

Introduction: Towards an Alternative Poetics of Intermediality

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The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have witnessed an intermedial dialogue between verbal, visual, and vocal representations, alongside the radical and contemporary avant-garde art movements. What sets avant-gardism apart from traditional representationalism are its distinct attributes of revitalising the ‘collective dimension of explorative creativity’ and employing ‘[inter]artistic activity as the means for opening up new territory’ (Sers and Eburne 849). Grounded in these principles of formal innovation and generic transgression, both literary and artistic historiography reveals a notable departure from the classical tenet of Horace’s *ut pictura poesis* towards the notion of intermediality – a confluence rather than the ‘ancient parallel’ (MacLeod 194), particularly evident in the early modernist experimentation of Imagism and Vorticism. Ezra Pound’s ideogram, Wyndham Lewis’s vortex, William Carlos Williams’s ekphrasis, Elizabeth Bishop’s perspectivism, and Gertrude Stein’s portraiture, all share an inspiration drawn from the material and technical innovations of modern art and mass media. Through a continuous and inventive interchange between various artforms and mediums, ranging from painting, architecture, photography, texture, novel, musical, theatre, and cinema, modern and contemporary writers opt to reconstruct their textual works by adopting a non-representational technique or style, discarding the naturalistic principles of mimicry in favour of new modes of expression.

In this shift towards an intermedial collaboration between poetic and non-poetic forms, the contemporary world itself has undergone a profound medial transformation, from what Walter Benjamin refers to as ‘mechanical reproducibility’ to later Jean Baudrillard’s concept of ‘hyperreality’ over the course of the entire twentieth century.¹ As a main break with traditions of representational art and narrative linearity, early modernism has opened up new possibilities for the aesthetics of intermediality. As Matei Calinescu claims in his *Five Faces of Modernity*, genuine modernism is ‘not historically but only aesthetically forward’ (84) and its anti-traditionalism and worship of novelty relinquishes the faith in linear progression of history or in chronologically-ordered time. Embracing spatial expansion and intensification as an autonomous experiment, modernists and postmodernists seek to create a new spatial-temporal reality by discontinuing the conventional materials and appealing to a synaesthetic experience at the interface ‘travelling’ among word, sound, and image based on the ‘interdisciplinary mobility’ (Bal 29). After this period, more and more artists begin to closely scrutinise the intersection between different artistic mediums, transcending the historical boundaries of highbrow and lowbrow arts and their ‘dichotomous cultural paradigm’ (O’Sullivan 283), whether it be in the context of a Baroque painting or computer-mediated imagery. This intermedial exploration thus challenges the validity and authority of old disciplinary frames, giving rise to a desire for an inclusive, ever-expanding, and heterogenous poetics beyond purely textual or literal criticism. The prism of poetic intermediality, in this vein, warrants greater attention in academic research and encourages more engagement with novel interpretations and conceptualisations.

W. J. T. Mitchell identifies these momentous changes as a ‘pictorial turn,’ which is a ‘postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visibility, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality’ (*Picture Theory* 16).² This pictorial or visual turn represents a significant deviation from the linguistic turn termed by Richard Rorty, a previous change that is distinguished by the influence of French Structuralism in the history of Western philosophy. Mitchell’s ‘picture’ now assumes a dominant position, supplanting earlier epistemological focuses on the ‘thing’ in ancient and medieval philosophy, the ‘idea’ during the Enlightenment, and Ferdinand de Saussure’s emphasis on the ‘word’ (Rorty 257–311). Structuralists posit that the world is ontologically grounded on a structural system of language, but their assumption may no longer be unassailable. Contrarily, scholars like Nelson Goodman, with his language of art, and Ernest Gombrich, who works on pictorial psychology, argue for a ‘conventionalist’ (Wang, ‘Demystification’ 81) perspective of representation. They contend that even non-linguistic symbols can be regarded as codes operating within a conventional system, whether based on pre-existing sociocultural constructs or rooted in transcendent human knowledge.³ This representational conventionalism effectively dismantles the longstanding boundary between text and image that has been central to the intellectual tradition since Plato’s ‘Allegory of the Cave.’

