

## Digital Ekphrasis



### *Dedication*

This text is dedicated to the mythical figure Europa, the princess who, in her dreams, has two mother figures. Europa is given a rest from the claims of their jealous appropriation through being seduced and abducted by Zeus, who carries her across the sea to an island that will forth on be called a continent. Europa brings along in a basket her fate, her destiny, not yet concluded, but curled up and, perhaps, asleep; at least given a rest, if only for the duration of the abduction. The myth is told by Moschos, one of the first known grammarians who lived in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century in Syrakus. Europa's basket is one of the early instances of ekphrasis, an art especially reserved for the rhetorically well-versed poets because it involves a mimetic strategy that works not only in a *double* way but also in a way that

packages self-referentiality within what it strives to achieve: the poet has to describe an object in words by fabulating a situation in which the words can contain their meaning in a manner that sets the object free, that acknowledges its autonomy; but the poet also has to endow this object with liveliness by narrating the fabulation of the description within a vaster scope, a scope vaster than can be expected. In this vaster scope, the depicted elements of the *fabula*—the *tableau* with which the description is to work—can link up and make sense variously, pursuing arbitrary directions. A *fable* is also called *the story space of a lie*, or *a ruse* for this reason, or *a story with a lesson*, *a gift*, or something to be taken away from it after reading it. But how does one think of that ideational space where *ekphrasis* places its *fabula*? It is not the space of geometry and its projections. It is also not that of a painting and its colored surfaces, lines, and figures. At stake is an ideation that is zealous, entirely unoriginal but full of ardor, devout and yet in pursuit of something it cannot and does not hope to ever grasp in full.

In the case of Europa and her basket, the poet places the *fabula* within the circuitous scope of a myth, which like all myth, must count as speech that captures what it presents in full, and because of the fullness of its speech can never conclude it-

self in one particular ending, nor one particular beginning. And yet, despite the fullness of mythic speech, ekphrasis has something to add to it. Something that leaves the cycle and that steps out of its compass; a tale that does not stay put in the *phrasis* of a mythic plot, a tale that seeks a certain amount of autonomy, that wants to invert direction: this ideational space is not without reason, but its fabulations ask to be placed on the grounds of a reason that is best called *abductive*.

This *Ode to Europa* is written in praise of *Inchoate Form*, literally meaning form that “commences.” Inchoate form is form that has “recently or just began,” from Latin *inchoatus*, past participle of *inchoare*, alteration of *incohare* “to commence, begin.”<sup>1</sup> Such a form has actuality too, but the time of its extension is not given. The actuality of form that just commences is given, but it lacks a place in time that would be proper for it. How can we picture, mentally, the scope of such an extension?

### *Image Loss*

“Everywhere under the sun the images were dying out,” the main character in Peter Handke’s novel

1 <https://www.etymonline.com/word/inchoate> (accessed September 14, 2021).

*Der Bildverlust* worries.<sup>2</sup> We never learn this character's proper name throughout the story, even though it is "her" story that is being told in this novel. Her story is being told, so we learn, by somebody who had been contracted as its author for the curious reason that he has no particular interest in her nor in the story itself, which he commits to writing. Such an odd choice of identifying an author is necessary, so we learn, because the story is to be told within the scope of calculative reason. There is one sole and very particular purpose to the writing of this story, namely, to make that very worry of hers, that "everywhere under the sun the images were dying out," *productive*. The main character whose worry irrigates—or should we say, "inspires"?—the story's plot, which she cannot tell, is "the Queen of Finance." *Finance* literally means "an end, settlement, retribution," it has come to mean the managing of money because the ending at stake in finance is one where "something that is due is being settled."<sup>3</sup> The book attempts to depict an image of thought in the light but also the force of *rea-*

2 Peter Handke, *Der Bildverlust oder die Reise durch die Sierra de Gredos*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2002, p.8 (here and throughout my own translation); English translation by Krishna Winston, *Crossing the Sierra de Gredos*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.

