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Dimensions of Intermediality & Diversions of Ekphrasis

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• **Intermediality:** A generic term for phenomena at the point of intersection
• between different media, or crossing their borders, or for their
• interconnection... convergence... intertextuality... [www.oxfordreference.com]

• **Ekphrasis:** A literary description of or commentary on a visual work of
• art; it is the practice of using words to comment on a piece of visual art
• [<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ekphrasis>].

Creativity & Theory

Being a practising poet & writer, literary translator & editor, filmmaker & photographer — I tend to think centrifugally and inter-textually; using multiple antennas to pick up creative and cerebral signals, drawing on varied forms of media to express myself; employing diverse genres — all interacting together in a holistic manner.

The process might start in a seemingly chaotic fashion, invoking Brownian Motion or Pedesis — but as I delve deeper into a subject, chisel away to reach its core, edit and re-shape draft-after-draft — the final product will take the shape of a tightly-wrought poem, a piece of micro-fiction, an essay, a distilled sharp-framed photograph — or a combination of words and images, sometimes with accompanying sound.

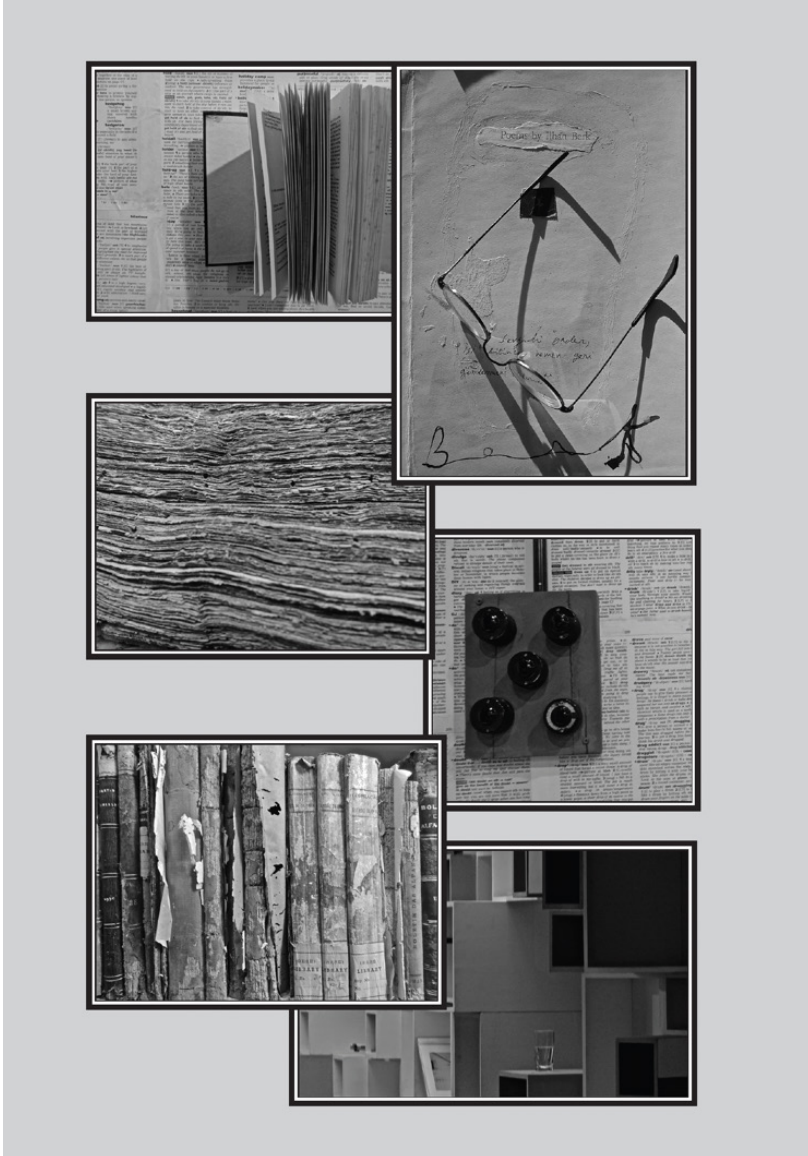
Usually, I leave ‘theory’ to the academics/critics, even though I might be well-versed in it. I stay far away from that mode of writing, especially when I am in a creative fervour. The former (which is, at least, a step removed from the primary source) requires a different and equally important skill-set. Creating art requires a free-flowing, associative, vulnerable part of the brain and heart. My approach is raw and visceral to begin with — though I might use my critical faculty to sharpen or chisel the creative text or image, once the basic text-object or art-form is firmly in place.

