like creator in the first section and denigrating Marc-Antoine Laugier's influential architectural theory and with it neoclassical aesthetics in the second section, which closes with the contemporary definition of Gothic as barbaric,<sup>6</sup> Goethe recounts his experience at Strasbourg Cathedral. This third section is the text's turning point and it prepares the reader for Goethe's discussion of "true art," which he calls "karakteristische Kunst,"<sup>7</sup> in the following section and for his call to arms in the fifth

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<sup>4</sup> I am very much indebted to Klaus Niehr's analysis of the role of spectator and beholding within architectural history in *Gotikbilder–Gotiktheorien. Studien zur Wahrnehmung und Erforschung mittelalterlicher Architektur in Deutschland zwischen ca. 1750 und 1850*, Berlin 1999. His article "Patterns of Behaviour: Architectural Representation in the Romantic Period" in Stephanie A. Glaser (ed.): *The Idea of the Gothic Cathedral*, Turnhout; Belgium (forthcoming), has profoundly influenced my own interpretation of the texts and images in this essay.

<sup>5</sup> According to W. D. Robson-Scott, Goethe's text was immediately forgotten, then appeared in pirated editions before being "rescued from oblivion" around 1800 (Robson-Scott: *Literary Background*, p. 91–95). In an earlier work, Robson-Scott discusses the text's composition and its possible dating: "On the Composition of Goethe's 'Von Deutscher Baukunst'" in *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 54, 1959 (p. 547–553).

<sup>6</sup> Johann Georg Sulzer's *Allgemeine Theorie der Schönen Künste* of 1771 was one of the most influential transmitters of this idea in Goethe's day. The idea of Gothic as barbaric was put forward in the fifteenth century by the Italian humanists; see E. S. de Beer: "Gothic: origin and diffusion of the term; the idea of style in architecture" in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. XI, 1948 (p. 143–162).

<sup>7</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: *Von Deutscher Baukunst. D. M. Ervini a Steinbach. 1773 (1772–3)* in

section, where he urges his contemporaries to create a truly German art.

In the third section, Goethe the eulogist and critic of the preceding sections portrays himself as a beholder. His narrative persona describes how, filled with the common anti-Gothic prejudices of his day, he approached Strasburg Cathedral only to be overwhelmed by emotions associated with the sublime: “Ein, ganzer, großer Eindruck füllte meine Seele, den, weil er aus tausend harmonirenden Einzelheiten bestand, ich wohl schmecken und genießen, keineswegs aber erkennen und erklären könnte” (Goethe, p. 99).<sup>8</sup> Although at the text’s opening Goethe had circumspectly evoked the sublime character of the edifice, praising the architect’s bold accomplishment in erecting the massive stone to extreme heights in a purposeful whole (Goethe, p. 95), here his narrative persona describes the effects the cathedral exerts on him in terms of physical sensations: “schmecken” (taste, savour), “genießen” (enjoy, relish), which leave no place for the intellect and reason, for he can “by no means identify and explain” the impression the edifice makes on him. In contraposing the emotional experience of an object with that of intellectually comprehending it, Goethe, the crafter of the text, underscores the opposition between true art, which springs from and speaks to the soul, and neoclassical art, which, based on rational rules and principles, emphasized surface beauty and was foreign to the German spirit (Goethe, p. 96). In so doing, he also foregrounds the Romantic aesthetic, which privileged emotions and sensations over Enlightenment rationalism.

Importantly, Goethe’s narrative stresses the physical effort involved in beholding an edifice, for the narrative persona recounts his repeated interaction with the cathedral in time and in space:

[...] how often have I gone back to enjoy this heavenly-earthly joy [...]. How often have I returned, from all sides, from all distances, in all lights, to contemplate its dignity and his [sic] magnificence. [...] How often has the evening twilight soothed with its friendly quiet my eyes, tired-out with questing, by blending the scattered parts into masses which now stood simple and large before my soul, and at once my powers unfolded rapturously to enjoy and to understand” (Gage, p. 107).<sup>9</sup>

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Johann Gottfried Herder: *Von Deutscher Art und Kunst* (1773), Stuttgart 1995 (p. 93–104), p. 102.

<sup>8</sup> “The impression which filled my soul was whole and large, and of a sort that (since it was composed of a thousand harmonizing details) I could relish and enjoy, but by no means identify and explain.” I use John Gage’s translation, “On German architecture,” in John Gage (ed. and trans.): *Goethe on Art*, Berkeley; Los Angeles 1980 (p. 103–112), p. 106.

<sup>9</sup> “[...] wie oft bin ich zurückgekehrt, diese himmlisch-irdisch Freude zu genießen, [...]. Wie oft bin ich zurückgekehrt, von allen Seiten, aus allen Entfernungen in jedem Lichte des Tags zu schauen seine Würde und Herrlichkeit. [...] Wie oft hat die Abenddämmerung mein durch forschendes Schauen ermattetes Aug, mit freundlicher Ruhe geletzt, wenn durch sie die unzähligen Theile, zu

This passage underscores the temporal dimension of viewing, first by highlighting its repetition in the phrase recurring in the original "Wie oft bin ich zurückgekehrt," and in the triple use of the adverbial, "How often" (Wie oft); and secondly by calling attention to the different lights ("in jedem Lichte des Tages") in which the edifice is viewed. These two points indicate that though the act of viewing may be repeated, the view itself is never the same.

Nor is the beholder's position. The narrative persona recounts how he moves around the cathedral, observing it "from all sides, from all distances." This physical movement corresponds to his mind's working around the object towards appreciation and understanding of it. As Klaus Niehr has pointed out, the position of the beholder becomes an important aspect of Romantic representations of medieval architecture, from Friedrich Schlegel, who recorded the proximate mineral and distant vegetable appearances of Cologne Cathedral (Schlegel, p. 178–179), through illustrated volumes like the *Voyages Pittoresques* which also portrayed edifices from various distances and perspectives and times of day.<sup>10</sup>

By observing the cathedral in different lights and from different distances and positions, the narrative persona's physical engagement with the edifice ultimately enables him both to take pleasure in and to understand rationally its grandeur and dignity. This results in part from his repeated and manifold efforts of studied viewing, the "forschendes Schauen" which exhausted his eye. His remark counters what was at the time a common criticism of Gothic architecture, that its excessive and overwrought detail fatigued the eye, and emphasizes that it was not the façade's myriad details but the repeated and intense act of beholding that tired the eyes. In this, Goethe again stresses the actual physical effort involved in viewing and in grasping the complexity and sublimity of the edifice.

Ultimately, the narrative persona finds rest for his eye at twilight, and this liminal, or transitional, time between day and night provokes a powerful change in his perception. As the cathedral's manifold details and parts coalesce into a complete whole, the narrative persona's emotions are reconciled with his intellect. With his inner discord resolved, he becomes whole, reflecting the wholeness he now perceives in the edifice. As such, he achieves a certain unity with the cathedral, and this opens him to another reality, a vision, in fact: "the genius of the great Master of the Works

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ganzen Massen schmolzen, und nun diese, einfach und groß, vor meiner Seele standen, und meine Kraft sich wonnevoll entfaltete, zugleich zu genießen und zu erkennen" (Goethe, p. 99–100).

<sup>10</sup> Friedrich von Schlegel: *Briefe auf einer Reise durch die Niederlande, Rheingegenden, die Schwiez, und einen Teil von Frankreich* (1804) in Hans Eichner (ed.): *Ansichten und Ideen von der christlichen Kunst. Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, Munich; Paderborn; Vienna; Zurich, Vol. 4, 1959 (p. 153–204). Niehr discusses the importance of this in *Gotikbilder-Gotiktheorien* (p. 11–19) and analyses the complexity of beholding in "Patterns of Behaviour." Friedrich von Schlegel: *Briefe auf einer Reise durch die Niederlande, Rheingegenden, die Schwiez, und einen Teil von Frankreich* (1804) in Hans Eichner (ed.): *Ansichten und Ideen von der christlichen Kunst. Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, Munich; Paderborn; Vienna; Zurich, Vol. 4, 1959 (p. 153–204).



revealed itself to me” (Gage, p.107).<sup>11</sup> The Genius of Erwin von Steinbach appears to him to deliver up the secret of the cathedral’s construction.

Whereas the narrative persona has uniquely described the cathedral in terms of the sublime, the medieval architect focuses on precise architectural details:

“Why are you so surprised?” he whispered to me. “All these shapes were necessary ones, and don’t you see them in all the old churches of my city? I have only elevated their arbitrary sizes to harmonious proportions. How the great circle of the window opens above the main door which dominates the two side ones: what was otherwise but a hole for the daylight now echoes the nave of the church! How, high above, the belfry demands the smaller window! All this was necessary, and I made it beautiful. But ah! If I float through the dark and lofty openings at the side that seem to stand empty and useless, in their strong slender form I have hidden the secret powers which should lift those two towers high in the air – of which, alas! only one stands mournfully there, without its intended decoration of pinnacles, so that the surrounding country would pay homage to it and its regal brother” (Gage, p. 107–108).<sup>12</sup>

As a depiction of a Gothic cathedral, the passage is rather disappointing, for it gives little detail besides the three prominent features of every Gothic façade: portals, rose window, and towers. Nonetheless, it differs strikingly from contemporary descriptions in that it makes no mention of the pointed arch, which Gothic enthusiasts praised as its outstanding characteristic and guiding principle (Glaser, 22–30);<sup>13</sup> and contrarily to those which emphasized the Gothic’s bizarre, overwrought decorative elements and lack of order or reason, this passage draws the reader’s attention to the order and purposeful organization of the construction.

It does, however, enable the reader to visualize the edifice. The second word in

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<sup>11</sup> “Da offenbarte sich mir [...] der Genius des großen Werkmeisters” (Goethe, p. 100).

<sup>12</sup> “Was staunst du, lispelt er mir entgegen. Alle diese Maßen waren nothwendig, und siehst du sie nicht an allen älteren Kirchen meiner Stadt? Nur ihre willkürliche Größen hab ich zum stimmenden Verhältniß erhoben. Wie über dem Haupteingang, der zwey kleinere zu’n Seiten beherrscht, sich der weite Kreis des Fensters öffnet, der dem Schiffe der Kirche antwortet und sonst nur Tageloch war, wie, hoch drüber der Glockenplatz die kleineren Fenster forderte! das all war nothwendig, und ich bildete es schön. Aber ach, wenn ich durch die düstern erhabnen Öffnungen hier zur Seite schwebe, die leer und vergebens da zu stehn scheinen. In ihre kühne schlanke Gestalt hab ich die geheimnißvollen Kräfte verborgen, die jene beyden Thürme hoch in die Luft heben sollten, deren, ach, nur einer traurig da steht, ohne den fünfgethürmten Hauptschmuck, den ich ihm bestimmte, daß ihm und seinem königlichen Bruder die Provinzen umher huldigten (Goethe, p. 100).

<sup>13</sup> I have analysed the importance of the pointed arch in the nineteenth century in “Lectures sémiotiques de l’ogive au XIXe siècle” in Isabelle Durand-Le Guern (ed.): *Images du Moyen Âge*, Rennes 2006 (p. 333–347).

the German sentence which describes the cathedral facade, the preposition "über," (above) directs the reader's eye to follow the cathedral's vertical ascension from its portals to its rose window to its single tower, and thereby emphasizes the cathedral's height. "Über" also indicates the position of the rose window opening directly above the central portal, and thus calls attention to the central axis which commands the organization of the façade. Goethe accentuates the façade's determined and purposeful organization by using active verbs: the central portal *dominates* ("beherrscht") the smaller flanking portals, the wide circle of the rose *opens* ("öffnet") above it and *responds* to ("antwortet") the nave, and the spire *demanded* ("forderte") smaller windows. These verbs emphasize how each of the façade's elements actively participates in determining the whole, and how all of the elements within the whole require specific purposeful relations to the others. As these relations order the façade, so they regulate the entire edifice as exemplified by the correspondence between the rose window and the nave. This purposeful ordering results in the harmonious proportions ("stimmende Verhältniß"), symmetry, and beauty of the Gothic edifice. Through the persona of the medieval architect then, Goethe transfers the aesthetic concepts which regulated neoclassical art to the Gothic façade and shows them to be the guiding principles of a creation which supersedes all prescribed norms and stands out as a magnificent example of a vital and creative aesthetic.

Following Erwin von Steinbach's description, the narrative persona awakens from his night-vision and relates how the misty light of dawn, another liminal moment, reverses the fusion of the cathedral's individual details and parts which he perceived at twilight:

How freshly the Münster sparkled in the early morning mist, and how happily I could stretch out my arms towards it and gaze at the harmonious masses, alive with countless details. Just as in the eternal works of nature, everything is perfectly formed down to the meanest thread, and all contributing purposefully to the whole. How the vast building rose lightly into the air from its firm foundations; how everything was fretted, and yet fashioned for eternity! (Gage, p. 108).<sup>14</sup>

Whether because of the light or the medieval architect's lesson, the narrative persona distinguishes that the harmonious masses are animated with innumerable small parts, each of which works purposefully together to form the complete whole,

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<sup>14</sup> "Wie Frisch leuchtet [der Münster] im Morgendufftglanz mir entgegen, wie froh konnt ich ihm meine Arme entgegen strecken, schauen die großen, harmonischen Massen, zu unzählig kleinen Theilen belebt; wie in Werken der ewigen Natur, bis aufs geringste Zäserchen, alles Gestalt, und alles zweckend zum Ganzen; wie das fest gegründete ungeheure Gebäude sich leicht in die Luft hebt; wie durchbrochen alles und doch für die Ewigkeit" (Goethe p. 100–101). (Gage, p. 108).

like in natural organisms.<sup>15</sup> He nonetheless refrains from describing the edifice in terms of its architectural elements; instead, he focuses on some commonly evoked characteristics of the Gothic: its enormity, its elevation, its elaborate openwork sculpture, and he gives them aesthetic value in terms of the sublime: vastness, height, incalculable delicacy, eternity. His description of the Gothic sublime works together with Erwin von Steinbach's description of the Gothic's ordering principles and aesthetic harmonies to create a heretofore unsuspected image of the Gothic cathedral as both sublime *and* harmonious and proportioned, *and*, on top of that, as an architecture which follows natural and eternal principles. This turns Strasbourg Cathedral into the prime example of "karakteristische Kunst" (Goethe, p. 102), art which arises from and communicates with the soul.

The Gothic edifice is the kernel of Goethe's text: it not only serves as the model for Goethe's aesthetic, but it lies at the text's origin, for it appears that the initial encounter with the edifice stimulated Goethe's entire reflection on art and the creative prowess of the German soul and incited him to write it down.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, the cathedral episode is pivotal to the text both thematically, for it lays out the components of the new aesthetic which Goethe expounds in the text's latter half, and in terms of the narrative persona's development and of the narrative itself, which moves from criticizing the neoclassical aesthetic to defending an alternative, German one. In fact, the dream, or the vision, which lies at the heart of the cathedral episode, may be considered as the turning point of the text. It may even be conjectured that, in significant opposition to Enlightenment rationalism (i.e. the habitat of neoclassicism) which dismissed the dream as irrational, Goethe anticipated Romantic thought, which privileged the dream as the free realm of the imagination and the means of inspiration, by crafting the dream-vision as the crucial scene in the text and, ironically, making it the sole carrier of reason and rationality in an aesthetic debate where the Gothic could be either barbaric (according to Sulzer's definition) or sublime (in the eyes of the narrative persona).

Situated dramatically between twilight and dawn, the dream-vision is a unique transformative experience that alters both perception and reception. From it neither the narrative persona nor the reader emerges exactly the same, for both end up positively appraising the Gothic. As such, it creates a caesura in the text and also produces

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<sup>15</sup> Earlier in the text, Goethe compared the facade to a magnificent tree branching out into several boughs, many twigs and innumerable leaves: "Vermannigfaltige die ungeheure Mauer, die du gen Himmel führen sollst, daß sie aufsteige gleich einem hochehabnen, weitverbreiteten Baume Gottes, der mit tausend Ästen, Millionen Zweigen, und Blättern wie der Sand am Meer, rings um, der Gegend verkündet, die Herrlichkeit des Herrn [...]" (Goethe, p. 98-99).

<sup>16</sup> Johann Gottfried Herder's ideas profoundly influenced Goethe's reflection on these topics, as Robson-Scott has explained (*The Literary Background of the Gothic Revival in Germany. A Chapter in the History of Taste*, Oxford 1965, p. 78-80), though he stresses the profound nature of Goethe's encounter with Strasburg Cathedral in "Goethe and the Gothic Revival" in *Publications of the English Goethe Society* 25, 1956 (p. 86-113), p. 110.

a rupture in the narrative voice, for Erwin von Steinbach's supernatural apparition speaks the most important lines of the entire text. This is fitting, for Goethe sets him up as the model of the genial artist: the mortal image of the divine creator (Goethe, p. 95–96) and the creative genius *par excellence*. Erwin is, moreover, the only one who can explain his creation and thereby counter Laugier's theories and oppose Sulzer, the proponent of the neoclassical aesthetic – and thus of Gothic criticism. As we have seen, the narrative persona doesn't – and can't – explain the organization of the Gothic cathedral's constituent parts – even after the vision he remains true to character and speaks about Strasbourg Cathedral almost exclusively in terms of the sublime. Thus someone must intervene and make the façade comprehensible, and who better than the cathedral architect to expound its harmonies and order to the novice and thereby initiate him into a new aesthetic and a new manner of thinking about art? Moreover, Erwin von Steinbach is the only one who can reveal his original plan for the edifice with its two majestic and symmetrical five-pinnacled towers, "of which, alas! only one stands mournfully there, without its intended decoration of pinnacles" (Gage, p. 107–108).

Deploring the cathedral's fragmentary state, the architect juxtaposes this with its would-have-been completed state: the dark, empty apertures contrast with the lofty towers that would have been raised, and the sad single tower contrasts dramatically with the image of two regal "brothers." Here both the fragmentary and the complete edifice are reconstituted. This enables the reader to envision the cathedral in two states, for the extant building stands out as the imperfect terrestrial apparition of a celestial creation, an ideal edifice, existing in words and, as a consequence, in the reader's mind: a magnificent edifice complete with two symmetrical and regal spires. This idea of a perfect edifice which cannot exist except in the mind of the architect presages the restoration philosophy of Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc: "To restore an edifice is to re-establish it in a complete state which could never have existed at any given moment."<sup>17</sup> In his text Goethe uses the medieval architect to describe the cathedral as it never actually existed, except as an idea in his mind, and this permits the beholder to fully envision the cathedral's symmetries, harmonies and its ordering principle.

### Karl Friedrich Schinkel at Strasbourg Cathedral

The concept of the ideal or perfect cathedral fuelled the nineteenth-century imagination, informing visual and verbal representation of an academic or an artistic nature, and influencing monumental restoration.<sup>18</sup> The German-speaking peoples

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<sup>17</sup> "Restaurer un edifice [...] c'est le rétablir dans un état complet qui peut n'avoir jamais existé à un moment donné." Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc: *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XIe au XVIe siècle* (1854–68), Paris n.d., Vol. VIII (p. 14; my translation).

<sup>18</sup> See my doctoral dissertation (p. 270–276).

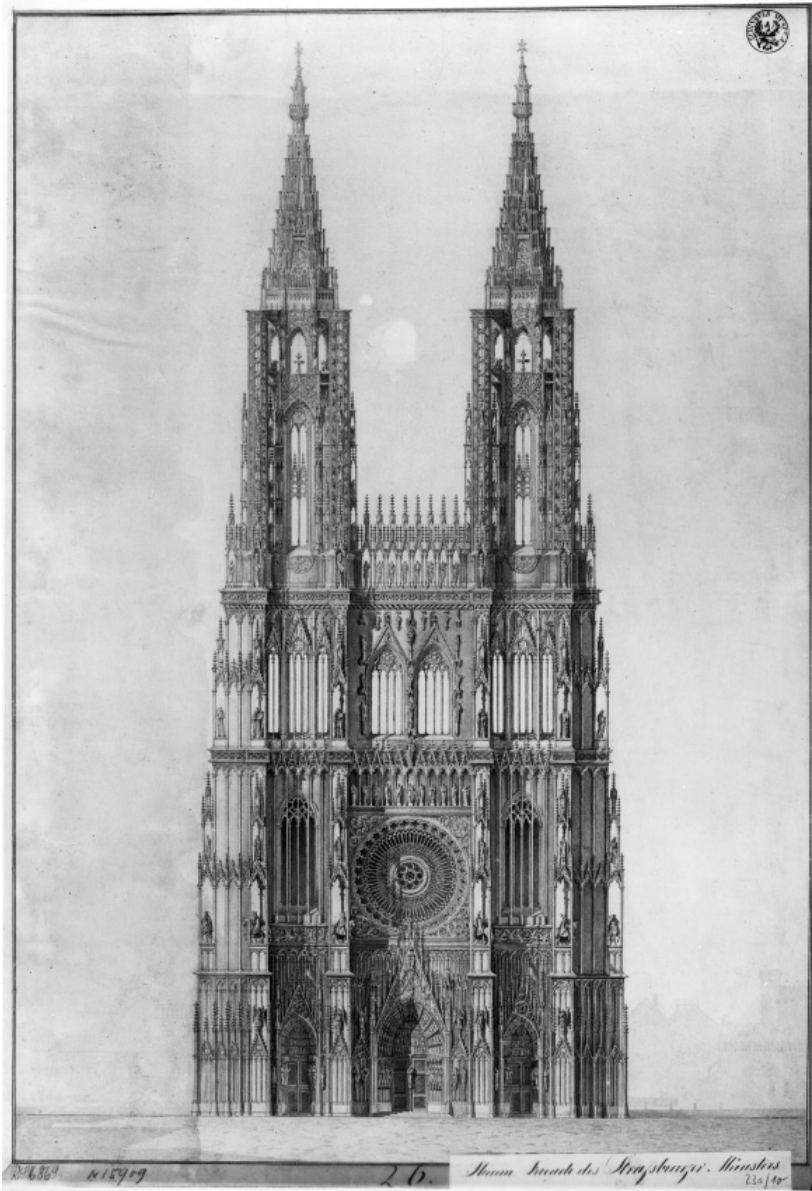


Fig. 1. Karl Friedrich Schinkel, Fassade des Münsters in Straßburger (1812). Ink, 69,5 x 50,4 cm. Bildarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz

focused on Strasbourg and Cologne cathedrals as “fragments” to be completed. During the Napoleonic wars, they hailed the Gothic as a German creation manifesting the strength and unity of the German people in the Middle Ages, which they dreamt of channelling in order to throw off the Gallic yoke and create a sort of German utopia. Popular during the Romantic period especially among Gothic enthusiasts, “Von Deutscher Baukunst” played some role in this (Robson-Scott 1965, p. 91–95), and so it is likely that Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1781–1841) knew, or at least knew

of, Goethe's text.<sup>19</sup> In 1812 Schinkel completed an elevation of Strasburg Cathedral with two spires, a perfected edifice similar to, but not necessarily a representation of, that in Goethe's text (fig. 1). Besides the two crowning spires, Schinkel's representation shares with Goethe's in focusing the reader-beholder's attention on the façade's order, the multiplicity of detail, the play of lightness and mass, and the verticality of the edifice.

Looking at Schinkel's façade, the beholder confronts a rigorously organized structure that exhibits total regularity, proportion, and symmetry. As the eye sweeps over the façade, from the foundation to the towers, it then descends to the row of clear, transparent window openings which constitute the façade's third storey, it pauses at the rose window to ascend the vertical axis back to the window openings and to the open gallery above them, then down again to the central portal with its great gable, in a movement which graphically echoes Goethe's sentence structure: "über dem Haupteingang [...] sich der weite Kreis des Fensters öffnet." As Goethe's reader is directed to look at the rose, which serves as the active subject, Schinkel's beholder is guided by the effects of shading to focus on the rose, whose circularity counterpoints the abundance of vertical lines, yet harnesses them in the minute tracery of its spokes. Simultaneously, the beholder perceives the horizontal and vertical axes that make up the façade. Constituted by the diaphanous third-storey windows which intersect the vertical axis at the central bay above the rose, these axes form a cross, which, even while alluding to the Christian origin and use of the edifice, powerfully regulates the façade's structure.

Schinkel's shading technique also accentuates the edifice's ascensional character. It pulls the eye to the diaphanous window openings, which echo the openwork towers to which they seem to belong, and thus shifts the proportions to dramatize the façade's verticality. His drawing portrays the façade in six tiers, three storeys in the body of the edifice, whose height is equal to the three tiers of the towers with their spires. Its middle is marked by the moulding above the clear window openings. If these openings were darkened, the edifice's verticality would be limited to the towers; yet the transparent openings obscure the break between the tower shafts and the cathedral's body, making the edifice appear to ascend in a single, elegant movement. This is heightened by the slight tapering of the edifice along the gradual incline of the outside walls, and is further accentuated by the long, slim bays, the myriad gables, and the crowning finials projecting upwards.

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<sup>19</sup> For discussions on Schinkel and the Gothic see Andreas Haus: "Gedanken über K. F. Schinkels Einstellung zur Gotik" in *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft*, 22, 1989 (p. 215–231); Georg Friedrich Koch: "Karl Friedrich Schinkel und die Architektur des Mittelalters. Die Studien auf der ersten Italienreise und ihre Auswirkungen" in *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 1966 (p. 177–222) and "Schinkels architektonische Entwürfe im gotischen Stil 1810–1815" in *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 1969 (p. 262–316); Robson-Scott 1965 (p. 232–237); Caroline van Eck: *Organicism in nineteenth-century architecture. An inquiry into its theoretical and philosophical background*, Amsterdam 1994 (p. 142–155).



Fig. 2. Strasbourg Cathedral, west façade, (1900/1920). Bildarchiv Foto Marburg

Thus guiding the eye and emphasizing the cathedral's verticality, Schinkel's careful shading also invites the beholder to marvel at the façade's filigreed and lacelike character created by the intricate tracery, the innumerable crockets and the moulded finials which stand out against the darkened mass of the cathedral's wall. The juxtaposition of light and dark spaces brings the plethora of minutely rendered details into stark relief and calls attention to the organization of the rich and complex ornamentation repeated seemingly to infinity across the entire surface of the façade. In evoking the sublime through infinity, Schinkel's facade seems to correspond to Goethe's exclamation, "how everything was fretted, and yet fashioned for eternity" (Gage, p. 108).<sup>20</sup> Thus setting light areas against dark, Schinkel creates a diaphanous edifice that diverges from the real edifice, as Klaus Niehr has observed.<sup>21</sup> In reality,

<sup>20</sup> "Wie durchbrochen alles und doch für die Ewigkeit" (Goethe, p. 101).

<sup>21</sup> Niehr declares that Schinkel disregards the actual appearance of the edifice, and explains how he renders transparency to give the edifice a diaphanous character: "Plastizität und Masse werden vermittle scharf schattierender Lavierung zum Ausdruck gebracht, die durchbrochene Struktur is anhand einer Durchsichtigkeit der Wände demonstriert. Daß letzterer vor allem auch eine bildrhetorische Dimension zukommt, ergibt sich aus der Diaphanie von zentralem Glockenhaus und ursprünglich erstem Freigeschoß der Türme, also Bauteilen, deren Fensterdurchbrechungen mit

(fig. 2) the third-storey window openings appear as dark recesses, and the windows on either side of the rose are actually walled in.

In Schinkel's drawing however, the darkened recesses of the portals and the window openings beside the rose add depth to the representation, for the delicate window tracery appears suspended inside the wall-openings, and the fine gables with their slim supports seem to adorn the very outside edges of the mouldings. The slim bars and intricate tracery in the bays, the diaphanous window openings and the openwork towers contrast with the weight and mass of the shaded lower storeys, underscoring the coexistence of lightness and solidity that Goethe saw reconciled in the Gothic.

This skilful rendition of the façade, however, differs from reality in another sense. As shown by the photograph, the buildings in front of the cathedral hinder the beholder from viewing the entire façade. The drawing, however, illustrates the whole façade and places the beholder directly in front of it, even on eye level with it, enabling the beholder to effortlessly perceive its organization and scrutinize even the details of its towers, which in reality would be too small and too far away to be analyzed by the unaided eye. It thus fixes the point of view and negates all movement and all observation from various standpoints and perspectives, which Goethe emphasized as critical for viewing and understanding. Reducing thus the conditions for viewing, which, according to Klaus Niehr, marks the beginning stage of the scientific approach to architecture (Niehr 1999, p. 28), this drawing, a front elevation, offers a "scientific" view that purports to objectivity and stimulates analytic thought about the façade. Herein lies the main difference between the text and the image, the one looks at the cathedral in terms of aesthetics, the other "scientifically."

Thus the beholder examines the façade isolated from the architectural structure to which it actually belongs and from an apparently unmediated perspective, seemingly in contrast to Goethe's reader, who confronts a façade that is built into a well-reflected context and used to support Goethe's argument for a new German aesthetic. Goethe's text thus mediates the reader's experience of the edifice both through the argument against neoclassicism and through the narrative strategy which distances the reader from the edifice insofar as the medieval architect's description is part of a dream, retold by the narrative persona, in a text written by Goethe. In short, the reader "sees" Strasburg Cathedral as an edifice that perfectly corresponds to Goethe's aesthetic ideals.

Yet, despite the purported objectivity of the frontal elevation, Schinkel's representation is nonetheless equally, and if possible, more subjective than Goethe's. We have seen how Schinkel's drawing diverges from or idealizes the actual edifice. Moreover, according to Klaus Niehr, Schinkel's drawing disregards the reality of the edifice by presenting Strasburg Cathedral as the epitome of the Gothic (Niehr 1999, p. 28),

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dunklem Raum zu hinterlegen gewesen wären" (Niehr 1999, p. 28).



containing all the salient characteristics which the Romantics saw in it. Not only does it highlight the fundamental concepts Goethe put forward in “Von Deutscher Baukunst”: verticality, the juxtaposition of lightness and mass, and the intricacy of its stonework, and symmetry and proportion, but it reflects the evolution of these concepts within the Romantic understanding of the Gothic as richly ornamented, immensely high, and diaphanous.<sup>22</sup> In short, the shading directs the beholder to experience the edifice how Schinkel thought it should be seen: sublime in its intricate and richly decorated structure, transparent in its lightness and elevation. In this sense, the shading plays a similar role to the medieval architect in Goethe’s text, directing the beholder to see and understand what he may not be able to upon confrontation with the actual edifice. Schinkel’s method literally removes any claim to objectivity and recreates Strasburg Cathedral entirely according to the Romantic ideal.

While Goethe reconstituted an edifice that should have been or that could have been, but that only ever existed in the mind of the architect – and now in the reader’s mind as an unreachable perfection –, Schinkel reconstructed the edifice, projecting his ideas of the Gothic onto it and presenting how it could look, were it to be “completed.” Where Goethe’s description is past-looking, finding the true significance of the Gothic in the genial mind of the long-dead architect, Schinkel’s representation is forward-looking, grasping the potential of the Gothic and rendering it in an ideal way. As such, the drawing corresponds to the movement within German Romanticism which promoted the completion of Cologne Cathedral. For the Romantics the fragment embodied not loss, but potential, because it could be completed and perfected, something which would at the same time, effect the betterment and “perfection” of society.<sup>23</sup>

## Conclusion: The Romantic Legacy

The forwardlooking ideal of the Gothic cathedral runs through nineteenth-century German thought, in Carl Georg Hasenpflug’s painting of a completed Cologne Cathedral to Lyonel Feininger’s 1919 woodcut for the Bauhaus Manifesto, “Kathe-

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<sup>22</sup> Friedrich Schlegel praised the Gothic’s abundant ornament and infinite repetition of forms (p. 179); Georg Moller’s drawings of Cologne Cathedral portray the immensity of the edifice and its exaggerated height; Schinkel emphasized the diaphanous character of Gothic architecture in his oil paintings as well as in his design for the light-flooded Luisenmausoleum in 1810 (Robson-Scott 1965, p. 235).

<sup>23</sup> Tina Grütter discusses the importance of the fragment to German Romantic thought in “Fragment und Künstlichkeit im Werk von C. D. Friedrich am Beispiel der Dortmunder Winterlandschaft mit Kirche” in Kurt Wettengl (ed.): *Caspar David Friedrich. Winterlandschaften*, Heidelberg 1990 (p. 60–65). An example of the political use of the Cologne Cathedral “fragment” is Joseph von Görres’s essay, “Der Dom in Köln” in *Rheinischer Merkur*, Vol. 20, November 20, 1814, in Wilhelm Schellberg (ed.): *Joseph von Görres’ Ausgewählte Werke und Briefe*, Kempten; Munich 1911, Vol. 1, (p. 592–595). For a general discussion of the relation between the Cologne Cathedral completion project and early nineteenth-century German nationalism, see my dissertation (p. 140–146).

drale." Both representations demonstrate the artistic legacy of the Romantic idea of the cathedral. Hasenpflug's (1802–1858) *Der Kölner Dom. Idealansicht in antizipierter Vollendung*, also known as *Idealansicht des Kölner Domes* (1834–36) portrays a gigantic, monumentalized Cologne Cathedral, whose spires rise triumphantly above the clouds. The cathedral's immense height and vast stature are highlighted, in typical Romantic convention, by the miniature figures dressed in medieval tract milling in the square at the front of the edifice. Like Schinkel, Hasenpflug emphasizes the cathedral's sublime character and ascension by the myriad of vertical columns in its tracery, finials, and gables. The fine lines of the stonework both underscore the rigorous ordering of the façade and contrast with the cathedral's mass to create an image of complete harmony between mass and weight. With the mood-evoking shadow falling on the south portal indicating the setting sun, which Herbert Rode has interpreted, in connection with the sixteenth-century clothing of the figures, as indicating the waning of the Middle Ages,<sup>24</sup> the painting is evocative and its view, as its title indicates, idealized. Since only the cathedral's choir and half of its south tower had been completed in the Middle Ages and the edifice had remained in that state until the 1840s, Hasenpflug's painting shows the cathedral as it never had – nor ever would – exist until its completion in 1880, except in the plans of the architect. Thus, like Goethe and Schinkel, Hasenpflug represents an ideal cathedral. Despite the medieval setting, his painting looks forward to the cathedral's anticipated existence as a perfected edifice.

In a very different way, Lyonel Feininger's (1879–1956) "Kathedrale" captures the Romantic ideas of verticality, ascensional movement, and transparency or the crystalline<sup>25</sup> in a diaphanous edifice rising upwards until its three spires touch the three stars brilliantly shining above it. Unlike the other representations we have looked at, Feininger did not represent an existing edifice. Yet like Schinkel, he emphasized the linear elements of the cathedral, but abbreviated them, thereby reducing the edifice's complexity and intricacy to boxed geometrical forms, with the triangle dominating.<sup>26</sup> In his idealized representation, Feininger reduced the Gothic to the outlines of its salient elements: spires, gables, windows, rose, keeping its organization of front portals, rose window, spires. These combine in a dynamic unity of mass and lightness, order and organization into an image bursting with

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<sup>24</sup> Herbert Rode: "Eine Idealansicht des Kölner Domes von Karl Georg Hasenpflug 1834–36: Ein Beitrag zur romantischen Architekturmalerei" in *Kölner Domblatt* 1963 (p. 89–94), p. 90–92.

<sup>25</sup> For a study of the crystalline from Romanticism to modernity, see Regine Prange: "The Crystalline," trans. David McLintock, in Keith Hartley (ed.): *The Romantic Spirit in German Art 1790–1990*, London 1994 (p. 155–163).

<sup>26</sup> In his *Geschichte und Beschreibung des Doms von Köln nebst Untersuchungen über die alte Kirchenbaukunst als Text zu den Ansichten, Rissen und einzelnen Theilen des Doms von Köln*, Stuttgart 1823, Sulpiz Boisserée theorized that the triangle was the fundamental form of Gothic architecture, both as symbol of the Trinity, and thus the tripartite structure of a Gothic cathedral, as well as the form which inspired the pointed arch.

energy and movement, which clearly underscores the Bauhaus ideal of regenerating society through the combined work of industry, crafts and the arts. Here, like in the Romantic period, the cathedral stands as an emblem for social unity and utopia, although by the twentieth century these concepts had different connotations than in the nineteenth century.

Thus modulated in striking ways, the Romantic legacy of the Gothic façade surfaces in these idealized representations of the Gothic edifice which are future-oriented and even utopian. The Romantic idea of the cathedral, as we have seen, was solidified by strategies that engage the reader-beholder in an act of visualizing the edifice and understanding it in a way very different from what the beholder might see when confronted with the real edifice. Most striking, perhaps, is the evocation of the Gothic sublime. Both Goethe and Schinkel called attention to the vertical structuring of the façade, its horizontal partitioning, and its underlying ordered structure: Goethe by replicating it grammatically and linguistically, Schinkel by sketching an infinity of vertical lines and carefully shaded ascensional elements. Both juxtaposed mass with lightness in evoking the delicate openwork tracery: Goethe's narrative personal marvelling at it, Schinkel rendering it in minute details. Both emphasized the height of the edifice: Goethe through the awestruck narrative persona evoking its majestic size, Schinkel seemingly matter of factly tapering the edifice and making its decorative elements seem overwhelmingly vertical. They also put forward the concept of an ideal cathedral: Goethe reinstating it in its originally conceived wholeness, with Erwin von Steinbach drawing attention to what is not there, Schinkel reconstructing it and completing it with its symmetrical two towers. Moreover, since for both Goethe and Schinkel the façade served as a synecdoche for the entire cathedral, it becomes a perfect topos where larger concerns are brought to the fore: Goethe used it to awaken his contemporaries to the plight of the arts and to create a new art which would overturn and oppose neoclassical (and foreign) norms and Schinkel "completed" Strasburg Cathedral at a time of great nationalistic sentiment during the Napoleonic wars. Both the writer and the artist serve as a mediator between the actual edifice and its idealized Romantic image.

Goethe and Schinkel differ, however, in their points of observation: where Goethe emphasized the movement around the edifice and its view at different times of day, Schinkel offered the beholder an ideal view, one that is impossible to capture in reality. While this might have to do with the growing interest in "objective" and "scientific" analysis that such architectural drawings were meant to offer, it might also have to do with the possibilities and limitations of the chosen media for the architectural transposition. We remember that in his 1766 treatise *Laokoon: oder Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* – not a decade before Goethe wrote "Von Deutscher Baukunst" – that Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–81) drew the distinction between poetry's and painting's respective abilities to capture temporality or

render spatial relations.<sup>27</sup> If the written word proved particularly apt to represent physical and temporal displacement, and thus narrative development over time, then the process of beholding that Goethe presents in "Von Deutscher Baukunst" could only with difficulty be captured in an image. Not only does Goethe's narrative persona change his position and observe the edifice at different hours of the day, but the cathedral architect gives another dimension to the representation. As I have argued, the blending of these two perspectives creates the monumental change in the narrator's and the reader's perception of the edifice and their ensuing reception of it. In contrast, any movement Schinkel made around the edifice and any observation from different perspectives can impossibly be retraced. These remain concealed to the beholder, who confronts only the beautiful, static, finished product of Schinkel's draughtsmanship. The question of how the visual arts could capture a three-dimensional object would have to wait until the twentieth century for its painterly achievement: in Robert Delaunay's "Les Tours de Laon" (1912), Albert Gleizes "Cathédrale de Chartres" (1912) and Lyonel Feininger's "Kathedrale."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: *Laokoon: oder Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie*, Stuttgart 2003 (1766).

<sup>28</sup> Kevin D. Murphy discusses some aspects of the relationship between Gothic architecture and Cubism in his article "Cubism and the Gothic Tradition" in Eve Blau and Nancy J. Troy (eds.): *Architecture and Cubism*, Cambridge, Mass; London 1997 (p. 59–76).

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# Still Chasing Down the Greased Pig: Cognition and the Problem of Ekphrasis

Valerie Robillard

During long periods of history, the mode of human perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence. The manner in which human sense perception is organized, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well.<sup>1</sup>

Several decades after the revival of the term “ekphrasis,” there is still a healthy debate about the definitions of the term, the extent of its parameters, and the wider implications of the word-image paradigm.<sup>2</sup> This debate, in which Hans Lund has played a significant (and pioneering) role,<sup>3</sup> is not an empty exercise because the categories and definitions we choose invariably determine, as David Radcliffe has pointed out, “both the relation of a discipline to its special objects of study, and the relation of the various disciplines to each other.”<sup>4</sup> By its very nature as an intermedial construction – a text which simultaneously employs the “special objects” of more than one discipline – ekphrasis continues to defy our efforts to fully explain its operations, resisting all

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin: “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in *Illuminations* London 1982, p. 224.

<sup>2</sup> Articles written on ekphrasis are too numerous to mention here. For books specifically on the subject see: Murray Krieger: *Ekphrasis. The Illusion of the Natural Sign*, Baltimore 1992; Hans Lund: *Text as Picture: Studies in the Literary Translations of Pictures*, trans. Kacke Götrick, Lewiston, N.Y. 1992. First published in Swedish in 1982; James Heffernan: *Museum of Words. The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*, Chicago; London 1993; G. Scott: *The Sculpted Word. Keats, Ekphrasis and the Visual Arts*, Hanover; New Hampshire 1994; A.S. Becker: *The Shield of Achilles and the Poetics of Ekphrasis*, Lanham; Maryland 1995; Katy Eisenberg: *Ravishing Images. Ekphrasis in the Poetry and Prose of William Wordsworth, W.H. Auden, and Philip Larkin*, New York 1995; John Hollander: *The Gazer's Spirit. Poems Speaking to Silent Works of Art*, Chicago 1995; Valerie Robillard and Els Jongeneel (eds.): *Pictures Into Words. Theoretical and Descriptive Approaches to Ekphrasis*, Amsterdam 1998. Siglind Bruhn: *Musical Ekphrasis in Rilke's Marien-Leben*, Amsterdam 2000; The January-March, 1999, issue of *Word & Image* (1) is devoted exclusively to the subject of ekphrasis.

<sup>3</sup> Lund's *Text as Picture. Studies in the Literary Transformation of Pictures* (see full reference in above note) has become an indispensable text in the study of intermediality. Further, his important essay titled “Ekphrastic Linkage and Contextual Ekphrasis” in *Pictures Into Words: Theoretical and Descriptive Approaches to Ekphrasis* (see above reference), p. 173–188, has broadened the scope of our consideration of ekphrastic texts, focusing not only what is contained within the picture frame but also the significance of their context of display (spatial contextual ekphrasis) as well as the elements brought to bear through memory (temporal contextual ekphrasis).

<sup>4</sup> David Radcliffe: “On the Critical Value of Categories” in Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey (eds.): *Visual Theory*, Cambridge 1991 (p. 260–264), p. 260.

attempts, as Murray Krieger has pointed out, to “wrestle it to the ground.”<sup>5</sup> This is due both to the increasing complexity of ekphrastic texts as well as to the fluid nature of the relationship between the visual and verbal arts. In the spirit of Walter Benjamin’s above statement on the importance of historical influences on human perception, I would like to suggest that a crucial factor in the (successful) operations of ekphrasis is the varied and culturally determined responses of readers. Considering the recent explosion of ekphrastic texts,<sup>6</sup> it seems to be an opportune moment for the field of intermedial studies to reconsider ekphrasis in the light of the new interest in the subject sparked by literary works presently crowding the marketplace.

A new look at the functions of ekphrasis seems particularly relevant since ekphrastic texts (and our understanding of them) have taken on a variety of faces since their earliest use. We have proceeded from the classical notion of *ekphrasis* in its original form, which was centered on the descriptive skills of the student of rhetoric and his ability to produce the experience of *enargeia* in his audience, to modern texts based on artworks which seem to do everything *except* “describe exhaustively” (which is one definition of the word). These latter texts demand much more of the reader in terms of knowledge (general and specific) and social/cultural experience. In his study of the psychology of image-reception, Ernst Gombrich argues throughout *Art and Illusion* that perception is determined by cognition.<sup>7</sup> How much more is demanded of a reader who must somehow “view” an artwork through its verbal representation? By what process can the reader of a modern ekphrastic text, in other words, be “turned from a listener/reader into a spectator”?<sup>8</sup> When an ekphrastic text is primarily descriptive, such as those found in the *Eikones* of the Philostrati (190 A.D), there is a considerable likelihood that *enargeia* will be achieved; however, contemporary ekphrases operate under the assumption that works of art are familiar or accessible to most readers and therefore description does not generally play a key role in these texts. Considering the number and variety of ekphrastic texts that we now encounter in our reading, it is no wonder that the terms and definitions we devise to make critical sense of the term ekphrasis continue to fall short of the mark. This essay will explore some of these critical stumbling blocks. In a comparative

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<sup>5</sup> Murray Krieger: “The Problem of Ekphrasis: Image and Words, Space and Time – and the Literary Work” in Valerie Robillard and Els Jongeneel (eds.): *Pictures Into Words: Theoretical and Descriptive Approaches to Ekphrasis*, Amsterdam 1998 (p. 3–20), p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> For example, most readers and viewers are familiar with Tracy Chevalier’s *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, which is based on the paintings of Vermeer and has been recently translated to medium of film; consider also the innumerable ekphrastic poems that have been written in all languages during the last decades, too recent to have been acknowledged in Gisbert Kranz’s *Das Bildgedicht* published in 1982 (see note 12).

<sup>7</sup> Ernst Gombrich: *Art and Illusion. A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, London 1994 (1960).

<sup>8</sup> See Bernhard F. Scholz: “‘Sub Oculis Subiectio.’ Quintilian on Ekphrasis and Enargeia” in Valerie Robillard and Els Jongeneel (eds.): *Pictures Into Words: Theoretical and Descriptive Approaches to Ekphrasis*, Amsterdam 1998, p. 73–99.



analysis of three poems by William Carlos Williams, I will demonstrate some of the complex ways in which modern ekphrastic texts play on the cognitive skills of the reader and the critical problems that arise in trying to place such texts into neat categories. Although much has been written on Williams<sup>9</sup> and the visual arts (and especially on his relationship to Brueghel), this essay is a departure from these in the sense that it does not address the ways in which Williams was influenced by the visual arts but focuses, rather, on the ekphrastic diversity of *Pictures from Brueghel* and their complex referential capacity.

### Ekphrastic Diversity in the 'Brueghel Poems'

Williams's final volume of poems, *Pictures from Brueghel* (1962),<sup>10</sup> not only engages with paintings which were the products of Renaissance pictorial tradition but reverses the modernist strain of the majority of his ekphrastic poems to identify Williams with one of the early masters: Pieter Brueghel The Elder (1525–1569). Although some critics have implied that Williams's "Brueghel poems" were somehow less original than his other ekphrastic poems – the artworks serving as a "crutch to compensate for a failing imagination"<sup>11</sup> – these poems are far from being facile copies, but signal an attempt to translate what he perceived to be the *essence* of Brueghel's paintings to his own medium. Williams's poems inspired by Brueghel are, in fact, a small part of a large and varied body of poetic responses to the paintings of this highly controversial artist.<sup>12</sup> As Margaret Sullivan has pointed out, "Brueghel has the ability to fascinate new generations... [and] each new generation develops a

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<sup>9</sup> For specific works on Williams and the visual arts, see Bram Dijkstra: *Cubism, Stieglitz, and the Early Poetry of William Carlos Williams. The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech*, Princeton 1969; Dickran Tashjian: *Skyscraper Primitives. Dada and the American Avant-garde, 1910–1925*, Middleton, Connecticut 1975, and *William Carlos Williams and the American Scene, 1920–1940*, Berkeley 1978; James E. Breslin: *William Carlos Williams. An American Artist*, New York 1978, and "William Carlos Williams and Charles Demuth. Cross-Fertilization in the Arts" in *Journal of Modern Literature* VI, 1977, p. 248–263; William Marling: *William Carlos Williams and the Painters, 1909–1923*, Athens, Ohio 1982; Christopher MacGowan: *William Carlos Williams' Early Poetry. The Visual Arts Background*, Ann Arbor 1984; Henry Sayre: *The Visual Text of William Carlos Williams*, Urbana 1983, and "Ready-mades and Other Measures. The Poetics of Marcel Duchamp and William Carlos Williams" in *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 1980 (p. 3–22); Peter Schmidt: *William Carlos Williams, The Arts, and Literary Tradition*, Baton Rouge; London 1988; Peter Halter: *The Revolution in the Visual Arts and the Poetry of William Carlos Williams*, New York; Cambridge 1994.

<sup>10</sup> *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams, Volume II: 1939–1962*, A. Walton Litz and Christopher MacGowan (eds.), New York 1978.

<sup>11</sup> Jerome Mazzaro: *William Carlos Williams. The Later Poems*, Ithaca; London 1973, p. 172.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Gisbert Kranz, in his voluminous work *Das Bildgedicht: Theorie, Lexikon, Bibliographie*, Volumes 1-2, Köln 1981, lists more than thirty poems written on Brueghel's *Fall of Icarus* alone. Perhaps the best-known of these are Williams's "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" and W.H. Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts." Since the publication of Kranz's work, a great many more poems on this painting have been published in a variety of languages.

relationship with the work of art that is to some degree idiosyncratic...<sup>13</sup> The nine poems contained in *Pictures From Brueghel* are widely regarded as Williams's most tangible translations from the visual to the verbal arts – the poems being frequently cited in discussions on interarts semiotics where, in spite of their diversity, they are offered as quintessential examples of ekphrastic texts.<sup>14</sup> In order to understand these “translations,” it is important to first consider the poet's own “idiosyncratic” relationship with Brueghel and to ask how his understanding of the artist informs the complex (and occasionally puzzling) re-presentations of the paintings. There is sufficient art-historical information to suggest that some of the similarities that Williams perceived to exist between himself and Brueghel were most likely based on long-standing misconceptions about the artist; many of these were propagated by Brueghel's earliest biographer Carel Van Mander, who wrote in his *SchilderBoeck* of 1604 that “in a wonderful manner Nature found and seized the man who in his turn was destined to seize her magnificently, when in an obscure village in Brabant she chose from among the peasants, as the delineator of peasants, the witty and gifted Pieter Brueghel ...”<sup>15</sup>

Although Van Mander's account helped establish this rather one-sided view of Brueghel, more recent studies downplay Brueghel's peasant background and emphasize instead his association with an elite group of scholars. In *Bruegel's Peasants*, for example, Margaret Sullivan points out that, far from being a simple peasant, Brueghel was the peer of the humanist intelligentsia – a group subscribing to the ideological teachings of Erasmus which stressed the importance of the pursuit of self-knowledge, submission to reason rather than passion and the possession of a

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<sup>13</sup> Margaret Sullivan: *Bruegel's Peasants. Art and Audience in the Northern Renaissance*, New York; Cambridge 1994, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, James A.W. Heffernan 1993, p.152–169; Wendy Steiner: *The Colors of Rhetoric. Problems in the Relation Between Modern Literature and Painting*, Chicago; London 1982, p. 73–80. Steiner has rightly suggested that these poems, which are ‘unabashedly interartistic in their motivation ... can serve as a testing ground for structuralist and semiotic insights’ (see p. 73).

