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# Intermedialities: Theory, History, Practice



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## **Introduction**

### *Intermedialities: A Brief Survey of Conceptual Key Issues*

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*“Much of the best work being produced today seems to fall between media. This is no accident. The concept of the separation between media arose in the Renaissance ... However, the social problems that characterize our time, as opposed to the political ones, no longer allow a compartmentalized approach”*  
(Higgins 1969, 11).

Forty years after the Fluxus artist Dick Higgins coined the term “intermedia” in New York, the concept has become a buzzword in art theory and media theory. “Intermediality” refers to the crossovers and interrelations taking place between the arts and the media. It also refers to the linkages within and between the various media that have intensified with the arrival of the digital (hyper)medium, insofar as the latter works through the interplay of words, images, and sounds on screen but also through the convergence of film, television, radio, news writing, e-books, photography, etcetera on the web. But these kinds of media interactions, a defining characteristic of the digital medium that some prefer to describe as “remediation” (Bolter and Grusin 1999) are also at work – albeit in a totally different way – in a Peter Greenaway film for example (imitating and incorporating art or digital photography), or in the performance art of Laurie Anderson (with sounds, digital screens, theatre and dance on stage), or in the commercial designing practices of Oliviero Toscani (citing Christian art side by side with documentary photography of AIDS patients). As Higgins’s quote suggests, it would be hard to explain such experiments solely in terms of the possibilities of the digital medium. That would be historical amnesia.

The term “intermediality” has been taken up by academics working in the margins of media studies, right there where media and communication raise

questions about art. In fact, I would argue that most of the research in the field of intermediality comes from disciplines outside media and communications studies, such as literary studies, performance studies, art history, film theory, and philosophy. Faced with the overall presence of digital media in the fields of arts and culture, these critics have turned to the notion of intermediality to reconceptualize their objects of study – literary texts, paintings, films – in relation to the (digital) medium. Seeking out the borders of their disciplines and the crossovers with media studies, they explicitly position themselves in between margin and centre, art and media. Different from discussions of media “convergence” (Jenkins 2006), media “flows” (Williams 1974), and “remediation” (Bolter and Grusin 1999), the study of intermediality takes as its starting point the specificity of the medium/media involved – a specificity not unrelated to the autonomy of art – even while this specificity is being radically questioned through the larger media environment within which it is situated. If “convergence” is the hot item in the world of communications, “intermediality” interrupts the smoothness of that term to address the critical space in-between media, art, and the surrounding world.<sup>1</sup>

A quick survey of the field of intermediality studies enables me to discern the following principles at work in the debates:

1. Any discussion of intermediality runs against the problem of defining what “medium” and “mediality” traditionally mean, and how the concept of intermediality differs from it. The definitions of medium and mediality greatly vary according to the disciplinary perspective from which they are viewed. Sociologists (Fagerjord 2003) in communication studies emphasize the social and commercial functions of transmitting messages across media: for them a medium is a channel of communication or entertainment. Philosophers (Oosterling 1998) who are more interested in aesthetic or ontological questions may interpret

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<sup>1</sup> Compare this to the question raised by Sage Elwell in *Intermedia: Forty Years and Beyond*: in an age of digital convergence where every medium, thanks to digitization, is already translatable in other media, and where fusion in the arts but also in communication and entertainment is the norm (a general environment) rather than the exception, is ‘intermediality’ – as falling between media – not an anachronistic legacy of the 1960s? Elwell says: not if we hold on to the spirit of permanent experiment and liminality (in-between) that the term has always stood for. It would mean that today’s convergence culture, and the debates about it, is not yet radical enough, that it needs to go further both in the realms of experience that are integrated – beyond the arts, beyond entertainment and into the social/political perhaps – and in the questions that are raised about it. So what intermediality offers to a generalized convergence is the need to recognize its specificity, its limits (I mean the limits of the (new) media focused on, of the questions raised, of the experiences offered) and in recognizing those limits already transcend them. One way to draw out the limits of convergence while transcending them is by putting convergence culture into a tradition which is hardly ever raised: the tradition of the avant-garde, of performance art, etc.

mediation in post-Hegelian terms, as the emergence of a third, critical space of the in-between. Literary critics (Ryan 2004), in turn, easily mobilize semiotics and signification when trying to define the medium. They interpret the medium as a formal carrier of content, or a means of expression in which the material-formal signifier co-determines the signified. Finally, and this is what intermediality is all about, several of the critics will argue that every medium is always already intermedial... Depending on how medium and mediality are defined, intermediality as the interaction between, and within, media, is made to critically re-evaluate the function of communication, entertainment, representation, mediation, meaning, expression... by the (singular) medium. This is, of course, where art – making the usual unusual – comes in.

2. Discussions of intermediality are, then, always conducted from particular disciplinary perspectives and in each case the emphasis on what is important varies. Intermediality in film studies (Spielmann 2005, Carroll 1996), for instance, may involve questions about the status of the moving image once it incorporates static photography generated by digital technology; whereas intermediality addressed in art history (Elwell 2006) tends to focus on the fluidity of art categories and the new meanings and possibilities generated by it. In the first case the notion of movement gets scrutinized, in the second case the immobility of the art object is interrogated. Other differences one could mention here (differences that, however, do not simply run along disciplinary lines): does one look at intermediality from the perspective of the producer(s) and the social-institutional context of production, or does one approach it from the point of view of the audience and the larger context of reception.

3. With the difference in discipline comes a different historiography. Along with the need to define what a medium is, we see critics wanting to write the history of the phenomenon called intermediality. Not surprisingly, the origins are found in various times and places, in accordance with what one seeks to define. A philosopher, trying to deconstruct representation, traces the roots of intermediality in the conceptual art of fusing words and images practiced by Magritte (*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*); but an art critic interested in transforming art through a fusion with technology, will turn to the Fluxus movement of the 1960s. Whereas a literary critic (Wolf 1999) looks for the origins of intermediality in intertextuality, film theorists such as Somaini often turn to montage.

4. Chapple and Kattenbelt (2006) have argued that the debate on intermediality comes from Germany (Jürgen Müller 1996, Franz-Josef Albersmeier 1992, and others). In the meantime it has been institutionalized in the Netherlands and

Canada (e. g. journal called *Intermédialités*) as well. I find these presumptions of nationalization peculiar given the international cross-references in the debates (for instance the role of Higgins in New York) and the international mobility of the scholars involved. The German artist Hans Breder, for instance, set up an Intermedia Program at the University of Iowa in the 1960s. Nevertheless it would be interesting to further investigate the national specificity of certain traditions, or schools, of intermediality in relation to the global developments and crossovers that it mostly signifies.

5. There are also the very complex distinctions to be discerned between intermediality, multimediality, and transmediality, all of which designate various relations between arts and media, and between, or within, media. I could not begin to do justice to the depth of the discussion here, but let me try to summarize nevertheless.

*Multimediality* concerns the co-existence, side by side, of various media within one object, such as an opera, without the various media fusing with each other. Some critics regard websites as forms of multimedia as well to the extent that words and images, or different news and entertainment media occur together, even interact, but do not structurally impact on each other.

*Transmediality* concerns the translation of one medium into another, as when a novel is turned into a film; or a film into a game. Equally, an author may simultaneously bring out a book along with a movie and a website and require the reader to view them together and in addition to each other.

*Intermediality* occurs when there is an interrelation of various – distinctly recognized – arts and media within one object but the interaction is such that they transform each other and a new form of art, or mediation, emerges. Here the exchange alters the media and raises crucial questions about the ontology of each of them, as when Greenaway interrogates the status of the moving and static image by integrating in his films representations of photography and of the digital image. “In consequence intermedia in visual culture are best expressed by modes of self-reflection” (Spielmann 2005, 134).

6. In contrast to the previously made distinctions, critics such as Wolf and Oosterling use intermediality in its broadest scope, to designate a general transcendence of medial boundaries at work in culture. Differences between multi-, trans-, and inter-mediality are then a matter of differences in the *degrees and scales* of intermediality manifested in particular cases: are the various media overtly visible within a work, if so which ones (this is sometimes called multimediality)? Or does one medium dominate over the other (as is the case in

adaptations)? Are the mixtures extensively present, or do we only discern fleeting moments? Are they intended or unexpected effects? Are the various media harmoniously integrated or do they alter and transform each other (in some cases one medium may even begin to imitate the other). Are the crossovers institutionalized (as a genre, for instance opera), or radically hybrid? Seen thus, intermediality is a broad phenomenon that manifests itself in different degrees and on varying scales. It is a cultural trend that has accelerated with the arrival of the digital media. In fact, it has become a general possibility that characterizes all forms of art and media in different ways. Hence the need to be specific about which arts and media are involved, the quality of the interaction, the meanings generated. As said, how intermediality works, or is perceived to work, also differs according to the disciplines within which it is studied, the national traditions, the histories traced. But in its most intense manifestation, I find, intermediality asks difficult questions not only about art and media – and their interrelations – but also about the institutional boundaries we draw around them. Boundaries within which we hope to control and distribute what is perhaps not so easily channelled (most simply perhaps, because it is potentially everywhere). This is where to me the question of intermediality can become deeply political.

7. On a final note: given the immense variations in the forms and concepts of intermediality described above, I prefer to speak of intermedialities, in the plural.

The articles published in this volume reflect much of the diversity sketched out above. They are the direct results of an expert meeting on “Intermedialities: Theory, History, Practice” that Ivo Blom, in collaboration with myself, organized with the financial support of the European Science Foundation (The Standing Committee for the Humanities) in Amsterdam in June 2009.<sup>2</sup> The workshop involved academics with a wide range of nationalities, disciplines, experiences, and ambitions. Together they provided a European platform for exploring ways of dealing with the current intermedial situation in the arts and media. During the presentations and discussions we explored the concepts and practices of intermedia and intermediality and related terms (multimedia, convergence, intertextuality) in different national, disciplinary and historical contexts. In addition to conceptualization, we looked at three other important categories: intermediality in historical research, intermediality in curatorship and intermediality in assessment and funding institutions. The central questions

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<sup>2</sup> The workshop took place at the Rode Hoed (“Red Hat”) cultural centre in Amsterdam. Details about the complete list of participants and the programme of the exploratory workshop can be found here: <http://www.esf.org/activities/exploratory-workshops/humanities-sch/workshops-detail.html?ew=8142> (accessed: 17 March, 2010).

posed to the participants were: how do we understand the convergence between arts and media, how do we curate it, and how do we fund it?

The answers published here reveal how, in the words of Jürgen Müller, it has simply become unacceptable to see “media” as isolated monads, even while it is important to take into account the specificity of the social, institutional, material and cultural context in which intermedial processes occur. Müller’s article on the historiography of intermediality, including its various meanings, materialities, and social functions, provides the basis for the rest of the articles.

After a short survey of the key questions regarding intermediality in cinema and placing them into the context of current debates in media studies and film theory, Ágnes Pethő addresses the key issues of the methodology of studying intermediality in film. She consecutively reviews the normative aesthetic viewpoints in the spirit of cinematic New Laocoöns, the trans-medial theorizing of the moving image, inter-art theories, and parallax historiographies, and ends with a closer look at intermedial figurations in the films of Greenaway and Godard.

Intermediality in specific films is further addressed in the contributions by Annika Wik and Ivo Blom. Starting from the transgressive media environment in which productions such as *The Matrix* franchise (which includes films, games, comic books, and so on) generate a total movie experience while involving the spectator as active participant, Wik then moves to a discussion of contemporary artistic instances in which a similar transgression of boundaries between media platforms (painting, video, television, film) and a permanent repositioning of the viewer are at stake. In his article on the iconology of Visconti’s films, Blom continues the discussion that Wik has initiated about the permeable borders between painting and film. He compares the motifs of doors and windows in Visconti’s films to those in 17<sup>th</sup> century painting while also highlighting the crucial differences between framing and perspective in art on the one hand and the mobile framing and the blocking of view in film on the other.

That the attempt to draw – or alternatively transgress – borders between artistic and film practices, and between disciplines, may not be a neutral intervention by a disinterested artist or theorist is the theme of the contributions by Jens Schröter, Klemens Gruber and Antonio Somaini. In a contrastive reading of Rosalind Krauss’s *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (1999) on the one hand and Dick Higgins’s *Horizons: The Poetics and Theory of the Intermedia* (1984) on the other, Schröter demonstrates that the whole discussion on “pure media” (Krauss) versus the fusion of media (Higgins) is structurally political. For while Krauss critically interrogates intermediality as a



possible capitulation to the capitalist spectacle, Higgins condemns the pure media as signs of capitalist division of labour and praises intermediality as the dawn of a Communist society. In a similar vein, Klemens Gruber discusses the political meaning of Gustav Klutsis's "Loudspeaker Stands" from 1922. This Latvian Constructivist avant-garde artist produced intermedial theatrical pieces that involved loudspeakers, radios and film screens. The purpose of this technical design was multiply political: not only did it transmit information about the Communist Revolution, it also celebrated in a typically constructivist fashion the functional beauty of the world of machines which made the human presence on stage superfluous.

What this insight in the "politics of intermediality" means in our contemporary image society is demonstrated in a second article by Schröter on the 3D display technologies used by the US army, which we can understand as a fusion of the flat screen of painting and the volumetric display of sculpture. The representation of objects in 3D space enables the military personnel to better grasp the spatial context of the object viewed and thus to better control the position of the enemy in space. In his contribution on the transmedial migration of the surveying eye, Antonio Somaini equally draws a disconcerting parallel between the intermedial crossing of borders and the emergence of total surveillance in space. Analyzing a series of works realized in the media of performance and photography (Sophie Calle), video installation (Dan Graham), and found footage cinema (Harun Farocki), Somaini shows how the act of visual surveillance can be enacted in different media while maintaining its defining characteristic: the disciplining power of an asymmetric gaze which is present across various media in social space, thanks to the proliferation of video cameras, monitors and satellite communication, and the links between them.

In the final essay Maaïke Lauwaert considers intermediality from the point of view of a funding agency, namely the Dutch Mondriaan Foundation for visual arts, design and heritage. The project applications received by the foundation are increasingly intermedial; they mirror a changing cultural field in which collaborations between neighbouring disciplines, fields of knowledge and experts from these fields increase. The article considers the role of new media within this transformation and outlines the ways in which the foundation deals with intermediality when it comes to the assessment of applications.

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# Intermediality and Media Historiography in the Digital Era<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** This paper approaches the concept of intermediality as a form of operation, as work in progress. A historiography of intermedia processes, including so called new or digital media would have to unfold in a specific social and historical context. On the one hand, it is closely linked to particular artistic, material, media-related and communicative forms of action; on the other hand, it should always be seen in the context of production of meanings that grow from these actions for a particular historical audience or historical users. In short: intermediality is closely intertwined with particular social and institutional practices. Intermedia research is not that new as we might suppose. Following that statement this article presents a short retrospective of the concept of intermediality, of the *axe de pertinence intermédiaire*, where its interactions, overlaps and differences with regard to the notions of intertextuality, hybridity and intertiality are re-constructed and the options or advantages of an intermedia historiography are clarified. An archaeology of intermedia processes should not be reduced to a monolithic paradigm of “materialities” or “meanings,” but should rather guide us toward new degrees of complexity in the research of intermediality in the digital era.

## 1. The Intermedia Research Axis as Work in Progress

The concept of “intermediality” still seems to enjoy high esteem among media theorists. Its success in the past twenty years proves that the concept evidently addresses central research concerns in the areas of media theory and media history.<sup>2</sup> Yet despite or perhaps because of this, we should remain cautious and critical toward a research axis of intermediality, and should maintain a certain reserve – as toward any theoretical phenomenon strongly subject to changing fashion.

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from German by Miriam Sentner, M.A.

<sup>2</sup> If we consider the most recent publications of representatives of so-called New Histories, we can now find there a large number of references to the relevance of an intermedia research perspective for media theory.

Such a reserve or distance, in a hermeneutic sense, toward this concept, regarding it as no more than a “Suchbegriff”, a search term (cf. Moser 2007), may prove helpful to anyone venturing to take stock provisionally of the *axe de pertinence intermédiatique* (as Roger Odin has proposed). If for no other reason, taking stock is provisional because the concept of “intermediality” is bound up in an ongoing process of development.

In spite of various, recurrently formulated research desiderata, and in spite of all attempts to draft a self-contained body of theory, intermediality research at present does not possess a coherent system which would allow a grasp of all intermedia phenomena (cf. Mertens 2000). Hence it is necessary to reflect in the future also on the theoretical foundations of intermediality research, to further study their mutual relations with other approaches in media studies. Above all, we should not neglect the theoretical perspectives opened by a media history approach. The systems proposed hitherto, be they structuralist or post-structuralist in kind, fail to do justice in almost all cases to the aims formulated in preambles – though they often claim to do so.

Their analytical categories, which cover only a very limited range of intermedia phenomena and processes, often emerge as inadequate, while the fields of “intermedia” which are used as examples in intermediality research are in need of discussion and extension (cf. Wolf 2006).<sup>3</sup> Intermediality research often remains within the shadow of literary theory, dealing mainly or even exclusively with (inter)media relations in literature or being guided by literary theories such as intertextuality concepts. In other words, in these cases there is no consideration of the complexity of mutual relations between audiovisual and digital media.

I strongly doubt that it will be possible to develop a comprehensive media theory system that embraces all processes involved. For this reason, instead of such a super- or mega-system I would propose a historical, descriptive, inductive, and perhaps more laborious approach that leads us step by step toward an archaeology and a geography of intermedia processes, including so called new or digital media (cf. Bolter and Grusin 2002).<sup>4</sup> From this premise, an attempt to approach the concept of intermediality will itself become a form of operation: it is work in progress.

In doing this, we should never forget that the concept of intermediality unfolds in a specific social and historical context. On the one hand, it is closely linked to

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<sup>3</sup> In this context, compare for instance the helpful connection between “frame theory,” narratology and intermediality research, as proposed by Werner Wolf.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the concept of remediation developed by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin in their book.

particular artistic, material, media-related and communicative forms of action; on the other, it should always be seen in the context of production of meanings that grow from these actions for a particular historical audience or historical users. In short: intermediality is closely intertwined with particular social and institutional practices. One of the essential factors to be explored further in future will thus be the sociality of intermediality (cf. Froger and Müller 2007).

As a concept and as a term, intermediality must always be situated in a historical, academic, social, and institutional context. Hence the history of intermediality leads us for instance to the development of the humanities, the natural sciences, and the social sciences from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century; it leads us to the differentiation of diverse academic disciplines (and division into various “arts”?); it leads us to the ideas of the Romantic period, to modern art (cf. Zima 1998) and to academic institutions, in particular the Western university concept.

Accordingly, the rise of the concept of intermediality can also be interpreted as an institutional and territorial strategy (cf. Cisneros 2007, 15–28) in this sense intermediality would appear as a kind of reflex to ensure the survival of university institutions, ones that can no longer found their academic legitimation upon maintaining a strict separation between forms of knowledge. From this perspective, the concept of intermediality (like that of ekphrasis) would appear at once as a sign of the decline or termination of the Western university as an institution and as a starting point for a research instrument that would allow us to observe ourselves at work as researchers.

Must we then see the history of the concept of intermediality as a symptom for the end of the university? This provocative question raised by James Cisneros (Cisneros 2007) invites us to the following little expedition into the history and toward an archaeology of intermediality.

## **2. Intermediality: A New Approach in Media Studies?**

Let us take a look at the history of this concept – or, better, at the histories surrounding this still developing concept. The starting point for the temporary and provisional way which I suggested in the 1980s to narrow down the topic, and which I would like to recall here, was the dynamic of media relations which called for a suitable analytic concept – as well as the connection between various approaches oscillating between (neo)formalist, post-structuralist, sociological, aesthetic, discursive, and historical foundations.

For myself and for some colleagues, the point of departure for this new approach was the necessity to account for an irrefutable fact: it had simply become unacceptable to see “media” as isolated monads. The familiar media theories and media histories were no longer able to meet research expectations; it had become necessary to turn one’s attention toward contemporary audiovisual phenomena and their mutual relations, and to study their complex interactions.

At the time, the concept of intermediality was based on the assumption that any single medium harbours within itself the structures and operations of another or several other media, and that within its specific context it integrates issues, concepts, and principles that arose in the course of the social and technological history of media and of Western visual arts (cf. 1996, 70; 2000, 105–134). The primary task of intermediality research hence appeared to be to elucidate the “unstable relations of various media to each other and the (historical) functions of these relations.” The following aims were paramount for me: the analysis of

- a) intermedia processes of specific media productions,
- b) interactions between various dispositives and
- c) a new intermedia foundation of media historiography or historiographies.

Even if the contours and scope of the concept of “intermediality” still needed more precision, it was clear from the outset that media are to be understood as processes in which continuing cross-effects between various concepts occur, and that these are not to be confused with any simple addition or juxtaposition. At the time, it was already taken for granted that an intermedia research approach should not be based only on a synchronous analysis of media, but that it should aim to elucidate the historical development of media and thus prepare the way for a new media historiography. These basic considerations still seem valid to me nowadays, as we shall see below.

### **3. “Intermediality:” A Short Retrospective**

The etymology of the term intermediality leads us back to the game of “being in between” – a game that compares various values and/or parameters. It takes us to the material and ideal differences between the persons and objects represented – the materiality of media. The question how far and with what methodological procedures intermedia processes of audiovisual productions are at all reconstructible was not adequately considered, to be sure, in the context of early studies. From the viewpoint of the present, the assumption that intermediality is an extremely difficult phenomenon to grasp, one that becomes accessible only

from the traces it leaves within audiovisions (Paech 1997 and 2008) seems an important point of departure – regarding the perspectives of studying intermedia works as well as the status of such studies. Accordingly, I consider an intermedia “search for traces” to be a very rewarding approach.

Although some colleagues these days quite justifiably demand an extension of the theoretical foundation of the concept of intermediality, the majority of models that, unlike Paech’s search for traces, seek to make the concept of intermediality applicable, appear less convincing to me – whether conceived in a meta-disciplinary, taxonomic, or systems-theoretical manner (Spielmann 1998).

From this angle, the disappointments or *illusions perdues* (Méchoulan 2003, 11 and 15) regarding the possibilities of an *axe de pertinence intermédiaire* would turn out to be mainly results of exaggerated expectations, comparable to the disappointed expectations that we were able to find as regards intertextuality concepts or semiotic systems. My contribution to intermediality is thus designed not so much as a meta-element of an intermedia theory of media theories; it is rather characterized by its opening of the possibility to take a fresh look at media history or histories. This is because the claim to devise a meta-theory of media theories would, precisely considered, be a rather naïve endeavour which would fail to do justice to the complexity of intermedia processes and phenomena – which in turn reveal themselves in the infinite number of possible intermedia combinations and interactions.

Of course, the purpose can only ever be to grasp typical manifestations of intermediality theoretically and taxonomically. But how would it be possible to develop a system for all kinds of conceivable or already realized interactions? Owing to this doubt, I prefer to regard the research axis of intermediality from a historical rather than from a theoretical perspective.

The discussions revolving around “intermediality” have shown, moreover, that it is necessary to demarcate this concept as against “interartiality” (cf. Paech 1996, 17; Moser 2007; Clüver 1996). The features that both concepts indisputably have in common, such as the transformation process of particular artefacts, should not divert our attention away from the fact that both concepts lead us to different research areas: intermediality includes social, technological, and media-related factors; interartiality by contrast restricts its scope to a reconstruction of interactions between the arts and artistic creation processes, and hence inscribes itself rather within a poetological tradition.

It goes without saying that the emergence of an intermedia research perspective is not merely an after-effect of the new, postmodern relations between media and

media productions. The rise of such a perspective owes something also to a new paradigm in the humanities: it bears witness to a paradigm change from textuality to materiality (cf. Gumbrecht 2003, 173–178). In this area, one can indeed discern a change in the general orientation of the humanities: the division of labour that took place between the various disciplines in the humanities and the natural sciences around the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with an orientation toward “text” and toward hermeneutic readability of various kinds of texts, served chiefly (and inevitably) as fertile ground for a need to reunite the separate academic disciplines – at first in the shape of a “textual reading of the world,” later in the 1960s and 1970s in the shape of a turn toward various intertextualities. As we now know, the interpretive potential of such a “textual universe” just had to come to a dead end – one from which the materiality of communication offered a welcome escape (Gumbrecht and Pfeiffer 1988).

Whether explicitly or implicitly, the question of materiality forms the premise for any approach aiming to understand the interactions between various media or media “materialities.” That is because interactions of heterogeneous elements allow us to regard intermedia processes as the site of an “in-between,” a volatile “between the media” whose traces are to be found only in their materials or media products.

The concept of intermediality thus returns us to the materiality of media as well as to the interaction between materials. These aspects should not, however, utterly exclude the question of social and historical meanings and functions of these processes. Or, in other words, the *axe de pertinence intermédiaire* must not neglect the making of meaning that results from its very materiality, even if materiality is just what it highlights. An intermedia approach that embraces this aspect would then allow us to reconstruct the historical genesis of these complex processes, and to account for the forms of media interactions as well as their meanings (Gumbrecht 2003). This seems to me a promising perspective, which I will explain later with the example of so called digital media.

Before I develop some of the essential possibilities of an intermedia approach for media historiography, I wish to insert a little excursus on the relations between “intermediality,” “intertextuality,” and “hybridity.”



## 4. Intermediality, Intertextuality, Hybridity

### 4.1. *Intermediality and Intertextuality*

In my opinion, parallels can be discerned between the rise of the concept of intermediality and that of intertextuality. Both terms were initially received with some reservation by the research community. As they made their way, however, meeting with growing acceptance, their original concepts were enriched with other approaches – which, however, led to a blurring of their contours. Various overlaps even occurred between several denotations and connotations of both concepts. Thus in the 1970s numerous processes that would later be described as intermedia phenomena were categorized as intertextual (Rajewsky 2002). Let us briefly recall a few central points of contact between both concepts in the course of their history.

By expanding Bakhtin's dialogic principle, Julia Kristeva combined the concept of Russian formalism with the tradition of French semiotics and the postmodern from the group *Tel Quel*. Thus intertext gained the quality of a cultural phenomenon interacting complexly with other phenomena. The theoretical foundation for a study of the dynamic of (cultural) texts and their "authors" is formed by two of Kristeva's core statements: "nous appellerons intertextualité cette interaction textuelle qui se produit à l'intérieur d'un seul texte; [...] pour le sujet connaissant, l'intertextualité est une notion qui sera l'indice de la façon dont un texte lit l'histoire et s'insère en elle" (Kristeva 1969, 443).

According to Kristeva, (cultural) intertexts are distinguished by their constant reorganization and redistribution of different sign systems. This means that these texts contain a "transition from one sign system to another."<sup>5</sup> Production of meaning may occur, for instance, in the shape of a transfer from oral narrative to written text; a transformation of several different sign systems, such as that of carnival, of poetry, and related phenomena, is also conceivable. Any signifying practice accordingly emerges as a field of transpositions of different signifier systems. The result is a pathway leading to sites of enunciation and to objects that always carry the connotation *pluriel* and *éclaté* within themselves. In short: Kristeva's approach leads to the concept of polysemy (Kristeva 1974, 59).

Roland Barthes's famous dictum that we are "swimming in an ocean of intertexts" leads us to a dynamic universe of texts in which the function of intertexts can be understood as a kind of meta-structure of literary production and reception (Riffaterre 1981, 4–7). Starting from this meta-structure, Genette

<sup>5</sup> "... un passage d'un système de signes à un autre."

proposed the term *transtextualité*, which he divides into five sub-categories (Genette 1982; Müller 1996):<sup>6</sup> *intertextualité*, *paratextualité*, *métatextualité*, *hypertextualité*, and *archi-textualité*. This proposal has proved to be quite useful in the field of narratology (including film and audiovisual media).

Genette's employment of the *axe de pertinence intertextuel*, which for Kristeva was still open to intermedia processes, is in a way symptomatic for the development of the concept. The concept of intertextuality turned out to be a useful instrument for the analysis of literary texts, since it enables an exploration of mutual relations and connections between (more or less literary) texts. Yet at the same time this orientation also led to a situation in which attention was restricted to literary analysis and the study of written texts. The consequence was that specific media aspects, such as materiality or reception of media, were neglected. Intermedia processes were not adequately considered, or, if at all, were regarded as a marginal sub-category of the taxonomic system of intertextuality. Plett, for instance, speaks of a sign transfer in the framework of "media substitutions" (Plett 1991, 20); for him the category of intermediality is, however, subordinated to the forms of intertextual transformations that are oriented toward a "media substitution." In this respect, we have to conclude that Plett's approach neglects the dynamic and interactive quality inherent in the concept of intermediality.

For all that, from the vantage point of the present, intertextuality represents a key concept in the area of cultural and literary studies. Without any doubt it is one that, even if it enjoyed its greatest successes in the 1980s, still proves its usefulness for many forms of analysis. Hence it makes sense to ask ourselves, in the context of the category of "intertextuality," where we might locate the specific usefulness of the concept of intermediality – what might be the advantage or added value of this other *gros mot* as against intertextuality.

In my opinion, the potential of the concept of intermediality lies in the fact that intermediality overcomes the restriction of studying the medium of "literature," that it enables a differentiated analysis of the interactions and interferences *between* a number of various media, thus enriching the orientation of research with the aspect of materiality and the social function of these processes.

Before I go on to explain the relevance of an intermedia research axis with some comments on an intermedia history of the digital, it seems helpful to demarcate "intermediality" for a moment from a further term that has become fashionable, i.e. that of the "hybrid" or of "hybridization."

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<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed discussion of these concepts from an intermedia perspective, cf. the comments in my volume *Intermedialität* (1996, 93–103.)

## 4.2. Intermediality and Hybridity

Like the terms “multimedia,” “intermedia,” and “intermediality,” in numerous scholarly discourses the terms “hybrid,” “hybridity,” and “hybridization” are currently in vogue. Speaking of the “hybridity” of social and media-related phenomena clearly opens helpful perspectives for description and analysis of a large number of manifestations and processes (cf. Müller 2006).

Possible reasons for the boom of the “hybrid” are doubtlessly to be found in social and media-related processes of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ones that are closely related to (post)modern developments in Western societies and their media landscapes. “Heterogeneities,” “eclecticisms,” “collages,” “fusions,” and the like are regarded as typical manifestations of the current “epoch” revealing themselves in social and media-related areas. Social and media theories take account of these manifestations by attempting to grasp them by means of the concept of hybridization. From this perspective, we cannot doubt that parallels to the historical development of the concept of intermediality ensue. It is not difficult to understand that that concept targets on (post)modern forms and histories of media mixture – or, provocatively speaking, of “media muddle.” In most concept drafts for a theory of intermediality, “hybridity” or “hybridization” is used without further reflection as synonymous with a description of intermedia processes (Müller 1996).<sup>7</sup> As an example of this undifferentiated usage and the lack of demarcation in the context of intermediality research, I would point to the definition of “hybridization” in *Lexikon Medientheorie und Medienwissenschaft* (Schanze 2002, 141)<sup>8</sup> as well as the most recent proposals by Irina Rajewsky, who includes “hybrid media” in the concept of “plurimedia media” (Rajewsky 2002, 197) without offering an explicit distinction between “hybridity” and “intermediality.”

This fact may serve to indicate the necessity and usefulness of a mutual definition of both concepts, which I will attempt in the following.

The etymological reconstruction of the “alluring” and “dark guiding formula” (Schneider 1997, 7) of the hybrid leads us to a mixed form of two concepts from two language systems, the Latin *hibrida* (bastard, mixed blood) and the Greek

<sup>7</sup> In my earlier publications, while proposing a distinction between intertextuality and intermediality, I only offered an implicit demarcation and clarification of the relationship between “intermediality” and “hybridity.”

<sup>8</sup> “Hybridization can be found throughout the primary intermedialities of communicative practices, both in oral and in literary cultures” (my transl.; “Hybridisierung findet sich durchgängig in den primären Intermedialitäten kommunikativer Praxen sowohl in oralen als auch literalen Kulturen”). It is clear that “hybridization” is understood here as a sub-category of intermediality.

*hubris* – excess (cf. Samoyault 2001, 175). The term “hybrid” is thus founded on the process it designates. It denotes and connotes moral (later: artistic) and (more or less) excessive transformations of beings and objects. We can already discern this important function of the concept in numerous hybrids of ancient Egyptian civilization. There, by contrast to the more negatively marked valuations of the Latin-Greek coinage, mythological human-natural and human-animal hybrids such as Anubis the god of death (a “human” shape with a dog’s head) enjoy high esteem as paradoxical and ambivalent manifestations and mediators between different dimensions of life.

If we glance at current usage of the terms “hybrid” and “hybridization” in the cultural sciences, we will find quite a heterogeneous picture. Meanings range from “multimedia interactions leading to the formation of communicative subsystems (as in newsgroups and chatrooms)” (Schanze 2002, 141)<sup>9</sup> to the disintegration of dichotomous gender roles in gender studies and to postmodern identity diffusions and crisis-laden dissolutions of the subject: “le cauchemar de l’altérité intériorisé dans le moi, qui devient autre à l’intérieur de lui-même ou bien se découvre du point de vue de l’autre, se voit et s’écoute de son extérieur” (Bernadi 2001, 117).

Hybridity plunges the subject into a crisis which makes it aware of its incoherence, its multiplicity, and its own negation. If we focus our attention on the contextual usages and definitions of the concept of “hybridization” in media studies, we can reconstruct these main tendencies:<sup>10</sup> following Schneider, we can find that the terms “hybridity” and “hybridization” are put to use in a large number of discourses, so that from the viewpoint of media studies a need for interdisciplinary clarification and differentiation emerges for these terms as well, to prevent them from falling prey to random usage.

In media studies, it is generally McLuhan who is named as one of the fathers of the (post)modern theory of the hybrid, since he speaks of the tremendous energies set free by hybrids (McLuhan 1964 [1999]). Several decades before McLuhan, whose ideas we will discuss more fully below, Bakhtin already formulated his hardly noticed hypotheses on the hybrid and on hybridization, a logic of “either way” (Bakhtin 1979, 244). The hybrid is to be understood as the ability to generate an orchestration of the image of reality in the novel. This may be done by specific methods such as “hybridization,” dialogic interrelations between languages, and pure dialogues. Hybridization thus means “[. . .] a mixture of two social languages within a single utterance, a meeting, in the arena of this

<sup>9</sup> My translation: “multimediale Interaktionen, die zur Herausbildung kommunikativer Subsysteme (z.B. newsgroups, chatrooms) führen.“

<sup>10</sup> I am again following the very informative text by Schneider, “Einleitung.”

utterance, of two different linguistic awarenesses which are separated by epoch or social differentiation (or by both of these)” (Schneider 1997, 24).<sup>11</sup>

By contrast to unintentional hybrids in language mixture, intentional hybrids require functionally differentiated societies as well as a momentum of artistic design. Unfortunately we cannot dwell on the implications of this distinction for linguistics and literary studies) (Schneider 1997, 24), and can only add a brief reference to this category’s relevance for genre and discourse theories.

As already mentioned, the concept of the hybrid and the bastard plays a decisive role in McLuhan’s universe of communication theory. With his category of the “bastard,” McLuhan explicitly draws on the etymological roots of the term, integrating it within contexts of functional history: “The hybrid or the meeting of two media is a moment of truth and revelation from which new form is born. For the parallel between two media holds us on the frontiers between forms that snap us out of the Narcissus-narcosis. The moment of the meeting of media is a moment of freedom and release from the ordinary trance and numbness imposed by them on our senses” (McLuhan 1999, 55).

