

# To See the Invisible. Inphrastic Inspirations by Night Nature Photography. From Photography to Audiovisual Composition

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## Abstract

The composition To See the Invisible for the six performers by Katarzyna Kwiecień-Długosz selected for discussion is an *artistic inphrasis* showing an artistic representation of the content and emotions previously existing in the philosophy and photography of Georg Shiras, and later in the painting of Aneta Kublik. The resulting artistic artefact is an emotional reference to the work of art from which the painter, and then the composer, drew inspiration. The modification of one code to another occurs in a symbolic space, which is related to the phenomenon of the mutual permeation of arts and the expression of a non-verbal work. The subject of Aneta

Kublik's paintings is the feeling of anxiety and suffering caused by frightened roe deer. The original painting technique used, based on the clash between light and black oil paint applied in a sculptural manner, caused the symbolic meaning to cross its original boundaries: the calm of the deer in the forest. The aesthetic experience at hand is about lyrical abstraction hidden in philosophy and inspiration drawn from another work of art. Inside the painter, at the moment of this experience, the vision develops of the artistic work.

The emotions contained in these paintings by Kublik were later reflected in the audio-visual composition by Katarzyna Kwiecień-Długosz. During the playback of the music material, the paintings are displayed that complete the narrative, creating an intermedial composition. The musical work contains various intermedial references; it uses and is inspired by three sources: photographic, painterly and philosophical. Yet the symbolic structure of the composition refers to the painting, and the music material suggests to the audience a transition from darkness to lightness with changing moods and colours.

**Key words:** intermediality, inphrasis, contemporary music, images, art, audio-visual art

## 1. Introduction. Scope of study

This article presents an analysis of an audio-visual work by the contemporary Polish composer Katarzyna Kwiecień-Długosz.

The work is an example of an *artistic inphrasis*, whose aim is to arouse emotions evoked by the paintings of the young Polish painter Aneta Kublik and to recreate these emotions in an audio-visual work.

Audio-visual art is based on combining sound with visual elements into a single structure, ensuring a continuous fusion of these media, creating a single integrated artistic message.

Generally, sound, video projection, lighting, digital and interactive technologies are used to create an audio-visual work. Therefore, this type of intermedial work requires an interdisciplinary approach.

The main aim of audio-visual art is to convey the emotions contained in the sound and visual layer. Among the best-known forms of audio-visual art are sound installation, audio-visual installation and audio-visual performance.

As it is known, there is still no uniform, established scholarly discourse and description methodology that will cover all genres of visual arts, music, theatre and cinema. As the scholars of this issue rightly observe, 'despite the growing interest of modern cultural studies and art critics in this, the issue of audio-visual discourse in modern digital culture remains insufficiently covered. A theoretical basis is being formed, and the active development of digital media involves the constant updating of factual materials' [3].

Thus it seems essential not only to study the influence of new technologies on the creative process, but also the intermedial relationships being formed between individual media.

The composition selected for analysis, *To See the Invisible* for six performers (2019) by Katarzyna Kwiecień-Długosz, reflects the inphrastic reconfiguration of specific works of art: paintings by Aneta Kublik (a contemporary Polish painter; <https://www.anetakublik.pl>). The use of selected paintings by this painter as source material for creating an audio-visual work played an important role in achieving the expression and dramaturgy of the work. It was the emotions resulting from and the painter's concern and anxiety, reflected in the cycle of works entitled '*Zobaczyć niewidoczne*'/'*To See the Invisible*', that provided the basis for *artistic inphrasis*.

The concept of *inphrasis* is described today by Kamila Woźniak in her studies on photographs as a carrier of literary content. She claims that 'there is a peculiar double interpretation [in this play] – the viewer interprets the artistic interpretation of a literary work. He attempts to reconstruct the artist's line of thought, at the same time recreating in his memory the content of the literary work to which the photograph refers [...] This confrontation with an artistic work will be complete only when the viewer discovers and recognizes the literary cultural code, and the artist reveals this code (in the form of the title of the photograph or a very clearly defined symbolism that appears in it) will expose to him' [5].

