

Tünde Varga

Image and Imagination in the Ekphrastic Tradition

The relationship of pictorial representation and picturesque poetic/linguistic representation and the problem of this relationship have a long tradition. In this work I will consider some aspects and reflections on the relationship between language and sight, or better to say, the visual dimension of language. As a theoretical framework I will strongly rely on the ideas of W. J. T. Mitchell and Murray Krieger, but I will not neglect the German reception on the topic either. I am well aware of the fact that within the framework of a short study it is hardly possible to give account of such an intricate question, neither do I think that any theory would be able to control or understand what images are or how they work. Nevertheless, it does not mean that examining them is completely futile, since the link between word and image is not so obvious as it might seem.

According to Robert Rivlin and Karen Gravelle, “The ability to visualize something internally is closely linked with the ability to describe it verbally. Verbal and written description create highly specific mental images.”¹ Clear as it seems, yet it should not be forgotten that the simple and clear-cut terminology “mental images” and to “visualise internally” are cultural products; they are always already stained by a philosophical tradition that should also be examined and not to be conceived as natural givens. As Rivlin and Gravelle also notes “The link between vision, visual memory and verbalization can be quite startling.”² There is a cultural component in that curious thing we call vision, yet it is not

1 Robert Rivlin and Karen Gravelle, *Deciphering the Senses: The Expanding World of Human Perception* cited by Martin Jay, *The Downcast Eyes* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1994), p. 8.

2 Jay, p. 8.

only due to linguistic differences in cultures as Martin Jay claims. He says that “although perception is intimately tied up with language as a generic phenomenon, different peoples of course speak different tongues. As a result, the universality of visual experience cannot be automatically assumed, if that experience is in part mediated linguistically.”³

In my view what Jay states in the first sentence is in itself the basic problem of the arts without the further complications of linguistic differences between cultures, and not only because the link between the verbal and the visual cannot be univocally defined. During the history of the arts in Western culture there are several ruling approaches to the media of the work of art, which are still present in one form or another in the approaches of different theories. The claim that “perception is intimately tied up with language” has been problematised in different ways. To note some without the intention to be exhaustive: firstly, there is the claim for the purity of the media (one of the central figures to this idea is Lessing), that is, each medium should represent its object according to its proper mode and avoid to be stained by the use of other media.

Secondly, the tradition of the *paragone* (Leonardo da Vinci) means also a somewhat counter-argument in this respect: here the verbal and the visual vie for greater performative power; the two art modes compete with each other in order to show which can represent its object – which is usually the same object – more truly to life or more vividly. Only at a later phase with Romanticism and the idea of the sublime was visual representation doomed to be a secondary form of art, since it was claimed that only the verbal arts are capable of grasping the unrepresentable with their infinite suggestiveness. And, although on a slightly different ground, Derrida also notes that for Kant “the highest form of expression is the spoken [...] At the summit of the highest of the speaking arts is poetry. It is at the summit because it emanates almost entirely from the genius.”⁴ Yet, in this view the visual itself is more on the side of transparent representation than a

³ Jay, p. 9.

⁴ Jacques Derrida, “Economimesis,” *Diacritics* 11 (1981) 3–25, p. 17. Here Derrida stresses the aspect of auto-affectation of the verbal arts, thus their claimed self-originating nature that is typical for German idealist philosophy. The claim is based on the fact that “it says what it [the spoken] expresses and that it passes through the mouth, a mouth that is self-affecting, since it takes nothing from the outside and takes pleasure in what it puts out” (p. 17). It goes without saying, that Derrida’s argument goes far beyond this observation undermining the concept of Kantian taste by identifying the pleasure of “what it puts out” with vomiting, that results in the “quintessence of its [philosophy’s] bad taste” (p. 25).

problem in itself. The unproblematic nature of vision – which is preserved in some common phrases like “seeing is believing” or that the eyes are “transparent windows on the world” – is, nevertheless, not so unproblematic after all. As Wittgenstein observed “we find certain things about seeing puzzling, because we do not find the whole business of seeing puzzling enough.”⁵ One of the cornerstones of transparent visual representation, the linear perspective, has long been demystified: “Perspective is a figure for what we would call ideology – a historical, cultural formation that masquerades as a universal, natural code.”⁶ Thus, the division between verbal and visual representation cannot be necessarily grounded on the naturalness of the visual versus, for instance, the arbitrariness of the verbal (as was among others claimed by Lessing).⁷ Finally, there are views affirmative with the interrelation of language and vision, yet, curiously, these views are themselves quite divergent: consider the role of illustration as explanation to the text or vice versa, when the text is supposed to explain pictures; but their curious relationship in Blake’s poetry and in its discordant reception can also be mentioned. The enumeration of examples and counter-examples could go on, but I think so much was enough to demonstrate that the visual, pictorial dimension of linguistic representation cannot be taken as a trivia and the questions it involves are worth examining.

The most self-evident place for examining the intersection of the verbal and the visual, of word and image is the ambivalent notion of *ekphrasis*. For ancient rhetoric ekphrasis is the vivid description in prose or poetry of a work of visual art, real or imaginary or a striking visual scene.⁸ The prototype of ancient ekphrastic text is the description of Achilles’ shield in the Iliad, in which the

5 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992), p. 212.

6 W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 1994), p. 31. Although I quote Mitchell here the demystification of the perspective as a figure primarily relates to Panofsky, but painters show awareness earlier of the same ideas in paintings which pun on perspectival delusions, e.g. Holbein’s perspectival illusions or his paintings with anamorphosis (*The Ambassadors*), that illuminate the gaps in the structure of perspectival representation, and show its fallacious construct.

7 “But the objection will be raised that the symbols of poetry are not only successive but are also arbitrary” (G. E. Lessing, *Laokoön*, trans. E. A. McCornick [Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989], p. 85).

8 Gottfried Boehm’s study, “Bildbeschreibung,” is also of great interest on the topic, in several respects. Gottfried Boehm – Helmut Pfotenhauer, *Beschreibungskunst-Kunstbeschreibung* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1995).

description of the shield is manifestly imaginary (a shield made by a god and described by a blind poet, who tells what the muses dictate). Krieger puts its appearance to the third or fourth centuries AD; and its role was to bring about seeing through hearing.⁹ However, according to Krieger, it develops renewed from the rhetorical trope of *energeia* (“the capacity of words to describe with a vividness that, in effect, reproduces an object before our very eyes”¹⁰) in “later classicism” which was “looking for a device that would break into and halt the temporal flow of discourse by forcing us to pause over an extended verbal picture.”¹¹ It is clear that in ekphrasis the problematic nature of the pictorial side of verbal representation is foregrounded, for how can words be pictured, if words are arbitrary?

In the history of verbal representation the notion of image also incorporates the different aspects of mental and real images, that is, pictures seen by the physical and the by mental eyes as well. Concrete poetry or calligrams are undeniably physical pictures, but otherwise the pictures raised by the text can only evoke the physical object, and not present it. In the latter case it is irrelevant whether or not the distinction between figurative and literal use of language is made. The representation which is rendered possible by ekphrasis can most obviously be addressed to the “inner eyes,” in other words, to “the mind’s eye.” Moreover, the concept of image at some phases of the history of arts is connected to a mental faculty, to imagination. The supposed relationship between image and imagination produced such far-fetched statements like Vilém Flusser’s claim that the “entire Western culture can be conceived as an experiment which aims at the exploration of the imagination (in order to explain images).”¹² Yet, it is an open question whether the image can be connected to the obscure workings of the imagination in such a univocal way, especially, because the term itself has strong overtones of its romantic establishment.

