

The trajectory of ancient ekphrasis*

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Introduction

This trajectory of the conceptual contours of ancient *ekphrasis* aims at denoting the historical ramifications of ekphrasis and their advantages within and beyond the field of interartial relationship. However, this study does not attempt to establish a new, overarching theory of ekphrasis and its relation to description. Rather it is at pains to survey the praxis and theory of ancient rhetoric according to modern philological studies, and to prompt exploring its differences from the modern concept of “interartial ekphrasis” of the twentieth century as well as to open it up for alternative thinking at the same time.¹ One problem is that only a restricted canon of ancient literary and visual sources is filtered in search for poetic and more or less detailed descriptions of visual and mimetic works of art defined according to modern aesthetics.² As claimed before, “the booming literature on ekphrasis

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1 Already the scholarship on the interartial line of literary ekphrasis is exhaustive and beyond the scope of this article. A good overview can be found in Lindhé 2013. In general, most authors follow Scott’s definition of ekphrasis as “the poetic description of a work of art” (Scott 1996: 315).

2 Peter Wagner summarizes this canon as stretching “from the description of Achilles’s shield in Homer’s *Iliad*, to the ekphrasis of the tapestries of Minerva and Arachne in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, and down to Shakespeare’s *The Rape of Lucrece*, Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn”, W. H. Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts”, William Carlos Williams’s *Pictures from Brueghel*, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s *When I look at Pictures* (1990)” (Wagner 1996: 12).

outside classics [...] rarely knows the classical material adequately” (Goldhill 2007: 1). The literary device ekphrasis often seems only adorned with an ancient pedigree. Therefore, we mean to give this concept more substance by fitting a motivated temporal trajectory. Yet, the aim of this paper is not so much to add examples from historiographers and philosophers as to outline the different concepts of *mimesis*, *phantasia*, and perception, which would explain ekphrasis in those days, and might help us to understand the modern set of terms and its limitations.

The modern, literary concept of ekphrasis is defined most clearly as “the poetic description of a pictorial or sculptural work of art, which description implies [...] the reproduction through the medium of words of sensuously perceptible *objets d’art* (*ut pictura poesis*)” (Spitzer 1962: 72; highlighted by LS); or shorter as “the verbal representation of visual representation” (Heffernan 1993: 3).³ Questioning the mimetic precondition in the term “representation”,⁴ Claus Clüver extended the definition of ekphrasis to “‘verbal representations of texts composed in a non-verbal sign systems’, because the objects of such representations need not to be representations and are often in other media besides painting or sculpture, and the manner of such representations tends to depend more on the function served than on the non-verbal medium involved” (Clüver 2007: 23).

Despite these seemingly general definitions it is most clear that, firstly, ekphrasis understood as “double representation” tacitly implies many traditional ideas about mimetic art works and about the historical *ut-pictura-*

3 In general, ekphrasis copes with dual representation on the slippery ground of the historically changing concepts of *mimesis* and ‘works of art’. Stephen Cheeke expresses a common attitude to ekphrasis: “We expect with an ekphrasis some commentary upon or an interpretation of an artwork that is simultaneously open to interpretation or appreciation as an artwork of its own right” (Cheeke 2008: 3).

4 Mario Klarer argued that the focus on representation in the current theoretical debate privileges mediated forms of expression, meaning the materialised form of documentation, and excludes oral and performative acts (Klarer 1999: 2). Although the intermedial discourse on ekphrasis replaced the questionable categories of “fine art” and “literature” with the broader notion “representation”, most analyses focus on static “realistic” figurative mimetic works of art of affirmed aesthetic value (“qualified media”). However, as Ankersmit puts it: “Precisely because there is no longer any difference between representation and what is represented, the question of what makes a representation a representation now becomes extremely urgent. Danto’s own reading of this revolution is that the art we are so familiar with has come to an end and has become a *thinking* about art (about the nature of representation)” (Ankersmit 1994: 154f).

poesis-discourse; secondly, that, with the benefit of hindsight, the interartial ekphrasis discourse seems to be cut out.⁵ At stake there are also methods and classifications applied when discussing the interrelationship of word and image.⁶ A survey of the much broader ancient concept of verbal ekphrasis that rather deals with “visibility”⁷ than with “visual arts” might be able to illuminate these “transcendent” preconditions as an “ideologically-burdened categorical framework” (van den Berg 2007).⁸ We believe that in concentrating on the term of *enargeia* we can solve many problems of the modern discussion about ekphrasis, which comes along with often decontextualized intermedial questions of defining image vs. picture, mental, verbal and visual representation as aesthetic works of art or as “qualified media”.⁹

Contextualised in the historical frame of rhetoric, philosophy and its performative practice, we can say that ekphrasis, essentially and above all,

5 Ekphrasis is most often confined to a verbal, even poetic text without regard to a changed medial landscape. Apart from modernism’s tenet to consider poetry as a special and privileged form of discourse, the interartial discourse often excludes descriptions of man-made objects like “commodities” (lamps etc.), which are not classified with lasting or autonomous aesthetic qualities (“qualified media”), because they cannot easily be described as physically closed objects with an accepted pedigree of a traditional artefact.

6 To shortly illustrate the hasty confusion of “vision” and “painting”, I quote from Mitchell’s *Picture Theory*: “[T]he notion of ‘visible language’ imports the discourse of painting and seeing into our understanding of verbal expression: it tempts us to give terms like imitation, imagination, form, and figuration a strong graphic, iconic sense and to conceive of texts as images in a wide variety of ways. If there is a linguistics of the image, there is also an ‘iconology of the text’ which deals with such matters as the representation of objects, the description of scenes, the construction of figures, likenesses, and allegorical images, and the shaping of texts into determinate formal patterns” (Mitchell 1994: 112). Moreover, when stating: “If writing is the medium of absence and artifice, the image is the medium of presence and nature” (ibid.: 114), the traditional, less helpful dichotomy of arbitrary verbal signs vs. “natural” iconic signs is repeated against better knowledge.

7 “Visibility” is a quality of the seeing *subject*, who dramatizes the moment of looking as interpreting, as reading and seeking meaning, and of the mind of the audience imaging the absent, see Bartsch 2007, Chinn 2007, Elsner 1995, 2007, Francis 2009 etc. To the interrelation of ekphrasis in the frame of visibility see Bal 2006: 124.

8 We have in mind the narratological dichotomies of “description” and “narrative” and topoi such as speaking of “narrative pause”, “natural signs” or “giving voice to an otherwise mute object”.

9 For the term “qualified medium” see Elleström 2012: 12. It refers to the more differentiated reflections on the different aspects or modalities constructing a mediated artefact. To a differentiated view on the polysemic term “image” see van den Berg 2004.

invites to an intensified mental experience of imagery encompassing events, objects or concepts. The topos of artistic vividness, grounded in different linguistic modes or styles, emphasizes in particular a mental involvement. Despite the shifting models of perception, imagination and understanding in the framework of social codes, ekphrasis demonstrates most of all the performative ritualised practice of how mental seeing can be produced. Thus, we have to trace back also the philosophical thoughts about the concept of *phantasia*, where we find the idea of ekphrasis embedded in a cluster of connected expressions like *enargeia*, visual vividness, *energeia*, potentiality, or *sapheneia*, clarity, and the varying concepts of *mimesis* with a shifting claim on verisimilitude, veracity or truth. Far from bluntly replacing the discussion of “interartial ekphrasis”, which restricts itself to an “aesthetic double representation” of a limited group of qualified media, we rather emphasise a reading of ancient concepts of ekphrasis, which differ with respect to their function, genre and form of mediation. Yet, all types of ekphraseis are linked together by the overarching criterion of *enargeia*. Therefore, we argue that by freeing ekphrasis from its object-bounded and referential frame, we can win a general model to describe it as a verbal invitation to imagine and to enter a scene evoked by the speaker. In a dynamic relationship the recipient is cooperatively engaged as spectator and plays the role designed for him.¹⁰ Such a revised ekphrasis concept does not obscure the cooperative and interpretative character of the recipient as viewing subject and the impact of both the mediated and mental representations.