In contrast, my definition of *inphrasis* comes from a radical redefinition of the

concept of *ekphrasis* proposed by Siglind Bruhn. The scholar, proposing a new concept of 'musical ekphrasis', described the phenomenon as a 'representation in one medium of a real or fictitious text composed in another medium' [1]. As Laura Sager Eidt aptly described, '[...] ekphrasis need not be purely verbal. If the goal of verbal ekphrasis is to make the reader see, cinematic ekphrasis can also be discussed in terms of its effect on the audience' [2].

This argumentation allowed me to produce another redefinition of the term *ekphrasis*, which would be appropriate to define the intermedial relationships present in an audio-visual work. The term *inphrasis* has only been introduced recently and is gradually being extracted from visual arts. Exploring the relationship between individual verbal and non-verbal media, I formulated my own definitions of *ekphrasis* and *artistic inphrasis*,<sup>1</sup> which I used to interpret selected contemporary intermedial works on an emotional and symbolic level.<sup>2</sup>

## **2. To See the Invisible – night nature photography as inphrastic inspiration**

The point of departure for the analysis of the selected audio-visual work is a night nature photograph (frightened roe deer) and philosophy, which originally inspired the painter.

In the piece selected for discussion, we deal with a juxtaposition of four different media: painting, photography, philosophical thought and music, which condition visual and auditory experience.

It is this expressive transition from darkness to lightness with altering moods and colours that becomes a symbol of a visual, and then audio-visual, work.

### **2.1 The painting (source medium). Inspirations and message**

The painting *To See the Invisible* by Aneta Kublik is the result of her inspiration and fascination with the photography of Georg Shiras, one of the pioneers of night nature photography. „As a result of his ingenuity, Shiras succeeded in capturing the first nighttime wildlife photographs ever created. They were the first wildlife images to use both flash photography and camera trap equipment” [6]. The painter also drew inspiration from Frida Kahlo's *Wounded Deer*, Franz Marc's *The Fate of Animals* and Gerhard Richter's *Deer*.

Aneta Kublik based her cycle of paintings on the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer and Emil Cioran, thus trying to express and elevate the emotions that we usually want to hide. The author of the paintings attempts to prove in her oeuvre that strong sensations need an outlet and may transform into a work of art inspired by extreme emotions. The title of the cycle *Zobaczyć niewidoczne* seems to best emphasize the above.

The aesthetic experience resulting from the reception of the photographic work and reading the sense of philosophical thoughts provoked the painter to express this content in a visual way. Painting, like any other type of art, should be based on the artist's experiences, feelings and sensations in order to become more

meaningful. Emotions resulting from deciphering the hidden meanings of a work may also be transferred to another work of art or a literary work, creating the phenomenon of *artistic inphrasis*. Aneta Kublik's *inphrases* are not typical pictures-illustrations of fleeing animals. Thanks to the painting technique used and the external play on light, they express emotions aroused by reading philosophical thoughts and looking at photographs; they are an experience in themselves.

The young Polish painter was fascinated by the feelings of animals that became restless at night under the influence of unexpected camera flashes, which she recorded in traditional painting in 2011. As time passed, Aneta Kublik dropped the classical chiaroscuro, perspective and colours, the collision of a beam of light with the blackness of oil paint becoming the sole element.

Kublik's cycle of paintings entitled *To See the Invisible* is an expression of the feeling of hidden emotions which the painter captured in thick paint painting, thanks to which the imaginary moods take on specific real form. The theme of the series is the inner mood of experienced fear, anxiety and uncertainty, which is difficult to express in a painting. The epitome of these emotions are the skittish roe deer that hide in the forest landscapes. Thus the deer became a figure, a symbol of the artist's dark experiences. Black in this painting becomes a colour that reflects these moods.