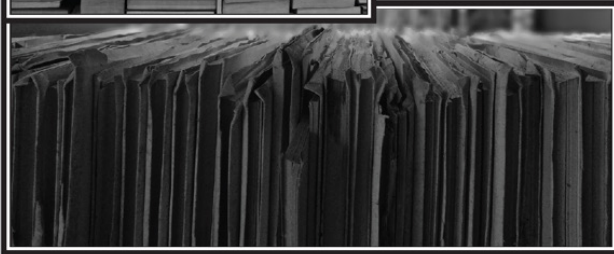
Intermediality & Ekphrasis

The very idea and definition of ekphrasis includes the notion of intermediality. Inspired by art or images, I might write in a literary genre. In some cases, a piece of literary writing may inspire other interpretative forms — poetry, music, dance, theatre or film. As a practitioner and collaborator, I have worked in the area of fusion and cross-arts.

Let me illustrate ‘intermediality’ in my poetic and photographic practices, through my craft of poetry and art of photography. The poem, *Paper T[r]ails*, from my latest book *Anthropocene* (London: Pippa Rann, 2021), was born

from my engagement with a series of photographs that I had taken — coming together as subsets and subtexts, both due to their provenance and their inherent themes/motifs. A close examination of the black-and-white photographs and the poem that follows, will serve as an illustration.





Paper T[r]ails

· Paper dreams within the cover of a book,
· book binds itself with the glue of a spine,

· spine weaves together — dovetailed
· by the grace of words — words of passion,

· words of grief; words of love, hate, wisdom.
· Paper crafts its papyrus origins

· journeying from tree to table
· through clefts, wefts, contours, textures —

· transforming from wood to sheet —
· white sheets born of unbleached

· natural shade — a tabula rasa waiting
· for ink, graphite, or sable-hair touch.

· Old-fashioned switches — dormant —
· now spark static electricity. Paper imagines —

· crisp, letter-strewn, bookish, word-wedged.
· Phrases elegantly poised, ready to trip off

· a palette, exposing photographic plates —
· bromide undulations of an untold story —

· a narrative to be matted and mounted —
· a frame freeing opens its borders to dream.

Ilhan's weathered hands, their bulbous veins
hold time and text beautifully phrased —

he is a poet and painter, lover of the sea,
light, silverfish, a sculptor of history.

Like a musician recording his lyrics —
magnetic forces marrying science

and arts — he swims on crest-troughs
of sine-graph modulations, through

physics' precision of arithmetic and tact.
Paper dreams in stacks, between covers,

among notes left surreptitiously
between pages for someone else to read.

A stray reader may find the letters —
electric text — unframed and borderless.

*

It might be useful to provide a note on the poem's 'context.' *Paper T[r]ails* is a series of tightly wrought images — set as pastiche montage, sometimes in diptychs and triptychs — charting 'paper tales' through their journey of birth, growth and creativity. With subtle use of natural light and controlled framing, material textures and contours, lines and phrases from the original poem as photographic titles, the black-and-white panorama unravels a narrative that is often hidden to an everyday eye.

Empty shelves dream of words they may have contained, the history of their making, the music that lies therein, lover's clues to be chanced upon and uncoded. The writer is a poet, the photographer a painter, and the viewer

a lover — he is also the creator, preserver and destroyer — alluding to the triadic Hindu myth of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. However, the palette is secular in nature, precise like architecture and arithmetic, fluid and spontaneous like a song and a story.

*

The second, more recent poem, *Split Fossil*, arises from my current fellowship as writer-in-residence at South Africa's Nirox Foundation in the 'cradle of humanity' Gauteng region. On one of my walks, I chanced upon an ancient rock that lay split open into two irregular parts, surrounded by wild bushes and verdant foliage. The flat open faces of these two stone-parts appeared like glazed mirrors in the setting sunlight.

One of the curators here, Sven Christian, showed me the various markings on it and explained some of the geological history of this stone. Since that day, I have visited and explored that same piece[s] of rock in closer detail, and photographed it from various angles and under different light conditions. The resultant art-text is a poem in couplets, *Split Fossil*. In its binary, bipolar structure — it captures the yin-yang, the inverse-obverse of the rock's dual/holistic countenance. Once again, explore the poetry and colour photography in slow-time.



Architecture & Form

Architecture and form in poetry too, rely on the idea of convergence — with the interplay between the shape of a poem and its visual lineation, between the white and inked spaces on a page, between syntax and punctuation, between the inner musicality/lyricism and oral articulation.