<sup>15</sup> Fritz Grossman: *Pieter Bruegel. Complete Edition of the Paintings*, London (third edition) 1973, p. 9. Most contemporary art historians have taken issue with Van Mander's account of Brueghel's origins and artistic principles. Grossman suggests that Van Mander invented the story about Brueghel going out into the countryside and recording the lives of the peasants, perhaps borrowing instead Leonardo's advice to artists to observe people in their daily lives and save their impressions for future reference. Grossman relates Van Mander's story about Brueghel and his patron watching the peasants at their celebrations: “Here Brueghel delighted in observing the droll behaviour of the peasants, how they ate, drank, danced, capered or made love, all of which he was well able to reproduce cleverly...he represented the peasants, men and women ... naturally, as they really were, betraying their boorishness in the way they walked, danced, stood still or moved” (p. 42–43). Grossman also points out that, although Leonardo's work wasn't yet in print, Van Mander had the means “to get hold of Leonardo's circulating notes” and that Vasari's references to Leonardo most likely alerted him to their existence. (Grossman is referring here to Vasari's *Lives of The Artists*, and specifically to the chapter titled “Life of Leonardo Da Vinci: Florentine painter and sculptor, 1452–1519,” trans. George Bull, London 1987, p. 255–271.

sanity which lets “reason gaze on honest things” (Sullivan, p. 10). Sullivan goes on to argue that, while the artists and writers of this group portrayed themselves as sober and hardworking, the peasants were depicted as base creatures who indulged their passions by “wallowing like animals in the midst of their vile instincts ... uncontrolled by reason or piety, wasting their resources on drinking and dancing” (Sullivan, p. 10–11).<sup>16</sup> In translating the visual to the verbal, a poet’s understanding of Brueghel’s social and intellectual affiliations will thus unavoidably inform the way in which he/she reads the artist’s paintings of the peasantry – artworks that constitute an important part of Brueghel’s oeuvre. In turn, our understanding, as readers, of the interests and backgrounds of both painter and poet, as well as our own (art-historical) experience will inevitably inform the way in which we read the ekphrastic poem thus generated – the intermedial ground upon which poet, artist, and reader meet.

Indeed, where acceptance of the “peasant theory” would imply that Brueghel’s depictions of peasant life should be read as unbiased chronicles, the second theory would suggest that the paintings be read ironically, the peasants depicted as caricatures of themselves. Sullivan’s study is not the first to point out this latter interpretation. Yet Brueghel’s paintings have evoked such diverse interpretations that, as Fritz Grossman suggest, arriving at the truth about this painter is not a simple matter:

The interpretation of Bruegel, the man and the work, from his day to ours, presents a bewildering spectacle. The man has been thought to have been a peasant and a townsman, an orthodox Catholic and a Libertine, a humanist, a laughing and a pessimist philosopher; the artist appeared as a follower of Bosch and a continuator of the Flemish tradition, the last of the Primitives, a Mannerist in contact with Italian art, an illustrator, a genre painter, a landscape artist, a realist, a painter consciously transforming reality and adapting it to his formal ideal – to sum up just a few opinions expressed by various observers in the course of four hundred years. With the exception of the peasant, whom I think we can decently bury, each of these views, even when apparently contradicted by another, contains some part of the truth (Grossman, p. 50).

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<sup>16</sup> Sullivan further points out that Van Heemskerck’s print for “The Planets” did much to perpetuate this attitude toward the peasants, who, being born under Saturn, were “ailing, avaricious, sad, unfaithful, dishonest, sluggish, with a sensitive stomach and too fond of drink.” This image of the peasantry was placed in opposition to those born under Mercury: the artists, doctors, writers, and merchants who were “all honorable professional men, who do not run, shout, or jostle (and) are slim of build, pale with honest eyes, and to be admired for their moderation in drinking,” p. 13.

It is clear that understanding Brueghel and his art is a complex matter. This, in turn, makes the reader's reception of an ekphrastic translation of the painter's works even more problematic: an ekphrastic writer is first and foremost a viewer, one who will inevitably bring his/her own "truth" to pictures and Williams varies his approach to the paintings in such a way that he depicts more than one dimension of Brueghel and his art. Three poems from *Pictures from Brueghel* that illustrate this complex and diverse relationship to the artist are "The Hunters in the Snow," "The Corn Harvest," and "Haymaking."<sup>17</sup> As pointed out above, although all of the poems in this volume have been referred to as "ekphrastic" in critical discussions, they are, in fact, quite diverse in their approaches to their visual sources – each making particular demands on the perceptual skills and experience of the reader.

### "The Hunters in the Snow"

The painting in Brueghel's seasonal series which, according to Fritz Grossman, "most exemplifies the artist's technique of subsuming a multiplicity of Nature's characteristics and human occupations onto one canvas" is *Hunters in the Snow* (1565) (fig. 1) (Grossman, p. 56). This painting depicts large foregrounded figures of hunters and their dogs descending to their village which, engulfed in a stark winter landscape, appears as a miniature cosmos of humans at work and at play. In his poem of the same title, Williams's translation of the painting's "multiplicity" (in Grossman's words), has generated a verbal text that so closely follows the organizational and material elements of the painting that, as in the works of the Philostrati, the reader literally becomes a viewer:

The over-all picture is winter  
icy mountains  
in the background the return

from the hunt it is toward evening  
from the left  
sturdy hunters lead in

their pack the inn-sign  
hanging from a  
broken hinge is a stag a crucifix

between his antlers the cold  
inn yard is  
deserted but for a huge bonfire

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<sup>17</sup> These poems refer to (and borrow the titles from) Brueghel's paintings which represent January and August respectively. The other two are *The Gloomy Day*, and *The Return of the Herd*.

that flares wind-driven tended by  
women who cluster  
about it to the right beyond

the hill is a pattern of skaters  
Breughel the painter  
concerned with it all has chosen

a winter-struck bush for his  
foreground to  
complete the picture.

*(Collected Poems II, 386–387)*



Fig. 1. Pieter Brueghel, *Hunters in the Snow* (1565)

This poem, remarkable (for a modern ekphrastic text) for its ‘exhaustive’ description of a work of art, very nearly revives the original spirit of ekphrasis. Here Williams describes a balanced winter landscape with its “icy mountains,” “cold / inn yard,” “wind-driven” fire, and adds a “winter-struck” bush at the center foreground – the final touch to an “overall picture” of the season. Yet this is also a landscape populated by human beings who hunt, cluster around a bonfire, and enjoy winter activities. What is striking about Williams’s arrangement of objects in the poem is

that in various ways it invites the reader to assume the position of viewer. First of all, Williams frames his poetic re-construction of the painting by placing the word “winter” at the top and the lines “a winter-struck bush / for his foreground to / complete the picture” at the bottom to stress the painting’s place in the calendar series. But Williams also builds in a “verbal frame,” as Wendy Steiner points out, by including the word “picture” in both the first and the final lines. In this way, Steiner argues, Williams not only offers his poem as an imitation of Brueghel’s painting but also stresses its nature as a visual artifact to be viewed *in situ* (Steiner, p. 80). It is this insistence on the materiality of the poem-as-painting that informs the text from beginning to end. Indeed, after identifying the painting in the title, Williams enumerates its details until, in the final lines of the poem, he focuses on the artist himself and the very act of creation which generated the artwork: namely, Brueghel’s considered selection and placement of a “winter-struck bush” – a formal artistic decision imitated here in the poem by Williams’s own selection of these details. Similarly, the poem is shot through with references to spatial considerations. In addition to the carefully arranged effect of “the over-all picture,” Williams calls attention to the “background” and “foreground” and “left” and “right” corners of the picture plane (all of which refer to considered use of perspective) and to a “*pattern of skaters*” (italics mine) which remind the reader that the poem is concerned first and foremost with the plastic qualities of Brueghel’s painting.

It might be argued that Williams has described this painting in sufficient detail to create *enargeia*, (in other words, that the poem’s pictorial vividness is sufficient to bring Brueghel’s painting before the inner eye of the reader);<sup>18</sup> yet Williams exceeds this visual appeal by engaging the reader as active viewer through the structural organization of details which plays on perceptual dynamics. It is here where our efforts to “wrestle ekphrasis to the ground” become interesting. In this poem, Williams deliberately employs the dynamics of “saccadic movement,” a technique used by the spatial arts to guide the inner eye in a deliberate manner over the surface of paintings, a phenomenon which has been described by Christopher Collins in “The Moving Eye in Williams’ Earlier Poetry.”<sup>19</sup> Collins appropriates the term from the cognitive sciences in order to explain the manner in which both the physical eye and the inner eye explore visual space and seek to perceive shapes and relationships – a visual response which proceeds by means of a series of optical fixations, a series of ocular shifts which must occur so that the viewer can take in an entire image (Collins, p. 266). The applicability of this perceptual theory to the visual arts is obvious, as it is these optical fixations upon which visual illusion – such as conventional perspective – depends. Yet, how might this perceptual activity function within a literary text?

<sup>18</sup> For more on *enargeia*, see Jean Hagstrum: *The Sister Arts. The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism from Dryden to Gray*, Chicago 1958, p. 11–12.

<sup>19</sup> Christopher Collins: “The Moving Eye in Williams’ Earlier Poetry” in Caroll Terrell (ed.): *Williams Carlos Williams. Man and Poet*, Orono, Maine 1983 (p. 261–285).

Through applying this theory to Williams's "Red Wheelbarrow," Collins has demonstrated that saccadic shifts, whose principal indicators in verbal texts are prepositions, operate either by fixating details within depicted objects or by relating separate objects spatially in the poem. Furthermore, these objects, which are nouns, when plural or indeterminate can create any number of saccades and fixations. In a painting, these ocular shifts are guided by particular artistic techniques involving lines, spatialization, and color employed variously by different artists or styles; in a verbal text, the writer appeals both linguistically and structurally to the reader's inner eye to create this sense of perusal. While acknowledging the innate differences between pictorial and verbal saccades (a poem at most involves textual elements which serve to create *analogues* of saccades and vergences), I suggest that Williams's attempt to appeal to the inner eye demonstrates not only that the borders between the visual and verbal are not as fixed as Lessing would have it, but, more importantly for this study, that developments in the cognitive sciences have a considerable contribution to make to understanding the process of perception in the verbal and visual arts – and their combination within ekphrastic texts. Let's see how this works in "Hunters in the Snow."

By first introducing "the over-all picture," Williams creates the sensation of approaching a painting from some distance, perhaps imitating the manner in which a viewer moving through the museum might take in the painting's entire surface for a general first impression. In the second line, Williams immediately shifts to a close-up view of the painting: to the mountains *in* the background, implying that the reader/viewer has moved closer to the painting (the rest of the painting would at that moment lie in the peripheral field, which is the area not focused on; Collins, p. 265). In line 3, "the return" directs the viewer's gaze once more to the foreground. Although Collins suggests that saccades would normally be indicated by prepositions, it is typical of Williams's rule-breaking poetics that this same effect is achieved wholly by means of the unusual syntactical juxtaposition in the third line. However, although Williams does not grammatically distinguish one from the other, these shifts from background to foreground, as well as the final shift from the middle-ground to "a winter-struck bush" in the foreground, are not a function of saccadic movement but of another kind of optical adjustment called a vergence, which, as opposed to the left and right movement of saccades, is an adjustment for depth.

This ocular movement allows us, according to Collins, to "zoom in" on objects at various distances from the eye – in effect, to break the pictorial plane and enter a three-dimensional perceptual environment (the functional difference between a saccade and a vergence is that the former involves a shift of angle to a new fixation point and the latter a re-adjustment for depth; Collins, p. 269). Aside from the four vergent shifts from back to front to middle-ground to front again, there are three saccadic shifts: in lines 5–6 ("*from* the left / sturdy hunters lead in," italics added); in line 7 ("their pack the sign"); and in lines 10–11 ("the cold / inn yard..."). All of

these shifts involve lateral or vertical moves, but only one uses a prepositional marker. Williams' idiosyncratic use of these perceptual dynamics invites continuous movement of the inner eye, preventing it from alighting for more than a moment upon any one specific element of his verbal canvas. Although the sequence represents one manner in which we might view Brueghel's painting, the speed of viewing, which is produced by the odd syntax and line breaks, and complete lack of punctuation, seems orchestrated to produce in the reader a sense of continual perusal. This detailed analysis of the visual play in the poem will inevitably lead to a fuller understanding of its thematic concerns.

Through Williams's analogous structuring and selection of detail, the poem depicts most of the material and pictorial elements of Brueghel's painting.<sup>20</sup> Aside from the introduction of symbolic elements through the "enlargement" of the inn-sign detail, the structural aspects of the poem has raised for some critics a far more complex question concerning the artistic principles which lie behind the painting. In this poem, Williams reproduces what Alan Dundes and Claudia Stibbe describe as "Brueghel's delight in opposition and paradox."<sup>21</sup> To what extent might Williams be following Brueghel's lead in depicting oppositional pairs? In an extensive explication of the poem in *The Colors of Rhetoric*, Wendy Steiner has convincingly argued that the opposition of figures and landscape is established in the poem through the division of the poetic surface into thematic "bands" as well as by the shifts from foreground to background which create an interplay between the natural landscape and the human element. Steiner further argues that the three diagonal bands which divide the painting by lines falling from upper left to lower right offer "a different choice of subject matter: a genre scene of the return from the hunt, a cross section signifying winter, and the frozen, nonhuman landscape of nature in January" (Steiner, p. 76). Steiner posits that, rather than focusing on an integration of human and landscape, Williams, by structurally grouping these two thematic elements, stresses their "separateness"; she goes on to suggest that, since the greatest part of the poem focuses on the people in the village, Williams appears to assume the dialogical position that the painting is not about landscape at all but about the human element (Steiner, p. 76).<sup>22</sup>

Barry Ahearn, on the other hand, argues that the oppositions we may find in *Pictures From Brueghel* have less to do with Williams's imitation of Brueghel's thematic concerns than they have with Williams's own "earlier fascination with

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<sup>20</sup> By "material" I am referring to canvas, paint, brushstrokes, perspective, and by "pictorial" to figurative elements.

<sup>21</sup> Alan Dundes and Claudia Stibbe: *The Art of Mixing Metaphors. A Folkloristic Interpretation of the 'Netherlandish Proverbs' by Pieter Bruegel the Elder*, Helsinki 1981, p. 67. Dundes and Stibbe go on to say that Brueghel "does not stop with simply delineating oppositional pairs ... [but] ... is concerned with the ritual reversal of reality." Williams does not take his oppositions this far in the seasonal landscape poems.

<sup>22</sup> This argument would agree with Sullivan's notion of the humanist quality of Brueghel's landscapes.



contraries (which) has become neoclassical in its carefully measured balance.”<sup>23</sup> In this context, Ahearn recalls Williams’s early interest in Cubism and argues that, in this poem, “Williams has become less interested in the divergence of images and objects and more interested in a coherent assembly of antinomies” (Ahearn, p. 163). Ahearn is not alone in his position that the oppositions have more to do with Williams’s style than with Brueghel’s. It is interesting to note, in fact, that many critics would disagree with the argument that the poem is in any way dialogical. As Joel Conarroe argues, for example, “in finding words to fit the painting, Williams again makes no attempt to discover meaning or message. He does not interpret, but simply records, letting his eye move over the various details (though selection itself is a kind of interpretation), allowing the things to evoke their own resonance.”<sup>24</sup> Conarroe may be right in saying that Williams’s “recording” of details in the manner of a “chronicler” avoids imposing any symbolic meaning to the painting. Yet, as we have seen (and as Conarroe would admit), an ekphrastic poem – no matter how we define this term – implies the same acts of interpretation we find in any translation, even in a text so tightly constructed around an artwork as this one. Williams interlaces a number of descriptive and structural elements in an intricate pattern where each function may be seen to be dependent on the operation of another.

By so closely following the details of the painting and by employing very specific strategies to create the effect of *enargeia*, Williams has produced a verbal artifact which comes as close to “a verbal representation of a visual representation” as we are likely to find either in Williams’s verse or elsewhere (Heffernan, p. 3). I think that it is safe to say that, aside from the dialogical or associative/symbolic aspects of “Hunters in the Snow” (which would demand more of the reader at the level of knowledge or membership in a particular community of interpretation), the descriptive elements of this poem render some degree of visualization a certainty. However, in the following poem, “The Corn Harvest,” Williams seems to proceed from objectives other than an attempt to faithfully translate the elements from one text to another and it is in this kind of text that we are confronted with the ambiguities of ekphrasis and the effect of these on the act of reading/viewing.

### “The Corn Harvest”

Williams based this poem on Brueghel’s *The Corn Harvest* (fig. 2), which depicts the summer activities of working peasants. The visual center of the painting is occupied by a young worker who is sleeping under a tree, and nearby and to the right we see a group of women who are seated on the ground eating their mid-day meal. To the left of this section, a worker is leaving the wheat field while another is cutting wheat,

<sup>23</sup> Barry Ahearn: *William Carlos Williams and Alterity*, New York; Cambridge 1994, p. 162.

<sup>24</sup> Joel Conarroe: “The Measured Dance: Williams’ *Pictures from Brueghel*” in *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 1, May, 1971 (p. 565–567), p. 566.

and still another has discovered a wine jug hidden among the stalks. The field, over which two large birds hover, extends into the painting's background where it converges with the green landscape surrounding a small community. As we shall see, most of these details have been ignored in Williams's poem.<sup>25</sup> This raises the issue at hand: to what extent can we say that Williams has captured and, more importantly, *communicated* the essence of Brueghel's painting? To what extent, in other words, can we say that this poem is "ekphrastic"?

Summer!  
the painting is organized  
about a young  
  
reaper enjoying  
his noonday rest  
completely  
  
relaxed  
from his morning labors  
sprawled  
  
in fact sleeping  
unbuttoned  
on his back  
  
the women  
have brought him his lunch  
perhaps  
  
a spot of wine  
they gather gossiping  
under a tree  
whose shade  
carelessly  
he does not share the  
  
resting center of  
their workaday world

(*Collected Poems II*, 389)

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<sup>25</sup> Robert Lawson-Peebles: "William Carlos Williams' *Pictures from Brueghel*" in *Word and Image*, No. 2, 1986 (p. 18–23), suggests that 92% of the details in Brueghel's painting have been left out of the poem, p. 18. Lawson-Peebles' claim has also been noted in Heffernan's *Museum of Words*, p. 157.



Fig. 2. Pieter Brueghel, *The Corn Harvest (August)* (1565)

By identifying Brueghel's painting in the title and by pointing out in the second line that "the painting is organized," Williams again reminds us that we are viewing, through his poem, a work of art which is a carefully constructed artifact. Having thus established the ekphrastic context of the poem, Williams proceeds in the following 10 lines to focus on the physical center of Brueghel's painting: "a young / reaper enjoying / his noonday rest..." (lines 4–6). The line following may be read in two ways: the young man is either enjoying his rest "completely" or is "completely / relaxed." However we choose to read the ambiguity in these lines, perhaps most important here is the *kind* of rest the poem implies. Williams communicates this through the organization of the poem's details. Having given the first half of the poem to the visual center of the painting, Williams introduces, in the second half, a "resting center" which refers to its subjective space. Here, the broken syntax of lines 19–23 ("whose shade / carelessly / he does not share the / resting center of / their workaday world") creates a thematic ambiguity which has interpretative consequences: this rest, which is related to productive labor, may be seen as one in which the young reaper purposefully does not partake.

On the other hand, these lines may also indicate that the reaper constitutes the resting center of an otherwise busy harvest scene. Through the use of ambiguous syntax, Williams lets us choose. Jerome Mazzaro, for example, has suggested that the young man in Williams's poem, who has overeaten and perhaps drunk too much,

projects the kind of “dreamy silence (which) in Williams is everywhere attacked as being ineffective (non-action producing), sentimental, and false” (Mazzaro, p. 168). If this is so, then we might expect that these notions would be reflected in the elements that Williams selects from the painting for re-presentation.

Although Williams focuses almost exclusively on this single image and appears to ignore the rest of the elements in the painting, he does set up one important (and perhaps the primary) opposition by dividing the poem in this way. Both “centers” depict resting, yet the rest enjoyed by the women is the kind that follows hard work; the other is one which sprawls “carelessly” and “unbuttoned” on its back. If we were to have the painting in front of us, the half-revealed jug of wine in the left-hand corner would be enough to alert us to the possibility that the young reaper might indeed have been drinking too much, as Mazzaro suggests. But even without this knowledge of the painting, the physical opposition between the two different sorts of resting makes this clear.

Again, as Alan Dundes and Claudia Stibbe have pointed out, in Brueghel’s paintings “one term of an oppositional pair without its complementary term is meaningless” (Dundes and Stibbe, p. 66–67). Indeed, if Williams had intended to ignore “the foolish peasant” moral in order to depict a genre scene, then his structural division would not make sense. Furthermore, even though the reaper’s “dreamy silence” is not directly attacked in the poem, Williams has separated it structurally from effective rest. As a consequence, the young reaper is isolated in the poem both spatially and semantically. Even if Williams seems to neglect most of the signature oppositions which Brueghel placed in his paintings, particularly in *this* painting’s division into work and play, it is these structural divisions in the poem which suggest that Williams really does intend to separate one from the other. Whether or not this indicates an aversion to “dreamy silence” is, of course, an interpretive matter – one which would depend on what we, as readers, know about Williams’s thematic concerns in other poems and whether he intended to project the same irony which we might argue is present in this painting.

How depictive, then, is Williams’s interpretation of Brueghel’s painting *The Corn Harvest*? As pointed out above, much is communicated about Brueghel’s painting and its position in his seasonal series through direct naming in the poem’s title and first line. Most importantly, however, is the poem’s organization, as it is structured in a manner that continually invites the reader to imagine that he/she is viewing a painting, beginning with a reference to the painting’s overall organization in the second line and then focusing on its central image. Furthermore, Williams allows the reader to cast an eye over the surface of the painting by inviting three discrete saccadic eye movements in the text. The first one is an indeterminate (and prepositionally unmarked) saccade, suggested in the opening exclamation, “Summer!” Through its explicative punctuation and isolated placement, this one word is sufficient to suggest any number of visual associations belonging to this

season. In contrast to “The Hunters in the Snow,” which invites a general kind of perusal by suggesting “the overall picture,” the inner eye movement here depends completely on this one exclamation to suggest an overall picture, yet it serves the same function: to invite the reader to scan for the elements that would suggest this season. In viewing the painting itself, this perusal would involve both lateral saccades and a vergent movement to adjust for depth in taking in the sun-glazed fields in the upper-middle section and outward to the distant green countryside in the upper segment. Williams immediately follows this by inviting a second vergence to what would be the foreground of the painting by referring to the center about which all else is “organized.” The final optical adjustment occurs in the form of a lateral saccade to the right, unmarked by a preposition but signaled by a new line indicating “The women...,” who are located precisely at the center of the poem. In this way, Williams both physically and semantically establishes two centers: the first is literal or positional, the second is thematic. Again, Williams plays on optical perception in a manner which allows the reader to experience the organization of the painting itself.

In addition to this kind of analogous structuring, the enumeration of the painting’s details may, to some extent, be sufficient to appeal to the reader’s inner eye. However, does this depiction sufficiently re-present the painting? Although the density of Williams’s selectivity of detail here does not approach the searching exploration that we have seen in “The Hunters in the Snow,” it might be argued that the foregrounded segment of the painting on which the poem does focus contains the central thematic and visual elements of the painting. By concentrating on this one section, furthermore, Williams creates a certain degree of dialogical tension between painting and poem because selection immediately implies interpretation. Yet in “The Corn Harvest,” the new text does not deviate *essentially* from the painting since it selects those details which are enlarged and foregrounded by Brueghel himself. If we look at Grossman’s edition of Brueghel’s paintings, for example, it is precisely Williams’s selected segment which is represented on a separate page. (This selection is titled “Detail of the midday meal from *The Corn Harvest*”). Williams’s text might be seen as just this sort of detail, chosen because it captures what the poet perceives to be the essence – or the primary focus – of the painting.<sup>26</sup>

The selection of foregrounded detail, then, sets up a synecdochal relationship to the painting in which the large representative segment is transferred to the new text with most of its important structural and visual elements intact. However, are these sufficient grounds upon which to claim that the poem is ekphrastic, in the classical sense of the term? In other words, can we say that the ekphrastic operations of “The Corn Harvest,” which takes significant liberties with its source painting, are

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<sup>26</sup> I think that it is reasonable to assume that Grossman based his selection on the representational importance of this segment.

sufficiently depictive as to create a sense of energeia in the reader? This is where an indiscriminate use of terms like “representation” bring us into critical quicksand, firstly, because we have to ask ourselves what it means to “represent,” and secondly, even if we can arrive at a definition of the term, can we be sure that the segment selected by Williams (and Grossman) is the most “representative” of Brueghel’s painting?<sup>27</sup> In other words, who is to say that the wine jug hidden in the wheat field is not the crucial segment? The reader who understands the painting to depict the opposition between “good” (working) peasants and “bad” (imbibing and slothful) peasants would argue that the depicted segment in Williams’s poem gives us only half of the picture. The reader who argues that Brueghel’s painting is purely a genre scene, as Joel Conarroe has done, would regard the depicted segment as highly representative of Brueghel’s painting (and to his wider oeuvre of peopled landscapes). It is clear from the diversity of critical approaches to “The Corn Harvest,” that predicting the extent to which any text will produce the “ideal” ekphrastic response is highly problematic. The final poem to be discussed, “Haymaking,” is even more challenging as it barely engages the painting at all.

### “Haymaking”

In this poem, one would be hard-pressed to find a “detail” in any art book to match Williams’s adaptation of Brueghel’s *Haymaking* (fig. 3). Instead of focusing on what he perceives to be the essence of the painting, we find that Williams is less concerned with rendering this particular painting into words or bringing it before the inner eye of the reader than he is with issues which lie outside its frame. The painting upon which Williams based this poem depicts peasants engaged in various harvest activities. The center foreground is occupied by three peasant women returning from (or going to) their harvest labors. Behind them, peasants laden with baskets descend into the fields and, in the bottom left-hand corner, a reaper sits on the ground repairing his scythe. These constitute the foregrounded images and the ones which Brueghel most strongly highlights through size, detail, and color. In the background and outside the center of the painting, workers in the field are loading hay onto a wagon; beyond them lies a village. In view of the dominant position which Brueghel gives to the human element in this painting, one might expect this to be in some way reflected in Williams’s poem. Nothing is further from the truth. As we shall see, the poem is not really “about” the painting at all and therefore raises some very interesting questions about ekphrastic relationships in general.

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<sup>27</sup> If, as some critics have argued, Williams identified Brueghel as a chronicler of his own time and place, this would lead the (informed) reader to see the text as bypassing the symbolism or satire which, as other critics argue, run through Brueghel’s depictions of peasants. Mariani, for example, has argued that Williams himself considered satire “a cheap substitute for coming into authentic contact with one’s place.” Paul Mariani: *William Carlos Williams. A New World Naked*, New York; London 1981, p. 747.

The living quality of  
the man's mind  
stands out

and its covert assertions  
for art, art, art!  
painting

that the Renaissance  
tried to absorb  
but

it remained a wheat field  
over which  
the wind played

men with scythes tumbling  
the wheat in  
rows

the gleaners already busy  
it was his own –  
magpies

the patient horses no one  
could take that  
from him.

(*Collected Poems II*, 388)

Although Brueghel's *Haymaking* is the ostensible subject of the poem, it is striking that so little of the painting itself is depicted here; more importantly, only a small part of the poem refers in any way to the painting communicated in the title. In fact the first half of the poem is concerned not with the artwork at all but with the artist who created it. The first line, which seems to raise the expectation that the poem will focus on the "enduring quality" of the *painting* is foiled in the second line in which Williams makes it clear that he is ultimately more concerned with the creative mind of the artist. Structurally, we find that the body of the poem is appropriately "framed" at beginning and end, first by the reference to Brueghel's genius and then to the artist's problematic relationship with the conventions of Renaissance art. These lines would be (and have been) sufficient to alert a *specific* reader to the possibility that the poem is perhaps not only about Brueghel but is an

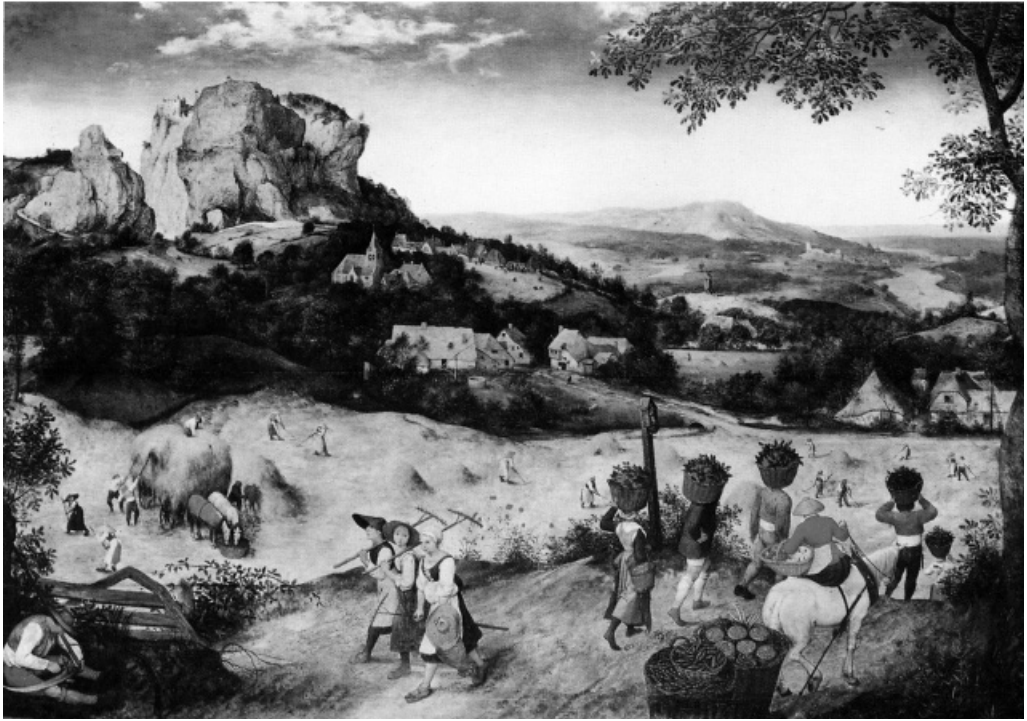


Fig. 3. Pieter Bruegel, *Haymaking (July)* (1565)

oblique autobiography about Williams himself and his relationship to the poetic norms of his own times. As Paul Mariani points out,

just as the predominant school of Eliot had tried to absorb or dismiss Williams and had failed, so with Bruegel, Williams believed, whom the Italian Renaissance had tried likewise to absorb. There was the old master's world as he'd seen it, those fields and woods and buildings put down on canvas so that no one would ever 'take that/ from him' any more than anyone could take what Williams had rendered in fiction and poem from him (Mariani, p. 747).

The point that Mariani makes here is compelling: that Williams shared Bruegel's problem with critical acceptance precisely *because* both he and Bruegel recorded their worlds as they had "seen it," avoiding the stylistic dictates of the "academies." Importantly, the autobiographical nature of the poem is reflected in its organization. Here, the depiction of the painting is not only highly generalized but the central and foregrounded figures are ignored altogether. Instead, Williams focuses on minor background details of Bruegel's painting – gleaners, men with scythes, an unseen wind playing over the field, and magpies which are not present in this painting at all (although they are present in many of Bruegel's other landscape paintings).



The play on visual saccades is also negligible. Here, the reader's gaze is not invited to follow lines or details suggested by Brueghel's painting; on the contrary, where the eye would, in viewing the painting itself, alight first of all on the foregrounded figures, in Williams's poem the eye is prevented from alighting on any one object and, instead, hovers between multiple images of gleaners, horses and magpies, all visualized within a generic wheat field. Nevertheless, as nebulous as the poem's references to this painting are, the text as a whole does set up a tension between painting(s) and poem which force the reader to look beyond the visual text to some underlying pre-text or group of texts. In this poem, Williams seems to be referring to Brueghel's oeuvre in general and not to this specific painting, an ekphrasis that appeals to the knowledge or experience of the reader to make this important connection.

The above analysis of Williams's three "Brueghel poems" demonstrates the complexity and variety of ekphrastic texts, even within the oeuvre of a single writer. So if "anything goes," ekphrastically speaking, how can we place such a variety of texts within a useful discursive framework? As it turns out, these poems offer a wonderful example of the difficulty of pinning down the slippery notion of ekphrasis. As literary texts become less dependent on (and less obvious in their references to) their visual sources, the more the reader must supply the missing information. Yet an individual's subjective response to indeterminacy is impossible to predict; we can only surmise that the (often subtle) information contained in the ekphrastic text will have the intended effect on *some* readers under *specific* circumstances. The problem is clear: if the definitions of ekphrasis we have on hand are not really helpful in articulating the complex relationships that we encounter in ekphrastic texts or the myriad ways in which they might be received by the reader, then perhaps it would prove fruitful to look beyond the discourse of our own discipline to developments in the wider scientific world.

## New Directions

No one will deny the importance of continuing the debate about the nature of ekphrasis, particularly in view of Benjamin's statement in our epigraph concerning the changeability of arts and the importance of historical change on the dynamics of perception. But the socio-cultural debate is only one road into more fully understanding the dynamics associated with word and image interaction. The field of intermediality has already richly profited from the technology provided by computer sciences and graphics, to name just one example. Indeed, it is becoming increasingly clear that the products of investigation within the "exact disciplines" can offer meaningful insights for research in the humanities. I would like to briefly address just a few of these insights offered by the fields of linguistics and cognitive psychology.

Let's begin with the contribution that the field of linguistics might offer to our problem of definition and categorization of ekphrastic relationships. As Jiri Veltrusky

has argued, “the semiotics of any single art has so many aspects that at the present stage of our knowledge it is plainly impossible to examine them all in a systematic way. As soon as different arts are compared, the number of these aspects soars.”<sup>28</sup> Add to this the subjectivity of reception and we have our “greased pig.” In the 25 years since Veltrusky made this observation, little has been done to construct a systematic comparative framework by which to examine the relationship between the objects of intermedial studies. For example, the very term “ekphrasis,” the subject of this paper, has functioned as an “all-purpose” umbrella term ever since its resurrection in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; unfortunately, this kind of general term has proven too broad to be meaningful: however we define the term, a poem is either “ekphrastic” or it is not. In my first attempt at addressing the problem, I devised what I called a “differential model,”<sup>29</sup> a typology which approached ekphrasis as a type of intertextual construct and was organized according to clarity of reference – ranging from precise “naming,” “description,” and “analogous structuring” – ekphrastic operations most likely to produce “enargeia” in the reader – to more subtle references such as “indeterminate marking” and “associative” responses which call largely on the reader’s knowledge of art/aesthetics (see appendix). In this model, “*Hunters in the Snow*” would be highly “attributive” (as it communicates its source directly), highly depictive or “representative” (since it is structurally analogous and most details of the painting are described) and “associative” (as it addresses both thematic and symbolic elements in the painting). On the other end of the scale, “*Haymaking*,” although highly attributive, is minimally depictive and highly associative (as it is more concerned with the artist and his oeuvre than with this particular painting).

This pragmatic typology, although useful in mapping degrees and types of ekphrastic reference, did not pretend to offer a theoretical approach to ekphrasis or take into account the ways in which reception actually takes place. It seems to me that, since ekphrasis is first and foremost a communicative act, the next logical step to a more complete typology would be to turn to the science of linguistics where research into the dynamics of perception might well provide useful insights for our own field of study. It goes without saying that literature is not an exact science and

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<sup>28</sup> Jiri Veltrusky: “Comparative Semiotics of Art” in Wendy Steiner (ed.): *Image and Code*, Michigan 1981, p. 109.

<sup>29</sup> Valerie Robillard: “In Pursuit of Ekphrasis: An Intertextual Approach” in Valerie Robillard and Els Jongeneel (eds.): *Pictures Into Words: Theoretical and Descriptive Approaches to Ekphrasis*, Amsterdam 1998 (p. 53–72), p. 60–62. (This development of a systematic typology was born of my own experience in study of microbiology, in which “mutually exclusive” categorization was essential to an understanding of the objects of the discipline.) The “differential model” has been recently changed to accommodate the translation from verbal to visual as well and will appear in a forthcoming paper in which I demonstrate the usefulness of the sub-categories “verbal ekphrasis” and “visual ekphrasis.” It is not my intention here to further complicate a field already replete with terminology, but to provide a means of categorizing visual responses to the verbal arts which go beyond “illustration” to form a variety of ekphrastic relationships with their verbal pre-texts.

will always be subject to the indeterminacies of language. Add to this the experiential diversity and cognitive difference among readers/viewers of texts, and we could make a good case for avoiding scientific categories altogether (as is largely the case) – at least if we insist on precise language and terminology.<sup>30</sup> The good news is that researchers in cognitive linguistics, most notably Eleanor Rosch, have developed ‘flexible’ categories which take into account the individual and the myriad ways that perception takes place, proceeding from the principle that structured categories go a long way in the ordering of experience. The resulting “prototype model,” which organizes levels of reception in concentric circles, ranging from the most “typical” to the most subjective, could prove very promising for the categorization of ekphrastic response.<sup>31</sup>

Moving on to cognitive psychology: we have already witnessed in the above explication of Williams’s “Brueghel poems” the importance of scientific investigations into optics to understanding (and application to) the operations of ekphrastic texts.<sup>32</sup> But this is only one area currently under investigation that will have important consequences for intermedial studies. Another promising area of investigation in psycholinguistics is those which explore the dynamics of reading literary texts (most specifically, poetic texts) by means of sophisticated sensors and computer imaging, hereby following the movement of the eye by tracking the pauses and repetitions evoked by unfamiliar, difficult, or “odd” words or ambiguous syntax.<sup>33</sup> These investigations have significant implications for tracing the more subtle textual encounters of ekphrasis: those which signal an “intertext” (or, in our case, the artwork which lies behind the poem), which Michael Riffaterre has called “breaks in the fabric of the text”<sup>34</sup> and which I have labeled in my own model as “indeterminate markings.”

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<sup>30</sup> I am referring here to Gottlob Frege’s theory of scientific language, which argues for a ‘precision of expression’ which frees scientific language from ambiguity. This, of course, has been heavily criticized for its implausibility, both by linguists and scientists themselves. An analysis of these theories can be found in Ora Avni’s *Resistance to Reference. Linguistics, Philosophy, and the Literary Text*, Baltimore; London 1990, p.78–112.

<sup>31</sup> See George Lakoff: *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things. What Categories Reveal about the Mind*, Chicago; London 1982, p. 39–57. I would like to thank Dr. Marjolein Verspoor, lecturer in English and Linguistics at the University of Groningen, for making me aware of Eleanor Rosch’s work on categories and its possible significance for Intermedial Studies. Our collaboration in this area is currently a work in progress.

<sup>32</sup> It is interesting to note that cognitive linguistics has provided further insights into this same process by offering the “spatialization of form hypothesis,” which refers to a “metaphorical mapping from physical space into conceptual space [...] more specifically, image schemas (which structure space) are mapped into the corresponding abstract configuration (which structures concepts).” See Lakoff, p. 220.

<sup>33</sup> The ‘sister arts tradition’ will not only offer new directions in sorting out the enigmas of intermedial discourse but will also go a long way in engendering a truly interdisciplinary spirit between the arts and sciences. This is research currently being carried out in the Department of Psychology at the University of Dundee, Scotland.

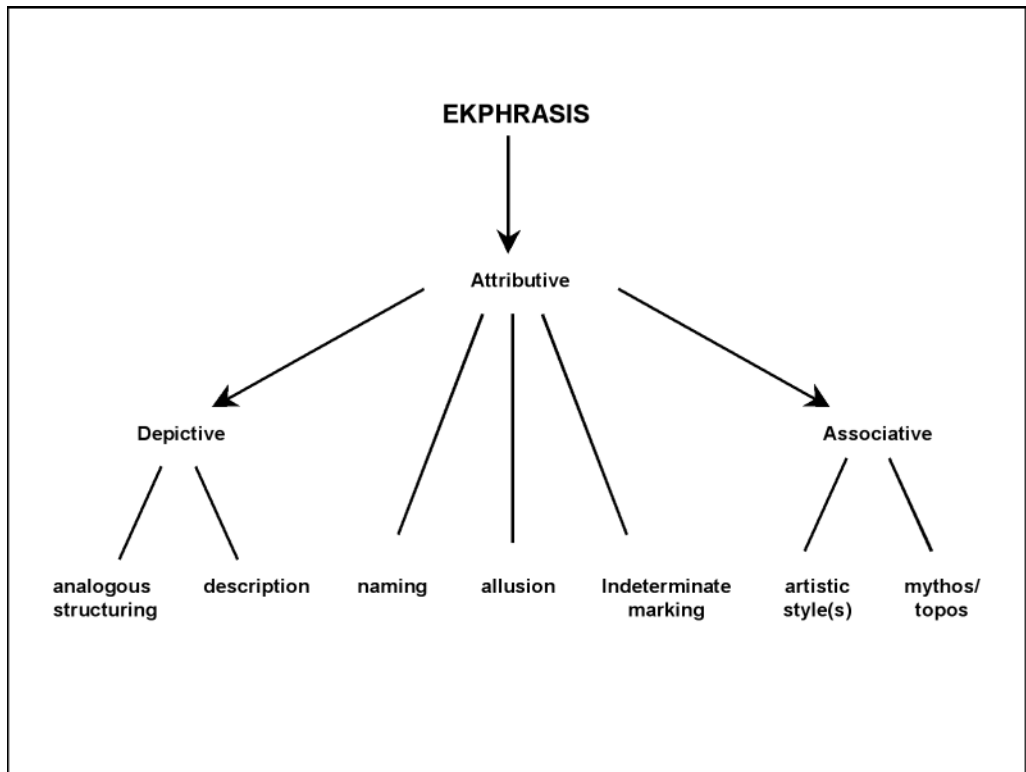
<sup>34</sup> Michael Riffaterre: *The Semiotics of Poetry*, London 1980.

These are just a few examples, but they clearly demonstrate that the ongoing research and innovations in the exact sciences might well provide an escape from the (often) tired discourse that circles around familiar questions and definitions, and which tend to cloud current achievements and the further development of intermedial exploration. Although I do believe that William James was right in cautioning us that “theories are instruments, not answers to enigmas”;<sup>35</sup> nevertheless, making place for the “exact” sciences as equal partner.

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<sup>35</sup> Williams James: *Pragmatism and Other Essays*, Washington 1963, p. 26.

Appendix



A "differential model" of ekphrasis

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# A Whale That Can't Be Cotched? On Conceptualizing Ekphrasis

Bernhard F. Scholz

When the men fell into a dispute concerning what kind of whales they were which they saw, Larry stood by attentively, and after garnering in their ignorance, all at once broke out, and astonishing every body by his intimate acquaintance with the monsters.

“They ar'n't sperm whales,” said Larry, “their spouts ar'n't bushy enough; they ar'n't Sulphur-bottoms, or they wouldn't stay up so long; they ar'n't Hump-backs, for they ar'n't got any humps; they ar'n't Fin-backs, for you won't catch a Fin-back so near a ship; they ar'n't Greenland whales, for we ar'n't off the coast of Greenland; and they ar'n't right whales, for it wouldn't be right to say so. I tell ye, them's Crinkum-crankum whales.”

“And what are them?” said a sailor.

“Why, them is whales that can't be cotched.”

Herman Melville, *Redburn*

I.

In 1955 Leo Spitzer published an article on John Keats's *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, which, judging from a considerable number of scholarly references, has by now become something of a *locus classicus* of modern ekphrasis studies.<sup>1</sup> But in spite of the broad agreement that it was Spitzer who reintroduced the term 'ekphrasis' as a genre-term into the terminological repertoire of modern word-image studies, various attempts at defining ekphrasis, which have been made in recent decades, have rarely if ever aimed at an explicit compliance with the Spitzerian use of that term. Though he may thus have been responsible for reintroducing the term 'ekphrasis' into modern criticism, Spitzer did not subsequently become a 'founder of discourse' in the sense of an author to whose writings later authors will have to return in order to clarify their own conception of a particular subject matter.<sup>2</sup> In

<sup>1</sup> Leo Spitzer: "The 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', or Content vs. Metagrammar" in *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 1955 (p. 203–225); also in Leo Spitzer: *Essays on English and American Literature*, Anna Hatcher (ed.), Princeton 1962, Vol. II, (p. 667–97).

<sup>2</sup> On the notion of a 'founder of discourse' see Michel Foucault: "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" (1969) in D. Defert and F. Ewald (eds.): *Dits et écrits 1954–1988*, Vol. 1. 1954–1969, Paris 1994 (p. 789–821).

fact, both the term 'ekphrasis' and the concept named by it appear to have become so problematic of late that a few years ago an exponent of word-image studies could suggest that "because the label ekphrasis has become so troublesome within the forty years after its re-introduction into the critical discourse by Leo Spitzer we may decide to dispense with it altogether."<sup>3</sup>

II.

The expression 'ekphrasis,' however, was not so easily jettisoned. It is, after all, not just an arbitrary label that one could paste on and subsequently peel off an object as one sees fit. Rather, it is an expression with a disconcertingly varied history of use as a *terminus technicus* that extends over close to two millennia during which it served in a number of different cultural and discursive contexts. Discarding a term so rich in historical reminiscences would not only deprive us of the possibility of reconstructing the uses of 'ekphrasis' in those contexts, all of which, trivially enough, involve the use of precisely that term. We would also rob ourselves of a valuable tool for retaining, perhaps even rekindling, an awareness of the continuity of a strand of Western literature that stretches from Classical Antiquity to W.H. Auden, Gertrude Stein and beyond. And, last but not least, we would be letting go of a term, which may shed an unexpected light on texts and contexts because of the very fact that it has been used in so many different ways in the course of time. It is indeed much more than just "a sort of etymological magic"<sup>4</sup> that has kept the use of the term 'ekphrasis' alive through the centuries. Like several other terms and concepts first used by Classical theoretical discourse, it has been retained despite radical shifts in theoretical framework and in discursive context. Think of how the concept of *mythos* of Aristotle's *Poetics* metamorphosed into that of plot of modern narrative theory; how Longinus's rhetorical concept of *hypsos* became the epistemological sublime of Kant and subsequently an aesthetic concept of Postmodernism; how Plato's *mimesis* first changed into Aristotle's version of it, then turned into Renaissance *imitatio*, then the *vraisemblance* of French Classicism, only to end up as *Widerspiegelung* of Marxist Realism.

With 'ekphrasis,' too, we have to pay careful attention to the manner in which that term came to name a number of different yet related concepts, and thus to acquire a number of different meanings. Significantly enough, it acquired only some of those meanings through definition. Most of them it did through exemplification. Only think of how Quintilian introduces '*enargeia*' as a defining property of

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<sup>3</sup> Claus Clüver: "Quotation, Enargeia, and the Functions of Ekphrasis" in Valerie Robillard and Els Jongeneel (eds.): *Pictures into Words. Theoretical and Descriptive Approaches to Ekphrasis*, Amsterdam 1998 (p. 35–52), p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> See Ruth Webb: "Ekphrasis Ancient and Modern: the Invention of a Genre" in *Word & Image, Vol. 15, No. 1*, 1999, (p. 7–18), p. 7.

ekphrasis by conjuring up before our inner eye a scene by the seaside at Ostia, with an aging senator cavorting with his mistress,<sup>5</sup> think of how Leo Spitzer exemplifies what exactly he means by ‘*transposition d’art*’ by means of a close reading of Keats’s *Ode*, thereby giving that expression a rather different meaning from the one Théophile Gautier had given to it in his programmatic writings.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, when we decide whether a text qualifies as an ekphrasis or not, we are more likely to make comparisons between those remembered exemplifications and the text we now have before us, than to hold that text against the light of one or the other explicit definition. For what we will have retained from reading Quintilian, Spitzer and others, and what will readily be at our disposal when we have to consider whether a text is ekphrastic or not, will not so much be our recall of definitions of ekphrasis involving the identification of the *genus*, the *species* and the *differentiae specificae* of ekphrasis. What we will be relying on much more, certainly initially, will be the ability, acquired from our encounter with those exemplifications, to see the similarities and differences between the text before us and the texts that have previously been called ‘ekphrastic.’ Thanks to those exemplifications a term like ‘ekphrasis’ possesses a hermeneutical as well as a heuristic potential only part of which will be actualized as we encounter a text that is presented to us – or presents itself to us – as ‘ekphrastic.’ The term ‘ekphrasis’, like so many other terms inherited through use in diverse cultural and discursive contexts of the past, can therefore be expected to possess a surplus of meanings in any context in which we are now likely to employ it. Any attempt at defining ekphrasis that were to lose sight of those exemplifications would therefore be needlessly forfeiting that hermeneutic and heuristic potential.

III.

In Classical affective rhetoric the term ‘ekphrasis’ referred to a *figura in mente* that was thought capable of allowing the listener/reader to vividly call up a scene or an object before the his inner eye, transforming him, as it were, into a spectator.<sup>7</sup> When the term was used in that way, paintings, statues or buildings could indeed

<sup>5</sup> Marcus Fabius Quintilianus: *Institutionis oratoriae libri XII. Ausbildung des Redners. Zwölf Bücher*, ed. & trans. Helmut Rahn, Darmstadt 1996 (1988). Bk. VIII, 3, 64; Vol. II, p. 176–7; for an overview of the development of the concept of *enargeia* see Perrine Galland-Hallyn: “De la rhétorique des affects à une métapoétique. Évolution du concept d’*enargeia*” in Heinrich F. Plett (ed.): *Renaissance-Rhetorik / Renaissance Rhetoric*, Berlin; New York 1993 (p. 245–265).

<sup>6</sup> On the Théophile Gautier’s concept of *transposition d’art* see e.g. Alain Montandon: “Écritures de l’image chez Théophile Gautier” in Peter Wagner (ed.): *Icons, Texts, Iconotexts. Essays on Ekphrasis and Intermediality*, Berlin; New York 1996 (p. 105–118); On the place of *transposition d’art* in 19<sup>th</sup> century French poetry see Klaus W. Hempfer (ed.): *Jenseits der Mimesis. Parnassische ‘transposition d’art’ und der Paradigmenwechsel in der Lyrik des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Stuttgart 2000.

