VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL FACETS OF METAEKPHRASTIC WRITING: A COGNITIVE STUDY OF JOHN BERGER'S ESSAYS ON VISUAL ART[1]

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Abstract: Addressing the cognitive poetic status of ekphrasis, this paper suggests the notion of *metaekphrasis* to account for verbal and non-verbal essayistic contexts that surmount ekphrasis as a literary representation of a work of art. For this purpose, the paper examines John Berger's essays for eliciting his vision of writing about art in order to reveal the rationale for his metaekphrastic passages through interpreting verbal and non-verbal (visual) instantiations of this underlying script.

Key words: ekphrasis, metaekphrasis, verbal, visual, cognitive poetics, essay, visual art.

1. Introduction

This paper approaches metaekphrasis as an instance of intermediality, traced in John Berger's essays on art (2015) and viewed from a cognitive poetic standpoint. Since ekphrasis is understood either as some correspondence between verbal and non-verbal (paintings, sculpture, music, dance) artefacts (Schaefer & Rentsch 2004: 132) or as "a central concept in studies that deal with the relation between word and image, and

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between literature and art" (Koopman 2014: 3), in recent studies it has been respectively interpreted in a double way: as a form of intermediality (Koopman 2014: 3; Schaefer & Rentsch 2004: 132) or as a functional component of intermediality (Юхимук 2015: 156). In our study we bring together our experience of analysis of Berger's ekphrasis (Луньова 2018; Lunyova 2020a; 2020b; Lunyova in print) and research into intermediality (Vorobyova 2017b; 2020; Vorobyova in print) to approach both essayistic ekphrasis and metaekphrasis as forms of intermediality and regard them as semantic phenomena that arise through the interaction of the verbal and the visual in the personalised discussion of art. As such the paper aligns with the three topical domains of current research: i) studies into the interconnection between the verbal and the visual – an area that has currently been of great interest to scholars in a range of related disciplines such as linguistics (Anthonissen 2003; Pagano et al. 2018; Panasenko 2020), rhetoric (Gross 2009), and neuroscience (Amit et al. 2017; Amit et al. 2019), ii) the burgeoning domain of intermediality studies (Brosh 2015; Bruhn 2016; Chrzanowska-Kluczewska 2017; Vorobyova 2017b; 2020; Vorobyova in print; Wolf 2011), as well as iii) research dealing with reflexivity, awareness, and self-consciousness in language use (Gnezdilova 2017; 2018; Tykhomyrova 2018).

Berger's essays contain numerous cases of ekphrasis, viewed as descriptive (mimetic) representations of paintings, drawings, sculptures, and photographs, as, a verbal ekphrasis from the essay about Piero della Francesca[1], e.g.:

(1) "*Look, for instance, at **the overall composition of his work**. Its centre [...] is Christ's hand, holding his robe as he rises up*" (Berger 2015, p. 14).

However, Berger's writings are not limited to ekphrastic representations of artworks. Rather, Berger expounds on the topics related to works of art represented ekphrastically. Thus, the same essay contains the author's ponderings over the difficulties of being an artist. Such and similar contexts which derive from ekphrasis and reach beyond an artwork representation, are designated here by the term 'metaekphrasis' which we take from several sources discussed further in this paper

(Armas 2005: 22; Webb 2009/ 2016: 185-186), e.g.:

(2) "*... I was thinking about the scientist's social predicament. And it struck me then how different **the artist's predicament** is*" (Berger 2015, p. 12).

While there were successful attempts to study ekphrasis via cognitive poetic methodology (Андреева & Белобородько 2016; Ізотова 2018: 285-290; Panagiotidou 2017; Verdonk 2005; Vorobyova 2017b), metaekphrasis, to our knowledge, has not yet been described in cognitive poetics terms. It has only been tackled in a cursory way in literary-historic studies (Armas 2005: 22; Webb 2009/ 2016: 185-186).

2. Ekphrasis: The range of phenomena and the scope of the term

The term *ekphrasis* is of Greek origin (History and etymology for ekphrasis, *s.a.*), where *ékphrasis* means "description", being derived from *ekphrad-*, stem of *ekphrázein* "to tell over, recount, describe" (from *ek-* + *phrázein* "to point out, show, tell, explain" of uncertain origin) + *-sis* (ibid.).

The earliest ekphrasis as a specific phenomenon is traced back to Homer's "Iliad" (Heffernan 1991: 298; Koopman 2014: 2). The most frequently referred to ekphrastic passage is found in Book 18 of the "Iliad" and deals with Hephaestus forging a new elaborately decorated shield for Achilles (Koopman 2014: 2).

As a term, *ekphrasis* appeared in late-antique rhetorical handbooks, known collectively as *"Progymnasmata"* (Chinn 2007: 267; Koopman 2014: 3; Webb 2009/ 2016: 17). In the ancient world the meaning of this term was broader in comparison with its modern interpretation (Chinn 2007: 256; Koopman 2014: 3; Webb 1999: 8) as it encompassed "descriptions of all types, usually characterised by the common feature of vividness (*enargeia* in Greek; *evidentia* or *perspicuitas* in Latin)" (Chinn 2007: 256). The contemporary, narrower definition of ekphrasis (Koopman 2014: 3) is that of "the rhetorical or literary description of works of visual art" (Chinn 2007: 256) or just

"description of a work of art" (Webb 1999: 9-10). As Goehr put it: "before it became attached rather too exclusively to the 'arts', ekphrasis was part of a much broader range of political, legal, and pedagogical exercises" (2010: 390). Following Schaefer and Rentsch (2004: 137), Koopman elucidates the main difference between these two definitions of ekphrasis: "in the late-antique definition ekphrasis is characterised by its *effect*, whereas according to the modern definition it is the reference to an *artefact* that characterizes ekphrasis" (2014: 3) (italics [sic]).

The main characteristics of ekphrasis in the ancient tradition was "the ability of ekphrastic language to create the illusion that the absent object of description is actually present in discourse" (Chinn 2007: 267). Hence, ekphrasis "was defined in terms of its impact on an audience" (Webb 1999: 12), thus focusing "on the impact of speech acts" (Goehr 2010: 395). For ancient rhetoricians ekphrasis "could be a description of a person, a place, even a battle, as well as of a painting or sculpture" (Webb 1999: 8). The contrast between the ancient and the modern definitions of ekphrasis comes down to the following: as for the ancients "works of art as a category are of no particular importance" (ibid., 11), contemporary scholars take ekphrasis as a "description of works of art" (ibid., 9-10, 11, 13). Commenting on the specificity of the ancient approach to ekphrasis, Webb claims:

> "*And even though highly polished and sophisticated descriptions of paintings or artifacts, like Philostratos' Imagines, or the Shield of Achilles, were classified as 'ekphraseis' in antiquity, the technical writers on ekphrasis hardly evoke discussion of the visual arts, or the special questions raised by their translation into a verbal medium*" (1999: 8).

Modern interpretations of ekphrasis are either traced to the late nineteenth century (Goehr 2010: 397) or attributed to Spitzer who, in 1955, suggested the definition of *ekphrasis* as "the poetic description of a pictorial or sculptural work of art" (1955: 207) while analysing Keats' "Ode on a Grecian urn", which has become a representative example of ekphrasis in its new interpretation when ekphrasis began to be viewed as "description of a work of art" (Webb 1999: 10).

The difference between the late-antique and modern approaches to ekphrasis becomes evident in the reception of Homer's famous description of the shield of Achilles. While in "Progymnasmata" this episode is given as an example of a specific kind of ekphrasis (ekphrasis of process) (Chinn 2007: 276, 277), the modern tendency is to present this description as the first example of ekphrasis in Western literature (ibid., 276), i.e. ekphrasis in its modern narrow understanding. Goehr contrasts modern ekphrasis and ancient ekphrasis in the following way: "Modern ekphrasis focuses on *works* that bring other *works* to *aesthetic* presence; ancient ekphrasis focused on *speech acts* that brought objects, scenes, or events to *imaginary* presence" (2010: 397) (italics [sic]).

The divergences between ancient and modern understandings of ekphrasis are summarised in Table 1, the common feature for both being the focus upon the medium of ekphrasis, i.e. ekphrastic means – verbal language.

Table 1. Ancient and modern interpretations of ekphrasis compared

Type of ekphrasis / Aspect of comparison	Ancient ekphrasis	Modern ekphrasis
phenomena covered by ekphrasis (scope of ekphrasis)	persons, objects, places, events; not restricted to objects; not restricted to art objects	restricted to art objects
status of the works of art	works of art are of no special importance	works of art are the core of ekphrasis
sphere of application	political, legal, and pedagogical spheres	the arts
focus	speech acts that bring objects, scenes, or events to imaginary presence	works that bring other works to aesthetic presence
the main properties	effect, impact on the audience	reference to an artefact

Modern interpretation of ekphrasis has not remained confined to verbal description of art works, or, in Heffernan's wording, "the translation of visual art into words" (1996: 262), "the verbal representation of visual representation" (ibid.). It has developed via expanding the range of phenomena covered by ekphrasis (scope of ekphrasis), media of ekphrasis, and sphere of its application.

