

12 ANGRY MEN (1957) THE EKPHRASTIC WORD-IMAGE AT JUDGMENT

12 ANGRY MEN (1957) A PALAVRA-IMAGEM ECFRÁSTICA EM JULGAMENTO

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This essay focuses on the imagetic power of the word as a central element of the film *12 Angry Men* (1957), directed by Sidney Lumet, screenplayed by Reginald Rose from his theatrical play and a TV special (CBS, 1954, directed by Franklin Schaffner). The aforementioned film starred Henry Fonda (Davis character), among others. This approach is discussed based on the rhetorical concept of ekphrasis, a conceptual dimension already used in film analysis studies, especially by Pethö (2010), Elleström (2010, 2020), Killander et al (2014), Heffernan (1993, 2015), Gonçalo (2017) and Clüver (1998, 2019). Thus, the focus of this essay is to interpret how the cinematographic and filmic resources made by Lumet dialogue with the vast rhetorical tradition of ekphrasis. Among the considerations of this essay, it is highlighted that the film under analysis is an exemplary piece of a “word cinema”. In brief, Lumet’s film reconstitutes scenes of the homicide, allegedly a parricide, through the character Davis, with verbal-descriptive flashbacks, to demonstrate Davis’ position on this crime, anchored in facts and in a methodical and fair analysis of these facts.

Keywords: *12 Angry Men*; *ekphrasis*; *enargeia*; *amplificatio*; cinema.

Este ensaio enfoca o poder imagético da palavra como elemento central do filme *12 Angry Men* (1957), dirigido por Sidney Lumet, com roteiro de Reginald Rose a partir de seus escritos teatrais e de um especial para TV (CBS, 1954, direção de Franklin Schaffner). O filme foi estrelado por Henry Fonda (personagem Davis), entre outros. Essa abordagem é discutida a partir do conceito retórico de éfrase, dimensão conceitual já utilizada em estudos de análise de filmes, especialmente por Pethö (2010), Elleström (2010, 2020), Killander et al (2014), Heffernan (1993, 2015), Gonçalo (2017) e Clüver (1998, 2019). Assim, o foco deste ensaio é interpretar como os recursos cinematográficos e fílmicos feitos por Lumet dialogam com a vasta tradição retórica da éfrase. Dentre as considerações deste ensaio, destaca-se que o filme em análise é uma peça exemplar de um “cinema de palavras”. Em síntese, o filme de Lumet reconstitui através do personagem Davis, em flashbacks verbo-descritivos, cenas do homicídio, supostamente um parricídio, para demonstrar a posição de Davis sobre esse crime, ancorado em fatos e numa análise metódica e justa desses fatos.

Keywords: *12 Angry Men*; *éfrase*; *enargeia*; *amplificatio*; cinema.

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The modalities are the essential cornerstones of all media without which mediality cannot be comprehended and together they build a medial complex integrating materiality, perception and cognition.

Lars Elleström

1. Introduction

The film *12 Angry Men*¹ (1957), starring Henry Fonda (Davis), was well received by critics at the time. In this essay, we seek to analyze it based on the rhetorical concept of ekphrasis, a conceptual dimension already used in film analysis studies, especially by Pethö (2010), Elleström (2010,2020), Killander et al (2014), Heffernan (1993, 2015), Gonçalo (2017) and Clüver (1998, 2019), among other scholars. Regarding the conclusions of this essay, it is noteworthy that the film under analysis is an exemplary piece of a “word cinema”, that is, through the rhetorical-cinematic resource of ekphrasis, this filmic work produced, through the rhetorical-discursive conduction of the protagonist in opposition to the rest of the panel of popular judges, that in *flashbacks*, verbal descriptions of scenes of reconstitution and re-evaluation of the murder on trial. In brief, Lumet’s film reconstitutes scenes of the homicide, allegedly a parricide, through the character Davis, with verbal-descriptive flashbacks, to demonstrate Davis’ position on this crime, anchored in facts and in a methodical and fair analysis of these facts.

The synthesis of the film is well known, it is a trial of a young man accused of stabbing his own father to death in the middle of a public square. The twelve jurors are summoned to deliberate the boy's future: death penalty or acquittal for “reasonable doubt”. All facts (or versions of facts) and circumstances of the crime are made known to the spectator through the dialogues of the jurors confined in the jury room. Thus, the spectator does not directly watch the crime through the filmic exhibition, but only knows it through the narrative and/or descriptive-argumentative stitching of the jurors. Most of the jurors are eager to finish the assignment and head back to their homes as it's the day of an important game of Baseball, Yankees v. Cleveland, which seems to most in the courtroom more important than the life of a Puerto Rican 18-year-old, accused of murder. To start the task, it is proposed by one of the members of the jury, who will lead the debates, to carry out the initial discussions.