Media-related hybrids accordingly set energies free which liberate our perception from habitualized patterns. Without sharing all of McLuhan’s reflections – especially some postulated and problematic interlinkings between procedures using technical equipment (and related forms of our perception), such as the movie image by contrast to the (large-scale?) image of television – we can maintain that his references to connections between hybridizations and turning points in media history appear very helpful. “Hybridization” for him, like our concept of “intermediality,” means a historical category that manifests itself in numerous mixed forms of media.

In the current discussion in media studies, the term hybridization is distinguished by denotations and connotations that are not so much media-historical in nature but rather generally theoretical. It is directed toward human-machine relations (Cubitt) (cf. Schneider, 1997, 33ff) interaction between the biological and the mechanical (Haraway), physicalities, technologies, and society (Stone), music and image relations in videoclips (Kaplan), construction of new a-chronological time patterns and links (Couchot), interaction between the real and the virtual (Boissier), code-crossing (Welsch), dissolution of binary gender oppositions (De Lauretis), and overcoming dichotomous categories by rhizomatic formations (Deleuze and Guattari).

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<sup>11</sup> My translation: “[...] die Vermischung zweier sozialer Sprachen innerhalb einer einzigen Äußerung, das Aufeinandertreffen zweier verschiedener, durch die Epoche und die soziale Differenzierung (oder sowohl durch diese als auch durch jene) geschiedener sprachlicher Bewußtseine in der Arena dieser Äußerung.“

This short excerpt from the application contexts of the concept of hybridization shows that, with some justice, there is a current demand in media studies that the category of “hybridization” be subjected to a more precise analysis of observation levels, to temporalization and operationalization, to prevent it from degenerating to a general catch-all term (cf. Schneider 1997, 57).

If this term is not directed solely toward hybrid “objects” but increasingly also toward processes and the “logic of either way,” it may indeed prove complementary to our notions of “intermediality.” The common characterization of hybrid media as a “combination of hitherto isolated media units or materials” moves them closer to our category of “multimediality,” which is distinct from “intermediality” owing to its “additive” principle.

Meanwhile, as our short excursus on the concept of “hybridity” and its uses in current media study discourses demonstrates, an understanding of this not so much as static and “object-centred” but rather as dynamic and process-oriented has developed in recent decades. The later application contexts of the hybrid as mentioned above do show helpful parallels to my ideas of intermediality, as for instance in the specific achievements and functions of media transformations.

Regarding our research axis of an interlinked and intermedia-oriented media history, the concept of intermediality does offer two advantages whose value we should not underestimate:

a) The level of development now achieved for the intermedia-related approach enables more clearly differentiated, synchronic and diachronic studies of media interactions than is possible by means of the rather general ideas of the hybrid – even though a small number of illuminating and relevant studies on the “hybridity” of media development exist (cf. Spangenberg 1997).

b) Since the category of the hybrid is transferred explicitly to just about all social phenomena and current conditions of society, it incurs a far greater risk than intermediality of losing itself in social and media-related generalities and random usages. My suggestion of a research axis of intermediality explicitly includes the social dimension and function of these processes, while considering these throughout in relation to corresponding (inter)media processes or interactions between various cultural and media-related series. (This is also to say that I wish to distance myself from current tendencies of a “pan-intermedialization of social phenomena” which seek to subsume such processes as migration movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries under this category.) This search for traces should continue regarding other concepts, such as (post-modern?) New History and the role played therein by the concept of “intermediality.”

But let us – finally – take a short glance at the options for an intermedia history of digital media (cf. Müller, 2010a).

## 5. The Digital Era as a Challenge for Intermedia Research

### 5.1. Digital Media and Intermedia History

Without any doubt, the digital media (in whatever way we may conceive of them) (Bruns 2008, 542ff)<sup>12</sup> turn out to be a great challenge for the intermedia research axis. Some time ago, Lev Manovich described the effects of digital cultures and networks as *cultural totalization*. This means that the still rapidly expanding digital nets would lead to a global network of various individual media, institutions, dispositives and infrastructures, and thus to a digital merging of phenomena that formerly existed independently of each other (cf. Manovich 2001). Numerous media theorists take the view that media forms in the digital age forfeit their materiality and material aspects, and that, having once assumed a virtual form, they become reshaped and recombined. This assumption appears valid, yet does it also inevitably mean that intermediality or intermedia processes (especially regarding material aspects) are deleted or cancelled, as some colleagues assert? (cf. Spielmann 1995, 117). I do not believe that is so.

Concerning this question, at least two arguments are relevant: media, also digital media, cannot and should not be reduced only to their material aspects. Despite all efforts to detach oneself from categories such as “sign,” “content,” “meaning,” “genre” and “format,” these continue to play an important role in any discourse on mediality and intermediality.

If we were to agree to this view, it would mean that intermedia processes would not disappear in the “general virtuality of the material,” but that they would continue to be effective and return in a changed form or with a shift of focus (cf. Paech and Schröter 2008, 585).<sup>13</sup> “Intermediality” does not stop when it reaches the so-called new media: we find it “in” digital media, where we need to explore and reconstruct new, “re-medialized” forms of intermediality. This task at present appears to be the greatest challenge for our intermedia *axe de pertinence*.

One of the central challenges, in my opinion, for just about any intermedia approach to so-called digital media turns out to be the dynamics and interrelations between media, materialities and contents, as well as a reconstruction of the

<sup>12</sup> Karin Bruns has rightly pointed out that there is no such thing as a “paradigm proper to the digital.”

<sup>13</sup> I agree with Jens Schröter’s proposals.



conditions framing these interactions. A historiology or archaeology of intermedia processes should not be reduced to a monolithic paradigm of materialities or meanings, (Gumbrecht 2003, 175) but should rather guide us toward new degrees of complexity in media research. Consequently, the relations between meaning and materiality, between significance and media would be conceivable neither as “complementary” nor as “mutually exclusive,” but as a balancing act and an oscillation that needs to be reconstructed with careful consideration of the historical conditions prevailing in each case. In this research perspective, McLuhan’s (inadequate) hypothesis that the “old” media diffuse into the “new and digital” media, would need to be updated as a history of intermedia encounters in the digital domain between various technological and cultural series with their historically fluctuating borders, institutional imaginations, formats and contents. Included as a central feature in this historiography would be a reconstruction of the *social functions* tied to the intermedia processes, allowing us to combine physical and spatial conditions of media with a construction of the meaning of their formats (cf. Hickethier, 1994).<sup>14</sup> That in this case we will be confronted with further variations or modalities (Elleström 2010) of intermediality differing from the levels of the “analogic” has been demonstrated by Schröter. This ‘new’ intermedia level does not, however, imply a termination of intermedia processes, but rather their continuation on a different scale, on one in which *ideas* of genres, formats, functions in re-medialized or recycled form play with the user’s imaginative capacity. An intermedia-oriented cultural history of digital media and their social functions would thus have to embrace the social processes of meaning constitution.

At this juncture, the question when a *digital* medium turns into a *digital* medium (as soon as digital chips/gadgets are used in recording, storage, transmission and reproducing devices or only by assuming other, *functionally* defined *qualities* such as the surely well-known factors of interactivity, sociality, and immersion offers) and the question in what societal-historical functions this “digitality” manifests itself becomes one of the central research axes of this history. Concepts or research axes on the intermediality of the digital would need to take account of these questions. Now, however, in a paradigmatic way three test cases of historical intermediality research of the digital are to be considered.

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<sup>14</sup> As for instance Hickethier has demonstrated for the history of German television in the 1950s and 1960s.



## 5.2. Internet News Pages – a First Test Case

The internet news offered by journals, television channels, and other providers have become some of the most successful products or formats of the Web 2.0. Long dismissed as a kind of cheap and transient spin-offs from “proper” print or television media, they nowadays appear to have moved to the centre of interest for producers and consumers. During the past few years, the perception of online departments of digital journals has completely changed: in the beginning the work done there was taken to be marginal and a *quantité négligeable* of “true journalism.” This, incidentally, is a certain parallel to the beginnings of television, when at least in Nazi Germany only “unambitious” or “politically unreliable” journalists were demoted to television. Meanwhile, internet news has become a very real and significant presence – and editors, schools of journalism, and media theorists need to account for this.

Let us take a quick glance at a page from *Focus Online*. Regarding our axis of questions, I would like to point to two relevant phenomena.

See: Fig. 1. Even if this internet page at first glance seems like a kind of digital ragbag, an accumulation, combination, and ultimately “merging” of media that in our imagination previously existed as *distinct* and *individual* media, this does not by any means delete our *memory* and our *image* of the original media configuration of analogic “individual media” and their correlating *genres* and *formats* (Bruns 2008, 543ff).<sup>15</sup> In other words: the surface of these pages leads to a shift of our knowledge about historical media configurations, about constructed and imagined media borders, while at the same time it enables playing with some essential possibilities of these “old” media. We make decisions and navigate on these pages according to our *expectations* regarding the profiles and the *added value* of the diverse elements, which range from texts and pictures to short videos or television news. In this process, the web pages appear to be a kind of media amalgam (similar to the way Robida in 1883 described the “téléphonoscope,” the “television,” in his utopian novel *Le vingtième siècle*), which is far more than merely the sum of its individual elements and possibilities. In this perspective, the user-related (further) development of these configurations and of their potential interplay and combinations appears as one of the greatest challenges of the future – both for intermedia-oriented media studies and for online journalism itself (cf. Tholen, 1999, 16 and 22).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> It would surely be a rewarding effort to compare the term as suggested by me (derived from the context of genre-historical and functional theories) with the profile formations proposed by Karin Bruns.

<sup>16</sup> These processes could be understood in Georg Christoph Tholen’s sense, as “media-unspecific representability of media-specific forms of representation” (“medienunspezifische Darstellbarkeit von medienspezifischen Darstellungsweisen”).

However, a further important aspect needs attention. Quite clearly, these pages play with a large number of historically evolved configurations and formats. This applies to the relationship between written texts and pictures which, despite the phenomenon's supposedly innovative character, is still guided by the patterns of the *first magazines* or *illustrated journals* in the second half of the nineteenth century; it applies to the photo galleries alluding to *public albums*, *pulp* and *glossy magazines* or *mass circulation tabloids*; it applies to video news which refer to *television news formats*; and it applies finally to videoclips which, by showing accidents, airplane crashes or natural disasters, place themselves in the *vaudeville* tradition which offered, and still offers, its viewers the extraordinary frisson of pleasure in confronting menaces and scares of our everyday (and not so everyday) life. The McLuhanesque ideas of a "technological-media cannibalism" are hence in need of an intermedia genre-theoretical and genre-historical revision.

If we follow our intermedia research axis, we should ask ourselves what happens with all these configurations, these genre and format patterns, when they are re-medialized in a digital context. How do they still manage to attract the user's/navigator's attention and motivate her or him to a "reading" of these sites?

### 5.3. Video and Film as Second Test Case

Video games and their historical functions evidently appear as a new challenge for the intermedia research axis, as I will briefly explain by using the examples of video games and the motion picture *Doom*. [Figs. 2–3.]

*Doom* is just one of numerous instances in which a game is re-medialized and transformed into a motion picture. Without detailing the contents of the motion picture or the possibilities of the game, we can classify it as "first-person shooter." Concerning our question about the theoretical options of the research axis of intermediality and the concept of "configuration" for studying digital media, I would like to call attention rather to the following processes: in games of this kind, the player/user has to solve a series of problems, such as eliminating aliens or superhuman monsters (Bouwknegt 2008, 101–121). The individual acts in the game are thus generated by a set of rules that enable the players a choice of various options for action, so that they can conclude the game in their own manner.

A film version of this game, or other games, must transform these configurative principles into a new configuration and form of narrative linearity (at least if the film is to follow Hollywood's traditional, transparent narrative patterns). Regarding our intermedia research axis, this leads us to a conflict between

ludological or narratological explanatory options, one that is solvable (cf. Bouwknecht 2009). Remedializing the manifold digital game patterns in a film embraces highly complex intermedia processes which lead, among other things, to a reduction of numerous game possibilities in order to enable a coherent narrative form – without destroying the fascination of the *topos* or the theme. What instruments can our intermedia *axe de pertinence* give us here, to grasp and analyze these processes?

A combination of the concept of *remedialization* and the historically oriented research axis of *intermediality* will guide us toward new insights – regarding both a recycling of narrative patterns in the digital game world and a recycling of game patterns in movies. In this sense, the relevance of intermediality research for the historical reconstruction of configurative processes within and between *games* and *movies* should emerge clearly. Let us then turn toward our last instance of digital paradigms.

#### 5.4. *Second Life* as Third Test Case

Even if the phenomenon of *Second Life* – after months of excitement and public interest in the digitalized world – has soon lost much of its attraction, it is still a fascinating test case for the applicability and relevance of an intermedia research axis regarding Web 2.0.

It is interesting to see and to experience that the makers and/or avatars of *Second Life* not only lead a double life within the virtual, spatial-temporal configurations of the platform (declaring this would be somewhat banal), but that one of the central elements of this game with (and in) virtual worlds can be seen in the multi-layered use of media-related and generic patterns of *cinematic* or other *audiovisual* kinds. [Figs. 4–5.] In other words: we find many cases in which the makers/producers/users take cinematic elements or elements of television with the potential for action and narrative patterns that are peculiar to each as starting point for *Second Life*. Speaking with Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein 1922, 2.0231 and 2.0271), the *virtual* platform would serve here as configurative basis for images from the *real* world (while we prefer to “bracket” in a phenomenological sense the question of an eventual “isomorphic relation” between these worlds).

At first glance, the interference between the “real” and “second” worlds and the media-related energies of *Second Life* do not seem especially significant for a ‘unifying’ digital representation as concerns our intermedia *axe de pertinence* – unlike some other processes that do indeed represent a challenge.

In this context, a focus will come to be on the question how we can investigate the material and semiological possibilities of interplay between “virtual materiality” and “content/meaning” of the various avatars’ actions within or between the different “locations” of *Second Life*. A decisive role should be attached in this context to the aspect of treating historical media configurations, forms, genres, and formats. Also, intermediality research would need to analyze the function of the images’ digital nature in relation to the so-called “live character” and “interactivity” of the dispositive. What happens, for instance, with narrative structures and elements of literary genres, or cinematic or television genres, when these are placed in the dynamic virtual space and the narrations of *Second Life*? What could be the social and cultural functions of these and other intermedia processes, and how could we expose and study the historical functions of some modalities?

## 6. The Potential of an Intermedia Research Axis in the Digital Era

In concluding, let me return once again to the beginning of this article: despite some disillusionments or disappointments (which I actually consider to be salutary, since an introduction of new terms and concepts should be accompanied with a great deal of soberness and a minimum of illusions), the *axe de pertinence intermédiaire* still seems to me a promising research perspective. The history/histories and prehistory/prehistories of this *Suchbegriff* (search term) have shown that there are several pathways we might follow in the jungle of intermedia processes. The concept of intermediality has thus not turned out to be a comfortable highway for any kind of theoretical or historical expedition into the media landscape. On the contrary: it requires considerable effort to develop clearly structured questions concerning theory and history; moreover, it will not deliver the system of systems that so many media theorists have been hoping for. As concerns media historiography, it turns out to be a useful perspective that should lead us to “integrative media research.” In employing it, we should always bear in mind the importance of reconstructing the social and historical functions of intermedia processes (cf. Müller, 2010b).

Despite some relevant and interesting reflections on media theory that are currently being offered (and in which I am participating with contributions of my own), I believe that the greatest potential for intermediality studies can be found in the *historical* dimension: in an intermedia archaeology of media within the

networks of cultural and technological series. Such an archaeology should include functional aspects, and should take into account the fact that intermedia processes seem to develop a tendency to increasing complexity – not least on account of growing possibilities to combine media, techno-cultural series, genre traditions, narrations, and the new challenges posed by so-called interactive media.

Regarding concepts of the intermedia research axis, I have done here no more than offer for discussion a few initial questions and aphorisms which I hope can make evident that so-called “old” and “traditional” categories such as that of the “sign,” “genre,” “format,” “content” and “meaning” will still play an important role, too, in the digital-intermedia universe. Our research should thus not rest contented with the (rather too simple) answer that the digital age – with reference to materiality – will lead to new overlaps and multimodal combinations of media each of which formerly existed on its own, in the shape of a “unifying” immateriality of the digital code. We should rather ask to what extent and how traditional audiovisual media and/or analogic sounds and images have left their traces in these digital worlds, what modalities could be reconstructed, and what *social functions* result from these processes for the users of so-called new media. These functions would embrace a wide range of actions on the part of recipients or users, which may range from an individual’s more or less personal aesthetic experience to forms of social action and behaviour of individuals or social groups.

In this sense, the digital age would not trigger the end of intermediality research, but would form a new and big challenge regarding the re-construction of an interconnected *history of digital media*, one that is yet to be tackled.

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**Figures 4–5:** Second Life – A young man's passion in real life: dolphins & realization of this passion: his 'existence' as a dolphin in *Second Life* (Jäger 2007).





## Intermediality in Film: A Historiography of Methodologies

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**Abstract.** After a short survey of the key questions regarding intermediality in cinema and placing them into the context of current debates in media studies and film theory, the paper addresses the key issues of the methodology of studying intermediality in film. In assessing the import of intermedial studies on film, the paper focuses on certain characteristic methodologies that have emerged in treating intermedial occurrences within films throughout the history of theorizing about the movies in general. Some of the major historical paradigms to be briefly described are: the normative aesthetic viewpoints in the spirit of cinematic New Laocoöns, the trans-medial theorizing of the moving image, inter-art theories, and parallax historiographies. Finally methodologies aiming at modelling intermediality and mapping the rhetoric of intermedial cinema are presented in somewhat more detail.

### 1. Theorizing Intermediality in the Cinema

#### 1.1. *Still a Maverick Scholarly Enterprise?*

In speaking about intermediality in the cinema we have to ask ourselves first of all the following questions: What is the role of cinema in what can be defined as “intermedial studies” within media studies? What is the place of an intermedial study of cinema within the general framework of film theory? And implicitly, can we speak of a general film theory regarding cinematic intermediality? And we may find that these questions are not so easily answered as they might seem at first sight. Whereas intermediality has become a generally accepted term in media studies, in film studies it is still a concept surrounded with much scepticism and ambiguity.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I am fully aware at the same time that the term “intermediality” itself may not be the only possible term relating to problems involving multiple media relations, lots of terminological surveys have shown us that “multimediality” or recently “multimodality,” or trans-mediality, media hybridity, media convergence, etc. also denote similar media phenomena, yet all of which can and should be distinguished from each other. Or, as the denomination of the recently convened expert workshop

If we look at the bigger picture, without any doubt, in the past two decades, “intermediality” has proved to be one of the most productive terms in the field of humanities, generating an impressive number of publications and theoretical debates. This popularity of intermedial researches was prompted by the incredibly accelerated multiplication of media themselves that called for an adequate theoretical framework mapping the proliferation of media relations. The other factor that propelled “intermediality” to a wider attention was most likely the fact that it emerged on an interdisciplinary basis that made it possible for scholars from a great number of fields (theories of literature, art history, music, communication and cultural studies, philosophy, cinema studies, etc.) to participate in the discourse around questions of intermediality.

The balance of these “intermedial studies,” we can say, is that a great amount of work has been done especially in three directions: a) studies concentrating on “intermediality as a fundamental condition or category” (Rajewsky 2005, 47) that resulted in debates over the general terminology and classification of intermedial relations; b) tracking media history from the viewpoint of the birth and interrelationship of each media (a direction that received a great boost on the one hand from the media studies of Friedrich A. Kittler,<sup>2</sup> and on the other, from the concept of “remediation” introduced by Bolter and Grusin (1999), or more recently, from the pragmatic concept of “media convergence” introduced by Henry Jenkins<sup>3</sup>); c) studies using “intermediality as a critical category” (Rajewsky 2005, 47) resulting in detailed analyses of intermedial relations within specific texts or media (configurations). As we see, the field is wide open from meta-theoretical enquiries and general philosophical approaches to specific empirical analyses. So much so, that more recently, even the possibility of conferring intermedial studies the status of an academic discipline has been brought into discussion.<sup>4</sup> However, an increasing number of theorists argue that essentially intermediality remains more like a “research axis,” a “research concept” (*Suchbegriff*) – to quote J. E. Müller,<sup>5</sup> and not

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(the *ESF Exploratory Workshop* held in Amsterdam, 12–14 June 2009: *Intermedialities*) has already suggested it, we might use the plural form of the word as an umbrella term, and refer to phenomena involving media relations as “intermedialities,” thus admitting that they can be approached from various points of view.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Kittler: *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* in which he develops the idea of how “media cross one another in time” (1999, 115).

<sup>3</sup> Jenkins stresses both the idea of the interrelatedness of media and their interaction with an active consumer See: Henry Jenkins: *Convergence Culture. Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006).

<sup>4</sup> This was one of the issues brought to general debate at the conference *Imagine Media! Media Borders and Intermediality* hosted by the University of Växjö, Sweden, 25–28 October, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> See for instance: Müller 2008, 31. Also in an earlier formulation of the same idea, he states that intermediality does not offer the “security” and the status of a closed scientific paradigm, but appears more like a “theory of praxis.” (“Sie bietet gewiss nicht die ‘Sicherheit’ und den Status eines

a coherent system of thought that would unite all the phenomena that can be called “intermedial” within a single theory. This “research axis” is meant to cut across several disciplines and identifies primarily the object of scientific investigation (namely, intermedial relations) that should otherwise be handled in a media specific research. The interdisciplinary approach to intermediality that resulted in the incredible diversity of topics taken on by intermedial studies, however, also brought about a proliferation of heterogeneous conceptions and methodologies that can often seem confusing.<sup>6</sup> The study of intermediality (or intermedialities) has reached a state of dissemination across disciplines and research topics that may seem productive, yet in fact, often results in a mere inflation of its terminology.

Within this general – and highly disseminated – field of “intermedial studies,” the investigations into cinematic intermediality seem to have a somewhat uniquely paradoxical status. While intermediality in literature and, more recently, in “new, digital media” dominates the discourse on intermediality and most of the people who embrace this “research concept” have a basic training either in literature or in communication studies/media theory, we can see that no theoretical study of intermediality can be written without references to cinema. Almost all essays dealing with the concept mention film as a possible field where intermediality can be observed, but time and again they limit their observations to only a few sentences which sometimes clearly betray that they are not at home with the history or theory of film as a medium; as a consequence these remarks are often received with due scepticism by film scholars. But this does not mean that researches concentrating directly on the intermediality of cinema are missing, on the contrary, the bibliography of cinematic intermediality has grown to an impressive bulk since the 1990s. Still we have to deal with a situation in which the idea of cinematic intermediality is far from being as accepted as literary intermediality is, for instance, that has had its validation through a more “natural” adaptation of the terminologies of linguistic or literary theory (intertextuality, dialogism, deconstruction, etc.). Studies openly confessing an intermedial approach to film may find themselves in a kind of maverick status, being disregarded by certain academic circles that see in them an unwelcome hybridization of film theory, an “application” of a conceptual framework regarded as something coming from “outside” mainstream film theories.<sup>7</sup>

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‘geschlossenen wissenschaftlichen Paradigmas,’ vielmehr rückt sie als eine ‘Theorie der Praxis’ Intermedialität in das Zentrum medienwissenschaftlicher Analysen.” Müller 1996, 17.)

<sup>6</sup> Hence we can see a continuous urge for a more clarified meta-theory in several current scholarly debates around the concept of intermediality.

<sup>7</sup> Quite often researches concentrating on cinematic intermediality are hosted by academic departments of linguistics and literature embracing interdisciplinary approaches (sometimes as a means of spicing up their current offer of courses and research topics) or departments of communication/media studies instead of university departments specializing in film studies.

So is it only a problem of a somewhat unbalanced interdisciplinarity, where the emphasis remains on territories other than film, and notions related to intermediality come to be merely illustrated by stretching the examples further over the media border lying between literature and cinema? Or is it a problem deriving from the other side, namely from the side of film theory that has still not acknowledged “as its own,” so to speak, researches into cinematic intermediality?

## 1.2. *Intermediality: A Rift in Film Theory, a Matter of Politics, or Just a Blind Spot?*

There have been two outstanding critical assessments of the state of film theory in the last few decades. The first critical survey accompanied the introduction of the idea of “post-theory” by David Bordwell and Noël Carroll in the mid 1990s and it was interpreted as an attack on film theory itself in the fiery debates that followed. The second prominent re-evaluation came from David N. Rodowick, who in 2007 voiced his concern in a public lecture entitled *An Elegy for Theory*<sup>8</sup> that film theory is currently undergoing a crisis, declaring that: “the evolution of cinema studies since the early 1980s has been marked both by a decentering of film with respect to media and visual studies and by a retreat from theory” (2007a, 91).<sup>9</sup> In this lecture – that is currently being elaborated into a whole book project devised to be a sequel to his latest work, *The Virtual Life of Film* (2007) – Rodowick mourns the loss of emphasis on film theory on the one hand in favour of renewed interest in both the history of film, implicitly the historical poetics of film and of a meta-theoretical interest in the critical history of theory itself. Both of these tendencies can be tied to the ideas put forward by David Bordwell in several of his books. In the introductory chapters written to the *Post-Theory* (1996) volume, Bordwell and Carroll themselves proclaimed the end of “Theory” or “Grand Theory” consisting of what they saw as “ethereal speculations,” and presented strong arguments for a “piecemeal” or “middle level research,” (cf. Bordwell 1996) insisting on “anchoring

<sup>8</sup> The lecture that was originally prepared as a keynote address at the *Framework* conference “On the Future of Theory,” Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, November 3-4, 2006 and was revised for the Radcliffe Exploratory Seminar on “Contesting Theory” at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, May 4–5, 2007, was published subsequently as an article in the journal *October* (2007).

<sup>9</sup> Although it seems a little paradoxical that Rodowick admits that the “film theory” that these newer tendencies seem to retreat from was also highly interdisciplinary in methods and concepts, therefore less of an autonomous discipline as certain scientific criteria would demand it: “From the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, the institutionalization of cinema studies in universities in North America and Europe became identified with a certain idea of *theory*. This was less a ‘theory’ in the abstract or natural scientific sense than an interdisciplinary commitment to concepts and methods derived from literary semiology, Lacanian psychoanalysis and Althusserian Marxism, echoed in the broader influence of structuralism and post-structuralism on the humanities” (2007a, 91).



the discipline in film as an empirical object subject to investigations grounded in natural scientific methods" (Rodowick 2007a, 92). On the other hand Rodowick notes that "philosophical challenges to theory came from film scholars influenced by analytic philosophy," naming Richard Allen, Malcom Turvey, Murray Smith as some of the allies from the side of philosophy to the idea of contesting the validity of film theory (2007a, 92). "In this manner," – he finds, that – "throughout the 1980s and '90s there is a triple displacement of theory – by history, science, and finally, philosophy" (2007a, 95). He notes that "from the analytic point of view, arguments for and against 'theory' take place against the background of a philosophy of science" and "philosophy disappears into science as 'theory' becomes indistinguishable from scientific methodology" (2007a, 97).

From these debates the two sides are fairly clearly distinguishable: one is reclaiming the rights of "Theory" grounded in philosophy (consequently ethics and epistemology), and seeking – for instance, as Rodowick points out in Stanley Cavell's example – an understanding of "how our current ways of being in the world and relating to it are 'cinematic'" (2007a, 107), while the other can be seen from this point of view as a "retreat" into "post-theory," understood by its promoters as a multiplication of theories and theorizing, of not doctrine- but problem-driven researches (Bordwell 1996, xvii). What seems to be relevant from our standpoint, however, is not which line of arguments we can accept, but what is missing from these critical perspectives. Although both Bordwell and Rodowick present fairly nuanced overviews of what they consider to be the current state of affairs in film studies, we can observe that there is also another divide that could be taken into account as far as film theory is concerned: there seems to be a rift not only between "Theory" and contemporary "piecemeal" theorizing, as Rodowick sees it, or between associative interpretations or theoretical writings "written as a bricolage of other theories" (Bordwell 1996, 25) and a search for a more "scientific" method as Bordwell sees it, but there is also a distinct divide between current cognitive, ecological or philosophical approaches to moving image theory on the one hand, and a media theoretical discussion of cinema that also inevitably includes questions of intermediality, on the other. This latter rift seems even more acute, as despite the existence of important works on both sides, there seems to be very little communication between the scholars on each side of the two "trenches," so to speak. And while the first "divide" has been much debated, this second "divide" is much less visible. One of the possible causes for this is the fact that the rift seems to be not only between theoretical schools or applied methodologies but also between the languages of discourse: English

versus German and French. In contrast to early film theory which started in Europe, the current mainstream theorizing seems to be located in America. Intermedial studies, however, established strongholds in Europe and Canada, and cinema studies embracing the idea of intermediality are practiced within an interdisciplinary framework. It is no surprise then, that important analyses scattered within mainly German or French language collections tend to fall out of sight as far as American based film theorizing is concerned.<sup>10</sup> It is true that, while there is no shortage of writings that can qualify for an intermedial “theory” in general, no “grand” intermedial film theory is in sight, only the kind of “middle-level research” that Bordwell advocated as “responsible, imaginative, and lively inquiry” (1996, xvii).

Nevertheless, in an age demanding a more specific and scientific pursuit of film studies, an intermedial analysis of film apparently still seems too much tainted by its interdisciplinarity or, as Rodowick’s argument might imply, too much attached to another vast field of interest, media studies in general. And we may also ask: why is it so that an intensely method-driven theorizing that borrows from other disciplines is accepted in the case of film semiotics, narratology or cognitive film theory – which are all recognized as legitimate pursuits of film studies, and not merely as branches of some other disciplines –, but the “interdisciplinarity” of intermediality so often suggests negative connotations of “hybridity”? Is it on account of the language barrier, suggested earlier, on account of the differences in cultural contexts that these researches are embedded in,<sup>11</sup> or is it more the effect of diverging trends in what we could call the global “politics of science”? Or does it have to do with the implicit ideological assumptions that also seem to “contaminate” the notion of intermediality,<sup>12</sup> or merely with the suspicion that the undertaking of this research perspective is a sign of decline in an academic world based on classic disciplinary hierarchies and a clear-cut distinction of academic fields of research (as suggested by Jürgen E. Müller<sup>13</sup>)? For

<sup>10</sup> Although Yvonne Spielmann’s book on intermediality and the work of Peter Greenaway (*Intermedialität. Das System Peter Greenaway*, 1997) is a notable attempt to reconcile the neo-formalist film analysis practiced by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson with the perspective of intermedial studies, this “gesture” has not been reciprocated, cognitive film theory has never really dealt with intermedial aspects of cinema.

<sup>11</sup> In the USA film theorizing, as I understand, is even today constantly forced to assert itself against filmmaking practices and film criticism. In Europe, by comparison, film theory is compelled to find its “foothold” not so much against the backdrop of film production, but among traditional academic disciplines and institutions in the context of which a strategy of interdisciplinarity might seem more successful.

<sup>12</sup> See details about the ideological charge of the notion of intermediality in Jens Schröter’s paper in this present issue.

<sup>13</sup> See Müller’s article also in this present issue.



there is undoubtedly an “eschatological” line of thinking linked to intermediality that is discernible in the “symptomatic” interpretation of intermedial researches (as manifestations of the “the end” of certain academic disciplines and subject matters, and also as manifestations of the efforts to revitalize ailing academic structures here and there). The same “eschatological” idea of intermediality emerges in the rhetoric of the discussions about the imminent demise of the cinematic medium (discussions that were held mainly around the centenary of the cinema, mourning the “death” of classical movie experiences and technologies).

But putting aside these ambivalences that can lead to such “final” perspectives and interpretations of academic policies, perhaps it is ultimately more adequate to describe the “place” of intermedial film researches not so much in terms of a “rift” or “divergence” between schools of thought or in terms of a politics of science, but merely as a kind of “invisibility,” “a blind spot of film theory”, as François Jost put it (2005, 111–112). Paradoxically, both Bordwell’s “piecemeal-theorizing” and Rodowick’s researches into the “figural” or the “virtual life of film” have a lot in common with “intermedial studies” of film, one in method, the other in actual content: the bordwellian “piecemeal” – as suggested earlier – can be seen as just another name of the “slices” of researches done along “the research axis of intermediality;” while Rodowick’s theorizing can be seen as revolving around the same questions as debated by media theorists regarding cinema,<sup>14</sup> even if he does not explicitly place himself along this “axis” of intermedial researches.

But what seems to be the most important “blind spot” factor is that several contemporary scholars who write about the “medium” of cinema consider it primarily from an aesthetic point of view, and place it into a discourse that revolves around the aesthetic value of cinema, and do not seem to consider it from a medium theoretical perspective. The question of cinematic mediality comes into their debates via criticism of classical film theories, and the concept of medium itself seems to become a casualty in the repeated attacks against “Big Theory.” The case of Noël Carroll is perhaps the most edifying in this respect. On the first glance, Carroll throws out completely the possibility of discussing the mediality of cinema. “Forget the Medium!” – the title of Carroll’s chapter explicitly says in one of his latest books. (Carroll 2003, 1–10). But in fact, the rejection of “media foundationalism,” as he calls it, equals merely the ousting of the monomedial

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<sup>14</sup> *The Virtual Life of Film* (2007) is essentially about the changing mediality of the moving pictures, and what can also be considered as the “remediation” of classical cinema into newer media.

concept of cinema, and the rejection of a normative, prescriptive aesthetics based on the assumption of media essentialism.<sup>15</sup> So, on the second glance, quite the opposite is true, Carroll seems to advocate the hybrid, multimedial nature of cinema as an artform.<sup>16</sup> However, as Rodowick rightly states (2007b, 41), Carroll manages to throw out the baby with the bathwater in arguing against media specificity of cinema on account of its hybridity. For – as Rodowick states – it is impossible to understand multimediality without a proper understanding of the individual properties of the media being combined. So in Carroll's case it is the concept of a "legislative" aesthetics, and also a simplified idea of cinematic multimediality that in fact "blocks the view" towards a more nuanced understanding of media relations involved in cinema. In an earlier example, in a book entitled *Theorizing the Moving Image* (1996), Carroll even deals with the deep interconnectedness of verbal language structures and images within certain metaphors, for instance, but without considering it a case for "intermediality" as we grew accustomed to in studies about word and image relations.

In a similar manner, there are some theoretical works that speak about certain facets of cinema that would rightly fall under the scope of intermedial analyses or would necessitate the discussion of medial aspects, but this is somehow not the case. Most often intermediality remains: "une question non questionnée" ("an unquestioned question") to quote François Jost (2005, 111) again. In addition, most mainstream theoretical writings (almost all the Film Studies or Film Analysis handbooks available, for instance) treat film as a monomedial entity, without taking into account its intermedial aspects even in newer works which deal with cinema's transition from the analogue to the digital.

Furthermore, in the course of the past decade questions of intermediality have had to face a new challenge that began to take shape in the growing discussions about the so called "post medium" condition. After years of upheaval brought about by the proliferation of new technologies producing and disseminating moving images, the challenge of the so called "post media age" can also be identified in the fact that there seems to be an effect of uniformization among the different forms of the moving images. Theorists claim that now that the term "medium" has triumphed, the actual media "are already deceased." (Luticken 2004, 12). Digitized imagery absorbs media that become "undead" media, mere

<sup>15</sup> He rejects "that there is a distinctive medium of film and that the essential properties of the film medium implicitly prescribe important constraints on what artistically successful cinema can and should achieve" (Carroll 2003, xiii).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Carroll: "Artforms generally involve a number of media, including frequently overlapping ones" (2003, 5).

