Lublin Studies in Modern Languages and Literature

VOL. 44
No 2 (2020)

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
MARIA CURIE-SKLODOWSKA UNIVERSITY

Lublin Studies in Modern Languages and Literature

Formal Intersections between Narrative Fiction and Other Media

Guest editors:
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UMCS
44(2) 2020
http://journals.umcs.pl/lsmll

e-ISSN: 2450-4580

Publisher

Maria Curie-Sklodowska University Press
MCSU Library building, 3rd floor
ul. Idziego Radziszewskiego 11, 20-031 Lublin, Poland
phone: +48 81 537 53 04
e-mail: sekretariat@wydawnictwo.umcs.lublin.pl
https://wydawnictwo.umcs.eu

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LUBLIN STUDIES IN MODERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE
Maria Curie-Sklodowska University Press
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Table of Contents

This journal is financed by the Polish Ministerial Programme „Support for Scientific Journals" (contract number 320/WCN/2019/1) and the Maria Curie-Sklodowska University.

Varia

LUBLIN STUDIES IN MODERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE Vol 44, No 2 (2020)
Maria Curie-Sklodowska University Press

E-ISSN 2450-4580

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DOI: 10.17951/lsmll.2020.44.2.1-2

Narrative Fiction and Other Media: An Introduction

The new millennium has seen a resurgence of literary narratives which combine a variety of semiotic modes, such as text, image, font and layout, speech, sound and video. Some of those works situate themselves in the tradition of postmodernist experimentation (represented by such authors as B. S. Johnson, William H. Gass and Raymond Federman), while others aspire to break out of the avant-garde niche and reach a wider audience. As demonstrated by the examples of Douglas Coupland's *Generation X* (1991), Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000) and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), multimodal novels are capable of gaining the status of bestsellers. They have succeeded in appealing to a broader audience because most readers are used to the multimedia environment of print, film, computer etc. By drawing on readers' experiences with other media, the form of contemporary fiction is becoming increasingly hybrid. Over the last two decades, literature has productively engaged with the computer (digital/electronic literature), videogames (interactive fiction), touchscreen devices (Reif Larsen's *Entrances and Exits*, 2016), photography (works by W.G. Sebald and Steve Tomasula), painting (Tom Phillips's *A Humument*, 1970–2016) and sculpture (Safran Foer's *Tree of Codes*, 2010). A synthesis of text, image, sound and video, Tomasula's *TOC: A New-Media Novel* (2009) may be a harbinger of how fiction will evolve in the decades to come.

This special section aims to contribute to a growing body of academic criticism devoted to generic hybridity and multimodal literature. Among the most important monographs about formally unconventional fiction published over the last decade one can mention *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature* (2012) edited by Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons and Brian McHale, Gibbons's *Multimodality,*

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This journal is financed by the Polish Ministerial Programme „Support for Scientific Journals" (contract number 320/WCN/2019/1) and the Maria Curie-Sklodowska University.

Cognition, and Experimental Literature (2012), Grzegorz Maziarczyk's *The Novel As Book: Textual Materiality in Contemporary Fiction in English* (2013), *New Literary Hybrids in the Age of Multimedia Expression: Crossing Borders, Crossing Genres* (2014) edited by Marcel Cornis-Pope, Simon Barton's *Visual Devices in Contemporary Prose Fiction: Gaps, Gestures, Images* (2015), Katarzyna Bazarnik's *Liberature: A Book-Bound Genre* (2018) and *The Poetics of Fragmentation in Contemporary British and American Fiction* (2019) edited by Vanessa Guignery and Wojciech Drąg. Each of those studies testifies to the myriad ways in which contemporary literature challenges the notion of a literary work as a codex composed of white sheets of paper with rectangular blocks of text on either side and seeks to refashion itself in the media-saturated world by creatively mingling with other arts.

The contributions to this special section reflect a variety of theoretical and critical approaches to intermedial narrative fiction. Dominika Bugno-Narecka examines the relation between word and image in terms derived from Neobaroque studies in order to propose a dynamic model of ekphrasis as a fold. Drawing on Gérard Genette's distinction between immanence and transcendence, Jarosław Hetman discusses the ways in which innovative interart references reinvigorate contemporary novels in English. Aleksander Bednarski's contribution fills in a lacuna in intermedial studies by providing an overview of pictorial insets in recent Welsh-language fiction. In his analysis of the relationship between Gerhard Richter's photo-painting series *October 18, 1977* and Don DeLillo's short story "Baader Meinhof", Tristan Ireson-Howells explores parallels between pictorial and verbal problematisation of the act of viewing. The applicability of traditional models of ekphrasis to narrative fiction evoking photography is discussed by Miriam de Paiva Vieira and Joicy Silva Ferreira in relation to Saura Baume's novel *A Line Made by Walking*. Katarzyna Biela expands the scope of intermedial studies by focusing on references to the newspaper as a medium in B. S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates*. In his reading of J. G. Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition*, Marcin Tereszewski relates its media-saturated fragmentation of the novel form to the cultural shift towards spectacular society. Subversion of genre boundaries figures equally prominently in a contribution by Dominika Ferens, who investigates the graphic novel *Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution* as an experimental alternative to an ethnographic monograph. In his application of the findings of digital discourse studies to Nicola Barker's *H(A)PPY*, Joe Darlington examines the political potential of innovative multimodal techniques. Finally, Wojciech Drąg's contribution goes beyond print literature in its Barthesian investigation of David Clark's digital biography *88 Constellations for Wittgenstein (to be played with the Left Hand)*. Taken together, the essays collected in this special section demonstrate the artistic vitality of formal intersections between narrative fiction and other media.

LUBLIN STUDIES IN MODERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE Vol 44, No 2 (2020)
Maria Curie-Sklodowska University Press

E-ISSN 2450-4580

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DOI: 10.17951/lsmll.2020.44.2.3-13

Ekphrastic Historiographic Metafiction – Enfolding Word, Image and History

ABSTRACT
The purpose of this paper is to provide a dynamic model of ekphrasis which can be used to interpret literary works that refer to, and thus, represent works of art. The paper will also show how ekphrasis as a fold collaborates with historiographic metafiction in ekphrastic historiographic metafiction. Theoretical reflection will be illustrated with the relevant examples from Salman Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence,* Patrick Gale's *Notes from an Exhibition,* Tracy Chevalier's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* and Joseph Heller's *Picture This.*
Keywords: ekphrasis, fold, historiographic metafiction, ekphrastic historiographic metafiction, Patrick Gale, Salman Rushdie, Tracy Chevalier, Joseph Heller

1. Introduction

The history of the relationship between word and image is a long and complex one, for its origins can be traced back to the ancient times and the beginnings of art, literature and rhetoric (Heffernan, 1993; Hagstrum, 1987; Praz, 1974). Painting and literature have inspired each other for centuries. Painters illustrated or depicted stories they heard or read, and poets/writers described works of art they saw and admired, or simply imagined. From its very beginning, the academic debate on the nature of the relationship between poetry and painting, or the visual and the verbal in general, has been divided into two opposing positions. On the one hand, there is the approach supporting the *paragone*, i.e., the definite separation, unresolved rivalry and continuous struggle for domination between word and image, visible in the theories put forward by the followers of Leonardo da Vinci or Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. On the other hand, there is the sister arts approach, which focuses on the similarities and the cooperation between the visual and the verbal, manifested in the Horatian doctrine of *ut pictura poesis*.

The question considered in this paper concerns the existence of a third option that would resolve the *paragone* and focus on the complementary nature and inseparability of word and image, especially regarding the problem of representing history in contemporary literature in English. Hence, the purpose of the article is

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This journal is financed by the Polish Ministerial Programme „Support for Scientific Journals" (contract number 320/WCN/2019/1) and the Maria Curie-Sklodowska University.

to examine how literature uses works of art, especially paintings, to write and tell (hi)story. The approach adopted here will follow neither the *paragone* nor the sister arts approach, but will attempt to establish a new thread in the study of word-image relationships. Theoretical reflection on the use of non-binary ekphrastic description in novels describing fictionalised history will be illustrated with examples of ekphrasis from four novels: Salman Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008), Patrick Gale's *Notes from an Exhibition* (2007), Tracy Chevalier's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (1999) and Joseph Heller's *Picture This* (1988). It will be demonstrated here how the descriptions of artworks can be used by historiographic metafiction understood as the writing of and about history by means of literary fiction.

2. Theoretical reflection

In order to determine the third way mentioned above, it is necessary to leave the post-Cartesian system of body-mind dichotomies for an alternative to the omnipresent ideal-material distinction. The alternative in question, provided by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and later developed by Gilles Deleuze and Anna Munster, is comprised of the notion of the fold. In Leibniz's view, all matter consists of an infinite continuum of elastic texture which folds into smaller and smaller folds. Within these countless folds there is no final indivisible point. Furthermore, due to different forces at play, matter also forms inner folds, which are distinct from the outer ones, but which belong to the very continuum and are part of the same unity. Consequently, the unity of matter points to another layer – that of the soul – which is further subject to the process of folding and unfolding.

Leibniz, Deleuze and Munster perceive the universe as an endless process of folding and unfolding the outside (matter) that creates an inside (soul) which, in turn, is the doubling of the outside. In other words, the world consists of the physical axis of material bodies and the metaphysical sphere of free souls which are both separate yet connected through folding. As a result, everything that exists is folded in-between: it constitutes "a fold-of-two" (Deleuze, 1993, p. 10), i.e., a fold-of-material-and-immaterial. As ideas are imbued with the material realisations of these ideas, they all form an infinite continuity. Consequently, fold is a hybrid which allows to explain the material and the immaterial reality. It is impossible to know the material without the presence of the immaterial.

One distinctive feature of the fold is that it "is both confluent and dissonant: it joins sides and marks the difference between them" (Munster, 2006, p. 31). Thus, the elements within the fold, or its sides, remain distinct but are inseparably connected as they belong to a continuum. What is folded is "at the very same instance different and the same" (Seppi, 2016, p. 52) – it differentiates and is differentiated (Deleuze, 1993, p. 30). As the structure of the fold is always double, it is impossible to suppress one side of the fold without the other being

suppressed as well (Teyssot, 2000, p. 79). According to West-Pavlov (2009), "[t] e fold is Deleuze's most genial solution to resolving the paradox of simultaneous indivisibility and multiplicity" (p. 233). The fold not only suggests but also imposes continuity, which eliminates the principle of the excluded middle and deconstructs binary oppositions. In this model, binary oppositions may constitute the two extremes or ends of the fold. Since they belong to the spectrum of the fold, mentioning of one extreme immediately evokes the presence of the other extreme.

In such a model of reality, then, it can be said that the fold joins word and image and, at the same time, marks the difference between them. Consequently, it can be argued that the *paragone* is solved – the elements are equally important and the binary opposition is lifted or deconstructed as the verbal and the visual elements constitute the ends of the fold and its extension in either direction.

The problem of the enfolded word and image is perhaps best illustrated by the notion of ekphrasis. The scope of the notion, i.e. whether ekphrasis is exclusively a poem about a painting or a description of any work of art (representational or non-representational) or any non-verbal text (kinetic or non-kinetic), and whether it is a separate work or part of a longer narrative, has been constantly debated and various scholars have adopted different definitions of the notion in their studies. For the purposes of this analysis, however, the definition of ekphrasis provided by Clüver (2017) in *Ekphrasis and Adaptation* seems to be the most appropriate. He understands ekphrasis as "the verbal representation of real or fictive configurations composed in a non-kinetic visual medium" (p. 462). His definition is broader than Heffernan's (1993) more popular "verbal representation of visual representation" (p. 3) as it includes descriptions of non-representational art, like architecture, sculpture or abstract art. At the same time, Clüver's definition is narrow enough to exclude instances of pictorialism and iconicity, which also belong to the general fold of word and image relationships, or the descriptions of dance, film and television.

The intuition that the verbal and the visual are inseparable, like the whole history of word and image relationships, goes back to the roots of ekphrasis and to the ancient art of rhetoric, which perceived ekphrasis as "a descriptive account bringing what is illustrated vividly before one's sight" (Heffernan, 1991, p. 312). The translatability of one code into another is inscribed in the etymology of the word: Greek *ek phrazein,* which literally means "to tell in full" or "to speak out". The linguistic precision and flexibility as well as the fluency of ekphrastic description transform the listener/reader into a spectator as the language of the description creates a picture in the imagination of the listener/reader. Consequently, the vivid language of description (word) immediately points to the existence of a specific visual structure (image). This feature of ekphrasis is referred to by rhetoricians as enargeia, and it strongly suggests a dynamic vision of the notion in which the distinction between the verbal and the visual is blurred and the two are

folded together into a single structure. Führer and Banaszkiewicz (2014) notice that rhetorical ekphrasis is a

> device surpassing the traditional narratological classifications of description and narration as well as the generalising semiotic categories of word and image when considered as two conventionally distinct media of oppositional character (p. 55).

As far as literary ekphrasis is concerned, Wagner (1996) claims that because literature and art occupy "the same representational space", there is no "line separating the visible from the readable" (pp. 32-33), which matches Deleuze's idea of a smooth transition from seeing to reading the unfolding world. According to Smith, the unconstrained transition between word and image is possible due to the instability of the relation between word, idea and thing. Although the correspondence theory of literary description assumes a stable and invariable reference, and a clear relation between the signifier and the signified, structuralism brings the idea of connotation, which destabilises the fixed relationship between the sign and its referent: "connotative references behind the denotative sign constantly remind one of the instability of communicative and reading acts that are always subject to supplementation or substitution" (Smith, 1995, p. 4). In the processes of communication and reading, new supplementary meanings of signs are created by means of connotation. What is more, some already existing meanings of signs can be replaced with others. This does not change the fact that there are certain contextual determinants that limit the meaning of a sign by indicating a relation between the sign and a singular external referent. Still, ekphrasis foregrounds "linguistic debates over truth-claims of referential and linguistic paradigms, making language their primary theme" (Smith, 1995, p. 12). It happens so due to the tensions between two competing theories of truth: correspondence theory and coherence theory. According to the former, there is a logical empirical link between language and reality. The latter, in turn, claims that language is a "rational system containing analogical truths that fit the experiential world" (Smith, 1995, p. 23). As a result, language is the instrument of world-making.

By analogy, the relationship between correspondence and coherence can be compared to the tension between the visual and the verbal, the two modes of representation present in the notion of ekphrasis. The analogy is particularly visible when we juxtapose Smith's (1995) observation that "[t]he consistent use of ekphrasis [...] reveals a regular pattern of literary struggle between the conflicting correspondence and coherence paradigms of representation" (p. 15) with Heffernan's (1996) statement that ekphrasis "stages a battle for mastery between two rival systems of representation" (p. 263): the driving force of the verbal code and "the stubborn resistance" of the fixed visual code. Smith (1995) further explains that "in order to establish truth-claims for a valorized paradigm of representation, the texts must represent both discourses, and this act

of representation undermines any obvious attempt to deny the representational efficacy of the opposing paradigm" (p. 38). In other words, both correspondence and coherence, or referentiality and performativity, are present side by side in a literary work. Neither of them is the privileged or the favoured one, and thinking of one immediately makes the other present. As a result, stability is absent and the denotation which governs the sign-referent relation becomes ambiguous. Without a stable and predominant foundation, meaning is a play of differences and depends on what is present and what is absent.

Similarly, the verbal and the visual elements in ekphrasis are equally valid and significant. Each element bears a trace of the other. The features of a text or a configuration in a non-verbal sign system can be extended onto the verbal representation of it and vice versa: the properties of the verbal representation entail and can be extended onto the visual. The verbal implies the visual and the visual bears marks of the verbal, even if the other element seems to be absent. Such configuration opens ekphrasis to connotation which, as mentioned above, frequently resorts to substitution and supplementation. Consequently, ekphrasis seems to be incomplete and capable of continuation. Indeed, it can be further extended by means of another fold that might include, for instance, the world presented in the story, a part of which is constituted by the configuration composed in a non-verbal sign system described verbally.

The morphology of ekphrasis outlined above leads to and allows for the distinction of ekphrastic historiographic metafiction, which is the extension of the notion of ekphrasis onto the issues related to representing history in literary works. Hutcheon (1988) in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* explains the way postmodernist thinking challenges the separateness of the historical and the literary. She observes that instead of being separate and individual, history and literature in fact share a particular set of features. According to Hutcheon (1988), history and literature "derive their force more from verisimilitude than from any objective truth" (p. 105). Both are "linguistic constructs, highly conventionalized in their narrative forms", and "equally intertextual, deploying the texts of the past within their own complex textuality" (p. 105). Currie (2013) in a short foreword to Hayden White's "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory" notices that "just as historical theory finds its way into narrative, so too does narrative find its way into history" (p. 104). Hence, the influence is both mutual and reciprocal. As a result, in historiographic metafiction there is a constant tension between the historical (be that figures, settings or events) and the fictional. The line between the two is blurred.

In addition, according to Hutcheon (1988), "[h]istoriographic metafiction acknowledges the paradox of the *reality* of the past but its *textualized accessibility* to us today" (p. 114). Because there is no access to historical reality, only a plausible version of history can be mediated and reconstructed. Historical

texts do not describe or trace history as it is or as it happened ("the reality of the past"), but propound a possible version of history ("textualised accessibility"). Indeed, Hutcheon (1988) states that "we can only know 'reality' as it is produced and sustained by cultural representations of it" (p. 121). Actual ekphrasis, i.e., a description of a non-verbal text which exists independently outside the literary work, is precisely a cultural representation of 'reality'. But the problem is more complex than that. Ekphrasis can be used to bridge the gaps in the story or history told. In other words, it can fill in the missing details or provide new information in the story, like in Salman Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence* or Patrick Gale's *Notes from an Exhibition*. At the same time, ekphrasis can be the trace or the remnant of the past which in itself contains gaps and triggers questions and speculations about the unknown or unrecorded aspects of history. As such, it can be the starting point for telling the story and providing a fictional account of the events related to the authentic visual material. That is the case of, for instance, Joseph Heller's *Picture This* or Tracy Chevalier's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. The two approaches and the four novels will be now briefly considered in the analytical part of this paper.

3. Practical application

The first of the two ways in which historiographic metafiction can use ekphrasis is to bridge the gaps in the story and in the plausible version of historical events proposed by the author. Ekphrastic descriptions can be smoothly, even seamlessly, incorporated into the narrative and might play an important role in the construction of a coherent plot. Ekphrases that describe Dashwanth's paintings in Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence* constitute significant integral elements of the complex narrative. They intertwine with the historical narrative, regardless of whether history is understood as historical fact, like battles and wars of which some historical record remains; or an invented story set in a particular historical context, like the story of Qara Köz and her adventures. In other words, a verbal account of the visual depiction mingles with the (fictitious) past reconstructed in language and contributes to the rewriting of history. As can be noticed in the extensive ekphrasis concerning the painting of the fall of Umar Sheikh Mirza (Rushdie, 2009, pp. 153-154), the description of the painting overlaps with the historical account and the other way round, history extends onto an ekphrastically presented work of art. This means that the description of the artwork evokes historical figures and events, and historical account points to the artwork. In particular, the fall of Akbar's ancestor is a historical fact, known to the members of the royal family and preserved in the sources outside the novel. But, in addition to the physical appearance of Umar Sheikh, who is depicted in the painting as fat and short, the character of Akbar's relative – good-natured, just and talkative backgammon player and wine-lover – is also deftly woven into the literary description of the picture. The description of

the depiction naturally goes beyond the image and smoothly moves on to include Umar Sheikh's descendants and warns them not to follow in the ancestor's steps (Rushdie, 2009, p. 154). The painting and its description help (re)construct and interpret historical events they attempt to depict.

The same can be said about the descriptions of Dashwanth's series of paintings depicting Qara Köz's life (pp. 149-160). The paintings, and their subsequent descriptions, are based on the verbal account provided by Niccolo, one of the protagonists. The artworks aim at representing, and hence (re)constructing, the image of the forgotten princess. Together with Niccolo's narrative, the artworks fill the gap in the memory of the princess's family. Set in the elaborately described and minutely depicted landscape of the early Mughal empire, the paintings show Qara Köz at different stages of her childhood and adolescence until her departure with the Shah of Persia. The paintings (re)present the long forgotten past: ancestors, cities and landscapes of the past spring back to life on canvases described. What is worth emphasising is that all the descriptions of Dashwanth's paintings imply and include the events from the princess's life before and after the scenes represented on canvas; hence, narrative mingles seamlessly with description. The Mughal princess, Qara Köz, is brought back to life because by looking at the paintings the royal ladies suddenly remember the name of the forgotten princess and re-consider her existence: "The painting itself worked a kind of magic, because the moment old Princess Gulbadan looked at it in Akbar's private rooms she remembered the girl's name, […] 'Makhdum, yes, that was the mother's name […]. And the girl was Qara Köz! – Qara Köz, that was it!'" (p. 150). It can be said that the paintings, after recalling forgotten and repressed history, restore the princess to the memory of her family. Ekphrastic passages in Rushdie's novel show history and art as a continuum and illustrate how the fold functions: the border between the two notions, history and art, is blurred and made invisible on the pages of the novel. There is a smooth transition from the work of art to history, i.e., from the description of the work of art to the narration of historical events and the other way round: from the verbal account of history to the description of its visual representation. The two forms extend onto and complement each other.

In *Notes from an Exhibition,* Gale organises the structure of the novel around a collection of exhibit labels – each chapter begins with a curatorial note which introduces a new exhibit and a new non-chronological fragment of the story. The intuition that these descriptions are separate from the narrative that follows because of the visible frame seems utterly wrong. Not only do the items described at the beginning of each chapter appear later in the narrative which is told from the points of view of different members of the family; but the exhibits also point to other items on display in the novel. For instance, a swimming costume, one of the exhibits described in the label at the beginning of the fourth chapter, matches in colour with two landscape paintings mentioned in that label. The item itself is

used in the narrative that follows by the artist during one of many picnics on the beach. All the items gathered for the literary exhibition – works of abstract art and private possessions – together with the curatorial notes that describe them and the narrative that accompanies each item (re)construct and (re)create the story of Rachel Kelly, an imaginary painter, her bipolar disorder and artistic activity, as well as the story of her family. The relationship between the objects on display is that they reflect stages of the artist's and her family's life, and complement the narrated fragments of the story, e.g., early works correspond to the early years of Rachel's life, clothes match the occasion on which they are worn and which is later described in the novel. Ekphrases not only complement but also unite the otherwise fragmented narrative provided by the members of Rachel's family and their shredded memories. Due to the consistent strategy of opening each chapter with an exhibit description, ekphrases become the binder of the multiperspective narrative, bringing together an array of viewpoints and scattered pieces of information.

The other approach to using ekphrasis in historiographic metafiction concerns the work of art as the starting point for the story. Here, the artwork precedes the story and frequently the depicted figures become the protagonists of such a story. A perfect example of this approach is Chevalier's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. The writer's personal obsession with the painting, as well as scarce information about Vermeer's life and no record of the model's identity, led to fictitious speculations about the model's history (a Protestant maid working in one of Catholic households in the 17th century Delft) and the story of the painting's origin (a commission from a wealthy patron and the artist's attempt to avoid social scandal). The novel can be regarded as a supplement to the painting, a supplement which blends fiction with history. The existence and actions of Vermeer, his family and patrons might be proved and documented, i.e. there are records of where they went and what they did, but no personal content remains. Consequently, Chevalier could put plausible words into their mouths, suggest plausible motives for their actions and for Vermeer's paintings, and speculate about the model for *Girl with a Pearl Earring,* her social background, thoughts, feelings and interaction with the artist. Thus, the whole novel can be considered not only as one extensive ekphrasis pointing to the events before and after the scene depicted in the eponymous painting, but also as a story built on ekphrastic descriptions of Vermeer's other works, including *View of Delft, Woman with a Perl Necklace, The Concert* and a couple of others. These paintings capture the reality of the time and place of their creation, i.e., Vermeer's household and baroque Dutch city, and determine the aesthetics and constraints of the novel's plot, e.g., Griet's thoughts and behaviour, descriptions of the setting, or social conventions.

Another example of a novel adopting the second approach is Heller's *Picture This,* in which the very distant and the very recent past seem to merge in Rembrandt's

painting *Aristotle Contemplating a Bust of Homer*. The painting and the description of the painting, as well as the fictionalised history of its creation and successive possession, are the starting point for a lengthy meditation on history, philosophy and culture that spans many centuries: from the antiquity long before Aristotle was represented in Rembrandt's painting, through the history of the Netherlands, especially during the period of Rembrandt's life, to the 20th century and the tense relations between the US and Russia during the Cold War. Ekphrasis is extended from what is widely known (or what is thought to be widely known) to what is not known (that can be guessed or presumed). It includes the story, i.e. a literary account that suggests a particular version of events, of the figures depicted by Rembrandt, the painter himself and the story of *Aristotle Contemplating a Bust of Homer*'s possession, which, in turn, are extended or unfold to include a great number of other facts, such as references to, and descriptions of, Rembrandt's other paintings, which are presented in a wider context of events and figures:

> In May of 1656 he [Rembrandt] transferred the house to Titus. He was safe from jail but penniless.
> In Amsterdam a man could be executed for stealing a coat and invited to city hall after stealing a fortune.
> Shares in the Dutch East India Company plummeted too.
> The house went up for auction in 1658, the same year he completed the majestic self-portrait now in the Frick Collection in New York, in which, lushly attired in a fur mantle and a gown of gold, he sits in a chair as though filling a throne, rests his fingers around a silver-topped cane that could be a scepter, and looks as regal, perhaps, as Mr. Henry Clay Frick, of the steel industry, did himself, as baronial, perhaps, as Frick, Cornelius Vanderbilt, Henry Ford, John Pierpont Morgan and Lorenzo de'Medici rolled into one (Heller, 1988, pp. 247-248).

In a way, *Picture This* could be read as a literary Wunderkammer accumulating many descriptions of objects and facts that attempt to explain the world and the rules that govern it, mainly economic and political, though not exclusively.

What is more, a possible literary explanation of how the meaning was bestowed on the painting is provided in the form of a dialogue between Rembrandt and Jan Six:

> "I don't recognise the man. Is it someone I should?"
> "Aristotle."
> "He looks like a Jew."
> Aristotle glared. Rembrandt toned him right down with a small touch of glaze.
> "It's the way I want him. […] A friend models for me."
> "In that costume? Aristotle?"
> "Don't you like the effect?"
> "He looks so sad."
> "It's the way that I see him. He is growing older. He doesn't know what to do. He's an ancient philosopher and he can't find work."
> "Do I see something else? Is that a face on the pendant now?"

> "I'm putting one in. I don't know whose it is. It's from something I bought."
> "Call it Alexander the Great." "Why?"
> "He was taught by Aristotle. You'll get credit for greater symbolic intelligence. The gold in the chain?"
> "I'm making it thicker" (Heller, 1988, p. 66).

The figure painted by the artist is that of Aristotle but with a Jewish physical appearance. The man on the medallion is now recognised as Alexander the Great while it is suggested that for Rembrandt it could have been anyone. The form of the dialogue about the painting in which one character challenges the other, instead of the tedium of a minute description, indicates the creative and pro-narrative potential of ekphrasis (Sawa, 2015).

The painting of Aristotle is animated both by the painter and the author of the novel – as soon as the author describes Rembrandt painting Aristotle's ears, the latter begins to hear; as soon as the artist paints the philosopher's eyes, the latter sees. The world presented in the novel is perceived through Aristotle's eyes, or, more precisely, through the animated representation of Aristotle painted on canvas by Rembrandt and described by Heller. This Aristotle is often bored, cold, angry or disappointed with the fact that people do not learn much from history and repeat the same mistakes. Still, *Aristotle Contemplating a Bust of Homer* is the prism through which the parallels between Hellenic culture and politics, on the one hand, and the culture and politics contemporary with Heller, on the other, are presented.

Conclusion

The notion of ekphrasis has the structure of a fold which joins but simultaneously makes a distinction between two such distant elements as word and image. The verbal and the visual constitute the ends or extremes of the fold's extension to each side. Ekphrasis as a fold, then, is a continuum of the verbal and the visual or the visual and the verbal. There is no hierarchy within a fold, and consequently within ekphrasis, and so there is no domination of one element over the other as the elements are indistinguishable. There is, hence, a chiastic balance and equality of the elements. The classical binary opposition between the visual and non-visual (the verbal) is replaced with the complementary and extendable functions of each element. Ekphrasis as fold can be extended into infinity, by means of another fold or folds, embracing, in the first place, the world presented in the literary work, to which a work of art described or mentioned belongs. By extension, it can unfold onto the topics and problems related to representing history. Ekphrastic historiographic metafiction uses non-verbal texts, or, to use Clüver's (2017) revised terminology, configurations in a non-kinetic visual medium (p. 462), either as a source of knowledge about the past, and as such as the starting point for telling a complex (fictionalised) story about the past, or a possible representation of the

past, as exemplified by novels by Tracy Chevalier and Joseph Heller; or as the material to bridge the gaps in the otherwise fragmented and incomplete account of plausible past events, illustrated by examples from Rushdie's and Gale's novels.

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LUBLIN STUDIES IN MODERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE
Maria Curie-Sklodowska University Press
Vol 44, No 2 (2020)
E-ISSN 2450-4580

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DOI: 10.17951/lsmll.2020.44.2.15-25

Still Ekphrasis? Visual and Non-Visual Art in Contemporary Anglophone Fiction

ABSTRACT
The article explores the ancient notion of ekphrasis in an attempt to further adjust it to the requirements of the contemporary literary and artistic landscape. An overview of the transformations in the world of art in the 20th century allows us to update our understanding of what art is today and to examine its existence within the literary context. In light of the above, I emphasize the significance of broadening the definition of ekphrasis so as to include not only painting and sculpture on the one side, and poetry on the other, but also to open it up to less conventional forms of artistic expression, and popularize its use in reference to prose. In order to illustrate its relevance to the novel, I have conducted a study of three contemporary novels – John Banville's *Athena*, Kurt Vonnegut's *Bluebeard* and Don DeLillo's *Mao II* – in order to uncover the innovative ways in which novelists nowadays use ekphrasis to reinvigorate long prose.
Keywords: ekphrasis, allographic art, autographic art, notional ekphrasis, visual art, Banville, DeLillo, Vonnegut

Ekphrasis has a long and eventful history in the studies of Western literature. Ekphrastic texts are those that feature prominent descriptions of pieces of art; however, any scholar of the *belles-lettres* would be quick to point out that such a definition is hardly adequate for any serious study of the fascinating phenomena that occur at the intersection of the visual and the literary. I see this as an excellent opportunity to observe the way we have perceived these fields in the past, and how our current views, on fine arts especially, have contributed to the development of new paths in literary expression. In order to discuss the way in which visual, and later, conceptual arts have provided inspiration to writers across the centuries, I would first like to focus on the contemporary understanding of art.

The perspective I would like to offer might be seen as controversial, though, as I will argue, it reflects well the situation at hand. Gérard Genette, one of the most distinguished representatives of the narratological approach to literature, is not

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This journal is financed by the Polish Ministerial Programme „Support for Scientific Journals" (contract number 320/WCN/2019/1) and the Maria Curie-Sklodowska University.

always remembered for his contributions to the study of non-literary arts, and yet I find his remarks published in *The Work of Art: Immanence and Transcendence* (1997) particularly illuminating for reflecting on ekphrasis. Granted, opponents of adopting a narratological perspective on all arts might argue that this take will inevitably be biased in favor of literature as narratology's main subject of interest, but we should remember that this bias is already inscribed in ekphrasis itself, a *literary* description of an *extra-literary* form of expression.[1] Genette's venture to introduce a set of concepts uniform to all arts should allow us to move easily across the generic boundaries to observe the fascinating cross-inseminations that enrich today's literature.

Genette's most significant contribution to our discussion consists in the distinction of two qualities that define every work of art: immanence and transcendence, the former explaining the necessity of each work of art to have a material manifestation, the latter showing that in order to function in an artistic way, each such work also needs to venture beyond its materiality (Genette, 1997, p. 11). This seemingly trivial observation has some rather profound consequences. It tackles the phenomenological problem of art's ontology: in order for anyone to perceive a work of art, and to classify it as such, that work of art has to offer itself, or at least signal its existence to the audience's senses. The fact that such a work transcends its material manifestation defines its status as art but is also instrumental for ekphrasis, for it is one thing to perceive an object, and quite another to perceive it as artistic.

In relation to the issue of immanence, Genette calls upon Goodman's distinction between allographic and autographic art: "if music and literature (among other arts) are allographic, the act of writing, printing, or performing a text or score is for its part an autographic art" (Goodman, 1968, p. 112), refining and updating it to more contemporary needs:

> [s]ince the opposition material/ideal bears on immanence alone, and sometimes divides artistic practices that are in all other respects homogeneous, I will generally avoid speaking of autographic or allographic *arts* or works (transparent metonymies aside), reserving these adjectives for the *objects of immanence* of such works; "autographic art", for example, will henceforth mean nothing more for us than "an art whose works have autographic, or material objects of immanence". Moreover, the category for greatest relevance for us will be one that often cuts across a considerable number of traditional artistic distinctions: that of the *regime of immanence*, autographic or allographic (Genette, 1997, p. 24).

I would like to claim that this typology could become more fruitful if we could slightly depart from what both Goodman and Genette are arguing by stating that

[1] It is worth noting that the conviction of literature's superiority to visual arts has a long tradition, which can be perhaps best observed in the case of the classical *Laokoon. An Essay Upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766) by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing.

autographic works of art manifest themselves in a particular materiality, exist in a singularity and make it possible to distinguish between the original and the copy. By contrast, allographic works of art, despite having a material existence, are significantly less limited by it. They exist in plurality, and therefore are potentially indestructible, thus they function like Baudrillard's *simulacra*, where the original, a manuscript, for instance, would rather be perceived within the autographic regime, existing in its singularity and often valued because of this.

In the last decades, we have been observing an increased interest in the notion of ekphrasis, and I believe that much of it has to do with the significant developments in the world of fine arts in the twentieth century. In his book, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*, Heffernan (1993) begins his study with the following definition: "ekphrasis is the verbal representation of a visual representation" (p. 3). We must at this stage, however, distinguish between literary and non-literary ekphrasis to honor the roots of the term. Originally included in the *Progymnasmata*, ekphrasis was one of the exercises the ancient Greeks and Romans used in teaching rhetoric (Webb, 2009, p. 3). With time, the skill of vividly describing a work of art (and works of art were used for didactic purposes to provide students with more challenging material for description) was appreciated by Greek and Roman poets, and in this form ekphrasis survived without many substantial changes roughly up until the twentieth century. However, with the rapid developments in the fine arts, it became apparent that this way of understanding ekphrasis had become outdated. I would like to argue that in attempting to redefine the term, we should be concerned with the principal mechanisms that govern the functioning of ekphrasis and not focus on the conventional limitations.

The example that Heffernan uses in trying to explain these mechanisms is very revealing. The scholar brings to our attention the famous painting by Pieter Breughel the Elder, *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (ca. 1557) and two twentieth-century poems depicting it: Wystan Hugh Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" (1938) and William Carlos Williams's "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" (1960). Both poets focus their ekphrastic works on Breughel's famous use of perspective. By placing in the foreground a peasant ploughing a field, the painter draws our attention to the mundane chore, and away from the death of the mythical Icarus, whose demise is merely signaled by a pair of legs sticking out above the surface of the sea. We only learn that those legs belong to the son of Daedalus from the painting's title. Breughel thus "outsources" much of the meaning of his autographic work to the allographic regime represented by the title, and in this, I would like to argue, he emphasizes its conceptual dimension of the canvas, and the concept, I would like to posit, is allographic in nature. Accordingly, both ekphrastic poems refer more to the conceptual aspect of the canvas than to its strictly visual properties[2] (it

[2] And through the concept, also to the myth.

could be argued that perspective is a visual property, but I believe that it is not the perspective itself that occupies the poets but rather its consequences). To Auden, the indifference to Icarus' death becomes an impulse to reflect on stoicism from almost a monist perspective. Williams too draws heavily on the consequences of Breughel's use of perspective, but his poem does not suggest indifference, but rather the limits of human perception, suggesting that even events of great significance can go unnoticed, I believe.

While studying the various instances of ekphrasis across the centuries, Heffernan distinguishes a subtype of the concept that will prove particularly useful in reading contemporary literature, which he calls "notional ekphrasis": one that offers the reader a work of art that was conceived in the imagination of the ekphrasis' author (Heffernan, 1993, p. 14). To illustrate what makes this type of ekphrasis both different from traditional ekphrasis while at the same time adhering to its fundamental principles, Heffernan (1993) focuses on John Keats's famous "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (1819) (pp. 113–114). The scholar is correct in pointing out that Keats constructs his ekphrasis *as if* he was dealing with an actual piece of art. That is why the poet uses language as if it was striving to challenge its own limitations, which it is obviously not. What makes Keats's work special, and additionally necessitates its notional character, is the theme the poet chooses to discuss. "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is a reflection on the passage of time in the face of a hypothetical eternity. The imagined work of autographic art represents this, as we have observed above, seemingly eternal duration of a material object in contrast with the fleetingness of human life depicted by it. Notably, that representing object is a symbol of death. If we imagine an urn decorated with the depictions of life, this image creates the foundation for the conceptual dimension of Keats's poem, which itself offers a haunting vision of eternity, one of stillness and unfulfilled desires. In the case of notional ekphrasis, we can see how an author can not only creatively interpret a work of art, but conceptually mold it to fit the thematic requirements of the ekphrasis. This quality will prove particularly important to the work of the contemporary authors that I discuss below.

In light of the present argument, therefore, it would be worth to acknowledge that we are currently witnessing what Sawa (2009) calls a "pro-narrative" tendency in studies on ekphrasis, which poses the question if ekphrasis must be strictly limited to poetry and the visual arts (p. 101), which is especially legitimate if we keep in mind what Mitchell (2005) observes in the context of contemporary art that "[f]or art historians today, the safest conclusion would be that the notion of a purely visual work of art was a temporary anomaly, a deviation from the much more durable tradition of mixed and hybrid media" (p. 395). Therefore, expanding the definition of ekphrasis is merely bringing it up to date with the current scholarship on the fine arts. Analogically, it makes sense to expand our understanding of ekphrasis in the other direction, and acknowledge its presence

in prose (Sawa, 2009, p. 100) for, as I have argued, it is more reasonable to define a concept by explaining its principal mechanisms and not the instances of its manifestation.

