How to Do More with Words. Two Views of (Musical) Ekphrasis

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This essay is about ekphrasis and the possibility of musical ekphrasis in particular. It shows how ekphrasis came to be bound up with the contest of the arts. By juxtaposing an ancient, description-based view of ekphrasis with a modern work-to-work view, we are led to see the many productive ways in which ekphrasis has engaged the arts, including music, without assuming hard and fast distinctions of medium between the different arts.

Introduction

This essay is about ekphrasis and the possibility of musical ekphrasis in particular. Commonly conceived, ekphrasis produces images for the mind's eye by means of words whereas music communicates by neither word nor image. Hence, music and ekphrasis do not naturally join hands. To join them, one must either discard their common conceptions or, much better, revise and expand them.

One way in which music and ekphrasis join hands is when a piece of descriptive speech or writing brings an image or scene of music before the imagination (the 'mind's eye'). Here, attention is paid to the musical subject matter or point of the text or to the rhythm and tunefulness of its delivery. This way, the less familiar of the two ways I consider in this essay, accords with an ancient view of ekphrasis drawn from Roman theories of rhetoric and associated practices of oratory. It persuades us to expand our concept of music beyond its modern medium restriction to the pure art of tone to accommodate music's principles, practices, persons, and instruments. From Philostratus the Elder to Thomas Mann, and far beyond, examples of this verbal musical ekphrasis are numerous and wide ranging.

Another way in which music and ekphrasis join hands is through a *work-to-work* relation, when, say, a musical work re-presents a poem, painting, or sculpture. This much more familiar way gives priority to music conceived of in terms of its works and its tonal (wordless and imageless) medium. It accords with a modern view of things captured by what Oscar Paul Kristeller termed 'the modern system of the arts'. It persuades us to count more artworks than verbal ones as ekphrastic by challenging the assumption that ekphrasis is performed only through the medium of words. Examples are equally in abundance, from Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* to Gunther Schuller's *Seven Studies on Themes of Paul Klee*.

The present essay juxtaposes the two views of musical ekphrasis, which, for convenience, I refer to as the ancient and the modern. Their juxtaposition shows what is at stake in awarding or denying to music an ekphrastic capability. It turns out, however, that on

neither view is there anything unique about music when it comes to ekphrasis, despite any medium specificity or ontological difference music has as an art. This means that to investigate 'musical ekphrasis', one needs to investigate how ekphrasis became attached not only to music but to *all* and, indeed, to *any* of the arts. This attachment is not so obvious, since, before it became attached rather too exclusively to the 'arts', ekphrasis was part of a much broader range of political, legal, and pedagogical exercises.

Overall, my aim is to reintroduce aspects of the ancient view into the modern view in order to expand the scope and interpretative possibilities of 'musical ekphrasis'. I do this to throw down a double gauntlet: to the theorists of ekphrasis who overly devote their attention to questions of medium and workhood, and to those who persist in treating music as standing apart from the other arts.

Agony and Agon

From Antiquity on, countless musical examples have entered philosophical arguments and works of art, especially when those arguments or artworks have staged contests. These examples reveal a concept of music as embracing more than music's *medium* of 'tonally moving forms'. The expansion of music's concept beyond both its medium and its works, which is to say also beyond what is heard by the ear, allows us to think about music as a performance art for sight, touch, and even perhaps for taste, as when, in brutal moments that are sadly too common, one laps up the blood that flows from the body of he who has been flayed. I draw my image here from Titian's famed painting in which a dog laps up the blood of Marsyas who hangs upside down from a tree. Hanging upside down has a certain irony given that 'upside down' is the common, though not easily intelligible, description used to explain how Apollo won his contest with Marsyas. Whereas Apollo could play his kithara upside down, Marsyas could not play his aulos.[1]

Expanding music beyond the modern formalist commitment to 'tonally moving forms' is to take a stand against both a restrictive formalism and a censorious brutality, but not against form. To take a stand is what those who have employed the ekphrastic technique have sometimes done very well when they have wanted to turn matters upside down or, better perhaps, inside out, by playing with the two tensions that make up the four strings of the ekphrastic lyre: between seeing and hearing, presence and absence.

An Example

The following description written by Philostratus the Younger (the grandson of the Elder) counts as an example of *musical ekphrasis* even though it is performed in words. The melody and rhythm of its poetic prose takes on music and musicality as its subject matter. The

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1   The present essay is motivated by my current book project which investigates the place of music in the age-old contest of the arts. The book focuses on one of the earliest contests staged, between Apollo and Marsyas. In the book, I make much of the fact that what is ostensibly a *musical* contest was taken up over the centuries remarkably rarely by the art of music yet very often by painting, sculpture, poetry, and philosophy.

description, about Apollo and Marsyas, offers us a scene *as if* it had already been presented before—as a painting—and *as if* it were being viewed by the writer at the very moment of its being written. To bring the past into the immediacy of the present is how the writer passes on the image to his readers as though they were looking at the painting too. The temporality of the ekphrastic description is further underscored given the decision to depict the scene that follows the crime committed, leaving the scene of the crime to be imagined in the light of the punishment that follows. In the translation I replace the word 'flute' by 'pipe' and italicize those moments that explicitly bring attention to the act of *looking*. For the aim of this ekphrasis is to show and indeed celebrate all that we can *see* by *listening*.

> The Phrygian [Marsyas] has been overcome; at any rate his glance is that of a man already perished, since he knows what he is to suffer, and he realizes that he has played the pipe for the last time, inasmuch as inopportunely he acted with effrontery toward the son of Leto [Apollo]. His pipe has been thrown away, condemned never to be played again, since just now it has been convicted of playing out of tune. And he stands near the pine tree from which he knows he will be suspended, he himself having named this penalty for himself—to be skinned for a wine-bottle. He glances furtively at the barbarian yonder who is whetting the edge of the knife to be applied to him; *for you see, I am sure*, that the man's hands are on the whetstone and the iron, but that he looks up at Marsyas with glaring eyes, his wild and squalid hair all bristling. The red on his cheek betokens, I think, a man thirsty for blood, and his eyebrow overhangs the eye, all contracted as it faces the light and giving a certain stamp to his anger; nay, he grins, too, a savage grin in anticipation of what he is about to do—I am not sure whether because he is glad or because his mind swells in pride as he looks forward to the slaughter. But Apollo *is painted* as resting upon a rock; the lyre which lies on his left arm is still being struck by his left hand in gentle fashion, as though playing a tune. *You see* the relaxed form of the god and the smile lighting up his face; his right hand rests on his lap, gently grasping the plectrum, relaxed because of his joy in the victory. *Here also* is the river which is to change its name to that of Marsyas. *And look, please*, at the band of Satyrs, how they are represented as bewailing Marsyas, but as displaying, along with their grief, their playful spirit and their disposition to leap about.[2]

The description tells us what we can see with corporeal vision but also what we can see beyond, of the mood of the figures involved. It speculates about mood to remind us that, however convincing a melody might be, if it contravenes the divine laws of harmony, its player will be punished. Yet, though we are told that Apollo is satisfied with his musical-moral victory, we are told also that, once they have mourned for Marsyas, his brother satyrs will take his music over as their own.