3 <https://www.etymonline.com/word/finance> (accessed September 14, 2021).

son's currency and convertibility. This is what makes it interesting regarding the promise of *ekphrasis*, namely, fabulations that are placed on the grounds of abductive reason, phrasings that are capable of setting something free through adding to what is already full or whole, and instead, make it *plentiful*.

If ekphrasis can add something to the fullness of mythical speech, then what kind of fullness is Handke's ekphrasis capable of adding something to? His object of "delivery" is not a basket but a contract. It is a delivery contract for some author to write the story of the contractor—the key protagonist—who literally places the story of her life in the author's hands so that, as we learn, she might perhaps "earn a place in her own story."<sup>4</sup> Our protagonist does not own her own life, and yet she wants to give what is not, properly speaking, hers; the fullness such a contract can add to, I want to suggest, is the fullness of ultimate capital. What it adds is the value of the priceless.

Handke's novel *Der Bildverlust* is concerned with the scope of an *unexpectedly vaster extension whose action is expanding arduously, zealously*. It is the story of the Queen of Finance, the story of a masked, impersonated "principle" that reigns not only "highest" but also with delight. This lofty and aspiring

4 Handke, 2013, p.8.

principle incorporates a reason that pursues an aim: to catch up with its engenderings. Such impersonation is not properly speaking an allegory, a cryptic and buried reference; its crypticness is not only contained but also delivered to the fleeting element of air, breath; it is dispersed into loftiness. Zealous ideation sources from the anonymous plenty, *copia*;<sup>5</sup> it is *copious* ideation that is original not because of the ideas it pictures but because it knows how to compose a *firmament* that can accommodate escalation by complementing it with a panoramic zodiac. Zealous ideation is ideation in fervent pursuit; the word comes from the Greek *zēlos* meaning “zeal,” a hot and corrosive spiritual motion concerned with *placement* and *displacement*. Jealousy shares the same etymological roots. In *Eros the Bittersweet* (1986), Anne Carson characterizes jealousy in two ways as a dance in which either, in the pursuit of erotic action, every person keeps moving, restlessly, or as a dance where erotic action is replaced with what Carson calls “a ruse of heart and language,”<sup>6</sup> where dance is depicted as the motion-less action of shifts in distances. In the action of this inverted dance, she says, the people do not

5 <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=copia> (accessed September 14, 2021).

6 Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet: An Essay*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2014, p.17.



move. Desire moves, and Eros is a verb. Eros, here, is an action word.

When Eros is an action word, zealous ideation is a hot and corrosive spiritual motion in pursuit of how to report an instance of Eros, an instance of its action with no location. The images that play in *Der Bildverlust* are images of cosmic erotic action:

A single image, mobilizing itself and her, was all she needed, and the day would acquire a peaceful aura. These images, although devoid of human beings and happenings, had to do with love, a love, a kind of love. And they had penetrated her since childhood, some days fewer of them, some days whole swarms of these shooting stars—always taking the form of something she had actually experienced *in passing*—sometimes completely absent, a non-day. And she was convinced that this happened to everyone, to a greater or lesser extent. No doubt the specific image always belonged to the individual's personal world. *But the image itself, as an image, was universal.* It transcended him, her, it. By virtue of the open and opening image, people belonged together. And the images did not impose anything, unlike every religion or doctrine of salvation.<sup>7</sup>

I call these images of cosmic erotic action, rendered into the setup of what Carson delightfully calls a

7 Handke, 2013, p.13.

“ruse of heart and language,”<sup>8</sup> *meteora alloys*. They are not telling the tales of love affairs. These images are not the images of a cosmogony. They depict Eros on the dance floor, Eros *as an action word*. They place him in a discrete-time that is neither properly historical, i.e., secular, nor a form empty of time like in geometry. The idea of a compass made up of critical points, in the sense of points beyond the possibility of return, would kill the ekphrastic beauty—which is to find words that contain their own meaning in such a manner as to set it, meaning, free. Hence a *critical* horizon cannot accommodate the action in “this ruse of heart and language.” *Crisis* represents a chronological limit after the crossing of which the restoration of a balance is no longer possible. Such a compass would outline a closed boundary across which no rendering—no “giving back,” no restoration of debt—is possible anymore. We need a figure of the horizon across which *rendering*, in our case, between *what expands and the extension that is to accommodate this commencing expanse* is possible. We need the figure of a horizon that works like an image without being one, an image that sets free through capturing.

