

Intermedial Poetics in Contemporary Anglophone Novels: Re-Negotiating Western Visual Archives

BIRGIT NEUMANN & GABRIELE RIPPL

1. The Right to See

In his study, *Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth Century English Art* (1985), British Caribbean writer David Dabydeen draws attention to the multiplicity of black figures in 18th-century English paintings. Paintings by, for instance, William Hogarth, Joshua Reynolds, John Hamilton Mortimer, and William Turner, are virtually populated with black figures. Typically, these paintings reduce the black figure to the status of an exotic detail (Eckstein 2005) and turn it into a fashionable commodity, i.e., a resource for gestures of superiority and related claims to 'the right to look' by white spectators. The "right to look", writes Nikolas Mirzoeff in his *Counterhistory of Visuality*, is a precondition for "claims of autonomy" and recognition in the political sphere (Mirzoeff 2011, 1). Conversely, the denial of said right amounts to a misrecognition of subjectivity and the denial of political participation.

In his literary work, Dabydeen is committed to re-vising and re-membering Europe's visual archive and to redistributing the right to look. He seeks to bring to the fore the invisibilized memories of violent contact that are encapsulated in the presence of these black figures, while also endowing them with the capacity to see. Hence, his re-visions are directed at making readers "see[] something *other*" (Kanaan xix) and to negotiate the seemingly given and reified boundary between what is visible and what remains invisible. Dabydeen's texts, such as *A Harlot's Progress* (1999), *Turner* (1994) or *Slave Song* (1984) bring to the fore previously invisibilized experiences and activate hidden layers of meaning within actualized interpretations (cf. Neumann / Rippl 2020, 60–85). Rather than merely describing paintings, Dabydeen's texts revise and re-vision them, challenging readers to look beyond conventionalized frames and to reconsider what is being excluded. In so doing, Dabydeen's texts question how images and the archives that contain them produce visibility, suggesting that visibility is produced by an assemblage of discourses, media and norms, which are complicit with power structures.

In this endeavour, Dabydeen is not alone: His work forms part of a large body of postcolonial and transcultural literature – for instance by Teju Cole, Derek Walcott, Salman Rushdie, Jamaica Kincaid, Michael Ondaatje, No Violet Bulawayo, Namwali Serpell, Jane Urquhart, Zadie Smith, Aleksandar Hemon and Katie Kitamura. Their texts abound with references to images. Typically, these intermedial relations come in the form of ekphrastic descriptions of real or imagined paintings and sometimes as reproductions of paintings or photographs inserted into the text. In one way or another, they draw attention to the centrality of world-making beyond the word, while also questioning the right 'to world', which includes the right to see. Hence, the postcolonial and transcultural novels at the heart of this essay partake in the visual turn that Cara L. Lewis (2019) deems characteristic of many contemporary novels – she names, amongst others, the works of W.G. Sebald, Ali Smith, Aleksandar Hemon and Ben Lerner as examples. Yet, they give the visual turn a more specific, namely politicized twist, by highlighting the power of images to construe world-views, produce visibility and organize sociality (cf. Neumann 2015).

In what follows we will first sketch some of the characteristics of the intermedial poetics in novels and then move on to more concrete configurations, namely verbal-visual configurations in postcolonial and transcultural fiction. We argue that many postcolonial and transcultural fictions use intermedial relations to enter into a critical dialogue with established visual archives and their mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Following Michel Foucault (2002) and Jacques Derrida (1996), we understand the archive first and foremost in a metaphorical sense, i.e., as an epistemic and normative framework, “a historical a priori”, that determines the registers of sayability and the respective truth value of discursive claims. Yet, we also go beyond this understanding by arguing that the archive is not exclusively discursively structured and can therefore not be reduced to “a system [...] of enunciability” (Foucault 146). Rather, as research in the field of the visual turn (cf. Benthien/Weingart 2014) indicates, culturally normative archives are also derived from the range of available images, which establish, despite their heterogeneity, a regime of visibility. This regime of visibility perpetuates specific world-views, which are critical in structuring interpretations of reality and in determining forms of social recognition. Thus understood, the regime of visibility, prefigured by visual archives, is akin to Judith Butler’s concept of frames. Frames, according to Butler, mark “[t]he limits of [...] what can appear”; they “circumscribe the domain in which [...] certain kinds of subjects appear as viable actors” (2004, xvii). Like archives, frames are always “politically saturated” (2010, 1), thus regulating forms of inclusion and exclusion in the public sphere. We suggest conceiving of the relation between literary visuality and the visual archive as interdependent and mutually transformative: While literary configurations of the visual are connected to and influenced by the archive, they are never fully determined by it. Rather, due to the liberties afforded by fiction, they can also reflect critically on the visual archive and add new perspectives and novel visibilities to it.