Along with works of visual art (paintings, drawings, and sculptures), works of music (Юхимук 2017: 9, 11; Goehr 2010: 407), as well as "uncanonized" art forms, "such as television, cinematography, photography, commercial and consumer advertising, comics, posters, and soap operas" (Persin 1997: 18), have been embraced under the umbrella term of ekphrasis. Likewise, media of ekphrasis have been expanded to include other arts besides painting, drawing, and sculpture. Thus, music (Goehr 2010: 407), cinema (Познер 2002: 152; Rusieshvili & Dolidze 2015), and other arts can now be treated as means of ekphrasis. Anyway, as Goehr summarises, ekphrasis in its modern evaluation presupposes that one work of art becomes a "re-expression or re-presentation" of another (2010: 406). Whether different media should be treated as involved in the ekprastic process remains disputable (ibid.). Hence, it is feasible to interpret a visual representation (e.g., photo reproduction) of a visual work of art (e.g., painting) as ekphrasis, the stand, which we adopt in our study.

Though expanded, the interpretation of *ekphrasis*, however, remained restricted to the sphere of arts. When Heffernan suggests that ekphrasis "must also open itself up to the vast body of writing about pictures which is commonly known as art criticism" (1991: 304), he paves the way to transferring ekphrasis from the domain of arts into the domain of writing about arts. Similarly, Wagner acknowledges the extension of ekphrasis into "art criticism and art history" by Bernadette Fort (1996: 13). The tendencies of ekphrasis expansion are generalized in Fig. 1 below.
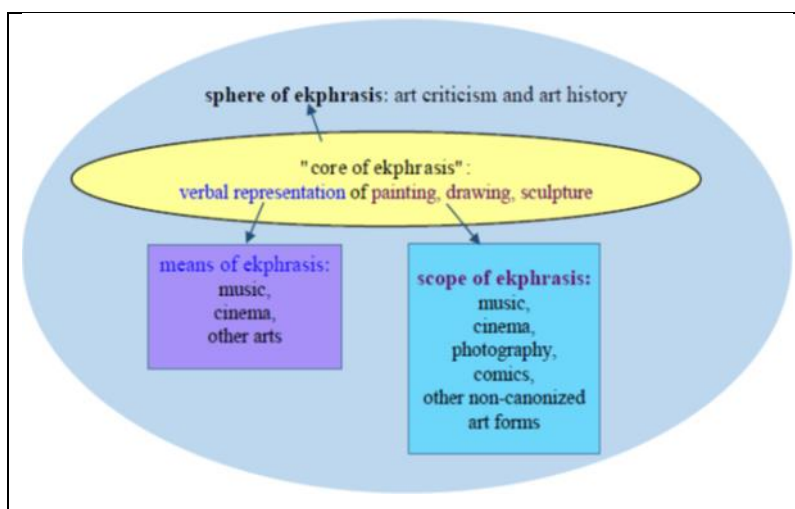

Figure 1. Modern tendencies in expanding the interpretation of ekphrasis

The "core" of ekphrasis is still its understanding as a verbal representation of visual art. The application of ekphrasis to any representation of any artwork by any medium as well as its extension to the domains of art criticism and art history focusing on writing about visual arts are relevant for this research, which addresses essayistic discourse. Thus, here we analyze verbal and non-verbal (visual) ekphrastic representations of paintings, drawings, sculptures, and photographs in the collection of Berger's essays, where he provides historical and aesthetic insights alongside critical analysis of the works of visual art. The purpose of the paper is to further the studies of ekphrasis by analyzing Berger's writing about art, in particular through the application of the notion of metaekphrasis which represents a phenomenon related to and yet different from ekphrasis.

3. Metaekphrasis: A tentative definition

Before suggesting our interpretation of metaekphrasis, let us resort to a parallel with music. Commenting upon the nature of musical ekphrasis, Goehr takes as an example a composition by Luciano Berio[2] (2010: 406). The piece under scrutiny is Berio's "Ekphrasis (Continuo II) (1996)", which "serves as a commentary on one of his earlier musical works: *Continuo for orchestra* of 1990" (Goehr 2010: 406). As Berio himself explains: "*Ekphrasis (continuo II)* is a reserved and reflective commentary on an adagio which I wrote in 1990. It is a commentary on a continuous and ever changing soundscape formed from a lace of repeated patterns" (1997). Goehr comes to the conclusion that "Ekphrasis (Continuo II)" "ultimately produces a picture of Berio's compositional *life as a whole*" (italics [sic]) (2010: 406), thus claiming that in such a way "the concept of ekphrasis begins to be broadened beyond the work-to-work relation to become a testament also to a musical life lived" (ibid.).

In this respect Berger's essays on art can be compared to Berio's "Ekphrasis (Continuo II)", since they also are broader than just rendering paintings, sculpture, or photography in writing. More often than not Berger's essays become accounts of life: stories of the life of an artist, contemplations on human life as such, or stories from his own life.

Since such parts of essays are not ekphrastic in the sense of "work-to-work relation", we choose not to broaden the meaning of 'ekphrasis' but to use another term for defining such a phenomenon.

Our suggestion is to employ the term 'metaekphrasis', which appears in quite a few works discussing ekphrasis (Armas 2005: 22; Webb 2009/ 2016: 185-186). Armas uses the term 'meta-ekphrasis' to consider ekphrasis within another ekphrasis: "an ekphrasis can be contained within another ekphrasis, creating a meta-ekphrasis such as the drawing of the battle with the Basque within the description of the discovered manuscript of don Quixote in chapter nine of the novel" (2005: 22). Webb makes use of the term 'meta-ekphrasis' in the title of one of her chapters "The poetics of ekphrasis: Fiction, illusion and meta-ekphrasis" (2009/ 2016: 167) and a subchapter within it "Descriptions of works of art as meta-ekphrasis" (2009/ 2016: 185). She applies it to refer to reflections upon the nature of experiencing ekphrasis and to a meta-fictional function of the latter:

"*Ekphraseis of all types of subjects, and not only those that present works of art, may therefore have a meta-fictional function in the novel, causing the reader not only to reflect upon the nature of his or her experience of fiction but also, through the dialectic of engagement ad distance set in place in the episodes analysed above, making him or her experience in various ways the disjunction between the fictional world and reality. In a similar way, I would suggest that certain examples of ekphrasis of paintings and sculptures perform their own commentary on the nature of ekphrasis in the broad sense of the word*" (2009/ 2016: 185-186).

Following the linguistic tradition of using the terms with 'meta-': 'metalanguage' (Berry 2005: 3; Dakowska 2007: 79-80), 'metatext' (Popovič 1976: 225; Witosz 2017: 107), 'metagrammar' (Spitzer 1955)*,* 'metacommunicative' (Gnezdilova 2017), 'metapragmatics' (Gnezdilova 2018), 'metafiction' (Tykhomyrova 2018), 'meta-parody' (Pleshakova 2016), and 'metamethod' (Vorobyova 2017a) as well as the interpretation of ekphrasis as "a *metalinguistic* reflection on the metaphoric content of a painting" (Шатин 2004) (italics are ours), we apply the term 'metaekphrasis' to such contexts, which are grounded in ekphrasis but transcend a sheer representation of works of art. According to Shatin, ekphrasis includes the viewer's explicated impression of the

painting (ibid.). Given the meaning of the prefix 'meta-' as "situated behind or beyond" (meta- prefix, *s.a.*), we use the term 'metaekphrasis' to refer to fictionalized or essayistic discussion of or meditation on existential, aesthetic, artistic, cultural, social, political, as well as psychological issues prompted by the ekphrastic representation of a work of art.

Delineated in this way, essayistic metaekphrasis might be described as an intermedial phenomenon, since it arises from the perception of a work of visual art and its content rendered by verbal means.

4. A case study of metaekphrastic writing: Material and methods

The material for research embraces Berger's 74 essays about visual art published in his book "Portraits: John Berger on artists" (2015) that comprises 502 pages and one-page long "Preface" from the same edition (ibid., xi-xii). John Berger (1926–2017) is a "British essayist and cultural thinker as well as a prolific novelist, poet, translator, and screenwriter" (Blumberg 2015). Berger's significant contribution to the contemporary intellectual discourse has been widely acknowledged as well as his book "Portraits: John Berger on artists" highly praised[3].

Berger's inclination to provide metaekphrastic representation and/or interpretation of art works has been noted, though indirectly, by the painter and art critic Alexi Worth in his review of the 'Portraits: John Berger on artists':

> "*Again and again, Berger asks that straightforward question: What is the key theme, the subject that is "home" for a particular artist? His answers are ingenious, jargon-free and direct – often to the point of bluntness. [...] Occasionally, his solutions seem tendentious, or too simple. Did Michelangelo really dream "in the last coil of his longing" of "the fantasy of men giving birth"? Did Matisse think only "in terms of silks, fabulous furnishings, the shuttered sunlight of the Côte d'Azur"?*" (2015).

In this comment Worth highlights Berger's search for the artist's "key theme", which does not directly fall within the definition of ekphrasis as a verbal representation of an artwork. The quotes from Berger's essays about Michelangelo (Berger 2015, p. 63) and

Matisse (ibid., 282) selected by Worth to represent Berger's approach can be viewed as examples of metaekphrasis since they operate in the domains of the artist's imagination (*Michelangelo really **dream***) and reasoning (*Matisse **think** only*) without representing the paintings in the narrow sense.

