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INTRODUCTION

Of Old and New Ekphrastic *Things*: Achilles's Shield and Judd's Boxes

Discussing the Shield of Achilles in the opening of his book *Other Things*, the founder of thing theory Bill Brown (2016: 2) argues that Homer's epic poem makes it clear again and again that Achilles's Shield is not merely a static visual object but "a living *thing*" [emphasis added]. "Homer's distribution of vitality," he goes on, "extends beyond the immortal and mortal—to the artifactual" (Brown 2016: 2). For Brown, the vibrant power of the Shield—which undermines the dualistic opposition between the active human subject and the inert nonhuman object—lies precisely in its "*thingness*" [emphasis in original] (Brown 2016: 5). The vivid, elaborate description of Achilles's Shield and its rich pictorial decoration in the *Iliad* is the oldest instance of ekphrasis, often defined as "*the verbal representation of visual representation*" (Heffernan 1993: 3). As an archetypal example of poetry's engagement with the visual arts, Homer's depiction of the Shield has been thoroughly explored in the framework of ekphrastic theory. A lot of attention has been paid to its rhetorical function: the vivid description stimulates mental visualization, making the listener (or reader) "see" the Shield in the mind's eye (Webb 2009: 2; Koopman 2018: 14; Dmitriev 2021: 196; Jarratt 2022: 11–14). Considerable scholarly interest in Homer's ekphrasis has been focused on the relationship between words and images, particularly the issues of representation (Heffernan 1991; Mitchell 1994). However, the materiality of Achilles's Shield has remained largely neglected in the framework of ekphrastic analysis: "The commanding role that the Shield has played in the history of modern ekphrastic criticism has all but denied it any role in the history of animate matter" (Brown 2016: 4). In other words, the scholarship on the most famous example of ekphrasis points at the limits of current ekphrastic studies, specifically its lack of interest in material vitality.

The aim of this dissertation is to fill in this gap, bringing the often-overlooked questions of materiality to the forefront of ekphrastic analysis. What is evident from the ancient example of ekphrasis—a need for a matter-oriented approach—is as relevant (and perhaps even more so) in the case of recent ekphrastic works. Contemporary ekphrasis often invites thinking of materiality in general and the *thingness* of media in particular. Consider, for instance, ekphrasis in Ben Lerner's novel *10:04* (2014), which engages with a variety of existing artworks, including those by Roy Lichtenstein, Donald Judd, John Chamberlain, and Jeff Koons. The narrator of the novel is an American writer and a frequent visitor of art galleries. In terms of materiality, especially remarkable is the way the narrator describes Donald Judd's sculptures, a series of boxes made of mill aluminum:

> The work was set in time, changing quickly because the light was changing, the dry glasses going gold in it, and soon the sky was beginning to turn orange, tingeing the aluminum. All those windows opening onto open land, the reflective

> surfaces, the differently articulated interiors, some of which seemed to contain a blurry image of the landscape within them—all combined to collapse my sense of inside and outside, a power the work had never had for me in the white-cube galleries of New York. (Lerner 2015: 179)

Like the Shield of Achilles in Homer's epic poem, Judd's boxes in Lerner's novel are not passive objects but lively things. Ekphrasis foregrounds the materiality of the medium, celebrating the vibrant and dynamic nature of physical processes: the constantly changing play of light and reflections on the shimmering aluminum surfaces. As the ekphrastic description goes on, it becomes clear that the artwork affects the spectator with unexpected power. This striking effect results from the entanglement of the meaningful and the material: the visual image of the landscape—which implies the artwork "to contain the world"—is inseparable from the materiality of the light reflection process (Lerner 2015: 180). Through ekphrasis, Lerner also weaves into the literary narrative an image of the world where the human is not central. As described in the novel, Judd's sculptures—which encompass the world—are "tuned to an inhuman, geological duration, lava flows and sills, aluminum expanding as the planet warms" (Lerner 2015: 180). Thus, ekphrasis in *10:04* brings together the experiences of the world at different scales—human and more-than-human scales.

Both examples of ekphrasis—the Shield in the *Iliad* and Judd's boxes in *10:04*—demonstrate that attention to materiality can be of central importance to ekphrastic analysis. How do ekphrastic works engage with the material world? What is the role of ekphrasis in challenging dualistic categories, such as matter and meaning, body and mind, nature and culture? How can ekphrasis foreground the significance and vitality of matter? By what means can ekphrasis address the materiality of ecological destruction? How can an emphasis on embodiment in ekphrastic works push the boundaries of well-established critical frameworks employed to examine intermedial relations? In what way is the development of ekphrastic theory entangled with the changes in material-discursive practices and media environments? These are some of the questions that I will explore in this dissertation. For this purpose, I will turn to a set of critical frameworks that have recently emerged in the humanities—the so-called "new materialisms." In this introduction, I will provide a brief overview of new materialist thought, its concepts and goals. I will then consider the "material turn" in studies of literature and art—namely the ways in which new materialist thinking is taking root and spreading across disciplines that deal with the media of literature, painting, film, and digital art. The overview will pave the way for bringing together new materialist thought and ekphrastic studies. Finally, I will introduce the structure of this dissertation and explain how its chapters develop a matter-oriented approach to ekphrasis. My research focuses on contemporary literary and filmic ekphrases, thus considering the presence of visual artworks not only in literature but also in film.

New Materialisms

The emergence of new materialisms is often seen as a reaction to the linguistic and cultural turns and the subsequent *turn away* from matter in the humanities and social sciences. As Karen Barad (2007: 132) puts it, "[t]he linguistic turn, the semiotic turn, the interpretative turn, the cultural turn: it seems that at every turn lately every 'thing'—even materiality—is turned into a matter of language or some other form of cultural representation." The focus on the discursive, as new materialists see it, pushed materiality to the margins of academic theorizing. This does not, however, mean that new materialisms dismiss language and textuality. At the core of new materialist thought is rather an emphasis on the inseparability of the discursive and the material, or what Barad theorizes as the entanglement of matter and meaning:

> The relationship between the material and the discursive is one of mutual entailment. Neither discursive practices nor material phenomena are ontologically or epistemologically prior. Neither can be explained in terms of the other. Neither is reducible to the other. Neither has privileged status in determining the other. Neither is articulated or articulable in the absence of the other; matter and meaning are mutually articulated. (Barad 2007: 152)

Thus, the relation between discursive practices and material phenomena is not hierarchical but co-constitutive. Within the new materialist framework of "mattering," the key assumption is that matter has the capacity to matter (Jones 2018: 245; Barad 2007: 3). Thinking of world phenomena in terms of entanglements and mattering, in turn, serves one of the main goals of new materialisms—to challenge dualisms such as body and mind, nature and culture, matter and meaning, things and words. As Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin (2012: 100) put it, new materialism is "transversal"[1] in that it "*cuts across* or intersects dual oppositions in an immanent way" [emphasis in original]. Within non-dualistic thought, humans with their ideas and culture do not stand outside but are part of the material world: cultural, artistic, and meaning-making practices are enmeshed in the network of entangled material-discursive phenomena.

As an alternative to the metaphor of "reflection" for knowing, Barad (2007: 30) develops a "diffractive methodology," which accounts for the complex relationality of the material and the discursive. Barad's methodology is inspired by the physical phenomenon of diffraction, which "has to do with the way waves combine when they overlap" (Barad 2007: 28). To give a familiar example, when two stones are simultaneously dropped into calm water, the waves overlap, creating a

[1] Within new materialist thought, the concept of *transversality* is used as a tool for challenging hierarchies and transcending disciplinary boundaries; as Helen Palmer and Stanimir Panayotov (2016) explain it, "A transversal line cuts diagonally through previously separated parallel lines, as in the common garden gate. Each of those horizontal planks in the gate could be an academic discipline, or a previously conceptualized categorical segregation. The diagonal or transversal line cuts through these."

"diffraction pattern" (Barad 2007: 77). If the notion of reflection creates a gap between things and their representations (words), holding "the world at a distance," then diffraction emphasizes the entangled nature of phenomena, simultaneously accounting for "differences from within" (Barad 2007: 87–89). What is crucial is that differences and relations are not predetermined but emerge from entangled processes. Dualistic thinking, on the contrary, insists on the fixed nature of hierarchies and oppositions (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2011).

Another goal that new materialisms pursue is to challenge the view of matter as a dull and passive object. In her essay "The Inertia of Matter and the Generativity of Flesh," Diana Coole notes that

> The predominant sense of matter in modern Western culture has been that it is essentially passive stuff, set in motion by human agents who use it as a means of survival, modify it as a vehicle of aesthetic expression, and impose subjective meanings upon it. … Yet is it not possible to imagine matter quite differently: as perhaps a lively materiality that is self-transformative and already saturated with agentic capacities … ? (Coole 2010: 92)

For new materialisms, the material world is not a passive object to be observed and mastered by humans but an entanglement of agential forces. Matter is not fixed or inert but vibrant (Bennett 2010) and agential (Barad 2007; Alaimo 2010; Iovino and Oppermann 2012; Schneider 2015). What is the importance of recognizing matter's agency? Barbara Bolt (2013: 2) argues that the "acknowledgement of agential matter" allows new materialisms to undermine "the anthropocentric narrative that has underpinned our view of humans-in-the-world since the enlightenment, a view that posits humans as makers of the world and the world as a resource for human endeavors," a view that allows for destructive and unsustainable activities. Thinking of matter as capable of "self-transformation, self-organization, and directedness" challenges the conventional understanding of agency as an exclusive property of humans (Coole and Frost 2010: 10). Agency extends beyond human actions into the material world where "it is not just humans who do things" (Bolt 2013: 3); nonhuman matter can as well exhibit vitality and enact effects (Bennett 2010). In Barad's (2007: 151) performative understanding, matter is not "an inherent, fixed property of abstract, independently existing objects"; matter is "*a doing*" [emphasis in original].

It is remarkable that material agency can be uncanny and unpredictable to humans. As Stacy Alaimo (2010: 146) notes in her *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*, material substances not only "travel across and within the human body" but also affect it by doing "often unwelcome or unexpected things."[2] Alaimo (2010: 19–20) describes her surprise at the amount of mercury that Greenpeace found in her hair: "When I received the results,

[2] In her argument, Alaimo draws on the concept of *trans-corporeality*, which she develops to emphasize the way in which the human body is "intermeshed with" the material world (2). The human, Alaimo argues, "is always the very stuff of the messy, contingent, emergent mix of the material world" (11).

I imagined various routes that mercury may have taken to my body (tuna sandwiches in childhood? Dallas air pollution?).” Material agencies, she observes, are “often imperceptible” (Alaimo 2010: 146). It is, thus, the quality of being unseen—being invisible to the human eye—that exacerbates the unexpected effects of material agencies.

If Alaimo (2010; 2016; 2020) is particularly interested in the agency of harmful substances—chemicals, pollutants, and toxicants—that can be detected on a microscopic level,[3] new materialisms at large engage with material agency on various scales, from microscopic cellular activities through the effects of everyday man-made things to the agential forces of large-scale materialities. In her book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, vital materialist[4] Jane Bennett (2010: xvi) argues that “ordinary, man-made items” can “exceed their status as objects” by manifesting “traces of independence or aliveness”—what she theorizes as *thing-power*. To illustrate her idea of vital materiality, Bennett considers the effects produced by different material things: a few pieces of trash that she encountered on Cold Spring Lane, a strange man-made item in Franz Kafka’s short story, and material evidence presented at a trial in Baltimore. Like Alaimo, Bennett finds the agential capacity of matter striking and even uncanny. Bennett then goes on to relate her surprise and fascination with vibrant matter to brain activity which she sees as another example of vital materiality (2010: 10). For Bennett, the capacity of bodily materials to self-organize may also be seen as thing-power (2010: 10). By highlighting “the extent to which human bodies and thinghood overlap,” Bennett (2010: 4–13) puts forth the idea that “all bodies are kin” through the entangled web of relations. Thus, for Bennett, the uncanny power of matter can be traced on a few scales[5] at once: in the neural and molecular activities of human bodily matters and in the strange effects produced by nonhuman items.

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[3] In *Bodily Natures*, Alaimo considers the harmful effects of various material substances, including silica dust particles that poisoned the lungs of Gauley Bridge workers, anthrax that intoxicates the blood of Native Americans in Percival Everett’s novel *Watershed* (1996), invisible chemicals that kill Fe in Ana Castillo’s novel *So Far From God* (1993), toxicants in the material memoirs of Candida Lawrence and other writers. It is remarkable that Alaimo turns to literature when developing her conceptualization of matter.

[4] Vital materialism is a strand of new materialisms whose emergence is often viewed as being rooted in Baruch Spinoza’s philosophy; for Spinoza, force was not external but “was immanent to matter, because matter is nothing other than an expression of *force itself*” [emphasis in original] (Gamble et al. 2019: 119). Jane Bennett (2010: 3)—one of the most prominent vital materialists—aims “to give voice to a vitality intrinsic to materiality” in order to free matter from its pervasive association with passivity and automatism.

[5] In “The Agency of Assemblages,” the second chapter of her *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett also examines material agencies that can be largely distributed in space. Bennett develops what she calls “a theory of *distributive* agency” by exploring a massive power outage that affected more than fifty million people across the United States in 2003 (21). The anthropocentric logic led the government to look for a human who could be deemed responsible for the blackout, while preventing analysts from recognizing “that the real locus of agency was an assemblage—of human and nonhuman actants” (Bennett 2018: 447).

Timothy Morton[6] explores material agencies at a wide range of scales from subatomic scales that are invisible to the human eye (Morton 2014) to the more-than-human scales of hyperobjects[7] (Morton 2013). Morton shares with Bennett an interest in the uncanny doings of matter: things and their behaviors, he argues, are "*weird*" [emphasis in original] (Morton 2014: 2). For Morton (2016: 5), the term *weird* is connected with both "appearing" and "doing." Following this line of thought, then, thinking of matter as weird implies attentiveness to its doings and agential capacity. Considering the agency of massively distributed things, Morton (2013: 54) observes that hyperobjects are weird in that they produce uncanny effects, such as cancer caused by "the force of the hyperobject radiation." The weirdness of hyperobjects, Morton believes, can "compel us to think ecologically, and not the other way around. It's not as if some abstract environmental system made us think like this; rather, plutonium, global warming, pollution, and so on, gave rise to ecological thinking" (Morton 2013: 48). Hyperobjects are weird networks of relations, which are also *things* (Morton 2018: 31–33). Embracing weirdness, as Morton (2018: 27) sees it, involves the recognition of the "deeper connectedness" of things, which is at the core of ecological thinking. In other words, thinking in terms of weird entanglements is ecological. Thus, the acknowledgement of the entangled and agential nature of world phenomena can not only challenge dualisms and anthropocentrism but also enable ecological thinking.

The Material Turn in Studies of Art and Literature

New materialist thinking has already made its way into the domains of art and literary studies. In art studies, the "material turn" involves above all an increased attention to the materiality of artistic practices. Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt's collection of essays *Carnal Knowledge: Towards a 'New Materialism' Through the Arts* (2013), for instance, explores a range of material aspects of creative

[6] Morton's work is often associated with object-oriented ontology (OOO), a school of thought which some scholars (Gamble et al. 2019; Pfeifer 2021) view as one of the many strands of new materialisms. Object-oriented ontology rejects the idea that "the world (and its objects) cannot be thought outside of its relation to thought"; in other words, every object or thing "*exceeds* the ways in which it" appears and is perceived by humans (Wolfendale 2018: 297). There is also a group of scholars (Leach 2016; Crockett 2017; Wolfendale 2018; van der Tuin and Nocek 2019) who view object-oriented ontology and new materialism as two related yet distinct schools of thought. Van der Tuin and Nocek (2019: 818), for instance, see object-oriented ontology and new materialism as strands of post-human materialisms. In this research, I rely on Morton's ideas that go in line with the new materialist interest in thingness and material agency.

[7] The term *hyperobjects* was coined by Morton (2013: 1) to denote "things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans." Hyperobjects, as Morton sees them, can be man-made products that are extremely long-lasting (such as plastic bags, Styrofoam, and all the man-made machines) or things that are not produced directly by humans (such as black holes, biospheres, planets, and nuclear materials).

practices from the materiality of artists' bodies and media to material agency that is at work in artistic practices. Their book encompasses matter-oriented studies of a variety of media, including (among others) painting, sculpture, film, and digital technology. Barrett and Bolt's *Carnal Knowledge*—along with a number of other recent studies (Rothman and Verstegen 2015; Neumark 2017; Kontturi 2018)—shows that new materialisms can illuminate art studies in manifold ways, opening up questions and providing methodologies for the exploration of art in terms of embodiment, material-discursive entanglements, and distributed agency.

The turn towards new materialist approaches may also be traced in recent literary studies, such as Frederic Neyrat's *Literature and Materialisms* (2020), which examines the relation between literature and materialisms, including new materialist theories. Theory, Neyrat (2020: 6) argues, "is made with words that affect our bodies," and so is literature. Language, he goes on, can record and thereby direct our attention to "the living materiality of the world" (Neyrat 2020: 75). By revealing matter's dynamism, new materialist theories and literature may, thus, serve the same purpose of combating anthropocentrism and dualisms. In particular, ekphrastic writing, as I will show, can record the embodied experience of artmaking and foreground the thing-power of media, thus questioning the supremacy of the artist over nonhuman materials.

Lieven Ameel et al.'s book *The Materiality of Literary Narratives in Urban History* (2020) similarly attempts to bridge the gap between materiality and literature. Ameel et al. share with Neyrat an interest in the entangled relation between materiality of literary narratives and their thematic engagement with the material world and embodied experience. Ameel et al. (2020: 2) conceptualize the double relation between materiality and literature as "materiality *in/of* literature" [emphasis added]. Literary works, they argue, engage with the material world on two levels at once: they contemplatively explore the material world and simultaneously partake in the material (re)configuring of the world (Ameel et al. 2020: 2). Likewise, Birgit Neumann's (2021) new materialist approach to literary analysis stresses the entanglement of material and thematic aspects of literature. By focusing specifically on nonhuman agencies *in and of* literature [emphasis added], Neumann (2021: 47–53) suggests that "material-semiotic agencies are literature's means to evoke the agencies of the nonhuman" and foster nondualistic thinking. The materiality of the text on the page affects the reader and the process of interpretation (Neumann 2021: 52). In other words, the materiality of literature, as Neumann (2021: 52–62) sees it, is agential in that it enacts effects on the reader. On the whole, new materialist approaches encompass a number of aspects including thematic manifestations of materialities and nonhuman agencies in literature (Boscagli 2014; Liebermann et al. 2021; Pedersen 2021) as well as their entanglements with literary materiality (Ameel et al. 2020; Neyrat 2020; Marcussen 2021) and agency (Bartosch 2021; Neumann 2021).

In comparative literary studies, the material turn coincided with a shift towards a medium-based approach to comparative literature. With "the rapid evolution of comparative literature into interart comparison, and eventually into comparative media studies," the notion of medium occupied a central place in comparative

research (Baetens and Sánchez-Mesa Martínez 2015: 290). The "intermedial configuration" of comparative literary studies, in turn, expanded the field to include "a comparison of material textures" and "media technologies" (Brillenburg Wurth 2018: 248). Broadly speaking, scholarly attention to matter is related to the intermedial turn as well as the development of technology. As Kiene Brillenburg Wurth (2018: 252) observes, the material turn in literary and media studies may be viewed "a response to the emergence of posthuman technologies that enabled digital extensions or re-wirings of the human." Brillenburg Wurth traces a correspondence between the new materialist emphasis on distributed agency and the ideas of media theorist Marshall McLuhan, who "observed that the human—and what the human is able to think, do, and make—is an effect of the media that speak through us, connect us, condition the possibility of perception, and constitute multiple frames of experience: the medium is the *massage*;[8] it moulds the human into creatures attuned to the media that constitute the ground of a given culture" (2018: 255). According to this reasoning, then, medium-oriented approaches can be combined with new materialist thinking in a productive way to decenter the human and foreground the entanglement of human thinking and nonhuman technology, concepts and practices, meaning and matter.

Bringing Together New Materialisms and Ekphrastic Studies

In what follows, I aim to extend the new materialist attention to the changing material world as well as the project of fighting dualisms and anthropocentrism to studies of ekphrasis. New materialist thinking will allow me to develop ekphrastic studies in multiple ways: first, by offering a materialist-performative approach for traversing such well-trodden critical paths as the emphasis on double representation,[9] which may suggest a separation between *things* and *words* (or *things* and *images*), thus increasing the sense of distancing from the material world; second, by overcoming the opposition of the visual and the verbal, which supports a set of binaries within ekphrastic theory (male word and female image, active word and passive image, etc.); third, by bringing into focus the questions of materiality, embodiment, and ecology, which remain underexplored in ekphrastic studies.

Before focusing on the matter-oriented analysis of contemporary ekphrasis (i.e., the case studies), I will turn to theoretical considerations, bringing the new

[8] Here, Brillenburg Wurth refers to the title of Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore's book *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* [emphasis added], which plays on McLuhan's earlier phrase "The medium is the message." The use of the word "massage" emphasizes the way in which media affect human senses. Media, as McLuhan and Fiore (2001: 26) see them, "are extensions of some human faculty—psychic or physical."

[9] New materialists promote a move beyond thinking in terms of *representation* toward "accounting for how *practices* matter" [emphasis added] (Barad 2007: 90).

materialist interest in thinking in terms of entanglements and performativity to the conceptualization of ekphrasis. **Chapter 1**—"Dynamic and Performative Ekphrasis"—is divided into two parts. First, I provide an overview of the changing usage of the term *ekphrasis* from antiquity to the present and show that the development of the concept of ekphrasis is entangled with changes in material-discursive practices and environments. The dynamic nature of the concept, I suggest, is crucial to its vitality. Ekphrastic practice involves engaging with images, which flow, multiply, and find various materializations across different media. The constant adaptation of the concept to changes in material-discursive practices and media environments explains the need for its renewal and updating. In short, I explore the dynamic life of the concept—*how it changes*. Second, I develop a performative understanding of ekphrasis in which ekphrastic practice involves engaging with the world and its entangled material-discursive phenomena. I view ekphrastic practice as a *doing* and aim to explore *what ekphrasis does*. In particular, I am interested in its power to transform images and thereby (re)configure material-discursive phenomena (i.e., artistic and media practices).

Therefore, in **Chapter 2**, I closely consider the concepts that illuminate the transformative power of ekphrasis: *media transformation* and *media modalities* (Elleström 2014; Bruhn and Schirrmacher 2022). The overview of the concepts not only sheds light on different aspects of mediation but also foregrounds their entangled nature. I then develop a typology of ekphrastic transformations that can be applied both in literature and in film. My differentiation between types of ekphrasis is, on the one hand, informed by the notion of media transformation, and on the other, it is illuminated by new materialist thought. In other words, I combine the theoretical frameworks of new materialisms and transformational intermediality to develop a method for a matter-oriented analysis of ekphrastic transformations. Iris van der Tuin and A. J. Nocek (2019: 815) observe that with the constant development of new concepts, materialism "is always *in the making*" [emphasis in original]. My typology contributes to the *making* of a materialist approach to ekphrasis by providing terminology for the analysis of its transformative capacity and the different ways in which ekphrasis can draw attention to materiality and embodied experience.

The subsequent chapters—**Chapter 3**, **Chapter 4**, and **Chapter 5**—are structured around the case studies including contemporary examples of ekphrastic transformations both in literature and in film: Pedro Almodóvar's film *The Skin I Live In [La piel que habito* (2011), Nuala Ní Chonchúir's short story collection *Nude* (2009), Ciaran Carson's poetry collection *Still Life* (2019), Derek Mahon's poetry collection *An Autumn Wind* (2010), and Lars von Trier's film *Melancholia* (2011). Though coming from various backgrounds and cultures, these writers, poets, and filmmakers all share an interest in ekphrastic practice, often engaging with paintings and other media in their work. It is perhaps worth noting that the work of three of the authors (Nuala Ní Chonchúir, Ciaran Carson, and Derek Mahon) belongs to contemporary Irish literature and poetry, which has a close relationship with the visual arts. Since the early twentieth century, largely under

the influence of W. B. Yeats, many modern Irish poets have been drawing inspiration from painting and sculpture (Corcoran 2012: 251). In my analysis of ekphrasis in literary and cinematic works, I am primarily interested in their preoccupation with the material dimensions of art.

The three analytical chapters are united by a common aim of exploring how ekphrastic transformations can challenge dualistic and anthropocentric categories and concepts (e.g., the notion of the ideal form as superior to matter, the view of the artist's body as separate from the mind, the concept of the human as the central creative force in the world). Notions and categories that sustain anthropocentric and dualistic thinking are not sealed off from one another but, on the contrary, feed into and reinforce one another. The three chapters, thus, examine different yet related cases where ekphrasis demonstrates the power to transgress dualisms and reconfigure anthropocentric understandings of humans-in-the-world. Another overarching aim that cuts across the chapters is to analyze how ekphrasis can foreground material agency, including the agency of flesh and the thing-power of the nude painting (in Chapter 3), the uncanny vitality of the artist's tools (in Chapter 4), the creative workings of architectural materials, and the strange effects of large-scale ecological phenomena (in Chapter 5). Thus, both research aims draw from the objectives of new materialisms: to overcome dualisms and to challenge the view of matter as a dull and passive object. The order of the chapters, in turn, allows for the exploration of materiality at multiple scales, starting from the microscopic scale of bioartistic practices in Almodóvar's film *The Skin I Live In*, moving to the human scale of everyday experience and art-making in Carson's poetry collection *Still Life*, and finally turning to the unfamiliar more-than-human scales of ecological processes in Mahon's ekphrastic poetry and the cosmic scale of weird planetary forces in von Trier's film *Melancholia*.

Chapter 3—"Beyond the Form: Ekphrastic Transformations of the Nude in Pedro Almodóvar's *The Skin I Live In* and Nuala Ní Chonchúir's *Nude*"—explores how literary and filmic ekphrasis transforms existing paintings and, by doing so, challenges the dualistic concept of the ideal form as superior to matter. I show that ekphrasis can question and reorient the tradition of nude painting in manifold ways, from addressing theoretical writings on the nude to foregrounding the material and dynamic nature of representational practices that objectify the female body and obscure the agency of flesh. I begin my analysis by examining how ekphrasis in Almodóvar's film *The Skin I Live In* brings together the nude tradition and contemporary bioartistic practices, engaging with the materiality of flesh at the microscopic, molecular level and destabilizing the dualisms of the ideal and the actual, form and matter, male culture and female nature. I then turn to Nuala Ní Chonchúir's collection of short stories *Nude*, which revolves around the nude body and art. I closely analyze the ekphrastic transformation of Roy Lichtenstein's *Nudes in Mirror*, which animates and gives voice to the nude painting—a man-made material thing. Here I focus on the way the transformed artwork transgresses the status of a passive object and thereby disrupts the familiar pattern of the everyday objectification of the female form.