Ancient rhetoric in a historical timeframe

Rhetoric, or *ars bene dicendi*, is concerned with the philosophical ideas and practical means of persuasion in form and content depending on the situation or text genre, the orator’s intention and audience’s heterogeneous preconditions.¹¹ The rhetorical knowledge of eloquence and the skill of persuasion flourished in the theoretical considerations, in the praxis of speaking, the rhetorical, didactical and /or literary writings (*rhetorike technike*) and the

¹⁰ A literary ekphrasis does not have to be harder to identify than other rhetorical or literary techniques, even if the impressive description of an object or scene does not belong to the classical canon.

¹¹ Aristotle defines “rhetoric” as “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” (*Rhet.* 1,2; transl. Rhys Roberts).

literary practice of the Hellenistic period and of the Roman Empire. The Hellenistic period corresponds to the time after Alexander the Great (d. 323 BC) to the death of Cleopatra after the Battle of Actium (31 BC), and the Roman Empire from the post-Republican period to the fifth century AD. The Second Sophistic, the period, which offers us the first formal definitions of ekphrasis in rhetorical handbooks, covers the second and third century AD.¹² We talk of a time, when highly popular men, sophists,¹³ lawyers and authors, supported their clients directly in court or discourse during other public events where they could thrill and influence their audiences with their political, ethical and philosophical declarations in various genres. With more or less stagy gestures (*actio*) they performed powerful speeches in different artful styles, which corresponded to their specific speech situations (*kairos*) or to the divergent expectations and backgrounds of their listeners, on whose approval they were dependent. Many of them both practiced and taught philosophy and the art of rhetoric to the attracted students in several regions of the Roman dominions.

Many educated members of the Greek and Roman audience recognized and appreciated a sophisticated rhetoric both in public speeches and in different literary genres (Goldhill 2007: 2). To the common “cross-pollination of oratory, drama, and historiography, and between politics and theatre” (Kremmydas & Tempest 2013: 11), they assumingly responded with “an intense imaginative involvement” (Webb 2009: 19). Anchored in this historical context of flourishing rhetoric skills in Hellenistic and Roman culture, *ekphrasis* is one of the rhetorical exercises and (literary) practices, in which the speaker or writer and the audience were engaged in bodily and mental coexistence of an interactive performance.

12 The term “Second Sophistic” is coined by Philostratus the Elder (c. 170 – c. 247 AD) in his work *Lives of the Sophists*, in which he collects the most charismatic Greek and Roman Sophists, literary-historical writers, philosophers and teachers in rhetoric from the early first century to the late second century AD. He himself is one of the leading orators or sophists of his time who witnesses the rich rhetorical culture in the Greek and Latin speaking domains of the Roman Empire.

13 Prominent sophists are Dionysius of Halicarnassus (c. 60 BC – c. 7 AD), Dio Chrysostom (c. 40–112 AD), ps.-Demetrius (perhaps teacher of Cicero in the first century BC, perhaps much later), Lucian (c. 125–180 AD) or Cassius Dio (163–235 AD).

Ekphrasis is irrevocably linked with the rhetorical ability to evoke an immediate image in the audience's mind and thus to provoke the intended emotional response. A communication is only successful when the audience is involved in what is said on the basis of *pistis*, i.e. the faith and benevolence a recipient is willing to accord to the speaker within the relative frame of *doxa* (culturally accepted norms and knowledge). In short, ekphrasis is the art to provoke a vision. Dealing within the context of the Hellenistic and Roman period we could say ekphrasis is a "rhetorical vision" embracing "the complex ways that words – oral or written – form perception" (Hawhee 2012: 140).¹⁴ There was no doubt that language could directly interact with vision depending on the rhetorical style.

Ancient philosophers have all mused about the impact of human visual perception and mental imagery when being concerned with epistemology, aesthetics or arts. The discourse about the importance of sight and vision as reliable sources of truth can be traced back to Plato's and Aristotle's thinking, as well as to Stoic philosophy.¹⁵ In difference to the modern focus on a word-image dichotomy, the ancient discourse about visual perception implied also an impact on other senses, elicited in a form of "communicative synaesthesia" (Hawhee 2009: 140; Zanker 1981: 307f). Indeed, in Hellenistic culture the discourse about viewing is already made to a "theory-laden activity" (Baxandall 1985: 107) within the context of the visual-rhetorical notions of *phantasia* and *enargeia*, a context, in which the later coined and less theorized term ekphrasis is embedded. Rhetorical vision reflects about how the speaker shapes the imagination of the audience on all cognitive levels. In fact, *enargeia* grants not only lively verisimilitude to a representation, but concerns also the (differently assessed) epistemological basis of eyesight and vision. It is most important for the understanding of the historical debate not to bring the Romantic belief in the power of imagination as a faculty that calls on the inner eye rather than mere outward vision.

14 In the framework of this historical background the modern dichotomy of oral vs. written text, or "performance" vs. "text" does not seem to be a sensible classification (Nagy 2010).

15 The notion *enargeia* or *enarges* as technical term can be traced to Aristotle (fourth century) and the Stoics some time in the second century BC (Zanker 1981: 309).

The coinage and formal definition of the term *ekphrasis*

Although theorizing about the concept of vivid speaking is embedded in epistemological and rhetoric reflections from earlier sources, formally, the life of the term *ekphrasis* begins with its denomination in the rhetorical handbooks, the *progymnasmata* from the first to the third century AD.¹⁶

The *progymnasmata* of the so-called Second Sophistic, which are handed down to us, encompass “a series of preparatory exercises, arranged in order of difficulty” (D’Angelo 1998: 439), in which the surprisingly shorthanded and consistent definition of *ekphrasis* is introduced.¹⁷ These manuals led rhetoric students through several rhetorical exercises and *declamationes* on their way to success in public.¹⁸ Being able to perform in different styles and (also literary) genres of oral and written persuasive rhetoric and to cope with topics of different sorts, they could improve their social position even during the Roman Empire, when epideictic discourses became more important than “free” political speeches.¹⁹

16 The sophistic authors of these school manuals are Ailius Theon in the first century AD, Hermogenes of Tarsus in the second century AD, Aphthonius of Antioch in the fourth AD, Menander Rhetor at the beginning of the fourth AD, or Nikolaos of Myra in the fifth AD. For a critique of this often quoted dating and an alternative timetable see Heath 2003: 129–160.

17 Apart from the *progymnasmata* with collections of sample texts, sophists used also other forms of didactical works of style like *hypomnemata*, commentaries on special topics, and *onomastica*, a type of lexicon (Haase 2009: 39). According to Ruth Webb’s seminal study (Webb 2009), the *progymnasmata* gathered parts of a living culture of the Roman Empire. They inform about how to participate in a learned listening, reading and speaking by recalling, imitating and creatively changing the older authoritative sources belonging to different genres like the epic texts of Homer (perhaps in the eighth or seventh century BC) or the historiographical texts by Thucydides from second half of the fifth century BC.

