

Intermedialising Modernities: The Polyphonism of Modernist *Ut pictura poesis*

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Abstract

The early twentieth century ushered in an unprecedented era of intermedial convergence, where different art forms such as *poesis* and *pictura* began to confabulate with each other rather than competing in historically paragonal debates. A hallmark of modernist aesthetics is the shift towards the non-verbal mediums, with poets breaking away from outdated subjects and linguistic structures, and instead experimenting with the visual, material, and spatial incorporation from non-literary domains. Hence, this article proposes an alternative framework for understanding and reconceptualising modernism through intermediality. It develops the polyphonically dialogic poetics—based on four types of dialogues: *referential*, *associative*, *programmatic*, and *self-reflexive*—emphasising the interaction and re-unification between textuality and visuality. Concluding with this typology of modernist collaborations, the study illuminates the mutual agency of creators of the time and the sociocultural implications of their artefacts. By adopting a revisionary focus on intermediality as an act of dialogising, it critically reinterprets the mediation within modernist *ut pictura poesis* as fluid, multifarious, and synergetic.

Keywords: intermediality; collaborative modernism; *ut pictura poesis*; polyphonism; dialogic poetics

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Introduction

No piece of information is superior to any other. Power lies in having them all on file and then finding the connections. There are always connections; you have only to want to find them.

—Umberto Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum*

The early twentieth century ushered in an unprecedented era of intermedial convergence, where different art forms such as *poesis* and *pictura* began to confabulate with each other rather than competing in historically paragonal debates. The historical turn of “optical impersonality”—“intersect[ing] and reverberat[ing] with images as the objects of sight” (Walter 2014, 6)—became one of the early symptoms of modernist intermediality. A hallmark of modernist poetics is the shift towards the non-verbal mediums, with poets breaking away from outdated subjects and linguistic structures, and instead experimenting with the visual, material, and spatial incorporation from non-literary domains.¹ The cultural iconoclasm of their dissenting practices targeted the conformist aesthetics, industrialisation, and complacent bourgeoisie of the verbal tyranny as transformed in their radically new expressions. They achieved this through a series of negotiations and collaborations with the avant-garde art movements and their defining productions. Modernist intermediality, functioning in “communicative material when it is transported from one media type to another” (Bruhn and Schirmacher 2022, 3), thus serves as an alternative mode to reconceptualise the ideal of tactic dialogues and collective energies of various art forms and ways of mediation. Apart from revising the “false dichotomy” between elitist modernism and mass culture (O’Sullivan 2017, 307), it resorts to the identification with the optical, perceivability, tactile apparitionality as another aesthetic exigency across the traditional medial and sociocultural borders.

The notion of intermediality here, as claimed in *The Palgrave Handbook of Intermediality*, positions itself on a “dialectical and dialogic basis [and] does not assume an actual juxtaposition of literary pictorialism or pictorial literariness, charging its partner with unspeakable or invisible deficiencies of dissonance” (Wang 2024, 23). It brings the dialectical, collaborative forces of mediation as a process of dialoguing into specific attention. Here, this article proposes an alternative framework for understanding and reconceptualising modernism through intermediality. It develops the polyphonically dialogic poetics—based on four types of dialogues: *referential*, *associative*, *programmatic*, and *self-reflexive*—emphasising the interaction and re-unification between textuality and visuality. It initiates a “miscellaneous and inconclusive talk” (Levenson 2011, 22) not only between different modernist artists, but also their groups, artefacts, and creative ideologies. This dynamic model is not a mere categorisation, but a conceptualisation designed to examine how modernism is

1 Specifically, on this intermedial exchange, see Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux’s *Twentieth Century Poetry and the Visual Arts* (2008).

intermedialised as a reciprocal space where word and image inform one another. Concluding with the typology of modernist collaborations at the end of the article, the study illuminates the mutual agency of creators of the time and the sociocultural implications of their “material properties and abilities for activating mental capacities” (Elleström 2019, 5). By adopting a revisionary focus on intermediality as an act of dialogising, it critically reinterprets the mediation within modernist *ut pictura poesis* as fluid, multifarious, and synergetic.

