

Intermedial Arts

Intermedial Arts:
Disrupting, Remembering
and Transforming Media

Edited by

Leena Eilittä
with Liliane Louvel and Sabine Kim

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INTRODUCTION: FROM INTERDISCIPLINARITY TO INTERMEDIALITY

LEENA EILITTÄ

In recent years, studies concerning the relations between the arts have become one of the major research areas in literary studies in particular. This has not only contributed to a growing number of publications focusing on intermedial relations, but also to those studies in which an urgent need for theoretical re-thinking has been emphasised. Whereas once these relations were discussed in interdisciplinary or interart terms, the rapidly changing scene of theoretical discussion has introduced new concepts, terms and ideas to be reassessed in critical discussion.

The term intermediality is one of the most promising concepts introduced into the present discussion, in which new paradigms and the tradition of artistic interrelatedness remain interconnected. Perhaps the greatest merit of intermediality lies in its success in making a “leap” from past uses of artistic interrelatedness to our contemporary medial age, in which literature may be understood as a medium. This ambitious undertaking has contributed to the liberation of literature—along with other art forms—from an isolated position in the established scholarly landscape with its clear-cut borderlines between disciplines. In this sense, intermediality has a close affinity with the aims of so-called French theory. Beginning in the 1980s, Roland Barthes, for example, pointed out that everything, from painting through objects and practices to people, can be studied as “text.” The influential theories launched by such thinkers as Foucault, Althusser, Lacan and Derrida have put forward new ideas about the social production of meaning, gender differences and language. Julia Kristeva’s notion of intertextuality, which focuses on the relations between texts, is the most relevant theory for intermediality. For Kristeva, the text is a dynamic mosaic of quotations that includes absorptions and transformations of other texts. Kristeva’s theory develops the ideas of Bakhtin’s principle of dialogicity, which assumes that words are filled with dialogic overtones and with echoes and reverberations of other utterances. Bakhtin’s theory allows the

view that verbal expressions are not only influenced by expressions of a similar art but also by other media and their structures. However, although Bakhtin's and Kristeva's theories have been important for intermediality to come into being, neither of these theories has really taken into consideration the perspective of medial transformations and fusions currently taking place.

In order to grasp the change which intermediality has brought about in theoretical discussions, we should first pay attention to the meaning of the word *medium*, which has to be specified. In this context, it is no longer sufficient to conceive media as a means of mechanical transmission which convey some kind of information from a "producer" to a "receiver." In this new context, *medium* should be understood as that which mediates on the basis of meaningful signs or sign configurations, with the help of suitable transmitters for and between humans over spatial and historical distances. J. E. Müller has pointed out that a change from media product to inter-media product takes place if a *multi-media coexistence* of different media quotations and elements is transformed into a conceptual *coexistence of intermedia*. Irina O. Rajewsky has made clear how such intermedial coexistence comes into being in works of art: either via combinations or transformations or references to another media. *Media combination* points to those works of art which benefit from two or more forms of art, such as opera, film or the photo novel. *Media change* highlights works of art that transform one form of art into another, such as takes place in the filming of literature. The third form of intermediality draws attention to works of art in which there is a *reference* to another artwork or to another artistic system altogether. This form of intermediality comes up, for example, in literary texts which describe a painting or a piece of music. In such cases, the target media (the painting or piece of music) is not materially present but remains present through being described or in some other way suggested in the source media (i.e., in the literary work).

It is relevant to pay more attention to how different media combinations, transformations and references to other media change our reception of a work of art. J. E. Müller suggests that intermedial coexistence foregrounds the aesthetic refractions and faults which open new dimensions of experience to the recipient. Such intermedial coexistence introduces an awareness of the aesthetics of another medium not only in combinations of other media but also in those transformations of and references to other media in which these media are no longer materially present. For example, intermedial references to works of visual art or to music in a literary narrative contribute to the audio-visual qualities of that narrative. Thinking further in these terms will eventually help us to get away from traditional

dichotomies and move toward a meta-definition of media. Lars Elleström has pointed out that a more mature intermedial perspective should build on comparisons and distinctions that take into consideration the full complexities of media. Instead of furthering such dichotomies as verbal–visual or verbal–acoustic, we should speak about, Elleström has argued, different modalities in interdisciplinary relations—which he has defined as the four modes of the material, the sensorial, the spatiotemporal and the semiotic.

Although the term intermediality puts interdisciplinary relations into a new medial context, we should also bear in mind that intermediality forms a link to earlier forms of poetic understanding. Here I am thinking not only of such traditions as *ekphrasis*, *ut pictura poesis* and the *sister arts* but also, for example, those forms of (oral) poetry which put emphasis on the audibility of language, and of ancient writings in which there was an affinity of sign and text. While making us aware of the medial communication between the arts, intermediality draws our attention to the aesthetic presence of other arts in those cases that have frequently been discussed merely as *translations* from one art to another. Intermedial narratives put new demands on the reader's involvement with the text and particularly on the understanding of genre, which in such narratives frequently go beyond the traditional definitions.

