

# The Poignant Moment: From G. E. Lessing to Film Theory

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**Abstract** This essay connects a minimalist approach to Ekphrasis, the transfer from the visual to the textual as proposed by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, an eighteenth century playwright, poet, and theorist of the image. He influenced Bertolt Brecht's approach to cutting devices for the sake of montage in the epic theatre of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and Eisenstein's stills in film, as discussed in the context of theoretical statements by Roland Barthes. Lessing's minimalist approach to the visual can further be linked to condensation in film, such as discussed by Christian Metz and most recently Anton Kaes whose observations on the omission of the traumatic in post WWII cinema is reminiscent of Lessing's motto "The more we see the more we must be able to imagine."

**Key Words** Laokoön; Ekphrasis; poignant moment; minimalist visuality; film

*Dasjenige aber nur allein ist fruchtbar, was der  
Einbildungskraft freies Spiel läßt. Je mehr wir sehen,  
desto mehr müssen wir hinzu denken können*  
—Lessing, *Laokoön*<sup>1</sup>

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729 – 81) is an eighteenth-century playwright, poet, and Enlightenment critic whose approach to the presentation of the visual has become path-breaking for theater, film production, and theories of timing images until today. Similar to his contemporary Denis Diderot (1713 – 1784), Lessing preferred sketches over finished paintings. Moreover, he developed an important new approach to visuality and experimented with it in his plays *Miss Sara Sampson*, *Emilia Galotti*, *Minna von Barnhelm* or *Nathan the Wise*. Lessing's theory of the poignant moment in visual representation as elaborated in his theoretical writings and letters had an impact on Bertolt Brecht's 20<sup>th</sup> century approach to epic theater. Brecht's theory of montage shows the traces of Lessing's idea to choose the most effective moment of action for the stage, the "pregnant moment" or the "fruitful moment" (Xu in *Comparative Cinema*, ed Allert 33 – 46). Also Roland Barthes' rhetoric of the image is related to what Lessing called the "obtuse meaning" which "disturbs or sterilizes any metalanguage" (Barthes 61) and which Barthes identified with "the crucial instant" (73) in his book *Image-Music-Text*. Barthes has also linked Lessing's approach with Sergei Eis-

enstein's filmic "stills" (69–78) which, for example turn the fist of an old woman into an icon for an entire era. Also, Christian Metz's concept of "the spilling over of the image" in film (289–92) could very well be traced back to Lessing's approach to ekphrastic condensation. Anton Kaes' interpretations of post WWII films such as Lang's *Metropolis* that may not be a "war film proper" yet, I think, reminiscent of Lessing. Kaes claims in his book *Shell Shock Cinema* that these films are "therefore doubly evocative" and he is correct to state in the same vein that in Lang's film *M* "trauma is present, yet invisible" (209). Kaes refers not only to cutting techniques and styles of abbreviation for practical purposes or for the sake of beauty, elegance, and art. Nor does he think of the spectators' "freedom" which Lessing first had in mind; Kaes argues that the only viable and artful way to "show the invisible wounds that remain when war has ended" can be presented via such significant reductions. It is convincing that one cannot always share pain, trauma, and violence on the screen in order to get spectators interested and think. More levels of metaphoric, metonymic, or indirect "showing" (or omission) may be needed.

Lessing wanted to establish an audience and chose a subtle approach to visuality as best summarized in his dictum: "But only what gives free reign to the imagination is effective. The more we see, the more we must be able to imagine." He suggested that in order to liberate the imagination of the onlookers during the performance of a play, especially a bourgeois drama, the artist must adhere to a minimalist approach to visuality. Ekphrasis is the process of narrating or textualizing the visual, the translation so to speak from visuality to textuality. Lessing suggested that any verbal portrayal of significant physical action as performed in a play or as described in a narrative should be similar to what a sculptor or a painter must do: they must limit themselves only to depict the most "poignant" (or pregnant, fruitful) moments of an entire action and cut the presentation before its climax.

Although Lessing acknowledges differences between the various disciplines and media, he insists on a common need of all effective languages of visuality: scarceness or minimalism.<sup>2</sup> He commented on those scenes as the most meaningful which had the most potential for action implied, were most compact. In his fables he cut any didactic comments or motto and made the story speak for itself. His parables were open-ended and his plays aimed at providing a selection of significant scenes rather than complete narratives or finished actions. As a literary critic he rejected what he believed was too much pictorialism in literature and he warned against expressions that appear overstated. He argued that they often become counter-productive and take away from the suggestive power of the visual arts.