In order to precisely express her emotions, the painter uses a limited colour palette that only comes to life under light reflections. As a result, the gesture, which is a painting trace and, simultaneously, a symbolically loaded

creative act, plays the fundamental role. The use of an innovative painting technique based on the use of a thick layer of paint on the canvas creates the impression of a sculpture that is a challenge for both the painter and the recipient of this art. This light becomes the main creator of artistic emotion and narrative in this work. Depending on the angle and incidence intensity, a new work is created in which one may notice motion and hidden colours creating different representations each time (see Figure 1, 2, 3).



Figure 1. *To see the invisible*, 2019, oil on canvas 1x2m. Reproduced by consent of Aneta Kublik



Figure 2. *To see the invisible*, 2019, oil on canvas 100x160cm. Reproduced by consent of Aneta Kublik



to see the invisible, 2019, oil on canvas, 0,9x1,2m

*Figure 3. To see the invisible, 2019, oil on canvas 0,9x1,2m. Reproduced by consent of Aneta Kublik*

## 2.2 Audio-visual work

The audio-visual work *To See the Invisible* for six performers was written to the cycle of paintings *To See the Invisible*. The piece was inspired by Aneta Kublik's exhibition, which the composer saw at the Academy of Fine Arts, Art Armoury in Gdańsk in 2018. The composer was particularly inspired by the limited colour palette and the figurativeness of painting.

The collaboration consisted in making a film (the visual layer) that used three paintings being presented in changing light (see Figure 1, 2, 3). This film, in turn, became the basis for composing the sound layer that musically commented on the emotions and symbols hidden in the paintings. In the music, similarly to the visual layer, there is a transition from darkness to lightness with changing moods and colours. The film containing selected paintings is thematically synchronized with the musical layer of the composition.

The source medium was transferred to a new medium; the visual layer displayed live during the sound playback. Sensory perceptions of image and sound are not

only a synthesis of the impressions being received, because they are enriched by their reproduction in the audience's memory. This means that everyone may interpret a work of art differently and perceive emotions differently.

In her compositions Kwiecień-Długosz uses the sounds of traditional instruments (flauto grande, clarinetto basso in si bemole, violino, viola, violoncello, contrabbasso a 4 corde).

The instruments' tone colour, changes in dynamics and rhythm used, as well as the original articulation and melodic line shapes become a reflection of the emotions triggered by fear and unpredictability, although in fact the emotions still refer to their painterly depiction.

Two wind instruments (flauto grande, clarinetto basso in si bemole) musically illustrate two young roe deer. The strings, on the other hand, help to reflect the emotions accompanying the situation in which the animals found themselves. The use of harmonic glissandos, flutter-tonguing, non-rhythmicized tremolo, against which the thematic lines built on irregular rhythmic values resound, intensifies the dark and disturbing moods in the listener. The skittishness of the roe deer is reflected in the sudden interruptions in the musical narrative (see Figure 1, 3).



Figure 4. K. Kwiecień-Długosz, *To See the Invisible* (score). Reproduced by consent of the composer

By contrast, the slow pace, long-reverberating sets of pitches in the strings, against which the cantilena melodic lines performed by the flute and the bass clarinet are presented, and, importantly, greater bursts of light, all calm down the dramatic scenes. The dialogue of these instruments symbolizes the blissful mood of two small roe deer that found a safe refuge behind the trees (see Figure 2, 5).



Figure 5. K. Kwiecień-Długosz, *To See the Invisible* – score. Reproduced by consent of the composer

The composer divided the large-scale form of the work into seven sections accompanied by various scenes of the

film being played. Sections marked with capital letters of the alphabet are a separate event from the life of roe deer:

Scenes of lurking danger; crouching deer anxiously waiting in the dark forest to escape

**Introduction** (bb. 1-16)

**A** (bb. 17-24)

Scenes of deer's escape

**B** (bb. 25-31)

**C** (bb. 32-44)

**D** (bb. 45-70)

**E** (bb. 71-91)

The scene of finding a safe refuge

**F** (bb. 92-120)

In the presented work, we are dealing with a specific coding, when a musical work uses and is inspired by two sources: visual (painting, photography) and philosophical, yet the symbolic structure of an audio-visual work always refers first to the original, that is, photography and philosophy.