Chapter 4—"Beyond the Body: Ekphrastic Embodiment and Material Artmaking in Ciaran Carson's *Still Life*"—shifts the focus to the embodied experience of artmaking and ekphrastic writing. As a case study, I examine Ciaran Carson's collection of ekphrastic poems *Still Life*. Drawing upon a new materialist-performative approach to ekphrasis, I argue that Carson's writing foregrounds the performativity of ekphrastic practice: his poetry records the embodied experience of ekphrastic writing, emphasizing the poet-narrator's everyday engagement with the material world. I also explore how the ekphrastic transformation of Claude Monet's painting in Carson's poetry brings into focus the embodied experience of the painter and thereby establishes an analogy between the material processes of painting and writing, where the agency extends beyond the human body into nonhuman matter. The centrality of embodied multi-sensory experience in Carson's *Still Life*—which reinforces the sense of enmeshment in the material world—leads me to theorize what I propose to call *ekphrastic embodiment*. Chapter 4 shows how ekphrastic embodiment can serve to question mind-body dualism and also challenge the notion of the body as static, discrete, autonomous, and impermeable.

Chapter 5—"Beyond the Human: Nonhuman Things and Eco-Ekphrasis in Derek Mahon's Poetry and Lars von Trier's Film *Melancholia*"—moves away from the human experience of artmaking and, in turn, explores how ekphrasis can draw attention to the often-overlooked nonhuman things and how it can address ecological issues, engaging with material vitality at unfamiliar more-than-human scales. My central concern here is with the ways in which ekphrasis provokes thinking beyond the anthropocentric notion of the human as the central agent in the world. In the first part of the chapter, I consider ekphrasis in Derek Mahon's ekphrastic poetry—including poems from his later collection *An Autumn Wind* (2010). As a starting point, I examine how Mahon's engagement with still-life art—which brings into focus everyday man-made items—opens up a possibility for transformation of *objects* into vibrant *things*. Focusing on nonhuman material things, I go on to analyze Mahon's eco-ekphrasis in his poem "Raw Material," which turns to the vitality of discarded shoes, thereby foregrounding the vibrant life of things beyond the human experience of consumerist consumption. I then discuss the ekphrastic transformation of César Manrique's architectural project in Mahon's poem "Under the Volcanoes," arguing that its emphasis on the hypertemporality of material processes enables what Morton (2016: 9) calls "ecological awareness." And finally, in the second part of the chapter, I consider the ekphrastic transformation of Pieter Bruegel's painting in Lars von Trier's film *Melancholia*. In particular, I am interested in how the affordances of film technology reinforce the uncanny sense of entanglement in differing scales—familiar everyday and unfamiliar more-than-human scales.

The issues considered in the chapters are closely related, while some of the ideas introduced in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 give an impulse for further exploration in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 respectively. If Chapter 3 points to how ekphrasis can draw attention to the embodied experience of objectification, then Chapter 4 turns to the experience of the artist, further delving into the importance

of embodiment in ekphrastic works. If the close examination of ekphrastic embodiment in Chapter 4 leads me to consider the thing-power of writing tools—nonhuman things that act as bodily extensions—then in Chapter 5, nonhuman matter takes the central position in the analysis of ekphrasis, and its significance is further fleshed out in regards to ecological issues. Thinking beyond the category of the ideal form—thinking in terms of material mattering—is bound up with moving beyond the static, discrete, autonomous notion of the body, while thinking in terms of embodiment—thinking agency as extending beyond the human body into nonhuman matter—paves the way for moving beyond the anthropocentric notion of the human as the central agent in the world. Before delving into the analysis of these entangled issues, let me consider the central term in this research—*ekphrasis*—and provide an overview of its changing usage.

CHAPTER 1
Dynamic and Performative Ekphrasis

Toward a Dynamic Concept of Ekphrasis

The term *ekphrasis* has a long history dating back to antiquity. Since its first mention in the first century CE, the notion of ekphrasis has been changing, developing, and expanding increasingly (Heffernan 2015: 35; Webb 2009: 1). This centuries-long, ongoing process of change results in the constant expansion of the range of definitions and meanings associated with ekphrasis. As Bernhard F. Scholz (1998: 75) formulates it, ekphrasis may be seen as a "term with a 'family of meanings,' with each member of that family calling for a separate definition." Providing the full range of meanings of ekphrasis is perhaps an unattainable endeavor, which I do not seek to achieve. What is, however, possible and necessary is to consider the differences between the application of the term in the ancient and modern discourses.

In antiquity, the term ekphrasis was primarily used in the framework of rhetoric, particularly to denote "a speech that brings the subject matter vividly before the eyes" (Webb 2009: 1). The object of description could be anything visible, from people to landscapes (Karastathi 2015: 93; Scholz 1998: 82). Crucial to this rhetorical practice was the capacity of ekphrasis to make the listener "see" what was described (Karastathi 2015: 3; Webb 2009: 95). What mattered was not the object itself but rather the effect that the vivid description had on the listener (Scholz 1998: 77; Webb 2009: 88). The key to achieving the persuasive effect was *enargeia*, the quality of vivid language that stimulates visualization and, as Ruth Webb (2009: 87) puts it, makes "absent things present." In other words, ekphrastic writing was aimed at persuading listeners (or readers) to believe in seeing what is vividly described. In the ancient world, ekphrasis was, thus, understood and used as a rhetorical tool of persuasion.

One of the major turning points in the use of the term dates back to the fifth century, when ekphrasis came to denote specifically a description of an artwork (Heffernan 2015: 36; Karastathi 2015: 93). Some scholars, such as Sylvia Karastathi (2015: 93), consider this shift of meaning crucial for shaping our "contemporary understanding" of ekphrasis. Perhaps it should be added here that there are rather multiple contemporary understandings which may be viewed as springing from the above-mentioned definition. The development of the notion of ekphrasis took another significant turn in the twentieth century, when Leo Spitzer (1955: 207) introduced the term into modern literary theory as "the poetic description of a pictorial or sculptural work of art." Along with the growing popularity of the concept of ekphrasis, a number of scholars expressed the need to reconsider and expand its definition beyond a description of an artwork. James Heffernan (1993: 3) proposed to broaden the understanding of ekphrasis by suggesting a definition which is commonly used in modern literary theory: "*the verbal representation of visual representation*." As a "counter-proposal" to

Heffernan's definition, Claus Clüver (1997: 23) offers a more "radical revision of the concept that would lead to a considerable extension, rather than restriction." Clüver (1997: 22) sees an unfounded restriction in Heffernan's "representation," which excludes from the notion of ekphrasis architecture, modern sculpture, and non-figurative painting as nonrepresentational arts. Clüver's definition of ekphrasis as "the verbal representation of a real or fictitious text composed in a non-verbal sign system" is more inclusive in that it comprises non-visual texts, such as musical and dancing compositions (1997: 26). His use of the word "text" in semiotic terms also marks a break with tradition, as it blurs the difference between art and non-art (Clüver 1997: 26). By being reviewed outside the art/non-art dichotomy, the notion of ekphrasis became not only inclusive of all kinds of texts but also highly applicable in intermedial studies. The medium-based approach to ekphrasis (Bruhn 2001; Rajewsky 2005; Grishakova 2010; Wolf 2011; Elleström 2014; Rippl 2015) extended the concept from the field of literary theory into the realm of intermedial studies. In short, then, from antiquity to today, our understanding of ekphrasis has gradually evolved from a rhetorical device to an intermedial phenomenon.

In intermedial studies, the concept of ekphrasis continues to develop and update. Johanna Hartmann (2015: 114) suggests that the constant development of the concept of ekphrasis is due to the dynamic nature of the cultural environment. The changes of the concept, she argues, might be viewed as "a reaction to changes in the cultural force-field" (Hartmann 2015: 113). Some of the recent changes in ekphrastic theory and practice may be explained by increased exposure to images and the subsequent shift toward the importance of images in modern culture that W. J. T. Mitchell (1994: 11) theorized as "the pictorial turn." With the wide access to images through online sources and reproductions, or what Karastathi (2015: 97) calls "easy visibility," lengthy ekphrastic descriptions of artworks have become unnecessary. Before the spread of reproductions, detailed, vivid descriptions that stimulated mental imagery were a common means of conveying the visual experience of artworks. If the oldest example of ekphrasis—the Shield of Achilles in Homer's *Iliad*—makes the reader "see" the artwork through a very elaborate description, then contemporary ekphrasis often engages with images that are already familiar to readers through reproductions. As Karastathi (2015: 97) observes, the availability of reproduced images of well-known artworks "renders description if not redundant, then surplus; definitely not a source of information, but one of interpretation." Similarly, Tamar Yacobi (1997: 40–45) proposes that ekphrasis today may be reduced to a mere allusion, which has the capacity to evoke the image of an existing artwork and thereby transfer it into a literary work. Gabriele Rippl (2018b: 267) goes even further by proposing to call such short references that are often encountered in contemporary literature "*stenographic* ekphrases." As Renate Brosch (2018b: 229–36) observes, the "omnipresence" of images in digital environments, which makes "a vast amount of pictorial material recognizable for web users transnationally," has brought about changes both in ekphrastic practice and theory. Ekphrasis, Brosch argues (2018b: 229), "responds to and participates in the culture of images," whose development is fueled by technological progress.

Technology spurs the proliferation and circulation of images, while ekphrasis engages with and reacts to images that flow, multiply, and find various materializations across different media. The continuous development of ekphrastic theory and practice is, thus, closely entangled with the ongoing material processes of media and technological evolution. Ekphrasis may, then, be seen as a dynamic multifaceted concept sensitive to changes in material-discursive practices and media environments.

The development of nonhuman technology has also expanded the variety of media that humans are attuned to. Photography, film, and digital media contribute to the diversity of contemporary material-discursive practices, and ekphrasis adapts to it as well. As a reaction to the growing popularity of film culture, the notion of ekphrasis was expanded to include the representation of film in fiction, or what Heffernan (2015: 45) calls *cinematic* ekphrasis. Laura M. Sager Eidt (2008: 18) goes even further by introducing the notion of *filmic* ekphrasis, which denotes the transfer of paintings into film. Likewise, Ágnes Pethö (2011: 46) applies the concept of ekphrasis to the medium of cinema and argues that ekphrasis in film "may be seen in parallel with the re-mediational[10] logic of traditional literary ekphrasis." Both Sager Eidt and Pethö attempt to draw an analogy between literary ekphrasis and the more recently developed notion of filmic ekphrasis by regarding ekphrastic practices as intermedial processes. In this research, I adopt this broader view of ekphrasis as encompassing remediation of images across different media, specifically focusing on literature and film.

If the invention of cinema brought about the transfers of films to literature and paintings to film, then the proliferation of digital media prompted the intermedial integration of digital images into literary works, which Hartmann (2015: 116) calls "digital ekphrasis."[11] Digital technology enables "completely unprecedented uses of word and image" (Louvel 2018: 249) and ekphrastic experiments. Ekphrastic writing today engages with not only paintings but also their digitized versions. Digitized artworks, though visually similar to the originals, have new distinct features, such as zooming options that allow viewers to examine close-up details. Contemporary Internet users can also visit exhibitions online and experience museum spaces virtually. Digital technology and media have expanded the possibilities of art experience—a change that has affected ekphrastic practice as

[10] Pethö uses Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's (2000: 45) concept of *remediation*, which implies "the representation of one medium in another." They argue that all media, especially new media, constantly "refashion" other media (Bolter and Grusin 2000: 15). Following this line of thought, both literary and filmic ekphrasis involve remediation and refashioning of texts composed in another medium.

[11] In Hartmann's understanding, digital ekphrasis implies the integration of all kinds of digital images in literary works and also interactive digital poetry that describes pictures; Hartamann gives as examples PowerPoint slides in Jennifer Egan's novel *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010), digital photography in Siri Hustvedt's novel *The Sorrows of an American* (2008), and Edward Falco's "Chemical Landscapes Digital Tales" (2008), interactive digital poems that describe Mary Pinto's photograms. Like Pethö, Hartmann relies on the concept of *remediation* (Bolter and Grusin 2000) when developing her theorization of ekphrasis.

well. Contemporary ekphrasis explores the affordances of digital media that come with their interactivity and manipulability (Hartmann 2015; Jansson 2018). A number of scholars, in turn, express the need to consider and theorize the changes brought about by the digital turn to ekphrastic practice (Lindhé 2013; Hartmann 2015; Jansson 2018; Louvel 2018; Mathieson 2018). Digital technology is, thus, reconfiguring ekphrastic practice—and with it theory.

A Performative Approach to Ekphrasis

Within the burgeoning field of intermediality, ekphrasis has received a lot of scholarly attention in terms of representational and media-related considerations. Some scholars, however, observe that there are limitations to purely semiotic and media-centered approaches to ekphrasis (Brosch 2018b: 226; Führer and Kraus 2020: 98). Renate Brosch (2018b: 226–32), for instance, argues that there is a need to overcome the outdated dichotomy of the visual and the verbal that has been haunting ekphrastic theory since the twentieth century. The view of ekphrasis as the paragonal[12] struggle between sign systems, Brosch (2018b: 232–33) goes on, is "reductive," in that it fails to provide insight into the wide array of ekphrastic phenomena. In the introduction to their *Ekphrastic Encounters*, Kennedy and Meek (2019: 3) explore "this critical shift" where theorists[13] question the paragonal model of ekphrasis and with it the idea that "word and image compete with each other for artistic supremacy." The binary opposition between word and image, they argue, was largely reinforced by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, who in his influential essay *Laocoön* believed that poetry and painting are two fundamentally different media that should not be mixed (Kennedy and Meek 2019: 8). Lessing argued that

> Painting, in its imitations, makes use of entirely different means and signs from those which Poetry employs; the former employing figures and colours in space, the latter articulate sounds in time,—if, incontestably, signs must have a proper relation to the thing signified, then co-existent signs can only express objects which are co-existent, or the parts of which co-exist, but signs which are successive can only express objects which are in succession, or the parts of which succeed one another in time. Objects which co-exist, or the parts of which co-exist,

[12] The term *paragone* refers to a debate that originated in the Renaissance and was linked to a competition among the arts, particularly the question of superiority of one artistic form (e.g., painting) over the other (e.g., poetry); Leonardo da Vinci, for instance, believed that painting was superior to other artistic forms (Bruhn and Schirrmacher 2022: 11).

[13] Already back in the 1960s, Murray Krieger questioned the paragonal opposition between poetry and the plastic arts in his essay "*Ekphrasis* and the Still Movement of Poetry; or *Laokoön* Revisited" (1967). Krieger (2019: 266) argues that ekphrastic poetry "takes on the 'still' elements of plastic form" that are normally associated with the spatial arts. Similarly, a number of later studies of ekphrasis (Mitchell 1994; Grishakova 2010; Rouse 2015; Louvel 2018) aim to go beyond the paragonal model, emphasizing the mixed and complementary nature of verbal and visual media.

> are termed bodies. It follows that bodies, with their visible properties, are the proper objects of painting. Objects which succeed, or the parts of which succeed to each other, are called generally actions. It follows that actions are the proper object of Poetry. (Lessing 1905: 131)

In other words, painting and poetry, as Lessing sees them, employ means that can express two entirely different types of objects: painting, as a spatial art, should deal with bodies, while poetry, as a temporal art, should deal with actions. Despite the radical emphasis on the separation of visual and verbal media, Lessing's ideas had a significant impact on word and image studies. The paragonal framework that was strengthened by Lessing has persisted and still pervades contemporary ekphrastic theory.

At the same time, some theorists contest the misleading binary constraints that the paragonal model of ekphrasis can impose (Fischer 2009; Keefe 2011; Brosch 2018b; Kennedy and Meek 2019). Barbara K. Fischer (2009: 73) points out that the binary opposition of the male word and the female image, which projects gendered values onto ekphrastic theory, may lead to overgeneralization.[14] Such well-trodden critical paths are both based on and reinforce binary thinking. As Anne Keefe (2011: 135) observes, the opposition of the visual and the verbal supports a whole set of binaries within ekphrastic theory: masculine and feminine, active and passive, speaking and silent. As a way to overcome the binary framework within ekphrastic theory, Brosch (2018b: 226) proposes to shift the focus from the issue of representation to the performative function of ekphrasis and thereby place the emphasis on what ekphrastic practices do for the reader and culture at large. Following Brosch's approach, I consider ekphrastic practices as performative acts.

In Karen Barad's (2007: 133) new materialist understanding, performativity contests representationalism, which "positions us above or outside the world we allegedly merely reflect on" and "insists on understanding thinking, observing, and theorizing as practices of engagement with, and as part of, the world." As an alternative to the tropes of reflection that suggest a division between the word and the world, Barad "proposes a vocabulary of practices, doings, and actions" (Pfizenmaier 2018). Accordingly, I view ekphrastic practice as a *doing* and aim to explore what ekphrasis *does*. Drawing on new materialist thought, I argue that ekphrastic practice is performative—in that it involves engagement with the world and its entangled material-discursive phenomena—and productive—in that it can enable non-dualistic ways of thinking.

[14] The view of ekphrasis as a gendered contest between word and image was put forward by W. J. T. Mitchell (1994: 168), who argued that the ekphrastic image is often treated as "a female other" in ekphrastic poetry. It has to be added that Mitchell aimed to criticize and expose the ways in which ekphrasis can reproduce the gendered hierarchy between male and female. However, several scholars (Fischer 2006: 145; Hedley 2009: 24; Bergmann Loizeaux 2009: 121) argue that Mitchell's analysis Keats's ekphrastic poem "Ode on a Grecian Urn" reinforced the opposition of male word and female image.

CHAPTER 2
Ekphrastic Transformations

Entangled Aspects of Media Transformation

Ekphrastic practice is also performative in its enactment of transformation. My approach is informed by Lars Elleström's (2014: 3) notions of "transfer" and "transformation,"[15] which he employs to describe the relocation of media traits among different media and the alterations that result from such media transfers.[16] Elleström's conceptualization is further developed by Jørgen Bruhn and Beate Schirrmacher (2022) in their *Intermedial Studies: An Introduction to Meaning Across Media*. My research is informed by both Elleström's (2014; 2021) theorization of media transformation and some insights offered by Bruhn and Schirrmacher (2022). As an alternative to the broad concept of *remediation* proposed by Bolter and Grusin, Elleström (2014: 7–12) introduces two aspects of media transformation: *transmediation* and *media representation*. Transmediation implies the transfer and transformation of the mediated object (e.g., a human figure, a landscape) from the source to the target medium (Elleström 2014: 17). It is crucial that the transferred object does not remain unchanged but is altered as the result of transmediation from one medium to a different medium (e.g., from a painting to a poem or a film). Bruhn and Schirrmacher's understanding of the term is similar to that of Elleström. Transmediation does not imply the transfer of a medium, but it refers to the transfer and transformation of ideas or images that were "previously mediated by another media type" (Bruhn and Schirrmacher 2022: 104). There is, however, a slight yet significant difference between their formulation and Elleström's understanding. Elleström (2014: 17) calls transmediated elements[17] *objects*, while Bruhn and Schirrmacher (2022: 104) discuss transmediations of *ideas*, *concepts*, and *images*. In order to avoid the dualism of object and subject, I follow Bruhn and Schirrmacher by focusing on transmediations of images. For instance, if a poem engages with a female figure that was previously mediated by a painting, we can say that the image of the female figure was transmediated and verbally materialized in the ekphrastic poem, where the verbal is entangled with the visual. In the case of filmic ekphrasis, images are often reproduced through

[15] *Media transformation* is a term that is employed by a number of scholars. Bruhn and Schirrmacher (2022: 104), for instance, use the term *media transformation* in its broad understanding as "all kinds of processes in which the form or content of one media type is constructed and thus transformed by another media type."

[16] Elleström (2021: 10) adopts the concept of "transfer" from communication models; at the same time, he points out that the term "may have misleading associations with material things being moved around"—associations that are difficult to avoid.

[17] In his later theoretical writings, Elleström (2021: 12) also discusses the transfer of "cognitive import," by which he means the transfer of meaning and ideas. Cognitive import, as Elleström sees it, is "a broad notion that also includes vague, fragmentary, undeveloped, intuitive, ambiguous, non-conceptual and pragmatically oriented" (2021: 10). In this dissertation, I focus on the transfer and transformation of images.

embodied reenactments of paintings. Transmediation, then, involves a corporeal reproduction of the image, its recording onto film, and materialization on screen.

The second aspect of media transformation—media representation—involves the transfer and transformation of the medium itself (Elleström 2014: 17). Elleström gives as an example a verbal statement "I bought a drawing," which mentions the medium of drawing but makes no mention of what is portrayed in the drawing. In this research, I am particularly interested in the transfer and transformation of material media characteristics (e.g., paint, brushstrokes, canvases). Rather than emphasize the idea of representation, I explore this aspect of media transformation as a process of engagement of one medium with another medium, focusing on the way it can foreground media materiality or thingness. The transfer of material media characteristics is often entangled with transmediation, and vice versa. Elizabeth Bishop's ekphrastic "Poem" (2015), which describes a Nova Scotia landscape painting, is a good example of such entanglement: "In the foreground / a water meadow with some tiny cows, / two brushstrokes each, but confidently cows" (Bishop 2015: 196). Here, ekphrasis transmediates the image of a meadow with cows, while simultaneously foregrounding such media characteristics as brushstrokes. Thus, for the study of ekphrasis, the transfer of material media characteristics is as important as transmediations of images. Among my research interests in this dissertation is the entangled nature of these two aspects of media transformation.

The above-discussed aspects of media transformation also involve the alterations of four media modalities: the material, the sensorial, the spatiotemporal, and the semiotic modalities[18] (Elleström 2014: 37). For Elleström (2014: 37–38; 2021: 46), media modalities are basic categories in that all the four of them can be used to analyze all media: any media product[19] (e.g., a painting, a book, or a film) may be seen as a combination of the four modalities or their traits. In new materialist terms, then, all media are constituted by the entanglement of the material, the sensorial, the spatiotemporal, and the semiotic modalities. The material modality may be constituted by the flat surfaces of paintings and printed literary works or the three-dimensional matter of sculpture and architecture. The flat surfaces of book pages, canvases, photographs, and computer screens provide a base for the materialization of words and images. In painting, the materiality of paint and canvases also constitutes the material traits of the media product. In bioart (which

[18] These four media modalities are also discussed by Bruhn and Schirrmacher in the introduction to their book *Intermedial Studies: An Introduction to Meaning Across Media* (2022). As Bruhn and Schirrmacher (2022: 24) observe, not all the media modalities and characteristics are necessary in every analysis of intermediality. In the following analysis, I consider the modalities and aspects that I find productive for exploring particular media transformations. I also rely on some insights from Ryan's (2005: 14–17) discussion of three aspects of media (semiotic, material-technological, and cultural).

[19] In this dissertation, I rely on Elleström's (2014: 19) understanding of the term *media product*, which denotes a particular work (e.g., a particular painting or a particular musical composition). In this research, I focus on specific artistic media products, such as poems, novels, paintings, sculptures, films, etc.

is discussed in Chapter 3), it is the DNA of biological organisms and systems that serves as the material basis for the artwork. Intermedial practice can reveal and intensify material media features by fostering their "blending," "variation," and "transformation" (Grishakova, forthcoming). It is also important to note that the material dimension of media encompasses technologies, which involve different expressive affordances (Ryan 2005: 15). The typewriter, for instance, greatly facilitated typographic experiments with the materiality of language, as seen in "*poesie concrete*, that form of pure typewriter poetry" (Kittler 1999: 229). The technology of film made it possible to optically record moving images of embodied action, while digital technology brought about computer-generated images.

The sensorial modality appeals to our senses: the sense of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Even though all the five senses are engaged in experiencing media products, some senses are usually more engaged than others (Bruhn and Schirrmacher 2022: 21). The medium of painting, for example, primarily appeals to the sense of sight. At the same time, the scent of paint can appeal to the sense of smell, and its texture can appeal to the sense of touch. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, gallery visitors were allowed to touch museum exhibits, including paintings and sculptures (Classen 2020: 277–79). The desire to touch artifacts was motivated by a variety of reasons, from mundane curiosity to devotional motives; kissing devotional paintings, for instance, was a widespread practice (Classen 2020: 279). The sense of touch was even more crucial to the experience of sculpture: it was believed to solidify the ephemeral impressions received through the sense of sight and provide "access to art at its highest level" (Classen 2020: 277–79). The senses can, thus, work together to intensify our engagement with media products. The medium of film, for example, simultaneously appeals to the senses of sight and hearing, both of which are equally engaged in constituting cinematic experience. As Bruhn and Schirrmacher (2022: 21) observe, media products can also "exploit our capacity for cross-modal translations. In the sensorial modality, we construct synaesthetic connections, where the image of the ringing bells makes us 'hear' the bells." Words can similarly play on synaesthetic associations in cases when a word simultaneously evokes a color and a sense of smell or taste (for example, "lavender," "saffron," "orange," "burgundy," etc.).

The spatiotemporal modality is constituted by spatial and temporal qualities of the media product. The capacity to mediate a temporal flow varies from medium to medium. As Elleström (2014: 38) notes, "All media are perceived and decoded in time, which is not the same as being temporal in itself." He repeatedly stresses the importance of distinguishing "between inherent media traits and the perception of those traits" (Elleström 2021: 7). Hokusai's woodblock print *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* (1831), for instance, is perceived in time: its dynamic composition provokes eye movement from one part of the painting to another. It does not, however, mediate a temporal flow of the action in the same way as film recordings of tsunami waves do (Figure 1).

Figure 1. *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, Katsushika Hokusai, 1831; color woodblock, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. *Wikimedia Commons*. Web. 26 January 2023.

Some media products, such as films or pieces of music, are viewed as temporal in that they may be perceived as temporal events that have a beginning and an end (e.g., a piece of music unfolds in time) (Bruhn and Schirrmacher 2022: 22). Even though spatiotemporal qualities vary from media product to media product, a strict categorization of media into *purely* temporal and *purely* spatial poses a risk of overlooking the spatial qualities of temporal media and the temporal qualities of spatial media. As Bruhn and Schirrmacher (2022: 22) observe, "the sound waves of music take up space as well; a rock concert can be heard miles away." Similarly, the printed words take up the space of the page. At the same time, some paintings—primarily spatial media products—may be viewed as having a beginning and an end. For example, the succession of images in the polyptych *The Legend of Saint Ursula of Cologne* (1482)—which tells the life story of Saint Ursula from left to right—suggests the temporal development of actions (Figure 2). Thus, when analyzing the alteration of the spatiotemporal modality, it is important to pay attention to the specific qualities of particular works.

Figure 2. *The Legend of Saint Ursula of Cologne* (detail), the Master of the Legend of Saint Ursula, 1482; oil on panel, Groeninge Museum, Bruges. *Wikimedia Commons*. Web. 26 January 2023.