The essays in the present collection provide rewarding readings of intermedial relations between written word, visual image and acoustics/music. Although intermediality does not claim the status of a tightly defined research paradigm, these essays position intermediality as a *praxis* of interpretive analysis in order to show how intermediality challenges and transforms our notion of art and our reception of experience. Although essays on literature dominate this collection, there are also intermedial analyses of works of theatre, cinema and music. In addition, this collection includes essays reflecting on historical and philosophical as well as institutional presuppositions of intermediality.

Disrupting Media. Liliane Louvel addresses some of the key questions of intermedial studies in her article “Intermedial Provocations: Paul Durcan’s Desecrating Art Gallery.” She analyses Durcan’s *Crazy about Women*, a collection of poems based on paintings in the National Gallery of Ireland, in terms of its “apparatus,” linking Durcan’s poetics to issues of desecration or profanation, to that of the erotic of the image and to questions of anachronism as a heuristic tool. Louvel’s analysis of Durcan’s work allows her to discuss the reception of word/image in terms of a concept she has introduced in her theoretical writings, “the pictorial third,” which provides a conceptual means to avoid the pitfalls of dualistic thinking in

intermedial studies. In his article “What Icarus Knew: On the Intermedial Meaning of Objects and Ekphrasis in Auden and Williams,” Jarkko Toikkanen sets as his goal the definition of the object of art in its intermedial relations. He argues that the discursive method of visual interpretation developed in contemporary theory actually fails to account for the intermedial meaning of the objects which he finds presented by W. H. Auden and William Carlos Williams.

Raluca Lupu-Onet brings a further modernist perspective to bear on intermedial discussion with her essay “Christian Dotremont’s Logograms: An Intermedial Work *avant la lettre*.” Her interest focuses upon the hybrid poems of Belgian poet Christian Dotremont, who co-founded the CoBrA movement experimenting with pluralistic approaches to art. Dotremont’s logograms came into being through his explorations of the materiality of language—ideas which have continued to influence hybrid poetry and to redefine text as a visual object. Lupu-Onet emphasises the impact of the CoBrA group on the development of intermedial studies, in which the reader emerges as a perceiver as well. Similarly, in her essay “Moving Letters and Complex Medial Limitations in Digital Poetry,” Mette-Marie Zacher Sørensen points out how digital poems borrow qualities from other media and cause a change in perception from the semiotic system of reading typical for literature to the semiotic system of viewing typical for art. The works of concrete poetry by Reinhard Döhl and digital poetry by Philippe Bootz which Zacher Sørensen discusses show how a kind of doubling of semantic meaning occurs, in which the optical gesture of a word is added to its semantic meaning. By drawing upon recent meta-definitions of media, Zacher Sørensen reflects upon the aesthetics of digital poetry in which the concrete poetry movement contributes to the interplay of meaning. Both Lupu-Onet and Zacher Sørensen address intermediality as a relation that causes a change in how we read, or more precisely, how we engage in practices of interpretation.

Remembering Media. In his article “A Cultural Poetics of the Photo-Documentary: James Agee and Walker Evans’s *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* Revisited,” Markku Lehtimäki argues that the meaning of works of art cannot be separated from the context of their production, and that media can thus act as carriers of memory in a double sense. In his analysis of the text jointly created by writer James Agee and photographer Walker Evans, Lehtimäki maintains that the book acts as both a document of tenant farming in Depression-era America and as a meditation on its own shortcomings in “realistic” representation. According to Lehtimäki, one should take into account the pragmatic, rhetorical, and political aspects of

photo-documentary processes, and to distinguish visual representations from the extratextual reality which is always more complicated than any framed image. In her essay “Historical Fiction and Ekphrasis in Leena Lander’s *The Order*,” Mari Hatavara is interested in studying how certain narratives use visual means to represent the past. She first points to the interpretive leap which both ekphrasis and historical fiction include. Whereas in ekphrasis, the textual “other”—the visual—remains absent, in historiography it is the temporal other—the past—which is absent. In her analysis of Lander’s historical novel *The Order* (2003), Hatavara points out how the narrator invites the reader to “picture” the Finnish civil war via characters who recall this past through photographs and visual memories. Such intermedial expansion of narrativity succeeds in forming a link between the present of the reader and the past of the story, in which the narrator’s retrospective quest for the past turns out to evoke a plurality of pasts that still exert influence upon the present. History is thus not to be explained by full narrativization but serves to maintain the friction between the interpreter and the object of interpretation.