Lessing explained this approach which I call in a book manuscript in process "Lessing's art of understatement" in his 1766 essay *Laokoön*, subtitled "On the Limits between Painting and Poetry" where he claims that visual art is the medium of space whereas music is the medium of time. Positioned between them is poetry or poetic writing ("Dichtung"), including all genres of literature. The artist must not only "translate" the visual into the verbal — as is expected in all Ekphrasis — but also deal with the problem of temporality, as music does.<sup>3</sup> Lessing carefully defines images as best when they are "almost" timeless, focusing on the most significant aspects

of inner actions (emotions) or outer actions (events). The artist should avoid the simultaneity of signs as typical for music by restricting its signs to sequences in space as in painting. It is best by avoiding temporality, or at least by condensing everything into poignant moments. Since according to Lessing the visual belongs to the dimension of space, whereas the acoustic or music belong to time, all languages of visuality must bracket, exclude, or postpone temporality and rely on sequential signs in space. Only then can they achieve an effective visual-verbal transfer, Ekphrasis.

When composing the *Laokoön* Lessing had to negotiate between rationalist and empiricist influences. He chose to avoid the empiricist approach to art associated with the work of the philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714 – 62) who in 1730 for the first time introduced and defined the word “Ästhetik.”<sup>4</sup> Baumgarten understood aesthetics as a concept of knowledge, an activity derived from the senses, specifically the sense-perception of beauty, as opposed to knowledge exclusively acquired in a logical fashion through reason. His approach, treated in his two volumes of *Aesthetica* (1750 – 58), was then developed by the philosophy professor Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804) in his *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790, *Critique of Judgment*). Kant’s innovative student, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744 – 1803) pursuing also ideas by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646 – 1716) and while drawing insights from the famous Molyneux debate surrounding a blind person as reported by Etienne Bonnot de Condillac (1715 – 80), shifted attention away from the eyes more to the ears and then especially to touch in his *Kritische Wälder*. Lessing’s approach in *Laokoön* was instrumental for Herder and for Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749 – 1832) who acknowledged how path breaking it was for a better understanding of the limits between painting and poetry but, as I argue in this essay, also for a more effective approach to textualize the visual.

Lessing chose not to use the word “Ästhetik” as Baumgarten had introduced it. In fact that word is only mentioned once by Lessing in the preface to *Laokoön* and somewhat dismissively. He did not share the idea that images in art should only present the beautiful, in part because of two other influences on him. In 1757 Moses Mendelssohn (1729 – 86) published an essay Lessing read as a student. In this essay, “Betrachtungen über die Quellen und die Verbindungen der schönen Künste und Wissenschaften” (Reflections on the Sources and the Links between the Belles-Lettres and the Sciences),<sup>5</sup> Mendelssohn raised the issue of how to define the relationship between the visual and the verbal arts in terms of poetic language and its ability to make use of various rhetorical devices to stimulate the imagination. Moreover, Lessing adopted ideas by Giambattista Vico (1668 – 1744), who considered metaphors not as secondary or derived language structures or shortened similes, as in antiquity Quintilian had done, but instead as primary language structures, an idea later recast by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900) for whom metaphors in language are “unhintergebar” (unavoidable) (Bode 649).

It was important to Lessing as he explored “the broad fields of art theory” and what was then called aesthetics that spectators should have a sense of freedom. Images should not be imposed on them but appear as if “natural.” He developed a semiotics how to achieve such apparent naturalness so that the signs appear “comfortable”

and not only “arbitrary as he puts it, a matter of rhetoric which is being achieved by suggested leaving plenty of space for thinking.”<sup>6</sup> His rationalist approach was part of his didactic efforts to educate an audience by liberating people so that they might imagine and think on their own. Second, Lessing’s approach to cutting wordiness and integrating silence in the rhetoric of the image involved metaphor and rhetorical devices including irony, dialogue, and stichomythia. He distilled his critical approach in his praise of statue of Laokoön, now in the Roman Vatican. This statue portrays a scene from Virgil’s *Aeneid* (Brilliant 44 – 45).<sup>7</sup> Lessing paid attention to the restriction implied in the medium of the visual and performing arts. Language is much more flexible than stone; nonetheless, effective written descriptions need in his opinion to be as compressed as sculpture is. Moments depicted also have to be very well chosen.