2. Intermediality, Ekphrasis and Verbal-Visual Configurations in the Novel

Over the last thirty years, the research fields intermediality and ekphrasis studies have become a vast and ever-expanding research field (Rippl 2015a) and intermediality has risen to pre-eminence as a central theoretical concept in many disciplines of the humanities. In the broadest sense, the term ‘intermediality’ pays tribute to the fact that media do not exist disconnected from each other; it refers to the relationships between media and is used to describe phenomena which involve more than one medium. Following W. J. T. Mitchell’s claim that there is no such thing as a ‘pure’ medium (1994, 94-95), intermediality research focuses on the connections and interactions between culturally available media and art forms. The unabating popularity and ever-increasing importance of intermediality and ekphrasis studies have also led to rich discussions amongst scholars of the Anglophone novel in general and the Anglophone transcultural novel in particular. In our digital age, many novelists employ intermedial techniques, by either combining and juxtaposing word and images or by referring to images in a plethora of ways (Brosch 2018; Yacobi 2013). An increasing number of scholars as well as novelists recognize the importance of visuality in negotiating constructions of knowledge and identity (Neumann 2015, 2023; Cole 2016). Moreover, word-image configurations have the potential to question epistemologies saturated with power relations; they help to reassess critically the working of archives and ratified narratives of the past, thus opening the way for telling other stories, stories of an unofficial nature that grant recognition of colonial pasts and what has come in their wake. An intermedial aesthetics (Neumann/Rippl 2020) is able to highlight the hegemonic political values, implicit norms and multiple forms of political appropriation words and images can carry, i. e., it showcases the fact that the meanings and social impact of words and images considerably hinge on culturally available apparatuses, institutions and discourses.

Ekphrasis in particular has caught the attention of researchers around the globe. It marks an imaginative encounter between two different media and artforms, i.e., between word and image, literature and painting, photography, sculpture, etc. As verbal renderings of visual phenomena,

ekphrases can refer to absent images or pictures reproduced in the text and take on different lengths and degrees of concreteness: they can be either long and very detailed or short and minimal, i.e., nothing but mere traces and allusions. Werner Wolf (2005) and Irina O. Rajewsky (2005, 2010) have defined ekphrasis as an intermedial phenomenon that denotes the linguistic verbalization/discursive description of or reference to another medium. Going back to Homer's evocation of Achilles' shield in the *Iliad*, the term ekphrasis (Greek *ek* = out and *phrazein* = tell, meaning 'to speak out') originally referred to descriptions of things, persons, places, and pictures for the purpose of *enargeia* in oration (Webb 2009). Having undergone numerous semantic changes over time, ekphrasis is today commonly understood as "*the verbal representation of visual representation*" (Heffernan 1993, 3). As second-degree representations, ekphrases thus always draw attention to themselves, their mode of representation and by implication also to their medial constructedness. Though ekphrases are very prominent in poetry, they have also played and continue to play a central and formative role in many novels. Examples of Anglophone novels that rely on intermedial techniques such as ekphrasis have become a conspicuous feature of novel production in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century (Behluli 2023, Karastathi 2015). In the field of postcolonial and transcultural novels (Neumann/Rippl 2020) prominent examples from India, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Nigeria, the United States of America and Canada are Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) and *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008), Raj Kamal Jha's *Fireproof* (2006), Amitav Ghosh's *The River of Smoke* (2011), Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* (2000), Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* (1990) and *See Now Then* (2013), Aleksandar Hemon's *The Lazarus Project* (2008), Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011), Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* (2013) and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013). These novels are replete with ekphrases and hence characterized by a visual writing-style. The effects of ekphrases in narrative texts are far-reaching and multiple as Liliane Louvel suggests, and fulfil referential, cultural, ideological, didactic and self-referential functions amongst others (2011, 101-133; Rippl 2015b; Behluli forthcoming). While ekphrases in narratives sometimes drive the plot forward, they typically serve to "refocus[...] attention" on a specific visual object, thus decelerating the narrative tempo, including the tempo of the reading process (Karastathi 2015, 109). As a mode of disruption, ekphrasis halts the narrative flow and produces new temporalities that undo conventional forms of plot- and action-driven storytelling, thus offering readers conceptual in-between spaces for reflection and for seeing things differently.