In her article “Forms of Ekphrasis in D’Annunzio’s *The Child of Pleasure*,” Helena Eskelinen shows how the descriptions of paintings in fictional narrative are influenced by former ekphrastic descriptions. Her example is taken from *The Child of Pleasure*, the first novel in a trilogy by Gabriele D’Annunzio, a highly controversial figure because of his closeness to the Italian Fascist party, which consists of descriptions of paintings that are in fact “borrowings” from various earlier literary sources concerning the works of art. Discussing a scene which takes place in a library, Eskelinen shows how the influence of ekphrasis has been more generally twofold: it has not only influenced the way writers write about an artwork but has also influenced the way the artwork has been seen. In his article “Constructing Media at the Turn of the Eighteenth Century: Painting and Poetry in Dryden, Addison and Richardson,” Tommi Kakko re-examines eighteenth-century discussions of media and mediality. He argues that a tendency to reduce various media to a single master medium is already to be found in the contemporary criticism of Locke’s philosophy as discussed by John Dryden, Joseph Addison and Jonathan Richardson. According to Kakko, modern medial theories of the arts benefit from the study of the arguments that have shaped the theoretical field in the past.

Transforming Media. In his article “*Master and Margarita*: From Novel to Interactive Audiovisual Adaptation,” Nuno N. Correia discusses his own video adaptation of Mikhail Bulgakov’s novel of the same name. Correia’s goal in this adaptation was to find the visual means to adapt Bul-

gakov's novel with an aim of creating a coherent and autonomous work expressing the artistic view of the novelist. His further concern was to integrate music and motion graphics in this project in a way that was engaging to experience. Apart from carefully elaborating the change of media in which the visual and acoustic were to replace Bulgakov's narrative means without sacrificing Bulgakov's artistic ambitions, Correia also reflects historically and theoretically upon such adaptations. Henry Bacon discusses Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Spider's Stratagem*, which is a cinematic adaptation of Jorge Luis Borges's *Theme of the Traitor and the Hero*. By focussing upon the narrative concept of hypothetical focalisation, Bacon analyses how the indeterminacy of narration is translated from the verbal novel into that of visual cinema. He shows how Bertolucci, by suggestive change of historical setting, partial transformation of the story material and subtle filmic style, has transposed the mode of the original text into his own cinematic medium.

Peter Dayan reflects upon intermediality and music in his article "Intermediality and the Refusal of Interdisciplinarity in Stravinsky's Music." As Dayan recounts, many post-Wagnerian composers deny that an inter-medial connection exists in their works. Using Stravinsky as his major example, Dayan points out that for the composer, words are the medium of expression and music cannot do anything analogous to what words effect. By analysing several examples from Stravinsky's compositions, Dayan is interested in solving the paradox which exists regarding Stravinsky's stubborn refusal to admit any word/music connection in his compositions, despite his lifelong interest in the literary setting. In her article "Sonic Events, Media Archives, Poetic Transfers: Emily Dickinson and the Phonograph," Sabine Kim explores the trope of vocality in Emily Dickinson's poetry as a pre-figuration of phonography and the "speaking machines" which were invented in the nineteenth century.

Conclusion. In the final essay of this collection, James Cisneros draws certain programmatic conclusions about the role of intermediality in the current world. In his essay "Remains to be Seen: Intermediality, Ekphrasis, and Institution," he suggests that the rise of intermediality as a field of research is the product of a greater shift within the university in a world of global market dynamics and tele-technologies. Cisneros argues that intermediality, as a symptom of this juncture, opens the possibility for a historical critique of today's institutional knowledge. His article shows how intermediality may be linked to earlier debates about the innovative role of aesthetic knowledge—in which the relations between the arts have played an important role since the advent of Romanticism.

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Leena Eilittä

DISRUPTING MEDIA

INTERMEDIAL PROVOCATIONS: PAUL DURCAN'S DESECRATING ART GALLERY

LILIANE LOUVEL

Abstract

This article will address some of the key questions of intermedial studies, taking up the example of Irish poet Paul Durcan's work. The issue of the word/image relationship may be tackled in terms of its "apparatus" and linked to issues of desecration. It is also a question of the erotic linked to image, and of anachronism and of its reception in "the pictorial third." The metaphor of the (fish)net and the riddle will help me structure this article. I will hold that word and image, put together in the restrained space of text, of its sieve, "sizzle" or emit a kind of sizzling as a result of their contact. Image strives for advent and to arise, as it arose for the poet. Is it the power of the text (still envisaged in its masculine dimension) to give flesh back to image once again, in order to give it back its life? Or is not the image's resistance so great that it inspires text, in a never-ending process? This is one of the questions intermedial studies may address. Indeed, if Durcan is "Crazy about Women," he is also crazy about images.