This intermedial lens enables us to reconsider the multiplicity and dialectic reflexivity of modernist *ut pictura poesis* as a polyphonic dialogue rather than just a one-way translation or monomedial configuration. My argument will extend what Liliane Louvel calls “the poetics of pictorial” (2018, 2) in *The Pictorial Third*—an applied intermedial criticism to the “Painter-Poet’s Studio” from either historicist or formalist approach—into a sociocultural and ideological level, by looking at the confabulation, mutual transformation, and transmediation between modernist *poesis* and *pictura*.² Before introducing the polyphonism of this dialogic poetics of modernism, this article intends to answer these theoretical and contextual questions: How do the non-verbal modalities dominate the modernist culture and reverse the power dynamics of the seeable and the sayable, visual representation and verbal discourse? Is this multimodal turn barely a structural, compositional change or rather a fundamental one in the aesthetic, ideological, and technological reconfiguration of reading and spectatorship? What are the interactivities between modernist poets and painters in a multimodal context that brings “all of these assembled creators a renewed imagination and determination beyond their individual ways of beings” (Caws 2019, 7)? Modernist intermediality transforms a singular, monologic narrative of art-making into a polyphony of collaborative dialogues taking place between verbal and visual representations, (inter-)artistic identities, and their communities within the “Painter-Poet’s Studio.”³ Its intermedial experimentalism defies the conventional generic designation of forms, styles, and techniques, and illustrates the iconoclastic power and multimodal potential of aesthetic modernities.

The Multimodal, Intermedial Turn

In his foreword “The Interart Movement” (1997) to *Interart Poetics: Essays on Interrelations of the Arts and Media*, Stephen Greenblatt reiterates his belief in interdisciplinary thought and the new interart poetics spanning across various mediums. According to Greenblatt, these “collaborative enterprises,” particularly the convergence of different artistic forms and disciplines starting from the twentieth century, have registered an “innovative conversation” towards the creation of a new dialogic system, embodying “the temporary, the hybrid, the betwixt-and-between that is exactly right for

2 In two chapters about the “Painter-Poet’s Studio,” Louvel respectively conducts her Picturo-Criticism from the perspective of art history and form.

3 For more about modernist artistic collaboration, see Nathan Waddell’s “Modernist Coteries and Communities” (2010).

this fluid moment” (1997, 15).⁴ More recently, W. J. T. Mitchell delivered a lecture series at the OCAT Institute Annual Lectures in 2018 entitled *Metapictures: Images and the Discourse of Theory*. The main argument of his “metapicture” is to resist the common notion that “images are simply the passive objects of verbal explanation and interpretation” (2018, 126) and to reverse the historical power relations between logos and icons:

In the paragone or contest of words and images that has enlivened culture since the first cave paintings enchanted their beholders, images play an equally important role. [...] There is, as Foucault insists, never a final victory in the struggle between the seeable and the sayable, the image and the word, representation and discourse, only a set of inconclusive skirmishes across ever-shifting borders. (2018, 126)

This paragraph indicates the most important issue underlying modernist intermediality, the problematic dynamics of image/text, image-text, or imagetext and how artists achieve this intermedial constellation. Mitchell drives us to question the authority of literal language (the sayable/word/discourse) and invites a reconsideration of its visual aspect (the seeable/image/representation).

As a result of the renewed phenomenon of multimodal presence, the early twentieth-century culture underwent a significant change, largely characterised by an alternative mode of *ut pictura poesis*. Owing much to “the visual and other arts” (2012, 16) as stated in Richard Lehan’s *Literary Modernism and Beyond: The Extended Vision and the Realms of the Text* (2012), modernist literature and visual art appeal to a paradigm and a fresh worldview through which the reader-viewer observes, contemplates, and experiences the artworks and their represented reality. Rather than treating the linguistic and the pictorial as discrete fields, they ask us to reformulate the mutuality and transformative recoding of the boundaries of their respective media. This intermedial shift is fundamentally transgressive, in Erwin Panofsky’s (1995) terms, as it moves from analysing “iconography” to interpreting “iconology,” transitioning from the iconic to the symbolic, from rhetorical and stylistic observations to visible and material resources of *physio-socio milieu* in a multimodal manner.⁵

Ludwig Wittgenstein in his philosophy of language notices the anxiety of pictorialism that lies in the linguistic system. “A picture held us captive. And we couldn’t get outside [the picture], for it lay in our language, and language seemed only to repeat itself to us

4 The notion of “fluid moment,” also referred to as the “interart movement” in its heading, aligns closely with Werner Wolf’s “visual turn”—with manifold references to visual art (2005, 256)—and W. J. T. Mitchell’s “pictorial turn,” which is “not a return to naïve mimesis, copy or correspondence theories of representation, or a renewed metaphysics of pictorial ‘presence’: it is rather a postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visibility, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality” (1995, 16). See Werner Wolf’s “Intermediality” (2005).

5 See more in Erwin Panofsky’s “Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art” (1995).

inexorably” (2009, 53; emphasis in original), indicating that speech forms a close association with visible appearance. To address the transcendental multimodality of language, Wittgenstein, in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (2001), foregrounds the problematic relation among the world, language, and thought on the nature of picture, the logical form of representation, which can be read from Proposition 2:

2.1 We picture facts to ourselves.

2.11 A picture presents a situation in logical space, the existence and non-existence of states of affairs.

2.12 A picture is a model of reality. (2001, 9)

Plainly speaking, the picture functions as the access for us to connect the propositions (with sense, viz. the thought in Wittgenstein’s rationale) and the reality (the represented/depicted) through the logical arrangement of visual elements in its pictorial form (representation). Applying this theory to the operation of language as analogous to the picture:

4.011 At first sight a proposition—one set out on the printed page, for example—does not seem to be a picture of the reality with which it is concerned. But neither do written notes seem at first sight to be a picture of a piece of music, nor our phonetic notation (the alphabet) to be a picture of our speech.