Anglophone novelists, whose life is shaped by experiences of diaspora, migration or transculturality, frequently explore the role of ekphrasis from a political perspective, focusing on notions of hierarchy and legitimacy in the field of cultural representation and on practices of seeing and epistemologies (Döring 2002; Neumann/Rippl 2020). Ekphrases are powerful literary devices to highlight visually encoded regimes of power, socio-political hierarchies and various inequalities that pertain to, for instance, race, gender, class and sexuality. Contemporary Anglophone postcolonial and transcultural novelists are well aware of the powerful effects ekphrasis can have and they use them in abundance. Due to their negotiation of visual practices and the power of images in our global world, ekphrasis helps to open up zones of creative transformation of established orders of the sayable and visible (Rancière 2004). As Birgit Neumann (2015) has pointed out, visual writing strategies and the combination of words and images in literary texts have the potential to create 'spaces of in-betweenness'; they complicate readers' usual way of looking at things, denaturalize cultural orthodoxies and allow for new aesthetic experiences. Due to their experimental and conceptual potential, ekphrastic descriptions can be potent means to push readers to rethink their world views by inviting them to ponder on systems of value and belief, cultural hierarchies, and socio-political realities. By investigating today's word-image configurations, by renegotiating cultural hierarchies, and finally by extending the notion of ekphrasis itself through 'politicizing' and 'transculturizing' this visual writing mode, the novelists discussed in this article do both: they open up the ekphrastic literary canon and enable negotiations of transcultural connectivity, global entanglements, cross-cultural encounters and aesthetic networks that have characterized our world in the past and today.

3. Verbal-Visual Configurations in Postcolonial and Transcultural Novels: Transcultural and Decolonial Remembering

Verbal-visual configurations in postcolonial and transcultural novels come in many different forms and they fulfil a range of diverse functions (for an overview see Neumann/Rippl 2020). This multiplicity notwithstanding, there are some shared concerns and features that allow us to consider verbal-visual configurations in postcolonial and transcultural fiction within a larger, comprehensive theoretical framework. This framework is grounded in the insight that postcolonial and transcultural novels are particularly interested in negotiating constructions of otherness and difference, including their effects on socio-political relations and hierarchies. As postcolonial theory has taught us, constructions of otherness and difference are never neutral; rather, within colonial and neo-colonial histories, they are complicit with power structures and can be mobilized in multiple ways to construe as well as legitimize cultural asymmetries. Importantly, this general interest in otherness and difference resonates with the aesthetics of intermediality, which, understood in a minimal sense, relies on the mingling of different media. Intermedial links have self-reflexive potential, and they throw into relief the specificities or the otherness of a distinct medium. Following the insights formulated by W. J. T. Mitchell and Tobias Döring (2002, 159), we argue that many postcolonial and transcultural novels mobilize the semiotic and material difference that intermedial relations inevitably produce and use it metonymically to probe the meanings of cultural otherness. That is to say that postcolonial and transcultural narratives activate the differences between and specificities of media to negotiate various forms of cultural otherness and to gauge how difference functions – how it is used, manipulated and misused – within larger socio-political, epistemic and affective constellations (Neumann 2015; Neumann/Rippl 2020). Implicated in a dynamic of connection and difference, intermedial relations, in particular when referring to actual images, open up a space in which politically resonant revisions of dominant visual regimes become possible. The evocation of (factual) images offers room for new interpretations and for bringing visibility to experiences as well as agents that have thus far fallen outside the culturally operative archive. Indeed, a range of postcolonial and transcultural novels – Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* (1992) and *The Cat’s Table* (2011), Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981) and Teju Cole’s *Open City* (2011) are prominent examples – engage critically with archives of Euro-American images and the imaginaries they imply to take issue with the kind of visibility, understood as a precondition of social recognition, they produce.

Given the potential of verbal-visual configurations to stage a battle, which flaunts media-specific capacities, it is unsurprising that intermedial constellations have frequently been interpreted as a struggle for power and dominance. The topical concept of the ‘paragone’ encapsulates this power-driven understanding of intermedial configurations. Mark Currie summarizes (1998, 129): “The subject is often broached in terms of a kind of power struggle between words and images, or through the broad idea that words are somehow on the retreat in an age which is dominated by images.” Yet, it is important to note that, on the level of form, such intermedial revisions and re-inscriptions cannot necessarily be reduced to their antagonistic oppositional stance. Intermediality is a formal device, and form is open and ambivalent, a process of shape-giving rather than a structure or ontology, that defies closure and cannot be determined by content alone. The interplay between words and images should therefore also be considered as a genuinely pluralizing aesthetic form, striving towards exchange, transgression and energizing fusion, however conflictual said exchange might be. Intermediality thrives on various forms of attachment and constitutes a multi-layered configuration of relationality, which often dismantles facile dualisms of self and other. To give just one example: In the novel, the ekphrastic engagement with images introduces descriptive and pictorial devices into the verbal text (cf. Louvel 2011, 247), which do not so much indicate an underlying fear or ambivalence about others (Mitchell 1994, 163). Rather, on the level of form, this engagement primarily promotes and legitimizes hybridizing modes of writing. Descriptive and

pictorial strategies constitute the winking “eye of the text”, as Liliane Louvel (60) elegantly puts it, inviting readers to see through the surface of textual narratives and consider the word from the perspective of the visual, and vice versa.