   Descriptions such as these, as ekphrasis in general, may be read as part of a history of iconoclasm, censorship, contest, and punishment. Endorsing the Apollonian principle of harmony—and thus appearing as compliant with Apollo's verdict—the descriptions may

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2   Philostratus the Younger, *Imagines*, with Philostratus the Elder, *Imagines* and Callistratus, *Descriptions*, trans. Arthur Fairbanks (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1931), bk. 1, no. 2 (pp. 295–296).

nevertheless subvert or resist the verdict through sharp-witted technique. Often through Pygmalion-like technique, descriptions give life, voice, and living breath back to that which Apollo has silenced. Even if 'mere words' cannot bring actual life back, they can place what has been silenced into imagination and memory and, by this means, give it meaning and value for the future. Moreover, descriptions that aim, as this one, to rescue an art that is being punished, aim also to rescue themselves *qua* another art for fear of their being punished on the same grounds. If a musician is flayed, how soon a poet? A recent commentator writes of the 'narcissism' of ekphrasis, of its 'recursive self-reflexivity that is also a self-reflectivity, a mode in and by which literary language gazes at the visual as a lens upon the beauty of its own performance.'[3] But there is one beauty that pleases the eye or the ear and another, more painful, that speaks to the survival of an art, be it music, poetry, or painting. What this commentator describes as 'narcissism', I prefer to describe as a caring but also self-caring attitude typical of an agonistic practice in which one art comes to another's aid in order to aid itself.

Many regard ekphrastic descriptions as effecting intermedial and energetic movements of form and sensorial experience, in which words speak *poetically* or *musically* through *painting* in order, like *sculpture*, *theatre*, and *dance*, to recorporealize and rematerialize that which is or has been made absent. Many also note that what ekphrasis aims to do, it cannot actually or literally do. It can neither bring all corporeal senses into action nor render present or existent that which is absent or non-existent. Generally, by paying attention to what ekphrasis can and cannot achieve in ontological or sensorial-aesthetic terms, one comes to understand why, historically, the non-verbal arts joined with the verbal art to expand the ekphrastic capability. But moving beyond ontology and aesthetic experience, one also comes to understand how, as in the above description, *words* may be used to put a *listener's eye* on a painting to make the *ear* pay attention to the sufferings of the *musical* art, to make the listener-spectator understand the potential suffering of *every* art.

Differently put, there can be no enquiry into ekphrasis without recall of Plato's censorious views in *The Republic* or what he writes in his *Phaedrus* about saying and showing, concealing and revealing, speaking and remaining mute. Nor can the enquiry be separated from what later are offered as Judaeo-Christian laws and regulations that aim to protect persons both from immoral or unmusical melodies and texts produced in the wrong modes on the wrong instruments and from visual images that falsely represent the sacred and unrepresentable through profane or banal forms of representation. Amidst this censoriousness, indirect techniques were developed (some say they even flourished) for saying or singing what could not be shown and for showing what could be neither said nor sung. In my view, ekphrasis was one such technique even if, as we shall see, it was not always put to so strategic or subtle a use.

Description

Description was once what ekphrasis was *all* about, when it was used evocatively to produce an image for the mind's eye. Over time, however, the tasks both of ekphrasis

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3   Bruce Holsinger, 'Lollard Ekphrasis: Situated Aesthetics and Literary History', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 35 (2005), pp. 67–90 (see p. 75).

and of description changed. Given the changes, their once inextricable relation was severed.

In many modern approaches, description is taken to constitute the core of the philosophical enterprise. 'We must do away with all *explanation* [*Erklärung*]', Wittgenstein wrote, 'and description [*Beschreibung*] alone must take its place.'[4] Nevertheless, for all the attention modern philosophers have paid to description, they have rarely connected description to the theory and practice of ekphrasis.[5] This contrasts significantly with art, theatre, classical, and literary theorists and historians who have contested the terms of ekphrasis vigorously. In the Anglo-American literature on aesthetics, and the *BJA* and *JAAC* are representative, there are very few articles, less than ten in either journal, on the subject. And there would be even fewer had David Carrier not taken the matter up almost single-handedly in his reflections on how one writes art's history and its criticism.[6] There is a similar lack in musicology, though here, too, a single theorist, Siglind Bruhn, has devoted most of her life's work to describing the terms of 'musical ekphrasis'.[7] By contrast, Laura Sager could introduce her edited volume *Writing and Filming the Painting. Ekphrasis in Literature and Film* of 2008 by noting the 468 items found in the *MLA*, of which 177 were produced in the five years before the publication of her volume. There are certainly as many, and likely many more, items in the journals of classical studies.[8]

Why the lack of attention paid to ekphrasis in the philosophical and musicological literature? The most pertinent explanation focuses on the change in understanding of ekphrasis when it was severed from the vivid act of describing and was turned into a relation of *re-presentation*, connecting one work of fine art to another. Whether the re-presentation still involved description or something like description became only part of a more general enquiry of the manifold relations possible between different works of fine art in modern times.

The more ekphrasis moved away from description, the more it severed itself from the task it once had *as a listening and temporal art* to render present through words what was absent to the eye. In modern treatments of ekphrasis, the play between absence and presence has often been overshadowed by the focus on what one work of art achieves in re-presenting another work of art. This focus raises interesting issues of redundancy: if a poem has already done the work, why make a painting do the same work; or is it that the painting does more work, offering itself therefore as an advance on the former, thereby rendering the poem redundant?

A complete genealogical argument would track ekphrasis through antiquity, the middle ages, the Renaissance *paragone*, the rise of art-historical description and criticism in the

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4   Quoted in Heather J. Gert, 'Wittgenstein on Description', *Philosophical Studies*, 88 (1997), pp. 221–243.

5   One exception is Roland Barthes: see his 'The Reality Effect' (1968), in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (California, University of California Press, 1989), pp. 141–147. Another is Jacques Rancière who addresses many issues pertaining to ekphrasis in his *The Future of the Image*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2007).

6   David Carrier, 'Ekphrasis and Interpretation: Two Modes of Art History Writing', *BJA*, 27 (1987), pp. 20–31.

7   Cf. Siglind Bruhn, *Musical Ekphrasis: Composers Responding to Poetry and Painting* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon, 2000).

8   Cf. the opening statements of Simon Goldhill's 'What Is Ekphrasis For?' *Classical Philology*, 102 (2007), pp. 1–19.

eighteenth century, romanticism and idealism, synaesthetic and transmedial experimentation, finally to a postmodernism conceived as a condition of modernity that is nevertheless meant to propel modernity past all modernist restrictions. I offer here only key moments of this history, after which I offer examples of musical ekphrasis given an expanded conception of both music and ekphrasis. Throughout, I draw on an extensive literature but most of all on a recent book by the classicist Ruth Webb.[9] Although she describes what ekphrasis once was in contrast to what it later became, her primary aim is to describe what ekphrasis once was. She does not join ekphrasis to music, even though, as I show consistently with her account, music did enter ancient exercises of oratory even if it was not the primary *medium* of the performance.

Evocative versus Plain Description

A familiar positivistic trajectory suggests that the more disciplines have been drawn to scientific or analytic method, the more description has been reduced to a reliable accounting of the 'mere' or 'plain' facts. This way, description—denotative, referential, etc.—has been separated from the less 'exact' tasks of interpretation, evocation, evaluation, and justification. So separated, it has lost, because it has willingly dispensed with, the honorific task it once had, when, as part of Greek and Roman exercises, it brought to life, memory, and often to esteem that which it presented to the imagination. Originally performed or delivered as speech or writing, an evocative description brought to imaginative presence a corporeally absent subject. Either the subject no longer existed, had never existed, or was not presently in view. Sometimes a description depended on a pure imagining because the subject did not exist or, because it did exist, the description only brought it (back) to imaginary presence. Often, it claimed to do the latter when really it was doing the former. Regardless, by bringing something under a description, the subject was given new or renewed presence in the present.