<sup>7</sup> See my “*Sub oculos subiectio: Quintilian on Ekphrasis and enargeia*” in Valerie Robillard and Els Jongeneel (eds.): *Pictures into Words. Theoretical and Descriptive Approaches to Ekphrasis*, Amsterdam 1998 (p. 73–99).

occasionally figure as elements of the scenes or among the objects thus called up. But Classical affective rhetoric did not expressly single them out as objects that needed to be considered apart from the rest. They therefore were not distinguished from any other element that might be part of the scene that was being conjured up before the inner eye. The inclusion of works of the visual arts in the extension of the rhetorical concept of ekphrasis was thus contingent, and the intension of that concept, as used by Classical rhetoric, did not involve any explicit mentioning of such artifacts. The same is still true of the discussions of ekphrasis as a rhetorical figure in Renaissance rhetoric.<sup>8</sup>

By contrast, the use of the expression 'ekphrasis' as a name for one of the writing exercises of the *Progymnasmata* of Classical Antiquity appears to have entailed both a *de facto* limitation of the extension of the concept of ekphrasis to works of the visual arts, and a corresponding *de facto* adjustment of its intension. But this more restricted usage of the term 'ekphrasis' does not appear to have been accompanied by corresponding adjustments in the explication of the concept of ekphrasis in the rhetorical treatises of Classical Antiquity. Such adjustments, if they had been undertaken, might indeed have reflected the fact that now works of the visual arts, rather than scenes and objects in general, were to be presented verbally *ad oculos*. They might also have shown that the expression 'ekphrasis' was now being used to refer to a descriptive text as a whole, rather than to a rhetorical figure as an element of such a text. But adjustments of this sort apparently did not take place. Very likely that is due to the fact that what was being taught and practiced in the writing exercise of the *Progymnasmata* under the heading of 'ekphrasis', was still the skill to produce examples of the *figura in mente* which the rhetorical treatises referred to as 'ekphrases', with paintings and statues serving as convenient and ready-to-hand but nevertheless contingent occasions for practicing that skill, rather than as objects that were to be described ekphrastically in their semiotic specificity as paintings and statues. If that assumption is correct, the earliest use of the expression 'ekphrasis' as a name for a description of a work of the visual arts rather than as a name for a rhetorical figure would indeed have been a derivative one only. It would also have been a use, which did not call for a matching of the newly restricted extension with a newly adjusted explication that would have been comparable to the matching of the use of the *figura in mente* called 'ekphrasis' in Classical oratory, and its explication in the rhetorical treatises of the time.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See Heinrich F. Plett's authoritative discussion of Renaissance ekphrasis in his chapter on '*Pictura Rhetorica*' in *Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture*, Berlin; New York 2004 (p. 297–364).

<sup>9</sup> For an excellent discussion of ekphrasis in relation to the *Progymnasmata* and the difference with the modern notion of ekphrasis see Webb, p. 7–18. For the Classical roots of ekphrasis see Fritz Graf: "Ekphrasis: Die Entstehung der Gattung in der Antike" in Gottfried Boehm and Helmut Pfotenhauer (eds.): *Beschreibungskunst – Kunstbeschreibung. Ekphrasis von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, Munich 1995 (p. 143–155). For a discussion of the varieties of ekphrasis in Classical Antiquity see Jas Elsner: "The Genres of Ekphrasis" in *Ramus*, Vol. 31, No. 1–2, 2002 (p. 1–18).

That such an attempt at matching practice and theory did indeed fail to be undertaken is indirectly suggested by the fact that to this day ekphrasis scholars tend to ask themselves what to do with the concept of *enargeia* in the context of a definition of 'ekphrasis' as a name for a word-image genre. In Classical and Renaissance affective rhetoric, it will be remembered, *enargeia* (*evidentia*) served as the principal defining feature of ekphrasis: if a description was capable of placing the described object or scene before the inner eye of the listener or reader, transforming him/her, as it were, into a spectator, it was due to the fact that it managed to achieve *enargeia*. Should the achievement of *enargeia* therefore be retained as a necessary and sufficient condition when the term 'ekphrasis' referred no longer to a rhetorical figure as an element of an *oratio*, but to a descriptive text as a whole? Should that *differentia* still be retained when that term was subsequently used as a name for a specific literary genre?

Without necessarily wishing to elevate Spitzer to the status of a 'founder of discourse' after all, I would like to take another look at his discussion of ekphrasis. The problems of defining and conceptualizing ekphrasis will, I believe, become somewhat more tractable if we contrast Spitzer's with several recent attempts at definition.

#### IV.

Spitzer begins his 1955 article on Keats's *Ode* with an attack on what he views as "certain questionable habits of contemporary criticism – for instance, the tendency to make the poetic text appear more difficult, intricate, paradoxical than it truly is." That tendency, he claims, involves "on the part of the critic a verbal-metaphysical play that outmetaphysicizes the poem" (Spitzer, p. 204).<sup>10</sup> Spitzer himself opts for an approach that is in line with French *explication de texte*, which, he suggests, starts out rather matter-of-factly with an attempt at placing a poem in the relevant contexts of tradition and literary genre. Hence his interest in the opening paragraphs of his essay in 'ekphrasis' as a name of a literary genre that can be traced all the way back to Classical Antiquity.

Keats's *Ode*, Spitzer suggests, should be read as "first of all a description of an urn," and therefore as belonging to "the genre, known to Occidental literature from Homer and Theocritus to the Parnassians and Rilke, of the ekphrasis." Before the backdrop of that tradition he defines ekphrasis as "the poetic description of a pictorial or sculptural work of art," adding that this particular kind of description "implies, in the words of Théophile Gautier, '*une transposition d'art*,' the reproduction through the medium of words of sensuously perceptible objets d'art (ut pictura poesis)." And

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<sup>10</sup> The target of Spitzer's criticism is the post-WWII New Criticism, then in its heyday, an approach to literature, Spitzer thought, that was flawed by a shortage of historical knowledge on the part of its practitioners, and by a tendency to invent descriptive concepts that frequently were not supported by the texts under study.

he concludes his general remarks on ekphrasis with the formulation of a heuristic question, which, he believes, we need to raise – *mutatis mutandis* – whenever we attempt to determine how exactly that ekphrastic ‘*transposition d’art*’ has been realized in a given ekphrasis: “Since, then, the ode is a verbal transposition of the sensuous appearance of a Greek urn, my next question must be: What exactly has Keats seen (or chosen to show us) depicted on the urn he is describing?” The answer to that question, Spitzer believes, will “furnish us with a firm contour [...] of the object of his [i.e., in this particular case, Keats’s] description itself, which may later allow us to distinguish the symbolic or metaphysical inferences drawn by the poet from the visual elements he has apperceived.” In the special case of Keats’s poem, it will also “point to several uncertainties of vision experienced by the poet while deciphering his sensuous subject matter, uncertainties that may help us ultimately to discern which particular message Keats wishes us to see embodied in the urn and which to exclude” (Spitzer, p. 207).

## V.

It goes without saying that as far as the formal rules of definition are concerned, Spitzer’s definition of ekphrasis as “the poetic description of a pictorial or sculptural work of art” leaves nothing to be desired. It recognizes description as the *genus proximum* of ekphrasis, and it identifies two *differentiae specificaе*, which will allow us to distinguish ekphrasis from other kinds of description. Accordingly, a description, in order to qualify as an ekphrasis, must be ‘poetic’, rather than, let us say, ‘scientific’ or ‘art-historical’<sup>11</sup> or couched in everyday language or in the language of an auction catalogue. In addition, it must refer to ‘a pictorial or sculptural work of art’, rather than, let us say, to a natural object or an artifact of everyday use.

Also, it is easy enough to make Spitzer’s definition of ekphrasis operational. For if we grant the historicity of concepts like ‘poetic’ and ‘work of art’, and if we assume that it will usually be possible to determine whether a particular use of language counted as ‘poetic,’ and whether an artifact counted as a ‘work of art’ at a specific moment in time, Spitzer’s definition of ekphrasis can be considered sufficiently separative so as not to leave us in doubt as to whether a given description of an artifact did count and can count as an ekphrasis.<sup>12</sup> Thus defined the term

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<sup>11</sup> For an detailed analysis of the characteristics of several varieties of art-historical description see James A. W. Heffernan: “Speaking for Pictures: the Rhetoric of Art Criticism” in *Word & Image, Vol. 15, No. 1*, 1999 (p. 19–33).

<sup>12</sup> The ceramic artifact of the genus ‘urinal’ produced by the firm of Mott Works, which Marcel Duchamps was to elevate to the status of a sculptural work of art by having it displayed in New York City’s Grand Central Palace in 1917, and calling it *Fountain* can illustrate the separative potential of Spitzer’s definition: a description of that urinal in a plumber’s manual would clearly not count as an ekphrasis even after Duchamps’ epochal deed, nor would a restorer’s or an insurer’s report after an iconoclast’s attack on the specimen on display. In the first case neither of Spitzer’s two criteria would

‘ekphrasis’ will be applicable as a genre term to descriptions ranging from those of the shields of Achilles and of Aeneas in the *Iliad* and in the *Aeneid*<sup>13</sup> to W.H. Auden’s and Williams Carlos Williams descriptions of paintings by Breughel in “Musée des Beaux Arts” and in *Pictures from Breughel* and beyond.<sup>14</sup> Descriptions of imaginary works of art – instances of what has become known as ‘notional ekphrasis’<sup>15</sup> – would not be excluded either, for Spitzer’s definition is not limited to the description of historically manifest art works. All that is needed is that the poetic description of a pictorial or sculptural work of art in question can be seen to satisfy the relevant criteria for being poetic and for being a work of art, regardless of whether the work of art thus described is real or imaginary.

But if things are that well with Spitzer’s definition of ekphrasis as it stands, what are we meant to gain from the additional remark that the kind of description known as ‘ekphrasis’ “implies, in the words of Théophile Gautier, ‘une transposition d’art,’ the reproduction through the medium of words of sensuously perceptible objets d’art (*ut pictura poesis*)”? Are we meant to treat this addition as the formulation of an additional third *differentia specifica* of ekphrasis? In that case we would have to restrict the use of the term ‘ekphrasis’ to those descriptions, which, in addition to being ‘poetic’ and to referring to works of the visual arts, are characterized by the fact that they involve an instance of a ‘*transposition d’art*,’ a ‘reproduction through the medium of words of sensuously perceptible *objets d’art*.’ Poetic descriptions of works of the visual arts, which do not exhibit that third feature, would therefore no longer qualify as ‘ekphrastic.’

Spitzer’s claim that such a *transposition d’art*, such a reproduction through the medium of words is ‘implied’ in poetic descriptions of works of visual art known as ‘ekphrases,’ suggests a different reading. Rather than suggesting that we should consider ‘*transposition d’art*’ or ‘reproduction through the medium of words’ as an additional third *differentia* of ekphrastic description, Spitzer appears to be saying that *whenever* we come across a description as defined in terms of the *genus* and the two *differentiae* of the original definition, we will be *implicitly* encountering an instance of ‘*transposition d’art*,’ of ‘reproduction through the medium of words.’ Rather than formulating an additional third *differentia* of ekphrasis, Spitzer would thus be formulating an *implication* of his definition. Speaking of ‘*transposition d’art*’ in conjunction with ekphrasis would therefore ‘only’ involve a shift of focus on that genre. When we speak in that manner, the focus of our attention is no longer primarily on the textual properties of an ekphrastic description and on its referent,

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be met, in the second case only the second.

<sup>13</sup> Homer: *Iliad*, bk. xviii, ll. 430–end; Virgil: *Aeneid*, bk. viii, ll. 625–731.

<sup>14</sup> W.H. Auden: “Musée des Beaux Arts” in *Collected Shorter Poems 1927–1957*, London 1966/69 (p. 123–124); William Carlos Williams: *Pictures from Breughel and Other Poems: Collected Poems, 1950–1962*, London 1963.

<sup>15</sup> See John Hollander: *The Gazer’s Spirit: Poems Speaking to Silent Works of Art*, Chicago 1995, *passim*.

but on its relational aspects, i.e. on the characteristic relation that links it to the work of the visual arts that is being described and referred to. That shift of focus, we shall see, is by no means a redundant feature of Spitzer's discussion of ekphrasis. For it takes us to precisely the place where the historical developments of ekphrastic description occurred – and are still occurring –, and where the variants of ekphrasis continue to have their source.

Spitzer's heuristic question, which can be generalized to read 'what exactly has the author of the ekphrasis seen (or chosen to show us) depicted on/in the pictorial or sculptural work of art he/she is describing?' fits in nicely with this shift of focus from the textual properties and the referent to the relational aspects of the ekphrastic text. It spells out explicitly that the *transposition d'art* of ekphrasis involves a gaze, a conscious encounter of a perceiving subject ('seeing', 'choosing', 'showing') with a work of art. The ekphrastic text thus comes to us, its readers, as the record of that gaze. This outspoken interest in the perceiving subject is underlined by the fact that Spitzer never speaks of the work of the visual arts *tout court*, which the ekphrastic text is supposed to be describing, but of the 'sensuously perceptible *objet d'art*', which is thought to be reproduced through the medium of words, of, in Keats' case, the verbal transposition of the 'sensuous appearance of a Greek urn', and of the inferences drawn by the poet from 'the visual elements he has apperceived.' It is thus not the *objet d'art* as a pictorial 'artifact' but as an 'aesthetic object,' the *objet d'art* viewed, as 'concretized' in and through the gaze of the poet, which is being 'transposed' in the *transposition d'art*.<sup>16</sup>

Spitzer's interest in the perceiving subject, it is true, identifies him as an author writing before the Structuralist strictures on the authorial subject during the late sixties and seventies of the last century. It also marks him as a 'mentalist' theorist-critic of a Phenomenological persuasion<sup>17</sup> who was not yet influenced by the so-called 'linguistic turn' propagated by Analytical Philosophy.<sup>18</sup> But neither his interest in the authorial subject, nor his adherence to mentalism need to be stumbling blocks any longer, since in the meantime we have come to view each of those formerly adversary positions as offering fruitful possibilities for analysis not offered by the other, and no longer as positions that demand blind and exclusive adherence. But it is indeed the case that one of the things that set Spitzer's approach to ekphrasis apart from at least some of the more recent ones is this outspoken interest in the perceiving subject of the author and, subsequently, the reader. A number of recent approaches,

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<sup>16</sup> It is probably not accidental that Spitzer does not speak of the visual elements of the pictorial work of art as 'perceived' but as 'apperceived,' thereby underlining, in keeping with a terminological tradition that begins with Kant and reaches to William James and beyond, the fact that those visual elements are not just received passively, but are actively processed mentally.

<sup>17</sup> See René Wellek: "Leo Spitzer (1887–1960)" in *Comparative Literature Vol. 12, No. 4*, 1960 (p. 310–334).

<sup>18</sup> See the representative early collection of articles edited by Richard Rorty: *The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method*, Chicago 1967.



we shall see, tend to focus exclusively on the relation between the ekphrastic text and the pictorial work described, while abstracting from the perceiving subject of both author and reader.<sup>19</sup>

What remains unaffected by the shift of focus in Spitzer's discussion of ekphrasis from the textual properties of ekphrasis and its referent to the relational and the subjective aspects of the genre is the decision that 'ekphrasis' should indeed be used as a name of a literary genre. That, we shall see, will turn out to be a great advantage of Spitzer's approach to ekphrasis, because by defining ekphrasis as a literary genre solely in terms of its *genus proximum* and its two textual and referential *differentiae specificae*, he can postpone attention to the many historically extant variants of ekphrasis until after the genre has been defined safely and separately. Many of those variants are indeed the results of vastly divergent ways in which the relational and the subjective aspects of the ekphrastic text can be realized, due to the fact that the subjective gaze on the work of art to be described appears to have unlimited possibilities. Formulating the definition of ekphrasis, as Spitzer did, solely in terms of the concepts of poetic description and of work of art, and assigning to the study of the relational and subjective aspects of ekphrasis a place outside and independent of that definition, thus makes it possible to account for those variants *qua* variants, and to do so without having to readjust one's definition of ekphrasis each time a novel variant comes in sight.

## VI.

The unease with Spitzer's usage of the term 'ekphrasis,' justified or not, has led to a number of alternative accounts of ekphrasis, some aiming at alternative definitions, others suggesting alternative contexts for discussing ekphrasis.

Thus Murray Krieger, wishing to go beyond what he considers "the narrow meaning given ekphrasis by Leo Spitzer [...] as the name of a literary genre [...] that attempts to imitate in words an object of the plastic arts," posits the existence of an "original ekphrastic impulse in the history of the verbal arts in the West," an "ekphrastic aspiration in the poet and the reader" that was meant to satisfy "the semiotic desire for the natural sign, the desire that is, to have the world captured in the word, the word that belongs to it, or better yet, the word to which it belongs." He therefore proposes to broaden the notion of the ekphrastic beyond its use as a designation for a genre so as "to include every attempt, within an art of words, to

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<sup>19</sup> But, judging from a representative volume on ekphrasis through the ages about to be published, that programmatic disinterest in the perceiving subject has by now lost much of its former rallying power. With a proposed "focus on the question of subject formation; in particular how ekphrasis may itself produce the viewing subject," (Shadi Bartsch & Jás Elsner, eds.: *Ekphrasis*, special issue of *Classical Philology* Vol. 102, No. 1, 2007, forthcoming, 'Introduction: Eight Ways of Looking at Ekphrasis'), Spitzer's interest in the perceiving subject of the author and the reader of an ekphrasis formulated half a century ago, thus appears to be more than vindicated by the most recent developments in the field.

work towards the illusion that it is performing a task we usually associate with an art of natural signs.”<sup>20</sup> It is somewhat difficult to see how Krieger’s postulate of an ‘original ekphrastic impulse in the history of the verbal arts in the West’ could either be substantiated empirically or historically. For if it were an ‘original impulse’ we would want to know whether we are to assume whether it only manifested itself in the West; and if it only manifested itself in the West, we would wonder in what sense it could qualify as an ‘original’ impulse. But if it could be substantiated, there would be no reason why it should not readily be reconciled with Spitzer’s ‘narrow’ genre-theoretical use of ‘ekphrasis’ in much the same manner in which Aristotle’s anthropological postulate of an original mimetic impulse – “the process of imitation is natural to mankind from childhood on”<sup>21</sup> – can readily be reconciled with the latter’s own ‘narrow’ genre-theoretical use of ‘mimesis.’<sup>22</sup> As an anthropological universal Krieger’s ekphrastic impulse, just like Aristotle’s mimetic one, would be situated ‘behind’ or ‘beneath’ the *transposition d’art* identified by Spitzer. Krieger’s proposal, thus, despite its criticism of Spitzer, leaves the latter’s definition intact.

While Krieger thought he could discern a single and universal ‘original ekphrastic impulse’ that is ultimately responsible for the fact that attempts continue to be made by poets to overcome the borders of poetry and pictorial art, and to achieve in poetry the ‘still moment’ assumed to be native to pictorial art, W. J. T. Mitchell identifies three different stances towards ekphrasis, three “phases or moments of realization” as he calls them, namely “ekphrastic indifference”, “ekphrastic hope” and “ekphrastic fear.”<sup>23</sup> As did Krieger’s single ‘original ekphrastic impulse’ all three of Mitchell’s ‘phases or moments of realization’ amount to driving forces ‘behind’ or ‘beneath’ the production of the ekphrastic text, with “ekphrastic otherness” either being ignored, successfully overcome, or to be feared. For our present purpose it will suffice to take a closer look at just one of those three stances, ‘ekphrastic fear,’ and at the manner in which Mitchell argues for its existence.

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<sup>20</sup> Murray Krieger: *Ekphrasis. The Illusion of the Natural Sign*, Baltimore 1992, p. 6, 9, 10, and 11 (italics mine).

<sup>21</sup> Aristotle: *Poetics*, trans. Leon Golden, Englewood Cliffs 1968, p. 7 (1448b5–10).

<sup>22</sup> It is difficult to suppress the suspicion that Krieger’s problematic postulate of an original ekphrastic impulse might be modeled on Aristotle’s utterly plausible postulate of a mimetic one.

<sup>23</sup> W. J. T. Mitchell: “Ekphrasis and the Other,” in *Picture Theory. Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, Chicago 1994 (p. 151–181), p. 152.

VII.

The *locus classicus* of ekphrastic fear, its “classic expression” according to Mitchell, is Gotthold E. Lessing’s *Laokoon* (1766),<sup>24</sup> which he reads as a text informed by Lessing’s largely inadvertent acknowledgement of “the most fundamental ideological basis for his laws of genre, namely the laws of gender.”<sup>25</sup> It is in accordance with his submission to those gender-based laws of genre, Mitchell suggests, that Lessing insists on the strict observation of the boundaries of poetry and painting. In a later article Mitchell goes a step further, and interprets Lessing’s concern with the boundaries of poetry and painting as an expression of the latter’s fear of castration: “Lessing’s fear of literary emulation of the visual arts is not only of muteness or loss of eloquence, but of castration [...]” (Mitchell 1994, p. 152).<sup>26</sup> Mitchell’s text leaves it undecided – cunningly so, one wants to add – whether the claim about Lessing’s fear of castration is meant to refer metaphorically only to the threatened intactness of the body of the literary work in the act of ekphrastic intercourse, or whether it is meant to refer also literally to Lessing’s fear for his own body. But in the context of Mitchell’s particular brand of hermeneutics that alternative may indeed be beside the point he wishes to make.

More significant from a methodological point of view is the fact that the suggestion offered in the earlier article that Lessing’s *Laokoon* was the “classical expression” of ekphrastic fear acquires a much more specific meaning as a result of the diagnosis offered by the later article. *Laokoon*, it now appears, expresses that fear not in the sense that it would refer to it one way or another in a third-person perspective, but in the narrow psychoanalytical sense in which the very text of *Laokoon* turns out to be an expression of its author’s own fear of ekphrasis / castration. Lessing’s

<sup>24</sup> Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: *Laokoon: oder über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie. Erster Teil*, in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: *Werke 1766–1769*, Wilfried Barner (ed.), Frankfurt/M. 1990. Mitchell unfortunately relies for all his quotations on Ellen Frothingham’s notoriously inaccurate translation: *Laokoon: An Essay upon the Limits of Poetry and Painting* (1873), rpt. New York 1969.

<sup>25</sup> W. J. T. Mitchell: “Space and Time. Lessing’s *Laocoon and the Politics of Genre*,” in *Iconology. Image Text, Ideology*, Chicago; London 1986, (p. 95–115), p. 109.

<sup>26</sup> The textual basis of Mitchell’s interpretation *cum* diagnosis is a passage at the beginning of Section X of *Laokoon*, in which Lessing mocks an earlier author on the relation of poetry and painting, Joseph Spence, for insisting that a poet should use in his description of an allegorical figure the same attributes, with which a painter identifies that figure: “Wäre es nicht, als ob ein Mensch, der laut reden kann und darf, sich noch zugleich der Zeichen bedienen sollte, welche die Stummen im Serraglio der Türken, aus Mangel der Stimme, unter sich erfunden haben?” (1990, Sect. X, p. 91, [‘Would that not be as if someone who can and may speak aloud were at the same time (i.e. in addition to speaking) to use the signs which the mutes in a Turkish Seraglio have invented among themselves for lack of a voice’ (my translation)]. It is difficult to see how Lessing’s suggestion that a poet should use his voice if he has one could possibly be interpreted as an expression of fear on Lessing’s part that he himself might lose his voice. In Lessing’s view there is simply no need for the additional use of (mute) signs if you have a voice to speak. Needless to add that Lessing’s sense of decorum would not have allowed him to make an analogous comparison with the other part of their body which those mutes, Mitchell suggests, are also missing.

text thus metamorphoses from the theoretical account of the “*eigenen Beschaffenheit der Kunst, und [...] derselben notwendige Schranken und Bedürfnisse*” [the specific property of the art in question, and its necessary boundaries and requirements],<sup>27</sup> which, we thought, Lessing had in mind when he wrote *Laokoon*, to an largely unintended revelation, in which the arguments that are given about the essential boundaries of poetry and painting can no longer be understood as arguments for and against which reasons can be given. Instead, they are now unmasked in a first-person perspective as symptoms of an underlying anxiety.

It is tempting to call Mitchell's diagnosis of Lessing's presumed fear of castration, and the reading of *Laokoon* based on that diagnosis, an instance of what Paul Ricœur, with an eye to Nietzsche, Marx and Freud, a number of years ago denounced as “interpretation as exercise of suspicion,” as opposed to “interpretation as recollection of meaning.”<sup>28</sup> Mitchell's reading of *Laokoon* is indeed one that systematically fore-closes the possibility of considering Lessing's ruminations about the borders of poetry and painting as a series of valid poetological arguments that can be put to test independent of their author's personal situation, and that can subsequently be accepted or rejected on rational grounds. It is thus a reading that obliterates the very propositional structure of Lessing's text, and substitutes for it a symbolic structure that prevents us from inquiring into Lessing's reasons for his assertions, and from entering into a dialogue with Lessing's text. It is, finally, a reading that insists on leveling the difference between assertion and expression, treating what are offered as assertions about an object as expressions of a state of mind of the speaking subject, over which that subject ultimately has no control.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Lessing 1990, Sect. IV, p. 35 (my translation).

<sup>28</sup> Paul Ricœur: *Freud and Philosophy. An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage, New Haven; London 1970, p. 28–36.

<sup>29</sup> Another most serious shortcoming of Mitchell's reading of Lessing's *Laokoon* should not go unmentioned. As a result of failing to check Ellen Frothingham's English translation against Lessing's German original, Mitchell consistently overlooks that English ‘man’ serves to translate both German ‘Mann’ and ‘Mensch.’ He thus misreads Frothingham's “beautiful statues fashioned from beautiful men reacted upon their creators, and the state was indebted for its beautiful men to beautiful statues” as referring to “beautiful ancient male creators” (Mitchell 1986, p. 108). Lessing's German original, however, has “*Erzeigten [sic] schöne Menschen schöne Bildsäulen, so wirkten diese hinwiederum auf jene zurück, und der Staat hatte schönen Bildsäulen schöne Menschen mit zu verdanken.*” Literally translated: “Just as beautiful human beings (or: ‘humans’) brought forth (also: ‘engendered’) beautiful statues, so the latter in turn influenced the former, and among the things to which the state (or: ‘society’) owed to beautiful human beings were beautiful statues.” (1990, Sect. II, p. 26). There thus simply are no ‘beautiful men’ in the sense of beautiful males, nor ‘beautiful ancient male creators’ to be found in this passage – or anywhere elsewhere in Lessing's *Laokoon*, – only beautiful human beings, ‘*schöne Menschen.*’ If one was looking for a true expression of Lessing's humanism, the following quote might serve the purpose:

Die Klagen sind eines Menschen, aber die Handlungen eines Helden. Beide machen den menschlichen Helden, der weder weichlich noch verhärtet ist, sondern bald dieses

VIII.

James A. W. Heffernan prudently abstains from trying to offer a causal explanation of the practice of producing ekphrastic texts, or of any of the historical attempts at theoretically accounting for that practice. His proposal of a definition of 'ekphrasis' does not involve an explicit rejection or criticism of Leo Spitzer's position. As he himself points out it was meant to follow the lead of the definition offered by the Oxford Classical Dictionary – 'the rhetorical description of a work of art'<sup>30</sup> – but unlike the OCD it does not treat description as the *genus proximum* of ekphrasis, and suggests representation in its place. Ekphrasis, Heffernan has it, is "the literary representation of visual art," or, more clearly theoretically charged, "the verbal representation of visual representation."<sup>31</sup> Elsewhere Heffernan maintains that ekphrasis "explicitly represents representation itself," that it employs "one medium of representation to represent another," and that it foregrounds "the difference between verbal and visual representation" (Heffernan 1994, p. 7, and 191, note 3).

All of these formulations suggest that Heffernan is using the term 'representation' as a *nomen actionis*, i.e. as a term referring to an activity, rather than as a *nomen acti*, a term referring to the results or products of that activity, and since it is the term 'ekphrasis' that is being defined with 'representation' serving as a *definiens*, that use of 'representation' as a *nomen actionis* is automatically carried over to the expression 'ekphrasis' also. 'Ekphrasis' thus no longer serves as a name for a rhetorical figure as it had done in Classical and in Renaissance rhetoric, nor for a kind of text as it had done in the *Progymnasmata*, nor for a literary genre, as it had done in Spitzer's analysis of Keats' *Ode*. It now serves primarily as a name for a writerly activity.

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bald jenes scheint, so wie ihn itzt Natur, itzt Grundsätze und Pflicht verlangen. Er ist das Höchste, was die Weisheit hervorbringen, und die Kunst nachahmen kann (1990, Sect. IV, p. 45). ("The lamentations belong to the human being, but the actions are the property of the hero. Together they account for the human hero who is neither soft nor hardened. He is the apex of what wisdom can bring forth and art can imitate") (my translation).

Needless to add that with the disappearance beautiful men in the sense of males as opposed to females from Lessing's text, the male-female opposition collapses, on which Mitchell's whole argument about *Laokoon* is based. (Mitchell 1986, p. 110). There are indeed a number of references in Lessing's text, which, with some effort, might be ordered in terms of a male-female opposition. But that opposition, marginal as it is to Lessing's argument, neither constitutes the central isotopy of *Laokoon*, nor is it in any way congruent with the distinction of poetry and painting in which Lessing is primarily interested. – Unfortunately the much more recent translation of Lessing's *Laokoon* by Edward Allen McCormick (as in note 55) invites the same gross misunderstanding on the part of a reader unfamiliar with the German original: "If beautiful men created beautiful statues, these statues in turn affected the men, and thus the state owed thanks also to beautiful statues for beautiful men" (p. 14).

<sup>30</sup> Ironically enough, the *OCD* thus offers a perfect definition of the exercise of the *Progymnasmata* known as a 'ekphrasis,' which the rhetorical treatises of Classical Antiquity fail to offer.

<sup>31</sup> James A. W. Heffernan: *Museum of Words. The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*, Chicago 1994, p. 1, 3, 191, note 2.

This use of the expression 'ekphrasis' as a *nomen actionis* rather than a *nomen acti* is taken yet a step further in Claus Clüver's proposal to think of ekphrasis in terms of "verbal/literary intersemiotic re-writing, or simply the verbalization of non-verbal texts," and to define it as "the verbalization of real or fictitious texts composed in a non-verbal sign system" (Clüver 1998, p. 49). For while the choice of the term 'representation' still allows for the shifting back and forth between the use as a *nomen actionis* and a *nomen acti*, albeit with some forcing of usage, and some risk of terminological fuzziness, such shifting seems hardly feasible any longer with either 're-writing' or 'verbalization.' True, it is possible to say of a text that it is 'a re-writing,' perhaps even 'a verbalizing' of some antecedent. But that would be an awkwardly derivative usage at best, one that leaves the focus of attention securely on the act of re-writing and the act of verbalization.

The fact that both Heffernan and Clüver use the formulation 'ekphrasis is...' when they formulate their respective definitions, rather than 'an ekphrasis is...', as Spitzer had done, supports our analysis: 'ekphrasis' now serves as a name for a writerly activity, which, presumably, is responsible for the typical appearance of the texts of that genre. That obviously raises the question about the precise nature of that activity. It also raises the question whether it will be possible to define that activity in such a way that the numerous variants of ekphrasis, as they have emerged in the course of time, can be accounted for.

## IX.

One of the difficulties one encounters as a consequence of giving up the idea of a literary genre called 'ekphrasis' in favor of an activity by that name can readily be seen if one takes a closer look at the differences between the various formulations of Heffernan's definition of ekphrasis in all of which the concept of representation serves as the focal concept of the *definiens*: (1) ekphrasis is "the literary representation of visual art," (2) ekphrasis is "the verbal representation of visual representation," (3) ekphrasis "explicitly represents representation itself," (4) ekphrasis employs "one medium of representation to represent another" and (5) ekphrasis foregrounds "the difference between verbal and visual representation" (Heffernan 1994, p. 7).

Heffernan offers these formulations as synonymous alternatives, but they clearly are neither intensionally nor extensionally equivalent. While replacing 'literary' by 'verbal' in (2) amounts to eliminating the evaluative aspect present in (1), and thus allows for including art-historical descriptions under the heading of 'ekphrasis', the substitution of 'visual representation' in (2) for 'visual art' in (1) focuses the proposed definition more narrowly on the signifier of the work of visual art, while the earlier formulation would seem to refer to the phenomenon of the work of visual art much more inclusively, leaving it open whether the focus is to be on the pictorial signifier or on the pictorial signified, on the combination of the two, or on

the work of art as perceived. The formulation ‘explicitly represents representation itself’ (3) narrows the focus yet further, this time by stressing that it is representation *qua* representation that is being represented; the signified of the pictorial pretext of the ekphrastic text, as well as the work of art as a perceived object have now all but disappeared from sight. Formulation (4) narrows the focus on the pictorial signifier yet a step further, perhaps taking matters into the realm of absurdity. For it is hard to imagine what it could possibly mean to represent a medium of representation as such. You can only perceive – apperceive, Spitzer would have it – and subsequently verbally represent particular forms and objects shaped in accordance with the rules and conventions of pictorial representation; but you can neither perceive nor subsequently represent (either verbally or pictorially) the medium of representation as such.<sup>32</sup> The formulation about ekphrasis foregrounding ‘the difference between verbal and visual representation’ (5) moves the focus on representing representation in a different direction, thereby narrowing the meaning of ‘ekphrasis’ yet a degree further. For while formulation (3) about ekphrasis “explicitly representing representation itself” would in principle allow for the foregrounding of both the similarity and the difference between verbal and visual representation, the possibility of representing similarity – *ut pictura poesis!* – is now explicitly eliminated in favor of the paragonal view of the two arts involved in ekphrasis, which is, after all the center of gravity of Heffernan’s conception of ekphrasis.

With each of Heffernan’s formulations of the definition of the writerly activity called ‘ekphrasis’ thus having a different intension as well as a different extension, it stands to reason that each of these formulations *de facto* delineates a different group of texts. In some cases a group of texts delineated by one of the formulations will be included in the group delineated by a different formulation. Such is the case with formulations (1) and (2), where group of texts characterized by “the literary representation of visual art” is included in the vastly larger group characterized by “the verbal representation of visual representation.” In another case one group of texts complements the other, as in the case of the group characterized by the fact that it foregrounds “the difference between verbal and visual representation”, which has its historically manifest complement in the group of ekphrastic texts that emphasize the similarities rather than the differences of verbal and pictorial representation in accordance with the Horatian maxim of *ut pictura poesis*.<sup>33</sup>

The true significance of Heffernan’s alternative formulations of his definition of ekphrasis thus becomes apparent if we decide to view them not as attempts at

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<sup>32</sup> One obviously can represent the rules governing a specific medium of representation by mapping them with the aid of the terms of the terminological repertoire associated with a grammatical or a semiotic theory. But that would obviously not qualify as representing that medium in Heffernan’s sense either.

<sup>33</sup> For an attempt at achieving similarity of perception see e.g. William Carlos Williams: *Pictures from Breughel and Other Poems: Collected Poems, 1950–1962*, London 1963.

formulating an elusive definition of a presumably homogeneous writerly activity called 'ekphrasis', but as successful attempts at characterizing a number of noticeably different variants of the literary genre called 'ekphrasis' in terms of the way in which the relational aspect of the ekphrastic text is realized in each case. For there are indeed cases of ekphrasis – think e.g. of Gertrude Stein's experiments with literary Cubism in her *Portrait of Picasso*<sup>34</sup> – where the verbal text serves to describe objects in such a way that the result asks to be read as a verbal analogue of a specific form of pictorial representation. The sense that we are dealing with a verbal analogue of a specific form of pictorial representation – and the reason why we may be tempted to speak of this as 'the verbal representation of visual representation' – is in this case owed to the fact that we constitute the objects described by the ekphrastic text in an act of apperception informed by recollection: our previous experience with Cubism allows us to view those verbally described objects as exemplifying rules and conventions of representation that call up those of Cubist representation. This is, of course, a rather special variant of ekphrasis, but it is certainly one that is to be found in the extant corpus of ekphrastic texts. What is more, it is a variant that has been very productive during the last century, so much so that we may be inclined now to treat this particular variant of ekphrastic as ekphrasis *tout court*. The same goes for Heffernan's alternate formulation, which claims that ekphrasis foregrounds 'the difference between verbal and visual representation.' It similarly foregrounds an important variant of ekphrasis. Suitably reformulated, so as to avoid the absurd suggestion that the medium of pictorial representation is represented as such, it can be understood to identify a 'paragonal' variant of the manner in which the relational aspect of an ekphrastic text can be realized. But, like the variant delineated by the first formulation, it, too, needs to be viewed as one variant among many that were productive in the past or are still productive.

Read in this manner, Heffernan's divergent formulations of ekphrastic representation can be interpreted as so many specifications of Spitzer's concept of '*transposition d'art*', with each of them identifying one of the historically manifest forms of that *transposition*. Rather than giving us a broad definition that would be capable of covering many, perhaps even all of the variants of ekphrasis that have been produced in the course of time, Heffernan has thus provided us with the invaluable conceptual tools for precisely identifying several of those variants qua variants.

X.

The definition of the writerly activity called 'ekphrasis' suggested by Clüver, it appears, cannot similarly be salvaged by treating it as a definition of one or more extant variants of ekphrasis. As it stands it is both too broad and too narrow. It is too

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<sup>34</sup> Gertrude Stein: "IF I TOLD HIM. A Completed Portrait of Picasso" in *Portraits and Prayers*, New York 1934.



broad since, as a derivative of the ordinary language expression ‘to verbalize’ in the sense of ‘to express in words’<sup>35</sup> it is neither an established term of the nomenclature of any of the text-related disciplines, like ‘description,’ ‘translation,’ ‘dramatization’ or ‘transliteration,’ nor is it a term in the narrow sense of an expression associated with a definition in the context of a specific text-related theoretical framework,<sup>36</sup> ‘concretization,’<sup>37</sup> ‘emplotting’ or ‘demythologization.’<sup>38</sup> ‘Verbalization’ thus does not tell us anything beyond its lexical equivalent ‘expression in words.’ That the definition as a whole is too narrow becomes apparent once one realizes that it is bound to fail in the face of ekphrastic descriptions of works of art of the type of *objets trouvées*, of readymades. For it would hardly make sense to call an ekphrastic description of Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain*<sup>39</sup> a ‘verbalization of a real text composed in a non-verbal sign system’, and that for the simple reason that no sign-system besides that of technical drawing was involved in its production as an object of everyday use. But it is clearly not as an ‘text’ produced on the basis of a technical drawing with the notational underpinning of the sign system of technical drawing, that the urinal selected by Duchamp for exhibition as ‘Fountain’ figures in the ekphrastic description, but as an art object constituted in and through the very act of exhibition. That kind of constitution as an art object, however, cannot adequately be described in terms of a ‘text composed in a non-verbal sign system’, for it involves the express rejection of the very idea that works of art in the sense of aesthetically validated artifacts are only ones *made* as such. Instead, it is suggested that they are just as well to be *found* as readymades. A readymade thus acquires its esthetically relevant sign character independent of its mode of production, rather than with it and through it. With the introduction of readymades into the art world<sup>40</sup> the primordial sign character of the object of ekphrastic description tacitly assumed by Clüver’s definition can thus no longer be taken for granted. The class of works of art, that is to say, is no longer co-extensive – if it ever was – with the class of ‘texts composed in a non-verbal-sign system.’ Hence, with ‘text composed in a non-

<sup>35</sup> See *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 10<sup>th</sup> ed. revised, Oxford 2002, s.v. ‘verbalize’

<sup>36</sup> For the distinction between a term as an element of the general nomenclature of literary scholarship and as an element of a specific terminology see Janusz Slawinski: “Probleme der literaturwissenschaftlichen Terminologie” in J. S.: *Literatur als System und Prozeß*, trans. R. Fieguth, Munich 1975, p. 65–80.

<sup>37</sup> Roman Ingarden: *Vom Erkennen des literarischen Kunstwerks*, Tübingen 1968, esp. Ch. I, 11.

<sup>38</sup> See Rudolf Bultmann: *Neues Testament und Mythologie: das Problem der Entmythologisierung der neutestamentlichen Verkündigung* (1941), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Munich 1985.

<sup>39</sup> See the reference to Duchamp’s *Fountain* in note 12.

<sup>40</sup> See Howard S. Becker: *Art Worlds*, Berkeley 1982. For a similar view of what happens to Duchamp’s readymades as they are transferred into the art world see Hans Lund: *Text as Picture. Studies in the Literary Transformation of Pictures*, Lewiston 1992, p. 15: “Pictorial art objects have, or are supposed to have, a density of information that other physical objects lack. When the bottle rack [i.e. one of Duchamp’s readymades] was moved from a bistro to an art gallery, the audience was confronted with the demand radically to change its attitude to this object.”

verbal sign system' not longer predicable of each and every work of art, a definition of ekphrasis that insists on the quality referred to by that predicate as a necessary quality of the object of ekphrastic description, will necessarily lack the generality it needs to possess in order to count as a definition.

But Clüver's definition not only runs into problems with works of art, which, due the fact that they are readymades, cannot adequately be subsumed under the *definiens* 'texts composed in a non-verbal-sign system.' It even runs into problems with a large group of artifacts primordially intended as works of art and subsequently perceived as such, but to which the predicate 'text composed in a non-verbal sign system' is nevertheless difficult, perhaps even impossible, to apply. Clüver's definition, in order to safeguard its generality, must proceed from the assumption that each and every work of art can be understood as a text composed in a sign system. That means that it should be possible to identify for each art form from dance to pantomime to poetry, drama, painting, music, sculpture and, last but not least, architecture, a unique sign system with regard to which any specimen of the art form in question can be understood as a 'text.' For in order to be able to use 'text composed in a non-verbal sign system' as a *definiens* as the definition suggests, in order, that is, to be able to make the proposed definition operational, we must first know whether a given work of art can indeed be subsumed under that *definiens*, whether the complex predicate 'text composed in a non-verbal sign system' applies to that work. And for that we first need to possess for each art form a definition of its specific sign system.

Clüver apparently saw this problem himself when he raised the question whether there are objects of ekphrastic description, which are not covered by his definition. He tries to answer that question by placing the decision whether a particular 'verbalisation' does indeed qualify as an ekphrasis on the shoulders of the reader of such a 'verbalisation':

What kinds of objects are not covered by the definition? Does it include the verbal representation of any building? This is not a question of distinguishing between an outhouse and a cathedral (as a 'work of art'); rather, what matters is whether the building is verbally represented as a text or as an object. This might also be true of a dance, for example: text or event? It is ultimately up to the reader to decide whether to *read* such a verbalization *as* an ekphrasis, a decision determined in part by the critical use he will make of the verbal text.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Claus Clüver: "Ekphrasis Reconsidered. On Verbal Representation of Non-Verbal Texts" in Ulla-Britta Lagerroth, Hans Lund, and Erik Hedling (eds.): *Interart Poetics. Essays on the Interrelations of the Arts and Media*, Amsterdam 1997 (p. 19–33), p. 26. That buildings, and therefore architectural works of art can allude, express, evoke, invoke, comment and quote without being texts has been argued convincingly by Nelson Goodman in "How Buildings Mean" in Nelson Goodman and

That solution might possibly have worked if an observational predicate or one very closely associated with it, like ‘object presenting itself for visual perception’ or ‘object presenting itself for auditory perception’ had served as the *definiens* of the definition. In that case it would have made some sense to insist that the object presenting itself for visual or auditory perception should be represented verbally *as* doing so, and that the reader, in order to be able to read the ‘verbalization’ in question as an ekphrasis must be aware of the fact that the object represented is indeed represented *as* presenting itself visually or auditorily. But the predicate chosen by Clüver as a *definiens*, ‘text composed in a non-verbal sign system,’ is not a predicate that in any way refers to the direct and sensuous knowledge, which we acquire as perceivers of works of the visual arts. Instead, it is a predicate that is obtained only through a strenuous sign-theoretical abstraction, and it is meaningful only in the context of that abstraction. Therefore, if it is suggested that the ‘text composed in a non-verbal sign system’ must be represented *as* a ‘text composed in a non-verbal sign system’, that can only mean that it must explicitly be described in terms of the relevant sign-theoretical framework, and with the aid of the terms and concepts associated with that framework, and that the reader, in order to adequately read the ‘verbalization’ in question, must be equipped with the appropriate knowledge of the theoretical framework employed in both the abstraction and the description/analysis of the object under consideration. But such a reader will not be reading the ‘verbalization’ in question as an ekphrasis. He will be reading it as a theoretical text, and he cannot help doing so for the simple reason that the *definiens* of Clüver’s definition does not involve a predicate that refers to any of the perceptually – aesthetically/aisthetically – relevant properties of the object described, on which the very possibility of ekphrastic description depends. Against its express intention, so to speak, Clüver’s mistaken definition of ekphrasis thus succeeds in drawing our attention to the important fact that the opposition, which is the very condition of the possibility of the genre of ekphrasis is not that of ‘verbal’ vs. ‘non-verbal’, but that of ‘being verbally accessible’ vs. ‘being sensuously accessible.’ Needless to add that it was precisely this opposition, which Leo Spitzer had in mind when he adopted Gautier’s expression ‘*transposition d’art*’ in order to be able to characterize the relation of the ekphrastic text to what it describes. It was this opposition, too, on which the rhetorical understanding of the *figura in mente* called ‘ekphrasis’ focused when it stressed the ability of that figure to bring about a *sub oculos subiectio* on the part of the reader/listener. And it was this opposition, we shall see, which prompted Lessing to insist that the poet describing a work of the visual arts should describe it as a *wirklicher Gegenstand*, a real object, rather than as a sign.

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Catherine Z. Elgin: *Reconsiderations in the Arts and Sciences*, Indianapolis 1988 (p. 31–48).

## XI.

Apart from the fact that it is hardly to be expected that the production of the extremely heterogeneous corpus of ekphrastic texts as it developed in the course of the last two millennia could be derived from a single homogeneous writerly activity, there is another reason for not focusing exclusively on the term 'ekphrasis' as a *nomen actionis*: the entity named by that term, a particular writerly activity presumably capable of generating ekphrastic texts, is not as such accessible to direct inspection. Like a rule of grammar of a language, it has no sensuous or material properties of its own, and the fact that it was involved in the production of a text can only be determined indirectly and in retrospect on the basis of the results which that involvement has yielded, i.e. on the basis of the sensuously accessible material properties of the ekphrastic text in question. That means that before we can in a given case try to settle the question whether or not we are dealing with an instance of ekphrasis in the sense of a writerly activity we must already have made sure somehow or other that the text in front of us is indeed a specimen of ekphrasis in the sense of a literary genre. The possibility of analyzing an instance of ekphrasis in the sense of a writerly activity thus necessarily depends on the possibility of first identifying the set of textual features that will allow for the inference that the writerly activity in question has indeed been put to work.

Leo Spitzer's proposal for a definition of ekphrasis, it will be recalled, was meant to take care of identifying the textual features, which a literary work must minimally possess, in order to qualify as a specimen of the genre of ekphrasis. Undoubtedly there is room, even a need, for inquiring into the relational aspects of ekphrasis, and for taking a closer look at the writerly activities that result in the production of ekphrastic texts, especially if we wish to study the varieties of ekphrasis. But, as Heffernan's difficulty with settling on a single formulation for that activity suggests, we may expect there a degree of heterogeneity that will forever frustrate any attempt at basing a definition of ekphrasis solely on a kind of writerly activity, rather than on a corpus of texts.

## XII.

In Section VII of *Laokoon. Oder über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* (1766) Gotthold Ephraim Lessing offers a brief discussion of the different ways in which the relational aspects of poetic texts that describe works of the visual arts can be realized (Lessing 1990, p. 67–78). Lessing, it needs to be stressed, does not use the term 'ekphrasis' anywhere in *Laokoon*, neither as a name for a rhetorical figure, nor in the sense of the *Progymnasmata*, nor in the sense in which Spitzer was to use it as a name for a literary word-image genre. He only speaks of the poet's imitation [*Nachahmung*] of the (visual) artist and *vice versa*, without, as yet, having at his disposal a genre term for the kind of text that would result from that kind of imitation. But the distinctions he suggests

clearly apply to the literary genre that eventually would be called 'ekphrasis'.<sup>42</sup>

Lessing's goal in determining the 'borders of painting and poetry' mentioned in the subtitle of his treatise was to identify for both painting and poetry the domains where the medium-specific representational potential of each art could be realized to the fullest, and to determine the 'specific property of each art, and its necessary boundaries and prerequisites' [*die eigene Beschaffenheit der Kunst, und [...] derselben notwendige Schranken und Bedürfnisse*"]. Hence his keen interest in the question what exactly happens when the poet and the painter do not, as they usually do, imitate nature, but instead make the work of the other their chosen object of imitation. Within the context of the theoretical discourse of Lessing's time, that question could only be raised and answered in terms of the Aristotelian version of the concept of imitation. So it is hardly surprising that behind the development of Lessing's argument about the poet imitating the painter (and *vice versa*) there lurks an adaptation of a fundamental distinction, which Aristotle develops in chapters 1 to 3 of the *Poetics*, namely that between the media or means, the objects, and the modes of imitation (Aristotle, p. 3–7 [1447a14-1448b2]). With Aristotle those distinctions had served to highlight the differences of imitative arts as far afield as epic and dramatic poetry, dithyrambic and music for flute or lyre. With Lessing they will serve, slightly adjusted, to highlight the different ways in which a poet may address the work of a painter (and *vice versa*), and in which a poem may refer to a painting (and *vice versa*). That Lessing will not only take a look at the 'ergo-centric' issue of the relation of poem and painting but also at the 'author-centric' one of the poet imitating the painter, and that in terms of the opposition of genius and mere copier, can be viewed as an early sign of an approach to art and the artist that only was to come into full bloom with the Romantics several generations later.

Lessing begins by asking what exactly one means if one says that the visual artist imitates the poet or that the poet imitates the visual artist. His answer can be seen to involve, slightly adjusted, the first two of Aristotle's three distinctions for identifying the varieties of imitation, name those the object and the means of imitation:

Entweder der eine macht das Werk des andern zu dem wirklichen Gegenstande seiner Nachahmung, oder sie haben beide einerlei Gegenstände der Nachahmung, und der eine entlehnet von dem andern die Art und Weise es nachzuahmen (Lessing 1990, Sect. VII, p. 67).<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> In Lessing's time the term 'ekphrasis' still referred to the rhetorical figure referred to by Classical and Renaissance poetics under that name.

<sup>43</sup> 'Either the one turns the work of the other into the actual object of his imitation, or both have the same object of imitation, and the one borrows from the other (only) the manner and mode of imitating it [i.e. the object of imitation shared by poet and painter]' (my translation).

Not surprisingly in view of his professed goal of clearly drawing the borders between the arts, Lessing's own preference is for the poet or the visual artist who will turn the work of the other into the 'actual object' [*wirklicher Gegenstand*] of his imitation, and who will, in doing so, be able to present himself as a genius [*Genie*] in his own right, someone who is capable of displaying his autonomy as a poet and a painter or sculptor, rather than as a mere 'copier' [*Kopist*], someone who opts for imitating the same object as the painter while borrowing the other's 'manner and mode' of imitating that object, and who thus only imitates imitation:

Bei der ersten Nachahmung ist der Dichter Original, bei der anderen ist er Kopist. Jene ist ein Teil der allgemeinen Nachahmung, welche das Wesen seiner Kunst ausmacht, und er arbeitet als Genie, sein Vorwurf mag ein Werk anderer Künste, oder der Natur sein. Diese hingegen setzt ihn gänzlich von seiner Würde herab; anstatt der Dinge selbst ahmet er ihre Nachahmungen nach, und er gibt uns kalte Erinnerungen von Zügen eines fremden Genies, für ursprüngliche Züge seines eigenen (Lessing 1990, Sect. VII, p. 67).<sup>44</sup>

Significantly, Lessing only considers the first type of imitation, the case when one artist treats the work of the other as an 'actual object', as a proper 'part of imitation in general' [*allgemeine Nachahmung*], which is for Lessing, just as it was for Aristotle, 'the essence of his [i.e. the poet's] art.' Only the manner of imitating the works of a different form of art first and foremost is thus on an equal footing with the imitation of nature. The second type of imitation which he mentions, the case when the poet imitates the painter's, and the painter the poet's manner and mode of imitation, in his opinion hardly deserves the name of imitation. It certainly is not a 'part of imitation in general,' and therefore does not participate in the essence of art either.