Based on these remarks, intermedial aesthetics can best be understood as an open, differential form of connectivity, which brings literature into a transformative relationship with the signifying and affective potential of images (cf. Neumann 2023a, b). Irina Rajewsky rightly suggests conceiving of intermedial references as ‘as-if’ constellations. While a medium may “generate an illusion of another medium’s specific practice,” there inevitably remains an “intermedial gap” between the attempted enactment of the medium and the medium itself (Rajewsky 2005, 55). Intermediality connects literature to other media and creates multiple forms of attachment; but in so doing it also introduces friction, difference and change, which can be harnessed as a springboard for validating new visibilities.¹ Projecting the particularities of one medium onto another, verbal-visual configurations consistently fuse the sayable with the seeable. Thus, they highlight the need for pluralizing modes of signification, which escape attempts of reifying meaning and that disrupt what Rancière, in *The Future of the Image* (7), calls “the identitarian alterity of resemblance”.

In a more specific sense and with an eye to some topical concerns of post-colonial and transcultural fiction, the differential connectivity enabled by intermediality serves as an operating principle of cultural memory in general and of transcultural as well as decolonial memory in particular: References to (actual) images in the novel always entail processes of remembering, a kind of remembering that is inevitably creative and transformative, geared towards the changed needs of the present and thus thriving on complex temporal interrelations. Located within distinct cultural contexts, intermedial references remember visual artefacts to examine their meanings and impact in the present; a visual artefact thus “becomes a co-actor as past histories linger in the present moment” (Lewis 2019, 133). Rather than describing existing images, intermedial references in postcolonial and transcultural fiction examine what kind of visibility is produced by images and how the interplay between visibility and invisibility intersects with forms of recognition in the socio-political sphere. Ekphrasis as a rhetorical device opens up a conceptual space that enables transcultural memory, i.e., memory that includes the stories produced by postcolonial and transcultural lives. Thereby, it reconfigures official national memories and visual archives. A range of contemporary Anglophone transcultural novels, for instance, Taiye Selasi’s above-mentioned *Ghana Must Go*, employ ekphrasis to revisit national archives of traumatic memories that often exclude or repress subaltern memories of specific social and ethnic groups. Ekphrastic negotiations of visual works of art and artefacts bring about a transculturation of memory, i.e., a memory that travels across cultures and takes on new meaning. Time and again, such cases of ekphrasis negotiate on the one hand personal traumas concerning cultural assimilation and immigration and on the other hand crimes against humanity and violent conflicts of a political and historical nature (the Holocaust, colonial clashes, slavery, etc.). This is also the case in Aleksandar Hemon’s novel *The Lazarus Project*, which revises the official visual archive of the Chicago Police Department (see in-depth discussion below) by ekphrastically working through US-American hegemonic visuality, xenophobia and racism around 1900. Ekphrasis as a memory and memorial device transculturates remembering and considerably enlarges the presented official archive by taking the memories triggered by the police photographs on a trip through Eastern Europe.

In other novels, the transculturalization of remembering takes on more a specific form, as intermediality is used to make a step towards decolonizing the visual archive. Decolonial, in this context, references a more even distribution of agency and visibility. It embraces local and differential modes of knowing and seeing, which, to quote Mignolo and Walsh (2018), “contest the totalizing claims and political-epistemic violence of modernity” (1). In a more concrete sense, one might suggest that intermedial references in postcolonial and transcultural fiction address (neo-)colonial ideologies, norms and tacit knowledges inscribed in specific artworks and explore how these ideologies affect understandings of race, gender, sexuality and citizenship in the present; they interrogate instances of historical erasure as well as ‘blind spots’ in the archive. Moreover, they also show how the

principles of inclusion and exclusion underlying the archive cause ongoing social injustices, emerging from the precarious tension between hypervisibility (for instance, of PoC in the public sphere) and invisibility (e.g., related to political participation). Such intermedial renegotiations therefore frequently respond to the norms of previously marginalized groups and their demands for the ‘right to represent’ and be represented on their own terms (see Rigney 2022, 12). This is also to say that, by means of their intermedial poetics, postcolonial and transcultural novels “create a transformed mnemonic space” (Lachmann 2008, 303), in which new voices, novel visual orders and alternative experiences can emerge. Importantly, decolonizing the visual archive in and through intermedial constellations not only involves an interrogation of western-centric forms of representation and a reconsideration of archival authority. Rather, it also often goes hand in hand with an interrogation of Euro-American notions of the archive itself, understood as exclusionary infrastructure, built on principles of “collecting, classifying, and isolating” (Cushman 116). To decolonize the archive, Cushman (117) perceptively observes, also entails a critical engagement with the epistemic structures, many of which are implicated in colonial orders, that inform them. One powerful way in which postcolonial and transcultural novels may challenge conventional notions of the visual archive is, for instance, the integration of (reproductions) of photos, which are offered as a more mobile and possibly easier accessible alternative to the institutionalized colonial and hegemonic archives.