The fact that Murray Krieger and W. J. T. Mitchell produce a narrative on the history of the image in the verbal arts with a somewhat different “moral” is symptomatic of the problematic nature of this relationship. Krieger applies two

9 Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign*. (Baltimore, London: John Hopkins University, 1992), p. 7. Though other sources say that the term occurs first in Dionysius of Halicarnassus in the fifth century AD. Cf. *Icons - Texts - Icontexts: Essays on Ekphrasis and Intermediality*, ed. Peter Wagner (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), p. 2.

10 Krieger, p. 68.

11 Krieger, p. 68.

12 Vilém Flusser, “Az új képzőművészet,” (*Atheneum*, T-Twins Kiadó, 1993/4), p. 256.

terms for the ruling mode of the aimed representation, by which historical periods can be described: the natural sign and the verbal emblem. The natural sign aesthetic belongs to Greek and Classicist art, whereas the verbal emblem is paradigmatic of the Renaissance, Romanticism and Modernism. The former, that is, the desire for the natural sign, seeks to capture the world in the word: “it is the naive desire that leads us to prefer the immediacy of the picture to the mediation of the code in our search for a tangible, ‘real’ referent that would render the sign transparent.”¹³ In the natural-sign aesthetic the verbal art is modelled on the pictorial arts, and its highest ambition can only be to become equal to the plastic arts and reach the immediacy of representation they are capable of. He refers to Plato’s *Cratylus* as a work in which “Plato deals at length and painstakingly with the relation of language at large to natural signs” and “tries in every way to avoid giving up the mimetic function of words”(73). Krieger notes that “Plato’s entire conception of natural-sign imitation rests upon the unproblematic notion” of the transition “from thing to picture of the thing to our internal image of the picture as if it were the thing”(74). He claims that the same applies to verbal representation, which, of course, brings about the banishment of the arts, verbal and visual equally from Plato’s state, since they cannot present the ideas themselves, only nature, therefore they are delusory.¹⁴

Horace’s *ut pictura poesis* belongs to this tradition, since as Krieger puts it, here poetic art “seeks to emulate the spatial and visual arts – the arts of the natural sign – to which the visible world is immediately accessible”(78). Thus, poetry is to be conceived as a speaking picture.¹⁵ For Krieger the natural sign aesthetic does not primarily show the oppression of linguistic art, but to the contrary, the verbal arts gain the stability and physical solidity that of the spatial arts. This is what

13 Krieger, pp. 11–12: “That aesthetic which is also dedicated to the primacy of the natural sign and of the visual arts that are the signs visual embodiment, develops – though with welcome interruptions by dissenters – over the centuries right up to the eighteenth” (p. 71).

14 Krieger oversees here Plato’s *Symposium* 211A–213A, and *Phaedrus* 250A–252D, which might provide a counter-argument for the natural-sign aesthetic (one of the reasons why Plato wants to get rid of the arts) he points out in Plato. In these two works love/Eros can create an ecstatic state (a state of poetic mania/creation), which provides an insight into the realm of the ideas, since it is still in touch with that realm. Gottfried Boehm argues that the priority of language is due to its ontological and spiritual excess ever since Plato (Boehm, “A kép hermeneutikájához” [*Atheneum*, T-Twins Kiadó, 1993/4], p. 91).

15 I should note at this place that Krieger does not pay attention to the problematic nature of visual representation, which cannot be called natural at all, but follows the claims of the eighteenth century aesthetic so as not to overcomplicate the issue.

Krieger calls the ekphrastic principle of poetry; he wants to point out is that poetry can have it both ways: to blend the temporal flow, that is, the dynamism of the verbal arts, and to attain the physical, spatial array of pictorial representation. This means that the materiality of the text dissolves in the reading process, and the text functions as a transparent window onto the fictional world or the reader is left in the presence of the thing.

The primary figure of Neo-classicist poetics is Addison for both authors. Addison following Lockean philosophy (and its distinction between sensation and idea), claims art objects to be mere reminders of the primary object of the actual sensation. Krieger says that in this aesthetics the "fidelity to external, 'real' origins in experience is what makes the natural sign the highest achievement of the work of art. It also dictates that the visual arts, as natural-sign arts, are to be the model arts for the other arts" (87). The end of such aesthetic came about around the same period, and its signs are already apparent in Addison's view. Krieger states that under Longinian influence Addison dwells upon the power of words and claims that "the property of words is such that they can stimulate 'stronger colors' in the imagination than a faithful representation can" (99). Interestingly, Krieger chooses the very same quote from Addison as Mitchell, yet the drawn conclusion is not quite the same. In this moment Krieger sees a turn, in which Addison, despite his main ideas, reverses the order of the privileged arts, "claiming poetry's superiority to natural-sign representation in sculpture or painting" (99), this will be then expanded by Edmund Burke in his ideas on the sublime.

In dealing with the representational practices of those periods that can be summarised with the notion of the verbal emblem, Krieger summing up Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* concludes that "The poet, not subject to nature, is free, in making fictions, to invent unnatural creatures" (130). The artist, Krieger notes, is in a position to be able to penetrate the veil between "heaven and earth," which is so thin that "indeed approaches transparency, at least with the sublimely mimetic artist" (132). In short the poet by analogy can present the "invisible-sacred," despite the apparent arbitrariness of signs; they are "authorised to become, in effect, meta-natural signs after all, full of the presence of the transcendental meaning they carry, though we cannot specify or translate them with confidence" (173). Krieger does not make much differentiation in this respect between the verbal and the visual arts, the signs in both cases function as hieroglyphs pointing beyond themselves, yet the poetic creation possesses the advantage of working

with signs that “does not resemble its object, and therefore free to appeal to the mind’s eye rather than to the body’s eye” (139).¹⁶

The analogical nature of referring to a transcendental realm, says Krieger, returns in a reborn version with Romanticism, and is “carried farther along for being less dependent on the extravagant metaphysical demands of Christian Neo-Platonism” (142). Krieger sees it as a counter-movement to pictorialism in favour of the freedom of the word, its liberation from the natural-sign aesthetic, which culminates in the modernist return to a newly dynamic spatiality. The vital point in this aesthetic is not only that the poet’s act is an imitation of God’s, being capable of creating a self-sufficient and organic world from his own genius, neither it is the suggestive unconcreteness of poetry, but that this organicity evolve the spatial element the verbal had so far to create on the analogy of the spatial arts. This is also what the Modernist concept of poetry attains, that is, “this return to spatiality is now to be made on the terms of the verbal arts rather than those of the visual arts, in that the spatiality is achieved in words is to be a hard-won victory over the inherent transience of verbal sequence” (205). So much so that the order is even reversed, and with “modernism they ascend to the status of model” (206).