Keywords: word/image relations, apparatus, "pictorial third," Paul Durcan

I will start with an image in keeping with our intermedial field of research: Parmigianino's drawing representing Vulcan catching Venus and Mars in the act, and casting a net over the two culprits while his body testifies to a strong corporeal reaction to the scene. If, according to the current way of envisaging the word/image relationship, painting is associated with the feminine (Venus) and poetry with the masculine (Mars), Vulcan might then represent the interpreter or hermeneut casting the net of interpretation over the two godly figures. This is a scene that Paul Durcan would have relished. It might also represent our task, i.e., to capture in the meshes of

the interpretive net, sieve or riddle,¹ the enigma of the word/image relationship, in its irenic and/or antagonistic dimension. Lessing clearly saw the two arts in gender terms: "[P]aintings, like women, are ideally silent, beautiful creatures designed for the gratification of the eye, in contrast to the sublime eloquence proper to the manly art of poetry" (1962: 21). To see intermedial transposition in terms of an erotic net fits in with Durcan's project when writing *Crazy about Women*: "the intercourse between what is painted and what is written [is] as reciprocal as it is inevitable" (Durcan 1991: xi).

Casting the Net of Words over Images: Durcan's "apparatus"

Crazy about Women is Paul Durcan's first project focussing on Dublin's National Art Gallery. It evolved from a proposal the director submitted to the poet on the occasion of the eponymous exhibition:

In the summer of 1990 I was invited by the National Gallery of Ireland to compose a book of poems out of my experience of the Gallery and its collection.² I accepted the invitation on the basis that the book would not be a coffee table book but a book as well-founded and inexorable as any other book of mine. (Durcan 1991: x)

The "plasticity" of the image and its capacity to arouse emotion are foregrounded in assistant director Dr Brian P. Kennedy's insistence on the uniquely personal response of the writer, namely, that "Paul Durcan is fascinated by the potential of paintings to offer us a unique and personal relationship with a visual image.... [Paintings] prompt the entire range of human emotions and provoke a different reaction depending on our mood as we view them" (Kennedy 1991: i).

The hiatus between arousal and expression, together with the problematic "statement function" of the visual image, engender a fruitful slippage, both poetic and fictional, which the viewer/reader may take advantage of in a true "encounter," as Blanchot defined it:

This infinite movement which constitutes the experience of meeting itself (as the event of experience, the present event of the meeting) always standing on the margin of the interplay and of the moment when it asserts itself; for it is this very gap, this imaginary distance, where absence is achieved. (Blanchot 1989: 18)³

This gap is what made Paul Durcan's book possible. *Crazy about Women* was followed by a second publication dedicated to the London

National Gallery and entitled *Give Me Your Hand* (1994). I was intrigued by this overt example of “word and image” relationship so clearly working as such and I thought this was indeed a thought-provoking instance of intermedial studies.

Durcan’s Gallery: An Apparatus

As we turn the pages of Durcan’s poetry collection, we realise that, in the manner of the grand tradition, Durcan pursues the fiction of a word/image gallery respecting the same lines as one’s trajectory while walking through the rooms of Dublin’s National Gallery. Roger de Piles broached this subject in his famous *Cours de peinture par principes* in which he envisages painting as a pilgrimage one makes when moving from one part of a painting to another, or from one genre to another:

For painting must be regarded as a long pilgrimage, as when while travelling one sees several things capable of pleasantly entertaining one’s mind for some time. The different parts of this art are considered; one makes a stop while moving on, as a traveller will stop at resting places along his way. (de Piles 1989: 90)

The relationship between painting and pilgrimage insists on the movement one is induced to undertake. The architectural gallery provided a private space for ladies in particular to take some manner of exercise. Juxtaposing paintings and poems, the titles of which are borrowed from the painted works, Durcan offers the viewer–reader a series of works which constitute his “dispositif,” a concept Giorgio Agamben recently theorised, which we could translate as “apparatus”:

It is clear that the term, both in common usage and as Foucault proposes, seems to refer to a set of practices and mechanisms (simultaneously discursive and non-discursive, judiciary, technical and military) aiming at coping with an emergency to obtain a more or less immediate effect. (Agamben 2007: 20)

He gives a broader definition a few pages later: “I call apparatus all that has the capacity to capture, orient, determine, catch, model, control and direct living beings’ gestures, behaviours, opinions and discourses” (Agamben 2007: 31). An apparatus then is a way of constraining people, of wielding power over them. It is also a *network*. In Durcan’s case, the apparatus works both ways: It is the answer to a particular constraint, that of the Gallery commission (the term recalling the architectural structure which conditions the visitor’s movements), and it also exerts a constraint

on the viewer, that of a set reading. It is a *praxis* and also an *oikonomia*, i.e., an economy of the visible.⁴ The theological heritage of the apparatus linked to *oikonomia* and translated by Latin theologians as *dispositio* underlies Durcan's work.⁵ And the concept of image is linked to presence/absence, to the doctrine of Incarnation and the figure of Christ as God's son modelled in His image. This is a trait we shall find in Durcan's work, which is immersed in the poet's religious Irish background. The doctrine of transubstantiation also plays a part here. Serge Tisseron recalls this when he insists on the role of the body in the visual process and its link with the Holy Trinity: "Like Christ who in Christian theology occupies an essential position as mediator between God and men, image is the essential mediation between bodies and words" (2003: 125–126). The reader's body will be the transmuting sieve or net (like that of enigma).