Lessing’s *Laokoön* offers a philosophy of the fine arts and the beautiful (which includes the horrible), investigating the poetics of numerous writers. It contains much that Lessing later incorporated in work as a playwright and poet, where he tested certain rules, features, and applications of so-called “Poesie.”<sup>8</sup> Lessing was more of a writer than a painter but he strongly believed in textual visuality.<sup>9</sup> His fables, parables, and plays include dialogues, metaphors, and references that from various perspectives raise issues of visuality.

Bertolt Brecht later rediscovered Lessing in his own approach to the epic theatre, raising the audience to the same level as the stage. Also in film he makes use of montage, the technique of combining two clips to express some third thing which neither one nor the other element alone could have achieved. It qualitatively differs from the sum of these elements by involving an imaginary dynamic, a creative spark.

Very similar ideas are expressed by the film expert Christian Metz in *The Imaginary Signifier* when he writes about the technique of condensation in film which he links with Sigmund Freud’s notion of “Verdichtung” or contraction, a thickening of experience or action as it often happens in dreams and as it has to be unraveled in order to understand their meaning. One must be able to read certain cues that have led to an “Entstellung” or displacement in the process in order to avoid certain psychological mechanisms, such as internal censorship. He finds that even in general there is a need of compression since: “The primary energetic of condensation is also a symbolic matrix: in order to say things more quickly, one has to say them differently and use different ideational paths (itineraries of discharge)” (236).<sup>10</sup> Metz argues that sometimes condensation is a temporary displacement or distortion in order to get to the most important message across, either in a dream or in a film.

The film producer and theorist Sergei Eisenstein refers to Lessing in his book *Film Form* and emphatically shares his awareness of the limits of the medium, as well as Lessing’s rejection of “imitative limitations” of the arts (183). His approach to create stills in film that capture symbolic moments and symbolize an entire action or specific time in history draws consciously from Lessing’s theoretical concepts of “prägnanter Moment” (poignant moment) and “stummer Schrei” (silent scream). To him, such moments are associated with “instants in which water becomes a new substance — steam, or ice — water, or pig-iron — steel.” (172). Eisenstein com-

ments; “And from this — for the structure of the work we are analyzing as well as for the structure of any construction of pathos — we can say that a pathetic structure is one that compels us, echoing its movement, to re-live the moments of culmination and substantiation that are in the canon of all dialectical processes” (173). He similarly insists on engaging the audience or spectatorship in that subtle way.

In what follows I would like to suggest that an understanding of the temporality of film emerges for us if we look more closely at *Laokoön*, where Lessing addressed the problem of space and time and questioned temporality in art by positioning it with music. Lessing's *Laokoön* is composed of numerous dialogues and digressions and it offers an outline of the complexities of the various disciplines of art. It includes also the representation of suffering in art. Humans experience pain and horror, and the visual arts, literature and film, have always documented that, whether it was theoretically welcome or not.<sup>11</sup> Lessing used the more inclusive word “Poesie” in referring to the various poetic arts and literary genres and he claims they all have a life force.

As Herder had written, this force (“Kraft”) works through all literary genres but according to Lessing with a difference in each. He argued that written images are often more impressive and leave a much stronger impact on the reader than the images on a canvas can do. The poetic image entices the spectators' imagination intensely; often calling for sympathy and making the public actively participate in the semiotic process; that is, the production of making meaning.<sup>12</sup> Herder's work also stressed the power of “Poesie.” He called for “Synästhesie perception” and the fluid translatability among the senses but did not emphasize, as Lessing did, the differences between the senses. Lessing drew attention to the specific media differences and gaps between the visual, the acoustic, and the verbal. In doing so, he became a forerunner for Marshall McLuhan for whom the medium is not only inseparable from the message but the message itself (McLuhan 8).