In contrast Mitchell tells the story of repression in which the verbal triumphs over the visual with an ever greater force, repressing the visual in favour of the verbal expression. In this story the verbal possesses the ability of speech and activity in contrast to the passive, and silent image, since for Mitchell the speaking picture (that is poetry’s ideal) is a problem in itself. Mitchell provides a very brief history of representation in “What is an Image?”¹⁷ It is by no means comparable with Krieger’s book-length study on the same subject, but for the sake of the different story lines it is worth comparing their main ideas. Mitchell’s starting point in his narrative is Addison (and as I have already mentioned with the very same paragraph Krieger deals with). Mitchell, nonetheless, unlike Krieger, does not see the lurking Burkean idea of the sublime in Addison’s text, but the

16 Its emblem is the *ouroboros*, the mysterious winged snake biting its tail, standing for “the unfolding series of interpretative possibilities whose intertwinings are full of mystery” (141). Krieger however sees the ultimate emblem of the ekphrastic art in it, because of its circularity corresponds to the circular, mythopoetic assumption of temporality, which converted into space shapes like a poem. The poem, thus, in its self-enclosure becomes the verbal emblem of temporality as mystery (cf. p. 228).

17 W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 7–47.

reinforcement of the pictorialist tradition: "The poetic consequences of this sort of language theory are of course a thoroughgoing pictorialism, an understanding of the art of language as the art of reviving the original impressions of sense" (23). The verbal image here is the exact description which equals to, or even better than, the "images that flow from the objects themselves";¹⁸ sensible forms become a property of words. This does not necessarily mean the abandonment of the natural-sign aesthetic, but only that words can reach better understanding, yet it is one distinguished form of the verbal. Therefore, the clarity of the verbal expression is contrasted with tropes and rhetorical figures, which count as redundant and alluring ornaments,¹⁹ and are no more than mere relationship between signs.

According to Mitchell Romanticism and Modernism still apply the notion of the verbal image, but the term is confusingly used for both the literal and the figural. At this point the two stories slightly converge, since Mitchell conceives the theory behind romantic representation as the workings of the obscure notion of imagination, due to which the requirement of the ideal representation is not that of the mimesis or description of "external visibilia," but the inner light of the poetic genius and the infinite capacity of his creative mind. The poet creating with the help of imagination is capable of rendering organic, living works (works associated with the symbolic), which belong to a higher artistic order than the mechanical reproduction of allegorical works.²⁰ The main tendency of Romanticism and Modernism in this respect is alike: to attain the notion of a non-representational art, the realm of the intellect which is to be found in the sublimity and the infinite suggestiveness of verbal expression, and which does not necessarily need to have a concrete referent. Mitchell sees the logical peak of the

18 *The Spectator*, no. 416, 27th June 1712 ("The Pleasures of Imagination VI," in: Elledge, ed., *Eighteenth Century Critical Essays*, quoted by Mitchell, p. 23, or Krieger, p. 99).

19 It is at hand to allude to the well known Lockean notion of rhetoric, its inferiority and misleading nature in the discourse of philosophy: "Eloquence, like the fair sex, has too prevailing beauties in it to suffer itself to be spoken against. And it is in vain to find fault with those arts of deceiving wherein men find pleasure to be deceived." John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book III, Chapter 10 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), Vol. II, p. 147.

20 It is almost common sense knowledge that the differentiation of symbol and allegory as two distinct tropes are the product of this age as well. Gadamer notes that presumably Winkelman used the two interchangeably. For further reference see: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinschüemer and D. G. Marshall (London: Sheed and Ward, 1993), pp. 63–65, and Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 187–229.

sublimation of image in the modernist concept of the “verbal icon,” (though he notes that there are some traits of Addison in this concept) the intellectual dynamism, which subordinates the image to the word.²¹

All in all, Mitchell, unlike Krieger’s structured taxonomy, tells a linear story of the gradual repression of the (after all unrepressible) pictorial “other” in the verbal arts which aims at establishing their superiority. In contrast, Krieger’s story points toward the gradual liberation of the verbal with an inserted backward step of empiricism, yet the liberated verbal arts do not dismiss the lesson learnt from the spatial arts, thus create their own spatial solidity to counterbalance the temporal flow of poetry, to, at its best, reverse the order of priorities and become a model for the spatial arts.

The importance of reviewing the historical development of representation in focus with the relationship of verbal and visual modes is that from this ground it is easier to examine the claimed status of the pictorial in the verbal arts in both thinkers’ theory. My aim with this comparison is to show how divergent the theories are in this respect of the work of art, therefore how impossible it is to have any theory which would get closer to control or understand this relationship. Furthermore, with the consideration of a third theoretical approach, primarily that of Gadamer’s hermeneutic approach to the question, I would like to draw attention to Mitchell’s idea, namely, that the poem’s literal visibility is its (*Zeichenbestand*) written materiality, its letters. Otherwise, it can become visible merely figuratively, that is, at its semantic level: descriptions, addresses etc. all come into existence or can be recognised, when the text is itself decoded, and they do not change the structure of the text. The semiotic processes, however, are determined by the text’s material dimension, therefore the picture plays the role of the ever recurring repressed other.

Concerning the three theorists, it is Mitchell who takes the notion of the image most literally. Mitchell claims that the interaction of pictures and texts is constitutive of representation as such: all media are mixed media, and all representations are heterogeneous.²² In his view “visual representations are already immanent in the words, in the fabric of description, narrative vision,

21 Pound’s poetic enterprise might give some place for doubts here, since although it is true that the verbal creation plays the leading role in his poetry, in the imagist phase of his career Pound wanted to model his poetry on cubist sculpture and painting. Furthermore, in his *Cantos* he consciously mixed Chinese ideograms as pictures into his poetry.

22 W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, p. 22.

represented objects and places, metaphor, formal arrangements and distinctions of textual functions, even in typography, paper, binding, or in the physical immediacy of voice and the speaker" (p. 99). Thus, he juxtaposes three different levels in conceiving what he means by the visual dimension of a text, namely, the semantic level of the verbal text, where the referent or the subject matter of the represented can be formed for the inner eyes; the figurative or tropological dimension of a text, in which the reference is ambiguous and the referential function is more 'openly suspended; and finally, the material aspect of the medium, the literally visible aspect of it. For Mitchell the verbal is stained by the visual, at every level, therefore the separation of the two in a supposed purification of the medium is impossible. Nevertheless, the relationship of word and picture is highly problematic, thus it is important to "ask what the function of specific forms of heterogeneity might be" (100).

Although image and text are intertwined in the texture of culture, this connection – in Mitchell's phrase the *imagetext* – is burdened with sutures. These sutures are subversive not only to the verbal representation, but also to the institutional meta-language that renders possible the superiority of the one over the other. In the spirit of the *paragone* the value attributed either to the word or to the image changed through different phases. Mitchell claims that the sutures of the *imagetext* undermine the possibility of such value judgements. As an example he evokes the prototype of ekphrasis, the shield of Achilles in the Iliad, and connects it to the relationship of narration and description. Narration is the temporal flow of the text as opposed to description, but it is not only that the pictorial element is a spatial extension that might threaten with freezing the temporality of discourse into the spatial, it can arrest the temporal flow as an ornament in such a way that the reader might get lost in the abundance and proliferation of descriptive details. It is fundamental that Mitchell sees the picture as a threat to the discourse, for the description thus, is which blocks the narrative so it can never proceed to its end. As an illustration Mitchell deals with the description of Achilles' shield and its relation to the whole Homeric text. The description of the shield is not only a utopian sight which forms a space in the narrative, but an ornamented frame around the narration, a frame or threshold across which the reader can enter into and withdraw from the text. Mitchell concludes that "ekphrastic ornament is a kind of foreign body within epic that threatens to reverse the natural literary priorities of time over space, narrative over description, and turn the sublimities of epic over to the flattering blandishments of epideictic rhetoric" (179).