“phantoms of their former self” (Lutticken 2004, 12).<sup>17</sup> So, the “invisibility” of intermediality seems to be threatened both by the contemporary media practice of digital “mixtures,” and by contemporary theories claiming that the concept of the “medium” itself needs a mutation accordingly.<sup>18</sup> So what happens to film and the notion of intermediality in the post-media age? Will its relevance disappear while questions of monomediality threaten to gain new strength with the uniformity of digitization? Or quite the contrary, it will come back with a vengeance, as intermediality (and moving images themselves) can be perceived more and more not just as a form of communication but as a form of an “environment” that remains a multilayered sensual experience despite all its globalizing and unifying aspects?

### 1.3. *Film as an Incredible Shrinking Medium, or an Intermedium?*

In asking ourselves the basic questions about film theory and intermediality, we cannot avoid the fact that the core of all these questions is the problem of the mediality of film itself. As Rodowick explains: “one powerful consequence of the rapid emergence of electronic and digital media is that we can no longer take for granted what “film” is – its ontological anchors have come ungrounded – and thus we are compelled to revisit continually the question, What is cinema?” (2007, 93.) Film as we knew it, has acquired a historical status, it has become a medium mainly preserved by film archives. Traditional movie theatre experience has been replaced by a cinema based on new digital technologies in order to provide an overwhelming multi-sensory experience. Home video systems, interactive 3D computer games, or even mobile phones or advertising screens installed on streets or underground stations have become media for our daily consumption of moving images. Film has become an “incredible shrinking medium,” as David N. Rodowick has pointed out in his book entitled the *Virtual Life of Film* (2007), disappearing from our daily life as a medium but persisting as “cinematic experience” in new media, and in the spaces and spectacles of everyday life.

So, consequently, a logical step to take is that film studies should include all the possible media “mutations” of cinema. In a way this has already happened. Instead of “cinema” or “film” the more general term of “moving images” seems to

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<sup>17</sup> This type of discourse, in a way, seems to continue the “death of cinema” debates among film critics and aesthetes conducted around the time of the centenary of cinema.

<sup>18</sup> See for instance Lev Manovich’s claims for “a new conceptual system that would replace the old discourse of mediums and be able to describe *post-digital*, *post-net* culture more adequately” (2001b).

acquire a growing popularity while the so called, analogue, “classical” cinema becomes only one of the media that can be included under this umbrella term. Cognitive and ecological film theories have already adopted this perspective (see Carroll 2003, Anderson 2005, etc.), and it is only natural that the perspective of intermediality should be edifying with regards to the different manifestations or changes in the mediality/configuration/social uses of moving images and their newfound interrelationships.<sup>19</sup>

The other important question, both from a narrower or a wider perspective, has been the following: Is film one medium among several others in our culture or is it one that combines more than one? Is film (even in its traditional form) an “intermedium,” a “composite” medium, in other words, perhaps the ultimate “mixed” or “hybrid” medium that combines all kinds of media in its texture of signification? Or should we more likely regard it merely as a “place,” a “field” where intermedial relationships and/or media transformations can occur? Is cinema therefore a prototype or a unique case for intermediality as some of the studies suggest?

In one of the groundbreaking books written on cinematic intermediality, Jürgen E. Müller writes the following: “The introduction of electricity and electronics made film into *the* intermedial threshold-medium of modernism that meant the final stages of mechanizing and also the beginning of the electronic and the digital within media history. Therefore film is not *hybrid* or *intermedial* because it made its medial forerunners into its own contents (as was the thesis of McLuhan), but because from the very beginning we find medial interactions and interferences on almost every level. Its technical conditions, its circumstances of presentation and its aesthetic structures are all marked by these interactions” (1996, 47).<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, Jürgen Heinrichs and Yvonne Spielmann address this subject in the following way in an editorial to the special issue entitled “What is Intermedia?” of the journal *Convergence* (2002 No. 8): “Conceptually, intermedia denotes a fusion rather than an accumulation of media. Thus, the convergence of elements of different media implies the transformation that is more than the sum of its parts.” [...] “Media histories tend to view cinema as the first truly intermedial medium.

<sup>19</sup> See also Müller’s views expressed in the article published in this same issue.

<sup>20</sup> “Die Einführung der Elektrizität und der Elektronik machte den Film zu *dem* intermedialen Schwellen-Medium der Moderne, welches den Endpunkt der Mechanisierung und zugleich den Ausgangspunkt der Elektronisierung und Digitalisierung in Mediengeschichte markiert. Der Film ist jedoch nicht deshalb *hybrid* und *intermedial*, weil er sich seit seinem Beginn auf nahezu jedem Niveau in medialen Interaktionen und Interferenzen befindet. Seine technische Voraussetzungen, seine Ausführungsbedingungen und seine ästhetischen Strukturen sind durch diese Interferenzen geprägt.” (Müller 1996, 47.)

Such historical assessments argue that cinema's adaptation, convergence, and amalgamation of discrete features from literature, music, dance, theatre and painting account for its intermedial quality. However, this does not imply that the medium of film per se should be considered intermedia.<sup>21</sup> The example of cinema rather highlights the transformative quality of intermediality that can be found in the varying interrelationships between two or more media forms. These may have developed separately but are transformed through convergence into a new, mixed form. In the example of cinema, intermediality acts as a model for the varied interrelationships between diachronic and synchronic media" (2002, 6-7).

These theoretical assessments clearly link the idea of intermediality to film, considering film either as a medium that interacts with other media on several levels and in a variety of forms, or as a medium that has developed certain configurations that can be called intermedial. Nevertheless, there is still room for more comprehensive answers to these fundamental questions. Theorizing intermediality in film, or a philosophy of cinematic intermediality in film is far from being a closed chapter, in fact it should become an even more acute question with the advent of "post-medium" theories and aesthetics.

## **2. Routes along the Historical Research Axis of Intermediality in Film?**

What is already quite clear is that questions of intermediality should always be regarded in a historical perspective: both in the case of researches done into intermediality, or in the case of meta-theoretical inquiries, when we look into theories about intermedial relations. Intermediality as an object of research can only be examined within its context, within the framework of concrete time and place coordinates.<sup>22</sup> Early films display a whole different array of media relations than the ones we find in the established institutionalized forms of cinematic storytelling, not to mention later developments of technique that establish new sets of intermedial networks or newer forms of moving images. And if we search for the history of thought regarding the idea of intermediality, likewise, we will find that the problem of media interactions emerges right at the very beginning of film history and is immediately reflected upon by early film theorists. Media

<sup>21</sup> In her earlier book, Yvonne Spielmann declares in a similar way that film has produced intermedial forms throughout its history, however this does not mean that film should be considered "per se intermedial." (Cf. "Im Medium Film haben sich historisch intermediale Formen herausgebildet, aber das Medium ist nicht per se intermedial." Spielmann 1998, 9.)

<sup>22</sup> Rodowick's *The Virtual Life of Film* is a good example of this.

relations together with inter-art relations of film prove to be an area under discussion that persists more or less emphatically throughout the history of film theory and do not only surface in the intermediality studies of the latter decades. On the one hand it is indeed a subject brought to attention by media studies, and the amount of literature that has been published on the topic of intermediality in film can already be assessed in terms of specific methodologies and terminology. On the other hand, it is also true that we can trace the input not only of “explicit” intermedial theorizing of cinema, but also of the more “implicit” theoretical considerations that preceded the emergence of medium theory, and also of analyses that may not include themselves under the heading of intermedial studies, which nevertheless deal with the same issues as the studies grounded in intermedial theories.

Historically speaking, the ways in which *intermedial occurrences* (in other words, media relations that cinema engages in) have been discussed (directly or indirectly) in film theory or analysis can be grouped in the following paradigms sketched below.

## 2.1. *Film as Synesthetic Experience and the Spirit of a New Laocoön*

The idea that cinema is unavoidably interconnected with other media and arts has been a constant issue addressed by theories one way or another ever since the first moving picture shows were presented in a theatrical environment and ever since movies attempted to present narratives and to produce emotions by a combination of images in movement, music and words. In the early decades of cinema history we find wonderfully poetic similes or synesthetic metaphors in essays describing the essence of cinema as a new art and medium emerging in terms of comparison to the other arts, also defining what films are not, and thus defining the specificity of cinema. Ricciotto Canudo wrote in 1911: “The new manifestation of Art should really be more precisely *a Painting and a Sculpture developing in Time* [...] in a most astonishing apotheosis, *the Plastic Art in Motion* will arise” (1993, 59). The name of “photoplay” employed by Hugo Münsterberg (1916) also suggests a similar mixture of arts giving rise to cinema. Vachel Lindsay’s *Art of the Moving Picture* (1915) even elaborates a taxonomy of “photoplay” types describing film either as “sculpture in motion,” “painting in motion,” or “architecture in motion,” and his whole vision of cinematic complexity culminates in the idea of a specific “hieroglyphics” of the moving image.

This tendency of describing the essence of cinema by way of pointing out analogies with other arts and media continued in a more systematic way with the ideas of Sergei Eisenstein, whose famous montage theory was elaborated on the concept of film being “music to the eyes” (the terminology used also reflects this concept, e.g. “tonal,” “overtonal montage,” etc.). His famous collaboration with Sergei Prokofiev in *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) is a well-known example of how he conceived of moving images following the rhythmic structure of a musical score. Eisenstein’s essays (1942) can also be regarded as the forerunners of the idea of media archaeology when he talks of the techniques of Dickens’s or Zola’s novels in comparison to filmic narrative, or the parallels between cinematic montage and El Greco’s paintings. In all his works, at the same time, he maintained a highly synesthetic view upon cinema, in which elements characteristic to each of the arts or to each of the senses were combined in a unique way. When talking about El Greco, for example, he talks of “cromo-phonic” montage and the rhapsody of the colour yellow; in presenting his own method of mixing black-and-white cinematography with colour in *Ivan the Terrible* (1944), he speaks of colour acting as a musical theme. As a whole, his theory of montage is an attempt (matching the ambition of Lessing’s synthesis in his *Laocoön*) to find correspondences between all the arts.

This type of theorizing cinema’s interconnectedness with the other arts and media is more than merely conferring a poetic quality (consequently aesthetic value) to film by the use of a synesthetic language, it can be attributed in fact to an early realization of what later came to be known as the phenomenon of “remediation” in the media theory of Bolter and Grusin (1999) or what Jens Schröter denoted as “ontological intermediality” (“ontologische Intermedialität,” 1996, 146): the definition of the emerging new media is done through comparisons with other, already familiar arts and media, and also cinema’s repurposing of the arts and media is acknowledged. It is also consistent with the process necessarily involved in the emergence of a new medium, as Gaudreault and Marion explained: “a medium’s identity is a very complex affair. Moreover, specificity by no means signifies separation or isolation. A good understanding of a medium thus entails understanding its relationship to other media: it is through intermediality, through a concern with the intermedial, that a medium is understood” (2002, 15).

However, the arguments for the acceptance of the new, seventh art bring forward not only such enthusiastic Gesamtkunstwerk-like ideas or synesthetic metaphors about cinema as quoted above, but also explicit rejections of too much “contamination” with the other arts, especially literature. And these debates tend



to renew from time to time around the introduction of new technologies within cinema: the introduction of sound or the shift from analogue to digital, and also around the questions of adaptations from literature.<sup>23</sup>

The so called “essentialist” aesthetics of film often resort to a comparison between the arts in the spirit practiced by G. E. Lessing in his famous *Laocoön* essay and set up normative aesthetic principles and media boundaries that film should conform to. Arnheim’s *New Laocoön* (1938) dealing with the advent of the talkies and dismissing sound as an unwelcome interference with the purity of the medium is one example in point.<sup>24</sup> In a later article, however, published in 1999, Arnheim revised his attitude and admitted that: in film “a variety of media could be involved, as is the case of an orchestra where every instrument plays its part in the whole performance.<sup>25</sup> [...] I see now that there is no such thing as a work limited to a single medium. [...] The film medium, as I recognize now, profits from a freedom, a breathing space that I could not afford to consider when I fought for the autonomy of the cinema. It is free to use sound or no sound, color or no color, a limited frame or an endless space; it can exploit depth or use the virtues of the flat plane. This freedom puts the film more closely in the company of the other performing arts, such as the theater, the dance, music, or pantomime” (Arnheim 1999, 558).<sup>26</sup> Thus Arnheim actually returns to a synesthetic or *Gesamtkunstwerk*-like model in the vein of Eisenstein.

## 2.2. *Trans-Medial Theories of Cinema*

This is perhaps the most arguable category listed here. As we know, especially in the field of narratology we have a long running tradition of theorizing filmic narrative (just like more recently computer games) on the basis of the notions developed in literary narratology. The first theorists to do so were the Russian

<sup>23</sup> See for instance the views of Russian Formalist Boris Eichenbaum, who advocated the idea that cinema and language cannot be separated and the analysis of the use of language in film constitutes one of the most important questions of film theory (*Problems of Film Stylistics*, 1927), but who also compared the relationship of film and literature to a marriage that has been going on too long, and urged that cinema should leave his “honourable mistress,” namely literature (*Film and Literature*, 1926). Bazin’s highly influential essay written in defence of an “impure cinema” can also be noted (1967).

<sup>24</sup> “A medium of expression that is capable of producing complete works by its own resources will forever keep up its resistance against any combination with any other medium” (Arnheim 1938, 2002).

<sup>25</sup> Although such metaphors necessarily imply a synesthetic view upon film as a composite medium, as Noël Carroll has pointed out, quite often such “musicalist analogies” are used in order to express the “true essence” of the medium in contrast to an overly literary cinema “in the name of purism” (1984/85, 146).

<sup>26</sup> One of the interpreters of Arnheim’s theory, Dimitri Liebsch considers that Arnheim’s revision of his earlier views could be described something like a new “*Hamburgische Dramaturgie*” in a further parallel with Lessing’s works (2004).



formalists (Boris Eichenbaum, Viktor Shklovsky, Yuri Tynyanov, etc.) who, as we know, wrote extensively on matters regarding the medium of film as well. Their ideas were later taken over by the so called neo-formalist film analyses (as practiced by Kristin Thompson, for example). David Bordwell's narratology is also based on formalist categories (like *fabula* and *suzhet*), just as Edward Branigan's theories of filmic narration or point of view repurpose Genette's categories. What makes it questionable to include such theories in the line of theorizing intermediality is that these categories of narratology are considered to be trans-medially applicable exactly because according to certain views narrative structure is believed to be medially non-specific (as a semiotic universal or as a deep structure), and without doubt these theories do not approach cinema as having the potential of engaging in intermedial relations. However, there are cases in which a trans-medial theoretic framework is used in order to theorize medial specificity and differences. Seymour Chatman's seminal essay: *What Novels can Do that Films can't (and Vice Versa)*, 1981, is a good example, but it can actually be fitted in the next category, named below (exemplifying how these categories are sometimes interconnected).

### 2.3. *Comparative Analyses, Inter-Art Theories* (*"Cinema and..."-Type Works*)

Quite a few works present comparative analyses of cinema and the other arts. This type of theorizing is most often practiced as a general inter-art theory comparing two art forms or media (painting and cinema, literature and cinema), which usually does not only comprise the comparative presentation of one art versus the other, but also deal with: a) tracing *the influences/borrowings between the arts and media*, their genealogical interconnectedness (see for instance, Joachim Paech's *Literatur und Film*, 1988), or b) concrete occurrences of interartiality, namely *embedded representations* of one art within the other (the analysis of the role of paintings seen in cinema, for instance, or comparing literary works and films, etc.). Both Bazin's well-known essay on the differences of painting and cinema (*Painting and Cinema*, 1967) and Chatman's essay quoted before, exhibit such duality in their methodology within a single work. Also, we can find a third type: c) comparative analyses that deal with phenomena that can be viewed comparatively in the arts, this is the case, for instance, of Robert Stam's approach, who examines reflexivity in both film and literature (Stam 1992). Nevertheless, this type of work can also be considered as both comparative and trans-medial theory as it deploys a methodology that rests on concepts elaborated by Bakhtin or Brecht in reference to literature.

As a whole, this category covers an extremely large area of researches (beside the already named connections: cinema and photography, cinema and architecture, cinema and theatre, cinema and television, cinema and new media, cinema and computer games, etc.) and it has to be said, that some of these do not even adopt a media theoretical approach (most works that incorporate intermediality as their “blind spot” can be found in this group, as sometimes the applied trans-medial conceptual frameworks – like hermeneutics or general philosophical categories – do not allow a conscious exploration of mediality). Nevertheless, as I have said, the works are numerous, only the works dealing with the relationship of painting and cinema, for instance, are so many that I cannot even attempt to enlist them here.<sup>27</sup>

An equally important subcategory here consists of the *adaptation theories*. Not all of the works, however, analyze the relation of film and literature from the perspective of mediality. Earlier theories most often construct their theses and methodologies based on aesthetic and critical assumptions and revolve around the “fidelity” issue, questioning to what degree films are true to their literary source. An important turning point in the history of adaptation theories constituted the rejection of the “fidelity discourse,” and the orientation of the adaptation studies in the direction of Bakhtinian dialogism and intertextuality (implicitly, sometimes even intermediality).<sup>28</sup> As Linda Hutcheon has pointed out in her recent book synthesizing contemporary views regarding these questions, adaptation can be seen from several perspectives: as trans-mediality, a “trans-coding into a different set of conventions” (2006, 33), translation of one media into another, as a cultural or trans-cultural phenomenon of “indigenization” (or “colonization”) or “a kind of extended palimpsest” (2006, 33). Or, we can add, as a more complex intermediality that combines all kinds of media relations, as can be observed, for instance, in the so called “picto-films”<sup>29</sup> that have emerged almost as a sub-genre among adaptations. We have so many adaptations of classical narrative literature in which a sense of “literariness” is conveyed in fact through ostensible imitations of paintings or painterly styles.<sup>30</sup> [Figs. 1–2.]

<sup>27</sup> Only some of the names here: Bonitzer (1987), Aumont (1989), Dalle Vacche (1996), Felleman (2006), Bonfand (2007), etc.

<sup>28</sup> Again the works are too numerous to even attempt to list them here. Some of the important contributors to the contemporary discourse on adaptations are: Elliot (2003), Stam and Raengo (2004, 2005), Stam (2005), Aragay (2005), Hutcheon (2006), Leitch (2007), etc. A new impetus was given to these studies by the start of a new specialized Oxford journal, *Adaptation*, in 2008.

<sup>29</sup> The term is borrowed from Jost (1993).

<sup>30</sup> Numerous BBC series adapting the works of Dickens, Thomas Hardy, Jane Austen or Thackeray could be cited as examples for this, or Roman Polanski's *Tess* (1979), Franco Zeffirelli's *Jane Eyre* (1996), James Ivory's films etc. (Cf. Pethő 2009.)

## 2.4. “Parallax Historiography” and Media Archaeology

The term “parallax historiography” has been introduced by Catherine Russell (2002), and refers to the way in which earlier forms of cinema get to be revisited and re-interpreted from the perspective of newer media forms of moving images, or reversely, how these newer forms can be interpreted from the perspective of earlier forms of cinema. As Russell explains: “new media technologies have created new theoretical ‘passages’ back to the first decades of film history” (2002, 552). “Parallax historiography refers to the way that early cinema comes into focus from the perspective of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.” [...] “The term parallax is useful to describe this historiography, because it is a term that invokes a shift in perspective as well as a sense of parallelism” (Russell 2002, 552).

Naturally, we could dispute whether the relation of older and newer forms of moving images should be considered intermediality or a sort of trans-mediality within moving pictures; nevertheless, this approach is extremely appropriate at a time of an incredible multiplication of the media forms of moving images and of an ever widening area of the remediation of cinematic techniques. We can see, for instance, how the internet is displaying forms of private moving picture consumption similar to early, pre-cinematographic techniques of cinema (see for instance, Lev Manovich’s idea that Quick Time is similar to Edison’s kinetoscope). In a similar parallax view Manovich (2001a, 180) sees Méliès as the father of computer graphics and there are several studies of computer games or digital media that draw similar parallels with early cinema. (See: Punt, 2000). The ongoing fascination or fashion of contemporary silent films (the films of Guy Maddin, for example), some instances of postmodern pastiche also invite such a parallax view over the medium of film.

From the part of film history this approach has benefited from the ideology of so called contemporary “revisionist” film history (as practiced by Thomas Elsaesser and Tom Gunning, for instance [cf. Elsaesser and Barker 1989]), defined as a kind of complex archaeology of the medium, that on the one hand takes into account several factors of the production of cinema and on the other hand, also envisages the history of cinema not as a linear progress in time, but as a set of paradigms that can be re-visited and refashioned (like the “cinema of attractions” that characterized early cinema and that proved to be a paradigm the elements of which persist not only in the avant-garde or several Hollywood genres, but can be “reloaded” into a number of other film types along the history of film or even newer media, like video blogging<sup>31</sup>).

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. the essays in the volume edited by Wanda Strauven: *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded* (2007).

In other instances we have researches into media archaeology in the spirit of Bolter and Grusin's idea of remediation, examining how cinema displays earlier forms of media, or how cinematic forms get to be remediated in other, newer forms. Certain types of films have also been singled out as explicitly acting as the "memory/archive of the medium," (see the "museum of memory" taken over from Malraux, in Godard's work, or the kind of archival or "database aesthetics" [cf. Vesna 2007] employed by Greenaway).

## 2.5. *Modelling Cinematic Intermediality and Mapping the Rhetoric of Intermedial Cinema*

Within the studies explicitly dealing with intermedial occurrences in cinema we find that general theory and concrete analysis are two large "avenues of investigation"<sup>32</sup> that are usually intertwined: the aim to reach a general outline of some kind of a model of intermediality is usually meant to lead to specific analyses of intermedial techniques.

In trying to identify the methodologies employed by the writings on cinematic intermediality within the last few decades I have found that the general debate over types and terminologies in intermedial studies have been matched by similar meta-theoretic approaches concerning cinematic intermediality. Moreover, these often meant a thorough investigation into the nature of cinematic mediality itself. The adaptation of the terminology of philosophy, literary theory or communication studies has been done with an ambition to draw conclusions that could apply not only to cinema but to a general view over intermediality as well.<sup>33</sup> Also, more specifically, certain artists like Peter Greenaway or Jean-Luc Godard have been singled out not just to exemplify cinematic intermediality but in order to unravel the intricate weave of intermedial relations within cinema and the particular intermedial rhetoric distinguishable within their works.<sup>34</sup>

It seems that intermediality has been explicitly targeted in such studies both as a *general concept* defining the complex mediality of cinema and as a *rhetoric* that defines certain artists or cinematic trends.

If mapping the rhetoric of intermedial cinema has been one of the main goals of theoretical investigations, in order to sketch some of the characteristic points of view adopted by these analyses, in what follows, *mutatis mutandis*, I should

<sup>32</sup> I have borrowed the expression from Gaudreault and Marion (2002, 12).

<sup>33</sup> No doubt, this is a possible argument for including studies of intermediality within the cinema under the umbrella term of media studies, as well as considering them as valid exercises of film theory.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Spielmann (1998), Paech (1989), Müller (1996, 1997), Roloff-Winter (1997), etc.

likewise be mapping the rhetoric of intermedial studies of cinema. In order to do that, I will attempt a brief survey of some of the key concepts by way of which these analyses interpret intermediality in film. I am doing this not only because there seems to exist a recurring terminology, but also because, as a rule, the analysis of specific concepts or metaphors used in the rhetoric of a discourse may prove to be relevant in trying to assess how a certain way of theorizing “makes meaning” of the things it tries to describe.<sup>35</sup>

a) *Intermediality described as a system or a network of interrelations (“Beziehungsnetz”), a system of media convergence and transformation*

This model is perhaps best presented by Yvonne Spielmann in her analysis of the intermedial features of Peter Greenaway’s cinema (cf. Spielmann 1994 and also 2001). She speaks of media correlations, of the way different types of images are *correlated* and *merged*, describing intermedial cinema as a result of “processes of transformation effected through convergence of elements of different media” (2001, 55). She emphasizes: “What is essential to intermedia and intertextuality as well is *the category of transformation*. But where intertextuality expresses a text–text relationship, intermedia means that the reference frame of the entire system of art forms that mediates the intermedial correlation is itself included in the processes of transformation.” (2001, 57) Joachim Paech speaks of a “constitutive intermediality” and a “dynamic correspondence/relationship”<sup>36</sup> between media (2002, 279), stating that intermediality is to be understood as the repetition of one medium as the content of its form within another medium.

b) *Theorizing the perception of intermediality in film: as a reflexive experience, a trace, difference, a “parasitic third,” oscillation, an interim form*

All these are ostensibly indebted to Derrida’s ideas of *difference* and *trace* and these ideas often accompany the previously named “correlational” model. I quote Joachim Paech again, he writes: “The only possibility to, as it were, reach the medium behind the form consists in self-observation of the observation and the re-entry of the medium as form or as a back link, in which mediality as the

<sup>35</sup> The choice of words in my own rhetoric here is also not accidental, as I proceed with this type of meta-theoretical analysis in the spirit of David Bordwell’s methodology of identifying cognitive metaphors underlying the rhetoric of film criticism in *Making Meaning* (1989).

<sup>36</sup> Translated from the German original of: “konstitutive Intermedialität,” and “Dynamische Zusammenhang.” (Paech 2002, 279.)

constitutive difference in the oscillation between medium and form becomes observable as the ‘parasitic third,’ whose background noise renders the event of the difference, thus, the message, perceptible and comprehensible.” (Paech 2000)

In this view there are certain conditions that have to be met in order to perceive intermediality as such. This definition contains multiple elements that are important: first of all the self-reflexive aspect (the spectator has to be either conscious of media processes or the film has to use a reflexive strategy that makes media processes visible)<sup>37</sup> and also the idea of media “difference” that has to be “inscribed”/“re-inscribed” within the work.<sup>38</sup> Paech further develops the idea, saying that: “Strictly speaking, intermedial processes are also only manifest as configurations or as transformative inscriptions of mediality in a work, text, or intertext. Thus, intermediality as medial transformation can always be observed where the medial difference of forms (of communication) is relevant in works, texts, or other (cultural) manifestations” (Paech 2000). The state in which we can observe intermediality according to this view is never a fixed form or structure but the “events of difference,” of “oscillations,” and as such, merely as the “interim” of forms.

All these ideas have served not only as the foundations for a general theoretical argument, but have also generated in-depth analyses of media relations within film. See for instance Joachim Paech’s study (1997) written on the subject of the “traces of writing” (“die Spur der Schrift”),<sup>39</sup> a comprehensive and detailed study of the interrelationship of writing and cinema that can eloquently exemplify the huge import this type of approach has brought to film studies in general.

### c) *Intermediality described as a performative act, an “action”*

In close connection with the view presented earlier, we can also distinguish a “performative” aspect emphasized in theorizing cinematic intermediality. Already as we have seen earlier, Paech described the perception of medium difference as an “event,” a “process,”<sup>40</sup> and this kind of rhetoric persists in several other intermedial analyses emphasizing in the first place the dynamics of intermedial

<sup>37</sup> Yvonne Spielmann also speaks of this reflexive aspect: “In relation to visual media, then, this definition of intermedia inherently implies that the processes of transformation are reflected in the form of the images, because it is through the modes of self-reflection that the structural shifts characteristic of new media images are mediated and made visible.” (2001, 55.)

<sup>38</sup> “Intermedialität ist als konstitutives und reflexives Verfahren der Wiederholung eines Mediums als Inhalt seiner Form in einem anderen Medium dargestellt worden.” (Paech 2002, 283.)

<sup>39</sup> An earlier study by Ropars-Wuilleumier (1982) referring to the way writing gets inscribed within a filmic image and narrative should also be noted.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Paech: “Intermedialität ist nur prozessual denkbar” (2002, 280).

relations. This dynamic is presented as *ars combinatoria* (cf. Roloff 1997, 22), a *play with media forms*,<sup>41</sup> or a *transgression of media borders*, a *displacement/dislocation* of media forms. Most often, however, it is presented as a “*dialogue*” between arts and media, repurposing Bakhtin’s term that came into focus with the theories of intertextuality. Then again this “dialogism” involved in intermediality can also highlight the differences of media in an acute manner, intermedial “dialogues” can actually become tangible manifestations of media rivalries. As Bolter and Grusin’s book on remediation has stated: “A medium in our culture can never operate in isolation, because it must enter into relationships of respect and rivalry with other media” (1999, 65). Cinematic intermediality, as such, quite often takes the form of remediation or a reflection upon the processes of remediation. Intermedial cinema incorporates painting or literature, but this is often done as a kind of “*anxiety of influence*,”<sup>42</sup> the tensions of such relations are then often described as warfare (“inter-media battles”) or in psychoanalytic terms of displacements, repressions.

The most characteristic example in this way is perhaps the presentation of the relationship of the French New Wave to literature: in T. Jefferson Kline’s evaluation New Wave filmmakers developed an ambivalent, almost oedipal relationship to literature which appears in their films as “a constituted-and-then-repressed authority” (1992, 5). For them literature was both a model and an authority to be challenged which can be seen in the techniques used to remediate literature. This prototype of interpreting modernist cinema can be seen also in Dalle Vacche’s descriptions of different media rivalries, the “random proliferation of competing, unstable signs” (1996, 6) within Godard’s *Pierrot le fou* that culminates in Godard’s use of cinematic collage meant to dismantle the traditional powers of painting and portraiture.<sup>43</sup>

Henk Oosterling’s theoretical writings emphasize this aspect of performativity from several points of view: from the perspective of the receiver we can say that the interpretation of intermediality requires an active viewer, willing to participate in interactivity; from the perspective of the avant-garde type intermedia artist we have the desire to make a statement (often to deliver a conceptual message – no

<sup>41</sup> Cf. “Zwischen-Spiele” (Müller 1997), “Spielformen” (Spielmann 1998).

<sup>42</sup> Harold Bloom (1973) has coined the phrase that was widely used in the discourse on intertextuality.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Dalle Vacche, in the essay entitled *Jean-Luc Godard’s Pierrot le Fou. Cinema as Collage against Painting* uses all kinds of imagery to describe the violent “action” that takes place in the interaction of media on the screen: “In collage the frame does not regulate any longer what gets into the composition; life seems to hit the canvas and leave its traces in defiance of aesthetic norms and standards of good taste” (1996, 108), or: “the transformation of the portrait into collage can also pave the way for a new level of energy” (1996, 129).



wonder that performance can be seen as a typical form of intermediality), and also from a general, philosophical view we can note the “tensional differences” of media within phenomena of intermediality (cf. Oosterling 1998, 2003).

The ideological charges that accompany ideas on intermediality and that we see time and again also attest to this performative, active aspect of intermediality. Intermediality is seen, more often than not, as something that actively “does,” “performs” something, and not merely “is.”

d) *Intermediality described in spatial terms, as a transitory or impossible “place” (heterotopia)*

Intermediality appears as a *border zone* across which media transgressions take place, or an instable “place” of “*in-between*” (“*Zwischenraum*”), a *passageway* from one media towards another.<sup>44</sup> The site for intermedial relations to be played out is considered in much of the literature of cinematic intermediality an *impossible place*, a “*heterotopia*” making use of Foucault’s term.<sup>45</sup> It is also a fact that explicitly intermedial films often prefer diegetic settings that can be directly associated with the principles of heterotopia described by Foucault (see for instance the garden and the hotel in *Last Year in Marienbad*, 1960), and such heterotopias also often serve as allegorical sites for intermedial relations to be brought to the viewer’s attention in some self-reflexive films. (See for example almost all of Greenaway’s films: the imaginary, “impossible” space mixing time and spatial frames in *Prospero’s Books*, the stylized cathedral as ritual and theatrical space of the *Baby of Mâcon*, the garden in *The Draughtsman’s Contract*, the zoo in *A Zed and Two Noughts*, the combination of the diegetic sites of the train, the cemetery and the museum in *The Belly of the Architect*.)

e) *Mapping intermedial figurations, and intermediality as part of the domain of the “figural”*

First of all, it has to be noted, that according to Joachim Paech, intermediality as such manifests itself as a kind of “figuration.” He writes: “The trace of the medium would become describable as a figured process or a configuration in the film” (2000). It is perhaps not surprising that as a methodology, identifying

<sup>44</sup> Raymond Bellour’s title, *L’entre images* (2002) also echoes this idea.

<sup>45</sup> It is true again, that heterotopia is also used in describing the “impossible,” mirror-like and illusory medium of film in general. The term is used in reference to cinematic intermediality for example by Roloff (1997).



specific figures of intermedial cinema has been one of the main goals of intermedial studies of cinema. There have been a great number of analyses of individual films with an explicit aim of *researching the historical poetics of intermediality* so to speak, of identifying the most important rhetorical tropes or “figures” of cinematic intermediality or a taxonomy of the basic techniques that convey medial difference.

Some of these figures are derived from techniques specific to cinema; others are trans-medial “adaptations” of more traditional rhetorical figures, while some of them seem to be forged on a more poetic level, in the poetics of individual authors. Without the possibility of making a complete list, let us review some of these two types of figurations.

Yvonne Spielmann identifies, for instance, a category of intermedial relations in Peter Greenaway’s films that she calls *cluster* (i.e. “multiple layering of different images or image elements, resulting in a spatial density,” see: Figs. 3–4.) closely linked to another category, the *interval* (something that in classical cinema marks a temporal difference or mediates continuity, which, however, in intermedial cinema can mediate the juxtaposition of different media and thus result in a cluster). Although she does not explicitly refer to them as tropes, the terminology that can also be related to musical theory entails connotations beyond a mere formal device.

Perhaps the most debated intermedial image type has been the “*tableau vivant*,” a site where painting and cinema can interact in different ways. The analysis of Jean-Luc Godard’s *Passion* (1982) by Joachim Paech revealed the multiple facets of the use of the cinematic reproductions of painting by Godard as devices that anchor certain thematic elements of the fragmented narrative, and as more complex vehicles for a cinematic meditation at the state of the art of cinema among the arts (Godard himself likened these to the operation of a musical theme, a note that is struck, so to speak, with each picture).<sup>46</sup> [Figs. 5–8.] What is also very important in a *tableau vivant* is that it does not only mediate between reality and fiction or between painting and cinema, but figurates a more complex intermedial relation. As Paech writes: “In a *tableau vivant* we only have the memory of a painting present and not the painting itself before the camera. The confrontation between cinema and painting unfolds on a third level: the level of the *theatre*. Such *tableaux vivants* are actually theatrical scenes, in which the penetration of the camera into the picture means an entrance into a stage-like setting. The space of the picture becomes theatrical space, the bodies that are represented in a picture become actual bodies further deconstructed into

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<sup>46</sup> See Godard’s reflections on his own film in the *Scénario du film Passion* (1982), a video “post-scriptum” to the film itself.

actor and part interpreted by the actor” (1989, 45). We have a direct rendering of this idea in Peter Greenaway’s more recent film, *Nightwatching* (2007), [Figs. 9–12.] in which he presented this interconnection between the scene of the painting transposed both onto the screen and onto the theatre stage, thus confronting the painter’s gaze and handwork (resulting in images and textures) with theatrical “acting” and “watching” (resulting in different situations and interpretations of situations).<sup>47</sup> Brigitte Peucker (2007) emphasizes that *tableaux vivants* in cinema are extremely charged instances of intermediality in which, furthermore, the bodily sensation is accentuated, animating the otherwise more abstract image and eliciting a direct, corporeal and emotional response from the viewer.<sup>48</sup>

Joachim Paech identifies in the technique of the photographic *blur* a similar device that can act as a figure of multiple mediation between the transparency of the cinematic image and the painterly, almost palpable and material rendering of an image on the one hand, and the photographic reality of the event captured in motion on the other (2008).