Some critics have noticed in *Laokoön* a concession to time, an attempt to allow temporality and simultaneity of meaning not only in music but also in poetic texts. Lessing appears to indicate that images or pictures are also to some extent poetic and that they cannot, as other critics have argued, be banned from the verbal.<sup>13</sup> Critics have therefore interpreted this as a move to combine the visual and the verbal and to allow all aspects of temporality in the verbal and visual arts, not as any sort of concession but as one of Lessing's most important discoveries.<sup>14</sup>

In *Laokoön* Lessing proposed two related concepts that are particularly important to our modern conceptions of time in art which have in my understanding interesting resonances and consequences for film theory, montage techniques, and cinematography and are relevant in other practices of image sharing. The first he called the “prägnanter Moment” (pregnant or poignant moment) and the second “stummer Schrei” (silent scream) which he finds in the facial expression of the famous *Laokoön* statue. The father does not have his mouth wide open screaming for pain but only slightly open, merely as if sighing. This subdued expression is exemplary for effective visual art in Lessing's view since it does not impose too much upon the spectators but instead leaves much open, thus inviting “Mitleid” or compassion.

Whereas sculpture and painting exist in space, music exists only in time and has

the advantage of the simultaneity of its signs. Notions of “der prägnante Moment” (the poignant moment), and “der stumme Schrei” (the silent scream) have had far-reaching theoretical consequences for later theorists, even those working with quite different media.<sup>15</sup> Lessing argues that since a painting can only depict one single moment in time, such a select moment must be chosen very carefully so that the implied potential of the entire action can be seen in a nutshell. The painter must think of the most poignant moment without giving away too much and thereby restricting the imagination.

By questioning the limitations between the visual and the verbal Lessing not only tried to establish dividing lines between them but inserted new meanings into the discussion. The art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717 – 68) had seen the statue during a visit to Rome in 1760. His response to the statue is found in *Gedanken über die Nachahmung Griechischer Werke in Malerei und Skulptur* (1755, *Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*). Winckelmann had commented that the mouth of Laocoön — who is entwined in the coils of the dangerous serpents and has already been bitten — is only slightly ajar and not, as might be expected in real life, open and screaming. But whereas Winckelmann saw this in terms of the attributes representing the Classical ideals of “edle Einfalt” (noble simplicity) and “stille Größe” (silent grandeur) (32), Lessing naturally shifted attention away from the statue *per se* to the spectators. He argued that the artist must be aware of the medium being used, in this case, sculpture, and insists that it is the effect of what is being seen that matters. We are invited to think about the “silent scream,” in terms of the signifiers, the attributes of the work of art, the medium of sculpture, and the process of reception.<sup>16</sup> Lessing recommends a mental experiment: “[M] an reiße dem Laokoön in Gedanken nur den Mund auf, und urteile. Man lasse ihn schreien und sehe.”<sup>17</sup> The thing itself or the person represented in an artwork does not carry any predetermined meaning; what matters is the interaction with the observer.<sup>18</sup> Lessing stresses that the process of production of meaning detaches itself from the intentions of the artist and becomes instead a matter of reception.

Timing is crucial in these *pars pro toto* relations and requires the choice of the most poignant moment for the scene the work of art represents. The painter and the sculptor can only choose one moment in time to depict, and this moment must be the one that will most engage the imagination of the viewer (*Laokoön*, ch. 3; 5/2, 32). Lessing does not simply declare that there is polarity or an unbridgeable gap between painting and poetic writing.<sup>19</sup> He distinguishes between the means by which the visual and the textual signify.<sup>20</sup> There could be signs as “figures and color in space” and signs he calls “articulated sounds in time.” He indirectly questions what he calls “suitable relations” or “comfortable relations” between signs and signified, thus entering the realm of more “unbequeme Zeichen” (“uncomfortable signs”). He draws attention to a gap in the signification process and asserts that bodies exist in space and time: “Doch alle Körper existieren nicht allein in dem Raume, sondern auch in der Zeit” (5/2, 116).<sup>21</sup> Here Lessing seems to question his earlier argument that the temporal and the spatial belong each to a different order. He brings them together by using the word “bodies” in a figurative sense. He shifts the level of his own discourse

by drawing attention to the fact that language can go beyond its own limits and that meanings are never entirely given. Lessing goes even further and raises the question of what is visible and what is invisible.<sup>22</sup> Since painting and the visual arts must be content with the visible, there is a problem, he argues, in that “die Körper” or the figures in space continue to have meaning beyond that limit of visibility:

Sie dauern fort und können in jedem Augenblicke ihrer Dauer anders erscheinen, und in anderer Verbindung stehen. Jede dieser augenblicklichen Erscheinungen und Verbindungen ist die Wirkung einer vorhergehenden, und kann die Ursache einer folgenden, und sonach gleichsam das Centrum einer Handlung sein. Folglich kann die Malerei auch Handlungen nachahmen, aber nur andeutungsweise durch Körper. . . Die Malerei kann in ihren coexistierenden Compositionen nur einen einzigen Augenblick der Handlung nutzen, und muß daher den prägnantesten wählen, aus welchem das Vorhergehende und Folgende am begrifflichsten wird.<sup>23</sup>

The continuation of movements changes meanings constantly. Since each appearance and each moment of an impression can become the center of a new action, the artist must choose among all the possible coexisting compositions that may be implied. The most pregnant moment would suggest as many possibilities as possible. Since the choice of such an apparent frozen image out of the flux of time is not a way to control real time, it is a way to use fiction in order to make sense of a complex and changing reality which, nevertheless, as Lessing is fully aware, always depends on processes of reception, not only of production.

*Laokoön* is most often debated as if Lessing were asserting a strict dividing line determining the boundaries between painting and literature, the visual and the verbal. On the other hand, if understanding imagination and images means transposing them into a narrative, then visual art and metaphor must first be translated into discursive language before their meaning can be deciphered. However, Lessing does not necessarily propose a translation between media, a textualizing of the statue into narrative. Visualization of an artwork may be simulated by reading about it, yet there is no friction-free transfer of the visual into the verbal. In *Laokoön*, chapter 14, Lessing points out that a poetic picture is not necessarily something that can be converted into a material painting (5/2, 112). There is a residue, something that is not entirely translatable in the process. Metaphors, metonymies, and elements of Ekphrasis remain unconverted. On the other hand, the poet makes the subject so concrete for us that we become more conscious of the subject referred to than of his words. Benjamin Bennett’s reading of *Laokoön* as a poetics shows how Lessing goes “beyond theory” by initiating moments of reflection. These cannot simply be reduced to a comparison of painting and poetry. Instead they allow us an experience of multiple senses best achieved by poetry, including music (128). Carol Jacobs has emphasized the significant “performative” features of Lessing’s essay that depend primarily on the attentiveness of readers and spectators. In her interpretation, Lessing’s *Laokoön* is not only an art-theoretical treatise; it also invites interaction and experience. There are indeed

features of Lessing's text that seem to subvert or to undercut his major argument about the borders between painting and poetry, because Lessing inserts more than one layer of meaning to his arguments, drawing attention to the exceptional, and thus suggesting multiple sense perceptions and multiple relationships between painting and poetry.