In considering the trope of ekphrasis Mitchell differentiates between three "phases or moments": ekphrastic hope, fear and indifference. The first covers more or less the desire for the natural-sign image, the wish for the possibility of the verbal image to come true; the second involves a counter-desire, the fear of its possibility, and the third states the impossibility of the ekphrasis. This threefold differentiation bears importance in two respects: on the one hand, he wants to prove that the ambition of ekphrastic hope, that is, the possibility of the image to come into existence in front of our very eyes, is followed by the fear of the emergence of the image, since then, in the presence of the image, the poetic voice would be doomed to silence. On the other hand, he points to the fact that the realisation of ekphrasis is not possible. Obviously, the image cannot come into view literally, since then ekphrasis were applicable only to concrete poetry, therefore the encounter of image and text can be conceived as figurative. What follows from this is that ekphrasis is notional, the image can only be found within the text as its "resident alien"; the descriptive details come to existence (becoming) in the textual space with the figurative and tropological positing act. In other words the text figures forth any description or image. Therefore, the translation into a picture seen by the mind's eye is just as problematic as the translation of a painting into words.²³ Mitchell of course does not offer any solution how the image to be seen in the poem is created on the semiotic level, he talks only about why the semantically conceived picture/image is repressed, namely, poetry in its crave for superiority represses the image to the place of secondariness. Nevertheless, he rightly states that it is impossible to abandon the representational model, though one can give up insisting on the transparency of this representation or on the privileged or superior mode of representation in favour of the one over the other.

In Mitchell's view the problem of ekphrasis lies exactly in the fact that it aims at the overcoming of the otherness of the pictorial in the verbal representation. This goal is highly ideological in the sense that the qualities of "otherness" are also determined and designated by the leading discourse. This is structured on the familiar dialectic of self and other, which means in ekphrastic poetry that the properties attributed to the verbal will, in the final analysis, turn out to be the valuable, higher rank qualities as opposed to the pictorial; to cite Mitchell's attributes: the active, speaking self and the passive seen other. It is

23 Cf. Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976) He claims that no amount of description can add up to a depiction.

exactly why the image the poem is supposed to present for the mind's eye cannot come into existence, and why it is considered to be a threat to the poetic voice. Since, when the ekphrastic hope is realised, then poetic creation itself proves to be useless, a mere servant, in order to achieve what paintings are capable of anyway, that is, presenting an image; but what is more threatening is that the silent passive picture attains the attributes of speech and activity, and it is no longer the voice of the poet which is heard.

Let me now examine why Mitchell can claim that the repression of the pictorial in favour of the imagination surfaces in Romanticism. The theoretical background for the repression of the pictorial other is most transparent in the theory of Burke (and in the traces of his influence on the Romantic tradition and beyond). Burke claims that a thing first and foremost is affecting to the imagination because of its obscurity and not of its clarity. He dismisses pictorial representation as inferior, since it can raise only a clear idea of the object, therefore produces the same affect as the object could have raised in reality. In contrast, words can convey an "imperfect idea of such objects," but then it is in the power of the poet "to raise a *stronger* emotion by the description than I [the poet] could do by the best painting."²⁴ It is by means of words the poet can create the required affection or emotion due to their uncertainty, furthermore, such obscure ideas as infinity or eternity can only be raised by words, since they cannot be depicted directly. He concludes that "poetry with all its obscurity, has more general as well as more powerful dominion over the passions than the other art" (57). It is also obscurity and uncertainty which results in experiencing of the sublime. Words thus are conceived to be a better means for representation because they can have access, in an analogical way, to a realm beyond reality ("there are many things in nature, which can seldom occur in reality but the words, which represent them often do" 158.), which cannot be conceived from nature directly, nor can it be formed into a clear idea, so words can "affect the mind more than the sensible image d[oes]" (159). This faculty of the mind, the faculty of imagination, is expressible only through words. Imagination creates in the text / by words an obscure image which, nonetheless, cannot become sensible since then the required obscurity factor would disappear, and the representation would lose its sublimity.²⁵

24 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 55

25 At this point I find it important to note the connection of Burke, Kant and English Romanticism as such with respect to the imagination. Kant states that the imagination cannot turn into conceptual

Imagination is often contrasted with mental imaging, for instance Coleridge's distinction between symbol and allegory – the devaluation of allegory as a “mere picture language” in favour of the symbol – is symptomatic of this tendency.²⁶ An excellent example for the repudiation of pictorial representation in poetry surfaces in the twenty-second chapter of *Biographia Literaria*. Coleridge claims that the “poet should paint to the imagination, not to the fancy,”²⁷ and although he speaks about “poetic painting,” it should not be a picture that “a draughtsmen could present to the eye with incomparably greater satisfaction by half a dozen strokes of his pencil or a painter with as many touches of his brush.”²⁸ He calls it “a creation rather than a painting, or if painting, yet such, and with such co-presence of the whole picture flash'd at once upon the eye, as the sun paints in a camera obscura.”²⁹ The creation of such a whole depends entirely on the verbal expression, which, thus, proves to be of higher value than the plastic arts, since they do not possess the ability to create for the imagination, neither do they “excite vision by sound.” There is a latent distrust in pictures, as there was in the eighteenth century, but the stakes are greater than resisting the alluring power of (feminine) pictures.

To cite another example for the stress on the verbal, Wordsworth in his *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*³⁰ often uses phrases which put emphasis on the verbal nature of poetry and its power of expression in a tone reminiscent of

knowledge, since both the beautiful and the sublime are beyond the conceptual. What the imagination figures forth is the idea for which there are no adequate outer images, it can be shown only by ways of analogy. The ideas are images produced a priori by reason, they are intuitive representations. Kant calls these ideas *archetypous* (ur-images), which in the *Critique of Judgement* are equalled to the aesthetic idea and the unity of thought. This idea the representation of the imagination, which is not accessible to the concepts of reason or understanding, manifests itself in poetry. Poetry can allow us to see nature as a phenomenon by sights (*Ansichten*) which nature does not offer either for the senses or for the intellect, but these sights can be used as the *schemata* of the supersensible (paragraph 59). Cf. Zoltán Papp, “Ästhetisch wohnet der Mensch,” *Gond*, 15–16, especially pp. 43–52; and Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), pp. 221–225.

26 See footnote 20, and for further reference see Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, pp. 114–116.

27 S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Shawcross (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), Vol. II, p. 102.

28 Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Vol. II, p. 102.

29 Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, p. 103. It might bear some interest that the reference to sun and light can evoke their transcendental referents as God's *lux* in its medieval sense.

30 *Romantic Poetry and Prose*, ed. Harold Bloom and Lionel Trilling. (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 592–610.