And yet these sign-languages prove to be pictures. Even in the ordinary sense, of what they represent. (23)

We basically realise that language is embedded in the pictures of states of affairs where facts actually exist or could possibly exist through its process of picturing the world. The picturing relation and the nature of representation are key to understanding the quasi-intermedial connection between language and reality, and how language and thought are capable of representing the perceptible but incomprehensible world. By prioritising the non-verbal role of pictures and the virtue of seeing, Wittgenstein succeeds in figuring out how the bipolarity of propositions, either true or false, can produce complex meanings all the time—a thorny issue that disturbed Bertrand Russell for decades.⁶

The epochal turn should not be regarded as monomedially visual or pictorial, but as one of intermediality or multimodality, which signifies an age of coexistence, interexchange, and crystallisation of otherness. The twentieth century is immersed in an incessant deluge or “an unending rainfall of images” (Calvino 1988, 57). “Nonstop imagery,”

6 Later on, in the correspondence between Mitchell and Charles Altieri, the latter restates this Wittgensteinian anxiety about language resulted from the realisation that “analytic philosophy was itself based on a radically pictorial notion of self-evidence and representability” (quoted in Mitchell 1995, 13).

described by Susan Sontag, becomes our historical backdrop and irrepressible experience of modernity (2003, 17). Modernism's interart experimentalism refers paradoxically to a multimodal culture, encapsulated through the circulation and transmission of diverse art forms. It aims to describe the dynamic interplay between word and image, the materiality of language and the texture of picture, and reading and spectatorship. Genres become blurred; different discourses or expressions intertwine; various mediums combine and interact in experimentally complex fashions. This intermedial or multimodal turn thus represents a diffusion and reconfiguration of objects, a negotiation of senses, and multiple modes of mediation. It manifests the highly interdisciplinary symptom of that era, as described by Jonathan Crary, where modern technologies have shaped the techniques of observation and contemplation, merging "abstract visual and linguistic elements [that] are consumed, circulated, and exchanged globally" (1992, 2). Through the simultaneously experiential eyes and ears, everything appears to be perceived and cognised by an ongoing confabulation of distinct medialities and modalities.

Martin Heidegger at the beginning of his essay "The Age of the World Picture" (1977) demonstrates five essential phenomena of the early twentieth century: 1. Mathematical physical science (e.g. artificial intelligence, machine learning, and natural language processing); 2. Machine technology (identical in importance to modern metaphysics); 3. Art becoming an expression of human's subjective experience (in the purview of aesthetics); 4. Production of the mass culture (human-related); 5. The loss of faith and atheism originated from Friedrich Nietzsche's "death of God" (1977, 115–117). In doing so, he urges the audience to explore the essence of modernity, and at the foundation of these phenomena how we could reinterpret ourselves and investigate the truth. He answers the question rhetorically after a few pages by associating the newness of our historical era with the picturing of the world and its "modern essence of representedness" to delegitimize the worn-out term "to represent [*vorstellen*]" (132)—in alignment with Wittgenstein's anti-representationalism:

The fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture. The word "picture" [*Bild*] now means the structured image [*Gebild*] that is the creature of man's producing which represents and sets before. In such producing, man contends for the position in which he can be that particular being who gives the measure and draws up the guidelines for everything that is. Because this position secures, organises, and articulates itself as a world view, the modern relationship to that which is, is one that becomes, in its decisive unfolding, a confrontation of world views. (134–135)

The "world picture [*Weltbild*]" for Heidegger connotes a structured image and an action of producing and generating meaning. His explanation on the key conceptualisation of picturing, instead of being merely the imitative or colloquially expressive, enables people to conceive or grasp the world as a picture.⁷ On the significant premise that "the

⁷ As also seen in the translator's footnote, Heidegger does not refer to a literal a picture or painting of the world, but to a metaphorical expression and literary translation for the "conception of the world"

world is transformed into picture,” he then suggests the transformation of “man into *subiectum*” (133). The *subiectum* or subjectivity of individual experience and knowledge, similar to René Descartes’s *ego cogito* and Friedrich Nietzsche’s “will to power,” is interwoven with the idea of the world picture, which from Heidegger’s existentialist stance highlights the existence preceding essence.⁸ It is this multimodal way of world-making that situates us at the core as free, self-conscious, and accountable agents capable of discerning authenticity in response to the multifarious meanings of life.