A range of texts such as Teju Cole’s *Open City* (2011) and *Everyday is for the Thief* (2007), Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), Jamaica Kincaid’s *Lucy* (1990), as well as Katie Kitamura’s *Intimacies* (2021) are committed to re-vising and re-visioning hegemonic visual archives from an ex-centric perspective to reveal previously hidden experiences. These texts explore some of the exclusionary principles of the Euro- and American-centric archives, but they also gauge how specific visual artefacts of these archives are implicated in colonialism and neo-colonial hegemonies and accordingly privilege specific ways of knowing, being, and belonging. As our following sample interpretations of Aleksandar Hemon and Katie Kitamura’s *Intimacies* will show, these novels activate intermedial relations to subject existing visual artefacts to the transformative and differential influence afforded by literary visuality.

4. Aleksandar Hemon’s *The Lazarus Project*: Complicating Visual Archives

In our day and age, when digital media facilitate combining words and images, contemporary narratives are often characterized by new intermedial shapes that attract contemporary readers (cf. Hepburn 2010, 3; Lewis 2019, 130; Beckman and Weissberg 2013, xii–xiii; Behluli forthcoming). However, as Liliane Louvel convincingly argues, literary scholars working in the field of word-and-image studies have focused more often on painting-text relations than on photography-text interfaces (Louvel 2008, 32). It is striking that even though photography no longer comes in analogue form, the photographic image is still broadly understood as an objective documentary form. NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names* (2013) and Teju Cole’s *Open City* (2011) are both excellent examples of how contemporary novelists interested in today’s pressing political issues negotiate this notion and employ ekphrases of photographs (which are not reproduced in their novels) to evoke a resonant scenario of the ethics of seeing, documenting and witnessing. In his travelogue *Every Day is for the Thief* (2007/2014), Cole, for instance, includes hazy and blurred photographs which serve his goal of making visible a complex network of subaltern histories, transitory experiences and liminal spaces, thus making room for creative re-visions of how politics influences the shape and content of archives. Bulawayo’s and Cole’s novels invite readers to ponder the question of who is represented and recognized and who is not.

This part of our article focusses on Aleksandar Hemon’s award-winning (autobiographical) novel *The Lazarus Project* (2008) and its cultural work of revisiting and re-negotiating visual archives. Sarajevo-born and since 1992 Chicago-based writer Hemon discusses U.S. immigration, xenophobia and anti-semitic anxieties around 1900 and 2000 and offers with his novel a prime example

of an intermedial transcultural narrative that includes ekphrases and 23 black-and-white photographs, seven of which are historical ones, originally published in the *Chicago Daily News* between 1904 and 1919. In an exchange with Cole, Hemon gives about his take on photography-text relations: “I always thought that Sebald used photographs in his books in order to expose their failure as documents. He places photos to interrupt narration so as to show that they mean nothing unless they are inside storytelling. Photographs might be self-authenticating (as Roland Barthes thought), but their authentic truth is available only in language, as practiced in narration.” (Hemon in Cole 2016, 81) He goes on to ponder on how to best connect with the past: “The only way to have an organic connection with the past is by way of narration” (Hemon in Cole 2016, 81), and exactly this is the project he pursues with his novel. Hemon uses black-and-white photographs in a way that has “imprecise connections to the text” (Cole 2016, 82): “In *The Lazarus Project*, I wanted to engage the reader into confronting the history as signified by the photos in the story. And I wanted to stretch the book between the (arbitrary) poles of subjectivity and objectivity [...], so I wanted the photos to cover the same range, too – but only to complicate readers’ ideas and perception” (Hemon in Cole 2016, 83). While “[t]he commonsense view would be that photography operates as a visual supplement (illustration) of the text” (Adams 2000: xxi) and that the photographic pictures reinforce the message conveyed by words, it is precisely this combination which is being subverted in *The Lazarus Project*; it is the words that try to fill the gaps in the official archive and endow the subaltern with a voice.

As the title of Hemon’s novel indicates, this novelist’s Lazarus project is about bringing back to life a dead person, an innocent young Jewish immigrant, refugee and 1903 pogrom survivor named Lazarus Averbuch from Kishinev (back then in the Russian Empire, today the Republic of Moldova), who was shot by the Chicago police on March 2, 1908, while trying to deliver a letter to the Chief of Police. Unlike the biblical story in the New Testament from which the novel’s epigraph is taken, Hemon can of course not bring his Lazarus back to life by shouting ‘Lazarus, come forth’, the way Jesus did, but his narrative is dedicated to refreshing the memory of this immigrant’s bleak life and unjustified brutal killing around 1900, which stands for many others. As Hemon explains, “[i]t started with two images of the dead Lazarus Averbuch sitting in a chair, being triumphantly offered by a blazingly white policeman to the American public. In 1908 these photos were supposed to show that his alleged anarchist proclivities were visible in his body and that foreign life in said body was successfully terminated by law and order.” (Hemon in Cole 2016, 83) In addition to its reference to the Bible, Averbuch’s first name is also an ironic reference to “The New Colossus” (1883), American poet Emma Lazarus’s well-known ekphrastic sonnet. In 1903 it was engraved on a bronze plaque for the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, ‘Mother of Exiles’, which symbolically welcomes immigrants upon their arrival:

The New Colossus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame
 With conquering limbs astride from land to land
 Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
 A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
 Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
 Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
 Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
 The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.