The literary landscape of the 20th century and beyond has been changing dramatically, and with the current wealth of the novelistic tradition, it would be risky to argue that long prose lacks the sophistication of poetry. The novels that I propose for analysis vary significantly in their ekphrastic interests, the functions art plays within their poetics, and the theoretical problems they pose. John Banville's *Athena* (1995) could be called a postmodern detective story that examines the notion of authenticity in art, and more broadly, in culture. Kurt Vonnegut's *Bluebeard* examines the emergence of American abstract expressionism and reflects upon the relationship between representational and non-representational art in the second half of the 20th century. Don DeLillo's *Mao II* studies the ideological and political implications of both art and literature in the context of media discourse. This, by no means, is an exhaustive list, but merely a display of the possibilities ekphrasis offers to the contemporary novelist.

Banville's *Athena* is, without doubt, the most conservative novel of the three as regards the choice of the type of artwork it discusses. The main character's task is to verify the authenticity of a number of canvases by Dutch and Italian painters for a group of criminals operating on the black market. The paintings are unveiled to us in a manner that resembles lengthy excerpts from an art history book or an exhibition catalogue, rather than a piece of traditional ekphrastic literature (Banville, 1995, loc. 217). On the one hand, the passages are undoubtedly vivid descriptions of works of art, much in the vein of classical ekphrasis, whilst being strikingly different. Rather than an artistic re-creation of the canvas, we are offered what seems like a scholarly account. The overwhelming technical details, references to real scholars, and even the sheer length of the passages, give the convincing impression that we are dealing with an non-fiction source. However, if we try to find information on Johann Lievelb, or any of the other painters whose work is depicted in *Athena* (L. van Habelijn, Giovanni Belli, Job van Hellin, L. E. Oklbijn, J. van Hollbein, Jan Vibell), we will only be able to re-trace these names back to the novel, and, on closer inspection, we will discover that these names are anagrams or near-anagrams of the name "John Banville." Clearly then the author employs notional ekphrasis, which is molded to the specific needs of the novel, primarily concerned with the notion of authenticity. It quickly transpires that Banville skillfully challenges its validity in relation to a work of art. On the level of the plot, the issue of whether the characters are in the possession of authentic works of art or their copies is significant mostly for financial reasons, but on the level of appreciating a literary work of art, it becomes irrelevant, largely legitimizing Genette's distinction between allographic and autographic regimes. Autographic works of art become of interest to Banville's criminals not because of

their aesthetic but monetary value, which is a direct consequence of their singular existence. The precise information regarding the artistic quality and significance is irrelevant to them.

The plasticity of notional ekphrasis also allows Banville to put the paintings in relation to the conceptual dimension of the novel. All of the canvases depict mythological scenes that can be seen as a form of commentary on ekphrasis itself. For instance, Livelb's painting draws on the myth of Apollo and Daphne, where Eros takes his revenge on Apollo for mocking him. To do so, he makes the son of Zeus fall in love with Daphne, whilst simultaneously causing Daphne's loathing of Apollo. When Apollo is about to catch Daphne in pursuit, the nymph asks her father to turn her into a tree. The myth itself explores themes of desire and loathing, chastity and the curse of unfulfilled love. In the history of studying the relationship between art and literature, gendering both forms of artistic expression is not new. Lessing does this permanently in his *Laokoon*, implying that painting is feminine – beautiful but passive – whereas writing is masculine – active and dynamic.[3] Interestingly, Mitchell too, though to a different effect, asserts the femininity of the visual:

> The painting's desire, in short, is to change places with the beholder, to transfix or paralyze the beholder, turning him into an image for the gaze of the picture in what might be called "the Medusa effect." This effect is perhaps the clearest demonstration we have that the power of pictures and of women are modeled on one another and that this is a model of both pictures and women that is abject, mutilated, and castrated. The power they want is manifested as ***lack,*** not as possession [emphasis original] (Mitchell, 1996, p. 78).

With the above in mind, we can easily see Daphne, the female object of desire, eventually mutilated, as painting and Apollo's desire as the ekphrastic attempt to take possession of something that cannot be owned.

Although the object of Banville's ekphrastic interest is the most conventional among the novels that I have selected for analysis, the author's approach to visual art is far from conventional, as it partially resembles Keats's take on ekphrasis but with a distinctively postmodernist undertone. The Irish author invites us to play a game, and within a novel that features investigating the authenticity of works of art, he has us doing the investigating, which in turn leads us to consider questions of art and literary theory.

While Banville resorts to ancient mythology to discuss issues of literature and art, Vonnegut employs the old French folktale of Bluebeard (first published in 1697). In the novel, the castle chamber filled with dead women is replaced by a barn, where the protagonist, Rabo Karabekian, keeps his final work of art, with no real intention of showing it to anybody. As the action unfolds, we learn the

[3] The sexism of this in today's view needs no further commentary (cf. Mitchell, 1994).

story of Karabekian becoming a famous painter and a prominent (if fictional) representative of American abstract expressionism. The novel itself is presented as a memoir of the artist, and thus Vonnegut establishes the primary link between visual art and literature: "I am writing in this museum. Yes, it's true: I, old Rabo Karabekian, having disgraced myself in the visual arts, am now having a go at literature" (Vonnegut, 2011, p. 2).

From a very early age, Karabekian shows considerable artistic talent, which eventually leads him to become an apprentice to Dan Gregory, who in the world of the novel is depicted as an equivalent of Norman Rockwell. Vonnegut thus begins his study of contemporary art from the point of radical mimesis, just to expose its shortcomings early on in *Bluebeard*: "Dan Gregory was a taxidermist. He stuffed and mounted and varnished and mothproofed supposedly great moments, all of which turn out to be depressing dust-catchers, like a moosehead bought at a country auction or a sailfish on the wall of a dentist's waiting room" (Vonnegut 2011, p. 10). He describes such mimesis in the categories of forgery: "Nobody could counterfeit rust and rust-stained oak like Dan Gregory. Nobody could counterfeit verdigris like Dan Gregory. Nobody could counterfeit plant diseases like Dan Gregory" (p. 10). Eventually, Karabekian comes to the conclusion that mimesis unattached to anything else (apart from commercialism), becomes a perversion of art (p. 15), and by extension, art cannot dwell in a form that merely seems artistic. As a result, Karabekian becomes fascinated with abstract painting, which resides on the opposite side of the spectrum of representation. It is noteworthy that Vonnegut makes his transition resemble that of Marcel Duchamp, the creator of the famous *Fountain* (1917). Had it not been for the fact that the father of the *readymade* was already an established painter prior to abandoning the easel, his gesture of exhibiting an object of everyday use in a gallery would not have produced any meaning. In this case it is clear that meaning is strictly connected with the sacrifice legitimizing the *readymade*, i.e. the work of art produces meaning because Duchamp is *not* employing his skills as a painter. Similarly, Karabekian's abstract art is only appreciated fully when it is revealed that he has the technical skill to paint in a realistic way (p. 33). It would then follow that art, at least in part, has to be immanent not exclusively in the physical object of its manifestation.

A careful study of Karabekian's *opus magnum* reveals that Vonnegut looks at autographic art in a similar way to Genette (1997), at least in the dimension that all objects of art are really 'facts,' and, in consequence, inherently have a duration. Ekphrasis, as a literary device, enables us to see the dynamics of a work of art that only seemingly is unchanging. What starts life as a series of enormous abstract canvases covered with commercially available paint, eventually starts flaking. By allowing the work to age, Vonnegut (2011) reveals to us that the painting continues to produce meaning, emphasizing the fact that the temporal existence of an object is merely a fact, but a fact that is semiotically potent. Throughout the

novel, Vonnegut emphasizes the transitional quality of Karabekian's canvas, until it finally reaches its final stage, one that not only shows its temporality but also its locality.

When the painting is finally placed in the locked barn and painted over to clear space for its final incarnation, the work begins to resemble more an installation than a pictorial canvas, which illustrates Mitchell's claim that all media are mixed media, and the physical environment of a work can be seen as a part of it, as can the process of its creation and deterioration:

> I had the eight panels purged of every trace of faithless Sateen Dura-Luxes, and restretched and reprimed. I had them set up in the barn, dazzling white in their restored virginity, just as they had been before I transmuted them into Windsor Blue Number Seventeen.
> I explained to my wife that this eccentric project was an exorcism of an unhappy past, a symbolic repairing of all the damage I had done to myself and others during my brief career as a painter. That was yet another instance, though, of putting into words what could not be put into words: why and how a painting had come to be (Vonnegut, 2011, p. 34).

Despite being locked and kept from the eyes of a wider audience, the work shows aesthetic quality: "The powerful floodlights dangling from tracks on the ceiling were part of it, pouring megawatts of energy into all that white sizing, making it far whiter than I would have believed white could ever be" (p. 34). This, however, is the penultimate stage of the work's transformation, just before Karabekian alters it in a manner that is highly prompted by his experience with literature. Having shifted away from pure visuality, Rabo turns to something that could be called a visual narrative concerning the day that World War II ended:

> There is a war story to go with every figure in the picture, no matter how small. I made up a story, and then painted the person it had happened to. I at first made myself available in the barn to tell anyone who asked what the story was of this person or that one, but soon gave up in exhaustion. Make up your own war stories as you look at the whatchamacallit, I tell people (p. 35).

If we choose to perceive the depiction of Karabekian's final work of art in terms of notional ekphrasis, we will notice that Vonnegut is almost solely concentrating on its conceptual dimension, much the way other contemporary authors do. This allows him to convey the dynamics of the work's creation and duration that offer much to our interpretation of it.

In DeLillo's *Mao II*, the existence-in-multitude that characterizes all allographic art becomes one of the central themes of the novel. In this particular instance, the significance of art for the narrative is emphasized in the title of the novel, which is taken from a painting by Andy Warhol. Pop art seems an excellent vantage point to study the social and political realities of the second half of the twentieth century, especially in the light of the surge of commercialism, pop culture and political turmoil.

Mao II's plot revolves around the character Bill Gray – an established novelist who is working in seclusion, pondering the publication of his new book. He is accompanied by his assistant Scott and his girlfriend Karen, a runaway member of a religious cult. Gray's absence from the literary spotlight attracts the attention of Brita, a photographer working on a series of portraits depicting writers. When Bill eventually decides to appear in public, he does so in order to speak in defense of an abducted fellow writer. While in London, where the speech is scheduled to take place, Gray is contacted by one of the kidnappers and decides to travel to Lebanon to negotiate the release of the captive. Due to an accident, however, he dies before he can reach his destination.

The novel is permeated with a sense of crowdedness, which is introduced as early as the opening sentences, which depict a scene of a mass marriage ceremony of the Sun Myung Moon sect members. Shortly afterwards, we are taken to a Warhol exhibition, which is presented in a similar way:

> The museum lobby was crowded. He went downstairs, where people moved in nervous searching steps around the paintings. He walked past the electric-chair canvases, the repeated news images of car crashes and movie stars, and he got used to the anxious milling, it seemed entirely right, people eager to be undistracted, ray-gunned by fame and death. […] He moved along and stood finally in a room filled with images of Chairman Mao. Photocopy Mao, silk-screen Mao, wallpaper Mao, synthetic-polymer Mao. A series of silk screens was installed over a broader surface of wallpaper serigraphs, the Chairman's face a pansy purple here, floating nearly free of its photographic source (DeLillo, 2016, loc. 253).

It is easy to see that Warhol's *oeuvre* as a whole is a commentary on mass production and mass consumption as pillars of the capitalist economy, which has a profound impact on all aspects of contemporary Western life. But amongst depictions of pop-cultural icons, such as Marilyn Monroe, or the consumer goods that have largely contributed to the emergence of the culture of convenience, such as the famous Campbell's Soup, the image of Mao Zedong holds a special place. The leader of a state that would soon become the embodiment of all mass production, becomes a menacing symbol of the looming change. The entire novel is haunted by a sense of anxiety that causes Bill Gray's writer's block. It seems that he cannot complete his final novel because he has lost his belief in literature's role in shaping the collective consciousness of humanity:

> The novel used to feed our search for meaning […]. It was the great secular transcendence. […] But our desperation has led us towards something larger and darker. So we turn to the news, which provides an unsettling mood of catastrophe. This is where we find emotional experience not available elsewhere (DeLillo, 2016, loc. 999).

In light of the above, Warhol's art, becomes a humorously dark commentary on a news-mediated reality that we currently live in. The bright pastel colors

used to represent a ruthless political leader give us a sense of the ridiculous; the multiplicity of the image mimics the aesthetics of media coverage, the blatant kitsch testifies to the irrelevance of such categories as beauty.

Warhol, much like Duchamp before him, challenges our collective understanding of art by disturbing our well-established boundaries between the allographic and autographic. His creations could be classified as allographic, be they silk prints or other artifacts of mass reproduction, which in many ways is prophetic to the changing status of the image in the contemporary world. DeLillo's novel depicts Warhol's work as dark, calling his aesthetics "death glamour" (DeLillo, 2016, loc. 1908). In a way, we can see the two artists, Gray and Warhol, as opposites. Whilst *Mao II*'s protagonist conceals himself from the public eye, Warhol merges his art with his persona, in a way consistently embodying absence and death that his work is so preoccupied with. The writer's demise can be seen as DeLillo's commentary on Gray's increasing irrelevance.

Mao II studies the aftermath of the world's growing visuality, whose immerging omnipresence can be directly related to its newly-forged allography. It is a sad novel that mourns the departure of nuanced cultural discourse and its replacement with instant, shocking, mass-produced meanings. The consequence of art no longer being tied to its object of immanence is chaos, where even brilliant artists like Andy Warhol can only discuss it by participating in it. With this in mind, the old order of clear boundaries seems peaceful, perhaps even idyllic, but then again, we might ask ourselves if our remembrance of it is not marked by nostalgia, and thus inherently false.

Postmodernism has brought about an atmosphere of finality: Barth's famous "Literature of Exhaustion" (1967), Philip Roth's repeated proclamations of the end of the novel, the pessimistic closing of *Mao II* are only a few examples of this. But, at the same time, DeLillo, speaking at the memorial service of his younger friend, David Foster Wallace, who by many was seen as the future of American literature, said the following: "But there is always another word. There is always another reader to regenerate these words. The words won't stop coming" (DeLillo, 2012, p. 24).

Just as literature was struggling to overcome its major identity crisis, the art world was experiencing an outbreak of new forms of expression, which could not go unnoticed by the literati. This creative energy quickly found its way into literature, reinvigorating it and opening it up to fresh possibilities. As I have been trying to show, this phenomenon has left us without adequate critical tools. The notion of ekphrasis had a strong tradition in literary studies, but whilst it represented well classical works of literature and art, it had little relevance to the changes brought about by the 20th century. Accordingly, I have attempted to show that expanding the term to accommodate these changes does not affect the basic principles of ekphrasis but merely alters the increasingly challenged convictions

regarding its scope. The three authors whose work I have offered for analysis employ ekphrasis in new and original ways, while maintaining its principal mechanics intact. The findings of conceptual art have unearthed the conceptual potential of both literature and visual art, providing a common space for both these fields. It seems that contemporary authors are well aware of this space and make the most of it to the great benefit of literature.

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LUBLIN STUDIES IN MODERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE Vol 44, No 2 (2020)
Maria Curie-Sklodowska University Press

E-ISSN 2450-4580

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DOI: 10.17951/lsmll.2020.44.2.27-39

Ekphrastic Insets in Welsh-Language Fiction 1992–2016: An Overview

ABSTRACT
Compared with Anglophone literatures, Welsh-language fiction has to date received little attention in the context of the rapidly developing intermedial and interart studies. The purpose of this article is to provide a preliminary mapping of pictorial insets in Welsh-language fiction in the period 1992–2016. The novels considered in this article include some of the milestones in the development of Welsh fiction and provide a representative sample of the literary production from the period in question. This article identifies and lists the sources of ekphrastic insets scattered throughout the texts, grouping them into descriptive ekphrases, references, pictorial models and spatio-contextual ekphrases.
Keywords: Welsh-language fiction, ekphrasis, interart studies, intermedial studies, Welsh literature

Sidney Curnow Vosper's painting *Salem* from 1908 is widely considered "the most celebrated image ever created of the common people of Wales" (Lord, 2017, p. 222). It shows an old lady wearing a characteristic stovepipe hat, in the chapel at Pentre Gwynfryn, North Wales. The woman has been identified as Siân Owen, a native of the area. The legend attached to the painting is that in the folds of Mrs Owen's shawl one can discern the countenance of the Devil. Although denied by Vosper himself, the "devil" has been interpreted as "a cunning caricature of Welsh piety and hypocrisy" (Williams, 1991, p. 15). Perhaps a more sensible reading of the painting is offered by Lord (1991), who writes of *Salem* that it "is redolent of the virtues of Nonconformism ... built around the centrality of the Word, symbolised, however, unintentionally, by the hymn book in Siân Owen's hand" (p. 19). Thus, the inscribing of the devil into the iconic representation of elsh Nonconformity could be also seen as a reflection, equally unintentional, of the Nonconformist culture's ambiguous attitude towards pictorial representation in general. Any attempt to identify in Welsh culture the symptoms of the alleged iconoclasm motivated by Nonconformism, however, would be a formidable task, far beyond the scope of this article, all the more so as the role of visual culture in Wales has

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This journal is financed by the Polish Ministerial Programme „Support for Scientific Journals" (contract number 320/WCN/2019/1) and the Maria Curie-Sklodowska University.

recently been considerably reassessed (Harvey, 1995; Lord, 2000; Lord, 2017). Yet the undeniable fact is that Welsh culture has been largely a word-dominated one, its creative impetus channeled mostly into literature. As opposed to the poetic tradition going back to at least the 6th century AD, the modern Welsh-language novel evolved largely in the 19th-century. The Nonconformist milieu, which at the same time contributed to its stunted growth and history, was, to a considerable extent, defined by attitudes towards the decline of Nonconformity (Price, 2002, pp. 124–125; Rowlands, 1998, pp. 159–160; Lynch, 2007, p. 124). In this context, Welsh-language fiction seems an interesting testing ground for examining the interactions between word and image, especially when considered against the background of the *ut pictura poesis* tradition and the pictorial turn in modern culture announced by W. J. T. Mitchell in the early 1990s[1].

While recent decades have seen an increasing interest in interart and intermedial studies, the problems of word-image relationships remain virtually absent from Welsh literary criticism (either Welsh-language or Anglophone). The increasing saturation of the contemporary world with images transmitted by different media is, however, a phenomenon that cannot be ignored in relation to any contemporary literary production. The status of Welsh-language fiction, originally growing out of Nonconformist culture and developing in the shadow of a vigorous poetic tradition on the one hand, and its Anglophone counterpart on the other, provokes a number of questions. How and to what degree is Welsh fiction affected by global visual culture? What types of visual elements are absorbed by it? How is visual culture related to the issues that Welsh literature is engaged with, e.g., the relationship with the Welsh-language poetic tradition, the (post)colonial predicament, devolution (and more recently Brexit), the problems of language preservation or the issues of cross-pollination between Welsh-language and English-language Welsh writing? Last but not least, what, if any, are the quantitative and qualitative differences between the rendering of visual elements in Welsh- and English-language literatures?

Bearing in mind that interart/intermedial issues have, to date, received virtually no attention in the context of Welsh-language fiction, answering the questions listed above is hardly possible without a prior mapping of the territory. The task this paper sets itself is therefore a modest one and is limited to presenting a preliminary overview of visual elements in selected Welsh-language novels. The selection is further narrowed down to verbally-mediated references to visual arts and non-artistic pictures, including photography. Again, the limitations of the length of this essay mean that any comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted functions that the visual references perform must be reserved for another discussion, and that it can only hope to offer tentative interpretations of the most representative examples.

[1] The article "Pictorial Turn" was published in *ArtForum* in 1992 and reprinted in his *Picture Theory* in 1994.

In what follows, I examine seven Welsh-language novels from the period 1992–2016. 1992 is the date of the publication of Robin Llywelyn's novel *Seren Wen a'r Gefndir Gwyn* (translated by the author as *White Star*), which in terms of both content and form was a major milestone in Welsh-language prose, and played a role in stimulating a renaissance in Welsh fiction (cf. Price, 2000, p. 58). The choice of the other novels aims to provide a diachronic selection of texts which are, at the same time, representative of Welsh-language writing. Most of the novels discussed won the Eisteddfod Prose Medal, a prestigious award given to the best novel during the Eisteddfod, the annual festival of Welsh-language literature and culture.

As already mentioned, the visual elements identified in the novels are limited to verbally-mediated ones. In interart and intermedial studies, these are categorised as covert (Wolf, 1999, p. 41) or unimedial (Lund, 1992, p. 9), as opposed to overt/bimedial, which involve illustrations or reproductions *in praesentia*. Covert relationships are, in turn, generally divided into ekphrasis – a description or interpretation of a real or fictitious picture, and imitation – an attempt to emulate in language a spatial work of art or to present the fictional reality *qua* picture (Lund, 1992, p. 16). The present paper focuses on examples classified as ekphrasis.

As a literary device, ekphrasis is also defined in various ways. Since the revival of interest in the problem in the mid-20th century, its understanding has evolved from the very narrow (e.g., a type of prosopopoeia in J. H. Hagstrum's *The Sister Arts,* 1958) to the very broad (Clüver's verbalisation of any non-verbal texts). In this paper, by ekphrasis I understand references to, or descriptions of, real or fictitious pictures and other types of visual representation (including, among other things, sculpture, film or comics): fictional ones are commonly conceptualised as "notional ekphrasis" (Hollander, 1988, p. 209). It needs to be stressed, however, that brief references to pictures (e.g., in the form of titles, or even names of artists or artistic styles) are not necessarily devoid of wider significance for the text and may well be meaning-constitutional. As demonstrated by Yacobi (1995), the "ekphrastic model" – a reference to an artistic or pictorial style, theme, or topos (e.g., a Turner seascape) – can activate a wide spectrum of associations and have considerable impact on the text's production of meaning (p. 632). For the purpose of this paper, I also coin the term "mute ekphrasis" to refer to fictional pictures present and referenced in the diegetic reality, but whose content is not revealed or remains concealed from the reader or the narrator.

It was also Yacobi (1995, pp. 601–602) who drew attention to the fact that the relationships between the visual source and the verbal target do not always have a one-to-one relationship (as in, for example, Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn") but may involve multiple items scattered throughout the whole text, a phenomenon common to narrative fiction. Instances where a text refers to multiple pictorial items are conceptualised by Lund (1998) as "ekphrastic linkage" – it is the reader

or a character within the fictional world whose task it is to link the "images to each other through a time sequence by filling in the intervening moments between the pictures" (p. 177) in the mode of panels in a comic strip or stations on a journey. Following Hagstrum, Lund (1998) sees such texts in terms of "a picture gallery form" or a series of tableaux (p. 177). Lund (1992, p. 177) further distinguishes between time-contextual ekphrasis (images linked by the reader) and spatio-contextual ekphrasis, where the pictures are collected in a definable spatial environment and contemplated on by the viewer within that space. By determining the provenance of pictures exhibited in such a textual "gallery" (either time- or spatio-contextual), their type (real or fictional, belonging to a specific artistic trend or not, etc.) and the way they are "exhibited" (described or merely mentioned in passing), we are thus able to map the areas of the text's inspiration, the degree of its pictorial saturation and (at least tentatively) the significance of the pictorial elements. This, in turn, may serve as material for comparison with other texts.

For reasons of clarity, the procedure assumed in this paper is a diachronic one: the selected novels will be examined chronologically for the presence of ekphrastic insets. The present paper takes into consideration whether the insets are real or notional, whether they are mere references or involve a more or less detailed description or represent an ekphrastic model and whether they form a spatio-contextual ekphrasis. Particular attention is given to the typology of visual elements used, (artistic or non-artistic) and the art-historical context of the former, as well as the medium used (oil painting, sculpture, photography, etc.). It has to be stressed that the borderlines between descriptive ekphrasis and the ekphrastic model, or between notional and real ekphrasis in many cases are blurred. An overview of each novel will be followed by a tentative assessment of the overall character of the time-contextual ekphrasis – a collection of pictures referred to in the given text.

The overview opens with *White Star*, which won the Eisteddfod Prose Medal in 1992 and which generated much interest and controversy in the Welsh literary world due to its novel (for Welsh-language fiction) mixture of diverse genres and literary modes: fantasy, alternative reality and dystopian elements inscribed in Welsh language literary history and mythology. Pictorial insets in the novel are scarce but varied, and present much interpretative potential as, being exclusively notional, they employ symbolism and iconography that belongs solely to the fictional reality. These include vexillological and heraldic images in the form of the references to flags: the eponymous white star on a white background (Llywelyn, 2004, p. 129) or the pre-World War II German jack with cross – the symbol of the Exile States roughly modelled on Nazi Germany (p. 110). The White Star flag also features on the mural contemplated by the main character, Gwern. Apart from the flag, the painting represents a battle scene between the Heartless Bodies and Small Country warriors, although the style, technique and other details are not described

(p. 20). However, the major example of an untypical ekphrasis is the description of the screen used by one of the characters, the clerk Zählappell, to display the text of the files he accidentally takes from the archive he works in. The text, flowing down the screen in Zählappell's living room, turns out to be the main body of the novel, so the scene can be read as an interesting case of a hybrid framing device combining ekphrasis and what Lund calls "iconic projection" (Lund, 1992, p. 16). Apart from constituting a compositional frame, the device can be interpreted as a mechanism providing the narrative with the qualities of arrested temporality often attributed to visual representation. The visual packaging of the narrative considered in relation to other features of the novel, like the dream vision of an alternative or future version of Wales, the innovative use of spoken language and the fantastic re-invention of Welsh history and mythology, all of these running counter to the conventions of Welsh-language fiction, allows us to see Llywelyn's novel in terms of a literary *capriccio* – the term originally applied to paintings featuring familiar landmarks in an unfamiliar, imaginary setting or/and "in a future ruined state" (Mayernik, 2013, p. 12)[2].

Rhys's *Cysgodion* [Shadows], 1993 is the story of Lois Daniel, a Welsh journalist researching the work of Welsh painter Gwen John, the sister of the better-known Welsh painter Augustus John (also mentioned in the novel). Gwen John had long been known for her relationship with Auguste Rodin, and only recently has her own artistic output been appreciated (Lord, 2000, p. 381, note 58). Many of Rodin's pieces are referenced in Lois's diary and come from the real photo album *Rodin: Eros and Creativity* from 1992 (Crone & Salzmann, 1992). They include *Iris, Messenger of the Gods* (1895)[3], *Le Baiser* [The Kiss], ca. 1882, *L'Éternel Printemps* [Eternal Springtime], ca. 1884, *L'Éternelle Idole* [Eternal Idol], 1890–1893, *Je suis belle* [I Am Beautiful], 1882, *La Méditation* [Meditation], 1885, *La Danaïde* [Danaid], 1889, *L'Avarice et la Luxure* [Avarice and Lust], before 1887, *Couple Saphique* [Sapphic Couple], drawing ca. 1900 and *Coquille* [probably La Coquille et la perle], 1899–1900. Apart from Rodin's sculptures, the novel has a liberal sprinkling of references to other continental artists and their works: Sandro Botticelli (Rhys, 1993, p. 22), Michelangelo (p. 147), Peter Rubens (p. 22), Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (p. 12) and Raoul Dufy (and his *Sleeping Nude with Butterflies* [pp. 122, 127]). Welsh and British artists, apart from Gwen John and her brother, include John Elwyn (1916–1997), Gwilym Prichard (1931–2015) and Eric Gill (1882–1940), although none of their works are

[2] The identification of *Seren Wen* as a form of *capriccio* is a way of sidetracking the problems voiced by Welsh criticism in the context of Llywelyn's work (cf. Price, 2000), as it opens up new interpretative possibilities. A preliminary study of Llywelyn's two first novels as caprices was delivered at the Third Lublin Celtic Colloquium held at the Celtic Department of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, 19 September 2019.

[3] All dates of Rodin's works are taken from the online catalogue of Musée Rodin.

mentioned. The novel also evokes tourist attractions associated with art: Musée Rodin, the Sacré-Cœur Basilica and the Louvre with "old Mona Lisa" [hen Fona Lisa] (p. 139). Real ekphrasis (Mona Lisa) is combined with notional ekphrasis in the scene in which Lois's daughter, Nia, sits for a portrait executed by a Paris street artist. In Lois, as well as in the artist, Nia evokes associations that may be categorised as ekphrastic models: to her mother, the daughter's smile resembles that of the Mona Lisa's, while the artist recalls Madonna (the singer), who is in turn confused with the Virgin Mary (p. 147). The portrait is mediated by Nia's reaction: she is appalled at the lack of likeness and claims that the portraitist makes her look like a whore (p. 151). *Cysgodion* is thus dominated by short ekphrastic references to real continental (mostly French) artists, and even the unique notional descriptive ekphrasis of Nia's portrait is "contaminated" with real elements. This strategy anchors the text in European culture and raises questions about the role and reception of Welsh artists and the condition of Welsh visual arts in general.

Y Dylluan Wen [The White Owl], 1995 is a novel by Angharad Jones (1962–2010), also a S4C[4] editor and film director. The novel, which won the Eisteddfod prose medal in 1995, tells the story of Myfanwy [Myfi] Jones, who returns to her hometown in North Wales to wreak vengeance on the local headmaster (Gruffydd) for caning her, years earlier, as punishment for spilling milk in the school canteen, an event that, in her opinion, triggered her father's death. While staying in Gruffydd's house, Myfi makes friends with his daughter Gwen, a budding artist for whom drawing is a means of escaping from everyday problems. Gwen's pictures, most of them representing witches [gwrachod], are exhibited in her room, where they are contemplated by the girl herself (Jones, 2002, p. 144) and by Myfi (pp. 71–73) – an example of spatio-contextual ekphrasis. Later in the novel, Gwen offers Myfi one of her drawings representing Blodeuwedd,[5] but the woman rejects it dispassionately. The disappointed girl drops the picture on the wet ground, where it is found by a teacher who becomes the focaliser, providing a brief description of Blodeuwedd's face wet with rain that resembles tears (pp. 101–102). Another example of ekphrasis includes the photograph owned by Myfi which she keeps by her bedside. The photo is, at the same time, an example of "mute ekphrasis": it remains undescribed and the reader is only allowed to guess that it represents Myfi and her father (p. 154). The ekphrases in the novel are thus exclusively notional and limited to short references, the only exception being the Blodeuwedd drawing. This can be explained by the fact that the novel's symbolic framework rests largely on the correspondence between the woman made of flowers and Myfi. Thus, the sodden drawing could be seen as a symbol of the main

[4] Sianel 4 Cymru [Channel Four Wales] – the Welsh-language television channel launched in 1982.

[5] A woman conjured out of flowers who is later turned into an owl as punishment for adultery featuring in the collection of medieval Welsh tales called the Mabinogion.

character's tragic fate, and her reaction to it betrays her denial of that connection.

Wele'n Gwawrio [Behold it Dawns], 1997, is a novel by another important Welsh woman author. Angharad Tomos (born 1958) was one of the most dedicated Welsh language rights activists of the 1970s and early 1980s, a period in her life interspersed with terms of imprisonment in several English gaols. *Wele'n Gwawrio*, the winner of the Eisteddfod Prose Medal in 1997, is the story of Ennyd, a language activist and a decorative painter who, despite unexpectedly dying in the middle of the narrative, retains the ability to see and hear, and continues to report the events around her until she is buried.

The novel contains several references to visual art, mostly notional, some of which contribute significantly to the overall symbolism of the work. Marginal ekphrases from the point of view of the plot include references to plates that Ennyd used to decorate, e.g., with doves, and which have the capacity of storing memories (Tomos, 1997, p. 35), or old protest posters she finds in the attic which could serve as excellent material for an exhibition (p. 61). The motif of the dove reappears in the description of the Welsh flag with which Ennyd's body is covered after her death (p. 146). Perhaps the most striking real ekphrasis that can be classified as an ekphrastic model is Ennyd's observation when she looks at her reflection in the mirror. Frustrated by the shape of her body, she thinks, "If I lived in the 17th century, I'd be in demand as a model for artists or I'd be a muse to poets" [translation mine] (p. 29)[6]. This remark has the potential to activate a wide range of associations depending on the reader's competence, the most stereotypical probably being "Rubenesque women," which, in turn, connotes a whole body of 17th century Dutch and Flemish painting. Another ekphrastic model can be found towards the end of the novel when Ennyd's body is carried by her friends to the summit of Yr Wyddfa [Snowdon]. The deceased narrator evokes memories of angels that she saw on postcards, in churches and films. The ekphrasis corresponds to the 1903 painting *The Wounded Angel* by the Finnish artist Hugo Simberg, which appears on the novel's cover. Thus, although Tomos's novel does not abound in ekphrases, the two models firmly anchor it in the continental artistic tradition and open up a wide range of possible questions like, for instance, the interrelations between the angel figure and the novel's paratext. The link between Ennyd's body and 17th century painting could be considered in terms of the gendered role of ekphrasis as a phenomenon that grants a voice to the mute or marginalised (female) agents, a perspective developed by Heffernan (1993) in his *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*. The symbolic common denominator of the novel's pictorial insets is that most of them seem to project a reality beyond the storyworld: a world in which corpulence

[6] Original text: "Taswn i'n byw yn yr ail ganrif ar bymtheg, mi fyddai galw mawr amdanaf fel model i artistiaid neu fel testun awen i feirdd" (Tomos, 1997, p. 29).

is a desirable aesthetic value or a spiritual, blissful otherworld represented by the dove and the angel.

Wyn's *Tri Mochyn Bach* [Three Little Pigs] from 2000 tells the story of Mair, a Welsh academic and an expert on folk tales and myths, who is commissioned by Prince Nwgeri of the fictional African country of Nacca Culaam, to write a biography of his prematurely deceased son. The novel is one of few examples in contemporary Welsh-language fiction that can be classified as multimodal. It is a dialogue of two alternating voices, one of them being a first-person narrator who could be identified as the main character's conscience or conscious self. The fragments narrated by the voice are printed in red which activates the semiotic potential of typography – "the basic element of the graphic surface that can convey visually meanings other than the verbal message it is a graphic signifier for" (Maziarczyk, 2013, p. 49). The red font, which alerts the reader to the tension between the two voices, belongs, in fact, to the protagonist's consciousness, while the main narrative line is later revealed to have been a dream-like, drug-induced reverie. The novel's ekphrastic insets echo the gap between the conscious and the unconscious, signalled by the difference in font colour. Mair's work as a myth analyst is reflected in the descriptive ekphrasis of a painting she sees in Nwgeri's library: it is a large canvas – a copy of an 11th-century French manuscript illumination (Wyn, 2000, p. 60) – representing a castle surrounded by an orchard/vineyard. In the foreground there is a herd of pigs and a sleeping man, presumably a swineherd, being woken by a magician with a wand. The group is complemented by three naked girls (p. 59). In this case, the notionality of the picture might be ambivalent for a more competent reader, as the picture may evoke real art-historical topoi or styles which would make the description a palimpsestic hybrid of notional ekphrasis and a real ekphrastic model. The blurred boundary between the two may be seen as yet another way of representing the porous borderline between the conscious and the unconscious. The novel also makes extensive use of descriptive ekphrases of photographs. These include pictures of Nwgeri's family and a series of polaroid photos of Mair's reflection in the mirror – an attempt to document the effects of her rape by her partner (p. 104–105). The woman hides the photos in the pendulum clock in the hope of forgetting about the traumatic event (p. 106). Later, however, the existence of the photographs is questioned by the "red voice", which undermines the reliability of Mair's narrative (p. 123).

Dafydd's novel *Y Llyfrgell* [The Library][7] from 2009 is a departure from ekphrasis traditionally conceived as a description or reference to a pictorial work of art. The novel, which won the Daniel Owen Memorial Prize at the 2009 National Eisteddfod, is set in the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth. There, members of the library staff, the twins Ana and Nan, implement their plan to wreak revenge

[7] In 2016 the novel was adapted as a feature film titled *The Library Suicides*/*Y Llyfrgell* (2016).

on Eben, whom they blame for the death of their mother, a renowned (fictional) Welsh-language author. The plan involves sealing off the library building from the outside world and taking everyone in the reading room hostage. By chance, on the same day the porter Dan, in order to mask his idleness, feeds the library CCTV software with old footage so that the monitors in the control room show what is in fact a simulacrum of reality. Thus, the story abounds with references and descriptions of characters seen on screen by other characters or even by the characters themselves, sometimes in the fast-forward mode (Dafydd, 2009, p. 114). Therefore, ekphrasis in the case of *Y Llyfrgell* requires a more capacious definition, like that of, for example, Claus Clüver's verbalisation of non-verbal texts which would allow the inclusion of video footage.

The novel's "textual gallery" is not, however, limited to video material, but also features traditional works of art like the sizeable oil portrait of the twins' mother and the statue of Sir John Williams, the (real) first President of the National Library of Wales. Characteristically, the characters confronted with the figures represented by the statue and in the portrait feel they are followed by their gaze as if the figures were alive, which blurs the borderline between the first- and second-degree representation already made porous by the video simulacrum. The ontological oscillation of visual representations is also present in the case of the photograph manipulated by the librarian responsible for cataloguing photographic material, from which she removes the figure of D. J. Williams – a historical Welsh poet (Dafydd, 2009, p. 190). Thus the library building is a spatio-contextual ekphrasis sporting a diverse collection of different visual representations and where, at the same time, the distinction between notional and real ekphrasis is destabilised. The library may then be seen as a space where Welsh collective memory is stored but, at the same time, infiltrated by simulacra, threatened by manipulation, destabilisation and, potentially, obliteration.