Durcan's "apparatus" works on the "disposition" of 49 images referring to 47 paintings and two sculptures that accompany 47 poems. They either face one another or follow one another. At times an image is inserted within a poem. The motif of an Irish harp, printed in the centre of a page, separates the different "chapters." This choice imparts rhythm to the work.⁶ Thus the reader's mind is made to look at Durcan's word/image apparatus in a specific way, creating an object we may also call an iconotext, or more precisely, an iconopoem. The latter builds up the fiction of a gallery made up of a selection of the National Gallery's works.

To this spatial aspect of the apparatus, we may add what I will call a "lecture/voyure" (a reading and a sighting), which is a more "temporal" reflection on the current formula, such as "after" the great masters. As a matter of course, Durcan's project was carried out "after" the paintings. The use of "after" in such occurrences as "After Brueghel"—like in the numerous poems⁷ composed "after" *The Fall of Icarus*—deserves attention. The ambiguity of the term is telling. Of course, it means the poem takes after the painting and will purport to offer an ekphrasis of the painting *a la mode* of the poet. It pays homage to the generating power of the image at the origin of discourse. But it also clearly signals the anachronistic link between poem and painting: The poem was written "after" the painting. Blanchot has pointed to such a multiple connotation:

Things aren't that simple. The ambiguity comes from the ambiguity of time which comes into play here and enables one to say and feel that the fascinating image of experience is at a certain time present, whereas this presence does not exist in any present time; it even destroys the present it seems to penetrate. (1989: 18)

Furthermore, psychoanalysis has pointed out the complex interplay between word and image: Freud insisted on the gap between word and image when he remarked that dreams think in images and that language comes after the dream to cast its net onto the images. As long as a trace of image lingers, the work of dream-elucidation is not finished (see Damisch 1995: 52).⁸ For psychoanalysts, language causes images to disappear. However, Jean Rousset has provided a counter-argument. Working on ekphrasis, he has remarked that, when an image arises from a text, the latter disappears:

I will make a last point without further ado, although probably a difficult one to theorise: What happens in the mind of the person busy reading a description? If he or she transposes the written words into (absent) things, he or she will transform them into a mental simulacrum, in other words: He or she visualizes it. In so doing, he or she substitutes this simulacrum for the text, reduced to the role of support, which means it erases and eventually destroys the text. (Rousset 1990: 163)

Since writing about painting refers to an image created before the verbal text, the critic cannot dispense with anachronism as a precious critical heuristic tool. This is one of the staples of Georges Didi-Huberman's critical stance when he remarks on the absence/presence of the subject in its representation:

What does it take to understand an image? Experience teaches us that, while looking at it, we must pay attention to its temporal content, to the polyrhythmic quality of which it is made up. Yet the standard historical models—past and present, ancient and new, obsolescence and renaissance, modern and postmodern—fail to describe this complexity of image. (Didi-Huberman 2002: book cover)

The recognition of the ghostlike quality of the image as “survivor,” in keeping with Aby Warburg's concept of *Nachleben*, seems of primary import for Didi-Huberman, who insists on the role of memory in picturing our culture. Writing “after” a painting means adding one more layer of fiction-as-interpretation to it, as well as an additional layer of time.

Therefore we can draw the first of our conclusions: Intermedial transposition is a combination of space and time that defies G.E. Lessing's clear-cut separation between the arts in his *Laocoön* (published 1766). Furthermore, a kind of temporal hiatus exists between image-time and text-time which constitutes a particular apparatus ascribing a specific place in a specific historical context to the spectator. Transaction and transposition are key concepts of the intermedial experience, as Marcel Broodthaers has so wonderfully exemplified with his graphic example of the exchange and transaction between poetry and the visual in his famous double “picture”:

Gedicht/poem/poème, change/exchange/Wechsel, an avatar of which is on view in the Barcelona Museum of Modern Art.

In Durcan's gallery, both time and space are put to work, combining the two arts and producing a new "object" offering a fine instance of hybridity, an iconopoem. Speed, the combination of time and space, and rhythm, that of the flux of the voice and of a walk, enable us to rethink this artistic object beyond the age-old word/image opposition and beyond the *paragone*. Hence they are "art objects," as Jeanette Winterson demonstrated in her eponymous work; that is, art makes a statement and thinks of art with its own means:

The picture on my wall, art object and art process, is a living line of movement, a wave of colour that repercusses in my body, colouring it, colouring the new present, the future, and even the past, which cannot now be considered outside of the light of the painting. [...]