“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she
 With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,
 Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
 The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
 Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
 I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

Hemon blends the historical events in Chicago at the beginning of the twentieth century with contemporary immigration politics, value systems, patriotism, and anxieties in the USA today, for instance, when the narrator-protagonist Brik (the author's *alter ego*) claims: "The war against anarchism was much like the current war on terror – funny how old habits never die" (Hemon 2008, 42). Like Averbuch, Brik is an immigrant and diasporic person who struggles with constructing his transcultural identity. Brik's companion on his travels to Ukraine and Moldova, where he tries to find out more about Averbuch's life, is his photographer-friend Rora, who supposedly shot many of the photos included in the novel. However, already on the book's title page, directly below the novel's title and the author's name, it says: "With photographs by Velibor Bo•ovic and from the Chicago Historical Society". It is deliberately left unclear which photos are historical and which were taken by Bo•ovic (only the picture credits at the end of the text provide clarification). Like the historical photos, Rora's alias Bo•ovic's photos capture moments of the trip are black-and-white with black borders. This is reminiscent of old photo albums, an impression that is further supported by additional black pages Hemon had added to the book. The photographs fragment the text due to their position between the chapters, which demands readers to actively link them to the text. However, despite the ekphrases provided once in a while in the novel, the logical connection between text and photo is very often unclear. This is, for instance, the case with the photo on page 24 and its ekphrastic description: "Assistant chief of police Schuettler [...] carefully steps over the carmine blood puddle, shaped like an obscure ocean on the light maple floor, to land on the carpet where the young man's body lays supine" (Hemon 2008, 25). Even though the quality of the photograph's reproduction is poor, one can spot white X marks characterizing the picture as a crime scene. But neither the pool of blood nor Averbuch's dead body are visible in the photograph. Hemon's novel with its word-photography figurations and allusive, trace-like ekphrases engages in social and political discourse and invites readers to participate in meaning-making processes by contemplating possible links between words and photographs and to question commonly accepted views on these intermedial figurations.

The photographs mostly depict seemingly random scenes of American, Ukrainian and Moldovan peripatetic everyday lives: cityscapes, transitory spaces such as streets poorly lit at night, houses and interiors, portraits, police portraits, the picture of a dog, landscapes and Jewish graves. These photographic motifs remind readers of both: the state of Averbuch's liminal position and the narrator-protagonist's own state of in-between-ness. The choice of a black-and-white format for the new photographs shot by Bo•ovic historicizes many of the depicted scenes. One of the most striking features of the photographs in Hemon's novel is that they reveal as much as they hide: the grainy quality thwarts clear vision. By virtue of it being "a trace, something directly stenciled off the real" (Sontag 1979, 154), the photograph is conventionally linked to objectivity, evidence, "authentication" (Barthes 2000, 87), testimony and memory (Marsh 2003, 13). But the evidentiary nature of photographs is constantly called into question. The photographs remain mysterious and their links to the text most often ungraspable, hence establishing their meaning can never come to a final conclusion. Bo•ovic's photographs energetically defer any voyeuristic appropriation and consumption and open up different historical times. Also due to the lack of captions, it is difficult to penetrate the surface of the photographs: Who are these people that we see? Where exactly are the places that we see? In what context has a specific photograph been taken? Step by step, the dynamic interplay between narrative and photograph renders visible a complex network of subaltern histories, transitory experiences and liminal spaces, *The Lazarus Project* makes room for creative re-visions.

Putting a spotlight on the selection mechanisms that structure scopic regimes, Hemon's intermedial aesthetics creatively and subversively reimagines archives and epistemes. *The Lazarus Project* makes room for new forms of identification, which authorize minority or subaltern perspectives and offers itself as an imaginative reconfiguration of the field of American (as well as Russian, Ukrainian and Moldovan) visuality by juxtaposing several temporal layers. By creating disjunctive temporalities,

the narrative brings the past into the present. The latency of a largely unresolved past conjures up the histories of racial violence that underlie American immigrant experiences of modernity and that persist in the present in various forms of socio-political inequality. In her study *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016), Christina Sharpe has developed ‘the wake’ into a conceptual frame for analysing racism against Black life. Lending from her this important frame, Hemon’s narrative can be said to also engage in ‘wake work’, work that deals with American racist violence and brutalities of the past that emerge in the present. Being an immigrant himself and choosing a Bosnian-American *alter ego* for his novel named Brik, who left Sarajevo in 1992 when the war broke out, Hemon negotiates “absences in the archives” and tries to make sense of the “partial truths of the archives [...] their silences, absences, and modes of dis/appearance” (Sharpe 2016, 12). Like so many other postcolonial and transcultural writers, Hemon’s art memorializes racist events that are not over but stand as warning signs for contemporary xenophobia, thus providing a particular intermedial way of “re/seeing, re/inhabiting and re/imagining the world” (Sharpe 2016, 22). By taking as a topic America’s immigration politics and by travelling to Averbuch’s native land, Hemon helps to ‘re-write’ the official police archive by examining the archive of American fears of foreigners and anarchists. Hemon’s creative intermedial intervention thus problematizes the official visual archive and its underlying political orders. His intermedial narrative with its interspersed photographs and ekphrases is suspicious of official archives and their power of documentation, thus highlighting verbally and discursively that which is omitted, and adding pictures and stories that are not stored in the official archives.