18 In preparation for juridical and political speeches in “real life”, rhetoric students were trained in fictional speeches, *declamationes*, which were mostly set in classical Greek past. This genre demanded an argumentation “with skills that we would consider to be ‘literary’ such as the mastery of style, characterization, narration, and, of course, the vivid use of language” (Webb 2009: 132f) and developed “into a performance art in its own right” (ibid.: 133).

19 To the Greek sources, usually Latin texts from the first century BC are added, which either theoretically or practically underscore the importance of rhetoric and philosophy. In particular the theoretical texts by the Roman Rhetorician Cicero are concerned with the integration of rhetorical praxis into a philosophical and ethical background, whereas the handbook *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, supposedly written by an unknown author from Ciceronian time, contains more dry applications and practical examples in a highly structured form. Another standard schoolbook is Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria* from the first century AD of the Roman Empire. It differs from the above mentioned because it not only focuses on theory and practice of rhetoric but

The earliest author of these surviving school manuals is Ailius Theon. At least he himself claimed “to be the first to provide definitions” (Webb 2009: 43). In his *Progymnasmata* he defines *ekphrasis* as a trope (a figure of thought) and “descriptive speech (*logos perihegmatikos*) that brings the subject matter vividly (*enargos*) before the eyes” (*Prog.* 2,118,7–8 Spengel; Chinn 2007: 267).

Rhetorical vision and performativity as a constituting pattern of ekphrasis

Already the etymology of *ekphrasis*, a compound made up from the Greek verb *phrazein* (“to speak”, “to show”) and the prefix *ek* (“out”, or even “in full”, “utterly”), leads to the conclusion that *ekphrasis* should unfold or tell something in all details. In a similar etymological direction points the technical term *logoi perihegmatikoi*, “words leading around” or “showing in words”. It suggests that characters and actions are led on stage scenery²⁰ to perform before the eyes of the recipients transforming into spectators, *theatai*.

In a verbally performed *ekphrasis*, the speaker or writer attaches great importance to the manner of rhetorical vision to negotiate mental imagery, most often for persuasive purposes. Rhetorical vision does not prioritise the essential properties of an object seen, it is rather concerned with how a creator of a scene guides the viewers in their mental imagery to make sense of these images. The intended impact of rhetorical vision and visibility benefits from the analogy to the concept of a theatrical performance and its dynamic interrelation between the spectators involved in an intentional arranged performance. By means of distinct artistic language a visual or, more general, sensory imagination is elicited in the mind of the receiver, if he is able to and involved in the performative process of mentally staging the de-

also on the necessary education of an orator in language, philosophy and other relevant cultural knowledge. Since Cicero and Quintilian were both familiar with Hellenistic rhetoric and interested in exploring its philosophical implications, they embedded their teaching and explanation of *enargeia* and *ekphrasis* in a larger theoretical background than most of the rhetorical handbooks. Other authors like Plutarch (c. 46–120 AD), for example, or Pliny the Younger (61–112 AD), to name just two, echoed similar judgements about the concept of *ekphrasis* as defined in the *progymnasmata*, and can also be used in this trajectory.

20 “Stage” and “performance” are understood in the broad meaning of performance studies, not limited to the institutionalised and artistic form; see McConachie 2010: 26–43 and Iser 1993: 281–295.

scribed scene. Rather than being an arbitrary metaphor, the cognitive frame of a theatrical event stresses the intensity of a scenic experience and illuminates that both parts, actor and the audience, are interactively engaged in this co-operative process of showing, telling, and seeing or listening, and of imagination. This performative relationship is not reducible to a one-sided transfer of information about a mimetic object to an audience. Rather, the speaker invites the audience to process mental images and is interested in the feelings that arise with these images that are also used as a means of persuasively blaming or praising a “staged” scenery, objects or persons. This is why one can talk about a rather complex relationship between various speakers and listeners. Indeed, this relationship may reflect on the representation of a sight, of an object or a scene, and, often self-reflexively, on the matter and manner of their relations to each other.

At the same time, the author shows his rhetorical skills, since ancient culture is throughout competitive. Granted that “our cognitive capacities are of necessity bound up within some kind of mediality” (Mahler 2010: 112), the cognitive model for ekphrasis would be the qualified medium of a dynamic live performance rather than a static mimetic artefact like a painting. In its intention to make a past and absent scene mentally to an absorbing *hic et nunc* effect, ekphrasis is deeply concerned with the concept of mimesis, which is traditionally applied to the qualified media of literature, painting, sculpture, visual arts, dance, performance and “their putative real-world equivalents” (Halliwell 2002: 15).²¹ This communicative act of an interactive rhetorical performance is easily lost when understanding ekphrasis in the modern sense of “description” and in semantic contrast to “narration”.

According to Theon, *enargeia* is the first of the two “virtues [*aretai*] of ekphrasis” (*Prog.* 11), the other is *sapheneia*, clarity. The latter amounts both to a stylistic quality like right wording, grammar, style, and to the quality of perception conditions, but also to the effect of clear and striking mental images (Zanker 1981: 307), whereas the former aims at the intended mental

21 Most interestingly, it is Lessing who suggests a “modification of a fundamentally mimeticist position by a stress on imaginative expression and suggestiveness” (Halliwell 2002: 119), when he insists in his prologue of the *Laokoon*: “Beide [Künste] [...] stellen uns abwesende Dinge als gegenwärtig, den Schein als Wirklichkeit vor; beide täuschen, und beider Täuschung gefällt.” Rather than the reference to reality, mimetic art stresses the process of mental imagination in general.

effect of language impinged on the receiver. Both qualities together elicit mental imagery, namely the illusion of absent things or ideas being present by making the audience “almost become viewers” (Nikolaos 68,II,20). This formulaic definition of ekphrasis is repeated almost unchanged throughout the rhetoric tradition (cf. Webb 2009: 51, 103). However, as will be shown below, since the philosophical concepts of perception, mental imagery and mimesis do not totally match, different variants of *enargeia* and ekphrasis are found between the fifth century BC and the fourth century AD.

In other words, in order to make the audience feel present within in a mental spectacle, ekphrasis has to be considered as *figura in mente* (“imagined shapes and forms”). “Designed to *produce a viewing subject*” (Goldhill 2007: 2),²² ekphrasis embraces the creative activity of imagination by both the speaker or writer and the recipient to bring about a fictive presence of an absent object or scene. Both terms, ekphrasis and *enargeia*, are often used synonymously. Vivid presentation as a figure is addressed under a variety of Greek and Latin terms, which coincide in their effect to create the feeling of presence and to underscore the relevance of rhetorical vision.²³

Ekphrasis and objects vividly explored

In general, transforming language into mental images, ancient ekphrasis is at its core, yet it is not concerned with mapping the interrelations between different works of art or semiotic medium-specificity. Rather, within a framework of persuasive rhetoric, ekphrasis vividly evokes certain roles and mobilizes others (listeners, readers) to play these roles, to be involved, to be charmed and thus to be moved. To Theon, the trope ekphrasis subsumes a descriptive unfolding or exploration of four object groups, which can also be mixed. He classifies 1) people (*prosopa*), exemplified with characters from the texts of Homer; 2) events or actions (*pragmata*), like battles or plagues; 3) places (*topoi*), like cities or wilderness; and 4) times (*khronoi*), like spring or summer (*Prog.* 2,II8,8–14 Spengel). As mentioned before, although the categories of listed subjects are relatively open, “works of art” (however

22 See Scholz 1998: 73–99; Scholz 2007: 285.

23 Apart from *enargeia* we find in Greek texts terms like *hupotuposis* or *diatuposis* (Webb 2009: 52, 77, 100f). Roman rhetoricians either applied the Greek technical terms or translated them, creating Latin neologisms like *evidentia*, *representatio*, *illustratio*, *demonstratio*, *descriptio*, and *sub oculos subiectio* (Vasaly 1993: 90).

