

Editor's Note

Peter Szendy in his book, *For an Ecology of Images* (2025), suggests 'Let's imagine, as Pliny proposes in his *Natural History*, that the first painted image was the outline of a shadow.' Marcel Duchamp describes shadow being the fourth dimension. We are surrounded by shadows, receding, fleeting, fading and following us in our daily life. As per common perception, one or several shadows are cast by the presence of light; and add multiple dimensions, replicas, silhouettes, layers of a human being, a living specie, an object.

Human beings, aware of the phenomenon of shadow, comprehend, and control it; which if translated in the realm of knowledge is the capacity of being exposed to diverse sources of light, a scheme of including various facades of an individual's self. It can be translated into a scheme/platform to connect with others; thus an archaic necessity, genetic code, and societal desire to be a swiss knife. A tool to survive in difficult jungles of ignorance as well as to cope with the luminous surroundings of a civilization.

This ability made humanity into a polymathic character. The dictionary of any language enlists multiple functions a person performs – from mundane and routine existence to complex exercises. Especially in the realm/light of knowledge, practice, creativity. In the glorious spans of Muslim Medieval Period, and European Renaissance, one comes across individuals who extended their thoughts, research, expressions in more than one area, including Al-Biruni, Al-Farabi, Averroes Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, to cite a few.

A tradition that continued to the latter ages too, in which a healer was also a poet, a historian, and a philosopher. Or a writer of fiction, additionally had a job in a post office, and toiled fields. (Two examples from this region can further illustrate this phenomenon: Jawahar Lal Nehru, a distinguished lawyer, the leader of Indian National Congress, and the first Prime Minister of Independent India penned books on India and world history while in the British prison; and Dr Allama Muhammad Iqbal, active in All India Muslim League, an advocate and a philosopher who wrote several volumes of poetry in Urdu and Farsi).

Polymathy was such an expected practice that its presence in one's personality never ignited awe, surprise or appreciation, because it was reminiscent of the conventional methods of production in a community. For instance, a potter used to collect clay, turned a number of pieces on the wheel, painted and glazed them, before baking them. Once ready, packed, priced, and sold them. But with the industrial revolution, these roles were split and segregated, with the individual, instead of a maker, ending up an operator, a cog in the mega machinery of manufacturing and marketing. Resulting into an alienation with a person's mode of livelihood. A scheme that evolved into the era of specializations; defined as 'professions' (different from another term, pursuits). For example in the fields of medical sciences, construction business, knowledge production, etc.

This illusion of excellence, this approach of a singular frame of mind, grasp on a subject, grip on a technique, if led to polarization in the society, embedding alienation among individuals, it also generated hegemonies of different levels. Conveniently converting a person into viewing universality through a single and limited lens, may be tinted by class, training, ethnicity, sexual demarcation, location, language, faith, sect. It could be traced in the ideal structures of pedagogy, popular in the twentieth century, primarily imported from the industrialized/colonialist nations.

In the colonized and global societies a person served a specific role, already defined and determined by the outsider/rulers, or market forces. Hence a minimum difference between mankind and machine. No matter if a doctor is famous in treating one organ, a lawyer has excelled in the corporate tax law, a singer is known for rap, they may still move ahead with a blinkered vision, practice. Following one path. Same applies to the fields of pedagogy, a seeker of knowledge acquires a degree in one discipline, but often is unable to interlink with other related – or even unrelated spheres of investigation and knowledge dissemination.

The supremacy of one discipline has been challenged in the twenty-first century, for multiple reasons. Access to information, ideas, examples, technology included, but mainly the mindset that the world does not end in the backyard of one's studio practice, or inside the classroom, or within an operation theatre, which due to their routineness, comfort, and allure create the power for a person, who is unable to deviate beyond a specifically attained and acclaimed area of research, practice.

The Journal of Transdisciplinary Practices in Art & Design (*IEDAs*), in its first issue, initiates a sequence of inquiries, investigations and expressions about the world being transformed in the age of polymathy. Inviting or/and selecting texts by a variety of contributors, each viewing/exploring the concept of polymathy through historic, political, personal, social framework/s, hence the formats of their contributions, structure of their narratives, systems of their arguments vary.

The Journal, in its essence, represents the ethos and the strategy of Mariam Dawood School of Visual Art and Design that has been offering diversity, and facilitating polymathic approaches in its studios, lecture halls, and in the encompassing environment on campus. This leading institution of South Asia, in its philosophy and vision, through its first issue of journal reminds one of a quote by Walt Whitman "I am large, I contain multitudes".