The lesson we can derive from this epistemological turn is an intermedial reorientation that shifts the paradigmatic hierarchy from Structuralism and its linguistic determinism to a model centred around the confluence of the verbal and the visual. The media combination, transformation, and representation become an active platform for “exchange value of things, operating primarily at the perceptual and cognitive level” (Mitchell 2018, 31). As a provocative reaction, they spark a wide array of questions about the metamorphosis of *ut pictura poesis* at an aesthetic level, the chaos of medial relationships, the simultaneity of reading and spectatorship, and the philosophical and sociocultural speculations that arise from these inquiries. Compared to the “pictorial turn,” this multimodal turn is also not meant to provide a definitive “answer to anything. It is merely a way of stating the question” (Mitchell 1995, 24). For instance, under such considerations, how does this new turn, in its mixed artifices, connect optical and acoustic messages to transform previously oral and literal traditions as a part of modernist visual culture? In their multimodal experiments, what painterly techniques are employed to expand the confined realm of textuality into one of perceptual and tangible mediation beyond its syntactic and denotative content? Particularly at that historical moment, the cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism of the global context, amplified by “imagetextual” (Walter 2014, 20) production, have alerted to us the presence of latent questions that have persisted for an extended period.

The Synergy of Modernist Intermediality

The twentieth century witnessed a convergence of diverse mediums and art forms, resulting in a synergetic, dialectical condition as the substrate of intermedial modernism. From a historical perspective, as noted in Klemens Gruber’s *Die Polyfrontale Avantgarde: Medien und Künste 1922–1940* (2020), intermedial phenomena emerged as a dominant cultural force in the wake of the avant-garde scenes of the 1910s and 1920s. This period was characterised by blurred genres and hybrid codes, spotlighting the intersection of art and technology—ranging from the staging of writing to the cinematicisation of arts. Following the year of 1927, literary texts started to integrate varied forms of medial “communication by telephone, radio, and cinema screening, and

or the “philosophy of life,” which discloses his theme of “man’s representing of the world as picture” (1977, 128) by means of its pictorial quality and character.

8 See these concepts used in Descartes’s *Discourse on Method, Optics, Geometry, and Meteorology* (2001) and Nietzsche’s *The Will to Power* (2019).

with the sorts of behaviour virtual interactions made possible” (Trotter 2013, 1). This evolution indicates the growing influence of technological advancements on literature, becoming a historical backdrop of modernism’s first media age.

Modernist intermediality is characterised by a “continued dynamism” (Lewis 2020, 138) of forms, styles, and materials, where artistic mediums mutually illuminate and refashion one another in response to the shifting cultural and societal context. Instead of confining themselves to familiar modes of expression, modernist artists sought out new sources from unfamiliar territories and skillfully matched the potential of language with these emerging opportunities for fresh experiences and aesthetic tastes. This intermedial exchange is more than a mere act of pictorialising or visualising everything; it represents a deeper and more perplexing entanglement with a variety of “media interrelations” (Elleström 2020, 2). As Jesse Matz highlights in *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics*, the early twentieth century marked a radical transformation in multimodal “forms of thought and the content of the world” (2003, 11). Beginning with movements like Imagism, modernism adopts painterly styles and techniques to transfigure the artistic existence of poetic objects, incorporating spatial, technological, synchronic, and architectural elements to create complex, multifaceted works of art.⁹ The aesthetics of modernism, thus, cannot be reduced to a simple interplay of word and image but must be seen as dialogic mediation that consistently reconfigures both mediums.

The global avant-gardes such as Symbolism, Abstract Expressionism, Vorticism in literature, alongside Cubism, Dada, and Surrealism in visual art, exemplify this mutually formative process of intermediality—all originating within a specific discipline but soon informing and transforming the other: the collaborative artworks of Gertrude Stein’s *Three Lives* in response to Paul Cézanne’s *Madame Cézanne in a Red Armchair*, Ezra Pound’s *Cantos* pages reminiscent of Marcel Duchamp’s readymades, Wallace Stevens’s “The Man with the Blue Guitar” influenced by Pablo Picasso’s *The Old Guitarist*, and W. H. Auden’s ekphrastic reference to Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique.¹⁰ As Glen MacLeod asserts, understanding poetic modernism without a “rudimentary knowledge of modern art” (2011, 245) is nearly impossible, as these poets often patterned their experiments after the manners of modern art movements. The synergetic affordance of verbal and visual modes in these artworks signifies a dialogically generative poetics of modernism, which makes expansive rather than

9 See Joseph Frank’s “Spatial Form in Modern Literature” (1991) and W. J. T. Mitchell’s “Spatial Form in Literature: Toward a General Theory” (1980).