The semiotic modality concerns our ability to decode and make meaning of signs (Bruhn and Schirrmacher 2022: 22). Ekphrastic transformations often involve the alteration of sign systems from visual to verbal. Like Elleström (2014), Bruhn and Schirrmacher (2022) rely on the work of Charles Sanders Peirce when discussing the semiotic modality of media products. According to Peirce, signs can relate to phenomena in three ways: the relation can involve iconicity (which is based on similarity), indexicality (which is based on contiguity), and symbolisity (which is based on habits and convention) (Elleström 2014: 38–39; Bruhn and Schirrmacher 2022: 23). For new materialism, meaning is entangled with matter (Barad 2007), and signs (iconic, indexical, or symbolic) are not only meaningful but also material. In this respect, Ryan (2005: 15) points out that the semiotic dimension of media is supported by "the *materials* and the *technologies*" [emphasis in original]. Considering the relation between iconicity and materiality, Jeffrey C. Alexander (2010: 11) similarly observes that with iconic signs, ideas become material things that are experienced through our senses in space and time. The semiotic modality is, thus, entangled with the material modality as well as with the sensorial and the spatiotemporal modalities. As Elleström (2021: 9) puts it, media traits and modalities are not strictly divided categories but "complementary" and "interwoven" aspects of mediation.

On the whole, the modal differences between media may open up a possibility for transformation and creative reconfiguring of entangled media traits and modalities. Elleström argues that

> the material, sensorial, spatiotemporal, and semiotic differences between source medium and target medium allow for inventive alterations of media products into new creations. By the same token, modal differences make transferring vital information impossible without transforming it. (Elleström 2014: 39)

Drawing upon Elleström's conceptualization of media transformation, I regard the transfer of images and media characteristics from a source medium (e.g., painting) to literature and film as a transformative relational process enabling new ways of thinking. I will explore how media transfers and transformations that contemporary ekphrasis enacts can draw attention to the dynamism and vitality of matter. I will show that ekphrasis has the power to transgress dualistic categories and reconfigure anthropocentric understandings of humans-in-the-world. In what follows, I will develop a typology of ekphrastic transformations that can be applied both in literature and in film. My typology provides terminology for the matter-oriented analysis of ekphrasis. Before introducing in detail the four types of ekphrastic transformations that support my analysis throughout this dissertation, I will give a brief overview of previously developed typologies of ekphrasis.

Typologies of Ekphrasis: An Overview

Attempts to develop a classification system for distinguishing different types of ekphrasis have been made by several scholars. Most of the existing typologies are based on and applicable to literary works. For example, in his *The Gazer's Spirit: Poems Speaking to Silent Works of Art*, John Hollander (1995) develops a categorization of poetic ekphrasis through an analysis of forty-eight poems dating from antiquity to the present day. For Hollander (1995: 4), crucial is the distinction between the "notional" and the "actual" ekphrasis: the former implies the description of fictional paintings and sculptures; and the latter includes poems which engage with existing artworks. In his book, Hollander focuses on actual ekphrastic poems, which he categorizes primarily according to the medium of representation of the embedded text (e.g., public monuments, architectural ekphrasis, photographs, prints, etc.). Hollander's system is useful in that some of his categories and findings may be applied in literature as well as film.

In particular, Hollander (1995: 57) argues that architectural ekphrasis has the capacity to convey "the *experience* of actual structures." He gives as an example the experience of walking into a church rendered in Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. The ekphrastic description, he observes, serves to convey the experience of space, or "what it is like" to enter the dome of St. Peter's (Hollander 1995: 57–58). Likewise, Silke Horstkotte (2017: 137–148) argues that ekphrases

may give the reader access to "embodied perception" of a visual artwork, or "what it's like"[20] to experience a particular work of art. Considering the function of literary ekphrasis through the lens of theories of focalization (as developed by Gérard Genette, Mieke Bal, Renate Brosch, Gabrielle Starr, Peter Stockwell, Manfred Jahn, Ellen Esrock, and Emma Kafalenos), Horstkotte (2017: 132–42) concludes that the subjective experience that ekphrasis may render is not purely visual but embodied and multisensory.

Similarly to literary ekphrasis, filmic ekphrasis may serve to convey the experience of space, or "what it's like" to walk into a particular building. For example, the use of point-of-view shots may give the viewer access to the character's subjective embodied experience of architectural space. Some cinematic techniques may also be used to convey very specific spatial experiences. For instance, the extensive use of close-up shots, which "deprives us [the viewer] of setting," may create a sense of claustrophobia and disorientation (Monaco 2008: 197). A similar effect may be observed in ekphrases other than architectural, e.g., the point-of-view shots (which follow the eye of a character) may convey his/her subjective experience of a visual artwork, or "what it's like" to perceive an artwork through someone else's eyes. In addition, characters may comment on their experience, as do the characters in Alexander Sokurov's *Russian Ark* (2002): wandering through the Winter Palace of the Russian State Hermitage Museum, its visitors not only comment on the visual properties of paintings but also discuss the smell of paint. Both in literature and in film, ekphrasis is, thus, tied to complex embodied multisensory experience.

Considering different forms of attention that ekphrasis may involve in his book *The Shield of Achilles and the Poetics of Ekphrasis*, Andrew Sprague Becker (1995: 41–43) categorizes ekphrases according to four levels of representation: the first level—that of *Res Ipsae*, or Referent—draws the reader's attention to "the events and characters that constitute the subject matter of the picture," that is, the focus here is on *what* is represented; the second level—that of *Opus Ipsum*—directs attention to the medium of representation, i.e., "the surface appearance" of the visual artwork: its "color, shape, texture, arrangement, size, and, at times, material"; the third level—that of *Artifex and Ars*—calls attention to the artist, the act of creation, and their relation to the artwork itself and the medium of representation; and the fourth level—that of *Animadversor*—serves to draw attention to the effect that the visual artwork has on the beholder through a description of his/her response and experience. Becker's typology provides useful insights into the function of ekphrastic works, particularly their capacity to defamiliarize by shifting attention from the referent to the medium. The four levels of attention described by Becker may also be adapted to the study of filmic

[20] Horstkotte's (2017: 137) use of the expression "what it's like" follows its application in neuropsychological studies, where the phrase is used to "the qualia or subjective quality of felt experience." Drawing upon recent research in cognitive literary theory, Horstkotte argues that "fiction can aim, at least somewhat, towards making an utterly strange 'what it's like' accessible to its readers" (2017: 137).

ekphrasis. In film, the techniques of directing attention are manifold, from camera movement to changing focus (e.g., rack focus)[21] and many others.

As seen from the above, both Hollander (1995) and Becker (1995) employ a qualitative approach to ekphrasis. Several other scholars have made attempts to develop continuum-based models for distinguishing different types of text/image interaction. In her book *Poetics of the Iconotext*, Lilianne Louvel (2011: 73–90) develops a text/image typology according to what she calls the degree of "pictorial saturation," which, in short, is defined by the quality and density of pictorial markers (such as the technical vocabulary used to describe colors, lines, forms, and perspective; references to pictorial genres; the use of framing devices, etc.). Her typology includes seven categories: the painting-effect, the picturesque view, the hypotyposis, the tableau vivant, the aesthetic arrangement, the pictorial description, and *ekphrasis* (Louvel 2011: 90). For Louvel, ekphrasis is, thus, one category along the continuum of possible text-image relations. Placed at its end, ekphrasis is characterized by the highest degree of pictorial saturation (Louvel 2011: 99). Louvel (2011: 100) sees "extra imaging power" in ekphrases that allude to artworks explicitly or include a description which evokes a "ready-made" image of an existing artwork in the reader's mind. In Louvel's (2011: 100) semiotically-informed view, the "meta-reflexive nature" of allusive representations of representations increases "the power of the sign." The powerful effect of allusive ekphrasis described by Louvel is also considered by Tamar Yacobi (1997: 38), who refers to ekphrasis that evokes existing artworks through visual resemblance as "ekphrastic simile." For Yacobi (1997: 41), the power of ekphrastic simile rather lies in its capacity to transform the existing artwork and thereby create a "making-strange" effect. As I will show later, numerous examples of this kind of transformation of "ready-made" images, to use Louvel's term, may also be found in cinema. Some of Louvel's theoretical implications are, thus, also relevant to the study of filmic ekphrasis. On the whole, however, her continuum is not applicable to film. Attempts to present the involvement of the visual arts in literature in the form of a continuum may also be found in the studies of Louvel's predecessors: Marianna Torgovnick (1985) and Valerie Robillard (1998). Similarly to Louvel's categorization, Torgovnick's continuum[22] is based on a mixed quantitative-

[21] "Rack focus" is a technique of changing focus "to direct the viewer to shift attention from one subject to another" (Monaco 86).

[22] In her book *The Visual Arts, Pictorialism, and the Novel*, Marianna Torgovnick (1985: 26) develops a continuum based on degrees of "pictorialism." Building on the idea that there is an analogy between literary and pictorial techniques, she explores the ways in which the visual arts are used in Modern novels (Torgovnick: 1985: 9–13). Torgovnick's continuum is divided into four types of uses of the visual arts in literary texts: *decorative* uses (whereby literary descriptions point at the influence of the visual arts on literature, e.g., the supposed influence of Impressionist art on Virginia Woolf's writings), *biographical* uses (which suggest the influence of the visual arts on the mind of a particular writer and his work), *ideological* uses (whereby images add "ideological content" to literary texts and vice versa), and *interpretive* uses (which give an insight into the "conscious and unconscious minds" of the characters by drawing attention to "the ways in which characters experience art objects and pictorial

qualitative approach, while Robillard's scalar model[23]—which draws upon six criteria[24] proposed by Manfred Pfister (1985) aims at a nuanced differentiation, particularly in terms of quantitative evaluation of ekphrasis.

The first attempt to develop a categorization of ekphrasis applicable to both literature and film was made by Laura M. Sager Eidt (2008: 19), who in her *Writing and Filming the Painting* argues that "ekphrasis need not be purely verbal" and applies the concept of ekphrasis to film. For Sager Eidt (2008: 20), both literary and *filmic* ekphrasis have the capacity to "transmedialize"[25] an artwork by "adapting the pictorial" into literary or cinematographic media. Largely drawing

objects") (1985: 13–22). In her categorization, Torgovnick largely relies on biographical details and the principle of *Zeitgeist* (Torgovnick: 1985: 5). For Louvel (2011: 74), Torgovnick's approach is erroneous in that the supposed influence of the work of a certain painter (e.g., Cézanne) on the work of his/her contemporary writer (e.g., D.H. Lawrence) is rarely supported by the text itself and is, therefore, "a matter of personal interpretation." In addition, Torgovnick's research encompasses quite a limited scope of texts (specifically, modernist literature), leaving aside recently produced texts.

[23] In her essay "In Pursuit of Ekphrasis: An Intertextual Approach," Valerie Robillard (1998) proposes a more broadly applicable typology by approaching interart relations in ekphrastic poetry through the lens of intertextuality. Her system includes two models: the "scalar model" and the "differential model" (Robillard: 1998: 57–61). The scalar model, similarly to other quantitative models, measures the degree and manner in which the secondary text is present within the primary text; Robillard employs six criteria proposed by Manfred Pfister—communicativity, referentiality, structurality, selectivity, dialogicity, and autoreflexivity—to define whether the text is "very ekphrastic" or "*somewhat* ekphrastic" (1998: 57–60). The differential model, in turn, comprises three categories: *depictive*, *attributive*, and *associative* ekphrasis (Robillard 1998: 60–62). The first and the most intertextually intense category, *depictive* ekphrasis, implies "explicit depiction of an art object" through description or analogous structuring (Robillard 1998: 61). *Attributive* ekphrasis, the central category, includes direct *naming*, *allusions* to painters, styles or genres, and *indeterminate marking* (namely, inexplicit references). The reader, Robillard argues, would "have to belong to a particular interpretive community" to recognise such inexplicit references; and *associative* ekphrasis refers to structural, thematic, and theoretical conventions associated with the visual arts (1998: 61). And again, this type of ekphrasis involves personal associations of the reader. To make use of Robillard's system, one has to, firstly, measure "the extent to which particular texts are ekphrastic" through the scalar model and, secondly, place them in the three-model typology, that is, the differential model (1998: 60).

[24] In his essay "Concepts of Intertextuality" ["Konzepte der Intertextualität"], Manfred Pfister (1985) proposes six criteria for measuring the intensity of intertextual relationship: communicativity (which implies the clarity and degree to which the pre-text is indicated in the target text), referentiality (which increases the more the target text thematizes pre-text), structurality (the extent to which the pre-text is structurally integrated into the target text), selectivity (the degree to which the elements from the pre-text, e.g., literal quotations, are stressed in the target text), dialogicity (the intensity of "semantic and ideological tension" created between the target text and the pre-text), and autoreflexivity (authorial reflections on the relation between the target text and the pre-text); Pfister's model is presented as a system of six concentric circles, whose central points designate the highest intensity of intertextual relationship, whereas the outer circles mark its lowest intensity (Robillard 57–59).

[25] In her analysis of ekphrasis, Sager Eidt uses Siglind Bruhn's (2001: 19) term *transmedialization*.

upon Valerie Robillard's differential model, she proposes her own system of four types: *attributive*, *depictive*, *interpretive*, and *dramatic* ekphrasis (Sager Eidt 2008: 40–56). Sager Eidt (2008) shares Robillard's (1998) intertextual approach to ekphrasis, which allows her to develop a widely applicable system of models.

Its first category, *attributive* ekphrasis, includes brief verbal allusions to artworks in descriptions and dialogue of a literary text or a film; in film, artworks may also be shown as pictures (e.g., pictures hanging on the wall) or tableaux vivants; Sager Eidt gives as examples the postcard reproduction of Picasso's *Les Amoureux* which hangs over Patricia's bed in Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* (1960) and Picasso posters which are shown in his *Pierrot the Madman* (1965); this type of ekphrasis, Sager Eidt argues, may function to add tension to the narrative (Sager Eidt 2008: 45–47). The second category, *depictive* ekphrasis, comprises extensive descriptions, discussions, and reflections on images, whereby details of artworks are either named or shown in close-up shots; to illustrate this type of ekphrasis, Sager Eidt considers Gauguin's reflections on his own paintings in Mario Vargas Llosa's novel *The Way to Paradise* and Alexander Korda's film *Rembrandt* (1936), in which the details of *The Night Watch* are shown in close-ups, with elaborate camera movement and montage (Sager Eidt 2008: 47–50). The third category, *interpretive* ekphrasis, includes "interpretive reflections" and "visual-verbal dramatization" of images, which involve a higher degree of complexity, transformation, and self-reflexivity than *depictive* ekphrases do; "interpretive ekphrases," Sager Eidt argues, "often follow depictive ones," as exemplified in the narrator's interpretative comments on Gauguin's paintings in Vargas Llosa's novel (Sager Eidt 2008: 50–52). Similarly to literary ekphrases, interpretive ekphrasis in film may follow depictive ekphrasis, particularly in the form of tableaux vivants. And the fourth category, *dramatic* ekphrasis, implies the highest degree of dramatization and theatricalization, whereby images "take on a life of their own" (Sager Eidt: 2008: 56). Like some of the above-mentioned typologies, Sager Eidt's system of models may be presented in the form of a continuum. However, in contrast to Louvel's (2011) typology and Torgovnick's (1985) continuum, Sager Eidt's (2008) models are more qualitative than quantitative, as her system is developed according to the increase of complexity, transformation, and self-reflexivity in ekphrastic texts. Sager Eidt's categorization is useful in that it provides a vocabulary and methodology for analyzing filmic ekphrasis, which is a relatively new and underexplored concept. However, in practice, the four categories often overlap: ekphrasis may simultaneously fall under two or more categories, as there is often no clear boundary between description, reflection, and interpretation in ekphrastic works.

The types developed in my dissertation, by contrast, provide a more concrete and nuanced differentiation of ekphrases, as well as shifting the focus to materiality and embodied experience. My matter-oriented typology of ekphrasis—which can be applied to literature and film—is, on the one hand, informed by the concepts of media transformation and media modalities (Elleström 2014; Bruhn and Schirrmacher 2022), and on the other, it is illuminated by new materialist thought (Alaimo 2016; Barad 2007; Bennett 2010; Braidotti 2013; Kontturi 2013;

Morton 2016). Of special interest to my research are the ways in which ekphrastic practice—particularly the processes of media transformation that it involves—may serve to foreground the mattering of media materiality, the embodied experience of artmaking, and the creative workings of nonhuman matter. My typology of ekphrastic transformations in no way can be considered complete or exhaustive; it has emerged as a result of my engagement with and comparison of literary and filmic ekphrases.

Matter-Oriented Typology of Ekphrastic Transformations

Unfamiliar Double

The first type of ekphrasis, which I propose to call the *unfamiliar double*,[26] includes literary descriptions or filmic images (e.g., scenes in film) that strangely resemble existing artworks. The word "unfamiliar" conveys a sense of strangeness and weirdness that such ekphrasis brings in: the transformation of an existing artwork through ekphrasis makes the familiar (e.g., a recognized painting) strange. This type of ekphrastic transformation involves transmediation, that is, the transfer of images that were "previously mediated by another media type" (Bruhn and Schirrmacher 2022: 104). The transmediation of the image—which is entangled with the alteration of media modalities—opens up a possibility for its creative reworking. The unfamiliar double brings forth the contrast between the two images by setting the original (i.e., the existing artwork) and its reworked version against each other. My primary interest is in matter-accentuating transmediations, namely the ways in which strange reworkings of well-recognized images in literature and in film can draw attention to materiality. In my matter-oriented analysis of ekphrasis, I will explore how the striking contrast between the original artwork and its unfamiliar double can reinforce the emphasis on material mattering (Barad 2007) and vitality.

This type of ekphrasis may involve transformations of images that include human figures (which is the case in Carson's ekphrastic poem considered in Chapter 4) and/or nonhuman things. A good illustration of the latter is ekphrasis in Margaret Atwood's speculative fiction novel *The Year of the Flood* (2009). The novel is the second part of Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, which speculates on a possible future which brings the rise of biotech corporations and increased environmental degradation. One of the main characters in *The Year of the Flood* is Amanda Payne, an artist who makes a series of landscape installations titled "The Living Word" (Atwood 2020: 363). Amanda uses what she calls "bioforms"—animal bones, fish guts, and birds killed by toxic spills—to create giant four-letter words, one of which is "love" (Atwood 2020: 363). As Gabriele Rippl (2018a: 227) observes, "Amanda's four-letter word installation 'Love' is reminiscent of American artist Robert Indiana's sculpture LO/VE" (Figure 3).

[26] This type of ekphrasis was firstly introduced in my MA thesis (Kurr 2019). However, my theorization in this doctoral dissertation differs from the previous discussion.

Figure 3. Robert Indiana, *LOVE*, 1976; aluminum, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Photograph by Christian Carollo. *Shutterstock*. Web. 22 January 2023.

Indiana's first *LOVE* sculpture (1970) was made of steel. After being reproduced in a variety of materials and colors, it became one of the most recognized images of American Pop art (Brooks 2019: 39; Weitman 1999: 44). As Indiana left his design unprotected by copyright law, it was also uncontrollably reproduced on numerous consumer products—such as T-shirts and beer mugs—and Indiana was deemed "a sellout" (Brooks 2019: 39).

Amanda's installation in *The Year of the Flood* may be viewed as an unfamiliar double of Indiana's sculpture *LOVE*. The well-recognized image that was previously mediated by steel and aluminum sculptures is transferred into the novel and transformed in a strange way. In contrast to Indiana's *LOVE*, Amanda's installation is made of animal remains. Thus, it is the decaying matter that serves as medium. The Living Word may be viewed as "weird" in Morton's (2016: 5) understanding, which implies not only "appearing" but also "doing." The strange dead-animal artwork is not fixed but changing: the letters disappear in the course of decomposition and ant activity. It is worth noting that Amanda's interest in uncanny nonhuman agency has been apparent since her childhood experiments with ants and syrup: she used to write words in syrup and watch the letters disappear as ants were feeding on them. Amanda's installation continues her exploration of the living materiality of media and also foregrounds the entanglement of the material and the discursive. As Rippl (2018a: 227–28) points out, Amanda's work suggests that nature and culture "are no longer separate entities, but are intimately connected, thus overcoming one of the central oppositional pairs of Western philosophy." The living materiality of the artwork is inseparable from

meaning, especially in terms of its ecological message. The animal remains serve as vivid reminders of the destruction of nonhuman species. If Indiana's *LOVE* sculpture solidifies the word "love" in steel, then Amanda's installation focuses on its instability and disintegration, which reinforces the sense of ecological urgency. Rippl (2018a: 225–28) views the description of The Living Word in Atwood's novel as an example of "eco-ekphrasis," arguing that it "produces an eco-ethical comment on the state the planet earth is in." It is significant that the unfamiliar double of Idiana's *LOVE* sculpture appears in a post-apocalyptic setting that demonstrates the possible results of unsustainable behavior. For instance, the forests of Wisconsin disappear, while its land becomes a desert covered with waste: "Wisconsin's covered with cow bones, ever since the big drought ten years ago when they'd found it cheaper to butcher the cows there rather than shipping them out—the ones that hadn't died on their own" (Atwood 2020: 67). Slaughterhouse waste products, which may be seen as ubiquitous signs of destructive human activities and reckless consumerism, serve as abundant materials for Amanda's work. Ekphrasis, thus, draws attention to the effects of human actions on the environment, while simultaneously posing nonhuman materialities as agentive factors in their own right.

The changing materiality of the media that Amanda works with is also important in terms of its resistance to mass reproduction. Unlike the materials that were used for the production of countless commercial copies of Indiana's *LOVE* image, the ant-eaten dead-animal matter rejects the prospect of consumer reproduction. The strange ekphrastic transformation of the well-recognized and widely-sold image may, therefore, be viewed as opposing commodification of art and matter. The striking contrast between Indiana's *LOVE* sculpture and its unfamiliar double reinforces the attention to the mattering of waste as to environmental and consumer issues.

Many examples of ekphrastic images that strangely resemble existing artworks or a series of artworks may also be found in film. As in literature, this type of ekphrastic transformation in film involves transmediation. As an example of transmediation in film, Elleström (2014: 33) discusses a film scene that resembles and therefore "may be understood as a variation of a previously existing oil painting depicting a similar scene." The well-recognized elements, he explains, "may be said to have been transferred from one media product to another" (Elleström 2014: 33). And again, crucial to this type of ekphrasis is the act of reworking that makes the familiar (e.g., a recognized painting) strange.

It has to be added that the type of ekphrastic transformation that I consider here includes but is not limited to *tableaux vivants* that resemble existing artworks in a strange way. *Tableau vivant* may be defined as a "composition, often based on a famous artwork or literary passage, of living human bodies that do not move throughout the duration of the display" (Adriaensens and Jacobs 2015: 41). In the nineteenth century, tableaux vivants—"the static embodiments of well-known paintings by human actors"—became known as a popular parlor game (Peucker 2007: 30). The development of film technology made it possible to optically

record the practice of re-enacting existing artworks. The "reenactment of painting" in film is similarly remarkable in terms of its corporeal basis (Peucker 2007: 30–31). As Brigitte Peucker (2007: 31) puts it, tableaux vivants introduce "the living body into painting." Some tableaux vivants in film aim to achieve maximum resemblance with the paintings they reproduce, while others modify them in a weird, uncanny way.

The type of ekphrasis that I consider here includes film scenes that not only re-enact but also rework existing artworks in a strange way. Embodied re-enactments that unfamiliar doubles involve can serve to strangely draw attention to the material world—which is my primary point of interest. For instance, in Peter Greenaway's *A Zed and Two Noughts* (1985), the strange transformation of Vermeer's *The Art of Painting* (ca. 1666–1668) foregrounds the materiality of the female body. The original (Vermeer's painting) is a seventeenth-century oil canvas that depicts a woman in blue clothes, posing for an artist. Unlike the fully dressed female figure that is being painted in Vermeer's painting, the woman in Greenaway's film is being photographed naked (Figure 4). As Peucker (2007: 36) observes, crucial to the scene is "the shock value produced by the woman's naked flesh." The emphasis on materiality in *A Zed and Two Noughts* is evident both from "[t]he overpresence of corporeality" (Boscagli 2014: 216) in the film and from the way ekphrasis transforms Vermeer's painting. The artist (the photographer) in Greenaway's *A Zed and Two Noughts*—van Meegeren—is also a surgeon. In the operating room, van Meegeren treats flesh as sculpting material, and in his leisure time, he takes pleasure in photographing naked female flesh.

Figure 4. Film still from *A Zed and Two Noughts* (1985), directed by Peter Greenaway. Reproduced with permission. © BFI / Courtesy of the BFI National Archive.

The scene that strangely resembles Vermeer's *The Art of Painting* highlights the voyeuristic nature of van Meegeren's interest in the female body. If Vermeer in his paintings aspired to capture the sublime in the everyday (Huerta 2005: 59–60), then van Meegeren focuses on the fleshy materiality of the body. The striking contrast between Vermeer's painting and its unfamiliar double reinforces the film's emphasis on corporeality and technological innovation.

It is significant that human and nonhuman flesh is frequently photographed throughout the film, while the stop-motion films of decaying flesh suggest that all matter—including rotting flesh—is vibrant and lively. In *A Zed and Two Noughts*, flesh is subject to constant change over time, and its vibrant existence does not end with the death of the body. The changing images of rotting flesh reveal death as "a process that involves life/motion" (Karastathi 2006: 208). In this respect, Greenaway's film resonates with a new materialist understanding of death as a vital process (Braidotti 2013). Whether in a state of growth or decay, flesh may be seen as vibrant materiality (Bennett 2010). The ekphrastic image may be seen as demonstrating an attempt to capture, fixate, and thereby master flesh—flesh that is constantly changing and whose gradual development from growth to aging and decay ultimately evades human control. Importantly, the film ends with the destruction of photographic equipment by nonhuman forces: snails invade and put out of action the system of technological devices used to capture the images of flesh. When considered in the context of the whole film, the strange transformation of Vermeer's painting not only brings materiality into focus but also addresses the failed human attempts to objectify and master the material world.

Artwork Animation

The second type of ekphrasis, which I propose to call the *artwork animation*, includes literary and filmic ekphrases that bring existing and fictional artworks (e.g., paintings or sculptures) to life, as if by magic. This type of ekphrastic transformation can be traced back to the myth of Pygmalion. As described in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the Cypriot sculptor Pygmalion creates an ivory statue of an ideal woman and falls in love with its beauty. In response to Pygmalion's prayers, the goddess Venus animates his creation: the ivory statue comes to life at the sculptor's touch. This type of ekphrasis is remarkable in terms of foregrounding media materiality, which is entangled with the sensory appeal of the medium. In the case of sculpture, the materiality of the medium, especially in relation to its tactile appeal, deserves close attention. According to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Pygmalion often touches and kisses the ivory sculpture during his outbursts of admiration. By emphasizing tactile experience, the myth of Pygmalion challenges Platonic privileging of sight over touch (Paraskos 2017: 62). Such shifts of attention to tacticity can be traced both in literature and in film. For instance, in William A. Seiter's film *One Touch of Venus* (1948), a statue of Venus comes to life at a kiss: when the male protagonist of the film kisses the statue, the perspective shifts to her point of view, and the statue touches the back of the man's head, thus exhibiting uncanny vitality. It is important that the camera zooms into her

hand, leaving the female body—the visual ideal—out of the frame. And here again, the artwork animation challenges the primacy of visual perception by foregrounding the act of touching. In terms of its sensorial dimensions, filmic ekphrasis in *One Touch of Venus* also appeals to the sense hearing: the inclusion of mysterious music reinforces the uncanny effect of the artwork animation, especially the statue's unexpected act of touching. The sudden touch of the Venus statue may be viewed as a strange manifestation of what Bennett (2010: xvi) would call "thing-power"—the strange capacity of man-made things to exceed their role of passive objects by enacting different effects and showing unexpected signs of independence.