A few pages later Lessing comes back to the idea of imitating a work of art as an 'actual object,' this time not with an eye to the difference between the roles of the poet as original genius and as mere copier, but to the manner in which a particular poet, Virgil, addressed the work of the 'painter': "*Der Dichter hatte das Kunstwerk als ein für sich bestehendes Ding und nicht als Nachahmung vor Augen*" (Lessing 1990, Sect. VII, p. 74).<sup>45</sup> The notion of the 'work of art as an object existing in itself, and not as an imitation' takes up the earlier notion of the work of art as an 'actual

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<sup>44</sup> 'With the first kind of imitation the poet is an original, with the second one he is a copier. The first kind is part of imitation in general, which is the essence of his art, and he works as a genius, regardless of whether his theme [i.e. his object of imitation] is a work of another art or one of nature. The second kind of imitation, by contrast, completely diminishes his dignity; for instead of imitating the things themselves, he imitates their imitations, and he presents us with the cold recollections of the traces of an alien genius instead of the original one of his own' (my translation).

<sup>45</sup> 'The poet envisioned the work of art as an object existing in itself, and not as an imitation' (my translation).

object.’ Lessing does not go into further theoretical detail about the meaning of the clearly negatively charged notion of ‘work of art as imitation.’ But the examples he offers of each of the two possibilities suggest that when the poet’s description deals with the work of the visual arts ‘as an object existing in itself’, there is for Lessing no explicit attention involved to the fact that that object is also an imitation of something else. In that case the poet’s description would therefore not involve what Heffernan would later call a ‘verbal representation of visual representation,’ not to mention a foregrounding of what he would label ‘the difference between verbal and visual representation.’

Lessing’s prime example of a poet who imitated the work of a visual art in such a way that it was treated ‘as an object existing in itself’ and thus became the ‘actual object’ of imitation, instead of borrowing of the visual artist’s manner and mode of imitation, is Virgil and his description of Aeneas’s shield at the end of Book VIII of the *Aeneid*:

Wenn Virgil das Schild des Aeneas beschreibet, so ahmet er den Künstler, welcher dieses Schild gemacht hat, in der ersten Bedeutung nach. Das Kunstwerk, nicht das was auf dem Kunstwerk vorgestellet worden, ist der Gegenstand seiner Nachahmung, und wenn er auch schon das mitbeschreibt, was man darauf vorgestellet sieht, so beschreibet er es doch nur als ein Teil des Schildes, und nicht als die Sache selbst (Lessing 1990, Sect. VII, p. 67).<sup>46</sup>

What Lessing had in mind when he suggested that Virgil was describing what is shown on Aeneas’s shield ‘only as part of the shield, but not as the subject matter in itself’ will become somewhat clearer if we take a closer look at Virgil’s actual description of the shield, which prompted Lessing to this – at least at first glance – somewhat mystifying observation on the poet’s imitation of the visual artist’s work.

Whenever Virgil provides us with detail about what is depicted on the surface of the shield he does so by describing certain aspects of the physical appearance of the shield, what it was made of in a particular place, and what its shape was in that place, rather than by telling us what the various sections of the shield were meant to depict. It goes without saying, and Lessing certainly would not have denied it, that after having read Virgil’s account of the shield, we will actually know in great detail what is depicted on it. But, and that is the crucial difference on which Lessing insists, that knowledge will have been gained from a description that presents the shield primarily as a physical artifact made and shaped in a certain way, and

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<sup>46</sup> ‘When Virgil describes the shield of Aeneas he imitates the artist who made that shield in the first sense of the expression [i.e. of ‘imitating a visual artist’]. The work of art [itself] is the object of imitation, not what is represented on the work of art [i.e. on the shield], and even if he also describes what is represented on the shield, he nevertheless describes it only as a part of the shield, but not as the subject matter in itself’ (my translation).

produced from certain materials. Only in a very few places in Virgil's text will we find express references to the surface of the shield as to a sign depicting something, and therefore possessing a meaning. Thus Virgil presents Vulcan, the maker of the shield as a craftsman capable of joining form and matter, impressing the forms of ships, weapons and landscapes into various kinds of metal, like gold, silver and bronze.<sup>47</sup> He does not present him as a craftsman-cum-visual artist who employs a particular visual medium in order to be able to produce a representational work of visual art, which, thanks to its representational properties, possesses a visually available meaning. In thus focusing on the shield as a shaped object rather than on what that object represents, Virgil explicitly presents Aeneas's shield, inclusive of what is depicted on it, 'under the description' of an artifact rather than of a sign:

Illic res Italas Romanorumque triumphos  
Haud uatum ignarius uenturique inscius aequi  
Fecerat ignipotens, illic genus omne futurae  
Stirpis ab Ascanio pugnatique in ordine bella.<sup>48</sup>

The most striking example of this foregrounding of the artifact-character of the shield at the expense of its co-present sign-character is undoubtedly Virgil's description of the part of the shield that depicts the Roman fleet before Actium:

Haec inter tumidi late maris ibat imago  
Aurea, sed fluctu spumabant caerulea cano,  
Et circum argento clari delphines in orbem  
Aequora uerberant caudis aestumque secabant.  
In medio classis aeratas, Actia bella,  
Cernere erat, totumque instructo Marte uideres  
Feruere Leucatem auroque effulgere fluctus.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> He thus presents Vulcan as a craftsman whose work does not fall under the strictures against *mimesis*, which Plato had formulated, and which were common property in Virgil's Rome. Instead, Vulcan's work is described as a case of *metexis*, as a work sharing the forms, rather than just imitating them at a second remove.

<sup>48</sup> 'But most [Aeneas] admires the shield's mysterious mold, / And Roman triumphs rising on the gold: / For there, embossed, the heavenly smith had wrought / [...] / The wars in order; and the race divine / Of warriors issuing from the Julian line' (*The Aeneid of Virgil*, trans. John Dryden, ed. Robert Fitzgerald, New York 1964). Frank O. Copley, by contrast, stresses the pictorial rather than the artifact character of the shield: 'There stood Italian history, Roman triumphs / portrayed by the fire god [...]' (Vergil: *The Aeneid*, trans. Frank O. Copley, Indianapolis 1965, VIII, l.626 f.); similarly the German translator Johannes Götte: 'Dort bot Italemacht im Bild und Römertrumphe [...] dar des Feuers Heer.' (Vergil: *Aeneis*, trans. Johannes Götte, Wiesbaden 1984, VIII, p. 228).

<sup>49</sup> Vigil: *Aeneid*. Bk. VIII, ll, p. 671–677: 'Betwixt the quarters, flows a golden sea; / But foaming surges there in silver play./ The dancing dolphins with their tails divide / The glittering waves, and cut the precious tide./ Amid the main, two mighty fleets engage: / Their brazen beaks opposed with



By claiming that Virgil describes what is represented on Aeneas's shield as a part of the shield, but not as the subject matter in itself, Lessing can thus be said to be attempting an account of Virgil's description, which will retain the latter's own focus on the shield as an artifact that is described in terms of its matter and its form, rather than as a sign which possesses a meaning through pictorially representing an object.

Lessing's own preference for a description of a work of art like Virgil's – one that 'turns the work of the other into the actual object of his imitation,' rather than telling us what the shield signifies, not to mention imitating its manner of imitation – would undoubtedly gain a considerable degree of (historical) plausibility if we were to consider it in relation to the co-existence – and the unresolved tension – in Lessing's *Laokoon* of elements of an older Platonic/Aristotelian paradigm of criticism ('imitation'), and a newer 'Pre-Romantic' one ('original,' 'genius').<sup>50</sup> For it is clearly the fact that that newer paradigm was beginning to make its presence felt towards the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, informs Lessing's own preference for the poet and the painter who are able to treat the work of the other as an 'actual object,' thereby asserting their autonomy as poet and as painter.

Matters become considerably more complicated when Lessing returns to Virgil's description of Aeneas's shield for a second time in Section XVIII of *Laokoon* (Lessing 1990, Sect. XVIII, p. 134–137). This time Virgil's description does not serve to illustrate the difference between imitating a work of art as an 'actual object,' and imitating its manner of imitation only. Nor does it serve to illustrate what Lessing sees as a corollary of that first distinction, namely the difference between a poet presenting himself as a genius in his own right, and one offering only 'cold reminiscences' of another artist's genius, and thus presenting himself as a mere 'copier.' The question to be tackled in Section XVIII is no longer *what* the poet is to imitate when the object of his imitation is a work of the visual arts, whether it is the work as an 'actual object,' or whether it is a question of imitating imitation. Now the example of Virgil's imitation of Aeneas's shield must help establish a conceptual link between the topic of the poet's imitation of a work of the visual art as an 'actual object,' and the topic of the role of time and space in the arts, which Lessing had been exploring in some detail in Section XVI of *Laokoon*.

In order to be able to see how the conceptual link between those two topics is achieved, we have to recall the specific manner in which Lessing had discussed the

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equal rage. / Actium surveys the well-disputed prize:/ Leucate's watery plain with foamy billows fries' (trans. Dryden); Copley again stresses the character of the shield as a picture: 'Midst all, the ocean flowed, a band of waves / all golden and yet blue, with hoary foam; / round it, in shining silver, dolphins swam / sweeping the seas and cutting through the waves. / The center showed the battle of Actium – / the bronze-clad ships attacking in a line. [...]' (VIII, ll, p. 671–676).

<sup>50</sup> For a proper understanding of context for Lessing's denunciation of imitating imitation in the sense of borrowing the 'manner and mode' of another art we need to recall a programmatic work like Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759) with which Lessing was familiar, and which he echoes with his denunciation of copying and his praise of genius and originality.

statue of the Laokoon group in the earlier reflections on the distribution of the categories of time and space over the arts of poetry and painting. The question then had been how the poet and the painter should represent Laokoon and his suffering, with each using to the fullest the possibilities offered by his own medium, while at the same time observing the limits imposed on it as a consequence of the fact that, as Lessing has it, painting deals with bodies in space, and poetry with events in time. The marble statue of the Laokoon group of Greek sculptors Hagesandros, Polydoros and Athanodoros from the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC – or a reproduction of it – had served Lessing as his concrete point of departure for his reflections. It did so, however, not simply as a finished, perceptually accessible piece of sculpture, but as the result of an imagined process of sculptural realization. The ‘real’ point of departure of Lessing’s argument that was to allow him to highlight the difference of poetry and painting with regard to time and space, was thus the as yet neither verbally nor pictorially realized ‘myth’ of Laocoon, the myth of Laocoon, that is, as yet unrealized in conformity with the media-specific constraints imposed on poetry and on painting as they attempted to represent objects in time and in space respectively. By choosing this as yet neither poetically nor pictorially realized aggregate state of the Laocoon myth as his point of departure Lessing could show, he believed, which aspects of that myth could best be imitated poetically and which could best be imitated pictorially. Since Lessing views poetry and painting as distinguished by their affinity with either time or space, there would thus be aspects of the myth which poetry could imitate but painting could not, and vice versa.

It takes a certain effort to see that in his discussion of the constraints imposed by the verbal medium of poetry on the poetic imitation of pictorial works of art, Lessing in Section XVIII of *Laokoon* continues the line of thinking he had developed with regard to the poetical and the painterly representation of the Laocoon myth. For the difference studied is now no longer that of representation by two different media. Now the difference is located within the poet’s own art, and now two poetic imitations of two comparable objects, Homer’s poetic imitation of Achilles’ shield, and Virgil’s poetic imitation of Aeneas’ shield, serve as the concrete points of departure of Lessing’s ruminations. But once again it is important to recognize that Lessing’s ‘real’ points of departure are the two as yet poetically unrealized shields, the two shields waiting in a medial limbo, so to speak, to be subjected to the media-specific constraints of poetic imitation. The difficulty one has with seeing and accepting the analogy between Lessing’s discussion of the poetic and pictorial imitation of the Laokoon group on the one hand, and his discussion of the two poetic imitations of two shields on the other, is undoubtedly due to the fact that it is easier to imagine the medially as yet unrealized myth of *Laokoon*, which has come down to us in numerous poetic and pictorial variants, than the verbally unrealized shields of Achilles and Aeneas, which are, after all, known to us only and exclusively through their descriptions by Homer and Virgil respectively.

The comparison between Homer’s shield of Achilles and Virgil’s shield of Aeneas

focuses on the different sets of constraints, which each author imposes on his poetic imitation of the poetically not yet realized shield.<sup>51</sup> As a result of this comparison Virgil's poetic imitation of Aeneas' shield, which, we recall, had previously been called a work of genius, is now found wanting.

According to Lessing, Homer describes Achilles' shield

nicht als ein fertiges vollendetes, sondern als ein werdendes Schild. Er hat also auch hier sich des gepriesenen Kunstgriffs bedient, das Koexistierende seines Vorwurfs in ein Konsekutives zu verwandeln, und dadurch aus der langweiligen Malerei eines Körpers das lebendige Gemälde einer Handlung zu machen. Wie sehen nicht das Schild, sondern den göttlichen Meister, wie er das Schild verfertigt. [...] Nun ist es fertig, und wir erstaunen über das Werk, aber mit dem gläubigen Erstaunen eines Augenzeugens, der es machen sehen (Lessing 1990, Sect. XVIII, p. 134).<sup>52</sup>

Given Lessing's intimate familiarity with the Classical tradition it can hardly be a coincidence that he would describe the experience of a reader of Homer's description of Achilles' shield – he is said to be an 'eyewitness who has seen it forged' – in exactly the same terms in which Quintilian in his *Institutionis oratoriae libri XII* describes what a reader/listener experiences when faced with an effective instance of the *figura in mente* called 'ekphrasis': "*proposita quaedam forma rerum ita expressa verbis, ut cerni potius videantur*" (Quintilianus, vol. II, bk. IX 2, 40, 286/7).<sup>53</sup> Nor can it be a coincidence that his comparison of Homer's and Virgil's descriptions of the shields of Achilles and Aeneas highlights a quality of Homer's description, which closely resembles the characteristic quality of the *figura in mente* called '*sub oculos subiectio*', another name for '*ekphrasis*.' According to Quintilian that figure occurs "*cum res non gesta indicatur, sed ut sit gesta, nec universa, sed per partis*," i.e. when an event is not

<sup>51</sup> For an excellent modern comparison between Homer's description of the shield of Achilles and Virgil's description of the shield of Aeneas see Heffernan 1994, p. 10–36.

<sup>52</sup> 'Homer does not paint (i.e. describe, B.F.S.) the shield as finished and complete, but as a shield that is being made. Thus, here, too he has made use of that admirable artistic device: transforming what is coexistent in his subject into what is consecutive, and thereby making the living picture of an action out of the tedious painting of a body. We do not see the shield, but the divine master as he is making it.[...] Now the shield is complete, and we marvel at the work. But it is the believing wonder of the eyewitness who has seen it forged' (*Laocoön. An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. E. A. McCormick, Baltimore; London 1984, p. 95, slightly adjusted).

<sup>53</sup> 'A representation of events in words in such a way that one rather believes to see them than to hear them expressed in words' (my translation). But even if one is unwilling to read Lessing's reference to the reader as eyewitness as a hidden allusion to Quintilian, and thus as a round-about way of praising Homer's description of Achilles' shield as a successful instance of ekphrastic description, one can hardly doubt that this passage, if we insist on having it express something besides what it says, expresses a delight in ekphrasis, rather than an 'ekphrastic fear' à la Mitchell.

referred to as having taken place, but as taking place, and not in its totality but in its parts (Quintilianus, vol. II, bk. IX 2, 40, 286/7).

In Lessing's opinion, Virgil's description of Aeneas' shield, though clearly intended by Virgil as an *imitatio* of Homer's ekphrastic description, is incapable of producing such a 'believing wonder' on the part of the eyewitness;

Der römische Dichter empfand entweder die Feinheit seines Modells hier nicht, oder die Dinge, die er auf sein Schild bringen wollte, schienen ihm von der Art zu sein, daß sie die Ausführung vor unsern Augen nicht wohl verstatteten. Es waren Prophezeiungen, von denen es freilich unschicklich gewesen wäre, wenn sie der Gott in unserer Gegenwart ebenso deutlich geäußert hätte, als sie der Dichter hernach ausleget. [...] Die Anstalten, welche Vulkan zu seiner Arbeit macht sind bei dem Virgil ungefehr (sic!) eben die, welche ihn Homer machen läßt. Aber anstatt daß wir bei dem Homer nicht bloß die Anstalten zur Arbeit, sondern auch die Arbeit selbst zu sehen bekommen, läßt Virgil, nachdem er uns nur den geschäftigen Gott mit seinem Cyklopen überhaupt gezeigt [...] den Vorhang auf einmal niederfallen, und versetzt uns in eine ganz andere Scene (sic!), von da er uns allmählig (sic!) in das Tal bringt, in welchem die Venus mit den indes fertig gewordenen Waffen bei dem Aeneas anlangt. Sie lehnet sie an den Stamm einer Eiche, und nachdem sie der Held genug begaffet, und bestaunet, und betastet, und versucht, hebt sich die Beschreibung, oder das Gemälde des Schildes an, welches durch das ewige: Hier ist, und Da ist, Nahe dabei stehet, und Nicht weit davon siehet man – so kalt und langweilig wird, daß alle der poetische Schmuck, den ihm ein Virgil geben konnte, nötig war, um es uns nicht unerträglich finden zu lassen. Da dieses Gemälde [...] aus dem eigenen Munde des Dichters kömmt: so bleibet die Handlung offenbar in demselben stehen. Keine einzige von seinen Personen nimmt daran teil; es hat auch auf das Folgende nicht den geringsten Einfluß, ob auf dem Schilde dieses, oder etwas anders, vorgestellt ist; der witzige Hofmann leuchtet überall durch, der mit allerlei schmeichelhaften Anspielungen seine Materie aufstutzet, aber nicht das große Genie, das sich auf die eigene innere Stärke seines Werks verläßt, und alle äußere Mittel, interessant zu werden, verachtet. Der Schild des Aeneas ist folglich ein wahres Einschiesel, einzig und allein bestimmt, dem Nationalstolze der Römer zu schmeicheln; ein fremdes Bächlein, das der Dichter in seinen Strom leitet, um ihn etwas reger zu machen. Das Schild des Achilles hingegen ist Zuwachs des eigenen fruchtbaren Bodens [...] (Lessing 1990, Sect. XVIII, p. 134–137).<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> The Roman poet either did not feel the fineness of his model or else the things which he wanted

Whether Lessing's suspicion that Virgil may not have felt "the fineness of his model" Homer is indeed justified or not need not concern us at this point. That "the things which he wanted to put on the shield [may have] seemed to him to be of such a nature as not to permit their execution before our eyes" certainly comes close to Virgil's own assessment of the difficult task of describing what he himself calls the "*non enarrabile textum*" of Aeneas' shield, the fabric of the shield that cannot be narrated.<sup>55</sup>

For Lessing both Homer's description of the shield of Achilles and Virgil's of the shield of Aeneas equally qualify as poetic imitations of pictorial works of art. Both also qualify as imitations of those works of art as 'actual objects' rather than as imitations of the manner in which those works of art imitate, i.e. as imitations of imitating. But the two poetic imitations of works of art as 'actual objects' are seen to differ radically when studied in the light of the third criterion which Aristotle had employed to differentiate the arts of imitation, namely that of mode of imitation.

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to put on the shield seemed to him to be of such a nature as not to permit their execution before our eyes. They were prophecies, which it would certainly have been improper for the god to utter in our presence as clearly as the poet afterward explains them. [...] The preparations which Vulcan makes for his work are approximately the same in Virgil as in Homer. But while we see not only the preparations but the work itself in Homer, Virgil, after he has shown us the busy god with his Cyclops [...] suddenly lets the curtain fall and transports us to an entirely different scene, whence he gradually takes us to the valley in which Venus comes to Aeneas with the now completed weapons. She leans them against the trunk of an oak, and after the hero has gasped and stared in wonder at them, and felt and tried them enough, the description, or painting of the shield begins. By its eternal 'here is' and 'there is,' 'close by stands' and 'not far off we see,' the description becomes so cold and tedious that all the poetic beauty which a Virgil could give it was required from becoming intolerable. Since this picture [...] comes from the mouth of the poet himself, it is obvious that the action comes to a standstill during this time. Not a single one of the characters takes part in the description; it does not exercise the slightest influence on what follows, regardless of whether this or something else is represented on the shield. The witty courtier who decks out his material with every sort of flattering allusion is everywhere in evidence, but not the great genius who relies entirely on the intrinsic strength of his work and scorns all external means of awakening interest. Consequently the shield of Aeneas is an insertion, intended solely to flatter the national pride of the Romans; an alien stream turned by the poet into his own river in order to stir it up. The shield of Achilles, on the other hand, is the natural growth of its own fertile soil. [...] (trans. E. A. McCormick, p. 95–97, minimally adjusted).

<sup>55</sup> Virgil: *Aeneid*, Bk. VIII, l. 829. Literally: 'the not to be related [or: not to be described] weave [or: fabric, build, composition]' of the shield. Dryden has 'the shield's mysterious mould' (*The Aeneid of Virgil*, trans. John Dryden, ed. Robert Fitzgerald [as in note 56], VIII, l.829); more recently Frank O. Copley has suggested 'the shield – its fabric, who could tell?' (Virgil: *The Aeneid*, trans. Frank O. Copley, VIII, l. 625); Johannes Götte has 'des Schildes im Wort nicht zu kündendes Kunstwerk' (Virgil: *Aeneis*, trans. Johannes Götte [as in note 56], VIII, p. 228). The translator's aim seems to have been in each case to find a translation that underlines that the shield is an artifact shaped in a specific manner, while avoiding the referential and representational implications of the modern notion of 'text.' – Keeping in mind that for a Roman poet like Virgil *imitatio* excluded the possibility of simply replicating the example one was imitating, one could argue that Homer's narration of the making of Achilles' shield was precisely the manner of making the shield's *non enarrabile textum* 'narrable' after all, which Virgil could not possibly have imitated, as much as he may have wanted to.

Discussing that third criterion with an eye to demonstrating its role in distinguishing forms of narration, Aristotle had suggested that

Using the same means and imitating the same kinds of objects, it is possible for the poet on different occasions to narrate the story (either speaking in the person of one of his characters as Homer does or in his own person without changing roles) or to have the imitators performing and acting out the entire story (Aristotle, p. 6 [1148a19–24]).

Lessing may have arrived at his divergent assessments of Homer's and Virgil's poetic imitations of the shields of Achilles and Aeneas by reasoning along the following lines: if one wishes to represent an artifact like a shield in the medium of poetic imitation in the context of a narrative, one can do so either by integrating that imitation into the narrative, as Homer did in the case of his poetic imitation of Achilles' shield, or one can do so by speaking 'in one's own person,' as Virgil did, whose imitation of Aeneas' shield comes "out of the mouth of the poet," without being properly integrated into the narrated action of the narrative, and thus without exercising "the slightest influence on what follows, regardless of whether this or something else is represented on the shield." Virgil's poetic imitation of Aeneas' shield, coming as it does 'out of the mouth of the poet' is therefore for Lessing an "insertion" only. It must therefore be considered dysfunctional from the point of view of the progress of the narrative. By contrast, Lessing considers Homer's poetic imitation of the shield of Achilles as a "natural growth of its own fertile soil," for it presents that shield "as a shield that is being made" by Vulcan, one of the personages of the narrative.<sup>56</sup>

Significantly, Lessing nowhere in *Laokoon* mentions poetic imitations of works of the visual arts – ekphrases, that is – as self-contained texts whose place is outside the flow of a narrative, and which for that reason do not raise the question whether they are narratively integrated or need to be rejected as 'insertions.' But the fact that Lessing does not mention any self-contained ekphrases should not come as a surprise. For his express interest in *Laokoon* was not in poetic imitations of works of the pictorial arts in general, in ekphrasis in general, to use the modern term. As his comparison of Homer's and Virgil's descriptions of the shields of Achilles and Aeneas clearly shows, his interest in the poetic imitation of works of the visual arts was strictly limited to the question how they should be integrated into a narrative. Given the position about the distribution of time and space over the arts of poetry

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<sup>56</sup> For modern descriptive discussions of ekphrasis in the context of narrative – rather than a normative one, like Lessing's – see e.g. Shadi Bartsch: *Decoding the Ancient Novel: The Reader and the Role of description in Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius*, Princeton 1989; D. P. Fowler: "Narrate and Describe: The Problem of Ekphrasis" in *Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 81, 1991 (p. 25–35); Tamar Yacobi: "Pictorial Models and Narrative Ekphrasis" in *Poetics Today*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 1995 (p. 599–649).

and painting at which Lessing had arrived earlier in *Laokoon*, his discussion of the difference of Homer's shield of Achilles and Virgil's shield of Aeneas can therefore be said to concern only the consequences of that distribution in the event that a poetic imitation of a work of the visual arts was to find its way into a narrative. It cannot be stressed enough that those constraints only come into the picture when the place of such imitations in the context of narratives like the *Iliad* or the *Aeneid* is under discussion.

In the course of his discussion of the poetic imitation of works of pictorial art Lessing thus mentions two variants: the poetic imitation of a work of the pictorial arts as an 'actual object', and the poetic imitation of the latter's manner of imitation. In addition he considers two possibilities in which the first variant may become an element of a narrative: as an element of the narrative that promotes the narrated action, and as a mere 'insertion' 'out of the mouth of the poet' that fails to do so. With his outspoken preference for poetic imitations of works of the pictorial arts that imitate those works as 'actual objects' instead of imitating only their manner of imitation, Lessing clearly speaks as one of the *Kunstrichter* [critics] which he had distinguished from the *Liebhaber* [amateurs] and the *Philosophen* in the preface of *Laokoon* (Lessing 1990, *Vorrede*, p. 13). The same is true of his preference for poetic imitations of works of the pictorial arts as elements of a narrative that promote its actions over such imitations that only figure as 'insertions' into a narrative. Ascertaining the reasons for these preferences falls outside the scope of this essay. But we may be certain that these preferences indeed involve ascertainable reasons that have been and still can be argued for or against; they certainly are not adequately read if one reads them as expressions of anxieties.

For our present purpose it is sufficient to be able to see in Lessing's account of the differences of Homer's and Virgil's shields of Achilles and Aeneas a striking illustration of the extent to which what is claimed about the representational aspects both of an ekphrastic text and of the work of the visual arts described by that text, is, first, a matter construction on the part of the author of the ekphrastic text, in this case of Homer and of Virgil. That construction subsequently becomes a matter for construction on the part of the student of ekphrasis – in this case Lessing –, who will analyze that ekphrastic text in relation to the work of the visual arts it was meant to describe, and in relation to the conceptual framework at his disposal. It goes without saying that the chances of getting lost in the maze of constructions are bound to increase considerably when, as modern students of ekphrasis, we attempt to come to terms with Lessing's attempts to come to terms with Homer's and Virgil's ekphrastic texts, i.e. when we try to reconstruct in terms of the conceptual framework available to us, Lessing's reconstruction – in terms of the framework available to him – of those two ekphrases.

XIII.

We are thus confronted once again with the problem addressed by Leo Spitzer's heuristic question: 'What exactly has the author of the ekphrasis seen (or chosen to show us) depicted on the work of the visual arts he/she is describing?' As the glimpses of the poet as original genius and as mere copier yielded by Lessing's analyses suggest, we are also back to Spitzer's belief that an answer to that question, will 'furnish us with a firm contour of the object of his/her description itself, which may later allow us to distinguish the symbolic or metaphysical inferences drawn by the poet from the visual elements he/she has apperceived.' But the example of Lessing's handling of Homer's and Virgil's ekphrases also suggests that we have to add a second heuristic question to the one formulated by Spitzer, this time a meta-level question: 'What exactly has the author of the analysis of the ekphrastic text seen (or chosen to show us) of/about the relation of that text and the work of the visual arts described by it?'

XIV.

A number of years ago Sir Karl R. Popper suggested that a field of studies should not be treated as if it were a self-contained entity with an essence of its own, asking for and amenable to a separative definition. Instead, it should be viewed as nothing more definite than an "*abgegrenztes und konstruiertes Konglomerat von Problemen und Lösungsversuchen*" ['a circumscribed and (arbitrarily) construed cluster of problems and problem solutions']. In such a cluster the only entities that can safely be identified are, according to Popper, the problems dealt with at any one moment, together with the scientific traditions that are in force at the time.<sup>57</sup> The crucial point of Popper's remarks on a field of studies as a cluster of problems and problem solutions is that the character of such a disciplinary cluster must ultimately remain a matter of open-ended debate and thus of revision.

The study of ekphrasis, it seems to me, would gain a great deal if we could bring ourselves to view it as a field of study in Popper's sense, i.e. as no more than a circumscribed cluster of problems and problem solutions. In the case of ekphrasis that cluster would have to be characterized by a considerable degree of heterogeneity as far as the phenomena waiting for investigation are concerned: rhetorical figures as elements of texts; ekphrastic literary and non-literary texts in

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<sup>57</sup> Karl R. Popper: "Die Logik der Sozialwissenschaften" in Theodor W. Adorno, Ralf Dahrendorf, Harald Pilot, Hans Albert, Jürgen Habermas, and Karl R. Popper (eds.) *Der Positivismusstreit in der deutschen Soziologie*, Darmstadt; Neuwied 1972 (1969) (p. 103–123), p. 108. "[...] weil es ja ein solches Ding-an-sich wie ein wissenschaftliches Fach gar nicht gibt. [...] Ein sogenanntes wissenschaftliches Fach ist nur ein abgegrenztes und konstruiertes Konglomerat von Problemen und Lösungsversuchen. Was es aber wirklich gibt, das sind die Probleme und die wissenschaftlichen Traditionen."



their totality; ekphrases as elements of narrative texts; forms of writing, e.g. the ‘verbal representation of visual representation’; textual functions, e.g. the ‘discursive interventions in visual culture’ investigated by Brosch;<sup>58</sup> intermedial relations; the emotive stances and responses towards such relations, e.g. ‘ekphrastic indifference,’ ‘ekphrastic hope,’ ‘ekphrastic fear’; the subject of the author and the reader of an ekphrastic text; the sensuously accessible vs. the verbally accessible; reasoned critical assessments and their contextual foundations, e.g. Lessing’s reasoned preference of Homer’s ekphrasis over Virgil’s. As far as the conceptual means are concerned that can be employed to carry out the investigations into those phenomena, there is a similar degree of heterogeneity: concepts, definitions, objects constituted for the purpose of investigation, explanations in terms of causes, explanations in terms of reasons, theories, all of them presenting themselves in a number of approach- and framework-specific variants.

Adopting Popper’s proposal to consider a field of study as a cluster of problems and problem solutions, we would no longer feel compelled to continue the search for a vantage point from which to perceive a single unified phenomenon of ekphrasis in place of the factual, and at times undoubtedly disquieting heterogeneity of the ekphrasis-cluster. The search for such a vantage point, it seems to me, has been the driving force behind much of recent theorizing about ekphrasis. Thus when Renate Brosch recently praised Heffernan’s definition of ekphrasis as ‘the verbal representation of visual representation’ as a definition that “avoids enclosing the phenomenon [of ekphrasis] within the narrow boundaries of art and literature and conceptualizes it as a wider discursive practice,” she did so clearly with the expectation that the concept of a discursive practice would at long last offer the possibility of adequately conceptualizing ekphrasis (Brosch, p. 104). But a fifteen-minute stint of googling the web quickly will soon reveal that besides ekphrasis the following items are currently referred to with the aid of the term ‘discursive practice’: organ improvisation, sexual harassment, self-understanding, argument, satire, theory, education programs, high performance sports, agency, learning disability, routine refusal of appeals to the football referee, designing, using a vocabulary, revising, modernizing, institutionalizing, technologizing, Americanizing, research interviews, corrective supervision, language use as deontic scorekeeping and philosophy of Africa. So the question that presents itself must clearly be what is cognitively gained by conceptualizing ekphrasis as a ‘wider discursive practice.’

The answer, it would appear, can only be, that in conceptualizing ekphrasis in this manner we avail ourselves of the possibility of raising about ekphrasis the kind of heuristic questions, which we have come to associate with the notion of a discursive practice, namely questions about the diverging subject positions of

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<sup>58</sup> Renate Brosch: “Verbalizing the Visual: Ekphrasis as a Commentary on Modes of Representation” in J. Eming, A. Jael Lehmann, and Irmgard Maassen (eds.): *Mediale Performanzen: Historische Konzepte und Perspektiven*, Freiburg 2002 (p. 103–123), p.104.

the participants of that practice, about the hierarchy of power that characterizes it, about its ideological drift, and about its institutional features, to mention but a few. But then it will indeed be the recognition of the enclosure of ekphrasis 'within the narrow boundaries of art and literature,' rather than the abstraction from those boundaries, which will provide us with the proper handle for asking these questions about ekphrasis understood as a discursive practice. For raising those questions will only make sense if they can be asked about a discursive practice in all its specificity, and in its germane 'setting in life,' rather than in abstraction from that setting. For the genre of ekphrasis, needless to add, the boundaries of art and literature are an integral part of that setting in life. The cognitive gain of considering ekphrasis as a discursive practice will therefore consist in the possibility of adding yet another set of problems to the cluster of problems and problem solutions, which we have come to associate with the term ekphrasis, this time the cluster of problems and problem solutions suggested by considering ekphrasis as a discursive practice. But it will not make the heuristic questions obtained by placing ekphrasis in a different company superfluous.

#### XV.

One of the stories in Alice Munro's collection with the title *Runaway* begins as follows:

Two profiles face each other. One the profile of a pure white heifer, with a particularly mild and tender expression, the other that of a green-faced man who is neither young nor old. He seems to be a minor official, maybe a postman – he wears that sort of cap. His lips are pale, the whites of his eyes shining. A hand that is probably his offers up, from the lower margin of the painting, a little tree or an exuberant branch, fruited with jewels.

At the upper margin of the painting are dark clouds, and underneath them some small tottery houses and a toy church with its toy cross, perched on the curved surface of the earth. Within this curve a small man (drawn to a larger scale, however, than the buildings) walks along purposefully with a scythe on his shoulder, and a woman, drawn to the same scale, seems to wait for him. But he is hanging upside down.

There are other things as well. For instance, a girl milking a cow, within the heifer's cheek.

Juliet decided at once to buy this print for her parents' Christmas present.

"Because it reminds me of them," she said to Christa, her friend who had come down with her from Whale Bay to do some shopping.

They were in the gift shop of the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Christa laughed. “The green man and the cow? They’ll be flattered.”

Christa never took anything seriously at first, she had to make some joke about it. Juliet wasn’t bothered. [...]

She loved everything in the picture, but particularly the little figures and rickety buildings at the top of it. The man with the scythe and the woman hanging upside down.

She looked for the title. *I and the Village*.

It made exquisite sense.

“Chagall. I like Chagall,” said Christa. “Picasso was a bastard.”

Juliet was so happy with what she had found that she could hardly pay attention.

“You know what he is supposed to have said? Chagall is for shopgirls,” Christa told her. “So what’s wrong with shopgirls? Chagall should have said, Picasso is for people with funny faces.”

“I mean, it makes me think of their life,” Juliet said. “I don’t know why, but it does.”<sup>59</sup>

This is without a doubt an ekphrasis in the sense in which Leo Spitzer proposed to use that term: it is ‘a poetic description of a pictorial work of art.’ Spitzer’s heuristic question, adjusted to this particular instance of an ekphrasis, would also appear to be applicable: ‘what exactly has Alice Munro seen (or chosen to show us) depicted on/in the pictorial work of art – Chagall’s *I and the Village* – she is describing?’ On the basis of that definition, and with the aid of that heuristic question it would be possible to enter into a detailed and structured analysis of the stylistic characteristics of Munro’s description, and of its purpose.

But would anything additional be gained from calling this particular passage a ‘verbal representation of visual representation,’ an ekphrastic text that ‘explicitly represents representation itself,’ an instance of ‘verbal/literary intersemiotic re-writing, or simply the verbalization of non-verbal texts,’ or even an instance of ‘the verbalization of real or fictitious texts composed in a non-verbal sign system’?

The answer to this question, it seems, must be that since Alice Munro’s ekphrastic text does not realize any of the variants of ekphrasis delineated by those formulations, these descriptions are out of place here. If we wish to understand Munro’s text as an instance of ekphrasis the analytical tools provided by Spitzer, including his heuristic question, would appear to be quite adequate for the task. If, in addition, we wish to specify the ‘*transposition d’art*’ realized in Munro’s ekphrastic text, thereby identifying the relevant variant of ekphrasis, we might try to do this by focusing

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<sup>59</sup> Alice Munro: *Runaway*, intr. Jonathan Franzen, London 2005 (p. 87–88).

on the manner in which Munro manages to render verbally Chagall's characteristic departures from traditional representational aesthetic:

At the upper margin of the painting are dark clouds, and underneath them some small tottery houses and a toy church with its toy cross, perched on the curved surface of the earth. Within this curve a small man (drawn to a larger scale, however, than the buildings) walks along purposefully with a scythe on his shoulder, and a woman, drawn to the same scale, seems to wait for him. But he is hanging upside down.

There are other things as well. For instance, a girl milking a cow, within the heifer's cheek. [...]

She loved everything in the picture, but particularly the little figures and rickety buildings at the top of it. The man with the scythe and the woman hanging upside down.

She looked for the title. I and the Village.

It made exquisite sense.

We might also point out, as part of the reconstruction of the characteristic '*transposition d'art*' of this ekphrastic text, how Munro manages to 'naturalize' Chagall's departure from that aesthetic by placing the world depicted in accordance with that break within the gaze of one of the personages of the story with whom we are likely to identify: "She looked for the title. I and the Village. It made exquisite sense."

The conclusion to be drawn from this simple example is that the notion of '*transposition d'art*' is not nearly as amenable to generalization as are the two elements of the *definiens* of Spitzer's definition, 'the poetic description of a pictorial or sculptural work of art.' There may indeed be more than one ekphrastic text, which realizes that *transposition* in much the same way, as does Munro's ekphrasis of Chagall's *I and the Village*. But that would be as unexpected as lightning hitting the same tree twice. The immense value of Spitzer's notion of '*transposition d'art*' as an element of the descriptive apparatus of ekphrasis lies in the fact that it allows us to identify the variants of ekphrasis not only in the sense of groups of texts with similar characteristics, but also in the sense of individual and unique realizations of the genre of ekphrasis.

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## **Transmedializations**





# Transfiguration Transmedialized: From Miraculous Vision to Musical Mirage

Siglind Bruhn

Jesus' transfiguration on a high mountain in the presence of three apostles, told in the three synoptic gospels,<sup>1</sup> is the culminating point of his public life. The phenomenon is described as *metemorphothe*, the emanation from his face and body of a dazzling brightness produced by an interior shining of his divinity.<sup>2</sup> In his 1969 composition for ten-part choir, seven instrumental soloists, and "very large orchestra," *La Transfiguration de Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ*, the French composer Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992) undertakes to render this visual event in musical language.

In the chapter "The Picture in the Poem: A Theoretical Discussion" from his book, *Text as Picture: Studies in the Literary Transformations of Pictures*,<sup>3</sup> Hans Lund provides a scheme intended to define what stance the author of a secondary representation may adopt toward a work of art that constitutes the primary representation of the scene or story told or imagined. Lund establishes three main categories for this relationship: combination, integration, and transformation. He defines the third category as follows: "No pictorial element is combined with or integrated into the verbal text. The text refers to an element or a combination of elements in pictures not present before the reader's eyes. The information to the reader about the picture is given exclusively by the verbal language" (Lund, p. 9).

While the choral components in Messiaen's *Transfiguration* do indeed quote from the biblical account – in alternation with texts taken from the Old Testament, the missal, and Thomas Aquinas (1224–1274) – and could thus be said to constitute musical settings of verbal representations (a case of integration), I want to show that a true interartistic transformation – or "transmedialization" – is captured in the musical parameters of this majestic work.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 17:1–6, Mark 9:1–8, and Luke 9:28–36.

<sup>2</sup> For theological studies on the transfiguration, see particularly Barbara E. Reid: *The Transfiguration: A Source- and Redaction-critical Study of Luke 9:28–36*, Paris 1993; E. W. Bullinger: *The Transfiguration: Its Historical Interpretation and Spiritual Application*, London 1920; Jack Haas: *Transfiguration: The Union of Spirit and Flesh*, Vancouver 2005; and Frank B. Brown: *Transfiguration: Poetic Metaphor and the Languages of Religious Belief*, Chapel Hill 1983.

<sup>3</sup> Hans Lund: *Text as Picture. Studies in the Literary Transformation of Pictures*, Lewiston, New York 1992. First published in Swedish as *Texten som tavla. Studier i litterär bildtransformation*, Lund 1982.

<sup>4</sup> "Transmedialization" describes the creative process that applies in the step from an artistic rendering in one medium to that in another. The best-known example is known as *ekphrasis*, the poetic rendering of a work of visual art ("the verbal representation of a real or fictitious text composed in a non-verbal sign system," as Claus Clüver defined it in "Ekphrasis Reconsidered: On Verbal

## The Oratorio in its Overall Design

Messiaen wrote his magnificent oratorio about “the transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ” in the years 1965–69, commissioned by the Portuguese Gulbenkian Foundation. The work, almost two hours in duration, was premiered on 7 June 1969 in front of an audience of 9000 in the large hall of the Coliseo in Lisbon. The performers were the Orchestre de Paris under the baton of Serge Baudo, the chorus of the Gulbenkian Foundation, and among the soloists, the cellist Mstislav Rostropowitsch and the pianist Yvonne Loriod, Messiaen’s wife. The score was published by Alphonse Leduc in Paris in 1972. International Messiaen scholarship has so far accorded the work only limited attention,<sup>5</sup> a surprising response in view of an early French critic’s assessment who likened the oratorio’s theological intention and potential effect to the eminent Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar’s opus magnum *Herrlichkeit. Eine theologische Ästhetik*,<sup>6</sup> and the judgment of the commis-

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Representations of Non-Verbal Texts,” in *Interart Poetics: Essays on the Interrelations of the Arts and Media*, Ulla-Britta Lagerroth, Hans Lund, and Erik Hedling (ed.), Amsterdam 1997 (p. 19–34), p. 26. A transmedialization is thus the second part in three-tiered process from reality to its artistic transformation: The first step consists of the process by which a scene or story, which may be fictitious or real, is artistically represented in a first medium (painted, sculpted, verbally described in poetic or prose form, musicalized, mimed, or danced, etc.). The “ekphrastic” second step takes this first artistic representation as a point of departure for a “representation of a representation” – in the case of musical ekphrasis, a sonic response to a work of literature or plastic art. The transmedialization should do more than merely recast the visual image in its own language. It characteristically evokes interpretations or additional layers of meaning, changes the viewers’ focus, or guides their eyes towards details and contexts they might otherwise overlook.

<sup>5</sup> A number of book-length monographs and essay collections devoted to an overview of Messiaen’s works have appeared since the publication of the *Transfiguration* score in 1972, yet few of them deal with the oratorio in any depth. Robert Sherlaw Johnson: *Messiaen*, London 1975/89, gives merely a one-page overview; Wilfrid Mellers: “La Transfiguration” in Peter Hill (eds.): *The Messiaen Companion*, London 1995, offers a chronological description of salient features; Harry Halbreich: *Olivier Messiaen*, Paris 1980, provides brief analyses but reprints Messiaen’s comments unquestioned and without relating them to compositional details; and Paul Griffiths: *Olivier Messiaen and the music of time*, London 1985, combines a general introduction with a thorough tonal-modal analysis of movement IX. Only Aloyse Michaely: *Die Musik Olivier Messiaens. Untersuchungen zum Gesamtschaffen*, Hamburg 1987, accounts in detail for the structures, harmonies, modal manifestations, rhythmic formations, and theological sources in every movement.

<sup>6</sup> Alain Michel: “La Transfiguration et la beauté. D’Olivier Messiaen à Urs von Balthasar” in *Bulletin de l’Association Guillaume Budé* IV/1, 1974 (p. 493–499), p. 493. The suggestion that his work reminded someone of the great Swiss theologian whom he much admired so gladdened Messiaen that he asked for Michel’s essay to be reprinted in the program booklet for the work’s Parisian premiere, which took place on occasion of the *Festival Messiaen* organized for the composer’s 70<sup>th</sup> birthday in November–December 1978. Balthasar (1905–1988) was one of the most important Roman Catholic theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In his work on theological aesthetics, he restructured theology around basic aesthetic concepts like form and beauty. Messiaen mentions Balthasar in almost all interviews of his later years, often with explicit reference to just that work, which had appeared in French under the title *La gloire et la croix*. He seems to have read the first two volumes soon after their publication in translation in 1965 and 1968.

sion who in 1985 awarded Messiaen the first Kyoto Prize for Art and Philosophy explicitly for his *Catalogue d'oiseaux* and *La Transfiguration*.<sup>7</sup>

Four movements chanted in Messiaen's neo-Gregorian style<sup>8</sup> provide the work's skeleton. They present the narrative from the Gospel according to Saint Matthew in the Latin version from the Vulgate: verses 1–2 with the short account of what happened, verses 3–4 with the affirmation of Jesus by Moses and Elias, verse 5 with the theophany from the luminous cloud, and verses 6–9 with Jesus' concluding words to his disciples. The overall structure that Messiaen built around this skeleton underwent a development resulting from the juxtaposition of three superimposed ideas. Early in the compositional process, Messiaen intended to follow the sequence of the liturgical office for the feast day of the Transfiguration. According to a sketch found in his estate,<sup>9</sup> the movements with gospel recitation were to be complemented by two movements setting texts from the psalms and by a hymn and a prayer, before the work was to close with an as yet indistinct *finale*. Shortly before completing this version Messiaen reconsidered, feeling that he wanted a more symmetrically balanced layout. Each of the gospel recitations was now to be followed by two choral meditations on the images and ideas of the *New Testament* verses, resulting in a layout in four analogous threesomes. Ultimately, however, this plan was altered again, recast by the addition of a chorale after the second and the fourth group into two halves of strikingly unequal length but strictly corresponding sequence. Since the two chorales are parallels of one another in many respects, the final design appears as consisting of two "septenaries."<sup>10</sup> The alternation of Gospel recitations with meditations and chorales in the work's ultimate format is reminiscent of Bach's *Passions*.

The eight choral meditations differ dramatically in duration and complexity, the two longest being about ten times as extensive as the shortest, which paints a musical picture of the transfigured Jesus' supernatural brightness ("VI – Candor est

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<sup>7</sup> See the dedication published on the Internet page of the Inamori Foundation that awards the Prize ([http://www.inamori-f.or.jp/laureates/k01\\_c\\_olivier/prf\\_e.html](http://www.inamori-f.or.jp/laureates/k01_c_olivier/prf_e.html), visited on 15 December 2005): "The greatest music composer of the 20th century. His music is the freely embraced non-classical position, which attempted to bring contemporary expression to Catholicism. Among his masterpieces are *Catalogue d'Oiseaux* and *La Transfiguration de notre Seigneur Jésus Christ*" (sic).

<sup>8</sup> In his first treatise, Messiaen describes the influence of plainchant on his melodic thinking and gives examples for how he adapts the interval structures of Gregorian chant to his own musical language (cf. Olivier Messiaen: *Technique de mon langage musical*, Paris 1944, chapter XII). The most developed version of this neo-Gregorian style can be observed in the singing of the brothers in Messiaen's opera *Saint François d'Assise* (1984); cf. the chapter "Messiaen's Franciscan Scenes about the Imitation of Christ" in Siglind Bruhn: *Saints in the Limelight: Representations of the Religious Quest on the Post-1945 Operatic Stage*, Hillsdale, New York 2003 (p. 360–391).

<sup>9</sup> For a description of this sketch dating from 1966 see Peter Hill and Nigel Simeone: *Messiaen*, New Haven; London 2005, p. 264.

<sup>10</sup> These "septénaires," as Messiaen called them, determine the practical aspects both of the two-volume score and the arrangement of the intermission in public performances.

lucis aeternae”). The varying complexity is directly proportionate to the contents. The movements that are most simply structured are the two that portray human reactions: the prayer that God may “make us coheirs with this King of glory” (“X – Adoptionem filiorum perfectam”) and the expression of the disciples’ sacred terror (“XII – Terribilis est locus iste”). The first four meditations, reflections of different aspects of the light, occupy a median position. The longest is “XIII – Tota Trinitas apparuit”; by far the most complex is “IX – Perfecte conscius illius perfectae generationis,” which sets a passage from Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa theologiae* in which the *doctor angelicus* discusses in what way the transfigured Jesus is the Son of God. In this essay, I wish to focus on the two central aspects and their musical representations: the brilliant light that is the hallmark of the miraculous event, and the nature of an apparent human revealed as the Son of God and part of the divine Trinity.

### Jesus’ Brightness, a Reflection of the Eternal Light

The first aspect plays a role in all movements whose texts include words like *lux*, *lumen* [light], *splendour* [magnificence], *claritas* [brightness], or *candor* [refulgence, radiance]. This holds true for all choral meditations with the exception of no. X, the human prayer for admittance as children of God. More specifically, the aspect of brightness is linked to the biblical verse that serves as a kind of verbal “theme” of this composition: *Candor est lucis aeternae, speculum sine macula, et imago bonitatis illius*. The verse is traditionally sung in the Office for the Feast of the Transfiguration as part of the Gradual, the chanting between the Lesson and the Gospel reading. The words, taken from the *Book of Wisdom* (7:26), enumerate three attributes: “the brightness of eternal light,” “the unspotted mirror of God’s majesty,” and “the image of his goodness.”<sup>11</sup> Messiaen had quoted the verse for the first time in 1935, as a motto for the fourth movement in his organ cycle *La Nativité du Seigneur*. In the *Transfiguration*, he has the chorus sing it in four of the eight meditation movements. The settings in nos. II, V, and VI represent an intriguing development of increasing complexity, while the brief quotation in no. XII seems to function above all as a reaffirmation of this central aspect in the oratorio’s multi-faceted second septenary, without exploring new musical nuances.

Both the Gradual and Messiaen employ the biblical verse in a way that entails a silent reattribution. In the *Old Testament*, the phrase is part of a passage devoted to the nature of Wisdom. The main clause, *Candor est enim lucis aeternae*, has no explicit subject beyond the unspecified third person implied in the verb form *est*, but it clearly refers back to the *sapientia* of verse 24 (*Omnibus enim mobilibus mobilior est sapientia...*). In a context where the focus is Jesus, this reference necessarily shifts: it is no longer Wisdom but He, the Son of God, who is “the brightness of eternal

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<sup>11</sup> The English wording of the biblical verses quoted in this essay corresponds with *The Holy Bible. New International Version*, New York 1973.

light, the unspotted mirror of God's majesty, and the image of his goodness.”