Another way of obtaining a complex intermedial figure in film is *translating verbal metaphors* or just *word plays into cinematic imagery* or narrative, thus, implicitly, self-reflexively foregrounding in cinema a deep underlying relationship between words and images, the culture of the book and that of the visual, between discourse and figure. Greenaway’s “framed” draughtsman in *The Draughtsman’s Contract* is a good example of this. The film’s main figure is both a visual rendering of the draughtsman’s concrete activity of representing reality by framing it, and transferring it via a mechanical system of grids into the field of graphic representation (enacting the meaning of “*mise en cadre*”), thus inscribing the trace of its own medium within the representation and the narrative of “being framed,” entrapped. [Figs. 13–14.]

Beside Greenaway, Godard is also famous for an extensive use of word plays and word-image translations. Of the multitude of such instances (some of which I have analyzed myself, cf. Pethő 2008), I will now quote just one. Christa Blümlinger identifies the figure of “*défilé*” in Godard’s oeuvre as one not only present in his short film entitled *They all Marched By* (*On s’est tous défilé*, 1988) but in many other films. The French word “*défilé*” that stands at the basis of this complex figure means, beside ‘*procession*,’ also ‘the passage of the celluloid film through the projector.’ In the form “*se défiler*” it means ‘to undo something that has been threaded,’ and the phrase ‘to steal away.’ Godard draws on all these

<sup>47</sup> A film that continues the theme of being “framed” and trapped presented in his earlier *Draughtsman’s Contract* with the theme of being “set up,” “staged.”

<sup>48</sup> Other notable artists beside Jean-Luc Godard, who have used this device extensively, include Peter Greenaway, Derek Jarman or Raul Ruiz, all of them have also been subjects of such analyses.

meanings, as the procession, in the form of/ functioning as a “*mise en scène*” of a number of bodies crossing the field of view, conspicuously represents the idea of the passage of the moving, ‘living’ image” – says Blümlinger (2004, 178). Through this figure Godard records “the power of the image (and of the body) that is recorded and then projected, but which in its very projection and movement constantly pulls back and remains, therefore, forever elusive” (2004, 187).

Beside these figurations there is also the possibility of exploring the cinematic versions of some more traditional rhetorical figures like *metalepsis* (which usually involves a reference to yet another figure or requires a further – often intermedial – imaginative leap to establish its reference<sup>49</sup>), or like *ekphrasis*, a figure that implies crossing media borders. In fact, *ekphrasis*, as Bolter and Grusin have pointed out, can actually be considered a form of remediation (1999, 151–152). Again, we can think of several instances of cinematic intermediality in Godard’s films in which one medium becomes the mirror of the other in such an ekphrastic way. In other words we can speak of an intermedial *mise en abyme*. One of the best known examples of this is Godard’s early masterpiece *Vivre sa vie* (1962, translated as *A Life of her Own/Her Life to Live*) which also includes a direct reference to the ekphrastic tradition itself. Here in the last episode a young man reads out a fragment from Edgar Allen Poe’s short story *The Oval Portrait* which includes an ekphrasis of a painting and the whole sequence displays cinema’s “ekphrastic impulse” that aims at rivalling the other arts by remediating traditional forms of portraiture both in the visual arts and in literature. The embedded representations flaunt cinema’s multiple mediality, but they also result in an endless process of signification. Similarly, in other Godard films the numerous reflections of characters in paintings, posters, comic book drawings, genre film iconography, literary figures, etc., may be seen in parallel with the re-mediational logic of traditional literary ekphrasis. Not to mention Godard’s ultimate ekphrastic project, the series of essays entitled *Histoire(s) du Cinema* (*Histories of Cinema*, 1989–1999).<sup>50</sup> Paech argues (2002) that the film’s main figuration is the medial difference between video as ‘individual’ medium (as video-graphic ‘writing,’ a medium suitable for personal archives) and the dreamlike medium of film. Not disputing this, we can also observe that as a

<sup>49</sup> I have elaborated on the possibility of intermedial techniques being perceived as *metalepsis* (both in a figurative and in a narrative sense) in a research article to be published in the next issue of *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies* with the title: *Intermediality as Metalepsis in the “Cinéécriture” of Agnès Varda*.

<sup>50</sup> The ekphrastic nature of the film was consciously explored by Godard who conceived of the project first as a book transcript of a series of lectures delivered at the request of the Conservatoire d’Art Cinématographique in Montréal, and then released together with the film version an art book of reproductions and a set of five CDs containing an edited version of the soundtrack. See also: Pethő (2009a).

whole, *Histoire(s)* accomplishes a uniquely paradoxical fusion of photographic collage, calligrammatic text with the musical and spiritual aspects of cinematic montage, and thus, using a seemingly archaic, or primitive medium (with relatively simple superimpositions, dissolves, photographic inserts, etc.), Godard effectively creates a singular inter-medium for cinema to speak about cinema.<sup>51</sup>

In conclusion, we can say that this methodology of mapping intermedial figurations not only produces data for a historical poetics of cinematic intermediality, but also effectively distances studies of intermediality from intertextuality, a concept it used to have a lot in common with at its genesis. While in intertextuality we have “an object that apparently dissolves into its relations,” in cinematic intermediality, more recently, we seem to have moved closer and closer to what Oosterling defines as the “sensable,” or what Peucker considers, “the material image:” namely, a quasi-palpable, corporeal entity in its intermedial density.

At the same time, we can also witness a strong direct influence of Lyotard’s concept of the *figural* (1971) applied not merely to film in general (as was systematically done by D. N. Rodowick in the chapters dedicated to film in his book, *Reading the Figural*, 2001), but in particular to intermedial occurrences. For Lyotard, “the figural is an unspeakable other necessarily *at work* within and against *discourse*, disrupting the rule of representation. It is not opposed to discourse, but it is the point at which the oppositions by which discourse works are opened to a radical heterogeneity or *singularity*. As such, the figural is the resistant or irreconcilable trace of a space or time that is radically incommensurable with that of discursive meaning.” (Readings 1991, xxiv.)<sup>52</sup> Moreover Lyotard’s concept of the *sublime* can

<sup>51</sup> For a more detailed analysis of this see Pethő (2009b).

<sup>52</sup> See the further assessment of Lyotard’s concept by Readings: “Against the rule of discourse in figurative or textual space, Lyotard insists upon the figural. It is crucial to understand that the figural is not simply opposed to the discursive, as another kind of space. Lyotard is not making a romantic claim that irrationality is better than reason, that desire is better than understanding. If the rule of discourse is primarily the rule of representation by conceptual *oppositions*, the figural cannot simply be opposed to the discursive. Rather, the figural opens the discourse to a radical heterogeneity, a singularity, a difference which cannot be rationalized or subsumed within the rule of representation. *Discourse*, *figure* evokes a difference or singularity of objects (A is not B) which cannot be thought under the logic of identity, as an *opposition* (A is defined by not being the rest of the system). The discursive system cannot deal with this singularity, cannot reduce it to an opposition within the network. The object resists being reduced to the state of mere equivalence to its meaning within a system of signification, and the figural marks this resistance, the sense that we cannot ‘say’ everything about an object, that an object always in some sense remains ‘other’ to any discourse we may maintain about it, has a singularity in excess of any meanings we may assign to it. The figural arises as the co-existence of incommensurable or heterogeneous spaces, of the figurative in the textual, or the textual in the figurative.” (Readings 1991, 3–4.) We can also note that Barthes’s comments on Eisenstein’s photogram (on ‘the third meaning,’ 1977, 52–69), or even Eisenstein’s idea of ‘hieroglyphic’ writing in film can be seen very much in parallel with Lyotard’s notion of the ‘figural.’ Also, W. J. T. Mitchell’s concept of the “imagetext” (1994) shares similar ideas on a more general level.

also apply: intermediality is often viewed as having the ultimate goal of “figuring the infigurable,” the incommensurable. This is obviously the case with Godard, for instance, who in *Vivre sa vie*, attempts by different embedded media forms and representations to ‘figure’ the ‘infigurable’ identity and beauty of Nana/Anna Karina. (The ultimate image of Nana/Anna Karina that we get in the film is placed somewhere in an impossible space between art and reality, between one medium and another.) Or we can note the case of the *Histoire(s) du cinéma* in which Godard regards, on the one hand, – as Jacques Rancière has put it – the image “as a promise of flesh” (2007, 8), and on the other hand, considers that cinema is ultimately: “Neither an art, nor a technique. A mystery,” or in other words – borrowing the expression from Malraux – “the currency of the absolute.” The *Histoire(s)* in this way highlights, paradoxically, both the tangible, hand-crafted nature of a quasi corporeal cinema in its sensual mediality and intermediality, of the transcendence from “the reel” into “the real,” and – by way of the intermedial “figurations” – a cinema that is reaching into domains that are intangible, infigurable, invisible.

The mapping of such tendencies has brought the study of cinematic intermediality far from the mere listing of media combinations or analogies of intertextual relations. As Henk Oosterling has observed, there has been, in general, a major shift “from the utopia of the Gesamtkunstwerk to the heterotopia of intermediality” (2003, 38), but furthermore, we can also add that nowadays we can witness a similarly important shift towards a scholarship acknowledging cinema’s non-discursive domains and more sensual modes of perception.

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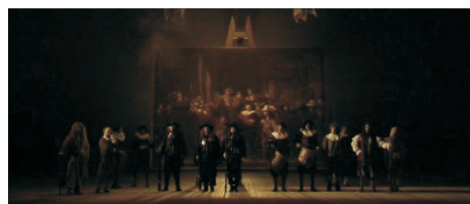
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## Experiences. The Transmedial Expansion of the Matrix Universe

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**Abstract.** Over time the Matrix universe has expanded, growing ever larger. Two aspects of this phenomenon will be highlighted here. Firstly, the transmedia narrative will be examined, which filmmakers Larry and Andy Wachowski have taken to the very limit possible. The narrative transcends different media platforms illustrating how narratives morph and re-morph into different forms, something which media analyst Henry Jenkins refers to as our contemporary convergence culture. What does it mean to have a complete movie experience in today's world? Secondly, the role of interactive spectator, the interaction that is developed in the production of games and accompanying media, will be examined. Close attention will be paid to how the media world of Matrix actualizes the shifts from spectator to participant, player, and media activist, which today take place in a variety of contexts. What do these shifts mean and where do the activities take place? Normally, phenomena such as transmedia storytelling and shifts from spectator to users, players and media activists are associated with the popular mainstream culture. It is, therefore, important to keep the discussion open to the inclusion of all forms of media. Both of these aspects will be discussed from the point of view of contemporary art illustrating that the same phenomena exist in all media contexts.

To say that expectations were high when *The Matrix* (Andy and Larry Wachowski) was released in cinemas in 1999 would be putting it mildly. A contributing factor to the buzz surrounding the release of the movie was the producer's unique marketing strategy, which asked the question: "What is the Matrix?" The question itself became a kind of pleasurable homework assignment, a puzzle to tackle, activities not often associated with a broad commercial film. If expectations were high before the release of the first Matrix movie, they were perhaps even higher for the sequel, *The Matrix Reloaded*. In May 2003 it was finally time to return to the world created in the first film, hopefully to get a few more answers to some of the questions it had raised. But it would not be as simple



as sitting in the theatre and passively watching the film. Certain parts of the story would be explained in the sequel; others, however, could only be found in the game *Enter the Matrix* (which also came out in May 2003) the plot of which was woven into the second Matrix film. In June 2003 *Animatrix* (Peter Chung, Andy Jones et al., script by the Wachowski brothers) was also released. *Animatrix* consisted of nine animated short films which were created when the Wachowski brothers were in Japan promoting the first Matrix film. The Animé films were marketed as “a unique opportunity to broaden your knowledge of the Matrix.” For more specifics, “See *Final Flight of the Osiris*, which is the platform for the film *Matrix Reloaded* and the game *Enter The Matrix*”. The final part of the trilogy, *The Matrix Revolutions*, was also released in November 2003. The philosophical questions raised by the first Matrix were clarified as the audience was finally able to assemble all three parts of the story. Taken together, these parts formed their own fictional world.

*The Trilogy*, *Animatrix*, and the Matrix comic books, which were also released in 2003, would be followed by even more games. In 2005, *The Matrix: Path of Neo* and *The Matrix Online*, a MMORPG-game played online via the Internet, were also released.<sup>1</sup> During the same period, a wealth of home produced films and videos put together by creative fans appeared on the Internet for general consumption. Proposals for how the fourth part might look were put forth, alternative endings to the Trilogy’s parts, as well as variations on how the films could be integrated with other films were discussed and debated all over the Internet. Over time the Matrix universe has expanded, growing ever larger. [Figs. 1–2.] Two aspects of this phenomenon will be highlighted. Firstly, the transmedia narrative will be examined, which filmmakers Larry and Andy Wachowski have taken to the very limit possible. The narrative transcends different media platforms illustrating how narratives morph and re-morph into different forms, something which media analyst Henry Jenkins refers to as our contemporary convergence culture (2006). What does it mean to have a complete movie experience in today’s world? Secondly, the role of active spectators, the interaction that is developed in the production of games and accompanying media, will be examined. Close attention will be paid to how the media world of Matrix actualizes the shifts from spectator to participant, player, and media activist, which today take place in a variety of contexts. What do these shifts mean and where do the activities take place? Normally, phenomena such as transmedia storytelling and shifts from spectator to users, players and media activists are

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<sup>1</sup> MMORPG is an abbreviation for Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game.

associated with the popular mainstream culture. It is, therefore, important to keep the discussion open to the inclusion of all forms of media. Both of these aspects will be discussed from the point of view of contemporary art illustrating that the same phenomena exist in all media contexts.

## **A Complete Film Experience**

Media plays an important role in our lives. By describing our relation to media, we also understand more about our life situation in general. The evolution of home movie systems is a good example of how our use of media and new technology has changed our lives. Since the 1950s films have been available to watch on television, yet surprisingly little has been written about our relationship to this activity (Klinger 1998, 4). For decades, the film industry has argued that the optimum film experience is inextricably linked to the cinema. Today, this notion has been seriously challenged by competition from home theatres as well as by other technology. Home movie systems are marketed with the claim that they do not only reproduce a complete film experience, but they provide a film experience even stronger than that offered by the cinema (Klinger 1998, 7). And, of course, 3D is one efficient strategy to again claim the advantages of the cinema theatre for the ultimate cinematic experience.

If we compare film and television research we see that the activity of watching television has been studied most frequently. To explain why Film Studies has focused more on “the object of viewing” rather than the “context of viewing,” film and television professor Mark Jancovich has this to say: “The study of television, unlike that of film, seems to have a more easily identifiable social context – the domestic living room – the cultural politics of which are therefore more immediately open to analysis” (Jancovich, Faire, Stubbings 2003, 4).<sup>2</sup> In other words, Film Studies has paid less attention to the viewer’s actual social position and more to a hypothetical audience construct. Accordingly, one begins largely from the point of view of an imaginary audience which one assumes has the same kind of response to the content of a film.

Today, the storylines of movies and television series are increasingly interwoven with story elements that appear in other medium, so that the narrative transcends different media platforms (i.e. transmedia storytelling). This will, of course, have consequences for the way in which these objects are studied, as well

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<sup>2</sup> Jancovich refers to David Morley when he speaks about “the object of viewing” and “the context of viewing”, taken from: David Morley 1992, 157–158. London: Routledge.

as for how the public and its experience are studied. Quite clearly we are in the midst of a generational shift when it comes to understanding the meaning of film experience – a generational shift which must be understood both in relation to the audience's age and also to film and media arts itself. As the stories cross over different media platforms, a number of phenomena emerge that must be described and analyzed. How, for example, the media works – individually and in relation to its content, but also how audiences are positioned within different media contexts. The most influential research on how the movie experience has been shaped by the contexts and cultures surrounding it has been devoted to early film history (Charney and Schwartz 1995). Together with the enrichment of transmedia storytelling and the development of media strategies which take one story and infuse multiple media with the story, it becomes apparent that in today's world, it is impossible to study public experience on the basis of individual media and the rooms in which they are viewed. If we previously considered studying film experience from movie audiences and movie theatres, television experiences from television programs, television viewers and living rooms, art experiences only from artwork, art audience and galleries, it can be shown that to view transmedia will, at the very least, be problematic as the limits of both expression, audience and viewing room are transgressed.

Henry Jenkins, who has long studied popular culture, points to the *Matrix* phenomenon as an example of the wide appeal of a commercial film, whereas in a European art film the main point is to understand, or grasp, the film's content: "To get it or not" (Jenkins 2006, 93–94). But to grasp the content means that one must grasp the entirety of the context. Unlike the European art film, self reflectively pointing to its own significance, *The Matrix* stretches out like a labyrinth with numerous ways to enter. It shapes a universe not only for the viewer to absorb, to embrace, but one to which s/he can also contribute. *The Matrix* as a phenomenon shows the contextual and conceptual creation of meaning which is contained in today's (multiple media) film experience.

An important difference between a more production-oriented vision of film experience and the transmedia experience concerns expectations and media strategies. Before *The Matrix* was released, expectations had been raised via several different channels. To a major extent these expectations were created by marketing strategies where the trailer played a very important role. For example, the soundtrack for *The Matrix* trailer contained language that promised a film with existential undertones: "What is the Matrix? The Matrix is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth. What truth?" What



world view or which world views will the film invite us to consider? Interpretations have been many. Most likely it was the ambiguity factor which worked so well worldwide. The last two sentences in the trailer suggest that the audience does not only see the film but also actively assume Neo's (the protagonist's) task of understanding what the Matrix is: "Unfortunately no one can be told what the Matrix is. You have to see it for yourself." We hear the voice at the same time as the film's website is shown, the now legendary *Matrix* green DNA-like alphanumeric font code: [www.whatisthematrix.com](http://www.whatisthematrix.com). Over time this official website for *The Matrix* has expanded from the first film to accommodate the entire Trilogy and beyond that, the comic books and media games. Today, the website contains an element of mystery (or perhaps lack of clarity) which is most likely an attempt to mirror the aesthetics and themes of the Matrix films. Ultimately, it is designed primarily as a marketing tool to induce us, the audience, to buy more Matrix products.

Film marketing via the Internet plays an increasingly important role in creating expectations. The limits are diffuse when we consider whether this adds something to the experience. An example of a marketing strategy which uses certain activities designed to somehow contribute to the experience can be found on the website [www.hatagbg.se](http://www.hatagbg.se). The Swedish film *Hata Göteborg* (Robert Lillhonga, 2007) is presented as "A comedic drama about masculinity at its worst." By clicking on the box that says "Who are you? Take the test!" and "Do you go your own way?" the viewer can take a variety of tests which help determine which of the film's characters comes closest to his own. It's possible that the website could contribute to creating identification with one or more of the film's characters (whether you see the movie before or after visiting the site) but the activity hardly adds anything to the film's narrative.

The film *Donnie Darko* (Richard Kelly, 2001), however, is an example of a movie where both the website and the Director's Cut version make a very direct contribution to the film experience. Film and television professor Geoff King, in his book with the same title as the movie, tries to sort out the mechanisms which influenced the classifying of the film as cult (King 2007). He emphasizes the nightly screenings at the Pioneer Theatre in New York's East Village, which were continuous until the Director's Cut was released, as well as how the story's explicit openness and high degree of ambivalence lent itself to fan participation (King 2007, 21). He writes extensively on how the extra textual contributions to the story on both the website, as well as other sites on the Internet, in addition to the Director's Cut version of the film with its cult status, presumes an active search

on the part of movie fans (King 2007, 22–23, but recurring through the entire book). On the website [www.donniedarkofilm.com](http://www.donniedarkofilm.com), it states: “Pay close attention. You could miss something,” as an admonition or clue that there is something special to discover; here exist details beyond the film’s narrative. Knowledge of details builds a sort of trust fund between the audience and film. Later, when the book *The Philosophy of Time Travel* appeared, the DVD material not only provided detail but also communicated the underlying philosophy, to the understanding of which King attaches great importance in order to intensify the insight over and above that of the film experience.

The function of trailers and websites is undergoing a change in at least two essential areas. Instead of merely describing the film’s story, encouraging us to go and see the film, they contribute to it in different ways. Rather than presenting something ready-made for the passive theatre viewer, they ask the spectator to immerse himself in materials from different media platforms. To illustrate the generational shift as it applies to the “experience,” Jenkins quotes Danny Bilson, an influential insider in the Hollywood gaming industry:

“If there is something I love, I want it to be bigger than just those two hours in the movie theatre or a one hour a week experience on TV. I want a deepening of the universe. ... I want to participate in it. I’ve just been introduced to the world in the film and I want to get there, explore it. You need that connection to the world to make participation exciting (Jenkins 2006, 106).”

The creators of *The Matrix* and *Donnie Darko* obviously share Bilson’s point of view. Both films require spectator activity as part of the experience, necessary in order to grasp the whole of the content. Activity is obvious when it comes to television, video and computer games. It is also clear that in many cases the games act as links to the films. Whether or not the games add anything to the film’s story or vice versa is not as obvious. Most examples after all show that one product does not necessarily function as an added incentive in the sales of another. The audience does not simply buy into all marketing tricks. The instances where the audience has responded to a story in the same way as it did with *The Matrix* are not as numerous as it may sometimes appear.<sup>3</sup> The public simply stays away if they don’t find the content sophisticated or interesting enough. Accepting the challenge to go further with the experience via different media differs substantially from seeing a film or playing a game with similar content. You can also ask yourself how far the public is prepared to go to participate in a fictional universe or film experience. Jenkins again:

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<sup>3</sup> In spite of that discussion, it can be worth noting that the Matrix games have been criticized as less interesting from a game perspective.

“Transmedia storytelling is the art of world making. To fully experience any fictional world, consumers must assume the role of hunters and gatherers, chasing down bits of the story across media channels, comparing notes with each other via online discussion groups, and collaborating to ensure that everyone who invests time and effort will come away with a richer entertainment experience. Some would argue that the Wachowski brothers, who wrote and directed the three Matrix films, have pushed transmedia storytelling farther than most audience members were prepared to go (Jenkins 2006, 21).”

By discussing the phenomenon of *The Matrix* and other films in relation to trailers and websites, I have tried to clarify how different movie experiences are structured today and how they increasingly require that the viewer actively engage within a broader context. We now turn to another media context to see if any parallels exist between popular culture and the way the art world structures film and art experiences today. To do so, we will examine how the Swedish artist and writer, Magnus Bærtås, chooses to show one of his works.

## The Context of Exhibition and its Significance

Magnus Bærtås has long worked on a project which he calls *Who is?*. It is a series of films about both well known and unknown people he depicts through a kind of essay reportage which during the project has evolved and been exhibited in several different ways. To simplify, you could say that it depicts the lives of individuals while exploring the biographical form. *Who is?* has its origins in a number of texts composed of simple notes on twenty lines which Bærtås had written over a period of time. At a certain point, he realized he needed a form, a method for telling the stories of the people he had been meeting. The texts were to be presented in the form of an installation on a reading apparatus, as well as on signs, banners and on furniture intended for the purpose of reading (benches, tables, and chairs) in different contexts, including libraries. He was later to look up several of the people depicted in the texts and consequently changed the medium from written text to film. From the notes which he had already taken, he allowed those individuals to play themselves filtered through his experience of them. One of the films was named *Who is Zdenko Buzek?* and is thus the result of the artist and his objects/subject working together to recreate the artist's impression and memory of Zdenko Buzek through Buzek playing himself.

The staging of Bærtås's notes was produced in 2003 by the Filmform Foundation within the framework for the project *Sex vågade livet / The Magnificent Six* – in

collaboration with Swedish Television, the Swedish Film Institute and the Future of Culture. The film has since been shown in many different galleries, art institutions and museums.<sup>4</sup> By looking at the list of screenings on Bårtås's website, you can see the number of art institutions, in the traditional meaning, where the film has been shown. It has also been shown in contexts where art is not traditionally shown. Television is still, on the whole, an unlikely place to view art films. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of July in 2003 Bårtås's film was shown on Swedish Television. It has also been shown at cinemas, which is not the usual venue for video art, although there have been exceptions. For example, *Sex vågade livet / The Magnificent Six* was shown at the Zita Cinema in Stockholm, Haga Cinema in Gothenburg and the Curzon Cinema in London. The film comprises a total of six films and can also be purchased on DVD as *Sex vågade livet* for approximately 100 Swedish crowns. For five Swedish crowns, the film can be viewed on the Internet at [www.glimz.net](http://www.glimz.net), a film-on-demand-service for Scandinavian short films and quality documentaries.<sup>5</sup> Yet another way to see the work is via a multi-media agency called Agence Topo in Montreal.<sup>6</sup> The agency redrafts works of art adapting them to the computer as a medium. They translated some of the film's linearity to segments which are clickable. In 2007 the film was presented in yet another way in Tokyo. In the manner of the Benshi tradition with a narrator for silent movies Bårtås had a narrator read the text while the film was shown as performance.

*Who is Zdenko Buzek?* is an example of an art event occurring through many contexts, in a variety of media and exhibition practices.<sup>7</sup> *Who is Zdenko Buzek?* is, therefore, a work of art that can be seen on the television sofa, a chair in the cinema, at the gallery, in the museum's darkened rooms and on the computer. We may assume that the audience experiences the work in very different ways depending on the form the exhibition takes. Likewise the audience will differ greatly depending on how the work is exhibited. And very likely the meaning of the work will vary according to these different contexts. This raises a number of questions: Which audience sees the work on television, in a museum, at the cinema or on the Internet? How does the audience react to the same work shown at different locations? Today, questions about where an audience sees the work, in which medium, and how their experiences differ, the linking together and

<sup>4</sup> Home page for Magnus Bårtås, [www.magnus-bartas.se/index.htm](http://www.magnus-bartas.se/index.htm) (Checked 13 May, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Payment for these films can be made via telephone, by invoice or with credit card.

<sup>6</sup> Home page for *Who Is? Re-enacted Biographies*, [www.agencetopo.qc.ca/whois](http://www.agencetopo.qc.ca/whois) (Checked 13 May 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Bårtås also works with an art research project at the art college Valand in Gothenburg concerning this and other films included in the *Who is?*-series. See: [www.valand.qu.se/forskning/doktorander.html#magnus](http://www.valand.qu.se/forskning/doktorander.html#magnus) (Available May 13, 2008)

colouring of it, are important to study. They are central to our understanding of contemporary image culture and its relation to experience. We may in point of fact ask ourselves where the experience of Zdenko Buzek begins and ends, just as we can ask ourselves where the experience of *The Matrix* begins and ends.

We cannot compare *Who is Zdenko Buzek?* to *The Matrix* where the story crosses over different media platforms and further where the audience collects more and more pieces of the story, adding them to its fund of information. *Who is Zdenko Buzek?* is always the same story but viewed through different media in different contexts. It is an event or a film which is viewed in an ever wider context. It can be stated that the perception of a work of art associated with a single original, existing in one place, is becoming rare. According to that tradition, a visit to the Louvre is required to experience Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* (*La Gioconda*, 1503–06). Arrows point the way throughout the museum guiding visitors in their search to find and experience the only “true” painting. The amount of references and copies of the *Mona Lisa* certainly creates a “mobile context”, but they primarily contribute to the myth of the original (Benjamin 1936). Although the consumer culture of the *Mona Lisa* is enormous, the original still exists behind armoured glass.

The similarity between *Who is Zdenko Buzek?* and its many installation incarnations, and transmedia storytelling illustrates, as does the film, *The Matrix*, that narrative takes on different meanings in different contexts, that the many ways to view it together creates the context of the work. A spectator who sees only the first Matrix film and nothing more can be on a similar viewing level as a spectator who sees *Who is Zdenko Buzek?* once in a single context. A serious Matrix fan who actively looks for the story's numerous riddles and answers can be compared to someone who follows, sees, and compares Bärtås's work in a variety of venues and thus can create a story that reaches further than the film's original narrative. The audience will, in both cases, depending on the variety of input, have a variety of experiences and activities. That said, we move on to another contemporary art work which illustrates the positioning of the viewer in a different way.

## The Use of Media in Art

*The All Seeing Eye. The Easy Teenage Version* (2005) is the title of a work of art by director Michel Gondry and the artist Pierre Bismuth. [Figs. 3–8.] It has been available to view in galleries, as well as online. In collaboration with the scriptwriter Charlie Kaufmann, Gondry and Bismuth wrote the manuscript for the film *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry, 2004). In many ways

the scriptwriters' different backgrounds reflect the current artistic climate, and the text itself illustrates simultaneously how different forms of art and media transgress boundaries: in terms of the creative process, expression, and also for the viewer.

*The All Seeing Eye* starts with the image of what looks like an everyday living room. As the camera slowly pans, a room that connects onto other rooms comes into view. As the camera moves on, designer furniture and exclusive furnishings come into view, as well as a window looking out. On closer inspection the view from the window reveals a great variation of geographical places: Moscow, Brussels, and so on. At the same time as the camera continues panning around the room you get the impression that this isn't just any living room. In the middle of the room there is a television showing *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. The sound that you can hear is taken from the scene in the film that is showing. The use of this sound might remind you of a home cinema system. Provided that you know the film, and use it as a reference, it becomes apparent that the views and the room have more to do with the memory of a room than an actual room.

*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* is about Joel Barish and Clementine Kruczynski who are going through the process of erasing each other from their memories. To ensure this is a success, Joel Barish is encouraged to map out his memories of Clementine and make sure that no apparently insignificant object could accidentally remind him of her. But how far does a memory linger or reach? How much has to be erased for you to forget someone? Pierre Bismuth, who claims to be one of the three scriptwriters who came up with the story, said that he became fascinated by something a friend shared with him after a brief love affair. The friend wished that it had never taken place and wished that there was a way to erase every trace and memory of the man she had met (Newman interviews Pierre Bismuth 2005, 188). It was in this way that lingering memories became the theme of the film. It is a very particular theme – to erase someone from your memory, to pinpoint every related thought that might remind you of them – and this also underpins the art work *The All Seeing Eye*.

All the memories of Clementine which are to be collected, mapped out, and destroyed in the film are staged and depicted visually in the form of a home which gradually disappears in *The All Seeing Eye*. Every trace of memory and life are literally erased from the work of art. Each step of this occurs as a camera pans 360 degrees in a circular moment around the room nine times. After each circle something disappears: a newspaper, a pot plant, a chair, a bookcase, another newspaper, a lamp, an arm chair, a mirror, another newspaper. After a while the room itself also begins to change; the window and the views outside

disappear, the adjacent rooms disappear, the walls become white and the floor also finally turns white.

In *The All Seeing Eye* the room becomes finally empty. When everything has been erased nothing remains except a white room shut away from the outside world. The white room has no external influence and it is as empty as an object. The object is such that it is reminiscent of a gallery room. Consequently, all that remains is the impression of a gallery resembling a white cube where every murmur or memory, every trace, has been erased. Similarly to the reference to the white cube (the modernistic gallery), the viewer or onlooker needs a number of other references to comprehend this work of art. Amongst them, of course, is the most central one, the film *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*; but also the designer objects, different buildings, places, and the object that remains in the room when everything else has become completely white – a Brillo Box. The sound from the film is audible and a Brillo Box à la Andy Warhol becomes visible in the middle of the room. The box has always been in the room but has been slightly hidden behind the TV where the film was playing. In art history the Brillo Box plays an unmistakable role as an art work that symbolizes both Pop Art and the dissolution of the complex relation between the original and the copy. These boxes have also become, theoretically at least, loaded symbols in terms of the discussions about a gallery's identifiable function – that the room as such defines what is art. In the book *After the End of Art. Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, art theoretician Arthur Danto, who is associated with the identified role of a gallery, wonders whether the art work of artist David Reed will be historically possible, and how this type of art can be critically possible (Danto 1997, xi-xiv).<sup>8</sup>

Reed has, in a well-known project, framed his paintings with a couple of scenes taken from Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958). He recreates in two works the bedroom scenes as installations and places his own paintings above Judy's and Scottie's beds (*Judy's Bedroom*, *Scottie's Bedroom*, 1994). He adds to this televisions in both rooms and on these he shows the scenes from the film that take place in the bedroom. Even here in the film he places his paintings above their beds, but this time digitally.

Danto's choice of artist is interesting given that Reed always emphasizes that he is a painter and that it is his paintings that he wants to be known for. He believes that the installations just function as frames for the paintings. Reed's art exemplifies for Danto the end of modernism and the end of art. And consequently

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<sup>8</sup> Arthur C. Danto, together with George Dickie, came to be regarded as one of the fathers of art institutional theory. The theory is about how the room defined art.



the end of the institution that sets the framework for art. He is interested in understanding how this art which consists of so many different forms of media – sculpture, video, film, installation – is possible, and how the boundaries of different art forms have blurred. As a painter, Reed chooses film and installations as a frame for his paintings. He frames them by creating a room around the painting. What is most important in this context is that he uses our contemporary experiences as viewers – our relationship to films, other art forms and media – as a point of reference. Danto represents a modernistic approach where a work of art is defined externally from the room in which it is displayed. Within this room there is, thus, just place for that which is defined as art and by extension those who come to look at art. He discusses the end of art in relation to mixed media and art forms, and following what he says about the end of art according to Reed, it ought to mean the end of paintings without context, or the end of visitors to galleries without film and TV references. In this way it would mean that the onlooker understands Reed's paintings in relation to TV and film – or in relationship to technological activities such as zapping between channels, using video and image editing. If we were to maintain Danto's viewpoint there would still be a sharp division between TV-viewers, cinema-goers and gallery visitors. This dividing line would be able to make life easier but the experience of film and art works less interestingly and is less relevant. In our contemporary culture of images it is not just the borders between the art forms that have been eroded; the understanding of different types of viewers or onlookers have been blurred. This is of interest both to commercial filmmakers and many artists today.

The use of the *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* in *The All Seeing Eye* shows in other words how we no longer seem to view film and art as separate forms, frames within their own boundaries; instead, we seem to put considerable emphasis on understanding references, the narrator's relationship to other narrators and the context in which the work is shown. Ultimately, this means that experiences are shaped and formed by contexts and surrounding cultures, and that these are mixed together; moreover, it seems that the cultural worlds which are often defined within the context of the work in which they are shown are now muddled. Kaufmann, Gondry, and Bismuth's background might appear to be different in terms of collaboration, but simultaneously, it has now become quite normal for this kind of transgression of boundaries. We have been theorizing for a long time art works which transgress boundaries. However, much remains in terms of the increasingly blurred picture of the onlooker; simultaneously, audio visual expression seems to be attempting to handle this. *Eternal Sunshine of the*



*Spotless Mind* is shown at cinemas, on our televisions, on computer screens or mobile phones. The art work *The All Seeing Eye* depicts all this on TV. The TV is in the living room. The living room is transformed into a gallery. The work of art is exhibited in a gallery. The work of art plays on the computer screen, perhaps in the living room. Art which enters our living rooms via TV, the Internet, and via different software and other technology is aimed at *users* rather than *viewers*. Many exhibition practitioners are influencing art and its attitude and its representation of our contemporary viewing situation. The above mentioned works are comprised of a number of different media practitioners – and once more even more blurred boundaries, which raises questions about which onlookers are involved. First and foremost the film can be seen by Internet users.<sup>9</sup> The work was shown for an audience of art lovers and TV viewers at an exhibition about television at the Witte de With museum in Rotterdam. It has also been shown at Lisson Gallery in London and to visitors at the Cosmic Gallery in Paris. The film *Eternal Sunshine of a Spotless Mind* was created for the cinema-going public. It is shown in an artwork that is shown in a living room for TV and film viewers. In other words, it can be seen as an attempt to problematize the notion of what a viewer is, questioning who sees what.