To render absent things *as if* both present and real served purposes broader than that of 'mere' classification: to legitimize the present state of things by bringing the past state of things back, as it were, to life; to generate material, literary, and mythological histories and traditions; to sustain canons rooted deeply in an often idealized Antiquity; and to memorialize and monumentalize heroes. To regard ekphrastic description as motivated by goals of remembrance suggests that its theory well informs a philosophy of history that is willing to confront both the logic and epistemology of what we can say and know of what is past or absent and the moral and social implications of our descriptive sentences.

In the first explicit theoretical statements, offered in the exercise books on the training of orators, ekphrasis was treated as one among many exercises of speech and composition: fable, narrative, topos, encomiom, etc. In this classification, life-and-death matters of morality and honour were not always given to ekphrasis. Aelius Theon of the 1st century C.E. specified

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9   Ruth Webb, *Ekphrasis. Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009). In
      the book chapter from which this essay is drawn, I provide full bibliographical references; here, I provide only the
      most essential.

that ekphrasis 'is about lifeless things and those without choice'. The 'plain descriptions' it thus offered were of *absent* things that were also *common* things. By the ninth century, however, John of Sardis had no doubt declaring the *Eikones* of the Elder Philostratus as containing 'nothing but' ekphrasis, where, however, the distinction between common objects that did and did not have life (regardless of choice) was now strategically blurred.[10] Accordingly, in one description, Philostratus the Elder depicted the stringed musical instrument of Amphion to show how the instrument, in having been made out of the horn of the leaping goat and the shell of the tortoise, acted as much from good nature or divine harmony as from human art, to bring life to the stones which, seemingly of their own accord, moved together to become the city walls of Thebes.[11]

Much about ancient ekphrasis—and about listening—was agonistic. This was because it was performed in situations in which speakers had to prove their cases or arguments in debating and competitive rituals (*agones*) exercised in schoolrooms, law courts, public assemblies and forums, and in what remained of the ancient, cultic Apollonian and Dionysian festivals. Tied to notions of *evidentia* and *enargeia*, an ekphrasis could bring a subject back to the present and to presence to explain an event, to win an argument or case, to create astonishment or wonder, to move listeners towards indignation or shock, or to render an argument or image vivid, clear, perspicuous, illuminating, and persuasive.

'*Ekphrazein*' was often defined by reference to 'ex-pression', meaning the pressing out of a 'complete description'. Either the point of the 'completeness' was, as ideally in courts of law, to give an exhaustive description of the facts and intentions, which meant everything known about the matter at hand. Or its point was, and this is what makes the legal trial necessarily agonistic, to give enough of a description so that an image of someone's either innocence or guilt did in fact come before the mind's eye of the jury. For many reasons pertaining to persuasion, poetry, and agon, the second idea of completeness as 'enough' or 'just the right amount' dominated.

With broad civic application, ekphrasis focused on the impact of speech acts. Its aim was to train listeners in the compelling art of emotive-cognitive response such that they would become seers (perhaps in every sense) and knowers. By 'the mind's eye' was meant visual imagination, *fantasia*, or the realm or storehouse of ideas, images, beliefs, and memories.[12] When early theorists spoke of transforming hearers into seers, they did not, however, require a sensorial displacement because nothing was actually seen by the eye. Everything given was heard. Hence, the many references to the act of *almost* seeing or *all but actually* seeing. Through hearing, the mind was transformed and expanded in an *as if* total synaesthetic-syncognitive sense.

Bringing an image before the mind's eye with words was inseparable from the essentially *compelling* means by which teachers educated pupils. The pedagogical aim was to turn

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10   George A. Kennedy (trans.), *Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), pp. 46 and 218.

11   Philostratus the Elder, *Imagines* (see n. 2): bk. 1. no. 10 (p. 45).

12   Cf. here Fritz Graf, 'Ekphrasis. Die Entstehung der Gattung in der Antike', in Gottfried Boehm and Helmut Pfotenhauer (eds), *Beschreibungskunst, Kunstbeschreibung: Ekphrasis von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: Fink, 1995), pp. 145–155.

pupils (mostly male) into teachers and wise men. Teaching pupils by ekphrastic example meant showing them empathetically how one learns to stand in another's shoes or (as Webb records) to live in another's skin. Providing an ekphrasis was little different in purpose from giving a choice example or telling a fable or parable; hence, the description of a master rhetor who taught *by* example and *as* example. Sometimes the rhetor was described as a travel guide, leading persons by descriptive hand through foreign places, past times, and absent worlds; sometimes as an actor, who made it seem as though the part he played were no part at all, but real life.

Speaking in Tune

Ekphrasis had everything to do with delivering an example well and the right example as the argument required it. Although it was not required in general civic exercises that the description be accompanied by either instrument or song, it was required that one speak both literally and metaphorically in tune. Hence, say, Quintilian's instruction that orators pay attention to their voice. Suffice it, he wrote, to mention our leading orator, Gaius Gracchus, who 'during his speeches had a musician standing behind him with a pitch pipe, whose duty it was to give him the tones.' And then: 'Such was the attention which [Gracchus] paid to this point even in the midst of his most turbulent speeches, when he was terrifying the patrician party.' Having delivered his example, Quintilian noted that the power of a speech lay in its effective delivery and, because of this, the orator required knowledge of music. Herein, he explained, was the value of music that the Greeks had both assumed and theorized under the name 'eurythmics' but which, nowadays, he remarked, was no longer being recognized by those who were incorrectly conceiving of music as a 'less important art'. By looking back at what music allegedly once was, Quintilian saw music as having fallen into disrepute the more 'emasculated' and 'lascivious' it had become. Yet, while others were happy to let music fall, Quintilian was not. That the Athenians had awarded music so important a place in civic life was enough for him to maintain that music as an accompanying art of pitch and tuning was worth saving.[13]

In his instruction, Quintilian attended to the musicality of civic speech acts. Nevertheless, he knew of the dominant moral assessment of the musical art that had seen, in the history of ancient writing and image production, one musician after another being flayed, disembodied, beheaded, and even blinded. Although, as suggested above, I find it significant that so many of the early *descriptions* took as their subject matter the bacchanalian, erotic, and hubristic character of the instrumental musician's performance, I do not find it surprising. After all, the same subject matter is found everywhere in the objects and images of Antiquity: in the first histories and philosophies of Herodotus, Plato, and Aristotle and in the literary-poetic tradition of Homer, Hesiod, and later Ovid, that so often inspired the most artful of the ekphrastic descriptions produced.

The idea that music *qua* tempo and pitch is essential to good speech-giving is quite familiar to us today. It is defamiliarized only when, in contemporary discussion, it is asked

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13   Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. H. E. Butler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), bk. 1, ch. 10 (pp. 163–175).

whether one can perform an ekphrasis by means of tempo and pitch alone—that is, when there are no accompanying words. If music as an art of pitch and tone cannot be ekphrastic, this is taken, in the modern contest of the arts, to show a limitation of the musical art. However, this perceived limitation derives from a restricted view of music as medium, according to which 'tonally moving forms' are denied the descriptive powers of poetry and the representational powers of painting. For many, of course, it is precisely these denials that are celebrated, given their appeal in helping to unshackle the musical art, enabling it, so it is said, to realize its true 'essence' as a pure and absolute art of tone.[14]

A Matter of Domain

The contest of the arts has long turned on how music can be pictorial and poetic, poetry imagistic and musical, painting musical and poetic. Countless theses have either joined or separated the different *arts* according to *principles* of musicality, pictoriality, and poesis or to *modes* of expression, representation, and description. The correspondences have rarely been straightforward: if, following Horace, *poesis* is as *pictura* is, is this because one art dictates the terms of the other or because both share in approximating a higher condition, say, of musicality? The complexity of these questions has only increased as sculpture, dance, and architecture *qua* arts and lyricism, plasticity, and corporeality *qua* principles and modes have entered the fold. Overall, the contest has involved a constant contestation of terms, especially when the contest has been staged as though the arts were essentially fixed through ontological differentiation or born into sisterhood by divine intervention or nature.