In the first choral meditation, Messiaen sets the complete verse, in two segments heard as conclusions of the movement's two strophes. The setting picks up the neo-Gregorian style used for the Gospel recitation in the preceding first movement: the texture consists of alternating groupings of voices and instruments, each of which keeps to a continuous unison, and the interval structure with its opening B-F and a contour saturated with tritones is directly reminiscent of the way Messiaen also presents Saint Matthew's account. While the verse from the *Old Testament* likens Jesus to divine Wisdom, the stylistic connection links this first reflection on Jesus' visual brilliance firmly to the evangelist's narrative.

With its position at the conclusion of the strophes, the verse here seems to summarize what Jesus *is* or what the light in which he is shrouded during the Transfiguration *shows him to be*. A musical counterpart to this verbal setting is the instrumental motif that opens each strophe as well as various smaller sections. It acts as a spiritual complement in that it evokes, in a way that is as ingenious as it is esoteric, the *purpose* of Jesus' mission. The motif is one of hundreds that Messiaen, a *bona fide* ornithologist, transcribed from bird song. Thankfully, the composer labels such birdsong elements in the score; occasionally he even comments in his preface on individual birds that matter to him for other than purely musical reasons. Here too, the brief text accompanying the movement provides a first clue:

We take up the idea of light. If Christ was luminous, so will we be after the resurrection, when we will have the gift of brightness. The voice of the Black-throated Honey-guide, a bird from Africa, proclaims this joyously...

As one can read in ornithological descriptions, the Honey-guide is a bird of normally unassuming coloring that calls attention by flashing white markings and then leads honey-seeking humans to bee nests that are otherwise hard to find. Messiaen seems to have welcomed the bird for this trait and apparently regarded it as an allegory of Christ who, in the sudden whiteness of his transfigured humanity, guides humankind to the sweetness of God's realm.

When the verse about the “brightness of eternal light” is heard again, in movement V, the choral meditation that follows the second of the Gospel recitations, it is highlighted in a very different way. In this movement's middle section, the solo cello presents a theme that is taken up first by the chorus to the words *Candor est lucis aeternae* and subsequently by various instruments. Together with a final entry in the coda, the theme is heard seven times, interrupted and sometimes also accompanied by birdsong. Whereas the words are shortened – Messiaen restricts the vocal line to the first of the biblical verse's three clauses – their musical embodiment is very prominent, not least because it shapes a major portion of the movement.

Example 1: the *Candor* theme

Particularly intriguing is the fact that this theme is a self-quotation. The very same contour can be found in three of Messiaen's instrumental compositions from the 1950s: in the organ cycle *Messe de la Pentecôte* (1950), in *Le Merle noir* for flute and piano (1951), and in the piano cycle *Catalogue d'oiseaux* (1958). In one of these cases, Messiaen provides a commentary that reveals what spiritual connotations he associates with the theme. In the seventh piece of the *Catalogue d'oiseaux* he relates it to the yellow iris, a flower that Christian iconography knows as a symbol for forgiveness. By means of this remotely defined musical signifier of forgiveness, the composer seems to interpret the affirmation that Jesus' visual brilliance is a reflection of the eternal light as a component in God's salvific plan.

The last choral meditation of the oratorio's first septenary (no. VI) is entirely reserved for a setting of the full *Candor* verse. Apart from using only a single text – one, moreover, that was already heard twice before – this movement also differs from all other meditation movements in the oratorio in that Messiaen keeps all vocal segments in a *single* color (female voices in unison doubled by the violas), in that its choral line uses only the pitches of the whole-tone scale (the mode based on a *single* interval, which Messiaen employs rarely throughout his life and nowhere else in this composition), and in that its structure is not the kaleidoscope of segments in ever different scoring, rhythm, and tempo characteristic for the other movements, but through-composed in a *single* impetus.

Instead of the horizontal divisions typical for other Messiaen works, we find a vertical layering. Register, articulation, and gestures allow to distinguish five strands:

1. The woodwinds, the gamelan trio (xylorimba, marimba, and vibraphone), the piano, and the first violins present an uninterrupted bird concert with twenty individually identified bird calls;
2. the solo cello contributes a passionate cadenza;
3. a trio of three other cellos adds a few gentle pizzicato utterances. Both the cello trio's and the solo cellos' materials are conceived in a style that suggests improvisation. Especially for listeners, they thus blend with the bird concert.
4. The second violins intone a soft chord sequence that is repeated throughout the movement. This chord sequence executes a rhythmic pattern that also relies on (modified) repetition but does not ever coincide with the harmonic grouping.
5. Finally there is the unison of the women's chorus and the violas.



Against it, the piano plays a 29-part chord sequence in a rhythm that restarts after 17 note values. Once set in motion, these *three* dimensions – the 15-part cello line, the 17-part piano rhythm and the 29-part chord sequence – would only meet again in their original constellation after almost four hours. The three-minute quartet movement thus resembles what could be called “an extract of eternity,” an idea that is consistent within Messiaen’s many-faceted meditations on time and its cessation. It seems that in the sixth movement of his *Transfiguration*, Messiaen may similarly have wanted to lift the “brightness of eternal light” from its temporal condition, the single event described in the gospels.

Finally, the movement’s conspicuous texture with five layers invites a comment on number symbolism. In Christian iconography, the number *five* is a common symbol for Jesus, insofar as it points both to his five wounds and to the five Greek letters  $\text{IX}\Theta\Upsilon\Sigma$  that stand for the titles defining Jesus’ sovereignty: *Jesus Christ God’s Son Savior*, whereas read as an acronym they mean “fish” (a frequent code word for Christ). Jesus’ *two* natures, which his contemporaries experienced sensually for the first time in the event of the transfiguration, are mirrored here in the two melodic strands: that of the choral line, which sounds in unison, is harmonized simply, and can easily be grasped by all listeners, and that of the tubular bells with its accompanying violin chords moving according to utterly complex, absolute laws. The *three* dimensions of the complex strand – the chord sequence, the rhythmic phrase, and the mysterious waxing and waning of its note values – anticipate what Messiaen will capture in the last of the choral meditations: that the transfiguration event is a manifestation of the Trinity.

### Revealed as the Son of God

The music of the first choral meditation in the second septenary takes up several aspects of what was heard in the last meditation of the oratorio’s first half. Once again, the whole movement relies on a text from a single source; once again, all vocal segments are either sung by individuals or in unison; and once again, Messiaen creates complex superimpositions of harmonic and rhythmic phrases.

The rather extensive excerpt stems from Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa theologica*, a text the composer is reading at this time in the context of his experiments with a “universally communicable language” made up of notes and motifs. The resulting organ composition, *Méditations sur le mystère de la Sainte Trinité*, will be completed immediately after the *Transfiguration*, still in 1969.<sup>13</sup> For the topic of Jesus’ divine sonship Messiaen chooses the following segments from Thomas’s response to his 45<sup>th</sup> question:

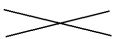
<sup>13</sup> On Messiaen’s *langage communicable* see Andrew Shenton: “Speaking with the Tongues of Men and Angels: Messiaen’s *langage communicable*” in Siglind Bruhn (ed.): *Messiaen’s Language of Mystical Love*, New York 1998 (p. 225-245).



Adoptio filiorum Dei est per quamdam conformitatem imaginis ad Dei Filium naturalem ... Primo quidem, per propriam gratiam viae, quae est conformitatis imperfecta; secundo, per gloriam, quae est conformitatis perfecta ... Gratiam per baptismum consequimur, in transfiguratione autem praemonstrata est claritas futurae gloriae, ideo, tam in baptismo quam in Transfiguratione, conveniens fuit manifestare: naturalem Christi filiationem testimonio Patris: quia solus est perfecte conscius illius, perfectae generationis, simul cum Filio et Spiritu Sancto.

The adoption of the sons of God is through a certain conformity of image to the natural Son of God. ... first, by the grace of the wayfarer, which is imperfect conformity; secondly, by glory, which is perfect conformity ... It is in baptism that we acquire grace, while the clarity of the glory to come was foreshadowed in the transfiguration, therefore both in His baptism and in His transfiguration the natural sonship of Christ was fittingly made known by the testimony of the Father: because He alone with the Son and Holy Ghost is perfectly conscious of that perfect generation.<sup>14</sup>

In the music, dual juxtapositions compete with Trinitarian structures. The movement's layout in two analogous halves is evident even to first listeners:

Example 2: the layout of the choral meditation <i>Transfiguration IX</i>	[1] orchestral chords		[26] orchestral chords
	[2]-[4] bird calls		[27]-[31] bird calls
	[5] orchestral chords		[32] orchestral chords
	[6] bird calls		[33] bird calls
	[7] introductory phrase gongs		[34] introductory phrase gongs
	[8] vocal line C1a		[35] vocal line C2a
	[9] bird calls		[36] orchestral phrase
	[10] vocal line A1		[37]-[38] bird calls
	[11]-[13] bird calls		[39] vocal line B1
	[14]-[17] vocal line A2		[40]-[41] vocal line B2
	[18]-[22] bird calls		[42]-[49] bird calls
	[23]-[24] vocal line C1b		[50]-[51] vocal line C2b
	[25] vocal line C1c		[52] vocal line C2c

With regard to the text, Messiaen sets out by defining three segments: A = *Adoptio* to *perfecta*, B = *Gratiam* to *Patris*, C = *quia* to *Spiritu Sancto*. He then fits these into his bipartite design by juxtaposing both segment A in the movement's first half and segment B in its second half with portions of segment C. Each segment is itself composed in bipartite or tripartite form, and the musical structures sometimes even

<sup>14</sup> Cf the section on the Life of Jesus in volume III of the *Summa*. The English translation is taken from *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*, literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Second and Revised Edition, 1920; online edition © 2003 by Kevin Knight, visited on 20 December 2005: <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/4045.htm>.

reach across the border between the movement's so carefully created two halves.

The chorus begins with element C1a, an excerpt from Thomas's last sentence. As Aloyse Michaely shows convincingly, Messiaen achieves a fascinating shift of meaning (Michaely 1987, p. 612). At cue [8], he initially sets only the words *quia solus est*. At [23]–[24] he complements this fragment with the end of the sentence, so that we hear *quia solus est, simul cum filio et spiritu sanctu*. This selective quotation changes the meaning in a significant way. While Thomas's complete sentence, *quia solus est perfecte conscius illius, perfectae generationis, simul cum Filio et Spiritu Sancto*, must be translated as "because He [the Father] alone with the Son and the Holy Ghost is perfectly conscious of that perfect generation," Messiaen's excerpt has to be rendered as "because He alone *is*, with the Son and the Holy Ghost." The first half of the movement thus does not address "perfect consciousness of perfect generation," but rather the Being of the triune God. The portion left out appears, now without any mention of the three persons of the Trinity, at the corresponding point in the movement's second half: *perfecte conscius illius* [35], taken up toward the end as *quia solus est perfecte conscius illius, perfectae generationis* [50]–[52] – "because he alone is perfectly conscious of that perfect generation."

Framed by these two partial quotations from the same clause, the central portions of the movement's halves present the two sentences that deal with the concept of grace. Each of them initially appears bipartite: the words about the Son of God are recited in monotone by a single baritone; for the arguments regarding imperfect and perfect conformity, the entire chorus, doubled by the solo cello as well as individual woodwinds and homophonically accompanied by vibraphone and strings, unites to intone a two-strophe melody. In the second half, the proportions are reversed: the baritone's unaccompanied chanting about baptism and transfiguration is twice as extensive, while the return to the subject of the Son of God is much shorter, composed as one strophe – the third – of the melody introduced in the first half. (This is the first *tri*-partite form straddling the movement's *bi*-partite layout.)

The remaining sentence from the *Summa* passage also contrasts textures in which the vocal lines are set simply (in unison with accompanying instruments) with others in which the orchestra leads a life that is both independent from the choral utterances and full of symbols. While the vocal contour blends into the larger phrase that includes the framing unison passages, the orchestra weaves an intricate braid of three strands, which far surpasses the play of chord sequence, rhythmic phrase and growth process found in the oratorio's sixth movement.

The three strands occupy different registers: The lowest strand is formed by bass clarinet, horns, violas and one half of the cello group, and reinforced by gong strokes; the middle strand includes clarinets and bassoons, the second violins and the other half of the cellos as well as the tubular bells; the highest strand unites the high woodwinds with the first violins, emphasized by various cymbals. Each strand repeats a sequence consisting of five chords that share the top pitch. Thus the chords

of the lowest strand (C1–C5 in the graph of example 4) move below a reiterated B-flat, the middle strand (B1–B5) features a reiterated F and the highest strand (A1–A5) a reiterated D. As a result this twelve-tone passage, so complex that it far surpasses any immediate human comprehension, is firmly anchored to a B-flat-major chord. The orchestra's three rhythmicized chord sequences, the B-flat-major chord ringing across them and the choral melody thus form a total of five layers.

The rhythmic source of the three orchestral strands is a phrase consisting of 17 note values, which I have elsewhere designated as Messiaen's "rhythmic signature"<sup>15</sup> since he employs it in every major work over a period of at least thirty-five years.<sup>16</sup>

Example 3: Messiaen's  
"rhythmic signature"



This rhythmic phrase can be interpreted in two ways. With regard to one of the key ingredients of Messiaen's music, "non-retrogradable rhythms" – rhythms that seem to cancel the continuity inherent in all temporal processes by remaining identical when read backward – the phrase encompasses five components: four palindromic threesomes (4–4–4, 2–3–2, 2–2–2, 3–3–3) followed by a final group that describes a growth process (1–2–3–4–8). Messiaen stresses that the phrase can also be seen as a combination of three *deçî-tâlas* – rhythm patterns from various regions of India that enchant him on account of their complete freedom from metric determinism<sup>17</sup>: *râgavardhana* (4–4–4–2–3–2) + *candrakalâ* (2–2–2–3–3–3–1) + *laksmîça* (2–3–4–8). Most Messiaen scholars are content with this exotic explanation. It is worth noting though that Messiaen repeatedly resorts to his "rhythmic signature" in musical representations of the humanly perceived Son of God.<sup>18</sup> Given this preference, a reading of the rhythm that sees it as tracing the entry of an atemporal being into the course of human continuity, gains theological significance.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. the chapter "Elements of a Musical Language of Faith" in Siglind Bruhn: *Messiaen's Contemplation of Covenant and Incarnation*, Hillsdale, New York 2007 (p. 41–68), particularly p. 53 and 61.

<sup>16</sup> Messiaen's "rhythmic signature" plays a major role in *Les Corps glorieux* (1939), *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps* (1941), *Visions de l'Amen* (1943), *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* (1944), *Harawi* (1944), *Cinq rechants* (1948), *Turangalîla* (1948), *Catalogue d'oiseaux* (1958), *La Transfiguration de Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ* (1969), and *Des Canyons aux étoiles* (1974).

<sup>17</sup> In *Technique de mon langage musical* Messiaen repeatedly refers to a table of Hindu rhythms. In each of the many interview series that have been published still during his lifetime, he repeats the story of his discovery. As he tells it, he found in the article on India in the *Encyclopédie de la Musique et Dictionnaire du Conservatoire* a comment about a collection of rhythms that a 13th-century Indian music theorist, Çarngadeva, had compiled for his book *Samgitarat nâkara* [Ocean of Music]. According to Messiaen in *Musique et couleur, nouveaux entretiens avec Claude Samuel*, Paris 1986, p. 80, the name for these ancient Indian rhythms, "deçî-tâlas," can be easily translated: *tâla* means *rhythm* and *deçî* means *from the provinces*.

<sup>18</sup> E.g., "Amen de l'Agonie de Jésus" in *Visions de l'Amen* and "Regard du Fils sur le Fils" in *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus*.



A restoration of the original superimposition of the three rhythmic phrases with the five-part chord sequences is no more in sight here than it was in the sixth movement. Yet whereas there, in the meditation on Jesus' supernatural brilliance, the musical depiction of the incomprehensibility of the divine miracle was outshone in the listener's attention by the joyous bird concert, the polyphonic web sounds here in the very foreground and thereby gains heightened significance.

### Musical Signifiers of a Visual Miracle

Messiaen's musical language is rich in symbols. Apart from a few that only reveal their full meaning when read in the context of his personal statements of faith, there are many that rely on ancient hermeneutic and semiotic traditions. To begin with, there are the gestural evocations and onomatopoeic elements. The instrumental preludes preceding each of the four gospel recitations – and with them each of the oratorio's four three-movement groups – begin with untuned percussion instruments descending in increasing volume to the very depth of the lowest tam-tam stroke: this is Messiaen's musical metaphor for the entry into the sphere of the divine mystery.<sup>20</sup> Examples of onomatopoeic music are heard in movement VIII, where the "luminous cloud" from which God's voice is speaking is translated into independently shimmering string glissandi, and in movement XII, where a dramatic hush of previously busy cluster trills and percussion rolls depicts the witnessing disciples' holy terror.

Number symbolism, known in Christian iconography since the Middle Ages, plays a major role in Messiaen's work. Examples for the musical figures *two* and *three*, which signal, respectively, the two natures of Jesus and the Trinity, are too numerous to be listed. Particularly striking in the context of the musical representations discussed above are Messiaen's attempts to portray through unusual musical structures and textures how the truth of the triune God absorbs the duality of the Son of God/Son of Man. The ninth movement, devoted to Thomas Aquinas's question what it means to be the Son of God, contains two most impressive examples: one is the central passage from the *Summa* excerpt, set as a choral song in *three* strophes that transcends the movement's design in *two* analogous halves; the other contains the *three*-strand polyphonic passage divided between the movement's *two* halves but continuing in unflinching consistency, ending only after the *second* repetition of one strand's rhythm has closed together with the *third* reiterations of the two others. Insofar as the orchestral strands participating in the passage can be shown to be *three* variants of *one* rhythmic model, and insofar as their different and disjoint chord sequences miraculously establish *one* major triad that resounds through the entire passage, Messiaen seems to have composed a musical image of the triune God Himself.

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<sup>20</sup> For the many manifestations of such descents and their theological connotations see Aloyse Michaely: "L'abîme. Das Bild des Abgrunds bei Olivier Messiaen," in *Musikkonzepte*, Vol. 28, 1982 (p. 7–55).

The figure *five* as a symbol for the crucified Christ, a staple of Christian iconography, is realized in the textures with five layers found in the movements depicting the transfigured Jesus' supernatural brilliance (VI) and the question after his now sensually revealed identity as Son of God (IX). Beyond its importance in the realm of texture, the number also shapes the material: the three *five*-chord groups that lend themselves to the polyphony of the three derivations of Messiaen's "rhythmic signature" provide only one of many examples in this oratorio.

More explanation is required in the case of the figure *seven*, which in this composition is not, as it is in many other works by Messiaen, employed with the apocalyptic connotations of divine punishment and human sins (inspired by the seven seals that unleash the humanly made disasters, the seven trumpet blasts that bring about God's retributive acts, and the seven bowls of God's wrath from which destruction is poured out over the earth at the end of time). The use of the figure *seven* in the *Transfiguration de Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ* seems determined rather by something Messiaen writes in the preface to his *Quartet for the End of Time*, where he declares *seven* a perfect number because it characterizes the day on which God rested and, by doing so, sanctified the preceding six days of Creation. The oratorio's ultimate layout in two septenaries, the choice of seven instrumental soloists, and the fact that the *Candor* theme in movement V has exactly seven entries confirms this assumption as much as does the seven-part rhythmic phrase that runs through the meditation on Jesus' brilliance in movement VI.

The verse from the Book of Wisdom, *Candor est lucis aeternae...*, emerges as the oratorio's central text owing to its fourfold setting. It also gives rise to the work's only explicit musical theme. The fact that in this theme, Messiaen quotes a melody he has earlier identified as spiritually associated with the yellow iris, connects the transfigured Jesus' brilliance to the flower that in Christian iconography signals the forgiveness of sins. A more veiled secondary allusion seems equally important: *iris* is the Greek word for *rainbow*, that natural event in *seven* brilliant colors which Messiaen celebrates so often in his music, along with what he considers its human imitation, the stained-glass windows of Gothic cathedrals. There are many biblical connotations of the rainbow; among the most relevant for this context are its function as a reminder of benevolence in God's covenant with Noah after the deluge<sup>21</sup> and as a simile for the brilliance of God's presence in the prophet Ezekiel's vision.<sup>22</sup>

Just as the bright splendor surrounding the transfigured Jesus both reveals and veils his divine nature, so do Messiaen's veiled musical signifiers help to reveal

<sup>21</sup> Gen 9, 13–15: "I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life."

<sup>22</sup> Ez 1, 28: "Like the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord."

impressions that transcend verbal description. The musical contour of the *Candor* theme, by reminding the friends of Messiaen's œuvre of the flower of forgiveness and the rainbow of God's promise, thus acts as a melodic transmedialization of the dazzling visual experience of which the gospels can barely speak.

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# Tristan Transformed: Bodies and Media in the Historical Transformation of the Tristan and Iseut-Myth<sup>1</sup>

Jørgen Bruhn

The story of Tristan and Iseut has been, and still is, a central myth in the cultural and literary history of Western Europe. According to the catholic writer Denis de Rougemont (1906–1985), the story was a veritable “etymology of our passions”<sup>2</sup> – and therefore the cause behind the problems of love and marriage (i.e. divorces!) he saw emerging in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The extremely influential myth is perhaps best characterized by its “plasticité,”<sup>3</sup> its openness when it comes to being reformulated into new stories,<sup>4</sup> and its characteristic way of confronting each new epochal ideology in particular and significant ways. The heterogeneity of the medieval Tristan-versions is paralleled by the historical transformation of the myth in a number of different media. The medieval *oral* myth whose origins are still a subject of academic dispute was, first of all, *written down* in the High Middle Ages and the large number of surviving illuminated manuscripts, where the oral myth enters an image-text-relation, testifies to the extreme popularity of the written versions.<sup>5</sup> After the versified 12<sup>th</sup> century stories faded away, prose-versions became widespread in the late middle ages and the renaissance. In later epochs the myth was continuously referred to and

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<sup>1</sup> In the Spring of 2005 I taught a seminar on Tristan and Iseut with Torben Sangild at the University of Copenhagen, and I owe a number of the insights in this article to this fruitful cooperation, in particular concerning the section on Wagner. I am also indebted to Heidrun Führer, Lund University, whose critical reading of the first draft of this article helped me straighten my thoughts. An early version of this paper was presented at the NORSIS conference *Bodies/Arts/Crossroads* conference at the University of Växjö, October 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Denis de Rougemont quoted in “Preface” in Bérout: *Tristan et Iseut*, Daniel Poirion (ed.), Paris 1989, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> See Robert Bossuad et al. (eds.): *Dictionnaire des lettres francaises. Le Moyen Age*, Paris 1992, p. 1445.

<sup>4</sup> Right from the medieval beginnings the core of the story showed significant differences. Regarding the different versions, see Peter S. Noble et al. (eds.): *The Growth of the Tristan and Isolde Legend in Wales, England, France, and Germany*, Lewiston NY 2003. The differences – and the common traits – can be compared to each other in the convenient Pléiade-edition *Tristan et Yseut. Les Premières versions européennes* (Daniel Poirion (ed.), Paris 1995) where 21 versions from the earliest fragments to the more fully developed romances are collected along with shorter texts like Marie de France’s *lai* (versified short story) “Chèvrefeuille.”

<sup>5</sup> See Roger Sherman Loomis and Laura Hibbard Loomis: *Arthurian Legends in Medieval Art*, New York 1966 (1938). For a more theoretically up to date discussion of the relations between text and image in medieval manuscripts, see Michael Camille: *Image on the Edge. The Margins of Medieval Art*, London 1992.

reformulated, and in my article I will discuss four important versions of the Tristan-myth from 1859 until 1970.

As a basis for my historical exposé of a small number of significant intermedial versions of the Tristan-myth I discuss a scene in Bérout's 12<sup>th</sup> century (written) version of the myth, which will grant me the opportunity to introduce my theoretical reference, M. M. Bakhtin. My next step will be a discussion of Wagner's adaptation of Gottfried von Strasburg's Tristan-version in his "Gesamtkunstwerk," *Tristan und Isolde*, completed ca. 1859. Thomas Mann's rewriting of Wagner is my next object of investigation followed by Jean Cocteau's film *L'Éternel Retour* from 1943. My final example will be Luis Buñuel's 1970 adaptation of Galdòs' 19<sup>th</sup> century novel *Tristana*.

The works are chosen from a large pool of possible examples and they illustrate the versatility of the myth as well as the need for different epochs to highlight the theme of love, death and betrayal. In order to focus my investigation I have, however, chosen to concentrate on the representation of the body in the different versions of Tristan and Iseut. My focus on the representation of the body in the early written version of the myth and later the opera, the novella and the two films is justified by my thesis, namely *that central thematics of the Tristan-story are closely related to the representations of the body*. I will suggest that the bodies in the different versions I have chosen function as nexus for the thematic and even formal conflicts of the texts.

A main inspiration for this approach is the cultural theory of the Russian philosopher and literary theorist M.M. Bakhtin (1895–1975). In particular I will employ Bakhtin's rather speculative (but for my purposes very useful) ideas on two adverse conceptions of the body.<sup>6</sup> According to Bakhtin, European cultural history has seen the development of two different understandings of the body in the world. From pre-historical times an ideological system with many concrete manifestations has suppressed the material aspects of reality (and thus the human body), in order to tempt man to orient himself towards either a long lost Golden Age or a future metaphysical, religious kingdom. All kinds of idealist and ascetic ideologies (first and foremost Christianity<sup>7</sup>) express this low evaluation of the body and everything connected to the material aspects of life which are illustrated in classical art, in literature and philosophy focusing on the mind and ignoring the material aspects of human existence. This ideology has struggled against a directly opposite idea focused on transgressing the traditional limits of the beautiful body. Bakhtin defined a powerful if also overlooked culturally subversive tradition working against the anti-materialist worldview described above, notably in his book on Rabelais where he attempted to describe the main structural and subversive elements within

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<sup>6</sup> In the following I summarize, rather freely, Mikhail Bakhtin: *Rabelais and His World*, Indiana 1984 (originally published in Russian in 1965 but written twenty years before).

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed discussion of Bakhtin's relationship to Christian thinking, see Ruth Coates: *Bakhtin and Christianity. God and the Exiled Author*, Cambridge 1998.

the popular world system of the late Middle Ages. Bakhtin famously stressed the importance of one specific manifestation of the popular culture, namely the liberating corporeal worldview lying behind the manifestations of the *carnival* traditions of the late middle ages.<sup>8</sup> In several instances in the following I will frame the representation of the body by way of Bakhtin's writings.

A study of the transformations of the Tristan-myth is a privileged field for conducting intermedial reflections because of the relative stability of a few narrative core-elements transformed in different media in different epochal constellations. I believe – following the oft-cited phrase of W.J.T. Mitchell, that all media are “mixed media,”<sup>9</sup> existing either – to quote Hans Lund's schematization – in a *combining/co-referring, integrating* or *transforming* relationship with other media.<sup>10</sup> But some mixed media are, so to speak, more mixed than others. I have chosen four examples where the intermedial relation is highly significant, and where the relation between media has taken the form of some sort of conflict – a *paragone* – that can be related to the thematic discussion of the body. In Wagner's work, musical and verbal messages exist in a vibrating intercutting, whereas in Thomas Mann's text literature comes to express the essence of music; the main intermedial conflict in Cocteau's film is between his theoretical *concepts* of the art of film in contrast to his *artistic* results (the film), and in Buñuel we meet a very common intermedial relation between novel and film, although Buñuel's film is a very critical adaptation.

Before I begin my search for the intermedial representation of the body in the Tristan and Iseut versions, a summary of the myth will be useful.<sup>11</sup> Tristan has lost his parents in childhood (his name means “sad year”) and is raised by his uncle Marke in Cornwall. He is sent to Ireland in order to find a wife for his uncle, and he asks for the hand of Iseut, the daughter of the King and Queen of Ireland. Iseut

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<sup>8</sup> The rather idiosyncratic ideas of Bakhtin can be reformulated in the more familiar terminology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, the body occupies a central place in the human existence, and it cannot be considered a mere “thing” among other things in the world. The body is, alongside the mind (an untenable distinction rejected by both Bakhtin and Merleau-Ponty) the natural centre of physiological but also mental perception, and any philosophy trying to deny this, normally by devaluating the “body,” is bound to misinterpret the human existence. For a consideration of the relation of Bakhtin and Merleau-Ponty, see Michael Gardiner: “The Incomparable Monster of Solipsism” in Michael Gardiner and Michael Bell (eds.): *Bakhtin and the Human Sciences. No last Word*, London 1998. See also Sarah J. Paulson's use of Merleau-Ponty in her contribution to the present volume.

<sup>9</sup> For instance in his article “There are no Visual Media” in *Journal of Visual Culture*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2005 (p. 257–266).

<sup>10</sup> I am referring to Hans Lund's schematization of the intermedial field of research in Hans Lund: “Medier i samspel” in Hans Lund (ed.): *Intermedialitet. Ord, bild och ton i samspel*, Lund 2002 (p. 9–24), p. 21.

<sup>11</sup> My summary (based on the different versions included in the Pléiade-edition) is constructed in order to make the observations of my article understandable – it does not cover the more or less significant differences amongst the main medieval versions of, say, Thomas, Bérout and Gottfried of Strassburg.

follows Tristan to England with her maiden Brangane, who brings a magic potion from Iseut's mother which will unite the married couple by the bonds of love. On the ship, Brangane by accident serves the drink to Tristan and Iseut, thus uniting the young couple forever (in some versions, the effect of the potion is restricted to a limited time). Iseut and King Marke are married all the same, but Brangane secretly takes the place of Iseut in the marital bed, thus sacrificing her own virginity for the sake of the honour of her mistress. The two lovers meet, are close to being discovered in several instances, but are saved, most often because of clever ruses and ingenious disguises (it is in this part of the story that different sorts of punishments are imposed on Iseut). The lovers are forced to take refuge either in a forest where they live a simple life or, in other versions, in a temple-like hide-out. Later, Iseut leaves the hiding place in order to live with Marke while Tristan marries another woman, "Iseut of the white hands," without sexually consummating the marriage. He visits Marke's court under a number of disguises, until he is badly wounded, with no one except Iseut (trained as a kind of sorceress by her mother) being able to cure him. A messenger is sent for, who is to return with a white sail on his boat if he is bringing back Iseut, while a black sail is to show that Iseut has refused to save Tristan. Tristan's jealous wife knows the secret code and she lies to Tristan, saying that the returning ship has a black sail. Tristan gives up his spirit – and Iseut dies when seeing her dead lover. King Marke buries Tristan and Iseut in the same tomb, thus reuniting the lovers in death.

### The Punished Medieval Body (Bérout)

The medieval Tristan and Iseut stories all concern the relation between individual desires revolting against the norms of a patriarchal society. It is, to put it short, an adulterous love story leading to death and therefore a discussion of the individual's right to gratify his or her (partly bodily/erotic) desires instead of following the norms of patriarchal society. It is, in other words, a conflict between the total, all-consuming love of Tristan and Iseut on the one hand, and the legal, patriarchal (and pragmatic) idea of marriage on the other. The act of infidelity was thus an individualistic revolt against the very norms that grounded patriarchal feudal society of the middle ages. Logically, the body was (as it is today) the locus of birth-control concerning the destiny of the family in such societies. It is therefore not surprising that in the medieval versions the bodily aspect is stressed in a number of ways. The feminine beauty of Iseut is, for instance, typical of all the versions, and Tristan's achievements as a hunter, warrior and musician/singer are a token of his extraordinary physical capabilities, distinguishing him, of course, from the elderly King Marke. In medieval thinking exceptional beauty signifies inner beauty and therefore the beautiful appearances of the lovers come to partly justify their acts.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> For a useful overview on medieval aesthetic thinking, see Umberto Eco: *Art and Beauty in the*

But because it is basically a story of adultery the narratives also contain an important element of bodily *punishment*, and in the following I shall discuss that particular aspect of the bodily presence in an early version of the Tristan and Iseut story.

The punishment differs from version to version, but here I want to focus on one particular scene in Bérout's version, probably the most complete of the 12<sup>th</sup> century Tristan-fragments.<sup>13</sup> When King Marke has revealed the true nature of the relation of Tristan and Iseut he decides that Iseut – his wife – should be punished in a way that equals the crime committed. Iseut is deemed morally “sick,” that is, socially excluded from a juridical point of view, and therefore, King Marke's argument goes, she ought to be infected with a real, physical disease. But not any disease will do (because the punishment must mirror the committed crime), and therefore Marke decides that Iseut shall be handed over to the mercy of the lepers. That Bérout chose the lepers for executing the punishment was no coincidence: “The leper functions as an image of the impurity, and here the queen resembles the sick. [...] As an image of suffering, of physical and moral impurity, of gluttony, because medieval man imposed on the lepers an intemperate sexual appetite, the leper in these stories [the medieval Tristan and Iseut narratives] is one of the metaphors of the devouring and banned passions which placed the lovers outside the law of the society.”<sup>14</sup> And the leader of the lepers does not conceal the cruel aspects of the verdict: “Never a woman will suffer a worse death.”<sup>15</sup>

The description is a violent reversal of the love-leads-to-death theme emblematic of the Tristan-story. In this scene, the deathly “love” is disturbingly concrete. The lepers form a marginal subculture outside normal society, which in Bérout's text seems to be an evil twin to Bakhtin's (highly idealized) concept of the carnival in the medieval world system. The “court” of the lepers, and the leper-king Yvain, forms a world opposed to the chivalric culture of King Marke's court (a world turned upside down), and the sick and distorted bodies of the lepers are a sort of evil parody of Bakhtin's beloved idea of the “open body”: a body focused on the orifices and entrances, on the body's relation to the material outer world, and thus on features like food, drink, sex and laughter (crucial elements of Bakhtin's conception of the late medieval carnival).<sup>16</sup> For Bakhtin, this sort of bodily openness – though not the one manifested in the lepers' cruel and negative version of the carnival! – is a praxis

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*Middle Ages*, New Haven 1986.

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, Jacques Ribard: *Du philtre au Graal. Pour une interprétation théologique du Roman de Tristan et du Conte du Graal*, Paris 1989. The leper-scene only exists in Bérout's version.

<sup>14</sup> See *Dictionnaire des lettres françaises. Le Moyen Age*, p. 1657 (my translation).

<sup>15</sup> “Yeseut nos done, s'ert commune./Païor fin damen'ot mais une.” Bérout: *Tristan et Isolde*, Pléiade, p. 35 (my translation).

<sup>16</sup> See Jørgen Bruhn: “Careful if Treated with Caution’: Carnevalization in *Don Quijote*” in Eyolf Østrem et al. (eds.): *Genre and Ritual. The Cultural Heritage of Medieval Rituals*, Copenhagen 2005 (p. 187–211). I argue for a sober-minded use of the Bakhtinian carnival approach to literary interpretation, and the critical discussion round his concept is introduced and discussed.

strongly opposed to any classicistic understanding of the body as being rounded, perfect, closed, and autonomous.<sup>17</sup>

The description of the lepers' unusual sexual exaltation, the smell of their moist sores, the hissing sound of their voices, partly enunciating through their noses, seems to come from an almost perversely sadistic desire on behalf of the narrator (or the author). And these descriptions of a popular medieval category might signify Bérout's wish to describe the lepers as the absolute *Other* defining the official medieval normality. Bérout creates the hideous and frightening representation of an Other that is so terribly alien (i.e. non-human) that it eludes language and description. This Other functions as a reverse-definition of the Same: the legal, mental and social normality which even Tristan and Iseut are part of – and at the same time, by their actions, are opposing. Or, to use the Lacanian nomenclature: the linguistic description of the lepers crashes against the non-linguistic order of the Real, thus creating the almost perverse efforts of the narrator to describe what is in essence indescribable.<sup>18</sup>

But Bérout does not only distribute the representations of the body in the dichotomy sketched above where the beautiful heroes confront the ugly and disgusting villains. In addition, Bérout has construed another position, a middle position, for Iseut and Tristan. In particular, Tristan disguises himself no less than four times (sick with plague, a pilgrim, a *jongleur* and a madman),<sup>19</sup> which seems to reflect another side of the bodily existence of the lovers, namely, their mutability and instability. Brangane, Iseut's maiden, is perhaps the one who pays the highest price in one of the numerous disguise-scenes: in order to conceal from King Marke that his future wife's virginity is not intact, Brangane acts as a stand-in for her mistress in the wedding bed, thus sacrificing one of the most valuable bodily assets of a medieval woman. These disguises function as a symbol of the lovers' extraordinary capabilities of setting up ruses, or to put it differently: to construct lies. But Tristan's abilities to assume different identities combined with Iseut's capabilities to "interpret" them correctly may have to do with the changing identities of the protagonists. Concerning

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<sup>17</sup> Iseut is, by the way, saved by Tristan before she enters this undifferentiated mass of sick, stinking, rotting bodies: a vision of a mundane bodily hell.

<sup>18</sup> I am here, indirectly, referring to two interrelated studies concerning the use of the Other in understanding the Same: Michael Camille's reflections on the Other in art and thinking (*The Gothic Idol*, Chicago 1991) and W.J.T. Mitchell's essay on ekphrasis: "Ekphrasis and the Other" in *Picture Theory*, Chicago 1994 (p. 151–183). Among the numerous illustrations of different parts of the Tristan-story (partly collected in Roger Sherman Loomis and Laura Hibbard Loomis, *Arthurian Legends in Medieval Art*), I have been unable to find any depictions of this particular scene. Perhaps it was, even to medieval standards and taste, too disgusting.

<sup>19</sup> And this is only during his love affair with Isolde: before that he disguises himself in order to get closer to King Marke, and there is an important element of disguises in the preparation of the love affair between Tristan and Isolde; in this sense, the second – or perhaps the first – nature of Tristan seems to be his disguises. The subjectivity is, in the words of Julia Kristeva (in *Polylogue*, collection tel quel: Paris 1977), perhaps still "in-process," that is, per definition unfinished and impossible to finish.

these disguises, the text produces an important distinction: Tristan disguises himself physically, bodily, whereas Iseut disguises her acts linguistically.

The lovers' changing identities suggests that they are, in fact, not as morally incorruptible as they may seem. Béroutl wants his readers or listeners to understand that the first impression of the two lovers – their beauty and corresponding ethical purity – is, perhaps, only a disguise. By stressing the bodily mutability, which is a middle position between absolute pure beauty and absolute evil, Béroutl conducts a complex interrogation of the medieval myth.

### The Romantic Disappearance of the Body (Wagner)

In the middle ages, the Tristan-story was generally construed as a fight against conventions concerning lineage and feudal power, and Tristan's (but less Iseut's) actions were interpreted as a vassal's rebellion against the lord. A decisive new configuration of the subject matter occurs in Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* in the aftermath of the Romantic Movement. Wagner almost suppresses the question of power and lineage in order to highlight another set of problems, marked by his personal preoccupations and influenced by philosophical questions indicative of the Romantic period.

Wagner takes as his point of departure Gottfried von Strassburg's Tristan-version, and transfers it into his own form – in this instance called simply *Action* (*Handlung*, which is later rephrased a *Musikdrama* or *Gesamtkunstwerk*). The *Handlung* is a multimediatric form where words, music, set design and action coexist, either in a fight for the overall dominance – or cooperating as parts of a collaborative form.<sup>20</sup> The most conspicuous transformation in Wagner's version of the Tristan-myth lies in his radical condensation of Gottfried's text, and we should notice what has been *left out* in this extensive compression. In *Richard Wagner's Music Dramas*, Carl Dahlhaus notes that “the external action involuntarily shrunk to a few sparse allusions, and the inner action emerged as the only important one.”<sup>21</sup> Wagner's brief description of his own work is telling: After having confessed their love for each other, he says in a letter, “the world, power, fame, glory, honour, chivalry, loyalty, friendship, all swept away like chaff, an empty dream; only one thing is left alive: yearning, yearning, insatiable desire ever reborn – languishing and thirsting; the sole release – death, dying, extinction, never more to wake” (Wagner cited in Dahlhaus, p. 50).

From my point of view it is important to stress two things in Wagner's remark. First of all, the material or bodily dimension is reduced to a minimum in Wagner's adaptation; or rather the bodies of the two lovers are now part of the despised area of the Will, according to the definition of the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. In Schopenhauer's philosophical system, the “Wille,” connected to bodily needs (nourishing, sexual desire, and reproduction) as well as the self of the

<sup>20</sup> In the sense of Thomas Jensen Hines: *Collaborative Form. Studies in the Relations of the Arts*, Kent 1991.

<sup>21</sup> Carl Dahlhaus: *Richard Wagner's Music Dramas*, Cambridge 1996 (1979), p. 49.

human being must not be satisfied if man hopes to achieve happiness. In other words, any satisfaction of bodily needs is nothing but the temporary repair of an infinite lack and therefore it cannot lead to human happiness. The grand metaphysical system of Schopenhauer had an immense attraction to Wagner who “was captivated by the philosopher,” Roger Scruton notes, and he considered Schopenhauer’s system as “quite simply the fundamental truth about the world.”<sup>22</sup> Wagner’s fascination with Schopenhauer’s philosophy might very well explain Wagner’s conception of the body in *Tristan and Isolde*: the bodies are only stumbling blocks on the road leading to the final, immaterial, unification of the lovers. The unification of the lovers is not the oneness of Gottfried’s medieval ideal of love (probably inspired by a Neo-Platonic idea of love as the regaining of the original One-ness) (see Scruton, p. 122–124).

In Wagner’s version, oneness can only be reached in death. True love cannot exist side by side with mundane preoccupations (which in Wagner’s *Tristan* is consistently referred to as the world of “Day” – in opposition to the idea of Night).<sup>23</sup> But we should note that the reason why the love-affair is bound to fail is not human institutions such as the arranged marriage and the overall patriarchal structure of feudal society. Instead, it is a metaphysical conviction, Schopenhauerian to the core, that is the *universal* obstacle for love. Thus, Wagner combines Schopenhauer’s pessimism with the typical romantic longing for the night, and from that moment on in Western cultural history the Tristan-myth has been transformed into an abstract narrative of universal conflicts – with a pronounced metaphysical dimension – instead of being a direct critique of societal structures.<sup>24</sup> The sexual meeting of the bodies – the medieval cause of scandal – is transformed into a sublimely a-sexual union in death.<sup>25</sup> This is, in fact, Denis de Rougemont’s interpretation in his history of the western idea of love.<sup>26</sup> In Rougemont’s highly influential *Love in the Western World*, the medieval Tristan-matter, and in particular Wagner’s metaphysical adaptation of it, is considered to be a major factor in the decay of 20<sup>th</sup> century love-relations.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See Roger Scruton: *Death-Devoted Heart. Sex and the Sacred in Wagner’s Tristan and Isolde*, Oxford 2004, p. 126.

<sup>23</sup> The source for this day-night dichotomy is probably Novalis’ *Hymnen an die Nacht*, ca. 1800, where this imagery is fully developed. See Sophia Schnittman: “Musical Motives in Thomas Mann’s *Tristan*” in *MLN*, Vol. 86, No. 3, 1971 (p. 399–414), p. 400.

<sup>24</sup> It would be unjust to say that Wagner leaves behind any political criticism. What I wish to stress here is that his mature political vision is more mythical and metaphysical than directly political.

<sup>25</sup> In opposition to this standard interpretation of the opera, Roger Scruton has recently argued that erotic, and sexual, love is not at all absent in *Tristan und Isolde*. See the fifth chapter, “The Philosophy of Love” (p. 119–161) in *Death-Devoted Heart. Sex and the Sacred in Wagner’s Tristan and Isolde*.

<sup>26</sup> Denis de Rougemont: *Love in the Western World*, Princeton 1983 (1939). For a less biased interpretation of the history of love in Western society, see Irvin Singer, *The Nature of Love*, Chicago 1983–1987. For a further consideration on the death drive in *Tristan und Isolde*, and an updated bibliography on the question, see Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon: “Death Drive: Eros and Thanatos in Wagner’s ‘Tristan und Isolde’”, *Cambridge Opera Journal Vol 11, No. 3*, Nov. 1999, (p 267–293).

<sup>27</sup> Rougemont actually ends up glorifying the holy marital vow as the only existentially mature and



But such an understanding of the verbal text probably simplifies the complicated intermedial relation between music and language in Wagner's oeuvre and in his *Tristan* in particular. Rougemont's interpretation is a typical example of the danger that lies in overemphasizing the role of words in Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

From a musicologist point of view, *Tristan und Isolde* has traditionally been considered an artwork dominated by the musical dimension – an opinion that can find support in Wagner's own remarks in letters and essays. According to this reading, Wagner's music is the leading aesthetic medium in the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, and the music even precedes, in terms of production of the work, the text.

But according to Dahlhaus that is also an erroneous understanding of Wagner's praxis, and he convincingly argues that the "musicologist" interpretation of the music as more important than the text does not grasp the major Wagnerian concepts such as *Drama*. The point is that Drama does not correspond to text but is instead an effort of words, music and dramatic action in a complicated intermedial relationship (Dahlhaus, p. 54–55). According to Dahlhaus, the text-music relation must be considered as having an equal but also conflictual relationship. His concept – which I believe can be fruitful in a number of intermedial analyses beyond Wagner's operas – is "intercutting": "The text and music are not simply equal in importance, which is a truism, but their relationship in some places is better described as intercutting, rather than one of correspondence or mutual absorption" (Dahlhaus, p. 54–55). "Intercutting" is synonymous with the film editing technique better known as crosscutting, and Dahlhaus' use of this term seems to suggest that the text-music relation may be understood as an intermittent struggle for the dominating role. When considering *Tristan und Isolde* in these terms the final interpretation of the opera can also escape the overtly negative interpretation of Rougemont. Whereas the words (relatively) directly doom the lovers to a union only in death, beyond the bodily limitations, the triumphant and vitalistic tones of the music seem to contradict this pessimistic reading of the ending. A more open, imaginative and musically sensitive reading of the relations between the "content" of the words and the "message" of the music – and their internal relation – must be a methodologically valid *point de départ* for any analysis and interpretation of the work. Considering the "text"-"music" relation as an intercutting relationship – i.e. an intermittent changing of dominant positions – facilitates an aesthetic and analytical interpretation of the basic *conflict* in Wagner's later creations: namely, the conflict between his pre-1848 revolutionary political ideals and his later, post-revolutionary idealization and sublimation of his former political engagement.<sup>28</sup>

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ethically sound answer to the fleeting nature of human desire. See the two final chapters in *Love in the Western World*, where "the myth against the marriage" is discussed, and where a positive response to the Tristan-myth is put forth, namely marital fidelity.

<sup>28</sup> Philosophically, Scruton formulates this shift as Wagner's fascination with the Left-Hegelians (in particular Feuerbach) before 1848 and his subsequent fascination with the pessimistic, idealistic philosophy

To sum up these reflections I may be allowed to put forth a thesis concerning the representation of the body in relation to the intermedial relations in *Tristan und Isolde* and combine it with the biographical facts of Wagner's political preoccupations. The radically immaterial idea of the body signifies Wagner's political disappointment: his forced exile due to his revolutionary engagements (fuelled by his interest in the theses of the German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach) is transposed to inner, emotionalized conflicts between his main protagonists on the one hand and the exterior world "of day" on the other. Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* produces a collaborative aesthetic form (cf Jensen Hines) in which communication can from now on take place in at least two "languages": in verbal exchanges *and* in musical tones. In other words, the intercutting between the utopian musical tones vis-à-vis the pessimistic words marks Wagner's psychological and political division between his youthful fascination with Feuerbach and his mature interest in Schopenhauer. Thus *Tristan und Isolde* exists only in the vibrant form of two intercutting media, two ideological tendencies, and that is why the *Liebeshod* must remain a *paradoxical* concept of immaterialized loving bodies united in death.

#### "Patho-Comedy" in Wagner's Sanatorium (Mann)

A new phase in the history of the Tristan-matter was opened by Joseph Bédier's extremely popular "roman" about *Tristan et Iseut* in fin de siècle France, where the cult-celebration of Tristan and Isolde – and of Wagner! – reached an historical zenith. The combination of Wagner, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche enabled the young Thomas Mann to write a long short story (hereafter termed a novella) called "Tristan." Mann "constructs his text upon elements of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* – specifically a parallel plot structure, characterization, and narrative line, and a contrasting setting and theme".<sup>29</sup> In Mann's work Tristan is transformed into a clumsy but also cynical aesthete who meets the beautiful and easily fooled Gabriele at a sanatorium, while King Marke is changed into the anglophile, vulgar husband, Herr Klötterjahn.<sup>30</sup> The medieval milieu of the Tristan-myth is turned into a sanatorium called Einfried (punning Wagner's house "Wahnfried" in Bayreuth) where the decadent and unsuccessful writer, Spinell, seduces a married woman of

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of Schopenhauer. See Scruton, p. 125. Henning Goldbæk basically agree in "Gesamtkunstværk som verdensteater: Wagner mellem emblem og tableau" [Gesamtkunstwerk as Theatrum Mundi: Wagner Between Emblem and Tableau] in *Marcel Proust og barokkens genkomst*, Hellerup 2002.

<sup>29</sup> Stevie Anne Bolduc: "A Study of Intertextuality: Thomas Mann's 'Tristan' and Wagner's 'Tristan und Isolde'" in *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, Vol. 37 no. 1/2, 1983 (p. 82–90) p. 82. See also Rainer Schönhaar: "Beschriebene und imaginäre Musik im frühwerk Thomas Manns" in Albert Gier and Gerold W. Gruber (eds.): *Musik und Litteratur: komparatistische Studien zur Strukturverwandtschaft*, Frankfurt am Main; Berlin; Bern; New York; Paris; Wien 1995.

<sup>30</sup> The source behind the novella, beside Wagner's opera, is difficult to establish but in Frank W. Young's *Montage and Motif in Thomas Mann's "Tristan,"* Bonn 1975, p. 6–7, several possible sources are mentioned.

bourgeois origin, Gabriele Klöterjahn. Even though Spinell entitles himself an artist, he is actually only a decadent aesthete, whereas Gabriele turns out to be the real, practicing artist. She is from the outset tubercular, thus already doomed by a disease that finally leads her into death, either because of her flirtations with Spinell, and/or because of her intense piano performance of Chopin and in particular Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*.

The novella is construed around a central musical scene, "a frigid form of seduction"<sup>31</sup> according to one critic, where the score of *Tristan* is played on the piano. Mann moves Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* into verbal language – but this medial transformation does not happen without considerable difficulties, which are partly induced by the philosophical convictions of the young Thomas Mann. "Rarely has there been as perfect a coalescence of music with literature as in Thomas Mann's *Tristan*" claims Sophia Schnittmann.<sup>32</sup> I will, on the contrary, argue that in "Tristan" music and text struggle for supremacy – and paradoxically, it is "music", in the grand verbal ekphrasis of music occupying the centre of the novella, that "wins" the battle between verbal language and Wagner's musical score.

In "Tristan," Mann's irony is, apparently, without limits: everyone at the sanatorium, guests and employees alike, are the target of Mann's sarcastic descriptions. Only music, exemplified by a few of Chopin's *Nocturnes* (possibly symbolizing bourgeois musical taste) and in particular Wagner's revolutionary and radical *Tristan and Isolde* played on piano, avoids the all-dominant use of irony and sarcasm from the omnipresent narrator. Furthermore, the Tristan-matter (the myth of love and death, mainly in Wagner's version) is exploited by Mann in order to deal with his own well-known Bürger-Künstler conflict. But he reworked, as I will argue in the following, the conflict in the novella by focusing on the representations of the body.