5. Katie Kitamura’s *Intimacies*: Countering Mnemonic Invisibilities

Katie Kitamura’s novel *Intimacies* features a female protagonist, serving as the auto-diegetic narrator, who has left New York behind to take up a position as a staff interpreter at the Court in The Hague. Eventually, she is required to interpret for a former West African president, “one of the higher profile cases at the Court” (Kitamura 145), who is accused of crimes against humanity. Terms referencing the president’s alleged crimes, such as “*cross-border raid, mass grave, armed youth*” (117), pervade the novel; much like ghosts they demand recognition, but ultimately defy interpretation, pushing the translator to the point at which “[l]anguage loses its meaning” (116). What, *Intimacies* explores, are the cognitive and affective costs shouldered by the translator who is required “not simply to state or perform but to repeat the unspeakable” (186). How, the novel asks, does the repetition of the unspeakable affect the translator’s subjectivity? As the novel, step by step, foregrounds the emotional burden of interpretation, it raises some uncomfortable questions concerning the (in-)visibility of those who sustain political and social life in the West. Ekphrasis, we argue, becomes a central device to counter the invisibilities and invisibilizations integral to western socio-political orders, including the institutions and infrastructures that support them.

From the novel’s beginning, the narrator is presented as a rootless subject; her family, as stressed several times, is of non-western origin and she, according to one character, does “not truly” belong to “the West” (211). She uneasily inhabits the shifting places between cultures, not knowing what or where home is: Following her father’s death, her mother moved to Singapore, and she “was happy to be away from New York”, a city that had “become disorienting” to her (1). Terms indicating alienation and non-belonging abound on the first pages, and the fact that the protagonist remains nameless throughout adds to the sense of strangeness that the opening establishes. And yet, this set of affects is soon superseded by a second one, centred around different forms of intimacy. Indeed, the words “intimate”, “intimacy” and “intimacies” pervade Kitamura’s novel, navigating, as they do, the intersections between privacy, proximity and desire. In the novel, intimacies are evoked to describe friendships, the desire for closeness, the longing for quietness and the experience of trust. But throughout, as if to refer back to the strangeness that the novel thrives on from its beginning, intimacies also mark unintentional and even unwanted forms of closeness, such as the overhearing of conversations, offensive touches, and disturbing revelations. Intimacies frequently turn into intimidations.

Intriguingly, in Kitamura's novel, different forms of intimacies are not only a topical concern but also serve as a method and organizing principle for linking seemingly different historical experiences and distant spaces. As a matter of fact, the novel resonates with Lisa Lowe's (2015) historiographic take on intimacies, which she uses as a methodology – a means of reading the archive against the grain – to bring to the fore unexpected and unseen connections between colonialism, slavery, imperial trade and western liberalism. It is at this point that the novel's ekphrases become critical as they make readable the histories that lie hidden beneath the surface. The novel uses ekphrastic devices to expose and counter socio-politically unquestioned, at times even structurally supported invisibilities. This intervention manifests nowhere more pronouncedly than in the narrator's recollection of an exhibition opening at the Mauritshuis, a well-known art museum in The Hague. The museum, a major Dutch heritage site, famously houses the Royal Cabinet of Paintings, which contains many famous works of the so-called Dutch Golden Age, by, for instance, Johannes Vermeer, Rembrandt and Hans Holbein the Younger. In a central scene, the female protagonist observes the exhibition's visitors, many of whom are "dressed in designer brands" and gather around the bust of Johan Maurits. The expenses that have gone into the designer clothes clash uneasily with the narrator's claim that Maurits "founded the museum with a fortune built from the transatlantic slave trade and the expansion of Dutch Brazil." (Kitamura 124) According to the narrator, the marble bust, ordered in 1664 by Maurits himself and produced by the Flemish sculptor Bartholomeus Eggers, depicts the former "slave trader and colonialist" in a highly triumphalist manner: "Maurits appeared particularly pompous in this rendering by Bartholomeus Eggers, with his jowls and pursed lips and ornate dress. He stared into space, one hand splayed across his front." (124) In what follows, Kitamura uses the space provided by the narrative to remember the transatlantic slave trade and to highlight the extent to which Europe's wealth, its institutions and cultures, relies on the exploitation of slaves, i.e., the turning of Black persons into commodities ruthlessly harnessed to maximize profit.