## From Viewer to User

We have been searching for a long time for methods to understand and discuss art that transgresses boundaries. We have spoken of the need for an interdisciplinary method of analysis and way in which to examine everything that comes under umbrella terms; for example, visual culture. The benefits of creating tools for film theory to study contemporary visual culture outside of the traditional context of film are numerous; it is just as valuable to use examples from media contexts (film, art, TV) in order to study public groups and experiences. Which conceptions form the basis for the public that sees *Judy's* and *Scottie's Bedroom*, *The All Seeing Eye*, *Who is Zdenko Buzek?* and *The Matrix*? What type of viewer gets all the references and every context? Is it the channel surfer? Is it the navigator? Is it the downloader? Is it the recycler? Is it the consumer? Or the gamer? Quite probably, a viewer comprehended in terms of technological activity (in a lesser or greater metaphoric meaning) – as a channel surfer, navigator, downloader, recycler, consumer and gamer – a conceptually technologically active user.

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<sup>9</sup> The website that showed the piece in connection with the exhibition at Witte de With is no longer available but the piece itself can be seen on YouTube under: "The All Seeing Eye" Gondry/Bismuth Installation," (Available May 15, 2008).

The film being shown on the TV in *The All Seeing Eye* is visual material that anyone has access to through purchasing, renting, downloading or watching at the cinema. There is nothing special about the film being shown on TV. From this perspective it is interesting to link it back to where this action takes place: at home, in the living room, in the private sphere. It is that place or room which has previously been associated with watching TV and thus passivity. In this and other art works it appears as if the living room is being associated with the exact opposite, with a technologically active user. In keeping with earlier theories of viewers, the cinema has been the place for the most active viewer. Now, from a technological perspective, this seems to be the least active setting, and it seems as if the most industrious activity takes place in the living room – at home. At the cinema there is, by comparison, the least room for activity – a social (and perhaps the most ritual) and mental activity, but not the technological activity that takes place at home.

Within contemporary art there are several artists who have commented on the living room as a room for media. Pierre Bismuth made *Link* (1998) before *The All Seeing Eye*; Pipilotti Rist has thematized the viewing situation by drawing attention to the room itself and over-dimensional sofas in front of a variety of screens and projectors. Ina Blom, an art historian, in her latest book *On the Style Site: Art, Sociality and Media Culture* shows how art thematizes the use of different media at home (Blom 2007).

She describes numerous pictures of exhibitions that look like contemporary settings, where furnishings with light have a leading role. Lamps of all kinds seem to be characteristic for this type of art represented by artists like Tobias Rehberger and Jorge Pardo. Blom is of the opinion that this ends up bringing about two conclusions regarding this type of art: the first, that, rather patronizingly, it is about cool settings, whilst the other is more positive and is about art and design getting closer to each other, so that the boundaries between them are blurring. Blom finds that a major interest in this type of environment is in some way or another about televisuality – or more specifically televisual experiences. She says: “Given that these elements open up for an agreement between the memory of media signal and our cognitive creations of room, forming the initial collusive of TV room and media production room.” (Blom 2006/07).<sup>10</sup>

Those environments that Blom speaks about are aimed at the media situation in these particular rooms or living rooms:

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<sup>10</sup> The article describes much of the book's contents. In the quotation emphasis is laid on the spatial aspects but in the piece itself it is primarily the temporal nature of things that Blom links to these environments. She calls these exhibitions/exhibition rooms “time machines” (time-believes machines). Time machines that function as a kind of public memory – or places or environments/atmospheres of public memory.

“Because if the lights are perceived first and foremost as effective creators of the atmosphere (a fundamental characteristic of any residence), it becomes easier to see the associations in one work after another, between the lamps and various other light sources that adapt or create the rooms that we live in. The lights that shine through differing media such as television, computer screens, clock radios, mobile phones, and the constant flashing of neon lights and billboards, seem to make night appear as a direct interface.” (Blom 2006/07).

Accordingly, the living room, also associated with TV viewing, has now come to resemble a kind of media centre which offers space for the more technologically active user like channel surfers, navigators, recyclers, consumers, gamers, influence producers and chats. This living room has been moved into the art work described above, into the setting of the gallery – this room, which in Danto’s spirit, has taken precedence in defining what art is today turns the living room into a TV and media production room. At the same time as it does this, it comments on the use of media that Jenkins paints when he describes the transmedial means of narration and our contemporary convergence culture. From this we can conclude that the technology that we are creating and using today is shaped and cultivated by active consumers. This, in turn, shapes the way we think.

## Conclusions

“Come. See. Experience.” With these words the cinema-going public in London were enticed to the cinema, computer users to YouTube and art lovers to visit the Tate’s website by a trailer to see a film with British actor Jude Law in the main role. Simultaneously, the trailer encouraged the public to visit Borough Market in London on November 30, 2007. Here a performance took place with the very same Jude Law right in the middle of the events. At Borough Market the trailer was also filmed (in 35 mm film). The film was, however, never made. It never existed except in our expectations. The work of art, for it was a work of art, was comprised of just a trailer and performance. That was all that was to be seen, all that was to be experienced. The person behind these media platforms attracting the public to Borough Market was the Polish artist Pawel Althamer.<sup>11</sup>

When contemporary art comprises art events like Althamer’s *Realtime Movie* or when the viewer is encouraged to use their own mobile phone to integrate with the art work, when a video installation is translated to a DVD so the viewer can

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<sup>11</sup> See the trailer: <http://movings.blogspot.com/2007/11/realtime-movie-in-borough-market.html> (available May 22, 2008). To find out more about the project: <http://feeds.tate.org.uk/tateshots> (available May 22, 2008). See also (Staple 2008, 15).

choose from a menu with the help of his or her remote control or when the viewer integrates by distance in realtime with help of their computer to later see the results on the Internet, it becomes clear that we ought to let experiences from several media contexts enrich the discussion that is taking place about how experiences are being enriched and structured differently today.<sup>12</sup>

Pop cultural phenomena have, in this text, been compared with similar phenomena in contemporary art. *The Matrix* was used as an introduction given that it is a major experiment with transmedia storytelling. *The Matrix* demonstrates how integrated user-perspective is in the entirety of the film's narrative. It is comprised of interactive elements, inviting the viewer to participate and create. The viewer is both an onlooker and user. The example *Who is Zdenko Buzek?* illustrated how the context within which a work is shown (the significance of context) creates parallels to popular culture and media use there. The work was shown in many different contexts and in all likelihood for a public in different kinds of settings. Even *The All Seeing Eye* took up the whole issue of context but also how the authors integrated their own view of the onlooker as a participant and user as part of the work itself. The films that they have made are used in different contexts, which drew attention to different levels of media use. Today's technological development challenges us to develop narrative structures and this in itself contributes to a change in the actions of the onlooker. Jenkins asked how far the public is prepared to go in terms of their own activity. Film as experience describes our relation to representation and activity in different media contexts. Our situation in life is depicted in the way we use technology; or, as media philosopher Friedrich Kittler put it: "Media determine our situation which – in spite or because of it – deserves a description" (Kittler 1999, xxxix).

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<sup>12</sup> The use of mobile phones and computers: Between September 12, 2001 and February 23, 2003 The Chaos Computer Club transformed a building at Alexanderplatz in Berlin into a gigantic computer screen upon which interactive installations took place with the help of Berliners' computers and mobile phones. A similar event coordinated by the artist Erik Krikortz took place in Stockholm. *Colour by Numbers* was an interactive light installation that was shown on Ericsson's telephone tower at Telefonplan between October 23, 2006 and April 1, 2007. The same artist was also behind *Emotional Cities* which was a light game that was shown on multi-storey buildings at Hörtorget in Stockholm from November 1, 2007 until January 6, 2008. The interactive light show was thought to reflect how people in Stockholm felt going through seven variations of colour. The use of remote controls: This refers specifically to a work by the Danish artist Eva Koch and her works *Villar och Villar - Manuela's Children* (2001). The first is a video installation and the second is a DVD version for private use. Both show two completely different attitudes towards technology, narrative, and viewer. An interview with Eva Koch about both these works is to be found in (Torp 2003, 125–134). For an interesting interpretation of *Villar* see: (Rossholm Lagerlöf 2007, 212–222). Realtime interaction from a distance: The artist Stelarc tries, in his art, to illustrate or depict his view of the body as obsolete. By connecting his body to advanced technological equipment it is controlled in realtime from a distance by figures in different places around the world. For clearer pictures and descriptions see: [www.stelarc.va.com.au/arcx.html](http://www.stelarc.va.com.au/arcx.html) (Available May 22, 2008).

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**Figures 1–2.** The expansion of the Matrix universe. Screenshot from the original film and the Muppet version available on YouTube.



**Figures 3–8.** *The All Seeing Eye. The Easy Teenage Version* (2005), video installation by Michel Gondry and Pierre Bismuth.





## Frame, Space, Narrative. Doors, Windows and Mobile Framing in the Films of Luchino Visconti

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**Abstract:** In the last years, film and media studies are more and more discovering or rather appropriating ideas from art history and art theory, in particular iconology. This has led to great attention for the work of Aby Warburg and Ernst Panofsky. In particular the concept of motif has led to publications such as Michael Walker's *Hitchcock's Motifs* (2005), and, most recently, the article "Medienwissenschaft der Motive" (2009) by André Wendler and Lorenz Engell.<sup>1</sup> In the underlying article, the motif of the door in the films of Luchino Visconti will be researched, in comparison with, in particular 17<sup>th</sup> century, painting. The framing by doors in art and film will be compared with the motif of the framing window, while differences with mobile framing will be traced. Finally, the results will be embedded within contemporary ideas on intermediality.

In his intriguing study *L'instauration du tableau* (1993), released in English as *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting* (1997), the Romanian art historian Victor Stoichita researched the phenomenon of *framing* in art, in particular the effect of the frame *within* the frame of a painting. He connects this with the creation of depth, and within this matter, he analyzes the functions and the representations of mirrors, paintings and maps within the representation, but he also deals with the representation of doors and windows in early modern painting. For research into depth and *framing* in *cinema*, in particular the work of the Italian filmmaker Luchino Visconti, Stoichita's work proved to be an extremely useful source in order to compare early modern but also 19<sup>th</sup> century painting, silent cinema, and the cinema of the 1930s and 1940s with the cinema of Luchino Visconti.

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<sup>1</sup> The article is part of a special issue on motifs of the new journal *zfm. Zeitschrift für Medienwissenschaft*.



## The Door as Frame within a Frame

Within Visconti's films, the *door opening* often functions as a frame within a frame. In *The Self-Aware Image*, Victor Stoichita makes an interesting division between door and window openings (Stoichita 1997, 47–68). In early modern painting, the window opens the interior to the exterior, permitting light to come in and offering a view towards the outside. That is how we see windows often represented. Much less often, we encounter examples of watching through a window towards the inside while standing outside. Doors mostly do not have that visual function. You can pass a door either towards the inside or the outside. Still, doors can also function as a kind of window, in the Albertian sense, when they offer us a view of the space behind the door. Not only can they offer a view from inside to outside or from outside to inside, but, while we remain inside, they can also show us another space, beyond the door. The open door thus connects two adjacent spaces. While we are inside in the world of culture, the window offers a view towards nature outside; with the door, however, we can stay within the world of culture, of domestic space. That's why Stoichita states that the door opening is the matrix of interior and genre painting. Of course these are a bit sweeping statements, and we will see this even more when projecting his analysis onto film: in cinema, open doors can also give views on streets and gardens, while sometimes windows are used to climb from the outside in (say burglars) or from the inside out (take rebellious teenagers). And as we will notice, views from outside to inside are very common in film, especially when the camera stands outside and shoots persons inside standing in front of an open window or behind a glass window.

The motif of doubling of the frame by use of the door opening is already visible in medieval art and thrived in Flemish painting of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, but whereas the motif had not been developed yet as a meta-pictorial issue, it surely became one in 17<sup>th</sup> century painting. The door became a topos. In the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the door appears as a prominent motif in Dutch painting, in its separation *and* connection of two adjacent interior spaces. One of the oldest examples is *The Sleeping Maid/The Idle Servant* (National Gallery, London, 1655) by Nicolaes Maes. The difference from previous paintings such as Pieter Aertsen's *Christ with Maria and Martha* (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, 1552) is that here the space behind is not a religious scene, but a second genre scene, a second interior scene. The viewer looks via the foreground and the frame of the image to a second space in the background, by means of the door opening. So there are two parallel frames, that are in close contact with each other, in contrast with previous



examples like Diego Velazquez' *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha* (London, National Gallery, 1618). In the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, this gaze through the open door, the famous Dutch "doorkijkje" or see-through, becomes a constant motif in the work of Maes, Pieter de Hooch and others. Samuel van Hoogstraten even went further. In his paintings *View of a Corridor or The Slippers* (Louvre, Paris, 1658) and *View of a Corridor* (Dyrham Park, Gloucestershire, 1662) [Fig. 1.] we have two representations in which humans are even almost absent. At most, we notice *references* to their presence, such as the woman on the Gerard Terborch-like painting in the back, the broom and the slippers in the first mentioned painting; and the dog and the swab in the foreground and the cat in the middle plane of the second painting, and only the vague contour of a man in the back room, seen from behind. We are looking at an almost pure interior, as a seemingly endless chain of door posts, the sign of a parallel research by Hoogstraten which eventually led to his well-known perspective peepshows, in which he offered three-dimensional looks onto a Dutch interior through peepholes at the far ends of the box. Here too we notice a fascination for the pure interior; man seems present only casually, in the foreground. Hoogstraten's *Slippers* contains even an extra door post, of which we notice a part on the right side. So the frame of the picture looks like a door opening itself.

Finally Stoichita discusses Johannes Vermeer's well-known *Love Letter* (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 1669) [Fig. 2.] and *An Interior, with a Woman Refusing a Glass of Wine* (London, National Gallery, 1660-5) by Ludolf de Jongh.<sup>2</sup> The play with spaces in Vermeer's *Love Letter* reminds us of Hoogstraten, but with Vermeer the foreground is a kind of *hors-porte*, an off-doors. The objects on the right side turn the foreground in a kind of still life. Because of the curtain and the dimmed light, the foreground functions like a *repoussoir* versus the interior in the back. Actually, in some reproductions of the painting, the foreground is not even visible or legible. Our attention goes to the middle plane with the two women and the chequered floor, while we notice the paintings in the back on the white wall, a landscape and a seascape. So a still-life, an interior scene and landscapes are thus combined as the three modalities of the image, used to create depth. In the painting by De Jongh we notice at the far left the post and the handle of a door, turning the whole painting in a kind of *doorkijkje*. Preceding Vermeer's famous interior scenes, we notice here the fascination for framing. In the back of the image, we see a mirror

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<sup>2</sup> The De Jongh painting could have been the inspiration for Vermeer, De Hooch and Hoogstraten as it precedes the work of Vermeer and others. Ludolf de Jongh, himself not from Delft but a Rotterdam painter, was from a generation older than the Delft based painters.

by which both the person in front of it and we ourselves can notice the off-screen space *behind* us, on the other side of the open doors, by means of mirrors. In his films, Visconti also often plays with this off-doors, thus showing simultaneously persons off-screen and onscreen talking to each other. Characters enter and exit spaces which we shall only notice in mirrors, thus avoiding editing, and creating a kind of neoclassical unity of time, space and action. Within De Jongh's painting, the character functions as our 'ambassador' within the painting – he stands opposite the mirror as we stand opposite the painting – but he is also the mediator between spectator and painting. This function of the character as mediator and ambassador also plays an important part in Visconti's films, either by reacting onto the space we also notice, or, on the contrary, by blocking our view onto another character we would like to see; so deliberately withholding information. In that sense, Visconti constantly plays with the different planes within the field of play, in ways reminding not only of Dutch genre painting but also of European silent cinema: we use the term *deep staging* then.

Visconti loved to film his actors through door openings, in ways that reminds us of 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch interior painting. But he also loved to put up barriers, in order to create distance between the viewer and the characters, refusing total identification and enabling moral judgment. Sometimes the door openings form blockades that partly obstruct the view, or they might construct a vertical frame around the space beyond the door, contrasting with the horizontal frame of the filmic image. Let me give you a few examples: In *White Nights* (*Le notti bianche*, 1957), a film set in a foggy harbour town, the young Mario (Marcello Mastroianni) and the girl Natalia (Maria Schell) just finished a wild dance in a bar. From the outside, we look at them through an open door, we notice them within the smoky room. The image was shot in the so-called Academy format (1.37:1), the standard format of the filmic frame between the 1930s and the 1950s. The horizontal format of the frame is contrasted, however, by the vertical lines of the door posts. Our see-through on the dance hall thus has a vertical character, in spite of the film frame.<sup>3</sup> [Fig. 3.] Back to *White Nights*: after the dance is over, the glass door is closed and we notice Natalia through the steamed up window. [Fig. 4.] She is all exited, steamed up herself. From the rest of the bar, we can hardly notice anything as the vapour on the window strategically works like a frame around Natalia's face; a kind of spotlight or natural focus on her. The other visitors are separated by Natalia and Mario by the vertical bar in the middle of the window: they are

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<sup>3</sup> In the days of silent cinema it was even common to use *masks* to create such effects, accentuating people climbing or falling down stairs.

left, Natalia and Mario sit right. Who manages to see through the steam, will notice that Natalia's exhilaration contrasts with the boredom of two ladies in the back, sitting on a bench.

Within Visconti's films, filmed in *widescreen format*, such as *The Leopard* (*Il Gattopardo*, 1963) and *The Innocent/The Intruder* (*L'Innocente*, 1976), this contrast of horizontal and vertical, in combination with staging in depth, is even more remarkable. In *The Innocent*, Visconti's last film, we see a hotel servant carrying an enormous bouquet of tuberose into the suite of Tullio Hermil and his mistress Teresa Raffo. We are looking at the servant from the bedroom, so the space in front of the room he is in. In the reverse shot, taken from the other room, Visconti films alongside the door posts and curtains to the bedroom, where, indirectly by means of a mirror we notice Tullio (Giancarlo Giannini), who, off-screen, is furious about the sender of the flowers, his rival, count Egano. These kinds of indirect reactions Visconti must have cherished, considering the many examples in his films where he used mirrors to show characters standing off-screen.

In widescreen films like *The Leopard* we do not see the upper sides of doors anymore, and thus we are even more confronted with the vertical elements of doors and door posts, contrasting with the extremely horizontal frame. Open doors offer views onto adjacent spaces beyond the doors, inviting the spectator to investigate not only the foregrounds, but much more than that. Leaving information out in the foreground, draws our attention to the back, as in the shot in which we notice the uncle, Don Fabrizio (Burt Lancaster), getting dressed to leave the ball. As the foreground is relatively quiet and no actors distract us, we do not mind he is in the back, in a space beyond an open door, in the middle plane of the image. Often our view is even directed towards the back by actors walking to these spaces in the back, as in *The Leopard* when Tancredi (Alain Delon) passes the rooms of his uncle's villa, saying goodbye on his leaving to war, when Tancredi and his fiancée wander through the empty spaces in the attics of his uncle's palace, when they pass the rooms of the palace of the ball in the final sequence, or when at the end of the ball Tancredi is searching for his uncle; all explorations for us as spectators, while often these are explorations for the characters, too. Continuously, the actors not only interact with each other, but even more with the – often changing – spaces.

Sometimes those door openings are shot from a relatively high angle, which enables to look far away into the spaces behind. That is the case in the opening scene of *The Leopard*, where we can watch over the heads of the staff into the room behind, in which the local family mass is held. When shortly after, Don

Fabrizio decides to ride into town in spite of the troubled times, we notice him standing in the room behind, surrounded by his family, while the camera looks over the heads of the princess and the family priest. If the camera had not been positioned so high, the actors would have blocked our view onto the persons in the back; in this way we are searching for a relationship between people in the foreground *and* those in the back. Sometimes people in the foreground almost function as a kind of *exhortatio* towards the central figures in the back; they show us how to respond emotionally to a certain situation, just like in classical paintings by Jacopo Tintoretto and others. In short, not having the central figure in the foreground is not a problem in this kind of deep staging, in particular if lighting accentuates where we are supposed to look at.

In Visconti's *The Damned* (*La caduta degli dei*, 1969) we notice two contrasting shots in which a character walks to the back and the corridor functions like a kind of tunnel. In the first case, the mother Sophie (Ingrid Thulin) finds her lost son Martin (Helmut Berger) back in the attic of their villa; Martin hides there, terrified by his uncle. The servant sneaking away must be an aid of the uncle. In the second example it is Martin himself who is head of the situation, after his uncle is killed and he has raped his own mother. He is walking to the back, but whereas in the previous shot the foreground was dark and the corridor was lighted, now the foreground is lighted and the corridor is dark. Our attention is drawn towards the back: the dressing room of Sophie who is getting dressed for her marriage, a dark marriage, as it also means the death of her future husband and herself, on instigation of her son. His dark profile means no good.

But sometimes Visconti deliberately did not opt for a high angle and used actors to block our view. Let me give you an example. Creation of depth through open doors and corridors is not only persistent in Visconti's work, we also notice it very often in the European cinema of the 1930s, in particular in the work of Max Ophüls, such as his *Everybody's Woman* (*La signora di tutti*, 1934), and in that of Jean Renoir, the French director with whom Visconti started his career in 1936, as trainee and costume assistant for the film *A Day in the Country* (*Une partie de campagne*, 1936). In Renoir's film *The Human Beast* (*La bête humaine*, 1938) we encounter a scene that Visconti uses and reworks in his first film *Obsession* (*Ossessione*, 1943), made during the war and hailed as the first neorealist film. [Figs. 5–6.] In *Obsession*, based on James Cain's hard boiled novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, a bum called Mario arrives at a gas station and inn, and falls for Giovanna, the young wife of the innkeeper Bragana. Eventually, she convinces him to kill her husband. In the opening scene, for a long time, we only see Gino's

(Massimo Girotti) back; while he gets off the truck, moves to the inn, enters, and hears Giovanna (Clara Calamai) sing in the kitchen. Our recognition of his face is postponed. Only after *she* has seen him, in shock, *we* get a close up of his face, enforced by a rapid tracking shot onto that face. These postponements are quite Renoir-like, I should say, and create a kind of distance: we observe Gino, but through him, we also observe, explore and validate the space, the location. So-called subjective or point-of-view shots lack, but we still experience a kind of *third person subjectivity*.

But I would like to point your attention to the first glimpse of *Giovanna*, a kind of filmic see-through if you like. The first part of Giovanna we get to see are her legs, dangling from the kitchen table. The rest of her body is covered by Gino's back in the open kitchen door. While again the filmic image is in Academy format, the door post, the door, the shape of Gino, the legs of the table, and even the vertical window in the back, put forward a dominance of vertical lines. Visconti used this exact composition and angle a *second* time, when the husband is away and Gino has decided to grab Giovanna. She already knows what is going to happen; defiantly she is waiting for him in the kitchen. This time we see her full figure. While in *Obsession* it was the *first* image of the woman, in *The Human Beast* Renoir uses this very composition for the *last* shot of *his* leading female character. In *Judas Was a Woman*, a quite liberal and condensed adaptation of the novel by Émile Zola, the railway station manager Roubaud (Fernand Ledoux), married to the *petite* but oh so *femme fatale* Severine (Simone Simon), has killed her rich tutor Grandmorin and has hidden his money and golden watch under the floor. Horrified, Severine stops loving him, starts an affair with the engine driver Jacques Lantier (Jean Gabin) and pushes Lantier to kill Roubaud, but he fails, to her great anger. Lantier, though, suffers from murderous afflictions, and during a reconciliation with Severine, he kills his beloved. Lantier confesses his crime to a colleague and throws himself from a running train. When Roubaud finds the corpse of Severine, we notice, again, her legs sticking out on the left side of the image, just like in *Obsession*, while Roubaud himself, standing right, and the high backside of the bed block our view on the rest of Severine. The composition is exactly as in the *Obsession*. Again, the vertical lines dominate within the horizontal film frame. So two examples where the human figure partly blocks our view of the space beyond or behind the door, raising our attention. Actually, the two films have very much in common, but that goes beyond this text. It is clear that here cinema can do something that for instance theatre cannot do, as only the persons right in front of the stage would have their view blocked; the others can just see around it.

Coming back to Hoogstraten's examples of corridors, let me show you an example of a typical Visconti trait, the serial opening of doors, of spaces; the *emulatio* of the see-through, if you like. Visconti loved to create spaces that opened up in sequence, thus proving to be larger and larger, comparable to Hoogstraten's corridors interrupted by door posts. In his historical drama *Senso* (*Senso*, 1954), set in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Visconti had his character countess Livia Serpieri (Alida Valli) opening one door after another in one of the most dramatic moments in the film, when her lover Franz (Farley Granger), threatens to have himself killed on the battlefield. Even if Franz is an officer in the Austrian army occupying Italy, she decides to give him the money of the free-fighters, the *garibaldini*, thus betraying her country, ideals and self-esteem, all for her beloved so that he can bribe a doctor and desert his military service. During a climax in the accompanying music of Brückner's *Seventh Symphony*, Livia desperately opens all doors to fetch the money. [Figs. 7–10.] What is striking is that often with these serial openings of doors and spaces, the actors are always walking to the back, while the camera stands still.<sup>4</sup> There must have been a biographical element there too, as Visconti, descendant of the counts that once ruled the whole of Lombardy, was raised in the vast *palazzi* and villas, with endless corridors, creating serial vistas towards the back.

## The Window

Let's move over now to the window. In *The Self-Aware Image*, Stoichita focuses on the question: what part did the painted window have in the consciousness of a new kind of painting? Just like he related the door to interior painting, the window was the catalyst in the definition of the genre of landscape. The window actualizes the dialectics between inside and outside, without which we would not perceive landscape. Landscape asks for distance, whereas still life calls for vicinity. Until the arrival of *plein air* painting, the image of nature had been conceived from a space of culture. It is the rectangle of the window that changed 'outside' into landscape. Thus in 15<sup>th</sup> century Flemish and Italian painting, we look at nature through open windows. The frame also helps the spectator to experience the landscape as a painting, but the stand-ins for our view, the figures in the painting watching the landscape also help us to get in the right mood.

In *La Madone au Chancelier Rollin* (Louvre, Paris, 1435) by Jan van Eyck, we notice in the back two people from behind, who seem to contemplate the scenery.

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<sup>4</sup> We already notice the same effect in the film *Tosca* (1941) by Carl Koch, for which Visconti was assistant-director, and which was originally started as a film by Renoir. See my forthcoming article (Blom 2010).

They are *stand-ins* for us viewers. So on one side, we look at the representation in the interior in the foreground, but by means of the two little figures in the back, we also look at the landscape. It is, however, only in the 16<sup>th</sup> century that the theme of the view through the window indicates the birth of landscape painting, and only in the 17<sup>th</sup> century that the independent landscape starts to play with the frame of the painting as if it were the frame of a window. Take Vermeer's *View of Delft* (Mauritshuis, The Hague, 1659–1660), one of the best known cityscapes of Dutch painting, which presumably was painted from a window. The independent landscape was a typical modern genre for the 17<sup>th</sup> century and was also conceived as such. Stoichita states that at the time, people saw the landscape, previously considered *parergon*, that is, a part referring to a whole, as a religious painting which, being in a subordinate position, had become *ergon*, a self-sustaining entity. This passage occurred by the window. Sometimes we cannot trace the window in the landscape as in Vermeer's painting; hanging on the wall it might as well be a kind of hole into the wall – Stoichita speaks of embrasures – even if that obviously only refers to land-scapes and not to sea-scapes.

This lack of clarity about the frame of the window we also notice in the films by Visconti sometimes. Take *White Nights* (*Le notti bianche*, 1957) where we are standing outside, with Mario, looking at the window of a bar. There is party going on and all are exited. A young woman laughs at Mario and writes 'Ciao!' on the steamed window. Only on the right we notice a part of the vertical bar of the window. Left, top and bottom frames are off-screen. Where we do see the complete frame of a window within the filmic frame is in Visconti's fishermen's drama *The Earth Trembles* (*La terra trema*, 1948). It contains an abundance of images of people at a window: Mara, looking outside, watering her basil and watching her beloved Nicola, the police sergeant Don Salvatore, looking inside, courting Mara's sister Lucia, or Mara and Lucia looking outside, lost and destroyed, after the shipwreck of their brother's boat which causes them to lose their money, house and reputation.

Such shots through open windows we also often encounter in the work of Visconti's "teacher" Jean Renoir, from outside to inside or from inside to outside; so there might be a tie too. We notice actions taking place in the background simultaneously with actions in the foreground. The window functions as threshold, as passage between two worlds, that of the observers and that of the observed. The window separates but also connects; so identification and distance at the same time, just as in Visconti's work. In *The Crime of Monsieur Lange* (*Le crime de M. Lange*, 1936) an injured, bed-ridden boy lies in bed and has no light in his room because of an announcement board. When the odious manager is



away, the inhabitants lift the board and give the poor sod a ‘window on the world.’ In Renoir’s *A Day in the Country* we notice the two men Rodolphe (Jacques Brunius) and Henri (George D’Arnoux) having breakfast at the open window, while we look outside, like Henri seen from behind, watching the daughter and the mother on the swing. While Rodolphe looks at the women with lustful eyes, Henri, the serious one, keeps to himself. Soon their roles will switch; Henri will claim the daughter, while Rodolphe is left with the mother. As Deleuze remarked: “the cynic proves to have a good heart while the sentimental proves to be an unembarrassed seducer” (Deleuze 2005, 84).

## Mobile Framing

But what happens when the camera itself and not only the actors move through open doors? Already in his first film *Obsession* Visconti used a remarkable *tracking shot* forward, a kind of following shot. [Figs. 11–16.] We are in Ferrara. From a bar Giovanna spies upon her former lover Gino. She watches how he leaves the house of the prostitute Anita (Dhia Cristiani), and runs for errands across the street. Giovanna is sitting at the table (MS).<sup>5</sup> The background of the bar is *out of focus*. Suddenly we can see on her face she has seen Gino exiting. Her mask of well-controlled middle class woman goes off, and vengeance and pain take over. Clutching her bag with the life insurance of her deceased husband, she stands up. The camera tracks in on her, showing her in CU while the camera stands next to her. She rises, walks to the back, towards the exit of the bar. The camera follows her from behind, on table height and not as fast as she walks, which results that she goes from CU to MS, to MLS. In the back we can see Gino and Anita coming out, crossing the street, but they disappear off-screen left. Giovanna leaves the bar, crosses the threshold, followed by the camera. A man left sitting at the terrace stands up and leaves, probably to make the tracking easier. As soon as the camera passes the terrace visitors, we have full view on Giovanna and the street, where just before, in the back of the image, we saw Gino and Anita in front of an ice-cream car near a dairy shop. The camera stops following when coming outside, turning Giovanna in LS, walking from the middle plane to the background, crossing the street. As the foreground is empty, we know where to look. As soon as she is crossing though obstacles occur like bikes and pedestrians passing by, blocking *her* way or *our* view on her. Apparently, this was the solution to indicate the time passed for Gino’s shopping, without the need for cutting the

<sup>5</sup> MS = medium shot, CU= close up, MLS = medium long shot, LS = long shot.



long take tracking shot, keeping the unity. After that, less extras pass and we can focus better on Giovanna. She walks around the ice cream car, around the shop, in order to have a better look at Gino. Only then, a cut is inserted in the editing, and we move to a closer shot of Giovanna (almost foretelling new dialogue), and yes, when he comes out, she grabs him, insults him and menaces him.

This scene introduces a new kind of treating perspective and depth, much beyond the previous example of *Senso* and beyond the research in perspective, and space in Dutch 17<sup>th</sup> century art. So yes, there are strong ties, we could even speak of a heritage or rather an appropriation, but there are also moments where painting and cinema become hard to compare, especially when the camera starts to move. It is then that the mobile gaze refers to other models. Gerard Wajcman in his study *Fenêtre* (2004) has indicated that the filmic frame does not so much hark back to the Albertian window – even if it is the basic model – as well as to other, newer models of *moving* windows in means of transports like the train. Before Wajcman, Jacques Aumont in *L'Oeil interminable* (1989) had already indicated that the mobile gaze marked a break between the traditional art historical conception and the filmic conception of representation.

## Transmediality, Intermediality, and Intervisuality

As we have noticed in the above mentioned examples of the use of doors, windows and mobile framing in the films of Luchino Visconti, the ways that, for instance, doors and windows manifest themselves in the films, we can draw comparisons both of cinema with another medium, painting, and compare with other films by other filmmakers, and thus stay within an intra-medial territory. In her article *Intermediality, Intertextuality and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality*, Irina O. Rajewsky, discusses the various interpretations and uses of the concept of inter-mediality. One option is so-called *trans-medial* intermediality<sup>6</sup>, “the appearance of a certain motif, aesthetic, or discourse across a variety of different media” (Rajewsky 2005, 46). That applies well to our comparison of Visconti’s use of the motif of the door with its use in 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch painting. Yet, when we deepen the analysis and notice how Visconti not only uses doors as with Vermeer or Hoogstraten, but often also uses means such as the blocking of our view by placing characters between our eyes and persons in the back, we notice then the differences between his cinema and this kind of

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<sup>6</sup> Trans-medial is one of the four categories Jens Schröter proposes in his seminal text *Intermedialität. Facetten und Probleme eines aktuellen medienwissenschaftlichen Begriffs* (1998). The other categories are synthetic, transformatory and ontological intermediality.

painting – not any kind of painting, if we take into account the work of Edgar Degas for instance. But the blocking brings us also closer to earlier, intra-medial examples in cinema itself, i.e. the films of the 1930s, in particular those of Jean Renoir. Also the mobile framing in film indicates where the motif of the door opening becomes definitely different from the medium of painting.

We start with formal resemblances then, but when deepening our case, we notice differences that we might define as not only referring to a filmmaker's personal aesthetics but also helping us to recognize medial differences. Within this framework, Rajewsky refers to Sybille Krämer's concept of media-recognition (*Medienerkenntnis*), to Jens Schröter's idea of *ontological* intermediality, and to Gaudreault and Marion's words that "it is through intermediality, through a concern with the intermedial, that a medium is understood" (Rajewsky 2005, 48). However, most versions of intermediality, such as Bolter and Grusin's remediation, tend to be generalizing. Dissatisfied with this broad interpretation of the term intermediality, that only conceives of phenomena that take place between media in general, Rajewsky proposes a narrower version that takes into account individual cases and historicity; an approach that appeals to me, as I am looking for both a formal and historical approach. In particular she proposes the category of *intermedial references*, "to be understood as meaning-constitutional strategies that contribute to the media product's overall signification: the media product uses its own media-specific means, either to refer to a specific, individual work produced in another medium (i.e., what in German tradition is called *Einzelreferenz*, "individual reference"), or to refer to a specific medial subsystem (such as a certain film genre) or to another medium as a system (*Systemreferenz*, "system reference")" (Rajewsky 2005, 53). References in film to painting is one of the possibilities then, though it remained unclear to me whether that encompasses both aesthetic conventions from other media, or even specific temporarily and geographically limited kinds of painting, and, say, pictorial quotations in films. It is hard to establish this, as her own approach remains mainly within the field of literary studies, which she honestly admits, though she combines it with a diachronic, historical layer – unusual for most literary studies. My own topic, though, rather calls for an inter-visual approach<sup>7</sup>, which takes into account the developments of both painting and cinema, even if, like Engell proposes, the concept of motif *per se* is not strictly medium-specific but receives its medium-specific impact only because of its use within the medium-bound framework of narrative, space, or, we might add: time.