We need an *ekphrasis* of the bounding circle: the description of its absent image in words—that

8 Carson, 2014, p.17.

brings it before the reader's mental eye vividly, endowed with affective force, and with a quality of vivacity. We need the *digitization* of the horizon. We need a compass that is not only a *hypothesis* but also a *hypothèque*. We need a dialectics of mechanical resourcefulness that considers method and its negation. What could be the components of its *tableau* or *fabula*? I have three proposals from which I will derive a list of concepts.

*The Tableau of Mechanical Resourcefulness  
and Zealous Ideation*

I.

The first component is Vitruvius's Books on Technology, Books IX and X of *De Architectura*.<sup>9</sup> He begins the introduction to Book IX, his treatise on *gnomons* (sundials) and, more generally, the use of science in architecture, by recalling how the Greek ancestors appointed great honor to the Athletes at the Olympic games; he recalls how they were applauded and greeted in public and with great public expense, and he is astonished that the same kind of honor has not been bestowed to those whose "boundless services were performed for all times and all nations," and whose training not only strength-

9 Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, trans. by Morris Hicky Morgan, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1914.

ened their own bodies but that of humankind in general—namely Pythagoras, Democritus, Plato, Aristotle, Archimedes, Hiero, all “men spent in constant industry, yielding fresh and rich fruit not only for their own countrymen but also to all nations,” and all of them “men whose tender years are spent in plenteous learning which this fruit affords.”<sup>10</sup> Their knowledge, mentioned by Vitruvius mostly as knowledge in geometry, arithmetic and mechanics, introduces civilized ways, impartial justice and law, “things without which no state can be sound.”<sup>11</sup> His examples of the general *resourcefulness* of their insights all concern the counting, keeping, and planning time according to mechanical processes. This becomes evident also in Book X, Vitruvius’s treatise on machinery. Here Vitruvius writes:

All machinery is derived from nature and is founded on the teaching and instruction of the revolution of the firmament. Let us but consider the connected revolutions of the sun, the moon, and the five planets, without the revolution of which, due to mechanism, we should not have had the alternation of day and night, nor the ripening of fruits. Thus, when our ancestors had seen that this was so, they took their models from nature, and by imitating them were led on by divine

10 Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, p.289.

11 Ibid.

facts, until they perfected the contrivances which are so serviceable in our life. Some things, with a view to greater convenience, they worked out by means of machines and their revolutions, others by means of engines, and so, whatever they found to be useful for investigations, for the arts, and for established practices, they took care to improve step by step on scientific principles.<sup>12</sup>

At stake here is clearly a mimetic relation to nature. It involves *copiousness*, literally the variation of constellations, of formulations, much in the same sense in which Erasmus of Rotterdam, some 15 centuries later, astonished his contemporaries by giving more than 250 copious variations of one and the same sentence, a simple “thank you for your letter,” whose version expanded in laying out this one phrase eloquently, using all his available resourcefulness in terms of modulating emphasis, by maximizing, minimizing and tempering contrasts through playing with distances, angles, the use of comparatives, superlatives, and so on. Starting with “From my dear Faustus’ letter I derived much delight.” He goes on with modulations of this sentence’s content, as in “At your words, a delight of no ordinary kind came over me,” or “I was singularly delighted by your epistle,” or “In these Faustine

12 Ibid., p.322.

letters I found a wonderful kind of delectation,” or “To be sure, how your letter delighted my spirits!” and one more, “Your brief missive flooded me with inexpressible joy.”