If the emphasis on tacticity disrupts visual objectification, then the strange, unexpected activity of animated figures can serve to question the artist's control over his material and the portrayed subject. As a result of this type of ekphrastic transformation, figures in sculptures, paintings, photographs, and other media begin to exhibit agency and independence: they can start talking and moving or even step out of the frame. Especially in the case of paintings and photographs, artwork animations both in literature and in film often involve such transgressions of the frame. For example, in Roger McGough's poem "Framed" (2004), a girl in a nude painting steps out of the picture after the closing hours of the Art Gallery; she then "dresses and walks away" (McGough 2004: 309). The ekphrastic transformation involves the alteration of the spatiotemporal modality from nontemporal to temporal, which allows the figure in the nude painting to perform actions unfolding in time. By emphasizing the agency of the nude figure, the artwork animation questions the artist's mastery over the female body as a passive object.

It is not only the media of painting and sculpture that this type of ekphrastic transformation can bring to life. For instance, ekphrasis in Manoel de Oliveira's film *The Strange Case of Angelica* (2010) draws attention to the uncanny thing-power of the photographic medium. The main character of the film—a photographer—takes a post-mortem portrait of a woman called Angelica. All of a sudden, the deceased woman in a photograph taken by him opens her eyes (Figure 5). The transmediation of the image of the dead woman is entangled with the transfer and transformation of the photographic medium. This transformation of the photograph in the film medium is particularly remarkable in terms of the dynamic development of ekphrastic practice. Technology brings about new possibilities for ekphrastic transformations: the technological affordances of the film medium—such as editing—support and reinforce the uncanny effect of the transformed photograph.

By foregrounding the strange thing-power of the photograph, the artwork animation transgresses the dualism of lively human beings and passive nonhuman things. Here, as in other instances of this type, the ekphrastic transformation also challenges gendered dualistic thinking: it is very often a female figure that comes to life, undermining the dominance of the male artist over matter and the female. I closely explore the capacity of this type of ekphrasis to subvert gendered dualisms in Chapter 3, which considers the artwork animation in Ní Chonchúir's short story "Roy Lichtenstein's Nudes in a Mirror: We Are Not Fake!".

Figure 5. Film still from *The Strange Case of Angelica* (2010), directed by Manoel de Olivieira. Reproduced with permission from Maria João Mayer, producer. © Filmes do Tejo II, Les Films de l'Après-Midi, Eddie Saeta, Mostra Internacional de Cinema.

As Louvel (2011: 100) observes, there are also examples of ekphrasis where the character enters and "wanders in the painting." In such cases, the painting usually comes to life as the character transgresses the frame, and ekphrasis can again serve to foreground the embodied experience from within the painting, or *what it is like* to enter its space. This is what happens in Ciaran Carson's *Shamrock Tea* (2001), where the narrator enters Jan van Eyck's *The Arnolfini Portrait* (1434) and describes the experience of being in the position of the merchant figure in the painting. The artwork animation brings forth the striking contrast between the act of looking at van Eyck's painting and the concrete, physical experience of standing in the merchant's room and wearing his clothes. This contrast is further reinforced when the narrator realizes that he cannot see the two figures that should stand in front of the merchant, according to the convex mirror in the painting. What the character can see instead is "a grey, formless blur" (Carson 2002b: 38). "I made to touch it with my hand," he notes, "and felt a palpable shock" (Carson 2002b: 38). By emphasizing the act of touching and the embodied experience of space, the ekphrastic transformation not only questions the primacy of visual perception but also challenges and tests the limits of the pictorial space based on fixed single-point-of-view perspective.

Artwork-in-the-Making

The third type of ekphrasis, which I propose to call the *artwork-in-the-making*, includes literary and filmic ekphrases that deal with art-making processes. This type of ekphrastic transformation, which often involves the change of the spatio-temporal modality from nontemporal to temporal mode, engages with art as a dynamic process rather than a finished product. Artworks-in-the-making may

serve to attract attention to the materiality of art-making processes, the embodied experience of the artist or the model.

Many examples of this type may be found in literary works about artists, be they real or fictional. Ekphrasis in Siri Hustvedt's novel *The Blazing World* (2014) is a good illustration of how literary descriptions can foreground the making of art as embodied material practice. The protagonist of the novel is a fictional artist Harriet Burden, who after the death of her husband Felix Lord, creates a series of Felix-like figures. Harriet calls them "metamorphs" (Hustvedt 2014: 31). She uses a special heating mechanism to make figures of different temperatures, from cool to warm and hot:

> No extra technology was required for my carcasses, although I fiddled with the wiring before I was truly happy with it. I began with a life-size effigy of Felix; it was an idea of him, not a likeness, his slender stuffed form covered with material I painted in blues and greens with a little yellow and dabs of red, man as canvas, but I added short white hair on the top of his head. When I plugged him in, his soft body ran a fever. The pleasure this gave me was ludicrous. I couldn't say then why the hot creature filled me with joy, but it did. I touched his colored sides gingerly to feel his warmth. I put my arms around him. (Hustvedt 2014: 30)

Here, the temporal mode of literary ekphrasis—which foregrounds the process of artmaking—is entangled with its semiotic modality—which enables the verbalization of the artist's experience. The verbalization of creative experience, in turn, brings forth the mingling of the mental and the physical: Harriet's "idea" of Felix is materialized within the embodied practice of artmaking (Hustvedt 2014: 30). The artwork-in-the-making, thus, challenges the dualisms of body and mind, matter and ideas.

It is remarkable that the stress here is not on the visual but on the tactile—the sense of touch and warmth. Ekphrasis also brings forth the reciprocal nature of touch: when Harriet shapes and touches the figure and materials, she also receives their touch and warmth. Her making of art may, thus, be viewed as a process of reciprocal exchange and engagement with the material world. As sculptor and materialist Tony Cragg (2021) observes, the artmaking process "is a dialogue with the material": when the artist changes the material, the material also changes and affects the artist. For Harriet, the embodied practice of molding, stuffing, sewing, and wiring her metamorphs becomes a way to overcome the loss of her husband. While she gives shape to the material, the material affects her physically and alleviates grief.

Similarly, this type of ekphrasis in Dawn Tripp's novel *Georgia: A Novel of Georgia O'Keeffe* (2016) draws attention to the effectivity of artmaking materials in the process of creation. Tripp's *Georgia* is inspired by the life and work of American painter Georgia O'Keeffe, who is the narrator in the novel. The following example of ekphrasis focuses on the process of painting as experienced and described by the artist: "I am playing with watercolor again and I love it—how the water is free—the color is always to an extent at the mercy of what the water is doing" (Tripp 2016: 229). The artwork-in-the-making not only engages

with art as a process but also foregrounds the doings of the materials, or what Katve-Kaisa Kontturi (2013: 18) would call "the *work* of painting" [emphasis in original]. The *work* of art, as Kontturi (2013: 18) sees it, is an art process "in which matter acquires expressive qualities; in which matter is an active and indispensable participant." By drawing attention to "what the water is doing" (Tripp 2016: 229), ekphrasis in Tripp's novel emphasizes the creativity of matter and its active participation in the making of art. Thus, with its focus on the process of creation, this type of ekphrasis can serve to explore the making of art as an embodied material-discursive practice and also acknowledge the creative workings of nonhuman materials. I consider several examples of artworks-in-the-making in Chapter 4—which explores how Ciaran Carson's ekphrasis engages with the embodied experience of the artist—and Chapter 5—which moves away from the human experience of artmaking, focusing instead on the agency and creativity of nonhuman matter in Derek Mahon's ekphrastic poetry.

Apart from foregrounding the physical sensations of the artist and the workings of materials, this type of ekphrasis may also draw attention to the embodied experience of the model (or the sitter). This is the case in Margaret Atwood's novel *Cat's Eye* (1988), which like Hustvedt's *The Blazing World*, tells the story of a fictional female artist. The protagonist of Atwood's novel is a Canadian painter Elaine Risley, who at the beginning of her training at the Toronto College of Art, takes a class called Life Drawing. The ekphrastic description of Elaine's artmaking practice in this class focuses on the process of drawing a naked female body:

> I'm trying to draw this woman, with a piece of charcoal. I am trying for fluidity of line. This is how the teacher has arranged her: for fluidity of line. I would rather be using a hard pencil; the charcoal gets on my fingers and smears, and is no good for hair. Also this woman frightens me. There is a lot of flesh to her, especially below the waist; there are folds across her stomach, her breasts are saggy and have enormous black nipples. (Atwood 2002: 269)

Here, the focus of the ekphrastic description gradually moves from the drawing materials—charcoal and a hard pencil—to the subtle tactile sensations in the artist's fingers, and then to the fleshiness of the naked female body. The artwork-in-the-making also draws attention to the embodied experience of the model, who "looks cramped and uncomfortable, and also cold" (Atwood 2002: 269). Elaine can see the goose-bumps on the skin of her upper arms. The excessively fleshy body, whose experiential reality exceeds the colorless composition of charcoal drawing and fluid lines, has a frightening effect on the young female artist. Elaine is afraid of becoming that woman one day and dreads seeing her own body going out of shape and control with age. Despite the attempt at a precise portrayal of the model's body, its vitality evades the artist. "I am careful and accurate," Elaine observes, "but I have drawn a person-shaped bottle, inert and without life" (Atwood 2002: 272). Thus, by bringing to the fore the process of drawing from models, ekphrasis exposes the discrepancy between the lived female experience and the lifelessness of the drawn body.

Examples of this type of ekphrasis may also be found in film. As in literature, artworks-in-the-making in film can draw attention to various aspects of art creation, from the artist's tools and materials to the physical actions involved in the making of art. A good illustration of this type of ekphrastic transformation is the Royal Academy scene in Mike Leigh's film *Mr. Turner* (2014). The scene is based on an incident from the life of the British painter Joseph Mallord William Turner, when he reworked one of his paintings on Varnishing Day at the Royal Academy. On Varnishing Days—the days before the opening of exhibitions—painters were given "an opportunity to repaint their works, which already hung on the walls" of the Royal Academy (Wagner 2014: 34). The repainting of works was performed in the presence of other artists, who could observe the working process of their colleagues (Wagner 2014: 34–35). Ekphrasis in Leigh's film gives an insight into the working methods of Turner: when repainting his work, the artist vigorously smears the paint on the canvas with his fingers and spits on the painting. And here again, the transfer and transformation of the painting, which adds a temporal dimension to the image, poses painting as a dynamic material process, not a finished product. The change in the spatiotemporal modality is entangled with the alteration of the sensorial modality: the use of dramatic string music in the scene reinforces the dynamism and intensity of the artist's actions.

By bringing into focus the dynamic gestures of the artist, ekphrasis also emphasizes the embodied nature of the painting practice. The intense tactile engagement with the canvas was crucial to Turner's painting technique. As Joyce Townsend observes, the close study of his work indicates that Turner frequently used his hands to apply paint to canvas:

> There is evidence that Turner worked paint with his fingers, in both water and oil media. … More late oil paintings show evidence of finger working than earlier ones, probably since Turner applied fewer glazes which conceal the application techniques in the later works. In paintings from the 1820s curved scratch marks are visible, apparently made by Turner's thumbnail. (Townsend 1993: 52)

Ekphrasis in Leigh's *Mr. Turner* illustrates what Townsend's observations suggest: the creation of art, for Turner, was deeply grounded in embodied actions. The artist's gestures and movements occupy a central role in this artwork-in-the-making. Considering Turner's "physical involvement" in his art creation, Hélène Ibata (2018: 13–17) notes that "The dramatic and gestural performance appears to provide the final structuring moment" in his paintings. In other words, the principles of geometric composition give way to the artist's physical gestures that become crucial to determining the composition of the painting (Ibata 2018: 19). In the film, the close-up of Turner's hands places an emphasis on tactile knowledge and skills as the basis for shaping the compositional space of the painting. Thus, the ekphrastic transformation of Turner's painting bridges the gap between art and life—the composition of the artwork and the lived experience of the artist.

Similarly, the artwork-in-the-making in Ed Harris's film *Pollock* (2000) shifts the focus from the artwork to the process of its production and the artist's body-in-action. The film is a biopic about American abstract expressionist painter Jackson Pollock, who was famous for developing a drip technique[27]—a painting technique that involves dripping paint from a brush onto a horizontally placed canvas. Pollock guided the flow of the paint and "the patterns it made with the motions of his body, hands, and arms" (Toynton 2012: 47). Ekphrasis in Harris's film engages with Pollock's Action Painting[28] by drawing attention to the highly dynamic nature of the artist's movements: the way he applies paint to the canvas with instinctive, vigorous gestures. In particular, one of the wide shots includes Pollock's large-scale canvas as well the full body of the moving painter (Figure 6). Here, the artwork-in-the-making serves to explore painting as an extension of the choreography of the body: the artist moves like a dancer on the canvas which, in turn, records his performance. In Action Painting, the moving body of the artist is itself part of art or, as Angela Dalle Vacche (1996: 16) puts it, "merges with the picture being made." The overhead shot in Harris's film visually emphasizes the inseparability of the dynamic body and the canvas (Figure 6).

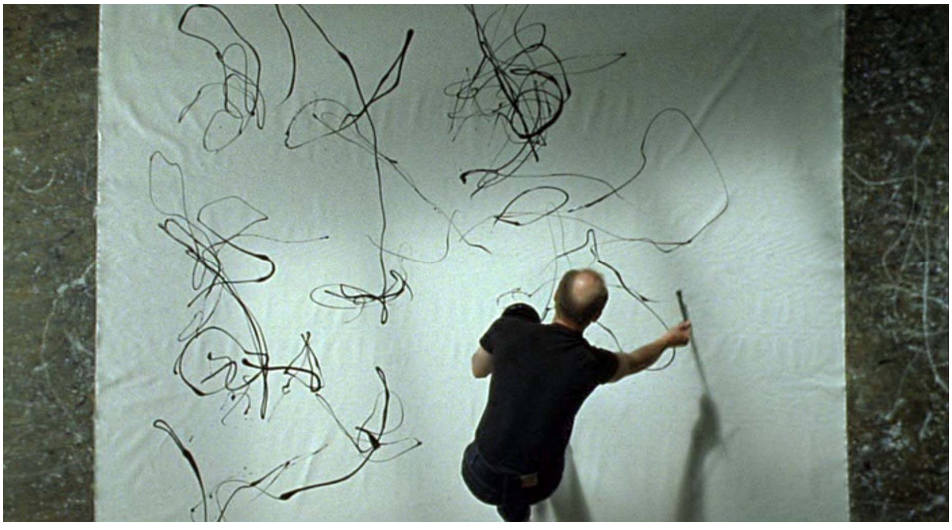

Figure 6. Film still from *Pollock* (2000), directed by Ed Harris. Reproduced with permission from Peter M. Brant. © Brant-Allen Films & Zeke Films.

[27] Some academics also use the term *poured paintings* to describe Pollock's technique, which involved not only pouring but also splattering, splashing, and hurling paint onto a canvas (Toynton 2012: 49).

[28] The term *Action Painting* was coined by American art critic Harold Rosenberg to designate the work of painters who pay special attention to "the very act of painting" (Greenberg 1995: 136).

It is worth noting that during his physical engagement with the canvas, the painter not only affects but is also affected by his materials. The size of the canvas, for example, may impact the artist's physical response and gestures. According to Evelyn Toynton, Pollock's drip paintings of different sizes vary in the ways the paint was applied to them:

> there is as much variation in size as there is in the effects and textures Pollock was able to achieve with his drip technique … Sometimes the impression is of fine tracery, sometimes of a raw, rough crust; sometimes the calligraphic lines look like handwriting, sometimes they are jagged and fierce, sometimes sinuous and lyrical; sometimes the effect is of spiders' webs, sometimes of lightning bolts or electrical charges. (Toynton 2012: 51–52)

When faced with a large canvas, the painter is prompted to respond to it with broader gestures and paint marks, as the artwork-in-the-making in the film demonstrates.

Crucial to Pollock's painting process was also the position of his canvases: "Painted not on the easel, not on the wall, but on the floor they allowed for a whole new kind of freedom: the freedom to move around the painting as he worked—to be, as Pollock said, in the painting" (Toynton 2012: xiv). As seen in Harris's film, it is both the size and the position of the canvas that makes Pollock dance on it. Rather than act upon his paintings as passive objects, the artist creatively engages with his materials: canvases, brushes, and paint. Through its emphasis on the making of art as material practice, ekphrasis allows us to witness how the painter's materials affect his creative development. For instance, the very materiality of paint—its capacity to drip from brushes in unpredictable ways—provokes the artist to change his working method and develop his famous painting technique. On the whole, the artworks-in-the-making in Harris's film foreground painting as a dynamic physical encounter of the artist with his materials—canvases and paint—which serve as active participants in the creative process.

Embedded World-Picture

The fifth type of ekphrastic transformation, which I propose to call the *embedded world-picture*, involves the transfer and integration of a broad panoramic picture of the world (a painting, drawing, or any other real or fictional artwork) into a literary work or a film. What is crucial here is that the transferred image encompasses a larger picture of the world than the primary narrative. Thus, this type of ekphrasis reverses the relation between the inside and the outside. The oldest example of an embedded world-picture is the description of the Shield of Achilles in Homer's *Iliad*. The artwork is decorated with elaborate engravings of the whole universe: the earth and the sun, the moon and the sky, the ocean and two cities. The Shield is simultaneously a material thing that appears *in* the world of the *Iliad* and an artwork that encompasses the world *outside* the primary narrative. The effect of external inclusion in Homer's *Iliad* was firstly pointed out by

W. J. T. Mitchell (1995: 180), who observes that Achilles's Shield encompasses "much more of Homer's world than the *Iliad* does." The transfer and integration of such a macroworld picture[29] into the human-centered narrative may invite the reader (or the viewer) to experience the world on multiple scales at once: both human and more-than-human scales.

Examples of this type of ekphrastic transformation may also be found in contemporary literature and film. Richard Powers's novel *Bewilderment* (2021) is a good illustration of how ekphrasis can create the effect of external inclusion. The protagonist and narrator of the novel is Theo Byrne, a widower whose nine-year-old son Robin is diagnosed with Asperger syndrome. The boy feels a profound connection to the nonhuman world and is deeply worried about the extinction of species. The narrative largely revolves around the daily life and struggles of the father and the son, whose family world is often turned upside down because of Robin's mood swings and waves of grief for the damaged planet. In order to attract public attention to environmental degradation, the boy creates a banner for a peaceful demonstration at the Capitol. The banner, which is covered with drawings of endangered species, reminds the narrator of Robin's late mother Aly and her environmental activism:

> The banner was longer than the two of us stretched end to end. And it was covered in paints, markers, and inks of all colors. Down the length of it ran the words:
>
> LET'S HEAL WHAT WE HURT
>
> He had filled the scroll with bright, bold design. It seemed another thing he'd learned directly from Aly, who worked on a canvas too large for me to see. Creatures ringed the letters, as though drawn by a hand more mature than his. Stands of staghorn coral were bleaching white. Birds and mammals fled a burning forest. Ten-inch-long honeybees lay on their backs along the bottom of the banner, legs up and little X's in their eyes. (Powers 2021: 211–12)

Like his mother, who was a researcher and animal rights activist, Robin thinks of the world on a large, more-than-human human scale. It is noteworthy that his banner—with its elaborate drawings of all kinds of birds, mammals, and insects—encompasses a larger view of the world than the primary narrative of the novel—the father-and-son narrative. Similarly to Achilles's Shield in Homer's *Iliad*, the ekphrastic description of Robin's artwork opens up a perspective beyond the familiar human scale, thus transgressing the boundaries of anthropocentric thinking.

If one side of the banner is a nightmarish picture of environmental destruction, or what the narrator calls "hell," its second side is "the peaceable kingdom" where "creatures in the wildest array of colors and forms" inhabit idyllic green forest and the blue ocean (Powers 2021: 212). In this respect, Robin's artwork reminds of Hieronymus Bosch's triptychs that include both hellish and heavenly imagery.

[29] I employ the term *macroworld picture* to denote a large-scale picture of the world.

The side panels of Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, for instance, bring together the realities of Heaven and Hell (Figure 7). As a whole, the triptych encompasses a vast view of the world and humankind. Like Bosch's panoramic painting, Robin's banner engages with the realities of the world at large. However, the central role in its design is occupied by the nonhuman beings. The hellish side of the banner also draws attention to the effects of the Anthropocene on the nonhuman world: the extinction of coral reefs, forest fires, habitat destruction, and pollinator decline.

Figure 7. Hieronymus Bosch, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, ca. 1490–1510; oil on oak panels, Prado Museum, Madrid. *Wikimedia Commons*. Web. 26 January 2023.

By bringing a macroworld picture into the narrative, Powers's ekphrasis decentralizes the human within the world and also invites the reader to engage with large-scale processes of ecological degradation. At the same time, the primary narrative conveys a sense of enmeshment in the material world. The characters' engagement with plants, animals, and environmental ecosystems is embodied, situated, and material. It is remarkable that some of the elements in Robin's artwork recall the events in the novel: the environmental disasters in the picture correspond to the signs of environmental emergency in the primary narrative. Most importantly, ecological change is entangled with the embodied experience of the characters, as it is the case in the narrator's description of abnormal heat: "It was only June, but I couldn't breathe" (Powers 2021: 138). In her *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times*, Alaimo (2016: 150–57) proposes "that we think the anthropocene subject as immersed and enmeshed in the world" as well as "entangled in differing scales." Ekphrasis in Powers's novel brings together the sense of material enmeshment and the vast view of the world. Rather than present an abstract, disembodied perspective on the Anthropocene, this type of ekphrastic transformation allows the reader to switch between human-scale embodied experience and large-scale processes of ecological ruination.

Thus, the embedded world-picture in *Bewilderment* not only disrupts the human-centered narrative but also cultivates a sense of embeddedness in the more-than-human world.

A filmic example of this type of ekphrasis may be found in Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* (2011), which includes Pieter Bruegel's panoramic landscape painting *The Hunters in the Snow*. Ekphrasis in von Trier's film is discussed in detail in Chapter 5. I am particularly interested in how the affordances of film technology can create the effect of external inclusion and thereby increase the sense of entanglement in differing scales.

The typology proposed above gives me tools and terminology for the matter-oriented analysis of ekphrastic transformations in Chapter 3, Chapter 4, and Chapter 5. The three chapters are structured around case studies, including ekphrases in Pedro Almodóvar's film *The Skin I Live In* (2011), Nuala Ní Chonchúir's short story collection *Nude* (2009), Ciaran Carson's poetry collection *Still Life* (2019), Derek Mahon's poetry collection *An Autumn Wind* (2010), and Lars von Trier's film *Melancholia* (2011). The following chapter—Chapter 3—focuses on the ekphrastic transformations of nude paintings in Almodóvar's film and Ní Chonchúir's short stories, particularly the ways in which filmic and literary ekphrasis challenges the dualistic concept of the ideal form as superior to matter.

CHAPTER 3
Beyond the Form: Ekphrastic Transformations of the Nude in Pedro Almodóvar's *The Skin I Live In* and Nuala Ní Chonchúir's *Nude*

"The nude remains the most complete example of the transmutation of matter into form," argues Kenneth Clark (1984: 27) in his seminal work *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*. The "geometrical discipline" of art, he goes on, has the capacity to transform the "vulgar" and "unruly human body" into harmonious and orderly form[30] (Clark 1984: 71). Clark's geometric analysis of the nude, which conceives of the female body as an assemblage of ideal shapes and lines, is not uncommon: in drawing manuals, for instance, bodies are often discussed in regard to form, volume, lines, and shapes (e.g., spheres, cylinders, boxes) (Bostrom and Malik 1999: 45–47). Flesh is, thus, overlooked and subordinated to form and human artistic activities. The idea that form is superior to and prevails over matter is prominent in the Western philosophical tradition, which is largely rooted in Platonic rationalism (Nead 2012: 216). For Plato, the material world is a mere shadow of the ideal realm of forms and ideas. The ideal nude has been reproduced and celebrated in painting for centuries, thus reinforcing the dualisms of form and matter, culture and nature.

Several scholars observe that the dualistic paradigm that dominates the nude tradition has gendered underpinnings. In her *The Female Nude*, Lynda Nead (2001: 14) argues that the privileging of the nude (form) over the naked (matter) both in the tradition of nude painting and the discourse on the nude "is associated with a number of other oppositional pairings," in which culture, ideas, reason, and art are related to masculinity and "positive values," whereas nature, matter, passion, and obscenity are tied to femininity and "negative values." Similarly, Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock (2013: 119) note that the nude tradition confirms male superiority: nude painting is often seen as the act of transforming female nature into "a *work* of art" by the means of male culture. According to gender binary thinking, then, the celebration of the ideal form is tied to the view of Man as an active and reasonable creator who masters the passive material world and the female body. The gendered category of the female form is also entangled with particular practices of looking. The convention of the nude has been repeatedly criticized for posing the female as an object of male sight (Berger 1990: 54) and

[30] The first chapter of Clark's book *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (1956), particularly his discussion of the naked (the actual body) and the nude (the ideal body), has had a significant influence on the contemporary discourse on the nude in the visual arts (McDonald 2000: 7). However, some scholars (Nead 1992; McDonald 2000) trace and challenge dualistic logic in Clark's discussion of the ideal female body. Lynda Nead (2001: 20; 2012: 206), for instance, criticizes Clark's tendency to discuss the female body as being "naturally predisposed to the contours of art" and waiting for "the act of artistic regulation."

thereby relying on "a voyeuristic mode" of viewing the female body (Bal 2013: 80). Thus, the repeated reproduction and celebration of the ideal nude in the Western painting tradition not only reinforces the dualism of form and matter but also enables a voyeuristic objectification of the female form for the pleasure of male visual consumption.

As a result of the ubiquity of the nude in Western visual culture, the transfer and transformation of nude paintings became prominent in contemporary ekphrastic practice both in literature and in film. Taking as case studies the ekphrastic transformations of the nude in Pedro Almodóvar's film *The Skin I Live In* (2011) and Nuala Ní Chonchúir's collection of short stories *Nude* (2009), this chapter develops a matter-oriented analysis of ekphrasis by addressing the following questions: How do the ekphrastic transformations of existing artworks address the dualistic and gendered assumptions that underlie the tradition of nude painting? In what way can ekphrasis challenge the privileging of the ideal form over matter? How can ekphrastic transformations reconfigure the process of the female body and matter becoming objectified? What is the relation between contemporary ekphrasis, changes in objectifying artistic practices, and the material processes of media and technological evolution? Both case studies discussed in this chapter involve ekphrastic transformations of nude paintings. I will show that ekphrasis serves to question and reorient the nude tradition in manifold ways, from addressing theoretical writings on art to foregrounding the material and dynamic nature of representational practices.