In the case of Salisbury's *Cai* (2016), we may speak of the strongest degree of ekphrastic saturation among the novels discussed so far. The book tells the story of Cai Wynne, a student in Aberystwyth art school, who unsuccessfully applies for a research grant on the "grossly neglected" Welsh artist Aeres Vaughan (Salisbury, 2016, p. 18). Apart from thematising art in the context of the art trade, art grants and academia, the novel is replete with descriptive ekphrases of drawings, paintings and photographs. It opens with an ekphrastic description of pictures exhibited in a local gallery (a spatio-contextual ekphrasis *par excellence*) which represent different perspectives of Aberystwyth, including one by the main character. Unexpectedly, Cai is approached by a little-known foundation called Oriel [A Gallery], which wants to fund his work on Vaughan (pp. 26–27). While cataloguing the artist's paintings along with those of her niece Catrin, Cai uncovers clues encoded in some of the pictures that lead him to launch a private investigation into Catrin's death. Unlike most of the novels discussed above, *Cai*

includes a large body of descriptive notional ekphrases of paintings, but also of photographs. In some cases the borderline between notional and real ekphrasis is blurred: one of the photographs researched by Cai in the National Library shows the chapel in the village of Capel Celyn, which was flooded in 1965, and whether the photo refers to one existing in reality is difficult to determine.[8] Notional ekphrases of some of the paintings are also linked to real artworks or ekphrastic models. For instance, one of Aeres's paintings evokes in Cai associations with Curnow Vosper's *Salem* (p. 74). Other historical Welsh painters who are evoked in *Cai* with reference to otherwise fictitious paintings are Thomas Jones (1742–1803) and Richard Wilson (1714–1782) (p. 99). Trying to locate the source of inspiration behind one of Catrin's canvases, Cai's friend Ffion remembers an illustration from a children's Bible showing the prophet Elijah and a crow bringing him food (p. 155). Whether the picture refers to a concrete edition of the Bible would perhaps be hard to establish, but it certainly does refer to a clichéd image of Elias found in many editions of the Old Testament, which makes it a typical example of Yacobi's ekphrastic model. Another example of what could be classified as a hybrid of notional ekphrasis and a real ekphrastic model are the titles of fictional art-history books that Cai studies: *The Dragon's Palette: Welsh Art 1979–99*, *Gathering Gems with the Eye: 15 Welsh Artists*, *A Garland of Six Portrait Painters & Y Ddelwedd a'r Ddalen*[9]. The books, albeit invented, evoke the history of Welsh visual arts. In contrast to Rhys's *Cysgodion*, however, where an attempt is made to reintroduce Gwen John to the canon of Welsh art without much reference to her actual work, *Cai* invents a notional, simulacrum-like body of art and art-related motifs that are provided with the illusion of verisimilitude.

Other ekphrases in the novel include Cai's own sketches of other characters, including a "mute ekphrasis" of his girlfriend's portrait: the painting is folded in white paper and upon seeing Ffion, Cai thinks "how alike she is to the portrait of her he had completed and framed this morning as a gift for her" [translation mine] (p. 189)[10]. As can then be seen, in Salisbury's novel ekphrastic linkage is particularly robust, as it employs both spatio-temporal and spatio-contextual ekphrasis (the Aberystwyth gallery, Vaughan's house, the National Library).

[8] The flooding, more commonly associated with the name of the valley (Tryweryn), had considerable impact on the Welsh nationalist movement and the language rights campaigns. Carried out despite widespread protests, the creation of the reservoir, whose purpose was to supply water to the Wirral and Liverpool industry has become a symbol of imperial English dominance and the motto "Cofiwch Dryweryn" [Remember Tryweryn] expresses an urge to protect Welsh-speaking communities from Anglicisation.

[9] As stated by the writer, the titles are fictitious, albeit inspired by real publications, mostly taken from Peter Lord's work on Welsh visual culture (Salisbury, 2020, January 13).

[10] Original text: "pa mor debyg yr edrychai i'r braslun ohoni a gwblhaodd y bore hwnnw ac a fframiwyd yn anrheg iddi" (Salisbury, 2016, p. 189).

The tentative interpretation of this strategy that can be offered here is that the wide gamut of visual elements is used to construct a complex metaphor of the collective trauma that Tryweryn continues to connote in Welsh-language culture. The memory of the event is encoded in images (both paintings and photographs) stored in places like Aeres's house, the gallery and the library, which invites associations with the tradition of *Ars Memorativa*. In this tradition, memory was conceptualised as a spatio-visual construct: an enclosed space (a gallery, a palace or a library) where memories were stored in the form of images (Bolzoni, 2001, pp. xviii–xxiii)[11]. The art of memory also involved ordering the visual material in *loci*, so that it could be retrieved when needed (p. xvii). Thus, remembering the past requires the process of investigating and decoding visual material – the procedure which constitutes the central theme of Salisbury's novel. The para-documentary world of Welsh art criticism portrayed in the novel may be seen as an apparatus enabling the ordering and securing of the visual repository of collective memory[12].

As we have seen, even such a cursory overview of Welsh-language novels from the period beginning roughly with Mitchell's announcement of the "pictorial turn" demonstrates that this minority literature originally growing from the Nonconformist tradition makes extensive use of the possibilities provided by diverse visual sources. The remarkable array of pictures featuring in the novels listed above includes some of the most prominent Welsh artists, canonical representatives of continental art, and a varied selection of notional images. An important part of the collection is taken up by photography, although other types of mechanical or digital images (screens, CCTV footage or polaroid pictures of mirror reflections) also occur. The examples also show a relatively wide scope of types of ekphrastic insets: traditional, long descriptions of pictures being less common, the list includes a multitude of short descriptions and brief references, ekphrastic models, spatio-contextual ekphrases and "mute ekphrases". In many cases, visual art, or artistic activity, is thematised and/or is meaning-constitutional. Attention should also be drawn to the tendency to anchor notional ekphrases in a real art-historical context.

It thus seems that contemporary Welsh-language fiction has been highly responsive to the proliferation of pictures in modern global culture, and any speculations about the alleged impact of the iconoclastic streak in Nonconformism on Welsh prose must be handled with extreme care (although the use of artwork as a potential counter-Nonconformist tendency also needs to be taken into

[11] It is not without significance that Cai's friend Ffion is a biochemistry student doing research on the effects of the rabies virus on the human brain, which results in a lack of communication between the neurons and, consequently, cell death (Salisbury, 2016, p. 55).

[12] The vulnerability and, simultaneously, the endurance of Tryweryn as a symbol have recently been illustrated by the daubing and then re-painting of the iconic "Cofiwch Dryweryn" graffiti near Aberystwyth.

consideration). By gesturing so extensively towards continental visual arts, Welsh fiction transgresses its minority status and taps into the wider waters of European culture. The outline of ekphrastic insets drawn above clearly indicates the existence of uncharted territory in the study of Welsh-language literature, but also in minority literatures elsewhere. It also requires a broadening of the area of research to include other manifestations of word-image relationships like imitation, multimodal elements or overt intermediality.

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LUBLIN STUDIES IN MODERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE
Maria Curie-Sklodowska University Press
Vol 44, No 2 (2020)
E-ISSN 2450-4580

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DOI: 10.17951/lsmll.2020.44.2.41-50

"Imprecision, uncertainty, transience, incompleteness": Gerhard Richter's *October 18, 1977* and Don DeLillo's "Baader-Meinhof"

ABSTRACT
This article explores the relationship between Gerhard Richter's *October 18, 1977* and Don DeLillo's short story "Baader-Meinhof". Richter's depiction of the deaths of members of the Red Army Faction draws from original photographic sources. Richter blurs these images thereby questioning aspects of obfuscation and the paradoxical clarity of incompleteness. DeLillo's story is centred on a discussion about the paintings which quickly transforms into a narrative of coercion and stalking. This paper considers how visual art can be represented in fiction finding parallels between Richter's and DeLillo's use of repetition, haziness and uncertainty to problematise the act of viewing.
Keywords: Gerhard Richter, Don DeLillo, "Baader-Meinhof", terror, ekphrasis

In Don DeLillo's short story "Baader-Meinhof", a woman visits a gallery and is captivated by Gerhard Richter's 1988 cycle of paintings *October 18, 1977*. Richter created the series of fifteen oil grisaille images depicting the imprisonment and deaths of leading members of the radical left-wing group the Red Army Faction (henceforth RAF). The RAF were a militant Marxist group operating in West Germany in the late seventies. The group became notorious for a series of assassinations, bombings and bank robberies. The title of Richter's work is a reference to the deaths of three members of the group: Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin and Jan-Carl Raspe, who were found dead in Stammheim Prison on this date under mysterious circumstances[1]. The nameless woman in DeLillo's story feels compelled to return to the gallery several times; she is eager to learn more about the artwork and to understand her own emotional response. While viewing

[1] The RAF evolved from peaceful protest which gave way to progressively more extremism through violence and terrorist acts. Their agenda was formed by what they regarded as the continued legacy of fascism in German political institutions, the humanitarian crisis of the Vietnam War, and bourgeoise elitism. The group were responsible for the deaths of more than thirty people.

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This journal is financed by the Polish Ministerial Programme „Support for Scientific Journals" (contract number 320/WCN/2019/1) and the Maria Curie-Sklodowska University.

the paintings she senses a man standing behind her and feels his gaze resting on her. The man instigates a conversation and they go to a café before a scene in her apartment. The sinister momentum of the story intensifies as the man makes sexual advances and the woman retreats, then shuts herself in the bathroom demanding that he leave her home. The man does eventually go before a final act, the following day, when they both return to view Richter's paintings once more.

The ekphrastic use of Richter's artwork demonstrates several ways in which visual art can both inform fiction and function in an exchange between artistic mediums. "Baader-Meinhof" not only uses an exhibition of *October 18, 1977* as a setting, but portrays Richter's conceptual ideas in literary form. DeLillo almost certainly visited the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City to see Richter's artworks, which were on display between September 2000 and March 2001 then again in early 2002[2]. The story, first published in *The New Yorker* in April 2002, was DeLillo's first work of fiction after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. As such, and due to its subject matter, it is impossible not to read the piece without this context. The story engages with responses to terrorist acts and questions how artists choose to depict these events[3]. However, DeLillo addresses 9/11 obliquely; although set in New York, the story develops before a backdrop not of religious extremism against America, but of a German artist's reaction to the deaths of members of a very different terrorist group.

In the early sixties, Richter began experimenting with mixed-media by merging photographic images with painting. He started working from an initial photographic source by projecting its image onto a canvas and then tracing the outline in pencil before filling in details with paint. The final stage of the process involved Richter blurring these images by running the paints together with a squeegee before they had dried, or else scraping into the paint while still wet with a spatula (Godfrey, 2011, p. 52). Richter's methods embraced the notion of chaos in creating artworks beyond his conscious expression. Richter states, "with a brush you have control. The paint goes on the brush and you make a mark. From experience you know exactly what will happen. With the squeegee you lose control" (as cit. in Godfrey 2011, p. 27). In 1962 Richter produced the first work he would label "photo painting" titled *Table*. Richter draws much from Walter Benjamin by playing with concepts of the automated aspect of design taking precedence over the visionary artist as creator. Richter (2009) explains, "I was dissatisfied because there was

[2] Herren (2015) notes that DeLillo's manuscript of "Baader-Meinhof" is dated February 2002, which could mean the setting of the story is Richter's career retrospective on display in New York after 9/11 between February-May 2002 (p. 165).

[3] In 2005 Richter produced his own response to 9/11 in his painting *September*. It is a small canvas: the size of a standard TV screen depicting the image of the blast as the first plane struck the north tower. Once again Richter applies the blurring and distorting techniques he used in *October 18, 1977*.

too much paint on the canvas and became less happy with it, so I overpainted it. Then suddenly it acquired a quality which appealed to me and I felt it should be left that way, without knowing why" (p. 259). Richter has spoken about his initial dissatisfaction with *Table* and other pieces not as a source of regret, but as a vital aspect of its final composition. As a result, the painting represents Richter's self-criticism through reworking, overlaying, and thereby emphasising how essential uncertainty should remain in his creative practice. This aspect, where absence and obscurity take prominence, closely align Richter and DeLillo. DeLillo incorporates uncertainties at the heart of his works where an accepted interpretation of history, subjectivity and even the legitimacy of language fall into question. Both probe the very purpose of art whilst challenging official versions of history through the dominance of metanarratives.

In *October 18, 1977* Richter's technique of blurring softens the separation of lines and shapes into murky washes of greys and blacks, in what is described in "Baader-Meinhof" as an "ashy blur" (p. 108)[4]. The series of monochrome canvases with their opaque overlays make for an unsettling viewing experience. Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof, another member of the radical group who died in prison a year before the others, are shown shortly after their deaths in *Erhängte* [Hanged] and *Erschossener 1* [Man Shot Down 1]. The effect of his photopaintings is particularly disconcerting as figures lying dead or hanging from a rope appear to melt into their backgrounds and a seemingly vital detail is obfuscated. By obscuring the image Richter draws attention to the photograph as a fundamentally imprecise representation of the reality we take for granted it has captured. For Barthes (1981), writing in *Camera Lucida*, the photograph "actually blocks memory, [it] quickly becomes counter-memory" (p. 91). Barthes gives the example of being with a group of friends who are talking about childhood recollections. As Barthes has been looking through his own family albums he is unable to summon memories with the same clarity as others can recall them. Rather than an inactive document of time and place, Barthes sees the power of an image to disrupt. He writes, "The Photograph is violent [...] because on each occasion it fills the sight by force, and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed" (p. 91). Yet Richter does precisely this: he manipulates the original sources and complicates the possibility of a photograph being an irrefutable artefact while maintaining its essential violence. The truth of what happened in Stammheim Prison will never be known. The photographs taken by the police as official documents of the deaths create only uncertainties. Richter's aim, possibly in part to represent a hazy version of the past like a distant memory, also serves to destabilise the viewer's relationship between precision and truth. The techniques

[4] All references to DeLillo's "Baader-Meinhof" are from the short story collection *The Angel Esmerelda: Nine Stories* (2011). New York: Scribner.

of sfumato, where colours are blended and outlines softened, particularly pronounced in pictures such as *Festnahme 1* [Arrest 1] and *Zelle* [Cell], offer an indeterminate subject matter and a lack of unequivocal interpretable intent. In an interview by Rolf Schon, Richter (2009) says, "I can make no statement about reality clearer than my own relationship to reality; and this has a great deal to do with imprecision, uncertainty, transience, incompleteness. But this doesn't explain the picture. At best it explains what led to their being painted" (p. 60). Richter's works are as much about the creative endeavour and imprecise process as the finished artworks themselves.

Richter's priority of highlighting uncertainty is not a failure of expression or a refusal to engage fully with the images he chooses to blur. In fact, the incoherence of Richter's paintings is dialectically intended to open the possibilities of a viewer's response by an absence of focused detail. In *Atlas* Richter writes, "You do not see less, by looking at a field out of focus through a magnifying glass" (as cit. in Jahn, 1989, p. 202). DeLillo's thinly sketched characterisation and lack of narrative closure fulfils a similar purpose allowing a piece the creative space to oscillate between various subjective meanings without venerating any of them. Richter's blurring technique could be interpreted to represent the possible cover-up of the deaths by the German authorities. The man in the story is well aware of the controversy; he says, "They committed suicide. Or the state killed them" (p. 106). Richter is drawing on a particularly traumatic period in German history which has had a profound effect on the national psyche. So shocking were those images that they created an outcry when first shown in Krefeld in 1989 (Danchev, 2010, p. 106). The very notion of presenting historical truth is problematised. Theodor Adorno defines how the culture industry "conserves the decaying aura as a foggy mist" (cf. Bernstein, 2001, p. 102). Richter's blurring corresponds to the degradation of memory; the artist is intrigued by the mnemonic capacity of photography to distil cultural fascination and yet occlude a possible consensus of meaning.

Paradox is central to Richter's aesthetic choices. His rationale is not to cloud his images to obscure, but in order to clarify he writes, "I blur to make everything equal, everything equally important and equally unimportant" (Richter, 2009, p. 33). As DeLillo writes from the perspective of the woman, the canvases show scenes "in nuances of obscurity and pall, a detail clearer here than there, the slurred mouth in one painting appearing nearly natural elsewhere" (p. 105). In the story the woman has some knowledge of the group's genesis. She is diligent in her attempts to understand the artwork focusing on very specific details. She concentrates "on the differences, arm, shirt, unknown object at the edge of the frame, the disparity or uncertainty" (p. 106). The woman's close attention is attracted by the painting *Beerdigung* [Funeral]. She demonstrates familiarity with Richter's creative process: "She knew that these paintings were based on

photographs, but she hadn't seen them and didn't know whether there was a bare tree, a dead tree beyond the cemetery, in one of the photos" (pp. 108–109). The painting, generally considered to be the final in the series, depicts the funerals of the three members of the group who died on 18th October as their coffins are carried through a swathe of onlookers. The woman is convinced that there is a small cross at the top of the painting just left of centre: "She saw it as a cross, and it made her feel, right or wrong, that there was an element of forgiveness in the picture, that the two men and the woman, terrorists, and Ulrike before them, terrorist, were not beyond forgiveness" (p. 109).

She wonders whether Richter has embellished the photo to add a hidden iconographic symbol of Christianity, but does not want to share her insight with the man. Her interpretation of the funeral painting as an emblem of forgiveness will be echoed at the story's close. However, the blurring effect means the cross she finds could equally be the silhouette of a tree or a scratched brushstroke, rather than the redemptive sign the woman hopes to see.

In a number of the paintings, Richter obfuscates the image to the point of complete distortion. Van Schepen (2017) suggests that Richter's series risks failing to engage in political discourse due to its aesthetic qualities. He considers that the act of blurring anaesthetises the violence the paintings depict as opposed to reflecting the group's driving anger and the subsequent oppression of the authorities. Van Schepen asks, "Does Richter's seeming occlusion of the specifics of historical memory in the painterly blur pull a gauzily romanticised scrim over the brutal workings of the State?" (p. 12). However, Herren (2015) comments that the effect of presenting the pictures in such stark forms "thwart the spectator's efforts either to romanticize or to fetishize the figures on display" (p. 141). Richter refuses to present emotional or political binaries. The obscuring of the bodies and blurring of the images is perhaps more shocking and haunting than the original sources. Richter's canvases were completed in 1988, eleven years after the deaths of Baader, Ensslin and Raspe. Richter, deeply moved by the events, allowed time to distance himself and to reflect on the furore surrounding the members' deaths. His pieces were never intended to be reactionary or to evoke the radical ideology of the group; rather they appear a meditation on death, loss, memory, cultural amnesia and the process of erasure.

Richter intentionally conceals chronology in the cycle. In fact, for a visitor to the gallery there is no clear narrative flow, but a depiction of fragmented stills in which the viewer struggles to see clearly or extrapolate meaning. The visitor is surrounded by provocative images without explicit links. Likewise, DeLillo's scenes, as within much of his oeuvre, jump cut without clear cues or smooth narrative transitions. Nothing in the café scene suggests the woman will invite the man back to her apartment, but in the next sentence they are awkwardly together in her home. Richter muddies details specifically in his title due to its subversion of

historicity. The title evokes one specific date of the coordinated deaths of Baader, Ensslin, and Raspe, but the pictures cover a much longer period. Meinhof hung herself over a year before the deaths of these three men. The woman in the story is aware of this detail: "Ulrike dead in May, she knew, of 1976" (p. 108). Some of the pictures are of a much younger Ulrike. The picture *Jugendbildnis* [Youth portrait] shows a 22-year-old Ulrike Meinhof. The original photograph is from 10th October 1966 and is by far the clearest image of the entire cycle. The woman looks at this image recognising "Ulrike as a much younger woman, a girl, really, distant and wistful" (p. 109). Richter softens her face so that she appears innocent with an almost childlike expression.

In creating his series, Richter heavily researched the group and had an archive of material to draw on or, to be more accurate, to paint over. Richter decided to include and, equally importantly, omit very specific images. The depiction of the young Ulrike humanises her. Richter is drawn to explore how Ulrike's leftist leanings could have turned to anarchistic violence and how the innocent girl of the portrait became a terrorist. There are three paintings titled *Tote* [Dead]. Each is derived from the same image of Ulrike's body, her head angled backwards and her face jutting upwards. DeLillo writes, "She was looking at Ulrike now, head and upper body, her neck rope-scorched" (p. 105). The body of Ulrike lying as if on a predella conjures the iconography of centuries of religious art. In the composition there are echoes of Richter's compatriot Hans Holbein's painting *The Body of Dead Christ in the Tomb* (1520–1522). Such an association with religious imagery is surely intended to be jarring by evoking ideas of martyrdom, theological iconography and the fascination with the group as a type of cult of the dead. In DeLillo's story the man asks the woman how the paintings make her feel. When the woman answers, her response is empathetic, "'I think I feel helpless. These paintings make me feel how helpless a person can be'" (p. 109). She feels an affinity with Ulrike; her reaction ignores or negates political anger concentrating on the human tragedy of her death. This sense also foreshadows her own experience as she too will be placed in a position of helplessness by the man's entrapment of her in her own home.

The man's presence in the gallery creates an undercurrent of menace, but his opening question seems simple enough, "'Why do you think he did it this way?'" (p. 105). This query serves two functions, firstly the man is asking both the woman and the reader about Richter's artistic choices. Why did he choose these particular fifteen images when his research had gained him access to hundreds? Secondly, the man's question can be read as a meta-reference to the story's function itself: self-consciously questioning why the author chose to write about Richter's paintings through the story of stalking and furthermore as an indirect response to 9/11. In contrast to the woman's fascination with the cycle, the man is dismissive of the paintings; he tells her that he only comes to the gallery to pass time before a job

interview. The reader is never sure if this is true. The woman chooses not to tell the man that she has come to the gallery for three straight days. However, during their conversation the man makes reference to her precise number of viewings with the implication that he has been watching her for much longer than she thinks. Yet the woman does not pick up on this detail. The man attempts to downplay both the artwork and the group's activities condemning them as terrorists who either kill other people or kill themselves. His interpretation intentionally simplifies a possible response to the fraught tension of radicalism, punishment and personal sacrifice that Richter's works convey. The man's lack of engagement with the art is contrasted to the woman's emotive response. Referring to the pieces, he repeats, "No color. No meaning" (p. 110). The man continues, "I don't feel anything" (p. 109). Yet the woman responds very differently as she desires to understand Richter's paintings. When the man claims that only those with artistic or historical knowledge can interpret the pictures the woman objects, "Just look. You have to look" (p. 107).

In contrast to the man, the woman's repeated visits, and even her discomfort, show how engagement and focus are rewarded as details and feelings emerge. She says, "I realize now that the first day I was only barely looking. I thought I was looking, but I was only getting a bare inkling of what's in these paintings. I'm only just starting to look" (p. 109). As Kauffman (2008) notes, "Richter and DeLillo confront us with myriad forms of misrecognition and unknowing: ignorance, amnesia, blindness, denial, disavowal" (p. 359). Through forms of visual denial, both Richter and DeLillo are able to open a plethora of meanings in their works. "Baader-Meinhof" is centred on forms of vision, whether the voyeuristic stare of the man watching the woman, or the uncomfortable nature of looking at images of the dead mediated for mass public viewings. In the scene in her apartment, the woman comes into the kitchen to find the man looking out of a window onto nothing but "dusty masonry and glass" (p. 112). The woman observes the man looking "as if waiting for a view to materialize" (p. 112). It is the same experience he has complained of in the gallery when he was unable to make sense of the paintings. Kauffman interprets aspects of the story in relation to sight and blindness as recurring themes. A group comes into the gallery led by a guide, before a woman with a cane enters the space. The woman looks across at the picture of Gudrun, and her eyes pass over the man watching her: "She only glimpsed him. He was looking at her, but she was looking past him to the figure of Gudrun in a prison smock" (p. 107). The woman later tells the man that what the group did was not "blind and empty" (p. 110). In her apartment there is the most chilling moment of all when the man's advances become more extreme as he observes "her so levelly, with such measuring effect [...] He was ranking her, marking her in some awful and withering way" (p. 115). She will eventually escape the man with her "head down, [like] a person marching blindly" (p. 116).

The repetition in the story, as the man echoes certain phrases, matches the repetition in Richter's art. Richter's cycle makes use of triptychs and diptychs where images are duplicated with subtle changes to form or tone whereas DeLillo reflects acts of double-seeing in his writing. This theme also relates to the woman's lack of agency. Her actions and motives are mysterious even to herself: "She wondered whether she wanted him to miss his interview. That couldn't be what she wanted" (p. 114). In the café the man tries to label the woman by guessing that she teaches "art to handicapped children" (p. 110). Even at this point she does not feel her own response, but witnesses her emotion in a reflection: "She didn't know whether [his remark] was interesting or cruel, but saw herself in the window wearing a grudging smile" (p. 110). No longer viewing canvases, she is watching herself and is detached from truly experiencing events. In fact, it is only when she looks at Richter's paintings that she feels an emotional response in contrast to the anaesthetised sense she exhibits in the rest of the story. As Herren (2015) comments, "what one sees in *October 18, 1977* becomes secondary to how one sees it, how that perception is refracted through multiple mediating gazes" (p. 114). As soon as the man leaves the woman's flat her perceptions are altered: "She saw everything twice now. She was where she wanted to be, and alone, but nothing was the same. Bastard. Nearly everything in the room had a double effect –what it was and the association it carried in her mind" (p. 117). Initially, it appears the man's presence in the woman's flat has caused her sense of double-seeing, yet it is perhaps as much Richter's paintings that have subtly altered her sensory perceptions.

Crawford (2009), Kauffman (2008) and Herren (2015) have all critiqued "Baader-Meinhof" in terms of verisimilitude, but an alternative interpretation may question if the man is real at all. Could he instead be a figment of the woman's imagination, a manifestation of her psyche given form by Richter's paintings, or an apparition? The opening of the story, after all, reads like the start of a ghost tale, "She knew there was someone else in the room. There was no outright noise, just an intimation behind her, a faint displacement of air" (p. 105). The man's spectral presence serves to challenge the woman's readings of the artworks. It is no coincidence that DeLillo's previous novel was *The Body Artist* (2001), a postmodern take on the ghost story. The ghostly quality of the story is signalled from the first page as the woman sits "as a person does in a mortuary chapel, keeping watch over the body of a relative or a friend" (p. 105). Both "Baader-Meinhof" and *The Body Artist* evoke grief and the solace of art for women in transient states. The woman in "Baader-Meinhof" tells the man she has only been in her flat for four months, prior to that she has "been a nomad [...] Sublets, staying with friends, always short-term. Ever since the marriage failed" (p. 113). This turn of phrase, with its passive voice, provides a clue to her backstory, but also dislocates her from her own past just as she is displaced by her earlier sight of

herself in reflection. Her self-description is key to the story's theme of transience portrayed too in the man's shadowy presence and puzzling words. In his attempt to seduce her, the man says, "This is not a major moment in the world. It'll come and go" (p. 114). Whether the man is real or not the woman experiences trauma.

DeLillo's story culminates in anti-dramatic climax, the pun here is intended, as the man's final actions in the woman's apartment are hidden from both the woman's and the reader's sight. The man's behaviour becomes slowly more predatory. At one point, she finds him suddenly approaching her: "She drew away and stood up, and he was all around her then […] for a moment, she seemed to disappear, tucked and still, in breathless hiding" (p. 115). The woman manages to escape fearing that his sexual aggression will escalate and shuts herself in the bathroom. The man will not vacate her apartment. Protecting herself, she can hear him moving towards her bed; behind the closed door, she hears, or assumes she hears, him undoing his belt. While there is the implication that he has masturbated on her bed, his actions are not certain. The woman listens carefully: "When he was finished, there was a long pause, then some rustling and shifting" (p. 117). Crucially: "He was sitting on the bed, unbuckling his belt. This is what *she thought* she heard" [emphasis added] (p. 116). A sexual act is only implied, she imagines what has taken place: what she has not seen. It is equally possible that the man is sitting on her bed in dejection.

The woman and reader are both denied narrative closure of witnessing or being certain of the man's final act. The door that the woman stands behind, but chooses not to lock, tantalisingly hides whatever is happening in the adjacent space. Just as with Richter's distortion of his images to both occlude and reveal more, so too does DeLillo's refusal to portray the man's possibly perverted behaviour add to the uncertainty of the story. In the closing paragraph, the paintings themselves draw both characters back to the original scene. There is a symmetry to the piece in its play-like form. The story begins with the man watching the woman from behind as she contemplates Richter's canvases. By the close, there is a reversal of vantage points. In this reframing, the writer is toying with the points of perspective an observer might adopt to view a painting and how this can potentially change its meaning. It now appears to be the man who is vulnerable. Initially, the man was the aggressor, but by the end he is viewed seated in front of the last canvas of the cycle. He has asked for forgiveness before he leaves the woman's apartment and, in this final scene, he sits before the painting the woman has already associated with repentance. Just as in Richter's cycle, shock and horror give way to the possibility of redemption.

This article has argued that DeLillo has not only been inspired by the content of Richter's artworks, but by the theoretical ideas fundamental to their creation. The themes of imprecision, uncertainty, transience and incompleteness are integral to a reading of "Baader-Meinhof". DeLillo and Richter are drawn to the fundamental imprecision of art itself to portray an event. Richter (2009) argues that paintings

can show the "infinite variety that preclude the emergence of any single meaning and view" (p. 33). Likewise, DeLillo's ekphrastic choices represent the limits of both visual art and fiction to portray historical events with anything other than ambiguity. The story is premised on a fleeting encounter between two drifting characters. It is a minimal piece so effective for its brevity and its omitted closure. The story ends prior to the scene the reader assumes will be the concluding interaction between the man and woman. Although I have referred to the redemptive possibility in the final image of the story, the closing sentences leave little sense of resolution. The reader is left to wonder if the woman will choose to confront the man or simply linger and watch as he views the paintings. If they do speak, will the man again ask to be forgiven and has the woman revisited with the expectation he will be there? The reader is forced to question the motivation behind her decision to return to the gallery. The story is unresolved in several ways and the narrative's absent denouement reflects Richter's proclivity for incompleteness and uncertainty. DeLillo replicates Richter's aesthetic motif into literary form as the blurred and foggy effect of the paintings mirrors the narrative's lack of clarity. Finally, the story's obfuscation refuses to satiate our strained attempts to understand its relationship to 9/11.

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LUBLIN STUDIES IN MODERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE Vol 44, No 2 (2020)
Maria Curie-Sklodowska University Press

E-ISSN 2450-4580

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DOI: 10.17951/lsmll.2020.44.2.51-62

From Brushes to Lenses: An Ekphrastic Stroll in *A Line Made by Walking* by Sara Baume

ABSTRACT
There is a sizeable body of scholarship concerning the ekphrastic relation of literature to painting – however, there has been ascending interest in other sources of inspiration, such as photography. The aim of this paper is to explore whether the categories used to analyse ekphraseis of paintings might apply to the ekphraseis inspired by photography in Sara Baume's *A Line Made by Walking* (2017), considering that they provide insightful information regarding the creative process of the protagonist and her inner state. The notion of ekphrasis (Clüver, Vieira, Webb) and theories of photography (Barthes, Machado, Sontag) will be used as theoretical support.
Keywords: ekphrasis, photography, painting, intermediality, comparative literature, Sara Baum

1. Introduction

In times of voluntary isolation, the story of Frankie, an artist in her mid-twenties who succumbs to a nervous breakdown and moves into her grandmother's bungalow in the Irish countryside, is likely to promote insights of different ways to make the absent present. We propose to examine how Frankie, the protagonist of the novel *A Line Made by Walking* (2017), by the Irish artist and author Sara Baume, copes with her confinement by embarking on a photographic project that happens to be revealed by means of ekphrastic passages. Departing from the understanding of photography's intrinsic features along with categories previously proposed for the study of ekphrasis of paintings, we will reflect upon the similarities and differences promoted by ekphraseis[1] inspired by the protagonist's photographic project composed of a series of animal corpses found in her secluded surroundings. Frankie's venture is guided by two self-imposed principles: firstly, the depicted

[1] Regarding the plural form of ekphrasis, although dictionaries of general English accepts its spelling as *ekphrases*, we chose to follow the form used by our theoretical scope: *ekphraseis*.

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This journal is financed by the Polish Ministerial Programme „Support for Scientific Journals" (contract number 320/WCN/2019/1) and the Maria Curie-Sklodowska University.

animals must already be dead; and, secondly, no pets are to be included. For doing so, we count on theories of photography (Barthes, Machado, Sontag) and the notion of ekphrasis (Clüver, Vieira, Webb).

2. Creating visual and verbal images

Photography has been connected since its first invention to the visual arts and especially to painting. The photography theoretician Arlindo Machado[2] (2015) explains that the invention of the camera dates back to the Renaissance, when devices built using the principle of the *camera obscura* first gained popularity among painters[3]. These early devices, consisting of a sealed black box with a single hole allowing the entry of a shaft of light, enabled a perfectly mimetic (albeit inverted) reproduction of the visible world: often, a tableau of objects arranged and lit by the painter. At this early stage, however, the projected image still required the artist's brush in order to be fixed. Machado also states that the invention of photography represented the crossing of two different discoveries in time and space: the *camera obscura* and Leon Battisti Alberti's *Perspectiva Artificialis*, explored in his 1443 *Della Pictura.* Intended to represent tridimensional relations within a bidimensional plan, Alberti's system of geometric projections improved the definition of images generated by the *camera obscura*. After the Renaissance, technology evolved beyond painting enabling discoveries that no longer depended on human mediation for the process of fixing images, such as the light-sensitivity of silver and its compounds. So, with the right chemical materials, the device itself could fix the image to its film.

This chemical process of capturing and fixing an image of one instant from a moment in life is at the root of a common superstition regarding photography: namely, that the camera might somehow steal the subject's soul, confining it within the final photograph. Machado (2015) explains how "some people commonly considered 'primitive' had the belief that photography could steal their spirits, and they refused to be photographed, fearing that a part of themselves would be fixed in the celluloid"[4] (p. 39). This popular belief is reflected in Honoré de Balzac's rather fanciful theory that all physical bodies are covered with an infinite number of spectral layers, and that each time a person is photographed, one of these layers is transferred to the film (p. 39).

As media technology, photography's historical background is relevant here due to the attention drawn to the device's mechanical nature and its ability to effectively

[2] Theoretician Arlindo Machado (1949–…) is a photography curator, critic and professor at the School of Communication and Arts, University of São Paulo. He is one of the main experts in his field in Brazil.

[3] For more detailed information, see Machado (2015) and Fainguelernt (2014).

[4] Original text: "Alguns povos ditos 'primitivos' acreditam que a fotografia lhes rouba o espírito e resistem em ser fotografados, temendo que alguma parte de si seja fixada no celuloide" (Machado, 2015, p. 39). Unless otherwise stated, all translations are our own.

capture reality. In 1984's *Camera Lucida*, Barthes posits that photography never distinguishes itself from its referent, and that the presence of the photographed subject/object is also never metaphorical, given that the photo is the reflection of its luminous emanation. Conversely, Sontag (1977) had suggested how photography is not merely an image or interpretation of reality: it is a derivative of reality. According to her, "a photograph is never less than the registering of an emanation (light waves reflected by objects) – a material vestige of its subject in a way that no painting can be" (p. 120). Krauss (1977), when discussing Charles Peirce's notion of the index, recalls his statement that photographs' stronger, more immediate connection to reality stems from their "having been produced under such circumstances that they were physically forced to correspond point by point to nature" (p. 63). And this matter of indexically happens to be the reason Barthes had previously called photography a certificate of presence. Machado (2015), in his turn, criticizes this direct association of photography with reality – a standpoint he refers to as realism. To him, this argument ignores the fact that when the luminous information enters the camera, "it allows itself to be restructured to comply with the convention of the pictorial system"[5] (p. 47), and that the refracted luminous information is later converted to the material basis of the film. Therefore, this argument dismisses the transformations suffered by the luminous information before achieving the final image processed into the photonegative. Nevertheless, Machado argues that photography cannot in fact be considered a pure register of an immanence of the object, since it creates a reality that only exists within itself. By agreeing with Barthes that photography cannot exist without its referent, Machado adds that it depends just as strongly on its mechanical support, i.e., the photographic device. While his opinion regarding the connection between photography and reality is slightly different from that of the other theorists mentioned thus far, his discussion of photography's evolution, as well as its relation to paintings, contribute to the question at the centre of this study: how do ekphraseis inspired by photography resemble those inspired by paintings? How do they differ?

The concept of ekphrasis comes from the ancient rhetorical device used to make something that is absent present in the mind of an audience, in such a vivid way that it helps maintain history and culture alive (Webb, 2009, p. 26). Since the nineteenth century and the advent of widespread technical reproducibility, history no longer depended on people's memory to survive; hence, the role of ekphrasis has changed (Vieira, 2017, p. 51–54). In the contemporary field of Intermedial Studies, it is considered a relevant (trans)medial phenomenon by models proposed to the study of media transformation, as the ones suggested by Rajewsky (2005) and Elleström (2010).

[5] Original text: "se deixa reestruturar para conformar-se à convenção de um sistema pictórico" (Machado, 2015, p. 47).

The well-accepted contemporary definition of ekphrasis proposed by Heffernan (1993) – "the verbal representation of a visual representation" (p. 3) – was revisited by Clüver in 1997 and updated in his latest article on the topic as the "representation of real or fictive configurations composed in a non-kinetic visual medium" (Clüver, 2016, p. 462). Clüver deems it relevant that ekphrasis preserves the ancient premise of evoking a vivid image in the reader's mind. Besides evident compositional resemblances, in order to achieve this vivid effect, certain intrinsic features of the source medium (in this case, photography) are likely to be enhanced by ekphrastic passages.