First of all, the novella takes place in a sanatorium where extreme attention, not to say anxiety, is attached to the body, and Mann's rewriting of the myth exposes his deep-rooted skepticism towards two equally questionable possibilities. These possibilities are symbolized in the representations of the *bodies* of his two main ideological representatives: the vulgar bourgeois on the one hand and the decadent artist on the other. The vulgar and totally un-aesthetic Klöterjahn (Mann is making a pun on the vulgar German word Klöter, i.e. testicles), whose fascination with drinking, eating and chasing girls is representative of the novella's negative position towards mundane, bodily pleasures. But the bodily presence of Spinell (who is described as an elderly baby with giant feet and bad teeth) is even more repellent, whereas

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<sup>31</sup> Françoise H. M. LeSaux cited in Neil E. Thomas: "Tristan in Germany Between Gottfried von Strassburg, Wagner, and Thomas Mann" in Phillipa Hardman et al. (eds.): *The Growth of the Tristan and Iseult Legend in Wales, England, France and Germany*, Lewiston, NY 2003, p. 166.

<sup>32</sup> See Sophia Schnittman (who coined the genreconcept "patho-comedy"), p. 399 (patho-comedy is defined p. 400, n. 2). Karsten Witte has defined the novella as a "Burlesque" in Karsten Witte: "Das ist echt! Eine Burleske" in *The German Quarterly* Vol. 41, No. 4, 1968 (p. 660–672).

Gabriele is vaguely idealized with one characteristic trait (one of Mann's repeated Leitmotifs, inspired by Wagner's musical Leitmotifs): a distinct blue vein in her face signifying her physical vulnerability. Thus Mann's triangle of psychological relations is mirrored in the representations of bodies: the ugly body of the writer Spinell, the material gluttony of Herr Klöterjahn, and the beautiful but weak body of the artistic Gabriele.

The artist is represented as a decadent soul in a hideous body whereas the bourgeois is a healthy and vital body covering an empty soul. And music (in medieval traditions considered an emblem for Tristan<sup>33</sup>) has a frightening force that goes beyond aesthetic pleasure or psychological visions: music has a deadly impact when it is played seriously, artistically, as does Gabriele, and so it turns out that Gabriele is the real artist (being sensitive to art in a passionate way), whereas Spinell is a simple dilettante *playing* the role of artist. Gabriele dies after having played Wagner's *Tristan*, which is her way of avoiding the two equally negative (masculine) possibilities embodied in the equally unattractive (bodies of) Klöterjahn and Spinell.

In Mann's "Tristan," music is, in accordance with Wagner's (and Schopenhauer's) musical philosophy, a gate towards transcendence of the body for the select few (Gabriele in "Tristan") whereas Spinell and Klöterjahn are stuck in the material world. But can we as modern readers, (and did Thomas Mann?), believe in such a metaphysical transcendence inherent in the art of music? Mann seems to hesitate himself, balancing instead the metaphysics of music with a genuinely bodily symbol, that of the progeny (Klöterjahn Junior) of the Klöterjahn couple which is heavily stressed throughout the novella. The only scene, perhaps, in the novella where Spinell is genuinely shaken is connected exactly to his meeting with Gabriele's baby, the "animal-like" child (see Schnittman, p. 413): the Klöterjahn baby is as vital and dominant as Spinell is decadent and weak. The silent encounter of Spinell and the young Klöterjahn concludes the novella on an almost absurd irony, and with this Mann manages to keep the novella in a state of thematic *intercutting*: the conflict between the musical transcendence and the material-bodily principle (in Bakhtin's system) cannot be put to rest, and for the remainder of his career Mann continually rewrites and reworks the unsolvable dilemma inherent in "Tristan."

### The Eternal Return of the "Closed" Body (Cocteau)

During World War II the Tristan-matter played an important role in occupied France, now in yet another medium. Jean Cocteau, the poet, painter and director, reached out for a wider audience by making a film-version of the story of Tristan and Iseut. An important part of Cocteau's leap from smaller circles to a kind of mainstream-position was achieved in the casting: he engaged two star actors, Jean

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<sup>33</sup> See, for instance, the description of Tristan as an "artist" in W.T.H Jackson: "Tristan the Artist in Gottfried's Poem" i *PMLA* 77, Vol. 4, 1962, p. 364–372.

Marais and Madeleine Sologne, and the movie became an astonishing success.

*L'Éternel Retour* is an example of Jean Cocteau's<sup>34</sup> cinematographic ideas known as "poésie cinématographique" which can be defined as "the intersection of the legend with quotidian reality" or "the incursion of the modern world of the quotidian into the normally timeless *fable*" (Grimbert and Smarz, p. 221). The clash on the level of content and milieu between eternal myth and everyday reality is supposed to create a dreamlike sense of heightened reality which Cocteau tries to create on the level of film style and setting, where reality is given a poetic interpretation. The relation between eternal myth and contemporary reality is expressed in the explanation of the title given in the first instances of the film (in text). The Eternal Return is, according to this introductory text, a Nietzsche term referring to the return of structures (a love story, for instance) which are beyond the conscious knowing of the people involved.

The aesthetic of "poésie cinématographique" is comparable to avant-garde theories of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, notably Brecht's *Verfremdung*-effect and the Russian Formalist's concept of *ostranenie*, two concepts that aim to defamiliarize our habitual conceptions of reality. Cocteau's idea of a "poésie cinématographique" was, in the 1940s, a modern solution to the problem of making the Tristan-myth a living, contemporary phenomenon. The film mixed a modern *milieu* of garages, bars, motorcars and up-to-date fashion with gothic castles and landscapes appearing as if outside of time (in contrast to Mann's realistic universe). The result is a rewriting of the medieval myth in a strange and alienating context, and it thus exemplifies Cocteau's vision of a poetic (understood as dreamlike, non-realistic) but still cinematographic (mimetic, realistic) work of art. The protagonists live in a setting of dream and reality that shows the medieval nature of the contemporary (1943) culture and, on the other hand, the continued existence of premodern castles and landscapes: "incessantly we hesitate between the Middle Ages and the twentieth century," as one commentator describes the reception of the film.<sup>35</sup> Thus Cocteau's utopian vision of a *poésie cinématographique* reaches an apex in *L'Éternel Retour* – at least formally and theoretically. But the film has some rather questionable aspects, to say the least, related to the representation of the body.

The disturbing body-politics of the film is rather obvious. The two main characters are platinum-blonde, and the protagonists' bodies, in particular Marais', expresses an idea of the body that Bakhtin called the idea of the "closed" body in his study of Rabelais. Bakhtin's concept of the closed body signifies beauty, power and

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<sup>34</sup> Though formally directed by Jean Delannoy, it is nevertheless considered a work of Cocteau. For a short discussion of the question, see Joan Tasker Grimbert's and Robert Smarz's "Fable and Poésie in Cocteau's *L'Éternel Retour* (1943)" in Kevin J. Harty (ed.): *Cinema Arthuriana. Twenty Essays*, Jefferson NV 2002 (p. 220–241), p. 221.

<sup>35</sup> Pierre Dubourg (*Dramaturgie de Jean Cocteau*, Paris 1954) cited in Tasker Grimbert and Smarz, p. 221 and p. 226–7.

stability, as expressed, for instance, in Classical sculptures of the human body. But this ideal suppresses the real, material needs of any living human body: the desire to eat, drink and make love, and even the more base functions of letting out faeces and urine. The opposite ideal of the body is, for Bakhtin, expressed in a number of rituals connected to the popular culture of the late middle ages, most blatantly in carnivals. The carnival system according to Bakhtin focused on the *openings* of the body, the channels where the body is in direct contact with the world, for example the nose, the mouth, the anus. Cocteau's protagonists' bodies, on the contrary, may remind us of some of Leni Riefenstahl's highly aestheticized, almost sculpturesque bodies in her famous propaganda film from the Berlin Olympics.

But the body-politics of Cocteau's film does not only express itself in beautiful, idealized bodies: the film even distributes heroes and villains according to racial and/or genetic markers. Whereas the blonde and beautiful heroes act on the positive half of the dichotomic distribution of the representations of the body, the negatively valorized figures can be found on the other side. The negative figures are characterized by way of bodily signs: the treacherous and violent cousin of Tristan, who tries to poison the lovers (but gives them the love potion instead) is not only a dwarf, he is also (with the other negatively evaluated figures of the film), remarkably dark in hair and complexion. And "Iseut of the White Hands" (i.e. the woman married by Tristan), is the classical *femme fatale*; erotic, vulgar – but in distinction to the classic *femme fatale* she has dramatically *dark* hair.

The political content of Cocteau's war-time activities has been a subject of debate, partly because Cocteau was in close contact with the sculptor Arno Breker.<sup>36</sup> Breker's sculptures expressed masculine ideals close to Nazism (and thus close to the imagery of *L'Éternel Retour*) – and he was a prominent artist, preferred by Hitler. It is not clear whether this body-politics is a coincidence, or if Cocteau's film simply expressed the unavoidable guidelines of the occupant's censorship during the war. That Cocteau – himself gay and being on friendly terms with a number of Jews and avant-garde artists that would clearly qualify as "entartet" in the Nazi-aesthetics – voluntarily expressed racist convictions seems too unlikely, despite the disturbing images in *L'Éternel Retour*.

For the purposes of this article I wish to stress how Cocteau's Tristan-version can be transposed into a modern political context by using the body as the focal point of this (problematic) modernization. Cocteau discusses, in his cinematic work, the possibility of an aesthetic transcendence in his project of combining "*poésie*" and cinematographic "*vérité*," and in the final shots of the film such a transcendence

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<sup>36</sup> For a description of this relationship, see Claude Arnaud's *Jean Cocteau*, Paris 2003, p. 581–583, who notes the disturbing body-images p. 600. Arno Breker mentions Cocteau several times in his autobiography *Im Strahlungsfeld der Ereignisse*, Preussische Oldendorf 1972. In Jean Touzot's introduction to the edition of Cocteau's diary, *Journal. 1942–1945* (Paris 1989), Cocteau's political preoccupations are briefly discussed p. 10–11 (with references to entries).

is achieved by way of a remarkable series of shots transforming the dead couple into one, beautiful marble-like sculpture (thus entering another artistic medium, in fact), lying on a sarcophagus while the simple fisher's shed where they were placed turns into a temple-like building. This is perhaps the final proof that Cocteau, in contrast to Mann, is intent on opening a metaphysical door to the other side: an opening marked by the passage to another medium and another dimension of life, perhaps, whereas Mann, being led by his distinct ironic way of handling the largest human issues, nervously lets a fat baby dressed in red and blue block the exit.

### Iseut Amputated (Buñuel)

It should come as no surprise that in Europe, in 1970, the heroic and high-strung elements of the Tristan-myth cannot be reproduced by a left-wing surrealist such as Luis Buñuel. Buñuel adapts the novel *Tristana* from 1892 by Benito Pérez Galdós (1843–1920) whose book described pre-fascist Spain.

The transformation taking place from novel to the film *Tristana* is substantial;<sup>37</sup> Buñuel transformed the mildly ironical novel to a seething attack against the patriarchal structures in general (no doubt also aiming at Fascist Spain) and Buñuel introduced a number of very blatant sexual (Freudian/Surrealist) motives in the film. In Buñuel's film, the depiction of Spain (Toledo) has strong reminiscences of the medieval Europe that gave birth to the original Tristan myth: from the urban architectural structure to the old-fashioned discipline in school and to the patriarchal structure of the urban society.

Catherine Deneuve plays *Tristana*, a young woman who is taken under the wings – and partly exploited – by her uncle, the authoritarian, elderly Don Lope (played by Fernando Reis). Don Lope's apparently liberal and chivalric ideals do not hold up when it comes to treating *Tristana* decently. She revolts against her patriarch and the misogynistic system he represents by running away with a young, handsome painter. She falls ill, though, and returns to her former provider of food and lodging (thus following an archetypal movement in the Tristan-myth) but is forced, as a consequence of her illness, to have one of her legs amputated. Whether Don Lope makes the final decision regarding the amputation (as a radical way of holding on to her) remains unclear. She has to submit to her earlier suppressed role by marrying Don Lope, and ends up being a bitter, careworn woman. In Buñuel's adaptation of the medieval myth (via a modern realistic novel) the female protagonist Iseut has turned into *Tristana* and the film focuses on her dramatic changes. She is a suppressed woman who is being severely punished, and who perhaps punishes herself, for her

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<sup>37</sup> Colin Partridge has translated Galdós' novel into English and, in the same volume, he compares the novel and the film. See Colin Partridge: *Tristana, Buñuel's Film and Galdós Novel. A Case Study in the Relation Between Literature and Film*, Lewiston NY 1995.

revolt and for her individualistic pursue of the objects of her own desire.<sup>38</sup>

Buñuel rewrites and transforms Galdòs' post-medieval adultery-theme in order to stage a conflict with clear psychoanalytic overtones. Dreams are mixed with realistic scenes and in Buñuel's version of the Tristan-story the myth is actually de-romanticized (thus being antithetic to Cocteau's version). The sobering, anti-idyllic tendency of the film shows itself, as I will show below, in the representations of the body, once again. The bodies of, in particular king Marke/Don Lope and Tristana/Iseut, occupies the centre stage of the movie, and in stark (but non-intended) opposition to Cocteau's problematic fascination with the closed, perfect, muscular bodies.

That the body occupies an essential part of the film is clear from the first scenes, where Tristana's mute nephew's compulsive masturbation is revealed, and bodily decay is an important part of Don Lope's rapid aging process. And it is shockingly obvious in the transformation of the virginal and dazzling beauty of Tristana in the first part of the movie to the grey, bitter woman of the final shots. Buñuel, in other words, underscores the body as unruly and dominant (the compulsively masturbating cousin), the body as rapidly aging (the transformation of Don Lope and Tristana) or the body as molested (Tristana's beautiful leg – a synecdoche of her overall beauty and eroticism – being amputated). All in all the body becomes a symbol of the fragile, imperfect human condition under the pressures of aging and the constant threat of disease and mutilation.

The Tristan-Iseut relationship in the Middle Ages was dangerous because of its potentially socially subversive consequences to feudal (patriarchal) society; in the modern epoch, as seen through Buñuel's lens, love and desire have turned into dangerous and destructive forces: exhibitionism, fear of death, the bodily maltreatment and death are shown to be the gloomy dark side of any love affair caught in the contradictions of a patriarchal society. Thus Buñuel infuses the grotesque body-language with political implications, and the combination of irony and politics is incorporated into a psychoanalytically inspired cinematic universe. In comparison to Cocteau's body politics, Buñuel has produced an anti-patriarchal political statement that can only be deciphered if we concentrate on the representation of the bodies.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Donald L. Hoffman discusses Buñuel's way of handling the Tristan-myth in "Tristan la Blonde': Transformations of Tristan in Buñuel's *Tristana*" in Kevin J. Harty: *King Arthur on Film. New Essays on Arthurian Cinema* (p. 167–182). According to Hoffman Buñuel redefines the Tristan-part by letting Tristana turn into "Isolde" in the concluding part of the movie: "Thus, castration redefines her, so that she becomes disidentified with Tristan and becomes resituated as a woman, Isolde of Brittany [aka. Isolde of the White Hands, JB], the passively murderous wife." (Hoffman, p. 180) Besides Hoffman's article I have not, surprisingly, been able to find discussions of *Tristana's* relation to the Tristan-myth.

<sup>39</sup> I should stress, perhaps, that I have not come across any evidence suggesting that Buñuel refers to Cocteau's film.



The most important intermedial relation in Buñuel's *Tristana* is the relation between the (absent) literary pretext and the present cinematographic adaptation, for Buñuel's film is an example of a radical break with the preceding text. Brian McFarlane examines, in *Novel to Film*, three possible relations between the literary work and the cinematographic adaptation. According to McFarlane, *transposition* is the relatively loyal rendering of the novel on screen; *commentary* describes the situation when the original has been changed intentionally by the director, but the adaptation is still loyal. *Analogy* represents considerable difference, and here the director is actually aiming at creating an entirely new work of art.<sup>40</sup>

Compared to Galdòs' novel, Buñuel's film lies between *commentary* and *analogy*. Several aspects of the novella are preserved, of course, but in crucial points the script and the film diverts strongly from the literary pretext.<sup>41</sup> J. Francisco Aranda has noted some of the main differences between novel and film,<sup>42</sup> but he curiously fails to note the most conspicuous difference, namely the highly divergent endings of the novel vis-à-vis the film.<sup>43</sup> The novel ends on a note of amused and mildly ironic wonder from the narrator: the elderly libertine Don Lope turns into a

self-satisfied bourgeois. He had never before known the burning desire to plant a young tree; and he gave himself no rest until he had watched the young plant take root and sprout fresh leaves. [...] [Tristana learns to] prepare two or three different types of pastry and she made them so well, so extraordinarily well, that Don Lope licked his fingers when he savoured them and didn't cease giving praise to god. [...] <sup>44</sup>

The bodily passion of the Tristan and Iseut story has been tamed and transformed into an idyll with only a hint (Don Lope's licking of his fingers!?) of the underlying passions. And the final words of the novel therefore sound rather reassuring if also bemused: "Could you say the two were happy? ... It's possible" (Galdòs, p. 161). Buñuel's ending, on the other hand, is devoid of any such illusions: the crippled Tristana coldly watches Don Lope die, but this final revenge does not seem to give her any comfort. Tristana is mentally and physically crippled, and not even the death of the man responsible for her disillusion can replace her lost youth and hopeful naiveté. As a typical adaptation, Galdòs novel is constantly present as the Other of the film; in the parts of the film "loyal" to the novel there is a positive intercutting

<sup>40</sup> Brian McFarlane: *Novel to Film. An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*, Oxford 1996, p. 10–11.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Leitch criticizes any concept of origin and originality in the relation between novel and film in his illuminating and provoking "Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory" in *Criticism*, 45, Vol. 2 2003 (p. 149–171).

<sup>42</sup> "Introduction" in *Tristana. A Film by Luis Buñuel*, trans. Nicholas Fry, Godalming 1971, p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> Gwynne Edwards notes the "total contrast" of the endings in *The Discreet Art of Luis Buñuel*, London; Boston 1982, p. 224.

<sup>44</sup> Galdos, *Tristana*, p. 161 (in Partridge's translation).

between the novel and the film, but in the final analysis the relation between film and the preceding novel is much more aggressive. Buñuel, who was apparently a great admirer of Galdòs,<sup>45</sup> overrules the hopeful but ironic literary ending, and the movie radically *cuts down* the “original” literary precedent in a defiant gesture of political satire: Buñuel sexualizes the original story, and he produces an evil Bakhtinian carnival of amputated legs, compulsive masturbation and anti-clerical satire, and concludes the film on a note of pessimism and hatred, instead of Galdòs’ liberal optimism on behalf of the odd couple.

The intention of Buñuel’s relation to his literary precedent can of course only be guessed at, but the reason might very well be found in the political circumstances of the period. Whereas the novel from 1892 points to the possibility that the relationship of the patriarchal Don Lope with the poor Tristana – that is, a modern King Marke and Iseut – might develop into something of an idyll in the 1880s, Buñuel produces a satirical and critical picture of Spain in 1920 and the chronological displacement made it pass the censorship of the 1960s (when the film was conceived). But there is no doubt that Buñuel wished to point to the crippling (with an appropriate metaphor) effects of the Fascist Government of 1970.

## Conclusions

In my short analyses of a small selection of the innumerable adaptations of the medieval Tristan and Iseut myth I have shown how the narrative core has moved from one medium to another. The diachronic development illustrates, in other words, a dialectical correspondence between substance and changeability. There is quite a distance from the verbal myths in medieval France to Buñuel’s cinematographic version – where Tristan is a woman! – yet a “family resemblance” ties together all the discussed Tristan-adaptations.<sup>46</sup>

Considering the representations of the body I have touched upon above it is possible to state (but not substantiate) a historical thesis: namely, that the representation of the body in the Tristan-versions functions as metonymical parts of the overall epochal conception of the body. In the Middle Ages – in Bérroul’s version – the body occupies a central point upon which sexual arousal and bliss as well as feudal punishment can be inferred. But Tristan occupies a strange middle position because of his many disguises, which might be a kind of symbolic warning in Bérroul’s text that the moral lesson of the myth is extremely difficult to grasp. In Wagner’s late romantic drama, on the other hand, the lovers transcend the material

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<sup>45</sup> Buñuel’s admiration is mentioned in Aranda’s “Introduction” (p. 6) and in Partridge’s study (p. 207–208).

<sup>46</sup> “Family resemblance” in the sense of Ludwig Wittgenstein, where a certain likeness (for instance among members of a family) can be established despite a number of obvious differences. See *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, Frankfurt am Main 1969, §§ 66–71.

limits of their bodies in death, probably inspired by the Schopenhauerian scepticism towards all material aspects of life. In Mann's post-romantic version of *Tristan* the bodies of the main characters are, on the one hand, the very symbols of their bearers, but the bodies are, in concordance with Wagner's conception, hindrances on the way to a metaphysical unification in death. In both Wagner's and Mann's cases I tried to show how the thematic interpretation of the representation of the body – and thus of the works as such – is impossible to define because of a radical undecidability of the “undercutting” media in Wagner or the surprising absence of narrator's irony in the key passages in Mann describing Wagner's music. In the two 20<sup>th</sup> century films discussed, Cocteau and Buñuel both express important themes through the representation of bodies. Cocteau's closed concept of the body is on the one hand classical, but it is also part of a system of exclusion that carries some very unfortunate parallels in Cocteau's political surroundings. Thus the problematic body politics of Cocteau's film works against the intentions of his progressive *poésie cinématographique* – not to mention Cocteau's own personal life. In contrast, the bodies in Buñuel's 1970 film takes part in a thematic battle concerning the lack of freedom of the female protagonist, while the critical stance of the medieval myths and written versions onto feudal society has been taken over by a critique of patriarchal structures. The visual transformation of *Tristana* (symbolizing the psychological transformation) is shocking: the difference between the first shots of an innocent girl to the final images of an old embittered woman comes to express such a critique.

Another characteristic trait of the selected examples is the relation between media. Dahlhaus' concept of the Wagnerian *intercutting* between music and words points to a general trait in all works of art that include more than one media (Mitchell's “all media are mixed media”). Apart from the medieval “origin” all the works of art have indeed proven to consist of several media: Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* is of course an ostentatious example of this, and further theorized by Dahlhaus' term *intercutting*, which concerns the crucial relationship between words and music in *Tristan und Isolde*. In Mann's “*Tristan*” the intercutting between word and music is played out in another way: Mann's apparently monomedia novella is actually striving to express the musical spirit through words in order to overwhelm or infuse literature with music: this paradox comes to further define the extremely ambiguous thematic content of Mann's novella.

The intermedial relation is harder to establish in Cocteau's *L'Éternel Retour* (apart from the obvious mixture of visual, verbal and musical media in any film), but there is a definite and very problematic schism between two different mindsets or even media, namely the partly *theoretical* program of ‘*poésie cinématographique*’ on the one hand, and the problematic *representation* of the Aryan Blondes that, probably unconsciously, seems to haunt Cocteau's film. The crucial stride between media in

Buñuel is clearly the one between literature and film: Buñuel unhesitatingly cuts down all the optimistic sprouts of Galdòs' liberal realism (and of Cocteau's romantic transcendence in the final scene of *L'Éternel Retour*). The bodies of Tristan and Iseut, concentrated by Buñuel in the amputated figure of Tristana, cannot survive, and thus Buñuel's film – the version among my samples which is the most remote from the medieval myth – remains “true” to the original violent core of the medieval myth, which may still belong to the “etymology of our,” should I add: contemporary?, “passions.”

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# Principles of Rhythm: Temporal and Spatial Aspects

*Eva Lilja & Lena Hopsch*

The concept of ‘rhythm’ is common in descriptions of music, poetry, sculpture and painting. Is ‘rhythm’ the same phenomenon in all these cases, or is the word sometimes used metaphorically? We will try to answer that question from two perspectives: Lena Hopsch will discuss the question in relation to producing a work of art and Eva Lilja will explore this in terms of academic reception. Respectively, Lena Hopsch will examine a sculpture by the constructivist sculptor Naum Gabo (1890–1977), and Eva Lilja will analyse a poem by Lawrence Ferlinghetti (1919–).

We regard ‘rhythm’ as an experience of the senses which determines the production as well as the perception of an art work. While Eva Lilja will discuss *spatiality* in poetry, Lena Hopsch will examine the spectator’s experience of a sculpture as one that takes place in *time* as well as in space.

Rhythms act in space as well as in time. We think that the experience of being a body in a room is basic for any apprehension of rhythm and that the basic rhythmical figure is the dancing body. Taking this idea as a starting point, we will argue that ‘rhythm’ is a specific and not a metaphorical category in all the art forms mentioned above. Cognitive theory points out how bodily experience shapes abstract notions, and we believe that this is correct.<sup>1</sup>

A dancing body moves in time as well as in space. Performing a dance may be regarded as the prototype of rhythm. The evident example here is the ‘mousiké’ of ancient Greece – an art form where dance, music and poetry were performed simultaneously. The ancient choir danced while performing.<sup>2</sup> In Antiquity the beat was provided by tapping the foot while reciting poetry.<sup>3</sup>

Rhythm functions multimodally – in the rhythmical experience you have to combine different types of perception, like visuality and audibility. We presuppose that seeing and hearing mediate rhythm, but that tactility probably is the main perception type, speaking of rhythm. This follows from our focus on the rhythm of the dancing body. However, tactility is more complicated and has been less investigated than the other four senses, and more than that – there is no adequate terminology to describe it. Tactility signifies the sum of several types of perception. We have to divide it in, at least, two kinds of perception, the tactile and the haptic one. The basic experience of rhythm probably takes place with help of the kinesthetic sense (‘proprioception’),

<sup>1</sup> Mark Johnson: *The Body in the Mind. The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination and Reason*, Chicago 1987, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Steven H. Lonsdale: *Dance and Ritual Play in Greek Religion*, Baltimore 1993, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Eva Lilja: *Svensk metrik*, Stockholm 2006, p. 406.

a bodily awareness situated in the memory of the muscles, which makes it possible to determine the position of your limbs even when you close your eyes. We are using our kinesthetic sense when we are dancing, cycling or walking.

## Definitions of Rhythm

We hold that rhythm is a basic ability of all living creatures. Think of heartbeat, breathing, sexual intercourse, walking or sleeping for example. Bodies rely on rhythmic lapses and so does society with its working hours and timetables. This observation implies a broad concept of rhythm, and defining ‘rhythm’ must start with the question of arrhythmia. What is arrhythmia? The answer is that there is no rhythm in chaos and emptiness, lacking a commanding form or Gestalt.<sup>4</sup>

The oldest meaning of the Greek word ‘rhythmos’ is ‘distinct form,’ ‘order,’ ‘proportion.’ There is also an archaic meaning of rhythm as ‘pregnant, varying form.’ Benveniste summarizes the archaic Greek concept of rhythm as improvised, immediate, changeable form.<sup>5</sup> The pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus (c. 500 BC) speaks of: “A repose in transformation” (fragment 84 a).<sup>6</sup> According to Heraclitus, balance could not be achieved through rest, but through a battle between opposites. The shift from one condition to another was the central issue for him, something we find in his famous sentence “panta rhei” or “everything floats,” explained as “you could never go into the same river twice” – the water is in constant flow, always changing. We would like to propose that rhythm in a composition should not be considered fixed, on the contrary, the experience of rhythm in an artwork is an experience of constant shifts between the perceiver and the piece of art.

Plato (427–347 BC) gives new meaning to the notion of rhythm when he applies ‘rhythmos’ to the motion of the body while dancing: he speaks of rhythm as “organized motion.”<sup>7</sup> Plato’s definition has had its followers through history. In other cases, the idea of rhythm as an organiser of time has come into focus. Later on, definitions of rhythm are probably aiming at the rhythm of music. Musical rhythm has been investigated more thoroughly, and the findings of how it works in music sometimes have coloured the whole concept of rhythm. However, musical definitions do not work very well when you come to other art forms, and furthermore, the antique definitions come closer to modern uses of rhythm in art.

Rhythm regarded as drive and energy of motion takes place in the shift between an artwork and its perception. The artists of early modernism were obsessed by the notions of speed and motility. They proposed that the old idea of dynamic rhythms

<sup>4</sup> Susanne K. Langer: *Feeling and Form. A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in a New Key*, London 1953, p. 23, p. 32.

<sup>5</sup> Émile Benveniste: *Människan i språket*, (texter i urval av John Swedenmark), Stockholm; Stehag 1995, p. 137 (our translation).

<sup>6</sup> Herakleitos: *Fragment*, trans. Håkan Rehnberg and Hans Ruin, Lund 1997, p. 175 (our translation).

<sup>7</sup> Benveniste, p. 138–39; Lonsdale; Plato: *The Laws*, Thomas L. Pangle (ed.), New York 1980, 665a.



(relations between forms) in the artwork should be replaced by the idea of kinetic rhythms, which effects an intensification of the spectator's perception of the artwork – in time as well as in space. With the help of the notion of kinetic rhythm we are able to focus on an art experience where memories of earlier experienced rhythmical sequences blend with the present experience.<sup>8</sup>

It has usually been said that painting and sculpture are spatial art forms and that poetry and music are temporal forms. However, investigations have shown that the perception of work of art takes place in both dimensions contemporaneously.<sup>9</sup> You need time to apprehend what you see, and this adds a temporal aspect to spatial forms. More than that, temporal lapses are structured into Gestalts, which make them spatial. There is no dichotomy between seeing and hearing, or between spatiality and temporality. Poems have expressive print pictures, and sculptures need time to be walked around and looked at from all sides. Rhythms have temporal as well as spatial qualities. Sometimes temporality will dominate, sometimes spatiality.

So far, we will describe aesthetic rhythm as follows: 'rhythm' in an art work signifies certain aesthetic qualities that play with temporal or spatial proportions within the perception of a Gestalt. Gestalt pressure shapes the perception of the relationship between masses, stresses and deviations – in the sound qualities of music and poetry, as in the visual qualities of painting and architecture. 'Rhythm' signifies a motion within the (perceived) Gestalt, a play of direction(s), which includes reaching a focus. In this play, rhythm yearns for balance. Reaching the focus means reaching the point of balance. 'Rhythm' signifies both the play between balance and the deviation from balance.<sup>10</sup>

## Principles of Rhythm

Lately, research in prosody has distinguished between the separate versification systems of different cultures. Gasparov (1996) has established the main systems, like French syllabic versification or Chinese syllabomelodic versification. In Scandinavia, we have at least three versification systems:

- Accentual versification of the fourbeat line in Norse poetry and in the poetry of Middle Ages.
- Meter or tactus in accentsyllabic poetry 1650–1930.
- Free versification in modern free verse.

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<sup>8</sup> Lena Hopsch: *Rytmens estetik, formens kraft*, Thesis in progress, Göteborg 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Gärdenfors, interview, Lund, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Johnson, p. 75; Reuven Tsur: *Poetic Rhythm. Structure and Performance. An Empirical Study in Cognitive Poetics*, Bern 1998, p. 90.

A versification system must rely on a certain rhythmical principle – with the addition of a set of rules. The rhythmical principle of accentual versification as well as of free verse relies on structured sequences in combination with powerful segmentation. The rhythmical principle of the measured forms from the Renaissance through romanticism is tactus or the beat.

Richard Cureton (1992) locates three so called temporalities in poetry – tactus, grouping and prolongation. Following Cureton and Gasparov, we have classified rhythm according to three principles of rhythm, serial rhythm, sequential rhythm and dynamic rhythm – that is to say three basic sets of Gestalt qualities:

- Serial rhythm – tactus or beat in measured music and poetry.
- Sequential rhythm - the sequence or the segment of the phrase which is to be found in free verse and in the hemistich of the four beat medieval line, in music and in the surfaces of a painting, as well as in the parts of a sculpture or a piece of architecture.
- Dynamic rhythm – the forces and directions in two- and three-dimensional artefacts and the temporal intensification towards a focus in music and poetry.

Below we will discuss and demonstrate how those three rhythmical principles operate in two works, a sculpture by Naum Gabo and a poem by Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Our analyses show that a piece of art generally exemplifies two or three principles of rhythm. For example, a drawing by Wassily Kandinsky may consist of segments in a dynamic combination of forces, or a piece of music by John Cage or a poem by Öyvind Fahlström may consist of serial elements in a row of segments.

Our examples below are typical for mid-twentieth-century modernism.

### Sculpture – from Spatiality to Temporality (by Lena Hopsch)

We are not familiar with describing sculpture as an experience in time. In order to experience a piece of sculpture, however, one has to move around it and take it in from every direction. The memories of how the sculpture is experienced from different angles become mixed with the one we currently observe. Here, I will describe how a sculpture is built up around both spatial and temporal courses of events.<sup>11</sup> My theoretical discussion of time/space relations starts with Rosalind Krauss's discussion of Umberto Boccioni's *Development of a Bottle in Space* (1912). According to Krauss, Boccioni talks of: "absolute motion" relations between the parts of the sculpture and "relative motion" what the observer can grasp.

The constructivist sculptor Naum Gabo discusses the matter in his own way.

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<sup>11</sup> Rosalind Krauss: *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1996 (1980), p. 41, 45 and 58.

Gabo devoted a large part of his life to discuss the structure of sculpture in theoretical terms. In my capacity as a sculptor I have been interested in his work for many years. My analysis begins with a theoretical discussion followed by an analysis of Gabo's work, the sculpture *Linear Construction in Space no 2*.

Gabo uses dynamic and kinetic rhythms as concepts for analysis,<sup>12</sup> and these I have defined thus: dynamic rhythms deal with relationships between forms or within a form, while kinetic rhythms focus on the observer's own personal experience of moving around the work thus perceiving the whole form.

The Greek word 'dynamis' refers to force or power. When we take a step we generate force, this causes movement and movement in turn creates a direction. There is a high degree of agreement as to how artists describe force, for example according to Henry Moore: "Force, Power, is made by forms straining or pressing from inside. Knees, elbows, forehead, knuckles all seek to press outwards. Hardness projecting outwards gives tension, force and vitality."<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the Swedish sculptor Bror Marklund speaks about how the sculptor has to imagine an inner force stemming from the centre of a form. This form strives towards space and space exerts a counterforce against this. When these forces reach their equilibrium the dynamics of the composition are created (clearly illustrated in Marklund's sculpture *Gestalt i storm*). Forces generate tension due to them giving rise to direction, which in turn provides movement.

What then does an artist mean by the concept of tension? Tension is created by the force inherent in the form. By adding direction to force, movement is generated. Wassily Kandinsky argues that the term 'movement' can be made more concise by dividing the concept into tension and direction: "Tension is the force inherent in the element; as such it is only one component of active movement. To this must be added direction."<sup>14</sup>

Directed tension generates the play of power of the object, which generates the movement (energy) of the composition. "Directed tension is as genuine a property of visual objects as size, shape and colour."<sup>15</sup> An object such as a square contains inherent directions stemming from the centre of the square; these directions generate the inherent tension of the form. How these inherent forces are directed in relation to the surrounding space or the surface of the image determine if the form is in balance or in movement. A stable square that rests on one of its sides is experienced as being in equilibrium, while an unstable square balancing on its tip is experienced as if it were in motion: "Oblique orientation is probably the most elementary and effective means of obtaining directed tension" (Arnheim, p. 424; fig. 1).

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<sup>12</sup> Gabo according to Read & Martin (1957), p. 151, p.167–170.

<sup>13</sup> Moore according to Philip James: *Henry Moore on Sculpture*, London 1966, p. 118.

<sup>14</sup> Wassily Kandinsky: *Punkt och linje, till yta*, Varberg 1995, p. 41.

<sup>15</sup> Rudolf Arnheim: *Art and Visual Perception. A Psychology of the Creative Eye*, London 1974, p. 423.

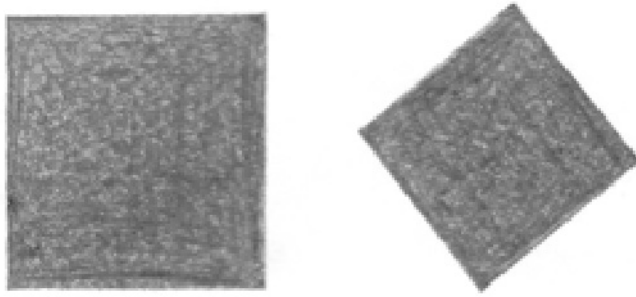


Fig. 1

The horizontal position indicates an object at rest, while the diagonal introduces a quality of movement. Therefore it is not surprising that both the baroque and modernism were interested in creating depth and movement in imagery by introducing diagonals. Theo van Doesburg in a polemic with Piet Mondrian argued that the new era was best expressed through the diagonal. Solely through this could the expression of movement be intensified.

In order to create dynamics of forms it is required that the artist imagines every object or part of an object as a happening rather than as static matter. Accordingly, the artist should not regard the relationships between objects as geometrical configurations but rather as a mutual interaction. Dynamic rhythm can thus be understood in terms of forces acting between poles.

Inspired by the spirit of his time Gabo sought a new means of forming sculpture. He was strongly influenced by his era's interest in movement and technological development; a technological development that encompassed and fostered human mobility. This was an era when there was great interest in cars, ships and not the least aircraft. Things we now take for granted had an almost spiritual character for people in the early twentieth century. Speed provided salvation, and people were also inspired by encompassing theories such as Einstein's theory on space and time. According to this theory, matter is seen as a mobile condition instead of being static as was previously conceived. In order to describe this feeling of movement, motion and transformation, Gabo (like other contemporary artists such as Malevich) chose the expression 'kinetic rhythm,' motion rhythm (from the Greek 'kinein').<sup>16</sup>

Both the word 'dynamic' and the word 'kinetic' are used in physics. 'Kinematic' describes how a movement develops along a line, in a circle etc. However, no study has been made concerning the origin or the cause of the movement. In classical mechanics, which is divided into statics and dynamics, the effect of forces on objects is taken into consideration, and 'kinetic energy' is used as a term for calculating of motion energy. 'Kinetic rhythm' is a concept that includes the mobility of the subject and the experience of its own mobility in relation to the object.

Gabo argued that he incorporated kinetic rhythms in the object, which is one aspect of the dynamic rhythm. Inspired by Cubism's continually shifting angles of

<sup>16</sup> Lena Hopsch: *Rytmens estetik*, Göteborg 2002, p. 68.

observation, Gabo wanted to get the observer to be in continual movement around the object. The sculptor has described how he struggled in his work to incorporate kinetic rhythm and time as important components. His sculptures strive toward movement and in this manner encourage the observer to move around them. They do this in the same way as Van Doesburg's earlier functionalist architectural models, which one could only experience as a whole by going round them.

By moving around in space in different ways, we are able to strengthen our bodily awareness, for example, in gymnastics and dancing. Body awareness ('kinesthesia' 'proprioception') helps us to orient ourselves in the room without the influence of vision. This is a faculty necessary for every movement we make irrespective of if we cycle, dance or walk. When the observer moves all the psychophysical directions of the body are activated, up/down, right/left and in the middle.

I have chosen to use the term kinetic rhythm when I refer to the observer's personal experience of movement in interaction with the sculpture. With the aid of this term we can more concisely describe the experience of the sculpture as being one in time. The observer's movement in time reinforces what happens in the sculpture. The dynamic rhythms of the sculpture act in interaction with the personal movement rhythms of the observer.

In the following section I analyse Gabo's sculpture *Linear Construction in Space no. 2* (1950) as this is a clear example of a modernist sculpture where the construction is the bearer of the sculptural expression. This is also one of Gabo's most loved sculptures and it was produced in no less than twentyfive examples! (Fig. 2)

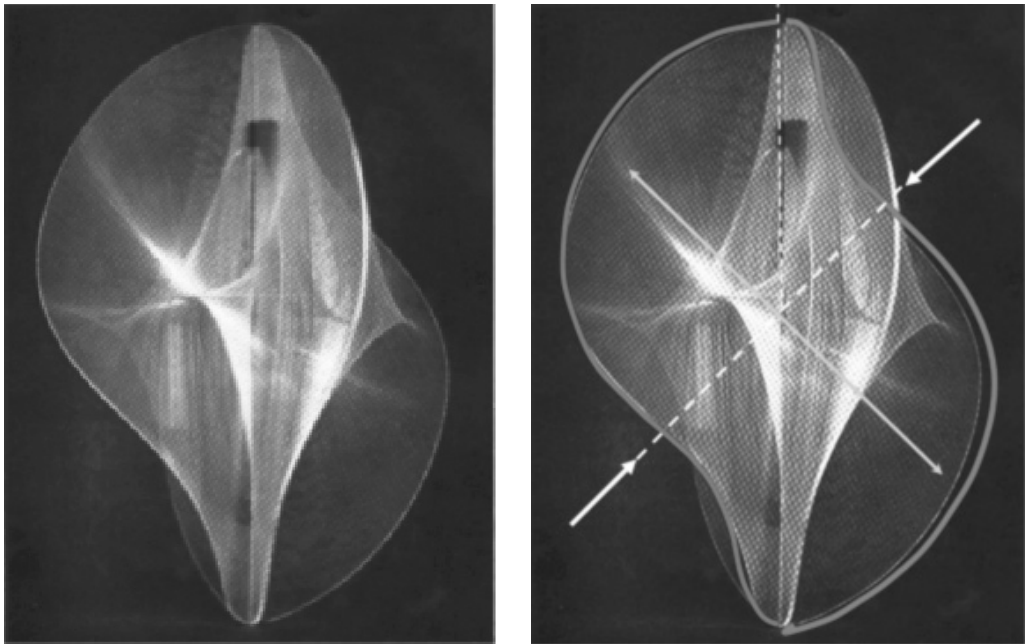


Fig. 2 and 3. Naum Gabo, *Linear Construction in Space no. 2* (1950)

In this sculpture Gabo works by putting together two counterplaced transparent surfaces<sup>17</sup> which together create a negative volume of matter. He made use of this way of working as early as 1916 in *A study of a woman's head*. In both these works space as sculptural material is the main theme. According to Gabo, in order to express space one has to have a spherical form; therefore the outer contour of the sculpture consists of a curved line.

The outer contour line of the sculpture can be read as a sequence rhythm where contrasting concave and convex lines are repeated in reverse. The sculptor allows the outer contour curve to expand and increase its volume, only to contract inwards in the next stage. The curve speeds up and slows down going from active to passive. In this manner an asymmetrical balance comparable with the classical sculptural figure 'contra-posto' with its alternation of active and passive sequences is created (fig. 3).

Dynamic rhythms are generated through inner tensions within the form. The surrounding space appears to compact the mass of the sculpture and in the same way the sculptural space appears to expand outwards into the surrounding room. We can make use of the archaic Greek meaning of rhythm as 'pregnant, varying, form'; rhythm is maintained through inner tensions between opposites that balance each other out.

In their multi-disciplinary experiments during the early 1900s artists were occupied with incorporating time into the artistic experience. In order to point out the sculptural possibilities of incorporating time in the sculptural experience, Gabo spoke of kinetic rhythms generated by activating the personal body movements of the observer in relationship to the sculpture. In addition, the sculptor himself moves around during the task of developing and discovering the form of the sculpture.

Apart from the two counter-placed surfaces, the sculpture in question is constructed of transparent nylon threads, which provide body and volume to the space between the forms. These threads create a vibrating life at the same time as they build up recurring octagonal shaped cavities within the sculpture. The octagonal form coincides with the design and inherent movement of the sculpture. The transitions between the surfaces in the sculpture generate a twisting element inside this. Through our own physical movement we can enhance the experience of this twisting element within the sculpture (The inner movement of the sculpture is seen in relation to the primary directions in space; fig. 4).

Early in his career Gabo worked on the sculpture *Kinetic construction, (Standing Wave, 1920)* a pole that was set in swinging motion in order to create an imaginary form in space. However, he was not able to find motors that were sufficiently small so as not to take the upper hand and therefore he abandoned these attempts at

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<sup>17</sup> The sculpture is made of perspex, a transparent acrylic material and threads of nylon. This version is about one metre in height.

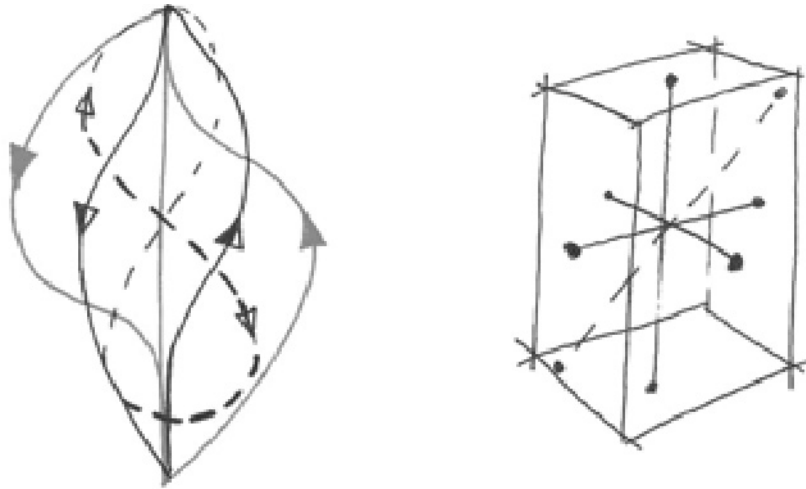


Fig. 4.

motorized forms. The concept of the twisting and vibrating movements of the standing balance can however still be identified in *Linear construction in space no. 2*. This sculpture appears to be drawn with the aid of pure space, as if it were a drawing in the air. It provides us with a feeling of both a universe in perpetual movement and a dancing Shiva character. No matter what we put into the philosophical dimensions of this sculpture, it appears to be summarised by an internal octagonal figure that provides the work with continual dynamic movement. A glimpse from a distance is not sufficient to experience this sculpture; it invites us to observe it in movement (space) and in time.

Poetry – from Temporality to Spatiality (by Eva Lilja)

The poem “Sweet and various the wood lark” completes the famous collection by Lawrence Ferlinghetti of 1958, *A Coney Island of the Mind*. This poem has a meta-poetic theme discussing the ontological status of language – a subject which was very common at that time.

# 13

sweet and various the woodlark  
who sings at the unbought gate  
and yet how many  
wild beasts  
how many mad  
in the civil thickets  
Hölderlin  
in his stone tower  
or in that kind carpenter's house  
at Tübingen  
or then Rimbaud  
his 'nightmare and logic'  
a sophism of madness  
But we have our own more recent  
who also fatally assumed  
that some direct connection  
does exist between  
language and reality  
word and world  
which is a laugh  
if you ask me  
I too have drunk and seen  
the spider



Looking at the rhythmic of this poem, we see that it uses all three rhythmical principles, serial and sequential rhythm alternate in the phrases, and dynamic rhythm dominates its printed shape. There are no stanzas to be seen, but nonetheless four line groups may be distinguished by help of extra blanks, which divide the text like this:

- Line group: 1. v 1–6  
2. v 7–13  
3. v 14–19  
4. v 20–23

Line group 1–6 mentions the wood lark to be the first among singers putting it in contrast to the “wild beasts.”

The next group of lines, 7–13, mentions two of the beasts, Hölderlin and Rimbaud, perhaps the most elevated of all poets. Here they are declared beasts because they are said to be mad. After line 13 comes the volta or the break of the poem, which now leaves nature as well as history behind and prepares for the conclusion.

The third group, 14–19, describes the most commonly held theory of language, the idea that there is a simple relation between language and the visible world, the mirror theory.

The last line group, 20–23, brings the problem to a conclusion by rejecting this relationship in a rude way, pinpointing that you may see whatever – if you are intoxicated (or mad?) enough.

First we will investigate the audible rhythm of the phrases. Hereby we will follow the notation beside/below. The big circle stands for prominence and the small one for an offbeat. The oval circle notates something in between, a stress that is (for some reason) weakened.

Below two tables can be seen. The first one indicates if the line represents serial or sequential rhythm, the second one designates rhythmical figures, here called by their antique names.

The notation shows the rhythm of speech. You might read the rhythm closer to an eventual tactus, but this is not done here (Lilja, p. 545).

1.	O o O oo / o OO	serial rhythm	trochees
2.	o O / oo OOO	2 segments	
3.	oO / OOo	2 segments	bacchius
4.	OO	segmental rhythm	spondee
5.	O oo O	segmental rhythm	choriamb
6.	oo Oo Oo	serial	trochees
<hr/>			
7.	O oo	segmental	dactylus
8.	oo OOO	segmental	bacchius
9.	O oo O / O oo O	2 segments	choriambs
10.	o O oo	segmental	dactylus
11.	oO oO	serial	2 iambs
12.	o OO o Oo	serial	adonius
13.	o O oo O o	serial	adonius
<hr/>			
14.	o O oo O / OO o	2 segments	choriamb, bacchius
15.	o O o O ooo O	serial	iambs
16.	o OO oo O o	segmental	spondee, adonius
17.	O o O o O	serial	trochees
18.	O ooo O oo	serial	trochees
19.	O o O	serial	creticus
<hr/>			
20.	O oo O	segmental	choriamb
21.	oo OO	segmental	ionicus
22.	oO oO / oO	serial	iambs
23.	oO o	serial	iambs

The first line is said to have a serial rhythm – that is the even pulse or tactus in music and in the measured poetry of the pre-modern period. The notation here follows the recited rhythm, but it is easy to make a different reading, which goes

O o O o O o O o

Those four trochees determine the pronunciation of the line. The spoken rhythm of recitation is playing with the tactus beneath.

Line 2 has a different shape. It ends up with the heavy expression “unbought gate” which definitely resists a continuation of the falling meter of the first line. The offbeats, ‘o,’ ‘oo,’ in the beginning of the line cannot balance the concluding threes

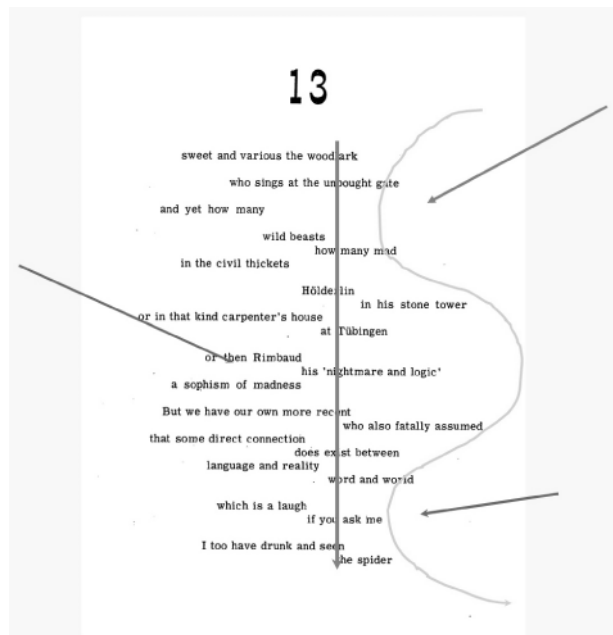
heavy syllables. The rhythm of the line is elaborated and expressive, but it follows another rhythmical principle than the pulse of the first line. Line 2 makes a distinct rhythmical sequence relying on the pauses – or the white spaces – which surround it. The line breaks isolate the sequence and mark it out, and you may regard line 3 to 5 in the same way – as a row of rhythmical segments. Especially, a device like the spondee OO in line 3 and 4 signalises sequential rhythm by definitely stopping the possibility of a beat.