Other jurors immediately propose that a first round of voting be held to assess the degree of agreement as to whether the accused is guilty or not. In this first vote, through a herd effect, eleven sentence the young man to the electric chair, and only one of the jurors, number 8, Davis, announces that he still has doubts, having all others voted for the defendant's guilt, which forces him to initially vote for innocence. Davis' vote infuriates the others jurors, eager to get the job done quickly. In the second round of voting, proposed by Davis, now done in writing and secretly, the herd effect cools down and there is a new vote in favor of the boy's innocence due to reasonable doubt. Thus, through the

¹ The choice of twelve jurors dialogues analogously with the twelve apostles of Jesus, also because in Lumet's film all the jurors are men. This film was nominated for a 1958 Academy Award for Best Director, Best Picture, and Best Adapted Screenplay.

reason-word (*logos*) and the ekphrastic images generated by them, juror Davis deconstructed the conclusions and hasty arguments of the others jurors, one by one, in a Socratic perspective. In this way, jurors began to review their own prejudices about the facts of the crime. After considerable explanation and debate among the jury members, especially from the arguments defended by Davis, the voting was totally reversed in favor of the accused. Initially there were eleven votes by the conviction and only one against it, the vote of the protagonist Davis, who was reticent from the beginning about the guilt of the young man, his doubt stopped him to sign the death penalty verdict for the young defendant. The insistence of not changing their position on the crime reflects the life experience of the jurors, their personal experiences, including grudges, hurts and fears, as shown by the last man to surrender to the reason brought by Davis. Even these feelings are brought to the judging table through the juror's narrative-descriptive comments regarding his abandoned son. Thus, based on Apollonian discourse, based on the luminous word, the *logos* Greek matrix, the protagonist-juror Davis faced the weaknesses of the partial and even prejudiced points of view of the other members of the jury, who, ultimately, were about to commit an extreme act of injustice that would lead to capital punishment for the young defendant. In the end, after a long deliberation by the panel of popular judges, the accused was unanimously acquitted, due to doubts that still persisted in his favor, as modern law and the good practices of democratic states recommend to decide, that is, *in dubio pro reo*. This age-old principle is closely linked to another principle of equal importance in all democratic societies: the *Presumption of Innocence*:

3.02 Presumption of Innocence; Proof Beyond a Reasonable Doubt

It is a cardinal principle of our system of justice that every person accused of a crime is presumed to be innocent unless and until his or her guilt is established beyond a **REASONABLE DOUBT**. The presumption is not a mere formality. It is a matter of the most important substance. The presumption of innocence alone may be sufficient to raise a reasonable doubt and to require the acquittal of a defendant. The defendant before you, has the benefit of that presumption throughout the trial, and you are not to convict [him/her] of a particular charge unless you are persuaded of [his/her] guilt of that charge beyond a reasonable doubt. (highlight mine)²

The film under discussion is a good example of the possibilities for cinema to explore the imagery creation with a literary or linguistic background that conforms to the language of cinema. From this angle, it is a filmic work full of images without images, that is, the imagery frame is not explicit, but derives from the words or speech of the characters, which is not just a discursive motor of reason, but also a resource for the development of the film script.

Therefore, in this film, we find a reasonable equivalence and identity between the film's literary script and the final filmed result. It is a Socratic script, in the mold of Platonic dialogues. It is a kind of cinematographic approach in which images can be inferred without actually showing them, forming a quite vigorous literary-image narrative conduction in the background.

Lumet's film is, in this perspective, an ekphrastic film, not because it primarily uses cinema as a descriptive art of another art, as traditionally occurs in this type of analytic relationship, but because it uses descriptive strategies from ekphrastic rhetoric for its narrative and scenic organization. Therefore, a narrative enhancement of the film, not through the use of other references or artistic means directly, but through the use of cinematographic and filmic means in order to virtualize the narrative process of the work and which transposes the attention of the viewers for a descriptive-narrative context external to the images shown.

² Available at: <https://www.mad.uscourts.gov/>. Accessed on: 05 mar. 2022.

2. Ekphrastic Cinema

The concept of ekphrasis dates back to the classical Attic rhetorical tradition, and from the etymological point of view, it literally means ‘*ec/ ek*’ (outside) of the sentence - The word derives from the Greek ἐκ (*ek*) and φράσις (*phrasis*), 'outside' and 'to speak' or 'phrase' or fr -, that is, is a transposition to another imagery universe from the descriptive-textual process, used as a rhetorical resource, or as summarized by Heffernan (1993) “the verbal representation of the visual representation” (Heffernan, 1993, p. 3), traditionally used in the composition and interaction of the visual arts with the verbal arts. The most famous example of ekphrasis was recorded literarily by Virgil, in his *Aeneid*, in bringing his version of *Laocoön*. This long discursive classical tradition sought to make present through the word the physical absence of the sculpture that materialized the famous scene in *Laocoon*. For an in-depth study of ekphrasis in the Greco-Roman context, including the Homeric epics, the work of Heffernan (1993) is highlighted and recommended.