In order to better understand what characterizes an ekphrasis inspired by photography, it is necessary to understand its intrinsic features, or "media modes" in the words of Elleström (2010). These features force us to "recognize the 'affordances' of any communicative relation" (Bruhn, 2016, p. 18). The modes of photography include both the mechanical device used to capture images (which might be a professional camera, a smartphone, or even a tablet) and the different accessories that go along with it, from lenses on cameras to digital configurations and filters on smartphones. The material on which the photos are printed (if they are printed at all), whether upscale photographic paper or simply regular stock, should also be taken into account. As explained by Machado, many nuances of colour will be determined by these factors. He singles out three aspects of the process of developing film[6] that will strongly affect the final image: the ink's materiality, the range of shades produced by the silver grains, and the artist's motivation (Machado, 2015, p. 165). Photography also brings into play other intrinsic features: the framing, point of view, and perspective adopted by the photographer, as well as the possibility of the photographs being manipulated, and the fact that the original could be enlarged or reduced when printed in different scales. Some of the unique specificities of photography include the possibility of arrested motion and, especially in current digital photography, the prospect of endless duplication and dissemination. Here the "technical reproduction" envisaged by Benjamin (1936) in his ground-breaking essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" is brought to new and dizzying proportions. Adding to this is the fact that, where the material of the support-medium of film was once vulnerable and perishable, today's digital negatives – saved on laptops, memory cards, or the cloud – allow for the technical reproduction, described by Benjamin, to continue potentially *ad infinitum*, as photographs that had been damaged could be easily replaced by a new copy whenever desired.

On the subject of arrested motion and photography's ability to freeze an instant in time, Machado draws attention to the fact that this feature is originally inherited

[6] The term film refers to the photographic film of cameras, which is later processed to create the negative that will be printed.

from figurative painting. However, in the case of painting, the moment portrayed in the image "is always that ideal and privileged time, filled with meaning and intention"[7] (Machado, 2015, p. 52). The moment captured in photographs, by contrast, "is always this thoughtless and random time, this hundredth of a second without control, in which chance cannot be entirely abolished by an intention" (p. 52)[8]. In this way, photography always implies some measure of unpredictability. Yet Machado also stresses that "this single fragment of time, chosen by chance to be frozen in the photo, is also composed of countless other instants that the shutter is still incapable of distinguishing" (p. 54)[9]. Consequently, to the author, photographs are a condensation of countless instants, increasing the level of unpredictability concerning the instant that will actually appear in the final shot, an uncertainty that is not likely to be applied to figurative paintings.

As previewed, ekphraseis inspired by painting and by photography are likely to share many of the same basic principles, such as its bi-dimensionality, framing and point of view. For instance, some excerpts from Baume's novel present certain photographic features, most notably concerning the framing, the choice of photographic paper, and some aspects of the image itself. Other ekphrastic passages tend to focus on the object photographed, the composition of the scene or the identification of something worth being captured. Meanwhile, the depiction of the time occupied with the creative process is one of the main differences between ekphraseis inspired by photographs and the ones inspired by paintings. To fully understand the other differences between these two types of ekphraseis, it is relevant to perceive the nuances in each conception process from beginning to end.

When analysing elsewhere[10] the ekphrastic descriptions of Vermeer's paintings in the novel *Girl with a Pearl Earring*[11], three categories were proposed: (a) post-work ekphrasis, (b) pre-work ekphrastic moments, and (c) ekphrasis of works in progress (Vieira, 2011, pp. 16–21). The first category concerns specific media products, as when characters bring about existing paintings, whereas the second

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[7] Original text: "é sempre aquele tempo ideal e privilegiado, pleno de sentido e intenção" (Machado, 2015, p. 52).

[8] Original text: "é sempre esse tempo impensado e aleatório, esse centésimo de segundo destituído de controle, em que o acaso não pode ser inteiramente abolido por uma intenção" (Machado, 2015, p. 52).

[9] Original text: "esse único fragmento temporal que o acaso escolheu para congelar na foto é também ele composto por outros instantes que o obturador, todavia, não sabe distinguir" (Machado, 2015, p. 54).

[10] See Vieira (2011).

[11] Written by Tracy Chevalier and published in 1999, the novel narrates the story of the fictional character Griet, a young Dutch protestant sent to work as a maid in the house of Johannes Vermeer. Throughout the novel, Griet becomes an assistant to the painter, culminating in her posing for the eponymous painting, *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (1665–1667).

one refers to the creative process portrayed in ekphrastic passages before the work has actually been started, such as when the novel's characters discuss what the next commissioned paintings should be and what pictorial elements are to be included. Finally, the third category invokes ekphraseis that take place while the work is still under preparation, for instance when the two main protagonists, master and muse, negotiate the composition of the homonymous painting during the course of its execution. Such categorization has provided comprehension on the depiction of each process of conception of an artwork through ekphrastic passages. The mentioned categories were therefore borrowed for the investigation of ekphraseis inspired by photography in the novel *A Line Made by Walking*.

3. Behind the shutter

As previously mentioned, the capability of arrested motion, indexicality, framing, aspects related to the mechanical device and the chemical processes of fixing and printing images are some of the intrinsic features of photography, as enhanced by the following ekphrastic passage:

> The last *photograph* is easy; I know which box it belongs in as soon as I turn it over. My grandmother from the breastbone up, a jaunty regimental hat pinned at an angle to her sensible hairdo.
> Here is London at the start of the Second World War; the day she entered the Women's Royal Naval Service. She is nineteen and still smiles with her teeth showing. By the end of the war, most of the ones in the front rows had been knocked out: not by a bomb but a car accident – an ambulance which crashed into a crater. This is a fact that has proved helpful to me in the sorting of the muddled *photographs*. Some of those without a date scribbled on the back can be dated by whether or not my grandmother has opened her mouth to smile.
> How beautiful she looks, but then everyone always says that about old *photographs;* it can't possibly be that people were uniformly better looking in the past, but that grainy monochrome is more generally flattering than crystalline technicolour, and because having your *portrait* taken was uncommon enough for people to bother dressing their best. Combing their hair just so, striking an elegant pose.
> I place the *photo* in its place. I pause for a moment of silent appreciation: my grandmother's radiant yet under-celebrated life [emphasis added] (Baume, 2017, pp. 251–252).

Framed by explicit mentions to "photography" and "photo" the ekphrasis is filled with specific details regarding it as media technology, such as the "grainy monochrome" resultant from the type of device available to take portraits during the Second World War, in comparison to the "crystalline technicolour" of contemporary devices. From this excerpt, it is possible to observe how, isolated from the creative process, the category of post-work ekphrasis of excerpts inspired by photography is quite similar to the one regarding paintings. Apart from the differences stemming from the specificities of each medium (such as the way a painting can be constructed in front of the reader's eyes, playing with the mixing of colours and emotions displayed on the canvas), the two share many important

features, such as their bidimensional nature, the importance of framing and light, point of view, and the composition of scenes. Additionally, the possibility of tracing the time period when the photo was taken relates to the indexical connection between photography and reality that is enabled by the presence of elements related to specific time periods that may be grasped only by means of specific background information – in this case, Frankie's grandmother's smile.

However, as announced, the focus of our analysis is Frankie's photographic series of animal corpses found in the surroundings of her grandmother's house in Ireland, as when she finds a mouse in an empty basin in her backyard. Her eyes immediately frame it within a square, as she will later do with her camera. She believes the framed image is her best photo so far:

> There is something floating on the surface of the rainwater. I lean in and my face appears *reflected* in the green, and *square* in the green of my face, a mouse.
> Floating on his belly, paws and tail extended. Ears inflated, eyes scrunched, nose submerged, whiskers pencilling frail lines through the green, a perfect drawing.
> [...]
> I *picture* the mouse trying to swim, to scrabble back out. Slipping down the sides, a spider in a bathtub. *Beneath the surface,* the pads of her paws are pale and bald like palms of tiny hands. Her back legs are splayed *as if she had been kicking at the instant her heart stopped*. As if, in the *instant* which came before the stopping of her heart, she learned to swim, a second too late.
> [...]
> I fetch my *camera* anyway; she makes my most impeccable picture so far [emphasis added] (Baume, 2017, pp. 128–129).

The emphasized terms are related to the main features of photography, as evinced by the choice of the verb "picture" instead of "imagine", and the ability to recreate the moments before the mouse's death. Also, the presence of the camera at the end of the quote recalls the discussion regarding the distance the device imposes between photographer and the photographed subject, stressing even more Frankie's lethargy. Her first reaction to the dead mouse is to fetch a camera to capture the moment, distancing herself from that piece of reality.

In accordance with her own self-imposed rules for the project, the ekphrastic passage reveals how Frankie does not intervene or re-arrange the scene in any way. Photography's features are reinforced in order to present the object to the reader "as if"[12] the tableau were already a photo, even though the actual photograph has yet to be taken. The narrator presents the object to be photographed in such a way that it already resembles a photo, her eyes functioning as the lenses of a camera, focusing on a random image that she later decides is worth being photographed.

[12] The "as if" character is defined by Rajewsky (2005) as a form of intermedial reference, by which one medium creates an illusion of being another one by borrowing or evoking its medial specificities (p. 55).

Photography's creative process is likely to happen well before the photo is actually "taken", in the aforementioned pre-work ekphrastic moments. This process is of two types, the first being when photographers exercise their photographic vision, randomly finding scenes and moments worth being recorded, as described by Barthes. By contrast, in the second type, the photographer carefully composes the scene he or she wishes to capture and dictates the way in which the subject is to be posed – all in view of achieving the specific pre-conceived effect the artist had in mind. Despite this division, a pre-work ekphrasis may focus more on the photographed subject/object, the composition of the scene, or the identification of an image worth capturing. However, this type of ekphrasis is likely to carry aspects of the work-in-progress category as well. As when Frankie breaks her own rules by consciously waiting for a rook to die so that she can take its photo. The creative process of the photographer interfering in the scene evidences the way the image is created before the photo is actually taken as:

> The only surface which seems to hold [the droplets] is the rook's broken wing. His outstretched feathers are *electric black*. The drops sit like diamanté *just for a second* before dripping on, or being replenished and merging into fatter jewels, quivering. *Up close,* I see that beneath his broken wing, the rook is struggling to draw breath. He opens an eye and his pupil swivels around and *registers* me. His hindered breathing quickens but he does not caw; he does not shift. He's lying on a shallow heap of straw, *the yellow and the black in bold contrast.*
> I climb back into the driver's seat, but I don't start the engine. I'm not allowed to photograph things which are not dead. And so, *I must wait.* [...] After a quarter of an hour, I get out and check the rook. He is still breathing, slower now. *Again I go back to the car.*
> [...]
> My hands have stopped shaking and the rook is dead. Or at least*, I tell myself he's dead*. In the spool of light cast from my headlamps, I don't look too closely. I'm tired and hungry and don't care about my own rules anymore. *I just want my picture and to be gone* [emphasis added] (Baume, 2017, pp. 139–141).

After hours parked by the side of the road, she decides that the rook is lifeless enough for her purposes, whether or not it is truly dead. Frankie's decision of waiting for it to die plays with the notion of Death which Barthes regards as the *eidos* of photographs, the intention to be looked for in it. In a way, this relation might be considered a reflection of her own motivations to start the series on dead animals, since she believed she was being slowly killed by the universe. Once again, the word choice in the excerpt reinforces the connection between Frankie's gaze and the medial traces of photography, as evinced by the use of "up close" to draw attention to a detail. She demonstrates the sensibility to shades of colours and contrast expected from a professional photographer.

Ignoring her own rules yet again, she removes a tin can from the face of a fox, thus altering the found scene:

> And now, a fox. My birthday fox.
> Pelt matted with dust, rear quarters *indented with the mark of passing tyres*. Hind legs twisted, paws flattened into novelty slippers. A gash in its side from which its entrails have slipped, already bloodless and writhing with flies.
> *And on its head, the tin can.* Yellow label of Pedigree Chum, no eyeholes. *So the tin-can fox couldn't see where it was going after all, nor what was approaching it.*
> [...]
> *I pull the tin can off the fox's head. Restore its handsome face, and take my photograph* [emphasis added] (Baume, 2017, pp. 163–165).

Differently from the previous excerpt concerning the rook, in which Frankie interferes by non-interfering while she waits for the animal's death, the episode of the fox refers to the creative process of finding the animal in the right time and directly interfering with her bare hands until she is satisfied with the composition of the scene. But similarly to previous episodes, when Frankie's eyes frame the image of the fox, she once again imagines the moment of its death, extrapolating the reality of the image itself based on indexical evidences on how it happened, namely the tin can in its head and the marks of passing tyres.

It is worth mentioning that the act of interference or non-interference during the initial creative process is also an important and frequently debated issue of photography. Sontag has argued that the act of taking a photograph is an event in itself, embedded with the right to interfere, invade or ignore what is happening, in order to create the intended visual effect. However, she also adds that "photographing is essentially an act of non-intervention [...] the person who is recording cannot intervene" (Sontag, 1977, p. 8). To Sontag, this does not mean, of course, that photographing is an act of merely passive observation, as it instigates whatever action that is happening to continue, sometimes independently of another's pain. The above-mentioned interest of maintaining things as they are may be related to the idea that, after taking a photograph, that small piece of reality is confined within the frame, untouched and unchanged. Hence, when Frankie decides to wait for the rook to die and to remove the tin can from the fox's head, she is simply practicing her right, as a photographer, to interfere directly or indirectly, by ignoring what is happening, on behalf of the aesthetics of her series.

Since photographs are taken by means of mechanical devices that take advantage of chemical processes, and alterations to the image during the camera's operation are minimal, ekphrastic moments portraying the creative process in a work in progress may overlap with the category of post-work ekphrasis. This is because photos may be edited after they are taken, using computer software like Photoshop or Adobe Lightroom. The photographer is able to manipulate the image in view of achieving a certain effect, for example by controlling its colour, contrast, brightness, saturation, and so on. An ekphrastic passage may therefore depict the photo both as it was taken and as it appears after editing,

drawing attention to what the photographer wished to highlight or elide. This occurs when Frankie recounts plugging in her camera and downloading the photos to her laptop. She describes how

> *My robin looks angry, much angrier in reproduction than it appeared in life.* Perhaps the Native Americans are right; perhaps the camera stole its spirit. *I open my robin in Photoshop. I select Brightness/Contrast. I restore the vibrancy lost along with its spirit* [emphasis added] (Baume, 2017, p. 17).

Frankie deliberately decides to attenuate the anger she sees in the photo of the robin. She does this by adulterating aspects related to light and contrast in order to achieve the desired vibrancy. This anger she notices in the robin might be related to the belief regarding cameras stealing spirits, almost as if the animal's spirit were angry for being imprisoned in the image. However, she again distances herself from the situation, deciding what needs to be altered to make the photograph more pleasant and to restore the spirit's vibrancy.

The novel also depicts the manipulation of the image as being motivated by instinct rather than any defined reason. Frankie narrates that "downloading the rook's picture, [she *feels*] *compelled to adulterate the colour balance in Photoshop***.** [She fiddles] with the contrast until his feathers are unrealistically blue". Then she wonders, "why *must I blue my crow* […] What does a blue crow mean?" [emphasis added] (Baume, 2017, p. 143). The photographer manipulates the image, even if she does not fully grasp her reasons for doing so.

By presenting the protagonist's aesthetic choices to the reader, Baume increases the understanding about the different stages of the creative process behind photographs. She draws attention to choices made bearing in mind the exact impact she wanted to make on a receiver, as well as to the intrinsic relation between Frankie and issues related to photography, such as the distance the camera adds between the photographer and the photographed reality, and photography's relation to death.

4. Framing a (possible) closure

In this article, we have discussed how photography evolved from a device used by painters, the *camera obscura*, to a mechanical device capable of fixing luminous information into photographic film by means of chemical processes. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the two media share many similarities. These include the decisional process of framing, by which the artist (whether painter or photographer) defines what is inside the picture/photo as worthy of being seen and relegates the rest to an invisible exterior, in accordance with his or her chosen perspective. Whereas the painting process lasts longer and allows for alterations during development, the photographic process of capturing an image, as depicted in *A Line Made by Walking*, is instantaneous and may allow

alteration only during the post-editing phase, although the alterations in question (especially when performed via digital manipulation) may be considerable. These and other factors will affect the way the artist's creative process is depicted in ekphrastic passages inspired either by painting or by photography. The former affords more space to focus on how the image is slowly created, the materials chosen to compose the colours and the emotions of the artist while doing so, as well as the painter's motivations for the aesthetic choices made during the process. On the other hand, with photography, the creative process is better explored during pre- and post-work ekphrasis, in which the photographer faces a series of aesthetic choices: whether to interfere or not with the subject, choosing what to depict in the frame, as well as post-editing choices regarding colour, saturation, and contrast, all of which may be manipulated in view of a specific effect. Nevertheless, since the actual capturing of a photo lasts only an instant, the so-called work in progress category is the one that mostly distinguishes an ekphrasis inspired by photography.

The final frame

In sum, by borrowing parameters used for painting, it was possible to stroll through various photography's medial traits and the creative process involved in Frankie's project. By means of skilfully captured ekphrastic passages, it was possible to observe not only the ways in which the protagonist's aesthetic decisions influenced the photographed object, but also how the act of photographing may in fact interfere with reality, even by not directly interfering in the real world. While the self-isolated protagonist experiences the constant feeling of being slowly killed, photography provides her an extra layer of distance between her own self and the grotesqueness of a reality that is far beyond control. Frankie may be able to freeze an image in time as a certificate of existence, or even capture the spirit of an animal corpse. Nevertheless, death remains inevitable.

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LUBLIN STUDIES IN MODERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE
Maria Curie-Sklodowska University Press
Vol 44, No 2 (2020)
E-ISSN 2450-4580

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DOI: 10.17951/lsmll.2020.44.2.63-74

Precision, Honesty and Liveliness: The Newspaper Medium in *The Unfortunates* by B. S. Johnson

ABSTRACT
The article analyses the representation of the newspaper medium in *The Unfortunates* – the fourth novel by the post-war British avant-garde author, B. S. Johnson. The narrator's job as a football reporter is discussed with reference to other themes and the unconventional form of the novel. Special attention is paid to the section called "The pitch worn", which presents the process of writing the report. The aim is to see how the chapter resonates within the whole work and what it reveals as regards Johnson's views on precision, honesty, liveliness and the author-reader relationship. Literary analysis is accompanied by references to journalism and media studies.
Keywords: B. S. Johnson, *The Unfortunates*, newspaper medium, journalism, precision, liveliness

1. Introduction

A discussion on intersections between narrative and media, which this special issue aims at stimulating, may, I hope, benefit from a reflection on B. S. Johnson – a British post-war avant-garde author, who worked across different arts. Aware of the influence media have on one another, he saw literature along a broader cultural landscape and, as Hucklesby (2014) notes, knew "that the future of print fiction hinges on its relationship with other media" (p. 204). Though probably most commonly associated with his novels, republished in the 2010s by Picador, Johnson worked also as a journalist, wrote theatre plays (six of which were published in the collection *Well Done, God!* in 2013) and directed films (released by the British Film Institute in the same year).

The growing interest in his works in the current century has brought numerous interpretations of his fourth novel, *The Unfortunates*, which, thanks to its unconventional shape, has been viewed as "the most extreme" by the author himself (Johnson, 1973, p. 20) and, subsequently, also by reviewers and researchers[1]. First published in 1969, it comes in the shape of a book-in-a-box containing 27 separate sections. Two of them are marked as "First" and "Last" while the remaining ones

[1] See e.g., Jordan (2014) and Drąg (2017).

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This journal is financed by the Polish Ministerial Programme „Support for Scientific Journals" (contract number 320/WCN/2019/1) and the Maria Curie-Sklodowska University.

are left to be read in a random order. The story presents the narrator as he arrives in Nottingham to write a football report and realizes that he used to visit the city to see his friend, Tony, who died of cancer at the age of 29.

Jordan (2010), for instance, analyses the novel with reference to the category of chance and aleatory writing in *Chance and the Modern British Novel: From Henry Green to Iris Murdoch*. Lea (2015), in turn, focuses on the theme of illness and cancer in "Narrative Wreckage: Cancer and the Unfortunate Body in B. S. Johnson" while Drąg (2017) highlights the motif of friendship in "In Pieces: Fragmentation, Friendship, and Mourning in B. S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates*". The unconventional shape of the book has also been of interest, among others, for White (2005) in *Reading the Graphic Surface* (2005) and Bazarnik in *Liberature: A Book-bound Genre* (2016).

Thinking about intersections between narrative and other media, I would like to draw on yet another theme in the novel, that is news reporting. The importance of the motif is suggested by the narrator's job – the football report he is supposed to write is what brings him to the city, and the match is the fixed event he has in mind while strolling around, observing and recollecting the past in the order determined by the unplanned walk (and the reader). The intersection between the novel and news writing is also strengthened by the biographical context – Johnson played and watched football, went to see matches with his father, at some point even applied to join the Chelsea team and later worked as a reporter, which all must have earned him a broad knowledge in the field (Johnson, 2013, pp. 407–411).

Still, presumably due to the parallel significance of other themes in *The Unfortunates*, such as e.g. death and trauma, the representation of the newspaper medium and journalism seems to be a frame rather than a subject in the story. The narrator himself, though he does not forget about the match, focuses on the lost friendship as well as his mental state and unwillingly turns to the job he does out of necessity rather than out of preference. Finding this ambiguity quite interesting, I would like to take a closer look at the narrator's job and the report he writes, mainly in the section "The pitch worn", which is actually the longest out of the 27. Commenting on the novel, Johnson's friend, Zulfikar Ghose (2015), wrote that he sees this as a fortunate coincidence if this section is read as the second last for it appears to fuse all themes relevant to *The Unfortunates*:

> Incidentally, it occurs to me that the football reporting section gains by coming second last; for by then one already knows so much about what you've been suffering in the town, and one is moved by the fact that you're having to watch a mediocre match and write about it and then sending the copy while your mind is full of other things (as cit. in Guignery, 2015, p. 268).

Taking this as a suggestion that the chapter might be an important micro-story within a larger whole, my aim is to see how it resonates in the novel and what characteristics of Johnson's writing it reveals, especially as regards his devotion

to truth, precision and honesty. Subsequently, it is worth looking at the news reporting theme through the lens of contemporary journalism and investigate what it may tell about Johnson's approach to the author-reader relationship.

2. Truth in journalism and in B. S. Johnson's view

Two complementary conceptualisations of journalism found their way into media studies as presented by Bird and Dardenne (1987), as well as by Carey (1989): one focuses on the transfer of information and the search for truth while the other highlights the continuity of communication, as well as the mission to create a coherent picture of reality and to bring together the audience as a community living in particular circumstances. Bird and Dardenne (1987) analyse news as a narrative, assuming it is beneficial to view journalism not only in terms of its informative function, but also with regard to its symbolic and cultural value. As they contend, their aim is not to "negate the value of considering news as corresponding with outside reality, as affecting or being affected by society, as a product of journalists or of bureaucratic organization", but to "introduce another dimension to news, one in which the stories of news transcend their traditional functions of informing and explaining" (p. 69). Using myth as a theoretical framework, they treat it as a means of comprehending troubling phenomena, yet not necessarily by reflecting the world, but rather by constructing an autonomous representation of reality (p. 70). In their opinion, releasing news similarly helps to understand what is happening, for it also "is a way in which people create order out of disorder, transforming knowing into telling" (p. 70). Relying on "the authority as 'truth'", both myth and news distinguish, for example, between what can and what cannot be accepted (pp. 71, 80). From such a perspective, crime reports not only provide information about the people involved and further possible danger, but primarily outline normative guidelines as for what kind of behaviour leads to arrest (p. 71).

Carey (1989), in turn, comments on journalism in a broader context while he distinguishes two approaches to communication: a transmission view and a ritual view. The former presents "the medium as an instrument for disseminating news and knowledge", while also asking what kind of effect this has on the audience: whether they gain knowledge or become more confused, whether they are willing to change their habits, whether they believe what they read about or begin to doubt (p. 20). The latter approach seems to suggest that journalism stimulates action in a given socio-cultural context and that it situates readers within this context:

> The model here is not that of information acquisition, though such acquisition occurs, but of dramatic action in which a reader joins the world of contending forces as an observer at a play. We do not encounter questions about the effect or functions of messages as such, but the role of presentation and involvement in the structuring of the reader's life and time (p. 21).

Thus, news can be treated as a linear story or a series of stories complemented each day by new information, but also as a means of communication that plays a role in building the picture of reality.

The questions of knowledge and understanding reality were especially important for journalism in the 1960s, 70s and 80s[2], which, as Bird and Dardenne (1987) note, "saw an increase in critiques of positivism and increased doubts about the possibility of reaching truth through empirical description" (p. 205). A trace of such an attitude can be found in B. S. Johnson's "Introduction" to his collection of short prose *Aren't You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs?* Though he does not comment directly on journalism, but rather theorizes on literature, he is clearly interested in the complexity of the transforming reality and the attempts to obtain stability. Published in 1973, the "Introduction" features a reflection that

> [p]resent-day reality is markedly different from say nineteenth-century reality. Then it was possible to believe in pattern and eternity, but today what characterises our reality is the probability that chaos is the most likely explanation ; while at the same time recognizing that even to seek an explanation represents a denial of chaos [punctuation original] (Johnson, 1973, p. 17).

Hence, the task Johnson accepts as a novelist touches upon a paradox of a futile quest – a search for what might not be possible to achieve. He is of the opinion that writers should accompany philosophers in facing contradictions and he admits that he keeps acting as if there was a certain pattern beyond the complicated reality (p. 18). He is also very much devoted to truth, which he chooses as one of his major writing goals. As he states, "I am not interested in telling lies in my own novels" (p. 14). A corresponding tension between the known and the unknown is reflected in *The Unfortunates*, where two sections are marked as the first and the last while the rest remain reshufflable, demonstrating that "control and order are anticipated and yet frustrated" (Tew, 2002, p. 40). It seems that Johnson was willing to accept a certain amount of precarity in the search for innovation and new knowledge, wishing other writers and readers would join him and embrace works that go against literary tradition (Johnson, 1973, p. 29–31).

3. Precision

The appreciation of truth and the willingness to search appear to be the issues connecting Johnson with journalism, which prompts to have a closer look at the

[2] Correspondingly, Ward (2018) speaks of a shift from realist to social constructivist epistemologies in the mid 20th century, suggesting that people began to view knowledge as no longer objective, but constructed by humanity (p. 63). He also treats the 60s as the end of the Epistemology of News Objectivity era and the beginning of the Alternate Epistemologies era (p. 68).

depiction of the football report the narrator in *The Unfortunates* is supposed to write. In fact, the article is reprinted in the novel three times in three different shapes. Firstly, as the narrator is composing the report in the "The pitch worn" section, where his notes in italics are interwoven with his internal monologue in straight font, e.g., "*Alexander, dragging his slow length along from right back, hit a long one which beat Phipps but struck the intersection* [emphasis original], like a wounded snake has to be worked in somewhere, no, it'll never work, too contrived, scrub it" (Johnson, 1999, p. 6)[3]. This carries on for nine pages, until a blank leading into a new paragraph illustrates that he is putting the notes together and editing the text, so that it can be published quickly: Now I must hack this into some shape, now I must make it into 500 well-chosen words […] Get on.

By five. In 40 minutes" [spacing original] (p. 9). Later, the narrator is found repeating the freshly written article over the telephone. The loose phrases are separated by numerous blanks illustrating how he is waiting for them to be registered in the newspaper office. Yet another characteristic feature of this part is that the narrator is reading out loud all punctuation marks and indicating verbally how he imagines the text to be distributed in print. This is further complemented by additional comments addressed to the receiver, e.g., "over the bar from no more than three yards out full point new par Okay, I'll wait" [spacing original] (p. 10). Finally, the report in its printed shape is reproduced on the internal back cover of the box containing the 27 sections. Here, the newspaper convention is shown in the way that the article has a headline, a subtitle and appears in two narrow columns. In this way, the readers are presented with the whole creative process from note-taking to the final published product, which seems to demonstrate both the desire for an accurate description of the events and the willingness to show how the account has developed – that its original shape is the outcome of changes and transmissions.

The pursuit of precision visible in such a thorough depiction of writing the report is worth noting as it is an attitude journalists are expected to adopt. Taking into account "the authority as 'truth'" (Bird & Dardenne, 1987, p. 80), as well as their readers, reporters should be as accurate as possible, honest when they are aware that some details are unknown and caring about providing fresh information in an attractive way. As Randall (2007) contends, "[j]ournalism should be the enemy of imprecision" (p. 164). Outlining his advice for amateur reporters, he stresses how important it is to know what one wants to say and to keep searching for a proper way to get it across: "Think hard about the real nature of what it is that you are trying to convey and try to find a phrase that fits the bill perfectly"

[3] I am using the reprint edition of *The Unfortunates* published by Picador in 1999. All subsequent references will be to this edition and they will include an opening phrase of a given section along with a page number.

(p. 160). Similarly, Reeves and Keeble (2015) explain that a reporter should try not to overuse words and stay reserved towards elaborate constructions in order to keep his account short and simple: "Complex sentences overload with long subordinate clauses should be avoided. Use short, precise sentences" (p. 119).

Throughout his career, Johnson paid great attention to the meaning-making process and cared about the ways in which he could convey different senses. As he states in the "Introduction", "I want my ideas to be expressed so precisely that the very minimum of room for interpretation is left" (Johnson, 1973, p. 28). This may correspond to the representation of the reporting process in *The Unfortunates*, but also to the manner in which the narrator describes his walk around the city before the match as well as his relationship with Tony. Aiming at accuracy, he provides numerous details. For instance, in his observations concerning the weather, he would keep redefining the kind of rain and resort to his physical and mental reactions in order to render the moment thoroughly and precisely: "It begins to rain, rain like an extension of the air, wet air, not falling as drops, in material terms, that is, in drops one would call drops, but a fine air mist of wetness, of rain, that makes me blink, that just depresses me one stage further…" (Johnson, 1999, "Time! " [spacing original], p. 3). Also, the descriptions of Tony's deterioration include biological details and the narrator's commentary on his mental processing, e.g., "And his teeth, I never remember seeing Tony's teeth before, they were there, of course, in that fleshy mouth, but now the mouth was not fleshy, the flesh was gone, not gone, but tautened, disfigured…" ("So he came to his parents…", p. 2).

Still, though precise, the narrative strategy is complex and ambiguous. The consideration of both the outside world and the subjective impressions make the account broad and detailed, yet at the same time objectivity is subverted. Parallel to how the narrator presents the entire process of reporting the football match, outlining how the text is being composed in his mind, he adds his own perspective also to the account of the present and past events outside the game. Precision in this sense means providing different perspectives and revealing one's own reactions. The reformulations and details seem to go against the model of reporting as based on brevity as they suggest an intense flow of words.

4. Honesty

Furthermore, accuracy is achieved through honesty and the awareness that not everything can be mediated or expressed. The blanks used throughout the novel indicate silence and waiting, like in the example of reading the report over the telephone, but sometimes they also stand for lapses of memory, e.g.,

> But when could that have been? Which day? Was it before I was ill? Yes, or June would not have expected much of me, though it was not much to expect, in any case, no, from me. I cannot place this, though, it will not fall into place ("The estate. " [spacing original], p. 8).

Apart from that, the blanks are used to show resignation and existential doubts, e.g.,

> when there were race-riots in the city, he was interviewed by reporters, or something, I don't remember, why should I, it doesn't matter, nothing does, it's all chaos, look at his death, why? Why not? [spacing original] ("His dog, or his parents' dog", p. 3).

Thus, the accuracy achieved through details is accompanied by the descriptions of moments when the opposite is at stake, that is when the narrator feels lost for words due to memory failure or negative mood. Demonstrating "a passing away of the power of language" in the novel (Tew, 2002, p. 35) seems to chime with the journalistic awareness that

> [t]here are aspects of the process of journalism which often compromise truth. The lack of time to collate a totally comprehensive account, the lack of access to all the sources and information and the need to write the story to a finite, often quite short length (Randall, 2007, p. 161).

Randall explains that these are all acceptable on the condition that the reporter knows his account is not absolute (p. 161). He also admits that an even better strategy is to look for ways to confront these kind of obstacles (p. 161). The above-quoted passages, thematically perhaps especially the one where the reference to interviewing is juxtaposed with the narrator's hesitation, illustrate that the narrator in *The Unfortunates* bears in mind the inevitable limitations of reporting, facing them with sincerity and, if necessary, silence. The account is not entirely composed of neat sentences, but the narrator decides to pause at times, which is in contrast to the flow of words in other passages.

Thus, his way of communicating appears to draw on the transmission view, as described by Carey (1989), for he provides information and cares about accuracy. Subsequently, though, this seems to lead him towards the ritual view and the acknowledgement that storytelling is a process of structuring a representation of reality, composed of different stages, reformulations and breaks. The same applies to the unconventional form of the novel, which lets Johnson convey "as accurately as possible what happened" and at the same time construct "a physical tangible metaphor for randomness" (Johnson, 1973, pp. 25–26).

5. Liveliness

Yet another pair of key issues in journalism, which may be useful in the analysis of *The Unfortunates*, is freshness and liveliness. In Randall's (2007) opinion, providing readers with new information, but also taking care of the writing style in terms of avoiding clichés and automatic collocations is crucial to professional reporting: "The whole point of articles in newspapers is to give readers something they have not had before" (p. 158). Furthermore, journalists should keep an

appropriate pace in their text, so as to make the account testify to the atmosphere during the event. It is beneficial to prioritize active verbs over the passive voice, to construct economical sentences and not to overuse adjectives (p. 171).

The narrator in *The Unfortunates* also tries to avoid conventional phrasing from the very beginning of the match: "*City's goal had a narrow escape* alter that, cliché, cross it through, later" ("The pitch worn", p. 2). From this perspective a reason for giving readers access to three different versions of the football report might be to provide them with a live account of the writing process, especially when at the beginning of the "The pitch worn" section the narrator fuses writing with thinking. The blanks in this context also guarantee freshness as they let the narrative start again numerous times, point to the change of topic as well as offer the narrator a chance to rephrase a structure and present it in a new way. On a larger scale, a similar effect is achieved by the loose sections, which let themselves be arranged in a new order in each reading.

What might also be of significance is that the narrator disapproves of the editors who expect him to follow their guidelines and correct his reports, so that the texts suit the newspaper better. For instance, his view on puns is unconventional for he would not eliminate them: "*and yet in one way it was, his lucky day: Holman, hunting* yes! *round for a way through* [italics original] that's the sort of horrible pun they hate, I enjoy" ("The pitch worn", p. 3). He is actually right about the journalistic standards in this reflection. The value of puns is questionable in news writing because they are rarely new. As Randall (2007) advises, "An outright ban would be a bit severe, because once in a while (say every three years) somewhere in the world a journalist comes up with a good fresh one. Meanwhile, many millions more that are anything but fresh get published" (p. 159). The narrator's distance towards the convention may suggest that he would like to preserve his personal writing style, even if it is not necessarily innovative throughout. Perhaps for him freshness stems from directness and authenticity, which are shattered by the editorial corrections intruding into his original text. This matches what Johnson himself thought about editing:

> it was what appeared in print that was usually such a pain. I would take great trouble to try to make my copy as good a piece of writing as anything else I might do […] and the sub-editors would almost invariably ruin it not only by cutting it, but also by re-writing to some faceless sub-standard of their own (Johnson, 2013, p. 410).

Moreover, the narrator is unhappy with the monotonous view that all matches should be reported as interesting: "Even if it's a bad match, they tell you, disguise it, write as though it were a good match. Bollocks to that, bollocks to this stinking match" ("The pitch worn", p. 5). Such disagreements are quite common in press industry as editors would often like stories to be shocking, so that they more easily attract as many people as possible. Randall (2007) explains that "writers know

what editors prize as a strong news story and in writing the story as strongly as they dare, they often make omissions and use language which exaggerates or 'hypes' the story beyond its true value" (p. 161). Bearing in mind Johnson's devotion to truth, it is no wonder that the narrator he employs disapproves of such a vision of storytelling. Bird and Dardenne (2009) are of the opinion that reporters should not only be aware of how editing can affect truth, but that their mission is to counteract, also because oftentimes a newspaper has a particular political or social profile inscribed into all articles: "journalists remain obligated to make the best possible effort to report and make sense of the world […] not to simply serve their corporate masters, by telling the government story, but to tell the most truthful story or stories that best serve citizens" (p. 214). From this perspective, reporting can be treated as an instrument of opposition and conveying an alternative view on reality. Again, it is probably not surprising that such an issue is addressed in the novel by the author who was described by his biographer, Jonathan Coe (2005), as "Britain's one-man literary avant-garde of the 1960s" (p. 3).

The content of *The Unfortunates* is also meaningful in this context as the novel features different stories from the narrator's past and present, touching upon death, illness, friendship, love, football reporting and many other themes. Additionally, the shape of the novel physically demonstrates that each section can be read as an individual segment included in a whole that transforms in each reading. The reality in the novel is presented not as uniform and homogeneous, but rather as diverse, susceptible to change and requiring an up-to-date, live and genuine description. This suggests that, again, setting off from informativity and accuracy, Johnson is leaning towards the ritual view on communication. The variety of motifs, including the dialogue with newspaper conventions, as well as the resignation from the traditional linear writing prompt one to view *The Unfortunates* as a work aiming at "presentation and involvement" (Carey, 1989, p. 21).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it might be worth looking at *The Unfortunates* from the perspective of the recent decades. Although Johnson worked mainly in the 1960s, the contemporary context can highlight important features of his writing. As stated at the beginning, he is experiencing a revival of interest and so his novels are interpreted with reference to current phenomena. Hooper (2014, para. 9), for instance, contends that Johnson is a perfect fit into the age of technological advancements and notes that some of his ideas, such as cutting holes in his second novel, *Albert Angelo*, have been used and developed since the post-war period. As for Johnson's fourth novel, in Hooper's opinion, "the choose-your-own-adventure qualities of *The Unfortunates* would lend it perfectly to this era of digitised readers and shuffle settings" (para. 11). Indeed, the act of arranging the chapters emphasizes the reader's role in constructing the story. White (2005)

remarks that analyzing the novel confronts the commentator with a doubt whether any of his readers will share his sequence of sections (p. 115). Likewise, Bazarnik (2010) views the form of *The Unfortunates* as a suggestion for the reader to play a part in the process of meaning-making: "While the narrator speaks through the text, the author-arranger performs a non-verbal gesture addressed to the reader–a gesture of invitation to engage in a dialogue with him and with his work" (p. 127). Johnson may thus presumably be seen as an anticipator of the digital age, electronic literature and the ongoing virtual conversation enabling users to make their personal statement in relation to the online content.