So, approximately half of the lines in the poem are in serial rhythm, half in sequential rhythm. You may notice that the sequential free verse rhythm dominates the first half of the poem, and that serial rhythm becomes more and more dominant in the second half.

If we look at the table below to the far right, we can notice some expressive figures, here labelled by their antique names. The characteristic spondee OO returns in lines 8, 14, 16 and 21. The choriamb O oo O is the basic metron of antique poetry. Here it turns up in lines 5, 9, 14 and 20. As part of the adonius O oo O it occurs still more often. The choriamb works well in both serial and sequential phrases.

The style of the poem changes from the high brow language of cultural tradition in the first half to ordinary speech in the second half. Additionally, the tempo changes between different parts of the poem. The second line group – that which mentions Hölderlin and Rimbaud – starts in a slow tempo put into sequential rhythm. The comments on Hölderlin include one slow spondee in line 8, and the next line – number 9 – is divided into two phrases, though rather short ones. When talking about Rimbaud, the rhythm, which becomes more and more quick, changes to the serial principle, reaching a full stop after line 13. The very last line group follows the same curve. After the slow expressive ionicus oo O O of line 21, the final two lines are written in regular iambic pentameter, which anchors the poem in its rash final conclusion.

So far, we have shown that the audible temporal phrases play with two rhythmical principles, serial and sequential rhythm. But dynamic rhythm is also at work in this poem, especially in its print picture. Once more, let us take a look:



This poem is spread over the paper more loosely than was common in the year of 1958. Both margins are loosely waving in a way that differs very much from metered stanzas or from early free verse with its typical shape – a straight left margin and a slightly wavering right margin.

The blanks between lines differ regarding extension. Lines 3–11 make a loftier impression than the rest of the text, and the line group 12–19 is tighter and more concentrated. This latter part elaborates language theory in an informal spoken language, and here the print picture goes rather dark.

The picture differs also as regards broadness. It is rather slim in the beginning, but especially the tight part of the third line group gets obviously thicker. When it comes to iconicity, the poem might be compared with a fat-bellied fellow standing – not too steadily – on his right foot. The print picture is unsteady in at least two ways. It has two swings to the right and one to the left, as it is to be seen in the diagram. One dynamic force hits the picture up to the right, another in the middle of the left. Is he going to tumble? More than that, the lead-line does not fall in the middle of the printed picture, but a bit more to the right, where the print falls tighter and blacker. The lack of balance looks dangerous. This fellow deviates from his point of balance, indeed.

The lead-line starts in the lovely woodlark and ends in the spider down to the right (thereby passing through Hölderlin). In that way it catches an opposition in the poem between the singing soul up in the air of spring and the delirious beast in his dark hole. From a meta-perspective the lead-line connects or points out the distance between the innocent happy singer of nature and the beast poet entangled in his own nightmares. This opposition produces another icon with the lark up there and the spider very much down there. However, the unpleasant spider also pictures a small foot for the poem to stand on.

In one way the poem's print picture resembles an intoxicated man, but it might just as well be seen as a lark rising from the ground on fluttering wings. If you choose the latter picture, the innocent singer will win over darkness. If you choose the drunkard, the poem will plead for a poetics of miserable mental spaces.

It is time to conclude this reading of poetic rhythm in three dimensions. There is an opposition between the first and the second half of the poem. In the beginning, a swinging loftiness dominates with elaborated sequences in a solemn poetical language. After the volta, a serial rhythm dominates and the style gets informal not to say careless, and the black print thickens on the page.

Moreover, there is a rush in tempo from Hölderlin to Rimbaud, the former still resting in antique figures and the latter dressed in the mechanic pulse of madness. The same rush returns in the very end of the poem where “language and reality / word and world” collapse into the hole of the spider. The two final lines form a regular iambic pentameter, the most traditional metre of them all. This gives an extra resolute weight to the final statement.

Here is an opposition between what is very much up – the wood lark – and very much down – the spider. Remember, more is up, and so is goodness and happiness, while down stands for bad things.<sup>18</sup> God is in heaven and hell is downwards. But the opposition up – down might just as well be seen as a connection, especially as the lead-line catches Hölderlin on its way up or down. What is then connected?

The poem elaborates two or three ideas about poetic language. First, the mirror theory – that language shows reality – is rejected in the same clause where it is mentioned. Secondly, that language expresses the inner world of a person is said to be true, but it is not appreciated – a somewhat surprising opinion to come from a poet. The third idea has its emblem in the singing lark. Its fluttering wings up in the air win the theoretical discussion, but, in spite of this, the delirious drunkard will remain in the poem.

## Conclusion

These two analyses show that there are temporal qualities in sculpture and spatial qualities in poetry. The print picture of the Ferlinghetti poem has mass (text) as well as space (the white page), both of which interact with the temporal audible qualities. In the sculpture by Gabo, the kinetic rhythm catches the play between dynamic and sequential rhythm in a temporal process. The patterning process of rhythmical apprehension changes the experience of time as well as space.

Every form has a point of balance where it rests. This is seen in the Gabo sculpture and also in the Ferlinghetti poem – in both cases this point of balance has both spatial and temporal dimensions. Although, the sequences within the gestalt are certainly not in rest but in conflict. In the Gabo sculpture we have an expansion and contraction of space. In the Ferlinghetti poem the spider fights the lark, the black print struggles with the silent white paper and a combat takes place between tactus and the full stop spondee. All these movements create tensions, deviations and motions within the gestalt. ‘Rhythm’ might be said to signify this happy contrast between balance and motion, rest and conflict in works of art.

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<sup>18</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson: *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago; London 1980, p. 15.

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## Interview

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# The Body Expressed in Word and Image: An Attempt at Defining Cora Sandel's Aesthetics<sup>1</sup>

Sarah J. Paulson

In a letter to Cora Sandel's friend and biographer Odd Solumsmoen (9 July 1956) the Norwegian musician and composer Pauline Hall (1890–1969) writes the following of her friend:

Her range of interests is very large indeed – she embraces theater, ballet, and, of course, painting with instinct and insight [...] and thus she concentrates on the posture of human beings, their physical bearing and their movements in her descriptions, and this is probably linked to her appreciation of dance and of human character.<sup>2</sup>

Descriptions of posture and bearing, the physiology and movements of the body are indeed frequently used to characterize and illuminate the figures that populate Cora Sandel's fictional universe. But Pauline Hall's insight into the connection between Cora Sandel's interest in the human body and her fascination with multiple art forms is at least as interesting as the observation of the prominent place of the body in her authorship.

The influence of the graphic arts on Sandel's mode of expression is not surprising considering that Sara Fabricius, the woman behind the pseudonym Cora Sandel, "loved to paint,"<sup>3</sup> worked seriously at painting for twenty years and had Paul Cézanne as her major role model.<sup>4</sup> Among the approximately forty extant works by

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a reworking of a presentation made at the conference "Bodies – Arts – Crossroads. The Body and Intermediality" at Växjö University in Växjö, Sweden, 27–30 October 2005. Special thanks to Frankie Shackelford, Augsburg College, Minneapolis, MN., for translating the article, as well as the quoted excerpts from the short story "Lola," from Norwegian and to Frankie B. Shackelford and Ann-Catrine Eriksson, Umeå universitet, for their comments.

<sup>2</sup> "Hennes interessefelt er jo meget stort, teatret, balletten og naturligvis malerkunsten omfatter hun med instinkt og innsikt ... så fester hun seg i sine skildringer mye ved menneskenes holdning, deres føring av kroppen, bevegelsene, og det henger vel sammen med sansen for dans og for karakteren hos menneskene." Quoted in Janneken Øverland: *Cora Sandel. En biografi*, Oslo 1995, p. 301.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Odd Solumsmoen, Håndskriftsamlingen, Nasjonalbibliotek, Oslo, 18 August 1956.

<sup>4</sup> Sara Fabricius studied with Harriet Backer in Kristiania and with painters such as Christian Krohg, Lucien Simon and André Lhôte during the years she lived in Paris, see Øverland 1995, p. 120–216. In a letter to Odd Solumsmoen (10 October 1956) she writes that she signed up to exhibit her work at "Les Indépendants" one time, but that she changed her mind at the last minute. She also writes that she worked at painting "av all makt, tvers gjennom alt" (with all her might, throughout everything). "Cézanne var for mange av oss det fjerne ideal, noe uopnåelig (Cézanne was for many of us a

Sara Fabricius,<sup>5</sup> there are twelve portraits that shed light on Cora Sandel's literary depiction of the body and that also indicate why representations of the body and its movements are so central in her texts. Researchers like Hans Lund have used the perspective of intermediality to show that both pictorial structures and qualities characterize Cora Sandel's authorship<sup>6</sup> and that it fruitfully can be understood in the classical *ut pictura poesis*-tradition of Horace.<sup>7</sup> While this insight is a prerequisite for my perspective, my intention here is to shed light on Cora Sandel's aesthetic mode of expression by showing how Sara Fabricius' visual representations of the body illustrate 1) how the world (the body) takes on meaning and form through (physical) apprehension of forms, colors, lines and physiognomy, 2) how (representations of) the body can be understood as evidence of a personal style, an individual mode of being in the world, and 3) how artistic expression reveals (the understanding of) a situated, perceiving, embodied gaze. In other words, the portraits show how the (represented) body becomes visible to the viewer, how the body (and the world in general) acquires meaning and form through visual perception. An understanding of the body as the defining element in all experience of the world can thus be said to be a primary constituent of Cora Sandel's aesthetics. Neither the *ut pictura poesis*-tradition as such, nor the pictorial aspects of Cora Sandel's work are therefore of primary concern here. Instead, the following "conversation" or "dialog" between image and text is an attempt to shed light on the underlying attitudes toward perception that precipitate the interart discourse in Cora Sandel's aesthetics.

A phenomenological understanding of the body as fundamentally situated forms the basis for my perspective. The body is what the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) calls "a situation." Merleau-Ponty says that the body "inhabits" the world, by which he means that the body is both perceiving and perceived, both seeing and seen. In other words, the body is not just a concrete "thing" which *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary* defines as "the physical

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distant ideal, something unreachable)," Cora Sandel says in an interview in *Arbeidetbladet* in 1972, quoted in Hans Lund: *Texten som tavla. Studier i litterär bildtransformation*, Lund 1982, p. 125. The English translation of Lund's book, *Text as Picture. Studies in the Literary Transformations of Pictures*, Lewiston; New York 1992, does not include his discussion of Cora Sandel's novels about Alberte Selmer. This translation from the original *Texten som tavla* is therefore Frankie B. Shackelford's.

<sup>5</sup> Janneken Øverland refers to the "approximately 30 pictures" by Sara Fabricius that exist, Øverland 1995, p. 211. Since Øverland's biography was published, several more paintings have been documented by art historian Anne Aaserud. Some of these are included in Anne Aaserud: *Kvinnelige pionerer i nord*, Tromsø 1997, p. 77–78.

<sup>6</sup> Lund uses the concept "iconic projections" to designate techniques that attest to an aesthetic distancing from the object of the gaze. An "iconic projection" is, in Lund's definition, "the act of decoding a framed field of vision in the exterior concrete world of objects as if it were a picture" and can also be understood as "texts interpreting fields of vision in the exterior reality of the fiction as structured pictures," Hans Lund 1992, p. 73; 85.

<sup>7</sup> See also Kristin Bliksrud: "Ut pictura poesis. Cora Sandel og billedkunsten" in *Samtiden*, No. 3, 1992 (p. 29–36).



structure of man or an animal not including the head, limbs, and tail; trunk.” Rather, Merleau-Ponty states that “[t]o be a body, is to be tied to a certain world, [...] our body is not primarily *in* space, it is of it.”<sup>8</sup> For Merleau-Ponty the body with its sense perceptions is thus neither pure physiology nor sheer psychology, but existence.<sup>9</sup> In this view it is our experiences – our physical and perceptual confrontation with the world – that give the world meaning. Put differently, the body and its perceptions of time and space are the basis for all of our consciousness and knowledge of the world. In the following, I use “body” both in reference to the physical human body as used in the colloquial sense, including head and limbs, and in the phenomenological sense of “situation” or “existence.” The context clarifies the usage in each instance.

### Visual Perception and Representation of the Body: Sara Fabricius’ Portraits

The existing twelve portraits by Sara Fabricius include three portraits of girls, five of women, two self-portraits and two portraits of the Swedish sculptor Anders Jönsson, to whom Sara Fabricius was married from 1913–1927. In none of the works do we see the entire body of the model; most focus on the head and face. As the German art historian Rudolf Preimesberger has indicated, the face is a fundamental and determining feature of portraiture because it can be understood as *pars pro toto* for the human being and because it is our most important means of communication.<sup>10</sup> Thus, portraits without faces do not exist.

Sara Fabricius’ portrait of the French-Breton woman Marie-Catherine emphasizes precisely the face (fig. 1).<sup>11</sup> Marie-Catherine served as Sara’s maid and nanny from 1917–1919<sup>12</sup> and was presumably a source of inspiration for the short stories “Kunsten å myrde” (The Art of Murder) and “Flukten til Amerika” (Escape to America) in the collection *Mange takk, doktor* (1935; Thank you, Doctor) in which the invaluable housekeeper is a recurrent motif.<sup>13</sup> Here Sara Fabricius depicts her in her characteristic white kerchief, the “coif” or “coëff-bléou” in Brittany (Øverland

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<sup>8</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty: *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, London 1962 (1945), p. 171.

<sup>9</sup> Mikkel B. Tin: ”Etterord” in Maurice Merleau-Ponty: *Øyet og ånden*, Oslo 2000 (p. 85–126), p. 120.

<sup>10</sup> Rudolf Preimesberger: “Einleitung” in Rudolf Preimesberger et al. (eds.): *Porträt*, Berlin 1999 (p. 13–64), p. 15.

<sup>11</sup> Anne Aaserud does not reproduce the painting in the catalog of Sara Fabricius’ work exhibited at Nordnorsk kunstmuseum in Tromsø in 1997, but documents it as follows: “*Marie-Catherine, Redon* (est. 1918). Oil on canvas, 55 x 46 cm., unsigned. Privately held, Stockholm,” Aaserud, p. 76. Reproduced here with permission of the owner. The picture is reproduced in color in Øverland 1995, p. 192 [7].

<sup>12</sup> Øverland 1995, p. 223–227; Aaserud, p. 76.

<sup>13</sup> Marie-Catherine is also described under her actual name in the short story “Enkle opptegnelser” (Simple sketches) in Cora Sandel: *Samlede verker, Vol. V*, Oslo 1951 (1935), p. 24–42. She also figures under her own name in the short story “Dag i november” (A Day in November) in Cora Sandel: *Barnet som elsker veier*, collected by Steinar Gimnes, Oslo 1973, p. 175–185.

1995, p. 217). Art historian Anne Aaserud estimates that the portrait was painted around 1918 and describes it as follows:

This is a frontal portrait of [Marie-Catherine]. The features are a bit coarse, but the firm chinline and the eyes that look frankly at the viewer attest to a courageous and industrious woman. She is wearing a simple dress of dark blue-violet and the white, starched kerchief that was usual in Brittany at the time.<sup>14</sup>

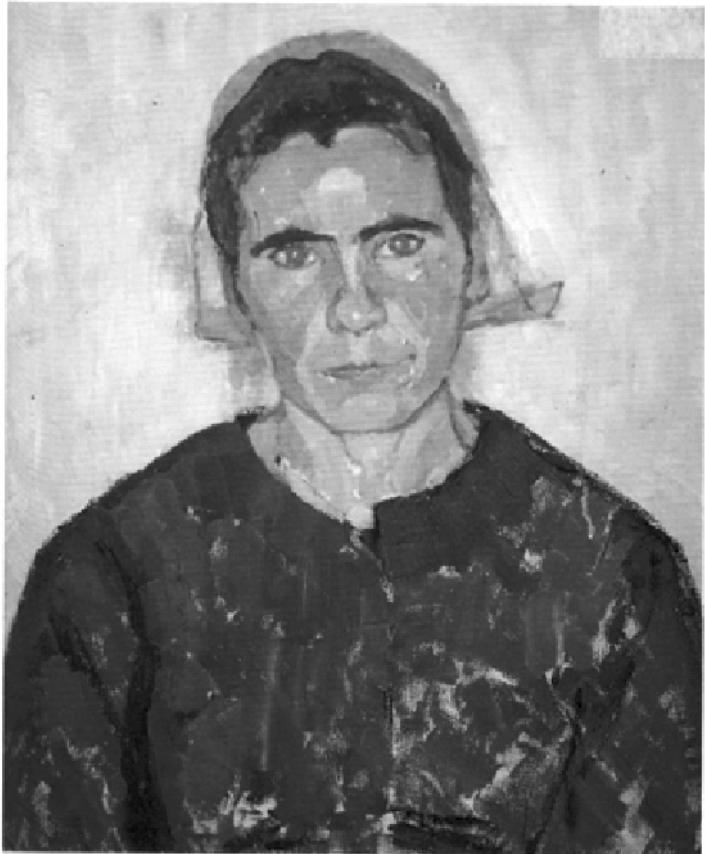


Fig. 1. Sara Fabricius,  
*Portrait of Marie-Catherine*,  
Redon (1918)

In the portrait of Marie-Catherine, Sara Fabricius has chosen to approach her model up close, and the figure of the woman thus fills up most of the canvas. This full exploitation of the canvas is characteristic of Sara Fabricius' portraits and can be considered part of her attempt to represent the individual presence demanded by the portrait genre. The fact that the figure confronts the viewer directly with

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<sup>14</sup> “[Marie-Catherine] er portrettert en face. Trekkene er litt grove, men den faste hakelinjen og øynene som ser uredde mot betrakteren, vitner om en modig og arbeidsom kvinne. Hun er iført en enkel blåfiolett kjole og det hvite, stivede hodetørkleet som den gang var vanlig i Bretagne,” Aaserud 1997, p. 76.

her gaze may have the same function, but frontality has also been used to create authority and dignity since ancient times. This technique, which characterizes most of Sara Fabricius' portraits, helps to emphasize the figure's status as subject. Art historian Anne Wichstrøm points out that "in general, the frontal portrait underscores the interaction between artist and model: the person represented is the one who communicates with the artist – viewer."<sup>15</sup> Thus, with her proximity and her presence, her distinct chin and her direct gaze, Marie-Catherine emerges as a strong and independent woman. The light blue-gray tone of her eyes, which is highlighted by the background, enhances this impression as the color can be associated with steel and strength. At the same time, the blue can imply a pleasant, sympathetic personality, since blue traditionally symbolizes such characteristics as steadfastness, loyalty, magnanimity, wisdom and prudence.<sup>16</sup>

The background and the dark color of the dress create, each in its own way, neutral fields that "frame" the figure's face and neck, while the dark eyebrows and the white areas beneath the eyes direct our attention toward the eyes and forehead. The bright "half moon" on the forehead can be said to function as a third "eye," and it forms, along with the white areas beneath the eyes, a triangular field that helps to draw the viewer's gaze to the upper half of the face. As an "eye," the "half moon" contributes in creating the impression of Marie-Catherine as "seeing"; its placement in the forehead can also indicate knowledge, insight, and prudence.<sup>17</sup>

Sara Fabricius' representation of Marie-Catherine shows how the physiognomy of the body can be read as a sign of Marie-Catherine's individual mode of being in the world, but the portrait also illustrates that the form of expression is the result of the artist's perceiving gaze. The portrait can be said to take the gaze as its central theme. For the unpainted areas that break up the heavy, dark blue-violet of the dress, the broken contours and the revised coloration<sup>18</sup> all emphasize the way in which the figure becomes visible to the artist, the way colors and lines and brush strokes create meaning for her – and consequently for the viewer. Janneken Øverland touches

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<sup>15</sup> "Det frontale portrettet fremhever i alminnelighet interaksjonen mellom kunstner og modell: den representerte er den som meddeler seg til kunstneren – betrakteren," Anne Wichstrøm: "Rom, kropp, blikk. Kvinneportrettet i moderniteten" in Anne Wichstrøm and Nils Messel (eds.): *Portrettet i Norge*, Oslo 2004 (p. 132–151), p. 141.

<sup>16</sup> See J.C. Cooper: *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols*, London, 1978, p. 40 and Hans Biedermann: *Symbolleksikon*, Oslo 1992, p. 109. First published in German as *Knaurs Lexikon der Symbole*, München 1989.

<sup>17</sup> The short story "Enkle opptegnelser" in *Mange takk, doktor* (1935) makes a point of Marie-Catherine's ability to read and write in an environment where most people were illiterate. That the real Marie-Catherine could read and write is also mentioned specifically by Øverland 1995, p. 218, so it seems that her literacy can be understood as a distinguishing characteristic that separates Marie-Catherine from her surrounding environment.

<sup>18</sup> Alison Aune-Hinkel underscores Sara Fabricius' tendency to revise: "Reworked images abound in her paintings; their forms and colorations suggest multiple revisions," Alison Aune-Hinkel: *The Art of Cora Sandel: A Norwegian Painter and Writer*, Unpublished Ph.D.-thesis, Ohio University, 2000, p.65.

on this when she writes that “the nuances in the colors create the pictures, not the drawing behind them.”<sup>19</sup> In keeping with Merleau-Ponty’s conception of painting, the portrait can be said to “depict matter as it takes on form” and thereby to elicit “the experience of seeing as a being in the world.”<sup>20</sup>



Fig. 2. Sara Fabricius,  
*Portrait of Vavi (Svanhild)*  
Schlyter Johnsson (1914)

The portrait of Sara Fabricius’ friend Vavi (Svanhild) Schlyter Johnsson (fig. 2), who was a fiber artist, also illustrates how the body can be understood as sign and how Sara Fabricius’ perception or impression of the world determines her form of expression.<sup>21</sup> Anne Aaserud estimates that the portrait was painted in 1914 and

<sup>19</sup> “...det er fargenes valører som skaper bildene, ikke tegningen bak,” Janneken Øverland: “Cora Sandel og Paris – møtet med det moderne” in Irene Iversen and Anne Birgitte Rønning (eds.): *Modernismens kjønn*, Oslo 1996 (p.112–124), p.113.

<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Gilmore: “Between Philosophy and Art” in Taylor Carman and Mark B.N. Hansen (eds.): *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, Cambridge 2005, (p. 291–317), p. 299; p. 298.

<sup>21</sup> Anne Aaserud documents the portrait as follows: “*Fiber Artist Vavi (Svanhild) Schlyter Johnsson*, (est. 1914). Oil on canvas, 97 x 68 cm., unsigned. Privately held, Stockholm,” Aaserud 1997, p. 71. Reproduced here with permission of the owner. Reproduced in color in both Øverland (1995, p. 192 [1]) and Aaserud (1997, p. 71) where the same picture is used both places. Unfortunately, the

points out that the blue chair that Vavi is sitting on, is the same one that is depicted in one of Sara Fabricius' still-life paintings.<sup>22</sup> Aaserud continues: "Sara has chosen to turn her slightly to the right, such that the blue chair back contrasts with the light wall and the red-striped cotton dress with the white, open collar."<sup>23</sup> By turning the figure to the right to reveal the chair's back, Sara Fabricius makes the viewer acutely aware of the figure's sitting position. In other words, this technique creates the impression that the female figure is sitting on the edge of the chair in a somewhat uncomfortable position instead of sitting solidly in the middle of the seat.

The figure is "lengthened and simplified" which according to Alison Aune-Hinkel can indicate the influence of Amedeo Modigliani. In addition, Aune-Hinkel points out that the figure "is stylized into a flattened but textually active composition of dappled blue, ochre, pink and violet tones" and claims – without elaboration or explanation – that the portrait "discloses an expressive depth of character and embodies a personal tribute" (Aune-Hinkel, p. 82). Such a comment is justified to some degree as a closer analysis of the portrait shows. The coloration of the upper half of the dress is generally lighter than that of the bottom half and the colors are especially illuminated across the figure's breast and abdomen. The light character of the colors, the torso's proportions in relation to the head, and the contrast in color between the arms and the dress all direct the viewer's gaze and attention toward this area, which roughly fills up the middle two-thirds of the canvas. In this way, the abdomen, embraced by the somewhat extended arms and shaped into a lap, is emphasized as a sign. The unfinished face, with eyes that are merely suggested, also contributes to the apprehension of the lap and arms as the most meaningful signs in the picture.

In my opinion, this focus on the lap, which stops with the suggestion of knees beneath the dress in the lower half of the picture and which is dependent on the figure's sitting position, must surely have a function. But how should the viewer understand this? Is the emphasis on the lap surrounded by embracing arms supposed to create an impression of the portrait's subject Vavi as nurturing? Is this why Aune-Hinkel reads depth of character and the embodiment of a personal tribute into the portrait? The rounding of the shoulders and the head's slightly downward tilt can, on the one hand, give the impression of an introverted stance. On the other hand, the position can help to strengthen the impression of a keen interest in the person whom the figure is facing: indeed, the figure can be seen to be leaning slightly forward

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colors in the picture do not correspond with the original, where they are less subdued and where the blue tones are less prominent. The colors in the printed reproduction are more subdued than in the original where the colors "glow" in a totally different way.

<sup>22</sup> Sara Fabricius' paintings do not have titles, but the still-life in question is referred to by Aaserud 1997, p. 68–69 as "*Stilleben på stol*" (Still-life on Chair).

<sup>23</sup> "Sara har valgt å dreie henne noe mot høyre, slik at den blå stolryggen kontrasterer den lyse veggen og den rødstripete bomullskjolen med hvit, løs krage," Aaserud, p. 71.

towards the viewer, attentive to him or her. And although the eyes are unfinished, the small, blue round-ings suggest that the figure is looking directly at the viewer. At the same time, the figure – with folded hands resting in her lap – emanates a calm and softness that is reinforced by the muted colors and the consistently light touch in the use of paint and in the brush strokes.

The emphasis placed on certain individual body parts as opposed to others reveals how Sara Fabricius' impression of her friend takes on consequences for her visual representation of Vavi's body. Likewise, Sara Fabricius' placement of the head of the figure up at the upper edge of the canvas is a technique that indicates her own manner of being in the world. We have seen this exploitation of the canvas in the representation of Marie-Catherine and, indeed, the figures pervasively dominate the canvas in Sara Fabricius' portraits.<sup>24</sup> Finally, Sara Fabricius' sense perception is indicated by the patches of color and brush strokes that create focal points of interest in the background without disturbing the impression of the woman being portrayed. This technique is predominant in Sara Fabricius' paintings. Even when the visibility of individual brush strokes is less evident, as in the portrait of Marie-Catherine, patches of color and brush strokes form the background.

Thus, Sara Fabricius' perspective can be understood as an essential trait in these women. Indeed, according to Merleau-Ponty, it is on account of the perspective that the perceived object possesses in itself a hidden and inexhaustible richness, which constitutes a "thing";<sup>25</sup> an image does not show "the appearance of things", but it "registers an attitude, a not exclusively visual point of view, toward the world" (Gilmore, p. 301). Merleau-Ponty claims therefore that "[a]rt is not imitation, nor is it something manufactured according to the wishes of instinct or good taste. It is a process of expressing."<sup>26</sup> In this way, then, "[a]n artist's imagery presents a way of seeing that reflects the artist's embeddedness in the world, but in so doing it furnishes neither a visual likeness of the world nor an external presentation of some internal mental imagery" (Gilmore, p. 301). So, although a given painting may realistically represent something in the world and express an attitude or point of view toward its subject, for Merleau-Ponty, the representative capacity of the image is derived from its registering an attitude and orientation toward the world (Gilmore, p. 301–302).

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<sup>24</sup> Sara Fabricius' use of space emphasizes the subject of the portrait. The body appears mainly flat, but a slight three-dimensionality is suggested by the contours of the knees and buttocks beneath the dress and by the figure being turned a bit to the right so that she is sitting obliquely. In addition, there is a suggestion of a floor that angles upwards at the bottom left of the picture and we can sense the contours of the blue chair under the dress on the bottom right side of the painting. The ultramarine and lavender surface behind the figure suggests a wall.

<sup>25</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty: *The Structure of Behavior*, trans. A. Fisher, Boston 1963 [1942], p. 186. Quoted in Jonathan Gilmore: "Between Philosophy and Art" in Taylor Carman and Mark B.N. Hansen (eds.): *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, Cambridge 2005 (p. 291–317), p. 295.

<sup>26</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty: "Cezanne's Doubt" in Maurice Merleau-Ponty: *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. and intro. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus, Evanston, Ill 1964 (1948) (p. 9–25), p. 17.

In other words, “the artist’s style participates in a kind of exchange or debate with the world that already exhibits a style, a way or manner of existing” (Gilmore, p. 306).

### Towards a Definition of an Aesthetics

In her book *Vision and Difference* the art historian Griselda Pollock argues that the practice of painting can be a place for the inscription of gender differences<sup>27</sup> and she suggests that “proximity, intimacy and divided spaces” are characteristics of paintings by women that suggest “the particularity of the female spectator” (Pollock, p. 84; 85). Pollock builds on an understanding of the engendered body as difference, on an understanding of the (female) body’s special situatedness as determining her gaze and manner of expression. While Pollock’s conception of the body can be reminiscent of the phenomenological understanding of the body as “situation”, her perspective also includes the gender aspect of the body’s embeddedness in the world that Merleau-Ponty overlooks.<sup>28</sup> But since she does not take the unique variations that are present in the individual woman’s (and man’s) situatedness into account, Pollock’s perspective seems to lack nuance. Nonetheless, I consider her observations to be relevant and interesting in this context because they cause us to reflect on how and to what extent the gender aspect of the embodied gaze is meaningful in artistic expression.

Based on a study of impressionist painters such as Berthe Morisot (1841–1895) and Mary Cassatt (1844-1926), Pollock emphasizes that the female observer’s gaze, which is directed at the represented figure, is not the gaze of mastery (Pollock, p. 87). Instead, according to Pollock, the gaze is that of “equal and like,” inscribed into the painting by a particular proximity, and she points out that there is “little extraneous space to distract the viewer from the inter-subjective encounter or to reduce the figures to objectified staffage, or to make them the objects of a voyeuristic gaze” (Pollock, p. 87). In Pollock’s view, the women depicted “function as subjects of their own looking or their activity” (Pollock, p. 87).

Sara Fabricius’ portraits fit this description to a remarkable degree. Thus, Pollock’s perspective can shed light on the way Sara Fabricius’ physical situatedness, her way of being in the world, influences her perception and interpretation of reality and the way this, in turn, has consequences for her aesthetic expression. In her visual representations of the body, Sara Fabricius prioritizes closeness, physical intimacy, and the inter-subjective encounter between the viewer and the person depicted. Seen from this standpoint, her female figures appear more as *subjects* than as objects of portraiture.

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<sup>27</sup> Griselda Pollock: *Vision and Difference. Femininity, feminism and histories of art*, London 1988, p. 81.

<sup>28</sup> Here Pollock is presumably building on the insights of Simone de Beauvoir: *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. H.M. Parshley, New York 1989 (1952). See also Toril Moi: *What is a Woman? And Other Essays*, Oxford 1999.

But Sara Fabricius' portraits also show a tendency toward indistinctness and incompleteness in the representation of the body. The freedom with which she handles color and contours results in blurred boundaries, creates unclear transitions from one element to another, and ties together elements that are naturally separate – such as Vavi's brooch and dress, which are tied together by the overlapping green. The unpainted areas in the portrait of Marie-Catherine, as well as the unfinished character of the mouth, and the unfinished eyes and hands in the portrait of Vavi, undermine the impression of the human body as a physical, limited and definable entity. Visuality and gaze are elevated to key themes through the very lack of clarity, which both suggests and reveals, at the same time that it erases and conceals. The unfinished aspects of the portraits can be said to refer to that which cannot be seen, but toward which “our sensorimotor presence in the world is oriented” (Gilmore, p. 299).

The thematization of the visual in Sara Fabricius' portraits challenges the idea that boundaries and edges of things exist before our senses give them meaning and illustrates how some aspects of our experience don't lend themselves to expression. In this way, Sara Fabricius' visual representation of the body can be illuminated by Merleau-Ponty's ideas that “to *see* the world is to participate in its becoming visible” (Tin, p. 90) and that “the painter's vision is an ongoing birth.”<sup>29</sup> As Merleau-Ponty writes:

Ultimately the painting relates to nothing at all among experienced things unless it is first of all “autofigurative.” It is a spectacle of something only by being a “spectacle of nothing,” by breaking the “skin of things” to show how the things become things, how the world becomes world (Merleau-Ponty 1993, p. 141).

It has been suggested that Sara Fabricius' self-critical stance toward her own work was the reason why she never completed her paintings (Aaserud, p. 74; Aune-Hinkel, p. 64–65). She herself expressed this criticism as a feeling of immaturity and, among other things, placed the blame on external circumstances.<sup>30</sup> But although

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<sup>29</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty: “Eye and Mind” in Galen A. Johnson (ed.): *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, Evanston, Ill. 1993 (p. 121–149), p. 129. This is reminiscent of Viktor B. Sjklovskij's idea that the poet in the process of rendering things strange “gives us back the feeling of being alive,” Viktor B. Sjklovskij: “Kunsten som grep” in Atle Kittang et al. (eds.): *Moderne litteraturteori. En antologi*, trans. Sigurd Fasting, Oslo 2003, p. 18. According to Sjklovskij the goal of art is “to give us feeling for the thing, a feeling that is a vision and not just a recognition [...]. Art is a way of experiencing things as they come into being; what already exists is unimportant in art,” Sjklovskij, p. 18.

<sup>30</sup> “Jeg følte meg inderlig umoden og var det også.” (I felt deeply immature and I was.) Letter to Odd Solumsmoen, Håndskriftsamlingen, Nasjonalbibliotek, 18 August 1956. “Det er uferdig som alt annet jeg gjorde, antagelig kom [min sønn] Erik i veien der også. Det ga meg jo svært meget å tenke på at jeg skulle ha et barn. Dessuten var jeg i veien i atelieret, i Firenze hadde vi hver sitt, en



there is arguably something to this, I am more prone to link the unfinished nature of her work to an aesthetic practice, such as Harald Flor tentatively suggests in a review of the first exhibit of Sara Fabricius' paintings:

It was probably her fear of reworking too much, the fear of losing the fresh and immediate from the first go-round, the anxiety that the color wouldn't find its full range of play. This reflects insecurity as well as self-criticism, but probably a deeper conception of what a work of art should express as well. Can't one, therefore, consider the unfinished as an expression of a notion that an artwork shouldn't close itself off, shouldn't act as a definitive statement for the person who encounters it? The incomplete parts of the paintings do not only give the effect of "silent" areas, but are often just as "vocal" as the frequently used dashes in Cora Sandel's literary works.<sup>31</sup>

This is well put. The use of dashes, understatement, and indirect suggestions so characteristic of Cora Sandel's authorship, indicate a significant insight into the fact that some things are visible because others are not, and that the invisible thus makes the visible emerge, as Merleau-Ponty points out.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, this insight can be associated with an aesthetic practice which, precisely by appearing unfinished, reveals a certain attitude toward the receiving party, as Harald Flor indicates: instead of presenting a universal "Truth" by appearing to be a finished product, this aesthetic practice opens up for co-creative reflection during the recipient's own experience of the work of art.

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velsignet ting." (It is unfinished like everything else I did; presumably [my son] Erik got in the way there, too. It sure gave me a lot to think about, knowing that I was going to have a child. Besides, I was underfoot in the studio. In Florence we each had our own, which was a blessing.) Letter to Odd Solumsmoen, 18 August 1956.

<sup>31</sup> "Det er vel [...] det overarbeidete hun selv har fryktet, redselen for å tape det friske og umiddelbare i anslaget, angsten for at farven ikke skal få sitt fulle spillerom. Her avspeiles så vel usikkerhet som selvkritikk, men også en dypereliggende idé om hva et kunstverk skal utsi. Kan man derfor ikke forestille seg det ufullendte som et uttrykk for en forestilling om at kunstverket ikke må lukke seg, ikke stå som et definitivt utsagn for den som møter det? Det ufullbyrdete i maleriene virker ikke bare som "stumme" felter, men er ofte like "talende" som de hyppig benyttete tankestrekene i Cora Sandels litterære arbeider," Harald Flor: "Billedkunstneren Cora Sandel" in *Dagbladet* 26 April 1972.

<sup>32</sup> In this context it is interesting that some of Paul Cézanne's paintings have unpainted areas of canvas. In the catalogue for The National Gallery of Scotland it says about his painting *The Big Trees*: "Areas of the white canvas may have been left deliberately unpainted to contribute to the picture's light-filled, lyrical character." Further, it can be noted that the Impressionists often worked with various types of sketches that they sometimes didn't complete. Allowing the canvas to show in places gives the impression, in keeping with the Impressionists' view, that the painting was produced in one sitting, that the painter has worked directly in front of a motif.

From Image to Text: Perception and Representation in the Short Story “Lola”

Implicitly, the verbal representations of the body in Cora Sandel’s literary texts also express this insight. Here bodily movements function in the same way as colors, lines and shapes do in Sara Fabricius’ paintings. Moreover, one of the major themes of the authorship is vision (the gaze) as metaphor for insight. This is developed through detailed descriptions of the body’s physiognomy and a sustained thematic focus on the consciousness-raising process in the narrator and/or fictional characters that specifically renders them “seeing” beings. In addition, in Cora Sandel’s short story “Lola” from the collection *Mange takk, doktor* we also find an explicit thematization of the intimate relationship between the “embodied gaze” or personal “style” and artistic representations of the body. It appears, therefore, as if this short story is a natural extension of the attempts at visual representation of the body that we see in Sara Fabricius’ portraits.

The (female) body is the central motif in “Lola,” which not only points out the non-mimetic quality of art, but also questions whether representations of the body – visual and verbal – are reliable signs of human essence, of an unchanging, stable subject. The story probably harks back to Sara Fabricius’ fifteen-year stay in Paris, for the female first-person narrator recalls a woman who was a model for a group of Scandinavian painters, to which the narrator belongs, who lived in Montparnasse “in a vanished era [...] before the war”.<sup>33</sup>

Splitter naken spøker hun i min erindring og gjør seg til, setter foten frem og vrir på kroppen, smeller med fingrene som med kastanjetter, vifter med nesevingene. En rose har hun uten videre snappet fra skålen på bordet og stukket inn i håret bak øret. Jeg ser den nok. Hennes freidighet er uten grenser. Hun griper etter hånden min, vil kysse den og dermed avvæpne meg helt og holdent.

Jeg skal til å forvise henne. Ned i det glemselens dyp hun steg opp fra. [...]

Da slår hun seg på låret så det klasker.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> “i en svunnen tidsalder [...] før krigen”, Cora Sandel: “Lola” in Cora Sandel: *Samlede Verker, Vol. V*, Oslo 1951 (1935) (p. 207–222), p 209. Further citations from “Lola” will be from this edition and give page numbers only. As earlier noted, all excerpts from the short story are translated by Frankie B. Shackelford.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted from p. 207: “Stark naked she haunts my memory, showing off, placing one foot forward and twisting her body, snapping her fingers as if she had castanets, flaring her nostrils. She has snatched a rose from the bowl on the table and stuck it in her hair behind one ear. I can see it clearly. Her impertinence has no limits. She grabs for my hand, wanting to kiss it and disarm me body and soul. / I start to push her away. Down into the depth of oblivion she emerged from [...] / At that instant she gives her thigh a raucous slap.”

The story opens *in medias res* with this description, which makes Lola's insistent presence clear. An onomatopoeic verb like *smelle* ("snap") and verbs of motion like *vri* ("twist"), *vifte* ("fan" or "flare"), *snappe* ("snatch"), and *gripe* ("grab") underscore the energetic movements Lola makes with her naked body. At the same time, they contribute to the sensation of restlessness that characterizes Lola as a person. The introductory section of the story has a predominately paratactic structure with clauses that list movements, a continuum of actions that can actually be happening simultaneously, while the use of commas in place of the conjunction *og* ("and") between the phrases helps to create an unevenness in the syntax. This comes across as a breathless way of writing, a technique that produces an extra cognitive effect in the reader.

Lola is naked, but the first-person narrator does not focus on her nakedness whatsoever. Thus, Lola's body is not presented to our "gaze" as a passive object for viewing as "a nude." Instead, Lola's placement of her foot, her body position, and the movements of her fingers and nostrils combine to create the reader's impression of her body as subject and to express Lola's sensual, theatrical, impatient and energetic personal style. The emphasis on Lola's movements in the text creates, in other words, the impression in the reader of an individual presence, a mode of being in the world. Further, the accentuation on *movement* in the representation of Lola's body underlines how Lola's individual presence takes on meaning and comes into (the artist's and reader's) "view." And finally, it reveals an artistic stance or "gaze" that underscores the difficulty in capturing that presence.

The first-person narrator draws the contours of a subject who is inconstant and unpredictable, as the following 'visualizing'<sup>35</sup> description of Lola's face confirms:

Store sviskeøyne har hun, innrammet av blått og svart i tykke lag, stor  
lakkkrød munn, bred, flat nese, et ansikt, herlig fortegnet på bredden og

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<sup>35</sup> The paragraph has visual power and can be called ekphrastic even though it does not refer to a visual representation. Amy Golahny points out, for instance, that the Greek verb *ekphrasein* means "to report in detail" or "to elaborate upon" and she explains further: "As an inserted passage, intended to make vivid an event, personality or object, an ekphrasis does not intrinsically refer to works of art. It does, however, indicate a verbal passage that conjures an image in the mind of the reader. The power of the word to convey an image, of whatever subject, is identifiably ekphrastic," Amy Golahny: "Introduction: Ekphrasis in the Interarts Discourse" in Amy Golahny (ed.): *The Eye of the Poet. Studies in the Reciprocity of the Visual and Literary Arts from the Renaissance to the Present*, London 1996 (p. 11–18), p. 12. The paragraph can be said to be ekphrastic because it has the ability to create a particular effect in the mind of the reader, namely that of *enargeia* or *evidentia*. These rhetorical terms refer to detailed, lucid descriptions that make a person, place or thing visible and "life-like," and that give the receiver the impression of being witness to that which is described, Tormod Eide: *Retorisk leksikon*, Oslo 1999, p. 52; p. 65; p. 116. See also Bernhard F. Scholz: "Ekphrasis and Enargeia in Quintilian's *Institutionis oratoriae libri xii*" in Peter L. Oesterreich and Thomas O. Sloane (eds.): *Rhetorica movet. Studies in Historical and Modern Rhetoric in Honour of Heinrich F. Plett*, Boston, 1999 (p. 3–24).

så pudderblekt at det fanger reflekser som en hvitkalket vegg gjør det, blir klart lysegrønt eller fiolett, eller mursteinsrødt i skyggene, alt etter omgivelsene. Manken er tett og ullaktig, skifter i kobber og sôt, lem-mene tunge, bena to bomsterke muskelbunter. De kunne bære en stor, kraftig kvinne, og bærer en liten, senet, sandgrå torso.<sup>36</sup>

This paragraph provides insight into how Lola exhibits and stages herself as subject in a theatrical fashion and how she consciously manipulates her body's appearance with make-up for this purpose. The first-person narrator's description of the body's appearance, especially Lola's complexion and hair, illustrates how Lola's character changes in relation to the surroundings and situation like a chameleon. The body's physiognomy can, in other words, be taken as a sign of Lola's inexplicable, incomprehensible, and unreliable being. This representation of the body promotes a modern understanding of the subject by underscoring how problematic it is to establish a definitive, unchanging, essential subject. The narrator also asks rhetorically, "Hvem var Lola?" (Who was Lola?) and answers: "Et lite vims, som bluffet, løy og gjorde scener, flink, frekk, hensynsløs, sôt også bevares, stygg og malerisk. Et kors alt i alt, hvem oppstyr og forvirring fulgte i sporet."<sup>37</sup>

This emphasis on descriptions of bodily movement and physiognomy in the text not only point to the body as "situation," as a reflection of Lola's personal style, but also to an aesthetic practice that reflects an embodied "gaze" that prioritizes fluidity, openness, and co-creative interaction. For the first-person narrator repeatedly stresses the mysterious air and the numerous lies that surround Lola:

Hun påstår seg ha stått for Van Dongen og Matisse – i hemmelighet, naturligvis, eftersom hennes liv består av hemmeligheter. Det er ikke det minst trolige av alt det Lola kommer med. [...] Lolas far, som skal være død, har snart vært lege, snart ingeniør. Lolas mor derimot er til enhver tid av gammel, spansk adel, og har egentlig begått en mésalliance. Med en neger, skulle man tro, når man betrakter Lolas flate nese og ullhår. Men er det noe hun konsekvent holder på, så er det sin spanske herkomst.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Quoted from p. 210–211: "Her eyes are big, soft prunes, framed by thick layers of blue and black, her mouth painted shiny red, the nose broad and flat, a face with magnificently distorted cheeks and so powdery pale that it picks up reflections like a whitewashed wall, turns clearly light-green or violet, or brick-red in the shadows, depending on the surroundings. Her mane, thick and woolly, shifts from copper to soot, her heavy limbs, two muscle-bound legs as strong as tree trunks. They could carry a large, powerful woman, and they bear but a small, sinewy, sand-gray torso."

<sup>37</sup> Quoted from p. 207: "A little gadfly, who bluffed, lied and created scenes, capable, impudent, inconsiderate, sweet, too, of course, ugly and picturesque. A pain, overall, with whom commotion and confusion followed wherever she went."

<sup>38</sup> Quoted from p. 211: "She claims to have stood [as model] for Van Dongen and Matisse – in secret,

But even though Lola “geberder seg i ett og alt som hovedperson, gjør seg ustanselig gjeldende,”<sup>39</sup> as the narrator says, the text emphasizes that she is interesting primarily on account of the commotion and confusion she causes. In other words, Lola’s mystery is enhanced by her interaction with the Scandinavian artists that she models for: “Over den lille flokken mennesker fra Norden har hun en besynderlig makt. Uten protester lar de seg proppes fulle av historier, gjøres narr av og pumpes for penger i forskudd.”<sup>40</sup> Indeed, the adjectives used to characterize Lola assume an interpretive gaze that sees her in relation to an “audience.”

Thus, the story of the impulsive, Spanish Lola becomes just as much a story about the quiet Jens Olsen from Gamvik in Finnmark, who is among the painters for whom Lola serves as model, and the picture he paints of Lola: “Tydelig er også Jens, blå og åndsfraværende i øynene, nøysom til det fabelaktige, en drømmer og fra Gamvik. [...] Tydelig er billedet han malte, muret og skrapet og klattet sammen, frembrakt som gjennom en rekke katastrofer, omfangsrikt og uforglemmelig.”<sup>41</sup> In this way, the first-person narrator stresses the human relationships and the intersubjective encounter in the presentation of the (female) body at the same time as syntactic structures in the text help to create the impression of physical intimacy and nearness.

In the short story, then, the narrator’s gaze is indirectly linked to an aesthetic practice that parallels Sara Fabricius’ use of techniques in her paintings and that can be seen to be representative of Cora Sandel’s form of expression. Her representation of the body as an indefinable and surprising entity, that calls the phenomenological understanding of body as existence to mind. Understood as an encounter between “like and equal” subjects, Sandel’s representation of the body illustrates how she understands artistic practice as a dialogue with the recipient. In this view, art opens up to and turns toward a sensing and co-creating receiving party who finds its own truth in and through its own experience of (the subject in) the work of art.

This aesthetic practice stands in contrast to Jens’. Jens’ format is, as he himself proclaims, “det store formatet” (the large format), “kolossalformatet” (the colossal

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of course, since her life consists of secrets. This is not the least believable story of all that Lola tells. [...] Lola’s father, who is supposedly dead, has been a doctor one minute and an engineer the next. Lola’s mother, on the other hand, is always of old, Spanish royalty and has really entered a misalliance. With a black man, one should think, when one regards Lola’s flat nose and woolly hair. But if there is anything that she consistently maintains, it is her Spanish ancestry.”

<sup>39</sup> Quoted from p. 209: “[Lola] always acts like the center of attention, makes her presence constantly felt.”

<sup>40</sup> Quoted from p. 211: “She has a strange power over the little flock of people from Scandinavia. Without protest they let themselves be filled with stories, made fun of and pumped for money in advance.”

<sup>41</sup> Quoted from p. 208: “I can see Jens clearly in my mind, too, with an absent look in his blue eyes, frugal to the point of being legendary, a dreamer and from Gamvik. [...] I can see clearly the picture he painted, grouted and scraped and blobbed together, emerging as through a series of catastrophes, expansive and unforgettable.”

format): “‘Naturlig størrelse e ingen størrelse,’ bedyrer han” (p. 212; “actual size is just not big enough,” he asserts). And employing ekphrasis the narrator describes the result of Jens’ view of art:

Jens’ Lola er en overveldende Lola, en Lola man bare har å bøye seg for. I pudderblått og rosa, i oker og grått, i kurver og vinkler, mot en bakgrunn, fantastisk som en drømt urskog. Sviskeøynene går nesten til ørene, lakkmunnen likeså. Rundelig og rikelig er det for øvrig av både et og annet, og fingertykk, svart kontur, hvor man kommer. Det er Jens’ uttrykk for Jens’ inntrykk av Lola, vakkert på sin egen voldsomme vis og helt for sin egen skyld.<sup>42</sup>

This description of Jens’ visual representation of Lola presents an interpretation of his art; the narrator “creates” Jens’ picture in words by emphasizing his use of color, background and outlining. The ekphrasis illustrates a gaze that objectifies, romanticizes, caricatures, and isolates the female body. In addition, the distinct outlines defining the female body’s shape and size in the narrator’s representation of Jens’ form of expression can be understood as a sign of how his gaze defines and locks her body in place. Indeed, in the narrator’s ekphrasis Jens has oversized, exaggerated, and underscored the body as a female object (for desire) and “thing” with firm contours and boundaries. This art says nothing about Lola’s existence, her “situation”, her “being in the world”; in the narrator’s representation she remains only a medium used by Jens in his attempt to express his own feelings, which the narrator alludes to indirectly by pointing out how the portrait emerges “as through a series of catastrophes.”

The narrator’s verbal representation of Jens’ visual representation of the body as “entirely for its own sake” stresses his ambitions as a painter, his need to make an impression on others and to earn money with his art. Thus, in the narrator’s eyes it is “an overwhelming Lola” that Jens presents to the viewer. The recipient, who can but “yield to” this picture and be impressed by it, is, in other words, forced to accept Jens’ interpretation as the universal “Truth” about Lola. According to the narrator’s description, Jens’ work of art is self-enclosed and offered as a pre-packaged “product” to be consumed.

