

Panel 13
Intermedial Interventions in Contemporary Fiction

**“A Novel From Life”: Female Relationships and the Making of the Artist in
Sheila Heti’s *How Should a Person Be?***

Pratishtha Pandey
Indian Institute of Technology Madras

This presentation will examine Sheila Heti’s auto-fictional novel *How Should a Person Be?* (2010) and its tensions concerning creative, aesthetic, cultural and ethical choices that an up-and-coming female artist attempts to make in the contemporary world. To this end, it will underline how the intermedial form of the novel disrupts the celebratory status quo established by (male) ‘genius’ art. This presentation will argue that the experimental form of *How Should a Person Be?* creates a feminist intermedial aesthetic through its fictional account of Sheila’s affective responses to celebratory art created by male artists and her struggles in exploring her own creativity amidst the everyday absurdities of her life.

In the novel, the newly formed friendship between the writer Sheila and the painter Margaux Williamson—a character that is based on and takes her name from the real-life Canadian filmmaker—becomes the catalyst in shaping their respective artistic sensibilities. The presentation will thus examine the relational significance of female friendship and its affective entanglements with creative and artistic labour. It will suggest that Heti’s exploration of female relationalities is inextricably tied to the novel’s intermedial structure that uses various elements like autofiction, the division of its chapters in the form of acts of a play, the inclusion of an intermission resembling a movie interval, references to reality television, and the inclusion of real-life Margaux’s visual art demonstrations.

Biography

Pratishtha Pandey studies figurations of traumatic memory in contemporary novels for her doctoral research at the Indian Institute of Technology Madras, Chennai. Her essay on storytelling and protest in Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor’s novel *Dust* is forthcoming in an edited collection to be published by Springer.

Her email is pratishthapandey25@gmail.com.