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Writing as a Spatiotemporal Concept: Ekphrasis of Place and the Spatial Turn

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Abstract

Ever since Lessing wrote his *Laocoön* many critics have classified painting as a solely spatial art and writing as a solely temporal one. However, in recent years the idea of the spatial turn, of space not fitting into only one category, has sparked new critiques as to what defines art. In this paper, I prove that, by using ekphrasis of place, writing is a spatiotemporal art, meaning it depicts both space and time. This argument is supported by evidence from literary critics, notably Joseph Frank, and pieces of poetry and prose in which ekphrasis of place is used. Through this support, writing is shown to be a spatiotemporal art and the importance of interdisciplinary studies is highlighted.

The Initial Argument Against Lessing

In human nature there is a desire for expression, a need to show what we as individuals or groups know, and to interpret this information for others use. Thus, the arts exist. At its core art is the medium of expression, of displaying all concepts and ideas that humans can create to others. However, within the realm of art there are subcategories or branches, for just as long as humans have had the desire for expression they have also had the desire to organize those expressions. Thus, the arts are divided into multiple categories; film, painting, sculpture, writing, music, theater, etc. Each category is its own specific branch on the artistic tree. Now, among these categories there are two in particular that have baffled humanity and literary theorists for centuries, the arts of painting and writing.

At first glance, such bafflement between two similar arts is puzzling. They both express an artist's personal vision, they both create images and inspiration within others, and they have both influenced one another in an almost endless cycle where painting has inspired written

expression and writing has in turn developed paintings. However, despite these similarities between such two distinct branches numerous literary critics have argued over exactly what other concepts writing and painting must align with. It is difficult to pinpoint when exactly people began to stubbornly organize writing and painting, but it is highly probable that Lessing's famous *Laocoön* played a major role in their separation when he discussed the essential differences that divide painting from poetry (a form of writing). Lessing states that:

The difficulty must be this: although both subjects, being visible, are equally suitable for actual painting, there is still this essential difference between them: in the one case [writing] the action is visible and progressive, its different parts occurring one after the other in a sequence of time, and in the other [painting] the action is visible and stationary, its different parts developing in co-existence in space. (Lessing 77)

Lessing, in his attempt to make sense of poetry and painting, aligns them with the already existing universal concepts of time and space. Literary critics have then taken this idea of spatial painting and temporal writing and encouraged their separation, so that even today arguments erupt over whether writing is a solely temporal art and painting is a solely spatial one.

However, the idea of writing as a solely temporal concept and of painting as a solely spatial concept is fundamentally flawed. While writing may be a mainly temporal concept, it is also a spatial one based on the idea of ekphrasis. Writing is a spatiotemporal concept. This spatial turn, the notion that space is not solely aligned with one single subject, but can be aligned with multiple concepts, stems from the idea and usage of ekphrasis in the modern world. Ekphrasis is a complicated subject in and of itself, as theorists cannot seem to decide on which of two versions of ekphrasis to use, the classical definition or the modern interpretation. The modern interpretation can be simply defined as “the description of works of art,” making ekphrasis any written description of a piece of art, such as a painting (Koelb 19). However, ekphrasis in the classical sense is defined as a written expression or speech that “had to do with a notion of vividness that makes imaginative eyewitnesses of the audience,” making the concept

much broader than just physical art (Koelb 19). Depending on which definition one decides to use ekphrasis can either be a simplified, categorized concept, much like the modern concepts of writing and painting, or ekphrasis can be this grand generalization that seeks to explain and name an idea that humanity shares, much like art in general. Ekphrasis can be used purely to describe art forms, but it can also be used to describe all worldly expressions, including art forms.

Critiquing writing through the classical lens not only gives readers a broader view of imagery, but it also brings readers closer to the concepts people were trying to describe when ekphrasis was first defined and used critically. The classical definition was used in society and taught as “an advanced exercise for older boys” throughout the middle ages, creating generations of scholars who only viewed written ekphrasis with the classical definition, and no other, in mind (Koelb 21). It was not until some point in the modern era that the definition of ekphrasis changed into only describing art forms. Therefore, ekphrasis should be used more in terms of the classical definition, as the modern definition is just another way to simplify a complex subject that does not need to be defined in a simple manner. It is easier to label the modern definition as a branch of ekphrasis, as just one way ekphrasis can be used, rather than using the modern definition in critical analysis of all written forms. For example, using a term such as ekphrasis of painting, the written description of a painting, or ekphrasis of statuary, the written description of a statue, or some other such idea would allow for the concept of ekphrasis to be both used the way it has been used for millennia, and to help modern critics make sense of ekphrasis in general.

Therefore, ekphrasis should always be defined in its classical sense, but can then be narrowed by the author into a more specific branch, like the field of art as was discussed earlier. Through this definition ekphrasis can be used to describe a variety of concepts and forms of expression or art. Thus, the concept of ekphrasis of place, of writing used to describe and transmit the vividness of

a place, exists and can be used as evidence against the idea of writing as a solely temporal concept.

If writing was a solely temporal art, then writers would not be able to create either space or place through their words. However, this would be a weak argument against Lessing's claims that "Objects or parts of objects which exist in space are called bodies. Accordingly, bodies with their visible properties are the true subjects of painting. Objects or parts of objects which follow one another are called actions. Accordingly, actions are the true subjects of poetry" (Lessing 78). Essentially, Lessing claims that painting is a solely spatial concept because a painting can focus solely on an object, on the individual aspects and complete body (or dimensions) of that object. Poetry (writing) on the other hand can only focus on the actions of bodies, on how individual objects do not display all the object's dimensions, which is what makes poetry, and writing in general, a solely temporal concept. This argument effectively counters the idea of writers creating a space by casting doubt as to whether they are showing the full body of that specific space. This is where ekphrasis of place comes into play, as writers may not be able to completely depict the dimensions of a space, but they can describe all the dimensions of a place. Space being every single part of an image or images that make up the universe around and in between us. In fact, it could even be said that writing is the only way to properly show all the dimensions of an individual place. This is because place "denoted a coherent and familiar, or at least recognizable local living space, the history of which was presented in the harmonious narrative form of a poem" (Suvakovic 65). Place is essentially just a "space that has been endowed with human meaning" as Professor Terkla once said, or a specific part of the universal space that is being focused on by others. Basically, place is made up of numerous factors, such as history and the five senses, to such a degree that just showing what it visibly looks like is not enough to

completely depict the dimensions of it's body. Place's body is more complex than that, and uses more concepts than only time or space in order to be properly shown to others. Therefore, ekphrasis of place is important in depicting the specific image one is trying to convey, because ekphrasis of space would not be capable of focusing in on one specific image and would have to display everything associated with that specific place including objects that readers would not be able to comprehend or need to know in order to visualize that place. Ekphrasis of place can depict a place, and only that specific place, through concepts that readers can understand. This means that in order to properly show place both the visual aspect and the actions that occur within that part of space must be presented in ways readers can comprehend. This means that ekphrasis of place is a spatiotemporal concept, as ekphrasis of place describes both the part of space the place is in and the actions that occur within that place. Ekphrasis of place is a tool that writers use to depict space in writing, making writing a spatiotemporal form of expression, as this paper will show.