I have written and spoken about this earlier on various occasions. In an article featured in *The Punch Magazine* (online), I have explained that this interconnection has been, “very important to me — partly because of my own inherent interest in architecture itself. During my days of apprenticeship, I consciously wrote using traditional strict forms, formal metre and rhyme schemes. I have also written in free verse, but due to my penchant for formal verse you are likely to encounter a pantoum next to an acrostic poem, a triolet juxtaposed against a ghazal, lyric narratives and prose poetry, Sapphic fragments, mosaic pastiché, ekphrastic verse, sonnet, rubai, poem songs, prayer chants, documentary feeds, rap, reggae, creole, canzone, tritina, sestina, ottava rima, rime royale and variations on waka: haiku, tanka, katauta, choka, bussokusekika, sedoka.”

As I became more experienced and skilled, I started innovating and experimenting, creating and inventing new forms and poetic structures — some of which are part of the English Prosody now. I believe that a poem should not only be linguistically challenging, but how it appears visually is an important factor as well. For me, typography and structure of a poem are just as vital as the inner spirit and content of any poem.

The poem *New York Times*, besides being a commentary on the frenetic pace of the city, has a new rhyme scheme — *abzba*. When you see the poem on the page, you will see that the middle line, i.e. the ‘z’ line, visually pushes out of the stanza. If you turn the poem 90 degrees, you will see the silhouette of the borough of Manhattan. The other reason I used the five-line stanza-format in the poem is because the city of New York itself has five boroughs: Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn, Bronx, etc.

The poem, *Bharatanatyam Dancer* is another example of a new scheme, devised as a response to the subject of the poem. It might be interesting for

readers keen on form to note, that the line-end rhyme-scheme — *abacca* — in the poem, mirrors the rhythmic oral beat — *ta dhin ta thaye thaye ta* — of the classical dance step. The left-hand margin indentations further match the same scheme and form.

Early in my writing career I wrote a book-length sequence, *Mount Vesuvius in Eight Frames* (featured on BBC Radio as a verse-play, and premiered in London as a stage-play by Border Crossings directed by Michael Walling). This is based on a series of eight etchings of British artist, Peter Standen. The entire poem is set in rhymed couplets, reflecting the presence of two principal characters — man/woman, lover/other, life/death, and the other essential binaries. These are not present as obvious rhymes — they are wrap-around rhymes as opposed to end-stopped rhymes. The four stanzas in each section reflect the four seasons, the four sides of a frame, the four corners of a visual space. I also use alternating line-indentation for each couplet and stanza with the idea that the entire poem works on a cyclical principle. So, if you join all the stanzas together using the left-justified margin as a reference plane, they in fact fit in a perfect dove-tail joint.

The poem *Single Malt* is one single line, without any full-stops. The visually slender presentation is designed to convey the manner in which whiskey, when poured gently into a crystal glass, caresses its sides and subsequently the tongue's palette. Therefore, the slim verticality of this poem's structure.

There is also my book-length poem, *Distracted Geography: An Archipelago of Intent* (published by Peepal Tree (UK) & Wings Press (USA)). This is another book-length poem of 206 pages. In the epilogue of the book I have explained, "The sparse elongated structure of the poem reflects the strength and surety of the human vertebra and spine, much like Neruda's Odes that reflects the long, thin shape of Chile. The sections and subsections join together like synapses between bone and bone. The titles are translucent markers or breath pauses, not separators. The short two-line couplets echo the two-step footprints, a pathway mapped on the atlas. The 12 sections correspond to the 12 bones in a human ribcage, the 12 months in a year, the two 12-hour cycles in a day. There are 26 bones in the human vertebrae, and the 26 parts in the poem slowly assemble themselves and form a montage of tenuously strung lyrics. The 206 pages in this book match the exact number of bones in a human body."

Location & Dislocation

Virtual and actual location, whether imagined or real, are equally my homes. I am both local and global at the same time. If I have to locate myself specifically, then I would say I am a Bengali poet writing in English. I was born into a Bengali family, in a Bengali-speaking neighbourhood of New Delhi. I grew up speaking Bangla at home, English at school, and Hindi around the city. All three languages are my mother tongues. Surrounded as I was by a Bengali milieu, the cultural, historical, linguistic and literary traditions of the Bengali language have had a significant impact on my poetic cadence, texture, rhythm and early rhyme-construction. A case in point is my poem *Durga Puja*. In the days preceding the eponymous festival, prayers are chanted from *Chandipaath*. The poem tries to capture the slow, languorous, song-like cadence, as well the long-lined couplet structure of the prayer.