Erasmus’s is a great play in exuberance! The gifts in articulacy expressed by the list escalate to the point where in some instances, he places the worth of his entire life purpose in the sender of this letter, knowing that he is grateful for having received it. What kind of *scope of extension* are we dealing with here? It is one where there is an *efficacious convertibility* between desire, the wish to be made whole, and pleasure, an enjoyment in expenditure, concerned with a making-whole on a great variety of vaster (or minor) scales of which none fit “properly” to the scale that balances one’s “indigenous” scope of extension. Is it really so different to Vitruvius’s claims concerning mathematics and mechanics, but now for Architecture? Anne Carson, again, has a beautiful figure that captures well the point I wish to make—on the delight we take in metaphor, she says that:

[...] a meaning spins, remaining upright on an axis of normalcy aligned with the conventions of connotation and denotation, and yet: to spin is not normal and to dissemble normal uprightness by means of this fantastic motion is impertinent.

What is the relation of impertinence to the hope of understanding? To delight? The story concerns the reason why we love to fall in love. Beauty spins and the mind moves. To catch beauty would be to understand how that impertinent stability in vertigo is possible. But no, delight need not reach so far. To be running breathlessly, but not yet arrived, is itself delightful, a suspended moment of living hope.<sup>13</sup>

When asking about the scope of extension at stake with mechanical resourcefulness, our concern is not so much the demonstration and exposition of positive knowledge but a kind of wonder about this peculiar relation between *impertinence* and *form* whereby *form also seeks delight*, and *the hope of understanding is nourished by delight itself*.

*As components for our tableau, let's hold onto the figures of 1) mechanical resourcefulness, 2) mimesis that delights in copiousness, and 3) the relation between impertinence, delight, and hope for understanding.*

## II.

For the second sheaf of components needed for our tableau, let us turn to Robert Grosseteste's *Treatise on Light*.<sup>14</sup> Grosseteste was an English bishop writ-

<sup>13</sup> Carson, 2014, p.xi.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Grosseteste, *On Light or the Beginning of Forms* (De luce, seu de incohatone formarum), 1225.

ing in the 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century, a teacher of Roger Bacon, and an important pioneer in the development of the scientific method.<sup>15</sup> Grosseteste's intellectual legacy is to have provided an empirical setting for studying natural science, emphasizing the role of experience. His achievement was to come up with a model of cosmic nature in which experiments could yield demonstrative proofs, one where these demonstrations would be related to the indefinite richness of experience, including how to make them shareable and communicable. He reserved a constitutive involvement of spirituality in all experience, but he sought how *not* to substantiate the conformity between natural science and the doctrines of theology. His cosmic model of the natural world—the world *below the firmament*—managed to neither offend nor involve the theological institutions with and within the novel *body of methods* (what Francis Bacon collected as the *Novum Organum*) for science. His key insight was to view natural force as a mythical principle, specifically as light. He believed that everything that naturally exists in the universe must encompass the same range

15 Roger Bacon, *Opus Majus*, trans. by Robert Belle Burke, New York, Russel & Russel Inc., 1962 [1267], an extensive treatise on (proto)scientific method composed for Pope Clement IV, ranging over all aspects of natural science, from grammar and logic to mathematics, physics, and philosophy.



as light's instantaneous propagation in any direction. (This may sound daring, but we still use light's speed to measure distances in today's astronomy). In Grosseteste, the aspect of zealous ideation consists of his separation of extension from dimension. It involves what I call *mythological modelling*: Extension is thought of by him as the domain in which the actuality of form exhausts itself. Form exhausts itself in an inchoate dynamics for Grosseteste, who was influenced, among many others, by Averroes's notion of a material intellect and by Pythagoras's ideas of a cosmos in spheres. In the outermost of Grosseteste's spheres, form is pure actuality; whereas towards the innermost spheres of his mythological model, it gets more and more mixed up with potentiality, that is, with an incomplete exhaustion of form's actuality. The Earth is at the core of his mythological model of the universe, and here form is mixed up most with the cyclical dynamics of generation and corruption of the four material elements, namely fire, earth, water and air. Form, actuality, is literally what is *rare* here. Yet "rarity" is not the same as "scarcity"—the beauty of his model is that it works with a principle of abundance, a plenty of actuality which is principle (firstness). Rare is what does not realize itself cyclically, what involves *form that steps out of*