<sup>7</sup> For the sake of my argument, I am leaving aside sound in film here, even when acknowledging that it makes up at least half of a film's final result.

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**Figures 11–16.** Mobile framing in *Obsession*.





## The Politics of Intermediality

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**Abstract.** The whole discussion, whether historical or contemporary, on intermediality versus ‘pure media’ (a notion which seems to be implied by ‘intermediality’, otherwise one would not know between what entities the ‘inter’ takes place) is structurally – and not only in a historical-empirical sense – a political discussion. A prominent reference to this is to be found, for example, in the recent work of Rosalind Krauss. At the end of her small volume entitled *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, she refers to the “international fashion of installation and intermedia work, in which art finds itself complicit with a globalization of the image in the service of capital,” a complicity at which Krauss levels sharp criticism. She denounces intermediality as capitulation to the capitalist spectacle (Debord). On the other end of the Spectrum, in the mid-1960s, Dick Higgins condemned the pure media as signs of capitalist division of labour and praises intermediality as the dawn of communist society. In the essay these two opposites are described in detail and thus a new field of research is outlined: the politics of intermediality.

### Intermediality and Capitalism

This subtitle may jar on the reader. What does the phenomenon of the combination of media – intermediality (in its most general sense<sup>1</sup>) – have to do with the politico-economic make-up of society? There are indications that questions concerning

a. ‘monomedia’ and their ‘specifics’ – and, that is to say, always concerning the processes of their ‘purification’ with a view to extracting them from a primordial intermediality (precisely that is the central problem of an important strand in the history of modern art)

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<sup>1</sup> A number of proposals for differentiating the often somewhat diffuse concept of intermediality exist (see, for example, Schröter 1998, Rajewsky 2002 and the various proposals in Paech and Schröter 2008).



b. the forms and strategies of combining (previously purified?) monomedia into a (secondary?) ‘intermediality’, and consequently

c. the relationships between a. and b.

are by no means purely theoretical or aesthetic questions. Rather, they have already been laden with massive political connotations for some time. A prominent reference to this is to be found, for example, in the recent work of Rosalind Krauss. At the end of her small volume entitled *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, she refers to the “international fashion of installation and intermedia work, in which art finds itself complicit with a globalization of the image in the service of capital” (Krauss 1999a, 56), a complicitness at which Krauss levels sharp criticism. I would like to pursue this reference below.

Point 1) presents the contexts in which Krauss made this statement. What exactly is Krauss criticizing and what alternatives does she propose? 2) Second, attention needs to be drawn to the fact that the question of the extent to which ‘monomedia’ or ‘intermediality’ have political implications is not entirely new. In some respects, the 19<sup>th</sup> century already gave rise to such discussion – which is continuing in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but must be distinguished from the line discussed in 1). 3) What does this mean for theoretical and historical discussions of “intermediality”? Would it not be an apposite moment – now<sup>2</sup> that a deep crisis in capitalist reproduction is again shaking the world to its core – for us to probe the political implications of our own discourse about intermediality? Of course, this is not in keeping with the comfortable aestheticism in which some have ensconced themselves. However, if the question of intermediality is to remain a relevant question in media studies, it must also include the question of the politics of the medial. The question of intermediality is too established for it not to be possible to ask about its politics. *Today, there is a need for this question to be asked.* The present contribution can only be a first step in this process.

## Intermediality as Capitulation to the Spectacle

The cited passage by Rosalind Krauss comes, as already mentioned, from a small book, whose subtitle is *Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*. What is the ‘post-medium condition’? Lev Manovich, who has a quite different theoretical orientation, offers a means of ingress into this problem, which is not always easy to understand in Krauss’ writings: “In the last third of the twentieth century, various cultural and technological developments have together rendered

<sup>2</sup> At the end of 2008/beginning of 2009.

meaningless one of the key concepts of modern art – that of a medium. However, no new typology of art practice came to replace media-based typology which divides art into painting, works on paper, sculpture, film, video, and so on. The assumption that artistic practice can be neatly organized into a small set of distinct mediums has continued to structure the organization of museums, art schools, funding agencies and other cultural institutions – even though this assumption no longer reflected the actual functioning of culture” (Manovich 2001).

The dilution of the concept of medium, which Manovich articulates here, may be initially surprising in view of the well-nigh inflationary expansion, at least in Germany, of media studies. At a later juncture, he remarks that, although the concept of medium has become obsolete to some extent, it continues to be used from “sheer inertia”. This, he contends, is because it is difficult to replace it with new conceptual systems: “So rather than getting rid of media typology altogether, we keep adding more and more categories” (Manovich 2001). The very spread and extension of the concept of medium to ever more objects, phenomena, ensembles, and the accompanying uncertainty of how properly to define ‘medium’ can be interpreted as part of the problem, which, as Manovich makes very clear, is particularly acute for art. Manovich then cites various historical reasons for the dilution of the concept of medium. Alongside the spread of video, digital, programmable and hence relatively non-‘specific’ technologies, he particularly points to the spread of new art forms in the 1960s, including installation, which had broken with the notion of a media-specific justification of art.

In fact, this development is also central to Krauss, who herself comes from a tradition which regarded a clearly circumscribed ‘medium’ as being fundamental to artistic practice. She was a student of Clement Greenberg, who can probably be said without exaggeration to be the most important art critic in New York in the 1950s and 1960s. It was he that made the concept of medium prominent in art criticism. “From the ’60s on, to utter the word ‘medium’ meant invoking ‘Greenberg’” (Krauss 1999a, 6). The central role that the concept of medium plays in Greenberg’s work consists in ‘art’ being defined as the process of reflection on, and hence purification of, the medium used in each case. Modernist *painting*, which is also the title of a well-known essay by the art critic, is thus painting which focuses *reflexively* on the specifics of the painting medium – color, surface, framing – and thus *renders* painting *pure* of all intermedial contaminations (be they sculptural or literary in nature): “The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence. [...] It

quickly emerged that the unique and proper area of competence of each art coincided with all that was unique in the nature of its medium. The task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the specific effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thus would each art be rendered 'pure', and in its 'purity' find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence" (Greenberg 1993, 85–86).<sup>3</sup>

We do not intend to discuss Greenberg's concept, its merits and demerits at any greater length here.<sup>4</sup> Suffice it to stress that from the 1960s onwards, as Manovich rightly emphasizes, the hegemony of his concept began to fade and art forms like 'abstract expressionism' that had previously dominated and been favoured and supported by him began to lose some of their importance.<sup>5</sup> Intermedia and installation art forms,<sup>6</sup> which rejected the idea of media reflection, at least in Greenberg's strict and narrow sense, began to establish themselves. It is hardly surprising that Greenberg should be unable to see any attraction in these intermedial strategies. In 1981, he wrote:

"What's ominous is that the decline of taste now, for the first time, threatens to overtake art *itself*. I see 'intermedia' and the permissiveness that goes with it as symptom of this. [...] Good art can come from anywhere, but it hasn't yet come from intermedia or anything like it" (Greenberg 1981, 93).

Although Rosalind Krauss (and also Michael Fried) criticized Greenberg in many points (particularly regarding the question of the 'medium'), they remained loyal to his basic intention "according to which esthetic autonomy can only exist if art defines its own area of competence, which can only succeed with reference to the representational modes on which the individual arts are based" (Rebentisch 2003, 87).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Greenberg's reference to 'purification' presupposes that there is a primordial intermediality.

<sup>4</sup> A good introduction is provided by Lüdeking 1997.

<sup>5</sup> One of the reasons why Greenberg's approach faded was that he equated reflection on the medium with its purification in the sense of reduction to the essential. Soon, this purification was threatening to become a *reductio ad absurdum*, which compelled Greenberg himself to abandon his approach and cast doubt upon its plausibility (cf. Lüdeking 1997, 18–20 and de Duve 1998, 199–279).

<sup>6</sup> Installation art does not, of course, have to be intermedial (and vice versa) – the two concepts refer to clearly different aspects but, historically, the one has usually been accompanied by the other. For a basic introduction, see Bishop 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Whereas Greenberg based the concept of medium very closely on concrete materiality and methods for processing such materiality (this proximity to the 'production' of art can, according to Lüdeking [1997, 10–11], be interpreted as a trace of his earlier Marxist or, more precisely, Trotskyist convictions), Fried and Krauss also include the sedimented history of conventions established in a medium.

<sup>8</sup> It should also be mentioned at this point that Fried was extremely critical of intermediality in his equally famous and harsh, but also perceptive 1967 critique of proto-installation Minimal Art: "*The concepts of quality and value* – and to the extent that these are central to art, the concept of art itself – are meaningful, or wholly meaningful, only within *the individual arts*. What lies between *the arts* is theater" (Fried 1998, 164); emphasis as in the original). For a historical account of the devaluation of 'intermedial' theatre, see also Barish 1981. Theatre and spectacle stand in close proximity to one another.

For it is only through the authority achievable by restriction to its own subject matter that art can succeed in escaping arbitrariness and hence the cheap showmanship aimed at outward attractions. If art were merely to consist in the production of *arbitrary* sensory stimuli, its difference from the attention-grabbing production of the mass media culture industry, which imposes needs on subjects by surprise attacks on all their sensory channels, would be blurred. Intermedial *mises-en-scène* would then no longer be distinguishable from other staged products and events.<sup>9</sup> Thus the “phenomenon of intermediality” appears “[...] as an expression of a break with the Modern Project in favour of, to use the language of contemporary art criticism, an affirmation of the situation as it is under the conditions of spectacle culture” (Rebentisch 2003, 83–84). ‘Spectacle culture’ contains an allusion to Guy Debord’s diagnosis that western societies, at least, are now ‘societies of the spectacle’. According to this diagnosis, “mass media” as “its most glaring superficial manifestation” of this culture have monopolized everything: “The spectacle is *capital* accumulated to the point that it becomes images” (Debord 2006, 13–17). Although Debord generally refers to images, the above-mentioned ‘mass media’ are usually audio-visual, which means that his ‘spectacle’ can arguably be interpreted as intermedial.<sup>10</sup> Debord explicitly links his diagnosis to the concept of capital (reminiscent of the statement by Krauss that was cited at the beginning of this essay). While critically revisiting the tendency of (intermedia, installation) artistic avant-gardes to sacrifice ‘craftsmanship’, Rosalind Krauss writes: “By rejecting craftsmanship [...], you get caught in a dangerous rivalry with those very powers of thought control, manipulation and suppression against which you have taken a stand” (Krauss 1995, 66).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Lutticken (2004, 13): “Installation art certainly shares a practice of impure ‘remediation’ with today’s media culture, which we have described as the apotheosis of the commercial Gesamtkunstwerk; various objects and media can be combined at will in installation art, and the result often resembles a showroom.” In point of fact, there are artists like Guillaume Bijl, whose installation work can scarcely be distinguished from a normal business. Of course, such installations have a critical intention, for example, to question museum space and its functions. Such installations can, however, also be interpreted as a dissolution of the border between art and commercial culture. For an overview, see Hollein et al. 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Debord (2006, 32), where he refers to the “language of the spectacle.” For a critical approach to Debord, see Rebentisch (2007, 120–122).

<sup>11</sup> Rosalind Krauss and others have, in this context, also levelled severe criticism at the replacement of classical disciplines by ‘Cultural’ and ‘Visual Studies’ (cf. Foster 1996). This also contains at least implicit criticism of intermediality. Thus, “medium-specificity in modernist art” was now invalid: “Due to artistic transgressions, theoretical critiques, political demands, and technological pressures, these old institutional arrangements are broken, and visual culture is thrown into the breach.” And “may be governed by a digital logic that melts down other logics of word and image” (100, 114). Greenberg’s criticism of “‘intermedia’, ‘multimedia’ and the rest” (Greenberg 1981, 92) can still be heard here.

To repeat, this position views intermediality as a capitulation of art to capitalist spectacle culture. Its ‘autonomy,’ if this refers to the area of special competencies circumscribed by medial reflexivity and purity, i.e. ‘self-definition,’ is lost. For what could otherwise be the point of combining media apart from achieving an effect that is different from their respective specifics – always assuming that one accepts this difficult concept –, i.e. a *general* effect? And this abstract effect in capitalist societies can only aim at increasing what is most abstract – money. From this vantage point, the “deadening embrace of the general” (Krauss 1999b, 305) would mean that media are now combined to produce an effect that is, in principle, different from each of them in isolation without allowing their heterogeneous, concrete sensual specifics, or laws, to appear. In this respect, intermedial *mises-en-scène* – just as the idea of the ‘total work of art’ (see below) – would seek to cancel out the differentiations of the various arts regressively and in heteronomous subordination to money.<sup>12</sup> De Duve insists on a very similar point: “All the styles, manners, forms, and media are exchangeable and interchangeable. They all compete without contradicting each other, much less as ideologies than as commodities. Painting, which sells best these days if it is figurative, has never been so abstract; it has the abstract quality of money” (de Duve 1998, 359).

However, it would not be a solution for the critics of intermediality cited in this section simply to return – in a *retour à l’ordre* – to the conventional media of tradition. Rather, art would have to respond to the spectacle with a “spectacle of decomposition” (Clark 1985, 83), as Clark put it in a somewhat different context. Or as Krauss writes: “Rather, it concerns the idea of a medium as such, a medium as a set of conventions derived from (but not identical with) the material conditions of a given technical support, conventions out of which to develop a form of expressiveness that can be both projective and mnemonic” (Krauss 1999b, 296). Krauss makes a plea for artists, rather than combining arbitrary media indiscriminately or becoming regressively traditional, to create their own medium, i.e. a field of possibilities which they then systematically illuminate. It is particularly relevant here that the artists that she deems to be exemplary in this respect, e.g. James Coleman or William Kentridge, should avail themselves of technical resources that, first, already have a long phase of being used by the spectacle industry behind them and, second, are now technologically

<sup>12</sup> This would be the criticism that Adorno, for example, has aimed at the ‘total work of art,’ although he was not, in principle, hostile to the ‘fraying of the boundaries’ of the arts in the 1960s (cf. Rebentisch 2003, 101-145). She refers critically to Eichel 1993. On the problem of differentiation of the arts, see also Nancy 1996.

obsolete. Since the technical resources already have their career as commercial technologies behind them – and are thus not in danger of being used ever again by the capitalist culture industry to obtain spectacular effects –, they can now become the starting point for an alternative, projective and mnemonic,<sup>13</sup> *mise-en-scène* that situates itself outside and in opposition to the spectacle: “For if Coleman turns toward the by-now outmoded low-tech support of the promotional slide tape or the degraded mass cult vehicle of the photonovel, [he does so] to mine his support for its own conventions [...]. It tells of an imaginative capacity stored within this technical support and made suddenly retrievable at the moment when the armoring of technology breaks down under the force of its own obsolescence” (Krauss 1999b, 301–302, 304).

Krauss’ proposal is sometimes abstruse and perhaps problematic.<sup>14</sup> All that needs to be noted here is that ‘intermediality’ or, to be more precise, forms of synthetic and transmedial intermediality (cf. Schröter 1998), are interpreted as the symptom of a capitulation of aesthetic strategies to the *mise-en-scène* strategies of the capitalist spectacle.

## Intermediality as Salvation from the Capitalist Division of Labour

The intention of this section is to outline another area of discussion, which also relates intermediality to capitalist modernity, but places different emphases and arrives at different evaluations.

The texts (cf. Kultermann 1970, Yalkut 1973, Frank 1987, Higgins 1984) that belong here also associate intermediality with artistic trends in the 1960s, i.e. those developments (or parts thereof) which, for Greenberg and Krauss, threatened to become the very symbol of capitulation to the spectacle. The evaluation, however, is completely different. The notion, frequently formulated at that time, of being able to *abolish* the schism between ‘art’ and ‘life’ by means of intermedial art forms is valued positively. To some extent, this trend is in the tradition of Wagner and his Zürich Writings, and hence in the genealogical line of the *total work of art*. This line must not, however, be simply equated with the line of intermedial installation outlined above, as the emphases of the discourse are quite different (cf. Rebentisch 2003, 104). At least two factors are characteristic of this discourse:

<sup>13</sup> An instructive analysis of how to specify Krauss’ definition of a projective and mnemonic self-distancing from, and critical examination of, the spectacle is provided, for example, by Buchloh 2000, using an artist that Krauss herself cites as an example: James Coleman.

<sup>14</sup> For a critique, see Rebentisch (2003, 89–99) and Lutticken 2004.

a) The condemnation of “monomedia” as a form of social and aesthetic alienation.

b) Linked to this, a revolutionary-utopian gesture, which sees overcoming ‘monomedia’ as (at least the preliminary stage of) social liberation from the capitalist division of labour.<sup>15</sup>

Higgins demands of avant-garde art that it should impart “holistic mental experiences” (Higgins 1984, 1). He understands this process as a form of cathartic peak experience, through which the conventionalized perception and behaviour patterns of so-called ‘everyday life’ are changed and enriched. He sees the potential of such ‘fusions’ particularly in the ‘new arts’, by which he means primarily fluxus: “[A]nother characteristic of many of them is that they are intermedial, that is, they fall conceptually between *established or traditional media*” (Higgins 1984, 15; emphasis J.S.). As this process of fusion is new, it is experienced as a zestful, refreshing and renewing shift in our own horizons – until ‘automation’ (in the sense of Sklovskij) takes hold again and the new intermedia, “with familiarity”, lose their “defamiliarizing” effect: “[B]ut we should look to intermedial works for the new possibilities of fusion, which they afford” (Higgins 1984, 17). Or as McLuhan put it in 1964: “The moment of the meeting of media is a moment of freedom and release from the ordinary trance and numbness imposed by them on our senses” (McLuhan 1965, 55). For Higgins, intermediality means the very breaking of habitualized (and hence also commercially utilizable) forms of perception, and not their duplication, as Krauss sees it. This conviction links him to authors like Kultermann and Frank.

He attempts to provide a historical justification of his position: “The concept of the separation between media arose in the Renaissance” (Higgins 1984, 18). He describes the Renaissance as a social phase, in which the division of society into different classes favoured the purification of media. Frank defines this point more precisely by arguing that the founding of art academies in 17<sup>th</sup> century France marks “that development of the separation of the arts” (Frank 1987, 6). Accordingly, the intermedial trend that begins in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is more a “re-unification” than a completely new process. Both Frank and Higgins attribute this development to similar social shifts. Whereas, according to Frank, “the age of specialization” is losing its influence and “simultaneity” (Frank 1987, 4)<sup>16</sup> is

<sup>15</sup> I shall ignore here the issue, which I have discussed elsewhere, of how to delimit ‘intermedia’ from ‘mixed media.’

<sup>16</sup> McLuhan’s media history-based model, popular in the 1960s, contains a tendency that is in keeping with the political understanding of intermediality outlined in 2). His media history is also, above all, a history of decline – the written word splits and fragments the world, similarly to the schisms and fragmentations of the divisions of labour – until, finally, the new world of electricity results in a new holism (cf. Winkler 1997).



shaping our century, Higgins remarks: “We are approaching the dawn of a classless society, to which separation into rigid categories is absolutely irrelevant” (Higgins 1984, 18). Overcoming the division of labour, specialization in rigid categories, in a classless society is one of the ideas of traditional<sup>17</sup> Marxism, which was relatively strong in the 1960s and which saw the division of labour as an ‘alienation’ to be abolished.<sup>18</sup> In this light, intermedia anticipate the overcoming of the division of labour in the realms of the artistic, appearing as a utopia that has become concrete.<sup>19</sup> In the same way as in certain readings of Marxian historical teleology, according to which the communist society (“classless society”) is the return of primeval society at a higher level, the lost original unity of the media re-emerges with that society.

In this respect, this discourse takes up that of the ‘total work of art.’ One of Wagner’s programmatic aesthetic writings is entitled *Art and the Revolution*, in which he refers to the ‘great revolution of humanity’, whose intention is to bring about a new state of society that links up with Greek antiquity and its ‘great work of total art that is tragedy’ (cf. Wagner 1975, Borchmeyer 1982). Borchmeyer states the following in respect of Wagner: “The disunification and independence of the arts stand in the same relation to modern social ‘egoism’ as their unity does to that ‘communism’ which is seen as the social ideal embodied in the Greek *polis* and required for the artwork of the future” (Borchmeyer 1982, 69).<sup>20</sup> Wagner himself writes of the dissolution of the “Athenian state:” “Just as the spirit of the community was fragmented in a thousand egotistical directions, so that great work of total art that is tragedy disintegrated into the individual components that it contained. [...] The drama separated into its component parts: Rhetoric, sculpture, painting, music etc. forsook the ranks in which they had moved in unison before; each one to take its own way, and in lonely self-sufficiency pursue its own egotistical development” (Wagner 1975, 14/34).

The metaphor of *fusion* that is evoked again and again by Higgins takes on, in this view, yet another component: It also connotes the re-unification of the individual, alienated through specialization and wage labour from himself and his work, with his (hitherto) stunted possibilities. The “wonderfully natural [...]

<sup>17</sup> ‘Traditional’ as opposed to the currently much-discussed tendencies relating to ‘post-operaism’ and ‘critique of value-split-off’ (see below).

<sup>18</sup> From the extensive literature, see, for example, Tomberg 1969.

<sup>19</sup> For a critical approach to such claims, see de Duve 2006.

<sup>20</sup> Although Wagner undoubtedly knew Marx, the conceptual proximity should not tempt us to see Wagner as a Marxist. His communism was based more on the model of the Greek *polis* and his anti-capitalism (cf. Wagner 1975, 33: “[O]ur God, however, is money, our religion its acquisition”) often contains anti-Semitic traits: Wagner does not focus on the systemic problems of capitalist socialization, but hallucinates the ‘Jews’ as the originators of this. On the politics of the total work of art, see Bermbach 1984.

interlocking of human individual and environment” (Yalkut 1973, 94) can thus be defined as the *telos* of intermedia artists (artist groups). Consequently, this enables Higgins to accuse the ‘pure’ media, particularly painting, of being ‘objects intended to ornament the walls of the rich’ (Higgins 1984, 18). After deriding the commercialization and marketing of art in galleries, he concludes: “It is absolutely natural to (and inevitable in) the concept of the pure medium, the painting or precious object of any kind. That is the way such objects are marketed since that is the world to which they relate” (Higgins 1984, 19). This demonstrates that Higgins sees the concept of the ‘pure medium’ as being directly linked to the world that includes art in its circulation of commodities – the world of capitalism based on the division of labour. Scarcely any greater contrast to the position outlined in 1) is conceivable. Here in 2), the processes of ‘purification’ that are usually required to generate an example of a ‘pure medium’ (cf. Schröter 2008, 595) do not result precisely in a field that is demarcated from that of capital; on the very contrary, this process is mimicry of the capitalist division of labour.

The erasure of the difference between ‘art’ and ‘life’ that is set against this is virtually a cliché with regard to the artistic trends of happening and fluxus, to which Higgins’ own artistic work belongs. In this context, Higgins undertakes an intensive critique of the proscenium theatre (Higgins 1984, 20/21), which for him is the symptomatic representation of a disappearing social order, just as Kultermann regards the separations between work and public as “a [...] ritual that is part of bourgeois society” (Kultermann 1970, 101). Wagner had already used the amphitheatre, which enabled a fusion of artists and recipients, to counter the polarization of public and stage: “In the classical orchestra, almost wholly encircled by the amphitheatre, the tragic chorus stood, as it were, at the very heart of the audience” (Wagner, cited in Borchmeyer 1982, 64). An intermedial *mise-en-scène* in this sense would therefore need to dissolve the boundaries between artist and public, art and life.

Accordingly, it is only consistent if Higgins considers even Duchamp’s *ready-mades* intermedial:<sup>21</sup> “The ready-made or found object, in a sense an intermedium since it was not intended to conform to the pure medium, usually suggests this, and therefore suggests a location in the field between the *general area of art media and those of life media*” (Higgins 1984, 20; emphasis J.S.) The ready-made or Oldenburg’s sculptures therefore appear to be intermedial, because an object from everyday life, a *life medium*, is carried across to the ‘general area’ of art, with art

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<sup>21</sup> With regard to Duchamp, Frank (1987, 13) remarks: “Duchamp’s aesthetic of ‘infra-mince’ emphasized the gap between art and life in order simultaneously to demonstrate and substantiate their proximity”.

and life, high and low – which needed to be separated from one another at all cost in the works of Greenberg and Krauss (see below) – being, as it were, dovetailed with one another. The concept of *life media* requires explanation. Since Higgins, in this essay that was published in 1965, evidently views shoes as a medium in the context of work by Claes Oldenburg, this passage suggests conceptual proximity to the above-mentioned book by Marshall McLuhan, entitled *Understanding Media*, which was published in 1964 and quickly became famous. It is doubtless no coincidence that Jud Yalkut (also a fluxus artist of the 1960s) should call his manifesto *Understanding Intermedia* (cf. Yalkut 1973). McLuhan regards all media as extensions of man, which is why clothing – the ‘extended skin’ – can also be interpreted as a medium (see McLuhan 1965, 119–122). That is to say, through the defamiliarizing access of ‘art media’ to ‘life media’, the latter are idealized into aesthetic forms which generally call into question the boundary between ‘art media’ and ‘life media’. This provides yet further clarification of the difference from the critique outlined in 1). Intermediality here refers to a very wide media concept, which can potentially include any object and is therefore in the tradition of Duchamp – a tradition that Clement Greenberg had to reject in order to narrow his media concept down (largely) to the art media that are traditionally called ‘genres’ (cf. Greenberg 1971, 18).<sup>22</sup> The fact is that intermediality in the position outlined in 2) is an anticipatory illumination of the overcoming of those divisions into which capitalist socialization forces individuals.

## Politics of Intermediality

This essay attempts to demonstrate that the concept of ‘intermediality’ always has political dimensions (and hence normative implications). There are at least two variants of the concept:

1. Intermediality is ‘bad’: Intermedial *mises-en-scène* in art can no longer be ‘specifically’ demarcated by medial self-reflection if, *qua* intermediality, they are no longer able to designate a medium whose reflection should distinguish it from the *mises-en-scène* of the capitalist spectacle devoid of reflection, which merely aims at unspecific effects in the service of reproduction of abstract money. The only recourse here is Krauss’ appeal to artists ‘to invent a medium’, a process in which commercially degraded procedures should, after their technological obsolescence, become new sources of projective and mnemonic form creations.

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<sup>22</sup> On Duchamp’s deconstruction of the traditional art media using the example of a paint tube, see also de Duve (1998, 147–196). On ‘medium’ and ‘genre’ in the works of Krauss, following on from Greenberg, cf. Rebentisch (2003, 89).

2. Intermediality is ‘good’, providing the focus is on (re-)unifying (purified) ‘monomedia’, each defined, *qua* capitalist division of labour, as specific fields. Monomedia reproduce in their ‘specifics’ the very division of labour that needs to be overcome in post-capitalist societies. The intermedial – and performative – *mise-en-scène* provides an exemplary anticipation of a social order in which the division of labour has been abolished. The only recourse here is the appeal to artists to overcome the division between life and art, thereby enabling this exemplary abolition of the division of labour to be transferred to society (in whatever way).

Of course, these observations give rise to an initial question: How do these different evaluations come about? First, reference can be made to the fact that there have always been two trends in the history of modernity, which Lütticken has called ‘Laocoonism’ and ‘total work of art’ (cf. Lütticken 2004, 12).<sup>23</sup> The former makes a plea for using ‘specifics’ in art (based on Lessing’s *Laocoön*), the latter for combining the arts. That is correct, but does not really answer the question, as the plea for specifics vs. total work of art necessarily involves issues of the structure of society and, on closer inspection, the question of its capitalist makeup. In fact, it appears to be the case that the question of whether specifics or intermedia are to be preferred depends on what it is about capitalist socialization that is primarily considered problematic.

The position outlined in 1) here distances itself particularly from what Rosalind Krauss calls ‘thought control’ or, occasionally, the ‘spectacle.’ Criticism is directed mainly at what would have been called ‘ideological superstructure’ (in a more traditional understanding). The roots of this again lie clearly with Clement Greenberg, who, in his influential essay “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” from 1939, had designated ‘kitsch’ as a negative contrasting foil. ‘Kitsch’ has already been labelled definitively as intermedial in this early text: it is linked to “chromeotypes, magazine covers, illustrations, ads, slick and pulp fiction, comics, Tin Pan Alley music, tap dancing, Hollywood movies, etc., etc.” (Greenberg 1986a, 11). According to Greenberg, the function of kitsch is to offer the “urban masses [...] a kind of culture fit for their own consumption”, to give them the possibility of “diversion” (Greenberg 1986a, 12).<sup>24</sup> Intermedial ‘kitsch’ therefore has an ideological tranquilizing and controlling function – in fact, ‘thought control’, as Krauss will subsequently express it.<sup>25</sup> By contrast, the artist turns his attention

<sup>23</sup> It seems to me that these two tendencies are not the same as the ‘specific’ and ‘generic’, which de Duve (1998, Part II) distinguishes in modernity, even though Krauss appears to narrow the scope of these 2x2 tendencies. As far as I can see, the task of relating these two differentiations systematically and historically to one another is yet to be undertaken.

<sup>24</sup> The echoes of Benjamin here would need to be discussed separately.

<sup>25</sup> Greenberg thereby evidently focuses on a finding that Adorno and Horkheimer similarly highlighted almost simultaneously in their famous description of the culture industry (see Schwering 2006).

away “from subject matter of common experience”, turning it in upon the “medium of his own craft” (Greenberg 1986a, 9). And at a time when the self-designation of revolutionary worker parties as ‘avant-garde’ was not yet as suspicious as it is today, Greenberg ends by invoking Marx: “Here, as in every other question today, it becomes necessary to quote Marx word for word. Today we no longer look toward socialism for a new culture – as inevitably as one will appear, once we do have socialism. Today we look to socialism *simply* for the preservation of whatever living culture we have right now” (Greenberg 1986a, 22; cf. Clark 2004).

The fact that Greenberg in 1939 is hoping for the advent of socialism makes his Trotskyist orientation (at that point) clear, especially since the (in those days) highly Stalinist USSR was being interpreted by Trotskyists not as socialist, but rather as ‘bureaucratically degenerate’ – furthermore, Trotsky was more open to the artistic avant-gardes than the small-minded Stalinists (cf. Mandel 1992). The task of the artistic avant-garde is, analogously to the political avant-garde in this sense, to withstand the ideological – and intermedial – manipulations of ‘kitsch’ and its ‘thought control’ in order to save culture and to build a new one on top of it (cf. de Duve 2006). Both avant-gardes thus provide an anticipatory illumination of a socialist society, in which people can consciously structure their social relationships (even if this emphasis is at best only implicit in the current position of Rosalind Krauss).

The position outlined here in 2) takes up another finding – it is ultimately derived from Wagner, who, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, problematizes the “industry” (Wagner 1975, 21) and the accompanying division of labour. This position also connects up with the critique of ‘alienation’ that is to be found, in particular, in the early Marx.<sup>26</sup> Even with regard to Marx, this concept has a long and complicated history, on which this essay cannot and does not intend to report (cf. Mészáros 1973). The ‘intermedia’ discussion of the 1960s evidently interprets the concept in such a way that the ‘specialization’ into individual arts is a process comparable to the critique of the fact that people deem their work processes and the resulting products to be alien. The reception of this concept varied from very simple forms – ‘factory workers only ever focus on individual steps in the production process’ – through to elaborate constructs, which are similar to Marx’s critique of fetishism and which focus on the more general phenomenon that people in capitalist societies perceive social cohesion as something alien and external. Even Adorno described the Wagnerian ‘total work of art’ as an attempt to overcome the “principle of the division of labour, which not only separates men from each other but also divides each man with

<sup>26</sup> Examples would be the ‘Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte aus dem Jahre 1844’ by Marx and Engels (1990, 510ff.).

himself” – but criticized it for this very reason, since it was a romantic-illusionary attempt to revert to pre-modern structures and thus persisted in a “form of spurious identity.” This can only give rise to an “external principle of simple aggregation of disparate procedures” (Adorno 1971, 99).

Both positions problematize different aspects of capitalist modernity, deriving different stances on intermediality from them. The final question ought therefore to focus on what it is about capitalist socialization today – at the beginning of 2009, we are beset by a deep financial and economic crisis such that the problem of capitalist socialization remains virulent, if not acute – that is regarded as particularly ‘problematic’,<sup>27</sup> and the stance on intermediality that follows from it.

Do we have an advanced perspective today that enables us to understand what ‘capitalism’ is – a concept which, while it is still in continual use, has appeared oddly vacuous since 1989/1990? Yes, there are a whole host of different approaches attempting to take up the Marxian analyses and enlist them in the cause of providing an understanding of capitalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These include, in particular, post-operaism, which has attained a good deal of fame through the book entitled *Empire* (cf. Hardt and Negri 2000; Birkner and Foltin 2006), and a field with many internal differentiations, which can best be defined by means of the overarching term ‘value critique’ (or, in some forms also, ‘critique of value split-off’).<sup>28</sup> This is not the place to provide a systematic and historical development of the two approaches or even their internal differentiations. However, it would be a rewarding task to analyze these two fields in respect of the understanding or critique of intermediality that could be derived from them.

But apart from the general perspective there are some more concrete questions concerning the ‘politics of intermediality’. Three should be mentioned here.

1. In continuation of the readings in this paper, one could undertake a broad reconstruction of the *history* of theoretical approaches to intermediality (and ‘paragone,’ etc.) to analyze and sketch out their political implications in the context of their specific historical backgrounds. To mention an interesting example: Why did Greenberg (1986b), Eisenstein (1946) and Arnheim (1957) write independently from each other, essays which discuss, with reference to Lessing’s *Laocoön*, problems of the separation between ‘the arts’ almost at the same time (1940, 1937, 1939)?

<sup>27</sup> Of course, it is always possible to side with adaptation and affirmation and say that nothing is problematic. However, apart from the fact that such a position can evidently no longer be squared with realities, it would suppress the simple observation that the discourse of intermediality has historically involved such problematizations all too often.

<sup>28</sup> For a lucid introduction to a particular variant of value critique, see Jappe 2005. For a somewhat differently oriented perspective, see Heinrich 2005.

2. The general question of a ‘politics of intermediality’ can be differentiated *socially*. The question is how do different social groups, classes, strata or institutions, even when located in the same culture, practically operate with intermedial processes in different ways? Is it possible to observe power struggles connected to those intermedial processes? How is power practically inscribed, let’s say, in the design of intermedial surfaces like those of the *iPhone*? This last question could be tackled through ethnographical studies of interface design practices at Apple, asking how the designers conceive of ‘intermediality’ and its implications. Additionally one could observe, also ethnographically, how users interact with the intermedial structures, how they follow the implied routes or how they resist.

3. Last but not least, there is the possibility of an *intercultural* approach to compare how different cultures understand the differences between media and their interaction in a given historical phase. It seems obvious for example, that Japanese culture understands the difference of image and text quite differently from ‘European’ culture – if one considers how poems and other writings were inscribed on the surfaces of traditional paintings.

The initial intention of the present contribution was merely to demonstrate that the question on the politics of intermediality has historicity – and is still possible and *necessary* today.