The idea of intermediality between the linguistic and the non-linguistic finds its theoretical alignment within the realm of poststructuralism.⁴ Roland Barthes, for instance, introduces a semiotic approach to deciphering not just literary works but also paintings, photographs, musical compositions, comics, and films, viewing them all as off-centred ‘texts’ or ‘sign systems’ devoid of a definitive closure. Michael Foucault examines the ‘infinite relationship’ between poetry and painting, shedding light on the inherent tension between the discursive and the visible. Julia Kristeva’s notion of ‘intertextuality’ synthesises semiology with dialogism to interpret poetic language both symbolically (literally) and semiotically (pictorially). Jacques Derrida’s coinage of ‘*différance*’ disrupts the hierarchical divide between the verbal and the visual by questioning the predominance of phonologism/logocentrism; he prioritises the trace of the signifier over the signified, the sound-image than the meaningful discourse in a deconstructive effect of ‘dissemination.’ In addition, Donna Haraway’s ‘cyborg’ and Homi Bhabha’s ‘hybridity’ resonate with the radically composite artistry that merges word and image, as exemplified in works such as William Blake’s relief-etchings and E. E. Cummings’ ‘poempictures.’

The intermedial or interartistic condition, from the antiquity to the contemporary, prompts us to further investigate what Mitchell terms as the ‘image/text problematic’ (*Picture Theory* 7) through a series of dramatic alternations in representation and creation. As early as the classical era, Horace, influenced by the Greek poet Simonides of Ceos’ aphorism that ‘painting is silent poetry and poetry is speaking painting’ (Rogers 41), composed the renowned axiom of *ut pictura poesis*, which emphasises the sisterly affinity of poetic and pictorial arts.⁵ Centuries later, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in *Laocoon*, contested this Horatian viewpoint and asserted that the ‘succession in time is the province of the poet, co-existence in space that of the artist’ (100). He insisted on a dualist understanding that separates these two artistic mediums and their embodied domains, reflecting his monomodal departmentalisation of artforms. Nonetheless, this binary division between poetry and painting has become obsolete, as the medial boundaries have been eroded by the interart influences and exchanges active since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its emergence of cross-medial poetics has played a pivotal role in dissolving the lines between these traditionally distinct models of art.

Instead of adhering to the laocoonised point of view that disconnects the literary and the non-literary, the innovative approach of intermediality offers a valuable framework for exploring the dynamic and productive interplay between diverse artforms and mediums. This intermedial perspective can be better understood by using phrases like ‘cross-fertilization’ (Landwehr 1) between poetry and painting or “infinite relation” (Shapiro 13) between saying and seeing, deeming them as ‘kindred muses’ (Moramarco 68) or a pair of sister arts, recognising the ‘crossover’ (Nadanner 32) of

interartistic knowledge, and realising their ‘mutual illumination’ (Wagner 2). Besides, Mitchell’s conception of ‘imagetext’ (*Image Science* 39) denotes the interdependent relationship and the composite form or idea transcends both mediums.⁶ Compared to conventional means that focus on the ‘sisterhood’ of *poesis* and *pictura*, dealing with their translatability and correspondence, intermediality encourages us to capture the ‘media interrelations’ (Elleström 2) that transgress old boundaries within a broader universe. In this expanded realm, artists can fully engage in the intermedial transfer of one medium into another.

As reformulated in *The Palgrave Handbook of Intermediality*, the essence of intermediality does ‘not lie in a simple combination of preexisting formulations but works as a more flexible, dynamic, and dialectical process in-between historically paralleled or separated domains’:

Intermediality, on a dialectical and dialogical basis, does not assume an actual juxtaposition of literary pictorialism or pictorial literariness, charging its partner with unspeakable or invisible deficiencies of dissonance; it instead brings mediating and communicating into specific focus, which encodes the collaboration between poets and painters within their lines on the page and the canvas with reciprocities, tensions, and iconoclastic powers of aesthetic modernity. (Wang, ‘Reformulating’ 361)