Among the total of 74 essays under study there are those that focus on one type of art (e.g., painting or sculpture) or discuss various types of visual art[4]. The thematic distribution of Berger's essays is represented in Fig. 2.
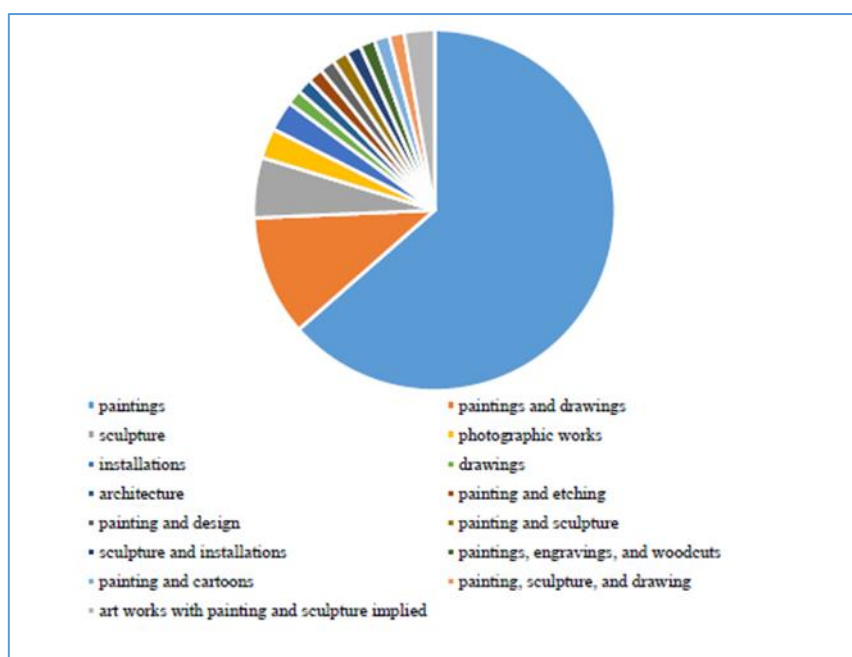

Figure 2. Thematic distribution of Berger's essays (2015, p. 1-502)

The research employed a combination of conceptual and contextual interpretative analyses complemented with the analysis of dictionary definitions. The following steps were taken: 1) ekphrastic and metaekphrastic contexts were identified based on the criterion of representation of an artwork/discussion of various issues stemming from perception of an artwork, 2) the pattern that underlies metaekphrastic contexts was modelled; for that purpose, Berger's "Preface" to his book "Portraits: John Berger on artists" (2015, p. xi-xii) was analysed through the prism of the notion of script following Schank and Abelson who "use the term to describe a canonical sequence of

events presupposed by social activity" (Croft & Cruse 2004: 17), 3) the actualisations of the modelled script in Berger's essays were registered and metaekphrastic contexts were interpreted to reveal the meanings created in an essay. The criterion for discrimination between ekphrastic and metaekphrastic contexts is the presence (in case of ekphrasis) or absence (in case of metaekphrasis) of explicit verbal statement whether a work of art is directly described, such as *"you **see this fresco** between two fictitious, painted pillars"* (Berger 2015, p. 14), *"**In the first picture there is** very little space"* (ibid., 45), *"**In a drawing of** a woman with a mantle over her head"* (ibid., 168).

5. Beyond the work of art: Berger's metaekphrasis

Berger's metaekphrasis is grounded in his ekphrasis, both verbal (a description of what a painting, a drawing, a photograph, a sculpture look like) and non-verbal (visual) (a photograph of an artwork). Since this paper primes the phenomenon of metaekphrasis, we will further concentrate on this aspect of Berger's writing about art.

5.1 Before discussing artworks: Berger's approach to writing about art

In "Preface" to his book "Portraits: John Berger on artists" (2015, p. xi-xii) Berger discloses his approach to writing about art (3). Since this reflexive (self-conscious) explanation precedes the whole body of the essays in the book, we assume that it applies to all the essays and thus can be analysed to elicit the cognitive template, or a blueprint for his writing about art:

(3) "*Yet what happens when **I write – or try to write – about art**?*

Having looked at a work of art, I leave the museum or gallery in which it is on display, and tentatively enter the studio in which it was made. And there I wait in the hope of learning something of the story of its making. Of the hopes, of the choices, of the mistakes, of the discoveries implicit in that story. I talk to myself, I remember the world outside the studio, and I address the artist whom I maybe know, or who may have died centuries ago. Sometimes something he has done replies. There's never a conclusion. Occasionally there's a vision which makes us both gasp – gasp as one does before a revelation" (ibid.).

Berger's *"I write – or try to write – about art"* can be interpreted in the context of the above passage as comprising both ekphrasis and metaekphrasis. Since Berger, by his own account, proceeds from the perception of a work of art (*Having looked at a work of art*) rather than discussion of a theory of art, it is plausible to assume that in his writing he will somehow ekphrastically represent the artwork to be discussed. However, Berger's prime interest seems to be that of metaekphrasis because he chooses *"the story of its* [a work of art. – O.V., T.L.] *making"* as the object of his aspirations (*I wait in the **hope** of learning something*). The story of making an artwork, though necessarily related to the work of art, extends the verbal representation of this artwork (i.e. ekphrasis *per se*) into artistic, historical and cultural, political, social, as well as psychological spheres, thus turning into metaekphrasis. The phrase *"I write – or try to write – about art"* represents the first slot of the cognitive blueprint (script) for Berger's writing about art, i.e. WRITING ABOUT ART while the phrase *"learning something of the story of its* [a work of art – O.V., T.L.] *making"* verbalises the slot LEARNING THE STORY OF MAKING AN ARTWORK.

Berger singles out four key components he finds particularly relevant to the story of an artwork making: *"the hopes"*, *"the choices"*, *"he mistakes"*, *"the discoveries"* of an artist. It means that he approaches metaekphrastic writing with a deliberate choice of events he would like to consider as a part of making an artwork: Berger is interested in what an artist hoped for, what kind of choices, mistakes, and discoveries they made rather than, for example, in whether the artist achieved financial success with their artworks or not. These lexical units represent the slots THE ARTIST'S HOPES, CHOICES, MISTAKES, AND DISCOVERIES of the script underlying Berger's essays about art. Besides, while focusing on the story of an artwork making, Berger relates it to the wider world, to real life, he does not succumb to the discussion of art for art's sake (*I remember the world outside the studio*). So, the slot NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO is a component of the script which is being modelled. Thus, Berger's metaekphrastic writing has two foci. The primary focus is that of how a work of art has been made with a particular emphasis on the artist's hopes, choices, mistakes, and discoveries,

while the secondary focus is that of the world outside the artist's studio.

In his search for the story of an artwork making, Berger goes to an artist's studio (*tentatively enter the studio in which it was made* – the slots AN ARTIST'S STUDIO and VISITING THE ARTIST'S STUDIO) and initiates a real (when the artist is alive) or imaginary (when the artist has died) dialogue with the artist (*I address the artist whom I maybe know, or who may have died centuries ago* – the slots AN ARTIST and HAVING A DIALOGUE WITH THE ARTIST ABOUT HIS/HER ART). Berger's reliance upon a dialogue for producing metaekphrastic writing about art correlates with the ancient Greek tradition of "conversation that is related to the painting, providing its description" (Брагинская 1994: 275), which Braginskaya calls a "dialogic ekphrasis" (ibid.). The latter unfolds according to the following scheme: "during the journey, a traveller or travellers come to a temple or shrine where they find an enigmatic, mysterious painting; suddenly a person appears and in his conversation with the travellers explains to them the hidden meaning of the painting" (ibid.). The scholar asserts that the pattern of "dialogic ekphrasis" occurs with some modifications in various writings of different ages, genres, and styles (ibid.). Thus, Berger's interpretation of his metaekphrastic writing about art as a dialogue with the artist is grounded in a deeply embedded cultural tradition.

What Berger, according to his own account, achieves with his writing about art, is not a definite conclusion but a revelation (*There's **never a conclusion**; gasp as one does before a **revelation***). This extract represents the slot ACHIEVING IF NOT A DEFINITE CONCLUSION THAN A REVELATION.

Overall, the aforementioned passage from Berger's "Preface" represents the author's conceptualisation of metaekphrastic writing about art. This conceptualisation can be modelled as the script "Berger's writing about art" that includes three stages (see Fig. 3): 1) looking at a work of art and contemplating upon it; 2) providing ekphrasis; 3) coming up with metaekphrastic representation/interpretation of the work of art. The third stage, in its turn, contains three constituents of metaekphrasis, i.e. the information about an artwork and connected with an artwork that the author wants to find out (the foci of metaekphrasis),

ways of obtaining the sought after knowledge, and the results of metaekphrastic activity. This latter stage can be modelled as the more focused script "Berger's metaekphrastic writing": *"to write about art is to go into an artist's studio to have a real or imaginary dialogue with the artist about his/her art in order to learn the story of artwork making (particularly, about the artist's hopes, choices, mistakes, and discoveries), not oblivious of the world outside the studio, thus achieving if not a definite conclusion than a revelation"*. The slots of this script (WRITING ABOUT ART, AN ARTIST, AN ARTIST'S STUDIO, VISITING THE ARTIST'S STUDIO, HAVING A DIALOGUE WITH THE ARTIST ABOUT HIS/HER ART, LEARNING THE STORY OF MAKING AN ARTWORK (OF THE ARTIST'S HOPES, CHOICES, MISTAKES, AND DISCOVERIES), NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO, ACHIEVING IF NOT A DEFINITE CONCLUSION THAN A REVELATION) shape a template for Berger's essays about particular artists and their artworks (see Fig. 3).