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## An Early Staging of Media. Gustav Klutsis's Loudspeaker Stands

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**Abstract.** Gustav Klutsis's "radio-orators," "agit platforms," and "loudspeaker stands" from 1922–23 are more than the multimedial objects they seem to be at first sight. They build a stage for the new media film and radio. The utilitarian design of the platforms combines loudspeaker and projection screen. But in contrast to Constructivist stage design, as we know it from the Russian theatre of those days, the beauty of these stands goes far beyond a mere glorification of machines, which still remained "a workbench" for actors. The Constructivist Klutsis insists on revealing the construction mode of the platforms: "laying bare the device" is the Constructivist credo. Furthermore, the so-called "radio-orators" not only show how they are made, but demonstrate the inherent mediatic energies of their apparatuses: a media environment on stage which takes over all human cognitive abilities – replacing man completely. The mise-en-scène of the apparatus thus produces media self-reflexivity. The essay shows that Klutsis's staging of the media is an early intermedial attempt which, in its elementary aesthetics and epistemological exuberance, makes no difference between past, presence, and future.

*"Fantastic work. Looking for new media.  
Surface. Space. Construction."  
Gustav Klutsis<sup>1</sup>*

The historical avant-garde's world of pictures comprises a series of drafts that evade all reassurances of an advanced enjoyment of art. Their attraction defies the museum cult of beauty, work, and value as it resists the self-understanding of an entertainment industry making use of the avant-garde's inventions in a fragmented and bonsaized version. We are talking about the more than thirty drafts of "kiosks," "agit platforms," and "loudspeaker stands" by Gustav Klutsis from 1922.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography*, manuscript from the 1930s in the archives of Klutsis's wife Valentina Kulagina, quoted after Rakitin 1980, 60.

<sup>2</sup> An earlier and extended version of this text was published in German as "Bastardisierungen und ein 'Kollektivbrötler': Die Lautsprechertribünen von Gustav Klutis und Walter Benjamins Kritik der Apparate durch das epische Theater." (Gruber 2005). The present article was translated by Wolfgang Astelbauer.

## The Animals of the Avant-Garde

These light-footed, sharp-edged, and sometimes prickly stands strike us as close relatives of the fabulous beasts, equally threatening and armed to the teeth, that have been passed on to us in Mikhail Larionov's costume sketches for *Histoires naturelles* and Fernand Léger's designs for *La Création du monde* [Fig. 1.]. Klutsis's stands are instruments for the circulation of signs, though, transmitters and receivers all in one, terminals, as we would say today, relay stations of revolution: the wings have been replaced by projection screens, the feelers and horns by antennae, the claws by jagged, bundled rays.

Since it is only the voice that makes Larionov's mechanical insect move, as the painter notes, the loudspeaker stands only come into operation by being used. Neither frozen as media sculptures, which are closed in themselves like classical sculptures, nor mere installations<sup>3</sup> or monuments, the loudspeaker stands are entirely functional. [Fig. 2.]

Klutsis's projects mark the completion of the transition from the mere form experiment of the non-objective to functional aesthetics. Their fundamental features – simplicity, economy, expediency – correspond with the lucidity of their construction and their multiple functionality. They combine the daring forms and colours of Constructivism with the emphatic imagery of the world of machines. Made of light wood, collapsible, and mobile, they fulfil the requirements of the urban information sphere. The colouring is mostly confined to red, white, and black – the basic colours of Constructivism. The extremely simple geometric structures of light and – a decisive factor in a situation of general shortage – easy-to-come-by materials are kept in balance by wires so that the construction exists only thanks to the mutual tension of forces. In a kind of modular solution, it combines with the latest technological components: the loudspeaker and the projection screen – future trademarks of all Constructivist presentations.

The purpose of this utilitarian design lies in transmitting radio messages, screening films, presenting literature, spreading information in the cause of the revolution. The apparatus does not yet take second place to the message. The canvases that are to replace those of painting tower above the entire scenery in accordance with the special place assigned to film as an instrument of cognition in avant-garde practice. Loudspeakers are part of the modern cityscape as well as of avant-garde life. And fantastic qualities are attributed to the radio, which had

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<sup>3</sup> "In addition, the word 'installation' was not really fashionable in German since it was used for sanitary facilities," Nam June Paik noted ironically. See Stoos and Kellein 1991, 58.

just been invented for communicating with men-of-war off the coast: “The problem of celebrating the communion of humanity’s one soul, one daily spiritual wave that washes over the entire country every twenty-four hours, saturating it with a flood of scientific and artistic news – that problem has been solved by Radio using lightning as its tool” (Khlebnikov 1985, 156). [Fig. 3.]

## The Rejected Subject

Thus, these light, colourful constructions equipped with modern media technology attract our attention and strike us as strange at the same time. Although their names are unambiguous, they are based on a contradictory conception.

They resemble reversed illustrations for Walter Benjamin’s notes on the stage of the epic theatre.<sup>4</sup> His thesis concerning “the theatre on the public platform” maintains that the stage no longer offers the public “‘the planks that signify the world’ (in other words, a magic circle), but a convenient public exhibition area.” And he continues in the first version of his study *What is Epic Theatre* from 1930–31: “The forms of epic theatre correspond to the new technical forms – cinema and radio. Epic theatre corresponds to the modern level of technology.” (Benjamin 2003, 2, 6)

Klutsis’s constructions result from a similar, yet – as we see – opposite thought. He builds a stage for the medium, presents the loudspeaker as an exhibit, and combines it with a projection screen. This bastardization makes the presence of man on the stage superfluous and confronts us with a certain attitude concerning the relationship between man and machine: a staging of the apparatus, which replaces man – while the technology itself becomes capable of speaking. However, by calling the arrangement “Radio Orator” Klutsis animates, anthropomorphizes it. In addition, the loudspeakers and platforms of certain designs render the constructions extremely anthropomorphic, making them appear like living stands whose outlines resemble dynamic human figures.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the replacement of man by an apparatus endows the latter with traces of human features. [Fig. 4.]

The rejection of the subject in Klutsis’s designs is radical. The staging of the apparatus erases the human body as an entity that provides meaning, or simply as something beautiful, as part of an intelligent creature and social being. The simultaneous anthropomorphization of the loudspeaker stands alleviates the loss of physical presence, of the immediate relationship between the speaker/narrator/

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<sup>4</sup> Even if Benjamin did not see any of these designs during his visit to Moscow in 1926/27, he might have come upon some works by Klutsis who designed numerous magazine and book covers as well as programme folders and booklets.

<sup>5</sup> The anthropomorphous traits are especially prominent in the designs for loudspeaker stand #2. [Fig. 4.]

performer and the public. The memory of an immediateness that does not come about any more since the apparatuses' interference is reified in it in an attractive manner. The apparatus not only ensures the transmission of information, but represents something manlike, something human.

On the loudspeaker stands, the systematic absence of man is even enhanced by the structure's anthropomorphization, although the latter only results from the former. At the same time, the constructions indulge in the transfer of human qualities into the machinery's interior. The relationship to machines, however, is not yet merely instrumental, but still playful: taking things apart, analytical and self-reflective.

## **An Elementary Solution**

The outstanding beauty of these stands, of which only two could be realized by Klutsis,<sup>6</sup> certainly lies in the fact that their construction is made visible, in the transparency of their building method, their exhibit character. And in the complete absence of the human body, the occupation of the dais by the media which clear the entire platform, the entire stage, remove everything, leaving only the installed loudspeaker and the projection screen: a pure apparatus.

Finally, the beauty of the stands derives above all from their simplicity, which is not only the achievement of an extraordinary stylistic and formal intelligence, but obeys a very old elementary functional principle<sup>7</sup> which we come upon in historical illustrations depicting *commedia dell'arte* stages, fair theatres, and similar motifs: the simplest form of stage is made of planks put on two sawhorses. An archaic, elegant, mobile solution, which is at least four hundred years old – but surely much older. [Figs. 5–6.]

## **Staging the Medium**

There is a deliberate epistemological effect that adds to the dimension of functionality. In order to complete the development of his prototype of a new communication vehicle, which we may describe as an intermedial stand today, all

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<sup>6</sup> At least one of these constructions with an antenna and a searchlight was mounted on top of the building where the delegates lived, in the centre of Moscow, during the Fourth Congress of the Communist International (1922). Another was built for the exhibition presented on the occasion of the Fifth Congress of the Communist International in 1925. See Oginskaja 1981, 26; Lodder 1990, 104; Gaßner and Nachtigäller 1991, 38 and 113.

<sup>7</sup> It thus comes as no surprise that Klutsis created stage sets for the Ochtenski Workers Theatre when he studied in Petrograd.



Klutsis had to do was mounting a screen and loudspeakers on the platform. In this prototype, the will to create technical inventions combines with the Constructivist avant-garde's continuous search for ways to exploit technical innovations both aesthetically and epistemologically: the stand equipped with media is energy centre, communication terminal, and cognitive instrument all in one.<sup>8</sup>

Yet only the staging of these innovations, the exhibitional character of their arrangement, creates the media consciousness Gustav Klutsis's loudspeaker stands, radio orators, and kiosks convey. They hint at how they are made, reveal their method of construction, and, above all, the particular character of their equipment.

The projection screen is ready to serve the art of light, which has taken the place of panel painting, ready to show its moving images – “the film has replaced God completely,” Jean Epstein once said. François Albera has shown that the cinema plays a twofold role for Klutsis: it is a place with projection screens above the stands, and it is a formal model in the layout of its axes, angles, and perspectives (cf. Albera 1994, 59).

Loudspeakers, which were also regarded as the newest achievement in the media world of the twenties, join the film, which leaves the cinema with its projection screen in a closed room to take a dominant place on stands with screens rising above them. Klutsis's loudspeakers show the media's genesis: the megaphone in its transformation to the loudspeaker which did not yet exist as such technically, and the new medium of the radio – the engineer Vladimir Šuchov's<sup>9</sup> radio tower had just been completed “within the shortest time” in Moscow in 1922, and weather forecasts and a stock exchange service had begun to be transmitted from the Eiffel Tower in Paris only two years earlier.

Projection surface and loudspeaker, one presenting the other, occupy the century-old dais: the loudspeakers of Klutsis's radio orators not only anticipate their own invention, but already hint ahead at the sound film emerging toward the end of the decade. The projection surface provides pictures accompanying the voice of the speaker or projects larger-than-life letters which condense to captions of the everyday world. At the same time, the separation of the media relates to the various senses they address – and can address individually thanks to the technological inventions.

The exhibition of the medium can be understood in terms of intermediality today: the staging of the medium shows it in its relational functionality and epistemological dimension. Thus, a reflection on media is initiated. [Figs. 7–8.]

<sup>8</sup> See the famous study by Annette Michelson 1972.

<sup>9</sup> “I also saw the enormous Moscow radio transmitter, whose shape is different from any other I have seen.” (Benjamin 1985, 112.)

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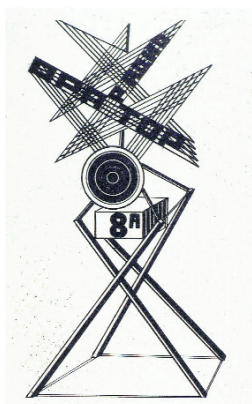
**Figure 1.** Fernand Léger, costume sketch for a beetle in *La Création du monde*, 1923. (© VBK, Wien 2010, Austria, courtesy of Dansmuseet, Stockholm.)

**Figure 2.** Mikhail Larionov, *Le Grillon*, sketch of a mechanical costume for *Histoires naturelles*, 1917–1919. (In: Lesák, Barbara. 1993. *Russische Theaterkunst 1910 – 1936. Bühnenbild- und Kostümentwürfe, Bühnenmodelle und Theaterphotographie aus der Sammlung des Österreichischen Theatermuseums*. Wien: Böhlau, p. 35. With permission from the Österreichische Theatermuseum.)



**Figure 3.** Gustav Klutsis: Radio Orator, Draft for loudspeaker stand 8a, 1922. (In: Klucis, Gustav. 1981. *Retrospektive*, eds. Hubertus Gäßner and Roland Nachtigäller. Ostfildern: Hatje, Fig. 88.)

**Figure 4.** Gustav Klutsis: design for loudspeaker stand 2, 1922. (In: Klucis, Gustav. 1981. *Retrospektive*, eds. Hubertus Gäßner and Roland Nachtigäller. Ostfildern: Hatje, Fig. 75.)



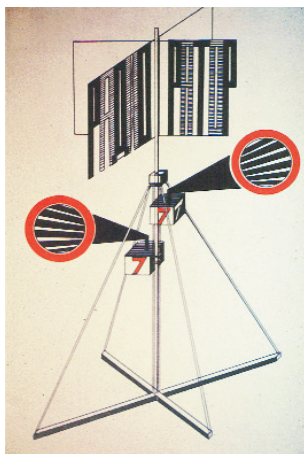
**Figure 5.** *Radio Orator, Screen*, design for loudspeaker stand 5, 1922. (In: Klucis, Gustav. 1981. *Retrospektive*, eds. Hubertus Gäßner and Roland Nachtigäller. Ostfildern: Hatje, Fig. 86.)

**Figure 6.** „Charlatans and actors in *Commedia dell'arte* costumes and masks.“ Watercolour in the family register of Adam von Eck, 1592 – 1594. (In: Archive of the National Museum, Prague, Sig. B.c.24.)



**Figure 7.** Gustav Klutsis, design for loudspeaker stand 7, 1922. (In: Klucis, Gustav. 1981. *Retrospektive*, eds. Hubertus Gäßner and Roland Nachtigäller. Ostfildern: Hatje, Fig. 87.)

**Figure 8.** Nam June Paik, *Cage*, 1990. (In: *Video-Time, Video Space*. 1991. Exhibition catalogue, Kunsthalle Basel, p. 107.)





## Volumetric Imaging as Technology to Control Space

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**Abstract.** Volumetric imaging is a relatively new technology for three-dimensional representation. In this article its political implications are sketched out. Especially important is that volumetric imaging can display spatial relations in an easily understandable way, thus it is a technology to control space. Its birth in the course of research on radar visualization points to this – and also its rare artistic usages, in which its implications are already critically discussed.

### 1.

Talking about ‘defence’ means talking about space. Any kind of defence – self-defence, military defence of a so-called nation or people – presupposes drawing a distinction, constructing a border which separates you from the subsequently defined, hostile Other.<sup>1</sup> One may try, perhaps, to make this barrier as impenetrable as possible to prevent every movement across the line. But in reality this strategy might fail. The moment the border is crossed by the Other the necessity of defence arises – for example, the necessity to destroy the invader with weapons or with pharmaceuticals.

This holds true even for the seemingly immaterial realm of *cyberspace* – as it is revealingly named – in which you have to erect ‘firewalls’ that defend your digital *domain* against the hacking invader. Although this usage of the term ‘space’ is somewhat metaphorical, I think it is plausible to state a fundamental connection between defence and space.

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<sup>1</sup> Other with a big ‘O’ in the sense of Lacan...

## 2.

Successful defence of one's proper realm is based on an efficient control of space. To control space means – of course – to *know* that space. You need information about where the Other is, how fast he can move through the territory, how fast you can move, whether there are for example natural phenomena such as storms which complicate the situation and so on. You need representations which give you information about the terrain. Traditionally – think of Lessing's *Laocoön* (Lessing 1962) – the type of media associated with space are *images*. There is – of course – *the map* as a kind of image/text-hybrid which had an enormous role in the history of space representation – indeed Farinelli spoke of the 'cartographical reason' of modernity (Farinelli 1996)<sup>2</sup>.

It suffices to say that with the increasing scale and speed of wars in modernity the static map alone wasn't satisfactory any longer. Rapid information retrieval became vital. As already noted by Lev Manovich, radar was invented during the Second World War to retrieve *real time* information about the structure of spaces in which the enemy presumably moves: "Detected objects appear as bright spots on the display watched by [a] radar operator. [...] All it sees and all it shows are the positions of objects, 3-D coordinates of points in space, points which correspond to submarines, aircrafts, birds, or missiles." (Manovich). The radar screen shows 3D-coordinates of points in space – but it often shows them using a two-dimensional screen. This became problematic under specific circumstances, insofar as the spatial structure of the observed territory would be much easier to understand and therefore to control by human operators if the spatial relations could be grasped intuitively. Some of the early developments in spatial imagery, therefore, took place in relation to radar. I will come back to this topic.

## 3.

Let me first outline the problem in more general terms. When dealing with two dimensions, images are obviously – as mentioned above – the preferred medium for representing spatial relations. But the representation of the third dimension on the picture plane can only be accomplished by techniques of *projection* of which the most important is of course *perspective*, invented in Renaissance painting. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, perspective can be automatically rendered by a lens or systems of lenses (as in photography, cinema, video, and even in

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<sup>2</sup> I do not address this topic here.



photorealistic computer graphics, where one can find ‘virtual cameras’ with virtual lenses<sup>3</sup>). The perspectival system of representation reigned for centuries and continues until today. But in modernity – the decomposition of perspectival representation in modernist painting set aside – perspective clashes more and more with the needs of modern warfare, modern science and modern medicine. The problem is simply that perspective, although it may not be a conventional, but a mathematically based and to that extent objective system of projection, is not *isomorphic*. That means: you cannot reconstruct the spatial layout of a three-dimensional scene from a two-dimensional perspectival representation of that scene in every case. Many other configurations of objects would fit the same pattern on the image-plane. It is not difficult to imagine that perspective’s non-isomorphism is a big problem for e.g. aerial reconnaissance, the analysis of bubble chamber volumes in particle physics, the visualization of weather phenomena, the correct mapping of the interior of the body in medicine and so forth (Manovich 1996).

For that reason, it is hardly surprising that different types of post- or trans-perspectival images were developed in modernity. These *trans-plane images* were [and are] giving increasingly precise spatial information. One example is – of course – stereoscopy. It was originally invented in 1838 by Charles Wheatstone to prove his arguments about the binocularity of vision and then became, roughly until the 1890s, a popular entertainment medium. As Jonathan Crary argues in his influential study *Techniques of the Observer*, stereoscopy disrupts the perspective paradigm by functionalizing the binocularity of the observer, even if the single images are still perspectival. His argument on why stereoscopy disappeared at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century rests exactly on that point. He argues that stereoscopy destabilizes the – so-called – ‘paradigm of the *camera obscura*,’ which he sometimes seems to identify with the perspectival order, whilst on other occasions he clearly differentiates both fields (Crary 1990).<sup>4</sup> This destabilization was – Crary argues – somewhat too obvious; therefore stereoscopy was superseded by photography which reconstituted the monocular, disembodied, perspectival gaze (Crary 1990, 132/133).

This argumentation is problematic in several respects.<sup>5</sup> My main point of critique is that stereoscopy simply *did not disappear* at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Even if it vanished as a popular entertainment medium and left that field

<sup>3</sup> On the historical roots of perspective see Damisch 1995. On the continuation of perspective in photographic media see Snyder 1980. On the continuation of photographic form in hegemonic computer graphics see Schröter 2003.

<sup>4</sup> See p. 118 for an identification of the ‘*camera obscura*’-paradigm with perspective and p. 34 for a differentiation of both fields.

<sup>5</sup> For a profound critique of Crary’s account see Phillips 1993.



to cinema, the post card, Kodak-self-made-photography and so on, it continued to operate, and even gained importance, in aerial reconnaissance, especially in the First World War. It is downright impossible to discriminate between a valley and a mountain range or low and high buildings on a photo made from a very high altitude – unless you use stereoscopy (Judge 1926, Ch. XVIII).

It was and is also utilized, for example, in photogrammetry or in the analysis of bubble chamber volumes in particle physics (for the last example, see Bassi et al. 1957; Galison 1997, 378–379). Stereoscopy was (and sometimes is) used in these discursive practices to provide the necessary spatial information. Considering this, the all-too-popular conviction that modernity witnesses an ‘annihilation of space,’ as (among others) Virilio teaches us, has to be differentiated. Of course telecommunications shrank the world, or better: the richer countries, into the global village (McLuhan 1964).<sup>6</sup> But in other, especially pictorial contexts, space did not shrink – it literally expanded.

#### 4.

*Stereoscopy* (here including so-called integral photography or lenticular imagery) is not the only type of trans-plane imagery. There are – I think – two further basic types<sup>7</sup>: the second type is *holography*, basically developed around 1948. The only lenseless form of image technology in the strict sense, holography is based on an ontology of light as wave (that is: on wave optics) and as such again underscores the break with the perspectival regime of light-as-rays in modernity.<sup>8</sup>

The third type, with which I am concerned here, is the *volumetric display* (into which I include so called varifocal mirror techniques). Volumetric displays were developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century – intimately connected with the topic of defence. Only three years after the Second World War P.R. Wallis and E. Parker published a paper on *Three-Dimensional Cathode Ray Tube Displays* whose aim is to optimize the already mentioned display of radar signals: “The three-dimensional displays are used to display the positions of the reflected ‘signals’ with respect to the three coordinates of the volume, in order that the radar can be used as an

<sup>6</sup> For a critique of the rhetoric of a ‘shrinking world’ see Kirsch 1995.

<sup>7</sup> It is important to understand that these three basic types work by fundamentally different principles. Stereoscopy exploits the binocularity of vision, while volumetric display uses the so-called persistence of vision and is not at all stereoscopic. Holography is completely different from both. While stereoscopy and volumetric display could be said to adhere to the principles of physiological optics in the wider sense, holography belongs to the regime of wave optics – and in no way presupposes knowledge of the human body.

<sup>8</sup> On the rise of wave optics see Buchwald 1989. For a concise history of holography see Johnston 2006. For detailed discussions on several aspects of holography see Rieger and Schröter 2009.

object-detecting and -locating system in three dimensions. [...] The physiological and psychological problems of the human operator peculiar to three-dimensional displays are discussed [...].” (Parker and Wallis 1948, 371). They describe different 3D-displays which may be useful in optimizing the performance of the human operator and hence the control over space. Parker and Wallis analyze stereoscopic displays as well, but this “pseudo-3D” (as they call it), has some limitations. Therefore, they propose first steps towards what they name “truly three dimensional displays”: the first volumetric displays “in which the echoes appear as bright spots in an actual volume of light.” (Parker and Wallis 1948, 372.). This is the central point: *Volumetric displays represent the image not on a plane, but in a volume.*

In their very early paper Parker and Wallis suggest different types of display for different “aerial scanning patterns” – that is, different ways for the radar system to scan the territory in which the enemy is suspected. The aim is to represent the radar-scanning of space in the most direct way. In Fig. 1 one can see a so called ‘spiral’ scan pattern. That means, it shows how the radar beam moves through the volume of space, the third dimension is – so to say – into the page. Fig. 2 (both figures are from Parker and Wallis 1948; Reprinted with permission from the IEE) shows the rather primitive apparatus, which is used to produce a seemingly three-dimensional image representing the scan movements. At that time, only analogue computation was available to Parker and Wallis (although digital computers already existed) and so their goal was to map the radar scan directly into the image volume. The Cathode Ray Tubes paint the elevation and the bearing scans on the rotating mirror, where they fuse and represent the radar volume.

Before turning to more advanced volumetric displays, I would like to draw attention to a weird coincidence. See Fig. 3 (from: Krauss 1993, 102 and slightly rotated), which is one of Marcel Duchamp’s *Rotoreliefs* from 1935 (this one is called *Corolle*, © Succession Marcel Duchamp / ADAGP Paris 2010). Compare it to Fig. 1, the spiral scan pattern from the early paper from Parker and Wallis. In *The Optical Unconscious*, Rosalind Krauss writes on these discs by dada- and proto-conceptualist-artist Duchamp: “Mounted on a record player’s turntable, the disks revolved soundlessly, the product of their turning a series of optical illusions, the most gripping of which was that rotation transformed their two-dimensionality into an illusory volumetric fullness [...].” (Krauss 1993, 99). Perhaps this is only a superficial coincidence – yet Duchamp was interested in mathematics, and the spiral radar scan and his rotorelief are quite obviously so-called Lissajous figures ... (Dalrymple Henderson 1983, 117–163). But more

importantly: the similarity may be a symptom for a kind of – via Krauss – *optical unconscious* generated by or connected with the need to control space in modernity. I think that there is a similar knowledge implied in both the volumetric radar display and the volumetric art of Duchamp, namely knowledge about the perceptual production of an image-volume by rotation. It is – this time in accordance with Jonathan Crary – knowledge about specific attributes of human vision. And indeed Duchamp was very interested in the psycho-physiological foundations of vision and in trans-planar images, as his experiments with stereoscopy show (see Krauss 1993, 131). And of course military research in the effectiveness of radar operators presupposes that knowledge, too. This is obvious in the development of volumetric display technology.

In the years after 1948, many different volumetric display technologies were conceived. Some of them are still difficult to realize even now, but some of them became really important. It is not necessary here to discuss their various archaeologies and effects, especially the basic distinction between solid state- and moving parts-types of display (Blundell and Schwarz 2000). I will concentrate on the currently established forms which belong to the moving parts category. In this type of volumetric display the image, or to be precise, the image-volume is based on the rotational movement of a planar or helical mirror screen. In a sense the old *paragone* of painting and sculpture is resolved in an image-volume, which is produced on a flat screen itself moving in space. An optical or laser beam system synchronized with the movement of the screen writes the image in points or lines or parts (dependent on the design) onto the spinning screen. Quite obviously, the knowledge on persistence of vision discovered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century does not only lead to the movement- or time-images of cinema (as Deleuze named them), but also to the volumetric type of trans-planar space images.<sup>9</sup>

The two most important advantages of volumetric displays are *first*, that the representation of the spatial object is itself spatial and insofar intuitively understandable, and *second*, that the representation is better suited to collective reception and consequently to teamwork. Until now, one central disadvantage is the transparency of the images, which eliminates one important clue for the reception of space – *occlusion* (although there is at the moment a lot of research in ‘opacity descriptors’, which admittedly can only be realized in static volumetric displays). But the advantages seem to prevail – it is therefore not surprising that the military is already working with such display technologies.

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<sup>9</sup> On the role of the research into the so called ‘persistence of vision’ for the emergence of optical techniques and lastly cinema, see Crary 1990, 104-112.

Interesting in this context is a paper on a volumetric imaging in the context of a book on health care (Soltan et al. 1995). In this paper, a relatively advanced helical volumetric display-technology (Fig. 4, from Soltan et al. 1995, 352. Reprinted with permission from IOS Press) is discussed. Especially interesting is that part of the paper in which potential usages of the display – to be precise: of a future volumetric display – are sketched out. One example: a representation of the potentials of volumetric display technology includes a woman (Fig. 5, from Soltan et al. 1995, 357. Reprinted with permission from IOS Press), but there you have – not surprisingly – the idea of bodily control, of the transparency of the body. Here defence does not lie so much in the localization of the outer enemy, but in the control of the female body which is rendered transparent to be functional – to allow an optimized birth.

## 5.

There surely is an – if you like – *Defence-Unconscious* in volumetric display technology. See for example the actual advertisements for the *Perspecta 3D-Display*, which is currently one of the best volumetric displays commercially available. It renders the image volume in 768 x 768 x 198 Voxels, which is the spatial equivalent of the pixel, in 8 colors at a refresh rate of 24 kHz onto a disc rotating with 730 rpm (Fig. 6, found some time ago on the Internet, shows some older representations of the display, chosen for their symptomatic character; the recent types and their developer is to be found here: <http://actuality-medical.com/Home.html> ).

The advertisement is highly symptomatic. In one case the volumetric display is used to present the flight of an airplane over a landscape; and in the other it presents a three-dimensional representation of – *HIV*. In the first case it might be the defence of the territory against an airplane; in the second the topic is the defence of bodily integrity against the deadly virus. Again we find the territory and the body as the central sites of defence, which have to be mapped and analyzed.

This is another reason why I argue that space became an important problem in modernity (whilst disappearing in other fields). Moreover, in modern warfare space is not any longer an always already fixed territory on which troops meet and fight – space itself has to be controlled preventively. Modern medicine – as part of what Foucault called the regime of biopolitics – has not only to observe the symptoms showing up on the surface, but has to map the body in more and more detailed depth to control, optimize and mobilize the worldly flesh (cf. the work of Michel

Foucault). These two types of defence – against the internal and external enemies – result, among other things, in the development of three-dimensional trans-planar images; or at least in certain applications of those image-types.

It is not surprising that one can also find traces of that *space control* in twentieth-century art. I already mentioned the weird visual analogies between one of Duchamp's *Rotoreliefs* and one specific radar scan pattern. Duchamp situates the disturbing Other in the corporeality of the observer, until then always excluded in art-historical narratives, and so points to the relation between art and the discursive practices which strive to control the body outside of the art-historical domain.

A seemingly similar strategy can be found in a different aesthetic field much later – in Jenny Holzer's installation *Sex Murder* (1994). In one specific realization of her installation, she uses volumetric display technology in a highly revealing context. She also suggests the uncanny connection between the two central topics of defence – control over the territory and control of bodily integrity – and space. First, the work is itself an installation taking up space. It maps out a territory which symbolizes in very different ways and in very different materials (bones, tables, photography and Holzer's famous neon writings) the Bosnian war zone – and thematizes very decidedly the violating assault on female bodies.

The volumetric display used here resembles a kind of shrine in which texts circulate: Holzer presupposes the work of Duchamp – but for her it is no longer a problem that the 'observer' can be tricked by rotation. She simply admits that there is a military-industrial-entertainment-complex which can produce – to cite Deleuze – 'any-space-whatever.' The point is that those techniques are nowadays – years after Duchamp – no longer disruptive in an enclosed realm of art, but within the standards of culture industry. She tries, as her work with neon writings show, to appropriate commercial media technologies for a political agenda. And this is the point of her installation: even before volumetric display will enter the household she already shows that it can (or should?) be used otherwise – or at least that volumetric display was not at all a development for entertainment purposes. She shows the *3D/efence-unconscious* in volumetric display technology – by using texts, which describe in a poetic and condensed way the horrors of a breakdown of defence and of the moment when the Other – in rape literally – intrudes into the private realm. We read: "She asks me to sleep in the house but I will not with her body and it's noises and wetness/She is narrow and flat in the blue sack and I stand when they lift her" (Holzer 1996, 49). That is: she is first in the *house* and then she is *flat* – this spatial metaphor might be a further hint. The

act of becoming-flat is marked as decidedly violent – that might also be a commentary on the violence of perspectival projection, which renders all three-dimensionality on a plane and so reduces their spatiality. Perspective produces a *dominated world*, as Merleau-Ponty once said... Jenny Holzer shows in one move the violence of projection and the even increasing violence when the territory can be mapped by post-projective image technologies. We are left with the question: what should we do with new imaging technologies – and their potentials to control space?

## 6.

I was only able to adumbrate that there seems to be an intricate network connecting military and biopolitical defence, strategies for controlling space and the development and application of trans-planar imagery. This network implies special – and spatial – forms of knowledge which circulate through different fields and can also be found in art. There is a lot of research left to be done until this discursive network can be itself mapped out in more detail (see Schröter 2009).

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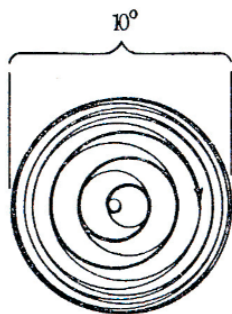
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# List of Figures

Figures 1-2.



Figures 3-4.

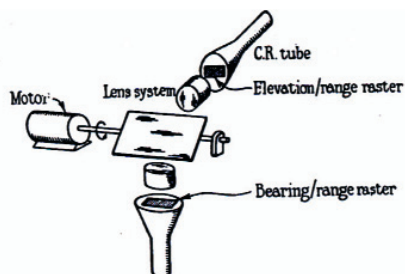
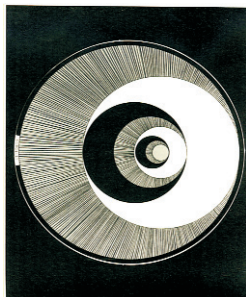


Fig. 3.—Truly three-dimensional displays. The “moving screen” display.

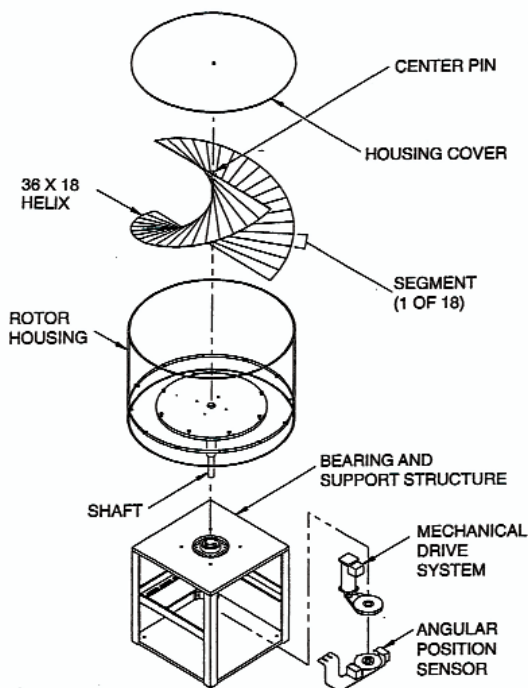


Figure 2. Major components of Helical Display.

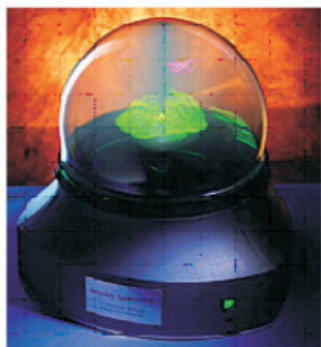
Figure 5.



Concept by NRad  
January 1994  
P. Soltan

Figure 12. Laser-based 3-D Volumetric Medical display.

Figure 6.



This simulation of a plane flying over hills shows how 3-D problems involving a changing environment can be modeled.



This representation of HIV allows researchers to study its structure from all angles and to "test-fit" protein molecules.



## Visual Surveillance. Transmedial Migrations of a Scopic Form

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**Abstract.** Analyzing a series of works realized in the media of performance and photography (Vito Acconci, Sophie Calle), video installation (Michael Snow, Bruce Nauman, Dan Graham) and found footage cinema (Michael Klier, Eyal Sivan, Harun Farocki) we will observe how the act of *visual surveillance* can be enacted or detected in different media while maintaining its defining characteristic: the disciplining power of an asymmetric gaze which is more and more present across the social space, thanks to the proliferation of video cameras, and which since the late 1960s has been explored by different generations of artists in all its political, psychological and aesthetic dimensions. The result will be a reflection on one of the possible ways of understanding the phenomenon of *intermediality*: in this case, intermediality as the *transmedial migrations* of a scopic form, of a way of seeing.

### Theatricality and Surveillance

In an article published in 1967 in the magazine *Artforum* with the title *Art and Objecthood* (Fried 1967), the American art critic Michael Fried, together with Clement Greenberg, the most influential representative of the ‘modernist’ trend of American art criticism in the 1960s, described the then current art scene as characterized by the confrontation between two opposite poles, the “pictorial” and the “theatrical.” On the one side of this opposition he saw the modernist paintings of artists such as Kenneth Noland and Jules Olitski, focused on the exploration of the *specific* elements of the pictorial medium (form, colour, frame, the bidimensionality of the canvas), while on the other he placed the theatricality of Minimalism: the sculptures consisting of abstract geometrical volumes (cubes, parallelepipeds, bars, slabs) by artists such as Donald Judd, Robert Morris and Tony Smith, which introduced in the artworld the anonymity and the seriality of industrial forms, but at the same time were characterized, according to Fried,

by an undeniable *anthropomorphic* dimension, since their presence in front of the eyes and of the body of the spectator was something very similar to the presence of a *person*. Given their position in space and their dimensions, such Minimalist sculptures seemed to ‘acknowledge’ the presence of the spectator and to ‘address’ him or her explicitly, whereas one of the defining traits of modernist painting was for Fried the decision to ignore altogether the spectator, locking the work of art in a condition of absolute and impenetrable self-sufficiency.