Whereas modern ekphrasis, especially from the late nineteenth century on, focuses on artworks and their mediums, ancient ekphrasis focused on speech and written acts performed within a wide range of practices necessary for the education of citizens. Modern ekphrasis focuses on *works* that bring other *works* to *aesthetic* presence; ancient ekphrasis focused on *speech acts* that brought objects, scenes, or events to *imaginary* presence. I refer to *aesthetic presence* when ekphrasis remains within the domain of the arts, and to *imaginative presence* when it extends beyond this domain. This distinction helps to differentiate the ancient and modern views according either to their restriction or lack thereof to a domain. Both views draw on relations established between word and image. Whereas, however, modern and, even more, postmodern ekphrasis eventually expands the meanings of 'word' and 'image' to grant ekphrastic capability to every contemporary medium of art, ancient ekphrasis focused on what spoken and written words could achieve in arenas far extending the systematized world(s) of the fine arts.

In the ancient exercise, very little was excluded by way of subject matter. A speech act—be it pedagogical, political, juridical, artistic, or theatrical—brought a subject—be it an event, object, action, person, aspect, place, or time—before the mind's eye. The subject was almost (as Webb shows) unlimited, informing listeners of the who, what, when, where, and sometimes even the how and why of animals and plants, individuals and groups,

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14   Cf. Peter Kivy, *Antithetical Arts: On the Ancient Quarrel between Literature and Music* (OUP, 2009).

paintings and statues, wedding chests and funerary monuments, vases and shields. In the modern conception, contrarily, though less and less restriction is placed on the medium of delivery, a restriction is increasingly placed on the subject matter or, better now, on the object of the ekphrasis. Whereas words were once spoken or written to conjure up almost any subject, the modern focus is given to what the arts can achieve through their mediums and works.

Both ancient and modern views ask how the verbal medium of words can perform and communicate as a pictorial-visual-image-making medium. Yet, the more ekphrasis is linked to the emerging fine arts, the more this question is overshadowed by another: whether one artwork, whatever its medium, can bring another to aesthetic presence. At first the question is: can *words*, such as we find in an epic poem or description, bring an *image*, such as we find in a painting, to the mind's eye. Then it becomes: can a *poem* do what a *painting* does? Finally, it becomes: can *any artwork* achieve what *another artwork* has already achieved? The more the focus turns to connecting artworks, the less it accommodates medium specificity. If a poem can bring a painting to presence, why not a painting a poem, or a musical work a painting, a poem, or a sculpture?

The Twist in the Tale

Many early ekphrastic descriptions were about arts and crafts, their producers and their instruments. Exemplary are those attributed to the Elder and to the Younger Philostratus, to Callistratus, Pliny, Lucian, and Pausanias. Yet these *descriptions* did not constitute the core of the civic practice that was dominated by the exercise manuals and treatises of, say, Theon, Quintilian, Cicero, and Nicolaus the Sophist.

Nevertheless, as the moderns developed their view, many chose as their primary examples of *ekphrasis* the *descriptions* that had focused on matters pertaining to the emerging fine arts. Separated from broader civic practices, ekphrasis was increasingly regarded as a technique illustrative of the autonomous, aesthetic power and capability of works of fine art to produce relations to other works of fine art. In this development, the uncountable noun 'ekphrasis' designating a general civic practice of persuasive speech-act performance was overshadowed by a countable noun of artistic work-production: one ekphrastic work, two ekphrastic works.

When the moderns sought an ur-example of ekphrasis, they often followed the ancients in selecting Homer's epic description of Achilles' shield. But their selection assumed a different focus. The ancients focused on the actions and events represented by the shield and on how those actions and events are brought through description dynamically to imaginary presence for listeners. The moderns tended to focus on what it means for the shield to be a fixed, painterly representation and on how a painterly representation can be re-presented by a work that is not a painting.[15]

15　Cf. chap. 18 esp. of Lessing's, *Laokoon*; Andrew Sprague Becker, *The Shield of Achilles and the Poetics of Ekphrasis* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995) and James A. Francis, 'Metal Maidens, Achilles' Shield, and Pandora: The Beginnings of "Ekphrasis"' *American Journal of Philology*, 130 (2009), pp. 1–23.

For the moderns, ekphrasis joins an ekphrastic work to a non-ekphrastic work despite their both giving off an 'image'. Inspired by Lessing-like considerations of what each artistic medium can achieve, an ekphrastic poem, in the medium of words, relates to a painting this way: whereas the ekphrastic poem gives off a second-order, artificial, or imagined image of the painting, the non-ekphrastic painting gives off an image that is first-order, immediate, natural to its medium, and present to the corporeal eye.[16] In the early stages, it is assumed that poetry has to engage the ekphrastic technique because it cannot produce (visual) images as painting can *by nature*. Put like this, painting can claim to be the superior image-producing art even if it cannot, because it does not need to, claim that it is thereby the superior ekphrastic art. In matters of ekphrasis, the poem *alone* excels. However, the more the paragone confuses the demands and tasks of ekphrasis with the aesthetic demands and competitive tasks of the emerging fine arts, the more confused the arguments become.

One argument awards poetry first place in the contest, not because it is ekphrastic but because it is a 'descriptive' or 'spoken' art. Whereas a 'speaking' poem can describe both the form and content of a painting, a 'mute' painting cannot do the same for a poem, even, if like a musical work, it can *somehow* express or represent it. Everything turns on how broadly, vaguely, or indeterminately the terms 'description', 'representation', and 'expression' are applied. The broader the application, the more painting and later music are encouraged to claim themselves capable of ekphrasis.

A pertinent question is why all the arts wanted to assume the task of ekphrasis. One answer returns us to the paragone: that what the arts do by 'nature' is one side of art's coin, and what 'artificially' as 'art', its other. The language of artificiality—whereby the *nature* of art is revealed through its *artifice*—is then quickly absorbed into a generalizing language of sign and symbol of which all the arts eventually partake. Increasingly, it is claimed that as much as a given art strives to be true to its own medium, this should not prevent it from aspiring also to the condition or medium-capability of another art, in this way surpassing its material limitations in the name of a singular, general, and universal concept of 'art'. Once a given art has proved that it can do what another does, it begins to claim (after Irving Berlin's song) that anything the other can do, it can do better. The extra, unnatural or artificial act demonstrates the greater creativity and resourcefulness of *art*. Du Fresnoy summarized the competitive impulse early on: 'Let poetry be like painting; and let painting resemble poetry; let them compete with each other and exchange their tasks.'[17]

Walter Pater's famed principle of 1873 says that 'all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music.' This statement captures the aspiration of 'all art', but especially painting, to 'partially alienate' itself from the 'limitations' of the medium to embody the Apollonian principle of musicality, harmony, and proportion. Partially alienating itself, painting will show all that it can achieve musically as painting, that is, by staying true to its medium. Pater wanted to describe what musicality in Renaissance painting had meant

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16   Cf. Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

17   Quoted in Henryk Markiewicz and Uliana Gabara in 'Ut Pictura Poesis. A History of the Topos and the Problem' *New Literary History*, 18 (1987), pp. 535–558 (see p. 537).

particularly for Giorgione.[18] Yet for painting to *be* musical as painting is not by itself an achievement of ekphrasis in the either ancient or modern sense, even though it is largely through synthesizing and synaesthetic notions of musicality, lyricism, and poesie that the modern concept of ekphrasis first comes to include all the arts, *including music*, under its purview.[19]

Indeed, Pater's statement is often reversed to say something not about painting but about music as an art. It is reversed by those who, having 'proved' music to be the most absolute and true to principles of musicality, aim to show that music can do what the other arts can do: namely, represent, describe, or depict, if not in determinate then in indeterminate ways, say, through analogy or symbol. If this can be shown, it is only a small step to showing that music can be ekphrastic as *any art* can now be ekphrastic.