Corporeal Nude

Pedro Almodóvar's[31] *The Skin I Live In* (2011) is a psychological thriller film that is based on Thierry Jonquet's novel *Mygale* (1984). When its production was announced in 2010, Almodóvar described the script as "a horror story without screams or frights" (quoted in Ríos Pérez 2010). The film features the story of a plastic surgeon and bio-scientist Robert Ledgard, who secretly carries out illegal transgenic experiments in an underground laboratory beneath his mansion. By transgenically splicing human DNA with that of a pig, Robert produces enhanced very strong skin that is resistant to burns and mosquito bites. As hinted in the title of the film, the skin—and, by extension, the fleshy reality of the body—is central to the story. After cultivating the transgenic skin, Robert performs a skin replacement surgery on a character called Vera. Being given new skin, Vera remains under the constant surveillance of Robert and is kept in his estate as a captive.

[31] Pedro Almodóvar Caballero (born in 1949) is a Spanish film director whose work has gained international recognition. With their distinctive visual style and thematic focus, Almodóvar's films are often viewed as auteur cinema. Filmic ekphrasis is a recurrent component of his work. Almodóvar's interest in painting is evident in many of his films, including *Law of Desire* (1987), *Bad Education* (2004), *Broken Embraces* (2009), *Julieta* (2016), *Pain and Glory* (2019), and *The Human Voice* (2020).

For Robert, transgenesis is not only a scientific procedure but also an artistic practice: he manipulates a corporeal organism to create an ideal female form, treating Vera as an artwork. Robert's fascination with the body as a perfect shape is evident both from the way he carefully measures the proportions of Vera's body and from the numerous nude paintings that decorate the walls of his mansion.

The film is abundant with ekphrastic elements which transfer into the medium of film a variety of artworks, from Renaissance paintings to modern sculpture. The following section focuses on Titian's *The Venus of Urbino*, a nude painting typical of the Old Masters' tradition. The painting draws on a geometrically balanced composition of a reclining nude figure, thus celebrating the ideal female form (Figure 9). Titian's *The Venus of Urbino* is embedded in the film in two different ways: firstly, we can see its reproduction hanging on the wall of the protagonist's estate; and secondly, the image on Robert's screen, which he uses to watch Vera from a different room, strangely recalls Titian's painting (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Film still from *The Skin I Live In* (2011), directed by Pedro Almodóvar. Reproduced with permission. Photo: José Haro. © EL DESEO DA S.L.U.

In terms of the capacity of ekphrasis to transform existing artworks, the latter—which is an example of an *unfamiliar double*[32]—is of primary interest. The ekphrastic transformation here involves the transfer of the image from the source to the target medium, or in Elleström's (2014) terms, transmediation. It does not, however, involve the transfer of such media characteristics as paint and canvas.

[32] See above the subchapter on the types of ekphrastic transformations.

The image is materialized on a film screen without the transfer of the painting as a medium. The ekphrastic transformation of Titian's *The Venus of Urbino*—which involves a corporeal re-enactment of the painting—makes the familiar (the image of Venus) strange. Ekphrasis, thus, brings forth the contrast between the two images by setting the original (the painting) and its reworked version (the filmic image) against each other.

Apart from engaging with Titian's painting in particular, the ekphrastic image serves to address the nude tradition in general. As Tamar Yacobi (1997) observes, ekphrasis can not only allude to a particular work but also recall a series of images that render a certain scene or a type of often-reproduced images.[33] Ekphrasis in *The Skin I Live In* alludes to Titian's painting and simultaneously recalls other images of the much-painted Venus (Figures 9–12).

Figure 9. *The Venus of Urbino* (1538), by Titian (1490–1576); oil on canvas, 119 × 165 cm.; Uffizi Gallery, Florence. *Wikimedia Commons*. Web. 25 January 2023.

[33] This idea was introduced by Yacobi in her discussion of literary ekphrasis. Yacobi (1997: 39) coined the term "ekphrastic model" to discuss literary descriptions that can allude to a particular artwork, while simultaneously recalling a series of similar artworks. Yacobi gives as an example the allusion to the "much-painted" *Last Supper* in Nabokov's short story "Spring in Fialta" (40). Initially developed in the framework of literary theory, the notion of ekphrastic model may also be applied to film.

Figure 10. *Rokeby Venus* (ca. 1647–1651), by Diego Velázquez (1599–1660); oil on canvas, 122.5 × 177 cm.; National Gallery, London. *Wikimedia Commons*. Web. 25 January 2023.

Figure 11. *Venus and the Lute Player* (ca. 1565–1570), by Titian (1490–1576); oil on canvas, 165.1 × 209.6 cm.; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. *Wikimedia Commons*. 26 January 2023.

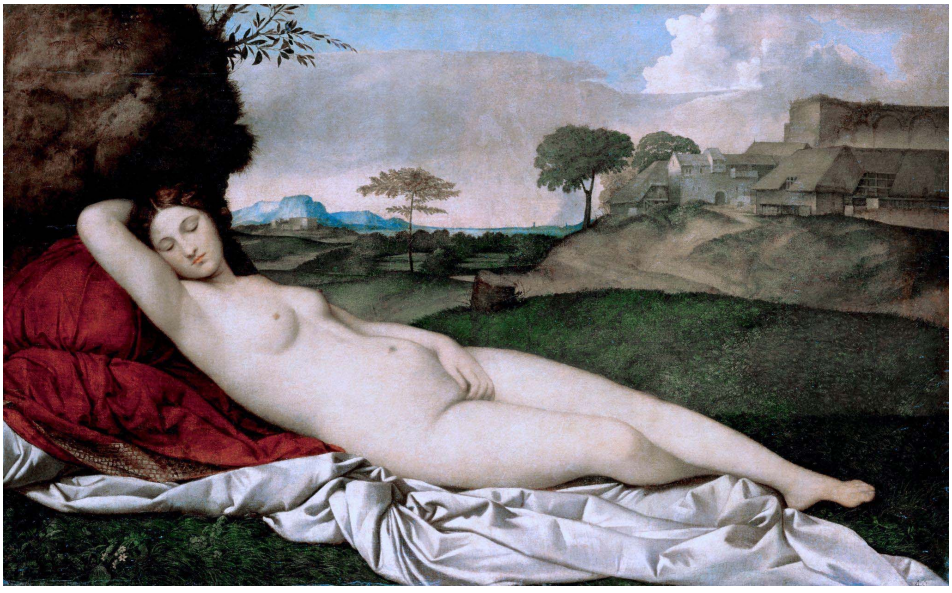

Figure 12. *Sleeping Venus* (ca. 1510), by Giorgione (1487–1510) and Titian (1490–1576); oil on canvas, 108.5 × 175 cm.; Old Masters Picture Gallery, Dresden. *Wikimedia Commons*. Web. 26 January 2023.

Therefore, ekphrasis addresses a type of female portrayal that, being constantly repeated, has become fixed and overused. The defamiliarizing transformation of the overused image serves to destabilize the fixed, repeated portrayal of the ideal female form.

In Almodóvar's reworking of Titian's Venus, crucial is the strange transformation of nudity. Unlike the nude female figure in the original painting, the figure in its reworked version is dressed in a skin-like costume. Vera is "wearing" her nudity, which serves to disguise the body of the character and is placed on display. Nudity is imposed on the body, which is there to be looked at. In this respect, the ekphrastic image recalls John Berger's criticism of visual objectification in art:

> A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a nude. … Nakedness reveals itself. Nudity is placed on display. To be naked is to be without disguise. To be on display is to have the surface of one's own skin, the hairs of one's own body, turned into a disguise which, in that situation, can never be discarded. The nude is condemned to never being naked. Nudity is a form of dress. (Berger 1990: 54)

On the one hand, the transformed image resonates with Berger's view of nudity as an imposed convention that disguises the actual and facilitates visual consumption. On the other, ekphrasis provokes thinking of the idealization and visual objectification of the female body in fleshy, corporeal terms. Remarkably, the ekphrastic transformation of the image involves the alteration of the spatiotemporal modality: if Titian's painting is a primarily spatial artwork, then Almodóvar's film is spatiotemporal. Media that have a certain duration may be

viewed as temporal events (Bruhn and Schirrmacher 2022: 22). With the temporality of film, nudity in *The Skin I Live In* becomes an action unfolding in time: Vera is performing the ideal nude through bodily practice. Nudity is, thus, not a fixed form but a corporeal enactment. The transfer of the image from the medium of painting into the medium of film transforms the painterly ideal into a moving image of a living material body.

By foregrounding the material human body as part of the signifying practice, ekphrasis challenges the dualistic perception of the world in a new materialist vein. Nudity as the practice of idealization and visual objectification involves the mattering of bodily matter. As Barad (2007: 3) puts it, "Mattering is simultaneously a matter of substance and significance." In Almodóvar's film, ideas and matter, real and representational, culture and nature, the human body and nonhuman technology are not opposed but entangled. The body underneath the skin-like costume is a changing materiality that is simultaneously enmeshed in scientific and representational practices. Vera's transgenic skin—which serves as the material for the reproduction of the ideal female form in flesh—is both a biological substance and a culturally significant element. The idealization of the bodily surface encompasses the processes of mattering and becoming. The ideas about the perfect female body are materialized through biotechnological practices where matter becomes enhanced. For Barad (2007: 151), matter is not fixed but "*refers to phenomena in their ongoing materialization*." In *The Skin I Live In*, the materialization of the ideal body may be viewed as a process of becoming that involves the changing materiality of the body and is made possible through material-technological practices.

Remarkably, the material-technological practices that allow Robert to create the Venus-like being are akin to biological arts. Biological arts or living arts is a recently developed artistic practice where artists use living biological organisms and systems that are altered through the means of technological biology; working with DNA as an "artistic medium," artists manipulate life itself and thereby go beyond traditional procedures of art-making; biological arts are sometimes seen as "promoting transhumanism," which seeks to enhance the human condition through scientific and technological advancements (Catts 2018: 66–67). To create bioart forms, artists work on the microscopic scale of scientific DNA modification. In Barad's (2007: 54) view, scientific practices, which involve dynamic engagement with the material world, are rather a "matter of intervening" than "representing." In biological arts, artistic creation and scientific intervention are inextricably entangled: in the course of artistic practice, bio-artists intervene into and reconfigure the material world.

Like in biological arts, biotechnology in Almodóvar's *The Skin I Live In* is part of the art-making process. Vera's body—which is reconfigured through transgenesis for the purpose of creating a corporeal Venus-like figure—may be viewed as a bio-artwork. The perfect, very strong skin is a result of transgenic splicing between human and animal cells. In this respect, Vera's skin recalls contemporary bio-artistic experiments, such as Jalila Essaïdi's project "2.6g 329m/s," which is also known as *Bulletproof Skin*. Essaïdi modified the properties of human skin by

transgenically splicing it with spider silk (Marciniak 2018: 829). This newly developed transgenic tissue can stop bullets fired at a certain reduced speed (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Jalila Essaïdi. *Bulletproof Skin*. Reproduced with permission. © Jalila Essaïdi. https://jalilaessaidi.com/2-6g-329ms/.

In *Bulletproof Skin*, the materiality of the artwork—which addresses the significance of violence, bodily vulnerability as well as the various functions of skin—is central. Essaïdi's bioart transgresses the dualism of form and matter by foregrounding matter's capacity to matter.

Similarly, Robert employs transgenesis for the purpose of tissue enhancement. The enhanced skin, in turn, serves as the material for the perfect female body. The centuries-long aspiration for the ideal form, which is manifested in and sustained by the persistent representation of the much-painted Venus, takes a "material turn," where the corporeal body simultaneously becomes an object of art, sight, and scientific manipulation. The ekphrastic transformation of the familiar image brings out the dynamic nature of representational practices and posits representations as phenomena in the ongoing process of their materialization. The changes in representational practices are, in turn, entangled with the development of new technologies. Technology also serves to turn the female objectification in art into embodied practice. Being under constant camera surveillance, Vera (unlike the painted figure of Venus) experiences objectification by the artist in corporeal terms. The controlling discipline that technology imposes on the body is twofold: on the one hand, technology and science regulate its appearance by manipulating matter (like in biological arts); on the other hand, film technology is used to impose a controlling gaze on the object of observation.

The visual objectification of the body enabled by the technology of film also parallels the microscopic observation of matter in Robert's scientific practice. Starting from the Age of Enlightenment, such visual technologies as microscopes

have opened possibilities for new practices of seeing, and film technology is often seen as the successor of earlier vision-enhancing instruments that affect the way the body is perceived (Bloom 2017: 121). The technology of film has been criticized for reinforcing the visual objectification of the female body, specifically in terms of what Laura Mulvey (1999) theorized as the *male gaze*.[34] If the microscope enables a visual fragmentation of the body at a cellular level, then the camera can present fragmented close-up images of body parts. According to Mulvey, objectifying close-ups of female legs and faces can add another level of visual pleasure (809). Ekphrasis in Almodóvar's film exposes the workings of technology in terms of objectifying fragmentation: in one of Robert's surveillance recordings, the Venus-like image of Vera is intercut with close-ups of the character's body parts. The technological affordances of the film medium serve to present the body as a fragmented assemblage of shapes, while simultaneously revealing the objectifying effect of such fragmentation. This is achieved through the montage that mixes the images of Vera's body with a headshot of Robert's gazing face. It thereby attracts attention to the act of looking at the fragmented, objectified body. Almodóvar's ekphrasis, which brings together the nude tradition, bioartistic experiments, and film practices, addresses the objectification of both the body and matter as a complex imbrication of art, science, technology, and bodily materiality.

Matter is, however, not fixed or passive: the capacity of skin tissue to heal and repair itself is crucial to the processes of plastic and biotechnological surgeries that Vera undergoes. The flashbacks to multiple stages surgery and recovery show that the shaping of the ideal body involves the continuous process of skin regeneration, whereby stitches and scars gradually disappear. Drawing upon Judith Butler's and Karen Barad's theories of performativity, Nancy Harding et al. (2021: 649–54) introduce "flesh as an agentive actor," arguing that bodily matter—including skin, hair, blood, and fat—"agentively participates" in processes of materialization. The transgenic skin in *The Skin I Live In* is agentive in that it actively partakes in the materialization of the Venus-like transhuman being. It is "the way living cells grow, change, and develop by way of 'decoding'" DNA that "shapes bodies and living articulations" (Iovino and Oppermann 2012: 453). We can see cells moving when Robert examines the transgenic skin under a microscope. We can also observe the skin tissue growing in Robert's laboratory from a few transgenically modified cells to large pieces of flesh—a living material that

[34] In her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey (1999) views the objectification of women in cinema from Freudian and Lacanian perspectives and develops the concept of the *male gaze*. Considering the manipulative use of "visual pleasure" in Hollywood cinema, Mulvey observes that films with sexualized images of women play on the "scopophilic instinct," which is the pleasure one receives when looking at another person as a sexual or erotic object (1999: 835–43). Mulvey also points out that visual pleasure is based on a split between the active role of the male and the passive image of the female (1999: 837). The female figure, she argues, is designed to be "looked at" for the pleasure of men, while the male takes the active role of the "bearer of the look" (Mulvey 1999: 837). For Mulvey, the eroticized images of women in films are, therefore, determined by the male gaze.

can evolve and regenerate. If the tradition of nude painting conceives of the female body a fixed, unchanging form (F. Carson 2001: 99), the film challenges this idea by acknowledging the agentive capacity of flesh.

The changing materiality of Vera's skin—which is the crucial element of the Venus-like bio-artwork—also disturbs the erotic pleasure associated with the sensual female body. As Rob White and Paul Julian Smith (2011) observe, the reduced sensation in the transgenic skin suggests the loss of pleasure and subsequently de-eroticizes the images of female flesh. At times, Vera's skin seems "numb to the touch" (Barker 2020: 308). Significantly, it is the very materiality of the skin tissue that enables its de-erotization, thus disrupting visual pleasure and consumption.[35]

The disruption of visual objectification is reinforced through the film's repeated engagement with the body *under the skin*. For instance, when Vera attempts a suicide by self-cutting, the film draws attention to what dwells beneath the perfect skin—the flowing blood. In this scene, when Robert finds Vera unconscious and bleeding, the bedroom setting as well as the pose of the female body—with one arm gently resting on the hip—once again strangely recall conventional idealized paintings of reclining nudes. However, the surface of Vera's skin, which is designed to reproduce the ideal female form in flesh, is disturbed by the flowing blood. In this respect, blood may be viewed as a transgressive element. For Julia Kristeva (1982), the capacity of such body fluids as blood to challenge borders—both physical and conventional—is an essential aspect of their abjection.[36] Considering Kristeva's theory of the abject in its resonance with new materialisms, Thomas Lamarre (2020: 269) argues that the "notion of the abject potentially activates the materiality of objects, for the abject is above all a materiality that resists containment—bursting forth, seeping out, spilling, overflowing materially and affectivity." As an abject body fluid, Vera's blood demonstrates resistance to containment by transgressing the borders of the body and thereby challenging the convention of the nude, a convention that promotes the view of the female body "as a sealed container, a perfected, rationally-organised formulation" (F. Carson 2001: 99), a fixed and passive object of the gaze. Idealized nude paintings, such as Titian's *The Venus of Urbino*, tend to conceal the abject reality of the female body (F. Carson 2001: 99), fetishizing its surface and denying its inner workings. Thus, the uncanny agency of the abject body fluid—particularly its disturbing capacity to spill and seep out from underneath the skin—not only disrupts the visual fetishization of the ideal female form but also unsettles the object-subject divide.

The passivity of the body and matter is furthermore undermined when the body reveals its capacity to react back: Vera resists the controlling discipline that

[35] The same can be said about Vera's skin-like costume, which makes the ekphrastic image of the nude unerotic (Figure 9).

[36] In her *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Kristeva (1982) theorizes abjection as the feeling of repulsion or horror that one experiences when encountering certain substances related to corporeal existence (e.g., food, vomit, urine, feces).

is imposed through surveillance technology and bio-artistic practice and escapes from Robert's estate at the end of the film. The body acts and is enacted within dynamic material processes. In the ekphrastic transformation of the nude, the emphasis on corporeal enactment is supported by the affordances of film technology, which make it possible to optically record the strange embodied re-enactment and reworking of existing nude paintings. The transfer of the painting into the medium of film foregrounds the material, dynamic, and embodied nature of contemporary representational and biotechnological practices. Thus, ekphrasis here demonstrates the capacity to address the past and the present at once: by evoking the existing paintings of Venus, the unfamiliar double serves to scrutinize and challenge past representations of the nude; at the same time, the ekphrastic image addresses contemporary material procedures of art-making as well as the changing role of the artist, who performs a multiple role of a scientist, a media creator, and an observer.

Shifting Perspectives and Female Experiences of Nudity

The ekphrastic transformation of the image also brings the creator/onlooker into the picture, thereby turning the observer into the observed (Figure 8). Such a shift of perspective is largely in line with the feminist reevaluation of art history and may also be found in literature. In what follows, I will consider literary ekphrasis and its play on perspectives in Nuala Ní Chonchúir's[37] collection of short stories *Nude* (2009). As Ní Chonchúir (n.d.) explains in an interview, the book is "so-called because each of the stories features an unclothed body, mostly in the world of art." Many of the stories—including "Madonna Irlandia," "Unmothered," "Ekphrasis," "As I Look," "Roy Lichtenstein's *Nudes in a Mirror*: We Are Not Fake!," "Mademoiselle O'Murphy," and "Juno Out of Yellow"—explore nude paintings and their making through multiple female perspectives, thus transgressing the limits of the male gaze. Remarkably, like Almodóvar's film, Ní Chonchúir's book addresses visual objectification with the awareness of theoretical writings on the nude. The collection begins with an epigraph from Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972): "Nudity is a form of dress" (quoted in Ní Chonchúir 2009a). Taking Berger's quote as a point of departure, Ní Chonchúir destabilizes the fixed observer-observed duality in nude painting in manifold ways.

For instance, the description of a nude portrait in the making in "Unmothered" places the figure of a male artist under the scrutinizing eye of a female protagonist and, like the ekphrastic transformation in Almodóvar's film, challenges the dominance of the male gaze:

[37] Nuala Ní Chonchúir (born in 1970; also known as O'Connor) is an Irish poet and writer. Ní Chonchúir interest in the visual arts goes back to her early work and is already evident in her first short story collection *The Wind Across the Grass* (2004).

> Your husband paints your portrait in the garden. You are naked, standing in the grass, and every breeze makes your skin prickle. You close your eyes against the sun and feel dizzy when you open them again. … You look at your husband. His brushstrokes are meditative, small; you strain your ears to hear the slap of brush on canvas—nothing. Sniffing deep on the warm, grassy summer smells, you shut your eyes tight. (Ní Chonchúir 2009a: 14–15)

The above description not only disrupts the familiar pattern of the visual consumption of the female form but also foregrounds the multi-sensory embodied experience of the female sitter. The focus here is on the senses of the lived body: the touch of wind on skin, the feeling of dizziness, the smell. What is also significant is a subtle yet clear attention to nonhuman forces. Rather than consider the male artist as the subject who is acting upon matter and the world, the description emphasizes the role of nonhuman forces—the breeze, the sun, the air—in shaping the experience of the female model.

Throughout the story, the focus of the narrative moves back and forth from descriptions of artmaking to contemplations on bodily experience and change. While the male artist is painting the portrait, the female narrator recalls how pregnancy reshaped her body: "you ripened like a plum, belly forward, breasts retreating—an exaggeration of the old you" (Ní Chonchúir 2009a: 14). The woman also ponders on the cellular development of her embryo, the way it "snuggled like a shell-bound sand grain, settling, embedding, readying" (Ní Chonchúir 2009a: 13). The description, thus, shifts from the human scale of female experience to the microscopic scale of cellular processes. Thinking of pregnancy on a cellular level, in turn, draws attention to the agentive capacity of flesh. It is the agency of cells that changes and shapes the narrator's body. As in Almodóvar's film, ekphrasis here brings together the practice of nude art and the workings of the body under the skin. While the ekphrastic passage addresses visual art, it is as well concerned with what happens beneath the visible surface of the female body, where flesh is not a fixed thing but a materialized becoming. Thus, the creation of the nude form by the male artist gives way to agential matter and female experience.

Ní Chonchúir repeatedly turns to the disjunction between the body as form and the materiality of living flesh in her writing. In "Odalisque," a short story from her collection *The Wind Across the Grass* (2004), the protagonist is Victorine-Louise Meurent, a painter and a model who posed for Édouard Manet's nude painting *Olympia*. Victorine's experience contrasts with the way the body is seen by the artist:

> She is unaware that for the most part the artist sees not the body, but the form: the slope of a thigh, the curve of the hairline, the fall of a wrist. His concern is not with her, or for her, but with how he might reproduce the lines of her body on the page. The artist's desire is to give solidity to the only dimensions paper will allow. She is merely a study, an exercise, an expansion of a lesson in anatomy. (Ní Chonchúir 2009b: 31)

Ekphrasis in the short story involves the transfer of the nude figure from the medium of painting to the medium of literature—or, to use Elleström's (2014) term—transmediation. At the same time, the ekphrastic transformation foregrounds media materiality, particularly by drawing attention to the limits of the material medium of paper. In the process of painting, the living body is being reduced to the form on the flat page.

Rather than dwell on the form, ekphrasis focuses on the living body of the model: "The model is cold. Her plum-colored nipples stand taut and the rash of goose-pimples spreads down her body like a shiver. … Her cheeks are flushed despite the chill of the studio and the steely feeling in her bones" (Ní Chonchúir 2009b: 31). Ekphrasis shifts the focus from the body as an assemblage of shapes and lines to the experience of the nude model: the feeling of cold and blushing. What is especially remarkable here is the emphasis on the living and changing materiality of the flesh: Victorine's skin reacts to the cold of the room by tightening and raising goose bumps. As Coole and Frost (2010: 10) put it, "conceiving matter as possessing its own modes of self-transformation, self-organization, and directedness, and thus no longer as simply passive or inert" contests the anthropocentric view of humans as masters of the world. And again, ekphrasis challenges the mastery of the male artist over matter by foregrounding the agency of flesh and the experience of the model.

The shift from representational to experiential[38] may also be traced in Ní Chonchúir's "Roy Lichtenstein's *Nudes in a Mirror*: We Are Not Fake!," a short story which is based on an actual incident that took place at an art exhibition in Australia. In 2005, a woman from Germany pulled a knife from her purse and stabbed Roy Lichtenstein's painting *Nudes in Mirror*, which was exhibited at the Kunsthaus Bregenz museum (*BBC News* 2005). The woman explained her violent act by saying that she thought the painting was fake (*BBC News* 2005). The title of Ní Chonchúir's short story—"Roy Lichtenstein's *Nudes in a Mirror*: We Are Not Fake!"—responds to the woman's claim, while ekphrasis reenacts the stabbing episode, simultaneously transforming Lichtenstein's painting. Roy Lichtenstein was an American artist and one of the leading figures in the Pop Art movement. Many of his paintings were inspired by commercial printing that employs the Ben-Day dots technique.[39] Lichtenstein's *Nudes in Mirror* (1994) is a pop art painting that depicts two nude figures reflected in a mirror. This twentieth-century artwork is a modern take on the nude tradition: based on comic strips, the painting blends the conventions of the nude with American popular culture.

[38] By the shift from representational to experiential, I mean that the focus of the description is on the experience of objectification rather than on the peculiarities of representation (e.g., form and composition).

[39] The Ben-Day dots technique is a mechanical printing process that was invented by Benjamin Henry Day, Jr.; it is based on small colored dots (cyan, magenta, yellow, and black) that are printed at different densities to achieve shading in images (Fine 2022: 343). Lichtenstein reproduced Ben-Day dots in his paintings by using a projector and stencils (McHugh 1996: 47–48).

Though experimental in technique, Lichtenstein's painting continues and even reinforces the objectification of the female body in nude art. The female figures in his paintings are flat and schematic, while the body is reduced to a geometric form. It is worth noting that the extreme stylization in Lichtenstein's works is entangled with material-technological innovations that were introduced in the printing industry at the end of the nineteenth century. Lichtenstein reproduced the printing method used in advertisements and comics—the Ben-Day dots technique—to "simulate the mechanical perfection of the mass-produced image into a single, clear, rigid form" (McHugh 1996: 47–48). With its focus on perfect surfaces, Lichtenstein's work has been criticized for fetishizing the female body. As Robert Fitzpatrick observes,

> they [Lichtenstein's nudes] remain as carefully edited and stylized as a sofa, lamp, or throw pillow. These are the perfect inhabitants of Lichtenstein's cool, linear worlds … They are not sensuous or even sexy, but objectified to elicit the same response as would an ashtray or potted plant. (Fitzpatrick 1999: 16)

According to this line of thought, the schematic quality and high stylization of nude figures in Lichtenstein's paintings heightens the effect of objectification. It is also remarkable that the objectifying portrayal of female bodies parallels the objectification of the material world: both female flesh and nonhuman things are reduced to a fixed, stylized scheme.