Ekphrasis of Place as a Part of Space

The reason that ekphrasis of place supports the idea of writing as a spatiotemporal subject is because of the close connection that space and place share. Basically, place is a part of space. Such an idea can be reasoned by the simple idea that a place cannot exist without being a part of space, but space can exist without being a part of place. The sense of space is one of the oldest concepts that has existed in human history and was considered just another part of nature, not a concept for analysis, for centuries. It was not until “around 1500 [that] some humanists developed an interest in the character of specific regions, which they tried to capture through a combination of historical narratives, maps, and landscape descriptions” (Kumin 307). So, around 1500 people finally began doing what they always do and began searching for meaning in, and

answers to, the idea of space. Thus, the concept of space was born and separated from time with the idea of place, those specific regions, following the movement. Such a history only supports the idea of writing as a spatial concept, meaning ekphrasis of place is truly a *spatio* (space) temporal (time) concept. Following this logic it is easy to conclude that writing is also a spatiotemporal concept because of ekphrasis of place, a spatiotemporal concept, that writers use as a tool for writing.

This connection between space and place in literature and in history, this turning of the idea of space or spatial turn, has not gone unnoticed since its creation. The spatial turn in modern literature began with Joseph Frank's essay the *Spatial Form in Modern Literature*. In this essay, Frank contradicts Lessing's idea of "pictorial poetry and allegorical painting" and how "both were doomed to fail because their aims were in contradiction to the fundamental properties of their mediums" (Frank 6). Basically, Frank argues against Lessing's ideas that are being argued against in this paper, but he also explains the history behind and reasons why he is opposing this idea of separate concepts in a very blunt manner. Frank shows how Lessing was effected by, and analyzed, Greek and Roman literature which "was presumed to have reached perfection" and was essentially the model for all forms of western literature from then on (Frank 7). By showing Lessing's narrow viewpoint, Frank affirms the idea that writing was a solely temporal art and that painting was a solely spatial art, but only in the ancient Greco-Roman world. Frank argues that the standards used in the ancient world do not apply to modern writing and that:

No longer was aesthetic form confused with mere externals of technique or felt as a strait jacket into which the artist, willy-nilly, had to force his creative ideas. Form issued spontaneously from the organization of the art work as it presented itself to perception.... For modern literature, as exemplified by such writers as T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Marcel Proust, and James Joyce, is moving in the direction of spatial form. (Frank 8)

Essentially, Frank is saying that modern authors are moving out of the established box that Lessing and others created and analyzed. That writing is taking a new turn and transforming into a modern form of art that has more of a spatial imprint than it's ancestors. Thus, according to Frank, writing is becoming, or has become, a spatiotemporal concept because of this spatial turn in modern literature.

The Opposition to the Spatial Turn

There are numerous critics who discount Frank's idea regarding modern literature, most of whom W.J.T. Mitchell points out when he analyzes the concepts of space and time in *Iconology*. Mitchell directly points out Frank's claim of the spatial form, and then shows how others view the spatial turn before Mitchell himself tackles the idea. One Frank Kermode "calls [the spatial form] a "weak figure" for a certain kind of suspended temporality, and [that] there doesn't seem to be any compelling reason for thinking of this phenomenon as "spatial,"" contradicting the existence of a modern piece of literature having a spatial form (Mitchell 96). Mitchell then describes the reasoning behind such refusals; that "Literary space, then, for many modern critics, has been a synonym for the denial of history and the escape into irrational reverence for mythic images." (Mitchell 97). Space, in regards to literature, has been considered impossible because otherwise the ancient ideal that critics held for the Greco-Roman world and the standards that critics have followed for centuries would cease to exist and need to be reconsidered as a whole field. Basically, critics do not like the idea of change and instead of adapting they refuse to believe, as they believe that they have already found their answer in the ancient model.

However ancient literature is viewed it is an ideal of the past. The world, and literature, has moved on and changed, adapting to new ideas and concepts. Definitions have grown,

concepts have evolved and devolved, and expressions have morphed into new intriguing areas. Literature must be viewed while keeping in mind both this modern adaptation of the world, but also the historical perspective. While writing is now a spatiotemporal concept, it may not have always been so. When Lessing first wrote the *Laocoön* it is entirely possible that he was right, but it is entirely possible that he was wrong as well. Theorists have been consumed with this separation and categorization of space and time that they have shielded their minds from the very idea that Frank and Mitchell argue for, refusing to acknowledge that the spatial turn exists. More to the point, refusing to acknowledge that the spatial turn can be used, as I will prove in the following pages. Through analysis of two forms of writing, poetry first then prose, I will show the spatial turn and ekphrasis of place in writing, proving that writing is a spatiotemporal concept.

First, through a short collection of poems ekphrasis of place will be used in a variety of manners, forcing the reader to recreate these places inside their own mind. By developing these images of specific places using both temporal and spatial methods through poems, Lessing's argument that poetry cannot develop space will be physically disproven through one form of writing. The poems themselves focus on a variety of different places to show that writing can present different kinds of places in different styles.

Descriptive Jottings of London

By Knight of the White Elephant of Burmah William McGonagall

As I stood upon London Bridge and viewed the mighty throng
Of thousands of people in cabs and 'busses rapidly whirling along,
All furiously driving to and fro,
Up one street and down another as quick as they could go:

Then I was struck with the discordant sound of human voices there,
Which seemed to me like wild geese cackling in the air:
And the river Thames is a most beautiful sight,
To see the steamers sailing upon it by day and by night.