All that is needed now is for one work to re-present another in some significant way. Somehow, 'in some significant way' becomes the key phrase for the entry of the modern into the postmodern view. This view increasingly promotes an open and deliberately indeterminate relation between art's different sorts of *works*. A poem can re-present a sculpture, a sculpture a painting, a painting a musical work by title, allusion, or 'significant form'. Although many celebrate the intermedial movement that now can transpire between the sister arts, others anxiously worry that the relation has become too open. As terms such as 'word', 'image', 'description', and 'representation' are expanded or incorporated into a general language of signifiers and significant form, less and less is excluded from the ekphrastic domain, except, critics sardonically suggest, ekphrasis itself. With modernist flourishes of synaesthesia and 'transpositions de l'art' and with later postmodern encouragements of medium migration, inter- or trans-mediality, the less distinctive purpose an ekphrastic act seems now to have.

Ancient ekphrasis admitted any and all sorts of images into its terrain because *all* the world was, if not yet a stage, then an arena for argument and persuasion. As modernity moved toward and into its postmodern condition, medium considerations re-entered the work-based view to show that there was no restriction on what artworks could now achieve when it came to ekphrasis. Increasingly, it was claimed either that any medium can achieve what words achieve because every medium is 'text' or that any sort of work can stand in ekphrastic relation to any other because all art production is symbol, simulacrum, and appearance. If *all* is either text or image, the message of either or both combined is now the entirely malleable and unrestricted medium. As W. J. T. Mitchell puts it, when words are transposed into images or images into text, there is nothing left to distinguish one art essentially from another.[20] With this, ekphrasis becomes possible anywhere, anytime, anyhow—in the terrain of the arts. But, after this, as the walls of the artworld come

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18   Walter Pater, 'The School of Giorgione', in *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Literature* (OUP, 1986), pp. 85–86.

19   Cf. David Wellbery, 'Aesthetic Media', in John Bender and Michael Marrinan (eds), *Regimes of Description in the Archive of the Eighteenth Century* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), pp. 199–211. Pater contributed more directly to the practice of ekphrasis in his *Imaginary Portraits* of 1887. On this type of ekphrasis, see section 'Novel Cases' below.

20   W. J. T. Mitchell: 'Ekphrasis and the Other', in *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1994), ch. 5.

tumbling down to let *all* the world back in, the ekphrastic medium becomes once more *all* the world's messages. Whether this counts as recapturing something of ancient ekphrasis or as marking only a departure from specific limitations imposed by a restricted modern view is the Janus-faced question that has motivated many in recent years to explore the contemporary potential of ekphrasis.[21]

This is where the debate currently stands, asking whether ekphrasis ought to be restricted or opened up according to the medium capabilities of the different arts, and whether the provision of evocative description ought similarly be restricted or opened up. One might complain that whereas the postmodern view focuses more on the medium than on the message, the ancients were more preoccupied with the message, but this would be wrong in both cases. Or one might argue that what once was a genuinely contested concept has been replaced by an equalization, indeterminacy, openness, and pluralism that has left the concept, as so many, drained of meaning. Hence, if ekphrasis is to regain any meaning, it should return to what it once was when, attached to acts of description, it showed that there was something at stake in the acts. This view is well met with the rejoinder that the nostalgia for the substantiality of things past prevents critics of the postmodern from seeing the social and aesthetic advantages of opening up our concepts.

There are two aspects of the story I have left out. They are both such as to more synthesize than separate the ancient and modern views. Both are needed, however, for what I want finally to say about musical ekphrasis. The first pertains to art history; the second to the history of theatre.

Bildbeschreibung

Many moderns took from the ancient practice of evoking *images* by verbal means the idea specifically of providing a *description* of a painting or sculpture. The Germans termed this *Bildbeschreibung* and generally have used this term in place of 'ekphrasis'. They used the idea to align ekphrasis to the emerging art-history and criticism of the eighteenth century (Addison, Diderot, Winckelmann, and Lessing). Most influential in the development, Goethe translated the title given to the descriptions of the Elder Philostratus—in Greek *Eikones* and in Latin *Imagines*—as *Gemälde*.[22] His translation encouraged a restriction of ekphrasis to art-historical descriptions of paintings of the sort that hang in a museum. Although Philostratus did write his descriptions about such paintings, others around him did not, even though they were also in the business of evoking images by verbal means.

For classificatory purposes tied to modern practices of collecting and connoisseurship, descriptions of artworks were often reduced to list-like catalogue entries, where what counted was more the information about the works than their evocation in the mind's eye.

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21   See Peter Wagner (ed.), *Icons-Texts-Iconotexts: Essays on Ekphrasis and Intermediality* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996) and Hans Lund and Erik Hedling (eds), *Interart Poetics. Essays on the Interrelations of the Arts and Media* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997).

22   J. W. Goethe, 'Philostrats Gemälde', in *Über Kunst und Alterthum,* 2 (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1818), pp. 244–250; also Ernst Osterkamp, *Im Buchstabenbilde. Studien zum Verfahren Goethescher Bildbeschreibungen* (Stuttgart: Meztler, 1991).

For other purposes, the descriptions retained their poetic power to bring to presence paintings, sculptures, and other artworks that were either not in view or perhaps no longer viewable. Goethe worried about empirical reduction despite his knowing the necessity to produce catalogues. But he also worried about poetical descriptions for fear that they would substitute for the direct, perceptual experience (*Anschauung*) of the paintings themselves. He feared that the paintings would be rendered redundant given the formation of new artworks of words in their place.[23] As the opening lines of his essay on Philostratus made clear, the practice of producing descriptions was now inseparable from the contest of the arts. Set into an agonistic context, two works, one ekphrastic and the other not, were seen to compete on the assumption that they could be equally satisfying or, worse, that the ekphrastic work would prove more satisfying. Everything depended on whether one treated the secondary, ekphrastic work as one would a 'mere' copy of the original or as an advance on the original given its ability to present itself as an new aesthetic object in its own right while also re-presenting the prior existing work.

Goethe's worry was provoked by the fact that so many works described by eighteenth-century theorists were temporarily or permanently absent from view. Much has been written about the development of an art history given the absence of works in the museums being built eventually (and where possible) to house them. Many of the first histories were written not through first-hand perceptual experience but on the basis of sketches and descriptions. From this we see just how tied up questions of absence and presence are with conditions of material culture, conditions that in turn shape expectations for what the imagination can achieve as a form of knowledge. Crudely put, when all is available for view, the achievement of ekphrasis cannot be what once it was when very little was available to view. Or, given an ancient pedagogical setting in which teachers were present to students but did not, as today, have unlimited access to all or even many kinds of materials, their speech acts were all-important.