defined)²⁴ are not singled out as a distinct group of its own, although “such objects certainly *could* be evoked in ekphrasis” (Webb 2009: 2; highlighted by RW).²⁵

Rhetorical vision is an attention-evoking and persuasive device surpassing the traditional narratological classifications of description and narration as well as the generalising semiotic categories of word and image when considered as two conventionally distinct media of oppositional character.²⁶ Neither Genette’s opposition between (spatial) description and (temporal) narrative, Chatman’s dynamic “events” comprising action, opposed to static “existents” comprising settings or characters (Genette 1969: 59; Chatman 1978: 32),²⁷ nor Barthes’s definition of ekphrasis as “a brilliant detachable morsel [of description], sufficient unto itself” (Barthes 1968: 88),²⁸ are classifications that do justice to the variety of ekphraseis with different rhetorical functions in different genres. Ekphrasis focuses on the impressive

24 Halliwell defends an early ancient understanding of artistic representations (Halliwell 2002: 8).

25 The same is still true of ekphrasis in Renaissance rhetoric; see Plett 2004: 297–364; Scholz 2007: 286. According to Zanker (2004: 6f), Nikolaos established the *ekphraseis agalmaton*, the descriptions of statues and pictures, as a category of its own. However, Francis holds that the “fairly ambiguous” language of Nikolaos does not allow for a clear decision, since these objects could just have been used as illustrative examples rather than as category (Francis 2009: 2).

26 See the quote in note 6.

27 Due to an interest in medium-specificity in the interartial discourse ekphrasis was not only regarded as a figure of amplification, and “digression”, but also as a “set-piece description”, as a “narrative pause”. Even today ekphrasis can be praised or blamed with such generalising epithets (Fowler 1991: 26f). For revision of this restricted concept of narration see for instance Ryan 2005, Martens 2007 or Jedličková 2010: 14. Fowler in his essay “Narrate and describe: the problem of ekphrasis” points out that “description is rarely ‘pure’, because the way that narrative impurity is introduced is often through the figure of an observer” (Fowler 1991: 27). Ruth Webb takes another perspective: “Rather than being an optional extra which could be inserted into a narrative, ekphrasis was a process which could be applied to it, in which the basic idea was expanded by reference to its perceptible characteristics. The object of the exercise was to have an imaginative impact on the viewer which, in a rhetorical context, meant contributing to the persuasive effect of a speech” (Webb 2009: 75).

28 In a larger context Roland Barthes was interested in the linguistic “reality effect”, in which you could find historical reality in the seemingly banal descriptions. To Barthes ekphrasis or *hupotuposis* were just descriptions for its own sake breaking away from “predictive language”. In these parts, he assumed, reality could reveal itself, since he, following de Saussure, did “not differentiate between language and reality as far as the reference of the sign is concerned” (Ankersmit 1994: 141).

imagination of something absent in the mind of the listeners or readers and is alien to Genette's inherent degradation of description (*ancilla narrationis*). According to the rules of rhetoric, *narratio* provides the larger cognitive structure to organize "'persons, places, times and events' as rhetorician-speak"²⁹ for practically everything" (Webb 2009: 63). Consequently, we find that Theon classifies ekphrasis as "showing" of both, objects and actions, so to say of description and narration. Furthermore, we find ps.-Hermogenes recommending ekphrasis as a part of exercising narration (*On Types of Style*, 244–245). Likewise Nikolaos explains ekphrasis: "'Vividly' is added because it is in this respect particularly that ekphrasis differs from *diegesis* (narration). The latter sets out the events plainly, while the former tries to make the listeners into spectators" (Nikolaos, *Prog.*, 68,II,9–10).³⁰

Theorising this frame further Quintilian divided *narratio* (*diegesis*) into simple and into vivid narrations.³¹ The former sets out the events plainly to inform about the "what", i.e. "telling" the facts, whereas ekphrasis, the latter, is outlined as vivid and convincing visualisation of details or circumstances with the function to "show" a scene more elaborately, since *enargeia* is "a quality, which makes us seem not so much to be talking about something as *exhibiting* it" (*Inst.* 6,2,31; highlighted by HF – BB). Quintilian states also that, when crafting a believable and compelling argument or narration, ekphrasis can be applied as useful, but sophisticated technique of persuasion. It does not only stir emotions, but also metonymically evokes a cause or a larger context, which otherwise had to be enfolded rather in propositional terms of argumentation.

By definition, ekphrasis deals with the *how* and the intensive effect resulting from a provoked mental imagery. This is often provided by describing possible details or through unfolding a performative "eventness",³² equiva-

29 To the ancient rhetoricians the Latin term *narratio* does not mean "story", but any discourse or semiotic "text" according to the rules of a specific context.

30 Nikolaos's *Progymnasmata* provides different types of narration. He "distinguishes a type of narration (*diegesis*) that is told in the narrator's persona as opposed to a dramatic narration told by a character, as in comedy or tragedy" (Webb 2009: 55).

31 Ps.-Hermogenes also distinguishes between different forms of *diegesis*, whether they were plain or more elaborate in their description (Ps.-Hermogenes, *On invention* 3,15; Webb 2009: 72).

32 The notion "eventness" is used by Bakhtin: "Insofar as I have thought of an object, I have entered into a relationship with it that has the character of an ongoing event" (Bakhtin 1993: 33). These thoughts do not allow for a pre-given and self-evident presence (in the Husserlian sense),

lent to the sensorial experience of a spectator. Since ekphrasis, as a product of mimesis has “a significant capacity to shape the ways in which people view and judge the world, and can therefore reveal things about the nature of the human mind itself” (Halliwell 2002: 27), to the readers or listeners it can admittedly be difficult to recognise and distinguish ekphrasis from similar devices.

Thus, ekphrasis does not only make something like objects, persons or scenes visible by means of detailed description; it can also be employed to intensify the audience’s engagement in case of representing action. Moreover, some forms of ekphrasis exemplify metonymic or metaphoric conceptions of provoking ‘hidden’ ideas by describing objects. When, for instance, Cicero begs his audience to imagine the statue of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill (Cic. *Catilina* 3), he elicits at the same time a complex series of thoughts and feelings, of which he knew that the audience had collected and stored them. Rhetorical vision is not limited to describing an object *per se* but it should also evoke its social meaning, as grounded in personalised narratives, connotations, ideas and, most importantly, in its emotional impact. All this “invisible” background is intentionally attached to enhance the meaning of the visualised object. The ancient mnemonic technique of concentrating ideas around a place (*locus*), which the rhetorically educated audience was familiar with, helped to guide the process of semiosis and to provoke both general linked conceptions and individual associations. Hence, *enargeia* and ekphrasis make something – to use the modern signification of the notions – intelligible rather than only visible, understood rather than imagined.