Elleström (2020) reminds us that the traditional horizon of ekphrasis is guided by the poetic text:

The artistic genre ekphrasis is generally defined as poems representing paintings, which is a case of qualified submedia representing other qualified media and normally includes transmediation of media characteristics from painting to poem. (Elleström, 2020, p. 82).

It should be noted that Elleström (2020) does not advance in considerations specifically about the relationship between cinema and ekphrasis. However, the perspective of Elleström (2020) that we are most interested in emphasizing is his finding that “Naturally, media transformations may also result from communicative choices to take advantage of the modal possibilities offered by the target medium” (Elleström, 2020, p. 82), because in Lumet's film there is exactly a potentiated exploration of the modal possibilities of the film and aspects of cinematographic language, which are activated for rhetorical-verbal accentuation of the filmic image through its visual absence. One of those aspects that is not only cinematic, but also literary, is the flashback narrative. In Lumet's film, instead of using this narrative resource visually as is traditionally done in films, it is incorporated into the filmic narrative in an almost entirely verbal way, drawing in the spectator's imagination its filmic materiality. Indeed, it is in the incessant search for the similarities and differences between the media that the core of Elleström's (2020) thought seems to reside and that helps us to unveil the new forms and ekphrastic relationships, moving an analytical bridge between tradition and innovation of media and arts, because: “media are both different and similar, and intermediality must be understood as a bridge between media differences that is founded on media similarities” (Elleström, 2020, p. 5).

Murray Krieger (1992) defines ekphrasis as being “a desire to stop time” (apud Mathew, 2021, p. 242). Mathew (2021) also clarifies that cinematographic ekphrasis differs from traditional ekphrasis due to its representative simultaneity, since “the film viewer observes the art object, its interpreter and its interpretation more or less at the same time” (2021, p. 242) and still advances, based on his analysis of the short film *Rug* (2007), by Iranian director, Kiarostami, towards a reading that ekphrastic cinema is more interpretive than representative, since Mathew (2021) enunciates a synecdochical and intermedial value to ekphrasis.

For Pethö (2010), the dubious relationship of cinema that embraces transparency and abstraction gives it a level of complexity in constitutive terms that cannot be disregarded in the analysis of the film's own mediality:

On the one hand, cinema is the most transparent or “invisible” medium possible, operating with moving pictures that result in the illusion of reality (we seem to see the things themselves and not their representation), and engaging all our senses in their perception. On the other hand, it is also the most abstract and constructed medium possible that has no palpable material form (all the sensual complexity of the cinematic image being nothing but an illusion) (Pethö, 2010, p. 293).

Included in this complex process of formation and reformulation of the cinematic image is the flowering of composite forms of film structure based on ekphrastic processes. Still referring to Pethö (2010), it is highlighted that the purpose of the rhetorical and ekphrastic text was to represent an artist's desire to capture or verbally express elements that may encounter representation obstacles in the field of visual language, in this case painting or sculpture or other arts, or to undertake artistic juxtaposition and complexification through different visual media:

Ekphrasis, as we know, is a rhetorical device elaborated in the antiquity consisting of the detailed description of a gallery of painting or a group of statues, a case where a verbal text is produced in competition with the plastic arts. In essence, it is generally understood to stand for the urge of an artist working in the medium of language to express whatever falls beyond the realm of language, to use linguistic expressivity as a “tactile” or visual sense and thus cross over into the domains of the visible (Pethö, 2010, p. 294).

In cinema, these verb-visual crossings have taken on an extraordinary dimension since the beginning of the seventh art, as silent films have been strongly erected with the support of intertitles, subtitles and other textual indications. In sound cinema, on the other hand, the characters' speech not only became part of the narrative, but also redirected the production of scripts and modes of interaction with other artistic means used for cinematographic composition. However, over the course of cinema's history and development, these relationships seem to have faded in terms of investigative and analytical interest, as film theories and critiques from the formative period began to explore more the mobile image as the central aspect of cinematographic language, even seeking to distance themselves as much as possible from other artistic languages, especially literature, as a way of reaffirming the identity of the nascent cinema and its particular language.