It is important to note that this act of decolonial re-membering not only manifests on the level of content but also on that of form. The ekphrastic engagement with the bust builds on descriptive and reflective devices, which do not feed into the progressive, sequential temporality of narrative. More specifically, the description of and reflection on the bust interrupt the flow of the narrative, "caught", according to Peter Brooks, "in an irreversible and ever-accelerating process of change" (136), and creates a non-progressive temporality. Arguably, the progressive temporality enshrined in linear narrative has been central to forging notions of progress and development, underlying western concepts of modernity. To be sure, we are not claiming that there is any intrinsic, causal connection between narrative and western modernity; yet, as many have argued before us, (linear and chronological) narrative promotes a specific kind of temporality, which is complicit with configurations of modern progress. Postcolonial scholars in particular (see Chakrabarty 2000, 2009; Cheah 2016) have highlighted that the teleological time of western modernity made possible different, but inter-related forms of "colonial violence" and "capitalist exploitation" (Cheah 2016, 12). Against this backdrop, Kitamura's ekphrasis-cum-reflection can be understood as a valorization of an alternative, non-sequential temporality that resists notions of progress to make room for previously marginalized and ignored histories of violence (see Baumbach/Neumann 2023). In other words, the temporality produced by the ekphrasis constitutes an intervention into dominant temporal regimes, including the contemporary 'economy of attention' and attendant forms of overlooking, ignoring and forgetting. Such forgetting and indifference seem to be omnipresent, as the narrator makes clear. In her characteristically neutral tone, she notes: "Although the bust was surrounded by guests, no one seemed to pay it any mind, the history present but unconsidered. As I watched, a man in a suit yawned and brushed against the bust before righting himself again." (Kitamura 124)

Very much in the sense of Jacques Rancière's *Figures of History* (2014), then, Kitamura's novel *Intimacies* activates ekphrases to address erasures and gaps in the archive, thus renegotiating the lines between visibility and invisibility. In his essay "The Threshold of the Visible", Rancière states: "If

there is a visible hidden beneath the invisible, it's not the electric arc that will reveal it, save it from non-being, but the *mise en scène* of words, the moment of dialogue between the voice that makes those words ring out and the silence of images that show the absence of what the words say." (44) It is precisely the "dialogue between the voice" and "the silence of images" that, in the novel, makes it possible to reinscribe into the western cultural spaces forgotten histories and reveal connections, the titular 'intimacies', between seemingly disparate spaces, i.e., the museum and slave plantations in Dutch Brazil. Indeed, such decolonizing remembrance enables what Cardina and Rodrigues call "mnemonic transitions", marking shifts in memory cultures that are directed towards more inclusive forms of representation as well as greater epistemic and social justice. The narrator's insistent demand to remember the slave trade and to see it as integral to Europe's 'civilization' therefore also ties in with the novel's main topic: It takes issue with the international division of labour, including its continuous processes of invisibilization, asking readers to acknowledge the persons and procedures upon which western wealth and life-styles rely. The central right pertaining to privileged people consists in the right to ignore what or who lies hidden beneath the visible - and it is this right that *Intimacies* energetically contests.

6. Coda

According to Mirzoeff, "the visibility of visibility is an index of crisis" (6); following the literary examples, we would argue that the visibility of visibility as achieved through intermediality is an index of and precondition for change. Intermediality makes room for re-remembering and reform through changing, from within, those forms that underlie and possibly sustain collectivities (cf. Kornbluh 2019). Intermediality offers ways of re-remembering that reach out to others, calling for the acceptance of other visions, without glossing over plurality and conflict (Neumann 2023b). Intermediality does important cultural work as it has the potential to decolonize and transculturize western visual archives and enable mnemonic transition to other, more socially just narratives of the past. Ekphrastic negotiations of visual works of art and artefacts in particular, bring about a transculturation of memory, i.e., a memory that travels across cultures and takes on new meaning according to the changed needs of the present. Ekphrasis as a memorial device transculturates re-remembering and considerably complicates colonial and other hegemonic visual archives. Hemon's *The Lazarus Project* as well as Kitamura's *Intimacies* both negotiate the relation between literary visibility and the visual archive as interdependent and mutually transformative. Their word-image configurations are connected to and influenced by official visual archives, but they are not fully determined by them. In fact, thriving on the liberties of fiction, they reflect critically on visual archives, adding fresh perspectives and novel visibilities to them, and thus offer themselves as complementary or even counter-archives.

University of Düsseldorf, Germany
University of Bern, Switzerland

Notes

¹ Irina Rajewsky understands intermedial references as 'as-if' constellations. While a medium may "generate an illusion of another medium's specific practice," there inevitably remains an "intermedial gap" between the attempted enactment of the medium and the medium itself (Rajewsky 2005, 55).

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