A similar transformation has affected journalism and writing the news[4]. As people were offered the opportunity to express their opinions on blogs and personal websites, the search for knowledge has begun to resemble an exchange of information rather than a one-way flow (Bird & Dardenne, 2009, p. 212). Now, as a result, "news is part of a conversation" and the reporter's task is to lead his readership through the "cacophony of narratives" (Bird & Dardenne, 2009, p. 212) rather than to speak from the position of someone who has access to the inaccessible. Meaning is not given, but being constructed by a community whose members participate in interpreting events and in the creation of a given vision of reality: "News reception is about process, not text, as 'the story' emerges in conversation with the news narrative as framing structure. In making sense of news, we involve others in the negotiation of meaning and its cultural significance emerges through everyday interaction" (Bird & Dardenne, 2009, p. 212). Hence, the ritual view on communication as action within a socio-cultural context seems to be suitable for the contemporary times.

Whether Johnson could be seen as an anticipator of journalism nowadays cannot be so straightforwardly concluded, yet he was aware that news writing is a process featuring transformation and an interaction of influences. Otherwise, probably, he would not have presented all stages of creating the report and he would not have fossilized the printed version of the article on the box in contrast to the working versions which are among the shuffled sections. In this sense, the invitation for the readers to participate in the construction of the story is also a meaningful gesture. Simultaneously, Johnson was aware that a reporter is responsible for outlining a path for interpretation, which is demonstrated in his different strategies for achieving precision, such as providing details and admitting to the lack of knowledge.

Finally, closing the discussion on how the longest section resonates in the novel, the chapter perhaps deserves a juxtaposition with the shortest one, where the narrator states that Tony's wife, June, called him to inform about her husband's death. Though the white space below the only paragraph in the section most probably stands for grief, shock and silence, the fact that the painful part about the "fossilization" of

[4] See also Ward (2018, pp. 63–82, especially 76–77), and Örnebring (2018, pp. 555–568).

Tony's body takes up the least space in the novel might also suggest that the story is primarily about action and liveliness: about how Tony lived and how difficult it is for the narrator to live without him.

Acknowledgements

Research financed from the budget for science and arts 2018–2022 as a research project being a part of the "Diamond Grant" programme.

I would like to thank my supervisor, dr. hab. Katarzyna Bazarnik, for her support and the anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions.

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LUBLIN STUDIES IN MODERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE
Maria Curie-Sklodowska University Press
Vol 44, No 2 (2020)
E-ISSN 2450-4580

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DOI: 10.17951/lsmll.2020.44.2.75-82

Piecing Together J. G. Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition*

ABSTRACT
J. G. Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition* can easily be classified as his most experimental novel, one that, more than any other of his works, succeeds in presenting, or perhaps representing, the fragmented condition of a media-saturated Western culture. On the surface, it does appear to be a postmodern and seemingly chaotic bricolage of pop iconography, landscapes, and medical references arranged non-linearly and without plot, and yet there is a unifying principle at work, anchoring the texts in a specific ideological context of 1960s Western culture. The main argument of this paper expands on Debord's study of spectacle and regards *The Atrocity Exhibition* as a work that not only attempts to frustrate reading expectations, but also addresses the cultural shift towards spectacular society.
Keywords: Ballard, Debord, spectacle, experimental literature

Much of the formal experimentalism associated with 1960s experimental literature seems to address the issue of coherence and unity: by challenging conventional linear narratives and undermining traditionally established expectations, the text is pushed towards a more writerly direction, thereby putting a greater demand on the reader to provide coherent resolution to distorted plots. Among writers of this loosely defined group of experimental writers, such as B. S. Johnson, Ann Quin, or Alan Burns, James Graham Ballard is perhaps an outlier, having begun his career in the academically and artistically disreputable science fiction genre. *The Atrocity Exhibition*, a clear departure from his more traditional earlier works, can easily be regarded as his most experimental and least accessible work; it is one that, according to critics, more than any other of his previous novels or short stories succeeds in presenting, or perhaps representing, the fragmented condition of a media-statured Western culture. On the surface, it does appear to be a postmodern and seemingly chaotic bricolage of pop iconography, landscapes, and medical references arranged non-linearly and without plot, and yet there is a unifying principle at work, anchoring the texts in a specific ideological context of 1960s Western culture. *The Atrocity Exhibition* treads similar theoretical ground as Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, which also

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This journal is financed by the Polish Ministerial Programme „Support for Scientific Journals" (contract number 320/WCN/2019/1) and the Maria Curie-Sklodowska University.

addresses the effects of the contemporary media landscape on the individual psyche.

The publishing history of *The Atrocity Exhibition* is as confounding as the text itself. Between 1966 and 1969, the fifteen "condensed" texts, which today comprise the book, were published separately in various avant-garde magazines, usually accompanied by illustrations and photographs. In 1970 these texts were published together for the first time under the current title, but without the earlier illustrations. In fact, these texts were initially intended to be primarily visual, which is evidenced by the title *Exhibition*. This was meant to correspond with what Ballard regarded as the increasingly visual nature of culture. In an interview with Alan Burns, Ballard stated the following: "I sensed way back in the fifties when I started that the tide was running away from the written word towards the visual mode of expression and therefore one couldn't any more rely on the reader, you couldn't expect him to meet you any more than half way". What is more, *The Atrocity Exhibition* was born out of an earlier idea called *Project for a New Novel*, which was to be published in fragments on advertising billboards. These fragments were to include headlines, symbols, letters from a variety of print sources, but that idea never came to fruition, mainly for financial reasons. Later, the text was republished in a magazine called *Re/Search* with paratextual marginalia and a preface by Ballard and later the American edition appeared with a preface by William S. Burroughs. What the publishing history of this novel makes clear is that there is no one text that is *The Atrocity Exhibition*, all the more so because no one version was granted the authorial stamp of being the final, decisive version, which makes all of the editions, with and without illustrations, legitimate, even though the reading experience is greatly affected depending on which edition is read.

The Atrocity Exhibition constitutes what Brigg (1985) described as Ballard's "most ambitious extended experiment in the techniques of fiction" (p. 56). It was part of Ballard's ambition to elevate science fiction literature to a more respectable critical space. However, these ambitions were not met with universal acclaim from within a hermetic and surprisingly reactionary science fiction community, which tended to favor a more traditional approach to literary conventions and looked down upon stylistic excesses, believing that they detracted from the primary function of science fiction, which is to convey concepts. Ballard's break with this conservative tradition provoked the ire of one of his most avid supporters, Kingsley Amis, who considered this unwelcome foray into experimental fiction to be a death knell for science fiction. Writing of *The Atrocity Exhibition*, Amis remarked on the "shock tactics, tricks with typography, one-line chapters, strained metaphors, obscurities, obscenities, drugs, . . . solipsistic, mystification and outrage . . . physical disgust" as completely alien to the genre (as cit. in Ballard, 1997, p. 190).

What upset the conservative science fiction aficionados was the glaring lack of a coherent narrative. Instead, what they found were fifteen randomly placed vignettes, a fragmented and non-linear storyline, held together by a thin thread of recurring images and themes. These passages were not written in the order in which they appear in the book and, as suggested by Ballard in the marginalia, neither are they meant to be read in any particular order. However, extended immersion in the narrative allows the reader to eventually distill the contours of something only vaguely resembling a plot, i.e. that we, as readers, are most likely in the mind of a patient in a mental facility. The identity, or at least the name, of this protagonist changes in the course of the novel: at one point he is Traven, then Talbot, Tallis, Travert, Travis, Talbert and Travers. These sudden changes in names bring to mind Samuel Beckett's protagonist(s) in his trilogy, whose names also shift from Molloy to Malone, and finally to an unnamable voice. Ballard's character takes on various roles: at one point he is a lecturer, a patient at a psychiatric facility, and at another he is a former H-bomb pilot. With the dissipation of proper names and social roles, the narrator's identity is never clearly established, creating what Huntley (2008) describes as "the most acute expression of the slippage of identity that occurs through the text" (p. 25). Travern's psychiatrist, Dr. Nathan, proposes the following diagnosis: "What the patient is reacting against is, simply, the phenomenology of the universe, the specific and independent existence of separate objects and events" (Ballard, 2001, p. 46). Psychopathological reactions to external events and objects are a well-established Ballardian theme, employed in most of his short stories and novels. *The Atrocity Exhibition* is no different in this regard, except for the radicalism with which Ballard pursues this theme. Although it is true that Ballard's other novels also present characters that are deeply affected by external determinants, even to the point of death, this psychological deterioration is rarely mirrored in the construction of the novel. However, it should be remarked that, despite the disintegration of form and narrative, Ballard still employs his trademark scientific language – objective, reserved, and forensic in its precision, which is something that separates him from Beckett.

Because there is no single stable narrator or protagonist, no stable setting or linear plot, we are left with a medley of seemingly disconnected images, i.e., "the independent existence of separate objects and events" (Ballard, 2001, p. 46). These images, however, are not as haphazard as they initially appear and can be classified into categories: pop iconography (with the references to Marilyn Monroe and Elizabeth Taylor), politics (JFK, Ralph Nader), violence (assassinations, Vietnam War). What all these images have in common is that they make up the mediascape of the 1960s; they present a cacophony of disparate images set alongside one another, as if one were changing channels on a TV set. Not only is Ballard drawing from popular iconography to weave this patchwork narrative, but

he is also referencing various cultural studies theories that were prevalent in the 1960s. Regarding this point, Luckhurst (1997) writes that "the text/s acted like an echo-box of literary experiment and cultural commentary of the 60s: concepts were spliced in from Marshall McLuhan, R.D. Laing, Herbert Marcuse" (p. 35). He develops this observation further: "*Atrocity* is nothing if not a sustained and reflexive investigation of the complex of negation, affirmation and oscillation that constituted countercultural avant-gardism of the 1960s" (pp. 83–84). Far from praising the vibrancy of 1960s culture, *The Atrocity Exhibition* presents the theme of "the emotional and spiritual sterility of contemporary Western culture, its loss of vitality and direction" (Stephenson, 1991, p. 64). This may be somewhat surprising, given the emancipatory impulses of the 1960s, which characterized the sexual revolution and a rebellious youth movement. Nonetheless, Ballard seems to focus only on the insidious undercurrents of this period in history, detailing its apocalyptic and morbid impulses. The landscapes that are molded out of these images are predominantly barren, derelict man-made urban settings scarred by some unknown yet violent atrocities. And, as is the case with most of Ballard's work, the depicted environment serves not only to project the psychological state of the characters, but also to offer commentary on the current state of culture.

The themes of spiritual sterility and disconnectedness are to be traced to the changes that took place in how media operated in the second half of the twentieth century. *The Atrocity Exhibition* reflects the shift from print-based media to electronic media, a shift which took place in one of the most charged decades in American (or even Western) history. The 1960s saw live images broadcast from the Vietnam War and brought the now iconic and indelible images of the Kennedy assassination to everyone's home. Though the assassination was not broadcast live, the assassination of Lee Harvey Oswald just three days later was witnessed on live TV; it was a decade of the countercultural revolution, space race, cold war and rampant commercialism. This radically changed cultural landscape is presented in *The Atrocity Exhibition* through a series of fragmented images, as one would see on a television screen, intermixed images of gravity and pulp, tragedy and frivolity, violence and sexuality, glamour and the grotesque, exemplified by the death of Marilyn Monroe, the intermingling of Hollywood fantasy and politics reified in the nascent political successes of Ronald Reagan.

The cut-up techniques are thus used to reflect the disintegrated state of reality as conveyed by the media, echoing Marshall McLuhan's famous statement that the medium is the message. Ultimately, *The Atrocity Exhibition* is attempting to duplicate the experience of being in the contemporary world. There are similarities between this mode of presentation with that of the stream-of-consciousness method, but with the important difference that Ballard steers clear of internal monologues, concentrating predominantly on external imagery presented to the reader with his characteristic affectless and forensic precision. What this achieves

is a type of lens through which we see consciousness as a reflection of mashed-up imagery; instead of presenting the environment through the subjective experience of the individual (as was the case with modernist novelists such as Proust), Ballard seems to present the protagonist through images of the environment. By depreciating the position of the subject, Ballard in effect undermines the traditional subject-oriented position from which narratives are focalized. And with the exterior environment elevated to such a degree, the subject no longer functions as the organizing principle. The reader is now tasked with coalescing the fragmented images into a coherent whole, as if we were meant to reassert ourselves as the subjects of the narrative. The protagonist's identity is not the only casualty of this disintegration. Other characters, such as Karen Novotny, are reconfigured as an objectified and marketable collection of images: "In a sense one may regard this as a kit, which Talbert has devised, entitled 'Karen Novotny' – it might even be feasible to market it commercially" (Ballard, 2001, p. 84). The presence of capitalist references is ubiquitous, further pressing home the interconnection between spectacular culture and capitalist materialism.

The publication of *The Atrocity Exhibition* came on the heels of Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, published just a few years earlier, in 1967. Debord is credited with establishing the Situationist International movement and providing the theoretical framework for psychogeography, but, more importantly for this discussion, his work addressed the predominance of visual culture and its effects on society. These thematic similarities did not go unnoticed by Ballardian scholars: "Throughout, Ballard's interest is in the inseparability of the political tragedies, traumas and realities of the 1960s from the media landscape, and he is documenting, as much as Debord, the rise of the spectacle" (Paddy, 2015, p. 109). Gasiorek (2004) also comments on how Debord's book "resonates with Ballard's work" (p. 71). A severe indictment of the image-saturated capitalist culture, *Society of the Spectacle* argues that modern culture experienced a paradigm shift, wherein representation has now acquired ontological weight to the extent that it occludes the thing represented. Developing on Marxist theories of reification and alienation, the eponymous spectacle functions here to include everyday manifestations of capitalism-driven phenomena: television, advertising, film, celebrity; it is the "autocratic reign of the market economy" (Debord, 2011, p. 2) with mass media functioning as a mere instrument used by capitalist societies for the purpose of pacifying and distracting the masses. Though Debord's Marxist critique of society is not conspicuously visible in *The Atrocity Exhibition*, there are parallels with regard to the idea of the spectacle itself, which is central to Debord's and, arguably, Ballard's work. According to Ferris (2019), Ballard's "fiction communicates, with greater lucidity than many of his peers, the social realm as spectacle: a landscape invaded and sustained by surveillance cameras, urban signage, communications networks" (p. 125). Debord's concept of the spectacle is never succinctly fleshed

out and remains nebulous to the very end, taking shape with each thesis that adds another dimension to the already convoluted concept.

The 221 short theses comprising *Society of the Spectacle* are divided across nine chapters and are delivered with self-assured, almost aphoristic, precision. The first thesis introduces the idea of the spectacle in the reworked opening line, which was borrowed from Karl Marx's *Capital*: "The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails presents itself as an immense accumulation of commodities". This is transformed by Debord (1970) in the following way: "The entire life of societies in which modern conditions of production reign announces itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Every thing that was directly lived has moved away into a representation" (p. 3). This shift towards spectacle is not merely one of many ideologies vying for hegemony on a superstructural level; instead, it is a shift which has infiltrated the base, or substructure, of cultural production. In this regard, Debord appears as a proto-postmodernist, paving the way for Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality or Jameson's critique of the depthlessness of postmodern culture. Both concepts build on Debord's claim that the emphasis on spectacle leads to a "degradation" of our lives, with reality being reduced to an assortment of commodifiable fragments, which in themselves are meaningless (i.e., they have no use value), and are endowed with meaning only in relation to one another (i.e., they have exchange value). This spectacle is a kind of weightless abstract network of references, founded on the extreme isolation and passivity of the audience; it offers regressive, banal fantasies to make up for the loss of meaningful action and connection and as such is termed in Debord's (1970) thesis 44 as "the permanent opium war" (p. 45). Debord develops Marx's concept of alienation and presents the modern individual as "reduced to consuming entrancing corporate-supplied narratives, which confirm us in our passivity even as they celebrate the freedom and purposeful lives of our leaders and elite celebrities" (Kaplan, 2012, p. 458).

Brigg (1985) in his reading of the novel, though not directly invoking Debord's spectacle, describes Ballard's intentions in the following way: "What Ballard has sought to do in *The Atrocity Exhibition* is to illustrate or suggest the meaning of the public and media fantasies that form so much of contemporary reality and to connect them to the private lives and experiences of individuals" (p. 65). This understanding assumes that there is still a difference between the private lives of individuals and their public fantasies, between fact and fiction. As Ballard put it himself while speaking about the fictive nature of contemporary reality: "the function of the writer is no longer the addition of fictions in [*sic*] the world, but rather to seek its abstraction, to direct an enquiry aimed at recovering elements of reality from this debauch of fiction" (as cit. in Brigg, 1985, p. 59). It is perhaps this aim that brings Ballard closest to Baudrillard's understanding of hyperreality, and there is little surprise that the latter took a keen interest in Ballard's work.

One part of *The Atrocity Exhibition* is especially pertinent with regard to the above considerations. The last section, titled "Why I Want to Fuck Ronald Reagan", brings together many of the earlier noted themes: sexuality, pop-culture and political power. Reagan, like previous icons of American pop culture, is described forensically as if he were a case study in a medical journal, with particular attention paid to sexual imagery:

> Incidence of orgasms in fantasies of sexual intercourse with Ronald Reagan. Patients were provided with assembly kit photographs of sexual partners during intercourse. In each case Reagan's face was superimposed upon the original partner. Vaginal intercourse with 'Reagan' proved uniformly disappointing, producing orgasm in 2 percent of subjects (Ballard, 2001, p. 166).

The narrative then moves to a description of Reagan as a media entity and the many constructed identities that he can assume:

> Fragments of Reagan's cinetized postures were used in the construction of model psychodramas in which the Reagan-figure played the role of husband, doctor, insurance salesman, marriage counsellor, etc. The failure of these roles to express any meaning reveals the non-functional character of Reagan. Reagan's success therefore indicates society's periodic need to re-conceptualize its political leaders (p. 167).

This points to the absence of Reagan as a person. He is merely portrayed here as a "Reagan-figure", an image that can represent any chosen theme or social construct. These icons, whether they be politicians, actors or singers, are presented as nothing more than commodities fashioned and refashioned in line with the law of demand. Reagan, an actor turned political candidate, capitalized on his celebrity status to enter politics, taking advantage of his established persona developed in films as an honest cowboy. This persona no longer functioned within the confines of fiction, as it seeped into the political arena, allowing Reagan to assume a prefabricated identity. This point is elaborated by Gasiorek (2004):

> For Ballard, Reagan's success lay in the way he grasped that the content of political policy pales into insignificance when set against the manner of their presentation. It was not that the medium could disguise the message but rather that the medium could obliterate the message, rendering it irrelevant to the way that voters decided on their political allegiances (p. 71).

The success of his candidacy provides a fitting example of the potential of spectacle as a blend of reality and fiction, which is able to package marketable politicians and advertise them in much the same way as an automobile. The violent and apocalyptic imagery suffusing many of the descriptions in *The Atrocity Exhibition* emphasizes the destructive potential of constructing dehumanized identities, of maintaining a situation where "all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles" (Debord, 1970, p. 3).

In a society of spectacle the medium reigns supreme, and it is a medium that is in service to the vagaries of market economy, connecting disparate objects and entities, though never signifying anything beyond the immediate message. Many of Ballard's predictions have come true to an extent that perhaps even he would not have expected. Eventually, Reagan did become president within Ballard's lifetime, but other celebrities, such as Donald Trump and Volodymyr Zelensky, the current President of Ukraine, achieved political power after his death. With the advent of Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and social media in general, images and spectacle have come to dominate communication, commodifying human exchanges, emotions and relationships. What *The Atrocity Exhibition* offers is a tour, in the form of a Surrealist narrative collage, of the modern social consciousness that has succumbed to spectacularisation and the attendant dissociation of emotions.

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LUBLIN STUDIES IN MODERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE
Maria Curie-Sklodowska University Press
Vol 44, No 2 (2020)
E-ISSN 2450-4580

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DOI: 10.17951/lsmll.2020.44.2.83-97

Lissa: An EthnoGraphic Experiment

ABSTRACT
The paper analyzes a recent experiment in the collaborative production of ethnographic knowledge and the use of the graphic novel form as an alternative to the conventional academic monograph. *Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution* (2017) is discussed here as a useful tool in the age of globalization for building recognition of the need to protect the lives of people other than our immediate kin, tribe, race, or nation. The paper argues that both the collaborative research behind the story and the formal experimentation stem from the authors' sense of accountability to their informants. By telling a story about distant others who are given names and faces, *Lissa*'s authors encourage readers to develop empathy across borders.
Keywords: graphic novel, ethnography, vulnerability, body illness, *Lissa*

Scholars of art and literature tend to think of experimentation as an avant-garde practice that may be cognizant of politics but not usually politically engaged, that tends to be antiutilitarian, and that involves suspending conventions to broaden the sphere of artistic freedom, allow for greater complexity, or render the hitherto unrepresentable. We assume that when visual artists and writers experiment, they forsake or tamper with established genres and styles, rules of decorum, grammar, and prosody, risking the possibility that their work will not be understood by many – at least until the broader public's aesthetic expectations adjust in response to challenges posed by the innovations. But that is not necessarily the case. This paper discusses an artistic experiment in translating research that would only be read by a handful of social scientists into a graphic language accessible to anyone with basic English reading skills, without sacrificing complexity. The ingenuity of this project lies in its synthesis of expert and grass-roots knowledges through collaborative research, writing, and drawing. Socially engaged and utilitarian, the experimental graphic novel *Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution* (2017) was conceived as a consciousness-raising book about the etiology and management of two serious illnesses: kidney failure and genetically transmitted breast cancer. To complicate matters further, the authors made one of the protagonists Egyptian and the other American to bring out the dependencies

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This journal is financed by the Polish Ministerial Programme „Support for Scientific Journals" (contract number 320/WCN/2019/1) and the Maria Curie-Sklodowska University.

between the Global South and the Global North, between the individual body and the body politic, between health and wealth. Despite the somber subject matter, they managed to write an engaging story. This paper discusses the potential uses of multimodality for those anthropologists whose goal is not just to generate knowledge for Western academia but to make it available to non-academics and people outside the West. The paper also suggests that both collaborative research and formal experimentation may be related to the authors' sense of accountability to their informants, and that by giving fictional names, faces, and complex lives to distant others the authors hoped to foster interest in, and empathy towards, them.

Work on the graphic novel *Lissa* began as two independent studies within the field of medical anthropology at Brown University. Sherine Hamdy investigated Egyptians' attitudes towards kidney transplants while Coleman Nye interviewed American women on their attitudes towards mastectomy as a preventive or therapeutic measure. After drafting a plot that allowed Hamdy and Nye to merge their two stories into one, they recruited two Rhode Island School of Design art students, Sarula Bao and Caroline Brewer, to create the graphics. The four women negotiated the complex plot and the visual aesthetics of the story. Mindful of the history of Western anthropologists representing others "behind their backs," they traveled with a filmmaker to Egypt to fine-tune the story and gather visual material for the illustrations.

The question arises: Why did Hamdy and Nye feel compelled to experiment in this way? One possible answer is that their project evolved in response to the postcolonial critique of anthropology. Cultural anthropology, which became an academic discipline towards the end of the nineteenth century, on the one hand, benefitted from the expansion of western colonial empires and, on the other, embraced a mission of preserving premodern cultural diversity from the homogenizing force of modernity. Assuming homogenization to be inevitable, Western anthropologists documented what they saw as authentic indigenous cultures primarily for an academic readership. By the 1970s, however, decolonization forced ethnographers to rethink their role in relation to the people they studied.[1] This involved, among others, justifying the usefulness of doing ethnographic research to its potential subjects, doing applied rather than strictly academic work, engaging in collaborative projects co-designed and co-authored by people from the investigated communities, as well as developing new, less objectifying forms of ethnographic writing. *Lissa* responds to all the above demands. Its radical experiment lies in the co-production of knowledge by an international team of scholars, graphic artists, physicians, students, and activists. Moreover, it was intended to be equally informative for people in Egypt and the United States.

[1] See, among others, Hymes (Ed.) (1974/1969); Clifford & Marcus (Eds.) (1986); Marcus & Fischer (1986); Brettell (Ed.) (1996); Ferens (2010); Jebens & Kohl (Eds.) (2011).

The fact that images are steadily replacing text in contemporary communication may be another way to explain the choice of the comic genre. At first glance, comics seem an unlikely vehicle for conveying complex ideas about such issues as illness and revolution. And yet, ever since Art Spiegelman drew the Holocaust in *Maus* and Marjane Satrapi represented Iran's Islamic Revolution in *Persepolis*, comic books have participated in current historical, social, philosophical, and political debates. Responding to the changing role of comics, the University of Toronto Press approached Hamdy and Nye, proposing a graphic novel project, and used the publication of *Lissa* to launch a new series titled ethnoGRAPHY.

A third reason for resorting to the comic form is its power to engage readers emotionally through visual storytelling techniques that foster identification with the characters. Such engagement is necessary if the novel is to evoke in readers what Hamdy and Nye (2018b) refer to as a sense of response-ability. "Donna Haraway," they explain, "describes response-ability as an active practice of attention, care, and openness to the complex and unresolved relations within which we live and work". Globalization has made human lives interdependent, but we have not yet developed an ethics of response-ability towards people other than our own kin, tribe, race, and nation (Butler, 2004, 2009; Fraser, 2010). *Lissa* depicts a turbulent friendship between an Egyptian and an American woman because it wants to make us understand and care about those who are culturally different from us.

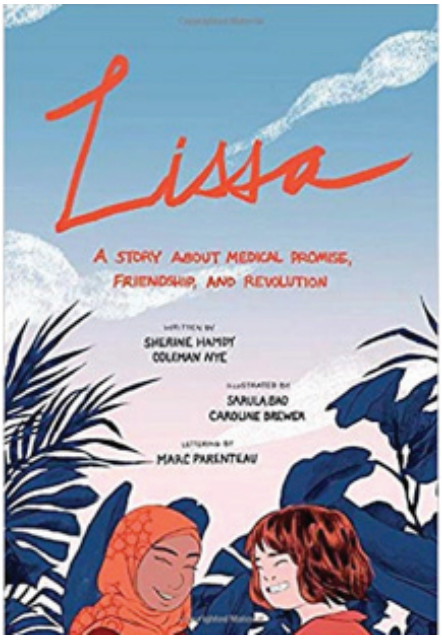

Figure 1: The cover of *Lissa*

The incongruous title *Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution* floats on the cover against a blue-and-pink sky above the smiling faces of two girls. A decoy, the cover does not prepare the reader for the subsequent images of a country under a military dictatorship, a mother's death of cancer, protesters blinded by rubber bullets, and the interior of a morgue after a massacre. Can any story successfully combine such disparate and unappealing phenomena as the failure of medicine and revolution to deliver on their "promises" to heal and to redeem? Can friendship bear such a double burden?

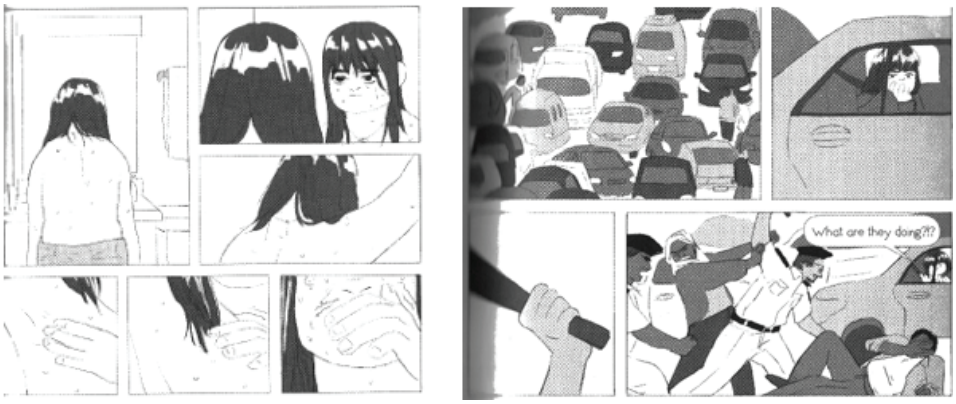

Figure 2: Images of bodies vulnerable to internal and external threats: Anna palpating her breast for cancer (p. 89) and observing an incident of police brutality from a car window (p. 97)

In taking on these unpromising subjects, *Lissa* provides an apt illustration of Butler's (2004) observation that

> the body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch, and to violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency and instrument of all these as well. Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever our own. […] Constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, the body is and is not mine (p. 26).

Lissa's characters exercise (a limited) agency over their own and their loved ones' bodies, and over their social environment. Although the text points to an analogy between resistance to bodily and political disorders, and although it encourages resistance as such, it makes no promises of a successful outcome.

The study of vulnerability grew out of the 1980s feminist research on dependency and ethics of care. Precarity is another name under which vulnerability has been studied. Butler (2004), whose book *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* gave this term resonance, continued to investigate the ethics of corporeal vulnerability in *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (Butler, 2009). Along similar lines, Fraser (2010) has been asking for over a decade: (how) can our sense

of responsibility for vulnerable others be extended to people living beyond the borders of our own nation-state? Fraser has rightly pointed out that although the Global North benefits from the human and non-human resources of other parts of the world, we tend to only recognize the vulnerability of fellow citizens. Some of us willingly, some more reluctantly, pay taxes for their benefit. Responding to the inequities caused by globalization, Fraser (2010) has argued for a transnational ethics of recognition, redistribution, and care. In *Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World*, which gives the fullest expression of her ideas to date, she points out that in the twentieth century, when justice was imagined on a national scale, citizens were encouraged to care about the welfare of fellow-citizens. Due to globalization, we can no longer draw sharp distinctions between national and international space. Neither can we use

> the vision of territoriality as the sole basis of assigning obligations of justice, given patently trans-territorial problems, such as global warming or genetically modified agriculture, which prompt many to think in terms of functionally defined 'communities of risk' that expand the boundaries of justice to everyone potentially affected (p. 5).

Changing the way people around the globe conceptualize their obligation towards human beings other than their own kin, tribe, race, or nation is clearly a long process. Non-fellow-citizens, Butler (2009) argues, are generally not seen as grievable because we do not recognize them as living beings in the same way that we do fellow-citizens. "Why is it that we are not given the names of all the war dead, including those the US has killed, of whom we will never have the image, the name, the story, never a testimonial shard of their life, something to see, to touch, to know?" she asks. Compassion for war victims is not encouraged, she writes, because it might lead to outrage, which "has enormous political potential" (p. 39). If she is right, then names, faces, and stories – which appeal to our emotions – might be an effective way to foster the recognition of all human lives as equally deserving protection, and of every death as grievable[2].

Although graphic fiction does not have the power of a photograph or witness testimony, it can move readers by revealing characters' thoughts and emotions. It encourages identification with (imaginary) distant others, because, unlike real distant humans, cartoon characters have expressive faces that can be shown in close-up. Graphic artist Scott McCloud argues that readers identify more readily with characters drawn in a few quick lines than with those drawn in detail or photographed (McCloud, 1994, pp. 28–30). If so, then Hamdy and Nye's (…)

[2] This claim is not uncontroversial. In her introduction to *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion,* Berlant (2004) suspects that compassion might be little more than a feel-good emotion, allowing us to empathize with those who struggle and fail, without having to work towards a more equitable system (p. 10).

choice of the comic medium is justified. Admittedly, caring for imaginary others costs us nothing: we need not pay higher taxes for their benefit, take to the streets on their behalf, nurse the wounded, or bury the dead. But reading carefully researched stories like *Lissa*, readers become aware of lives that would not otherwise count as lives. Films can perform similar work, but because they are far more expensive to produce, they must appeal to 19 much larger audiences.

In short, *Lissa* is about a transnational girlhood friendship which extends into adulthood and barely survives conflict over values and politics. The story opens in Cairo, where two pre-teen girls, Layla (Egyptian) and Anna (American), become friends. In the middle section of the novel, Anna returns to the United States but she returns to Egypt twice to visit Layla while the two are college students. When the Arab Spring[3] spreads from Tunisia to Egypt, the two women become involved in anti-government demonstrations. They witness atrocities as well as minor victories. The revolution creeps on without bringing the expected change, while quarrels over cultural values and Egyptian nationalism cause a rift in their friendship. But the protagonists are eventually reconciled and learn to support each other at critical moments.

Each protagonist faces a different combination of problems. Layla is a janitor's daughter and her family lives precariously. Environmental factors precipitate her father's kidney failure. Layla is able to arrange for dialysis, but as his health continues to decline the family needs to decide whether he should get a kidney transplant, and if so, should one of his children be the donor. Meanwhile, Anna, the daughter of an American oil company executive, is financially secure, but in the opening pages of the novel she loses her mother to breast cancer caused by the BRCA genetic mutation. Worried that she may have inherited the mutation, Anna must negotiate with her father, who disapproves of preventive mastectomy, because she cannot afford the expensive genetic test, monopolized by a single pharmaceutical company. Diagnosed with BRCA, she deliberates whether to undergo surgery or wait until cancer develops.

Unlike in traditional comics, the artwork in *Lissa* is not uniform. Whereas in some sections (in which the protagonists are friends and spend much of their time together) Bao and Brewer worked on the same panels, in other sections (where Anna and Layla live apart or are not on speaking terms), Bao and Brewer worked in their distinctive styles, each drawing the experiences of one protagonist so as to emphasize her individuality and cultural identity. To slow down the tempo of the

[3] The Arab Spring was a series of pro-democracy uprisings that took place in several predominantly Muslim countries, including Tunisia, Morocco, Syria, Libya, and Egypt, in the early 2010s. Initiated in Tunisia in December 2010, by a street vendor's act of self-immolation, these popular uprisings had a major political and social impact, although in some cases they resulted in political instability or the reassertion of authoritarian rule, rather than increasing democracy and cultural freedom.

narration and encourage readers to contemplate the theme of vulnerability, they drew close-ups of hands, feet, and other parts of living and dead bodies. In the case of Anna's busy father, Bao and Brewer inserted his figure into several panels but left his head outside the frame to signal his inattentiveness towards Anna. Only when the father starts listening to Anna do the readers finally get to see his face. These are just a few examples of formal innovations developed in response to the novel's central themes.

What is new from an anthropological perspective is the adopted process of knowledge production and representation. As Hamdy and Nye explain in the film *The Making of Lissa* (Dragone, 2018b), they first worked from the "fine-grained details" of their Egyptian and American informants' lives "to develop a bigger story about medicine, culture, and bioethics." Then they "worked backwards." Taking "the abstractions that [they] wanted to teach through this book," they immersed themselves in the street life of Cairo, together with the graphic artists, observing and taking photographs whenever possible in a city that was heavily policed due to the unrest.

Figure 3: The *Lissa* team in a Cairo hospital in 2015, discussing the details of the project with the medical staff (Dragone, 2018b)

They also consulted local experts – medical doctors, artists and political activists who had been involved in the 2011 demonstrations, as well as working-class people who resembled some of the novel's protagonists – to develop credible

and historically accurate scenes. In the documentary, Nye admits that although she had initially believed the trip to Egypt might be "useful" but not "crucial", afterwards she could not "imagine having done the script without having come here" (Dragone, 2018a).

Lissa intertwines academic knowledge and storytelling, Egypt and the United States, as well as the private sphere in which individuals/families make medical decisions and the public sphere in which health care systems operate, governments govern (or fail to do so), and citizens rebel against governments. *Lissa*'s characters are composites "each based on scores of interviews and research" (Hamdy & Nye, 2017a). The outcome, as academic and non-academic reviewers unanimously attest, is a highly informative yet readable and engrossing book. Both groups appreciate the fact that *Lissa* addresses their disparate interests and expectations. It has been praised by anthropologist Julie Livingston (cf. Hamdy & Nye, 2018a) for exploring experimental modes of doing ethnography, by people seeking information on how to cope with genetic susceptibility to breast cancer and kidney failure, and most notably by Egyptians seeking international recognition for their political struggle. As we learn from the documentary *The Making of Lissa*, in which several medical doctors and activists engaged in the Tahrir Square demonstrations appear, *Lissa* was interesting to them as an unconventional vehicle for conveying their dramatic experience to members of the international community.

Multimodality[4] allows this novel to address various audiences. Non-academics probably start reading the novel on page 15, where the cartoon panels begin. But anthropologists are unlikely to skip the foreword by Marcus (2017, pp. 13–17), who endorses the project and positions it in the context of experimental ethnography, which he helped to pioneer in the 1980s. For more inquisitive readers, the book has 60 pages of appendices, including study questions and an afterword by graphic artist Paul Karasik, which highlights the formal innovations introduced by Sarula Bao and Caroline Brewer. Another indispensable teaching tool is "Timeline of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution," with cross-references to Anna and Layla's story. Nineteen pages of interviews offer a fascinating back story. The project also branches out into other media. The book's homepage http://lissagraphicnovel.com/ includes more interviews, a link to the above-mentioned documentary, and links to related websites, such as the Egyptian Women and Memory Forum. Readers interested in health can follow the links to various medical humanities websites and find a list of graphic memoirs of illness.

Although cultural attitudes are shown to play a major role in the management of both kidney failure and genetically transmitted cancer, *Lissa* does not stop at

[4] There is a growing body of research on multimodality, well represented in the Routledge Series on Multimodality, which includes Gibbons's (2012) groundbreaking *Multimodality, Cognition, and Experimental Literature*.

exploring cultural difference. The characters' material status and geopolitics are shown to be no less important in their decision making. Traditional ethnographies[5] cannot offer such a complex view of life in a globalizing world because they tend to focus on small communities, portray them in a synchronic mode, and focus on shared beliefs and practices. Meanwhile, the novel's action is not limited to one location or a single historical moment. By choosing the graphic novel genre, Hamdy and Nye were able to cover a period of about seven years, and to show two societies in contact. They were additionally able to zoom in on individual characters' bodies and facial expressions, showing them at their most vulnerable, and then zoom out to show panoramic views of thousands of Egyptian characters gathered in Tahrir Square, risking their lives in an attempt to topple a corrupt government.