Process, the energy in being, the refusal of finality, which is not the same thing as the refusal of completeness, sets art, all art, apart from the end-stop world that is always calling "Time Please!" [...] The arts stand in the way of this doomsaying. Art objects. The nouns become an active force not a collector's item. Art objects. (Winterson 1996: 19)

Desecrations

In Paul Durcan's case, I would argue that some of his poems, the majority of which were written "after" religious paintings, actually aim at desecrating them while revealing their erotic flavour. Durcan's words are truly iconoclastic, which is not one of the lesser paradoxes. The reader going through Durcan's gallery gradually understands that the new narrative derived from ancient painting often verges on blasphemy if not on the absurd. In *Profanations*, Agamben defines desecration as the act of restoring to the profane sphere what had been restricted to the sacred one:

Whereas to consecrate (*sacrare*) designated the way things used to leave the sphere of the human law, to desecrate, on the contrary, meant their restitution to men's free usage. [...] Pure, profane, freed from the sacred names is this thing which is restored to men's common use. But use does not appear here as something natural. On the contrary, it can only be reached through desecration. So there seems to be a particular relation between "using" and "desecrating." (Agamben 2006: 95–96)

By lifting certain paintings out of their "sacred" locus of the museum and using them in a way that differs from their original sacred function as religious paintings, Durcan "uses" them for his own purpose and dese-

crates them. He recycles them into a new work of art, and to make sure the reader understands the profaning nature of his art, he consistently inscribes their themes with a mundane iconoclastic momentum. The book with the reproduced masterpieces belongs to one's private sphere when perused at leisure at home. This achieves part of the desecration, for "to desecrate not only means to abolish and erase separations, but to learn how to use them in a new way, to play with them" (Agamben 2006: 115).

In Durcan's case, the intermedial relationship may be seen as an "inter-course" where painting is imbued with an erotic flavour by the text, a fact that his iconoclastic poems, written "after" the paintings, show. It is a way of staging the strong attraction between painting and poetry, of envisaging their transposition as peaceful while giving flesh to what stood lifeless in a museum. The poem is the result of this interart negotiation in which the loser is also the winner, where ekphrasis imparts the text with its *enargeia*.

The Apparatus at Work: Durcan's "dis-covering" Enterprise

Durcan's word/image apparatus strictly matches poems with paintings, often with an erotic flavour. The works were freely selected by Durcan, who, in true postmodern manner, both celebrates and debunks them, a paradoxical enterprise for a dedicated iconophile who defines his "lifelong obsession with picture-making" in conjugal terms:

It is promulgated by the arbiters of culture that an artist should have only one spouse. An artist such as myself with the two spouses of poetry and picture-making is not looked upon favourably by the chaperones of art. The challenge of art is to be inclusive, and *Crazy About Women*, born out of a lifetime's romance with the National Gallery of Ireland, is my attempt to be so inclusive as *to make the intercourse between what is painted and what is written as reciprocal as it is inevitable*. (Durcan 1991: xi, my emphasis)

Rest on the Flight into Egypt with the Infant St John the Baptist, attributed to Francesco Granacci (c. 1494); *Veneration of the Eucharist* by Jacob Jordaens (1630); and the *Portrait of Bishop Robert Clayton and his Wife Katherine* (c. 1740) by James Latham will prove my point. The first two paintings illustrate a sacred subject with duly registered iconography. The third, although profane, is nevertheless the portrait of a clergyman in full garb. The three poems operate on the same "veneration"/"desecration" mode in which "desecration is the counter apparatus which renders unto common use what sacrifice had separated and divided" (Agamben 2006:

40). Three aspects of this complex operation will be examined to see how it emerges from the image to restore its erotic power, once the sacred net has been lifted.

The poem *The Holy Family with St John* after Granacci (referring to the painting's former title) displays a systematic pattern of reversal. The traditional treatment of the episode is turned upon its head. The role of the speaker is attributed to the smallest and humblest character, the rower in the tiny boat in the background of the picture. His point of view on the family is given from the back. He gives pride of place to the donkey, one of the lowest creatures in the animal kingdom (but nevertheless one of the two which, according to tradition, witnessed Jesus's birth). He imagines the donkey deep in conversation with Joseph about his spouse. Thus the Holy subject is reduced to the level of idle talk. The fact that the speaker eventually enjoys a good pint of Guinness with a "halo" at "The Judge and Jury," shows that the profane has invaded the sacred, when "to use" is to profane. The Holy Family is demoted to the level of "the human family" whereas the too-human animal is gifted with speech.

Even iconography is put to the test of common use: the "halo" becomes a frisby and the Virgin's sandals take on the shape of a horsehoof. Her body is described with the detail of *blazon*: "her toes, her knuckles, her eyebrows" emerge as one follows the viewer's eyes and envisions the parts evoked. As for St John's little penis, it "peers out like a bullfinch from a bough." The desire to turn values upside down, to debase the sacred with the mundane, is close to blasphemy when the holy image becomes "a pretty emotional picture." The last word is given to the donkey's enigmatic thoughts: "what is it that a donkey sees in a man?" Thus the "apparatus" shows itself as a way of constraining the spectator to look at the painting in the same manner as the speaker, as the agent of the poet, would look.