The ekphrastic transformation of Lichtenstein's painting *Nudes in Mirror* in Ní Chonchúir's short story brings the nude figures to life: they observe the visitors of the gallery and holler to each other when it is empty. The *artwork animation* involves the alteration of the semiotic modality from nonverbal to verbal, which allows to put the female experience into words. The story is narrated by the forefront figure, who, speaking for both portrayed women, describes the stabbing episode from her perspective:

> We are so glad that Roy isn't alive to see what's happened to us because, oh my Lord, he would die. Yes, we're comic-strippy—not exactly *The Rokeby Venus*—but we are of-our-time, same as old Mrs Rokeby. Whoever she was. And, we are not pleased that some weirdos want to get at us because we are undressed. And that there are fancy-schmanzies who think we're dumb because we were modelled from models. (Ní Chonchúir 2009a: 88)

By bringing Lichtenstein's painting to life, the ekphrastic transformation challenges the gendered assumption of female as passive object. The female figures in nude paintings (e.g., Venus in Giorgione and Titian's *Sleeping Venus*) are often "asleep, unconscious or unconcerned with mortal things"; such portrayal facilitates "undisturbed and voyeuristic enjoyment of the female form" (Parker and Pollock 2013: 116). The artwork animation in Ní Chonchúir's short story transforms the passive figures into conscious living beings and gives voice to the female experience. By doing so, ekphrasis in Ní Chonchúir's short story disturbs the pleasure of the visual consumption of the passive female form.

This ekphrastic transformation involves the transfer of the female figures, or transmediation (Elleström 2014). Importantly, the transmediation of the image is entangled with the transfer of material media characteristics. The nude figures (though lively) retain the material media traits of Lichtenstein's painting: the women are "comic-strippy," have "benday dotted skin," and their bodies are canvases (Ní Chonchúir 2009a: 88–89). The artwork animation brings forth the thing-power (Bennett 2010) of the man-made painting. Though clearly fictional, the transformation of the painting into a lively speaking thing is effective in the way it destabilizes the status of man-made things as dull passive matter. It has to be added here that new materialist thinkers often turn to fiction "when advancing their various reconceptualizations of matter" (Skiveren 2020: 2). Bennett, for instance, considers Odradek—the protagonist of Franz Kafka's short story "Cares of a Family Man"—as "an effective transgressive figure that resists the dichotomy of dull matter vs. vibrant life" (Skiveren 2020: 3). Odradek is what appears to be a man-made item with no clear origin or purpose. To the surprise of the narrator, the thing demonstrates the ability to move, laugh, and speak. As Bennett (2010: 8) puts it, Odradek resists familiar ontological categories: "Wooden yet lively, verbal yet vegetal, alive yet inert, Odradek is ontologically multiple. He/it is a vital materiality." Following Bennett's argument, such binary transgressions may foster an openness to recognizing the vitality of things. Similarly, the artwork animation in Ní Chonchúir's short story serves to transgress the dualistic ontology of dull nonhuman matter and vibrant human life. The nude figure is simultaneously a material thing and a lively being, a canvas and a woman, an observed and an observer.

Significantly, the transmediation of the image involves the alteration of the spatiotemporal modality: unlike the medium of painting, the literary work mediates a temporal flow of experience. The transfer of the image from nontemporal to temporal mode allows Ní Chonchúir to not only animate the static figures but also convey the continuous embodied experience of objectification. For the nude figure, the constant observation of her body is an everyday routine experience. Temporality is crucial to understanding the entanglement of particular representational practices and the phenomenon of objectification at large. The repeated production and consumption of nude representations are temporal processes in the course of which the phenomenon of body objectification becomes habitualized. Remarkably, the above passage also alludes to Velázquez's *Rokeby Venus* (Figure 10) and thereby addresses the whole tradition of the nude, which spans through centuries and across cultures. In their essence, the nude figures in Lichtenstein's painting are the "same as old Mrs Rokeby" (Ní Chonchúir 2009a: 88). Numerous nude paintings, from Velázquez's *Rokeby Venus* to Lichtenstein's *Nudes in Mirror*, serve as the material means and records of the ongoing phenomenon of body objectification. It is worth noting that Velázquez's painting was also attacked by a gallery visitor. In 1914, Mary Richardson—a suffragette and activist—damaged Velasquez's *Rokeby Venus* with an axe at the National Gallery (F. Carson 2001: 96). As she later explained, the attack was meant as a protest against the routine objectification of the nude female body by male visitors: "I didn't like the way men visitors to the gallery gaped at it all day" (quoted in F. Carson 2001: 96).

Thus, the allusion to Velasquez's *Rokeby Venus* in Ní Chonchúir's short story reinforces the idea of sameness and repetition on many levels.

The ekphrastic transformation of Lichtenstein's nude also serves to bring into focus the sense of disembodiment that the repeated practices of body objectification may induce in those objectified. The self is not only constituted by the body, but it can also experience estrangement or alienation from its outer bodily manifestation (Lennon et al. 2012: 2). The nude figure in Ní Chonchúir's story feels alienated from her stabbed body, which she observes from the outside: "I look down at my canvas; the wounds are long and threaded, I am cut from boob to belly. A flap of canvas falls forward like a lolling tongue and I wonder if I will ever see the inside of a gallery again" (Ní Chonchúir 2009a: 90). The sense of the otherness of the body is entangled with the ongoing representational practices which posit the nude body as the object of sight. Nudity is not a form but a process. The repeated production and consumption of nude representations are dynamic material phenomena which involve the continuous objectification of female bodies. The male gaze, which becomes internalized by those objectified, structures embodied experience. The body is, however, not a passive surface but an agential force that can resist objectification. The nude figure in Ní Chonchúir's "Roy Lichtenstein's *Nudes in a Mirror*" expresses strong discontent with the way the "undressed" figures are perceived and treated by gallery visitors (Ní Chonchúir 2009a: 88). The nude figures also resist the imposed passivity and silence by hollering to each other, that is, by using their voices. Hence, the artwork animation in Ní Chonchúir's story brings to the fore the dynamic relational entanglement of representational practices, the experience of objectification, and resistance to it.

Both in Almodóvar's *The Skin I Live In* and in Ní Chonchúir's *Nude*, ekphrastic transformations of the nude expose and reconfigure the workings of representations. Ekphrasis not only serves to scrutinize objectifying representational practices but also disrupts the familiar pattern of the visual consumption of the female form by foregrounding the embodied experience of objectification. Apart from addressing particular images, ekphrastic practice interrogates representational practices at large. Representations are not static objects but dynamic phenomena in the ongoing process of their materialization: the repeated production and consumption of images are temporal material processes. The ekphrastic transformations analyzed in this chapter show that ekphrasis has the capacity to foreground the material and dynamic nature of representational practices and also subvert gendered dualisms, particularly the divides between male culture and female nature, male subject and female object, active male creator and passive female matter. The *unfamiliar double* of Titian's nude painting in Almodóvar's film provokes thinking of the idealization and visual objectification of the female form in fleshy, corporeal terms, while the *artwork animation* in Ní Chonchúir's short story gives voice and thing-power to Lichtenstein's nude painting, thereby challenging the view of matter as passive feminized object. With its emphasis on the mattering of flesh and uncanny thing-power, ekphrasis goes beyond and subverts the dualistic concept of the ideal form as superior to matter. Ekphrastic transformations, therefore, serve as powerful tools for (re)shaping our understanding of art and the world, the world which is continuously in the making.

CHAPTER 4

This chapter is based on Silvia Kurr's article "Beyond the Body: Ekphrastic Embodiment and Material Agency in Ciaran Carson's *Still Life*," which will be published in *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*.

CHAPTER 5
Beyond the Human: Nonhuman Things and Eco-Ekphrasis in Derek Mahon's Poetry and Lars von Trier's Film *Melancholia*

Before proceeding with the next chapter, I would like to return, for a moment, to the starting point of this dissertation—the consideration of Achilles's Shield, the oldest example of ekphrasis. As I noted in the Introduction (and also later in this dissertation), the Shield is remarkable both as a lively nonhuman thing and as an artwork that invites thinking beyond the human scale. By confronting the reader with the more-than-human universe depicted on the Shield, ekphrasis enables a radical decentering of the human position in the world. Today, in the light of environmental degradation, the power of ekphrasis to challenge the anthropocentric view of human subjectivity acquires special urgency. New materialist attempts to decenter the human by stressing the agency of nonhuman matter and accounting for the dynamics of the more-than-human world are ultimately motivated by ecological concerns (Alaimo 2016; Bennett 2010; Morton 2016, 2018). This chapter explores how ekphrastic transformations can serve to foreground the often-overlooked nonhuman matter and also draw attention to ecological processes that extend beyond the human scale. As case studies, I examine Derek Mahon's ekphrastic poetry—including poems from his later collection *An Autumn Wind* (2010)—and filmic ekphrasis in Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* (2011). The given case studies are united by their emphasis on decentering the human and enabling ecological thinking (Morton 2016).

In an interview with Willie Kelly, Derek Mahon[47] (1981: 11) said: "I think there's a sense in which the human race flatters itself, takes too much for granted its own status as the articulate centre of the universe. … I have a consciousness of things over and above, beside and below human life." Mahon's interest in the nonhuman is apparent both in his early poems and throughout his writing career. If his earlier work engages with the world of man-made material things that are part of the everyday, his later poetry often addresses the large-scale effects of the Anthropocene[48] on the more-than-human world and exerts a strong sense of ecological

[47] Derek Mahon (1941–2020) was a Northern Irish poet who entered the Irish poetry scene in the 1960s (Haughton 2010: 1). Mahon's work has had a profound influence on his contemporaries including Michael Longley, Seamus Heaney, and Eavan Boland (Haughton 2010: 3). His poetry is remarkable for its rich intertextual and intermedial dimensions. In this dissertation, I focus on Mahon's ekphrasis.

[48] The term the *Anthropocene* was coined by Eugene Stoermer and Paul Crutzen to denote a new geological epoch where humans have come to play a significant role in shaping the geology and ecology of the planet (Clark 2015: 1; Burger et al. 2021: 2). The beginning of the Anthropocene is often dated back to the invention of the steam engine in the eighteenth century

concern. As Hugh Haughton (2010: 7) puts it, Mahon "is always a poet of the daily, the ordinary … but also of the bigger picture." Whether in terms of global, large-scale processes or familiar everyday reality, his poetry frequently draws attention to the often-overlooked nonhuman materialities and foregrounds the thingness of the world.

Mahon is interested in materiality as an essential aspect of all life on Earth—organic and inorganic—and as a basis for art. In a conversation with John Brown, Mahon (2002: 117–119) notes that he sees words and poems as things. It is the thingness of words on the page, he believes, that "promises the material arrest" of the reader (Mahon 2002: 117). For Mahon, art—poetry, painting, or photography—is not a mere reflection of the real world, "nor its shadow, but reality itself" (Jarniewicz 2013: 11); different media are part of the world and also serve as materials for creative reworking. Hugh Haughton (2010: 311) calls Mahon's reworking of material from various sources—books, songs, and radio programmes—"literary recycling." Mahon also incorporates visual artworks in his poetry, which he sees as "a visual art among other things" (quoted in Patke 2012: 118). Mahon's deep engagement with the visual is apparent both from the vivid, "painterly" quality of his poetry (T. Brown 1994: 40) and from his ekphrastic recycling and transformation of images. In this chapter, I focus on the material aspects of art and creativity in Mahon's ekphrastic poetry, especially the ways in which it pushes the boundaries of anthropocentrism.

Drawing upon Jane Bennett's (2010) vital materialism and Timothy Morton's (2013, 2016, 2018) theorization of ecological thinking, I examine three different yet entangled dimensions of Mahon's ekphrastic poetry: firstly, I am interested in how Mahon's ekphrastic transformations of still-life art turn everyday *objects* into vibrant *things*; secondly, I analyze how ekphrasis addresses ecological issues and provoke thinking of material vitality at unfamiliar more-than-human scales; and thirdly, I closely consider the material modality of Mahon's ekphrastic poetry, particularly the power of words as *things* to foreground material processes.

From *Nature Morte* to Vibrant Things

Mahon's interest in the material world—and especially man-made things—has been noted by several scholars (Haughton 2002; Patke 2012; Jarniewicz 2013; Vincent 2018). Bridget Vincent (2018: 375), for example, argues that material objects, such as household items, are crucial to what she calls "Mahon's material ekphrasis." His poetic descriptions of rooms and objects, Vincent (2018: 372–74) observes, may be seen as a still-life art in its own right, while three-dimensional things function as "ekphrastic prompts." This is, indeed, the case in Mahon's "New Space," which plays on the tradition of still-life painting:

(Clark 2015: 1). Even though the concept of the Anthropocene brings forth the results of human actions, it does not place humans at the center of the world; rather, it acknowledges a new degree of human impact on the physical world, where "human intentionalities start merging with nonhuman agencies that counteract them" (Burger et al. 2021: 2).

Swept and scrubbed, the studio fills
with cut cloth, illustrated books,
materials shaped by polished skills
in a time-honoured fashion, one
that aims for a real thing well done
with real significance. Just look

at how green light and shadow fall
on the interior, jug and bowl,
still life, *nature morte*. The place
itself is a still life restored
to living matter, a new space
whose true life is renewed once more. (Mahon 2018)

The poem not only places the emphasis on materiality but also acknowledges the vitality of material things, which *nature morte* painting obscures. What is especially remarkable about Mahon's poetry is how *objects*—such as everyday household items that are habitually seen as passive matter to be used and acted upon—become lively *things* charged with thing-power, in Bennet's (2010) terms. The emphasis on the vibrant nature of material things is central to the transformation of still-life art in Mahon's poetry.

It is noteworthy that the thematic focus on thinginess and thing-power is supported and guided by the materiality of words on the page. For Mahon, the way words are "clumped" together and printed on the page—that is, their materialization—is crucial to the communicative effect of the poem (Brown and Mahon 2002: 111). In the first stanza of "New Space," the set of noun words—"studio," "cloth," "books," "materials"—introduces the reader into the world of man-made things, which extends into the second stanza ("interior, jug and bowl / still life") (Mahon 2018). The italicized "*nature morte*" breaks the center of the second stanza and thereby highlights the restoration of objects to "living matter" (Mahon 2018). This break is followed by a set of words that affirm the liveliness of material things: "living," "new," "life," "renewed" (Mahon 2018). Thus, the thinginess of words enacts a sense of renewal and material vitality.

As in "New Space," the material world in "Shapes and Shadows" may be seen as exhibiting thing-power. "Shapes and Shadows" is an ekphrastic poem that transforms a still life by William Scott. William Scott was a Northern Irish artist known for his still-life paintings of kitchen utensils. Inspired by American Abstract Expressionism, Scott's work became more abstract in the 1950s (Haughton 2010: 327). His later paintings may be viewed as a combination of still life and abstract art. Scott's painting *Shapes and Shadows* (1962), which hovers between figuration and abstraction, explores the shapes, form, and colors of kitchen items: pots, pans, and cutlery (Figure 17). Mahon's ekphrastic poem opens up the possibility for renewal and transformation. To put it in Elleström's (2014) terms, ekphrasis here involves both the transmediation of things—the kitchen items in Scott's painting—and the transfer of media characteristics such as paint, pigment, and colors. The first two stanzas of the poem engage with the

household items as physical things. As in "New Space," the material things in "Shapes and Shadows" function as what Vincent (2018: 372) calls "ekphrastic prompts." The kitchen items in Mahon's ekphrastic poem—"black kettle and black pot," "frying pans, / skinny beans and spoons, / colander and fish-slice" (Mahon 1999: 278)—recall not only one but several of Scott's paintings: *The Frying Pan* (1946), *Colander Beans and Eggs* (1948), *Shapes and Shadows* (1962), *Fish* (1976), *Still Life on Brown with Beans* (1978), *Frying Pan* (1981).

Figure 17. William Scott, *Shapes and Shadows* (1962); oil on canvas, 86 × 112 cm; Ulster Museum, Belfast. Reproduced with permission. © Estate of William Scott 2023.

Later in the poem, the kitchen items give way to the abstract composition and colors of Scott's *Shapes and Shadows*. If in the first two stanzas, the world of things is characterized by harmony, the following stanzas convey a sense of jarring dissonance. Scott's painting abstracts the harmonious world of material things "to a dissonant design" (Mahon 1999: 278). Mahon's ekphrastic transformation of Scott's painting creates a sense of tension between material things and abstract shapes. As Rajeev S. Patke (2012: 123) puts it, the household items (pots and frying pans) "are read off from" Scott's still life "as fraught with an energy that is driven to breaking free of form, shape, and substance, in order to return matter and color." The focus of the poem gradually shifts away from the materiality of kitchen items to the "dissonant" composition of the painting, and thence to the

vibrant materiality of the medium itself (Mahon 1999: 278). Mahon's recurrent interest in abstract painting[49] is often bound up with a close attention to the material basis of art. In "Shapes and Shadows," crucial is the transfer and transformations of material media characteristics—pigment and the colors of paint. Ekphrasis not only draws attention to the materiality of painting but also foregrounds the uncanny vitality of paint and colors:

> knifed and scrubbed, in one
> corner a boiling brown
> study in mahogany;
> beige-biscuit left; right
> a fat patch of white,
> bread and milk in agony. (Mahon 1999: 278)

The words "boiling" and "agony" reinforce the sense of dynamism and liveliness (Mahon 1999: 278). As Jerzy Jarniewicz (2013: 194) observes, the word "boiling" suggests "movement, but also with the sense of heat and sound that boiling evokes, turning the verbal image into a vivid synaesthetic complex." With the evocation of multiple sensations, the ekphrastic transformation of Scott's painting further emphasizes the lively quality of the material medium.

The media of painting and writing exhibit liveliness in several of Mahon's poems. In "Rain," for example, the colors of paint in Howard Hodgkin's abstract painting are "roaring" and "making violent love" (Mahon 2008: 34). As in "Shapes and Shadows," the choice of words in "Rain," which stresses the sense of action and simultaneously evokes sound, foregrounds the strange thing-power of the medium. For Hodgkin, paintings were primarily material things, "things that one would like to touch and hold in one's hands," and the thick layers of paint serve to emphasize their thinginess (Jarniewicz 2013: 171). Like many of Hodgkin's abstract paintings, "Rain" may be seen as a painting "about paint" (Mahon 2008: 34). With the thick brushstrokes covering not only the board but also the frame, the materiality of paint dominates the artwork. Mahon's ekphrastic poem engages with Hodgkin's painting as it is made, starting from the basic materials—"Some kind of board and an old frame"—and then focusing on the vibrant materiality and colors of oil paint (Mahon 2008: 34). This type of ekphrasis, which I propose to call an *artwork-in-the-making*, foregrounds the dynamic nature of the artmaking practice. By altering the spatiotemporal modality, from nontemporal mode of painting to temporal mode of writing, ekphrasis serves to recognize painting as a process rather than a product. Crucial is the transfer and transformation of material media characteristics such as "brush strokes" and "oil on wood" (Mahon 2008: 34). Mahon's "Rain" engages with the creation of Hodgkin's painting as a dynamic material process where the meeting of paint with the board becomes a vibrant and exuberant event. Remarkably, the poem hardly describes what the painter is doing,

[49] For a discussion of Mahon's ekphrasis that engages with abstract art (William Scott, Howard Hodgkin, Mark Rothko, and Anne Madden), see Jarniewicz (2013: 170).

and it is the emphasis on the thing-power of the medium that decenters human agency.

The foregrounding of the uncanny vitality of media and tools is a recurrent tendency in Mahon's poetry, which explores nonhuman agency in manifold surprising ways. At times, media and tools for artistic creation demonstrate unexpected independence and even signs of rebellion. In "The Drawing Board" (or "Table Talk"), for example, a drawing board acts as a narrator and addresses its owner:

> You think I am your servant but you are wrong.
> The service lies with you. During your long
> Labours at me, I am the indulgent wood,
> Tolerant of your painstaking ineptitude. (Mahon 1999: 125)

The poem animates and also gives voice to a man-made thing. As Haughton (2010: 173) puts it, "[t]his is part of Mahon's paradoxical liberation movement on behalf of mute phenomena, a rebuke to the anthropocentrism of the post-Enlightenment project." The lively drawing board resists the anthropocentric divide between living humans and lifeless objects, active artists and passive tools. And here again, the uncanny vitality of the material thing decenters human subjectivity. The focus of the poem moves away from the human to the life story of the drawing board, which once "was a pine and lived in a cold climate" (Mahon 1999: 125). Thus, "The Drawing Board" acknowledges the life of things beyond the human experience of use. The wooden thing remembers "the chain-saw surgery" that turns trees into pieces of timber (Mahon 1999: 125). The implied suffering of the pine gives an uncanny and dark twist to the habitual use of things and environmental resources.

The Life of Discarded Things

Mahon frequently engages with the use and life cycle of material things in his poetry. As Haughton (2002: 324) observes, it is especially discarded objects, rubbish, and waste that have a "privileged position in his work and speak with unexpected power." For example, "Raw Material," a poem from Mahon's later collection *An Autumn Wind*, recognizes a striking vitality of discarded shoes:

> The recycling of old shoes
> as raw material
> makes artwork
> of the contingent
> real when sunlight,
> finding them
> among shadows,
> throws
> shadow shapes on their used souls. (Mahon 2018)

Here, sunlight acts as an artist, while the old discarded shoes serve as raw material for an artwork. We can even say that this is also an example of an artwork-in-the-making. Within John Hollander's (1995: 4) distinction between "actual" and "notional" ekphrasis, Mahon's ekphrastic description may be seen as "notional." Unlike "actual" ekphrasis, which engages with existing artworks, "notional" ekphrasis involves the description of imaginary artworks (Hollander 1995: 4). However, both actual and notional ekphrases often address existing artistic practices. Artworks made from discarded items, whether found or scavenged, are commonly referred to as recycled art. Recycled art can give a new life to a variety of discarded things, from bottles and cans to old clothes, flip-flops, and shoes. By doing so, it negotiates and challenges the consumerist view of material things, whereby once an item "no longer fills its original purpose for our perceived needs—or if something more efficient, prettier, newer, shinier comes along"—the thing becomes "trash" (Mears 2018: 2). According to consumer culture logic, the life of material things ends with them ceasing to be useful for humans. Recycled art can not only reverse this paradigm but also raise awareness of the global waste crisis. When worn out or out of fashion, massive numbers of shoes are discarded every year and subsequently accumulate in landfills. Given the large scale of footwear waste accumulation, discarded shoes provide abundant material for recycled art by such artists as Willie Cole and Noah Scalin. Scalin, for example, has reworked old shoes to create a number of artworks, from portraits to mural installations.

Figure 18. Noah Scalin, *Scull-A-Day* (2007–2008). Reproduced with permission. © NoahScalin, https://www.noahscalin.com/#/skull-a-day/.

His skull artwork[50] which is made from a pair of old tennis shoes may be seen as a *memento mori* of the transient consumer culture: waste is physical evidence of the damaging material effects and futility of consumerism (Figure 18). Importantly, the meaning in Scalin's work is inseparable from its materiality: the material practice of recycling reconfigures the status of things as objects of consumption.

Like recycled art, Mahon's ekphrasis in "Raw Material" engages with the life of things beyond consumer use. What Martin Heidegger (2006: 18) would call the "wasting of being-tool"[51] coincides with the discarded shoes becoming recycled art. It is crucial that in this artwork-in-the-making, art emerges not as a result of human artists acting upon passive matter, but rather as a result of material processes where nonhuman forces are central. It is the sun and the shoes that partake in the artmaking process. By foregrounding the creative agency of nonhuman forces, the poem challenges the anthropocentric view of art and creativity. Mahon's engagement with trash as vibrant matter that exceeds the status of passive object of consumption also recalls Jane Bennett's surprising encounter with five discarded things on Cold Spring Lane—an encounter that led her to recognize their thing-power:

> Glove, pollen, rat, cap, stick. As I encountered these items, they shimmered back and forth between debris and thing—between, on the one hand, stuff to ignore, except insofar as it betokened human activity … and, on the other hand, stuff that commanded attention in its own right … I realized that the capacity of these bodies was not restricted to a passive 'intractability' but also included the ability to make things happen, to produce effects. When the materiality of the glove, the rat, the pollen, the bottle cap, and the stick started to shimmer and spark, it was in part because of the contingent tableau that they formed with each other … For had the

[50] Scalin's skull artwork which is made of tennis shoes is part of his *Skull-A-Day* (2007–2008) art project. In 2007, Scalin began making skulls from various materials: an old audio cassette tape, a CD, paper, books, a cardboard box, a plastic bag, a single-use plastic cup and cutlery, a light bulb, disassembled computer keyboard keys, clothes and bedsheets, a plastic bottle, a VHS tape, a vinyl record plate, a computer mouse, a newspaper, Chinese take-out boxes, a wooden chair, old diskettes, a crumpled soda can, food and food packaging, pencils, comic books, cotton buds, trinkets, burning matches, an old TV, etc. Every day, in the course of a one-year period, he made a skull, photographed it, and shared the image online.

[51] Mahon's poem "Raw Material" recalls Heidegger's discussion of Vincent van Gogh's painting *A Pair of Shoes* (1886) in his essay "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1950). Van Gogh's painting depicts a pair of old, worn-out shoes. Heidegger (2006: 17) argues that we can encounter the "being-tool (*das Zeugsein*)" of tools (such as shoes) when we use them [emphasis in original]. Heidegger (2006: 17) goes on to point out that the "shoe-tool" in van Gogh's painting is removed from the context in which it actually serves: "There is nothing around this pair of peasant shoes in or to which they could belong, only an indeterminate space. Not even clumps of earth from the field or from the field-path cling to them, which at least could point to how they are used." Van Gogh's painting reveals the shoe-thing "in its resting-within-itself" (Heidegger 2006: 18), thus shifting the focus away from human agency. In this respect, Heidegger's discussion of van Gogh's painting resonates with Mahon's poem "Raw Material," which foregrounds the discarded shoes as man-made items removed from the context of use, revealing them as self-sufficient material things in their resting-within-themselves.

> sun not glinted on the black glove, I might not have seen the rat … In this assemblage, objects appeared as *things*, that is, as vivid entities not entirely reducible to the context in which (human) subjects set them … In my encounter with the gutter on Cold Spring Lane, I glimpsed a culture of things irreducible to the culture of objects. (Bennett: 2010: 4–5)

Bennett (2010: 5) believes that it was also her openness "to the appearance of thing-power" that allowed her to discover the vitality of matter, which American consumerism, with its use-and-throw-away logic, conceals. Mahon shares with Bennett a fascination with trash and a readiness to explore and acknowledge the vibrant life of things beyond the context of consumerist consumption.

For both Mahon and Bennett, it is sunlight that has a unique power to draw attention to nonhuman matter, provoking the state of surprise and wonder. As Terence Brown (1994: 38) observes "[l]ight plays a crucial part in the imaginative world of Derek Mahon's poetry." Remarkably, he also goes on to suggest that light not only bears "witness to moments of perfection," but also "*composes* landscapes and cityscapes, still life interiors, as it falls on sea and shore, on street and table" [emphasis added] (T. Brown 1994: 39–42). In "Raw Material," sunlight creates an artwork out of the discarded shoes by throwing shadows "on their used souls" (Mahon 2018). And here again, by playing on the tradition of still-life art, Mahon's ekphrastic poetry brings to the fore the often-overlooked trivial things. The still-life genre, with its focus on the nonhuman, undermines the centrality of the human subject in the world (Bryson 2013: 60).[52] In Mahon's non-anthropocentric ekphrasis, the nonhuman creative force gives a new life to thought-to-be-dead stuff.

