JOSC 8 (1) pp. 81–95 Intellect Limited 2017

Journal of Screenwriting
Volume 8 Number 1
 doi: 10.1386/josc.8.1.81_1

PABLO GONÇALO
University of Brasília

Film in words/words in pictures: Ekphrasis modulations in Peter Handke and Wim Wenders' cinematic collaborations

ABSTRACT

The article considers a connection between the theories of ekphrasis/enargeia and screenplay studies and investigates how two different ekphrasis traditions are combined in the film Wings of Desire *(1986) in the partnership between its screenwriters, Peter Handke and Wim Wenders. It begins with a brief review of these concepts in Greco-Roman oratory, then moves on to address ekphrasis in media. More specifically, ekphrasis is broached in Peter Handke's theatre and literary works, which evolve into his screenwriting for Wim Wenders' films. The article also contrasts the first draft of the screenplay for* Wings of Desire *with the final film, as it shares and analyses sections of Handke's verses that are excluded from Wenders' final film.*

KEYWORDS

ekphrasis
script
new German cinema
Wings of Desire
Wim Wenders
Peter Handke

This article aims to reframe debates concerning ekphrasis (the verbal representation of the visual) by applying it to the relationship between screenplay

and film, and screenwriter and director. It will examine the ekphrastic tradition via the preparatory phases of film realization, including collaboration and screenwriting. First, it will review the working relationship between writer and screenwriter Peter Handke and filmmaker Wim Wenders and demonstrate how both employ differing ekphrasis traditions, while also embodying the tension between voice, word and image in each one of their joint artistic endeavours. Second, it will take on a more conceptual approach to the relationship between ekphrasis and the writing of a screenplay wherein, based on Peter Handke's experiments using literature and media, it will consider aesthetic aspects of the transition from word to image in his works. Finally, this article will contribute an interpretation of the film *Der Himmel* über *Berlin* (*Wings of Desire*) (1986) by analysing its various screenplay drafts found in the Deutsches Kinemathek, in Berlin, and at the Deutsches Literatur Archiv, in Marbach, which houses a part of the Peter Handke archives. These screenplay drafts cast a revealing light upon the concept of ekphrasis, such as it occurs in the transition from script to screen. This emphasis on the screenplay as a conceptual meeting point for Handke and Wenders has been discussed previously, and the creative partnership has been discussed in previous academic works (Brady and Leal 2012: 13–34). However, none of those texts directly analyse the script as a medium, an archival record of the development process, or as a starting point for a detailed and precise interpretation of the joint process of realization and writing, between text and film.

Wings of Desire is the fourth film yielded by the long-standing partnership between Handke and Wenders, and is regarded by critics and audiences as its most fruitful product. This partnership initially began with the short *Three American Lps* (1969), and then the two feature films – *The Goalkeeper's Fear of the Penalty* (1972), based on a novel by Handke, and *Wrong Move* (1975), in which Handke tackles a free adaptation of Goethe's *Bildungsroman Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (2015). In the course of each of these films, the juxtaposition and convergence of words and images (screenplay text and film text) is specifically explored in scenes and sequences, and subsequently becomes one of the most important characteristic features of their partnership. This article, therefore, suggests that, in *Wings of Desire*, the passages and coexistence between enargeia and ekphrasis become modulated in a visual way.

EKPHRASIS AND ENARGEIA

In conceptual terms, we can summarize ekphrasis as 'the verbal representation of visual representation' (Heffernan 1993: 03), and it can also be defined as image that is later reconstructed with verbal description. It is interesting to note that these descriptions mention transmutations or transitions between words and images, like metamorphoses that are intimately connected to the cinematographic experience. The long tradition of ekphrasis and enargeia describes the conjuring of mental images, which are 'themselves both present in the imagination and absent from the world perceived by the senses' (Webb 2009: 169). Therefore, ekphrases lead us to a dynamic and complex play between presence and absence. It includes some concrete materiality – as a medium: a voice, an oral narration, a book, a picture or even a film that sets off the imagination of the audience, the readers and the spectators. What makes ekphrasis pertinent is sense of lack, or a gap, which is also a link between the event, its transmission and its reception. The ekphrasis, then, is located not