The highest genre of classical painting—historical and *a fortiori* religious painting—is also debunked in Jordaens's *The Veneration of the Eucharist*. It is as if the image were once again provoking the poet via the aesthetic sensual choices of the painter—in the choice of mellow colours, composition and in bold, sensuous strokes. This time Durcan is provoked and provokes the spectator/reader in turn by the counteruse of the subject. The Eucharist is the Holy Sacrament linked to the mystery of the Incarnation, of Christ's body rendered visible and consumed. A divine sacrifice, it brings redemption to sinners as a result of God's infinite compassion. In the poem, the Holy Communion is transposed into a much more earthly one. In a systematic way, the newsagent is associated with the church, the counter with the altar and the after mass plays on aftermaths, complete

with “post-coital grief.” As for “intercourse,” it resonates with “eucharistic union” and a true “communion.” The blasphemous attempt aimed at conflating the sacred and the profane in the intermedial transaction strikes the reader when the poet recycles the sacred “signifiers” of the painting: the woman carrying the monstrance; the lion; the child with the bleeding sacred heart; the cross; and Golgotha’s skull, all aligned in a descending line. The poet’s eye lingers on the woman’s breasts: “a sturdy pair of Conne-mara ponies.” This beautiful woman represents the Church welcoming the sinner in her bosom. This is the place where the poet wishes to die “a small death”: “to leap into her bosom and to die forever.” When “[a]s a vision of fact” replaces “as a matter of fact,” the poem is revealed as a place where flesh and vision “sizzle” together. Venus underlies this veneration and the poem develops the latent message of the image as in a dream, when the lover is held up above the faithful in erotic transport or monstrance:

I would tell you that every moonburst
 We have intercourse, you and I?
 It is a eucharistic union.
 I place my two hands on your thighs,
 Hold you up to our sea-strewn skies.
 (“The Veneration of the Eucharist”: ll. 14–15)

The third instance of Durcan’s word/image apparatus merges a profane subject and a sacred character. *The Portrait of Bishop Robert Clayton and his Wife Katherine* once more offers Durcan the opportunity to entangle the profane and the sacred. If a portrait truly is a profane subject, the bishop has seemingly been touched by Grace. His function is first and foremost a religious one, evident in his clothes, his cassock and long white shirt together with bands. His left hand is resting on a Bible. But the painting also suggests something wholly different that did not escape Durcan. The deep décolletage of the young wife, her open hand resting on her thighs, the direction of the bishop’s gaze plunging directly into her cleavage, and furthermore, as in Fragonard’s *Lock*, the red curtain behind the young woman arranged diagonally with shadowy mellow pleats: All concur to suggest a sensuality which the text immediately converts into words. Durcan then chooses to use the figure of chiasmus to equate the profane with the sacred, in which “décolletage” is the seat of the “godhead”:

Upon her décolletage
 In whose umbrageous rocks divinity dwells,
 Dwells the godhead.
 (“Bishop Robert Clayton and his Wife Katherine”: ll. 15–17)

Thus in the poem, "Sacristy" echoes "scullery"; "carnal fault" "her soul"; "her thighs" "hands" and "gospel." On their way to church, the bishop and his wife grin and on Christmas Eve indulge in libertine games. The progress of the collection towards the erotic is complete when the clergyman and his wife's love games are technically described :

This Xmas night
 I having placed pillows beneath her back
 She will draw back her knees up past her cheeks
 Until her knees recline upon her shoulders
 So that I can douse her haunches with my tongue
 Install myself inside her,
 Until we two are become as one divinity;
 One divinity crouched in interlocking stillness on a bough;
 The sole sound—the small rowboat of my member
 Bobbing on the waters of her lough.
 In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghosts, Amen.
 ("Bishop Robert Clayton and his Wife Katherine": ll. 36–47)

This blasphemous discourse violates the fourth commandment: Thou shalt not take God's name in vain. It reminds us of the mystery of the Holy Trinity pictured in Jordaens's *Veneration* and the principle of economy/*oikonomia*, fusing three in one. Granacci's *Holy Family* is also echoed in this poem with the "small rowboat of my member" which retrospectively imparts the former with more profanity, for the boatman was also rowing "to drift sideways onto the family shore." (Durcan 1991: 11, "The Holy Family with Saint John" l. 3).

Irish Subversion: Eroticism and the Church

In Catholic Ireland, performing a desecration or a blasphemy has always been considered a subversive political act. The Church is still very powerful in controlling education, sexuality and birth control. For E. H. Gombrich, "[t]he form of a representation cannot be divorced from its purpose and the requirements of the society in which the given visual language gains currency" (1996: 111).⁹ Thus Granacci's *Holy Family* is "revised" by Durcan according to the conventions of twentieth-century Irish society. Durcan submits painting to the "noise" of his century and to the discords potentially inscribed in the work by challenging common use.