Figure 4: Layla as a medical student looking after her father (p. 66)

[5] By traditional ethnographies I mean texts by Malinowski (1922), Mead (1928), Chagnon (1968), and others who embraced the modernist approach. Among the earliest scholars to counter this mode of doing ethnography were feminist anthropologists, including Shostak (1981), Lawless (1988) and Behar (1993), in whose collaborative studies the native informant co-authored the final narrative. The three latter works can be viewed as antecedents of *Lissa*.

Figure 5: Panoramic views of the street protests (p. 172)

While the various forms of vulnerability and risk are not equated in the novel, the authors suggest analogies between them that may lead to a better understanding of their causes, and, potentially, stronger identification on the part of the readers.

Unlike sociologists, who tend to focus on social problems that government agencies should address, anthropologists have traditionally shown communities' adaptability and resilience. Interestingly, *Lissa* does not advocate resilience, for in an unbearable situation resilience may inadvertently preserve it, as Chandler and Reid (2016) point out in *The Neoliberal Subject: Resilience, Adaptation, and Vulnerability*:

> Politics requires a subject capable of conceiving the transformation of its world and the power relations it finds itself subject to. In contrast, the neoliberal subject is a subject that must permanently struggle to accommodate itself to the world. Not a subject that can conceive of changing the world, its structure and conditions of possibility (p. 4).

Admittedly, Layla's parents do embody stoicism, but the novel offsets it with examples of resistance. Even as a child, Layla does not passively absorb class prejudice: she plays pranks on the Egyptian neighbor who snubs her family. When news of the Tunisian uprising reaches Cairo, Layla develops a strong political identity. The more passive and self-absorbed Anna learns from Layla's example and supports the protesters by carrying medical supplies and helping to identify the dead. She then applies the principle of resistance in her private life and decides to undergo a preventive mastectomy (Hamdy & Nye, 2017b, pp. 118, 147). Not every sick or wounded body in the novel can be saved. Many of the protesters

in Tahrir Square die, as does Layla's father, having refused a transplant so as not to endanger the life of a child or burden his family financially by lifelong immunotherapy. The uprising is suppressed by the police and one pernicious government is replaced by another. But the novel asserts in a double spread at the end that "there is still time" (Hamdy & Nye, 2017b, p. 235) to bring about real change. The spirit of dissent is still there in the image of the chanting woman; the short-haired girl in western dress seems to be striding confidently into the future.

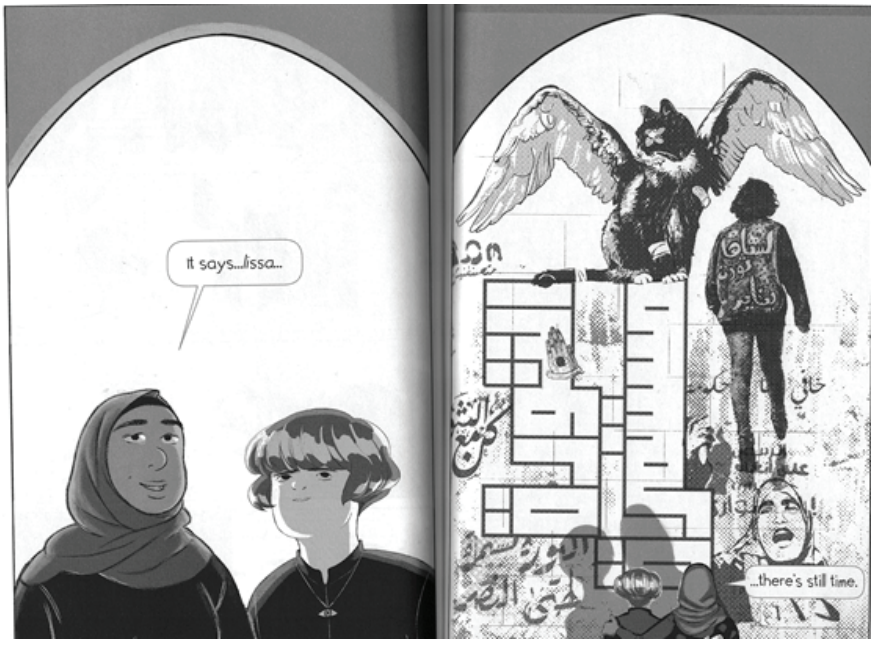

Figure 6: Conclusion of *Lissa*, in which Layla translates the meaning of the title (pp. 234–235)

Lissa: Still Time was, in fact, an earlier version of the novel's title, one whose multiple meanings ("there is still time," "not yet," "it is still the case") Hamdy and Nye discussed with Dr. Amr Shebaita in the documentary *The Making of Lissa* (Dragone, 2018a). On one level, the subtitle expressed the hope for change shared by the authors and the Egyptian activists. On another level, the phrase "still time" invoked for them the power of the hand-drawn and photographic image to still or stop the passage of time, to preserve and contemplate moments. Anna's mother is a photographer who develops her own negatives. Mother and daughter are shown bonding in the darkroom. Photographs of the mother are all that Anna is left with after scattering her ashes. Later Anna takes up photography to better grasp the overwhelming events in Egypt. She takes snapshots of the faces of the dead in the morgue, which she then compares with photographs brought by people looking for their loved ones after a massacre.

The hand-drawn photographs fuse the two modes of representation and add a spatial-temporal dimension to the text, allowing the past to intrude in the narrative present. The foregrounding of the relation between time and image in the novel's early title suggests that Hamdy and Nye took seriously both the artistic and documentary aspect of their project.

To return to the question whether experimentation inevitably means the pursuit of aesthetic freedom at the expense of intelligibility, one could argue that Hamdy and Nye explore unconventional modes of storytelling in order to do the reverse – make sophisticated, synthesized knowledge intelligible to a broad readership. In this sense their work can be compared to that of David Simon and Ed Burns, creators of the HBO series *The Wire* (2002–2008) – touted as an important experiment in realist filmmaking. What Simon (who spent 12 years doing investigative journalism for the *Baltimore Sun*) and Burns (a local public school teacher) attempted to do was to translate their immensely complex diagnosis of Baltimore's late-capitalist urban blight and the failure of public institutions into the language of a television series accessible to millions. In order to do so, they turned the police procedural genre inside out and merged it with several others, submitting the screenplay and settings to a standard of realism not hitherto required of television shows. For this documentary strain, fueled by a utopian desire for social transformation, the series was praised by Jameson (2010). As Flight (2019) explains in a podcast about the making of the series, Simon and Burns, "had an extreme level of commitment to realistically portraying Baltimore. […] When they came up against a subject they didn't know inside out, they conducted extensive research," interviewing stevedores, immigration officials, port personnel, customs inspectors, steamship agents, and drug sellers. Methodical research and reliance on grass-roots consultants is something the creators of *The Wire* share with the *Lissa* team. In both works, the leading characters are composites based on informants and historical figures. Simon and Burns went so far as to hire retired policemen and former drug dealers as actors and extras, to draw on their insider knowledge. According to Flight (2019), the watchfulness of the non-professional actors, "helped to keep the show from straying into the realm of fantasy". Similarly, the *Lissa* team adjusted story details and characterization on the advice of their Egyptian informants, several of whom appear as cartoon characters under their own names (*The Making of Lissa*).

Far from being pedantically or naïvely attached to "the real", *The Wire* filmmakers adopted a stance of accountability for their representations of real people living in troubled places – people left behind by the global economy, caught up in alternative economies based on drugs or human trafficking, and shortchanged by public institutions.

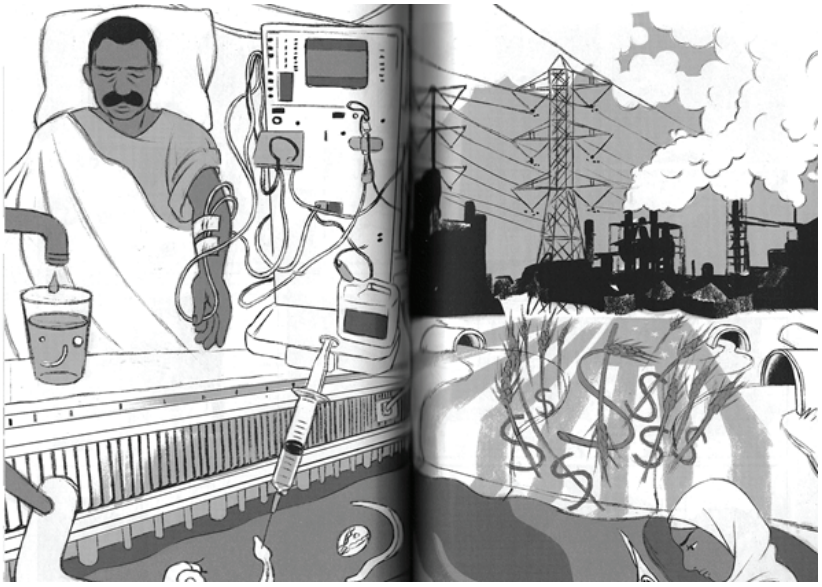

Figure 7: Panel showing Layla's understanding of the interrelated factors that may be responsible for her father's kidney failure (Hamdy & Nye, 2017b, pp. 134–135). In several interviews Hamdy and Nye mention that panels like the above synthesize knowledge that took thirty or more pages of academic writing to explain.

Likewise, the *Lissa* writers and artists made it clear in interviews that they felt accountable to their informants in both Egypt and the United States. Although the graphic novel is a much more compact work than the 60-hour television series, it, too, offers a multilayered socioeconomic diagnosis. Layla's brother Ahmed, for instance, makes a connection between the Egyptian government's dealings with American oil companies and the scarcity of jobs in Egypt, which forces him to migrate for work. Ahmed also connects the imported fertilizers and pesticides his father once used with water quality and his subsequent kidney failure. The novel includes several large panels that synthesize the information in graphic form.

Lissa could have been told as three separate narratives: Story 1: an American woman's experience of breast cancer prevention; Story 2: an Egyptian man's difficulties with accessing basic medical care for kidney failure and his family's dilemma concerning a potential kidney transplant; Story 3: The Arab Spring. But the three stories merge into one because in real life vulnerable human bodies function at the intersection of the local and the global and are influenced as much by cultural as by economic and political factors. By telling a story with relatable fictional characters, Hamdy and Nye attempted to make their academic research accessible to the largest possible audience, including their informants. Underlying this project is the assumption that readers' capacity for emotional involvement in

fictional lives will encourage reflection on how their own bodies relate to other bodies beyond their immediate family, tribe, and nation. There is of course no guarantee that readers' identification with Anna and Layla will translate into a commitment to improving the living conditions of people like them. In fact, literary critic Felski warns us against making unwarranted assumptions about what it means to be moved by literature: "Caught up in the suspenseful drama of *Goldfinger*, I feel a surge of delight as Bond outwits the dastardly schemes of SMERSH, even though as I go about my daily life I have no interest in saving the free world from Soviet conspiracies" (Felski, 2018, p. 157). But if Butler (2009) is right in arguing that we cannot recognize distant others as worth protecting unless they have faces and names (p. 39), then even if *Lissa* does not guarantee such recognition, it brings us closer to this goal.

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LUBLIN STUDIES IN MODERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE
Maria Curie-Sklodowska University Press
Vol 44, No 2 (2020)
E-ISSN 2450-4580

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DOI: 10.17951/lsmll.2020.44.2.99-112

Free Speech and Digital Discourse in Nicola Barker's *H(A)PPY*

ABSTRACT
Nicola Barker's *H(A)PPY* (2017) depicts a dystopian future in which all speech is monitored and regulated. Politically dubious topics are flagged, metanarratives like religion and history are censored, and even words expressing heightened emotional states are marked as dangerous. Barker uses innovative techniques to visualise the warping of language under conditions of totalitarian surveillance. In analysing Barker's novel, this paper applies the findings of digital discourse studies to the novel's content while arguing that its experimental techniques reflect a distinct break from the digital information stream. Barker's innovations are a formal route to escape the deadlock of our current politics.
Keywords: Digital writing, graphic surface, free speech, dystopia, experimental writing, Nicola Barker

Nicola Barker's *H(A)PPY* was published in 2017, winning the Goldsmiths Prize that year for its innovative approach to the novel form. It is a dystopian novel set in an unspecified future where an automated System monitors the language of each citizen – known collectively as the Young – and charts their word usage on a Graph. Their Graphs are visible to all, and are monitored in the hope of maintaining a language without any deep, unusual, or extreme thoughts. The world of *H(A)PPY* is uncomplicatedly happy. The problem is with its protagonist, who is not. Through the use of innovative graphic devices including coloured words, alterations in font, and musical notation, *H(A)PPY* immerses the reader in the protagonist's own dangerous stream-of-consciousness and, as the novel progresses, into her confused half-formed philosophy as well. It is a novel that, more than anything, makes a clear case for free speech, and warns of the dangers of algorithmically-driven language policing. Yet, being written in a complex contemporary climate in which, among other dramatic changes, the defence of free speech has shifted from a primarily left-wing to a primarily right-wing issue, the politics of the novel itself are often, as a result, provocative in their implications.

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This journal is financed by the Polish Ministerial Programme „Support for Scientific Journals" (contract number 320/WCN/2019/1) and the Maria Curie-Sklodowska University.

In this paper I hope to unpack the politics of *H(A)PPY* by using contemporary digital media theory, drawing attention to its uncomfortable location between political poles, before making a case for its innovative use of graphic devices and musical metonymy as a way of transcending the political and aspiring to a language untrapped by political discourse.

The reception of the novel demonstrates its uncomfortable political status. Barry (2018), winner of the 2016 Goldsmiths Prize, described the novel as a "work of vaulting ambition" that "extrapolates madly to make a language for an utterly believable future, a world enslaved by technology". Jordan (2017), writing in *The Guardian*, called Barker's work "as gnomic, terrifying and glorious as ever", while interpreting the techno-censorship of *H(A)PPY* as being satirical: "the novel both satirises the Information Stream and is wholeheartedly plugged into it". In *The Financial Times*, Tonkin (2017) also considered the world depicted in *H(A)PPY* to be a satire, although in his view its "dictatorship of niceness, enforced by The System, [is] a gloves-off satire on 'Generation Snowflake'". We can see in these three positive reviews three very different interpretations of the novel. For Jordan, it is a satire on modernity, on the love-hate relationship of people to the internet, while for Tonkin it is clearly a satire on the people themselves, the new generation who are emotionally underdeveloped. Barry, writing on the Goldsmiths website and representing a voice for innovative writing, avoids the political question altogether in favour of taking the narrative seriously. These, roughly, are the three dialectical points that will shape our argument. Is *H(A)PPY* a satirical warning about the power of our new machines? Or, is it a warning about the new types of people who are using these machines? Or, is it an attempt to transcend this type of machinic discourse entirely and locate an alternative space of discourse?

In exploring the relationship between society, technology and language, *H(A)PPY* draws on a wealth of material from the dystopian tradition. The paring down of language – the flagging of dangerous words, highlighted in red type, and the limiting of all musical instruments to a standardised tuning – reminds us of Orwell's *1984* (1949). The figure of the lone discontent rebelling against the system also feels like *1984*, or Zamyatin's *We* (1924), which came before it. Closer to *H(A)PPY*'s message, however, is Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and an earlier novel, *Man's World* (1926), by Charlotte Haldane. Haldane and Huxley's novels both feature a protagonist who, through an "irrational" interest in the culture of the past, rebels against the "happy" society in which they live, only to be castigated and driven to suicide (Firchow, 1975, p. 307). Both novels reflect "a society in which the values (or nonvalues) of scientific technology are dominant, [and] reduce man to a species of machine" (p. 303). Huxley in particular captures this world with an unflinching eye. The technological utopia of *A Brave New World* is appealing in many ways; it is not the obvious hellscape

of Orwell's Airstrip One. In writing the book, Huxley followed current trends in science to their logical conclusion, actively dissuading himself from passing moral judgement upon them. "The fact that one feels something should be so," he reasoned, "does not make it true" (Webster, 1934, p. 195). The result is an ambiguous and uncomfortable read. Although *H(A)PPY* does not quite reach Huxley's level of detached appreciation, Barker very clearly depicts her happy world as a boring one. We can find important parallels in her willingness to pursue scientific developments to a logical imaginative end and her refusal to impose on the world her own extraneous ideological biases. This is especially important when it comes to the question of language, as Barker shows us that Orwellian language-policing does not require an Orwellian state censor, but can emerge as a natural result of Huxleyan scientific development.

The final piece to the puzzle of Barker's dystopia comes in the form of postmodernism. Reaching its heyday in the 1980s and 1990s, postmodernism has been described by Ruland and Bradbury (1992) as reflecting "a moment of creative exhaustion, of labyrinthine aesthetic pluralism, or critical mystification, an age of decadence" (p. 427). Reflecting the rudderless self-criticism of Western intellectuals after the fall of communism, postmodernism perceived the world as consisting of a series of "narratives", each of which it sought to deconstruct. The clearest expression of the System's views in *H(A)PPY* is expressed in exactly these terms:

> The narratives of family and romance and adventure, the masculine and the feminine narratives, the narratives of class, of nationalism, of capitalism, of socialism, of faith and myth and mystery, historical narratives, science fiction narratives, experimental narratives, horror narratives, literary narratives […] The Sensor automatically deconstructs these stories for us [as] to understand them is to disable them (Barker, p. 45)[1].

The dystopian System that regulates the world of *H(A)PPY* thinks like a postmodernist and judges like one. As a result, the words that appear in the first part of the novel (flagged by the system and so presented to the reader printed in red ink), include both words to do with unhappiness ("unhealthy" [p. 9], "aggressive" [p. 28], and "regret" [p. 14]) and words that signify what postmodernists would describe as "metanarratives" ("History" [p. 1], "corporations" [p. 39], and "narrative" [p. 138] itself). By highlighting these words in red, Barker draws our attention to them before we even know why they are highlighted. In advance of the System's explanation, we are already seeking meaning in these highlighted words. The fact that some reflect pain or other strong emotions while others signify, or at least hint at, ideological convictions, means that we, as readers, begin to act as

[1] All subsequent references to Barker's text refer to the pagination in the 2017 Heinemann UK edition.

a censor ourselves. We are looking for the offense. That the "negative" words also include acquisitive feelings like "preciousness" (p. 23) and "competitive" (p. 3) demonstrates how the System is aligning all highly-wrought emotions – those that do not complement happiness – with narrativised thought and the ideologies of the "Past" (p. 1): itself a flagged word.

To understand Barker's integration of both Orwellian and Huxleyan tropes into her own dystopia, we must therefore also position the text against changes within public discourse driven by digitisation, social media and algorithmically-analysed speech. Orwell's vision of dystopia, it should be remembered, was one of a single-party state; a centralised authority with a rigid ideology. Barker's dystopia is equally rigid in its approach to language and thought control. Yet, as a postmodern System, her central authority presents itself as a post-ideological being, or even an anti-ideological one. To the reader, however, Barker makes clear that such post-ideological claims are themselves reflections of an ideological celebration of all things happy, peaceful, and good for self-esteem. The System is, by its very nature, exclusionary. And yet, one of the words it excludes through its flagging is "exclude" (p. 3). The System, we must conclude, is therefore thoroughly knowledgeable about the "old" ideologies, as it must know these systems inside and out in order to censor them and deconstruct their languages. Inside it, our protagonist is told, the System contains a "Map of All Narratives" (p. 41), which it uses to inform its flagging algorithm. The System therefore embodies the postmodern Party line. A concept celebrated by contemporary Marxist writer Jodi Dean (2016), the Party line reflects a "standpoint from outside the workers that workers can take toward their own condition" (p. 180). Ultimately, the Party line acts as an external force to which "workers" should submit in a psychological process of externalising their decision-making functions. For the modern Marxist, one must give up free choice in submission to a higher moral force. The Graph that represents the System's individual user-interface in *H(A)PPY* does not provide the user with information: it does not explain the line. Like the Party, it merely flags the words that should be avoided in order to maintain the line.

That *H(A)PPY*'s dystopia aligns with the desires of many contemporary left-wing thinkers gives credence to Tonkin's reading of the novel as an anti-leftist satire. That Jordan can claim the novel for the left, however, is also valid, provided we base our interpretation of left and right on pre-digital positions. Ultimately, Barker's novel is a defence of free speech. In recent years, free speech has switched from a left-wing to a right-wing talking point (Stoughton, 2018, p. 11). I argue that this is largely as a result of a change in social emphasis. The right typically predominates within institutional power arrangements, while the left predominates in culture. The internet has shifted emphasis away from institutional power, towards cultural power. As free speech is always the demand of the underdog, it follows that the right now defend their right

to speak within our culturally-driven discourse with the same vehemence that the left once defended its right to speak truth to institutional power. Marcuse (2015) once wrote that "all dialectic is liberation: […] liberation by virtue of the contradiction generated by the system, precisely because it is a bad, false system" (p. 175). His primary fear, expressed in *One-Dimensional Man*, was that institutional power would flatten language by submerging both the powerful and the powerless in an all-pervasive system. Such a system would be "a vicious circle that encloses both the Master and the Servant. Do the technicians rule, or is their rule that of the other, who rely on the technicians as their planners and executors?" (Marcuse, 1964, p. 33). Being a Marxist, Marcuse still associated this "other" with a shadowy group of elites, yet his writing opens up the more terrifying possibility that the "other" may simply be the system itself; in our case, a computer system. The System in Barker's dystopia is, after all, merely running its programmes. Technicians maintain it and there are powerful people whose role is to maintain the public's faith in it, but as a system it is one that performs its function thoughtlessly, and yet tirelessly.

Against this system, Barker presents us with a protagonist who breaches the limits of speech. She begins the novel by breaching the accepted limits of polite speech. She sets off a warning signal by spiking her Graph with too many red-flagged negative words. She begins to resent her Graph, finding ways to detach it, for example by staring directly into bright lights or by hiding in certain rooms. She uses these uncontrolled spaces to test the boundaries of unrestricted dialogue. At first, this provides catharsis. "I am not even entirely sure what these thoughts are," she thinks to herself, "they are so quick, so fleeting – but it feels good to release them – to unburden myself of them. Afterwards my mind vibrates like a metal string" (p. 25). What she is experiencing in her cathartic moments of non-compliance is a short burst of freedom. This freedom, however, is fleeting. Through it, she is made aware that there are ways of thinking and feeling which are not those of the "happy" System. What those alternative thoughts are, she has no language left that is capable of understanding. Every narrative is already deconstructed, yet she longs to live by one. In an era of compulsory postmodernism, however, such a longing must, by necessity, remain unspoken.

Barker explores these intuitions-beyond-words through the use of a musical set of analogies. Already, as her protagonist is unburdening herself, she refers to her mind vibrating "like a string" (p. 25). We will later find this metaphor expanded, revealing the string to be the string of an instrument, and the ideas that she seeks to be a type of music. She hears music in her dreams, music that "loses its course" (p. 210), wandering away from the standard tuning that is the only permitted tuning under the System. Confused, she interprets these intuitions as reflecting actual music, and so retunes her musical instrument – a West African kora – to its original tuning. The scales that she plays are no longer in harmony with the scales

of the other kora players in her kora group. This leads to a "correction" being offered to her by a fellow player:

> Kipp patted me on the shoulder. 'The tuning is in our hearts, Mira A,' he explained, smiling. 'Perfection is not about the instrument itself – its leather rings or its pegs – but how we, The Young, choose to respond to the instrument. The tuning fork is in our hearts (p. 59).

His line – "the tuning fork is in our hearts" (p. 59) – becomes a mantra for the protagonist. It at once reminds her of her "untuned" nature in comparison to the other "happy" ones of her society, and also that her nagging musical dreams are not, ultimately, about music, but about something else.

In her search for expression she eventually finds a musical piece. Under the System, musical pieces from the past have had their titles and authors replaced by numerical references. This is presumably, due to the large amount of music written for religious purposes or else written about excesses of love, grief or patriotism. The piece "91.51.9.81.81.1.2-14.9.02.91.12.7.1" is one that the protagonist finds particularly resonant and, after much scandalous searching within the historical records, she discovers that its title is "The Cathedral" (p. 219). This Cathedral obsesses her. She longs to hear the music and, during her dreams, she finds that the many unspoken, non-happy and therefore forbidden intuitions that lie on the verges of her thought all agglomerate into a symbolic Cathedral.

The image of the Cathedral is constructed from layers of detritus picked up by the protagonist on her helpless journey towards self-expression. In place of discourse, which is strictly regulated, she has had to construct an alternative viewpoint through the random assemblage of facts. Barker visualises this by combining mathematical symbols with religious ones, physical formulae with musical notation, and placing these together across a number of layers, with a darker foreground and a lighter background, giving the illusion of depth. The illusion of depth is indeed what is produced. The pages leading up to it are scattered with randomly interconnected thoughts: "8HZ: The frequency of the double helix in DNA replication" (p. 244), "in Lacanian algebra upper-case phi stands for the symbolic phallus" (p. 242), "Twelve-tone equal temperament = universally adopted in 18… in 18.. in 1953" (p. 238). Each contributes a mess of symbols and phrases that align into a Cathedral only through the rough resemblance of an outline. We, like Myra, see the Cathedral because we are primed to do so, but what it is made of now makes less sense than ever. All she knows is that it is "towering above us. Dark. Ancient. Remorseless. Terrifying" (p. 252). It is the culmination of her unscriptable thoughts; her intuitions beyond language. Like music, it signifies without words. It is an attempt at raw, unfiltered communication, in a world where the written exists purely as a subject of bad faith interrogation and deconstruction.

Arguably, the method that Barker's protagonist finds to express her unspeakable discomforts is a reflection of Barker's own stuckness when it comes to writing

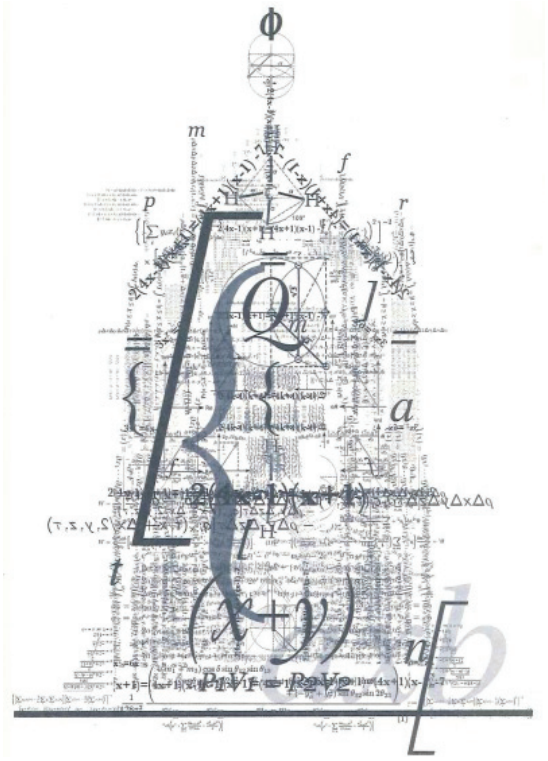


Figure 1: Mira A's image of the Cathedral (Barker, p. 253)

a political dystopia in the contemporary, digitised age. Her adoption of experimental techniques allows her a mode of expression unhampered by the deconstructable word. The question of what exactly Myra A wants is left unresolved, reflecting its fundamental irresolvability. Where John Savage may cling to his Shakespeare and Winston Smith writes "down with Big Brother" in his diary, Myra A constructs a fantasy Cathedral, of which she herself is afraid. Barker's protagonist is ultimately trapped in the position of a free speech advocate within a culture dominated by progressive ideas. The System is configured as both morally right and serving happiness, meaning that objection to it becomes, by default, an act of wilful immorality or wilful self-harm. The question of freedom arises, but only as a question predetermined by morality; of course you *could* believe otherwise, but why *would* you?

The enfolding of liberty by morality reflects a process of cultural digitisation described by Kirby (2009) as the creation of the "apparently real" (p. 140). The apparently real is a specifically digital aesthetic that "proffers what seems to be real, and that is all there is to it"; it "comes without self-consciousness, without irony or self-interrogation" (p. 140). The aesthetic is as equally valid to online roleplaying games as it is to message boards, social media or other performative

digital spaces. It represents a renewed post-postmodern sanctity of what is presented. To question what is presented is to break the spell of its existence, much like refusing to play along in an MMORPG or to refuse to recognise someone's dating profile picture as an accurate reflection of their appearance. To question is, under the new rules of the internet, to break a taboo, to not play along, or to cheat. Politically, we might understand the apparently real as either driving, or driven by, a newfound respect for performed identities. To question someone's identity is to commit a cardinal sin, and is perceived as an assault upon the very foundation of that individual's happiness. We can find the echoes of this in the quiet passivity of the Young with whom Mira A shares her world. Nobody in *H(A)PPY* seems to work. Authority is embedded in those who guide wavering souls back to the correct and "happy" way of thinking. Time is instead taken up by joining musical groups, resting, attending lectures, and walking neuro-mechanical pets. These are the "ideal netizen-prosumers" described by Lovink (2008) as "data-dandies that can freely stroll around the internet like it is one big game" (p. 120). Each of the activities partaken in by the Young are ludic in their structure. When Mira fails to play correctly, by detuning her instrument, for example, or failing to take care of her neuro-mechanical canine, she is taken aside and reminded of the rules. She is not "punished" in a traditional sense (disparaging language having been flagged by the System as unhappy) but she is patronised and treated as if she were a child. She is told that she is "experiencing some problems" (p. 121) and this makes others worry about her. Soon, she is told, "everything will return to normal again. Don't be impatient" (p. 121). The concern expressed, whether real or faux, is a result of her failure to play along.Mira's own transcendent vision of language evolves in dialogue with this performative mode of existence. The apparently real emerges on the internet due to the primarily linguistic nature of identity performance on the web. By introducing the Graph as a constantly visible, augmented-reality-type interface, the citizens of *H(A)PPY* translate their everyday discourse into something written. This is highlighted immediately in the novel through the use of red text to flag "unhappy" words. Yet it also takes physical form in a series of visual glitches and/or hallucinations that effect Mira as she grows increasingly divergent from the "happy" norm. The words she sees appear to her no longer as solid objects that are liable to set off the Graph's sensor, but as bubbles.

These bubbles, she dreams, either contain "souls" (p. 278) or are "souls" themselves. They are shimmering appearances that we must presume, like soap bubbles, are as fragile and impermanent as they are glimmering. They, like the performative identities of the "happy" Young, are entirely constituted of surface. Mira must respond to them as she does to the rest of her apparently real world; by acting as if they are solid and physical, even while their very appearance suggests otherwise. The alternative to playing along is shown in a separate dream, in which the words "devastated / rotten / abducted / Krishna" (p. 212) appear for a moment

Figure 2: Mira A's thought bubbles (p. 278)

only to burst. After the words withdraw into themselves, like popped balloons, all that remains is "a gap. A white space. It floated above her hands like a pale cloud and then turned into a dove and flew around the room. It was frantic. It slammed into the window" (p. 212). The presence of an absence lying behind the surface of happy words is represented as the terrifying Lacanian real. It contains a state of frenzy, of animal panic, that the apparently real buries, contains or covers over. To not play along, to reject the System, is to unleash this terrifying gap into the apparently solid meaning of the world. It is for this reason that the ludic structures of *H(A)PPY* have to be maintained. They insulate the Young from the horrifying responsibility to find existential meaning within the world's void.

It is suggested throughout *H(A)PPY* that the Young are the key to maintaining their own innocent and "perfect" state. By refusing to play along, and more specifically by thinking of the words red-flagged by her Graph, Mira A is told that she threatens not only herself and those around her but the entire system. "You will poison the Graph," a mentor, Kite, tells her, "you will pollute The Information Stream. You will imbalance the Sensor […] You will effectively declare war on The Young" (p. 46). It appears that the system of mental censorship embodied in the electronic System is merely the by-product of a series of algorithmical inputs generated from the Young themselves. Again, this breaks with the centralised bureaucratic forms of dystopia typified in Orwell and Huxley, and more closely aligns with contemporary digital forms of social mediation. As Sue Curry Jansen (1991) writes, large corporate actors define the accepted range of expression within any market-driven cultural forum, including the internet, and these actors orient

towards the forms that are most likely to produce profits. In doing this, they enlist marketing companies to canvas opinion and, by listening to the public voice and targeting it, corporate-driven media ultimately "assumes the mantle of mediators of public morals" (Jansen, 1991, p. 16). By designing products that appeal to the public taste, corporations help define the limits of public taste in their turn.

Where pre-internet marketing departments would enlist members of the general public to form consumer panels (typically skewing small-c conservative), internet-enabled marketing uses metrics driven by social media (which skews towards the loudest, more extreme voices). Corporate entities in a digitised world therefore mediate the public conversation in a manner that orientates more towards the progressive than the conservative. In *H(A)PPY*, Barker follows this process to its logical conclusion, where a society of infantilised adults have actively infantilised themselves by submitting to a technical system that, in turn, promotes submission back to them. The apparently real is an aesthetic that sits comfortably alongside such infantilisation. Wachter-Boettcher (2017) has described the recent trend for progressive corporate marketing as "paternalistic playfulness" that "makes us childlike" (p. 114) by telling us what's best for us in an unmistakably patronising tone. Coetzee, writing in the 1970s, when free speech was a primarily left-wing concern, also condemned the tendency towards patronising paternalism evident in attempts to clean-up speech. As Coetzee (1996) phrased it: "innocence is a state in which we try to maintain our children; dignity is a state we claim for ourselves" (p. 14). The aesthetic of the apparently real is precisely not to claim dignity for ourselves. It is to knowingly set reality aside and live in a consciously limited state of unknowing. Such unknowing is believed to facilitate social wellbeing and the happiness of others. The Young are therefore simultaneously the result of and the producers of, and perhaps even the *enforcers* of, their own state of innocence. The role of the experienced adult who was traditionally tasked with protecting innocence has been outsourced to the System and its algorithms.

The question remains as to how and why such a person as Mira A comes to exist in a society as rigorously self-ordered as the one depicted in *H(A)PPY*. If the System is merely a mirror of the desires of each individual, measured algorithmically and thus becoming a collective will, then why does Barker's protagonist not recognise herself in the call? If the System calling out to her is built from her own desires and interests, why does the interpellation fall short? Barker shuns the trope of the damaged or resentful individual. Mira A is a genial and polite woman. She is not one of Huxley's sub-Alphas or the visibly sick Winston Smith. In fact, outside of her nagging doubts about the System, she appears quite content with her place in the world and, if anything, she is worried more about losing her present happiness than about finding the truth behind the Graph. Her "war with the System" appears to be compulsive, driven by curiosity, rather than an act of conscious rebellion.

To understand Mira A's non-compliance we can again look to the effects that digitisation has had upon discourse. In early studies of internet messaging between strangers – forums, message boards and comment sections – rhetoricians located a set of recurring phenomena including: "overcompliance with group norms, unnecessarily aggressive behaviour, a decline in the quality of deliberation, gender marginalisation, and technological elitism" (Warnick, 1998, pp. 74–75). Over time, the shared message boards of the internet fragmented into distinct communities aligned around shared interests and, increasingly, around shared politics. Yet, even within the "echo chambers" of modern internet discourse, where everyone ostensibly agrees with each other, or should, there remains a recurrent undertone of "criticism, carping, condemnation [and] complaint" (Kirby, 2009, p. 107). It would appear that there is something in internet discourse that drives its speakers towards aggression and resentment. As much as the performance of identity locks speakers into an "overcompliance with group norms", it also simultaneously creates a forbidden outgroup – one who must exist in silence, repelled by the discourse – and sets in motion an intensive process of boundary policing. This may be to do with the nature of digital language. David Crystal (2007) has described how such language is "something completely new. It is neither 'spoken writing' nor 'written speech' […] it is something fundamentally different" (p. 272). From our position as readers interested in matters of free speech and censorship, the overlap of written and spoken forms of language may hold the key to much of this contradictory "arguing over agreements". The matter appears to be one of tone and content. Tone, being largely communicated by voice and body language, belongs to the spoken, and therefore to casual and everyday speech. Without tone, one relies upon content. On the internet, the apparently real demands that we treat messages as speech – they should be conversational, unpretentious and immediate – and yet, being written, opponents will rigorously analyse and dissect the content of these statements as if they were formal academic writing. In digital discourse we therefore end up with the worst of both the written and the spoken. There is the imperative to use language informally; but this language will then be held to rigorous formal standards.

By outsourcing the role of rigorous formal adjudicator to the algorithmic System, the citizens of *H(A)PPY* have effectively compartmentalised and repressed their own compulsion towards aggressive boundary policing. Nevertheless, they still exist within a language system mediated digitally, and so the treading of boundaries no doubt remains a compulsion for many citizens; especially because, as Mira A is discovering, the act of maintaining a performed identity requires the active silencing of many elements of the human condition. As Marcuse (1964) describes,

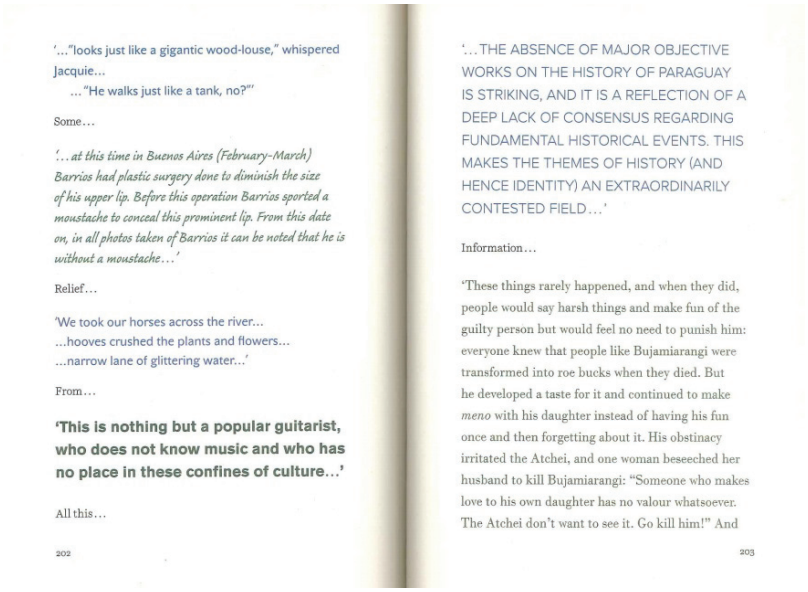
> the language which the man on the street actually speaks is the language which expresses his behaviour; it is therefore the token of concreteness. However, it is also a token of false concreteness […] for it is a purged language (p. 174).