Besides discussing his approach to writing about art, Berger arguments his choice of using visual representations of artworks in his book (4):

(4) "*The illustrations in this book **are all in black and white**. This is because glossy colour reproductions in the consumerist world of today tend to reduce what they show to items in a luxury brochure for millionaires. Whereas **black-and-white reproductions are simple memoranda***" (Berger 2015, p. xi).
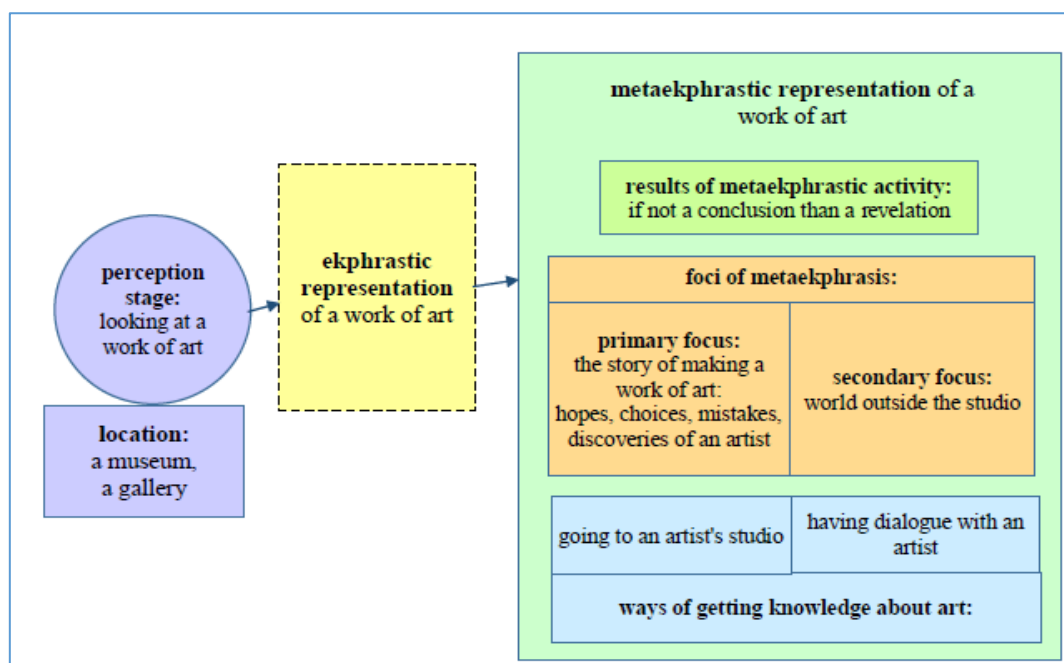
Figure 3. The pattern of Berger's metaekphrasis as explicated in his "Preface" (2015, p. xi-xii)

Berger's preference for black-and-white reproductions over colour ones is evident as the latter can be afforded by the rich only. By implication, Berger strives to reach a wider audience of readers than just those who are well-off. This aspiration is linked with the abundance of metaekphrastic contexts in Berger's essays since in such contexts Berger discusses issues that can be relevant to all people rather than to few. For example, Berger touches upon the contemporary problem of emigration in his essay about The Fayum portrait painters[5] (ibid., 7-11):

(5) "*There is a second reason why* **the Fayum portraits** *speak today.* ***This century****, as has been pointed out many times,* ***is the century of emigration****, enforced and voluntary*" (ibid., 11).

5.2 Discussing art and beyond: Berger's verbal metaekphrasis

The pattern of "Berger's metaekphrastic writing" is instantiated in his essays in two ways: 1) when all the components of the script are actualised; or 2) when several components of the script are objectified.

5.2.1 Full implementation of the script

The former is rather an exception, occurring only once in his essay about Rembrandt[6] (ibid., 137-158), e.g.:

(6) "*Just outside Amsterdam there lives an old, well-known, and respected Dutch* **painter** [AN ARTIST]. *He has worked hard throughout his life – but he has only produced, as far as the world knows, a few drawings and one large canvas which is in the National Museum.* **I went to see his second major work**, *a triptych of the war* [VISITING THE ARTIST'S STUDIO]. **We spoke of war, old age** [NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO], **the vocation of the painter** [HAVING A DIALOGUE WITH THE ARTIST ABOUT HIS/HER ART]. *He opened the door of* **his studio** [AN ARTIST'S STUDIO] **to let me go in** *first* [VISITING THE ARTIST'S STUDIO]. *The huge canvases were white.* **After years of work he had that day calmly destroyed them**. **The second major work of his life was still unfinishe**d [LEARNING THE STORY OF MAKING AN ARTWORK].

The point of this story is that it shows **how persistently something very like Calvinism can still influence Dutch art even today** [ACHIEVING IF NOT A DEFINITE CONCLUSION THAN A REVELATION]. *In itself the Calvinist religion had discouraged art, and all important Dutch artists have had to fight against it. But it has influenced them nevertheless* [WRITING ABOUT ART]. *[…]* **Their central fight – as with my friend – has been with their own consciences** [ACHIEVING IF NOT A DEFINITE CONCLUSION THAN A REVELATION]" (ibid., 137).

Though this passage addresses several artworks (*a few drawings and one large canvas which is in the National Museum; his second major work, a triptych of the war*), only one of them (*his second major work, a triptych of the war*) is represented ekphrastically, however very briefly: *"The huge canvases were white"*. The major part of this extract focuses on metaekphrastic writing that mainly deals with the influence of a particular religious denomination on art (*how persistently something very like Calvinism can still influence Dutch art even today; In itself the Calvinist religion had discouraged art, and all important Dutch artists have had to fight against it. But it has*

influenced them nevertheless).

The script "Berger's metaekphrastic writing" zeroes in on specific information about a particular artist (*an old, well-known, and respected Dutch painter*), the reason for Berger's going into the artist's studio (*I went to see his second major work, a triptych of the war*), the aspects of art discussed in his dialogue with the artist (*We spoke of … the vocation of the painter)*, the world outside which matters a lot both for the artist and the writer (*We spoke of war, old age*), dramatic events that accompanied the artist's vocation (*The huge canvases were white. After years of work he had that day calmly destroyed them. The second major work of his life was still unfinished*), and getting an insight of the religious influence upon Dutch art (*The point of this story is that it shows how persistently something very like Calvinism can still influence Dutch art even today*).

5.2.2 Partial implementation of the script

In the rest of the 73 essays only several slots of "Berger's metaekphrastic writing" script can be traced. For example, Berger's essay about Vija Celmins's[7] (ibid., 430-433), contains the following slots: AN ARTIST, AN ARTIST'S STUDIO, VISITING AN ARTIST'S STUDIO, NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO, and ACHIEVING IF NOT A DEFINITE CONCLUSION THAN A REVELATION.

The slot ARTIST is specified as painter (*paints and draws*, *paints*, *draws*), e.g.:

(7) "***Vija Celmins** is sixty-three years old.* […] **She both paints and draws**, *paint**s** in oils**, draws*** [AN ARTIST] *with graphite*" (ibid., 430), the slot ARTIST'S STUDIO is represented as Vija Celmin's studio – *her studio* (ibid., 431), the slot VISITING AN ARTIST'S STUDIO is concretized as an imaginary visit – "***I picture*** *her **in her studio***" (ibid.), the slot NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO is represented as an observation on a typical human activity – "*She takes eleven pebbles from the beach to look at (**like everybody does when idle)**…*" (ibid., 432) and reference to the real huge tragedies – "*Hiroshima is razed*" (ibid., 431) and smaller yet still painful disasters – "*A roof burns*" (ibid.), and

the slot ACHIEVING IF NOT A DEFINITE CONCLUSION THAN A REVELATION is narrowed down to 'a search for the answer' (*a clue*), with the latter grounded in comparing the painter with the mythic character of Penelope – "*And this is where Velázquez's* Tapestry Weavers *offers us **a clue** [ACHIEVING A DEFINITE CONCLUSION]. **Vija Celmins is the artist as Penelope**" (ibid.).

Berger's essay about Albrecht Dürer[8] (ibid., 56-61) contains another cluster of slots, i.e. AN ARTIST (*the first painter*), HAVING A DIALOGUE WITH THE ARTIST ABOUT HIS/HER ART (*an imaginary conversation*), NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO (*a man paint(s) himself*), and ACHIEVING A DEFINITE CONCLUSION (*express the terms of this incompatibility*) together with RESERVATIONS OVER THE CONCLUSION (*a very abstract statement, to enter Dürer's experience*), e.g.:

(8) "***Dürer** was the first **painter*** [AN ARTIST] *to be obsessed by his own image*" (ibid., 56), "*We are more than five hundred years away from Dürer's birth. […] When they seem short, it appears to be possible to understand **Dürer and an imaginary conversation with him becomes feasible** [HAVING A DIALOGUE WITH THE ARTIST ABOUT HIS ART]*" (ibid.), "*Why **does a man paint himself**? [NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO] Among many motives, one is the same as that which prompts **any man to have his portrait painted. It is to produce evidence, which will probably outlive him, that he once existed** [NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO]*" (ibid., 56-57), and "*Dürer's **independence as an artist** [AN ARTIST] **was sometimes incompatible with his half-medieval religious faith**. **These two self-portraits** [AN ARTIST] **express the terms of this incompatibility**. [DEFINITE CONCLUSION] **But to say this is to make a very abstract statement** [RESERVATIONS OVER THE CONCLUSION]. We **still do not enter Dürer's experience** [RESERVATIONS OVER THE CONCLUSION]*" (ibid., 56).