Burke. (Though for an extent of a sentence Wordsworth affirms the sister art tradition of poetry and painting, p. 600.) First of all poetry should be brought as close as possible to “the language of men”; a poet is a “man speaking to men” (600–601). This language is such that it is the “breath and finer spirit of all knowledge” (604), and its object is “the great and universal passions of men” (606); poetry, as Wordsworth puts it, should produce “excitement in co-existence with an overbalance of pleasure” (607), the excitement is due to the power of words, whereas the pleasure derives from the regulating meter, which does not let lose the dangers of words, that is, “that the excitement may be carried beyond its bounds” (607). The stress falls, on the one hand, on a mode of representation, which depicts notions not to be found in the outer world or in nature directly; (nature is used here as an entity from which the poet is at liberty to supply himself “with endless combinations of forms and imagery” (606) in order to evoke the unrepresentable), and on the other hand, on the affections and passion this representation brings forth. Similarly, according to Shelley, the power of poetry and poets is such that they “draw into a certain propinquity with the beautiful and the true, that partial apprehension of the agencies of the *invisible world* which is called religion” (748)³¹ (my emphasis).

What is at stake in representation is, then, not only the alluring power of ornamental pictures opposed to the truthful knowledge deriving from clear representational modes,³² but that pictorial representation can unravel the epistemological claims of poetry. The access to a mode of knowledge, which is beyond what can be assessed from sensorial experience, is the function of words. To be precise, it is poetic language, which can attain this power. The inner images the imagination causes can never become real or re-presentable pictures, they

31 In the *Defence of Poetry* also the ethical and socio-political interest vested in poetry surfaces fairly transparently, he claims that poets are “the institutors of laws, and the founders of civil society” (748) which he connects with the invention of life and art, moreover he states the “poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world” (762), thus claiming the highest place for poetry in society. Also it should be noted that religion here cannot be the institution of Shelley’s age, since he was infamous of his hatred for the church.

32 The irony in the attempt to clear modes of representation of course is apparent in the fact that they could not get rid of the use of (ornamental) tropes in philosophical discourse, since language is thoroughly saturated with figures and tropes. For further reference see: Paul de Man “The Epistemology of Metaphor,” *Aesthetic Ideology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) and Jacques Derrida, “White Mythology,” *The Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). Both thinkers consider tropes to be the very basis of language.

cannot stand forth as pictures, because then the dynamism and the obscurity, which guarantee invisibility and passion, is irrecoverably lost. The aimed translation of the invisible, of the ideas of imagination into phenomenal entities produced by verbal signification, result in the disarticulation of the images of the imagination and their manifestation, since by definition the phenomenal representation can only approach, but never reach its "object"; in the correspondence the object or subject matter would lose its transcendental nature. What Mitchell so well observes is that the poetic voice cannot be winded up by the closure of the text into meaning or univocal referent, that is, to freeze into a picture, because then it threatens with silencing the poetic voice. To put it differently, the poetic voice cannot be brought to a halt, for its dynamism and suggestiveness is the repository of the existence of the unreachable beyond, or the mind's capacity to know about this beyond by ways of analogy. But for Mitchell the repression of the seen other is a social repression; or better to say the relationship of the object represented, the artist and the reader in ekphrastic poetry "provides a schematic metapicture of ekphrasis as a social practice."³³

Leaving Mitchell's social criticism, the pictorial cannot be repressed if for no other reason then because one cannot forget the visibility of written characters. Texts of the Romantic authors often refer to the fact, that even writing, or rather, the printed book, was seen as a supplementary device, a mere instrument in the service of the poetic voice. The above-mentioned example of Wordsworth shows that the stress was on "the voice" and not on writing; or in "The Tables Turned," he is openly against books: "Up! up! my Fiend, and quit your books / [...] Books! 'tis a dull and endless strife."³⁴ In this respect even the chapter entitled "Books" in *The Prelude* is not a real exception: the inspired dream of the Arab comes only after he has "closed the book"; furthermore, the *song* – as the song of the shell-book ("a loud prophetic blast of harmony") – bears more importance from the aspect of poetic creativity. No wonder he also calls books "Poor earthly casket of immortal verse."³⁵

33 W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 165. It means that the represented object's or subject's relation is conceived by Mitchell as representing the always already repressed, whatever difference of the object of the representation should be (women, children, black people), since ekphrastic poetry takes the other of its object (it is not a self-representation, not only because then it would re-describe a painting of the writing self, but because the mental image of the representing artist of itself is a construct).

34 William Wordsworth, *Selected Poems* (Reading: Penguin Books, 1969), pp. 201–202.

35 William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, ed. J. C. Maxwell. (London: Penguin Books), pp. 173–177 (Book 5, lines 64–65, 90–95, 164–65, respectively).

Similarly, Coleridge expresses his dissatisfaction about the increasing number of books and the deterioration of their value: "in times of old, books were as religious oracles [...] and at present moment they seem degraded into culprits to hold up their hands at the bar of every self-elected [...] judge, who chuses to write from humour or interest."³⁶ He calls books a "sort of mental *camera obscura* manufactured at the printing office, which *pro tempore* fixes, reflects, and transmits the moving phantasms of one man's delirium."³⁷ The fixity of the printed, material letters of books threaten to dissolve the power of invisible sounds, the proper mode of the poetic genius' expression and its sublimity.³⁸ Yet, there is an ambiguous attitude to writing in Romanticism, since all their contempt towards the printed word was distributed in printed books, these writers hoped to be widely read. Moreover, counter-examples also appear: Keats expresses fear about not to be able to transmit his mind's fruit before he dies, but the means of transmission are books, and the type: "Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain, / before high-piled books, in charactery, / hold..."³⁹ But there is more to it, the visible material dimension of language does not disappear in the temporality of reading: at its most reading oscillates between looking at and looking through the text,⁴⁰ but the text, the types does not disappear to give place to the meaning, to the mental pictures, let them be whatever ideological nature, the clear ideas of eighteenth century or the obscure verbal dynamism of Romanticism.

Krieger finds the romantic move toward the creative, emblematic powers attributed to poetic language tied to the discipline of general aesthetics.⁴¹ He seeks to establish ekphrasis to get beyond the function of a mere trope so that it can be characterised as a subject for theoretical placement, hence the expression of ekphrastic principle. This principle shows the ambition of the poetic work to have it both ways: to establish the spatial solidity of the plastic arts, that is, a certain mode of being within the temporal and shifting world of verbal becoming. The most obvious way to achieve this is of course to find a visual object to

36 Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter III, p. 41.

37 Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter III, p. 34.

38 For a somewhat more elaborate treatment of the politics of Romantic writing and Blake's resistance to the underrating or devaluation of the materiality of writing see. W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, pp. 111–150.

39 John Keats, "When I have Fears," *Romantic Poetry and Prose*, p. 503.

40 Cf. D. J. Bolter, "Ekphrasis, Virtual reality and the Future of Writing," *The Future of the Book*, ed. G. Nunberg (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1996), pp. 264–66.

41 Cf. Krieger, p. 145

describe, and hope that verbal representation, in turn, can attain the spatial fixity and solidity of its object of imitation, and which thus "can be appealed to as a constant, unlike our varying perceptual experiences of objects in the world."⁴² This way the poem would establish a balance between the flux and temporal disjunction of the verbal and the spatial simultaneity of the visual.