The happy speech that is spoken by the happy people of *H(A)PPY* is a similarly purged language. The Graph flags not only aggressive or hateful speech, but any speech connected to outdated "narratives"; a category including all philosophical systems and nearly all abstract thought. The "concreteness" of everyday speech is such because it lacks the function of abstraction. In a state of innocence, the fully interpellated citizens of *H(A)PPY* can inhabit this concreteness as a form of blissful immanence. For Mira, made curious by the "Well Balanced" (p. 15) character Kite who seems, for all his "calm resignation and deep renunciation" (p. 15), to contain something of the transcendent, the limits of the language permitted by the Graph are felt to be restraints. To understand whether there is anything beyond the apparently real requires an unfiltered language to explore with, yet such a language contains the possibility of contradiction and therefore dialectic, and the dialectic brings the end of the static, unmoving, undeveloped and innocent state of happy immanence.

Barker displays this fraying at the corners of happy language through the imposition of outside texts onto the page. The page may reflect the protagonist's thoughts, or perhaps her sight as she encounters texts in the archives. At first, the impositions from outside of the Graph come like an unstoppable flow:

The black text in Times New Roman font is the voice of the protagonist. We can see how she feels washed away by this information flow, her voice breaking in between quotations as if she is coming up, breathless, for air; "Some […] Relief […] From […] All this […] Information…" (pp. 202–203). Meanwhile, an array of green and blue text in a variety of fonts – cursive for historical, all-caps for official, bold for a judgement – fill the page with an uncontrolled flow of information about Paraguay. It is all loosely connected to the musician in whom she is interested. The pursuit of the transcendent (signified by music) has led her to wallow in the unfiltered, unsorted and seemingly endless torrent of raw information. It is the Information Stream that constitutes the internet and, by extension, represents human knowledge more generally. She buries herself in written languages, in digitised books, and spoken languages, in audio and video recordings, only to feel herself losing more and more of her apparently real identity with each new piece of media. By removing the boundary, she has opened herself to unmediated discourse. She is experiencing an opening of all boundaries. A form of negative transcendence.

We must therefore conclude that Barker's intention with *H(A)PPY* is to show a society that cannot persist in functioning. Where Orwell and Huxley's protagonists are aberrations that, we are told, the system will soon eradicate, Mira A is an almost fully content member of the System's ideal society who is led to declare "war on the System" (p. 251) as a result of the repressive mechanisms of the System itself. Her journey begins, after all, when she notices the red highlighted text that marks out her thoughts as unhappy ones. The Graph, which



'..."looks just like a gigantic wood-louse," whispered Jacquie...
..."He walks just like a tank, no?"'

Some...

'...at this time in Buenos Aires (February-March) Barrios had plastic surgery done to diminish the size of his upper lip. Before this operation Barrios sported a moustache to conceal this prominent lip. From this date on, in all photos taken of Barrios it can be noted that he is without a moustache...'

Relief...

'We took our horses across the river...
...hooves crushed the plants and flowers...
...narrow lane of glittering water...'

From...

'This is nothing but a popular guitarist, who does not know music and who has no place in these confines of culture...'

All this...

202

'...THE ABSENCE OF MAJOR OBJECTIVE WORKS ON THE HISTORY OF PARAGUAY IS STRIKING, AND IT IS A REFLECTION OF A DEEP LACK OF CONSENSUS REGARDING FUNDAMENTAL HISTORICAL EVENTS. THIS MAKES THE THEMES OF HISTORY (AND HENCE IDENTITY) AN EXTRAORDINARILY CONTESTED FIELD...'

Information...

'These things rarely happened, and when they did, people would say harsh things and make fun of the guilty person but would feel no need to punish him: everyone knew that people like Bujamiarangi were transformed into roe bucks when they died. But he developed a taste for it and continued to make *meno* with his daughter instead of having his fun once and then forgetting about it. His obstinacy irritated the Atchei, and one woman beseeched her husband to kill Bujamiarangi: "Someone who makes love to his own daughter has no valour whatsoever. The Atchei don't want to see it. Go kill him!" And

203

Figure 3: A double page showing Mira in the Information Stream (p. 202–203)

acts as a visible trace of the progressive-corporate nexus of repression, leads Mira A towards her understanding of the apparently real as a constructed reality, a ludic structure, and her inevitable break with the System that takes the form of a return of the repressed. Kite, despite his superficial compliance, is disappeared before Mira, suggesting that he too grew "unhappy" once he understood the foundation of his "happiness". Any too-full understanding, any attempt to put aside innocence and regain dignity, renders the citizen incompatible with the System and results in their decoupling. The System seems to have this flaw built into it; it is based upon it, in fact. Perhaps, in this way, Barker is suggesting that the Young must cast aside their youth in the name of existential honesty. Or perhaps she is merely satirising the imperative towards happy Youth that our modern digital utopians and political puritans view as a moral good. The text is ambiguous. All that is certain is that her use of experimental techniques is what creates this ambiguity, and it is a useful ambiguity; one that does much to shake loose the clotted moralisms of our age.

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LUBLIN STUDIES IN MODERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE
Maria Curie-Sklodowska University Press
Vol 44, No 2 (2020)
E-ISSN 2450-4580

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DOI: 10.17951/lsmll.2020.44.2.113-122

"A galaxy of signifiers": David Clark's *88 Constellations for Wittgenstein* as a Paradigm of the Barthesian Writerly/Plural Text

ABSTRACT
This article argues that David Clark's digital biography *88 Constellations for Wittgenstein (to be played with the Left Hand)* (2008) meets all the criteria of a writerly/plural text as defined by Roland Barthes in *S/Z* (1970). The discussion focuses on the interactive and reversible structure of Clark's work, as well as on the plurality and hybridity of its components. The experimental form of Wittgenstein's biography is examined as an attempt to capture the elusiveness and the contradictions of its subject.
Keywords: electronic literature, digital biography, writerly text, hybridity, experimental life-writing, David Clark, *88 Constellations*

At the beginning of *S/Z*, Barthes (1970) proposes "a basic typology of texts" – a distinction between "what it is possible to write" and "what it is no longer possible to write" (pp. 3–4). The two categories are named "readerly" and "writerly" (or "plural"). The former constitute "the enormous mass of our literature" and are described by Barthes as mere "products" manufactured according to convention, designed to provide closure and a single meaning, while the latter do not conform to any structure, celebrate the plurality of their meanings and turn the reader from a passive "consumer" to a "producer" of the work (pp. 4–6). "The writerly text is not a thing", declares Barthes, and adds, "we would have a hard time finding it in a bookstore" (p. 5). A bookshop is certainly no place to look for a work which I wish to present as a paradigmatic plural text – David Clark's piece of electronic literature *88 Constellations for Wittgenstein (to be played with the Left Hand)* (2008). Although the Barthesian notion of the writerly text is frequently employed in literary criticism as a handy label for experimental and formally unconventional works, I wish to examine it more closely and indicate the remarkably strong connections between Barthes's theory and Clark's practice.

I will argue that *88 Constellations* – an interactive biography of the Austrian philosopher in the form of an interconnected network of stars, each of which contributes a biographical fact, a cultural reference or an association with its

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This journal is financed by the Polish Ministerial Programme „Support for Scientific Journals" (contract number 320/WCN/2019/1) and the Maria Curie-Sklodowska University.

protagonist – bears an uncanny resemblance to the "image of a triumphant plural" conjured up by Barthes (1970) and defined as follows:

> In this ideal text, the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to is by it several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one (p. 5).

I shall structure my discussion of *88 Constellations* by considering four of the main attributes of the writerly text: its interactive nature, reversibility, plurality and hybridity. During my formal analysis, I will comment on the ways in which specific solutions contribute to Clark's artistic motive, which, as he has explained, was not so much "to tell Wittgenstein's story" but rather "to organize stories, images, and ideas around the figure of Wittgenstein" (Clark, 2015, p. 295).

Canadian media artist and filmmaker, David Clark began working on a digital biography of Wittgenstein in 2004 and completed it four years later. *88 Constellations* was created in Flash, which makes it possible to combine text, sound, animation and video, as well as to provide an interactive framework. Upon clicking on the link http://88constellations.net/88.html, the reader (or, more appropriately, the user) is confronted with an introduction in the form of a brief voice-over narration accompanied by a simple animation. The voice of Canadian actor Neil Thompson (used consistently throughout *88 Constellations*) invites the user to take an active role in the work:

> Join the dots. Join the dots together. Make pictures in the sky. Connect the muddle of our thinking to these drawings in the sky. This story is about a man named Wittgenstein. He was a philosopher. His life was a series of moments, and our story is a series of constellations. Join the dots.

Once the introduction is over, the user encounters the "home page" of *88 Constellations* – a black screen with two adjacent circles (arranged in the form of the symbol of infinity) presenting the image of a starry sky at night. The placing of the cursor on any fragment of either circle results in the appearance of lines connecting the nearby stars into a constellation, of which there are 88. Clicking on any part of a given constellation activates one of 88 multimodal vignettes, which by means of text, sound and visuals (graphic symbols, appropriated photography, drawings, animations and embedded film scenes) offer an insight into Wittgenstein's life, ideas or legacy. Each constellation has a number, a name (such as Lynx, Hydra and Ursa Minor) and a title (such as *Tractatus*, *Infinity* and *Alan Turing*)[1] and takes a couple of

[1] Three constellations (*Leo*, *Gemini*, *Capricorn*) have the same names and titles. *Leo*, for instance, combines references to lions in Wittgenstein's writing with solecisms by Samuel Goldwyn, one of the owners of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, whose famous logo contains an image of a lion.

minutes to survey. There is, as prescribed by Barthes (1970), no indication where to begin one's exploration of the Wittgensteinian storyworld; instead the user "gain[s] access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one" (p. 5). As Clark (2015) has noted, the interlinked stories are "not arranged chronologically or even thematically" but "invite the viewer to move from association to association throughout the work" (p. 291).

The dots of individual constellations are to be joined and the biography's astoundingly wide range of reference is to be integrated in the mind of the user. Clark's investigation of Wittgenstein is not confined to the facts of his life and the ideas advanced in his philosophical writings but encompasses forays into the lives of Wittgenstein's contemporaries (such as Adolf Hitler, Charlie Chaplin and Alan Turing), as well as discussions of films made after Wittgenstein's death (Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* and Jean-Luc Godard's *Two or Three Things I Know About Her*) and recent events, such as the attack on the World Trade Center. An example of the intertextual richness of *88 Constellations* is Clark's use of the motif of the monolith, which serves as a symbol of Wittgenstein's notion of "that whereof we cannot speak" and is evoked in the context of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Barrett Newman's sculpture *Voice of Fire*, The Who's album *Who's Next* and *9/11*. The related motif of silence is linked to the Miranda warning (the right to "remain silent" announced in the US to a criminal suspect upon arrest), Wittgenstein's weakness for film star Carmen Miranda and John Cage's *4'33"*. The connections suggested by *88 Constellations* are at times so obscure and esoteric that they have been compared to paranoid "delusions of reference" and to "apophenia" – "the practice of finding patterns in random data" (Clark, 2015, p. 291). Rettberg (2019) speaks of the "absurdist connectionism" of Clark's work, which, he maintains, "spins off from this central narrative [of Wittgenstein's life] into a web of connections that resembles a sophisticated conspiracy theory" (p. 84).

Clark has suggested that exploring the "associational structure" of *88 Constellations* is akin to the experience of "surfing the internet" (2005, p. 291). Intrigued by a specific idea or event in Wittgenstein's life, the user is indeed free to pursue that strand by surveying nearby constellations. The experience of Clark's work can also be marked by the same selectivity that accompanies navigating a website – some of the content will probably never be processed. Since *88 Constellations* is not equipped with any device indicating which parts of the work remain to be explored, it implicitly accepts that the user will most likely choose those constellations whose titles promise the most informative or engaging content. It is therefore very probable that "Wittgenstein's grave", "Adolf Hitler" or "Hollywood" will be selected more often than constellations with less evocative titles, such as "Hand" or "Pointing". The cherry-picking manner of reading encouraged by Clark is very similar to that of the average Internet user, who skims the multiple visual stimuli and confirms their wish to learn more about a given topic by clicking on the corresponding icon.

Hayles (2012) has pointed to Clark's work as a quintessential example of a recent literary development: "Competing for attention in the Web's information-intensive environment, narratives become smaller, less connected, tending toward an array to be sampled rather than a whole to be absorbed".

Analogies can also be found between the exploration of *88 Constellations* and the reading of classic examples of interactive literature. "Navigating its universe", notes Butler (n.d.), "is like playing a Choose Your Own Adventure". Besides having an influence on the order in which specific parts of the work are assimilated, the reader/user is in both cases addressed as "you". Whereas the child recipient of a CYOA novel is expected to cast themselves in the role of the hero of the second-person narrative, the user of *88 Constellations* is occasionally addressed by the narrator. In *Silence*, they are asked to interpret the silence of a man whose face is projected in the accompanying animation; in *Psycho* the user is placed in the role of Dr. Mildred Newman, Anthony Perkins's psychoanalyst, and is invited to imagine her gradual recognition of the analysand's double life. Clark's work also displays a formal affinity with shuffle narratives like Marc Saporta's *Composition no. 1*, which have been defined by Montfort and Husárová (2012) as works "consist[ing] of text segments that may be read in any order". As noted by the authors of "Shuffle Literature and the Hand of Fate", representatives of the genre tend to offer the opportunity merely to choose the order in which different components of the text are presented, without allowing for those changes to affect the storyworld of the work. *88 Constellations* shares that characteristic with shuffle narratives, as, by the end, provided that the user has indeed dutifully clicked on each of the 88 constellations, they will have assimilated the exact same content regardless of their chosen path. The only alterations in the content of specific parts can be made by pressing certain keys on the left-hand side of the keyboard and thus activating additional visual effects in animations (such as the appearance or disappearance of certain icons). That special feature, signalled in the work's subtitle – "(to be played with the Left Hand)," alludes to Wittgenstein's practice of playing the piano only with his left hand.

The comprehensive interactiveness of *88 Constellations* is closely linked with another quality of the writerly text, which – as prescribed by Barthes (1970) – "has no beginning" and is "reversible" (p. 5). Reversibility is the potential of a given work for being read or experienced in more than one pre-arranged manner or order. Serbian author Milorad Pavić has defined reversible arts as those that "enable the recipient to approach the work from various sides, or even to go around it and have a good look at it, changing the spot of the perspective, and the direction of [their] looking at it according to [their] own preference" (Pavić, 1998, pp. 142–143)[2]. Architecture and the

[2] In his essay *Notes Toward the Musicality of Creative Disjunction, Or: Fiction by Collage*, Olsen (2005) elaborates on Pavić's distinction and calls reversible art "prismatic, multi-directional, rhizomic" (p. 131).

visual arts belong to that category. Music and literature, on the other hand, resemble "one-way roads on which everything moves from the beginning to the end, from birth to death." Still, Pavić (1998) declares that his ambition – in devising fictional works such as *Dictionary of the Khazars* (1984) – has been "to make literature, which is a nonreversible art, a reversible one" (p. 143). *88 Constellations* can certainly be regarded as part of that experimental tradition aiming to open up the literary work to the reader's involvement. In that respect, Clark's work is very much like the panoramic image of a starry sky at night which serves as its home page – it can be inspected in any direction, following a meticulous pattern or with no apparent design. Consequently, the emerging portrayal of Wittgenstein and his intellectual universe defies narrative patterns and rejects the clichés of cradle-to-grave biographies. Instead of a plot, a chronology and a cause-and-effect arrangement, Clark offers an assemblage of loosely connected facts, ideas and associations which are perfectly interchangeable.

By doing so, Clark opts for the logic of the database in what Lev Manovich in *The Language of New Media* sees as competition in the computer age between two fundamentally opposed cultural forms – the narrative and the database. *88 Constellations* does fit Manovich's definition of databases as "collections of items on which the user can perform various operations: view, navigate, search" and whose multiple components cannot be arranged into any kind of sequence (Manovich, 2001, p. 194)[3]. Hayles (2016) compares the experience of noting the surprising, often coincidental, links between constellations to being "inside a database" and "constructing a data derivative through correlations between seemingly disparate entries." "Caught in a maze of connecting paths," the users of *88 Constellations* are tempted by "the possibility of some overwhelming meaning that remains maddeningly just out of reach" (p. xiii).

However, the hope for a single master meaning that would account for the complexity of Clark's work, or of Wittgenstein's life, is ultimately dashed, as celebratory plurality and resistance to any form of reduction or unification are among the key properties of the writerly text. Barthes argues that to interpret such a work 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" [emphasis original] (p. 5)[4]. The impossibility of a single and conclusive explanation of any phenomenon is a leitmotif of *88 Constellations*, which frequently cites the Wittgensteinian dictum about the need for silence where language fails. In the earlier invoked *Silence*,

[3] Among the discussed subtypes of the database, the "virtual museum" genre shares a particular affinity with Clark's work, which – like an interactive guide to an art gallery – invites their audience to take an individual tour of Wittgenstein's world by exploring the assembled multimedia resources in the order and at the pace of their own choosing.

[4] In the competition diagnosed by Manovich, plurality is clearly aligned with the database, which rejects the elements that Barthes (1970) deems a stumbling block to a writerly text – "a narrative structure, a grammar, [and] a logic" (p. 6).

the image of a man's face serves as an invitation for the user to exercise their interpretive skills and determine the meaning of his silence. Among the numerous explanations proposed by the narrator are the man's "dark secret", his "impeccable manners", his "contempt", his being entirely "at peace" with himself, his dumbness and his full agreement with the interlocutor. The choice of one of those interpretations over any other would be arbitrary. Throughout *88 Constellations*, Clark revels in the polysemy of various symbols, such as the "$" sign (a marker of the split subject according to Jacques Lacan), the Heil Hitler gesture and the duck/rabbit image discussed by Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations*.

Barthes (1970) maintains that the plurality of meanings carried by the writerly text is guaranteed by "the infinity of language" (p. 6). Alongside the most obvious applicability of that statement to *88 Constellations* – as a product of language, it is polysemous – there is also its fortuitous relevance to the subject matter of Clark's work. Infinity and language are both among the principal interests of *88 Constellations*. The former is signalled in the very title of the work – the number 88 is, after all, composed of two infinity symbols placed at an angle. The sum of its referents, as demonstrated by Clark's "absurdist connectionism", could also be close to infinite: it is the number of constellations in the night sky and of keys in a piano; it lurks inside the number 1889 – the birth year of Wittgenstein, Chaplin and Hitler; it represents the age at which Chaplin died; it is the numerical equivalent of HH [Heil Hitler] and therefore a loaded and shunned number in Germany. The symbol of infinity is also a frame for all the 88 constellations as displayed on the home page and thus an entry point into Wittgenstein's universe. In the constellation titled *Infinity,* the narrator poses questions about the concept of the infinite while echoing some of Wittgenstein's philosophical concerns. The question about the night sky – "Is everything already there for us to see?" – appears to allude to Wittgenstein's idea that "nothing is hidden." In *Sky*, Clark juxtaposes the cliché "the sky is the limit" with Wittgenstein's dictum about the limits of one's language as the limits of one's world, bringing together the notions of infinity and language. The foundation of Wittgenstein's philosophy, language is the recurrent subject of speculation in voice-over monologues, which outline the biographical context and consider the implications of such Wittgensteinian ideas as the reduction of philosophy to language games and the impossibility of a private language.

Another way in which the plurality of *88 Constellations* is evoked is through its insistence on the protean character of its subject. In the most overtly biographical constellation titled *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, the narrator asks who Wittgenstein was after all and provides the following answer:

> There were so many. There was the early Wittgenstein and the late Wittgenstein. And, of course, there is now just the late Wittgenstein. He was a boy who didn't talk until he was four years old.

> He was an engineer who designed propellers. He was a schoolteacher in rural Austria. He was an architect who designed an elaborate Modernist house for his wealthy sister. He was one of the richest men in Europe after his father died but he gave all his money away and lived off of his wages. He was a whistler and a lover of music. He was an aesthete. He was a homosexual. He was an exile. He was a lover of movies and pulp fiction. He was a Cambridge professor who shouted down his opponents in the moral sciences club. He published one thin book but when he died he left 20,000 pages of notes.

Some of the above labels (a homosexual, an aesthete, a rich man who gives everything away) could easily constitute the lens through which a biographer might present Wittgenstein's life anew. Clark (2015), however, is not interested in finding a new "take" on his subject or in revealing any "truth" about him. As the author has admitted, *88 Constellations* was conceived as a "meta-biography" – an "accumulation" of information gathered in existing biographies (p. 292)[5]. Not privileging any particular interpretation, Clark's work remains "a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds" (Barthes, 1970, p. 5). The earlier cited enumeration of Wittgenstein's multiple selves also echoes the work's consistent interest in doubling. In the constellation called "Doubles", the narrator states, "you were always at least two people, perhaps more". A moment later, he quotes the philosopher's remark after being caught conversing with himself: "I was talking to a very dear friend of mine – myself." Wittgenstein's writing, particularly *Philosophical Investigations*, is also described as enacting an ongoing dialogue with the other in oneself.

By emphasizing the plurality and elusiveness of Wittgenstein, Clark adopts a similar strategy to that employed by David E. Nye (1983) in *The Invented Self: An Anti-Biography, from Documents of Thomas A. Edison*, where the biographical subject is not presented as "a unitary object" but "becomes only a series of meeting points, a pattern of possibilities ... a set of relationships" (pp. 12–13). Prager and Hannesschläger (2017) view that approach as anticipating the emerging genre of digital (or online) biography, of which *88 Constellations* is an example. In digital biography, they argue, "the subject is dissolved into a space of possibility comprising data, objects … and interchangeable fragments" (p. 259)[6]. The dissolution of the stable and coherent subject is achieved through a construction of the self as a "network" of crisscrossing relations (p. 259)[7].

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[5] Rettberg (2019) has called *88 Constellations* an example of "postmodern historiography" (p. 85), whereas van Dijk (2014) argues that Clark conceives of history as "the choice of one route amongst many" (p. 121).

[6] The representation of the self as an assemblage of information is discussed by Solove (2004) in *The Digital Person*: "Similar to a Seurat painting, where a multitude of dots juxtaposed together form a picture, bits of information when aggregated paint a portrait of a person" (p. 44).

[7] Prager and Hannesschläger (2017) cite Paul Longley Arthur's remark made in the context of the online biography that "people exist as networks" (p. 259).

88 Constellations proposes networks of constellations into which the content of individual parts could be arranged; when exploring *4'33"*, for instance, the suggested network comprises *Silence*, *John Cage*, *Piano*, *Tractatus* and *Ludwig Wittgenstein*. In accordance with Barthes (1970), "the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest" (p. 5).

In a commentary on his own treatment of the genre, Clark explains, "I use the facts of Wittgenstein's life not to create a portrait with an internal consistency but instead to emphasize the external relations of his life to the outside world". Exposing such "relations of exteriority", Clark (2015) adds, is a "distinctive feature of the hyperlinked world of digital media". It is also "the crux of what can be done in an online biography" – an indication of the myriad ways in which the life and work of a given person relate to our time (pp. 295–296). Hence the frequent occurrence in *88 Constellations* of the earlier noted references to events and films postdating Wittgenstein's death. In *Psycho*, a constellation asserting a connection between Anthony Perkins's role of Norman Bates and the actor's conflicted self, the narrator remarks, "you know how those things echo into the future"[8]. Exploring the echoes of Wittgenstein in the digital world of today is precisely what Clark's project sets out to do.

A related notion to plurality is the hybridity of the writerly text – the last aspect I wish to consider. Barthes (1970) proposes, "The writerly is the novelistic without the novel, poetry without the poem, the essay without the dissertation, writing without style, production without product, structuration without structure" (p. 5). While incorporating aspects of many genres, the plural text evades classification. In *88 Constellations*, the novelistic, the poetic and the essayistic co-exist and interpenetrate. Of the three conventions, essayism predominates as the approach best suited to an intellectual biography of a philosopher. Constellations such as *Certainty*, *Pointing* and *Facts Not Things* are, in fact, illustrated mini-essays taking as their point of departure a specific principle of Wittgenstein's philosophy. While Clark does not overtly fictionalise Wittgenstein's life[9], *88 Constellations* demonstrates a postmodern awareness of the impossibility of presenting an account of a life without making recourse to literary tropes. In the introductory monologue, the narrator signals this by referring to the work as a "story" about "a man named Wittgenstein." Whereas the fictional or the novelistic is incorporated rather subtly, the poetic elements

[8] Van Dijk (2014) proposes that *88 Constellations* is a "mediation of cultural memory" demonstrating "how the past is always connected to the present" (p. 121).

[9] A rare and humorous instance of fictionalisation occurs in a constellation titled *A Wonderful Life*, which turns Wittgenstein into a protagonist of a feature film – the philosopher's life is recast as an altered plot of Frank Capra's Christmas classic *It's A Wonderful Life* (1946). In it, under the influence of an angel representing Bertrand Russell, Wittgenstein realises on his deathbed that despite his keenly felt unhappiness he has had a "wonderful life".

are immediately apparent. In constellation number one (titled *88*), the narrator delivers the following rhymed passage: "Constellations and piano keys. Two upright infinities. Two fat ladies. 1, 8, 8, 9. Chaplin, Hitler and Wittgenstein. Star-crossed sons of fate. Born to love and born to hate. One would last to 88". Besides the occasional use of rhyme, Clark regularly employs parallelisms and repetition and shows such attention to language that the effect is unmistakeably poetic, as is the case with the opening of the constellation titled *World*:

> This is the world as I found it. This is the world. The whole wide world. The world is flat. The world is round. Money makes the world go round. All around the world. All around the first world, the third world, the new world and the old world. Hello, world. Goodbye, cruel world.

In *Aesthetic Animism: Digital Poetry's Ontological Implications*, Johnston (2016) proposes that *88 Constellations* is "in effect a poem". Johnston also calls it "a consummate example of hybrid interactivity, future cinema, Net art, and scholarship", which succeeds in merging "the dichotomies of abstraction/figuration, analytic/affect, and materiality/ontology" (p. 95)[10]. Among other ways in which the hybridity of Clark's work manifests itself is in its postmodern fusion of high and popular culture – in the unlikely marriage of Bertrand Russell and Carmen Miranda and of Frank Capra and Jean-Luc Godard.

In its interactive and reversible structure and its commitment to radical plurality and multifaceted hybridity, *88 Constellations for Wittgenstein* meets all the criteria of the writerly text as set by Barthes in *S/Z*. Undoubtedly, its status as a work of electronic literature greatly facilitates the enactment of certain aspects of the Barthesian ideal[11]. To a large extent, however, the novelty and diversity of its form arise from Clark's ambition to construct a work capable of evoking the remarkable complexity and elusiveness of Wittgenstein's biography. The numerous blind spots and contradictions marking the philosopher's life and work are conveyed more effectively by inviting the audience to take an active role in assessing their significance. Similarly, the variety and richness of Wittgenstein's intellectual legacy is made all the more apparent by being signalled by a wealth of diverse references and multiple media. In that respect, *88 Constellations* could be viewed – alongside *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (1975), Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1980) and the earlier mentioned *The Invented*

[10] Johnston (2016) also emphasizes the musical qualities of *88 Constellations*, such as Clark's use of recurrent themes functioning like "fugue motifs" and the "contrapuntal" quality of its "sparse, elegant and effective" soundtrack (p. 96).

[11] The link between Barthes's notion and the possibilities of digital literature has been noted by Cornis-Pope (2014). In the introduction to his edited volume *New Literary Hybrids in the Age of Multimedia Expression*, he observes, "In its arborescent, often multimedia structure, hypertext approaches Roland Barthes's definition of the 'plural text,' proposed well in advance of the age of electronic textuality" (p. 3).

Self by David E. Nye – as an example of what Novak (2017) calls "experiments in life-writing" – works that "push at the boundaries of existing forms to mould them into something that better suits the writer's efforts of representation", which frequently involves "ostentatiously" incorporating elements not associated with auto/biography (pp. 4, 15).

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LUBLIN STUDIES IN MODERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE
Maria Curie-Sklodowska University Press
Vol 44, No 2 (2020)
E-ISSN 2450-4580

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DOI: 10.17951/lsmll.2020.44.2.123-131

Narrative, Temporality and the Modernist City

ABSTRACT
The article explores the idea of temporality in relation to high-modernist literary representations of London. I claim that the modernist metropolis appears as a palimpsest whose memorialising function is upheld by techniques such as fragmentation, citation, myth, allegory, intertextual references or allusions, which question the stereotypical relationship between then and now, subject and site. It does so by deconstructing traditional temporal sequences and by foregrounding a subtle connection between past and present. Thus, the modernist city will be considered as a space of transformation in which the substantialness of space and subjective time translates the elusive meaning of contemporary history.
Keywords: the modernist city, London, palimpsest, subjective time, contemporary history

First used by Charles Baudelaire in his essay *The Painter of Modern Life* to describe "the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent" (Baudelaire, 1995, p. 13) quality of modern living, modernity is a concept that encapsulates the sense of rapid change that shapes human life in the industrialized urban centres of the latter half of the nineteenth century, where new technologies accelerate the speed of living and reshape the individual's perception of time and space. Subject to perpetual change and, implicitly, to the accumulation of various types of knowledge, the modern metropolis has been defined, in the words of Iain Chambers, as a "poignant narrative" understood as "the site of the ruins of previous orders in which diverse histories, memories and traces continually entwine and recombine in the construction of new horizons" (Chambers, 1990, p. 112). Acutely aware of progressivism paradoxically premised on a critique of contemporaneity, the modern city is a historical-cultural palimpsest deeply rooted in the conception of modernism as an art of disintegration which upholds the heterogeneity of the positions and manifestoes generated in response to the conditions of modern urban life by writers and artists working within and across a wide range of mediums. Written by recourse to mythical narratives that reconstruct the puzzle of cultural history, the modernist city captures "the

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This journal is financed by the Polish Ministerial Programme „Support for Scientific Journals" (contract number 320/WCN/2019/1) and the Maria Curie-Sklodowska University.

panorama of futility and anarchy that is contemporary history" (Eliot, 1975, p. 178) and concurrently reveals significant underlying processes taking place in the psychological apprehension of the city. As an artificial, anomic and "Gesellschaft" environment literally and representationally constructed or produced according to modern(ist) interpretations of space and time, the city as palimpsest, or as a spatial and temporal metaphor translated by Mikhail Bakhtin as "chronotope" (Bakhtin, 1981), is built on the reminiscences of a Heideggerian type of past that "belongs irretrievably to an earlier time; it belonged to the events of that time; and in spite of that, it can still be present-at-hand now" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 378). Elaborating on Heidegger's idea, Lawrence Phillips cogently argues that "to produce meaning from the 'space' between the past and the 'present-at-hand' there is narrative" (Phillips, 2006, p. 4). According to this line of thought, I argue that high-modernist literary narratives of the city not only reveal, but also reconfigure past modes of representing the city. By high-modernist literature I understand the experimental works written by T.S. Eliot, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf in the 1920s, when "high" denoted an innovative and particularly elitist form of artistic creation and aesthetic judgement that was radically opposed to lowbrow culture. Such literature was engaged in reworking the concept of history, on the one hand, and in promoting both a sophisticated way of observing and experiencing the world and literature as high art, on the other. My task is to show that such narratives encode accounts of spatio-temporal simultaneism made possible by space engaged in an intense process of negotiation between images, histories and memories of the city encapsulated by the individual's subjective time theorized by Husserl in his 1928 *Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness.* According to Lynch (1960), our perception of the city is "rather partial, fragmentary, mixed with other concerns. Nearly every sense is in operation, and the image is the composite of them all" (p. 2). The composite image whereby we make sense of our experience in the city is translated and codified through a narrative of consciousness, in which our mental experiences, acts and feelings have a specific duration, are re-enacted by memory and anticipated by consciousness. In this light, I claim that the modernist metropolis appears as a palimpsest whose memorialising function is prompted by techniques such as fragmentation, myth, allegory or intertextuality, which question the stereotypical relationship between past and present by annihilating traditional – be they linear, chronological or positivist – temporal sequences. Thus, the modernist city, most notably London, will be considered as a space of transformation in which the individual faces crisis "as a way of thinking about one's moment, and not inherent in the moment itself" (Kermode, 2000, p. 101) and seeks to decode the meaning of contemporary history.

In his analysis of London as a modernist city, Bradbury (1991) underlines its "English-language Modernist activity" (p. 172) which spawned a wide array of artistic experiments between 1890 and 1920. Though London exerted a great

fascination on many outstanding artists at the dawn of the twentieth century, it was culturally inferior to Paris and, in the words of Bradbury (1991), an ill-reputed creative space which the social imaginary of the time depicted as

> one of the dullest and most deadening of capital cities, with no real artistic community, no true centres, no coteries, no cafés, a metropolis given to commerce and an insular middle-class life-style either indifferent or implacably hostile to the new arts. Its image lives in Modernist writing itself. Its fascination and its repulsion, its status at the centre of vivid multiple impressions and as the city of dreadful night, have entered deeply into poetry and fiction, where a cluster of unforgettable associations surround it (p. 172).

However, such a besmirched social poetics of London does not prevent Bradbury from highlighting the fact that "the cosmopolitan and the nativist" (p. 174) formed an osmotic relationship which accounted for the rise of modernist aesthetics acutely concerned about forging the urban identity of London in the early twentieth century. Ford endorses this idea, noting that writers who portray London "ought to be alive to the glamour of old associations" and must take heed of "new haunts" that "are being formed for new people around whom will congregate new associations" which "will in their turn grow old, tender, romantic, glamorous enough" (Ford, 1995, p. 5). Ford makes straightforward reference to London, a city in which past and present coexist. Such a collage of temporal sequences is contingent upon fragments which bear no relation to the world as a whole, on the one hand, and to the allegedly comprehensive grand narratives "dissolved within the single element of receptive interiority" (Kwinter, 2001, p. 39).

London as a site of artistic experiments and social philistinism is a socio-cultural paradox Bradbury fails to resolve. Labelled as a kaleidoscope of contradictions and inconsistencies by Henry James, London "is a collection of many wholes, and of which of them is it most important to speak?" (James, 2011, p. 18). Apart from revealing epistemological uncertainties, James's statement suggests that the process of fictionalization substantially contributes to making sense of London as a polymorphous space. Thus, the textual London is subject to creation and shaping perception, it is "an enigmatic glow", "a vast graveyard of stilled hopes" (Ford, 1995, pp. 94, 95), which is highly indicative of the new *qua* modern urban consciousness. Though not entirely oblivious of the sediments of history, this profound and fragmentary consciousness brings forth what Henri Lefebvre calls "qualities of space" (Lefebvre, 2011, p. 230). They call for a twentieth-century type of sensibility of the city, a kind of sensibility comprised "of small little experiences, of little personal impressions, of small futile things that, seen in moments of stress and anguish, have significances so tremendous and meanings so poignant. A cloud – as it were of dust of men's lives" (Ford, 1995, p. 112). The new sensibility of the city is expressed by stories that are able to bridge physical and discursive spaces by inventing – in the etymological sense of *in venire* (to

come into being) – a topography that unveils fragments of forgotten or neglected history. Employing Derridean and Deleuzian terminology, Wolfreys (2007) argues that the city's new sensibility becomes meaningful in writing understood as invention

> in that technical sense of devising a form, a structure for memory. It taps time if you will, entering into the temporal core of place, of what has taken place *in* place and which imprints itself indelibly as the signature of place, awaiting invention by the subject who responds to the resonance of that location, who provides the inventive and corresponding *locution* to the *location*, in which give and take the singular *locus* of the city is neither simply *in* the subject or the particular place, but is instead discernible as the *invenient* becoming taking place, once more, between the subject and site [emphasis original] (p. 3).

Taken as "a structure for memory", the city is indelibly linked to the notion of circular time developed from Bergson's understanding of time as "durée", i.e. time as an ongoing process of "becoming", and foreshadowed by Nietzsche's eternal recurrence, Joyce's cyclical time and Eliot's fractured time in need of Christian redemption.

Virginia Woolf's "Portrait of a Londoner" is a case in point. "Portrait" is the sixth of a series of essays gathered together under the title *The London Scene* (1931), a collection initially published in 1981. It was discovered by Emma Cahill at the University of Sussex and reprinted by *The Guardian* in 2004. The essay foregrounds the image of London appropriated and encapsulated through gossip by Mrs Crowe, a Cockney lady who spent 60 years in the same London house. Plotless as it is, the essay juxtaposes the fashioning of the self with the perspective on the metropolis pulverized into a myriad of present-day singularities and perceptions that feed Mrs Crowe's imagination. Always eager to articulate the lived and living present offered by her guests every day, between 5 and 7 o'clock pm, under the form of easy yet polite conversation, Mrs Crowe acts as the embodiment of a private subject who fabricates her own version of London. Not only does she invent it, but she also establishes a perfect correspondence between "locution" and "location":

> The truth was she did not want intimacy; she wanted conversation. Intimacy has a way of breeding silence, and silence she abhorred. There must be talk, and it must be general, and it must be about everything. It must not go too deep, and it must not be too clever, for if it went too far in either of these directions somebody was sure to feel out of it, and to sit balancing his tea cup, saying nothing (Woolf, 2004).