Over the last few decades, however, there has been a new theoretical push to dissipate the rigidity between artistic boundaries. It is in this horizon of investigative possibilities that it began to make sense to explore classical conceptual relations in a contemporary artistic and media environment, even being possible to evoke founding theories of cinema, such as Eisenstein's. This juxtaposition of two planes, according to Eisenstein, results in more than a sum, it becomes a product. The Soviet filmmaker defended, with his theories on cinematographic editing, precisely the production of filmic meaning through the “clash” of originally disconnected planes. Thus, in the clash of two planes, there are two representations in clash and its resulting one, according to Eisenstein (1957) it is not just a new representation, but an idea, a concept, an image: “a juxtaposition of the two representations, is objectively unrepresentable—a new idea, a new conception, a new image” (Eisenstein, 1957, p. 8). Note that this procedure used purely the images of the planes to stimulate the creation or description of mental images or rhetorical images by the spectators. It is not by chance that Eisenstein called one of these montages’ dialectic. In this sense, silent cinema was essentially ekphrastic.

And in this aspect, ekphrasis guides a new look at the filmic image itself, as this resource carries extra visual imagery, in addition to amplifying the film's narrative possibilities, by even providing "economy" in film production, as through ekphrastic description the film shows or narrates through descriptive-textual images, or even, as in the case of the film *12 Angry Men*, shows the possibilities and versions of the occurrence of the parricide object of judgment through verbal images of an analytical-descriptive hue, since the jury-protagonist "reconstructs" several moments of the crime only through his comments, syntheses and analytical conclusions without any need for external plans to the jury room, which, incidentally, is practically the only location in the film, having also taken place main room of the courtroom, a few scenes at the beginning and at the end of the movie.

It should be noted, however, that eventually this character "stages" for the other jurors critical and dubious points about the facts of the crime, but even so in these moments, it is possible for the spectator to amplify the staged images with reference to the speech undertaken by the character of Fonda. Thus, based on a measured theatricality, the film exposes an additional imagery to its composition. This feature gives the film a layer of complexity, as spectators are not given a clear picture of the events and actions that led to the crime, it is up to them to mentally "construct" the fundamental images to reach their verdict, in a perspective that Clüver (2019) called "the spectator's involvement with the object of an intensive gaze" (apud Bugno-Narecka; Vieira, 2020, p. 51).

From this perspective, the spectator becomes also a spectator-jury and who only accesses certain facts (or versions of facts) and decisive moments of the crime in a secondary way, that is, mediated by the discourses of a descriptive or argumentative nature of the jurors-characters, above all, from the main jury, Mr. Davis, juror nº 8.

Thus, in this compositional process of the film, there is a possible double game: of text (word)-images and images-text (word), something that is being analyzed about the Godard's cinematic poetics, Pethö (2010) called the "ekphrastic-intermedial essay".

This means to say that literary ekphrasis or classical rhetoric describes and induces visual images of interest to cinema, but the language of cinema has also started to provide opportunities for the production of sequences or imagery sets related to literary or verbal texts, whether these have an intra or extra-visual. In this journey of ideas, it is complex to distinguish between metaphorical and ekphrastic aspects. Aristotle (2005), when meditating on *enargeia*, coined the expression "that which represents an action" and also as having the property of "putting it before the eyes" as aspects inherent to metaphor and associated, according to Lima (2021), to ekphrasis. A similar approach was taken by Longinus (1890) in *On the Sublime*:

The dignity, grandeur, and energy of a style largely depend on a proper employment of images, a term which I prefer to that usually given. The term image in its most general acceptance includes every thought, howsoever presented, which issues in speech. But the term is now generally confined to those cases when he who is speaking, by reason of the rapt and excited state of his feelings, imagines himself to see what he is talking about, and produces a similar illusion in his hearers. (XV, 1).

Thus, *enargeia*, and consequently, the ekphrasis that sustains it, evoke not only a static image, but an action, and therefore it is a good representational and even substitutive mode for the dramatic or theatrical action of characters outside the deliberation room of the jury. Therefore, in *12 Angry Men*, the very act of murder on trial is an example of this model of dramatic representation through ekphrasis verbalized by the jurors. In fact, this is a fundamental point for understanding the ekphrasis in Lumet's film, as most of the ekphrasis in this film are discursive, composed mainly of the jurors' verbal dialogues.

What is defended at this point, experimentally, is the possibility of expanding the ekphrastic relations of cinema, without necessarily resorting to analogical and comparative approaches with other visual arts or understanding them exclusively as a verbal representation of an artistic object. Thus, it is argued that the cinematographic film has its own constitutive elements, therefore, visual and/or imagetics, even that in an intermedial perspective, conditions to resemiotize or expand such ekphrastic relations, performing image descriptions with their specific media or by other intermedial esthetic solutions.

Killander Cariboni et al. (2014) also worked in this direction, based on Sager Eidt (2008), even citing Eidt's expanded concept of ekphrasis:

Laura Sager Eidt makes a similar argument against the verbal media as the only possible target in ekphrasis: “[...] 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” (2008:19). Her definition of ekphrasis is thus: “The verbalization, quotation or dramatization of real or fictitious texts composed in another sign system” (2008:19). (Killander Cariboni et al., 2014, p. 13).