Thing-power does not cease when things are no longer used and discarded. Mahon's poem reminds us that the vitality of trash, along with the environmental impact of consumerism, cannot be disposed of and ignored. According to this line of thought, "Raw Material" may be viewed as an example of eco-ekphrasis, in Rippl's (2018a: 225) terms. Mahon's ekphrastic poem not only addresses ecological degradation but also enacts a sense of entanglement of nature and culture, nonhuman and human agency. The division between the active human and the material world as "a passive resource for use" has proven to be ecologically unsustainable (Bolt 2013: 3). The Anthropocene epoch is marked by the massive accumulation of waste—waste which despite being deemed undesirable and rejected, persists and exhibits vitality. Mahon's fascination with discarded things in "Raw Material" is part of his broader interest in the global

[52] In his book *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting*, Norman Bryson (2013: 60) argues that by avoiding the human form, still life opposes "the anthropocentrism of the 'higher' genres," such as history painting, which not only idealizes the human figure but also places it at the center of the world. Still-life art, Bryson goes on, "also expels the values which human presence imposes on the world" (60). Mahon's ekphrasis, similarly, expels the human figure, and with it anthropocentric humanist values.

waste crisis.[53] In "The Great Wave," a poem from the same collection, Mahon (2018) explicitly addresses the enormous scale of waste production: "If 'waste is the new raw material' as they say / our resources are infinite." By turning to the marginalized reality of waste (Solnick 2016: 108–10), Mahon draws attention to the long-ignored ecological degradation. Eóin Flannery (2015: 381) observes that his later poetry not only addresses "the consequences" of anthropocentric activities but also considers "the potential cures for such destructive historical patterns." This is the case, for instance, in "Recycling Song," which encourages recycling:

> Be careful with that refuse
> respect that wrapper;
> once in another life that bottle was your friend
> …
> Throw nothing out; recycle
> the vilest rubbish, even
> your own discarded page. (Mahon 2018)

As in "Raw Material," Mahon's preoccupation with recycling in "Recycling Song" is accompanied by a keen awareness of the persistence and vitality of rubbish. The life of a bottle or a shoe extends far beyond the human experience of consumerist consumption. Mahon's recurrent concern with the longevity of waste emphasizes recycling not as a possibility but as necessity and even inevitability.

Several scholars (Haughton 2010; Boisseau and Naugrette-Fournier 2019) suggest that Mahon's poetry was largely influenced by the work of Michael Thompson, particularly his study *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value* (1979). Thompson (2017: 10–17) argues that in the face of "discard-generated problems such as climate change," there is a need for a "materiality-respecting approach" to waste studies. All the things, he observes, are often parsed into two categories—the Transient and the Durable—which include only the things that are believed to "have value, leaving a vast and disregarded realm—Rubbish" (Thompson 2017: 10). According to this use-oriented logic, durable things, such as acknowledged masterpieces of art, "increase in value over time and have (ideally) infinite life-spans," transient things, such as used cars, "decrease in value over time and have finite life-spans," while massive amounts of discarded material things are deemed valueless, unimportant, and their actual, at

[53] Mahon's interest in rubbish and accumulation of waste has been noted by several scholars (Haughton 2010; Flannery 2015; Solnick 2016). One of the early examples of Mahon's preoccupation with consumerism and non-degradable waste products is his poem "The Apotheosis of Tins," which considers discarded things as "Imperishable by-products of the perishable will" (Mahon 1979: 74). Haughton (2010: 108) observes that the comparison of tins to "skulls / in the hands of soliloquists" (Mahon 1979: 74) turns the waste products into "modern equivalents of Hamlet's traditional emblem of mortality." Similarly, Solnick (2016: 109) suggests that the tins in Mahon's poem may be seen as "Yorick-like *memento mori*," which point at the transience of human life and civilization. In this respect, Mahon's "The Apotheosis of Tins" resonates with contemporary recycled art (e.g., Scalin's skull artworks).

times unimaginable longevity is denied (Thompson 2017: 24–25). Thompson is particularly interested in the fluid nature of value and the transfers of objects from one category to another (i.e., from the Transient to the Durable, from the Transient to Rubbish, from Rubbish to the Durable). Mahon shares Thompson's interest in the vastness and longevity of neglected materialities as well as his preoccupation with the transformation and revaluing of waste. For Mahon, recycling is a way to acknowledge the mattering, longevity, and changeability of discarded material things.

Recycled art not only makes waste overt but also demonstrates its potential as a material and catalyst for creativity. As Mélanie White (2013: 267–68) puts it, Mahon "sees in waste … a return to a raw material that is in fact a source of creation," which is the case in "Raw Material." In Mahon's ekphrastic poem, neglected matter is not fixed but changeable, while artmaking is a material process unfolding in time. Crucial here is the temporal dimension of the artwork-in-the-making, which also contributes to Mahon's play on the still-life tradition. Though reminiscent of still-life art, the world of things in Mahon's poem is not still, and creativity is not exclusively human: neglected by humans, consumer-generated footwear waste becomes a raw material for the creative workings of the nonhuman. Mahon's eco-ekphrasis, thus, addresses the effects of anthropocentric consumerism, while simultaneously recognizing the matter's potential for renewal and the uncanny creativity of nonhuman forces.

In this respect, Mahon's eco-ekphrasis in "Raw Material" recalls the photography of Mandy Barker, who works with marine debris that is transformed by the workings of the nonhuman. What is important is that Barker does not change the things found on the seashore but records them as they are: in their "unwashed and unaltered" state (Mandy Barker, "Indefinite"). Human creativity is, thus, not central to this recycled art. Barker's photographs show the effects of matter's uncanny agency: the man-made things reshaped by the sea are unfamiliar and weird (Figure 19).

I use Morton's (2016: 5) understanding of the term *weird*, which is connected with both "appearing" and "doing." The marine debris recorded in Barker's pictures is weird, in that it looks strange and also bears the traces of uncanny nonhuman doings. Once identical, the gloves differ in shape and color—a change that resulted from being enmeshed in the contingent agential forces of the material world. In other words, Barker's ecological sensitivity is marked by an awareness that discarded things continue their lives in the agential more-than-human reality. Similarly, Mahon's eco-ekphrasis in "Raw Material" emphasizes the enmeshment of consumer-generated waste in the agential world—the world that is characterized by contingency.

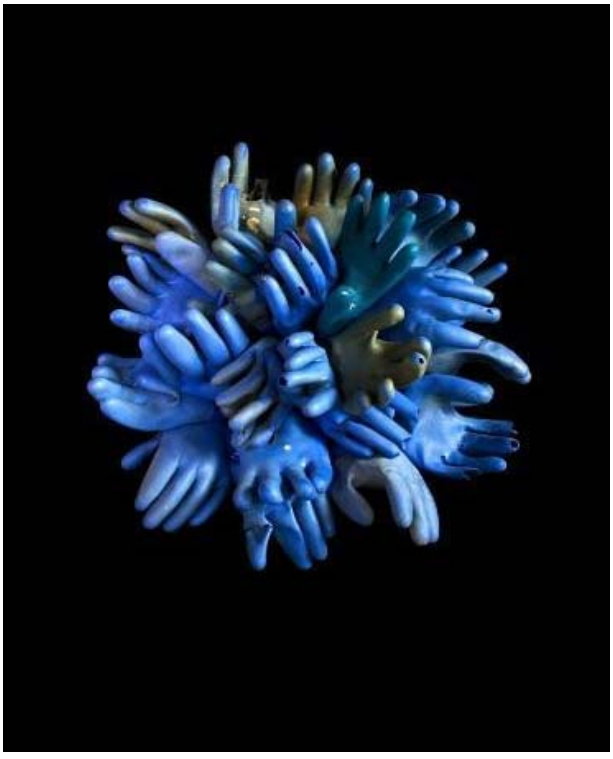

Figure 19. *30 Years, Or INDEFINITE?* Photograph by Mandy Barker. Reproduced with permission. © Mandy Barker, mandy-barker.com.

It is remarkable that the artwork-in-the-making in "Raw Material" also brings forth the sense of darkness that pervades the material reality of persisting waste. The discarded shoes in Mahon's poem become a raw material for a weird and rather dark artwork as the sun "throws / shadow shapes on their used souls" (Mahon 2018). The pairing of the words "shadows" and "shadow" reinforces the sense of darkness. In his essay "Rubbish Theory," which may be viewed as a response to Thompson's *Rubbish Theory*, Mahon addresses the uncanny longevity of neglected and devalued material things as follows:

> What concerns me here is the evidently *unsalvageable* junk, the forlorn things with no hope of ever being antiques or even relics of contemporary material culture … The discarded stuff lives on though; there's a dark energy there in the dustbins of history, of potential use in some future ecological dispensation. [emphasis in original] (Mahon 2017: 25)

Mahon's (2017: 25) concern with the "dark energy" of neglected things is accompanied by an awareness that "everything in nature goes round and round"—including waste materials that enter and flow through ecological systems. In his essay, Mahon notes that non-biodegradable materials break down in the sun into smaller pieces and can be mistaken for food by animals (Mahon 2017: 22).

"Rubbish Theory" returns to and brings together the subjects explored earlier in his poems: the dark yet fascinating life of trash in "Raw Material," the reincarnation of things through recycling in "Recycling Song," and the scavenging of waste by birds in "The Great Wave." At times, Mahon's exploration of rubbish brings to mind what Morton (2016: 5) calls "dark ecology," or "ecological awareness" that is "dark-uncanny." By engaging with recycled art in particular and waste in general, Mahon's ecological writing confronts the reader with the weird, unfamiliar, and dark dimensions of consumerist consumption and material flux.

The three poems from *An Autumn Wind*—"Raw Material," "Recycling Song," and "The Great Wave"—also echo and reinforce each other. If "Raw Material" and "Recycling Song" engage with the uncanny vitality of things in the everyday, "The Great Wave" addresses the waste crisis at a larger, more-than-human scale. As Solnick (2016: 121) observes, "The range and scale of Mahon's later poetry" that addresses ecological issues "zooms between macro and micro." The relationship between the global and the particular is revealed through the web of connections between the poems. For instance, the title of the ekphrastic poem "Raw Material" echoes the way "The Great Wave" addresses the accumulation of waste ("If 'waste is the new *raw material*' as they say / our resources are infinite") and thereby creates a link between the everyday and the bigger picture, between a single encounter with the uncanny vitality of discarded things and the vast, unimaginable scale of waste accumulation [emphasis added] (Mahon 2018). When viewed in the light of ecological concerns and new materialist thought, Mahon's eco-ekphrasis in "Raw Material" can be read as reminding us that consumerism and waste production are human acts of partaking in the more-than-human world and agential materiality.

Ekphrasis of Hyperobjects

Mahon's engagement with ecology and the more-than-human world can be traced throughout much of his work. Eóin Flannery (2015: 381), who situates Mahon's poetry "within a burgeoning field of Irish ecopoetic criticism," argues that his "ecological conscience" is especially prominent in his latest work—poetry collections *An Autumn Wind* and *Life on Earth*—where he adopts "the role or voice of ecological advocacy." Mahon's final collection of poems *Washing Up* (2020) further extends his exploration of ecology and the Anthropocene. At the core of Mahon's ecological sensibility is a concern with an often overlooked agential matter, from everyday man-made and used items to the large-scale materialities of geophysical processes, as may be seen in *An Autumn Wind*. In "Under the Volcanoes," a poem from this collection, Mahon's eco-ekphrasis engages with rock formation as an art-making process. At the centre of the poem is a volcanic landscape in Lanzarote, a "ferocious, natural work of art" (Mahon 2018). The landscape was integrated into an architectural project by Spanish artist and architect César Manrique (Figure 20), who saw his own work as a "dialogue between art and the natural medium" (Echarri and Echarri 2018: 414).

Figure 20. César Manrique, *Jameos del Agua* auditorium in Lanzarote. Canary Islands, Spain. Photograph by Jacek Sopotnicki. *Shutterstock*. Web. 26 January 2023.

Figure 21. César Manrique, *El mirador del Rıo* (*River Lookout*), 1973. Canary Islands, Spain. Photograph by Natalia Egorova. *Shutterstock*. Web. 14 February 2023.

Manrique's *El mirador del Rıo* (*River Lookout*), for example, blends man-made architecture with volcanic rock, inviting the visitors to "become the eyes of the mountain" (Echarri and Echarri 2018: 420) (Figure 21).

Ekphrasis in "Under the Volcanoes" may be seen as an example of what Hollander (1995: 56) calls "*architectural*" ekphrasis.[54] Architectural ekphrases engage with all kinds of architectural creations, from churches and towers to bridges, arches, and fountains (Hollander 1995: 56–63). Mahon's ekphrastic poem deals with the creation of the architectural form, thus presenting the volcanic landscape as an artwork-in-the-making. What is, however, crucial is that ekphrasis shifts the focus from human creativity—where matter is treated as the natural medium to be acted upon—to the creative agency of more-than-human forces. Active volcanic furnaces, the speaker notes, are there "to remind us of the origins of the arts" (Mahon 2018). On the one hand, these lines recall mythical accounts of the origin of the arts. In Greek mythology, for instance, the invention of the arts is associated with Prometheus, who "stole fire and knowledge of the arts from Hephaestus and Athena" (Summers 1990: 236). On the other hand, the emphasis upon nonhuman agency in Mahon's poem breaks down the art/nature dichotomy inherent in myths. As David Summers (1990: 236) observes, the origin of the arts in classical mythology is bound up with "a deep sense of the opposition of art and nature," where the development of artmaking practices marks the departure from nature to culture and civilization. By foregrounding the creative agency of more-than-human forces, the artwork-in-the-making in Mahon's poem challenges this antithetical view of (human) art and (nonhuman) nature. It is nonhuman matter—"an avalanche of lava, ash, debris"—that acts as a creator of art, giving shape to rock (Mahon 2018).

Here again, the thinginess of words on the page serves to emphasize the dynamism and vitality of material processes. The shape of the poem enacts a sense of pulsation, reminding us of vibrant magma pulsating under the volcanoes of Lanzarote. The Lanzarote volcanic eruption, which took place between 1730 and 1736, was the longest eruption on the Canary Islands (Becerril et al. 2017: 1145). Its six-year duration is even seen as "anomalous" by some scholars (Carracedo et al. 1992: 239). In "Under the Volcanoes," the creation of the "natural work of art" by volcanic activity takes place on a large spatiotemporal scale (Mahon 2018). In Morton's (2013) terms, the volcanic rock—whose entire formation process exceeds the human lifespan—may be seen as a hyperobject. Morton (2013: 1) coined the term *hyperobjects* to denote "things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans." Hyperobjects, as Morton sees them, can be man-made products that are extremely long-lasting (such as plastic bags, Styrofoam, and all the man-made machines) or things that are not produced directly by humans (such as black holes, biospheres, planets, and nuclear materials). The entire process of rock formation spans over large, more-than-

[54] In his book *The Gazer's Spirit: Poems Speaking to Silent Works of Art*, Hollander (1995) categorizes ekphrastic poems according to the medium of the embedded work (e.g., public monuments, architecture, photographs, engravings, etchings, etc.).

human spatiotemporal scales. The evocation of "the great cosmic breath" of the earth in Mahon's "Under the Volcanoes" simultaneously emphasizes the hyper-temporality of geophysical processes and suggests the immense vitality and thing-power of the more-than-human world.

Of special interest is the relation between temporality and subjectivity in the poem. As Flannery (2015: 386) observes, "Mahon's focus on temporality in his later poetry is equally central to the ecological temperament of his work." In "Under the Volcanoes," subjectivity extends across multiple timescales, including human and more-than-human scales. The human timescales—where the Yaiza parish priest witnesses the volcanic eruption and the visitors of Lanzarote fly to the Canary Islands—are entangled with the more-than-human timescale, where volcanic activity gives shape to rock through the span of centuries. The poem, thus, fosters the sense that subjectivity is fluid, multiple and extends beyond the human.

In his *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence,* Morton argues that "ecological awareness" implies thinking of the human and nonhuman world at many scales at once:

> Our sense of planet is not a cosmopolitan rush but rather the uncanny feeling that there are all kinds of places at all kinds of scale: dinner table, house, street, neighborhood, Earth, biosphere, ecosystem, city, bioregion, country, tectonic plate. Moreover and perhaps more significantly: bird's nest, beaver's dam, spider web, whale migration pathway, wolf territory, bacterial microbiome. And these places, as in the concept of spacetime, are inextricably bound up with different kinds of timescale: dinner party, family generation, evolution, climate, (human) "world history," DNA, lifetime, vacation, geology; and again the time of wolves, the time of whales, the time of bacteria. … So many intersecting places, so many scales, so many nonhumans. (Morton 2016: 9–10)

Crucial to (re)thinking the world in ecological terms, Morton (2016: 25) goes on, is the ability to think at "unfamiliar, even monstrously gigantic" scales. Mahon's "Under the Volcanoes" gives us the sense that familiar human scales—those of beach parties, plane travel, vacation—coexist with large unfamiliar nonhuman scales—those of volcanic activity, rock formation, and the evolution of trees. By doing so, the poem enacts ecological thinking, which, in turn, disrupts the anthropocentric divide between passive nonhuman matter and human agency.

The vast unfamiliar scale of Mahon's eco-ekphrasis also allows us to recognize more-than-human matter as both medium and subject, whose activity extends beyond the scale of human actions, including Manrique's work on his architectural project. Within dualistic logic, creative processes presuppose the divide between the subject and the object, the artist and the *objet d'art*, the creator and the created. New materialism, on the contrary, aims to rethink the subject and object relation in non-dualistic terms. In an interview with Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, Barad (2012: 52) argues that "[i]nstead of there being a separation of subject and object, there is an entanglement of subject and object, which is called the 'phenomenon.'" Following this line of thought, then, both creative agency and products emerge as a result of entangled phenomena rather than

subject acting upon object. Eco-ekphrasis in "Under the Volcanoes" recognizes createdness in the emergent phenomenon of rock formation, where subject and object blur together. Mahon's take on subjectivity and temporality, thus, invites us to think of material processes in nonlinear, non-anthropocentric, and non-dualistic ways.

Mahon's eco-ekphrasis engages with the material world at scales ranging from the familiar, domestic, and everyday to the unfamiliar and more-than-human. Material things in his ekphrastic poetry—whether man-made items, trash or volcanic substances—exhibit uncanny vitality, which is often obscured by the visual arts and the anthropocentric tendency to posit the material world as the passive object of observation and depiction. Importantly, the thematic focus on materiality in Mahon's ekphrasis is inseparable from the thinginess or materiality of his ekphrastic writing: the thing-power of words on the page and their ekphrastic entanglement with images foreground material phenomena as well as enact a sense of material vitality. The ekphrastic transformation of still-life painting turns the *objects* of *nature morte* into vibrant *things* and thereby acknowledges the liveliness of the overlooked nonhuman matter. Mahon's engagement with discarded things and recycled art, in turn, demonstrates subtle yet acute ecological sensibility: his eco-ekphrasis not only elevates the status of discarded things from passive objects of consumption to vibrant matter but also addresses the global waste crisis and the ecological degradation of the Anthropocene. It is remarkable that Mahon's ekphrastic poems contain several examples of *artworks-in-the-making*, many of which bring into focus the agency of nonhuman matter as well as enable ecological thinking. Equally important is that the artworks-in-the-making in his poetry provoke the reader to recognize matter's creativity at different scales, including the more-than-human scale of rock formation. By going beyond the boundaries of familiar human-scale ekphrasis, Mahon's ekphrastic poems foster nonlinear, non-anthropocentric, and non-dualistic understandings of creative processes and world phenomena.

Eco-Ekphrasis and More-Than-Human Scales in Film

As in literature, ekphrasis in film can provoke scale-switching, thereby enabling ecological thinking and challenging anthropocentrism. In what follows, I will focus on Lars von Trier's[55] film *Melancholia* (2011) and the ekphrastic transformation of Pieter Bruegel's panoramic landscape painting *The Hunters in the Snow* (1565), considering its significance in regards to the ecological message of the film.

[55] Lars von Trier (born in 1956) is a Danish filmmaker who, together with Thomas Vinterberg, founded a 1995 avant-garde film movement called Dogme 95. Von Trier and Vinterberg developed a set of rules that encourage filmmakers to shoot on location, use a hand-held camera, and avoid using special effects (Koutsourakis 2013: 211–12; Stavning Thomsen 2018: 117–18). If in his earlier films (e.g., *The Idiots*) von Trier tried to abide by these rules, then in his later films (e.g., *Melancholia*), von Trier departs from some of Dogme 95 principles, particularly by embracing digital technology.

In short, von Trier's *Melancholia* may be described as a film about the end of the world: Earth is destroyed as the result of its collision with the fictional planet Melancholia. The title of the film simultaneously gestures to the apocalyptic catastrophe and relates to depression experienced by the main character—Justine. Justine is a newly-wedded woman who feels withdrawn from everyday human rituals and, as a result, develops a grave depression. The melancholic state of the main character was largely inspired by von Trier's own experience and battle with depression. In an interview with Nils Thorsen, von Trier (2011) said: "I think that Justine is very much me. She is based a lot on my person and my experiences with doomsday prophecies and depression." Taking his own depressed mood as a point of departure for the film, von Trier explores the state of melancholia alongside ecological issues and at the same time engages in ekphrastic experiments.

Von Trier's *Melancholia* is divided into two parts, the first of which is devoted to the lavish wedding reception of the melancholic Justine, while the second follows Justine and her family (her sister Claire, brother-in-law John, and nephew Leo) as they anticipate the apocalyptic destruction of Earth. The primary setting of the film is a large mansion that is owned by Justine's wealthy bourgeois family. Linda Badley (2022: 136) suggests that the luxurious setting[56] may be viewed as epitomizing the "greed" and "excess" of late capitalism. Though grand in size, the mansion evokes a strong sense of confinement and domesticity. As Steven Shaviro (2012: 7) puts it, "The world of *Melancholia* is a tiny, self-enclosed microcosm of Western white bourgeois privilege." Shaviro (2012: 15) goes on to observe that everything in the film seems "too close, too stiflingly intimate." The feeling of claustrophobic closeness is emphasized through the intense use of close-ups.

In contrast to the confined and suffocating environment of the domestic setting, Bruegel's landscape painting *The Hunters in the Snow* encompasses a large view of the world and may therefore be viewed as an example of an *embedded world-picture*. Pieter Bruegel the Elder was among the Flemish painters who contributed to the development of the world landscape genre, which was largely influenced by cartographic and cosmographic images (Roland 2022: 122–24). The use of linear perspective and bird's-eye-view composition allowed these artists to create broad views of distant landscapes and townscapes (Roland 2022: 123). Bruegel's winter landscape *The Hunters in the Snow* is among his paintings that confront the viewer with a large picture of the world. What is especially significant is the way in which the macroworld picture is incorporated into the film and transformed through the use of digital technologies. We can see a reproduction of Bruegel's *The Hunters in the Snow* in the library of the mansion, when Justine contemplates the painting at a close distance (Figure 22). Bruegel's landscape also appears in the prologue to the film: the painting starts smoldering, and then the shot is intercut with a cosmic view of Earth (Figures 23–24). This editing technique creates a link between the two macroworld images: Bruegel's panoramic landscape

[56] Many of the key scenes were shot on location at Tjolöholm Castle, which is actually a Swedish neo-Gothic mansion that was designed to look like a castle (Badley 2022: 138).

and the cosmic image of our planet.[57] Thus, ekphrasis brings in a picture of the world that extends far beyond the self-enclosed microcosm of bourgeois anthropocentrism. It is remarkable that the affordances of film technology—such as editing and digital image compositing—support and reinforce the effect of external inclusion created through ekphrasis.

The image of the smoldering landscape painting and the computer-generated cosmic view of Earth (Figures 22–24) also foreshadow the eventual destruction of the world at the end of the film.[58] However, the envisioned disaster happens, as Shaviro (2012: 6–7) puts it, "in a sort of parenthesis," while the narrative "remains claustrophobically focused" on the characters and their feelings. The film invites the viewer to experience the world of bourgeois domesticity closely and intimately. In her chapter "Mediating Anthropocene Planetary Attachments: Lars von Trier's *Melancholia*," Nicole Merola (2014: 265) argues that by keeping "the viewer in an uncomfortably intimate relationship to the action" at Justine's wedding reception, von Trier "refuses the viewer a distanced perspective from the consumption occurring on screen." If the primary narrative focuses on the self-enclosed microcosm of bourgeois anthropocentrism and overconsumption,[59] the embedded world-picture confronts the viewer with the more-than-human world—the world that is on the verge of destruction.

Figure 22. Film still from *Melancholia* (2011), directed by Lars von Trier. Reproduced with permission. © Zentropa Entertainments.

[57] The appearance of Pieter Bruegel's painting *The Hunters in the Snow* in von Trier's *Melancholia* is also often seen as a reference to Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Solaris* (1972). In *Solaris*, we can see Bruegel's painting hanging on the wall of a space station located on the planet Solaris. Rupert Read (2019: 91) suggests that both in *Melancholia* and in *Solaris*, the macroworld in Bruegel's painting stands for the Earth. See also Metelmann and Loren (2015: 165), (Heikkilä: 2017: 191), Holland (2019: 96), Badley (2022: 126), Sinnerbrink (2022: 285).

[58] According to Lars von Trier (2011), the prologue to the film serves to make the viewer aware of how the story ends, thereby directing attention from the plot to the characters' reactions to the apocalyptic threat. See also Badley (2022: 104).

[59] In an interview with Nils Thorsen, von Trier (2011) notes that the primary narrative also "hints at the disaster in closeups."

Figure 23. Bruegel's painting in *Melancholia*. Reproduced with permission. © Zentropa Entertainments.

Figure 24. A cosmic view of Earth in *Melancholia*. Reproduced with permission. © Zentropa Entertainments.

It is noteworthy that the ekphrastic transformation brings together a perspective from within everyday life and a larger view of the world. The human overconsumption of environmental resources is entangled with the oncoming disaster of a planetary scale. Even though the apocalypse envisioned in *Melancholia* is caused by an interplanetary collision, some scholars argue that the mass extinction in von Trier's film implicitly points at the large-scale effects of the Anthropocene (Noheden 2018: 138; Badley 2022: 148). Significantly, it is the melancholic Justine who contemplates Bruegel's painting in the film. She feels oppressed by the rituals of bourgeois life and claims that "the Earth is evil." Badley (2022: 147) suggests that Justine's statement alludes to the Anthropocene, where humans contribute "to 'evils' such as global warming, environmental change, the acidification of the oceans, and mass extinctions." Some scholars describe Justine's depression as "environmental melancholy" (Merola 2014: 260; Noheden 2018: 135). Merola (2014: 263), for instance, argues that Justine experiences "a form of environmental melancholy" which is characterized by thinking on "planetary

geospatial and temporal scales." This kind of environmental melancholy, Merola (2014: 263) goes on, "involves cultivating a radical openness to the agency of nonhumans and things and our relations with them; extending grief to encompass nonhuman and ecological processes." Like Merola, Badley (2022: 149–50) stresses Justine's receptiveness to nonhuman agency, arguing that it "exemplifies Morton's 'dark ecology'"—which implies uncanny and radical coexistence between humans and nonhuman agents. Given it is grieving Justine who engages with Bruegel's panoramic landscape painting, the embedded world-picture may be viewed as suggesting the woman's melancholic attunement to the world beyond the human.