Interestingly, Lessing was one of the theorist strongly against such a view: with insisting on representational purity, he also claims that the two distinct modes should remain within their proper spheres, since they can never be able to overcome the differences. The verbal would irrecoverably remain temporal and thus unable to create the simultaneous unity a painting is capable of. He says that "which the eye takes in at a single glance he counts out us with perceptible slowness, and it often happens that when we arrive at the end of his description we have already forgotten the first features."⁴³ The conception of the whole remains questionable, since "the imagination must be able to survey them [the details of a description] all with the same rapidity in order to construct them in one moment that which can be seen in one moment in nature."⁴⁴ Lessing is utterly sceptical about the feasibility of such representation (or reading process), he denies the "power of depicting corporeality to language" since its illusion, namely, "the coexistent nature of a body" comes into conflict with the "consecutive nature of language" and the "final reassembling of the parts into a whole is made extremely difficult and often even impossible."⁴⁵

Krieger, in contrast, finds this theoretically possible, but at a higher level than a mere natural-sign, or spatial representation. He differentiates between two doubleness in language as the medium of the work of art. The one is the already mentioned conflict between the attraction to ekphrasis as the semiotic desire for the natural-sign and the aversion of it as the deprivation of the flow of imagination in its arbitrary signs. The other doubleness he observes, is that "language in poems can be viewed as functioning transparently, sacrificing its own being for its referent; and it can be viewed as functioning sensuously, insisting upon its own irreducible there-ness."⁴⁶ He claims that these oppositions form the

42 Krieger, p. 8.

43 Lessing, p. 86.

44 Lessing, p. 87.

45 Lessing, p. 88.

46 Krieger, p. 11. It is important to note that the there-ness of the poem Krieger equates with the verbal emblem, which, in my opinion, is heavily loaded with Poundian imagist concepts. Taken in

ekphrastic principle of poetry, in which the poetic is aware of its own delusion of recovering the “immediacy of sightless vision built into our habit of perceptual desire,” that is, it knows about its incapacity, “the incapacity of words to come together at an instant, at a single stroke of sensuous immediacy, as if in an unmediated impact.”⁴⁷ Nonetheless, he attempts to bring these opposition into a happy synthesis of mutual supply on an abstract, theoretical level. The paradoxical character of ekphrasis will serve then as its advantage, and I believe that it is worth quoting Krieger in full:

I believe that as the Western imagination has seized upon and used the ekphrastic principle, it has sought – through the two-sidedness of language as a medium of the verbal arts – to comprehend the simultaneity, in the verbal figure, of fixity and flow, of an image at once grasped and yet slipping away through the crevices of language. This sense of simultaneity is sponsored by our capacity to respond to the verbal image as at once limitedly referential and mysteriously self-substantial. (11)

The ekphrastic principle realises itself fully in the modernist development to the concept of the verbal emblem, in which the verbal and the visual interact. Krieger claims that the visual object of representation is lost in the translation, but “gradually the verbal representation, no longer leaning on another, extratextual, tangible representation, takes on the power of free-standing entity” (16). The motivation in poetic representation can be conceived as the dialectic between these two stands, the strife for presenting or overcoming the pictorial. This, in the final analysis, renders a picturable poetic principle, which establishes itself in the dialectic of the temporal, arbitrary and the spatial, natural. It is a poetic “which presses for a verbal play that acknowledges the incompatibility of time and space, while collapsing them *into the illusion of an object* marked by its own sensible absence” (28). The recuperative gesture of poetic creation emerges from the verbal, which “creates itself as its own object,” thus, repressing the pictorial forever in favour of the verbal. Krieger saves his principle at the cost of the one side of his dialectic which brings the whole dialectic into motion. In Krieger’s theory the picture will not be a potential threat as it is in Mitchell’s, it can never gain the fearful ability of activeness, since it remains in the control of the verbal expression.

the Poundian sense the there-ness of the poem is an ideality, an abstraction which points at the represented and at itself at the same time.

47 Krieger, p. 10.

Gadamer's theory might seem a bit far-fetched to bring into connection of ekphrasis; it obviously does not relate to such a trope directly. But since he produced texts on pictorial representation, moreover he wrote a text entitled "Bildkunst und Wortkunst," in which some of the above mentioned ideas recur, it might be worth paying attention to him.⁴⁸ First of all, Gadamer's starting point is, not unlike Krieger's, that art belongs to a privileged mode of representation, which is differentiated from the everyday by its power of being beyond the historicity and by its truth measure. Since it has no use-value it cannot be exhausted by the passing of time, but remains valid by spanning periods. In Gadamer's notion the beauty of the artwork (whether the transitory temporality of literary text or the atemporal picture)⁴⁹ lies in its ability to show itself openly (276), yet this moment involves a special mode of time: it involves a special mode of temporality, and not to get stuck in the presence of the work. This moment is the moment of *Verweilen* [whiling, lingering, tarrying] at the artwork in the process of reading. The reading process articulates the inherence of the artwork, in which the discordant things come into harmony, though their differences are not effaced, they keep their mutability. This mode of harmony is to be found only in art, in which its validity discloses itself.

The preservation of the possibility of change is rendered conceivable by Gadamer's claim that the mode of being of the artwork is a permanent becoming and/or execution [*Vollzug*]. It is when the object of the representation fulfils itself with penetrating into and overwhelming the reader (dissolving the distance of the work and its reader). The temporality of *Vollzug* makes itself exact in the time structure of reading.⁵⁰ Reading, or rather the correct way of reading, in Gadamer's view is interpretation, which is the constant co-speaking [*Mit-rede*] with the artwork. The process of interpretation cannot dissolve with the meaning of the work, it is which produces the meaning, yet cannot be terminated or brought to a halt. This is a circular structure (a whiling at the text) which brings about the simultaneity of the artworks' structure in which they "come back into

48 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Bildkunst und Wortkunst," in: *Was ist ein Bild?* ed. Gottfried Boehm (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1994) and "Wort und Bild - «so wahr, so seiend»,[»] *Gesammelte Werke 8. Ästhetik und Poetik* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), pp. 373-400.

49 See Gadamer, "Bildkunst und Wortkunst," p. 100: "Der Zeitunabhängige Bestand des Bildes und der transhistorische Zeitfluss des textes bzw. besitzen eine Gemeinsamkeit, die im *Vollzug* besteht."