The "invenient" space acquires the status of a palimpsest of everyday opinions accumulated as observations dissected in the private drawing-room of a Victorian hostess, almost a legend of the city, who is informed of the public life of the

metropolis – the macro-text read and interpreted by a motley community of Londoners:

> Thus Mrs Crowe's drawing-room had little in common with the celebrated salons of the memoir writers. Clever people often came there – judges, doctors, members of parliament, writers, musicians, people who travelled, people who played polo, actors and complete nonentities […] The talk that Mrs Crowe liked and inspired was a glorified version of village gossip. The village was London, and the gossip was about London life. But Mrs Crowe's great gift consisted in making the vast metropolis seem as small as a village with one church, one manor house and 25 cottages. She had first-hand information about every play, every picture show, every trial, every divorce case. She knew who was marrying, who was dying, who was in town and who was out (Woolf, 2004).

When Mrs Crow dies, Woolf confesses that "London will never be the same city again", for cityspace will display different qualities to be recorded by different psyches. Her death symbolizes the death of the London of her time that she synecdochically embodies and it is precisely this past that future generations of Londoners might feel estranged from, since London's history, the metropolis reduced to "a small village", is only the history of a small portion of the city constructed through discourse.

If the city is "a temporal container" (Weinstein, 2014, p. 139), then one may argue that the modernist city propels memory into action so as to allow for a more comprehensive relationship between subject and space. The liaison between memory/images and discourse taken as narrative/story or history becomes effective when dealing with the description of the lived experience of the city in fragmentary form. In the words of Weinstein (2006, p. 17), "living your life is not a guided tour. Modernist literature isn't, either". He is right in saying that "the kinetic renditions of the modernist city" shatters "our familiar assumptions about subject/setting, about inside/outside, about now/then and here/there" (Weinstein, 2014, p. 139). Eliot's praise of Joyce's mythopoeic method used in *Ulysses* actually becomes his own project in *The Waste Land*, where escapism from "the panorama of futility and anarchy that is contemporary history" is achieved through art. The disconnected stories, fragments, quotations, allusions, intertextual references and footnotes disconcert the reader, who is puzzled by the literary and cultural traces at work throughout the poem. In this cultural cryptogram time is represented as spatial plots in the flow of consciousness: the discovery of unexpected transitions and suppositions, images rather than statements, or images as statements in the vein of Ezra Pound's imagistic poems. In doing so, Eliot, like other high modernists, elevates fragmentariness to an aesthetic level and *modus operandi* meant to convey the wavering experience of the city by bringing the past into the present in a simultaneous manner. According to Wolfreys, London is "the invenient becoming taking place" the moment the barrenness of the city prevails upon the poet's consciousness as well. By having recourse to the myth of the Fisher King, Eliot depicts the city as an apocalyptic image

of destruction, as an entity affected by a de-realized ontology, as spatial otherness indicating both an existential crisis and a crisis in faith. As a mosaic of ruins, or "as a poem of modern ruin-gazing" (Morrison, 2015, p. 29), *The Waste Land* depicts the destructive process of modern urbanization grasped in a subjective manner. "The fragments I have shored against my ruins" (Eliot, 1969, p. 430) articulate the rhetorical strategy of the poem and, concurrently, the interdependence between the past and the present perceived not only as physical space, but also as subjective temporality. The fragments that populate the poem are on a par with the shattered buildings of urban modernity. As Morrison (2015) suggests, there is an excess of meaning in the urban ruins which is apt "to invoke multiple and fragmented pasts while simultaneously gesturing to indeterminate possible futures" (p. 31). Invested with a temporal dimension, ruins point to an apprehensive subjectivity tightly related to the decaying present, i.e., London's destruction. Much in the vein of Woolf, Eliot composes "in-betweens of time, text, and being" (McIntire, 2008, p. 211) with the help of cultural patches embedded in the past and the present, or imaginatively projected into a blurred future. Eliot's palimpsestic city is invented within the historical situatedness of modernity and at the same time reinvented through fragments of everyday life Terry Eagleton labels as "a self-transformative organism extended in time and space, constantly reorganised by [the idioculture of] the present" (Eagleton, 1978, p. 147). Similarly, *Ulysses* stages individual stories that reveal Dublin as an ultimately incoherent and chaotic metropolis that needs to be decrypted by a "flâneur-reader" like Leopold Bloom, who is part and parcel of the polyphony of urban life and its "*traffic* (human, neural, not just vehicular) [emphasis original]" (Weinstein, 2014, p. 142). Nevertheless, Joyce's Dublin, much like Virginia Woolf's London in *Mrs Dalloway*, is grasped and experienced through an irregular shifting in time-consciousness, one of the prerequisites of modernist plotless writing.

An urban background in which history and life are interwoven, Virginia Woolf's London is the setting not only of her collection of essays titled *The London Scene*, but also of a few stories and novels, of which *Mrs Dalloway* is a telling example. Woolf's fascination with the vibrant though evasive metropolis may be inferred from her thoughts jotted down in her diary: "One of these days, I will write about London and how it takes up the private life and carries on, without any effort" (Woolf, 1978, p. 301). Transformed into a space which constructs the selves of various characters, London plays a crucial role in shaping consciousness by letting ourselves get out of our selves and become one with the "outside world" epitomised by the hustle and bustle of the city. In her essay "Street Haunting: A London Adventure", she summarises this point as follows:

> Into each of these lives one could penetrate a little way, far enough to give oneself the illusion that one is not tethered to a single mind, but can put on briefly for a few minutes the bodies and

> minds of others. One could become a washer-woman, a publican, a street singer (Woolf, 1966, p. 165).

Erasing class boundaries, Woolf's statement creates an environment that is propitious for a modernist urban *flâneuse* who, in stark contrast to Mrs Crowe, contributes to reconfiguring cityscape and the experience of the public space at the dawn of the twentieth century, on the one hand, and to how London shapes memory and social behaviour, on the other.

Mrs Dalloway portrays London as a paragon of lively modern life and dominating presence of space attuned to the fluctuations between external/physical and internal/subjective time. Woolf regards consciousness and urban environment as "mutually interactive and expressive" (Parsons, 2000, p. 69), in that London is the *locus* and nexus of many stories and histories of the city, which become tightly connected with characters that must have a traceable past. "I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters" (Olivier & McNeillie, 1978, p. 272) represents Woolf's recipe for designing *Mrs Dalloway* as "a vast site of excavation, yielding itself up to the novelist as archaeologist whose task it is to unearth or bring to 'daylight' the subterranean links between individual consciousnesses" (Tromanhauser, 2004, p. 36). The novelist as "archaeologist" goes hand in hand with the city as a palimpsest of histories and biographies that are brought to life under the guise of modernist epiphanies experienced in the most commonplace circumstances of ordinary life. Here is a long-lasting moment of exhilaration experienced by Clarrisa when she gets immersed in the animated city:

> In people's eyes, in the sing, tramp and trudge; in the bellow and uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June (Woolf, 1990, p. 4).

The image of London condensed into "a moment" functions as a repository of stories, histories and biographies gradually uncovered against the backdrop of Big Ben, the epitome of external time that interrupts the internal flow of thoughts compressed during a single day of June. Woolf's "encounter-theme of city texts and city life" (Weinstein, 2014, p. 144) sets the frame for the party, distinguishing between Clarissa's exuberant view of London life and Septimus's grim picture of the city: "[…] and once a maimed file of lunatics being exercised or displayed for the diversion of the populace (who laughed aloud), ambled and nodded and grinned past him … each half apologetically, yet triumphantly, inflicting his helpless woe" (Woolf, 1990, p. 90). Septimus stands solid proof that London is constructed through the subjectivities of its observers and that the city throws us into the anonymous crowd. According to de Certeau, the subjective and the social are mutually interactive in a space metaphorically constructed by

those who view it as unstable, kinetic, "produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it" (de Certeau, 1988, p. 117). Instability accounts for a limited view of space and time, which calls for the need to organize life in accordance with a coherent matrix made up of fragments of truth revealed through intuition.

Such representations of London, or of Joyce's Dublin, were perceived by high-modernist writers as a centre of post-war crisis, stasis, and paralysis understood as "a way of thinking of one's moment", to quote Kermode again, which is aesthetically translated as a living moment in one's consciousness. Always predicated on the writer's or artist's imagination, the city, notwithstanding its palimpsestic nature, is permanently fictionalized and morphed into a pivotal figure of Modernist literature. Written, invented or appropriated as a landscape of the mind, high-modernist London discloses a network of fragments, traces of, and intersections with, the past that further engender an endless series of Londons, each one being "the crystallization or actualization of the city's countless singularities, its countless moments of taking place, of becoming" (Wolfreys, 2007, p. 3). As such, writing the city in a modernist manner has been an invention of a plethora of meanings of "the panorama of futility and anarchy that is contemporary history" and, more significantly, an "invenient becoming", according to Wolfreys, which looks backward and forward, (re)appropriating the past under the guise of ruins and fragments that turn London into a palimpsest which blends forgetting, remembering and the acute awareness of the present.

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LUBLIN STUDIES IN MODERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE Vol 44, No 2 (2020)
Maria Curie-Sklodowska University Press

E-ISSN 2450-4580

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DOI: 10.17951/lsmll.2020.44.2.133-143

La couleur rouge et sa valeur pathétique dans l'expressionnisme abstrait et le surréalisme tardif

The Color Red and its Pathetic Value in Abstract Expressionism and Late Surrealism

RÉSUMÉ
On analyse dans cet essai le dialogue entre art visuel (l'automatisme de Jean-Paul Riopelle) et surréalisme tardif sur la couleur rouge, notamment en termes d'intensité. Le point de départ est un poème en prose d'André Breton, Élisa Breton, et Benjamin Péret, écrit pour une exposition de 1949 et intitulé « Riopelle ». Ce texte a été repris dans *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*.
Mots-clés : rouge, surréalisme, expresionnisme abstrait, Riopelle, Breton

ABSTRACT
This essay analyses the dialogue between automatism and late surrealism on the color red, with a focus on the intensity shared by painting and literature. The starting point is a collective prose poem by André Breton, Élisa Breton, and Benjamin Péret. This poem, « Riopelle », written for an exhibition of Jean-Paul Riopelle's automatist paintings in 1949, is included in Breton's *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*.
Keywords: red, Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, Riopelle, Breton

[ ] l'œil aussi a ses orgies et l'idée ses réjouissances.
Flaubert

1. Introduction

Flaubert écrivait à Louise Colet que « la poésie de l'avenir » serait « *une manière de voir* » [italiques de l'auteur cité] (Flaubert 1980, p. 229), et que dans ces conditions, la littérature serait « surtout *exposante* » [italiques de l'auteur cité] (Flaubert, 1980, p. 298), sans cependant tomber dans le didactisme. Dès lors, selon lui, « [il] faut faire des tableaux, montrer la nature telle qu'elle est, mais des tableaux complets, peindre le dessous et le dessus » (Flaubert, 1980, p. 298). Ce plaidoyer fait de l'écrivain une manière de peintre, mais le domaine de ce peintre serait à la fois le visible et l'invisible. Il semble en fait que pour cet 'œil littéraire', l'important ne

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This journal is financed by the Polish Ministerial Programme „Support for Scientific Journals" (contract number 320/WCN/2019/1) and the Maria Curie-Sklodowska University.

soit pas ce qui est décrit, mais la manière de le voir (qui contribuerait à constituer un style), le regard et non pas la chose regardée. Ce regard-style se déclinerait en regard de texte (pour une œuvre considérée), voire en regard de fragment, et les deux derniers seraient les projections du premier. Ce regard joue sur ce qui lui est déjà familier, et même le déjà-vu implique un jugement fondé sur une culture du regard, qui établit des classements, et réveille les échos de la mémoire de l'auteur, de certains de ses textes, et des textes (ou des images) sur lesquels ces derniers s'appuient. Ainsi dans cette phrase :

> De Hagios Joannis jusqu'ici (Polignia) c'est une charmante route, *paysage classique s'il en fut, tranquille* ; on a vu cela dans d'anciennes gravures, dans des tableaux noirs qui étaient dans des angles, à la place la moins visible de l'appartement [italiques de l'auteur cité] (Flaubert, 1964, p. 675).

Et en retour, cette mémoire favorise l'exercice d'une contemplation esthétique. Mais qu'arrive-t-il quand cette contemplation se fait sur une œuvre d'art qui fait naître chez l'écrivain non pas un sentiment familier, éthéré, passif ou tranquille, mais, au-delà du déjà-vu, un sentiment intense provoqué par la vision de la matérialité d'une œuvre d'art ? « Je me souviens d'avoir eu des battements de cœur, d'avoir ressenti un plaisir violent en contemplant un mur de l'Acropole, un mur tout nu [...]. Eh bien! je me demande si un livre, indépendamment de ce qu'il dit, ne peut pas produire le même effet » (Flaubert, 2007, p. 31 ; lettre du 3 avril 1876 à George Sand). Il s'agit là d'un ravissement que Huysmans ne trouve pas chez Gautier :

> L'impression des objets s'était fixée sur son œil si perceptif, mais elle s'y était localisée, n'avait pas pénétré plus avant dans sa cervelle et dans sa chair ; de même qu'un prodigieux réflecteur, il s'était constamment borné à réverbérer, avec une impersonnelle netteté, des alentours (Huysmans, 1977, p. 308).

L'intensité de cet effet-œuvre peut-elle être reproduite par un texte littéraire ? Tel est le problème que pose cette phrase de Flaubert, tel est le nœud du texte qu'on va étudier, dans la mesure où précisément ce texte semble tenter de reproduire un effet similaire à celui des paysages ou monuments dont Flaubert parle. Dans ce texte surréaliste, si la manière de voir reste l'essentiel, la recherche de l'intensité sur laquelle jouent les co-auteurs semble, comme dans le cas de Flaubert, devoir prédominer. Et comme pour ce mur de l'Acropole, la beauté et la littérarité des éléments ci-après semblent partager un élément fondamental de surprise : on est à cent lieues du familier. Mais, comme chez Flaubert, on est encore dans le domaine de la littérature exposante, et dans la partie généralement considérée la plus visuelle de celle-ci : l'ekphrasis.

2. Le rouge en contexte : entre expressionnisme abstrait et surréalisme tardif

Pour mieux comprendre les liens qui unissent littérature exposante et peinture, on voudrait analyser ici les modalités du transfert et du dialogue entre art visuel (l'automatisme de Jean-Paul Riopelle) et surréalisme tardif (André et Élisa Breton, et Benjamin Péret) sur le 'cri' de la couleur rouge. Le point de départ est un texte écrit pour une exposition de 1949 et intitulé *Riopelle*, un texte repris dans *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* (Breton, 1979, pp. 282–284) et qu'on ne peut reproduire ici dans son intégralité. Le lecteur est donc invité à s'y reporter. Il ne s'agit pas d'un texte sur un tableau précis de Riopelle, bien que son tableau *La Ville* soit reproduit dans le catalogue de l'exposition, catalogue introduit par ce texte ; c'est plutôt un texte sur l'œuvre de l'artiste en général et ce qu'elle tend à exprimer selon les trois co-auteurs, voire sur son entreprise et le sens de celle-ci. C'est là un type de critique d'art créatrice qui prend la forme d'un poème fait en collaboration. Dans ce poème, cette phrase de Breton illustre bien ce que les trois co-auteurs ont cherché à faire : « Pour moi, *Riopelle* est le nuage qui sert de parachute à la carcasse de fer d'un immeuble toujours en construction ». On trouvera ci-dessous une tentative d'explication à cette métaphore du nuage, mais pour le moment notons combien l'image de Breton est proche du célèbre tableau de Duchamp exposé au musée des beaux-arts de Philadelphie et également centré sur l'expression du désir, *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*. Cependant cette métaphore ne suffit pas à rendre compte de la 'description d'œuvre' et du 'regard de texte' des trois co-auteurs. Ce sont en fait les variations à propos de la couleur rouge, essentielle dans l'œuvre de Riopelle, qui sont au centre du texte. Elles suggèrent une vision moderniste du monde.

2.1.Un rouge moderniste

On s'intéressera donc ici au rouge moderniste dans sa version surréaliste, entre peinture et littérature. Mais comment ce rouge est-il introduit dans l'histoire du texte et dans l'espace du tableau, dans la logique de l'œuvre d'art ? Les couleurs se mélangent, impliquent mobilité, effacement, surimpression, interaction, rencontre, opposition. La couleur est lieu d'une interaction entre les arts, mais si elle est parfois considérée comme l'essence de la peinture, elle apparaît aussi comme l'attribut d'une fonction souvent décriée de la littérature, la description, et ce en particulier au sein d'un surréalisme qui ne célèbre pas précisément la description. Cette introduction de la couleur, on l'étudiera d'abord dans le simili-dialogue que met en scène le poème collectif des poètes surréalistes précités, ce qui conduira à s'interroger sur l'intensité qui semble ici constitutive du rouge.

2.2. Entre peinture et poésie

Eluard, commentant un tableau de Picasso, écrit que « [le peintre] est devant un poème comme le poète devant un tableau » (Eluard, 1968, p. 938). Chez Breton,

ce simili-chiasme n'est pas figé ; on peut noter une évolution de l'attitude du poète par rapport aux tableaux. Dans le domaine de la couleur (peu présente dans la première version de 1928 du *Surréalisme et la peinture*), c'est plutôt dans des textes tardifs, comme dans celui qu'on étudiera, que la vision de Breton s'exprime. Mais dans le poème considéré intervient aussi la passion originaire de Breton pour le dialogique. « C'est encore au dialogue que les formes du langage surréaliste s'appliquent le mieux », lit-on dans les *Manifestes du surréalisme* (Breton, 1973, p. 48). Dans ce poème il y a dialogue entre Breton (qui a repris le mouvement surréaliste en main depuis qu'il a organisé l'Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme à la galerie Maeght en juin 1947), Péret et Élisa Breton d'une part, et l'œuvre d'un artiste, Riopelle, d'autre part. Chaque intervention, si elle semble être d'abord un monologue, s'ouvre aux autres, les reprend, comme mimétiquement le pinceau procède par touches.

2.3. En territoire automatiste

On sait que pendant la deuxième guerre mondiale, Breton passe au Canada, où il écrira *Arcane 17*. Quelques mots sur Riopelle (1923–2002) : c'est un peintre canadien, ami d'Émile Borduas, et membre du groupe des automatistes créé par Borduas dès 1946 ; ce groupe a recours aux principes de l'écriture automatique. Riopelle part à New York, à Paris, rencontre Mabille, Césaire, George Duthuit, et Georges Mathieu. Il se ralliera à l'abstraction lyrique puis à l'expressionnisme abstrait. Il a été le compagnon du peintre américain Joan Mitchell.

C'est la période automatiste de l'œuvre qui est examinée ici par les protagonistes à l'occasion de l'exposition personnelle de Riopelle à la galerie 'La Dragonne' en 1949. Rappelons la définition de l'automatisme, si essentiel à la conception que Breton a de l'art :

> Je soutiens que l'automatisme graphique, aussi bien que verbal, sans préjudice des tensions individuelles profondes qu'il a le mérite de manifester et dans une certaine mesure de résoudre, est le seul mode d'expression qui satisfasse pleinement l'œil ou l'oreille en réalisant l'*unité rythmique* (aussi appréciable dans le dessin, le texte automatique que dans la mélodie ou dans le nid), la seule structure qui réponde à la non-distinction, de mieux en mieux établie, des qualités sensibles et des qualités formelles, à la non-distinction, de mieux en mieux établie, des fonctions sensitives et des fonctions intellectuelles (et c'est par là qu'il est seul à satisfaire également l'esprit). Que l'automatisme puisse entrer en composition, en peinture comme en poésie, avec certaines intentions préméditées, soit, mais on risque fort de sortir du surréalisme si l'automatisme cesse de cheminer au moins *sous roche* [italiques de l'auteur cité] (Breton, 1979, pp. 94–96).

Dans le poème considéré, il faudrait parler d'automatisme collectif. Cet « aparté » (le mot est mis en exergue du poème) est en fait conjonction de trois apartés par Breton, Péret et Élisa Breton ; les apartés se font écho, et ressemblent graphiquement à un dialogue constitué de répliques, même si la continuité

apparente de ce dialogue se révèle largement artificielle lorsqu'on prend la peine d'en examiner les contenus. Le statut du texte est ambigu, entre critique d'art, poème-objet, et cadavre exquis. Rappelons que pour Breton le poème-objet « est une composition qui tend à combiner les ressources de la poésie et de la plastique et à spéculer sur leur pouvoir d'exaltation réciproque » (Breton, 1979, p. 365). Pour reprendre l'analyse de Michael Riffaterre, la critique d'art de Breton, « quintessentiellement littéraire », est en fait « une variante en prose de la poésie lyrique, l'expression du moi » (Riffaterre, 1991, p. 133), et se révèle ici comme un « discours du moi » qui se substitue à la critique. Et dans la mesure où le texte présente « avec des mots une représentation visuelle », il donne lieu à une ekphrasis, ou plus précisément à une « ekphrasis lyrique » (p. 133), qui tend par ailleurs à démentir la condamnation que fit Breton de la description. Lyrique car Breton et ses pairs racontent leurs émotions « sur le mode visionnaire » (p. 135).

2.4. Points de comparaison

La vision est manifestation d'une création. Le poème explore métaphoriquement les voies d'un 'orgasme' créatif représenté dans l'espace d'un tableau. Le « nuage » du poème considéré, parachute et orage en puissance, comme dans *La Mariée* de Duchamp, est ce qui contrôle la machine célibataire avant l'explosion. Le nuage est inscrit, comme souvent chez les surréalistes, dans une thématique romantique ; il est comme un lieu privilégié de la couleur dans la nature, un faisceau de couleurs en puissance ; le nuage a servi aux plus grands coloristes qui ont surenchéri sur sa mobilité, sa versatilité, sa capacité à générer de la couleur, bref, sur ce qu'on pourrait appeler sa capacité d' « imaginarisation », ainsi chez Bernardin de Saint-Pierre :

> J'ai vu aussi dans les nuages des tropiques, de toutes les couleurs qu'on puisse apercevoir sur la terre, principalement sur la mer et dans les tempêtes. Il y en a alors de cuivrées, de couleur de fumée de pipe, de brunes, de rousses, de noires, de grises, de livides, de couleur marron, et de celle de gueule de four enflammé. Quant à celles qui y paraissent dans les jours sereins, il y en a de si vives et de si éclatantes qu'on n'en verra jamais de semblables dans aucun palais, quand on y rassemblerait toutes les pierreries du Mogol (Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, 2007, p. 17).

Le nuage est donc manifestation de couleur autant que possibilité de couleur, et ce qui domine dans ce texte de Bernardin, comme dans le poème considéré, est la couleur rouge (et ses différents tons). Cependant le poème du trio surréaliste commence par un blanc, le blanc du nuage, puis il y aura les blancs entre les apartés, et des couleurs non-vives : dans le texte, une carcasse de fer reprend les constructions de l'époque grise ou beige de Picasso (cf. Breton, 1979, p. 141). Dans le détail du poème, le « ça » qui se niche dans le syntagme « c'est » dévoile le pôle inconscient du refoulé, alors que les grues (animaux mais aussi machines, le texte joue sur le double sens) évoquent les machines d'un port comme les cris

d'oiseaux en escale d'amour que Breton comme Riopelle avaient pu voir sur le Saint-Laurent. Les images qui suivent, avec la métaphore du trappeur, disent le désir et son élan. Or, comme on sait, le rouge est la couleur privilégiée pour dire le désir ou la passion ; dans le contexte moderniste qui est celui de ce poème on retrouve cette couleur dans les références à un « port » et à une « mine » modernes. A propos de l'élan du désir, notons que dans « Pour se prendre au piège » in *Capitale de la douleur*, Eluard parle d'un orage qui permet de ne plus être le même (Eluard, 1966, p. 55). En ce sens, le texte fait partie d'un système poétique de références à d'autres textes qui constituent comme l'environnement sans lequel le poème ne peut véritablement se déchiffrer.

2.5. Rouge désir

Dans le poème, le désir se dit notamment par une association entre « port » et « mine » dans la réplique d'Élisa ; cette association est source d'un réseau connotatif qui implique un jeu sur les signifiants caractéristiques de ce poème en prose. Dans les images qui succèdent à cette 'association', une fête ouvre sur un prélude amoureux où l'homme est considéré plutôt comme machine désirante que comme être pensant, et où les sensations premières priment sur l'intellect. Dans la réplique de Breton (qui suit celle d'Élisa), les plis du vent miment ceux d'une robe mais aussi ceux de *La Ville*, tableau exposé par Riopelle en 1949 et représenté dans *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* avec le poème qui lui est contemporain. Puis, dans sa réplique (ou comme on voudra son aparté), Péret évoque une anecdote qui renvoie non pas aux abeilles de Virgile, mais à un conte du même Péret, *Au paradis des Fantômes*, où apparaît le personnage de Virgile de Naples, constructeur d'une mouche mécanique. Ce collage textuel est caractéristique d'un poème-objet.

Puis Élisa parle d'un lit qui dit la réalisation du désir, comme l'ouragan et les précipitations sont la réalisation de la potentialité 'nuage' ; la force inhérente à la nature se libère (Pierre Schneider insiste dans une étude sur Riopelle sur ce phénomène ; Schneider, 1957–1958, pp. 85–87), et son précipité, à la fois dépôt sexuel et dépôt de couleur sur la toile, est aussi chute, tant il est vrai que « [toute] épave à la portée de nos mains doit être considérée comme un précipité de notre désir » (Breton, 1979, p. 363) ; ce précipité serait à la fois résultat de l' 'orgasme' créatif évoqué plus haut et métaphore de la vitesse de l'automatisme. Dans la réplique de Breton qui suit, la paronomase dans le segment « Elle aime son ami et les lacs sombres » est une figure de l'union, alors que le sombre fait partie des valeurs picturales qui par contraste (et comme Klee et d'autres l'ont indiqué) 'contextualisent', 'installent' le rouge (voir sur ce point Victor Hugo, qui évoque dans *Le Rhin* « les sombres moires de la nuit », en un vers cité par Huguet, 1905, p. 249).

3. Vers un 'sur-rouge'

Que penser de ce rouge surréaliste et automatiste à la fois ? Qui considère la réplique de Péret introduisant l'image de l'aurore boréale (phénomène à prédominante verte dans la nature, mais qui peut aussi être de couleur rougeâtre, rose ou violette) peut savoir que la flamme de l'aurore boréale est chez Breton l'emblème de l'amour ; c'est aussi une image de la création (et dans notre poème un commentaire sur l'utilisation du rouge dans les tableaux de Riopelle) ; on peut consulter sur ce point le *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* ; l'entrée « rouge » donne : « Récolte de la tomate par des cardinaux apoplectiques au bord de la mer Rouge (Effet d'aurore boréale) (Alphonse Allais) » (Breton & Eluard, 1991, p. 75). Dans le poème étudié, Breton poursuit en évoquant l'état de grâce manifesté dans *Arcane 17* ; les rosaces ne sont plus épanouies comme chez Gautier mais éclatent avec l'aboutissement du désir. Polysémie du rouge : le rouge de la flamme est création, forge, et intensité, festin, ivresse ; le rouge est couleur du feu, allié de la foudre, du ciel incendié, ensanglanté par l'aurore boréale et ses jambes de flammes ; il y a homophonie, homonymie de couleur dans deux arts différents. Le rouge colore ici une machine désirante à la Deleuze et Guattari. C'est la version moderne de la grande prostituée de l'apocalypse, c'est le rouge comme couleur de la passion, le rouge « amoureuse » (Eluard, 1966, p. 175). Et en ce sens l'utilisation du rouge reste compatible avec certaines valeurs traditionnelles associées à cette couleur, valeurs qu'illustrent les images de la vie et de la régénération présentes dans le sang et le feu, respectivement.

3.1. Un rouge mimétique ?

Suit dans ce poème collectif une intervention brutale de Péret (« Tais-toi »), en contradiction totale avec le système théâtral de l'aparté ; Péret, vilipendeur de curés, prolonge l'image de la rosace éclatée avec celle du cadavre de curé (ici le rouge et le noir de la soutane sont en tension). Dans l'avant-dernière intervention d'Élisa qui suit, le fjord reprend l'image de l'aurore boréale. Chez Breton qui poursuit, les Indiens (en tant que 'Peaux-Rouges') prolongent la couleur dominante et le Nouveau Monde évoqué au début du texte, monde qui est l'univers du Canadien qu'est Riopelle ; et les « fleuves [des] colliers » sont dans le texte une version surréaliste des rivières de diamants des bijoutiers. Dans les dernières interventions des trois poètes, la fin de « l'orage » est représentée par les emblèmes de l'automne ; et le biscuit de neige, état final du nuage, est aussi une sorte de précipité qui laisse son empreinte sur la toile. Avec ses rouges feux, l'automne, associé dans le poème aux fauves de la savane, à des feuilles d'automne très hugoliennes dans de grands bois où joue le soleil, ou encore à une amanite phalloïde (précipité rouge vif et coin de nature anti-naturelle dans le tableau peu à peu formé par le poème), est une 'expression abstraite' de l'été indien américain, selon certains commentateurs. Ainsi Waldberg (1981) a-t-il

commenté une toile de Riopelle comme une « sorte de paysage rouge où dansent les couleurs d'une fête sauvage » (p. 77). Il reste que toute cette ekphrasis semble bâtie à partir de l'image matricielle du nuage comme métaphore du désir et du travail de la création. En devenant ouragan et / ou aurore boréale, ce nuage réalise ses potentialités, comme fait l'amour, comme fait l'œuvre.

3.2. Lyrisme et 'surexpression'

Il est cependant un autre rouge, moderniste lui aussi, qui brille ici par son absence : le rouge politique, emblème de la révolution, celui qu'on trouve par exemple dans l'*Ode à Charles Fourier*, texte contemporain à notre poème et où Breton se fait critique de son temps. Mais dans notre poème, le rouge sert plutôt à la description d'une image de la création soutenue par une vision lyrique. Précisons, comme l'a vu un commentateur, que des

> […] valeurs distinctes sont données par Breton et par les théoriciens cubistes et « post-cubistes » au terme de « lyrisme ». Chez Kahnweiler, le lyrisme fournit la résolution du conflit entre la représentation et la structure. Le lyrique, c'est la joie devant la beauté des choses, en dehors du narratif, du drame antique, de l'épopée, qui permet à la beauté formelle des choses de se marier avec la beauté formelle de la structure de la peinture (Ades, 1991, p. 36).

Comme l'a remarqué Combe, Breton a toujours cru en l'importance du sentiment et de l'émotion, le lyrisme étant pour lui « dépassement en quelque sorte psalmodique de l'expression contrôlée » (Breton, *Entretiens*, cité in Combe, 1991, p. 79). Et l'œuvre plastique se référera à ce modèle ou ne sera pas : « c'est bien l'exaspération du sentiment qui distingue le lyrisme de la surréalité de sa définition classique et le rattache au Romantisme […] à travers le thème de la passion » (Combe, 1991, p. 81). Ainsi Breton parlera-t-il pour la peinture de Miró d'une peinture qui « ne demande au réel que le *surexpressif*, l'expressif au sens le plus enfantin », pour mieux distinguer l'expression de l'imitation, le lyrisme étant du côté de la création [italiques de l'auteur cité] (p. 83). Il revalorise ainsi l'*inventio* contre la *dispositio* (p. 89). Et « [l'] idée d'automatisme est en soi le recours le plus radical contre l'organisation du discours et de la peinture, et permet de se libérer de la tyrannie de la composition » (p. 89). Il est cependant vrai que comme chez Paulhan, « le refus de la rhétorique est encore une rhétorique » (p. 93).

Au-delà, il semble qu'ici par l'intensité du lyrisme Riopelle saisisse « l'esprit de la plénitude de la nature », par l'intermédiaire d'un « élan d'activité » (Auster, 1981, p. 82), soit un phénomène qu'on peut relier sur le plan de la représentation élaborée dans notre poème à l'intensité de la couleur rouge, à l'affirmation du rouge. Du début à la fin du poème, il y a intensification des couleurs, du gris au noir, du violet au rouge. Le rouge est couleur par excellence, *colorata* ; et en ce sens aussi, le rouge, extrême de la couleur, couleur *per se*, est intensité. Le rouge est énergie, couleur de la vivacité et de l'intensité, comme dans certains portraits

d'Otto Dix, comme dans nombre de tableaux emblématiques de Bacon. Riopelle aime selon Hess (1981) les tons vifs, le rouge écarlate du tube, la difficulté à utiliser des couleurs qui « se comportent presque comme des teintures » (p. 83), et il aime à jouer sur la difficulté à les placer entre des tons plus neutres ; or toujours selon Hess ces couleurs intenses ne peuvent jouer le rôle de couleurs que si elles sont « lourdement appliquées », « [généreusement] utilisées en taches, grumeaux, écumes » (p. 83) ; ainsi seulement elles ont une qualité pénétrante, comme des « joyaux » (p. 83).

3.3. Energie et intensité de la couleur

Dans ces conditions, observe Dupin (1981), « [l'] énergie de la couleur triomphe de l'inertie de la matière et de la dispersion des images » (p. 80). Vers le milieu des années 1950, Riopelle commence à peindre avec un couteau. A propos du résultat (« conglomérats denses de taches colorées » selon Schmalenbach, 1981, p. 78), et du vitalisme que ces taches expriment, Rusoli parle d' « amoncellements, pissements, éclats et traînées de couleur ». Selon sa formule, « [l]'épaisseur de la matière devient lumière. Et la lumière, substance, corps, se condense en des volumes différents » (Rusoli, 1981, p. 81). Comme si l'intensité s'accentuait encore. Schneider cite Riopelle à propos du rôle essentiel qu'il attribue à l'intensité :

> On dit que la tache faite par une bouteille lancée du troisième étage est libre. Pas du tout. Le geste propre à chaque homme y est toujours. Sans parler du choix de la bouteille, de la couleur – l'art, quoi. L'écriture automatique, c'est un climat intellectuel. Le véritable automatisme se situerait en dehors de l'individu. Où il y a geste, celui-ci est toujours guidé par l'individu. Il n'y a pas d'automatisme. Etre libre, c'est une autre façon d'être coincé, plus personnelle, plus intense. L'essentiel, c'est l'intensité (Riopelle, cité in Schneider, 1981, p. 15).

C'est sur ce point précis que Riopelle est le plus proche de Breton, pour qui

> [l']émotion véhiculée par le lyrisme se caractérise par son intensité, ce que signifie encore la célèbre définition de la « beauté convulsive » dans *L'Amour fou*, « explosante-fixe », et l'expression même d' « élan lyrique » utilisée à propos du cubisme (Combe, 1991, p. 81).

3.4. De la valeur pathétique des couleurs

On pourrait faire du texte des trois surréalistes un point de départ pour une interprétation phénoménologique de la couleur à même d'éclairer la création poétique, en insistant sur l'importance de l'intensité de la couleur du point de vue poïétique. On peut trouver une telle interprétation chez Cohen (1979), dans sa théorie phénoménologique de la poéticité. Ainsi Cohen écrit-il à propos du fameux syntagme « blanche agonie » de Mallarmé que dans le poème dont il est tiré « la blancheur […] demeure seule dans l'univers de la couleur, comme si […] toute agonie était blanche et toute blancheur mortelle » (p. 84). Le blanc, ou ici le rouge. Dès lors, la couleur peut avoir un sens « poétique, affectif ou pathétique »

(p. 158). Dans ces conditions, le « pathème » que serait fondamentalement la couleur servirait à « désigner le contenu éprouvé de la signification » (p. 158), et aurait une intensité qu'on pourrait opposer aux autres instruments plus neutres de la représentation. Et en ce sens, on pourrait parler de « valeurs pathétiques » des couleurs, le rouge étant ainsi associé à la violence (p. 159 ; pour plus de précisions sur la théorie de Cohen, voir Ippolito, 2009, pp. 105–118).

Conclusion

On a examiné dans le poème considéré le sens qu'on peut donner à la dissémination métaphorique de la couleur rouge, aux réseaux culturels et thématiques qu'elle forme, à la polyphonie poétique engendrée par les diverses associations qui sont construites par les usages qui sont faits de cette couleur. On a comparé les rouges si singuliers qu'on y trouve à ceux utilisés par les grands coloristes en littérature, de Bernardin à Eluard. Mais il semble que dans le texte étudié, l'essentiel reste que le discours poétique soit ramené à sa fonction première, qui est de raconter des origines – théogonie, naissance d'un monde, d'une couleur, sorties de l'Idée au sein du langage. A proprement parler, il n'y a pas de critique de tableaux, mais plutôt une vision qui se libère de la toile pour devenir texte et raconter par un discours poétique l'aventure de la création : aventure signifiée par le processus métaphorique et l'engendrement des couleurs. Le rouge, figure de l'intensité, aiguille et gouverne ce processus, et ce dans une logique du et des sens qui n'a plus grand-chose à voir avec la représentation mimétique. Certes, « on peint mal, si une sorte de couleur universelle, particulière au sujet, ne domine pas constamment dans le tableau » (Senancour, 1984, p. 506), voire dans un texte comme celui-ci, anhistorique, tout entier orienté par le rapport à l'image (et la métaphore filée) de la création.

Au final, ce qui importe c'est que le regard transcende la description et par là la justifie poétiquement. Et par ailleurs, en termes d'opérations scripturales, Breton et ses co-auteurs se réapproprient certains instruments flaubertiens. L'écriture de la contemplation (que celle-ci soit désintéressée ou extatique), qui transparaît par exemple dans les silences ou les blancs de Flaubert, est utilisée dans notre poème pour donner un surplus de littérarité au décrit. Et les échos qui scandent les réseaux descriptifs qu'y forment les métaphores filées et autres sous-textes tissent, dans l'esprit de la prophétie flaubertienne sur la littérature exposante qu'on a citée au début de cet essai, une mémoire des 'dessous' du texte.

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