*the cycle*, form that aspires and seeks delight and elevation. According to this separation of actuality and potentiality, he also separates light from color, whereby the latter is tied up with potentiality and gives *dimension*. In contrast, the former is tied up with actuality and gives *extension*. Grosseteste responded with such inception to the dominant doctrines on *intellect* (as divine and immaterial) and *matter* (as fallen and dependent on being informed by intellect) with great ingenuity: he related form to light as a physical force, not to divine light of intellection immediately; but it did also not rival with divine light, for his model kept a place with the outermost sphere, where form has exhausted itself in pure actuality, for divine intellect which imparted the energy for its sustenance. Like this, there is a model of *impertinence* across the spheres where intellect could still, ultimately, be considered divine, but where there was also a natural domain of light, facilitating insight and understanding in reach for the human mind through the pursuit of natural science. In the *methods*, this pursuit of natural science, thus facilitated by Grosseteste's empirical paradigm, was largely independent of theology. This model could accommodate an experimental practice in science that would not cause conflict so easily and quickly with the churches. But it did

not, of course, compete with theology with respect to the ultimate questions; this is precisely why I call it *a world model crafted in zealous ideation*; like Vitruvius, Grosseteste appreciated the insights of geometry, arithmetic and mechanics primarily for civic and political purposes.

*For our tableau, let's hold on to the following figures: 1) the one that connects light with actuality and its instantaneous expanse that opens up time in a scalar scope of harmonics, 2) the one which connects color with potentiality and dimensions, opening up nature as voluminous and spatial; let's also hold on to 3) the idea of rarity, 4) the figure which relates demonstrations (in geometry, mathematics) to experience, not to ontology; furthermore let's also keep for our tableau 5) the relation between actuality and impertinence, as facilitated by inchoate form.*

### III.

We will turn to René Descartes's notion of *the Universe as a Plenum (with Cracks)* for our tableau's third sheaf of components. Strongly influenced by Grosseteste's revolutionary treatises on light and color, Descartes also accepted the instantaneity of light's propagation as a *natural* property of light. He, too, crafted a model of the universe with zealous ideation; yet his was not a mythological model like

Grosseteste's but an architectonic one like Vitruvius's. Descartes's model of the universe aspired to systematize all that could be demonstrated of experience (hence color) by relating the domain of color again to an empirically accessible *nature* of light. In Grosseteste, light was considered a physical force but treated as a mythological principle that remained ultimately inaccessible to experiments. Somewhat like-minded, Descartes postulated that there is a universal nature to light which gives *Divine Laws of Nature*, which is inaccessible, but there are also *Ordinary Laws of Nature* that manifest in locally diverse effects. Descartes is very conscious about the model character of his approach; he begins his own "treatise on light," titled *The World* (1629–33)<sup>16</sup> with a description of light, but he also tells us that he will have to omit something from this description: namely the "true nature [*vray quelle est sa nature*]" of light.<sup>17</sup> The omission of saying anything about the *true* nature of light is why Descartes (like Kepler) speaks of *natural* geometry. His geometry is to describe *the nature of the ordinary laws*: The "nature" that geometry measures is

16 René Descartes, "The World, A Treatise on Light," trans. and ed. by Stephen Gaukroger, in *The World and Other Writings*, London, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

17 René Descartes, cited in James Griffith, *Fable, Method, and Imagination in Descartes*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p.160.