In the same sense, Killander et al. (2014) by emphasizing another key concept to the ekphrastic discussion, *enargeia*, precisely the vivid and incandescent side of ekphrastic description, highlights cinematographic description, and which, in my opinion, boasts a special descriptive force that attracts the viewer's interest and attention from Lumet's film:

The *energeia-enargeia* relation is an aspect that is often neglected in modern theoretical debates about ekphrasis. We believe that there cannot be ekphrasis without the description making the receiver “see” the object with his/her inner eye. At the same time, following Seymour Chatman and Werner Wolf, we argue that description is not a prerogative of the verbal medium and that even the cinematic medium can describe, using different strategies. (Killander Cariboni et al., 2014, p. 10).

Killander et al (2014) make a prominent distinction on the concepts of *energeia* and *enargeia*, considering both the ekphrastic outbreak as crucial. The first concerns the “visual experience” and the second refers to the “liveliness” with which such experience is presented to the spectator or observer. (Killander Cariboni et al., 2014, p. 16). In fact, they are sides of the same coin in which “the listener's desire to observe” is produced, as noted by Clüver (1998). Somehow, although there is centrality of the visual or imagery character of ekphrasis, it is necessary to consider that its strength is also in the absence of visuality of what is described, since this visuality is highlighted precisely by its absence, as the object is virtual. Thus, something that is missing, that is not present is energetically described and that is why its “image” gains power. From this angle, the idea of metonymy, or of its special synecdochical type, starts to make sense. Therefore, upon learning about the crime in Lumet's film, as described by the popular judges, mainly by Davis, the spectator keeps in his memory the smallest details, and thus is able to reflect on the questions and concerns of the protagonist-juror, analyzing the facts of the crime based on the parts highlighted by it. See that witnessing or showing the crime loses importance, giving way to its vivid and eloquent description. Even the accused is no longer a priority imagery target, as he is only shown in a few brief film frames, two at the beginning and one at the end of the film. The boy's name is not even mentioned. Of course, not showing it also has the narrative benefit of avoiding an evaluative “contamination” by the viewer, avoiding premature judgment on its appearance, color, race or social origin, for example, something that had been done by several of the jurors present. But anyway, the defendant is highlighted by his absence during the film, because what is on trial is not only him, but mainly the basic principle of Western civilization: not to punish without proof or with

reasonable doubts. Furthermore, not showing it shifts the viewer's attention to the words and votes of the popular judges, who are also judged by the viewer. In short, as representatives of society, it is society itself that is under the spectator's judgment. Not showing the defendant allows all these inferences, all of which are fully reasonable, as it is also reasonable to interpret that his absence throughout practically the entire film is justified as an interpretation of his social exclusion, something that is even mentioned by some jurors, but only to highlight the past of the youth's minor crimes as an argument in favor of his conviction. With all this, I want to emphasize that the lack of visual presence in an ekphrastic film is a constituent element of the energetic description of what was not shown. In a similar opinion, Gonçalo (2017) ponders: "The long tradition of ekphrasis energizes and describes the conjuring of mental images, which are 'themselves both present in the imagination and absent from the world perceived by the senses' (Webb 2009: 169). Therefore, ekphrasis lead us to a dynamic and complex play between presence and absence" (Gonçalo, 2017, p. 82). In this way, we were able to reinforce and "see" more and better by hiding an image, as the fact that the film does not show it does not mean that the viewer did not "see" with their hermeneutical senses and gazes.

Therefore, in Lumet's film, the verbal word is highlighted in the foreground to energize the non-visual images, accentuating the narrative force of the film. And this is done because it is the verbal word of the jurors that is on trial. By verbal, I mean the cosmivision, ideologies, social feelings, prejudices embedded in the socio-historical bosom that contextualizes the film and which are being evaluated by the viewer. It is a film that wants to be verbal and not visual, is an "ek-image". And this strength comes, in thinking about cinema, from the spectator's own curiosity, who normally feels a special interest in the occult, which is why it is not made explicit in the filmic image. Thus, it is necessary to bring closer and closer studies of cinematographic ekphrasis to studies of spectatoriality, Clüver (2019) is an exception, as it seems to me that there are quite productive relationships that have not yet been explored. It is in this horizon of ideas that Lumet's film is no longer seen as a resurgence of filmed theater, but instead becomes an avant-garde film.

On the other hand, Killander et al. (2014) also discuss and problematize the conventional understanding that the descriptive process is necessarily verbal or linguistic, excluding other languages from this process. I am in favor of this perspective, since in the same way that exists in the linguistic field, since his father, Saussure, the notion of the "acoustic image" of the word or for cognitivists of "mental image", there is in the theoretical field of cinema the possibility to "describe" visually or imagetically objects, people or situations, including those not shown in the filmic field. It is no coincidence that cinema still carries a force or belief in a reliable representation of reality. In part its power of description by images is responsible for this. Associating the theoretical universe of linguistics with cinema, Christian Metz (1968) even worked on description with one of its syntagmatic axes. Documentary films to this day are popularly known as "pure" descriptions of the facts and events of reality. They are seen as the imagery capture of reality itself.