## Notes

1. Lessing, *Laokoön*, ch. 3 (5/2, 32) ("But only that which gives free rein to the imagination is effective. The more we see, the more we must be able to imagine" [Lessing as translated into English by McCormick 19]). All subsequent citations throughout my essay will be from the Frankfurt edition of Lessing citing volume and page numbers. The translations of Lessing's *Laokoön* are from McCormick's translation cited as "McCormick." All other translations in this essay are mine.
2. Beate Allert, ed. *Languages of Visuality. Crossings between Science, Art, Politics, and Literature*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996) 1–25.
3. For an elaborate presentation of the history of the term "Ekphrasis" which is initially based on Homer's lively description of the shield of Achilles in book 18 of the *Iliad* and for a range of debates surrounding it, see Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992).
4. "§. CXVI. Sunt ergo noētá cognoscenda facultate superiore obiectum logices, asthētá episēmēs aisthētikēs siueaestheticae." See Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus*, (Halle: Literis Ioannis Henrici Grunerti, 1739) 39; "Therefore things known are to be known by the superior faculty as the object of logic; things perceived [are to be known by the inferior faculty, as the object] of the science of perception, or aesthetic" (Baumgarten 78); See also Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, 2 vols. (Trajectum cis Viadrum [Frankfurt an der Oder]: Johann Christian Kleyb, 1750–1758). Reprinted from edition of 1961, (Hildesheim: Olms, 1986). His concept of "aesthetica" is a neo-Latin coinage. For a brief history of the issues involved, see Alan Goldman, "The Aesthetic," *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, Ed. Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes, (London: Routledge, 2001) 181–92; Luc Ferry, *Homo Aestheticus: The Development of Taste in the Democratic Age*, Trans. Robert de Laoiza, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). Rev. trans. of *Le Sens de beau: aux origines de la culture contemporaine*, (Paris: Cercle de l'Art, 1998); Allert Beate, "Lessing's Poetics as an Approach to Aesthetics," *A Companion to the Works of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing*, Ed. Barbara Fischer and Thomas C. Fox, (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005) 104–30, to which this essay is very much in debt. See further Immanuel Kant, *Werke*. 6 vols. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998); Johann Gottfried Herder, *Kritische Wälder*. In *Werke*, ed. Günther Arnold et al. 10 vols. in 11, (Stuttgart: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985–2000), Vol. 2 (1993), ed. Gunther E. Grimm; 9–442, 812–1105.
5. This essay was revised as "Ueber die Hauptgrundsätze."
6. Lessing asserts that he will draw the evidence for his arguments from the original texts, and not, like Baumgarten did in his *Aesthetica* rely on a dictionary of quotations.
7. Catterson claims that the statue was a forgery foisted on Pope Julius II by Michelangelo. This generated considerable controversy but the weight of opinion seems to be on the side of Richard Brilliant who is of the opinion that Catterson's claim is "noncredible on any count" (Kathryn Shuttuck, "An Ancient Masterpiece or a Master's Forgery?" *New York Times* [April 18, 2005]: E7).
8. Such an approach has already been suggested by Bennett, chapter 3: "Lessing's Laokoön: The Poetics of Experience" (See Benjamin Bennett, *Beyond Theory: Eighteenth-Century German Literature and the Poetics of Irony*, [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993] 116–61, esp. 154–58).

9. This is one of my arguments in response to Mitchell, *Iconology* and *Picture Theory*, who in my reading correctly links poetics with politics but unfortunately does not realize Lessing's important contribution to the visual-verbal debate. For more on this see Allert Beate, "Horaz-Lessing-Mitchell: Ansätze zu Bild-Text Relationen und kritische Reflexionen zur weiteren Ekphrasis-Debatte," In *Visual Culture*, Ed. Monika Schmitz-Emans and Gertrud Lehnert, (Heidelberg: Synchron-Verlag, 2008) 37 – 49; See also Louis Rose, *The Survival of Images, Art Historians, Psychoanalysis, and the Ancients*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001).
10. Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, Trans. Celia Britton et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982). First published as: *Le Signifiant imaginaire: Psychoanalyse et cinéma*, (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1977) 236 – 244. Also useful in this context are the essays in Linda Williams, *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995).
11. While the term "Poesie" is often translated as "Poetry," that term in English is too restrictive, as it is clear from the text that Lessing includes lyric, epic, and drama under that heading. Therefore the term is translated here as "poetic arts."
12. Lessing has been considered a semiotician. See, for example Gunter Gebauer, "Die Beziehungen von Bild und Text in Lessings *Laokoön*," In *Texte-Image, Bild-Text*, Ed. Sybil Dümchen and Michael Nerlich, (Berlin: Institut für Romanische Literaturwissenschaft, Technische Universität Berlin, 1990) 17 – 27; Gebauer, ed. *Das Laokoon-Projekt: Pläne einer semiotischen Ästhetik*, (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1984); and David E. Wellbery, *Lessing's Laocoon: Semiotics and Aesthetics in the Age of Reason*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).
13. See further Allert Beate, "Lessing im Kontext kunsttheoretischer Debatten," *Lessing Yearbook* 32 (2000): 371 – 87; Jeoraldean McClain, "Time in the Visual Arts: Lessing and Visual Criticism," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 44 (1985): 41 – 58; Michael Cohen, "Lessing on Time and Space in the Sister Arts: The Artist's Refutation," *Lessing and the Enlightenment*, Ed. Alexej Ugrinsky, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986) 13 – 23.
14. Burgard's reading involves an equation, a textualizing of the visual.
15. Among them are the filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein (1898 – 1948) and the art theorist Roland Barthes (1915 – 80). Also see Beate Allert, "Lessing im Kontext" and "Reconceptualizing a Pictorial Turn: Lessing, Hoffmann, Klee and Elements of Avant-Garde Language," *Breaking the Disciplines: Reconceptions in Knowledge, Art & Culture*, Ed. Martin L. Davies and Marsha Meskimmon, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003) 187 – 222, esp. 195 – 200.
16. Lessing, *Laokoön*, ch. 2; 5/2, 29. "The scream had to be softened to a sigh, not because screaming betrays an ignoble soul, but because it distorts the features in a disgusting manner" (Lessing as translated into English by McCormick 17).
17. Lessing, *Laokoön*, ch. 2; 5/2, 29. "Simply imagine Laokoön's mouth forced wide open, and then judge! Imagine him screaming, and then look!" (McCormick 17). See further Reinhart Meyer-Kalka, "Schreit Laokoon? Zur Diskussion pathetischerhabener Darstellungsformen im 18. Jahrhundert," *Von der Rhetorik zur Ästhetik: Studien zur Entstehung der Moderne Ästhetik im 18. Jahrhunderts*, Ed. Gérard Raulet, (Rennes: Centre de Recherche Philia, Université de Rennes 2, 1995) 67 – 110.
18. This may not necessarily be the case, as demonstrated by the counter-examples in Astrid Gudarian-Driesen, *Die Stimme in der Kunst*, (Bad Rappenau: Kulturhaus Forum Fränkischer Hof, 1989), esp. "Der Schrei," 86 – 107. See also Simon Richter, *Laocoon's Body and the Aesthetics of Pain: Winckelmann, Lessing, Herder, Moritz, Goethe*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992).
19. See Peter Utz, *Das Auge und das Ohr im Text: Literarische Sinneswahrnehmung in der Goethezeit*, (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1990). In summarizing what he refers to as Lessing's aesthetics in chapter 3 (39 – 53), Utz draws upon the words of the Templar in Lessing's *Nathan*