50 Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Bildkunst und Wortkunst," p. 100.

themselves.”⁵¹ The artwork, or the literary text, are works “in the highest degree”: as Gadamer states about the literary text, it “in its own right prescribes all repetitions and acts of speaking,” the poetic text “is something that seems to originate in itself.”⁵² Therefore the artwork becomes self-presenting, that renders the unity of the *Gebilde* [shaped form or structure] (also due to the harmony of its parts). The *Gebilde* is the unity of the work of art in which “something has developed *into its own pattern from within* and thus is perhaps to be grasped in further formations” (my emphasis).⁵³ With respect to interpretation Gadamer does not make any distinction between the verbal and the plastic arts: both are artworks thus both need to be read and interpreted, thus implying the hierarchy of the two media. The interpretation reproduces the original work (which is distinguished from the intention of the speaker) and allows it to appear in its own light. But Gadamer notes that “one draws false conclusion if one thinks one can understand such presence with the language of metaphysics as presence at hand [*des Vorhandenen*], or with the concept of objectifiability.”⁵⁴

Nonetheless, the circularity of the process of interpretation and the thus the self-presentation of the work is a curious one: on the one hand, it is like the recitation of a fully skilled artist, which “will render the linguistic gestalt fully present,” it is not “a mere series of pieces of discourse; rather it must be a whole, which stands in itself.”⁵⁵ The meaning of the work thus shines forth,⁵⁶ renders itself visible, as its truth.⁵⁷ In the “blow-like suddenness of understanding, as the disordered fragments of the sentence, the words, suddenly crystallize into the unity of meaning of the whole [...] in which the unity of the whole formulation is illuminated.”⁵⁸ The unity of the artwork Gadamer refers to is seemingly

51 Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Text and Interpretation,” *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, ed. Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 41.

52 Gadamer, “Text and Interpretation,” p. 42.

53 Gadamer, “Text and Interpretation,” p. 49.

54 Gadamer, “Text and Interpretation,” p. 47.

55 Gadamer, “Text and Interpretation,” p. 47.

56 Gadamer uses Plato’s *Ekphainstaton* at this place, which he translates as *Herausscheinenden* (“Bildkunst und Wortkunst,” p. 100).

57 Gadamer, “Bildkunst und Wortkunst,” p. 100.

58 Gadamer, “Text and Interpretation,” p. 48.

possesses a curious visibility, a picture-like quality, the place probably that of the beautiful in which the idea (or eidolon) appears.⁵⁹

On the other hand, it possesses dynamism, it cannot be reduced to the state of mere objecthood, its sense is carried in its *Vollzug* [becoming; execution]. Gadamer connects this process to the Aristotelian term of *energeia* and *dynamis*. The work although becomes a *Gebilde*, it does not mean the stopping of the interpretative process, the whiling at the text, but have both simultaneously. The meaning of the artwork shines forth from within, in its own light, by its own in the simultaneity of the whiling at it, but due to the dynamism of this whiling, it does not mean that that the process can ever be brought to a halt.⁶⁰ Yet, the notion of *energeia* carries the connotations of embodiment, shining and making visible. It comes into being with the reading process, that is, the meaning (or rather the *Gebilde*) of the text. If it is considered to be an ekphrastic object, as Mörike's antique lamp in "Text and Interpretation" can be, then Gadamer's idea of reading is riveting around the problems of the ekphrastic poem. Namely, that the object of the poem is brought into existence by the text itself and it does not pre-exist before the depiction, moreover that the circularity of the described object might impose its structure on the structure of the artwork. Though Gadamer is strongly against the latter view.

Gadamer's ideas are rather reminiscent of Krieger's less philosophical approach to the ekphrastic principle, which would preserve both the dynamism and the spatiality in its ideality. (Krieger identifies circularity as one of the most basic structure of ekphrasis [the *ouroboros*], and interestingly to prove this refers to the very same interpretation of Mörike's "The Lamp" by Leo Spitzer as Gadamer). The image produced in both cases remains captive in the verbal, which produces it and renders its dynamism, its flow. It is verballity which can thus preserve its superiority over the pictorial other, and which can mediate the image "seen" or rather suggested between the becoming of an image and the verbal temporality. The only thing the understanding of the text leaves behind is its linguistic appearance, but not the text itself.⁶¹ Gadamer considers the *Zeichenbestand* [signs and writing] of the artwork mere *Äusserlichkeit* [externals],

59 Hegel claims that the beautiful is the appearance of the idea and that the sublime is the absolute beautiful. Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, trans. B. Bosanquet (London: Penguin Books, 1993).

60 See Gadamer, "Bildkunst und Wortkunst," pp. 102–103.

61 Gadamer, "Text and Interpretation," p. 49.

which are not sensible elements (like motifs, images) its structure is built up of. The letters, words and sentences, that is, the signs and writing of the artwork, is an unavoidable and necessary burden on imagination. Yet, it is a rather disrupting one: it can produce the uncontrollability of representation, the impossibility of taming its excess, the way they take on a life of their own that escapes and defies the will to determine meaning.

In both Krieger's and Gadamer's approach the free-play of imagination is bound to the flow of verbality. The circularity is constitutive of the reading process and the object thus formed, just like in Krieger's ekphrastic principle. As a result of this circular movement of interpretation, in Gadamer's view, the artwork becomes active: it shines forth its sense, yet the shining is not the appearance of the object represented in an objectified state (the lamp if we consider Mörrike's poem), but its appearance is the depository of speech, of the dialogical process between the reader and the object. Due to this dialogue the work begins to speak for itself. The image that would stand forth cannot become a real image, a pictorial one, since the constant co-speaking of the dialogical interpretation cannot dissolve speech. No wonder the shining or appearance of the work turns out to be a kind of speaking in the end,⁶² speech cannot be stopped even if it is related to the interpretation of the plastic arts. The instability of the painting is not due to the questions of representational unreliability in the plastic arts (as Mitchell claims), but to the interpretative process. The free-play of imagination cannot allow the picture to stand in front of us, since then, it might result in the silencing of the active speaking voice, let it be the poetical, the object's or the object producing dialogue. Corollary, the fixed object as such would lose its timelessness and eternal validity. The shining of the work, that is, the light of understanding, might turn out, in the final analysis, to be dependent on the late medieval metaphysical sense of light: the divine *lux* (and not the perceived *lumen*). It is God's word, the logos, which first creates light, thus making the depository of shining the word (speech) in the first place. The work of art could, then, with full right claim the metaphysical values of timelessness, lasting validity and the appearance of its truth. Gadamer, seemingly with full right, obliterates the word-play of "es scheint" ["it shines" and "it seems"], since the "larger context" determines that we are dealing with a work of art, so it can only shine in the realm of the aesthetic, not prosaically seem (in the illusory appearances of reality),

62 Cf. Gadamer, "Text and Interpretation," p. 51: "The interpreter, who gives his reasons, disappears – and the text speaks."

yet he remains within the *circulus vitiosus* of his own claim, his decision in favour of shine is made on the presumption that he deals with a work of art. This curious shining of the art might, then, actually blinds us, and the appearance of the idea can never be made perceivable.

Mitchell seems to be right in arguing that the repression of the image is constitutive of the recuperation of the imagination. With analysing Shelley's "Medusa"⁶³ he stages the dangers of the graphic other of the word that remains inaccessible and beyond control. At this place although I build upon Mitchell's idea, I will provide a somewhat different analysis of Shelley's poem. The dangers of the other's activeness, if Gadamer's idea of the speaking work is considered and seen from Mitchell's point of view, is that it might get out of control, so much so that its beauty freezes the reader/writer.