Therefore, it is *enargeia* that in fact has considerable repercussions in the conduct of filmic and ekphrastic description, description or focusing, which not only focuses on artistic objects of the visual arts, whether paintings or sculptures, but also on people, actions, facts, events, that can be vividly recalled or reconstituted as is the case with the mobilizing murder in Lumet's film. For Clüver (1998), *enargeia* is a constitutive property of ekphrasis. In fact, for Lausberg (1966, §1133) apud Lima (2021) he defined ekphrasis

as being “the detailed description of a person or object, whose objective is the *enargeia*³”. Lima still highlights another rhetorical notion prior to the 1st century AD, a moment considered to be the birthplace of the Greek ekphrasis. This is the technique called *amplificatio*. According to Lima (2021), this oratory technique, a precedent of the Greek ekphrasis, was widely used by the famous Roman orator Cicero in his legal disputes, precisely to describe “moral portraits” capable of persuading jurors about their perspective of the facts under discussion in court in favor of his client Sestio. Lima (2021) ponders about this interesting and very pertinent rhetorical technique regarding its application to the Lumet film under analysis, since in *12 Angry Men* the context is precisely that of the court in action:

A *amplificatio* (amplification) is one of those resources that provides the effect of putting before the eyes, in an evident way, through the word, something that is distant and inaccessible to the audience. [...] the technique of *amplificatio*, used by Cicero in the *oratio pro Sestio* (Defense of), through which the speaker manages, amplifying elements of the speech, to build the *ethos* of his client Sestio and deconstruct the *ethos* of his opponents with the painting of moral portraits destined to win the adhesion of the jury, a procedure that can be glimpsed as a predecessor of ekphrasis in rhetoric. (Lima, 2021, p. 35, my translation).

In addition to the *amplificatio*, there is another rhetorical resource, cited by Lima (2021), now with an Aristotelian background, and which is also connected with the rhetorical-descriptive procedures used by Davis and the other jurors in Lumet's film. It is the personification or *conformatio*, and which, according to Cicero apud Lima (2021): “consists of configuring an absent person as if he were present, also of making a shapeless thing speak, attributing to it either form and speech or an appropriate action to his dignity (RHETORICAL TO HERENIUS, IV, 66)”. (Lima, 2021, p. 38-39, my translation). In fact, as Lima (2021) himself emphasizes, these procedures or techniques were already the very advanced “embryo” or even the “fetus” of what would be systematized by the Greeks as the ekphrasis as it had been passed on to us. Thus, strictly speaking, due to the wide use of these procedures in the judicial context, it is not surprising that they developed more in the Roman period, as these were the great developers of the basic principles of the legal sciences. And these rhetorical devices are explicitly perceived in Lumet's film.

It is noted that both the jury-protagonist uses this technique to describe the family, social and economic context of the defendant, thus amplifying the image of the young man that for him it makes sense to pass it on to the other members of the jury, as well as for them, but in a sense opposed to Davis, that is, to justify his hasty and irresponsible votes, describing the social origin of the accused, including his juvenile crimes, as sufficient elements of his guilt. It is important to emphasize that this technique does not refer to the description of a particular artistic object, but to “moral portraits”. Cicero for the erudition he boasted, probably used his knowledge of art to carry out such moral descriptions of his clients' opponents in court, however his focus in this case was not a particular visual art but the moral configuration of his opponents and their clients, all with the aim of establishing an image of the parties in the judicial process to the popular judges. In *12 Angry Men*, the use of this rhetorical technique with a pre-ekphrastic background is notorious.

In fact, the presence of this technique can be seen even in the way the jurors treated Davis. It is worth mentioning that Davis is an architect, therefore, a man of technique, but also of the arts, although he does not explicitly trigger a framework or artistic content in

³ Translated by Lima (2021) also as ‘evidence’.

his statements. Also, from an architectural point of view, in Lumet's film, the few images outside the deliberation room of the jury, in addition to the main gallery where the judge is, are exactly of the facade of the court building. These planes are shown right at the beginning of the film and reappear at the end of the work when Davis descends the building's stairs. It is thus, a descriptive image to announce to the viewer that this is a film about the universe of justice. The images, for example, of the building's columns, its staircases and rooms full of papers, typical of public offices or public bureaucracy, somehow, albeit indirectly or imprecisely, translate to the viewer that this is a movie that thematizes the judicial system in the United States. This is a good example of descriptive filmic images with an ekphrastic background.