Applying Bakhtinian keyword of dialogue between characters in a fiction to the ‘mutual interference’ (Caws 4) between two medial presences, verbal and non-verbal, this energetic ‘mediating and communicating’ of intermediality goes deeper than previously expected. It involves not only a poem and a non-verbal art, but also the poet and the artist, their respective artistic schools and movements, and cultural backgrounds and social values. The simultaneous combination of reading and spectatorship creates a more comprehensive, fluid, and reciprocal conversation. Its destruction of the fixed frame of subjects can be seen as a ‘meeting ground and battle ground’ (Wagner 36), as it provides an interactive space for experimenting with the ‘verbal-visual-sonic complex’ (Perloff 18) to search for creative and interpretative contingencies. The reader-viewer is substantially stimulated to choose new ways of reception and interpretation within this framework, fostering a rich and ever-evolving interaction among different disciplines, cultures, and mediums.

Inspired by the poetics of intermediality, which attempts to reorient modern thought by bridging the gap between the discursive and the visible, there is a growing need for more focused research and studies in intermedial reading, as defined by Mitchell as a ‘magisterial “theory of Imagery”’ or ‘Iconology’ (*Iconology* ix) studying on logos, icons, and other medial elements. This applied criticism shall extend what Liliane Louvel calls a ‘pictorial third’ (2) to a ‘medial third’ paying careful attention to the pragmatics of interartistic connections across the textual, plastic, and auditory borderlines. This special issue, titled ‘Intermedial Poetics: Alternative Methods and Practices,’ aims to critically dissect how this intermedial collaboration of poetry and non-poetry responds to the ongoing debate between literature and art. It also probes into how this engagement with visual culture and mass media moves beyond the structural differences within separated dualism, contributing to an alternative model for communication that is an inseparable part of modern and contemporary aesthetics.

From ‘iconic projection’ to ‘medial projection’ (Bruhn 28), intermedial poetics may cover specific generic crossovers in a highly refashionable manner, such as cinepoetics, ekphrasis, digital poetry, concrete poetry, sound poetry, city lyrics, intersemiotic translation, verbal-visual portraiture, the poetic-architectonic, textural practices, visual poetics, and textual theatricality, as elaborately discussed in this special issue. Beyond mere multimedial influence or artistic effects, the collection of papers here intends to offer a more broadened, transformative perspective by casting lights on aspects like spectatorship, aesthetic form as an altered identity, and interdisciplinary considerations of contemporary art practices. In general, this special issue tries to address several key research questions: *au fond*, what sets traditional textual or literalist poetics apart from the poetics of intermediality? How does the latter function and perform within distinct artforms or mediums? Furthermore, how does intermediality serve as an actual agency designed to facilitate conversations crossing different domains, whether they are aesthetic, technological, or ideological in nature?

The selection of papers for this issue features a wide range of influences and perspectives, spanning different historical periods, and engaging with many of the aforementioned approaches to literature, art, and beyond. In their paper ‘Guy Gilles or the Cinepoetics of Presence,’ Hugues Azérad and Marion Schmid engage with the intermedial nature of poetic cinema through their study of French filmmaker Guy Gilles, using the lens of Yves Bonnefoy’s theoretical texts to establish Gilles’ ‘cinepoetics of presence.’ This paper demonstrates the transfer between aesthetic categories such as ‘poetic’ are not confined to the medium of literature: cinema specifically can create a porous space for poetry and cinema to flourish in the interstices between categories that also facilitates a fusion of artwork and audience. Continuing on in this vein, Birgit Neumann and Gabriele Rippl’s paper ‘Intermedial Poetics in Contemporary Anglophone Novels: Re-Negotiating Western Visual Archives’ places the references to images evident in verbal–visual configurations of postcolonial and transcultural artists and authors as the manifestation of the racially politicised ‘right to see,’ situated within the wider pictorial turn. They argue that many postcolonial, transcultural fictions utilise intermedial relations to critically engage with established visual archives and their mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, crucially positing the potential for this as an index of – and precondition for – change.