10 On the symbiotic relationship between their verbal and visual representations in modernist literature and art, particularly between poetry and painting, see Wendy Steiner’s *Exact Resemblance to Exact Resemblance: The Literary Portraiture of Gertrude Stein* (1978), Reed Way Dasenbrock’s *The Literary Vorticism of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis: Towards the Condition of Painting* (1985), Bram Dijkstra’s *The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech: Cubism, Stieglitz and the Early Poetry of William Carlos Williams* (1969), Glen MacLeod’s *Wallace Stevens and Modern Art: From the Armory Show to Abstract Expressionism* (1993) and John G. Blair’s *The Poetic Art of W. H. Auden* (1965).

“reductive claims of influence or of mutual support” (MacGowan 2004, 269).¹¹ This medial divergence from orthodox dogmas within one field expands the fixed boundaries of conventional sisterhood within *ut pictura poesis*.

Towards a relational dynamic, the dialogicality of intermediality is not limited to just barely aesthetic concerns but also reflects broader sociopolitical agendas of evolution, subversion, and reconstruction. The avant-gardism of the early twentieth century intended to challenge the alienating effects of industrialisation and rationalisation, and reshape monomedial cultural environments and achieve self-realisation through interart creations. The era’s crisis of the *fin-de-siècle* values and its apocalyptic prophecy of civilisation, coupled with the rapid advancements in sciences and technology, provided fertile ground for these interdisciplinary projects. While bemoaning the decline of the world, modernism fosters a sense of renewed energy and optimism born out of cross-medial, transcultural communications. People were living at a moment when “all human relations have shifted” (Woolf 1924, 5), when there were “freshly awakened tendencies to put research on new foundations” (Heidegger 2001, 29), and when what people again and again needed most, as Nietzsche notes,

for my cure and self-restoration, however, was the belief that I was *not* thus isolated, not alone in *seeing* as I did—an enchanted surmising of relatedness and identity in eye and desires, a reposing in a trust of friendship, a blindness in concert with another without suspicion or question-marks, a pleasure in foregrounds, surfaces, things close and closest, in everything possessing colour, skin and apparitionality. (Nietzsche 2005, 5)

As these modernists reflect here, the last century itself called for an alternative description of this interrelatedness as a renewed belief in connection, rejecting isolation in favour of collaboration, conversation, and the multisensory richness of artistic experience.

An intermedialised reconsideration of modernist artifices brings us away from perceptually and cognitively “scopic regime of Cartesian perspectivism” (Sanchez 2015, 29) and its long-dominated binary of mind and body—the discursive and the visible.¹² In *Singular Examples: Artistic Politics and the Neo-Avant-Garde*, Tyrus Miller draws attention to modernism’s “integral, interdisciplinary, and intermedial ‘compositions’” as a sublation of destruction and re-creation and of generic or medial homogeneity, in order to “dynamically embody the contradictory and conflictual relations between those people, materials, and contexts shaping their genesis” (2009, 3) as its artistic politics. To achieve this, modernism should create:

something of a vanishing point for the perspective lines projected by works in several different artistic fields, as well as by the political and critical discourses current in the

11 On their fruitful parallels, see MacGowan’s “Twentieth-Century American Poetry and Other Arts” (2004, 269–275).

12 On the notional development of vision and its “scopic regime” from the past to the present, see Martin Jay’s *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (1993).

late 1920s and 1930s and by diverse popular tendencies of the day. Careful reading of these works, together with the reconstruction of their context, shows the tacit dialogue they conducted with the other arts. It reveals how they sought to bind the restless, disturbing collective energies of [different mediums and art forms]; and it exposes to critical view the stigmata where mass politics and urban life left their forceful signatures. (Miller 1999, 6)

This synergy of modernist intermediality spotlights the ideal of “tactic dialogue” and “collective energies” of various art forms and mediums. Its motional understanding of *ut pictura poesis* opens a site for exploring the tensions between word and image, moving beyond the paragonal debate on one’s supremacy over the other and recognising it as a conversational exchange in between literary and artistic spheres. Rather than treating poetry as a time-based genre and painting as a space-oriented one, it questions and subverts the statically formulated medium specificity and its binary ideologies. Moreover, modernist experimentation with diverse modalities and medialities—such as the tactile embodiment of words on the printed page—is emblematic of a key shift in aesthetic modernisation of different mediums. These multimodal artefacts, which blend the sayable and the seeable, embrace the viscosity of text and the verbiage of image, offering alternative perspectives on representation and identification. At this point, the polyphonism of this dialogic spirit lies at the heart of modernist intermediality, allowing for revisionary treatment of modernity that transcends traditional generic boundaries in certain patterns.