To illuminate the concept of ekphrasis as developed so far, we can recall the classical example of the “first” ekphrasis, Homer’s (dramatic) description of the shield of Achilles (*Il.* 18,478–608; D’Angelo 1998: 442; Heffernan 2004: 10ff; Francis 2009: Bram 2011: 1ff, etc.). Mentioned by Theon as a specific subtype of ekphrasis dealing with processes, this example visualises brilliantly a mimetic object as a miniature narrative inside a larger one. Overriding the formal categories of descriptions and narration, the poet, as builder, builds “not actual but only sublime monuments, monuments grander than anything ever witnessed in history” (Porter 2012: 692). He evokes in an ekphrasis

but as an event formed in a process with an intentionally wished or stipulated direction. “Eventness” is also fundamental to Sauter’s concept of the “theatrical event” (Sauter 2006).

the illusion of experiencing and taking part in a multi-sensorial action.³³ Its celebrated position in the discourse of interartial ekphrasis does not result only from the highly skilled artistic language and rhetoric of Homer, constructing a *mise en abyme*, but also from the long tradition of quoting exactly this passage as a form of allegorical mimesis,³⁴ which parallels the making of the shield, held to be an *eikon* (symbol) of the cosmos, with the act of creation and Homer's creating of the poem. Moreover, the topos of making arms, *hoplopoiia*, is a recurrent literary motif, employed by writers like Vergil and Statius in a comparative and competitive intention, making this ekphrasis to one of the well-known (but not solely) imitated ekphraseis of Homer. Self-reflexively and in constant oscillation, amidst of the descriptive and narrative parts of the *hoplopoiia*, Homer draws attention to the importance of illusion by making the audience aware of it, and, at the same time, he also submits the spectator to the illusion (Becker 1995). "This movement between absorption into the mimetic world of the representation and awareness of the artistic and material means by which that representation is created is seen as characteristic of the response to the visual art in Homeric ekphrasis" (Webb 1995).

As said before, ekphrasis is a complex literary device of rhetorical vision referring to the capacity of language to evoke mental pictures. By means of its artistic language and the intra-diegetic performance of its creator, spectator and the shield as "stage", the Shield of Achilles invites the recipient to accept the role suggested and to imagine a multi-sensorial spectacle of emotional impact. Moreover, it stipulates the viewer/listener to go beyond what can be seen optically and what is described or narrated. This example, always used in the interartial discourse on ekphrasis, gives no evidence for drawing a line between narrative and description, as grounded in the linguistic material (like static verbs), in the structural entities, in the teleological movement, nor in the medium-specificity of the object or scene it refers to.

33 *Prog.* 2,118,21–24 Spengel: "There are also ekphraseis of processes, such as implements and weapons and siege engines, describing how each was made, as the making of the arms [of Achilles] in Homer [*Il.* 18,478–614]" (Chinn 2007: 276).

34 Crates of Mallos is the ancient source that parallels the making of arms, *hoplopoiia* with the making of the cosmos, *kosmopoiia*, with Democritus as his predecessor (Porter 2011: 689).

The power of language and emotions

The ancient concept of ekphrasis and *enargeia* is – as we have seen in the last section – embedded in larger philosophical and rhetorical theories about perception, imagination, memory and mimesis. As said before, ekphrasis foregrounds consistently the speaker’s performative capacity rather than a specific object. Thanks to his experience and imagination the speaker is able to visualise a scene, which sparks a corresponding scene and affect in the minds of the audience. By means of *enargeia*, i.e. a special type of clarity, the speaker elicits *enargeia*, the audience’s performative capacity to imagine, and provokes emotional effects linked to these culturally influenced mental images.³⁵ Ekphrasis evokes and imitates the emotional effect of the audience’s mental representations or *phantasiai* rather than a real object or scene.³⁶ In addition, ancient ekphrasis is palpably built upon the trust in language as power and action, in performative interactivity and the imaginative engagement between speaker and listener. What reaches the ears is also displayed to “the eyes of the mind”. Even more, it is the artistic and vivid, i.e. sensorial language which can force its “powerful, physical imagery” (Webb 2009: 98) with its emotional impact on the listener.

Theoretically Quintilian and ps.-Longinus (1st or 3rd century AD) draw strongly on the power of affective rhetoric in the act of intersubjective signification: “A particular image (*visio*), summoned to mind, sets in motion a predictable emotional response (*pathos*)” (Vasaly 1993: 97). Quintilian goes as far as to state that plain facts or arguments stay only on the surface of the mind, whereas vivid speech penetrates inside, since “*enargeia* derives from the innermost recesses of the speaker’s mind and works its way inside the listener to produce its intense effect” (Webb 2009: 99). To ps.-Longinus

³⁵ Aristotle uses *enargeia* or the adjective *enarges* in closely linkage to sight and vision in difference to *energeia*, meaning the capacity of an entity in its specific function. To say it with Aristotelian words, *energeia* is “the representation of things in a state of actuality [...] in opposition to *dunamis* [the] potential latent existence or capacity for action” (Zanker 1981: 307). The term “representation” is the modern translation of the ancient term mimesis and refers to the capacity of a mythos to do a work, or task (*ergon*), meaning to have an intellectual and emotional impact on an audience. In emphasising the parallel effects of the process and results of *enargeia* (*phantasiai*) and the process and results of direct perception (*phantasiai*), Aristotle describes these *visiones* alike a sensation. They “can be contemplated either as equivalent to what they represent, or as likenesses” (Webb 2009: 112).

³⁶ See the following paragraphs about *phantasiai*.

enargeia has even an enslaving emotional effect, which only a good listener can resist: “What then is the effect of rhetorical visualization (*phantasia*)? There is much it can do to bring urgency and passion into our words; but it is when it is closely involved with factual arguments that as well as persuading the listener, it enslaves him” (ps.-Longinus, *On the Sublime*, 15,9; Webb 2009: 98). An emotional visualisation impresses, astonishes or amazes, even dazzles the listener or reader both in poetry and juridical rhetoric. In such an emotional confusion, facts can be concealed and the listener or reader is absorbed due to the artistic quality of language.

As we know from recent research (Massumi 2002: 24), and from our daily experience of, for instance, commercials, emotional language is more persuasive and memorable than long and dry explanations. No wonder that *enargeia* and *phantasia* have been considered a violent power meant to be used as “a weapon of rhetoric” (Goldhill 2007: 5). A strong link between the writer’s words and the reader’s expected imaginative reaction seems to be a predictable given in this particular cultural context. Quintilian boasts that he, like everybody else, can not only evoke the image of Cicero’s enemy, the Roman governor Verres, but also supply further details to Cicero’s short outline of his appearance (*Inst.* 8,3,64). Quintilian’s mental image is not so much enhanced by real visible details but more by his memorised knowledge and emotions toward Verres. To provide a similar vivid, emotional effect, Quintilian advises his rhetoric pupils “to follow the nature” (*Inst.* 8,3,71). The listener’s capacity to create images out of the speaker’s words depends, as obvious from this example, plainly on a store of remembered *phantasiai*, i.e. memories. Consequently, the recipient of an ekphrasis is to be understood as prompted to mental effects, since the transfer of imagery is aroused rather automatically: The good author knows how “to follow the nature” to cause this effect. Therefore, the process of the addressee’s imagination depends on the familiarity of the described scenes. The familiarity again results from the addressee’s personal experience and the author’s dramatic or artistic quality in representing: i. e. genre expectations, cultural codes, or “the discursive quality of culture” (Mahler 2010: 109). We know that “the storage and processing of imaginal mental representations” (Thomas 2014) play an essential role in cognitive functioning, the way of understanding images, language or ekphraseis.

Rhetorical vision and phantasia

Rhetorical vision operates on a sensorial and metaphorical level when making the reader “see”. This will be made obvious by taking a closer look on Aristotle’s thoughts about *phantasia* and on different philosophical models of perception and cognition. Contrary to modern understanding, ancient epistemological philosophies always embrace the double-sided aspect of mental and material representation. They are responsible for the fact that ekphrastic descriptions are evaluated on a spectrum that runs from the true to the fictional, and from hyperbolically praising the “truth” or “lifelikeness”³⁷ to blaming its effect as “deception” when comparing the representations with the perceived and memorised referential object.