In addition, Emma Tornborg’s paper ‘Ekphrasis as Intra-action: Re-reading “Photograph from September 11” by Wislawa Szymborska’ engages anew with the ekphrastic nature of this ‘poem about a photograph’, excavating the spatiotemporal properties of the different media types utilised to renegotiate the relationship between subject and object. Jarkko Toikkanen presents ‘Vanishing Intermedialities in Wallace Stevens’ “The Idea of Order at Key West”,’ which offers a complementary alternative reading of Wallace Stevens’ poem by appealing to the medium-specific elements of the vanishing intermedialities that impact the reader-viewer. This strategy is proposed as a different manner of approaching textual analysis, one which takes into consideration more fundamentally the concepts of design and agency, and ultimately demonstrates how the sensory palate of this poem expands past sight and hearing alone.

Noticeably, Lars Elleström’s presence looms large in several papers: Mette-Marie Zacher Sørensen’s paper ‘Disjunctive Pronouns: On Multimodal Analysis of Digital Poetry’ tackles the instability of boundaries through Elleström’s conceptual framework of multimodality and mixed modalities, providing an analysis of a selection of digital poetry and how its various modal compositions can illuminate meaning formation within this paradigm through ‘non-trivial’ means. In addition, Signe Kjaer Jensen’s paper ‘The Sound of a Snow Queen: Perspectives on Synchronic Intermediality and “Let It Go”’ addresses the inherently intermedial format of song and animated musical film as ‘integrated’ media using Elleström’s framework, presenting her reading of synchronic intermediality and its impact on meaning potential within her chosen musical, *Frozen*.

The other papers in this special issue deal with poetic intermediality across a variety of mediums and time periods, from early Romanticism to contemporary concrete poetry: in ‘Perceiving Intermedial Romanticism: “The Eye sees more than the heart knows” & “the despotism of the eye”,’ Serena Qihui Pei presents the intermediality inherent in overlapping yet distinct interplay between plastic arts and poetic visions in the Romantic poetry of William Blake and William Wordsworth respectively, while through the paper ‘In Flux: Actor–Network Theory, Concrete Poetry, and Critical Making,’ Kelsey Dufresne uses Actor–Network Theory (ANT) to encourage a critical analysis encompassing the broader relationships evident in the visual configurations of concrete poems, specifically through designing and constructing video representations of poetic elements and networks. This indicates the strong future potential of interactive opportunities for engagement with the wider networks of association connected with and to a poem that broadens the parameters of traditional literary analysis.

Marc Matter’s paper ‘From Repetitive Structures to Loops in Contemporary Sound Poetry’ invokes concepts of repetition in relation to loops in sound poetry, discussing how the compositional use of media-technologies can influence the aesthetics of sound poetry and the subsequent excava-

tion of meaning. Sibyl Gallus-Price places the poetry of Susan Howe in conversation with modernist painting in order to challenge the ‘painterly’ aspects of Howe’s poetic work in the paper ‘Susan Howe’s *That This: Art at the Limits of the Canvas and the Page*.’ It revisits the traditional interpretations of Howe’s experimentation with boundaries and borders to extend the commentary on her innovative approaches to liminality. In ‘The Fall of Icarus (through Mediums): Intersemiotic Translation from Painting to Poetry,’ Swagata Chakraborty re-reads the classic ekphrastic links between Pieter Bruegel’s painting *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* and William Carlos’ poem ‘Landscape with the Fall of Icarus’ through an intersemiotic conceptual lens, in order to explore the extent of the textual networks inherent within the ekphrasis, and its capacity to reflect the incompleteness of translation.

Moreover, in ‘City Lyrics in a “Sensible Age”: Intermediality and Intersensoriality in Oscar Wilde’s *Impression Du Matin* (1881) and “Symphony in Yellow” (1889),’ Eszter Gyorgy invites us to consider cross-fertilization, synaesthetic sensibilities, and transformative intertextuality between different artforms in an examination of two of Oscar Wilde’s ‘city lyrics.’ This thus presents a fresh reading of the Wildean dandy situated within the urban metropolis by appealing to the choreographics of looking, voyeurism, and an appreciation for both the material and aesthetic components of urbanity. Natalia Morzhenkova focuses on the intermedial flexibility of the poetics of literary and pictorial portraits as a cross-media process in the paper ‘Modernist Verbal and Visual Portraiture: The Artistic Construction of the Portrait’s Subject,’ which explores identity construction and erosion with respect to the dialectic between word and image in the works of the early twentieth century’s most significant artists.

