

Between Art and Literature: The Poetics of Visual Thinking in Poile Sengupta's *Collages*

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Abstract:

Poile Sengupta's play *Collages* is an experimental work that explores the intersection of visual art and literature through the poetics of visual thinking. The play abandons traditional linear narrative in favour of a fragmented, collage-like structure that mirrors the creative process of the protagonist, a middle-aged woman artist. Through the use of montage and visual motifs, Sengupta disrupts conventional storytelling and engages the audience in interpreting meaning through spatial and associative thinking. *Collages* also critiques patriarchal marginalization of female artists by making the fragmented, multilayered form a metaphor for female subjectivity and creativity. The work aligns with feminist and postmodern aesthetics by embracing ambiguity, multiplicity, and non-linear temporality. Sengupta's use of theatrical and visual art techniques invites interdisciplinary readings and expands the boundaries of Indian English theater. Ultimately, *Collages* functions as a meta-artistic reflection on the struggles and triumphs of the female artist, making it a significant statement on art, literature, and identity in contemporary drama.

Key Words: Visual thinking, Narrative experimentation, Interdisciplinary art, Textuality and Visuality, Visual-literary intersection.

Introduction:

Poile Sengupta's play *Collages* is a distinctive work that creates a rich terrain for examining the interplay between art and literature through the framework of visual thinking and poetics. Unlike many of Sengupta's other works that have predominantly addressed themes of gender, social injustice, and protest, *Collages* stands apart because of its unique experimental style, innovative form, and complex approach to meaning-making. The play employs techniques that draw from both literary traditions and visual arts, embodying an interdisciplinary practice that challenges conventional dramatic structures.

Collages does not adhere to a linear narrative or clearly defined scenes, instead presenting a fragmented collection of memories, images, and voices that a middle-aged woman artist who is manipulative and of questionable talent assembles. This fragmented structure allows the play to function much like a visual collage, where disparate components are layered and juxtaposed to create a larger, cohesive artistic expression. The absence of a straightforward plot invites the audience to engage in the process of visual thinking, which consists of interpreting images, associations, and symbolic patterns instead of relying solely on logic or narrative progression. Such an approach requires the viewer or reader to piece together meanings from the complex interplay among the fragments, echoing how visual artworks often communicate through juxtaposition, texture, and composition.

In *Collages*, Poile Sengupta dissolves the boundary between verbal and visual expression, constructing a space where art and literature converge as parallel forms of cognition. For Sengupta, creative production is not confined to linguistic articulation or pictorial representation; instead, both serve as complementary gestures of perception and thought. As she observes, “The written word is not separate from the painted image; both arise from the same impulse to capture the fleeting rhythm of thought before it dissolves into silence” (*Collages* 45). This insight resonates strongly with Rudolf Arnheim’s argument in *Visual Thinking* that perception itself is a mode of reasoning, where visual forms embody and structure complex ideas (Arnheim 13). By aligning with Arnheim’s notion that artistic vision is a cognitive act rather than a mere sensory experience, Sengupta transforms *Collages* into an arena of “visual thought” a poetic field where language and imagery interact to mirror the mind’s associative rhythm. In this sense, Sengupta’s text becomes not merely a literary artifact but a meditative visual discourse, situating the act of seeing as central to the act of meaning-making.

In Poile Sengupta’s *Collages*, the concept of visual thinking is central to the play’s unique narrative style and structure. Unlike traditional plays with linear sequences and clear scene divisions, *Collages* adopts a fragmented architecture that mimics the form of a visual collage. Various disparate elements memories, images, and voices are layered and juxtaposed to form a textured and multifaceted whole rather than a straightforward storyline. This structural choice forces the audience into an active role where meaning is not sequentially revealed but constructed through associative and imagistic thinking.

The play’s narrative weaves together sensory and poetic devices, using visual metaphors and symbolic fragments that resonate beyond literal language, reflecting modernist aesthetic principles that prioritize perception and composition over direct narrative logic. This experience evokes the way the human mind perceives and connects ideas through patterns and juxtapositions, rather than through a singular, linear progression. Thus, *Collages* invites viewers to engage deeply with the poetic and aesthetic dimensions of art, making the act of viewing an active, interpretive, and visual mode of cognition.