And the Tower of London is most gloomy to behold,
And the crown of England lies there, begemmed with precious stones and gold;
King Henry the Sixth was murdered there by the Duke of Glo'ster,
And when he killed him with his sword he called him an impostor.

St. Paul's Cathedral is the finest building that ever I did see,
There's no building can surpass it in the city of Dundee,
Because it's magnificent to behold,
With its beautiful dome and spire glottering like gold.

And as for Nelson's Monument that stands in Trafalgar Square,
It is a most stately monument I most solemnly declare,
And towering defiantly very high,
Which arrests strangers' attention while passing by.

Then there's two beautiful water-fountains spouting up very high,
Where the weary traveller can drink when he feels dry;
And at the foot of the monument there's three bronze lions in grand array,
Enough to make the stranger's heart throb with dismay.

Then there's Mr Spurgeon, a great preacher, which no one dare gainsay,
I went to hear him preach on the Sabbath-day,
And he made my heart feel light and gay,
When I heard him preach and pray.

And the Tabernacle was crowded from ceiling to floor,
And many were standing outside the door;
He is an eloquent preacher I honestly declare,
And I was struck with admiration as on him I did stare.

Then there's Petticoat Lane I venture to say,
It's a wonderful place on the Sabbath-day;
There wearing-apparel can be bought to suit the young or old,
For the ready cash, silver, coppers, or gold.

Oh! mighty city of London! you are wonderful to see,
And thy beauties no doubt fill the tourist's heart with glee;
But during my short stay, and while wandering there,
Mr Spurgeon was the only man I heard speaking proper English I do declare.

The Globe Theater

Two story timber walls rise around and aside
forming a circle below of beaten floor
where people will stand for hours and abide
the rules of the theater or be shown the door.

Crowds tumble in clutching their candy.
Some up above place down soft pillows of bliss
regarding the architecture and how it's so handy,
gossiping over the play, "What Shakespeare is this,"

and sitting or standing, now quiet, ignoring the sky
that showers the stage, a fat 'T' made of timber
with natural light or darkness as the day waves goodbye.
Then the actors come out costumed in fine dress and limber

with their feet as they spread out and show a tale,
a play, as the audience laughs and is whipped like a gale.

The Tower of London

O'er looming banks, high in history, stands the tower gate. Open mouth swallowing souls of hundreds who cross the threshold, admiring Flanders Fields filling the moat, brimming over immovable walls. Cries move across bodies searching for the lost among a maze of stone, of an iron foundation digging into buried earth, covering the screams of shades who pulled, ripped, spat, slobbered, wasted, lived beneath soles of guards marching to a beat of *the king is dead long live the queen is dead*. Ravens pluck at grass stranded beneath their claws, watching crowds cawing over their prophecy of cages, trapped until England falls and the priest runs out of the chapel chased by the spirits the mother the daughter the unholy dead crawling along the packed earth searching for their words carved into the thickness of blood, preserved by the curious as they carry on. Grey shapes walking the battlements with maps clutched tight in their hands searching for jewels and wondering how to best go about getting there or maybe a spot of tea first under the window there where two children played earlier. I wonder where they are now? Deep, dank, down among the rock and mortar that holds this fort against he who will harm and they that conjure, but stand firm in resolve along the ancient Thames stronghold.

The Epte Woods

By René Char

I was nothing more that day than two legs walking.
My vision drained, a zero at the center of my face,
I took to following the stream that ran through the valley,
Low-lying, that dreary hermit had kept well clear
Of the formlessness into which I kept pushing on.

From the cornerstone of a ruin formed once by fire,
Two wild rose-shrubs filled with great tenderness and determination
 emerged,
Plunging abruptly down into the gray water.
You could somehow sense the bustle of the departed, on the point of
 coming forward once more.

The harsh vermilions of a rose as it struck the water
In a rapture of questions restored the sky to its original aspect,
Rousing the earth to a chorus of loving tongues
And like a famished, feverish tool urging me on into the future.

At the next turning, the Epte woods began.
There would be no need to cross them, though, my beloved seed-
 sowers of recovery!
Half-turning, I breathed the damp must of the meadows where a beast
 was merging;
I heard the slither of the fearful grass-snake;
I did then-do not treat me harshly-what everyone, I knew, was
 Hoping would be done.

The Island of Machines

Inside the island -

remnants of ancient docks,
built and molded by Nantaise hands
as boats came and went,
nourishing the city with foreign pleasures,
magnolia, slaves, sugar, rum
- there is a warehouse

Inside the warehouse -

oh, old factory, where once sailors came together
to launch their creations, now abandoned
desecrated, and restored by a magician
with visions from old adventures he once read
- there is a garden

Inside the garden -

a minor biological miracle
where plants have genetically mutated
metal leaves and wire stems
- there is a spider

Inside the spider -

a scientifically engineered monstrosity
crawling along the roof of the greenhouse
before shakily drifting down, liquid spewing from its maw
into a crater surrounded by gawking onlookers

- there is a person

Inside the person -

a normal human being
with intricate, mystical knowledge
of the movements of plants and machines
turning into spiders and sea monsters

- there is a wish

Inside the wish -

a child's wondrous hope
to ride inside the giant man made elephant
that drove their life's work
until this very moment

- there is the island

The Park

the path I walk is
dry and bare.
yellowing
cobblestones and
graying sand,
patted down by
hundreds of feet,
soles crossing the
space lying
between two
streets that only
lead to more.
trees starting to
sprout fresh
green and darker
shades of brown,
the vestige of
morning frost
chipping at their
bark, standing on
either side,
square topped
heads like
soldiers awaiting
their orders,
glancing casually
from side to side,
front to back, in
perfectly straight
rows, concerned
that some artist
will come along
and graffiti their
neat, clean stone
walls while their
leader,

the statue of cambronne. that
infamous napoleonic general, known
for his glory in Waterloo and that
word which must never be uttered,
waves his sword in hand, as if to
command green troops against those
sworn enemies of France, England.

people ignore
this persuasive
silent
monument,
instead focusing
on themselves;
why they are
here in this not a
garden, but not a
street, in the first
place. some hold
conversations,
loudly laughing in
fluid French,
while others sit
on benches,
eating lunch and
throwing the
remains to fat
grey pigeons.
children run in
and out of
bushes, kicking a
ball among the
branches and
stares. the eyes
of people who
live in the
apartments along
the walls,
guarded by the
tree soldiers,
stare as if to
demand 'why are
you in our
garden.'