Partial actualisation of the script in 73 out of 74 essays rather than of its complete structure is a characteristic feature of Berger's verbal metaekphrasis. The way the "Berger's metaekphrastic writing" script is employed is reminiscent of creating and perceiving a painting since every essay is similar to an artwork with its unique

combination of basic elements rather than a scholarly account which rigorously follows a definite pattern.

To fully appreciate the uniqueness of each essay, let us compare Berger's texts about two contemporary women artists: Liane Birnberg[9] (ibid., 445-447) and Cristina Iglesias[10] (ibid., 475-477).

5.2.2.1 The "Berger's metaekphrastic writing" script in the essay about Liane Birnberg
The essay about Liane Birnberg highlights several components of the script, focusing on the figures of artist and her interlocutor: AN ARTIST, verbalised by the key words *'a painter'* as well as *'paintings'* and *'painted'* (9), and HAVING A DIALOGUE WITH THE ARTIST ABOUT HER ART, represented as an imaginary or potentially real dialogue with the painter about the challenges of interpreting her artworks (*to interpret them for somebody else would be to limit them*) (10), e.g.:
(9) "*In the past's space (of which you are mistress as **a painter**)* [THE ARTIST]" (ibid., 447); "*The first authenticity of these **paintings*** [ART] *is proved by the way the **painted** light* [ART] *touches what **is painted*** [ART]" (ibid., 446);
(10) "***Liane, I don't want to interpret your paintings for a third person*** [HAVING A DIALOGUE]*, because they are independent and free, and to interpret them for somebody else would be to limit them*" (ibid., 445).

In the quoted extract the concept DIALOGUE is verbalised as a direct appeal to the painter (***Liane,*** *I don't want to interpret **your** paintings*), with the concept ART being marked by the possessive word combination *your paintings*. The challenge of interpreting Birnberg's artworks as the focus of the dialogue is rendered via the author's refusal to provide such an interpretation (*I don't want to interpret your paintings*) because of the contradiction between the limits of interpretation (*to limit*) and the nature of the artist's paintings (*they are independent and free*).

The slot NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO is concretized as an account of

the experience in using linen for clothing and bedding (11), e.g.:

(11) "*Linen never clings and it invariably lets breathe* [NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO]. *There is always air between it and body touching it – even if the body is lying on it* [NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO]" (ibid., 445).

The slot ACHIEVING IF NOT A DEFINITE CONCLUSION THAN A REVELATION is instantiated by the concepts IMAGE, LIGHT, MYSTERY (12), MEMORY (13), STORY (14), and SOUND (15), that jointly represent an attempt to disclose the mystery of the paintings through observing and comprehending the specificity of the painted light, cf.:

(12) "*These are* **images** [IMAGE] *which demand to be looked at […]. They demand to be looked at because one immediately recognises that* **the light, the painted light in them** [LIGHT]*, is falling on something real, something existent.* **The light in them** [LIGHT] *authenticates the rest.* **This is why, for all their mystery** [MYSTERY]**, they celebrate substance**. [ACHIEVING A DEFINITE CONCLUSION]" (ibid.).

In the passage that follows the striving for conclusion or revelation is shaped as a question to be answered, with the latter being a tentative one (*they tell* **something new**) rather than a definite statement (13), e.g.:

(13) "*And* **what is being painted, what is there***? They are images from the past; they* **evoke the past** [MEMORY]*, as do certain Watteaus – with those palette they have something in common. Yet* **your paintings** *are not about performances, nor* **about players who have left** [MEMORY]*;* **they are about what remains** [MEMORY]. *And it is here that* **they tell something new about memory** [MEMORY]" (ibid., 446).

The extract below begins as an assertive statement (*Your paintings are wordless stories*), which is, however, immediately questioned (*How can there be any narrative without word?*), thus the certainty of the conclusion gets undermined (14), e.g.:

(14) "**Your paintings are wordless stories** [STORY / CONCLUSION]. **The term may sound strange. How can there be any narrative without word?** *[…] I know that new* **stories** [STORY] *begin wordlessly*" (ibid, p. 446-447).

The last paragraph of Berger's essay about Liane Birnberg, with the question inside the statement (*and the secret of this space is close, **no?**, to the mystery of acoustics*) and evocation of the concepts, SOUND, SECRET, and MYSTERY, offers no final conclusion as to Birnberg's paintings (15), e.g.:

(15) "*In the past's space (of which you are mistress as a painter) colours often float like **sounds** [SOUND], and **the secret** [SECRET] **of this space is close, no?, to the mystery** [MYSTERY] **of acoustics**? In any case, I cannot look at **your paintings** without **listening to them** [SOUND]*" (ibid., 447).

Overall Berger's essay about Liane Birnberg offers two plausible interpretations of her artworks as complementary explanations: Birnberg's paintings represent a unique vision on how past and present are connected (ibid., 446) and they tell stories without words (ibid., 447).

5.2.2.2 The "Berger's metaekphrastic writing" script in the essay about Cristina Iglesias

The essay about Cristina Iglesias manifests four slots of the "Berger's metaekphrastic writing" script: (i) artist-oriented – AN ARTIST, concretized professionally as *an installation artist* and ideologically as *not a didactic artist* (16); (ii) writer-oriented – LEARNING THE STORY OF MAKING AN ARTWORK, represented as the artist's attempt to overcome the meaninglessness of life and find its sense (*a sense of the inexplicable, to find a way out of meaninglessness*) (17), (iii) ACHIEVING IF NOT A DEFINITE CONCLUSION THAN A REVELATION, and (iiii) world-oriented – NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO (18), cf.:

(16) "*How to persuade you to go to the first-ever exhibition in Britain of the incompatible Spanish **installation artist** [AN ARTIST] Cristina Iglesias?*" (Berger 2015, p. 475); "*Iglesias is **not a didactic artist** [AN ARTIST]*" (ibid., 476);

(17) "*Perhaps I should start by saying **where I believe her works have come from** [LEARNING THE STORY OF MAKING AN ARTWORK] – rather than what's in them. They come from a **sense** of the inexplicable [SENSE], and from the disappointment, confusion, loss,*

*as well as wonder, which often accompany that **sense*** [SENSE]. *This is **not what the works express*** [SENSE]*, **it is what they seek a way out of*** [LEARNING THE STORY OF MAKING AN ARTWORK] *[…]. They come from – and address – the human need to find a way out of **meaninglessness*** [SENSE/ MEANINGLESSNESS]" (ibid., 475).

The concepts SENSE/MEANINGLESSNESS are also used to concretize the slot NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO (18), when Berger gives his insight into the global processes in the world, disclosing totalitarian inclinations of the so called New World Order, from which, according to the writer, escape is possible with the help of Iglesias's artworks since they offer *"A shared but secret way out"* (ibid.) e.g.:

(18) "***We are living at a moment*** [NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO] *when **meaninglessness*** [SENSE/MEANINGLESSNESS] *is particularly dense. The criminal and absurd war **taking place today*** [NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO] *accentuates this […]. **The New World Order of corporations and B-52s** constructs not roads or railways or airstrips but blind walls* [NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO]. *Walls for physically separating the rich from the poor, walls of misinformation, walls of exclusion, walls of virtual ignorance* [NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO]. *And all these walls insinuate together a global **non-sense*** [SENSE/MEANINGLESSNESS]" (ibid., 476).

The slot ACHIEVING IF NOT A DEFINITE CONCLUSION THAN A REVELATION is specified as "a search for meaning" (19) and "finding ways out of meaninglessness" (20), thus explaining the key meaning of the painter's artworks as a consistent dominant idea, or rather, the painter's striving to embody this idea in her art, e.g.:

(19) "*She is silent singer who transports the listener to an elsewhere, which is hidden but familiar, and which **encourages a personal quest for meaning*** [SEARCH FOR MEANING]" (ibid., 477);

(20) "***Ways out of meaninglessness*** [FINDING WAYS OUT OF MEANINGLESSNESS]*, varied an artful, discovered in silence*" (ibid.).

As it has been shown, both essays have the slots AN ARTIST, NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO, and ACHIEVING IF NOT A DEFINITE CONCLUSION THAN A REVELATION instantiated, which reveals that both foci of Berger's metaekphrasis are of great importance to him. However, the character of these slots verbalization and the concepts that specify them differ as Berger approaches each artist with an original set of ideas responding to the uniqueness rather than the regularities in art. Furthermore, the slot HAVING A DIALOGUE WITH THE ARTIST ABOUT HIS/HER ART is specified in the essay about Liane Birnberg while the slot LEARNING THE STORY OF MAKING AN ARTWORK is objectified in the essay about Cristina Iglesias, which reflects Berger's preference for taking a personal approach to writing about art rather than following a rigorous plan of analysis. Such flexibility of the "Berger's metaekphrastic writing" script enables Berger to give credit to the originality of each artist, making his essays heuristic and thus engaging for the readers.