The Dialogic Poetics between Poets and Painters

René Wellek’s seminal essay “Literature and the Other Arts” anticipates the scholarly significance of intermediality by underscoring the complicated, dialectical relationships between art forms. He describes this medial interplay as a dynamic “scheme of dialectical relationships which work both ways, from one art to another and *vice versa*, and may be completely transformed within the art which they have entered” (Wellek 1956, 134). This claim shifts beyond earlier discussions of inspiration, description, source, and effect between literature and other arts, focusing instead on the dialectical, reciprocal nature of their relationship:

It is not a simple affair of a “time spirit” determining and permeating each and every art. We must conceive of the sum total of man’s cultural activities as of a whole system of self-evolving series, each having its own set of norms which are not necessarily identical with those of the neighbouring series. [...] Thus poetry today needs a new poetics, a technique of analysis which cannot be arrived at by a simple transfer or adaptation of terms from the fine arts [but] will take the form of an intricate pattern of coincidences and divergences rather than parallel lines. (134–135)

As discussed by Wellek, the “dialectical relationships” not only suggest the historical conflicts between word and image, either compatible or differentiated, fusional or separative, but also point to a close affinity superimposed on parallels and analogies like

ut pictura poesis.¹³ To directly rephrase these mutual relations as intermedial allows one to develop a reciprocal and evolving system of artistic production. It could bring about synthetic fibres of meaning interpenetrative to every strand of their life as a pair of dialoguing and cohabitating partners.¹⁴

Nevertheless, this intermedial dialogue between *poesis* and *picture* is central to reformulating modernist aesthetics as motile and variable rather than stable or unchanging. The cross-pollination of mediums is not a simple imitation or translation but a deeply integrated process that brings about mutual transformation and equal conversation. It should be deemed as a double capture between two realms, without assimilating or creating binary machines. In this sense, the dialectics of intermediality operates as a dual becoming, a non-parallel evolution, a productive bloc, and an assembly of enunciation with multipliable possibilities. It challenges the validity of old disciplinary frames, giving rise to a motivation for an “inclusive, ever-expanding, and heterogenous poetics beyond purely textual or literal criticism” (Wang and McConville 2024, 1). As Murray Roston illustrates in *Modernist Patterns in Literature and the Visual Arts*, such doubling or “split consciousness of the self” is an important aspect of “modernist pluralism, the individual no longer able to appraise life from a single authoritative standpoint [but being split] into a second figure, into an alternative vantage point” (2000, 36).¹⁵ To find this “alternative vantage point,” modernism’s intermedial communication is indicative of a common ground for interart, cross-genre experimentations, tracing paths that encompass not only one’s own domain but also that of the other.¹⁶ It involves beneficial contracts with previously unrelated communities and an ontological shift from the present to the absent, from the verisimilitude of figuration to an intensification of abstraction, from expertise in the given frame to a transdisciplinary—even de-disciplinary—diversion.

Within this framework, understanding the mechanism of intermediality as an act of dialoguing or conversating becomes a crucial point for modernist *ut pictura poesis*. Involved in a cross-medial conversation, modernist artists can fully explore the particularities of another modality. In *Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means in the*

13 Also see Hans Lund’s “The Picture in the Poem—a Theoretical Discussion” (1992) and Mary Gaither’s “Literature and the Arts” (1961).

14 Ulrich Weisstein further expands on the categories of image-text cohabitation as a result of this “intermedial lineage” (1982, 259): literary descriptions or interpretations of an artwork, e.g., iconic poetry or ekphrasis; the literal constitution of objects or motifs; the reproduction of senses (synaesthesia), styles, and techniques; the thematisation of artists as fictional figures; intellectual history (Geistesgeschichte) or periodisation of interart; symbiotic genres, e.g., comics or graphic novels; book illustrations, among others. See Ulrich Weisstein’s “Literature and the Visual Arts” (1982).

15 For more about the idea of double and doubling, see Michael Levenson’s *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality: Character and Novelistic Form from Conrad to Woolf* (2009) and Karl Miller’s *Doubles: Studies in Literary History* (1985).

16 On the collaboration of authorship, see Jack Stillinger’s *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of the Solitary Genius* (1991) and M. Thomas Inge’s “Collaboration and Concepts of Authorship” (2001).

New Century, Marjorie Perloff articulates this in a similar manner, noting that the poetic dialogue with other means occurs not only intertextually with “earlier texts [but also intermedially with] texts in other media” (2010, 11).¹⁷ This intermediation fosters a bilateral exchange of voices from each side, which adds an overtone of mutual respect, reciprocal coexistence, and ethical seriousness. John Berger’s *Confabulations* captures this idea even in its title, where he refers to his creative proceeding of drawings and reflective notes as a “confabulation” (2016, 7)—a melding of mediums that rejects formal hierarchies and generates a collective voice of shared experience. Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, in *Dialogues II*, offer a more abstruse explanation of this dialogic interaction, calling it the “encounter, the becoming, the theft and the nuptials, this ‘between-two’ of solitudes” (2007, 9). For Deleuze and Parnet, the intermedial dialogue is not barely a process of changing terms or borrowing techniques but a mingling that occurs multidirectionally. The poet, painter, and poet-painter, in this context, go beyond the notion of isolated individual creators; instead, they affiliate to a collective “production studio,” or as Roland Barthes would say, the end of authorial singularity paves the way for an emergent collaborative “gang”:

But what is good in a gang, in principle, is that each goes about his own business while encountering others, each brings in his loot and a becoming is sketched out—a bloc starts moving—which no longer belongs to anyone, but is “between” everyone, like a little boat which children let slip and lose, and is stolen by other [...] using it as a means of encounter, making a line or bloc shoot between two people, producing all the phenomena of a double capture, showing what the conjunction AND is, neither a union, nor a juxtaposition, but the birth of a stammering, the outline of a broken line which always sets off at right angles, a sort of active and creative line of flight? AND ... AND ... AND ... (Deleuze and Parnet 2007, 9–10)

This intermedial encounter is more than just a modal exchange; it is the prerequisite for collecting experiences, picking up nuptials, and generating a multitude of micro-politics. Drawing upon concepts such as the Freudian theory of free association, Deleuze and Parnet’s concept of the rhizome replaces hierarchical structures with a network of interconnected conversations. Rather than regulating or systematising these interplays, the rhizomatic launches discovery and innovation through a series of dialogues—a “broken line” (18) that proliferates across literary and artistic domains.¹⁸

Miller’s or Perloff’s dialogues, Berger’s confabulations, and Deleuze and Parnet’s conversations delineate the important role of polyphonic mediations that take place between *poesis* and *pictura*. Beyond a mere technique for transferring effects between diverse art forms, modernist intermediality works in various modes of dialoguing and

17 In terms of medium, Perloff still keeps a differentiation of artistic mediums here from mass media. The former is within the discourse of art while the latter is out of mass culture in opposition to high modernist aesthetics. See Marjorie Perloff’s Preface to *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of the Media* (1991).

18 On Deleuze’s rhizomatic philosophy, see his collaboration with Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (2005).

communicating, which can be categorised into four main patterns: *referential*, *associative*, *programmatic*, and *self-reflexive*. In contrast to Lars Elleström's models on media interactions—namely media combination, media transformation, and media representation (Bruhn and Schirmacher 2022, 103; Elleström 2014, 89–90)—my typology will work beyond the relationships between different basic or qualified media types. Instead, it will aim to be a broader framework that considers mediations between media products, technical media for display, and even the creators behind these media.

At first, *referential dialogue* involves a one-directional exchange in which one medium reflects upon or critiques another without full integration. This approach preserves the generic autonomy of each modality while acknowledging the potential for cross-disciplinary learning and support. Modernist artists often engaged in introspective commentaries or reviews, drawing upon the inter-aesthetic energy of other rhetorical or figurative expressions to fuel their own creations. Samuel Beckett praised Jack B. Yeats's paintings for characteristic Irishness, while Wallace Stevens explored the relationship between poetry and painting in his philosophical speech.¹⁹ These poets sought to investigate and incorporate the intimacies of another medium while keeping the formal specificity of their native one.

Secondly, *associative dialogue* represents interpersonal collaboration between poets and painters, establishing interart connections at both individual and collective levels. Modernist artists frequently organised or patronised salons, galleries, cafés, art colonies, and little magazines to foster friendships and expand artistic networks. These social spaces function like associations or societies across multiple art forms ranging from literature, painting, and sculpture to music. By using methods such as ekphrasis, illustration, or other adaptative approaches, they aspired to borrow new creative forces from unfamiliar territories. Instead of imitating or simply translating between mediums, their aesthetic reconfigurations act as homage and stylistic re-creations that put what they have learnt into experimental practices. William Carlos Williams's *Pictures from Bruegel* corresponds to classical heritage, while Charles Demuth's *I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold* is a transformative response to Williams's poem "The Great Figure." Such collaborations create revolutionarily new modes of expressions that bridge the verbal and visual circles.

Next, *programmatic dialogue* arises when the confabulation expands beyond individual interactions to encompass collective efforts of modernist artists from different disciplines. Avant-garde art movements plan to fuse mediums, with some developing common objectives and manifestos. Instances of this include Ezra Pound's Imagism, with its connections to Post-Impressionism, and his deeper involvement with Vorticism,

19 See Beckett's "Homage to Jack B. Yeats" (1984, 149) and Stevens's "The Relations between Poetry and Painting" (1981).

led by Wyndham Lewis.²⁰ These movements encourage poets, novelists, painters, and musicians to participate in extensively inter-aesthetic conversations, striving towards a unified creative vision. These creators, conventionally restricted to their respective mediums, collaborated with the shared goal of alternative modes of expression that can be applied intermedially. In opposition to sibling rivalries, they cooperate with each other to merge and synthesise different mediums and form groups, schools, or joint programmes with general schemata. This collaboration extends beyond their immediate communities to include foreign, heterogenous allies.