Place and Poetry

One of the most notable aspects of this collection of poetry is that the poems center around places not in the United States, but in England and France. The poems were chosen and created purposefully around these two countries, so that it would be even harder for those reading the collection to envision the places shown through the words. Essentially, I specifically chose and wrote poems that would make ekphrasis of place more difficult, that would require more interaction with the reader, yet the collection and individual pieces still succeed in ekphrasis of place. Each poem shows place in a different manner or way, with the intention of recreating that specific place, that part of space, inside the reader's mind. In the first poem, *Descriptive Jottings of London*, the image of London appears in the reader's mind through the vivid description of landmarks and people that the narrator dictates. The speaker of the poem describes the physicality of London through lines such as "And as for Nelson's Monument that stands in Trafalgar square," which gives readers a sense of location regarding the physicality of objects (McGonagall 17). The speaker then continues his ekphrasis of London, this ekphrasis of place, by also describing the landscape of the city through the people he sees, the sounds he hears, and his own personal opinions about the world around him. The reader is immediately swept up into this world from the first stanza until the last line, and truly sees the city of London. This is one common way to depict a place, or image, within poetry. Indeed, it is even recommended to poets who are writing about place to keep in mind that place is not just one singular mindset "but a landscape [place] include[ing] any vision of place: the heated rhythms of the city, the long silence of the desert, the pastel house rows and clipped lawns of the suburbs, the sights, sounds, and smells of our neighborhoods" (Addonizio 74). In this manner poetry, can

depict place, and it is in this manner that McGonagall depicts London. His piece of poetry is not only temporal in his journey across London over a period of time, but also spatial through his description of the specific imagery around him that makes up London proper.

This description of place holds true for all poems in this collection, but there are some that try to depict place in a different manner, through a more modern approach to poetry. One such method is through the physical form of the poem, creating a poem that is in the shape of the object or place that it is describing in order to create a better image for the reader. This is block poetry, and is used among some poems notably *The Tower of London*. In this poem, I intended to create an image of a specific place by invoking the form of an object that is an icon of that place, in this case a block column or tower. The idea is that by invoking that specific icon the reader will automatically recall memories and senses associated with that icon, pulling them further into the place the poem is trying to represent. By invoking an image of a place poets can also create a sense of place for the reader because “images are closely linked to memory, that in fact many of our memories consist of images” (Addonizio 85). McGonagall also used this technique of representing an image, of using ekphrasis, in his poem to place readers in London, but only through words and not physical imagery. By using physical form or structure to create a specific image of a place a poet is automatically using ekphrasis of place as a tool to pull the reader into that specific place as well. In this manner, the poem is both “appealing to us [as a reader] at the level of any of our five senses,” and using our personal memories recalled by those senses to create a sixth sense, or ekphrasis, of place (Addonizio 86).

Another strategy that poets, and the poems collected here, use to invoke a sense of place is through the word choice of the poem. Word choice in a poem is important because every word of a poem is intentional. Every word has a meaning in order to add to the depth of the poem and

to invoke a certain sense in the reader. Word choice is especially important in poetry that invokes a sense of place, as changing one word can change an image, therefore a memory, therefore the place that the narrator is trying to convey. For instance, in the poem *The Island of Machines* I use the word “monstrosity” to describe the arachnid instead of “giant.” By using the word “monstrosity” the reader is more likely to imagine a giant creature of nightmare-ish proportions or a creature that they themselves find horrific. The word “monstrosity” creates a sense of awe and fear in the reader which the word “giant” may not. This is just one example of how each individual word conjures or adds to an image, or place, that a poem is trying to convey, making word choice generally an important aspect of ekphrasis of place.

Word choice also has the side effect of aiding in the creation of the narrative voice of the poem. The narrative voice is “that sense of a unique presence on the page,” that unique style that draws the reader in so they can create the image the poem is attempting to display (Addonizio 115). When writing a poem, the poet wants readers to enter and see the place that they are trying to display, and to display that image they must have a voice, “a presence that convinces, one that engages and seduces a reader into the world of our poems” (Addonizio 115). Through the voice of the poem the reader visualizes the picture or place that the poem is trying to develop. For example, take the voice of René Char’s narrator in the translation of *The Epte Woods*. The narrator is in first person, creating an intimate connection with the reader by placing them in that ‘I’ mindset. Then the narrator uses highly descriptive words to describe not only his own thoughts, but also the immediate environment in order to place the image in a specific view. In one stanza the narrator, instead of simply describing a rose in basic terms, says “Two wild rose-shrubs filled with great tenderness and determination \ emerged” (Char 93: 7-8). The narrator uses the simple term of ‘rose’ and then, instead of describing its physical appearance, he

describes how he views the rose, as “wild” and “filled with great tenderness and determination” (Char 93: 7). The narrator assigns emotions that he would use to describe the roses, emotions that he assumes the reader will understand, and then assign to their specific image of a rose, in order to show readers how he felt in that moment in that place. The voice of the poem drags the reader into the overall vision, or personality, that the poem is displaying in order to properly show each individual reader the place the poem inhabits.

Now it is almost certain that each reader will view each poem differently, creating their own representation of a specific place. Such a phenomenon is only naturally as everyone goes through life, and views different words, in different ways. For example, the word “love” may be viewed as a happy, joyful experience by some individuals, but a painful experience by others. Thus, the specific places that these poems recreate differ for every person, and even the author’s ekphrasis of place cannot possibly capture the entirety of that place. A true ekphrasis of place, a true re-presentation of a place, is impossible for both writing and painting. There is no true objective lens for any artist to base their work on. That does not mean that people do not attempt to use ekphrasis, just that ekphrasis as a tool can only be successful to a degree. It is the generality of a place, the general image or atmosphere of a place, that ekphrasis of place conveys. However, ekphrasis of place, still recreates a place not just in the moments within the poem, but also by even attempting to represent a place. In this manner poetry about place, ekphrasis of place, is not only temporal in its movement, but spatial in its imagery. Therefore poetry, one major form of writing, of artistic expression, is both spatial and temporal.

However, poetry is just one form writing takes, one method of ekphrasis of place. To prove writing is a spatiotemporal concept another form of written expression must be viewed;

prose. Thus, a small collection of short prose pieces similar to the collection of poetry have been assembled to depict different ways in which ekphrasis of place is used in prose.