When ps.-Longinus defines *phantasia* as “what some people call *eidolopoiein*, image production” (15,1), meaning that it embraces both, the word *logos* and the images *hup’opsin* (15,1), he applies the Aristotelian concept of *phantasia* (just like Quintilian) as applicable to poetry and rhetoric speeches, although poets are considered freer than orators in placing fantastic scenes before the eyes (ps.-Long. *On the Sublime* 15,1; Zanker 1981: 303).

Aristotle explains the concept of *phantasia*³⁸ as being “the process by which we say that an image [*phantasma*] is presented to us”.³⁹ To him, the sensations from everyday life imprint themselves on the soul (like representations in wax or on paintings), where they create memory images, that is, the material for making judgements (Hawhee 2011: 144). Since *phantasia* is also a kind of thinking, which orders sensations, it increases the efficiency of words (*Rhet.* 1370a28–30). *Phantasia* provides also the capacity of conceptual thinking which relies on the cumulative effect of memorised images, its

37 Halliwell terms this effect the “quasi-vitalistic quality of mimesis” (Halliwell 2002: 123).

38 In contrast to fancy, Aristotle’s *phantasia* does not emphasise “the unreality of what is ‘presented’ to the mind; the focus is rather on the cognitive process that consists in entertaining a given notion or idea, a process that brings pleasure or pain to the one who engages in it” (Gonzales 2006: 125). Aristotle defines *phantasia* at *Rhet.* 1370a28–30 as “a kind of weak perception’ (*aisthesis*), connected not only with the sense perception but also with the mental faculties of memory and hope” (Gonzales 2006: 106).

39 *De Anima* 428a 1–4, transl. according to Hawhee, who argues strongly against the strict metaphorical reading of “seeing” standing in for understanding as initiated by George Kennedy (Hawhee 2012: 144). It is also argued that *phantasmata* would be better translated as “appearance” or “presentation” rather than as “image”. Mental images and percepts are not to be distinguished sharply (Thomas 2013).

“animated gathering of both future and past images into the now by rendering them lively, vivid, and kinetic”, in particular, when expressed through metaphor and style (Hawhee 2009: 153). This concept of *phantasia*, linked with memory, emotions and the capacity to differ between right and wrong (Gonzales 2006: 106), provides a background for understanding the power of ekphrasis. To Aristotle linguistic meaning stems from imagery, making spoken words to symbols of inner images (*De Interpretatione* 16a 5–9; *De Anima* 420b 29–32; Thomas 2014). Different from the modern concept of perception is the interconnection between inner pictures and their active role in perception which makes the distinction between the modern terms “seeing of” and “seeing-in” collapse (Thomas 2014).

Important for *enargeia* and ekphrasis is Aristotle’s belief that the beauty of words lies in the appeal to the senses, to that of sight, of hearing or of both, all implied in the “bringing-before-eyes”. *Phantasia* is responsible for a vivid depiction of scenes also beyond the realm of actual reality. Employing perceptual modalities mimetic art (such as dance, tunes, gesture, colours, lines etc.) offers therefore a set of entities to perception just like the “real world”. In this way, performed among the makers, performers and audiences, mimetic art is embedded within the relational connection of culturally accepted rules of communication.

Rivalling concepts

Rivalling philosophical concepts complicate a simple comprehension of ekphrasis since it is dependent on the terms *enargeia*, *sapheneia* or *mimesis*. In general, the Stoics argued that the mind (the soul) is something corporeal and following the laws of physics. Their sophisticated theory of perception, which belongs to logic as opposed to physics and ethics, differs from our contemporary thoughts working with a sharp contrast between mind and body.⁴⁰ While the Stoics held that language, as a technique of *mimesis*, could

40 Ancient theories of vision insist on a direct contact between viewer and object with the result “that what is seen also enters into the mind itself because its images continue to recur in the ‘mind’s eye’ even after the thing has been seen” (Stansbury-O’Donnell 2006: 64). Moreover, Francis argues, that “vision, whether mental or ocular, is invasive and tactile, its impact concussive. What is seen, once it is touched by, taken into, or has invaded the mind, can have a life (and perhaps a will) of its own” (Francis 2009: 17).

give a correct picture of reality,⁴¹ to Aristotle, *mimesis* is not informed by the actual but by the potential. Rather than imitation, *mimesis* “must be understood as actualization of what is possible (of that which could or should be) rather than as a simple representation of nature (of that which is)” (Landgraf 2000: 555).⁴² According to Peripatetic psychology, a symbolic but pre-linguistic awareness or apprehension is “supposed to carry information even though they do not belong to language proper” (Spruit 1994: 10). The Stoics do not accept any metaphysical reality of concepts. To them, passions do not result from a distinct irrational faculty but from errors in judgement.⁴³ By contrast, Plato and Aristotle explain mental conflicts as a battle between the rational and irrational parts of the soul. Independent from the body’s goal, perception provides information to make inferences and theories about the world possible. Interesting for modern cognitive theories is the fact that Peripatetic cognitive psychology allows for “positing a fundamentally non-discursive, cognitive stage” (Spruit 1994: 9). Yet, since Stoic epistemological philosophy grounds in language, the Stoics reject the Peripatetic differentiation according to the level of details (clarity) in an ekphrastic description. In short, these emulating epistemological concepts about “how to theorize the regime of the visual and rhetorical performance in society” (Goldhill 2007: 7) are responsible for divergent types of ekphrasis.

At the same time as Aristotle, but differently from his idea of *phantasia* and *mimesis*, the Greek philosopher Epicurus (341–271 BC), father of the Epicurean school, taught – more like the Stoics – that knowledge of the world could be gained by relying solely upon the senses and that all

41 The Stoics believed in “cognitive presentation” (*phantasia kataleptike*) as a criterion for knowledge (Halliwell 2002: 265). The sole criterion of truth is a striking conviction produced by means of real objects. “The strength and vividness of the image distinguish these real perceptions from a dream or fancy” (Rubarth 2006).

42 Landgraf concludes in his review the convincing re-reading of Aristotle’s *mimesis* concept by Arbogast Schmitt (in Kablitz – Neumann 1998). To Schmitt, Aristotelian *mimesis* includes the perceiver’s creative subjectivity and involvement in constructing realities, which are represented in the aspects of actuality and *dunamis*, potentiality (see note 35). In modern term, *mimesis* implies “an understanding of reality which posits the real as attainable only within the ideal, not within the empirical” (Landgraf 2000: 555).

43 See the example of a stoic ekphrasis by Seneca.

sense-impressions are inscribed in the mind.⁴⁴ He defined *enargeia* in line with his “linguistic speculations” (Zanker 1981: 310) as “the clear view”, i.e. in close relation to clarity in sense impression, which “all true opinion must be based upon” (*Ep. Hdt.* 52). Only striking language of evident clarity (*perspicuitas*) promised “true representations” and the only ones that are made available to memory contrary to “false images” (*visiones inanes*) (Vasaly 1993: 94).

The same line of argumentation is held by ps.-Demetrius in his book on styles and literary criticism, *De Elocutione*.⁴⁵ He also demanded the completeness of details, which were paired with *sapheneia* (clarity of sight) to entail *enargeia* and truth. This is because to him, no distinction can separate inner objects of mind from the outer reality, and therefore he “grounds knowledge solely in the mechanism of perception” (Spruit 1994: 54).⁴⁶ Based on the Stoic concept of language as *mimesis*, “every representation (*pasa mimesis*) contains some measure of *enarges*” (*Eloc.* 219; Walker 1993: 354).