*der Weise* as he addresses Nathan's daughter, Recha: "Wie ist doch meine Seele zwischen Auge / Und Ohr geteilt" (Act 3, sc. 2; 9, 545) ("How indeed is my soul split between eye and ear"). Utz connects this splitting of the senses with the historic division of labor in the nascent industrial age and also associates Lessing's *Laokoon* with a "Territorialisierung der Künste" (42) ("territorializing of the arts") and "eine Kolonialisierung des Körpers" (42) ("a colonizing of the body").

20. "[I]f it is true that in its imitations painting uses completely different means or signs than does poetry, namely figures and colors in space rather than articulated sounds in time, and if these signs must indisputably bear a suitable relation to the thing signified, then signs existing in space can express only objects whose wholes or parts coexist, while signs that follow one another can express only objects whose wholes or parts are consecutive" (Lessing, *Laokoön*, as trans by McCormick 78).

21. "However, bodies do not exist in space only, but also in time" (Lessing as translated into English by McCormick 78).

22. This question was much later raised again and developed further by the painter Paul Klee (1879 – 1940); see "Reconceptualizing a Pictorial Turn: Lessing, Hoffmann, Klee and Elements of Avant-Garde Language," *Breaking the Disciplines: Reconceptions in Knowledge, Art & Culture*, ed. Martin L. Davies and Marsha Meskimmon, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003) 186 – 222.

23. *Laokoön*, ch. 16; 5/2, 116 – 17. "They persist in time and in each moment of their duration they may assume a different appearance or stand in a different combination. Each of these momentary appearances and combinations is the result of the preceding one and can be the cause of the subsequent one, which means that it can be, as it were, the center of an action. Consequently, painting too can imitate actions. [...] Painting can use only a single moment of an action in its coexisting compositions and must therefore choose the one that is most suggestive and from which the preceding and the succeeding actions are most easily comprehensible" (Lessing as translated into English by McCormick 78). On the implications of "der prägnanteste Augenblick," see further Norbert Christian Wolf, "'Fruchtbarer Augenblick' — 'prägnanter Moment': Zur medien-spezifischen Funktion einer ästhetischen Kategorie in Aufklärung und Klassik," in *Prägnanter Moment: Studien zur deutschen Literatur der Aufklärung und Klassik: Festschrift für Hans-Jürgen Schings*, Ed. Peter-André Alt, et al. (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2002) 373 – 404.

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