Oliver Twist

By Charles Dickens

chapter XXI: The Expedition

It was a cheerless morning when they got into the street; blowing and raining hard; and the clouds looking dull and stormy. The night had been very wet: large pools of water had collected in the road: and the kennels were overflowing. There was a faint glimmering of the coming day in the sky; but it rather aggravated than relieved the gloom of the scene: the sombre light only serving to pale that which the street lamps afforded, without shedding any warmer or brighter tints upon the wet house-tops, and dreary streets. There appeared to be nobody stirring in that quarter of the town; the windows of the houses were all closely shut; and the streets through which they passed, were noiseless and empty.

By the time they had turned into the Bethnal Green Road, the day had fairly begun to break. Many of the lamps were already extinguished; a few country waggons were slowly toiling on, towards London; now and then, a stage-coach, covered with mud, rattled briskly by: the driver bestowing, as he passed, and admonitory lash upon the heavy waggoner who, by keeping on the wrong side of the road, had endangered his arriving at the office, a quarter of a minute after his time. The public-houses, with gas-lights burning inside, were already open. By degrees, other shops began to be unclosed, and a few scattered people were met with. Then, came straggling groups of labourers going to their work; then, men and women with fish-baskets on their heads; donkey-carts laden with vegetables; chaise-carts filled with live-stock or whole

carcasses of meat; milk-women with pails; an unbroken concourse of people, trudging out with various supplies to the eastern suburbs of the town. As they approached the City, the noise and traffic gradually increased; when they threaded the streets between Shoreditch and Smithfield, it had swelled into a roar of sound and bustle. It was as light as it was likely to be, till night came on again, and the busy morning of half the London population had begun.

Turning down Sun Street and Crown Street, and crossing Finsbury square, Mr. Sikes struck, by way of Chiswell Street, into Barbican: thence into Long Lane, and so into Smithfield; from which latter place arose a tumult of discordant sounds that filled Oliver Twist with amazement.

It was market-morning. The ground was covered, nearly ankle-deep, with filth and mire; a thick steam, perpetually rising from the reeking bodies of the cattle, and mingling with the fog, which seemd to rest upon the chimney-tops, hung heavily above. All the pens in the centre of the large area, and as many temporary pens as could be crowded into the vacant space, were filled with sheep; tied up to posts by the gutter side were long lines of beasts and oxen, three or four deep. Countrymen, butchers, drovers, hawkers, boys, thieves, idlers, and vagabonds of every low grade, were mingled together in a mass; the whistling of drovers, the barking dogs, the bellowing and plunging of the oxen, the bleating of sheep, the grunting and squeaking of pigs, the cries of hawkers, the shouts, oaths, and quarrelling on all sides; the ringing of bells and roar of voices, that issued from every public-house; the crowding, pushing, driving, beating, whooping and yelling; the hideous and discordant din that resounded from every corner of the market; and the unwashed, unshaven, squalid, and dirty figures constantly running to and fro, and bursting in and

out of the throng; rendered it a stunning and bewildering scene, which quite confounded the senses.

The Tube

Next train in: 5 minutes

I sat calmly on the bench, placing my purse beside me as I looked at the display showing how many minutes were left. Only five, not so bad, I probably could stand. But no, I'm already sitting down. And this bench is comfortable, not too hard or dusty, if a bit creaky. At least it's out of the way, and I can still see everyone else on the platform so there can't be any surprises. Not like what happened on the blue line last week. That man appeared from that side route out of nowhere, in such a hurry too. Oh, it makes me anxious just remembering that incident. Maybe I should have reported him to the security. He did seem awfully smelly and greasy. I do wish they would put a fan in here, maybe I could complain about that as well. The air is just so stale in this tunnel.

Next train in: 4 minutes

Why is the train taking so long? I have a meeting at Monument I can't be late for. I don't have time to stand around, staring into a black tunnel, waiting for a green light for a green line. Ha, that was actually a bit funny, too bad I can't enjoy my own humor right now. And that those brown tiles seem to be breaking onto the track. And if I see one more advertisement for that new Cumberbatch film I will throw a fit. Honestly, whose idea is it to even put adverts in here. No one looks at them, no one has the time! I can understand the V&A painting, we are by the

museum, it makes sense, but why all this other nonsense about facial cream and films. It's pointless and I don't have time right now for nonsense.

Next train in: 3 minutes

Look mum, it says that that the green one is coming soon. Can we stop walking now? It's my favorite color. Please! Or can I get some chips?

Next train in: 2 minutes

No, we can't that's not the one we need to catch, now stop whining. Maybe for dinner later. We need the one that comes after the next one, otherwise we won't make it in time. Now stop trying to jump onto the safety line, I don't want you to fall in. You'll get electrocuted or run over by the train or god knows what else. Come on!

Next train in: 1 minute

Oh, thank god, I didn't miss the tube. But now I have to drink my coffee in the train. I hope it's not packed again, I hate feeling like a sardine even if I do love the metaphor. It's so claustrophobic. I would kill to sit down right now. Too bad that lady's hogging the bench. All nice and comfortable, staring straight into the depths of hades itself. Man, that tunnel can get dark, and there's the rumble that I know and love, come on in you big metal lump. I have a class to get to and I can't be late again.

Now arriving

Watching the tube come in is always so interesting. The wind, the rumbling thunder, the boxes of steel that would kill a man if he touched it, the architecture and design of the actual system itself. So cool. I just wish it weren't so bloody expensive.

The Sheep's Fields

Baab was having a decent day. There was plenty of that light up in the sky, but not too much thanks to those fluffy white things, and there was a mild wind blowing across the fields, which was just how Baab liked it.

He was sitting all nice and cozy next to a large rock, sheep watching like usual, minding his own business, when he saw some of those humans walk by. Again. Baab had stopped trying to figure out where those humans came from long ago, it was just too much to think about in his opinion. Some of the other sheep had tried to follow them, once, but they had been foiled by the large stone wall that sat on the edge of every pasture. Apparently, the humans had almost been stopped by the wall as well, as they had shouted in their own angry language for quite some time before somehow climbing the wall and falling off it onto the other side, but Baab was inclined to think that that part of the story was poppycock. Humans were always coming and going over the walls, it was just a part of life.