Tara Brusselaers’ contribution – ‘Breaking the Mould: Multimodality in Jay Bernard’s *Surge* and Koleka Putuma’s *Collective Amnesia*’ – deals with the aesthetic and political functions of multimodality in postcolonial, de-colonial, and transnational historical contexts of these works. The focus here is on the use of non-lyric modes in both texts: specifically in how these uses relate to notions of authority and silence from the perspectives of their young, Black, queer authors. Anna Lynn’s paper ‘Textural Aesthetics in the Avant-garde Art Practice of Nilima Sheikh and Rajyashri Goody’ explores the development of a personal locus for formulating loss in the intermedial exchange between her two chosen artists, with a focus on emotional affect and its evocative implications for feminist methods of ‘doing’ and its politics.

Apart from these intermedial collaborations between poetic and plastic arts, Huayu Yang’s paper ‘Writing the Stage: Intermediality, Textual Theatricality, and *Hag-Seed* as a Theatre-Fiction’ explores how the dramaturgical framework employed by Margaret Atwood creates an embodied, lively, and intermedial reading experience for readers of the text. This paper addresses how the intermedial poetics of textual theatricality enacts the readers’ embodied perception of theatrical liveness and explores the porous mediality of both novel and theatre. Besides, architecture as a medium for intertextuality also features: R. B. Schwartz fuses modernist architecture with a study of poetic content in ‘Poetic-Architectonic Realizations: Louis Kahn and Fumihiko Maki’ where an examination of each architect’s built environments is posited as revealing linguistic and poetic elements, which evinces through subtle intermediality the development of meaning.

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Acknowledgements

The original idea of initiating a conversation on intermedial poetics was from our organisation of the panel “Intermedial Poetry and the Poetics of Intermediality” during the 6th International Conference of International Society of Intermedial Studies (ISIS), which took place at Trinity College Dublin in September 2022. We deeply appreciate the perceptive comments and enriching discussions from both the presenters and the audience. Furthermore, we want to extend our thanks to all contributors to this special issue, and anticipate its further expansion as the subject of intermediality continues to evolve.

Notes

- ¹ See more in Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, edited by Michael W. Jennings et al., translated by Edmund Jephcott et al. (Harvard UP, 2008); Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, translated by Sheila Faria Glaser (U of Michigan P, 1995).
- ² Werner Wolf also points out a ‘visual turn’ (256) as an intermedial phenomena in the last century, see Wolf, ‘Intermediality,’ in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, edited by David Herman et al. (Routledge, 2005), pp. 252-56.
- ³ For more on the idea that all representation is conventional, see Goodman, *Language of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Hackett Pub. Co., 1976); Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Phaidon P, 1987).
- ⁴ Most of these theoretical readings are from *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, edited by Vincent B. Leitch et al. (W. W. Norton, 2010): Barthes, ‘From Work to Text,’ pp. 1326-31; Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, pp. 2067-81; Derrida, *Of Grammatology and Dissemination*, pp. 1680-734; Haraway, ‘A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s,’ pp. 2187-220. Besides, see Foucault, ‘Las Meninas,’ in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (Routledge, 2005), pp. 3-18; Bhabha, ‘Dissemination: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Natio,’ in *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 2004), pp. 199-244.
- ⁵ On the archaeology of word (poetry) and image (painting), see Rensselaer W. Lee, *Ut pictura poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting* (W. W. Norton, 1967); Henryk Markiewicz and Uliana Gabara, ‘Ut pictura poesis... A History of the Topos and the Problem,’ *On Poetry*, special issue of *New Literary History*, vol. 18, no. 3, 1987, pp. 535-58.
- ⁶ For more writings on this critical term ‘image-text,’ see W. J. T. Mitchell, ‘Word and Image,’ in *Critical Terms for Art History*, edited by Robert Nelson and Richard Schiff (U of Chicago P, 1996), pp. 51-61.

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