The erotic undertone contained in the painting is all the stronger for its religious aspect. The transgression is threefold:

—In the word/image combination, the text dissolves the image and entraps it in a book just as paintings are trapped in a museum.

—Eroticism features in an apparently “serious” book.

—The religious image generates an erotic piece of writing: an iconoclastic desecration.

The power of the erotic is thus augmented by its profaning and iconoclastic dimension. The word/image apparatus reveals the sensual potentialities of the image which are otherwise veiled by the overt religious message of the title that orients the so-called “reading” of the painting: *The Veneration of the Eucharist* features the Church/Virgin as a beautiful buxom lady literally offering the “bosom” of the church to the faithful. Bishop Clayton’s gaze is telltale, by means of which the painter seems to hint at the sensual, irreligious inclinations of the bishop, a Protestant in Catholic Ireland. Finally, mentioning the Virgin’s bare feet and St John’s penis focuses on aspects that were to be ignored when one was deeply immersed in prayer and veneration. The eroticism of the paintings is all the more subtle when one considers that they used to hang in dark corners and niches of chapels, only given life thanks to the flickering light of candles, the movement of which sometimes provoked an hallucinatory effect.

The apparent desecration of image is perhaps only the advent of truth (that of *enargeia* and *evidentia*), the unveiling of a latent sensual content painted by an artist “in the know.” There is also a question of time and the gaze when the issue of “after” and of anachronicity as a heuristic method recur. At the end of the twentieth century in Ireland, it became possible to “unveil” paintings without being banned. Another kind of image glimmers in-between the overt message, the religious meaning carried by a canonical iconography, and its obtuse message pregnant with profane meaning: the feminine beauty of a woman, the eroticism of her veiled/unveiled body and the Saint’s sex. The superimposition of the two bodies of the Church twins the sacred with the profane. In-between, the gaze oscillates. It is up to the reader/voyeur to choose between two visions, as with the case of Jastrow’s duck–rabbit, or Rubin’s two-edged vases.¹⁰

The sacred text “sizzles” when transposed into images that in their turn profane into a new text. The text “hystericizes” the image, exposing what was latent and censured by the ruling eye. Divesting it of its aura, the text turns the image into a cruder object. The oscillation between meaning and the “flesh” of image acts in-between painting and text, conjuring up “the pictorial third” (see Louvel 2010): an image appears on the reader’s inner “screen” between painting and text, neither painting nor text but an in-between or twilight zone, a third term, then. This is the moment when the image turns the body into a filter or net, a result of its provocations, and we remember Raymond Keaveney’s declaration concerning Durcan:

The pictures he has chosen to write about [are] capable of provoking a rich and varied personal response which works on many levels, aesthetic, historic, cultural and emotional. This collection reflects the deeply personal response of the poet to the many images contained in the Gallery's collection. (Keaveney 1991: viii)

The Way Image "Touches" Us

"It is forbidden, in any way, to 'touch' painting," according to Hubert Damisch, "but to describe it and even more so to interpret it, is another way of touching it, including all the risks it entails; to begin with that, under the cover of words that celebrate it, to cause it to disappear" (Damisch 1995: 50). The text seems to provoke the disappearance of the painting it purports to celebrate, as if obeying a lethal desire to kill the image by casting a net of words (a word-net) over it. Consequently, when reading a text, one no longer contemplates the image captured in it. We remember that for Rousset, on the contrary, the image supersedes the text which describes it.

Celebrating the image is another way of "touching" it and, since one is confronted with its materiality, of looking at it closer and giving it a shape thanks to words. This is a kind of commerce, conversion, exchange, transposition or erotic intercourse similar to that of the work of dreams, pertaining to the very nature of the exchange between the readable and the visible. It involves the pleasure and satisfaction of the contemplation of a painting and its soothing effects as the gaze rests on/in it, following its many modes of manifestation. One remembers Lacan and the concept of *invidia*, i.e., the always-lost object, and the fear of castration triggered by the visual.

May we then advance that the satisfaction one enjoys while contemplating images is invested with a libidinal charge, triggering a discharge, plunging one into a soothing absorption: "[T]he charm of painting is to 'nourish the eye's appetite'" (Lacan 1973: 105). For Lacan, "[t]he *trompe-l'œil* of painting gives itself for something it is not" (1973: 105). Image opens itself up to discourse, to reach *this thing it is not*: A screen has to be lifted, hence the pleasure experienced in front of a *trompe-l'œil*. According to Lacan, the small child observing his brother at the breast experiences *invidia* while confronted with a completeness from which he is excluded. Granacci's *Holy Family* provides us with a fine example of *invidia* when St John is trying to climb into the Virgin's lap.

Crazy About Women testifies to a desire to prolong this soothing intercourse and rich exchange by creating a textual poetics equivalent to the painting "elected" to museum status. It would be a text which, more than a