I am constantly innovating with form and structure, allowing me to invent and introduce new aspects of prosody in the English poetry tradition. Even as the voice and technique are in a constant state of flux and growth, there is always a distinct personal signature. At the end, it is this seamless 'local-global' nature of my outlook and experience, that informs my overall creative practice.

Ultimately, it is not just an onlooker's gaze, but also the artist's and critic's inter-relational gaze, that lead to multiple interpretations — invoking John Berger's "ways of seeing." Artistic creations, both analogue and digital, have intimate parallelism and are enriched by dualities — between the intermediality of the arts and the sciences, between articulation and silence, between presence and absence, between logic and fantasy — all intricately cross-wired and inter-connected.



Sudeep Sen's prize-winning books include *Postmarked India: New & Selected Poems* (HarperCollins), *Rain, Ladakh, Aria* (A. K. Ramanujan Translation Award), *The HarperCollins Book of English Poetry* (editor), *Fractals: New & Selected Poems | Translations 1980-2015* (London Magazine Editions), *EroText* (Vintage: Penguin Random House), *Kaifi Azmi: Poems|Nazms* (Bloomsbury), *Anthropocene* (Pippa Rann), and *Red. The Whispering Anklets and Blue Nude: New Poems | Ekphrasis* (Jorge Zalamea International Poetry Prize) is forthcoming. He is the editorial director of AARK ARTS, and editor of *Atlas*. The Government of India awarded him the senior fellowship for "outstanding persons in the field of culture/literature." Sen is the first Asian honoured to deliver the Derek Walcott Lecture and read his poetry at the Nobel Laureate Festival [www.sudeepsen.org].

Postscript:

'Intermobility' overview, as seen through essays by the various contributors

Central to the idea of 'intermobility' is the cross-disciplinary perspective of artists, writers, theorists and critics. Edyta Frelík's paper *What Scene, What's Seen, What's in a... Word: Thoughts in and on Artists' Writings* explores this "multimodal domain" with interest, citing American modernist artists, and "correlations between the painterly and writerly intuitions and competences at play in artworks and texts produced by artist-writers."¹

Transmedial Creation of Text Worlds: Pictorial Narration in Response to Verbal Texts by Elżbieta Chrzanowska-Kluczevska furthers the above trope, investigating "world-formation," "media transformation (transmediation)" in "pictorial narrativity." She draws on Elleström, Li, Zlatev, Weitzmann, Varga, Sonesson, Speidel, and others.

In his essay, *Dynamic Ways of Prospecting: Parts, Wholes, Experiential Futures, And Eating a Banana for the First Time*, Adam Cowart applies "Goethean science and dynamic ways of seeing" to "storytelling in futures and transition design." He, "proposes a methodological approach to surfacing and disrupting fixed assumptions about the future with the intention of reanimating the narrative to create space for novelty to emerge."

Alexander Scherr explores the idea of 'intermediality' through a specific filmic text, the Netflix documentary, *Tiger King*. He unravels the "Struggle for the Narrative": Cooperative and Conflictive Storyworlds in [this film]'s Intermedial Universe.

Handley & Allen's essay looks at how in the original 1958 *Alice in Wonderland* ride in Disneyland "the familiar was made strange." The ride was substantially rebuilt in 1984. In the new version "the distortions of shape and size are largely gone. We simply ride past a series of vignettes of moments as if taken from [a] Disney film." Ultimately, "both story and character gave way to

¹ Editor's note: All the quotes in this postscript come from the respective contributions in this volume.

an emphasis on physical immersion in the environment, to take us on our own personal journey through Wonderland.”

Krzysztof Majer deals with Staatstheater Augsburg Adaptation of *Wittgenstein's Mistress*. It explores David Markson's 1988 eponymous novel in Nicole Schneiderbauer's adaptation. Framing it via Virtual Reality headsets and through a conversation with the director, Majer remarks on the text under a centrifugally titled, *A Frame to the Void*.

Oleksandr Kapranov's *Throwing Soup at Van Gogh: The Framing of Art in Climate Change Activism by British Mass Media* is a novel way of approaching climate change through the lens of food, specifically through “throwing food at the world-known canvases by climate change activists.”

All these taken together present a rich, polyphonic, multi-lensed view and interpretation of ‘intermediality’ in a sound, critical and scholarly manner.

— Sudeep Sen