Overall, the slots ARTIST, NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO and ACHIEVING IF NOT A DEFINITE CONCLUSION THAN A REVELATION are actualised in all essays under study, which demonstrates that Berger was primarily concerned with providing an insightful yet not restricting interpretation of the works of art as well as revealing the links between the art and the real world. Hence his readers are guided – however not forcefully pushed – towards certain conclusions about the artworks because Berger does not impose his interpretation as the only one which is absolutely true. Besides, the readers are encouraged to contemplate the relevant issues in the real world as each essay highlights some existential experience or current social and political problems.

5.2.2.3 The slot LEARNING THE STORY OF MAKING AN ARTWORK in Berger's essays

As it was mentioned earlier, the slot LEARNING THE STORY OF MAKING AN ARTWORK includes four subcomponents: HOPES, CHOICES, MISTAKES, and DISCOVERIES OF AN ARTIST, which are selectively objectified in Berger's essays. This selectivity contributes to crafting a unique verbal response to different artworks created by different artists.

Let us compare two of Berger's essays to savour the idiosyncrasy of each metaekphrastic reaction to various artworks sustained by the single script. For example, in Berger's essay about Jean-Louise-André-Théodore Géricault[11] (Berger 2015, p. 209-214) the concept DISCOVERIES is specified as striving for discovery of respect (*let me discover respect*) and the concept HOPES is instantiated as hope to find beauty (*the beauty he hoped to find*) (21), while the concept CHOICES is represented as a choice of the people to be depicted because of a special interest in them (*why Géricault painted these patients, he knew and thought of them by their names. The names of their souls*) (22). Meanwhile, the concept MISTAKES is not actualised. Such a choice of the concepts to give an account of Géricault's art enables Berger to highlight the artist's professional interests (ambitions) and their realisation as well as speculate about his professional feelings as consistent through the artist's career and present these features as a succinct and vivid characteristics of the artist, e.g.:

(21) "*Behind everything that Géricault imagined and painted [...] one senses the same vow: Let me face the affliction, **let me discover respect** [DISCOVERY OF AN ARTIST] and, if possible, find a beauty! Naturally **the beauty he hoped to find** [HOPE] meant turning his back on most official pieties*" (ibid., 209);
(22) "*Exactly **why Géricault painted these patients** [CHOICES] we can only guess. Yet **the way he painted them** makes it clear that **the last thing he was concerned with was the clinical label**. His very brush marks indicate he knew and thought of them by **their names. The names of their souls** [CHOICES]*" (ibid., 210).

In contrast, in Berger's essay about Fernand Léger[12] (ibid., 290-303), the concepts CHOICE and DISCOVERIES OF AN ARTIST are actualised, while the concepts HOPES and MISTAKES OF AN ARTIST are not. Thus, the essay offers a sharp focus on the artist's professional interests (ambitions) and their attainment without an insight into the artist's feelings or an account of his failures. The concept CHOICE is specified in the essay as a choice of people for depiction (*a man who always preferred to begin with something tangible, He himself always referred to his subjects as 'objects'*) (23) and a

choice of artistic means (*Léger chose a similar vocabulary because of what he wanted to say*) (24), verging on DISCOVERY OF AN ARTIST, associated with the discovery of a special use of colour (*the special use to which he discovered he could put colour*) (25), which taken together create a lucid representation of the key features of Léger's artworks, e.g.:

(23) "*Léger was a man who always **preferred to begin with something tangible*** [CHOICE] *(I shall refer later to the effect of this on his style). He himself always referred to **his subjects*** [CHOICE] *as 'objects'* " (ibid., 296);

(24) "***Léger chose a similar vocabulary*** [CHOICE] *because of what he wanted to say*" (ibid., 301);

(25) "*The second point I want to make about Léger's style in his third period concerns **the special use to which he discovered he could put colour*** [DISCOVERY OF AN ARTIST]" (ibid., 298).

5.2.2.4 The slot NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO *in Berger's essays*

While all the other components of the "Berger's metaekphrastic writing" script are mainly employed in his essays to discuss artworks, it is the slot NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO that takes Berger's metaekphrasis beyond a particular artwork and very often beyond the domain of arts. This slot is in some way actualised in all the 74 essays, which certainly testifies to the importance Berger placed on the relationship between an artwork and its context as well as that between art and real life.

The slot NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO is concretized by the concepts that belong to two thematic domains "Existential issues" and "Political and social problems". When the former domain is activated, these are the questions of how people perceive and assess their lives, what values they hold.

For example, in his essay about Matthias Grünewald[13] (ibid., 49-55), having considered Grünewald's "Insenheim Altarpiece"[14] and his own interpretations of the painting, Berger turns to discussing the question of how contemporary people see themselves in

relation to previous generations (26), e.g.:

(26) "*Usually, however, this knowledge is used to distinguish between* **'them' (in the past)** [ANCESTORS] *and* **'us' (now)** [CONTEMPORARIES]. *There is a tendency to picture* **them and their reactions to art as being embedded in history** [ANCESTORS HAVE VIEWS BEING BY THE TIME THEY LIVED IN]*, and at the same time* **to credit ourselves with an overview, looking across from what we treat as the summit of history** [CONTEMPORARY PEOPLE'S VIEWS ARE NOT LIMITED BY HISTORY]. **The surviving work of art then seems to confirm our superior position. The aim of its survival was us** [CONTEMPORARY PEOPLE ARE PRIVILIGED OVER THEIR ANCESTORS]. **This is illusion. There is no exemption from history** [THE ASSUMPTION IS FALSE]" (ibid., 55).

Here, Berger first discloses that contemporary people tend to entertain the assumption that they are privileged over their ancestors as having better understanding of the past, since their ancestors were limited by their epoch while contemporary people do not think they are. He then challenges the validity of this assumption by stating that it is an illusion. Berger clarifies his point with a brief summary of how his perception of Grünewald's "Insenheim Altarpiece" changed after he realised the erroneousness of seeing oneself as exempt from historic limitations (27), e.g.:

(27) "*The first time* **I saw the Grünewald I was anxious to place it historically**. *In terms of medieval religion, the plague, medicine, the Lazar house* [ASSUMPTION]. *Now* **I have been forced to place myself historically** [REINTERPRETATION OF THE ASSUMPTION]" (ibid.).

In this passage Berger contrasts placing the painting historically (*I saw the Grünewald I was anxious to place it historically*) with placing himself historically (*I have been forced to place myself historically*), thus acknowledging his own limitations and biases in the interpretation of the artwork as well as any other artwork.

When the slot NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO activates the domain "Political and social problems", Berger expresses his concern and/or criticism of the

contemporary world. For example, in his essay about Randa Mdah[15] (ibid., 497-502), Berger focuses on the artist's installation "Puppet theater" (ibid., 500-502), outlining its connection with the situation in the Gaza Strip (ibid., 499, 501): *"This work prophesied the Gaza Strip."* (ibid., 501). While writing about the Gaza Strip, a part of the real world outside the artist's studio, Berger voices his deep distress over the situation in that area (28). He then brings together the situation in the real world and the content of Mdah's installation (29) and in such a way makes an appeal to the readers to take an active position and join those *"voices across the world"* which *"are raised in protest"* (ibid., 500), e.g.:

(28) "***Gaza, the largest prison*** [SUFFERING] *in the world, is being transformed into an* ***abattoir*** [KILLING]. *The word 'Strip' (from Gaza Strip) is being drenched with blood, as happened* ***sixty-five years ago to the word 'ghetto'*** [SUFFERING].
[…] The ***massacre*** [KILLING] *will soon be followed by pestilence […]*" (ibid., 499-500).

In this extract Berger characterises the political and social situation in the Gaza Strip through its comparison with a prison (*the largest prison in the world*), an abattoir (*transformed into an abattoir*) as well as a Jewish ghetto during World War II (*sixty-five years ago to the word 'ghetto'*) and condemns it as a mass killing of civilians (*The massacre*). In the next extract (29) describing Mdah's installation that *"prophesied the Gaza Strip"*, Berger reveals how it represents the sufferings (*Their hands, torsos, faces are convulsed in agony*) of the people being forcefully killed (*The ... figures ... are being hurled to the ground ... Again and again until their heads split*), e.g.:

(29) "*The three solid, palpitating figures attached to the invisible puppeteers' cords are being hurled to the ground, head first, feet in the air. Again and again* ***until their heads split*** [KILLING]. *Their hands, torsos, faces are* ***convulsed in agony*** [SUFFERING]" (ibid., 501).

Overall, through verbal metaekphrasis Berger succeeds in convincingly demonstrating the relevance of art to every person, while tackling not only artistic but existential, political, and social issues. Without imposing a rigorous way of analysing artworks but

offering his readers a variety of interpretation routes instead, Berger manages to preserve the uniqueness of art while discussing it against the background of world issues. This approach fosters reader's interest in both Berger's essays and the artworks he writes about as well as makes the reader (more) aware of the current burning problems in the real world.