Like sleeping. Sleeping was a thing Baab very much enjoyed doing. After spending a few hours making rounds around the green fields, eating some of the short grass, and maybe eating a few leaves from the forest, Baab would rest his tired hooves in a patch of dirt by his boulder and shut his eyes for a few moments. It was a nice boulder, right on the edge of the forest, but still very much within the pasture and view of others so that he didn't have to worry about wolves or

any silly creatures like that. There was very little mud, so he felt dry, and a perfect view of the rolling fields, so he could see everything, if he so desired.

Baab rustled his fur, pausing a moment from chewing the green slime. He hoped that the other humans, the ones who tended to all of them, would take his fur soon. All the heavy, curly weight was beginning to wear on his aching joints and cover his eyes. Not to mention it had turned a light brown from the mud, with some shades of green from all the vegetation that surrounded him.

Ah, now he was hungry again. It was time to toddle around a bit, eat some more, and maybe baaaa at those odd humans again. It was possible that one of them would pat that itch on his shoulder away if he baaaad at them loud enough. It was worth a shot.

Baab wandered over to the something of a brown path that went across their fields, deciding to eat along it for a while and see what happened. It was so nice out, that surely some more humans would come clambering over the pastures again today.

Baab briefly wondered why they came across their, “dirty” as a human had once said, beautiful fields anyway. Then he decided that it wasn’t really any of his business as his stomach demanded attention and he got on his way. After all, Baab the sheep was having a very nice day along the English countryside, and he didn’t want to spoil it.

The Hunchback of Notre Dame

By Victor Hugo

Book Third: Chapter II – A Bird’s-Eye View of Paris

Look at the sky athwart that surprising forest of spires, towers, and belfries; spread out in the centre of the city, tear away at the point of the islands, fold at the arches of the bridges, the Seine, with its broad green and yellow expanses, more variable than the skin of a serpent; project clearly against an azure horizon the Gothic profile of this ancient Paris. Make its contour float in a winter's mist which clings to its numerous chimneys; drown it in profound night and watch the odd play of lights and shadows in that sombre labyrinth of edifices; cast upon it a ray of light which shall vaguely outline it and cause to emerge from the fog the great heads of the towers; or take that black silhouette again, enliven with shadow the thousand acute angles of the spires and gables, and make it start out more toothed than a shark's jaw against a copper-colored western sky,—and then compare.

And if you wish to receive of the ancient city an impression with which the modern one can no longer furnish you, climb—on the morning of some grand festival, beneath the rising sun of Easter or of Pentecost—climb upon some elevated point, whence you command the entire capital; and be present at the wakening of the chimes. Behold, at a signal given from heaven, for it is the sun which gives it, all those churches quiver simultaneously. First come scattered

strokes, running from one church to another, as when musicians give warning that they are about to begin. Then, all at once, behold!—for it seems at times, as though the ear also possessed a sight of its own,—behold, rising from each bell tower, something like a column of sound, a cloud of harmony. First, the vibration of each bell mounts straight upwards, pure and, so to speak, isolated from the others, into the splendid morning sky; then, little by little, as they swell they melt together, mingle, are lost in each other, and amalgamate in a magnificent concert. It is no longer anything but a mass of sonorous vibrations incessantly sent forth from the numerous belfries; floats, undulates, bounds, whirls over the city, and prolongs far beyond the horizon the deafening circle of its oscillations.

Nevertheless, this sea of harmony is not a chaos; great and profound as it is, it has not lost its transparency; you behold the windings of each group of notes which escapes from the belfries. You can follow the dialogue, by turns grave and shrill, of the treble and the bass; you can see the octaves leap from one tower to another; you watch them spring forth, winged, light, and whistling, from the silver bell, to fall, broken and limping from the bell of wood; you admire in their midst the rich gamut which incessantly ascends and re-ascends the seven bells of Saint-Eustache; you see light and rapid notes running across it, executing three or four luminous zigzags, and vanishing like flashes of lightning. Yonder is the Abbey of Saint-Martin, a shrill, cracked singer; here the gruff and gloomy voice of the Bastille; at the other end, the great tower of the Louvre, with its bass. The royal chime of the palace scatters on all sides, and without relaxation, resplendent trills, upon which fall, at regular intervals, the heavy strokes from the belfry of Notre-Dame, which makes them sparkle like the anvil under the hammer. At intervals you behold the passage of sounds of all forms which come from the triple peal of Saint-Germaine des Prés. Then, again, from time to time, this mass of sublime noises opens and gives

passage to the beats of the Ave Maria, which bursts forth and sparkles like an aigrette of stars. Below, in the very depths of the concert, you confusedly distinguish the interior chanting of the churches, which exhales through the vibrating pores of their vaulted roofs.

The Bus

You watch as the bus comes to a slow and steady stop at your feet, splashing the dirty street water onto the curb like a miniature tsunami as the rain continues to fall around you. With a screech the brakes come into play, except it is more of a squelch than a screech isn't it, and the sound of the motor running takes hold of your senses. Quickly, or quickly for a bus, the doors slide open, dividing into two, then fourths, as the interior of the bus becomes visible to your water washed eyes. Quickly you step, out of the pouring wet morning, onto the little grey platform that makes the floor of the bus. The doors, those green trimmed dividers with speckled black glass, close behind you, trapping you within the stale air of other bodies.

The driver looks at you expectantly, but you don't notice because you are pondering the intense feeling of warmth now caressing your face and feet as you attempt to close your umbrella, to wipe the moisture from your hands and to stop the droplets from streaming onto the already dirty floor. Once your umbrella has been pulled shut, the cloth Velcro tightened into place, you look up to see the driver staring at you. Suddenly, you realize you have yet to swipe your card. Then you remember, you don't swipe your card, you just show it to the driver who is still staring at you and has yet to start the bus. Nervously, smiling as if this whole day was a joke,

you pull your buss pass out of your coat pocket and hold it out for inspection. He squints, then gives a brief nod and starts the bus. You sigh, push back a stray piece of hair, and shove your hand with the card clasped in your palm back into your pocket before finally stepping forward and considering the enclosed boxes where passengers briefly rest.

Thankfully, and yet oddly, not many people are riding today. You quickly spy a seat by a window and make your way over, ignoring everyone else as you keep your head down. They ignore you as well, lost in the raindrops that fall onto the window planes or slowly diving into whatever book that is, or just swaying to the motion of the bus, eyes closed, headphones in, off in a different world. You walk over to the seat, a green piece of plastic that reminds you of desk back in elementary school, except with an extra layer of squiggly blue felt, and drop your bag to the floor. It lands with a plunk as the bus turns a corner, the hum underneath your feet turning into a longer note, the sides pushing at you to fall to the floor, but you grip the hand rail by the seat before the motion overtakes you.