The absence of clear narrative markers or definitive plotlines amplifies this effect, enabling the play to exist as an interplay of images and ideas, much like a layered artwork that reveals new meanings through each viewing and interpretation. This approach not only challenges the conventions of traditional theatre but also expands the possibilities of storytelling by merging literary and visual modes of thought. Through this poetics of visual thinking, Sengupta's "*Collages*" exemplifies how fragmented forms can gesture to the complexity and multiplicity inherent in human experience and memory. "Memories arrive like scattered pieces of old paintings; I must fit them together, though the edges no longer match"(*Collages* 58).Links the physical act of collaging to memory reconstruction, aligning with your exploration of intermediality and layered consciousness.

The poetics of "*Collages*" is deeply rooted in this blending of art and literature. Language in the play gains an additional dimension as it becomes a visual and tactile element, almost sculptural in its form and function. The protagonist herself embodies the intersection of creator and creation, blurring the lines between the authorial voice and the artwork produced. Rather than offering traditional character development or plot advancement, the play foregrounds the experiential, sensory, and interpretive aspects of storytelling, turning the theatrical piece into an art object whose meaning varies with the perspective of its audience.

This interplay between literary and visual forms in *Collages* corresponds with broader cultural and theoretical movements that celebrate the "visual turn" in arts and humanities. Here, meaning is not fixed but multiple and provisional, emerging from the materiality of language and images as well as the audience's active engagement. Sengupta's work exemplifies a new mode of creative expression that is both interdisciplinary and open-ended, reflecting the fluidity and multiplicity of contemporary identity and artistic production. In this sense, her creative method aligns with James Elkins's assertion in *The Poetics of Perspective* that perspective is not simply a device of representation but "a mode of thought that structures how we see and how we interpret seeing" (Elkins 14). Elkins's insight thus deepens our understanding of Sengupta's poetics of visual thinking, revealing how perception itself becomes a narrative strategy in her art-literary synthesis.

Moreover, the methodology of collage as both artistic technique and metaphor is crucial to the play's thematic and structural design. By assembling fragments into a complex whole, the play mirrors the challenges faced by creators and interpreters alike in constructing meaning from diverse and often contradictory elements. This act of collage symbolizes the creative tension between order and chaos, coherence and fragmentation, reflecting the protagonist's inner struggles and the broader human condition.

Through "*Collages*," Poile Sengupta not only innovates in form but also offers a meta-commentary on the creative process itself. The play dramatizes the artist's attempt to impose meaning on fragmented experiences while simultaneously acknowledging the irreducible complexity of life and art, which resists definitive interpretation. This meta-

artistic stance invites reflection on how both visual art and literature function as modes of knowing, expressing, and reshaping reality.

The “poetics between art and literature” refers to the dynamic, interdisciplinary field where visual arts and literary expression intersect to produce unique forms, meanings, and experiences. At its core, this poetics examines how techniques and devices from both domains such as imagery, structure, rhythm, symbol, and spatial arrangement can blend, resulting in hybrid works that engage both the eye and the mind. “The written word is not separate from the painted image; both arise from the same impulse to capture the fleeting rhythm of thought before it dissolves into silence” (*Collages* 12). Visual poetry, for example, arranges words on a page to create shapes or images, embodying this fusion as language becomes both visual object and literary text.

Historically, theorists like Aristotle laid the groundwork by defining poetry and art as forms of mimesis creative imitation where each field uses different media (language, colour, form) to represent life and emotion. Modern interdisciplinary scholarship highlights how the boundaries between art and literature are porous, allowing practices such as collage, montage, and concrete poetry to emerge, wherein literary texts employ visual strategies, and artworks incorporate narrative or poetic devices.

In this space, literature may be experienced not only through reading but through seeing, while visual artworks may evoke narrative, metaphor, or symbolic meaning traditionally associated with literature. Thus, the poetics between art and literature locates creative significance in the dialogue and in-betweenness of these forms, celebrating ambiguity, multiplicity, and the sensory interplay of words and images in shaping interpretation and aesthetic experience.