5.3 Berger's non-verbal metaekphrasis

Berger's non-verbal (visual) metaekphrasis in the collection of his essays that have been brought to discussion in this study is of two types: (i) photographs of the artists and (ii) reproductions of Berger's own sketches of other artists' paintings. The former include two artists' photographs: (a) the photo of Pablo Picasso[16] (ibid., 285) and (b) that of Alberto Giacometti[17] (ibid., 325). There are also two reproductions of Berger's own sketches of other artists' paintings: one is entitled "Author's work, from Bento's Sketchbook, 2011" (ibid., 18), it is the drawing of the figure of Christ from the painting "Christ crucified" by Antonello da Messina[18]. The other has the title "From a woman's portrait by Willem Drost" (ibid., 166), being a drawing after Willem Drost's[19] painting "Young woman in a brocade gown".

5.3.1 Photographs as metaekphrastic means

Pablo Picasso's photo, entitled "Fish-eye Picasso" (ibid., 285), was taken by David Douglas Duncan[20]. The photograph, which represents Picasso's naked torso, in no way shows what the painter looked like because of its unusual angle and a very close shot, rather it evokes the concepts of SEXUALITY and OLD AGE marked by the photograph's date, 1963, against the years of Picasso's life (1881–1973). These two concepts play the key role in verbal metaekphrasis in the essay "Pablo Picasso" which discusses Picasso's late works in the context of probing the theme of sexuality in art (30) and contemplating the predicaments of old age (31) as well as Picasso's personal challenges of getting old (32), e.g.:

(30) "*The stuff of colours possesses a **sexual charge** [*SEXUALITY*]*" (ibid., 287);

(31) "*And so he was alone – like **the old** [*OLD AGE*] always are*" (ibid., 288);

(32) "***He was becoming an old man*** [OLD AGE], *he was as proud as ever,* ***he loved women as much as he ever had*** [SEXUALITY] *and he faced the absurdity of his own* ***relative impotence*** [SEXUALITY]. *One of the oldest jokes in the world became his pain and his obsession – as well as a challenge to his great pride*" (ibid., 286).

Jointly verbal and visual metaekphrases in Berger's essay about Picasso instantiate the slot NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO of the "Berger's metaekphrastic writing" script with the concepts that belong to the domain "Existential issues". Thus, the reader is invited to pay attention to the sensitive topic of ageing.

While Duncan's photograph of Picasso was not described in Berger's essay Cartier-Bresson's[21] photograph of Giacometti is (33). Such a description helps the reader clearly identify the artist who is less known than Picasso, e.g.:

(33) "*The week after* ***Giacometti's*** *death* Paris Match *published a remarkable* ***photograph of him*** *which had been taken nine months earlier.* ***It shows him alone in the rain, crossing the street near his studio in Montparnasse***" (ibid., 324).

Berger puts forward the claim that this photograph epitomises Giacometti's character as a person and an artist (*suggests more than that about Giacometti's character*) (34, explaining the artist's character through the concept of LIFESTYLE (*his isolation*) (35), e.g.:

(34) "*But what makes* ***the photograph*** *remarkable is that* ***is suggests more than that about Giacometti's characte***r [AN ARTIST]" (ibid., 324);

(35) "*Nothing during Giacometti's lifetime broke through* ***his isolation*** [LIFESTYLE]" (ibid., 326).

The author expounds on this statement by letting the readers know that Giacometti shared his life even with the loved ones only temporarily (ibid.). Berger develops his point further by establishing the causal links between Giacometti's worldview and the social relationships during his lifetime. The writer represents the latter through the idea

of social fragmentation and maniac individualism as specific characteristics of his lifestyle as a true bourgeois intelligent (36), e.g.:

(36) "*Insofar as **Giacometti's view** could not have been held during any preceding historical period, one can say that **it reflects the social fragmentation** [LIFESTYLE] and **manic individualism** [LIFESTYLE] of the late bourgeois intelligentsia*" (ibid., 327).

All in all, verbal and visual metaekphrases in Berger's essay under analysis jointly instantiate the slot NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO through the concepts of OLD AGE and SEXUALITY in their reference to "Existential issues" domain and the concept of LIFESTYLE in its reference to "Existential issues" and "Political and social problems" domains. Overall, photographs of the artists as means of non-verbal metaekphrasis are used by Berger to both reveal the key features of the artists' personalities and discuss their artworks in wider existential and social contexts.

5.3.2 Sketches as metaekphrastic means

Berger's sketches of other artists' paintings represent only certain details of the respective canvases. His sketch after Antonello da Messina's "Christ crucified" shows only the figure of Christ on the cross, while the original painting depicts two other figures of "the Virgin Mary and his disciple John the Evangelist" (Christ crucified) against the landscape. The sketch after Willem Drost highlights the face of the woman in the painting, while leaving out her torso and a hand. Both essays, along with Berger's sketches, include visual ekphrastic representations of the respective paintings, i.e. their photo reproductions (ibid., 22, 160), so that the reader should compare the original and the copy to determine the focus of Berger's metaekphrasis.

In his essay about Antonello da Messina Berger recounts the way he contemplated Antonello's painting "Christ crucified" (ibid., 18-19) at the National Gallery in London on Good Friday of the year 2008 (ibid., 17) thus specifying the slot NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO (37), focusing on the sources of the depicted figures' authenticity (*the surrounding painted space exerts a pressure → they then resist this pressure → It is this resistance which makes them so undeniably and physically*

present), e.g.:

(37) "*I find **Antonello Crucifixion** easily [...]. What is so striking about the heads and bodies he painted is not simply their solidity, but the way the surrounding painted space exerts **a pressure** [*AUTHENTICITY*] on them and the way they then **resist this pressure** [*AUTHENTICITY*]. It is this **resistance** [*AUTHENTICITY*] which makes them so undeniably and physically present. After looking for a long while, **I decide to try to draw only the figure of Christ**"* (ibid., 18-19).

This passage, placed next to Berger's sketch, interprets the original painting in terms of two key concepts, PRESSURE and RESISTANCE, as the sources of the figures-in-the-canvas AUTHENTICITY, explaining how these figures resist the pressure of the space around them.

Chronicling his act of drawing, Berger resorts to the same concepts of PRESSURE (*exert no pressure*) and RESISTANCE (*no resistance*) to elucidate the procedure of analysing the painting and verifying the adequacy of his sketch (38), e.g.:

(38) "*I start drawing. [...] The crucial question is the scale of the cross on the page. If this is not right, the surrounding space will exert no **pressure** [*ADEQUACY*], and there'll be no **resistance** [*ADEQUACY*]*" (ibid., 19-20).

Narrating at length his being confronted by an armed security guard who insisted on Berger holding his bag while painting, Berger emphasized that he found it impossible and pleaded to let him finish the sketch within ten minutes with his bag on the floor. However, the security guard called his superior and together they escorted Berger out of the gallery (ibid., 20-22). This story, or rather two interconnected stories about Antonello da Messina's resistance against the people, unable to comprehend his artwork, on the one hand, and Berger's resistance against the people who were unable to empathise with his creative impulse, on the other, can be interpreted as a parable of an artist's resistance against the pressure of the hostile surroundings. Hence, in this essay verbal and non-verbal metaekphrases work together towards actualising the slot

NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO, specifying it with the concepts from the "Political and social problems" domain.

The other sketch, after Willem Drost's painting (ibid., 166), is thematically connected with the respective verbal metaekphrasis on one's experience of being desired via the simile that brings together this mighty feeling (*to be so desired, the one who is desired, to be desired, feeling immortal*) and the sensation of being protected by armour (*No suit or armour from the galleries downstairs ever offered, when worn, a comparable sense of protection, fearless*) (39) and participates in instantiation of the slot NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO with the concepts from the "Existential issues" domain, e.g.:

(39) "*I was reminded of something of which one is not usually reminded in museums. To **be so desired** [HUMAN FEELINGS] – if the desire is also reciprocal – renders the one who **is desired** [HUMAN FEELINGS] fearless. No suit or **armour** [PROTECTION] from the galleries downstairs ever offered, when worn, a comparable **sense of protection** [PROTECTION]. To **be desired** [HUMAN FEELINGS] is perhaps the closest anybody can reach in his life to **feeling immortal** [HUMAN FEELINGS]*" (ibid., 161).

On the whole, Berger's non-verbal metaekphrasis is not self-sufficient and depends on his verbal metaekphrasis. Together they contribute to the instantiation of the slot NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO, involving concepts from the "Existential issues" and "Political and social problems" domains.

6. Conclusion

Acknowledging the long tradition of employing the term *ekphrasis*, one should not be misguided by its modern application as a complete equivalent of its ancient usage. While in ancient rhetoric ekphrasis covered vivid description of a wide range of phenomena, in its contemporary use ekphrasis was first restricted to verbal representation of the works of art, further expanding to embrace other arts as well as other media to reach beyond the domain of literature into the domain of art history and

criticism. However, ekphrasis cannot be taken to account for all the instances of representing art in writing, since the context might "take off" an artwork to become a prompt for discussing burning problems in the real world outside an artist's studio. Our suggestion is to call such contexts *metaekphrastic*. Being closely linked to ekphrasis *per se*, metaekphrasis inherits its intermedial nature as a "contact zone" between visual art and verbal response to it.