The bus finishes the turn and the normal balance restores itself. You sit down, adjusting to the material beneath you and ignoring how uncomfortably hard it is at this specific angle. Finally, you find a position that suits you, settle in, and turn to the window. You watch the streets, the buildings, the lamplights still glowing a soft orange in the grey rainy light as water droplets collect and become drooping rivers right in front of your eyes. You ignore where you are and instead focus on other things.

The bus screeches. The bus stops. Someone gets off while someone else gets on and glances around. You don't pay attention though. You just sit, legs comfortably crossed, and watch the moving landscape outside. Apartments becoming boutiques and cafes by the river. A

bridge flashes by as another corner turns and squeaks. Construction workers begin operation of a new dock.

The bus slowly pulls to another stop.

Tapestries of the Apocalypse

The quiet murmurs of the tour group are slowly silenced as the guide gently coaches them to “follow her to the next point please.” People begin to follow her loud voice, not a shout, just loud enough in this black space, cut through the mass of bodies temporarily frightening a few. They quickly return to the moving organism and huddle around the speaker, like little ducklings, so that they can be closer to their only source of information and greatest source of light, as she is the only one permitted to carry a flashlight. The darkness quickly covers the space they had just passed, hiding the benches in a crowd of shadows.

The shadows have free reign over the room, for the preservation of the delicate colors that form the ancient tapestries on the walls is of the highest priority. The chamber, more of a square cavern with a turn, is in a perpetual nighttime state. Few soft blue, not white or yellow, lights hang from the ceiling or rest beneath the dividing barriers, providing a gentle light. It is just enough to walk through the room without tripping over one’s own consciousness, and to maybe read the plates in front of the hangings that state what is what, when it was created, and what portion of *The Revelations* this cloth depicts. The light mainly exists just to illuminate the

tapestries, which is fine as their majesty is completely justified in being the sole vision of the room.

The tapestries, as there are many, hang from the ceiling, attached to the walls by a special magic that no one cares to know. The important thing is that they are here and are real and are grand. They fall in two rows across the chamber, sometimes being split by one giant block like the chapter cover of a comic book. Most are perfectly fine, if faded and worn from the passage of time that has constantly been trying to destroy their holiness. Others have holes or ripped out chunks missing, forever lost because of human hubris and flames. A few are just gone, forever. However, all were woven with a single purpose; to show the final judgement, the end of days, the apocalypse.

The fine cotton threads, dyed from plants long since destroyed, weave tightly together to form unholy images, words of warning, and the last story. That ancient fear is felt across the chamber by the massive size of these depictions, the largest warning against sins and sinners before even Dante's *Inferno*. Angels, Saints, priests, men, creatures of dark earth, demons sent from the fires of hell, dark angels blackened by the weight of punishment, of God himself; all stride across the cloth story book, destined to meet some day in the dark, distant future.

Place and Prose

After reading these prose pieces the similarities that prose shares with poetry become apparent, as does the dilemma that still creates tensions among the critical community today as to what is prose and what is poetry. Such an argument is important to ekphrasis of place because the way place is shown depends on the form of writing used. Depending on the definition, and opinion one uses, prose can be poetry or poetry can be prose, but with a different structure. It is this structural difference, the “*visual change*,” that Lanham discusses in his attempt to explain the key differences between these two forms of writing, showing the key difference between the formation of prose and poetry (Lanham 80). Obviously, there must be at least one crucial difference between the two because, despite their similarities and the fact that they are both forms of writing, poetry and prose are considered two different forms of writing by everyone. Everyone being society, critics, teachers, students, people who just know that poetry is not prose, and prose is not poetry, despite how similar the two are.

The main differences between prose and poetry seem to be style and personal reception. Style being the individual structure or appearance of the poem that the reader expects a piece of prose or a piece of poetry to follow. Lanham discusses this issue in depth, explaining that:

As prose, the passage is a bit mannered; as poetry, almost affectedly informal. Typographical convention has acted as the fundamental context here, changing how we read the poem so much that it changes the poem itself. / This contrived example points an important truth. To print written utterance as prose amounts, in our time, to a fundamental stylistic decision. In prose we expect not only a particular range of topics but a transparent style to express them clearly. We expect, in fact, the whole Clarity-Brevity-Sincerity syndrome so commonly thought to define good writing. But with poetry, just the opposite – all the poetic virtues. The poet need not be grammatically correct, may talk about feeling not fact, and will do so in a self-conscious metaphorical way. (Lanham 80-81)

Basically, poetry has more freedom, more choice, when it comes to style and how to express its message, while prose appears to be more structured or has a specific checklist of things that must occur for a piece to be considered prose. So, while both forms of writing can use the same phrases and attempt to show the same image in a similar manner they are still two distinct, separate branches of writing that are not usually mistaken for one another. For the most part the reader can differentiate what is prose and what is poetry based on their personal literary experiences.

However, poetry and prose do use ekphrasis of place in a very similar manner. For example, through detailed description. Poetry, as discussed, uses very specific word choice to help depict a specific place. Prose also uses specific word choice, but has more liberty with the amount of words used to describe a place because prose, even short pieces of prose, tend to have a larger word count. Being able to use more words means that authors can go more in depth, more exacting detail, about individual images to set the scene of the place than they could with a poem. Setting the scene of a place through intricate and detailed word choice is clearly seen in the excerpt from *Oliver Twist*. The entire first paragraph of the excerpt is only a description of the weather for the day, but it takes an entire paragraph. Dickens creates this entire paragraph

specifically to help readers situate themselves into this specific place, this “cheerless morning” (Dickens). He uses words in a way that is not possible in poetry, expanding upon each individual piece of the scene with adjectives and expletives to create a specific image of a place in the reader’s mind.