The confrontation between these two tendencies in the artistic scene of the 1960s is described by Fried as a real clash in which what is at stake is not only the alternative between two styles or two different approaches to art making, but the very distinction between what is art and what is not: “Theatre and theatricality are at war today, not simply with modernist painting (or modernist painting and sculpture), but with art as such [...]. The success, even the survival, of the arts has come increasingly to depend on their ability to defeat theatre [...]. Art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theatre” (Fried 1967, 163–164). One of the main reasons why Fried rejected radically the theatrical *openness* of the Minimalist works, while at the same time celebrating the self-sufficient *closure* of modernist painting, had to do with the different forms of spectatorial experience implied by such works. According to a conviction shared in those years also by Clement Greenberg, the modernist work of art had the property of being at every instant *entirely present and accessible* in front of the eyes of the beholder, who ideally should have been able to ‘capture’ the work with a single, immediate and instantaneous glance. As we read in *Art and Objecthood*, “it is by virtue of their *presentness* and *instantaneousness* that modernist painting and sculpture defeat theatre” (Fried 1967, 167). On the contrary, the aesthetics of theatricality conceived the relation between spectator and artwork as a process diluted in time and, most of all, open and not fully determined. A relationship predisposed by the artist, but which needed the active presence of the spectator in order to be progressively activated and developed.

As we know now, the late 1960s and early 1970s saw the crisis of the modernist aesthetics and the success and proliferation of the theatrical tendency that had been so harshly condemned by Fried. The artists working in those years within the fields of performance, happenings, body art and video art explored in all directions the dynamic relationship between the work of art and the spectator, initiating different forms of *interactivity* which in many cases – for example in the famous performances by Marina Abramović and Ulay – involved

directly the body of the artist. In all these works, the spectator was considered as a constitutive factor of the work of art, i.e. as one of the poles around which the artistic intervention was structured. Such a spectator, depending on the situation, had to be confronted, attracted, seduced, shocked or even physically assaulted; let free to interact with the work in an unpredictable way but also, often, captured, constrained, subjected to various forms of control and surveillance.

Among the various forms of spectatorial experience explored by the artists beginning with the late 1960s, it is precisely this last relationship of surveillance that will be the focus of our attention in the following pages. Following a line that begins with a performance enacted by Vito Acconci in 1969 and ends with some recent found footage films by Harun Farocki, we will examine a body of works employing different media configurations in order to see how contemporary art has established itself in the last few decades as a particularly stimulating field in which to detect and enact the various dynamics of seeing and being seen in all their aesthetic, psychological, political and social dimensions, situating the spectator from time to time, and often at the *same* time, as *object* or as *subject* of a surveillant gaze. What will particularly interest us in the context of a reflection on the elusive notion of *intermediality*, is the way in which such a relationship of visual surveillance has been explored by the artists we will consider through a variety of different media, with the result of revealing it as a scopic form whose essential traits can manifest themselves in different medial forms.<sup>1</sup>

## Forms of Video Surveillance: from the Social to the Artistic Field

We can define as *visual* surveillance – distinguishing it for example from *audio* surveillance (on which cf. Szendy 2007) – any form of control and discipline which is exercised mainly through the act of *seeing*. The paradigmatic form of this type of surveillance has been described by Michel Foucault in his famous analysis of Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon*, an optical and architectural device in which Foucault identified the birth of the "disciplinary" society (cf. Bentham 1995 [1791], Foucault 1991 [1975]). The functioning of such a device, as we know,

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<sup>1</sup> On the theme of surveillance in contemporary art, cinema, and media, cf. the exhibition entitled *Ctrl [Space]. Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother* presented at the ZKM – Center for Art and Media of Karlsruhe in 2001-2002, and the numerous essays contained in the catalogue (Levin – Frohne – Weibel 2002).

was based on a precise spatial construction and on a fundamental *asymmetry* of seeing. In Bentham's *Panopticon* – a flexible structure which according to its author could have been used indifferently as a prison, a hospital, a madhouse, a school or a factory – there is a radical distinction between he who sees and those who are seen: between the guardian located in the central control tower, who sees everything without being seen, and the prisoners / patients / madmen / pupils / workers hosted in the cells surrounding the central tower, who know that they are seen without being able, though, to identify the source of such seeing. In this way, in full coherence with the “utilitarian” approach of its author, the *Panopticon* aimed at maximizing the results while at the same time minimizing the effort: subjecting a potentially large number of individuals to the disciplining power of an invisible surveillant gaze, the *Panopticon* according to Bentham could have eventually functioned even without the presence of anyone in the control tower, since the awareness of being under visual surveillance would have induced a correct behaviour in the individuals hosted in the cells.

Over the last few decades, with the diffusion of video surveillance cameras, the forms of visual surveillance have proliferated through the social space, becoming more flexible and diffused, and extending their reach through a variety of social, institutional, scientific and military domains. Blurring more and more the boundaries between the private and the public, the video surveillance cameras multiply the efficacy of the asymmetric gaze theorized by Bentham without the need of constraining the movements of the individuals under control. As Deleuze noted, the early-modern “disciplinary society” has become a “society of control” (cf. Deleuze 1990), in which discipline is induced across the social spectrum by a diffused and de-localized array of control factors. The video camera plays a key role in this transition: thanks to one of its fundamental characteristics, that of allowing the spectator to receive an immediate feedback, observing live the images being recorded, the video camera multiplies exponentially the power of the panoptic gaze, transforming the social space in a domain that can be potentially rendered entirely visible, transparent, and disciplined.

The political and psychological consequences of the proliferation of such a pervasive surveillant gaze began to be investigated from the late 1960s onwards by a number of artists working with different media, ranging from performance to photography, from video installations to found footage cinema. Examining some of their works may allow us to observe how the practice of visual surveillance can be reformulated in different media while maintaining some of its defining traits.



## Surveillance as Performance

Among the artists working on the theme of surveillance through the form of performance we may mention Vito Acconci and Sophie Calle. In his performance entitled *Following Piece* (1969) [Fig.1], Vito Acconci chose some people randomly encountered in the streets of Manhattan and followed them across the city as long as they remained in a public space. Such following could last only a few minutes, if the people entered in the private space of a house or a car, or various hours if they went to a restaurant or to the movies. At the end of the performance, the results of each following were presented in panels containing the general 'rules' governing the performance itself, as well as various photographs, notes and comments referring to each person that had been followed. Several years later, Sophie Calle chose again performance, photography and text in order to explore within the urban space the dynamics of following and being followed, observing and controlling. In a work entitled *The Shadow (Detective)* [Figs. 2–3], begun in 1981 and completed in 1985, she asked her mother to contact a private investigation agency in order to hire a detective whose task should have been to follow her and take photographs and notes documenting all her movements and activities. In its final form, the work consists of a series of panels which contain both the detective's photographs that portray the artist seen from behind in a series of locations which eerily recall the movie *Vertigo* (a cemetery, a park, a museum), and the notes taken by Sophie Calle, who was obviously aware of being followed and who in turn spied on the detective, who was himself unaware of being an object of surveillance.

If from the domain of performance and of its photographic and textual documentations we now move towards artists focusing on the main protagonist of the contemporary forms of visual surveillance, the video camera, we encounter a number of works which explore the dynamics of seeing and being seen, of visual control and visual discipline, in at least two different ways: either by producing video images *ex novo* through video cameras located inside installations conceived as spaces of surveillance, or by discovering and re-editing non-artistic surveillance images treated as found footage material in order to investigate their aesthetic potential and their social and political meaning.

## Video Installations as Surveillance Devices

To the first group described just above belongs a series of works realized between the end of the 1960s and the mid 1970s by artists who explored the act of



surveillance within the context of a wider interest in the relationship between artwork and spectator. Rejecting the modernist aesthetics described and prescribed by critics such as Michael Fried and Clement Greenberg, artists such as Michael Snow, Bruce Nauman, and Dan Graham emphasized the confrontation between the artwork and the body of the spectator, the duration and the unpredictability of the spectatorial experience, the incompleteness and the opacity of a seeing which could be mediated in a variety of forms.

What is of particular interest for us in the context of this reflection on intermediality, is the attitude of these artists towards the medium-specificity of video. In the works we will now analyze, such a medium is employed both for its specificity and for its flexibility.

On the one hand, these works use video as a medium whose essential characteristics define it as particularly indicated for any form of visual surveillance. One of such characteristics is the possibility of seeing as live feedback the images captured by a closed-circuit camera, as well as that of dislocating in different spaces the video camera and the monitor on which its images are transmitted, thus establishing situations in which someone is seen without knowing the source of such seeing; the capacity of 'covering' a given space entirely through an accurate positioning of the video camera which reduces to the minimum the space that remains offscreen; finally, the possibility of recording long, continuous takes without any interruption in the temporal flow. All these possibilities that are specific to video, and that in the case of live feedback differentiate it altogether from cinema, explain why critics such as Anne-Marie Duguet have suggested that the principle of surveillance is somehow intrinsic, or constitutive, of the video image (cf. Duguet 1988, 229–230, and Parfait 2001, 247–288).

On the other hand, in all these works video is employed as a highly flexible medium which can be deployed in a wide variety of spatial configurations, thanks to the mobility and the lightness of the video cameras, as well as to the various forms and positions that the monitors can take. If we consider that in a video installation the 'medium' is not only the video device but also its specific spatial arrangement, we have to recognize that what we consider as 'medium' is here something extremely fluid and flexible, since the spatial arrangements exhibited by the installations we will now consider are very different from one another.

The video installation by Michael Snow entitled *De La* (1969–1972) [Fig. 4.] stages the optical device that the artist had previously employed in a work entitled *La Région centrale* (1969–1970) [Fig. 5]: a video camera installed on a mobile

mechanical arm which, by moving continuously in space along a series of ever-changing trajectories, allows it to record without interruption the surrounding space. In *La Région centrale* the videocamera, located in the midst of the wilderness of a mountain landscape in Québec, explored such a panorama in all directions, offering the spectator a panoptic but labyrinthic visual experience which was totally disorienting, up to the point of causing altogether the loss of one's own sense of location in space. In *De La*, such a kinetic video-sculpture is instead presented in the interior space of an art gallery and mounted on a circular platform surrounded by four monitors which transmits in real time the images captured by the video camera. The panoptic exploration of the inner space of the gallery becomes here particularly puzzling once the camera eventually captures the images shown on one of the monitors, showing a monitor in a monitor in a monitor... *ad infinitum*: a sudden moment of feedback which gives place to a short but vertiginous *mise en abyme*.

In *Live/Taped Video Corridor* (1969–1970) Bruce Nauman uses the contrast between frame stop and live feedback in order to induce a moment of estrangement in the spectator who enters the installation, a long and narrow corridor (10 meters long, 50 centimetres wide) with a video camera high above the entrance and two monitors, one on top of the other, at the end. [Fig. 6.] The higher monitor shows a static image of the empty corridor, while in the lower monitor the spectator sees the images recorded by the video camera located at the entrance high behind his or her shoulders. As long as the spectator advances through the corridor towards the monitor at the end, he moves farther and farther away from the video camera, and therefore the image that appears on the higher monitor is that of his body seen from behind, moving away and becoming smaller and smaller: rather than coming closer to one's own image becoming larger and larger as it would happen when approaching a mirror, the movement of the spectator towards the monitor sets him farther and farther away from his own image, which recedes more and more in space. Instead of a process of gradual recognition of oneself in the monitor we have here an experience of dissociation, a losing of one's own image which seems to be slipping away.

In *Video Surveillance Piece: Public Room, Private Room* (1969–1970) this act of expropriation of the spectator's own image is represented through a different spatial disposition of monitors and video cameras [Fig. 7]. We now have two rooms located next to each other, in both of which there is a video camera and a monitor. The first, "public" room is open to the visitors, while the second "private" one is closed. In the first room there is a video camera which sends its images to the

monitor located on the floor of the second room. The images recorded by the video camera in this second “private” room are in turn sent to the monitor located in the first “public” one. The result is that the spectator sees in the monitor of the public room a view from above of the monitor located in the second inaccessible room, on which appears the image of his or her body seen from behind and standing in front of the monitor of the public room. Just as in *Live/Taped Video Corridor*, the eeriness of feeling oneself seen from behind is multiplied by the fact that one’s own image becomes unreachable, while as in *De La* by Michael Snow the live feedback produces a highly disorienting effect of *mise en abyme*.

Between 1974 and 1976 Dan Graham realized a series of video installations in which the relationship between the spectator and his or her own image recorded by a video camera and diffused by a monitor was explored in all its complexity with the aid not only of live feedback and the different spatial dispositions of video cameras and monitors encountered in the installations previously analyzed, but also of a number of different strategies which included the juxtaposition of monitor and mirrors and the use of time delay. While in Michael Snow’s and Bruce Nauman’s installation the feedback images on the monitors were always transmitted live, Dan Graham introduced often in his video installations a disorienting temporal delay of a few seconds between the moment of recording and the moment of the appearance of the images on the screen. As an emblematic example of such video installations conceived as a series of variations using the same elements and accompanied by an articulated theoretical reflection on the specificities of the video image in comparison with the cinematographic and the mirror image (cf. Graham 1999),<sup>2</sup> we can take the installation entitled *Present Continuous Past(s)* (1974), whose description given by Dan Graham will appear less disorienting if compared with the illustration prepared by the artist himself [Fig. 8]: “The mirrors reflect present time. The video camera tapes what is immediately in front of it and the entire reflection on the opposite mirrored wall. The image seen by the camera (reflecting everything in the room) appears 8 seconds later in the video monitor [...]. If a viewer’s body does not directly obscure the lens’s view of the facing mirror the camera is taping the reflection of the room and the reflected image of the monitor (which shows the time recorded 8 seconds previously reflected from the mirror). A person viewing the monitor sees both the

<sup>2</sup> The main video installations by Dan Graham which in the 1970s deal with the theme of surveillance, besides *Present Continuous Past(s)* (1974), are: *Two Rooms / Reverse Video Delay* (1974), *Time Delay Room* (1974, of which there are seven different versions), *Opposing Mirrors and Video Monitors on Time Delay* (1974), *Mirror Window Corner Piece* (1974), *Video Piece for Two Glass Office Buildings* (1976), *Video Piece for Showcase Windows in Shopping Arcade* (1976).

image of himself, 8 seconds ago, *and* what was reflected on the mirror from the monitor, 8 seconds ago of himself which is 16 seconds in the past (as the camera view of 8 seconds prior was playing back on the monitor 8 seconds ago, and this was reflected on the mirror along with the then present reflection of the viewer). An infinite regress of time continuums within time continuums (always separated by 8 seconds intervals) is created. The mirror at right-angles to the other mirror-wall and to the monitor-wall gives a present-time view of the installation as if observed from an 'objective' vantage point exterior to the viewer's subjective experience and to the mechanism which produces the piece's perceptual effect. It simply reflects (statically) present time" (Graham 1999, 39–40).

Taken all together, all these video installations have in common the idea of working on the aesthetic and psychological dimensions of the surveillant gaze through a series of variable spatial and visual devices. As we said before, video is here employed both as a medium whose specificity seems to be intrinsically intertwined with the act of surveillance, and as an extremely flexible medium which can be articulated in space in different ways. The common aim of all these works is to introduce a dimension of estrangement in the spectator's experience, an uncanny disturbance in one's own sense of being in space, through a device in which one's own image is either taken away or rendered unreachable, frustrating our need for self-recognition.

## Surveillance Images as Found Footage

The second group of artists we will now consider works on the theme of surveillance in an entirely different way from the artists just examined. In works such as *The Giant* (*Der Riese*, 1983) by Michael Klier, *I Love You All* (*Aus Liebe zum Volk*, 2004) by Eyal Sivan, *I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts* (*Ich glaubte Gefangene zu sehen*, 2000) and *Counter-Music* (*Gegen-Musik*, 2004) by Harun Farocki, the images of surveillance are not generated live by video devices spatially arranged by the artists, but rather taken as found footage material from the innumerable video cameras which are scattered through a variety of public and private spaces. Recorded continuously by video cameras that are specifically positioned in order to frame in the most effective way the area they are supposed to cover, such images constitute an endless reserve of mostly anonymous and useless visual material which the artists reveal and explore in order to investigate the effects of their social presence, their political meaning, as well as their hidden narrative and fictional potential.

*The Giant* by Michael Klier begins by showing us the images of an airplane landing at Berlin Tegel airport shot by a video camera located on the air traffic control tower. The Wagner soundtrack seems to reveal a distant, ironic quotation of the beginning of Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (*Triumph des Willens*, 1935), and introduces the first of a series of disorienting juxtapositions between such anonymous images and clearly 'authorial' soundtracks spanning from Romantic classical music to jazz. The following sequences show us images of the streets of Hamburg and Berlin seen from above, a control room full of monitors, a sailing boat on a lake followed by the jerky mechanical movements of a surveillance video camera, a gas station, a striptease bar, a railway station, a beach, and so on. Among this seemingly endless series of anonymous images we capture here and there some short sequences which seem to possess a certain narrative potential, as if they were disperse fragments of all the infinite stories that unfold themselves daily within the space of the city: a sick man taken away by an ambulance; a girl playing with a frisbee in the garden of a luxurious villa while soon after a fancy car enters the gate; a young man caught while stealing in a department store, and the voice of the employee who is alerting the guards at the entrance; a man pushing a woman violently into the service door of a supermarket, in front of the perplexed faces of the people near by... While watching this movie made exclusively by editing found footage surveillance images which appear to be all characterized by the same formal traits – static or mechanically moving shots always taken from above, black and white, low quality – what we feel is the constant need to find some sense in what we are seeing; to discover the stories hiding behind such anonymity and meaninglessness, behind such seemingly unintentional editing, considering Klier's film as a sort of postmodern "symphony of the city" entirely composed of surveillance images.

The case of *I Love You All* [Fig. 9] by the Israeli film director Eyal Sivan is entirely different. If the source of the images seen in *The Giant* was uncertain, here there can be no doubt: all the images we see are the product of the all-pervasive system of social control that had been put into practice by the Stasi, the infamous Secret Police of the former East Germany, the DDR. Having had access to such an immense visual archive, Sivan selects and re-edits them with the voice over of a narrator who knows them well: Mayor S., a former Stasi official, who tells us about his experience in 1990, just after the fall of the Socialist regime. What is at stake in *I Love You All* is not the temptation of unveiling the fictional potential hiding among apparently ordinary and anonymous images, but rather the possibility of understanding the all-pervasive presence of a systematic apparatus of control and

discipline which aimed at rendering the social space perfectly transparent and disciplined, abolishing any distinction between the public and the private dimension, and considering any citizen as a potential suspect.

The same strategy employed by Sivan in order to analyze the archival Stasi surveillance images is adopted by Harun Farocki in order to examine an even more elusive apparatus, since it is still functioning and can be detected throughout societies which are considered as fully democratic: that vast system of visual control constituted by hundreds of thousands of video cameras which are increasingly deployed in order to control the social space in its entirety. In *I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts* we see images captured by the video cameras in charge of monitoring the movements and behaviours of the clients in a supermarket, a surveillance system which, as Farocki clearly shows us, is very similar to the one used to control the inmates in a prison. In *Counter-Music* [Fig. 10] we see instead the various forms of visual surveillance that are functioning in the French city of Lille, from the control of the railway traffic to the observation of the crowds in the streets and squares of the city. Through a complex editing which mixes found footage images of various provenience, and in which the ones that seem to dominate are the ones that Farocki calls “operational images” – images generated automatically and connected to the functioning of some system or device – we are confronted with the existence of an iconic universe of which we were almost entirely unaware: an array of *images without spectators* (cf. Bredekamp, Bruhn, and Werner 2007) which permeate all the levels of our daily life, scanning in all directions the spaces in which we live, and *de facto* producing a regime of visual control that is not so far from the one that had been dreamt by the totalitarian regimes of the past, although much more polycentric and complex.

Working not so much on the creation of new spaces of video surveillance but on the discovery and the *détournement* of pre-existing images, often totally anonymous and doomed to disappear in some remote visual archive, Michael Klier, Eyal Sivan and Harun Farocki show us the various and often unexpected medial forms in which the principle of surveillance manifests itself throughout the social space. Their objective as artists – especially in the case of Harun Farocki, whose work is entirely dedicated to this aim – is that of using the epistemic power of montage in order to contribute to a critical analysis of one of the hidden dimensions of contemporary visual culture. As artists-iconologists who explore the most remote regions of our iconosphere, they use montage to reveal the potential and the threat posed by this vast array of surveillance images which more and more permeate our society.

## Transmedial Migrations

Performance and photography, video installations and the editing of found footage images: taken all together, the various works we have encountered in the previous pages – from the street performance of *Following Piece* by Vito Acconci to the complex montage of the films and installations of Harun Farocki – present us with a partial but meaningful cross-section of the diversity of media through which contemporary art and cinema have explored the surveillant gaze in all its seductiveness, its disciplinary function, its social presence, and its political dangers.

What strikes us at the end of this itinerary is on the one hand the great flexibility with which different generations of artists have worked with different media and different devices in order to establish a relationship of surveillance between those who see and those who are seen, as if such objective had a clear primacy over the different medial forms in which it has been articulated. Vito Acconci and Sophie Calle investigate surveillance through performance, photography and text. Michael Snow, Bruce Nauman and Dan Graham take as their starting point the medium specificity of video, especially the live feedback, but at the same time they use the closed-circuit video cameras and monitors within spatial configurations that are constantly changing, and in which the video image is integrated with the mediation provided by the spatial disposition of architectural elements specifically designed for the occasion (corridors, rooms) and is often juxtaposed with other types of images, for example those produced by mirrors.

On the other hand, working with the same operation consisting in the editing of previously gathered found footage images, Michael Klier, Eyal Sivan and Harun Farocki unveil the great variety of surveillance devices that are invisibly scattered in the social space, both that of a totalitarian regime which aimed at the most pervasive forms of control over the lives of its citizens, and that of societies in which individual freedom and privacy are listed, at least nominally, among the core values to be defended.

What emerges from the analysis of all these different works taken together is the possibility of considering visual surveillance as a scopic form which has the capacity of ‘migrating’ not only *across media* – an expression which seems to imply a distinction between media as clearly defined and separate entities – but also *reinventing media*: maintaining some of its characteristic features but at the same time rearranging them in ever changing medial forms. We may call this



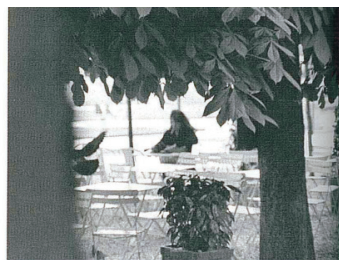
migration ‘transmedial’ (cf. Schroeter 1998, 136ff.), only if we emphasize the prefix *trans-* in a scopic form, visual surveillance, which never ends to transform and transcend the medial configurations in which it manifests itself, both in the artistic and in the social domain.

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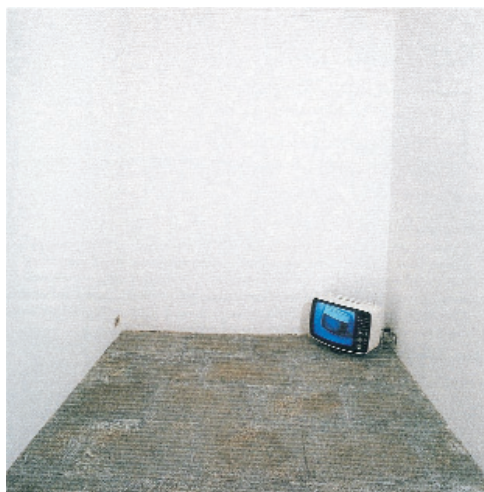
**Figure 1.** Vito Acconci: *Following Piece* (1969). **Figures 2–3:** Sophie Calle: *The Shadow (Detective)* (1985)



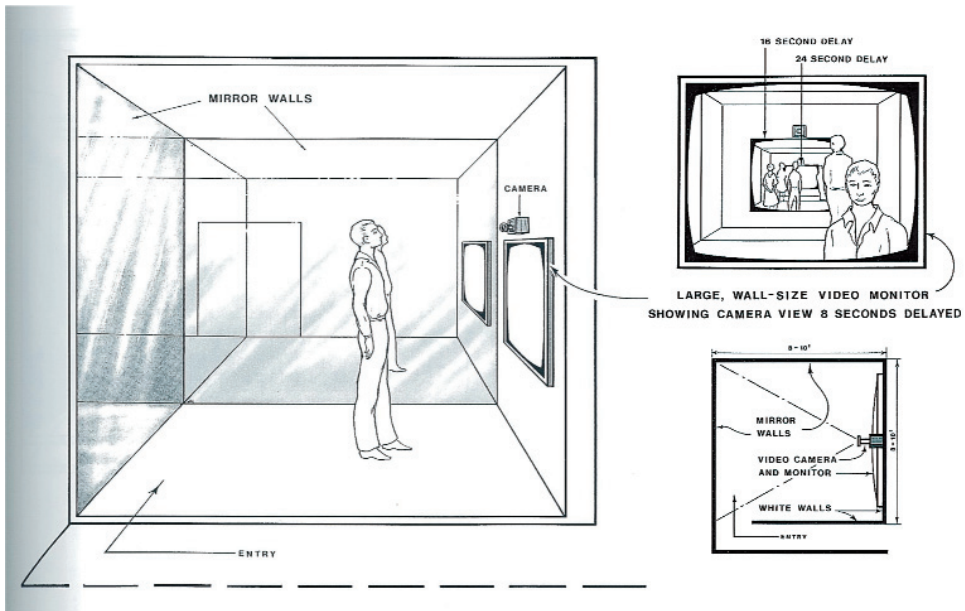
**Figures 4–5.** Michael Snow: *De La* (1969–1972), *La Région centrale* (1969–1970).



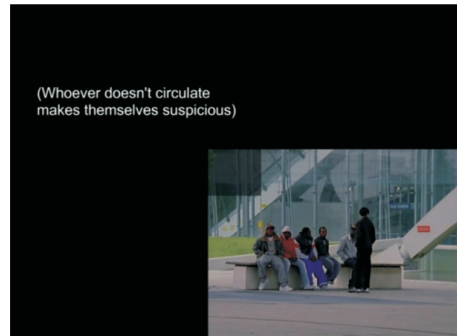
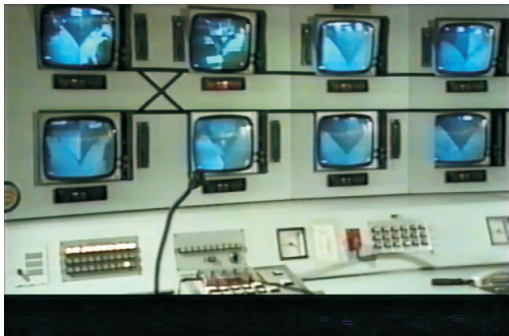
**Figure 6.** Bruce Nauman, *Live/Taped Video Corridor* (1969–1970). **Figure 7.** Bruce Nauman, *Video Surveillance Piece: Public Room, Private Room* (1969–1970).



**Figure 8.** Dan Graham, *Present Continuous Past(s)* (1974).



**Figure 9.** Eyal Sivan, *I Love You All* (*Aus Liebe zum Volk*, 2004). **Figure 10.** Harun Farocki, *Counter-Music* (*Gegen-Musik*, 2004).







## Intermedialities in Policy Making & Funding

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**Abstract.** This article considers the intermedial way of working (working across media) from the point of view of a funding agency. The Mondriaan Foundation is an important funding body in the Netherlands for visual arts, design and heritage. The project applications received by the foundation are increasingly intermedial; they mirror a changing cultural field in which collaborations between neighbouring disciplines, fields of knowledge and experts from these fields increase. The article considers the role of new media within this transformation and outlines the ways in which the foundation deals with intermediality when it comes to the assessment of applications.

### Introduction

The Mondriaan Foundation is a Dutch funding agency for visual arts, design and cultural heritage. It was founded in 1994 to stimulate visual arts, design and cultural heritage. The primary goal of the foundation is to increase interest in, and demand for, contemporary visual arts, design and cultural heritage. The foundation is committed to strengthening the international position of contemporary visual arts and design, and accomplishes this by offering financial support to enable institutions, both national and international, to reach their audience and extend that reach. The Mondriaan Foundation supports activities within the Netherlands such as acquisitions for museum collections, activities in the field of cultural heritage, publications and magazines, programming for artist run spaces, art and design projects, exchange programs and an art purchase scheme for private individuals. All these types of funding are based on the premise that visual arts, design and cultural heritage are presented to a small or large, a specialized or broad audience. Presentation and audience reach are thus at the heart of the foundation.

The Mondriaan Foundation has an annual budget of approximately € 23 million. Every year more than 1500 applications are processed and some 800 projects get funded. Over one third of the projects supported by the foundation take place abroad.

Besides the daily practice of funding, the foundation also actively innovates/reforms policymaking by organizing debates and publishing books on pressing issues such as the effects of subsidies on the art market, the ways in which (heritage) museums build their collections and most recently, folk culture.

## Intermediality

It is important to start by stating that the term intermediality is never used within the foundation or by people applying for funding. If the phenomenon of intermediality, working across media, is addressed, it is with the more common term interdisciplinarity. Nevertheless, intermediality, in the broad definition given by Irina Rajewsky, is experienced within the foundation as well. She states in her article *Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality* that: “intermediality may serve foremost as a generic term for all those phenomena that (as indicated by the prefix *inter*) in some way take place *between* media. »Intermedial« therefore designates those configurations which have to do with a crossing of borders between media” (Rajewsky 2005, 46).

Many of the project applications we receive are intermedial in the sense that they might be based on research, in collaboration with universities or R&D labs for example, and may result in an exhibition, lectures, workshops, sometimes a conference where artists and researchers present their findings side by side, or a publication, often with independent, stand-alone qualities. These projects seamlessly combine theory with practice, contemporary art with cultural heritage, the shaping of a critical discourse with the presentation of the latest developments in arts and design. Intermediality is not only encountered on the level of project design, the artists or designers working within projects will often cross boundaries between media as well.

## New Media and Intermediality

New media technology, and digital technology in particular, have pushed intermediality to new levels. New (and often digital) technologies facilitate collaborations, combining material, linking archival material to contemporary



sources and much more. Lawrence Lessig describes this development in *Remix* (2008), a book on copyright laws and how they are challenged by digital technologies. Without wanting to go into the copyright discussion, the transformation Lessig describes is useful in outlining just how important new media technologies are for intermediality. Lessig outlines a historical transformation of entertainment technologies from Read/Only (RO) to Read/Write (RW), from watching, reading and listening to remixing, sampling and performing. Although it has been argued convincingly that reading, listening and watching are not passive forms of consuming culture, there is a difference between RO culture and the more hands-on RW culture in which users manipulate culture to create their own content. An important point Lessig makes about this shift is that it has been facilitated by technological developments. Remix culture has been given an immense boost with digital technologies that make remixing both easy and cheap. He writes: "If in 1968 you wanted to capture the latest Walter Cronkite news program and remix it with the Beatles, and then share it with your ten thousand best friends, what blocked you was [...] that the production costs alone would have been in the tens of thousands of dollars. Digital technologies have now removed that economic censor" (Lessig 2008, 83).

Creating new content based on a mix of existing content has thus become easier and cheaper than it used to be with analogue technologies. Digital technologies not only facilitate remix culture, they also facilitate intermediality. It is easier and cheaper nowadays to work between boundaries, to literally combine media and make the results of these collaborations visible and accessible. The Netherlands Council for Culture states in her 2003 advisory report, *From ICT to E-culture*, that new media technology "stimulates the blending of various forms of presentation" and "makes the boundaries between disciplines and domains more permeable and gives rise to new crossovers" (Netherlands Council for Culture 2003, 21).

## Effects of Intermediality

What we have noticed within the Mondriaan Foundation is that it often makes no sense to try to characterize the project applications we receive in terms of one central discipline. How do you characterize a project that, for example, combines old cinematic material with contemporary visual art, cutting-edge web design with an experiment to engage audiences in new ways? Such projects are as much about archival material or contemporary visual art as about new media. One response to a changing cultural field was a temporary funding scheme called the



Interregeling for e-Culture projects. Between 2001 and 2008, different Dutch funding agencies collaborated within the Interregeling. The word “inter” in the name of the program referred to a changing cultural field in which collaborations, interdisciplinarity and the defying of one simple label, were becoming more common. The Interregeling was specifically targeted at e-Culture projects, projects that in one way or another aimed at renewing the cultural sector by means of, or aided by, digital technologies, or that experimented with the possibilities of the digital in the cultural domain.

The Interregeling was a temporary funding option and the program ended in 2008. The option to fund interdisciplinary new media and e-Culture projects is now integrated within existing funding structures.

## **International Discussion**

The effects of new media on the cultural field are also discussed in an international setting. Since the mid-nineties, international partners such as new media organizations and networks have gathered artists, policy makers and academics in workshop settings to discuss trends and developments in new media and make policy recommendations on how to fund new media projects. In 2008, one of these sessions took place in Singapore, in conjunction with ISEA, the International Symposium of Electronic Art. The Singapore summit was organized by the Asia Europe Foundation (ASEF) and the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA). The 50 participants – artists, practitioners and policy makers from 26 different countries – worked in parallel groups to discuss issues, case studies and formulate recommendations (the full report can be accessed at: <http://media.ifacca.org/uploads/ASEFReport2008.pdf>).

Most of the recommendations centred on the need for funding options for international exchange projects and a flexible policy that could easily accommodate changes within the field of new media. The Mondriaan Foundation has internationalization as one of its policy priorities. This means that international exchange projects are welcomed and encouraged. A new funding scheme for the development of projects, which started in 2009, has room for experimental projects, out of the box ideas, or the establishment of (international) networks. This funding scheme is aimed at providing organizations the time and money to develop such projects. Especially international projects are often time consuming and expensive to set up. This is a highly flexible form of funding with a very short assessment process; it has been designed with input and feedback from the field.

## **From Multiple Disciplinary Committees to a Single, Integrated Assessment Process**

Another response to the growing number of intermedial projects received by the Mondriaan Foundation is the decision to work, from January 2009 onwards, with a single project committee. Before 2009, there were separate committees for visual arts and design projects and for cultural heritage projects. The new interdisciplinary committee deals with all the project applications the foundation receives. The committee is a mixed group of external advisors: curators, critics, journalists, researchers, artists and directors of cultural institutions. They are also selected on the basis of their all-round knowledge.

Applications are assessed on the basis of four criteria that reflect the primary goal of the Mondriaan Foundation to increase interest in, and demand for, contemporary visual arts, design and cultural heritage. We look at how projects distinguish themselves (added value), how they engage and reach their audiences (audience reach), whether the partners involved are professional (excellence) and at the ways in which the project impacts society in terms of content, project design or audience reach (relations to society). These four criteria are used for the assessment of all the project applications; there are no separate criteria for intermedial projects. Because the criteria are not medium-based, intermediality does not pose a problem in the assessment process.

## **Conclusion**

Intermediality is an aspect of a changing cultural field in which collaborations have become easier and more common, in part due to digital technologies. Not only do cultural organizations increasingly work together with partners from outside the cultural field, but heritage, ethnographic or contemporary art museums also work together more often. To answer to these practices, the Mondriaan Foundation has adapted its assessment process in terms of knowledge, experts, criteria and staff. Needless to say, this does not mean that intermediality is a requirement to apply for funding. Based on the positive feedback from the field, the applicants and the advisors, we will continue working with an interdisciplinary committee and an integrated assessment process.

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