All these above-mentioned early concepts, apart from the Peripatetic (Aristotelian) one, make clarity of sight, *sapheneia*, responsible for the true accordance of the “*visiones*”, *phantasiai*, with the perception. Clarity in this sense is a summa of conditions, all ascribed to the object in question and to the process of perception: In this way, we talk about a shared sensory experience as a result of the brightness of the light, of the accuracy of the object, of good working senses of a creature and so on. Since language is understood as a tool to induce such “*visiones*” with the same clarity, the term *enargeia* links sensory perception and truth. In the modern discourse, we often follow the Stoic concept of a prior and ontological given reality, to which

44 To Epicurus, perception is “the reception of and the commitment to information about what is perceived. Therefore, perceiving and thinking are not separate faculties, for a full-blown sense perception includes judgement” (Spruit 1994: 55).

45 Ps.-Demetrius is an author who is hard to date; he lived either in second or first century BC or perhaps in the first or second century AD (Zanker 1993: 305).

46 To Democritus “all knowledge derives from sensation, which originates in the *eidola* effluent from external objects and impinging on sense organs” (Spruit 1994: 50). In a direct contact with external objects, the incoming atoms of the *eidola* or *imagines* cause the mental representations. To Democritus “the object of perception is the outcome of the interaction between the sensible thing and the sense organ. Thus the medium in which the interaction takes place has an essential role to play in perception” (*ibid.*: 32), since the things transmit strings of atoms representing them and communicate their structure to the medium. “These representational atom-strings are called *eidola* or ‘images’” (*ibid.*: 32).

verbal representation in mimetic intention should refer by carefully describing realistic details, demanded to recognise ekphrasis (Bernhardt 2007: 131f). However, this is just one of other rhetorical styles depending on which functions and expectations an ekphrasis responds to.

Truth or deception

Depending on the mimesis concept applied, ekphrasis can be conceived of as deception as long as one compares the referential source with its mediated representation under the precondition that an objective reality may be perceived. This deduction, which resulted in Barthes's understanding of ekphrasis linked to a "reality effect" (Barthes 1968), is built on Stoic rather than on Aristotelian concepts of perception and mimesis. However, after a modern revaluation of the status of "reality" from an objective given to a more constructivist view on it, also mimesis assumes an increasing autonomy with regard to the "reality". Rather, it is understood as being itself involved "in the construction of *representational realities*" (Landgraf 2000: 554; highlighted by EL). Since the contents of literature are never just a source of information and evidence about past social condition, any differentiation between factual and notional ekphrasis, as introduced by John Hollander (1988: 209) and grounded in a modern distinction between *fiction* and *faction*, does not equal the different philosophical concepts which strived to develop epistemological knowledge or even truth from language (*logos*), sensorial experience and *phantasia*.⁴⁷

Contrary to the concepts above, the Roman rhetorician Cicero (106–43 BC) follows a more sceptical philosophical opinion mistrusting truth or knowledge derived solely from sensory data. To him, clarity as mode of perception is not any longer a distinctive criterion for representing the real. Thus, ekphrasis and *enargeia* are not restricted to mimetic realistic description of perfect perception via *eidola*. Rather they imply – as we have seen before – the impact and possibilities of shared conventions, including

47 I assume this distinction between factual and notional ekphrasis is a relict from the times when ancient texts were rather read as if describing historical facts or as a tool to reveal "the aesthetic norms of the period" as Wendy Steiner puts it (Steiner 1982: 18). It is ironic that this modern restriction of ekphrasis, which centres mostly on poetry and figurative art, points back to the ancient mimesis concept. Such referential reading is neither adequate to ancient nor to postmodern thinking.

“the judgments and emotions of the describer” (Becker 1995: 11). These shared conventions include also fictive descriptions – just as we nowadays share conversations about a set of fictive stories, Hollywood-blockbusters everybody has seen. Quintilian explains in *Inst.* 8,3,70: “We will obtain vivid clarity if we remain very close to reality (*verisimilia*), so that we may invent fictitious elements (*falso adfingere*), which did not occur, if they usually occur in the situation we are describing” (Francis 2009: 6). Given that the modern distinction between fiction and non-fiction does not exist in Hellenistic and Roman culture, we understand *sapheneia* denoting the condition for perfect perception (but differently defined in different schools) and *enargeia* signifying the condition for perfect imagination, or as Vasaly puts it, *enargeia* is the “verbal counterpart to the sensory reception of clear and striking images” (Vasaly 1993: 94).

Seneca (4 BC – 65 AD), the philosopher, writer and educator of Nero, gives another variant of ekphrasis, which shows that evoked mental imagery does not principally aim at emotional stimulation. Rather, *enargeia* depends on the function of ekphrasis in text and context, and on the cooperation of the recipient to perform as an optically and mentally viewing subject according to the speaker’s intention. Stoic ekphrasis, as exemplified by Seneca, is a means of didactic artistic communication. Like Stoic philosophers who trained their students to free themselves from the delusion of the incoming impressions (images) and value judgments, Seneca’s ekphrasis aims rather at freeing the audience from emotions and habitual modes of perception. In general, the Stoics held that one could train oneself to hold back with an emotional reaction and opinion resulting from a certain perception.

The following example shows how Seneca’s ekphrasis of the city Syracuse teaches the reader in the stoic restriction of the gaze: After having described and praised the most salient natural and artistic qualities of the beautiful and opulent city Syracuse (*Cons. Ad Marc.* 17,2–4) for a vividly addressed audience, he turns the aroused admiration of a delightful place (*locus amoenus*) into the opposite (*locus horribilis*) by inviting the audience to reflect the other side of the town, i.e., the memorised and stored images linked to this place as rhetorical *locus*, the inhospitable climate, the cruelty of its barbaric tyrant Dionysius II, who invited and, consequently arrested Plato (Bartsch 2007: 85). The description aims not only at turning the praise into blame by rendering striking words inducing the opposite emotion and soul-stirring

enargeia. Rather, when gruesome spectacles are sketched, usually making the reader react strongly and emotively, the correct and intended response to Stoic ekphrasis would counteract such an emotional reaction by virtue of conscious reconsideration. Stoic ekphrasis does not limit itself to evoke a “viewing subject”, but strives “to initiate viewers out of their ordinary assumptions into a new exegetic reality, a truth that brings salvation” (Elsner 1995: 47). In doing so, Seneca shows his awareness of the gaze’s inclination for failure and deception in the ekphrastic performance of occluding the purported visual objects (ibid.: 68). Moreover, he also emulates the intertextual tradition of praising Syracuse by representing an invisible world-view with regard to his ‘pedagogical model’ and ethical concept.⁴⁸

Staging a view when describing historical events

To demonstrate the difficulty of drawing a strict borderline between reality and fiction, objectivity and ideology or rhetorical manipulation, or mediated and mental representation, I take an example of ancient ekphrasis from the historiographer Thucydides (c. 460 – c. 395 BC). Although we can find similar rhetorical techniques to prompt emotions, engagement and mental imagery as in Homer’s Shield of Achilles, this description of an historical event is not counted as belonging to the modern concept of a “double representation”. Yet, the historiographical or literary text is unfolded as performative process to stimulate an – in modern terms – inner- and extradiegetic audience to experience a scene in a dramatic setting. Thucydides dramatizes the act of interpreting visually framed scenery in the same rhetorical technique like Hellenistic epigrams describe works of visual art (Goldhill 2007).

