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Precisely because ekphrasis represents a pause at the level of narration and cannot be read functionally, the reader is possessed by a strong need to interpret. [...] To relate description in this way to narration is to accept its poor relation status but to give it a limited form of social mobility: the more radical move is to free description from the chains of slavery and give it true autonomy. The vanguard of this approach was the *nouveau roman*, particularly in the theorizing of Robbe-Grillet, with its cry that “instead of this universe of “significations” (psychological, social, functional), one must try to construct a world more solid, more *immediate*.”¹

Patrons-watch-an-activist-004.jpg²

This is a photograph of the interior of a cafeteria or restaurant, viewed from the outside. It is nighttime and it is darker on the outside than on the inside of the restaurant. We are looking at the interior scene through a plate glass window or door and we know this because we can see reflections on the glass. These are mostly indistinct, but we can just make out the reflections of the heads and shoulders of a group of people at the left side of the photograph. The interior of the restaurant, seen through the glass, takes up approximately two thirds of the frame on the left side of the image. The remaining third of the photograph is filled almost entirely by the figure of a man standing in the foreground, just on the outside of the restaurant and close to the window or door. His left arm is raised in an act of gesticulation and he seems to be waving or possibly banging on the window or door with his hand. His arm and hand are blurred, probably due to movement and the slow shutter speed of the camera in the limited available light. Just behind him, and obscured by him apart from one bare arm, is a second person. This isolated arm is raised in a similar fashion and at a similar angle to the first man's, so that the two arms configure as parallel forms. The man in the foreground is black and he is thick set. He is smartly dressed, with a bright blue shirt cuff protruding from underneath a dark blue or black jacket. He is wearing a dapper, white trilby style of hat, with a black band that can only just be seen due to the

angle of the camera, which is situated somewhat lower than the man's head. He is wearing spectacles and the light of the restaurant is reflecting in the lens that is on view, which is the left hand lens. His mouth is open wide, either in a gesture of surprise, or as if he is shouting. A gold ring, possibly a wedding ring, is visible on his left hand and it is catching the light and glinting brightly against the dark skin of his hand. A line of smaller windows continues to the right of the larger window that has already been encountered and reaches to the right edge of the photograph, above the man's head. The glass is set in aluminium or a similar light coloured metal, with a black core. There is a sign stuck on the top of the window, the window that is directly to the left of the main window. It is a white sign, with bold, red text printed on it and it reads 'APPLY TODAY'. The bottom right corner of the sign is obscured by the man's head, or, more specifically, by the front brim of his hat. Overlaid on the sign, and at an angle, is a clear reflection of a second sign, not a printed sign this time, but a neon sign that reads 'EXIT' in backwards writing, as it is reflected. Positioned underneath the signs are two approximately life-sized but faint images of women's faces, which are not reflections but appear to be attached to the window, although they are translucent and the warm light of the interior can be seen through them. We are looking at the interior of the restaurant at an angle from the street, so that the right hand wall and a small portion of the back wall are on view. The interior is lit with hanging wall lights and two of these lights can be seen, but there are probably more that are outside the frame of the image. There is in addition a central rectangular panel set into the ceiling, which is emitting a brighter and slightly cooler light than that given off by the wall lights. The walls of the restaurant are painted a warm yellow-beige and there is a matching mural on the right hand wall. It is an abstracted view of a group of people with what appears to be an outsized drinks cup behind them. The style of the picture is 'corporate', with faded gradations in yellows and reds and with slightly offset white outlines overlaying and delineating the objects. The head and shoulders reflections in the window echo and continue the line of figures in the mural, as they lie at the same height and appear a similar size. The bottom portion of the restaurant walls, to approximately waist height, is covered in what seems to be a dark wood or imitation wood panelling, applied in sections with obvious joints every metre or so. This panelling is topped with a black border of around ten centimetres that separates it from the upper part of the walls. The ceiling is constructed in large square sections, with gratings and grids set in them, and also the light panel, which takes up two of the squares. There are plastic drink containers hanging from the ceiling; they are dark brown with a lighter coloured logo or pattern, which suggests that they may be coffee cartons. There are several curly pieces of paper, or other similar material, hanging from each of these cartons. It is a possibility that these are homemade decorations of some sort, or that they could be serving a more practical purpose and that the curly papers could be old-fashioned flypapers. The main part of the ceiling is high, but there is a slightly lower and curved section at the back of the restaurant that disappears off the left edge of the image. The floor is covered with small beige tiles that extend slightly up the wall in a functional style. There are three dining tables across the right hand wall of the restaurant. The middle table is wider than the other two and has four chairs, whilst the others each have two. The chairs at the back table are of a comfy padded type, and the ones at the other tables are of a simple design in wood and metal. The table nearest to the front of the restaurant is unoccupied and

clear and the chairs are pulled out slightly in a tidy and welcoming fashion. At the furthest table, on the chair nearest the back wall, sits a man with dark skin, a long grey beard and a receding hairline. He is wearing a dark grey casual coat, light coloured trousers and black and white trainers. There is a large blue bag of some kind placed on the chair opposite him. Both his hands are placed on the table and he appears to be eating a meal from a large, red tray. The rest of the table is covered with what could be packaging or paper and also a drinks can. The middle table is occupied by a man with sparse, grey hair and spectacles. He is sitting upright and is neatly dressed in a pale pink sweater and beige trousers. He too has a red tray, and it is covered in objects that are impossible to identify, but are probably the remains of a meal. The tray is placed to one side and on the table directly in front of the man are a newspaper and a large drinks carton, of the same design as the ones hanging from the ceiling. Both figures are looking towards the action that is taking place on the other side of the window from them. The man in the corner is looking in a guarded and surreptitious way, his head kept straight and only his eyes slightly turned. The man at the middle table is looking with unconcealed interest, his head and eyes lifted from the newspaper and turned directly towards the window.

¹ FOWLER, D. P. 1991. Narrate and describe: the problem of ekphrasis. *Journal of Roman Studies*, 81, 25-35.

² HEADLINE: Patrons watch an activist banging on the window of McDonald's in Los Angeles. CREDIT: Mario Anzuoni. SOURCE: Reuters