The narrator’s voice, or point of view, is also important in prose when situating the reader, and therefore the place, that is being depicted. For example, a few of the collected prose pieces are in second person, or the ‘you’ tense, notably the piece *The Bus*. Second person point of view can be used on purpose in order to draw the reader into the setting of the story, to help them visualize and put themselves in the specific place, in this instance a bus in France on a rainy day. By using ‘you’ instead of ‘I’ or ‘The girl’ for this specific story the reader can connect with the narrator, the voice, better and begin to visualize what this narrator is doing even if they have never been in a situation involving a bus. The style of the narrator is distinctive enough to be its own identity, while at the same time open enough to be taken on as the reader’s own personal identity. Such a trick is useful for *The Bus* in particular because there are elements in the piece that a normal reader would not be able to visualize if using first person. However, *The Bus* is just one short piece of prose attempting to show a place through a variety of methods. Just like other methods there are pros and cons to using each individual voice, and it just so happens that using second person was best for the ekphrasis of this place. Sometimes first person is best, using ‘I’ to force the reader into the story, making them the narrator and blending into one unifying voice that all readers can become. Other times third person is best, allowing the reader to gain a sort of power over the narrator, being able to fill in the gaps of the bigger picture with their own imagination while at the same time being confined by what the author has written. Every voice is different, but the most important aspect to a prose’s voice is its existence. As

Lanham described “the more fully you perform prose, the closer you will get to identity with the writer” (Lanham 117). By having a voice with an identity, the reader can perform, or delve into and relate to, so that that voice, that character, becomes easier to understand. Readers can then better visualize and experience writing for themselves, another tool for the formation of ekphrasis of place.

Another way that prose, and poetry, show place is through their structure. Poetry takes this idea to extremes, combining images with texts and pictures and basically anything a poet can imagine. Prose takes a more formal approach to structure, creating a linear system that readers can easily follow and understand. There may be less expression in the structure of a prose piece, but that structure provides readers a foundation, a solid mental construct, to work from. It is this “*suppression* of the visual” that allows readers to make more decisions on their own, to create an image from the ground up without having to constantly change the entire structure (Lanham 99). Readers are presented with an organized system, a certain lack of expression, that they are familiar with through the structure of prose. Such a structure creates an idea of an image in the reader’s mind, an expectation that they then build from while reading. This is extremely evident in the excerpt describing Paris from Victor Hugo’s *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. The imagery of Paris comes from a variety of techniques, notably detailed word choice, but would not be able to continuously exist and expand inside the reader’s mind if the structure was not traditional. There is just so much detail packed into every line, every description, that *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* is hard to currently visualize with a traditional, linear structure. If these words were in poetic form than it would be an entirely different poem, an entirely different image, or just not be possible to visualize at all. Therefore, the linear structure of prose is necessary sometimes, to familiarize the readers with the difficult or detailed concepts being depicted.

Just like poetry, there are a variety of methods that can be used to replicate place in prose. These examples are just some of the more popular ways in which authors can create ekphrasis of place, and which I have used in writing some of the short prose pieces. The main point though, is that these prose pieces do depict a place, that ekphrasis of place is successful. The ekphrasis may not be exact, and it may be muddled by other writing tropes such as emotions, but the image of a specific place is created inside the reader's head. The image itself may not be perfect, but there is no such thing as a perfectly objective ekphrasis of any sort. The prose pieces also display a strong use of time, or the flow of time, particularly in *The Tube*. Prose, like all other writing, changes over the course of its reading making it a mainly temporal subject. However, that sense of time does not stop ekphrasis, and can even be used to aid ekphrasis of place by showing the movement that occurs in a single space. This phenomenon occurs in prose, in poetry and in all forms of writing that use ekphrasis. By attempting to show a place, no matter how well or poorly done, writing is depicting a space. This makes writing not just a temporal subject as it has been believed, but a spatial one as well. Writing that attempts such expression, that attempts to utilize ekphrasis of place, is a spatiotemporal concept.

What This Means

Space and time have long been associated together so much so that, in the beginning, “space as an analytical category did not need inventing” (Kumin 307). Ancient critics did not need to invent the categories of space and time because they were interchangeable, a unified concept that applied to all expressions. Yet these two married concepts were slowly split apart over the centuries by people like Lessing, who sought to categorize painting and poetry into two separate entities because of a belief that they had to be two completely different things. To Lessing and others painting and poetry, while similar, were so different that they could not be the

same thing. Painting had to be associated with only space, and poetry had to be associated with only time. They could not be one concept as that would disrupt the existence of categories.

This is the same mistake that critics have made with the ideas of space and place. The two, while different, are often used interchangeably and do share a close relationship. After all, place has long been considered a part of space, or just “small-scale regional space,” that exists as just another part of a whole concept like space and time (Withers 639). Place has been categorized, examined, separated into multiple definitions such as “place as location, place as locale, and the sense of place” when really, place is just place (Withers 639). Place is a broad concept that can be defined in so many ways, just like space is a broad concept that can be defined in many different opinions. However, at the end of the day space and place are intricately connected and difficult to separate, so they should be viewed together, like all concepts.

Writing and painting, and any other artistic expression, should not be stuck under any one label. Writing is not solely a temporal concept, it is a spatiotemporal concept that depicts both space and time. Writing may depict these concepts in ways that are unfamiliar, in ways that are not perfect, but they are both used and displayed. This means that painting should be considered a spatiotemporal subject as well, that space is not limited to only one form of artistic expression, but constantly turning and shifting across all mediums.

It is a lesson in futility to try and separate two things that are so closely linked together. Space and time, space and place, prose and poetry, all these concepts share relationships that cannot be fully explained. We can attempt to explain what we think they mean, but one single definition does not grasp the entirety of any of these subjects. They appear as separate entities, they all have key differences that make them unique, but at the same time they depend upon one another to fully explain themselves. You cannot try to explain poetry without explaining its

similarities and differences with prose. You cannot show what place is without discussing the role space plays with place. You cannot talk about time without discussing space and vice versa, otherwise the one concept appears incomplete. It is impossible to have only one and be completely rid of the other as there are just too many similar elements. Space and time must remain together, whether it is in writing or painting. They are disciplines that are shaped by one another, and to ignore one is to make it impossible to fully explain or develop the other. The same can be said for any field of thought. In order to properly explain one concept critics must look towards other concepts that may or may not be normally associated with it. By merging fields together, by creating interdisciplinary study, ideas and discoveries that would normally never be found are created due to their mutual existence. One must look past the box and into other departments to find better ways to analyze and teach certain concepts. If an idea is to be properly explored then it must be explored by all, not just the one vision or mindset. To express a thought, to create a piece of art, is to take elements from multiple concepts and combine them into one unique piece. The arts are interdisciplinary, writing is spatiotemporal, and critical analysis from any one person must remember that spatial (or temporal) turn.

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