Momentary Ekphrasis

The second modern development reminds us that the history of ekphrasis is not exhausted by the paragonal contests that took place in Italy, France, and Germany between painting and poetry, painting and sculpture, or painting, poetry, and music. For there is the history—a British one—of theatre too, in which contests have been staged as a matter both of theory and of drama. In his work on ekphrasis and paragone, Leonard Barkan articulates this view most elegantly. He shows how Renaissance theatre continued ancient practices of oratory more than it departed from them; how given less attention to painting in England, theatre became the arena through which ekphrasis productively developed; how theatre continued a practice revealing a description's ability to step back and reflect upon its own capability while engaging simultaneously in the play of absence and presence; and,

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23   Leonard Barkan makes much of the ekphrastic paradox that a verbal ekphrasis erases the visual object it brings to presence the moment it brings attention to itself. Above, I referred to another commentator's remarks on the narcissism of ekphrasis. Rancière similarly writes about the necessary 'dissemblance' between text and image.

finally, that an ekphrasis, as in ancient practice, might take a shorter or longer time to complete, depending on whether it was offered as a decisive dramatic moment or as spread out over the whole work.[24]

It serves us well to introduce now the new idea of *momentary ekphrasis* and to distinguish it from *work-to-work ekphrasis*. Much more attention has been paid to the latter than to the former. I believe this to be an error given the limitation of possibilities it incurs. Others, for good reason, have spoken not of momentary but of *fragmentary* or *epigrammatic* ekphrasis.[25] Drawing on Winckelmann's descriptions of parts of sculptured human figures, Alex Potts encourages a fragmentary conception, so that one may see 'in the very fabric of an extended description' how 'a vivid scene of individual parts' relates to 'what made the whole so significant and alive'.[26]

Shakespeare's plays are full of direct and indirect references to what the different arts separately and together can achieve. Yet, by 'the arts' is meant not only the mediums but also the principles, persons, practices, and instruments. Barkan draws on a moment in *Hamlet* when Hamlet compares the portraits of his father and uncle to show how the play as a whole tests language and visuality 'to make the imaginary real'. In my view, another ekphrastic moment—a musical one—occurs just prior to the 'play within the play' and which explains *indirectly* why the indirect play is needed. This is when Hamlet reprimands Rosencrantz and Guildenstern for treating him as though a pipe on which to be played. Turning himself through words into an instrument or tool, Hamlet articulates his failure 'to control the air',[27] that is, the failure of his spoken words to have made the truth or, better, the lie of his family's situation explicit to others. To play a pipe stops one from speaking, as we learn from Marsyas's contest with Apollo and later from Oscar Wilde. Playing a pipe, Hamlet quips, is as 'easy as lying' and all that exists around him is a lie. A play of lies and concealment, *Hamlet* is a search for a truthful medium—be it a ghost, musical instrument, or indirect play—that will 'open up' what the direct medium of the spoken word hides. Following the Marsyan moment in Plato's *Symposium*, 'opening up', as turning 'upside down' or 'inside out', is how ekphrasis is sometimes defined. This musical moment shows *Hamlet* to be a play not only about existential crises and internal states (such as Goethe demonstrates by nesting *Hamlet* inside *Wilhelm Meister*) but also about the successes and failures of different sorts of mediums and tools to transform not knowing into knowing, lies into truth, absence into presence, and vice versa. The ontological failure that attends poetry

24   L. Barkan, 'Making Pictures Speak: Renaissance Art, Elizabethan Literature, Modern Scholarship', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 48 (1995), pp. 326–351 and 'Shakespeare and the Theater as a Visual Art' (unpublished).

25   See Simon Goldhill, 'The Naive and Knowing Eye: Ecphrasis and the Culture of Viewing in the Hellenistic World', in Simon Goldhill and Robin Osborne (eds), *Art and Text in Ancient Greek Culture* (CUP, 1994), pp. 197–223; also his 'Literary History without Literature: Reading Practices in the Ancient World', *SubStance*, 28 (1999), pp. 57–89. Here, Goldhill notes the suppression of a certain oratorical tradition of ekphrasis the more 'literature' attained the status of a fine art in the early nineteenth century.

26   Alex Potts, 'Disparities between Part and Whole in the Description of Works of Art', in *Regimes of Description* (n. 19), pp. 135–150 (see p. 137).

27   Cf. Cara Mazzio, 'The History of Air: *Hamlet* and the Trouble with Instruments', *South Central Review*, 26 (2009), pp. 153–196.

when it tries to do what painting does is also the very condition of its transformative power to turn a play within a play into a play also about (a) play.

Musical Ekphrasis

Siglind Bruhn has explored the possibility of 'musical ekphrasis' more than anyone else. Given music's development as a purely instrumental art, she draws her examples mostly from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She has an abundance of examples to choose from. Yet, despite her careful articulation of conditions, critics challenge her to prove that ekphrastic musical works are different from works of so-called programme music. She replies that, though admittedly related historically and as genre, they are not identical. For a work to be ekphrastic, it must not only represent or express but also *explicitly* re-present or re-express another *work*. However, an additional answer would be to rethink the claims of programme music in terms of 'ekphrastic description' every time tonally moving forms conjure up an almost cinematographic spectrum of images before the mind's eye. Indeed, another study of musical ekphrasis would take programme music and then film music as its objects.[28]

Bruhn mostly selects works that relate to works that actually exist and are known. This allows her to produce formal comparisons between the works, but comparisons that show how one work, through a dynamic process of transmedialization, succeeds in re-presenting a work of *another* medium. Her approach stands in tension with the ancient view. The modern fact that the works re-presented by other works are independently known and accessible undermines the material *need* that drove ancient ekphrasis, to bring something absent to presence by foreign means because otherwise it would not have been brought to presence. To be sure, there were ancient cases when present objects were described, say, when a rhetor wanted to bring attention to something which, without the verbal act, would have remained unnoticed. But these cases are (sometimes) exceptions that prove the rule.

For the moderns, ekphrasis is not necessary on material grounds. *Whether or not* the object is present, the ekphrastic achievement is to present a work *again* in a different work. Consider looking at a painting and then hearing a musical work composed by reference to it. Given Goethe's worry, would we say that the painting's presence renders the musical work redundant? Not if our interest was in how the musical work changes our understanding of the painting. But what if we deemed the musical work better than the painting? Would this render the painting no longer necessary to look at? No, because to judge the ekphrasis of the musical work, we still need to know the painting.

The matter of redundancy arose acutely in the sixteenth century with modern translations of Philostratus, when it was asked whether visual illustrations should accompany the descriptions.[29] The impulse to provide images for the eye, because one *could* now do

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28   Cf. Thomas S. Grey, 'Tableaux vivants: Landscape, History Painting, and the Visual Imagination in Mendelssohn's Orchestral Music', *19th-Century Music*, 21 (1997), pp. 38–76.

29   Tatiana Smoliarova discusses this matter in 'The Bronze Horseman and the Tradition of Ekphrasis', in Robert Reid and Joe Andrew (eds), *Two Hundred Years of Pushkin. Alexander Pushkin: Myth and Monument, Studies in Slavic Literature and Poetics*, 39/2 (2003), pp. 103–116.

this, suppressed the impulse to leave the descriptions for the ear and imagination alone. On the other hand, it was thought that knowing and then seeing the artworks could amplify the understanding of the descriptions. More evidence is better than less. However, the most exciting examples of ekphrasis, ancient and modern, show us that sometimes additional evidence proves more a distraction than an advantage. Given the absence of something to look at, listeners listen more carefully to the content and rhythm of speech and to how much can be done with words. Whereas some fear that description will replace visual experience, others fear that visual experience will gradually replace all other forms of experience.