the “nature of light,” and the geometrical descriptions tell us about the order of the World—and not a supposed order of “universal nature itself.” He titled his book on natural philosophy *The World*. His interest was to empirically access a study of the world of which he held, ultimately, that it can only be depicted as a fable. And the fable needs to tell the story of a world sculpted out of an abstract Plenum—this, indeed, was his architectonic model with which he wanted to systematize all empirical knowledge. But it was the model of an imperfect—or rather, *perfectible*—Plenum because it is *plentiful with the absence of a void*: from the beginning, there are cracks in Descartes’s Plenum, whereby none of those cracks is ever *empty* because they are immediately being filled up, hence keeping the actuality of this Plenum in incessant action such that its action is turbulent and fluid in an unordered manner. In his *Treatise on Light*, Descartes asks his readers to imagine a new world “very easy to know, but nevertheless similar to ours” consisting of an indefinite space filled everywhere with “real, perfectly solid” matter, divisible “into as many parts and shapes as we can imagine.”<sup>18</sup> It is from out of such a *Solid*

18 Jeffrey K. McDonough, “Optics,” in *The Cambridge Descartes Lexicon*, ed. by Lawrence Nolan, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp.550–559.

*in Action* that his geometry can, from learning to *instrument* the ordinary nature of light, achieve descriptions of the world, but these descriptions are to be read with respect to them being the object of fabulation—an objective, impersonal, geometric kind of fabulation. Like Vitruvius’s architectonics, Descartes’ architectonic and mechanistic world view does not favor determinism but *indefinite resourcefulness and zealous ideation*.

*Let’s keep from Descartes the following notions for our tableau: 1) The Plenum and Instrumentality, 2) the relation between Mechanicism and Fabulation, 3) the distinction between Universal (divine) and Ordinary (worldly) Laws that facilitate experimental science.*

### *Keeping the Actuality of Time in Zealous Ideation*

And now, let’s turn back to our initial Metaphysical Principle, the Queen of Finance in Handke’s *Der Bildverlust*. Here too, the images whose loss is being told of are images of a zealous kind of ideation. They, too, need a scope of expansion “where shifting distances can trigger a play of emplacement and displacement.” I quote Handke:

[...] the image itself as a game in which an entirely different present is in effect than my personal one. The images play out in an impersonal present,

which is more, far more, than mine and yours; they take place in the grander time, and in a single tense, for which, when I consider them, the images, the term ‘present’ is not really appropriate—no, the images do not take place either in a grander or grand time, but in a time and in a tense for which no adjective, let alone a name, exists.<sup>19</sup>

*Images in a time and in a tense for which no adjective, let alone a name, exists.* They are grammatical images. What I am after with this notion of zealous ideation are syntactical images in the architectonic scope of ekphrasis—this manner of depicting in words an absent image with liveliness, a manner of dialectic statement that sets its thesis free, that endows it with autonomy.

The forms of time in grammar are called *tenses*. My proposal breaks with that custom and instead maintains that the grammatical tenses are inchoate forms of actuality, not forms of time. *Grammar, then, keeps what it makes explicit in impertinent suspension.* Grammar articulates an artificial kind of intelligence that is propelled by mechanic resourcefulness and zealous ideation. Let’s look closer at what grammatical tenses do. Let’s look at what they do for “reading pure and simple,”<sup>20</sup> for a kind

19 Handke, 2007, p.232.

20 Ibid., p.4.

of reading that wants to report on the instances of actions without foreclosing their scope of efficacy; this entails regarding action as a magnitude. But how to speak of this? Action that takes place both externally and internally is *in-transitive* (object-less), but it is entirely *trans-formative* action. This is how Handke characterizes the reading he hopes his readers will attend to his text with. He writes:

[...] the story and the manner of its telling were calculated to make [the future reader] free to forget, from the moment they turned the first page, any thoughts they might have had of hunting for clues or sniffing around. If possible, the first sentence of her book would banish any such overt or ulterior motives in favour of reading, pure and simple.<sup>21</sup>

At stake is action that characterizes “reading, pure and simple.” Not reading that would proceed by “hunting for clues or sniffing around,” the reader of this story cannot proceed analytically. She is not a detective; there is not a plot of an event already past that needs to be sorted out retrospectively and put in the right light. The sole basis for her expedition is one in the present continuous: *images are dying out everywhere under the sun*.<sup>22</sup> This is her plot, the inchoate space of extension she carries along

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid., p.13.



wherever she goes. It is the plot that needs to be put in the poetic meters of action as a magnitude.