In his essays, Berger finds a unique approach to writing about visual art through masterful handling of metaekphrastic contexts. Berger's essayistic metaekphrasis is grounded in his well-thought conception of writing about art, which can be modelled following its self-reflexive representation by the author, as the "Berger's metaekphrastic writing" script. The latter contains the following slots: WRITING ABOUT ART, AN ARTIST, AN ARTIST'S STUDIO, VISITING AN ARTIST'S STUDIO, HAVING A DIALOGUE WITH THE ARTIST ABOUT HIS/HER ART, LEARNING THE STORY OF MAKING AN ARTWORK (OF HOPES, CHOICES, MISTAKES, DISCOVERIES OF AN ARTIST), NOT OBLIVIOUS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE STUDIO, ACHIEVING IF NOT A DEFINITE CONCLUSION THAN A REVELATION. While the first six components of the script are mainly used to elaborate on the art itself, the latter two serve as a bridge between art and the real world.

The aforementioned script, being a flexible template of Berger's essayistic writing, provides a solid conceptual foundation for the diverse essayistic responses to various artworks by different artists. In each essay the script "Berger's metaekphrastic writing" is concretized by a set of more specific concepts. Such a strategy allows Berger to offer a personalised approach to each artist and his/her artworks, since they are not described with the inventory of standard terms and concepts but are endowed with specifically tailored verbal expressions and conceptual structures. This strategy is also an invitation to the readers to get involved in art and experience its relevance in their daily lives.

Berger's non-verbal metaekphrasis, represented by artists' photographs and reproductions of his own sketches, pertaining to their artworks, depends on verbal

metaekphrasis, making the intermedial play of visual and verbal even more intricate and thus more expressive.

The study proves that Berger's essays on art are rich in verbal and non-verbal metaekphrases, which might be a characteristic feature of essays about art as a sub-genre, thus paving the way to further research in the area of intermediality.

7. Notes

1. Piero della Francesca (c. 1415–1492) – "painter whose serene, disciplined exploration of perspective had little influence on his contemporaries but came to be recognized in the 20th century as a major contribution to the Italian Renaissance" (Watson, *s.a.*).

2. Luciano Berio (1925–2003) – "Italian musician, whose success as theorist, conductor, composer, and teacher placed him among the leading representatives of the musical avant-garde" (Luciano Berio, *s.a.*).

3. In their obituary to Berger, sociologists Yasmin Gunaratnam and Vikki Bell assert that he "has had a profound influence on the popular understanding of art and the visual image" (2017). Berger shot to fame as an intellectual in 1972 with his BBC television series "Ways of Seeing" that challenged the way art had been interpreted (McNay 2017, *s.a.*). The subsequent book with the same title has become "a key text in art history education into the 21st century" (Blumberg 2015, *s.a.*). Berger is acclaimed as an author who had "a rare gift" of "the ability to communicate complex ideas about history in language that is accessible to more than just the most highly educated and privileged" (Schor 2017, *s.a.*). Berger's collection of essays "Portraits. John Berger on Artists" (2015) has been praised by many renowned authors for the ingenious insights into art and its perception as well as mastery of expression (Reviews, *s.a.*).

4. Among the total of 74 essays under study 47 focus on paintings, 8 on paintings and drawings, 4 on sculpture, 2 on photographic works including photomontage, 2 on installations, 1 on drawings, 1 on architecture (a building). The rest have a mixed content, with 1 related to painting and etching, 1 to painting and design, 1 to painting

and sculpture, 1 to sculpture and installations, 1 to paintings, engravings, and woodcuts, 1 to painting and cartoons, 1 to painting, sculpture, and drawing, and 2 to art works with painting and sculpture implied.

5. Fayum portrait – "any of the funerary portraits dating from the Roman period (1st to the 4th century) found in Egyptian tombs throughout Egypt but particularly at the oasis of al-Fayyūm" (Fayum Portrait, *s.a.*).

6. Rembrandt (1606–1669) – "Dutch Baroque painter and printmaker, one of the greatest storytellers in the history of art, possessing an exceptional ability to render people in their various moods and dramatic guises" (van de Wetering, *s.a.*).

7. Vija Celmins (born in 1938) – "an American-Latvian contemporary artist known for her photo-based drawings and paintings of the ocean, rocks, spider webs, and stars in the night sky" (Vija Celmins, *s.a.*).

8. Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) – "painter and printmaker generally regarded as the greatest German Renaissance artist" (Ruhmer, *s.a.*).

9. Liane Birnberg (born in 1948) – a German painter, photographer and composer born in Bucharest in 1948 (Liane Birnberg, *s.a.*).

10. Cristina Iglesias (born in 1956) – "a Spanish installation artist and sculptor" (Cristina Iglesias, *s.a.*).

11. Jean-Louise-André-Théodore Géricault (1791–1824) – "painter who exerted a seminal influence on the development of Romantic art in France" (Théodore Géricault, *s.a.*).

12. Fernand Léger (1881–1955) – "French painter who was deeply influenced by modern industrial technology and Cubism" (McMullen, *s.a.*).

13. Matthias Grünewald (c. 1480–1528) – "one of the greatest German painters of his age, whose works on religious themes achieve a visionary expressiveness through intense colour and agitated line" (Harbison, *s.a.*).

14. The "Insenheim Altarpiece" by Grünewald was painted for the Antonite monastery at Isenheim (in southern Alsace) (Harbison, *s.a.*). It "consists of a carved wooden shrine with one pair of fixed and two pairs of movable wings flanking it. Grünewald's paintings on these large wing panels consist of the following. The first set of panels

depicts the *Crucifixion*, the *Lamentation*, and portraits of *SS. Sebastian and Anthony*. The second set focuses on the Virgin Mary, with scenes of the *Annunciation* and a *Concert of Angels*, a *Nativity*, and the *Resurrection*. The third set of wings focuses on St. Anthony, with *St. Anthony and St. Paul in the Desert* and the *Temptation of St. Anthony*" (ibid.).

15. Randa Mdah (born in 1983) – a contemporary artist, educated and residing in Syria who, in her own words, usually works "with painting, etching and sculpture" (Randa Maddah, *s.a.*).

16. Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) – "Spanish expatriate painter, sculptor, printmaker, ceramicist, and stage designer, one of the greatest and most-influential artists of the 20th century and the creator (with Georges Braque) of Cubism" (McCully, *s.a.*).

17. Alberto Giacometti (1901–1966) –"Swiss sculptor and painter, best known for his attenuated sculptures of solitary figures" (Hohl, *s.a.*).

18. Antonello da Messina (c. 1430–1479) – "painter who probably introduced oil painting and Flemish pictorial techniques into mid-15th-century Venetian art" (Antonello da Messina, *s.a.*).

19. Willem Drost (1633–1659) – "Dutch painter, active in Italy for part of his very brief career" (Willem Drost, *s.a.*), "one of the most gifted of Rembrandt's pupils, but also one of the most enigmatic" (ibid.).

20. David Douglas Duncan (1916–2018) – "American photojournalist noted for his dramatic combat photographs of the Korean War" (David Douglas Duncan, *s.a.*), "a renowned war photographer, photojournalist […] [who was] among the most influential photographers of the last century, capturing World War II, the Vietnam War" (Picasso through the lens of David Douglas Duncan, *s.a.*). David Douglas Duncan is also known as the photographer who "developed a lasting friendship with Picasso over the course of 17 years during which time" and "captured an astounding visual archive of the artist's life at La Californie" (ibid.).

21. Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908–2004) – "French photographer whose humane, spontaneous photographs helped establish photojournalism as an art form" (Scharf, *s.a.*).

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Résumé

Having acknowledged the rich tradition in the studies of ekphrasis with the focus on the differences between its ancient and modern conceptions, this paper adopts a new, cognitive poetic approach to ekphrasis in essays on art and suggests the notion of metaekphrasis to elucidate such contexts that reach beyond representation of a work of art. The analysis is directed towards explicating verbal and non-verbal metaekphrases in John Berger's essays on visual art. For that purpose, a combination of conceptual and contextual interpretative analyses complemented by the analysis of dictionary definitions was employed. Alongside three stages of the research were implemented:

(i) identification of ekphrastic and metaekphrastic contexts based on the criterion of representation of an artwork/discussion of various issues, (ii) modelling the underlying cognitive pattern of Berger's verbal and non-verbal metaekphrases in terms of a script, and (iii) interpretation of the meanings evolving in metaekphrastic contexts in the essays. The "Berger's metaekphrastic writing" script is a flexible template of his writings that ensures a robust conceptual foundation for varying responses to different works of art. This script is specified with a set of more concrete concepts that differ from essay to essay. It results in developing a personalised approach to each artist and their artworks while encouraging the reader to contemplate the relevance of art and its relation to current burning issues in the real world. Berger's non-verbal metaekphrasis is subordinate to his verbal metaekphrasis. In their intermedial interplay the verbal and non-verbal metaekphrases generate rich and unique essayistic meanings. The abundance of verbal and non-verbal metaekphrases in Berger's essays on art makes it possible to arrive at the tentative conclusion of its being a characteristic feature of essays on art, which opens a new perspective for the further studies of intermediality.