Evidence by Example

So what, finally, is musical ekphrasis? One answer returns us to the complex agonism illustrated in ancient descriptions of the destruction of musicians. Another focuses on modern and contemporary examples often, but not always, produced through the medium of tones. Developing the second answer, I shall run through a range of examples which, when interpreted, benefit from having the modern concept of work-to-work ekphrasis supplemented by aspects of the ancient concept. For each example of 'musical ekphrasis', one must ask what is musical and what ekphrastic about it. Given the movement and agonism between the different arts, a painting might prove a marvelous example of musical ekphrasis as a musical work might prove a good example of poetic ekphrasis, which suggests that ekphrasis should not be solely or too rigidly qualified by hard medium distinctions between the arts. This conclusion accords with the postmodern view. But more importantly, it opens up a space to assess ekphrastic acts not solely with respect to their being 'works' but also given how far they engage a critical and strategic play between presence and absence, concealing and revealing. Not every such play counts as an ekphrasis but some do and the interesting task is to determine when one does. This case-by-case approach is consistent with treating ekphrasis and music as constantly contested concepts.

Gunther Schuller's *Seven Studies on Themes of Paul Klee* of 1959 and Morton Feldman's *Rothko Chapel* of 1971 effect transmedial, temporal, and spatial movements of painting and architecture into music. Another example is Arvo Pärt's 2002 *Lamentate* (lament at Tate Modern), which pays homage to Anish Kapoor's sculpture *Marsyas* by turning a blood red musical instrument into a man who 'died for all', not, however, 'upside down' but in an upright crucifixion on the cross. Mark-Anthony Turnage's *Three Screaming Popes* of 1988–89 effects something less sacred but highlights an interest in what one might, after Harold Bloom and David Rosand, describe as an agonistic and anxious chain of influence extending from a musical work back to paintings of Francis Bacon, first, and Velasquez, second. 'The history of Western art', tracking the traditions of ekphrasis, may be seen, Rosand writes, 'as a cycle of . . . exchange, the intercalation of texts and pictures through the helix of time—image begetting image'.[30]

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30   David Rosand, 'Ekphrasis and the Generation of Images', *Arion*, 1 (1990), pp. 61–105 (see p. 61), and the very
       recent Jaś Elsner, 'Art History as Ekphrasis', *Art History*, 33 (2010), pp. 10–27.

These examples all differ from Luciano Berio's *Ekphrasis* of 1996: whereas they relate themselves to works produced in a non-musical medium, Berio's serves as a commentary on one of his earlier musical works: *Continuo for orchestra* of 1990—hence its subtitle *Continuo II*. Berio's gesture is rather Wagnerian but true to many artists who make one work lead into another and then another, as though their aim were to produce the total work of their life—in 'late style'—as a commentary on all their previous works. One reviewer remarks that Berio's *Ekphrasis* is ekphrastic because 'the piece seems … to stand beside its predecessor, observing.' And then: 'Ekphrasis (Greek for "expression") is yet the more introverted piece; ideas from Continuo are reflected there as though dimly. The prevailing sonorities are string-based, in contrast with Continuo [II]'s relatively aggressive and active forces of wind instruments.'[31] The musical description of the antagonism between strings and winds is relevant to anyone interested in the Apollo–Marsyas contest. What, however, is questionable is the watered-down translation of 'ekphrasis' as expression. If expression is all ekphrasis is, every work is entitled to be titled *Ekphrasis*. Even if ekphrasis does mean expression (as it does in modern Greek), it is still required, given the modern concept, that the expression *in* one work be a re-expression or re-presentation *of* another. Berio's *Ekphrasis* meets this condition. But whereas it meets the condition of bringing another work to presence, it does not engage in a play between *different* mediums. It offers itself as a pure work-to-work ekphrasis without medium interference, comparison, or contest. More even, it offers itself as a doubly self-reflexive/reflective example: it *is* ekphrastic, *about* ekphrasis, and ultimately produces a picture of Berio's compositional *life as a whole*. Although, in this example, the concept of music remains restricted to the tonal medium, the concept of ekphrasis begins to be broadened beyond the work-to-work relation to become a testament also to a musical life lived.

Pictures at an Exhibition

Musorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* is a testament to a life but a life lived by a painter. Allied to poems such as Yeats's 'The Municipal Gallery Revisited' or Andrew Marvell's 'The Gallery', and to the final moment in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, it captures the pace, rhythm, and experience of walking or promenading through a gallery, as though one were looking at each painting in turn, giving each its due. Scored first for piano and later orchestrated, it is ekphrastic, first, because it re-presents paintings by Viktor Hartmann, and second, because, interpreted as an ode, it remembers a friend who died too young.[32]

For the first listeners, Hartmann's paintings were not there to view. For a long time, it was believed that the paintings were lost, and later, when they were (allegedly) found, it remained uncertain whether they were exactly the images that Musorgsky had had in mind. Given a typical scholarly quest for certainty, it seemed as if identifying the paintings mattered most to the scholars, that in the absence of this knowledge the work's understanding would remain incomplete. But the more they looked for the paintings, the more they forgot the death of the painter. When they (allegedly) found the paintings, they

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31   Robert Kirzinger, *All Music Guide*, http://www.answers.com/topic/ekphrasis-for-orchestra-continuo-ii.

32   Cf. Leo Spitzer's classic 'The "Ode on a Grecian Urn", or Content vs. Metagrammar', *Comparative Literature*, 7/3 (1955), pp. 203–225.

were disappointed. Musorgsky was clearly a better composer than Hartmann was a painter. Keeping the paintings absent would have prevented the disappointment. Yet, suppose the paintings had proved better than the music: we would have been disappointed too. Refusing to compare the works would have prevented disappointment either way. It might also have brought our attention back to the person honoured by Musorgsky's ekphrastic *act*.

Novel Cases

Musical ekphrasis is achieved when a musical work follows another work whatever the latter's medium. But it is also achieved by some artworks inspired by musical works or, as in literature, by moments when music is brought to aesthetic presence through imaginary performance or through the sheer power of description.

E. M. Forster's *Howard's End*, epigraphed by the phrase 'only connect', describes a concert in London's Queen's Hall during which Helen mentally travels through programmatic correspondences and discordances between the architecture of the hall, its ceiling painting, Beethoven's music, and thoughts about marriage. The scene is described in an associational and intermedial way and finally distances Helen from the music. Forster's description brings Beethoven's symphony to presence—goblins and all—but its presence is constantly overshadowed by how Helen engages disconcertedly with far more mediums than the musical one. Might one read Forster's description as a critique of 'unserious' listening practices in the concert hall?

In *Doctor Faustus,* Thomas Mann's Adorno-inspired descriptions of works and performances are more concentrated and less distracted. They connect works by establishing correspondences of style, idea, and compositional method. Like Turnage's *Three Screaming Popes* and Berio's *Ekphrasis*, Mann's novel produces an ekphrastic chain but where, now, the works, writers, composers, and philosophers connected are not all 'real'. As is well documented, the fact that Mann connected *notional* or *projected* works—Leverkühn's *The Lamentation of Dr Faustus*—to *actually existing* works by Křenek, Busoni, Beethoven, Pfitzner, and Schoenberg annoyed Schoenberg enormously. What was imagined was all too real.[33]

But never mind, because by this means Mann illustrated the ancient exercise of ekphrasis. He reinforced the view that whether or not the works really exist, the point is to see all that can be done with words, through literary description. In several places, he engaged ekphrasis to lead readers through what more than one scholar of ekphrasis has termed an 'imaginary museum'.[34] He drew on Hermann Kretschmar's 1880 *Guide through the Concert*

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33   The distinction between 'notional' and 'actual' ekphrasis is developed by John Hollander in *The Gazer's Spirit: Poems Speaking to Silent Works of Art* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1995) after which W. J. T. Mitchell responds that, in a certain sense, all ekphrasis is notional.