On the other hand, the film that also uses the image-text model (word) is structured as a cinematic rhetoric, starting to produce what we can call "ek-image" (outside the image), an inverse process of ekphrasis, as now the aim is to build a verbal text or image of a verbal nature through descriptive visual images or scenes in which there is the empire of verbal dialogue, typically theatrical. Thus, if in traditional ekphrasis there is an ectopic visuality, in the "ek-image" there is in turn an ectopic textuality, pregnant with resignification on the part of the cinematographic spectator. In *12 Angry Men*, this perspective can be observed when there are moments of reconstruction of the crime scene shown visually, staged under the "direction" of the character Davis, in order to embody his arguments in favor of his doubts regarding to the initially unequivocal, under the prism of the other jurors, the guilt of the young defendant.

Thus, the concept of cinematographic ekphrasis still seems to me lacking in further theoretical and critical illumination. As a contribution to this exciting investigative field, I dare to bring an additional consideration: *ekphrastic cinema is also a filmic presence possessed or described by visual absence in which an irresistible spectator's interest in absence emerges, rather than in the imagetic presence.*

While verbal ekphrasis articulates the reading of the text, therefore, vision with the acoustic image of its reading, received by hearing, ekphrasis in cinema reverts from a dullness of the visual, therefore of vision, starting to articulate intensely with the analytical-hermeneutic and discursive process. In this way, the verbal ekphrastic discourse visualizes virtual or virtualized images, while the ekphrastic filmic image can be "trans-textualized" in interpretive discourse with an equally rhetorical and mnemonic purpose. In this sense, there is a didactic-normative character in both processes. In antiquity, ekphrasis was a rhetorical instrument of precision and linguistic fluency (Bugno-Narecka, 2017). In cinema, this feature can synthesize and add complexity to the film's narrative images.

Applied to cinema, its rhetorical role seems to have been expanded. In any case, whether describing when showing or describing when not showing, something in common remains in both ekphrastic types: the complementation or amplification of artistic discourse through different means, modes and senses. Heffernan (1993) examines this expanded representative role of ekphrasis, and concludes: "Ekphrasis speaks not only about works of art but also to and for them" (Heffernan, 1993, p. 7). In the same direction, there remains another point in common between these two historical poles of ekphrasis: its power of representation and attraction to the observer or spectator. Heffernan (1993) reiterated this point in relation to classical ekphrasis: "To represent a painting or sculpted figure in words is to evoke its power - the power to fix, excite, amaze, entrance, disturb, or intimidate the viewer - even as language strives to keep that power under control" (Heffernan, 1993, p. 7).

This seems to me to be an approach that still has an important resonance in the composition of cinematographic ekphrasis. In addition to axiomatic similarities and

equivalences, it seems that in cinema, the ekphrastic relations are no longer restricted only to the inseparable verbal and visual aspects and necessarily linked to an intertextual link with other visual arts, but also new arrangements of these aspects emerge, including the limits of our understanding of these dimensions, above all because, for example, the verbal is not restricted to writing, and similarly, the imagery is not reduced to the visual. Heffernan (1993) himself, in a more orthodox analysis of the concept of ekphrasis, permeated significant differences between classical and contemporary ekphrasis: “While classic ekphrasis, they say, salutes the skill of the artist and the miraculous verisimilitude of the forms that he - it is always he creates, postmodern ekphrasis undermines the concept of verisimilitude itself” (Heffernan, 1993, p. 4). And his considerations are quite pertinent, as it simply does not make sense to apply the classical concept of ekphrasis to the current artistic and discursive-rhetorical context, as this would be at least ahistorical and extremely forced from an analytical point of view. In a very conservative analysis, unless better judgment, but with significant depth, Mitchell (1994) tried to categorize the perceptive process and uses of ekphrasis, synthesizing in three phases: “ekphrastic indifference”, “ekphrastic hope” and “ekphrastic fear”. In fact, Mitchell's (1994) analysis, although not exactly consensual, at least works from a demoralizing perspective of ekphrastic rhetoric use. In his defense, at the end of the chapter “Ekphrasis and the Other”, Mitchell (1994) recognizes that his analysis and ekphrastic historicization focused on ancient poetic texts, making it impossible to advance to other more modern and contemporary artistic domains:

I have not mentioned the verbal representation of other kinds of visual representation such as photography, maps, diagrams, movies, theatrical spectacles, not reflected on the possible connotations of different pictorial styles such as realism, allegory, history painting, still-life, portraiture, and landscape, each of which carries its own peculiar sort of textuality into the heart of the visual image. This treatment of ekphrasis, then, like the typical ekphrastic poem, will have to be understood as a fragment or miniature. (Mitchell, 1994, p. 181).