The poem enumerates the marks of the Burkean sublime related to the impressions from the observation of Medusa: the "flares and light" it projects on the "midnight sky" is a "dread," not only "obscurity," and its beauty arouse the feeling of "terror" (its "horror" and its "beauty" are "divine"). But the terror is not only due to its "beauty" or "tempestuous loveliness" or "grace" to mention a few epithets Shelley uses, but to the active gazing back of the serpents to the viewer, and as Mitchell observes, the active gaze of Medusa: "it lieth gazing." The "gleaming" "glare" of the serpents is paralleled with the "fiery" and "lurid" shine emanating from the Medusa face: both stir anguish and fear, as it should be raised by the sublime. The shining of the beauty is mingled with the feeling of terror, unlike the shining beauty of Gadamer's work of art which shows or speaks for itself. The terror of the Medusa is not only due to the oxymoron of "hideous" "beauty," neither to the activity of its (and the myriads of serpents) looking (or talking as the ambiguity of "lieth" implies) back, but the possibility that this active gazing "transforms" its observer: if the process of reading is fulfilled and the Gebilde of the poem can shine forth then the prophecy of the poem comes also true and in the presence of the active gazing head the observer becomes frozen, since it "turns the gazer's spirit into stone." In the act of naïv identification or the moment when the reader/observer is overwhelmed, the dead Medusa freezes its observer into death, his/her "spirit into stone." This stone-like spirit then becomes like the stone used for the material of the plastic arts: it is not the place from which the understanding of the poem emanates when the whole poem is "learnt by heart and live written in the soul on the way to

63 "On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery."

scriptuality,"⁶⁴ but the place of inscription, into which the lineaments or features of the Medusa's face are inscribed. From the moment on this inscription occurs the observing reader has no control over what is inscribed, since it is something that "thought no more can trace." If the harmonisation of the parts can occur this way then it is very unlikely to produce the melody (or harmony) Gadamer talks about.

The realisation of the picture is dependent on the reading of the poem, on the interpreter, the seemingly dead and mutilated Medusa seems to bear life in the reading act, which endows it with the active gaze. The activity of the Medusa is entirely dependent on the reader's reception. Yet, the feeling of threat does not disappear: it stages the problem that the moment the picture stands forth the observer loses its activity in its presence. The active speaking and glaring of Medusa deadens all other activities. Thus the implied threat that the whole picture might turn into an enormous site of gaze: the "ever shifting mirrors" formed from the "vapours of the air" do not function as the mirror of the observer, neither do they seem to mediate the site as Mitchell claims, but "kindle" the "brazen glare" of the sneaks and of the Medusa head and corollary, its beauty and terror. The picture in the end would be an immense site of gazing eyes, which at the same time emanate light and shine enhanced by the mirroring vapours, thus blinding any observer in the process of realisation.

For the impossibility of realising the "pictorial other" a supposedly descriptive part "A Game of Chess" from Eliot's *Waste Land* can serve as a good example. As Lentricchia argues, "In the *Waste Land*, Eliot, a man of his aesthetic times, created a kind of painting in five panels, which must be grasped by the mind's eye all at once, as a spatial form, taken in as if the poem were a single complex image, not a work to be read through time, from beginning to end but to a work to be 'seen' in a glance."⁶⁵ Yet, this construction is curious since the real referents are only previous texts or myths. The juxtaposition of many perspectives at once is supposed to insert a spatial dimension into the temporal flow of narration and therefore to create instantaneity or simultaneity, and to freeze the temporal into the spatial. If successful the "meaning," that is, the picture seen by the 'inner eye' stills the movement and becomes static as opposed to the dynamic and active voice. However, Eliot presumably does not want to freeze his poetry into the state of an icon, his poem is so overtly

64 Gadamer, "Text and Interpretation," p. 42

65 F. Lentricchia, *Modernist Quartets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 275.

overloaded with different images the prevalent allusions create that it is hardly possible to stop their whirlpool.

The first part of "A Game of Chess" begins with a close paraphrase from Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. If one follows Eliot's notes it is easy to notice that the whole section is framed by Shakespearean texts as it closes with the last words of Ophelia. The opening picture of this section give hints of an affluent setting, but these are misleading about the time period we are supposed to imagine. Also the presence of candle light or the massive gold ceiling suggest earlier periods whereas "closed car" and "Shakespearean Rag" appearing in the last lines of this part might refer to a later period, early 20th century, though it does not suspend the ambiguity. The description of the first 110 lines present the interior but leaves out any description of the woman the room belongs to: she is present in her absence. There is no information about her, only the setting and later her diction suggest indirectly her social class. Some pieces of the furniture ("a chair she sat in"; mirror and reflection, perfumes) and the last lines "under the brush her hair / spread out in fiery points" give hints that probably she is seated in front of a dressing table brushing her hair. But we do not know anything about her appearance or age, the woman directs the passage in her bodily absence, but with the presence of her voice for which there is no "audible" answer (only her lines are in quotation marks).

The description of the room has no unified focal point, the elements of the description follow the intertexts intertwined in the texture of the poem, and this makes extremely difficult for the reader-interpreter to imagine the actual setting. Description, according to Mieke Bal, in reality, is closer to de-description, that is, to un-writing, with which she claims that any description falsifies its object rather than presents it. But here the question is not only the falsity of description, since in Eliot's poem the impossibility of description is due to the intricate allusive system it applies. (Enobarbus's description of Cleopatra also states the impossibility of depicting, he says that "it beggar'd all description"). The first 110 lines are incorporating different sources: after the Shakespearean intertext, the *Aeneid* takes over, the description of Dido's banquet, and then we find a few lines from Philomel's story, Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. Even the intertexts overlap: Cleopatra invites Anthony for dinner, Dido gives a banquet, Philomel and her sister Procne make a feast for Tereus and serve his son Itys for him as a revenge.

Following the "description" one even finds that on the thematic level it is rather the disruption and the distraction of the senses: light, gold and the glitter of

jewels are doubled and reflected by the glass and the marble, all the light emanating from the different objects “meet” in the reflection, blinding any observant eye (especially “lidless eyes,” or eyes which are pearls now⁶⁶) thus thwarting seeing and traditional description. From the 86th line on, smell takes over resulting not only the confusion of the senses, but the intellect as well: “And drowned the sense in odors.” The Ovidian intertext, represented as a depiction of a painting, functions as a window, mocking the claimed transparency of artworks by the actual re-writing of a verbal passage. The picture of Philomel points to another picture, to the tapestry, to a mute textile into which she wove her story. Pictures just like signs in this poem point to ever newer signs: “other withered stumps of time / were told upon the walls.” But very interestingly, these signs gaze actively and their gaze silence the “talking image-texts” which form the room’s description: “staring forms / leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed.” Eliot’s idea of the objective correlative,⁶⁷ according to which objects or external facts must terminate in sensory experience and evoke the required emotion, does not seem to reach its aim, it does not terminate in sensory experience, but in the blindness of reading and recalling other texts. The eyes that became pearls might be objects and impersonal as opposed to the private and personal eye, but with them the possibility for private seeing is lost, for if the image turns into a pearl (the pearls of literature?) there is little chance to gain its original back. The set of objects are not objects but words which has to do more with their sources (with previous texts) than with the existing objects of a description or the probably evoked referent. Although the whirlpool of thoughts and images might be reached in this case, it is possible only at the price of concreteness.

66 It is another allusion to Shakespeare, namely to Ariel’s song from the *Tempest*: “Those are pearls that were his eyes” (Act I, scene ii).

67 “The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an ‘objective correlative’; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked” (T. S. Eliot, “Hamlet,” *Selected Essays* [London: Faber and Faber, 1958], p 145).