34   James Heffernan: *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1993); Bruhn, *Das tönende Museum: Musik interpretiert Werke bildender Kunst* (Waldkirch: Gorz, 2004); Norman Bryson, 'Philostratus and the Imaginary Museum', in *Art and Text in Ancient Greek Culture*, n. 25 above, pp. 255–283; Diana Shaffer, 'Ekphrasis and the Rhetoric of Viewing in Philostratus's Imaginary Museum', *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 31 (1998), pp. 303–316. The chapter from which I have drawn this essay is titled *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Words*. It continues the aim of my *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* to situate the work-concept historically to show that the modern organization of the arts was not always how the arts were exercised and organized.

Hall but more explicitly on Adorno's descriptions of music to produce a devastating critique not only of music's most modern works but also of a world in which such works were produced.

Notational Ekphrasis

Consider next what might be called *notational ekphrasis*. This occurs when by means of signs or score alone, a musical work is brought to imaginative but not fully to aesthetic presence. More than one highly educated musician has noted the pleasures of reading scores separate from hearing performances. In this case, reading scores is arguably ekphrastic in the ancient sense, given the absent or unperformed works it makes imaginatively present. But it does not yet meet the modern condition of referring to a work that is *other* to itself. Nevertheless, the modern condition might be met if the score became or was produced as a work of visual or graphic art in its own right. Here, the visual music work would re-present the musical work to the eye separate from the score that was used as a guide for a performance for the ear. Notational ekphrasis asks us to consider music under the terms of its being *heard, read*, or *seen*. Whether the exact *same* mind's image is produced if heard, read, or seen is unlikely, but does the variation matter if what it leads to is an expansion of our minds in *diverse* musical and ekphrastic ways?

Momentary Musical Ekphrasis

Consider, finally, *momentary ekphrasis*, which occurs not between works but within works without necessarily exhausting them, though they may be of such import as to explain the whole. Such examples are abundant in all arts, from the object arts to the performance arts of theatre, opera, and film.

There are numerous operatic moments when statues come to life, in ghostly form at the end of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, in angelic form at the end of Puccini's *Suor Angelica*, or as a wicked ancestor in more than one of Gilbert and Sullivan's operas. As in Woody Allen's *Purple Rose of Cairo*, the wicked ancestor steps out of a frame to enter the (life's) drama. Several commentators have written of how stepping out of a picture is exactly what the auratic descriptions of the Elder Philostratus achieved when he turned (or *as if* turned) what was stationary or still in the absent painting into something mobile, temporal, breathing, and living.[35]

There are very few operas that re-present paintings but many that offer dramatic moments when pictures or paintings are invoked. From Mozart to Meyerbeer and Wagner, to Verdi and Puccini: seeing a picture is often what begins a love story or what begins a comedy or tragedy in which there is an essential confusion of identity.[36] Though there are literally hundreds of operas 'based' on Shakespeare's plays, not all are ekphrastic as wholes even if some contain

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35 Cf. Stephen M. Beall, 'Word-Painting in the "Imagines" of the Elder Philostratus', *Hermes*, 121 (1993), pp. 350–363 and Richard Meek, 'Ekphrasis in *The Rape of Lucrece* and *The Winter's Tale*, *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 46 (2006), pp. 389–414.

36 Cf. my '"——*wie ihn uns Meister Dürer gemalt*!" On Prophets, Painters, Musicians, and Mastersingers' (submitted to *JAMS*).

ekphrastic moments as parts. There are also many operas that refer to prior operas or operas that bring to life real and fictional artists (say, by Berlioz, Pfitzner, Hindemith, Richard Strauss, and Puccini). Each of these examples requires careful interpretation to show what sort of ekphrasis, if any, is at work and whether it has any interesting bearing on music.

In 2007, John Musto and Mark Campbell created a one-act opera of five scenes. Titled *Later the Same Evening*, it was inspired by five paintings of Edward Hopper: hence its nickname *Hoppera*. According to various reviews, the set projected the paintings in a row, highlighting each one when it was its turn to be brought to life.[37] For each, the singers appeared in exact dress and gesture and when the scene was over, the singers stepped back as it were into the painting. The dramaturgical 'addition' apparently did more than illuminate each painting as a separate work; it produced an overarching drama about New York City in 1932 of 'loneliness and discord'. In this sense, the ekphrasis effected a transformation of painting into sung theatre. I am not sure if Musto and Campbell explicitly declared their opera ekphrastic, but it meets the modern condition. Given the ancient condition, however, one may ask what difference it would have made had Hopper's paintings not actually been projected on the stage.

I pose this question to raise the issue of redundancy for the last time. Consider Puccini's *Tosca*, which begins with the famed singer expressing jealousy of a painting that she believes is modelled on another woman, whereupon her lover, the painter Cavaradossi, defends himself, a little like Zeuxis with his many models, by claiming that the Madonna he paints surpasses any single model. Tosca remains unconvinced: why, she persists, does he paint his Madonna with one choice of hair and eye colour rather than with another, the other of course matching her own appearance? The painter can only divert Tosca from her question by declaring more fidelity to his love than to his art.

In the libretto, no instruction is given that a painting be shown to the audience. Usually, however, a painting is shown. A recent Met production in New York showed an androgynous Caravaggio-like painting, perhaps to remind us of the trouble Caravaggio also got into with his choice of models. An older production from Los Angeles showed the Madonna with her eyes lowered, perhaps to tell us that Tosca's jealously would have been just as intense whatever her lover had painted. Would Cavaradossi have won more favour by painting Tosca herself? Not if, following Zeuxis, his painting was still an improvement on the original! To be sure, showing a painting on the stage may serve as a directorial critique of the opera, but sometimes the presence of such undercuts what is achieved or achievable by the mediums that are made by the composer and librettist to constitute the work. Looking with our eyes, we may forget to listen with our ears to what is (already) achieved ekphrastically when the lovers sing their agonistic and agonized duet. Sometimes less is more or, with respect to ekphrasis, *enough*.

A Last Note

Expanding ekphrasis beyond its work-to-work conception tells us about the contest of the arts. It also tells us about how the different arts engage ekphrastic techniques for all sorts

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37   See e.g. http://www.scene4.com/karrenlalondealenier/2007/06/birth_of_an_ekphrastic_opera_i_1.html

of reasons, sometimes to illuminate another artwork but sometimes to produce virtual and dynamic dramatic spaces in which all the tensions between saying and showing, concealing and revealing, are put into play. Sometimes these tensions are playful and sometimes most serious when, say, a musician is put to death. Taking ekphrasis seriously in the arts, we are finally led back to consider the impact that description has for a philosophical theory that does more than mention an artwork to exemplify a premise but actually describes it to reveal a truth that lies beyond what is directly seen, sung, or said. Descriptions of artworks by many modern philosophers constitute the blood-red thread of their philosophies. Such descriptions are often criticized as being disrespectful to the artworks. Reading the descriptions through the lens of ekphrasis—ancient and modern—allows us to read the disrespect as sometimes deliberate for the sake of both philosophy and art. Description in philosophy, as in the arts, is, at its best and most subtle, hardly ever plain, mere, or, indeed, faithful.[38]

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38   I develop this point further in my '"Other pictures we look at—his we read." Arthur Danto on Depiction and Description', in preparation for Mark Rollins (ed.), *Danto and his Critics*, revised edition (Blackwell). I am most grateful for comments from Leonard Barkan, Guy Dammann, Michal Gal, Klaus Krüger, Marlies de Munck, Tatiana Smoliarova, Gabriella Szalay, and Ruth Webb.