In the same vein, Elleström (2010) also criticizes Mitchell's rigidity, who insists on studying the artistic domains separately: “Mitchell is perhaps the most influential contemporary critic of attempts to find clear boundaries between arts and media. [...] I find it as unsatisfying to continue talking about 'writing', 'film', 'performance', 'music' and 'television' as if they were like different persons” (Elleström, 2010, p. 11).

However, it does so in a sense, it seems to me, in a rather pessimistic sense regarding the potential of ekphrasis in the contemporary context. It seems to me that this occurs when the analyst positions himself in a nostalgic way and is very attached to the conceptual and artistic frameworks of the artistic tradition, as seems to be the case. Thus, it seems to be more productive to reflect on the concept of ekphrasis of the rhetorical tradition as an important substrate, but not as a categorical imperative, especially to think about these relationships within a recent artistic creation, such as cinema, because there is another aspect which discourages a direct use of the classical concept of ekphrasis in cinema, since the relationship of the verbally described discourse of traditional rhetoric was in relation to an immobile, fixed artistic object, a painting, sculpture or even architecture.

In this regard, Heffernan (1993) considers that there is a rivalry of modes of representation “Because it verbally represents visual art, ekphrasis stages a contest between rival modes of representation: between the driving force of the narrating word and the stubborn resistance of the fixed image” (Heffernan, 1993, p. 6). Cinema is the

moving image, and thus the resistance of its images to descriptive processes is dramatically increased, which can mean an expansion of the representative “conflict” with the narrative-descriptive word, but it can also catalyze new modes and relationships of interartistic representation. This seems to me to be one of the “reasonable doubts” that still hover over what has already theoretically settled down about ekphrastic cinema, on which the critical judgment still needs to pronounce itself.

In a process of reflection after a long investigative trajectory on ekphrasis, Heffernan (2015) expanded his theoretical considerations in a collective work in which his chapter “Ekphrasis: theory” opens the book. His considerations are so illuminated that I transcribe his conclusion in full, especially because his analysis is quite in line with the way I observe the current scenario of studies on ekphrasis in cinema:

As a literary genre, therefore, ekphrasis ranges from ancient rhetorical exercises in description through art criticism to poetry and fiction. Furthermore, since digital technology and cinema have animated visual art itself, the verbal representation of visual representation has become more fluid than ever before. While traditional ekphrasis generates a narrative from a work of art that is still in both senses, silent and motionless, cinematic ekphrasis exploits the metamorphic power of film to conjure a dream world that rivals and contests the order of realistic fiction. In all of these cases, the verbal version of a work of visual art remakes the original. The rhetoric of art criticism aspires to make the work of art “confess itself” in language that is always that of the critic; ekphrastic poetry turns the work of art - whether still or moving - into a story that mirrors the mind of a character. Finally and simply, then, ekphrasis is a kind of writing that turns pictures into storytelling words. (Heffernan, 2015, p. 48).

It is along this line that a word said in a movie can, for example, bring to light an image and/or visual set, including an entire movie or an image of a filmic plan, refer to an entire poem, short story or novel, describing your way, the literary reference text. In short, the ekphrastic description in the cinematographic environment cannot be understood only as a verbal description or visual display of an artistic object external to the film, therefore, of another artistic medium. It is necessary to consider the occurrence of other ekphrastic modes of realization, including discourses and descriptive dialogs of characters, who, by their words and actantial intensity or vivacity, generate or “film” scenes or film planes virtually and imagetically recognizable to the “eyes” of the sensitivity of the viewer. Based on this narrative mode, in fact, an entire parallel “filmic sequence” of images is configured, which are only seen by the mental recreation or imagination of the spectators and even the jurors, considering that they only accessed the crime by the content of the process judicial and by their own interpretations of what they read.

3. Final Remarks

In the case of Lumet's film, the “ek-image” produced translates into two possible words: guilty (death) or innocent (life), as highlighted by some phrases from the film's official poster: “Life is in their hands / Death is on their minds!”. Certainly, this process is not impervious to the more orthodox ekphrastic use in terms of the descriptive procedure that is also present in the film on several occasions.

Finally, Davis' ekphrastic word, which was under the judgment of his peers, was victorious, as well as the film was successful in its daring proposal to bring layers of narrative complexity through the apparent simplicity of its ekphrastic script, tensioning in this syntagma rhetorical tradition and cinematographic modernity. It won not only the discourse of rationality operated by Davis, but mainly because he knew how to handle

highly convincing rhetorical-descriptive resources of an ekphrastic nature. In short, in addition to the already traditional way of examining ekphrasis in films, locating imagery references from other visual arts in filmic planes, the filmic image has in its compositional procedures means to describe itself even more “ekphrastically”, that is, “filming”, “images”, “planes” or even “sequences” through vivid verbal descriptions made by the characters, that is, *it is a self-referential ekphrastic form*.

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