Therefore, a musical work should be played together with the visual layer (a film with selected paintings and light emission) in order to properly convey the emotions hidden in individual media. The audience may follow the narrative being constructed by the intermedia message live.

**3. Conclusion**



Taking into account the issues relating to defining intermedial phenomena, as well as the variety of terms, reveals how complex the matter that we are dealing with is when analysing the relationships developing among the areas of creativity.

The composition by Kwiecień-Długosz is an artistic artefact that is an emotional reference to the work of fine art from which she drew her main inspiration (painting, visual layer). The modification of one code to another occurs in a symbolic space, which is related to the phenomenon of the mutual permeation of arts and the expression of a non-verbal work. The painter's aesthetic experience, in turn, concerns lyrical abstraction hidden in philosophy and inspiration by another work of art. Inside the painter, at the moment of this experience, the vision develops of the artistic work. Present here is the phenomenon of a mutual permeation of meta-artistic texts, which is a reflection of a non-verbal (photographic, film, visual) or verbal (philosophical content) medium in a non-verbal medium (audio-visual work), typical of *artistic inphrasis*. *Inphrases* are the emotions of frightened roe deer recorded first in the photograph and then in the painting, later transferred to the audio-visual layer.

Kwiecień-Długosz, in the musical layer of her audio-visual composition *To See the Invisible*, attempted to fully convey the feelings and symbolism that may be read in Kublik's paintings. 'The peculiarity of the symbolism of [Aneta Kublik's] paintings seems to be an attempt made in them to express the suffering inherent in human existence, set, as it were, in the metaphysical blackness preceding birth, which, after all, no light of life may illuminate [...]' [4].

Therefore, the audience's attention is focused not on the painting or the music itself, but on the illuminated elements of the paintings with expressive music, which come to life, gaining a symbolic dimension, creating inphrastic inspirations. It is them that evoke in the audience emotions transferred from the original medium updated with a new aesthetic experience.

## Notes

**1. Artistic ekphrasis** – a verbal interpretation of music or other artistic medium; the use of a verbal medium for representing a non-verbal medium. It consists of an artistic description of works of art or a reference in a literary work. The author of such text describes not only the original work of art that made an aesthetic impression on him or her, but also introduces the author's subjective element into the description, thanks to which the work of art gains a new dimension; it is enriched with a new context and interpretation. The overriding goal of ekphrasis is to evoke emotions resulting from the contemplation of a work of art, as a result of which a description of the work of art or a different kind of reference to the perceived object of artistic creation appears in the narrative layer.

**Artistic inphrasis** – respectively: musical, choreographic, visual, plastic, is a process opposite to ekphrasis; it is an intermedial work or its excerpts that convey emotions using appropriate means resulting from the interpretation of literary content or other work of art (original work). Artistic inphrasis is a phenomenon of mutual permeation meta-artistic texts, which is a reflection of a non-verbal (musical, choreographic,

cinematic, visual) medium or a verbal one in a non-verbal medium.

2. The research results were presented at the 16th International Scientific Conference *Music Science Today: the permanent and the changeable*, Daugavpils University Vytautas Magnus University, 2022; subject of presentation: *Artistic Ekphrasis and Inphrasis. A Term in the Studies of Intermedial Works*. The results will have been published in the scholarly journal *Nova Contemporary Music Journal* 2022, Vol. 3, Musical Performance as Creation International Conference Proceedings, Centro de Estudos de Sociologia e Estética Musical Lisbon, Portugal.

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