The final mode of *self-reflexive dialogue* occurs within the figure of the poet-painter. It phenomenologically embodies an ontological intermediation between the poet-self and the painter-other, revealing the multiplicity and interior complexity of modernist artisthood. Drawing on the spirit as Plato's Socratic *maieutics* or Oscar Wilde's dialogic preface—whether in an argumentative or dramatic form—this intermedial confabulation illuminates the fluidity of creative selves and identifications.²¹ It acts as a catalyst for stimulating the interlocutors' unconscious thought, critical reflection, and latent creativity. They attempt to complement the absence of alterity and uncover the hidden otherness, thereby capturing the transformative, productive nature of their (inter-)artistic creations. Their intermedial identities could then expand the boundaries of their practices through a process of “deterritorialisation” (Deleuze and Parnet 2007, 37), establishing a dialogue with otherness and escaping the generic limitations of rigid frameworks:

We are always pinned against the wall of dominant significations, we are always sunk in the hole of our subjectivity, the black hole of our Ego which is more dear to us than anything. A wall on which are inscribed all the objective determinations which fix us, put us in a grille, identify us and make us recognised, a hole where we deposit—together with our consciousness—our feelings, our passions, our little secrets which are all too well known, our desire to make them known. (45)

When confined to a single mode, narrow vision, or limited perspective shaped by territorial instincts, breaking free from the constraints of subjective dominance and egoistical behaviours becomes an exceeding challenge. As Deleuze and Parnet assert, “Something must always remind us of something else, make us think of something else” (44), emphasising that the writer is constantly influenced by and “imbued to the core with a non-writer-becoming” (46)—a force they can engage with, speak through, and create from. This middle space is not a stagnant or chaotic blending of contamination, but rather, as understood through a Lacanian lens, a transmutable flow within the creative process of becoming. It enables the poet-painter to flight away from the

20 See William C. Wees's *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde* (1972), Allen Ginsberg's *The Best Mind of My Generation: A Literary History of the Beats* (2018), and Serge Guilbaut's *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (1983).

21 On their dialogic forms of writing, see Plato's *Theaetetus* (1999) and Oscar Wilde's *The Critic as Artist* (2019).

Symbolic order and its patriarchal laws, forging a new realm of *ut pictura poesis* in the Imaginary, and reconnecting with the Real, where self and other exist in a state of organic unity. In this vein, the polyphonism of intermedial dialogues between poets, painters, and poet-painters substitutes dualistic and parallel thinking with interdisciplinary complementarity. These polyphonic ways of mediating move towards an “assemblage” (69) or alliance that encourages crossing, mutual interpenetration, and co-functioning.

Conclusion

Jahan Ramazani, in *Poetry and Its Others: News, Prayer, Song, and the Dialogue of Genres*, defines the “dialogic poetics” as the complex interaction between poetry and other discourses or representations that are constituted both “intragenerically and intergenerically” (2014, 8–9). It reimagines poetic art as an unfolding of “dynamic give-and-take with other genres, its butting up against and assimilation of various codified uses of language, its reversals and co-optations of multiple discursive forms” (9). Approaching modernist poetry as a heterogenous and ever-changing dynamic from an intermedial perspective, therefore, frees us from conventional literalist interpretations, through which the message contained within verse is deciphered as a homogenised entity. Instead, the prism of intermediality invites us to explore verbal-visual modernism as a fluid, multifarious, and synergetic interaction between various art forms and mediums, revealing plural layers of meaning that disbelieve any single interpretation. Likewise, “Modernism’s Collaborative Poetics” draws attention to the communicative dynamics and collaborative scene of modernism at play, by reading and seeing with both “an eye and ear to their interactions with other genres and media” (Runchman and Walker 2019, 2). The dialogicality of intermedial modernism resists representational homogeneity in favour of a polyphonic constellation, where multiple independent voices coexist and interact. The polyphonism of modernist *ut pictura poesis* constructs multileveled narratives and disrupts the monotony of a singular vantage point. The shift from the monologic or homophonic to the polyphonic highlights a dialectical interrelation not only between characters, but also between art forms and mediums. This collaborative and communicative agency, as fundamental to this new understanding of modernist intermediality, is inscribed by this dialogic poetics—both outward and internal. It leads to both conceptual and technical transformations characterised by collectiveness, inclusion, and plurality. Through the typology of various intermedial dialogues, modernist *ut pictura poesis* opens up new possibilities for (inter-)artistic experimentation, where diverse mediums communicate and collaborate as a philharmonic orchestra.

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