According to the rhetorical handbooks, Thucydides’ descriptions of the sea battle and defeat, which the Athenians suffered in the Syracusan harbour (Thuc. 7,71), is repeatedly quoted and praised as a type of ekphrasis. Thucydides enfolds the event in the cognitive frame of a tragic spectacle by delivering perceptual details of the circumstances of the place, the agents, the process of action and the observers. Although being players involved in rules of war games, the warriors are not aware that they are being observed

48 Seneca competes with the tradition of the so-called *laus Siciliae*, the praise of Syracuse, see Cic. *Verr.* 4,117–119, Quint. *Inst.* 4,3,12–14. Rather than to an interartial rivalry, ekphrasis invites here to the same intertextual competition as in the case of the shield description.

as actors. All that happens is presented through different spectators' point of view, from the Athenian shore. As a consequence of their limited view, these spectators react with different and strong emotions. Furthermore, reflecting on the sympathetic response of the eyewitnesses, the narrator allows that different voices can be heard to give different perspectives on the event. Identifying with the described viewers, the listener or reader can either follow the experience of the engrossed witnesses of a live performance, or the narrator's reflecting comments on the limits of perception and the authenticity of eyewitnesses.

Thus, this ekphrasis both imitates and encodes *the vision* of an outer reality mimetically. In doing so, the text combines facts, visual perception, imagination, emotional subjectivity and self-reflexivity.⁴⁹ Additionally, on the linguistic and semantic level this verbal representation is conditioned by a teleological configuration, as it is the case of tragedy,⁵⁰ a code or frame that points to the conscious blend of "fact" and "fiction". Moreover, only the reader of the whole texts can imagine this scene as a self-reflexive *mise en abyme*, by hindsight, "since the spectators who watch the scene (of ships embarking or at battle) are themselves part of a larger scene that includes the first" (Walker 1993: 362). Thus, rather than a transparent encounter and imitation of past reality or facts, this piece of the historiographical work of Thucydides provides insight in the limited perceptual and emotional experience of a historical scenery.⁵¹ Although this ekphrasis is not concerned with a conventionally defined artefact mediated in a static materialised form but with a performative event framed through vision, it "can call attention to

49 "Thucydides turns our attention from the spectacle itself, to the psychology of the spectators who look on, and he draws into relief the disparity between the incidents (*ergon*) and their visual perception (*opsis*)" (Walker 1993: 356).

50 It had been said that Thucydides' narrative technique "owes more to the dramatists of the fifth century than to his generic predecessor Herodotus" (Walker 1993: 356).

51 Walter Bernhart explains the difference between descriptions made by "professional historiographers and forensic lawyer-orators aiming at 'veracity' in contrast to 'verisimilitude' strived for by literary writers" (Bernhart 2007: 130). Reading Greek and Roman historiographies by authors like Thucydides or Lucian, to name just two, makes obvious that the poetic writers do not only blur the modern borderline between fact and fiction, but also muse self-reflectively about their seeing and genre specific writing. A very good introduction is given by Walker 1993: 353–377. By the way, Thucydides is a good example for the dramatizing history according to Aristotelian understanding of tragedy.

the artificialities (and shortcomings) of representation, creating as a consequence a text concerned with discourse over and *against* representation” (Walker 1993: 363). The reader can create different mental spaces, provided from different input spaces: the war scene located in a simulated space of the past on the level of reality is superimposed by a space constructed according to the rules of a spectacle. The mental space of the spectacle, then, is furthermore determined by more specific genre conventions of a tragic ending, demanding a specific emotional response in another, mental body space. These superimposed mental spaces allow, when neatly mapped, for a reflection on the imaginary act of the “world-creation” as a form of verbal representation and virtual imaginery.

This example is, like the Shield of Achilles, constructed as a *mise en abyme*, and refers self-reflexively to the author’s poetico-rhetorical strategy to present himself as creator. Moreover, it does not only override the distinction between *mimesis* and *diegesis*, but also between different rhetoric, literary and historiographical genres.

Rhetorical vision in interartial ekphrasis

Rather than from the *progymnasmata*, the tradition of choosing works of art like paintings or sculpture for ekphrastic descriptions considers its origins to come from other prose works of the Second Sophistic. Philostratus the Elder is called the father of a specific “literary genre” because of his ekphrastic descriptions of sixty-five art works. Yet, not the fact that Philostratus chose paintings for displaying his poetry-rhetoric makes this type of ekphrasis more exceptional than others. He used the same technique of *enargeia* that can be shown for ekphraseis referring to towns, gardens, houses and so on. Nevertheless, the manner how he provided fully realised scenes, how he transformed the reader into a spectator by means of *enargeia*, and how he introduced a performative and educational communication between a teaching “sophist” and a child to demonstrate *how* to view and *how* to understand art work, fulfils the poetic-rhetorical rules.⁵² However, what seems to be more important, is the potentiality and functionality that this type of ekphrasis shares with others. Facilitated as embedded and framed narrative,

52 See Zeitlin 2013b: 61–87 or Miles 2013: 123–141.

ekphrasis may also be understood in an interpretative play as *mise en abyme* or complex argumentative technique beyond the surface description.

Admittedly, Philostratus had many successors emulating in the same field. Already his son-in-law Philostratus the Younger (c. 300 AD) who wrote the *Imagines* did so, as well as the sophist Callistratus (the fourth or third century AD) with his *Descriptiones*. Other authors like Pliny, Vitruvius, Lucian or Pausanius, applied their rhetorical skills in describing works of art in a similar way, and integrated them into their further argumentation. These texts together are traditionally considered a literary genre, the beginning of a “Roman catalogue of pictures, and the Roman viewing of pictures” (Bryson 1994: 225) and supposed to anticipate the discourse of modern art catalogues and their critical analysis (Cheeke 2008: 15).⁵³ However, gathering all these different texts in one group because of the same object of reference makes it seem as if all texts were ekphraseis, fulfilling the same function, that is, to provide a (more or less detailed) description of a work of art. Moreover, Mitchell assumes that the texts would be principally in an agonal relationship to the items of art they describe: He talks about a rivalling mode between image and text, of “ekphrastic hope”, “fear” or “indifference” (Mitchell 1994: 152–168). When following this modern concern, the central act of translation from a mental interrelation into words and the stipulating act of rhetorical persuasion and delight are shifted to a more scientific perspective of how to translate visual objects into verbal expressions and how to draw cultural information of historical evidence from the literary texts, as if literature could offer “a simple window into the past” (Stark 1990: 21). When doing so, we lose sight of the different styles of languages, different functions and genre expectations of the texts, in short of the dynamic interrelation of communication and cultural expectations. What we can learn from ancient tradition is that ekphrasis depends on the rhetorical skill of *enargeia*, a capacity that comes only to life in a performative engagement between the author’s intentions pinged upon a text assuming and anticipating the

53 Independently of the mental qualities of *enargeia* singled out above, Jaś Elsner subsumes all admittedly different verbal expressions of ekphrasis under the category of description to be transferred to art history (Elsner 2010: 12). However, modern museum catalogues have a specific cultural function different from that of literary genre; these modern texts do not need to arouse the reader-viewers mental imagery in the same way, in particular not when published as iconotexts.

reader's preconditioned mental images, his knowledge, cultural codes, and emotions. Ekphrasis and *enargeia* cannot be mechanically found by exploring linguistic material. The intra- and extra-textual context and a stipulated affective engagement are likewise relevant. Ekphrasis is not a static rhetorical trope formally related to autonomous art, but deeply imbricated with the historical and social individuals who are engaged in combining acts of perception with acts of imagination in a communicational act of response. The Greeks embraced this mental activity with the concept of *enargeia*.

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