It is equally important that Justine's melancholia is marked by a strong yet intimate sense of enmeshment in the more-than-human material world. In this respect, especially remarkable is the scene in which she goes to a river bank and lies there naked; her body merges with the landscape. As Merola (2014: 270) notes, the scene "foregrounds Justine's embrace of a posthuman becoming" as well as her complete openness to "material forces." By bringing a large-scale view of the world into the narrative, the embedded world-picture reinforces the relation between Justine's embodied grief and more-than-human ecological processes.

In this ekphrastic transformation, the sense of entanglement in differing scales is supported by the changes in the modalities (Elleström 2014; 2021) of the medium. In the sensorial modality, crucial is the change of the mode from visual to audio-visual. Being perceived by the senses of sight and hearing, the medium of film is what Elleström (2021: 53) would call "sensorially multimodal." The appearance of Bruegel's *The Hunters in the Snow* in von Trier's film—both in the prologue and in the scene when Justine contemplates the painting in the estate library—is accompanied by Richard Wagner's prelude to *Tristan and Isolde*. The majestic orchestral music heightens the affective impact of the film. As Badley (2022: 112) observes, "Wagnerian grandeur moreover enlarges what might have been a merely 'personal' film about depression," intensifying the film's concern with global matters and crises. The recurring music also binds together Bruegel's landscape painting, the apocalyptic images of planetary destruction, and the scenes that communicate Justine's embodied grief and openness to uncanny material agency. Thus, through the coupling of the painting with the music, the ekphrastic transformation further emphasizes Justine's engagement with the more-than-human world as a form of environmental melancholy.

The environmental sensibility of von Trier's ekphrasis is also supported by the change in the material modality, which encompasses digital technologies. It is through digital effects that Bruegel's landscape painting begins to smolder, foreshadowing planetary destruction. The ekphrastic transformation not only brings the macroworld picture into the narrative but also confronts the viewer with the dark-uncanny awareness of environmental ruination. The digitally-manipulated landscape painting is intertwined with the computer-generated images of the apocalypse, which allow the viewer to witness the complete destruction of the world and humankind. Furthermore, technology heightens the effect of scale-switching created by ekphrasis. Especially remarkable is the contrast between the scenes filmed with a handheld camera and the highly stylized shots manipulated

in digital post-production (Valsson 2021: 196). If the wedding reception scenes and the library scene are shot mostly with a handheld camera (Figure 22), then the spectacular image of the burning landscape painting in the prologue is the result of heavy digital processing (Figure 23). Andreas Kirchner (2015: 197) suggests that the digitally-enhanced visuals in *Melancholia* express Justine's inner state. Hence, different technologies reinforce the sense of entanglement between the striking effect of scale-switching and Justine's dark-uncanny ecological awareness.

The material-technological dimension of the film also supports the change in the spatiotemporal modality, which foregrounds materialities at different scales as processes unfolding in time. In the prologue, the ekphrastic transformation of Bruegel's painting puts an emphasis on the changing materiality of the canvas. The material process of burning, in turn, parallels the destruction of the world—the world that is not a still object but an entanglement of uncanny material agencies. The transformed painting also attracts attention to the strange forces of gravity at work: the slowly descending bits of burning paper recall the first shot of the film, in which birds succumb to gravity and start falling from the sky. As Rareş Moldovan observes, the reworking of Bruegel's *The Hunters in the Snow* in *Melancholia* provokes the viewer to mistake the "falling specks" for the "falling birds":

> we see Pieter Bruegel's painting *Hunters in the Snow*. Black specks that seem to be birds start falling across the snow, in a symmetrical allusion to catastrophe, until we realize that they are bits of charred paper from the slowly burning reproduction. Meanings are tightly knotted here: catastrophe spreading across lifeworld and artwork (or a reproduction thereof), the idea of replicating structures (falling birds, falling specks) that makes the artwork accommodate the catastrophe *materially* within itself. [emphasis in original] (Moldovan 2017: 334)

In von Trier's film, the painting is both a weird material thing and an artwork that invites thinking beyond the human scale into wide apocalyptic processes. The falling birds and the falling specks not only foreshadow the apocalypse but also foreground the strange effects of massively distributed phenomena: after all, it is the force of gravity that causes the interplanetary collision. The ekphrastic transformation brings together the changing materiality of the burning canvas and the workings of gravity—a manifestation of the uncanny agency of celestial bodies. Moreover, the use of slow motion in the prologue increases the weirdness of unfamiliar more-than-human agencies and scales. Thus, the interwoven aspects of media transformation work together to decenter the human, cultivating a sense of enmeshment in the weird large-scale dynamics of the world.

As in Mahon's poetry, eco-ekphrasis in von Trier's *Melancholia* invites us to think of the material world at multiple scales, including familiar everyday and unfamiliar more-than-human scales. If Mahon's ekphrastic poetry calls attention to the uncanny vitality of man-made things and its entanglement with the global waste crisis, then von Trier's film fuses the everyday reality of ruthless overconsumption with the embodied experience of environmental melancholia and the weird agency of gigantic celestial bodies. It is remarkable that in both cases

ekphrasis is marked by dark ecological awareness (Morton 2016). In *Melancholia*, the dark-uncanny sense of entanglement in differing scales is emphasized through the changes in the interwoven media modalities. Especially crucial in the ekphrastic transformation of Bruegel's *The Hunters in the Snow* is the support of digital technologies, which not only reinforces the effect of external inclusion but also brings forth the weirdness of material phenomena. Both in Mahon's poetry and in von Trier's film, scale-switching is one of the key aspects of ekphrasis and its dark-uncanny ecological sensibility, while the focus on weird nonhuman materialities—discarded things, volcanic rock, and celestial bodies—provokes the reader/viewer to move beyond the human-centered view of the world.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to develop a matter-oriented approach to ekphrasis, shifting the focus of contemporary ekphrasis studies to the questions of materiality and embodiment. Drawing upon new materialist thinking, my dissertation contributes to the development of scholarship on ekphrasis in multiple ways.

- First, I show that ekphrasis is a dynamic concept sensitive to changes in material-discursive practices, which are, in turn, closely entangled with the ongoing material processes of media and technological evolution. The continuous development of ekphrastic theory and practice is, thus, a relational dynamic process that is inextricably linked to the material phenomena of the changing world.
- Second, my study of ekphrasis offers a materialist-performative approach for traversing such well-trodden critical paths as (1) the paragonal word-image opposition[60] and (2) the emphasis on double representation. My research shifts the focus from representational considerations to the mattering of ekphrastic and artmaking practices. I argue that ekphrastic practice is performative—in that it involves engagement with the world and its entangled material-discursive phenomena.
- Third, I develop a typology of ekphrasis, which brings together the transformational paradigm of intermediality and new materialisms. The combination of these conceptual frameworks allowed me to work out a method for a matter-oriented analysis of ekphrastic transformations. My typology of four transformations (*unfamiliar double*, *artwork animation*, *artwork-in-the-making*, and *embedded world-picture*) provides a useful tool for exploring the different ways in which ekphrasis can foreground material mattering and agency.

The matter-oriented typology supported my analysis of ekphrasis in **Chapter 3**, **Chapter 4**, and **Chapter 5**, which were united by the aim to explore the power of ekphrastic transformations to challenge dualistic and anthropocentric concepts. The order of the chapters allowed me to examine materiality at multiple scales, starting from the microscopic scale of bioartistic practices in Almodóvar's *The Skin I Live In*, moving to the human scale of everyday experience and artmaking in Carson's *Still Life*, and finally turning to the unfamiliar more-than-human scales of ecological processes in Mahon's ekphrastic poetry and the cosmic scale of weird planetary forces in von Trier's *Melancholia*.

In **Chapter 3**, I focused on the ekphrastic transformations of nude paintings, particularly the ways in which filmic and literary ekphrasis undermines the

[60] As I have noted before, several previous studies of ekphrasis (Krieger 1967; Mitchell 1994; Grishakova 2010; Rouse 2015; Louvel 2018; Kennedy and Meek 2019) similarly aimed to go beyond the paragonal model. My approach takes this scholarly discussion further by turning to the new materialist notion of performativity.

dualistic category of the ideal form. The unfamiliar double of Titian's nude painting in Almodóvar's *The Skin I Live In* attracts attention to materiality by making the familiar idealized image of Venus strange. Crucial here is the corporeal re-enactment of the painting, which invites the viewer to experience a striking encounter with the mattering of flesh. Remarkably, the strange ekphrastic transformation of Titian's painterly ideal not only reinforces the emphasis on corporeality but also stresses the entanglement of objectifying artistic practices with the development of technology (i.e., film and biotechnology). The unfamiliar double of Titian's nude addresses the past and the present at once: on the one hand, it evokes the conventional Venus paintings by the Old Masters, challenging the tradition of nude painting; on the other hand, ekphrasis engages with contemporary bioartistic practices, foregrounding the entanglement of matter with form and meaning. The ekphrastic transformation emphasizes the material and dynamic nature of developing representational practices as well as provokes thinking of the idealization and objectification of the female form in corporeal terms. By engaging with the materiality of skin at the microscopic, molecular level, Almodóvar's film also brings into focus the agentive capacity of flesh. It thereby destabilizes the view of the female body as a fixed, unchanging form.

Similarly, ekphrasis in Ní Chonchúir's *Nude* serves to question the dualistic assumptions that underlie the tradition of nude painting. The artwork animation in "Roy Lichtenstein's *Nudes in a Mirror*" brings Lichtenstein's *Nudes in Mirror* to life, giving voice and thing-power to the nude painting. My analysis shows that the alteration of the spatiotemporal modality from nontemporal to temporal is one of the key aspects of this type of ekphrastic transformation. It allows artworks—particularly the figures depicted within them—to perform actions unfolding in time and thereby exhibit unexpected agency and independence. This type of ekphrasis is, thus, effective in challenging the dualism of lively human beings and passive nonhuman things. As the result of the ekphrastic transformation, the painted nude in Ní Chonchúir's short story becomes a transgressive figure that is simultaneously a material thing and a lively being, a canvas and a woman, an observed and an observer. The artwork animation also serves to question gendered dualistic thinking by undermining the dominance of the male artist over matter and the female as passive objects. Remarkably, with the alteration of the spatiotemporal modality from nontemporal to temporal, ekphrasis not only animates the static nude figure but also conveys the continuous experience of objectification. The ekphrastic transformation, thus, disrupts the familiar pattern of the visual consumption of the passive female form.

If Chapter 3 focused on how ekphrasis provokes thinking beyond the category of the ideal female form, then **Chapter 4** fully delved into the importance of embodiment in ekphrastic works, thus further destabilizing the static concept of the body. In Chapter 4, I explored how ekphrasis in Carson's *Still Life* foregrounds the embodied experience of artmaking and ekphrastic writing. The artwork-in-the-making in his poem "Claude Monet, *Artist's Garden at Vétheuil*, 1880" poses painting as a dynamic material process rather than a finished product. And here again, crucial is the change of the spatiotemporal modality from

nontemporal to temporal mode. Ekphrasis brings into focus the artist's body-in-action, emphasizing the sense of bodily enmeshment in the dynamic process of painting. The emphasis on embodiment is significant in that it challenges the dualism of body and mind. In Carson's poem, the "embodiment of the brain" (Braidotti 2017) is acknowledged and emphasized by the change in the semiotic modality from visual to verbal. With the verbalization of the artist's experience, the ekphrastic transformation brings forth the mingling of the mental and the physical. Equally important is that Carson's ekphrastic poetry also mediates the embodied experience of ekphrastic writing, thereby establishing an analogy between the material processes of painting and writing. Like the painter, the poet-narrator is positioned not outside but as part of the world, while his ekphrastic writing emerges through the multi-sensory embodied engagement with the world and its entangled material-discursive phenomena. Thus, Carson's *Still Life* illustrates the performativity of ekphrastic practice. The unfamiliar double of Vermeer's *The Lacemaker* in "Jeffrey Morgan, *Hare Bowl*, 2008" further reinforces the emphasis on embodiment, drawing attention to the mattering of bodily matter in everyday life and medical practices. My analysis of Carson's *Still Life* shows that ekphrastic embodiment is one of the key aspects of his poetry. Though its focus on the complex, multi-sensory bodily engagement with the heterogeneous materiality of the world, art, and language, Carson's ekphrasis transgresses dualisms and hierarchies in manifold ways.

In **Chapter 5**, the focus of my study shifted away from the human experience of artmaking toward the ways in which ekphrastic transformations provoke thinking beyond the anthropocentric notion of the human as the central agent in the world. I was primarily interested in how ekphrasis brings forth the often-overlooked vitality of nonhuman things and also draws attention to ecological processes that extend beyond the human scale. In my analysis of Mahon's ekphrastic poetry, I discussed several examples of artworks-in-the-making, which are remarkable for acknowledging the creativity of nonhuman matter. The ekphrastic transformation of Hodgkin's abstract painting in Mahon's poem "Rain" stresses the uncanny doings of materials in the dynamic process of painting where the meeting of paint with the board becomes a vibrant and exuberant event. Similarly, the artworks-in-the-making in "Raw Material" and "Under the Volcanoes" place an emphasis on the vitality of nonhuman matter, thus decentering human agency. Ekphrasis in these two poems is also significant in terms of its ecological sensibility. In "Raw Material," the material making of recycled art foregrounds the uncanny vitality of waste and thereby addresses the global waste crisis. In "Under the Volcanoes," the creation of the volcanic landscape, which takes place on a large spatiotemporal scale, enables the reader to think ecologically and recognize the immense vitality of the more-than-human world.

As in Mahon's poetry, the ekphrastic transformation in von Trier's *Melancholia* invites us to think of material processes at differing scales. By bringing in a broad panoramic view of the world, the embedded world-picture provokes scale-switching: ekphrasis in von Trier's film fuses the image of planetary destruction with the everyday reality of ruthless overconsumption. This type of

ekphrastic transformation is remarkable for its capacity to enable ecological thinking and challenge anthropocentrism. The embedded world-picture in von Trier's film invites the viewer to engage with the weird large-scale dynamics of the world. Importantly, the ekphrastic transformation not only disrupts the human-centered narrative but also cultivates a sense of embeddedness in the more-than-human world. In von Trier's *Melancholia,* the effect of scale-switching is supported and reinforced by the affordances of film technology (i.e., editing and digital image compositing). In addition, the alteration of the material-technological modality is interwoven with the changes in the sensorial and spatio-temporal modalities, which work together to increase the sense of entanglement in differing scales.

Thus, my analysis of materiality at differing scales—from microscopic to planetary—shows that contemporary ekphrasis challenges dualisms and anthropocentrism in multiple ways—from putting into focus the agency of cells and embodied experience to foregrounding large-scale ecological processes. What is also noteworthy about contemporary ekphrastic practice is its entanglement with the dynamic development of nonhuman technology. In Almodóvar's *The Skin I Live In*, the emphasis on corporeality is supported by the affordances of film technology, which makes it possible to optically record the embodied re-enactment of Titian's painting. In Carson's *Still Life*, the focus on the materiality of Monet's painting is inspired by the close microscopic study of its detail. The poet-narrator in *Still Life* also engages with digital reproductions, examining the magnified views of paintings found on the Internet. In von Trier's *Melancholia*, digital image compositing reinforces the dark-uncanny sense of enmeshment in the more-than-human ecological processes. Therefore, nonhuman technology provides new affordances for ekphrastic transformations, expanding possibilities for creative reconfigurings of the world and its material-discursive phenomena. Given the dynamism of technological innovation, the entanglement of ekphrastic practice with media and technological development is an area that could be further explored in future studies of ekphrasis.

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SUMMARY

If in antiquity the term *ekphrasis* was used to denote a speech that stimulates mental visualization, then in contemporary discourse, ekphrasis refers to a wide array of intermedial phenomena, from descriptions of paintings, sculpture, and photography in literature to the integration of paintings in film. In this dissertation, I explore how contemporary literature and films engage with artworks (paintings and other media). In particular, I focus on how ekphrasis transforms images, thereby drawing attention to materiality and embodiment. My matter-oriented approach to ekphrasis is informed by new materialist thought, which pursues a twofold aim: first, to overcome dualisms, such as matter and meaning, body and mind, nature and culture; second, to challenge the view of matter as a passive object.

The dissertation is divided into five chapters. In Chapter 1, I provide an overview of the changing usage of the term ekphrasis from antiquity to the present and show that the dynamic development of the concept of ekphrasis is entangled with changes in material-discursive practices and environments. One of the notable recent developments is the introduction of the notion of filmic ekphrasis, which I consider in this dissertation. In Chapter 2, I develop a matter-oriented typology of ekphrastic transformations that can be used to analyze ekphrasis both in literature and in film. The typology gives me tools and terminology for examining the different ways in which ekphrasis can subvert dualisms and foreground material agency.

The subsequent chapters—Chapter 3, Chapter 4, and Chapter 5—are structured around case studies, including ekphrases in Pedro Almodóvar's film *The Skin I Live In* (2011), Nuala Ní Chonchúir's collection of short stories *Nude* (2009), Ciaran Carson's poetry collection *Still Life* (2019), Derek Mahon's poetry collection *An Autumn Wind* (2010), and Lars von Trier's film *Melancholia* (2011). The three analytical chapters are united by the aim to explore how ekphrastic transformations challenge and go beyond dualistic concepts, while the order of the chapters allows me to examine materiality at multiple scales, starting from the microscopic scale of bioartistic practices in Almodóvar's *The Skin I Live In*, moving to the human scale of everyday experience and artmaking in Carson's *Still Life*, and finally turning to the unfamiliar more-than-human scales of ecological processes in Mahon's ekphrastic poetry and the cosmic scale of weird planetary forces in von Trier's *Melancholia*.

Chapter 3 focuses on how filmic and literary ekphrases transform nude paintings and thereby undermine the dualistic and gendered assumptions that underlie the tradition of nude painting. In particular, the ekphrastic transformation of Titian's Venus painting in Pedro Almodóvar's *The Skin I Live In*—which involves a corporeal re-enactment of the painterly ideal—serves to question the idea that the ideal form is superior to and prevails over matter. Ekphrasis in Almodóvar's film brings together the nude tradition and contemporary bioartistic practices, engaging with the materiality and agency of flesh at the microscopic,

molecular level. In Nuala Ní Chonchúir's *Nude*, the most remarkable is the ekphrastic transformation of Roy Lichtenstein's *Nudes in Mirror*, which animates and gives voice to the nude painting. The painted nude, thus, becomes a transgressive figure that is simultaneously a material thing and a lively being, a canvas and a woman, an observed and an observer. Remarkably, ekphrasis also conveys the experience of objectification and, by doing so, disrupts the visual consumption of the passive female form.

Chapter 4 explores how ekphrasis in Ciaran Carson's *Still Life* foregrounds the embodied experience of painting and ekphrastic writing. The ekphrastic transformation of Claude Monet's painting poses painting as a dynamic material process rather than a finished product. By bringing into focus the artist's body-in-action, ekphrasis emphasizes the sense of bodily enmeshment in the dynamic process of artmaking. Equally important is that Carson's ekphrastic poetry also mediates the embodied experience of ekphrastic writing, thereby establishing an analogy between the material processes of painting and writing. My analysis shows that the emphasis on embodied multi-sensory experience in Carson's *Still Life* challenges mind-body dualism, particularly the view that art originates in the disembodied mind of the artist.

Chapter 5 shifts the focus from the human experience of artmaking toward the often-overlooked nonhuman things and ecological processes that extend beyond the human scale. My central concern here is with the ways in which ekphrasis undermines the anthropocentric notion of the human as the central agent in the world. In the first part of the chapter, I consider Derek Mahon's poetry, showing that ekphrastic transformations bring forth the vitality and creativity of various nonhuman materialities, from paint and wood to discarded things and volcanic substances. I also argue that, by engaging with large-scale material processes, ekphrasis in Mahon's poems provokes ecological thinking. In the second part of this chapter, I analyze the ekphrastic transformation of Pieter Bruegel's painting in Lars von Trier's film *Melancholia*. By bringing a broad panoramic view of the world into the narrative, ekphrasis invites the viewer to switch between the human scale of bourgeois rituals and the unfamiliar more-than-human scale of planetary destruction.

My analysis of materiality at differing scales—from microscopic to planetary—shows that contemporary ekphrasis challenges dualisms and anthropocentrism in multiple ways—from putting into focus the agency of cells and embodied experience to foregrounding large-scale ecological processes. Ekphrasis, thus, serves as a powerful tool for (re)shaping our understanding of art and the world.

SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Materiaalne ekfraas: uusmaterialismi ja ekfraasiuuringute kohtumine

Kui antiikajal kasutati terminit „ekfraas", et viidata mentaalset visualiseerimist ergutavale kõnele, siis kaasaegses diskursuses kasutatakse seda mõistet kirjeldamaks erinevaid intermediaalseid nähtusi, alates maalide, skulptuuri ja fotograafia kirjanduslikest kirjeldustest kuni filmidesse integreeritud maalikunstini. Käesolev doktoritöö käsitleb ekfrastiliste kirjelduste ja kujutiste funktsioone kirjanduses ja filmis ning uurib, kuidas ekfraas transformeerib kujutist, juhtides seega tähelepanu materiaalsusele ja kehastumusele. Materiaalsusele orienteeritud analüüs toetub uusmaterialismi teooriatele, millel on kaks eesmärki: esiteks, ületada dualistlikke vastandeid (keha ja vaim, loodus ja kultuur, materiaalsus ja tähendus); ja teiseks, vaidlustada ideed, et materiaalsus on passiivne objekt.

Doktoritöö koosneb viiest peatükist. Esimene peatükk annab ülevaate termini „ekfraas" kasutamisest alates antiikajast kuni tänapäevani. Selles peatükis näitan, et kontseptsiooni dünaamiline areng on seotud muudatustega 20. sajandi diskursiivsetes praktikates, mis on samuti materiaalsed ning tehnoloogia arengutest sõltuvad. Üks tähelepanuväärseid arenguid intermediaalsetes uuringutes on uue mõiste „filmilik ekfraas" kasutuselevõtt, mida vaatlen käesolevas doktoritöös. Teises peatükis töötatakse välja materiaalsusele orienteeritud tüpoloogia, mille eesmärgiks on pakkuda paremat arusaamist erinevatest ekfrastilistest transformatsioonidest. Minu tüpoloogiat on võimalik rakendada nii kirjandusliku kui ka filmiliku ekfraasi analüüsis. Tüpoloogia eesmärgiks on uurida erinevaid viise, kuidas ekfraas vaidlustab dualisme ning toob esile materiaalset agentsust.

Järgnevad peatükid—peatükid 3, 4 ja 5—käsitlevad juhtumianalüüsi vormis ekfraasi kirjanduses ja filmis, kaasa arvatud Pedro Almodóvari „Nahk, milles ma elan" (2011), Nuala Ní Chonchúiri „Alasti" (2009), Ciaran Carsoni „Natüürmort" (2019), Derek Mahoni „Sügistuul" (2010), ja Lars von Trieri „Melanhoolia" (2011). Neid peatükke ühendab eesmärk uurida, kuidas ekfrastilised transformatsioonid vaidlustavad dualistlikke vastandeid. Samas peegeldab peatükkide järjekord materiaalsuse käsitlust mitmel skaalal, alates biokunsti mikroskoopilisest skaalast Almodóvari filmis „Nahk, milles ma elan" kuni inimkogemuse skaalani Carsoni luulekogus „Natüürmort" ning ökoloogiliste protsesside makroskoopilise skaalani von Trieri filmis „Melanhoolia".

Kolmas peatükk keskendub sellele, kuidas filmilik ja kirjanduslik ekfraas transformeerib aktimaale, ületades seega dualistlikke ja soopõhiseid vastandmõisteid, millel aktimaali traditsioon põhineb. Veenuse maali transformatsioon Pedro Almodóvari filmis „Nahk, milles ma elan"—mis hõlmab maali kehastunud taaslavastust—seab kahtluse alla klassikalise esteetika idee, et ideaalne vorm on mateeriast tähtsam ja valitseb selle üle. Ekfraas Almodóvari filmis toob kokku aktimaali traditsiooni ja biokunsti, käsitledes keha materiaalsust mikroskoopilisel tasandil. Ní Chonchúiri novellikogus „Alasti" on aga kõige tähelepanuväärsem ekfrastiline transformatsioon, mis äratab ellu Roy Lichtensteini aktimaali. Seega

pildil kujutatud alasti figuur muutub transgressivseks tegelaseks, mis on ühtaegu materiaalne asi ja elav olend, maal ja naine. Lisaks näitan selles peatükis, et ekfraas paljastab naiste objektistamise protsessi.

Neljas peatükk uurib, kuidas ekfraas Ciaran Carsoni luulekogus „Natüürmort" koondab tähelepanu maalimisele ja kirjutamisele kui kehastunud ja materiaalsetele protsessidele. Claude Monet maali transformatsioon toob fookusesse kunstniku keha, rõhutades selle rolli kunsti protsessis. Sama oluline on see, et Carsoni ekfraas annab edasi luuletaja kehastunud kogemust, tuues välja analoogia maalimise ja kirjutamise vahel. Pannes rõhku kehastunud ja multisensoorsele kogemusele, vaidlustab Carsoni ekfrastiline luule keha-vaimu dualismi, eelkõige ideed, et kunst pärineb kunstniku vaimust, mis on kehast eraldatud.

Viies peatükk nihutab fookuse inimkogemuselt mitteinimlikele asjadele ja ökoloogilistele protsessidele. Peamiseks küsimuseks selles peatükis on, kuidas ekfraas ületab antropotsentrilise arusaama inimagentsusest kui maailmas domineerivast tegurist. Esiteks vaatlen Derek Mahoni luuletusi, näidates, et ekfrastilised transformatsioonid toovad esile erinevate mitteinimlike asjade agentsust ja loovust. Lisaks järeldan, et käsitledes suuremahulisi materiaalseid protsesse, edendab Mahoni ekfrastiline luule ökoloogilist mõtlemist. Teiseks analüüsin, kuidas ekfraas Lars von Trieri filmis „Melanhoolia" transformeerib Pieter Bruegeli maali „Jahimehed lumes" (1565). Ekfraas, mis toob sisse maailma panoraamvaate, võimaldab filmivaatajal lülituda inimkeskselt perspektiivilt suurele pildile, sundides teda mõtlema maailma ökoloogilisele seisundile.

Materiaalsuse analüüs mitmel skaalal—alates mikroskoopilisest kuni makroskoopiliseni—näitab, et ekfraas vaidlustab dualisme ja antropotsentrismi mitmel viisil, rõhutades muu hulgas rakkude agentsust, kehastunud kogemust ja ökoloogilisi protsesse. Seega on ekfraas võimas vahend (ümber) kujundamiseks meie arusaama kunstist ja maailmast.

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