

Digitalising Ekphrasis: Can Virtual Reality Represent?

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Abstract

What does digitalisation mean for ekphrasis, the representation of one medium (source medium) in another kind of medium (target medium)? The source media in ekphrasis have been digital for a long time by now: novels representing webpages, films capturing people's relation to artificial intelligence, paintings depicting people staring at their smartphones' screens. But ekphrasis's target media seem to be 'old' media in their digital form, such as eBooks or films. Can ekphrasis engage with more digitally born media?

To answer this question, I take the example of Virtual Reality (VR), a digital technology which creates simulated experience, to, first, examine whether VR can be called a qualified medium with the ability to represent, i.e., produce meaning what is at the core of ekphrastic practice, or whether it is a purely technical medium, "a body that mediates" (Elleström 2010). Thus, I delve deeper into the theoretical questions of how we understand Virtual Reality as a medium basing my reasonings on Lars Elleström's models of media modalities (2010) and media transformation (2014). Secondly, I present a comparative analysis of the simulated experience of a visit to Anne Frank's house, [The Secret Annex VR App](#) (2024), and the immersive VR environment of Vincent Van Goth's art, [the VR App "The Night Café"](#) (2016). By showing how VR represents Anne Frank's written diary and Van Goth's paintings, I draw a conclusion on not only whether VR can produce meaning of other media but also how the 'digitalised' ekphrasis can be a source of new insights into the evolution of the phenomenon.

Elleström, L. (2010). The Modalities of Media: A Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations. In: Elleström, L. (eds) *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*. Palgrave Macmillan, London. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230275201_2

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Keywords

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Bio

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