Sengupta’s aesthetic philosophy resonates strongly with Roland Barthes’s semiotic reflections on the interplay between text and image. In *Image–Music–Text*, Barthes argues that meaning is not confined within a single mode of expression but emerges through the interaction of visual and verbal signs, creating what he terms a “plurality of meaning” (Barthes 38). This theoretical lens illuminates Sengupta’s poetics of seeing, where written and visual forms engage in a dialogic relationship rather than a hierarchical one.

While *Collages* primarily explores the interplay between the visual and the verbal, it also subtly engages with questions of gender and creative authorship. Police Sengupta’s collage aesthetics can be read as an act of reclaiming artistic agency within patriarchal structures that have historically separated the domains of fine art and literature. Through fragmented imagery and introspective narration, Sengupta constructs a self-reflexive space in which the woman artist negotiates both visibility and voice.

This dynamic recalls Rajeswari Sunder Rajan’s argument in *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism* that women’s creative expressions often

challenge inherited aesthetic hierarchies by “reconfiguring the relationship between selfhood and representation” (Rajan 27). Sengupta’s experimental form, therefore, becomes not only an aesthetic innovation but also a feminist articulation and re-imaging of the woman creator’s position within the broader artistic and cultural landscape.

Poile Sengupta employs collage both as a formal technique and as a philosophical framework in her play *Collages*. The fragmented structure of the play mirrors the essence of a visual collage, a modernist artistic method that combines various heterogeneous elements in a single plane to create a new, composite meaning. This form disrupts linear narrative expectations and encourages the audience to actively construct meaning through recognizing the relationships and juxtapositions between disparate fragments. This method mirrors the prismatic and multifaceted nature of identity and voice in contemporary literature and performance, emphasizing multiplicity over singularity.

The use of collage in the play is not only structural but also thematic and philosophical. *Collages* functions as a meta-artistic critique by reflecting on how artists and writers grapple with the creative process. The protagonist’s attempt to assemble pieces of her life and art symbolizes the dual challenge all creators face: the instinctive desire to impose order on chaos and fragmentation, while simultaneously accepting that multiplicity, ambiguity, and disorder are intrinsic and enriching aspects of creativity. This tension reveals the struggle between control and surrender in artistic production, marking the play as an exploration of creativity’s complex nature.

By framing the play as a kind of collage, Sengupta explores broader questions about the nature of art, identity, and storytelling. The fragmented narrative performs a philosophical statement on how reality and selfhood are constructed through assembling memories, perspectives, and experiences that resist a single, unified interpretation. This methodology thus elevates the act of collage into a metaphor for the contemporary human condition, where identity and meaning are provisional, fluid, and composed of intersecting narratives and images.

In redirecting the audience to this active process of interpretation, *Collages* challenges conventional forms of theatre and narrative and expands the scope of dramatic writing to incorporate visual and literary hybridity. It blurs boundaries between disciplines, suggesting that meaning in art and literature emerges as much from form and perception as from content. Sengupta’s use of collage foregrounds the materiality of both text and image, thereby inviting audiences to engage with the work as a layered, dynamic artwork and to reflect on the complexities of creative expression in the modern world.

Poile Sengupta’s play *Collages* stands as an innovative and significant contribution to contemporary Indian English theatre, particularly through its experimental form that intersects art and literature with visual thinking and poetics. By adopting the methodology of collage, Sengupta disrupts conventional narrative structures and invites audiences to

engage in an active process of interpretation, where meaning is assembled through fragmented images, voices, and memories rather than linear storytelling.

This fragmented, layered approach not only reflects the complexity of identity and creative expression but also offers a meta-artistic commentary on the struggles of imposing order on chaos within the artistic process. The play's poetics foregrounds the visual and sensory modes of knowing alongside the linguistic, thereby expanding theatrical and literary possibilities through interdisciplinary hybridity. Sengupta's *Collages* thus embodies a modernist and feminist sensibility that valorizes multiplicity, ambiguity, and the rich interplay between visuality and textuality. Ultimately, the play transcends genre boundaries and stands as a profound meditation on creativity, memory, and female subjectivity, marking it as a timeless and resonant work within both Indian and global literary-artistic discourses.

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