The narrator’s verbal representation of Lola presents – in much the same way as the verbal representation of Jens’ visual representation – the female body as

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<sup>42</sup> Quoted from p. 215: “Jens’ Lola is an overwhelming Lola, a Lola one can merely yield to. In powder blue and pink, in ochre and gray, in curves and angles, against a background as fantastic as the primeval forests of dreams. The prune eyes go almost to her ears, the painted mouth, too. Generous and plentiful in all aspects, and black outlines, as thick as your finger, everywhere you look. It is Jens’ expression of Jens’ impression of Lola, beautiful in its own violent way and entirely for its own sake.”

interesting, mysterious, and “picturesque.” But their different forms of expression are explicitly bound to the differing ways in which their embodied gazes are situated in the narrator’s portrayal. Jens’ need to impress and to create a finished product, linked to his social background (“from Gamvik”), ambitions and financial situation, is clearly contrasted with the narrator’s own representation of Lola, which is motivated by Lola’s insisting “appearance” in her mind’s eye. A prioritization of text – and therefore of indirect representation of the body through actions – over the image and the “static” representation of the body formed by shapes and colors, seems to lie implicitly in this contrast. However, it is possible to see this favored aesthetics as encompassing a view of both visual and literary art. Indeed, as we have seen, verbal and visual representations of the body create similar effects through the choices of technique. Descriptions of bodily movements and physiognomy as well as the use of alternating perspectives on Lola’s person fill the same function in Cora Sandel’s short story as color and contour lines have in Sara Fabricius’ portraits. Both show the unclear contours of a subject and thereby assist the receiver (viewer/reader) “to see.”

This technique underlines the affiliation between the two art forms. While the viewer of Sara Fabricius’ paintings must co-construct the images, the text allows the reader to co-create a “vision” of Lola. But in spite of the fact that the reader is initiated into the mysteries surrounding Lola’s person and is invited to assist in the creation of meaning, the story emphasizes how any Truth about Lola escapes not only Jens, but the narrator and readers as well. For in prioritizing a “blurred” representation of Lola, the text underscores the fact that the body is a fluid condition rather than a stable, fixed entity that can be firmly defined and reproduced. In addition, the short story demonstrates Merleau-Ponty’s idea of art as a process of expressing, as an exchange or dialogue between the model’s and artist’s individual styles of being in the world rather than an imitation or visual likeness of the world. In this way, the text underlines that neither painting nor literature can objectively or adequately capture or represent bodily experience.

“De spør om jeg var impresjonist?” writes Cora Sandel (Sara Fabricius) in a letter to her friend and biographer Odd Solumsmoen (18 August 1956). Her answer is as follows: “Jeg var vel det? Jeg satt iallfall trofast foran mine motiver, men samtidig var jeg vist ute efter noe annet som jeg uklart søkte.”<sup>43</sup> Both Sara Fabricius’ portraits and the short story “Lola” imply that the “something else” that Cora Sandel vaguely was in search of, can be so simple – and so difficult – as being able to represent that which is “behind” the visible, physical body (world). Perhaps it can be said that she sought to express the body understood as existence, that witness of life which is invisible and indefinable, that she in Merleau-Ponty’s words wanted to “[give] visible existence to what profane vision believes to be invisible” (Merleau-Ponty 1993, p. 127).

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<sup>43</sup> “You ask if I was an Impressionist? I was, wasn’t I? In any case I sat faithfully in front of my motifs, but at the same time I believe I wanted something else [i.e. something other than the impressionistic representation of the motifs] that I vaguely was in search of.”

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# Medium Translations between Fictional Arts<sup>1</sup>

Eli Rozik

Whereas it is evident that language is capable of generating descriptions of fictional worlds (literary fiction), only under the influence of Charles S. Peirce did it become manifest that iconic arts too are capable of generating such descriptions. Not only the dramatic arts such as theatre, opera and puppet theatre demonstrate this ability but, as I show below, so too do the pictorial/plastic arts. On such grounds, I explore here the principles that explain possible translations between these arts. I suggest that *the common denominator of these iconic arts is the imagistic nature of their media; i.e., their being grafted upon the spontaneous ability of the human brain to produce mental images and employ them as units of a particular form of thinking.*<sup>2</sup> I also suggest that it is *this common ground that enables medium translations of fictional worlds.* The substantiation of this thesis requires a new understanding of (a) ‘fictionality,’ (b) ‘iconicity,’ (c) the function of language in literary fiction, and (d) the semiotic nature of cinema.

a) *Fictionality*: I propose that ‘fictional world’ should be understood as *reflecting the spontaneous (and originally preverbal) capacity of the brain to think through creating complex images of characters and their actions.* I thus presuppose a fundamental distinction between arts that are capable of generating descriptions of fictional worlds and those that are not. This distinction does not overlap traditional classifications of the arts, such as theatre, ballet and art, since some of them also feature ‘abstract’ styles that are neither capable of describing fictional worlds nor aim to do so.

b) *Iconicity*: Most of the arts that generate descriptions of fictional worlds are iconic. Traditional definitions of ‘iconicity,’ however, do not consider its crucial imagistic element. In contrast, I propose that *‘iconicity’ should be redefined in terms of imagistic thinking and communication,* thus connecting iconic media to the natural faculty of the brain to produce images and employ them in thinking processes. I support this definition through recent findings in neuroscience.

I also suggest that, in principle, *all iconic media are capable of generating descriptions of fictional worlds, with differences between them stemming from the nature of a particular medium and a mediating creative interpretation.* However, in contrast to the dramatic arts, the static nature of the pictorial/plastic arts (e.g., figurative painting and sculpture) pose a problem in creating separate images in contrast to

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<sup>1</sup> I dedicate this article to Prof. Hans Lund, whose contribution to interart studies I very much admire.

<sup>2</sup> Eli Rozik: *The Roots of Theatre – Rethinking Ritual and Other Theories of Origin*, Iowa City 2002a, p. 249–269.

the dynamic nature of fictional worlds. I suggest that various conventions and/or mechanical procedures aim at overcoming this obstacle.

c) *Literary fiction*: Despite the symbolic nature of language, *literary fiction is capable of describing fictional worlds because of the evocative power of words*; with the imagistic approach settling this problem too.

d) *Cinema*: Following Charles S. Peirce's remark that photography is predominantly indexical,<sup>3</sup> it is widely accepted that cinema is basically indexical. In place, I propose that *cinema is a recording of an iconic text, and, therefore, capable of describing fictional worlds on the grounds of the imagistic approach to iconicity*.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, I support my theses by analyses of fictional worlds based on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in most of the fictional arts (theatre, opera, ballet, painting, comics, animation, puppet theatre, still photography and cinema); and explore their common grounds that, in principle, enable translations from medium to medium.

## The Fictional World

By 'fictional world' (narrative), I mean here an imaginative world of characters and their interaction, their temporary and final successes or failures, and the meanings of their worlds. I follow thereby Northrop Frye's fundamental distinction between two basic modes of authorial expression: the 'fictional' and the 'thematic,' in the sense of 'not mediated by a fictional world.'<sup>5</sup> Frye bases this distinction on the widely acknowledged capacity of the human psyche to spontaneously create fictional worlds that reflect its innermost thoughts and feelings, as in dreaming, daydreaming, children's imaginative play and mythology. Furthermore, there are sound indications that this kind of creativity reflects an archaic mode of thinking employed by preverbal humans to ponder themselves and their worlds (Rozik 2002a, p. 249–269). In this sense, artistic fictional worlds are embodiments of authorial thoughts and potential descriptions of readers/spectators' amorphous psychical states of affairs.

From the time of Aristotle's *Poetics* on, there has been a vast body of studies relating to the principles that structure fictional worlds. Although many of them have been devoted to drama, I believe that similar principles apply to fictional worlds in other fictional arts. Following Aristotle, I assume that beyond the amazing diversity of fictional worlds there is a set of poetic principles that structure them, and explain the readers/spectators' experiences. Since the principles that structure fictional worlds have been found effective for readers/spectators in different cultures for millennia, it is sensible to conjecture that these reflect their archetypal patterns

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce: *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* in Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (eds.): Cambridge 1965, 2.281.

<sup>4</sup> Eli Rozik: "Back to 'Cinema is Filmed Theatre'" in *Semiotica*, CLVII, No. 1–4, 2005 (p. 169–185).

<sup>5</sup> Northrop Frye: *Anatomy of Criticism. Four Essays*, Princeton; Oxford 1957, p. 33–35 and 365, p. 52–54 and 367.

of expectation and response. Following Carl G. Jung, I employ “archetypal” in the sense of “spontaneous (combined innate and culturally-conditioned) expectations and responses.”<sup>6</sup> Authors seem to be able to anticipate possible reactions, on the grounds of experience, although not always able to fully explain them. These principles, therefore, plausibly reflect a practical knowledge of human psychological mechanisms, amounting to a kind of fictional “technology.” Such generalizations are only occasionally verified scientifically *a posteriori*; e.g., the principle of catharsis is consistent with empirical findings.<sup>7</sup> I propose, on such grounds, that the five basic structures suggested in chapter XIII of Aristotle’s *Poetics* reflect readers/spectators’ archetypal expectations and responses. Unfortunately, Aristotle ignored structures that contrast them, such as those that aim at an experience of the absurd, which can be explained by simple inversion of the archetypal ones.

I have suggested elsewhere that a fictional world reflects a stratified inner structure of at least five layers: mythical, praxical, naïve, ironic and aesthetic, which bestows upon it a sense of inner logic, unity and wholeness.<sup>8</sup> I have also suggested that, on the relational level between fictional world and readers/spectators, the former constitutes a potential complex metaphor of the readers/spectator’s psychological state of affairs and reflects rhetoric intent.<sup>9</sup> I also assume that in affecting the spectator the dominant factor is not the language/medium employed, but the nature of the fictional world. Although this is an analytic distinction, which is not intuitively perceived, each of these aspects of a performance-text reflects different structural principles.

### The Traditional Definition of ‘Iconicity’

Charles S. Peirce first employed ‘icon’ in the context of his theory of signification and communication, and defined it in terms of motivation on the grounds of similarity (*inter alia*: II, 2.247 & 2.274-2.308). ‘Motivation’ means here that a sign can be ‘read’ through natural inference, with no need to learn the system, on the grounds of either similarity (to real models) or contiguity. ‘Icon’ (e.g., a painted smile) belongs in a triad that also includes ‘index,’ a sign motivated by contiguity, e.g., a real smile indicates a state of mind (Peirce II, 2.248); and ‘symbol,’ an unmotivated sign based on a conventional link, between ‘signifier’ and ‘signified’ in Saussure’s terms,<sup>10</sup> e.g., the word ‘smile.’ Since ‘similarity’ also applies to other kinds of relationship such as twin brothers and two peas, an icon is supposed to be first recognized as a sign, or set of signs, and only subsequently distinguished from other kinds of signs.

The implication of the fundamental difference between iconic signs and words

<sup>6</sup> Carl G. Jung: *Man and his Symbols*, New York 1969, p. 67–68.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Hans Kreidler, and Shulamith Kreidler: *Psychology of the Arts*, Durham 1972, p. 12–22.

<sup>8</sup> Eli Rozik: “Towards a Methodology of Play Analysis – A Theatrical Approach” in *Assaph – Studies in the Theatre*, No. 6, 1990, p. 43–79.

<sup>9</sup> Eli Rozik: “Theatrical Experience as Metaphor” in *Semiotica*, CXLIX, No. 1–4, 2004, p. 277–296.

<sup>10</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure: *Cours de Linguistique Générale*, Paris 1972, p. 99.

(symbolic signs) is that iconicity is nonverbal by definition. Although this implication seemingly contradicts the capability of iconic media to describe speaking fictional worlds, there is nothing to preclude iconic replicas of real speech acts, which also are nonverbal by definition, fundamentally being not a form of description but a form of action. In this sense, dramatic dialogue is a nonverbal description of a nonverbal form of interaction, despite employing words.

The question is: does iconic similarity apply to the real or to the described fictional world? In theatre studies, for example, there is a tendency to identify ‘iconicity’ with ‘*mimesis*’ in the sense of ‘imitation’ of reality and even with ‘naturalism.’ I suggest that the notion of ‘iconicity’ is not a synonym of ‘*mimesis*’, but merely implies that iconic units are read and interpreted on the grounds of similarity, however faint or stylized, to real or mental models; e.g., a real horse or a mental image of a unicorn. An iconic text can thus evoke a world that either resembles real life or differs from it to various extents; e.g., science fiction. Imitation of reality is thus only an option.

In contrast, ‘similarity’ does apply to the relation between a describing iconic text and a described fictional world. ‘Reading’ an iconic description indeed means evoking a fictional image on the grounds of similarity; e.g., actors’ looks are meant to indicate that characters resemble them, thus explaining type casting and even the use of masks and make-up. This should be qualified, however, because iconic conventions presuppose that, qua conventions, their features should not be attributed to fictional worlds; e.g., a mature actor enacting a young character requires that indexes of older age be disregarded.

The traditional definition of ‘iconicity’ on the grounds of ‘motivation’ and ‘similarity’ is widely accepted in traditional semiotics. However, while providing a reasonable description of typical iconic units, it poses a problem in regard to some forms of iconic semiosis, iconic conventions in particular. Conventions are characterized by partial or total cancellation of the principle of similarity, thus precluding natural inference and justifying their categorization as such; e.g., a description of a fictional world through still frames displayed in linear order. The universality of iconic forms, moreover, leads to the conjecture that their roots lie in a primeval, elementary and vital mental faculty, to which traditional definitions of ‘iconicity’ hardly relate. In their place, I propose defining ‘iconicity’ in terms of ‘imagistic thinking.’

### An Imagistic Definition of ‘Iconicity’: from Nietzsche to Neuroscience

Sigmund Freud suggests that while dreaming the brain goes into a process of regression: “We call it ‘regression’ when in a dream an idea is turned back into the sensory image from which it was originally derived. [...] *In regression the fabric of the dream-thoughts is resolved into its raw material.*”<sup>11</sup> He implies thereby that

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<sup>11</sup> Sigmund Freud: *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. J. Strachey, Harmondsworth, Middlesex 1978, p. 693.

‘regression’ is a translation from verbal into imagistic representation; that there is a basic correspondence between verbally formulated ideas and their respective sensory images, e.g., between the phrase ‘red apple’ and the image ‘red apple’; and that images are not mere perceptions, or retrieved perceptions, but employed as basic units of thought. He also implies that thinking through images has been a pre-linguistic method of thinking, characteristic of humankind in the early stages of its development. Freud thus follows Friedrich Nietzsche’s insight that in dreams the brain “is reduced to a condition of imperfection such as in the primeval ages of mankind may have been normal by day and in waking. [...] in dreams we all resemble this savage” (Freud, p. 16–17).<sup>12</sup> Traces of preverbal imagistic thinking are also found in daydreaming and children’s imaginative play and drawings (Rozik 2002a, p. 270–292).

Following Freud’s line of reasoning, in *Philosophy in a New Key*, Susanne Langer claims that images are “our readiest instruments for abstracting concepts from the tumbling stream of actual impressions. They make our primitive abstractions for us, they are our spontaneous embodiments of general ideas.”<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, images are “just as capable of articulation, i.e., of complex combination as words” (Langer, p. 93) Thinking is thus anchored in perception, the raw material of mental imagistic representation. Langer suggests the following definition of thinking:

Man, unlike all other animals, uses “signs” not only to *indicate* things, but also to *represent* them. [...] We use “signs” among ourselves that do not point to anything in our actual surroundings. Most of our words [...] are used to talk *about* things, not to direct our eyes and ears and noses toward them [...]. They serve, rather, to let us develop a characteristic attitude toward objects *in absentia*, which is called “thinking of” or “referring to” what is not there. “Signs” used in this capacity are not *symptoms* of things, but *symbols*. (Langer, p. 30–31)

In her view, ‘thinking’ presupposes two main conditions: representation of things in the mind and manipulation of them *in absentia*; i.e., thinking takes place when such representations are disconnected from actual experience. This definition of thinking is meant to equally fit verbal and imagistic representation.

For R. L. Gregory, in *The Intelligent Eye*, the eye is not merely an ‘image-forming’ organ, but also one of interpretation.<sup>14</sup> Perception is thus conceived of as the prototype of thinking (Gregory, p. 146): the eyes “freed the nervous system from the tyranny of reflexes, leading to strategic planned behaviour and ultimately to abstract

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Carl G Jung: *Dreams*, trans. R. F. C. Hull: Princeton University Press 1974, p. 33.

<sup>13</sup> Susanne K. Langer: *Philosophy in a New Key. A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, Cambridge 1976 (1942), p. 145.

<sup>14</sup> R. L. Gregory: *The Intelligent Eye*, New York; St. Louis; San Francisco 1970, p. 12–15.

thinking” (Gregory, p. 13). Gregory thus supports Langer’s philosophical approach on scientific grounds. From her perspective, “[e]yes that did not see forms could never furnish it with images.” (Langer, p. 90) Moreover, “[t]he eye and the ear make their own abstractions, and consequently dictate their own peculiar conception” (Langer, p. 91).

Conceiving images as fundamental units of thought is amply supported by recent findings in neuroscience. In *Descartes’ Error*, Antonio R. Damasio asserts that having a mind means “the ability to display images internally and to order those images in a process called thought.”<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, whatever is not “imageable,” including words and mathematical symbols, cannot be known and, therefore, cannot be manipulated by thought (Damasio, p. 107). In *Image and Brain*, on the grounds of digital methodology, Stephen M. Kosslyn asserts that “[i]magery [in the sense of mental representation] is a basic form of cognition, and plays a central role in many human activities – ranging from navigation to memory to creative problem solving.”<sup>16</sup> He distinguishes between ‘propositional’ and ‘depictive’ representations, with the latter being stored in the brain spatially, like the objects they represent: “Depictive representations convey meaning via their resemblance to an object, with parts of the representation corresponding to parts of the object” (Kosslyn 1995, p. 5). ‘Depictive’ representation is thus synonymous with ‘imagistic’ representation. Damasio distinguishes between ‘perceptual images’ (e.g., running your fingers over a smooth metal surface); ‘recalled images,’ which occur when one conjures up a remembrance of things; and images “recalled from plans of the future [that] are constructions of your organism’s brain” (Kosslyn 1995, p. 96–7). The latter should be conceived of as images that have been disconnected from actual experience and become units of thought. Such images are not exact reproductions of objects, qualities or acts, but a combination of faint reproduction and interpretation, “a newly reconstructed version of the original.” (Kosslyn 1995, p. 100)

Kosslyn characterizes thinking as hinging on two properties: “First, information must be *represented* internally; and second, [...] information must be manipulated in order to draw inferences and conclusions.”<sup>17</sup> He reconfirms thereby Langer’s definition of ‘thinking’ in general, and thinking by means of images in particular.

There are, however, two problems in defining ‘iconicity’ on the grounds of imagistic thinking: First, spontaneous mental images are figments of the imagination, i.e., non-material entities, which cannot be communicated. Mental images thus require a material carrier to enable communication of their signifying function. I suggest, therefore, that the ‘iconic unit’ is an image imprinted on matter, such as marble, paint and human bodies. In Saussurian terms, the imprinted image and

<sup>15</sup> Antonio R. Damasio: *Descartes’ Error*, New York 1994, p. 89.

<sup>16</sup> Stephen M. Kosslyn: *Image and Brain*, Cambridge 1995, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Stephen M. Kosslyn: “Introduction” in Michael S. Gazzaniga (ed.): *The Cognitive Neurosciences*, Cambridge 1996 (p. 959–961), p. 959.

the imprinted matter together constitute the signifier of the iconic unit (Saussure, p. 99). Although it would appear that iconic conventions cancel the principle of similarity, as suggested above, they are nonetheless images imprinted on matter, as otherwise their presence in an iconic text would be precluded.

Second, in contrast to words, spontaneous mental images carry diffuse signifieds. In particular, they do not determine clear boundaries between core sense and associative peripheries, making interpersonal communication problematic. I suggest, therefore, that in order to become an established cultural medium, iconicity requires the mediation of language, which is the main repository of relatively controlled abstractions in any culture. Assumedly, mediation is spontaneous because a brain conditioned by a language naturally assigns senses to iconic units, according to the words that conventionally categorize their models. It is precisely in this sense that an imprinted image of an object and the verbal sentences used to describe it are equivalent in different systems of signification. This implies that understanding an iconic text presupposes linguistic competence. An image thus becomes a cultural unit of signification and communication, and can be used as a unit of thinking and description, under two conditions: material imprinting and language mediation; e.g., an image of a verbal threat can be communicated by imprinting it on an actor's voice and mediated by the word 'threat.'

The definition of 'iconicity' in terms of 'imagistic thinking' does not contradict the traditional one because the notion of 'image' implies 'similarity' and 'motivation' but, in addition, (a) *it connects the iconic unit to the natural faculty of the brain to produce images and employ them as units of thinking*; and (b) *it expands the set of its models to images created in the mind.*

### The Two-Fold Nature of Fictional Texts

Images of fictional worlds, spontaneously created by the human imagination, cannot be communicated unless described by a language/medium that is capable of evoking them in the minds of readers/spectators; i.e., their communication is dependent on descriptions, although not necessarily on a specific language/medium. Since fictional worlds are figments of the imagination any description of a fictional world must be evocative, in the sense of producing the corresponding image of a fictional world in the receivers' minds. Whereas literary fiction employs language for describing images of fictional worlds and evoking them in the minds of readers through the associative power of words, iconic arts employ imprinted and language-mediated images for the same purpose; with the implications being that whereas the former actually functions as an imagistic medium, the latter afford a highly suitable means of description of fictional worlds because their units already resemble the evoked worlds. Indeed, the imagistic approach does not preclude the evocation of images in the minds of receivers through non-iconic means. On such grounds,

iconic media and literary language contrast abstract arts, such as music, abstract ballet and abstract art, which are non-imagistic in the above sense altogether. In contrast to the spontaneous form of fictional creativity (such as a dream or a child's imaginative play), literature and iconic arts employ culturally established media, poetic rules that structure fictional worlds, and guided contextualization in terms of the viewers/spectators' culture.

I claim that fictional worlds and the means of their descriptions are mutually independent. In principle, different languages/media can describe the same fictional world; and the same language/medium can describe different fictional worlds. This mutual independence reflects the different principles that structure either a language/medium or a fictional world. It is the imagistic nature of these descriptions shared by language and iconic media that enables the translations of fictional worlds. In fact, as we shall see below, translations are never absolute because of mediating creative interpretations and changing cultural contexts. Moreover, the rules of a language/medium and the poetic rules that constitute fictional worlds are not only different and independent of one another, but also complement one another. A fictional text is thus a combination of a describing language/medium and a described world.

### Specific Differences of Iconic Media

This study aims at ascertaining not only the possibility of describing fictional worlds by means of iconic media, each one according to its nature, and in addition to language, but also their translatability. Therefore, while presupposing that each iconic medium reflects the common features of iconicity, it is sensible to ponder its intrinsic qualities that determine its potentialities and limitations. I suggest here several dimensions of difference:

**a) Imprinting matters** – While all iconic units are images imprinted on matter, each iconic medium is characterized by the nature of its imprinting matter. Whereas some iconic arts use matters that differ from those of their models, underscoring thereby their signifying and communicative function, e.g., painting and puppet theatre, other iconic arts are characterized by extending the principle of similarity to the material level, e.g., theatre and opera. In the latter, for example, images of human behavior are imprinted on actors' bodies, images of costume on real fabric and images of light on real light.

**b) Dynamic and static media** – The specific qualities of the imprinting materials determine a fundamental distinction between dynamic and static media. Whereas a dynamic medium generates continuous sequences of images, just as in real life, static media are only capable of generating discrete images and, at most, sequences of such images. For example, whereas an actor's body can produce a fluid sequence of images of astonishment, fury and violence, in a comic strip such a sequence would be described by a series of discrete frames. The fluidity of images imprinted



on a body means that they are linked by transitional neutral positions of expressive organs, which both separate and link images together. It is these neutral links that disappear in the static media, without impairing their descriptive capability.

**c) Deflection of reference** – Since the notion of ‘description’ implies the existence of a referent, the question is: how is reference to a fictional world accomplished? In describing fictional worlds iconic media usually generate images of interaction, i.e., sequences of acts, including speech acts, which are indexes of actions.<sup>18</sup> In this respect, there is a fundamental difference between iconic media that employ live actors for imprinting images of interaction and those that do not. While real acts inherently refer to those that perform them, actors perform acts meant to refer not to themselves, but to characters. This is achieved by performing subject signs that identify entities other than themselves (characters), and predicate signs that describe their actions. Elsewhere, I have termed this principle ‘deflection of reference.’<sup>19</sup> This principle does not apply to iconic media that do not employ live actors.

**d) Specific conventions:** In general, iconicity reveals some inherent constraints. For example, because of replicating the external appearances of things, iconic media are limited in the communication of characters’ thoughts. I suggest that such constraints require conventions in order to generate full descriptions of fictional worlds; e.g., stage soliloquy. In addition, each medium reveals specific limitations that also require compensating conventions; e.g., since in static media the fluid transition between images on the time axis is precluded, there is a need for a convention that can put separate images into a narrative order. Such a sequence, for example, is from left to right for an English readership, and the opposite for a Hebrew one, implying thereby that this convention reflects the typical order of a writing culture.

**e) Aesthetic effect:** Each medium enables different forms of harmony and disharmony. Whereas iconic media that enable the replication of voiced speech create images of harmony or disharmony on both the visual and aural levels, iconic media that do not are restricted to only visual harmony or disharmony. In various iconic media aural and/or visual harmony are enhanced by the addition of music, singing and/or dancing.

### Fictional Worlds in the Main Iconic Media

Although I assume that the same fictional world can be described through different iconic media/languages, it is virtually impossible to find fully equivalent texts because, in addition to medium differences, each description reflects a particular creative

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<sup>18</sup> J. L. Austin: *How to Do Things with Words*, Oxford 1980; John R. Searle: *Speech Acts. An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge 1985; *Expression and Meaning. Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts*, Cambridge 1986, p. 1–29.

<sup>19</sup> Eli Rozik: “Acting: The Quintessence of Theatricality” in *Substance*, XXXI, No. 2–3, 2002b (p. 110–124).

interpretation and a particular contextualization in the terms of a contemporary readership/audience. However, since my intention is to determine the possibility of description of fictional worlds by all iconic media/languages, and their translatability, differences of interpretation will be by and large overlooked.

I focus here on the analyses of several texts based on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in various imagistic media/language, and speculate about additional ones that, to my knowledge, were not used for this purpose. The number of fictional works based on this narrative is enormous, ranging from genuine attempts to "faithful" interpretations of the original to highly peculiar departures from it; e.g., the Guinea Pig Theater animated cartoon (fig. 1).<sup>20</sup> The following thus also serve to illustrate major trends in the interpretation of the Shakespearean source.

**a) The literary source** – Arthur Brooke's 3000 lines long poem *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet*, believed to have been Shakespeare's actual source, was first published in 1562, about two years before the bard's birth, and reprinted in 1587, about eight years before the first performance of *Romeo and Juliet* (c. 1595). Although some of the motifs had appeared in earlier literary versions, such as Xenophon (second century AD), Massusccio Salernitano (1476), Luigi da Porta (1530) and Matteo Bandello (1554), it is Brooke's poem that already features the main events in Shakespeare's fictional world: the feud between the two families, Romeo's previous infatuation (albeit the girl is unnamed), the party in Old Capulet's home, the instant falling in love of Romeo and Juliet, their secret marriage, Romeo's killing of Tybalt, his banishment and flight to Mantua, Juliet's arranged marriage with Paris, the friar's sleeping potion, Romeo's tragic mistake, the lovers' double death and the two families' eventual reconciliation (Brooke).

In his moralistic preface, Brooke advises the readers that his story is a good example of the fatal consequences of becoming prey to desires and not heeding good advice. The narrative certainly substantiates this moral teaching. Romeo and Juliet are in love, not in the vein of chivalric decorum typical of the sixteenth century, i.e., not reflecting respect for the virtues of the beloved, but in carnal relations; not to mention parental disapproval. The nurse behaves as a kind of procuress, in the manner of Fernando Rojas' *La Celestina* (c. 1499), thus lending an ignoble innuendo to their love. She actually provides all the means for the consummation of their matrimony; and even suggests that if Juliet marries Paris she will be most fortunate in having both a husband and a lover. Friar Laurence's "good" advice could have counterbalanced her services, but he makes a gross mistake in assuming that Romeo and Juliet's wedding will bring about the reconciliation of their families: only their death succeeds in achieving this. He also errs in providing Juliet with the sleeping potion, causing the opposite of what he had intended. Eventually Prince Escalus inquires into the tragic events and passes judgment: because of his good intentions

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<sup>20</sup> Source of fig. 1 in <http://www.musearts.com/cartoons/list.html>.

the friar is exonerated, the nurse is exiled, the families reconcile, and a monument is built in memory of the tragic consequences of the unfortunate feud.

The evocative nature of this story is made prominent by the verbal descriptions of the circumstances of the fictional action; e.g., the descriptions of Verona (1–24), the friar's cell (1257ff) and the funeral customs of Verona (2515ff). We may conclude, therefore, that *it is the ability of words to evoke images that makes possible the literary description of this fictional world.*

**b) The play-script** – Brooke's narrative is 'moralistic' in the sense that it is meant to reaffirm the values of the synchronic readership by bringing a set of absurd events to their "logical" consequences. I claim that the intertextual relations between Shakespeare's play-script and Brooke's story, his departures from this source in particular, indicate his intention *to avoid the simplicity of the source and experiment on the structure and mood of this narrative.* In addition to its dramatization, the highly significant departures from Brooke's story are:

1) Right from the opening scene Shakespeare sets up a definite comic mood, clearly contrasting the tragic mood of the ending. While the fight is comic, the Capulets' behavior verges on the grotesque; e.g., in response to Lord Capulet's asking for his long sword, Lady Capulet remarks: "A crutch, a crutch! Why call you for a sword?" (I, i, 75–6). Similarly, Lady Montague too scolds her husband (I, i, 80). These love-obstructing old fathers, clearly designed in the images of the Pantaloons of *commedia dell' arte*, bestow a sense of triviality on the feud. In general, Mercutio and Nurse polarize the comic mood: the former with his witty and libertine remarks and the latter with her go-between behavior. They are meant not only to provide comic relief, but also to establish a worldly standard from which the youngsters' poetic love departs.

2) Shakespeare stresses the innocent and immature nature of Romeo and Juliet's love by developing Romeo's sudden infatuations with both Rosaline and Juliet. This indicates that he is more in love with love than with either of them. Juliet intuits his inconsistency and asks him not to swear by the moon, the symbol of unceasing change: "O, swear not by the moon, th'inconstant moon," (II, ii, 109). However, Juliet too is not exempt from being in love with love. I suggest that decreasing Juliet's age from sixteen (Brooke) to thirteen years reflects the very same intent. *Inter alia* it is the immaturity of the lovers that unleashes the unfortunate chain of events.

3) Shakespeare softens the illicit nature of Romeo and Juliet's love by only hinting at sexual attraction, in place of the consummation of their matrimonial ties that in Brooke's poem takes place over several months, and through the outstanding beauty of their dialogues. Nonetheless, it is rather clear that their love reflects not a chivalric attitude, but sheer passion.

4) The ending produces a sense of absurdity. First, against the background of the persistent trivial feud and the lovers' immaturity, the blindness of the friar, who believes that their wedding will bring about reconciliation of the families, absurdity

is exacerbated. The same applies to the idea of the sleeping potion. His good intentions bring about the opposite results. Second, the coincidental nature of Romeo and Juliet's death evokes a similar sense of absurdity in not gratifying the audience's expectations. Third, the reconciliation of the families at the cost of the adolescents' tragic death precludes any sense of a final happy end.

5) Shakespeare precipitates the tempo of the action from several months to a few days, thus increasing the sense of a terrifying vortex.

Undoubtedly *Romeo and Juliet* reflects experimental intent.<sup>21</sup> Shakespeare evidently tried out an unusual combination of comic and tragic moods. Initially, he created a comic fictional world, in mood (e.g., Old Capulet) and situation (e.g., Rosaline), which begets an eventual tragic outcome. He also experimented with the structure of the fictional world. Against the background of a foolish feud, on the one hand, the imprudent acts of the youngsters and the equally foolish help of Friar Laurence could have been experienced by the synchronic audience as a manifold tragic *hamartia* (error and/or flaw) that is balanced by catastrophe, which is the moralistic structure of Brooke's story. I am inclined to think that although this structure was rejected by Shakespeare, its traces are still felt in his interpretation. The very young age of the lovers, their highly poetic dialogue and their final absolute faithfulness, on the other hand, probably led to an attitude of forgiveness and compassion, mitigating the harsh verdict of catastrophe. However, by the same token, it could also have brought about an experience of the absurd, in the sense of contrasting the expectations of the contemporary spectators.

I suggest that it is not the structure of a fictional action in itself, for such structures are shared by tragedy and comedy, but its combination with a specific mood (comic, tragic or grotesque<sup>22</sup> that determines its genre. In this sense, the transition from a preliminary comic mood to an eventual tragic one does not require a change of structure on the level of action. I suggest, therefore, that Shakespeare's experimentation lies in putting in tension two different principles that structure the same narrative material: the *hamartia*/catastrophe and the absurd version of the happy end structures. Whereas the dead seriousness of *hamartia* arouses expectations for an unhappy ending, the initial lighthearted comic mood arouses expectations for a happy ending. However, the more the sympathy for Romeo and Juliet is promoted, the more the frustration of the audience's expectations becomes plausible. The addition of the motif of fate (the star-cross'd lovers) could not have prepared the audience for such an ending, and thus mitigated their disappointment (cf. Charlton, p. 53–55).

<sup>21</sup> H. B. Charlton: "Shakespeare's Experimental Tragedy" in *Shakespearian Tragedy*, Cambridge 1948, p. 49–63.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Wolfgang Kayser: *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*, trans. Ulrich Weisstein, New York; Toronto 1966, p. 136–138.

In order to gratify the expectations of the audience Shakespeare could have opted for Romeo's discovery that Juliet was merely asleep. Whereas the hastiness of Romeo's decision logically follows from his characterization, there was nothing to prevent the use of a *deus ex machina*, quite a sensible means for a typical comedy of the period: love, parental obstruction and eventual marriage (Frye, p. 163ff). Furthermore, presenting the idea of the eternal union of Romeo and Juliet in death could have compensated the sense of absurdity aroused by the actual ending, but this romantic idea, in the popular sense, was most probably not shared by Shakespeare. His play-script is thus neither moralistic nor romantic. I believe that he opted for the tension between the moralistic and absurdist experience, with the latter being dominant.

Most of the art works based on this narrative claim allegiance to Shakespeare's play-script. What is the reason for this widespread appeal? I suggest that it is rooted in both its poetic excellence and the inherent deficient nature of play-scripts, which not only allow for, but also require innovative interpretations, relevant to ever changing audiences. Nonetheless, the current tendency is to see in this love story the epitome of romantic love that realizes itself beyond death. This interpretative shift can only be explained on the grounds of a far-reaching change in the hierarchy of values, typical of present-day culture that has put love at its top and allows for physical relations as its expression.

In many a production, such a romantic interpretation is often combined with the sense of futility aroused by perennial conflicts, including wars, always justified and always claiming innocent victims. This is achieved by identifying the Montagues and Capulets as the actualized contending parties; e.g., the bilingual Israeli/Arab co-production of *Romeo and Juliet* by the West Jerusalem Khan Theatre and the East Jerusalem El Kasaba Theatre, jointly directed by Fouad Awad Nimer and Eran Baniel, 1994, in which the Montagues were played by Palestinian actors in Arabic and the Capulets by Israeli-Jewish actors in Hebrew. In such productions the feud becomes central and the final reconciliation of the families is meant to be experienced as a happy end. Such adaptations too support the principle of translatability that, as suggested above, is based on the imagistic common grounds. Moreover, in itself, Shakespeare's dramatization of Brooke's story bears witness to the possible translation from an imagistic/evocative use of language to an iconic medium.

**c) Theatre** – For example, Peter Gill's production of *Romeo and Juliet* at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 2004, with Sian Brooke and Matthew Rhys in the leading roles (fig. 2).<sup>23</sup> In this production, which maintained close intertextual relations with the source play-script, the actors imprinted images of fictional interaction on their own bodies and deflected reference to characters, thus evoking such images in the minds of spectators. Theatre is a dynamic medium because it enables neutral

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<sup>23</sup> Source of fig. 2 in <http://www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/RSCrandj-rev.htm>.

images of transitional positions of expressive organs that both separate and connect meaningful images, creating thereby a sense of real life. In addition, this text featured a permanent set that, although in neo-classic style, was reminiscent of the basic Shakespearean stage.<sup>24</sup> Elements of dilapidation in the set created a metaphor of the horrendous consequences of the feud. The aesthetic effect was achieved not only by the poetic nature of the verbal text, but also on visual and aural grounds.

**d) Opera** – For example, Guy Joosten’s production of Gounod’s opera *Romeo and Juliet* at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, 2005, with Natalie Dessay as Juliet and Ramón Vargas as Romeo (fig. 3).<sup>25</sup> Just as in several other well-known operas, the libretto is a romantic adaptation of Shakespeare’s play-script.<sup>26</sup> In general, opera is an art generated by the theatre medium in the sense of imprinting dynamic images of characters on human actors and deflecting reference to them, with its specific difference being the integration of music and singing into the acting. Stage monologues become arias, dialogues – duets, and choruses – choral songs. It is quite evident that in this art the quality of music and singing is substantially more important than the narrative. The dramatic use of singing should be seen as a stage convention, fulfilling an aesthetic function, because it is implied that in their own worlds characters are not supposed to sing rather than speak. Such an aesthetic effect is also achieved on visual grounds; e.g., set design and choreographed movement. Moreover, in this production, on the grounds of the amply employed sky imagery in the play-script, the set featured various backdrops showing a galaxy, the moon and the sun (shining and in eclipse), visible through a stage-high round portal, as if the theatre has been remodeled into a planetarium. Similar considerations apply to musicals, further removed adaptations of the play-script such as Leonard Bernstein’s *West Side Story*.

**e) Figurative ballet** – For example, Mikko Nissinen’s production of *Romeo and Juliet*, music by Sergei Prokofiev and choreography by Rudi van Dantzig, the Boston Ballet, 2003, with Jennifer Gelfand as Juliet and Paul Thrussell as Romeo (fig. 4).<sup>27</sup> In principle, figurative dance too should be seen as generated by the theatre medium, in the sense of actors imprinting dynamic images of characters on their own bodies and deflecting reference to them, with its specific difference being the integration of music and (silent) dance into the acting. It is widely believed that in this art the quality of music and dancing is substantially more important than the narrative. The dramatic use of stylized movement should be seen as a stage convention, fulfilling an aesthetic function, because it is implied that in their own

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<sup>24</sup> Kate Wilkinson: “Romeo and Juliet – Presented by the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon. March 26 – October 8, 2004” in <http://www.shu.ac.uk/emls/10-2/revwilk.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Source of fig. 3 in [http://unserefotos.com.h887666.serverkompetenz.net/merker/main.php?g2\\_itenId=18...](http://unserefotos.com.h887666.serverkompetenz.net/merker/main.php?g2_itenId=18...)

<sup>26</sup> Ronald Blum: “Gounod’s Roméo and Julliette Goes on the Met” in <http://www.andante.com/article/article.cfm?id=26199>.

<sup>27</sup> Source of fig. 4 in <http://www.robertaonthearts.com/id21.html>.

worlds characters are not supposed to dance in silence rather than walk and speak. The aesthetic function is achieved on visual and aural grounds. I note that the extreme aesthetic nature of ballet is most suited to the romantic interpretation of this narrative.

**f) Figurative drawing/painting** – For example, Frank Dicksee’s painting “Romeo and Juliet,” 1884, shows the young couple kissing at the balcony (fig. 5).<sup>28</sup> Juliet is in her dark room, the light of dawn peering forth “from the golden window of the east” (I, i, 119), while Romeo is already on the balustrade, as they part with a passionate kiss: “Farewell, farewell! One kiss and I’ll descend.” (III, v, 36). In the background, there is a passion plant climbing a column, with its flower symbolizing the instruments of crucifixion, a metaphor probably hinting at the lovers’ suffering. In principle, being a static medium, it is difficult to see how a figurative painting can evoke a fictional world that is essentially a complex of characters and their interaction on the time axis. However, although I assume that a single frame picture cannot tell a story, it can call to mind the entire narrative of which it represents a single episode.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the identification of this episode as part of the Romeo and Juliet narrative may also evoke the events before and after it, thus inducing a sense of time progression. This associative process presupposes the knowledge of Shakespeare’s play, which can be presupposed for Western viewers. Although such a picture is usually conceived of as only an illustration of a preexisting narrative, it can also function as a prism through which such a fictional world is perceived; i.e., as an independent text that, by intentionally focusing on a particular scene, attempts to reflect a creative interpretation of the entire fictional world. In this painting, the contrast between day and night, their imminent parting, their passionate kiss and the metaphoric allusion to the Passion definitely convey a romantic interpretation of the narrative. The extreme stylization of the picture supports this interpretation. Such a text reflects an artist’s imprinting of a static image on canvas, with no deflection of reference because there are no live actors who produce acts or expressions that could have been attributed to themselves. The inability of this medium to reproduce speech is usually compensated by pictorial conventions such as a title or drawn/painted words within the frame. In this case, the painting relies on the viewers’ knowledge of the Shakespearean wording. The aesthetic effect is circumscribed to visual harmony.

**g) Cartoon** – A *single frame* cartoon, in regard to a description of a fictional world, evinces the same problem as a painting: its static nature. At most it can be conceived of as a prism through which a known fictional world can be interpreted. A *strip cartoon* overcomes this fundamental temporal limitation by the convention of aligning still drawings in the typical order of a specific verbal culture, from left to

<sup>28</sup> Source of fig. 5: Oil on canvas: Southampton City Art Gallery, Southampton, England.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. James Elkins: “On the Impossibility of Stories: the Anti-narrative and Non-narrative Impulse in Modern Painting” in *Word and Image*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 1991 (p. 348–364), p. 348.

right in the case of English, creating thereby a sequence that spatializes the temporal nature of the fictional world (cf. Elkins, p. 350). Elkins distinguishes between the 'order of recurrence', (e.g., the order of the source narrative), the 'order of telling' (e.g., the order of the frames from left to right) and the 'order of reading' (Elkins, p. 350). In the case of a strip cartoon of the Romeo and Juliet narrative it is sensible to assume that these three orders, although not necessarily, coincide.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, the strip cartoon remains a static medium because it imprints images of human behavior without separating/connecting neutral movements. There is no deflection of reference because the imprinted human images can not refer to themselves. The typical conventions of this medium are speech bubbles (balloons) for speaking and thought bubbles for thinking. The aesthetic impression is produced only on visual grounds as by any other pictorial medium.

The *animated cartoon* goes even further; for example, the animated version of *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by Yefim Gamburg (fig. 6).<sup>31</sup> This production is the product of a mechanical device that enables the recording and projection of drawn/painted static frames in a way that makes the impression of a dynamic medium. The imprinting of images is similar to that of static pictures. There is no deflection of reference. The spoken elements of a fictional world are conventionally conveyed by voice-over. The aesthetic impression is produced on the same grounds as by any other combination of pictorial and aural media. Computerized techniques have not substantially changed the nature of animated cartoons.

**h) Sculpture** – Similar considerations apply to figurative sculpture. Although some of its typical im-printing matters, such as stone and iron, may preclude descriptions of whole fictional worlds for technical reasons, there is nothing to prevent a single scene from being sculpted and provide a prism through which an entire fictional world is perceived. Moreover, nothing precludes the use of lighter materials, not only for sculpting static images of narratives, e.g., the typical manger scene at Christmas, but also ordered images of entire fictional worlds. Moreover, there are animated films of puppets sculpted in wood or plasticine. An outstanding example of animated sculptures is puppet theatre.

**i) Puppet theatre** – For example, Marek Becka's production of *Romeo and Juliet*, the puppet Teatro Toc of Prague, 2004, is a typical marionette version, albeit condensed, of Shakespeare's narrative (fig. 7).<sup>32</sup> The performers not only operated and dubbed, but also carved and painted the wooden marionettes. In principle, puppet theatre should be seen as a kind of theatre medium, with its specific difference being the use of puppets in place of human actors. Its animated sculpted and painted images are operated thus as to create an illusion of human behavior; i.e.,

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<sup>30</sup> I have found no strip cartoon of this narrative, but refer the reader to "Shakespeare's *Macbeth*," illustrated by Von, New York 1982.

<sup>31</sup> Source of fig. 6 in <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt105273>.

<sup>32</sup> Source of fig. 7 in <http://www.radio.cz/en/article/56026>.



the impression of a dynamic medium. Although it is the puppeteers who imprint images on the puppets, there is no deflection of reference because these images can not be attributed to the puppets, unless the characters themselves are puppets (e.g., Stravinsky's *Petrushka*). A typical convention of this medium is the puppeteer's voice-over. Aesthetic effects are similar to those of combined visual and aural media.

**j) Still photography** – For example, the photographed poster of Franco Zeffirelli's film *Romeo and Juliet* (fig. 8).<sup>33</sup> A photograph is basically a mechanical recording of an object and, therefore, its qualities are mainly dependent on its object. Still photography is a static medium that reveals constraints similar to those of a drawing/painting. Therefore, it can be either an illustration of a literary text or a prism reflecting a creative interpretation of a whole narrative or production. In this photograph, Zeffirelli's particular interpretation of the balcony scene is made prominent by comparison to Dicksee's painting. This photograph deflects reference because its object is a human actor enacting a character. In this case, the inability of photography to reproduce speech is compensated by knowledge of the play-script. Its aesthetic effect is conditioned by the same principles governing all pictorial media.

A **photo-novel** of this narrative can reflect the same spatial convention of strip cartoons: aligning still photos in the typical order of a specific verbal culture, from left to right or vice versa, creating thereby sequences that spatialize the temporal nature of a fictional world. In this way, it can compensate for the static nature of still photography. This medium is nonetheless static because it imprints images of human behavior without separating/connecting neutral movements. In this case too there is deflection of reference because the photographed characters are enacted by live actors. Since replication of speech is precluded, the photo-novel employs conventions of speech and thought similarly to strip cartoons, such as speech and thought bubbles (balloons).

**k) Cinema** – For example, Zeffirelli's film *Romeo and Juliet*, that basically follows the play-script, with Olivia Hussey and Leonard Whiting in the leading roles (fig. 9).<sup>34</sup> In principle, film is a mechanical device capable of screening single photographic frames in a way that creates the illusion of a dynamic medium, thus overcoming a basic limitation of still photography. Furthermore, following Peirce, cinema is widely perceived as an indexical text, in the sense of being – like a footprint – the mark left on celluloid by its object. However, it is an index of a process of mechanical recording (cf. Benjamin; cf. Barthes), which does not impinge on its textual nature: still and kinetic photography can record the visual aspects of any object, whether text or not, without changing the nature of its object. Indeed, 'recording' is not a principle of signification and communication. This applies to any

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<sup>33</sup> Source of fig. 8 in <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0063518>.

<sup>34</sup> Source of fig. 9 in <http://students.ed.uiuc.edu/bach/nrj24/rj1968.html>.

kind of recording process. Cinema is neither iconic in Peirce's sense of a photograph being similar to its object, which is in the nature of recording. I have suggested elsewhere, instead, that a film is iconic in the sense of its object being an iconic text generated by the theatre medium; i.e., produced by actors who enact or, rather, imprint images on their own bodies and deflect reference to characters in front of a (recording) camera (Rozik 2005). It is this acting that determines its textual nature. The difference lies in that cinema, because of being a recording, precludes the direct experience of actors' bodies that characterizes theatre. Furthermore, the acting is usually performed intentionally to suit the requirements of the camera. The parallel recording of voice (the sound track) overcomes another limitation of photography. We may conclude, therefore, that it is the recording nature of cinema that enables the description of fictional worlds formulated in the theatre medium.

This production reflects the director's romantic interpretation, and maintains intertextual relations with the source play-script, and possibly with previous theatre and cinematic productions. Zeffirelli stresses the adolescent nature of Romeo and Juliet's love by casting very young actors and, for the first time, showing their naked bodies. Because of the advantages of the cinematic camera, scenes in real open spaces were made possible. On the sensory level, the aesthetic effect was achieved not only by the poetic nature of the verbal text, but also on visual and aural grounds.

While silent movies are recordings of only the visual aspects of descriptions of fictional worlds, radio dramas are recordings of only their aural aspects. In both cases specific conventions make up for their deficiencies. Cinema combines these two techniques of recording.

Similar considerations apply to a video recording deliberately made for this medium; i.e., if it is a recording not of a stage production, but of actors enacting a fictional world in front of a video camera; e.g., Eric Weinthal's video production of *Romeo and Juliet*, 1997.<sup>35</sup> In principle, video too is a mechanical device capable of recording the texts that actors imprint on their own bodies, including their visual and aural components, their dynamic nature, deflection of reference and aesthetic structure. However, like film, it lacks the unmediated experience of actors' bodies that characterizes theatre.

## Conclusions

The redefinition of 'iconicity' in terms of imagistic thinking and communication accounts for the fact that all iconic arts, whether dynamic or static, can generate descriptions of fictional worlds. Static iconic arts overcome their inherent limitations through either conventions, such as linear presentation of single frames and balloons, or mechanical procedures that enable their animation. Literary fiction is capable of describing fictional worlds due to the evocative power of words, and cinema is

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<sup>35</sup> <http://www.bullfrogfilms.com/catalog./romeo.html>.

capable of doing so because of recording imprinted images of characters and their actions. In other words, one way or the other, all these arts can describe fictional worlds due to their common ground being *the imagistic nature of their medium/language; i.e., their being grafted upon the spontaneous ability of the human brain to produce mental images and employ them as units of a nonverbal form of thinking, shared by artist and reader/spectator*. This common ground also explains, in principle, the possible translation from one medium/language to another, albeit reflecting different interpretations, as demonstrated by the various renderings of the Romeo and Juliet narrative. All the above examples bear witness to this translatability.

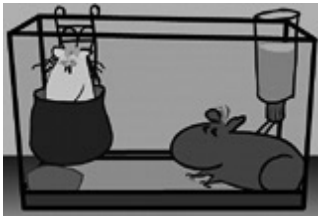


Fig. 1. The Guinea Pig  
Theater animated  
cartoon of *Romeo and Juliet*



Fig. 2. Matthew Rhys and  
Sian Brooke as Romeo and  
Juliet in Peter Gill's theatrical  
production at the Royal  
Shakespeare Theatre, 2004



Fig. 4. Simon Ball and Pollyana Ribeiro  
as Romeo and Juliet in Mikko  
Nissinen's production, with  
music by Sergei Prokofiev and  
choreography by rudi van Dantzig,  
the Boston Ballet, 2003



Fig. 3. Ramón Vargas and Natalie Dessay as Romeo and  
Juliet in Guy Joosten's production of Gounod's opera  
at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, 2005



Fig. 5. Frank  
Dicksee's painting  
*Romeo and Juliet*,  
1884 (oil on canvas)

Fig. 6. The animated  
version of  
*Romeo and Juliet*, directed  
by Yefim Gamburg





Fig. 7. The Teatro Toc puppet theatre version of *Romeo and Juliet* in Marek Becka's production, Prague, 2004



Fig. 8. The photographed poster of Franco Zeffirelli's film *Romeo and Juliet*

Fig. 9. Leonard Whiting and Olivia Hussey as Romeo and Juliet in Zeffirelli's film



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