*Action as a Magnitude, Tenses as Inchoate Forms that Facilitate the Weathering of Situations*

This interest in action as a magnitude brings us back to the problem of form and Eros as a verb. Among the early Grammarians, especially Varro, there was a dispute about how to think of the grammatical status of nouns versus that of verbs. Is it the case that nouns somehow roll-off, crystallize or condensate as an effect of verbs? Or is it rather the case that the corruptibility, the nature of all given things that can be given names, trigger a kind of cyclic activity which the verbs capture?

Verbs need a timelessness we attribute to form. Grammar speaks of *time forms* when it distinguishes the tenses. But what is the content? What is the subject or the extension that verbs, in the different tenses, grasp “perfectly,” as the grammatical names of those time forms say? Das *Präsens Perfekt* is the *vollendete Zeitform*; it is the final form of time, the form where-within time finds perfection. It is a form that makes a present whole, that keeps a present intact. It keeps it as a conclusive activity. But the so-called “deficient” form of time, the tense that in German grammar is called *das Imperfekt*, does not

make such a present, that can be kept perfectly, in any way deficient or less: the imperfect tense is also called the *praeteritum*, literally that which has passed by. Austrian German calls it, beautifully so, the *Mitvergangenheit*, the past that comes along. The form of a tense adds memory to an intact present. It facilitates the discretion of one present from another; it, too, is a form, a grammatical form. Grammar is insightful in a deep, in an absurd kind of way—*absurd* literally means also *that which sounds from the bottom*, from an unfathomably deep base.<sup>23</sup> Some say lost. Grammatical forms capture the lost base of actuality. From it springs the growing scope of extension of inchoate *syntax*. Grammatical forms are inchoative and inchoate; this means that they are always just commencing; they are unfolded, drawn out of, wrested from, a bottom that is deeper than can ever be reached. This is to say that the inchoate forms of tenses self-engender themselves. We could say, here, perhaps: their forms are forms *sub specie absurditas* rather than *sub specie aeternitatis*. They are forms in the optics of absurdity rather than in that of eternity. Next to the perfect tense and the imperfect tense, most languages also know what in German is called *das Plusquamperfekt*, a tense that

23 <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=absurd> (accessed September 14, 2021).

opens up memory to all it does *not* cover. We use it for indicating, with respect to a past event, that there was something happening before this event, something that is not entirely captured by lifting this one event, however imperfectly, up towards its absurd actuality in the ideally-perfect tense, that of a present perfect. The grammatical forms of tenses make room syntactically for events to happen, to take place.

The names for tenses vary across languages; English distinguishes a simple present and a present progressive or present continuous for what we call *das Präsens* in German. Similarly, it speaks of a *simple*, as well as of a *continuous or progressive past*, or what we call *Plusquamperfekt* in German is called a *Past Perfect* in English. Regardless of differences like these, the grammatical tenses render time in various scales of perfection, all of them cyclical and “impertinent,” open and leaking, with respect to each other.<sup>24</sup> The grammatical form of time gives time a quality of *tense-ness*, which comes from the Latin *tendere*, meaning to stretch or to extend. Grammar has learnt to think of this stretching cyclically, through scales of perfection. Verbs are action words, but what exactly do they do to ac-

24 Cf. Georg Steiner, *After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation*, London, Oxford University Press, 1998 [1975].

tion? If action can be simply or perfectly present, as well as future or past progressively or continuously, how can we think of the delimitation and qualification of action in adverbial terms that index *recycling* and *sustainability*? *Weathering* as a verb is rarely used, but it is also not my invention. It colloquially means “coming through safely,” as when a ship makes it out of a storm. Weather as a noun is irreducibly linked to notions of time. As the etymological dictionary tells us, Greek had words for good weather” (*aithria*, *eudia*) and words for storm and winter, but no generic word for “weather” until *kairos* (literally “time”) began to be used as such in Byzantine times. Latin *tempestas* “weather” also originally meant “time;” and words for “time” also came to mean weather in Irish (*aimsir*), Serbo-Croatian (*vrijeme*), Polish (*czas*), etc.

The weather is the only thing of which it is acceptable to say that it is given in plenty, abundantly so, and ubiquitously so, all over the Earth. Ever since I read *Der Bildverlust*, what fascinates me is that we might have to learn to think of images like this: images are like the weather, they too are given in plenty, and they form an immaterial kind of magma.

Can we imagine an architectonics of ekphrasis as an architectonics of the weather? Action as a

magnitude—power, if you want—is a magnitude that does not leave unaffected whoever attempts to either negate or affirm it. It affects whoever attempts to make the magnitude of action work for oneself or to keep oneself free from it. If viewed *sub specie absurditas*, its promise is nothing more and nothing less than the possibility of finding *safe passage* through whatever time might bring. It is reason for hope that any situation at all can—but might not—be *weathered*. What such an architectonics would render, would give back to whoever credits its assumptions so daringly, so zealously, is to render her capable of talking about the *experience* of time before the background, and while being *in touch*—*con-tingently*<sup>25</sup>—with a Real Presence of Actuality and its forms of a Contemporariness.

*Coda: Sheaving a Plenum that Spills Over with the Absence of Voids*

Let's now recall what we have collected for our tableau from the sheaves of components via Vitruvius's civic scope of mechanic resourcefulness, Erasmus's plays in exuberance and exploration of copious escalation and containment of the plenty (*copia*), Grosseteste's mythological model of light

25 <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=contingent> (accessed September 14, 2021).

as a physical force, and Descartes's architectonic of the universe, which treats the nature of light as a metaphysical principle whose "true nature escapes what can be understood in science," and who distinguished, therefore, an architectonics of the world as a fabulous Plenum—a *plenum which spills over with the absence of voids*. We collected a bundle of notions from each of them, and, concluding; I would like to suggest thinking with these notions to pursue what they might do to the *grammatical* tenses as we know them. How can they delimit and qualify, how can they help us to articulate—to *fabulate*—those tenses as inchoate forms of a *magma* between actuality and perfection?

The notions are:

*Mechanical resourcefulness.*

*Mimesis that is not concerned with originality but delights in copiousness.*

*The relation between impertinence, delight, and hope for understanding.*

*Connecting the physics of light with real actuality and with intellectual resourcefulness.*

*The scope of light's expanse of instantaneous propagation in all directions, as copia, as plentiful noisiness.*

*Time's actuality rendered in the scalar scopes of harmonics and impertinence.*

*Time's actuality as being of form, but lacking dimension. Connecting color with potentiality, material resourcefulness, and dimensionality. Relating demonstrations (in geometry, mathematics) to experience, not ontology. Rarity, as the actuality of form, in so far as it reaches beyond a natural compass that is given to it.*

*The architectonics of the world as a plenum abundantly full with the absence of voids.*

*The relation between a mechanistic world view and geometry that counts as natural. The relation between fabulation and subjectivity.*

*The distinction between universal (divine) and ordinary (worldly) laws.*

I dedicated this text to Europa, the mythic princess who, on the grounds of abductive reason, carries her destiny along wherever she goes, carefully but without thinking about it, in a golden basket that is a family talisman. All she seeks is to escape the jealous claims of her two mothers—mother tongue and the tongue of a muse in poetic voice, perhaps. Let's sing songs with zealous ideation instead, praising her adventures. And let's celebrate Moschos, this early grammarian who knew how to describe an absent object in words by fabulating a situation in which the words grow capable of containing their own meaning in a manner that sets

it free, that endows it with autonomy. *Let's exercise literacy in coding by learning about each other in the delightful "ruses of heart and language."* Let's follow the brave adventurer—whoever Europa might be—on her trips through a cosmic kind of weather made up of actuality and impertinence, facilitated by inchoate form and going on, *fabulously* so, since ever.

This, I imagine, is what digital images are all about.





